

The dialectical praxis of organizing for social change in digital hashtag movements: #MeToo and the Kavanaugh hearings

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE HASHTAG MOVEMENT

In September of 2018, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford came forward with public allegations of sexual assault against Supreme Court nominee, Judge Brett Kavanaugh. Ford was immediately embraced by the burgeoning online hashtag movement, #MeToo. The hashtag had been widely circulated in recent years, stimulating a larger social movement against misogyny and the cultural norms that facilitate it (Zernike and Steel, 2018). In response to the #MeToo movement's support for Ford and opposition to the Kavanaugh nomination, #HimToo was employed by groups who rejected Ford's claims and argued that it was Kavanaugh, and not Ford, who was the real victim (Ellis, 2018). During this period, the hashtag movement received hours of mainstream media coverage, with references from the highest levels of government and millions of daily mentions from users across social media platforms (Ohlheiser, 2018).

Digital communication through a hashtag movement provides a powerful platform for women to combat misogyny and empower themselves. In this investigation we argue that such communication allows women to organize for social change to produce transformative empowerment. At the same time, social change is a complicated process where people also experience tensions between competing poles of communicative action. One way of understanding these tensions is to examine social change from a dialectic perspective.

This investigation begins with a description of the process of organizing for social change. Second, the concept of dialectic tensions is examined. Third, our methods of examining the dialectical praxis of organizing for social change through digital communication are described. Specifically, we examine publicly posted tweets in the days leading up to the congressional testimony of Brett Kavanaugh and Christine Blasey Ford during Kavanaugh's confirmation hearing. Fourth, we conduct a qualitative thematic analysis of these tweets from the perspectives of organizing for social change and dialectics. Finally, we draw conclusions from this investigation.

## ORGANIZING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

How can vulnerable, silenced and marginalized people gain in political, economic and social power? How can they achieve freedom and equality through democracy and participatory governance? How can they express their views and participate in decisions that shape their lives? The answer to these questions can be found in activating the process of organizing for social change, the process through which a group of individuals gain control of their future (see Chapters 5, 6, 17). Importantly, both the means and ends or the processes and outcomes of organizing should be just and humane. In this chapter, we focus on organizing for social change processes that are pro-disempowered, pro-women and pro-vulnerable individuals or groups. Organizing, in this sense, is empowering and transformative; it orchestrates people's talents, resources and skills to enhance their collective power (Papa et al., 2006). More specifically, with respect to this investigation, we focused on how women organized for social change through the dialectical praxis of a hashtag movement that gives women's voices a forum for expression and helps them mobilize to experience empowerment in the form of communicative action.

### Dialectic Tensions

When a group of disempowered people organize for social change, the complexity of the enterprise becomes apparent. Those in power sustain their privileges by reinforcing control or further denying rights to the disempowered. Alternatively, a bit of empowerment in one sphere may lead to oppression in another sphere. Dialectic struggles between competing opposites are fundamental in organizing for social change processes (Papa et al., 1997; Papa et al., 2006). The concept of dialectics has been conceptualized in various ways in the disciplines of philosophy and communication (Papa et al., 2006). Central to most of these conceptualizations are the following elements: totality, contradiction, motion and praxis (Conville, 1998; Dindia, 1998; Rawlins, 1992, 1998; Van Lear, 1998). The concept of "totality" refers to the "constant interconnection and reciprocal influence of multiple individual, interpersonal, and social factors" (Rawlins, 1992, p. 7). This perspective on totality draws attention to relational interdependence, meaning that any person's actions in a social system impact others within that system. Also important to the notion of totality is that social and cultural factors impact the process of communication and how it is perceived (Papa et al., 2006). "Contradiction" refers to the oppositional forces that are simultaneously present in human relationships (for example, independence and dependence). Although these forces are antagonistic, they are also part of the

interdependent relational dynamics between social actors (Papa et al., 2006). “Motion” refers to activities, movement or changes that occur as people shift between the competing poles of communicative action (Papa et al., 2006). Finally, the notion of praxis “describes the human communicator as an ongoing producer and product of his or her choices within an encompassing cultural matrix” (Rawlins, 1992, pp. 7–8).

Before moving on to describe some of the historical development of a dialectic perspective, it seems important to separate dialectics from dualisms. When two mutually antagonistic aspects of communication exist in a relationship a dualism exists (Papa et al., 2006). When describing dualisms, no assumptions are made about the independence, simultaneity or possible unification of these opposing influences (Fairhurst, 2001). From a dualistic perspective we come to understand “what something is by focusing on what it is not” (Fairhurst, 2001, p. 380). By contrast, a dialectic perspective focuses on the tensions that exist between opposing forces and the simultaneous existence of each force in relationships. Simply stated, rather than reducing tensions to binary decisions, such as either/or, a dialectical perspective urges us to think in terms of “both/and.” In addition, researchers interested in dialectics also describe what occurs as people shift between competing poles of communicative action and may attempt to show how a synthesis between opposites may be reached (Papa et al., 2006).

