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Witches, Victims, and Villains: #MeToo and the
Political Polarization of Sexual Violence

Hannah Shoaf

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science

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ABSTRACT

Witches, Victims, and Villains: #MeToo and the Political Polarization of Sexual Violence

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The MeToo movement, which sought to combat sexual violence, evolved into a partisan problem, where support for or against the movement fell across party lines. This polarization negatively impacted the progress of the MeToo movement, fitting the larger pattern of increasing polarization in the United States. My thesis seeks to understand the politicized nature of sexual violence and to explore what language and themes are drawn on to politicize conversations around sexual violence by using the MeToo movement as a case study. My thesis found that the political polarization of sexual violence increased during the MeToo movement (and especially during and after the Kavanaugh hearing) primarily through detractors' language and framing of the issue. #MeToo detractors employed legalistic, violent, and misogynistic language to victimize the accused and villainize victims and supporters. In contrast, #MeToo supporters consistently used legalistic language to advocate for survivors' rights to state support in the face of actual violence. Insight on these politicizing discourses reveals a need for Democrats and Republicans to take on #MeToo policy reforms that both address due process and human rights while refraining from a victim/villain dichotomy.

Keywords: sexual violence, #MeToo, polarization, politicization

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INTRODUCTION

In the U.S., about 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men will be raped during their lifetime (“National Sexual Violence Resource Center”). The MeToo movement seeks to combat this epidemic of sexual violence and support sexual assault survivors through community, leadership, and empathy (me too). Because of the pervasiveness of sexual violence, studying the MeToo movement is crucial. Tarana Burke founded the MeToo movement in 2006, naming the movement after her experience when a young survivor shared her story, and Burke thought to herself ‘me too’ (me too). Then, in 2017, “the hashtag #MeToo went viral” (Castle et al. 2020:927), increasing awareness about the issue of sexual violence and garnering support for survivors (McDonald 2019). However, the movement also resulted in political controversy, including questions regarding due process and false accusations (Tambe 2018:200; Piacenza 2018; McDonald 2019), and was marked by political partisanship that threatened its potential (Lowe 2018). Studying the politics of the MeToo movement matters because the political partisanship surrounding the #metoo tweets did threaten to detract from the movement’s mission to stop sexual violence, an issue that affects the lives of individuals across party lines.

While much research has been done on political topics using Twitter posts (Graham, Jackson, and Broersma 2016; Golbeck, Grimes, and Rogers 2010; Jacobs, Sandberg, and Spierings 2020), the MeToo movement and politics (Castle et al. 2020; Blumell and Huemmer 2019; Ha Rim Rho, Mark, and Mazmanian 2018; Rodino-Colocino 2018), and the MeToo movement using Twitter posts (Hosterman et al. 2018; Schneider and Carpenter 2019; Bogen et al. 2019), few researchers have analyzed #metoo tweets to understand the polarized nature of sexual violence. One exception to this pattern is a study done by Clark and Evans (2019) that analyzed what affected Congress members to tweet about the MeToo movement or not, finding

that gender and ideology of the Congress member matters. This thesis expands on the idea of ideology and partisanship outlined by Clark and Evans (2019) by using the MeToo movement as a case study to understand how a universal (and universally abhorred) issue like sexual violence is politicized. Using a qualitative analysis of a random sample of 5153 tweets containing #metoo, I address this gap in the literature about Twitter posts, the MeToo movement, and politics by hand-coding tweets to better understand the politicized nature of sexual violence and to explore what language and themes are drawn on to politicize conversations around sexual violence. The goal with this research is to better understand political polarization and offer insight on how politicians can come together and create more unified, bipartisan policy reforms addressing the epidemic of sexual violence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much research has been done using Twitter posts, including on political topics (Graham et al. 2016; Golbeck et al. 2010; Jacobs et al. 2020). Several researchers have examined political aspects of the MeToo movement (Castle et al. 2020; Blumell and Huemmer 2019; Ha Rim Rho et al. 2018; Rodino-Colocino 2018) and others have used #metoo tweets to better understand the movement more generally (Hosterman et al. 2018; Schneider and Carpenter 2019; Bogen et al. 2019). However, few researchers have used tweets to analyze the political implications, outcomes, or trajectory of the MeToo movement, despite the politicized nature of sexual assault (Ghosal 2009) and women's rights issues (Castle et al. 2020; Wolbrecht 2000). My thesis addresses this gap in the literature by studying the polarization of #MeToo, and expanding on the idea of ideology and partisanship mentioned by Clark and Evans (2019). Outlined below is a section on sexual assault and politics, a history of the MeToo movement, research on politics and

Twitter, studies on the MeToo movement using Twitter posts, and research on the MeToo movement and politics.

Sexual Assault and Politics

A brief history of the laws surrounding sexual assault highlights the political nature of the issue as the definition of rape has repeatedly changed. Sexual assault was first framed as a property crime (Bishop 2018; Tracy et al. 2012; WCSAP; Ghosal 2009:109). According to the Code of Hammurabi, if a virgin got raped, it was viewed as property damage to her father (Bishop 2018). The next major shift in sexual assault laws was in the 11th and 12th centuries when rape started to be seen as a crime against the victim (Bishop 2018). In the late 1200s, rape was then redefined as a crime against the state (Bishop 2018). It is also important to note that throughout history, women of color were broadly excluded from the protections written into sexual assault laws and were not safeguarded by the law (Bishop 2018; WCSAP).

In the 1960s, more rapid changes were made regarding rape laws in the U.S, and rape was again redefined as a tool used to exercise control over women (Bishop 2018). In 1976, marital rape was first defined as a crime in Nebraska; by 1993, it was considered a crime in every state (Bishop 2018; WCSAP). In 1975, rape shield laws were put into place that restrict a defendant's ability to look into the sexual behavior, history, or reputation of the alleged victim, because such actions previously had stopped victims from bringing up cases of sexual assault to avoid having their sexual histories exposed in court (Bishop 2018). In fact, Ghosal (2009:114) explains that victims often face a "verbal rape" as they are questioned and objectified in court cases, one of the ways in which the actions of the police and legal system are the basest form of politics connected to sexual assault. Ghosal (2009:111) also argues that "by the 1980s, rape had become completely politicized and was viewed as the major weapon for the sustenance of

patriarchy.” Today, the lack of consistency regarding sexual assault laws and sex crime terminology is viewed as a result of the patriarchal foundation of rape crimes where women were considered property (Tracy et al. 2012:1). However, there is also a broadening of the role of consent in sexual assault laws today, and that unwanted and unconsented touch is the crime that sexual assault laws need to deal with (Tracy et al. 2012:1). Multiple states have also implemented revenge porn laws (Bishop 2018).

As this brief history shows, sexual assault crimes have intersected with issues of women’s rights, which are highly polarized, “with the Democratic Party advocating on behalf of second wave feminist issues and the Republican Party generally downplaying or opposing such issues” (Castle et al. 2020:928; Wolbrecht 2000). This polarization can be seen in the MeToo movement. A Morning Consult poll found that from May to October 2018, the partisanship of the MeToo movement increased, with support for the movement 2 points greater for Democrats (from 81 percent in May) and 7 points lower for Republicans (from 54 percent in May) (Conroy 2019; Castle et al. 2020). In between those dates, in September 2018, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford accused Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, Brett Kavanaugh, who was then a Supreme Court nominee, of sexual assaulting her in high school. The Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing on the sexual assault allegations against Supreme Court Justice Kavanaugh, and weeks later, Kavanaugh was confirmed to the U.S. Supreme Court (Chicago Tribune). Castle et al. (2020) further explains that initial support for the MeToo movement turned into a partisan divide, which widened further during the hearings for Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh. My research confirms Castle’s et al. (2020) timeline, that the increased polarization that occurred due to Dr. Christine Blasey Ford’s accusation and Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh’s hearing is a crucial element in understanding the politization of

#MeToo. The overall aim of my research is to use the MeToo movement as a case study to understand the perpetuating politicized nature of the issue of sexual violence.

History of the MeToo Movement

Before “hashtag #MeToo went viral” in 2017 (Castle et al. 2020:927), Tarana Burke started the MeToo movement in 2006 to help survivors, especially Black women, and girls from low-wealth communities, receive help and resources to heal from sexual violence. Burke’s initiative focused on the concept that “empowerment happens when we lead with empathy” (me too). Burke also started a nonprofit organization named Just Be Inc. to help survivors of sexual harassment and abuse (McDonald 2019).

Years after Tarana Burke founded the MeToo movement, and leading up to #MeToo going viral, McDonald (2019) explains that President Donald Trump’s sexist remarks, the accusations of sexual abuse he received, and his presidential win over former United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2016 angered many people. This anger resulted in the Women’s March of 2017 and additional protests (Castle et al. 2020; McDonald 2019). Then, in 2017, a series of prominent men were accused of sexual misconduct, including former film producer Harvey Weinstein and former head of Amazon Studios, Roy Price, in October days before the MeToo movement gained popularity on Twitter. (“#MeToo: A timeline of events”). The accusations against Weinstein especially fueled the fire that led to the sharing of stories of #metoo (Castle et al. 2020), which actress Alyssa Milano called for when she encouraged survivors of sexual harassment and assault to tweet “me too” (Rodino-Colocino 2018). Women around the world shared their stories (McDonald 2019). During the first 24 hours after Alyssa Milano’s tweet, #metoo had been tweeted 1 million times (me too), and in 2018, it was tweeted about 19 million times (McDonald 2019). The objective of the MeToo movement then became

centered on raising awareness of sexual violence (Lopez et al. 2019) through thousands of personal stories (Clark-Parsons 2018), which also gave survivors "a sense of solidarity and empowerment" (Castle et al. 2020:927; Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2018). #MeToo also became an international movement, as 85 countries started their own #metoo campaigns (me too), including in Argentina (Garibotti and Hopp 2019), China (Ma 2021), India (Sambaraju 2020), South Africa (Shefer and Hussen 2020), Sweden (Pollack 2019), and #BalanceTonPorc (DenounceYourPig) in France (Lopez et al. 2019). Lopez et al. (2019) also found that MeToo movements in different countries were influenced by one's culture and social reality, which is important to keep in mind when considering #MeToo policy implications.

