

Socially Constructing the #MeToo Movement in *The New York Times*

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Abstract

In 2017, *The New York Times* published an article titled, “Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades” written by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey (2019), exposing one of the most abusive sexual predators in Hollywood. This sparked a movement among victim-survivors and their allies now known as the #MeToo Movement. This movement brought issues of sexual assault to the forefront. *The New York Times* covered this movement extensively and can be considered very influential in their coverage of the movement. For this project, I conducted a content analysis of 31 *New York Times* articles to identify how *The New York Times* framed the #MeToo Movement as it was unfolding. After coding for narrative construction of the abuser and victim-survivor, noting structural implications, and coding rape myths and rape culture within their text, I found that *The New York Times* tended to maintain focus on victim-survivors over abusers. I also document the presence of rape myths and sociologically analyze the implications of these enduring myths. I note that while rape culture was not explicit in articles, there was more subtle language that I suggest needs reconsideration. Further research should focus on other institutions within our culture that may be supporting or resisting rape culture (i.e. the government).

Chapter 1: Introduction

“From prehistoric times to the present, I believe rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more or less a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men keep all women* in a state of fear.” -Susan Brownmiller

In 2015, Brock Turner is arrested for the rape of Chanel Miller. In 2016, Donald Trump, a man who has been accused of sexual assault and harassment by 24 different women as well as caught on tape encouraging the assault of other women, is elected as President of the United States (Pearson, Gray, & Vagianos, 2019). In 2017, Harvey Weinstein, one of the most powerful Hollywood executives, is exposed for a slew of sexual assaults by *The New York Times* catalyzing a viral tweet into an entire movement. In 2018, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford testifies against Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh for sexual assault. He is sworn in almost a year to the day of the Harvey Weinstein article.

In the context of all of these events, we seem to be experiencing what has been referred to as a “reckoning” around the pervasive issue of sexual assault. These significant events in victim-survivor rights as well as women’s rights have activated some major moments of progress. For one, America has seen an increase in discussion surrounding sexual assault and harassment, including questions of what constitutes sexual assault? What does consent look like? Who should be held accountable for abuse? The abusers or the systems who enable them? The activism surrounding sexual assault has also become more visible. Most notably, the Women’s March in January 2017 following Trump’s election where 500,000 people in Washington as well as 3 million people around the world marched for women’s rights. It was an event where

influential people from all over world came out and spoke publicly, many for the first time, of their own experiences of sexual assault and harassment. Not to mention, of course, the millions of victim-survivors coming forward to share their stories and experiences of sexual assault across social media.

However, there have also been moments of extreme struggle and backlash to this progress. Memorably, Brock Turner received a shockingly lenient sentence for his crime being charged with 6 months in county jail and only serving a total of 3 (Miller, 2020). America still elected a man who was caught on tape, objectifying and encouraging sexual assault against women. Brett Kavanaugh was still confirmed to the Supreme Court after a moving and telling testimony from Christine Blasey Ford.

The major mediator throughout these key moments was the media. Throughout the autobiography, *Know My Name* (2020), Chanel Miller shares how the news media created a negative and disempowering space for her. The relentless coverage of how she was ruining the life of her abuser, with no concern for her own trauma, shaped her ability to process her victimization. The narrative that she was ripping a potential Olympic swimmer's future away dominated. The news media coverage of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford's claims of sexual assault against Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh also led to extreme outrage from victim-survivors and their allies about allowing an abuser on the Supreme Court. They were also responsible for the dethroning of Harvey Weinstein and the subsequent powerful individuals as well as the systems upholding them. They also empowered victim-survivors around the world to share their stories and experiences of abuse by using their own social and political power to elevate their voices.

While these articles and outlets are important to the narrative of the victim-survivor, they are also key resources with which the public learn what they should value and believe in terms of sexual assault in the United States. According to *the Los Angeles Times*, there was an 86% increase in Google searches surrounding sexual assault after the spark of the #MeToo Movement (Kaplan, 2018). This shows that the rhetoric around sexual assault during the time of #MeToo was highly sought after and therefore has the potential to make a large impact on how America understands and perceives topics and culture around sexual assault. Due to the pervasive rape culture that America holds that perpetuates this disbelief in victim-survivors and their experience, it makes it all the more critical to analyze if these ideals are being furthered or combated within our media. That is why for this project, I wanted to take a critical look at how the media constructed and framed narratives and information surrounding #MeToo in order to understand the cultural values that inform Americans of how to interpret, understand, and react to sexual assault and the implications this may have on our belief in victim-survivors.

Thesis Overview

For this paper, I have conducted a content analysis of 31 *New York Times* articles starting chronologically from the initial Harvey Weinstein article that broke on October 5, 2017. In Chapter 2, I develop themes and ideas from relevant literature that was used to inform my research including rape myths and rape culture, systems of silencing, and media frames. In Chapter 3, I delve into the methodology and points of analysis in my study. Chapter 4 is the culmination of my analysis where I discuss key findings. Finally, Chapter 5 includes my suggestions and thoughts for further research as well as the limitations of my study.

A Note On the Politics of Labels

There has been debate within the feminist community on whether to use the term victim or survivor when referring to people who have experienced sexual assault. According to Webster-Merriam dictionary, victim is defined as, “a person harmed, injured, or killed as a result of a crime” while a survivor is defined simply as, “a person who survives.” The first definition clearly marks someone as being damaged, while the other is someone who has simply overcome something. For some victim-survivors, not using the word victim would be disregarding the pain that they had to endure and in using the identifier victim they are claiming power over that harm (Harding, 2020). For others, the length of time since the crime occurred shapes which identifier they choose. In this case, the term victim is used when referring to someone who has recently experienced assault and a survivor when there has been significant time and healing between the incident. However, healing is a continuous process. For many, trauma is not a linear path. When someone experiences trauma there could be triggers that set off pain that happen days or years after the assault—time in this case is irrelevant. There are people who do prefer the term survivor because they feel like it is more representative of their experience of surviving and getting through this terrible experience. There may be implications surrounding our extremely individualistic culture that encourage victim-survivors to identify as a survivor. The idea of the victim-survivor being able to pull oneself out of troubling times and triumph over their experience may be a more socially acceptable and more palatable narrative than that of the victim. However, what it really comes down to is how the person identifies in that moment. Since I believe it is up to the individual to self-identify as victim or survivor and I want to be

inclusive of all experiences within this paper, I decide to use the term *victim-survivor* when discussing individuals who have experienced sexual assault. I think there is value in including both terms and want to allow all voices to be seen and heard within this piece.

Reflections on My Standpoint

Finally, on the basis of feminist standpoint theory, I also note my own experiences and biases that shape my research and perspective. While the #MeToo Movement has brought about great conversation around these gray areas in sexual relationships and experiences, (one of the more notable and well-known cases is "Grace's" experience of sexual assault with Aziz Ansari), I believe if the victim-survivor feels violated in some way (even if it does not meet the societal norm or definition of sexual assault) then I assume they are truthful (Way, 2018). It is also important to point out that it has been statistically proven that only 2-8% of sexual assault claims are actually false (Lonsway, Archambault, & Lisak, 2009). With that said, my choice is to believe all victim-survivors. So, it will be assumed that all claims of sexual misconduct discussed in this piece are truth.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Rape Culture and Rape Myths

Broadly defined, rape culture is “a pervasive ideology that allows, effectively supports or excuses sexual assault” (Burt, 1980, p. 218; Johnson & Johnson, 2017, p. 2). Studies such as, Brownmiller (1976) and Schwendinger and Schwendinger (1974), have shown that one of the most important aspects to rape culture is the perpetuation of rape myths. Brownmiller (1976) was the first to label and discuss the issue of rape myths in her groundbreaking book, “Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape.” There have been multiple and varying definitions of rape myths throughout feminist studies, but for the purpose of this paper I will be using Ullman’s (2010) and Burt and Albin’s (1981) definition from Sarah E. Ullman’s book, “Talking About Sexual Assault: Society’s Response to Survivors.” The reason I chose this particular set of rape myths is because Ullman’s particular definition surround the beliefs of the society that are not necessarily specific to the narrative of the offender or the victim-survivor, but the more general population.