To describe the process of organizing for social change requires consideration of the nuances, contradictions and dialectics that emerge when people attempt to change their behavior at the individual or collective level. Social change is seldom a neat and tidy process that flows linearly or can be predicted. It rarely flows directly and immediately from participation in organizational activities that involve a specific group of people. Rather social change emerges in a nonlinear, circuitous and dialectic process of struggle between competing poles of communicative action. It is a rather complex process, if not downright messy (Papa et al., 2006).

While organizing for social change, people often create a social learning environment in which new behavioral options may be considered only to later discover that what seems possible in theory may not work so easily in real life. Certain community members may develop a sense of collective efficacy in solving a social problem, but the solution they devise may not be effective. A person may say that they believe in performing a certain action, yet these beliefs may not be reflected in his or her actions (Papa et al., 2006).

Leading communication scholars share this viewpoint. For example, many scholars have drawn attention to the dilemmatic character of life and how change processes of any sort must be understood from a perspective that recognizes contradictions, paradoxes and dialectics (Handy, 1994; Harter and Krone, 2001; O'Connor, 1995; Putnam, 1986). Furthermore, struggles between competing poles of communicative action may be intensified with a social justice mission or with the turbulent and complex environments characteristic of post-modernity. In fact, organizational communication researchers in particular have focused on how cooperative organizing efforts of any kind are informed by contradictions, paradoxes, ironies and dialectics (Ashcraft, 2000, 2001; Ashcraft and Tretheway, 2004; Harter, 2004; Poole and Van de Ven, 1989; Putnam, 1986; Stohl and Cheney, 2001; Tracy, 2004; Tretheway, 1999; Tretheway and Ashcraft, 2004; Wendt, 1998). Such a focus disrupts the myth of rationality that has traditionally supported much theorizing about how people work interdependently in organizations or organized movements. Simply stated, any contemporary theory of communicating and organizing must account for the struggles and tensions that surface as people act together and work interdependently to accomplish individual and collective goals (Papa et al., 2006). With respect to this investigation, we are concerned with the struggles and tensions women experience when they confront patriarchy. Importantly, these struggles and tensions are both internal and external. Internal tensions exist when women engage in actions that are simultaneously empowering and disempowering (Papa et al., 2000). External tensions exist when women's attempts at empowerment are opposed, even thwarted, by external agents (see Chapter 16). The preceding review of literature focused on field-based organizing for social change, whereas this study examines social movements taking form in digital space. This recent and significant shift in the places where organizing for social change occurs requires critical attention so we can gain an understanding of how digital organizing can produce social change independently or in conjunction with face-to-face organizing efforts. In the next section, we describe our study of digital organizing for social change by examining social media conversations using the #MeToo and #HimToo hashtags.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample and Rationale

This investigation relied on a purposeful sample of 3492 tweets that included the hashtags “#MeToo” and 587 “#HimToo” tweets collected between September 23–26, 2018. Tweets for this study were selected using Twitter’s public API search function. This approach produced random samples of publicly available tweets. Employing a simple method for exporting web content to text files (trumptwitterarchive.com), the tweets were downloaded and formatted into a spreadsheet for further processing.

Hashtags are keywords preceded by a “#” symbol that denote macro-level 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 and Burgess, 2011), facilitate online political protest movements (Freelon et al., 2018; Myles, 2019) and play a major role in coordinating offline collective action movements (Penney and Dadas, 2013). Hashtags are regularly used to discuss current events and major news stories as well (Vis, 2013). Since the guiding research in this study was concerned with understanding online political expression in the wake of the Kavanaugh hearings, examining hashtags on Twitter was an ideal method of inquiry.

### Qualitative Thematic Analysis

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 re-contextualizing. The comprehending stage involved selecting an appropriate methodological approach and identifying when we had enough data to offer a “descriptive slice” of the project. After preliminary readings of the tweets, two authors conducted separate coding sessions with the sub-samples for the purpose of searching for dominant themes. Then we began an intensive reading of the preliminary categories together, clumping and re-coding 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 re-contextualization, that is, finding ways in which the theoretical explanations can be applied to other settings and be useful to others (Morse, 1994).

### QUALITATIVE DATA INTERPRETATION

Thematic analysis produced four parallel themes from each hashtag: (1) Personal Experiences, (2) Identification, (3) Calls to Action, and (4) Discursive Appropriation. Some tweets covered a single theme; others covered multiple themes. Each of these four themes is discussed with reference to each hashtag.

### Personal Experiences

Personal experiences with sexual assault and harassment were discussed in two ways. Tweets described first-person experiences or third-person accounts. For the #MeToo hashtag there were 317 first-person tweets and 68 third-person tweets. For the #HimToo hashtag there were 42 first-person tweets and 171 third-person tweets.

