Erin Brown

Professor Wood

WMNST 492W

4/13/21

The Politics for Survivors of Sexual Violence: A Critique of the #MeToo Movement

Introduction:

The hashtag "MeToo" went viral online when actress Alyssa Milano tweeted on October

15th, 2017, "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet"

(Gill 1). The tweet went viral with Alyssa Milano quickly giving credit to Tarana Burke, a Black

women who created the phrase #MeToo and had been leading sexual violence activism for many

years (Gill 1). In the following days, twitter would become flooded with accounts of sexual

violence, showing many people, for the first time, the trauma of violence:

> @colecat06: Me too. There shouldn't be so many of us, but there are. Let them hear us,
> we're silent no more. #MeToo (October 15, 2017, 9:21 pm)

> @LJonasDaughter: #metoo tried to figure out how to explain it with the character
> restriction. Decided #metoo said enough (October 15, 2017, 8:28 pm)

> @LieutenantDainty: #MeToo because while I'm not ready to share my story, I can be
> strong enough to admit that it happened. (October 16, 2017, 7:15 pm)

> @JennyS38: #MeToo brings so many emotions right now . . . But one overwhelming
> emotion is admiration towards the people who have stood up and shared their experiences

so that everyone will realize this problem is real and can't be buried and ignored.

(October 16, 2017, 8:08 pm) (Clark-Parsons 9).

The initial flood of #MeToo tweets acknowledged the pain and trauma of sexual violence with the simple words "Me Too". For the first time, survivors were able to be visible without having to bear the details of their trauma. The hundreds of thousands of stories that erupted over Twitter were heartbreaking and the hashtag caught people's attention. Sexual violence began to be viewed as systemic issue. Suddenly, the statistics that 1 in 6 American women will become a victim of sexual violence in their lifetime became more real (*Scope of the Problem: Statistics* RAINN 1). The #MeToo became popularized as a feminist tool of resistance. And it also quickly became contested online. People on twitter began to point out problems with some survivors still being silenced:

@jennyanthro: A reminder—#MeToo might not appear on all your social media feeds because survivors might still be virtually connected to their abusers (October 16, 2017, 2:28 pm)

@bnack: if you see some women not posting #metoo they've probably been harassed but feel silenced by a society that often punishes the woman who was harassed and not the man who harassed her (October 16, 2017, 8:00 am) (Clark-Parsons 11).

Just because the hashtag "Me Too" existed did not mean that all survivors were visible. Marginalized survivors still struggled to be visible. The #MeToo also became a contested movement over its politics of visibility. The movement was founded by Tarana Burke, a woman of color, and it was initially co-opted by white feminists:

@chisuleyman: As important as #MeToo has been, remember the movement only took

off when rich white women spoke out. Women of color have been vocal for a long long

time but no one cared. Realize what that says about your communities. (November 11,

2017, 8:11 am)

@VenkaylaH: A black woman launched this movement & white women tried to take

credit for it until people made it clear that Tarana Burke was the creator. #MeToo is

supposed to center the marginalized, not the privileged who have access to adequate

resources. (December 6, 2017, 8:13 am) (Clark-Parsons 12).

The politics of visibility and inclusion only grew more contested on Twitter when people called

out #MeToo for not being inclusive to men or LGBTQIA+ individuals:

@ItsNathanielT: It's interesting that people assume that no men have #MeToo stories.

We have also experienced these things. (October 16, 2017, 3:47 am)

@JinPossible1: I feel uncomfortable adding my #MeToo because I am not a woman, but

trans and non-binary people need a voice, too, so here I am. (October 16, 2016, 1:14 am)

(Clark-Parsons 12).

#MeToo started out as one tweet and quickly erupted into a whole movement that became

complex. The tweets above reflect the problems faced by victims of sexual violence and how

they initially interacted with #MeToo. Throughout my paper, I intend to explore how #MeToo

impacts survivors of sexual violence. The first section of my paper focuses on analyzing if the

#MeToo movement has changed public awareness about sexual violence. I outline my argument

by providing a background on feminist activism during the second wave, with an emphasis on

consciousness raising circles. And then, I connect second wave sexual violence activism to the movement to prevent sexual assault on college campuses. Next, I give a brief background of the #MeToo movement and the events that led to the viral tweet by Alyssa Milano. I integrate a neoliberal feminist critique arguing that the #MeToo movement is really motivated by politics of visibility and ignores marginalized voices.

This leads me to my next research question which focuses on how the experiences of various survivors have been reflected in the #MeToo movement. I start this section by introducing Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, and stating how I will apply this theoretical lens to Black women victims and LGBTQIA+ victims. I use the "Mute R. Kelly Movement" as a case study to exemplify the marginalization of Black women survivors of sexual violence. Next, I critique the #MeToo movement by commenting on its emphasis on cisgender heterosexual rape tropes which erases the accounts of LGBTQIA+ victims. In my final section of the paper, I explore if increased awareness of sexual violence has led to justice for survivors of sexual violence. I analyze the frame of "justice" by looking at the burdens of public testimony for sexual assault victims and the intense public backlash to #MeToo that resulted in victim blaming. I conclude that section by acknowledging the failed criminal justice system and theorize a new radical approach for accountability—restorative and transformative justice.

The purpose of this feminist paper is to examine how the #MeToo movement has impacted victims of sexual violence in the United States. I outline my argument on the impact of the #MeToo movement on survivors of sexual violence by organizing my paper around three central research questions: *How has the #MeToo movement changed awareness about gendered violence?, How have the experiences of victims/survivors been reflected in the #MeToo*

movement?, and Has increased awareness of sexual violence led to justice for survivors of

sexual violence?

How has the #MeToo movement changed awareness about gendered violence?

In order to understand the viral power of the #MeToo movement it is essential to understand feminist discourse about violence before #MeToo. I begin this section by briefly outlining the impact of consciousness raising in the second-wave feminist movement and how it generated widespread awareness about rape. Then, I transition to the rise of activism on college campuses in response to sexual violence and I briefly touch on Title IX regulations. Next, I give a brief summary of the beginning of the #MeToo movement with the viral tweet by Alyssa Milano and how a movement started in response to the serious allegations against Harvey Weinstein. I touch briefly on the misattribution of the #MeToo movement to Milano and the overshadowing of its original founder, Tarana Burke. But this is explored in depth later in the paper. Another section also measures public attitudes about sexual violence before and after #MeToo to show a change in public perception of sexual assault. Lastly, this section contains an important neoliberal feminist critique of #MeToo that is framed around the politics of visibility and the economies of visibility.

The Feminist Response Before #MeToo: Consciousness Raising and The Beginnings of Rape Crisis Centers

The second wave feminist movement that began in 1960s and 1970s used consciousness raising as a feminist tool to address deep-seeded social inequities. The act of consciousness

raising was born out of women's grassroots experience sharing (Abrams 5). Consciousness raising created a feminist perspective around sexual violence:

> Through consciousness raising and iconic feminist literature, rape and sexual violence came to be understood as a means of male control over women and the product of a patriarchal society. This consciousness raising process led feminist to identify rape as a crisis that demanded a feminist response. Feminist accounts of rape gave voice to the physical and emotional trauma of rape that had not been accounted for in the medical, mental, and criminal justice systems (Abrams 6).

Consciousness raising circles were a key part of the second wave feminist movement that allowed women to see rape as a part of the system of patriarchy. The shift in consciousness raising as a tool of feminist action enabled the creation of a feminist response.

The second wave of the feminist movement in the US, during the 1960s and 1970s, also raised awareness around gendered violence, particularly domestic violence. Consciousness-raising circles challenged popular stereotypes about how rape occur ed:

> The collective sharing of experiences eroded the assumption that sexual violence was typically physically violent, rare and perpetrated by a stranger outside the presumed safety of the private sphere. In particular, they revealed that rape was perpetrated predominantly by husbands, partners or family members, and therefore these experiences were 'not exotic, quite legal and unavoidable for too many of us (R. Loney-Howes 23).

At this time, rape in the context of marriage was not recognized as a criminal offense (R. Loney Howes). The consciousness raising circles helped women understand the social and political contexts in which rape happened. Consciousness raising helped individual women organize around this issue. Women stopped thinking it was their fault, and then found other women with

similar experiences. The consciousness raising circles worked as both political organizing and healing. To quote the famed phrase from the second wave, "the personal became political". Rape went from being a private shameful form of violence to a systematic and institutional problem that needed to be addressed.

