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## Lights, Camera, Inaction: Relationship Management in the Film Industry Following Sexual Misconduct Accusations

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LIGHTS, CAMERA, INACTION: RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT IN THE FILM  
INDUSTRY FOLLOWING SEXUAL MISCONDUCT ACCUSATIONS

by

AUTUMN CROUCH

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major program  
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## **ABSTRACT**

In the wake of the #MeToo movement, how society responds to sexual misconduct allegations has greatly changed. It has had an effect on policy from the federal to the organizational level. Looking at overarching changes that came about after the movement is one thing but taking a look at consequences brought upon certain individuals who had allegations put against them is another. This thesis explores public relations (PR) strategies executed by prominent individuals in the film industry and their publicity teams following sexual misconduct accusations. PR at its core is about relationship management. So, this line of thought leads one to believe that college-aged students are more willing to forgive prominent figures for alleged problematic actions if the individual had a higher investment in their relationship management practices. Four case studies of actors and directors who had misconduct allegations brought against them during the peak of the #MeToo movement were analyzed and compared based on how their reputation stands today. This is important because the consequences faced by these individuals can be greatly influenced by perception and not the analysis of the actual situation. The findings of this study showed that with greater awareness of the actual claims put against a person, the more likely college-aged people are to perceive individuals negatively.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Sexual misconduct claims in the workplace have long been a cause for controversy among the audiences an organization serves. In recent history, perhaps no greater controversy has arisen from this than the #MeToo movement in the film industry. This was a movement born in the year 2006 by Tarana Burke, a black woman, created for fellow women of color (Brown, 2018). It was founded as a support system for survivors of sexual violence, particularly those from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds, to find pathways toward healing (metoomvmt, 2018). Through this mission, she focused on addressing the lack of resources for survivors and building a community of advocates to help change the conversation of sexual violence in our society (metoomvmt, 2018).

The movement found its way into the film industry on October 5, 2017, when the *New York Times* reporters Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey published an article on Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein that detailed years of sexual misconduct allegations. Before that, in 2015, actress Ashley Judd had published an essay in *Variety* describing her story of sexual misconduct by a wealthy film executive (Evans, 2018). At the time the piece was published, the person she accused was unnamed, but once the *Times* article came to light, she Judd admitted she was referring to Harvey Weinstein (Nicolaou & Smith, 2019). Following that article, over 100 women came forward with accusations involving him. Only five days later, Ronan Farrow published an exposé in the *New Yorker* on this same individual and included 13 more allegations from other women. This article and Farrow's follow-up published on November 6 solidified Harvey Weinstein as the face of everything the #MeToo movement was looking to dismantle. That's why his case was one of the focuses of the research and analysis. Alyssa Milano,

following the explosion of news coming out of the Weinstein controversy, took to her Twitter page to encourage people to share their own stories of sexual misconduct. The ensuing response to this tweet was the origin of the #MeToo movement as it is known now within the film industry (Nicolaou, Smith, 2019).

Looking at how the movement has changed things today, droves of actresses have come forward testifying that they feel much safer reporting claims of sexual misconduct than they did before (Editors, Vulture, 2018). One year following the newsbreak, Time's Up raised \$22 million for the project's Legal Defense Fund, which offers pro-bono attorneys to women fighting sexual misconduct accusations (Morris, 2018). In California, a new law does not allow perpetrators to keep their identity confidential, but victims are given the option (Mandell, 2018). Hollywood workers unions like the Producer's Guild of America have heavily added to their sexual misconduct policies in order to make it easier for victims to come forth (Mandell, 2018). Although some feel progress is slow, the industry is over 100 years old and the movement is barely three so it's best to not analyze the progress in the context of time. Rather, how large the strides in progress are.

The topic of this research was how the strategies used by the PR teams of these accused have since influenced college students' attitudes toward them. With the focus on college student opinions, the goal was to see if the publicity team and individual responses to these controversies affected the perception participants had of those individuals with accusations against them. Due to the growing presence of social media activism, it could be said that one would see greatly negative perceptions of those individuals that have sexual misconduct claims in their close past. On the other hand, perhaps one could say that social media activism has no real-world effect on

societal behavior and actions, and therefore impressions on pro-#MeToo messaging would not actually reflect how college students view certain individuals and the film content they support.

College students were chosen as the target demographic because they are statistically one of the highest percentages of moviegoers in America (Loria, D. et.al., 2019). A study done by the Motion Picture Association in 2018 showed that movie theater attendees between the ages of 18-24 had the second highest percentage of frequent moviegoers only behind those in the age range of 25-39. They were also overrepresented relative to their proportion of the population. Meaning, in 2016, they only made up ten percent of the overall population while representing twenty percent of frequent moviegoers (Motion Pictures Association, 2018). Overall, the target demographic has a large influence on the film industry and their contributions to box office numbers are no small feat.



## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In other industries, there has been a variety of responses from organizations following a sexual misconduct accusation. In a parallel industry, accusations against *The Today Show* host Matt Lauer came to light around this same time period and NBC terminated him. Although this was a swift and efficient response to such claims, later information revealed that NBC had been informed of Lauer's past indiscretions with other co-workers, and did not take action at that time (Papenfuss, 2018). Perhaps this shows the power in the movement itself, where an organization's reactions to this type of controversy are much swifter and more proactive as opposed to the more reactive responses they executed previously.

In the political sphere, legislative mandates have been pushed forward in reaction to the #MeToo movement. New York State passed a law requiring organizations to teach employees about harassment and the process to file and track complaints (Brown, 2018). Other states have revamped their current laws surrounding sexual misconduct that include making retaliation against accusations more difficult (Brown, 2018).

### **Public Opinion and the #MeToo Movement**

When we looked at the movement's outward reach into the public, we found that widespread opinion of the situation was mixed. Reports said that with the prominence of social media, people are now coming forth much more comfortably with their accusations through mediums like Twitter or Facebook (Burke, 2018). This is due to the network of allies and other alleged victims that has grown online and made those accusers feel more comfortable in stepping forth. Leanne Atwater, a professor at the University of Houston, did a public opinion study that consisted of two subsets: one for men and one for women, both on the change in views of sexual

misconduct since the movement's fruition (Seward, 2019). The content of the surveys consisted of describing different behaviors and then asking if they would be labeled as harassment. This included things like commenting on a subordinate's looks or making sexually suggestive jokes. It then went into the participant's personal opinion on a number of hypothetical scenarios. Responses were skewed between the gender of the individual respondent. For instance, seventy-four percent of women felt that following the movement's reach they would now be more willing to speak out against harassment. Seventy-seven percent of men believed they would be more cautious in the way they acted around colleagues (hbr.org, 2019).

There have been interesting data points on the backlash the movement has caused as well. Atwater and her organization did a follow-up survey with the same parameters in early 2019. They found that twenty-one percent of men were reluctant to hire women for jobs involving close interpersonal interactions (hbr.org, 2019). So, although the movement has brought broader awareness to the issue and has given accusers more comfort to come forth, it has also had negative consequences on the way in which men question their dynamics in the workplace with women. American opinion has also become more skeptical of sexual misconduct accusations following the #MeToo movement. Another study conducted by YouGov in September 2018 polled 1,500 men and women on their attitudes toward this issue. One of these findings was that eighteen percent of respondents thought that false accusations of sexual misconduct were a bigger problem than attacks that go unpunished (Team, 2018). This was compared to the National Sexual Violence Resource Centre's report a year prior that only found thirteen percent of respondents fell under this belief. YouGov polled over 1,000 Americans a second time in regard to this topic and their own experiences with sexual misconduct. Millennials, the youngest

generation polled, were most likely to consider actions such as a man placing his hand on a woman's lower back or commenting on a woman's attractiveness as being considered sexual misconduct. This was compared to responses from Generation X and Baby Boomers (Medium, 2017).

In the past two years, the #MeToo movement's presence on social media and in the press has greatly exploded from its grassroots. Case studies have shown that the media's portrayal of an accuser greatly impacts how that person is later perceived by the public (Medium, 2017). This was the point of the study: how prior public opinions about the #MeToo movement and public perception of individuals being analyzed affected the way in which our target demographic feels towards them before and after reading a synopsis of their accusations and responses.

