Constructing #MeToo

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the German News Media’s Discursive Construction of the #MeToo Movement

Me too.

Suggested by a friend: "If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘Me too.’ as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem."

Alyssa Milano
@Alyssa_Milano

If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.
53.3 Tsd. 92.4 Tsd. Nutzer sprechen darüber

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Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this thesis is to examine how German newspapers discursively constructed the #MeToo movement in order to determine whether the hashtag campaign was legitimized or delegitimized. The ideological construction can be seen as an indication of social change or respectively the upholding of the status quo in regard to gender equality. Of further interest was how the coverage can be perceived as an example of a post-feminist sensibility in mainstream media.

**Approach:** Relevant articles published during two time periods in 2017 and 2018, following defining events of the #MeToo movement, were retrieved from selected publications, including *Die Welt, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Die Zeit*. A qualitative critical discourse analysis applying Norman Fairclough’s (1995) three-dimensional approach was performed on 41 newspaper articles.

**Results:** Through analysis, three main discursive strands emerged: (1) supportive coverage of #MeToo (2) opposing coverage of #MeToo (3) #MeToo as complex. The degree to which the articles adhered to these positions varied from publication to publication. The most conservative publication largely delegitimized the movement by, amongst others, drawing on a post-feminist discourse. Whereas the liberal publications predominantly constructed #MeToo as legitimate. Overall, there was little discussion of marginalized voices and opportunities for progressive solutions leading to social change.

**Conclusion:** The analysis of the German media debate around #MeToo offers a perspective onto the tensions and potentials of the recent media-driven conversation about sexism and sexual harassment. Additionally, it gives some indication of the public attitudes towards gender issues in Germany.

**(Social) Implications:** This thesis contributes to a growing pool of research on news media’s framing of social movements. With its critical impetus, it might add a small input to social change directed at gender equality.

**Keywords:** #MeToo, Critical Discourse Analysis, Sexual Harassment, Norman Fairclough, Social Movements, Hashtag Activism, Media Framing, Sexism
# Table of Contents

Abstract 2

Table of Contents 3

1. Introduction 4

2. Reflections on the Genesis of #MeToo and the German Context of Gender Issues 6
   2.1. Genesis of the #MeToo Movement 6
   2.2. State of Affairs in Germany 8

3. Theoretical Framework 9
   3.1. Theories of CDA 9
   3.2. Conceptualizing Media Hegemony and the Protest Paradigm 13
   3.3. Post-Feminism 15

4. Literature Review 16
   4.1. Protest Paradigm 17
   4.2. Framing Feminist Activism 18
   4.3. Framing Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women 21

5. Data and Methodology 23
   5.1. Study Design: Tools of CDA 23
   5.2. Sample 26
      5.2.1. The German Media Landscape 26
      5.2.2. Die Welt 27
      5.2.3. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 27
      5.2.4. Süddeutsche Zeitung 28
      5.2.5. Die Zeit 28
   5.3. Sample Selection 28
   5.4. Conduct of the Analytical Process 29
   5.5. Ethical Implications, Limitations and Validity 30

6. Findings and Analysis 31
   6.1. Supporting #MeToo 32
   6.2. Opposing #MeToo 34
   6.3. #MeToo as Complex 36
   6.4. On Victims and Perpetrators 38
   6.5. Differences and Commonalities in Discursive Practices 40

7. Discussion 43
   7.1. Summary 43
   7.2. Consideration of the Sociocultural Dimension of Research Findings 43
   7.3. Need for Further Research 46

8. Conclusion 46

Bibliography 49

Appendix 55

Endnotes 59
1. Introduction

“I better use some Tic Tacs just in case I start kissing her. You know, I’m automatically attracted to beautiful — I just start kissing them. It’s like a magnet. Just kiss. I don’t even wait. And when you’re a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. Grab ’em by the pussy. You can do anything.”

-Donald J. Trump

If a man is elected President of the United States of America, despite being known for the above-quoted statement, it is telling of the times we live in. Sexual harassment and violence against women are still deeply engrained in society, a problem which has been minimized by some government officials and citizens alike. In October 2017, however, something of a watershed moment occurred when *The New York Times* reported that Hollywood film producer, Harvey Weinstein, was accused by dozens of women in the film industry of sexual abuse during a period of over three decades (Kantor and Twohey 2017). The scandal triggered a multitude of similar allegations against powerful men around the world, which led to the ousting of many of them from their positions. Within days after the first accusations against Weinstein appeared in the media, women who had experienced harassment and assault began to use #MeToo as an outlet to tell their stories across social media. Post-Weinstein, #MeToo has become a global phenomenon, spreading beyond the entertainment industry. Akin to the Weinstein case, German film director Dieter Wedel was accused by several women of sexual misconduct and assault in *ZEITmagazin* in the beginning of January 2018 (Simon and Wahba 2018). This instance brought the topic closer to the German public sphere.

Previous research has focused extensively upon how the media represents social movements because the media acts as people’s main source of information and it is assumed to play a role in the creation of public support or opposition of a movement’s goals (Mendes 2011). Due to its topicality, #MeToo has yet to be covered by academia in great length. The combination of the high newsworthiness of the subject and my personal interest as a feminist media scholar in the debate are the driving forces behind the present thesis. Despite #MeToo being a global movement, I have chosen to focus on its manifestation in Germany, where I am located, as I am convinced that an analysis of the German media discourse offers telling insights into the tensions and potentials around
the worldwide public debate of sexism and sexual violence. Accordingly, my interest lies in the discursive construction of the #MeToo movement by German print media – a topic raising questions of power structures, public and media discourse on gender and violence, as well as the opportunity for social and institutional change towards greater gender equality. Thus, my research questions are as follows:

**Research Questions:**

1. How is the #MeToo movement discursively constructed in German print media?
   a. Which discursive strategies are used in order to legitimize or delegitimize the movement?
   b. How are normative power structures in the context of victim/perpetrator discursively reinforced or dismantled?
   c. What are the differences and commonalities across the coverage of the movement in conservative and liberal newspapers?

2. How can the construction of the #MeToo movement by the German press be perceived as an example of a post-feminist sensibility in mainstream media?

In order to unearth the oftentimes relatively hidden power relations in media texts, I will apply Norman Fairclough’s (1992) conception of critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA) as the guiding theory and method. The thesis seeks to contribute to the growing pool of research on mainstream news media’s framing of social movements and possibilities for social change by conducting a CDA of the news coverage of the #MeToo movement in 2017 and 2018. Based upon my knowledge of the German media landscape, I selected the newspapers which best represent the mainstream news media: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Die Zeit*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Die Welt*. Covering the breadth from liberal to conservative, the sample allows for a comparison between the prevailing editorial lines of German print media.

By way of introduction, I will provide the context of the present thesis by describing the genesis of the #MeToo movement as well as the broader sociocultural contexts to sexual harassment in Germany specifically. Subsequently, I defer to the theoretical framework of this research, discussing CDA and its accompanying theories in the light of my chosen topic. The following literature review discusses and synthesizes empirical studies about media and how it frames feminism and social movements in general as well as sexual
harassment. The extent of the review aims to illustrate the knowledge gap, which this study seeks to fill. Next, I will present the methodology, sampling strategy and implementation of method. Further, ethical considerations and validity will be discussed. Building upon the previous chapters, I will present and analyze the research findings by re-connecting them to the literature. Finally, the results are reconsidered in the light of a broader theoretical and societal context. At last, I conclude by providing answers to my research questions, pointing out the contribution I have made to academic research in this area and the need for further research.

2. Reflections on the Genesis of #MeToo and the German Context of Gender Issues

In order to provide the premises of understanding of the #MeToo movement for this thesis, it is worth reviewing the movement’s genesis and its integration in other recent news media coverage of sexual harassment claims. Furthermore, Germany’s unique societal presuppositions in regard to the topic are considered.

2.1. Genesis of the #MeToo Movement

While other cases involving sexual misconduct have made headlines before, e.g. against candidate and now US-President Donald Trump, actor Bill Cosby, or Stanford student Brock Turner (Wexler et al. 2018), it was the breaking of the story around Hollywood producer, Harvey Weinstein, that set the ball rolling for the modern day reckoning around sexual harassment. On October 5th 2017, The New York Times reported that dozens of women accused Weinstein of sexual abuse over a period of more than 30 years (Kantor and Twohey 2017). Not only did the report garner widespread coverage in other news outlets but inspired the so-called “Weinstein effect” (Graham 2017; Nemzoff 2017), a global phenomenon in which primarily women come forward to accuse powerful men of sexual misconduct. In the course of the events, the actress Alyssa Milano (2017) tweeted on October 15th:

“If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘Me too.’ as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.”
Shortly after, reports from women – and some men – around the world started to amass all over social media, detailing stories of harassment, abuse, and rape in the workplace and beyond. The hashtag #MeToo trended in 85 countries and Twitter confirmed that the hashtag was used over 1.7 million times in just the first 10 days after Milano’s initial tweet (Park 2017). Facebook released statistics showing that there were more than 12 million posts, comments and reactions regarding “Me Too” in less than 24 hours (ibid.). These numbers are especially striking compared to previous popular hashtags targeting sexual harassment, i.e. #YesAllWomen and #EverydaySexism, that accumulated less uses in the whole of 2017 than #MeToo in 24 hours (Main 2017).

However, some women of color were quick to point out that there already was a preexisting “Me Too” social movement, initiated by the African American activist, Tarana Burke, in 2006. The original movement focuses on women of color and marginalized people in underprivileged communities, and uses self-identification as a way to build bridges among survivors of sexual violence (Garcia 2017). Burke’s ultimate goal is to “collectively, start […] dismantling these systems that uphold and make space for sexual violence.” (Murray 2017). These new #MeToo developments inadvertently exposed tensions surrounding mainstream, white, feminism and its lack of intersectionality. Burke and Milano joined forces quickly, though (ibid.).

A distinction that has to be made is that Burke’s “Me Too” is a social movement with explicit goals, which the hashtag campaign #MeToo is not, as it was only intended to be informative and enhance visibility of the problem (Wexler et al. 2018). Della Porta and Diani (2006) define social movements as a distinct social process consisting of three main mechanisms through which actors engage in collective action. This comprises being involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents, being linked in dense informal networks, and sharing a distinct collective identity. According to this definition, #MeToo cannot be categorized as a social movement in a classical sense. Rather it has to be seen in connection to the notions of discursive activism or hashtag feminism (Clark 2016), which argue that online discourse can be a mode of activism “directed at promoting new grammars, new social paradigms through which individuals, collectivities, and institutions interpret social circumstances and devise responses to them” (Young 1997, p. 3, cited in ibid., p. 4). Thus, #MeToo qualifies as a discursive hashtag movement, which is why I will refer to it as a movement throughout the thesis.
Since this study concentrates on the media coverage of the hashtag movement, discussions on what constitutes political participation and activism – e.g. Morozov’s (2011) notion of slacktivism – go beyond the scope of this thesis. Ultimately, it can be said that the virality of #MeToo triggered an increased worldwide dialogue about sexual violence, gender equality, and power structures.

2.2. State of Affairs in Germany

When the #MeToo posts started flooding social media, German women chimed into the chorus. This comes as no surprise since 60% of women indicated they experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15 in a representative survey by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA 2014). However, it was not until three months later that the first German celebrity was publicly accused of sexual misconduct. On January 3rd 2018, ZEITmagazin published a long investigative piece in which several actresses made an affidavit in which they accused the film director and writer Dieter Wedel of sexual harassment, assault and rape. In the 1980s and -90s Wedel was one of the most popular and powerful theater and TV directors in Germany. He denied all accusations (Simon and Wahba 2018). The article shifted the #MeToo debate in Germany from an international spectacle to a domestic issue, even leading to a televised debate about sexism and harassment on one of Germany’s most popular political talk shows, Hart aber Fair (WDR 2018).

However, the #MeToo movement was not the first trigger pulled for a public discourse about sexual harassment in Germany. The #Aufschrei (outcry) campaign first emerged in January 2013, when women began posting their personal stories of everyday sexism on Twitter. The hashtag movement responded to a series of national events in Germany involving misogynist comments and sexist behavior by prominent male politicians running for office in the federal election. The feminist Anne Wizorek consequently coined #Aufschrei, which amassed 57,000 Twitter reactions within one week and yielded the debate around sexism into print media and talk shows (Jakat 2013). The hashtag campaign was awarded with the prestigious Grimme Online Award due to its high response in traditional media and its potential to illustrate a new interconnected on- and offline debating culture (Baer 2016). The campaign was, however, not ubiquitously well-received – then Federal President Joachim Gauck delegitimized the debate as “Tugendfuror” (virtue frenzy) in an interview (Rietzschel 2013). The conservative author
Birgit Kelle went on to write the anti-feminist book *Dann mach doch die Bluse zu* (Then better fasten up your blouse) in response to the hashtag campaign and its new feminism, which received widespread attention and support – she was even awarded a prize for her work by a right-conservative magazine (Thaler 2013). On this note, there is no consensus about the status of women, notwithstanding feminism, in Germany. Conservative values are deeply engrained in German society through politics, culture, legislation and also discursive practices. However, change is demanded more and more. These insights about the German context are important to keep in mind for the eventual analysis and positioning of empirical data in accordance with my chosen theoretical framework, and the concluding results that will render broader societal circumstances vital.

