The Weinstein Effect: The Role of MeToo Movement in Altering the Communication Strategies of Members of Congress

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In this paper, we explore the effect of critical events in shaping the responsiveness of elected officials to gender issues. In particular, we explore whether U.S. House Representatives discuss women's issues more after the outing of Harvey Weinstein as a sexual harasser and the growth of the MeToo movement. To explore the impact of the Weinstein accusations and the movement that followed, we assess members of Congress' discussions about gender issues on twitter before and after October 2017. Through our analysis of over 150,000 tweets from 409 U.S. House Representatives from the 115th Congress, we show that on average U.S. House Representatives were more likely to discuss women's issues after the Harvey Weinstein incident. This change in focus on gender issues is driven primarily by female Democratic elected officials. Contrary to our expectations, the race/ethnicity of the female legislator did not predict changes in discussions of women's issues above and beyond partisanship. Overall, we find evidence that critical events can have immediate and long-lasting effects on the communication strategies of members of Congress.

The 2018 midterms were a watershed moment in American politics. For the first time in American history, more than 100 women were elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. The election in many ways was a culmination of increased female activism over the previous two years. In January of 2017, the Women's March broke world records in terms of participation. A year later, the number of protestors in the 2018 Women's March increased substantially. While these marches played a large role in signaling the importance that gender would play in American politics, a turning point in the media's focus on gender occurred in October 2017. It started initially with actress Ashley Judd accusing a well-known Producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual harassment. Actress Alyssa Milano then created a thread on Twitter stating, "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet," which gathered numerous replies, and quickly reignited a movement. From that point on, many people, mainly women, shed light on their own stories and connected them by using the hashtag "#MeToo" (Clair et al 2019).

The MeToo Movement has had a profound impact on our society in the last few years. The phrase was first coined by civil rights activist Tarana Burke in 2006 with the goal of raising awareness of the pervasiveness of sexual assault and sexual violence targeted towards women with a particular focus on women of color. The hashtag became significantly more popular after the Weinstein incident and follow up claims of sexual harassment against prominent public officials like Minnesota U.S. Senator Al Franken and Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh and media figures like Les Moonves and Matt Lauer[1]. There is no doubt that discussions about the challenges that women face in society have become a more prevalent topic.

However, whether the MeToo movement has changed the behavior of elected officials has yet to be explored.

The exploration of how the Harvey Weinstein incident and the subsequent MeToo movement influences the behavior of political elites has important implications for studies on political representation. First, by exploring whether the same elected officials' discussions of issues related to a social movement have changed over time provides a causal test of the impact that critical events may have on elite political communication strategies. Second, by exploring whether some elected officials are more influenced by critical moments in society than others, we can identify the characteristics necessary for these events to infiltrate the upper echelons of politics. In particular, we argue that female representatives should be the most responsive to the outing of Weinstein and the social movement that followed. Such a finding would suggest that descriptive representation is necessary for critical events to gain recognition among elected officials. Finally, this study would be able to assess whether critical events around identity exacerbate or minimize differences in discussions about group inequalities between descriptive and non-descriptive representatives.

In this study, we explore whether the MeToo movement has increased public officials' attention to the plight of women in society. While the MeToo movement has been most directly associated with sexual harassment, we are interested in whether the movement may alter politician's communication around a host of women's issues. To accomplish this goal, we begin by discussing when and why politicians alter their communication strategies on important issues. Based on this review, we argue that there will be a Weinstein effect; where the growth of the MeToo Movement following allegations against Harvey Weinstein for sexual harassment lead

politicians to answer the call to address gender inequality in society. While we expect that all politicians will be moved by the MeToo movement, we argue that female elected officials will feel a heightened sense of consciousness following the Weinstein accusations and become even more likely to take a stand on women's issues.

We test these possibilities by focusing on gender communication in Twitter. Twitter communication is advantageous for our project because it provides an unfiltered source of candidate communication which occurs more frequently than other forms of outreach like speeches or press releases. Thus, the use of Twitter allows us to measure changes in focus on gender issues over time. Using a unique data set of over 400 U.S. House Representative's Tweets in the 115th Congress (2017-2018) and a difference-in-difference test, we find strong evidence that all representatives became more likely to speak about women's issues after the Weinstein incident. However, it is women and Democratic women in particular which drive this increase in focus of women's issues on twitter. We do not find significant evidence, however, that women of color were unique in their responses to the Weinstein incident compared to other women. In the conclusion, we discuss the significance of our findings for social movements, high profile events, and the responsiveness of elected officials.

