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**Special Issue: #MeToo Movement:
Intersectional Approach**

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Editorial

The October issue of the *Journal of Communication Inquiry* explores the #MeToo movement from an intersectional perspective. Articles in this themed issue seek to problematize the ongoing cultural conversation around sexual hostility, harassment, and assault by critically examining the intersectionality of the #MeToo movement and the complex role of the media, broadly defined, in shaping the movement's potentialities and consequences for social change.

The two words that came to symbolize the #MeToo movement put no rhetorical boundaries on survivors' race, class, or gender, providing a welcoming space for them to tell their stories. Yet, as the movement gained prominence, the mainstream media centered its coverage on experiences of White, upper-middle class women victimized by White men, which highlighted the need for an intersectional approach to understanding the origins and ramifications of the movement that would illuminate the ways in which race, class, and gender work together to reinforce and preserve the structures of disadvantage and discrimination. In the first essay, Rebecca Leung and Robert Williams contribute to this conversation by applying the concept of intersectionality to critically analyze the differential treatment that victims received in the cases of R. Kelly and Harvey Weinstein.

This conversation continues in the essay by Ashley Noel Mack and Bryan J. McCann, who analyze the campaign to unseat Judge Aaron Persky that followed his sentencing decision in the sexual assault trial of Stanford University athlete Brock Turner. The authors conclude that the campaign can be effectively viewed as an example of "White rage [directed] toward the judge for his perceived betrayals of a White paternal social contract." They further argue that despite the activists' intention to make it more difficult for the justice system to advantage privileged White man, the campaign contributed to further legitimization of carceral solutions, which are known to disproportionally harm communities of color.

The implications of various corrective practices in cases of sexual violence are also central to the article by Emma Frances Bloomfield, who examines the news coverage of the #MeToo movement to categorize how blame is assigned and what corrective actions are offered. Specifically, she identifies two cultural narratives that surround the discussion of sexual violence: scapegoating, which tends to limit the scope of the problem to isolated cases, and transcendence, which attributes blame to structural and social forces. The article discusses the

tension between the two narratives and makes the case for what the author calls a "rhetorical constellation," a practice that addresses structural inequities while recognizing the individual, often silenced voices.

In "Torment Porn or Feminist Witch Hunt: Apprehensions about the #MeToo Movement on /r/AskReddit," Candice Lanius adopts a critical discourse analysis to study the response to the movement in this popular online space. Based on the analysis of online comments over a 9-month period that followed the viral surge in #MeToo posts across social media platforms, Lanius finds that despite the inclusive ethos of the movement, the strongest frames maintained the stereotypical representations of an ideal female victim, repentant male savior, and the grotesque, and rare, male rapist, which have been found in previous research. "By taking the emerging knowledge claims at face value," Lanius concludes, "those who seek change using the #MeToo movement, run the risk of inadvertently supporting the dominant cultural model by accepting its discursive frames rather than negotiating a new shared model for addressing sexual harassment and assault."

The special issue is rounded out by the article by Jesse C. Starkey, Amy Koerber, Miglena Sternadori, and Bethany Pitchford, who explore #MeToo in an international context. As the movement received global attention, and in some countries experienced discursive pushback that evoked cultural specificity argumentation, it became clear that the survivors' experiences, and the cultural conversation surrounding them, are not only racialized, gendered, and classed but can also be complicated by an interplay of other identities, such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, and others that need to be brought into discussion. The article contributes to this conversation by analyzing the differences in the news media coverage of the #MeToo movement in four national contexts—the United States, Japan, Australia, and India—and by theorizing about factors that may have contributed to those cultural variations.

Finally, in her review of Julie A. Wilson and Emily Chivers Yochim's "Mothering through precarity: Women's work and digital media," Shani Orgad applauds the authors for making a "profound and critical contribution . . . to the affective and psychic life of neoliberalism" by revealing an inherent tension between mothers' attempts to resist the turbulences that come with advanced neoliberalism and the resulting internalization of neoliberal rationality that underlies the very commotions they seek to resist.

I would like to end the introduction by thanking the authors for participation in this important conversation and by expressing gratitude to each and every one of our 30 manuscript reviewers whose contributions of time and expertise have made this special issue possible.

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Article

#MeToo and Intersectionality: An Examination of the #MeToo Movement Through the R. Kelly Scandal

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Abstract

The momentum of the #MeToo movement has broadened the reach of the campaign that activist Tarana Burke started in 2006 to help women of color from underprivileged communities who have experienced rape or sexual assault. The campaign received little mainstream media attention until 11 years later, when the phrase was used by prominent White women to share their stories of sexual assault through social media. While the movement has found success with the Weinstein effect, the original audience of the movement—women of color—did not share in its success because of the added factor of race. This comparative analysis through an examination of the R. Kelly scandal will provide insight into the role that intersectionality has played in the #MeToo movement and how the movement has evolved to address intersectionality as part of its overall goal to combat sexual assault and harassment.

Keywords

ethnicity, journalism, media, multiculturalism, news media, intersectionality, R. Kelly, MeToo

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Introduction

The momentum of the #MeToo movement has broadened the reach of the campaign that activist Tarana Burke started in 2006 to help women of color from underprivileged communities who have experienced rape or sexual assault. Burke, who is African American, saw her efforts unheralded in the mainstream media when she first launched the movement (Ohlheiser, 2017). That changed in 2017 when prominent White women started using the phrase "#Me Too" as a hashtag to share their stories of sexual assault and harassment through social media. The "#MeToo" movement went viral and ushered in a new era of rules that would break down long-established power structures, define what type of behavior would be tolerated by men, and how people accused of sexual misconduct should be held accountable. But the boundaries of the debate between women and predatory men that the mainstream media outlined to define the #MeToo narrative did not include an underlying issue that emerged from the movement's roots—the issue of intersectionality. While the #MeToo movement addresses grievances a person faces based on gender, it does not address situations in which race is also a factor.

The term "intersectionality" captures the "multidimensionality" of Black women's experiences (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139). That is, Black women's identities are constituted by the interplay of gender, race, class, and sexuality and shaped by how these categories interact in particular historical, social, and cultural contexts (Nash, 2009, p. 3).

The collision of such marginalization was first highlighted by legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989) and continues to surface today as society wrestles with how to appropriately tackle racism, sexism, religion, sexual orientation, and other forms of discrimination. This article explores intersectionality and how it can be applied to understanding the #MeToo movement. It will examine how society has chosen to respond to African American female victims at the center of the R. Kelly scandal and how the response compares to the backlash faced by victims after the Harvey Weinstein sex scandal. This comparative analysis will provide insight into the role that intersectionality has played in the #MeToo movement and how the movement has evolved to address intersectionality as part of its overall goal to combat sexual assault and harassment.

An Intersectional Lens

The theoretical framework used to analyze the R. Kelly scandal and the public response to African American female victims is intersectionality. Intersectionality refers to the concept of evaluating how an action, event, theory, or policy affects a community that is defined by at least two categories of identification, as opposed to one category (Gopaldas, 2013). The foundation of intersectionality is that two separate categories of identification, when

combined, can create a third new category of identification that has its own set of circumstances and experiences that differ from the original two categories (Crenshaw, 1989).

Intersectionality was first defined in 1989, when Crenshaw (1989) created the term to examine Black feminist theory and how society struggled to address the specific grievances of Black women who were discriminated against because of their gender and race:

> To bring this back to a non-metaphorical level, I am suggesting that Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and Black men. Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to white women's experiences; sometimes they share very similar experiences with Black men. Yet often they experience double-discrimination—the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes, they experience discrimination as Black women—not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women. (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149)

The term intersectionality was originally used to describe any person who has experienced discrimination based on more than one association with a group that has been previously oppressed by society. The term was needed because, as Crenshaw demonstrated, the judicial system and society in general viewed discrimination and oppression through a singular classification, usually associated with race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. Through an examination of three court cases, Crenshaw (1989) illustrated how judges rejected the claims of three major class-action lawsuits in which the plaintiffs comprised more than one classification of discrimination (p. 141). This created a special class of victims, which, according to their interpretation of the law, was not the purpose of the law when it was created and passed by the U.S. Congress. This meant that African American women could either pursue legal claims based on race or gender, but not both, even when the circumstances and facts of the case displayed a bias toward people based on both factors:

> Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender. These problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including Black women within an already established analytical structure. (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140)

As a result, Crenshaw believed that intersectionality was the best framework to use when analyzing how policy will affect issues concerning Black women.

This concept of multiple classifications as a victim of discrimination revealed a deeper level of prejudice and bias that society in general had yet to understand

and address 30 years ago. This was validated by the adoption of the term by other groups who also faced discrimination and oppression based on multiple classifications and has been used within the law to change the judicial interpretation of an aggrieved class of people.

The use of intersectionality has expanded as scholars in several other disciplines have used the theoretical framework to explore how different groups of people experience and are affected by various actions and policies (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011, p. 217). Some of those fields include sociology, education, anthropology, psychology, political sciences, law and literary studies, health studies, and social work (Lutz, 2015). Intersectionality has also been used by scholars not specifying a particular group or social identity structures, which Gopaldas (2013) claims expands the concept of intersectionality beyond race, class, and gender to include categories such as

> age, attractiveness, body type, caste, citizenship, education, ethnicity, height and weight assessments, immigration status, income, marital status, mental health status, nationality, occupation, physical ability, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and other naturalized—though not necessarily natural—ways of categorizing human populations. (p. 91)

The latest emergence of intersectionality has now surfaced in the form of the #MeToo movement.

The #MeToo Movement

The crux of the #MeToo movement has challenged gender norms and the roles they play in sexual assault and harassment. Overall, perceptions of victims and what role they play in a sexual assault or harassment incident are often weighed heavily by observers who use social and gender norms to form a public opinion about how to treat victims and those accused of sexual assault and harassment. Through the perspective of intersectionality, gender norms are shaped through cultural and social circumstances—and are different for White men and women when compared to men and women of color. As a result, generalizations associated with men and women tend to align more with the interpretation of the White social experience versus the social experience people of color have endured in our society:

> Black men and women live in a society that creates sex-based norms and expectations which racism operates simultaneously to deny; Black men are not viewed as powerful, nor are Black women seen as passive. An effort to develop an ideological explanation of gender domination in the Black community should proceed from an understanding of how crosscutting forces establish gender norms and how the

conditions of Black subordination wholly frustrate access to these norms. (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 155)

These differences set the foundation for how the African American female victims of the R. Kelly scandal were publicly shunned, while their White counterparts involved in the Weinstein scandal were publicly embraced.

"Even today, as #MeToo continues to dominate headlines, black girls have been invisible in the movement," wrote Salamishah Tillet and Scheherazade Tillet in an editorial on the R. Kelly scandal for *The New York Times*. "And since black girls live at the crossroads of gender and racial violence, if we want to empower them, we have to confront and dismantle each system of oppression that affects them" (Tillet & Tillet, 2019, para. 9–10).

Turning Point: The Surviving R. Kelly Documentary

The documentary, *Surviving R. Kelly* (hampton, 2019), is a six-part television program on Grammy award-winning musician R. Kelly that aired on January 3, 2019 on the Lifetime television network. The series explored the ongoing allegations claiming that the R&B singer sexually assaulted women and had inappropriate and sexual relationships with underage girls. The Lifetime documentary covers the start of Kelly's career as a music producer and singer and how his status as a celebrity influenced his interaction with women and the public reaction to the allegations. It also featured interviews with family members, members of his entourage, journalists, music industry personalities, and several women who claimed to have been a victim of Kelly or observed behavior and incidents that were either inappropriate or illegal.

The documentary examined several aspects of Kelly's story. It probed his personal background to gain insight into when he started his alleged pattern of having sex with underage girls. It featured several women who described a grooming pattern of how Kelly approached women with whom he became sexual or romantically involved and the trauma they experienced or witnessed during their time with Kelly. The documentary also featured a segment on Kelly's relationship with underage R&B singer Aaliyah, whom he married without parental consent in 1994 when she was only 15 years old (the marriage was eventually annulled). This was the first public report of Kelly being romantically and sexually involved with an underage girl. Kelly's victims all described a pattern of sexual, mental, and physical abuse that included verbally abusing women and restricting where they could go at home and in public. Some victims also said that they were cut off from contact with other men, family members, and friends.

Public reaction to these allegations of sexual assault and inappropriate relationships with women is also a prominent subject in the documentary. Several people interviewed in the documentary point to Kelly's fame as a big reason why

his actions were overlooked. The documentary also chronicled the public debate among fans over whether the victims should be believed and if the singer's music should be boycotted because of these allegations of rape and sexual abuse. It also looked at how Kelly managed to escape prosecution for charges of producing child pornography despite videotape evidence that showed him having sex with underage girls (DeRogatis, 2017).

The documentary itself became part of the scandal's narrative, as it sparked a renewed interest in the allegations against Kelly and was influential in getting more women to speak out about the abuse they allegedly suffered when romantically or sexually involved with Kelly. It also helped expand a movement to have his music removed from radio and Internet music streaming services. State and federal criminal charges have also been filed against Kelly since the documentary aired in 2019. In Illinois, the Cook County state's attorney filed 10 counts of aggravated criminal sexual abuse against Kelly on February 22, 2019 (Li, Fitzpatrick, & Fieldstadt, 2019). Federal charges were filed simultaneously in Chicago and New York City, totaling 18 charges that included racketeering, kidnapping, obstruction of justice, child pornography production, and child sexual exploitation (Meisner, Buckley, & Crepeau, 2019). Kelly has denied all accusations of wrongdoing and the allegations made in the documentary.

Intersectionality Meets #MeToo

The intersectionality of the #MeToo movement first emerged in the summer of 2017, when Buzzfeed (DeRogatis, 2017) published articles alleging that singer R. Kelly sexually, physically and mentally abused a group of African American female victims and outlined his history of predatory behavior against young and underage women of color. Three months later, in October 2017, the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker* published articles outlining a similar pattern of behavior by movie mogul Harvey Weinstein.

According to *Surviving R. Kelly* (hampton, 2019), the singer would continue a pattern of similar behavior in which he was sexually involved with teenage girls, some below the statutory age minimum of consent. This behavior resulted in charges of child pornography levied against him in June 2003. Five years later, he was acquitted of those charges. However, since the 1990s, Kelly has been accused of forming what has been described as a "sexual cult" that lives with him at his homes in Atlanta and Chicago and travels with him when he is on tour. Women who were formerly a part of this cult described an experience in which he isolated them from their friends and family, confined them to a bedroom, and made them ask for permission to eat, use a toilet, and move around their home. In addition, they said he made them call him "Daddy" and dictated what they wore and to whom they could speak. According to these women, Kelly would physically and mentally abuse them if they did not follow his rules. While the women claimed that they were not held against their will in the cult,

they described themselves as being brainwashed by Kelly and made to perform sexually humiliating acts. The documentary also featured two sets of parents who shared stories of how their daughters were currently members in an effort to help their daughters leave the cult. Kelly has settled several lawsuits stemming from this behavior with legal settlements. However, several women have since decided to speak publicly with the mainstream media or participate in the documentary that chronicled Kelly and his record of abuse. Buzzfeed broke the Kelly sex cult story in July 2017, which started a public dialogue surrounding the R&B legend and coincided with the #MeToo movement later that year (DeRogatis, 2017).

Three months after the Kelly story broke, the Harvey Weinstein scandal emerged after the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker* reported a history of sexual harassment and abuse by the movie mogul that reached back nearly 30 years. The victims, mostly White women, accused Weinstein of forcing them to have sex with him. He would invite them to his hotel rooms or office telling them he wanted to discuss their careers. Once they arrived, he would demand sex from them and threatened to use his influence to damage their careers if they did not comply (Farrow, 2017). At least 18 women accused Weinstein of rape, while more than 80 accused him of sexual assault or harassment (Barnes & Ransom, 2019).

Like the victims who spoke out in the documentary *Surviving R. Kelly*, those who shared their experiences of rape and sexual assault also feared retaliation from within their own community.

While the accusations were similar—powerful men using their influence to intimidate and coerce women into performing sexual acts or endure sexual harassment against their will—the mainstream media reaction was different. With the Weinstein case, the mainstream media focused on the high-profile White women who identified themselves as victims. This included actresses Ashley Judd, Angelina Jolie, Rosanna Arquette, Kate Beckinsale, Rose McGowan, Gwyneth Paltrow, Mira Sorvino, Uma Thurman, Heather Graham, Annabella Sciorra, and Daryl Hannah (Saad, 2018). Media attention on the case eventually led to Weinstein resigning from his company, his company being dissolved, the loss of memberships to several professional academies, the rescission of honorary academic awards, and several criminal investigations. The scandal also had a ripple effect, known as the Weinstein effect (Almukhtar, Gold, & Buchanan, 2018), which tarnished the reputation of other famous film and television celebrities including Dustin Hoffman, Kevin Spacey, Louis C. K., Ben Affleck, Brett Ratner, James Toback, Matt Lauer, and Charlie Rose.

In an interview with *The New Yorker*, Sciorra told journalist Ronan Farrow that Weinstein "violently raped" and sexually harassed her during the early '90s. "From 1992, I didn't work again until 1995," she said. "I just kept getting this pushback of 'We heard you were difficult; we hear this or that.' I think that was the Harvey machine" (Farrow, 2017, para. 13).

Hannah, who starred in the Miramax blockbuster movie, *Kill Bill*, said that she felt backlash from her community after speaking out about how Weinstein sexually assaulted her while promoting the movie. "I experienced instant repercussions. I called all the powers that be and told them what had happened. And that I thought that was the repercussion, you know, the backlash, from my experience," said Hannah.

> "I think that it doesn't matter if you're a well-known actress, it doesn't matter if you're twenty or if you're forty, it doesn't matter if you report or if you don't, because we are not believed. We are more than not believed—we are berated and criticized and blamed". (Farrow, 2017, para. 21–22)

The Cosby Factor

Another case that was also bolstered through the Weinstein effect was the Bill Cosby scandal. The Bill Cosby scandal featured more than 60 women (Mallenbaum, Ryan, & Puente, 2018) who accused the African American comedian of rape and sexual assault. On the surface, the allegations against Cosby appeared to have strong similarities to the R. Kelly scandal. Both Cosby and Kelly are powerful famous Black male celebrities who continued to receive significant support from fans even after the allegations were made public. Both scandals also featured victims who were women of color. However, the media chose to cover each case differently in terms of how race and class were addressed. In the Cosby case, the media shared (Allison, 2015;; F. Jones, 2015; S. Jones, 2018; Lockhart, 2018) stories of victims who were mostly White—from aspiring artists to famous celebrities—even though nearly a quarter of Cosby's alleged victims were women of color (Mallenbaum et al., 2018). Class was not a factor in this case because the public image of the victim—as portrayed by the media—was a White woman, even though there were women of color among Cosby's victims. Had class been a factor, Black supermodel Beverly Johnson's account of being sexually assaulted by Cosby during the '80s would have been more prominently covered by the media.

Among the most outspoken accusers of Cosby in the public were all White women—Andrea Constand, Barbara Bowman, Carla Ferrigno, and Janice Dickerson—who helped create the public image of Cosby's victim as a White woman (Mallenbaum et al., 2018).

Former Temple University employee Constand, who was of Greek and Italian descent, accused Cosby of drugging and sexually assaulting her at his Pennsylvania home in 2004 (Bowley & Hurdle, 2018). She said Cosby touched her breasts and crotch and that she remembered waking up around 4 a.m. to find her clothes all over the room (Associated Press, 2005). She later gave an

interview to *NBC*'s *The Today Show* along with four other women who testified against Cosby in his 2018 criminal trial.

Bowman was an aspiring actress who penned her own essay about being drugged and sexually assaulted by Cosby in 1986 for *The Washington Post*. She wrote: "When I came to, I was in my panties and a man's t-shirt, and Cosby was looming over me. I'm certain now that he drugged and raped me" (Bowman, 2014, para. 2). She also described two more incidents in Reno, NV, and Atlantic City and shared details of her rape in interviews for *Philadelphia Magazine*, KYW-TV (Philadelphia), *People Magazine*, and *Newsweek*.

Ferrigno, a former Playboy Bunny and wife of bodybuilder/actor Lou Ferrigno, said that she was assaulted by Cosby during a double date with his wife, Camille. She said Cosby forcibly grabbed and kissed her in the basement of his Hollywood home before she pushed him away and ran out of the hall (Youn, 2014). She described the incident in an interview with Los Angeles radio station KFI.

Former model Dickerson, who was awarded a settlement in her defamation lawsuit against Cosby, said the entertainer drugged and sexually assaulted her in 1982 during a visit to Cosby's hotel suite in Lake Tahoe (Bowley & Hurdle, 2018). She described the details of her experience in interviews with *The Guardian*, *Entertainment Tonight*, and other media outlets.

Because the public image of Cosby's victim was portrayed as a White woman, his defense team tried to position the accusations made against Cosby in racial terms using the crime of lynching as a metaphor for what they argued were motivating factors behind the scandal and the women's accusations. This portrayal was also underscored by the history of African American men who have been killed and convicted after being accused of sexually assaulting a White woman (F. Jones, 2015). A Cosby spokesperson compared the comedian to Emmett Till, a Black teenager who was murdered in 1955 after being accused of whistling at a White woman, after the verdict was released (Lockhart, 2018, para. 23).

Cosby's spokesperson also characterized his case as the "most racist and sexist trial in the history of the United States" and said that three psychologists who testified in Cosby's trial were "white women who make money off of accusing black men of being sexual predators" (Dale & Sisak, 2018, para. 5).

> Within the African-American community, one of Cosby's black accusers said she received the same response from a friend who did not know that she was one of his victims: Last year, before I revealed my own story, I called a very dear African-American friend and asked her what she thought about the women accusing Bill Cosby. "I don't believe these white women," she said. "They are just trying to destroy another black man." It pained me terribly to hear her say it, but I knew her perspective wasn't uncommon. Black people are sensitive to the fact that, for

centuries, images of African American men as threats to white women have been used to justify oppressing them. (Allison, 2015, para. 6)

Escaping the #MeToo Effect

While the #MeToo movement gathered momentum through the mainstream media coverage of the Weinstein effect, the R. Kelly scandal, and its non-famous African American female victims struggled to draw the same mainstream media attention even though their stories came out 3 months earlier than the Weinstein scandal and featured several similar circumstances. Kelly escaped the Weinstein effect, remained on RCA Records' music roster, continued to tour and perform concerts, and enjoyed airplay on radio stations around the nation. Burke, who was interviewed for the Lifetime documentary (hampton, 2019) on the R. Kelly scandal, summarized the media's double standard when covering celebrity cases of rape, sexual assault, and race:

> These families came forward, and were making desperate pleas to get their children back, to get their daughters back home and away from R. Kelly. We've been watching them since they came forward in 2017 to try various attempts to get the media attention but it doesn't take hold, and again I think that goes back to this idea that black girls don't matter. They don't matter enough, and it's proven over and over again. (hampton, 2019)

Angelo Clary and his wife Alice shared their story about their daughter Azriel, who first met Kelly when her parents took her to one of Kelly's concerts in Tampa. Kelly lured Azriel, an aspiring teenage singer, with promises of mentorship for her singing career. Azriel eventually moved in with Kelly and cutoff communication with her family. Clary said that he felt race played a key role in the amount of attention the mainstream media paid to his story: "If those kids were Caucasian white women, we would not be going through this" (hampton, 2019).

The Social Case Against Black Chastity

In the Lifetime documentary, radio disc jockey Charlamagne Tha God, who has observed the R. Kelly scandal unfold during the past two decades, spoke about how the double standard in the mainstream media of Weinstein and Kelly reflected the how society has historically treated African American women:

> The most disrespected woman in America historically has always been the black woman. You know, I always say if you want to get away with murder, kill a black rapper. If you want to get away with sexual assault, assault a young black girl. . . .

> If R. Kelly had been doing this to white women, oh my god. The fact that is it mostly young black girls he preys on, simply nobody cares. (hampton, 2019)

This lack of media attention in the R. Kelly scandal highlighted a key aspect of intersectionality, as Crenshaw (1989) had outlined it in her landmark article. She identified how the history of African American women struggling to have both their race and gender acknowledged as part of their struggle reaches as far back as the women's rights and civil rights movements. Crenshaw argued that the issue of rape and how White female victims and African American female victims are treated illustrated how intersectionality unfolds in the judicial and law enforcement systems. Crenshaw points to the intention of rape laws and how then have been enforced and adjudicated in the judicial system in different ways. For example, she shows how rape laws were created to preserve White female chastity, and how, if an African American man was found to have disrupted that chastity, he faced a heavy penalty, including lynching, imprisonment, or death. However, in cases where African American female victims accused men, especially White men, of rape and other sexual violent acts, it was not uncommon for White men to go unpunished by juries and law enforcement agencies.

> Rape statutes generally do not reflect *male* control over *female* sexuality, but *white* male regulation of *white* female sexuality. Historically, there has been absolutely no institutional effort to regulate Black female chastity. Courts in some states had gone so far as to instruct juries that, unlike white women, Black women were not presumed to be chaste. (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 157)

Overall, the difference in treatment of African American female victims and White female victims reinforced stereotypical beliefs about the sexuality of African American women, who were not considered chaste. Mikki Kendall, a writer and cofounder of the blog Hood Feminism, said this stereotype was a key factor in the reaction to the stories of the African American female victims in the R. Kelly scandal: "We still socially don't perceive young black women as innocent, as deserving of protection, somehow it's their fault. When the reality is that the problem isn't the girls, the problem is the predators" (hampton, 2019).

