Changes made and engagements with reviewer commentary

1. I have highlighted all changes in the body of the article.
2. Reviewer suggestions on minor grammar, language and issues of clarity have been accepted and highlighted. Changes to reference list formatting have been accepted, but not highlighted.
3. Reviewer 2 suggests that #MeToo is used through the paper for the sake of consistency. Burke’s movement is ‘Me Too’ and Milano’s movement came to be known as ‘#MeToo’. I have added a footnote clarifying this and reformatted where necessary.
4. Reviewer 2 suggests more explicit mention of the theoretical framework in the abstract. I changed the abstract accordingly.
5. As per reviewer 1, a footnote was added in the introduction to give background on the Harvey Weinstein allegations. This also addresses Reviewer 2’s suggestion that the introduction needs relevant citation. Since the coverage of the Weinstein incident was across multiple journals, I used an article by The New Yorker’s Editorial Team which provides an overview.
6. As per reviewer 1, I have changed the last sentence in the introduction into a question.
7. As per reviewer 2, I have added a supporting sentence to guide the reader on what is to come.
8. In the section entitled “Rape Culture and Power” reviewer 1 says the following “Around the Commented [MN9]: This needs to be foregrounded in the preceding sections” – I disagree with this as that same paragraph elaborates a highly nuanced discussion of power. Up until then, it is only alluded to through statements made by Tarana Burke on her movement.
9. In the final paragraph of ‘Rape Culture and Power’ reviewer one suggests clarity around the use of ‘rape culture’. I did not add footnotes here, not any supporting sentence as the preceding quote already adequately grounds the points made in this paragraph. Revisions to this section or footnotes would complicate/subtract from the argument.
10. The section titled “Men Supporting Me Too” begins with a discussion of men’s responses to feminism. Reviewer 1 suggests more references. In this regard I have added a footnote to relevant authors. These have been added to the reference list.
11. In the paragraph following this, I discuss men’s responses to #metoo. Reviewer 1 suggests adding screenshots of tweets as a means of evidence. I think this suggestion is valid, but I am weary of screenshots of tweets as readers may find that the tweet has been deleted. So instead, I have included a footnote.
12. In the final paragraph preceding the conclusion, Reviewer 1 suggests bringing in the earlier discussion on power to produce nuance. This is valid. Instead of writing new sentences or footnotes I added clarifying words. This produces the nuance that I think Reviewer 1 is alluding to.
13. Reviewer 2 suggests adding citations to conclusion, and also compliments the final sentence. I do not want to add citations to the conclusion as it is structured in a way that gives the final sentence its power.

**Abstract**

While having its origins after the sexual assault allegations against Harvey Weinstein a decade ago, the #MeToo movement came to occupy a prominent role in talks around sexual violence. The purpose of the hashtag was and is to demonstrate how widespread sexual violence is, the silence around it, and to provide support for women who have had similar experiences. As the movement gained more prominence and allegations against other sexual predators emerged, many men began to show support for the movement. Individual men were called out for supporting the movement, due to the fact that they were implicated in allegations of sexual harassment and violence.

The paper draws on Foucault’s (1977,1978) ideas on power and uses as a precedent men’s historical responses to feminism. It then examines the way in which men’s practice and talk around ‘morality’, ‘consent’ and ‘support’ work to absolve individual men of systemic responsibility through a discourse of ‘individualism’. This paper makes the argument that the way in which men provide support to the #MeToo movement can be a means to reiterate patriarchy.

**Introduction**

After the sexual assault allegations against Harvey Weinstein[[1]](#footnote-1), as well as other high profile men, the #MeToo movement came to occupy a prominent role in talk around sexual violence. The purpose of the hashtag was and is to demonstrate how widespread sexual violence is, the silence around it, and to provide support for women who have had similar experiences. As the movement gained more prominence and allegations against other sexual predators emerged, many men began to show support for the movement. Individual men were called out for supporting the movement, due to the fact that they were implicated in allegations of sexual harassment and violence. Thus, this paper will explore the ways men’s support for #MeToo reproduces patriarchy and how this occurs. In doing so, this paper will examine Foucault’s (1977; 1978) ideas on power and consider men’s historical responses to feminism.

**The Me Too Movement**

While #MeToo Movement went viral in October 2017, it has its origins as far back as 2006 (Manikonda, Beigi, Liu & Kambhampati, 2018, p. 2). Me Too, as it occurred in 2006 however, has some differences to the 2017 incarnation.