When to Speak Out

Most previous research suggests that most politicians work to refrain from taking strong positions on any particular issue because it increases the possibility of a backlash (Pietryka 2012; Milita et al 2014). This is in large part driven by the fact that if politicians say nothing, individuals who approve of them will assume they share their values (Stokes 1963, Druckman et. al 2009). Moreover, Weaver (1986) demonstrates that elites are more likely to remain silent on

issues because there is a tendency for politicians to be more responsive to potential losses then they are to potential gains. As a result, politicians will generally only take a stand on events or issues which are both salient and will yield almost certain political rewards for himself/herself (Sides 2006). Moreover, they will be much more careful in taking clear positions on any topic because they can't be sure how such a position will influence their likelihood of success in future elections.

However, politicians are often pushed to be vocal about different issues depending on the political climate. In their analysis of campaign websites, Milita et al (2014) demonstrate that elected officials were more likely to take a stand on the Iraq War and/or Gay Marriage as the issue became more salient in the district. Similarly, Pietryka (2012) finds strong evidence that the national climate can play a large role in pushing politicians to take positions on issues they would otherwise avoid. These and other studies suggest that politicians weigh heavily the electoral implications of silence when deciding how public they should be in stating their support or opposition for any particular issue (Milita et al 2014, Chapp et al 2018, Druckman et. al 2009, Pietryka 2012). When forced to or when the national climate makes it necessary, politicians are more likely to speak up.

The rise of the MeToo movement may have increased pressure for politicians to take a stand on gender related issues. One year into the MeToo movement, there were 19 million tweets which used the hashtag MeToo[1]. Moreover, sexual assault and sexual harassment were major components of the 2018 Women's March was which the largest protest in United States History[2]. As a result of the activism around gender issues, and specifically sexual harassment after the Weinstein incident, politicians may have felt additional pressure to discuss their opinion

on gender issues and sexual harassment in particular. This would be consistent with previous research which suggests that both activism online and protests increase the salience of a political issue and push politicians to takes a strong stance on the topic (Stout et al 2017, Gillon 2018 FIND OTHERS). Given that 2018 was an election year where gender was a major focal point, the MeToo movement which followed from the Weinstein accusations may have increased the incentives for politicians to discuss gender issues. Silence on these topics could be harmful for reelection because it would increase perceptions among voters, who have become more focused on gender issues after the beginning of the MeToo movement, that elected officials who do not discuss gender issues are unsympathetic to the gender inequality. This may lead to a backlash among concerned voters. To ward off this reaction, we suspect that...

Hypothesis 1: Politicians will be more vocal about gender issues following the Harvey Weinstein incident and the rise of the MeToo movement given that these issues have become more salient over time.
Descriptive Representation and Elite's Reactions to the Weinstein Incident

However, who speaks up and how clearly they speak up is based on the individual legislator. One of the strongest predictors of who speaks out are those who care deeply about the issue and those who want to be closely associated with that topic. There is a significant amount of research which suggests that individual legislators' socio-demographic identities play a large role in influencing their willingness to take a position. For example, Stout et al (2017) demonstrated that blacks were much more likely to tweet about Black Lives Matter and Bring Back Our Girls than white members of Congress. Similarly, Evans and Clark (2015) demonstrate that women are more likely to tweet about women's issues than are their male counterparts. Both of these studies suggest that descriptive representation matters in explaining who speaks out

about a issues surrounding identity. In particular, these and other studies show that legislators from underrepresented groups are most likely to speak out in support of these groups (Find Sources.)

While this research shows that there are substantial differences between descriptive and non-descriptive representatives in speaking out about issues regarding their group, it is not known whether critical events will exacerbate or attenuate these differences. On one hand, the growing salience of these events may lead non-descriptive representatives to focus more on identity based issues which they have previously not focused on. As a result, men may be more likely to speak about women's issues and women would remain active in their discussion on these topics. The combination of which would lead to a decrease in discussion about women's issues among male and female legislators.

On the other hand, female elected officials may feel especially motivated to speak out in support of other women after critical events like the outing of Weinstein as a sexual harasser and the revival of the MeToo movement. There are numerous reasons why we expect women to be more responsive in speaking out about women's issues after the Weinstein incident. First, there is a significant amount of research which shows that women tend to be more responsive to gender issues because of their own position in society. Like other underrepresented groups, women are more likely to work for the interests of those who share their gender to help address inequality in society (Wängnerud 2009; Dolan et al 2017). In part, this extra motivation to address gender disparities is driven by a sense of higher group consciousness among female legislators (Gurin 1985; Naff 2018). Of course, recent research suggests that women tend to have

more varied levels of group consciousness than other underrepresented groups (Gurin 1985; Mansbridge and Morris 2001; Harnois 2015).

