

**A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF FEMINIST JOURNALISM COVERAGE OF THE
#METOO MOVEMENT IN *MS.* AND *JEZEBEL***

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

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ABSTRACT

Since October 2017, many people have shared their experiences as sexual assault survivors on social media using #MeToo, and the #MeToo movement has been covered extensively by media outlets. The purpose of this qualitative study is to use textual analysis to examine the coverage of the #MeToo movement in two feminist journalism publications *Ms.* and *Jezebel* in order to explore how that coverage is intersectional in its depictions of the movement and the thematic narratives that it promotes about sexual assault survivors and perpetrators. The results of the study indicate that both outlets' coverage of the movement and narratives about survivors and perpetrators were, at times, very intersectional in how attention was given to expanding the movement well beyond Hollywood and challenging the broader systems and societal beliefs that perpetuate the prevalence of sexual violence. However, by detailing how the coverage was distributed across the first four years of the movement, this study reveals that there were gaps in both outlets' coverage where the reporting did not critically evaluate #MeToo regarding who was involved in the movement, what the movement has accomplished and how it needs to continue to grow in order to bring about lasting change. This research informs scholarly understanding about feminist journalism's depiction of the movement and the feminist and intersectional values included or omitted by this coverage.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Chapter I contains the following sections: (a) background of the study, (b) significance of the study and (c) purpose of the study.

Background of the Study

On Sept. 14, 2021, Tarana Burke published her memoir *Unbound: My Story of Liberation and the Birth of the Me Too Movement*, which provides a comprehensive overview of the social movement that all too often forgets her. The hashtag #MeToo rose to near instant popularity online on Oct. 15, 2017, following a Tweet from actress Alyssa Milano asking women to help raise awareness of sexual assault survivors by tweeting “Me too” if they were a survivor (Milano, 2017). But the movement didn’t start there. Burke founded the movement in 2006 as a means to help empower women (Lauren, 2020). However, the tipping point didn’t come until October 5, 2017, when *The New York Times* shocked the country with an exposé revealing that Harvey Weinstein faced sexual assault allegations spanning nearly three decades (Kantor & Twohey, 2017). The media firestorm that followed included an even more detailed exposé from Ronan Farrow at *The New Yorker* just five days later.

Since 2017, #MeToo has continued to be a rallying cry for people around the United States and the world to share their stories as sexual assault survivors. A year after the online movement began, a *New York Times* study revealed that over 200 men — including numerous journalists, actors, editors, directors, producers, radio hosts, U.S. representatives and U.S. senators — had lost their jobs after being publicly accused of sexual harassment (Carlsen et al., 2018). High profile cases continued to be the topic of public conversation. Kevin Spacey lost his role on the Netflix show *House of Cards* (Paulson, 2017). The #TimesUp movement brought the conversation to Hollywood as women in entertainment told their stories (North, 2018). The

conversation continued as allegations were (re)brought against Woody Allen, Aziz Ansari, Bill Cosby, Morgan Freeman, Mel Gibson, R. Kelly, Louis C.K., Brett Kavanaugh and Donald Trump to name a few. As the five-year anniversary of the movement approaches in October of this year, #MeToo is more than a passing cultural moment. It is still very much in the public consciousness as evidenced by Burke's memoir and the ongoing conversations and court trials.

This brief overview of the #MeToo movement and its significance would be incomplete without acknowledging Anita Hill. Through her 1991 testimony that Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas had sexually harassed her, Hill brought national attention to sexual harassment (Ruiz, 2021). A 2001 quantitative content analysis of news articles published after allegations against Bill Clinton and Bob Packwood examined the references that these articles made to Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas (Black & Allen). The results revealed the continued legacy of Hill's testimony and showed she had become "an accepted name to invoke in discussions of sexual harassment" and "an important political and social commentator sought by journalists" (Black & Allen, 2001, p. 50). Since then, Hill has continued to speak publicly about her experience and published a memoir this year that goes into further detail. In an interview with *The New York Times*, Hill said that at the time of the hearings many people "didn't even realize that sexual harassment was something that was actionable, that they could file a complaint about" (Bennett, 2019, para. 7). Later in the interview Hill attributed the increasing coverage of and conversations about the complexity of sexual assault to the rise of the #MeToo movement. Indeed, Hill's testimony laid the initial groundwork for the #MeToo movement by making sexual harassment a household term.

In light of the history leading up to the #MeToo movement and the extensive media coverage of the movement since 2017, this study focuses on the coverage in two prominent

feminist media outlets *Ms.* and *Jezebel*. *Ms.* was one of the first national and mainstream magazine publications to feature women in a feminist light and was launched in the 1970s by prominent second-wave feminists including Gloria Steinem (*About Ms.*, 2021). *Jezebel* began as a blog focused on women in 2007 that was launched by Gawker Media (Smith, 2017). The tone and brand of the online women's publication is captured succinctly in its tagline: "Sex. Celebrity. Politics. With Teeth." By nature of their readership and status, these media outlets provide important insight into feminist values and responses to the movement, and analyzing their coverage presents an opportunity to consider which aspects or key actors within the #MeToo movement are highlighted and prioritized.

Significance of the Study

So far, scholarly research on the #MeToo movement primarily takes two main approaches. The first approach includes studies that have focused on hashtag activism and the role of social media, particularly Twitter, in the #MeToo movement. Studies in this vein typically seek to explain what elements contributed to the success or decline of the movement (Lindgren, 2020; Xiong et al., 2019). Other research focuses on news media coverage of the #MeToo movement. These studies often use framing theory and content analysis to focus on how the movement was portrayed in specific time periods or news outlets (Aroustamian, 2020; Baker & Rodrigues, 2020; De Benedictis, 2019; Hindes & Fileborn, 2020). Less common research approaches include qualitative analysis of individuals' responses to the movement (Williamson et al., 2020) and how the #MeToo movement influenced the topics covered in men's magazines (Bell, 2018).

Research on coverage of the movement in feminist media outlets exists, but these studies tend to reflect the broader approaches noted above. Some focus on online feminist activism

(Keller et al., 2018; Mendes et al., 2018). Others examine how feminist media outlets use their platforms to raise awareness of sexual assault (Harrington, 2020; Loreck, 2018). This study offers an important addition to the field by focusing specifically on intersectionality in feminist media outlet coverage of the #MeToo movement. Given that the movement and mainstream feminism (White feminism) have been critiqued for their lack of intersectionality, this study is important because it presents a critical analysis of who is being featured in the coverage and whether harmful and limiting stereotypes of sexual violence survivors and perpetrators are being advanced in this coverage.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to use textual analysis informed by intersectionality and feminist theory to explore the coverage of the #MeToo movement in two feminist journalism publications to see how the movement is depicted and what thematic narratives about sexual violence perpetrators and survivors are included in the coverage. This study focuses on coverage from two feminist journalism publications *Ms.* and *Jezebel* from 2017 to 2021 in order to trace the changes in coverage of the movement from when it began to the present. Analyzing coverage from both media outlets not only provides a larger dataset from which to identify dominant patterns in coverage, but it also presents an opportunity to compare and contrast the coverage between both outlets. In addition, this study offers a chance to examine debates surrounding the #MeToo movement as covered in *Ms.* and *Jezebel*. Lastly, examining coverage of the movement from 2017 until the present allows for analysis of which elements of #MeToo continue to be important within feminism. This research informs scholarly understanding about feminist journalism's response to the #MeToo movement and contributes to theory that further applies feminist values to media coverage in order to identify problems or tensions within this coverage.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter II contains the following sections: (a) overview, (b) feminist theory, (c) intersectionality, (d) representations of sexual violence, (e) coverage of the #MeToo movement, (f) feminist media outlets and sexual violence and (g) summary and research questions.

Overview

This literature review provides an overview of scholarly research that examines sexual violence and the #MeToo movement within the field of journalism and mass communication. Studies that address this topic range from those analyzing news and magazine coverage to those discussing the #MeToo movement as a whole. The purpose of this literature review is to inform this study on the representation of the #MeToo movement in *Ms.* and *Jezebel*. In particular, this study uses feminist theory and intersectionality as a lens through which to investigate the depiction of the movement and the thematic narratives it promotes about sexual violence perpetrators and victims. As such, this literature review first provides an overview of feminist theory and intersectionality. After establishing this theoretical framework, the review then presents an overview of research surrounding sexual violence and how it is reported and covered within the news media. Following this broader context, the review turns to focus specifically on the #MeToo movement. This section includes studies that examine the movement as a whole, those that touch on specific cases and scholarly critiques of the ways that the movement has been represented. The review then shifts to discussion of how the #MeToo movement and sexual violence have been presented in feminist media outlets. After highlighting those studies, the review ends with the specific research questions that this study answers.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory rose out of feminism to broadly address and theorize the way that heteropatriarchal political and social structures have defined, constrained and limited the role and conception of women in all facets of society and culture. Although feminist theory has evolved heavily throughout the years along with the growth of feminism, Mary Maynard has identified three main feminist approaches (1995). The first, liberal feminism, focuses specifically on equality for individual women and how their sociopolitical positionality is affected by discussions of women's rights. The second, Marxist feminism, looks at the oppression of women as it relates to work and their perceived and real economic value and worth within a capitalist society. The third approach is radical feminism, which seeks to redefine how women relate to or are controlled by male-dominant power structures such as the patriarchy and heteronormativity.

The main concepts of feminist theory derive from Michel Foucault's focus on the intersection of power and knowledge (Shapiro, 1992). Indeed, feminist theory acknowledges the "ways in which the exclusion of women has shaped professional practices and to the effects, within the knowledges of each discipline, of socially and historically constructed gender identities" (Shapiro, 1992, p. 1). Feminist theory not only examines the power structures that have maintained a heteropatriarchal status quo, but it also looks at how people in the margins and liminal spaces, particularly women, create and maintain their selfhood and autonomy within these structures (Johansson Wilén, 2021). These main concepts of feminist theory apply to knowledge-making. Feminist approaches to epistemology emphasize that knowledge production should be inclusive and more democratic (Code, 2014). In other words, feminist epistemology embraces a more horizontal approach, rather than a hierarchical top-down perspective on knowledge production.

Beginning largely in the 1970s, scholarly critiques of feminist theory drew attention to the theory's overwhelming focus on White women. These critiques, and the work of scholars of color and queer-identified scholars, expanded feminist theory to include womanisms, Black feminisms, queer theory and transnational and global feminisms (Wright, 2014). This shifted the focus of feminist theory from being essentialist in its approach to heteropatriarchy and instead brought the conversation to one that acknowledged how gender expression, sexual orientation, economic status, ethnicity, race, class and ability all influence how people interact within sociopolitical structures (Wright, 2014). This shift in feminist theory is discussed in the next section more explicitly as intersectionality, which is a theoretical concept rooted in the scholarship and activism of Black feminists.

This study utilizes feminist theory specifically to inform its analysis of media coverage of sexual violence survivors and perpetrators. Feminist theory has been applied to numerous studies that examine sexual violence and how female rape survivors are perceived as unreliable due to misogynistic misconceptions and rape myths (Code, 2014). Rape and sexual violence more broadly have been studied through the lens of psychology, feminism and discourse analysis. This approach utilized feminist theory to define rape as an act that is “socially produced and socially legitimated, as a mechanism that ultimately maintains patriarchal gender power relations” (Anderson & Doherty, 2008, p. 4). This definition of rape moves the conversation from solely focusing on survivors and perpetrators to a broader consideration of societal structures and norms that allow for and perpetuate myths and expectations about sexual violence.

Intersectionality

Scholarly conversations of intersectionality have been varied and complex.¹ Author of *Black Feminism Reimagined*, Jennifer Nash, notes that intersectionality's "histories and origins, its methodologies, its efficacy, its politics, its relationship to identity and identity politics, its central metaphor, its juridical orientations, its relationship to 'black women' and to black feminism" are all heavily debated and discussed (2017, p. 117). Before delving into more specifics on these debates surrounding intersectionality, it is first important to provide a preliminary definition of this term. For the purposes of this literature review, intersectionality is defined as "the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (Collins, 2015, p. 2). Per this definition then, intersectionality is not only the recognition of multiple interconnected and compounded facets of identity but also the realization that social, political and cultural structures affect people differently depending on their locus of identity. As such, it is often used as a theory to inform research that looks at the relationship between people's lived experiences and systemic problems such as violence, specifically sexual violence (Armstrong et al., 2018; Collins, 2017). Well-known women's and gender studies scholar Kathy Davis offers a cogent explanation of how an intersectional approach to identity considers the "intertwined and mutually constitutive" nature of identity in order to trace the relationship between identity and the "continuities and transformation of social class" (2008, p. 71). An intersectional approach to social identity

¹ The majority of this section originally appeared in a paper titled "Intersectionality's complexities and merit in research on sexual violence" that I wrote for WGST 8040 "Problems and Issues in Feminist Scholarship" in the fall 2021 semester. Per the course instructor Lynn Itagaki, the purpose of that assignment was to use what we had learned in the course to write about a topic that would be useful in our future research. Thus, I have included the relevant portions of that paper in this thesis.

requires scholars to acknowledge that each person's social identity is experienced as a complex whole of varied circumstances and systems (Crenshaw, 1994; Shields, 2008). Each person's intersectional identity thus informs and affects how they experience reality.

Intersectionality's origins are often debated and cited differently among scholars. However, most descriptions of intersectionality are rooted in an understanding of Kimberlé Crenshaw's work and in the ongoing legacy of Black feminism. This literature review first provides an overview of intersectionality as described by Crenshaw. Then it describes intersectionality's origins in Black feminist scholarship and activism. Crenshaw's 1989 and 1994 works are commonly cited as the origins of the term intersectionality. In her 1989 work, Crenshaw presented two analogies for understanding intersectionality. The first is viewing discrimination as traffic in an intersection. In other words, if someone is standing in the intersection and discrimination is the traffic, an accident could occur from one, multiple or all directions in the intersection. Crenshaw used this analogy to argue that Black woman could experience harm because of discrimination against both their sex and race. As Crenshaw wrote in her later work, "because of their intersectional identity as both women *and* of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other, women of color are marginalized within both" (1994, p. 1244). Thus, this analogy and Crenshaw's work more broadly centered Black women as important figures through which to understand intersectionality.

The second analogy is a basement containing everyone discriminated against based on their ability, gender expression, race, class, sexual orientation, age and other aspects of their identity (Crenshaw, 1989). The people discriminated against due to all of those factors make up the bottom layer of the basement whereas those only discriminated against due to their race, for example, are at the top. Crenshaw notes that if a hatch were developed at the top, only the people

at the top would be able to climb through it and escape the basement. This hatch represents antidiscrimination laws that fail to take intersectionality into account by recognizing that people can be marginalized due to multiple, interwoven and overlapping factors of their identity. Often these laws are one-dimensional and do not recognize that someone could experience discrimination from several factors at once such as racialized sexism or gendered classism. Without acknowledging that those at the bottom of the basement are disadvantaged by multiple factors, the hatch is only helpful for those most closely aligned to the hegemonic and respected identity categories. In order to remedy these discourses and laws, Crenshaw drew attention to the need for structural, political and representational intersectionality (1994). By addressing structural, political and cultural systems, Crenshaw aptly notes that social values and behaviors, both positive and discriminatory, are produced and sustained in each of these systems.

