

Psychology of Men & Masculinity

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Online First Publication, September 13, 2018. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/men0000186>

CITATION

Pettyjohn, M. E., Muzzey, F. K., Maas, M. K., & McCauley, H. L. (2018, September 13). #HowIWillChange: Engaging Men and Boys in the #MeToo Movement. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/men0000186>

#HowIWillChange: Engaging Men and Boys in the #MeToo Movement

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In response to the #MeToo movement, #HowIWillChange was intended to engage men and boys in the ongoing discussion about sexual violence by asking them to evaluate their role in sustaining rape culture. We collected publicly available tweets containing #HowIWillChange from Twitter's application programming interface on October 26, 2017 via NCapture software, resulting in 3,182 tweets for analysis. Tweets were analyzed qualitatively and coded into three primary groups: (a) users committing to actively engage in dismantling rape culture, (b) users indignantly resistant to social change, and (c) users promoting hostile resistance to social change. Actions suggested by users for dismantling rape culture included the following: examining personal participation in toxic masculinity, teaching the next generation, calling out other men, listening to women's experiences, and promoting egalitarianism. Users indignantly opposed to social change used the rhetoric of "not all men" and promoted benevolently sexist attitudes to assert that men as a group have been unfairly targeted. Other users were hostile toward the notion of social change and expressed their resistance through attacking perceived weaknesses of men supporting #HowIWillChange, hostile sexist attitudes, statements of antifeminist backlash, and rhetoric of Trump-inspired racism. The identified themes provide valuable information for prevention scientists about what holds men back from participating, and what men are willing to do to help.

Public Significance Statement

#HowIWillChange represents an important dialogue on sexual violence against women, spurred on by the #MeToo movement, by specifically aiming to engage men and boys. Tweets included suggestions for dismantling rape culture, as well as evidence that some men and boys continue to be resistant to the idea of social change. The analyzed data will help inform sexual violence prevention efforts moving forward.

Keywords: sexual assault, violence against women, rape culture, social media, masculinity

The past several years have evinced an evolution in the social discourse about rape culture. Due to the rise in prominence of social media platforms, these conversations have become more far-reaching and include a greater diversity of voices than had been possible just a decade ago, including the engagement of men in public discussions of sexual violence (Murthy, Gross, & Pensavalle, 2016). Specifically, the social media platform Twitter has facilitated many conversations about violence against women through hashtags such as #YesAllWomen, #MaybeHeDoesntHitYou, #WhyIStayed/#WhyILeft, and #NotOkay (Cravens, Whiting, & Aamar, 2015; Maas, McCauley, Bonomi, & Leija, 2018; McCauley, Bonomi, Maas, Bogen, & O'Malley, 2018; Rodino-Colocino, 2014),

though such hashtags have not focused specifically on men's role in ending violence against women. These movements are demonstrative of a new form of social justice advocacy called "hashtag activism," a way to mobilize social media tools for social change (Kangere, Kemitare, & Michau, 2017). For researchers focused on developing interventions for sexual assault, it is critical to join in and evaluate these social media-based conversations to maintain a pulse on public sentiment, notable challenges, and gaps in knowledge. To this aim, the current study examines qualitative data from Twitter users who participated in rape culture dialogue using the hashtag #HowIWillChange, a hashtag intended to be used by men in response to the #MeToo movement (Vagianos, 2017).

Rape Culture

The concept of "rape culture" was identified in the 1970s during the second-wave feminism movement (Johnson & Johnson, 2017). Scholars have subsequently defined rape culture as "a pervasive ideology that effectively supports or excuses sexual assault" (Burt, 1980, p. 218). Research has identified five key dynamics that contribute to and perpetuate rape culture: (a) promotion of traditional gender roles, (b) sexist beliefs/behaviors, (c) adversarial sexual beliefs (viewing women's engagement in sex as a form of manipulation), (d) hostility/distrust toward women, and (e) view-

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A summary of these data and our findings were presented via poster presentation at the University of Michigan's Sexual Assault Prevention Summit in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on May 2, 2018.

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ing violence as an appropriate and often necessary response (Johnson & Johnson, 2017; Kimmel & Ferber, 2000).

It is often difficult for individuals to identify how their beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes contribute to rape culture due to how covertly these dynamics have become ingrained in how we socialize with one another (Johnson & Johnson, 2017). It can also be difficult for people to conceptualize why some of these dynamics are problematic when they appear to occur disconnected from acts of overt sexual violence. Examples of such problematic dynamics could include conservative beliefs that men should be “head of the household,” socializing men to be assertive and women to be passive, or withholding reproductive rights from women (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). Although these situations may not always lead directly to violence being perpetrated against women, they set the stage for inequalities to persist by devaluing the voices and opinions of women compared with men. These dynamics help create a society where instances of violence against women are not believed or taken seriously, allowing sexual violence to persist.

Historically, rape and sexual violence have been seen as a “women’s issue,” leaving much of the advocacy and prevention work up to women (Campbell & Wasco, 2005). There is an inherent irony in classifying rape culture as an issue to be addressed by women when women and girls are disproportionately the victims rather than the perpetrators of sexual violence (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2015). Relying solely on women to convince men to change this dynamic creates a paradoxical issue in which those who suffer the most from the oppression of rape culture (women), are expected to somehow have influence over those who are privileged in this dynamic (men). This process may have contributed to the limitation of progress of previous movements to combat rape culture that were led by women.