3. Theoretical Framework

Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) note, that CDA is not to be used as a method of analysis detached from its theoretical foundations, and researchers must accept the basic philosophical principles in order to use it as their method. Thus, I begin by introducing the essential theories of CDA. Further, I outline several other theories that are related to my chosen topic, such as media hegemony, framing and post-feminism.

3.1. Theories of CDA

*Roots & Objective*

Discourse analysis has a long linguistically-oriented history, that is, solely focusing on text and its analysis. Only in the mid-1960s to early 1970s did Michel Foucault popularize discourse analysis as a method in the social sciences and humanities. Then, CDA emerged in the early 1990s during a symposium with different scholars, including Norman Fairclough (Wodak and Meyer 2009).

It has to be noted that CDA is not a homogenous method, school or paradigm but may be described as a “shared perspective on doing linguistic, semiotic or discourse analysis” (van Dijk 1993, p. 131, cited in Richardson 2007, p. 44). It does, however, provide theories and methods for the empirical study of the relations between discourse and sociocultural developments in a variety of social domains. Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) argue that CDA’s aim is to “shed light on the linguistic-discursive dimension of social and cultural phenomena and processes of change in late modernity” (p. 61). Hence, in the
case of this thesis, CDA helps to show how newspapers discursively construct the issue of sexual harassment by legitimizing or delegitimizing the #MeToo movement, thus, possibly normalizing inequalities and concealing power structures in the status quo.

**Discourse & Critique**

Before I go deeper into the theoretical premises of CDA though, I want to define the notion of discourse, as it is a heavily contested concept whose definition varies from scholar to scholar. I assume a functionalist point of view – that language is active – which defines discourse as “language in use” (Richardson 2007, p. 23). By adopting this definition, I am interested in the ways in which language is used to mean things and do things that relate to a wider socio-political, cultural and historic context as opposed to only relate to the immediate context of writer-text-audience (ibid.). Consequently, my study takes a social constructionist stance which adheres to CDA’s paradigm. That is, CDA is influenced by both Materialism (the world exists independent from human beings and this material existence determines our consciousness) and Idealism (humans create their own reality), as it sees “discourse as social practice [...] that implies a dialectical [or] two-way relationship: the discursive event is shaped by situations, institutions and social structures, but it also shapes them” (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, p.55, cited in ibid., p. 28). Hence, Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) conclude that “changes in discourse are a means by which the social world changes. Struggles at the discursive level take part in changing, as well as in reproducing, the social reality” (p. 9).

These observations already imply that discourse is to be approached by a circular model of analysis. CDA studies social phenomena, which are ultimately complex, and thus require a multi-disciplinary and multi-methodical approach that integrates textual and social analysis (Wodak and Meyer 2009). Another essential trait of CDA is that it seeks to have an effect on social practice and relationships – especially on those of dominance, disempowerment, prejudice or discrimination – by investigating the relationship between the text and its social conditions, ideologies, and power relations. Critical analysis focuses, according to Fairclough (1995, p. 62), “at different levels of abstraction from the particular event: it may involve its more immediate situational context, the wider context of institutional practices the event is embedded within, or the yet wider frame of the society and culture”. Overall, CDA requires the researcher to be critical by revealing structures of power, unmasking ideologies and ultimately helping to inspire social
change. This notion goes back to the influence of the Frankfurt School’s Critical Theory, in the sense that social theory needs to be oriented towards critiquing and changing society, as opposed to traditional theory, which is solely oriented to understanding society (Wodak and Meyer 2009). At this point, I will go on to further explain the three aforementioned themes – power, ideology, hegemony – as these are key concepts to CDA, before returning to Fairclough’s analytical model of CDA.

*Power, Ideology, Hegemony*

Since discourse is defined as socially consequential, naturally issues of power arise. As briefly mentioned above, discursive practices may have major ideological effects, i.e. they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between, for instance, women and men, through the ways in which they construct things and position people (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). But what exactly constitutes power? According to Lukes (1974, in Richardson 2007) there are three ‘faces of power’: the simplistic one that consciously initiates decision-making; the critical one that (un)consciously creates bias to influence decision-making or (un)consciously makes non-decisions; and finally the systemic one, that is, the unconscious and non-intended bias from a system. Richardson concludes that “the structural biases of the system are not sustained simply by a series of individually chosen acts, but also, most importantly, by the socially structured and culturally patterned behavior of groups and practices of institutions” (ibid., p. 31). Power is a central concept for CDA, as it often analyzes the linguistic of those in power – e.g. journalists’ choice of constructing the #MeToo debate.

Ideology is an elusive concept, but can be described as “meaning in the service of power” (Thomson 1990, p. 135, cited in ibid., p. 34). Fairclough (2003) finds that “ideologies are representations of aspects of the world which contribute to establishing and maintaining relations of power, domination and exploitation” (p. 218, cited in Wodak and Meyer 2009, p. 8). Thus, in the case of this thesis, ideology can refer to a post-feminist sensibility that is manifest in newspaper discourse – I come back to this notion at the end of the theoretical framework.

Finally, hegemony can be described as the process in which a ruling class uses force and consensus in order to persuade the mass to accept its rule and their subordination. This is usually maintained through education, by teaching ideas and values to the general public.
so that the relationship is seen as legitimate (Gramsci 1971, in Richardson 2007). Hence, there is a clear connection to the third face of power. Mainstream journalists support the hegemony by accepting, or having internalized, “commonsensical notions of who ought to be treated as authoritative”, “accepting the frames imposed on events by officials and marginalizing the delegitimate voices that fall outside the dominant elite circles” (Reese 1990, p. 425, cited in ibid., p. 36). As I will illustrate in the literature review, the framing of social movements largely relates to the notion of hegemony.

**Fairclough’s Model of CDA**

There are different approaches to CDA (Wodak and Meyer 2009). In this thesis, I turn to Fairclough’s conceptualization which follows a text-oriented approach. According to Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) his approach tries to unite three traditions:

- Textual analysis within the field of linguistics;
- Macro-sociological analysis of social practice;
- Micro-sociological, interpretative tradition within sociology.

This interdisciplinary approach is necessary to reveal the links between texts and societal and cultural processes and structures. The benefit is that it takes the circularity of discourse, meaning that social practices are shaped by social structures and power relations, into account (ibid.). As I alluded to above, Fairclough (1995) developed a three-dimensional model which enables a holistic view of discourse. Every discursive – or ‘communicative’ event is composed by three dimensions that overlap and mutually influence each other: text, discourse practice and sociocultural practice (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Theoretical three-dimensional model for CDA, adapted from Fairclough (1995)](image-url)
In sum, analysis based upon the model seeks to draw out the form and function of the text, the way the text relates to the way it is produced and consumed and also how this relates to the wider context of society in which it takes place (Richardson 2007). At the text level, CDA looks at the linguistic choices that are made in order to describe a person, an event, action or process. These choices must be seen in relation to their direct or indirect involvement in reproducing or resisting the systems of ideology and social power (ibid.). Regarding #MeToo the words used to describe the movement/activists – e.g. hysterical, united – can give some indication of whether the movement is legitimized or delegitimized.

At the level of discursive practices, the conditions of production and consumption of the text are of interest, e.g. how the author’s gender or the newspaper’s political bias affects the framing of sexual harassment (ibid.). In regard to an author’s gender, however, Rosalind Gill (2007) found that differences between male and female journalists are actually few, except notably women “are more interested and oriented towards audience needs than male journalists and they tend to look more for female spokespersons” (p. 126).

Since CDA needs to involve an analysis of “the social and cultural goings-on which the communicative event is part of” (Fairclough 1995, p. 57), a sociocultural critique of structured dynamics should come into play. In the case of my thesis, this could include questions of why there has been such a high resonance with the topic of sexual harassment during this point in time.

This concludes my theoretical discussion of CDA. I will later address the more specific methodological aspects and tools of CDA, which fit my research purpose. With Fairclough’s model in mind, I now present further theories, which are helpful in the context of my thesis.

3.2. Conceptualizing Media Hegemony and the Protest Paradigm

In accordance with the theory of hegemony mentioned above, three key theories have emerged that account for ‘media hegemony’: gatekeeping, agenda-setting and framing. For the scope and purpose of this thesis, I will briefly explain the theoretical concept of framing as it is vital in understanding how the ‘protest paradigm’ works. Journalists use interpretative – mostly dominant – frames for events they present, defined as “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual” (Gitlin 1980, p. 12). Essentially, framing refers to how news media representations determine the parameters of public debate by covering events in a
coherent narrative in which some actors and their motivations are emphasized while others are marginalized or left out. Frames are used in the effort to simplify, prioritize and structure the presentation of information and events (ibid.).

Protest groups hold a valuable place in every society as they contribute to social change, elevate issues on the political agenda or encourage reforms, and provide critical feedback to various governmental, economic and social institutions (Boyle et al. 2012). Hence, journalists should be motivated to cover them objectively and thoroughly. Academic research on the media coverage of protest groups and social movements has largely shown, though, that there are certain structural biases in reporting, which is known as the ‘protest paradigm’ (Chan and Lee 1984; McLeod and Hertog 1999). The paradigm can be defined as a “master narrative of news coverage that tends to focus on protester’s tactics, dramatic actions, and spectacle, rather than emphasizing the protester’s grievances and motives” (Harlow et al. 2017, p. 329). The adherence to the paradigm has been established in numerous studies (Boyle, McCluskey, McLeod and Stein 2005; Chan and Lee 1984; Di Cicco 2010; McLeod and Hertog 1998). Four characteristics for the reporting template have been identified by scholars (Papaioannou 2015; Leopold and Bell 2017):

1) Use of narrative structures or news frames which often define protests in a way that actually has nothing to do with the motivation for the protest;
2) Reliance on official sources and definitions;
3) Invocation of public opinion that is often hostile or superficial;
4) Techniques of delegitimization, marginalization and demonization.

How these characteristics will take shape for the coverage of #MeToo, not being an on-the-ground social movement, will be revealed through analysis. There are various possible causes for the protest paradigm, including biases of individual journalists and norms and practices of the news industry (Boyle et al. 2012). For example, journalists tend to rely on official, mainstream sources, instead of direct activist quotes. Elite sources maintain the illusion of objectivity and trustworthiness while simultaneously increasing the efficiency of news production (Wouters 2015). In the routinized creation of news that is deemed necessary in a capitalist world, journalists are trained to judge an event’s newsworthiness by the impact and uniqueness of the event (Eliasoph 1988, in Leopold and Bell 2017). Furthermore, traditional news routines often lead to one-dimensional,
chronological coverage of events (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993, in ibid.). The effect of this finding will be tested in analysis, as one of the newspapers from my sample is a weekly newspaper, in comparison to the others being daily. A social movement is increasingly likely to receive news coverage if they are centrally located, involve famous or public figures, or consistently provide images and definitions that are appealing to the general public (ibid.). The consequence is that the status quo is being reinforced, as mainstream viewpoints predominate (McLeod and Hertog 1998). The problem with the protest paradigm is that because the press seeks for newsworthiness, protesters often use dramatic techniques like mass demonstrations, nudity and clashes with police to grab the media’s attention and ensure mobilization. In turn, this often leads to negative news coverage and the protester’s message gets lost in the spectacle – a catch-22 (Harlow et al. 2017).

3.3. Post-Feminism

According to Rosalind Gill (2007) post-feminism is best understood as a sensibility – not solely as an epistemological perspective, historical shift or backlash as other scholars have proposed. In response to this notion, I follow her call that post-feminist media culture should be treated as a “critical object” (ibid., p. 254) which needs to be inquired and interrogated. Thus, I will make use of the theoretical concept of post-feminism to analyze the broader sociocultural practices of news media’s coverage of the #MeToo movement.