### **Theoretical Approach: Relationship Management**

To better understand how public perception is shaped by the way those in the film industry have reacted to #MeToo inspired claims of abuse, we reviewed a traditional PR theory. Relationship Management is a public relations strategy that focuses on the engagement between an organization and its audiences (Bailey, 2018). At the very heart of PR, this is how we manage communication for mutual relationships and attempt to maintain positive perceptions of an organization by its publics. Publics meaning any group of individuals who have some form of connection with the organization or individual. This could be employees, stakeholders, or in the case of this study, college-aged students who consume film content. Mary Ann Ferguson was the curator of the shift in focus within public relations from one that sought to influence publics to one that saw them as equals and emphasized two-way communication (Ledingham, 2015). She identified three main focuses of this new concept: social responsibility and ethics, social issues

and issue management, and public relationships. She stated that the last of the three also needed to be the primary focus in all PR practices. Previous to this, public relations was centered around the persuasion of the publics with a one-way stream of communication. Now, the desired outcome for the industry is about attaining positive and two-way public relationships.

In a public relations context, relationships are defined as “the state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other.” (Hung, 2011) There are six key aspects that make a good public-business relationship. These are control mutuality, trust, commitment, satisfaction, exchange relationship and communal relationship (Bailey, 2018).

Some of these concepts can be understood in their simplest forms. For example, trust is about each party having confidence that the other has their best interest for the other in mind. If we look at *The Today Show* case, a few years prior to the accusations placed against Matt Lauer there was already internal organizational turmoil. Following the firing of Ann Curry, the once renowned number one morning show in America lost half a million viewers and millions of dollars as well as their primary female demographic’s trust in the network (Coscarelli, 2013). Lauer was blamed for her firing after internal research company SmithGeirger analyzed *The Today Show*’s audience perception. What was found was that when Lauer was onscreen with the female co-host, he was made to look less appealing in comparison. They cited Curry’s gentle and welcoming nature being juxtaposed against Lauer’s more direct and commanding demeanor as the reason (Papenfuss, 2018). When his contract was up for renegotiation, he asked that she be taken off as co-host or he would not renew (Coscarelli, 2013). She was fired with her last appearance on the morning show immortalized in a news clip where Curry is seen giving a

tearful goodbye and then flinching away from Lauer's attempts to console her. This response made the audience feel like they no longer had trust in the morning show because they were not given a thorough message with reasoning as to why she was being let go. Because their audience's perception of Curry was highly favorable, they expected a more accurate communication plan that told them why she was leaving. When she was fired without NBC providing in-depth communication on why, the blame fell on Lauer who they felt did not favor Curry (Papenfuss, 2018). When the following years' accusations against him came into the public light, *The Today Show* had already damaged its relationship with its audience and therefore was only adding fuel to the fire. The trust in the relationship between NBC and its public audience had diminished greatly.

Another aspect, commitment, can be broken down into two variations: affective commitment, and continuance commitment (Bailey, 2018). Affective commitment is the emotional side in which one decides to commit to a relationship because they have an emotional attachment and therefore want to remain in a mutually beneficial relationship. Continuance commitment is about maintaining a relationship and promoting it because one feels as though they've held the attachment for a long time and might as well continue it. In the context of the film industry, commitment is tested following sexual misconduct accusations and whether the PR response reassures the publics that their sense of attachment is still justified. The Weinstein Company is perhaps the biggest example in recent history. Previous to the accusations made against Harvey Weinstein, the Weinstein Company was one of the most profitable film studios in America. Before it was sold to The Walt Disney Company, the powerhouse was owned by Miramax and under it the studio produced films such as *Pulp Fiction*, *Good Will Hunting* and

*Chicago*. These were commercial and box office successes and have since become classics. Even without the early commercial success, the Weinstein Company had successfully campaigned for multiple Oscar contenders including the winner of the 2011 Best Picture for *The King's Speech*. Others included Best Actor, and Best Director awards for the same film (Oscars.org, 2011). The Weinstein Company had a very committed public audience following its production of the previously mentioned cult classics. Since Harvey Weinstein's accusations though, this commitment has been all but stripped away. Following the accusations, the Weinstein Company has filed for Chapter 11 Bankruptcy and Harvey Weinstein has been blacklisted from the film industry (Teodorczuk, 2017). When the relationship between the public and the organization is a direct financial one, losing that commitment is detrimental.

Now relaying this theory to executions within the industry, Relationship Management can be done between Business to Business or Business to Consumer relationships (Phillips, 2006). For Business to Business relationships, it would be about ensuring film distribution and external marketing companies do not pull out of a partnership with a production company because of a sexual misconduct claim. Manners of doing this would include private direct email messaging, phone calls to stakeholders or press releases distributed to internal audiences. When it comes to Business to Consumer, this theory can take a couple of forms. These include: Promotion of #MeToo messaging through all communication mediums, firing the person who has accusations against him or her, or a new communication plan that works to assure their publics that they are working to make their organization a safe place for all people.

On October 30, 2017, Kevin Spacey was accused of making a sexual advance towards actor Anthony Rapp when he was 14. The alleged incident took place in the year 1986 but was

first shared publicly in a BuzzFeed Interview with Rapp. Anthony Rapp is now 46. Two days later, two more men came forward with similar accusations regarding the actor when they were underage. A month later, over 20 different allegations of similar context were brought to light against Spacey (BBC, 2019).

In this study, a closer look at Kevin Spacey's publicist and his own response was conducted. Following his initial accusation, he released a public statement not acknowledging the accusation fully, but instead separated the statement into an apology and a statement coming out as gay (BBC, 2019). Prior to this, Spacey had never publicly announced that he was homosexual which is why the announcement seemed misplaced in the context given. Although there was nothing wrong with both statements separately, put together and the timing of it made his public audience feel as though it was ingenuine (Wexler, 2018). After the initial message, no more communication was put out by him or his team.

The aspect of Relationship Management that can be seen neglected here is control mutuality and communal relationships. When the actor's response to these claims was deemed unsatisfactory by his audience, he neglected to follow-up with a more thorough response. This is what started to make his audience believe there was truth to the accusations. Silence following a crisis has long been a sign of poor PR practices because rumors grow in a vacuum. So, an unsatisfactory response to the claims and then having not followed up with anything else cut off that reciprocity that is needed to ensure a positive relationship between a public and an organization. The outcomes from this were increasingly negative. His most recent film, "Billionaire Boys Club" made just \$618 during its opening weekend. It was released in 11 theaters at that point (McClintock, 2018). The budget to make this film was \$15 million, a

significant loss (Box Office Mojo, 2018). For comparison, the Korean film *Parasite* by director Bong Joon-Ho ran at the box office for months and initially opened in only three American theaters. It made \$586,000 opening weekend. This occurred before it won the Academy Award for Best Picture at the 2020 show. Or, compared to his previous film, *Baby Driver*, which was a critical success and had an overall domestic gross of \$107.8 million. He was also fired from the last season of his popular Netflix show *House of Cards* (Tallerico, 2018).

A relevant comparison of how the six aspects of Relationship Management can affect a response in crisis communication is to compare Spacey's situation to another actor who has had accusations put against him but has seen lesser backlash to his career. This would be Morgan Freeman, who is regarded by many to be one of the most beloved actors of all time. In the wake of #MeToo accusations coming forth, Freeman was one of the actors who had accusations put against him. Both Spacey and Freeman were acclaimed as some of the most established actors of today's time and have extensive filmographies to back it up.

So, where does the difference lie in each individual's current reputation? Compare their public responses to accusations. On May 24, 2018, Morgan Freeman was accused of sexual harassment and inappropriate behavior by eight women. The claims ranged from women who worked on his film sets to workers under his production company, Revelations Entertainment. Eight additional people stepped forward in this report to say they had bear witness to these claims. These allegations were initially brought to light in an article on CNN.com (Vox, 2019).

