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The Future of the #MeToo Movement

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

A Capstone Submitted to the

University Honors Program

In Partial Fulfillment of the

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With Honors

Department Of

Sociology

By

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The Future of the #MeToo Movement

University Honors Program

Capstone Approval Page

The Future of the Me Too Movement

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The Future of the #MeToo Movement

Abstract

The current era of the Me Too movement started in 2016 when Alyssa Milano tweeted out a concept: for her Twitter followers to tweet using #MeToo if they were victims of sexual misconduct. The actual Me Too movement started over ten years ago with Tarana Burke, who founded the movement to advocate for young, black women who were victims of sexual misconduct. The two movements merged into one and is now the social media movement society knows today. With Me Too came a large amount of backlash, similar to any other social media movement, but the amount of backlash depends on the amount of controversy regarding the issue. I argue the future of the Me Too movement is being challenged in an effort to maintain the status quo, as any social movement experiences, however the attackers have framed the movement as a gender war when, in fact, my research shows that the attacks are coming from both men and women. Through qualitative data collection, I found three themes that represent disputes against the movement: the attacks against women, the outcome the movement has for men and discounting the movement as a political tool.

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

Introduction

No one knew one hashtag, five letters and six Twitter characters could create a social eruption like #MeToo did. When actress Alyssa Milano used the #MeToo on October 15, 2017, she had no idea what she began and unintentionally promoted. The Me Too movement actually started nearly ten years prior with founder Tarana Burke. Burke used the movement to advocate for young, black women who were victims of sexual harassment and violence. After a year of spreading the hashtag around all forms of media, Me Too developed into a predominantly digital social movement that advocates for all victims and fights to change the conversation around sexual misconduct.

The future of the Me Too movement remains unclear because of the challenges the movement faces in society, but also because there is still confusion over what the movement is, and who leads the movement. The movement focuses on victims of sexual violence, whether that is by aiding with their healing or expanding the conversation around the stigma of sexual misconduct. Because what most people know as the Me Too movement started on Twitter, many are unaware of who really heads Me Too. Social movements require a hierarchy and direct leadership for success, otherwise things like critiques can bring a movement down.

While the Me Too movement stands out from previous digital social movements, the future of the movement remains uncertain. The success of social movements depends on various aspects, like actors in the movement, support and overall message. I argue the future of the Me Too movement is being challenged in an effort to maintain the status quo, as any social movement experiences, however the attackers have framed the movement as a gender war when, in fact, my research shows that the attacks are coming from both men and women. Through

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

qualitative data collection, I found three themes that represent disputes against the movement: the attacks against women, the outcome the movement has for men and discounting the movement as a political tool.

Lit Review

Throughout history, some social movements have successfully created changes in society. They have represented a way for members of society to stand up against injustice and fight for a change in policies, perceptions or institutions. Historically, some of the most successful social movements have been feminist movements (Vernet, Vala and Butera 2011). In the 1800s, women created the suffrage movement for equality with men for political representation, and ultimately gained the right to vote. After women participated in the workforce during World War II, they fought for the right to become independent, work and receive degrees with higher education. Today, women still fight for a sense of equality in society. There has been a lot of change in society, but inequality between men and women still exists, especially when it comes to sexual harassment.

For a social movement to begin, there needs to be a claim made against society, a group or an individual. The claim maker or makers call out grievances and concerns about particular conditions they see as unacceptable (Perrin and Miller-Perrin, 2011). The Me Too movement has two main claim makers: Tarana Burke and Alyssa Milano. Burke stood up against sexual harassment over ten years ago when she created Me Too for victims of sexual harassment. She may not have created a social movement at the time, but she went against society's norms regarding sexual misconduct. Burke set a program that worked toward helping victims, not ignoring their voices. Almost a decade later, Milano's tweet that used #MeToo was another

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

claim that challenged the way sexual misconduct is perceived in society. She challenged people to use their voice to call out the cycle of ignoring sexual misconduct.

Once a claim is made, it then brings forward the social problem. A social problem can be defined as a situation regarded as bad or undesirable by a group of people or a significant number of people who propose a remedy to change it (Heiner 2016). Some of the most well-known injustices that inspired social movements include: racial inequality, inequality in the workforce and civil rights. The Me Too movement is based on the social problem of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Milano's claim, for Twitter users to share #MeToo if they were victims of sexual misconduct, sparked the digital movement that later merged with Burke's existing Me Too and created the #MeToo movement society knows today; a movement that challenges the culture of sexual harassment.

