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Coverage of the #MeToo & Time's Up Movement: Examining who is quoted and what terminology is used in MSNBC, Fox News and the BBC's coverage of the #MeToo and Time's Up Movements

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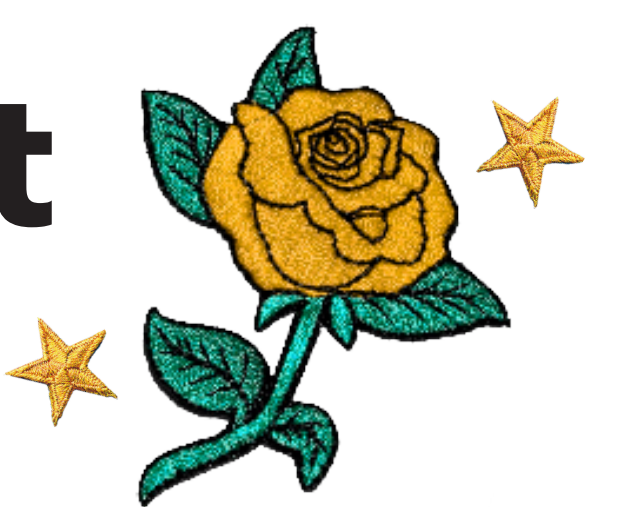
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Coverage of the #MeToo & Time's Up Movement



By Stella Harvey - Journalism - Mass Media Ethics taught by Sheila Webb

Assignment

- The ethics audit assigned in JOUR 351, Mass Media Ethics, asks students to pick a subject or event and analyze the coverage by a credible news source. Based on the topic, students develop research questions to test through textual or content analysis and scholarly research. Students then analyze their findings, wrestle with ethical issues common in journalism and apply ethical theories to real world events. The purpose of the project is to familiarize students with how to find research connected to what they are doing and to expose them to the work being done by mass media scholars.
- I chose to look at the coverage of the #MeToo and Time's Up Movement by two popular news sources in the United States, MSNBC and Fox News, and one international source, the BBC.

Project

- Methodology:** I performed a content analysis by counting the language used by MSNBC, the BBC and Fox News when they described behavior inflicted by perpetrators. I also looked at who was interviewed in each article and clip. My categories came from my data set.
- Research Domain:** I examined all of the articles and clips about the #MeToo and Time's Up movements by MSNBC, the BBC and Fox News from October 18, 2017, around the time the movements began, to February 28, 2018, when I officially began my audit. I examined 23 articles and clips from the BBC, 21 from MSNBC and 20 from Fox News.
- Research Questions:** Do MSNBC, Fox News and BBC cover the #MeToo and Times Up Movement differently? What kind of language is used when describing the actions of people who perpetrate this inappropriate behavior? Do these sources use different language? Who is interviewed and quoted in each of these articles and clips?

