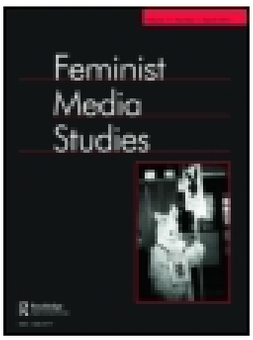

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Networked feminism: counterpublics and the intersectional issues of #MeToo

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ABSTRACT

In October 2017, millions of people shared public testimonials of sexual abuse and harassment in an expression of global vulnerability using the hashtag #MeToo. While #MeToo was triggered by Hollywood actress Alyssa Milano, the phrase can be traced back a decade earlier to when African-American activist Tarana Burke said "me too" in a private exchange of solidarity with young black girls who were survivors of sexual assault. This study examines over 200,000 tweets from the first three days of #MeToo to understand how the meaning and narratives of the feminist hashtag were discursively negotiated. Combining social network analysis and discourse analysis, the paper draws attention to the exclusivity of popular and networked feminism and elevates the voices of the multiply marginalised survivors who were erased from the dominant narratives of #MeToo. It is a call to white feminist researchers and activists to be mindful of the voices that are excluded when examining popular feminist actions. The study contributes an understanding of the power dynamics within digital feminist networks that reproduce colonial violence and oppression within mainstream neoliberal feminism and academia, and extends support to the existing research that documents how digital networks do not empower marginalised voices equitably.

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Introduction

In October 2017, millions of people reflected on their experiences of sexual abuse and harassment, publicly sharing their testimonials in an expression of global vulnerability using the hashtag #MeToo. Social media platform Twitter became the site of an international phenomenon with reports documenting that in less than a month #MeToo had been tweeted over 1.7 million times across 85 countries (Andrea Park 2017). However, amongst all of the testimonials emerged an undercurrent of tweets that portrayed the angst and distress individuals experienced in their decision to participate, indicating the emotional and psychological costs of engaging with online feminist campaigns. Further, some tweets questioned the efficacy of the movement; expressing frustration at the re-appropriated nature of the campaign and the collective feeling of an "intersectional betrayal" by white women and feminists who dominated the mainstream media reporting

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of the movement. This article examines the intersectional struggles of the #MeToo movement, drawing attention to those absent from the global conversation and highlighting the additional risks of participating in online feminist protests.

The phrase "me too" can be traced back to 2006 when African-American activist Tarana Burke used the expression to raise awareness of the pervasiveness of sexual violence against multiply marginalised women. Burke developed a non-profit called Just Be in which she worked with young black girls who were survivors of sexual violence and it was during this work where she said "me too" as a private act of solidarity to let them know they were not alone. More than a decade later, the hashtag spread virally after American actress Alyssa Milano tweeted #MeToo and accused film producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual misconduct. This shift from a private exchange of solidarity to a public testimonial is crucial in understanding the costs associated with participation and how the action was reappropriated, consequently overlooking the affective labour of the black woman who laid the foundation.

This research draws attention to the marginalised voices of the #MeToo movement and provides an analysis into the additional costs of participation that prevent less privileged women from contributing. Moreover, this article examines the intersectional concerns that complicate the scale, reach, and seeming permanence of the millions of testimonials suspended online that constitute the #MeToo movement. It highlights how the many voices and stories that have circulated the online sphere obscure the absence and recognition of marginalised women and those who are already more vulnerable in regards to experiencing sexual assault (Angela Onwuachi-Willig 2018).

A growing body of literature is developing in attempt to conceptualise the large-scale impact of what has potentially been one of the most highly publicised movements in the connective era (Lauren DePoint 2018; Jonas R. Kunst, April Bailey, Claire Prendergast, and Aleksander Gundersen 2018; Mona Lilja and Evelina Johansson 2018; Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose and Jessalynn Keller 2018; Onwuachi-Willig 2018; Srila Roy 2018; Simona Sharoni 2018; Verity Trott 2019; Dubravaka Zarkov and Kathy Davis 2018). Much of this research examines #MeToo as a secondary case study, considering the broad meanings of the large-scale movement and using a more local and defined protest to flesh out the examination in finer detail. This is understandable given the radical pace of the movement and its global spread. Many of the impacts and the peripheral actions that have been energised by #MeToo are yet to be fully realised.

Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2018) map out the promises and pitfalls of digital feminist actions such as #MeToo. They primarily focus on the hashtag campaign #BeenRapedNeverReported which, similarly to #MeToo, worked to challenge rape culture and myths in the public sharing of women's experiences. They draw links between the two hashtag campaigns, arguing for a recognition of the significance of the solidarity networks that develop as a result of these types of digital protests. In addition, they emphasise the affective labour burdened by feminist activists involved in these types of campaigns. Despite the public momentum and collective engagement propelling hashtag campaigns like #MeToo, the founders or participants with known public profiles often become the subject of mainstream media attention and public scrutiny (Verity Trott 2018). While it may be technologically-easy to engage in hashtag campaigns, many of those involved report high levels of emotional, mental and practical costs that make

participating in feminist activism "risky, exhausting, draining and overwhelming" (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2018, 244; Trott 2018).