In 1973, the National Organization of Women (NOW) passed a resolution to form the NOW Rape Task Force (R. Loney-Howes 22). The goals of the task force were to push for legislative reforms, improve institutional responses to sexual violence, and challenge attitudes that support rape culture (R. Loney-Howes 23). The NOW Task Force was in response to the prevalence of rape crisis centers that began forming in cities (Abrams 6). Feminists created rape crisis centers to provide support to rape victims. The centers were structured around, "woman-centered, autonomous decision-making in which staff supported women in their choices" (Abrams 6). By 1974, rape crisis centers existed in forty-three states and by 1976, there were 400 rape crisis centers across the U.S. (Abrams 8). Before the 1970s, only police, hospitals, and prosecutors responded to rape—the second wave feminist movement framed rape in a way to put the victim's needs first (Abrams 8). The rise of rape crisis provided important psychological services to victims of sexual violence but the populations they reached varied upon race.

The book *Rape Work* by Patricia Martin comments on the difference in treatment for white women and women of color, "…nearly all rape workers in Florida were white and women of color received less appropriate treatment in medical care after a rape" (Abrams 34). A significant problem with rape crisis centers is, "…Of the number who accessed rape crisis centers, a staggering 91% were white" (Abrams 34). In the second wave, rape crisis centers were framed as the ultimate feminist response moved to addressing sexual violence. But those resources were really only provided to white women. This trend also reflects exclusion of Black women in

second wave feminist movements. Patricia Martin notes why women of color do not rely on rape

crisis centers:

> Women of color overwhelmingly believe that rape crisis centers are a white woman's
>
> place—staffed by and for white victims. They worry that the center staff does not
>
> understand their needs, will not follow their preferences with regard to prosecution and
>
> worry generally about the impact on their communities of color" (Abrams 35).

The discomfort for women of color at rape crisis centers also reflects a trend in feminist

movements of failing to acknowledge the different barriers women of color face. And sexual

violence and the process of reporting and processing trauma will look different for Black women

due to social ideas in their community. In order to properly contextualize the #MeToo

movement, it is important to understand the women of color who have been victimized by sexual

violence have been largely ignored by anti-rape social movements for a very long time.

From Rape Crisis Centers to Campus Sexual Assault

The feminist consciousness raising movement in the 1970's transition to widespread calls

for reform on college campuses in the 1980's (Abrams 12). College campuses began to have

student run anti-rape groups which connected with community crisis centers (Abrams 12). The

prevalence of campus sexual assault has lead framing of a "campus sexual assault crisis" that

normalizes campus rape culture (Abrams 14). The rape culture that exists on college campuses

always generated public outcry but the federal government did not intervene until 2011 under the

Obama Administration (Abram 14). In 2011, Obama issued guidance to college campuses under

the "Dear Colleague Letter" which stated that, "sexual violence, interferes with students' right to

receive an education free from discrimination and directed colleges to take immediate and

effective steps to end sexual violence" (Abrams 14). Obama created laws to protect victims of

sexual violence under Title IX (Abrams 14). This was the first time the federal government had really intervened and taken a huge step to address sexual assault on a college campus. Obama's policies were seen as a victory for survivors of sexual assault but all of this was repealed under the Trump administration. Sexual violence on college campuses would remain hotly contested and justice for victims on college campuses has still not been attained. The transition to a focus on college campuses reflects how the social discourse about sexual violence has evolved. Since the beginning of feminist consciousness raising, the public has began to understand how prevalent sexual assault is in everyday life. But general the public still did not understand the horror and trauma experienced by a sexual assault victim. The shift in public understanding did not begin until the fall of 2017 when the #MeToo started trending.

The Start of the Hashtag "MeToo"

A movement erupted on Twitter in October of 2017. Hollywood Actress, Alyssa Milano tweeted, "Me Too. Suggested by a friend: If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'MeToo' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem" (Fileborn 3). The hashtag was used over 12 million times in the first 24 hours (Fileborn 3). Alyssa Milano's tweet was in response to the groundbreaking story about sexual harassment allegations against Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein (Fileborn 3). *New York Times* investigative journalists, Meghan Twohey and Jodi Kantor had published a piece chronicling years of sexual harassment that had been covered up by Weinstein's lawyers and extended into the highest levels of the Hollywood elite.

In the book *She Said,* Megan Twohey and Jodi Kantor explain the steps taken to break the Weinstein story. When Twohey and Kantor first started their investigative journalism they found very few women who were willing to go on the record about Weinstein. Even high-profile

and powerful Hollywood actresses like Ashley Judd and Gwenyth Paltrow were not =willing to

go on the record. If famous privileged white women were not going to out Weinstein—what

lower level employees would be open to taking a step out against Weinstein? (Kantor 31).

Weinstein was the one of the largest figures in Hollywood. He had the power to make or break

someone's career. He was viewed as having positive interactions with women; he released the

groundbreaking documentary *The Hunting Ground* about rape on college campuses, donated to

female Democratic candidates and to Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign (Kantor 9).

Weinstein's positive relations with women made him look like a man who could never be

accused of sexual harassment. Speaking out against Weinstein in Hollywood would mean the

end of an actresses career and young, aspiring film stars did not want to take that risk. Weinstein

was considered such a powerful figure in Hollywood, he was viewed as untouchable.

When Kantor and Twohey interviewed Ashley Judd about sexual harassment she

revealed the power imbalances that made sexual harassment so pervasive, "He was a powerful

boss who used the pretext of business meetings to try to pressure women into sexual

interactions, Judd said, and no one did anything about it" (Kantor 33). Weinstein exerted his

power over women on the "casting couch" and dangled job opportunities in return for sexual

favors. Gwenyth Paltrow describes the implications of the sexual harassment she experienced

while working with Weinstein, "The more successful her partnership with Weinstein became, the

less she felt she could say about the ugly episode as the start of their collaboration. 'I had this

incredible career there, so I could never in a way traverse back over what happened…I was

expected to keep the secret" (Kantor 40). Paltrow's initial reluctance to speak out against

Weinstein shows the power dynamics between perpetrators and victims. She felt like if she spoke

out she was punishing the person who made her career. Paltrow shows the internalized shame

that many victims of sexual assault experience. She felt like she was betraying Weinstein by holding him accountable because he held power over her boss. The women who Weinstein had abused were forced into a code of silence through fear of ruin or retribution. Kantor and Twohey realized the system of fear and NDA's related to Weinstein was so powerful that the Weinstein story would have to be broken with legal evidence not just victim's accounts:

> What is your strategy for getting these women on the record?...Why is it their burden to publicly tell uncomfortable stories where they had never done anything wrong?...Even if the reporters managed to persuade one or two women, that could lead to the old, 'he said, she said' problem. The journalists were starting to realize the Weinstein story would have to be broken with evidence: on the record accounts, ideally, but also the overwhelming force of written, legal, and financial proof (Kantor 48).

It would take years of examining records and interviews to gain a repeated pattern of misconduct to truly hold Weinstein accountable. Weinstein abused his power as the "kingmaker" in Hollywood that no one was willing to call him out for sexual assault/harassment. The Weinstein story shows the dangers of a patriarchal culture that silences victims and upholds the

The journalistic process to hold Weinstein accountable reveals that victim statements are not widely accepted as a standard of evidence. The publication of the Weinstein story started a toppling of powerful men in Hollywood. The influence of the breaking news story about Harvey Weinstein has been called, "The Weinstein Effect" (Leung 7). The toppling of Harvey Weinstein lead to the downfall of other Hollywood celebrities such as, "Dustin Hoffman, Kevin Spacey, Louis C. K., Ben Affleck, Brett Ratner, James Toback, Matt Lauer, and Charlie Rose" (Leung 7). Weinstein's fall from power started the public discussion about how society treats victims of sexual assault. But it also left a lot of unanswered questions. Twohey and Kantor commented on

the public divide that emerged out of Weinstein, "There was a lack of process or clear enough rules. The public did not fully agree on the precise meaning of words like harassment or assault, let alone how businesses or schools should investigate or punish them" (Kantor 188). The public discourse debated the punishment for perpetrators of sexual assault and how far the #MeToo movement should go. Some individuals felt that the #MeToo movement should not "ruin men's lives" or called the movement a "witch hunt". The debates about the #MeToo movement are still hotly contested today. But there has been a significant public opinion change about how society perceives sexual assault.