Findings

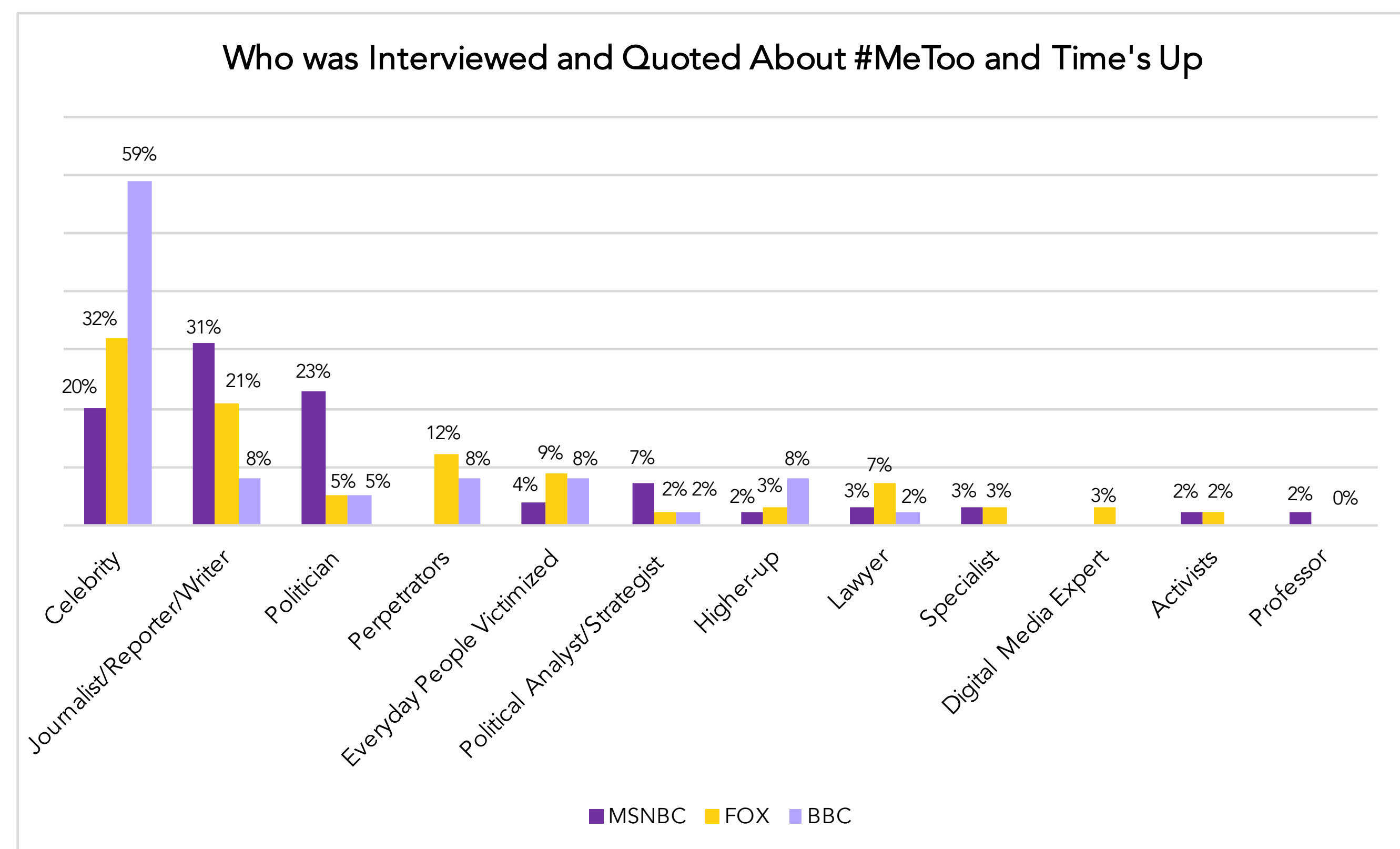


Figure 1.0 – The graph above shows the percentages of who was interviewed in all articles and clips about the #MeToo and Time's Up movement from MSNBC, Fox News and BBC between October 18 to February 28.