Engaging Men and Boys to Reduce Sexual Violence

Prevention and intervention work addressing violence against women has seen a philosophical shift over the past 15 years by highlighting the need for men and boys to be engaged in these efforts (Fabiano, Perkins, Berkowitz, Linkenbach, & Stark, 2003). This shift has been driven by feminist theory, which posits that men are the primary perpetrators of violence, that constructs of masculinity often encourage or perpetuate violence, and that non-perpetrating men have a positive role to play in changing problematic gender dynamics (Flood, 2011). This shift also stems from research demonstrating that men have a high level of influence over other men’s behaviors, suggesting that men taking a larger role in prevention efforts may improve outcomes (Fabiano et al., 2003). Engaging men as allies to promote prosocial behaviors can decrease resistance of men by reframing their involvement as helpful rather than placing them in a position of blame (Banyard, Plante, & Moynihan, 2004; Katz, 1995). These theories have resulted in the development of a variety of prevention and intervention programs, such as community-based education programs, bystander intervention programs on college campuses, and high school programs targeting male athletes (Banyard et al., 2004; Flood, 2011; Katz, 1995; Miller et al., 2012).

Although the shift to engage men in violence prevention has gained momentum, notable critiques have begun to emerge as well. Flood (2015) argued that current antiviolence prevention

strategies that aim to engage men fail to adequately address systemic inequalities between men and women. For instance, they are not grounded in theory of intersectionality in the same way as feminist and queer scholarship (Johnston, 2018). Intersectionality refers to the confluence of aspects of people’s identity (e.g., gender, race, sexual orientation, class) and how this impacts social positionality and life outcomes (e.g., health, poverty, violence; Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw (1991) introduced this term in the context of analyzing the disproportionate levels of physical and sexual violence experienced by women of color, which highlights the irony that this concept is not being widely used by prevention efforts to improve or critically analyze outcomes of programs engaging men.

Further, by overemphasizing the importance of men trying to engage other men, the experiences and needs of women are still ignored. Ironically, by edging women out of prevention efforts, these programs may be perpetuating many of the ideals they are trying to fight against (e.g., only men’s voices carry substance worth listening to, only men should be in leadership/teaching positions over other men). These critiques are important to consider alongside existing empirical findings as prevention programs continue to be modified and developed.

Evolution of Hashtag Activism Regarding Rape Culture

Hashtag activism has become a way for oppressed groups to come together, unite their message, and share their unique stories through a common word or phrase on a social media platform (Maas et al., 2018). In response to (then presidential candidate) Donald Trump bragging about grabbing women by their genitals and kissing them without consent, millions of people used #NotOkay to give disclosures of sexual assault, and commentary about the impacts of national figures minimizing sexual assault on such a public stage. An analysis of these data found that Twitter users called for the need to identify and denounce rape culture, and to engage boys and men in preventing violence against women (Maas et al., 2018).

Almost exactly a year after #NotOkay went viral, #MeToo was introduced in response to the cascade of celebrities, politicians, and other high-powered men outed for acts of sexual harassment and violence, starting with Harvey Weinstein. The #MeToo movement, first created by activist Tarana Burke in 2007 and repopularized by actress Alyssa Milano, was intended to demonstrate how widespread the experience of sexual abuse is for women and girls (Garcia, 2017). In just the first 24 hr after the Weinstein story broke, the hashtag #MeToo was used 500,000 times on Twitter and 12 million times on Facebook (Renkl, 2017). The intention behind and messages brought forth through the #MeToo conversation seemed to parallel the sentiments expressed through #NotOkay, highlighting a lack of progress over the previous year since the first time this conversation went viral. Although many people participating in this discourse were not surprised by the reach and impact of sexual violence expressed in these online conversations, many other people expressed feeling shocked by the prevalence of sexual violence experienced by their friends and family. The questions emerging in the wake of the #MeToo movement were as follows: what do we do next and how do we change the culture of sexual misconduct?

These questions prompted a response from Benjamin Law, an Australian journalist, who tweeted “Guys, it’s our turn. After yesterday’s endless #MeToo stories of women being abused, assaulted and harassed, today we say #HowIWillChange” (Vagianos, 2017). The intention of the hashtag was to prompt people (directed toward men with the phrasing “guys”) to commit to specific changes in their behavior that contribute to or perpetuate rape culture. Thousands of Twitter users responded using #HowIWillChange, with many praising, and many critiquing, the movement. In the progression of hashtag activism used to denounce rape culture, #HowIWillChange represents a notable shift in the conversation by intentionally engaging men and boys in the discourse.

It is important to highlight that although the #NotOkay and #MeToo movements were started by women, the #HowIWillChange hashtag was started by a man. Previous research on bystander intervention indicates that men often feel anxious about intervening or speaking up about violence against women due to fears of being perceived as “weak” or “gay” by their male peers (McMahon & Dick, 2011). Men participating in bystander intervention training also identify being surrounded by and hearing the voices of “like minded men” as important in their level of comfort speaking up about these issues (McMahon & Dick, 2011). According to these findings, we hypothesize that the initiation of this discourse by a man in such a public forum may have made it feel safer or more acceptable for other men to join in the conversation. As such, we aimed to capture the sentiments and suggestions put forth in this Twitter conversation of #HowIWillChange via qualitative content analysis to inform prevention and intervention programs aimed at combatting rape culture, with specific attention to engaging men and boys.

