The Me Too Movement: A Qualitative Content Analysis of News Featuring #MeToo

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On Wednesday, December 6, 2017, *Time* magazine honored the Silence Breakers as 2017 Person of the Year. The present study examined online news articles published in December 2017, immediately before and after the *Time* feature. A qualitative content analysis of 78 articles published by three news outlets—the BBC, CNN, and *Fox News*—examined each article's focus, how the articles communicated issues of sexual violence and/or gender inequality, and the similarities and differences in communication based on the news source. Results indicate a focus on public figures and a tendency to link those stories to Harvey Weinstein and the #MeToo hashtag. Few articles mentioned backlash against accusers or Tarana Burke, founder of the Me Too movement. Results provide insight into how #MeToo was communicated during December 2017 by these news outlets, which provides additional support for ongoing feminist research on activism related to violence against women.

KEYWORDS: #MeToo, Me Too movement, sexual harassment

> Feminism in the United States has never emerged from the women who are most victimized by sexist oppression; women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically, and spiritually—women who are powerless to change their condition in life. They are a silent majority.
>
> —hooks, 2015, p. 31

A silent majority was honored on Wednesday, December 6, 2017, when *Time* magazine named the Silence Breakers as 2017 Person

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of the Year. In honor of the people who spoke out against sexual violence, *Time* covered the stories of nearly 30 women and men from a variety of industries. Only the arm of one woman, a hospital worker, appeared on the magazine cover, as she wished to remain anonymous. *Time* stated, "For giving voice to open secrets, for moving whisper networks onto social networks, for pushing us all to stop accepting the unacceptable, the Silence Breakers are the 2017 Person of the Year" (Felsenthal, 2017, para. 7). While the news featured #MeToo since the hashtag went viral on social media in October 2017, the current study examined online news articles published during the month of December 2017, immediately before and after the *Time* feature. The researchers conducted a qualitative content analysis of 78 articles published by three news outlets—CNN, *Fox News*, and the BBC—which were selected due to their popularity as cable news sources with a strong online presence (Pew, 2011). In conducting the qualitative content analysis, the researchers investigated the framing of the articles in the context of #MeToo, how the articles communicated issues of sexual violence and/or gender inequality, and the similarities and differences in framing gender inequality based on the news source through the use of the #MeToo hashtag. Results indicate an overwhelming focus on celebrities and public figures—both impacted by and accused of sexual misconduct—and link those stories to the story of Harvey Weinstein and the #MeToo hashtag. Very few articles mentioned backlash against accusers or Tarana Burke, founder of the Me Too movement. As a result of the study, we gain insight into how #MeToo was framed by these news outlets, which provides additional support for ongoing feminist research on activism related to violence against women, specifically the #MeToo movement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Two important bodies of literature contextualize our research: #MeToo and the history of the Me Too movement as well as fram-

ing theory related to feminist movements. This work illuminates how the news articles from the present study framed issues of sexual violence and/or gender inequality and the similarities and differences in communicating gender inequality based on the news source.

#MeToo and the Me Too Movement

The Me Too movement and the hashtag #MeToo focus on highlighting stories of sexual violence and harassment through a feminist lens. According to Minic (n.d.), the "goal of feminism is a social change of unequal relations of men and women" (p. 282), and the primary focus of #MeToo and the Me Too movement is to do just that in the area of sexual violence. Historically, in American culture, "hierarchical rule and coercive authority" by those in power against those who lack power has been the cause of violence against women, which is encouraged by "white male supremacy" (hooks, 2015, p. 118). In addition to the abuse of power, the sexual objectification of women, which is the reduction of women from "fully human" individuals to objects that serve only as pleasure for others, is another cause of sexual violence, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, and sex trafficking (Gervais & Eagan, 2017). The sexual objectification of women can especially be seen in portrayals of women in the American media. The idea of women as sex objects in magazine advertisements, on television programming, in songs on the radio, and on Instagram posts has become a cultural norm of sexual objectification of women, which has created a cycle of acceptance and violence. Through the constant exposure to women being sexually objectified, media viewers begin to accept that perception of women. Through that "passive acceptance," norms for how men should treat women shift, allowing for the perpetuation of violence (Gervais & Eagan, 2017). As the cycle continues from White male supremacy through the media to passive acceptance by the public, sexual violence against women becomes almost impossible to control or eliminate (hooks, 2015, p. 12).