Ullman (2010) categorizes four different rape myths; false allegations, rape as just sex, the victim-survivor wanted it, and the victim-survivor deserved it. The relevancy of these myths can have particular influence over the attitudes and behaviors of those who have experienced sexual assault as well as those reacting to said experiences. For instance, it has been shown that people who have greater rape myth acceptance are less likely to believe survivors (Finch & Munro, 2005). This has implications when it comes to victim-survivors disclosing their assault. Ullman (2010) notes that victim-survivors are less likely to disclose their assaults to those they believe have greater rape myth acceptance due to fear of disbelief (Ullman, 2010, p. 13). While statistics show that about 1 in 5 women will be sexually assaulted and 1 in 3 women will

experience sexual violence, there is still a significant amount of underreporting in part due to disbelief in survivors that is perpetuated through these rape myths and rape culture (Black et al., 2011).

Underreporting

While sexual assault and harassment affects 1 in 5 women (Black et al., 2011), the overwhelming majority of incidents still go unreported. There are a number of reasons why these cases go unreported. Ullman (2010) found there are typically six main reasons for an assault to go unreported; there is no proof, fear of retaliation by their abuser, perception that the incident was not serious enough (did not fit the model of what society has deemed sexual assault should look like), not certain if harm was intended, not wanting their family to know about the abuse, and fear of treatment/perception from the authorities (p. 43). These last two causes of underreporting (not wanting their family to know about the abuse and fear of treatment by the authorities) are directly linked with the victim-survivors perception of the party's belief in rape culture and rape myths. Jacques-Tiura, Tkatch, Abbey, and Wegner (2010) show that victim-survivors are less likely to report their experience of assault if they believe the potential party has a high rape myth acceptance. This is true for both formal parties such as, the police, as well as informal parties such as, family and friends. However, it has been shown that victim-survivors are more likely to tell informal parties than formal (Ullman, 2010). According to Kilpatrick et al. (2007) less than 18% of victim-survivors will formally report their assault to the police. As Ullman (2010) stated this is due to the fear of the authorities treatment of victim-survivors that can often lead to what is known as secondary victimization.

Secondary victimization is when a social service provider (police officer, victim advocate, etc.) expresses victim-blaming attitudes and behavior toward the victim-survivor that may bring up or aggravate trauma experienced from the assault that makes the victim-survivor feel victimized again (Campbell & Raja, 1999). What has been seen to cause a higher likelihood of secondary victimization is if the social service provider has a higher rate of rape myth acceptance. While there are mixed results in terms of the rate of rape myth acceptance among police officers, it has been found that police officers do have a higher rape myth acceptance than other fields of practice (Venema, 2018). Due to the nature of being a police officer, the officer is often looking for any weakness in credibility from the reporter (Venema, 2018). This questioning of credibility can appear to be disbelief in the victim-survivors story (even if the officer does believe the victim-survivor), which can then trigger shame and post-traumatic symptoms in the victim-survivor. There is also this belief that victim-survivors and their actions during the assault have to meet a certain criteria that actively counter these myths. Ullman (2010) states that “real rape victims” are, “those who are attacked by strangers and who have not engaged in any potentially blamable preassault behaviors” (Ullman, 2010, p. 14). Victim-survivors note that they feel less inclined to come forward about their assault if they have behaved in ways that could be assumed as blamable or could even be framed as consensual (Twohey & Kantor, 2019). Finally, rape myth acceptance does not solely affect the reporting process. In cases that end up going to trial, if the people of the jury have higher rape myth acceptance they are more likely to give the abuser a shorter sentence than those with a lower rape myth acceptance (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Kelly & Stermac, 2008).

Separate from rape myth acceptance, it is also important to mention that underreporting of assault is also affected by age, race, and citizenship status. Older victim-survivors are more likely than younger victim-survivors to come forward about their assault (Ullman, 2010). White victim-survivors are also more likely to report their assault than victim-survivors of color. Victim-survivors of color cite their reason for not coming forward as being due to, “fear of blame and because they do not want police involved,” due to possible racial discrimination (Ullman, 2010, p. 47). Finally, victim-survivors without citizenship status are less likely to report their assault formally due to fear of deportation.

Systems of Silencing

These problematic myths and culture are not only embedded in our criminal justice system, but in our media, in the workplace, at home, and all other parts of life. It can specifically be found in these systems and procedures that consciously or subconsciously silence victim-survivors. In the book *She Said* by Jodi Kantor and Meghan Twohey (2019), the two reporters who broke the original story about Harvey Weinstein on October 5, 2017 and who led an extensive investigation into sexual assault in Hollywood, discuss the difficulty of finding victim-survivors who were willing to speak out against their abuser (Kantor & Twohey, 2019). For one, discussing one’s experience of sexual assault is already a highly sensitive and personal topic and may be even less appealing to share with strangers who may have the intention of publishing a story about it. However, what they noted to be the most complicating factor was that many survivors had settlement terms that would legally not allow them to speak about their experiences.

Research has shown that one of the ways to produce or reproduce inequality within our society is when the victim-survivor accepts their place in the hierarchy of abuse. According to Schwalbe et al. (2000), “The withdrawal of participation by people who are fed up with powerlessness and disrespect has the effect of allowing things to go on as they are” (Schwalbe, Godwin, Holden, Schrock, Thompson, & Wolkomir, 2000, p. 429). While victim-survivors’ intentions typically when entering into a non-disclosure agreement with their abuser is to seek some type of reparation, the consequence of their silence and other limitations they are tied to is in some way a moment of them accepting and maintaining their place in the hierarchy. Therefore perpetuating the abuse and inequality that Kantor and Twohey (2019) were able to expose.

However, victim-survivors are oftentimes manipulated into accepting their place in the hierarchy not just by the monetary incentive they may receive from the abuser, but also by their own legal representation. These same non-disclosure agreements that are repressing the rights of the victim-survivors are also benefiting the lawyers that they work for. Typically, the offender is willing to give more money to the victim-survivor and their legal team if in return the victim-survivor gives up more of their rights and/or agrees to more of their guidelines (i.e. destroying evidence, only allowed to tell one or two specific people, etc.). Since legal representation is often paid for through contingency fees, meaning the lawyer receives a percent of the money from the resolution rather than a flat fee up front, the legal team has more incentive to encourage their client to give up more of their rights in order to receive a larger sum of money from the opposing side at the end of the mitigation. This leads to more victim-survivors agreeing to more limitations, accommodating to their offenders requests and sometimes unknowingly giving up their rights for the benefit of their representation (Kantor & Twohey, 2019). So while

legal representation often presents this narrative of advocating for their client and this facade of equality and justice, they are actually actively participating in the oppression and commodification of their client's liberty.

Of the women who Kantor and Twohey interviewed for the Harvey Weinstein story only one woman was not limited by a non-disclosure agreement, Emily Nestor. Emily Nestor and actress Ashley Judd were the only two who first spoke out against their abuser. Ashley Judd did in fact have a non-disclosure agreement, however, she had the privilege of breaking it because she was financially secure due to her previous acting career. This also shows the power and privilege it takes to break the silence when it comes to sexual assault.

However, it is not just the power and privilege of the victim-survivors that should be recognized when it comes to the silence of victim-survivors, but also that of the offender. Many times the offender that charges are being brought against are those who hold great monetary, social, and political capital. Oftentimes their capital is much more significant than that of the victim-survivor making the victim-survivor vulnerable to manipulation before, during, and after their experience of assault. This makes it more difficult to bring about justice for victim-survivors not only due to the systems in place that are to the abusers' advantage (i.e. non-disclosure agreements), but also the feelings of inferiority they illicit from the victim-survivor. Research shows, "the impression that elites possess powerful, worthy selves—no matter the reality—can induce feelings of trust, awe, and/or fear that help to legitimate inequality and deter dissent" (Schwalbe, Godwin, Holden, Schrock, Thompson, & Wolkomir, 2000, p. 424). This feeling of fear and intimidation that comes from that power and

privilege, not only affect the victim-survivor, but make it so bystanders also feel as though they must be silent. However, that silence only leads to building more of the abusers' power.

