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HILDE LINDEMANN'S COUNTERSTORIES: A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE #METOO SOCIAL RESISTANCE MOVEMENT ON TWITTER[1]

abstract

*This paper proposes a framework for understanding and analysing online social resistance movements based on Hilde Lindemann's concept of counterstories (*Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*, 2003). This framework is based on the premise that we shape our identities in shared social spaces, and that such shared spaces are structured according to so-called 'master narratives'. Master narratives define the 'realm of possible identities' that we can assume, and form the basis for either recognizing or denying recognition to various social groups in specific roles that they might occupy. Social oppression occurs when master narratives preclude or forbid a certain form of self-expression, or alternatively force members of a specific social group into a determinate societal role (say, women who receive recognition only in the roles of mother or housewife). Counterstories serve as a corrective to these aspects of oppression by challenging the oppressive facets of master narratives. Based on this framework, I propose an interpretation of the #MeToo movement as a counterstory that aims to change the oppressive aspects of the patriarchal master narrative that (partially) structures many shared social spaces in the modern Western world. I end this paper by applying the framework to consider potential obstacles #MeToo may encounter as a distinctively online movement.*

keywords

social resistance, counterstory, master narrative, Twitter, #MeToo

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1. Introduction

Social media platforms constitute online technologies for social interaction and community building. Since the establishment of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat, users have been able to express themselves online, often to a global audience. Such platforms are used to tell stories, to discuss problems and to share information. Although they are often used to share positive experiences, many members of marginalized groups have come to appreciate these platforms for the role they can play in resisting social structures (as indicated by the use of hashtags such as #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, #Occupy, or #IfTheyGunnedMeDown). The role of social media platforms in providing a shared social space for social resistance movements is still under-investigated. As a basis for future inquiries aimed at understanding and evaluating online social resistance movements, I propose an overarching interpretive framework in which Hilde Lindemann's concept of counterstories (2003) takes central stage. After introducing this conceptual framework in Section 2, I demonstrate in Section 3 how it can be applied to the Twitter-based #MeToo movement. In Section 4, I use the framework to highlight potential obstacles to the online #MeToo movement posed by Twitter's status as an online public platform.[1]

2. Identity, Master Narrative, and Counterstory

To understand and evaluate online social resistance movements, I propose a conceptual framework based on Lindemann's concepts of identity, master narrative, and counterstory. For Lindemann, our identities are narrative constructs created in an intersubjective, shared space: "identities are collaborative ventures requiring a number of people to bring them into being" (p. xiii).[2] Our identity – our autobiographical narrative – weaves together "acts, experiences, and characteristics we care most about, and the role, relationships, and values to which we are most deeply committed" into a story of our life (p. 71). By embedding our past and future actions within the broader story of our lives, our identity functions both as an interpretative framework to make our past actions intelligible to ourselves and as a decision-making framework to guide our deliberations (p. 70). As our identities guide our decisions, we reveal our identities – who we are – through our actions (p. 25).
However, because our identities are collaborative ventures – taking shape in intersubjective

1 Related hashtags are #NiUnaMenos in Latin America (which preceded #MeToo), #QuellaVoltaChe in Italy, and #TimesUp. #YesAllWomen is a powerful example similar to #MeToo (see Rodino-Colocino, 2014 for discussion).
2 Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers in parentheses refer to Lindemann's *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*.

spaces – we are constrained by the social contexts in which we live and act. This means that we are not entirely free in deciding how we express ourselves through our choices and actions, and are thus also restricted in what life-story we can create for ourselves: "freedom of agency requires not only certain capacities, competencies, and intentions that lie within the individual, but also recognition on the part of others of *who one is*" (p. 24).[3] For example, if someone values 'being employed' as a way to express herself, she will depend on others to see her as a competent employee – an ascription historically denied to many women. We are only able to express ourselves by taking up a specific role (and thereby integrating this role into our identity) if others grant us the necessary recognition.