#MeToo is an important example of a feminist movement seeking to frame the injustice of sexual violence, especially against women, and to raise awareness for social change. Although many recognize #MeToo as a hashtag from an October 15, 2017, tweet by Hollywood actress Alyssa Milano that quickly went viral, Milano's tweet was the framing of the injustice of violence against women. It was not, however, the first time this exact phrase had been used to communicate this same injustice. The Me Too movement began in 2006 when activist Tarana Burke founded Just Be Inc., an organization focused on "the health, well being, and wholeness of young women of color" (Just Be Inc., 2013). As senior director of Girls for Gender Equity (2018) in New York, Burke's current organization focuses on "the physical, psychological, social, and economic development of girls and women" (Just Be Inc., 2013). Earlier in her career, Burke worked at a youth camp where a girls' bonding workshop was facilitated. A young girl named Heaven pulled Burke aside and confessed to being sexually abused. On her website, Burke described feeling deep regret for cutting Heaven off and directing her to another counselor. Burke said, "I couldn't even bring myself to whisper . . . me too" (Burke, 2013). Burke's Me Too movement has worked to bring awareness of sexual violence against girls and women; for example, Burke wore a "me too" shirt as she spoke at the 2014 March against Rape Culture in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which was attended by 600 people (Lipp, 2014; Ohlheiser, 2017). At the time of Alyssa Milano's #MeToo tweet in October 2017, she had not yet heard of Tarana Burke or her Me Too movement (Milano, 2017), but Twitter posts and media coverage quickly brought Burke into the conversation. The #MeToo example supports Tufekci's (2017) argument that networked protests organized online often lack a clear leader due to the "open participation afforded by social media." Additionally, informal leaders emerge in those with "the largest followings on social media" and thus "the greatest influence" (p. xxiii). In this case, Milano received the initial credit for

#MeToo due to sharing it with her large following on social media; however, a large enough group of people on Twitter knew about Tarana Burke and highlighted her involvement in founding the Me Too movement very soon after Milano's #MeToo tweet went viral. This allowed for two social movement entrepreneurs to collaborate on the same diagnostic frame—the injustice of violence against women—using the same phrase: "me too."

After seeing #MeToo on social media in October 2017, Tarana Burke published a series of tweets, adding her voice directly to the movement. She wrote, "It has been amazing watching all of the pushback against Harvey Weinstein and in support of his accusers over the last week. . . . In particular, today, I have watched women on social media disclose their stories using the hashtag #metoo" (Burke, 2017a, 2017b). Indeed, Milano's tweet on October 15, 2017, was a response to the sexual assault allegations against film producer Harvey Weinstein; however, participants using the hashtag #MeToo quickly revealed America's sexual violence problem beyond Hollywood. By October 16, the phrase "me too" and hashtag #MeToo had been used more than 500,000 times on Twitter (France, 2017). During that same 24-hour window on Facebook, more than 4.7 million users and 12 million Facebook posts used #MeToo (Santiago & Criss, 2017). West (2017) referred to the viral response to #MeToo as "the staggering breadth and ubiquity of sexual predation" (para. 7). Burke (2017c, 2017g) commented on the pervasiveness of sexual violence as she continued tweeting in October 2017:

> It made my heart swell to see women using this idea—one that we call "empowerment through empathy" #metoo . . . to not only show the world how widespread and pervasive sexual violence is, but also to let other survivors know they are not alone.

Indeed, the concept of empowerment through empathy has been Burke's focus since she began the Me Too movement "to aid sexual

assault survivors in underprivileged communities 'where rape cri-
sis centers and sexual assault workers weren't going'" (Hill, 2017,
para. 5). This grassroots approach to illuminating the problem of
rape and sexual assault legitimizes the mass of voices.

Although #MeToo resonated with large audiences very quickly
online, the hashtag and the original purpose of the movement are
not exactly the same. In a statement to *Ebony*, Burke discussed the
difference between her original Me Too movement and the viral
#MeToo hashtag; she said the Me Too movement

> wasn't built to be a viral campaign or a hashtag that is here today
> and forgotten tomorrow. It was a catchphrase to be used from
> survivor to survivor to let folks know that they were not alone
> and that a movement for radical healing was happening and
> possible. (Hill, 2017, para. 6)

Unlike her inability "to whisper . . . me too" (Burke, 2013) after her
conversation with Heaven years before, Burke not only verbalized
her "me too" but also worked to ensure that survivors knew they
were not alone. Burke (2017d, 2017e, 2017f) concluded her series
of October 2017 tweets,

> The point of the work we've done over the last decade with
> the "me too movement" is to let women . . . particularly young
> women of color know that they are not alone—it's a move-
> ment. #metoo. . . . It's beyond a hashtag. It's the start of a larger
> conversation and a movement for radical community healing.
> Join us. #metoo.

Importantly, Burke touches on the long-term and larger conversa-
tions needed with any social movement but especially with a feminist
movement. hooks (2015) argued that the aim of feminism raises
important questions, such as these: "Since men are not equals in

white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class culture, which men do women want to be equal to? Do women share a common vision of what equality means?" (p. 19). Thus issues of race, class, and privilege, which are critical to understanding unequal relations between men and women, must be considered when studying #MeToo.