Crenshaw's focus on Black women as the basis for understanding and conceptualizing the need for intersectionality was born out of Black feminism. Indeed, understanding systems of oppression as multifaceted and integrated was a concept expressed in a 1997 manifesto by the Combahee River Collective, a Black feminist lesbian organization (Davis, 2008). The collective stated that they were "actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (1977, p. 1). Although the collective did not use the term "intersectionality," their manifesto expressed the same core ideas that Crenshaw wrote about in her texts. Other scholars have traced the theory's origins even earlier to well-known, nineteenth century Black feminists including Ida B. Wells and Sojourner Truth (Bilge, 2020). Whether traced back to Black feminist leaders such as Sojourner Truth, the activists of the '60s or '70s such as the Combahee River Collective or

Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality is rooted in the lived reality, treatment of and work of racialized women (Bilge, 2020; Nash, 2018). As Nash articulates it, “intersectionality used black woman to map what the discipline could aspire to be—a critical practice deeply attentive to complexity and particularity” (2018, p. 92). Rooting intersectionality’s origins in Crenshaw’s scholarship and the concepts developed within Black feminism is important in order to depict a more holistic description of the theory’s history and deep connection to feminism.

Indeed, it is intersectionality’s own history that lends precedence and credibility to its use in informing research on sexual violence. In 1977 the Combahee River Collective noted in their statement that “the history of rape of Black women by white men” is a “weapon of political repression” (p. 4). This connection between the rape of Black women as a political weapon of control was echoed in Crenshaw’s articles. For example, Crenshaw articulates that rape was not only male domination of the female body and sexuality but also a “weapon of racial terror” (1989, p. 158–159). In a later article she details the institutionalization of rape and sexual violence against Black women through slavery and how that violence was justified by the “myth that Black women were sexually voracious and indiscriminate” (1992, p. 1469). Crenshaw’s purpose in examining sexual violence against Black women through an intersectional lens was to illustrate how these women experienced oppression due both to their gender and race. She cogently summarizes the role of intersectionality in exposing the oppression that women of color face, particularly in regards to sexual violence:

Intersectionality can be used to map the ways in which racism and patriarchy have shaped conceptualizations of rape, to describe the unique vulnerability of women of color to these converging systems of domination, and to track the marginalization of women of color within antiracist and antirape discourses (1994, p. 1265–1266).

Thus, as Crenshaw aptly noted intersectionality as applied to researching sexual violence gets at the larger structures and systems of oppression and how those contribute to the increased sexual violence faced by people with marginalized identities. Following in this vein, this study also applies intersectionality as a theory and method in researching depictions of sexual violence as seen in feminist journalism coverage of the #MeToo movement. The section above has detailed intersectionality as a theory, and in the Methods chapter I revisit intersectionality again to describe its uses in research.

Representations of Sexual Violence

A variety of research studies address how sexual violence is characterized, described and represented in media coverage. The overarching purpose of these studies has been to research the connections between media coverage and audience perception of sexual violence. In other words, how do media outlets' representation of sexual violence impact the broader cultural understanding and response to sexual violence? Studies in this area also look at how media coverage reflects preexisting societal conceptions surrounding sexual violence.

To examine how media coverage treats sexual violence, some scholars focus on the themes and broader narratives regarding sexual violence that are present within both newspaper and magazine coverage. These studies often go one of two ways. The first analyzes the presence of themes and narratives (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2006; Gutsche & Salkin, 2015). The second researches how these themes and narratives affect consumers and their views on sexual violence (Hust et al., 2014; Worthington, 2008). These narratives about rape, known as “mythical news narratives,” offer an insight into how a community conceives of sexual violence and responds to it (Gutsche & Salkin, 2015, p. 457). Although analysis of these narratives is not explicitly connected to intersectionality, the narratives are helpful for describing the complexities and

nuance in the varying ways that communities of people respond to sexual violence perpetrators and survivors. These myths provide context and a lens through which to look at personal experience in an intersectional manner. For example, a study of local, regional and national coverage of the 2012 rape case in Steubenville, Ohio, revealed that the most nuanced representations of the community and involved actors came from the regional press rather than local and national press (Gutsche & Salkin, 2015). This study found a relationship between a newspaper's proximity to a community, its perceived audience and the narratives and archetypes that were presented. The relationship between these factors is important to consider because it illustrates how societal concepts and relationships may affect how an audience receives news reporting, as well as how media outlets are likely to cover a case of sexual violence.

Examining broader themes and narratives is only one approach to studies examining coverage of sexual violence. Vocabulary can also be highly indicative of a magazine or newspaper's broader ideology. Although not explicitly related to sexual violence, one study examined the vocabulary within four women's magazines in order to discern the gender ideology that was constructed through the language used (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2006). Through this lexical analysis, the study revealed a correlation between the word frequency and context and the overall ideology of the magazines themselves. Notably, the study showed "how language contributes to the creation of some of the gender discourses to which members of society turn to create their own gendered performances" (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2006, p. 2019). This detailed approach along with the aforementioned thematic and narrative analyses present several methods through which scholars synthesize and analyze the way that media coverage represents ideology, norms, and expectations of sexual violence.

This relationship between media coverage and ideology has also been evident in audience responses to coverage of sexual violence cases. For example, audience responses to a televised story about rape revealed the pervasiveness of patriarchal discourse surrounding rape (Worthington, 2008). Even while this televised story resisted hegemonic views on rape, there were still audience members who participated in victim blaming after being exposed to the story. In other words, this study found that even resistant news framing does not wholly eliminate the presence of patriarchal values such as victim blaming. Another study established a link between magazine content and college students' conceptions of sexual consent (Hust et al., 2014). Based on a quantitative analysis of survey data, college students who read men's magazines were less likely to ask for consent, whereas those who read women's magazines were more likely to refuse unwanted sex. By establishing a relationship between magazine reading and approaches to consent and unwanted sex, this study reinforced the idea that magazines may influence readers' perceptions. While studies such as this are often limited and not applicable to broader research samples, they clearly demonstrate the connection between coverage and audience ideology.

Within the larger topic of sexual violence and media coverage, a subset of scholars examined how rape myths are both reflected in and fueled by reporting on sexual violence (Franiuk et al., 2008; O'Hara, 2012). Rape myths are "generalized and widely held beliefs about sexual assault that serve to trivialize the sexual assault or suggest that a sexual assault did not actually occur" (Franiuk et al., 2008, p. 288). Common myths include beliefs that victims deserve to be assaulted because they acted in a risqué or unscrupulous way. Others insinuate that a survivor must be lying or secretly desired the sexual assault. Some focus on the perpetrator and attempt to trivialize their behavior or use their perceived character as a defense (Franiuk et al., 2008; O'Hara, 2012). Still other intersectional studies of media narratives about violence against

African American women showed how news narratives have reinforced victim blaming tropes and stereotypes about race, gender and class (Mohrman & Fischer, 2019; Nielsen, 2011). In these studies, intersectionality helped to provide the complexity needed to adequately describe the “multiple dynamics working simultaneously” that led to the perpetuation of these tropes and stereotypes (Nielsen, 2011, p. 9). This study of myths and how they harm survivors of sexual violence and harassment can be traced back to Crenshaw. As mentioned above in the section on intersectionality, Crenshaw described how historic myths about Black women’s sexuality have been used to justify sexual assault and harassment against them (1992). Crenshaw also drew attention to how these “myths that devalue Black women” were reproduced in the media (1992, p. 1471). Whether focusing more specifically on race and gender as Crenshaw did or on broader aspects of identity, studies that examine these rape myths are an example of research that can be intersectional in noting the connections between myths produced about identity and how that can factor into the systemic and structural violence faced by people with marginalized identities.²

To examine the presence of rape myths within media coverage, scholars have analyzed news coverage of specific rape cases. O’Hara’s 2012 quantitative lexical analysis found that rape myths were present in media coverage of three separate rape cases. The articles focused more on the perpetrators — their character and societal standing — as a way of casting doubt on the survivor’s stories. Furthermore, when coverage addressed the survivors, it often placed blame on them and glossed over the trauma they experienced as a result of being raped. The Franiuk et al. study (2008) goes a step further than O’Hara’s to not only examine the presence of rape myths within coverage of the Kobe Bryant case, but also to note how it affected the audience. This

² Portions of this paragraph originally appeared in a paper titled “Intersectionality’s complexities and merit in research on sexual violence” that I wrote for WGST 8040 “Problems and Issues in Feminist Scholarship” in the fall 2021 semester. See footnote 1 for more information.

study found that 65.4% of the articles analyzed contained rape myths. Of significant note is the myth about the “commonality of Black men’s sexually assaulting White women” (p. 295). According to the findings, 23.5% of the articles in the study mentioned that Bryant is Black and the alleged survivor is a White woman. The presence of this myth is important to acknowledge as data has shown that Black men receive longer prison sentences when convicted of sexually assaulting White women (Franiuk et al., 2008). Thus, audience responses to coverage with this myth could lead to more harsh responses to Bryant due to his race. The second part of the study then surveyed undergraduate students to see how their exposure to rape myths (or lack thereof) influenced their perception of Bryant’s guilt. Those who were exposed to the article with rape myths were more likely to believe that Bryant was not guilty and that the survivor was lying. Franiuk et al. emphasizes the harm in this type of coverage: “By using rape myths to explain away the majority of sexual assaults that occur, a culture maintains that sexual assault is a serious violation that should be punished harshly (in the rare instances) when it does occur” (289). The presence of rape myths then serves to not only reveal what a group of people believe about sexual violence, but also as a means to excuse and obscure the disturbing reality that sexual violence even occurs. Examining the presence of rape myths thus remains an important step in countering and interrogating public perceptions of sexual violence and the #MeToo movement.

The aforementioned examples of media coverage with rape myths and “mythical news narratives” illustrate coverage of sexual violence that conforms to hegemonic ideology (Gutsche & Salkin, 2015, p. 457). Coverage that portrays sexual violence in these ways continues to fuel the discourse that sexual violence only happens to certain types of people — people who deserve it or people who encounter a truly horrific stranger. In response to this, scholars have researched

narratives that present more nuanced descriptions of sexual violence. These studies seek to draw attention to how media covers instances of sexual violence that do not conform to the rape myths and narratives (Gunnarsson, 2018; Hinde & Fileborn, 2020). In doing so, these studies explore the limitations of the current discourse surrounding sexual violence and how it hampers the ways in which people accurately categorize and respond to unwanted sex and ambiguous sexual incidents. One of these studies applied this approach to #talkaboutit narratives from both women and men describing their “grey area” sexual experiences, or experiences that did not appear to have an explicit confirmation or denial of consent (Gunnarsson, 2018). The study concluded that increased attention should be given to the relationship between discourse and people’s lived experiences, particularly those that do not conform to dominant narratives surrounding rape and sexual violence. In a similar vein, scholars have analyzed Australian news media coverage of Babe.net’s account of Aziz Ansari’s sexual violence against “Grace,” the pseudonym of the women who wrote the story and went on the date with Ansari (Hinde & Fileborn, 2020). This study found that most of the news media coverage applied restrictive and normative standards/definitions of sexual violence to the case, rather than treating it as an example of “grey area” sexual violence. Both of these studies reveal the need for less restrictive understandings of consent and the definition of sexual violence. Without this nuanced approach, people weaponize narrow definitions of consent to blame sexual assault survivors for their assault.

Within this vein of research arguing for more nuanced representations of sexual violence, one scholar examined how *New York Magazine*’s “I’m No Longer Afraid” project presented the stories of 35 women speaking out against Bill Cosby (Palmer-Mehta, 2018). Building on the theoretical concepts of “survivor narratives” and “nontraditional archives,” Palmer-Mehta demonstrated how this multimedia project successfully moved the power from the media outlet

and journalist to the survivors themselves. The project's emphasis on the narratives and experiences of the 35 women is an example of intersectionality in that it was built around the rich context and depth of their personal experiences. In doing so, the "I'm No Longer Afraid" project resisted dominant narratives surrounding sexual assault survivors and brought to light the backlash that many survivors face as they attempt to tell their stories. This multimedia project also crafted an alternative perception of Cosby that countered his public persona and served as a place where survivors could articulate their experiences in a very public and resistant manner (Palmer-Mehta, 2018). Although "I'm No Longer Afraid" was published before the #MeToo movement's rise to public consciousness on Twitter, Bill Cosby's retrial and conviction in 2018 occurred during a time when the movement had considerable momentum. Thus, studies such as Palmer-Mehta's provide an apt case study of how to determine whether magazine coverage of rape and sexual assault is resistant or merely furthering inaccurate and patriarchal conceptions of sexual violence.

Coverage of the #MeToo Movement

As mentioned above, a variety of research studies have examined how sexual violence has been represented within media coverage. Building on this breadth of research are yet more studies that examine how the #MeToo movement has been depicted. Within the field of gender studies and feminism, the research focus has shifted since the rise of the #MeToo movement. Prior to the movement, more studies focused on the sexualization of people within media coverage. However, after the rise of the movement, studies have shifted to researching the connections between sexual violence and the larger political system (Gill & Shani, 2018). This new vein of research then seeks to examine whether coverage of the #MeToo movement is depicting it as bringing systemic change for people in an intersectional and holistic manner. The

movement, as with most movements, has its faults, and these faults are highlighted in media coverage. One study used content analysis to analyze how prominent UK newspapers covered the first six months of the #MeToo movement (De Benedictis et al., 2019). During these six months, media coverage of the #MeToo movement often focused on celebrities within the fashion and entertainment industry while ignoring the experiences of those who are marginalized. Additionally, these newspapers focused more on describing the movement and its effects rather than presenting systemic solutions for how to minimize sexual violence. These critiques of coverage and by extension, of the movement, are vital as this thesis focuses on whether feminist media outlets exhibit the same pitfalls in covering #MeToo.

Similar to studies on media coverage of sexual violence, research on the #MeToo movement has also focused on specific cases. For example, qualitative analysis of media coverage of Kavanaugh's and Ford's testimonies for Kavanaugh's Supreme Court nomination sought to examine how news coverage presented hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives regarding the testimonies (Pollino, 2020). Altogether the study revealed that counter positions require that sexual violence be interpreted as separate from the dominant ideology in order to be effective and unbiased. In other words, media coverage and news framing must escape the societal expectations surrounding gender and sexual violence (victim blaming and the like) in order to actually cover it in ways that do not merely reinforce the preexisting problems. Along this vein, framing theory was applied to the newspaper coverage of Brock Turner, Bill Cosby and Harvey Weinstein from 2014 to 2018 to examine the description and framing of their cases within news articles (Aroustamian, 2020). In each case, thematic framing, or framing that centered on specific topics and general ideas, was the most popular. However, in the 2017–2018 articles, the social science frame became more popular. This frame, which pays closer attention

to the systemic problem of sexual violence, is encouraging as it shows a broader awareness of the fundamental problems that the #MeToo movement has brought to light.