Angela McRobbie (2009) characterizes post-feminism as a “double entanglement” (p. 12), in which feminism is, on one hand, taken into account while simultaneously, on the other, maligned and disregarded. She established the concept of a “post-feminist gender regime” to describe the various ways in which feminism has been mainstreamed, or “taken into account”, across a multitude of domains, but whereby its consideration perpetuates the undoing of feminism by framing it as no longer necessary or relevant (ibid.). Gill (2007) found various stable themes, tropes and constructions of this post-feminist sensibility, one of which is the emphasis on individualism, choice and empowerment. She states that “a grammar of individualism underpins all these notions – such that even experiences of racism or homophobia or domestic violence are framed in exclusively personal terms in a way that turns the idea of the personal as political on its head” (ibid., p. 259). Hence, notions of politics or cultural influence are almost totally
evacuated from media culture. Women are generally constructed as autonomous agents no longer constrained by any inequalities or power imbalances (ibid.). In the same manner, McRobbie (2009) argues that a new gender dichotomy is upheld by casting feminist discourse to the margins of cultural intelligibility while simultaneously praising neoliberal, post-feminist stories of female freedom, success and individualization. These narratives operate as a “substitute for feminism”, so as to ensure that a new women’s movement “will not re-emerge” (p. 1).

Irony was found to be a commonly employed discursive tool in newspaper articles to establish a safe distance between the writer and particular sentiments or beliefs (Gill 2007). Gill found that in post-feminist media culture “irony has become a way of ‘having it both ways’, of expressing sexist […] sentiments in an ironized form, while claiming this was not actually ‘meant’” (ibid., p. 266-267). Through this, critique on texts becomes very difficult – especially so when the anticipated criticism is preempted by the author.

4. Literature Review

The #MeToo movement is still an unfolding phenomenon in which most academic discussion is imminent. However, before #MeToo’s advent there were numerous related social movements and hashtag movements on which scholarly studies have been published. In order to frame the research gap for my thesis, I am thus drawing on an interdisciplinary mix of literature that engages with the media coverage of feminist activism, sexual harassment and violence against women, as well as media coverage of social movements more generally in due consideration of the so called ‘protest paradigm’. At this point it should be noted that research on the media coverage of feminist hashtag movements – specifically in the German context, e.g. #Aufschrei – is scarce.

Previous research has predominantly applied framing and content analysis to study the aforementioned occurrences. However, content analysis is only able to quantitatively study the manifest content of communication, but is not able to consider any social or contextual factors outside or subsequent to it (Richardson 2007). Thus, I will steer away from that approach by conducting a CDA, which is able to examine meaning within texts and relationships between these meanings and wider processes of text production and consumption (ibid.). Despite taking a different methodological approach, the findings presented below are invaluable for me to embed my research in.
4.1. Protest Paradigm

Following the preceding theoretical conceptualization of the protest paradigm, at this point I concentrate on empirical studies investigating the phenomenon. Boyle et al. (2012) invoke McLeod (1999) while stating that “there is evidence that journalists may not even treat all protest groups equally, subjecting them to frames that marginalize them from mainstream society” (p. 128). In their study of the influence of protest goals and tactics they found that groups that use more extreme (‘deviant’) tactics, are treated more negatively or critically by the media. Positive coverage stems from issues that favor the status quo (ibid.). Leopold and Bell (2017) demonstrate this in their analysis of media coverage of the Black Lives Matter movement – a movement which fundamentally criticizes the social system of white supremacy in the US – that was delegitimized, marginalized and demonized to a large extent. These systemic biases favor the status quo and possibly interfere with the quality of social discourse, including equal representation within media coverage, and hinder positive social change. Furthermore, I ask, if protest strategies and goals have been considered the most surefire way to gain access to news coverage (Wouters 2015), how will this play out for the #MeToo movement as there is no central resource or leader who provides strategic goals?

The above findings concentrate on the protest paradigm in traditional news media. Due to the changing media landscape, it needs to be acknowledged that recent research is detecting less predictable media coverage of protests. A number of political, social, and technological – namely social and alternative online media – transformations have contributed to this phenomenon (Papaioannou 2015). Recent studies suggest an evolution of the protest paradigm, showing that the level of adherence to the paradigm depends on a number of factors, including ideology of the protestors and the media outlets (Boyle et al. 2004; Lee 2014); news media ownership (Ibrahim 2012); social, political, and cultural contexts (McCluskey et al. 2009); and today’s media outlets being in a much more “complex relation to the politics of protest than assumed in the past” (ibid. p. 859). Lee (2014) attributes this trend to the Internet and its abundance of user-generated content and citizen journalism. Cottle (2008) adds that in a time of individualized action, public attitudes towards protests change and a recognition of them as a legitimate form of political action emerges. Thus, media coverage is likely to change too. Moreover, protesters have also expanded their communicative opportunities, allowing them to take control of their own messages (Harlow et al. 2017). Kyriakidou and Osuna (2017)
substantiated these findings in their study of the Indignados protests in the Spanish and Greek press, which they found to be moving beyond the protest paradigm.

4.2. Framing Feminist Activism

It is argued that the news media is predominantly run within a patriarchal framework (Mendes 2011), thus, it comes as no surprise that the coverage of women’s movements and activism largely adheres to the protest paradigm. In the following section, I present a chronological account of previous research on the framing of feminist activism. First of all, it has to be noted that feminism is considered a ‘niche topic’ in the media (Ashley and Olson 1998; Lind and Salo 2002; Jaworska and Krishnamurthy 2012) and coverage has even declined over time (Mendes 2012; Sisco and Lucas 2015). If the subject is covered, research often confirms that the news media frames feminists in ways unlikely to curry public favor (Bronstein 2005).

A number of scholars have investigated the construction of stories about second-wave feminism. In her seminal paper Van Zoonen (1992) analyzed how Dutch newspapers covered the 1968-1973 Women’s Movement in the Netherlands. She found several dominant frames, including feminism as illegitimate, feminists as different from ordinary women and feminists as anti-male. Further, Ashley and Olson (1998) examined media coverage of the 1966-1968 Women’s Movement in three major US newspapers and found statistical and textual support for the following frames: feminists as less important and less legitimate than opponents, feminists as more deviant than opponents and finally that coverage is more event- than issue-driven. Also, women were pitted against each other. Rhode (1995) found these strategies in her historical overview of media’s image of feminism: demonization, personalization and trivialization by focusing on women’s physical appearances, polarization by presenting extreme positions and the focus on individual rather than social transformation. The author further noticed a strong focus on self-transformation, meaning, individual success stories encouraging women to believe that they can meet all the challenges of modern life by working hard on themselves and for success. Obviously, this discourages collective action and translates into a post-feminist sensibility (McRobbie 2009; Gill 2007). Terkildsen and Schnell (1997), however, identified shifting frames in coverage of the Women’s Movement between 1950-1995 in three US news outlets. They discovered frames that encompass: feminism as a struggle between women who are happy with the status quo and women who desire
change, feminism as a violation of traditional gender roles, women in political roles, as well as gender and economic equality for women. While the frames in the aforementioned studies have not been entirely consistent, they did overlap in large extents. Thus, Lind and Salo (2002) compiled enduring frames that were used by the media to portray feminists and feminism: demonization, personalization and trivialization, goals and rights, victimization, and agency. However, Mendes (2011) revisited news coverage of the Women’s Movement between 1968-1982 in British and American newspapers and found a larger number of supportive frames than previous scholars had demonstrated. This does not mean that patriarchal and heterosexist ideologies were challenged though, because the “support largely resulted from de-emphasizing feminism’s more radical goals and presenting reformist rather than revolutionary critiques around women’s oppression and inequality” (ibid., p. 87). Mendes also found that a newspaper’s political leaning is not necessarily the best indicator of how a social movement will be framed—an interesting finding which will be considered for the coverage of #MeToo. Finally, she discovered another frame which shows that feminist activism is not always presented in terms of a dichotomy. In a few articles feminism was framed as complex and at times contradictory (ibid.)

Other scholars have focused on the construction of third-wave feminism (early 1990’s to circa 2012) by the media. In her analysis, Bronstein (2005) states that journalists still rely heavily upon some of the frames that were already used to construct the second wave. Further, the author discovered the new frame of “Feminism Lite”, which translates to third-wave feminism being “less intense and committed to political engagement as its predecessor” (p. 794) and its advocates intent on looking good, friendly and approachable. This image ultimately offers the reader a limited and partial account of modern feminism. Bronstein concludes that the complexities of third-wave thought are rarely explained and journalists tend to frame the movement in ways that make it seem redundant. Moreover, second- and third-wave are pitted against each other in the sense that second-wave feminism is framed negatively in comparison to post-feminism (ibid.). Similarly, Mendes (2012) found that a neoliberal framing focuses on women’s individual choices and how these decisions can empower women, but disregards structural problems. The same applies to the solutions to problems raised by the movement, either no solutions are offered, and when they are, they are typically individualistic (Mendes 2011). Of the same tenor, Dean (2010) introduced the notion of “domestication” (p. 393)
in his study of feminism in the British quality press from 2006-2008. According to him, the term captures the double entanglement of a bold affirmation of feminism on the one hand, and a disavowal of its more inconvenient, radical dimensions on the other. Thus, the author substantiates McRobbie’s (2009) theory of a ‘post-feminist gender regime’. Further observing this post-feminist sensibility, Darmon (2014) examined media framing of the ‘SlutWalk’ event in London – a march to raise awareness of slut-shaming and sexism – in British news outlets. She wondered whether feminist messages were able to travel intact from online spaces in which they were formed to mass media spaces where they are reported. Darmon found that political elements are often completely stripped away as one journalist focuses solely on the “protestors’ attire and her own personal relationship with the word ‘slut’” (ibid., p. 702). However, as already described with regard to the protest paradigm, strategic communication of an activist group can heavily influence the framing of events. This was effectively shown in Nicolini and Hansen’s (2017) study on the framing of the Women’s March in Washington D.C. after the inauguration of Donald Trump. The authors found that all organizational messages appeared in media coverage, and the protest group was depicted through a supportive lens by two out of three newspapers. They conclude that this was largely made possible due to access to manifold strategic communication tools (i.e. social media, websites, email lists) that allow the activists to directly reach press and audiences with their goals, mission and vision (ibid.). Thus, key characteristics of the protest paradigm – the reliance on official sources and the focus on events rather than grievances and motives – can be overcome.

Finally, I want to take into account a study specifically focusing on the media representation of feminism in Germany, as almost all previous research is based on investigations in an Anglo-American setting. In their corpus-based linguistic analysis Jaworska and Krishnamurthy (2012) found that, first and foremost, feminism is depicted as a thing of the past through frequent references to its own history or famous deceased or elderly feminists. A revival is either rejected or seen as obsolete. The authors state that “the weak status of the feminist ideal in society is also confirmed by the introduction of the notion of ‘conservative feminism’ which, at its core, perpetuates the concept of patriarchy (and the traditional model of family as central to the wellbeing of the nation), and dismantles feminism rather than reviving it” (ibid., p. 22). Furthermore, they found that feminism in German press is strongly associated with academia and the arts as well
as ideas on the left of the political spectrum. Feminism is frequently described with adjectives such as *radikal* (radical), *kämpferisch* (combative) and *militant* – all drawing from war discourse and suggesting an aggressive activism. Jaworska and Krishnamurthy (2012) conclude that there is a “strong sense of irony in some of the depictions of feminism and feminists” (p. 22). This finding endorses Gill’s (2007) observation.

4.3. Framing Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women

As #MeToo is not a social movement in the classical sense, but is mainly responsible for the recurring emergence of public and media discourse of sexual harassment, I finally provide an overview of how the media has framed sexual harassment and violence against women in the past. First of all, it has to be noted that the way media presents sexual harassment has received relatively little scholarly attention (McDonald and Charlesworth 2013). This could be due to the fact that the topic is generally under-reported and typically only driven by specific events and scandals (ibid.; Easteal 2015). However, feminist theorists have observed that representations of violence against women may reflect the media’s internalized ambivalence toward feminism in general (Mendes 2012).

In their study of media representations of several Australian sexual harassment cases and the according law, Judd and Easteal (2013) found a tendency of over-simplification, avoidance of context and reliance on broad-brush characterizations together with a love of drama and exaggeration (p. 3). In tabloid journalism they were met with “screaming simplistic headlines, highly emotive language, and a focus on scandal and gossip” (ibid, p. 16). A more flattened narrative was used in broadsheet newspapers, however, media commentary was commonly ‘buried’ far beyond the front page, thus, the topic was less accessible as readers had to dig for it (ibid.).

McDonald and Charlesworth (2013) observed in their analysis of workplace sexual harassment in mainstream news media from the US, UK, Canada and Australia that the media almost exclusively focuses on stereotypical forms of sexual harassment, that is, a male perpetrator and a younger woman. There is a tendency by media to describe the ‘ideal’ victim stereotype as female, vulnerable and more powerless compared to the ‘ideal’ perpetrator who is typically characterized as poor, psychotic, uneducated or, more recently, an immigrant (Custers and Van den Bulck 2013, in Easteal 2015). The problem that arises from these narratives is that often the media does not elicit the reality of sexual harassment, which is “persistent, varied, complex, and dynamic” (McDonald and
Charlesworth 2013, p. 101). A nuanced understanding would be necessary in comprehending the broader context of sexual harassment and its manifestation in the larger gender system. Further, Easteal (2015) discovered that despite judicial efforts to shift discourse from victim-blaming to a narrative that reflected the realities of sexual assault, news reports continued to occasionally put the emphasis on women and risk and risk avoidance.