Following the accusations, Freeman immediately released two statements denying all allegations and apologizing for any actions that may have been interpreted as misconduct to his alleged victims. After the statements were put out, he also did not remove himself from the



public sphere the way Spacey did (Stolworthy, 2018). Instead, he put forth continuous statements through his lawyer that condemned the claims and called them sensationalized. This included accusing one of his own accusers of coercing other women to come forth even when they may have not viewed his actions in that way (Stolworthy, 2018). This shifted the blame initially placed on him to his accusers and made people question the claims much more than they had done with Spacey's. By having a more present and reactive strategy to the claims, Morgan Freeman ensured his commitment, trust, and control mutuality remained intact even with the accusations coming from a number of different sources. To compare how this has changed the future of the two actor's careers, Freeman's most recent film, *Angel Has Fallen*, grossed \$69 million domestically on a \$40 million budget (Box Office Mojo, 2019). While not incredibly profitable, it was not a financial loss the way *Billionaire Boys Club* was.

Looking at an equivalent to Weinstein's stature in the film industry pre-#MeToo Movement who also faced allegations would be Lars Von Trier. The critically acclaimed director who created films such as the *Antichrist* and *Melancholia* was accused by singer Bjork to have committed acts of sexual misconduct against her on one of his sets. Both Weinstein and Trier are critically acclaimed with prolific careers previous to their sexual misconduct accusations and both men had alleged victims who fell under a much more prominent light than the ones who accused Freeman and Spacey. Meaning, their accusers were already famous themselves and therefore had their own audience and publics to back their claims. The difference in the outcomes once again could stem from the strategy taken. Trier put out a statement immediately following Bjork's statement denying there was ever any misconduct on his sets (North, 2019). He also, leaned on his stakeholders and fellow well-established peers to back his denial of the

allegations. This included the producer on the film he was working on when he was accused of the conduct, instead citing that the singer and actress was the one who made the film's production difficult (Agencies, 2017). Another backing came from a second actress who worked with Trier in the past. Chloe Sevigny denied the director was ever inappropriate with her on her respective film set and sung his praises (Agencies, 2017).

This meant that the communal relationship aspect of his Relationship Management strategy stayed intact. With other publics standing with the director, his public audience would not have felt concern for the welfare of others who worked with Trier. The outcomes of their situations prove this as well. Lars Von Trier this past year released a controversial film entitled *The House That Jack Built*, which was critically acclaimed. Even with its so-called unsettling imagery that made over 100 people walk out of the screening, it still received a 10-minute standing ovation at the Cannes Film Festival in 2018 (Hooton, 2018).

### ***Applications of Relationship Management Theory***

Three studies of public opinion using this theory drafted useful results. Robert L. Simmons at Walden University did a doctoral study on Customer Relationship Management usage and customer satisfaction and revenue (Simmons, 2015). He did so in the context of business firms. His findings were that firms using Relationship Management techniques saw a higher revenue stream and more customer satisfaction. He also found that businesses that funded Relationship Management projects provided the organization with an increase in firm value, improved reputation and relationships with stakeholders.

Another study by Patrick Amofah and Amer Ijaz at the Lulea University of Technology studied the strategies and benefits of Relationship Management initiatives in companies in

Sweden (Amofah, Ijaz, 2005). They did so through a case study of three specific banks and the ways they executed initiatives of this theory. They found there was a positive correlation between funding the initiatives and profitability, customer retention and loyalty among publics. Jumyong Lee at the University of Central Florida focused on its effect in the Hospitality industry and its relationship between meeting planners and convention destinations (Lee, 2011). They found that investing in Relationship Management with these stakeholders, a majority of the time, resulted in meaningful implications between the two parties.

### **The Current Study**

The hypotheses that were tested in the survey came from the theory the public opinion data researched above. How does the gender of the respondent affect the actions they took toward the individuals impacted by the #MeToo movement in the film industry? This was derived from the gendered results found in public opinion research. It was found that men's responses to the movement were wildly different from the way women responded and how they feel about it today. Another was: Following a sexual misconduct allegation, which specific aspects of Relationship Management result in a more positive attitude toward and willingness to support content featuring the accused? This tested whether the Relationship Management techniques used by the organizations impacted their publics after something as explosive as a sexual misconduct claim hit their reputation and in what ways. This also took from the Amofah and Ijaz study that looked at customer retention rates in a different industry. Lastly, an analysis was conducted of whether a higher investment in Relationship Management following a sexual misconduct claim allowed these individuals and organizations to have a better public reputation than those that did not invest.

- RQ1: How does gender influence individuals' attitudes and intentions to support those who face allegations in the wake of the #MeToo movement?
- RQ 2: Following a sexual misconduct allegation, which specific aspects of Relationship Management result in a more positive attitude toward and willingness to support content featuring the accused?
- RQ3: Does a higher investment in Relationship Management following a sexual misconduct claim allow individuals and organizations to have a better public reputation than those that did not?

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY AND MEASURES

In order to get a comprehensive measure of public opinion on the exemplars, this study utilized a public opinion survey. The four exemplars studied were chosen based on the backlash received following their accusations and the results that came of them. The exemplars were broken up into two groups and were used as a juxtaposition against one another in order to see a difference in what the Relationship Management theory could do following a controversy. Harvey Weinstein and Lars Von Trier were the first comparisons. These two worked primarily on behind the scenes work as Weinstein was an executive producer and owned his own film studio while Lars Von Trier is a seasoned director. The other was Morgan Freeman and Kevin Spacey for similar reasons. Morgan Freeman and Kevin Spacey are both mature and seasoned actors with critical acclaim in their long careers and are primarily public facing.

### **Procedure**

The survey was distributed among students at the University of Central Florida across all fields of study. This was to ensure the population in which opinion is being measured were of young adult age and had varying levels of higher education. There were no exclusions for gender. Participants took a 10-minute online survey, for class or course credit. This length was chosen because if it were made any longer, the risk of participants not completing the survey would be greater. The question content consisted of Likert scale questions on individuals with content surrounding a person's familiarity and opinions about a number of different subjects. The survey began with demographic questions in order to get a well-rounded account of the individual participating. Then questions about levels of film knowledge were asked. This was used to be able to preface the respondents' choices with whether they had ample knowledge of

the film industry as a whole and its current state. Then the participant was asked about their feelings toward 20 different actors, directors or producers that matched the status of the four exemplars. This was done to mask the intent of the survey but still be allowed to gauge their opinions on those being studied without bias.

Once the initial feeling was measured the survey detailed each exemplar's public relations response to their sexual misconduct accusations and then asked the respondent to rate this response by how well they managed the six aspects of Relationship Management. This showed how the public perceives each accused individual's ability to correctly follow best Relationship Management practices and be able to account for the fact that most responses will handle some aspects better than others. Feelings toward the individuals were also measured after they had rated the responses to see if each individual's Relationship Management practices were effective. The survey concluded by asking participant's opinions on the #MeToo movement. This was placed at the conclusion of the survey to ensure there was no contextual bias but also to be able to see if this bias existed in general.

## **Participants**

The survey was distributed among UCF students. In total, 347 students participated with 247 female students versus 100 male students. This is a limitation of the study as this is not the gender makeup of college-aged students. Out of these 347 participants, 28% identified as Hispanic/Latino, 15% Black, 4.6% Asian-American, and 2.6% identified as Other/Miscellaneous Race. Non-white participants versus white were also accounted for. This means if someone selected any categories other than White or White plus another category, they were measured in

the nonwhite category. White participants totaled 179 while Non-White accounted for 170. The age range of participants was majorly in the target demographic of 18 to 25 years olds.

## **Measures**

### *Attitudes*

Attitudes were measured on a 5-point Likert scale for each individual before and after the details of their sexual misconduct accusation responses were given to the respondent. This was supported by the feelings and attitudes toward multiple other individuals who are adjacent in the public light to the individuals studied. The scale for favorability ranged from highly favorable to highly unfavorable. There was also an option for unfamiliarity, therefore, making the question non-applicable to the final data set.

