#MeToo; #HimToo: Popular Feminism and Hashtag Activism in the Kavanaugh Hearings

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In this article, we analyze the use of #MeToo and #HimToo in response to the hearings on sexual assault allegations against Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh. We explore the use of these hashtags within the context of popular feminism and employ a qualitative thematic analysis of a purposeful sample of Tweets that include the hashtags #MeToo (n = 730) and #HimToo (n = 124) collected between September 23 and 27, 2018. We find that four themes are mirrored in both #MeToo and #HimToo tweets: personal experience; identification and disidentification; calls to action; and discursive appropriation. Although the sample size was limited and the relative popularity of these oppositional hashtags must be considered, these findings offer support for Banet-Weiser's suggestion that popular feminism is structurally mirrored by popular misogyny. Thus, although there is evidence that individuals link their deployment of these two hashtags to explicit political calls to action, we suggest that the ease with which popular feminist discourse can be rhetorically inverted is a limitation of popular feminist hashtag activism.

Keywords: MeToo, hashtag activism, popular feminism, HimToo

In September 2018, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford came forward with public allegations of sexual assault against Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh. This event sparked a large show of support through the bourgeoning #MeToo movement that, since its deployment as a form of feminist hashtag activism, has received hours of mainstream media coverage, references from the highest levels of government, and millions of daily

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mentions from users across social media platforms (Olheiser, 2017). Although #MeToo has been popularized in contemporary culture as indicative of a larger social movement against rape culture and the social norms that facilitate it (Zernike & Steel, 2018), we seek to contextualize the #MeToo hashtag within a nascent "popular feminism" where feminist discourse is increasingly made prominent through mainstream media, celebrities, and commercial culture (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Dejmanee, 2018; Keller & Ryan, 2018).

In particular, we focus on Banet-Weiser's (2018) argument that popular feminism is structurally coupled to the increased visibility and seeming legitimacy of "popular misogyny," a networked form of misogyny that competes alongside feminism in a mediated economy of visibility (p. 2). For these reasons, alongside our analysis of the #MeToo hashtag, we also consider the use of #HimToo, the much less used but similarly ardent hashtag that ran parallel to #MeToo in the days sampled for this study. That is, in response to the Kavanaugh hearings, we find that #HimToo was largely employed by individuals who rejected Dr. Ford's claims and argued that it was Kavanaugh, not Dr. Ford, who was the real victim in this scenario.

This study explores how competing narratives about popular feminism and rape culture manifested in conversations linked to #MeToo and #HimToo on Twitter in the days surrounding the Kavanaugh congressional nomination hearings. Drawing on a random sample of Tweets (n = 854), this study employs a qualitative thematic analysis to discuss how these two hashtags were used to variously express popular feminist and popular misogynist sentiments. Results reveal a complex ecology of feminist ideology on Twitter, where calls to political action and personalized experiences compete with polarized politics and a general attempt to delegitimize #MeToo as part of a feminist movement that victimizes men. We situate these oppositional hashtags and the polarizing discourses clustered around each as emerging from popular feminist ideologies as well as the structures and logics of social media platforms (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Accordingly, we find that the study of the #MeToo and #HimToo hashtags in response to the Kavanaugh hearings offer an exploratory study of the potentialities and limitations of digital feminist activism in a popular feminist climate.

#MeToo and Feminist Hashtag Activism

In October 2017, actress Alyssa Milano used #MeToo in a Twitter message, urging followers to use the hashtag to share their experiences of being sexually harassed or assaulted (Garcia, 2017). This highly publicized tweet triggered a viral, global response, with the #MeToo hashtag being used more than 12 million times within 24 hours (Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2018). Celebrities—who have backed the movement as advocates as well as survivors (Olheiser, 2017)—are considered a key factor in separating #MeToo as a campaign from other examples of social media–based feminist activism. However, it is also important to note that the phrase "Me Too" is over a decade old (Wagmeister, 2018), with the original Me Too campaign born of activist Tarana Burke's longstanding work to highlight the pervasiveness of sexual assault against women and girls of color, particularly through her founding of the nonprofit Just Be Inc. in 2007 (Garcia, 2017).