Social movements can fight for various outcomes. Some fight for cultural changes, while others argue for policy change. Researcher and professor Touraine (2002) described social movements as organized conflicts fighting for the social use of common cultural values. Within a social movement, there are organized actors who represent the different sides of the common cultural values (ibid.). In the Me Too movement, the actors in the movement are predominately fighting for an end to sexual harassment and sexual assault by creating a conversation around it. Members of the movement are challenging the cultural norms and values surrounding sexual harassment, mainly how sexual harassment is discussed.

The actors, otherwise known as agents, of a social movement play an immense role in the movement's success. Social movement actors affect the interpretations of the movement (Benford, 2007). Well-known celebrities have been leading actors in the Me Too movement. Thousands of girls and women around the world shared their stories as a result of actresses and

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

singers coming forward about their experiences with sexual harassment. When people have role models and leaders, especially when it is someone they already idolize, it can make coming forward more of a conceivable task. When women and girls see celebrities calling out other celebrities' actions, using their platforms to speak out against injustice and create a movement of solidarity, it can be inspiring. While Me Too is the definition of the women's movement today, the Me Too movement has become a part of the women's movement and calls out the injustices women face in society. These well-known celebrities are affecting the interpretation of Me Too for movement participants.

Me Too has become this generation's take on a women's movement. Even though Me Too advocated for all victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault, it has been predominately characterized as a women's movement in the media. Women are using their platforms to call out the inequality that still exists between men and women. Whether or not men support the movement depend on how threatening it appears to be for them (Vernet et. al, 2011). The more threatening the movement seems for men, the less likely they are to support it, which has made the Me Too movement out to be a disagreement between men and women.

Even though the movement advocated for all victims of sexual harassment, Me Too has been viewed as a feminist movement in society. This may be because a majority of the victims coming forward have been women, or because when women have come forward, it has been against their male perpetrators. As a result, observers of the movement see the agents to be men against women. Men are more likely to disagree with a movement when there is a higher risk of either being called out for partaking in sexual misconduct or being falsely accused for such actions (Vernet et. al, 2011). The idea of social movements based on men against women has

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

been seen in society before, when previous feminist movements took place. For the Me Too movement, the idea of women against men determines the actors of the movement.

The media scrutinizes the Me Too movement as a movement with a goals of taking down powerful men, especially when a dominant group of the actors supporting the movement are well-known celebrities speaking out against men in Hollywood.

While previous movements like #BeenRapedNeverReported and #IAmNotAfraidToSayIt raised awareness for victims of sexual misconduct, the Me Too movement became a social movement that has yet to fizzle out. There are various reasons as to why, but one of the most speculated is the agents of the movement. The movement most of society knows began after a well-known actress spoke up when allegations against director and producer, Harvey Weinstein, were in the air. At the time, numerous actresses, like Milano, Gwyneth Paltrow, Angelina Jolie, Ashly Judd, Salma Hayek, and at least 15 other women in Hollywood were accusing Weinstein of sexual harassment or sexual assault (Harvey Weinstein Scandal: Who Has Accused Him of What? 2018). Milano had no idea that Me Too was already a name advocating for victims of sexual misconduct. From there, other well-known celebrity figures began sharing their stories surrounding sexual misconduct, which created the power of the social narrative in the Me Too movement (Lokot 2018:803). Whether their aware or their role or not, the well-known celebrity figures have played a large role in making Me Too a social movement.

Even though the well-known agents of the movement are not publicizing the entire goal of Me Too, their influence has created a large amount of media coverage, which could be a main reason the movement has yet to fizzle. One of Burke's main goals of the movement is to create a community of healing for victims; to give victims the safety to come forward and help them use

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

their voices. When actresses and artists spoke up about sexual misconduct in the entertainment industry, both their names and the names of their perpetrators created a lot of media attention. Researchers have found in the past that reporters admit to reporting on events that create drama and controversy, as the stories of the celebrities did (Malinick, Tindall and Diani 2013: 155). The well-known names created headlines for the movement.