### *Six aspects of Relationship Management*

The six aspects of RM were given to the respondent by way of statements relating to each aspect and the respondent had to rate how much they agreed with each. This was to measure how much the respondent felt the PR response followed good Relationship Management tactics or not. Each aspect had its own rating scale. This way the participant could more specifically gauge the responses and whether they were better at engaging some aspects of the theory more than others.

The wording in which the aspects were laid out went as follows: “I feel the communication allowed for two-way interaction,” which represented Mutuality. “I feel the communication was truthful,” represented Trust. “I feel that [the exemplar provided] seems committed to positive audience relationships,” represented Commitment. “I feel comfortable supporting his future work, knowing his response,” represented Satisfaction. “This does not

affect the extent to which I enjoy viewing films featuring [the exemplar provided],” represented Exchange. “I no longer have concerns about [the exemplar provided]’s interactions with colleagues,” represented Community.

### ***Feelings toward #MeToo Movement***

The last opinion questions asked were about the #MeToo Movement. This was done in order to gauge the participant’s knowledge base and feelings about it. The first two questions were based on favorability and familiarity. The Likert scale points for favorability went from Highly Favorable to Highly Unfavorable. The same wording was applied to familiarity; it ranged from Highly Unfamiliar to Highly Familiar. Then, the participants were asked to rate how much they agreed with the following statements: “I feel that the #MeToo movement has strayed from its original purpose,” and “I feel the #MeToo movement has become sensationalized.” The Likert scale points for these two questions ranged from Highly Disagree to Highly Agree.



## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

### Research Question 1 (RQ1)

Research Question 1 (RQ1) asked: Does the mean favorability rating and intent to support in the future differ by gender before and after they read the synopses? A Highly Unfavorable rating had a value of 1 while a Highly Favorable rating was 5. To test this, a 1-way ANOVA test with the independent variable of gender and the dependent variable of favorability ratings at Time 1 (before the participant is given any synopses of sexual misconduct allegations and responding strategy) and at Time 2 (after the participant is given the synopses) was conducted.

The statistical results found were: before participants read the synopses, there was no significant difference between genders for all prominent individuals. After they read them, there was a significant difference between male participants favorability ratings of Morgan Freeman ( $M = 3.49$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) and females ( $M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ,  $p = .003$ ), indicating males had a more favorable impression of Morgan Freeman at Time 2 than females did. There was a marginally significant difference between gendered responses for Lars Von Trier at Time 2 ( $p = .087$ ), in the same direction. Male participants reported a mean favorability rating of 2.88 and a standard deviation of .0832 while women reported a mean favorability rating of 2.63 and a standard deviation of .911. Overall, men had more favorable views of two of the four prominent figures after reading about the prominent individuals and their team's PR responses in the aftermath of sexual misconduct allegations than women did.

From the results, some conclusions can be drawn. For one, since male respondents were found to have more favorable views of two of the four prominent figures after reading about their

PR responses, this may allude to the idea that males were more likely to respond positively to a strategy than female respondents were. Or, that men found there was a less serious offense to forgive. Meaning, the forgiveness of allegations of this caliber were more likely to occur among a male demographic than a female one.

## **Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 (RQ2) asked: Following a sexual misconduct allegation, which specific aspects of Relationship Management result in a more positive attitude toward and willingness to support content featuring the accused? This question was tested by way of a multiple regression model where the six aspects of Relationship Management were regressed on the favorability ratings of all four prominent individuals at Time 2. The six aspects used as predictor variables were Mutuality, Trust, Commitment, Satisfaction, Exchange, and Community. This was done to see if there would be a significant difference in favorability ratings of prominent individuals based on which aspects of Relationship Management they invested in more. These were on the same value scale as the previous question. This was asked of participants in more common terms so they would have an easier time responding.

The regression model was overall significant based on the finding of an adjusted R-squared of 0.142 and a p-value of less than .001, demonstrating 14.2% of variance in favorability ratings at Time 2 were explained by variation in the 6 aspects of Relationship Management employed by the individuals. Three aspects were found to be statistically significant; Aspect 1 (Mutuality) with a beta coefficient of 0.128 and a p-value of .056. Aspect 4 (Satisfaction) was most significant with a beta coefficient of 0.191 and a p-value of .020. Aspect 5 (Exchange) was also significant with a beta coefficient of 0.142 and a p-value of .056. The statistically

insignificant aspects were Aspect 2 (Trust), Aspect 3 (Commitment), and Aspect 6 (Community). A good follow-up question to ask is why these specific aspects are good predictors of favorability?

For Question 2, the Mutuality, Satisfaction, and Exchange aspects of Relationship Management seem to be the most important factors when it comes to a PR response following accusations. This may suggest that when a PR strategy of this type is done well, it focuses on making communication two-way and ensures that after it has been executed the benefits of consuming the individuals content outweigh the consequences. As well, the PR practitioner must focus on assuring audiences that consuming the individual's content still better their film viewing experience. Of these three, Aspect 4, or Satisfaction was rated as most statistically significant. So, from this, it's presumed that PR responses that ensure the audience continues to feel satisfied with the benefits of consuming an individual's content outweigh the bad are most efficient.

### **Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 (RQ3) asked: Does a higher investment in Relationship Management following a sexual misconduct claim allow individuals and organizations to have a better public reputation than those that did not? For the last research question, a paired samples t-test was done to measure favorability ratings at Time 1 versus Time 2. The synopses that had a positive outcome for the individuals in question and were therefore hypothesized to have higher favorability ratings at Time 2 were Morgan Freeman and Lars Von Trier's. They were chosen based on prior research, the current state of their careers, and the level of general audience awareness of their accusations before taking the survey. The exemplars who were hypothesized

to have lower favorability ratings at Time 1 were Kevin Spacey and Harvey Weinstein, based on the same factors as the other two individuals. The favorability ratings found to be statistically significant with a p-value less than 0.01 between Time 1 and Time 2 were those for Kevin Spacey, Morgan Freeman, and Lars Von Trier. Harvey Weinstein had a marginally significant difference between the two times of measurement. Kevin Spacey's favorability ratings decreased from Time 1 ( $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 1.136$ ) to Time 2 ( $M = 2.34$ ,  $SD = 1.090$ ) with the number of respondents at 139. Morgan Freeman's mean favorability decreased from Time 1 ( $M = 4.31$ ,  $SD = 1.136$ ) to Time 2 ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 1.090$ ) with the number of respondents at 172. Lars Von Trier's favorability ratings also decreased across time points; from ( $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = 0.735$ ) to ( $M = 2.61$ ,  $SD = 0.797$ ). Lars Von Trier's results were something to be wary of basing decisions off of with the number of respondents at 62. This number was lower than others because most participants noted not being familiar enough with him at Time 1 to report an accurate favorability rating. Harvey Weinstein's marginally significant results were ( $M = 2.03$ ,  $SD = 1.342$ ) to ( $M = 1.85$ ,  $SD = 1.058$ ) and the number of respondents at 142. The number of respondents is based on respondent's early answers as to whether they knew who the prominent individuals were and then later were randomly selected to read and respond to that same individual's synopsis.

Question 3's results were the furthest from the original hypothesis with overall favorability ratings decreasing for all participants at Time 2 and three of the participants having statistically significant decreases in favorability. What this means is that even if the participants felt the PR response was good, they still did not have a favorable rating of them. It did not matter how well the response hit certain aspects of Relationship Management because now that the

participant was fully aware of the accusations, their perception of the individual was negatively impacted.