Regulation of Discourse

Limiting these victim-survivors' rights to speak about their experience, regulates their discourse. In doing so, it controls and minimizes their connections and networks to other victim-survivors going through similar experiences that have the potential to provide the victim-survivor an immense amount of support and empowerment. For an experience that is already so isolating and disempowering to so many victim-survivors, limiting their communication can create an even more isolating environment, which can then have negative consequences for their mental health (Tyson, 2019). According to Schwalbe et al. (2000), regulation of discourse is another way in which society sees inequalities being reproduced. They write, "Inequality within the group may then be reproduced by controlling access to the key networks through which information is traded, decisions and deals are made, and rewards are disbursed" (Schwalbe, Godwin, Holden, Schrock, Thompson, & Wolkomir, 2000, p. 432). Those key networks in this case are the connections between victim-survivors. While *The New York Times*' goal was to break this inequality through their reporting and investigation of sexual assault and the #MeToo movement by elevating victim-survivors' stories, they were also limited by non-disclosure agreements causing them to regulate and limit discourse between the victim-survivors they were speaking to.

Acknowledging Those Who Have Spoken Up

While many are silenced through these oppressive processes, scare tactics, and manipulation, there are others who have stood strong in their claims and efforts, but have not been given the attention that they deserve. A prime example is Tarana Burke, the founder of the #MeToo Movement. Her first attempt to bring light to these issues surrounding sexual assault was in 2007 when she first used the phrase “Me Too” in an effort to bring recognition to the scope of sexual assault (Giribet, 2018). As we know, it took 10 years for that effort to be acknowledged. Then there are the victim-survivors who have brought claims against offenders that were not taken seriously until #MeToo. For example, the women who brought claims against Donald Trump first came forward during the 2016 Presidential election. However, they felt the need to renew their claims after the movement was sparked because they felt the, “aggressive attitude against harassment will give their stories new life” because they were not given the attention they deserved previously (Shear, 2017). This type of negligence is not just seen by the media, but also our criminal justice system. According to the National Sexual Assault Hotline, for every 1000 incidents of sexual assault 995 will walk free, 46 will go to trial, and only 5 will lead to a felony conviction (The Criminal Justice System: Statistics, n.d.). These voices show how much society has turned a blind eye to the issues of sexual assault and have passively perpetuated rape culture for years. Without these initial voices and the work of these women, the voices we hear today would not be heard as loudly.

Media Framing: Importance of Language in Reproducing Inequality

Finally, one of the most important factors to analyze specifically in the context of the #MeToo Movement is how sexual assault and harassment have been framed and discussed

within our media and everyday lives. It is specifically important in the context of the *New York Times* to consider the concept of media frames. Media frames, a concept developed by Gamson and Modigliani (1989), show how the language and tone of media shapes the way the public understands and experiences those events. They explain, “media discourse is part of the process by which individuals construct meaning” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 2). Schwalbe et al. further this idea by saying it not only constructs public meaning, but also emotion. They state, “Inasmuch as language is the principal means by which we express, manage, and conjure emotions, to regulate discourse is to regulate emotion” (Schwalbe, Godwin, Holden, Schrock, Thompson, & Wolkomir, 2000, p. 435). Especially when dealing with a highly emotional topic such as sexual assault, it makes it all the more important to identify how the media is regulating the meaning and emotion surrounding this topic. Media frames can also affect things such as common meaning and understanding of key concepts such as rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment. Within this context, it gives the media the power to either perpetuate or disrupt rape culture.

The media played a particularly vital role in the widespread success of the #MeToo Movement. Without news coverage from *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Time Magazine*, and other more local newspapers, the #MeToo Movement would have never reached the capacity that it did. Particularly the work of *The New York Times* reporters Megan Twohey and Jodi Kantor, who investigated and broke the first article about Weinstein, had a large impact on the subsequent movement. Throughout Twohey and Kantor’s book called *She Said*, which discusses specifically how they went about the investigation into Harvey Weinstein, they explained how each woman they talked to only wanted to come forward if the reporters could

ensure that they were not alone in their disclosure. However, since they were not allowed to reveal the names of the other women they were interviewing and for quite a few of the women they were bound by non-disclosure agreements, it was difficult for the authors to make these women feel like they were supported. In fact, so many women feared their story would be told in isolation or felt like they could not financially risk breaking their non-disclosure agreement that only one woman was solidly confirmed to the original story before it broke, Emily Nestor (Kantor & Twohey, 2019). However, after the story broke on October 5, 2017, more women immediately started to come forward as well as those who had already come forward but were not been ready to share within the first article including, Tomi-Ann Roberts, Cynthia Burr, Katherine Kendall, Judith Godreche, Rosanna Arquette, and Gwennyth Paltrow, were all ready to go on record about their experiences. Without the media's power of connection, these hundreds and thousands of women would not have heard each other's voices. But it takes that one woman willing to speak up for the rest to follow. The handling, framing, and reaction to these cases also sets a precedent for potential cases to follow. If influential news outlets like *the New York Times* portrays victim-survivors, their abusers, and the overall culture implications of the movement in a certain way, it could potentially have an impact as well as set a precedent for how America views, understands, and discusses sexual assault going forward.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In order to understand how the media framed the #MeToo Movement, I conducted an in-depth content analysis of 31 *The New York Times* articles. Using relevant literature, I developed four research questions to explore:

Research Question 1: In what ways does *The New York Times* frame the narrative of the #MeToo Movement?

Research Question 2: How are victim-survivors and abusers represented, in terms of labels, tone, quantity and quality of coverage, and emphasis on narrative?

Research Question 3: In what ways does *The New York Times* perpetuate and/or resist common rape myths and rape culture in their coverage of the #MeToo Movement?

Research Question 4: To what extent does *The New York Times* frame sexual assault as an individual or structural phenomenon in their #MeToo Movement coverage?

I limited my analysis to the timeframe of October 5, 2017-October 5, 2019 because October 5, 2017 was the day the original Harvey Weinstein article was published. However, due to the volume and concentration of coverage surrounding the #MeToo Movement at the time the 31 articles I coded only took place during the timeframe of October 5, 2017-December 21, 2017. Using the search tab within *The New York Times*, I searched #MeToo and limited the dates to October 5, 2017-October 5, 2019. Then using the “sort by” function I sorted the articles from oldest to newest. I then pulled the first 50 articles in chronological order that explicitly mentioned the #MeToo Movement. My decision to pull the articles in chronological order was to be able to see if there was a shift in narrative as the movement gained traction. This methodology was then refined after my initial meeting with my committee. In its first iteration, I included both

articles and opinion pieces published by *The New York Times*. After conversation with my committee, it was decided that I would omit opinion pieces since they may not accurately reflect the view of *The New York Times* as an institution. However, because I had coded 29 articles previous to this modification, it would be remiss to say that they did not inform or shape this piece in some way. So while they are not included in my direct analysis, they did guide codes and insights for my current data set.

Analysis

I coded each article by hand for the five following categories relating to my research questions; abuser narrative, victim-survivor narrative, discussion or presence of rape myths, unnecessary salacious detail regarding victim-survivor experience, and systematic perspective versus individualistic perspective. Each code had an assigned color that I used to highlight within each article. I created a key with each category and its assigned color that I kept open while coding. I also annotated thoughts and questions throughout the articles noting places to come back to for closer analysis or sections that provided clear examples of each code. It was important to me to physically code each article to ensure a close read of each and to be able to note any small discrepancies between the codes.