The impact of the MeToo movement has involved both change and controversy. Social change has occurred as the MeToo movement succeeded in providing support to survivors, raising awareness about the issue of sexual violence, (McDonald 2019) and holding prominent men accountable for their sexual misdeeds, leading to many celebrities losing their jobs (Castle et al. 2020). However, the MeToo movement has also been blamed for not being inclusive of women of color (Onwuachi-Willig 2018), and excluding other marginalized groups (McDonald 2019). It has been attacked by counter-protests such as #ProtectOurBoys and #HimToo (Ellis 2018; Castle et al. 2020). Another consequence of the movement has been the fear of false accusations, which has negatively impacted the workplace, with 57% of US adults reporting that they were just as concerned about men receiving false accusations as they were about women being sexually harassed/assaulted (McDonald 2019; Piacenza 2018), which has influenced men to be less inclined to socialize with or mentor female colleagues (Castle et al. 2020; Bower 2019). The movement has also resulted in debates regarding due process (Tambe 2018:200;

McDonald 2019) and in political divisiveness, as the decision whether to support or oppose US Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation fell across party lines (Lowe 2018).

Research on Politics and Twitter

Several researchers have used Twitter posts to address political issues, although few have studied the MeToo movement. Many researchers have analyzed how politicians use Twitter and for what purposes (Graham et al. 2016; Golbeck et al. 2010; Jacobs et al. 2020). Other researchers have looked at various aspects of the nature of political communication on Twitter, including whether social status affects who joins the conversation (Ausserhofer and Maireder 2013; Bekafigo and McBride 2013), what kind of political content is more likely to get retweeted (Dang-Xuan and Stieglitz 2013), and what is the main purpose of political hashtags (Small 2011). My thesis adds to this discussion regarding politics and Twitter by considering the political dimensions of the MeToo movement.

Many different political movements have been studied using a Twitter sample, including the Gezi Park protests that started in May 2013 in Istanbul (Ogan and Onur 2017), #BlackLivesMatter and #TCOT (Top Conservatives on Twitter) (Ray et al. 2017), and #FreeIran, #FreeVenezuela, and #Jan25, (related to economic and political issues in 2009-2011) (Bastos, Raimundo, and Travitzki 2013), but few address #MeToo. However, my thesis draws upon Ray et al. 2017:1807 and their finding that #BlackLivesMatter and #TCOT acted as "polarizing collective identities about race and policing in America" by similarly exploring the polarizing narratives regarding #MeToo. Additionally, although few researchers have focused on the MeToo movement, politics, and Twitter posts, Clark and Evans (2019) used tweets to discover that what affects Congress members to tweet or not to tweet about the MeToo movement is gender and ideology, with liberal women being the most likely to tweet about the movement. My

research builds upon Clark and Evans' (2019) study and their finding about ideology being influential, as politics heavily shaped support for the MeToo movement.

Research on the MeToo Movement and Twitter

Several researchers have used Twitter posts to learn more about the MeToo movement, and similar to my approach, they have largely focused on analyzing the content of the tweets (Hosterman et al. 2018; Schneider and Carpenter 2019; Bogen et al. 2019). While a few of these researchers included an analysis of negative tweets or responses (Schneider and Carpenter 2019; Bogen et al. 2019), my thesis provides a deeper exploration into detractors' negative responses that further politicized #MeToo. Additionally, tweets about the MeToo movement have been used for a variety of research objectives, including investigating the role of social media in movements (Brünker et al. 2020), the risk of assault by a stranger versus a family member (Khatua, Cambria, and Khatua 2018), the major functions of #MeToo (Kachen et al. 2020), and public sentiment regarding #MeToo (Manikonda et al. 2018). While Manikonda et al. (2018) discovered how the #metoo tweets included empathy and encouraged participation in the movement, my thesis considers the negative and politicized discourses surrounding #MeToo that discouraged participation. Similar to Bouvier's (2020) conclusion that the MeToo movement included complex and diverse discourses, becoming somewhat of a chaos chamber, I similarly find that #MeToo involved complex discourses, with supporters and detractors framing the accused and the accusers in divisive ways. My thesis adds to this body of research on the MeToo movement and Twitter by using #metoo tweets to understand more about the politicization of sexual violence.

Research on the MeToo Movement and Politics

Seeking to understand the politicization of #MeToo is important since politics have been at the heart of the MeToo movement since its onset, with some claiming that the MeToo movement was initiated in part by political forces (Tambe 2018; McDonald 2019; Castle et al. 2020). One of these political forces was the nomination of Donald Trump to President of the United States, which stirred up anger among the public (Tambe 2018; McDonald 2019; Castle et al. 2020) in part because, after admitting to actions others linked to sexual misconduct, President Trump was not held accountable, which was traumatizing for survivors (Tambe 2018:198). Anger about President Trump defeating former United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, along with the Women's March on Washington, the firing of prominent men in the news industry, and increased numbers of women running for U.S. politics, acted as catalysts for the MeToo movement by influencing the public's schemas to resonate with the movement's message once it spread on social media (McDonald 2019; Tambe 2018). Considering the political climate surrounding actress Alyssa Milano's initial #MeToo tweet informs my research on how politics and political polarization continued to play a large role in #MeToo as the movement progressed.

Multiple researchers highlight the political polarization of the MeToo movement (Castle et al. 2020; Blumell and Huemmer 2019; Ha Rim Rho et al. 2018; Rodino-Colocino 2018) including the importance of ideology (Castle et al. 2020; Blumell and Huemmer 2019), which directly influenced the focus of the current thesis. While the MeToo movement succeeded in raising awareness about sexual harassment and sexual assault, it was Democrats, people who have experienced sexual harassment or assault, and individuals highly interested in politics, who were more likely to report that the movement made them more aware of and concerned about sexual violence (Castle et al. 2020). Researchers have also discussed the implications and

outcomes associated with due process (Tambe 2018; McDonald 2019), and my thesis seeks to add to the conversation on this central and debated #MeToo issue. Tambe (2018:200) explained that the MeToo movement has reversed due process, with accusers being believed more than the accused. Tambe (2018: 200, 202) argued that this “politics of retribution” with perpetrators being publicly shamed and criminalized, is especially problematic for Black men. My thesis offers an additional angle to consider: detractors seeking to criminalize survivors in support of the accused and due process. Additionally, McDonald (2019:95) explained how the reversal of due process is problematic, because the debate for or against it (through #BelieveWomen and #BelieveEvidence) “pit[s] women and men against each other.” My thesis confirms that justice for men and justice for women seemed divided in the MeToo movement, offering additional insight into the polarized issue of due process.

Lastly, a substantial portion of research on the MeToo movement and politics has focused on a feminist perspective and feminist politics (Page and Arcy 2020; Mendes et al. 2018; Gill and Orgad 2018; Clark-Parsons 2018). Researchers suggest that the focus on shared emotions could lead to a feminist politics based upon collective support and restorative justice (Page and Arcy 2020) or could lead to the personal becoming political through increased visibility (Clark-Parsons 2018), while others note the exclusionary dynamics of the online MeToo movement leaving out women of color and the LGBTQ community (Gill and Orgad 2018). The overarching question is, what can online movements like #MeToo and platforms like Twitter accomplish for feminist politics? My thesis approaches this question by examining how the legal goals of #MeToo intersected with women’s rights, aligning the MeToo movement with a feminist cause.

Current Study

While several researchers have studied the MeToo movement and politics, including the political origins of the movement (Tambe 2018; McDonald 2019; Castle et al. 2020), its association with feminist politics (Page and Arcy 2020; Mendes et al. 2018; Gill and Orgad 2018; Clark-Parsons 2018), as well as the movement's political implications and outcomes (Tambe 2018; McDonald 2019), few researchers have used #metoo tweets to understand the politicized nature of sexual violence, despite the knowledge that sexual assault is highly polarized (Ghosal 2009), as well as a women's rights issue (Castle et al. 2020; Wolbrecht 2000). With the MeToo movement as a case study and using Twitter posts, my thesis examines the politicized nature of sexual violence and explores what language and themes are drawn on to politicize conversations around sexual violence. I find that the political polarization of sexual violence increased during the MeToo movement (and especially during and after the Kavanaugh hearing) primarily through detractors' language and framing of the issue. #MeToo detractors employed legalistic, violent, and misogynistic language to victimize the accused and villainize victims and supporters. In contrast, #MeToo supporters consistently used legalistic language to advocate for survivors' rights to legal protection and governmental action against abusers.

Studying the political dimensions of the MeToo movement matters because a universal issue, sexual violence, remains highly polarized, and this polarization can be seen as hindering the movement's progress (Lowe 2018). Also, as Ray et al. (2017:1808) point out, there is a "heightened polarization that exists in a post-Obama/Trump-era." It is critical to study the political nature of sexual violence as found in the #metoo tweets, so that the polarization that complicated the MeToo movement and that continues to complicate the country as a whole can be better understood. Having an increased understanding of this polarization can lead to

knowledge of how to create more civilized discourses on the subject of sexual violence, so that Republicans and Democrats can better work together to create more unified policies to address #MeToo issues.