Tillet and Simmons (2007), and author of the *No! The Rape Documentary Study Guide*, said that the stereotype led to an assumption that African American female victims of sexual assault could not exist:

> The other side of the racist stereotype is the Black woman "whore" who is incapable of being raped because she's always wanting, willing and able to have sex. More often than not when we are thinking about victims-survivors of sexual assault we don't think about, much less visualize women of color who have been sexually assaulted. (p. 10)

This sentiment was certainly shared by Jerhonda Pace, one of Kelly's accusers who publicly discussed her abuse at the hands of the singer. Pace met Kelly during his 2008 jury trial when she was 14 years old. She described moving in with him after the trial ended and being physically and mentally abused by Kelly when she did not follow his rules. She said that she decided to leave after he spat, choked, and slapped her during a disagreement. She said that the stereotype was not only apparent by the lack of mainstream media attention but was adopted within the Black community: "R. Kelly's victims, nobody just cares about the black victims that speak out, especially the black community. It's the black community that bashes the black women that speak out about abuse" (hampton, 2019).

The Roots of Black Female Victimization

The roots of these negative images of Black female sexuality can be traced back to the antebellum South during slavery, historians claim (Kennedy, 2003). The foundation was laid during slavery for the acceptance of certain rape myths and the pattern of African American women experiencing collective shame, self-blame, and guilt when coping with crimes involving sex. These are contributing factors as to why African American women are less likely to disclose their rape.

There is a lengthy cultural history of disbelieving Black women. According to Nash (2009), "Historians show the connections between the racial-sexual mythologies that shape current perceptions of black women and the racial mythologies that enabled slavery" (p. 9).

As a result, slavery and its legacy of bigotry and sexual violence play key roles in the continuing discrimination against Black rape victims (Kennedy, 2003). The rape of African American female slaves by enslaved African American men or by White men in the antebellum South was not considered a crime. During slavery, rape was used to silence the African American community. African American women were viewed as hypersexual and existing only to increase the labor force since children of enslaved women inherited the legal status of their mother not their father. Slavery was underpinned by conceptions about Black women's deviant sexuality: (Nash, 2009, p. 2) the notion that Black women were good breeders, the conception that Black women were hypersexual, and the idea that Black women were quintessential mammies (Nash, 2009, p. 10).

Also contributing to this cultural enslavement were stereotypes that emerged in Europe and were later promoted by the European settlers who arrived in the United States. "America's racial representations were built on reinventions of European racial representations where blackness is a sign of lasciviousness and excess," wrote Diane Roberts (1994, p. 4). "When Europeans enslaved Africans, blackness came to mean not only easy sexuality but laziness, bestiality, savagery, and violence, all of which had to be countered" (Nash, 2009, p. 9).

Another stereotype used to culturally enslave African American women was the image of Black women as the "alluring, sexually arousing and seductive" Jezebel, which can also be traced back to slavery, when the image was used "to relegate all Black women to the category of sexually aggressive women, thus providing a powerful rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by White men typically reported by Black slave women" (Collins, 2000, p. 81). The modern-day image of Jezebel has morphed into "welfare queens, hoochies, freaks and hoodrats" who are "sexually available and sexually deviant" (Donovan & Williams, 2002, p. 98) and continue to be viewed as responsible for the sex crimes that are committed against them: "The public identity of the 'welfare queen' is the indigent version of the Black matriarch controlling image: a dominant mother responsible for the moral degeneracy of the United States" (Hancock, 2004, p. 56).

Also prominently used was the stereotype of African American women being portrayed as mammies, a "faithful, obedient domestic servant," according to Patricia Hill Collins (2000, p. 72), which served to "explain Black women's long-standing restriction to domestic service" and allow the continued sexual violation of Black women (Nash, 2009, p. 9).

The Intersection of History and the Judicial System

The negative image of African American female victims of sexual assault has also become part of the culture in the judicial system. Studies have found that overall the judicial system is an environment in which African American female victims are not going to find justice when they were sexually assaulted by men, Black or White. Instead, these victims are met with several obstacles in how different actors—prosecutors, jurors, attorneys, and judges—all share the likelihood of prejudging the role of the victim in the sex crime committed against her.

Studies have shown that there has been a bias against African American defendants in cases of rape and violent crimes, but few have explored how the race of a sexual assault survivor—especially if the victim is African American—affects the prosecution of her attacker in a rape case (Kennedy, 2003; Nash, 2009). Other studies have also explored how prosecutors are less likely to file charges in reports filed by African American victims than by their White counterparts in cases of rape and sexual assault. Race also plays an important role in whether juries find a victim credible, with one study showing how jurors were more likely to believe similar claims of rape made by a White victim, over a Black victim. And it is this fear of credibility in the testimony of Black victims that affects a prosecutor's decision to pursue claims of rape and sexual assault (Kennedy, 2003).

When the jury does find the assailant of an African American woman guilty of rape, her race continues to play a role in the proceedings. A study of actual trial outcomes indicates that, in combination with defendant race, victim race

affects the seriousness of the defendant's charge and the severity, location, and length of his sentence (Kennedy, 2003).

Credibility also played a key role in claims of rape and sexual assault by African American women. Courts often ignored or discarded the testimony of African American women in cases of rape and sexual assault because they were viewed as liars or noncredible sources (Nash, 2009). One study found that jurors in felony rape cases are less likely to find a defendant guilty when a rape survivor is African American because of a negative sexual image of African American women (as hypersexual) or a belief that African American witnesses were less credible in court (Nash, 2009). A 1991 study by Cyndie Buckson (1991) that presented mock crime reports to police officers showed that race played a major factor in the credibility of a survivor's testimony. A 1995 study (Foley, Evancic, Karnik, King, & Parks, 1995) concluded that participants were more likely to find a suspect guilty if his victim is White, more likely to believe the testimony in a reported date rape if the victim is White, and less likely to view a sexual assault as rape if the victim is Black (Nash, 2009).

In addition, a 2008 study on how the criminal justice system responds to rape complaints was conducted by the *Making a Difference (MAD) Project* at End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI), which collected data on approximately 12,000 sexual assault cases from eight cities across the United States. EVAWI (2009) found that race affected prosecutorial decision-making and played a major role in whether prosecutors would pursue cases involving African American survivors. The study also found that judges often rejected cases made by rape survivors who were African American (EVAWI, 2009).

The Victim's Dilemma: Self Justice Versus Social Justice

Victim Jerhonda Pace's observation highlights another aspect of the R. Kelly scandal as it applies to the #MeToo movement. Unlike the Weinstein scandal, race was a key factor in how the public responded to the numerous accusations by African American women against Kelly.

Crenshaw (1989) points to the conflict that arises when both race and gender are key points in a victim's oppression. Black women are sometimes forced to decide whether to sacrifice justice for themselves for the greater good of their community:

> Even though [Payne v.] Travenol was a partial victory for Black women, the case specifically illustrates how antidiscrimination doctrine generally creates a dilemma for Black women. It forces them to choose between specifically articulating the intersectional aspects of their subordination, thereby risking their ability to represent Black men, or ignoring intersectionality in order to state a claim that would not lead to the exclusion of Black men. When one considers the political consequences of this dilemma, there is little wonder that many people within the Black

community view the specific articulation of Black women's interests as dangerously divisive. (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 148)

This dynamic of multiple classifications for African American female victims poses a dilemma: They have to decide how their claims will affect the African American community as a whole or hinder the social progress of their racial community. And it is a double-edged sword if their grievances are made against a prominent African American man since they will be attacked by both African American women and the larger community for trying to tarnish the reputation of a symbolically uplifting role model. It could appear as if the African American female victim is being asked to sacrifice her justice for the sake of advancing the overall social justice of her racial community while not receiving any support or redress for her personal grievance. This dynamic emerged during another high-profile sexual harassment case: The Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings. When law professor Anita Hill accused a federal attorney and U.S. Supreme Court nominee named Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment, she was criticized by both women and members of the African American community:

> The two groups most visible at the Hill-Thomas hearing were at odds with each other. Many white feminists appeared largely unaware of the racial dynamics that shaped the Thomas-Hill confrontation. And many people fighting for racial justice, aware of lynching's toll on black men, heeded Judge Thomas's appeal to racial solidarity. They argued past each other, damaging the goal of antiracist and feminist collaboration—the sort of alliance Ms. Hill's testimony might have, in a better world, solidified. . . . We despaired as it became clear that our organizing on Anita Hill's behalf was ineffective in the face of outrage over a black woman who had dared to turn on a fellow African-American at the cusp of enormous judicial power. This complaint echoed across barber shops, churches and dining rooms across the country. (Crenshaw, 2018, para. 6)

Another high-profile example of this dynamic emerged during the premiere of the movie, *The Color Purple*. Some members of the African American community, including the Beverly Hills chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), felt (Crenshaw, 1989) the domestic violence scenes involving Danny Glover's character against the lead character portrayed by Whoopi Goldberg promoted an image of the African American man as violent against the African American woman. The film ultimately remained unchanged in its scenes, but Crenshaw (1989) presented the issue as another example of the self-sacrifice this dynamic presents for African American women: "The struggle against racism seemed to compel the subordination of certain aspects of the Black female experience in order to ensure the security of the larger Black community" (p. 163).

R. Kelly's Court of Public Opinion

This dynamic was central to the R. Kelly scandal and its African American female victims. Prior to the Buzzfeed (DeRogatis, 2017) article, supporters of Kelly defended his actions with various rationales. Despite the leak of three videos featuring Kelly having sex with at least two apparently underage girls, some supporters (hampton, 2019) pointed to the legal acquittal in 2008 as a reason not to condemn the R&B legend for his predatory actions. In that case, two key factors influenced the outcome. First, the family of the girl identified in one of the videos refused to testify or allow the girl to testify to her experience with Kelly. The girl was the niece of Kelly's protégé, a singer named Sparkle who was signed to his boutique record label Rockland Records. The girl's father played in Kelly's music tour band. It was reported that the family was paid off and the girl's father continue to perform for Kelly as late as 2003. When the charges were filed, the family denied it was the girl in the video (the girl was later identified by Sparkle, who testified in the case). Without the cooperation of the family, prosecutors decided not to pursue statutory rape charges and instead filed 21 counts of producing child pornography, which was the second factor (Carlozo & Fekenhoff, 2002).

Ultimately, these factors led to a weak case and eventual acquittal. However, it gave Kelly supporters a reason to justify their continued loyalty to a man who had been recorded on videotape having sex with an apparently underage girl (hampton, 2019). Other Kelly supporters pointed to other example of famous entertainers involved in sexual relationships with underage girls, including music superstars Elvis Presley who met his former wife when she was 14 years, and Jerry Lee Lewis, who married his first cousin once removed when she was 13 years and he was 22 years (Salam, 2019). A social media hashtag #FirstThem was later used by his supporters to highlight this argument (Sadeque, 2019).

In the *Surviving R. Kelly* documentary (hampton, 2019), three African American women—shown separately waiting on line for an R. Kelly concert that took place after the Buzzfeed article (DeRogatis, 2017) appeared—displayed no empathy for victims of the R. Kelly scandal. "Yo, he's been the same for years," one concertgoer says looking to the FOX5 news camera. "Who are we to judge?" another concertgoer says looking to the FOX5 news camera. "The protesters don't affect anything," a third concertgoer says looking to the FOX5 news camera. Their reactions reflect other general assumptions of the R. Kelly scandal as an attempt by society to take down a successful African American man, a sentiment echoed in the Cosby case. Kelly himself released a statement making similar accusations (Blackmon, 2018):

> R. Kelly supports the pro-women goals of the Time's Up movement. We understand criticizing a famous artist is a good way to draw attention to those goals—and in this case, it is unjust and off-target. We fully support the rights of women to be empowered to make their own choices," the statement added. "Time's Up has

neglected to speak with any of the women who welcome R. Kelly's support, and it has rushed to judgment without the facts." Soon it will be clear Mr. Kelly is the target of a greedy, conscious and malicious conspiracy to demean him, his family and the women with whom he spends his time. R. Kelly's music is a part of American and African-American culture that should never—and will never—be silenced. Since America was born, black men and women have been lynched for having sex or for being accused of it. We vigorously resist this attempted public lynching of a black man who has made extraordinary contributions to our culture. (Blackmon, 2018, para. 5)

These responses echoed the sentiment Oronike Odeleye (hampton, 2019) said that she observed when she cofounded the #MuteRKelly campaign, which seeks to stop Kelly's music from being sold, performed at concerts, played on the radio, and streamed via online music streaming services. "The response was very polarized, as is the black community on R. Kelly," Odeleye said. When she first started working with the campaign, she thought the history of R. Kelly's behavior would be enough to quickly meet her organization's goals. "I thought that would be a simple ask," Odeleye said. "That was met with resounding silence" (hampton, 2019).

Odeleye said racial progress was a key factor in the polarization that took place within the African American community:

You have this powerful person that is beloved in the African-American community and then you have a victim that no one cares about. And the greater society perpetuates stereotypes about black women that internally you start to believe. We'll believe if it is a convenient excuse not to have to deal with the reality of R. Kelly and how we have been supporting and enabling him for decades. (hampton, 2019)

Odeleye's experience underscored that the remaining support for Kelly has been influenced by the cultural dynamics found within the African American community and its experience with racism (hampton, 2019). Some scholars have written about African American women excusing violent acts by African American men because of the racism African American men experience in society:

In her 1990 book, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, the scholar bell hooks writes:

Many of us were raised in homes where black mothers excused and explained male anger, irritability, and violence by calling attention to the pressures black men face in a racist society . . . Assumptions that racism is more oppressive to black men than black women, then and now, are fundamentally based on acceptance of patriarchal notions of masculinity. (p. 124)

However, the #MuteRKelly movement gradually found famous supporters who were upfront about the disrespect faced by African American female victims. "I didn't value the accusers' stories because they were black women," said Chance the Rapper, a Chicago rapper who worked with R. Kelly in 2015 (hampton, 2019). With high-profile members such as John Legend, Kerry Washington, Shonda Rhimes, Ava Duvernay, Viola Davis, and Lupita Nyong'o of the African American community speaking out against R. Kelly and in support of the African American female victims, the victims started to experience a change in the response from the mainstream media, which has more frequently featured their stories (Newman, 2019). This change occurred recently with the debut of the "Surviving R. Kelly" documentary and its timing—airing almost a year after the Weinstein scandal and #MeToo movement—has influenced how society handles accusations of sexual abuse by powerful men.

A key factor in the documentary's effect in sparking the public reexamination of the allegations against Kelly was the firsthand accounts of Kelly's victims. Several women spoke in on-camera interviews about the abuse they experienced when they were with Kelly. His ex-wife, Andrea Lee, shared the experience of being physically attacked by Kelly in the back seat of a Hummer truck and also being raped and hogtied by Kelly. Lizzette Martinez met Kelly in Florida in 1995 when she was 17 years and described how he physically abused and hit her when he felt she was looking at other men. Lisa Van Allen, who met Kelly when she was 17 years in 1998, shared how she was smacked by Kelly when he did not feel she was listening to him or felt she was looking at other men. Jerhonda Pace, who was 14 years when she met Kelly in 2008, said Kelly slapped her and choked her until she passed out. Kitti Jones, who was 33 years when she met Kelly in 2011, talked about how Kelly physically abused her 2 weeks after she moved in with him when she questioned him about the videotapes showing him having sex with an underage girl (hampton, 2019).

The documentary, for the first time, showed the victims as human beings who had lives before they met Kelly and saw their lives changed through traumatic events Kelly inflicted upon them. Viewers saw their tears and uncomfortable body language as the victims recounted the emotionally damaging experiences they suffered when they were with Kelly. These personal testimonies, along with the timing of the documentary, led to a change in the public response to the allegations against Kelly (hampton, 2019).

As a result of the documentary's mainstream media exposure, Kelly finally experienced the Weinstein effect, which took place just months after the Kelly scandal emerged. The broadcast of the documentary reintroduced the R. Kelly scandal to a public audience that had shifted its thoughts about how to treat, respect, and respond to victims of sexual abuse and misconduct. This new approach to responding to sexual assault and misconduct allegations led to other public figures and businesses disassociating themselves with the accused. For Kelly, several artists, including Lady Gaga and Celine Dion, who once

worked with Kelly spoke out against him and requested their joint projects not be featured on music streaming services (Gottsegen, 2019). Kelly's record label RCA records was reported to have decided not to put any more money into Kelly's music, which meant his contract will likely expire and not be renewed. Several radio stations have decided not to play Kelly's music. Concert promoters have also decided to cancel some of his concerts, and the singer has had trouble getting permission to host concerts (Osborne, 2019).

Conclusion

The documentary about the R. Kelly scandal sparked a prominent and rapid evolution in the #MeToo movement and the mainstream media through the perspective of intersectionality. The social media and public debate about the role of intersectionality in the R. Kelly scandal at first compelled the African American female victims of Kelly to consider not publicly discussing their sexual assault for fear of being attacked by their own community. It was a present case study of how race and gender affected Kelly's victims in a different way from the prominent White women who were victimized by Weinstein. While Weinstein's victims dealt with gender-related grievances, Kelly's victims had to consider the complicated balance of addressing both race and gender. The focus on intersectionality ultimately provided a reckoning for the #MeToo movement, which saw an expansion of the mainstream media's coverage of the R. Kelly scandal and fallout and featured several interviews with various women who were sexually assaulted by Kelly. Thirty years after Crenshaw (1989) first introduced the concept of intersectionality, the world discovered it still had a lot more to learn.

"It seems that #MeToo has finally returned to black girls," wrote community activists Salamishah Tillet and Scheherazade Tillet.

> After all, #MeToo was founded by a black woman, Tarana Burke, to help African-American girls like the 13-year-old in Alabama who told her in 1997 about being sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend. Now we have to make sure that it does not leave. (Tillet & Tillet, 2019, para. 5)

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Article

Recalling Persky: White Rage and Intimate Publicity After Brock Turner

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Abstract

By attending to the successful campaign to recall and unseat Judge Aaron Persky in retaliation for his sentencing decision in the sexual assault trial of Stanford University athlete Brock Turner, we argue that the campaign constituted a White intimate public that directed White rage toward the judge for his perceived betrayals of a White paternal social contract. Because the campaign posited Persky's willingness to inflict carceral violence upon Turner as the measure of his fidelity to the state's obligations with regard to sexual violence and equality under the law, it legitimized carceral solutions that disproportionately harm communities of color. Such a centering of carceral solutions betrayed the public's affective divestment from the needs of marginalized communities.

Keywords

affect, affective divestment, intimate publics, racial contract, rape, sexual violence, social contract, Whiteness, betrayal

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In 2016, a jury convicted White Stanford University student Brock Turner for the sexual assault of Emily Doe, a White woman, while she lay unconscious near a dumpster on the Stanford campus. The maximum sentence for a conviction such as Turner's was 14 years in prison, and the prosecution sought 6 years imprisonment. Judge Aaron Persky sentenced Turner to 6 months in jail and 3 years' probation, plus requiring that he register as a sex offender. The state released Turner 3 months early on the basis of good behavior. Critics of the sentence characterized it as unjustifiably light, arguing that the sentence prioritized Turner's well-being over his victim's and that a person less privileged than Turner would have likely received a harsher sentence (Stack, 2016). The Stanford Rape Case inspired robust public discourse regarding the prevalence of sexual assault on U.S. college campuses. It mobilized myriad commentaries regarding the ways race and class privilege figure into criminal sentencing, as well as the criminal justice system's demonstrably poor record in responding to the needs of victims of sexual violence. Eventually, the robust discourses resulted in the successful campaign to recall and unseat Judge Aaron Persky in retaliation for his sentencing decision in the Stanford Rape Case.

In this essay, we argue that the campaign to unseat Persky constituted a White intimate public (Berlant, 1997, 1998) mobilized through White rage in response to the judge's abdication of a paternal social contract. For Persky's opponents, the judge's willingness to inflict carceral violence upon Turner's White masculine body was the measure of Persky's fidelity to the state's paternal obligations to the public. Such obligations included the use of punitive justice as a corrective to sexual violence. White intimate publics coalesce around shared affective investments and divestments (Mack & McCann, 2017), which structure the public's relationship to Whiteness, to other publics, and to the state. The mobilization of this public in response to Persky's perceived betrayals expressed White rage through arguments that espoused commitments to the interests of victims of sexual violence, as well as people of color and other marginalized communities who suffer carceral violence in especially intense ways. In spite of these claims of investment in the experiences of oppressed populations, the reliance on carceral solutions to sexual violence and other injustices centered the experiences of privileged White bodies (Bernstein, 2010; Bumiller, 2008; Mack & Na'puti, 2019). In so doing, the campaign is an example of a White intimate public's mobilization of White rage through an investment in the White paternal contract which simultaneously constitutes an affective divestment from the interests of communities for whom carceral violence is a source of ongoing vulnerability to "premature death" (Gilmore, 2007, p. 28).

As we hope will be clear throughout this essay, we do not write out of sympathy for Turner, nor do we disagree that Turner's sentence was the result of his privilege. Rather, we proceed out of concern that when White rage toward the actions of men such as Turner manifests in ways that embolden the carceral state, it is racialized Others and victims of gendered violence who are most likely

to suffer the consequences. With mutual investments in confronting sexual violence and carceral violence (as well as the myriad ways the two intersect), this essay proceeds in three parts. First, we theorize the mobilization of White rage and the constitution of White intimate publics that invest in a White paternal contract and rely on carceral solutions to protect White feminine victimhood. Next, we attend to the public campaign to unseat Judge Persky, analyzing a variety of texts that coalesced to constitute the successful mobilization of White rage that ended the judge's career. Lastly, we conclude by meditating on the salience of intimate publicity and White rage as heuristics for critiquing the communicative norms of nonintersectional feminisms that invest trust in a carceral state invested in protecting White cis-heteropatriarchy.

Intimate Publicity and White Rage

It is vitally important, Herman Gray (2013) argued, that critical communication and cultural studies scholars begin "to trace exactly how media organize and circulate powerfully affective means of gathering and assembling sentiment, attachment, and (dis)identification to public policies, bodies, histories, and cultures" (p. 254). One mode for doing such work, we argue, is through the conceptual resources of intimate publicity (Mack & McCann, 2017). Berlant (1998) described intimate publicity as a means of tracing how proprietary publics coalesce around shared affective intensities. Tracing the formation and circulation of intimate publics is useful for examining the cultivation of assemblages of concern, attention, and detachment/attachment. Intimacy describes the powerful affective enthymematic linkages between bodies that coalesce to produce a public. Berlant wrote, "To intimate is to communicate with the sparest of signs and gestures, and at its root intimacy has the quality of eloquence and brevity" (p. 281). The production of intimate publicity comes with the expectation that members "share a worldview and emotional knowledge that they have derived from a broadly common historical experience" (Berlant, 2008, p. viii).

Many intimate publics are built around shared experiences of injustices and function to make life more livable for marginalized populations (e.g., Berlant, 2008; Khanna, 2015; Nash, 2011). Berlant (2008) explained that intimate publics comprising oppressed and exploited peoples function "as a porous, affective scene of identification among strangers that promises a certain experience of belonging and provides a complex of consolation, confirmation, discipline, and discussion about how to live as an *x*" (p. viii). Through intimacy, members of a public develop an intensely felt sense of what it means to belong to a group and, very often, to suffer as a member of a group. Such affectively charged shared histories and experiences mean that even the most egalitarian intimate publics have a boundary of belonging, while also claiming to represent and constitute a large body of individuals who seemingly hold some qualities or experiences in

common. Central to the constitution of belonging and felt sense of intimacy is the mobilization of affective investments and divestments. Affective investments are the "inarticulable affective commitments that are mobilized through discourse and social conditions" (Mack & McCann, 2017, p. 337). Practices of affective investment and divestment, or the orientation of affective intensities toward or away from certain bodies and experiences, produce the boundaries of belonging within an intimate public by delineating whose pain and needs matter and by cultivating concern (Gray, 2013). As Garcia-Rojas (2017) explained, the embodied intensities that many critical and cultural studies scholars refer to as *affect* vary widely on the basis of lived experience. Despite primarily examining White affects, affect scholars—Garcia-Rojas argued—often discuss affect as a universal phenomenon. Such engagement centers White feelings and epistemologies while obscuring the power structures of Whiteness. Naming White affects and their circulation, on the other hand, can answer Gray's call to examine the cultivation of concern. For example, White intimate publics, which are what we primarily critique in this essay, often speak in universal terms about the interests they serve, and such modernist logics obscure the degree to which such publics are exclusionary and predicated on violence against racialized and gendered subjects (e.g., Wanzer-Serrano, 2015).

In order to better illustrate how White intimate publicity finds expression through discourses of belonging and protection from the neoliberal state, we trace the ways a paternal social contract anchors the affective investments that constitute White intimacy and how White rage functions as an affective response to perceived betrayals of that agreement in the context of sexual violence.

The White Paternal Social Contract

The White intimate public we scrutinize in this essay is constituted through fidelity to the White paternal social contract, which is a founding agreement in the formation of the U.S. nation-state that was designed to secure and protect the interests of White men. Such a public functions to name and protect specific terms of cooperation with the state that center the experiences of White bodies while claiming to represent the interests of all (e.g., Mills, 1997; Pateman, 1988). The capacity of the public and the state to honor their end of the bargain is the condition for continued cooperation between both entities.

