

A white women's win, a Black women's loss

The construction of whiteness in news articles about #MeToo

Master thesis

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Abstract

This study examines the manifestation of whiteness in the context of womanhood in news articles about the #MeToo movement in the US. #MeToo is widely regarded as a significant milestone for women in the fight against sexual harassment. However, the movement appears to be dominated primarily by white, famous women and their stories. This stands in contrast to the original founder of the “metoo” movement, Black activist Tarana Burke, and her initial objective of establishing an intersectional movement to support women of colour. A qualitative grounded theory approach is applied in this study, guided by the following sensitizing concepts: white feminism, intersectionality, white womanhood, Black womanhood and #MeToo. The critical discourse analysis of 73 news articles demonstrated an overrepresentation of white women in the articles. As apparent in the articles, a traditional ideal of white womanhood was emphasised, accentuating innocence and vulnerability. Numerous characteristics of white feminism manifested prominently with, among others, an emphasis on the gendered aspect of sexual harassment. References to race, the experiences of Black women or an intersectional perspective were largely absent. Therefore, the #MeToo movements is mainly a milestone for white women.

Intersectionality-Whiteness – White feminism- #MeToo

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Introduction

“What history has shown us time and time again is that if marginalized voices- those of people of colour, queer people, disabled people, poor people- aren’t centred in our movements then they tend to become no more than a footnote. I often say that sexual violence knows no race, class or gender, but the response to it does.... Ending sexual violence (and harassment) will require every voice from every corner of the world and it will require those whose voices are often most heard to find ways to amplify those voices that often go unheard.”

- Tarana Burke (2017)

#MeToo is widely regarded as a significant development in the fight against sexual violence, representing a positive development for women’s safety within societies. #MeToo went viral in October 2017 and was used by thousands of people on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to share their experiences with sexual harassment, sexual violence and rape (Boyle, 2024). Notwithstanding the fact that the movement was meaningful to many people, including men, trans people and people who identify with other genders, this study focuses exclusively on people who identify as women. The hashtag united the voices of many women and created a space for their stories to be heard. It resulted in a global, powerful movement against sexual abuse; a movement that challenged existing gender norms, demanded society wide behavioural changes and initiated discussions about consent. The movement demonstrated that sexual violence is a problem for all women, regardless of class, race¹ or nationality. Nevertheless, the movement is predominantly associated with wealthy, famous, white women. It was a white actress, Alyssa Milano, who first used #Metoo in a tweet, encouraging others to do the same. Newspapers were filled with testimonials of white, affluent women (De Benedictis et al., 2019). In the words of Black² actress Gabrielle Union: “I think the floodgates have opened for white women” (Krischer, 2017). This gives rise to the question of whose pain is being prioritised and whose pain is not? This question is of particular relevance in light of the movement’s history.

¹ The use of the concept of race refers to race as a social and cultural construct, not as a biological or natural category.

² In the present study, the word Black is invariably written with a capitalized B to acknowledge that Black is not a natural category, but a social construct with a very painful and violent history (Laws, 2020). At the same time, the decision was made to not capitalize white because it creates the false suggestion of equality between the groups (Lanham, 2020). Moreover, it results in a colourblind approach, and as Burke states in the quote, it is only possible improve the position of marginalised groups by putting them at the centre.

The movement and slogan “me too” originated from the mind of Black activist Tarana Burke, who created it in 2006 (Boyd & McEwan, 2024). The objective of the project was to create a safe, supportive and healing space for Black women³ who had been subjected to sexual violence. Burke’s knowledge through her own positionality highlighted the unique experiences of Black women with sexual harassment. Her focus was directed towards Black women, as opposed to her white female counterparts, acknowledging the intersectional dynamics of sexual violence. Nevertheless, the original use of “me too” never received as much support as the #MeToo movement that arose as a result of the first #MeToo tweet in 2017, not even from feminist groups (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018b). The initial message of Burke’s “me too” movement evolved into #MeToo, a social media movement that almost exclusively represents the experiences of white women, erasing Black women’s fundamental place within it.

This thesis focusses on newspaper coverage of the #MeToo movement in the US and explores #MeToo as an exemplary case of white feminism. Newspaper articles are a multi-faceted source of research because they have a significant impact on the public discourse. Furthermore, they influence how movements like #MeToo are perceived in the public discourse. It is evident from the literature that both British and American media focus their #MeToo coverage almost exclusively on the stories of white, affluent and famous women (De Benedictus et al., 2019; Tambe, 2018). Nevertheless, there is little empirical research on how the concept of whiteness emerges in these articles. The current study explores the construction of whiteness, situated in the broader socio-historical concept of white womanhood, in news articles from the five largest American newspapers published in the first four weeks after Milano sent her tweet. The objective of this study is not to belittle or dismiss the experiences of white women with sexual harassment but to acknowledge Black women’s place within a movement that was initially created by and for them. This study examines the concept of whiteness, how this is centralised in the current movement and what this means for women of colour. The research question in this study reads: *how is whiteness in the context of womanhood manifested in news articles from American newspapers concerning the #MeToo movement?*

³ In this study, the term Black women is employed to denote women with an Afro-American descent.

Theoretical framework

This chapter provides an examination of the following concepts: *white feminism*, *white womanhood*, *Black womanhood*, *#MeToo* and *intersectionality*. These concepts situate the research question within a broader context of research into whiteness, womanhood and white feminism and provide valuable insight into the complex interplay of womanhood with whiteness and Blackness. Furthermore, it argues for an intersectional perspective on feminist movements. It is imperative to acknowledge that these concepts are theorised within the American context, and these versions of womanhood, whiteness and Blackness are profoundly influenced by American culture. The concepts are considered sensitizing concepts; they function as both guiding concepts and as a theoretical basis for the development of this research and draw attention to specific points (Bowen, 2006). This thesis is based in grounded theory; this involves the construction of new theories, or the extension of existing theories through new research (Corbin, 2017). Grounded theory is suitable for this research because the subject of whiteness in relation to #MeToo is relatively unexplored. It is precisely due to this relative unfamiliarity that the importance of placing the data at the centre and allowing it to speak for itself is paramount. Moreover, for me it is important to centre the data, rather than trying to fit it into existing frameworks. Grounded theory facilitates this process.