Table 1 – Mean favorability ratings at Time 1, Time 2 and p-values for the four exemplars

Prominent Individuals	Mean Favorability Time 1	Mean Favorability Time 2	p-value
Kevin Spacey	2.93	2.34	< 0.01
Morgan Freeman	4.31	3.08	< 0.01
Lars Von Trier	3.13	2.61	< 0.01
Harvey Weinstein	2.03	1.85	< 0.15

\*Favorability tested on a 7-point scale ranging from Highly Unfavorable to Highly Favorable

### **Additional Results**

Differences in favorability ratings at Time 1 and Time 2 for all four prominent individuals were also analyzed with two different racial groups being the independent variable. This was done by breaking participants into two groups; white and non-white. If an individual self-identified as white plus another race or another race other than white, they were put into the nonwhite group. This was done based on number of respondents and the percentages of respondents in each racial category available. There was no statistically significant difference between the two groups at Time 1. At Time 2 however, there was a statistically significant difference in how both groups responded in regard to Harvey Weinstein; white participants responded with (M = 2.10, SD = 1.133) and nonwhite with (M = 1.78, SD = 0.917) with a p-value of .046. Meaning those who self-identified as white, on average, had a more positive perception of Harvey Weinstein than nonwhite participants did. Lars Von Trier had the opposite with white participants at (M = 2.57, SD = 0.936) and nonwhite at (M = 2.84, SD = 0.833). The

statistical significance being a p-value = .054. Meaning, that nonwhite participants had a more positive perception of Lars Von Trier than white participants did. These results were rather interesting because both men fall into the same demographic; 50+ white males who worked behind the camera and had less audience interaction than the actors Morgan Freeman and Kevin Spacey.

The participant's feelings about the #MeToo movement rounded out the end of the survey. The questions asked were if participants felt the #MeToo movement was still acting within its original purpose, the participant's favorability rating and level of familiarity of the movement, and level of agreement with if the movement had become sensationalized or not. All questions were on a 5-point scale, except for familiarity which was on a 4-point scale. The mean for familiarity was 2.97, favorability was 3.69, original intent was 3.09 and the question of whether it had become sensationalized or not was 3.14.

There were also statistically significant differences in gender for these questions. Female participants possessed a higher level of familiarity with a p-value = .056. Favorability was the same with a p-value = < .000 and belief that it has stuck to its original intent with a p-value = .045. More statistically significant data included the Pearson's correlation between familiarity with the #MeToo movement and opinion of Harvey Weinstein at Time 1, which possessed a value of  $r = -0.301$ . Meaning there was a correlation between those that knew of the #MeToo movement and had a negative opinion of Harvey Weinstein before reading the synopses. Favorability of the #MeToo movement and opinion of Harvey Weinstein had a Pearson's correlation of  $r = -0.240$  with a p-value < .001. So, those that had a positive perception of the movement had a negative one of Weinstein. Kevin Spacey also had statistically significant

results with a Pearson's correlation between familiarity of the movement and opinion of the actor being  $r = -0.240$  with a  $p\text{-value} < .001$ . The Pearson's Correlation between favorability and opinion of Kevin Spacey was the same with  $r = -0.240$ . So, in summary, those that possessed higher awareness of the movement also possessed a more negative perception of Kevin Spacey and Harvey Weinstein.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

### Overall Discussion

The idea of Relationship Management was developed to ensure that PR practitioners maintain positive relationships with publics with whom the success or failure of the organization depends. When crises come into play, these vital relationships can be tested. It is the practitioner's job to try and salvage as much of their public's positive perception of the organization or individual as possible. From what was tested in this study, these relationships do not follow an objective reasoning. Human emotion plays a large part in how an audience perceives an individual as well as what they're willing to forgive.

College-aged students were targeted in the research because this generation has a very unique dynamic in how they approach problematic situations featuring media personalities. As the oldest members of Gen-Z, they're people who grew up with the internet but still have recollections of life before it. They've seen the growth of online activism and the globalization of social movements through social media. Education on a topic can now be done in the blink of an eye and they're the youngest age group to be able to experience this shift of information gathering and be able to have an influence on it. They're also on the precipice of adulthood and therefore do not form relationships with media in the same way younger demographics, who are more impressionable, and older demographics, who are more steadfast in their ways, would do so.

Through the findings in RQ3, insight into how college students perceive media relationships was gained. Even if the PR responses were technically good by public relations practitioner standards, the participant's awareness of these accusations caused the favorability



ratings for all four exemplars to be negatively affected. The takeaway from this is that it wasn't necessarily a PR tactic that impacted the perception of these people negatively, but lack of awareness about the specific accusations by the studied demographic. Meaning, overall, college students may not be completely aware of a situation like this, but once they are, there isn't a PR strategy that could completely salvage the relationship.

The exemplar most interesting to analyze in regard to this theory was Morgan Freeman. His accusations in the wake of the #MeToo Movement were relatively low-profile compared to Kevin Spacey and Harvey Weinstein. His career and reputation were not as negatively affected as Spacey and Weinstein. It was interesting to witness that with him having the highest favorability rating among the exemplars at Time 1, he also had the largest drop in favorability at Time 2.

Putting this theory aside, RQ2 shows what aspects of Relationship Management are most important in a response strategy. Participants were given the aspects in a series of "I feel" statements so that they were able to identify what aspects they felt were most important without needing background knowledge of Relationship Management. The statements the participants agreed with most were, "I feel the communication allowed for two-way interaction; I feel comfortable supporting [the exemplar provided's] future work knowing their response; and, this does not affect the extent to which I enjoy viewing films starring or made by [the exemplar provided]."

The key takeaway from this is what PR response strategies have to incorporate in order to salvage relationships with publics in the face of allegations. The first being to ensure that the communication allows for feedback and responses from the audience. Another is that

practitioners have to ensure that in the aftermath of allegations that the audience's grievances about not wanting to support someone who may pose a threat to those around them is acknowledged and responded to. As well, adding in elements of the campaign that remind the audience why they possess this viewer relationship with the actor in the first place is important.

Put in context, Kevin Spacey's PR responses following his accusations did not thoroughly touch on Aspect 4 (Satisfaction), which was cited as most important to the audience. His team did not assure his publics that by continuing to support the actor after the accusations Spacey would not pose a threat to those around him. This is why it makes sense that he was removed from all of his ongoing projects at the time of the response as well as not currently being listed on any upcoming ones.

On the other side of the spectrum, both Morgan Freeman and Lars Von Trier had colleagues who had worked with them at the time the accusations took place speak on their behalf. In the aftermath, neither person was removed from the projects they were working on at the time and continue to create new work today. In the synopses participants read, these tactics and testimonials were all provided.

Research Question 1 was the only hypothesis correctly presumed and is the reasoning for why further research into how personal background affects participant responses should be conducted. Men were much more accepting of the PR responses provided by two of the four exemplars than women. These were Lars Von Trier and Morgan Freeman. It was theorized that this could be a gendered connection, meaning men are more likely to believe and accept responses from other men in the face of accusations. Or, it could be that the subject matter the

exemplars were responding to did not resonate as much with men than it did with women, who on average experience sexual misconduct at a higher frequency than men.

Data like this led to further hypotheses on how different life experiences effected results. This was analyzed on a surface level through the racial category data set. By putting respondents into two categories, white and nonwhite, it was found on average white participants had a higher favorability rating than nonwhite participants did toward Harvey Weinstein. On the opposite end, Lars Von Trier was found to have a higher favorability rating among nonwhite participants than white ones. This was an interesting point of data because as stated previously, both men fall into the same category and demographic. Perhaps it's the types of accusations put against the individuals or perhaps, once again, it's a matter of how one demographic's background causes them to resonate with an exemplar.

Other insights explored included the respondent's feelings towards the #MeToo movement as a whole. This provided insight that those who had a more positive perception of the movement and knew more about it had a more negative opinion of two of the exemplars, Kevin Spacey and Harvey Weinstein. As for the favorability and familiarity towards the movement, these fell slightly above the middle around an average of three points on a 5-point scale and for one question, a 4-point scale.

Overall, this study is important because research is the very backbone of what makes a PR strategy successful and the knowledge gained through conducting it was worthy of being acknowledged. There are entire professional positions dedicated to studying different audiences and finding an insight into the best way in which to target them for campaigns. Previous to conducting first-person research with this survey, it was hypothesized that favorability toward

Morgan Freeman and Lars Von Trier would be higher than it was. As well, after reading about their accusations and the PR responses, it was a belief that participants, or at least some key demographics would have gained a more positive perception of the individuals.