Method

The current study used publicly available Twitter data, known as “tweets.” Using NCapture, an NVivo software attachment designed to collect tweets and basic Twitter profile information (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013), we collected 18,000 publicly available tweets from Twitter’s application programming interface containing the trending (i.e., popular) hashtag #HowIWillChange on October 26, 2017. We eliminated non-English language tweets ($n = 378$), “re-tweets” of a previous tweet ($n = 12,612$), and all tweets that included news articles or advertisements ($n = 1,828$). Our final sample included 3,182 tweets containing original content. As tweets are publicly available information, the Institutional Review Board at Michigan State University deemed the current study as exempt.

The study team consisted of four gender-based violence researchers, representing both cisgender and gender diverse communities. We used qualitative content analysis approach to systematically summarize and identify prominent key themes of original content tweets. This approach is common among qualitative articles analyzing Twitter data (Cravens et al., 2015; Lachmar, Wittenborn, Bogen, & McCauley, 2017; McCauley et al., 2018). Two study members began by coding ~10% of the tweets ($n = 400$) and discussing key themes that emerged, with any discrepancies resolved via consensus. Next, coders continued analyzing tweets until ~25% of the tweets ($n = 800$) were coded. All four team members met at this point to establish consensus regarding the codebook, finalize definitions of key themes, and conduct a neg-

ative case analysis of tweets that were not represented by these themes. Finally, the two coders finished coding the remaining 75% of the data ($n = 2,382$) and extracted exemplars (presented verbatim, hereunder) of themes identified in the data.

Results

The data demonstrated that users tweeting #HowIWillChange fell on a spectrum of how engaged or opposed they were toward the idea of social change regarding sexual violence toward women. Many users expressed support for the movement by (a) discussing ways to actively dismantle rape culture. Some users were (b) indignantly resistant to the hashtag, expressing frustration or annoyance for what they viewed as unfair treatment of men as a group. Other users were more (c) hostile in their resistance, using rhetoric consistent with the tenets of toxic masculinity to suggest that change is not needed or wanted. In the following text, we provide definitions of these three primary themes, important subthemes, and tweet examples that showcase these constructs. A brief overview of the themes, subthemes, definitions, and examples is presented in Table 1.

Theme 1: Active Engagement in Dismantling Rape Culture

Twitter users indicated a commitment to dismantling rape culture by constructively engaging with #HowIWillChange. Tweets within this primary theme fell in five unique subthemes: examining personal participation in toxic masculinity, teaching the next generation, calling out other men, listening to women’s experiences, and promoting egalitarianism.

Subtheme 1: Examining personal participation in toxic masculinity. Twitter users reflected on toxic forms of masculinity, largely focusing on how their socialization as men contributed to them engaging in activities that served to perpetuate rape culture. Some users went beyond self-reflection and committed to stopping specific problematic behaviors that they had previously engaged in or tolerated.

#HowIWillChange I will be intentional with unlearning the toxic behavior that I perpetuate as a man.

#HowIWillChange by realizing how destructive and harmful my past, present, and future actions/words are to the women around me.

#HowIWillChange I will not accept the misogynistic ideals that have been accepted by everyone as the norm

#HowIWillChange Recognize we, as men, have all taken part and perpetrated in the toxic culture we live in and it’s our duty to learn/grow

I will not infantilise women by using pet names or terms that I wouldn’t equally use with men (including “girls” vs. “men”) #HowIWillChange

I will no longer tolerate the phrase “boys will be boys” #HowIWillChange

#HowIWillChange I am not going to be the man who treats a woman as an object by calling them names & look at them with lust.

#HowIWillChange [. . .] Stop talking over women and mansplaining as much

Table 1
Definitions of Key Themes and Tweet Examples

Theme	Subtheme	Definition	Example
Active engagement in dismantling rape culture	1. Examining personal participation in toxic masculinity	A recognition of how socialization in toxic masculinity contributes to the existence of rape culture	<i>I've done gross things because of lies I believed about being a man. Not asking for a pass, I just want to do better. #HowIWillChange</i>
	2. Teaching the next generation	A desire to instill values in the next generation that will help combat rape culture	<i>One thing I want to do better is teach my son limits, boundaries, respect and kindness. And learn them with him. #HowIWillChange</i>
	3. Calling out other men	A commitment to speak out against instances that contribute to rape culture	<i>I'll not participate-and-actively fight against "locker room talk" which degrades or insults women in shape or form. #HowIWillChange</i>
	4. Listening to women's experiences	A commitment to listen more to women's experiences of rape culture	<i>I will no longer laugh & say "that's not that bad" when a woman tells me of an incident that (I deem) to be very minor. #HowIWillChange</i>
	5. Promoting egalitarianism	A commitment to demonstrate greater respect toward women and promote gender equality	<i>#HowIWillChange: I will listen, I will react. I will not accept women to be belittled in the work place, in the community, or at home.</i>
Indignant resistance to social change	1. Not all men	A critique of who is responsible for challenging rape culture	<i>#HowIWillChange I won't change, because I'm like the other 99.99% of men who would never assault anyone. I'm happy to out real criminals!</i>
	2. Benevolently sexist attitudes	An assertion that rape culture would be eliminated by men and women adhering to traditional gender roles	<i>#HowIWillChange I WON'T! I will continue being the great husband, humble father, and strong head of the home that I am.</i>
Hostile resistance to social change	1. Attacking men's perceived weaknesses	An attack on other men for speaking out against rape culture	<i>#HowIWillChange is for men without testicles.</i>
	2. Hostile sexist attitudes	A hostile attack on women using sexist, sexualized, or violent language	<i>#howiwillchange i wont "accidently" put it in her ass when we do doggy. i will now do it on purpose.</i>
	3. Antifeminist backlash	Antifeminist rhetoric used to delegitimize #MeToo	<i>#HowIWillChange I won't because like most men I don't harass women and we don't live in a rape culture. Women stop manufacturing oppression.</i>
	4. Trump-inspired racism	Politically charged racist or nationalistic statements suggesting that rape culture doesn't exist in the United States	<i>#HowIWillChange I will try to get a border wall built to stop rapists from crossing the border illegally into the US.</i>