METHOD

Procedure

My sample of 5153 tweets is a randomly selected subset of a larger dataset collected from Twitter using the Crimson Hexagon and Twitter Developer API endpoints. Tweet IDs from the Crimson Hexagon API, a user interface that finds tweets matching one's search criteria, were applied in Twitter Developer to locate text and other tweet-level information from Twitter. Tweets with #metoo were collected from September 15, 2017, to October 15, 2019. There were 24,397,158 tweets available in this time period, and due to how the monitor can only find up to 10,000 tweets per day, 17,473,898 tweets were gathered from the sample. To get at a sample of 17,473,898 and bypass the 10,000 tweets per day limit, the monitor was run several different times using specific search criteria to gather more tweets. Next, by limiting the sample to Twitter handles in the U.S. and in the English language, there were 4,756,846 remaining tweets in the sample. Then, 5958 tweets were selected randomly from the U.S., English language dataset. However, since 805 of these tweets contained missing content, my final sample was 5153 tweets which included retweets but not comments (see Figure 1).

Data Preparation

The initial 24,397,158 tweets included were from public accounts, since Twitter only shows information for public tweets that are presently visible. Everyone with a public Twitter account were included in the initial sample frame, with the tweet being the unit of analysis. Information regarding each Twitter users' location, gender, and language was included, when

available on the Twitter profile, thus information on gender, for example, was missing for some of the tweets, where the profile user did not specify gender. The data were anonymized through removing the twitter handle and all identifying information from the tweets, excluding gender. I put the tweets in chronological order and assigned each tweet a number ranging from 1-5153 based on the date and time they were tweeted, with 1 referring to the earliest time point. Subsequently, when a tweet is referenced in the thesis there will be the tweet number and when available a capitalized letter “M” for male and “F” for female (such as #1067F if a woman tweeted the post) to orient the reader to the timing of the tweet and the gender associated with the Twitter handle. Lastly, when the tweets were pulled from Twitter, some tweets were truncated, so to accurately code the tweet, I searched for the full tweet when it was available on Twitter and added it to the dataset.

Coding Procedure

I coded the 5153 tweets through both deductive and inductive processes. First, I read through the tweets to identify themes. Then, I created a codebook of the themes, coded all 5153 tweets, and refined the codebook during the first analysis. Next, I conducted another round of analysis, taking a deeper dive into a few chosen themes from the first analysis. To establish greater reliability, the codebook provides evidence of the definitions and themes I chose, and can be referenced to check validity (see Appendix A).

My codebook was both inductive and deductive, with a priori codes being based off of existing literature on Twitter and politics (Small 2011; Graham et al. 2016; Ausserhofer and Maireder 2013; Ray et al. 2017) and themes from my inductive coding. Using categories from other researchers (Ausserhofer and Maireder 2013; Small 2011), I noted who was tweeting about politics during the MeToo movement, including politicians and citizens (Ausserhofer and

Maireder 2013), the media (Small 2011), and celebrities, but I especially focused on which politicians were being accused, criticized, or supported. Since most of the political tweets were about politicians, politicians were framed as one of the main political topics being tweeted about, and as Ausserhofer and Maireder (2013) differentiated between domestic and non-domestic tweets, my thesis focused on U.S. politicians. Also, similar to the study by Ray et al. (2017) that coded for polarizing collective identities between #BlackLivesMatter and #TCOT, I coded for tweets that criticized one party over another and compared those results to tweets that supported the movement. A final category of codes was the language and themes used in the tweets to politicize the conversation around sexual violence. These codes were largely inductively developed, as the tweets were examined for relevant themes once before the deductive coding began. Then, I created several themes and coded for them during the first analysis, and then focused on three main themes during my next round of coding: Legalistic Terms, Violent Language, and Gendered/Misogynistic Language (which combined the Gender/Politics and Misogynistic/Witch Hunt categories). Legalistic Terms also incorporates the code “rights,” which relates to “civil/human rights” included in an election campaign study by Graham et al. (2016). The themes of (a) who was tweeting about political topics and (b) whether a tweet criticized one party or another were mutually exclusive themes, but political topics and language/themes were not mutually exclusive, since some tweets included more than one political topic and theme. See Figure 2 for a chart demonstrating the coding process.

Limitations

There are some limitations to consider with my thesis. First, Twitter is considered to be a politicized platform, so discourses on Twitter may already be politically polarized. However, my thesis acknowledges the political nature of Twitter and considers the timing of the MeToo

movement, finding that during and after the Kavanaugh hearing, sexual violence became even more politicized than before. Also, my thesis looks into how sexual violence was being politicized on Twitter, using the political nature of Twitter to understand the language that makes the issue so polarized. Another limitation of this research is that there is no second coder to establish interrater reliability. However, I created and followed a codebook to enhance the validity of the findings. A third limitation was that the sample contained 5958 tweets, but 805 of them had content missing. From the 5153 tweets used, some of these tweets did not contain the full messages in them. I sought to address this issue by looking up the missing tweets on Twitter and adding the full tweets to the dataset, but not every tweet was found. When content was missing from the tweet, the researcher coded the available information. A fourth limitation was that my sample of 5958 tweets were randomly selected from the complete dataset, so the number of tweets at one point in time cannot be compared to the number of tweets at another point in time. However, I was able to capture timing as a key part of my analysis by organizing my sample of tweets in chronological order and noting when important #MeToo/political events occurred, as Figure 3 outlines. Despite these limitations, my thesis offers insight into the politicizing discourse of sexual violence with the hope to create greater understanding of the polarization that negatively influenced the MeToo movement and that continues to affect the country as a whole.

RESULTS

The Players, the Politics, and Party/Movement Support

My analysis confirms that the MeToo movement was highly polarized, with politicians being denounced and more tweets criticizing the Democratic Party being against #MeToo. Regarding the main contributors to the political discussions surrounding #MeToo, the

news/media, celebrities, and politicians all joined the politicized MeToo conversation. The public often retweeted celebrities and some politicians. Specific politicians were the main targets of #metoo tweets- most often about their scandals or their perceived blunders regarding MeToo. Significantly more politicians were accused of misconduct or criticized for how they handled MeToo compared to the number being supported for their MeToo views. For example, one tweet read: (RT) “Bob Menendez won the Democratic Party primary in N.J. again. Democrats must stop saying they support women & children when they keep electing a guy who allegedly raped underage girls. The #MeToo movement will never be taken seriously when people like Menendez gets re-elected” (#2635M). As this tweet shows, politicians were framed as being a main source of the problem, and rarely as change makers. This tweet is also an example of how the Democratic Party was criticized about twice as much for their MeToo actions compared to the Republican Party. Heretofore, tweets criticizing the Democratic Party or liberal ideals were labeled as “anti-Democratic tweets,” and tweets criticizing the Republican Party or conservative ideals were labeled as “anti-Republican tweets.” While the Democratic Party was criticized more often, almost twice as many individual Republican politicians were called out compared to Democrats (most were about President Donald Trump and how he was a “sexual predator”). While almost all of the anti-Republican tweets supported the MeToo movement (such as blaming Republicans for furthering sexual violence issues by electing President Trump -#405F, #2790), several of the anti-Democratic tweets were against the MeToo movement. For example, Democrats were criticized for “weaponizing” #MeToo (#3442M), and one tweet read: “Just saw this scene from The Crucible on Tucker Carlson. Reminds me so much of the Democrat party and the #metoo movement” (#3505M). An analysis of the political undertones of the tweets in my sample reveals the highly politicized nature of the MeToo movement on Twitter, as

politicians were directly connected to #MeToo, mostly in problematic ways, and more anti-Democratic tweets criticized #MeToo, while almost all anti-Republican tweets were supportive of #MeToo (see Figure 3 for an outline of the timing of the tweets and major #MeToo/political events).

Overview of the Three Main Themes

The three main themes that I identified that further politicized the conversation of sexual violence during the MeToo movement were Legalistic Terms, Violent Language, and Gendered/Misogynistic Language. The category “Legalistic Terms” includes words that are not strictly legal terms, but that are legalistic in their rhetoric. #MeToo supporters largely used legalistic terms to advocate for their human rights in the face of experiencing actual violence, while #MeToo detractors used the legalistic terms of “due process” and “accusation,” along with violent terms, to usurp the language of violence to claim their own victimhood.

Gendered/Misogynistic Language that is deeply rooted in political and legal violence and atrocities (historically deployed against women and other marginalized people) was primarily used by detractors to assert the innocence of (mostly) straight, White men. The concept of due process, which pitted justice for men against justice for women, helps explain why the MeToo movement became so polarized. The use of Legalistic Terms, Violent Language, and Gendered/Misogynistic Language shows how sexual violence was being further politicized during the MeToo movement. Additionally, this political polarization increased during and after the Kavanaugh hearing, as detractors employed a greater amount of specific legalistic terms and violent and gendered/misogynistic language to attempt to re-frame the conversation and re-define true victims as those accused instead of those suffering from sexual violence.

Theme 1: Legalistic Terms

Legalistic Terms was a category used by supporters and detractors alike to either claim their rights in the face of actual violence or to claim their right to a “fair” trial. The following concepts were coded as Legalistic Terms: “justice,” “equality,” “accountability/accountable,” “due process,” “law,” “rights,” “accusation,” “allegation,” and any comments about a lawyer or trial/hearing (especially any reference to Kavanaugh or Ford). Legalistic Terms was a highly politicized category, as Kavanaugh accuse/Ford support tweets supported the movement more and were more often anti-Republican, and Kavanaugh support/Ford criticize tweets were more often against the movement and anti-Democratic (and Democrats were criticized a greater amount during/after the Kavanaugh hearing). For example, one anti-Republican tweet that supported the movement and Dr. Christine Blasey Ford read: (RT) “Brett Kavanaugh’s accuser passed a polygraph. If he and the rest of the GOP expect me to take him at his word that this assault never happened, I’ll expect his polygraph results from the FBI released to the public tomorrow. #MeToo” (#3190F). And an anti-Democratic tweet against the movement and supporting Supreme Court Justice Kavanaugh: “RT@RealCandaceO: Any person who cannot admit that the #metoo movement has fully deteriorated into a political weapon is either a liar or a coward. Any person who ACTUALLY cares about sexual assault victims should be vehemently & vocally against what the Democrats are staging against Kavanaugh” (#3231M). Interestingly, a few tweets opposed Supreme Court Justice Kavanaugh for largely political reasons, connecting his stance on abortion with his sexual misconduct allegation. For example: “You’re saying a possible RAPIST will DECIDE if a woman MUST HAVE A BABY conceived in VIOLENCE? What’s wrong with the GOP? #KavanaughHearings #AmJoy #Maddow @Lawrence #MeToo #Resistance @DesignationSix #Inners” (3636F). Also, some survivors supported Dr. Christine

Blasey Ford since they equated her experience with their own account of sexual violence: (RT) “I distinctly remember the name, and face of the high schooler that raped me when I was 16...24 years ago. Time doesn’t always heal invisible wounds but walking in our truth sometimes does. #MeToo #IBelieveDrFord” (#3350M). Legalistic Terms further politicized the conversation around sexual violence as the debate around the Kavanaugh hearing was extremely polarized, spilling over into the #metoo conversation on Twitter.

