

(SELF-)LOVE MATTERS:
A DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS OF
#BLACKLIVESMATTER ON TWITTER (2012-2015)

by

AXEL CONRAD SEVERS

Bachelor of Arts, 2011
University of North Texas
Denton, Texas

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
AddRan College of Liberal Arts
Texas Christian University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts

May, 2017

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis was completed over a period of two years (April 2015-April 2017) in Dallas, Fort Worth, and Denton, Texas. The author would like to thank Dr. Jason Helms and Dr. Mona Narain for their patience and guidance, and Dr. Karen Steele for being and doing everything one could hope for in an Advisor. They would also like to thank Kayla E. for her support during the first year of writing, and Rosie for her continued support. This thesis is dedicated to the woman who, during a June 2015 protest in McKinney, Texas against Eric Casebolt's brutalization of Dajerria Becton, confided to a friend that the sight of the American flag often makes her nervous.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Epigraph	1
II. Chapter 1: An Overview of #BlackLivesMatter.....	2
1.1 - Introduction.....	2
1.2 - The Role of #BlackLivesMatter in the Evolution of the Movement.....	5
1.3 - State of the Field.....	12
1.3.1 - Overview	12
1.3.2 - The Evolution of Twitter	13
1.3.3 - The Public Sphere Debate	17
1.3.4 - Hashtag Publics and Discourse Communities	23
1.4 - The Role of Twitter and Hashtag Rhetoric in the Black Lives Matter Movement..	26
1.5 - Framework.....	34
III. Chapter 2: Case Study	40
2.1 - Parameters	40
2.2 - Academic Precedents.....	41
2.3 - Collecting Data.....	43
2.4 - Overview of Discursive Trends at Each Locus Point	46
IV. Chapter 3: Analysis	54
3.1 - Overview	54
3.2 - Discursive Analysis of Tweets	55
3.2.1 - #BlackLivesMatter’s 1st Appearance on Twitter (April 2012-July 2013)..	56

3.2.2 - The Emergence of Hashtagged Counter-Rhetorics (December 2014).....	59
3.2.3 - Constructing Counter-Narratives (January 2015).....	72
3.2.4 - Sustaining the Movement (March 30-April 7 2015).....	80
V. Chapter 4: Conclusions.....	88
4.1 - A Case for #BlackLivesMatter as a Mode of (Self-)Love.....	88
4.2 - Implications for Further Study.....	92
VI. Bibliography.....	100
VII. Vita.....	117
VIII. Abstract.....	118

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Google Trends graph comparing search interest over time for “Trayvon Martin,” “Eric Garner,” and “Michael Brown” between January 2012 and April 201544
2. Google Trends graph comparing search interest over time for “Eric Garner” and “Michael Brown” between April 2014 and April 2015.....44
3. Google Trends graph comparing search interest over time for “#BlackLivesMatter” and “black lives matter” between April 2014 and April 2015.....45
4. Screenshot of the first three tweets to feature the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter.....46
5. Screenshot of a tweet by @LaPenaCulturalCenter featuring an image of a child holding a protest sign (16 Jul 2013).....49
6. Screenshot of a tweet by @JusticeWarrior98 featuring an image of Kelly Thomas sourced from reddit (14 Dec 2014).....64
7. Screenshot of a tweet by @menes676 featuring an image of a roaring lion superimposed with flames (31 Jan 2015).....78
8. Screenshot of a tweet by @JumpVote claiming to have verified millions of illegal votes (13 Nov 2016).....96
9. Screenshot of a tweet by @realDonaldTrump claiming to have won the popular vote citing millions of illegal votes (27 Nov 2016)96
10. Screenshot of a tweet by @JumpVote affirming @realDonaldTrump’s citation of illegal votes (27 Nov 2016).....97

(Self-)Love Matters: A Discursive Analysis of #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter (2012-2015)

Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.

-Audre Lorde, "Epilogue," *A Burst of Light: Essays* (1988)

Living in a society that constantly marginalizes you, invalidates your experiences and emotions, and fosters insecurity, it becomes an uphill battle to love yourself. Based on the messages that we receive from all corners of society (from politics to economics, from media to schools), we are taught to hate ourselves. To affirm, value, and validate yourself—to love yourself—amidst this daily onslaught of disparaging messages is not only political but also radical. It is radical because you're not supposed to survive.

-SooJin Pate, "The Radical Politics of Self-Love and Self-Care" (2014)

Our bodies run with ink dark blood. Or else

It pools in the pavement's seams.

Is it strange to say love is a language

Few practice, but all, or near all speak?

Even the men in black armor, the ones

Jangling handcuffs and keys, what else

Are they so buffered against, if not love's blade

Sizing up the heart's familiar meat?

-Tracy K. Smith, excerpted from "Unrest in Baton Rouge" (after the photo by Jonathan Bachman) (2016)

Chapter 1: An Overview of #BlackLivesMatter

1.1 - Introduction

Black Lives Matter is an international, chapter-based, non-hierarchical organization dedicated to fighting against the pervasive systematic dehumanization of Black people. Though it now holds a ubiquitous position in public consciousness, the movement originally took form as a hashtag on Twitter, a much smaller public arena within which the hashtag constitutes an online counterpublic discourse community. An analysis of #BlackLivesMatter discourse reveals myriad insights into how rhetors use activist hashtags as a tool for exercising (self-)love, building communities, engaging in critical civic discourse, and affirming their lived experiences before a global audience. This study focuses on the rhetorical operations of #BlackLivesMatter within Twitter discourse during the first three years of its existence and explores three central questions: What does the first three years of #BlackLivesMatter Twitter discourse look like? What might the qualities and shifts within the discourse across these three years suggest about the rhetorical functions of the hashtag? Finally, and most importantly, with what sorts of powers does #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric imbue its rhetors?

To address these questions, I have performed a discursive analysis of the first three years of #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter, beginning with its first appearance in April of 2012. In order to conduct this study, I have constructed a three-tiered methodology using tools that are accessible to anyone with an internet connection and browser. First, I used Google Search Analytics to locate four significant points in the hashtag's use between April 2012 and April 2015 based on search interest in the phrase "Black Lives

Matter.” Then, using Twitter’s advanced search function, I collected one hundred tweets from each point: 1) the months following its first appearance; 2) December 14, 2014, the day after the Millions March in New York City, when search interest in the phrase reached its first peak; 3) January 31, 2015, the date the phrase reached the nadir of search interest within this time window; and 4) the first week of April 2015, when this study began. Finally, after indexing each tweet in a spreadsheet and reading it closely, I performed a broad discursive analysis of each set of tweets, noting rhetorical patterns within each set, as well as significant shifts in these patterns across each set.

This study is divided into three chapters. The first begins by drawing a clear distinction between #BlackLivesMatter and the Black Lives Matter movement by exploring the relationship between the two, followed by an overview of the state of Twitter studies within the context of hashtag activism, which provides salient background on Twitter, its relationship to the public sphere, and the use of hashtags as counterpublic discourse communities. A discussion of the rhetorical operations of #BlackLivesMatter within its particular constitutive discourse community follows, and the chapter concludes with an overview of the theoretical framework that has shaped my approach to this study. Chapter two provides a walkthrough of the methodology and execution of the data collection, and the final chapter follows with a discursive analysis of each set of tweets.

I have placed this study squarely within the ecological framework developed by Jenny Edbauer, who defines exigences as “amalgamation[s] of processes and encounters” that may be described as “series of events,” and identifies rhetorical situations as part of “an ongoing social flux” (8-9). Rather than viewing public rhetorics in a situational context constituted by a finite number of elements, Edbauer’s framework places public

rhetorics in a relational context and views them as a fluid, “circulating ecology of effects, enactments, and events” whose elements flow through time and across social fields (9). Likewise, I view #BlackLivesMatter discourse as occurring across a multitude of fluid rhetorical ecologies constituted by a wide “sphere of active, historical, and lived processes” (Edbauer 8).

This study provides a snapshot of #BlackLivesMatter discourse as it has played out among individuals within the discourse community and analyzes #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric as a public construction. Using Edbauer’s ecological framework, I have charted a rough map of the public construction of #BlackLivesMatter hashtag rhetoric, and I have identified a set of persuasive appeals inherent in this rhetoric that carry power for those who wield it. As one might expect, outrage is a prominent emotion in this discourse, which is unsurprising given that anger has been shown to spread more virulently across social networks than any other emotion (Fan et al.). Though public outrage plays a role in sustaining the movement’s power, however, it is not the most significant quality of #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric. In analyzing the discourse, #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric appears to transcend outrage and has become more than a reactionary rhetoric; rather, it manifests in the discourse as a state of mind - or mode of living - centered around continuous mass public affirmation of the value of Black lives.

In what follows, I argue that #BlackLivesMatter discourse cultivates rigorous self-reflexive intersectional social critique and (self-)love, and that rhetors use the hashtag as a tool for re-forming Black identity in order to construct the narrative of Black life and Black activism on their own terms. Just as film reels of protests and speeches document the rhetoric of past movements, so, too, do these tweets document the Black

Lives Matter movement through the public construction of its rhetoric on Twitter. With this study, I hope to shed some light on this active, lived history by taking a close look at how this form of hashtag rhetoric operates within public discourse.

1.2 - The Role of #BlackLivesMatter in the Evolution of the Movement

On February 26, 2012, Trayvon Martin, a 17-year old Black boy, was shot dead by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch coordinator for a gated community in Sanford, Florida. On July 13, 2013, Zimmerman was acquitted on charges of second-degree murder. Following Zimmerman's acquittal, activists Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi started #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter. Over the next three years, the hashtag evolved into Black Lives Matter movement (BLM). The organization defines several goals: to work for "the validity of Black life" ("About") by creating "a space for the celebration and humanization of Black lives" ("Herstory"); to work for "a world where Black lives are no longer systematically and intentionally targeted for demise" by sustaining a "call to action and a response to the virulent anti-Black racism that permeates our society"; to "(re)build the Black liberation movement" by affirming the lives of "those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements," such as "Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum"; and to "[broaden] the conversation around state violence to include all of the ways in which Black people are intentionally left powerless at the hands of the state" ("About"). The movement's "Herstory" web page expands upon their goals and principles at length, acknowledging

that, though the three originators “created the infrastructure” for the movement, it took a collective effort to expand “the hashtag from social media to the streets.”

Although the movement began as the hashtag, the hashtag is not constitutive of the movement. Rather, the hashtag represents the first stage in the movement’s evolution and serves specifically as a communication and mobilizing tool for the movement.¹ The slogan was coined during an exchange between founders Alicia Garza and Patrisse Cullors on Facebook following the news of Zimmerman’s acquittal. In a Facebook post responding to the acquittal, Garza wrote, “Our Lives Matter. Black Lives Matter,” to which Cullors replied via comment, “#BlackLivesMatter.” (qtd. in Ruffin II, “Black Lives Matter”). As the hashtag spread across Twitter, new rhetorics began to emerge within the discourse. Between #BlackLivesMatter’s initial proliferation and the first peak of the phrase’s search interest in December of 2014, three high-profile killings of unarmed Black people by police occurred: Eric Garner in July 2014, Michael Brown in August 2014, and 12-year-old Tamir Rice in November 2014.² In each of these cases, framings of the victims from news media outlets repeatedly skewed towards vilification and none of the officers who pulled the triggers were indicted. As outrage swelled, BLM’s efforts and presence (and the hashtag) became synonymous with these incidents; social unrest grew, exemplified by the mobilization of upwards of fifty thousand people

¹ This classification is complicated by the fact that the hashtag is not necessarily meant to be wielded solely by official members of the BLM organization, but rather is a tool produced by the movement that operates independently and is used by individuals that constitute a wider Twitter public. In other words, the hashtag is a tactic of and for the movement, but it does not have to be used by members of the movement for it to serve its function.

² It should be noted that Eric Garner’s and Michael Brown’s deaths both rose to media attention due to the hashtags #ICantBreathe and #Ferguson, respectively.

(roughly three percent of the population of Manhattan [“Quick Facts”]) during the Millions March in New York City on December 13, 2014 (Barbato).

In *Persuasion and Social Movements*, Stewart et al. identify five stages of evolution: genesis, social unrest, enthusiastic mobilization, maintenance, and termination (89). The events I’ve outlined - the coining of #BlackLivesMatter, the rising social unrest, and the increasing mobilization of activists - loosely mark the first three stages of the evolution of BLM: genesis, social unrest, and enthusiastic mobilization. The first three years of #BlackLivesMatter discourse on Twitter reflect these stages insofar as they are documented in various ways within the discourse, which will become clear in my analysis. Stewart et al. also describe six persuasive functions of social movements: transforming perceptions of social reality, altering self-perceptions of protesters, legitimizing the social movement, prescribing courses of action, mobilizing for action, and sustaining the social movement (49). As a tactic of BLM, #BlackLivesMatter performs one central persuasive function: to alter self-perceptions of protesters. Though tweeted statements attached to #BlackLivesMatter may serve to transform perceptions of social reality, legitimize the movement, or mobilize for action, the core message of #BlackLivesMatter is designed solely to affirm Black life. #BlackLivesMatter may take the form of an objective, third-person declarative statement, but it transcends categorization as a rhetorical argument as it is not necessarily meant to persuasively communicate its inherent truth (i.e. that Black lives matter) to those who believe otherwise. Rather, based on my analysis of the Twitter discourse, I argue that the hashtag is largely meant to *reinforce* this truth among Black folks. BLM is a movement of and for Black folks, regardless of who utters #BlackLivesMatter or what is uttered alongside it.

As such, the hashtag is meant for Black folks as well, and its function is to strengthen the self-perceptions of Black folks by affirming their lives.