Community organiser Tarana Burke, the originator of The Me Too Movement, grounded her practice in empathy, empowering the oppressed and targeting systems of oppression, such as patriarchy and whiteness (Rodino-Colocino, 2018 p. 98). Having done community work in the past, the catalyst for Burke was when she heard a 13 year old girl talk about her own assault and that Burke could not even bring herself to say ‘me too’, to tell this young woman that she too had faced the same thing (Rodino-Colocino, 2018 p. 97). Thus Burke wanted to show survivors that they were not alone, to confront the stigma and enforced silence of survivors of sexual assault. For Burke, this ‘transformative empathy’ could contribute to healing (Rodino-Colocino, 2018 p. 98).

Ostensibly for Burke, connecting individuals draws attention to systems of oppression and the eventuality that these systems can be confronted. For Burke, The Me Too movement is about ‘power and privilege’ and not about individuals or the mere singling out of certain perpetrators (Adetiba, 2017). Burke emaphises that these systems are centuries old and that her original movement focussed on marginalised communities, and especially communities of women of colour and queer women (Adetiba, 2017). The systems Burke alludes to centre around patriarchy, class and whiteness (Adetiba, 2017).

Following widespread allegations of sexual assault and misconduct in Hollywood, specifically that of Harvey Weinstein, Alyssa Milano encouraged women to tweet #MeToo to demonstrate the extent of sexual assault (Ohlheiser, 2017)[[2]](#footnote-2). While Milano was not aware of Burke’s initial campaign, she acknowledged it once made aware (Ohlheiser, 2017). Burke’s initial fear about this new movement was that it was essentially undermining the years of work she had done earlier (Ohlheiser, 2017) and that it was driven by white women drawing attention to a certain type of high profile man, taking away from the systems approach of the original movement (Adetiba, 2017). A common criticism of this new iteration of the movement is that it draws attention to individuals as opposed to a systems approach (see Bennett, 2018). It is important at this stage to discuss why a focus on individual perpetrators as opposed to a systems approach can work to protect perpetrators and sustain the culture that allows sexual violence to be so widespread.

**A Focus on the Individual**

Humans are not ‘individuals’ in the sense that they are affected (or are effects) by and of culture and the networks of existing humans and institutions they must come into some form of co-operation with to partake and sustain themselves in society. In cooperating with these networks, where does the individual end and the network begin? Who were the people who knew about and enabled individuals such as Harvey Weinstein or for that matter any perpetrator who is being singled out? It is here that Thompson’s (2001) discussion on this ideology of ‘individualism’ becomes pertinent.

According to Thompson (2001, p. 43) individualism, as ideology, may be seen as depicting:

“ ‘humanity’ as a set of isolated selves, floating freely in a space which is ‘social’ only to the extent that there are many selves [residing alongside each other in society]. Each self is detached from every other, and contains within itself all that is necessary for identification as ‘human’. Desires, needs, interests, beliefs, actions, feelings, attitudes and behaviours, are perceived as personal properties intrinsic to each individual, and as arising fully formed within each individual psyche. The desires, etc., of any one individual can come into conflict or competition with those of any other, or can provide a reason for cooperation.”

Thompson (2001, p. 44) discusses how in this discourse, politics essentially ‘vanishes’. Social processes are reduced to individual actions, whereby the individual is acting upon his or her own desire and exercising his or her own individual freedoms or alternatively, exercising constraint (Thompson, 2001). And while It is certainly true that two individuals may come into conflict, this becomes a matter of one individual possibly infringing upon the agency and freedoms of another individual. Actions are merely a matter of ‘personal responsibility’ (Thompson, 2001, p. 44). This turn to the individual is most useful for a system of domination to sustain itself. If actions are a matter of the individual, then they cannot be considered to be systematic and the oppressed cannot unite around a shared condition to change that system (Thompson, 2001).

Sexual assault, however, cannot be considered to be an individual matter. Rape, itself, may be a punishable offence as defined by the law, but any number of statistics demonstrate that rape is covertly condoned. One in five women will be raped in their lifetimes (Black, Basile, Breiding, Smith, Walters and Merrick, Chen, & Stevens, 2011). Only 37% of sexual assaults are reported to the police (Rennison, 2002). Both of these statistics refer to the US, but a similarly bleak outlook can be garnered by examining sexual assault statistics either globally or from nation to nation. The disjuncture between how widespread rape is and the fact that it is punishable by law is an example of what is called ‘rape culture’. Rape culture may be defined as the “complex of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women [... which] ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself. A rape culture condones physical and emotional terrorism against women as the norm” (Buchwald, Fletcher & Roth, 1993 p. vii). While addressing individual perpetrators may be important, systemic change is necessary to address the culture that condones and supports rape and makes rape possible. A focus on rape culture itself, rather than only on perpetrators, may be able to reduce the incidence of sexual assault.