Lindemann identifies widely shared master narratives as important grounds on which recognition is granted. Master narratives are "stories found lying about in our culture that serve as summaries of socially shared understandings" about the available roles we (can) take up (p. 6). At the same time, master narratives function as the "repositories of common norms", providing an interpretative framework for assessing the self-expressions of others (pp. 6-11). In this way, master narratives to a large extent govern what we perceive as justified self-expressions by the people with whom we share our social space (p. 6). For instance, the master narrative 'all human beings are born free and equal' undergirds (in the eyes of ourselves and others) our common possession of the right to determine our own lives.

As we need recognition from others, the construction of our identities depends on more than merely making our actions intelligible to ourselves by fitting them into our personal life-stories. We also need to make ourselves intelligible to others by fitting our actions into the dominant master narratives that structure the social spaces we share.

2.1. Master Narratives and Social Oppression

Within this framework, a social group may be oppressed in a given society if prevalent norms deprive this group of "valuable roles, relationships, and goods" (p. 7). For example, in modern Western societies, women have long been pushed into taking up the roles of housewives and mothers. According to norms implicit in the master narrative 'family is the cornerstone of society', women are not typically recognized as 'autonomous' or 'able to be employed'. This prevailing narrative may limit the extent to which women can pursue independent lives. The influence of this master narrative in our Western societies continues today (see, for example, Gotlib, 2016), as the expectation that mothers should function as the primary caretakers of children is still widespread. This makes women less free than men to pursue the expression of other aspects of their identities, such as a career, fulfilling friendships, and hobbies.

Dominant master narratives are reproduced in societies in many different places and ways, which extend beyond the control of any one individual. As individuals do not control the master narratives that govern much of their lives, this lack of control exacerbates the oppressive force of master narratives. Lindemann articulates this in a recent paper: "fragments of history, biography, film, fables, jokes, and similar narrative forms ring changes on the theme [of dominant master narratives], as do proverbs, music, advertising slogans, and other cultural artifacts" such as fairy tales or children's books like Harry Potter (2020, pp. 288-289). The fact that master narratives are reproduced in so many different places and forms makes it difficult for individuals to challenge them solely by themselves. To counteract the oppressive effects of a master narrative, a more united effort involving a large group of people that start to tell and reproduce a 'counterstory' seems necessary.

3 The idea of relational identity and autonomy is explored in feminist philosophy and recognition theory. For a useful introduction and overview, see Anderson (2014).

2.2. Counterstories – Aims

Lindemann introduces the concept of a counterstory as a way to challenge the oppressive relations created and reproduced by master narratives. A counterstory confronts "an oppressive but shared moral understanding", and attempts to shift it by "rejecting its assumption that people with a particular group identity are to be subordinated to others or denied access to personal and social goods" (p. 8). A counterstory is itself a narrative, one that reidentifies the oppressed group under different, non-oppressive norms. The counterstory introduces a new understanding of the oppressed group into the socially shared space, an understanding which gains greater authority over the norms by which we grant recognition to others as this story is shared and recounted. If successful, the counterstory starts to structure the socially shared spaces, reconfiguring the possibilities open to the oppressed and providing the social recognition necessary for taking on new roles in society at large.

A counterstory, by telling and reproducing an alternative story about an oppressed group, changes the social imaginary in relation to which roles are considered appropriate for the members of this oppressed group. For a counterstory to succeed, therefore, it must be able to change the interpretative framework of the dominant, oppressive group: "the [oppressors] would not only have to hear [the counterstory] but accept it and alter [their] behaviour accordingly" (p. 6). Since recognition is crucial to one's expressive ability, the behaviour and beliefs of the oppressor must be changed so that they can recognize these new identities.