Moreover, gender group consciousness is context specific. According to Gurin (1985), group consciousness arises when individuals arrive at a shared recognition of common experiences. Based on this, we would expect that gender group consciousness should increase when women feel most threatened or are made aware of inequality (Harnois 2015; Cassese and Homan 2016). The MeToo movement should have a large effect on a gender consciousness given that the movements focus was on shared experiences around gender based harassment. As a result, we expect that the Weinstein incident and the MeToo movement which followed may have a strong effect in increasing gender group consciousness for female legislators. This change in consciousness should lead to an increase in women in Congress being active in discussing women's issues publicly.

However, given the mood of the country in 2018, it is also possible that women would be more likely to make public statements about women's issues because it improved their opportunities for electoral success. Several studies argue that women generally receive more press coverage when they discuss women's issues than when they discuss issues more associated with males (Thomas and Welch 1991, Swers 1998). As a result, as gender issues become more salient there may be more of an incentive for women to speak out on these issues to improve their national profile heading into an election year.

Like their male counterparts, female legislators work hard to capture issues which are important to the electorate (Arbour 2013). Gender issues offer a space where they have a natural advantage given the media's focus on women when discussing these topics and their own

personal experiences make them more credible on these topics (Arbour 2013, Herrick 2016). Dittmar (2015) through interviews with female legislators finds strong evidence that female candidates know that focusing on women's issues may strengthen their campaign and increase their appeal to female voters. As a result, it would not be surprising for women to focus more on women's issues to increase their levels of support in the electorate. Whether it be personal preferences or electoral incentives, we expect that….

Hypothesis 2: Women will be much more responsive to the Weinstein incident and become more vocal about women's issues after it occurred than their male counterparts.

While we expect that women will be more responsive than their male counterparts, we also expect that women of color may be particularly responsive to the MeToo movement in publicly addressing gender inequality. Previous research shows that because of the double bind of racial and gender discrimination, women of color are especially concerned with both racial and gender issues (Tate and Gay 1998, Simien 2005, Junn and Brown 2008, Bejarano 2013). Brown (2014) in interviews with black women in the state legislature shows that that these women were concerned about racial and gender issues and were much stronger advocates for black women than white female legislators or black male legislators. Along the same lines, Bejarano (2013) showed that Latinas in government were more active in addressing the specific problems that Latinas face.

One of the interesting things about the MeToo movement is that it is much more diverse than previous women's movements and there has been a more intersectional approach to analyzing statistics around sexual harassment and gender inequality (Nunnally 2019). Some of this analysis indicates that women of color are much more likely to be sexually harassed than white women (NWLC 2018). In fact, analysis conducted by the National Women's Law Center

shows that black women were three times more likely to encounter sexual harassment than white women. Additionally, other studies show that black and Latina women are much more likely to pay a penalty in terms of the wage gap compared to white women and their co-racial male counterparts[4].

As the MeToo movement has highlighted gender inequality, it has also shed light on the particular forms of discrimination that women of color face. This may have led to a greater increase in women of color's levels of gender and intersectional group consciousness. As previous research shows, women of color in government appear to be particularly responsive to the plight of those who share their race/ethnicity and gender when they display higher levels of group consciousness (See Brown 2014).

Moreover, women of color may be sought out more when they discuss women's issues because of the focus on intersectional discrimination. As a result, women of color too may be strategic in speaking out more about women's issues in this political climate to gain an electoral advantage.. Based on this research, our third hypothesis states….

Hypothesis 3: Women of color should be more likely to respond to the rise of the Weinstein Movement than White Women.

Data

To assess our three hypotheses, we began by using a webscraper to collect the universe of tweets from as many members of Congress as possible. Given that our key event, (the outing of Harvey Weinstein) occurred during 2017, we focus on the 115th Congress which was in session from January 3rd, 2017 to January 2nd, 2019. By focusing on this single congress, we can better measure within representative change as few representatives quit or were replaced during this period of time. In all, we were able to scrape tweets from 409 U.S. House Representatives. This

accounts for 94% of the total membership in the U.S. House for that period of time. In all, we collected 167,784 tweets from these 409 House members.