In its broadest sense, the social contract, often discussed as a product of enlightenment liberalism, is an agreement that grounds governance in which citizen-subjects sacrifice certain rights in exchange for state protection. Pateman (1988) and Mills (1997) documented how descriptions of the social contract, when not approached with a critical understanding of power dynamics and social hierarchies, fail to account for how White male supremacy structures civil society. As Mills noted, the social contract "is not a contract between

everybody ('we the people'), but between just the people who count, the people who really are people ('we the white people')" (p. 3). Questions of who deserves protection and whose actions warrant harsh punishment are tethered to racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies. Reddy (2011) illustrated in his critique of liberal egalitarianism that the expansion of the social contract to include previously excluded bodies and communities inevitably comes at the cost of more violence directed toward other marginalized people. In other words, the realization of justice through the state is predicated on a politics of disposability. Reddy also argued that the state offers protection and freedom only in ways that allow it to continue hiding its own incoherence. He explained that the "contemporary conjoining of state violence and social emancipation" (p. 37) is necessary in order to ensure that progress only emerges in ways that adhere to the normative logics of the neoliberal state.

The ways violence against marginalized communities structures the White paternal social contract become clearer in the context of public and state responses to sexual violence. In U.S. public culture, we symbolically deploy rape as an unusually heinous crime to which the state, acting on behalf of the aggrieved public, should respond with exceptional force (Bernstein, 2010; Bumiller, 2008; Freedman, 2013). But the consequences of this logic do not fall evenly across all bodies. When White women accuse Black or Brown men of rape, the resulting discourses of sexual violence and state protection often reinforce the monstrosity of the men and the innocence and purity of White womanhood. Such are the logics which justified the lynching of Black men and other modalities of White supremacy (e.g., Curry, 2017; Davis, 1978; Jackson, 2006; Ore, 2019). Furthermore, controlling images that figure Black women as hypersexual or parasitic drains on the welfare state make them less legible as victims of sexual violence (Bumiller, 2008; Collins, 2008; Griffin, 2013; Phillips & Griffin, 2015). With few exceptions—such as serial predators or those who are marked as abnormal "monsters"—when White men are accused of raping women, the act is often minimized, dismissed, or normalized (Mack & McCann, 2018).

This apparent contradiction in the ways we circulate different narratives of sexual violence becomes more understandable, and appears less contradictory, when we understand it as an expression of a racial and sexual social contract that establishes which bodies warrant state protection and which ones figure as threats to the social order—when we consider who "belongs" and who does not. The symbolic construction of innocence and victimhood through the White paternal social contract, which is both racial and sexual, is fundamentally based, as Pateman (1988) and Mills (1997) argued, on the establishment of White supremacy (Mills, 1997) and patriarchy (Pateman, 1988). Thus, relying on state violence to protect White women from racialized masculine bodies and often rationalizing sexual violence inflicted by White men presents no contradiction whatsoever. Rather, it is fundamental to a social contract that centers White men as quintessential social subjects who enjoy access to women's bodies.

The punishing power of the state vis-à-vis sexual violence, while nominally deployed in defense of women, ultimately rationalizes a social contract that protects White masculinity.

White Rage and the Politics of Betrayal

When it is perceived that the terms of the White paternal social contract have not been met, White rage gives expression to the feelings of betrayal that emerge in response. Specifically, the White intimate public comes to believe that the state has fallen short of its solemn responsibility to provide protection to the bodies the social contract comprises. Just as the White paternal social contract does, White rage presumes to speak for all. White rage does not express itself as such. Rather, it finds expression through discourses that lament the state's failure to sufficiently protect individuals regardless of race, gender, or other subjectivities. But because the terms of protection are predicated upon the experiences of White bodies, such grievances are ultimately complaints regarding the state's perceived betrayals of Whiteness.

Anderson (2016) described White rage as the political expression of White resentments regarding advancements by people of color in the United States. This anger betrays an instinctive understanding among most White people that the social contract is ultimately drafted with their interests at the center. Thus, increases in Black and Brown access to previously forbidden sectors of civil society read as denials of the promises of Whiteness. Those very racialized bodies of color become the targets of White rage. Numerous scholars have documented the ways in which White publics react forcefully to anxieties regarding Black emancipation following the Civil War (Ore, 2019), waged labor at various stages of capitalist development (Roediger, 2007), or changing national demographics at the dawn of the 21st century (Alcoff, 2015). In such instances, White people respond to perceived erosions of White supremacy by directing resentment and violence toward Black and Brown bodies.

However, as we argue here, White rage also emerges and circulates in nominally "progressive" social movements—sometimes even spoken by people of color or through rhetorics that articulate and critique systems of oppression such as White supremacy and patriarchy. To the extent that a White intimate public experiences an injustice as a betrayal of the paternal social contract, it will mobilize the forces of White rage. Thus, tracing and critiquing White rage is not simply a matter of identifying instances in which White people direct violence and vitriol toward communities of color. Rather, White rage becomes identifiable in discourse when members of a public intimate with Whiteness by lamenting an abdication of responsibility or some other act of betrayal vis-a-vis the White paternal social contract.

The mobilization of White rage toward sexual violence and the production of White intimate publics help sustain the violence of the state by naturalizing it

and tethering it to an emancipatory feminist project that speaks in universal terms but relies on logics that ultimately serve to protect only certain privileged bodies. Because an assumption of universal experience underlies this public and the social contract to which it adheres, and such universals presuppose privileged White bodies, reliance on carceral violence to ameliorate sexual violence arises with minimal dissonance because the marginalized bodies on the line under such logic do not register as salient. The stakes of such universalizing discourses are deeply consequential for already-Othered bodies. A social contract that relies on the punishing power of an already-racist, patriarchal, and heteronormative state unleashes that state's various modes of violence on those communities it is designed to control, discipline, and punish.

Because this project explores the contours of activism that posits the carceral state as a corrective to sexual violence, it offers insights into the social patterns that produce the conditions of what Bernstein (2010) called carceral feminism. Engaging in the breadth of research about carceral feminism is beyond the scope of this essay, but certainly that research provides history and context to feminist movements that rely heavily on the carceral state as a corrective to gendered and sexual violence (Bernstein, 2010; Bumiller, 2008). Our analysis of the campaign to recall Persky does arguably provide insight into the social and communicative terms by which carceral logics become deployed in ostensibly "feminist" campaigns and movements. By illuminating how White rage is mobilized to produce intimate publics in the service of punitive solutions to rape, we contribute to understandings of how state violence emerges as a desirable response to social injustice—even in movements that seek structural justice more broadly.

Public discourse regarding the Turner case is salient for studying White intimate publics because it espouses an investment in social justice following an agent of the state's betrayal of a social contract. However, while the campaign against Persky espoused broad commitments to an egalitarian system of law and order, its centering of the carceral state as a corrective to injustices such as sexual violence and institutional disparities betrayed a narrower set of affective investments in the experiences of privileged White bodies. Here we see a privileged White man accused of raping a White woman whose conviction and sentencing catalyzed a forceful response. By refusing to imagine responses to sexual violence outside of the carceral state or legal system, the campaign affectively divested from the needs of people of color and other oppressed communities for whom the carceral state is a source of persistent violence.

Punishing Persky for Not Punishing Enough

Individuals who were disgusted by Turner's actions and what they perceived as a light sentence argued that the state failed to draw on its capacity to administer carceral violence in response to sexual violence. In so doing, they also constituted themselves as an intimate public invested in a paternalistic social contract.

If Persky was unwilling to orient his own capacity to wield state violence by properly punishing Turner, then activists would mobilize in order to punish the judge himself.

In addition to accepting Turner's probation officer's sentencing recommendation (Anderson & Svrluga, 2016), Persky justified Turner's sentence by claiming "A prison sentence would have a severe impact on him" (Stack, 2016). The sentence also came in the context of a letter Turner's father submitted to the judge, which posited his son as a victim. The elder Turner claimed that his son had already paid a steep price for "20 minutes of action out of his 20 plus years life" and lamented that his son had grown so depressed during legal proceedings that he no longer craved rib eye steaks or his favorite snacks. Turner's father also blamed alcohol consumption and a culture of campus promiscuity for his son's actions (Hunt, 2016). The sentence and statements such as Turner's father's promptly inspired condemnation from various activists, lawyers, and public figures. In a press release published after the sentencing, Santa Clara County District Attorney Jeff Rosen lamented, "The sentence does not factor in the true seriousness of this sexual assault, or the victim's ongoing trauma. Campus rape is no different than off-campus rape. Rape is rape. And I will prosecute it as such" ("Former Stanford Student," 2016). For Rosen and others who desired a longer sentence, a more punitive response from Judge Persky would have communicated the gravity of Turner's offense and affirmed the social contract around which this intimate public mobilized. However, while Turner remained an object of intense public anger following his sentencing, there were no legal avenues to correct what so many commentators regarded as an injustice. Turner was a convicted sex offender. There would be no new trial unless Turner himself sought one.[1] Public anger turned to Persky and his sentencing decision.

Activists mobilized White rage in the service of an impeachment campaign against Persky, as well as a petition to subject the judge to a recall election. Whereas the impeachment effort failed, the recall petition was successful and, on June 5, 2018, a majority of voters supported removing Persky from the bench (Astor, 2018). Next, we scrutinize the key themes that emerged in the campaign against Persky. We demonstrate that the recall attempt and other public critiques of the judge constituted a mobilization of White rage through a series of argumentative frames and, specifically, constituted an intimate public that relied on a paternalistic and racialized social contract that constitutes the state as the savior of (White) women and privileges carceral punishments as a the primary legitimate corrective to sexual violence and social inequities.

Communicating the Gravity of Rape

Much of the anger following Persky's sentencing of Turner rested on the belief that Persky, like so many other White men, did not take sexual violence against

women seriously. For them, imposing a harsher sentence on Turner would have sufficiently communicated the cruelty and pervasiveness of sexual violence. Absent that, the campaign insisted that Persky himself had to pay. Thus, a significant share of the White rage that emerged in the wake of the Turner sentencing came in response to a White man who simply did not appreciate what Emily Doe and so many other women had experienced. The campaign figured Persky as what Hill (2016) called a custodian of rape culture, or someone whose actions and attitudes "are essential in shoring up and propagating the cultural climate whereby sexual violence can flourish" (p. 35). The campaign's targeting of custodians such as Persky resulted in the production of an intimate public that equated harsh penal sanction with communicating the gravity of sexual violence and restoring the paternal social contract.

The website for the Recall Judge Aaron Persky (RJAP) campaign featured a black and white photograph of the U.S. Supreme Court building on the top and bottom of its main page.[2] In this stark image, a partially cloudy sky loomed in the background and darkness draped the upper portion of the iconic federal building. The image constituted an intimate public through affective investments in the majesty of the law—so central to the paternal social contract—expressed through the recognizable building, as well as fear of the looming threat that judges such as Persky pose to it. The image invited site visitors to contemplate and fear the legal consequences of the Turner trial. Superimposed on the image was the text "Today, I am every woman," which paraphrases a statement made by Emily Doe in an interview following the Turner sentencing (Martin, 2016), as well as an icon encouraging visitors to make donations to the campaign. Above the red donation button was the text "Our legal system must protect every woman from violence." Immediately, the site's authors beckoned visitors to invest in a vision of the legal system as the ultimate and necessary arbiter of justice in matters of sexual violence, and to invest in a universal category of woman-as-victim. Removing Persky from the bench figured as an affirmation of the system's imperative to protect (White) women, as well as the White rage that mobilized the intimate public. Thus, the site characterized Persky as a perversion of an otherwise sound justice system. In the abstract, the site posited the courts and other purveyors of carceral violence as fundamentally sound manifestations of the paternal social contract around which the intimate public mobilized.

The site explained its rationale for seeking to remove Persky from the bench. The authors claimed, "We need judges who understand violence against women and take it seriously." They also argued,

> There's a reason why this case has sparked national outrage. Women – and men –
> across the country know this ruling is an injustice and are willing to speak out on a
> difficult topic. Judge Persky and Brock Turner's father fail to understand who the

real victim is in this case. It's not the attacker. It's the innocent woman who was sexually assaulted.

Tethering Persky to Turner's father, the site's authors constituted the judge as a custodian of rape culture who was indifferent to the anger of sexual assault victims and their allies. In the site's telling, Persky simply did not appreciate or respect the seriousness of sexual violence. Rather, he was as out of touch as a White man who would lament his son's diminishing taste for ribeye following a conviction for sexual assault. If members of the public found Mr. Turner's letter to Persky outrageous, they should find the judge's sentence equally worthy of their indignation. The authors also wrote, "Persky is unfit to sit on the bench, and as long as he is a judge, predators in Santa Clara County will know they have an ally on the bench." Thus, Persky's failure to grasp the salience of sexual assault on college campuses was more than patently offensive to these authors. It was also a dangerous dereliction of his duties under the paternalistic social contract. In characterizing carceral violence as a modality for sending a "message" about the seriousness of sexual violence, the site's authors privileged the prison as the measure of the state's investment in protecting (White) women. These members of the campaign against Persky argued that, in failing to impose prison on men such as Turner, he was an "ally" of sexual predators and a threat to the intimate public the campaign constituted.

Other commentators echoed the recall campaign's characterizations of the sentence as a crass denial of the seriousness of sexual violence. In a brief editorial following the sentencing, *The Mercury News* of San Jose wrote, "Brock Turner's six-month jail term for sexual assault of an intoxicated, unconscious woman on the Stanford campus last year is a setback for the movement to take campus rape seriously" (Mercury News Editorial, 2016). The editorial invoked public anger regarding what Turner did to "an intoxicated, unconscious woman" and reduced it to the administration of punitive justice. Absent a satisfying carceral response, the Turner case figured as a setback for those who wished to eliminate sexual violence. Stanford student Kasey Luo (2018) expressed the same sentiment in an op-ed published in *The Stanford Daily*, writing,

> We cannot change the fact that Turner did not serve even close to what he deserved. But what about the next time this happens? Are we going to let Judge Persky excuse another sex offender? We cannot afford to sit around when there is someone in power who cannot deliver justice, especially when it's their job to do so. We need judges who will acknowledge that violence against women is a serious issue and take concrete steps to prevent it from happening. The time is up for judges like Persky.

Consistently, critics of Persky lamented his abdication of responsibility to victims of sexual violence. In so doing, they presumed the legitimacy of the judicial system's prerogative to confine bodies in response to criminal acts—indeed, they claimed it was Persky's "job to do so." The measure of Persky's responsibility to the intimate public and fidelity to the social contract was to "deliver justice" in the form of appropriately harsh sentences. By targeting Persky, activists and commentators invested in a vision of justice for victims of sexual violence that relied on carceral solutions. In figuring Persky as a perversion of the system, the pubic presumed the legitimacy of the social contract itself.

Carceral Correctives to Privilege

Turner's status as a White male student athlete at a prestigious university, as well as his privileged familial economic background also mobilized the White rage calling for Persky's ouster. Although the campaign expressed rage toward Persky's deference to privileged defendants, it did so in ways that relied on a social contract whose carceral logics historically do disproportionate violence to racialized bodies of color—even in the context of reforms designed to make the system more equitable (Murakawa, 2014). In so doing, the intimate public presumed the legitimacy of the criminal justice system by positing harsh sentences as an antidote to an unjust system.

RJAP organizers and other commentators frequently claimed that Turner's sentence was a function of his privilege, noting that the criminal justice system as a whole typically imposes harsher punishments on people of color, the economically disadvantaged, and other members of marginalized communities. The solution to these disparities, these activists claimed, in addition to ending Persky's judicial career, was the more even dissemination of harsh punitive measures. The perfection of a system whose genesis is White supremacy emerged as the preferred corrective to a trial that activists claimed reified the inequities of that very system. Thus, the intimate public that coalesced amid RJAP rested on espoused investments in equality under the law just as surely as punitive responses to sexual violence.

In a widely circulated, if ultimately unsuccessful, online petition seeking Persky's impeachment, author Maria Ruiz (n.d.) argued,

> Judge Persky failed to see that the fact that Brock Turner is a white male star athlete at a prestigious university does not entitle him to leniency. He also failed to send the message that sexual assault is against the law regardless of social class, race, gender or other factors.

For Ruiz, leniency or the lack thereof was the measure of Persky's sensitivity to privilege and its role in the criminal justice system, as well as his fidelity to the paternalistic social contract. The corrective to such structural inequities and a

proper response to public outrage would have been a harsher punishment for Turner. In their *The Stanford Daily* op-ed, Luo (2018) also invoked Turner's privilege and Persky's apparent solidarity with privileged defendants. Luo wrote, "We don't seek to recall Persky for harsher sentences. We seek to recall Persky because of his historically consistent bias in favor of privileged men like Brock Turner." Luo's argument took a curious turn, as they explicitly claimed that the goal of the recall campaign is not to ensure harsher sentences. Stanford law professor and founding chair of RJAP Michele Dauber (2018) made a similar claim in an interview with *San Francisco Magazine*, explaining,

> Our campaign isn't about harsh sentencing. It's been extremely clear and narrowly focused on addressing the problem of impunity for privileged perpetrators of violence against women, particularly in the case of college athletes, tech workers, and upper-class or white individuals.

Dauber added,

> And I reject the idea that's being advocated by Judge Persky's supporters that we have to choose between caring about mass incarceration and caring about the fact that victims of sexual and domestic violence do not have adequate access to justice.

Still, commentators who opposed the Persky recall expressed concerns that his removal would set a harmful precedent vis-à-vis mass incarceration. Numerous lawyers, activists, and others argued that the recall would threaten judicial independence by placing greater pressure on elected judges to impose harsh sentences and, therefore, increase incarceration (e.g., Chammah, 2016; Levinson, 2018; Pfaff, 2018). In rejecting such claims, RJAP advanced a mode of argument that accommodated concerns regarding disparate sentences and harsh sentences in their own right, as well as sexual violence. One could long to see Turner spend significantly more time in prison, vote in favor of removing Persky from the bench, and still identify with the burgeoning movement to reduce mass incarceration. Whereas RJAP members and other pro-recall activists expressed affective investments toward the historically over-incarcerated, they argued Persky was a friend of the privileged. Furthermore, both Luo and RJAP plainly claimed that Persky's leniency reflected a lack of attention to survivors of sexual violence. Thus, a harsher punitive response to Turner's crimes remains the measure of Perksy's affective investment toward victims of sexual violence and the under-privileged. The campaign links myriad expressions of injustice, as well as affinity toward numerous marginalized populations, in the service of ending Persky's career. Anger about mass incarceration, sexual violence, and the role of race and class privilege in the criminal justice system coalesce to produce a message that maintains fidelity to a social contract characterized both by the state's

responsibility to equitably distribute punishment and respond forcefully to sexual violence.

On its website, RJAP attempted to document Persky's leniency toward privileged men by describing other decisions he made while sitting on the bench. The site authors contended, "Judge Persky's sentencing of Brock Turner was consistent with other cases in which he appeared to favor athletes and other relatively privileged individuals accused of sex crimes or violence against women." On the site's "Frequently Asked Questions" page, the authors responded to the question "Has Judge Persky shown bias before?" by outlining several previous cases in which they claim Persky displayed leniency toward privileged defendants. For example, the site provided several examples in which Persky, himself a former Stanford athlete, appeared to favor fellow athletes in his courtroom. The authors noted that in 2015, Persky allowed college football player Ikaika Gunderson, who was "convicted of felony domestic violence for severely beating and choking his ex-girlfriend and pushing her out of a car" to leave California in order to play football for the University of Hawaii. The site added that, after leaving Hawaii for Washington State, Gunderson was again arrested for domestic violence. Thus, in addition to deferring to Gunderson's perceived needs as a promising student athlete, the site also faulted Persky for enabling an abusive predator to continue victimizing women.

RJAP described other instances in which Persky favored athlete defendants and other privileged men. For example, the site documented Persky's decision to sentence Robert Chain, a White man who "was convicted of having dozens of highly disturbing images of very young girls ages 18 months to 4 years being penetrated or in sexual situations," to 4 days in jail as further evidence of the judge's investment in the interests of privileged defendants over those of victims. The site added, "Less privileged defendants evidently do not receive the same level of solicitude from him." The authors cited a case in which Persky sentenced a "low-income Latino defendant charged with similar crimes to Brock Turner" to 3 years in prison. They noted, "Like Turner, he had no serious criminal history. Unlike Turner, the Latino defendant was extremely remorseful, apologized, admitted it was wrong, and pleaded guilty." Turner's refusal to concede his guilt was one of the chief focal points of the widely read letter penned by his victim, Emily Doe (Baker, 2016). By invoking anger through disturbing examples of domestic violence and sexual abuse against children, as well as narratives of inequitable treatment of defendants, the site mobilized White rage toward Persky and affinity toward victims by characterizing the judge as apathetic toward the traumas of vulnerable communities. RJAP collapsed outrage toward sexual predators and social inequities, making the administration of carceral violence the measure of Persky's commitment to social justice. To the extent that he demonstrated leniency toward privileged defendants, he figures as indifferent to the legitimate anger of a broad range of victims. The intimate

public calling for his ouster, on the other hand, stands as firmly invested in the fates of all victims.

The RJAP website also addressed privilege and disparity by claiming, "This recall sends a clear message that the people demand equal justice for all, regardless of race and privilege." Implicit in the message of recalling Persky was the presumption that harsh punishments for men such as Turner would itself express a commitment to "equal justice for all." The site also engaged critics of the recall measure who "have argued that recalling Judge Persky will cause other judges to impose longer sentences on all criminal defendants, the majority of whom are people of color charged with nonviolent or drug offenses." In response, the RJAP authors wrote, "We are confident that judges have sufficient judicial integrity to be able to distinguish between high status, white or privileged college athletes like Brock Turner who are convicted of sex crimes and poor minority drug and non-violent offenders." RJAP expressed faith in the capacity of judges not mired by Persky's affinity for the privileged to meet the demands for justice that the intimate public constituted by RJAP expressed. The campaign collapsed anger regarding the myriad, well-documented flaws of the U.S. criminal justice system into the person of Persky while affirming the legitimacy of the system in its own right. While drug offenders generated considerable outrage among White intimate publics during the 1980s and 1990s in the United States (e.g., Reeves and Campbell, 1994), contemporary discourse regarding law and order tends to minimize the salience of drug offences and typically centers the drug offender—particularly the underprivileged drug offender—as worthy of sympathy and leniency. The violent offender, on the other hand, does not typically warrant sympathy or mercy (Sered, 2019). Thus, the campaign mobilized affective investments in ways that responded to anger regarding sexual violence as well as mass incarceration.

Conclusion

By articulating real and legitimate anger regarding sexual violence and structural inequalities within the criminal justice system to the carceral state, the campaign against Persky posited punitive solutions to sexual violence as a corrective to social injustice. In so doing, the campaign embraced a paternal social contract under which state recognition through carceral violence is the measure of justice. In mobilizing public outrage against Turner's brief jail sentence following his sexual assault conviction, advocates for recalling Persky affirmed the carceral state's legitimacy as the chief arbiter of justice (instead of imagining alternatives), both with regard to sexual violence and its own entrenched inequities with regard to race, class, and other marginalized positionalities. The emergence of such an intimate public was only possible to the extent that its members invested in a paternal social contract that centered White feminine victimhood, and divested from the bodies and experiences of those who stood to suffer

considerably from an emboldened carceral state—even as the campaign itself presumed to mobilize and satisfy anger toward the legal system's violence against marginalized bodies.

Brock Turner is by no means a sympathetic or ideal icon for those of us invested in challenging the carceral state. Furthermore, Persky's record of leniency toward male athletes and other privileged defendants warrants scrutiny, critique, and rage. How one feels about either of these White men should not be the measure of how we attend to the communicative practices at play in the campaign to unseat Persky. Rather, critical communication scholars interested in the intersections of carceral and sexual violence should be guided by a skepticism regarding the carceral state's ability to deliver justice to oppressed populations. In this respect, we agree with Murakawa (2014) that the harm of penal justice "varies least by what the partisan values most: the 'message' of punishment" (p. 19). Bureaucratic refinements such as the reforms RJAP advocated historically empower the carceral state to expand its reach in ways that ultimately fall the most heavily on marginalized communities. Such empowerment has already occurred in California following Turner's conviction. In September 2016, California Governor Jerry Brown signed Assembly Bills 701 and 2888— bills that arose largely in response to public outrage regarding the Turner case. The laws mandate prison time for individuals convicted of rape and broaden the state's legal definition thereof to include all forms of nonconsensual sex. Brown signed this legislation with some ambivalence, citing California's overall trend toward ending mandatory minimum sentences. But with his signature, Brown affirmed the State Assembly's desire to impose such sentences on individuals convicted of rape, affirming the RJAP's position that sexual offenses warranted special scrutiny and severe carceral solutions. Santa Clara District Attorney Jeff Rosen agreed, declaring in a public statement, "While prisons are not appropriate for every person convicted of a crime, rapists belong in prison" (Ullola, 2016).

