2023

Theoretical Motivations for Posting in #MeToo

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THEORETICAL MOTIVATIONS FOR POSTING IN #METOO

BY

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Arts

Major in Communication and Media Studies

South Dakota State University

2023

THESIS ACCEPTANCE PAGE

Shannon Pappas

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for

the master's degree and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree.

Acceptance of this does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are

necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

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This thesis is dedicated to my bravest friend

Ikse Mennen

Thank you for reminding me that I can do hard things.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many people who have helped me achieve this work. First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Jennifer Anderson. You are truly a force of nature, and I am lucky to have had you as my advisor. Thank you for your guidance, support, and constant belief in my ideas. There is no way I would have been able to finish this without you and that extremely chaotic diagram you drew. Additionally, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Rebecca Kuehl and Dr. Rebecca Martin. Thank you for the time and energy you gave to me this past year. I don't think I could have found two better people to provide insights and critiques on this thesis.

I am grateful to have a network of family and friends that have helped me along the way. To my parents, thank you for your unwavering support as I have figured out my life. To my grandparents, thank you for being such strong role models. You have had such a large part in who I am today. To my sisters, thank you for making it so easy to come to school at SDSU, even if Keri had to slowly wear me down over the course of six months. I don't know where I'd be without you all. To my friends near and far, thank you for the encouragement, many facetimes, adventures, and worktime at Skinner's.

I would also like to thank Dr. Andrea Carlile and Dr. Kathryn Coduto for being my life advice gurus. You two, along with Jadah Morrison, have inspired me to go further with this degree than I ever thought possible. Furthermore, I would like to thank Studio Ghibli for the movies and soundtracks. I wrote many pages with them in the background.

Finally, I would like to thank the hundreds of survivors who took the time to fill out my survey. I look forward to the day when it is much harder to find this large of a participant sample.

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ABBREVIATIONS

GVS   gendered violence survivor

NCADV   National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

SNS   social networking site

SIDE   Social identity model of deindividuation effects

CMC   computer-mediated communication

FtF   face-to-face

SOS   Spiral of silence

WSC   willingness to self-censor

ANOVA   analysis of variance

DV   dependent variable

IV   independent variable

ANCOVA   analysis of covariance

GV   gendered violence

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ABSTRACT

THEORETICAL MOTIVATIONS FOR POSTING IN #METOO

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In 2017, actress Alyssa Milano shared a tweet encouraging survivors of gendered violence to write "me too." A media storm ensued as survivors answered her call in the millions. Anyone can look back at what survivors posted during the height of #MeToo, but we still don't know why they felt the need to post in the first place. To answer this question, the social identity model of deindividuation effects and spiral of silence were utilized. The social identification, perceived anonymity affordances, and willingness to self-censor scales were used for this research, along with a perceived deindividuation scale that was created for this study and found reliable. Snowball recruitment focusing mainly on Reddit and other SNSs yielded 256 eligible participants. Through a quantitative survey, it was found that survivors who posted in #MeToo had stronger group identification with others posting, higher perceptions of anonymity afforded on social networking sites, and higher perceptions of deindividuation during #MeToo compared to survivors who chose not to post. Furthermore, survivors who posted had lower willingness to self-censor during #MeToo and in the present day when compared to non-posters. This lends evidentiary support to a causal relationship between posting in #MeToo and a survivor's willingness to self-censor today.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2005, Former President Donald Trump was caught on tape discussing what it means to be a powerful man. He stated, "I'm automatically attracted to beautiful. I just start kissing them. It's like a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait. When you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything" (Nelson, 2016, para. 7). This recording was leaked before he was elected as President of the United States in 2016, showing what little regard many people have for sexual assault. This mantra of men feeling that they can take whatever they want from women and do whatever they want to women did not begin with Former President Trump. However, a string of high-profile accusations like the one described above did begin to shift public support and mass media narratives involving violence against women. Shortly following the 2016 election, more women would come forward, beginning one of the largest media storms surrounding sexual violence (Hill & Stable, 2021).

In 2017, the New Yorker published the stories of 13 high-profile women who were sexually assaulted or harassed by the film executive, Harvey Weinstein (Farrow, 2017). Survivors stated the shame they felt, blaming themselves for putting themselves in the situation or not fighting to get away. An overwhelming trend among the survivors was the fear of what would happen to them if they came forward. As most women worked in the film industry, they worried that Weinstein would ruin their careers, convincing other film executives to not hire them for any projects. He also boasted a large legal team that could quiet any accusations from the women. Weinstein's power was showcased when a woman wore a wire and caught him on tape groping her and admitting to previous assaults. In the end, the district attorney chose to drop all charges

for reasons not stated, leaving the woman to sign a non-disclosure agreement and receive a payment to expunge the recording from the record (Farrow, 2017). Even with non-disclosure agreements and threats of financial ruin, women finally chosen to come forward. They hoped to receive justice for the pain Weinstein caused, regardless of backlash from his legal team or public perceptions.

The Weinstein brief was the final straw for survivors. On October 15, 2017, Alyssa Milano shared a tweet, stating "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet" (Milano, 2017). The next morning, Milano had received 55,000 replies (Hosterman et al., 2018). Within the first four months, Twitter counted 6.5 million tweets using #MeToo. Additionally, 45 million Facebook users created 12 million posts with the hashtag (Hosterman et al., 2018). The culture of silence surrounding these heinous acts was over.

#MeToo was a cultural phenomenon. Survivors around the world self-disclosed their experiences on various social media platforms, showing no fear of what could happen to them afterward. It seemed that wherever you logged on, #MeToo was there. Hosterman et al. (2018) found many gendered violence survivors (GVS) posted detailed accounts of their experiences, often using anonymity to protect their privacy. Other GVS attempted to make sense of their experience by discussing the emotional aftermath of gendered violence and how they doubted the wrongdoing until #MeToo went viral (Hosterman et al., 2018). While we know what survivors shared and how they did it, we did not know why they chose to post. This thesis examined the theoretical motivations behind survivors' choices to communicate their experiences. In chapter one, we begin by

defining gendered violence, the "me too" and #MeToo movements, and the social media platform Reddit.

Gendered Violence

A common misconception regarding gendered violence, or gender-based violence, is that it only refers to violence against women. While women may be disproportionately impacted by gendered violence, using a term like "violence against women" erases the experiences of men and LGBTQIA+ individuals (Buiten & Naidoo, 2020). However, the issues embedded in gendered violence are much broader. Gendered violence is built upon the intersectionality of race, class, and sexuality (Buiten & Naidoo, 2020). Through this definition, it showcases the wide array of genders, classes, and races that could be the victim of gendered violence.

Most #MeToo posts were from women, assumingly due to the disproportionate nature of gendered violence. However, there were LGBTQIA+ and male-identifying individuals who shared. This was likely due to the term "gendered violence" communicating an inclusive experience for a diverse group of survivors. Fixmer-Oraiz and Wood (2019) define gendered violence as any "physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, and visual brutality that is inflicted disproportionately or exclusively on members of one sex or gender" (p. 240). Some prominent areas of gendered violence include gender intimidation, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence. Gender intimidation refers to any verbal or nonverbal treatment that makes an individual fear for their safety (Gold, 2014). Sexual harassment involves unwelcome verbal or nonverbal sexual behaviors that interfere with an individual's success or links it to sexual favors (Fixmer-Oraiz & Wood, 2019). Sexual assault is any sexual activity that occurs without

consent from one or more individuals involved (Savage, 2012). Intimate partner violence

pertains to the physical, mental, emotional, verbal, or economic power used against a

romantic partner (Fixmer-Oraiz & Wood, 2019). As the definitions of the various forms

of gendered violence are becoming publicized, more survivors are realizing their

experiences were violent.

Gendered violence is an increasingly common issue facing individuals. According

to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) (2020), rape and sexual

assaults in the United States increased 146% between 2016 and 2018. The cause of this

increase is unknown. Additionally, it is estimated that 1 in 5 women and 1 in 40 men are

survivors of rape or attempted rape, while 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men will experience

intimate partner violence (NCADV, 2020). It is likely that these statistics are lower than

actuality, due to the stigma surrounding gendered violence (Powell & Webster, 2018).

Due to this stigma, many survivors never feel that they could successfully report their

experiences to authorities (Mendes et al., 2018).

Many GVS will never come forward because of public backlash. Powell and

Webster (2018) conducted a survey to test what attitudes and collective norms are present

in the public. Their results show most individuals have tolerant attitudes towards violence

against women. More specifically, it was found that most cultures will blame the

survivor, deny the claim or allegation, and exonerate the perpetrator (Powell & Webster,

2018). These attitudinal norms can be seen in society at large and smaller, more

personalized groups. Hosterman et al. (2017) found that gendered violence survivors

(GVS) who disclosed their experiences to friends or family received a mixture of positive

and negative support. If the support was positive, they were more able to cope with their

trauma. However, if they received negative reactions, such as blame, differential treatment, or trying to control their future choices regarding the incident, GVS often chose to not speak of their experiences to anyone again. They assumed that disclosure would only create more trauma for them (Hosterman et al., 2017). However, one survivor sought to change this destructive assumption and help others heal through community and resources.

The Origins of the "me too" Movement

In the early 2000s, Tarana Burke, a Black activist, was working at a youth camp when she met a 13-year-old camper named Heaven (Ohlheiser, 2017). In a private conversation with Burke, Heaven disclosed that she had been sexually assaulted by her stepfather. Burke was not prepared to participate in this discussion, so she rejected Heaven. However, after Heaven walked away, Tarana could not help but wonder why she could not just say "me too" and let her know that she was not alone (Ohlheiser, 2017). It was then that Tarana realized how powerful the phrase "me too" could be in signaling community support.

In 2006, Tarana Burke founded "me too" (Mosley, 2021). As a survivor of rape herself, she knew how powerful exposure to other survivors' stories could be. She knew that stories like her's and Heaven's were all too common among communities of color. While many Black women and girls are labeled as "angry" or "trouble," no one asks why they are that way. Therefore, she chose to focus the efforts of me too on spreading awareness and providing support for Black survivors of gendered violence (Mosley, 2021). To this day, she still focuses on the intersectionality of gendered violence,

ensuring that each survivor, no matter race, class, or gender, receives the resources needed to heal and move forward.

She always aimed to help GVS find empathy and healing. She also stressed that a survivor's most important responsibility is to survive (Kantor, 2021). Therefore, Burke never encouraged GVS to confront perpetrators or disclose their experiences before they were ready. In an interview with Mosley (2021), Burke discussed how she is still not ready to confront her rapist. After assaulting Burke when she was a seven-year-old, he went on to become a police officer that she sees at community gatherings (Mosley, 2021). However, even after the large network of survivors she has garnered, she still does not feel ready to speak to him or tell him the key role he had in the global me too movement.

Burke started me too on MySpace, although the need quickly outgrew the platform (Ohlheiser, 2017). The movement remained a grass roots effort, spread mostly by word-of-mouth among communities of color (Kantor, 2021). For the next decade, Tarana Burke continued to work on the me too movement. However, it was not until 2017 when the movement developed an outpouring of support through Alyssa Milano's tweet urging GVS to write #metoo. Within the first 24 hours of Milano's tweet, the hashtag was shared more than 12 million times (Quan-Haase et al., 2021). Tarana Burke's phrase, but not her name and decade-old movement, had gone viral.

#MeToo

When Burke (2021) awoke on the day #MeToo went viral, she was afraid of what it meant for her and GVS. For one, she was afraid that the decade of work she had done with me too would be erased, as white women using the hashtag gained mass media attention. Burke noticed that most of the posts were not from Black communities, which

is who me too was founded for. She also worried for the GVS, who were suddenly being told to disclose their experiences without any way to help them process the emotional baggage (Burke, 2021).

Luckily for Burke, her work was not erased. Many scholars and advocates credited her for the beginnings of the phrase and the movement. Hill and Stable (2021) discuss how #MeToo would not have been as successful without the tireless efforts put in by people like Burke before the viral moment. They also agreed with Burke's observation regarding the lack of people of color, stating that white female victimhood helped with the press, but muted the experiences of individuals that do not fit the stereotype (Hill & Stable, 2021). While high-profile white women like Alyssa Milano spurred the publicity surrounding #MeToo, the massive amounts of white female victimhood took away the spotlight from people of color, which is who the original movement was for.

While Burke agreed that the phrase "me to" was sometimes used too casually by the public, many GVS still found a community through the hashtag (Kantor, 2021). Mendes et al. (2018) found that women using digital feminist hashtags such as #metoo and #beenrapedneverreported received numerous signs of support and solidary through favorites, retweets, or direct messages. Kachen et al. (2021) and Maier (2022) reported similar findings, stating many GVS felt that they found a community of support through #MeToo posts. In that sense, Burke's original goal of creating a community through the phrase "me too" was successful.

The accountability of mass media coverage and perpetrator accountability was also changed by #MeToo. Carlsen et al. (2018) researched what happened to high-profile men who were publicly accused during #MeToo. They found that 201 of them lost their

jobs or major roles. Of the 124 positions that received replacements, 54 of them were women. As Carlsen et al. (2018) stated, following the Weinstein report, women became a safer long-term hire. Hill and Stabile (2021) also discussed the societal change that occurred after #MeToo. They describe how "hactivists" exposed mishandlings of rape cases by large institutions. Mass media was forced to cover sexual assault and other gendered violence stories because the posts blanketed social media. As the stories came from GVS directly, mass media began to slightly shift language and publicity surrounding the stories, removing common rape myths involving a survivor's clothing or a perpetrator's accomplishments (Hill & Stabile, 2021). Once GVS saw that some perpetrators were being held accountable, there was no going back. Even though societal views in the United States have not completely flipped when it comes to gendered violence, tremendous strides have been taken to make workplaces, academia, and public spaces safer for GVS.