Through the unequal distribution of power as well as media portrayals of women, sexual harassment in the workplace becomes commonplace, which is why #MeToo focuses on bringing this to light. hooks (2015) argued that when women entered the workforce, which also "serves the interest of capitalism," men used violence against women as a reaction to their lack of control "to establish and maintain a sex role hierarchy in which they are in a dominant position" (p. 121). Many countries view sexual harassment as one form of violence against women. According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (n.d.), sexual harassment in America may be defined as "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature" and is "illegal when [the harassment] is so frequent or severe that it creates a hostile or offensive work environment or when it results in an adverse employment decision (such as the victim being fired or demoted)" (paras. 1–4). However, according to Galdi, Maass, and Cadinu (2017), the interpretation of sexual harassment "as immoral and unethical or perfectly normal" by those who act and those acted upon differs based on context, which includes the immediate, microlevel, normative context "created by people's social networks or by the organizations in which they work or study" (p. 339) as well as the big-picture, broader cultural context. Additionally, in American courts of law, sexual harassment charges must stand up against the "objective prong of the severe and pervasive test," which "requires a judgment of a reasonable person, but exactly what is a 'reasonable' person?" (Kimble et al., 2016, p. 320). Owing to the context-driven construction of sexual harassment episodes, and to the "reasonable person" legal language,

identifying and prosecuting sexual harassment often prove difficult, if not impossible.

In the #MeToo era, some narratives charge sexual harassment claimants as falsely accusing and fictionalizing accounts, while others claim that women and/or feminists cannot fairly evaluate cases of sexual harassment; however, empirical data and research say otherwise. A review of research on false reporting of sexual assault and sexual harassment revealed that "the prevalence of false reporting is between 2 and 10 percent," which has been evaluated by researchers as low (National Sexual Violence Resource Center [NSVRC], n.d., para. 10). This negates the argument that false reporting is rampant. Additionally, in terms of fair assessment and evaluation of sexual harassment cases, in an experiment with 961 participants, Bhattacharya and Stockdale (2016) indicated that evidence—and not the gender of the accuser—in sexual harassment cases "had a stronger effect on women's, feminists', and feminism supporters' perceptions" of sexual harassment scenarios. This evidence illustrates criticism that women and feminists "are unable to reach fair judgments of [sexual harassment] complaints" (p. 594) as incorrect. The arguments stating that accounts of sexual harassment are false or fictionalized despite the evidence is a way of framing evidence as unimportant. #MeToo and the Me Too movement, however, shift the frame. In this respect, framing theory allows the prevalence of sexual violence to resonate with audiences while also factoring in the critical issues of race, class, and privilege. Additionally, framing theory allows for an interrogation of counternarratives, such as false accusations and fictionalized accounts, so that ideas by movement entrepreneurs like Tarana Burke and Alyssa Milano can be effectively communicated to promote social change.

Framing Theory and Feminist Social Movements

Framing theory refers to how the media presents, or frames, information to mass audiences (Johnston & Noakes, 2005). The theory

allows us to better understand movements like #MeToo and how those movements motivate audiences to participate. A social movement formulates when individuals and groups identify a social change and seek to make that change (Buechler, 2011). According to Johnston and Noakes (2005), "mobilizing people to action has always been a subjective component, and in recent years this subjective component—the element of perception or consciousness—has been conceptualized as a social-psychological process called framing" (p. 2). For example, the American women's suffrage movement effectively used a variety of frames to increase the capacity of the movement and to gain and organize new members (Johnston & Noakes, 2005). Those frames included a justice frame emphasizing the equal rights of men and women, a societal reform frame arguing that women should have a place in politics, and a home protection frame highlighting the importance of women's voices in caring for other people. In short, framing information is the way in which the story is told to illuminate an issue—and for the #MeToo hashtag to evoke participation.

Mass media affects public views of various movements, but depending on the framing of the information, perceptions by audience members differ. Some believe that mass media may change the message behind activism and protest, resulting in the distortion of the message to the general public, because "journalistic and editorial norms may distort movement messages" (Sisco & Lucas, 2014, p. 494). For example, in a study analyzing how the media framed feminism in portrayals of Clinton, Obama, and Palin during the 2008 U.S. presidential election, Sisco and Lucas (2014) found the construction of feminism and the intercession of the news media to simplistically frame the movement, which could also undermine movement unity by exacerbating conflict. This framing also takes the message out of the hands of activists. Movement actors may want to reconsider their media strategies to respond to this changing political environment (Sisco & Lucas, 2014). Additionally,

most movements contain multiple frames simultaneously, as in the American women's suffrage movement. Better understanding the frames used and whether those frames resonate with audiences allows for an evaluation of the movement as a whole.

Movements may begin offline or online, but they all begin the same way: by identifying an injustice and framing the injustice to elicit support. When considering a movement on social media, the identification of dissonance as shared can create a community or movement, an affective solidarity that serves as the impetus to generate alternative values and different ways of thinking that, in turn, allow people to feel differently. To become political, these dissonances must be related to social injustices and resonate with the experiences of others (Rudolfsdottir & Johannsdottir, 2018). An example of this is the feminist hashtag campaign called #FreeThe-Nipple, which circulated on social media prior to #MeToo. In studying #FreeTheNipple in March 2015, Rudolfsdottir and Johannsdottir found that "young women manage to claim space as agents of change but highlight the importance of the support or affective sustenance they received from older feminists" (p. 133). Understanding how to sustain feminist campaigns and movements through social support is especially critical when mass media begins reporting on, and changing—or reframing—the original message of that campaign or movement.