Henrik Ibsen's 1879 play *A Doll's House* (Ibsen, 2008) offers a microcosm that illustrates the process of telling a counterstory. In the play, Nora attempts to convey to her husband Torvald that she is not merely a tool to assist him in the pursuit of his aims. At a pivotal moment in the play, Nora tries to explain to Torvald that she has duties to herself as well. Not understanding this, Torvald replies: "Before all else, you are a wife and a mother" (Ibsen, 2008, Act III). In an attempt to challenge the master narrative by which Torvald lives, Nora responds by telling a counterstory that presents both herself and Torvald as beings of equal moral worth, saying, "I don't believe that any longer. I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are – [...] a being of equal moral standing" (ibid.). Torvald, however, is unable to understand Nora because he is incapable of questioning the expectations and shibboleths of the 'traditional family' master narrative. This narrative ascribes a subservient role to women within the family in relation to men, whether fathers or husbands. Nora's attempts to emancipate herself within her marriage fail, and it comes as no surprise when she leaves Torvald at the end of the play.

2.3. Counterstories – Necessary Conditions

A counterstory thus aims to free both the oppressed and the oppressor from the shared norms that maintain the oppressive relation. What are the conditions under which a counterstory can be developed and told? The aim of a counterstory is to tell a positive story that reidentifies the oppressed group as equal to their oppressors. In describing this process, Lindemann stresses the importance of a 'chosen community'. A chosen community is one that individuals join voluntarily, for example a trade union, political action network, or support group (cf. Friedman, 1992).

The chosen community is important in that it provides a safe and private space for the construction of a counterstory. Chosen communities assist in the development of counterstories in three ways. First, the chosen community makes the oppressive nature of the master narrative (that the oppressor lives by) intelligible to the oppressed person (p. 31). In other words, a chosen community creates a basis for consciousness-raising. Second, the chosen community provides the recognition required to allow the oppressed person to imagine and build new, non-oppressive modes of self-identification: "the moral space created by the chosen community" provides "a space for reflecting on who the [oppressed] are and want to be" (p. 11). This allows the oppressed person to try on new perspectives, distinct from

those offered by the oppressive master narrative (p. 5). Third, chosen communities allow for the safe expression of developed counterstories, by supplying alternative evaluative standards (p. 10). These alternative standards are important because under the oppressive norms the oppressed person takes herself as well to occupy a submissive role. This makes it impossible to confidently imagine and communicate a counterstory. The alternative perspectives provided by a chosen community do more than merely position the oppressed on an equal moral standing equal with her oppressors; they also make the act of telling the counterstory in society at large conceivable to the oppressed herself (p. 10).
To summarize, a counterstory is developed within a chosen community that provides a safe and private social space. In this space, mutual recognition makes the act of telling a counterstory conceivable to the oppressed person, who can then retell the counterstory with the aim of changing widely accepted, oppressive norms. The counterstory proposes a more positive (self)understanding of the oppressed group as being of equal moral standing. If successful, the counterstory can by its own manifold reproduction impact society at large, eventually replacing the oppressive aspects of master narratives with alternative (counter) stories. This process opens up the eyes of both the oppressed and oppressor – changing the behaviour of both by offering alternative norms that grant recognition to the oppressed.

3. Social Resistance on Twitter: #MeToo as a Counterstory

Tarana Burke initiated the Me Too movement in 2006 to highlight the prevalence of sexual abuse of young women of colour and create "empowerment through empathy" (Just be Inc, 2013).[4] The movement took on a new global form after actress Alyssa Milano tweeted on October 15, 2017, asking women who had been sexually harassed or assaulted to "write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet" in order to draw attention to the problem of sexual harassment and assault.[5] In doing so, she aimed to place the focus on survivors of sexual assault, rather than their assailants (Sayej, 2017). The response to the tweet was overwhelming: within 48 hours, the hashtag #MeToo had appeared in over a million Tweets and more than 12 million Facebook posts worldwide (Park, 2017). Since this event, #MeToo has been identified as an online social resistance movement against the sexual harassment and abuse of women that continues to impact our lives (Jackson *et al.*, 2019; Xiong, 2019).
Although #MeToo had clear (and ongoing) offline consequences,[6] it predominantly developed online through shared testimonies and expressions of support. This makes #MeToo an interesting case study to evaluate the usefulness of the counterstory framework for understanding and evaluating online social resistance movements. In the following, I develop this line of enquiry through two questions. First, can we understand #MeToo as a collective act of telling a counterstory? Second, can the counterstory framework serve as a tool to critically reflect on #MeToo as an online social resistance movement capable of changing the relation between oppressed and oppressor? Section 3 discusses the first question, while Section 4 takes up the second.

