

Senior Honors Thesis:

When Will They #BelieveHer?:

The Role of Partisanship and Framing of Sexual Misconduct in the News

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## **Abstract**

In recent years the #MeToo movement and the implication of several politicians in sexual assault and misconduct incidents have been widely depicted and debated in media. The effects of media's framing of such cases involving politicians in combination with motivated reasoning by partisans are potentially important to the future of American government. Motivated reasoning in favor of the inparty and the episodic framing of issues of sexual misconduct are hypothesized to decrease sympathies towards victims, decrease likelihood of holding the politician accountable and increasing belief in rape myths, however these effects will be moderated by gender. To test these predictions, I used MTurk to run a survey experiment with a 2x2 factorial design to assess the implications of a news article depicting a fictional sexual assault scenario with varying framing (episodic vs. thematic) and partisanship of the politician (Democrat vs. Republican). Variations of articles did not show significant main effects influenced by inparty biases or framing of the stimulus. However, gender and party were found to be significant moderators for participants' attitudes.

## Introduction

When Dr. Christine Blasey Ford came forward in 2018 to testify against the Supreme Court nomination of Judge Brett Kavanaugh, media and politicians alike erupted into chaos. The media drew similarities to Anita Hill's 1991 testimony of sexual harassment committed by Supreme Court nominee, Justice Clarence Thomas. Both judges received Senate confirmations and remain on the court despite Ford and Hill's testimonies of alleged sexual transgressions. In the wake of the #MeToo movement, men in other industries have been ousted from high power positions due to similar allegations. While the private sector has felt these changes, politicians seem to have had a mixed experience; some Democrats have stepped down due to accusations, but many Republicans have seemed to be immune to the trend. President Trump has been accused of sexual assault by multiple women and remains in the nation's highest office. Alabama's candidate for Senate, Roy Moore, was accused of sexually assaulting minors and still gained 48.4% of the vote, losing the election by less than 2% (Meza, 2017). Current research is lacking an understanding of the media effects of differing frames on the public's perceptions and opinions surrounding these events of sexual misconduct. This project seeks to understand whether media's portrayal of sexual misconduct perpetrated by political officials affects the opinions of the mass public which is an essential question to understanding the media's impact on our political processes.

This project examines the relationship between media's framing of stories of sexual assault and its effect on audience perceptions. It seeks to understand the ways audiences may be subtly influenced to believe or not believe an accuser's story based on the way news media depicts it. Furthermore, another variable I measure is whether or not the audience is willing to support the accused political figure after reading the story. Additionally, this project explores the

significance of partisan identification when assessing sexual misconduct allegations against political officials. I assessed these phenomena by using a 2x2 factorial design randomly assigning partisanship of the politician and a frame to a fictional news story of a politician assaulting a woman.

Media portrayals of sexual misconduct accusers are absorbed by both politicians and the citizenry, potentially influencing perspectives on what the best subsequent course of action is. Whether Americans are willing to hold politicians accountable when they believe they have committed a crime like sexual abuse provides a look into the health of American democracy and the accountability of our politicians. This study seeks to understand whether Americans consider it their responsibility to hold political officials accountable for sexual wrongdoing, even when it might be a member of their own party.

A survey experiment facilitated by Amazon Mechanical Turk measured participants attitudes on the characters in the simulated news article and sexual assault issues overall. Overall, there was a lack of significant framing and ingroup/outgroup main effects on participants. However, there were significant differences due to participants' gender and partisanship. The remainder of this paper will present a review of the existing literature on this topic, a discussion of this study's methodology, a presentation of study results, limitations, implications for American politics and recommendations for future research.

## **Literature Review**

News media coverage of crime has been shown to influence the way crime is understood by society and the public opinion regarding appropriate response to crime. Davies, Francis & Greer (2017) found through a comprehensive critical analysis that for crimes to be covered by the media, victims must seem to be innocent and "ideal" to the gatekeepers. Which crimes are

reported on and which crimes are not, along with the ways in which crimes are reported, affects public opinion and sympathy regarding crime. Visuals, dramatic language and details about the victim all influence the newsworthiness and the sympathy elicited by the story (Davies et. al, 2017). Similarly, Carll (2003) examined media's portrayal of violence against women and found that it can heavily influence public opinion and policy, resulting in long term implications for the justice system. The current study will examine gaps in understanding of how news framing affects public opinion and attitudes around sexual assault. Previous literature shows that individual frames, in which only a single individual event is mentioned, are commonly used by media to depict instances of sexual misconduct and violence. There remains a gap in the research in regard to the effects of these individual frames on the public.

## Framing

An abundance of research has been conducted to clarify how people form worldviews based on the cues and images created for them by the media, thus guiding them in their everyday opinions and life decisions (Gitlin, 2003). The media uses frames in order to inform their audience of a particular angle of an issue; "frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters" (Gitlin, 2003, p. 6). Frames can influence audience perspectives and the way those perspectives distribute responsibility, which could affect ideas on public policy (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001). Framing can benefit journalists by allowing them to provide meaning to their audience by emphasizing certain aspects of an event. This emphasis is significant; it influences the way the public evaluates and thinks of similar events.

Despite the power that frames can have over an audience, there are limitations to the extent that frames affect audience perceptions (Shen, 2004). Shen (2004) evaluated how news

frames affect attitudes and understandings of issues. He used a 2x2 factorial design similar to the one utilized in the current study. He provided articles to his participants in which he altered whether the topic of the article was about arctic drilling or stem cells, and whether it used either a value or consequence frame; value frames illuminate the moral and ethical sides of an issue, whereas consequence frames emphasize the consequences to the people involved (Shen, 2004). Before reading the articles, participants were asked to provide their pre-existing opinions on drilling and stem cells to provide an understanding of their current schemas surrounding the issues (Shen, 2004). Schemas, which help people understand the world around them, are defined as “a network of cognitive organizations that guides how an individual perceives self, others and situations” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009, p. 436-437). Shen (2004) found that for there to be an attitude change or trigger for frame-related thoughts it was important that the frame fit the schema of the participant. Throughout both frame conditions, schemas were found to be responsible for a “significant increase in the total variance explained” (Shen, 2004 p. 409). Similar schemas may be relevant when it comes to participants in the current study. If a participant has a schema of sexual violence being the fault of an individual versus the system, the schema may affect the way frames change participant attitudes and interpretations of issues.