With any social movement comes backlash from those who don't support the movement's claim or ideologies. Backlash is expected in any social movement, but the amount usually depends on the amount of attention the movement receives. Me Too has had a lot of media attention since Milano tweeted using #MeToo, so it is no surprise that Me Too received a lot of backlash. A majority of the Me Too backlash comes from the previously mentioned idea of a movement of men against women. Research shows men are less likely to support a feminist movement if they feel threatened (Vernet et. al, 2011: 730). Other research finds that backlash also comes from people dismissing the movement's claims if they see the claims as ideologically motivated (Perrin, 2011: 9). Ideologically motivated can mean motivated by someone's beliefs or perceptions. Some can see the movement as a feminist attack against men, because of the stereotype that women are against men. For those who see this as a he versus she movement, they may support their beliefs and society's sexual misconduct status quo with the argument that the movement will blow over or that it is just a way to take men down. A lot of the backlash claims made against the movement are against the women who speak up against men.

The Me Too movement has all the qualities of a social movement: claims, a social problem, support, growth and even backlash. The movement gained a lot of attention within its first year as a social media movement, but like any social movement, it begs the question: Is the Me Too movement here to stay? From here, the future of the movement is unknown. The power

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

and strength of the Me Too members and agents offer the social movement momentum to continue on and achieve the goals.

Method

This qualitative study was conducted from September 1, 2017 to October 31, 2018 to answer the research question: Is the Me Too movement around to stay, or is it a social movement that will fade away from society? In that time, data was collected from Twitter and established news sites. Tweets were gathered from Twitter using #MeToo; the data collected either used the hashtag, or is a tweet in response to a tweet using the hashtag. Every tweet used in the research came from public twitter accounts, accessible to members of the public. For the established news sites, headlines were looked at to evaluate how the news media narrated the conversation around the movement. After the data collection period, the screenshots and articles were then coded and grouped into themes. The following themes were originally found: success of the movement for women, outcome of the movement for men, the movement hindering a man's reputation, attacks geared toward women, the movement as a voice for women, political discounting, and critiques of the movement. The preliminary themes were then condensed into three main themes to organize the findings: the movement's outcome for men, attacks against women and the movement as a political tool. Using the main themes, four to five individual pieces of qualitative data were chosen to support the themes. The data consists of either a tweet screenshot or a news article.

Findings

The entire conversation around the Me Too movement cannot be defined into the three themes used in this research. The data represents some of the most relevant themes below when monitoring the #MeToo conversation. I argue the three themes found support the concept that the

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

Me Too movement is being challenged in an effort to maintain the status quo, as any social movement experiences, however the attackers have framed the movement as a gender war when, in fact, my research shows that the attacks are coming from both men and women. These themes represent disputes against the movement: the attacks against women, the outcome the movement has for men and discounting the movement as a political tool.

Women Under Attack

One of the most common themes within the movement was attacking a woman's claim, appearance, or opinion. The most common had to do with attacking a women's claim of sexual harassment as false and a way to ambush men. It was also common for a man to be the one attacking a woman's claim. For example, male Twitter user @weesammyblog tweeted, "Memo to the #MeToo crowd: 'Just because a woman said so does not make it so.' Sorry. I don't take a woman's word for it, just like I don't take a man's word for it either. If you accuse, be ready to back it up, or shut up. Stop destroying lives. #KavanaughAccuser."¹ Here, he was attacking the claims Dr. Forde made against Kavanaugh.

Although, even though most would assume there are only men calling out a woman's claim, there was evidence of women attacking other women's claims. Female user @jenniegerrard: "My problem with #metoo is all these women that claim in Hollywood Weinstein attacked them kept quiet for the sake of their careers and allowed him to prey on the next innocent victim. How is that being a strong woman failing to protects the next one to fall prey."² In this instance, she is calling out the celebrities who kept quiet for years. Her tweet

¹ Sam Buick (@weesammyblog) on Twitter, accessed on September 20, 2018
<https://twitter.com/weesammyblog/status/1042827572348940289>

² Jennie (@jenniegerrard) on Twitter, accessed on September 3, 2018
<https://twitter.com/jenniegerrard/status/1036870958043279361>

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

infers that these women who never spoke out against Weinstein in the past are partly to blame for the problem.

Along with attacking a woman's claim, twitter users also attacked feminism, which is a key part of the Me Too movement. Although, this tweet differs from the one above, as this was a woman speaking against other women and feminism. User @RealCandaceO tweeted, "Modern feminism has never been about equality with men. It has been about special treatment and exemption from all responsibility. Many condemned me for being one of the first to [speak] out against #metoo. Now it's toxicity is on full display. #DefendOurBoys."³ Candace Owens not only spoke about her disapproval towards the movement, but she also blamed it on modern feminism. Throughout history, feminism has had a stigma as a movement against men, and a lot of people use that as correlating the movement with a hatred towards men.