The issue of sexual violence was further politicized during the MeToo movement as supporters employed Legalistic Terms such as “justice,” “rights,” “law,” “equality,” and “accountability/accountable” to assert their own humanity and right to state support due to actual violence. A majority of these tweets supported the MeToo movement, and the timing of these tweets were gradual, suggesting that supporters used these legalistic terms throughout the MeToo movement to claim their rights.

“Justice” was used by MeToo supporters to claim rights for survivors and consequences for the accused, and “justice” was framed as an integral purpose of #MeToo. In this sense, “justice” functioned as an antithesis to sexual violence and was a main argument espoused by survivors for their right to legal protection and governmental action against abusers. “Justice” was also the term used most frequently by #MeToo supporters to claim their rights, and interestingly, the available tweets within my sample revealed that more women than men tweeted about “justice.” One example of supporters using “justice” to claim rights for survivors is: “It’s time for accountability to become the norm after sexual harassment and violence. It’s time to pass the Equal Rights Amendment so that our legal system can become a system of justice for survivors, and #MeToo can become #NoMore” (#2188). Also, “justice” applied to both the accusers and the accused: the accusers deserved to see the accused held accountable, and the

accused deserved to receive consequences for their actions. For example, multiple tweets were about President Trump’s accusers “demanding” or “deserving” justice: “RT @funder: RETWEET if you agree Donald Trump’s sexual assault accusers deserve justice #SexualPredatorTrump #MeToo #TrumpSexPredator” (#464F) and “RT @funder: The women Trump sexually assaulted deserve justice. RT if you agree. #MeToo #TrumpSexProbe” (#825M). An example of justice being dealt to the accused is: “It has reached the point where if an elected official is involved in this type of behavior, they need to step down for the betterment of the folks that they serve...Eventually, one way or another they will be brought to justice... #MeToo” (#2418M). Specific predators such as #MuteRKelly (#2455F) and President Trump and Supreme Court Justice Kavanaugh (#3488F) were also called to justice. Additionally, a few of the tweets seemed to imply that “justice” is an integral part of MeToo, even one definition of the MeToo movement: “They [GOP female senators] should all be speaking out about #Kavanaugh. #MeToo means justice, regardless of when the incident happened. #PostponeTheHearing” (#3196F). This woman declared that the MeToo movement’s definition is justice. Similarly, another woman retweeted: “@nowthisnews Tony Robbins is so in the wrong here...The #MeToo movement isn't trying to "get significance", it's pursuing #justice & cultural change.” (#2142). For supporters of MeToo, “justice” was used to demand state rights for victims of sexual violence, and for their perpetrators to be held accountable. “Justice” was also framed as an essential element of the MeToo movement, a key tool in combatting sexual violence.

Similar to “justice,” “rights” was another legalistic concept viewed as an important purpose of the MeToo movement. Fighting for various human and women’s rights was framed as a natural outgrowth of #MeToo, and politically lined up with fighting for survivors’ rights. “Rights” was a term used largely by supporters to advocate for survivors of sexual violence.

Interestingly, given the available tweets within my sample, roughly double the number of women compared to men tweeted about rights. Multiple types of “rights” were mentioned, including “voting rights,” “civil rights,” the “Equal Rights Amendment” (ERA), and the two broadest categories: “human rights” and “women’s rights” (most of which were from women). Overall, these various rights were defined as being a part of MeToo, such as declaring that pushing for the ERA is a natural extension of MeToo (#505, #3808F) and that #StandUp4Human Rights belongs alongside #MeToo (#1173M). Also, helping survivors who have experienced actual violence includes fighting for civil rights as well: “RT@SenSanders: The #MeToo movement demands real action from Congress to stop sexual harassment and abuse. That’s why I’m co-sponsoring groundbreaking legislation, to finally end mandatory arbitration and expand civil rights protections to domestic workers, interns, and contract workers” (#4714M). A few tweets also declared that #MeToo is a movement about human rights and women’s rights, including Tweet #2429F: “#MeToo represents an economic, public health and human rights crisis and every leader must have a plan. #mepolitics” and #164: “@Alyssa_Milano #MeToo... We are stronger together in this movement for women’s rights and equality!” “Rights” was used by supporters to advocate for their right to legal protection and governmental action against abusers, and fighting for legal rights aligned with the purpose of #MeToo.

Although sometimes applied in a “news” context, “law” was used by supporters to advocate for survivors’ rights to state support. “Law” was employed largely in support of the MeToo movement, and similarly to “rights,” there were specific laws championed for that addressed survivors’ needs, such as #TitleIX: “RT@AAUW: #TitleIX is critical in the fight to end sexual harassment & violence on campus. It must be protected & upheld. Schools must be compliant with the law...#MeToo #MeTooK12” (#2963F). There were also specific workplace

laws (#1492, #2581M), including #SexualHarassmentLaws (#2559F) advocated for on behalf of survivors. Calls to create and change laws to enable women to receive state support in the face of sexual violence were also advocated for in political courts. For example, a RT@SenKamalaHarris read: “If the #MeToo conversation ends without a meaningful change in our laws, then we will have failed...” (#2620M). In a few instances, “law” was used by detractors to claim victimhood for the accused, such as “Franken was denied due process...Everyone deserves a fair hearing. That’s why the law says you’re innocent until proven guilty #ISupportAlFrankin #MeToo” (#4974F). However, “law” was largely used to stand up for survivors and demand they receive state support: “‘Zero tolerance’ must mean every complaint gets logged and investigated. It means consequences for EVERY PERPETRATOR. No one is above the law. No one gets a ‘pass.’ #WeSaidEnough #MeToo #CALeg” (#597F). Whether used to uphold current policies or to push for progressive change, “law” was used to advocate for survivors and help them receive state support.

“Equality” was a legalistic term utilized by supporters to not only promote survivors’ rights to state support, but also linked #MeToo to a broader feminist agenda, further politicizing sexual violence. “Equality” was mentioned several times, mostly in support of the movement. Specifically, “equality” was largely used in a way that advocated for the equality of women, so this code not only supported the MeToo movement, but also pushed forward a feminist agenda. For example, one woman tweeted: “What it the true meaning of the word FEMINISM? Learn more here...#genderequality #feminism #metoo” (#2371). Not only was feminism and gender equality connected to #MeToo, but specific feminist issues were linked to #MeToo as well, including #equalpay (#2214F) and the Equal Rights Amendment (#2570). “Equality” aligned a survivors’ rights to state support due to sexual violence to a broader feminist agenda.

Similarly to “justice” and “rights,” “accountability” was framed as a defining aspect of the MeToo movement, and supporters were claiming that survivors had the right to see legal action taken against their perpetrators. Almost all of the “accountability/accountable” tweets were in support of the movement. “Accountability” also seemed to be viewed as part of the definition of the MeToo movement: “The #MeToo era means there is accountability” (#4507F), “music has dodged #MeToo accountability” (#4704F), and “We are voting for accountability in 2020. #MeTooVoter” (#5145M). For supporters, accountability was an integral part of #MeToo. While both men and politicians in general were called out to be held accountable, (such as “men who chose to sexually assault women and are now being held accountable in public for their actions” #3070F; and “are transforming #MeToo into #MeTooVoter to hold politicians accountable” #5153), interestingly, around half of the “accountable” tweets were about President Donald Trump. Tweets called for support for Trump’s accusers, and for legal action to be taken against President Trump. For example: “RT@funder: The 16 women who accused Trump of sexual assault are telling their story in one video-please share this far & wide. RT if you agree it’s time for Trump to be held accountable for his sexual misconduct. #TrumpSexPredator #AMJoy” (#660). There were even hashtags calling for President Trump to be brought to justice: #HoldTrumpAccountableDay (#819M) and #HoldTrumpAccountable (#1058M, #1498M). “Accountability” was defined as being an essential part of the MeToo movement, and “accountable” tweets called for legal action to be taken against perpetrators (and in particular, President Donald Trump) in support of survivors and their right to state support in the face of actual violence.

However, a couple of legalistic terms “due process” and “accusation” (especially in comparison to “allegation”) were used by detractors to claim legal rights to a “fair” trial for those

accused of sexual violence (usually men), even to the point of usurping the language of “violence” to claim that these men are the true victims. “Due process” was employed by detractors to contend that accused men were not receiving a “fair” trial, and therefore were primarily victims of #MeToo, instead of perpetrators of sexual violence. With “due process,” a majority of the tweets were against the movement. “Due process” was also tweeted about more during and after the Kavanaugh/Ford hearing, showing how sexual violence became even more politicized due to the hearing. Interestingly, there were a few more anti-Democratic than anti-Republican tweets regarding “due process.” For example, one tweet read: (RT) “@JaneMayerNYer @alfranken I fully support #MeToo. Franken deserved due process...As it was, the party and the movement lost credibility-and diminished both” (#4973F). Whether they were anti-Democratic or not, “due process” tweets supported the accused over the accusers, focusing on the accused rights’ to a “fair” trial, even calling the accused the actual targets of violence. For example: “RT@nytimes: Gayle King on #MeToo: “I think when a woman makes an accusation, the man instantly gets the death penalty. There has to be some sort of due process here” (#2700F). The use of “the death penalty” in this tweet suggests that men have the right to a fair trial because they are possibly the real victims of violence. Detractors used “due process” to claim that the accused (mostly men) deserve a “fair” trial, and that the accused are not receiving that right and are therefore the true victims of violence.