In seeking harsher punishments for privileged sex offenders through the removal of a judge or passage of punitive legislation in the name of universal victims, those who sought to end the judicial career of Persky and otherwise guarantee that men like Turner will spend considerably more time behind bars invest faith in the state as a neutral arbiter when its history of carceral violence demonstrates that it is anything but. Because the White intimate public that coalesced around public outrage regarding the Stanford rape case was fundamentally rooted in the logics of modernity—and, therefore, colonialism, White supremacy, and cis heteropatriarchy—it could rationalize further entrenching the power of the carceral state by affectively divesting from the lives of racialized and otherwise marginalized Others for whom carceral and sexual violence are deeply entwined. Rather, the campaign predicated its demands on affective investment in the experiences of a universal victim—and universal victims are always already White (Bumiller, 2008). While Persky's opponents declared

solidarity with victims of carceral violence, their activism ultimately rested on affective responses to White victimhood and the presumption that, in spite of considerable evidence to the contrary (Murakawa, 2014), a properly finessed criminal justice system could be self-correcting with regard to social injustice.

In rendering the state and its punishing power as a guarantor of justice for victims of sexual violence or an unjust criminal justice system, Persky's opponents sustained a number of damaging tropes regarding sexual and carceral violence. For instance, RJAP and their allies constructed a narrative that pits Persky, Turner, and other men who engage in or tolerate sexual violence against the figure of the victimized (White) woman. Bumiller (2008) argues that discourses regarding sexual violence that advance a binary gender relationship between always-already potentially victimized women and always-already potentially violent men represses the significance of race and other positionalities with regard to sexual violence. For instance, while RJAP Chair Dauber noted that men can also be victims of sexual violence during at least one televised interview (Fox News, 2016), the vast majority of discourse from Persky's opponents posited cisgender White women as the primary victims of sexual violence and, therefore, the most salient members of this intimate public. In addition to erasing the sexual trauma experienced by cisgender men, transgender, and nonbinary individuals, or the distinct ways women of color are vulnerable to sexual violence, the campaign against Persky advanced a normative conceptualization of what sexual violence entails. Indeed, by turning to the carceral state as a corrective to sexual violence, the campaign ignored the ways the prison itself functions as a site of sexual violence. In addition to under-documented and poorly addressed instances of prison rape (Bruenig, 2015), Curry (2017) argued that incarceration itself functions as a mode of sexual violence for racialized bodies of color. He described the prison as "an institution with a historical libidinal obsession toward Black male flesh" (p. 74). In other words, incarceration as such is an act of sexual violence towards Black men. However, Persky's critics and others within the White intimate public described in this essay invested in a facile narrative of sexual violence that recognizes it only in instances that are legible within the registers of modernity and, therefore, to the carceral state. They affectively divest from the state sanctioned sexual violence towards racialized bodies of color even as they presume to mobilize their anger in order to make it more difficult for the justice system to advantage privileged White men.

On June 5, 2018, a majority of Santa Clara County voters decided to end Persky's judicial career (Astor, 2018). Several journalists characterized the campaign's success as a victory for the #MeToo movement, thus tethering the carceral logics of the campaign against Persky to broader mobilizations against sexual violence that have emerged since Turner's conviction (e.g., Bach, 2018; Elias, 2018). But as many activists and scholars of color have observed, the #MeToo movement itself too often roots its interventions in the experiences

of White women, when women of color experience justice, public opinion, and institutional responsiveness regarding sexual violence in different ways (de la Garza, 2019; Onwuachi-Willig, 2018; Tambe, 2018). Me Too founder Tarana Burke, a Black woman and survivor of sexual violence, has made precisely this point by arguing the movement she initiated, but that found mainstream appeal through the social media activity of celebrity White women, has failed to center the experiences of women of color or attend to the nuances of the ways they experience the cultural politics of sexual violence. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Burke explained, "We can't wait for white folks to decide that our trauma is worth centering on when we know that it's happening." She has also expressed concern that the movement invests too much energy in the mobilization of justifiable outrage and neglects the salience of healing for victims (Harrison, 2018). While relying on the carceral state as a corrective to sexual violence may seem a perfectly natural response for an intimate public invested in the experiences of privileged White women, voices such as Burke's illustrate that publics who experience significant measures of both sexual and carceral violence will find recourse to police and prisons less desirable (e.g., Davis, 1978).

The prospect of seeing sexual predators face the full majesty of the law is undoubtedly satisfying in many salient respects. For instance, in the context of a criminal justice system that is woefully inadequate when responding to the needs of victims of sexual violence (e.g., Jordan, 2015), instances in which the offenders we view as especially vile are held to legal account for their actions often constitutes a welcome alternative to the status quo. We deny neither the satisfaction associated with such punitive measures nor the failures of our current legal system to address sexual violence. We readily admit that our disgust at Brock Turner's offenses lead us to, at times, relish the prospect of him suffering. Our desire is not to mitigate the intensity of public outrage regarding sexual violence, but to suggest that contemporary iterations thereof presuppose the experiences of White women victims at the expense of women of color and other victims of sexual violence. To presume the legitimacy of the carceral state in instances of sexual violence at a time when many of the same activists who called for Persky's ouster align with efforts to end mass incarceration more broadly invests in an idealized system that simply does not exist. Furthermore, such presumptions portend the expansion of a system, fueled by White rage, that will continue absorbing Black and Brown bodies at disproportionate rates. A robust critique of the carceral state that questions its efficacy even in the face of the most despised culprits enables more nuanced discussions about how we might confront sexual violence without relying on prisons, prosecutors, or police. Such a critique also requires that we center the rage experienced by women of color and other victims of sexual violence who do not align with the normative ideal of the White feminine victim. As Black feminists and other historically marginalized voices have long argued, outrage toward

myriad modes of violence is an indispensable resource for constituting publics and mobilizing political action (e.g., Combahee River Collective, 1978). It is not the anger toward men such as Turner and Persky that we have sought to critique in this essay. Rather, we problematize the ends to which such anger finds expression and whose anger takes precedent in public discourse. Whereas those who ended Judge Persky's career organized White rage and rooted it in the carceral state, those who regard the violence of sexual predators and the state as equally worthy of outrage should theorize ways we might produce new affective investments and critique violence in ways that exceed the felt parameters of modernity and the epistemologies of White victimhood.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

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Notes

1. Following his release, Turner unsuccessfully sought a retrial ("Court Denies," 2018).
2. The campaign's website is archived at https://web.archive.org/web/*/https://www. recallaaronpersky.com/

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Article

Rhetorical Constellations and the Inventional/ Intersectional Possibilities of #MeToo

Emma Frances Bloomfield[1] ⓘ

Abstract
In this project, I analyze news coverage of the #MeToo movement to categorize how blame is assigned and what corrective actions are prescribed for the pervasive problem of sexual violence. Although it is tempting to scapegoat individuals, this practice often limits the scope of sexual violence to isolated cases. Transcendence is an alternative route to redemption that attributes blame to structural and societal forces. However, transcendence may erase intersectional differences and silence voices by overshadowing individual stories. I argue that the risks in focusing exclusively on either scapegoating or transcendence can be mediated through the lens of a rhetorical constellation. This approach calls for media and news coverage of #MeToo to attend to the specific circumstances of individual cases and to frame those unique people, voices, and stories as part of a series of interactions with other instances of sexual violence that constitute a call for societal change.

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Introduction

On October 15, 2017, actress and activist Alyssa Milano tweeted a call for people who have been victims of sexual violence to repost #MeToo in a show of solidarity. Shortly thereafter, the hashtag was tweeted by millions of people across the world sharing their personal stories of sexual violence (Sayej, 2017). #MeToo has quickly become a social phenomenon that has drawn increased attention to issues of sexual violence. However, #MeToo is not without those who have noted flaws in the movement's lack of diverse voices (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018), exclusion of men (PettyJohn, Muzzey, Maas, & McCauley, 2019), and unclear goals (Zarkov & Davis, 2018). In examining this significant social movement, care must be taken to validate the stories and experiences of all victims and to acknowledge issues that the movement addresses and fails to address. In this article, I analyze patterns in the assignment of guilt and in the proposed solutions to sexual violence that emerge as inventional and intersectional resources in news coverage of #MeToo.

To analyze the #MeToo movement, I draw from Kenneth Burke's (1969, 1970) guilt-redemption cycle and consubstantiality. Before I elaborate on Burke's methodological influence in this project, it is important to explain the tension in using his work to analyze a feminist movement. Some scholars have taken issue with Burke's "patriarchal bias," his glossing over of individual differences, and his overreliance on the Western, male experience as the stand-in for the human experience (e.g., Condit, 1992; Foss & Griffin, 1992; Murray, 1998, p. 29). Inherent in all theoretical and methodological approaches are "selections" and "deflections," where some rhetorical and material features are emphasized over others (Burke, 1966, p. 45). In applying Burke to a feminist artifact, the questions become, "To whom does this theory apply? Whose rhetoric is being described here?" (Foss & Griffin, 1992, p. 345) and are the answers the method provides compatible with the rhetoric of and about the #MeToo movement? While I acknowledge the limitations other scholars have mentioned regarding the application of Burke to feminist rhetorics (e.g., Murray, 1998, p. 31), I justify my choice of dramatism as a methodological influence precisely because of Burke's (1969) attention to "the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise" (p. xviii). Furthermore, even in his proposal of male-centric ideas, such as his "Definition of Man," Burke (1966) specifically calls for his definition to be challenged, noting that the point of the exercise is in part to prompt consideration of "what should be added, subtracted, or in some way modified" (p. 3).

Celeste Condit (1992) responds to this call by offering a "Post-Burke" definition that reinserts the voices of diverse others and incorporates the variety of different ways that we use language and language uses us. Other scholars have reworked Burke's foundational theories of identification and the guilt-redemption cycle and found them compatible and open to the flexibility required

to analyze feminist works, most often with strategic modifications (e.g., Brown, 1978; Houston Grey, 2011). Aligned with these scholars, I advocate that there is something both Burkean and feminist about playing in the ambiguities and the gaps, reimagining expectations, and modifying norms. I take on Burke, then, with the knowledge of potential issues but also with the conviction that looking at the language of guilt and redemption within the #MeToo movement can provide insight into the dominant narratives that circulate about sexual violence. Thus, I view Burke as a starting point from which an exploration into public discourse and feminist rhetorics might illuminate other "available potentials in language [that we can] add to the Dramatistic dictionary" (Condit, 1992, p. 352). In what follows, I explain Burke's influence and elaborate on what I call a "constellation" approach to guilt-redemption rhetoric based on Burke's concept of consubstantiality to explore guilt and responsibility in news coverage of #MeToo. I propose the lens of a rhetorical constellation to analyze how rhetorics of redemption circulate in contemporary public discourse and to uncover the inventional/intersectional possibilities of #MeToo.

Guilt-Redemption Cycle in #MeToo Rhetoric

This analysis is informed primarily by the work of Kenneth Burke (1970) and Barry Brummett (1981), who outlined core components of the guilt-redemption cycle and how societies respond to and manage guilt. One of the defining features of humans is our need to create and maintain order (Burke, 1970), which is inevitably corrupted and violated by various forms of pollution (Brummett, 1981). There are three primary ways by which society attempts to restore the order by purging the source of the pollution: scapegoating, mortification, and transcendence. In the process of scapegoating, a rhetor assigns guilt for the pollution to a person or entity external to the rhetor and then figuratively or literally sacrifices them. A rhetor enacts mortification by taking on the guilt themselves and making amends through figurative or literal sacrifice. During appeals to transcendence, a rhetor purges guilt by placing the guilt in a new perspective that addresses society at large or recasts the pollution as something not worthy of guilt. Of the three ways to expiate guilt, only scapegoating and mortification require figurative or literal sacrifice.

In the history of American politics, sacrifices for the political order, or performances of the "cultural sociodrama of American ideology" (Klumpp & Hollihan, 1979, p. 3), are often the figurative sacrifice of killing one's political career. For example, in the case of Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz, his political career was sacrificed after making a racist joke that became public "to atone for the disorder his slur had created" (Klumpp & Hollihan, 1979, p. 4). While the term *scapegoating* often connotes that the scapegoat has been wrongly accused, the scapegoat can be made "worthy of sacrifice" by being rhetorically constructed as the cause of the pollution (Burke, 1974, p. 40). For Burke (1974),

the scapegoat is not and cannot be the sole cause of the pollution but is made to bear the entire weight in order to serve as a "representative" and symbolic "vessel" for the pollution in its entirety (p. 40). Brummett (1981) described this tension as "the goat is punished, not so much for what it has done, but for its ability to represent what the guilty themselves have done" (p. 256).

This feature of scapegoating is also present in environmental discourse through the process of "scapegoat ecology," where rhetors focus "on a single person for being particularly harmful to the environment" even though "that individual's actions have little to no largescale or long-lasting impact on broader environmental issues" (Schmitt, 2019, p. 2). Attending to an individual is "easier to comprehend and reconcile than blaming systemic factors" and "offer[s] an immediately satisfying moral tale" to assuage any sense of collective guilt (Schmitt, 2019, pp. 6, 9). Thus, scapegoating in both political and environmental contexts represents the assignment of guilt to a particular person or representative in place of overarching social factors. For example, in representing the collective guilt of racism in politics, Butz was scapegoated in order for the Ford administration to avoid "the obvious political implication of a broader sacrifice" if the political system itself was found complicit in Butz's racist discourse (Klumpp & Hollihan, 1979, p. 8). Similar to admonishing all of humanity for our environmental crisis, transcendent rhetoric in the case of Butz would have required broader sacrifice and a rethinking of the entire order. As James Klumpp and Thomas Hollihan (1979) noted, had the Ford presidency been implicated in Butz's racist comments, "the sacrifice of Butz would not be sufficient" (Klumpp & Hollihan, 1979, p. 7). Turning to scapegoating may offer the public the misconception that the pollution has been fully purged and the order restored, which "remov[es] the pressure for change" at the societal level (Klumpp & Hollihan, 1979, p. 9) and may distract society from considering "other factors" as blameworthy (Schmitt, 2019, p. 9).

The guilt-redemption cycle has also been applied to literary works as ways to explore the potential compatibility of Burkean and feminist criticism. Janet Brown (1978) noted in her feminist analysis of the guilt-redemption cycle in *Mod Donna* that women are oftentimes categorized as the scapegoat because of their difficulty establishing agent status and setting the dominant redemptive frame. Those with enough power to define the drama become the arbiters of guilt, whose goals are likely to reflect the dominant order as opposed to the need of the "Other" (Murray, 1998, p. 30). Burke's ideas, therefore, can be used as a critical tool to highlight these inequities if a critic adopts them not as prescriptive of how society *should* deal with guilt, but as descriptive of how dominant voices often do. A focus on the routes to redemption also opens space for the critical analysis of the implications of choosing different routes over others for different agents and coagents within the drama.

In the #MeToo movement, scapegoating often isolates individual perpetrators and calls for atonement through the sacrifice of people's careers and

reputation. Scapegoating can be a beneficial route to redemption because it provides catharsis for individual ills and highlights unique circumstances. But, scapegoating often limits the scope of the problem to isolated incidents and situates solutions solely in the private sphere (Klumpp & Hollihan, 1979). As an alternative route to redemption, transcendence emphasizes patterns and structural features of sexual violence. Transcendence offers the possibility of making the #MeToo movement about the shared experiences of those who are victims of sexual violence. A transcendent approach is potentially detrimental, however, in its overshadowing of individual identities, such as the experiences of trans women, people of color, and men who are victims of sexual violence, along with other intersectional identities. These differences make incidents of sexual harassment unique, varied, particular, and thus hard to generalize. When we turn toward transcendence and view sexual violence more broadly, we may inadvertently erase the stories of certain groups and identities and craft a perfect victim, who is typically a White, cisgender female.

With neither route fully sufficient, I wish to explore how public discourse surrounding the #MeToo movement offers inventional/intersectional possibilities for making sense of sexual violence through combining scapegoating and transcendence into what I call a rhetorical constellation. This dual approach attends to perpetrators as unique instances and works to prevent future sexual violence through structural changes. Condit (1992) argued that Burke's perspective is uniquely suited to "play with" both "universalism and particularism" (p. 349), which is the primary tension through which I propose a constellation approach to guilt-redemption narratives. By combining the discourses of scapegoating and transcendence, we can borrow the strengths and make up for the shortcomings of each. While many articles I analyzed as part of my data set typically emphasized either scapegoating or transcendence over the other, I advocate that these discourses can be combined and viewed as complementary routes to redemption.

I call this approach a rhetorical constellation because it simultaneously embodies the duality between individual elements and the "fusion of elements" created by their "interrelated forces" (Campbell & Jamieson, 1978, p. 25). Constellations reveal important patterns and give an overall picture based on the configuration of its individual stars. Within the constellation, each star is treated as unique, meaningful, and distinct but also as contributing to the constellation's overall pattern. Catherine Palczewski (2019) argued that the constellation metaphor is particularly well suited to discussing women's issues such as suffrage because it emphasizes "interactions" and the "arrangement" of individual events as parts of "recurring patterns" and deemphasizes stars as "traveling independent of each other" (pp. 87, 91). Similar to a star's center of gravity, public arguments interact with and circle one another; they do not exist in isolation in the vacuum of space.

In applying the constellation frame to the #MeToo movement, we can conceptualize individual instances of sexual harassment as their own stars. These loci of attention spark public responses that seek to define, assign blame, and offer ways to restore the order through sacrifice. Taken together, a collection of individual instances and their representation in discourse manifest as a pattern that carries a stronger "argumentative force" than any star alone (Palczewski, 2019, p. 87). In other words, part of the rhetorical force of #MeToo comes from the image created when seeing sexual violence in aggregate. A rhetorical constellation emphasizes the need for scapegoating particular to an individual's story where one size for redemption does not fit all. This practice can elevate and provide media attention to intersectional experiences of sexual violence. Simultaneously, a rhetorical constellation views individual stars/stories as part of a larger narrative/pattern/arrangement that speaks to the pervasiveness and common experiences of sexual violence that can only be redeemed and prevented by turning to structural and societal-level changes.

A rhetorical constellation draws from Burke's (1950) concepts of identification and consubstantiality. When identifying oneself with others, we become ever more aware of our differences and divisions as "unique" individuals (Burke, 1950, p. 21). While scholars have critiqued dramatism for overemphasizing identification and unification, it is also true that Burke (1950) argued, "Identification is compensatory to division," meaning that division is always already part of seeking identification with others (p. 21). Discourse that unites, by necessity, also highlights the "distinct substance" of each, achieving a dynamic state of consubstantiality (Burke, 1950, p. 21). The concept of a constellation highlights division within consubstantiality not as something to be avoided or corrected through identification, but as a natural component of the identification process. In #MeToo discourse, consubstantiality can be a way to amplify the voices of those who are marginalized when experiences of sexual harassment and sexual violence are generalized. This rethinking is one way to include voices that would otherwise be "excluded from the dominant conception and articulation of 'society'," which has a stake in crafting a particular redemptive narrative that maintains a private/public dichotomy (Murray, 1998, p. 32). Thus, maintaining a both/and perspective that attends to both individuals and patterns enables intersectional understandings of how people experience sexual violence and prevents public structures from being ignored as potential solutions.

In what follows, I analyze the dual presence of scapegoating and transcendence in news coverage of the #MeToo movement. To support this analysis, I first provide more background and context for the emergence of the movement. Then, I perform a close reading informed by the concepts of the guilt-redemption cycle to identify patterns in how guilt was assigned. My artifacts were pulled from a Nexi Uni Search of newspaper and online outlets from the date of Milano's tweet to the end of 2018, organized by relevance. Because the

initial data pull retrieved over 10,000 results, I worked systematically through the articles for themes related to scapegoating and transcendence until I found saturation, which is defined as reaching a point where "no new themes, findings, concepts or problems" emerge with additional data analysis (Francis et al., 2010, p. 1230). Considering the #MeToo movement has gained much attention and traction because of its association with celebrities, many of the articles I examined centered on #MeToo within Hollywood. I readily acknowledge that the #MeToo movement is not limited to the sphere of celebrities. In this vein, my analysis is not meant to be generalizable to all commentary of #MeToo but to highlight representative statements that reflect scapegoating and transcendence approaches to sexual violence that are circulating in media. I conclude by expanding upon the rhetorical risks and opportunities inherent in redemptive discourse, the implications of the #MeToo movement's discursive practices, and the potential contribution of rhetorical constellations as a reframing of scapegoating and transcendence.

From #MeToo's Inception to Contemporary Public Discourse

Milano's 2017 tweet was a catalyst for contemporary discussions of #MeToo, but the movement started years earlier in 2006 with the work of activist Tarana Burke ("me too.," n.d.). The idea of saying "me too" as a means of "empowerment through empathy" came to Burke during an interaction with a child named Heaven ("me too.," n.d., para. 4). After Heaven confided in her about experiencing abuse, Burke noted that she "could not find the strength" to share her story with Heaven ("The Inception," n.d., para. 8). In her inability to connect with Heaven, Burke thought about how powerful and yet simple it was to "ensure survivors know they're not alone in their journey" ("me too.," n.d., para. 4). Sexual assault and harassment are pervasive and yet often unspoken, meaning that victims/survivors may suffer in silence. Although not aware of the existing movement started by Burke (Garcia, 2017, para. 23), Milano enacted empowerment through empathy in tweeting, "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet" (Pflum, 2018, para. 1). Reflecting on the multitude of people using the hashtag and the public dialogues started in response, Milano noted that by sharing stories, experiences, or simply the words, "me too," #MeToo participants transformed "collective pain" into "collective power" (Pflum, 2018, para. 8). Using the established force of digital spaces to amplify arguments and build community (Bloomfield & Tillery, 2019), the #MeToo movement simultaneously showed the pervasive presence of harassment and made those experiences highly personal to participants' peer networks.

   The future of the #MeToo movement is uncertain, but there is no mistaking that increased attention has been given to issues of sexual violence as a result of the hashtag, Tarana Burke, and other activists. Perhaps as evidence of the

movement's success, other celebrities are speaking out against the need for the movement and lamenting the many careers that are being sacrificed in its wake.[1] From supportive to dismissive to mixed responses, I analyzed media coverage of the #MeToo movement to uncover the tensions between the cathartic desire to scapegoat and transcendent calls to change the social order.

Scapegoating Individuals and Calling for Punishment

When a crime has been committed, a social norm violated, or an order polluted, there is a natural tendency to assign responsibility for the disorder. News coverage of the #MeToo movement is no exception; I found repeated calls for scapegoating and targeting individuals who have perpetrated sexual violence. Within the many examples of scapegoating discourse, I found themes of sacrifice, individual accountability, and justice. In exploring these themes, I draw on selected quotations to illustrate how calls for scapegoating narrow public attention to individual instances of sexual violence, often at the expense of societal-level engagement.

Sacrifice. In my collected artifacts, scapegoating discourse often centered on the sacrifices that have been made or should be made as punishment for sexual violence. For example, in article on *The New York Times* argued that the #MeToo movement "has toppled dozens of entertainers, executives and politicians, among others" (Salam, 2018, para. 8). The term *toppled* refers to the ending of dozens of individuals' careers and, perhaps more importantly, the power they wielded while holding those positions. A *Hollywood Reporter* article noted that "few if any of the accused [of being sexual predators] have been hired for new work" (Siegel & Guthrie, 2018, para. 3), also emphasizing the expiation of guilt through the figurative death of individuals' careers. Many articles referred to Harvey Weinstein as one of the first casualties of the #MeToo movement because he was "outed as an alleged sexual predator" shortly after Milano shared the hashtag (Siegel & Guthrie, 2018, para. 3). These articles praise the punishment of losing careers, a figurative sacrifice of the prominence and positions of power after violations were revealed to the public.

Sufficiency of a sacrifice is a critical criterion for the pollution to be purged and the order to be restored (Klumpp & Hollihan, 1979, p. 8). Some scapegoating discourse argued that the punishments levied so far, particularly career sacrifices, have not been sufficient to restore the order. For example, an article in *The Mary Sue* noted, "For the majority of those called out, being accused has been a temporary blip on their career" (Weekes, 2018, para. 2). The same article argued that more appropriate and sufficient punishment would be permanent career sacrifices and even jail time, lamenting that many of those accused "most likely won't go to jail" (Weekes, 2018, para. 1). This article frames career sacrifices as insufficient and encourages more severe punishments to make amends

for the violations to the order. While the #MeToo movement is not a legal movement that seeks incarceration for public figures, such characterizations did emerge in some articles.

Other articles discussed the variety of punishments and lack of punishments levied on those accused as a response to claims that #MeToo was "going too far" (Hesse, 2018, para. 7). Hesse (2018) argued, "For the worst offenders, we have court dates. For the others, we have periods of public embarrassment, followed, potentially, by cautious paths to redemption" (para. 12). This scapegoating discourse reduces the scope of sexual harassment to specific occurrences, which requires "dealing with them individually, not with a bludgeon but a scalpel" (Hesse, 2018, para. 19). This article highlights one of the benefits of scapegoating—the isolated attention to the nuances of specific accusations and situations. In choosing a scalpel over a bludgeon, however, one may wonder if the limited scope of the scalpel "will translate into any kind of substantial change" (Zarkov & Davis, 2018, p. 5). If a disease has spread to the entire body, a scalpel becomes an insufficient means of excising it.

Individual accountability. In addition to sacrifice, scapegoating discourse also emphasized individual accountability. For example, an article in _The New York Times_ article quoted Tarana Burke as saying that everyone is "accountable for our individual behavior" (Salam, 2018, para. 19), whereby she places at least partial responsibility for sexual violence on individual agents. In an article in _The Mary Sue_, the author characterized the #MeToo movement as calling "for people, men, women, to be held accountable" (Weekes, 2018, para. 2), reducing the scope of the movement to targeting and eliminating individual perpetrators. The article further stated that the focus on the #MeToo movement "has to be personal accountability" and described the journey individuals must take to recognize their past behaviors and change them in the future (Weekes, 2018, para. 2). While calls for individual accountability do not necessarily prevent changes at the societal level, they serve to shift the focus of the primary cause of sexual harassment to individual actions that society has limited power to control.