Subtheme 2: Teaching the next generation. Another prominent action discussed by users was dedication to teaching the next generation values and beliefs that they felt would help dismantle rape culture for future generations. This included teaching their children to be respectful of others, as well as their own bodily autonomy. There were specific declarations of how boys should be taught to respect women, and girls should be taught to be confident in themselves.

#HowIWillChange As a man, I will do my best to be a positive example for my daughter. She needs to know men are not greater than women.

#HowIWillChange Toxic masculinity knows no bounds and I will spend every day actively fostering empathy and goodness in my son.

#HowIWillChange I will be respectful to every woman I meet and raise my son to do the same. Defend anyone that is being harassed, anywhere

#HowIWillChange I will call out abuse when I see it and I will teach my son the important of respect and empathy toward women, all the time.

Many Twitter users making this commitment were also community leaders (e.g., religious leaders), or in positions of authority while working with children (e.g., athletic coaches, teachers). These Twitter users described a desire and commitment to instilling values with the children they worked with, especially as these users recognized their social positions as being crucial to shaping the lives of children and young adults.

#HowIWillChange:As a teacher & coach; there will be an emphasis on teaching young men how everyone has the right to feel safe and be safe.

#HowIWillChange As an instructor, I will keep an as-needed lesson plan on sexism as I encounter it in my class. Prepared teachable moments.

*I will education my kids, my students, and my colleagues on the mistakes I made. So they do not have to learn how I did.
#HowIWillChange*

Subtheme 3: Calling out other men. Twitter users committed themselves to calling out other men for behaviors rooted in toxic masculinity that serve to perpetuate rape culture. Their tweets seemed to speak to a newfound sense of duty as a man to call out problematic behaviors among peers. The specificity of types of behaviors they committed to speaking up against suggests they may have been recalling incidents from personal experience.

I will call out inappropriate sexual harassment when I see it, that's #HowIWillChange

#HowIWillChange I will always call out male friends and acquaintances that objectify how women look, it's a fulltime job with some.

#HowIWillChange: I resolve to stand up against "joke" harassment, "rapey" comments etc. Good guys must call out sexist bullying!

Some users supporting this idea alluded to the perceived social risks associated with calling out other men on harmful behaviors. These users referenced ignoring opportunities to speak up in the past due to fear of criticism, and the fact that it takes courage to speak up about rape culture with peers.

#HowIWillChange Calling out toxicity when I see it and not staying silent because it's the "safe thing to do."

#HowIWillChange: Find the courage to confront problematic friends [. . .]

I've never been 100% diligent about speaking out against disrespect to women I regret that! It's never too late to act #HowIWillChange

call out sexism on my friends whenever, even if it's not cool #howiwillchange

Subtheme 4: Listening to women's experiences. Some tweets emphasized the importance of listening to and respecting the lived experiences of women in relation to sexual victimization. Users spoke of realizing they had previously belittled, dismissed, or even blamed women who came to them about harmful incidents, and the users now regretted these responses. These tweets encom-

passed a commitment to changing these patterns of behavior by truly listening and being more receptive to the reality of harassment or abuse which many women face.

#HowIWillChange - I will listen until you feel heard . . . not just until I've heard you.

#HowIWillChange: be open to talk and listen to women about how about harassment affected them instead of scaring them away with blame

*Today listened for 2 hr as she talked. I hugged & cried w/her & recognized there were times I didn't speak up. No more.
#HowIWillChange*

Subtheme 5: Promoting egalitarianism. Twitter users spoke of the importance of establishing an egalitarian culture through elevating more women to leadership positions and equalizing social power. Users also referenced the importance of men being more cognizant of how their behaviors may impact women in the professional sphere.

#HowIWillChange can help by equalizing the social power men and women have.

I need to think more about how a loud/angry-sounding male voice can be triggering & moderate myself, esp. at work #HowIWillChange

#HowIWillChange In every discussion, I want to make sure everyone gets an opportunity to deliver their ideas.

Resistance to Social Change

Twitter users also used #HowIWillChange to express resistance to social change. Many users tweeted something similar to the iteration of: "#HowIWillChange? I won't," indicating pushback to the movement, but without enough context to determine where their resistance was stemming from. Other users were more explicit in their attitudes resisting social change and will be subsequently discussed in more detail.