Importantly, those who engage in feminist campaigns must consider the online and offline consequences of such actions. For example, "when women have used social media to raise consciousness on particular issues, such as . . . stopping the daily objectification of topless women . . . , they have faced a barrage of abuse, and rape and death threats on social media platforms" (Locke, Lawthom, & Lyons, 2018, p. 4). This idea is echoed by Chun (2016), who argued that social media "blames the user—*her* habits of leaking—for systemic vulnerabilities, glossing over the ways in which our promiscuous machines routinely work through an alleged 'leaking' that undermines the separation of the personal from the networked"

(p. 145). Women are often stigmatized for communicating sexual behavior, sometimes known as being "slut shamed," when they "embrace publicity as a means of empowerment" (Chun, 2016, p. 145). Despite these negative consequences for women, the value of social media to begin movements and inspire change proves too important.

The argument about the media made by Sisco and Lucas (2014) should not be ignored by activists if they want their messages to be received by the public as they intend; despite perceived distortions, others have argued that activism and protests require mass media. According to Haunss (2015), social media are well suited to reach sympathizers and activists, but social movements usually can only be successful if they reach and get support from a broader audience.

This general public still can only be reached reliably through mass media; therefore Internet and social media tools can complement and not replace other media strategies. Importantly, across all platforms, framing not only the issue but also the solution to that issue must be effectively communicated. However, Johnston and Noakes (2005) pointed out that "frames evolve over time as they confront alternative interpretations of events, sometimes being co-opted and used for purposes unintended by their originators" (p. 7). As such, activists must work hard to ensure that frames are constructed in a meaningful and purposeful way and that when frames change, the meaning and purpose are not completely changed from the original injustice. Additionally, while frames may allow for an issue to be publicized and better understood, action requires the use of strong motivational framing. Buechler (2011) argued that motivational framing "provides a rationale for action, a call to arms, and vocabularies of motive supporting that action" (p. 148). Motivational framing, then, works to show audiences that change is possible. This is especially important in the political and legal arenas when changes to society, culture, and law are required to address an issue.

Certainly the framing of #MeToo by Alyssa Milano on Twitter

resonated with a large audience, which reveals the importance of social media to modern-day social movements. In considering how a social media campaign may supplement traditional media strategies, one must keep in mind the cheap, easy, and spontaneous nature of social media. Dencik (2015) said, "The power of social media is said to lie in the spontaneous and unpredictable ways in which networks of protest and solidarity can emerge," and social media power "provides new opportunities for political activism, for people to organize and mobilize in new and easier ways with fewer necessary resources" (pp. 203–204). #MeToo is one example of a powerful social media movement—born from a spontaneous, single tweet and unpredictably sparking a network of protest and solidarity around sexual violence. However, #MeToo was so powerful that it translated across social media to mass media, including news coverage on television and online.

Prior to #MeToo and the swell of voices on social media speaking out against sexual harassment, news coverage tended to be limited. News coverage of sexual harassment prior to #MeToo has been studied by Saguy (2002), who conducted a quantitative content analysis of news stories in the United States and France. Her findings reveal that "American press coverage of sexual harassment tended to focus on cases involving high-profile political figures and institutions" (p. 120). Additionally, Saguy found that articles "presented sexual harassment as an important social problem, a woman's issue, an abuse of power, and a form of discrimination, despite the focus on political scandals" (p. 134). These political scandals included prominent figures such as President Bill Clinton and Supreme Court justice Clarence Thomas. According to Saguy, Anita Hill's accusations against Thomas prompted the first questions in the media about sexual harassment and "raised public consciousness about a problem that was, before then, little known among the American public" (p. 110). Fifteen years later, however, media coverage of sexual harassment exploded during and after the presidential election in the United States due to sexual harassment

allegations against Donald Trump, which once again brought the issue to the forefront of media coverage, including social media (Calfas, 2017; Parker, Berman, & Sellers, 2017; Shear, 2017).

To contribute to the literature on #MeToo and on the framing of feminist movements, the present study explored the communication of #MeToo by three specific news outlets, the BBC, CNN, and *Fox News*, in December 2017. These three outlets have prominent audiences on cable news television but also utilize online print news articles to reach their consumers. As McIntosh and Cuklanz (2014) argued, analyzing print news media is important since "mainstream print media purport[s] to be objective and, thus, the operation of power within print news is both unacknowledged and subconscious" (p. 270). This argument applies to the present study even though the focus is on digital news media. To gather a large corpus of data to analyze, these three outlets were selected due to their popularity among Americans as cable news sources with strong online presences (Pew, 2011). The present study examined online articles published by these outlets and sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do articles from three news outlets, the BBC, CNN, and *Fox News*, frame sexual violence against women using #MeToo?

RQ2: How do those articles communicate issues of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and/or gender inequality?

RQ3: What are the similarities and differences in communicating gender inequality based on the news source?

METHODOLOGY

To answer the study's research questions, a qualitative content analysis was conducted of 78 articles published by three online news outlets in December 2017. Data collection included 14 text-only articles from the BBC, 38 articles from CNN, and 26 articles from *Fox News*. Data analysis began with codes from Saguy's (2002)

quantitative analysis of news articles on sexual harassment. Codes were then adapted, changed, and expanded based on the data collected from December 2017.