Although the #MeToo movement has brought increased visibility to sexual violence, it nevertheless faces critiques. Most often these critiques center around the movement's lack of intersectionality. Even prior to the movement, intersectional critiques revealed problems with magazine coverage. For example, one study revealed that magazine coverage tended to emphasize the vulnerability of White women and not of Black women (Lykke, 2016). In the same study, White men were more likely to escape blame by representing women as false accusers. By contrast, Black men focused more on the systemic racism that led to their blame as a means of establishing their innocence. Lykke's study demonstrates the effects of race and gender on people's conception of and experiences with sexual violence.

Unfortunately, the #MeToo movement has been known to problematically ignore these differences and instead focus primarily on the experiences of White women and men. In doing so, it centers on people situated within a subjective experience and position that is strongly impacted by their Whiteness (Phipps, 2019). Phipps interrogated this Whiteness by applying the concepts of "political whiteness" and "fragility" to the conversations about sexual violence within the movement. This Whiteness, Phipps argued, "shapes public feminisms around sexual violence and the backlashes against them, circulating through narratives of personal pain that do not recognize intersecting structures, and foregrounding a concern with power and control, which is a continuation of colonial values" (17). Failing to critique the prevailing invisibility, or normalization, of this very Whiteness prohibits feminists from confronting the larger racist, sexist and colonial systems that continue to oppress people in marginalized positions.

Indeed, non-intersectional media coverage fails to recognize how victims' experiences with sexual violence can be directly affected by their race. An analysis of two stories about coerced sexual experiences examined how consent was understood and constructed during both incidents, particularly how it was defined for the presumed White women in both stories (Dubrofsky & Levina, 2020). This study situated consent as directly related to the agency each woman possessed. Dubrofsky and Levina explain that White women have historically been seen as more agential than women of color who have been portrayed as promiscuous or as sexual objects. As such, conversations about consent and sexual assault fall on the shoulders of White women. Thus, this study concluded that most conversations about consent fail to recognize the broader sociocultural context that White women navigate as perceived agential figures even as they also experience privilege due to their race. Furthermore, it noted that the #MeToo movement is not racially inclusive because these conversations about consent and agency tend to focus solely on the stories and experiences as expressed by White women. Although these studies focused specifically on race, this thesis is informed by an intersectional approach that looks at identity more broadly including race, gender, sexuality, class, ability and age.

Feminist Media Outlets and Sexual Violence

Media coverage of sexual violence and the #MeToo movement has also been researched through the specific lens of feminist media outlets. Within this more niche vein of research, studies tend to focus on the digital activism of feminists using Twitter, other social media platforms or feminist websites and publications. For example, one study used a mix of interviews, content analysis, textual analysis, and discourse analysis to examine three specific case studies of how women used digital technology to speak against rape culture: Hollaback! posts, #BeenRapedNeverReported narratives and the use of Twitter by teenage feminists (Keller

et al., 2018). In each case, digital technology allowed women to connect with each other in ways that may not have been possible with a nondigital medium. Despite the positive effects of this digital activism, online feminist activism has been shown to take a negative emotional and mental toll on its participants (Mendes et al., 2018). The impact comes from not only being exposed to numerous accounts of sexual violence, but also from being targeted by trolls and hostility. Studies such as this rightfully call for more research on the harmful effects of using digital technology for feminist activism.

Research on feminist media outlets has revealed that feminists have used these outlets as a means to raise awareness and provide support for victims of sexual violence. A study of feminist media outlets *Feminist Frequency*, *Jezebel*, and *Rosie Recaps* revealed that each outlet invited their audience to critically enjoy pop culture (Loreck, 2018). In doing so, these outlets raised awareness of feminism by applying feminist criticism to pop culture and encouraging their readers to do the same. A study of the comment sections of two feminist websites *Jezebel* and *xoJane* demonstrated that the comments created “feminist intimate publics” (Harrington, 2020, p. 168). The study applied the concept of “feminist consciousness-raising” to these digital spaces as a lens through which to analyze how the commenters address rape, sexual assault and sexual violence (p. 172). The comment sections of both websites illustrate how commenters collectively gathered in those digital spaces to share experiences and provide support that challenges heteronormative rape narratives and instead uplifts a more feminist understanding of their experiences.

Summary and Research Questions

Altogether there has been a significant body of research on media coverage of sexual violence and the #MeToo movement. Still other studies examine the effects of online feminist

activism and how feminist media outlets raise awareness and provide support for audiences. The aforementioned research illustrates both positive and negative examples of media coverage. Although some reporting and coverage is subversive, all too often it is not intersectional and perpetuates harmful ideology about sexual violence. Notably, none of the research mentioned above focuses on the coverage of the #MeToo movement in feminist media outlets. Thus, this study applies the analysis of media coverage and sexual violence specifically to feminist media outlets *Ms.* and *Jezebel*. Analyzing both outlets provides a larger dataset from which to identify dominant patterns in coverage. Furthermore, it allows for critical analysis of potential similarities and differences between the #MeToo coverage within each outlet. These media outlets, and others like them, must be examined critically to investigate what representations of sexual violence are included within the coverage. In conclusion, this study is situated within the context provided by past research on sexual violence and the #MeToo movement and uses feminist theory and intersectionality to inform its investigation of the following research questions:

RQ1: How do *Ms.* and *Jezebel* represent and characterize the #MeToo movement in their coverage?

RQ2: How are thematic narratives about perpetrators and survivors of sexual violence evident in *Ms.*' and *Jezebel*'s coverage of the #MeToo movement?

RQ3: When and how does intersectionality emerge in the outlets' representations of the #MeToo movement and the thematic narratives about perpetrators and survivors of sexual violence?

RQ4: How has coverage of the #MeToo movement in both outlets shifted between the start of the movement in 2017 until 2021?

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Chapter III contains the following sections (a) overview of methodology, (b) intersectional research (c) data collection, (d) procedure and measure, (e) strategies to improve validity and (f) review of research questions.

Overview of Methodology

This thesis relies on textual analysis, which is similar to the methodologies used in other studies analyzing #MeToo movement coverage. For example, some studies have used framing theory and content analysis to focus on how the movement was portrayed in specific time periods or news outlets (Aroustamian, 2020; Baker & Rodrigues, 2020; De Benedictis et al., 2019; Hinds & Fileborn, 2020). Another study used a mix of interviews, content analysis, textual analysis and discourse analysis to examine three specific case studies of how women used digital technology to speak against rape culture: Hollaback! posts, #BeenRapedNeverReported narratives and the use of Twitter by teenage feminists (Keller et al., 2018). Following in this vein, this thesis uses textual analysis informed by feminist theory and intersectionality to analyze the thematic narratives and depictions of the #MeToo movement in two feminist journalism outlets' coverage.

The methodology for this thesis is qualitative textual analysis in order to analyze what the text itself is representing, rather than on how the audience receives it or even the intentions of those who produced the text. As Fursich argues, “close reading of texts can help explain the hegemonic or emancipatory potential of a popular culture text” (2009, p. 247). Fursich also notes that textual analysis “can help understand the spectrum of readings a media content allows” (247). This thesis identifies the readings set forth within #MeToo coverage in *Ms.* and *Jezebel*

and analyzes them for their “hegemonic and emancipatory potential,” specifically noting when and how that coverage might be intersectional.

Intersectional Research

Intersectionality as a research method and as theory informing research is difficult to define and summarize due to the multiplicity of ways that the theory can be understood as a means of gathering and describing knowledge.³ Patricia Hill Collins describes intersectionality as a “broad-based knowledge project” that appears in three sets: as a “field of study” that includes the history, debates, limitations and themes of intersectionality; as an “analytical strategy” that includes how intersectionality can provide knowledge on inequality and oppression in social practices, institutions and systems; and as “critical praxis” or how activists and others apply intersectionality toward social justice (2015, p. 3). These three descriptions of intersectionality and its contribution to knowledge offer a helpful basis from which to consider how intersectionality operates within research and praxis.

One of the main tenets of intersectional research — a tenet that contributes heavily to intersectionality’s usefulness in research on sexual violence — is how it involves acknowledging that facets of identity are always informed by and in the process of simultaneously shaping other aspects of identity. In particular, scholars often analyze these facets of identity in relationship to power or its lack thereof, whether personal, systemic, institutional or structural (Cho et al., 2013). In other words, the relationship between factors being analyzed is a dynamic and nuanced one rooted in the fluidity and interrelatedness of each of those topics or facets of identity. One of the limitations of this type of research is how it can become additive in its treatment toward

³ The majority of this section originally appeared in a paper titled “Intersectionality’s complexities and merit in research on sexual violence” that I wrote for WGST 8040 “Problems and Issues in Feminist Scholarship” in the fall 2021 semester. See footnote 1 for more information.

identity or systems of oppression (Jordan-Zachery, 2007). Avoiding this limitation requires that researchers stray away from describing identity as, for example, gender plus race plus class. Instead, it should be less about describing the separate parts of identity but rather acknowledging the complexity of the whole. A practical example of this interrelationship is to treat categories as equal in importance rather than ranking them (Nielsen, 2011). Proceeding from this equal position allows for a researcher to then identify “relationships within and between categories” and use that to develop fuller themes in the coding process (Richardson & Taylor, 2009, p. 254). Thus, research informed by intersectionality focuses more on relationality and identity construction rather than merely categorizing identity.

Another key quality of intersectional research is its open-endedness not only in conceptualizing social identities but also in the structure of the research itself. Bowleg cogently defines intersectional research as “the analysis and interpretation of research findings within the sociohistorical context of structural inequality for groups positioned in social hierarchies of unequal power” (2008, p. 323). Conducting intersectional research requires careful attention to writing questions and analyzing, synthesizing and interpreting data. The caution in each of these phases is to avoid an approach that separates or categorizes social identity (Bowleg, 2008; Shields, 2008). In particular, scholars should seek not to avoid, ignore or constrain questions in ways that limit engagement with intersectionality or ignore it altogether (Shields, 2008). Often more open-ended questions allow research participants to share their experiences in ways that remain intersectional. This typically means that qualitative methods work best for intersectional research, a consideration that is reflected in my study’s chosen methodology. As this study is a textual analysis rather than an interview-based analysis, it relies on open coding in order to keep the analysis open-ended and thus more intersectional.

Lastly, intersectional research uses context to inform and enriching analyses (Jordan-Zachery, 2007). Context, in this case, refers to the lived experiences of the people being studied or of their experiences within or as shaped by the system or structure being studied. This context can come in four main forms: “1) the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, 2) the centrality of personal expressiveness, 3) the ethic of personal accountability, and 4) concrete experiences as criteria of meaning” (Jordan-Zachery, 2007, p. 260). Seeking out these four expressions of personal experience provides a rich breadth of knowledge about people’s identities and experiences that illustrates the dynamic, nuanced and interrelated nature of identity. Without this context through experience, research centered on inequalities in structure can lead to categorization that is oversimplified and lacks specificity (McCall, 2005). Altogether, intersectional research broadly requires intentionality and fluidity in categorizing, analyzing relationships to power (personally, systemically, structurally) and gathering context through experience.

At its core, intersectional research is complex and broad — a reality that makes it easily applicable for research but also hard to describe. Collins terms this the “cutting-edge definitional dilemma” for intersectional research, or the struggle between the creativity and openness of intersectionality in research whilst also recognizing that the lack of set guidelines can make it more difficult (2015, p. 17). The theory is also enriched and rendered more complex by how it “turns not only on the various theoretical and methodological prisms at play but also on the race, gender, and other discursive prisms through which the theory and its originating contexts are read” (Cho et al., 2013, p. 791). Thus, the very facets of identity, power and systems of inequality studied in intersectional research also shape intersectionality as a field through the

scholars that study it and the applications of that research. Recognizing this requires reflexivity on the part of researchers and embracing the need for context.

Data Collection

As the methodology for this thesis is textual analysis, the content I analyzed was articles from both *Ms.* and *Jezebel*. These texts were selected from coverage ranging from the start of the movement in October 2017 until December 2021, the end of the last full year of coverage. Within this roughly four-year timespan, eligible articles were found by searching for #MeToo (and variations such as metoo and me too). The articles from *Jezebel* are accessible online. *Ms.* articles are also accessible online but had to be searched using an advanced Google search that was narrowed by keyword, site and time range. These search results from both *Ms.* and *Jezebel* were further narrowed down to only include articles where #MeToo (or one of the variations) was mentioned within the title of the article, the subhead or the first paragraph of the text. This process resulted in 309 total eligible articles within the timespan, 134 from *Ms.* and 175 from *Jezebel*.

Once I identified the total number of eligible articles from both *Ms.* and *Jezebel* specifically about or in direct reference to the #Metoo movement from October 2017 to December 2021, I used critical case sampling and maximum variation sampling to further limit the scope of eligible articles for analysis. Both critical case sampling and maximum variation sampling are specific subsets of qualitative purposeful sampling, which is defined as “selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth ... those from which once can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 1990, p. 169, italics in original). In this study, information-rich examples of coverage include articles in *Ms.* and *Jezebel* that offer the most detailed reporting on the #MeToo movement. With the broader definition of

purposeful sampling in mind, critical case sampling then is sampling that includes cases “that can make a point quite dramatically or are, for some reason, particularly important in the scheme of things” (Patton, 1990, p. 174). Examples of critical cases in #MeToo movement coverage includes articles that are about high-profile cases including celebrities and politicians. It can also include articles from periods in the coverage that are the most saturated with examples. In other words, it could be selecting detailed reporting from a one-month span in the coverage that had substantially more reporting about the #MeToo movement than the time before and after.

In addition to critical case sampling, I used maximum variation sampling in order to ensure a useful variety in the coverage being analyzed. Maximum variation sampling is an attempt to identify recurring themes and outcomes from a variety of samples (Patton, 1990). The purpose in selecting diverse samples is two-fold, according to Patton. The first is that it can lead to “high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case” and the second is it can help in identifying “important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity” (1990, p. 172). Combining critical case sampling and maximum variation sampling to select articles for analysis helped guarantee that the articles selected were not only important but also provided a broad variety in the topics, people, situations and context being covered. In addition, this combination helped to further narrow the scope as it eliminated some of the repetition that could occur from only using critical case sampling.

In order to narrow down the sample size with critical case and maximum variation sampling, I used several key methods. The first was to organize all the eligible articles from highest to lowest according to the number of #MeToo mentions in each article. This helped me to go through and remove articles that were only tangentially related or had very low mentions of #MeToo. Furthermore, I also took out articles that were very news focused and did not include

significant analysis. Lastly, I removed all articles that were about videos as this study relies on textual analysis. Each of these strategies for eliminating articles is an example of critical case sampling in that it helped me to remove articles that did not provide rich, in-depth coverage of the #MeToo movement. I also organized the articles by publish date in order to see the progression of coverage and guarantee that I selected a variety of articles that varied in topic and the time they were published. The results of these sampling strategies were 46 articles from *Ms.* and 35 articles from *Jezebel* spanning dates from October 17, 2017, to December 8, 2021.