Theme 2: Indignant Resistance to Social Change

The resistance from many users appeared to be rooted in indignation toward the proposal that they should examine their own participation in perpetuating rape culture. This group of users did not absolutely deny that women face mistreatment in society, but emphasized that they themselves should not be held responsible or be called to take action for violence or disrespect which they do not believe they have committed.

Subtheme 1: Not all men. Although not all tweets under this theme used the specific hashtag or phrasing of "#NotAllMen," they all made a claim that men were being treated unfairly in the broader social narrative surrounding sexual assault. These users seemed to express defensiveness and denial that they could ever contribute to violence against women. Also, though users acknowledged that some men are predatory, they did not seem to view it as their role to intervene in changing those behaviors, which was a stark contrast to the users offering solutions of how they wish to be more actively involved as bystanders.

#HowIWillChange By doing nothing. Men as a group aren't responsible for the actions of an individual. Fuck everyone promoting this tag

Not ALL men Need to change #HowIWillChange

*I didn't do anything to y'all. Most, yes *most*, men respect women. #HowIWillChange*

#HowIWillChange I wont because Im not a rapist, never have been, never will be. All rapists should be castrated, but not all men are rapists

Notably, many users appearing to identify as women expressed support for the narrative “not all men” as well. It is important to be aware that this rhetoric can impact all people’s perceptions of rape culture, not only those identifying as men.

Men, please note that we women know that overall you're decent and caring. I apologize that you've all been lumped as one #HowIWillChange

Men, if you haven't sexually assaulted anyone (like most men), then you do not need to change #HowIWillChange

Subtheme 2: Benevolently sexist attitudes. Users also expressed benevolent sexism via reinforcing patriarchal ideals as a form of “protection” for women and suggesting that these attitudes and behaviors were the antidote to sexual assault. Many of these tweets also seemed to communicate the notion of “not all men,” but were rooted more distinctly in religious or cultural beliefs that elevate men to positions of leadership or superiority.

99% the men here have done nothing wrong. You built & maintain the safest society to ever exist for women

I will help end the abuse of women by returning them to the domestic sphere where they have flowered [. . .]

#HowIWillChange I will not. I'm Christian man who respects Wamen

#HowIWillChange by treating “older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.” 1Tim 5:2

Theme 3: Hostile Resistance to Social Change

Although users reacting with indignant resistant appeared to be focused more on their own lack of responsibility to social change, those responding with hostile resistance engaged in rhetoric seemingly rooted in toxic masculinity as a way to delegitimize or outright reject the need for social change. The tone of these tweets were much more angry, aggressive, and in some instances actually promoted continued violence against women.

Subtheme 1: Attacking men’s perceived weaknesses. One of the strategies used by those engaged in hostile resistance was attacking men who expressed support for #HowIWillChange by questioning their masculinity. Many of the tweets made penile references, or implied that the men supporting #HowIWillChange were sexually incompetent.

#HowIWillChange is full of a bunch of whiney losers who cannot get laid fuck off cunts

#HowIWillChange by growing a pair and not assuming blame for the behavior of other men. #FeminismManHatingHashtag

#HowIWillChange [really vague comment supporting feminism so i think i have a bigger chance of getting laid even though i dont]

These attacks were also characterized by name calling and use of language intended to be derogatory. Some of the common phrases used included *cuck* or *cuckold* (a slang term to describe a man who knows and accepts that his wife is having an affair, speaking to his sexual incompetence), *SWJ* (a *social justice warrior*, used in a derogatory way to describe weak or soft men), *virtue-signalers* (a man who is perceived to call out other men’s morals in an effort to *win points* with women), and *betas* (men deemed to be less than their superior *alpha* counterparts; Shariat-madari, 2016; Squirrel, 2017).

#HowIWillChange This hashtag is for weak men to feel better about themselves. Stop virtue signaling.

#HowIWillChange I will not laugh at all the virtue signaling beta males tweeting #HowIWillChange

HowIWillChange I will not because I'm not pathetic beta cuck like you

#HowIWillChange a virtue signaler's wet dream. Shoulda woulda coulda. Some of us have been protecting people, people for years.

Subtheme 2: Hostile sexist attitudes. Some users responded to the hashtag with aggressive and overtly sexist comments about women. These tweets included language that describes sexual acts that are violent, threatening, or intended to be degrading toward women.

#howiwillchange When I say, “Go make me a sandwich.” I will add “Now!” Then I will smack her butt for a job well done.

#HowIWillChange I will give my women the deep dicking they deserve.

*#HowIWillChange s*ck my d*ck b*tches!*

#HowIWillChange grab her pussy harder

#HowIWillChange I will apologize after I nut in her mouth

#HowIWillChange I will be rougher during sex.

#howiwillchange i will give her \$5 extra if she does swallow all my cum

Subtheme 3: Antifeminist backlash. Some users tweeted #HowIWillChange to deny the existence of rape culture altogether. These tweets used antifeminist rhetoric in an attempt to delegitimize the dialogue surrounding women’s experiences in the #Me-Too movement.

#HowIWillChange there is no rape culture fuck off

#HowIWillChange to fight nonexistent rape culture? I'll start by giving a nonexistent crap.

#HowIWillChange I will not. This “culture” that women have created doesn't exist. It's fake. Catcalling isn't rape

#HowIWillChange I will not. You people whine too much. There isn't a rape culture. It doesn't exist.

