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"Me Too": Epistemic Injustice and the Struggle for Recognition[1]

Debra L. Jackson

Abstract

Congdon (2017), Giladi (2018), and McConkey (2004) challenge feminist epistemologists and recognition theorists to come together to analyze epistemic injustice. I take up this challenge by highlighting the failure of recognition in cases of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice experienced by victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault. I offer the #MeToo movement as a case study to demonstrate how the process of mutual recognition makes visible and helps overcome the epistemic injustice suffered by victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault. I argue that in declaring "me too," the epistemic subject emerges in the context of a polyphonic symphony of victims claiming their status as agents who are able to make sense of their own social experiences and able to convey their knowledge to others.

Keywords: epistemic injustice; recognition theory; sexual harassment; sexual assault, #metoo

In its December 18, 2017, issue, *Time* magazine declared "The Silence Breakers" as the "2017 Person of the Year." The article features stories from 35 women and men who had suffered from sexual harassment and/or sexual assault in a variety of occupations, from Hollywood actors, prominent journalists, and political lobbyists to hotel housekeepers, restaurant dishwashers, and office assistants. The honor bestowed on "The Silence Breakers" was, in part, sparked by a symphony of

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"me too" declarations across the world, which began on October 15, 2017, when actress Alyssa Milano posted on her Twitter account,

> Me Too. Suggested by a friend: "If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too.' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem." If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet.

The response was overwhelming. Milano told *Time* that she received 32,000 replies to her tweet within 24 hours (Zacharek, Dockterman, and Sweetland Edwards 2017, 32). *CNN* reported that 4.7 million people engaged in the "me too" conversation on Twitter, with over 12 million posts, comments, and reactions in the first 24 hours after Milano's post (Santiago and Criss 2017). "Me too" statements also flooded other social media platforms including Facebook and Instagram. Some of the posts were a simple "me too," while others included descriptions of the incidents that the writers endured. Although #MeToo as a social media phenomenon appeared at the end of 2017, "me too" as a social movement has a much longer history. Tarana Burke, founder of the youth organization Just Be Inc., is widely credited as the originator of the "me too" movement beginning in 2006.

#MeToo is not the first social media campaign aimed at drawing attention to sexual harassment and sexual assault. In 2011, photography student Grace Brown created Project Unbreakable, a website featuring photographs of survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse holding signs which quote their attackers or those to whom they had disclosed their experience. In 2012, activist Laura Bates launched the #EverydaySexism campaign, which catalogs stories of sexism from around the world, including experiences of sexual harassment and sexual assault. In 2014, #YesAllWomen was widely posted to raise awareness about violence against women after a misogyny-driven killing spree in Isla Vista, California. In 2016, #NotOkay drew attention to rape culture following the release of the *Access Hollywood* video in which Donald Trump bragged about groping women. And, in response to the October 5, 2017, *New York Time*s article about Harvey Weinstein's long history of sexual misconduct (Kantor and Twohey 2017), #MyHarveyWeinstein appeared as individuals shared their own stories of sexual harassment in the workplace.

However, #MeToo differs from previous campaigns to raise awareness about sexual harassment and sexual violence, and that difference is not just about the numbers of people across the globe who have participated in the conversation. The difference can be illuminated by drawing on two lines of scholarship: work in feminist social epistemology on epistemic injustice and work in social philosophy on the role of recognition in the development of self-identity. In this essay, I argue that

"me too" is more than a strategy for "giving people a sense of the magnitude of the problem;" it simultaneously makes visible the epistemic injustice suffered by victims of sexual harassment and sexual violence, and helps overcome that injustice through a process of mutual recognition. To make this case, I describe the recognitive failures of testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice, and argue that in declaring "me too," the epistemic subject emerges in the context of a polyphonic symphony of victims claiming their status as agents who are both able to make sense of their own social experiences and able to convey their knowledge to others.

Epistemic Injustice and Recognition Theory

While the term "epistemic injustice" itself highlights the intersection of epistemology, ethics, and political theory, the literature has focused primarily on epistemic questions rather than questions of justice. For example, in the introduction to her 2007 book, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Miranda Fricker distinguishes her focus from political concerns about "distributive unfairness in respect to epistemic goods such as information or education" (Fricker 2007, 1). Unfortunately, this remark misses the fact that questions of justice are more than a matter of the distribution of goods, as recognition theorists have argued (Young 1990; C. Taylor 1994; Honneth 1995). In contrast, Congdon (2017), Giladi (2018), and McConkey (2004) insist that feminist epistemologists and recognition theorists join theoretical forces in analyzing epistemic injustice.