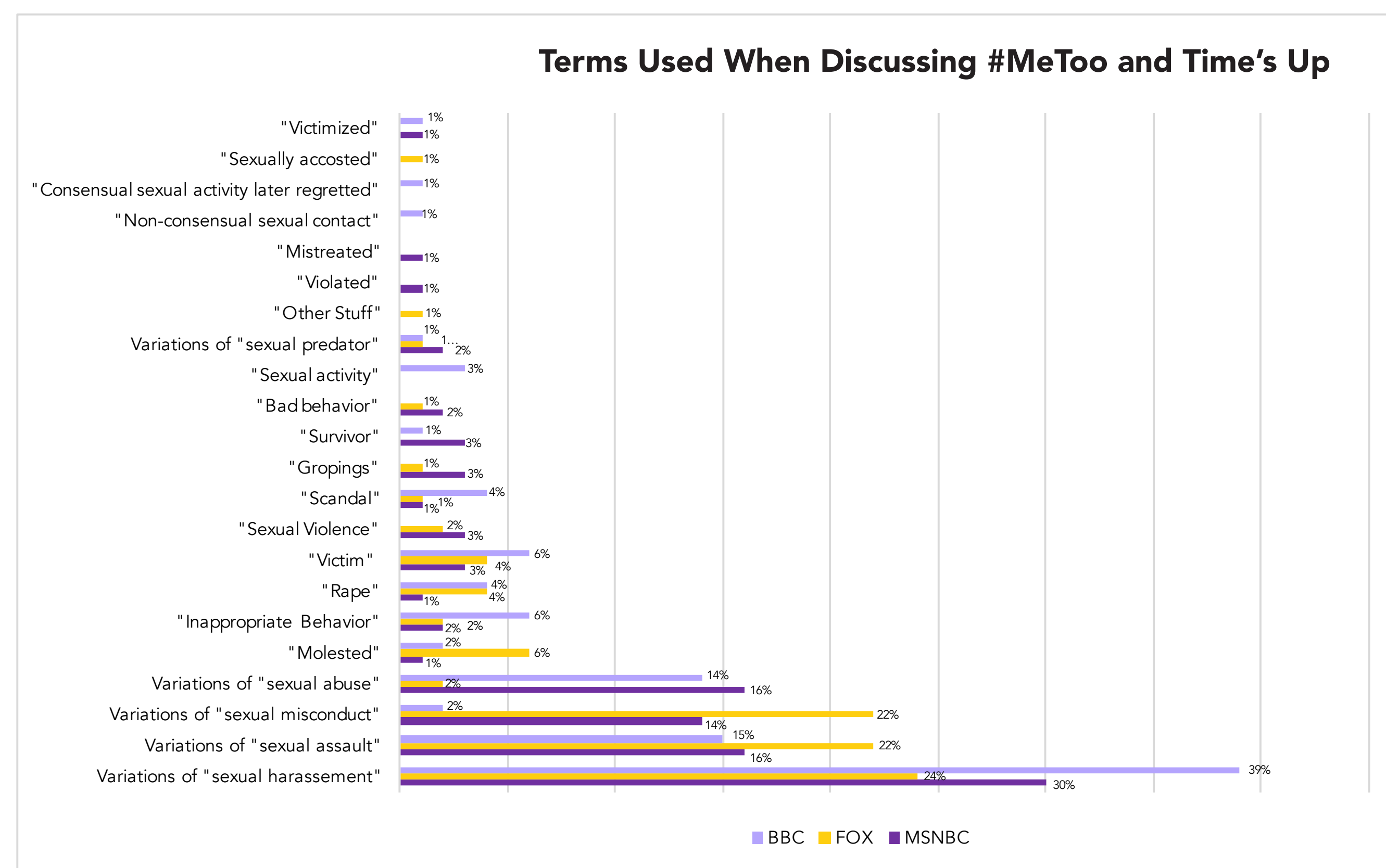


Figure 2.0 – The graph above shows the percentage of what terms were used in all articles and clips about the #MeToo and Time's Up movement from MSNBC, Fox News and BBC between October 18 to February 28.

Examples

- "Actresses wore black gowns in support of the Time's Up movement, standing in solidarity with **victims of sexual assault and harassment**," (BBC).
- "The "Me Too" movement — which encourages women to identify themselves as **victims of sexual harassment or assault** — gained momentum after Weinstein's case exploded," (Fox News).



Figure 3.0 - Tarana Burke is a social activist and community organizer who started #MeToo in 2006 on MySpace. Her goal was to empower women of color who have experienced assault and abuse, according to the Boston Globe.



Figure 4.0 – In December, the #MeToo movement was named Time Magazine's Person of the Year for 2017.

Discussion

- In all of the coverage I examined, terminology regarding inappropriate behavior was used interchangeably. Here is a break down of the definitions of the most used terms.
- Sexual Harassment** is a legal term that comes from Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of sex.
- Behavior deemed as "sexual harassment" is actually very specific, and restricted to the workplace, but I saw it used in a variety of ways.
- Sexual Assault** is another legal term defined as "any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient," by the Justice Department. There must be physical contact to be considered assault.
- Sexual Misconduct** is not a legal term, and is defined as unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature that is committed without consent or by force, intimidation, coercion, or manipulation.
- Behaviors that can be described as misconduct could also be illegal, depending on the state.
- Sexual Abuse** - I could not find one clear definition of "sexual abuse," yet it was also used interchangeably with these other terms.

Ethical Issues

Truth Telling

- To represent the truth in its entirety, it is essential for reporters to provide their audience with the full context of the story, which includes defining terms
- While the reporters did not withhold the truth of these stories or lie, by leaving out the context, the audience is left to assume what they think these terms mean, making it even more complicated when reporters use these terms interchangeably.

Fairness

- Society of Professional Journalism encourages reporters to minimize harm, especially when reporting on sensitive subjects.
- While journalism has made this information more accessible and widespread, it is also important to use the correct terminology in order to treat all subjects fairly.

Media Credibility

- Using terms interchangeably and not explaining the full context does not reflect well on these news organizations, and could make them less credible and lead to backlash from their audience.

More Discussion

MSNBC, Fox News and The BBC do cover the #MeToo and Time's Up movement differently.

- It is the responsibility of journalists, especially networks like MSNBC, Fox News and the BBC who have a massive audience, to report on issues fairly and truthfully so individuals may engage with the world with a clearer understanding of events and issues that impact people around them.
- While these sources did not clearly exhibit any outright unethical behavior such as lying about a source, ignoring or covering up a conflict of interest, not using the correct terminology, and consistently using terms interchangeably will impact the way an audience views and interprets these events and movement, which can potentially be detrimental to these social movements and individuals.
- Newsrooms and reporters must do better at understanding the terms that are often used interchangeably in society in order to be an asset to the public.

Ethical Theories

The Golden Mean asks journalists to come to a moderate but ethical solution in situations where extreme choices are unacceptable.

- This theory was **not met** because each network had specific groups they leaned toward more when reporting on these movements.

The Categorical Imperative asks reporters to tell the truth no matter the consequences.

- This theory was also **not met**, because while the reporters did not specifically withhold information or lie to their audience, using nuanced terms interchangeably and not providing adequate context did not portray the full story to their readership and viewers.

Utilitarianism asks reporters to look at the consequences of their actions by asking who could benefit or be hurt by their decisions.

- Utilitarianism was **not met**. By using a variety of terms that have different social, political and legal meaning interchangeably, the general public, who is the greatest number, is failed because they are not being informed with the whole truth or context for these complicated discussions.

The Veil of Ignorance asks journalists to report independent of social, political or economic factors that make us biased.

- The veil of ignorance **was met** in the reporting of all three of these news outlets because every party was treated the same, with fair and responsible judgement by the reporter.