Data Collection

The media sample of 78 total articles was drawn from three online news sources: 14 articles from the BBC,[1] 38 articles from CNN,[2] and 26 articles from *Fox News*.[3] The sample was collected by searching the term "#MeToo" in the search function of each news website. Articles from December 1 to 31, 2017, were archived for analysis. It is important to note that searching "#MeToo" with a hashtag on the *Fox News* website resulted in a search error glitch. The search term "metoo" was adapted to effectively search *Fox News* articles. Video results were removed from the analysis; only articles with text were included in the sample to align with the study's focus of content analysis of text only. Text-based articles included news and opinion pieces.

Qualitative Content Analysis

According to Berg and Lune (2012), "content analysis is a careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meanings" (p. 349). Although content analysis may be qualitative or quantitative, a qualitative approach "focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text" and "goes beyond merely counting words to examining language intensely for the purpose of classifying large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meanings" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). To answer the present study's research questions, a qualitative content analysis allows for interpretation of the focus of news articles featuring #MeToo; how those articles communicate issues of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and/or gender

inequality; and the similarities and differences in communication based on the news source. A qualitative, rather than quantitative, approach was also selected because feminist media research of news media seeks to "elucidate and elaborate on how dominant ideologies are supported through patterns of repetition and omission" (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014, p. 270).

Although Hsieh and Shannon (2005) argued that qualitative content analysis should "avoid using preconceived categories" and instead "allow the categories and names for categories to flow from the data" (p. 1279), the present study began with Saguy's (2002) codes from her prior quantitative analysis of news articles on sexual harassment. This approach provided the research team with a more focused starting point that we then expanded as outlined by best practices of qualitative content analysis. We felt that an established set of codes based on the literature was an important starting place for our coding of the online articles, and we then added codes as they emerged from the study of the articles. This process included first reading the data—the 78 news articles—then identifying instances of Saguy's codes to obtain new codes. We "highlight[ed] exact words from the text that appear to capture key thoughts or concepts" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279), made notes about impressions of the data while reading, and edited and changed code labels and titles. Then, codes were clustered together based on similarities in categories. Through these clusters of codes, we analyzed the study's research questions.

Data Analysis

For the present study, the first 10 codes were developed from Saguy's (2002) study on sexual harassment communication in media messages; however, as outlined by Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) explanation of qualitative content analysis, these original 10 codes were expanded, adapted, and changed as the research team examined the news articles. The research team divided the

articles based upon source, and each team member conducted a close reading of all articles from one news source, and coding categories were adapted to flow from the data. During the close readings, new codes emerged and were documented on a shared Google Sheets spreadsheet listing all coding categories. A total of 43 codes were considered, ranging from article tone and word choice to specific content references to Alyssa Milano and backlash. Data were sorted by category and news source.

After the initial close read and development of codes, the research team sought intercoder reliability by coding the first 10 articles from the other two news sources. Determining intercoder reliability is important because it illustrates a methodological process of determining coding agreement by the research team (Saldana, 2016). Throughout this process, the research team made additional notes while reading the other 10 articles and highlighted key words and phrases from the news articles that best reflected examples of codes. Once the researchers read and coded these articles from the other two news sources, final codes emerged. After finalizing coding categories based on the intercoder reliability exercise, the research team coded all 78 news articles from all three news outlets and subsequently analyzed the sorted data together to identify themes.

RESULTS

As a result of the qualitative content analysis, two themes originally appearing in Saguy's (2002) work reemerged during the present study: public figures and institutions. Additional themes that emerged were the lack of mentions about Tarana Burke, founder of the Me Too movement; denial; #NotMe; and backlash.

Saguy's Codes: Public Figures and Institutions
Despite Saguy's (2002) focus on quantitative content analysis, the research team highlights this study as the only previous content

analysis of news coverage related to sexual harassment in America. Most of the 10 codes were not well represented when coding news articles from December 2017, but this may be attributed to the fact that #MeToo is not linked to sexual harassment only. Articles from all news sources used a variety of phrases to describe that which #MeToo sought to bring to awareness; terminology included "sexual abuse," "sexual harassment," "sexual harassment and assault," "sexual harassment or assault," "sexual harassment and abuse," and "sexual misconduct." The assortment of repeated phrases, most often without definitions of these terms, reveal that #MeToo has been reported by the media in a variety of ways to encompass all sexual violence and harassment. Without clear parameters or differentiations between these terms, readers may be confused as to what actually transpired, and with an already context-driven construction of sexual harassment episodes, the need for clarity is evident. In some specific cases, clearer words, such as "rape" or "grope/groping," were used to describe an incident of sexual assault and abuse; however, specific cases and descriptions were in the minority.