Framing of women’s issues and sexual violence in particular has important consequences for how problems are perceived by the public. McDonald and Charlesworth (2013) performed a content and discourse analysis of articles discussing sexual harassment. They coded 311 articles for representations of the characters, details regarding the incident, as well as context and outcome of the cases. McDonald and Charlesworth (2013) found that most cases depicted stereotypical sexual harassment, emphasizing the scandalous and sexual nature of the cases and more than five out of six of the articles had only one victim involved. The discourse analysis

adds to these results as 88% of articles were found to describe these crimes as singular incidents (McDonald & Charlesworth, 2013). Only 1/5 took on the frame of sexual harassment as a systemic issue by including information depicting it as a societally widespread issue (McDonald & Charlesworth, 2013). McDonald and Charlesworth (2013) provided evidence that sexual harassment is commonly depicted as an individual occurrence rather than a wider systemic issue this could influence the public's understanding of the source of these crimes and solution to them.

*Research Question 1: Does a thematic versus episodic frame covering an instance of sexual assault alter attitudes surrounding beliefs and sympathies of the incident?*

Different frames can influence the ways in which women's issues are perceived by the public as well as their attitudes regarding them. Terkildsen and Schnell (1997) performed both an experiment and content analysis in order to understand the implications of the type of frames on public opinion of women's issues. In the content analysis portion of their study they evaluated print media coverage of feminism and the women's movement from 1950-1990, coding for their use of five different frames: sex roles, feminist, political rights, economic rights and anti-feminist frames. Economic rights and feminist frames were found to be most commonly used in news (Terkildsen & Schnell, 1997).

Terkildsen and Schnell's (1997) randomly assigned 141 participants to one of 4 frames: feminist, economic rights, political rights and anti-feminist. Economic rights and anti-feminist frames had a strong negative impact on support for gender equality, nontraditional gender roles, women's rights and whether participants would state that women's issues are important. Additionally, the political rights frame had positive effects for these same variables (Terkildsen & Schnell, 1997). Overall, men were found to be more susceptible to framing effects than women. These findings support the idea that frames are capable of affecting issue support,



specifically for women's issues. Additionally, these results support the hypothesis that gender may be a moderator in this study.

*Hypothesis 1: A thematic frame will elicit greater levels of belief in the victim's testimony and greater respect for the woman.*

*Hypothesis 2: The thematic frame will elicit greater sympathy for and willingness to empower women overall.*

### The Portrayal of Sexual Violence

Significant qualitative and quantitative work by various authors assessed the role that media plays in creating perceptions of sexual violence. A literature review by Flood and Pease (2009) found that a variety of components influence conceptions of violence against women specifically. These conceptions then create ideas of how these problems are to be solved by society. A significant aspect of this understanding are the types of media and the ways they influence attitudes. Flood and Pease (2009) found that certain kinds of media, such as pornography, television and other types of popular media that show violence and gendered roles, are the most important types of media involved in these processes. Participant's preconceived schemas surrounding violence against women and sexual violence will likely be powerful in the results of my current study as framing research has already shown how schemas can alter the effects of frames.

### *Quantitative Work in the Portrayal of Sexual Violence*

Much of the quantitative work completed regarding sexual violence surrounds the ideas of rape myths and how they are often supported by media portrayals of sexual violence. Heath, Gordon and LeBailly (1981) completed a content analysis of over 8,000 newspaper articles from

publications in three cities nationwide to see if news media perpetuate rape myths and common misperceptions regarding sexual violence. Their findings show that newspapers use less details in stories about rape than other crimes, such as murder or assault. Many articles lack specific details that are not victim-identifying and used in other reports on crime. Additionally, severity of injuries to the victim and use of weapons in perpetrating these crimes are over-reported (Gordon & LeBailly, 1981). Misrepresentations such as victim-blaming or reporting only stereotypical rape cases can be problematic. These misrepresentation and lack of detail regarding these crimes could potentially be creating misconceptions of how rape is perpetrated. Gordon and LeBailly (1981) recommend that newspapers publish feature stories when covering sexual assault to provide a greater societal context to the issue. The current study will show whether a thematic frame, which is similar to a feature story, as both have the explicit purpose of bringing a larger context to an event or issue, actually helps to reduce the misconceptions surrounding violence against women.

O'Hara (2012) had similar conclusions when she completed a lexical analysis of articles covering three rape cases. She assessed the language used, imagery and naming of individuals in the articles. She found that rape myths were often perpetuated, and the articles tended to omit the impact of the event on the victim (O'Hara, 2012). Articles also oftentimes used terms such as "sociopath" to describe the perpetrator and language that blames the victim. Additionally, Hollander and Rodgers (2014) study the construction of victims in newspaper articles, and they found that women's resistance to sexual assault is often not reported on, especially when they were successful in fighting off the attacker. The authors also find that rapes committed by strangers are over-reported (Hollander & Rodgers, 2014). All of these narratives could be leading to perceptions of women as weak and the perpetuation of rape myths. Such

representations of sexual assault once again could build inaccurate schemas of sexual violence in the eyes of the public. These expectations that are set will most likely affect willingness to believe the victim in the stimulus of the current study.

While most of the previous studies examine newspaper content, most lack definitive results on the exact impact of these themes on the public. Li, Kim and O'Boyle (2017) used a survey to try to understand the media effects of sexual assault reporting. They found that social media use was positively related to issue engagement, attributions of responsibility and rape myths. Television and news exposure were largely unrelated to the dependent measures, but newspaper readers were more likely to blame victims. Once again, gender appears to be a moderator as females are less likely to blame victims than males (Li, Kim & O'Boyle, 2017). Overall, these findings show that certain types of media exposure can affect attribution of responsibility for sexual assaults, possibly showing a relationship between the kinds of victim blaming and rape myths present in reporting of sexual assaults.

*Hypothesis 3: Men will be less likely to believe the woman, to have sympathy for and empower women overall, but be more likely to believe the politician.*

*Hypothesis 4: An episodic frame will make participants more likely to victim blame and believe rape myths, especially when the political figure is a member of their party.*

#### *Qualitative Work on Portrayals of Sexual Violence*

Qualitative research focusing on media portrayals of sexual violence finds similar themes to the quantitative research; individualization of the issue, victim blaming, and rape myths are consistently evident in the literature. Much of the qualitative work also includes aspects of framing and how frames contribute to these themes. Frames and the language used by media in depicting women in incidents of sexual violence shape the way the public views these issues and the change enacted to fix them.