The hashtag's particular inherent persuasive function affects any rhetoric surrounding it. For example, in a tweet by user @RaefMusic that states, "The sad reality of the world we live in: some lives are more valuable than others #KenyaAttack #BlackLivesMatter," the persuasive function of the tweet may be to transform perceptions of social reality, but the inclusion of #BlackLivesMatter at the end saturates the entire tweet with the persuasive function of the hashtag. Though the rhetoric of the tweet may serve as a reminder of the state of social reality, the *hashtag rhetoric* qualifies this message with an appeal to the self-perceptions of Black people at large. In effect, the tweet reads, "Many in this world do not value your life, but remember that *your life does matter*." By nature of its inherent persuasive function, to include #BlackLivesMatter in any tweet is to imbue any rhetorical utterance with this reminder to Black folks: "Remember to love yourself."

Such is the case even in tweets that are not traditionally tagged (i.e. tweets that do not include the hashtag at the end of a statement, but, rather, include the hashtag within the statement). For example, user @Slickjnr's tweet, "#BlacklivesMatter isn't about a few men. It's about structural racism built on 400 years of black slavery," incorporates the hashtag into a sentence, using it not only as a hashtag, but as a direct reference to the movement. In this case, the hashtag operates as a noun phrase within a sentence, and functions grammatically within a statement whose persuasive functions are to transform perceptions of social reality and legitimize the movement. However, since the phrase is condensed and hashtagged, it carries added intentionality, and thus imprints the statement

with the persuasive function of the hashtag. Even if the tweet reads as a cohesive sentence, the hashtagging of the phrase is *transformative*, and effectively imbues the statement with the hashtag's message, "Your life matters, remember to love yourself," which can be transmitted via the surrounding statement, even if indirectly, to an audience.

This transformative operation sets what I refer to as hashtag rhetoric apart from the rhetoric of the tweet itself. I highlight the rhetorical operation of #BlackLivesMatter within tweets here to illustrate that these are relatively new, complex rhetorical genres that operate within a movement that that was founded "in cyberspace as a sociopolitical media forum" and require a different analytical approach than traditional oral or written rhetorics (Ruffin II). In his essay "Analyzing Social Movement Rhetoric," Richard J. Jensen points out that, before the advent of the civil rights movement, communication scholars "had traditionally focused on studies of great speeches by great orators, persuasion, and public speaking" (372). In the 1960s, however, "protest rhetoric included marches, music, slogans, chants, and other forms of nonverbal communication," and "scholars were forced to change the way they studied rhetoric and learn new tools of analysis" (Jensen 373). In analyzing recent protest rhetoric, Jensen posits, scholars must utilize traditional approaches and build upon them to create new ones in order to explore "how new technologies such as the Internet have impacted the role of leaders and the organization of movements," and, in this case, how these new technologies facilitate the public construction of new rhetorical genres that operate in new ways (374). The founders of BLM followed this process of adaptation in forming the movement. In his essay "Black Lives Matter: The Growth of a New Social Justice Movement," historian and African American Studies professor Herbert G. Ruffin II describes how BLM

organizers not only adapted organizational and rhetorical approaches of past and parallel movements (revising flawed elements and building upon effective ones), but also used social media technology to construct a new type of movement functionally suited to operate effectively within the current networked age.

When forming the movement, the founders of BLM appear to have been acutely aware of both their position within the rhetorical ecology of Black activism and the many intersections Black activism shares with other social movements within the wider ecology. “Black Lives Matter,” Ruffin II explains, “incorporated those on margins of traditional black freedom movements.” Now, marginalized folks such as “women, the working poor, the disabled, undocumented immigrants, atheists and agnostics, and those who identify as queer and transgender,” play highly visible, prominent roles in the movement (Ruffin II). The founders of BLM also recognized approaches taken by past leaders that would most effectively contribute to an inclusive, mindful, intersectional framework for their movement in order to attract the widest possible audience (i.e. any and all who are marginalized by white supremacist patriarchy). Martin Luther King, Jr. held that “none of us are free until all of us are free” (qtd. in Ruffin II, “Black Lives Matter”). Stokely Carmichael, the first leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, critiqued the weaknesses of the established Civil Rights Movement and “[reconstructed] social reality for his audiences in terms and experiences they understood well,” particularly young Black folks (Stewart 436). Fannie Lou Hamer, voting rights activist and vice-chair of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, valiantly attempted to forward a leaderless, non-hierarchical grassroots participatory politics program “that strove to advance the interests of all marginalized people in [Mississippi]” by involving

poor folks that had been disenfranchised (Stephens II). Theologian James H. Cone draws upon the “black *self-love* [and] communal solidarity” offered by the “black, working-class church” in which he was raised in calling for a “new economic and political system of the United States for poor blacks and other downcasts” via Black Liberation Theology (Hopkins 387, emphasis mine). Though BLM is inherently critical of the weaknesses and limitations of the civil rights movement, it also affirms the value of those who came before BLM by incorporating particularly productive approaches into their own mission. By simultaneously questioning and honoring (read: reclaiming) the efforts of its predecessors and by synthesizing the approaches of various aligned social justice causes (e.g. feminism, LGBTQIA rights, disability rights, trade unions, etc.), Garza et al. frame injustice against Black people as a public problem affecting individuals at every intersection of white supremacist patriarchal oppression.

Political scientist Deva Woodly, whose approach to the study of democratic politics focuses on the ways in which public meanings shape our politics through all manner of public discourse (particularly social media), argues that movements emerge when enough people gain “insurgent consciousness,” which she defines as the “understanding of a grievance” caused by the status quo arrangement of power as a “public problem” that may be solved from the ground up through the effort of ordinary folks. This insurgent consciousness is facilitated by “injustice frames” constructed by activists (Woodly). In the case of BLM, the injustice frame took the form of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. By constructing an injustice frame designed to operate within social media networks, the founders were able to rapidly “awaken and activate” (i.e. foment insurgent consciousness within) the public on a global scale (Woodly). Herein lies the

power of #BlackLivesMatter as both the genesis of BLM and a communication and mobilization tool. As Woodly puts it, this injustice frame made coherent “the vividly repressive response of the state” with regard to Trayvon Martin’s death, and “turned the public pain. . . and communal trauma, which had been forged into shared affect on social media, into collective action and political demand.”

Apart from using the simple truth that Black life has value as a self-affirming slogan for protesters and activists, #BlackLivesMatter acts as a digital sociolinguistic vehicle designed to encode the movement’s grievances into an instantly spreadable datum. The hashtag’s operational function within Twitter augments its potency as a rhetorical tool, and the message it contains (“remember to love yourself”) augments its viral capacity as a hashtag. Without question, the Black Lives Matter movement would exist without the hashtag, but the movement would arguably not have facilitated insurgent consciousness as quickly or as widely had its message not been publicly distributed via #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter.

1.3 - State of the Field

1.3.1 - Overview

As a discourse analysis centering on the rhetorical operations of #BlacklivesMatter on Twitter, this thesis fits squarely within the field of Twitter studies. Given the broad spectrum of the medium’s applications, Twitter scholarship intersects with many other fields, a number of which this thesis also engages with. Aside from substantial volumes on Twitter and the role of social media in the public sphere and society at large, this thesis draws largely from several focused studies on Twitter

discourse and hashtag rhetoric in the context of social movements, which fall within the fields of sociology, cultural anthropology, and media studies. In addition to providing an overview of the scholarship that has informed this thesis, the purpose of this section is to provide relevant background on Twitter and activist hashtag rhetoric and to foreground my own framing of #BlackLivesMatter discourse by exploring prominent scholarly framings of Twitter's role in social movements.

1.3.2 - The Evolution of Twitter - From Banality to Civic Participation

Katrin Weller, Axel Bruns, Jean Burgess, Merja Mahrt, and Cornelius Puschmann have edited a thorough and balanced critical introduction to Twitter scholarship titled *Twitter and Society*. The book collects international research on the current uses of and issues surrounding Twitter from leading scholars in rhetoric, law, marketing, journalism, cultural studies, social science, computer science, and political science. A prominent topic of discussion throughout *Twitter and Society* involves the platform's potential use as an outlet for pointless babble and, conversely, its potential as a forum for substantive reporting and political discourse. Though Twitter has a wide spectrum of potential functions, as evidenced by the range of fields the book draws from, the dichotomy between self-centered banality and civic participation in Twitter discourse lends itself to a common scholarly debate over how the platform ought to be approached. This debate is unpacked in the foreword to the volume, in which Richard Rogers, chair in New Media and Digital Culture at the University of Amsterdam, provides a thorough run-down of the state of the field and makes a case for Twitter as an object of study. Rogers suggests that,

as the platform has evolved, scholarship has grown from an exercise in exploring the banality of Twitter discourse to considering its role in mediating major world events.

Rogers traces the evolution of Twitter as a platform through three different stages, describing the focus of Twitter studies at each stage. Rogers refers to these three stages as “Twitter I,” “Twitter II,” and “Twitter III” (ix-xxvi). The first iteration of the platform, Twitter I, took form at the company’s inception in 2006, and lasted about three years. Rogers points out that Twitter began as an “urban mobile lifestyle tool” for allowing friends to maintain a networked presence on the web and to follow each other (xii). The company’s tagline during these years was “What are you doing?” (which appeared in the text box reserved for typing tweets within, suggesting that one’s tweets should answer this question). Rogers suggests that this prompt correlates with users’ tweets being characterized by a ubiquitous banality, and that many scholars roundly considered the lion’s share of Twitter communication to be phatic in nature and mostly “devoid of substantive content” (xiv). This sentiment is exemplified by critics’ fixation over the “what I had for lunch today” tweet, which appears to have been the go-to tweet type to scoff at, often used to write Twitter off as a subject unworthy of study.

Most Twitter studies during this period were aimed at categorizing different types of tweets, an exercise that ultimately served to distinguish different forms of banality and yielded a clear minority of tweets with so-called “pass-along value” (Rogers xiii). Rogers does point out that, even during this early period, more well-rounded perspectives of the platform’s functions were present (e.g. Twitter co-creator Jack Dorsey’s comment that a tweet about breakfast may be “extremely meaningful to [his] mother”; also, the author cites an early scholarly work that uses Twitter to study cultural conditions by comparing

language use in different areas of the US via geo-tagged tweets), but most studies tended to play into the notion that the info-web had given way to the social web, thus diminishing the saliency of the content therein (xiii-xiv).

This binary became blurred by the shift in Twitter's tagline in late 2009 - from "What are you doing?" to "What's happening?" - marking the evolution of the platform into its second stage. Rogers suggests that this shift indicates Twitter's transformation from an "ego" machine to a "reporting machine," but that the platform was still being studied largely as the former (xvi). Studies continued to focus on categorizing different types of tweets, now distinguishing between a majority of "me-tweets" and one type of "information sharing" tweet (Rogers xvi). Despite this, Twitter had become a platform through which users experienced, followed, and commented upon large-scale media events, and scholarship and debates increasingly began to focus on studying Twitter's role in these events.

The most prominent of such "massively shared experience[s]" involved in this discussion were the 2009 Iranian presidential election protests, which occurred on Twitter insofar as the hashtag #IranElections began trending, and ground-level reports were shared internationally through the platform (Rogers xvi-xvii). Blogger Andrew Sullivan and journalist Clay Shirky used this event to frame their arguments for Twitter as a "revolutionary machine" and for "social media as a democratising force," respectively, while Evgeny Morozov, a prominent researcher on the sociopolitical implications of technology, argued that the Iranian voices on Twitter were not representative of the greater population of Iran (as most Iranians wouldn't have access to the necessary technology), and that ground-level public voices shouldn't necessarily be trusted to report

news in any case (Rogers xvii-xviii). Nevertheless, Twitter began to function as a news source, and scholars began to implement hashtags and other formal aspects of Twitter into their studies, focusing on Twitter as a space that aids culturally and historically significant events. Now, as Twitter is in its third iteration, its uses as an emergency communication channel, an event-following technology, and a marketing tool have led to massive studies of tweets as data in fields as diverse as social sciences, law, and economics.

While the debate over whether Twitter ought to be studied seriously may now be moot on account of its demonstrably growing influence over the way the public experiences and interacts with world events and exigencies, scholars are still divided over whether or not Twitter is, as Sullivan and Shirky suggest, “a democratising force” (Rogers xvii). As a politically charged public utterance, tweeting #BlackLivesMatter constitutes some level of civic participation. However, whether such political participation on Twitter has a positive effect on political efficacy, or whether it strengthens the political public sphere, is the subject of much scholarly debate. While it is not my intention to frame #BlackLivesMatter or other activist hashtags as having a positive or negative influence over the public sphere, scholarship on this subject is helpful in determining the extent to which Twitter can be considered a reflection or extension of the public sphere.

1.3.3 - The Public Sphere Debate - Twitter as a Generator of Counter- and Mini-Publics

Christian Fuchs directly addresses the debate over Twitter's relationship to the public sphere in his 2014 book, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, devoting an entire chapter to the subject (179-209). Fuchs foregrounds his central research questions (first, whether Twitter constitutes a public sphere, then, whether Twitter advances or harms the political public) by critiquing the notion that Twitter had, or could have had, a central role in the 2011 revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, invoking Lotan et al.'s 2011 study on the subject (189). Fuchs reads Lotan et al.'s central claim that “the revolutions were, indeed, tweeted” as a premise for framing these uprisings as “Twitter revolution[s]” and cites their findings that journalists, bloggers, and activists were largely responsible for the dissemination and circulation of information about the revolutions on Twitter as insufficient evidence on which to base such an argument (180). Fuchs concludes that, though a high volume of retweets about an event may help “raise global awareness,” the authors' analysis does not shed any light on the “role these tweets had in mobilizing activists on the street” (180). Indeed, my own analysis in chapter 3 reads “mobilizing” tweets [i.e. calls to action] simply as reflective of what's happening on the ground rather than proof of tweets positively correlating with ground-level mobilization.