Detractors also used “accusation” (instead of “allegation”) to claim that the accused are the real targets of #MeToo instead of the villains. “Accusation” was used in a largely negative context by detractors of the MeToo movement, with around twice as many of the “accusation” tweets in my sample being against the movement compared to supporting it. The timing of the “accusation” tweets were fairly gradual, with a few more during the Kavanaugh/Ford hearing.

Similarly to “due process,” Democrats were criticized more than Republicans for unfair “accusations.” For example, one tweet read: (RT) “ALL senators calling for Al Franken to step down before a FAIR INVESTIGATION can go to Hell. The accusations against him reek of political hit job not only to destroy him but cheapen the entire #MeToo movement. This is why Democrats lose” (#673). Violent language also made its way into “accusation” tweets, with the attempt to re-cast the accused as the true victims: “@hardwick @AMC_TV The #metoo movement has officially jumped the shark. What started out as a wake up call has turned into a war against men for bad breakups. No proof required, presumed guilty, career ending accusations by bitter exes. Women with true stories should be outraged” (#2697). In this tweet, the MeToo movement is framed as a war against the accused (men). A tweet compared #MeToo to lynching: (RT) “@DineshDSouza Let’s not forget the ORIGINAL #metoo movement: 1882-1962 4743 Black men lynched. In most cases, all it took was a white woman’s accusation of sexual harassment or misconduct” (#4785). As these tweets show, “accusation” was largely used to frame the accused as the real victims. However, some “accusation” tweets supported the movement, which showcases the political polarization of #MeToo: (RT) “Credible accusations of sexual assault are like roaches. There is never just one. #IBelieveHer #BrettKavanaugh #MeToo #WhyIDidntReport” (#3449). Also: “RT@ChrisCuomo: How can journalist E. Jean Carroll be brushed away as just one more?...This is the most extreme accusation we’ve had against this President and it has had almost no impact on our dialogue” (#4865F). Yet, “accusation” tweets were more often used in a negative sense in support of the accused, such as with “false accusations:” (RT) “BELIEVE THE WOMEN? Woman’s False Rape Accusations Ruins Three Men’s Lives” (#4273F). Additionally, when comparing the use of “allegation” to “accusation,” it is apparent that “accusation” was used in a far more negative context. “Allegation” was often

used in a news/factual sense, such as “California Assemblywoman Cristina Garcia #MeToo movement lawmaker investigated for sexual misconduct allegations” (#1615). Given the definition of “allegation” vs. “accusation,” with the former being more assumed to be made without proof, it is interesting that “accusation” became the term used more negatively by detractors to discredit #MeToo and frame the accused as the actual targets. Detractors’ use of both “accusation” and “due process” as an attempt to reframe victimhood for the accused further politicized the conversation of sexual violence during the MeToo movement.

Theme 2: Violent Language

Violent language was largely used by detractors against the movement to claim that the accused (mostly men) were the true victims of “violence” due to the MeToo movement. This victimization of the accused further politicized sexual violence during #MeToo. Items coded as “violent language” were words typically associated with war and violence such as: “weaponize,” “ruin,” “crucified,” “lynching,” “avenger/assassin,” and “mob rule.” Violent language was often used in a political sense, as tweets with this theme spiked up during and after the Kavanaugh/Ford hearing. There were also more anti-Democratic than anti-Republican tweets within “violent language,” but no major gender differences were found. While some tweets used “violent language” in support of the movement, many tweets used “violent language” to usurp the language of “violence” to claim victimhood for the accused, further politicizing sexual violence.

Detractors relied on the terms “weaponized” and “lynching” in particular to appropriate the language of violence and make their argument that the accused were innocent men, the real targets of #MeToo, instead of the accusers. “Weapon/weaponized” followed by “lynching of men” were the codes used most frequently in “violent language.” Several “weapon/weaponized”

tweets criticized the Democratic Party for “weaponizing” the MeToo movement (while only a couple criticized the Republican Party). For example, one woman retweeted: “@RealCandaceO It is incredibly sad for sexual assault victims that the Left decided to weaponize #MeToo” (#3611F). Some of these tweets also utilized violent terms to make it seem like the accused (mostly men) were the true victims of the MeToo movement and therefore deserved support: “RT@RealCandaceO: The war on police = #BLM The war on ICE = #AbolishICE The war on men = #MeToo What other movements will the left launch and weaponize so that they can implement mob rule?” This tweet painted men as the victims of “mob rule.” Detractors also used “lynching” to assert that the accused (mostly men) were the actual targets of the MeToo movement. The exact phrase “lynching of men” was retweeted multiple times: “RT@RealCandaceO: “metoo is just rebrand of Democrats using sexual assault allegations to justify the lynching of men...#KavanaughHearings #ConfirmKavanaughNow” (#3620). “Lynching” tweets called for “fair” trials while supporting the accused as the real victims of “violence:” (RT) “The problem with the #MeToo movement is that it allows anyone to make any accusation against any person from any period in time without any proof or due process and then asks the public to act like the accusation is automatically true. This is not justice. This is lynching” (#4480). Additionally, during the Kavanaugh/Ford debate, the MeToo movement was referred to as “the #MeToo lynchings” (#3407) and earlier #MeToo got labeled as “#MeToo’s lynch mob justice” (#1384F). Detractors defined the MeToo movement as being about lynching, attempting to usurp the language of “violence” to declare the accused as the real #MeToo victims. They also criticized Democrats and occasionally others for “weaponizing” the movement, in particular against accused men, and therefore heightened the polarization of #MeToo.

Similarly, words like “crucified” and “mob rule.” This “violent language” further politicized the issue of sexual violence by asserting that the accused were the true victims of “violence,” not the survivors. For example, one tweet read: (RT) “This pedophile’s career should be 100% ruined just like every other male, who was crucified by her #MeToo movement after being accused” (#3046). The use of the word “crucified” is a strong example of detractors usurping the language of “violence” to claim victimhood for the accused men. Even one individual claiming support for #MeToo wrote: “I understand the importance of the #MeToo movement, I honestly do. But you can’t just crucify everyone who’s ever made a mistake” (#3071M). These tweets suggest the accused are victims. Similarly, several tweets accused the MeToo movement for its “mob rule.” For example, actress Alyssa Milano was called a “mob boss” (#3901F), the movement itself was referred to as “#MeToo ‘mob rule’” (#1980), and actor Aziz Ansari, who was accused and received both hate and support from the media was said to possibly be “a victim of mob justice” (#4936). Another tweet read: “On the off chance a militant #MeToo mob assembles outside the Capital when the #KavanaughHearing is over, keep your eye...” (#3575M). These tweets paint MeToo supporters as the potential threat. Additionally, “mob rule” was used in a political sense to insult MeToo supporters and sometimes the Democratic Party. For example, one tweet read: (RT) “Never thought I’d long 4the days when these #MeToo mobsters were jumping out of moving cars while doing the Kiki dance instead of committing rhythmic simple assault on the elderly #MobRuleDemocrats #StayMad #RememberInNovember #VoteRedToSaveAmerica” (#3850). This tweet framed MeToo supporters and Democrats as violent “mobsters.” However, one politician sought to respond to this criticism: “RT@SenSchumer: Women across the country came together around this nomination to say #MeToo, to stand up against sexual abusers and harassers. And all Donald

Trump, Mitch McConnell, and Republican leaders have to say to them is that they're a mob. Disgraceful" (#3868). MeToo supporters were also called a "mob" for fighting against Justice Kavanaugh's Supreme Court nomination and interfering with due process (#3801). "Mob rule" was also linked to #MeToo being an attack on the accused (men): (RT) "This is the radical left's new 'I CAN'T' feminism of victimhood that reduced the #MeToo movement 2 #MobRule mentality- it has nothing 2 do with equality 4 women & everything 2 do with the hateful destruction & emasculation of men #StayMad #VoteRedToSaveAmerica" (#3877M). Both "crucified" and "mob rule" were violent terms used by detractors to paint the accused (mostly men) as the real targets of "violence," thus further politicizing sexual violence.

However, there were a few exceptions where supporters attempted to steal back the language of violence they were being condemned with, refuting claims' that men were the real victims, although most of the "violent language" was employed by detractors. For example, one tweet read: (RT) "If you think the #metoo movement is about attacking others you are WRONG. It is about identifying predators. These men are not the victims here. Please get woke" (#2139). This tweet called out the detractors' main tactic with using violent language: men are not being attacked, and they are not the victims of the MeToo movement. Furthermore, another tweet called out author Tony Robbins' criticism of #MeToo, explaining that "The #Metoo movement isn't trying to 'get significance,' it's pursuing justice & cultural change. #MeToo isn't 'attacking' someone else, it's holding perpetrators accountable" (#2142F). This tweet pointed out that holding perpetrators accountable is not the same as attacking them. Additionally, while detractors declared that #MeToo is a war against men, this tweet explained that there is another war: (RT) "#NowReading: #MeToo is important, but the war on women is a far, far bigger deal...Heather Barr" (#1036M). These tweets all refute detractors' claims that the accused are the

real victims. However, a majority of the tweets using violent language were against the movement, painting the accused (mostly men) as the actual targets, referring to #MeToo and social media as a “Taliban-ish execution” (2769F) and women and Democrats as “weaponizing” the movement (#3519F, #3442M) at the expense of men who were getting “lynched” (#3620). Although a few tweets sought to reclaim the language of violence for supporters and survivors, overall, detractors used “violent language” to claim victimhood for the accused, as victims of “lynching,” “mob rule,” and a “weaponized” MeToo movement. This re-framing of victimhood further increased the political polarization of #MeToo by creating a larger divide between detractors and supporters on their view of the movement.