The #MeToo hashtag has gained much prominence because of the relative ease and support that it provides sexual assault and harassment survivors in speaking out, as well as its relevance to current mainstream discussions about rape culture and popular feminism. The use of the hashtag increased in conjunction with important events, such as the day after #MeToo activists were named by *Time* magazine

as persons of the year, and immediately following International Women's Day. The hashtag peaked in popularity on September 9, 2017, when Leslie Moonves, chairman of CBS, resigned in response to sexual misconduct allegations (Brown, 2018). The hashtag received considerable public attention again in the fall of 2018 in response to the case of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford and now Supreme Court Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh. Although Dr. Blasey Ford felt reluctant to come forward with her decades-old sexual assault claims, the #MeToo movement provided her support and encouragement (Zernike & Steel, 2018).

The rise of the #MeToo campaign takes place within a broader landscape of feminist hashtag activism that "involves using hashtags . . . to produce communities of conversation among disparate Twitter users" (Mendes et al., 2018, p. 237; see also Berridge & Portwood-Stacer, 2015). For instance, many comparable hashtags have been used to call attention to the issue of sexual assault, including #BeenRapedNeverReported, #YesAllWomen, #YouOkSis, #WhatWereYouWearing, #SurvivorPrivilege, and #WhyWomenDontReport. These hashtags have been theorized as a multifaceted response to rape culture that operate through the dissemination of information, providing a visual representation of the pervasiveness of sexual assault and harassment, constructing a community of support, and offering a forum for individuals to share their personal experiences (Baer, 2016; Dadas, 2018; Mendes et al., 2018; Rentschler, 2015), ultimately providing a framework for the coherence and visibility of the #MeToo campaign (Jackson, Bailey, & Foucault Welles, 2019).

In the ways that these hashtags document and collectivize individual testimonies, digital activism such as #MeToo can be considered to operate through a logic of personalized politics, which scholars (e.g., Bennett & Segerberg, 2011, 2013; McAllister, 2009) have argued characterizes political participation in the digital age. This personalization of politics is enabled through the logic of "connective action," which explores the intertwining forces of "the personalization of causes and the corresponding inclination to use scalable digital media to aggregate individual actions" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 6). That is, network technologies allow digital activism to spread through their interpersonal and connective capabilities, contributing to social movements that tend to reflect a decentralized, individualized form of political expression with an increasing reliance on participation that is "channeled through often dense social networks over which people can share their own stories and concerns" (Bennett, 2012, p. 22).

We characterize the #MeToo hashtag as an example of personalized politics. It is a large-scale campaign within the feminist movement mobilized through digital media networks that relies on the logic of sharing personalized experiences. However, as a digital campaign, it raises further questions about the legitimacy and efficacy of online activism as a component of engaging with politics and social justice movements. On the one hand, feminist hashtag activism may provide comfort and social support for survivors of sexual assault (Mendes et al., 2018), encourage solidarity and community building around specific social issues (Portwood-Stacer & Berridge, 2014), and highlight locally rooted and transnational cases that would not otherwise have gained the attention of mainstream press (Higgs, 2015; Thrift, 2014; Williams, 2015). On the other hand, feminist hashtag activism can be triggering for some survivors (Mendes et al., 2018), can work to oversimplify complex issues (Portwood-Stacer & Berridge, 2014), can legitimate certain feminist voices and experiences over others (Mendes et al., 2018), and can expose individuals to further online harassment and threats (Clark, 2016). Accordingly, feminist hashtag activism has generally been regarded with an ambivalence that is characteristic of the popular feminist context.

#MeToo in the Context of Popular Feminism

Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) describes popular feminism as a set of "practices and expressions that circulate in an economy of visibility" (p. 10), a definition that is crafted through the analysis of recent cultural moments that have foregrounded feminism in mainstream media such as the proliferation of girl empowerment organizations and the use of celebrities as glamorous feminist spokespeople. #MeToo as a hashtag campaign is thus a prime example of popular feminist ideologies and practices. Although popular feminism references feminism in a positive way, it generally fails to "challenge deep structures of inequities" (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 11) as it tends to reinscribe commercially lucrative forms of feminism that are predominantly "white, middle-class, cis-gendered, and heterosexual" (p. 13).