The following #MeToo tweets reported first-person experiences:

- (1) My abuser was an uncle who was in his teens, I was five. Even as an adult I kept it from my mother, I knew it would destroy her. We keep silent for a myriad of reasons.
- (2) No shit. I'm sick and tired of reliving my own #MeToo moment (from 36 years ago), every. single. damn. day.
- (3) I was cross examined by a female attorney who literally had the balls to speculate in open court that perhaps all of the bruises from my violent rape were just due to rough sex and that maybe I was into that and how could the jury truly know.
- (4) In psychotherapy, I discovered that part of my depression stems from not saying something when I was raped. For years I wondered how many fewer victims Gacy would have had if I only said something in 1973. That's obviously a hypothetical question that can't be answered.
- (5) I've been victim to sexual abuse several times from different men starting when I was 10 years old. I never reported one of them for a number of reasons. I can only imagine how difficult this has been for Christine Blasey Ford. Her courage is overwhelming.

The following #MeToo tweets described third-person experiences:

- (1) I've heard from over a dozen complete strangers who said they were sexually assaulted and never reported it. They are appalled by GOP flippancy toward Kavanaugh supporters and are ready to vote.

(2) As a 911 dispatcher, you would not believe how many times I have taken a call from a just battered woman, while my partner is on another 911 call from the batterer ... trying to mansplain it away, or ultimately blame the woman.

(3) My best friend was being sexually harassed at her job and her employers told her to wear looser fitting clothes and that she should expect that behavior from men because she's attractive. Unacceptable.

The following #HimToo tweets reported first-person experiences:

(1) I remember everyone there and the multiple people accusing me that night. I remember when I was called up by law enforcement to question me. I remember the boos coming from the crowd when my name was called for graduation. Not all victims are women.

(2) From someone that was falsely accused and did not seek recourse, it's time to stop this crap. Due process! Feminists, the law applies to you too. Defend our boys.

The following #HimToo tweets described third-person experiences:

(1) My brother went through a sexual accusation coming from his ex-wife, at court her own family testified in my brother's favor, it was all a lie; however, the pain to see him going through it it's hard to forget.

(2) We wonder why there is so much suicide and violence coming from men. We do not support men in our society. We bash them. We accuse them. We do not support fathers. There is no support for men. They are falsely accused often. Sad for men.

(3) This Democrat will be voting straight Republican ticket from here on in. Disgusting politics slandering a good man's reputation. Destroying his family. We all better wake up this could be anyone at any time. Innocent until proven guilty.

The juxtaposition of #MeToo and #HimToo tweets reflected the notion of absence and the dialectic of control. Specifically, Mumby and Stohl (1991) argued that discourse "creates meaning systems of presence and absence which systematically privileges and marginalizes different ... experiences" (p. 313). This point requires understanding "ways that social collectives come to privilege certain articulations of reality over others" (p. 314). Concerning the focus of this investigation, the dialectic of presence and absence emerged around the question of

whose experiences, women or men, should be recognized as reflecting harm (presence) and whose should not (absence).

An examination of the dialectic of presence and absence directed attention to how it was embodied in various texts (Harris, 2013; Mumby and Stohl, 1991) such as #MeToo and #HimToo tweets. These texts showed how power was displayed through the production and reproduction of dominance, making present some forms of reality over others that were absent (Clegg, 1975; Conrad, 1983; Giddens, 1979, 1984; Manuti and Mininni, 2013; Mumby, 1988). Moreover, as Mumby and Stohl (1991) explained:

Discourse and the rules that constitute it function to establish a particular “regime of truth” within which organizational members are simultaneously objectified (that is, treated as bodies upon which various disciplinary practices can be exercised) and recognize themselves as subjects (that is, organizational members whose identity is constructed in a certain way). (pp. 316–17)

Concerning the focus of this study, this point meant that the presence of #HimToo tweets as part of their hashtag movement signified the standards associated with a particular “regime of truth” (for example, men’s experiences of harm are equal to or more relevant than women’s experiences). Consequently, the absenting of women’s tweets through the opposition of the #HimToo movement was justified because women’s experiences did not meet the same standards of harm experienced by men.

Although texts could establish a particular regime of truth, “systems of meaning are contestable and hence open to transformation” (Mumby and Stohl, 1991, p. 317). This point means that in a social system, there may be “a struggle between different interest groups to create a meaning system in which certain views of the world are privileged over others” (Mumby and Stohl, 1991, p. 318). Furthermore, any “consensually derived systems of meanings possess within them alternative meanings” (Mumby and Stohl, 1991, p. 319). These alternative meanings are based on alternative readings “that produce transformative possibilities and change” (Mumby and Stohl, 1991, p. 319).