Another angle people used to attack women was to blame them for the instances of sexual harassment in society. Male user @NihilismNow tweeted, "'Nobody gives a fuck about #MeToo Men need to #boycottwomen for their melodrama. 'We're a generation of men raised by women. I'm wondering if another woman is really the answer we need.'"⁴ This statement contradicts a theme later in the argument, that sexual harassment is a man's fault. Instead, this user saw it as a woman's fault, and women ruling things in the future will only extend the issue. According to this user, women are traditionally responsible for raising men, the men that society is now accusing of sexual misconduct. Therefore, it is a woman's fault that men act this way. It brings up whether or not women really need more power in society?

³ Candace Owens (@RealCandaceO) on Twitter, accessed September 25, 2018
<https://twitter.com/RealCandaceO/status/1044576938029977600>

⁴ Tyler Durden (@NihilismNow) on Twitter, accessed on October 23, 2018

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

The Outcome the Movement has for Men

The present day Me Too movement has had an anti-man stigma around it since Milano's tweet in October 2015, presumably because of all the media attention and public accusations. Me Too has been criticized as a movement where women target men to bring them down. For example, a female written *Elle* article had the title, "These High-Profile Men Were Brought Down by #MeToo. Now They're Plotting Their Comebacks" (Feller 2018). The words "brought down by #MeToo" offer the notion that the movement created a negative atmosphere for me; that the movement targets high profile men in power. The article features 8 celebrity men who faced accusations in the Me Too era. With each featured man comes a paragraph about how the men are recovering and trying to comeback in society. For example, Aziz Ansari, who faced sexual assault and harassment accusations, is now performing stand-up comedy shows again as a part of his comeback.

As a result of the bringing down men stigma, there's a trend that men in today's world will be falsely accused and ultimately have their lives ruined because of false allegations from women. Female Twitter user @AmyKremer tweeted: "If you are a man in today's world, you better hope and pray no one ever accuses you of sexual assault because if they do, your life could be ruined. In the #metoo era, men are liars and a women's allegations are taken as fact. There is no due process."⁵ According to Amy Kremer, a women's allegation ruins a man's life, because the in the Me Too movement, men are guilty until proven innocent.

In another approach, a male Twitter user had similar remarks to Kremer. In response to a tweet from the *Washington Post* with a link to the article, "Opinion: Americans are not going to

⁵ Amy Kremer (@AmyKremer) on Twitter, accessed on September 20, 2018
<https://twitter.com/amykremer/status/1042727097238781952>

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

forget this day. Especially women.” @MichaelBerrySho tweeted: Agreed. Mothers of sons are going to be terrified that a woman can ruin their life 35 years after they even live in the same city, with no basis of evidence. It’s frightening, actually. Their sons won’t be believed, they’ll be pre-judged. #KavanaughHearings.”⁶ The article discussed Dr. Forde’s testimony during the Kavanaugh trials. The reference to Americans not going to forget the day had a lot to do with the power of Dr. Forde and her statement. This user, on the other hand, took the approach to flip the context and point out that women will have to fear for the reputations of their sons.

Another male user had a different approach to the discussion of the movement. Twitter user @Mikel_Jollett tweeted: “And I just want to say, good. I’m glad they’re afraid. I’m proud of all the women who’ve come forward. I’m proud that the #MeToo movement had restored some balance to the equation and struck some fear into the hearts of these men. They should be afraid. It’s about God dame time.”⁷ His approach supported the women who came forward and used their voices. It is his belief that men should be afraid; the actions do have consequences.

On another level, people also believe the movement does not help men who are victims of sexual harassment or sexual abuse. Instead, people believe the movement only advocates for a women’s voice and story, while overlooking male victims. Female user @nehasiddhwani tweeted: “I wish [for] boys to participate in #MeToo and share their side of the story of being harassed and blackmailed by girls and being wrongly framed in the cases either on Twitter or in real. But wait, people won’t believe you, know this because you are not a girl 😊.”⁸ In this tweet, the user is calling out the movement for not backing men and only supporting the claims against them.