After beginning to write my analysis, there were several points in which I went back to code for more detail, specifically the amount of direct quotes from victim-survivors as well as the mention of Harvey Weinstein. These codes provided more specific detail under the umbrella of victim-survivor narrative versus abuser narrative. When coding for the prominence of the victim-survivors' narrative versus the prominence of the abusers' narrative I compared the total

number of highlights in each category for each article. If the article had more highlights from the victim-survivor, I coded it as a 1 and if there were more from the abuser it received a 2. If the article did not contain either narrative it received a 0. Then for categories that looked at presence versus absence of a code they received a 1 for presence and 0 for absence.

"Up until then I'd envisioned a limitless future. Now the lights went out, and two narrow corridors lit up. You can walk down the one where you attempt to forget and move on. Or you walk down the corridor that leads back to him. There is no right choice; both are long and difficult and take indefinite amounts of time. I was still running my hands along the walls looking for a third door, to a corridor where this never happened, where I could continue the life I had planned." -Chanel Miller, "Know My Name" (p. 46)

Chapter 4: Results

Victim-Survivor Versus Abuser Narrative

My results show that 20 out of 31 articles were mainly victim-survivor focused while 10 out of 31 were abuser focused. Only one article did not contain any victim-survivor or abuser narrative. I then furthered my analysis of this section by coding for the mention of Harvey Weinstein (symbol of abusers) as well as direct quotes from victim-survivors. Then within each narrative, I noted particular themes that seemed to construct and frame each of their experiences.

	Victim-Survivor vs. Abuser	Mention of Weinstein	Direct Quote from Victim-Survivor
Article 1	1	1	1
Article 2	1	1	1
Article 3	1	1	0
Article 4	2	0	1
Article 5	1	1	1
Article 6	1	1	0
Article 7	2	1	0
Article 8	1	1	1
Article 9	1	1	1
Article 10	1	1	0
Article 11	1	1	1
Article 12	1	0	1
Article 13	1	0	1
Article 14	2	0	1
Article 15	2	0	1
Article 16	0	0	0
Article 17	1	0	1
Article 18	2	0	0
Article 19	1	0	1
Article 20	2	0	0
Article 21	2	0	0
Article 22	1	0	0
Article 23	2	0	0
Article 24	1	0	1
Article 25	1	1	1
Article 26	2	0	1
Article 27	2	0	0
Article 28	1	1	1
Article 29	1	0	1
Article 30	1	0	1
Article 31	1	1	1

Key:	
Absence/Presence	0/1
Victim-Survivor/Offender	1/2

Constructing the Abuser

The narrative of the abuser or offender is one that is complex and complicated to dissect. Within this theme there were two main findings; the building of the character of the abuser and using Weinstein as a symbol to represent all offenders. For the majority of the narrative in *The New York Times* it is based on one offender in particular, Harvey Weinstein. Of the 30 articles I coded for analysis 14 mentioned Mr. Weinstein. Here I will analyze not only how *The New York Times* went about constructing Mr. Weinstein's narrative, but also the implications it may have for its audience.

Within Mr. Weinstein's individual narrative, journalists would often document his successes, the influential people he was affiliated with, the people he had power over, and his great philanthropic efforts. This in a sense built his character. They often made these grand statements about his personal influence as well as his works' influence in the community by saying things such as, "Mr. Weinstein helped define popular culture. He has collected six best-picture Oscars and turned out a number of touchstones..." and "Weinstein's films helped define femininity, sex and romance..." (Kantor & Twohey, 2017). These particular quotes imply how much power and influence he had in the Hollywood community and subsequently our culture. They also did this by mentioning his affiliation with highly influential people such as Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama's daughter, Malia Obama. The articles typically described him as such,

A longtime Democratic donor, he hosted a fund-raiser for Hillary Clinton in his Manhattan home last year. He employed Malia Obama, the oldest daughter of former President Barack Obama, as an intern this year, and recently helped endow a faculty chair at Rutgers University in Gloria Steinem's name (Kantor & Twohey, 2017).

This tactic of building up the character of the abuser has two potential implications. What I believe this particular narrative is attempting to do is provide not only a juxtaposition for all of the horrific crimes Weinstein has committed, but also lay the groundwork to call out the silent enablers who were influenced by Weinstein's power. By showing his cultural, social, and political power, they begin to illuminate the structures that held him in place. Also, by showing his philanthropic efforts, they show that even people who have been champions for women can still be perpetrators of sexual assault.

There were, however, potentially more harmful statements used in building Weinstein's character. While *The New York Times* is required to show all sides and perspectives to ensure fair, just, and unbiased reporting, what becomes problematic for victim-survivors are these oppositionary statements that could be used to discredit their experience. For example,

Many women who worked with Mr. Weinstein said they never experienced sexual harassment or knew of anyone who did, and recalled him as a boss who gave them valuable opportunities at young ages. Some described long and satisfying careers with him, praising him as a mentor and advocate (Kantor & Twohey, 2017).

This statement is in exact opposition to those of the victim-survivors. By including this narrative journalists directly call into question the statements of the victim-survivors. Another example of this comes from testimony from hotel workers at the Peninsula where Weinstein resided some

saying, “they were unaware of Mr. Weinstein’s behavior” and others declining to comment (Mueller, 2017). While it is important to honor both sides of a story, the relevance of this particular type of statement is worth examining. If reporting on victim-survivors’ experience of sexual assault with this offender is the main subject of the article, then this statement says nothing about that specific experience. Also, if this is being used as a type of character statement, the same type of statement should also be provided for the victim-survivor, which it is not. I also find the necessity of the statement questionable. While hearing both sides of the experience is vital to good journalism, this can be done through direct quotes from each respective party rather than third parties. By using direct quotes, it allows both sides to be heard without competing elements of other people’s opinions or experiences.

It could also be argued that this statement was used to show the complexity of character in the offenders, however, it comes at risk of the audience not being able to read past the blanket statement of positive character. It is asking more of the audience to read deeply and consider that this statement may be used to build a deceitful character of the abuser rather than genuinely good character. While quantitatively, there were less articles focused on abusers than victim-survivors, this type of complexity of character that was developed for the abusers rather than victim-survivors draws upon this idea of male-centered narratives. This idea of male-centered narratives is seen within the concept of the patriarchy developed by Allan G. Johnson (Johnson, 2014). Male-centered narrative asserts that the normative view in our society is the male perspective. This male-centeredness makes it so that society’s default response to sexual assault claims against men immediately draws out a response of defensiveness as well as suspicion against women because it goes against or attacks the norm. By providing these character

statements and by building more complexity in the narrative of abusers, *The New York Times* is playing into the concept and ideals of the patriarchy by defending the narrative and causing doubt in victim-survivors.

As mentioned previously, by emphasizing Harvey Weinstein constantly in articles, *The New York Times* turned him into a symbolic stand-in for all offenders of the #MeToo era. An article illustrating this tendency asks, “Who was your Weinstein?” (Fortin, 2017). So while *The New York Times* wrote about other offenders (i.e. James Toback, Woody Allen, Donald Trump, Al Franken), it was their reporting on Weinstein that truly defines the #MeToo coverage. That is why journalists' construction of Weinstein carries such weight. He does not represent one individual, but a whole system of abusers. Weinstein's specific representation of this system can be drawn not only in the similarity of his specific character (money, power, influence, enabling structures, etc.) to other abusers, but also conveniently the timing at which his story was told, the audience in which it targeted, and the subsequent reaction. The negative consequences of Harvey Weinstein representing all abusers during the #MeToo era is that while he has many qualities that are recognizable in other abusers, he is an extreme example. By making him a symbol, it could in a way limit what women consider legitimate ideas of who and what abuse looks like.

Constructing the Victim-Survivor

When constructing the narrative of the victim-survivors there were two key themes; the intentional use of power and privilege and giving power back to the victim-survivor. Here I will analyze how *The New York Times* used these two themes to construct the victim-survivor narrative as well as its potential implications.