Other scholars have been more critical in their commentary of the #MeToo movement. Zarkov and Davis (2018) express scepticism and concern surrounding the outcomes of "call out" campaigns such as #MeToo. They trace clear historical links between the public testimonials of #MeToo and the feminist actions in the 1970s, in which personal testimony of sexual assault survivors was employed as a mode of resistance to the "patriarchal prescriptions of silence and shame" (2018, 4). Zarkov and Davis (2018) importantly raise the question of the context and location of the perpetrators and victims as they discuss their ambivalence about the #MeToo movement. They argue that while it took courage to participate, #MeToo operated as a platform for individuals who were already powerful enough to be heard such as celebrities (Zarkov and Davis 2018). Emma A. Jane (2016) in her earlier research into "feminist digilantism" warns about these types of individualised actions, arguing that while they can be cathartic, the individual actions can go unrecognised and forgotten. Moreover, Danielle Citron's (2014) research has found that participating in feminist activism and speaking out against perpetrators can be accompanied with an increase in online abuse. This raises concerns for the impact on everyday people who may have participated and received little support within the community and who had the basic capability to participate.

In terms of specifically addressing the racial and intersectional concerns of the movement, there has been a growing field of research into the black feminist Twitter community and intersectional analyses of social media activism (Miranda Ganzer 2014; Sarah J. Jackson and Brooke Foucault Welles 2015; Tanya Serisier 2018), however again these often look at earlier social media activism or the #MeToo movement as a secondary case study for a broader analysis into the intersectional issues complicating the contemporary feminist movement. Legal scholar Onwuachi-Willig (2018) contends there is a racial bias within the #MeToo movement. She argues for the adoption of an intersectional and multidimensional framework for understanding the different experiences of sexual assault and harassment complainants by the U.S. legal system. Onwuachi-Willig (2018) compares the different levels of support white actress Rose McGowen and black female journalist Jamele Hill received in relation to the sexual harassment and abuse they received on Twitter to demonstrate the racial bias in white women's protest of gendered and racial abuse online. Overall, Onwuachi-Willig (2018) argues there is an ongoing failure in recognising the role of women of colour in movements such as #MeToo.

Anthropologist Ritty Lukose 2018 provides a broader understanding of the global spread of #MeToo within a discussion surrounding the decolonising of feminism within academia. Lukose offers a more in-depth understanding of the "politics of location" and how it has been used in processes of decolonising feminism and employed to provide a more intersectional understanding of feminist actions like #MeToo. She problematizes the common employment of intersectionality within contemporary feminist actions arguing that too often it has been focused on the multiple identities women possess rather than the institutional discrimination and the practical impacts they encounter. Lukose (2018) raises a number of key questions and provocations in relation to #MeToo including whether the movement will do more than "check its privilege" and extend its resources to women of colour. She rightly identifies how too often groups simply extend

their resources as an indication of inclusiveness instead of reconsidering the foundations of a feminist imaginary.

Importantly, Lukose (2018, 45) begins to shift the analyses away from a U.S. centric investigation into #MeToo and draws to the forefront the significance of the movement within India, highlighting links between the movement's circulation and what has become known as "the list"—the List of Sexual Harassment Accused (LoSHA) within India. Several media reports digitally visualised the spread of #MeToo across the globe claiming it trended within at least 85 countries.[1] They also document several translations of #MeToo including the French #BalanceTonPorc (out your pig), which was actually trending within the French and Belgian media before #MeToo began in the U.S. Much of the media coverage of these movements implies that the U.S. #MeToo triggered many of these other hashtags and protests, however as Lukose (2018) highlights in her analysis of "the list" in India, many of these actions were already at the precipice.

This paper provides an intersectional interrogation into the beginning of the U.S. dominated #MeToo movement that was triggered by Alyssa Milano on the 15th of October in 2017. The paper adopts an intersectional framework, as conceptualised by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), to analyse the intersectional issues within the #MeToo movement. Crenshaw (1991, 1246) in her research into violence against women of colour, creates the concept of intersectionality to denote the ways in which "systems of race, gender, and class domination converge" and how the patterns of subordination intersect in women's experiences. How these different aspects associated with identity interact to shape multidimensional experiences cannot be fully explained by looking at simply one dimension in isolation (Crenshaw 1991). Moreover, Crenshaw (1991, 1249) identifies how another dimension of disempowerment can be a result of the imposition of one subordinal factor and how it interacts with a pre-existing vulnerability. This results in unique intersectional concerns that are often not addressed by social movement groups. Crenshaw (1991) demonstrates how feminist and antiracist discourses not only fail to address the issues that arise at the intersection of gender and race but can unintentionally further reproduce the subordination of both. Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality is used as a conceptual framework for the analysis of the narratives and intersectional critique that arose from the tweets collected for this research into the #MeToo movement. They demonstrate some of the issues that women of colour experienced in their participation as well as the additional challenges that arose surrounding the inclusion of queer women and women with disabilities.

Adrienne Rich's (2003) research problematizing the often default assumption of heterosexuality is employed to expand the analysis into looking at queerness within #MeToo and how it adopted a heterosexual framework. Similarly, trans scholar and writer Julia Serano (2013) also identifies how feminist movements have often been unwelcoming to trans folk and particularly transwomen. Trans folk experience both traditional and oppositional sexism, which contribute to the high levels of sexual harassment and assault they experience, making them an exceptionally vulnerable community (Serano 2013). Together, this literature helps to inform the intersectional analysis provided within this article.

Methodology

The data used in this paper was collected on Stuart Schulman's platform Texifter using the Twitter API. The research design for this paper incorporated two stages of analysis. To begin with, overall 241,361 tweets using the hashtag #MeToo were collected from the first three days of the movement over 15–17th of October 2017. The first stage of the analysis consisted a keyword search for identity markers within the dataset and then conducting a discourse analysis on the extracted tweets examining how they constructed narratives about identity and relationality. The second stage involved a social network analysis of the first 50,000 tweets from the larger dataset. These two methods along with the rationale for them will be further detailed below.