4 Some commentators have argued that we need to distinguish between the Me Too movement started by Burke and the #MeToo moment instigated by Milano's tweet, see, e.g., Karen Boyle (2019, pp. 3-8).
5 Statistics show that one out of every two women in the EU have experienced sexual harassment or assault (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014).
6 Virtually every industry has seen change as a result of the #MeToo movement. Examples include mandatory annual anti-harassment training for members of the US Congress, panic buttons for hotel workers in Chicago, and some luxury fashion brands introducing a Model Charter (involving, among other requirements, private spaces to be provided for models to change of clothes during events).

3.1. #MeToo as Counterstory: Shared Community and Challenging Master Narratives

To assess whether the #MeToo movement can be understood within the counterstory framework, we need to determine whether we can locate the central features of a counterstory within the #MeToo movement itself. Through the use of hashtags, Twitter has enabled survivors of sexual assault and harassment to create an extensive community. Within this community, survivors can connect and share their stories of sexual assault and harassment in a space where these stories are recognized and accepted by others. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Milano affirms that #MeToo movement has been effective as "a standing in solidarity to all those who have been hurt" (Sayej, 2017). This claim finds further support in a recent empirical study by Suk et al. (2019), which shows how the use of #MeToo created a network of acknowledgement "through testimony and witnessing about harassment and assault" (see also Gallagher *et al.*, 2019, p. 1).[7] An additional advantage of social media is its international reach, allowing women to build extensive communities across geographical locations to fight against their oppression.

Within the counterstory framework, #MeToo can be understood as a movement that fights social oppression by challenging widely accepted master narratives. These master narratives give our modern Western societies a patriarchal orientation that places women in oppressed and submissive relations (see Jackson, 2019; Hu *et al.*, 2020). #MeToo challenges many aspects of patriarchal master narratives; in what follows, I highlight some aspects that have been addressed in empirically-oriented literature.

Hu *et al.* argue that "[w]omen are supposed to be subservient in many aspects in order to become intelligible under the aggressive male gaze" (2020, p. 2). This enforced subservience undermines women's opportunity to build their own identities (Hu *et al.*, 2020, p. 1). This point is reflected in the above example of *A Doll's House*: within the patriarchal master narrative of our society, women's actions only make sense to members of the oppressing class if they conform to this expectation of subservience. It is this structure that makes the male 'gaze', or the dominant interpretative framework of patriarchy, so oppressive of women and their actions.

A further element of the patriarchal master narrative is 'the myth of chivalry', discussed in a recent analysis by Ilinskaya and Robinson (2018). This myth involves men telling themselves they 'would do anything for her': "[t]hey are being nice to women; telling them how beautiful and wonderful they are; making them feel loved and appreciated" (Ilinskaya & Robinson, 2018, p. 384). But underlying this myth is the oppressive idea that the pure and perfect woman needs to be taken care of. By implication, she cannot do this herself. According to this narrative, if a woman denies the advances of a man she is both casting doubt on his good intentions and character as well as acting contrary to her own interests. In other words, "this privileging narrative confers" to men a position of "dominance" over women, giving them "permission to control" women's actions (ibid., p. 386).[8] By posting '#MeToo', women assert that the fantasy of chivalry frequently underlies acts of sexual harassment and abuse, and that it is actually oppressive, domineering, and controlling. Moreover, the act of posting #MeToo is already a challenge to the subservient role women are supposed to accept under the patriarchal master narrative, as women claim control over their own narrative through the act of posting itself.