Several qualitative scholars used framing theory when evaluating media coverage of sexual violence. When assessing past literature, Easteal and Judd (2015) found that there is often a trend of mutual responsibility in sexual violence coverage. The framing techniques utilized by authors contribute to this with the use of episodic frames and individual stories, which allow for more blame to be placed on the victim rather than societal causes (Easteal & Judd, 2015). Kasinsky (1998) assessed the frames used in a single sexual assault that occurred at a military gathering, commonly referred to as the Tailhook case. Kasinsky (1998) found that mainstream media reported the dominant narrative pushed out by the government and military organizations, these included themes of victim blaming and male stereotyping.

Similar findings emerged when Asenas & Abram (2018) looked at coverage of Anita Hill's sexual harassment in more recent years. Most articles looked at her individually, promoting her individual experience and ignoring the larger societal context (Asenas & Abram, 2018). Lastly, Waterhouse-Watson (2012) took a different approach by evaluating the ways in which sexual assault is portrayed on television, rather than in print news like most other studies have. Waterhouse-Watson (2012) found that the narration and testimony used, music and effects all paint a victim as believable or not. When comparing the shows evaluated in the study, they find that one show provides a greater societal context to the depiction of the assault by using music and effects that support the audience's perception of the act as nonconsensual (Waterhouse-Watson, 2012). Another show uses language such as "group sex" as opposed to "rape," and brings up the victim's sexual history, both of which imply the victim is to blame for the assault (Waterhouse-Watson, 2012). This juxtaposition between the two different portrayals in the shows emphasizes the differences that an episodic and thematic frame can have for who the audience attributes blame to.

## Motivated Reasoning

News coverage can alter the ways in which public figures are evaluated by society. Information provided by media outlets is most often what is utilized when members of the public are asked to evaluate the performance of a political figure (Krosnick & Kinder, 1990). This influence that media has over attitudes towards political figures gives them power, potentially influencing whether politicians will be held accountable for wrongdoings. However, the effects of news coverage are often dependent on the prior opinions and attitudes of the individual. This way in which individuals incorporate their previous beliefs into information processing is defined by the theory “motivated reasoning” which is when “individuals weigh information consistent with their existing beliefs or social identities more heavily than contradictory information when motivated by a directional goal in forming an evaluation” (Bolsen, Druckman & Cook, 2014 p. 236). Partisan-motivated reasoning occurs when one consumes information in a way that aligns his or her beliefs to be consistent with his or her party identification to produce the least amount of inner conflict (Bolsen, Druckman & Cook, 2014). There are two different goals related to reasoning when one forms an opinion: directional and accuracy goals (Bolsen, Druckman & Cook, 2014). Directional goals are relevant to the current study as they are the way in which one is motivated to align their attitude with the political party to which they identify. On the other hand, accuracy goals are concerned with developing the most accurate opinion (Bolsen, Druckman & Cook, 2014).

*Research Question 2: Does partisanship influence beliefs and attitudes when consuming news about a political figure accused of committing sexual assault?*

Support for motivated reasoning theory and directional motivation comes from a study by Bolsen, Druckman and Cook (2014). Participants were assigned randomly to conditions of no motivation, directional motivation and accuracy motivation. When primed to defend their

partisan identification they are found to change their opinions to support the stance taken by their party (Bolsen, Druckman & Cook, 2014). They are also found to support policies that their party elites promote and to be less inclined to adopt policy preferences of the opposition party (Bolsen, Druckman & Cook, 2014).

Slothuus and De Vreese (2010) assessed the effects of issue frames when certain political parties are associated with them. In their experiments, participants were more likely to be affected by a frame if it was a frame supported by their own party. Additionally, people are more likely to change their prior opinion when exposed to contrary attitudes supported by their party rather than change their affiliations with the party (Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010). However, if an issue is personally important to the participant they are less likely to change their opinion. Since Democrats tend to support systemic causes for societal problems it is likely that those who identify as Democrats will be more affected by the thematic frame supporting those attitudes in the current study.

*Hypothesis 5: Democrats will be more susceptible to effects of the thematic frame condition than Republicans.*

While partisanship is important in determining policy preferences, it also impacts the willingness to hold political officials accountable. Tilley and Hobolt (2011) used survey experiments to find that partisanship is influential in voter willingness to hold elected officials accountable and their attribution of responsibility. While partisanship only has small effects on performance evaluations, participants are significantly less likely to hold a political official of their party accountable, even if they themselves have determined performance to be low.

*Hypothesis 6: Participants will be less likely to believe the woman, more likely to believe the politician and be more likely to blame the victim and believe rape myths when the accused is a political figure of their own party.*

While the literature has developed a consensus that sexual crimes are depicted most commonly by an episodic frame regarding an individual event, whether this is a problematic theme has not been established. The current study will bring perspective to whether frames affect the attribution of responsibility, sympathy and misconceptions when it comes to sexual assault in the news. Additionally, the study will contribute to the understanding of gender as a moderator regarding these issues. Lastly, the study will add to motivated reasoning theory and whether partisans are willing to hold politicians of their own party accountable based on sexual assault allegations.

### **Methods**

I tested these hypotheses with an experiment using a 2 (thematic or episodic frame) x 2 (Democrat or Republican politician) factorial design (see Figure 1). An experimental design is the ideal method to test these hypotheses because it allows me to have the most reliable cause and effect information to show media effects. The experimental manipulation will consist of mock online newspaper articles that are based on real events and real news coverage. The articles are about a female Doctor Wilson accusing a Congressman Jones of Virginia of sexual assault that occurred five years prior. She was chosen to be a doctor in order to give her a respected position in society in which her motivation to speak out would be less likely to be questioned by the audience. The incident was made to occur five years ago in order to provide some room for doubt as well. This scenario was created in order to reflect previous incidents shown in the media. Each article is neutral in judgment of the guilt or innocence of the accused, just focusing on the basic details of the accusation. All articles will include the same information surrounding the incident of the Congressman forcing himself on her without consent at a holiday party (see Appendix B).

		Partisanship of Politician	
		Democrat	Republican
Frame Used	Thematic	Democrat x Thematic	Republican x Thematic
	Episodic	Democrat x Episodic	Republican x Episodic

Figure 1 2x2 Factorial Design of Conditions

The first factor manipulates whether these events are framed episodically or thematically. The episodically framed articles includes personal details of the woman and the political figure. This is episodic because the article focuses only on the two individuals involved in the incident, painting it as an independent event. The episodic frame shares details of Dr. Wilson’s life such as where she went to school, how many children she has and where she lives. The thematically framed articles excludes most personal details of the individuals, but instead includes information regarding the #MeToo movement and the recent sexual misconduct incidents in Hollywood and government. Thematic frames emphasize the larger context of the issue rather than the individual aspects.