On the one hand, Matthew Congdon and Paul Giladi argue that social epistemologists working on epistemic injustice ought to pay attention to recognition theory. In "What's Wrong with Epistemic Injustice? Harm, Vice, Objectification, Misrecognition," Congdon contends that the wrongness of epistemic injustice is not only a matter of harmful consequences, vicious perception, and objectification; it is also a matter of misrecognition. Because a person's self-identity is both developed and maintained through relations with others, epistemic injustice undermines a positive relation-to-self through the denial of one's standing as a knower. That is, epistemic injustice is a failure of recognition. Like Congdon, Paul Giladi also argues that recognition theory can help diagnose the wrongness of epistemic injustice. In his essay, "Epistemic Injustice: A Role for Recognition?" Giladi describes how both testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice are failures of recognition. The former entails denying a speaker the status of a rational enquirer, which alienates her from her own rationality and excludes her from the community of rational enquirers. The latter entails preventing members of marginalized groups from accessing the self-interpretational dimension of rational agency, which maintains existing ideological structures and prevents radical social change.

Giladi further considers how recognition theory can help identify ways to overcome epistemic injustice. He writes, "The practice of *overcoming epistemic unsociability and realizing our epistemic sociability* seems to share much in common with the process of *transitioning from asymmetrical recognition orders to genuinely symmetrical recognition orders*, since *true* sociality does not merely consist in interacting with others *simpliciter*, but rather in interacting with others in *a way that enables self-realization*" (Giladi 2018, 149; italics in original). That is, epistemic justice and mutual recognition are mutually supporting. To treat a person with epistemic respect is to recognize that person as one's peer, and this supports his/her/their[2] status as a rational agent. Giladi points to consciousness-raising initiatives and solidarity movements as potential examples of symmetrical cognitive environments in which testimonial justice is possible. He also suggests that while hermeneutical justice is difficult under oppressive social conditions, attempts to shift unequal power relations can result in progressive gains.

Jane McConkey, on the other hand, argues that recognition theorists ought to pay attention to the phenomenon of epistemic injustice. In "Knowledge and Acknowledgement: Epistemic Injustice as a Problem of Recognition," she links epistemic injustice to forms of oppression such as cultural imperialism. Because cultural imperialism involves the misrepresentation of marginalized groups and the ongoing misunderstanding of that group's social identity, it is widely accepted as a problem of recognition (Young 1990). However, she maintains, cultural imperialism can also be understood as involving epistemic injustice. Although she doesn't use the terms hermeneutical injustice and testimonial injustice, her description of the injustice committed by cultural imperialism entails both concepts. This is because marginalized groups are denied the opportunity to contribute to the collective epistemic resources, given that only the dominant group's cultural products are regarded as valuable and thus universally representative of the human experience. McConkey describes the paradox faced by members of oppressed groups: "They are understood in terms of crude stereotypes that do not accurately portray individual group members but also assume a mask of invisibility; they are both badly misrepresented and robbed of the means by which to express their perspective" (McConkey 2004, 202).

Recognition theory has much to offer critical social epistemology: it can help diagnose interpersonal acts of testimonial injustice; it can help diagnose political relations supporting testimonial and hermeneutical injustice; and it can help identify remedies for epistemic injustice. In the following sections, I highlight the recognitive failures in cases of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice experienced by victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault, and characterize the #MeToo movement as a

[2] For the remainder of this essay, I will use the pronouns "she," "her," and "hers."

performance of mutual recognition which both reclaims a victim's status as an epistemic subject and builds a community of solidarity.

Testimonial Injustice and the Struggle for Recognition

The role of testimony in the recovery of the self following a traumatic event is often emphasized in trauma studies scholarship (although usually put in terms of narrative rather than testimony to highlight the agency of the testifier). Susan Brison (1999, 2002), for example, argues that self-narration is a process of re-subjectification. In narrating one's own experience, the victim shifts from the status of an object to that of a subject, resulting in the restoration of both the victim's sense of self and her membership in a community of selves. Recovery of the self after a traumatic event requires, then, the ability to authoritatively tell one's story, to testify about what one has experienced. It also requires a recognitive response to that testimony. I argue that when that recognition is mutual, when it occurs between two (or more) victims, the restorative potential of testimony is more fully achieved.

When victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault disclose their experiences, some are believed, but many are not. The credibility of their testimony greatly depends upon their social identity and the nature of the incident. That is, the credibility of a victim's testimony depends upon the "rhetorical space" in which it is uttered. Lorraine Code (1995) uses the term "rhetorical spaces" to characterize "fictive but not fanciful or fixed locations, whose (tacit, rarely spoken) territorial imperatives structure and limit the kinds of utterances that can be voiced within them with a reasonable expectation of uptake and 'choral support': an expectation of being heard, understood, taken seriously. They are the sites where the very possibility of an utterance counting as 'true-or-false' or of a discussion yielding insight is made manifest" (Code 1995, ix–x). The rhetorical spaces in which a victim's testimony is expressed are shaped by social scripts, attitudes, stereotypes, and discourses which are culturally and historically situated.

When it comes to experiences of sexual harassment and sexual assault, the testimony that elicits social and legal response is generally restricted to that which conforms to social scripts about legitimate victims. For example, affluent white women who are sexually assaulted by strangers and suffer substantial injuries are the most likely to be believed. Their experience fits the model of "real rape." But those whose experiences do not conform to the model of "real rape" are those which are denied uptake and choral support. Women who are sexually assaulted by acquaintances are unlikely to be believed due to the wide acceptance of rape supportive attitudes. These include the views that women frequently lie about being raped to draw attention to themselves, to protect their reputation as chaste, or to

enact revenge when a relationship fails.[3] Women of color who are sexually assaulted are unlikely to be believed due to racialized gender stereotypes. Black women, for example, are subject to what Patricia Hill Collins (1990) identifies as "controlling images of Black womanhood," namely the mammy, matriarch, welfare mother, and Jezebel, which situate them as either unsexed thus unrapable or else oversexed thus unrapable. Similar social scripts are at work with respect to sexual harassment. Women's reports of sexual harassment are frequently met with incredulity for many of the same reasons as are reports of sexual assault (Lonsway, Cortina, and Magely 2008). In some cases, the inappropriate behavior is acknowledged, but the woman's report is discounted on the basis that she failed to understand the nature of the behavior: the victim's offense is attributed to her being oversensitive and unable to "take a joke." In other cases, the inappropriate behavior is denied altogether, and the victim is accused of lying to gain attention, to seek revenge, or to profit financially. Men who are sexually harassed or sexually assaulted are also unlikely to be believed due to gendered social scripts. Wendy Hollway (1989) identifies "male sexual drive discourse" as having a pervasive influence on attitudes about male sexuality. According to this script, men have an overwhelming desire or need to have sex, which translates not only into justification when men perpetrate sexual harassment or sexual assault, but also translates into the impossibility that a man could be victimized. Hegemonic masculinity is equated with potency and impermeability, not sexual victimization.

Each of the situations described above involve testimonial injustice. Miranda Fricker defines testimonial injustice as a distinctively epistemic harm that "occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word" (Fricker 2007, 1). Victims of sexual harassment or sexual assault are perceived as lacking credibility due to the wide acceptance of rape-supportive attitudes, racialized gender stereotypes, sexual harassment myths, and gendered social scripts. Fricker points out that these prejudices operate through the collective social imagination, distorting the hearer's perception of the speaker at the nondoxastic level. That is, these prejudices may operate in ways that may be inconsistent with

[3] One of the most debated issues regarding sexual violence is the frequency of false allegations. In 2006, criminal justice professor Philip Rumney published a comprehensive review of studies and reports on false rape allegations, finding estimates ranging from 1.5% to 90% (Rumney 2006). Psychologist David Lisak and colleagues argue that few of the sources included in Rumney's review are credible. They argue that when considering only credible studies—those which clearly define what constitutes a false report, clearly explain the source data used, and evaluate the data received from law enforcement agencies—the prevalence of false allegations is between 2% and 10% (Lisak et al. 2010).

the conscious beliefs of hearers. Hearers *perceive* women and men who report sexual harassment or sexual assault as dishonest, even at the same time as they might deny conscious adherence to rape myths. The pervasive and powerful influence of these prejudices on the social perception of victims is captured by the term "rape culture."

For many victims, particularly those whose experiences do not fit the expectations for credible reports, testimonial injustice can be exacerbated by "epistemic violence," the pervasive silencing of marginalized groups. Kristie Dotson (2011) distinguishes between two of these practices of silencing, namely "testimonial quieting" and "testimonial smothering." On the one hand, testimonial quieting refers to practices in which a speaker's testimony is silenced due to the hearer's failure to identify her as a knower. The credibility of victims who are members of epistemically marginalized groups is systematically undermined already, thus their testimony of victimization has little chance to gain uptake. On the other hand, testimonial smothering refers to practices in which a speaker engages in self-silencing due to the hearer's incompetence. In these cases, victims are effectively coerced into silence because to testify to their victimization would risk future harm to themselves. In both cases, the victim is perceived as dishonest and as an unreliable source of knowledge.