The Changes in Public Opinion about Sexual Violence Because of #MeToo

One of the most important outcomes in the #MeToo movement was the change in public opinion about sexual assault. A quantitative research study done by, feminist scholar Szekeres, aimed to measure views of sexual assault changed in response to the #MeToo movement. The study tracked views of sexual assault, defined as, "assessing opinions on false complaints and whether reporting assault is aimed at hurting men" (Szekeres 1). The study measured the opinions over a long period of time; twice before the #MeToo appeared online and twice after the peak of the #MeToo and six months later" (Szekeres 1). Szekeres found that compared to the baseline before the #MeToo movement; the peak of #MeToo showed that public dismissal of sexual assault was lower. And this trend continued for six months after the introduction of the #MeToo which suggests that the dismissal of sexual assault had become a normative view (Szekeres 1). Note the definition of "dismissal of sexual assault" means that the public does not readily dismiss sexual assault anymore and there is a recognition that it is a serious problem. This data shows that the #MeToo movement created a strong public acceptance that sexual violence is a serious issue. This public attitude did not exist before #MeToo started appearing on

the internet. The power of Twitter and the digital nature of the #MeToo movement changed

public awareness and also encouraged people to come forward with their own stories.

Neoliberalism, Popular Feminism, Politics of Visibility and Economies of Visibility in #MeToo

The emergence of the hashtag "Me Too" is another example of feminist hashtag activism

that has become popular with new media. Past hashtags include, "#bringbackourgirls,

#solidarityisforwhitewomen, to #yesallwomen, and #NotOkay" (Banet-Weiser, et-al, 1). The

power of the #MeToo movement is in the networked visibility on digital platforms. The #MeToo

movement was also aided by the rise of popular and neoliberal feminist platforms. Rosalind Gill

argues that the rise of popular feminism with neoliberal agendas have allowed grassroots

feminism to emerge as a "potent political force" (Banet-Weiser, et al, 1). The commodification

of feminism has allowed the movement to become more mainstream and also carry more

political force. This rise of popular feminism connects to how #MeToo lies at the center of

politics of visibility, economies of visibility, and the influence of popular and neoliberal

feminism. The influence of neoliberal and popular feminism explains the different types of

visibility within #MeToo.

In order to understand how the #MeToo became so popular, it is necessary to understand

how the theories popular feminism and neoliberalism created new typologies of feminism in the

21st century. Catherine Rottenberg coined the term neoliberalism to describe feminism that does

not disrupt mainstream markets or politics. Rottenberg argues that, "neoliberal feminism is one

in which the values and assumptions of neoliberalism—ever-expanding markets,

entrepreneurialism, a focus on the individual—are embraced, not challenged by feminism"

(Banet-Weiser, et al, 12). Under neoliberalism, feminist is not social justice oriented, instead it is

driven by capitalism and individualism, which distort its original intent. Rottenberg expands on how neoliberal ideas drive individuality in feminism:

> Since when feminism encourages individual women to focus on themselves and their own aspirations, it can be more easily be popularized, circulated, and capitalized in the market place. Neoliberal feminism is also an unabashedly exclusionary one, encompassing as it does only so-called aspirational women in its address. It thus reifies white and class privilege and heteronormativity, lending itself to neo-conservative and xenophobic agendas (Banet-Weiser, et al, 20).

The framework of neoliberalism which became popularized in the early 21st century connects to the rise of popular feminism. Suddenly, feminism has become a marketplace commodity. Sarah Banet-Weiser explores the rise of popular feminism in her book *Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny.* She provides an excellent framework to understand how feminism became a commodity.

In her book, Sarah Banet-Weiser defines popular feminism as a "media that is widely visible and accessible" (Banet-Weiser 9). She goes onto elaborate that the corporate-friendly popular feminism comes from an increased visibility in dominant economic spheres: a lack of female CEO's, a lack of female Hollywood directors, a lack of women in technology and media fields (Banet-Weiser 12). Banet-Weiser argues that the popular feminism she analyzes are popular because they call for more women to brought in, simply because they are women, and the inclusion of women becomes the solution for all feminist problems (Banet-Weiser 12). The popular feminism does not challenge deep structure of inequity, rather it attempts to solve the problem by simply making women more visible. An example of this is Sheryl Sandberg's best-

selling memoir *Lean In,* she attempts to motivate girls and women to overcome imposter syndrome by "leaning in" in order to become economically successful (Banet-Weiser 8). Here, Sandberg does not account for structural barriers that prevent many women from advancing in the workplace, especially women of color. Sandberg's definition of feminism is easy, palatable, and seems like it can help everyone—until it does not.

Popular feminism is also connected to markets and the theory of neoliberalism. Popular feminism makes some women more visible than others and it also continues to promote deep seeded structures of inequality around marginalized groups. Popular feminism connects to neoliberalism because companies have decided to take up women's issues in order to sell products—suddenly supporting women in sports and empowering girls becomes "trendy" and leads to more sales (Banet-Weiser 13). Now everyone wants to #playlikeagirl because Nike told us that empowering women in sports is important—even as Nike continues to make a lot of money off of their clothing but fail to adequately support their female athletes (Banet-Weiser 13). The rise of popular and neoliberal feminisms are important to understand because they explain why the #MeToo movement gained traction and became socially acceptable. Rottenberg argues that the embrace of popular feminism by Sherly Sandberg, Hollywood stars, and music celebrities like Beyonce, paved the way for #MeToo to gain widespread social acceptance (Banet-Weiser, et al, 20). Suddenly, feminism was more visible than ever.

The use of the hashtag connected to the word "Me Too" created a new digital campaign of feminist activism and the *politics of visibility*. Sarah Clark-Parsons argues that the #MeToo goes beyond the feminist idea of making the personal political by engaging in the politics of visibility, defined as, "a representational struggled aimed at exposing power so it might be

transformed" (Clark-Parsons 4). Here, Clark-Parsons argues that the sharing of #MeToo accounts challenges social norms about silence and undermines the structure of power in society. The power of the #MeToo would be described as "discursive activism because it is a collective action that, "promotes new grammars, new social paradigms through which individuals, collectivities, and institutions interpret social circumstances and devise responses to them" (Clark-Parsons 5). The politics of visibility and the discursive activism aim to challenge patriarchal norms about sexual violence by making the realities of sexual violence visible to every individual. Suddenly, a person cannot log onto twitter without seeing a #MeToo story. Samatha Thrift argues that the hypervisibility of the #MeToo allows the event to become a, "widely shared reference point for how we conceptualize and choose to narrate misogynist aggression and gender violence in American culture" (Clark-Parsons 5). The hypervisibility of #MeToo allows some survivors to come forward and share their stories. The feminist networks of visibility and discursive activism can be best seen through the tweets in response to #MeToo:

> 60 years old and I still have trouble saying it aloud. #MeToo" (October 15, 2017, 8:02 pm)
>
> @LieutenantDainty: #MeToo because while I'm not ready to share my story, I can be strong enough to admit that it happened" (October 16, 2017, 7:15 pm). (Clark-Parsons 10).

The text of the hashtag allowed victims of sexual assault to acknowledge their trauma without going into detail. But it also provided evidence for people to understand how sexual violence has been ignored:

> @JennyS38: #MeToo brings so many emotions right now . . . But one overwhelming emotion is admiration towards the people who have stood up and shared their experiences

so that everyone will realize this problem is real and can't be buried and ignored.

(October 16, 2017, 8:08 pm)

@RachelTGreene: To everyone who has a #MeToo story whether you're able to share it

or not—it's not your fault, you're not alone, and you're not "overreacting." (October 16,

2017, 5:37 am)

@hannahchoreo: To anyone saying #MeToo tweets are attention-seeking, you are the

reason women are afraid to speak up after being sexually assaulted. (October 15, 2017,

7:54 pm) (Clark-Parsons 15).

The tweets above mostly focus on women's reactions of experiences to the #MeToo. The politics

of visibility in #MeToo tweets is also linked the economies of visibility. Clark-Parsons defines

economies of visibility as, "individualist systems of exchange in which representation in

consumer culture is positioned as the height of empowerment" (Clark-Parsons 6). Feminist critic

Nancy Fraser highlights the problems with the politics of visibility and economies of visibility,

"Feminists emphasis on the symbolic power of discourse and performance leaves them highly

susceptible to commodification, recuperation, and depoliticization—especially in the absence of

strong social movements struggling for social justice" (Clark-Parsons 6). The desire to make a

message super visible often takes a strong social justice component out of the feminist messaging

and the message becomes politically ineffective. Nancy Fraser argues that in order for a feminist

message to be commodified and widely accepted it must lose its social justice lens. Clark-

Parsons expands on the economies of visibility in the #MeToo:

The most visible forms of #MeToo flow through the attention economy of commercial

media, where clicks, likes, ratings, and ad revenues are the primary goals and where

experiences as complex as sexual violence is easily simplified and commodified.