Although it may have felt like every GVS was sharing their story, some chose not to post. Masciantonio et al. (2021) found that many GVS were worried about Twitter rejection, unpredictable followers, or potential backlash from the public. In some cases, these fears were valid. After conducting an analysis of Twitter posts containing #MeToo, Nutbean and Mereish (2021) discovered six common themes: invalidation of survivor, disbelief of claims, alternate motives for post, concern for harm to accused, concern for preserving the patriarchy, and questioning the integrity of the movement. Even though there is risk in online disclosures, many scholars still state that the digital sphere is safer than in-person disclosures (Mendes et al., 2018). One way that survivors could avoid this backlash was by posting their experiences anonymously.

Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites (SNSs) have varying levels of anonymity afforded to users. For example, Facebook offers little anonymity to its users, as profiles contain names, photos, and networks of friends and family (Halpern & Gibbs, 2020). Twitter can offer more anonymity, but many users still know other users by name, which can create a more personal environment (Masciantonio et al., 2021). A SNS that offers complete anonymity is Reddit. Proferes et al. (2021) states that Reddit users can post under complete anonymity. The SNS does not even require an email address for account creation. This leniency also allows users to create "throw away" accounts, or accounts for limited use, if they do not want a post associated with their main account. Due to the anonymity offered by Reddit, it is an ideal SNS for #MeToo posts (Proferes et al., 2021). Along with anonymity, Reddit also boasts an impressive organizational strategy for posts.

As the self-proclaimed "front page of the internet," Reddit contains many types of posts, from personal narratives from users to links to external sources, and of course, current events (Jamnik & Lane, 2017). With 52 million active daily users, Reddit boasts an ever-replenishing stock of content (Proferes et al., 2021). To better organize this massive amount of information, Reddit contains over 138,000 subreddits, or topical communities. Each subreddit has a specific topic or area that all users in the topical community discuss. If other community members like a post, they can upvote it to push it further to the top of the discussion board. Vice versa, an unlikable vote can be downvoted to push a post further out of public visibility (Proferes et al., 2021). The large number of users and distinct communities create an exciting opportunity for researchers.

Scholars have utilized many SNSs and other websites for participant recruitment throughout the years (Shatz, 2017). Some sites are difficult to find targeted samples, while others are expensive for the researcher. However, Reddit is the perfect combination of SNS characteristics. Many of its users are slightly more educated than the average population. Reddit also tends to have older, more liberal individuals than the average population. Anonymity does create challenges for truly knowing the demographics of Reddit users. However, some studies have estimated the users skew young and male (Proferes et al., 2021). Massanari (2017) studied the anti-feminism and misogyny that has become rampant in some subreddits. This research study shines a light on Reddit's algorithm and anonymity features allowing toxicity and anti-women posts to thrive (Massanari, 2017). However, other academic studies, such as Shatz (2017) and Jamnik & Lane (2017) have estimated the demographics are a rough estimate of a general population, sometimes showing even more diversity than a college campus. In this sense, Reddit is one of the more reliable places to post surveys, as users are equipped to answer, are more likely to answer, and are a relatively accurate depiction of population demographics.

Academic researchers have only recently begun utilizing Reddit as an SNS for survey distribution, content analysis, and interview recruitment. All users who volunteer to participate in research are doing so voluntarily with no cost to the researcher (Jamnik & Lane, 2017). There are even some subreddits that are specifically targeted for academic surveys. One subreddit, r/SampleSize (n.d.), claims it is "where your opinions actually matter!" Within this subreddit, an entire community of users is interested in completing academic surveys and assisting in research. However, researchers have had

the most luck regarding survey recruitment when they solicit responses from multiple subreddits.

For example, one subreddit that was of use for this thesis was r/meToo (n.d.). This subreddit welcomes any users who have experienced gendered violence to share their experiences in as much or as little detail as they wish. This subreddit allows users to share stories, post links to resources, ask for advice, or request research participation. To better filter content, Reddit recommends filters to signal what type of post users have made. These filters include discussion, serious question, news, research/survey, announcement, social media link, and serious/personal. There are also a variety of subreddits linked from r/meToo, such as r/Rape, r/SexualViolence, r/SexualHarassment, r/DomesticViolence, and r/BreakTheSilence (r/meToo, n.d.). Reddit users can find community with like-minded people within these subreddits. The contexts of these subreddits often consist of outcasts, or individuals who do not feel like they belong elsewhere. Like much of the work surrounding gendered violence, GVS do not know how to discuss their experiences with other people. However, through specific community guidelines, afforded anonymity, and topic filters, GVS can break their silence and allow them to connect to others who understand.

Now that we have learned about gendered violence, the me too and #MeToo movements, and Reddit, we can dive into the foundational literature and methodology of the study. Chapter two employs the spiral of silence and the social identity model of deindividuation effects to create theoretical backing for the study. These theories are the basis of two research questions and three hypotheses related to why survivors chose to share their stories during #MeToo. Chapters three and four discuss the quantitative

methodological survey distributed to GVSs, the sample demographics, and the results of

the study. Finally, chapter five lays out implications, limitations, and future research

ideas.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects (SIDE)

The social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE) emphasizes group characteristics and decreases individuality amongst group members (Vilanova et al., 2017). The SIDE model is derived from social identity theory and self-categorization theory. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social identity theory implies that an individual belonging to groups will factor that belonging into their collective identity and individual identity. For example, Christians will often factor their religion into their collective identity and how that identity is expected to be communicated in their personal lives. In this theory, a group member does not forget who they are as an individual. However, the actions and wishes of the group do impact how the individual behaves and interacts with the world around them.

Self-categorization theory, originally coined by Turner et al. (1987), suggests two distinct levels of categorization: personal identity and social identity. At times, an individual may see themselves as a unique human being, unlike those around them. However, if they belong to a group with a strong social identity, the individual's characteristics may emphasize the group identity in some situations. During these occurrences, the individual tends to follow the rules and behaviors of the group, ignoring any actions that may decrease normativity among group actions (Turner et al., 1987). One example of this phenomenon is a woman who notices another woman being uncomfortable by a man's advances in a bar. This situation may cause the woman to emphasize her group identity as a woman by going up to the uncomfortable woman and speaking to her like they are friends or family to get her out of the man's proximity. Even

if these women would never have spoken in a different situation, the circumstance caused one to break societal norms to adhere to her social identity.

Finally, self-categorization theory and social identity theory are combined and applied to deindividuation. Originally a theory in psychology, deindividuation refers to a reduction in an individual's self-control as they become more embedded in a group identity (Festinger et al., 1952). Many scholars have theorized deindividuation at work in the actions of individuals in a group or crowd, such as French revolutionaries losing all sense of self and adhering to mob mentality. It was from examples like this that caused scholars to originally believe that crowds of people were uncontrollable, comparing them to riots and revolutions. However, much like self-categorization theory states, individuals in a group act in a controlled, meaningful way (Reicher et al., 1995). As deindividuation scholarship moves away from crowd mentality research, a new definition has formed. Vilanova et al. (2017) describes deindividuation as a situation where individual differences are minimized to greater impact the group identity. One example of this phenomenon is fundraising. Many fundraisers will highlight a common characteristic among potential donors, such as being a cancer survivor or former college athlete. Fundraisers use this common characteristic to encourage those that share it to donate to a cause that helps those like them. Much of the time, this is successful, with donors minimizing all other aspects of their life and donating to impact the identity they share with the fundraising goal.

Normative and Antinormative Behavior

Normative behavior is derived from social constructs. Most social constructs are completely dependent on the situation in which they occur. There are multiple theories

that attempt to define normative behavior and what causes it. Two theories that attempt to answer the question of behavioral influences are the theory of planned behavior and its extension, the theory of reasoned action (Madden et al., 1992). Both theories state that an individual's behavior is determined by their attitude about the behavior and the subjective norm. According to Madden et al. (1992), subjective norms are based on contexts, including attitudes of those around them and the situation in which the behavior would be occurring. The theory of reasoned action extends these two determining factors by adding a third: perceived behavioral control. Perceived behavioral control is defined as the resources and opportunities individuals think they have that will help them successfully complete the behavior. Lapinski and Rimal (2005) proposed the theory of normative social behavior (TNSB). TNSB focuses on injunctive and descriptive norms and the moderators of these behaviors.

TNSB's descriptive norms are based on the perception of what most people are doing (Rimal & Lapinski, 2015). For example, if a child does not see their parents drink at home, they might assume that they do not drink. Descriptive norms are moderated by outcome expectations, group identity, and injunctive norms (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). Injunctive norms are influenced by an individual's referent groups (Rimal & Lapinski, 2015). One example of an injunctive norm is the perception that you should not be late to work because your coworkers are consistently on time. TNSB also breaks normative influence down into collective and perceived norms. According to Lapinski and Rimal (2005):

> Collective norms operate at the level of the social system, which could be a social
> network or the entire society. They represent a collective social entity's code of

conduct. Collective norms emerge through shared interaction among members of

a social group or community, and the manner in which norms emerge is

dependent on, among other things, how they are transmitted and socially

construed. Perceived norms, on the other hand, exist at the individual,

psychological level. They represent each individual's interpretation of the

prevailing collective norm (p. 129)

Perceived norms can occur concurrently with the other types of norms or separately.

Antinormative behavior will occur when individuals are going against collective norms in

society. Due to the emphasis on group identity, TNSB is often used to describe

descriptive and injunctive normative influence in SIDE (Chung, 2019).

In terms of this thesis, descriptive and injunctive norms are seen at work in

#MeToo. GVS do not discuss their experiences very often because they do not see other

survivors coming forward or being successful when coming forward. Therefore, the

descriptive norm for GVS is to not discuss their experiences with gendered violence. The

injunctive norms in #MeToo came when survivors saw others sharing their story on

social media. Even though this may not have been a survivor's first choice, they

perceived it was what should be done because those around them were posting.

The SIDE Model

The SIDE model was proposed to extend the knowledge on collective norms in

group and social settings. Through SIDE, it is argued that individuals do not lose their

personal identity traits in a group. Instead, the individual transitions to a collective

identity when the group identity becomes salient. The term salient refers to any moment

where the individual perceives themselves as a member of the group instead of a unique

individual (Reicher et al., 1995). While previous deindividuation studies describe an individual's loss of self-awareness as the cause of antinormative behavior, the SIDE model proposes that the injunctive norms of the group are more important at that time (Postmes & Spears, 1998). In this way, the individual is behaving consistent with the situational group norms. These behaviors may not agree with societal or larger outgroup norms. This clash of what is viewed normative or antinormative will further strengthen social boundaries between the in- and out-group (Postmes et al., 1998).

Researchers have suggested two sides to the SIDE model: cognitive and strategic. Klein et al. (2007) has labeled the loss of self-awareness in a salient group identity the cognitive aspect of the theory. This loss of self-awareness is not permanent. Instead, the cognitive side of SIDE depicts moments when the individual identity is overpowered or muted on behalf of the group identity. This cognitive component will accentuate the shared characteristic among group members, drawing attention away from any trait that shows individuality (Klein et al., 2007). For example, GVS posting in #MeToo were not seen as individuals. Instead, each post highlighted the one thing they all share: being a GVS.

Klein et al. (2007) stated the strategic aspect refers to a group member's identity performance as they express normative and antinormative behaviors. Identity performance is considered strategic as it expresses injunctive normative behavior and enhances the overall group standing. As stated previously, the strategic side of SIDE can be seen by the sheer number of posts and responses that occurred during #MeToo. GVS responded to injunctive norms and furthered the purpose of the movement.

According to Klein et al. (2007), "behaviors that help consolidate social identities are not any less instrumental than behaviors that enlist group members to act toward a given collective goal" (p. 31). In other words, descriptive norms that individual group members perceive as necessary in the group are just as helpful as an individual behaving consistently with perceived injunctive norms of other group members. The consolidation of social identities can also have lasting impacts on the outgroups, as behavior within the group becomes less repressed by societal expectations (Klein et al., 2007). In this thesis, the phenomenon can be seen with the public becoming more aware of gendered violence issues as GVSs become less willing to censor their experiences.

Group Identification

Group identity is defined as individuals feeling a sense of belonging in a group (Klein et al., 2007). The group identity can be reinforced when individuals feel connected to the group message, identity category, or other group members. Group identity is strengthened and can become salient when individuals frequently interact with other members and receive affirmative responses to their actions and behaviors. A salient group identity can also influence an individual's actions. In a study by Tanis and Postmes (2005), participants were asked to give money to a stranger with hopes that the stranger returns their earnings. It was found that participants exhibited more trusting behavior towards individuals giving trusting social cues, such as an individual liking or commenting on another's post (Zalmanson et al., 2022). However, if the strangers were anonymous, participants were more likely to trust those sharing their group identity. The researchers also stated that members of the same group had higher perceptions of

trustworthiness towards individuals of the same group identity and higher expected reciprocity that the individual would return their money (Tanis & Postmes, 2005).

Individuals also tend to provide more support to those sharing their group identity. When students were asked to provide comments to peers' posts requesting support to a peer from their university (in-group) or a rival university (out-group), responses were predictable along group lines. It was found that students were much more likely to reply to posts from their in-group (Li & Zhang, 2021). Additionally, students provided more in-depth, action-based support to posts that already contained supportive replies from other in-group members. This study showcases the importance of group identification among members. Without identification, group identity and in-group normative behavior would not be possible (Klein et al., 2007). For example, #MeToo created a strong group signal to all GVSs. All a person had to do to find group members (fellow GVSs) was search for a hashtag. This strong and clear group identification created stronger in-group normative behavior.