Although the presence of the #HimToo hashtag movement represented a regime of truth that attempted to deny or absent women’s experiences of sexual harassment and assault, the #MeToo movement established its own regime of truth. The very presence of millions of tweets affirmed the reality women have established for themselves by sharing their experiences. In fact, since



actress Alyssa Milano encouraged women to share their experiences of sexual assault and harassment in 2017, the #MeToo hashtag has been used 19 million times in the 2017–18 timeframe (Brown, 2018).

Also, interesting to note was the difference in the ratio of first-person versus third-person experiences between the #MeToo and #HimToo hashtags. For the #MeToo hashtag, the ratio of first-person to third-person experiences was 4.7 to 1. For the #HimToo hashtag, the ratio was the reverse, 4.1 to 1 for third-person experiences over first-person experiences. What this showed was the overwhelming number of experiences women shared about their personal experiences as reflected in the 19 million tweets between 2017 and 2018. On the other hand, men needed to search and report experiences of sexual assault and harassment they heard from others because the experience of this phenomenon was not nearly as prevalent as women's experiences. The difference between first-person and third-person accounts of women and men was also reflective of a strategy used by more powerful people (mostly men) to deny the existence of a problem experienced by the disempowered (mostly women). This is another way to describe the presence-absence dialectic. For example, in another context, regarding claims of racism, whites often denied the racist experience of minority groups by claiming the actual problem was racism against whites (vanDijk, 1992).

The final dialectic present in the first-person experiences theme was the dialectic of empowerment-disempowerment (Papa et al., 2000). Tweet #4 and #5 from the first-person experiences of #MeToo survivors captured this dialectic. These women were empowered by sharing their stories of abuse and survival with others having similar experiences. As Held (1993) observed, the power to give voice to one's aspiration to be heard is not so much the removal of an external impediment as it is the beginning of internal empowerment. At the same time, their personal experiences were deeply disempowering because of the psychological and emotional barriers preventing them from holding their abusers accountable for their behaviors. They may also have confronted barriers to reporting that are embedded in the power dynamics of a male patriarchal system in which some men control women with the threat of retaliation, while others silence women through refusing to believe their stories.

Identification

There were two types of identification reflected in #MeToo and #HimToo tweets: positive identification and disidentification. Positive identification occurs when a person perceives their interests and experiences are joined or linked to another person (Burke, 1937; Papa et al., 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 and Fairhurst, 2001). For the #MeToo hashtag there was positive identification with: (a) Christine Blasey-Ford (n = 523), (b) Survivors (n = 229), and (c) MeToo (n = 257). Disidentification was reflected in #MeToo tweets for: (a) Brett Kavanaugh (n = 310) and (b) Republicans in general or specific politicians such as, for example, President Trump (n = 440). For the #HimToo hashtag there was positive identification with: (a) Brett Kavanaugh (n = 178) and (b) Republicans (n = 38). Disidentification was reflected in #HimToo tweets for: (a) Christine Blasey-Ford (n = 145), (b) Democrats (n = 132), and (3) MeToo (n = 33).

#### Identification and disidentification—#MeToo tweets

The following #MeToo tweets described positive identification with Christine Blasey Ford:

- (1) I stand in solidarity with Christine Blasey-Ford. My heart is pounding and I feel sick to my stomach with nerves for Ford, so I can't even imagine what she's feeling. Such a courageous woman, and a truly wonderful role model. With you in spirit from Australia.
- (2) Today we stand. Today we stand with Christine Blasey Ford. Today we stand with our mothers, sisters, friends, daughters. Today we watch someone go through their worst nightmare to stop a bad man from getting a lifetime Supreme Court position. Today we stand with #Me too.
- 3) Watching Ford this morning has me in tears; recalling my sexual assault by a powerful attorney over 34 years ago. Seeing/hearing the pain as Ford testifies—she's beyond courageous.
- (4) Christine Blasey-Ford I served in the infantry for twelve years and I have never seen courage like what you have displayed today. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!!!

The following #MeToo tweets reflected positive identification with survivors:

- (1) Women are screaming without being heard. Sexual abuse and violence from childhood and through schools and college continues. We have to listen and support those who cry out. Not silence them and give them a life of suffering.

(2) It's not just the brave women coming forward with Kavanaugh stories but every woman who has added her own story to help explain rape culture and stand in solidarity. We are all using our trauma to save the country from Kananaugh #MeToo #BelieveSurvivors

(3) You are FAR from alone. Sending survivor hugs of support.

(4) We believe survivors. Women can't win. Any time a #MeToo story comes out, it's a "Bad time", for the person she is accusing. The people accusing #Kavanaugh are getting threats on their lives from #ProLifers, let that sink in.

The following #MeToo tweets established positive identification with the #MeToo movement:

(1) I'm proud of all the women in the MeToo movement. Willing to give up their privacy to stop creepy men from thinking their privates give them privilege.

(2) The patriarchal social structures we live under honor and promote dominance, especially over those who are weaker—this is a very sick system that keeps humanity from progressing #MeToo #MeToomvmt #TimesUp

(3) I support #MeToo because literally every woman I know carries the burden and does the work of actively maintaining safety from predators at work and can't always succeed.