As discussed, Burke saw her original movement as not focussing on individuals, but rather on systemic change. Because the second incarnation of the movement lacks central organisation, it would be difficult to say whether individual women engaging in this movement are looking toward this same systemic change or are instead interested only in holding to account individual men. The concern of this paper, however, regards how men engage with #MeToo and how this may reproduce rape culture or patriarchy.

**Rape Culture and Power**

According to Burke, sexual assault inhabits a ‘grey area’ (Jeffries, 2018). Burke notes that it is sometimes unclear for women what constitutes consent and that women have been taught to yield to men in sexual situations. In contrast, Burke describes how the media[[3]](#footnote-3) may depict rape happening outside of these domestic contexts, with the rapist being a stranger and possibly engaged in other criminal behaviour. The media depiction Burke describes may make it difficult for women to understand issues of consent when they arise with a partner whom they have known previously. In this media depiction, consent is very clearly violated. Importantly, since the media depiction may make sexual assault more possible in domestic circumstances, they can both be seen as manifestations of rape culture.

This then highlights two important ways in which power manifests itself. The first being that in which power is clearly held and exerted by an individual over another and the second in which power constitutes the social relations of society, benefiting some more than others. In this second form, power is a priori knowledge which makes actions and behaviour possible. This speaks to Foucault’s work around power (1977, 1978). The first form can be described as sovereign power as it is much like the power a king has over his subjects (see Foucault 1977). Here, it is clear who and what the law is and what the consequences are for violation. In the second form, power is not merely top-down but emerges through relationships people have with each, based on the shared knowledge that they have (Foucault, 1978). This shared knowledge constitutes a power relation between individuals and groups who act to reproduce power (Foucault, 1978). Though one can decipher the reasoning behind strategies of power, there are no individual subjects or architects that determine power (Foucault, 1978).

The implications of Foucault’s ideas around power speak to Burke’s discussion on the media depiction of rape, as well as the discourse of individualism discussed by Thompson (2001). Foucault thus speaks to the ways in which rape culture may maintain itself by constructing rape in a very particular way. As Herbele (1996, p. 65) asks:

But what if in emphasizing the strategy of piecing together our reality as a rape culture through speakouts and detailed descriptions of experience, we participate in setting up the event of sexual violence as a defining moment of women’s possibilities for being in the world? What if [...] we participate in conferring a monolithic reality onto an otherwise phantasmatic, illegitimate, and therefore fragile edifice of masculinist dominance rent with contradiction and internal conflict? What if there is an immanent fragility to masculinist dominance that has been obscured by the construction of a political strategy grounded upon the exposure of women’s suffering? Simply put, what if this strategy furthers the reification of masculinist dominance?

For Foucault (1978), knowledge is an act of power: the way we know about something is inextricable from relations of power. In creating a knowledge around rape, women activists engage with power relations. By creating one kind of ‘knowing’ about rape, women may ‘unknowingly’ reproduce rape culture. On the opposite end of the spectrum, however, there lies the potential of a ‘knower’, a subject who ‘knowingly’ engages in these practices for their own benefit. In other words: if women activists can engage in these practices and ‘unknowingly’ reproduce rape culture, it is certainly true that perpetrators may ‘knowingly’ do the same.

**Men Supporting #MeToo**

At this point, it is necessary to contextualise men’s support for women’s movements. As feminism has been the driver of change with regard to gendered power relations and that Burke originally conceived the movement in feminist practice, men’s relationship toward and within women’s movements will be discussed in this context. Baily (2015) lists a number of ways in which men have responded to feminism[[4]](#footnote-4), from being pro-feminist to re-asserting men’s power and privilege. Similarly, men have been viewed by some feminists as being allies and other feminists have viewed them with mistrust (Baily, 2015). There is thus debate about the role of men in and around feminism (Baily, 2015). Although these positions have been expressed in binaries, men’s involvement with women’s movements may be more complex. While men may want systemic change, they are in positioned at an advantage to women in those same systems. Thus men’s involvement in women’s movements may have different motivations and investments than women.