Intentional Use of Power and Privilege

Of the 31 articles read for analysis, 10 of those articles mentioned a victim-survivor by name who is considered a celebrity. These articles were concentrated within the first two months of coverage. The building of this narrative and the use of celebrity seems to be used intentionally in order to build visibility of the issues surrounding sexual assault, but also conveniently build monetary benefits for *The New York Times*.

It is not a coincidence that the Weinstein story received particular attention due to the fact that it shed light on the abuse of highly visible people, specifically well-known actresses. That visibility comes with significant power and influence. For one, these women who came forward have far less fear about potential financial burdens that may come from something like breaking non-disclosure agreements than others in less lucrative jobs. The only woman who initially came forward who was not considered a celebrity was in fact not tied to a non-disclosure agreement so had no fear of that financial repercussion. The women with celebrity who did come forward also have significant social power due to devoted fan-bases and notable followings. All women that initially came forward were also white so did not have to fear any potential racialized implications.

While I think the timing of the particular case of Harvey Weinstein may have been unintentional, I think the use of celebrity after the initial coverage was extremely calculated. *The New York Times* even shows its self-awareness in their use of celebrity. They published, “‘When you have Angelina Jolie and Gwyneth Paltrow in the same sentence, well, people take note,’ the sociologist Michael Kimmel said” (Bennett, 2017). However, while *The Times* would use these

celebrity names in titles of their articles such as, “Jennifer Lawrence and Other Stars Share Stories of Harassment” by Niraj Choski (2017), to grab the attention of their audience, they would often discuss other women who had been affected within the body of the article. In this way, they are still representing and recognizing all of the voices coming forward, but are using the recognizable names to garner the attention to the content. Although there was heavy use of celebrity especially within initial coverage, the narrative quickly shifted focus to abuse of government aides and then later on to abuse in “blue collar” jobs. However, without the initial attention to celebrities, there may not have been the same type of public reaction or awareness brought to the subsequent issues and articles. For example, the well-known actress, Alyssa Milano, may not have been moved to tweet her initial “Me Too” tweet if the Weinstein article had involved women or celebrities like herself. And without Alyssa Milano’s highly visible tweet to her 3.6 million followers, the #MeToo Movement may not have been launched into hypervisibility the way it was.

The drawback to this strategy is that other victim-survivors without the same power and privilege fall into the shadows of these celebrities. Their names are not highlighted in the same way victim-survivors with status are. There were several articles that mentioned celebrity names and referred to women with less power as “and others” leaving them nameless. While they in the end may be receiving more attention due to the initial draw of celebrity than they might have otherwise, people should care about the mistreatment of women no matter their status in society. It is also critical to note when thinking about the intentional use of celebrity that *The New York Times* is a for-profit organization. So by sensationalizing these stories (i.e. using celebrity status) they increase the amount of clicks, viewers, and eventual profits they turn from doing so. While

in the case of #MeToo there were a lot of victim-survivors who were considered celebrities, there were also equal part victim-survivors who were not. No matter their status, each should have received an equal amount of coverage and attention from the media.

Giving Power Back to the Victim-Survivors

Something that is customary within journalism is to allow all parties that are involved within the topic of the article a chance to provide a comment. That same custom was seen throughout these articles by *The New York Times*. However, what made these articles particularly significant was allowing victim-survivors to have a voice and to directly share their experiences. Of the 31 articles 20 were victim-survivor narrative focused and 20 had direct quotes from victim-survivors that were both known and anonymous. Within these quotes, the victim-survivors were not only able to talk about their experience, but also their feelings toward the problematic systems and barriers they have faced. For example, Dylan Farrow, spoke on her experience of being abused by her famous father, Woody Allen. She shared her frustration with rape culture that has allowed Allen to perpetuate his abuse stating, “It isn’t just power that allows men to see simple situations as complicated and obvious conclusions as a matter of “who can say”? The system worked for Harvey Weinstein for decades. It works for Woody Allen still.” (Hauser, 2017). These direct quotes from victim-survivors, gives direct power back to the victim-survivor because they get to control their narrative. It also provides a raw look into the experience of sexual assault that allows the audience to understand more deeply the issues that take place not only in these systems that support sexual assault, but also the real physical, emotional, individual consequences that come from this experience.

Importance of Recognizing Structural Power

When writing about something as intimate as sexual assault, it can be difficult to pull back from the deeply personal narrative to discuss the macro-issues within the systems and culture that perpetuate these behaviors. It is important for the media to acknowledge the structural aspect of sexual assault and harassment for several reasons. First, the media can illuminate these systems, people, and behaviors that are problematic; drawing attention to the areas and cultures that need significant change in order to prevent future abuses. Also, on a more functional level, by focusing on the systems it takes that emotional burden and pressure off of the victim-survivor to provide the whole story. It becomes less about the individual story and lurid details of the experience of abuse and more about the oppressive and patriarchal systems that enable them. Within the 31 articles coded for analysis, 20 of those articles framed or discussed the issue of sexual abuse in terms of its macro-implications.

It is critical to examine the institutions in which journalists identified these issues. The institutions that were found within my articles of analysis were Hollywood, the government (Congress, the White House, prominent courts), academia, the food industry, and “blue collar jobs.” Within these institutions, the key themes that were seen as covered by *The New York Times* were: use of money and power to evoke silence and complicity, intimidation tactics by abuser and others enabling the abusers, systemic collateral consequences, and also several moments of positive institutional response and pushback.

Money and Power

Money and power were cited by *The New York Times* as playing a significant role in the perpetuation of abuse. Speaking to the fact that Woody Allen still has the ability to create successful movies and recruit influential stars for his production, *The New York Times* cites his economic power as part of the issue stating, “It is a testament to Allen’s public relations team and his lawyers that few know these simple facts. It also speaks to the forces that have historically protected men like Allen: the money and power deployed to make the simple complicated...” (Hauser, 2017). Within this statement they show how having economic power can enable those silencing structures; i.e. public relations teams who can control the narrative seen in the media as well as legal teams who can protect their story.

This was also seen throughout the Weinstein narrative. Many of the women he abused were young women starting out in their career looking for Weinstein to use his power and money to further their career. Weinstein was able to manipulate these women and force them into abusive situations that he may not have had the power to do so without that money and influence. There were also institutions that had monetary incentive to stay quiet about these issues of abuse. For example, many of Weinstein’s moments of abuse took place within a hotel, specifically the Peninsula. *The New York Times* states, “Mr. Weinstein frequently turned a fourth-floor Peninsula suite into his headquarter-away-from-home...His stays would likely have brought in thousands of dollars; rooms at the Peninsula cost several hundred dollars a night, while suites can go for more than \$2,000 a night.” (Mueller, 2017). If the hotel had any inclination about the abuse occurring at their hotel, it was for their monetary benefit to stay quiet in order to ensure Mr. Weinstein’s continued residency. This goes to show that not only do these offenders actively use their money and power to silence victim-survivors and other potential reporting parties (i.e.

use of legal counsel, public relations teams, etc.), but it also may occur passively through tangential benefits that keep the structure of abuse in place.

While Weinstein and Allen are just two individuals, their particular cases illustrate power dynamics that translate into systemic exploitation and avoidance of accountability. A particularly powerful example of this is within Congress. In an article titled, “House Secretly Paid \$115,000 to Settle Harassment Claims Over Four Years” by Sheryl Gay Stolberg, Stolberg details how the House helped pay for the settlement of three different sexual assault claims against members of Congress during the years 2008-2012. Stolberg states, “Under federal law, congressional employees who bring claims against lawmakers must go through a confidential mediation process; although the law does not require it, the parties typically sign nondisclosure agreements” (Stolberg, 2017). Here Stolberg points out this silencing process is created by Congress to silence victim-survivors. This structural process is designed by the powerful to protect the powerful. As discussed in the section titled, “Systems of Silencing,” nondisclosure agreements are one of the main ways in which our society uses the structure of the legal system to perpetuate inequality by claiming to advocate for victim-survivors when in reality limiting their rights for monetary benefit. By creating this system and precedent that legitimizes the silence of victim-survivors, it normalizes their oppression for the benefit of abusers with money and power. Oftentimes the victim-survivors who are subjected to this abuse, in this specific case aides to the Congressmen, are, again, with little to no social, financial, and political power. The perpetrators, on the other hand, hold endless means and connections to continue their patterns of abuse with little to no accountability.