A _Bustle_ article quoted Ashley Judd, a prominent advocate for the #MeToo movement, as saying that more survivors should come forward with their stories to "put the 'shame back on the perpetrator' instead of on the victim" (Downs, 2018, para. 6). This quotation highlights the role of the individual, but in this case the victim, as responsible for failing to correct the pollution of sexual violence. While calls for individual accountability can be empowering, this narrative fails to account for the immense "courage" and "strength of mind" one needs to display oneself publicly as a victim/survivor of sexual assault (Zarkov & Davis, 2018, p. 4). Calls for individual accountability also overlook the variety of factors that may limit certain voices from participating, being heard, and getting fair treatment. Dubravka Zarkov and Kathy Davis (2018) argued that not everyone is capable of participating in the #MeToo movement because of a

lack of access to social media and fear that repercussions and "sanctions would be too great" if they spoke out (p. 5). In this sense, individual accountability can become a double-edged sword where individuals are held accountable for their violations, but victims can also be implicated or judged for their decision to come forward or not.

Justice. Scapegoating discourse also intersected the theme of justice, which addresses what constitutes fair ways to come to conclusions about accusations and reasonable sacrifices to be made for varying types of violations. On one hand, some articles claim that justice is already being done by eliminating sexual predators from positions of prominence and authority in society. On the other hand, some articles raised concerns about the court of public opinion and the premature condemnation of individuals. Unsurprisingly, much of the latter discourse stemmed from articles quoting those who have been accused. An article in *The Washington Post* characterized the accused as not considering their treatment by media to be "fair" (Hesse, 2018, para. 11). The article elaborated: "[Political analyst Ryan] Lizza . . . called his *New Yorker* firing 'a terrible mistake' [and comedian Chris] Hardwick said he was 'devastated' and 'blindsided' by his former girlfriend's accusations" (Hesse, 2018, para. 11). Other accusers have made more explicit denials. An article from the *The Guardian* quoted Weinstein's attorney Benjamin Brafman as saying that allegations against Weinstein were "poorly" vetted (Wong, 2018, para. 5) and an article on *New York Daily News* reported Russell Simmons declaration, "I will prove without any doubt that I am innocent of all rape charges" (Desantis, 2017, para. 4). Scapegoating discourse places attention on the individual, which provides perpetrators an equal opportunity to defend as survivors to accuse.

In addition to the evaluation of accusations, other articles addressed the outcomes of individual cases. An article in *The Washington Post* noted that the "difference between Weinstein's outcome and Ansari's or Hardwick's outcome illustrates that we're not treating them all the same" (Hesse, 2018, para. 9). This article refutes accusations that the #MeToo movement is unfair by pointing to the individual attention being paid to each case, where society is "in fact, doing the hard, unpleasant work of figuring out who belongs in jail pens and who belongs in pig pens. (And who shouldn't be penned up at all)" (Hesse, 2018, para. 9). This quotation reflects both the positive and negative aspects of scapegoating. The article identifies how individual differences are important to consider in each case, but this focus can shift attention off of holding responsible the structural and societal situations from which these agents and their acts emerge. In the next section, I examine the transcendental themes present in #MeToo discourse that expands the scope of discussion by viewing individual cases not as isolated events but as collective violations of the social order.

Enacting Transcendence and Calling for Structural Changes

While scapegoating rhetoric was most prominent among the articles in the data pool, news articles about #MeToo also focused on the broader climate of sexual harassment through transcendent rhetoric. Transcendent rhetoric widens the scope of pollution to include scenic features such as lack of awareness of the pervasiveness of sexual assault, stigmatization of victims, and patriarchal ideologies that disempower the voices of women, the trans community, people of color, the queer community, the differently abled, and others. Transcendence is perhaps the route to redemption most closely aligned with Tarana Burke's initial vision for the #MeToo movement. The #MeToo website notes that the movement was started to "galvaniz[e] a broad base of survivors to disrupt the *systems* that allow for the global proliferation of sexual violence" ("me too.," n.d., para. 2, emphasis added). This mission statement locates the reason for the polluted order not in the actions of a few individuals, but in the structural, systemic features that operate across the world. Systemic change can be realized, in part, through raising awareness of the problem in order to transform people's conception of sexual harassment from isolated cases into societal ills. In the transcendent discourse of #MeToo, I identify three common themes: inclusivity, increasing the circumference of the pollution, and focusing on solutions rather than blame. These three themes expand on an exclusive focus on individuals by recognizing sexual violence as a public concern.

Inclusivity. A transcendent approach to sexual violence can unite people who identify as victims or survivors under a common sense of belonging. While media may highlight specific stories (mostly White women as victims and White men as perpetrators), the #MeToo hashtag and online conversations also fostered an inclusive environment for people of all genders and sexual orientations to be a part of the movement. For example, Michelle Rodino-Colocino (2018) described the #MeToo movement as promoting the "feeling of sharing an experience" (p. 97). The #MeToo movement's goal of "empowerment through empathy" ("me too.," n.d.) can be mapped onto Kenneth Burke's (1950) notion of "consubstantiality," whereby people locate "common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, and attitudes" that foster "acting-together" (p. 21, emphasis removed). In other words, finding commonalities is an important component of spurring collective action. The pervasiveness of sexual violence transcends racial, gender, economic, cultural, and sexual divides to unite people under common experiences, feelings, and a need for change.

In her Cecil B. DeMille Award acceptance speech, Oprah used the term *transcend* to describe the universal story of sexual violence. She noted, "But [sexual violence is] not just a story affecting the entertainment industry. It's one that transcends any culture, geography, race, religion, politics, or

workplace" ("Oprah Winfrey's Full Golden Globes Speech," 2018, para. 8). Inclusivity also emerged in a *TIME* Magazine article that named "The Silence Breakers" of the #MeToo movement as TIME's "Person of the Year 2017." In describing the winner, the article noted,

> The women and men who have broken their silence span all races, all income classes, all occupations and virtually all corners of the globe. They might labor in California fields, or behind the front desk at New York City's regal Plaza Hotel, or in the European Parliament. They're part of a movement that has no formal name. But now they have a voice. (Zacharek, Dockterman, & Sweetland Edwards, 2017, para. 10)

#MeToo has often been associated with women speaking out against male perpetrators because of the movement's founder and many prominent voices that have followed, but the movement is not exclusively for women. The *TIME* article included the stories of men such as Terry Crews and Blaise Godbe Lipman, who have accused other men of sexual harassment (Zacharek et al., 2017). A *CNBC* article discussed the importance of including men in the #MeToo movement both to hear their stories and "to move forward" together (Connley, 2018, para. 9). While not all survivors have found a home in #MeToo discourse, it is also true that the movement was founded on creating inclusive spaces for (all) people to recognize the pervasiveness of sexual violence.

Increasing the circumference. Kenneth Burke (1969) argued that when people describe the scene of a story, they draw a line around what to include (what lies within the circumference) and what to exclude. The circumference of a story will have a marked difference on the narrative that gets told. For example, if someone tells the story of a person killing another person, they are likely telling the story of a murder. But, if they expand the circumference and consider the scene of the murder as part of a battle between warring nations, the murder might now be described as a heroic act of defending one's country. In expanding the scope of sexual harassment beyond individual circumstances, transcendent rhetoric in the #MeToo movement takes a societal-level view of the problem of sexual violence. In a *Variety* article, Tarana Burke compared sexual violence to a medical crisis (Wagmeister, 2018, para. 10). Noting that the #MeToo hashtag was shared 12 million times, Burke argued that if 12 million people caught a communicable disease in a 24-hour period, "we would be focused solely on the cure" (Wagmeister, 2018, para. 10). Burke characterized sexual harassment as a plague on global health, thus requiring far more than individualized attention to sufficiently address the crisis. Also using a health metaphor, another article called sexual abuse an "epidemic," widening the conception of "public health" to include sexual violence (Factora-Borchers, 2017, para. 13). In addressing sexual assault through the metaphor of public health, these articles widen the

circumference of an individual story to a collective story and from sexual assault as an issue only for women to a public health crisis.

In a *Marie Claire* article, writers Kayla Webley Adler and Eric Sullivan (2018) wrote, "If you think the #MeToo reckoning is over because the Weinsteins of the world have been toppled, you've missed the point. This moment calls for the dismantling of . . . systemic harassment" (para. 1). This article specifically positions scapegoating as not "the point" of the movement, broadening #MeToo's mission to the disruption of normalized systems that enable harassment and stigmatize reporting. This article works to counter the scapegoating tendency to end discussion and deliberation after individual sacrifice has taken place. In taking a transcendent approach, the pollution of sexual harassment is recast as something not easily nor sufficiently destroyed by individual sacrifice. Another article characterized this sentiment by noting that when we address sexual violence as a societal issue, "we confront ourselves, not just perpetrators' behaviors" (Factora-Borchers, 2017, para. 13). It is far easier to point the finger and identify culprits and wash our hands of the matter; it is far harder to turn "the microscope inward" (Schmitt, 2019, p. 3) and recognize our own or the system's potential complicity, especially if we somehow benefit from the system as it currently stands.

Solutions. In an article in *The New York Times*, the #MeToo movement was described as addressing "the entire sensibility" of sexual assault by looking at "the way that people understand what a problem is and what needs fixing" (Salam, 2018, para. 16). In this article, the solution to sexual harassment was conceptualized as not only sexual harassment itself but also how people understand and respond to sexual harassment when it happens. There is no doubt that actions are a problem but so too are beliefs, stereotypes, and stigmatizations. Specifically addressing sexual harassment in Hollywood, a *Guardian* article outlined how systemic changes in the "entertainment industry" are needed for larger cultural shifts: "Roles for women will be different, the way women are portrayed in media will be different," which will increase "the opportunity [for women] to be film-makers, producers and writers. By the very nature of that, the industry will shift" (Sayej, 2017, paras. 26, 27). In other words, having more women's voices in all stages of media production will allow for new perspectives, narratives, content, and opportunities that challenge the assumptions of the current entertainment industry. In her Oscars acceptance speech, Frances McDormand pointed toward a transcendent solution: implementing inclusion riders, which are part of actors' contracts that outline certain diversity or inclusion standards for participating in film projects (Dwyer, 2018). By addressing a potential solution, without isolating individual perpetrators or calling for punishments, McDormand contributed to transcendence by focusing on how to make structural, concrete changes to prevent future violations of the order.

Transcendent #MeToo discourse acknowledges how the scene is also part of the problem. Without scenic changes or cultural shifts that prevent or discourage harassment, the #MeToo movement might succeed in removing a few perpetrators from the system but would likely leave intact the system that allows for the perpetration of sexual violence. Of course, it is an act of both justice and catharsis to isolate individuals and find fitting punishments for crimes. But, if the #MeToo movement's discourse ends with scapegoating, then it is not likely to have long-lasting effects. As Klumpp and Hollihan (1979) argued, "Only strategies that locate responsibility in the broader society . . . will lead to social change" (p. 10). The transcendent rhetoric within #MeToo seeks to establish a new order that raises awareness about the ways that sexism, racism, ableism, and heteronormativity lead to power imbalances that enable sexual violence in Hollywood, workplaces, and society at large.

Risks, Opportunities, and Constellations

In this project, I have located scapegoating and transcendent rhetoric in news coverage of the #MeToo movement. The presence of both forms of guilt expiation points to the catharsis and comfort that scapegoating provides to eliminate pollution from the order quickly, simply, and directly, and the transcendent need to prevent future transgressions through recognizing the scenic factors at play. Neither scapegoating nor transcendence is without its risks for public understanding of sexual violence. To conclude this article, I further explore the consequences and implications of engaging scapegoating or transcendence exclusively and elaborate on how these shortcomings can be rectified by combining them through the lens of rhetorical constellations.

In my previous discussion of the Butz political controversy, I highlighted how scapegoating falsely narrows guilt and blame to an individual, hiding that the individual is part of a larger political agenda (Klumpp & Hollihan, 1979). While sacrificing Butz temporarily restored a sense of order, the underlying pollution of pervasive racism remained. Scapegoating holds individuals accountable for their actions. However, the practice of unloading the total burden of responsibility for pervasive and systemic sexual violence onto individuals is rhetorically and socially problematic. Francesca Smith and Hollihan (2014) discussed similar consequences of scapegoating discourse in their analysis of the attempted assassination of Representative Gabby Giffords (D-AZ). Media narratives about the shooting were quick to label Jared Lee Loughner as a lone wolf shooter with mental illness, cleaving him from being considered a product of polarized political rhetoric. A focus on scapegoating Loughner "closed off rhetorical alternatives that would allow the nation collectively to take responsibility for, learn from, and work to prevent similar instances of violence in the future" (Smith & Hollihan, 2014, p. 587). In engaging exclusively with rhetorics of scapegoating, we block ourselves off from considering the possibility that scenic influences

might play in the performance of the act and from considering structural remedies to restoring the order.

In the same vein, to focus on individuals within the #MeToo movement is to fall victim to the narrative that individual perpetrators are isolated incidents and to forget the larger culture and climate that contributes to empowering and shielding those in power. Tarana Burke's (2018) TED talk emphasized some of the negative consequences of scapegoating in her description of how the media cover sexual violence. She argued, "So much of what we hear about the Me Too Movement is about individual bad actors or depraved, isolated behavior," which "fails to recognize" the role that "power and privilege" play in the pervasiveness and prevalence of sexual violence (Burke, 2018). The prevalence of scapegoating practices in contemporary media "perpetuates a sense that [individuals] are responsible for social ills and not the systems or communities that enable micro-level, daily infractions leading or contributing to those ills" (Schmitt, 2019, p. 10). Wherever scapegoating occurs, its narrowed focus provides a comforting but inaccurate view of the pollution that has violated the order and those responsible for it.

These insights are important checks on the benefits of scapegoating, but we should note that engaging in a transcendent rhetoric is also not a perfect solution. Some people may engage in transcendent rhetoric as means to downplay, ignore, or shift focus from their personal accountability. Kenneth Burke (1969) argued that scene-focused rhetoric, a rhetoric that emphasizes the mitigating factors of the agent's situation and circumstances, is often used to reduce the acts of agents to mere motion. An agent controlled by the scene is "in a situation not of [their] own making" and thus bears little to no responsibility for their actions (Ling, 1970, p. 84). For example, Mari Boor Tonn, Valerie Endress, and John Diamond (1993) argued that "rhetors may feature scene to absolve themselves from error in personal judgment" (p. 166). It would be a mistake to let a purely scenic focus excuse perpetrators from sharing accountability for their behaviors and actions.

Within the transcendence section on inclusivity, I argued that the #MeToo movement unites people under common experiences across gender, race, ability, and other identity categories. This benefit of transcendent rhetoric must be acknowledged alongside how such rhetoric may erase individual differences, construct the idea of a perfect or typical victim, and undermine or silence certain people and their stories (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018). If people look at the #MeToo movement and its stories and do not see themselves reflected there, then the movement may have inadvertently erased too many of the differences, uniqueness, and nuances of people's lived experiences (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018). While scapegoating may narrow our scope too drastically, transcendence may be guilty of expanding the focus too broadly, ignoring distinctions and unique circumstances that may change how we describe, recognize, and respond to sexual violence. Exclusive emphasis on either the complete control of individual

agents or the mitigating factors of a corrupt scene fall into the same rhetorical trap of only addressing part of the cause of sexual violence, thereby diminishing our ability to address sexual violence in all its forms and locations.

In order to maintain the role of the agent in transcendence while not succumbing to the limited opportunities offered by scapegoating, I propose the perspective of a rhetorical constellation. A constellation is similar to the metaphor of a tapestry, which Charles Conrad (1981) used to understand social movements. He argued, "rhetorical movements are complex tapestries composed of . . . individual needs, common frustrations, and conflicts between self and society" (Conrad, 1981, p. 296). Constellations and tapestries share a feature often forgotten in Burke's conceptualization of transcendence: Transcendence "seek[s] to encompass a diversity of individual voices in larger unities that preserve, but transcend, any one of them" (Zappen, 2009, p. 281). In other words, transcendence addresses "individual discourses in relationship to each other," seeing differences as part and parcel of the larger narrative created in their unification (Zappen, 2009, p. 281). Rhetorical constellations recover the productive recognition of differences that is sometimes lost in pursuing the Burkean goal of "ultimate identification" (Zappen, 2009, p. 281).

The constellation perspective I propose considers the scene and all the agents in the scene as being in mutually constitutive relationships, requiring modification of both systems and the people that create and support them to change the overall shape. A dual approach evaluates both individuals within the scene and the influence of the scene itself and also takes into account issues of intersectionality and how individuals who span "intersectional categories may experience any particular event or events" differently than others (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018, p. 110). From scapegoating, a rhetorical constellation borrows the idea that individual events are unique and require tailored responses to the nuances of that particular event. From transcendence, a rhetorical constellation borrows how we can combine these individual instances, locate their commonalities, and consider the overall picture of sexual violence as a universal and pervasive problem, even as we respect how it manifests in different ways for different people. This approach emphasizes what James Zappen (2009) views as a primary feature of transcendence: "respect[ing] a diversity of individual interests" while "seek[ing] to transcend them in higher unities" (pp. 280–281). A rhetorical constellation calls for media coverage to do both; articles should recognize the voices who are silenced currently in the #MeToo movement and work to invite them in while also addressing structural inequities and norms that foster a culture of sexual violence.

To model what a constellation perspective looks like, we can turn to the original discourse of the #MeToo movement through the words of Tarana Burke. In her TED Talk, Burke (2018) critiqued the media's role in the public perception of the #MeToo movement: "The media has been consistent with headline after headline that frames this movement in ways that make it difficult

to move our work forward." When the movement becomes only about White women launching witch hunts against powerful men, Burke (2018) argued that other voices, such as the "84 percent of trans women who will be sexually assaulted this year," the "indigenous women who are three and a half times more likely to be sexually assaulted," and "people with disabilities, who are seven times more likely to be sexually abused," are left out, overlooked, and silenced. Burke specifically notes how this is counter to the original goals of the movement that aimed to highlight intersectional differences and how sexual violence manifests differently for different communities and identities. A constellation approach attends to the pervasive pattern of sexual violence and sees individual stories as important, unique, and valuable, even if (especially if) they do not fit the dominant narrative of sexual violence.

News coverage of #MeToo can enact a constellation approach by including calls for structural changes in its articles about individual perpetrators and allegations. Articles can also attend to intersectional differences in their evaluation of accusations as legitimate and what constitutes sufficient punishments. It is important to note that some articles in the data pool did call for redemption by recognizing both individual differences and collective experiences. In its series of interviews with "The Silence Breakers," *TIME* Magazine described its interviewees thusly: "Their ages, their families, their religions and their ethnicities were all a world apart. . . . But on that November morning [when Milano's tweet went viral], what separated them was less important than what brought them together: a shared experience" (Zacharek et al., 2017, paras. 12, 13). This quotation highlights the divisions but also the similarities that exist among victims of sexual violence. Steps toward a constellation approach also emerged in a *New York Times* article that quoted sociologist Dr. Tina Fetner as describing the tendency for people to collapse social movements into "a single solid entity," when they are really "complex groups of lots of diverse people" (Salam, 2018, para. 15). This "meso-level approach" of treating people as collectives within a larger group "splits the difference" (Bloomfield, 2019, p. 161) between universalizing victims of sexual assault and erasing how identity categories influence people's experiences of sexual assault. The compensatory nature of identification and division is an integral component of a rhetorical constellation that seeks to elevate individual differences while also locating meaningful points of similarity toward larger, cultural shifts.

As media and public audiences took up #MeToo, they provided their own perspectives, interpretations, and modifications that have strayed in some ways from the movement's original intentions. Burke (2018) stated,

> We have moved so far away from the origins of this movement that started a decade ago, or even the intentions of the hashtag that started just a year ago, that sometimes the Me Too movement that I hear some people talk about is unrecognizable to me.

The public uptake of #MeToo proliferates the movement's message but also, in some cases, undermines its intended goals. If we can recover those original intentions and focus on individuals and groups within a systemic context, we may truly move forward and enact societal change without silencing, erasing, or co-opting the voices of others oftentimes forgotten.

In this project, I aimed to highlight the presence of both scapegoating and transcendent rhetoric as competing routes to redemption in news coverage of #MeToo. While I argue that transcendence is the rhetorical pathway with more opportunities for societal healing, I also acknowledge that an exclusive focus on transcendence is potentially as problematic as an exclusive focus on scapegoating. I thus propose that scholars, media, and members of the public adopt the perspective of a rhetorical constellation in order to borrow the specificity of scapegoating and the broader circumference of transcendence to move toward both cure and prevention and meet our communal responsibility to provide "future generations a world free of sexual violence" (Burke, 2018).

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Note

1. For example, Lindsay Lohan made disparaging statements about #MeToo that she eventually walked back (Lam, 2018) and 100 women in the French entertainment business condemned the movement as bifurcating men and women by demonizing men for having their flirting misread (Lichtman, 2018, para. 20).

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Article

Torment Porn or Feminist Witch Hunt: Apprehensions About the #MeToo Movement on /r/AskReddit

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Abstract
This article argues that #MeToo posts are transgressive and can be understood as a case of confessional discourse that has the potential to empower women around the world rather than inspiring shame. Due to its public nature, #MeToo also challenges existing frameworks for understanding sexual relationships in the United States. This critical discourse analysis of the response to the #MeToo movement over 9 months (2017–2018) on the Reddit community AskReddit surfaced fears about how the movement is redefining normal sexual behavior. By inventorying the knowledge claims produced across four question and answer comment threads, important shifts in subject positions and discursive frames show that under the guise of inclusive rhetoric and expert discourse, many Reddit respondents fear their past behavior will be reconstituted as abusive. Rape myths also appeared in the discourse as a backlash against the #MeToo movement.

Keywords
#MeToo, Reddit, critical discourse analysis, confessional discourse, backlash

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Introduction

#MeToo: a short phrase that masks its power to open eyes, start conversations, and make normal sexual strategies suddenly feel uncomfortable. On October 15, 2017, actress Alyssa Milano shared a post asking anyone who had been sexually harassed or assaulted to write "me too" in a reply to her post. While Milano did not invent the #MeToo discourse, following the very public accusations against Harvey Weinstein, Milano's call to share your #MeToo moment went viral, reaching over 85 countries with nearly 2 million tweets and 12 million posts, comments, and reactions on Facebook (CBS/AP, 2017; Park, 2017). The #MeToo hashtag created an exigency for hundreds of thousands of individuals, both men and women, to share their harrowing narratives. As they shared stories of harassment, assault, and abuse that happened in both social and professional spheres, they participated in a set of discursive practices to reveal their pain, condemn the perpetrators, and call out the institutions of silence which have allowed sexual aggression and exploitation to flourish in the entertainment industry and other domains around the world.

While an analysis of the discursive practices of individuals who participated in #MeToo in early October would be invaluable, in this article, I tackle responses to the #MeToo movement as understood through a series of question and comment posts (threads) on the popular pseudoanonymous website Reddit. The website hosts community-driven content that includes links, photos, and videos and is described by its creators as "the front page of the internet." Each user on Reddit has a persistent username, but since that username can be anything, the user is not concerned with any real-world ramifications resulting from their post (Santana, 2014). The freedom from consequences provides the Redditor (a Reddit user) a wider range of expression that can reveal more honest and hostile discourse than what is shared publicly on other social media platforms or in person.

According to Mitchell, Barthiel, Stocking, and Holcomb (2016), the largest segment using Reddit for news is men in their 20s and 30s accessing the site from the United States. In an extensive ethnographic study of Reddit, Massanari (2017) describes Reddit's "toxic technocultures" where women face "an ongoing backlash" about "their use of technology and participation in public life" (p. 330). Using #GamerGate and the #Fappening, two cases of organized hostility toward women in 2014, Massanari (2017) shows a geek masculinity on Reddit that has a "fraught relationship to issues of gender and race" because it values a "cyberlibertarian ethos" that idealizes a rational and autonomous persona (p. 332). Massanari (2017) concludes that many Redditors espouse views that "women should be shamed and deserve lower standard of privacy because of their sexual activities" (p. 341). Three years later, when #MeToo emerged across social media sites, it raised questions about the ability of #MeToo disclosures to alter existing perspectives around gender and sexual relationships.

With Redditors being primarily young, White male's posting anonymously, a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of AskReddit can contribute to our understanding of the #MeToo movement's potential to make long-lasting societal changes in the United States.

Theorizing #MeToo as Confessional Discourse

Discourse theory decenters the speaker to understand how language helps us order our lives; Lazar (2014) describes this as a focus on "social practices that are reflected in as well as constituted by discourse" (p. 184). Utterances, rather than being studied as single authored texts, are understood as negotiated meaning from a wide range of available discursive materials, but not all materials are equally accessible. A critical approach maintains that there are underlying ideological structures that shape the ways we know how to speak. Lazar writes that "gender ideology is hegemonic in that it often does not appear as dominance at all, but as consensual and acceptable to most in a community" (p. 186). The ways that members of society talk about sexual assault and harassment are structured by underlying ideology. Everyone, even women who have been victims of rape, repeat these discourses. Wood and Rennie (1994) found this when interviewing eight women who had experienced a rape (even if they did not use that term directly). Wood and Rennie describe an "interpretive repertoire" that the women used to produce their identity and name what happened (p. 134). Under different accounts, different possibilities for understanding the situation, describing persons involved, and passing judgment emerged. Wood and Rennie found that women pulled from legal frames when disclosing to the police and medical discourse when approaching a doctor if they used the term *rape*. On the other hand, if the situation was described as a "date" or if the women knew their attacker, what happened had to be "worked out and negotiated in interactions with other people" (Wood & Rennie, 1994, p. 135).