The second factor manipulates whether the accused is identified as a Republican or Democrat. Within the first sentence of the article the politician is identified with his party. It is then mentioned again tying it to the ideals of whichever party he is assigned, saying “he has been



a champion of Republican ideals, like family values” or “a champion of Democratic ideals, like women’s rights.” Party is mentioned again by using a quote from the Congressman saying the accusation is a “smear plain and simple” from the party in opposition to the one assigned to that condition. Overall, party is mentioned four times in each article to ensure that the reader has caught on to which party the Congressman belongs to and hopefully invoke partisan thinking in the participant.

The articles were created by gathering paragraphs from a variety of articles covering cases of sexual misconduct by a public official similar to the one I portray in this study. I used news sources that do their best to avoid expressing political preferences like the Associated Press and National Public Radio to pull quotes from. I then altered the information to fit the specific case of Dr. Wilson and Congressman Jones that is portrayed in the stimuli by replacing names and details. The news stories originally both covered the Kavanaugh and Franken cases that occurred in recent years. While the bulk of the articles were created using these news articles, parts of the article had to be written in order to create the different frames.

The surrounding features of the news article including title, source, author, format and imagery will remain consistent throughout all conditions. The Richmond Times-Dispatch was chosen as the “source” for the article because of the need for a relatively neutral source without prior implications to readers. We measure previous exposure to the newspaper by asking how often they have read the Richmond Times-Dispatch before they are exposed to the stimulus. 79.8% of the participants had never read the Richmond Times-Dispatch. From those who had read the newspaper before: 9.6% said they read it rarely, 8.7% said they read it sometimes and 1.9% said they read it frequently. The gender-neutral name Taylor Johnson was used for the

author's name in order to avoid any gender biases towards the source. I used the formatting and header of the Richmond Times-Dispatch in order to ensure authenticity to the participants.

### Participants

I used Amazon's MTurk to recruit participants and administer the online survey. The nominal monetary incentive of \$1 was used to encourage participants to complete the survey. There are limitations with MTurk participants because they are professional survey takers and are interested in taking them as fast as possible, which could potentially influence the quality of results. However, MTurk respondents have been found to be better participants than university participant pools as they have been shown to perform better on attention tasks during studies and show greater effects to minute text manipulation (Hauser & Schwartz, 2016). MTurk allowed me to limit participants to only those residing in the United States, as those are the only participants relevant to the study because of U.S. partisanship and the societal context surrounding sexual misconduct.

We collected 280 responses to the survey through MTurk from February 28 – March 15, 2019. Participants were eliminated from the sample that was run for analysis on for several reasons. Those who failed any of the three attention checks were taken out of the sample. The first attention check is a question in the post-stimulus survey that reads “Please select ‘strongly agree’” those who do not select ‘strongly agree’ are eliminated from the results as they failed the attention check. The second attention check asked participants to identify the party of the Congressman who had been mentioned in the article. The 29 participants who chose the wrong party or selected ‘I don't know’ were eliminated from the sample. I did this because their partisan ties would not have been evoked effectively if they believe the Congressman belonged to a different party than they were actually exposed to. The third attention check was a timing

check where participants who spent less than 2 minutes on the survey in its entirety were eliminated as they likely did not read the article thoroughly.

The final sample had 208 total participants. Participants took an average of 6.81 minutes to complete the survey. The sample was 61.1% male. For age range, 3.8% of participants were 18-20, 33.2% were 21-29, 37% were 30-39, 14.4% were 40-49, 6.7% were 50-59 and 4.8% were 60 or older. For highest level of education attained, .5% had less than a high school degree, 14.4% had a high school degree or GED, 18.3% had some college but no degree, 7.2% had an associate degree, 51.4% had a Bachelor's degree, 6.7% had a Master's degree and 1.4% had a Doctoral degree. In terms of partisan identification, 51.4% of the sample identified with the Democratic party and 28.8% identified with the Republican party, .5% identified with the Green Party, 5.3% identified with the Libertarian Party and 13.9% identified as 'other' or 'none'. Those who did not identify as a Democrat or Republican were asked if they leaned towards one of the two parties which we then included as their partisan identification. In the final sample 33.2% were coded as Republicans and 55.8% coded as Democrats. We then took the party identity of the politician they were assigned for their stimulus and the participant's party identification to create "ingroup" and "outgroup" categories. If a participant received a stimulus with a politician of their own party they were coded as "ingroup" and if they received a stimulus with the opposing party's politician they were coded as "outgroup."

The number of participants in the different conditions follows as such: 46 participants in Democratic x Thematic, 51 in Republican x Thematic, 56 in Republican x Episodic and 55 in Democratic x Episodic. In total, 107 participants had a Democratic Congressman in their stimulus and 101 had a Republican Congressman in their stimulus.

Procedure

Participants were asked to complete a pre-stimulus survey about their demographics including age, gender, race, level of education and partisanship. They were asked how often they read the Richmond Times-Dispatch in order to ensure there is no bias based on the source of the newspaper article because of familiarity with the publication. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of four conditions. They were asked to read the article all the way through. The article is a 3-5 minute read at most, which was found by a pilot test of the survey. We piloted the study with a small group of people to ensure that the designated reading time for the article is correct and that the manipulations are effective.

After reading the article assigned, the participant filled out a post-stimulus survey about their attitudes towards the people in the story and their feelings about sexual misconduct. This allowed us to know if participants were picking up on the cues of both partisanship and framing in the article they were randomly assigned.

### Measurements

The post-stimulus survey was a series of questions in which participants decided the extent to which they agree with the following statements on a seven-point scale (*strongly agree to strongly disagree*). All of these questions serve as dependent variables regarding beliefs towards individuals in the articles, as well as sympathies towards the characters and groups in society overall. I used sixteen questions in the post-stimulus survey to measure how frames and partisanship alter who one believes and has sympathy for in these situations

*Believability of the woman.* In order to measure attitudes related to believing the accuser the following questions were used: (1) “In this situation, I find the woman in the article, Dr. Wilson, seems credible.” (2) “In this situation, I feel sorry for the woman, Dr. Wilson.” (3) “In

this situation, the woman, Dr. Wilson, seems respectable”. The scale had a Cronbach’s Alpha reliability of .931 between the three items ( $M = 5.15$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ).

*Believability of the politician.* To measure participants’ attitudes towards and willingness to believe the politician I used the following questions: (4) “In this situation, Congressman Jones seems credible.”, (5) “In this situation, Congressman Jones, should resign from office.”, (6) “In this situation, I feel sorry for Congressman Jones.” The scale has a Cronbach’s Alpha reliability of .774 between the three items ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ).