(4) The first time I was groped, I TRIED to report it. I was told it was my fault because I happen to be well-endowed. Guess where my hesitancy to report when it happened later on in life came from #MeToo.

The following #MeToo tweets described disidentification with Brett Kavanaugh:

(1) Come on how is this guy still a nominee? He obviously has no character or morals. There are consequences to the actions you take in life. Brett should face this now & withdraw his name from consideration.

(2) I believe we are going to have a sexual predator on the bench of the Supreme Court. This is NOT a man I want making decisions about reproductive rights. He is nothing more than a power hungry angry white man. No to Kavanaugh.

(3) Kavanaugh might be removed from his current position as a judge because of this fiasco that HE allowed to play out. I guess he thought that over time people would forget his horrible behavior. Nobody ever forgets being violated. This was doomed from the start.

(4) This sounds less like the cries of an innocent man and more like the bratty behavior and answers from a guilty person who is used to getting his way.

The following #MeToo tweets reflected disidentification with Republicans:

- (1) This horror show from Lindsay Graham tells you everything you need to know about how this all went so wrong for the GOP: They have NO IDEA WHAT IS HAPPENING IN AMERICA regarding #MeToo
- (2) Trump never takes subjective complaints seriously. Especially from women.
- (3) The GOP already had their minds made up from the start. The Republican agenda is more important than the possibility of truth and justice.
- (4) For people to say the Senate GOP hasn't learned from MeToo & Anita Hill is to assume the GOP wants to be ethical and principled. I think they did learn. They learned that in the era of MeToo, they must move faster and more brutally to get their way than was necessary for Anita Hill.

For the #MeToo movement there was an internal dialectic tension between identification and disidentification. One possible explanation is that the process of organizing for social change involves both identifying positively with those whose experiences are similar to one's own, while simultaneously opposing those who attempt to deny empowerment for a group. In Ford's case, survivors and the #MeToo movement not only served as sources of identification, but they illuminated a path toward empowerment through the connective tissue of common experience. Alternatively, Brett Kavanaugh and Republicans were opponents who were attempting to disempower women by denying the relevance of their experiences. Both identification and disidentification are necessary to promote social change. In fact, communication scholars have noted there is often an interplay between acceptance and rejection of different identities (Phillips and Hardy, 1997; Putnam and Fairhurst, 2001) as a group shifts among identification, counter-identification and disidentification (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996; Papa et al., 2005; Papa et al., 2006; Putnam and Fairhurst, 2001).

Identification and disidentification— #HimToo tweets

The following #HimToo tweets described positive identification with Brett Kavanaugh:

- (1) I am crying my eyes out! Who's the real victim? Kavanaugh is!
- (2) The suffering is from Judge Kavanaugh. He's the victim of an allegation w/zero evidence by all alleged witnesses.
- (3) How about Kavanaugh? Is he basically on witness protection because of all the death threats against him & his family are receiving? Over an accusation 30 years ago, that no one will corroborate, that is brought up now in the most suspicious of circumstances.
- (5) Kavanaugh's heartfelt declaration of innocence made me cry.

The following #HimToo tweets reflected positive identification with Republicans:

- (1) We want to move to SC to support Lindsay Graham. Someone who spoke from his heart, the truth and patriotism. Rare to find a leader like that today.
- (2) Key word "alleged". Kavanaugh has a pretty important job right now and in the past when a President appointed someone ... all was silent. This is all a lie from the resist Trump at any cost and it's shameful.
- (3) Senator Graham gets my respect from now on I will no longer call him "Grahamnesty"

The following #HimToo tweets established disidentification with Christine Blasey Ford:

- (1) She suffers from 'ImGonnaGetPaidOnABookDeal' Syndrome.
- (2) Not credibly accused. That is a lie. Ford has zero proof and zero corroboration, even from her girlfriend. Something probably happened to Ford, but it wasn't Kavanaugh.
- (3) Not one single tear from Christine Ford! I have NONE for her!
- (4) This is absurd! The committee ALREADY has signed sworn statements from ALL the people Ford "said" were there stating they were either not there or didn't even know Brett Kavanaugh. Even her friend wouldn't back up her story! She has NO proof of anything!
- (5) She whined though never cried. Then read from her attorney's script and she lied under oath.

The following #HimToo tweets described disidentification with Democrats:

- (1) Of course, they will send more liars. Should we expect anything else from these evil people?

(2) Selling their souls to the devil, just for greed and attention. It is a sad world we live in. God help us. All of these false allegations are just more obstruction from the Democrats. They are evil and will stop at nothing to get their way. It is so infuriating.

(3) Being a Senator, I'm disappointed you might be wavering and caving to the Democrat political terrorist party. There is NO PROOF but the false accusation from 35 years ago. If you're that stupid to support liberals and their fake news agenda, you're a turncoat.