Another common tactic that was identified by several scholars is the heavy reliance on official statements and sources, which is also a feature of the protest paradigm. Oxman-Martinez et al. (2009) cite several sources from 1972-2003 that found that the primary definers of violent situations are “government sources such as political leaders, law enforcement officials, and other state managers” (p. 287). By relying almost exclusively on official government press releases, the media passively echoes the dominant ideology (Kasinsky 1998, in McDonald and Charlesworth 2013). However, in their own analysis McDonald and Charlesworth (ibid). found that more than half of the examined articles emphasized the complainant’s version of events which they attribute to the easy accessibility of these accounts in legal reports. Since the #MeToo movement largely relies on the voices of private persons, these notions will be useful in analyzing how the German media frames the movement and whose statements will be used to represent the movement. Also problematic is Judd and Easteal’s (2013) finding that media reports often focus upon the credibility of the complainant. In their study they observed the discussion of the accuser’s behavior, response to harassment, mental health, discrediting statements and including irrelevant information. Further, language was used to undermine the complainants’ credibility. The authors conclude that “whilst it is important for the media to be careful in reporting of court cases and show an understanding of key concepts like damages, and to not describe matters in dispute as established facts, the journalist’s use of the word ‘allegedly’ five times and ‘allegations’ twice in [a] 300-word article […] does seem excessive” (ibid., p. 17). Other instances of language tools include the use of dehumanizing descriptions of the perpetrator (fiend, monster, beast, ripper) if the report is sympathetic to the victim (Easteal 2015). However, dehumanizing the perpetrator makes sexual harassment seem alien and uncommon rather than frequent and imbedded in society. Already in 1979 McKinnon found that sexual harassment was often dismissed by the media as “trivial, isolated, and personal” (McKinnon 1979, cited in Judd and Easteal 2013, p. 1). The issue continues to be represented as isolated incidents, rather than
as a systematic problem within a social context marked by patriarchal hegemony (Easteal 2015). McDonald and Charlesworth (2013) report that the overwhelmingly dominant discourse frames sexual harassment as an individual aberration, meaning, a conduct by one individual against another individual – especially if the perpetrator is constructed as a social outsider. Only few articles present it as a cause and consequence of gender inequality (ibid.). The authors also found that articles tended to focus on overtly physical forms of sexual harassment – and their lurid details – which does not coincide with the most frequent forms of harassment that are non-physical. This presents the readers with a restricted view of what constitutes sexual harassment and the broader context in which it can occur (ibid.). Reporting of ‘milder’ forms of harassment is important in order to raise awareness of the widespread structural problem. By framing sexual harassment as an individualized problem, patriarchal hegemony is upheld (Oxman-Martinez et al. 2009), which leaves a “misleading impression of victims and offenders, complainants and perpetrators, and their respective rights and responsibilities” (Easteal 2015, p. 111).

However, some research suggests that the patterns of sexist discourse in media framing are changing due to more gender-sensitive journalism training and the presence of female journalists (Worthington 2008, in Easteal 2015).

5. Data and Methodology

5.1. Study Design: Tools of CDA

As mentioned above, CDA does not consist of a single, well-defined method but offers various approaches depending on the researcher’s intentions and questions. However, it is crucial to adopt a critical mindset as CDA is “always politically committed to social change by taking the side of the oppressed” (Phillips and Jørgensen 2002, p. 64). Thus, in every step of my research process I aim to uncover unequal power relations by critically questioning journalists’ language use and what it is reflective of. The advantages of a qualitative method like CDA, compared to content analysis, is that it is able to examine text and its effects on the broader context of society, whereas content analysis is only able to quantify patterns across a sample (Richardson 2007, p. 20). Further, CDA lets the researcher assess context, absences and connoted meanings in texts, which I deem crucial to revealing structures of inequality. In accordance with Fairclough’s three-dimensional
model of discourse, I chose a custom mix of methods from the CDA “toolkit”, based on their anticipated usefulness in answering my research questions.

Textual Analysis

First, I concentrated on the inner dimension of Fairclough’s model: textual analysis. According to Fairclough (1995b) there are two major aspects of texts to consider in analysis: “the first has to do with the structuring of propositions, the second with the combination and sequencing of propositions” (p. 104). This means, that first the representation of individuals and processes or events in clauses is looked at, and then the whole organization of these clauses into a coherently structured whole is considered. Thus, text analysis progresses from small-scale analysis of words, through sentences and onto the larger analysis of meaning across a whole text (Richardson 2007). Depending on the amount of material and desired detail, textual analysis can focus on just a selected few features, or many simultaneously (Fairclough 2003). For the scope and purpose of my thesis, I focused on several features at once in lesser detail: lexical analysis, predication, rhetorical tropes, as well as naming and reference.

Lexical analysis refers to the analysis of specific words (nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs) as all words convey value judgements through connoted or denoted meanings (Richardson 2007). Further, predication concerns “the very basic process and result of linguistically assigning qualities to persons, animals, objects, events, actions and social phenomena” (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, p. 54, cited in ibid., p. 52). Predicational strategies cover longer word chains. Rhetorical tropes are non-obligatory additional structures in texts that usually draw attention, and may therefore indirectly emphasize a specific meaning (ibid.). In my analysis, I focused on hyperboles, metaphors, and irony – irony having a particular impact as it is a characteristic of a post-feminist sensibility (Gill 2007). With regard to my research question on the construction of victim and perpetrator, I further chose to analyze naming and referencing of social actors. Through this, actors are identified as part of a certain group and the relationship between the namer (journalist) and named becomes explicit (Richardson 2007). Additionally, I chose to analyze the articles in terms of a larger analysis of meaning. Derived from recurring themes in the literature review, I established the following codes: motives and goals, problems and solutions, individualization, as well as double entanglement.
Analysis of Discursive Practice

Moving on to the next dimension, my study design further encompasses the discursive practice which considers the processes involved in the production and consumption of texts. Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) note that the discursive practice is focused on how authors draw on already existing discourses and genres to create text. Thus, I chose interdiscursivity and intertextuality as additional tools. Interdiscursivity examines the different kinds of discourses and genres that are being used together in one communicative event. A creative mix of discourses is a sign of, and driving force in, discursive, hence, sociocultural change. Whereas a conventional mix indicates, and works towards, the stability of the dominant order of discourse, hence, dominant social order (ibid.). Linguistics scholars state that all communicative events draw on earlier events. Thus, intertextuality “refers to the influence of history on a text and to a text’s influence on history, in that the text draws on earlier texts and thereby contributes to historical development and change” (ibid., p. 73). Not only does this concern prior written texts but more so reported speech and quotations. Direct quotes are a sign of accurate portrayal of what actually happened, while indirect and transformed quotes give a greater interpretative influence to the reporter (Richardson 2007). Furthermore, who is quoted gives some indication of who’s position the author favors.

Inspired by Judd and Easteal’s (2013) empirical study on media coverage of sexual harassment, I chose to also look at where in the newspaper the article is placed – i.e. if it is ‘buried’ or visible. Lastly, I considered the author’s gender. Even if the gender of the author does not directly imply a certain type of reporting, it does reflect whether male staff takes on the topic of harassment or if it is regarded a “feminine” topic which can be a pointer on how the different newspapers approach #MeToo and the ensuing debate.

Analysis of Sociocultural Practice

Finally, the furthest dimension of Fairclough’s model is concerned with social practices which cover “the structures, the institutions and the values that, while residing outside the newsroom, permeate and structure the activities and outputs of journalism” (ibid., p. 114). The study of sociocultural practices is a two-way relationship between the social world and journalism, in which both affect the other. There is no specific tool to conduct this part of the analysis, it is more about a critical examination of the communicative events in the light of a broader theoretical and societal context. Thus, at the end – and in order to answer
my second research question – I need to re-connect my findings to the theories of post-feminism, power, ideology, and hegemony. Questions arising for the social analysis involve:

- What do the texts say about the German society?
- What impact may the texts have on social or institutional change?
- Why did the #MeToo debate find so much resonance at this particular point in time?

5.2. Sample

5.2.1. The German Media Landscape

The German media landscape has a longstanding history deeply-rooted in the tradition of the printing press, dating back to its first newspaper about 400 years ago (Thomaß & Horz 2018). Despite a changing landscape due to other competitive players, like digital media and broadcasting, printed newspapers still play a major role in disseminating politics and local information, encouraging analysis and critique, as well as forming opinions, educating, counseling and entertaining. Political parallelism is low, which can be explained historically by the desire of the German press to avoid political extremes post-World War II, (ibid.). Despite this fact, some newspapers pursue a specific editorial policy that reflects a political agenda which I present below.

Based on being German and a native German speaker, as well as my knowledge of the German media landscape, I chose the four newspapers which in my opinion best represent the mainstream press: *Die Welt, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Die Zeit*. Initially, I considered doing a comparative analysis between quality broadsheet papers and tabloid papers. However, tabloid papers are much more local, further, the database Nexis® revealed that *BILD* – Germany’s daily tabloid paper with the overall highest circulation – only published two articles on #MeToo in my chosen timeframe. Thus, I chose to focus on the four most prominent nationwide newspapers, whose viewpoints range from liberal to conservative (see Figure 2).
5.2.2. **Die Welt**

The *Welt* was founded in 1946 after the end of World War II by the British occupying forces. After having their editorial office in Hamburg for several decades, the newspaper moved to Berlin in 1993. Today, the newspaper’s circulation amounts to 164,415 newspapers daily, reaching 673,000 readers. Its’ readers are on average between 30 and 59 years old (Media Impact 2018). In 1952 the publishing house *Axel Springer*, who also owns Germany’s biggest and most contested populist tabloid newspaper, *BILD*, bought *Die Welt* which led to the liberal newspaper becoming the conservative, center-right paper it is today. The paper distinguishes itself through quality journalism that is easily understood (Hanke 2011). On Sundays, the Welt publishes the *Welt am Sonntag (WAMS)* which I also included in my sample.

5.2.3. **Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung**

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (F.A.Z.)* was founded by a group of businessmen in 1949. Their editorial office resides in Frankfurt, the business and banking center of
Germany. Its circulation amounts to 239,946 newspapers daily, reaching 758,000 readers. The newspaper advertises itself as giving “exclusive access to the elites of politics and business”, reaching Germany’s top decision makers (FAZ Media 2018). It is largely considered conservative and center-right, however the arts and society sections can be quite liberal sometimes. The *F.A.Z.* enjoys an excellent reputation due to its high journalistic quality and depth of analysis. However, its language and style is found to be esoteric (Hanke 2011). The *F.A.Z.* also publishes a Sunday edition, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung (F.A.S.*), which I included in my sample.

5.2.4. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (*S.Z.*) was founded in 1945 in the conservative Munich, where the newspaper’s editorial office still resides today. The *S.Z.*’s circulation amounts to 350,104 sold issues daily and is Germany’s only printed paper that was able to mostly keep a stable circulation in the past ten years, reaching 1.24 million readers on average (SZ Media 2018). With the highest circulation of newspapers – barring BILD – the *S.Z.* is considered the German newspaper of record. The average readers are between 20 and 49 years old (ibid.). Its alignment – in contrast to its location – is thought of as social-liberal and left-leaning with a heavy focus on culture and arts. Overall, the newspaper is valued for its high journalistic standards and depth of analysis (Hanke 2011).

5.2.5. *Die Zeit*

The *Zeit* was founded in 1946 with the intention of establishing a civic-minded newspaper. Its editorial office traditionally resides in Hamburg. It is the only weekly newspaper in my sample, with a current circulation of 498,439 per issue, reaching 2.29 million readers. The average readership is between 20 and 49 years old and is considered to be rather intellectual (Marktplatz Zeit 2018). The *Zeit*’s editorial alignment is seen as liberal and center-left. Due to its weekly publication, the paper provides very detailed analyses and background information – an issue can easily be more than 100 pages thick (So tickt Deutschland 2012). The *ZEITmagazin* is an integral part of the newspaper and offers week after week guidance and entertainment at the highest journalistic level. It was also included in my sample.

5.3. Sample Selection

With CDA, like with every other methodology, comes several criticisms. The most notable one is that texts are arbitrarily selected and only a small number of texts is considered in
analysis, which ultimately leads to concerns of representativeness, and thus susceptibility to the researcher’s bias in sample selection (Sriwimon and Zilli 2017). In order to counter the criticism, data must be obtained systematically and there should be enough data to provide a representative sample (ibid.). To forego the issue of representativeness, I followed these criteria set by Wodak and Meyer (2009, p. 98) to focus on specific political units (e.g. nation state); specific periods of time relating to important discursive events; specific discourse; specific semiotic media and genre.