Anonymity and Accountability

Research regarding the SIDE model has been heavily involved in the identifiability-anonymity continuum (Postmes et al., 1998). This continuum refers to the wide array of visibility a user could have, from having an identity completely hidden, to visible. Scholars have utilized computer-mediated communication (CMC) to better understand anonymous interaction. This sets SIDE apart in a new way, as older deindividuation research focused on face-to-face (FtF) projects (Vilanova et al., 2017). The concept of anonymity changes based on the CMC platform. Facebook often contains a closer network of friends, reducing chances of truly anonymous posts. On the other

hand, Twitter allows users to have no identifying factors on accounts, creating a much higher possibility of obscurity. Lea et al. (2001) found that visual anonymity increased levels of group attraction. Participants can relate to anonymous posts more easily, as there are no identifiers showing the originator, and thus exhibits no cues that the anonymous person is different from the participant (Chung, 2019). Postmes et al. (1998) states visual anonymity in CMC can nurture cohesion and attachment among group members. Chung (2019) supports this claim, stating that individuals will be more susceptible to situational injunctive norms and peer influence from within the group. The lack of individuating cues showing a user's personal identity creates a space where individuals only see themselves as members of a group identity and not as unique individuals (Chung, 2019).

The proposal of normative behavior in online groups seems difficult, especially when users may have altered identities and varying login times. However, research states that perceived group identity and perceived collective group norms will still become salient, even in asynchronous, anonymous situations (Postmes et al., 2000). According to Chung (2019), this perceived group identification in anonymous, asynchronous situations is still possible in recent years. Through their experiment, anonymous, asynchronous users were still able to identify with perceived descriptive norms and form a salient group identity. In fact, many researchers agree that obscured or restricted identifying factors will increase individual susceptibility to injunctive norms, stating "...behavior in line with a group identity may transgress the norms of a particular outgroup, and so we may only feel free to behave in this way under conditions of anonymity" (Postmes et al., 1998, p.

698). In these conditions of anonymity, it is important that both the individual and the group members are anonymous.

It is important to note that conditions of anonymity will not always cause group salience to occur. In some cases, anonymity will undermine the group identity. This is due to a low group salience and unclear group boundaries (Reicher et al., 1995). However, if a person is deeply immersed in the group, salience is still achievable.

As stated previously, anonymous individuals working collectively under a group identity may be hazardous for members of the out-group. For example, groups sending hateful messages may cause the receiver to internalize the messages or begin performing the normative behavior themselves (Chung, 2019). According to Postmes and Spears (2002), the Ku Klux Klan is a primary illustration of member diversity being hidden while highlighting the overall group identity. The anonymous nature protects all group members from consequences for their actions.

Through CMC, it is sometimes unlikely to remain completely anonymous (Kende et al., 2016). The extensive networks created in online platforms make it more difficult to conceal identities. Human communication is subjective, being impacted by many outside forces. For example, some research has shown that gender stereotypes are still present in anonymous communication. In one study, research participants were exposed to an activity depicting masculine or feminine stereotypes before entering a discussion regarding a gendered topic. When the conditions were completely anonymous, participants communicated along gender lines and acted on gender stereotypes (Postmes & Spears, 2002). This is due to gender identity being dependent on multiple factors, not just visibility.

Halpern and Gibbs (2013) investigated the effectiveness of discourse in two online settings: Facebook and YouTube. They found that Facebook created discussions that were well-balanced and polite. However, on YouTube, a platform that can effectively hide user identity, comments were much ruder and antisocial. Researchers hypothesize this contrast is due to the accountability of actions on Facebook and lack thereof on YouTube. In this situation, Facebook has created a stronger group identity with social cues. The dangers of anonymity in CMC were described as: "… that given the relative lack of social cues in CMC, individuals may find it easier to issue unpleasant decisions as they are divorced from the human consequences of their actions" (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013, p. 1160).

In relation to this thesis, anonymity can take away accountability for posts. While this may result in negative actions, such as those described above, anonymity also lets people post without consequence. For #MeToo, GVS were able to share their experiences under the guise of anonymity. They were not fearful of institutional backlash or doubt or blame from family and friends. The cognitive and strategic sides of the SIDE model, along with anonymity affordances, allowed GVS to tell the truth safely and on their own terms.

Spiral of Silence

The spiral of silence theory (SoS), originally coined by Noelle-Neumann, describes "the process by which individuals in the majority and minority opinion groups choose whether to express their opinion on a controversial and morally laden issue" (Gearhart & Zhang, 2018, p. 35). Initially written as a political theory, many researchers still use it to investigate political opinion expression (Matthes et al., 2018). As SoS has

diversified into other areas of opinion expression, it is still vital that the opinion has large

ethical or moral implications. It is thought that if an issue does not involve ethics or

morals, individuals will not fear voicing a dissenting opinion against a moral majority

(Matthes et al., 2018). Two examples that demonstrate the power of moral or ethical

topics can be found in football. If an individual is in Chicago, but does not like the

Chicago Bears, they would likely still be willing to express a dissenting opinion

regarding the team. However, the controversies surrounding football athletes kneeling for

the national anthem in support of Black Lives Matter is an issue that has a much higher

risk of being ethically or morally implicated.

Opinion

Zaller (1991) states "every opinion is a marriage of information and values –

information to generate a mental picture of what is at stake and values to make a

judgement about it" (p. 1215). In this definition, information refers to the flow of

information, whether that be found in mass media, interpersonal communication, or

education. Values are defined as stable predispositions to accept or reject information

stances. An individual's values could be based on their identity, personality, ideology,

etc. As values and information change, it is likely that an individual's opinions are also

subject to change (Zaller, 1991).

Public opinion is a major factor in SoS. According to Scheufele and Moy (2000),

"Perceptions of public opinion matter not only because individuals attend to their social

environment, but also because these perceptions potentially influence individual behavior

and attitudes" (p. 6). Public opinion can be characterized in two ways: rationality and

social control. Rational public opinion occurs when most of the public agrees on

judgements and are willing to participate in political processes. Social control public opinion creates consensus by threatening dissenting individuals with social isolation to better achieve cohesion. Public opinion being used as social control is the basis of SoS (Scheufele & Moy, 2000).

In SoS research, there is often a significant relationship between an individual perceiving a strong opinion climate and that individual's willingness to express an opinion that may or may not conform with the climate (Matthes et al., 2018). If an individual perceives the opinion climate to have a majority against their opinion, they will often remain silent. This silencing effect refers to an individual choosing to remain silent if they perceive the opinion climate to not be aligned with their personal opinion. This silencing effect will often allow individuals in a majority to become louder, while those in a minority become quieter (Matthes, 2015). In terms of this thesis, the doubt projected onto GVSs becomes a loud social majority, even if it is only a select group of people.

Fear of Isolation

Morrison (2022) discussed GVSs unwillingness to come forward for fear of doubt, blame, or pity from their receivers. The driving force behind the silencing effect involves an individual's fear of isolation. Noelle-Neumann (1974) describes that this fear can significantly impact individual expression, stating "not isolating himself is more important than his own judgement" (p. 43). Scheufele and Moy (2000) state that individuals are constantly scanning their environment to see which opinions will lead to societal approval or isolation. Social conformity, one of the most tested aspects of SOS,

involves individuals choosing to align with the perceived opinion climate (Matthes, 2015).

As conformity was previously discussed in the SIDE literature, it is important to note some differences. In SoS, social conformity refers to individuals remaining silent or adjusting opinions to conform to the moral majority (Matthes, 2015). In SIDE, social or group conformity relates to the individual behaving in ways that match the perceived injunctive norms (Chung, 2019).

Time is another, less tested, factor that gives the "spiral" namesake for this phenomenon. Matthes (2015) stated that changes in the perceived opinion climate will lead to changes in opinion expression. For example, in an experiment by Gearhart and Zhang (2018), they found that individuals are more willing to express a current minority opinion if they perceive the future opinion to align with their views. Therefore, time, whether that be through generations or directly involving how much time an individual is involved with the issue, can lessen the silencing effect (Matthes, 2015). As this thesis researched #MeToo, one must remember the time it was taking place. While not many perpetrators of gendered violence had been punished for their actions, some had. This could have caused some GVSs to feel more comfortable sharing their experiences because they could sense a future shift in public opinion.

Referent Groups

SoS was originally written in the context of societal opinion. However, studies have begun researching the effects of perceived opinion climate in smaller referent groups. Dalisay et al. (2012) states "individuals are likely to express opinions when their opinions align with those of their referent groups, and less likely to do so when they do

not" (p. 326). Referent groups are often more important to individuals than society at large, as they are made up of family, friends, and neighbors (Moy et al., 2001). These perceived "micro-opinion" climates can have the same or more impact on silencing opinion expression than community and societal perceived opinion climates. This is likely due to social rejection from a primary group being more meaningful to an individual (Moy et al., 2001). As discussed earlier in SIDE, perceived collective norms refer to the behaviors and social influence of the majority (Lapinksi & Rimal, 2005). Perceived opinion climates are focused on cognitive aspects, such as thoughts, attitudes, and opinions towards topics or behaviors (Moy et al., 2001). While these two key concepts may overlap at times, they are distinct and should not be used interchangeably.

In a similar study involving organizational communication, individuals were less likely to express personal identities if they perceived an unsupportive climate (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003). The researchers referred to this phenomenon as a second spiral of silence. In these situations, the individual in the outgroup will usually belong to an invisible minority, such as the LGBTQIA+ community. To maintain social cohesion of the ingroup, individuals will assimilate into the dominant culture while silencing any opinions that disclose their identity (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003). As discussed earlier, the SIDE model states individuals relate to the group identity and will conform to perceived group norms (Reicher et al., 1995). In this organizational study, individuals did not feel that they can express their anti-normative identity until they have a referent group that shares a similar identity or set of values, such as being accepting of LGBTQIA+ people (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003). In both theory applications, the queer identity was emboldened to engage in behaviors and identity expression due to the knowledge that

they were not in an isolated minority. A very similar finding can be seen in this thesis, where normally silent GVSs began speaking out due to the outpouring of posts showing that they are not the only one with these experiences.

CMC, Mass Media, and SNSs

There has been much debate surrounding disclosure in CMC. Self-disclosure is quite literally the opposite of silence, which creates a clear connection between disclosure and SoS literature. Ruppel et al. (2017) performed a meta-analysis of quantitative studies comparing FtF and CMC self-disclosure. They found that FtF disclosure was more prominent than disclosure in CMC. However, it was noted that CMC disclosure is likely increasing as technology becomes more available to individuals. In other studies, CMC has been shown to increase a person's willingness to self-disclose. Health communication scholars have observed patient-provider interactions in FtF and CMC channels. Lucas et al. (2014) found that patients were more comfortable disclosing personal information to a computer screen. It is hypothesized that this was due to the anonymity afforded causing a reduced fear of negative evaluation (Lucas et al., 2014).

Mass media can also have major impacts on an individual's willingness to express genuine opinions or self-disclose. Moy et al. (2001) states "through mass media, people assign importance to issues, learn of specifics regarding the issue, and more importantly, gauge the climate of opinion on a given issue" (p. 11). Mass media often covers opinion climates on ethical issues, therefore being an important asset to individuals scanning their environment for potential threats of isolation. Additionally, individuals that stay informed with media coverage are 8% more likely to express their opinion in any perceived climate (Moy et al., 2001). Scheufele and Moy (2000) described a similar media effect, stating

that shifts in the balance of issue coverage can cause a shift in an individual's willingness to express an opinion.

Many scholars have suggested that increased use of SNSs would cause SoS to dissipate (Matthes et al., 2018). Taimoor-ul-Hassan et al. (2019) have suggested a new theory: Spiral of social media. In this theory, it describes SNSs having much more opportunity for discourse and interaction among users compared to traditional media. The traditional media SoS was originally based off one-sided communication, which often promotes a particular perceived opinion climate through agenda setting (Meraz, 2009). In this format, viewers cannot interact with the content or perceive other viewers' interactions. In the spiral of social media, researchers state that users create networks of people with similar interests, which enables them to express opinions more freely (Taimoor-ul-Hassan et al., 2019). The spiral of social media has been compared to echo chambers. Terren and Borge (2021) describe echo chambers as a filter bubble, allowing users to select opinions they want to be exposed to while effectively blocking out alternative views.

While the spiral of social media is still new, many other studies have found that the silencing effect is not weakened or absent in online communication. Researchers suggest this is due to opinion scanning that is still able to occur on SNSs through other users' interactions with posts (Matthes et al., 2018). As Moy et al. (2001) described earlier, reference groups are more influential on opinion expression than the society at large. In this sense, a tight-knit social network could be more impactful on expression than FtF. Gearhart and Zhang (2018) found that SoS is especially prominent on Facebook, likely due to the overlap between friends on the platform and in FtF situations.

News media organizations are also on SNSs, which brings more controversial opinions to an individual's attention (Matthes et al., 2018). Duncan et al. (2020) discussed the importance of perceived opinion climates in news stories online. This is due to the social cues embedded in comment sections of controversial issues. They found that perceived opinion climates can promote consensus and influence individual opinions in direction of the majority (Duncan et al., 2020).

As this research will pertain to Reddit, it is important to connect social cues in comment threads in the platform. Proferes et al. (2021) describes Reddit as a mostly public discussion forum made up of posts and subreddits. Subreddits are moderated by a qualified moderator and create threads of posts and comments that relate directly to the subreddit discussion. Posts and comments on Reddit can be voted on to increase visibility (Proferes et al., 2021). As Duncan et al. (2020) discussed earlier, social cues in comment sections of SNSs are another way to determine the perceived opinion climate, as the majority opinion should become more visible on Reddit through votes.