The effects of testimonial injustice on victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault are profound. To be denied the status of a "genuine victim" is to be denied access to the emotional, social, medical, and legal responses that status warrants (Burt and Estep 1981). Instead of receiving sympathy, hearers respond to victims with hostility, which can be particularly painful when coming from loved ones to whom one typically turns to for support. Instead of receiving social support, victims become socially isolated and ostracized. They are left to attempt to cope with the harm they endure on their own, or to try to locate limited services from organizations such as rape crisis centers. Instead of being able to access medical care or legal recourse, victims are rejected by those professionals sworn to advocate on the behalf of the vulnerable. Even when a report is filed with human resources or the police, the case is rarely prosecuted. And for those who undergo a sexual assault examination kit, the evidence is unlikely to be analyzed as rape kits sit in storage for decades (Mulla 2014). As a result, most victims forgo reporting their victimization to authorities. For example, only 6% to 13% of those who experience sexual harassment in the workplace file complaints (Cortina and Berdahl 2008), and only 31% of attempted and completed rapes are reported to police (L. Taylor 2006). This indicates the extent to which testimonial smothering affects victims of sexual harassment and/or sexual assault. In the face of an incompetent audience unwilling and unable to hear one's testimony, victims suffer in silence.

Above all, to be denied the status of a "genuine victim" is to be denied recognition as an epistemic subject. When hearers respond to a victim's testimony with incredulity, they deny her the status of someone who can authoritatively speak to the facts of the events she endured, and deny her the status of someone who others can rely upon to gain knowledge about the world. Thus, testimonial injustice alienates the speaker from both her own self-relation and her relation to others. Her diminished status also erodes her self-confidence in being able to effect change to the social environment that produced her victimization. If she is not believed, she is less likely to be able to improve her working conditions or living situation. She may, herself, come to accept the judgment that she is at fault, that her actions precipitated the incident(s), or that she deserved the harm she suffered. This is particularly true for victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault. A sexual predator, in committing a crime against a person, attacks the victim in her capacity as a subject, refusing to recognize her as an individual agent with her own life plans, projects, and perspective. When a victim discloses her experience to another person, her status as a subject is on the line. If the hearer responds with disbelief, her diminished status is reinforced.

All this points to the fact that testimony calls for an empathic response. Because the self is relational, narrating one's experience cannot be monological; it must be shared with and heard by others even if those others are imagined, potential others. The ability to interpret and represent one's own experience requires an audience, someone to whom and for whom the narrative can be told. Dori Laub writes, "The absence of an empathic listener, or more radically, the absence of an addressable other, an other who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story" (Laub 1992, 68). Without uptake and choral support, that is, without recognition, testimony cannot accomplish its intention, namely to convey knowledge to others. Brison captures how the need for an empathic listener is particularly critical for victims who are traumatized by their experiences. She writes, "In order to construct self-narratives we need not only the words with which to tell our stories, but also an audience able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them. This aspect of remaking a self in the aftermath of trauma highlights the dependency of the self on others and helps to explain why it is so difficult for survivors to recover when others are unwilling to listen to what they endured" (Brison 1999, 46).

To counter the testimonial injustice experienced by many victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault, two common responses from empathic listeners are "I believe you" and "That should not have happened to you." These responses are recognitive acts and powerful indictments of rape culture. In taking up a victim's testimony as true, the former recognizes her as an epistemic subject, as someone

capable of understanding her own experience and contributing her knowledge to the collective epistemic resources. The latter expresses moral outrage for the injury that the victim experienced, affirming her rights to bodily integrity and autonomy. Thus, these responses affirm the victim's positive relation-to-self as both an epistemic and moral subject. I do not intend to contest the appropriateness of these responses to hearing a victim's disclosure of sexual harassment or sexual assault. However, I do want to note that both "I believe you" and "That should not have happened to you" pose a risk of reinscribing the victim's disempowerment. They posit the hearer-respondent as the epistemic and moral authority, as the subject capable of making a judgment on the veracity of the testimony and the wrongfulness of the deed. These recognitive responses thus create an asymmetrical relationship between the victim-testifier and the hearer-respondent, in which the latter's validation as a subject depends upon the former's judgment.