After collecting this information, we wanted to examine how the outing of Harvey Weinstein as a sexual harasser would influence elected officials' discussions of women's issues. To accomplish this goal, we used a combination of hand coding and computer assisted content coding analysis to assign each tweet with a score of 1 if it mentioned gender issues or 0 if it did not. The program that we used for this content coding analysis is Rtexttools. Standard computer assisted content coding apparatuses use a sample of hand coded training set documents to predict the coding for the uncoded documents. There have been several algorithms which have been developed to more accurately use the training set to predict the uncoded tweets. Rtexttools estimates the coding of the uncoded tweets using six different computer content coding algorithms. It then codes the documents (or in our cases tweets) based on what the majority of algorithms agreed was the predicted code. It then provides information to the researcher about where there is disagreement among the algorithms which provide an opportunity for additional content coding.

For our purposes, we hand coded 3,500 tweets for the presence (1) or absence (0) of a gender topic. We coded tweets as addressing a gender issue if they discussed sexual harassment, sexual assault, pay inequality, the recognition of women, human trafficking, women's health issues, gender disparities in professions, and international women's issues. As a result, we only coded for topics which are explicitly women's issues. Moreover, we did not code for conservative's women issues. The only example of this would be anti-choice tweets. Following

our coding of each of these 3,500 tweets, we used this information and Rtexttools to classify the remaining 164,285 uncoded tweets from the 115th Congress.

One of the most important aspects of machine learning is to ensure that the algorithms worked correctly (see Grimmer and Stewart 2013). One of the main advantages of RTextTools is that the output provides researchers with information on how often the different content coding algorithms agreed and how accurate they were when they agreed on the coding (Jurka et al 2012; Collingwood and Wilkerson 2011). Using a sample of 3,000 of our 3,500 manually coded articles as the training set and the remaining 500 of the 3,500 manually coded articles as testers, we identified how well the different algorithms in concert predicted the manually coded score for each article (Collingwood and Wilkerson 2011). Based on this analysis, when at least 5 of the six algorithms agreed, the program predicted the presence or absence of a gender appeal over 90% of the time. We then went back in and hand coded instances in which fewer than 5 of the algorithms disagreed.

After the manual and computer assisted content coding was complete, we calculated the average number of gender appeals each representative made before and after the Weinstein incident (October 5th, 2017) . For representatives who are somewhat active on twitter (meaning they tweet at least once a year), we have 2 scores for how often they discussed gender issues over the course of the 115th Congress. We excluded analysis for January 2019 because there were only two days in this month in the 115th Congress and many representatives were silent on these days.

Our main independent variable was the time in which Harvey Weinstein was outed for sexual harassment. This occurred on October 5th, 2017. As a result, we coded all dates in the

115th Congress prior to October 2017 as 0 and all dates after this date as 1. If our hypotheses are correct, we should expect that the different groups of representatives should be more likely to issue gender related tweets after the Weinstein incident.

However, there are numerous factors which may influence the percent of gender related appeals a representative uses which should be accounted for particularly in our comparison across groups. First, given that we are mostly focused on gender issues which are progressive, we expect that Democrats and those from liberal districts should be the most likely to issue gender appeals and may be more likely to do so after the Weinstein controversy. As a result, our models control for whether the representative was a Democrat (1) or not (0) and the partisanship of their district as measured by Cook's Partisan Voting Index. Second, we expect that districts which have more women may feel a particular electoral incentive to speak out following the Weinstein incident. As a result, we control for the percent of women in the congressional district. We also control for the age of the representative to ensure that our results are not primarily driven by our groups of interest being younger. Recent research shows that younger individuals tend to be more progressive on gender issues. As a result, it is possible that younger representatives in our analysis would be the most likely to speak out about gender topics. While we include these controls, for the most part most other outside factors are accounted for because we are examining *within* representative change in gender appeals. Given that we only use representatives who did not retire, quit, or pass away partway through their term, our analysis can provide a more controlled estimate of the Weinstein Effect.

Did Representatives Become More Likely to Discuss Gender Issues After Harvey Weinstein?

To assess whether representatives became more likely to speak out about women's issues we run a fixed effects regression model which fixes the intercept of each individual representative. In doing so, we are able to estimate the average *within* representative change in their levels of tweets around women's issues. Given that we are looking at all representatives in which we have data for and the representatives are the same across time, our model does not include any controls. For example, controlling for factors like party, age, percent of women in a district are all static within each individual legislator and thus the controls would be unnecessary.