Subtheme 4: Trump-inspired racism. Some users used #HowIWillChange to make racist, ethnocentric or nationalistic statements suggesting that rape culture is not an issue in the United

States but exists in other countries and cultural groups. Notably, the rhetoric used in these tweets (e.g., alluding to Mexicans being rapists, open borders for Muslims) mirror the platform of ideals which Donald Trump ran on for the 2016 U.S. presidential election, and has consistently relied on throughout his presidency to appeal to his base supporters.

Sure would like to see more #HowIWillChange tweets from shithole Muslem countries.

#HowIWillChange I will not institute open borders and allow woman-hating Muslims by the million into my country

#HowIWillChange I will send you to Saudi Arabia with a go pro funded by gofundme and watch what will happen to you

Discussion

The aim of the current study was to assess public discourse regarding dismantling rape culture via the Twitter hashtag #HowIWillChange as a response to the #NotOkay and #MeToo movements. Three primary groups emerged from our analysis of the tweets: (a) those committing to actively engage in dismantling rape culture, (b) those indignantly resistant to social change, and (c) those promoting hostile resistance to social change. Actions for dismantling rape culture as suggested by users included the following: examining personal participation in toxic masculinity, teaching the next generation, calling out other men, listening to women's experiences, and promoting egalitarianism. Users indignantly opposed to social change used the rhetoric of "not all men" and promoted benevolently sexist attitudes to assert that men as a group have been unfairly targeted as needing to make universal changes to address violence against women. Some users were hostile toward the notion of social change and expressed their resistance through attacking perceived weaknesses of men supporting #HowIWillChange, hostile sexist attitudes, statements of antifeminist backlash, and rhetoric of Trump-inspired racism. These themes shed light on continuing challenges to prevention and intervention work, notably demonstrating that although some men are willing and ready to participate, others express defensiveness and/or a desire to maintain the power structures of the status quo. Findings from these data support existing masculinity and bystander intervention research regarding challenges in engaging men in prevention work, while also providing insight into engaging men in dismantling rape culture more effectively.

Active Engagement in Dismantling Rape Culture

Users who expressed a desire to actively engage in dismantling rape culture reflected on what problematic behaviors themselves and other men engage in that serve to perpetuate rape culture. Many of these tweets specifically referenced how these harmful actions were influenced by their socialization as men and what they were raised to believe about masculinity.

Masculinity refers to the set of traits, behaviors, and expectations traditionally associated with being male (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Hegemonic masculinity more specifically refers to the process by which certain masculine traits are privileged in society, serving to maintain patriarchal power structures (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In Western culture, hegemonic masculinity is typically characterized by men who present as "strong,

successful, capable, reliable, [and] in control," with straight, White, middle- or upper-class men most often being viewed in this way (Ferber, 2000; Kimmel, 1994, p. 125). Although not all men embody traits of hegemonic masculinity, men as a group stand to benefit from the symbolic status offered by identifying as a man. Toxic masculinity has been theorized as a form of hegemonic masculinity that specifically promotes aggression, competitiveness, and domination (Kupers, 2005). These "hypermasculine" ideals are maintained through the denigration of traits or behaviors considered to be traditionally "feminine," leading to the promotion of misogynistic and homophobic attitudes (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016; Parent, Gobble, & Rochlen, 2018).

The action steps proposed by users wanting to engage in combatting rape culture corroborate the need to recognize toxic masculinity as problematic and offer new conceptualizations of masculinity and gender relations. Many users reflecting on their own participation in problematic behaviors specifically used the word *toxic* to describe how they and their peers denigrated women. Notably, this aligns with findings in intervention research that programs attempting to engage men in violence prevention are more successful when they directly evaluate the cultural construct of masculinity (Flood, 2015).

Many of the behaviors identified by users referred to nuanced issues of sexism, such as dismissing or belittling women's stories of sexual misconduct or ways in which women are silenced or held back in the workplace, rather than more blatant forms of harassment or abuse. Tweets giving examples of sexism that often go overlooked in society may indicate that part of the achieved activism by the #MeToo movement and #HowIWillChange was education into the subtler forms of rape culture that women commonly deal with, including sexual harassment and coercive control. Notably, users expressing a desire to engage in prevention work still noted apprehension in speaking out against rape culture due to fears of rejection or criticism from peers. This speaks to the idea that boys or men often feel pressure to engage in or be complicit to degradation of women to conform to standards of hegemonic masculinity (McMahon & Dick, 2011; Pascoe, 2005).

Parents, educators, and community leaders spoke of wanting to ensure that toxic behaviors that have sustained rape culture do not get passed on to the next generation. A sense of urgency was evident through recognition that their children could one day end up being a victim or a perpetrator of sexual violence if an intervention in how we conceptualize masculinity does not occur. The number of users in a position of influence speaking out with a willingness and desire to instill different values in the next generation is indicative of a need for further dissemination of interventions targeted to this population. Examples of such existing interventions are the Coaching Boys Into Men program, which trains and provides tools for coaches of male athletes to have conversations about healthy masculinity and relationships, and Mentors in Violence Prevention program, which is a bystander-focused program implemented in multiple settings from schools to military bases (Katz, Heisterkamp, & Fleming, 2011; Miller et al., 2012). The diversity of voices participating in this Twitter discourse (e.g., parents, older brothers, teachers, preachers) poses an opportunity for additional adaptations of similar interventions to fit each of these different contexts.