The first of two important findings from Saguy (2002) emerged from the present study. Like Saguy's original findings, yet again in December 2017, American and British news coverage focused on prominent figures in the United States—including politicians, talk show hosts, and professional athletes—as well as institutions such as Hollywood, Washington, and academia. Harvey Weinstein specifically was the public figure mentioned most often across all news articles. Articles typically communicated issues of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and/or gender inequality through the lens of public figures being accused and, often, public figures accusing other public figures. According to a CNN article published on December 6, 2017, "the [#MeToo] hashtag took off last month when a slew of high-profile men were publicly accused of sexual misconduct" (Disis, 2017, para. 6). Disis linked the viral nature of

#MeToo with the public figures accused, which mimicked findings by Saguy (2002). A large percentage of the BBC, CNN, and *Fox News* articles referenced celebrities and public figures, as evidenced in Table 1—greater than 75% of articles in all cases. This illustrates the media's obsession with celebrities and public figures, and the framing of the #MeToo movement in this manner could lead the public to believe that this is not a woman problem but instead a celebrity problem. This framing ignores the sexual harassment faced by nonpublic figures in other industries.

The second important finding in this study based on Saguy's (2002) codes is references to institutions. According to a *Fox News* article published on December 8, 2017,

> while the floodgates on reporting abuse and sexual harassment have opened with high-profile cases in Big Tech, Hollywood and Washington, it's not yet clear whether the effects of the #metoo movement have trickled down to day-to-day offices, factories and other places regular people work. (Ortutay, 2017, para. 2)

Ortutay argued that the prevalence of sexual abuse and harassment allegations in high-profile cases related to American institutions has propelled stories into public consciousness. With respect to institutions, like Saguy's (2002) original findings, 66% of CNN articles and 42% of *Fox News* articles referenced American institutions. Zero articles from the BBC referenced American institutions, also illustrated in Table 1; however, this may be because the BBC is headquartered in the United Kingdom versus the United States. This is also ironic in that the BCC articles referenced celebrities but did not reference Hollywood as an entity.

The focus areas of articles from the BBC, CNN, and *Fox News* largely skewed toward reporting about public figures and institutions (CNN and *Fox News*), including, most prominently, Harvey Weinstein, but issues of race, class, and privilege could be seen in

Table 1. *Relevant Saguy Codes*

Article reference	BBC News		CNN		Fox News	
	No. articles	%	No. articles	%	No. articles	%
Harvey Weinstein	8	57	11	29	10	38
Other celebrities/public figures	11	79	34	89	20	77
Institutions (Hollywood, Washington, academia, sports, media)	0	0	25	66	11	42

Note. From Saguy (2002).

Table 2. *Burke and Milano Mentions*

Article reference	BBC News		CNN		Fox News	
	No. articles	%	No. articles	%	No. articles	%
Milano	1	7	0	0	3	12
Burke	0	0	1	3	1	4
Both Milano and Burke	2	14	2	5	2	8

the data analysis process, as stories about public figures embroiled in sexual misconduct dominated news stories versus reports about "everyday" people. A majority of news articles tended to remain neutral in tone and content; however, this just-the-facts approach understood the value of increasing viewership and audience, which is likely why the present study and previous findings of Saguy (2002) did not reveal news stories about the "everyday" person in favor of stories about public figures like Al Franken, Matt Lauer, and Russell Simmons as well as the prevalence of sexual harassment in institutions like media, sports, and politics. With overwhelming news coverage on public figures and the industries employing those public figures, significant research and awareness efforts on sexual harassment outside of those realms are critical to ensuring the safety of the "everyday" person's work environment.

Although not overtly written about in the news articles analyzed for this study, certainly news story after news story spotlighting men in positions of power exploiting those roles to sexually objectify and harass women does harken back to Saguy's (2002) finding that news articles "present sexual harassment as . . . an abuse of power" (p. 134). However, the absence of "abuse of power" language in all articles may indicate that from 2002 to 2017, public opinions on sexual harassment have shifted, which may very well include the opinion that sexual harassment is so clearly an abuse of power that it goes without saying.

Tarana Burke and Alyssa Milano

Despite the prevalence of news coverage on public figures accused of sexual misconduct, abuse, and harassment, Tarana Burke's name was noticeably absent from most news stories. Burke was mentioned by herself in two articles and with Alyssa Milano in six articles. Milano by herself was mentioned twice as frequently as Burke—in four total articles, as illustrated in Table 2. *Fox News* was more likely than the BBC and CNN to mention Burke and Milano. The prevalence of Milano's name over Burke's could be

due to two reasons: first, Milano is more well known to the public, and second, an issue of race could be at play. Either way, the media perpetuated the highlight of Milano over Burke, indicating a clear framing of their interpretation of what is important and what should be reported. In one example, Heavey (2017) used a direct quote from Burke in the one *Fox News* article that mentioned her name by itself as associated with #MeToo:

> "I could never had envisioned something that would change the world. I was trying to change my community," Tarana Burke, who created the hashtag, told NBC. "This is just the start. It's not just a moment, it's a movement. Now the work really begins." (para. 5)

Although this is the only time *Fox News* used a Burke quote in its articles, it at the very least illustrates Burke's intention accurately.