In this thesis, the central focus will be on white womanhood, often in relation to Black womanhood, in the context of #MeToo. All demographic groups of women have distinct experiences, histories and relations to sexual harassment and the #MeToo movement. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine all this in depth. This should not, of course, be taken as a suggestion that the experiences of other groups of women of colour are unworthy of consideration. The decision to focus on white and Black women is grounded in the specific context of the #MeToo movement, with an apparent dichotomy between Black and white women. The movement was created in 2006 by a Black woman to support other Black women but the statement #MeToo gained worldwide publicity when it was used by a white famous woman in 2017. The resulting movement then became predominantly associated with white women.

White feminism

Before defining white feminism, it is necessary to define feminism. Feminism can be defined in many different ways, but in this text the following definition of Black scholar and activist bell hooks will be used: “feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation,

and oppression” (hooks, 2000). However, often the experiences of white women are centred in feminist movements and their experiences are made representative of the experiences of all women, women of colour included (Moon & Holling, 2020; hooks, 2014). This ‘feminism’ is therefore also predominantly concerned with the needs and concerns of white women, while the rights of women of colour are being disregarded, or in some cases, jeopardised. This phenomenon is referred to as white feminism (Moon & Holling, 2020). White feminist movements do not recognize the different experiences of women of colour since it tends to focus only on gendered oppression. Simultaneously, this focus overlooks the ways oppression is explicitly mitigated for white women due to their white privilege (Collins, 2000, p. 287; Lorde, 1984; Zakaria, 2021). Moreover, there is little recognition of how their privilege contributes to the oppression of women of colour (Crenshaw, 1989). In this, an intersectional perspective is lacking, and often Black feminists and their achievements have been ignored, while their efforts have been used (Borah et al., 2023). Consequently, this feminism has often been used by white women to improve their own position in society (hooks, 2014).

Intersectionality

The theory of intersectionality is central in Black Feminist Thought, and stems from Critical Race Theory. Intersectionality provides a framework for criticism on white feminism. It was introduced in the academic debate by lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw. She used this term to explain the unique experiences of Black women with discrimination because their marginalisation cannot be explained by looking at either race or at gender (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244). Intersectionality is about the merging of at least two separate categories of identification, creating a new third and unique category of identification (Leung & Williams, 2019). It includes categories such as race and gender, but also others like sexual orientation, class and age. For Black women, this means that their experiences differ from those of both white women and Black men. Black women can encounter gender-based discrimination, but also race-based discrimination in the form of racism. Black women, thus face heightened discrimination, that is to say, discrimination based on both race and gender resulting in a multisided form of marginalisation (Crenshaw, 1989). In the words of Patricia Hill Collins: “intersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation” (Collins, 2000, p. 18). These different forms of oppression overlap and together create a unique experience of subordination. This cannot be reduced to and solved by looking at one factor only. The concept of intersectionality is necessary to explain and

understand these forms of subordination. Moreover, without acknowledging this multiple subordination, it is not possible to find a solution for inequalities.

Intersectionality is relevant for explaining the exclusion of women of colour in mainstream feminist movements: these movements focus on oppression from the gender perspective but fail to recognize oppression from the interaction between gender and race, as well as other factors (Crenshaw, 1989). Initially, intersectionality was developed in the context of Black Feminist Thought with a focus on Black women, but it has evolved into a supportive framework for many marginalised groups. The concept of intersectionality is useful to research whiteness in the context of #MeToo because it helps to ascertain whether multifaceted forms of discrimination are addressed.

White womanhood

White womanhood can be considered a cultural construct, based on the intersection of race, gender, class and nationality. Whiteness creates a certain type of womanhood, and shapes the experiences of white women (Frankenberg, 1993). It is accompanied by a set of expectations regarding women's behaviour and life choices. Historically, white womanhood is connected to stereotypical ideas about goodness, purity, innocence, obedience and virtue (Phipps, 2021). Especially four virtues; piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity were closely linked to white womanhood (Collins, 2000, p. 72). The role of wife and mother was regarded as women's primary responsibility, due to the nurturing nature attributed to them. In terms of their sexual behaviour, a passive role was expected. Furthermore, white womanhood was considered the embodiment of a normal female heterosexuality. It is important, however, to note that the association of white women with virtue and purity emerged as opposed to the broader context of the hyper sexualisation of Black women and men (hooks, 2014). Above all, white womanhood is linked to innocence and vulnerability.

White womanhood is inseparably linked to racism, and serves as a way to justify racialised violence (hooks, 2014). Throughout history, white men believed that they needed to protect their white women, and consequently white womanhood, from men of colour. This was reinforced by the persistent myth of the Black man as a rapist of white women. The protection of white womanhood, thus, has served as a justification for lynching, and other forms of violence in particular against Black men (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018a). Sexual violence can be seen as one of the most powerful weapons of white supremacy: against Black men with allegations of rape, and against Black women with rape, as I will detail below. The very

vulnerability of white women is in fact also their power, with white tears as weapon (Phipps, 2021).

White tears, as the symbol of innocent femininity, hold a cultural power, because they have the power to turn the white woman into a helpless victim, which in turn generates sympathy. This results in her being absolved from any form of accountability or responsibility. Moreover, crying and experiencing emotions is a privilege reserved for white women, which serves to perpetuate the inhumanity of women of colour (Phipps, 2021). However, it is imperative to acknowledge that white women have been, and continue to be, an oppressed group throughout history. Nevertheless, a salient characteristic of white womanhood is the ability to alternate between the roles of the oppressor, when it comes to race, and the oppressed, when it comes to gender (Hamad, 2019).

Black womanhood

Black womanhood is about being a Black woman, with the history, roles and expectations that accompany it. Black womanhood is inextricably linked to gender, race and the history of slavery and the intersecting oppression that comes with this. It is important to note that, historically, the concept of Black womanhood has been predominantly defined by the perspective of those in positions of power, particularly white individuals, within the context of whiteness (Clemons & Grieser, 2023). Black womanhood is accompanied and dominated by a lot of negative stereotypes and myths (Gammage, 2016). For this research, the assumed hypersexuality and impossibility of rape of Black women are the most relevant. The Jezebel stereotype, the opposite of the white Victorian lady, emerged during the period of slavery as one of the most prominent stereotypes (Hamad, 2019). Jezebel, characterised by promiscuity and godlessness, degraded all Black women to sexual aggressive women, legitimising sexual violence and rape of Black women (Collins 2000, p. 81). As Collins (2000) argues; “efforts to control Black women’s sexuality lie at the heart of Black women’s oppression” (p. 81).