Although the majority of tweets about teaching the next generation focused on molding young boys to be more respectful of girls

and women, many tweets also focused on ways to empower girls. Users tweeted about the importance of raising girls to be more assertive, confident, and to speak up about abusive behaviors. Women, as with any other marginalized or oppressed group, are pressured to comply with societal norms or expectations rooted in patriarchal ideals to survive or be successful. This adherence to oppressive standards to paradoxically attain power and security is defined by Kandiyoti (1988) as the patriarchal bargain. Although it is important to ensure that the responsibility of change remains with perpetrators of violence and abuse, it is also critical that young girls are provided with messages of self-respect, self-worth, equality, and assertiveness that will help them navigate (and challenge) the existing power structures in a way that protects and helps them succeed. Recent research has highlighted the potential impact resistance programs (i.e., self-defense) have on reducing risk for sexual assault (Senn et al., 2015). Pairing resistance programs that focus on reducing individual risk with social norm change approaches like bystander intervention programs may be beneficial in dismantling rape culture as well.

Indignant Resistance to Social Change

Many users demonstrated continued resistance to acknowledging or changing rape culture, even in light of the #MeToo and #HowIWillChange movements. Users expressed indignant resistance to social change through the rhetoric of “not all men” to assert that it is unfair for all men to be held responsible for the actions of some men. The rhetoric of “not all men” has grown in relevance over recent years as dialogue about violence against women has become more prominent (Bridges, 2014). The use of this rhetoric polarizes the discussion of sexual assault and distracts from the narrative of survivors by focusing on distress over men being generalized as a homogenous group.

In response to the critique that prevention programs focused on individual perpetration alienate men through blame, an emphasis on approaches rooted in community responsibility for violence prevention (e.g., bystander intervention programs) has emerged (Banyard et al., 2004). Given the difficulty of this subject, it may be that men find it easier to externalize problematic behaviors contributing to rape culture to other people, rather than do a personal examination of how one benefits from and perpetuates rape culture themselves (Murphy Austin, Dardis, Wilson, Gidycz, & Berkowitz, 2016). Indeed, “distancing strategies” in social justice literature posit that people in positions of privilege (in this case, men) remain ignorant to issues (rape culture) by condemning extreme examples of injustice (e.g., rape or extreme sexual harassment in the work place) while avoiding recognition of how their own actions contribute to problematic social dynamics (Whitt, 2016). This distancing serves a function for individuals with privilege by offering them a sense of morality, while not requiring changes to their own behaviors (Whitt, 2016). As with interventions into any other oppressive behavior (e.g., racism) one of the first steps toward meaningful change is for people within a dominant group of privilege (e.g., White people or men) to examine how they sustain the existing power structure, whether intentionally or unintentionally (Whitt, 2016). Sexual violence prevention programs could consider incorporating a nonstigmatizing, written self-assessment of common behaviors (often viewed as benign in day-to-day activities) that contribute to rape culture to help

men more accurately identify how they reinforce or perpetuate toxic behaviors and existing power structures.

Users tweeting messages of benevolent sexism also dismissed the need for taking personal responsibility and advocated for maintaining the existing power structure. Although these tweets promoted the safety of women and denounced sexual mistreatment, they viewed this aim as being best accomplished through protection by men and the maintenance of traditional gender roles. The majority of these tweets made reference to religious beliefs that women are to be respected, with the understanding that men are meant to maintain power and control. The ever-present challenge of benevolent sexism is that on the surface, it generally promotes a positive message that women should be respected and cared for (Becker & Wright, 2011). However, the underlying message that straying away from traditional gender roles is the root cause of problems in today’s society feeds directly back into the maintenance of the rape culture that these men believe they are fighting against. Although some of these views may be driven by a benign ignorance to the issue, they also pose a challenge in knowing how to address them effectively given their origins in deeply held religious or philosophical beliefs. For these reasons, it is crucial for all prevention and intervention programs to be equipped with an understanding of common conservative beliefs relating to the dynamics between men and women and how to address these beliefs in a way that is constructive, while also working to increase the safety and equality of women.

Hostile Resistance to Social Change

Many users expressed hostile resistance to acknowledging or changing rape culture by expressing aggressive and misogynistic views consistent with the tenets of toxic masculinity. This was evidenced through blatantly sexist comments and the promotion of sexual violence toward women. Users also engaged in antifeminist backlash intended to discredit the legitimacy of women’s experiences. The reframing of “rape culture” as nothing more than feminist-driven “moral panic” has fueled a growing trend among Men’s/Father’s Rights Activists (Dragiewicz, 2008; Gotell & Dutton, 2016). Many users also directed hostility toward other men who acknowledged rape culture as a pressing issue and expressed support for the movement.