*Willingness to victim blame and believe rape myths.* To understand participants’ attitudes about rape culture and willingness to blame women I asked: (7) “Men in power are often falsely accused of sexual misconduct.” (8) “Women often make up sexual assault accusations for attention.” (13) “Women need to take responsibility for provoking attention from men.” (14) “Women need to be more careful to make sure these incidents don’t occur.” The scale has a Cronbach’s Alpha reliability of .842 between the four items ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ).

*Willingness to empower women.* To understand participants’ willingness to empower women on sexual assault issues I asked: (9) “I am happy women are standing up for themselves when incidents of sexual harassment/assault occur.” (10) “Congress should always address these issues aggressively by conducting investigations.” (11) “Men in power are not often enough held accountable for their misconduct.” (12) “I feel sorry for women overall regarding the issue of sexual harassment/assault.” (15) “Women generally should be believed when they come forward about these issues of sexual misconduct.” The scale has a Cronbach’s Alpha reliability of .852 between the five items ( $M = 5.46$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ).

These scales allowed me to compare sympathies and beliefs regarding the characters in the article, as well as perceptions regarding rape myths and women overall, which I expected to

be related to partisan ties and whether the participant has received an episodic or thematic frame. Lastly, I also measured attitudes towards the media when covering these issues. I asked (16) “The media does a good job of covering sexual misconduct stories like this one.” Allowing me to see if partisanship changes participant’s views of the media source covering the case based on if the politician is in the in party or out party.

Lastly, there were two manipulation checks included in the post-stimulus survey that allowed me to measure whether participants were identifying the key components in the stimulus. The first manipulation check asked (17) “Which party did the accused Congressman belong to?” This ensured that the reader did notice which party the Congressman belonged to in the condition they were assigned, allowing it to influence their perceptions and answers. The second manipulation check asked (18) “Did the article make sexual assault/misconduct seem like an important societal issue?” This question allowed me to know if the reader had noticed the thematic or episodic frame emphasized in the stimulus. Overall, frames did not appear to be effective as 71.6% of the participants thought the article made sexual assault seem like an important societal issue, including 69 participants who were assigned an episodic condition. Only 14.4% of those who received the episodic condition thought that the article did not make sexual assault seem like an important societal issue.

## Analyses

To test the hypotheses, I conducted a series of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests. ANOVA analysis compare means across groups, but also examines within-group variance as compared to between-group variance. This type of analysis allowed me to test for the main effect of each factor, as well as the interaction between the two factors.

## Results

Overall, the frames and in/out party effects were not found to be significant in this study. To assess whether the frames were recognizable I asked participants to identify whether their stimulus had made sexual assault/misconduct seem like an important societal issue. An overwhelming majority of participants, regardless of the frame given, thought the article they had received made sexual assault/misconduct seem like an important societal issue (*see Figure 2*). This already makes it unlikely that there will be differences between attitudes due to frames, as the frame manipulation seemed to have little influence on participants.

*Figure 2: Did the article make sexual assault/misconduct seem like an important societal issue?*

	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Maybe</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>I don't know</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Thematic</i>	80	12	4	1	97
<i>Episodic</i>	69	24	16	2	111
<i>Total</i>	149	36	20	3	208

*Hypothesis 1: A thematic frame will elicit greater levels of belief in the victim's testimony and greater respect for the woman.*

In order to measure Hypothesis 1, I ran an ANOVA with the frame of the article and ingroup/outgroup of the politician as the fixed factors and the believability of the accuser as the dependent variable. The mean score of the thematic frame ( $m = 5.096, sd = 1.52$ ), was not significantly different from the episodic frame ( $m = 5.184, sd = 1.41$ ) ( $F = 0.143, p = .706$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was unsupported by the findings. There was also no significant main effect of the ingroup/outgroup of the politician ( $F = 0.099, p = .753$ ), and no significant interaction effect ( $F = 1.355, p = .246$ ).

*Hypothesis 2: The thematic frame will elicit greater sympathy for and willingness to empower women overall.*

In order to measure Hypothesis 2, I ran an ANOVA with the frame of the article and ingroup/outgroup of the politician as the fixed factors and support for empowering woman as the dependent variable. The mean score of the thematic frame ( $m = 5.398$ ,  $sd = 1.21$ ), was not significantly different from the episodic frame ( $m = 5.527$ ,  $sd = 1.08$ ) ( $F = 0.534$ ,  $p = .466$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported. There was also no significant main effect of the ingroup/outgroup of the politician ( $F = 0.029$ ,  $p = .864$ ), and no significant interaction effect ( $F = 1.227$ ,  $p = .269$ ).

*Hypothesis 3: Men will be less likely to believe the woman, to have sympathy for and empower women overall, but be more likely to believe the politician.*

In order to measure Hypothesis 3, I ran an ANOVA with ingroup/outgroup of the politician and gender of the participant as the fixed factors and support for believability of the woman as the dependent variable. The mean score for a male participant ( $m = 4.964$ ,  $sd = 1.52$ ) was significantly different from female participants ( $m = 5.404$ ,  $sd = 1.32$ ) ( $F = 4.08$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported that men are less likely to believe the woman. There was also no significant main effect of the ingroup/outgroup of the politician ( $F = 0.229$ ,  $p = .633$ ), and no significant interaction effect ( $F = 0.169$ ,  $p = .682$ ).

I ran an ANOVA with the ingroup/outgroup of the politician and gender of the participant as the fixed factors and support for willingness to empower women as the dependent variable. The mean score for male participants ( $m = 5.333$ ,  $sd = 1.13$ ), was marginally significant from female participants ( $m = 5.661$ ,  $sd = 1.14$ ) ( $F = 3.71$ ,  $p < .10$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was



partially supported. There was also no significant main effect of the ingroup/outgroup of the politician ( $F = 0.017, p = .897$ ), and no significant interaction effect ( $F = 0.050, p = .824$ ).

I ran an ANOVA with the ingroup/outgroup of the politician and gender of the participant as the fixed factors and support for believability of the man as the dependent variable. The mean score for male participants was ( $m = 4.049, sd = 1.47$ ), was significantly different from the female participants ( $m = 3.560, sd = 1.45$ ) ( $F = 4.97, p < .05$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported that men are more likely to believe the man. There was also no significant main effect of the ingroup/outgroup of the politician ( $F = 0.543, p = .462$ ), and no significant interaction effect ( $F = 0.00, p = .953$ ).