Popular feminism emerges from a mainstream media culture that, since the late 1980s and early 1990s, has been dominated by postfeminist ideologies. Postfeminist media was described as offering commercially palatable representations of feminism—typically reduced to certain tenets of white, liberal feminism—as ostensible evidence that the goal of gender equality had been achieved (Douglas, 2010; Dow, 1996; McRobbie, 2009; Tasker & Negra, 2007). Yet, such mediated representations not only exaggerated the success of women in contemporary cultural spheres (Douglas, 2010), they also invoked the political silencing of young female subjects, effectively offering token representations of feminism in exchange for the broader repudiation of feminist politics (McRobbie, 2009). Accordingly, postfeminism offered a version of feminism that was celebrated through neoliberalism and commercial popular culture, while eschewing use of the term "feminism" itself and effacing the political history and significance of feminist values.

Popular feminism similarly embeds feminism within the ideals of neoliberalism and consumer culture, relying on commercial messaging to disseminate feminist ideas and to gesture toward the responsibility of the individual in adopting and enacting feminist activism. However, it can be distinguished through its recuperation of the word "feminism" as a politics and identity, as well as the mainstream attention to the broader concepts and history of feminist activism in a fashion that deploys the postfeminist context to authorize a "popularity of feminism . . . that is tied to media visibility, circulation and affective embrace" (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenberg, 2019, p. 2). The prominence of this shift in the cultural landscape is evident in the number of theories that have concurrently arisen to describe the contemporary mediation of feminist concepts, including "emergent feminism" (Keller & Ryan, 2018), "millennial feminism," (Tully, 2018) and "neoliberal feminism" (Rottenberg, 2013, p. 420). Ultimately, in this article we rely on the theory of popular feminism, as it is particularly useful in analyzing two key tenets of the #MeToo movement and discussions surrounding Kavanaugh's nomination and confirmation as Supreme Court Justice: first, the contemporary visibility and discourse surrounding rape culture as a feminist issue; and second, the mobilization around this issue—including the activation of oppositional and misogynist voices—through digital platforms.

Popular feminism has been instrumental in highlighting rape culture discourse in media as a "pervasive and normative presence" (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 55), with social media platforms facilitating the dissemination of testimonies from individual (though often privileged) female subjects as both evidence of and activism against the ubiquity of sexual assault in women's everyday existence, as discussed in the above section. However, Banet-Weiser (2018) characterizes such discourse as operating through an

economy of visibility: in this economy, visibility becomes the political goal in and of itself, which tends to obfuscate the broader and more representational political aims of a feminist movement. Moreover, economies of visibility are increasingly influenced and facilitated by the logics of digital technologies, where the "end goal" of visibility can be quantified (and made profitable) through "the accumulation of views, clicks, 'likes'" (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 2). Significantly, while digital media platforms tend to portend greater visibility for female media makers, digital logics tend to emphasize the structural coupling of popular feminism to popular misogyny, which Banet-Weiser (2018) describes as a call-and-response where misogyny is mobilized "to compete for visibility within these same mediated networks" (p. 4) as popular feminism. For these reasons, in this study we explore the parallel usage of the #HimToo hashtag as a misogynist counterdiscourse to #MeToo during the time of the Kavanaugh hearings.

#HimToo and Popular Misogyny

Alongside our analysis of the #MeToo hashtag, we consider #HimToo as a hashtag that trended during the Kavanaugh hearings and potentially offers evidence for the discursive and structural coupling of popular feminism to popular misogyny (Banet-Weiser, 2018). #HimToo was originally used in 2015 as a literal way to include men in everyday activities, and was then deployed in 2017 to complement #MeToo by calling attention to the existence of male sexual assault survivors (Ellis, 2018) with research suggesting that men are actually likelier to experience sexual assault than to be falsely accused (North, 2018). However, in the wake of the growing popularity of the #MeToo movement, #HimToo gained its utmost popularity during the confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Kavanaugh, where it was largely used to portray men who were accused of sexual assault as victims (Ellis, 2018). This iteration of the hashtag is indicative of "popular misogyny" in which a discourse of men's rights emerges because of men's apparent injuries within a feminist context (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Bratich & Banet-Weiser, 2019), with scholars also noting the broader digital circulation of misogyny, violent threats, and gendered vitriol that is frequently directed toward women through online platforms (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016; Jane, 2014; Mantilla, 2013; Marwick & Caplan, 2018).