Our shared understanding of rape is driven by "rape myths" used to describe and understand the situation once there is a disclosure. Benedict's (1992) book *Virgin or Vamp* documents the many "rape myths" that the press uses to describe rape throughout the 20th century, with some myths going all the way back to Biblical depictions. Benedict's (1992) list of rape myths include rape is simply sex with no harm to the victim, and the assailant could not help himself, is perverted, or of a lower class or non-White. Victims are also blamed for either deserving or enticing the attack, being promiscuous, or placing themselves in danger; as a result, they are often depicted as "sullied" (Benedict, 1992, p. 17). In 2002, Ardovini-Brooker and Caringella-MacDonald reported that "progress against rape myths has been minimal" in news coverage from 1980 to 1996 (p. 17). The final myth—that women use false accusations to manipulate men or exact revenge—appears frequently in the AskReddit comments analyzed below. Rape myths can still be seen today in the discourse used to construct

identities and evaluate #MeToo statements. But why are these myths being used in exchanges on Reddit?

It may be a result of the unique nature of #MeToo disclosures. According to Mills (1997), different discourses form discourse coalitions that enable some actions while foreclosing other actions (p. 78). For example, the 2014 #NotAllMen and #YesAllWomen are examples of discourse coalitions with different political aims. #NotAllMen focuses on the perception of individual men as good or bad actors, while #YesAllWomen highlights the systemic harassment of all women. It is difficult to discuss systemic abuse when a man says he is not a perpetrator; the discourse disciplines the conversation by framing it as an individual rather than cultural problem. Individuals select from various discursive materials available to them via epistemic cultures (how we know what we know; Cetina, 2009) and moral models (how we pass judgment; D'Andrade, 1995).

The #MeToo movement is multifaceted and difficult to situate because it evokes many different moral models that are not necessarily conscious yet are used to pass judgment. In discussing sexually aggressive behavior, sexual harassment, and sexual assault, different evaluative models are deployed, whether those models focus on feminine performance, male chivalry, generational differences, party culture, and so forth. As an example, evaluative models are apparent in discourse when someone asks a sexual harassment victim why they did not leave the room, what Wood and Rennie (1994) describe as a question of control. The questioner is relying on their own experience (subject position) to evaluate right and wrong action; if the victim of sexual harassment was *physically* able to leave the room and did not, the question produces a model that holds the victim responsible for their treatment because it disciplines the situation. As a result, coercive financial and cultural power is diminished in light of a model that places mobility as the way to evaluate a #MeToo post.

The disclosure of victim status has traditionally been shameful and a form of confession; as Mills (1997) explains, "confession has proved useful for feminist theorists who have analysed . . . the relation between confessing and submitting to a relation of power" (p. 81). Mills demonstrates that in the past, confessing any sexual act, even where it was not a consensual act, required absolution in the eyes of religious institutions, society, and the family. I argue that the #MeToo posts are transgressive and can be understood as a form of confession that attempts to empower rather than produce shame. Mills wrote that "confession within particular politicised contexts may be empowering, setting stories of 'failure' and 'self-blame' into contexts where those same 'failings' can be seen to be structural problems with Western culture's demands on women" (p. 83). The #MeToo posts attempt to shift the blame away from the individual to the society that made sexual harassment, assault, and rape both possible and permissible.

The very public nature of the #MeToo posts is also highly subversive, moving the confession from the diary and private conversations to a public and persistent online space. Pennington and Birthisel (2016) used framing theory to understand the media coverage of the Steubenville High School rape case. They found that "technology was presented as something to be feared: it can document your misdeeds, it can allow deleted or private indiscretions and crimes to be unearthed as evidence against you" (Pennington & Birthisel, 2016, p. 2445). An added dimension that complicates the #MeToo movement is its mediation and persistence on social media.

In posting #MeToo, the individual is negotiating their own position rather than being subject to the demands of historically dominant discourses around sexual relationships and workplace dynamics. As a result, the #MeToo discourses are in direct conflict with other discourses "which will force [the dominant discourses] to change in structure and content and which will make available to women and to men spaces wherein they can resist and construct their own sense of self" (Mills, 1997, p. 94). By studying the reception of the #MeToo posts on AskReddit, I approach the discourses in their "conflictual relations" (Mills, 1997, p. 99). As Massanari (2017) pointed out, Reddit has been a core of antifeminist and misogynistic activism. Because the #MeToo posts challenge older notions of responsibility for rape and sexual assault, the discourse produced on AskReddit can help us better understand what new discursive formations are emerging and how those invested in change can best respond to makes spaces of resistance possible. In the remainder of this article, I lay out my method, discuss my findings, and conclude by addressing the most common apprehensions to the #MeToo discourse.

Method

Following Fairclough's (2001) analytical framework for CDA, in my first step, I chose to "focus upon a social problem which has a semiotic aspect" (p. 125). Fairclough proposes that an order of discourse is not "a closed or rigid system, but rather an open system, which is put at risk by what happens in actual interactions" (p. 124). While there are other discussions about #MeToo happening in other spaces on- and offline, the AskReddit threads were selected for analysis because they deal directly with #MeToo posts as social actions with pseudoanonymous speakers who can position and represent themselves in flexible ways. As my literature review shows, discourses about gender and sexual relations have been a continuing social problem. Interactions concerning who is allowed to speak, what they are empowered to say, and how they are permitted to act reveal underlying power relations (Wodak, 2001).

The four threads (an original post followed by other users commenting in reply) were pulled for analysis from AskReddit—a subreddit with 18 million subscribers dedicated to asking and answering questions of common interest;

the AskReddit wiki explains that "the focus of this subreddit is to ask and answer questions that elicit thought-provoking discussions" (AskReddit, 2018). AskReddit has developed a reputation as a place for reasonable individuals to share ideas based on a combination of personal experience and expert testimony. The people communicating in this forum therefore create discourse that addresses the specific question raised while they inhabit the role of a reasonable, commonsense speaker. The AskReddit moderation policies specifically ban using the forum as a soap box to push a specific agenda (Rule 5) or to seek professional advice on medical or legal issues (Rule 6).

The four threads studied are from October 2017, January 2018, March 2018, and July 2018 (AsignFromWithin, 2018; Bigganya, 2017; CorgiSmuggler, 2018; DolorestheExplorer, 2018). The first occurred 2 days after the viral surge in #MeToo posts across Twitter, Facebook, and other social media networks. The October 2017 thread contained 75 parent comments (the direct response to the original post) and 158 children comments (responses to another user). In January 2018, a new post asked "What are your views on the #metoo movement?" and drew 200 comments, with 26 unique parent comments and 175 responses. The final two threads from March 2018 and July 2018 were much briefer with only 16 and 13 parent comments, respectively. The final two threads were also tagged "serious" by the original poster, indicating a shift in tone. Previously, those asking the AskReddit community about #MeToo assumed that others would treat the issue seriously; 6 months in, the original posters think that the question requires a serious tag. The concern about jokes and memes might indicate a more stable discursive structure open to satirization.

After selecting my corpus for analysis, I next copied all the comments into a spreadsheet with a corresponding parent and child code. Fairclough (2001) describes the second step in a CDA as a focus on semiosis, or the signification and meaning produced by the discourse. To uncover the meaning produced within the discourse, I read the comments for their overt knowledge claims, specifically attending to the way the Redditors each oriented (positioned) themselves to the #MeToo disclosures to offer an opinion on the movement. I borrow the overt/covert conceptual distinction from anthropologists who discuss overt and covert knowledge in field research (Jorgensen, 2015). Overt knowledge claims are clear to anyone reading the thread and deal with the surface meaning, whereas covert knowledge resonates on a more subtle level that conditions the interaction in ways often unseen by the interlocutors.

In Table 1, the knowledge claims are reported with an illustrative example, the number of times the claim occurred in the thread, and the sum total votes for each claim over the four AskReddit threads. All comments begin with a single point before other Redditors upvoted or downvoted the comment. While some knowledge claims were made with great frequency, they had a low or even negative vote total which showed that the utterance was received poorly by

the community. The reception made visible in the responses and voting behavior indicates, as Gee (1999) described it, if the discourse has been "pulled off" by the speaker (p. 18). Where the parent comment is recognizable as part of the larger discourse yet unique to the aspects of the situation, it can both transform and reify the positions and framing of the dominant mindset. While quantitative aspects are not a traditional part of CDA, Tornberg and Tornberg (2016) used topic modeling and CDA on a 105-million word corpus pulled from a Swedish Internet forum with promising results. By using topic modeling (a statistical technique), the authors were able to show the relative magnitude of dominant representations and discursive constructions of Islam and Muslims. My use of Reddit vote totals also work as a complimentary approach that supplements the CDA effort.

With the overt knowledge claims established, I next approached the corpus seeking the subtle meanings embedded in the discourse through the comments relation to other comments (Tirado & Galvez, 2007). Fairclough (2001) writes that "interdiscursive analysis" concentrates on how "particular types of interaction articulate together" (p. 126). For this step, I read the AskReddit threads looking at where the Redditors made their claims. The where of utterances (responding to others) more than the what (argument that stands alone) of the AskReddit knowledge claim reveals the shifting discourse and models for how we perceive sexual relations. To show the value of this method, take an interaction recently shared by author Jones (2017) about women receiving compliments from men; "Piss a man off today: Tell him you agree with his compliment of you." In the resulting Twitter conversation, many women shared the same conversational pattern: First, a man compliments the woman on their physical appearance. If the woman agrees with the man without saying thank you or denying the compliment, the man then takes the compliment back and often insults the woman in the process. If the statements are taken as standalone utterances, this exchange would be bizarre. However, by understanding the utterances in relation to one another as the interlocutors position themselves, it becomes clear that the man is giving the original compliment to indebt the woman to him. When this does not happen, his power and control over the exchange is shaken which results in him lashing out at the woman. A critical eye to when claims are made is included as part of my analysis below to surface these types of insights.

The final step for CDA is attending to silences. Foucault (1978) describes repression as "a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, and affirmation of nonexistence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see, and nothing to know" (p. 4). In studying the #MeToo movement, it is important to understand what remains unsaid as much as what is said, and several noticeable silences are considered in the Discussion section.

Findings

In Table 1, the first stage of the CDA is shown with the knowledge claim and a textual example of it in use. In the right-hand column, the time period for when the knowledge claims were made is shown with the number of times the claim occurred and the vote totals for that claim type across each of the four threads.

Early Responses: Emotion and Definitions

The first 16 knowledge claims documented in the above inventory only appear once in response to #MeToo. These October 2017 utterances struggle with the raw emotion of the #MeToo posts, including expressions of sheer sadness, individual's explaining why they chose not to post, and Redditors explaining that #MeToo revealed the extent of the problem to them. The October 2017 thread also contained the ideas that #MeToo generates fake sympathy, that no one is owed a #MeToo story, and that harassment is more common than the #MeToo posts reveal. There are also several ideas here that speculate about the future: Will the #MeToo posts encourage others to speak out, will men confess to their past misbehavior, or will individuals intervene in the future if they see a #MeToo moment unfolding? Three Redditors worry about how they will prepare their children. The sole mention of race over the 9-month period also appears in the October thread once, with a Redditor pointing out that #MeToo was created for minority women. Ardovini-Brooker and Caringella-MacDonald (2002) wrote that "the media tend to ignore the victimization of women of color" (p. 4). The conversation on AskReddit perpetuates the silencing of minority women by not engaging with race at all (i.e., Foucault's [1978] affirmation of nonexistence).

A series of knowledge claims appear throughout the AskReddit threads that struggled to define a serious situation compared with something merely awkward or aggravating. While some users posted that they do not believe street harassment (e.g., catcalling) or unwanted compliments are a big deal, others pointed out that there is a great deal of individual interpretation: Some women will appreciate sexually aggressive, verbal behavior, but others will be uncomfortable or anxious. The core tension in defining a "serious" #MeToo situation is the competition between two evaluative models.

Adapting Wood and Rennie's (1994) discussion of blame and responsibility, the AskReddit thread reveals the belief in a standard code of conduct that is contradicted by some Redditor's claims that are grounded in an interpersonal communication model. Under the first evaluative model, the discourse posits that there ought to be consistent rules of engagement to structure interactions (such as "men can't read minds"). The standard code of conduct model is allied with the legal definition for sexual harassment (hostile environment and quid pro quo); as a result, this way of judging the severity of a #MeToo post will

Table 1. Inventory of Knowledge Claims From r/AskReddit Threads About #MeToo in 2017–2018.

Knowledge Claim	Example	When	No. of Posts	Vote Total
Hearing about #MeToo is depressing	"a close friend of mine shared a really sad story that broke my heart . . . the ones with really heavy heartbreaking tragic stories really hit you hard."	Oct. Jan. March July	14 – – –	150 – – –
I chose not to post	"The torment porn aspect of it is just ridiculous. I'm an actual human being with actual trauma and feelings and emotions, and I don't exist to quench your curiosity or serve as your entertainment."	Oct. Jan. March July	13 – – –	127 – – –
#MeToo made me aware of the problem	"I knew it was a problem . . . but . . . this definitely opened my eyes, and that was the point of the whole hashtag."	Oct. Jan. March July	13 – – –	105 – – –
#MeToo moments are individual interpretations	"What one woman finds confident and attractive another woman could find creepy. And because it's unrealistic to expect every advance to be received well, we accept that sometimes guys are creepy by no fault of their own . . . "	Oct. Jan. March July	13 – – –	42 – – –
#MeToo generates fake sympathy	"I don't want a hashtag and some hollow apologies, I want actual, physical support, as the phrase was intended."	Oct. Jan. March July	8 – – –	109 – – –
#MeToo encourages others to speak out	"I feel like with some people who didn't feel traumatized, talking about what happened would give courage to those who were."	Oct. Jan. March July	7 – – –	23 – – –
Assault and harassment are more common than #MeToo shows	"They do not want to share that they have been with their family/work mates. I don't think even a quarter of people that have suffered will post it."	Oct. Jan. March July	6 – – –	57 – – –
Do not owe anyone the story	"You don't owe anyone your story. And you don't need to post a hashtag. . . .You matter equally."	Oct. Jan. March July	5 – – –	46 – – –
#MeToo moments happen to everyone	"I think that if people really thought about it, everyone could come up with at least one incident that would count them in. Male or female."	Oct. Jan. March July	4 – – –	13 – – –

Table 1. Continued

Knowledge Claim	Example	When	No. of Posts	Vote Total
#MeToo means people will step in and stop harassment in the future	" . . . maybe if they are out and see a friend harassing/assaulting someone, they will speak up."	Oct. Jan. March July	3 – – –	9 – – –
Prepare our children for harassment or assaults	"I am now thinking of all the things I need to do and say to prepare my little girl to deal with this crap, and resigned myself to the fact I will probably be arrested one day for beating some asshole almost to death for assaulting her."	Oct. Jan. March July	3 – – –	9 – – –
#MeToo has created a precarious future for men	"Society has damaged me to the point where I will not even hold a door open for a person behind me, for fear they get 'triggered'. . . .Because apparently some people feel these actions are assault because I was born male, and therefore default to a dominating position."	Oct. Jan. March July	3 – – –	7 – – –
#MeToo made me address my past misbehavior	"I have also looked at my behavior in the past, and I'm not sure it all was wanted . . . and definitely know that I have manipulated and acted unethically in pursuit of sex."	Oct. Jan. March July	2 – – –	90 – – –
Feminism created rape culture	"If anything, femism created rape culture by selling snake oil to teens telling them they should do whatever they want. A good young women would never get drunk. But hey . . . feminism told her she can do so."	Oct. Jan. March July	2 – – –	20 – – –
#MeToo created a duty to speak	"And I guess I felt I had a duty not to let someone out in the community who might end up ruining some poor girls life."	Oct. Jan. March July	2 – – –	11 – – –
#MeToo is not for White women	"The hashtag and idea behind it is intended for social minority women. I honestly don't even feel comfortable with white women co-opting it."	Oct. Jan. March July	1 – – –	1 – – –
Some #MeToo experiences are not serious	"I think the reality is it's a bit silly to get offended by pestering comments or compliments. They're in most cases without consequence and the fact they're lumped in with serious rape and assault is unproductive."	Oct. Jan. March July	22 17 – –	96 13 – –

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Knowledge Claim	Example	When	No. of Posts	Vote Total
#MeToo is not for men	"Men need to stop using it. . . .The problem that this intends to highlight is the systemic cultural objectification of women that has caused almost every woman you know to have to make a career or life decision based on inappropriate behavior of a man with power over them."	Oct. Jan. March July	10 7 – –	17 1 – –
#MeToo should include male victims	"So men too can be sexually assaulted but they shouldn't use the #MeToo hashtag? Despite the fact that it applies to them as well? Take me through this logic, because to me it appears that you're saying sexual assault is only a problem when the victim is a woman."	Oct. Jan. March July	14 15 4 –	50 87 5 –
#MeToo posters are attention seeking	"Its being used to gather sympathy likes on Facebook at this point. Half the time theres no story and the other half is 'Some Guy said he liked my hair'"	Oct. Jan. March July	15 8 6 –	–65 25 17 –
#MeToo are false accusations	"I think a lot of it has to do with the false accusations taking away from the credibility of well-founded accusations . . . "	Oct. Jan. March July	7 10 8 –	–33 53 30 –
#MeToo will not change anything	"Somewhere along the way, when so many people are just posting #MeToo and the number of people actually reporting these crimes still doesn't go up, it looks a lot like this is just another internet trend that soon disappear without any consequence."	Oct. Jan. March July	15 – 7 –	50 – 9 –
#MeToo has become a witch hunt with blind belief in accusers	" . . . no one should lose their job or have their name slandered all over the press until they are guilty, proven by a court not crazies on twitter. A person who gets a guilty verdict from a jury then deserves all they get after, but there should no witchhunting before this conclusion, it's just biased and wrong."	Oct. Jan. March July	– 11 9 3	– 54 14 6
Women could have left the situation	"Why didn't she leave? She could have left anytime, but she stayed . . . "	Oct. Jan. March July	– 8 – –	– 16 – –

Table 1. Continued

Knowledge Claim	Example	When	No. of Posts	Vote Total
Celebrities are hypocrites	"Meryl Streep gave him that standing ovation. She also knew about Harvey. And now she's a Times Up star and going to be in Big Little Lies season 2 to help bash men. hypocrite."	Oct. Jan. March July	– 7 – –	– 22 – –
Majority of cases are men assaulting women	"If sex doesn't matter, why are women disproportionately the victims and men disproportionately the perpetrators?"	Oct. Jan. March July	– 7 – –	– 6 – –
#MeToo is a sex-negative movement	"Again, this is nonsense caused by the puritan American culture. We are so obsessed with sex because it's been forbidden. Other countries don't have this problem."	Oct. Jan. March July	– 4 – –	– 4 – –
Judicial system is hard on accusers	"If someone is assaulted, the police never ask 'what were you wearing?' 'what did you consume that night?'. . . .If you are sexually assaulted, expect to hear those questions and many more that lay 99% of the blame on your actions."	Oct. Jan. March July	– – 4 –	– – 8 –
Consent is not hard	"How hard is it to not touch someone or say something sexual to them without their permission? Is it really so much to ask?"	Oct. Jan. March July	– 4 – –	– 7 – –
It is acceptable to boycott accused	"Yes, but that's because people don't want to work with, and fans don't want to support him (so I guess they're not fans anymore). I personally love Kevin Spacey's acting, but I no longer wish to see him in any movies."	Oct. Jan. March July	– – 4 –	– – 5 –
Assault is difficult to prove	"It's difficult to prove something like this, so that means that 99.99% of them will remain innocent."	Oct. Jan. March July	– – 3 –	– – 4 –
#MeToo has done good	"Good that people aren't accepting of creepy sex perverts anymore."	Oct. Jan. March July	– – – 6	– – – 27
Economic inequality plays a role in creating #MeToo moments	" . . . in the case of the metoo movement, hadn't been any unequal distribution of power in the movie industry the whole actress abuse thing wouldn't have happened."	Oct. Jan. March July	– – – 2	– – – 4

eliminate interactions that do not rise to the level of a provable legal offense, and those found in violation of the standard code of conduct lose their humanity as grotesque rapists or serial harassers.

The second evaluative model, on the other hand, calls forth individuals in specific settings to use their communication skills and judgment to avoid harming others ("consent is not that hard"). Under the interpersonal framework, more #MeToo moments are accepted as legitimate expressions, and as a result, more individuals can be found responsible for bad behavior. Someone using the standard code of conduct model will fear being found responsible under the second model because the consequences in their mind are so severe. There is a gap between being found guilty or responsible, with the guilty facing much harsher repercussions and the responsible person learning and improving through reflection.

Fear of Consequences

In the initial AskReddit thread, two rape myths (Benedict, 1992) appear yet receive a negative vote score: Women are attention seeking (–65) and women are making false accusations (–33). By January 2018, however, the fear of consequences is illustrated in the claims that there are many #MeToo false accusations (+53) and that women are attention seeking (+25). In one exchange, a Redditor asked what another individual would recommend as a way to achieve justice. In response, the user wrote "I'm not too proud to say 'I don't know'" what would help victims or those wrongfully accused. The user then outlines a story:

> Meanwhile, some college kid has his whole life ruined because some drunk sorority chick hooked up with him and when she awoke sober the next morning, she realized he wasn't the Adonis the beer goggles made him out to be, and she'd NEVER sleep with a slob like that, so he must have raped her! (Bigganya, 2017)

The hyperbolic depiction focuses on the male as a college student with a bright future suddenly having that future destroyed by a sorority chick (no mention that she is presumably a college student as well) who was drinking (immoral behavior) and made an accusation based on the male student's appearance (shallow female character). The discursive frames used (female drinking, female promiscuity, and female shallowness) minimize the complexity of sexual assault on college campus as a reaction to and fear of the consequences.

The next issue centers on whether the #MeToo movement is for women or both genders. In October, 10 posts argued that the movement should focus on women as victim, but by January that number had fallen to 7 posts. In contrast, in October, January, and March, numerous Redditors focused on the abuse men face with a total vote score of 142 compared with the meager 18 for those

arguing #MeToo is a women's movement. To caveat, when men share their #MeToo moments, it is a powerful act where they overcome the masculine protector role that would cause them to remain silent in the face of their victimization. That said, in the AskReddit threads, the discourse about including men is used for a different effect. While the utterance may be offered with good intentions, the discourse itself tends to discipline the situation by minimizing and silencing. A stark example of this can be seen in the exchange below from the October 17, 2017 AskReddit thread:

> Original Comment: I would be amazed to find a woman who hadn't been touched or at least verbally harassed. I don't think anyone is lying. I'm fact, there are probably many people like me that have been physically sexually assaulted and aren't posting "me too" because we don't want to be known. So I'd argue that more women than you see posting are actually effected [sic], not less.

> Response: "You could say the same for men but they're not posting."

The mark of this discourse about including men in #MeToo is that it places men in the victim subject position to mask the presence of men as responsible for abuse. These utterances do not raise calls for change for either gender. Instead, "you could say the same for men" places men as victim before moving to silence "but they're not posting," implying that men suffer more than this woman, therefore she has less right to make a claim about sexual assault. In January 2018, one Redditor argued that women are the majority of victims of male violence. Discourse describing men as the perpetrator was not well received by the discourse community, receiving a negative vote average. The discourse that places men as victims has successfully obscured the male as perpetrator, disciplining the conversation to focus on individuals or nongendered plurals. Claims about men and women are perceived as hostile to one or the other and starting a "gender war."

By January 2018, the #MeToo movement was hitting its stride with a public record of dozens of famous men who faced both economic and legal repercussions for their behavior (North, 2018). With the long list of accused, new fears appeared in the discourse that #MeToo had become a "witch hunt." One example illustrates the power of this discourse well: "I'm worried about the erosion of due process and presumption of innocence. A person accused of something with no proof should not be named and shamed and have their life ruined." The Redditor is conflating economic and social consequences with legal judgment; they are attempting to discipline those who share their #MeToo posts without extensive proof. By using legal terms ("erosion of due process" and "presumption of innocence"), the victim is told not to name the person who they know violated them without extensive evidence. The use of legal terms brings that discursive frame to bear, highlighting a lack of documentary

evidence over compassion for the person sharing #MeToo. Not all cases of this claim are unsympathetic to the victim. One Redditor wrote, "I think prosecuting people in the court of public opinion is a really sketchy thing. But there are also a whole lot of fucking scumbags in the world and that needs to stop."

The discourse in the March 2018 thread continues this framework, with many Redditors calling on victims to go to the police, with one user asking "then why we made courts and law then? to bypass them?" In a similar conversational pair, two users confronted each other over the treatment of victims by the justice system (implying a justification for using public opinion rather than legal judgment). One person argued, "I'm not saying don't take people to court. I'm saying don't abuse the victims while you do it." The confrontational discourse indicates a distrust on many sides for the two systems being used to mete out justice. On one hand, the courts are perceived as unfair to victims for being too rigid with evidentiary standards and too slow to pass judgment; on the other, the economic consequences from a poor public relations image are seen as unbalanced and unfair. Two users had an extended exchange discussing the merits of boycotting accused entertainers. They eventually found a neutral discursive frame of personal choice to support whoever they want in a free market, but the underlying issue of justice for the victim or clearing the accused was not handled.