In *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflict* (1995), Axel Honneth argues that the development and maintenance of a positive self-relation is grounded not on an asymmetrical process of recognition but on an intersubjective process of *mutual* recognition. He writes, "The very possibility of identity-formation depends crucially on the development of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. These three modes of relating practically to oneself can only be acquired and maintained intersubjectively, through being granted recognition by others whom one also recognizes. As a result, the conditions for self-realization turn out to be dependent on the establishment of relationships of mutual recognition" (Honneth 1995, xi). Unlike "I believe you" and "That should not have happened to you," "me too" creates a symmetrical relationship between the victim and the listener since the act of recognition simultaneously reverses the roles of victim-testifier and hearer-respondent. When I respond to another's testimony with "me too," I am both testifying and recognizing her testimony, and my recognition of her as a victim is dependent upon her recognition of me as a victim. The "too" in the response is the central feature of the moment of mutual recognition. When I respond "me too," I not only recognize her as reliable testifier, I also expose myself as a victim and make myself vulnerable to her judgment about my testimony. Our mutual vulnerability empowers each other as both epistemic and moral agents.

Hermeneutical Injustice and the Struggle for Recognition

Being able to narrate one's experience of victimization requires the hermeneutical resources with which to characterize the events as harmful or injurious. But these interpretive resources are not always available. In some cases, this is a matter of circumstantial bad luck, but in others it is a result of a systematic prejudice regarding which social groups have the authority to interpret the world. Fricker identifies this phenomenon as hermeneutical injustice, namely, a distinct

form of epistemic injustice occurring “when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their own social experiences” (Fricker 2007, 1).

One of Fricker's central examples of hermeneutical injustice is taken from Susan Brownmiller's memoir, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (1999), in which she recounts how the phenomenon of sexual harassment appeared on the feminist agenda. It begins with the story of Carmita Wood, who had worked at Cornell University for eight years. Wood endured unwanted sexual attention from one of the professors at the university. His behavior included jiggling his crotch when he stood near her desk, brushing against her breasts when reaching for papers, and cornering her in an elevator to kiss her. The stress from these encounters led to a host of physical ailments including chronic back pain and neck pain, so Wood left her job and filed for unemployment insurance. However, Brownmiller writes, "When the claims investigator asked why she had left her job after eight years, Wood was at a loss to describe the hateful episodes. . . . Her claim for unemployment benefits was denied" (Brownmiller 1999, 280–281). Because this incident occurred prior to 1975, Wood lacked the interpretive resources necessary to identify her experience as a form of sex discrimination which we now identify as sexual harassment. As a result, Fricker argues, Wood suffered hermeneutical injustice.

Like testimonial injustice, hermeneutical injustice also involves a failure of recognition. Giladi writes, “The principle harmfulness of hermeneutical injustice consists in depriving a victim of having access to the self-interpretational dimension of rational agency: this represents a *specific* variety of alienation, because an indispensable feature of rational agency is one’s ability to make sense of one’s experiences” (Giladi 2018, 152 italics in original). Victims of hermeneutical injustice do not just accidently lack the concepts to understand their experiences; they are systematically denied the epistemic authority to interpret their own experiences. Charles Mills characterizes this succinctly: “It is not a matter of an innocent misunderstanding or gap, but of a misrepresentation generated organically, materially, from the male perspective on the world, motivated by their group interests and phenomenologically supported by their group experience” (Mills 2017, 105). The phenomenon of what we now recognize as sexual harassment is highly gendered and differentially impacts men and women. The historical absence of this concept is determined by the parameters of the existent rhetorical spaces. Women’s social subordination to men both produces and is reinforced by their unequal ability to participate in the shaping of dominant interpretive resources (Fricker 2007, 152). When women are not fully recognized as epistemic subjects who are both equal members of the epistemic community and at the same time subjects whose experiences of the world are different from that of men, their subjectivity is not only

devalued, it is given no value at all. In other words, the failure of recognition is one of nonrecognition, not just misrecognition.