Moreover, because systems of inequality structure access to representation in the

marketplace, economies of visibility compound intersecting oppressions by further

marginalizing underprivileged groups, as seen in white women's domination of #MeToo

(Clark-Parsons 6).

One of the problems with economies of visibility is that it increases structural inequality. The

#MeToo movement was somewhat effective in the lens of political visibility—raising awareness

about sexual violence. But the economies of visibility explain why certain voices are not

popularized in the #MeToo media. The tweet below calls out the major problems with the tweets

in response to #MeToo, showing how the *economies of visibility* create inequality:

"@monaeltahawy: #MeToo is not about white women. It's about patriarchy—its

ubiquity, how it intensifies other oppressions such as racism, ableism, classism, etc. It

must not be exclusively about what powerful men do to white women nor which white

women say they're ok w/powerful men's "seduction." (January 14, 2018, 11:07 am)

(Clark-Parsons 15).

This tweet exemplifies the economics of visibility by directly calling out the other groups that

#MeToo ignores by focusing on white women. The economies of visibility prioritize white

women's accounts because they are more marketable. A popular feminist critique of #MeToo

suggests that accounts of sexual violence have become a commodity. The #MeToo movement

started out as a group networking moment to make victims of sexual violence visible. But the

movement has failed to challenge the structures of inequality and showcase marginalized voices. The overwhelming whiteness of the #MeToo movement highlights the economies of visibility that prioritize tweets by white women because they can be more easily commodified. The convergence of neoliberalism, popular feminism, and economies of visibility can explain how the #MeToo movement changed public perception and awareness about sexual violence but limited its scope by only making some individuals more visible than others.

The second-wave feminist consciousness raising started to generate outrage and awareness of rape in feminist circles. The movement started to work to change the perception of sexual violence and address rape at the community level through rape crisis centers. Then, the federal government started becoming more involved in addressing sexual violence at the executive level through Obama's "Dear Colleague Letter" which sought to address rape on college campuses. At the center of all of these movements, there was a lack of public understanding of the realities of sexual violence and the recovery for survivors. It was not until the #MeToo erupted on twitter that the public consciousness started to shift and more people became aware of the invisibility of sexual assault, the unfair justice systems for victims, and how sexual violence impacts different communities. The #MeToo was able to be successful because the feminist movement was popularized and deradicalized. Suddenly, feminism became "cool" and "trendy" which created the setting for #MeToo to become more socially accepted. As #MeToo became widely popularized the economies of visibility worsened. The questions over who became visible and who was not heard got worse.

How have the experiences of victims/survivors been reflected in the #MeToo movement?

One of the most important parts of the #MeToo movement is its commitment to center the voices of survivors of sexual violence. The survivor voices heard and unheard in popular culture vary. The #MeToo movement has been heavily criticized for centering white, cisgender, heterosexual women in the spotlight. In this section, I analyze the reactions of marginalized survivors in the #MeToo movement. I start by framing my argument with the critical theory of intersectionality to interpret the testimonies of Black women and queer individuals. My following sections focus on the underrepresentation of Black women in the #MeToo movement and the erasure of LGBTQIA+ survivors in the popular #MeToo movement. My aim is to expand upon the traditional white heterosexual narrative and shed a light on the lesser known accounts.

Kimberelé Crenshaw's Intersectionality

The feminist theory of intersectionality considers multiple forms of oppression, as experienced by Black women, to be equally weighed (Crenshaw 1). Kimberlé Crenshaw offers a broad definition of intersectionality in her groundbreaking essay *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity, Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.* Crenshaw argues that, "The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences" (Crenshaw 2). Crenshaw then theorizes that in order to address the shortcomings of identity politics one has to account for multiple intersections, "Indeed, factors I address only in part or not at all, such as class or sexuality, are often as critical in shaping the experiences of women of color. My focus on the intersections of race and gender only highlights the need to account for

multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (Crenshaw 5). The theory of intersectionality can be expanded to include multiple intersections such as race, gender, social class, education, disability, sexuality, and more.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, provides commentary on the critical intersection of race and gender. In Crenshaw's essay "Mapping the Margins" she explains how women of color are severely diminished in feminist and anti-racist practices:

> Feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of color have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains. Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when the practices expounds identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling" (Crenshaw 3).

Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality will be essential for understanding the voices that are marginalized in the #MeToo movement. The feminist movement will often prioritize the white heterosexual cisgender woman and minimalize other voices. Intersectionality was founded to articulate why black women face a double oppression but it can also be used to understand the marginalization of LGBTQ folks and other marginalized voices.

Black Women Voices Unheard in #MeToo

The phrase "Me Too" was first used by activist Tarana Burke. Activist and local community organizer, Tarana Burke started using the phrase "MeToo" in 2006 to help women of

color who experienced rape or sexual assault (Leung 2). Burke's activism focuses on women of color who need extra support in instances of sexual assault and abuse:

> What history has shown us time and again is that if marginalized voices of people of color, queer people, disabled people, poor people aren't centered in our movements then they tend to become no more than a footnote. I often say that sexual violence has no race, class, or gender, but the response does…Ending sexual violence and harassment will require every voice from every corner of the world. And it will require those whose voices are most often heard to find ways to amplify those voices that often go unheard (Johnson 1).

Burke's comments on the marginalized voices that were initially ignored in the beginnings of the #MeToo movement. But they are a very important criticism that can allow us to understand how race and class play out in public consciousness. When wealthy, popular white celebrities started to speak out about sexual assault they were able to bring the discussion to the national stage (Johnson 1). Burke started her activism in 2006 with largely no national platform. The public has largely ignored victims of sexual assault who are women of color or belong to marginalized groups. This disconnect is encapsulated in the delayed outrage over R. Kelly.

R. Kelly is a Grammy-award winning musician who for years sexually assaulted and abused women and underage girls (Leung 5). The general public did not learn about the extent of "R. Kelly's abuse until the release of the documentary *Surviving R. Kelly* which aired on Lifetime TV on January, 2019. Kelly's victims described the physical, mental, and sexual abuse that they had experienced for years (Leung 5). The documentary focuses on the public's mixed reaction of R. Kelly and how his prominence lead to his actions being overlooked and how he managed to avoid prosecution for charges of child pornography (Leung 5). The #MeToo

movement really took off in 2017 and prominent men in Hollywood began to fall in response to the Weinstein scandal. But R. Kelly did not face the same level of public scrutiny as Weinstein. The black female victims of Kelly struggled to get mainstream media attention even though their stories had come out 3 months before the Weinstein scandal broke (Leung 10). Initially, Kelly did not face severe public outrage, he still had a deal with RCR Records, toured and performed at concerts, and his music was widely played on radios (Leung 10). There is a huge disconnect between severity of Kelly's abuse and the delayed public reaction, especially when compared to how quickly Weinstein was shutdown once the allegations became public. The documentary *Surviving R. Kelly* offers an explanation:

> These families came forward, and were making desperate pleas to get their children back, to get their daughters back home and away from R. Kelly. We've been watching them since they came forward in 2017 to try various attempts to get the media attention but it doesn't take hold, and again I think that goes back to this idea that black girls don't matter. They don't matter enough, and it's proven over and over again (Leung 10).

The muted response to the disgusting abuse by R. Kelly reflects the way the public responded differently to Black women victims of sexual violence versus white women victims. Initially, white women from Hollywood provoked more outrage than the young black girl victims of R. Kelly. The erasure of Black women victims of sexual violence in popular media leads to their stories holding less space in the #MeToo movement.

The reason behind the lesser public outrage over the victims of R. Kelly goes is based on social perceptions of Black women, "We still don't socially perceive young Black women as innocent, as deserving of protection, somehow it's their fault. When the reality is that the problem isn't the girls, the problem is the predators" (Leung 11). Black women face a double

barrier as both people of color and women. Their identities intersect and that makes them face different social barriers in both the Black community and the feminist community.Part of the reason why there was a slower response to R. Kelly is the double-bind Black women face when deciding to speak out:

> They have to decide how their claims will affect the African American community as a whole or hinder the social progress of their racial community. And it is a double-edged sword if their grievances are made against a prominent African American man since they will be attacked by both African American women and the larger community for trying to tarnish the reputation of a symbolically uplifting role model (Leung 15).