Throughout the period of slavery, rape of Black enslaved women by white men was very common and can be considered a highly compelling manifestation of racial domination and a way to control Black women (Feinstein 2018, p. 16). The Black woman was considered a sexual savage and animal like, representing a deviant female sexuality. Since animals cannot be raped, Black women were considered unrapeable. Consequently, the notion of innocence, an important characteristic of white womanhood, was never accessible for women of colour because they already had been dispossessed of this through sexual exploitation and rape (Phipps, 2021). The

rape of Black women during the period of slavery resulted in a devaluation of Black womanhood, which continues to the present day and still affects the social status of women of colour (hooks 2014). Moreover, this still affects societal perceptions of Black women who have experienced sexual violence: they are less likely to be seen as victims, and since they are not innocent, it is, at least partly, their own fault (Leung & Williams, 2019). Furthermore, Black womanhood is often linked to notions of power and dominance. This also significantly impacts whether they are seen as victims in cases of sexual violence.

As mentioned above, the ability to express emotions and be a victim is a privilege historically reserved for white women, but not for Black women, who have been taught to be strong and keep their emotions to themselves ever since the era of slavery (Slatton & Richard, 2020).

#MeToo

#MeToo became a worldwide phenomenon on October 15, 2017. On this day, actress Alyssa Milano, a white woman, posted a tweet encouraging all women who ever experienced sexual harassment to respond with #MeToo (Boyle, 2024; Khomani, 2020). The response was absolutely unprecedented: Facebook reported more than 12 million comments in the first 24 hours after the tweet was posted. The tweet was shared on Twitter almost a million times in the first 48 hours (Lawton, 2017). Milano was one of the women that accused film producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual abuse in a New York Times article published on October 5 2017 (Kantor & Twohey, 2017). The #MeToo tweet was posted in a response to this and resulted in a powerful movement of women speaking out against violence and challenged existing gender norms (Larasi, 2024; Leung & Williams, 2019). Many powerful men faced allegations and the movement demonstrated that a society wide behavioural change was necessary (Tambe, 2018).

However, #MeToo was not created by Milano. The term and movement “me too” were created in 2006 by the Black activist Tarana Burke, as a grassroots project of helping Black women who experienced sexual harassment (Boyd & McEwan, 2024). Burke aimed to create a safe space for Black women because she recognized that sexual violence against women of colour was different from sexual violence against white women because of a racialised aspect (Boyd & McEwan, 2024). She used the words “me too” as a powerful expression of support.

Milano was alerted to this by Black activists and referred to Burke and the work she had done in a second tweet and they appeared together in interviews and tv shows (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018b). Nevertheless, the #MeToo movement has become predominantly associated

with affluent, white women (Gómez, 2020). A survey of the first week of the hashtag found that white women were over-represented among those who responded (Modrek & Chacalov, 2019). The pain of white women was made central, and their painful experiences became representative for the experiences of all women (Davis, 2020). The intersectional aspect was lost: the focus was almost exclusively on the gender aspect of sexual harassment, not on the racialised aspect (Leung & Williams, 2019).

Therefore, according to many scholars, the #MeToo movement can be seen as an example of white feminists appropriating something that was created by and for Black women, to seek justice for white women (Boyd & McEwan, 2024; Phipps, 2020, p. 38). This issue is further exacerbated by the fact that Black women are more likely to be subjected to sexual violence than white women (Collins, 2000, p. 147; Burke, 2017). It is just another example of the exclusion of women of colour in feminist movements (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018b).

Research Design

Methods

As mentioned above, a grounded theory method was used. This methodology involves the development of theory stemming from collected data (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). This encompasses both the development of new theories and the extension and refinement of existing ones. As described above, a number of sensitizing concepts served as a foundation for the research and analysis. This study explored the emergence and representation of whiteness in news articles concerning #MeToo in the context of womanhood. It should be noted that the movement under discussion is the #MeToo movement that emerged in 2017 as a result of Milano's tweet, and not Burke's original "metoo" movement.

The data is drawn from a sample of 73 news articles. 81 articles met the selection criteria and were located through the utilisation of the Nexis Uni, ProQuest, Gayle research database, and the selected Los Angeles Times articles were found through its website. The search term was #MeToo. In the course of the coding process, eight articles were excluded on the grounds of irrelevance to the present study, resulting in a total of 73 analysed articles. The sample of articles was derived from articles published between the 15th of October, the day Alyssa Milano posted her now well-known tweet, and the 15th of November 2017. This period was chosen in order to focus the analysis on the initial reporting since this has a significant impact on the manner in which the movement is perceived (Tambe, 2018). Besides, the subject received the most media coverage in the initial period, which decreased over time. The present analysis was limited to articles categorised as "news articles" because the objective of this study was the construction of whiteness in news articles with a more factual nature. Consequently, opinion pieces were excluded from the study because the intention of these pieces is to relay personal perspectives rather than "news".

This study has exclusively analysed articles from American newspapers. The American context was selected as #MeToo initially gained traction in the US, following a tweet by Alyssa Milano, an American actress. The analysed articles were published in the five American newspapers with the highest circulation: The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today and Los Angeles Times. The New York Post was initially selected over the Los Angeles Times on the basis of its higher circulation but their archive did not contain an advanced search engine, which made it impossible to find and select articles within the chosen time period. Therefore, it has been replaced with the next one on the list. The selection

criterion of circulation was employed on the basis that these newspapers reach the largest number of people. Thus, they have the capacity to influence the public discourse (King et al., 2017). Consequently, if articles primary focus on the stories of white women, this significantly impacts the perception of #MeToo in the public discourse.

The following table provides more information about the circulation, owner and political leaning of the newspapers. The circulation figures are from 2023, the most recent year for which circulation data is available for all newspapers. The ‘owner’ column refers to the proprietor of the newspaper, who may be either a corporate entity or an individual person. The column ‘political leaning’ is relevant because the political orientation has a significant impact on the portrayal of events and the articulations of perspectives.