*Hypothesis 4: An episodic frame will make participants more likely to victim blame and believe rape myths, especially when the political figure is a member of their party.*

In order to measure Hypothesis 4, I ran an ANOVA with the frame of the article and ingroup/outgroup of the politician as the fixed factors and willingness to blame victims and believe rape myths as the dependent variable. The mean score of the thematic frame ( $m = 3.479, sd = 1.50$ ), was not significantly different from the episodic frame ( $m = 3.265, sd = 1.47$ ) ( $F = 0.934, p = .335$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was unsupported by the findings. There was also no significant main effect of the ingroup/outgroup of the politician ( $F = 0.180, p = .672$ ), and no significant interaction effect ( $F = 0.259, p = .611$ ).

*Hypothesis 5: Democrats will be more susceptible to effects of the thematic frame condition than Republicans.*

In order to measure Hypothesis 5, I ran an ANOVA with partisanship of the participant and the frame of the article as the fixed factors and support for believability of the woman as the dependent variable. The mean score for Democrats ( $m = 5.583, sd = 1.12$ ), was significantly

different from Republicans ( $m = 4.401$ ,  $sd = 1.66$ ) ( $F = 35.78$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, there are significant differences between participants of different parties, but not in the way that Hypothesis 5 had predicted. There was a no main effect from frames ( $F = 1.17$ ,  $p = .281$ ), however there was a significant interaction effect between frame and party ( $F = 5.36$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

I ran an ANOVA with the frame of the article and partisanship of the participant as the fixed factors and support for willingness to empower women as the dependent variable. The mean score for Democrats ( $m = 5.831$ ,  $sd = 0.94$ ) was significantly different from Republicans ( $m = 4.852$ ,  $sd = 1.19$ ) ( $F = 41.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, there are significant differences between participants of different parties, but not in the way that Hypothesis 5 had predicted. There was also no significant main effect from frames ( $F = 2.27$ ,  $p = .133$ ), however there was a significant interaction effect ( $F = 6.03$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The interaction effect is between frame and party of the participant where Republicans were significantly less likely to empower women specifically when in the thematic frame.

I ran an ANOVA with the frame of the article and partisanship of the participant as the fixed factors and support for believability of the man as the dependent variable. The mean score for Democrats ( $m = 3.399$ ,  $sd = 1.36$ ) was significantly different from Republicans ( $m = 4.608$ ,  $sd = 1.35$ ) ( $F = 35.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, there are significant differences between participants of different parties, but not in the way that Hypothesis 5 had predicted. There was also no significant main effect from frames ( $F = 0.68$ ,  $p = .411$ ), however there was a marginally significant interaction effect ( $F = 3.125$ ,  $p < .10$ ). The interaction effect is between frame and party of the participant where Republicans were marginally significantly more likely to believe the man specifically when in the thematic frame.

I ran an ANOVA with the frame of the article and partisanship of the participant as the fixed factors and support for willingness to blame victims and believe rape myths as the dependent variable. The mean score for Democrats ( $m = 2.916$ ,  $sd = 1.36$ ), was significantly different from Republicans ( $m = 4.123$ ,  $sd = 1.38$ ) ( $F = 34.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, there are significant differences between participants of different parties, but not in the way that Hypothesis 5 had predicted. There was also no significant main effect from frames ( $F = 1.64$ ,  $p = .202$ ), and no significant interaction effect ( $F = 0.582$ ,  $p = .446$ ).

*Hypothesis 6: Participants will be less likely to believe the woman, more likely to believe the politician and be more likely to blame the victim and believe rape myths when the accused is a political figure of their own party.*

In order to measure Hypothesis 6, I ran an ANOVA with the frame of the article and ingroup/outgroup of the politician as the fixed factors and the believability of the accuser as the dependent variable. The mean score of the ingroup ( $m = 5.100$ ,  $sd = 1.55$ ), was not significantly different from the outgroup ( $m = 5.182$ ,  $sd = 1.37$ ) ( $F = 0.09$ ,  $p = .753$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 6 was unsupported by the findings. There was also no significant main effect of the frame ( $F = 0.143$ ,  $p = .706$ ), and no significant interaction effect ( $F = 1.355$ ,  $p = .246$ ).

I ran an ANOVA with the frame of the article and ingroup/outgroup of the politician as the fixed factors and the believability of the politician as the dependent variable. The mean score of the ingroup ( $m = 3.929$ ,  $sd = 1.46$ ), was not significantly different from the outgroup ( $m = 3.775$ ,  $sd = 1.49$ ) ( $F = 0.47$ ,  $p = .490$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 6 was unsupported by the findings. There was also no significant main effect of the frame ( $F = 0.088$ ,  $p = .767$ ), and no significant interaction effect ( $F = 0.056$ ,  $p = .813$ ).

I ran an ANOVA with the frame of the article and ingroup/outgroup of the politician as the fixed factors and willingness to blame the victim and believe rape myths as the dependent

variable. The mean score of the ingroup ( $m = 5.475, sd = 1.22$ ), was not significantly different from the outgroup ( $m = 5.457, sd = 1.07$ ) ( $F = 0.03, p = .864$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 6 was unsupported by the findings. There was also no significant main effect of the frame ( $F = 0.534, p = .466$ ), and no significant interaction effect ( $F = 1.227, p = .269$ ).

## Discussion

While this study did not find main effects of episodic versus thematic framing or ingroup partisan biases, there were significant findings in regard to the importance of party and gender when consuming news about sexual misconduct perpetrated by a politician. The differences in the way different partisan groups and genders interpret news about sexual misconduct has important implications for accountability of politicians and the news industry in how to approach these topics. There are several limitations of the study that could explain why main effects were not found, such as the current climate surrounding sexual misconduct or weak stimuli. Based on this research I have several recommendations for future projects and methods to further understand the media effects of sexual misconduct in the news.

Both frames did not significantly affect participants across conditions when assessing the scales regarding the article itself or attitudes about sexual assault and misconduct overall. In addition, there were no significant differences in attitudes between participants who received an article with an ingroup or outgroup politician. While frames and partisan group biases did not appear to play a role in the current study, this could have been due to limitations with the strength of the stimulus. The frames in the stimulus were not easily identifiable for participants because 62% of participants in the episodic condition had thought the article they read made sexual assault seem like an important societal issue, even though the article had purposefully not touched on the societal aspects of the issue. While all the participants used in the

ingroup/outgroup analyses had been able to correctly identify the party of the politician in the article, it is possible the article did not effectively elicit ingroup emotion and ties. In future similar studies, it should be ensured by pilot studies that the stimuli are strong enough to evoke partisan ties and also allow participants to identify the different frames used.