Men “disciplining” other men who step outside the lines of their own perception of appropriate masculinity is a common phenomenon among men and boys and is seen as an effort to maintain social order (Pascoe, 2005). Many of these tweets made penile references implying that men supporting #HowIWillChange were less masculine or sexually incompetent. This speaks to our culture’s socially constructed perception of the penis/testicles and overt male sexuality as symbolic of power, status, and dominance, the same values revered in toxic masculinity (Karioris & Allan, 2017). The attacks imply that “real men” maintain control over women, and that empathizing with women’s experiences of sexual violence is symbolic of relinquishment of the power men have been given by living in a patriarchal society. It is important to remember that even though men are in a powerful position to disrupt disrespectful and harmful behavior, they too are shaped by social norms and it remains intimidating and threatening for men to confront other men who hold similar privilege (McMahon & Dick, 2011; Pascoe, 2005). Educators must normalize these fears

of rejection or criticism men may experience in the face of confronting another male peer, and provide them with tools for strategizing action, and coping with potential ramifications. Despite critiques for its shortcomings, incorporating men into bystander intervention trainings who are viewed as having status (such as community leaders, celebrities, athletes) may help instill confidence in young boys who have been raised to view the tenets of toxic masculinity as their only path to acceptance.

Notably, #HowIWillChange was also used as a platform to promote ideas of racism and nationalism. The rhetoric in these tweets was consistent with the narratives expressed by Donald Trump, asserting that other countries and cultures are dangerous and morally corrupt (e.g., Mexicans are “rapists,” Muslims should not be allowed in the country). Trump’s policies, which seek to dehumanize “outsiders” by suggesting they are a threat to Americans, have appealed to White men under the illusion that they are being victimized and disempowered by feminist and multicultural movements (Johnson, 2017; Lim, 2018). These tweets symbolize users’ efforts to reconsolidate White male power by employing ignorant and discriminatory ideals to deny issues of violence against women in the United States, while simultaneously using racist and ethnocentric slurs to shift attention toward vilifying the “other.” Prevention programs should be informed by the current sociopolitical climate that they are functioning in and be prepared for resistance as the national discourse challenges long-standing, patriarchal social norms.

Representation in Rape Culture

Although our discussion thus far has focused on users commenting on the proposed message of #HowIWillChange, it is important to note that some users participated in the #HowIWillChange dialogue by critiquing the movement itself. These users felt that survivors beyond those who identify as White, heterosexual, cisgender women were being left out of the conversation. Many pointed out that boys and men are also sexually victimized (by men and women), but perceived their trauma as not being given the same priority or recognition. This represents a significant challenge for researchers, educators, and prevention scientists in the realm of sexual violence. Discussions on rape culture typically focus on women as victims and men as perpetrators. Indeed, one in five women and one in 71 men report experiences of rape (i.e., completed, attempted, or alcohol/drug-facilitated forced penetration), whereas one in two women and one in five men report some form of sexual victimization other than rape at some point in their lifetimes (Black et al., 2011). We also know that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer populations and people of color/native populations are disproportionately affected by sexual violence victimization (Black et al., 2011; Coulter et al., 2017). It is crucial for researchers and direct service providers to consider the intersectionality of rape culture and the ways in which other forms of oppression (e.g., racism and homophobia) intersect with and elevate risk for sexual violence victimization. Moreover, our findings suggest the need to intentionally incorporate discussions of how all people are impacted by sexual violence in prevention programming and provide resources for groups of survivors not identifying as cisgender, heterosexual, White women.

Limitations

This study should be considered in light of several limitations. Although the #MeToo movement appeared to reach a wide audience, recent studies have indicated that people often exist in “echo chambers” within online spaces, whereby their preexisting views are amplified and reinforced by the news content they are exposed to and the messages of like-minded people who make up their virtual social group (Spohr, 2017). It is possible that this has been the case for the #MeToo and subsequent #HowIWillChange movements, and thus may impact who we were able to capture in our data. However, given the diversity of views captured in the data, we feel assured that the public engagement in #HowIWillChange was not limited to isolated groups with uniform opinions. Future research on how echo chambers impact hashtag activism and how to better access isolated subgroups of Internet users could be useful in understanding how to spread prevention and intervention information more widely. Additionally, only those individuals with Internet access and an investment in using Twitter are represented in our sample. Individuals who may not have access to the Internet, or individuals who do not use social media platforms such as Twitter, were not represented in our sample. Indeed, Twitter tends to be dominated by younger and college-educated users (Pew Research Center, 2018). Lastly, we were unable to collect demographic information from users included in the study due to limitations of the information Twitter collects and releases to researchers through their application programming interface.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insight into the current public discourse surrounding sexual violence toward women in the aftermath of the #MeToo movement, specifically in relation to engaging boys and men in dismantling rape culture. Through the #HowIWillChange dialogue, we identified three main subgroups of users: (a) those wanting to become actively engaged in dismantling rape culture, (b) those indignantly resistant to social change, and (c) those expressing hostile resistance to the idea of social change. Many users offered poignant insight into actions they perceived as necessary for combatting rape culture (i.e., examining personal participation in toxic masculinity, teaching the next generation, calling out other men, listening to women’s experiences, and promoting egalitarianism). Despite these positive responses, resistance from other Twitter users highlighted continued challenges for engaging men in prevention work (e.g., denial of personal responsibility in rape culture and perpetuation of toxic masculinity). Based on the data, prevention programs should aim to intervene with children at a young age and continue to be critical about how hegemonic masculinity is embedded within our culture. Though much work remains to be done, the findings in this study offer a sense of optimism for the role of boys and men in the continuing progress of the eradication of violence against women.

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Received April 2, 2018

Revision received July 26, 2018

Accepted July 27, 2018 ■