(4) How did Brett Kavanaugh go from a raging angry drunk in college to a nominee for the highest court in the land. Success doesn't work like that, Democrats are pure EVIL!

The following #HimToo tweets represent disidentification with the #MeToo movement:

(1) Save our sons from this political sham that is the #MeToo Movement. No more bitter, belligerent females.

(2) As a survivor of rape this is the point I've been making since the MeToo crap started. These allegations were predictable from the Dems. They keep doing it because it's worked 4 them. Ford wasn't credible. I was glad to see Kavanaugh fight back!

(3) This is not about women being assaulted! This is about keeping Judge Kavanaugh from being appointed. Do not believe Christine Blasey Ford—MeTooLiars.

(4) The #MeToo is being taken too far by some people out there on the internet, but yeah, #HimToo. If there's no evidence, there's no crime.

In much the same way as performed by the #MeToo movement, the #HimToo movement displayed both identification and disidentification in their tweets. They identified with Kavanaugh and the Republicans, and they disidentified with Ford, the Democrats and the #MeToo movement. The identification they exhibited with respect to Kavanaugh is because they viewed him as a victim of unjustified and unsupported accusations. At some level, this identification may also have existed because #HimToo participants also perceived themselves as unfairly victimized by false allegations. Identification with Republicans existed because they supported Kavanaugh and his nomination to the Supreme Court. #HimToo disidentified with Ford, the Democrats and the #MeToo movement because of the role each played in victimizing and opposing Kavanaugh. Both identification and disidentification were part of the process of

how #HimToo organized for change to oppose the efforts of #MeToo to empower women who experienced sexual assault and sexual harassment.

As with the personal experiences theme, the juxtaposition of #MeToo and #HimToo tweets reflected the notion of absence and the dialectic of control. Concerning the focus of this investigation, the dialectic of presence and absence emerged around the question of whose identifications, women or men, should be recognized as reflecting truth (presence) and whose should not (absence). From the #MeToo perspective, women were victimized by men through sexual assault and harassment. People and groups who posited this view were perceived as advocating the truth. From the #HimToo perspective, men were victimized by false allegations of sexual assault and harassment. People and groups who presented this view were also perceived as advocating the truth. The presence of this opposition showed how dialectic tensions are part of the process of how a disempowered group advocates for social change against the opposition of a group attempting to protect their power.

#### Calls to Action

For the #MeToo hashtag, there were two types of calls to action: (a) resources for those identifying with the #MeToo movement (n = 553) and (b) actions such as uniting or acting together, voting, removing people from office, providing social support and working for change (n = 177). For the #HimToo hashtag, actions were recommended such as voting, removing people from office, confirming Kavanaugh and starting the HimToo movement (n = 63).

For the #MeToo hashtag, the following tweets identified resources for those identifying with the #MeToo movement:

- (1) The newest novel from Kate Walbert, “His Favorites”—primed to be a major work for the #MeToo movement—arrives not quite a year into an unprecedented outpouring of testimony from women about their experiences of sexual harassment and assault.
- (2) I recommend those struggling with trauma, PTSD, stress, anxiety etc. from the constantly triggering MeToo stories look into the community resilience model. There is also a free app you can download called the ichill app. I have found it very helpful.
- (3) Need help getting through today: Call 800.656.HOPE (4673) to be connected with a trained staff member from sexual assault service provider in your area through @RAINN

For the #MeToo hashtag, the following tweets described specific actions that could be taken by those identifying with the #MeToo movement:

- (1) Burr supporting Kavanaugh. Thank you, Senator Burr for making it crystal clear that the safety of women means absolutely nothing to you. I will NEVER stop fighting to remove you from office.
- (2) The #MeToo movement should empower victims from this point forward to speak up when something happens. Don't sit on it, don't wait.
- (3) #MeToo has been declared a militant group and compared to terrorists by Laura Ingraham. Please purchase products from those who don't advertise on Fox news.
- (4) Following Kavanaugh hearings from Houston, where I'm sitting with a room full of women nonprofit leaders discussing the importance of raising our voices to strive for long-lasting change.

For the #HimToo hashtag, the following tweets identified actions that could be taken by the #HimToo movement:

- (1) Senator Feinstein needs to be removed from her post immediately. What she has done to this man is disgraceful. As a Democrat I am infuriated with how low my party has gone.
- (2) Smearing this man over politics. People need to walk away from these disgusting people and vote them out of office. They are not fit to run this country.
- (3) This sparks the #HimToo movement. Sexual assaults go both ways and it is very serious. So, if people make an accusation whether it's the next day or thirty years from now, they better have evidence that can be corroborated.

There was a resource dialectic in the calls to action that reflected the power structures framing #MeToo and #HimToo conversations. Despite the presence and support of millions of #MeToo members, there was still a perceived need for external resources to sustain advocacy for the right to be free from sexual assault and sexual harassment. Personal advocacy alone was insufficient for women to experience transformative empowerment. Specifically, over 100 tweets identified various external sources of support for #MeToo members. Conversely, there was not a single tweet identifying external resources for #HimToo members. The reason for this may have been



that groups with power need to only rely on their personal advocacy to sustain their dominance over a disempowered group.