⁶ Michael Berry (@MichaelBerrySho) on Twitter, accessed on September 27, 2018

⁷ Mikel Jollett (@Mikel_Jollett) on Twitter, accessed on September 27, 2018

⁸ Neha (@nehasiddhwani) on Twitter, accessed on October 6, 2018

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

Political Tool

Another form of debate for the movement stems from politics; to many, the Me Too movement is a political tool. Each political stance believes the movement is a mechanism for the opposing side. Twitter user @PatriotRed525 tweeted: “Fuck the #MeToo movement. It does nothing but make a mockery of real rape and sexual assault victims. #Democrats are now using that as a weapon to try and stop Kavanaugh. #FalseAllegations #ConfirmJudgeKavanaughNow.”⁹ According to this person, the movement does no good for society, but only stands as a weapon for the democratic party. Note, the gender for the American Patriot Twitter user remains unclear.

Another user felt similarly, female user @dundeeborn69 tweeted: “All this does, is PROVE that democrats USE women for political gain; they couldn’t give a crap about any of us real victims, the danger they put people in or the mockery they make out of us, we are collateral damage in their quest for power. THIS is WHY #metoo is a FARCE.”¹⁰ This is another example of someone, a woman, claiming the democrat party is using the women in the Me Too movement as a tool for political gain in democracy. This is also another example of a woman opposing, rather than supporting the movement.

Contradicting, another female user believed the movement was making a difference when women share their stories. Twitter user @JessOConnell tweeted: “Republicans have forgotten what #metoo actually means. They act like some slick pr firm came up with a catchy phrase that makes electing & promoting their men a little tougher. But it’s born from thousands of women

⁹ American Pride X (@PatriotRed525) on Twitter, accessed on September 18, 2018

¹⁰ PHYLLIS FINNEGAN (@dundeeborn69) on Twitter, accessed on October 17, 2018

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

bravely sharing ‘old’, sometimes ‘never-told’ assault stories.”¹¹ This tweet calls out another political party for forgetting the meaning of Me Too and a woman’s voice.

On the other hand, there were tweets for where users who claimed a political party that saw the movement as a political tool by using Me Too as an excuse to disagree with an opposing party. For example, during the Kavanaugh hearings, male user @johniadarola tweeted: “The right wing defense of Kavanaugh is their counter offensive against the #MeToo movement. This is Republicans fighting back against what they see as an unacceptable change in the status quo which allows men to assault and harass whomever they want whenever they want.”¹² This tweet claims the right wing was using the Kavanaugh hearings as political tool against the Me Too movement.

Discussion

There is a common misconception when it comes to the Me Too movement: women support the movement and men oppose the movement. The evidence shows something different. Each theme within the findings had statements from both men and women. Some women failed to support the movement, while some men support it. Although, there are still men who oppose the movement and women who support Me Too. I argue the future of the Me Too movement is being challenged in an effort to maintain the status quo, as any social movement experiences, however the attackers have framed the movement as a gender war when, in fact, my research shows that the attacks are coming from both men and women.

First, the hierarchy of the movement needs to be looked at. When considering the effect of leadership in social movement, take into consideration the Black Lives Matter Movement,

¹¹ Jesse O’Connell (@JessOConnell) on Twitter, accessed on September 18, 2018
<https://twitter.com/JessOConnell/status/1042014879123730432>

¹² John Iadarola (@johniadarola) on Twitter, accessed on September 27, 2018

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

which is one of the most notorious social media movements of this decade. BLM started in 2013 in similar way to Me Too: with a hashtag. For months, BLM dominated social media feeds, received a large amount of news coverage and stood up against anti-black racism (“HERSTORY, 2018). Like any social movement, the Black Lives Matter had key agents/actors play a role in the media success, but there was a lack of certainty as to who the headed the movement. Yes, BLM had founders- Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi- but the general public following the movement was unclear as to who the founders were, similar to the Me Too movement now. The media does not focus on a movement’s creators, but instead it focuses on the key players and agents in a movement that will help a make a better headline.

Me Too and BLM are similar in some ways, but different in others. Both fought against an injustice in society, as most social movements do. Looking at the movements with a micro lens, Me Too was actually created years before 2017, when most people believe it started. When the movement started on Twitter, thousands of people were unaware of Burke’s original Me Too movement, including Milano who many consider the flame for the present day Me Too. The lack of hierarchy and confusion in the movement’s goal could ultimately cause some confusion surrounding the movement.