Before the *Surviving R. Kelly* documentary came out there was a sentiment that the R. Kelly scandal was just an attempt to take down a successful Black man (Leung 16). It was not until a few years after #MeToo and the release of the documentary that public opinion started to shift. The public was able to really understand the victims personal testimonies and trauma which led to a shift. Prominent black Hollywood celebrities began to speak out against R. Kelly and eventually his record label did not renew his contract and his concerts were cancelled (Leung 19). The delayed outrage over R. Kelly encapsulates how a movement does not adequately respond to Black women survivors of sexual violence.

The failure of society to adequately address sexual violence experienced by Black women is also due to hypersexual jezebel stereotypes about Black women that originate from slavery. The control of Black women's bodies during slavery resulted in the creation of sexualized stereotypes about Black women. Dorothy Roberts, in her book *Killing the Black Body,* describes the image of the Jezebel which represented Black women as, "Not only was she governed by her erotic desires, but her sexual prowess led men to wanton passion" (Roberts 10). These horrific

images were used to justify the abuse of black women, "This construct of the licentious temptress served to justify white women's sexual abuse of Black women. The stereotype of Black women as sexually promiscuous also defined them as bad mothers" (Roberts 11). The hypersexualization of black women during slavery lead to years of abuse and exploitation by social systems. This resulted in the creation of myths of the "hypersexual" black women which is still holds prominence in culture today. The cultural myths about Black women influence public perceptions of Black women victims of sexual assault.

Over the course of a lifetime, 35% of Black women will experience some form of contact sexual violence (Black Women and Sexual Assault). Black women are less likely to report their assault to authorities and less likely to be believed due to the jezebel stereotype that originated during slavery (Black Women and Sexual Assault). According to The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community, for every Black women who reports rape, at least 15 Black women do not report (Black Women and Sexual Assault). The marginalization of Black women voices in the #MeToo movement is deeply connected with the history of state-sanctioned violence against Black Women in the United States.

This economy of visibility allows white women voices to be more popularized in the #MeToo movement while Black women are often pushed outside the mainstream framework. The initial erasure of Tarana Burke's work and the invisibility of the R. Kelly scandal highlight how Black women victims of sexual violence do not receive the same level of attention as white women victims. Their voices go unheard and sometimes disappear. Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality also provides a theoretical framework to analyze the marginalization of Black women victims of sexual violence. The inequitable experience of victims of sexual assault in the

#MeToo movement can also be reflected in the marginalization of LGBTQ folks who have been left out of the popular #MeToo narratives.

The Erasure of LGBTQ Stories in #MeToo

One of the largest critiques of the #MeToo movement is the media reporting that has largely focused on cisgender heterosexual instances of sexual assault and ignored issues faced by queer people. The primary focus on the heterosexual violence narrative isolates queer people who may experience sexual assault from both the heterosexual and queer community. Jess Ison offers a theory about the public misconception that violence does not happen in the queer community, "This is often because of homophobia and heternormativity. LGBTQIA people, our lifestyles, relationships and sex lives were historically—and often still—seen as illegitimate. The problem then is that if we are not legitimate from the outset, how could the violence we enact be seen? (Ison 153). The popular feminist discourse focuses on cisgender men committing sexual violence against cisgender women. The queer experience is often left out of popular feminist culture because not all feminism includes the queer experience. Ison also goes onto add that even though there is erasure of LGBTQIA+ violence, the queer population still experience sexual violence at higher rates compared to heterosexual people (Ison 153). Ison goes onto elaborate how the norms in the queer community do not fit in with the common heterosexual romantic tropes which most people understand in relation to sexual violence (Ison 154).

Ison argues that queer people have many varied relationships, and there is not enough research on sexual assault that occurs in non-traditional queer relationships (Ison 154). This oversight does not provide context in which queer sexual violence occur, because queer communities exist differently than heteronormative communities, sexual violence will not fit heteronormative tropes (Ison 154). This further erases narratives and statistics that can help

understand sexual violence within the queer community. One of the problems that adds to the erasure of LGBTQ people in #MeToo is the lack of resources for queer populations.

Most sexual assault services are geared towards heterosexual white women. This promotes heteronormativity in the survivor experience and creates concerns in the queer community that the services will be homophobic or transphobic. Transgender rights campaigner Sarah McBride articulates some of her concerns that transgender survivors of violence face:

> There's this baseline of disbelief that survivors of sexual assault writ large face…And then there's this extra unique barrier that transgender people face around this notion that…we are somehow so undesirable that people wouldn't sexually assault us, which is a fundamental misunderstanding of both who transgender people are and how sexual assault works (Ison 155).

The misconceptions and lack of accessible resources for the queer community lead to their violence rates disappearing from popular media. The services for survivors do not always have a broad understanding of the diverse relationships in the LGBTQIA+ community (Ison 156). And this leads to the silencing of queer survivors of violence. They are unable to receive support services and they will be unable to process their trauma or feel like they can fit into popular #MeToo culture.

Ison also argues that queer populations face queerphobia and victim-blaming when a sexual assault perpetrated by a queer person become public. She gives the example of Avital Ronnell, a well known philosopher and lesbian who was accused of sexual assault by her male graduate students (Ison 159). Ronnell attempted to defend herself by arguing she was acting like a sexually fluid queer woman:

Our communications which the victim-survivor now claims constituted sexual

harassment—were between two adults a gay man and a queer woman…as well as a

penchant florid and campy communications arising from our common academic

background and sensibilities…These communications were repeatedly invited, responded

to and encouraged by him over a period of three years (Ison 160).

Ison argues that Ronnell uses queerness to justify her actions and, "calls on the deviance

narrative that has been used to oppress queers who transgress homonormativity" (Ison 160). Ison

argues that for queers, there is no confusion that a perpetrator can be a lesbian and the survivor a

gay man (Ison 160). But heteronormative feminists have a harder time grappling with the idea

that a lesbian can sexually assault a gay man. Sexual assault in the queer community will

somehow appear different because it involves queer people—and this view of "different" renders

these survivors stories invisible. The heteronormative framing of sexual assault renders queer

experiences invisible because the relationships in the queer community appear different than

heteronormative relationships.

Queer theorist QJ Thomas offers a critique of the #MeToo movement grounded in queer

theory. Thomas's theory argues that the public desexualization imperative that started during the

#MeToo movement harms queer citizens sexual expression in public life. Thomas states, "The

public desexualization imperative presents a double bind in which it creates, on one hand, public

spaces that are less threatening and discriminatory to women and, one the other, public spaces—

that from a queer white cisgender man's perspective, one whose only 'marking' is his

sexuality—erase queers' valued differences" (Thomas 1). Thomas offers an interesting critique

of the #MeToo movement that the importance in desexualizing common spaces will create a

world where queers cannot feel like they can express themselves. This connects to the previous

argument sent forth by Ison which argues that the prevailing heteronormativity prevalent in

sexual violence narratives erases stories of queer violence. Thomas closes his argument by

stating:

> If the #MeToo movement continues on its current trajectory—toeing the line of public
>
> desexualization in furtherance of economic and political equality—queers risk
>
> functioning as second-class citizens as we are expected to check our sexualities at the
>
> door when we enter public spaces. Always, we will only be partially present. Making our
>
> sexualities known will continue to threaten the body politics in ways characterized as a
>
> hostile work environment" (Thomas 10).

The heart of Thomas's argument is the balance between finding women's sexual equality

without sacrificing queers' sexual liberty (Thomas 15). Thomas offers another important critique

of the white heteronormative #MeToo movement and how it excludes queer voices and may

create sexual politics that force queer people to conform. Both Ison and Thomas craft important

statements on how the #MeToo movement erases the violence that occurs within queer

communities and the consequences of going too far with desexualizing politics.

The visibility of sexual assault victims has overall increased in during the #MeToo era.

Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality can help us understand how Black women remain

victimized by the justice system and why they face additional barriers of visibility. The case of

R. Kelly shows the economies of visibility compared to the victims of Harvey Weinstein—Black

women sexual assault survivors do not get the same level of media attention of justice that white

women receive in the public sphere. #MeToo has created visibility for survivors of sexual

violence who have access to resources and are privileged. The LGBTQIA+ community has also

faced erasure in the #MeToo movement due to the overwhelming presence of cisgender female

survivors that fails to acknowledge the barriers faced by queer individuals. The increased

awareness about sexual assault has not led to visibility for all survivors, especially those whose

identities exist at multiple intersections. The assumption that increased awareness/media

attention equals visibility, is false. The #MeToo movement still needs to evolve and critically

examine the individuals they are highlighting—and also address if the media attention is making

a positive change for survivors of sexual violence.