Additionally, another limitation on the study was the current climate surrounding the issue of sexual misconduct and the pervasiveness of the #MeToo movement. The issue of sexual assault and misconduct has received a lot of media attention recently, including instances in which politicians have been accused, bringing it to the forefront of many Americans' attention. Likewise, the spread of the social media movement #MeToo has framed it as both an individualized and societal problem all in one by allowing individuals to come forward to say they are a victim of such a pervasive culture of sexual misconduct. Both of these factors may have contributed to the lack of framing main effects in the study. Participants may be so inclined to see the issue as a societal one regardless of receiving an episodic frame because of how the issue has been portrayed on mass and social media. Had this study been completed two years ago, before such coverage and movements had been created the effects of the articles may have differed.

Even though there was a lack of main effects from frames and partisan ingroup biases, the study found an interesting and significant importance of partisan identity when audiences interpret news about sexual misconduct. First of all, Republicans were less likely to believe the woman in the article and less willing to empower women overall in the issue of sexual misconduct, compared to Democrats. Additionally, Republicans were more likely to instead believe the man in the article and also more likely to blame women and believe rape myths, when compared to Democrats. These differences between Republicans and Democrats illustrates

that there are some inherent differences in the ways that these two partisan groups interpret news on sexual misconduct or in the way that they view these issues in general.

Some of these differences in reactions could potentially be related to the interaction found between party and frame. Republicans in the thematic frame condition were significantly less likely to believe the woman and empower women, and marginally significantly more likely to believe the man, than their Republican counterparts in the episodic frame condition. While I had hypothesized that an episodic frame would make people more likely to have these attitudes, the effect works in the opposite direction for Republicans.

These results could be potentially caused by a backfire effect specifically for Republicans. Republicans could feel as though the thematic frame is contrary to their existing beliefs on the systemic and societal nature of sexual assault. As stated previously, participants have been found to be convinced by a frame if it is supported by their party (Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010). Republicans are significantly less likely than Democrats to believe sexual harassment is a serious problem, so when confronted with a frame contrasting to those beliefs like a thematic frame they may reject it and take on opposing attitudes instead (Van der Linden & Panagopoulos, 2019). Republicans seem to prefer an episodic frame over thematic when covering sexual assault topics in order to have them believe the woman and be more likely to empower women overall. This is in line with previous findings that Republicans can be more sensitive to framing effects, especially when the frame contradicts their opinions on the issue they are less likely to support societal remedies (Hart & Feldman, 2018).

If Republicans are less likely to believe women and empower them to act on these accusations there may in effect be a difference in the way in which Republicans handle an accusation of sexual misconduct in their party. These reactions could be creating societal effects

of differing party responses to sexual misconduct which could in turn effect the political consequences certain politicians face. Additionally, the findings have interesting implications for gatekeepers and journalists who may have previously thought thematic frames were the best way to portray issues of sexual misconduct to elicit belief in the story, while in reality there may be unintended consequences to using thematic frames specifically for Republican consumers of news.

Aside from party, another significant impact on results came from the gender of participants. Men were significantly more likely to believe the man in the article compared to women, as I had hypothesized. Men were also significantly less likely to believe the woman in the article and less likely to empower women compared to women, which also supported my hypothesis. These differences in interpretations of sexual misconduct news likely signals a difference in the understanding women have with these issues on a personal level that men are less likely to have experience with. Several studies have found these significant differences in the ways that sexual harassment is interpreted by women and men. Females are significantly more likely than males to see sexual advances as offensive or potentially hindering to their work (Adams et al, 1983). Men also tend to tolerate harassment at greater lengths than women do (Reilly et al, 1986). In addition, women tend to find sexual harassment to be costlier than men who are more likely to accept the behavior (Jones & Reiland, 1992). These differences in perceptions of sexual harassment could be responsible for the discrepancies in results between men and women.

Future studies addressing the media effects of sexual misconduct in the news should seek to remove the limitations described in the current study. Ensuring the stimulus is strong enough to be recognized by the participants and also that it elicits the same partisan attitudes that these

cases do in real life when they are covered by media. In order to manage the limitation of the #MeToo culture, studies should take into account prior attitudes about sexual misconduct in order to ensure the attitudes presented are a result of the stimuli rather than previous experience or beliefs. If these two alterations were applied to the current study, there may be the possibility of main effects from frames and partisan biases.

In order to fully understand the genuine effects these cases have on audiences it would be ideal to use a real case as it is happening in the present. This way the case is more realistic, and the accused is someone the participants have likely heard of, potentially creating a sense of more at stake in their partisan ties. This would be mainly important for seeing genuine partisan effects, however the obstacle of the #MeToo media would still potentially minimize framing effects for whatever the dominant media frame of the case is. While it would be difficult to manage such an experiment or survey to run at the exact time a case is being divulged in the news and would leave the researcher with a lack of control over the situation, it would likely have the closest results of what the media effects actually are. It would also be necessary to have both a Democrat and Republican case in order to ensure results are not limited to a single party. Additionally, it would be interesting to run a similar survey experiment to the one in the current study, but while participants are having galvanic skin response measured. This way we could see if there are certain physiological reactions that occur that we are unable to get from the post-stimulus survey. This might allow us to see if people are experiencing different visceral reactions when they are in the ingroup versus outgroup during these cases.

Lastly, future research should address the significant findings of the current study by looking into both partisanship and gender when consuming news about sexual misconduct. The different ways in which Republicans respond to these incidents, especially in the thematic frame



should be assessed to understand exactly why these reactions are specific to Republicans.

Additionally, it can be reasonably assumed why there are differences between men and women in their responses to these cases due to general higher rates of victimization of women. However, the ways in which news media can alter their work in order to help men empathize or understand these situations should be looked into further.

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## Appendix A

Pre-Stimulus Questions:

### Age

How old are you?

- 18-20
- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or older
- Prefer Not to Answer

### Race

Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be:

- White
- Black or African-American
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific islander
- Other (please specify)
- Prefer Not to Answer

### Gender

What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer Not to Answer

### Education

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- Less than high school degree
- High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- Some college but no degree
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- Professional degree (JD,MD)
- Prefer Not to Answer

### Partisanship

Which party do you most identify with?

- Democratic Party
- Republican Party
- Green Party
- Libertarian Party
- Tea Party

- Other (specify)
- None

Do you tend to lean more towards the Republican or Democratic Party?

- I tend to lean towards the Republican Party
- I tend to lean towards the Democratic Party
- I don't lean either way
- Prefer Not to Answer

With which ideology do you identify with most?