As mentioned above, I concentrated on Germany, choosing four publications to represent a range of the mainstream ideological spectrum. Further, I concentrated on two periods of time that were most significant in the course of developments around #MeToo. Namely, the two weeks after Alyssa Milano’s tweet and the coining of the phrase, #MeToo (October 15th 2017 – October 29th 2017) as well as the two weeks after the breaking of the Dieter Wedel scandal (January 3rd 2018 – January 17th 2018). Articles from Welt, F.A.Z. and Zeit were selected by a Nexis® database search using the key words #metoo, metoo and ‘me too’ in order to account for different spellings. Articles from S.Z. were selected using the same search terms from the newspaper’s in-house archive. Further, I selected only the articles published in my two set timeframes. This left me with an initial sample size of 40 articles in the first timeframe and 67 articles in the second, a total of 107 texts. After a cursory review, I excluded less relevant articles in order to narrow down the sample. To be included in the sample, articles must be longer than 400 words. Articles that had mentioned #MeToo only in passing were also eliminated. Furthermore, I excluded interviews and reader comments because they do not necessarily reflect the editorial line of the newspaper. Eventually, I was left with 21 articles from the first phase and 20 articles from the second phase, which is a sample size of 41 texts that I believe to be a sufficient quantity in order to be representative and offer meaningful insights.

5.4. Conduct of the Analytical Process
After deciding on my final sample, I printed out all articles and organized them by publication, time phase and in chronological order. During the literature review and writing of the theoretical framework, I had already compiled a list of deductive codes. In a first reading, I highlighted and annotated the articles according to what struck me as particular in regard to lexical choice, quotations and content wise. Further, I added some inductive codes to my list. Subsequently, I set up a spreadsheet for the coding process divided into
content, textual analysis, and discursive practices. The umbrella codes I decided on are as follows: Double Entanglement (McRobbie 2009); Individualization (Gill 2007; Lind and Salo 2002; Easteal 2015); Motives and Goals (Chan and Lee 1984; McLeod and Hertog 1999); Problems and Solutions (Mendes 2011; Lind and Salo 2002); Lexical Analysis; Naming and Reference; Predication; Rhetorical Tropes, specifically Irony (Gill 2007; Jaworska and Krishnamurthy 2012); Interdiscursivity; Intertextuality; Author’s Gender; Page Number (Judd and Easteal 2013). During a second close reading, I analyzed the texts accordingly and assigned certain words and passages to the coding categories on the spreadsheet. Keeping a critical mindset, I particularly focused on strong lexical choices (words and clauses used where others might have been more appropriate), absences (what could have been said, but was omitted), quotations and references (who/what is acknowledged and how). With my first research question in mind, three overarching themes emerged: supportive coverage of the #MeToo debate, opposing coverage of the #MeToo debate, as well as nuanced coverage of the #MeToo debate that covered complexities and varying viewpoints. In the ensuing analysis, I present how these themes were discursively constructed. Irrelevant data was omitted from the analysis and the focus remains on recurring patterns.

My research was conducted from a position of feminist criticism, and understands that sexual harassment and violence against women result from a patriarchal ideology. Millet (1971) defines ‘patriarchy’ as a term used to describe men’s power over women – a power imbalance that functions by organizing sexual differences ideologically (defining masculinity and femininity as ‘natural’) and hierarchically (masculinity is constructed as dominant while femininity is subordinate). With the critical impetus of CDA in mind, this thesis is thus not only interested in the ways #MeToo is discursively constructed, it also seeks to make statements about how gendered hierarchies function through media discourse, possibly preventing gender equality.

5.5. Ethical Implications, Limitations and Validity

Since my sample consists solely of texts from the public domain, there were no human subjects requiring informed consent (Collins 2010), so no direct ethical concerns present themselves. Further, by describing the methodology and sample collection, I made my work transparent, “so that any reader can trace and understand the detailed in-depth textual analysis” (Wodak and Meyer 2009, p. 11). On request, the complete sample as well as coding can be accessed.
In the name of scientific objectivity, some might object to the critical impetus of CDA, that takes the side of the oppressed and is interested in critiquing power relations with an eye for possibilities for social change (Phillips and Jørgensen 2002). However, by clearly positioning my research in the social constructionist paradigm, retaining scientific methodologies while remaining self-reflective of my research process and making explicit my own position (Wodak and Meyer 2009), an increased journalistic integrity could be realized through my analysis and critique of the current status quo, and I believe the good that might come out of this study outweighs perceived threats to objectivity.

The present thesis does have several limitations that must be mentioned in regard to validity. In Fairclough’s (2003) words, analysis is “inevitably selective: in any analysis, we choose to ask certain questions about social events and texts, and not other possible questions” (p. 15). Thus, first, I acknowledge that the study design, sample selection, and analysis are a product of my subjective assessment. For instance, the inclusion of the selected print media automatically entails the exclusion of online and social media. Further, the focus on national newspapers disregards local newspapers which play a big role in agenda setting in Germany. Moreover, it has to be noted that the coverage of #MeToo encompasses a variety of topics. Thus, the sample selection is influenced by my informed but subjective choice of what still belongs to the debate and what does not. Inevitably, my qualitative analysis is subjective and colored by my own personal lens, which includes feminism, as described above. I will be the sole consumer of the texts in this study.

Second, the discursive dimension of CDA also entails to look at the consumption and interpretation of texts. However, an audience study is beyond the scope of my thesis. According to Richardson (2007), the discursive practice is the most underdeveloped aspect of CDA.

6. Findings and Analysis

As an average German consumer, my reception of the #MeToo debate in Germany left me with the initial impression that the topic is largely contested but neither seen as a German nor a structural problem per se but more of an international scandal. Hence, the analysis of my sample brought several insightful findings to light. Through the textual and discursive analyses, I was able to group the articles into three major categories:
legitimizing, complex, and delegitimizing – while some articles reside between categories.

One glance at the table above (Table 1) reveals that the articles were overwhelmingly supportive of the #MeToo movement—18 in total. Whereas a total of 7 articles were opposing the subject matter and 16 were in-between. The table only serves the purpose of vividness and is not intended to quantify the qualitative results of this study. The ensuing analysis, primarily addressing the first research questions and its sub-questions, presents how the different newspapers discursively constructed #MeToo in detail.

6.1. Supporting #MeToo

The supportive coverage of #MeToo distinguishes itself mainly through certain lexical choices and predicational strategies; the explicit mention of motives, goals, problems and solutions; and a creative interdiscursive mix as well as features of intertextuality.

Starting with the smallest features of textual analysis, there is a clear focus on the magnitude of #MeToo, describing it as a “wave of outrage” (SZP1 S8), a “mass

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1 A full list of references to the used acronyms can be found in the appendix.
2 All translations are my own. The original texts can be accessed upon request.
movement” (SZP2 S5) and “having a forceful impact” (ZP1 S1; SZP1 S3). Further predicational strategies emphasize the authors’ value judgements, e.g. #MeToo’s success is “busting dimensions” (SZP1 S1) and that “hundreds of thousands of such stories are flooding social media revealing the scale of the problem” (SZP1 S4). The S.Z. writes: “…spreading from Hollywood, the sexism debate under the banner #MeToo set the world on fire”, further noting that ‘#MeToo’ came in third place for German word of the year (SZP2 S2). In a few instances the movement is affirmatively valued through lexical choice and predication, e.g. “shocking report of sexual harassment” (SZP1 S1), #MeToo’s “sad success” (SZP1 S1) or “This release from guilt makes #MeToo valuable.” (SZP1 S3).

Moving on to a more macro textual analysis, I found the explicit mention of motives, goals, problems and solutions to be the most influential factors of legitimization (c.f. Boyle et al. 2012). For instance, the F.A.Z. states that the #MeToo campaign “calls for a social debate and to bring cases of abuse to justice” (FAZP1 S4). Covering the ‘Time’s Up’ campaign – a spin-off of #MeToo led by Hollywood actresses – the S.Z. mentions different goals of the initiative including judicial reforms, the inclusion of marginalized victims, the institutionalization of resistance, as well as guidelines for companies and a quota for minorities in executive positions (SZP2 S1). This finding can be seen in correlation to the evasion of the protest paradigm, as it cements those findings of Nicolini and Hansen (2017) and Lind and Salo (2002) who found that explicit protest goals have a positive effect on news coverage. With regard to fundamental problems, a F.A.Z. author finds that “the movement only emerged because there is too much abusive power in our still patriarchal society” (FAZP2 S6). The S.Z. maintains: “Sexual assaults are not a compliment, they are a demonstration of power, it has nothing to do with whether a woman […] is considered inconspicuous or attractive.” (SZP1 S2). Alluding to the systematic nature of sexual harassment, a male Zeit author writes that he is shocked to see that this kind of violence has a system, even in his private environment (ZP1 S1). The kinds of solutions that are being offered reach from individual to structural and always depend on the context of the article. This can be illustrated in an article about sexual harassment on German TV and theatre, where the suggested solutions reach from actresses having to be more self-confident to appointing a harassment officer or installing a quota for women in leadership positions (SZP1 S6). A controversial article in the Zeit even demands to regulate all sexual relationships with contracts similar to the ones used
in the BDSM scene (ZP1 S2). Another Zeit article concludes that men have to start acknowledging their privilege in order to show solidarity and instigate change (ZP1 S1).

Finally, the discursive practices also give some indication of how the #MeToo debate is legitimized in some articles. Given the background of #MeToo, it comes as no surprise that the discourse that was drawn on most is centered around Hollywood and the movie or theatre industries. However, there were some notable examples making use of a creative mix of interdiscursivity – a sign of social change (Phillips and Jørgensen 2002). In an S.Z. article on the international adaptations of the #MeToo movement and how different countries discuss sexualized violence, the author draws on judicial, feminist, social movement, human rights and Hollywood discourses (SZP2 S5). Furthermore, the above mentioned contested article in the Zeit involves philosophical, academic, business, BDSM, and feminist discourses (ZP1 S2).

Looking at intertextuality, many of the supportive articles invoked the #Aufschrei campaign as a preceding positive moment of public discussion of sexism and misogyny. Moreover, most articles use direct and indirect quotes of predominantly women, thus, defying the protest paradigm in this point. The S.Z. dedicated two articles to the women behind #MeToo, Alyssa Milano and Tarana Burke, who are both extensively quoted (SZP1 S1; SZP1 S4). These results indicate that #MeToo provides a unique opportunity for women’s voices to be prioritized in the news (Mendes 2011). Another article quotes the Swedish “star investor” Sven Hagström about why he identifies as a feminist, which he replied to: “Are you not in favor for equal rights for all humans?” (SZP2 S2). Having a powerful man embrace the feminist label – opposing sexual violence, thus, supporting #MeToo – marks feminism and #MeToo as desirable and positive, setting an example for the readership (Mendes 2011).

6.2. Opposing #MeToo

The opposing coverage of #MeToo distinguishes itself with the use of linguistic tools different from the supporting coverage. For instance, I found a heavy reliance on rhetorical tropes as well as double entanglement. First however, the lexical choices and predicational strategies are useful pointers to the authors’ attitudes towards the topic. The movement is described as “hysteria” (WP1 S3), “female sacrificial cult” as well as a “scandalization of
nothing” and “hysterical squeamishness” (WP1 S4), a “pillory strategy” and “regulation mania” (FAZP1 S3). Further, in some articles #MeToo is considered to be a “moral drumhead trial” (WP2 S1), “lunacy” and “dictatorship of opinion, disguised as solidarity with women” (WP2 S3). The so-called “MeToo-feminism” is written off as “puritanical and totalitarian, as well as hostile to women and men” (WP2 S5). The lexical choices have a strong anti-feminist tone to them, especially since ‘hysteric’ was a common psychological term used to delegitimize women in the past.

Particularly striking is the heavy use of irony and hyperboles in several Welt articles. One author writes: “The line between play and harassment is narrow, and sometimes one goes a step too far.” (WP1 S3). I find this to be an understatement (negative hyperbole), which takes away from the structural background and severe magnitude of harassment and assault since the author links flirting so closely to harassment. The following quote is an instance of irony used to delegitimize #MeToo and the women who are speaking out:

“Rape Culture. We don't take any less. If one believes the swarm intelligence of the current sexism thunderstorm that is unfolding online, we women live under the systematic yoke of a heterosexual-white rape culture of aging voluptuaries, who sleazily assault women... Every woman a victim. Ergo, every man is a potential perpetrator. [...] Somebody whistled after you to get your attention? Somebody gave you a compliment you didn't want to hear? Yeah, that's really bad. Poor thing.” (WP1 S4)

The author employs a mix of hyperbole and irony, instantly trivializing the #MeToo movement as petty outrage over comparatively minor incidents and generalizes issues ad absurdum. This tactic is used in two other Welt articles as well (WP2 S1; WP2 S3). The irony in this article is that she describes the sexist norms that define rape culture while still denying the culture’s saliency. At this point a post-feminist sensibility becomes obvious, as these findings are perfect examples of Gill’s (2007) and Jaworska and Krishnamurthy’s (2017) observations in regard to irony.