Data analysis

It is a common feminist practice to engage in reflexivity about one's standpoint and positioning within society when engaging in conversations about lived experience and political debates. Maria C. Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman (1983) philosophise the importance of stating one's position as an "insider" or an "outsider" in the pursuit of understanding women's voices and recounting women's lived experiences and how stating one's position can open up a more honest dialogue between women who wish to share and theorise their experiences. Lugones and Spelman's (1983) feminist theory specifically addresses the inadequacy of saying "we" and the importance of finding ways to theorise and discuss women's voices that do not erase the differences among women. In their own work, they model an approach to discussing women's voices and lived experiences by stating the positionality and identity of the speaker or writer at the beginning. This has become a common practice in marginalised communities, particularly within feminist, black and queer communities.

Keeping this practice in mind, to detect narratives of intersectionality within the larger #MeToo dataset (241,361 tweets), I conducted a keyword search, specifically looking for words used as identity markers by participants. To do this, I initially extracted all of the original tweets from the larger dataset. This meant that the dataset of 241,361 tweets was cut down into a dataset of only 81,408 original tweets (in other words: not retweets or duplicates). Within this dataset, I searched for the terms: "black," "white," "brown," "PoC" (people of colour), "WoC" (women of colour), and "race". I was also interested in whether queerness (including both sexuality and gender identity) was discussed within the dataset thus I additionally searched for several common terms associated with LGBTWQI+ identities (lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, intersex). Lastly, I searched for whether narratives surrounding body size and disability were raised. These key words were chosen not simply due to their use as identity markers but in terms of how they operate as signifiers that individuals employ to position themselves in relation to discussions of power and domination within the public sphere (Crenshaw 1991; Lugones and Spelman 1983). Following this, I conducted a qualitative discourse analysis on the tweets collected from the keyword search process to understand how identity and relationality was discussed within the #MeToo network.

The qualitative discourse analysis allowed the data analysis to move beyond descriptions of the tweets into an understanding of the meaning-making process behind

participation and how and why people engaged with #MeToo. In a similar process to Jackson and Welles (2015, 937), I used discourse analysis to analyse how "language, explicit and implicit values, image, and tone were used" to make #MeToo semantically meaningful. Mediated and non-mediated discourse has the power to frame and define social reality, and as Jackson and Welles (2015, 938) argue, hashtags can be used by counterpublics to negotiate meaning of our social reality and to discursively define social issues within both the digital realm and the broader public sphere.

To help contextualise the counternarratives that are examined within this dataset, I also consider the self-disclosed positioning of the users and whether they are individuals, media outlets, feminist or intersectional organisations, or celebrities. To do so, I looked at the original tweets of the ones retrieved in the keyword search. As modelled by Karen Boyle and Chamil Rathnayake (2019, 5) in their analysis of #HimToo participants, I found that by examining the original tweet I could make note of how the users presented themselves (usernames, profile images, bio), identify the tweet within the broader thread of tweets it might be embedded within, and consider how networked and active the user was (if they were a verified account, number of followers and tweets). Understanding further who the user was provided insight into their motivation and intention for participating in the hashtag as well as how they may be positioned within counterpublics.

It is worth noting the limitations around knowing whether a user is authentic in their presentation on Twitter and that this contextual discussion relies on the data users present about themselves. Discussing the identity of users in feminist protests, particularly around a protest that often involves disclosing sexual assault, also raises some ethical concerns. There have been recent shifts in terms of how the internet research community defines "public" participation in the public sphere (as detailed in the latest edition of the AoIR Ethics Guidelines). In light of these shifts, and in consideration of the ethical feminist approaches to digital methods explored in the *Internet Research Ethics for the Social Age* (Michael Zimmer and Katharina Kinder-Kurlanda 2017), this paper does not identify individual Twitter users or include direct quotes of tweets unless they are from accounts that are verified, well-known public figures or celebrities, frame their Twitter accounts as part of their profession (e.g., journalists), or are accounts that belong to organisations. However, an analysis including the positionality of other participants (e.g., they present themselves as male-identifying) will be incorporated in a more generalised discussion.

Counterpublics and social network analysis

Several scholars have previously used social network analysis to map counterpublics online to understand how social networking sites such as Twitter have been used to spread alternative narratives. Jackson and Welles (2015) conceptualise "networked counterpublics" as an extension of Nancy Fraser's (1990) critique of Habermas's foundational theory of the public sphere in which she introduces the notion of "counterpublics". Counterpublics, as Fraser (1990) argues, encompass the sites, methods and collectives that produce new, alternative or nondominant forms of knowledge and culture and which challenge and subvert traditional, historical and dominant forms of knowledge that are inherent within the mainstream public sphere. Jackson and Welles (2015, 934) argue that the significance of counterpublics is how they legitimise and sustain marginalised communities and in their research into the hijacking of #myNYPD, they extend Fraser's concept of counterpublics into the digital domain, putting forth the notion of

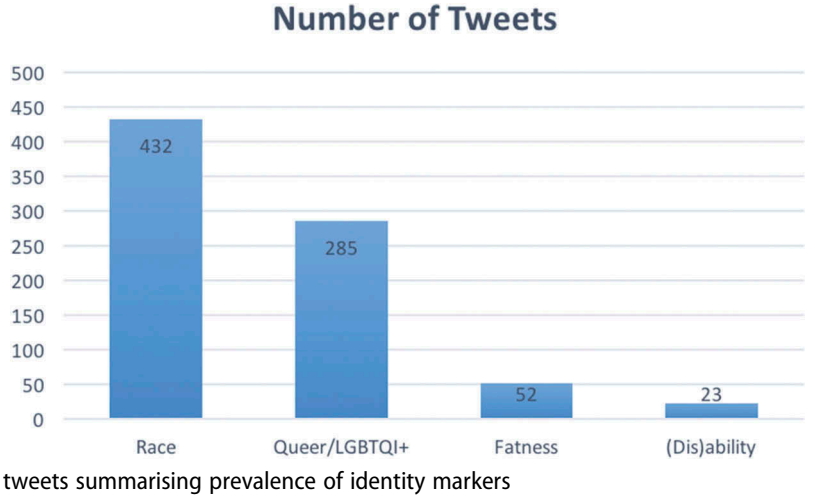
"networked counterpublics". They link the significance of networked counterpublics with Manuel Castell's (2012) analysis of networked power, adding that networks of resistance can produce "counterpower,"—"a type of power that challenges the power embedded in the institutions of society for the purpose of claiming representation for their own values and interests" (Castells as cited in Jackson and Welles 2015, 935).