While *The New York Times* points out these specific moments of abuse of monetary power, they do not specifically label or call out the overarching monetary incentive as being an issue as well as its potential implications. It is only implied that their monetary, social, and political capital are used in the silencing of the victim-survivor as well as bystanders to these incidents for the reader to then make the connection for further analysis. *The New York Times* should more explicitly be labelling this type of abuse of power rather than assuming readers will read actively and with a sociological mindset to make the connection between these implications of capitalism and the perpetuation of abuse.

Fear of Social Repercussions

Another major obstacle cited by *The New York Times* for victim-survivors not coming forward was their fear of potential isolation (socially, professionally, etc.) and/or retaliation. When someone with extreme power has not only monetary capital, but also social capital, it makes it all the more difficult for victim-survivors to come forward out of fear of rejection and/or loss of livelihood. *The New York Times* used their reporting to illustrate the silencing of victim-survivors not just in Hollywood and Congress but also academia. Covering the protests occurring at Spelman and Morehouse Colleges during the time of the #MeToo Movement, *The New York Times* talked to young victim-survivors who had experienced assault or harassment on these campuses. Here victim-survivors cited one of their main reasons for not coming forward as due to the anticipated or experienced negative reaction from their peers. One student described, “a fierce social hierarchy that existed among the two schools — which have only about 2,000 students each — where one false step can cause a person to be ostracized” (Dickerson & Saul,

2017). This is an example of institutional support of rape culture. These students perceive a culture of disbelief towards victim-survivors on college campuses that led them to isolation and non-disclosure of their own assaults. This is a clear example of underreporting seemingly correlated with high levels of rape myth acceptance and victim-blaming on college campuses.

While it is a different context, many of the women within the Weinstein case said similar things. Especially the young women starting out in their career who were worried that coming forward would isolate them from potential connections and opportunities to further their careers. However, what was most telling in the narrative of Weinstein was the women's desire to come forward on the condition that she was not alone in her report. The importance and power of social support and solidarity for these women was more for protection of social and emotional repercussions than anything else. Having multiple voices would not only give credibility to their story, but also make it more difficult for these women to be socially isolated by society.

Here *The New York Times* has pointed out several different structures that cultivate these limiting circumstances and environments for victim-survivors, but do not directly recognize the larger concepts at play here including, rape myth acceptance and rape culture, which are embedded with patriarchal limitations (i.e. male centered response) (Johnson, 2014). They also do not take responsibility over their own part in limiting victim-survivors' social support during the #MeToo coverage. While they are applauded for bringing victim-survivors together post-Weinstein article, they do not own up to the fact that they limited this entire network of women previous to the breaking of the story. While this again may be due to customary journalism practices, if they had allowed for these victim-survivors to know they were not alone in their story it would have had major implications for breaking this toxic culture of silencing.

While *The New York Times* aims to expose the systemic nature of sexual abuse through showing patterns and trends in response to assault, as compared to previous mainstream media which typically only focused on individual stories of assault, they need to be connecting these patterns more directly to the oppressive systems our culture has put in place (i.e. capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy).

Collateral Consequences

As *The New York Times* moved beyond the reporting of Harvey Weinstein and the exposure of other abusers, they began to cover the more collateral consequences sexual assault and harassment can have on victim-survivors, particularly victim-survivors who identify as women. One particular article stands out titled, “The #MeToo Moment: How One Harasser Can Rob a Generation of Women” by Amanda Taub. This specific article surrounds the story of Heidi Bond’s experience of sexual harassment by Judge Alex Kozinski. In this piece, Taub explains how Heidi Bond had been a highly outspoken and successful law student until her experience with Kozinski, which led her to withdraw from the legal field entirely. While this is one individual case, other women came forward saying that they were deterred from applying to clerkships with Kozinski due to his problematic behavior. These clerkships described by Taub were more than just job opportunities; they were much-needed stepping stones to significant careers. By creating a toxic work environment for women, he had not only harmed those who had directly experienced harassment from him, but also those who chose not to work for him and limited their opportunity due to his behavior. Taub quotes a study done by the Quality of Opportunity Project stating, “A research program run jointly by Stanford, Brown, and Harvard,

found that women were dramatically more likely to become inventors if, as children, they had encountered female inventors” (Taub, 2017). Taub’s point here being that exposure matters. If women see other women in positions of power or in certain occupations, they will be more likely themselves to imagine themselves having that same opportunity. This means that women do not even have to be in a similar field as those being harassed to feel the consequences. If women are avoiding certain occupations or specific positions due to harassment, young women will not be exposed to women in those fields and will therefore be less likely to enter into that environment themselves. The perpetuation of toxic behavior in these work environments creates a cultural precedent that allows for a space where “male dominated fields” are normalized. It makes it seem as though there is a natural divide that occurs in the work field when really it is this cycle of women avoiding harassment, which then becomes the societal norm that people are expected to imitate and follow. We will never know how many women could have been potential Supreme Court judges by now if women felt comfortable enough to work with Alex Kozinski. Our society will never know how our culture would be affected by an increase in women leadership and the potential policy implications that could be seen today.

While this is a clear example of how the patriarchy constructs our social systems (i.e. men and women are opposites, there is a natural divide, etc.), *The New York Times* makes no connection between these macro-implications and the sociological concept. Within this specific narrative, the author identifies how sexual assault is a key factor in our development of this idea of “male domination” (meaning only men are allowed in powerful roles), however, does not directly relate or connect this idea to the overarching and underlining theme of the patriarchy. In order to get at the root of the issue, *The New York Times* needs to be more willing to make these

explicit connections in order for their audience to understand the source of the issue. As Kimberle Crenshaw points out in her work on intersectionality, it is extremely important to provide labels to social problems (Crenshaw, 1989). Without providing a name or label, people will not know how to discuss or dissect the matter. This makes it all the more vital for *The New York Times* to clearly provide a link between these large trends to the sociological concepts in order to provide their readers with the tools to discuss and dismantle the topic at hand.

Positive Institutional Responses and Pushback

The New York Times cited several institutions that responded in a positive way when faced with issues of sexual assault. For example, when Ms. Andrea Ramsey was faced with sexual assault claims, the members of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee decided to withdraw their support from her campaign. The communications director for the D.C.C.C. stated, “Members and candidates must all be held to the highest standard. If anyone is guilty of sexual harassment or sexual assault, that person should not hold public office” (Fortin, 2017). There were other institutions that used similar tactics and statements, firing those who were accused and withdrawing their support. One organization actually noted the #MeToo Movement as part of their reason for reacting with repercussions to the offender saying, “Elizabeth Nolan Brown argued that NBC’s decision to fire Mr. Lauer reflected, in part, the increasing power of consumers — their voices amplified through social media...” (Bennett, 2017). This clearly shows the movement’s power and its cultural implications on what a workplace or organization will or will not stand for.

Another example is directly from Andrea Ramsey herself. When stepping down from her congressional campaign due to claims of sexual assault against her she said she felt that, “it is far more important to me that women are stepping forward to tell their stories and confront their harassers than it is to continue our campaign” (Fortin, 2017). Here Ms. Ramsey validates the efforts of the movement by not only recognizing the women coming forward, but taking action in stepping down from her Congressional efforts in order for the work these women have done to keep going forward.