Looking at the macro level of textual analysis, I discovered McRobbie’s (2009) notion of double entanglement in several articles. For instance, marginalized voices were only taken into account to function as a tool of delegitimization of the whole hashtag campaign.
Accordingly, the Welt writes: “#MeToo didn't care about the parts of the world where [...] women are the property of men with whom they can do what they want - stoning or pouring acid over them. It wasn't about those who needed help. It was about the women of the West.” (WP2 S3). Another was as a reaction to a letter signed by 100 prominent French women opposing #MeToo – including Catherine Deneuve who promoted abortion rights in the 1970s, the Welt published an article praising the glamorous French feminism of 1968 while criticizing the ‘new MeToo-feminism’ (WP2 S5). This finding is supported by Bronstein’s (2005) research who states that feminisms are pitted against each other to delegitimize one or the other. Furthermore, the debate is predominantly constructed from a personal point of view (WP1 S3; WP1 S4; WP1 S6), evicting any political or structural notions (McRobbie 2009; Darmon 2014).

In terms of interdiscursivity, the most salient use is that of a refugee or immigrant discourse. In an article titled “The great silence - Women's rights are not primarily threatened by the white man. They are in danger if we close our eyes to the partly medieval perception of women of many immigrants” (WP1 S4), the author delegitimizes the #MeToo debate by discursively constructing immigrants as the scapegoats for structural sexism – the existence of which she simultaneously denies. The same discourse reappears in another delegitimizing article (WP1 S6). Drawing on the discourse of immigrants as threats has the effect of denying responsibility by presenting the perpetrator as non-German, thus, framing the problem as not inherently German. According to Easteal (2015), using immigrants as the ‘ideal’ perpetrator is a common tactic, further promoting racist stereotypes, xenophobia and disregarding critique of one’s own society.

Finally, the analysis revealed a high number of intertextual references to the aforementioned letter by French women opposing #MeToo (WP2 S3; WP2 S4; WP2 S5; FAZP2 S3; FAZP2 S4). Thus, having a large number of female sources does not automatically ensure that the debate will be constructed in a pro-#MeToo manner. Moreover, in emphasizing that the signees themselves are feminists – e.g. Deneuve – but are still opposing #MeToo, the reference becomes even more effective in delegitimizing the debate than the use of anti-feminist voices.

6.3. #MeToo as Complex
The final category includes those articles which neither constructed the #MeToo movement
as unduly legitimate nor illegitimate but carried a mixture of supportive and oppositional discourses – hence, sending a mixed message. As illustrated in the table (Table 1) above, some articles are more inclined towards either the former or the latter. The majority of the articles in this category are indeed striving for a balanced and complex coverage of the topic, giving room to arguments from proponents as well as opponents or praising positive changes but also talking about reasonable doubts. For instance, the *F.A.Z.* quotes both Alyssa Milano and critics of the hashtag campaign and concludes: “Waves of online solidarity, simple and effective as they may seem, are a delicate matter... #MeToo is no exception.” (FAZP1 S1). Furthermore, in response to the article blaming immigrants for bringing their sexist attitude to Germany, another *Welt* author calls for an honest discussion (WP1 S5). She uses a feminist discourse to identify the structural problems behind some refugees’ misogynistic views and then provides solutions that she also terms as important for every man.

Two discursive positions emerged from the complex construction that merit further exploration. One of which is the criticism of the #MeToo movement that simultaneously implies that the problems and reasons behind the debate are legitimate. One *S.Z.* author accuses Hollywood’s debate around sexual harassment of hypocrisy since at the end of the day, everyone still thinks of himself first (SZP1 S5). Of the same tenor, a *Welt* author criticizes the symbolic dress choices and trivial acceptance speeches at the Golden Globes as not strong enough to take a stand against sexual harassment and power abuse (WP2 S2). Still, she does mention the goals of the Time’s Up initiative which is a sign of legitimization. In the article “What #MeToo remains silent about” (FAZP2 S5) the author states that the hashtag movement is not inclusive of marginalized voices, i.e. women working in the porn industry. With these accounts, however, the newspapers themselves miss the opportunity of providing applicable solutions to the structural issues of sexual assault, abuse and harassment, although they urge for greater inclusion and integrity.

Another discursive angle that was used in the *Welt* is the support of a ‘Lite’ (Bronstein 2015) conception of #MeToo, meaning less intense and politically committed. Overall, the movement is legitimized through stating its magnitude and significance, referencing Tarana Burke, directly quoting #MeToo tweets or praising its importance for victims (WP1 S1; WP1 S2). However, through personalization and double entanglement, the authors deny the progressive or even radical dimension of the hashtag campaign. One article is titled: “Why I think the #MeToo campaign is important but don’t want to be a part of it.”
The author further states that she likes the idea precisely because it is different to similar initiatives from the past that were too activist for her taste. This finding also supports Darmon’s (2014) research of the media framing of the ‘SlutWalk’. The other article concentrates on a very narrow definition of the #MeToo debate, stating: “exactly this boundary between harmless flirt and disgusting assault is a matter of interpretation and varies from person to person” (WP1 S1). By oversimplifying the problem, the author takes away the structural dimension. She goes on to offer individual solutions every woman can take in case she is being harassed. A finding which supports Mendes’ (2012) observation of a neoliberal framing that focuses on women’s individual choices and how these decisions can empower women. Ultimately, the ‘Lite’ construction of #MeToo presents a very limited community understanding of sexual harassment, upholding power inequities because it is defined on solely individual terms. McDonald and Charlesworth (2013) made the same assessment in their study on the media coverage of violence against women.

6.4. On Victims and Perpetrators

Only a fraction of my sample dealt directly with the actual cases of sexual harassment and assault – e.g. the Weinstein and Wedel accusations. However, in regard to my second sub-question, it is worth looking at the instances where victim and perpetrator are described, as the naming and reference can function as a marker of power structures.

Most striking is the construction of victims in the Welt. In an article about the Wedel case, the victims are described as “allegedly help- and defenseless, frightened women” (WP2 S1). A strong victim-blaming discourse is perceptible as the author asks:

“Decades later, it is easy to claim that you were only yelled at because you refused sexual favors. By the way: How many female journalists also attribute their failed career to allegedly refused favors (and put their more successful colleagues in the twilight)? [...] The actresses have remained silent for decades and have only piped up when they could expect the greatest possible public response – and a verification of the correctness of their statements is almost impossible… Should one really believe that they would have only dared to speak up now - not to the prosecutors, of course, but to the media?” (ibid.)

Further, the term ‘victim’ is put into quotation marks twice in the article. The author’s
declared intention is to call a halt to the media pillory and to plea for Wedel’s presumed innocence. In this endeavor, she describes Wedel as “rightly regarded as one of Germany's most distinguished and successful film and TV directors” (ibid.). The director is indirectly quoted denying all accusations, while there are no quotes from the victims. Thus, the victim is being discursively delegitimized while the alleged perpetrator is defined over his success and power using various linguistic tools. Questioning of the credibility of the complainant (Judd and Easteal 2013) was also used in two further Welt articles (WP1 S4; WP1 S6). A similar strategy is applied in another article covering the accusations against fashion photographer Mario Testino (WP2 S6). He is constructed as wildly successful, charitable, having a close relationship with his mother and the only photographer the “distraught Princess Diana” trusted. The author refers to Testino as “my friend”. The victim-blaming discourse continues:

“But where were the limits in the hedonistic 1990s? Where did the game, the kick end, where did the abuse start? Fashion, Art, Film, Wall Street - Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll. Those weren't suburban idylls. Anyone who moved in knew that.” (ibid.).

Ultimately, the author puts the blame on the victim by invoking an individual responsibility – she concludes her article citing a bystander, that is an Instagram commentator, who writes: “Witch hunt. Run, men, run!” (ibid.). This connects to Papaioannou (2015) and Leopold and Bell (2017) who defined the invocation of public opinion that is often hostile or superficial as one characteristic of the protest paradigm.

On the other hand, it has to be noted that the other publications in my sample all made sure to describe the victims as credible, e.g. the S.Z. mentions a conversation with one woman accusing Wedel where the actress “sounds resilient and self-confident, not bitter at all” (SZP2 S4). Furthermore, the F.A.Z. writes that because one of the women is a very successful entrepreneur, it makes her statement all the more credible because she could not have any interest in publicity of this kind (FAZP2 S1). In the legitimizing articles Wedel is still described as a powerful and successful director, however, also as quick-tempered and having a self-identified inferiority complex (SZP2 S4). I find this construction to be the most authentic, as it is important to emphasize the power he had over the situation and women but still not putting him on a pedestal. In the investigative piece by the
ZEITmagazin, that first published the accusations against Wedel, both the victims and him are constructed in-depth and very multi-faceted (ZP2 S1). At this point, the hypothesis that traditional news routines often lead to one-dimensional coverage of events is inconsistent (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993, in Leopold and Bell 2017), as the Zeit and ZEITmagazin have more time for research than a daily newspaper. Furthermore, in two instances dehumanizing descriptors are used to name the perpetrator (Easteal 2015). The S.Z. and the Zeit refer to Weinstein as a “monster” (SZP1 S2; ZP1 S3). Albeit showing sympathy to the victim, the descriptor limits the understanding of sexual harassment as a structural problem because the behavior is cast as something non-human, ergo, exceptional.

Although the coverage in most publications being supportive of the victims and trying to offer a nuanced account of the involved persons, the overall absence of marginalized voices is deafening. The media almost exclusively focus on stereotypical forms of sexual harassment or high-profile cases – the F.A.Z.'s article on the porn industry (FAZP2 S5) and some smaller innuendos in the Zeit and S.Z. constitute an exception. As McDonald and Charlesworth (2013) note, a more nuanced representation is necessary, also with respect to non-physical forms of harassment.

6.5. Differences and Commonalities in Discursive Practices

Finally, I turn to how the findings of my analysis connect to the processes involved in the production of the articles. In their research on the media coverage of sexual harassment, Judd and Easteal (2013) found that often articles are buried somewhere in the newspaper so that readers are only confronted with them if they dig through the pages. Looking at the page numbers of the sample revealed that the coverage of #MeToo was quite prominent. From 41 articles in total, seven were published on the first three pages and 14 on pages four to ten. Looking at the articles that were placed on the front pages – assuming these are the texts the publications want to highlight – the Welt chose three delegitimizing, post-feminist articles (WP1 S3; WP1 S4; WP2 S3) whereas the S.Z. chose two legitimizing and in-depth articles (SZP1 S6; SZP1 S7) and the F.A.Z. opted for a complex article that is leaning-towards the delegitimizing side (FAZP2 S3). This cursory survey further reinforces the assessments I made through the textual analysis.

Overall, I found the number of articles published on the topic arguably high (the original sample size before selection was 107). Even though there is no direct number for comparison, #MeToo cannot be regarded as a niche topic. Scholarship generally views
feminism as niche (Ashley and Olson 1998; Lind and Salo 2002; Jaworska and Krishnamurthy 2012; Mendes 2012; Sisco and Lucas 2015). However, it has to be kept in mind that #MeToo originated from a celebrity scandal and the accusations grew to involve more public figures. Leopold and Bell (2017) already pointed out that a social movement is bound to receive more news coverage if it involves famous or public figures. Considering feminism is ‘niche,’ it is curious if #MeToo would have received the widespread attention it did without celebrities’ influence.

Although Gill (2007) found that an author’s gender does not have a substantial impact on reporting, considering this discursive aspect in analysis could be a further pointer towards the newspapers’ general attitude in regard to the importance of involving all genders in the discussion of the #MeToo debate – after all a newspaper holds an exemplary function. It comes as no surprise that the overwhelming number of articles, 28, were written by women. Of course this number has to be treated with caution, because no information on the percentage of female and male authors at the different publications is available. Still, there are two findings which I deem interesting in the light of my analysis. The Zeit and S.Z. are the only publications who published articles by mixed-gender author teams (SZP1 S6; SZP2 S5; ZP1 S1; ZP1 S3). Whereas all Welt articles, except one, were written by women. The one exception, however, is a polemic comment (WP1 S6) ridiculing the #MeToo movement. The division can be seen as a problematic sign, either the debate is perceived as a feminine topic which men do not care to write about or female journalists are purposefully deployed to write about #MeToo as delegitimizing coverage coming from women cannot be disregarded as easily because they are supposedly the ones affected. Either way, there is a contrast to the more balanced reporting of the other publications.