Has increased awareness of sexual violence led to justice for survivors of sexual violence?

One of the biggest concerns that has emerged out of the #MeToo movement is problems with how the justice system addresses sexual assault. The feminist movement has done a great job of creating public recognition that sexual violence is a huge societal problem. But the public awareness has not translated to changes in justice systems for survivors. In this section, I will examine the burden on the victim to relieve their trauma through testimony in order to gain public legitimacy. Then, I will analyze the cultural pushback on #MeToo through the Aziz Ansari case and the viral #HimToo. The negative responses to #MeToo suggest that the change may not be as radical as some feminists proclaim. Finally, I will suggest a new system for addressing allegations of sexual violence called restorative and transformative justice which aim to rethink the way society approaches accountability for perpetrators of sexual assault.

The Burden of Public Testimony on Survivors of Sexual Assault

The #MeToo movement has been extremely effective in collecting witness accounts of sexual violence. Leigh Gilmore suggests that one of the positives to come out of the #MeToo movement is the reframing of the victim into a survivor, "In response to the invitation to join a collective intersectional witness of survivors by sharing the #MeToo hashtag, survivors saw themselves in relation to each other, primarily, rather than as victims" (Gilmore 11). Gilmore makes an important point, one of the powers of publicly sharing testimony is that the survivor no longer feel like they are completely alone. The act of delivering testimony is still a huge burden on the survivor in order to gain public legitimacy. And act of delivering testimony does not offer a promise of justice or accountability. Gilmore provides a theoretical framework through which to understand survivor testimony:

1) Identity: it reframes the victim as a survivor and the accused as perpetrator of sexual violence; 2) Impact: it reframes sexual violence from the survivor's perspective, taking it as traumatic rather than trivial; 3) Temporality: by centering the survivor's experience and understanding of sexual violence, acts committed in the past are understood to have lasting negative effects and deserve and require a proportional response, so that temporality and justice intersect as a new framing of the survivor exposes statutes of limitations as unjust; 4) Justice: survivor demands for justice do not necessarily reduce to a carceral response (Gilmore 6).

Gilmore's theoretical framework shows how the act of delivering testimony can reframe the sexual violence from a survivor's perspective. But it also makes an important end point, the burden of delivering testimony does not lead to accountability. Gilmore uses the Kavanaugh Hearings and examines Christine Blasey Ford's testimony as a case to understand the burden on women delivering testimony in a post #MeToo world.

Christine Blasey Ford, a psychology professor from Palo Alto California, publicly came forward with serious allegations of sexual misconduct against presumptive Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh (Kantor 140). The hearings that unfolded erupted into a national discussion about gender, sexual violence, and ethical decision making. The American public was quickly reminded of the Anita Hill Hearings in 1992—which had not aged well. There was a political "promise" to handle this situation with fairness and dignity. Gilmore argues that even in the post #MeToo world the testimony of Dr. Ford introduced a false appearance of fairness (Gilmore 12). The Kavanaugh hearings were framed as "he said/she said". In sexual assault hearings, doubt is always shadowed over the women's testimony because the public defaults to the speaker they are habituated to believe, a man (Gilmore 12). The pretext of fairness in Dr.

Ford testimony was a complete farce because, "Women are doubted; they are also threatened when they come forward. Men are believed, and when they are not, they are still protected, or forgiven" (Gilmore 12). The burden on survivors to give testimony is a double edged sword; they are able to tell their side of the trauma but they also know that accountability is unlikely. In responses to sexual assault, even post #MeToo, there is an unstated premise that a perpetrator's testimony will carry more weight. The popular feminist depiction of #MeToo creates an image that notable perpetrators are finally being held accountable. But the high profile Kavanaugh testimony's show that even for individuals with enormous privilege, accountability still does not exist. And this leads to the assumption that for marginalized survivors of sexual assault; justice and accountability will be even more difficult. The failure to treat survivors of sexual violence with respect can also be analyzed in public backlash over #MeToo.

The Public Backlash over the #MeToo Movement

The #MeToo movement has done an excellent job of generating awareness about the epidemic of sexual violence. But extensive public criticism of the movement has led to charges of false allegations, and public sympathy shifting towards those accused. The vicious pushback against #MeToo is rooted in anti-feminism and irrationality (Fileborn 101). Some critics compare the #MeToo movement to a witch hunt, McCarthyism, and claims of satanic and moral panic (Fileborn 101). According to Bianca Fileborn, in an analysis of #MeToo headlines between October 2017 to June 2018, roughly 26% were critical of the movement. Some of the headlines stated, "Ladies's, Let's Be Reasonable About #MeToo or Nothing Will Ever Be Sexy Again", "Beware the Long Reach of #MeToo", and "It's Time to Resist the Excesses of #MeToo" (Fileborn 101). One of the problems with the intense public backlash is the need for society to construct what meets the criteria for sexual violence.

Political commentator and critic Andrew Sullivan argue that the #MeToo movement has, "extended to more ambiguous and trivial cases where righteous exposure of hideous abuse of power has morphed into a more generalized revolution around the patriarchy" (Fileborn 102). One of the problems when society cannot generate a common definition of sexual violence is that assumptions are rooted in white, heterosexual, middle-class women whose experiences are viewed as legitimate. And the marginalized voices or LGBTQIA+ voices may not fit into the traditional assumptions of sexual violence. The public debate over what constitutes "real" sexual violence leads to myths and stereotypes that portray "real" sexual violence as something that:

> requires physical force, or overt violence, as perpetrated by a monstrous stranger and as involving penetration (usually a penis penetrating a vagina)…and real sexual violence requires unambiguous refusal on the victim-survivor beheld: a clear, verbal 'no' or physical resistance (Fileborn 103).

These conversations about the definition of sexual violence diminish the experience of all survivors and create dangerous conversations around consent. The culture war over what constitutes as sexual violence reached its peak when an article was published on Babe.net detailing a woman's date with Aziz Ansari (Fileborn 103).

The Ansari case started a public conversation about the difference between "bad sex" and "sexual violence". Many journalists severely critiqued the article for poor journalism; it was not adequately researched or published with journalistic integrity. And many journalists blamed the anonymous women. Cultural critic Caitlin Flanagan argued, "What she felt afterward—rejected yet another time, by yet another man—was regret" (Fileborn 103). Flanagan argues that the anonymous women's allegations are "3,000 words of revenge porn" (Fileborn 203). Flanagan's harsh condemnation of the anonymous women is victim blaming and supports the narrative that

any #MeToo accusation that is not explicitly violent is not harmful. Feminist critic, Liz Kelly

offers an explanation for why examining sexual violence on continuum is problematic. Kelly's

critique centers on the idea linkage between sexual violence and normalized male behaviors:

>…prevalent forms of everyday harassment and intimidation share underlying mechanism
>
>of coercion, abuse, and force that are extensions of normalized heterosexual behaviors.
>
>That is, gendered relations are rooted in patriarchy structure influence our understandings
>
>of behaviors ranging from consensual sex to rape. Additionally, seemingly diffuse forms
>
>of sexual violence are drawn together by the fact that they all work to deny or
>
>circumscribe victim-survivors' sexual and bodily autonomy. Despite this
>
>interconnectedness, only a narrow range of these experiences are legitimized as 'real'
>
>sexual violence in dominant discourse (Fileborn 204).

Kelly makes a really important point, there is a continuum of harm. But these behaviors are all

part of a societal patriarchal system which hurts victims. There is no singular definition of sexual

violence and it cannot be reduced to one action. It is fluid over time and it matters more how the

person constructs the experience. Sexual harassment and uncomfortable sexual experiences are

all a part #MeToo continuum. Fileborn argues the debate over what constitutes sexual violence

severely harms survivors, "The notion that sexual violence is clearly defined and bounded, with

only certain experiences recognized, works to silence others from coming forward. Resultantly,

not only are particular experiences underrecognized, those who perpetrated these actions are not

held to account, and the underlying power structures and norms remain unexamined" (Fileborn

106). The argument over what constitutes sexual violence hinders the attempt to find the root of

the problem—patriarchal norms and toxic masculinity which lead to rape culture. The increased

awareness of sexual violence has led to concerning conversations that attempt to create excuses

for not addressing toxic male behavior. The desire to focus more on the accused is called

"himpathy", a term coined by Katherine Boyle. Boyle analyzes the backlash to #MeToo in the

wake of the Kavanaugh Hearings with the viral hashtag #HimToo.