Procedure and Measure

To conduct a thorough textual analysis of the articles from both outlets, I used open coding informed by feminist theory and intersectionality. Open coding, as defined by Emerson, is coding that emerges during the analysis of the text, rather than bringing pre-set codes to the text (1995). St. Pierre and Jackson note the importance of coding that is informed by theory. Their study on coding qualitative data suggests “using theory to determine, first, what counts as data and second, what counts as ‘good’ or appropriate data” (2014, p. 715). For example, feminist theoretical depictions and definitions of sexual violence and rape culture informed the codes that I used as I completed the textual analysis. Intersectionality also informed codes that identify the nexus of identities depicted in the #MeToo movement coverage. For example, this meant noting how sources are described and what aspects of their identity were highlighted throughout the text.

The specific coding method I used during the textual analysis is one described by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014). I did a thorough read of each article to complete the first-cycle coding phase. During this phase I utilized descriptive, in vivo, emotion, values and holistic coding to develop a nuanced and detailed coding of each article. In vivo coding utilizes phrases

and terms from the text being analyzed, emotion coding identifies emotions within the text, and values coding looks for the attitudes, values and beliefs as they appear to be represented in the text. Lastly, holistic coding offers a broader view of the text and seeks to identify codes from the text as a whole rather than through line-by-line analysis (Miles et al., 2014).

Once the first-cycle coding was complete, I used pattern coding and application, along with jottings and memos to more thoroughly analyze the articles for themes, discursive strategies and ideology. Pattern coding and application involve condensing and grouping the first-cycle codes into more concise “categories, themes, or constructs” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 86). Jottings and memos involve writing down my own reactions, inferences and reflections about the text. Doing so helped me articulate broader themes and context that were applicable to the coding process. It was also an example of reflexivity, which is discussed later as a validity practice. The main themes and ideological statements that I looked for included patterns in the way articles were written, descriptions and value judgments of sexual violence and the #MeToo movement. I also looked for value judgments and analyses of other media coverage as reported by *Ms.* and *Jezebel* of sexual violence and #MeToo. Examples of these patterns and themes I looked for included the presence of rape myths or perceptions of sexual violence that cast doubt on or place blame on the survivor (Franiuk et al., 2008; O’Hara, 2012). Another example of themes and patterns was to note how consent was described and whether the coverage characterized the consent as explicit or implied.

In addition to looking for the themes and ideology, I coded the texts for discursive strategies. This included looking for patterns in sourcing and topics covered in relation to and about the #MeToo movement. It also involved looking at who was covered and in what way. For example, a intersectionality-informed textual analysis via coding would consider how race,

gender, sexuality, class, ability, age and other aspects of identity are depicted and included in coverage. An example mentioned in the literature review included a critique of the invisibility of Whiteness, which showed attention to how race was depicted (Phipps, 2019). Analyzing coverage in light of intersectionality included noting how and when people were depicted as those in positions of authority and/or as survivors within the coverage. This is in line with the aforementioned tenets of intersectional research that examine identity in relationship to power, whether personal, systemic or structural. For example, this included analyzing whether the coverage was slanted more toward the experiences of celebrities and public figures or toward the average person. This analysis also explored whether the #MeToo movement was described in coverage more as a result of systemic and sustained problems (i.e., rape culture, misogyny, racism, heteropatriarchy) or from the perspective of individuals and their responsibility or agency as sexual violence survivors and perpetrators (De Benedictis et al., 2019).

In summary, the analysis for this thesis was a textual analysis. The thorough coding occurred within an intersectional feminist interpretivist approach that recognized the contextual significance of both publications as feminist media outlets and also the cultural significance of the #MeToo movement. In order to provide a quick glance at what emerged from the coding, I have included a table below that breaks down the main concepts that I focused on and how those were organized into broader categories. Those concepts and their relationship to the overarching categories guided how I organized and analyzed the findings.

BROAD CATEGORIES	ASSOCIATED CONCEPTS
<p>The “what” of #MeToo: The broad descriptors of the movement and its perceived purpose and reach</p>	<p>Conceptualizing sexual violence, origin story of #MeToo, goals of #MeToo, impact of #MeToo, scope of #MeToo, setting, legislative change</p>
<p>The “who” of #MeToo: Details on the people involved and included in #MeToo, how they’re situated within the movement and societal perceptions and beliefs about them</p>	<p>Movement leadership, naming, social media use, identity, descriptions of perpetrators, descriptions of survivors, visibility of survivors versus perpetrators, accountability, rehabilitation, privilege</p>
<p>The “where” of #MeToo: Where the movement still needs to go and the limitations and shortfalls of #MeToo</p>	<p>Activism, relationship to feminist theory, complicity (historic and continued), industry response, rape culture, cultural change, responsibility</p>

Table 1: Categories and associated concepts found in the coding process

Strategies to Improve Validity

This thesis also used reflexivity as a method of improving the validity of the data analysis. Reflexivity involves being transparent and intentional about the ways that my personal identity and interests impact this study. In essence, being reflexive entails detailing the reasons why I am not capable of being fully objective as a researcher and how my identity then informs my research. As noted above, one example of reflexivity was the use of jottings and memos during the second-cycle coding phase of the textual analysis. This practice helped me to record and confront my own personal reactions and interpretation of the text. These reactions informed my approach to the coding process. Denzin and Lincoln touch on this as well: “Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations socially situated in the worlds of—and between—the observer and the

observed” (pg. 24, 2012). By acknowledging these filters, I am attempting to be transparent and forthcoming about what preconceived notions, interests and worldview I bring to this study.

An overview of reflexivity would be remiss without acknowledging my positionality to the topics and methodology of this study. I would be lying if I did not admit that I wanted to study #MeToo movement coverage because of my own interest in and frustration at the ways in which media coverage has depicted sexual violence. I am also fascinated by the complex ways that feminism is understood and depicted. As a White, cisgender, middle class, nondisabled woman who is a feminist, I went into this study hoping to find that these publications have been covering the #MeToo movement in an intersectional manner. While completing my undergraduate degree, my research interests focused on women’s and gender studies. My honors thesis looked at victim blaming and rape culture in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and the first three seasons of the Hulu adapted series of the same name. I used critical race theory, media and close textual analysis to analyze both works. My argument was that complicity within the novel must be discussed in relation to rape culture and that while the series accounts for rape culture, it problematically manifests a type of feminism that privileges White women over women of color. These personal interests and research experiences did not invalidate my ability to conduct this study. Rather, they provided a rich background of careful thought, reflection and engagement with relevant research methodology and theory. I believe this strengthened my study, particularly since I am passionate about this topic. As such, I do not think that my own interests and thoughts on this research kept me from conducting this research.

Review of Research Questions

Given the prominence of the #MeToo movement and its significance within the news media and society at large, the purpose of this thesis was to understand how the #MeToo

movement was represented in two feminist journalism outlets, *Ms.* and *Jezebel* (RQ1). Additionally, I noted what feminist values were presented and highlighted in the thematic narratives and depictions of sexual assault survivors and perpetrators in both outlets' coverage (RQ2). I used textual analysis informed by intersectionality to analyze both the descriptions of the #MeToo movement as well as the depictions of survivors and perpetrators in order to see where and how intersectionality (or the lack of it) emerged in the coverage (RQ3). Lastly, I analyzed coverage from the start of the movement in October 2017 until the end of the most recent year of coverage in December 2021 in order to provide a thorough overview and see coverage shifts over time (RQ4).

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Chapter IV contains the following sections (a) overview of findings (b) representation and characterizations of the #MeToo movement (c) critiques and suggestions for the #MeToo movement (d) the perpetrators of #MeToo (e) survivors and #MeToo (f) sexual violence, feminism and #MeToo and (g) #MeToo coverage from 2017 to 2021.

Overview of Findings

This study examined 81 articles, 46 from *Ms.* and 35 from *Jezebel*, published between October 2017 and December 2021. This chapter highlights the main themes and trends across the coverage and specifically applies feminist and intersectionality theory to the analysis of that coverage (RQ3, RQ4). The following sections focus on how the #MeToo movement was represented within the coverage (RQ1), how the people both as perpetrators and survivors were integrated into the coverage (RQ2) and how sexual violence and the relationship between #MeToo and feminism was defined by both outlets. By evaluating *Ms.* and *Jezebel's* coverage through the lens of intersectionality and feminist theory (RQ3), several key themes were evident: 1) Both outlets were inclusive in how they described the movement's origins and in extending the movement beyond Hollywood, but 2) *Ms.* articles were more focused on providing solutions and suggesting activism whereas 3) *Jezebel* articles approached the need for systemic changes and activism as it specifically applied to how we respond to perpetrators. Both outlets included discussions of the broader systems at play such as heteropatriarchy, racism, rape culture and how the prevalence of sexual violence is fueled by each, but these discussions were not sufficiently nuanced or consistently included throughout the coverage. These themes are discussed in much more detail in the following sections. Of course, the sections also include plenty of positive

examples where *Ms.* and *Jezebel* articles were more inclusive and intersectional in covering #MeToo.

Representations and Characterizations of the #MeToo Movement

In order to provide a thorough overview and analysis of *Ms.* and *Jezebel*'s coverage of the #MeToo movement, this section addresses the nuanced and detailed depictions of the movement from 2017 to 2021 (RQ1). It begins with an overview of the movement's origins, particularly who received credit for its beginnings. The section then includes an acknowledgement of how the movement has been described in *Ms.* and *Jezebel* articles across the first four years of the movement. From there, it turns to #MeToo's reach, in particular the industries and communities that are represented in both outlet's coverage. Lastly, this section details the critiques of the #MeToo movement proposed in the coverage and the suggested areas of improvement highlighted within. As this is an intersectionality-informed textual analysis of *Ms.* and *Jezebel*'s coverage, each of the aspects listed above are also put in conversation with intersectionality theory (RQ3).

Tracing the Origins of the #MeToo Movement

Noting and considering how the origins of the #MeToo movement are described throughout the coverage is necessary in order to trace who or what is credited with the movement's beginnings. Of the 81 articles included in this study, 34 addressed the movement's origins in a significant manner. Over half of these articles credited Tarana Burke as the founder of the movement. Examples of this include descriptions of the movement as being "planted 12 years ago by #MeToo founder Tarana Burke" (Hope, 2018a) and noting that Burke had been using the phrase 'Me Too' in her "organizing work since 2005" (Melero, 2021). Another article detailed that "the original incarnation of Me Too was created by activist Tarana Burke, who built

an online support network of the same name” (Lutkin, 2017). It’s important to note, however, that multiple articles credited Burke alongside others including Alyssa Milano and Jodi Kantor’s and Megan Twohey’s expose of Harvey Weinstein in *The New York Times*. Not a single article gave sole credit to Alyssa Milano, although one did only acknowledge Burke’s work as a parenthetical after listing Milano first (Baker, 2020). Most references to Milano were quick to point out how her initial involvement failed to address Burke’s work. One article described how Burke’s “work was almost erased with the adoption of #MeToo in hashtag form by actress Alyssa Milano” (Jackson et al., 2020). Another said that Milano “accidentally launched a viral movement” (Elizabeth, 2018). The allocation of credit for the movement’s origins is significant in light of the ongoing reckoning regarding intersectionality’s origins and scholarship more broadly that seeks to give proper recognition to the work of Black feminists and women of color (Bilge, 2020; Nash, 2017). In having over half of the articles that address the movement’s origins give credit to Burke, the coverage gives credit to a Black woman’s work, care and effort as foundational to the movement. It is important to note, however, that beyond crediting Burke, there were few BIPOC women who were directly named within both outlets’ coverage.

In addition to addressing who is credited for originating the #MeToo movement, it is also worth acknowledging the references to whisper networks within *Ms.* and *Jezebel’s* coverage. Whisper networks, defined by one of the articles as “the way women and other marginalized people unofficially share information with each other to stave off alleged predators and other bad actors,” have played a meaningful role in the context leading up to the #MeToo movement (Escobedo Shepherd, 2018c). These networks are not a new concept and have been a method for survivors to create safe spaces for themselves and others before the #MeToo movement brought much broader awareness to the prevalence of sexual violence and the need for these spaces

(Derr, 2019; Lutkin, 2017; Merlan, 2019a). Indeed, these networks not only preceded the movement, but they also “continue to take up the slack where legal or social systems might fail” (Escobedo Shepherd, 2018c). The attention given to whisper networks within the coverage shows consideration for the lack of institutional, systemic, political and social support that survivors have historically had and how that has caused them to rely on communities and the efforts of other survivors.

Descriptions of the #MeToo Movement

Reading and coding articles from both publications across five years of coverage revealed certain recurring themes and patterns in how the #MeToo movement was described (RQ1). These descriptions range from what the movement has accomplished, what it has provided for survivors and how it has impacted the public as a whole. In order to provide a more comprehensive and detailed overview and analysis of these descriptions, I have separated them into two main categories: (1) solidarity and consciousness-raising and (2) change and activism. This section focuses on the positive descriptions of the movement in both areas. Discussion of the movement’s failures, blind spots and needed expansions are included in a later section.

As noted above, one of the recurring descriptions of the #MeToo movement focused on how the movement brought empowerment for survivors and the strength that came from that solidarity in collectively drawing attention to sexual violence. One article described it particularly well as “the primary frame of #MeToo is one of solidarity and an insistence that stories about the personal are systemic and political” (Jackson et al., 2020). It then goes on to state that in sharing their stories “women speak to mainstream media, to patriarchal establishments, and directly to one another as a form of community building that works to alleviate the risk and fear associated with coming forward” (Jackson et al., 2020). This

description of the movement directly draws on the well-known feminist sentiment “the personal is political” that was popularized by Carol Hanisch (Bachmann et al., 2018; Harrington, 2020). It also details how the process of sharing in such a collective manner “works to alleviate” the ramifications for survivors. This sentiment is reflected in other descriptions of the movement as a “cathartic release” (Lutkin, 2017) and as a “time to break the glass ceiling of shame” (M. Martin, 2018). In each of these examples, the #MeToo movement is portrayed as a positive safe space for survivors to be seen and heard.

Equally important as the characterizations of the #MeToo movement as providing solidarity for survivors are descriptions of the movement as raising public consciousness and engaged awareness of sexual violence. This depiction of the movement was recurring throughout *Ms.* and *Jezebel's* coverage. Indeed, many articles drew attention to the grand scale of the movement in prompting people to hear survivors. The movement was characterized as a “collective rise in decibel level” about the prevalence of sexual violence (Fishbein, 2018c), as a “macro-shift” in society’s response and awareness to sexual violence (Lauren, 2020), as the “social media equivalent of yelling from the rooftops” (Harrison, 2019) and as a “mainstream rallying call” (Austin-Evelyn, 2018). All of these descriptions are an example of consciousness-raising, a concept that has significant roots in feminist movements, particularly Black feminism. The Combahee River Collective drew a connection between consciousness-raising as an expansion of the aforementioned concept that the “personal is political” (1977, p. 5). They noted in their statement that Black women sharing their experiences in these consciousness-raising efforts was in direct response to the fact that people largely ignored the “cultural and experiential nature” of their oppression (1977, p. 5). In addition to describing the movement as one of rising public awareness of sexual violence, the coverage went a step further to position the movement

as a request for everyone to “bear witness” (Garza, 2018b). The use of witness suggests active listening and empathy. It is not just about hearing but about feeling, believing and remaining open to survivor’s experiences. The same article further described the process of listening to and believing survivors as one that “demands and creates another iteration of citizenship, one that, in this political climate, you’re asked to renew it over and over and over” (Garza, 2018b). In her work on Black feminism and intersectionality, scholar Jennifer Nash situates witnessing as an “act of naming what others seek to ignore or normalize” (2018, p. 119). This description of witnessing implies action in how it not only includes survivors in the process of naming or bearing witness to their own experiences but also in how the broader public can join into that act. The characterization of this process as renewing citizenship also utilizes action-based rhetoric that highlights the need for consistent and repeated openness toward survivors as they share their experiences.