Rationale

SIDE and SoS have not been combined in any notable scholarly work. However, there are many similarities between the two theories, especially when looking at the process of speaking out to create change. The strategic component of SIDE can be used to spur collective action and generate social change. In SoS, collective action by a group that shares their opinions could help individuals previously silenced have a voice (Duncan et al., 2020). Kende et al. (2016) found that receiving affirmation in online platforms caused individuals to become more motivated to act on behalf of the group identity. This result was found in anonymous and identifiable situations. The researchers

suggest that a level of identifiability and accountability increased the overall group performance. While much research involving SIDE works with the identifiability-anonymity continuum, an individual having anonymity is not necessary if the group identity is salient (Kende et al., 2016). Tarana Burke (2021) described one survivor's experience with #Metoo as relieving, stating:

> …so many people had pulled these memories from the pits of their stomachs and the recesses of their minds. They came forward not knowing what would come next but feeling far too compelled by the promise of community to let the moment pass them by. They hoped, for the first time, that they might feel less alone by sharing. Here was a woman feeling less alone because she had found a place to be seen (para. 20).

In this quote, both SoS and SIDE can be interpreted. Perceived deindividuation in a salient group identity is related to group members abiding by a perceived group norm regardless of any potential damage. #MeToo also provided a visible majority for survivors, a previously minority opinion, to feel safe sharing their experiences and opinions regarding gendered violence.

The #MeToo movement showcased the power of SoS, as the movement spurred public conversation by motivating GVS to stop self-censoring themselves for fear of isolation (Maier, 2022). The sheer number of posts containing #MeToo allowed a level of anonymity GVS would not have received in face-to-face reporting. Incidents of gendered violence range from horrific crimes to workplace discrimination (Kachen et al., 2021). GVS often choose between censoring themselves or experiencing more trauma from law enforcement, the perpetrators of the crime, and in some cases, public scrutiny. Therefore,

many people remain silent, refusing to share their stories with anyone that could put an end to the issue. The posts containing #MeToo did not necessarily get investigated. However, most people did not join the movement with that goal in mind. More than anything, GVS wanted the chance to be heard, something many had yet to experience in their personal and professional lives.

SIDE is frequently cited in a negative light, creating instances where individuals go against societal norms to follow a group identity whether it is socially acceptable or not. Klein et al. (2007) hypothesized that SIDE can strategically consolidate and mobilize individuals to coordinate social action. For example, if a group identity is strong enough, it can influence outgroup opinion to shift. A study by Chung (2019) demonstrated this phenomenon. After reading a neutral article on e-cigarettes and anonymous comments stating positive or negative views, survey results showed participant perspectives were influenced by the comments shown. If readers were able to identify with the commenter or the commenter's perspective, they were more likely to agree with the post and adopt the perceived injunctive norm. More specifically, readers' perceptions of e-cigarettes were altered following their acceptance of the perceived injunctive norm presented to them. This is due to the lack of identity cues that would show the commenter as someone unlike the individual reading the post (Chung, 2019). Many SoS and #MeToo articles also involve perceptions of opinions or attitudes in the majority. Duncan et al. (2020) found that an individual perceiving strong opinions in SNSs will be more likely to adjust their own beliefs or attitudes regarding the opinion. Also, Aroustamian (2020) acknowledged the importance mass media and SNSs have in agenda setting and public opinion perceptions of issues, such as gendered violence or e-cigarettes.

GVS are often silent due to the massive amount of doubt and blame society places on them. As there is a high chance that GVS will experience isolation or backlash, many choose not to report any incidents of gendered violence. Wu and Atkin (2018) observed higher levels of anonymity increasing genuine opinions shared by participants. In that same study, it was found that perceived support from other commenters on a social media platform fostered willingness to post. Similarly, Gearhart and Zhang (2018) examined a stronger willingness to post minority opinions if participants felt the climate around the topic was shifting soon.

Reddit offers the perfect platform for GVS to achieve anonymity and feel supported by fellow users (Proferes, 2021). The interactive makeup of the platform allowed GVS the privacy to self-disclose and be able to help other group members (Maier, 2022). In this platform, it is also likely that GVS would feel accepted as a part of the ingroup without self-disclosing. Massanari (2017) noted that some subreddits amplify anti-feminist posts, as misogynistic users upvote derogatory posts to the tops of feeds. Other subreddits focus on supporting survivors of gendered violence (r/meToo, n.d.). SNS will not always welcome dissenting opinions, such as those speaking out against a majority complicit in violence. It is therefore important that GVS that posted on any SNS during #MeToo are accounted for.

SIDE and SoS studies have both shown that participants will participate in antinormative behaviors if they have a strong group identity and anonymity. It is hypothesized that individuals will be more susceptible to perceived group norms if they are experiencing perceived deindividuation (Postmes & Spears, 1998). Due to this

perceived deindividuated state, it is likely that GVS felt less willing to self-censor their experiences on behalf of the opposing majority (Klein et al., 2007).

RQ1: How does perceived **group identity** with GVS on a SNS differ between GVS who created a #MeToo post and those who did not?

RQ2: How does **perceived anonymity** for an SNS of GVS differ between GVS who created a #MeToo post and those who did not?

H1: **Perceived deindividuation** will be higher among GVS who created a #MeToo post compared to those who did not.

H2: **Perceived group identity** and **perceived anonymity** will positively predict **perceived deindividuation**.

H3: GVS will report less **willingness to self-censor** (WSC) about their experiences during #MeToo, compared to their WSC in present day.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Now that I have discussed the purpose of this study and literature involved, I will describe the methodology used. In this chapter, I discuss my quantitative methodology and sample collected. I will lay out my survey design and distribution, instrumentation, and sample.

Design

I created a cross-sectional survey using QuestionPro. The survey was disseminated through my personal Facebook and Instagram pages. The survey was also posted on subreddits focused around academic surveys or gendered violence. The chosen subreddits were: r/MeToo, r/PTSD, /WomensHealth, r/Rape, r/MenGetRapedToo, r/TitleIX, r/TraumaToolBox, r/SampleSize, and r/SurveyExchange. Additionally, the survey was distributed through the National Communication Association's (NCA) CommNotes email list, the NCA Women's Caucus Facebook group, the South Dakota State University (SDSU) Communication and Journalism Instagram page, and SDSU campus flyers. Survey recruitment messages encouraged participants to share the survey with others, so it is expected that the survey was also shared on personal Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts. Recruitment messages and where participants found the survey can be found in Appendix A. The primary purpose of this survey was to study participants' reasoning for choosing to post or not post during #MeToo.

Instrumentation

The survey was a combination of 59 open- and close-ended questions. Eligibility questions required participants to choose the type(s) of gendered violence they

experienced (as introduced in Chapter One), when they first heard of #MeToo, and whether they had a social media account. In the demographics section, the following information was collected: age, race, gender identity, sexual orientation. Likert-scale questions were used for perceived anonymity, social identification, perceived deindividuation, and WSC. One open-ended question was used for participants to explain why they chose to post or not in #MeToo. This question was not thematically analyzed in this thesis due to time constraints.

Participants were required to select the type(s) of gendered violence they experienced (see the survey in Appendix B). As gendered violence is not a well-known term, participants were presented with four forms of gendered violence, including definitions and examples (Fixmer-Oraiz & Wood, 2019, p. 240). Examples from this section of the survey included "gender intimidation," which includes the definition "treatment that leads to an individual feeling vulnerable or unsafe." Examples of gender intimidation included "groping, stalking, sexist comments, and publicly masturbating in one's presence" (Fixmer-Oraiz & Wood, 2019).

Sample

To be eligible, participants were required to be 18 years of age, have at least one social media account, be a GVS, and have awareness of #MeToo. After removing ineligible participants and bots, 256 participants were left in the sample. Most participants were located in the U.S. Due to the sensitive nature of this survey, participant privacy was a high priority. Participants were encouraged to take the survey in a private location on a safe connection.

This study received IRB approval (#IRB-2312008-EXM) before initiation. Special ethical consideration was given to participants to guarantee their anonymity. An informed consent was presented at the beginning of the survey, detailing content warnings to protect participants' mental health and links to resources if they needed help before, during, or after the survey. These links were available in the consent form, footer of each survey page, and in the Thank You and Termination pages. After completing the survey, participants had the chance to enter their email address into a drawing for a $25 Amazon gift card. For this drawing, participants were given a separate survey link in the Thank You page. This allowed them to enter identifiable information without any chance of linking to previous survey data.

Sample Demographics

After removing bots and ineligible participants, 256 responses were used for data analysis. Most participants were women (75.8%), white (82.0%), heterosexual (61.4%), and had an average age of 28 ($SD = 7.2$) years old. The complete demographics can be found in Table 1. Additional identities refer to those who marked genderqueer, nonbinary, agender, or prefer to self-describe. Additional races and identities refer to all those who preferred to self-describe or marked other.

Table 1

Gender, Race, and Sexual Orientation

Demographic variable	Demographic	Percent	Frequency
	Women	75.8%	194
	Men	14.5%	37
Gender (n = 255)	Transgender men	3.1%	8
	Additional identities*	6.3%	16
Race (n = 255)	White or Caucasian	82.0%	210

	American Indian or Alaska Native	7.4%	19
	Black or African American	5.9%	15
	Asian	3.9%	10
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1.2%	3
	Hispanic or Latino	2.7%	7
	Additional races and identities	2.4%	6
Sexuality (n = 252)	Straight	61.4%	154
	Gay or lesbian	6.0%	15
	Bisexual	25.0%	63
	Queer	8.0%	20

Gendered Violence Experience. All participants have experienced some form of violence. 36.7% of the sample has experienced only one form of gendered violence, while 63.3% of the sample has experienced two or more forms of gendered violence. Tables 2 - 8 showcase the types of gendered violence and how they differ based on gender, sexuality, and race.

Table 2

Participant Gendered Violence Experience

Type of Gendered Violence	Percent	Frequency
Gender Intimidation	60.5%	155
Sexual Harassment	57.4%	147
Sexual Assault	46.9%	120
Intimate Partner Violence	39.1%	100
Experienced, but prefer not to answer	7.0%	18

Note. N = 256

Table 3

Gendered Violence Experience Based on Participant Gender Identity

	Type of gendered violence				
Gender Identity	Gender Intimidation	Sexual Harassment	Sexual Assault	Intimate Partner Violence	Experienced, but prefer

38

	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	not to answer %	N
Women (n = 194)	64.9%	125	56.2%	109	52.6%	102	37.6%	72	5.2%	100
Men (n = 37)	48.6%	17	62.2%	23	10.8%*	4	37.8%	13	16.2%	5
Additional gender identities (n = 16)	50%	8	56.3%	9	62.5%	10	43.8%	7	12.5%	2
Transgender Men (n = 8)	37.5%	3	75%	6	50%	4	62.5%	5	0	0

*Note. N = 255. *p < .001.*

Differences by gender identity. Sexual assault was experienced by 46.9% of participants in this study ($n = 120$). Men were significantly less likely to experience sexual assault (10.8%, $n = 4$), compared with women (52.6%, $n = 102$) and people with additional gender identities (62.5%, $n = 10$), $\chi^2 (3, 255) = 26.6$, $p < .001$. No other gender identity differences were observed (i.e., for gender intimidation, sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, experienced but not specified).

Table 4

Gendered Violence Experience Based on Participant Sexuality

	Type of gendered violence									
Sexuality	Gender Intimidation		Sexual Harassment		Sexual Assault		Intimate Partner Violence		Experienced, but prefer not to answer	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Straight (n = 154)	53.9%*	83	59.7%	92	42.9%	66	35.7%	55	5.2%	8
Gay or Lesbian (n = 15)	66.7%	10	80.0%	12	26.7%	4	26.7%	4	6.7%	1

	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Bisexual (n = 63)	74.6%*	47	52.4%	33	54.0%	34	52.4%	33	7.9%	5
Queer (n = 20)	60.0%	12	40.0%	8	70.0%*	14	35.0%	7	20.0%	4

Note. $N = 252$. *$p < .001$

Differences by sexuality. A chi-square test revealed significant differences in gender intimidation by sexuality, χ^2 (6, 252) = 8.57, $p = .036$. For all groups, significantly more participants experienced gender intimidation than did not. In particular, bisexual participants were significantly more likely to experience gender intimidation than all other groups.

There was a significant difference in sexual assault by sexuality, χ^2 (3, 252) = 9.22, $p = .026$. Among queer participants, significantly more reported experiencing sexual assault than not. On the other hand, gay or lesbian participants were significantly more likely to report *not* experiencing sexual assault.

There were no significant differences by sexuality for sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, or experiencing gender violence but not specifying.

Table 5
Gendered Violence Experience Based on Participant Race

Race	Type of gendered violence									
	Gender Intimidation		Sexual Harassment		Sexual Assault		Intimate Partner Violence		Experienced, but prefer not to answer	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
White (n = 199)	63.8%	127	58.8%	117	49.7%	99	40.2%	80	6.5%	13
American Indian and Alaska Native (n = 17)	29.4%	5	52.9%	8	11.8%**	2	29.4%	5	5.9%	1
Asian (n = 10)	40.0%	4	60.0%	6	20.0%	2	20.0%	2	10.0%	1

Black (n = 15)	60.0%	9	46.7%	7	53.3%	8	40.0%	6	6.7%	1
Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian (n = 3)	33.3%	1	0	0	0	0	33.3%	1	66.7%*	2
Other (n = 3)	100.0%	3	66.7%	2	66.7%	2	33.3%	1	0	0
Hispanic (n = 8)	62.5%	5	75.0%	6	87.5%**	7	62.5%	5	0	0

Note. $N = 255$. ** $p < .001$. * $p = .008$.

Racial differences. Results from the Likelihood Ratio test (based on Maximum likelihood method), using the Bonferroni correction method, revealed significant differences in gender intimidation by race, χ^2 (6, 255) = 13.29, $p = .039$. Specifically, American Indian/Alaskan Native were significantly *less* likely to experience gender intimidation than White and "other" race participants. Additionally, *among* White participants a significantly greater proportion reported experiencing gender intimidation than not. Finally, among American Indian and Alaska Natives, significantly fewer reported experiencing gender intimidation than not.