Theme 3: Gendered/Misogynistic Language

Gendered/misogynistic language was also employed by detractors to criticize feminists and the left especially, and to portray the accused (mostly men) as victims in need of “fair” trials, thus further politicizing sexual violence by victimizing the accused and villainizing victims and supporters. It is significant to note that the terms used in this category are a part of a vocabulary deeply rooted in political and legal violence and atrocities historically deployed against women and other marginalized people. This theme includes “gendered language,” from the “gender and politics” category, which included any political tweet that also mentioned gender. “Gendered language” was used especially during the Kavanaugh/Ford hearing. While several “gendered language” tweets supported the movement, such as fighting against anti-women’s rights or behavior (#1311, #3319), this theme highlights the “gendered language” that was used by detractors against #MeToo, feminists, and/or the left. Within “gendered language,” there were more anti-Democratic tweets than anti-Republican tweets. For example, (RT): “We are about to see an explosion of leftist misogyny. And like the overwhelming majority of #MeToo

perpetrators, the woke male feminists will be the worst” (#2747). Democrats and feminists were often grouped together, such as “where are #Democrats? #MeToo #feminists? #SenateDemocrats? #HouseDemocrats?” (#1059). #MeToo supporters were also labeled as feminists, often in a derogatory way, depicting them as the villains and the accused as the victims: (RT): “@TwitterMoments Oh, what happened to all the feminist #metoo angry mob? Conveniently ignoring Avenatti’s wife beating while they tried to destroy Kavanaugh with no evidence. They drink hypocrisy like it’s a fine wine” (#4125). This tweet painted an accused man (Supreme Court Justice Kavanaugh) as a victim, while portraying MeToo supporters as angry, violent feminists. Additionally, some tweets used the term “feminazi” to label MeToo supporters as a dangerous threat: “the predatory, hateful, and politically motivated feminazis comprising the #MeToo crew (#3478)” and “Feminazis for Military Women Plan #MeToo Demonstration Outside Pentagon” (#1005M). The “gendered language” used by detractors sought to discredit #MeToo, feminists, and the left, while depicting the accused as innocent victims, further politicizing sexual violence through the use of deeply political, violent language rooted in atrocities historically deployed against marginalized people, such as the Holocaust (“feminazis”).

“Misogynistic language” was also used by detractors to claim that the accused men were the real victims at the hands of #MeToo supporters and deserve “fair” trials (in particular Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh). Given the fact that such misogynistic language is rooted in historical atrocities against women further politicizes the issue of sexual violence. The category “misogynistic/witch hunt language,” also is a part of the “gendered/misogynistic language” theme, which coded the following words: “Salem witch trials,” “witch,” “hysteria,” “hunt,” and “pitchfork.” This “misogynistic language” was used most often during and after the Kavanaugh/Ford hearing. In fact, several tweets explicitly called out the Kavanaugh/Ford

hearing as witchlike, including labeling it as “The Kavanaugh witch trial” (#3903F) and declaring it a “witch hunt:” “It’s time to confirm Brett Kavanaugh, and put an end to the #metoo witch hunt” (#3486). Furthermore, one tweet read: “#BrettKavanaugh sits on the court because allegations without any proof should never carry any power in a civilized liberal society. We call what happened a witch trial conducted by a mob. #metoo” (#4875M). These tweets demonstrate support for Supreme Court Justice Kavanaugh, framing him as a victim in need of a “fair” hearing. Interestingly, witch hunts and witch trials were historically conducted against women, yet detractors utilized these misogynistic terms to claim victimhood and innocence for primarily White men such as Supreme Court Justice Kavanaugh.

Detractors also used related misogynistic terms, such as “pitchforks and torches” to depict MeToo supporters as the real enemies and show support for Supreme Court Justice Kavanaugh: (RT) “The Soft and Caring Women of the #MeToo Movement. -Pitchforks & Torches are Optional. #ConfirmJudgeKavanaugh” (#3655). Also, a couple of tweets after the Kavanaugh/Ford hearing criticized Democrats instead of Republicans for their #MeToo actions. For example: (RT) “It’s a typical Leftist Tactic to stall...first they create Mass Hysteria...” (#3466). This tweet used a related misogynistic term to “witch hunt:” “hysteria,” which historically was a medical condition said to afflict only women and is therefore a disputed term, to denounce Democrats and #MeToo supporters. Another anti-Democratic tweet read: “You mean the same party that hates White Men like you and consider the #MeToo Salem Witch trials to be a good political tactic? You wanna co-sign with that party?” (#4111). Not only did this tweet (implicitly) accuse Democrats of conducting witch trials, but it specifically referenced the “Salem witch trials,” which was a historical atrocity that targeted primarily women. Detractors using such misogynistic language rooted in historical atrocities aimed against women (such as

witch trials) to claim innocence and victimhood for men accused of sexual violence increased the polarization of #MeToo.

While more of the “misogynistic language” tweets were against the movement, a few tweets were of #MeToo supporters calling out the “witch hunt” accusations and attempting to reclaim the narrative. For example, one tweet read: (RT) “Media: Why don’t more women come forward about sexual assault? *Women come forward about sexual assault* Media: Witch hunt! Fake news! That’s why...#MeToo @Jezebel” (#431F). In this tweet, MeToo supporters pointed out the harmful nature of the “witch-hunt” language used against them, which this tweet did as well: (RT) “What is fundamentally misunderstood by vilifiers of #MeToo is that none of this is fun for us. They’re picturing us holding a bag with the top tied shut, cackling away as an accused kicks and flails. In reality, every new story reopens our wounds, and it hurts like f***** h***” (#4531). This tweet seeks to respond to the detractors’ subversion of violence and victimhood, explaining that MeToo survivors are not the witches, and the accused are not the victims. Additionally, supporters sought to reclaim the narrative, to make the “witch-hunt” language work for them: (RT) “1 in 5 women stalked 1 in 4 sexually assaulted or raped 1 in 4 suffering domestic abuse 2 UK women a week murdered by abusers 10 a week committing suicide as result of FGM, Early & Forced Marriage This #metoo ‘witch hunt’ has barely started!” (#1303M). This tweet showed that there are a lot of societal ills related to #MeToo to combat and change. Another tweet read: (RT) “Yes, This Is a Witch Hunt. I’m a Witch and I’m Hunting You. via @NYTimes #MeToo” (#222F). This tweet takes the “witch-hunt” language and makes it work for the #MeToo cause.

However, about twice as many “misogynistic language tweets,” which terms are rooted in historical atrocities against women, were used by detractors to depict the accused as victims in

need of a fair legal process. For example, one tweet read: (RT) “@Bravotv @evolutionusa Btw, @Bravotv @evolutionusa I hate to see what you would do with Miss Nazi Chic’s comments on the ‘male witch hunt’ otherwise known as the #metoo movement. Please spare me. Sincerely, A Viewer” (#1616). This tweet explicitly claimed that the MeToo movement unfairly targets men, painting them as innocent victims. Another tweet read: (RT) “If you are a woman or a man, and a victim of sexual assault please call the police immediately! But do not become a slanderer or an accuser. You are never more like the devil than when you are a slanderer. Rev. 12:10 Time for the #MeToo witch hunts to end” (#3849M). This tweet implies that the accusers are more villainous than the accused, and that the current legal process for the accused is unfair. (Also, interestingly, the Salem witch trials involved accusing innocent women of consorting with the devil, and this tweet states that accusers are like the devil). Overall, detractors used terms such as “witch hunt,” “hysteria,” and “feminazis,” which are deeply rooted in political and legal violence and atrocities historically deployed against women and other marginalized people, to assert the innocence and victimhood of primarily straight, White men, further politicizing the issue of sexual violence.

DISCUSSION

My thesis used the MeToo movement as a case study to explore the politicized nature of sexual violence, and while Ray et. al. (2017:1807) concluded that both #BlackLivesMatter and #TCOT served as “polarizing collective identities about race and policing in America,” my thesis found that #MeToo contained polarizing identities about sexual violence in the U.S., with both supporters and detractors using the hashtag to assert their viewpoints on the MeToo movement. Supporters framed the MeToo movement as a fight for greater legal rights, including women’s rights, further politicizing sexual violence by aligning #MeToo with a feminist agenda. Other

researchers have recognized this connection and have studied the MeToo movement and its implications for feminist politics (Page and Arcy 2020; Mendes et al. 2018; Gill and Orgad 2018; Clark-Parsons 2018). My thesis adds to this body of research and describes the connection between feminism and #MeToo in the context of legal rights.

While other researchers have documented detractors' counter-protests of #MeToo, such as #ProtectOurBoys and #HimToo (Ellis 2018; Castle et al. 2020), my thesis shows how detractors formed a counter-narrative to the MeToo movement within the hashtag #MeToo through the utilization of "violent" language, as well as certain legalistic and gendered/misogynistic terms. Detractors' use of "accusation" and "violent language" to claim the accused are innocent victims of #MeToo is in line with previous research that has found that one consequence of the MeToo movement has been the fear of false accusations, which has negatively impacted the workplace, with 57% of US adults reporting that they were just as concerned about men receiving false accusations as they were about women being sexually harassed/assaulted (McDonald 2019; Piacenza 2018). Detractors also used "due process" to assert victimhood and "fair" trials for the accused, who were mostly men, confirming McDonald's (2019:95) assertion that the debate for or against due process "pit[s] women and men against each other." Additionally, Tambe (2018:200, 202) concluded that the accusers were being believed more than the accused and that #MeToo's "politics of retribution" publicly shames and criminalizes perpetrators, while my thesis discovered that detractors sought to switch this #MeToo narrative by villainizing the accusers and victimizing the accused.