Fuchs's sentiments reflect my own inclination to make a clear distinction between the Black Lives Matter movement and #BlackLivesMatter discourse on Twitter. Granted, Lotan et al.'s claim that “Twitter plays a key role in amplifying and spreading timely information across the globe” reflects my own assertion that #BlackLivesMatter's proliferation on Twitter played a substantial part in fomenting swift insurgent

consciousness for the movement (1375). However, even though my own study does not take into account any data that might aid in establishing a concrete causality between hashtag activity on Twitter and the overall efficacy of the movement, the validity of such a correlation is questionable nonetheless, given the fact that social media technology is a human-created tool that is embedded in society, and, as Fuchs puts it, “it is the people living under and rebelling against power relations, not the technology, who conduct unrest and revolutions” (202). The notion of a “Twitter revolution,” Fuchs attests, carries the misguided implication that “Twitter constitutes a new public sphere of political communication that has emancipatory political potentials” (180).

Unlike Richard Rogers, who merely provides an overview of the debate over Twitter as a democratizing force in the foreword to *Twitter and Society*, Fuchs considers the merits of each argument and examines each in light of Jürgen Habermas’s concept of the public sphere. Habermas characterizes the public sphere as requiring open access to all citizens within a society, unrestricted freedom of association and assembly, and formation of public opinion through critical debate over rules that govern relations within a society (qtd. in Fuchs 181-183). Fuchs argues that because entertainment far outweighs politics as a topic of discourse on Twitter, and because “Twitter is dominated by the young, educated middle class and *excludes* other groups, such as workers, farmers, and elderly people,” Twitter cannot be considered a public sphere as it is far from properly constitutive of “‘a society engaged in critical public debate’ about politics” (199-200, emphasis mine). Furthermore, Fuchs refutes the technological determinist position that Twitter advances the political public sphere and benefits democracy by unpacking Twitter’s underlying capitalist political economy, which clearly limits freedom of

association and assembly (200). Fuchs identifies Twitter, and the Internet at large, as a forum for user-generated content in which the audience exists as a prosumer commodity, which is to say that users generate data that is “sold as a commodity to advertisers” (199). This exploitation “generates a dispossessed non-owning class” in opposition to the “Twitter owning-class,” whose capital gains rely on “economic surveillance of user data” (Fuchs 199-200). As a profit-oriented corporation that “stratifies visibility of tweets, profiles and trends...at the expense of everyday users,” Twitter, Fuchs asserts, is “detrimental to the character of a public sphere,” and does not advance “a participatory or democratic system” (199-200).

Fuchs suggests that Twitter is not a public sphere, but rather what Habermas would refer to as a manufactured “pseudo-public sphere” in which a profit-driven system built around culture consumption and audience commodification operates under the pretense of democratic participation (201). However, in *Citizen Participation and Political Communication in a Digital World*, a volume edited by Alex Frame and Gilles Brochette, several scholars offer alternative conceptions of Twitter’s relationship to the public sphere and expand upon Fuchs’s discussion of various extensions of the public sphere, such as ad hoc publics, counterpublics, and mini-publics. This volume is a compendium of scholarly research on the ways in which civic participation is evolving in a digitally networked age, the nature of social media’s increasing role in political activism, and the types of publics Twitter cultivates.

Contrary to Fuchs, some *Citizen Participation* contributors, including Jaromír Mazák and Václav Štetka, suggest, based on empirical evidence gleaned from computer-assisted data collections, that political engagement on social media is, indeed, positively

correlated with political efficacy in the real world (125-138). In “Re-Imagining the Meaning of Participation for a Digital Age,” Darren G. Lilleker approaches this sentiment cautiously, acknowledging digital technology’s potential negative effects on democratic life while identifying several positive aspects of social media’s affordances. Citing several studies on cognitive engagement during Internet use, Lilleker suggests that as social media users graduate from passive consumption of information to “active interrogation,” they begin to feel well-informed, and that the more informed users are, “the more *empowered* they feel,” and “the more likely they are to engage in some form of expressive behavior” (113, emphasis mine). Networks, Lilleker further suggests, afford “belonging within a *community*,” imagined or otherwise, which encourages expression through “the promise of connectedness” (116, emphasis mine). Expression within a community affords the feeling that one’s voice is being heard and thus lends itself to the feeling of empowerment, which “is important for sustaining engagement and acting as a participant in any form of activity” (Lilleker 116). The notion of a well-informed community cultivating feelings of empowerment by encouraging expression is directly reflected in my own framing of #BlackLivesMatter discourse as fostering critical thinking and empowerment via informed questioning of social structures and expressions of self-affirmation, which I will discuss at length in chapter 3.

In “Twitter as a Counterpublic Sphere: Polemics in the Twittersphere During French Electoral Campaigns,” Arnaud Mercier expands on Lilleker’s discussion of communities by pointing out Twitter’s capacity to create communities through hashtags, which act as a “coordination tool” and provide a relatively focused forum for “critical conversation about a specific event, often of a polemical nature” (140). As a hashtag

community formed around “altering self-perceptions” of Black folks and “transforming perceptions of social reality,” #BlackLivesMatter exhibits some key qualities of Nancy Fraser’s concept of subaltern counter-publics, a particular extension of the public sphere that Mercier discusses at length (Stewart et al. 49). Invoking Fraser, Mercier describes counterpublics as ““parallel discursive arenas”” in which members of “dominated social groups” share their sentiments with “their affinity-based community” and ““circulate counter discourses’ to produce ‘their own interpretation of their identities, interests and needs”” and radically modify the ““existing norms and patterns...of the critical public sphere”” (142-143). Though Mercier specifically focuses on how French citizens use methods of irony and mockery such as personal insults, indignation, and accusations of conspiracy to destabilize politicians and the media during elections, his analysis of the rhetorical operations of counter-publics is representative of many scholarly framings of activist hashtag communities, particularly in the case of #BlackLivesMatter, which rhetors often wield in order to reclaim Black identity and representation of Black life in the media.

In “The Mediatization of Politics and the Digital Public Sphere: The Dynamics of Mini-Publics,” Caja Thimm lends credence to #BlackLivesMatter’s operation as a counterpublic, noting that counterpublics are particularly favorable for those with “low social visibility” who may have relatively limited access to the media sphere (172). As will be explored later in this chapter, #BlackLivesMatter and other adjacent hashtags are often used to increase visibility of incidents of police brutality against Black folks that are not being circulated in the media. This functionality is related to what Thimm identifies as Twitter rhetors’ desire for self-affirmation through self-expression, which

#BlackLivesMatter fulfills on multiple levels (168). By using the hashtag to increase visibility of the harassment or unwarranted death of a Black person, Black rhetors affirm not only their own lives by nature of the hashtag's inherent persuasive function, but also the life of the victim in question.

The latter part of Thimm's article explores mini-publics, which she describes as small circles of well-informed groups that "engage in information exchange processes and discourses" surrounding "a shared topic in a publicly visible and publicly accessible online space over a period of time" (173). Thimm identifies several subsets of mini-publics, including platform-based mini-publics (which materialize on one particular media platform that determines the dynamics of the public), polymedia mini-publics (which are more intense, occur across a number of platforms, and engage with a wider public), and event-driven mini-publics. The latter may be ad hoc mini-publics, which react to a particular incident and are "characterized by a short duration and high intensity," and over-time mini-publics, which occur over longer periods and are "characterized by variable levels of activity" (Thimm 174).

Thimm's concept of mini-publics provides an apt description of hashtag discourse communities. This is particularly true for event-driven mini-publics, which are exemplified by hashtags such as #JusticeforTrayvon and #Ferguson. Since these discourse communities materialized specifically in reaction to the killings of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, respectively, they can both be considered ad hoc mini-publics. #BlackLivesMatter, on the other hand, has remained active since it materialized in 2012, and activity tends to ebb and flow as incidents and developments in the movement rise and fall in public consciousness. As such, the #BlackLivesMatter

discourse community, over time, can be considered a subaltern counter-public operating under the umbrella of the movement at large. Regardless of its effect on the efficacy of the movement outside of its function as an organizational and mobilization tool, as a discourse community, #BlackLivesMatter operates as a space in which Black rhetors can distribute information that is ignored by the media, circulate counternarratives to correct unjust misrepresentations of Black deaths and Black life, and find empowerment through self-affirmative expression.

1.3.4 - Hashtag Publics and Discourse Communities - Focused Studies on Activist

Hashtags

Much of the scholarly research on Twitter in the two volumes discussed above is reinforced by recent focused studies on activist hashtags as discourse communities. In his 2013 study, “Black Twitter? Racial Hashtags, Networks and Contagion,” sociologist and communications scholar Sanjay Sharma frames Twitter as a “technocultural assemblage” and frames “racialized hashtags” - or “Blacktags” - such as #onlyinthe ghetto and #ifsantawasblack as “contagious digital objects” that “articulate and interact with” ethno-racial identities by circulating meaning and affects like “anti/racist humour, sentiment and social commentary” (46-64). Sharma contends that racialized identities and “ethno-racial collective behaviors” are not performed or represented within Twitter; rather, they are “emergent aggregations, materialized through the contagious social relations produced by the networked propagation of Blacktags,” and invokes Weller et al. (*Twitter and Society*) in framing hashtags as ad hoc publics (46-50).

In “#Ferguson: Digital protest, hashtag ethnography, and the racial politics of social media in the United States,” Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa theorize activist hashtag circulation using sociology and linguistic-anthropology-based approaches to attempt a “hashtag ethnography” that examines “how social media platforms can provide strategic outlets for contesting and reimagining the materiality of racialized bodies” (4-17). The authors focus on #Ferguson and, to a lesser extent, #BlackLivesMatter, and highlight these hashtags’ roles as field site within which Black Twitter users can address negative, negligent, or altogether absent mainstream media narratives surrounding “state-sanctioned violence against racialized populations” by circulating counternarratives and re-framing Black identity on their own terms (Bonilla et al. 12). Sociologist Kitsy Dixon builds upon hashtags’ potential to empower users by allowing them to redefine their own narratives within the context of feminist hashtags in her 2014 study, “Feminist Online Identity: Analyzing the Presence of Hashtag Feminism.” In addressing the debate over whether feminism “acknowledge[s] real life experience outside of the academic terrain,” Dixon frames hashtags such as #YesAllWomen as virtual spaces within which women seeking to form communities with other women can push against patriarchal social constructs and re-author their lives by sharing their own narratives (34).

Finally, the scholarly journal *Feminist Media Studies* published three special issues constituted entirely by articles on feminist hashtags between 2014 and 2015, holding space for some particularly salient scholarship on hashtag activism as an empowering counterpublic force for Twitter users seeking to push against white supremacist patriarchal culture. As Susan Berridge and Laura Portwood-Stacer explain in

their introduction to the third installment, “Feminism, Hashtags and Violence Against Women and Girls,” hashtags have substantial potential as injustice frames through which women can address and expose “the transnational pervasiveness” of violence against women and Black folks, and as spaces in which to collectively challenge traditional framings of these exigencies and identities by sharing their own lived experiences (341).

Two articles from this series offer particularly pointed perspectives on activist hashtags as empowering counterpublic spaces. Journalist and communications scholar Sherri Williams’s “Digital Defense: Black Feminists Resist Violence with Hashtag Activism” examines the rhetorical operation of Black feminist hashtags such as #SayHerName and #BlackWomensLivesMatter (341-358). Williams deconstructs ubiquitously negative mainstream media depictions of black women, highlighting how these misrepresentations lead to pervasive ignorance of black women’s issues, and explicitly defines these hashtags as “site[s] of resistance” from which Black Feminists wield the platform to bring attention to these issues (343). Ethnographer Tara L. Conley expands upon this rhetorical operation at length in “From #RenishaMcBride to #RememberRenisha: Locating Our Stories and Finding Justice,” which examines one specific exigency and the activist hashtag discourse communities that formed around it (1111-1113). As Conley explains, the “lives of black women and girls are often downplayed, exploited, or all-together ignored in mainstream media and other public discourses” (1112). A case in point was Renisha McBride, a 19-year-old Black woman who, in 2013, sought help after crashing her car and was shot dead after knocking on the door of a man who believed her to be an intruder. Following her death, feminist activists used the hashtags #RenishaMcBride and #RememberRenisha to publicly call attention to

her death in the face of widespread media silence. Conley contends that hashtags not only “compel us to act”; they are also, in themselves, “political actors,” and “represent evidence of women and people of color resisting authority, opting out of conforming to the status quo, and seeking liberation, all by way of documentation in digital spaces” (1111). When used by women of color as “tactics to counteract the emotional and psychological trauma of marginalization, colonization, and...death,” Conley explains that hashtags empower rhetors to move through and beyond “painful experiences of (re)membering violence in our homes, across our communities, and in our country” by providing an injustice frame through which to express their own lived experiences (1112). Because of this power, Conley argues, “hashtags represent a new semiotics of emancipation” (1111).

1.4 - The Role of Twitter and Hashtag Rhetoric in the Black Lives Matter Movement

In his 2015 essay “Social Media Helps Black Lives Matter Fight the Power,” Bijan Stephens begins with a narrative that illustrates how citizens and activists used technology to disseminate information during the civil rights movement, highlighting how complicated and labor-intensive it was to communicate and reach out to allies and the wider public in America during the 1960s. If you lived in the Deep South, Stephens explains, and you needed to communicate urgent news to the rest of the world, you would start by making a call from a telephone booth. Rather than dialing a standard number, however, which would require going through a switchboard operator, “who was bound to be white and who might block your call,” you would dial the number for a Wide Area

Telephone Service (WATS) line to reach a civil rights organization directly (Stephens). Your story would be recorded, mimeographed, and compiled into “WATS reports” that would then be mailed to a number of other allies of the movement around the US (Stephens). “In other words,” Stephens clarifies, “it took a lot of infrastructure to live-tweet what was going on in the streets of the Jim Crow South.”