The call-and-response structure theorized between #MeToo and #HimToo has been noted in other hashtag campaigns with Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark (2018) noting that "social movements are not alone in social media: other parties interested in the same topic almost always emerge to wield their own power alongside, against, or orthogonally with respect to the movement" (p. 991). Accordingly, scholars have examined how #BlackLivesMatter activists successfully interrogated the stance of counterprotest hashtag #AllLivesMatter (Gallagher, Reagan, Danforth, & Dodds, 2018); the hijacking of #myNYPD hashtag, which was intended as a public relations campaign but was appropriated by thousands of citizens to "highlight instances of police brutality, abuse, and racial profiling" (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015, p. 1); and, the homophily and heterogeneity that characterized prolife and prochoice discourse in response to the murder of abortion doctor George Tiller (Yardi & boyd, 2010). A call-and-response structure has also been noted through the use of #YesAllWhiteWomen, which operates as an oppositional counterpublic pointing out the lack of intersectionality in gender-based hashtag activism such as the #YesAllWomen campaign (Jackson & Banaszczyk, 2016). More broadly, Conover and associates (2011) examine how the Twitter platform reflects, and may exacerbate, bipartisan political ideologies, noting that partisan information is unlikely to be shared

across the political divide although "ideologically-opposed users interact with one another, either through mentions or content injection" (p. 93).

Drawing on these findings on polarization and counterprotest on Twitter, in this study we explore the discursive logic that authorizes both #MeToo and #HimToo as a response to popular feminist rape culture. We perform a qualitative thematic analysis of these two samples—noting the significant discrepancies in sample sizes and relative popularity of these two hashtags—to explore how the Twitter discourses organized under each hashtag frame understandings of rape culture and feminist action in a popular feminist context.

Methods

This study relies on a purposeful sample of Tweets that include the hashtags "#MeToo" (n = 730) and "#HimToo" (n = 124) collected between September 23 and September 27, 2018. These dates were selected to coincide with the lead up to the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on September 27, 2018, at which Kavanaugh and Ford both testified. Tweets for this study were selected using Twitter's public API search function. This approach produces random samples of publicly available tweets. Since the use of Twitter firehose data was outside the scope of this study as well as beyond our resources, we relied on the streaming API to collect data and ensure that we collected a representative sample by collecting data on the same day for each date, while also noting the documented limitations of relying on Twitter's public API (Pfeffer, Mayer, & Morstatter, 2018). Employing a simple method for exporting Web content to text files (trumptwitterarchive.com, n.d.), the tweets were downloaded and formatted into a spreadsheet for further processing. The unit of analysis in this study is the text of the tweet from a sample of users who posted to either the #MeToo or #HimToo hashtag threads in the days around the Kavanaugh congressional hearings.

Hashtags are keywords preceded by a "#" symbol that denote macrolevel conversations on Twitter. Following a hashtag allows a user to post and receive messages outside their regular network of friends and followed accounts (Bruns, 2011). It is the only means of accessing larger conversations without active effort by the individual. Hashtags offer an opportunity to link separate online conversations (Bruns & Burgess, 2011), facilitate online political protest movements (Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2018; Myles, 2019), and play a major role in coordinating offline collective action movements (e.g., Penney & Dadas, 2014). Hashtags are regularly used to discuss current events and major news stories as well (Vis, 2013). This study is intended to build on these established uses of the study of Twitter hashtag movements through the focus on the popular feminist context and the Kavanaugh hearings in particular.