Building on the descriptions of how the movement broadened public awareness of sexual violence, a significant group of the articles associated the movement with activism and structural and systemic change. For example, articles in the coverage chronicled the movement as “the beginning of a full-fledged dismantling” of institutions and structures (Edwards, 2018c), as an “activist-driven moment” (Cills, 2018) and as a movement that is “shifting the ground underneath the law” (Colvar, 2018). Another article quoted Burke’s description of the movement as being the “work that we’re doing on the ground to support survivors, it’s the programs that we’re implementing, it’s the initiatives that we’re standing behind, it’s the way that we’re coming together collectively to move the work forward” (Levin, 2021). Still others highlighted increased voter engagement and legislative changes at the local, state and national levels that have happened in the years following #MeToo (Baker, 2020; Harrison, 2019; Lauren, 2020;

Surrusco, 2019). This coverage of the movement from an activist lens shows an attention to the multiplicity of ways that oppression and sexual violence are perpetuated in the absence of systemic change. Crenshaw describes three facets of intersectionality that are particularly helpful here: structural intersectionality, political intersectionality and representational intersectionality (1994). Through positioning the movement as one of action and change, *Ms.* and *Jezebel* acknowledge the nuance and multi-pronged approach needed for #MeToo to be more inclusive and meaningful.

The #MeToo Movement Beyond Hollywood

Since the #MeToo movement's launch in October 2017, a recurring criticism of the movement has been its preoccupation with Hollywood. This has been fueled in large part by media coverage of the movement, a topic discussed at more detail later in this chapter. As such, this section of the findings details the specific industries, communities and topics other than Hollywood that were included in *Ms.* and *Jezebel's* coverage of the #MeToo movement. These results are not exhaustive or representative of either outlet's coverage of the movement but are rather the key highlights within the coded articles. Notably, there were several extensive feature articles that covered #MeToo in areas beyond Hollywood. These included a feature on #MeToo in the roller derby community (Morrison, 2018); two articles on the movement in the Christian evangelical community, a subset of the movement known as #ChurchToo (Bullard, 2018; Shaw, 2018); a lengthy article on #MeToo in the porn industry (Clark-Flory, 2018); and a detailed feature on #MeToon, or the movement within the animation community (Elerding, 2020). There were also numerous articles that focused on #MeTooK12, the initiative to bring attention to sexual violence and gender discrimination in K-12 schools (Kay, 2018; Levin, 2020; Levin, 2021). Still other articles focused on #MeToo in the tech industry (Hintze, 2020), #MeToo

within higher academia (Turcotte, 2018b) and the movement's global impact in China (Wang, 2018). Of these mentioned articles, seven were from *Ms.* and four were from *Jezebel*. These varied and detailed instances of coverage show *Ms.* and *Jezebel's* intentional portrayal of #MeToo as a movement that is larger than Hollywood celebrities and filmmakers.

Critiques and Suggestions for the #MeToo Movement

As established in the section above, *Ms.* and *Jezebel's* coverage of the movement highlighted what it had accomplished in providing solidarity for survivors, raising awareness of the prevalence of sexual violence and resulting in change in activism. The coverage of the movement did not stop there, however. The coverage as a whole showed notable awareness of the movement's weaknesses and downfalls. This section includes an overview and analysis of those articles and focuses specifically on coverage that (1) identified and critiqued representations of the movement in specific industries and communities and (2) that discussed how the #MeToo movement needs to improve in the future. In providing coverage of the movement's success alongside its limitations, both outlets showed a more nuanced and rich engagement with #MeToo that takes into account the need for increased intersectionality (RQ3).

Critiques of the #MeToo Movement's Representation and Characterization

By far the site of most of *Ms.* and *Jezebel's* critiques regarding #MeToo were leveled against journalistic descriptions of and coverage of the movement. These critiques can largely be grouped into two main categories: concerns about insufficient representation within the coverage and calls for more informed reporting that reflects the nuance and depth needed to cover sexual violence. Both outlets paid significant attention to the holes in journalistic coverage of the moment. As one article noted, this is especially pertinent in light of the rise of reporting on sexual violence since #MeToo began (Mitchell, 2018). Another drew attention to the need to

give more credit to the women journalists covering the movement (Edwards, 2018b). In a similar vein, one *Jezebel* article critiqued Ronan Farrow for his focus on the reporting's effect on his personal life in *Catch and Kill* (Reynolds, 2019). The criticism of journalistic coverage of the movement also extended to who was being included in the coverage. Indeed, a *Ms.* article called attention to how “the mainstream media has worked to garner sympathy and shock for the white women of the movement like Alyssa Milano and Rose McGowan but has given comparatively smaller amount of attention to women of color like Lupita Nyong’o and Misty Upham” (Baker & Bellanca, 2018). Another described that despite the increased reporting and attention to sexual violence, media coverage still reveals a “disproportionate attention ... to marquee abusers and accusers, versus the most vulnerable women” (Escobedo Shepherd, 2018a). This reflects past research on coverage of the movement that found that high-profile survivors, perpetrators and industries were covered more often than those from marginalized communities (De Benedictis et al., 2019). In drawing attention to the people being overlooked in media coverage of the movement, *Ms.* and *Jezebel* show an awareness of these existing critiques that extends to themselves as media outlets.

In addition to noting who is frequently absent in journalistic coverage of #MeToo, the *Ms.* and *Jezebel* articles also included multiple calls for more nuanced and informed reporting on sexual violence and the movement. One of the most detailed examples was a *Jezebel* article that highlighted the precision and sensitivity needed in reporting on sexual violence:

At its most basic level, this means that reporters must be careful not to re-traumatize subjects, which includes consideration of the ways that their reports will be received—that is, often with skepticism and disbelief—and account for that with journalists’

sharpest tools: fidelity to confirmable facts, thorough arguments, and an abiding lack of sensationalism. (Escobedo Shepherd, 2018a)

This critique not only stated what to avoid but also offered suggestions for journalists on how to use their skills to better report #MeToo-related stories. Another example argued for specificity of language in covering stories about sexual violence by “using ‘survivor’ rather than ‘victim’ and distinguishing words like ‘harassment’ from ‘assault’” (Mitchell, 2018). A different article stated that journalistic coverage needs more depth and attention toward solutions and addressing the systemic problems and structures that perpetuate and even condone the existence of sexual violence (Szal, 2019). This focus on improving coverage echoes existing scholarly critiques of media’s reporting on sexual violence for lacking depth, scope and broader sociocultural awareness needed to cover the topic in an intersectional manner (Franiuk et al., 2008; Gutsche & Salkin, 2015; Hinds & Fileborn, 2020). It also shows attention to media coverage’s significance as a “contributor to the construction of social hierarchies” (Lünenborg & Fürsich, 2014). Thus, by including these calls for more nuanced and informed reporting in their coverage, both *Ms.* and *Jezebel* demonstrate self-awareness of their responsibility and positionality as media outlets covering #MeToo.

The critiques in *Ms.* and *Jezebel*’s coverage of how the movement has been represented and characterized did not stop at journalism. Rather, it also included discussions of art and #MeToo, most notably a caution against acknowledging the value of art produced by women only when “it’s about tidy realizations of women’s trauma” and assuming that art about sexual violence is “representative of the #MeToo movement” (Cills, 2018). In other words, it is a call to not define or limit the value of women-produced art only in its relation to #MeToo but to instead celebrate stories, films, art installations and more expressions that move beyond depictions of

suffering and violence. Going beyond filmmaking and art, the coverage also included discussions of political hypocrisy toward #MeToo including calling out politicians for merely paying lip service to the movement and refusing to follow that up with legislative change (McDonough, 2018; Ruiz, 2021). Another particularly striking critique called out a data company for “framing #MeToo in terms of its branding and marketability potential” after compiling data that suggested people found celebrities more trustworthy after hearing about their involvement with the movement (Walker, 2018). Additionally, two *Ms.* articles written by incest abuse survivors chronicled the publishing industry’s refusal and reticence to hear or publish their accounts as survivors (Lauren, 2018; Strauss, 2018). Each of these critiques of different industries and communities for their lack of thoughtful engagement with #MeToo reveals a theme within *Ms.* and *Jezebel’s* coverage that calls for a more intersectional, nuanced understanding and representation of the #MeToo movement (RQ3).

Suggested Improvements for #MeToo

In addition to the aforementioned assessments and criticism of how #MeToo has been represented and characterized, a considerable number of *Ms.* and *Jezebel* articles in the sample size addressed areas of future improvement for #MeToo. Some of these suggestions focused mainly on educating people more broadly about the social and systemic conditions that lead to a culture of sexual violence, abuses of power, gender roles, consent and pleasure (Colvar, 2018; Dharmapuri & Shoemaker, 2018; Turcotte, 2018a). More importantly, however, were the articles that delved into long-term solutions and action-based plans for continuing #MeToo’s momentum and impact. These solutions-focused articles centered on two main topics: changing how we approach sexual violence within the legal system and mixed approaches involving education, activism and cultural and systemic change.

As noted above, a subset of the *Ms.* and *Jezebel* articles focused on needed improvements within the legal system when it comes to prosecuting perpetrators, believing survivors and generally handling proceedings in court. One of the articles helpfully noted that the foundation for improving the legal system's handling of sexual violence rests in "creating a new trauma-informed justice process for survivors that honors the complexity of power dynamics and traumatic impact on memory" (Lauren, 2020). This emphasis on the underlying power dynamics and the way that trauma affects memory shows a much-needed awareness of the broader systems at play that keep survivors from being believed and respected in courts. Furthermore, other articles queried the issue of how to approach interactions that are not explicitly illegal according to our current standards but are still instances of assault, discrimination, harassment and mistreatment (Escobedo Shepherd, 2018c; Kash, 2018). These interactions are those that do not lead to convictions in the courtroom for a multiplicity of reasons including the survivor not being willing or able to testify, a lack of sufficiently admissible evidence and other situations. As described by one of the articles, we must move away from only recognizing what is "punishable by the legal system" and instead bring about a cultural shift that refuses to condone any sexual violence (Escobedo Shepherd, 2018c). Another effectively articulates how this legal standard should not be applied beyond the courtroom:

"Beyond a reasonable doubt" is an important part of our legal system, but to protect women and prevent future violence, we need to make sure this criminal standard of evidence stays in the courtroom—and that our vision for a world without rape, assault and harassment extends beyond it. Otherwise, we risk dethroning villains without changing the system that crowned them in the first place. (Kash, 2018)

Both of these articles' critical engagement with societal responses both outside and inside the legal system get at the larger conversation of what needs to change in order to create a world with less systemic violence. Patricia Hill Collins offers relevant context for this discussion on violence by noting the multiple methods that systemic violence has been consistently framed by those in positions of power in the U.S. (2017). In particular she identifies part of this framing as "the power to legitimate what counts as violence" (p. 1461, 2017). Taking that criminal standard outside of the courtroom and using it to broadly police and define what counts as sexual violence runs the risk of perpetuating a culture complicit in perpetuating sexual violence through our lack of activism and informed support for survivors.

Building on the proposed improvements to responding to sexual violence both within and outside the legal system, *Ms.* and *Jezebel* articles also included various mixed models of education and activism targeting cultural and systemic change as a response to #MeToo. One article in particular noted that an effective approach must "focus both on the deconstructive process of violence as well as the reconstructive process of creating systems of safety on individual and systemic levels" (Lauren, 2020). This approach recognizes the need to take down existing structures while replacing them with ones that better serve survivors. Other articles called for confronting all kinds of systems of oppression and interrogating how those systems interlock to perpetuate inequality and violence, particularly for those in marginalized communities (Garza, 2018b; Sullivan & Thomas, 2019). Within the articles there was also a focus on providing concrete solutions such as improving and clarifying how survivors can report workplace harassment to Human Resources departments and Title IX offices, calling for political candidates to propose policies focused on supporting survivors, developing more trauma-informed and active responses and working to erase barriers that survivors face when sharing

their experiences and seeking support (Hintze, 2020; Levin, 2021; Rios, 2019; Sullivan & Thomas, 2019). Although each of these suggestions of how to continue #MeToo are important, it is also worth noting that the highlighted solutions in this study's sample size were more concentrated in *Ms.* articles. Of the 12 articles mentioned above, 10 of them were *Ms.* articles whereas only 2 were from *Jezebel*. This reveals a potential trend in this study's sample size in which *Ms.* articles are more solutions-based than *Jezebel* articles. It also leaves room for both outlets to focus more on #MeToo's next steps and how we collectively can continue to respond to systemic violence and oppression.

The Perpetrators of #MeToo

In order to form a more complete picture of *Ms.* and *Jezebel*'s coverage of the #MeToo movement, it is necessary to consider how perpetrators were portrayed and in what context (RQ2). As such, this section focuses on several key themes that were evident in the coded articles. The section begins with an overview and discussion of which perpetrators were named throughout the coverage. That is followed with consideration of how perpetrators were depicted as defending themselves to the public. It then includes a discussion of how the accused sought to rehabilitate themselves post allegations and what that reveals about our societal response to perpetrators. Lastly, the section concludes with an overview of how this coverage of the accused was distributed between *Ms.* and *Jezebel*. In order to answer this study's third research question, the coverage of the perpetrators was also analyzed through the lens of intersectionality theory.

Throughout the *Ms.* and *Jezebel* articles included in this study there appeared to be a consistent trend toward naming prominent perpetrators. By far Harvey Weinstein was the most named perpetrator and appeared significantly in more than 20 articles. This is likely due, in part, to how he is often associated with the origins of the movement. As mentioned in the earlier

section on who was credited for the movement's origins, there were a surprising number of articles that traced the beginning back to the post-Weinstein allegations whether generally or in specific reference to Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey's reporting. The second-most named perpetrator in the coverage was Brett Kavanaugh. This makes sense due to the timing of his Supreme Court confirmation that happened less than two weeks before the second-anniversary of #MeToo going viral on Twitter. As such, articles focusing on Kavanaugh were an opportunity to reflect on how the first year of the movement might have influenced people's responses to and perception of Kavanaugh after the assault allegations. In addition to Weinstein and Kavanaugh, a significant number of articles also named Aziz Ansari, Larry Nassar, Bill Cosby, Louis C.K. and Matt Lauer. In fact, one *Jezebel* article published less than a week prior to the second-year anniversary of #MeToo named 27 men who had been accused including Weinstein, Ansari, Nassar, Cosby, C.K. and Lauer (Gupta, 2018). As this is not a quantitative study, I cannot make definitive statements about the number of men named, however, the findings mentioned above still reveal how both outlets have focused on high-profile cases of those who have been accused of sexual assault, harassment and misconduct.