There were significant differences in sexual assault by race, χ^2 (6, 255) = 23.86, $p < .001$. Specifically, American Indian/Alaskan Native participants were significantly *less* likely to experience sexual assault, compared with Black participants and White participants. Hispanic participants were significantly *more* likely to experience sexual assault than White participants.

There were no significant differences in experiences of intimate partner violence, based on race. There were no significant differences in experiences of sexual harassment, based on race.

#MeToo Posting Behavior. To gauge #MeToo knowledge and engagement, participants were asked to disclose whether they posted, and if so, where and when they posted, if they included #MeToo, and if they created an anonymous account for the post.

Within this sample, 18.0% (*n* = 46) of participants posted during #MeToo, 59.8% (*n* = 153) of participants did *not* post, and 22.3% (*n* = 57) posted online but preferred not to say why. For data analysis, concerning differences in posting behavior, we collapsed the responses of "posted" and "posted but preferred not to say why." This resulted in a dichotomous variable where 40.2% (*n* = 103) of participants posted and 59.8% (*n* = 153) did not post. Of people who posted, 77.8% (*n* = 35) said they used #MeToo and 22.2% (*n* = 10) said they did not use the hashtag. Of people who "preferred not to say," 85.5% (*n* = 47) said they used #MeToo and 14.5% (*n* = 8) said they did not. These differences were not significant.

To analyze posting behavior dichotomously, participants who posted were combined with participants who preferred not to say why they posted. From this combination, it is assumed that 40.2% (*n* = 103) of the total sample created a post disclosing a gendered violence experience.

97 participants moved on to answer questions regarding the anonymity of their post. 80.4% (*n* = 78) stated that an anonymous account was created specifically for the #MeToo post. The complete list of platforms used and anonymous accounts created is listed in Table 6 below.

Table 6

Platform and Anonymity Choices for #MeToo Posts

Platform	Created anonymous account	Did not create anonymous account	Platform posts overall

	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*
Facebook	72.9%	35	27.1%	13	49.5%	48
Twitter	88.9%	16	11.1%	2	18.6%	18
Instagram	80.0%	8	20.0%	2	10.3%	10
Pinterest	100%	3	0	0	3.1%	3
Snapchat	100%	3	0	0	3.1%	3
Reddit	100%	3	0	0	3.1%	3
TikTok	83.3%	10	16.7%	2	2.4%	12
Total	80.4%	78	19.6%	19	100%	97

There were no differences in posting based on race.

    Gender differences. Most participants who posted were women (78.3%, *n* = 36). At the same time, a significantly greater proportion of women (64.4%, *n* = 125) chose *not* to post, compared with the proportion of men (48.6%, *n* = 18) who chose not to post. Men (48.6%, *n* = 18) were significantly more likely to prefer not to explain why they posted, compared with women (17.0%, *n* = 33), χ^2 (6, 255) = 16.72, *p* = .010.

    Differences by gendered violence type. Gender intimidation was experienced by about 60.5% (*n* = 155) of participants in this study. Participants who experienced gender intimidation were 3 times *less* likely to post than those who did not experience it, χ^2 (2, 256) = 8.39, *p* = .015. When we look at the sample in terms of who posted and who did not, participants who experienced gender intimidation made up 65.4% (*n* = 100) of those who did *not* post and 43.9% (*n* = 25) of those who preferred not to say why they posted.

    Sexual assault was experienced by 46.9% of participants in this study (*n* = 120). Participants who experienced sexual assault were more than 3 times *less* likely to post than those who had not experienced sexual assault, χ^2 (2, 256) = 22.59, *p* < .001. When we look at the sample in terms of who posted and who did not, participants who experienced sexual assault made up 56.9% (*n* = 87) of those who did *not* post and 21.1% (*n* = 12) of those who preferred not to say why they posted.

No differences were observed in posting based on experiences of sexual harassment or intimate partner violence.

Perceived Anonymity

Participants were asked to evaluate the perceived anonymity afforded to them by the SNS they most associate with #MeToo. The social media affordances perceived anonymity scale was kept with original wording (Fox & McEwan, 2017, p. 305). The scale contains seven items and has been found to be reliable (α = .95). Example items from the scale include "This channel can make me anonymous to the person I am communicating with" and "This channel can mask my true identity when communicating" (Fox & McEwan, 2017, p. 305). Participants rated their SNS's perceived anonymity affordance using a five item Likert-scale of choices "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

After data collection closed, a reliability analysis determined that one scale item was weak. This item is "This platform/app makes it difficult to conceal one's identity when communicating." Likert-scale choices were assigned a 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. Most participants rated their SNS platform's anonymity affordance above the midpoint (M = 3.2, SD = .9). The updated six item scale has been found to be reliable (α = .89).

Social Identification

Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they identified with people who participated in the #MeToo movement. The social identification scale was reformatted to pertain to group identity and participation in #MeToo (Wu & Atkin, 2018, Appendix B, Table 2). The scale contains 12 items and has been found to be reliable (α =

0.93). Example items from the scale include "I feel a bond with those who posted/commented" and "I regard those who posted/commented as important" (Wu & Atkin, 2018, Appendix B, Table 2). Participants rated their feelings towards #MeToo posters using a five item Likert-scale of choices "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

After data collection closed, a reliability analysis determined that two scale items were weak. These items were "I see myself as quite different from the people who posted/commented" and "My values are different than the people who posted/commented." Likert-scale choices were assigned a 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. Most participants rated group identification above the scale's midpoint ($M = 3.5$, $SD = .5$). The updated ten item scale has been found to be reliable ($\alpha = .79$).

Perceived Deindividuation

Two studies have attempted to create a scale for perceived deindividuation. Kim and Park (2011) created a 4-item scale of deindividuation, which was found to be reliable ($\alpha = .90$). Their items included (1) I think I could be who I am in this group (reversed item), (2) I think I saw myself predominantly as an individual in this group (reversed item), (3) I think I was not considered as a distinctive individual in this group, and (4) I think members in this group were not represented as unique individuals in this group. Perceived deindividuation was positively correlated with conformity and group identity, in line with SIDE literature. Mikal et al. (2016) also used Kim and Park's scales for deindividuation and conformity, however, statistical analysis revealed that only 2 of the deindividuation items were valid. They had to be combined with items measuring conformity, and that scale had low, but acceptable, reliability, $\alpha = .75$.

Kim and Park's deindividuation items do not deal directly with SNSs, and Mikal et al. (2016) did not find the scale to be reliable. Even if I were to use Kim and Park's scale, it would need to be modified so much to fit this context that it would create a new scale. Thus, I decided to create a scale, in collaboration with my advisor, Dr. Jennifer Anderson, to measure deindividuation specific to this context. We did this by looking into the definition of deindividuation and wrote constructs that relate to the construct provided in the literature. The scale contains 10 items. The items have face validity, as all items are related to the construct. We also confirmed our scale validity with an expert in SIDE research, Dr. Kathryn Coduto. The final measure included 9 items (listed below), which used a Likert response scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). On average, participants rating their perceived deindividuation fell slightly above the scale's midpoint ($M = 3.1$, $SD = .7$). The scale has been found to be reliable ($\alpha = .85$).

1. I thought of myself less as an individual and more as part of the group of gendered violence survivors.
2. I saw no distinction between myself and other gendered violence survivors posting in #MeToo.
3. I cared more about the #MeToo movement than about myself as an individual.
4. I saw myself more as a member of gendered violence survivors than as an individual.
5. I was more focused on gendered violence survivors posting #MeToo than I was myself.
6. I was less concerned about what would happen to me if I posted than what would happen to other gendered violence survivors.
7. I was thinking so much about #MeToo that I thought very little about myself.
8. Being part of the group of gendered violence survivors was more important than who I was as an individual.
9. Anytime I thought about gendered violence, I thought of #MeToo.

WSC

Participants were asked to rate their willingness to share their opinion or experience regarding gendered violence during #MeToo and in present day. The WSC

scale was modified to apply to gendered violence survivors (Hayes et al., 2010, p. 272).

The scale contains six items and has been found to be reliable ($\alpha = .79$) (Hayes et al.,

2010, p. 259). Two of the eight items were removed from the scale due to incompatibility

with the research question. The redacted questions were "When I disagree with others,

I'd rather go along with them than argue about it" and "If I disagree with others, I have

no problem letting them know it." The remaining six items were printed twice in the

survey, to allow for participants to rate their WSC during and after #MeToo. Example

items from the scale include: "There have been many times when I have thought others

around me were wrong, but I didn't let them know" and "It is safer to keep quiet than

publicly speak an opinion that you know most others don't share" (Hayes et al., 2005, p.

272). Participants rated their WSC using a five item Likert-scale of choices "strongly

agree" to "strongly disagree."

No questions regarding perceived norms were asked. Through previous research,

it is established that the original perceived norm for gendered violence is that GVS do not

talk about their experience (Masciantonio et al., 2021). However, during #MeToo, GVS

felt pressured to post because the rest of the group was posting (Maier, 2022). In this

study, self-disclosure was coded as a lower WSC.

After data collection closed, a reliability analysis determined that all scale items

were strong. Likert-scale choices were assigned a 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for

strongly agree. Participants rating their WSC during #MeToo tended to be above the

midpoint ($M = 3.6$, $SD = .7$). Participants rating their WSC after #MeToo also tended to

be above the midpoint of the scale $M = 3.5$, $SD = .7$). The scale prompting users to rate

their WSC during #MeToo has been found to be reliable ($\alpha = .70$). The scale prompting

users to rate their WSC after #MeToo has been found to be reliable ($\alpha = .75$).

Data Diagnosis

IP addresses were collected by QuestionPro automatically. Immediately after

closing the survey, IP addresses were deleted from the academic survey to protect

participant anonymity. Participant entries that were unable to answer the two human

verification questions were removed. Finally, participants unable to meet the eligibility

requirements were removed from the overall results. To remove bots from the Amazon

gift card drawing survey, duplicate IP addresses and illegitimate email addresses were

deleted. Examples of email addresses we removed were: urhrudhfurhfibfjff@gmail.com,

vdksbdidbdhdufvrudhudvd@gmail.com, and hdudvdhdvdh@gmail.com.

As scales were reformatted, created, or shortened, reliability was checked before

analysis. Prior to conducting additional analyses, potential covariates were tested by

examining the relationship between demographic variables and theoretical variables:

group identity, perceived anonymity, WSC, and deindividuation. If any significant

relationships were found, those covariates were used as control variables in the

ANOVAs, regression model, and repeated measures ANOVA

To answer RQ1, RQ2, and H1, a series of ANOVAs were run to compare those

who posted with those who did not, with respect to the following variables: group

identity, anonymity, and deindividuation. A p-value of 0.05 or lower indicated a

significant difference between the groups. A linear regression was used to analyze data

for H2. In the first step, covariates were entered. In the second step, group identity and

perceived anonymity were entered to test for main effects on deindividuation. In the third

step, interaction between group identity and perceived anonymity was assessed. To answer H3, a repeated measures ANOVA was used to compare GVS's typical WSC about their experiences, compared to their WSC during #MeToo.

Correlations

I first reviewed the correlations between all theoretical variables and the continuous demographic variable of age. These can be seen in the correlation matrix in Table 7. Age was significantly, negatively related to the theoretical variables of WSC during #MeToo, r (251) = -.19, p = .003, and current WSC, r (227) = -.18, p < .001. Thus, age will be included in analyses where these variables serve as dependent variables.

Table 7

Correlation Matrix

	Age	WSC During #MeToo	Current WSC	Deindividuation	Anonymity
WSC During #MeToo	-.19**				
Current WSC	-.18**	.77**			
Deindividuation	0.04	-.13*	-0.08		
Anonymity	-.10	-0.08	-0.05	.38**	
Group Identification	0.04	0.03	0.07	.45**	0.10

Note. N = 227 – 251.

*p < .01, **p < .001

Covariates

Using the guidelines of Tabachnick & Fidell (1996), I tested for potential relationships between the specified theoretical outcome variables: group identity,

anonymity, deindividuation, and WSC and categorical, demographic variables. The categorical variables included: race, gender, sexual orientation, and type of gendered violence experienced. As noted above, age was significantly related to WSC during #MeToo and now, so it will be included as a covariate in analyses when those variables serve as DVs. The table below indicates which additional covariates will be used in tests where each theoretical variable will serve as the DV. Note: no categorical or continuous variables were significantly related to perceived group identity, so analyses with that variable as a DV will not include any covariates.

Table 8

Significant Covariates

Theoretical Variable	Covariates					
	Age	Gender	Race	Sexual Assault	Gender Intimidation	Unspecified gendered violence
WSC During #MeToo	x			x		
Current WSC	x			x		
Perceived Anonymity		x	x	x	x	
Perceived Deindividuation		x		x	x	x
Perceived Group Identity						

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this brief chapter, I will discuss the results of my two research questions and three hypotheses. These results will be interpreted in detail in chapter five.

Perceived Group Identity

RQ1 focused on differences in perceived group identity based on posting status. No control variables were needed for this ANOVA. In answer to RQ1, those who posted felt greater group identification ($M = 3.6$, $SD = .5$) than those who did *not* post ($M = 3.5$, $SD = .4$), $F (1, 241) = 5.57$, $p = .02$. Posting explained only 2.3% of variance in group identity.

Perceived Anonymity

RQ2 focused on the differences in perceived anonymity for GVS based on posting status. For the ANCOVA test, I controlled for gender, race, and experiences with gender intimidation and sexual assault. In answer to RQ2, those who posted reported a greater perception of anonymity ($M = 3.5$, $SD = .6$) than those who did not report posting ($M = 2.9$, $SD = 1.0$), $F (1, 239) = 17.3$, $p < .001$. Posting explained 15.7% of the variance in perceived anonymity, after accounting for the impact of covariates.