Stephens’s mapping of the process by which information was circulated and distributed among networks during the 1960s illustrates the instrumental role technology plays in mediating social movements. He also explains that the most important technology to the movement at the time was film reels of police brutality captured during protests, which would be broadcast on national television and shared with the wider American public through the mass media. The technologies that mediated the civil rights movement were relatively diffuse and compartmentalized in that each technology performed a separate function: activists used telephones and WATS lines to communicate with one another, and journalists used cameras and film reels to distribute images of injustice and broadcast speeches by prominent rhetors in print and on television, respectively. As Stephens points out, “any large social movement is shaped by the technology available to it and tailors its goals, tactics, and rhetoric to the media of its time.” The Civil Rights movement, whose aim - among many others - was to advance equal rights for Black folks by making their struggles public, tailored their goals and rhetoric around television broadcasts. Leaders of the movement organized protests and wrote speeches (i.e. rhetoric was constructed around this technology) such that they were able to reach the public effectively through this medium.

As BLM activist DeRay McKesson points out, ““The tools that we have to organize and to resist [today] are fundamentally different than anything that’s existed before in black struggle”” (qtd. in Stephens, “Social Media”). Today, social movements are mediated largely by the internet, and activist tactics have evolved to suit this medium. The advent of social media technologies such as Facebook and Twitter has also changed the way people connect, communicate, distribute and consume information, and form communities and networks. Society has always been networked, but today the social field is far more networked and connected in that the Internet not only connects the over three billion people who use it, but also the physical technologies that individuals use in their everyday lives (Davidson).³ Cell phones capture images and videos that are distributed via the Internet on social media and YouTube, and television and print media entities now have web presences that allow them to reach audiences via the Internet on their cell phones and home computers. The now common tendency for people and media entities to personify these technologies as sentient collectives (e.g. @TwitterData’s tweet, “Watch how Twitter responded to last night’s #GOPDebate, measured in Tweets per minute” and Matthew Birl’s *BroBible* article, “The Internet DID NOT Take Kindly To Miley Cyrus Picking On Stephanie From ‘Full House’”) is evidence that, today, what appears on the Internet both reflects and mediates people’s lived experiences such that these technologies are, to a large extent, instrumental to how we experience and engage with information and each other.

The progenitors of BLM knew this when they created the movement. As Stephens posits, “If you’re a civil rights activist in 2015 and you need to get some news out, your

³ Note that these technologies (i.e. smartphones, computers, etc.), as well as the communities and networks they provide access to, are far less accessible – if at all - to those who cannot afford to buy them.

first move is to choose a platform. . . If you want to mobilize a ton of people you might not know and you do want the whole world to talk about it: Twitter.” Over the past decade, Twitter has become “exemplary as a ‘masspersonal’ communication platform, appearing to collapse the historic distinction between mass and interpersonal communication” (Sharma 49). As Sanjay Sharma points out, the openness of the platform early on “enabled users to influence the development of the architecture of the system,” users began using the hashtag symbol as a way of indexing their conversations, which quickly became a key element of the platform (49). Consequently, Twitter has cultivated “modes of communication. . . that were not necessarily envisioned by its original design” (Sharma 49). Hashtags in particular have developed into a rhetorical subgenre that is “generative of ad hoc communities” and “formative of a ‘new kind of sociality where [Twitter users] engage in ambient affiliation’” with one another (Sharma 49-50). As a result, Twitter has given way to a mode of public rhetoric construction that fosters “a vital sense of community,” and, in many cases (including #BlackLivesMatter), allows users to publicly construct and reclaim their identities, narratives, and struggles (Woodly).

One of the most powerful aspects of Twitter is its capacity to enable geographically distant users “who are territorially displaced to feel like they are united across both space and time” (Bonilla et al. 7). This allows users around the globe to “enter into a shared temporality” that Teju Cole describes as “public time,” another way of describing a counterpart to public space (Bonilla et al. 7). As Bonilla et al. put it, “the dialogicality and temporality of Twitter create a unique feeling of direct participation” (7). For example, users who engaged in Twitter discourse using the hashtag #Ferguson

during the unrest surrounding Michael Brown's death did not necessarily have to be there in order to feel they were participating in the event in real time. This particular hashtag is what Daer et al. refer to as "semantic tagging," which is used as a "method for sorting, finding, and organizing content." In the case of #Ferguson, users tweeting with this hashtag were engaging in discourse surrounding the events in Ferguson, thus forming a discourse community within Twitter in which users circulated and distributed information and sentiments regarding that particular exigency.

#BlackLivesMatter, on the other hand, is what Daer et al. refer to as a metacommunicative hashtag. While semantic hashtags provide context, metacommunicative hashtags contain their own messages that comment on the context implied by the adjacent utterance. "The use of hashtags as 'metacommentary'," Daer et al. explain, "is a distinctly rhetorical practice" whose "meaning lies with [its] function, not [its] form." Metacommunicative hashtags do more than categorize the tweet as pertaining to a particular topic. Rather, they encode a particular, often complex mindset or rhetorical approach toward a specific exigency, which makes them particularly effective when used to create injustice frames. When used as a tool for activism, these hashtags are instrumental in creating "a virtual space where victims of inequality can coexist together in a space that acknowledges their pain, narrative, and isolation" (Dixon). For example, the feminist hashtag #YesAllWomen is, in form, a response to the notion that not all men engage in misogyny or violence against women (the response being that this may be so, but all women experience some form of gender-based oppression). Its function as a rhetorical metacommentary on this particular argument is expanded, however, when joined by a user's personal account of their own experience of

misogyny. When paired with this hashtag, the user's personal narrative becomes part of a larger conversation and is transformed into an injustice frame that serves to "expose the transnational pervasiveness of gendered violence" in a way that challenges traditional understandings of this problem and fosters "a space for women and girls to share their own experiences" (Berridge et al. 341).

#BlackLivesMatter functions in this way as well. Tara L. Conley links such hashtags to what Gloria Anzaldúa refers to as "la facultad," or "the inner meanings and deeper realities that we [women of color and indigenous folks] experience as a result of being pushed out of the dominant tribe" (1112). #BlackLivesMatter and other activist hashtags trace "trauma that [is] rooted in historical and structural violence, while at the same time, they [write] the counter stories" of those who endure that trauma (Conley 1112). Conley's notion of counter-stories bears an exploration of the ways in which activist hashtags function as tools with which to re-claim narratives and actively construct identity. Kitsy Dixon points out that "traditional representations of knowledge have been constructed from the societal perspective of the male," and explains that the rhetorical process of tweeting personal narratives attached to feminist hashtags is "an extension of re-authoring the lives of women by sharing their narrative." In her 2014 essay, "#AskThicke: 'Blurred Lines,' Rape Culture, and the Feminist Hashtag Takeover," Tanya Horeck analyzes women's re-appropriation of the hashtag #AskThicke, which was used to coordinate a Q&A with singer Robin Thicke, whose song, "Blurred Lines," implicitly advocates misogyny and date rape. By hijacking the Q&A with tweets like "#askThicke If one of your songs played in a forest and no one was around to hear it would it still be sexist and gross?" and "#AskThicke When you're not busy objectifying

women, making light of rape and justifying sexual violence, how do you like to relax?”, women shifted the focus of the discourse community from a Q&A with Thicke to a discussion about rape culture (Horeck 1105). Horeck argues that this sort of hashtag activism has the potential to recast “the socio-dynamics of discourse on rape” and “actively re-shape the cultural consensus on questions of gender, violence and power” (1106).

In cases of Black activist hashtags, Deva Woodly points out that BLM and the exigencies and events surrounding the movement are “reported and reflected upon” on Twitter in a way that enables users to “frame international and domestic debates, and perform agenda-setting functions that were previously the exclusive purview of trained journalists in established professional media organizations.” Sherri Williams expands upon this point, suggesting that “negative images that circulate about black women render them as ‘not newsworthy’ by many mainstream news organizations” (342). Williams identifies Twitter as a “site of resistance where black feminists challenge violence committed against women of color and they leverage the power of [the platform] to bring attention and justice to women who rarely receive either,” and points to Twitter users who construct rhetoric around hashtags such as #SayHerName and #BlackWomensLivesMatter (343). While mainstream news media have historically ignored the issues Black women face, these hashtags amplify them.

#Ferguson and #BlackLivesMatter are exemplary cases of a hashtag being a tool for “collectively constructing counternarratives and reimagining group identities” that push against mainstream media contexts in which “the experiences of racialized populations are overdetermined, stereotyped, or tokenized” (Bonilla et al. 6). By using

Twitter as a platform “for providing emergent information about the killing of Michael Brown and for commenting on the treatment of the officer who shot him,” activists and citizens constructed a discourse community around #Ferguson that became “a key site from which to contest mainstream media silences and the long history of state-sanctioned violence against racialized populations” (Bonilla et al. 5-6). Similarly, the #BlackLivesMatter discourse community became “a site for the reevaluation of black materiality” (Bonilla et al. 9). Bonilla et al. explain that Black Twitter users within this discourse community use this hashtag to construct rhetoric that aims to “document, contest, and ultimately transform their quotidian experiences by simultaneously asserting the fundamental value and the particularity of their embodiment both on- and off-line” (9).

In the case of #BlackLivesMatter, Deva Woodly contends that “since the emergence of the hashtag-cum-mass movement, the mainstream American conversation has been shifting.” This is due in part by the hashtag’s capacity to transmit awareness, as Kitsy Dixon puts it (37), of the fact that “racism and the struggle against it do not exist somewhere in the distant past,” and that “the terror and greatness we associate with [the Civil Rights movement] is right in front of our faces, as near to us as our screens” (Stephens, “Social Media”). More importantly, however, the hashtag serves Twitter users as a powerful rhetorical tool through which to “redefine social realities by combining new ways, and ideas, in forming communities” for Black folks who are seeking a space in which to share their lived experiences with each other (Dixon 39). As a result, Bijan

Stephens suggests that the emergence of this rhetoric “has changed the visceral experience of being black in America.”⁴

1.5 - Framework

Because messages on Twitter are, for the most part, publicly archived as evidence of online communication among and between users, discourse communities on Twitter are particularly suited for framing as spaces in which rhetorics flow and circulate as networked elements. As such, in my analysis of #BlackLivesMatter Twitter discourse, I use an ecological framework developed by Jenny Edbauer in her 2005 article, “Unframing models of public distribution: From rhetorical situation to rhetorical ecologies.” The scope and complexity of this discourse, its rhetoric, and its exigencies resist elemental frameworks used in many Twitter studies. Traditional methods of rhetorical analysis, such as prominent theorist Lloyd Bitzer’s approach to the rhetorical situation, often lean toward quantitative approaches to discourse, which can lead to a problematic framing of Twitter discourse as systematic, obscuring the lived human experience behind it.

Though Twitter scholarship has evolved substantially over the past five years, the texts produced through Twitter (i.e. tweets) are still often studied solely as data, and are thus largely understood to matter for the boon they provide to fields such as marketing. When studied as data, tweets are plundered for their “elemental properties,” while their “*material affects and processes*” as rhetorical texts are largely bypassed, and the

⁴ Again, it bears noting that access to Twitter, smartphones, and the Internet (and, thus, the digital and cultural literacies that these technologies afford) is still subject to limitations of class, age, access to education, and geography.

substance and nuances of the discourse that these texts are a part of is lost (Edbauer 23, emphasis original). Invoking Eberly, Edbauer suggests that rhetoric “‘*demands engagement with the living*’” and identifies rhetoric as the very process “‘through which texts are not only produced but also understood to matter’” (qtd. in Edbauer 23, emphasis original). In studying #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric across three years of discourse, my aim is to theorize the nature of its relationship to rhetors’ lived realities; to glean a sense of how #BlackLivesMatter matters to its rhetors beyond its face value as a hashtag or its goals as a monolithic movement. Further, in chapter 4, I theorize #BlackLivesMatter’s virality using a similar approach. In his 2012 book *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks*, Tony Sampson offers a theoretical framework for virality as it occurs across networks that is related to Edbauer’s ecological framework for rhetorical analysis, but builds on the nature of contagion in some interesting ways. Sampson’s framework theorizes virality as a product of “the forces of relational encounter in the social field,” which he describes as a vast epidemiological space “in which a world of things mixes with emotions, sensations, affects, and moods” (4). Like Edbauer’s framework for rhetorical analysis, Sampson’s framework for virality makes ample room for lived human experience and resists mere quantitative approaches.

Edbauer explains that traditional understandings of rhetorical situation tend to frame rhetoric as a “totality of discrete elements: audience, rhetor, exigence, constraints, and text” (Edbauer 7). Although these models can be useful, they tend to ignore how fluid rhetoric can be and fail to account for the spread of rhetorics within a wider ecology, thus misrepresenting “the fullness of rhetoric’s operation in public” (Edbauer 19-20). Edbauer aims to theorize the elements that constitute these frameworks “in a wider sphere of

active, historical, and lived processes” and to “rethink rhetorical publicness as a context of *interaction*” (8-9, emphasis mine). She augments popular understandings of rhetoric by applying a framework of “*affective ecologies*” that *recontextualizes* rhetorics within “temporal, historical, and lived fluxes” and theorizes public rhetorics as a “circulating ecology of effects, enactments, and events” (Edbauer 9, emphasis original). In explaining this ecological framework, Edbauer points to how elements of rhetorical ecologies are “enacted and lived, how they are put into use, and what change comes from the in-process-ness itself” (13). In other words, examining the operation(s) of public rhetoric benefits from focusing on the ways in which rhetors, audiences, exigencies, constraints, and messages interact, relate, flow, and circulate within the social field as elements of nature do within an ecology.