One of the recurring themes in the coverage of perpetrators was the focus on how those who had been accused defended themselves against the allegations and how they sought to rehabilitate their reputations following the public accusations. As they were the two most mentioned perpetrators, Weinstein and Kavanaugh understandably were frequently discussed in the coverage as examples of perpetrator defense and rehabilitation. For example, a *Jezebel* article focused on Weinstein's attorney Donna Rotunno and how she cites her gender as making it easier for her to more viciously cross-examine survivors in the courtroom (Merlan, 2019b). As noted in the article, this is an example of "attempting to use women in the court of public

opinion” (Merlan, 2019b). In other words, part of Weinstein’s defense was to find a woman to speak against #MeToo in ways that he knew he could not. Another *Jezebel* article noted that the narrative developed to defend Weinstein in court was “the bad husband defense ... the collision of age-old sexist notions of men’s uncontainable sexuality with fantasies of power, access, excess” (Clark-Flory, 2020). In this view, Weinstein is relying on that idea that he could not help himself and riding on his failure as a husband and the absence of his wife as attempts to humanize him. Descriptions of Kavanaugh’s defense, however, took a different turn: “Instead of blaming Blasey Ford, he blamed Democrats. He positioned himself and his accuser alike as victims, as pawns in a political game” (Page, 2018). Although different from Weinstein’s defense, this approach still shifted attempted to shift the blame off Kavanaugh. In these instances, neither Kavanaugh nor Weinstein take responsibility or accountability for their actions.

Building on the discussion of how the accused of #MeToo have attempted to defend themselves, the articles also addressed their efforts to rehabilitate their reputations post-allegations. One article drew a connection between how the accused perpetrators lack motivation or incentives to “honestly engage with the accusations against them ... there’s no money in something as intangible as a moral awakening or a strengthened sense of personal ethics, there’s no guaranteed return to fame” (Merlan, 2019c). This directly connects the defense to the rehabilitation efforts. In other words, why bother with a sincere apology or a defense that accepts responsibility when there is no definitive proof it will assist in how the public views them later on. As evidenced by the *Jezebel* article mentioned earlier that named 27 accused men, many of these men lost opportunities, money and favor following the allegations but were still largely doing well financially and in their careers (Gupta, 2018). Rather, tracing the impact reveals that

“permanent cancellations look vanishingly rare” (Merlan, 2019c). The focus in these articles on the perpetrator’s rehabilitation could be read as a response to pushback of #MeToo that argues that it crosses the line significantly in how it ruins the lives of the accused.

Furthermore, this attention to rehabilitation in the coverage also shows a critique of our societal response to perpetrators and how they are frequently privileged over survivors. One *Jezebel* article summed this up quite well by arguing that “it should be clear that the cautions over #MeToo ‘going too far’ or doling out excessive punishment has, emphatically, not panned out” and that the reason people think that is true is based on “not only a fundamental belief in male entitlement, but also a prioritization and magnification of men’s pain” (Clark-Flory, 2019). In refuting the idea that #MeToo is a witch hunt and bringing the conversation back to male privilege and entitlement, this article critiques the patriarchal tendency to place cisgender heteronormative men’s emotional, physical and financial stability over those of survivors — a tendency otherwise described as “himpathy” or the “flow of sympathy away from her” and “up the social hierarchy to him” (Edwards, 2018b). This critique of the hierarchy is a clear example of feminist theory and how it is often applied to interrogate and resist the patriarchal power structure and status quo (Johansson Wilén, 2021). It also moves the focus beyond merely confronting the acts of sexual violence to also confronting how that violence itself and the response to it has been used to perpetuate the very same heteropatriarchal constructions of gender and power (Anderson & Doherty, 2008).

Although there were *Ms.* articles that focused on the themes and named perpetrators mentioned above, it is important to note that *Jezebel* coverage included much more extensive coverage of the aforementioned topics. As noted earlier, the articles selected for this sample are not wholly representative or exhaustive. However, all but one of the articles included above as

examples of how the coverage addressed the defense and rehabilitation of perpetrators were from *Jezebel*. When it came to naming perpetrators, this also factored much more significantly into *Jezebel's* coverage. This seems to indicate a trend of *Jezebel* being more focused on the perpetrators, particularly as a lens through which to confront the power structures and biases that lead to a prevalence of sexual violence.

Survivors and #MeToo

Similar to the section above on depictions of perpetrators, this portion of the findings centers on the survivors as represented in *Ms.* and *Jezebel* coverage (RQ2). The section first addresses who was included within the coverage as survivors. This is followed by a specific focus on how the feelings, stories and descriptions of survivors themselves were featured in the coverage. From there it moves to an overview and discussion of the themes presented about survivors' experiences during #MeToo. The section then delves into needed improvements highlighted in the *Ms.* and *Jezebel* coverage on how to make #MeToo more inclusive and effective for survivors (RQ3). It then concludes with details on how this coverage of survivors was dispersed between the two outlets and any patterns that emerge from that.

Overall, there appeared to be fewer named survivors in the *Ms.* and *Jezebel* coverage than there had been in naming the accused. This is not a surprise due to the frequently harsh ramifications that survivors of sexual violence face when coming forward. Indeed, there were several instances where survivors were given pseudonyms in order to protect them (Edwards, 2018d; Escobedo Shepherd, 2018c). This is not to say, however, that survivors did not factor significantly into the coverage. Rather there was more attention given to survivors in a collective sense that focused on the communities and industries they belonged to and their identity. In this way, many of them were featured across the coverage including survivors as athletes, journalists,

politicians, churchgoers, celebrities, porn stars, students, service workers, artists, tech workers and lawyers; survivors of incest abuse, female genital mutilation, obstetrical violence, intimate partner violence, rape, emotional abuse, sexual misconduct and gender-based harassment; and survivors from the LGBTQ+ community, BIPOC communities, incarcerated and undocumented survivors, survivors with disabilities and low-income survivors. One article brought up a particularly salient point that “there isn’t a one size fits all when it comes to who survivors are and what survivors look like” (Surrusco, 2019). Although it was common for these articles to be referencing women in the aforementioned communities, there were multiple instances where articles noted that #MeToo survivors are not just women (Goodman, 2018; Kay, 2018; Sullivan & Thomas, 2019). This attention to survivors of numerous backgrounds and socioeconomic standing with varying race, gender expression, ethnicity, levels of ability and sexual orientations shows a commitment to inclusivity that is vital to intersectionality and its exploration of how people experience oppression differently due to their identity. However, as mentioned in the earlier section about the descriptions of the movement’s origins, BIPOC women in particular were often only mentioned as a group rather than named as individuals within the coverage. Thus, recognizing survivors of numerous backgrounds and diverse identities happened more in the abstract act of acknowledging their communities rather than in the practice of featuring these women by name in the coverage.

In addition to including a variety of survivors in their coverage, *Ms.* and *Jezebel* also served as platforms from which survivors could share their #MeToo experiences. This included multiple instances of survivors sharing the emotional impact of telling their stories, both positive and negative (Escobedo Shepherd, 2018c; Escobedo Shepherd, 2021; Garza, 2018b). Others included in the coverage spoke about their decision to come forward and the difficulty of the

healing process beyond sharing their #MeToo story (Baker, 2018; Lauren, 2018). Another called out the importance of language: “We are not victims, we don’t see ourselves as such. Survivors call ourselves survivors because we refuse to be vilified for harm that was incurred upon us, that we never asked for” (Escobedo Shepherd, 2018b). This is a direct push back to victim blaming narratives that place responsibility on the survivors for how they were acting, what they were wearing and other factors as example that they either deserved or wanted to be violated. Still other survivors included in the coverage noted what it was like to see many survivors come forward and how they hoped the movement would continue to support survivors in the future (Fishbein, 2018c; Sperber, 2017). They also described #MeToo as a time where the general public was finally listening to and noticing the extreme toll of experiencing sexual violence and hearing other share those stories (M. Martin, 2018). One survivor wrote: “We know that it’s hard to listen to. We know that it’s hard to hold. We know that it’s hard to process. We know these things because we’ve had to do them, for all our lives, all by ourselves” (Lauren, 2018). This statement beautifully acknowledges that, yes, this is difficult but it is still necessary. It highlights the need for us to collectively hold space, energy and resources for survivors of sexual violence. Altogether, these instances within *Ms.* and *Jezebel’s* coverage that center survivor’s voices and descriptions of the movement are an example of showing care to not overshadow or speak for survivors.

Even when not coming directly from survivors, there was a recurring survivor-centric theme in the coverage that focused on those in marginalized positions who experience higher rates of sexual violence. Multiple articles called for more attention to the most vulnerable communities and the need to make sure they are being included in #MeToo (Austin-Evelyn, 2018; Kay, 2018; Osberg, 2020). One article said this particularly well: “While sexual violence

can happen to anyone, regardless of income, status or privilege, identity groups pushed to the margins often experience at higher rates” (Sullivan & Thomas, 2019). This example reflects tenets of intersectionality theory in that it illustrates Crenshaw’s point that people often experience oppression and violence due to a convergence of factors (1989; 1994). Thus, as Crenshaw notes, responding to the violence and oppression requires systems, laws and preventative action that recognizes the multidimensionality of people’s identities.

These articles not only focused on those more vulnerable to sexual violence, but they also recognized that survivors often have numerous reasons for not bringing their allegations to light, particularly through the legal system. One article approached this from the perspective of how the trauma can make it more difficult to remember and recount the sexual violence (Lauren, 2020). Other articles discussed how survivors might choose not to speak out because of the impacts on their economic situation (Baker, 2020; R. Martin, 2018). Another article called attention to the extent of what we ask of survivors in #MeToo:

Survivors are expected to offer up their most private traumas for public consumption. They’re asked to present a united front, despite their diversity of experiences, and the institutionally disproportionate support, at their disposal. While doing this, they must also bear witness to each other’s suffering. The implication of this demand is that if enough people share their grief (whether or not they’re ready/able/safe to), then abuse can no longer be denied ... (Lutkin, 2017)

This quote thoroughly encapsulates how the demands and expectations placed on survivors in #MeToo often fail to take into account the toll that it takes on them. It also notes that even after sharing their experiences, there is no guarantee that they will be believed or supported. By paying attention to the circumstances, effort and cost of speaking out, these articles demonstrate

a more nuanced and thoughtful consideration of how survivors' identity and positionality affect their decision to speak out and society's response to them.

In addition to including survivors from multiple industries, communities and backgrounds, the *Ms.* and *Jezebel* coverage also called for increased intersectionality for the movement. This call came alongside critiques of #MeToo for continuing to center the stories of White women and for society for giving them more credence and support (Baker & Bellanca, 2018; Escobedo Shepherd, 2018b; Hope, 2018b). In response to this, several articles addressed the underlying problems such as the patriarchy and how many marginalized people in particular are not able to speak up about sexual harassment and violence they've faced because handling the retribution and the potential economic impact is not feasible (Goodman, 2018; Kabeer, 2018; Ruiz, 2021). These calls for improvement highlight the tension between seeking to amplify the stories of marginalized survivors while also recognizing that they might not have the same support or ability to share as more privileged survivors such as White celebrities. Notably, the coverage included proposed solutions that would seek to ameliorate the difficulties that those in marginalized communities face when reporting sexual violence. Examples of the proposed solutions included having lawmakers create policy to help those in communities who are most affected by sexual violence, making the reporting processes clearer and removing as many potential threats that employers could use to dissuade survivors from reporting (Baker, 2020; Ruiz, 2021; Turcotte, 2018a). Each of these proposed solutions and calls for improvement signify an awareness of how #MeToo needs to keep working to expand beyond Hollywood and the experiences of White women.

Those suggested solutions also show an acknowledgement that making #MeToo more intersectional requires dismantling the barriers that survivors face when speaking out and seeking

support. Building on the examples mentioned earlier about what #MeToo asks of survivors, the coverage is attune to the intense emotional labor and vulnerability that it takes from survivors, particularly those on the margins, to come forward. The nuance in this coverage echoes Crenshaw's analogy of the basement. In that analogy, Crenshaw considers how one-dimensional antidiscrimination laws might help the people at the top who are marginalized due to only one or two facets of their identity, but these laws fail to help those at the bottom of the basement who face discrimination due to multiple factors of their identity (1989). Similarly, #MeToo might be helping White celebrities, but without intentionality and systemic change, it will not provide enough support for all survivors. One *Ms.* article puts it quite clearly, "If we don't get to the finish line together, we're not going to get there at all" (Turcotte, 2018a). Thus, this focus on the needs and protection of those in marginalized communities who face higher rates of sexual violence reveals coverage that acknowledges the significance of intersectionality and the complex and systemic nature of oppression.

The coverage mentioned above about survivors and how they were depicted was spread more uniformly across both *Ms.* and *Jezebel* than the coverage on the perpetrators. Of the 25 articles mentioned in the section above, nine of them were from *Jezebel* and 16 were from *Ms.* Although this would seem to indicate that *Ms.* is more focused on survivors, it is important to recognize that there were more *Ms.* articles represented in the sample size. That being said, this could indicate that *Ms.* does have more survivor-centered coverage of #MeToo. However, as evidenced through textual analysis and the examples mentioned above, both outlets do focus on survivors and both seem to be committed to doing so in an inclusive manner even though *Ms.* seems to include more coverage of that nature.

Sexual Violence, Feminism and #MeToo

An intersectionality-informed textual analysis of the coverage of #MeToo in *Ms.* and *Jezebel* would be remiss without taking into consideration how sexual violence was conceptualized in relation to the movement and feminism more broadly (RQ3). Building on the context and details discussed above, this section focuses on how sexual violence was defined and approached within the coverage. Then the section addresses sexual violence as it relates to rape culture and how that was approached more broadly within the coverage. Finally, the section ends by tracing the relationship between feminism and #MeToo in the coverage and how this was informed by the conceptualization of both sexual violence and rape culture as a whole.

Depictions and Definitions of Sexual Violence

Building on the sections above that focus on who is included in coverage of #MeToo as survivors, it is also necessary to explore what that coverage defines as instances of sexual violence. This speaks to the broader question of what should be considered part of #MeToo. Throughout the coverage multiple types of sexual violence and misconduct were mentioned including intimate partner violence, female genital mutilation, rape, emotional and physical abuse, sexual harassment, gender-based discrimination, grooming, groping, incest abuse and gaslighting (Dove-Viebahn, 2019; Escobedo Shepherd, 2021; Hintze, 2020; Saifee, 2020). One article in particular provided definitions for both sexual coercion and assault (Escobedo Shepherd, 2018c). These definitions highlighted how coercion does not always rely merely on physical violence or force. Other articles drew attention to how #MeToo broadened our societal expectation for what counts as sexual violence and misconduct (Lauren, 2020; Sullivan & Thomas, 2019). This emphasis on broadening what counts as sexual violence and misconduct to include emotional and psychological coercion and manipulation, to name a few, shows a shift in

how we approach violence. In other words, it is a way of resisting the narratives about sexual violence that have been perpetuated by rape myths such as the idea that people are most commonly raped by violent strangers (Franiuk et al., 2008; O'Hara, 2012). By giving a platform to survivors of incest abuse and intimate partner violence, for example, *Ms.* and *Jezebel* are portraying sexual violence as more expansive and pervasive of a problem than the stranger danger view of rape. Rather, this conceptualization of sexual violence acknowledges how it can and often does occur from those closest to the survivors.