Perceived Deindividuation

H1 predicted that perceived deindividuation would be higher among GVS who posted compared to those who did not. For the ANCOVA test, I controlled for gender and experiences with gender intimidation, sexual assault, and unspecified gender violence. H1 was supported, in that those who posted felt greater deindividuation ($M = 3.4$, $SD = .6$) than those who did not post ($M = 2.9$, $SD = .8$), $F (1, 104) = 20.91$, $p < .001$. Posting

explained an additional 16.1% of the variance in perceived deindividuation, after accounting for control variables.

H2 predicted that perceived group identity and perceived anonymity would positively predict perceived deindividuation. In this hierarchical linear regression model, the following covariates were used in Step 1: gender, experience with sexual assault, experience with gender intimidation, and experience with gendered violence (unspecified). In Step 2, I added the theoretical variables of group identity and perceived anonymity. Both perceived anonymity ($\beta = .44$) and group identity ($\beta = .29$) were significant positive predictors of perceived deindividuation. These variables together explained an additional 29% of variance in perceived deindividuation, after accounting for control variables. This was a significant change in variance explained, $F (2, 224) = 50.57, p < .001$. Thus, H2 was supported.

In a *post hoc* test, posting behavior was added as a third step in the hierarchical linear regression described above. It too was a significant, positive predictor of perceived deindividuation ($\beta = .16$) and explained an additional 2.1% of variance in perceived deindividuation. See Table 9 below for detailed regression model results.

Table 9

Hierarchical Regression Results for Deindividuation

Variable	B	95% CI for B		SE B	β	R^2	ΔR^2
		LL	UL				
Step 1						.08**	
Constant	3.38	3.10	3.65	.14			
Gender	-.02	-.15	.11	.07	-.02		

	B	LL	UL	SE	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Experience with sexual assault	-.35	-.54	-.16	.10	-.24**		
Experience with gender intimidation	-.16	-.36	.03	.10	-.11		
GV unspecified	.16	-.24	.56	.20	.05		
Step 2						.37**	.29**
Constant	.35	-.29	.99	.32			
Gender	-.01	-.12	.10	.06	-.01		
Experience with sexual assault	-.28	-.44	-.11	.08	-.20**		
Experience with gender intimidation	-.09	-.25	.08	.08	-.06		
GV unspecified	.16	-.17	.49	.17	.05		
Group identity	.62	.47	.77	.08	.44**		
Perceived anonymity	.24	.14	.33	.05	.29**		
Step 3						.39**	.02*
Constant	.47	-.17	1.1	.32			
Gender	-.03	-.14	.08	.05	-.03		
Experience with sexual assault	-.24	-.41	-.08	.08	-.05*		
Experience with gender intimidation	-.07	-.24	.09	.17	.02		
GV unspecified	.07	.08	-.26	.40	.02		
Group identity	.56	.44	.74	.08	.41**		
Perceived anonymity	.21	.12	.30	.05	.25**		
Posting behavior	.24	.01	.42	.09	.16*		

Note. N = 223. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit.
*p < .05, **p < .001

Willingness to Self-Censor

H3 predicted that GVS will report less WSC about their experience *during* #MeToo, compared to their WSC in present day. Results indicate that WSC during #MeToo (*M* = 3.6, *SD* = .7) was *higher* than it is now (*M* = 3.5, *SD* = .7), but this difference was not significant, *t* (226) = 1.81, *p* = .07. Thus, H3 was not supported.

In a *post hoc* test, I considered whether there were differences in WSC *within* the two time points, based on posting behavior. First, I looked at WSC *during* #MeToo. I

conducted an ANCOVA with age and sexual assault as covariates, posting behavior as the IV, and WSC during #MeToo as the DV. Results indicate that, *during* #MeToo, WSC was lower among those who posted ($M = 3.3$ $SD = .5$) compared with those who did *not* post ($M = 3.8$, $SD = .7$), $F (1, 247) = 15.08$, $p < .001$. The same pattern emerged for present WSC, as indicated by an ANOVA using age, sexual assault experience, and experience with gender intimidation as covariates and posting behavior as the predictor. Results indicate that, presently, WSC is significantly lower among those who posted ($M = 3.3$ $SD = .6$) compared with those who did *not* post ($M = 3.7$, $SD = .7$), $F (1, 222) = 12.93$, $p < .001$. Because #MeToo occurred *before* this survey was distributed, these results can be interpreted as evidence of a causal relationship between posting and current WSC, where posting behavior predicts current levels of WSC.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Gendered violence is a widespread societal problem. #MeToo created a public space for survivors to share stories, offer support, and demand change from systems of power. In this section, I discuss the theoretical, methodological, and applied implications, future research ideas, and limitations of the study.

Theoretical and Methodological Implications

This study focused on two communication theories: Reicher et al.'s (1995) SIDE model and Noelle-Neumann's (1974) SoS. Even though the two have not been combined in previous work, they share many common characteristics in their foundational knowledge and measurement. The social identification, willingness to self-censor or conform, and anonymity scales have been used in studies involving SIDE and SoS, showcasing the similarities these theories have.

The SIDE model has only rarely been used in research regarding #MeToo. Given the emphasis on perceived anonymity and perceived group identity seen in #MeToo, SIDE was a good fit for this study. To measure if SIDE was at work, the social identification, anonymity affordances, and perceived deindividuation scales were used.

Previous works studying SoS tended to focus on other politically charged taboo topics, such as immigration or abortion (Matthes et al., 2018). While some studies focusing on gendered violence have made the connection to SoS, the theory is not often seen in relation to #MeToo. The WSC scale was the primary measurement for SoS active in #MeToo in this study. However, group identification, anonymity affordances, and perceived deindividuation were used as further support for SoS.

Future research should continue to study situations where SoS and SIDE are influencing individuals in tandem to better understand the relationship between these two theories. In the following sections, I will be discussing the instrumentation used in this study and how they are connected to the other scales used, as well as overall literature surrounding SIDE and SoS.

Instrumentation

Group Identification. This scale focused on GVS feeling a strong connection with the group identity of GVS participating in #MeToo. All participants in this study felt they could identify with the group, with those who posted feeling a stronger identification than those who did not. This finding supports SIDE's notion that individuals who feel strong bonds with the group are more likely to follow perceived situational group norms. This result mirrors one from a study by Nguyen and Platow (2020), where individuals with strong national social identification were found to abide by the injunctive national norms of eating meat more strictly.

Many studies have added academic backing to the notion that some SoS is present in SNSs (Matthes et al., 2018). However, the ability to surround yourself with like-minded users and be positively reinforced by a tight-knit online community can diminish the spiral for the user. This study contributes to SoS literature by showing that GVS who felt strong group identification were comfortable enough to break their silence and share their experience (Taimoor-ul-Hassan et al., 2019). Fox and Holt (2018) found comparable results when testing individual's willingness to share opinions regarding police discrimination on Facebook. As expected, their study resulted in positive perceived opinion climates that created an environment where participants had lower fear of

isolation (Fox & Holt, 2018). However, specifically seeking out SNS users that share your opinions and views may lead to an undesirable situation: echo chambers.

Surrounding yourself with a group of like-minded people may make them more relatable to you and they may positively reinforce their behavior, but it may also be perpetuating echo chambers. As all users can select their networks, it is likely that many will choose to interact with those that share common ground on polarizing topics (Gillani et al., 2018). This, along with algorithms pushing targeted ads and sponsored posts to the top of newsfeeds, creates an environment where an individual may only see what they want to see. Gillani et al. (2018) used "Social Mirror," an application meant to show the diversity or lack thereof on Twitter feeds. Researchers found that users often assumed their newsfeeds were more diverse than they were. Research participants also failed to keep their Twitter feeds diverse after discovering the echo chamber (Gillani et al., 2018). While it is not necessary to interact with users who have opposing viewpoints, there has not been much research connecting group identification to echo chambers. If this connection can be established, it will assist in exploring community-building and opinion sharing on SNSs.

To connect to this thesis, group identification is a key factor of a healthy social life. With SNSs, it has become even easier to find groups of people that you share common experiences, views, and ideas with. Participants in my study clearly connected with #MeToo and GVS, as most rated the group with high perceived group identification regardless of if they chose to post a personal story. Participants who posted had even higher group identification with other GVS. This begs the question of whether echo chambers of #MeToo posts played a factor in their willingness to contribute. Future

studies should research echo chambers alongside the group identification measure to further contribute to our understanding of SoS and SIDE.

Anonymity and Accountability. The anonymity affordances scale asked participants to rate the SNS they used or most associated with #MeToo posts. Given the stigma surrounding gendered violence, this scale is logical to include in this study. All participants rated their SNS as having anonymous options available. Participants who created a post felt a greater perception of anonymity than those who did not create a post.

Of participants who created a #MeToo post, 80.4% did so under an anonymous account. The time and effort participants put into creating anonymous accounts on public SNSs like Facebook further support the importance of anonymity in situations where antinormative behaviors are occurring. Anonymity affordances have been linked to SoS (Lucas et al., 2014) and SIDE (Postmes & Spears, 2002). In both theories, anonymity is expected to enable behavior an individual would not feel comfortable performing in public.

I found that my participants were so willing to use anonymity that they were creating anonymous accounts on SNSs like Facebook. In terms of creating anonymous accounts, it is much easier to do so on Reddit, where a user is not even required to provide an email address, compared to a site like Facebook (Proferes et al., 2021). Facebook is built on networking with a group of friends. Something that I did not ask my participants is where they posted their story on Facebook. There are options to post anonymously in Facebook groups. A user can do this without creating an entirely new anonymous account.

One article investigated the effects of self-declared throwaway accounts on Reddit (Ammari et al., 2019). For this, researchers studied subreddits meant for discussing parenting struggles. They found that users who had anonymous accounts were more willing to follow the subreddit community norms and disclose personal issues and ask for support. It is thought that the ability to be anonymous in the group enabled users to behave in line with community norms (Ammari et al., 2019). A different study found a similar finding. Fox and Warber (2015) also studied Facebook and the ability to express morally laden opinions and experiences. Their study focused on queer identity management, involving co-cultural and SoS theoretical backing. They found that queer people were either silent on SNSs or would use anonymity to speak their true opinions (Fox & Warber, 2015).

To connect it back to the present thesis, my participants who posted were much more likely to rate their SNSs with higher perceived anonymity. The options for anonymity led most participants who posted to create an anonymous account specifically for their #MeToo post. There is still much to learn about how much time and effort was put into creating anonymous accounts on SNSs that are harder to remain anonymous. Future research should investigate the lengths SNS users are willing to go through to remain anonymous when posting personal or polarizing opinions.

Perceived Deindividuation. Most studies involving SIDE assume that deindividuation is occurring and then measure side effects. There have only been two studies that attempted to measure deindividuation. One study by Kim and Park (2011) used a four-item scale in which two items were reverse coded. The second study by Mikal et al. (2016) took two questions from Kim and Park for their study. This is the first

study to measure deindividuation within a real-world context. Our newly created nine-item scale involved deindividuating actions instead of potential side effects and was found to be reliable. Future research should continue to test and refine the deindividuation scale created in this study to better understand deindividuation in real time.

The perceived deindividuation scale asked participants to rate the feelings they had towards themselves and other GVS during #MeToo. This scale was created specifically for this study and proved to be a good fit. Much like SIDE literature predicted, group identification and perceived anonymity were significant predictors of deindividuation occurring (Klein et al., 2007).

Perceived deindividuation is not connected to SoS often. However, the predictors of deindividuation have been connected to SoS in online settings. Sakariassen and Meijer (2021) studied online inhibition and its relation to communication theories. They found that inhibition is most connected to the fear of isolation associated with SoS. However, they also discovered that identity management influenced an individual's willingness to share opinions (Sakariassen & Meijer, 2021). Identity management could cause an individual to feel safer sharing opinions under the disguise of an anonymous account (Fox & Warber, 2015). It could also have caused them to want their identity to be in line with the group overall, causing them to participate in #MeToo. This notion is supported by my study, where strong identification and anonymity were each positively correlated with deindividuation, thus allowing individuals to break their silence.

WSC. The WSC scale was utilized to test SoS in GVS during #MeToo. It was found that GVS who posted during #MeToo reported less WSC regarding their

experiences with gendered violence. This supports the notion that GVS experienced less fear of isolation for sharing dissenting opinions or felt that the public opinion climate was shifting to align with their views. This furthers the knowledge of WSC in online environments. Past research concludes that fear of isolation impacts an individual's WSC on a SNS (Gearhart & Zhang, 2018). However, this finding found that #MeToo was a unifier among GVS, prompting some to overcome their WSC and post morally laden opinions. Two potential reasons that these participants felt compelled to post in #MeToo are perceived anonymity and group identification.

Over half of all participants who posted in #MeToo created an anonymous account. Many GVS likely felt safer disclosing personal information about a polarizing topic with an account that does not show any identifiers. This finding was supported in other work regarding SoS online. Clark et al. (2015) researched the effects of nameless accounts on SNSs. They found that participants, specifically women, were more likely to be honest while deliberating politics anonymously. When comparing just gendered preferences, men were more likely to have lower WSC in debates where their identity was shown (Clark et al., 2015). Along with anonymity, group identity likely played a role in WSC for survey participants.

This study confirmed that those who posted had higher perceived group identity and lower WSC. This is like a study by Collinson (2006), who researched group identity in the workplace. He found that strong leader identities could influence follower identities' willingness to conform to group ideals (Collinson, 2006). This finding can be related to this thesis, where GVS felt influenced to share a story, regardless of how stressful it was, to aid the #MeToo movement. Future research should explore the

relationship between WSC, anonymity, and group identification in other contexts. Future studies can aid in our understanding of the relationship between these three measures and how the constructs influence individuals to act antinormatively.

Applied Implications

#MeToo Movement

One of the largest applied implications of this thesis involves the overall impact of the movement. Scholars and GVS alike have voiced concerns regarding the legitimacy of #MeToo (Nutbeam & Mereish, 2021). Tarana Burke, the founder of me too, was concerned about the virality of SNS posts and how quickly a phrase like "me too" can lose meaning (Kantor, 2021). At times, it felt that #MeToo was turning into other viral SNS trends: a moment. The findings in this study contradict that fear.