The notion of networked counterpublics helps frame the social network analysis within this paper as it provides a useful way of understanding the role and significance of nondominant narratives being produced and transmitted on Twitter, the surrounding affective publics that emerge from the dataset, and the differences in connections between significant users (particularly popular celebrity feminists and non-celebrity feminist activists).

The present research into #MeToo includes a social network analysis of 50,000 of the first tweets from the first day of the #MeToo movement in October 2017.[2] Using this dataset, I created several social network visualisations with the open source tool Gephi. Social network analysis enables the mapping of links and the clustering of publics or communities that constitute the networked publics or in this case the networked counterpublics present on Twitter. Hashtags, such as #MeToo, facilitate a connectivity and visibility, which aids in the formation of protest publics. These networked publics and counterpublics can be "reactors, (re)makers and (re)distributors" as they engage in a shared culture through "discourse and social exchange" as well as via media reception (Mizuko Ito 2008, 6). Data publics are "inherently unstable, dynamic, or vibrant, and ephemera" (Anthony McCosker and Timothy Graham 2018, 1). This paper begins to illustrate the emergence of counterpublics within the #MeToo movement and details the relational significance of key users, the connections between counterpublics within the movement, and the ties between feminist celebrities, popular feminist groups, feminist and intersectional organisations and women of colour feminist activists.

Intersectional narratives and visualising #MeToo

The primary result that emerged from the keyword search and discursive analysis was the lack of intersectional discussion or consideration within the early stages of #MeToo. Out of



Graph of tweets summarising prevalence of identity markers

81,408 tweets only 432 mentioned race, 285 mentioned sexuality or queerness, 52 mentioned fatness, and 23 mentioned disability. Each of these categories represent less than .53% of the tweets collected. The absence of intersectional narratives is also reflected in the social network analysis of the hashtag from the first day, which demonstrates how the protest core was dominated by popular white feminists.

Figures 1 and 2 document the protest network over the first day of the #MeToo movement. Figure 1 is an overview of the entire #MeToo protest network consisting 50,018 edges (tweets) and 40,904 nodes (users), and provides a launching point for the SNA. It indicates the clusters and possible counterpublics illustrated by the different colours and demonstrates how there were several dominant users within the network. Figure 1 also visualises the peripheral rim of the central network, and a disconnected outer rim of participants who had no ties or connection with any other participant. The amount of nodes (users) within this disconnected outer rim suggests how common it was for people to receive no response or engagement to their participation in the hashtag. This raises questions about whose voices were heard and actively engaged with in the protest compared to those who remained overlooked.

Figure 2 visualises a closer frame of the network to highlight more clearly the key actors. Figure 2 details the most prevalent users within the network, visualising the users for Women's March, Alyssa Milano, Lady Gaga, Amy Siskind and Dana Loesch by in-degree. For Figure 2, Tarana Burke, BlackLivesMatter and Rose McGowan are also visible, however they are specifically enlarged for aesthetic purposes to clearly indicate their position within the network and to accompany the discussion later in this paper.

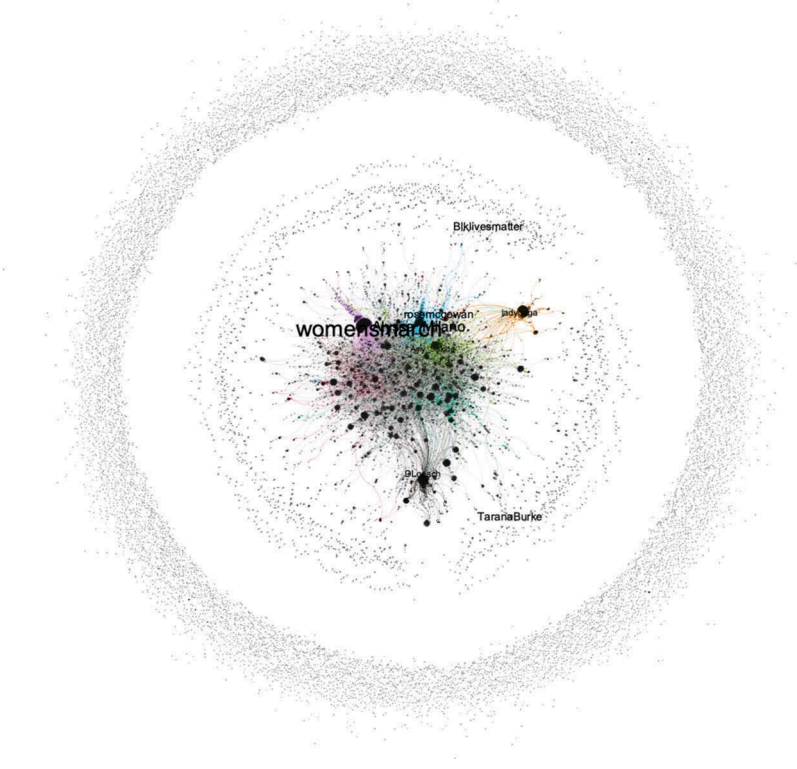


Figure 1. Overview of the #MeToo protest network.