The only extended conversation in the July thread was a discussion of the harsh punishment for being accused. The exchanges, stretching out from the parent comment to six children comments, featured a cascade of "I agree" statements that "the movement needs to focus on guys who are true scum. Not just every guy who ever was a asshole on a date or made a rude comment." The community is seeking a mechanism to evaluate the severity of bad behavior and treat it with an appropriate response, yet the Redditor's search for new tools to evaluate behavior is grounded in fear of consequences rather than taking responsibility for their actions.

A series of other new knowledge claims appeared in the January 2018 thread that bolster a discourse coalition to diminish the authority of #MeToo. Seven comments spoke about the hypocrisy of women who were either silent in the past or applauded powerful men who were accused of sexual harassment and other bad behavior. The Redditors "name names" here, calling out Scarlett Johansson for working in three Woody Allen films, the many celebrities who worked with Harvey Weinstein, and Meryl Streep for giving a standing ovation to Roman Polanski. Two comments go further by implying that the women participated in the #MeToo moments to strategically advance their own careers by "playing into the part of using sexual advances to get what they want." These claims appear 7 times with 22 upvotes, indicating a strong reception within the AskReddit community. By showing these historic silences in the past by #TimesUp stars, these discourses unequivocally diminish the authority of

other #MeToo posts because the movement is criticized as moralizing for personal gain.

Subject Positions

The roles and subject positions depicted in the response to #MeToo discourse are also changing. The "best" (highest voted) comment on the October 2017 thread received 84 upvotes, and it contained a 551-word story that describes a situation from "back in college." The male subject received a text message from a female friend thanking him for "not taking advantage of her, and for not letting the other guy do so" after she got "really drunk at a party at my apartment." The male subject repeatedly claims no memory of the event, but "some guy" had entered the room and suggested raping the friend; he promptly kicked him out of the apartment. The rest of the comment is a reflection on how "desperate the situation must have felt for her," a personal challenge to take "a very serious look at the way I conduct myself, both around women, and in conversations with other men about women," and a call for "every single person who reads this to do the same."

The comment blends different narrative tropes that allow us to read different models from the discourse. A male savior rescues a thankful (if imperfect) damsel in distress from a gross rapist who is finally removed from the space. The male subject shows empathy for the female friend's position and reflects on his own behavior in the situation. The narrative follows traditional models for gendered behavior and makes the perpetrator, "some guy," unknown and atypical even as the subject writes "they aren't all neck-beards and predators." At the same time, the comment calls forth the desired reflection about sexual relations without the specter of consequences or punishment. After all, the male subject is the savior in his story, accruing to him the power to call for self-reflection from others in this manifestation of discourse.

The popularity of the comment, especially when compared with other narratives told from the victim and perpetrator perspective, affirms the community's desire for discourse that avoids the guilt, shame, anger, and resentment that arise from other subject positions entangled in the #MeToo discourse. The responses "<3 < 3 <3 < 3 so grateful for the way you are considering this situation" and "as a fellow man . . . I would like to thank you for upholding what it really means to be a true 'man'" reveal the parent comments heteroglossic (double-voiced) nature (Bakhtin,1935/2004). The discourse speaks to a wide range of people while sharing the core message that change is needed.

Discussion

After the public cascade of #MeToo posts across social media channels in October 2017, there have been calls to change sexual relations in our society.

The focus is on those in positions of power (whether physical, financial, and social) who take advantage of those in lower positions. Whether the coercion comes in the form of sexually aggressive language, groping, harassment, assault, or rape, the message is now clear: It happened to #MeToo, but not anymore. With this powerful new discourse now circulating, there have been challenges. While this study revealed nothing as grotesque as Massanari (2017) observed through ethnographic study of #GamerGate or the fappening, which included doxing (sharing someone else's private or identifying information) and harassment of women organized through Reddit, the AskReddit discourse does contain claims that indicate a hostility toward women using #MeToo.

The initial statements shown on AskReddit were more emotional and open, but by January 2018, examples of Benedict's (1992) rape myths were both present and highly rated. The claim that many #MeToo posts were done for attention or were false accusations consumed the threads. The AskReddit community was exhibiting backlash similar to what Ardovini-Brooker and Caringella-MacDonald (2002) observed as a result of the 1970 rape reforms that included a broader range of behaviors under the definition of rape. With #MeToo, a wider range of experiences were made public, and it forced the male Redditor to consider his past actions in light of the new call. While two Redditors openly did so in the October 2017 thread, the vast majority used calls of witch hunts, hypocrisy, and male victims to deflect from the discomfort of facing their past. This deflection is consistent with what Wood and Rennie (1994) observed: An attacker "may be uncertain about how to name his actions" (p. 132) and, therefore, he will have "strategies used to make sense of his actions and construct his identity to involve excuses and justifications" (p. 143).

Despite the early promise of the October 2017 AskReddit thread, by July 2018, AskReddit revealed the beginning of ambivalence. For the first time, you see a high occurrence of claims that #MeToo is a good movement. These statements are framing the moment or movement as over, complete, and, whether intentional or not, as no longer necessary. The substantive conversation about #MeToo has nearly disappeared within the AskReddit community by early 2019, showing the book ending function of the July 2018 discourse. In the month of May 2019, six Redditors posted questions that somehow related to #MeToo. Three posts asked about unnamed perpetrators (Arod979, 2019; KLJohnnes, 2019; Thecrookedbookworm, 2019), two posts asked about how to navigate the workplace and social life as a man after #MeToo (ChaseNJohns, 2019; Hydron11, 2019), and one post speculated about how a fictional character would be perceived in light of #MeToo (TrollsTheKing, 2019). These 6 threads averaged approximately 11 comments each: for example, minimal perceptible traction within the AskReddit community of 23 million subscribed members (AskReddit, 2018).

The critical approach allows us to further look at some of the unstated claims that are precluded by the existing discourse. The lack of a discussion about race

is a noticeable silence, with only one Redditor mentioning minority women without any response from others. There was also no mention of technology. Based on Pennington and Birthisel's (2016) work on the Steubenville rape case, the technology of social media and digital recordings became a source of fear that was used by the media to frame the story. In the AskReddit responses to #MeToo, the technology was not mentioned, perhaps because the disclosures were not happening in the AskReddit thread itself. The AskReddit community had a sense of distance between this online space and the online spaces where #MeToo disclosures occur. The distance did allow for interesting narratives to emerge such as the male friend as a savior. The new standard, where a male friend intervenes to rescue the damsel in distress, has limitations as a moral model that could be useful for evaluating #MeToo moments. Mills (1997) described a few narrow cases where confessional discourse was empowering for women, but in the case of AskReddit's response to the #MeToo movement, there is not a great deal of change to the dominant discourses. The goal remains to "make available to women and to men spaces wherein they can resist and construct their own sense of self" (Mills, 1997, p. 94). The concern with a male friend as savior is that it does not address the male aggressor or account for woman's own control or lack thereof in many #MeToo situations.

While AskReddit threads offer a trove of interactions for CDA, there are limitations due to the structure of the corpus and available methods. As Mautner (2005) puts it, online forums are an excellent resource for studying social processes and problems. That said, social media is massive, and millions of people spoke about #MeToo across numerous platforms in different communities and in various languages. My project is granular in comparison with the work done by Tornberg and Tornberg (2016) on discourses about Muslims on a Swedish Internet forum. Future research might look at online discourses for an extended period of time and pull interactions from other social media platforms, such as Twitter, to surface intertextual discourses and social practices across platforms and communities.

Another limitation concerns the "multiplicity of voices that can make themselves heard" in the "ephemeral" environment of online forums (Mautner, 2005, pp. 816–817). With the pseudoanonymous environment, Reddit users could be trolling (intentionally saying controversial things to get a reaction), a rhetorical purpose that complicates a discourse analysis. AskReddit is also moderated by teams of volunteers and administered by employees who have control over blocking Redditors, removing comments, and stickying posts (locking content at the top of threads). Both trolls and the Reddit governance activity can distort the integrity of the AskReddit discourse as genuine interactions about a social problem. Despite these limitations, studies of online interactions about social movements using CDA frameworks are a valuable tool.

Conclusion

By studying the response to #MeToo on AskReddit, I have shown where conflicts are emerging surrounding subject positions, who has the authority to speak, and who decides the consequences for past action. While there are calls for more inclusion in the movement, the strongest discursive frames maintain an ideal female victim (repentant), male savior, and the grotesque and rare male rapist (Wood & Rennie, 1994). Where these roles are visible in the described situation, the community generally endorses the utterance. It is where the individuals deviate from the easy subject positions that other claims are made to discipline the situation; as the roles shift or expand, there are counter claims made in response to make the discourse comfortable again. Surprisingly, the knowledge claim that men are victims too and often by female perpetrators is not made on AskReddit for the purpose of inclusivity in the movement or to support widespread change. Those claims are made strategically as a mechanism to dispel the power of the #MeToo movement as an empowering confession that calls to account the structures of a society that has silenced vulnerable people, allowed their bodies to become transactional objects, and conditioned perpetrators to expect and get away with sexual abuse.

By taking the emerging knowledge claims at face value, those who seek change using the #MeToo movement run the risk of inadvertently supporting the dominant cultural model by accepting its discursive frames rather than negotiating a new shared model for addressing sexual harassment and assault. The provocation moving forward is how we provide discursive frames that address the apprehensions about the #MeToo movement and push for change before conversations about #MeToo disappear from online interactions and public discourses.

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Article

#MeToo Goes Global: Media Framing of Silence Breakers in Four National Settings

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Abstract

This article reports the results of a qualitative media framing analysis of news coverage about #MeToo in four national contexts: the United States, Japan, Australia, and India. Comparing media coverage of a woman who became associated with #MeToo in each country reveals four media frames: brave silence breaker, stoic victim of an unjust system, recovered or reluctant hero, and hysterical slut. By identifying these frames, and their cultural variations, we add to understanding of #MeToo as an international social movement that has crossed national and cultural barriers.

Introduction

The #MeToo movement, started by activist Tarana Burke in 2006, gained new momentum when Alyssa Milano's October 2017 "tweet heard 'round the world" (Pflum, 2018, para. 7) launched #MeToo as a global movement of

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unprecedented scope (Gersen, 2017). In this article, we explore how the global spread of #MeToo has created variations of the silence breaker frame that is a prominent feature of U.S. media coverage. A prominent example is *Time Magazine*'s "Silence Breakers" issue, which named individuals who spoke up against sexual violence as the 2017 person of the year, calling them the voices that launched a movement (Zacharek, Dockterman, & Edwards, 2017).

Our analysis joins the efforts of researchers attempting to understand the media's role in #MeToo around the world (e.g., Dahlström & Sundström, 2018; Kunst, Bailey, Prendergast, & Gundersen, 2018; Lekach, 2017; Pipyrou, 2018; Robinson & Wang, 2018; Zarkov & Davis, 2018) through comparing media framing of women who could be considered silence breakers in four countries: Susan Fowler in the United States, Shiori Ito in Japan, Tanushree Dutta in India, and Tessa Sullivan in Australia. These four women were selected because each is portrayed in their respective national media coverage as starting #MeToo in that country. See Table 1 for details.

Our analysis was guided by three research questions:

1. To what extent is the "silence breaker" frame present across national contexts?
2. If present, how does the "silence breaker" frame differ according to different social and cultural norms?
3. What additional media frames are employed in media coverage of the case studies, and how do these frames differ according to social and cultural norms?

Media Framing and Cross-Cultural Analysis

Framing theory recognizes the power media wields through selectively presenting information and defining narrative (Entman, 1993). Fung and Scheufele (2014) establish a framework for cross-cultural media framing analysis in observing that dominant media frames reflect social norms and encourage individuals to adhere to these norms or face social sanctions. In addition, however, audiences also engage by "decid[ing] how to interpret the social phenomenon and whether or not to adopt the media representation" (Fung & Scheufele, 2014, p. 132), which is especially apparent in hashtag activism. For example, Pennington (2018) considers how #MuslimWomensDay has enabled Muslim women to tell their own stories and, in so doing, to "push back" against dominant media frames depicting them as silent victims (p. 200), and Jackson and Banaszczyk (2016) explore how #YesAllWomen and #YesAllWhiteWomen enabled "feminist counterpublics" to "rewrite dominant public narratives about violence against women" (p. 392).

Because of the impact of social media on collective action, the notion of collective identity becomes a central concept to understand the impact of #MeToo.

Table 1. Case Studies and Justification.

Name	Background	Inclusion justification
Susan Fowler *United States*	• A former Uber engineer whose blog post about the gender bias and sexual harassment she faced at Uber went viral. • Featured as one of the "Silence Breakers" for Time Magazine's Person of the Year issue in 2017.	• Fowler's own voice brought her case to the media, even though her example takes place before the Harvey Weinstein case and #MeToo became a global phenomenon.
Shiori Ito *Japan*	• A journalist who accused a prominent journalist of rape. Initially, she did so anonymously, but as the #MeToo movement gained traction, she published a book about her experience and came forward publicly. She is also the subject of a BBC documentary.	• Her case was largely ignored by the media and the public of Japan until after the #MeToo movement started in the United States. • The only case widely reported on in Japanese English-language media.
Tanushree Dutta *India*	• A former Bollywood actress who has become the face of the #MeToo movement in India. Dutta had returned to India on vacation after living in the United States for almost a decade and was offhandedly asked about the #MeToo movement by an entertainment reporter. Her revelation about her own case of sexual harassment nearly a decade ago set off a media storm. She accused a prominent Bollywood actor, Nana Patekar, of sexually harassing her in 2008.	• Her story, and the #MeToo movement, was still ongoing at the time data were being collected, and the national conversation was heating up amid several prominent politicians and social figures being put under the spotlight.
Tessa Sullivan *Australia*	• A city councilor from Melbourne who became the unwilling face of the #MeToo movement in Australia when she accused the long-standing and well-liked mayor of Melbourne of sexual misconduct. She eventually resigned her post as councilor in the midst of the flurry and said publicly that she did not wish to be a "Me too warrior." Once she spoke up, several more women came forward, and the mayor resigned in disgrace, all the while claiming his innocence.	• Sullivan's story and the resulting political fallout were widely covered by the national media in Australia.

Milan (2015) argues that social media amplifies collective action and sets in motion an identity building process where membership in the group and taking part of the collective action becomes a new form of collective identity. Treré (2015) also found that participation in social media fueled movements reinforced solidarity and internal group cohesion, thus strengthening inclusion into a collective identity that exists primarily in the digital world.

Research on #MeToo across cultural contexts is limited and mostly comes from Western countries. Some research outlines the challenges that the movement has faced from Western social and academic elites. For example, Pipyrou (2018) recalls French actress Catherine Deneuve's denouncing #MeToo as a "witch hunt" and British screenwriter Terry Gilliam calling it a "mob rule" (p. 415). Some European critical feminist scholars recognize the movement's global reach but express concerns about its individualism and marginalization of women without media access. As U.K. scholars Gill and Orgad (2018) note, the #MeToo hashtag has circulated in 85 countries—"arguably the result of, at least in part, its broad and inclusive appeal, and its ability to cross lines of stratification" (p. 1317). But, they add, the global movement privileges career women with "respectable" sexualities while marginalizing many others. Dutch scholars Zarkov and Davis (2018) express ambivalence about #MeToo's ability to effect global change because "we should not assume that what is happening among the political and cultural elites will automatically 'trickle down' to the streets" (p. 6). By contrast, Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2018) argue that "hashtag feminism" allows victims "to understand sexual violence as a structural rather than personal problem" (p. 238).

The few studies that compare content filed under the #MeToo hashtag also find similarities across national and linguistic contexts. In Sweden, where #MeToo inspired sector-specific movements, a qualitative content analysis of the first 100 stories posted in December 2017 and January 2018 under the #slutavverkat (clear-felled) hashtag used by forest workers identifies familiar patterns in the narratives: objectification of women's bodies, unsafe spaces, and reproduction of sexist practices (Johansson, Johansson, & Andersson, 2018). A critical discourse comparison of the content of the U.S. Time's Up Legal Fund website and the Danish #MeToo website, both started by actors in each country, identifies similarities and differences: (a) U.S. discourse positions women as both victims and survivors, while Danish discourse sees them only as victims; (b) the U.S. site places responsibility on male perpetrators, while the Danish one blames both perpetrators and culture; and (c) the U.S. site acknowledges immigrants and women of color face higher risk of sexual assault, while the Danish site is unconcerned with intersectionality (Jakobsen, 2018).

Two comparative studies of #MeToo media coverage originated in Sweden. One is a qualitative content analysis comparing *USA Today* with the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* (Wallin, 2018). Findings indicate surprise as a major theme in *USA Today*, while *Dagens Nyheter* viewed the phenomenon as

long-in-the-making and assumed that the newspaper's audience had a basic theoretical understanding of gender as a "socially constituted role" rather than a static biological reality (Wallin, 2018, p. 36). Dahlström and Sundström (2018), who also analyze *Dagens Nyhete's* #MeToo coverage, identified two major frames: #MeToo as a natural force, and #MeToo as a feminist autumn or season of harvest.

A Hofstede Insights Country Comparison (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010) provides a useful backdrop for addressing social norms in each country. The Hofstede Insights Country Comparison explores cultural norms through six dimensions. For the purpose of this study, three relevant dimensions are discussed: power distance, individualism, and masculinity. Power distance is defined by Hofstede et al. (2010) as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (p. 61). Individualism is the degree to "which the interests of the individual prevail over the interests of the group" (p. 90–91), and masculinity examines the degree to which "emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life" (p. 139). For each of the dimensions, scores can range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating that dimension is absent from a culture and 100 meaning it is the dominant paradigm within a particular dimension (Hofstede et al., 2010).

As shown in Figure 1, India stands out for its high score in the power-distance cultural dimension, which means the national culture emphasizes hierarchy and top-down communication, reflected in organizations that are hierarchical and centralized. Australia and the United States stand out for their high scores in the individualism cultural dimension, implying a cultural emphasis on personal agency and responsibility, rather than membership in groups or collectives. Finally, Japan is notable for its high score in the masculinity cultural dimension, meaning the culture is highly competitive, and desire for professional and personal success is a strong motivating force.

Our analysis is one of the first to compare Western and non-Western media sources and to include four national contexts. The four silence breakers examined are objects of media framing, but they are also producers of messages affiliated with #MeToo, whether or not that was their intention. As our analysis reveals, whereas Susan Fowler's and Tessa Sullivan's stories were contained largely within their national contexts, Shiori Ito had to leave Japan to have her story told and was shamed and silenced within Japan while being lauded internationally as the hero of Japan's #MeToo (Rich, 2017; "Shiori Ito," n.d.). Tanushree Dutta, who had been living in the United States since leaving India after she was shamed for speaking out in 2008, witnessed firsthand the sweeping effect of #MeToo, and was inspired to speak out (Satija, 2018). Citizens in most democratic countries now can access media reports from almost any source,
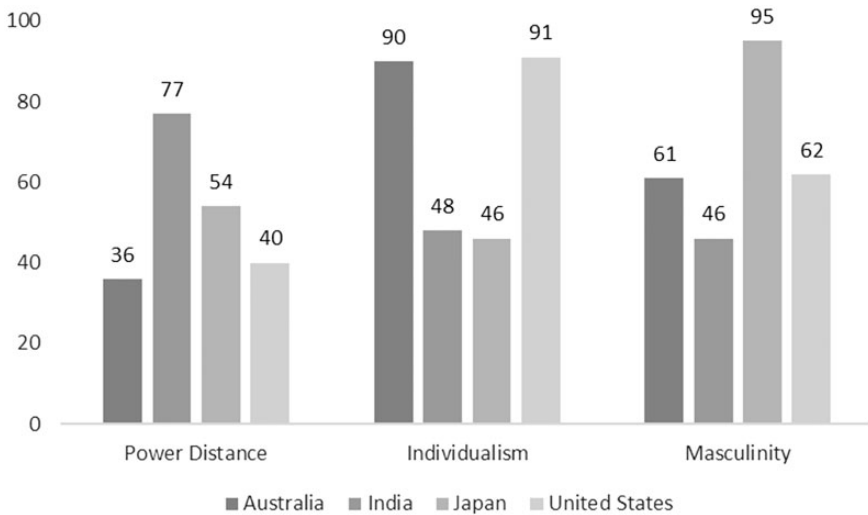
Figure 1. Hofstede Insights Country Comparison. This figure illustrates the differences in three of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, comparing the United States, Japan, India, and Australia (Hofstede et al., 2010).

roughly translate them via Google, and use digital platforms to challenge national rhetoric surrounding sexual assault. And yet, even with this access to global perspectives, the differing social norms to which Fung and Scheufele (2014) refer are still evident in the media framing of these four cases. In different ways, these social norms act through media frames to constrain individuals' efforts to break the silence that surrounds sexual misconduct. We also reveal how social norms in each country relate to the positive or negative valence of media framing—in other words, the extent to which "some frames are indicative of 'good and bad' and (implicitly) carry positive and/or negative elements" (DeVreese & Boomgaarden, 2003, p. 363).

Methods

We selected countries where multiple online English-language news sources had run stories on a case connected to #MeToo. Each case represents a story that garnered national media attention and, in some capacity, became affiliated with the start of #MeToo in that country (see Table 1). To allow for close comparisons, we used only written news stories on online news sites, and we did not address social media or reader responses, except when it was reported in the news stories. We examined news stories ($n = 352$) from February 2017 (when Susan Fowler published her blog post) through October 2018. News websites

were identified by, first, identifying the top-ranked news publications (including some TV news sites) for each country through Google and, second, searching within the websites to determine whether they had published stories on #MeToo. Online content was more easily accessible than print, so we sampled only from the web versions. Once case examples were identified, an additional Google search determined whether other online media sources had published pertinent content. A total of 35 sites were identified and searched, using the sites' local search engines with keywords "#MeToo" and the woman's name (see Appendix).

PDF versions of news articles were first imported into NVivo 12 Plus. Coding was loosely guided by our research questions and relied on inductive analysis to address the second and third research questions. During the first round of coding, the first researcher read each of the collected news articles and noted how the women were being discussed using analytic memos (Saldaña, 2013). The research team then collectively reviewed the analytic memos and developed a loose descriptive coding hierarchy (Saldaña, 2013), which began to capture the essence of the observed frames. At all points throughout the analysis, the team worked iteratively and collaboratively, discussing differences until agreement was reached.

Results and Analysis

Our coding process resulted in identification of four overarching media frames across the four cases:

- The brave silence breaker frame highlights the woman's courage for coming forward. News reports that used this frame relied on words such as "courageous" and "brave" to describe these women.
- The stoic victim of an unjust system frame contextualizes the risk that each victim faces in seeking justice in an unjust system.
- The reluctant or recovered hero frame acknowledges two different forms of heroism: In the reluctant hero frame, the silence breaker is unintentionally shunted to the forefront of a global movement; in the recovered hero frame, the victim initially endures attacks but later emerges as heroic.
- The hysterical slut frame is the most negatively valenced. In this frame, the silence breaker's emotions, sexual activity, and overall credibility are questioned.

Susan Fowler: U.S. Silence Breaker Framed as Whistle-Blower

As soon as her February 19, 2017, blog post went viral, Susan Fowler was framed positively. Of the 33 articles in our sample, almost half used either the

word "whistleblower" in the headline, or related language, such as "the engineer who shook up Uber" (*Houston Chronicle*, October 10, 2017) or "She's 26 and brought down Uber's CEO..." (*The New York Times*, October 21, 2017). Consistent with the positive framing that emerged in our coding, Fowler received numerous public recognitions (e.g., Webby Awards, *Time* person of the year, *Financial Times* person of the year, *Huffington Post* 2017 list of most powerful pieces of writing by women).

Brave Silence Breaker

The brave silence breaker frame emerged prominently in our coding of Fowler's case. Media reports highlighted her bravery: "the 29,000-word missive that blew the door open on the abuses being perpetrated at Uber required...a great deal of bravery" (*Houston Chronicle*, October 24, 2017). The announcement of Fowler's Webby award also highlighted her bravery: "As a result of Fowler's brave and personal post...women entering the tech world in the future stand a greater chance of being treated with fairness" (*Webby Awards*, December 2017). Other media reports used similar language, suggesting that Fowler "gave women a primer on how to report sexual harassment" (*USA Today*, December 2017).

Stoic Victim of an Unjust System

Fowler's blog post, labeled as "the tipping point...for drastic change" (*Financial Times*, December 11, 2017) and described by *The Ringer* as "stoic" (February 21, 2018) was characterized as a catalyst for change in an unjust system. Her description of working in Uber's misogynistic environment emphasizes that "the male-dominated atmospheres are discouraging the talented from seeking careers in the sector" (*Fox News*, February 20, 2017):

> On my first official day...my new manager sent me a string of messages...trying to get me to have sex with him...I immediately...reported him to HR...I was told by both HR and upper management that ...they wouldn't feel comfortable giving him anything other than a warning...and that I had to make a choice: (i) I could either go and find another team...or (ii) I could stay on the team, but...he would most likely give me a poor performance review . . ., and there was nothing they could do. (Fowler, 2017)

Through this frame, our research suggests that Fowler was keenly aware of the risks that she faced. Yet, the stories we analyzed were full of quotations from her blog post, giving Fowler a powerful platform to tell her own story as a stoic victim of an unjust system: "One of the things that kept popping up was this idea that if you do whistle-blow about sexual harassment, then that is what will

define the rest of your life. And I kind of struggled with this" (Fowler, 2017). Yet, in later interviews, she called being a whistle-blower "a badge of honour" (*Financial Times*, December 11, 2017). Overall, this frame was positive, corresponding with U.S. social norms that applaud brave individuals who risk their own security to fight an unjust system.