As expected, participants who posted had lower WSC during #MeToo than those who did not post. My initial hypothesis predicted participants to have lower WSC during #MeToo than in present day. Even though this hypothesis was not supported, there were still differences between those who posted and those who did not. Specifically, those who posted during #MeToo continue to have lower WSC to this day, compared with those who did not post. This provides evidentiary support of a causal relationship between posting behavior and WSC. This evidence supports the claim that survivors are experiencing less fear of isolation when sharing their opinions regarding gendered violence and showcases the change #MeToo has had on society. It was more than a moment: it was a movement.

Differences in Demographics Experiences

In this study, I found significant differences among race, gender identity, sexuality, and type(s) of gendered violence experienced. Consistent with previous literature surrounding sexual violence, men were significantly less likely to experience sexual assault compared to women, trans men, and additional identities (Buiten & Naidoo, 2020). This finding supports research stating that women are disproportionately affected by gendered violence (Buiten & Naidoo, 2020). However, there were less men in the study overall. Petersson and Plantin (2019) discuss how GVSs identifying as men often do not come forward or identify with #MeToo because it is extremely against masculine norms in U.S. culture. In future research, focusing specifically on survivors identifying as men could help construct a better understanding of men and how they relate to GVS as group members.

In terms of participant sexuality, those who identified as bisexual or queer were more likely to experience gender intimidation or sexual assault, respectively. This adds to existing literature surrounding the hyper sexualization of bisexual and queer women. In one such study, Bedera and Nordmeyer (2021) discussed the connection between masculinity, homophobia, and gendered violence against marginalized groups. Mass media representations of queer women as promiscuous and untrustworthy have only added to the cultivation that these women are "asking for advances" from gendered violence perpetrators (Bedera & Nordmeyer, 2021). As more people come out as identifying within the LGBTQIA+ umbrella, it is vital that researchers find ways to end the connection between gendered violence and the queer community.

Finally, there were significant differences in gendered violence experience based on race. American Indian and Alaska Native participants were less likely to experience

gender intimidation when compared to White and Additional identities participants. Additionally, American Indian and Alaska Natives were less likely to experience sexual assault when compared to Black and White GVS. These findings are unexpected, as literature points to marginalized groups being targeted more often than their White counterparts. In a study by Mack and McCann (2018), they discuss the intersectionality of race, sexuality, and gendered violence, noting that BIPOC groups are dehumanized and oversexualized in ways that enable gendered violence at alarming rates. The only finding in this thesis that supports existing literature involved Hispanic participants, who were significantly more likely to experience sexual assault compared to all other racial groups. In the next section, I explain one reason this unexpected result may have occurred.

Exclusionary Effects of #MeToo on SNSs. These differences in race, gender, and sexual orientation could be due to the smaller groups of demographics sampled from. Hill and Stable (2021) discussed the white victimhood of #MeToo taking away the spotlight from survivors from marginalized groups. Burke (2021), who created me too for survivors in the Black community, had a similar fear of the Whiteness involved with the hashtag. It is possible this sample could have been more diverse if marginalized groups felt more involved or welcomed into #MeToo.

There are parallels between past waves of feminist movements and #MeToo. Just as past waves fought for equality and respect for all, it was not until the third wave that feminists purposefully included intersectionality into the movement's activism goals (Grady, 2018). Similarly, #MeToo may have had responses from all backgrounds. However, White women were most often the GVS discussed in the public eye (Hill &

Stable, 2021). Future research should spend more time focusing specifically on marginalized groups' experiences. This research can hopefully lead to a better understanding for how these groups feel and interact with large-scale social movements capitalizing on White female victimhood.

Posting Behavior. When it came to posting behavior, type(s) of gendered violence experienced and gender affected participation in #MeToo. In this sample, men were more likely to post in #MeToo, compared with women. This is unexpected considering most research involving #MeToo discusses how focused the movement was on women (Hill & Stable, 2021). Men who were GVSs tended to remain silent in the movement, as they felt #MeToo was not meant for them or could not comprehend their experience was comparable to other GVSs (Masciantonio et al., 2021).

There are potential reasons to explain why men in this sample felt more comfortable posting compared to women. First, there is likely selection bias occurring within the type of men who responded to this survey. Men who responded to a recruitment prompt that explicitly asked for experiences with #MeToo clearly felt a strong connection to the movement. Therefore, they were more likely to have participated in the movement. Secondly, all men (cisgender and transgender) in this sample were more likely to rate their SNS platforms with high anonymity affordances. This added identity protection could have made it easier for men to post.

When examining gendered violence experiences, I found that participants who disclosed experiencing gender intimidation or sexual assault were far less likely to post than those who did not experience either type. In this study, there was one open-ended question. This was linked to the question asking participants if they posted or not in

#MeToo. Participants who did or did not post could explain why. These answers were not thematically analyzed for this study. However, a few were looked through for this discussion. Among gender intimidation survivors, they cited doubt that their experience was serious enough for #MeToo. Sexual assault survivors, which tended to have an experience close to the epicenter of the movement, felt fear or recurring trauma having to recite the event in a post.

Hashtag Activism

The me too movement was active long before #MeToo became a social media phenomenon. Nearly 80% of the participants who posted stated that they included "#MeToo" in their post. This showcases the level they identified with the movement. Much of social media has the option to include hashtags to categorize posts, which can then be searched and counted. These hashtags may go viral, trending on platforms for hours or days at a time. It is unlikely #MeToo would have been as successful without the catchy hashtag being used as a tagline for every post.

This begs the question of hashtag activism's effectiveness in generating social change. Often termed "slactivism," scholars fear that this type of advocacy is too easy to become involved in (Zulli, 2020). One example of this is #BlackLivesMatter, which has been an active hashtag for years but regained traction after the murder of George Floyd in 2020. There was an outcry for change on SNSs, often including #BlackLivesMatter in the posts. However, the longstanding BLM organizations were separate from the hashtag, with many who posted the hashtag having little else to do with the organizational movement (Zulli, 2020).

The findings from the current study provide evidence for the long-term effects of one hashtag social movement, #MeToo. Moving forward, it is obvious that social movements will have an online presence. This SNS presence helps users be involved around the world in any level of participation. It is vital that more social movements with hashtags are analyzed to understand if the hashtag helped or harmed their overall goals.

Building Online Communities

When #MeToo posts began to flood SNS newsfeeds, GVS witnessed a supportive referent group taking center stage. As gendered violence experiences were shared, GVS rallied around the posts, leaving likes, comments, and direct messages offering support (Mendes et al., 2018). This new supportive referent group aligned with GVS experiences, creating a new community where opinion favored survivors. Given the reach and fast-paced environment of SNSs, it was not long before many GVS felt supported enough to share their own experiences.

Online spaces create opportunities for support groups based around identities. Clark-Parsons (2018) discussed one such group in their ethnographic fieldwork. The support group, "Girl Army," was created to provide a safe space for girls and women to bond and participate in feminist activism, regardless of location, means, or knowledge. This created a space for group members to form lasting friendships that would not have been possible without an SNS. In 2015, Girl Army began opening their member guidelines to transgender and nonbinary users (Clark-Parsons, 2018). Girl Army showcased the possibilities of what online communities can accomplish.

As gendered violence is as prevalent as ever, it is important to promote online support groups. Given the considerable number of GVS who utilized anonymous

accounts to share their story, holding online safe spaces for them to speak freely seems like a logical step to assist in their healing process. The effectiveness of online support groups, both run by recognized survivor organizations and created by moderators for the public, should be included in future research surrounding survivors of trauma. This research could lead to a recommended list of best practices for safely running online support groups for at-risk participants or advocating for online counseling.

Reddit

Reddit has proved to be a great SNS for forming strong group identities (Jamnik & Lane, 2017). The moderation of subreddits allows users to feel safe in the community. Each subreddit clearly promotes the purpose of the community, even including flairs or tags that categorize the posts (Jamnik & Lane, 2017). Unlike other SNSs, Reddit has an easier capability to be completely anonymous on the site, not even requiring an email address for an account (Proferes et al., 2021). The anonymity affordances and group identification on Reddit make it a great environment for deindividuation (Massanari, 2017). With a new perceived deindividuation scale showing reliable results, Reddit is a great context for further testing.

Much of this study was focused on Reddit for the high levels of anonymity and specificity among subreddits. It is important to note that twenty-five percent of the participant sample came from Reddit, tying with Instagram (25.0%) for the top recruitment source. It is likely that Instagram cultivated such a strong response was in part due to my previously established social presence on the site, as well as a younger population that heavily uses it. I do not think Instagram would have been as successful if I had not already been active on the site and established a network of followers.

This is very different compared to my distribution approach with Reddit. I created an account with Reddit immediately before distribution. This showcases how available users on Reddit are for quick survey distribution, regardless of a researcher's social presence. This sample's size and diversity was largely due to Reddit. Survey respondents came from all over the world, including locations in China, Australia, and Europe. I recommend future researchers utilize Reddit, targeting specific and non-specific subreddits, to meet their recruitment goals.

Limitations

The largest limitation involving this study was the nature of the study itself. While the participant sample was more diverse than expected in terms of gender identity, race, and sexuality, the overall makeup still skewed towards cis-, white, and straight women. #MeToo has already been accused of taking the spotlight away from marginalized groups (Burke, 2021). Therefore, it is unlikely the sample majority is giving the full picture of how different demographic groups are identifying with #MeToo.

Another limitation of this study involves the method of data analysis. Participants did have the option to complete one short-answer question. However, given that this is a master's thesis with a deadline, there was not a timeline to analyze these open-ended questions. This analysis could provide more nuance into why participants chose to post or not to post in #MeToo.

Finally, asking participants to self-report behaviors from years ago is difficult. Participants were asked to rate their WSC from years ago and in the present day, which can be confusing for anyone to do. It is possible that the hypothesis surrounding WSC could have been different if there was not such a large time gap between the times the

participants were meant to be rating. Due to the identical scale being shown twice, there is always a chance that some participants simply entered the same answers without reading the prompt completely.

Conclusion

In review, this thesis aimed to research the theoretical motivations for GVS participating in #MeToo. SIDE and SoS were cited as theoretical backing, two communication theories that have similar qualities but are rarely referenced in the same research studies. After collecting over 200 responses in an online survey, I found significant differences in theoretical motivations for GVS who posted and did not. GVS who posted rated their perceived group identity and perceived anonymity affordances higher, two measures used in both SoS and SIDE. A linear regression showed that these two measures independently predicted variance in perceived deindividuation. Additionally, the deindividuation scale created for this study was found to be reliable.

One of the most interesting findings from this study involved participant's WSC. I found that GVS who posted in #MeToo have continued to have lower WSC in the present day than those who did not post. Given the time that has passed between #MeToo and present day, this can be interpreted as a potential causal relationship between the movement and a survivor's lessened fear of isolation regarding their experiences.

This thesis has also added support to #MeToo being an effective social movement. #MeToo was far from perfect. Some participants were clearly participating in hashtag activism, using the phrase too casually or without meaning for the movement's gravity. Other voices were drowned out by White female victimhood. GVS communities are full of queer people, people of color, and people who are not traditionally seen as

valid survivors. As future social movements utilize online hashtags to create traction, it is vital that we lift a diverse array of voices and experiences. The original me too movement has been vowing to diversify their support as survivors continue to have this traumatic experience. "So that one day, nobody ever has to say 'me too' again" (me too, n.d.).

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT SCRIPTS

Reddit, gendered violence survivors' pages on Facebook

Are you a survivor who remembers #MeToo? Complete this survey about #MeToo and social media to enter to win a $25 Amazon gift card!
This study is part of my Master's thesis and has IRB approval. Your information will be completely confidential.
Please feel free to share this link with others who may fit this description. Click the link for more information: https://sdstate.questionpro.com/t/AW1WhZv0gf

Twitter, Instagram

Complete a survey about #MeToo and social media to enter to win a $25 Amazon gift card! Click the link for more details. This study is part of my Master's thesis and has IRB approval #IRB-2312008-EXM.
https://sdstate.questionpro.com/t/AW1WhZv0gf

Campus flyer
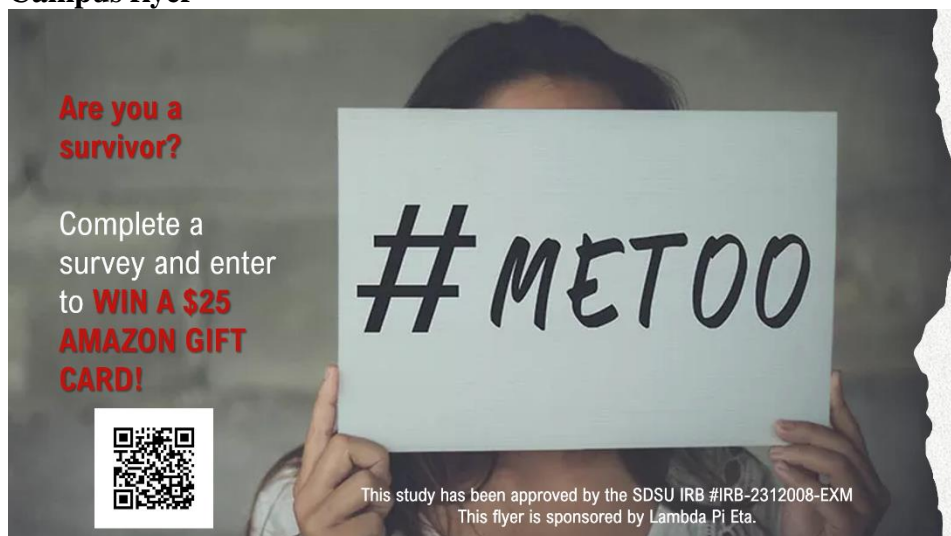
CommNotes, Email

Hello! My name is Shannon Pappas and I am a graduate student at South Dakota State University. For my thesis, I have designed a study to examine gendered violence survivors perceptions of #MeToo and social media. I am working under the direction of my advisor, Jenn Anderson, Ph.D.
I am inviting survivors who have a social media account and are aware of #MeToo to take a survey. If you know others who may fit this description, please feel free to share the survey link with them.