In her 1978 essay 'The Rape Culture', Herman argues that one oppressive myth of the patriarchal master narrative we live by is "that victims are usually the ones to be responsible for their victimization" (as cited by Hu *et al.*, 2020, p. 2). According to this myth, victims invite

7 Their study used computational approaches, such as part-of-speech tagging, dependency analysis, hashtags extraction, and retweet network analysis.

8 McAdams (2020) gives a personal account of these and other relevant aspects of her own experience.

abuse by behaving in seductive ways or wearing particular types of clothing. This myth creates the false idea that women have the power to stop men abusing them, because they are the ones "in charge of men's sexual interest" (McAdams, 2020, p. 26). This is illustrated by the following tweet posted in response to Milano: "I never told anyone because I thought it was my fault for sending the wrong signals" (Jackie, 2017). Research shows that this perspective is reproduced in the way police treat women who report sexual assault, asking questions such as what they were wearing at the time of the assault (see, e.g., see Maier, 2008; see also Hockett *et al.*, 2016 on rape myths) even though such questions are irrelevant to building a criminal case or identifying an offender. #MeToo provides an opportunity for survivors to counter this narrative of assault, and instead articulate the counternarrative that clothing is irrelevant. Here again, we see how #MeToo builds a community that can form a basis for consciousness-raising.

#MeToo also aims to raise awareness and change the behaviour of the oppressors. This is necessary as male offenders are often unaware of harm they have caused, particularly because the patriarchal master narrative upholds the idea that only 'deviant' men with low moral standards commit acts of sexual harassment and assault. This leads to the common response 'not all men!' from those who "feel that feminist critiques unfairly tarnish all men" when in fact there are only a few bad apples (Flood, 2019, p. 288). Evidence of this reasoning can be found in a study by Flood, who found that men tend to understand sexual harassment to mean actual sexual coercion, failing to recognize that sexist jokes and offensive gendered commentary are also examples of harassment. Instead, they tend to view such comments as natural expressions of "male sexuality" (Flood, 2019, p. 288). The #MeToo movement created an increased awareness that sexual harassment includes unwanted sexual attention, sexist jokes, and other gendered commentary, and at the same time revealed how prevalent this type of behaviour is among many men. Flood suggests that #MeToo served in this way as a "call to action among men" comprising "three key tasks" (2019, p. 285): first, to listen to the stories of women and take them seriously; second, to change their own behaviour and thinking; and third, to speak up if they see other men harassing women. This shows how the #MeToo movement can be understood as a counterstory aimed in part at opening up the eyes of the aggressor and demanding a changes in their behaviour.

By sharing their stories of sexual harassment and abuse, women created a counterstory that revealed the scale of the issue of unwelcome sexual advances and harassment from men. This counterstory was amplified through the power of Twitter, creating a community across time and geographical location. Moreover, #MeToo's counterstory is clearly aimed at changing the norms embedded in patriarchal master narratives. Used to assess the behaviour of both men and women, these norms are shared by oppressor and oppressed alike. I thus conclude that the #MeToo movement can be understood as telling a powerful counterstory that contradicts the prevailing patriarchal master narrative, which has tended to minimize or even justify the abusive and oppressive acts of men.

3.2. #MeToo as Counterstory: Changing the Norms of the Oppressor

To close this section, I want to make a qualification. On the surface, we might think that #MeToo has opened the eyes of the oppressors and impacted their perceptions and behaviour. The following tweet appears to provide an example of this: "Guys, it's our turn. After yesterday's endless #MeToo stories of women being abused, assaulted and harassed, today we say #HowIWillChange" (Law, 2017). But beneath the surface, the reality is more complex. In his article, Flood uses survey data to show that we "should not overestimate #MeToo's reach among men" (2019, p. 286). Although around 50% of men in two 2018 surveys from the US and UK reported changes in how they perceived (in)appropriate behaviour, around 40% of men in the US and 60% in the UK claimed they had not heard of the #MeToo movement (Flood,

2019, p. 287). Only about one third of the men interviewed in the UK had had a conversation about #MeToo. Perhaps even more tellingly, only 30% of the men interviewed in the US said that they had changed their behaviour towards women in response to the #MeToo movement (Flood, 2019, p. 292). These results suggest that #MeToo still has the potential to effect further changes in the attitudes and behaviour of men.

