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Introduction

In a recent study from NPR, Chatterjee (2018) found that 81% of women have experienced sexual assault or harassment, as have 43% of men. It's the kind of statistic that makes parents afraid, and has a shock value that makes change possible. That change has come in the form of the Me Too movement. This important step in ending sexual harassment and assault has allowed victims to share their stories, or even just their status as victims, which has created a collective understanding of the scope of this problem. It has made it possible to talk about sexual assault and harassment without fear, and with the likelihood of being believed in a way that was culturally unacceptable until this movement changed our culture.

According to Ohlheiser (2017), a black woman, Tarana Burke started the Me Too movement over a decade ago in 2006 on MySpace, where she had created a page to enable "empowerment through empathy" for survivors of sexual assault and abuse (p. 1). The movement as we know it today went viral in October of 2017 after an actress, Alyssa Milano, tweeted "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet" with an image containing, in part, the statement "If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too.' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem" (Rife, 2017; Alyssa_Milano, 2017). Eighty-five countries around the world had at least 1,000 Me Too tweets, with 1.7 million twitter users sharing their experiences in the week after Milano's tweet. 4.7 million Facebook users had posted, reacted, or commented 12 million times in the first 24 hours following Milano's tweet (Park, 2017). All of this is evidence of the movement going viral. In the months that followed, accusers were believed, and suddenly

perpetrators became a public relations problem that could not be swept under the rug or victim-blamed into obscurity. And then there were questions about the intersectionality of the Me Too, asking whether the movement was including and representing not only people of color, but regular people without the platform of fame, wealth, and often whiteness, so many of the women, and men, in Hollywood had used to bring attention to this issue. Buckley (2018) explains that in November 2017, 700,000 female farmworkers sent a letter to the women in Hollywood endorsing the Me Too movement. The actresses who so popularized the Me Too movement responded by establishing the Time's Up initiative through the creation of a legal defense fund and legislation to help combat sexual harassment and assault, specifically in the workplace. If at all possible, this is how the movement will become truly intersectional, as men and women with the means have provided $13 million in donations toward a legal defense fund that will hopefully create change for those in all social strata. In this paper I will analyze how narrative agency applies to this movement through narrative form and other means established by Campbell (2005), and adapted by Yang (2016) for hashtag activism. Narrative agency delineates the movement's, as Campbell (2005) defines it, "capacity to act," through the ability to create a message that is accepted by the community (p. 3).

Literature Review

The literature regarding the narrative analysis of the Me Too movement was largely associated with either feminist activism, hashtag activism, or literature describing narrative agency and form. Campbell's (2005) work establishes criteria for what can be said to have rhetorical agency. First, like it's origin in ancient Greece as the endoxa, or collective consensus, she argues that agents are representatives of their communities, and thus agency is inherently

communal. She then dictates that authors are not the originators of the ideas they impart but rather "points of articulation," and that agency is "effected through artistry" achieved through the study of what tools are available to a rhetor and how to use them (p. 5; p. 6). Authors use their rhetorical skills to create ties between their ideas and the ideas of others in a way that frames their own argument, which allows a broader understanding among a community or culture. Next, she addresses form as a means of agency, in that texts achieve agency through form and framing. Lastly, she says that agency can be perverted, that it is the "power to do evil, to demean and belittle" (Campbell, 2005, p. 7). She then applies the proposed method of analysis to a recreation of a speech by Sojourner Truth, as it will be applied to the Me Too movement here. Yang (2016) adapted these same methods to analyze the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, focusing on the form created by the temporal sequence of the narratives of hashtag movements. Hashtag narratives are driven by conflict, confrontation, and a large number of personal stories shared through hashtags and comments to co-produce a collective narrative of the movement. She claims that hashtags used for movements have sentence structure and a call to action, which #MeToo does not.

Agency in the Me Too movement is not as confrontational as Yang (2016) claims hashtag activism must be, but more invitational. Foss and Griffin (1995) theorized a new form of rhetoric rooted in feminist theory called invitational rhetoric, which seeks to "create a relationship" focused on "equality, immanent value, and self-determination," where individuals are invited to hear perspectives rather than be dominated by another's persuasive technique. This egalitarian, invitational model is in many ways reflective of all online discourse in that it is a platform that is supposedly available to all, and each person chooses which sites to visit. It is particularly

reflective of the Me Too movement, which is also grounded in feminist theory, and seeks not to confront but to listen to the stories of victims and create a relationship between survivors. Lozano-Reich and Cloud (2009) provide a direct contradiction of the civility proposed by Foss and Griffin (1995), asserting that invitational rhetoric is impossible between unequal parties. Lozano-Reich and Cloud (2009) say that "an invitational paradigm grounded in civility is not only antithetical to the goals of invitational rhetoric, but also in combating systems of oppression"(p. 223). Their approach is, as stated, far more combative than that of Foss and Griffin (1995), similar to the differences between the Me Too and Time's Up movements.