In regard to the question of commonalities and differences across the coverage of the #MeToo movement in the examined newspapers, I found several aspects I want to summarize at this point. These findings are already vaguely perceptible in the table above (Table 1). The conservative and neoliberal Welt is the only publication that almost exclusively delegitimized the #MeToo debate. Even in the more complex articles, where the authors ostensibly took the notions of the movement into account, the structural problems behind sexual harassment were dismissed by the use of a “double entanglement” (McRobbie 2009) or by solely defining problems and solutions on individualized terms (Gill 2007). Thus, ideological power structures of the status quo are being upheld through
hegemonic practices. By contrast, the also rather conservative *F.A.Z.* provided the most balanced coverage of #MeToo, publishing articles that are legitimizing but also critical or delegitimizing ones. Through their in-depth analytical pieces, they provided a valuable multi-faceted view of the structural problems underlying the hashtag campaign. One of the most telling quotes of the whole sample stems from an *F.A.Z.* article:

“Again and again cases have to be ’staged’ in such a public way that everyone can experience what public outlawing means. It is the task of the broadcasting institutions and the press to show this. They should not succumb to the temptation of focusing on the most prominent cases, on the infernal downfall of big names, and to forget the victims that nobody knows, for the sake of their quotas. They should also draw the attention of their viewers and readers to the unknown. They should not only be transparent when it comes to abusing political or economic power, they should also be transparent when human relations are abused. It must end that the perpetrators remain in the dark and the victims remain silent.” (FAZP2 S6)

Overall, the *F.A.Z.* effectively demonstrates the ideological battle that takes place in trying to define #MeToo and the problems it is symptomatic of – discursive movements like the recent hashtag campaign are no dichotomy. The two publications whose editorial lines showed the most commonalities are the liberal and left-leaning *S.Z.* and *Zeit*. Both predominantly construct the #MeToo debate as legitimate. Further, both were the only newspapers who published own investigative articles trying to uncover abusive power relations in German film and theatre (SZP1 S6; SZP2 S4; ZP1 S3; ZP2 S1). By focusing on structural problems and solutions as well as goals of the #MeToo movement, the newspapers offered a comprehensive understanding of the issue. However, neither one concentrated on marginalized victims nor presented more radical solutions – with the exception of one *Zeit* article which proposed to set up contracts for sexual relationships (ZP1 S2). In the context of this thesis I already stated that there is no consensus on issues of gender equality in Germany, with conservative values still prevailing in the heads of many. The findings of my analysis, thus, only reflect and substantiate that assessment. But many instances also give hope for possible social and institutional change. In the ensuing discussion, I will further go into the sociocultural dimension of the analysis, reconnecting my findings to the notions of power, hegemony and post-feminism in a German and international context.
7. Discussion

7.1. Summary

Due to #MeToo still being an unfolding movement with little published academic research on it, my interest lay, first and foremost, in assessing its discursive construction by the German printed news media. In summary, my study argues that the movement was constructed around three main positions – supportive, opposing, complex – each being used to varying degrees depending on the newspaper. Supportive coverage predominantly came from the liberal, left-leaning papers Zeit and S.Z., focusing on structural problems and offering individual as well as collective solutions. The most varied and complex coverage was employed by the conservative F.A.Z., which used various discursive tools to construct the issues surrounding #MeToo – perhaps the biggest surprise to emerge from this study. Most of the delegitimizing coverage was published in the conservative, center-right Welt, which heavily focused on a flirtation and sexual freedom discourse as well as individualized solutions in the few texts where #MeToo was constructed as legitimate. A reason for this could be that feminist critique is seen as ‘deviant’ by the conservative newspaper, Welt. The discursive construction of victims and perpetrators largely adhered to the aforementioned findings, with the Welt being the only paper seriously questioning the victims’ credibility. Therefore, such findings only partially indicate whether a publication’s editorial line influences the construction of a discursive movement like #MeToo (c.f. Mendes 2011). Overall, my study shows that the debate is very present in German media discourse. Despite the hashtag movement not having a central leader, able to provide strategic communication measures, I found the protest paradigm was overcome in many instances. However, this could be accounted for by the involvement of prominent people, the changing media landscape in general, a more gender-sensitive journalism or the undeniable magnitude of #MeToo built upon the voices of hundreds of thousands of women.

7.2. Consideration of the Sociocultural Dimension of Research Findings

Finally, I want to consider the findings of my study in the light of a broader theoretical context, which simultaneously constitutes the analysis of the sociocultural dimension of CDA and answers my second research question. In regard to the question of how the construction of the #MeToo movement by the printed press can be perceived as an example of a post-feminist sensibility in mainstream media, it has to be noted that only one
publication – Die Welt – employed a post-feminist discourse. The delegitimizing articles all emphasized individualism, choice and empowerment and constructed women as no longer constrained by any power imbalances, but largely held their individual attitudes accountable in the case of harassment. Especially perfidious though, is the “taking into account” (McRobbie 2009) of #MeToo only in a very narrow and reformist way, withholding a deeper understanding of harassment and assault in the context of the larger gender system from their readers. Overall, feminist critique is largely maligned. This post-feminist sensibility is an ideology which contributes to maintaining relations of power, domination and exploitation between the genders (Fairclough 2003). By frequently referencing the still prevailing structural gender inequities which perpetuate a climate of sexual violence, the remaining newspapers in the sample did not participate in delegitimizing #MeToo through post-feminist thought. However, radical thought and critique or the inclusion of non-elite people was missing in almost all texts.

This brings me to the sociocultural context of Germany specifically reflected in the findings of the analysis and vice versa. As I described in the context (see 2.2.), traditional values are engrained into German society through politics (e.g. the reign of the conservative Christian Democratic Union under Angela Merkel since 2005), legislation (e.g. restriction of free abortions; income splitting between spouses only; same-sex marriage only becoming legal in 2017) or the refusal of gender-inclusive language in many public institutions. Feminist issues are often delegitimized or only taken into account with regard to refugees and immigrants, for example after the sexual attacks on New Year’s Eve 2015/16 in Cologne. Still, there is a growing number of fourth-wave ‘Netzfeministinnen’ (online feminists) who are challenging the status quo, whose ideas are largely shared by liberal and left-leaning people. This societal discord is also evident in this research through the different voices of the newspapers – the discursive construction of #MeToo holds up a mirror to society and its different ideological groups. Further, the circular relationship between society, discourse and text becomes obvious as all factors are constitutive of each other.

Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) state that changes in discourse are a way by which the social world also changes, thus, struggles at the discursive level participate in changing, as well as reproducing, the social reality. For change to be effective in this matter, it would be necessary for a paper like the Welt to publish legitimizing texts pointing out problems and
solutions and not just focusing on a ‘lite’ version of events. Namely, this applied double entanglement can be seen in connection to the notion of hegemony (Gramsci 1971, in Richardson 2007) as dominant groups cannot afford to ignore a popular phenomenon if they want to stay legitimate. Thus, they have to adopt the least-threatening counterposition, which is problematic as it does not instigate real change. Since systemic power is defined as an unconscious and non-intended bias from a system (Lukes 1974, in ibid.), the patterned behavior of groups – journalists – and practices of institutions – media corporations – would have to alter for social change to come into effect. #MeToo’s coverage by the conservative F.A.Z. which included several progressive nuances can be seen as an example. The media’s influence on the sociopolitical public sphere is undeniable, which is why a progressive coverage of debates like #MeToo is crucial. For instance, after the attacks on New Year’s Eve 2015/16, which the media covered excessively, a new legislation became effective that criminalized groping. If the debate around sexual harassment under the banner of #MeToo continues, the news articles’ impact could eventually lead to further legislative changes, e.g. the inclusion of non-physical harassment, which, as of now, is only criminalized in work law. #MeToo may have already lead to an increased public sensitivity to sexual harassment and violence in Germany and beyond. Time will only tell.

Thanks to the application of the theoretical concepts of CDA to my empirical data, I was able to assess and uncover the more or less hidden power imbalances I presented above. In the critical spirit of inspiring social change – a requirement for a researcher utilizing CDA (Fairclough 1992) – I propose that further news media coverage of the #MeToo movement will need to include more intersectional analyses of power inequities in a domestic dimension, giving a voice to invisible victims and finally pointing out collective solutions to structural issues.

On a last note, the question of why #MeToo found so much resonance at this particular point in time remains. The answer must reside somewhere in the sociocultural and sociopolitical going-ons of the last months and years – perhaps it has something to do with the words of a certain US President I quoted at the beginning of the thesis, which might have been the proverbial last straw for many women around the world.
7.3. Need for Further Research
Overall, the coding of empirical data supplied me with more angles than fit the scope of my research. Though only described in a few articles, the graphic depiction of sexual assault could merit further analysis as it invokes ethical questions and questions of necessity that relate to the process of newspaper production. As already discussed in the section on limitations and validity (see 5.5.), this thesis is the result of methodologically-informed subjective choices and assessments. Hence, its limitations point to possible areas of further research beyond the scope of my own analysis. For instance, it would be worthwhile to examine the coverage of online media where reader comments could also be included. Further, the analysis of reactions and comments on social media to the articles could give some indication of how the audience perceives #MeToo and its construction by the media. Especially in regard to the underdeveloped dimension of discursive practices in CDA this approach would be beneficial and probably highly revelatory. Also the production of the articles with its historical, theoretical and practical knowledge deserve further scrutiny, entailing a deeper research of journalistic practices. Finally, a more quantitative approach including a larger sample size, drawing on content or corpus-based analysis, might possibly reveal further angles of the news media’s coverage of #MeToo. In order to paint a picture of the international perception of the #MeToo movement, a comparison of results from qualitative and quantitative studies from different countries would also make for a compelling research objective.

8. Conclusion
The aim of the present thesis has been to examine how German newspapers discursively constructed the #MeToo movement. My research centered around questions of how the hashtag campaign was legitimized and delegitimized, how power inequities between victim and perpetrator were reinforced or dismantled, and what differences and commonalities were perceptible across the different newspapers’ editorial angles. In order to unearth the often hidden ideological power relations in news media, I conducted a CDA as conceptualized by Norman Fairclough (1995) on a sample of 41 texts. Articles were chosen from the conservative Welt, conservative F.A.Z., liberal S.Z. and liberal Zeit. Further, the empirical data was considered with McRobbie’s (2009) theory of post-feminism in mind. Through a qualitative text-oriented study built around the three-dimensional model proposed by Fairclough, I first identified three main discursive strands:
(1) supportive coverage of #MeToo (2) opposing coverage of #MeToo (3) #MeToo as complex. The degree to which these angles were used varied from publication to publication. As a keeper of the status quo, the Welt predominantly published articles that delegitimized the #MeToo debate by using irony and derogatory lexical choices, focusing on a discourse of accepting elements of rape culture, while delegitimizing the #MeToo movement and sexual harassment. The progressive Zeit and S.Z. featured overwhelming support. The publications used lexical choices focusing on the magnitude and relevance of #MeToo, structural problems and solutions, as well as frequent quotations of women. Surprisingly, the rather conservative F.A.Z. offered the most complex and varying coverage of the #MeToo movement by making use of both supportive and critical notions.

With regard to the question of the construction of power inequities between victim and perpetrator, my study showed that the offender was mostly described as powerful yet cruel and the victim as inferior yet credible. Only the Welt questioned the credibility of the victim by employing a victim-blaming discourse and focusing on the successes and positive qualities of the perpetrators. Further, the analysis revealed a post-feminist sensibility in the majority of the Welt articles. Through an uncritical, narrow adaptation of the #MeToo movement, the newspaper constructed the pertaining issues as individually solvable. Overall, the predominant absence of non-elite and marginalized voices as well as description of non-physical forms of sexual harassment across all publications was noticeable. In the final consideration of the sociocultural dimension of the research findings, I connected the outcomes to the conservative values that are still prevailing in Germany as well as the international rise of nationalist parties, upholding patriarchal values – factors which shape and reflect the media discourse around the #MeToo movement.