Hermeneutical injustice can, then, be attributed to the pervasive power of ideology, what in common parlance is referred to as "rape culture." Unfortunately, this hegemonic worldview is often internalized by those whose experiences flatly contradict the prevailing interpretations (Mills 2017, 102). For example, psychologist Lynn M. Phillips (2000) has documented how young women from diverse backgrounds frequently describe experiences that fit the legal definition of rape, battering, or harassment, yet do not define them as such. When a victim internalizes rape myths that blame victims for eliciting the assault, deny that a person with a particular social identity can be raped, or excuse perpetrators for being at the whim of "evolutionary drives," she will be unable to understand her own experience of victimization. In "Rape Myths and Domestic Abuse Myths as Hermeneutical Injustices" (2017), Katherine Jenkins argues that this constitutes a kind of hermeneutical injustice. Instead of attributing a victim's understanding of herself as a result of her failure to make use of the interpretive resources available (e.g., legal definitions) that would warrant seeing herself as a victim, Jenkins insists that these conceptual resources are genuinely not at her disposal. This is because there is a conflict between the meaning of the concepts at the formal, policy level and those at the everyday level of practice. The rhetorical space of "rape culture" produces failures of recognition, and these failures can be both the inability of a victim to recognize herself as well as the inability of others to recognize her as a victim.

Interestingly, what makes hermeneutical injustice visible is its overcoming through an intersubjective process of mutual recognition. It is through the collective efforts of those who are hermeneutically marginalized that a gap in the economy of interpretive resources is exposed and filled. To see this, let's return to the case of Carmita Wood. Brownmiller credits the emergence of the term "sexual harassment" to a group of eight women working in Cornell University's Human Affairs office who were discussing how to raise awareness not only about Wood's experience but also the experiences of other women, including those in Lin Farley's seminar on "women and work." Because Wood's experience was identified as just one example among many, it could be situated as a result of a larger social pathology. Farley's colleague, Karen Sauvigne, described to Brownmiller the recognitive moment:

> "Lin's students had been talking in her seminar about the unwanted sexual advances they'd encountered on their summer jobs," Sauvigne relates. "And then Carmita Wood comes in and tells Lin *her* story. We realized that to a person, every one of us—the women on staff, Carmita, the students—had had an experience like this at some point, you know? And none of us had

> ever told anyone before. It was one of those *click, aha!* moments, a profound revelation." (Brownmiller 1999, 281)

The women decided to hold a "speak-out" in order to "break the silence" about their collective experiences but needed a name to advertise the event. After some brainstorming, the term "sexual harassment" was coined. The ability of the women to identify the gap in the collective hermeneutical resources and to fill it with a new concept depended upon a process of mutual recognition in which women who had been targeted by predatory coworkers or bosses were able to see themselves as victims by seeing the others as victims.

Note that if the response to Carmita Wood's testimony had been simply "I believe you" or "That should not have happened to you," the rhetorical space for the emergence of collective action to protest the harm she endured would not have been possible. Although "I believe you" and "That should not have happened to you" leave open the risk for enacting an asymmetrical relationship in which the hearer-respondent is the epistemic and moral authority, these responses also preserve the isolation of the victim-testifier, or rather the *potential* victim-testifier since, so long as she is solitary, she can continue to understand her experience as natural, inevitable, or deserved. Honneth argues that in order for members of subordinated groups to understand the profound disrespect they experience to be something they encounter not simply as individuals but in virtue of their membership in that social group, they need a semantics with which to articulate and protest it. He writes, "As soon as ideas of this sort have gained influence within a society, they generate a subcultural horizon of interpretation within which experiences of disrespect that, previously, had been fragmented and had been coped with privately can then become the moral motives for a collective 'struggle for recognition'" (Honneth 1995, 164). Without an intersubjective process of mutual recognition, Wood would have lacked the opportunity to understand her experience as shared, as a part of a group whose members are similarly situated and thus suffer similar harms. Honneth states this clearly: "One can count as the bearer of rights of some kind only if one is socially recognized as a member of a community" (Honneth 1995, 109).

Throughout her memoir, Brownmiller describes numerous "speak-outs" aimed at "breaking the silence" about a variety of issues facing women, including ones on abortion, rape, and sexual abuse. These "speak-outs" are public testimonies of victims' experiences aimed to demonstrate that these experiences are not isolated incidents but part of a pervasive social pathology. In each of these cases, consciousness-raising plays a big part. Brownmiller defines consciousness-raising as the process of "bringing submerged truths to the surface, where I learned that I wasn't alone" (Brownmiller 1999, 7). In sharing one's own experience with abortion,

rape, sexual abuse, or sexual harassment in the context of others who share their stories, victims experience "me too" moments, which allow them to discover that their suffering is not a "personal problem," but is instead a result of a larger system of oppression. That is, "me too" launches the realization that the personal is political. As a result, new hermeneutical resources emerge, allowing for the recognition of a variety of forms of sexual misconduct which were previously obscured. These include, for example, the now familiar terms date rape, acquaintance rape, marital rape, and male rape.