Survivors of sexual assault and harassment often experience trauma. Albright (2008) studied trauma narratives by viewing those narratives as a form of qualitative interview that could be used to analyze the lived experience of those who have experienced trauma, which in her paper focuses on physical injury, but allows for all forms of physical, emotional, and psychological trauma. I propose that, just as Albright seeks to preserve the entire narrative of those with spinal cord injuries rather than just the quantitative data mined from their experiences, the Me Too movement seeks to include and preserve the individual trauma narratives of the survivors who share their stories online, and to further use their narratives to, as Yang (2016) said, co-produce the narrative of the movement. Gong (2015) explores the use of emotion work online to create indignation, inspiration, and interaction, which is most often done using digital storytelling. She uses the example of sharing the stories of survivors of human trafficking to create inspiration, in much the same way that those who shared their stories alongside #MeToo created both inspiration and interaction. Geographers McLean, Maalsen, and Grech (2016) discuss the use of participatory mapping to analyze the interaction between feminists in digital

spaces, specifically through the lens of an Australian feminist group, 'Destroy the Joint'.

Relevant to the Me Too movement is the use of digital platforms for activism, and the

implications participatory mapping, which is the use of GIS software and surveys to map the

physical location of participants, has for studying the intersectionality of digital movements,

especially those concerned with feminist goals.

Bakardjieva, Svensson, and Skoric (2012) discuss hashtag activism, or "clicktivism"

more generally, summarizing the findings of that field and coming to the conclusion that it "does

not inhibit those who are interested from getting involved in political activities offline, as some

pessimistic accounts have predicted." (p. 2). They argue that online activism lowers the bar of

entry for political and activist participation, thus changing the power dynamics, and that it

encourages digital storytelling as activism, supporting Gong (2015). They assert that digital

activism is circumventing "institutional gatekeepers"(p. 1). Where the Me Too movement is

concerned, gatekeepers have often been men using their power in the media to cloak a toxic

culture of sexual harassment and assault. One of those less optimistic outlooks is presented by

Harlow and Guo (2014), who researched impact of slacktivism on immigrant activism,

specifically how slacktivism might be inhibiting so-called real activism. They found that these

digital platforms are better for "raising awareness" than they are for getting people to participate

physically (p. 473). Bonilla and Rosa (2015) analyze the use of #Ferguson. They identify

hashtags as both means of "indexing," like a filing system, and a way to convey greater meaning

(p. 5). In the Me Too movement, the hashtag stands not only for the revolution against sexual

assault and harassment, but also a revival of feminist ideals. They also identify the intertextuality

of some online texts linked together through hashtags, as Time's Up and Me Too are connected.

RQ1: Does the Me Too movement have narrative agency as described by Campbell

(2005) and the narrative form of a hashtag movement as described by Yates (2016)?

Methods

I will follow the criteria established by Campbell (2005) for identifying agency in a text.

That criteria is, in short, that the text is communal, invented by authors, artful, has narrative

form, and can be perverted. I will supplement that definition with that of Yang (2016), in order

to adapt the original model created for traditional rhetoric for use with digital rhetoric,

specifically hashtag activism. I will treat instances where individuals not only shared the hashtag

#MeToo to identify as victims, but also told the story of their experience, as qualitative

interviews about trauma, as established in Albright's (2008) discussion of trauma narratives. I

will analyze the Me Too movement, and its counterpart Time's Up to establish both the narrative

agency and form of Me Too and the narrative agency of the overall Me Too movement as

continued in Time's up.