I hope to learn more about the effects of #MeToo and how findings can be used to help survivors heal from their trauma and feel more comfortable disclosing, reporting, or asking for help.
After the survey is completed, you can enter to win a $25 Amazon gift card. My survey link can be found here: https://sdstate.questionpro.com/t/AW1WhZv0gf

Table 10

Survey Source for Participants

Survey distribution source	**Percent**	*N*
Subreddit - "r/MeToo"	8.6%	22
Subreddit (not "r/MeToo")	16.4%	42
Facebook	19.5%	50
Instagram	25.0%	64
Twitter	10.9%	28
TikTok	2.7%	7
Other SNS	8.6%	22
Recommended by a friend	0	0
Recommended by a survivor-oriented organization	0	0
Received in an email	0	0
Other	0	0

Note. N = 256

APPENDIX B: SURVEY

Consent to Participate in Research

School of Communication & Journalism, South Dakota State University

Study Title: Theoretical Motivations for Posting in #MeToo

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Anderson, Ph.D., Faculty Advisor

Co-Investigator: Shannon Pappas, B.S., Graduate Student

You are invited to participate in this research study! **To be eligible for this study you must:**
- Be at least 18 years old
- Be a survivor of gendered violence
- Have at least one social media account
- Be aware of the #MeToo movement

The information in this consent form is to help you decide if you want to be in this research study. Please take your time reading this form and contact the researcher(s) with questions if there is anything you do not understand.

Study Purpose: I am conducting this survey as a part of my master's thesis requirement. This study is meant to find what motivated gendered violence survivors to post in #MeToo. Through this study, I hope to find ways to better support gendered violence survivors and investigate if #MeToo was effective for the healing and disclosure processes.

Participation
- You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this study.
- Your participation is voluntary. You can decline to participate.
- You must answer six screening questions to determine your eligibility to participate. These questions are:
  - Do you have a social media account? (*Yes/No*)
  - What is your age? (*Choose Under 18 – 99*)
  - When did you first hear about #MeToo? (*Over 10 years ago – less than 1 year ago*)
  - Have you experienced gendered violence *(for this question you can choose "prefer not to answer")*
  - Did you post a personal story online regarding your experience with gendered violence? (*if you prefer not to answer this question, you may choose "I posted but prefer not to answer"*)
  - What platform did you use to post your story? (*If you posted a story but prefer not to say where, you can choose "Other"*)

- All other questions are voluntary. You can decline to answer any non-screening questions.
- The survey takes 10-20 minutes to complete.
- Your participation includes completing survey questions about:
    - Demographics (age, race, sexuality, social media use)
    - Gendered violence experience and #MeToo participation
    - Identification with survivors who participated in #MeToo
    - Ability to remain anonymous on social media platforms
    - Perceptions of feelings regarding yourself and other survivors during #MeToo
    - Willingness to censor your experience about gendered violence during and after #MeToo

Can I Say No?

- Survey participation is completely voluntary. There are no consequences if you decide not to complete this survey.
- If you feel that you cannot complete the survey after starting, you may exit at any time.
- All data collected up until you exit the survey will be discarded and not used in the research study.
- Once you submit the survey, we will not be able to discard any anonymous data.

Content Warning

This survey will ask questions about your experience with gendered violence. You will never have to explain what happened or retell your story.

You will be presented with definitions of gendered violence and asked to choose which one(s) applies to your experience. You are always able to choose "I have experienced gendered violence but would prefer not to answer."

Resource links are available in this consent, at the bottom of each survey page, and at the end of this survey. If at any time you feel you cannot complete the survey, please exit and use the resources as necessary. You will not be able to reopen the survey once you have exited.

Protecting Your Privacy
Your participation is confidential.

However, we will gather IP addresses, which could potentially allow for your responses to be linked with your personal identity.
- IP addresses are gathered automatically by the survey platform (QuestionPro).
- They are only used during the initial review of responses to confirm that there are not duplicate responses.

- **IP addresses will be deleted prior to data analysis.**

Your confidentiality is only as secure as your equipment; no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the internet.

Benefits: You will not directly benefit from this study, but the results will show how gendered violence survivors can heal through community involvement. This study will also help show if #MeToo caused any lasting change, such as survivors being less willing to censor themselves, more willing to disclose, report, or get help.

Risks: You may experience psychological or social risks (distress, PTSD, embarrassment, etc.) from taking this survey.

As researchers we are not qualified to provide counseling services and we will not be following up with you after this study. If you feel upset after completing the study or find that some questions or aspects of the study triggered distress, talking with a qualified clinician may help.

If you feel you would like assistance, please contact these resources for #MeToo, gendered violence survivors, mental health, etc.
- Resources for gendered violence survivors: https://metoomvmt.org/how-can-we-help-you/
- Resources for those struggling with mental health: https://www.nami.org/help
- Resources for those struggling with mental health, gender identity, or sexuality: https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/article/resources-for-mental-health-support/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAyracBhDoARIsACGFcS7s1nnbmRYEuo6387lxAY3XUQMS2Md9rDSRZzdRjL-hswiUwu_XWMEaAqYmEALw_wcB
- In the case of an emergency please call 911.

Please note: Clicking on a link here will direct you to a different page and you won't be able to come back to the take the survey. You may copy and paste these links into new windows. The links will also be available at the bottom of each survey page and at the end of this survey.

Incentive: You can choose to enter a drawing for a $25 Amazon gift card. If you choose to enter the drawing, you will be given the opportunity to enter your email in a separate survey that will be linked in this survey's thank you page. We will not be able to connect your email address to your responses on this survey.

Survey completion is required to enter the drawing. If chosen, you will receive an e-gift card to the email address provided.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of South Dakota State University # IRB-2312008-EXM.

Collected Information

- This survey is hosted by QuestionPro who may use the data you provide according their user privacy agreement, available here: https://www.questionpro.com/help/privacy-policy.html
- Data may exist on backups or server logs beyond the time frame of this research project.
- Upon receiving results of your survey, any possible identifiers will be deleted.
- Your email address will be stored separately from your survey data and is only being collected for payment purposes.
- All information will be kept on a password protected computer only accessible by the research team.

Contact Information
For questions or concerns about the study, contact Shannon Pappas (shannon.pappas@sdstate.edu) or Dr. Jennifer Anderson at Jennifer.Anderson@sdstate.edu.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact SDSU's Research Integrity and Compliance Officer at 605-688-5051 or sdsu.irb@sdstate.edu.

To indicate your VOLUNTARY consent to participate in the study, click "start" below.

START

To prove you are a human, choose all the images with trains:

Option 1

Option 2

Option 3

Option 4

* Required: What is your age?
(drop-down menu: Under 18 [TERMINATE], 18 – 99)

Form of gendered violence	Definition	Example
Gender intimidation	Treatment that leads to an individual feeling vulnerable or unsafe	Groping; stalking; sexist comments; publicly masturbating in one's presence
Sexual harassment	Unwelcome verbal or nonverbal sexual behaviors that links academic/professional standing to sexual behaviors or interferes with work or learning	Promising a student a good grade in exchange for a date; withhold promotion from an employee who refuses to have sex; lewd remarks or demeaning language directed at one's sex or sexual activity
Sexual assault	Any sexual activity that occurs without the informed consent of at least one of the people involved	Rape; sexual slavery; sex trafficking; child molestation
Intimate partner violence	Physical, mental, emotional, verbal, or economic power used by one partner against the other partner in a romantic relationship	Controlling a partner's: appearance, behavior, friendships, lives; aggression; stalking

*Required: Have you experienced any of the above forms of gendered violence? Check all that apply:
Gender intimidation
Sexual harassment
Sexual assault
Intimate partner violence
I have experienced gendered violence, but prefer not to answer
I have not experienced any forms of gendered violence [TERMINATE]
Other

* Required: When did you first hear about #MeToo?
(drop-down menu: More than 10 years ago – Less than 1 year ago; I have not heard of #MeToo [TERMINATE])

* Required: Do you have a social media account?
Yes
No [TERMINATE]

What gender identity do you most identify with? Check all that apply:
Female
Male
Transgender
Non-binary/third gender
Cisgender
Agender
Genderqueer
Prefer to self-describe: _____
A gender not listed
Prefer not to say

Which of the following best describes you? Check all that apply:
American Indian or Alaskan Native
Asian
Black or African American
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
White or Caucasian
Hispanic or Latino
Some other race, ethnicity, or origin
Prefer to self-describe: _____
Prefer not to say

What sexual orientation best describes you? Check all that apply:
Straight/Heterosexual
Gay or Lesbian
Bisexual
Queer
Asexual
Prefer to self-describe: _____
Prefer not to say

* Required: Did you post a personal story online about your experience with gendered violence?
Yes –> Why did you decide to post? _____
No -> Why did you decide not to post? _____ [SKIP AHEAD]
I posted online but prefer not to answer

* Required: If you posted a personal story for #MeToo, what platform did you post the story?
Facebook
Twitter
Instagram
Pinterest
Snapchat
Reddit
TikTok
Other
I did not post [SKIP AHEAD]

Did you create an anonymous or "throw away" account for the post?
Yes
No

When did you first post about your experience with gendered violence?
(drop-down menu: More than 10 years ago – Less than 1 year ago)

Have you posted a personal story in the last year?
Yes
No

Did you include "#MeToo" in a post containing a personal story regarding your experience?
Yes
No

[SKIPS SENT HERE]
When thinking of where you were when #MeToo was most prominent in your social media, please rate your willingness to share your opinion or experience regarding gendered violence **during** the #MeToo movement: (5-point Likert-scale: Strongly disagree – Strongly agree)

There have been many times when I have thought others around me were wrong about what gendered violence survivors go through but I didn't share my experience.
It is easy for me to express my experience around others who I think will not believe me.
It is difficult for me to express my experience if I think others won't approve of me.
I tend to share my experience only around friends, gendered violence survivors, or other people I trust.
I'd feel uncomfortable if someone asked my experience and I knew that they wouldn't approve of me.
It is safer to keep quiet than publicly share my experience, knowing that most others wouldn't approve of me sharing it.

What social media platform do you most associate with #MeToo?
Facebook
Twitter
Instagram
Pinterest
Snapchat
Reddit
TikTok
Other: _____

Please rate the social media platform/app you associate with #MeToo: (5-point Likert-scale: Strongly disagree – Strongly agree)

This platform/app can make me anonymous to the person I am communicating with.
This platform/app allows people to remain anonymous or unidentifiable if they want to.
When using this platform/app, I can take on another identity if I want to.
This platform/app can mask my true identity when communicating.
When I communicate through this platform/app, the receiver doesn't necessarily know it's me.
You can't necessarily tell who is communicating through this platform/app.

This platform/app makes it difficult to conceal one's identity when communicating.

To prove you are a human, please write the color of shirt you are wearing.
(short answer)

Please rate the extent to which you identified with people who participated in #MeToo:
(5-point Likert-scale: Strongly disagree – Strongly agree)

I feel a bond with those who posted/commented.
I see myself as part of those who posted/commented.
I regard those who posted/commented as important.
I see myself as quite similar to the people who posted/commented.
I see myself as quite different from the people who posted/commented.
I think I am intellectually similar to the people who posted/commented.
My values are different than the people who posted/commented.
My behaviors are similar to those who posted/commented.
My feelings towards people who posted/commented made me want to share my own opinion/experience.
The people who posted/commented made me feel like part of the majority.
The people who posted/commented made me feel safe to share my opinion/experience.
The people who posted/commented think in a similar way to myself.

Please answer the following questions in regards to how you feel/felt about yourself and other gendered violence survivors during the #MeToo movement: (5-point Likert-scale: Strongly disagree – Strongly agree)

During the #MeToo movement…
I thought of myself less as an individual and more as part of the group of gendered violence survivors.
I saw no distinction between myself and other gendered violence survivors posting in #MeToo.
I cared more about the #MeToo movement than about myself as an individual.
I saw myself more as a member of gendered violence survivors than as an individual.
I was more focused on gendered violence survivors posting #MeToo than I was myself.
I was less concerned about what would happen to me if I posted than what would happen to other gendered violence survivors.
I was thinking so much about #MeToo that I thought very little about myself.
Being part of the group of gendered violence survivors was more important than who I was as an individual.
Anytime I thought about gendered violence, I thought of #MeToo.

When thinking of where you now in the **present**, please rate your willingness to share you opinion or experience regarding gendered violence today: (5-point Likert-scale: Strongly disagree – Strongly agree)

There have been many times when I have thought others around me were wrong about what gendered violence survivors go through but I didn't share my experience.
It is easy for me to express my experience around others who I think will not believe me.
It is difficult for me to express my experience if I think others won't approve of me.
I tend to share my experience only around friends, gendered violence survivors, or other people I trust.
I'd feel uncomfortable if someone asked my experience and I knew that they wouldn't approve of me.
It is safer to keep quiet than publicly share my experience, knowing that most others wouldn't approve of me sharing it.

Is there anything more you would like me to know about your experience with gendered violence and #MeToo?
(short answer)

Were any of these questions hard to answer – if so, what, and why?
(short answer)

How did you find my survey?
Subreddit – r/metoo
Reddit subreddit (not r/metoo)
Facebook
Instagram
Twitter
TikTok
Some other social networking site
Recommended by a friend
Recommended by a survivor-oriented organization
Received survey in an email
In a way not listed here: _____

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