This brings a new question to the forefront. Is there a point where PR absolutely cannot change the perception of an individual? The data collected from this research points to the answer being yes, at least among the target demographic. There comes a point within the field of publicity and PR that clear, honest and open communication is the only strategy one can utilize.

To build a crisis strategy in the wake of sexual misconduct allegations, one that needed to directly target college-aged students, it seems the most correct route to go would be one that had a constant flow of communication and promoted transparency above all else. As well, increased focus on the most statistically significant Relationship Management practices for an individual's female audience is essential. Especially if it is in response to similar accusations. The idea behind public relations in this situation isn't to excuse someone's actions, it's to promote positive relationships between organization and public. So, if a client were to be accused of actions of this nature, it's not the practitioner's job to ignore it, deny any and all claims or make excuses. All communication coming from the team as part of the response should be to promote the truth, whatever that is. This is based on the research found that supports the idea that no matter what the response is in the wake of sexual misconduct accusations, the relationship with this public will be negatively affected.

### **Research Limitations**

While conducting research, there were several limitations. For one, when it comes to the film industry and pop culture in general, college students have an incredibly wide variation of

knowledge. So, the number of participants that were thoroughly familiar with not just the studied individuals but also their accusations and the consequences faced were minor. While investigating Research Question 3, a limitation arose because the number of participants who knew who Lars Von Trier was and rated him on a favorability scale was only 62. Out of a total of 365 respondents, this is not enough of a representative sample to draw a clear conclusion.

Another limitation faced was the overall demographic of respondents and how that represents a college community. There were more female participants than there were male. As this is not a representative sample of most colleges, this skewed results in the direction of female respondents becoming majority. This being said, the participants in this study still provided valuable information and insights. As previously stated, this demographic is one of the most frequent moviegoers and have a much higher percentage of box office contributions than most other age groups. Therefore, even though there is a misrepresentation in gender among the audience, the insight gained was still valuable.

Throughout the research and testing phase of this study, one of the exemplars, Harvey Weinstein, was being covered in the media in regard to a high-profile sexual assault case. He was convicted of felony rape and sentenced to 23 years in prison on March 11, 2020. By this time, a majority of respondents had already participated but there were a handful that participated after the fact. This may have affected the Time 1 perception of the exemplar before the synopsis was read about him. The media coverage of this case and its ruling was extensive. Therefore, participants who read the synopses of his accusations and responses may have been biased because they had already read about him being convicted of crimes of this nature.

## **Future Research**

Some future things to research are how these results may differ when considering sexual orientation. Kevin Spacey's accusers were majority male whereas the other three exemplars had female accusers. It would be interesting to delve into if this had any effect on his favorability ratings compared to the others. As well, the experience of LGBTQ+ individuals in regard to this topic is one that most likely varies greatly from those of a heterosexual orientation. Taking this into consideration in further research could greatly increase the context around how one's background affects their response to allegations from similar prominent individuals. Also, evaluating the cultural norms and mores within each community could bring an insightful look into perceptions and responses.

As well, research into parallel industries is also something that would be greatly beneficial to continue looking into. For instance, the music industry. It's incredibly common for individuals in the film industry to lead much more private lives than those in the music industry and therefore less of their situations and lives are covered by the media. Relationship Management tactics are most likely invested in at a much higher rate for PR professionals in the music industry than for specific actors and directors in the film industry. Chris Brown, for instance, had a very public abuse case against fellow singer Rihanna in 2009 that was covered extensively in the media. Whereas, many of the exemplars' allegations had much smaller amounts of coverage and therefore less awareness. As well, due to this increased presence in the public eye, musicians are able to invest way more in Relationship Management and therefore abuse and sexual misconduct allegations have more polarizing opinions.

Using the Chris Brown example once more, the singer pled guilty to the charges Rihanna filed against him. In the aftermath of this, the singer still has a large fanbase as well as a large group of individuals who dislike the artist. It's now known that Harvey Weinstein was also convicted of his accusations and in the aftermath of them he was fired from the Weinstein Company and taken off its Board of Trustees. Whereas Chris Brown has released multiple albums since his own controversy. He also currently has 27 million monthly listeners on Spotify. This being said, he also has a large amount of negative coverage on social media. Research into individuals like this and other prominent individuals in the music industry would prove interesting because of how much more their relationships with their publics are invested in.

In another industry that is worth taking a look at, the Collegiate Sports world has a long history of allegations of a similar type. Penn State, for example, had years of sexual misconduct accusations put against their former head football coach, Jerry Sandusky. In 2011, testimonial was released that detailed sexual abuse allegations against young boys by Sandusky and spanned over a period of 15 years (CNN.com, 2019). Recently, the university was once again hit with accusations and possible fines for how they handled further sexual misconduct claims (Pallotto, 2020). At the time the initial claims came to light, Penn State was a prominent football university (Green, 2020). A deeper look into why these claims of abuse went on for so long without repercussions would prove interesting. Football culture and sports culture as a whole has had a long history of sexual misconduct accusations and yet it seems that the relationships between sports fans and players is so strong that repercussions seem to be less severe.

Box office numbers would also be an interesting aspect to incorporate into how the perception of these individuals translates to action. Although one of them has now been

sentenced to prison, the other three exemplars are not and are still working within Hollywood. Even if Kevin Spacey does not currently have any new projects booked, it would be interesting to test if social media activism directly translates into physical changes. Or if there truly aren't any empirical changes in how films are affected after sexual misconduct accusations are put against one of the people working on it.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, this study provided insightful data about human perception and the way in which a certain demographic determines who they do and do not support in the media. The study of PR and the real-life execution of a strategy in response to a crisis like this one are entirely different things. What theory does not account for is human behavior and how subjective it is. This research uncovered the finding that even when given good versus bad PR responses, participants still developed a negative perception of an individual knowing he was accused of sexual misconduct. Awareness of the situation was the key, rather than how well the PR response was. Other than that, the research also introduced statistically significant aspects of Relationship Management the target demographic looks for. The most significant aspect being Mutuality with the other two of significance being Satisfaction and Exchange. This meant that college students value Relationship Management practices that focus most on two-way communication followed by assurance of the wellbeing of those around them and the individual in question. As well, being reminded of the benefits they receive by supporting the relationship was a significant aspect.

The data also showed that men were more likely to possess positive perceptions of two of the four exemplars. It was theorized that this had to do with personal background in relation to



the connotation a sexual misconduct accusation would have to a respondent. Additional results showed that nonwhite participants possessed more favorable views of Lars Von Trier while white participants had a more favorable perception of Harvey Weinstein. This study emphasizes the idea that when faced with accusations of this type you face two trials, one in a court of law, and one by the general public. It is vital the accused are as transparent as possible in both trials because either way, perceptions of an accused person for just being associated with situations of this nature will negatively affect favorability.

Which is why, as both a PR practitioner and a college student, it's imperative that the industry heed the data researched and analyzed in this study. It may not possess easy solutions for those PR professionals who have to deal with crises like this, but it does withhold truths. Promoting transparency and honesty in the wake of controversy should always be the number one goal. With the spending power that this demographic possesses, it's important to take note of their attitudes and behaviors. Do what one must for the sake of healing the relationships between client and this public. If that means admitting to the truth behind accusations and then proactively working to try and better the situation through donations, volunteering or firing of accused individuals then so be it. It's easy to think that a perfectly curated response with vehement denial and making your own accusations would be the cure all for something like this. But the strong recommendations made here show that there are ways to try and rekindle some relationships. It may not be the easy course of action, but it may just be the right one.