In conclusion, the German #MeToo debate offers a window into the tensions and potentials of this media-driven public conversation about sexism and harassment around the world. As I initially stated, academic research about #MeToo is still unfolding, and I have sought to contribute a new study to the field. I hope to have contributed not only to academic research but also, in a small way, to social change. This study illuminates the discomfort, confusion and critique surrounding #MeToo, and feminism in general, as it pertains to Germany and greater contexts for the world at large. The articles sampled throughout this paper unearthed society’s turmoil as it struggles toward greater gender justice. The analysis of the articles underscores the reluctance for society as a whole to accept #MeToo and its
compatriots, feminism and gender equality. This reluctance is doldrums whereby more women everyday are at the mercy of society’s gridlock. Let this thesis stand as a call to action that refuses to let the important discussion of #MeToo subside and urges journalism to keep #MeToo in the limelight through critical analysis and feminism.
Bibliography

Academic References


Non-Academic References


**Reports**


**TV**


**Visualizations**

# Appendix

**Acronyms and references of the sample:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Acronym</th>
<th>Publication, Page Number</th>
<th>Date of Publication</th>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WP1 S1</td>
<td>Die Welt p. 23</td>
<td>18th October 2017</td>
<td>#metoo - Erneut löst ein Hashtag eine Sexismus-Debatte aus. Der Grat zwischen Belästigung und Flirt ist schmal</td>
<td>Clara Ott</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP1 S3</td>
<td>Die Welt p. 2</td>
<td>23rd October 2017</td>
<td>Der Geschlechtertanz - Das Verhältnis zwischen Mann und Frau ist beliebte nicht so katastrophal, wie gerade wieder einmal behauptet wird. Die Gefahr ist, dass alle wegen solcher Hysterie immer mehr verkrampfen. Ein Plädoyer für Freiheit und Lockerheit</td>
<td>Kathrin Spoerr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP1 S4</td>
<td>Die Welt p. 2</td>
<td>24th October 2017</td>
<td>Das große Schweigen - Frauenrechte werden nicht in erster Linie vom weißen Mann bedroht. Sie sind in Gefahr, wenn wir die Augen vor dem teils mittelalterlichen Frauenbild vieler Zuwanderer verschließen</td>
<td>Birgit Kelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP1 S5</td>
<td>Die Welt p. 21</td>
<td>25th October 2017</td>
<td>Warum wir Feministinnen über Flüchtlinge reden müssen - Wer den Sexismus männlicher Flüchtlinge benennt, liefert den Rechten Munition - so heißt es immer wieder. Das Gegenteil ist der Fall. Plädoyer für eine ehrliche Diskussion</td>
<td>Marlen Hobrack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP1 S6</td>
<td>WAMS p. 12</td>
<td>29th October 2017</td>
<td>Ich will jetzt auch einen Hashtag einrichten!</td>
<td>Henryk M. Broder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP2 S1</td>
<td>Die Welt p. 23</td>
<td>5th January 2018</td>
<td>Der Regisseur, die Frauen - und die Kehrseite von #MeToo - Schauspielerinnen erheben Vorwürfe gegen Dieter Wedel. Das moralische Standgericht ist eröffnet</td>
<td>Gisela Friedrichsen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP2 S2</td>
<td>Die Welt p. 8</td>
<td>9th January 2018</td>
<td>Peinliche Familienfeier - Die Verleihung der Golden Globes war die erste Gala nach den Vorwürfen sexueller Übergriffe in Hollywood. Aber die Frauen beschränkten sich auf ein Zeichen des Protestes und Dankesworte an Mutti</td>
<td>Iris Alanyali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP2 S3</td>
<td>Die Welt p. 1</td>
<td>11th January 2018</td>
<td>Merci, Catherine!</td>
<td>Dr. Kathrin Spoerr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP2 S4</td>
<td>Die Welt p. 6</td>
<td>11th January 2018</td>
<td>&quot;Wir fordern die Freiheit, aufdringlich werden zu dürfen&quot; - Französische Künstlerinnen warnen vor &quot;puritanischer Säuberungswelle&quot; als Folge von der MeToo-Debatte. In einem &quot;totalitären Klima&quot; gehe sexuelle Freiheit verloren</td>
<td>Martina Meister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP2 S5</td>
<td>Die Welt</td>
<td>12th January 2018</td>
<td>Wo bleibt das Recht der Frau auf erotisches Spiel? - Der von Catherine Deneuve initiierte Brief gegen die #MeToo-Aktivistinnen war überfällig. Er erinnert an den französischen Feminismus der Sechziger, der unserer spießigen Prüderie Glamour entgegenhält</td>
<td>Sarah Pines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP2 S6</td>
<td>Die Welt</td>
<td>16th January 2018</td>
<td>Auch Du, Mario Testino? - Der peruanische Star-Fotograf soll, wie auch sein amerikanischer Kollege Bruce Weber, übergriffig geworden sein gegenüber Models und Mitarbeitern. Die Szene ist schockiert. Wer klärt nun, was wirklich geschah?</td>
<td>Inga Griese</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAZP 1 S1</td>
<td>F.A.Z.</td>
<td>18th October 2017</td>
<td>Einen Typen wie ihn kennt fast jede - Der Skandal um Harvey Weinstein könnte ein Wendepunkt in der amerikanischen Debatte über sexuelle Angriffe auf Frauen sein. Die Kampagne #metoo wird es zeigen</td>
<td>Ursula Scheer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAZP 1 S2</td>
<td>F.A.S.</td>
<td>22nd October 2017</td>
<td>Nackte Wahheiten #metoo - Was nutzt ein Hashtag gegen ein Problem, das nicht weggeht?</td>
<td>Florentin Schumacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAZP 1 S3</td>
<td>F.A.Z.</td>
<td>27th October 2017</td>
<td>Begehren unerwünscht - Liebe ist dumm: Droht uns auch hier die sexuelle Paranoia?</td>
<td>Christian Geyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAZP 1 S4</td>
<td>F.A.Z.</td>
<td>27th October 2017</td>
<td>Wer sagt, was Sexismus ist? - In Hollywood ist der Fall klar, in der Werbung nicht</td>
<td>Ursula Scheer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAZP 2 S1</td>
<td>F.A.Z.</td>
<td>5th January 2018</td>
<td>Unser Weinstein? - Die #MeToo-Debatte ist in Deutschland angekommen</td>
<td>Verena Lueken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAZP 2 S2</td>
<td>F.A.Z.</td>
<td>9th January 2018</td>
<td>Wie das Kleine Schwarze zum Dresscode wurde - Bei den Golden Globes gab es für den deutschen Film mit dem Preis für Fatih Akin eine positive Überraschung. Dass fast alle festgäste Schwarz schienen, überraschte hingegen niemanden. Doch was sollte das?</td>
<td>Nina Rehfeld</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAZP 2 S3</td>
<td>F.A.Z.</td>
<td>12th January 2017</td>
<td>Das französische Spiel des Lebens - Hundert Frauen stellen sich offen gegen die #MeToo-Kampagne - aus Angst vor Prüderie und neuer Unfreiheit</td>
<td>Michaela Wiegel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAZP 2 S4</td>
<td>F.A.Z.</td>
<td>13th January 2018</td>
<td>Der kleine Unterschied - &quot;Recht auf Belästigung&quot; oder &quot;Me Too&quot;? Der Aufruf französischer Frauen für die sexuelle Freiheit findet in Paris Beifall, stößt aber auch auf heftige Kritik</td>
<td>Jürg Altewegg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAZP 2 S5</td>
<td>F.A.S.</td>
<td>14th January 2018</td>
<td>Worüber #metoo schweigt</td>
<td>Friederike Haupt</td>
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<td>FAZP2</td>
<td>S7</td>
<td>15th Jan. 2018</td>
<td>&quot;Er war ein Triebtäter&quot; - Die Fotografen Mario Testino und Bruce Weber sollen männliche Models belästigt haben. Die Missbrauchsdebatte erreicht nun auch die Modeszene</td>
<td>Alfons Kaiser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SZP1</td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>17th Oct. 2017</td>
<td>Profil: Alyssa Milano - Schauspielerin und Wortführerin gegen sexuelle Belästigung</td>
<td>Katharina Riehl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SZP1</td>
<td>S2</td>
<td>18th Oct. 2017</td>
<td>Hollywoods Monster - Der Fall des Filmproduzenten Harvey Weinstein hat eine überfällige Debatte über sexuelle Übergriffe ausgelöst. Die droht zu verpuffen</td>
<td>Susan Vahabzadeh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SZP1</td>
<td>S3</td>
<td>18th Oct. 2017</td>
<td>Sexuelle Belästigung: Was zu sagen ist</td>
<td>Friederike Zoe Grasshoff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SZP1</td>
<td>S4</td>
<td>19th Oct. 2017</td>
<td>Sie auch - Nicht die Schauspielerin Alyssa Milano erfand #MeToo, sondern die Amerikanerin Tarana Burke - schon vor zehn Jahren</td>
<td>Laura Hertreiter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SZP1</td>
<td>S7</td>
<td>25th Oct. 2017</td>
<td>Wider die &quot;Kultur der Verführung&quot; - Der Skandal um den Filmproduzenten Harvey Weinstein hat auch die französische Gesellschaft aufgewühlt</td>
<td>Cécile Calla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SZP1</td>
<td>S8</td>
<td>26th Oct. 2017</td>
<td>Empörung, keine Überraschung - Nun befasst sich auch das EU-Parlament mit dem Thema sexueller Übergriffe - auch in den eigenen Reihen</td>
<td>Daniel Brössler, Alexander Mühlauer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SZP2</td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>3rd Jan. 2018</td>
<td>#nichtmituns - 300 prominente Frauen starten einen organisierten Widerstand gegen sexuelle Belästigung in Hollywood. 13 Millionen Dollar stehen bereit</td>
<td>Kathrin Werner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SZP2</td>
<td>S2</td>
<td>3rd Jan. 2018</td>
<td>Feminismus: Neue Selbstverständlichkeit</td>
<td>Andrea Rexer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SZP2</td>
<td>S3</td>
<td>5th Jan. 2018</td>
<td>Der Verdacht - In der &quot;Me Too&quot;-Debatte fällt nun erstmals auch ein deutscher Name: Zwei Schauspielerinnen erheben schwere Vorwürfe gegen den Regisseur Dieter Wedel. Der streitet alles ab</td>
<td>Christian Mayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SZP2</td>
<td>S5</td>
<td>15th Jan. 2018</td>
<td>#HierAuch - Zwischen &quot;Verpfeiff dein Schwein&quot; und &quot;Auf geht’s du Luder&quot;: Wie die Welt nach dem Weinstein-Skandal über sexuelle Gewalt diskutiert</td>
<td>Various authors (abbreviated)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZP1 S1</td>
<td>Zeit p. 5</td>
<td>19th October 2017</td>
<td>Ich auch? Ich auch! - Im Internet erheben Frauen unter dem Stichwort #MeToo ihre Stimme gegen sexuelle Übergriffe. Was folgt aus ihrer Empörung?</td>
<td>Khue Pham, Paul Middelhoff, Lea Frehse, Gero von Randow, Laura Cwiertnia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZP2 S1</td>
<td>ZEITmagazin p. 17-25</td>
<td>3rd January 2018</td>
<td>Im Zwiellicht - Mehrere Frauen beschuldigen den Regisseur Dieter Wedel. Es geht um Übergriffe bis hin zur sexuellen Nötigung und um Machtsstrukturen in der Filmbranche. Wedel weist alle Vorwürfe zurück</td>
<td>Jana Simon, Annabel Wahba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZP2 S2</td>
<td>Zeit p. 49</td>
<td>11th January</td>
<td>Wer wir sind, wo wir stehen - Anmerkungen zur #MeToo-Debatte. Damit sie nicht wieder im Sande verläuft</td>
<td>Susanne Meyer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Endnotes

i Germany is considered one of the most dynamic media markets in the world, which is reflected in the population’s high average media consumption of 9.5 hours per day. The German print market is the largest in Europe and considered to be amongst the most stable in the world (Thomaß & Horz 2018). However, revenues are decreasing paralleling the global trend of market shrinkage. According to the BDZV (Federation of German Newspaper Publishers) the penetration of printed newspapers has fallen from an average of 72.4% in 2008 to 63.6% in 2016 (BDVZ 2017). Naturally, the number is higher for an older cohort than for younger age groups who predominantly prefer online media. Nonetheless, throughout the cohorts, 95% of Germans say that they trust the daily printed papers (ibid.). Due to the still prevailing importance and trustworthiness, I chose to analyze printed press rather than online outlets.

ii In due consideration of the scope of this study, it has to be noted that the chosen sample of newspapers cannot be reflective of the entirety of the German media landscape. The main focus laid on selecting mainstream broadsheet newspapers representing a spectrum of editorial lines, from left-liberal to right-conservative. In the process of the sample selection the number of circulation as well as Weischenberg et al.’s (2005) study on ‘Leitmedien’ (opinion-forming newspapers of record) were taken into account, but were not the only pivotal factors. For instance, relevant publications like Der Spiegel (left-liberal weekly news magazine) or taz Die Tageszeitung (left-alternative daily broadsheet paper) were initially considered, but could eventually not be included in favor of the chosen newspapers. Instead, Die Welt was included due to its right-leaning-conservative bias despite not traditionally being considered a Leitmedium or not having the overall widest circulation. As briefly mentioned, the newspaper shares a publishing house with BILD, Germany’s favorite baiting and populist daily tabloid, which made Die Welt a more relevant addition to the sample than another left-liberal paper.