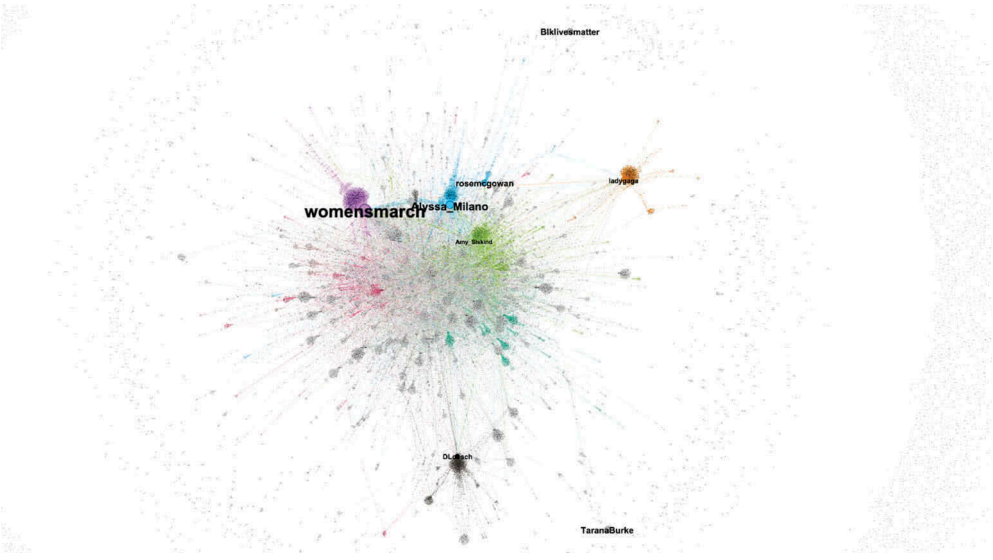


Figure 2. Overview of the #MeToo protest network with Tarana Burke, BlackLivesMatter and Rose McGowan enlarged for clarity.

In these networks, the nodes (or vertices) represent Twitter users, and the ties (or edges) between nodes represent a tweet that mentions or replies to a user. These ties are directed, which means they display the relationship between the users (whether it is one-directional or if it is reciprocal). The colour of the nodes indicates which community cluster or "neighbourhood" they belong to and the nodes are sized by out-degree, in other words the number of retweets (note this does not include how many times the tweet has been favourited). In addition, the name of the node is also weighted to indicate the size of the node (with the exception of Tarana Burke, BlackLivesMatter and Rose McGowan). In addition, neighbourhood or cluster detection was performed using the modularity algorithm on Gephi. All of the visualisations were generated by the Force Atlas 2 algorithm that spatially presents the data in a process of attraction and repulsion according to patterns of connectivity (McCosker and Graham 2018, 2).

Figures 1 and 2 together make clear the broader protest network. The rim of nodes that directly surrounds the core protest network represents the users who are only loosely connected to the core of the network. Tarana Burke[3] is positioned within this rim as illustrated in Figure 2. It is clear that Tarana Burke is distantly and only loosely connected to the protest network at the beginning of the #MeToo movement. This distance indicates a weakness of connectivity between her and the celebrity feminists who are positioned front and centre within the protest network. It is worth considering her position in the network may change over the course of the movement particularly when she receives coverage by mainstream media outlets such as Time Magazine. When combined with the keyword data analysis also conducted in this paper, a smaller counterpublic of women of colour (WoC) feminists and WoC-led media outlets and organisations emerges over the second and third day of the protest. The users within this counterpublic mobilised to raise awareness of the origins of #MeToo and attempted to redirect credit toward Burke and her work with African American girls who were sexual assault survivors.

Also visible within Figure 2 are larger clusters of communities that revolve around the Twitter user associated with the Women's March (represented in purple), Alyssa Milano (blue), American singer Lady Gaga (orange), American radio talk show host and activist Dana Loesch (black), and American feminist activist and author Amy Siskind (green). The core protest network of #MeToo illustrated here demonstrates the role of feminist identifying celebrities (Alyssa Milano, Lady Gaga) and popular feminists (Dana Loesch, Amy Siskind) in mobilising a large-scale protest and how the publics that surround each of these figures overlap and contribute to a shared framing of the movement.

Leadership

Highlighted within the SNA visualisations is the size and role of the Women's March for mobilising the early #MeToo movement. The positioning and centrality of the Women's March in the network indicates the significance of sedimentary networks (Andrew Chadwick 2007). Sedimentary networks may be revived or reconfigured in response to a new demand, enabling the potential for a very rapid mobilisation. The larger cluster around the Women's March suggests the foundations of the initial #MeToo network were borrowed from this same community and the reconfiguration of the network set the tone for the early discursive framing of #MeToo.

The first Women's March was one of the largest physical mass mobilisations ever observed in the United States consisting of more than 2 million people around the United States protesting on numerous streets on the day after President Trump's inauguration (Dana R. Fisher, Dawn M. Dow and Rashawn Ray 2017). In addition, there were coinciding protests around the globe with reports stating there were more than 600 protests across all seven continents (Michael Slezak 2017). Fisher, Dow, and Ray (2017) argue that intersectionality contributed to the scale of the Women's March, documenting the ways in which individuals across racial, class, gender and sexuality identities came together in one of the largest mass mobilisations observed. However, there have been numerous reports of intersectional failure (Sarah Brewer and Lauren Dundes 2018) from the Women's March that challenge Fisher, Dow, and Ray's (2017) findings. Fisher, Dow, and Ray (2017) conclude that the Women's March was an intersectional success highlighting the diverse motivations of individuals and the varying demographics that participated within the large-scale protest. However, what they fail to consider, is the experiences of individuals during and after the protest.