A qualitative thematic analysis of tweets was undertaken in a continuous, cyclic process using Morse's (1994) four stages of conceptualizing textual data: comprehending, synthesizing, theorizing, and recontextualizing. After preliminary readings of the tweets, two authors conducted separate coding sessions with the subsamples for searching for dominant themes. Then we began an intensive reading of the preliminary categories together, clumping and recoding until a tree of large-order and small-order themes emerged from the data (Lindlof, 1995). In this way, a grounded theory approach to understanding the data emerged, and we then moved to recontextualization, that is, finding ways in which the theoretical explanations can be applied to other settings and be useful to others (Morse, 1994).

Results

Thematic analysis yielded four themes from each hashtag: (1) personal experiences, (2) identification, (3) calls to action, and (4) discursive appropriation, with some tweets covering a single theme and others containing multiple themes. We find it significant that these four themes were paralleled in both the #MeToo and #HimToo conversations. Each of these four themes is discussed with reference to each hashtag.

Personal Experience

Personal experiences with sexual assault and harassment were typically discussed in two ways, with tweets describing first-person experiences or third-person accounts. Although the majority of #MeToo hashtags employed first-person tweets, the #HimToo hashtag was mostly employed in third-person voice. For the #MeToo hashtag, there were 59 first-person tweets and 13 third-person tweets. The #MeToo hashtag mostly contained personal stories about sexual abuse, shame, victim blaming, social injustice, sense of empowerment, and resistance, and could therefore be reasonably interpreted as responding to the initial call for tweets under this hashtag, which was to make visible and collect a movement of individual experiences that demonstrate the ubiquity of gender-based sexual harassment and assault. The following #MeToo tweet reports a first-person experience: "I reported. I had to repeat it over and over for strangers. I was asked uncomfortable and demeaning questions. I walked away from it and dropped the charges. Women don't talk because this culture doesn't believe us. #MeToo."

> The following #MeToo tweet describes a third-person experience: "I have volunteered with female alcoholics/addicts for over 15 years. I have heard more sexual abuse stories from these women than you can imagine. THEY NEVER told anyone because THEY felt SHAME. THEY felt like THEY had done something wrong. #METOO."

For the #HimToo hashtag, there were eight first-person tweets and 32 third-person tweets. These personal experience tweets mostly used a defensive tone to highlight men as victims of false allegations of sexual assault, unlike those who used the #MeToo hashtag to share emotional and specific details about their sexual abuse. Notwithstanding the smaller sample size of the #HimToo hashtag conversation, it is interesting to note that most of the personal experiences related under #HimToo are expressed in the third person. The following #HimToo tweet reports a first-person experience:

> Back in 1993 while attending Morris Brown College, a classmate I had broken off a relationship with called campus police and told them I had mentally, physically, and verbally abused her. I know from personal experience, the havoc a false allegation can wreak! #HimToo

The following #HimToo tweet describes a third-person experience:

> #HimToo My cousin was accused by a woman from his church. Thankfully the last time she called 911 to report him in her backyard, he was actually with a detective at his house. The cops cleared him, but I'm sure there are people on her side who still believe her lies.

Identification

There were two types of identification reflected in #MeToo and #HimToo tweets: identification and disidentification. Identification occurs when a person perceives that their interests and experiences are joined or linked to another person (Burke, 1937; Papa, Auwal, & Singhal, 1997). Disidentification occurs when a person perceives that another person's interests and experiences oppose their own or pose a potential threat (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). For the #MeToo hashtag, identification occurred when tweeters supported each other for speaking out, praised the bravery of Ford and other survivors, and expressed solidarity for the movement. There was identification for the #MeToo hashtag with: (1) Christine Blasey Ford (n = 97), (2) Survivors (n = 47), and (3) Metoo (n = 47). For example, the following #MeToo tweet describes identification with Christine Blasey Ford:

> Somehow you feel powerful today, by taking back the control he took from you. I want you to know we are with you. We stand next to you and behind you. Because #MeToo. Because we need you, and we are you. Thank you for coming forward. Thank you for telling your story.

The following #MeToo tweet reflects identification with survivors:

> Nobody can hurt you any more [*sic*] if you're not silent! Speak the truth and yell it from the highest mountain peaks! #MeToo many people's hearts and souls are behind those who suffered over the years and still suffer #yournotalone

The following #MeToo tweet establishes identification with the #MeToo movement: "This tweet brings me to literal tears. Love to every woman who suffers from the derangement of 'those' men. Stand up, be strong, you are never at fault. We stand with #metoo."