Table 1: Fixed Effect Regression Predicting the Percent of Tweets Related to Women's Issues Before and After Weinstein

	115th Congress	114th Congress
Weinstein	0.63***	-0.1
	(0.31)	(0.15)
Constant	1.98***	1.48
	(0.23)	(1.2)
Observations	830	512
Number of var1	419	256
		0.0011
R-squared (Within)	0.01	
R-squared (Between)	0.034	0.0047
Overall	0.0106	0

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1 Robust Standard Error in Parentheses

Table 1 presents estimates from the 115th Congress and from the 114th Congress. For the 115th Congress, we use the date of the Harvey Weinstein incident as our cutoff. To better demonstrate the Weinstein effect, we also include an analysis from the 114th Congress with the 10th Month of the session (the same month of the Weinstein incident in the 115th Congress) as the cutoff. By

including the 114th Congress as a comparison, we can better show that representatives are responding to Weinstein rather than to election pressures as the election becomes nearer around the same time.

The results in Table 1 demonstrate that legislators on average became much more likely to discuss women's issues following the Harvey Weinstein incident in the 115th Congress. On average, there was a .63 percent increase in the number of tweets focused on gender related issues after October of 2017. While .63 percent may not seem like much, given that representatives tweets about everything from football games, to economic policy, to the weather, to highlighting bills that they have introduced a one percent increase in any one particular topic is relatively large. The results from the analysis of the 114th Congress actually show a negative effect, albeit not significant at .05. This suggests that legislators' responses to gender issues around the Weinstein incident could not simply attributed to cycles within sessions of Congress. While this analysis demonstrates that representatives on average were more likely to speak out about gender issues after the Weinstein incident, the analysis cannot show whether some representatives were particularly likely to speak out. To address this concern and to test our second and third hypotheses, we turn to difference in difference estimations.

<u>Were Female Legislators the Most Responsive to the Weinstein Incident?</u>

Table 2 OLS Regression Predicting Percent of Female Related Tweets in the 115th and 114th Congress Before and After Weinstein (With A Focus on Gender)

	115th Congress	114th Congress
Female* Weinstein	0.01***	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.04)
Female	0.03***	0.01
	(0.00)	(0.03)
Weinstein	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.02)
Percent Female in District	0.00	-0.01
	(0.00)	(0.01)
DW Nominate Score	-0.01	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.06)
Democrat	0.00	0.06
	(0.01)	(0.04)
Black	-0.00	0.04
	(0.01)	(0.03)
Latino	-0.01**	0.01
	(0.00)	(0.03)
Age	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Cook's PVI	0.00	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)

Total Tweets	0.00***	0.00***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Observations	754	516
R-squared	0.36	0.02

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1 Robust Standard Error in Parentheses

To assess whether women were more likely than men to be responsive to women's issues after the Weinstein Incident, we turn to difference in difference analysis. The basic premise of a difference in difference design is that two groups should have a parallel trajectory over time. However, with a treatment, in our case, the Weinstein incident, the trajectory of one group should change significantly more than a control group. In our case, we expect women will change in their levels of discussion on women's issues more than their male counterparts. Given that other factors may interact with the Weinstein incident and discussion of women's issues, we control for the partisanship of the representative and the district, the percent of women in each district, the average number of tweets each representative put out each month, and the age of the representative.

Figure 1: Marginal Effect of Gender on Percent of Female Related Tweets Before and After Weinstein

Table 2 presents two estimations of the difference in difference estimates. Figure 2 presents the corresponding marginal effects. The first estimate is from the 115th Congress and the second is from the 114th Congress for purpose of comparison. Overall, we find strong support that women were uniquely affected by the Weinstein incident. Before the incident, women on average put out about 3% more tweets focused on women's issues than their male counterparts. This of course, is not unexpected given that female elected officials generally are more likely to

discuss women's issues than male legislators. However, this gap in discussion of gendered topics grows an additional 4.8% after the Weinstein incident. The difference between men and women then is 1.8 percent greater after the Weinstein incident than before and is statistically significant at .05.