For example, a river does not operate within a closed system, but rather, as Edbauer might suggest, an open network. Edbauer suggests that human interaction primarily occurs through networking, and that the process of networking is largely constituted by “historically-shaped forces of flows” since people “carry with them the traces of effects from whole fields of culture and social histories” whenever they interact (9-10). Invoking philosopher and cultural critic Steven Shaviro, she states that ““the force of all messages, as they accrete over time, determines the very shape of the network,”” and, in turn, “shape of public rhetorics,” just as the forces and flows of various natural elements, as they accrete over time, determine the shape of a river (Edbauer 9-10). As such, Edbauer argues that the rhetorical situation can be best described in ecological terms of varying intensities of encounters and interactions - “much like a weather system” (12). By applying this ecological framework to public Twitter discourse,

Edbauer suggests that one is able to visualize public rhetoric's operation across a broader "field of social distribution" (i.e. in the case of this study, broader than simply its operation within Twitter) and to examine how public rhetoric circulates within what Raymond Williams describes as a "practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity" (13).

Edbauer's use of an ecological framework to recontextualize elements of rhetorical situation is exemplified by her problematization of exigence. Bitzer defines exigence as "an imperfection marked by urgency" (qtd. in Edbauer 17). Edbauer, on the other hand, sees exigence as rather a "complex of various audience/speaker perceptions and institutional or material constraints" (8). She cites Vatz, who argues that exigences do not happen in a vacuum; they are not isolated events that are discovered by rhetors, but rather are continuously constructed and thus mediated by rhetors (6). As such, exigencies are not a part of a closed loop, but rather an ongoing historical and social flux, and are "everywhere shot through with perceptions" (Smith and Lybarger, qtd in Edbauer 8). If this is so, then the constraints and perceptions that rhetors are subject to play a substantial role in the shaping of not only public rhetorics, but also exigencies. The material constraints of Twitter (e.g. a 140-character limit on Tweets, hashtag indexing, etc.) clearly affect the way #BlackLivesMatter rhetors address exigencies, distribute messages, and engage in discourse within the social field of Twitter, particularly with regard to the transformative interaction between uttered rhetoric and hashtag rhetoric. But if constraints may be understood as social conditions, mores, or limitations, then BLM's inclusive, humanistic culture may similarly shape the way the public experiences or addresses exigences (i.e. police shootings, presidential campaigns, etc.). Furthermore, if

exigences are subject to rhetors' perceptions, they must be subject to rhetors' self-perceptions as well, so if #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric fosters self-love and self-reflexivity, this may also shape the way #BlackLivesMatter rhetors and discourse communities experience and addresses future exigences.

Edbauer uses the Keep Austin Weird slogan as a case study to demonstrate her revised method for theorizing public rhetorics within an ecological framework. She applies this framework to the narrative of the phrase's evolution, from its inception by small business owners in Austin, Texas to its eventual development into a ubiquitous phrase used and manipulated by many different agents. In response to the exigence of the increasing corporatization of spaces in Austin, small business owners coined the phrase in order to garner support from the public in resisting this corporatization. As the phrase was distributed and circulated throughout the rhetorical ecology and across social fields, it took many different forms (e.g. bumper stickers, shirts, billboards, yard signs, etc.) and underwent several evolutions as it was re-appropriated, mutated into counter-rhetorics (e.g. "Keep Austin normal"), and even co-opted by the very sorts of corporate entities against which the phrase was originally meant to rally (Edbauer 19). Edbauer analyzes Keep Austin Weird rhetoric(s) using an ecological rhetorical model and reads public rhetorics as occurring within a "fluid framework of exchanges" (19). In doing so, she re-contextualizes the rhetorical situation surrounding the movement as a rhetorical *process* that "circulates in a wide ecology of rhetorics" by thoroughly tracing Keep Austin Weird rhetoric's myriad distributions across the social field (Edbauer 20).⁵

⁵ Edbauer, now Rice, continues her examination of the rhetorics and discourse surrounding urban sprawl and development in her 2012 book *Distant Publics: Development Rhetoric and the Subject of Crisis*.

While the evolution of #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric does not necessarily follow a narrative that mirrors that of Keep Austin Weird, similar processes and encounters can be identified with respect to its distribution and circulation within Twitter. By viewing #BlackLivesMatter discourse as engaging with rhetors' lived reality through a fluid rhetorical ecological framework, I explore how rhetoric is distributed among the #BlackLivesMatter discourse community within the social field of Twitter, and how #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric emerges as a publicly constructed rhetoric that positively affects people's lived experience. I argue that #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric is fostering, if not creating, a manner of public discourse in which humanity, inclusivity, self-reflexiveness, and self-love are emerging as prominent constraints through which future exigencies may be articulated.

Chapter 2 - Case Study

2.1 - Parameters

When this study began in April of 2015, #BlackLivesMatter had been active in public consciousness for at least three years. This thesis seeks to provide an overview of rhetorical approaches used in #BlackLivesMatter tweets at critical points during these first three years of the hashtag's use on Twitter. I have manually culled four hundred #BlackLivesMatter tweets from four catalytic days between April 2012 and April 2015, which I have used as the data set for this study. My first method for gathering source materials within this time window involved using Twitter's advanced search function and Google Trends - a tool that provides search data to chart consumer search behaviors on Google. After using Twitter's advanced search function to find the date of the first #BlacklivesMatter hashtagged tweet and Google Trends to chart search interest in the phrase, I located four points within this three-year window: the point at which the hashtag first appeared on Twitter (inception: April 11, 2012-July 17, 2013); the point at which it appeared the greatest number of times since inception (peak: December 14, 2014), the point at which it appeared the least number of times since inception (nadir: January 31, 2015), and the point at which this study took place (current: March 30-April 7, 2015). After locating these points, I used Twitter's search utility to find all tweets in which #BlackLivesMatter appears during each of these points, then took screenshots of at least one hundred tweets from each of these points. After all the data was culled and each set of tweets was indexed in a separate spreadsheet, I performed a rhetorical analysis of each tweet, noting both recurring patterns of rhetoric during each locus point and shifts that occur in these patterns across locus points.

The results of the case study aid in formulating preliminary answers to a number of questions for further study: What does the first three years of #BlackLivesMatter Twitter discourse look like? What might the qualities and shifts within the discourse across these three years suggest about the rhetorical function of the hashtag? Finally, with what sorts of powers does #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric imbue its rhetors?

2.2 - Academic Precedents

Though no studies have been performed with this particular methodology, nor solely about this particular hashtag, similar contemporary studies have been used in researching sociolinguistics and the performance of race and gender in the fields of social science and communication studies. In “Historicizing New Media: A Content Analysis of Twitter,” Humphreys et al. compare tweets to 18th and 19th century diary-writing habits. In doing so, the authors seek to reveal social and communicative functions of Twitter in a new light, and effectively demonstrate people's’ “long-standing social needs to account, reflect, communicate, and share with others” (Humphreys et al. 413). Jodi L. Rightler-McDaniels and Elizabeth M. Hendrickson also explore the social functions of Twitter in “Hoes and hashtags: constructions of gender and race in trending topics.” The authors of this study use critical discourse analysis and race and gender theory to examine how one subset of Twitter users’ social dialects, structures, processes, and relationships are played out textually through the use of the hashtag #BecauseOfHoes. While both of these studies are quite valuable in terms of their contributions to Twitter studies, they aren’t particularly helpful to this thesis, as they both use coding schemes to collect data and process tweets. Both studies use algorithm-based methods of content analysis to process

tweets, which, in the case of Humphreys et al. involved multiple teams of coders, and Rightler-McDaniels and Hendrickson use a systematic random sampling algorithm to obtain their data set.

While these studies use complex computer-assisted data analysis methods to collect and analyze source material, I have looked to two studies that rely on external digital sources to perform manual, qualitative analyses of tweets in constructing my own methodology. In a 2014 study out of Brazil, “He Votes or She Votes? Female and Male Discursive Strategies in Twitter Political Hashtags,” Cunha et al. correlate gender to linguistic variation by “comparing discursive strategies used by men and women when designating hashtags to their political tweets” (3). Using a data set collected by the Brazilian National Institute of Science and Technology for the Web, the authors manually collected and assessed a concentrated data set in order to “guarantee high precision and coverage, leaving the use of [automated] tools for next studies” (Cunha et al. 2).

Counterintuitively, the study whose parameters are most similar to my own was one of the first Twitter studies, undertaken in 2009 by marketing firm Pear Analytics. The study, which set out to examine “what people [were] *really* using Twitter for,” randomly sampled 2,000 tweets over the course of a week, disregarding user metadata, and manually analyzed and divided into six categories (Pear). Granted, this study is guilty of “[condemning] the accounting and reflecting practices on Twitter as narcissistic,” as Humphreys et al. put it, in that the study concluded that most of the content on Twitter can be considered pointless babble (428). But the simplicity of the study’s goal most closely reflects the aim of this thesis: to manually analyze a small data set without considering user information and to clearly identify rhetorical patterns within the set.

2.3 - Collecting Data

Google Trends allows one to search one or more terms within a selectable time window and provides a graph charting roughly how often the terms were searched over time. Since Twitter's search function does not provide visualizations of how often a given hashtag is tweeted over time within a specified window of time, I decided to index my four locus points according to search interest levels on Google regarding the phrase "Black Lives Matter" rather than frequency of the hashtag use in tweets.

In order to establish context, I researched significant events related to the Black Lives Matter movement and found that there were three prevalent deaths that correlated most prevalently with the development of the movement. The first was Trayvon Martin's in February 2012, which is considered to be the event that sparked the hashtag. The other two deaths associated most commonly with the movement were Michael Brown's and Eric Garner's. A search of these names in Google Trends between February of 2012 and April of 2015 confirmed that search interests regarding these three names were comparable. This search also revealed that the acquittal or non-indictments of those responsible for killing these three people yielded higher search interests than their deaths (see Fig. 1-3).