The resource dialectic observed in the #MeToo and #HimToo tweets was reflective of what Papa et al. (2000) observed concerning women dairy farmers in India. Specifically, women sought the assistance of others to promote a particular cause (for example, forming women's clubs) rather than engage in personal action themselves. This is an example of an oppressed group internalizing a belief of incompetence so that it may seek external assistance from others believed to be more competent to act.

The second dialectic reflected in the calls to action was one of dominance-resistance. #HimToo calls to action, namely, voting, removing people from office, confirming Kavanaugh or starting the #HimToo movement, were for the purpose of sustaining dominance. Men did not want women to challenge their right to be free from accusations of sexual assault or harassment. MeToo calls to action such as uniting or acting together, voting, removing people from office, providing social support and working for change were for the purposes of resisting domination and producing meaningful empowerment. Here, Gramsci's (1971) views on hegemony are particularly informative. Gramsci viewed hegemony as a process of struggle that embodies, simultaneously, processes of domination and resistance. For those identifying with the #MeToo movement, this meant both confronting domination and engaging in acts of resistance to prevent continued domination.

### Discursive Appropriation

Discursive appropriation occurs when persons who oppose the views held by a group enter the conversational space of that group and offer their own views, often in the form of criticism, attacks, belittlement and sarcasm. The #MeToo hashtag tweets included 719 tweets by people who opposed the #MeToo movement. The #HimToo hashtag tweets included 11 tweets by people who opposed the #HimToo movement.

For the #MeToo hashtag, the following tweets were examples of discursive appropriation:

(1) Ford—what an excuse for a woman who has raked up events from teenage years to discredit a good human being. Perceived events of 30/40 years ago being dragged up to support a discredited #MeToo movement following that now undermines everything it should stand for.

- (2) Make no mistake, if the LEFT gets away with preventing Kavanaugh from being confirmed, NO MAN IS SAFE ever again. Ever.
- (3) As women we are strong to come forward. And as women we are weak to have evidence or proof required from us. THAT is #EmpoweringWomen! The #MeToo era is a good time to have a #Vagina! #IDontBelieveHer #KavanaughHearings
- (4) These #MeToo frauds, the democRats drag up, are always fishy from beginning to end. No evidence, no credible witnesses & inaccurate memories are the calling card of the #MeToo fraud #Know your enemy.

For the #HimToo hashtag, the following tweets were examples of discursive appropriation:

- (1) I'm unfriending all people who share that #HimToo post about men not being safe from sexual assault accusations. I'm way more concerned about the women who are not safe from sexual assaults.
- (2) To the idiotic #HimToo movement, if men aren't safe from allegations of sexual misconduct, then why aren't these allegations being investigated to see if they're true or false? What did you Dumb Conservatives think the Judicial system was established for? Lock up minorities?

An explanation of the dialectic tensions present in discursive appropriation requires consideration of Foucault's views on discourse and discursive formations. For Foucault (1973), the statements a person produces are not meaningful in and of themselves. Rather, statements create a network of rules that determine what is meaningful. These rules are the preconditions for statements or utterances to have meaning. According to Foucault, all statements are produced within certain societal conditions and they exist within a field of discourse. When he used the term "field of discourse," Foucault meant the total field within which social actors communicate with one another. This encompasses all statements or utterances made in each societal context. This enormous field of statements is called discursive formations. With respect to this investigation, the conversations linked to both the #MeToo and #HimToo hashtags created a field of discourse within which there were discursive formations.

Foucault (1973) then provided insight into power relations within specific fields of discourse by explaining how context influences the meanings that people assign to texts or actions. In a field of discourse, the total communication environment created by people interacting with one another forms discursive formations that influence the meaning that is given to human actions where power is displayed. Of course, different interpretations may be possible in a large field of discourse where people's discursive formations may be influenced by dominant or exclusive communication networks. In other words, more than one discursive formation may be present in a single field of discourse. Furthermore, continued interaction among members occupying a field of discourse may produce new discursive formations that produce new interpretations of a given action.

Both the #MeToo and the #HimToo movements created fields of discourse in the tweets they posted. Each field of discourse was dominated by tweets supportive of the members of these movements. There were, however, instances where members of one movement entered the conversational space of the other movement. These tweets were largely in the form of criticism, attacks, belittlement and sarcasm, hence the term discursive appropriation. In the context of this investigation, discursive appropriation occurred when persons appropriated for themselves the conversational space of a group they opposed. We believe this was done to disempower or discredit the communication of the members of a group.