#MeToo: Empowerment through Empathy

Thus far, I have argued that both testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice are failures of recognition, and that a process of mutual recognition, embodied in the response "me too," offers a restorative response to epistemic injustice at both the interpersonal and collective level. On the one hand, "me too" as a response to testimonial injustice works at the intersubjective level to establish the epistemic and moral agency of victims through a process of mutual recognition. On the other hand, "me too" as a response to hermeneutical injustice works at the social/collective level to create new concepts to name the harms experienced by members of the group. In this final section, I consider the political potential of "me too" as a social movement, arguing that the stream of "me too" statements across the world inscribe both the victim-testifiers and the hearer-respondents into a community of others who are able to mutually sympathize with each other and work to raise the esteem of themselves as a collective group. I also consider some of the potential pitfalls facing the movement.

The process of mutual recognition embodied in "me too" creates the groundwork necessary for a political movement. By recognizing the epistemic and moral agency of its members and then generating new concepts to name the harms experienced by its members, "me too" is positioned to become #MeToo, a political movement uniting victims in solidarity to work toward cultural change. It is a public struggle demanding widespread attention and aimed at elevating the status of the group. This requires recognizing the distinct features of the group as different yet worthy of equal esteem, rather than erasing the group's differences through assimilation. Honneth writes, "The more successful social movements are at drawing the public sphere's attention to the neglected significance of the traits and abilities they collectively represent, the better their chances of raising the social worth, or indeed, the standing of their members" (Honneth 1995, 127). In the case of sexual harassment and sexual assault, the experience of victims provides evidence challenging the social scripts, attitudes, stereotypes, and discourses that comprise "rape culture." One of #MeToo's aims, then, is to reconfigure the rhetorical space so that these insights can be expressed and heard.

As of the writing of this essay, #MeToo has garnered significant uptake and choral support. *Time*'s recognition of "The Silence Breakers" as the "2017 Person of the Year" indicates the success of the #MeToo movement in attracting the public attention it needs to effect change. The magazine provides the victims a stage upon which to speak (the magazine) and invites an audience (its readers) to listen to their testimony. In that sense, #MeToo is a successful act of defiance, both as a challenge to the epistemic injustice faced by victims and as a way to "put a face" to the statistics confirming the widespread prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual assault. It is also notable that *Time* names "The Silence Breakers" as the "2017 *Person* of the Year." Conferring the status of a *person* on this group of women and men must be understood as an act of recognition that raises the esteem of the group and its members. Although the members of this group have been epistemically marginalized insofar as they have been pressured to remain silent via testimonial smothering, or if they have not been silent, their speech has landed on unresponsive ears via testimonial quieting, to honor them in this way is to recognize that their experiences have an important contribution to make to understanding the world. Importantly, "The Silence Breakers" are not a homogenous group. The 35 women and men featured in the article come from diverse socioeconomic and racial/ethnic backgrounds and work in a wide range of different occupations. This diverse yet harmonious chorus of voices works in concert to create a movement for social change. They not only represent those typically recognized as "legitimate victims," but also those whose experiences are often excluded in dominant narratives. Thus, the article creates a counternarrative to the usual testimonial injustice victims face.

There are, of course, dangers to this kind of public recognition. The call for victims to expose themselves *as victims* through public declarations of "me too" risks enacting a confessional culture. In *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction* (1990), Michel Foucault highlights how power operates through the rituals of confession. He writes, "One does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it" (Foucault 1990, 61–62). It is this ritual of confession that reinforces testimonial injustice faced by victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault, and captures why "I believe you" and "That should not have happened to you" as responses from a hearer can, under certain conditions, be disempowering. When the rhetorical space situates hearers-respondents as the epistemic and moral

authority, the victim-testifier is made more vulnerable. #MeToo also threatens to create a spectacle of victims' experiences. In "Survivor Discourse: Transgression or Recuperation?" (1993), Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray expose the ways that victim testimony has been co-opted through television talk shows, which sensationalize and exploit their narratives for public entertainment. As a result, the transgressive potential of victim testimony is undermined. Rather than victims speaking for themselves as epistemic and moral authorities, they are "reified purely as objects, in need of expert interpretation, psychiatric help, and audience sympathy" (Alcoff and Gray 1993, 278).