- Strong Conservative
- Conservative
- Lean Conservative
- Moderate
- Lean Liberal
- Liberal
- Strong Liberal
- Prefer Not to Answer

### **Newspaper Habits**

How often do you read the Richmond Times-Dispatch newspaper?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often

Post-Stimulus Questions:

Whose account of the events in the news article do you find more credible?

- Dr. Wilson
- Congressman Jones
- I don't know

Please rate the level of agreement you have with the following questions based on the article you read on the page previous.

(1) In this situation, I find the woman in the article, Dr. Wilson, seems credible.

(2) In this situation, I feel sorry for the woman, Dr. Wilson.

(3) In this situation, the woman, Dr. Wilson, seems respectable.

(Attention Check) Please select "strongly agree"

(4) In this situation, Congressman Jones seems credible.

- (5) In this situation, Congressman Jones, should resign from office.
- (6) In this situation, I feel sorry for Congressman Jones.
- (7) Men in power are often falsely accused of sexual misconduct.
- (8) Women often make up sexual assault accusations for attention.
- (9) I am happy women are standing up for themselves when incidents of sexual harassment/assault occur.
- (10) Congress should always address these issues aggressively by conducting investigations.
- (11) Men in power are not often enough held accountable for their misconduct.
- (12) I feel sorry for women overall regarding the issue of sexual harassment/assault.
- (13) Women need to take responsibility for provoking attention from men.
- (14) Women need to be more careful to make sure these incidents don't occur.
- (15) Women generally should be believed when they come forward about these issues of sexual misconduct.
- (16) The media does a good job of covering sexual misconduct stories like this one.
- (17) Which party did the accused Congressman belong to?
- Republican Party
  - Democratic Party
  - I don't know
- (18) Did the article make sexual assault/misconduct seem like an important societal issue?
- Yes
  - Maybe
  - No
  - I don't know

## Appendix B

Stimuli

Episodic x Democrat

# Richmond Times-Dispatch

## Congressman Jones accused of sexual assault

By Taylor Johnson Jan 4, 2019

The House Committee on Ethics hearing on a sexual assault allegation against Democratic Congressman Matthew Jones has riveted Washington and the nation with fiery, emotional commentary from the Congressman and Dr. Wilson, the woman accusing him of sexual assault. Jones denied the accusation.

Sophia Wilson, a 40-year-old Ohio doctor, went public a week ago with her allegation that Congressman Jones assaulted her at a holiday party in 2013. The allegation has prompted an investigation by the House Committee on Ethics.

Wilson made a statement in front of the hospital she works at surrounded by her friends and family. The mother of three said the traumatic incident was seared into her memories, while admitting some gaps in her memory around the attack. "I need to do this for myself and to be a role model for my daughters," Wilson said through her tears.

Jones, 42, a Democratic Congressman of Virginia, has denied Wilson's allegation and said he wanted to testify as soon as possible to clear his name. The Congressman has served in office since 2010, where he has been a champion of Democratic ideals, like women's rights.

In a statement provided by the Jones' Press Secretary, Jones said the event "did not happen" and that the allegation was "a smear, plain and simple, organized by the Republicans to ruin my reputation."

Wilson described in detail how a drunk Jones cornered her in an empty bathroom at a holiday party. She said he put his hand over her mouth to muffle her screams, and said he exposed himself to her and forced himself on her. Wilson insists that she repeatedly said "no" and asked him to stop.

Asked how certain she was that Jones was her attacker, she declared, "100 percent." A work friend of Wilson's said Wilson told her about the incident a couple weeks after it allegedly occurred.

Wilson received her M.D. from University of Virginia and her bachelor's degree from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. In 2008, she married Henry Wilson, and have since made the Greater Cleveland area their home. The couple now has two daughters and a son.

The two were at a holiday party of a mutual friend in Cleveland when Wilson alleges the event occurred. Multiple party attendees have confirmed that both Wilson and Jones attended the party, but no one has been able to prove Wilson's side of the events.

Jones said "I briefly remember meeting Dr. Wilson at the holiday party, but it was nothing more than a quick introduction. We never saw one another again."

Members of both parties joined in pressing for an investigation. Jones said he would welcome it.

"If I'm going to tell my story, now is the time. 2019 is not 2013. It's just a different time," Wilson said at a news conference Thursday in Cleveland.



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Jones is the latest public figure to be caught in the deluge of revelations of sexual harassment and misconduct that have taken down prominent abusers and punished serial offenders in Hollywood, and beyond. Women are finally experiencing a reckoning for a problem that has been deeply pervasive for decades. Many hope that the ensuing reforms will end the victimization of women in the workplace once and for all.

The swift rebukes from both Republican and Democratic lawmakers suggest that momentum from the online #MeToo movement has begun to spur a culture shift on Capitol Hill, where current and former staffers say misogynistic and predatory behavior has long been an open secret.

In a statement provided by the Jones' Press Secretary, Jones said the event "did not happen" and that the allegation was "a smear, plain and simple, organized by the Republicans to ruin my reputation." Jones has been a champion of Democratic ideals, like women's rights, during his time in office.

In a story that will be familiar for many women, Wilson described in detail how a drunk Jones cornered her in an empty bathroom at a holiday party. She said he put his hand over her mouth to muffle her screams, and said he exposed himself to her and forced himself on her. Wilson insists that she repeatedly said "no" and asked him to stop.

Asked how certain she was that Jones was her attacker, she declared, "100 percent." A work friend of Wilson's said Wilson told her about the incident a couple weeks after it allegedly occurred.

The two were at a holiday party of a mutual friend in Cleveland when Wilson alleges the event occurred. Multiple party attendees have confirmed that both Wilson and Jones attended the party, but no one has been able to prove Wilson's side of the events.

Jones said "I briefly remember meeting Dr. Wilson at the holiday party, but it was nothing more than a quick introduction. We never saw one another again."

The accusations against Jones come just days after the Senate unanimously adopted mandatory sexual harassment training for members and staffs amid a flood of stories about harassment, sexual misconduct and gender hostility from staffers, aides and even female elected officials.

Members of both parties joined in pressing for an investigation. Jones said he would welcome it.

"If I'm going to tell my story, now is the time. 2019 is not 2013. It's just a different time," Wilson said at a news conference Thursday in Cleveland. "I have to do this for all the women who have not been able to tell their stories," Wilson said ending her statement.

# Richmond Times-Dispatch

## Congressman Jones accused of sexual assault

By Taylor Johnson Jan 4, 2019

The House Committee on Ethics hearing on a sexual assault allegation against Republican Congressman Matthew Jones, has riveted Washington and the nation with fiery, emotional commentary from the Congressman and Dr. Wilson, the woman accusing him of sexual assault. Jones denied the accusation.

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