4. #MeToo on Twitter: Drawbacks of the Online Public Sphere

Despite the ways in which Twitter has empowered women (making it possible for them to connect, speak up, and support each other), this platform also comes with its drawbacks that may undermine the force of #MeToo as a counterstory. In this section, I use the counterstory framework as a tool to critically reflect on the hurdles faced by the online #MeToo movement. Due to space limitations, I will focus exclusively on Twitter as a public platform.

4.1. Diverging Voices within the Oppressed Group

One hurdle that in which the public nature of Twitter poses to the creation of a coherent counterstory is that communication regarding the new narrative takes place in public. This undermines the process by which new identities, roles and ways of acting are imagined and negotiated. This can be observed, for example, in the open letter written by a group of prominent French women led by Catherine Deneuve. The letter expressed concern that the #MeToo movement "includes a moralist backlash, [...] [in which] women's bodies and sex become again this forbidden territory and that a new moral order introduces a new censorship against the free movement of desire" (Poirier, 2018). Further, it claimed that men's "freedom to pester" is "indispensable to sexual freedom" (ibid.). As a consequence of such challenges, the message of the #MeToo counterstory becomes more diffuse. On this point, it is helpful to revisit Lindemann's emphasis on the importance of initially creating a counterstory within the safe and private confines of a chosen community. Creation of the counterstory in private enables the oppressed to negotiate their new identities together first, so that after developing an effective counterstory they can speak in public with a unified voice, thereby increasing the potential of the counterstory to replace the oppressive master narrative.

4.2. Who Controls the Act of Telling?

The public nature of Twitter also has the idiosyncratic consequence that the #MeToo narrative is, as Paul Dawson puts it, "not told by anyone" (2020, p. 979). The #MeToo movement mainly consists of individual posts and responses, collected together by use of a hashtag and regulated by an algorithm in the background. No one person or group is in charge of creating the counterstory. This has at least two consequences.

First, the counterstory itself may fall short of the aims imagined by those who started it. In a speech shortly after #MeToo took off, Burke described herself as "desperate to change the narrative about the #MeToo movement before it's too late". She said that she regretted the movement's focus on prosecuting powerful men, and wished instead to see a more fundamental change in society's (sceptical) attitudes towards women who speak out about sexual assault and harassment (Bitran, 2018). Furthermore, some have maintained that the emergent #MeToo narrative has solely encouraged survivors "to publicly reflect on their experiences without explicitly pushing perpetrators to examine their own behaviour" (Clark-Parsons, 2019, p. 11)[9] – something that should be a central purpose of a counterstory, as we have seen above. But because no one person or unified group is in control of the narrative as it emerges from individual posts, it can become difficult to develep one consistent and coherent counterstory.

A second negative consequence of Twitter's public design is that uncovering a counterstory from a set of individual posts becomes an interpretative act, leaving ample space for

9 This is in line with Flood's discussion (2019), as detailed above.

interpreters to construct their own versions of the narrative. As there is no clearly defined group in control of the counterstory, and a plurality of diverging voices can be heard, one person's understanding of the narrative may be very different from someone else's. As such, when the emergent counterstory is reproduced in mainstream media it may be framed in ways that have potentially harmful effects, as Starkey et al. (2019) show in their qualitative media framing analysis. For instance, some mainstream media outlets have portrayed the women posting under #MeToo as 'hysterical sluts' or 'uptight feminists'. A concrete example can be found in a *Washington Post* op-ed by Garrison Keillor, a former Minnesota Public Radio host, who "used his position to marginalize alternative narratives of assault while promoting a masterplot of women as hypersensitive" (Johnson, 2018, p. 52).