Table 1

Background Information Newspapers

Newspaper	Circulation (print) 2023 in thousands	Owner	Political Leaning	Selected articles
The Wall Street Journal	555.5	Dow Jones & Company	Conservative, centre-right	8
The New York Times	267.6	The New York Times Company	Liberal, lean left	17
The Washington Post	127.7**	Jeff Bezos	Liberal, lean left*	28
USA Today	121.6	Gannet Company	Centre, moderate	8
Los Angeles Times	105.7**	Patrick Soon-Shiong	Liberal, lean left*	12

** These have historically been regarded as liberal progressive papers. However, in the period leading up to the 2024 presidential election, the company owners have been pushing for more support for Republican candidate Donald Trump and refused to endorse the Democratic candidate in their papers. Therefore, the political leaning of these papers is changing (Thorpe & Helmore, 2024).*

*** Both newspapers experienced a decline in readers after the events described above, but exact figures are lacking (Rainey, 2024).*

As this study was concerned with the investigation of the construction of the concept of whiteness in written news articles, the analysis of the data was guided by a critical discourse approach (hereafter CDA). CDA is an analytical approach, not a method, and provides a framework for critical examination (van Dijk, 2001). It represents a valuable tool in the investigation of power relations and social inequalities in language because it aims to identify and analyse “opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance,

discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak, 2001). It involves a critical examination of texts to understand how they represent and reproduce power, social inequalities and dominance (van Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 2001). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the subjectivity of CDA as it does not aim for objectivity. It takes the experiences of marginalised groups seriously, and aims for more equality.

CDA also aligned congruently with the concepts in the theoretical framework, with both focusing primarily on power inequalities. Together, these critical lenses facilitated the identification of what is obvious, hidden and missing in the articles. Therefore, CDA was an ideal method to gain better insight into the constructing of whiteness in the context of womanhood and #MeToo.

The framework of intersectionality enhanced this examination and guided the analysis. Intersectionality as an analytical strategy examined complex social phenomena to determine to what extent they perpetuate social inequalities (Esposito, 2023). This facilitated the mapping of complex relationships and power, and enabled the exploration of layered systems of oppression. Moreover, the concept of intersectionality provided a theoretical framework to critique feminism, interpreting it as a form of white feminism. An intersectional framework does not provide very clear methods of analysis. Nevertheless, it is precisely this that engenders its usefulness because it can be applied to all kinds of experiences and to all kinds of social groups and practices (Davis, 2008, p.72).

For the analysis, the news articles were coded with the use of Atlas.TI software. For coding, the three-step process of Straus and Corbin, open, axial and selective coding, was used (Belgrave & Seide, 2019). Open coding, the first step, involved the categorisation and identification of relevant concepts in the text. It is the process “of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (Strauss & Corbin in Belgrave & Seide, 2019). In the process of assigning codes, consideration was given to word choice, the frequency of use of specific words and the absence of certain words because the absence of particular words or explanations can reveal assumptions that are taken for granted or deemed irrelevant. Some codes were formulated deductively based on the theoretical framework such as white feminism, white womanhood and Black womanhood, while others emerged from the salient features identified within the articles. In total, 29 different codes were formulated, and these were assigned to 799 words or phrases. CDA was useful in this part of the coding because it facilitated the exploration of the underlying messages of the articles, and proved to be a particularly effective method in identifying the underlying assumptions, as well as what was

absent as described by Machin & Mayr (2023). In the process of axial coding, the concepts identified during the open coding were categorised into the following categories: *general background information*, *#MeToo movement*, *race and racism*, *who is centralised*, and *whiteness*. Besides this, relationships between concepts were examined. In the final step of selective coding, the core category of whiteness was identified and the relationship between other categories and the core category were examined.

Positionality

I am aware that I am a white woman of European descent. I am also aware of my privileges and the way this mitigates my experiences with gender oppression. I can only imagine what it is like to be excluded and discriminated against on the basis of race or multisided forms of oppression. I understand that a critical examination of white feminism, a movement that is in fact advocating for my rights as a white woman, is a bit ambiguous. Notwithstanding, it was my aim to conduct a critical examination of white feminism in this particular manifestation of #MeToo. It is my conviction that self-interest and privilege should never serve as a basis for the refusal to engage in critical reflection. I see it as my duty to critically interrogate existing power relations in order to contribute to more inclusive and intersectional theorising.

Findings and analysis

This chapter illustrates the construction and manifestation of whiteness in the context of womanhood in news articles about #MeToo. In doing so, connections will be made with the sensitizing concepts as described in the theoretical framework and these will guide the analysis. The analysis of the news articles showed the significance of nuance, since the majority of the articles do not explicitly address race. Nevertheless, these articles provide a valuable insight in the construction and manifestation of whiteness for women.

Whose pain is centralised?

The coding of the articles revealed a predominant focus on famous women and famous men, in which the vast majority of both men and women were white. These articles describe allegations of sexual harassment against 41 different well-known and successful men. Within this group of 40 men, six men are of colour. Besides this, the articles refer to 76 different well-known women who have made accusations against these prominent men. Of these 76 women, 19 are of colour. It is worth noting that white women are mentioned more often. To illustrate; only five women of colour are mentioned in more than one article, and Tarana Burke was mentioned in six articles. By contrast, twenty white women were mentioned in more than one article, and Alyssa Milano was mentioned in fifteen articles.

#MeToo as movement is not described in great detail in the majority of the articles. Although it is referred to in almost every article, it is often addressed in one or two sentences while the biggest part of the article focuses on the accusation of a high-profile woman to a prominent man. The following quote is an illustrative example of how the majority of the articles refer to the movement:

“That became clear on Sunday, when Facebook, Instagram and Twitter were flooded with messages from women who used the hashtag #MeToo to acknowledge that they had dealt with sexual harassment or assault” (Abrahams, Rutenberg & Ryzik, 2017).