In summary, my thesis finds that the political polarization of sexual violence continued and increased during the MeToo movement (and especially during and after the Kavanaugh hearing) primarily through detractors' language and framing of the issue. #MeToo detractors

employed legalistic, violent, and misogynistic language to victimize the accused and villainize victims and supporters. In contrast, #MeToo supporters consistently used legalistic language to advocate for survivors' rights to state support in the face of actual violence. This supports previous research which also highlighted the political polarization of the MeToo movement (Castle et al. 2020; Blumell and Huemmer 2019; Ha Rim Rho et al. 2018; Rodino-Colocino 2018). Furthermore, my thesis found that party support aligned with support for the movement, as almost all anti-Republican tweets supported #MeToo and many anti-Democratic tweets were against #MeToo, which is in line with previous research that states that the Democratic Party supports second wave feminist issues, but the Republican Party frequently disagrees with or minimizes them (Castle et al. 2020; Wolbrecht 2000). It also supports Castle et al.'s (2020) #Metoo study that concluded Democrats were among those more likely to report that the movement made them more aware of and concerned about sexual violence (Castle et al. 2020).

My thesis also corroborates the #MeToo timeline given by Castle et al. (2020): initial support for the MeToo movement turned into a partisan divide, which widened further during the hearings for Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, as it was found that the #MeToo conversation became more politicized through the use of legalistic, violent, and gendered/misogynistic language during and after the Kavanaugh hearing. The use of legalistic, violent, and gendered/misogynistic language increased polarization by creating a greater divide between supporters and detractors on their framing of the MeToo movement. Furthermore, my thesis confirms Lowe's (2018) statement that the decision whether to support or oppose Supreme Court Justice Kavanaugh's confirmation fell across party lines, as more anti-Democratic tweets supported Kavanaugh and were against the movement, while more anti-Republican tweets supported Ford and the movement.

Because my thesis found increased political polarization as detractors sought to victimize the accused and villainize the accusers, and along with Tambe's (2018) assertion that #MeToo publicly shames and criminalizes the accused, one policy implication is that Democrats and Republicans should attempt to refrain from a victim/villain dichotomy when seeking to create and implement #MeToo legislation. Victimized and villainizing the accused or the accusers only heightens political partisanship as each party feels entitled to certain rights and that the other side only deserves punishment. Also, policy reforms regarding sexual violence should seek to address concerns related to both due process and survivors' rights to state support. #MeToo detractors demanded due process for the accused, while #MeToo supporters believed that women and others have the right to legal protection and governmental action against abusers. Democrats and Republicans can seek to create policies that value both due process and survivors' rights to state support, so that justice can be served for both men and women. McDonald (2019:101) similarly asserts: "Real equality for men and women means procedures that do not presume either side is innocent or guilty." Related to the finding by Lopez et al. (2019) that #MeToo movements in different countries were influenced by one's culture and social reality, internationally, policy reform efforts should focus on understanding particular countries' cultural climates surrounding sexual violence in order to implement culturally appropriate solutions.

CONCLUSION

My thesis contributes to the research of content analyses of #MeToo tweets (Hosterman et al. 2018; Schneider and Carpenter 2019; Bogen et al. 2019), the MeToo movement's political implications and outcomes (Tambe 2018; McDonald 2019), and #MeToo's connection with feminist politics (Page and Arcy 2020; Mendes et al. 2018; Gill and Orgad 2018; Clark-Parsons 2018). My thesis also expands on research by Clark and Evans (2019) and their analysis of the

MeToo movement, politics, and Twitter posts. While Clark and Evans (2019) concluded that gender and ideology were the greatest factors on whether Congress members tweeted about the MeToo movement or not (and partisanship was less influential), with liberal women being the most likely to tweet about the movement, my thesis found that party affiliation and ideology had a large impact on general support for the MeToo movement, as almost all anti-Republican tweets supported #MeToo and many anti-Democratic tweets were against #MeToo, which is in line with previous research that found more Democratic support for #MeToo (Castle et al. 2020; Wolbrecht 2000). However, my thesis did not find that gender was particularly significant when considering support for #MeToo. Additionally, in line with Bouvier's (2020) finding that the MeToo movement included complex and diverse discourses, becoming somewhat of a chaos chamber, my thesis found that both #MeToo supporters and detractors drew upon specific terms that further increased the political polarization of sexual violence. My thesis uses #MeToo as a case study to offer understanding on the politicized nature of sexual violence, finding that detractors employed legalistic terms, violent language, and gendered/misogynistic language to claim victimhood for the accused and paint accusers as the real #MeToo villains, while supporters engaged legalistic concepts such as "justice" and "equality" to claim their right to state support in the face of actual violence. My thesis offers insights on some of the discourses that further politicized sexual violence during #MeToo, with the hope to better understand the political polarization that negatively affected the MeToo movement and that continues to impact America as a nation.

Policy suggestions include encouraging discourses between Democrats and Republicans that exclude a victim/villain dichotomy and striving to implement legislation that honors both due process and survivors' rights to state support in the face of actual violence. Further research

should address other dimensions of the MeToo movement in addition to gender and politics, such as race and sexual identity. Researchers can look into who was being left out of the conversation in addition to continuing to explore political outcomes from the MeToo movement related to the use of such polarized language.