4.3. Inclusion of the Oppressed, Problematized

Clark-Parsons' (2019) analysis of tweets using the #MeToo hastag emphasizes a third potential drawback associated with the public nature of Twitter: many women require anonymity to be able to give voice to the oppressive relations they find themselves in. These women may be unable to use the platform to find the support and recognition they need to change their circumstances. Clark-Parsons points out that making oneself visible "as a survivor on a globally networked platform" can involve significant personal risk (2019, p. 10). As one online participant in the #MeToo movement has "put it bluntly, 'Twitter is NOT a safe space'" (2019, p. 10). Of course, Twitter allows for the possibility of posting under a pseudonym. However, as each Twitter account is associated with an email address and often a mobile phone number, true anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Regardless, the fact that some women may feel the need to post anonymously highlights the fact that many do not feel empowered to address sexual harassment and abuse in the contexts where they take place, whether online or offline.[10]

One takeaway from the study by Clark-Parsons is the need to create private and safe social spaces where women can find the support and recognition needed to cope with oppressive relations without immediately revealing themselves as engaged in this effort. In this paper, I can only touch upon possible avenues for further exploration. One possibility is the creation of private social spaces on social media platforms such as Facebook or WhatsApp. However, like Twitter, these social media platforms also request an email address or mobile phone number, undermining the possibility of true anonymity. Another possibility is to base initiatives in offline contexts, creating in-person communities that provide safe and private spaces for women, as consciousness-raising groups have already done for decades (Suk *et al.*, 2019). Another option is to engage men in offline groups. Corbin describes an inspiring example of a program consisting of five two-hour discussion sessions with migrant Hispanic men in the US around sexual and intimate partner violence. Corbin's study found that the program's focus on "reflection on past behaviours and current decision-making supported self-initiated behaviour change" (Corbin, 2018, p. 923). The success of examples like these may inspire us to combine the online activism of the #MeToo movement with offline initiatives. These initiatives could aim either at the creation of safe spaces to empower women to fight and escape the oppressive relations they find themselves in, or at behavioural change in men.[11]

10 A related, and equally important, issue is that public social media platforms do not provide equal representation for those whose identities lie at the intersections of multiple axes of oppression. Empirical research shows that it is (white) women in already privileged positions who have benefitted most from the #MeToo movement (Hu *et al.*, 2020; Onwuachi-Willig, 2018-2019). A telling example is the R. Kelly scandal, which received broad media coverage only after prominent white women shared their stories under #MeToo (for discussion, see Leung & Williams, 2019).

11 The Black Lives Matter movement (#BLM) can be understood as a fairly successful attempt to combine online and offline action (for an excellent overview and discussion, see Nunmings *et al.*, 2019).

Although Twitter is a powerful tool for connecting people and creating communities around urgent social problems and injustices, the #MeToo movement provides an opportunity to reflect on how spaces both online and offline can provide safe environments for women. A mix of online and offline environments may empower women, providing them with opportunities to receive the recognition they need to express themselves.

5. Conclusion

Lindemann points out that we depend on our communities to provide legitimacy and intelligibility to our identities and actions. Moreover, we are assessed by widely shared standards and norms within the social spaces we occupy. If our social spaces are structured according to master narratives that uphold oppressive norms, one powerful way to counteract this oppression is to create a counterstory that highlights the equal moral standing of the oppressed. However, the act of creating and telling this counterstory itself depends on recognition from others. Here Lindemann stresses the importance of chosen communities, where shared norms help facilitate the development of such counterstories among the oppressed themselves.

Using Lindemann's framework as a basis, I have argued that the #MeToo movement on Twitter can be understood as a counterstory. This counterstory centres the freedom and moral authority of women, and, in doing so, challenges the oppressive patriarchal master narrative that tends to dominate in how shared social spaces are structured in our Western modern societies. I have discussed how one significant drawback of Twitter as a platform for social resistance movements is its public character, which can allow dissenting voices to weaken a unified message, and may also ultimately fail to empower the women who feel the need to remain anonymous. Despite these potential shortcomings, it is clear nonetheless that social media-based movements like #MeToo can and do have a powerful influence in driving societal change and overcoming oppression and injustice.

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