In this, the articles do acknowledge the flood of stories the hashtag sparked but none really address these stories of unknown women. Because of this, it can be argued that the #MeToo movement in itself is secondary to the stories of well-known, often white, women whose experiences are reported in great detail as opposed to the majority of women who used the hashtag, whose stories and experiences are seldom disseminated. These present findings corroborate the assertions made by Gómez (2020) and Davis (2020) that the #MeToo movement is predominantly associated with affluent white women and that their pain and experiences are

of central importance. At the same time, the fact that the original “metoo” movement of Tarana Burke was mentioned in only six articles in this regard is also indicative of the movements limited presence in the public discourse. Not a single Wall Street Journal article was found that made a reference to this original movement, while the other newspapers mentioned it at least in one article.

In addition to the fact that the women in question are predominantly white, they are also very well-known. The prominent status of these women was highlighted in the articles with words such as:

“Stars” (Abrahams, Rutenberg & Ryzik, 2017), “Oscar winners” (Berman, Johnson & Tumulty, 2017), “A-list celebrities” (Lawler, 2017).

Consequently, socioeconomic status was found to be a significant factor. Therefore, it is also important to consider the role that their celebrity-status and wealth play in enhancing the credibility and reach of their testimonies and accusations. A number of articles make a compelling case for the assertion that the celebrity status of the women increases the level of attention for the topic of sexual harassment:

“It’s sad, but why are we only talking about it when someone famous is talking about it?” (Brenda Gutierrez in Vives, 2017).

“Heller said she wondered whether the fame of Weinstein's accusers - who include Oscar winners such as Gwyneth Paltrow - played a role in how their claims were received” (Cathy Heller in Berman, Johnson & Tumulty, 2017).

“The prominence of the accusers ... lends enormous credence and power to the allegations” (Mark Feldstein in Lawler 2017).

In addition, economic position is also a component of socioeconomic status. This is also addressed in the articles:

“The women who have done this, by and large, who have made the headlines and brought it to the forefront, are women who are financially stable” (Blake, 2017).

“If it’s hard for rich and famous people, so many of whom kept silent in the face of Mr. Weinstein's well-known depredations, imagine how much harder it is for someone with no political or economic power” (The New York Times Editorial Board, 2017).

“Harassment is equally if not more prevalent in the hourly workforce, workplace experts say, but a similar groundswell is unlikely because the risk of speaking up and losing income may be too great” (Alpert, Hymowitz & Vranica, 2017).

These quotes reflect on the central focus on wealthy and famous women. Indeed, it is important to recognise this and draw the reader’s attention to it because socioeconomic status has an impact on people’s ability to speak out and the credibility and power of their testimony.

Nevertheless, I would argue that the frequent references to socioeconomic status is a significant finding in the context of research into whiteness and race. Two arguments can be put forward to justify this. First, it should be acknowledged that wealth accumulation and wealth distribution in the US is highly racialized, and inseparable from racism. It can be considered one of the most visible consequences of the influence of white supremacy (Darity & Mullen, 2020; Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Therefore, the prosperity of the white, famous women is not entirely race neutral as they accumulate their wealth in a socioeconomic system that is inherently biased in their favour because of their race.

Additionally, the utilisation of the variable of socioeconomic status, and synonymous, class, cannot be considered race neutral. It is frequently employed as a substitute for the variable of race, and is often used as a way to avoid discussing the uncomfortable issue of race (French, 2017). Evidently, the prevailing norm in this is whiteness, so it is employed in reference to the position of people, and groups, of colour. In doing so, it is an element of colourblind racism, predicated upon the following line of argumentation: it is not about race, it is about class. Colourblind racism is defined by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva as the ideology that “explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of non-racial dynamics” (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). The aforementioned quotes align with this ideology: it is acknowledged that it is more difficult to stand up against sexual harassment for individuals who are in a financially vulnerable position but the existence of other barriers such as race is not acknowledged. This engenders the perception that an improved socioeconomic position would facilitate a safe environment for everyone to speak out, but this is too simplistic. The limited focus on socioeconomic status effectively disregards the complex yet pervasive role of race in society.

It is evident that the public profile of the women who have come forward is of considerable significance for the credibility of their testimonies and the movements’ success. In addition to this, Tarana Burke drew attention to the correlation between race and the credibility and power of a testimony in one article. She posits that the success of the accusations

against Weinstein can be attributed to the race of the women making the accusation, as well as to their prominent status. With regard to the absence of significant social indignation in previous sexual harassment cases against prominent men, she states:

“In the case of O’Reilly, they (initially) were women who were relatively unknown in the journalism world. And in the case of R. Kelly, they were black⁴ girls” (Tarana Burke in Lawler, 2017).

Therefore, it is important to recognise the impact of race on the credibility of a testimony because as Crenshaw (1991) already pointed out, African-American women who have experienced rape are the least likely to be believed. So, race matters, even in the #MeToo movement.

White womanhood

As previously outlined, white women are centred in the #MeToo movement. The descriptions and representation of these women in the articles also construct a particular concept of white womanhood. In this, the dominant concept is the white woman as innocent, vulnerable and silent. Innocence, in particular, is a prominent theme in the articles, and is highlighted in a variety of ways. First, much emphasis is placed on the young age of these women. This is relevant because the term ‘young’ is often linked to innocence. Additionally, there are a lot of references to the powerful position of the accused men, and their abuse of power. The focus on the power of these men simultaneously emphasises the vulnerability and innocence of the women. This also serves to emphasise the submissive characteristic of white womanhood as described by Collins (2000). Furthermore, feelings of fear, shame and disappointment in oneself are also present in the articles:

“Many women said they felt shame, which society has levied on them more harshly than men when it comes to matters of sex” (Fleishman, 2017a).

This may be associated with the passive sexual role that is expected of white women but also with the loss of virtue and purity, very important features of white womanhood. The articles describe that women feel silenced by these feelings but also by people who respond with critical comments, such as:

⁴ The quotes are taken directly from the articles without adjustments. Since the majority of the articles write ‘black’ without a capital ‘B’, this is also the case in some of the quotes.

“You must be overreacting” (Adam, 2017).

“You just need to smile darling” (Adam, 2017).