The #HimToo went viral online during the Kavanaugh Hearings when a mother who

supported Kavanaugh wanted to call attention to the impact of sexual assault allegations on

young men, "This is MY son. He graduated #1 in boot camp. He was awarded the USO award.

He was #1 in A school. He is a gentleman who respects women. He won't go on solo dates due

to the current climate of false sexual accusations by radical feminists with an axe to grind. I

VOTE. #HimToo" (Boyle 2). The #HimToo took off and many conservatives started tweeting

about the dangers of radical feminism and false allegations of sexual assault. One of the most

notable tweeters was Candace Owens, a conservative African-American activist. Owens sent out

a plethora of tweets in support of Kavanaugh and men who had been accused of sexual assault:

> I'm loving the hashtag #HimToo. It appears to be a movement built of men who have had
>
> their lives and families destroyed by false allegations and a lack of due process (Boyle 7).

> Radical feminism has become problematic and needs to be addressed (Boyle 7).

> Kavanaugh is INNOCENT. So proud of the REAL women in this country who took a
>
> stand and defended our men (our husbands, brothers, fathers and sons) against the evils of
>
> the left—their radical feminism and LIAR Christine Ford. #ConfirmKavanaugh
>
> #HimToo (Boyle 7).

The viral #MeToo tweets were met with considerable misogyny that severely diminished the

work of survivors who tweeted #MeToo. The public support for false allegations and accused

men can be defined as "popular misogyny". The coexistence of popular feminism and popular misogyny is argued by Sarah Banet-Weiser in her book *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (Boyle 12). The "himpathy" exhibited in this tweets tries to justify aggression towards women and ridicules the feminist movement to hold perpetrators accountable (Boyle 12).

The increased awareness about sexual violence has not created a safer environment for survivors online. Instead, survivors have to approach online engagement with a fear of being criticized or facing extreme misogyny. The popular feminist expression of #MeToo is often met with hate and anger at feminism. The negative pushback over #MeToo in regards to the debate over what *constitutes* sexual violence, and the viral #HimToo tweet, suggest a world where the public cannot provide closure or support for victims of sexual violence. In response to #MeToo, scholars have suggested a more radical approach to provide accountability for survivor's of sexual violence. Scholars suggest a framework of transformative or restorative justice in order to address sexual assault. These approaches have not been widely implemented but offer a radically different approach to assist with the healing of the survivor and hold the perpetrator accountable.

Transformative Justice

One of the most hard pressed questions to come out of the #MeToo movement is a solution for a better way to address sexual violence because the criminal justice system is not providing accountability for survivors. Legal scholar L. Kohn argues that the criminal justice system does not hold perpetrators accountable or treat victims fairly:

> First, the rate at which police investigate and close sexual assault cases is at a record low; second prosecutors bring few prosecutions for sexual assault relative to the number of complaints; third, prosecution success rates remain low; and fourth, the criminal justice

system has neither proven to serve its goal of rehabilitating offenders nor does it offer

support to complaining witness/survivors (Kohn 13).

In 2017, the "clearance rate", the rate at which criminal cases are closed, for sexual assault cases

was 32%. The 32% is down from a 62% closure rate in 1964 (Kohn 13). Part of the reason for

low-clearance rates for sexual assault cases is they are very difficult to prosecute in the criminal

justice system. In 2006, a study found that 80% of survivors were reluctant to seek police

assistance in the aftermath of an assault (Kohn 14). Victims who choose to press forward with

charges find that their credibility is attacked because their testimony is cross-examined and they

are forced to relieve their trauma in a court-room (Kohn 14). The criminal justice system is

severely flawed in many ways but especially in respect to how it handle sexual assault cases.

Scholars, feminists, and activists have begun to suggest alternative restorative or transformative

justice methods.

Restorative justice, which has recently started to emerge as a mainstream practice, calls

for a more legitimate system of criminal diversion such as peacemaking circles and family group

conferencing (Kim 10). Restorative justice rejects punitive behavior, "dramatically shifts the

notion of harm from individual to collective and the procedure of justice from punishment to

dialogue" (Kim 12). There have been some concerns that restorative justice would have a

difficult application to sexual assault cases because it has mostly been used in juvenile justice

systems in the U.S. (Kim 12). Kohn suggests that restorative justice could be used as a tool to

mediate conversations through a "victim-offender mediation" based on screening processes, and

both parties having a desire to talk honestly, and the offender to take responsibility for their

actions (Kohn. 20). Kohn supports restorative justice because it allows the victim to have some

autonomy. But scholar Mimi Kim suggests that restorative justice is *good*, but the not the best

solution. Restorative justice still keeps a link with the state criminal justice system, and continues to rely on police and prosecution, and practitioners working together strongly with law enforcement (Kim 12). Kim suggests an even more radical approach that bases itself on a complete rejection of the carceral system, transformative justice.

Transformative justice was created by women of color who identify as survivors of sexual or domestic violence, work on crisis lines, counseling centers, or advocacy programs (Kim 10). The group called themselves, "INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence" and centered their approach on the needs of women of color (Kim 10). They developed a framework of transformative justice which, "condemned both gender-based violence and state violence and the demand for prevention and intervention approaches that addressed the structural conditions contributing to the devastation of communities of color and other marginalized communities" (Kim 11). The transformative justice movement is rooted in abolition feminism and is anti-carceral. INCITE! argues that the roots of violence are embedded in a system of structural harm and conditions that need to be changed in order for the violence to be eliminated (Kim 11). They believe that criminal consequences such as being placed on sex offender registry prevented people from seeking support and created negative stigmas (Kim 11).

Transformative justice movements also rely on new language to redefine "victim" and "perpetrator". Someone who was once a perpetrator is now "a person who caused harm" (Kim 11). And transformative justice advocates for collective community strategies that relied on social support instead of members of the criminal systems like the police (Kim 11). The introduction of abolition feminism cause people to rethink the outcomes of mandatory minimum sentencing, sex offender registry, and enhanced sentencing for gender-based violence offenses (Kim 11). It requires someone to rethink their assumptions about justice and the current flaws in

the ways the U.S. criminal justice system handles sexual assault. Transformative justice offers a new solution to the problem and the theory is important for survivors of sexual violence to understand. The current criminal justice system is not working and it is time we look to alternatives.

In my opinion, one of the public perceptions of the #MeToo movement is sexual assault survivors are getting the necessary attention and accountability they have longed for. But closer examination of the burden of public testimony, intense public backlash scrutiny, and the failed justice systems tell another story. The #MeToo movement has encouraged survivors to come forward but it has not lessened the burden of public testimony. The retelling of the assault still can re-traumatize a victim and victims are still facing intense backlash. Anytime, someone sends out a victim blaming tweet about #MeToo it affects a survivor of sexual assault. The constant public discourse about the validity of someone's experience will create more doubt and fear in someone's mind. All of this fear will sometimes culminate in a failed criminal investigation that does not result in accountability or closure. I believe, that the #MeToo movement has generated awareness but it is not the answer to ending sexual violence in society. It is simply the beginning.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to critically examine how the #MeToo movement affected survivors of sexual violence in the United States. I explored the answers to this thesis through three key research questions: *How has the #MeToo movement changed awareness about gendered violence?, How have the experiences of victims/survivors been reflected in the #MeToo movement?, and Has increased awareness of sexual violence led to justice for survivors of sexual violence?* The #MeToo movement started out as a simple hashtag on twitter which emerged into a neoliberal popular feminist movement. The #MeToo movement positioned itself as a radical feminist movement to call out systematic sexual violence. But a closer examination of the environments changed as a result of #MeToo, only shows a significant change for white heterosexual survivors, marginalized voices still struggle to find visibility.

The #MeToo movement has generated a lot of hope for activists and survivors in addition to its well-earned criticism. But one of the biggest questions that has emerged out of the conversation about #MeToo is: what next? Feminist activist Jody Raphael articulates the public's concern about what comes next after #MeToo:

Here is an important "what now" question that comes out of #MeToo, How can we call on such a system for justice knowing that it is quite likely to deliver justice for some, but not all and not equally? We don't yet know the answer to this question. In the meantime, survivors deserve the justice they demand, in the forms they demand, including justice delivered from an imperfect system (Raphael 15).