Analysis

The #MeToo movement can be said to be, as Campbell (2005) said, "communal" and

"social", because it took place in a communal environment on a social media platform, beginning

on Twitter and then branching out to others like Instagram and Facebook (p. 3). Further evidence

exists in a Medium article by Gallagher (2018), which provides a graphic visualization of how

the hashtag spread through social networks. The visualization shows that the majority of the

people who engaged with the hashtag found it through Alyssa Milano's original tweet, or that of

the user apbenven, a journalist who tweeted "Reminder that if a woman didn't post #MeToo, it

doesn't mean she wasn't sexually assaulted or harassed. Survivors don't owe you their story"

(apbenven, 2017). There is further evidence that it is communal, in that some pre-established

communities are clearly visible, like the 'Supernatural' fandom interacting with the actor from

the show, Jensen Ackles, who tweeted "For my wife, for my daughters, for all women...I stand

with all of you. This has gotta change. #metoo #nomore" (JensenAckles, 2017). It is also, as

Campbell (2005) says, "participatory" in that millions of people engaged with this hashtag (p. 2).

Thus, the Me Too movement has agency as described by the first of Campbell's (2005) criteria.

        The second criteria, that authors are not originators of concepts per se, but rather "points

of articulation" also applies to the Me Too movement (Campbell, 2005, p.1). Those who shared

their stories did not redefine sexual harassment or assault, but rather articulated the experience of

those evils using rhetoric, especially pathos, to engender support among survivors and catharsis

for themselves. Gong (2015) discussed the importance of emotion in digital activism, and used

their emotions to create, as she said, indignation about the problem, inspiration from the stories

of survivors, and interaction for support. Considering the stories of the Me Too movement to be

trauma narratives, as discussed by Albright (2008), and utilizing Rife (2017) and the signing

page of the Time's Up letter, I cross referenced and found 8 of women, Alyssa Milano, Evan

Rachel Wood, Anna Faris, Jenny Slate, Rose McGowan, Lena Headey, Caterina Scorsone, and

Gina Rodriguez who used the hashtag, shared their trauma through narratives online, and then

signed the letter founding Time's Up. These individual posts are trauma narratives, not only

because they fit Albright's(2008) definition, but because these experiences are verifiably

traumatic, as explained by the data provided by Chatterjee (2018) showing that of those who

experienced either sexual harassment or assault, 31% of female victims and 20% of male victims

felt anxious or depressed, and 7% of female victims , and 4% of males sought medical attention

or therapy. These actresses are evidence of the articulation throughout every facet of the Me Too movement.

Campbell's (2005) third criteria for agency is that it is "effected through artistry" (p.1). The Me Too movement is artful, not only in that the sharing of personal stories transcended the original call for action, which only asked victims to say "Me Too," but also in the modes of expression. Women, and a few men, shared their stories without prompting from Milano. The original call to action asked only for a sketch of each individual's experience, just that it happened rather than what happened, but many people chose to paint the whole picture by describing their experiences. Some people chose different methods of expression by sharing their experiences on different platforms, which inevitably have different formats and norms, which would require users have a certain level of artistry in order to conform with the standards of each platform. For example, many chose to use Instagram instead of twitter, including America Ferrera, Trace Lysette, and Viola Davis (Rife, 2017). According to an article from Rife (2017), some women, like Molly Ringwald and Laura Dern, defected from the social media focus of the movement to tell their stories through traditional media outlets, in these instances utilizing The New Yorker and the Ellen Degeneres Show respectively. Their decision to use another kind of outlet is also artful.

The next criteria established by Campbell (2005) and carefully adapted by Yang (2016) is that of form. Yang (2016) argues that narrative form consists of a beginning, middle and end that is propelled by conflict, distinguishable because it is confrontational. I argue that while the Me Too movement does have temporal sequence, as identified in the history of the movement given in the introduction, and thus narrative form, it doesn't have a traditional form. The Me Too

movement has not an end but a goal- to rid our culture of complacency toward sexual assault and

harassment. I reject the notion that such a movement must be confrontational, as the Me Too

movement, though rooted in a cultural conflict regarding the normalization of sexual harassment

and assault, engages in something far closer to the invitational rhetoric as theorized by Foss and

Griffin (1995). It seeks to address the concerns of all kinds and creeds of victims equally and

through self-determination. Participation is optional, as apbenven pointed out in her tweet,

"Survivors don't owe you their story" (apbenven, 2017). Chaterjee's (2018) data further supports

that this movement is non-confrontational in that only 1% of female victims and 1% of male

victims confronted their aggressors out of 81% of women and 43% of men who have

experienced sexual harassment or assault. The characterization of the Me Too movement itself is

invitational, but its successor, Time's Up, is confrontational. In many ways the progression from

Me Too toward Time's Up has narrative form in itself, as it has temporal sequence driven by the

lack of conclusion in the Me Too movement alone because it wasn't confrontational. The

language of Time's Up is far more combative in that they have pledged to take perpetrators court

and to strengthen legislation penalizing this kind of activity (Buckley, 2018). Time's Up is

intertextually related to, but separate from Me Too, and therefore not a conclusion to the

movement.