<u>Were Women of Color Particularly Influenced By the Rise of MeToo?</u>

Table 3 OLS Regression Predicting Percent of Female Related Tweets in the 115th Congress Before and After Weinstein For Only Female Respondents

	Female Tweets
Weinstein*Women of Color	0.02
	(0.02)
Weinstein	0.01***
	(0.00)
Women of Color	0.01
	(0.01)
Percent Female in District	0.01**
	(0.01)
DW Nominate Score	-0.08
	(0.06)
Democrat	-0.04
	(0.04)
Age	0.00
	(0.00)
Cook's PVI	0.00

	(0.00)
Total Tweets	0.00***
	(0.00)
Constant	-0.59**
	(0.26)
Observations	141
R-squared	0.32

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1 Robust Standard Error in Parentheses

We continue our analysis by exploring whether women of color were more responsive than women overall in their response to the Weinstein incident. To accomplish this goal, we divide all representatives in the 115th Congress into two categories. The first is white representatives and the second is non-white representatives. The latter category combines Latino/a, black, Asian American, Native American, and mixed race individuals. As with the previous analysis, we turn to difference in differences estimations to explore whether women of color became more vocal about gender issues after October 2017.

Table 3 presents a difference in difference estimate predicting the change in the percent of tweets which address gender related issues before and after the Weinstein incident for female representatives only. The model controls for the partisanship of the representative, the age of the representative, the partisanship of the district, and the percent of females in each district and the total number of tweets the representative put out over our period of interest. Figure 2 presents corresponding marginal effects.

Figure 2: Marginal Effect of Gender on Percent of Female Related Tweets Before and After Weinstein

Table 3 and Figure 2 demonstrate that the Weinstein incident did not disproportionately influence discussions of gender for congressional members of color. Regardless, of the gender of the representative, the gap between white and non-white representatives around discussions of gender related issues did not change before and after October 2017. It is interesting to note, that all else being equal, racial/ethnic minority women put out 2 percent fewer percent tweets than white female legislators before the Weinstein incident. Afterwards, they became more likely than white women discuss women's issues by 2 percent. This change, however, was not statistically significant at .05.

Conclusion

The outing of Harvey Weinstein as a sexual harasser and the rise of the MeToo movement played a significant role in altering the narrative around the discussion of gender inequalities in society. The same changes in the social context also appears to have significantly altered how our elected officials discuss gender related issues in twitter. The results of this analysis show that all representatives became significantly more likely to discuss women's issues on twitter after Weinstein was accused of sexual harassment. This effect is largest among female legislators and Democratic female legislators in particular. We however, found no evidence that women of color where more likely to speak out about women's issues more than white women after the Weinstein incident.

The study provides important information on how the political context can shape the communication strategies of our elected officials. Previous studies have demonstrated that local factors play a large role in pushing legislators to take a stand on political issues (Milita et al 2014).). Others have shown that national levels polls can also influence representative's

communication strategies (Pietryka 2012). Our own study shows that significant events can have an immediate and long-lasting effect on how legislators decide on what to discuss. This finding is significant because it may explain why events like the Weinstein incident lead to substantial and permanent changes in the dialogues within the population. Not only does the media focus more on these issues, but elected officials ensure that these issues are recognized by those within political power.

However, the results of this study suggest that for important incidents like this to have an impact on the discourse of our public officials, descriptive representation is necessary. Female legislators appeared to be the most responsive the MeToo movement in their discussion around women's issues. As other have found with Black Lives Matter and black elected officials (Stout et al 2017), our research shows that watershed moments like the Weinstein incident may not be as impactful in the outreach of policy makers and in part the media without elected officials from underrepresented groups.

While this study advances our understanding of critical incidents and the responses of our elected officials, more work is necessary. First, future research should explore whether legislators discuss certain topics more than others as a result of the Weinstein incident. For example, is the rise in discussion around gender issues tied to more of a focus on sexual harassment/assault or has there been more of a focus on additional issues like gender pay inequality. Second, one of the main reasons we expected that female legislators would be more responsive after Weinstein would be due to a grown in gender consciousness. We were not able to test this with the data we have available. Future studies should conduct interviews with elected

officials to test whether the Weinstein incident and others like it change the way female legislators think about the significance of their gender in society.

Third, future research should continue to explore the longevity of the Weinstein effect. We find in our own cursory analysis that once the Weinstein incident occurred, female legislators remained more likely to speak about gender issues even in December of 2018 (over a year since the rebirth of the MeToo movement). Whether this change in discussion around women's issues is permanent should be explored further. Finally, future research should explore whether this change in discussion around women's issues is tied to more substantive legislation addressing gender inequality. In doing so, this research would show that representatives are not just engaging in symbolic outreach, they are doing more to change legislation around these issues.

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