One of the largest critiques of Me Too is that its main goal is attacks men and leaves them guilty until proven innocent, but that’s not the point. According to the Me Too website, “What started as local grassroots work has expanded to reach a global community of survivors from all walks of life and helped to de-stigmatize the act of surviving by highlighting the breadth and impact of a sexual violence worldwide,” (History & Vision, 2018). The movement focuses on victims of sexual violence, whether that’s by aiding with their healing or expanding the conversation around the stigma of sexual harassment.

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

On the contrary to women attacking men with their allegations, another way the movement is critiqued is through the attacks against women. This is a common theme of backlash seen when looking at the Me Too movement, even from a woman's perspective. In the findings, male user @NihilismNow commented "We're a generation of men raised by women. I'm wondering if another woman is really the answer we need." He was women for raising men in such a way and the answer to the problem clearly does not include more women.

Others use any chance to attack the claim of a woman. For instance, the Kavanaugh trials were going on, numerous attacks against Dr. Forde were found, and a majority of them attacked her allegations against Kavanaugh. There were also attacks at the women in Hollywood who came forward. Female user @jenniegerrard tweeted: "My problem with #metoo is all these women that claim in Hollywood Weinstein attacked them kept quiet for the sake of their careers and allowed him to prey on the next innocent victim. How is that being a strong woman failing to protect the next one to fall prey." This tweet called out the celebrity women that came forward against Weinstein. Instead of supporting them for using their voice to stand up against sexual misconduct, she called them out for not using the voice sooner.

The data continuously found instances where headlines and tweets talked about the movement bringing down powerful men, and because of a large spin the media puts on that idea, people can begin to believe it. Consider the *Elle* headline, "These High-Profile Men Were Brought Down by #MeToo. Now They're Plotting Their Comebacks." This headline, which ultimately determines whether or not a reader will read an article, targets an audience that sees Me Too as movement aimed towards bringing down men.

Other times, headlines used the names celebrities and the movement together. Researchers Jang and Pasek looked into the relation between Twitter and online news, they

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

found newsworthy events controlled whether or not there was coverage on Twitter (2015). Me too has been highly covered in the media, mainly because of the celebrity names involved, but the coverage allowed a familiarity with the movement name, but maybe not the direct focus of the movement. For weeks, the hashtag was followed by names like Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby and Brett Kavanaugh. The only cases that were really talked about in the media were ones that involved prevalent men and women in culture, like the *Elle* magazine article. A majority of cases covered by the media featured a well-known actress, singer or company executive. The media focused on the celebrity names to grab attention, and because of that, social media followed trend. For this reason, the research looked at Twitter and media activity in examining the potential longevity of the movement.

This in part has to do with the actors/agents of the movement. As Benford (1997) said, social movement actors affect the interpretations of the movement. Because Me Too lacked established leadership the hashtag started, many looked to the celebrities as the leaders. There were various famous figures speaking up against sexual harassment and sexual violence, and they used #MeToo as a platform. They walked red carpets in unity and used award shows as an opportunity to address the injustices that, mostly women, face in modern society. Seguin's (2016) research found that social movements are more likely to get continuous media coverage when they tie into the continuous media coverage cycle, and in America the media focuses a lot on the lives of celebrities. So when a well-known actress, singer or politician is seen supporting the movement, which has been the case for Me Too, the movement sees more media attention because it fits into the dominated cycle topic.

As that confusion of leadership continued and Me Too grew into a movement seen for women's voices, critiques against feminism came forward. Think about Candace Owen's tweet:

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

“@RealCandaceO tweeted, “Modern feminism has never been about equality with men. It has been about special treatment and exemption from all responsibility. Many condemned me for being one of the first to speaking out against #metoo. Now it’s toxicity is on full display. #DefendOurBoys.” She called out modern feminism as a tool for special treatment, which can also be seen as a way to attack the patriarchy and personally bring down men. Women need to be responsible for their own actions before they can make allegations against the actions of other.

As more women spoke up, more attacks against the claims appeared too. Consider the tweet from @weesammyblog :“Memo to the #MeToo crowd: ‘Just because a woman said so does not it so.’ Sorry. I don’t take a women’s word for it, just like I don’t take a man’s word for it either. If you accuse, be ready to back it up, or shut up. Stop destroying lives.