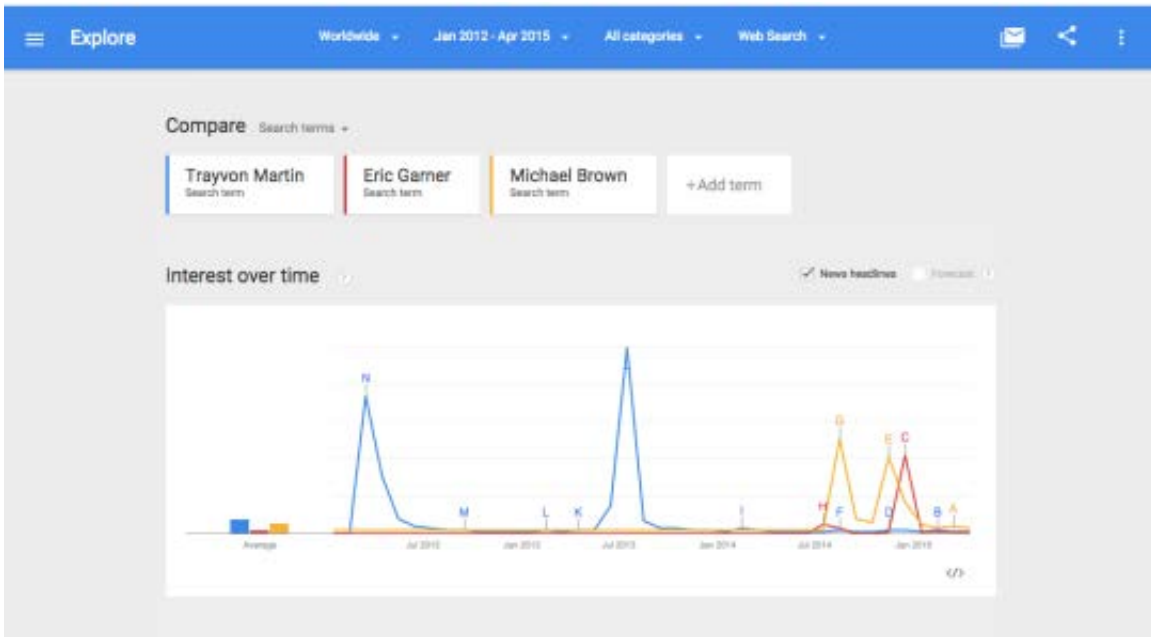


Fig. 1

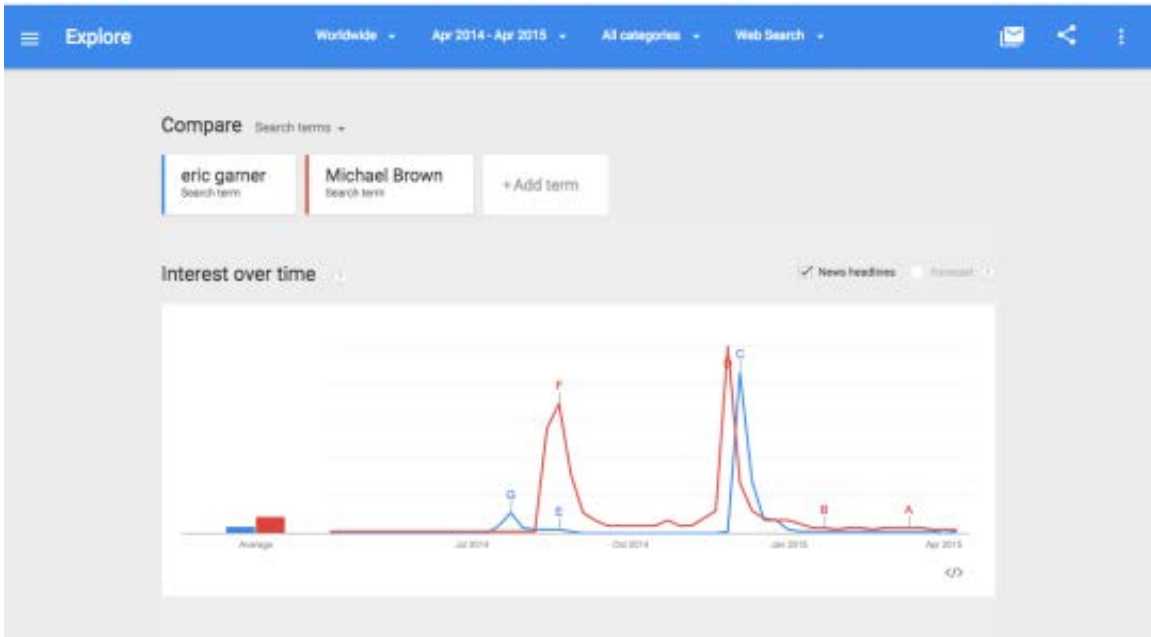


Fig. 2

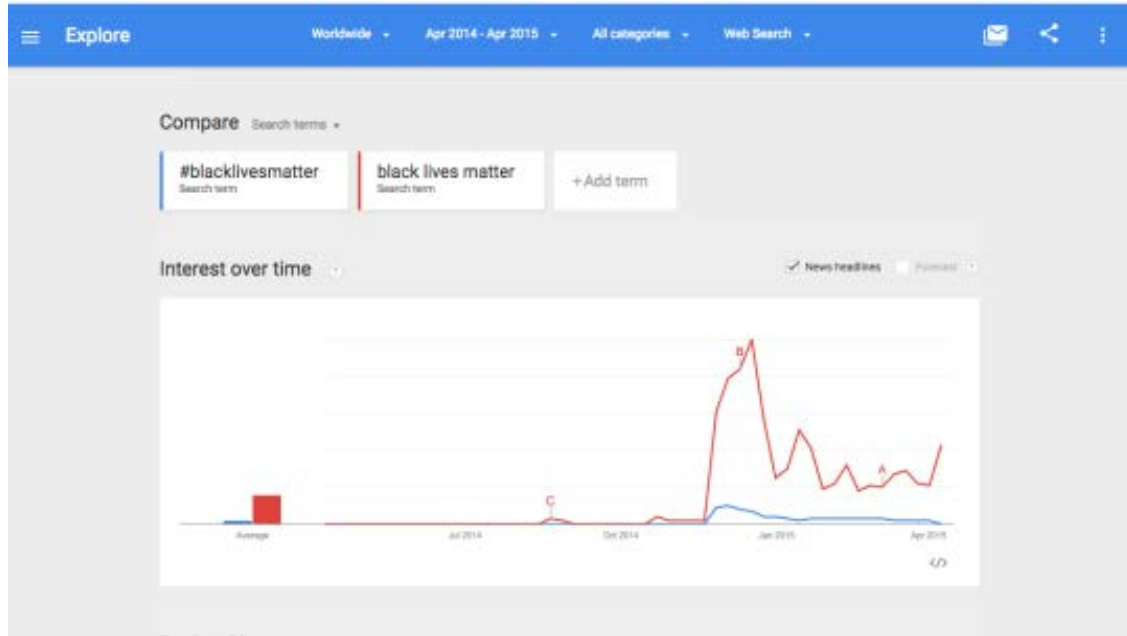


Fig. 3

A search of “Black Lives Matter” in Google Trends showed no search interest in the phrase whatsoever until the death of Michael Brown, which, even then, only yielded a bump in the graph. The peak of the phrase’s search interest did not occur until mid-December of 2014, after the indictment of Daniel Pantaleo, who put Eric Garner in a fatal chokehold. This peak directly coincided with the Millions march in New York City on December 13, 2014, which suggests that the widely publicized outrage expressed during public protests is correlated to the high level of public interest in the movement within this time window. Interest in the movement has ebbed and flowed at an average of about one third of the level of interest that occurred during its peak.

These Google Trend graphs provided me with a rich timeline and two out of four of my locus points, but I was unable to glean the date of the hashtag’s inception from the results. In order to find this date, I had to search for the hashtag month by month using Twitter’s search function. I began with February of 2012, the month Martin was killed,

but did not discover any tweets until I searched all tweets containing the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter during the month of April 2012. Only one tweet using the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter showed up during the month of April, and a total of three tweets using the hashtag occur between April and December of that year. No other tweets using this hashtag show up until July of 2013, after Zimmerman was acquitted. Having discovered the first ever tweet to use the hashtag, I was able to create a full timeline and begin collecting tweets.

2.4 - Overview of Discursive Trends at Each Locus Point

1. Inception - April 11, 2012 - July 17, 2013

While Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi - the progenitors of the Black Lives Matter movement - created the hashtag in 2013 following George Zimmerman's trial, #BlackLivesMatter first appeared on Twitter over a year earlier in April 2012 (on the date of Zimmerman's arrest), and was used in a total of three tweets prior to Zimmerman's acquittal on July 13th 2013 (see Fig. 4).

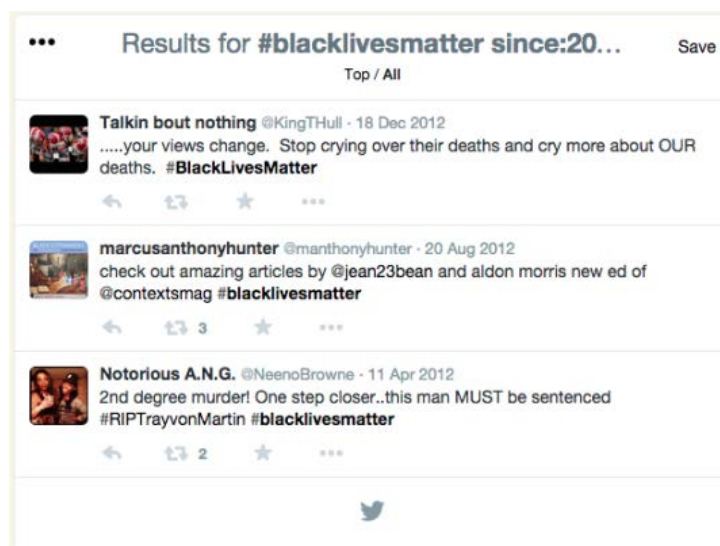


Fig. 4

Despite the fact that they appear to have been tweeted months before the movement officially materialized on Twitter, these three tweets demonstrate two out of what I found to be the four broad distinguishable categories of #BlackLivesMatter hashtagged tweets. The categories include, in order of prominence:

- 1) expressions of outrage;
- 2) promotions (e.g. shared articles, events, etc.)
- 3) standalone hashtags (either #BlackLivesMatter alone or paired with others);
- 4) humorous or casual tweets.

The first and third tweets pictured above clearly demonstrate expressions of outrage via calls to action; the first demands that George Zimmerman be sentenced for second degree murder, and the third demands that someone “stop crying over their deaths and cry more about OUR deaths,” though exactly who "their" and "our" designates is not clear (@KingTHull). The second tweet demonstrates promotion via call to action for people to “check out amazing articles” (@manthonyhunter).

After the first three #BlackLivesMatter tweets in April, August, and December of 2012, BLM hashtagged tweets begin to appear on July 13, 2013, the day of Zimmerman’s acquittal. On this day, only one tweet appears: “#blacklivesmatter” (@FightSoulCities). This tweet begins at the beginning, so to speak, as it is the very first #BlackLivesMatter tweet to demonstrate the standalone hashtag tweet type. Each following day, the number of #BlackLivesMatter tweets doubles. One can see the hashtag catching fire, going from one tweet to six the next day, then to eleven the next, then to twenty-six, then to at least fifty-three. Often tweeters will tweet only the hashtag, sometimes tagging other tweeters

in a digital *pass-it-on* gesture,⁶ sometimes pairing #BlackLivesMatter with #BlackLove.

One tweet even repeats the hashtag, as if the tweeter were crying it out at a protest:

“#blacklivesmatter #blacklivesmatter #blacklivesmatter #blacklivesmatter”

(@KINGDACEO).

While this set of tweets features a few examples of promotion tweet types, such as “LA folx! tune into KPFK at 8pm to listen 2 a dialogue abt the #TrayvonMartin case and the marches happening in LA #blacklivesmatter” (@teenaankhen), an example of the casual tweet type that reads “Damn I love this city... Lol [laughing emoji] #BlackLivesMatter be positive!!!” (@DipN_Pitts), and several standalone hashtags (more appear in this set than in any other, likely due to the infancy of the hashtag), the overwhelming majority of tweets in this set are expressions of outrage. A handful of examples of outrage tweet types appear in this set in which the tweeter calls out a person, people, or entity for lying, hypocrisy, or being disingenuous, such as “Fox News channel is on some Bull S@#! #blacklivesmatter” (@Angel_ahhh), and a few tweets appear in which the tweeter expresses an opinion with a tone of disappointment or disgust, such as “The system is not broken.....it is doing exactly what is intended, oppressing black folks.....#TrayvonNOLA#BlackLivesMatter” (@sunshinekarissa). Several tweeters express outrage via apparent statements of fact (which almost always take the form of a shared article), such as “Black defendants rarely get a ruling of justifiable homicide, whether the victim is white or black. [link to an article on *TheRoot.com* titled “Killing in Self-Defense: You Better Be White”] #BlackLivesMatter” (@opalayo), and via rhetorical questions, such as “The sound of police helicopters in Oakland is deafening. Will there

⁶One tweet clearly reads, “#blacklivesmatter Pass it on!” (@NijmieZD)

ever be justice for #OscarGrant or #TrayvonMartin #blacklivesmatter” (@robynmdrodriguez). However, most of the outrage in this first set of tweets is expressed through tweets that directly channel protests that were occurring in the real world, either through tweeting about future protests, live tweeting protests, or tweeting photos of recent protests. Photos of protests are either simply shared or paired with rhetoric that buttresses the images (see Fig. 5).



Fig. 5

These tweets most often use calls to action, either explicit⁷ or implicit.⁸ While the glut of standalone hashtag tweets in this set illustrate the proliferation of the #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter, these protest tweets document the materialization of the

⁷ e.g. “step up” (@JardanaPeacock); “keep the convo goin” (@AdamSM13); “get fired up” (@JohnnyGolightly); “RT” (@laura_luna); “take action” (@domesticworkers); “share widely” (@michacardenas); “march” (@DocMellyMel).

⁸ e.g. a photo of protesters is arguably an implicit call to action, especially when it is being live-tweeted by someone who is attending a protest at that moment.

Black Lives Matter movement as it occurred on the ground, and provide tangible images that communicate much of the outrage codified by #BlackLivesMatter among the Twitter-using community.

Between April 2012 and April 2015, as #BlackLivesMatter transformed from a hashtag into a global movement, the discourse surrounding the hashtag on Twitter became much more diverse and complex in terms of subject and rhetorical approach, which will become apparent in overviews of successive locus points. During this first period, however, the discourse is rather urgently focused on justice. Within this set, given its notably high volume of tweets in which #BlackLivesMatter is paired with hashtags calling for justice in the case of Trayvon Martin, the vast majority of tweets that occur during the first four days of the hashtag's wide use on Twitter manifest as an injustice frame addressing Martin's killing and Zimmerman's acquittal.

2. Peak - December 14, 2014

A year and a half after #BlackLivesMatter spread across Twitter, a remarkable confluence of police brutality incidents, non-indictments, activist organizing, and protests appear to have effectively viralized #BlackLivesMatter within the public consciousness on Twitter. Search interest in Black Lives Matter shot up with the non-indictment of Michael Brown's killer, Darren Wilson, on November 24 2014, and climbed even higher when a grand jury chose not to indict Eric Garner's killer, Daniel Pantaleo, on December 3, 2014. The latter grand jury decision sparked a slew of protests around the country over the next ten days, which came to a head with the Millions March in New York City on

December 13, 2014. This date marks the highest level of search interest in Black Lives Matter during the time window of my study.⁹

This set of tweets, which were culled from virtually thousands of tweets available in a search of *All Tweets* on this date, shows #BlackLivesMatter being appropriated, and in some cases hijacked, by those tweeting messages that either support some other movement (e.g. pro-life),¹⁰ or directly express anti-#BlackLivesMatter sentiments via counter-rhetorics. Many of these draw attention to black-on-black crime statistics, apparently to discredit #BlackLivesMatter for taking issue with police officers disproportionately brutalizing people of color (specifically African Americans) without facing consequences. Even more tweets take issue with #BlackLivesMatter's focus on the struggles of Black folks by suggesting that Black lives aren't the only lives that matter; most of these tweets suggest, rather, that "#AllLivesMatter". The latter tweets suggest that the #BlackLivesMatter movement is predicated upon the idea that black lives matter more than others, or even that *only* black lives matter. Chapter 3.2.2 focuses primarily on the implications of these counter-rhetorical tweets within the wider rhetorical ecology surrounding the #BlackLivesMatter discourse community.

3. Nadir - January 31, 2015

⁹ Note that search interest peaked again outside of the time window of this study; on August 9, 2015, the day after two Black Lives Matter protesters interrupted a Bernie Sanders rally in Seattle, search interest was five times higher than the December 14, 2014 peak.

¹⁰ e.g. "#ICantbreathe Planned Parenthood supports #BlackLivesMatter, but is responsible for Millions of dead Black babies" (@cuda1791), in which the tweeter not only hijacks the #BlackLivesMatter discourse community with a counter-rhetorical statement against Planned Parenthood, but also manipulates the BLM-adjacent hashtag #ICantBreathe to fit their own rhetorical aims.