The first Women's March was criticised for a lack of intersectionality, particularly in terms of its inclusion, or exclusion, of racial minorities and transwomen (Brewer and Dundes 2018). Brewer and Dundes (2018, 51) documented African American women's attitudes and perceptions of the Women's March and found a few key themes: a lack of cross-racial unity in priorities, a distrust of white women allies, and a need for a more inclusive feminist movement. Much of the criticisms about the Women's March arose from the community of activists involved in the BlackLivesMatter movement, with women of colour questioning the absence of support from white women allies.

The distance between the Women's March, Tarana Burke and BlackLivesMatter, as visualised in Figure 2, highlights a continuation of the lack of intersectional considerations within #MeToo and the reappropriated use of the phrase "me too". While there was no apparent counterpublic supporting Burke at the beginning of #MeToo as documented

within Figure 2, a counterpublic began to emerge on the second and third day of the movement. On the second day of the movement Burke posted the tweet:

> It's beyond a hashtag. It's the start of a larger conversation and a movement for radical community healing. Join us. #metoo (@TaranaBurke, October 16 2017).

Burke's tweet received 579 retweets and 1,694 favourites. On the other hand, Milano's original #MeToo tweet received 23,000 retweets and 51,400 favourites, which demonstrates significantly more engagement. However, contemporary digitised protests often spill across multiple platforms in a messy and complex hybrid media ecology (Chadwick 2007). The complications of the cross-platform nature of #MeToo becomes clear when the analysis takes into consideration the role of Facebook. Statistics around media engagement documented that Burke's interview with the millennial-targeted American media company Mic, posted on Facebook on October 18 2017, was the most popular individual post about #MeToo on Facebook (see Ezyinsights 2017; Mic 2017). Mic's interview with Burke received over 3.4 million views and just over 1,000 comments thanking Burke (Ezyinsights 2017; Mic 2017).

As a media company, Mic (previously known as PolicyMic) rose to prominence as a result of their reporting on the Tunisian uprising in April 2014 and provides a form of news more attractive to millennials than the coverage of corporate media (Abram Brown 2014). Media companies such as Mic contribute to the counterpublic that began to build around Burke, attempting to recognise her role in the movement. The interview with Mic media happened three days into the movement and it was also at this time that more tweets showing support for Burke appeared in the dataset, indicating the emergence of a counterpublic.

Most of the tweets that mentioned Burke were in response to tweets posted by the official BlackLivesMatter account (@Blklivesmatter) and a BlackLivesMatter co-organiser. Both of the tweets generated more engagement than Burke's own #MeToo tweets and worked to raise awareness of Burke's role "pioneering" #Metoo a decade earlier. The tweet posted by @Blklivesmatter garnered 2,000 retweets and 6,300 favourites, indicating they played an influential role at framing and driving an emergent counterpublic that negotiated the meaning of #MeToo and worked to position Burke as a leader. In comparison, the #MeToo tweet posted by the Women's March generated 29,500 retweets and 85,600 favourites. The Women's March account has 638,100 followers compared to the BlackLivesMatter official account, which only has half the follower count (322,6000). This difference in engagement and follower count highlights how the community supporting Burke and BlackLivesMatter activists emerged as a counterpublic secondary to the core protest public that emerged around the Women's March. Figure 2 also highlights the weak connectivity between BlackLivesMatter and the Women's March with @Blklivesmatter positioned on the periphery of the core protest network at the beginning of the movement.

The tweets that mentioned Burke worked to re-centre black women and black girls within the #MeToo conversation in a positive way by expressing appreciation to Burke for her activism. However, there were a couple of tweets that attempted to raise awareness of Burke by critiquing the mainstream media reporting of the movement for "erasing black women". These tweets were published by a WoC journalist and a WoC-led media outlet. As a result, there was a division within this counterpublic consisting of WoC journalists,

WoC-led media outlets, and BlackLivesMatter activists and supporters working to negotiate the meaning and leadership of #MeToo. Collectively, each user had the same goal of centring Burke and WoC but there were two approaches that differed in tonality.

Exclusionary framing

Two dominant frames of the #MeToo movement arose within the dataset and from mainstream media coverage. To begin with, Milano's original tweet was framed as a call to action for "all the women," setting the agenda of #MeToo to be about women's experiences of sexual harassment and assault specifically. This kind of framing excludes the experiences of men, transmen, and nonbinary folk, with the latter groups experiencing a higher rate of sexual violence. The second dominant frame that appeared in the #MeToo tweets and that ultimately reinforced the first frame was that "sexual assault does not discriminate" and regardless of individual identities "we're victims and we should stand together". This seemingly inclusive frame was operationalised in a way that silenced the voices of those who critiqued #MeToo and the feminist movement more broadly for not necessarily being inclusive, in particular of trans voices. This was exemplified in the high profile incident in which Rose McGowen, who was positioned by the media and the public as a leader of #MeToo, shouted over a transwoman in response to criticisms that McGowen was not doing enough for transfolk. Importantly, the transwoman who was labelled a "heckler" in media accounts, was attempting to raise awareness of the different experiences and issues transwomen face in regards to sexual violence (Ilana Kaplan 2018). McGowen responded "we are the same … you're part of that, too sister. It's the same" before the encounter escalated and McGowen shouted "step the fuck back" as security escorted the transwoman from the venue (Kaplan 2018). While unlikely her intention,[4] the silencing and physical removal of the transwoman contributed to the portrayal of mainstream feminism as trans-exclusionary. As Serano (2013) argues, the historical and ongoing exclusion of transfolk in mainstream feminism can perpetuate and contribute to the violence and oppression transfolk experience. The social network visualisation in Figure 2 highlights McGowen's strong ties to Alyssa Milano from the first day of the movement, positioning her close to the centre of the dominant #MeToo public early on.