The final criteria established by Campbell (2005) is that agency is reversible--it can be

perverted to "demean and belittle" (p.7). Yang (2016) identifies instances where the hashtag

#BlackLivesMatter was perverted with racial slurs. This is applicable to the Me Too movement

in that there have been calls against it, like that of several French actresses led by Catherine

Deneuve, saying that #MeToo has gone too far and lamenting the loss of a man's supposed right

"to steal a kiss or send a salacious text" (McCallister, 2018, p. 2). Such criticisms of the Me Too movement are much more than just criticisms. By making the definition of sexual harassment more ambiguous in the favor of so-called romance, they endanger their own gender by complicating the cultural discussion about what is and isn't allowed with their ignorance of the meaning of the movement. Me Too has always been about giving those who are vulnerable to unwanted advances tools to combat those advances, through support, through cultural change, through Time's Up. However, these criticisms do provide rhetoric that, as Campbell (2005) put it, "demean and belittle" the movement and thus support the assertion that the Me Too movement does have narrative agency (p.7).

Discussion

Yang (2016) says that "agency responds to social conditions"(p. 16). Me Too not only has agency and form, but is a response to the inherently unequal status of women in this current culture, using its agency to demand that the culture be changed. Having analyzed the participatory nature of the Me Too movement in accordance with the first criteria laid out by Campbell (2005), the findings of McLean, Maalsen, and Grech (2016) are relevant in that they provide further evidence that participation is a key factor of analyzing feminist activism, and that mapping that participation can help provide evidence of intersectionality in a way that helps ensure movements are as inclusive as possible. Bakardjieva, Svensson, and Skoric (2012) also provide evidence that physical participation is not hindered by online activism.

Bonilla and Rosa (2015) also discuss participation but go on to discuss the intertextuality of online texts connected by hashtags, which is evidence of the the narrative form of the overall Me Too movement and Time's Up. Yang (2016) identifies the importance of form in analyzing

hashtag activism movements, focusing on the temporal sequence established in online platforms like twitter and the confrontation that causes progression. I argue that the Me Too movement is not confrontational, but rather a reflection of the invitational ideals of Foss and Griffin (1995), and that Time's up is closer to confrontational, reflecting the more combative methods of Lozano-Reich and Cloud (2009) in their critique of Foss and Griffin (1995). Me Too has a clear temporal sequence beginning with Burke and Milano and progressing into a viral movement that spawned a whole new movement, Time's Up. However, Time's Up is not the end of Me Too movement, but the next iteration in the digital narrative of a new facet of feminism, where the collective identity comes not from claims of sisterhood but is created in an equally shared digital space with lower social barriers that enables a truly intersectional movement where active participation does not require physical presence, supporting the claims of Bakardjieva, Svensson, and Skoric (2012), and McLean, Maalsen, and Grech (2016).

Me Too uses digital storytelling to create support among survivors, supporting both Bonilla and Rosa (2015), and Gong (2015), and even adding to the evidence that Campbell's (2005) work is applicable in that such storytelling requires "artistry" and that authors, or perhaps users, must be "points of articulation" (p.1). Those stories can be used as qualitative interviews to further analyze the narrative of the movement, supporting Albright (2008). The analysis does not support the findings of Harlow and Guo (2014), as the digital activism associated with Me Too has resulted in a physical presence, if one considers the attendance levels at the Women's March in 2018 to be reflective of the greater meaning of Me Too, not just as a call to rid our culture of sexual harassment and assault , but also a resurgence of feminist ideals.

Conclusion

The Me Too movement can be successfully analyzed using the methods of Campbell (2005) and Yang (2016). Digital activism is effective, and feminist activism has embraced that new platform. Me Too is far from over, but the change it has wrought is slowly becoming evident. As described by Martin (2018), one of the many people who were accused of sexual assault just before the Me Too movement began has been in court throughout its progression- the infamous Bill Cosby. April 27th, 2018, he was found guilty. His accuser's "justice was delayed, not denied," (p.1). May the same be true for the millions of others who said #MeToo.

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