Disidentification was evident in #MeToo tweets when tweeters criticized Kavanaugh and Republicans, particularly President Donald Trump. Disidentification was reflected in #MeToo tweets (1) Brett Kavanaugh (n = 57), and (2) Republicans—in general or specific politicians (e.g., President Trump)—(n = 73). President Trump was referenced in these tweets because of his public support of Kavanaugh in light of the allegations and general misogynist sentiment that it was "a very scary time for young men in America . . ." (Diamond, 2018, para. 1) as well as his documented objectification and sexualization of women during his presidential campaign. The following #MeToo tweet describes disidentification with Brett Kavanaugh: "Angry white man rages! Cries! Typical response from an abuser who screams at you then acts pitiful until he feels the need to abuse you the next time. #KavanaughHearings #MeToo #IBelieveChristineBlaseyFord #BelieveSurvivors." The following #MeToo tweet reflects disidentification with Republicans:

> @LindseyGrahamSC you are talking from both sides of your mouth. You can't say that the lack of facts around Ford's allegation makes her unbelievable and at the same time not push for an investigation to discover those facts. #sad #MeToo

For the #HimToo hashtag, there was identification with: (1) Brett Kavanaugh (n = 34), and (2) Republicans (n = 5). These tweets praised Brett Kavanaugh for his hard work and Republicans, particularly President Trump, for their service. The following #HimToo tweet describes identification with Brett Kavanaugh:

> Imagine leading your best life, working toward one specific goal since you were a teenager, and having people try to rip it away from you in the most despicable way possible—with LIES—when it's just within your grasp. #IStandWithBrett #IBelieveHim #HimToo #KavanaughHearings

The following #HimToo tweet reflects identification with Republicans: "Trump is on a roll! I love my President! Don't take sh— from anyone of the leftists di—s! #conjob #himtoo."

Disidentification was reflected in #HimToo tweets for: (1) Christine Blasey Ford (n = 26), (2) Democrats (n = 22), and (3) Metoo (n = 7). The following #HimToo tweet establishes disidentification with Christine Blasey Ford:

> THERE IS ZERO EVIDENCE! #HimToo Can't remember the house, the street, date, transportation to and from. Her own witnesses disavow the events but hey let's derail a good man's life because.....#HimToo There can be victims on both sides. Prove what you are saying or STFU.

The following #HimToo tweet describes disidentification with Democrats: "Yes they should! #HimToo #evil @SenFeinstein and her #cronies should all be ashamed...every @senator that walked out should be referred to ethics committee and removed from all congressional leadership positions. #HimToo #DrainTheSwamp."

The following #HimToo tweet represents disidentification with the #MeToo movement:

> "this is NOT about women being assaulted! This is about keeping #JudgeKavanaugh from being appointed. The #UnhingedLeft is in full #Panic mode #IStantWithBrettKavanaugh #IdoNOTbelieveChristineBlaseyFord #MeTooLiars #DesperateDemocrats #HimToo."

Calls to Action

For the #MeToo hashtag, there were two types of calls to action: (1) resources for those identifying with the #MeToo movement (n = 105), and (2) collective action, uniting or acting together, voting, providing social support, working for change (n = 33). The following tweet identifies resources for those identifying with the #MeToo movement: "Need help getting through today: Call 800.656.HOPE (4673) to be connected with a trained staff member from a sexual assault service provider in your area through @RAINN #metoo #BelieveSurvivors #believewomen #MentalHealthMatters." Furthermore, the following tweet describes a specific action that can be taken by those identifying with the #MeToo movement:

> #ChristineBlaseyFord I am making note of any #Senator that makes you cry because I am really pissed about that and as far as I am concerned I will fight with every breath to have him/her ousted from office. EVERY BREATH. Sincerely yours, Ms 'UNAFILLIATED' VOTER #MeToo RT

For the #HimToo hashtag, actions were also recommended (e.g., voting, removing people from office, confirming Kavanaugh, starting HimToo movement, [n = 12]). The following tweet identifies an *action* that can be taken by the #HimToo movement: "#IBelieveKavanaugh #HimToo #IStandWithBrett Will you be next? Wake up #America! We know how the #Democrats work make sure you get out and #VoteRedToSaveAmerica2018 we must take back our government from these Power Hungry Evil People."