By asking people to put aside the differences that arise at the intersection of marginalisation to come together in solidarity as an homogenous group of women, the framing effectively erases the systems of oppression that specifically perpetuate violence against minority communities. As Crenshaw (1991, 1260) argues, the "displacement of the 'other' as the presumed victim of domestic violence works primarily as a political appeal to rally white elites," and I would add ciswomen. Seemingly inclusive framing and the message that "we are all women" works as a strategy that permits white ciswomen victims to come forward and into focus but does little to disrupt the patterns of neglect and systems of oppression that continue to permit violence for transfolk and other minority communities. In other words, the experiences of violence by women at the intersects of marginalisation (whether it is trans or nonbinary folk, WoC, or women with disabilities) continue to be ignored except when their experiences can be employed to gain the support of white cisfolk for initiatives and resources to assist white cis-communities.

A tweet made by an account for the book *Black Woman Redefined* written by Sophia A. Nelson drew links to the historical exclusion of WoC in feminism in a critique of the centring of white women in the #MeToo movement:

> Maybe Black women should use #AintIAWomanToo instead of #MeToo because nobody pays attention when we are hurt, harmed or sexually assaulted. (@BWRpaperback, October 18 2017).

The above tweet problematises the erasure of WoC voices in #MeToo and was in response to the erasure of the origins of "me too" and how the international public that had accumulated was centred around white women rather than black girls. The second hashtag #AintIAWomanToo is reminiscent of a key historical event in relation to Black female civil rights. In 1851, an African-American activist Sojourner Truth[5] delivered a moving speech in which she famously asked "Ain't I a woman?" at a Women's Rights convention that was dominated by white suffragists.

The recognition of the historical exclusion of black and indigenous women and the further oppression they experienced from colonial violence has repeatedly been a point of failure by the mainstream feminist movement. Several tweets reflected how "very few people acknowledge that our entire culture" was built on the sexual violence of indigenous women. A few tweets carried an affective weight that framed their solidarity and participation in #MeToo with the "promise to #NeverForget" the historical trauma experienced by African American and indigenous women. Further, a couple of tweets emphasised the importance of #MeToo for "reclaiming voice and power" for indigenous women and those who experience the "highest rate of assault and rape". Collectively, these tweets developed a counternarrative within the #MeToo movement that re-centred WoC and contextualised the movement with the "historical pain" felt by WoC and indigenous communities.

Most of the tweets that attempted to reposition and foreground WoC and their narratives over the first three days of #MeToo received very little engagement. Despite @BWRpaperback having over 3,000 followers, their tweet including #AintIAWomanToo received little engagement with only 10 favourites and 7 retweets. However, the most critical tweet that brought attention to how Western culture was built on the sexual violence of black and indigenous women received 486 retweets and 1,300 favourites. This tweet, which was the beginning of a thread about the historical violence and experiences of WoC, was posted by a WoC sociologist professor and author and was the most engaged tweet over the first three days of the movement that helped develop a counternarrative of #MeToo centring the experiences of WoC. The fact that this series of academically framed critiques of #MeToo was engaged with more than the shared lived experiences of WoC reinforces how the hashtag operated more effectively for media and academic elites than everyday WoC users who may have participated in Milano's call to action. Significantly, this characteristic existed in both the dominant network public as well as the counterpublic of WoC that developed around Burke.

Finally, several tweets reflected the pain, anxiety, and shame individuals experienced when deciding whether to participate in #MeToo and how intersects of marginalisation contributed to the denial of victimhood. Several tweets detailed why the intersection of "race and fatphobia is so violent" and how "fat black women" are routinely denied victimhood. Several scholars, such as Noortje Van Amsterdam (2013) and Anna Mollow (2017), have conceptualised this denial of victimhood based on several factors including

body size and how these characteristics have been employed as weapons to blame women of colour for their own assault and even murder. Mollow (2017) contributes an intersectional understanding of how fat black disabled bodies are perceived as "unvictimizable". Mollow (2017, 105) examines how fatphobia and ableism intersect with racism to construct an "ideological double bind that rhetorically positions black bodies as incapable of being victimised". She (2017, 105) argues that this double bind positions the violence black people experience as inconsequential by attributing the real cause of violence to their fatness while also claiming violence is a necessary response to the imagined excessive power black people supposedly embody.

While there was largely an absence of tweets from a queer perspective, there was one particular Twitter thread that detailed how some queer folk found #MeToo "triggering" and how the hashtag was being employed as a form of "voyeuristic trauma porn" contributing to a largely "performative campaign" that demands a high level of emotional labour from survivors but demands nothing from perpetrators. This Twitter thread suggested that #MeToo was "coercive" and more needed to be done to support and protect those who were most vulnerable. This series of tweets emphasises the importance of recognising the high emotional and psychological labour required of individuals to participate in feminist hashtag activism. Overall, however, the few discussions of how sexual violence is experienced by LGTBQI+ people demonstrates the limitations of #MeToo to discursively address the concerns and experiences of those at the intersection of vulnerability, homophobia, and subordination. The majority of the dataset documents a persistent mapping of sexual violence onto the patriarchal domination of women, overlooking the additional systemic structures that affect queer folk in a neoliberal world.