One of the biggest takeaways from researching the criticism of the #MeToo movement is the fact that it is an imperfect system. Popular feminism and neoliberal feminism are more relevant than ever. And the widely accepted watered down feminism has created the conditions for a

movement which does not adequately address systematic inequalities. But one important positive change from the #MeToo movement has been that survivors of sexual violence are no longer accepting the status quo. They are demanding real intersectional change. Even though the #MeToo movement has serious problems, activists, such as Tarana Burke, have been extremely successful in generating conversations about the need for an inclusion of an intersectional feminism and activism. Recently, the Biden Administration's gender policy shows outcomes of the public conversation inclusivity in women's rights.

In March, President Biden reestablished the Gender Policy Council that was axed under the Trump administration (NPR.org). The co-chair of the White House Gender Policy Council, Jennifer Klein, announced that they are broadening their definition of gender, "We are very inclusive in our definition of gender. We intend to address all sorts of discrimination and fight for equal rights for people, whether that's LGBTQ+ people, women, girls, and men" (NPR.org). Klein also announced that the Council will add a special assistant to specifically focus on, "policies to advance equity for Black, indigenous and Latina women and girls of color" (NPR.org). The added focus on disproportionate barriers faced by Black women and girls of color reflects the larger conversations the country has had over the problems with white feminism, conversations that partially emerged out of problems with the #MeToo movement. Biden also signed an executive order aimed at reversing the controversial-rule on campus sexual assault that was implemented by Trump's Secretary of Education Betsy Devos (NPR.org). While Biden's gender progressivism is not enough, it does mark a societal shift in the pursuit of a more intersectional feminist resistance. The public disagreement over the #MeToo movement has resulted in a change in federal gender policy to be more intersectional and inclusive. Biden's changes are not radical feminism but show a step in the right direction.

The #MeToo movement has been ongoing since 2018, and it is a feminist movement that has gained a lot of popularity, criticism, and traction. In order to evaluate the efficacy of the #MeToo movement it is essential to understand its pitfalls and problems. The activists who have spoken out and criticized the #MeToo movement have help push the public into embracing a more progressive gender policy. The #MeToo movement has forced us to enter into a new phase of gender issues and feminism. The fight for gender equality is not over and the #MeToo movement is another example of how in future social movements we need to be more conscious and intentional with representation and visibility.

Works Cited

Abrams, J. "The #Metoo Movement: An Invitation for Feminist Critique of Rape Crisis Framing."
University of Richmond Law Review, no. 52(4), 2018, pp. 749–94.

Anderson, Gwendolyn D., and Rebekah Overby. "The Impact of Rape Myths and Current Events on
the Well-Being of Sexual Violence Survivors." *Violence Against Women*, July 2020, p.
1077801220937782. *SAGE Journals*, doi:10.1177/1077801220937782.

Banet-Weiser, Sarah. *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. Duke University Press,
2018.

Banet-Weiser, Sarah, et al. "Postfeminism, Popular Feminism and Neoliberal Feminism? Sarah
Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in Conversation." *Feminist Theory*, vol.
21, no. 1, Jan. 2020, pp. 3–24. *SAGE Journals*, doi:10.1177/1464700119842555.

"Biden Establishes A Gender Policy Council Within The White House." *NPR.Org*,
https://www.npr.org/2021/03/08/974655385/biden-will-establish-a-gender-policy-council-
within-the-white-house. Accessed 15 Apr. 2021.

Black Women and Sexual Assault . The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black
Community, Oct. 2018, www.ujimacommunity.org.

Boyle, Karen, and Chamil Rathnayake. "#HimToo and the Networking of Misogyny in the Age of
#MeToo." *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 20, no. 8, Nov. 2020, pp. 1259–77. *DOI.org (Crossref)*,
doi:10.1080/14680777.2019.1661868.

Clark-Parsons, Rosemary. "'I See You, I Believe You, I Stand With You': #MeToo and the
Performance of Networked Feminist Visibility." *Feminist Media Studies*, June 2019, pp. 1–19.
DOI.org (Crossref), doi:10.1080/14680777.2019.1628797.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against

    Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6, July 1991, p. 1241. *DOI.org (Crossref)*,

    doi:10.2307/1229039.

Fileborn, Bianca, and Nickie Phillips. "From 'Me Too' to 'Too Far'? Contesting the Boundaries of

    Sexual Violence in Contemporary ." *#MeToo and the Politics of Social Change*, Palgrave

    Milliman, 2019.

Gill, Gurvinder, and Imran Rahman-Jones. "Me Too Founder Tarana Burke: Movement Is Not Over."

    BBC News, 9 July 2020. *www.bbc.com*, https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-53269751.

Gilmore, Leigh. "Frames of Witness: The Kavanaugh Hearings, Survivor Testimony, and #MeToo."

    Biography, vol. 42, no. 3, 2019, pp. 610–23. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, doi:10.1353/bio.2019.0062.

Gómez, Jennifer M., and Robyn L. Gobin. "Black Women and Girls & #MeToo: Rape, Cultural

    Betrayal, & Healing." *Sex Roles*, vol. 82, no. 1–2, Jan. 2020, pp. 1–12. *DOI.org (Crossref)*,

    doi:10.1007/s11199-019-01040-0.

Hindes, Sophie, and Bianca Fileborn. "'Girl Power Gone Wrong': #MeToo, Aziz Ansari, and Media

    Reporting of (Grey Area) Sexual Violence." *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 20, no. 5, July 2020,

    pp. 639–56. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, doi:10.1080/14680777.2019.1606843.

Johnson, Richard Greggory, and Hugo Renderos. "Invisible Populations and the # MᴇTᴏᴏ

    Movement." *Public Administration Review*, vol. 80, no. 6, Nov. 2020, pp. 1123–26. *DOI.org

    (Crossref)*, doi:10.1111/puar.13209.

Kantor, Jodi, and Megan Twohey. *She Said: Breaking the Sexual Harassment Story That Helped

    Ignite a Movement*. Penguin Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2019.

Kohn, L. S. "#Metoo, Wrongs Against Women, and Restorative Justice." *Kansas Journal of Law &

    Public Polic*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 561–86.

Kim, Mimi E. "Transformative Justice and Restorative Justice: Gender-Based Violence and

    Alternative Visions of Justice in the United States." *International Review of Victimology*, vol. 27,

    no. 2, May 2021, pp. 162–72. *SAGE Journals*, doi:10.1177/0269758020970414.

Leung, Rebecca, and Robert Williams. "#MeToo and Intersectionality: An Examination of the

    #MeToo Movement Through the R. Kelly Scandal." *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, vol. 43,

    no. 4, Oct. 2019, pp. 349–71. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, doi:10.1177/0196859919874138.

Loney-Howes, Rachel. "The Politics of the Personal." *#MeToo and the Politics of Social Change* ,

    Palgrave Milliman, 2019, pp. 21–36.

"Me Too Founder Tarana Burke: Movement Is Not Over." *BBC News*, 9 July 2020. *www.bbc.com*,

    https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-53269751.

Peters, Michael A., and Tina Besley. "Weinstein, Sexual Predation, and 'Rape Culture': Public

    Pedagogies and Hashtag Internet Activism." *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, vol. 51, no. 5,

    Apr. 2019, pp. 458–64. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, doi:10.1080/00131857.2018.1427850.

Raphael, Jody, et al. "Twenty-Five Years of Research and Advocacy on Violence Against Women:

    What Have We Accomplished, and Where Do We Go From Here? A Conversation." *Violence

    Against Women*, vol. 25, no. 16, Dec. 2019, pp. 2024–46. *DOI.org (Crossref)*,

    doi:10.1177/1077801219875822.

Rhode, D. L. (2019). #MeToo: Why Now? What Next? *Duke Law Journal*, *69*(2), 377+.

https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A607787220/LT?u=carl39591&sid=LT&xid=4e605b6e

Roberts, Dorothy E. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. 1st ed,

    Vintage books, 1997.

Scope of the Problem: Statistics | RAINN. https://www.rainn.org/statistics/scope-problem. Accessed

    14 Apr. 2021.

Szekeres, Hanna, et al. "Views of Sexual Assault Following #MeToo: The Role of Gender and

    Individual Differences." *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 166, Nov. 2020, p. 110203.

    DOI.org (Crossref), doi:10.1016/j.paid.2020.110203.

Thomas, Queer J. "Fagchild Tools: Softening the Body Politic and Sexualizing Paul Ryan in a Pussy-

    Grabbing Era." *Politics & Gender*, vol. 14, no. 4, Dec. 2018, pp. 602–18. *DOI.org (Crossref)*,

    doi:10.1017/S1743923X18000727.