The lone CNN article mentioning Burke's name by itself was labeled as an opinion piece called "How Black Women Saved Alabama—and Democracy." In the article, Bolton (2017) wrote, "The invisibility [of Black women] was perhaps most acutely obvious in the *TIME* magazine 'Person of the Year' print cover in which Tarana Burke, the founder of the #metoo movement, was not included" (para. 10). This assessment of the invisibility of women of color is important for a feminist movement about sexual violence; however, given that two women of color are on the cover, this argument must be interrogated further. Burke does not appear on the cover but instead appears inside of the magazine referenced by Bolton. Bolton argued,

> The article took over 1,000 words to finally get to Burke's story, even though her hashtag led to an ongoing, national conversation about sexual assault and harassment and resulted in the toppling of powerful men in Hollywood, politics and media. (para. 10)

Although this article about the #MeToo movement showed the power of women uniting to bring awareness to a worthy cause, it also reinforced the argument by hooks (2015) that feminist movements must continue to evaluate what "equality" means while always considering issues of race, class, and privilege.

Articles mentioning both Burke and Milano tended to accurately report the cadence of the Me Too movement, illustrating an awareness of the purpose of the hashtag and the movement. For example, one BBC article reported,

> In 2007, the US activist Tarana Burke started the Me Too movement that would be rekindled in 2017 by the hashtag #MeToo. . . . The term gained momentum after actress Alyssa Milano took to Twitter to ask victims of sexual assault to come forward in a show of solidarity. ("#MeToo, #TakeAKnee," 2017)

This quote illustrates Burke's original purpose in the use of "Me Too" as showing support for those who have been victimized. Similarly, *Fox News* reported,

> The roots of #MeToo are in a movement started over a decade ago by activist Tarana Burke to harness "empowerment through empathy" for victims of sexual assault. . . . The hashtag #MeToo began trending on social media last month after actress Alyssa Milano asked victims of sexual harassment and violence to let their voices be heard. (Rogers, 2017, paras. 5–6)

Both of these articles, in addition to mentioning the evolvement of Burke and Milano and the evolution of the movement, also focused on the victims of sexual assault, which is what should be highlighted. Although both Burke and Milano are important figures in the history of #MeToo, the empowerment of the victims is vital.

Denial and #NotMe

Few articles featured the denial of claims by the men accused of sexual harassment and abuse; in fact, only four total stories featuring the denial by Russell Simmons specifically were published. The BBC featured one story about the New York Police Department (NYPD) investigating claims of rape against music mogul Russell Simmons; according to the story, Simmons vehemently denied all allegations, and "Simmons posted to social media with the hashtag #NotMe in a play on the #MeToo campaign" ("New York Police," 2017, para. 7). The use of #NotMe was also seen in one CNN article and two *Fox News* articles—all three also featuring Russell Simmons.

Despite Simmons's denials, some news stories reported on the negative consequences of his being accused of sexual misconduct and depicted Simmons in a negative light. According to *Fox News*, "HBO said it would edit out any link to Simmons in its 'All Def Comedy' show after a sexual misconduct allegation by a screenwriter" ("Russell Simmons," 2017, para. 4). One BCC article focused on the evidence against Simmons, including mentions of a formal investigation by the NYPD and the fact that a number of women had come forward to accuse Simmons, including five accusers reported by the *New York Times*, three accusers reported by the *Los Angeles Times*, and a new accuser—also a public figure—who said "she chose to come forward with her alleged story because she was horrified by Simmons' #NotMe social media campaign. 'The #NotMe thing? I'm going to do a #YeahYou,'" she said ("New York Police," 2017, paras. 12–13). The same BBC article also linked Simmons with Weinstein: "Simmons is not the only celebrity facing accusations of sexual impropriety. The NYPD is also investigating Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein for allegations of rape" ("New York Police," 2017, paras. 16–17). By providing a quote directly from one of Simmons's accusers, the BBC gives a voice to an alleged victim and does not allow Simmons's denials to be the only voice heard in the news story.

On the other hand, one CNN article reporting on Simmons included language that seemed to show Simmons in a more favorable light. For example, CNN reported that the NYPD was investigating Simmons after he had been accused of sexual misconduct, including rape, by three women, but CNN included this paragraph after its summary of events: "The NYPD can open an investigation without a complaint made directly to them, which is the case with Simmons. A group of women told their stories to the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*" (France & Gingras, 2017, para. 2). While not overtly stating that Simmons's accusers were seeking fame, the CNN article makes sure to point out that the women accusing Simmons of sexual misconduct did not go to the NYPD and instead went to the press. The article also focused several paragraphs on Simmons's denials in his own words and denials by Simmons's attorney and did not include any direct quotes or statements from Simmons's accusers. Additionally, the article stated, "*CNN* has not independently verified the women's stories and has reached out to them for comment" (France & Gingras, 2017, para. 5). This particular news story reported the facts but also included language that could be construed as favorable toward Simmons with the overabundance of direct quotes from Simmons and the Simmons team in denying the allegations; the omission of direct quotes from Simmons's accusers; and word choice highlighting the accusers' choice to speak to the press—but not to CNN—with their stories versus going to the police.