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FIGURES

Figure 1. Data Collection

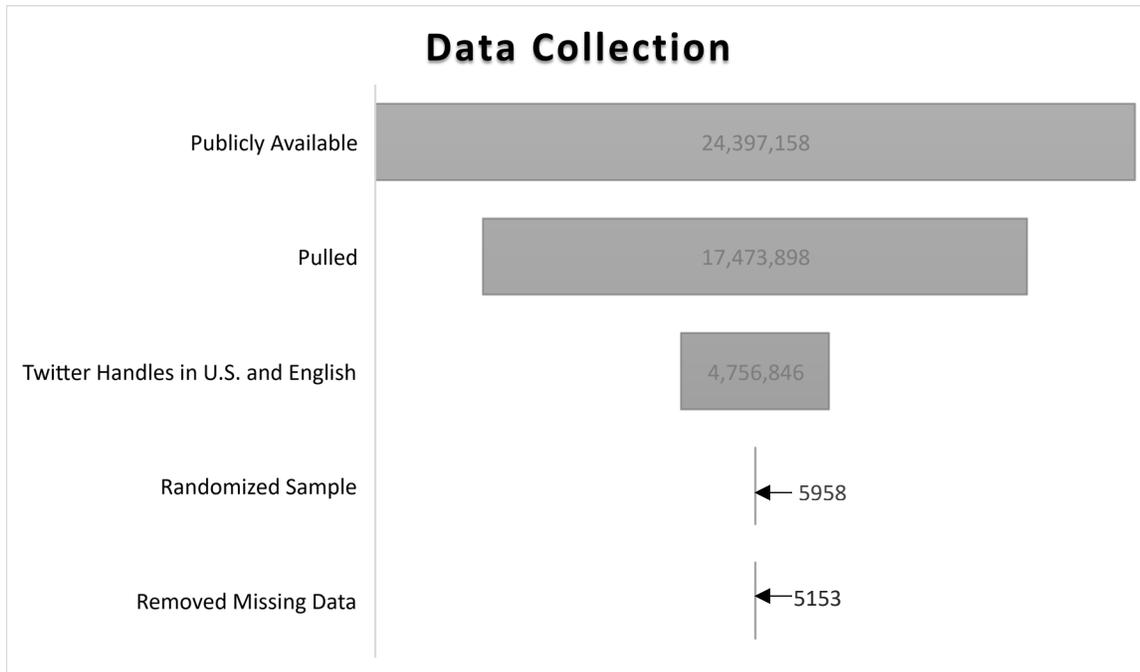


Figure 2. The Coding Process

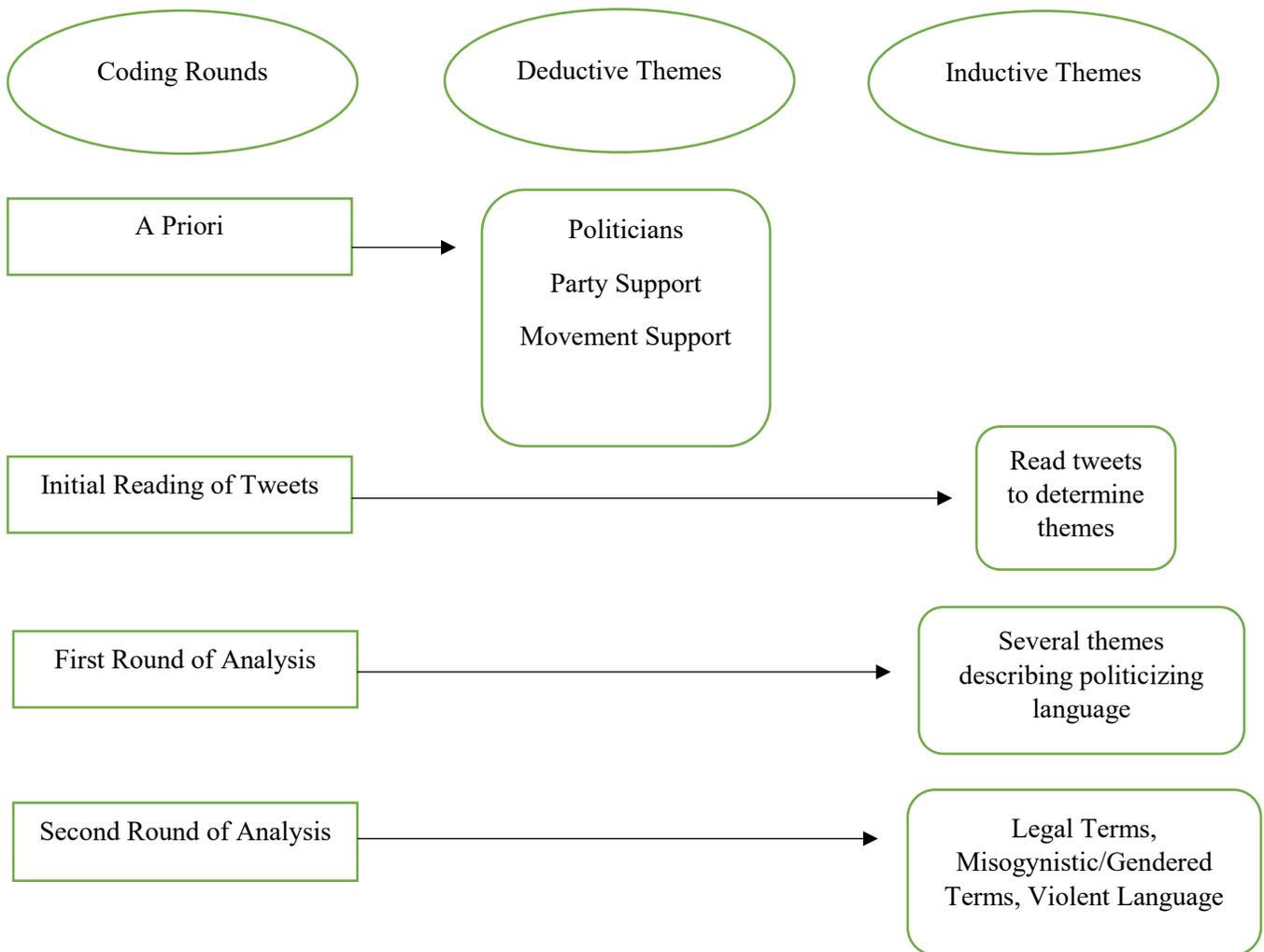
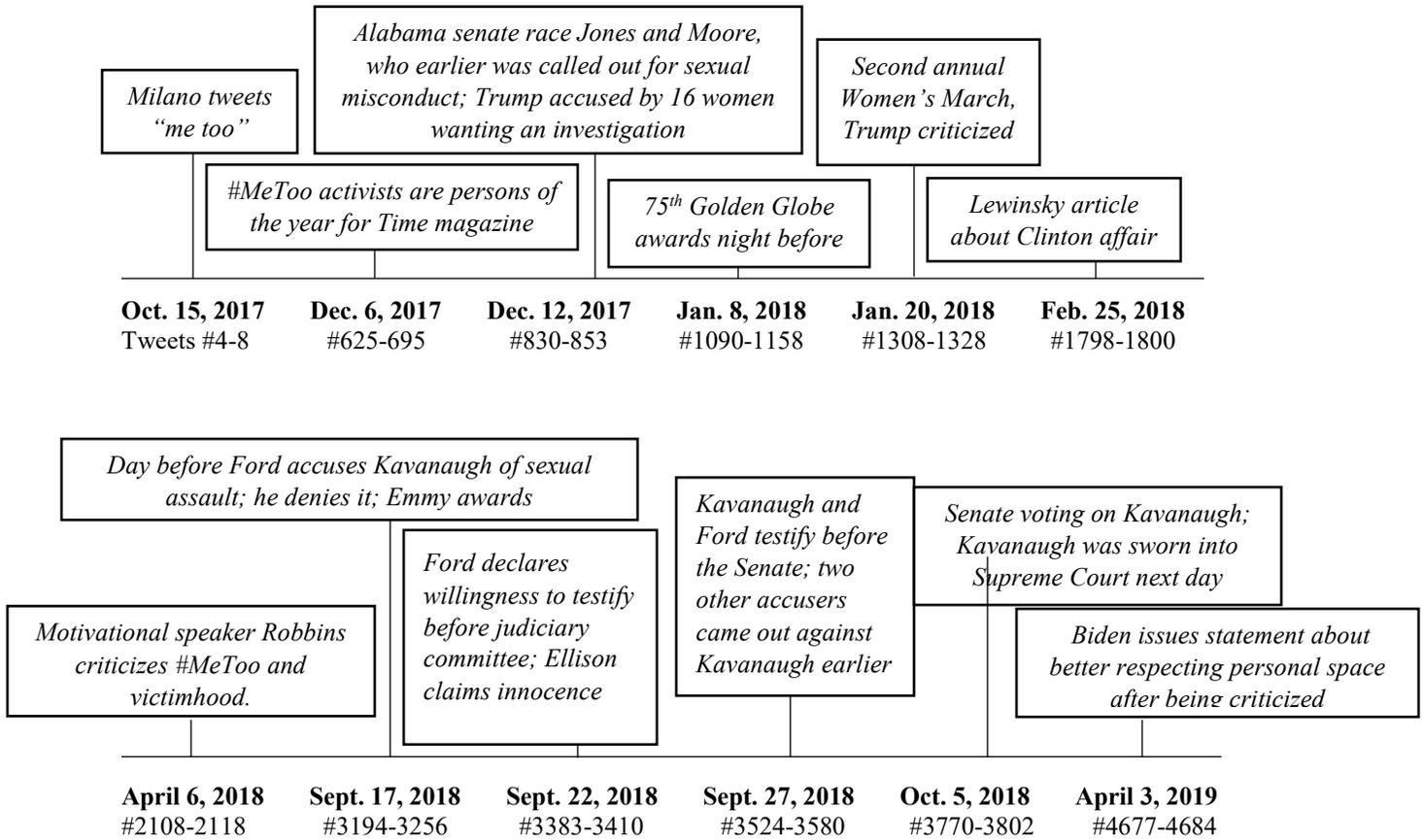


Figure 3. Timing of the Tweets and Major #MeToo/Political Events



*Some information and dates drawn from the Chicago Tribune's "#MeToo: A timeline of events"

APPENDIX A

Codebook for Witches, Victims, and Villains: #MeToo and the Political Polarization of Sexual Violence

1. Political- explicitly mentions or refers to a specific politician, political party, government policy, or the word “politics;” describes MeToo or issues related to it in a politically biased or gender biased way
2. Supports the MeToo Movement or Not or a Specific Party
 - Supports the MeToo Movement: overall positive comments about the MeToo movement; implicit or explicitly stated support for MeToo; constructive criticism and support for MeToo; supporting victims by calling out the accuser
 - (if accusing President Trump- mark as support for movement because accusing a predator)
 - (if accusing a MeToo leader, not support movement because also criticizing it)
 - Include hashtags
 - Mark those that do not support the movement that are political or relevant as black in same column
 - Supports the Democrat Party: explicitly supports the Democrat party or “liberal” ideas/mindset; insults or accuses Republicans in a way that shows support for Democrats

- Supports the Republican Party: explicitly supports the Republican party or “conservative” ideas/mindset; insults or accuses Democrats in a way that shows support for Democrats
 - Since many of the tweets criticized one party but did not support the other, marked the column orange and as criticizing that party
 - Added after coding: Anti-Democratic tweets: criticized the Democratic party or liberal ideals
 - Added after coding: Anti-Republican tweets: criticized the Republican party or conservative ideals
 - Apply the Accused/Criticized/Praised-Defended Politician categories to each political party; pay attention to which party gets labeled as: “hypocrisy,” “political weapon,” etc.
- Bipartisan: uses the word “bipartisan;” emphasizes unity among the parties or states/implies that both parties should be concerned about MeToo or related issues
 - Made it its own category
 - (Mark when both parties are being called out)

3. Politician-

- Democrat or Republican Party- will look up separately online if the tweet does not explicitly state it- which party the politician belongs to.
 - (Also, if it mentions the accuser’s name but not the politician but you know who the politician is, write “hinting at” in politician box and mention their name).

- (When another title is used for a politician such as “Impeach President,” write “referring to Trump” because you know it’s President Trump).
 - Include hashtags with politicians names in them
 - Accused- politician mentioned is accused of sexual misconduct of any kind; or a tweet reporting people who have accused them in a way that supports the accusers
 - Criticized- negative comments on how a politician handled a MeToo situation or any criticism related to MeToo that is not an accusation; occasionally some negative thing not related to MeToo
 - Praised/Support or Defended- positive comments about the politician in relation to MeToo or being defended against accusations
 - Applied these terms to Justice Kavanaugh as well
 - Kavanaugh accuse- any statement saying he shouldn’t be hired; needs accountability
 - Also add call to action category like praise, defend, etc.
 - Added “News” to describe politicians who are named in headlines or tweets with no clear praise or criticism
 - (Tweets can be in more than one category, such as news and accuse)
4. War/Violent Language- describes MeToo and related issues using words typically associated with war and violence such as: “weaponize,” “ruin,” “crucified,” and “lynching” (added mob rule, attack, avenger/assassin during coding)

5. Misogynistic/Witch Hunt Language: describes MeToo and related issues and supporters of MeToo using words that are misogynistic or related to a witch hunt (which is also historically misogynistic) such as: “Salem witch trials,” “witch,” “hysteria,” “hunt,” “pitchfork,” (also added panic, except when talking about hotel panic buttons such as #4115)
6. Tweets that directly reference both gender and politics- mark any tweet that explicitly mentions gender or men vs. women and “politics” or a political issue/topic
 - (Especially focused on women and politics during coding)
 - “Feminazi” added to this category
7. Legal Terms and Justice- any comment that involves a lawyer and/or trial; uses words like “justice,” “equality,” “accountability,” “due process,” “law,” “rights;” added “allegation” and “accusation;”
 - During coding, changed “human rights” to “rights,” included women’s rights, civil rights, and various rights activists)
 - (For “justice,” titles not included- not counting Supreme Court Justice or Justice Department)