Men’s responses to #MeToo and discussions around their role in the context of the movement have been varied. Ostensibly, some men have been supportive of the movement, but any movement aiming to confront power will inevitably be met with resistance and a reassertion of that power. Burke herself has noted that this indeed would be the case (Jeffries, 2018). According to Burke, some people have tried to deride the movement as a ‘witch hunt’ and that some men have responded by asking the question of ‘what about good men’ (Jeffries, 2018)[[5]](#footnote-5). For Burke, it is not enough for men to declare that they are ‘good’, because it is not always clear if this is the case. Burke continues on to say that instead of asking that question, men should be engaging in self-reflection in how they have reproduced rape culture or should instead confront other men.

While some men have engaged with the movement in this manner (see Victor, 2018), this has not always been the case. Hensley (2018) describes how several high profile men have shown support for #MeToo and used this as a defense against allegations of sexual misconduct. Essentially, when confronted by allegations of sexual misconduct, these men have used the rhetoric of that since they are supportive of women speaking out it would thus be impossible for they themselves to be involved in such misconduct. Examining this logic, men here are using women to deflect themselves against the allegations of other women. Men here are using the voices of women to silence women. A movement aimed at targeting rape culture becomes for men a means to perpetuate it.

If all men, or even just men who were accused of being perpetrators, were constantly absolving themselves from any wrongdoing by showing their support for #MeToo then it would be clear that this is a means for rape culture to perpetuate itself. It would be clear because no man would be able to be held to account. Who the perpetrator is would be in a constant state of deflection. Some men, however, have been held to account either through social sanction or legal means. For a man to be implicated in allegations, while simultaneously showing support for #MeToo is for that man to dictate what does and does not constitute sexual assault. If a man is saying he supports #MeToo and thus cannot be guilty of assault, he is saying very clearly who and who cannot be considered to be a perpetrator.

When a man says he supports #MeToo, he is also pointing at *this other man* who doesn’t. He is saying that *this other man* who doesn’t support a movement aimed at exposing rape does so because *this other man* is aware that soon *he* will be held responsible for *his* actions. In this account, both men are depicted as being aware of what constitutes sexual assault and what constitutes consent. These men then are alike in this regard, the only point of difference being that one violated consent, while the other did not.

This depiction of the perpetrator very much plays into individualism as described by Thompson (2001). Human beings have a shared space and the act of rape, here, becomes merely the violation of one individual by another. In such a practice, in order to address rape, one merely has to remove problematic individuals from society. Individuals who are cast as ‘problematic’ thus commit rape under very specifically defined circumstances. The many ways in which rape culture manifests itself are thus rendered invisible. Rape becomes a matter of an external and objective morality. Men who commit rape know are cast as knowing that it is objectively wrong. Condemning rape, then, has a disciplinary function. It punishes those who are pointed at, but absolves the men who are doing the pointing. It sets up a clear demarcation of who is ‘moral’ and who is ‘immoral’.

**Conclusion**

Rape is not only the act itself between two people hinging on ‘consent’ - it relies on social processes prior to the act of rape which enabled it and those after that make it difficult for a woman to talk about, let alone report rape through means of the law. Part of the reason rape culture is so pervasive and so insidious, then, is that it does not openly refer to itself. Addressing rape culture requires a vast systemic overhaul. Men who seem to be interested in supporting a women’s movement or who are aiming to address rape culture need to do more than merely position themselves in some external morality in which they are absolved. Men need to evaluate the manner in which they have colluded and benefitted from the system. Men need to confront the times they supported problematic actions of men who are their co-workers, friends and family. Men need to examine how they themselves acted towards women. Men need to confront men.

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1. Harvey Weinstein is the founder of the production house, The Weinstein Company, which has produced a number of highly profitable and award winning films. In 2017, *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker* began publishing stories which would amount to over 30 women coming forward with sexual assault allegations against Weinstein. Following this, allegations from women against other men in the US entertainment industry would become public. For this work, *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times* were jointly awarded the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service. See The New Yorker (2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Burke’s movement, ‘Me Too’, thus gained a hashtag and became ‘#MeToo’. Depending on the context, this paper refers to both ‘Me Too’ and ‘#MeToo ‘where appropriate. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For the sake of clarity of this paper, ‘media’ is used in its broadest sense to refer to textual productions in the public domain, ranging for example from newspapers and online articles to films and television series [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For further discussion on men’s responses to feminism see, for example, Ashe, 2007;

   Goldrick-Jones, 2002; Holmgren & Hearn, 2009 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Examples of these responses are Matt Damon’s comments that we should also focus on men who are not sexual predators (Guerrasio 2017) and Michael Haneke’s comments that #MeToo is a witch hunt orchestrated by people who ‘hate men’ (Mumford, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)