This attention to broadening what is considered sexual violence was most evident in the recurring focus on grey areas within the coverage. By grey areas, I am referring to the instances between “violent rape and encounters in which the boundaries of consent are blurred” (Escobedo Shepherd, 2018c). Multiple articles approached this topic through the story that a woman under the pseudonym Grace shared in an account published by Babe.net about nonconsensual experiences with Aziz Ansari. The central theme of many of these articles was the question of what to do with those instances that are not explicitly rape but also involve coercion, manipulation and a lack of enthusiastic consent. One article described this conversation as the “lack of nuance between determining what’s sexual assault vs an awkward sexual experience” (Edwards, 2018d). The same article then called for more interrogation of our beliefs about consent and coercion, specifically that we pay attention to the ““sex he takes”” or the sex that “does not meet the legal definitions of sexual assault or rape ... rarely can that sex be labeled explicitly as coercion because it conceals itself beneath a legalistic definition of sexual assault, treating consent as a binary” (Edwards, 2018d). Another article discussed how our limited understanding of consent and how we wrongly tend to conflate that as the sole arbiter of whether

an experience was positive (Colvar, 2018). Instead, this article called for a broader approach that takes into account the power dynamics at play and centers pleasure rather than just consent.

In addition to focusing on the grey area experiences and broadening how we approach consent, these articles also noted the difficulty that #MeToo has had in expanding our conversation beyond the legal definitions of sexual violence. As one article put it particularly well, “#MeToo needs abuse that is easy to identify” (Edwards, 2018d). However, as that article and others argue, those situations that are not easy to name or articulate are exactly the kind that must be included and further explored as part of #MeToo. In doing so, the movement becomes more inclusive of survivors and the multiplicity of situations they have faced. This also echoes previous scholarship that argues that “what counts as ‘rape’ and who is to be treated as a ‘genuine victim’—innocent rather than accountable—are constructed in discourse and practices that reflect the social, political and cultural conditions of society” (Anderson & Doherty, 2008, p. 5). Indeed, by bringing the conversation to focus on the limitations with our societal conception of consent and pleasure, this coverage of the movement moves away from a narrative that blames survivors and instead calls for us to confront power imbalances at the personal, institutional and societal levels. This shows intentionality in constructing discourses that resist the current societal conditions that have led to the prevalence of sexual violence and is an attempt to change how we respond to the violence and support survivors.

#MeToo Through the Lens of Rape Culture

Notably, the coverage also discussed sexual violence as rooted in rape culture. This was seen particularly in *Ms.* coverage. Within those articles, rape culture was portrayed from multiple angles, some that were not explicitly labeled as such but that still fell into the definition of rape culture. For the purposes of this section, rape culture is defined by feminist scholars Emilie

Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher and Martha Roth as a “continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself. A rape culture condones physical and emotional terrorism against women and presents it as the norm” (qtd. in Harding, 2015, p. 3). Echoing this definition, one of the articles specified that #MeToo is more than instances of sexual violence and rather it’s about “the broader issue of men’s privilege and power” and how that unequal power has affected women’s lived reality (Dharmapuri & Shoemaker, 2018). Other articles also highlighted that rape is a manifestation power and called for a closer look at men’s responsibility and complicity in maintaining this culture (Essig, 2018; Sernaker, 2017). Still others drew attention gender roles and how that has perpetuated sexual violence by continually privileging male desire and control and expecting women to give into that (Gordon-Bramer, 2018; R. Martin, 2018). These connections between sexual violence and power follow in the same vein as scholarship that describes rape a “an institutionalized crime with a deep-seated underlying philosophy ... a reenactment of social dominance no matter what the situation, no matter who the target” (Madigan & Gamble, 1991, p. 18). Thus, the aforementioned *Ms.* articles situate sexual violence as something that is foundationally part of our culture as a means of dominating women and those from marginalized communities. This threatened and actual domination, both physical and emotional, maintains heteropatriarchal ideology and power structures, otherwise known as rape culture.

Although the coverage, particularly the *Ms.* coverage, did situate sexual violence and #MeToo against the backdrop of rape culture, there was a lack of engagement from both outlets in acknowledging how rape culture is rooted in racism. This is not to say that there was no mention in the coverage. The most notable exception was a *Ms.* article focused specifically on rape culture and racism (Baker & Bellanca, 2018). This article drew a connection between the

current narratives surrounding the treatment of women and how much of that stems from way that Black women have been historically treated:

The fact that enslaved women did not have the right to refuse the sexual demands of white men, for example, set a standard that then shaped the treatment of all women. The treatment of the most marginalized women then sets a standard against which all women have to measure their behavior in order to maintain their respectability and freedom. This makes rights contingent on good behavior—a slippery and subjective standard determined by those in power—and pits women against one another. (Baker & Bellanca, 2018)

This quote clearly traces the lineage from racist treatment of Black women to our expectations of women's behavior and the problems that come from not working together to protect those who are the most marginalized and most likely to experience sexual violence. Thus, the article called for #MeToo to combat rape culture “by centering the sexual assault and abuse of Black women.” In doing so, this article directly echoes Crenshaw's works that highlight how rape has been used a tool for racial domination (1989; 1992). Unfortunately, however, this article's focus on racism and its impact on rape culture was the exception rather than the rule in both *Ms.* and *Jezebel's* coverage, especially *Jezebel's*. As noted in the sections on survivors, the outlets did continually call for more focus and inclusion of Black women and other marginalized communities. But overall, these calls for greater intersectionality did not go deep enough into the reasoning behind how rape culture even came to be and why people of color have historically experienced higher levels of sexual violence.

Feminism's Relationship with #MeToo

As described in the earlier sections on the origins and descriptions of #MeToo, the fight against sexual violence has gone on long before #MeToo went viral on Twitter. It has been a part of activism, feminist marches and the broader women's rights movement. In light of that, it is important to consider how *Ms.* and *Jezebel* characterize the relationship between feminism and #MeToo in their coverage. One article took an especially interesting route in tracing how feminism and #MeToo have shaped our societal view of sexual violence. According to that article, the movement along with "50 years of feminist theorizing, legal intervention and activism around sexual violence" has provided the cultural consciousness and vocabulary necessary to identify "the rapist, the workplace harasser, the serial jerk who ignores consent" (Essig, 2018). In a similar vein, a different article highlighted how #MeToo followed feminism by drawing attention to the relationship between the personal and the political (Jackson et al., 2020). Still others positioned the changes brought about by #MeToo as distinctly feminist in nature (Baker, 2017; Tithila & Rios, 2018; Wang, 2018). The recurring theme in each of these articles is the understanding that #MeToo is a part of a much broader conversation about women's rights and safety and how violence is perpetuated by heteropatriarchy.

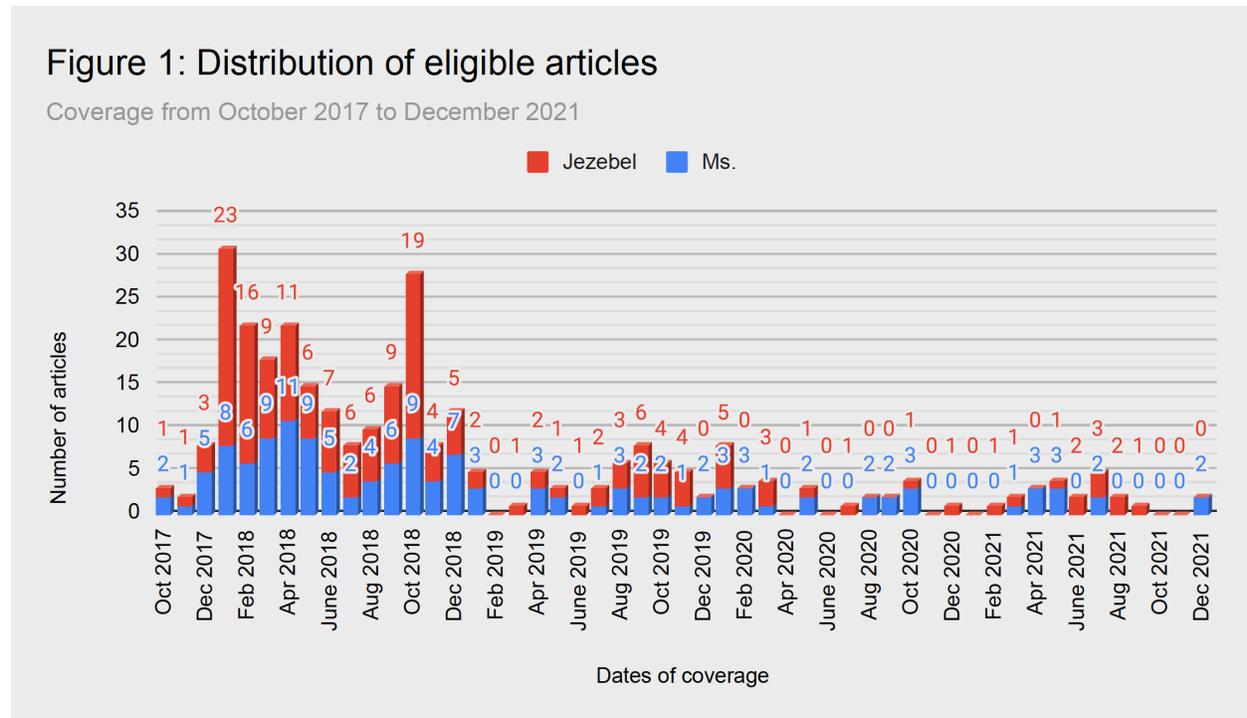
Interestingly, the coverage in *Ms.* and *Jezebel* did not include many critiques of feminism and its relationship to #MeToo. There was one notable exception that called out second-wave feminism for limiting #MeToo to only focus on "brutal physical attacks as the barometer for abuse" and turning a blind eye to the discriminatory systems that lead to sexual violence (Edwards, 2018c). This article noted that second-wave feminists are all too often "well-to-do white women who were born with the ability to navigate power structures they inhabit, while leaving those very structures perfectly in place" (Edwards, 2018c). Although this article adeptly

pointed out the problems with White feminism, the *Ms.* and *Jezebel* coverage as a whole did not often turn a critical eye to the ways in which feminism has frequently ignored those whose identities place them on the margins. Indeed, this was a missed opportunity to interrogate the whiteness of “public feminisms around sexual violence and the backlashes against them” (Phipps, 2019). The coverage would have been more intersectional had it approached feminism with more nuance and critically examined how feminist principles had been extended to #MeToo survivors and advocates of varying races, gender expressions, sexual orientations, classes, ability, ages and ethnicities.

#MeToo Coverage from 2017 to 2021

With all of the context provided by the earlier sections’ focus on recurring themes and patterns in the coverage, this section answers this study’s fourth research question by addressing how that coverage was distributed by both outlets between October 2017 and December 2021. In order to facilitate that analysis, I have included two graphs. *Figure 1* details the distribution of all *Ms.* and *Jezebel* articles within the four-year time period that were eligible for this study. This is simply provided as a point of comparison for the articles that were selected and coded for this study. *Figure 2* shows the distribution of the *Ms.* and *Jezebel* articles that were coded for this study. This section first highlights trends and specific notable instances in the eligible coverage.

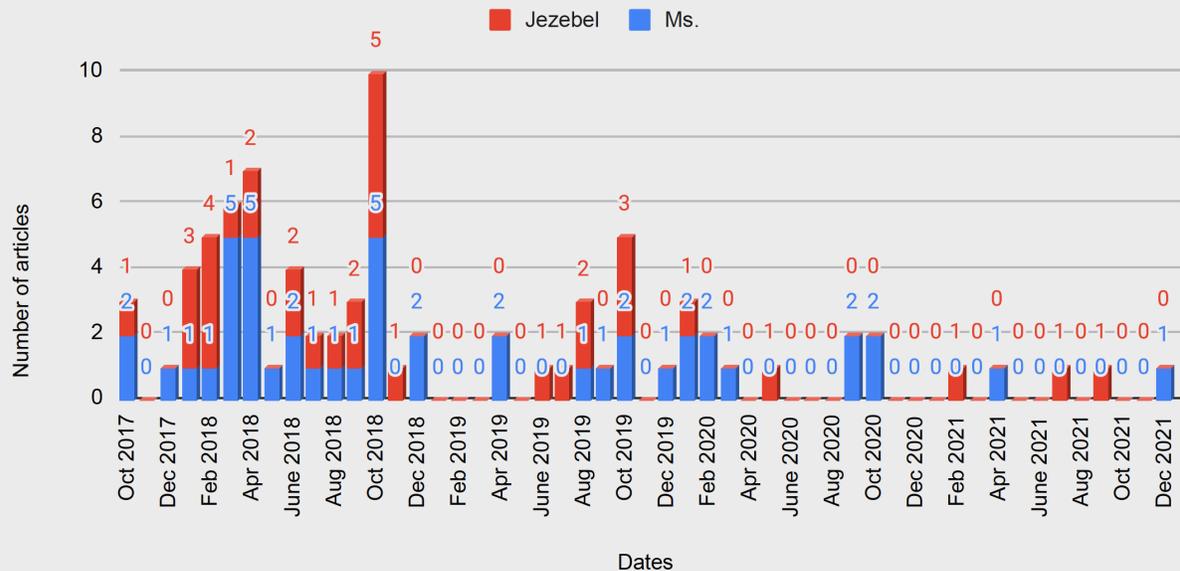
It then compares the sample article distribution to that. Lastly, the section explores how *Ms.* and *Jezebel* have shifted their coverage throughout the four-year period.



At first glance, *Figure 1* illustrates a clear peak of #MeToo coverage in 2018, followed by a steadily decreasing number of articles in 2019 through 2021. Interestingly, the cumulative peak of coverage in the graph below was in January 2018. This could be in part because this was the time that Babe.net published the story about Aziz Ansari and prompted many media outlets including *Ms.* and *Jezebel* to analyze the way Grace’s allegations were received by other media outlets and the public. January 2018 was also the date of the second annual Women’s March. Understandably, the second highest concentration of articles was in October 2018, the one-year anniversary of #MeToo’s viral rise on Twitter. After 2018, however, there was a marked decrease in coverage. This is especially evident by October 2021 when the coverage did not increase even at the four-year anniversary of #MeToo.

Figure 2: Distribution of sample articles

Coverage from October 2017 to December 2021



Building on the broader context provided by *Figure 1*, *Figure 2* details a more focused overview of how the articles coded for this study were distributed across the four-year time period. Not surprisingly, the highest concentration of articles coincides with the one-year anniversary of the movement in October 2018. *Figure 2* also follows the general trend depicted by *Figure 1* that the coverage was overall highest in 2018 and dropped significantly in 2019 through 2021. This graph, however, does make it clear that there was a spike in coverage in October 2019 and October 2020 even. This completely changes by October 2021 when there were actually no articles from either outlet. Indeed, there was no month in 2021 that had articles from both *Ms.* and *Jezebel* included in the coded sample.