There was not only a positive institutional response to the movement and its consequences (i.e. exposing offenders who were representing or working for that institution), but there was also positive pushback against the movement. April Reign, digital media strategist and creator of #OscarSoWhite, “If there is support for Rose McGowan, which is great, you need to be consistent across the board. All women stand for all women” (Garcia, 2017). This shows that *The New York Times* was not just covering the #MeToo Movement as a positive force, but one that was complex and full of faults that needed to be improved. This point is particularly important since *The New York Times* helped spark the #MeToo Movement. It could be thought that they would only show supportive rhetoric to a movement that positively acted on their work, but here it can be seen that they still view the movement through a critical lens.

Presence of Rape Myths

There were 179 instances of rape myths throughout the 31 articles. My coding of the rape myths started strictly as the four basic rape myths outlined by Ullman (2010); false allegations, rape is sex, it was consensual, or she asked for it. However, as my coding progressed I began to

see more subtle forms of rape culture that had potential to develop disbelief in victim-survivors. Within this section, I will breakdown *The New York Times* use of rape myths into three categories; the explicit rape myths that are mostly seen within quotes from abusers and their respective parties, calling out rape myths and rape culture, as well as the more subtle language used by *The New York Times* that may perpetuate implicit disbelief in victim-survivors.

Explicit Use of Rape Myths

Of the four rape myths that were coded for the purpose of this paper, three were found to be explicitly used as explanation for an abusers' action or behavior; rape is consensual, she asked for it, and the allegations are false. These myths were used both solely and in combination with one another. The explicit use of myths typically took the form of a quote from the abuser and their parties, typically lawyers or sources close to the subject, or within a summary of their previous statements on the matter. For example, when discussing offenders' reaction to being accused of sexual assault many of them employed the rape myth defined by Ullman (2010) of false allegations to create doubt among their audiences. In talking about Donald Trump's reaction to his sexual misconduct, *The New York Times* summarized Trump's previous comments stating, "...he has steadfastly denied all of the women's accusations, calling them "made-up stuff" and "totally fake news"" (Shear & Cochrane, 2017). Others such as, Woody Allen, spoke directly with *The New York Times* when stating his claim of false allegations saying, "No one wants to discourage abuse victims from speaking out, but one must bear in mind that sometimes there are people who are falsely accused and that is also a terribly destructive thing," Mr. Allen wrote in *The Times*..." (Hauser, 2017). These statements are used to create

disbelief in survivors and even frame the offender as a victim themselves. Due to this customary practice within the structure of journalism that asserts journalists should show both sides, by doing so they may be unintentionally perpetuating rape myths and rape culture. By including quotes from these abusers, who have already been cited as holding immense amounts of social, political, and monetary power, it has the potential to activate sympathy for the abuser in its audiences.

Another rape myth found within my quotes from an offender fell somewhere in between “rape is consensual” and “they deserved it” (Ullman, 2010). In a Facebook post created by Associate Deputy Attorney General Andrew D. Leonie, he states, “Aren’t you tired of all the pathetic ‘me too’ victim claims? If every woman is a ‘victim’, so is every man. If everyone is a victim, no one is. Victim means nothing anymore” (Astor, 2017). Within this statement, Mr. Leonie delegitimizes any victim-survivors’ claim of victimhood. He is also claiming that when a victim-survivor claims their victimhood, it instantly means that the man (in this particular statement man insinuates the victim-survivors’ offender) is also a victim. He then went on and linked an article titled, “Can We Be Honest About Women?” by D.C. McAllister in which she writes that women need to own up to their role in sexual assault. She states that women, “love the sexual interplay they experience with men...We can’t assume women are hapless damsels in distress horrified by how they’re objectified” (Astor, 2017). This is making the argument that men are not at fault because according to her women enjoy being objectified by men and if they did not, they would say something because they are not “hapless damsels in distress”. While this may be true in certain instances, it does not acknowledge the structures and institutions that have propelled these oppressive and patriarchal ideologies forward. The idea that women use or enjoy

the male gaze is in part because our society rewards those who do with culturally valued capital such as powerful jobs, higher income, social connections, etc. By not acknowledging the cultural framework that lies within this system, it removes the context and reasoning behind why women feel like they have to choose to engage and embrace this type of behavior and ideology. It also assumes that all women have the power and privilege to stand up against this abuse as well as disregards any of the other systems of silencing at play.

The rape myth of false allegations was also seen across genders. One of the few claims of sexual assault that was brought to light against a woman during this time-frame was Andrea Ramsey, a woman from Kansas running for a congressional seat. It was claimed by the victim-survivor that Ramsey had fired him after he refused to engage in an intimate relationship with her. Ms. Ramsey responded in *The New York Times* by simply saying, “That is a lie” (Fortin, 2017). Again, what is interesting to note about this particular case is while Ramsey employed a rape myth in her response, she was one of the only offenders to state something positive about the claims against them stating, “...It is far more important to me that women are stepping forward to tell their stories and confront their harassers than it is to continue our campaign” (Fortin, 2017). While this data point was used earlier when discussing positive institutional response, I think it is interesting to bring up in this context because it shows how gendered responses can be even to sexual assault. While Ms. Ramsey did employ a rape myth, her intersectional perspective as a woman made it so that she was the only offender to explicitly state the importance of her stepping aside. It also shows the pressure and influence the patriarchal framework has on the response to claims of sexual assault from a woman. Because Ms. Ramsey is a woman, she is not allowed the same kind of mistakes and/or reaction of outrage

and aggression to claims against her as the men who are accused during this time. She has to be empathic, understanding, and compassionate even when it comes to defending her character and career.

Calling Out Rape Myths

The other way in which *The New York Times* employed rape myths was when they were critiquing their use and educating the public. One specific example of this comes from “The ‘Click’ Moment: How the Weinstein Scandal Unleashed a Tsunami” by Jessica Bennett, where she reflected on the cultural implications of the #MeToo Movement. She stated, “Maybe it’s reflective of a specific period in the assault world where we often talk about how we incorrectly interpret silence as consent...” (Bennett, 2017). Here Bennett is clearly calling out the rape myth of rape as consensual sex and is asking the audience to reevaluate this myth. In this moment, the presence of rape myth in the article is positive because it is identifying its problematic nature.

Implicit Disbelief in Survivors: Allegations, Alleged, Accusations, and Accuser

The code that had by far the most data points was the subtle use of language that may imply disbelief in victim-survivors. Out of the 179 accounts of rape myths and culture, 115 of those were presence of subtle language that may perpetuate disbelief in survivors. Throughout almost every article, *The New York Times* uses the word “allegations” in reference to the sexual assaults and harassment that survivors have faced. The use of the words allegations, alleged, allegedly, and accusations are all used to respect and uphold the process created by our criminal justice system. While there is no written rule in journalism, it is customary for reporters to write

that someone is innocent until they have been formally found guilty in a court of law. This also ensures that *the New York Times* is not tried for libel. So, while these words may be protecting the rights of the offender as well as the journalistic institution, they unfortunately may also be creating doubt and uncertainty when discussing victim-survivors accounts of sexual violence and assault. An allegation is “an assertion unsupported and by implication regarded as unsupportable” (Merriam Webster, n.d.). With the use of the word allegation, it makes it seem as though these victim-survivors’ experiences are not supported and “unsupportable.” The word of these victim-survivors’ are not enough to support a claim. What I found most problematic was the use of the word “accuser.” This not only brings doubt into the story of victim-survivor, but labels them with doubt.