Discursive Appropriation

Discursive appropriation emerged as another theme. Discursive appropriation occurs when a person who opposes the views held by members of a hashtag group, offers their own views, often in the form of criticism, attacks, belittlement, and sarcasm. #MeToo tweets included 142 tweets by people who opposed the #MeToo movement. For the #MeToo hashtag, the following tweet provided an example of discursive appropriation:

> #metoo is a man hating movement, it's a disgrace to those of us who have actually been abused. Words hurt your feelings, so you were abused? Wrong! #metoo is a joke. Making good men walk away from love, marriages, children in fear of false claims. U 'women' r f'ing yourselves over

The #HimToo hashtag tweets included only three tweets by people. The following tweet is an example of a satirical appropriation of #HimToo and the notion that the Kavanaugh hearings reveal the vulnerability of males to sexual assault allegations. This tweet mocks this premise by inverting advice commonly directed to women on how to avoid sexual assault as advice to men on how to avoid sexual assault allegations:

> I have recently learned from the #HeToo and #HimToo movements that MEN ARE NOT SAFE! This is serious! FALSE ACCUSERS ARE EVERYWHERE!
> So, for all you men, I would like to help with some safety tips. Please feel free to add your own, WE MUST KEEP OUR MEN SAFE!
> 1. Begin training boys at an early age to never go to the bathroom alone. There may be a false accuser in there.
> 2. Never accept any unsealed drinks at a bar or party AND make sure not to drink too much, because if you do get falsely accused, people may say you were asking for it or just 'confused.'
> 3. If an elevator opens and there is a lone woman inside – wait for the next elevator or take the stairs. Being late is better than being falsely accused.
> 4. If you notice a woman following you, go into the nearest store and call a friend. She can't falsely accuse you in a public, well-lit space.

5. When you walk to your car, hold your keys in between your thumb, index, and middle fingers so you can use them to jab a false accuser in the eyes and get away.

Discussion

It is important to note that although #MeToo is commonly considered a form of digital activism that is more broadly supported through the feminist movement, #HimToo is more accurately classified as a hashtag conversation that—in the current sample—has trended in response to the Kavanaugh hearings and media commentary, for instance, through conservative commentator Candace Owens, who promoted the narrative that Kavanaugh was being falsely accused. Additionally, as has been noted, #MeToo is a much more visible and frequently used hashtag than #HimToo, as reflected by the different sample sizes collected over the relevant period in this study. Nevertheless, we found it important to examine these two hashtags in conjunction with each other to explore Banet-Weiser's (2018) notion that popular feminism and popular misogyny are structurally linked and emerge through the same cultural and technical mechanisms, particularly in reference to the attention economy and social media platforms. Our findings that these counterpart hashtag conversations elicited parallel discursive themes seemed to support this notion. This coupling also foreshadows some of the findings that we suggest are limitations of #MeToo as a popular feminist movement.

Our thematic analysis revealed that #MeToo relied on individual personal experiences as a foundation for feminist theory, collating these testimonies to illuminate the pervasiveness of sexual violence within patriarchal culture. This demonstrates how a feminist version of "personalized politics" was applied through the Twitter platform and its conventions. However, we also note that one of the vulnerabilities of such experience-based feminist movements is the possibility for rhetorical inversion, as indicated by the #HimToo hashtag that was commonly used to frame men as the "real" victims of contemporary rape culture because of the possibilities for wrongful accusation. We found that, in contrast to the first-person testimonies typically shared using the #MeToo hashtag, experiences shared using the #HimToo hashtag were predominantly written in the third person, demonstrating a generalized fear of the injury popular feminism is inflicting on men rather than objective experiences of gender-based victimization. Nevertheless, when hashtag activism is made visible through personal experiences, there seem to be limited means for crediting or discrediting either movement, a finding informally supported through tweets that cast judgment on the appearance of innocence or guilt for both Blasey Ford and Kavanaugh during the hearings.