## APPENDIX A: SURVEY MEASURES

1. What is your gender?
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  - c. Other, or prefer not to say
2. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ (please enter a number only)
3. What is your major? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Please specify your ethnicity/race
  - a. White
  - b. Black or African American
  - c. American Indian or Alaska Native
  - d. Asian
  - e. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
  - f. Hispanic/Latino
  - g. Other
5. Are you currently enrolled at the University of Central Florida?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
6. How often would you say you consume film media?
  - a. At least once a day
  - b. At least once a week
  - c. At least once a month

- d. At least once a year
7. Do you keep up with any film industry related publications?
- a. Yes
    - i. If so, which ones?
  - b. No
8. How would you rate your feelings towards Morgan Freeman?
- a. Highly favorable
  - b. Favorable
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Unfavorable
  - e. Highly unfavorable
  - f. I'm unfamiliar with this person
9. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?
- a. Highly likely
  - b. Likely
  - c. Neither unlikely nor likely
  - d. Unlikely
  - e. Highly unlikely
  - f. I'm unfamiliar with this person
10. How would you rate your feelings towards Christopher Nolan?
- a. Highly favorable

- b. Favorable
- c. Neutral
- d. Unfavorable
- e. Highly unfavorable
- f. I'm unfamiliar with this person

11. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?

- a. Highly likely
- b. Likely
- c. Neither unlikely nor likely
- d. Unlikely
- e. Highly unlikely
- f. N/A; I'm unfamiliar with this person

12. How would you rate your feelings towards Jonah Hill?

- a. Highly favorable
- b. Favorable
- c. Neutral
- d. Unfavorable
- e. Highly unfavorable
- f. I'm unfamiliar with this person

13. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?

- a. Highly likely
- b. Likely

- c. Neither unlikely nor likely
- d. Unlikely
- e. Highly unlikely
- f. N/A; I'm unfamiliar with this person

14. How would you rate your feelings towards Martin Scorsese?

- a. Highly favorable
- b. Favorable
- c. Neutral
- d. Unfavorable
- e. Highly unfavorable
- f. I'm unfamiliar with this person

15. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?

- a. Highly likely
- b. Likely
- c. Neither unlikely nor likely
- d. Unlikely
- e. Highly unlikely
- f. I'm unfamiliar with this person

16. How would you rate your feelings towards Brad Pitt?

- a. Highly favorable
- b. Favorable
- c. Neutral

- d. Unfavorable
- e. Highly unfavorable
- f. I'm unfamiliar with this person

17. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?

- a. Highly likely
- b. Likely
- c. Neither unlikely nor likely
- d. Unlikely
- e. Highly unlikely
- f. N/A; I'm unfamiliar with this person

18. How would you rate your feelings towards Kevin Spacey?

- a. Highly favorable
- b. Favorable
- c. Neutral
- d. Unfavorable
- e. Highly unfavorable
- f. I'm unfamiliar with this person

19. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?

- a. Highly likely
- b. Likely
- c. Neither unlikely nor likely
- d. Unlikely

- e. Highly unlikely
- f. N/A; I'm unfamiliar with this person

20. How would you rate your feelings towards Spike Lee?

- a. Highly favorable
- b. Favorable
- c. Neutral
- d. Unfavorable
- e. Highly unfavorable
- f. I'm unfamiliar with this person

21. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?

- a. Highly likely
- b. Likely
- c. Neither unlikely nor likely
- d. Unlikely
- e. Highly unlikely
- f. N/A; I'm unfamiliar with this person

22. How would you rate your feelings towards Zack Snyder?

- a. Highly favorable
- b. Favorable
- c. Neutral
- d. Unfavorable
- e. Highly unfavorable



- f. I'm unfamiliar with this person
23. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?
- a. Highly likely
  - b. Likely
  - c. Neither unlikely nor likely
  - d. Unlikely
  - e. Highly unlikely
  - f. I'm unfamiliar with this person
24. How would you rate your feelings towards Harrison Ford?
- a. Highly favorable
  - b. Favorable
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Unfavorable
  - e. Highly unfavorable
  - f. I'm unfamiliar with this person
25. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?
- a. Highly likely
  - b. Likely
  - c. Neither unlikely nor likely
  - d. Unlikely
  - e. Highly unlikely
  - f. I'm unfamiliar with this person

26. How would you rate your feelings towards Roman Polanski?

- a. Highly favorable
- b. Favorable
- c. Neutral
- d. Unfavorable
- e. Highly unfavorable
- f. I'm unfamiliar with this person

27. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?

- a. Highly likely
- b. Likely
- c. Neither unlikely nor likely
- d. Unlikely
- e. Highly unlikely
- f. N/A; I'm unfamiliar with this person

28. How would you rate your feelings towards Joaquin Phoenix?

- a. Highly favorable
- b. Favorable
- c. Neutral
- d. Unfavorable
- e. Highly unfavorable
- f. I'm unfamiliar with this person

29. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?

- a. Highly likely
- b. Likely
- c. Neither unlikely nor likely
- d. Unlikely
- e. Highly unlikely
- f. N/A; I'm unfamiliar with this person

30. How would you rate your feelings towards Lars Von Trier?

- a. Highly favorable
- b. Favorable
- c. Neutral
- d. Unfavorable
- e. Highly unfavorable
- f. I'm unfamiliar with this person

31. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?

- a. Highly likely
- b. Likely
- c. Neither unlikely nor likely
- d. Unlikely
- e. Highly unlikely
- f. I'm unfamiliar with this person

32. How would you rate your feelings towards James Franco?

- a. Highly favorable

- b. Favorable
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Unfavorable
  - e. Highly unfavorable
  - f. I'm unfamiliar with this person
33. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?
- a. Highly likely
  - b. Likely
  - c. Neither unlikely nor likely
  - d. Unlikely
  - e. Highly unlikely
  - f. N/A; I'm unfamiliar with this person
34. How would you rate your feelings towards Quentin Tarantino?
- a. Highly favorable
  - b. Favorable
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Unfavorable
  - e. Highly unfavorable
  - f. I'm unfamiliar with this person
35. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?
- a. Highly likely
  - b. Likely

- c. Neither unlikely nor likely
- d. Unlikely
- e. Highly unlikely
- f. N/A; I'm unfamiliar with this person

36. How would you rate your feelings towards Woody Allen?

- a. Highly favorable
- b. Favorable
- c. Neutral
- d. Unfavorable
- e. Highly unfavorable
- f. I'm unfamiliar with this person

37. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?

- a. Highly likely
- b. Likely
- c. Neither unlikely nor likely
- d. Unlikely
- e. Highly unlikely
- f. N/A; I'm unfamiliar with this person

38. How would you rate your feelings towards Wes Anderson?

- a. Highly favorable
- b. Favorable
- c. Neutral

- d. Unfavorable
- e. Highly unfavorable
- f. I'm unfamiliar with this person

39. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?

- a. Highly likely
- b. Likely
- c. Neither unlikely nor likely
- d. Unlikely
- e. Highly unlikely
- f. N/A; I'm unfamiliar with this person

40. How would you rate your feelings towards Jack Nicholson?

- a. Highly favorable
- b. Favorable
- c. Neutral
- d. Unfavorable
- e. Highly unfavorable
- f. I'm unfamiliar with this person

41. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?

- a. Highly likely
- b. Likely
- c. Neither unlikely nor likely
- d. Unlikely

- e. Highly unlikely
- f. N/A; I'm unfamiliar with this person

42. How would you rate your feelings towards Harvey Weinstein?

- a. Highly favorable
- b. Favorable
- c. Neutral
- d. Unfavorable
- e. Highly unfavorable
- f. I'm unfamiliar with this person

43. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?

- a. Highly likely
- b. Likely
- c. Neither unlikely nor likely
- d. Unlikely
- e. Highly unlikely
- f. N/A; I'm unfamiliar with this person

44. How would you rate your feelings towards Leonardo DiCaprio?

- a. Highly favorable
- b. Favorable
- c. Neutral
- d. Unfavorable
- e. Highly unfavorable

f. I'm unfamiliar with this person

45. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?

a. Highly likely

b. Likely

c. Neither unlikely nor likely

d. Unlikely

e. Highly unlikely

f. N/A; I'm unfamiliar with this person

46. How would you rate your feelings towards Steven Spielberg?

a. Highly favorable

b. Favorable

c. Neutral

d. Unfavorable

e. Highly unfavorable

f. I'm unfamiliar with this person

47. How likely are you to consume his content in the future?

a. Highly likely

b. Likely

c. Neither unlikely nor likely

d. Unlikely

e. Highly unlikely

f. N/A; I'm unfamiliar with this person



Please read the following synopsis and answer the questions below:

On May 24, 2018, Morgan Freeman was accused of sexual harassment and inappropriate behavior by eight women. The claims ranged from women who worked on his film sets to workers under his production company, Revelations Entertainment. Eight additional people stepped forward in this report to say they had bear witness to these claims. These allegations were initially brought to light in an article on CNN.com.