While it is paramount to keep the integrity of our legal system by maintaining the idea of innocence until proven guilty, I wonder if there is a way to uphold that idea without the counter attack or implications of the victim-survivor. While the United States legal system is built on this binary system of guilty and not guilty, there are other systems that have more of a spectrum. For instance, Scotland has three verdicts; guilty, not proven, and not guilty (Bray, 2005). Not proven is the verdict that the jury chooses if there is evidence of wrongdoing, but not enough to be convicted. To begin, I think this is a much more comprehensive system than our current system in the United States, but I also think this label of not proven could be used for those who have claims against them prior to the result of their trial. I think that the labels of “not proven” or “person in question” may allow more room for belief in victim-survivors. It puts the questioning on the offender rather than the victim-survivor. This could then extend to other descriptors such, “questioned, questioner, questioning, etc.” Here I am suggesting not that the media or the legal

system rid the words “allegations, alleged, accused, or accuser” all together, for they serve a practical purpose, but to have a gentle reconsideration of words that could be used in place of these in order to ensure victim-survivors are not discredited before the jury has reached a verdict.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Overall, while I think it can be said that *The New York Times* had some of the best coverage of the #MeToo Movement due to their ability to empower the voices of the victim-survivors and recognize the many systemic elements that allowed for this type of abuse, it still had potentially negative impacts through the overshadowing of victim-survivors without power and privilege, oppositional statements to the experience of victim-survivors, and the subtle language of disbelief in victim-survivors. While it may be at the fault of outdated journalism practices and the limits of the legal system, it is at the potential downfall of victim-survivors experiences being invalidated, overlooked, and undermined. I think that what *The New York Times* needs to consider is the impact of including explicit rape myths, the inclusion of subtle language that could lead to disbelief in victim-survivors, as well as making more of an effort to directly connect the systemic trends they are noting to the sociological issue or concept at hand (i.e. the patriarchy, capitalism, etc.). By excluding this type of language as well as more explicitly connecting these issues to sociological framework, *The New York Times* would be giving their audience the tools to break down rape culture and potentially prevent its perpetuation within their media.

Now, in 2020, we see that the symbol of offenders within the #MeToo Movement, Harvey Weinstein, has been convicted of 2 out of 5 charges of sexual assault. Weinstein was charged with one count of first degree rape, two counts of predatory sexual assault, one count of third degree rape, and one count of first-degree criminal sexual act. He was only found guilty on the last two charges, which are considered the least severe of all the charges (Dwyer & Romo, 2020). While this is in some terms still a “win” for the #MeToo Movement and absolutely for the

victim-survivors who saw their cases brought to justice, it is important to remember that just because one offender and his system were exposed and dismantled does not mean that the issue of sexual assault has been solved. Just because we elected a black President does not mean racism has been abolished. Just because we have taken down a toxic and destructive offender does not mean sexual assault does not exist anymore. There are still so many victim-survivors facing issues of sexual assault and harassment. While our awareness and cultural rhetoric surrounding sexual assault has increased, these issues are just as prevalent today as they were on October 5, 2017.

Chapter 6: Limitations and Further Research

Limitations

Due to the amount of coverage of the #MeToo Movement, specifically within *The New York Times*, it made it difficult to make significant progress within the timeframe causing more current articles to be left out of my analysis. The 31 articles I coded only took place during the timeframe of October 5, 2017-December 21, 2017. This means it was also difficult to comment on any extreme shift in narrative by *The Times* because the window of analysis was so small. Also, due to the limited amount of time to conduct my research and analysis, I had to limit the amount of articles to only 31 while the other 29 pieces were used as background references due to changes in my methodology. Another thing to consider is that there were articles dealing with similar and even specific subject matter that were not coded because they did not explicitly mention the #MeToo Movement. For example, there were multiple articles surrounding President Trump's sexual assault allegations that were not coded because they did not mention the movement. This means that there are potential data points missing in the overarching implications of the movement, however, for clarity and structure of analysis it was vital to omit those articles. Finally, I think it is important to note that because the research surrounding the #MeToo Movement is so new that all of my data is preliminary in nature. Everything that was found within this specific content analysis are only some first incites into beginning cultural implications of the movement and suggestions on where next research should follow.

Further Research

Rape Culture Embedded in Our Legal System

I think it is important that researchers look deeply at the structure of our legal system and analyze if it is fully and comprehensively supporting victim-survivors. While those accused have a right to a fair trial, the justice system needs to be evaluating and maintaining that this system is providing that same right to victim-survivors (even if it comes down to doing a critical analysis of their semantics). This means research supporting this system needs to be as up to date as possible and refounded regularly. I would also suggest that the legal system look into more restorative justice efforts seen on some college campuses for inspiration and insight on how they might go about trying cases of sexual assault in a way that could potentially provide the facilitation of more healing to both parties.

Government Support of Rape Culture

Another factor that I believe needs further analysis are the effects and implications of seeing large institutional support of sexual assault, specifically from our government. While this type of governmental support of rape culture was seen several times throughout my research, including presence of rape myths in quotes from the White House and the incident written by Stolberg (2017) surrounding settlement payments made by the House for Congressmen accused of sexual assault, there have been several large societal events that have occurred regarding governmental support and perpetuation of rape culture that I believe need specific analysis. The three specific instances include 1) President Trump's *Access Hollywood* tape 2) Christine Blasey Ford's testimony against Supreme Court Judge Brett Kavanaugh 3) The 24 claims of sexual assault against President Trump (Pearson, Gray, & Vagianos, 2019).

President Trump's infamous *Access Hollywood* tape is specifically interesting to look at because this tape was circulated prior to his election in 2016. Researchers need to question and look at the implications of a society that not only dismisses the objectification and diminution of women, but also rewards it. It would also be interesting to look at if and how sexual assault reporting was affected in 2016-2017 due to the increase in promotion and perpetuation of rape myths and rape culture. The #MeToo Movement came about after the circulation of this tape, so it would also be interesting to see if and how public opinion has changed surrounding that video now that sexual assault and harrassment has become more of a concern in America.

Then there is the case of Christine Blasey Ford and Brett Kavanaugh. Christine Blasey Ford was what many define as "the perfect" victim-survivor. For one, she is a white, upper-middle class, highly educated professional. She also had documented evidence that she had talked about the event with others prior to the case. She remained clear and calm throughout her testimony, but yet not unemotional. She used science to explain her answers. She asked questions to make sure she was fully answering their questions. She was honest when she did not remember a detail about her story. Followed by Brett Kavanaugh's testimony that was full of disgust and outrage that a woman would speak up about her experience. It was not just Mr. Kavanaugh that expressed this sentiment, but also Senators, most memorably Senator Kelsey Graham, who were verbally and physically enraged by the claims made against Mr. Kavanaugh. In the end, Brett Kavanaugh was voted into the Supreme Court. So what does it reflect to our society when there is a reaction of anger when a woman steps forward? And of course what does it reflect when such an influential institution then rejects and ignores these claims? And then

promotes the accused? What happens when the systematic oppression is clearly displayed for all of America to see?

Finally, I separate the sexual assault claims against Trump from the initial *Access Hollywood* video due to the fact that when the majority of these claims received public attention, he was supported by one of the most influential institutions in America, the White House. While holding arguably the most powerful position in America, Mr. Trump claimed that the experiences of sexual assault in question were “fake news” (Amatulli, 2017). He was then supported by the White House when press secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, confirmed the White House’s official position was that these women were lying (Amatulli, 2017). Here the rape myth of false allegations is explicitly present. So, again, what does it mean to have such an influential institution perpetuate these problematic rape myths and therefore rape culture?

Devastating Costs

Finally, I think something that is important to analyze is why it takes such devastating costs for our society to listen to victim-survivors. For instance, it took the suicide of a 16 year old girl, Amina Filali, in Morocco for lawmakers to change their problematic policy that exonerated rapists if they married the victim-survivor they assaulted (Sengupta, 2017). While Filali’s suicide sparked a movement of women and a serious policy change in Morocco and other subsequent countries, it came at an extremely devastating cost. Even looking at the #MeToo Movement, why did it take 10 years for our society to pay attention to concerns Tarana Burke and many others have been voicing for decades? Why do the 24 women making claims against Trump feel the need to have to renew their claims because they were not given the attention they deserve? One

of the quotes that I circled, underlined, and bolded a thousand times over during my analysis was when one woman said, “She is waiting for an important moment: “When are we going to start believing people the first time?” (Bennett, 2017). This being said, I think future scholars should analyze if the likelihood to believe in victim-survivors has changed at all since the #MeToo Movement. Within those results there could be serious implications on if our culture has truly shifted to believe in victim-survivors.

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