Additionally, the theme of identification and disidentification offers further insights into the limitations of personalized politics, which is that the reliance on individual narratives and experiences of popular feminist issues tends to yield oppositional viewpoints that are rarely put in meaningful conversation with each other, with identification and disidentification with Blasey Ford and Kavanaugh falling clearly along partisan political lines. Additionally, and given the purposefully oppositional way in which #HimToo was framed in response to the #MeToo movement, the #MeToo hashtag was often "hijacked" by skeptics questioning or criticizing the movement and the testimonies published therein. Although it is the flexibility inherent to the #MeToo hashtag that Bennett and Segerberg (2013) argue generates the potential for widespread individualized mobilization, in this example we note that this flexibility also opens the movement to discursive appropriation. This reflects one of the broader pitfalls of hashtag activism, which is its potential

to have its original message and intent distorted or even inverted (e.g., Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015; Stache, 2014). Our findings in this sample were that relatively few #MeToo protesters engaged with the #HimToo hashtag to challenge the ideological assumptions within this hashtag conversation. Inversely, the popularity of #MeToo meant that it was quite frequently used to make antifeminist sentiment visible alongside tweets supporting the movement, diluting and potentially discrediting its efficacy as a social movement while also reinforcing triggering narratives for survivors (for instance, that their accounts of sexual assault will not be believed or will be mocked).

Finally, it was clear through the theme of "calls to action" present in both hashtag conversations that Twitter participants attempted to explicitly link their sentiments around the deployment of these hashtags to explicit political and social justice outcomes, supporting findings that individuals increasingly understand their social media participation as an expression of political and civic action (e.g., through participating in interest groups or inciting others to take action on political issues[2]). Tweets classified as "calls to action" were evidence of the ways that hashtag activists envisioned the value of their participation in these conversations, and the potential for these movements to facilitate social support and political action.

Conclusion

This study employed popular feminism as a theoretical lens to understand tweets that contain the hashtags #MeToo and #HimToo associated with the Blasey Ford and Kavanaugh hearings. This study conducted a qualitative thematic analysis to make salient the ways in which participants were engaging with these hashtags, and it ultimately found that the #MeToo and #HimToo movements both evidenced the themes of personal experience, positive identification and disidentification, discursive appropriation, and calls to action. We found it significant that these themes were paralleled within both movements, as this was evidence of the structural logic linking the rise of popular feminism to a pervasive, oppositional popular misogyny. These themes also revealed some of the limitations of hashtag activism in general—including the reliance on experience-based testimonies as the basis for social movement, the lack of meaningful dialogue to contextualize the oppositional ideologies inspiring these two movements, and the potential for discursive appropriation to be rooted within the hashtag movement. At the same time, we found evidence that individuals understood their participation in these conversations as forms of civic action and platforms for social and political change.

Despite yielding these findings, we acknowledge that this study has several limitations. First, this study relied exclusively on hashtags for the search terms and data collection. Although #MeToo has longstanding roots as a hashtag movement, #HimToo was comparatively newer and less popular, resulting in a smaller data set that was available to analyze. Furthermore, there was no attempt to determine audience makeup, either politically, demographically, or geographically. We did note the possibility of results being skewed by bots, although we suggest that the immense resources and strong motives required to generate

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[2] This information comes from the Pew Research Center study on Activism in the Social Media Age (Anderson, Toor, Rainie, & Smith, 2018), although it is important to note that in this study, the prima facie use of hashtags related to a political or social issue was one of the categories used to measure "civic action on social media."

the sophisticated bots required were unlikely to be expended on the social justice issues presented in this study, and tweets that were closely examined did not exhibit likely characteristics of bots (Varol, Ferrara, Davis, Menczer, & Flammini, 2017) and could be linked to active Twitter accounts that did not appear to have bot properties. Finally, the tweets in our database did not consider relative popularity or visibility through opinion leadership or number of retweets, meaning that the relative influence of each comment was not taken into account. Such information would make for a richer analysis of comments and a more in-depth exploration of concepts of identification and the personalization of politics. Moreover, future studies might contemplate exploring the changes in the themes and sentiment on these issues over time on social media.

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