#KavanaughAccuser.” This is an example of discounting a woman’s claim when it involved a well-known name case, like Brett Kavanaugh. This tweet stands out in the sense that the user also claims they don’t take a man’s word for it as well, but the stop destroying lives comment is similar to how a lot of people view the movement: one against men.

A majority of the critique also comes with the threat the movement brings to society. There are people who are afraid that the movement will actually change how sexual harassment and violence are treated. There are people who are afraid that they will be punished for their actions. Because women want equality with men, they must hold the men accountable for their misogynistic behavior. In addition, there are people who are afraid to give victims of sexual violence a voice, because it empowers women? To some, the movement challenges the status quo of how society governs sexual harassment, where women have no power or voice, which has historically been by doing nothing or maybe paying some money to make problems go away.

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

This idea of keeping the status quo is a reiteration of the political aspect of the movement. Many people view the movement as a political tool, for whatever side someone supports, and because of that, the movement will never grow. For those in support of the movement, some might agree with male user @johniadarola when he said, “The right wing defense of Kavanaugh is their counter offensive against the #MeToo movement. This is Republicans fighting back against what they see as an unacceptable change in the status quo which allows men to assault and harass whomever they want whenever they want.” In his opinion, the Republicans are using tactical defenses, like the Kavanaugh hearings, to fight back against Me Too, because they feel threatened. They are threatened that the movement may succeed in changing the way the nation addresses sexual assault, ultimately altering the status quo of American culture.

On the other hand, some of those against Me Too are calling it out as a Democratic tool, like when @PatriotRed525 tweeted: “Fuck the #MeToo movement. It does nothing but make a mockery of real rape and sexual assault victims. #Democrats are now using that as a weapon to try and stop Kavanaugh. #FalseAllegations #ConfirmJudgeKavanaughNow.” This tweet does pertain to the Kavanaugh hearings, but at the time Me Too was heavily portrayed as a tool working against Kavanaugh during the hearings.

When looking at the movement as a political tool, there’s one flaw. Me Too does not have any political goals, which in turn diminished the impact of the movement. The Me Too movement works to focus on healing and holding perpetrators accountable, but there are no political agendas in the mission statement. Maybe members of the movement would like to see more perpetrators face consequences for their actions, but that doesn’t make Me Too a political based movement. Me Too is not a bill being proposed by one side of democracy to change laws;

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

it is a movement aiming to change the conversation and cultural perception of sexual harassment and sexual violence.

More research is needed on the hierarchies and structures of social movements that are heavily media concentrated. Research shows the formation begins with a claim that calls out a social problem. In this instance, Me Too began as a movement to stand against the injustices regarding sexual violence that young, black women were facing. Years later, the new era of Me Too started with a claim to use one's voice and share their story of sexual harassment. Now it's morphed into a new movement that advocates for all victims of sexual harassment and sexual violence.

There is also a need for more research on social movements that started on social media and how they changed over the years, because many social media movements fizzled out. Me Too is unique in its formation as the movement many know today, but there is little to no research to look at regarding how merging two movements can affect the goal and success of the movement. There is little that discusses how a combination like that could affect the hierarchy and leadership of a movement, which ultimately influences how people address a movement.

This research does have limitations in its scope. The data extraction took place for only two months, in which time various trials and culture moments were happening that could have affected the conversation regarding Me Too. Those events include trials for Bill Cosby and Harvey Weinstein, the Supreme Court hearing for Brett Kavanaugh, and the one-year anniversary for #MeToo. These events could have skewed how the movement was discussed during the data collection period. The research also only looked at established news headlines and tweets on Twitter that used #MeToo, meaning other accounts regarding the movement could have been overlooked.

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

Conclusion

The future of the Me Too movement remains unknown. At this time, it is unclear whether or not Me Too will continue as a movement that advocates for healing or gets lost in society and fades away. I argue the future of the Me Too movement is being challenged in an effort to maintain the status quo, as any social movement experiences, however the attackers have framed the movement as a gender war when, in fact, my research shows that the attacks are coming from both men and women. Through qualitative data collection, I found three themes that represent disputes against the movement: the attacks against women, the outcome the movement has for men and discounting the movement as a political tool. There is backlash from both backlash from men and women toward the Me Too movement, but there is also support from both sides as well. Me Too does key elements of a social movement, like a strong claim and key agents, that can help guide the movement to a permanent status in society.

The Future of the #MeToo Movement

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