Although this set of tweets - again culled from a search of all #BlackLivesMatter hashtagged tweets occurring on this day - takes place during the lowest point of Google search interest so far during this study's time window, common topics of discourse within the set suggest that global public awareness of the movement is higher than at any previous point. As the movement is being recognized as globally salient, the hashtag is being paired not just with other hashtags that revolve around the movement (e.g. #j4tmla, #ICantBreathe, #Ferguson, and #SayTheirNames), but also with other hashtags surrounding separate movements such as #translivesmatter and #yesallwomen.

Tweeters in this set appear to be actively historicizing the Black Lives Matter movement by pairing the hashtag with quotes from figures of authority from within the civil rights movement and the black power movement (e.g. MLK, Fannie Lou Hamer, James Baldwin, and the Black Panthers). Many tweets also focus on reminding other users of past victims of police brutality and murder whom they do not feel are being appropriately reported upon by the media. As I will discuss at length in chapter 3.2.3, tweets in this set are largely focused on sustaining public consciousness of the movement through such utterances, which are also employed by rhetors to reclaim their own lives by actively re-framing Black life, death, identity, and activism on their own terms.

4. Current - March 30-April 7, 2015

For the final set of one hundred tweets, I wanted to gather data from a stretch of days leading up to April 7, the cutoff date of this study, to represent a slightly broader view of what #BlackLivesMatter tweets look like currently. This approach mirrors my approach to the first set of tweets, which was culled from a time window spanning

several days following the inception of the hashtag (July 13-17 2013). This time, however, I culled one hundred of the *Top Tweets* from March 30 through April 7 of 2015, which allowed me to cull tweets that distributed #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric more widely across Twitter's social field. Note that, during this time window, another high-profile incident of police brutality by a white officer against an unarmed black person occurred (this time, the murder of Walter Scott by Michael Slager on April 4, followed by Slager's arrest on April 7). This incident was not, however, mentioned in any of the tweets from this time period. This is likely due to a delay in media attention surrounding the incident, as search interest of the incident peaked on April 9. The immediate action taken against Slager also likely led to a briefer period of concentrated outrage.

This set of tweets contained the widest array of tweet types and rhetorical approaches of all the sets, and one common theme was not distinguishable. However, more so than in other sets, tweets in this set focus on calling out the hypocrisy of Twitter users who show solidarity for other viral movements (e.g. #TIDALforALL and #BoycottIndiana) but do not openly or ostensibly support #BlackLivesMatter. Outrage is also continually expressed over the disparity between the attention given to the Charlie Hebdo attacks by Al-Qaeda gunmen in Paris on January 7, 2015 than the mass shooting of Garissa University students by Al-Shabaab militants in Kenya on April 2, 2015. This manner of calling out hypocrisy reflects the prominent role critical thinking plays in #BlackLivesMatter's rhetorical operation. Through such shared expressions, rhetors are likely to gain a sense of empowerment that may spread to others within the discourse community. This process of empowerment through expression is the focus of chapter 3.2.4.

CHAPTER 3 - ANALYSIS

3.1 - Overview

In chapter one, I explored #BlackLivesMatter's role as an injustice frame for the Black Lives Matter movement from the moment of its inception and discussed #BlackLivesMatter as counter-public discourse community in which rhetors use the hashtag to positively influence self-perceptions, circulate counternarratives, re-frame Black identity, and reclaim Black life through mass public self-affirmation. In this chapter, I perform a discursive analysis of each tweet set introduced in the previous chapter, exploring the myriad ways in which the discourse demonstrates the evolution of #BlackLivesMatter's rhetorical function as a tool for rigorous self-reflexive intersectional social critique and (self-)love.

My discourse analysis of the four tweet sets collected in Chapter 2 unpacks the points I've laid out about #BlackLivesMatter's functionality in Chapter 1 and highlights the stages of its evolution. Between April of 2012 and July of 2013, #BlackLivesMatter emerged as an injustice frame that rhetors used to address the systemic dehumanization of Black people in America in the wake of Trayvon Martin's killing. On December 14, 2014, the hashtag's inherent persuasive function of altering protesters' self-perceptions crystallized as rhetors wielded the hashtag as a tool for mass public affirmation of Black life in the face of invalidating counter-rhetorics driven largely, I argue, by white fragility. By January 31, 2015, rhetors began using the hashtag to augment rhetoric aimed at re-framing both Black identity and Black activism on their own terms, publicly constructing Black Lives Matter as a valid movement in the face of media misrepresentation and silence. Finally, by March of 2015, the hashtag came to embody its own activist mindset,

operating as a hinge for a particular mode of intersectional social critique centering around Black (self-)love.

In the spirit of Edbauer - whose ecological framework for rhetorical analysis directly informs this study - I approach #BlackLivesMatter discourse as a “fluid framework of exchanges” by analyzing its circulation within a “wide ecology of rhetorics,” exploring various transformations in the surrounding rhetoric as the hashtag’s functionality develops (Edbauer 19-20). Later, I draw on the Tardean theoretical underpinnings of Tony Sampson’s approach to contagion in the age of networks to explore the nature of #BlackLivesMatter’s spread across the social field and how its functionalities contribute to its spread. These approaches help make visible how #BlackLivesMatter functions as a living rhetorical force that saturates the surrounding rhetorical ecology with a love-based ethos that permeates the social field through rhetors’ utterances.

3.2 - Discursive Analysis of Tweets

It bears acknowledging that many exigent incidents similar to the killings of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, and Michael Brown have occurred nationwide both before and since April 2012 (the cases of Rekia Boyd, Laquan McDonald, Tamir Rice, Freddie Gray, and Sandra Bland come to mind). In fact, in 2015 alone, over one hundred unarmed black people were killed by police in the U.S. (“Unarmed Victims”), and 34 percent of unarmed people killed by police in 2016 were Black males, despite the fact that they make up only 6 percent of the U.S. population (Kelly et al.). Indeed, as Edbauer states, any given rhetorical situation is part of “an ongoing social flux,” and any given exigence

is essentially “a series of events” (8-9). This is to say that racism and racially-motivated violence in America has been occurring systemically for centuries within a “circulating ecology of effects, enactments, and events” as well as “material experiences and public feelings” (Edbauer 5-9). These experiences and feelings all intersect within the rhetorical ecology surrounding the #BlackLivesMatter discourse community, and the hashtag is an ongoing mass public utterance addressing the long-standing, complex exigency of racism that continues to flow like so many rivers, streams, and sewers through our society. The death of Trayvon Martin and his killer’s exoneration, however, were instrumental in catalyzing #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter, the development of the Black Lives Matter movement at large, and the subsequent ascension of the hashtag and the movement into global public consciousness.

3.2.1 - #BlackLivesMatter’s First Appearance on Twitter (April 2012-July 2013): Emergence as an Injustice Frame

Despite the centuries-long flow of race-based injustices before it, the single exigent drop, so to speak, that precipitated #BlackLivesMatter’s emergence from the rhetorical primordial soup was the death of Trayvon Martin at the hands of George Zimmerman. The hashtag, however, did not appear immediately. Though Martin’s death was covered widely by the media, the hashtag first appeared on Twitter two months later in a tweet calling for Zimmerman to be sentenced for second degree murder. Two other tweets emerged over the next few months, but none appeared at all during the first six months of 2013. Then, on July 13, the day of George Zimmerman’s acquittal, #BlacklivesMatter hashtagged tweets appeared again, beginning with a single hashtag

that day and increasing exponentially over the next week. As rhetors embedded the hashtag within calls for justice and live-tweets of protests, #BlackLivesMatter circulated quickly and widely into the rhetorical ecology. These utterances of #BlackLivesMatter, most of which were couched by demands for justice as well as images related to such rhetoric, ground the hashtag in counter-public discourse about a perceived failure or denial of justice to Martin, his family, and Black people at large in America. As such, they illustrate the hashtag's functionality as an injustice frame addressing race-based injustice against Black people.

An investigation of #BlackLivesMatter as an injustice frame requires an analysis of the rhetoric and constraints involved in the most prominent exigency (Martin's killing) from which the hashtag emerged, keeping in mind Edbauer's construction of exigence as "a complex of various audience/speaker perceptions and institutional or material constraints" (8). On the evening of February 26, 2012, in a gated suburban community in central Florida, George Zimmerman - a 28-year old neighborhood watchman - fatally shot Trayvon Martin - an unarmed 17-year-old Black boy - during a violent altercation after having followed Martin for at least five minutes. Zimmerman called the police during the pursuit to report a "black male" in a "dark hoodie" who looked "real suspicious" (i.e. not to be trusted), "up to no good" (i.e. criminal), "on drugs or something" (i.e. out of control), and lamented that "these assholes always get away" ("Transcript"). Note that the two tangible identifying descriptors, *black* skin and *dark* hooded sweatshirt, are imbued with a stereotypical negativity by the subsequent assumptions (*up to no good* and *on drugs*) and opinion (*these assholes always get away*), and that the latter implies anger and possible intent to act on Zimmerman's part.

Zimmerman justified the killing as self-defense, which suggests that he believed Martin was capable of killing him (i.e. that he was dangerous), and, more importantly, that Martin *intended* to kill him (i.e. that he was an imminent threat). A Florida court affirmed this justification under the Stand Your Ground law, which allows for a person to use otherwise unlawful force on another, rather than retreating, as long as the other is found to have been reasonably perceived as an imminent threat. On the other hand, based on this information (which was widely circulated by the media in the following months), one could argue that Zimmerman, having made negative judgments based on clothing and skin color, targeted Martin as a threat out of racially-motivated fear and anger and killed him without further justification. Put more broadly, an adult in a position of authority murdered an unarmed Black teen out of prejudice-based fear, which is perceived by many as a clear injustice that warrants correction under the law.

Now, consider a few things. Consider that the decision to inflict violence upon someone involves a value judgment on their life; that, as Simone Weil suggests, violence turns anybody subjected to it into a thing (qtd. in Sontag 13); that to kill someone is to deny them life, to erase their humanity; that the logical justification behind any act of dehumanization: *your life does not matter*. Finally, consider the incalculable volume of racially-motivated violence that preceded this event that did not, and will not, reach public consciousness; the lives and deaths and humanity that will remain invisible, and the justice that remains denied. #BlackLivesMatter's appearance, given its particular constitutive grouping of words, directly correlates to the continuous smoldering recapitulation of the logic underlying centuries of myriad forms of race-based dehumanization - i.e. Black people's lives *do not matter* - and Zimmerman's act of

violence was a spark that caught. The appearance of the hashtag marks a turning point in public discourse and political consciousness surrounding race-based injustice (Herwees), which became apparent on Twitter as soon as a Florida court legally reinforced the perceived injustice of George Zimmerman's killing of Trayvon Martin. Beginning at this moment, #BlackLivesMatter's presence on Twitter went from a drip to a heavy flow and began evolving from a flourish of public rhetoric to a continuous mass public recapitulation of the value of Black life. The all but ubiquitous discursive focus on justice in Martin's case within this first set of tweets illustrates the hashtag's emergence as an injustice frame for activists and rhetors on Twitter.

3.2.2 - The Emergence of Hashtagged Counter-Rhetorics (December 2014):

Crystallization of #BlackLivesMatter as a Tool for Altering Self-Perceptions of Protesters

The first set of #BlackLivesMatter hashtagged tweets displays a relatively focused flow of messages expressing outrage and calls for justice surrounding Martin's death and Zimmerman's acquittal. However, after a year and a half, two more high-profile deaths (Eric Garner and Michael Brown), two non-indictments, numerous protests, and widespread media coverage of the movement, #BlackLivesMatter's functionality as an injustice frame effectively expanded to serve the persuasive function of altering protesters' self-perceptions. At this point, the Twitter discourse surrounding the hashtag shows a marked advancement in the hashtag's distribution through ecologies that expand beyond its original audiences, exigences, and rhetors. This expansion occurs most prominently in the form of hashtags such as #AllLivesMatter and

#OnlyBlackLivesMatter, which appropriate and manipulate the structure of the original hashtag, and which counter-rhetors used to attempt to invalidate #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric and the movement at large.

Edbauer highlights a similar distributive process of expansion in the case of the phrase *Keep Austin Weird*, which was coined in 2002 by local business owners in order to translate their efforts to resist the city's use of tax breaks as incentives for large corporations to open stores near local businesses into a slogan (16). The slogan was originally distributed in earnest via bumper stickers and t-shirts, but as Edbauer notes, once the phrase "passed into the city's cultural circulation, taking on the importance of a quasi-civic duty," its rhetorical force expanded as "as others [began to] adopt the phrase to fit other purposes" (Edbauer 16-17). A local radio station appropriated it to solicit pledges, a library manipulated it to promote literacy ("Keep Austin Reading"), Cingular Wireless - one of the big-box corporations that the phrase was originally aimed against - used the phrase "Keepin' Austin Weird" to market themselves, and eventually the phrase was rhetorically inverted to "Make Austin Normal" (Edbauer 16-19). For Edbauer, these developments collectively illustrate the "distributed ecological spread" of the primary *Keep Austin Weird* rhetoric, in which the different rhetorics "overlap through a kind of shared contagion" across various "affective transmissions"; i.e. utterances via bumper stickers, shirts, commercial slogans, chants or signs at a protest, tweets, soundbites, or media coverage (18-19).

Edbauer argues that, despite the fact that they often address vastly different exigencies and audiences, both appropriative rhetorics and counter-rhetorics increase the circulation of the original rhetoric and "expand the lived experience of the original

rhetorics by adding to them [or] changing their shape” (19). This is the case for many structurally similar hashtags that often supplement #BlackLivesMatter tweets, such as #BrownLivesMatter (which appears in this set of tweets), #TransLivesMatter, and #BlackLoveMatters (the latter of which appears, along with the former, among the next set of tweets). All of these hashtags recall the rhetoric of the original hashtag by imitating its structure. Further, as these hashtags address particular audiences and exigencies and thus *add* to #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric by changing its shape, the movement that was built around the hashtag is explicitly *inclusive* of these audiences and exigencies since it was constructed to be thoroughly intersectional.¹¹ As such, these #BlackLivesMatter-adjacent rhetorics not only expand the distribution of #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric by imitating its structure and message, but they also fit naturally within its social dimensions and public operations within the rhetorical ecology.