Backlash

Backlash against accusers and against the #MeToo movement could be found in only one article from the BBC, while an additional two articles from *Fox News* highlighted backlash against two public figures, both women, in light of #MeToo. In "Why Women Fear a Backlash Over #MeToo," Kay (2017) wrote,

> The biggest backlash risk is **a fake accusation** that will under-
> mine genuine accusers. . . . The next fear is that men will get
> so nervous that they're going to be accused of harassment that
> they will simply stop hiring, meeting or socialising with female
> colleagues. (paras. 6–7)

It is important to note that the bolding of "a fake accusation" is
original to the text, which highlights Kay's biggest concern. With
the singular fake accusation, other victims could be undermined.
Her rhetoric of "accusers" rather than victims is also noteworthy
in that it diminishes the violence on the individuals. Despite re-
search indicating the low prevalence of false reporting on sexual
harassment and sexual violence, narratives in the media do not
always reflect these data (NSVRC, n.d.). Fortunately, as evidenced
by the lone BBC article in the sample featuring backlash, news
stories covering #MeToo in December 2017 did not concentrate
on backlash against accusers or against #MeToo.

On the other hand, backlash against women, especially those
considered as having flaunted their sexuality during #MeToo, could
be seen in two *Fox News* articles. Social media examples embed-
ded within both of these news stories highlighted the abuse two
women faced online, including the slut shaming and threats seen
in previous research (Chun, 2016; Locke et al., 2018). Two *Fox News*
articles depicted backlash on Twitter against women in instances
not directly related to #MeToo. For example, a woman named Ad-
die Zinone who was previously employed on *Today* disclosed her
prior affair with Matt Lauer. Images of tweets were included in the
article to show the response to Zinone's revelations. One Twitter
user (as cited in Savitsky, 2017) posted,

> Addie Zinone just wanted some 5 minute attention . . . her affair
> with Matt Laurer [*sic*] was 100% consensual and she honestly

should have never brought it up. She made the choice to be a homewrecker and gives a bad name to the real #MeToo people. (para. 5)

Other tweets accused Zinone of "playing the victim," being a "whore," "trying to sleep [her] way to the top," only wanting to be famous, and being a homewrecker. Additionally, Zinone reported that she was told to "go get hit by a bus" (para. 8). Although Zinone's affair with Lauer was consensual, and although she did not accuse him of any form of sexual misconduct, she did receive backlash for speaking to the press at the same time as the #MeToo movement. A second *Fox News* article depicted Twitter backlash about a recent Jimmy Choo advertisement starring Cara Delevingne that included cat-calling. Tweets called the ad, and Choo and Delevingne, distasteful and tone-deaf due to being aired at the same time as #MeToo. While neither Zinone or Delevingne has been involved directly with the #MeToo movement, these two *Fox News* stories depicted Twitter backlash against women discussing or showing sexuality deemed as inappropriate in light of #MeToo.

CONCLUSION

In hooks's (2015) call for a common vision of what equality means for women, we must continue to bring in voices from all races, classes, and privileges when examining sexual harassment, especially since the most prevalent stories in the news feature prominent figures according to Saguy's (2002) quantitative content analysis and the results of the present study 15 years later. Although Milano, Simmons, and Lauer are all important media figures, their perspectives and information about them should not be at the forefront of the media articles; instead, the victims' stories should be highlighted.

In addition to defining a more inclusive vision of equality for women, a more concrete definition of sexual harassment is needed

versus the current, contextually driven definition, which is dependent on many factors that may be interpreted differently on a case-by-case basis; that adapted definition may allow for citizens—and news organizations—to communicate more adequately about the issue of sexual harassment and sexual violence against women, which may, in turn, allow for a deeper understanding of the issues. One of those issues, as Gervais and Eagan (2017) pointed out, remains the sexual objectification of women, a contributing factor to the violence against women. Despite the important message of #MeToo, the present study encountered some examples of the sexual objectification of women through bullying on Twitter. This reinforces the idea that not only news organizations but also many people on Twitter participate in sexual objectification of and violence against women. The present study's findings reinforce Chun's (2016) argument that social media often blame, threaten, and shame women when and if they seek empowerment through publicity, such as telling one woman to get hit by a bus for bringing up her prior consensual affair with Matt Lauer on television. This shows the perpetuation of objectification and violence against women that leads to the cycle of abuse.

Finally, while most articles communicated issues of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and/or gender inequality in an overall unbiased fashion, opinion articles revealing persuasive language published under these news websites tended to view the #MeToo movement as positive, focusing on the positive outcomes of the movement and calling for change as a result of #MeToo. Opinion pieces focused on the potential backlash of #MeToo perpetuate narratives about fictionalizing sexual harassment episodes, which research indicates is a very low number (between 2% and 10%, according to NSVRC).

Limitations of the present study included a focus on only three news outlets. While findings of the present study did reveal important themes, directions for future research may include expanding

to all six of the popular broadcast/cable news sources with online presences in the United States, including MSNBC, ABC, and CBS in addition to CNN, *Fox News*, and *BBC News*. Additionally, collecting data from news articles over a longer period of time may also reveal interesting and important trends in news coverage related to #MeToo.

NOTES

1   http://www.bbc.com/
2   https://www.cnn.com/
3   http://www.foxnews.com/

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