(De)legitimising #MeToo: concerns and considerations

Present within the dataset was evidence of misogynistic alt-right and men's rights activist (MRA) attempts to disrupt #MeToo that are indicative of a broader assault and an attempt to delegitimise feminist mobilisations against sexual violence (Ganzer 2014). There were several tweets that shared what appeared to be testimonials of a victim's experience of sexual harassment and which specifically labelled the perpetrator as black. However, the tweets originated from right-wing identified white males. Further, there were several tweets that weaponised the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag to criticise #MeToo for not listening to black folk. The tone of these tweets was aggressive and highly critical through the incorporation of swear words and sarcasm. This differed from the tone of the #MeToo tweets posted by the official @Blklivesmatter account and BlackLivesMatter organisers, which attempted to reframe Burke as the leader of #MeToo. Further, the highly critical tweets originated from users whose Twitter activity reveal that they are anti-feminist white men. In this way, MRAs and alt-right men attempted to sow discord within #MeToo by creating and posting fake or disingenuous #MeToo testimonials. This type of trolling has two purposes: the first is to trigger internal conflict between white and black feminist communities and the second is to delegitimise and discredit the testimonials and claims by real survivors.

Fortunately, the #MeToo tweets posted by alt-right MRAs received little engagement and failed to trigger the intended conflict. However, the prevalence of these types of tweets from the very beginning of the mobilisation of the hashtag indicates an ongoing

and continued threat of alt-right MRA communities for the feminist movement. The weaponization of fake feminist profiles, testimonials, and critiques is something that demands further research, especially as scholars (Ganzer 2014) have found these misogynistic groups have used online feminist communities as sites to test and refine their tactics for disruption before conducting even larger campaigns that attack the heart of democracy.

The networked counterpublics captured in this research convey a high level of affective and emotional activity, but the dominance of white popular feminist celebrities, media organisations and the Women's March, represents a prevailing white-centred narrative surrounding the #MeToo hashtag. The peripheral positioning of Tarana Burke and the absence of intersectional narratives suggests the voices of the counterpublics within the movement were mostly dwarfed. However, mapping the protest networks over the course of the #MeToo movement might shed further light on whether Burke's position within the overall #MeToo network shifts, especially once she is featured in mainstream news outlets such as Time Magazine.

Tanya Serisier's nuanced study of white feminist politics in *Speaking Out* (2018) provokes us to think about whether the absence of representation and of intersectional narratives within the early #MeToo protest network is in fact important given the limitations of "speaking out" to achieve social change within the saturated testimonial cultures of neoliberalism. Considering the emotional, psychological and sometimes physical harm some individuals documented experiencing as a result of their participation in #MeToo, there are costs to speaking out that not every survivor has the resources or support to endure. The social network visualisations document a disconnected outer rim of the #MeToo network, visualising the thousands of individuals who participated without receiving any response or engagement. While their participation contributes to the datafication of the enormity and frequency of women and survivor's lived experiences with sexual harassment and violence, it is reasonable to question the limitations of a collective solidarity when thousands of users receive no individual acknowledgement.

While conscious of the limitations of speaking out, the counterpublics that emerged around Tarana Burke and BlackLivesMatter and the pain expressed by queer women and transfolk in their experiences of engaging with #MeToo indicate the importance of having intersectionality centred and recognised in mainstream feminism and society. This representation should not have to come from the individual level, with multiply marginalised women being coerced to relive their trauma on a public stage, but it should be reflected in the leadership of the movement with activists and advocacy groups such as Burke and BlackLivesMatter re-centred. Further, in the context of a heteronormative society, the prevalence of anti-trans or trans-exclusionary feminists, and high profile incidences of the silencing and removal of transfolk from feminist spaces, the framing of #MeToo can be interpreted as a movement for cis-women. In this way, oppression is reproduced within #MeToo by the combination of nominally inclusive frameworks, the centring of white women, and the context of a neoliberal society in which the accused are discursively constructed as individual "bad men" rather than part of a broader systemic problem.

This article is not written with the intention of retelling intersectional narratives to marginalised women but to draw attention to the exclusivity of popular and networked feminism and to elevate the voices of the multiply marginalised survivors of sexual violence who were erased from the dominant narratives of #MeToo. It is a call to white

feminist researchers and activists to be mindful of the voices that are excluded when examining popular feminist actions. Further, this study contributes an understanding of the power dynamics within digital feminist networks that reproduce colonial violence and oppression within mainstream neoliberal feminism and academia, and extends support to the existing research that documents how digital networks and technology do not empower marginalised voices equitably.

Notes

1. See https://ezyinsights.com/metoo-viral-event-2017-1/.
2. Note the data is collected using the Twitter API via Texifter. The Twitter API only provides a snapshot of activity; it does not return all tweets using the hashtag, but it provides enough to construct a large dataset.
3. The label for Tarana Burke has deliberately been enhanced for visibility purposes and does not represent the size of her node within the protest network.
4. McGowan's silencing of the transwoman initially appears reflective of a trans-exclusionary notion of feminism however after some women in the audience cheered at the removal of the transwoman, McGowan redirected her anger at them shouting "I didn't agree to your cis fucking world … transwomen *are* women."
5. Crucially, Sojourner drew attention to the radically different experiences of black women who had "plowed and planted and endured the ravages of slavery" (Trina Jones and Kimberly Jade Norwood 2016, 2024) yet were denied the right to vote as well as the basic rights of citizenship. The experience of slavery not only differed from white women's experiences but also opposed the narrative that (white) women were too fragile and delicate to exercise their rights of citizenship. This narrative of white fragility was used to restrict white women from civil society.

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