Besides this, women feel broken and the perpetrators often told them that no one would believe them, and that they are powerless. These elements align closely with the prevailing perception of white women as innocent, vulnerable and submissive (Phipps, 2021). Furthermore, feelings of shame and fear may also be rooted in this ideal, as experiencing sexual abuse can be seen as a loss of virtue and purity:

“I felt like a prostitute, an utter disappointment to myself, my parents, my friends” (Adrienne LaValley in Whipp, 2017).

This contributes significantly to the prevailing stereotype of white women as the innocent victims of sexual abuse and harassment, and strengthens the invisibility of Black victims (Phipps, 2019). The emphasis on innocence in the articles is an important finding in the context of a historical hierarchy of victimhood. Within this hierarchy, the white woman, due to her perceived innocence and hence greater credibility, was regarded the worthiest victim of sexual abuse (Buisser, 2024). Consequently, this emphasis on innocence is in a way perpetuating whiteness in the news articles, and further complicates the position of Black victims. Furthermore, the significant level of attention devoted to the pain of white women serves to illustrate the cultural power of white tears. White tears call for sympathy and perpetuate, by emphasising helplessness, their position as innocent victim. White tears demand attention, and thus indirectly constitute a form of violence against women of colour by further marginalising them to the background (LeMesurier, 2024). Evidently, it is indisputable that white women are also victims, but it is important to note that the discourse around their victimisation has the potential to be harmful to Black victims.

White normativity and colour-blindness

It is imperative to note that the issue of race was only referred to in articles that mentioned women of colour and especially in articles about Tarana Burke. This underscores the notion that the issue of race is in essence predominantly pertinent for the humans that, throughout history, have been subject to racialisation as non-white. This notion can be problematic because it has the potential to engender the idea that race, and inherently racism, is not something that white humans need to be concerned with since it is an issue for people of

colour. The articles contained some explicit references to race, and this was almost without exception to describe a woman of colour. Here are some examples:

“Ms. Burke, who is Black” (Garcia, 2017).

“Mechelle Vinson, one of a number of African-American women who were involved in early sexual harassment lawsuits” (Bennet, 2017).

The absence of any reference to race, outside of labelling women of colour, is indicative of a broader phenomenon, namely the normativity of whiteness. In this, whiteness is the norm and the default, and consequently, non-whiteness is deviant (DiAngelo & Dyson, 2018). People of colour are deviant, and this is emphasised by mentioning their race.

White normativity is embedded in and maintained by the pervasive ideology of colour-blindness that is prevalent in the US. The ideology of colour-blindness is predicated upon the notion that race is a concept from the past, and is no longer an influential factor in society. This renders discussions of race irrelevant using a colourblind lens. The inability to critical reflect on race, and consequently on whiteness, makes a critical reflection upon white power structures impossible. This, in turn, perpetuates white normativity and white superiority (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Doane, 2017). Although the articles are not all written from a completely colourblind perspective, due to the few references to race, they do contribute to maintaining white normativity.

White feminism

The obvious over-representation of white women in the articles as described above is already a strong indication, and a very characteristic of white feminism as described by Moon & Holling (2020). With the central position of white women in the media coverage, their pain is very much central and becomes representative. Especially because these stories only focus on the gendered aspect of sexual abuse. Therefore, it is easy for the reader to assume that these experiences are consistent for every individual with the female gender. The movement is not inclusive, and as a consequence, women of colour are less likely to identify with it. This is also appointed by Black activist Wagatwe Wanjuki:

“I just knew it wouldn’t be empowering for me” (Wagatwe Wanjuki in Olheiser, 2017).

Given the already invisible position of women of colour in the discourse, this is problematic. This problem of their exclusion is further exacerbated by the fact that Black

women in the US experience sexual harassment at a significant higher level than white women (Collins, 2000, p. 147; Burke, 2017).

Another sign of white feminism can be seen in the way that many articles criticise society for failing to protect women, refer to the increased threat to women's rights, and stress the importance of legislation:

"The stories have different characters but similar themes: men in positions of power and women who feel their institutions didn't do enough to protect them" (Wootson, 2017).

"Trump's ascent and the cascade of Hollywood allegations have refocused the feminist movement at a time women increasingly feel their rights are endangered (Fleishman, 2017b).

"To all the (victims) here I want you to know the California legislature has your back" (Connie Levy in Zeitchnik, 2017).

This is a relevant finding because it argues that the state and its institutions should guarantee women's safety and thus apparently have failed to do so. Moreover, it also emphasises that women's rights and freedoms are under increasing pressure. Both observations are valid, yet they are indicative of a predominantly white perspective. Black women have never been granted protection from government institutions and legislation, and certainly not in terms of their sexual integrity (Gross, 2015; hooks, 2014). It has never been something that they can rely on. Furthermore, women's rights have always been more complex for Black women. This is a subject that is seldom discussed by white feminists. Consequently, pointing out that institutions have failed to protect women and that women's rights are under threat reveals a certain white naivety. This is a paradigmatic example of white feminism because the issue is only addressed when it becomes a problem for white women. This aligns with Phipps (2019), who posits that the #MeToo movement exhibits a pronounced emphasis on the role of the state, thereby signifying the privileged position of whiteness. The following quote re-emphasises this white naivety:

"Sexual harassment is apolitical" (Gretchen Carlson in Scott, 2017).

This statement demonstrates a very white perspective on the world. For Black women, sexual violence cannot be separated from politics. Since the beginning of slavery, sexual violence against Black women was a political instrument of oppression, with the goal of

maintaining white supremacy (Hamad, 2019). This is still the case after this period, for example with police violence (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018b).

Black voices

As previously stated, white women occupied a central role within the articles under discussion. However, the limited number of articles about Tarana Burke included some perspectives of Black women. Yet, these few articles only made some space for Black women to express their opinions, perspective and criticisms. The articles itself, and thus the author's perspective, did not articulate the points of criticism of these Black women. Consequently, it can be posited that a critical reflection on the #MeToo movement from the media is conspicuously absent from the articles that were examined in this study.

Nonetheless, the articles about Tarana Burke were the only ones that included any references to the disparate experience of women of colour with regard to sexual harassment. Moreover, these specific articles were the only ones in which an intersectional perspective was found, something that was lacking in the other articles. Burke acknowledged

“a great lack of intersectionality across these various movements” (Tarana Burke in Garcia, 2017).