Although rituals of confession and spectacles of suffering are real threats to the success of #MeToo as a political movement, its grounding in a process of mutual recognition resists these dangers. "Me too" establishes a symmetrical relationship between the victim-testifier and the hearer-respondent, in which mutual vulnerability and mutual authority to interpret and judge are recognized. In this way, victims are not reified as objects; they are empowered to speak on their own behalf, not needing the expert interpretation of a medical or legal authority figure. By building a community of solidarity among each other, they are able to generate interpretive resources grounded in their own experience and supported by the experience of others who are similarly situated. This process of mutual recognition is critical because agency is something that must be claimed, not given, if it is to avoid undermining itself.

Some critics have expressed concern that #MeToo's operation outside of the bonds of formal, legal processes for investigating and prosecuting cases of sexual harassment and sexual assault constitutes a violation of due process for those accused. When victims post #MeToo on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and public blogs, they often describe their experiences and/or name particular individuals as the perpetrators. These accusations can unfairly damage reputations and livelihoods. For example, Harvey Weinstein, Kevin Spacey, and Louis C.K. were all fired following *allegations of*, not prosecution for, sexual assault. Margaret Atwood cautions that this "understandable and temporary vigilante justice can morph into a culturally solidified lynch-mob habit, in which the available mode of justice is thrown out the window, and extralegal power structures are put into place and maintained" (Atwood 2018).

It's true that the failure of the legal system to effectively respond to and deter sexual harassment and sexual assault has inspired some victims to look for extra-legal solutions such as publicly exposing perpetrators. For example, the same month that Alyssa Milano's call for #MeToo posts on Twitter, Moira Donegan created an anonymous, crowdsourced spreadsheet, "Shitty Media Men," which listed more than 70 men accused of sexual misconduct before it was taken offline 12 hours later (Donegan 2018). Donegan admits that although it was not her intention,

the spreadsheet could be used to inflict consequences on those named as perpetrators. She notes that investigations have been conducted into some of the men listed on the spreadsheet, some of whom have left their positions or been fired. At the same time, Donegan has also suffered consequences for her efforts to give victims a platform from which to testify without fear of retaliation. She, too, has lost her job.

Concerns about false allegations and the threat of retaliation for speaking up have long afflicted victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault, shaping the rhetorical spaces in which victim testimonies are expressed (or not expressed, as in the case of testimonial smothering) and heard (or not heard as in the case of testimonial quieting). In contrast, the focus of #MeToo is victim empowerment and solidarity, not vigilante justice. At *Variety*'s 2018 "Power of Women" New York event, Tarana Burke clarified the purpose of the movement: "Folks think it's about naming and shaming, about taking down powerful men. But they're wrong" (Noveck 2018). "Me too" centers victims' epistemic authority and agency. It does not call for the abandonment of existing legal channels established for responding to sexual harassment and sexual assault, but for their reform.

A more significant concern is that #MeToo can become a self-serving mechanism that empowers some victims while exacerbating the marginalization of others. Many of the victims who have attracted public attention from the #MeToo movement are those who already hold considerable social and economic power. Despite the fact that the Black activist Tarana Burke had created the "me too" movement in 2006, it was only a decade later that the movement gained substantial public attention through the tweet of a white celebrity, Alyssa Milano. While Burke's work aimed to center the voices of women and girls of color who had suffered from sexual abuse, the voices that have been centered in the media at the end of 2017 are mostly those of affluent white women. Unfortunately, this is an all too common phenomenon. In "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" (1991), Kimberlé Crenshaw emphasizes the need for attention to the intersectional nature of gender and race to address violence against women of color. On the one hand, the intersection of sexism and racism result in women of color experiencing domestic violence and sexual assault differently than white women. On the other hand, prevailing approaches to feminist and antiracist politics have marginalized women of color's experiences with domestic violence and sexual assault. While *Time*'s article features voices from a diverse group of women and men, none of the narratives interrogates the intersectional nature of systems of oppression nor their role in the production of sexual harassment and sexual assault as a social pathology. It remains to be seen whether the #MeToo movement will do better.

Despite the dangers, #MeToo has great promise as a political movement. Its foundation in a process of mutual recognition offers the opportunity for the movement to alter the rhetorical spaces in which victims' testimonies can be heard by empathetic listeners. Exposing the epistemic violence of testimonial quieting and testimonial smothering, #MeToo encourages both individual and collective instances of silence-breaking. Moreover, the influx of a polyphonic symphony of voices testifying to their experiences of sexual harassment and sexual violence can challenge the prevailing ideology of rape culture and shift the social imaginary shaping both how victims are perceived and how they perceive themselves. As Burke explains, "The power of using 'me too' has always been in the fact that it can be a conversation starter or the whole conversation—but it was *us* talking to *us*" (Hill 2017).

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