The actor responded to these claims the day the CNN story broke saying that "any suggestion that he assaulted women or created an unsafe workplace is false, but he apologizes to anyone he may have upset." A day after the initial apology, Freeman released a second statement grieving that 80 years of his life and work would be undermined by these allegations. The following week, a law firm representing Freeman ordered CNN to retract their sexual harassment investigation on the claims that it was defamation and based on falsehoods. This was based on the claim that one of the authors of the story was also one of the alleged victims and therefore it was not written with journalistic objectivity and impartiality.

As of this year, Morgan Freeman has three films in post-production and continues to work in Hollywood. His production company, Revelations Entertainment, is currently producing six different projects.

48. Please evaluate Morgan Freeman (and his public relations team's) communication strategy following the sexual assault claims. Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

- a. I feel the communication allowed for two-way interaction
- b. I feel the communication was truthful

- c. I feel that Morgan Freeman seems committed to positive audience relationship
  - d. I feel comfortable supporting his future work, knowing his response
  - e. This does not affect the extent to which I enjoy viewing films featuring Morgan Freeman
  - f. I no longer have concerns about Morgan Freeman's interactions with colleagues
49. What is your favorability rating of Morgan Freeman following the knowledge of his response?
- a. Highly favorable
  - b. Favorable
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Unfavorable
  - e. Highly unfavorable

On October 30, 2017, Kevin Spacey was accused of making a sexual advance towards actor Anthony Rapp when he was 14, this took place in the year 1986. This was released in an interview with the actor in a BuzzFeed interview. Rapp is now 46. Two days later, two more men came forward with similar underage incidents regarding the actor. A month later, over 20 different allegations of similar context are brought to light against the actor.

Spacey responded to the initial allegation by Rapp on his public Twitter account. The response detailed how he did not remember such an incident as it happened 30 years prior and that if it did, he "owes him the sincerest apology for what would have been deeply inappropriate drunken behavior." In the same response, Spacey admitted that he also lived his life as a gay man,

something he had never publicly stated before. Two days later, Spacey's publicist released a statement saying that the actor was "taking the time necessary to seek evaluation and treatment."

By July 2019, a number of different charges against the actor had been dropped, including the only criminal case brought against him due to the accusers' unwillingness to testify. Another suit against the actor was dropped after the accuser, an anonymous masseur, died while the suit was pending. Spacey currently has no projects in the works.

50. Please evaluate Kevin Spacey (and his public relations team's) communication strategy following the sexual assault claims. Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

- a. I feel the communication allowed for two-way interaction
- b. I feel the communication was truthful
- c. I feel that Kevin Spacey seems committed to positive audience relationship
- d. I feel comfortable supporting his future work, knowing his response
- e. This does not affect the extent to which I enjoy viewing films featuring Kevin Spacey
- f. I no longer have concerns about Kevin Spacey's interactions with colleagues

51. What is your favorability rating of Kevin Spacey following the knowledge of his response?

- a. Highly favorable
- b. Favorable
- c. Neutral
- d. Unfavorable

e. Highly unfavorable

On October 5, 2017, Harvey Weinstein was accused of sexual harassment and assault spanning across decades and multiple accusers. This feature was published in the New York Times. Three days later, the producer was fired from his production company. Two days later, 13 more allegations against the producer were published in the New Yorker. Over the course of a year, many more people come out about witnessing or experiencing harassment by the producer, including actors like Uma Thurman, Angelina Jolie, and Tom Hanks.

The same day the story was published, Weinstein issued an apology stating "he 'has caused a lot of pain' - but disputes allegations he harassed female employees over nearly three decades." This same apology also stated that he would be taking a leave of absence from the Weinstein Company, a production powerhouse he founded with his brother, to seek therapy. The same day the New Yorker story broke, Weinstein's spokesperson announced that "Any allegations of non-consensual sex are unequivocally denied by Mr. Weinstein". On October 27, 2017, Weinstein's lawyer filed a suit against his production company after he alleged that they withheld documents that would prove his innocence. Following each new accusation, Weinstein's spokesperson continued to release statements saying that they were "unequivocally false" The producer's lawyers also lamented that many that came forward during the series of allegations were not true and were personal attacks rather than wanting justice.

The Weinstein trial is currently ongoing. On February 18, the jury was out on deliberation as to whether the producer is guilty or not guilty. The Weinstein Company filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy on March 19, 2018. It is now defunct.

52. Please evaluate Harvey Weinstein (and his public relations team's) communication strategy following the sexual assault claims. Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

- a. I feel the communication allowed for two-way interaction
- b. I feel the communication was truthful
- c. I feel that Harvey Weinstein seems committed to positive audience relationships
- d. I feel comfortable supporting his future work, knowing his response
- e. This does not affect the extent to which I enjoy viewing films produced by Harvey Weinstein
- f. I no longer have concerns about Harvey Weinstein's interactions with colleagues

53. What is your favorability rating of Harvey Weinstein following the knowledge of his response?

- a. Highly favorable
- b. Favorable
- c. Neutral
- d. Unfavorable
- e. Highly unfavorable

On October 17, 2017, Lars Von Trier was accused in a Facebook post by famous singer and actress Björk that she was sexually harassed on the movie set for his film *Dancer in the Dark*. After the director's denial of these claims, the singer released a second Facebook post explicitly detailing her accusations against him. A few weeks after this statement, nine women

came forward accusing the director's production company of making a hostile work environment full of "degradation and sexual harassment."

A couple of days after the initial accusation, Von Trier released a statement saying that the allegations were false but that the two were definitely not friends during production. The director's partner through his production company later came out stating that "they were the victims" and that the singer made the film set "incredibly difficult, that woman was stronger than both Lars von Trier and me and our company put together." She dictated everything and was about to close a 100m movie." Another actress that previously worked with Von Trier came forward defending the director by saying "I was not harassed, I adore that man." The director was quoted a year later stating, "I think the MeToo movement is a brilliant idea. If it's used the right way, it's something very important. The problem is that the Internet is something that we had not imagined would affect our lives so much. I'm just scared that if someone says that person has committed murder or whatever, she's [not] presumed innocent until proven guilty." Von Trier currently has a short film in production. His Danish production company, Zentropa, released a film in 2019. The director's last feature-length film, *The House That Jack Built* released in 2018, caused walkouts at that year's Cannes Film Festival but still received a 10-minute standing ovation.

54. Please evaluate Lars Von Trier (and his public relations team's) communication strategy following the sexual assault claims. Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

- a. I feel the communication allowed for two-way interaction
- b. I feel the communication was truthful

- c. I feel that Lars Von Trier seems committed to positive audience relationships
  - d. I feel comfortable supporting his future work, knowing his response
  - e. This does not affect the extent to which I enjoy viewing films directed by Lars Von Trier
  - f. I no longer have concerns about Lars Von Trier's interactions with colleagues
55. What is your favorability rating of Lars Von Trier following the knowledge of his response?
- a. Highly favorable
  - b. Favorable
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Unfavorable
  - e. Highly unfavorable
56. How familiar are you with the #MeToo movement?
- a. Highly familiar
  - b. Familiar
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Unfamiliar
  - e. Highly unfamiliar
57. What is your opinion of the #MeToo movement?
- a. Highly favorable
  - b. Favorable
  - c. Neutral

- d. Unfavorable
- e. Highly unfavorable

58. Do you feel that the #MeToo movement has stuck to its original intent?

- a. Highly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Highly disagree

59. Do you feel the movement has become sensationalized and no longer sticks to its original message?

- a. Highly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Highly disagree



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