In the same article, April Reign, a Black activist, also advocated for the implementation of such a perspective, referring to the support for Rose McGowan, a white famous actress:

“We used it as a peaceful moment to say feminism should be intersectional,” Ms. Reign said. “If there is support for Rose McGowan, which is great, you need to be consistent across the board. All women stand with all women” (April Reign in Garcia, 2017).

The finding that race is largely ‘explicitly’ lacking in news coverage is a salient point, given the significance of an intersectional perspective for the inclusion of women of colour in feminist movements. This finding is in alignment with Crenshaw's (1989) assertion that contemporary mainstream feminism predominantly accentuates the gender dimension of oppression, while demonstrating a relative disregard for other dimensions, such as race. Therefore, intersectionality, and consequently an intersectional perspective is missing.

Besides this, the issue of white feminism was occasionally highlighted, albeit again exclusively by women of colour:

“Some women of color noted pointedly that the longtime effort by Ms. Burke, who is black, had not received support over the years from prominent white feminists” (Garcia, 2017).

“White women have not been as supportive as they could have been of women of color when they experience targeted abuse and harassment” (April Reign in Garcia, 2017).

The lack of support from white feminist for Black feminists is a defining feature of white feminism. White feminism tends to only pay attention to movements like this when it becomes useful for them. Even then they often use it in a way that is beneficial to white women. This pattern also emerges in the #MeToo movement, and is therefore also visible in the articles. Therefore, this finding is consistent with the statements of Boyd & McEwan (2024), and Phipps (2020).

Black womanhood

The articles demonstrated some characteristics of Black womanhood. In particular, the assumed hypersexuality of Black women, which is accompanied by a lesser degree of innocence and credibility, can be found in the articles:

“It describes an executive assistant who quit after her boss asked for oral sex; a student who dropped out after being assaulted by her adviser; a black medical administrator whose white supervisor asked if the women in her neighbourhood were prostitutes — and, subsequently, if she would have group sex with him and several colleagues” (Bennet, 2017).

This quote gives an example of a stereotype faced by Black women. Although not explicitly mentioned in the articles, this demonstrates that race does matter when it comes to sexual harassment. The example points to a connection between the race of the medical administrator, and the associated assumption that the women in her neighbourhood are prostitutes. It was not said but it is safe to assume that by her neighbourhood, the man means a Black neighbourhood. This would suggest that he holds the presumption that all Black women are prostitutes. In this, the prevailing stereotype of the Black woman as a highly sexual creature, who is always willing to have sex, is very visible. Furthermore, it shows that the sexual transgressive behaviour to which this woman is exposed, is not solely attributable to her gender; it is also racialized. The following statement is also related to this stereotype:

“They think you’re crazy or you asked for it or you’re too hypersexualized” (Christina Garcia in Mason, 2017).

In this quote, the hypersexuality of Black women is literally mentioned. Through this attributed characteristic, Black women are made responsible for the sexual exploitation and sexual harassment to which they are subjected (Collins 2000, p. 81). As Phipps (2021) also stated, the quotes show that Black women are generally not perceived as innocent. Because of the absence of innocence, they are not considered as victims; it is their own fault (Wallace et al., 2024). This outcome serves to reconfirm the de facto inferior position of Black women within the historical hierarchy of victimhood, and especially when contrasted to the position of white women in this hierarchy. In the context of the issue of victim blaming, this is also relevant. The #MeToo movement is often seen as a turning point in terms of victim-blaming because it encourages women to speak out and aims to make sure that the voices and the stories of victims are heard (Przybyla, 2017). However, it is necessary to be critical of this: does the movement end victim blaming for every victim or mostly for the traditionally innocent white women? This question cannot be answered on the basis of the present study but I would argue that this is an issue that requires critical reflection. For instance, Maier (2024) revealed that, despite the #MeToo movement, Black women continue to encounter disparate treatment, and still often experience victim-blaming based on racial stereotypes.

In order to demonstrate the presence of characteristics of Black womanhood in these articles, I will highlight one specific case from the articles: the allegation of the Black actress Lupita Nyong’o, one of the more than 40 women who accused him, against Harvey Weinstein. This is illustrative because it demonstrates the significant impact of race on the credibility of an allegation. The case of Lupita Nyong’o is relevant because she was the first Black woman accusing Weinstein of sexual harassment (Wang, 2017). Nevertheless, her accusation was the only one that was explicitly denied by Weinstein, while he did not respond to the other accusations, or offered only general denials. Weinstein could of course have all sorts of reasons for this but it is possible to consider this as a sign that her testimony is apparently easier to refute, maybe because of her reduced credibility because of her race. What also stands out is how this is described in the article: it is mentioned that some people relate this to the race of Nyong’o and accuse Weinstein of racism, but then the article immediately proceeds with the following sentence:

“Many of those accusing Weinstein of racism, on top of everything else, failed to mention he had also specifically refuted claims by Ashley Judd” (Wang, 2017).

This is a noteworthy point because the article immediately seeks to refute the potential racist undertones in Weinstein's denial by promptly presenting a similar case involving a white woman. With this, the article avoids the issue of race, and Weinstein potential racist denial, immediately. This constitutes yet another illustration of the ideology of colour-blindness because it is posited that race should not be taken into account as a relevant factor in this situation.

Conclusion and discussion

This thesis focused on the construction of whiteness and white womanhood in news articles about the #MeToo movement. This included an examination of the references to the issue of race and Black womanhood. A grounded theory method has been used. The study was guided by the following research question:

How is whiteness in the context of womanhood manifested in news articles from American newspapers concerning the #MeToo movement?

In the majority of the articles, whiteness manifested itself prominently. The analysis revealed that white women were overrepresented in the articles and their stories and experiences dominated the news articles. It is notable that the #MeToo movement itself, and simultaneously the “me too” movement and its founder, were of secondary importance to the narratives of the women in the articles. White normativity is prevalent in the articles, while a discourse about the issue of race and an intersectional perspective were lacking. This was not criticised by any of the authors of the articles.