So, within a given field of discourse (for example, #MeToo or #HimToo movements), there were comments that were both empowering and disempowering. This not only created an empowerment-disempowerment dialectic within each field of discourse, it reflected the fact that more than one discursive formation was present within each field (Foucault, 1973). Interestingly, there were far more instances of #HimToo supporters entering the conversational space of #MeToo. One way to interpret this finding is that it reflects the determination of an empowered group to continue their domination over a disempowered group. Also, the anger reflected in so many of these tweets showed the disrespect #HimToo had for the views expressed by #MeToo members.

## CONCLUSION

When Ford came forward with public allegations of sexual assault against Supreme Court nominee, Brett Kavanaugh, it stimulated two hashtag movements in the form of #MeToo and

#HimToo. We looked at these two hashtag movements in terms of how they allowed each group to organize for social change and how this organizing brought forth dialectic tensions that needed to be confronted. Qualitative thematic analysis of about 4000 tweets from the period of September 23–26, 2018 yielded four parallel themes for #MeToo and #HimToo movements: personal experiences, identification/disidentification, calls to action and discursive appropriation. With respect to the personal experiences theme, the juxtaposition of #MeToo and #HimToo tweets reflected the notion of absence and the dialectic of control. Specifically, the #MeToo movement argued that the experiences of women with sexual assault and harassment from men deserve attention and action in the form of holding men accountable for their actions. Alternatively, the #HimToo movement tried to position men's experiences of harm from false accusations as equal to or worse than the harm experienced by women. The #MeToo movement countered this opposition with tens of millions of postings documenting women's experiences of sexual assault and harassment from men. #HimToo postings failed to document personal harm at levels even close to those of the #MeToo movement.

Also, concerning the personal experiences of women was an important empowerment/disempowerment dialectic. Women were both empowered to share their stories of abuse and survival while many were also simultaneously disempowered by a self-imposed silencing when they did not hold their abusers accountable for their behaviors. This silencing is a product of the historical experiences of too many women when they not only failed to successfully hold men accountable for their actions but were further victimized by the process of bringing forward their stories.

The theme of identification/disidentification showed both the #MeToo and #HimToo movements identifying with those people and groups who advocated their interests and disidentifying with those who opposed them. At one level, this reflected an internal dialectic between identification and disidentification for each group because each simultaneously advocated for those who contributed to their cause and opposed those who denied them empowerment. However, does the pursuit of both identification and disidentification advocate group interests or divert attention away from those interests by emboldening the opposition? Importantly, both #MeToo and #HimToo were attempting to empower themselves through advocacy of group interests and disempower their opposition through their self-advocacy. This ultimately draws attention to

absence and the dialectic of control: specifically, whose identification should be recognized as representing the truth (or presence) and whose should not be recognized as truth (or absence). The third theme, calls to action, drew attention to two dialectics. First, there was a resource dialectic. Groups holding greater access to power (mostly men) were able to sustain their power and promote their interests solely through self-advocacy. Alternatively, women, although they were unified by millions of common experiences of abuse, could not promote their interests through self-advocacy alone. Rather, they needed the assistance of external resources. Given that the power should be theirs because of their experiences, why would self-advocacy alone be not sufficient to advocate their cause? The answer appears to lie in the difficulty of confronting and overturning an entrenched power structure that has been successful in suppressing women's empowerment for centuries. The second dialectic was one of dominance and resistance. #HimToo calls to action were for the purpose of sustaining dominance. #MeToo calls to action were primarily for the purpose of resisting that dominance. The struggle women face is how to confront this dialectic in ways that are ultimately empowering.

Discursive appropriation was the final theme. Discursive appropriation occurs when persons who oppose the views held by a group enter the conversational space of that group and offer their own views, often in the form of criticism, attacks, belittlement and sarcasm. This complicates and disrupts the field of discourse for a group because member messages of empowerment are forced to confront dialectically the disempowering appropriation of their space by those who oppose them. We posit that to organize successfully for social change, group members need to make decisions about how to best confront attempts to disempower so they can move forward their empowering agenda.

When a group of disempowered people, mostly women, organize for social change the complexity of the enterprise becomes apparent. Those in power, mostly men, sustain their privileges by reinforcing control or further denying rights to the disempowered. Alternatively, a bit of empowerment in one sphere may lead to oppression in another sphere. Because dialectic struggles between competing opposites are fundamental in organizing for social change processes, the disempowered need to engage in communicative action that leads progressively to empowerment, while also communicating effectively and strategically to oppose attempts to disempower, whether it be from within group or from external groups (see Chapter 6).

This research has discussed and analysed theoretical discourses on organizing for social change that were originally formulated through an analysis of field-based movements. However, as social media become increasingly integrated within social movements to mobilize participants, disseminate messages and generate digitally based activism and protest, it is important to consider the ways that these discourses might be applicable to contemporary hybrid and digital social movement formations. This study demonstrates a way in which traditional organizational theories may be applied to the study of digital social movements that may be relevant for further inquiries into this growing research area.

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