As illustrated above, coverage in both outlets peaked in October 2018 and largely declined from there. Beyond that trend, however, it is important to note when certain articles

were published within that four-year time period in both outlets. Doing so provides a chance to consider where the gaps in coverage are within both outlets.

Immediately following the hashtag's viral ascent on Twitter, *Ms.* published an interview with its founder Gloria Steinem in October 2017 that took care to situate #MeToo within history and acknowledge the need for allies and systemic change. During that same month, *Ms.* also published a personal essay from a survivor. In March 2018, a *Ms.* article focused on the need for #MeToo to include women from the Global South rather than only centering the experiences of White women. Albeit four months after the movement went viral, this does show critical attention to who #MeToo was impacting and where it needed to improve. These calls for increased intersectionality were echoed again in May 2018, August 2019, October 2020 and December 2021. This shows a fairly even distribution across the four years of *Ms.* articles that highlight how #MeToo needs to expand who is included. That being said, it is notable that these instances are usually one article a year. Thus, there are plenty of missed opportunities for articles to more regularly critique who the movement is leaving on the margins. In October 2018, *Ms.* published an article that reviewed media reporting on the movement. This time also included articles that focused on Christine Blasey Ford and Brett Kavanaugh. Coverage on feminism and rape culture was distributed mainly in April and September 2018. Coverage on expanding the conversation about sexual violence was distributed in December 2018 regarding obstetrical violence and in February 2020 in an essay about female genital mutilation. The most notable feature story about #MeToo in a distinctly not-Hollywood industry was not published until September 2020. Tracing these trends and shifts in *Ms.* coverage shows that though there was a clear commitment to improving #MeToo, there were plenty of gaps within the four-year period

without meaningful coverage that interrogated how sexual violence was contextualized, how survivors were being treated and the ongoing need for more systemic changes.

Coverage across the four-year time period in *Jezebel* also reveals these gaps in meaningful coverage. Similar to *Ms.*, there was a *Jezebel* article in October 2017 that focused on what #MeToo could and should mean for the future. The next month there was an article addressing second-wave feminists and their failure to fight back against the existing systems of oppression. In January 2018, there were two stories centered on the Babe.net story about Ansari that queried how the movement was responding to instances of sexual violence and misconduct that fell into the grey areas. *Jezebel's* first feature about #MeToo in an industry not related to film or art was in June 2018, and it focused on the roller derby community. Understandably, *Jezebel* published significant coverage of the movement in October 2018 that featured Tarana Burke, detailed the movement's impact on the porn industry and thoughtfully questioned the borders and limitations of #MeToo up until that point. Following an article about Burke in November 2018, there is no *Jezebel* coverage until June 2019. The theme of the coverage for the rest of the year centered on the defense and rehabilitation of the accused and resisting how #MeToo had been characterized as going too far. Notably, *Jezebel* articles calling for more inclusivity and intersectionality were mostly published in 2020 and 2021. For example, an article in May 2020 focused on survivors who are undocumented. One in February 2021 called for more focus on intimate partner violence, and an article in September 2021 covered Burke's memoir, which centered the experiences of Black women. Similar to *Ms.*, these trends in *Jezebel* coverage reveal a lack of consistent coverage that delved into the limitations of #MeToo and pushed the movement to be more inclusive in its representations of sexual violence and its treatment of survivors.

Although it is by no means the focus of this section, addressing the trends and gaps in the four years of coverage mentioned above would be remiss without at least a brief consideration of how media outlets cover news. Scholars have discussed and theorized what criteria makes information newsworthy. These criteria, known as news values, are what media often rely on when selecting what to cover and how often to cover it (Harcup & O’Neill, 2017; Mast & Temmerman, 2021). According to a 2001 study, some of these criteria included stories that provided entertainment, were surprising, covered people in positions of power and had particularly positive or negative themes (Harcup & O’Neill). The same scholars did another study in 2017 where they revised the criteria to reflect the changes brought on by the onset of social media and changing values in the industry. As with the other list, entertainment, surprise, conflict and coverage of powerful people still remained important. However, the criteria also included how likely a story would be shared on social media and whether it had the possibility for compelling audiovisual components (Harcup & O’Neill, 2017). My goal in highlighting this research is to illustrate that there are many reasons for how media outlets choose to cover what they do. Thus, there are ways that *Ms.* and *Jezebel* could continue to cover #MeToo in nuanced and thoughtful ways that still adhere to news values. In other words, #MeToo is not old news. Future studies could merit from more detailed engagement with how news values might have impacted the way that #MeToo has been covered across multiple years.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

Chapter V contains the following sections (a) summary and discussion of findings, (b) limitations of the study and areas for further research, and (c) applications of the study.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

This study used textual analysis to examine the coverage of the #MeToo movement in *Ms.* and *Jezebel* in order to see how both feminist journalism publications represented the movement and its survivors and perpetrators (RQ1, RQ2). There were 81 total articles coded for this study, 46 from *Ms.* and 35 from *Jezebel*. As this study is informed by feminist and intersectionality theory, a significant portion of the study focused on how and when intersectionality emerged in the outlets' coverage of the movement and survivors and perpetrators of sexual violence (RQ3). Lastly, the study traced the distribution of coverage from the start of the movement in October 2017 until December 2021 (RQ4). This portion included special attention to any shifts and gaps in *Ms.* and *Jezebel* coverage. The following section provides an overview of the findings and their significance. It is important to note that both *Ms.* and *Jezebel* produced coverage that, at times, was quite intersectional. However, as the summary below indicates, there were also instances in which both outlets could have improved or deepened their coverage of the movement. By exploring the coverage from both outlets through the lens of feminist theory and intersectionality, this study provides a detailed and nuanced analysis of when and how intersectionality emerged in the coverage. The goal was to use these articles as a case study of how two feminist publications covered the first four years of the movement.

When it came to representations and characterizations of the #MeToo movement, several key themes emerged that answered this study's first research question regarding how the

movement was described in the coverage. For one, both outlets largely credited Burke with the origins of the movement, whether as the singular founder or alongside others including Alyssa Milano, Megan Twohey and Jodi Kantor. By anchoring the movement's origins in Burke's work, both outlets took care to acknowledge her work and showed an attempt at avoiding the whitewashing and erasure of Black activist's work and emotional labor that so often occurs. However, this inclusion of Burke did not mean that other BIPOC women were frequently named or featured within the coverage. In other words, intersectionality was more represented in theory rather than in practice, which meant that people from historically marginalized communities tended to be discussed more in a collective sense rather than featuring prominently as individual sources within the coverage. In addition to the focus on the movement's origins, the articles in the study also situated #MeToo in the history of the fight for women's rights including references to whisper networks and Anita Hill's testimony before the Senate in the Clarence Thomas hearings. Descriptions of the movement's reach and impact focused significantly on the solidarity that the movement brought and how this was empowering for survivors. Both *Ms.* and *Jezebel* covered the movement beyond Hollywood through features, Q&As, personal essays and other articles that situated #MeToo as much more than a movement only for celebrities and filmmakers.

The *Ms.* and *Jezebel* coverage of the movement was not without critiques and suggestions for how to improve #MeToo. These instances in the coverage were analyzed in order to answer this study's third research question regarding when and how intersectionality was present within the articles. Many of the critiques included by both outlets were concentrated on journalistic depictions of the movement. In critically examining how the movement had been represented in media, *Ms.* and *Jezebel* displayed awareness of their role as media and their responsibility as

such to be careful in their depictions of the movement and survivors and perpetrators of sexual violence. There were also suggested improvements for the movement including calls for more education, activism, cultural and systemic change. These mixed approaches to bring about lasting change from #MeToo show intentional engagement with what intersectionality scholar Collins identifies as “the complex social inequalities fostered by intersecting systems of power” that lead to “knowledge projects and/or political engagements that uphold or contest the status quo” (2015, p. 15). One of those specific systems that was repeatedly tackled within the coverage was the legal system. The coverage addressed the limitations of only defining and responding to sexual violence within the bounds of the legal system. Although these critiques and suggested improvements are positive, it is significant to note that *Ms.* as a whole was more solutions-based in its coverage than *Jezebel*. The tendency to focus more on describing the movement rather than presenting solutions also appeared in a content analysis study on newspaper coverage of the first six months of the #MeToo movement (De Benedictis et al., 2019). This is not to say that *Ms.* and *Jezebel*, in particular, avoided presenting solutions to the degree noted in that study, but rather that there is room for improvement from both outlets to focus more on needed changes to the problematic power structures that perpetuate the prevalence of sexual violence.

Moving beyond *Ms.* and *Jezebel*'s descriptions of the movement, there was also significant coverage on perpetrators and survivors which answered this study's second research question. This coverage was analyzed through the lens of intersectionality to also answer the study's third research question. Although not conclusive, *Jezebel* coverage did appear to focus more on perpetrators whereas *Ms.* coverage appeared to focus slightly more on survivors. At first glance, *Jezebel*'s detailed coverage of perpetrators appeared troubling. However, as noted in the findings chapter, this coverage often centered on how perpetrators had attempted to defend and

rehabilitate themselves as a lens through which to critique our societal response to them. In other words, it called into our question our tendency to afford perpetrators with credibility and grace in ways that discredits survivors and fails to adequately address the underlying belief systems such as heteropatriarchy that have created and maintained those conditions. Both *Ms.* and *Jezebel's* coverage included broad representations of survivors from multiple industries, communities and those of varying identities. The outlets also provided a platform for survivors to share their stories. *Ms.* did this especially well by publishing personal essays written by survivors. The inclusive coverage of the survivors within both outlets is admirable, yet there is still more room to feature marginalized voices and to call for “white cis-hetero people to be disruptors/contrarians to stand up against the wrongs perpetrated on marginalized bodies by white systems” (Battaglia et al., 2019, p. 133). Thus, more intersectional coverage must not only center the people experiencing multiple marginalization but also call for those in privileged positions to actively dismantle systems of oppression and be vocal allies.

As noted above, aspects of the coverage describing #MeToo and depicting survivors and perpetrators of sexual violence were often fairly intersectional. By and large, the areas of coverage that needed more depth and intersectionality were those focusing on rape culture and the connections between feminism and #MeToo. In other words, both *Ms.* and *Jezebel* offered pretty thorough overviews of sexual violence, but they both lacked reporting that adequately situated rape culture within broader systems such as racism and homophobia. While this reporting existed, these themes did not appear regularly throughout the coverage. Furthermore, the coverage did, at times, disparage feminism for centering White women, but these critiques were the exception rather than the norm. What the coverage needed was more focused attention to how “sexual violence is about domination—across race, nation, class, gender, and other

dimensions of inequality” (Armstrong et al., 2018, p. 101). Although it is notable and significant that both outlets addressed rape culture, this coverage would have benefited from delving deeper into how that culture has been and is continuing to be maintained “by the intersection of patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial systems” (Phipps, 2019, p. 18). This critical approach to those systems was also lacking in the coverage that engaged with feminism and how it is related to #MeToo. There were exceptions, but often the articles did not critique feminism for its limited engagement with women-identifying and nonbinary people at the nexus of multiple marginalized identities.

The recurring themes and blind spots highlighted above were reinforced by looking at how the coverage of both outlets was dispersed from 2017 to 2021 (RQ4). Overall, most of the coverage was concentrated in 2018 with significant drops in 2019 and 2020 to almost nothing in 2021. In the sample size coded for this study, there was not even an increase in coverage in October 2021, the four-year anniversary of #MeToo going viral on Twitter. This decreasing pattern of coverage is not surprising, but it does show a lack of sustained attention to #MeToo — a pattern that does not bode well for systemic change and activism. Furthermore, the *Ms.* and *Jezebel* articles that called for more intersectionality tended to be grouped more at the beginning of the movement and in 2020 or 2021. This indicates gaps in coverage that lacked critical evaluation of #MeToo for who it involved, the changes it brought about (or failed to) and an analysis of how the movement should continue to progress.

Limitations of the Study and Areas for Future Research

This study is not without its limitations. The main limitation of this study is that it only examines data from two feminist media publications. Although I recognize this is a small sample size, I believe it is sufficient given the scope of this study and the timeframe during which it was

completed. I make no claims that these outlets produce coverage that is representative of feminist media coverage of the #MeToo movement. However, I am treating the limited set of texts as a case study, one that I have informed and strengthened through careful methods and by engaging with relevant theory. As explained in the methods chapter, I took great care to select articles for this study that would provide a wide variety of information-rich coverage. The 81 articles coded for this study were from just over four years of coverage, and their distribution across that time period was similar to the distribution of all the eligible articles. This shows that the coded articles peaked and waned in patterns that would have likely continued even if the sample size had been larger. Another limitation of this study is that it does not consider the intentions of the writers and editors who produced the articles. Part of this is acknowledging that coverage might be limited in who it represents due to journalists' access to diverse sources who were willing and able to speak about their experiences. These limitations are intentional, as this study focused on the meaning within the text.

There are numerous opportunities for further research that could build on this study's findings. For example, other studies could apply the same methods of textual analysis to different feminist media publications. Alternatively, studies could focus on similarities and differences between feminist media coverage of #MeToo and other outlets' coverage. Moving beyond the methods used in this study, other studies could add interviews with editors, writers and readers as a means to analyze journalistic intent and audience response to coverage of #MeToo. Studies could also consider whether exposure to findings similar to these has an impact on journalistic reporting on #MeToo and sexual violence. Even moving beyond academia, these findings could be used to educate reporters and editors on what to continue doing in their coverage and what to avoid.

Applications of the Study

As I stated in the introduction, the purpose of this study is to inform scholarly understandings of feminist journalism's coverage of the #MeToo movement. Focusing specifically on *Ms.* and *Jezebel* was an opportunity to evaluate whether both outlets fell into many of the same traps that mainstream media has in covering the movement. Although not exhaustive or definitive, the findings suggest that both outlets did, in fact, cover the movement in ways that were thoughtful, nuanced and fairly intersectional. As detailed above, however, there were definite areas for improvement. This study has contributed to others that have also applied feminist values to media coverage and offers an in-depth textual analysis informed by feminist theory and intersectionality of coverage of the movement across four years. This analysis is not only significant for other scholars of sexual violence and #MeToo, but it can also be helpful for journalists to see what themes and patterns emerge in coverage that might have been otherwise overlooked.

One of the other main contributions is that this study can be informative to the world of solutions journalism by providing a detailed exploration of solutions-based coverage of sexual violence. Through detailing when and how *Ms.* and *Jezebel* included calls for improving our individual and collective response to sexual violence, this study illuminates scholarly understandings of how journalism can attempt to offer solutions for systemic problems. As noted in the coverage from both outlets, part of combatting or solving these problems requires collective education about where the systems have gone wrong and who continues to be overlooked and unheard within those systems. Whether as scholars, journalists, activists or people interested in this topic, the results of this study serve as a reminder of how important it is to be aware of the oppressive systems that go unnoticed and unchallenged. It is a reminder to each of us to interrogate and disrupt our complicity in upholding those systems. As Audre Lorde

articulates so well, “the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors’ tactics, the oppressors’ relationships” (2007, p. 123). My hope is that this study helps to illuminate those tactics, relationships and systems and raise awareness as to how they have been presented and critiqued in media coverage of #MeToo.

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