Above all, I would argue that the success of #MeToo movement is inextricably linked to the involvement of white, famous women. Additionally, their whiteness and prominent role were a significant factor because it enhanced their personal credibility, and thus the entire movement’s credibility. The depictions of white women in the articles align closely with the conventional notion of white womanhood. The utilisation of specific vocabulary and descriptions accentuates the innocence, vulnerability and victimhood of the white woman. The emphasis on innocence perpetuates the notion of white women as the most valuable victim, thereby automatically excluding Black women from this category, leaving them at the bottom of the hierarchy of victimhood. This once more corroborates the historical power relations in terms of victimhood (Buisker, 2024). The cultural power of white tears is an element of this: white women know how to be a victim and their tears highlight their vulnerable position. Hamad (2019) and Phipps (2021) had previously identified this in other contexts, and it is also apparent within the #MeToo context. Whilst it is evident that white tears do not result in direct violence in the #MeToo context, they nevertheless have the capability to demand attention, thereby marginalising women of colour.

Furthermore, the #MeToo movement contains a number of characteristics of white feminism as described by Moon & Holling (2020), Collins (2000), Lorde (1984) and Zakaria (2021). First, the central position of white women and their experiences in the articles, thereby

suggesting that their experiences were universal and shared by all women. This universalisation of the experiences of white women is a very distinctive characteristic of white feminism. Moreover, the articles focus exclusively on the gender aspect of sexual harassment and it is framed as a gender problem. As Leung & Williams (2019) already stated, the present study also demonstrates that intersectionality is not taken into account in the articles, and consequently the impact of race in experiences of sexual harassment is not addressed. This is also indicative of white feminism, and explains the absence of women of colour in the movement as Crenshaw (1989) already pointed out. Finally, the #MeToo movement is built on something that is developed by a Black woman, many years before, yet it is subsequently employed to advance the position of white women, without real recognition for Tarana Burke and the work she had been doing for over ten years. It is evident that the movement provides a compelling illustration of a white feminist movement. Additionally, the analysis further revealed a pronounced emphasis on the role of the government and legislation. I would argue that this can be considered another characteristic of white feminism because it reveals a white perspective on society. This is a characteristic that has not yet been extensively explored in the existing literature on white feminism.

In summary, the #MeToo movement can be considered an illustration of white feminism. This aligns with the statements of Boyd & McEwan (2024), Phipps (2020) and Onwauchi-Willig (2018b). Of course, the #MeToo movement is a significant step forward for the position of women in society, but it is mainly a white women's win and a Black women's loss.

From a broader standpoint, the present study offers insights about feminism more generally, as well as the position of whiteness in society. It demonstrates the pervasive nature of whiteness, and its enduring, yet unperceived, power on various societal structures such as the media. The dominance of whiteness within a feminist movement is, in principle, a logical outcome of this pervasive nature. It would be illogical to assert that the #MeToo movement has deliberately become a white feminist movement. However, the fact that the dominance of whiteness within a feminist movement receives so little attention, is indicative of the dominance and prevalence of whiteness. Therefore, it is evident that active resistance against whiteness is necessary, both in feminist movements, as society as a whole, otherwise the status quo will remain unchanged.

Finally, some limitations of this study. In general, the subjective interpretation of the articles and consequently, the findings, constitute both a strength and a limitation inherent to qualitative research. This limitation also applies to the present study. A follow up study could

improve on this this by having multiple researchers undertake the coding process, thereby increasing intercoder reliability and making subjectivity more transparent (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

Another limitation is the exclusive focus on Black and white women, and the exclusion of other groups of women of colour such as Asian, Arab or Hispanic women. As outlined in the theoretical framework, a thoughtful choice was made to focus exclusively on white and Black women. Therefore, the very limited number references in the articles to other women of colour were excluded from the analysis and it is not possible to conclude about the position of other women of colour in the #MeToo movement based on this research. However, the present study is not the first to focus on this dichotomy because the majority of scientific research into race and racism tends to focus exclusively on this Black-white binary (Gonzalez-Sobrinho & Goss, 2018). An exclusive focus on the Black-white power relationship and its racism can perpetuate an oversimplification of the complex nature of racism and this may have negative impact on the visibility of other human groups of colour (Deliofsky & Kitossa, 2013). For further research, it would be interesting and relevant to include this in the analysis.

For future studies, it would be interesting to expand the sample and the timeframe. In this research, the sample of articles was relatively small and the time period of four weeks was also limited. This fitted well with the purpose of the research, as it provided an accurate representation of the message during the movement's initial phase. However, it would be interesting to study what, if anything, has changed over time. It is possible that newspapers over time adopted a more intersectional perspective, or featured more stories about non-famous women or women of colour. This would be particularly interesting in the context of the considerable impact exerted by the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020.

Another suggestion for further research is to explore the construction and manifestation of whiteness beyond mere news articles. For example, an examination of conversations in talk shows concerning the #MeToo movement could also be an interesting angle.

Lastly, I would argue that more research into whiteness, its effects and its consequences is important and necessary. Whiteness is a powerful but often invisible force in society and it is important to examine this dominant force and its role in various forms of inequality. The study of whiteness is necessary in the fight against racism (Olcoń, 2024). Research into white feminism, and white feminist movements is a necessary part of this.

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Appendix I: Ethics and Privacy Checklist



CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Bonnie French, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: Thesis about whiteness in the #MeToo movement

Name, email of student: Ireen Albers (728904ia@eur.nl)

Name, email of supervisor: Dr. Bonnie French (french@essb.eur.nl)

Start date and duration: April 4- June 22 (11 weeks)

Is the research study conducted within DPAS **YES - NO**

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted? (e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants. YES - **NO**

If 'NO': skip to part V.

If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research? YES - NO

Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act ([WMO](#)) must first be submitted to [an accredited medical research ethics committee](#) or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects ([CCMO](#)).

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants. YES - NO

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else). YES - NO

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? YES - NO
2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? YES - NO
3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? YES - NO
4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants? YES - NO
Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).
5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? YES - NO
6. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)? YES - NO
7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? YES - NO
8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? YES - NO
9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? YES - NO
10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? YES - NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

The articles that will be the subject of my analysis will be downloaded and stored on my personal laptop.

Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

Myself (Ireen Albers)

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

I will back up my data every time after editing it.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

I'm not collecting personal data

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Ireen Albers

Name (EUR) supervisor: [Bonnie French](#)

Date: March 12, 2025

Date: [March 19, 2025](#)

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