Reluctant Hero

Fowler's blog was written nearly seven months before Milano's tweet; yet, she was featured on the cover of *Time Magazine* as one of the "Silence Breakers," and multiple news stories depicted her as responsible for the downfall of Uber's CEO. This finding may suggest that Fowler's story was integrated seamlessly into the #MeToo narrative in media reports that used the reluctant hero frame. But this was not her intention: "I expected the reaction to die down, but it never did. It became much bigger than me, so much bigger than Uber" (*Financial Times*, December 11, 2017). Furthermore, after Fowler left Uber, we see evidence of the recovered hero frame, in reports that she was hired by *The New York Times* and got a book and movie deal.

Hysterical Slut

In Fowler's case, the victim discrediting appears to have been internal to Uber, while she was still employed, although some of this internal strife became public in the aftermath of her blog post. For example, on October 9, 2017, a *Business Insider* article publicized Fowler's critical response to a *Wall Street Journal* interview with Uber's Human Resources director, Liane Hornsey. The *Business Insider* article highlighted the conflicting perspectives of these two women, quoting excerpts from Hornsey's interview as well as Fowler's Twitter responses. Although this is an isolated example of a more negative framing, it appears that none of the stories on Susan Fowler in our sample used the hysterical slut frame.

Shiori Ito: Japanese Silence Breaker Framed as Bad Citizen

Our analysis found that *The Japan Times* noted that Ito was called a bad citizen and characterized her decision to speak publicly as "rare" (May 2017). The *Asahi Shimbun*, the only other English-language Japanese news site to have stories about Ito and #MeToo, effectively captured Ito's experience of coming forward in their headline, "In patriarchal Japan, saying 'Me Too' can be risky for women" and supporting statement, "many people think Shiori's problem has nothing to do with them" (March 2018), adding to our claim that Ito's status as a silence breaker was negatively associated.

Brave Silence Breaker

In collectivist Japan, where social harmony is a core value, we found Ito's decision to speak out often characterized as brave: "she braved a room full of journalists to say she was raped" (*Asia Pacific Journal*, August 2018), and "Ito has become one of the few brave voices to speak out from Japan" (*Tokyo Weekender*, February 2018). However, in contrast to the prominence of this frame in Susan Fowler's case, the brave silence breaker frame in Ito's coverage is scarce, and mostly offered to English-speaking foreigners, with the more traditional publications focusing more on societal disruption and legal ramifications. Thus, overall, the brave silence breaker frame carries a negative valence for Ito.

Stoic Victim of an Unjust System

In contrast to the other three cases, the negative impact Ito faced in reporting to authorities was extremely harsh, as evident in the transcript of a May 29, 2017, press statement. The interactions Ito described, including friends who told her to "get on with her life," and Ito's description of trying to report to the police, illustrate the system she was operating in:

> At first, the police would not let me file a report. Investigators repeatedly tried to convince me not to file and said things like, "This kind of thing happens often, but it's difficult to investigate these cases;" "This will affect your career;" "You won't be able to work in this industry after this;" and "All the effort you've made so far in your life will go to waste." (*Japan Subculture Blog*, October 2017)

In later articles, our analysis revealed a more critical stance of Japan—a stance that positions Ito at the forefront of impending cultural change. For instance, one article mentioned the need to confront "rape myths" that have existed in Japanese culture, such as "consent had been given because the victim had not resisted," as an example of social norms that make it especially difficult for Japanese women to speak publicly about rape (*The Japan Times*, January 6, 2018).

Although her experience of reporting rape in Japan is far from unique, we suggest that Ito's ability to share her story through the press conference enabled later media coverage to frame her as a stoic victim, telling the story in her own words. This frame largely carries a positive valence, but with the caveat that much of this reporting may have been done for Western audiences.

Reluctant Hero

According to one report, "Shiori Ito has inadvertently become the standard bearer for the #MeToo movement in Japan" (*The Japan Times*, November 25, 2017). In Ito's case, it seemed timing was everything, catapulting her from a silenced victim to leading a movement in a country that did not want her as its

voice. She was repeatedly advised to drop the case, but "for the young freelance journalist...that simply wasn't an option" (*Tokyo Weekender*, February 2, 2018). In Ito's own words, "...this was the only option I had left" (*Tokyo Weekender*, February 2, 2018).

Ito originally told her story anonymously in a May 2017 press conference, but in October 2017, her book, *Black Box*, was published with her full name, and then #MeToo forced her back into public view, and eventually into civil court. The public recognition allowed her to be a keynote speaker at a Japanese university, where she framed herself as the reluctant hero (as reported in the school blog): "She opened the conversation by affirming that she has had apprehensions about speaking out publicly on these difficult and polarizing issues," and in Ito's own words, "If I couldn't tell the truth, I couldn't be a journalist, it would twist me up inside" (*Temple University Japan, Student Blog*, May 22, 2018). In articles such as these, which often quote Ito, we see a more pronounced and positive presence of the reluctant hero frame.

Hysterical Slut

Japanese media coverage devoted significant attention to public criticism of Ito, especially through social media: "Many online comments criticized her for speaking out, looking too seductive and ruining the life of a prominent figure" (*Asahi Shimbun*, March 1, 2018). Ito reported social media posts that called her "slut" and "prostitute" and even included death threats (*Japan Subculture Blog*, October 2017). She was also criticized for having the top button of her blouse undone during the 2017 press conference where she first publicly told her story—"something she was told took away credibility from her testimony and her account of the event" (*Agencia EFE*, April 3, 2018). In general, we found the public response after her 2017 press release was negative, with people on social media saying, "a true Japanese woman wouldn't speak of such 'shameful' things" (*Agencia EFE*, April 3, 2018). Ito was the only one of these four women to be characterized as a bad citizen because she spoke out and disrupted the façade of social harmony ("Japanese Culture," n.d.).

Tanushree Dutta: Indian Silence Breaker Framed as Celebrity

Dutta's case is a prime example of Indian media's tendency to sensationalize criminal cases (Arulselvan, 2016). Our analysis suggests the brave silence breaker frame conferred celebrity status on Dutta. In less than a month (from September to October 2018), English-language media sites in India published almost 150 stories on Dutta. Indian media seemed cognizant of their role in #MeToo, as indicated by the first English-language headline from the

India Times: "Tanushree Dutta Kickstarts #MeToo in Bollywood, Alleges Nana Patekar of Sexually Harassing Her" (September, 2018).

Brave Silence Breaker

Consistent with this awareness of Indian #MeToo, we found Dutta was frequently framed as brave: "Everyone is lauding her courage to stand against an A Lister actor" (*India Times*, October 6, 2018); "Tanushree's courage to share her story gave a lot of other women the courage to share their stories" (*India Times*, October 19, 2018). Celebrities also lent support through the brave silence breaker frame, like this quote from Freida Pinto: "I add my voice...in support of Tanushree's bravery..." (*Indian Express*, October 3, 2018).

Although most references to Dutta as the brave silence breaker carried a positive valence, our analysis revealed some notable instances indicating doubt or mistrust of ulterior motives: "While Tanushree Dutta's courage is admirable, her testimony will not be a lightning rod for a larger, more disruptive storm" (*Indian Express*, October 3, 2018), and "while supporting all the brave women who have spoken out against their perpetrators, jewellery designer Farah Khan wants just the truth to be stated with no exaggerations as some may try to misuse it" (*Manorama Online*, October 15, 2018).

Stoic Victim of an Unjust System

Similar to Fowler and Ito, our research revealed Dutta also initially tried to report to authorities. Recent media coverage depicts this 2008 attempt as a failure. In a September 29, 2018, *India Times* story, Dutta described her reaction to the 2008 incident and the immediate fallout: "I was shocked. It was...humiliating...I said I am not doing this and I walked off. And right after I did, they called the media and labeled me unprofessional." But the attack was more than verbal: A mob attacked her car as she tried to leave. When the footage resurfaced, we found at least one media report emphasized Dutta's stoicism:

> From people trying to deflate her car tyres (while she is seen sitting inside with a calm face) to how a person jumped on the hood of her car, this video gives us a glimpse of hooliganism that Tanushree had to face. (*India Times*, October 1, 2018)

Similar to the later coverage of Ito in Japan, we found much of the 2018 media coverage of Dutta framed her positively by criticizing Indian culture. For example, an October 9, 2018, *India Times* article suggested four reasons for Indian women's reluctance to speak up about sexual harassment: socioeconomic factors and risks, shame, downplaying assault, and fear of repercussions. We found, in general, the stoic victim frame was positive for Dutta, depicting

her as patiently and persistently telling her story, despite initial resistance, until she was heard.

Recovered Hero

Dutta, who left Bollywood in shame after the 2008 assault, was largely forgotten by the public but had been trying to speak out about the event and the culture of sexual assault in India for years:

> I was probably one of the first people in the history of this country in the media field to speak up and stand up. Everybody saw what happened but the memory and the popular perception of it is that Tanushree Dutta spoke up against harassment and then she was no more. (*India Times*, September 26, 2018)

Specifically, 14 of the 151 articles in our sample framed Dutta as a #MeToo hero, suggesting that she "started," "triggered," or "kickstarted" the Indian movement. These articles largely reflect a positive valence, lauding her as a hero of Indian #MeToo. Many articles quoted extensively from Dutta's interviews, allowing her to tell her own story, as a recovered hero:

> She calls it her destiny. When Tanushree Dutta returned to Mumbai from the US…she had in no way imagined that she would become a catalyst for a "movement." Yet, the 34-year-old was not unprepared to take on the fight against her sexual harassers. (*Indian Express*, October 21, 2018)

This frame was almost entirely positive. In fact, when celebrities tried to discredit or shame her, acting on the cultural supposition that immodest women brought attacks on themselves (Mukherjee, 2014), our research reveals the public response was brutal, reflecting the stark dichotomous status of women as both exalted and inferior (Abishek, 2018), as shown in these headlines:

- "After Salman Khan avoids talking about Tanushree Dutta, people slam him for acting clueless" (*India Times*, September 28, 2018);
- "Shakti Kapoor gets slammed for mocking Tanushree Dutta…" (*India Times*, October 3, 2018);
- "Vivek Agnihotri call Tanushree Dutta's allegations 'False & Frivolous', Social Media slams him brutally" (*India Times*, October 5, 2018).

Hysterical Slut

Although we found that most articles framed Dutta positively, some detractors (mostly the accused) tried to discredit her. The movie director said "that she [Dutta] is 'probably creating a controversy because she may want to make a

comeback'" (*India Times*, September 27, 2018). Another told reporters that "there is a possibility that she did drugs" (*India Times*, October 4, 2018), while a movie producer was overheard by reporters saying "I feel that day she was on her periods" (*India Times*, October 5, 2018).

Thus, we found the hysterical slut frame was evident and was enacted by critics trying to dismiss Dutta's accusations through discrediting her. Yet simultaneously, our analysis revealed the media and public discredited the attackers. So, while the framing of Dutta as a hysterical slut did occur, we found the public pushback, and subsequent media framing of attackers resulted in an overall positive framing of Dutta.

Tessa Sullivan: Australian Silence Breaker Framed as Slut/Liar

As soon as Tessa Sullivan leveled her accusations against Robert Doyle, she resigned her city council position to avoid claims that she was seeking the mayoral seat, according to several news articles we analyzed. Yet, when the story broke, the *Herald Sun* used a picture of Sullivan in a bikini on its front page, with salacious headlines suggesting she had been romantically interested in the mayor. It took nearly 3 months for that story to be removed, which only happened after public criticism of the *Herald Sun*. Attacks on female politicians based on their physical appearance and suspected sexuality are common in Australian news coverage (Peeters, 2004), so the *Herald Sun's* response was not surprising.

Brave Silence Breaker

Our analysis revealed the brave silence breaker frame in the coverage of Sullivan through quotes from her colleagues and others close to the case. For example, Councilwoman Cathy Oke (who would eventually come forward with her own allegations), "labelled Ms. Sullivan 'very brave' for coming forward with the sexual harassment and indecent assault allegations late last year, but was upset her colleague felt she had to resign afterwards" (*9News*, February 17, 2018). We found this sentiment echoed by the primary investigator: "Mr. Rimmer said Ms. Sullivan took a courageous step to come forward and it was 'a matter of regret that Ms. Sullivan felt she had no alternative than to resign as a councillor'" (*News.com.au*, March 13, 2018). In other reports, where Sullivan's colleagues were interviewed, bravery was also prominent, but as with Dutta, caveats were sometimes added: "It takes a very brave woman to speak up in this way and, of course, it puts everyone in a very difficult situation" (*Daily Telegraph*, March 13, 2018).

In contrast to the other three cases, our analysis revealed media coverage of Sullivan reflected far less of her own voice. After her December 2017 statement and resignation, Sullivan did not speak to the media again until March 2018,

when several stories reported Sullivan "breaking her silence," (e.g., *News+*, March 6, 2018), and then, after findings were released, she gave one more final statement about wanting to be left alone to heal privately with her family (*Daily Telegraph*, March 14, 2018). Our analysis revealed the brave silence breaker frame was initially negative, focusing on the accused, but evolved throughout the course of the coverage toward a more positive valence.

Stoic Victim of an Unjust System

Of the four cases, we found Tessa Sullivan's was the only one in which authorities acted immediately on her complaints. Numerous articles reported Sullivan's accusations and resignation on December 17, 2017, the majority focusing on the accused, such as the *Daily Telegraph*'s headline, "Melbourne Lord Mayor Robert Doyle steps down amid council sexual harassment probe."

Cathy Oke, Tessa Sullivan's fellow councilwoman who later brought allegations against Robert Doyle, explained her hesitation: "I was fearful for a range of reasons. Including being attacked in the media…That if I spoke up…I would be personally attacked" (*News.com.au*, March 14, 2018). Similar to Ito and Dutta, we found instances of articles criticizing the country's culture: "the response from workplace leaders…has often been crude" (*The Conversation*, March 22, 2018). However, aside from the initial attempt at a smear campaign in early *Herald Sun* reports, we found Sullivan was generally portrayed positively as a stoic victim of an unjust system.

Reluctant Hero

Tessa Sullivan stated that she did not intend to be part of a movement: "I don't want to be some spokesperson for sexual harassment. I don't want to join the #MeToo movement, I'm not interested…I didn't think it would become this" (*The Sydney Morning Herald,* March 9, 2018). This was the only article in our sample that associated Sullivan with #MeToo, and it clearly framed her as reluctant—not someone who intentionally started the Australian movement. Although other articles aligned the *case* with #MeToo (e.g., *The Sydney Morning Herald*'s October 5, 2018 article), we found most Australian stories did not frame the story as part of #MeToo. However, some international media reports did name Sullivan as the face of Australian #MeToo (e.g., *Marie Claire*, August 2, 2018 and *The New York Times*, March 11, 2018). This frame was minimally present in this case; yet, when it was used, it has a largely positive connotation.

Hysterical Slut

On December 17, 2017, when the Sullivan story broke, the *Herald Sun* ran a front-page story, accompanied by a picture of Sullivan in a bikini on a beach with her young son, and the headline, "Rob, I'm so lucky to have you."

According to later news reports, this headline came from an unrelated message. The bikini shot was accompanied by a story inside that began: "Tessa Sullivan wouldn't take no for an answer." The original story referring to the bikini was removed in March 2018 after the *Herald Sun* faced intense public criticism (Lucas & Perkins, 2018). Thus, we observed the initial reaction of at least one media outlet was to fall in line with the expected narrative of silencing or shaming victims, especially when the accused was a powerful person. *The Sydney Morning Herald* seemed acutely aware of this: "A photo of Sullivan in a bikini is sadly one of the most effective means of discrediting her. With that one image she becomes sexualised, trivialised and therefore untrustworthy" (January 10, 2018).

As with the other cases, we found the hysterical slut frame to be negative, although in Sullivan's case, media reports shifted over time, toward more positive frames, and there was significant pushback against the attempted discrediting from other media sources and the public.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our analysis identified four main frames in media coverage of all four cases: brave silence breaker, stoic victim of an unjust system, reluctant or recovered hero, and hysterical slut. These findings substantiate Fung and Scheufele's (2014) observations, revealing differences in the media frames that appear to arise from differences in social and cultural norms.

In Susan Fowler's case, the positive valence of all four frames might be said to resonate with Hofstede's high individualism score for the United States, a country that values strength and leadership, although these positive traits are usually attributed to men rather than women (Walker, Bialik, & van Kessel, 2018). In addition, the United States' low score for power distance suggests that Fowler may have felt freer to speak up than would be the case in a country that scores higher on power distance because individuals from low power-distance cultures are comfortable rejecting formal and rigid hierarchies and tend to embrace equality and openness (Hofstede, 1993; Pascale & Athos, 1981). Fowler has spoken publicly (e.g., Carson, 2019; Levin, 2018) about her desire to speak up against Uber and the injustices she had observed firsthand, emphasizing that she always felt it was her right, and perhaps even her duty to call out the discrimination she was experiencing. However, the resistance that Fowler encountered when she first spoke up reminds us that any particular situation can vary from overarching cultural generalizations—especially when we acknowledge research on the different responses to men and women who express strong emotions in the workplace (e.g., Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008; Maxfield, Grenny, & McMillan, 2006).

In Shiori Ito's case, the negative valence of coverage intended for Japanese audiences, in contrast to the positive valence in coverage intended for Western audiences, leads to some important observations about cultural norms. First, the

small number of stories indicates that Japanese culture was not ready for a conversation on sexual assault. This also reflects a cultural preference to keep quiet and suffer in silence ("Japanese Culture," n.d.). This low number could also reflect Japan's relatively low score on the individualism cultural dimension. In a culture that emphasizes the social collective over the individual, preserving social harmony is prioritized, and thus, it is worth noting that Ito is the only one of the four women who was, in some reports, framed as a bad citizen. This is discussed earlier as a version of the hysterical slut frame, but evidence of a similar cultural norm also appears in conjunction with the reluctant hero frame. We see Ito struggling to reconcile her need for justice and the cultural expectation of *honne* and *tatemae* (truth and façade), as Japanese citizens are expected to tell social lies to maintain harmony ("Japanese Culture," n.d.).

The relationship between cultural norms and media frames is especially complex in Tanushree Dutta's case. This is partly because the case unfolded over 10 years, with her initial attempt differing from her later attempt. It also relates to her celebrity status, which led the case to receive much more coverage than the other cases, but also led to backlash against her detractors, lending credibility to Dutta in a country where celebrity endorsements are a gold standard (Mahanta & Sangameshwaran, 2010). So, although the negative framing of Dutta as a hysterical slut is evident in some media coverage, the public pushback and subsequent media framing of attackers indicates an overall positive framing of Dutta. This dichotomy may reflect the divided social position of women as revered and subservient, but in a modernized social context, it reflects the rapid change in Indian values as technology and modernization reach all strata of Indian society (ChenarestanSofla & Karami, 2016). Among the three cultural dimensions of Hofstede considered in this analysis, India scores highest on power distance. However, given that Dutta's celebrity status allowed her, at least in the more recent reports, to exceed the bounds of a traditional workplace, this factor—which might otherwise be seen to discourage a victim from reporting—has less meaning than it would for the other three cases in this study.

In Tessa Sullivan's case, our understanding of cultural norms in relation to media framing might begin with the fact that she resigned immediately after going public. This, along with the fact that she stayed silent throughout the media storm, may reflect her attempt to balance the social expectation of modesty (Peeters, 2004) with her desire to speak up for herself and demand justice, although it is hard to know for certain that this was her intention. Adherence to tradition, and suspicion toward societal change (Hofstede et al., 2010), played out in this case as the national media struggled to make sense of Sullivan's story and balance the forces of tradition with the public's new desire for truth. Sullivan's desire to stay out of the spotlight may reflect a generalized Australian desire to keep private things private and maintain a modest public persona (Peeters, 2004). Among the three of Hofstede's cultural dimensions considered for this analysis, Australia scores high on individualism and is

within a few points of the United States for all three dimensions. Thus, similar to Susan Fowler, we may expect that Sullivan initially felt relatively free to speak up in the organizational hierarchy, but she experienced much harsher resistance and backlash, perhaps reflecting the Australian tendency to attack female politicians in a particularly personal fashion (Peeters, 2004). As for Susan Fowler, some of this negative response may substantiate previous research on gender differences (Maxfield, Grenny, & McMillan, 2006).

These cross-cultural differences in media framing of #MeToo expand our understanding of hashtag activism by offering an example of a social media movement that crossed national and cultural boundaries, effectively creating a new collective identity (Gerbaudo & Treré, 2015). The traditional tendency to silence or shame victims who speak up about sexual assault or misconduct, which exists to varying degrees in all four countries we examined, was disrupted, to different extents, enabling this cross-cultural collective identity. Thus, although these four women were initially silenced, their stories were publicized through social media, and audience interest forced the media, and ultimately the authorities, to pay attention and take action. By contrast, in previous studies of online social movements (e.g., the Arab Spring), scholars have identified a transnational spread, but there was a shared cultural basis (i.e., people of mostly Muslim background fighting against authoritarian regimes; Falk, 2016).

Nonetheless, our analysis also reminds us of the need to be cautious in our optimism. In each case, the woman in question has experienced some negative effects. Tanushree Dutta was initially run out of Bollywood in 2008, gave up her acting career, and left India. Shiori Ito also fearfully fled Japan and gave up her journalism career. Tessa Sullivan resigned her city council position when she filed her report, in hopes of quashing stories that she wanted to take the mayoral seat, yet still faced those criticisms and worse. Susan Fowler may be the only one who seemingly avoided negative lasting effects. But in reality, she had to give up her dream job at Uber and is now labeled a whistle-blower, which can have long-term negative effects (Jordan, 2018; Park & Lewis, 2018).

Of the four women, only Dutta may have intentionally started #MeToo in her native country (Satija, 2018). The others were simply seeking personal justice and, because of timing, were shunted to the forefront of a media storm, labeled as starters of a movement, and then subjected to all the fallout, positive and negative, that accompanies silence breaking. In this sense, we can see that the collective identity may have been constructed as much by others as by the storytellers themselves (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Moreover, such framing was not always positive. For example, we can observe cultural differences in the hysterical slut frame. In Fowler's case, this frame was not prominent, and in Dutta's case, it was contested by celebrities who spoke out against it. In Ito's and Sullivan's cases, however, this frame enabled media coverage to participate in

the shaming and ridicule of victims, which was not contested until much later, after damage had been done to the women's credibility. Thus, an important question that our analysis leaves unanswered is about long-term impact. In the United States, backlash against #MeToo was evident from the beginning, with some expressing fear that the social media movement would become a "witch hunt" (Mumford, 2018, para. 1), or a "casting of stones" (Wilhelm, 2017, para. 18), against all men. On the global scene, of course, there is even more uncertainty about the long-term impact of #MeToo, and we must expect variations from one country to the next. The lack of conclusion about long-term impact is certainly a limitation of the present study.

Another important limitation is that all four women chosen for this study are fluent in English, and we examined only news articles written in English. For the United States and Australia, this is not a problem, as the primary language is English. For India, English is one of 23 official languages, so the limitation exists, but not to the same extreme as for Japan, where English is not widely spoken, and publications that are written in English are more directed at international audiences than are the Japanese-language publications. In addition, by focusing on specific case examples, we may have missed broader, more generalized reporting on #MeToo that might have enabled a closer look at the national contexts where the stories unfolded. These limitations point to future research, such as examining media reports in the native languages, and thematic approaches to changes in public discourse around sexual assault. As we increase our understanding of such changes, we need to ensure this dialogue is framed in a way that victims can relate to and take part in, no matter their cultural expectations and geographic location.

Appendix. News Sources.

Case example	Publication name	No. of articles about case
Shiori Ito	*The Japan Times*	10
	Asahi Shimbun	5
	Tokyo Weekender	2
	The Asia-Pacific Journal	1
	Temple University Japan, Student Blog	1
	Japan Subculture Research Center	1
	Agencia EFE	1
	Japan Today	1
	Total sites	8
	Total articles	22

Continued

Case example	Publication name	No. of articles about case
Susan Fowler	*CNN*	6
	USA Today	6
	Houston Chronicle	5
	HuffPost	5
	The New York Times	2
	Financial Times	1
	The Ringer	1
	The Webby Awards	1
	The Independent	1
	Forbes	1
	Fortune	1
	Engadget	1
	Fox News	1
	Total sites	13
	Total articles	32
Tanushree Dutta	*The Indian Express*	69
	India Times	47
	Manorama Online	17
	The Hindu	10
	The Economic Times	1
	NDTV	1
	India Today	1
	Republic World	1
	Total sites	8
	Total articles	147
Tessa Sullivan	*News+*	60
	The Sydney Morning Herald	43
	9News	29
	News.com.au	10
	PerthNow	8
	The Conversation	1
	Total sites	6
	Total articles	151
	Total articles analyzed	352
	Total number of sites for all cases	35

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