#BlackLivesMatter diverges from Edbauer’s theoretical framework, however, in the case of the hashtag #AllLivesMatter. This hashtag is arguably the result of “mutations and new exposures” (or, to reference Edbauer’s invocation of Deleuze and Guattari, “aparallel evolution”) similar to those that occurred with *Keep Austin Weird* during its transversal expansion (Edbauer 13). However, while *Make Austin Normal* rhetoric adds to *Keep Austin Weird* rhetoric by ironically invoking it with tongue-in-cheek humor, #AllLivesMatter is constituted by an oppositional logic built to distort and polarize #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric and thus serves to disrupt its distribution. Within this set of tweets, there is a flurry of counter-rhetoric flung against the tide of #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric, sometimes attached to #WhiteLivesMatter and #PoliceLivesMatter (which has

¹¹ As discussed later in this section, the movement explicitly maintains “active solidarity with all oppressed people who are fighting for their liberation,” including oppressed non-Black folks (“Herstory”).

now evolved into #BlueLivesMatter), but most often couching #AllLivesMatter. These rhetorics are direct reflections of particular constraints among white audiences: white fragility, the elusiveness of white empathy, and defensiveness and anger on the part of many rhetors when confronted with the reality of racism and white supremacy.¹²

An exploration of the various manifestations of these constraints within #BlackLivesMatter discourse bears consideration of how white privilege affects many people's perceptions of Black activism. In her op-ed, "A Black History of White Empathy," Government and African Diaspora scholar Juliet Hooker discusses a particularly problematic perception of Black activism among the white middle class, in which white empathy is directly correlated with the visibility of Black struggles. Hooker points out that this expectation - that the amplification of racial injustice through explicit invocation of Black suffering will naturally elicit empathy from whites - is based on "incomplete and inaccurate" historical framings of the Civil Rights Movement, particularly what she describes as "dominant, mainstream narratives" that focus on Northern audiences being galvanized by images of nonviolent protesters being brutally beaten by police during marches in the South ("A Black History"). This expectation of white empathy rests on the assumption that whites are universally inclined toward allyship with - and genuine empathy for - groups of people who are othered by white supremacist social hierarchies; this expectation of white empathy also ignores historical patterns of direct white resistance against racial progress. Regarding #BlackLivesMatter, Hooker points out that even as the current movement appears to be eliciting "outrage and

¹² Though I do not account for the racial or ethnic identities of the Twitter rhetors in this study, the defensiveness and anger that manifests in the discourse is, as this section will discuss, largely associated with white fragility.

disbelief” among whites over race-based injustices, it has also provoked opposition and outright denial, as evidenced by the handful of anti-#BlackLivesMatter utterances in this tweet set (“A Black History”).

A potential source of this empathic disparity and opposition is white fragility,¹³ which refers to white folks’ tendency to respond defensively when “white privilege is in crisis” or when “white dominance is threatened” (Hooker). Hooker links this defensiveness to “the current moment of economic anxiety,” particularly among white folks who experience class-based oppression, which adds to the difficulty many may have in seeing “Black rights as anything other than *special rights* that detract from their own prospects” (“A Black History,” emphasis mine). This notion is reflected in one particular tweet from this set: “#BlackLivesMatter #OnlyBlackLivesMatter #Ferguson” (@JusticeWarrior98). The tweet is accompanied by a screenshot of a Reddit¹⁴ page featuring an image of Kelly Thomas - a schizophrenic homeless man who was fatally brutalized by police in California in 2011 - and a list of points that, along with the three hashtags, constitute a straw man argument that exploits Thomas’s death and the subsequent lack of media coverage for the purpose of invalidating #BlackLivesMatter under the pretense that the movement is concerned about police brutality and abuse of power *only* when inflicted upon Black people (see Fig. 6).

¹³ This term was coined by Dr. Robin DiAngelo, lecturer at the University of Washington and prominent scholar on Whiteness Studies and Critical Discourse Analysis, in her 2011 essay, “White Fragility.”

¹⁴ Reddit is a moderated social news and media-aggregation site and online discussion forum.



Fig. 6

#OnlyBlackLivesMatter embodies the logic that underpins the rhetorics attached to #WhiteLivesMatter, #PoliceLivesMatter, and #AllLivesMatter in this set. When used in #BlackLivesMatter discourse as counter-rhetorics, these hashtags suggest a negative reading of #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric that is arguably motivated by fear that privilege has been threatened. In such cases, #BlackLivesMatter is perhaps read as *Black Lives Matter More Than Mine* or *My Life Matters More Than Yours Because I'm Black*. In reality, however, the movement explicitly maintains “active solidarity with all oppressed people who are fighting for their liberation,” including oppressed non-Black folks (“Herstory”). A prominent rhetorical distinction between #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric and these counter-rhetorics lies within the source of outrage. In the former, the outrage is focused on systemic injustice stemming from anti-Black prejudice; in the latter, the outrage appears focused towards Black people’s outrage.

Throughout this tweet set, several other instances occur in which rhetors frame #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric as destructive and misleading in order to distort and invalidate the movement and its supporters. Most of these counter-rhetorical utterances

perform this operation either by implying that the movement is inherently racist (and, in turn, casting white folks as victims) or by wielding misleading crime statistics that place blame on Black folks for perpetuating violence against themselves (which implicitly casts Black folks at large as criminal). Examples of counter-rhetorical utterances within the #BlackLivesMatter discourse community include: “Controversial post: I am sick and tired of hearing #BlackLivesMatter. #PoliceLivesMatter too. #AllLivesMatter!” (@AshleyJeanine), which attempts to invalidate #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric by downplaying it as a problematic annoyance; “#BlackLivesMatter, but only when the killer is white” (@anthonyveasman1), which further invalidates Black life by constructing white people as the victims of race-based injustice, even at the expense of Black life; “Until this nation realizes #AllLivesMatter then all #BlacklivesMatter does is cause more of a divide” (@ajjrrj), which builds upon the invalidating role-reversal of the previous tweet by explicitly blaming #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric for being divisive and exacerbating injustice, even as the rhetor indirectly acknowledges racial tension as an exigency; “Can we discuss how #blacklivesmatter as well at #whitelives and every other motherfucking race. Racism would be dead if we all didn't cry it” (@BrianaaLynne), which builds upon the implied vilification of #BlackLivesMatter rhetors in the previous tweet by blaming the perpetuation of racial injustice on those who amplify and seek to correct it; “#BlackLivesMatter, 6-8 thousand blacks killed each yr. Almost all by other blacks. Usually young blk males. FBI stats prove it” (@wjordan333), which attempts to invalidate Black folks’ experience of racially-motivated violence and abuse while simultaneously maligning Black folks by focusing on murder statistics *and* exonerating whites by removing them from the discussion entirely; and “#BlackLivesMatter

Really??!! OBVIOUSLY NOT among themselves!!” (@brianpirlo), which is accompanied by a screenshot of FOX News statistics purporting that 93% of Black murder victims are killed by other Black folks, adding a scornfully incredulous tone and further defaming the character of Black people in general with the same message as the previous tweet.

Of the one hundred tweets I culled within this time window (December 14, 2014), only a handful of instances occur in which #BlackLivesMatter rhetors respond to counter-rhetors. Two examples demonstrate succinct, relatively diplomatic arguments acknowledging that, indeed, “All lives matter, but saying so in conjunction with #BlackLivesMatter is rude and derailing. Please stop” (@RotSterne), and again, that, “Sure, #AllLivesMatter equally. But not everyone is in an equal situation right now, so some need more help than others. #BlackLivesMatter” (@YYZhed). Even the less diplomatic examples of such responses, including one in which a rhetor simply calls #AllLivesMatter rhetoric “extreme bullshit” (@LuckyLibrarian1), demonstrate more straightforward, grounded logic than the counter-rhetoric, which aims to cast (self-)doubt onto #BlackLivesMatter rhetors by recasting whites as the primary victims of racism and injustice and reframing #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric as false, divisive, destructive, and invalid. Contrary to this framing, across all sets of tweets, though #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric does not necessarily “suffer politely,” it does tend to be more inclusive than divisive,¹⁵ and few #BlackLivesMatter rhetors across all four sets of tweets specifically implicate white people or make generalizations about police outside of citing specific cases of injustice (Rasheed).

¹⁵ Indeed, as a movement “‘against white supremacist patriarchal society’” (Shamell Bell, qtd. in Aron, “These Savvy Women”), BLM is fundamentally feminist and intersectional (“About”).

#BlackLivesMatter rhetors' responses to counter-rhetorics directly reflect the movement's own rationale, which is explicitly stated on their website's "Herstory" page. BLM explains their claim that "When Black people get free, everybody gets free" by clarifying that to say Black lives matter is not to say Black lives are *more important* than others', nor that only Black people experience oppression ("Herstory"). Rather, this statement addresses the fact that Black lives have historically been - and continue to be - systematically devalued under white supremacy, which fosters an inherently unequal system that benefits some - even non-Black folks who are oppressed - at the expense of others. This is precisely what @YYZhed is communicating when they tweet, "Sure, #AllLivesMatter equally. But not everyone is in an equal situation right now, so some need more help than others. #BlackLivesMatter." Ideally, everyone's life *would* matter equally, but the fact that state violence and institutional oppression disproportionately affects Black lives more than others means that "the lives of Black people—not ALL people—exist within these conditions," and the movement operates under the notion that when Black lives *do* matter as much as others', "the benefits will be wide reaching and transformative for society as a whole" ("Herstory").

For non-Black rhetors, circulating the message that Black lives matter affirms the value of Black lives while simultaneously affirming Black folks' lived experience of *not* being valued; for Black rhetors, circulating this message also affirms their own lives through an expression of self-love. While #BlackLivesMatter is largely meant to address systemic and individual racism,¹⁶ #AllLivesMatter is deployed to "correct" this intervention under the false pretense that "we are all the same" ("Herstory"). This

¹⁶ And to work to narrow the gap between the two within public perception.

approach further dehumanizes Black folks by ignoring both the ongoing historical oppression of Black people in America and Black people's lived experience of this oppression, thereby "erasing Black folks from the conversation" entirely ("Herstory"). Further, uttering #AllLivesMatter, particularly for non-Black folks, demonstrates a refusal to acknowledge that America's continuing history of white supremacist culture fosters a lack of empathy toward people of color and *benefits* non-Black people by reinforcing white privilege. This denial perpetuates and implicitly permits anti-Black racism. Regardless of whether the #BlackLivesMatter counter-counter rhetors in this tweet set were aware of the movement's public explanation of its rationale or its public deconstruction of #AllLivesMatter rhetoric, their utterances in this tweet set are evidence of the effective distribution of this complex understanding of social reality and race-based injustice through #BlackLivesMatter utterances.

The polarizing function of #WhiteLivesMatter, #PoliceLivesMatter, and #AllLivesMatter as counter-rhetorics in #BlackLivesMatter discourse is also related to a particular empathic constraint exemplified by what Kameelah Rasheed refers to as the "perfect victim' narrative" ("Black Deaths Matter"). In her February 2016 op-ed in *The Guardian*, originally titled "Public Empathy Must Not be Reserved Only For 'Perfect Victims,'" Rasheed explains that "for Black people to be seen as victims and worthy of empathy, they must be exemplary and angelic . . . [never] ambiguous or messy" ("Black Deaths Matter"). She invokes the predatory strategies of serial rapist Daniel Holzclaw, a police officer who targeted poor, criminalized Black women who would be less likely to come forward due to "the matrix of gendered perfect victimhood and anti-blackness" that engenders pervasive suspicion and doubt among the public toward such women and

precludes them from being believed (“Black Deaths Matter”).¹⁷ Rasheed highlights Holzclaw’s defense attorney’s exploitation of victims’ criminal backgrounds to cast doubt on their testimonies (“Black Deaths Matter”), just as Trayvon Martin was “post-humously placed on trial for his own murder” after the results of his autopsy indicated marijuana use (Garza, “A Herstory”). She goes on to explain the public’s reasons for deeming dead Black men and women undeserving of empathy: “Sandra Bland was too assertive. Tamir Rice, a child, should not have been playing with a toy gun. Michael Brown was a ‘thug’, Freddie Gray the offspring of drug addicts” (“Black Deaths Matter”). Those who seek to invalidate #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric under the pretense of the perfect victim narrative may argue, as Hooker explains, that “if Black victims had not resisted, or followed directions, or not broken the law. . . they would not have found themselves in the situations that led to their deaths” (“A Black History”). This rhetoric is inherently dehumanizing as it exploits Black victims’ “complicated humanity” to justify the pretense of an “impossibility of innocence,” which pressures victims’ families to

¹⁷ Considering Rasheed’s discussion of the perfect victim narrative in the context of rape, it bears noting, as Stephanie L. Schmid points out in her “Rape Law” entry in the *Encyclopedia of Rape*, that this narrative has long been a part of legal discourse surrounding rape in the United States. Schmid explains that legal discourse tended to focus more heavily on the “victim’s behavior and character rather than the [perpetrator’s] criminal actions” until pressure from feminist activists began to shift this discourse during the 1970s (187). Schmid also points out that this shift was catalyzed, at least in part, by the publication of Susan Brownmiller’s 1975 book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, in which the author gives a detailed history of rape and argues that rape is less a crime of passion than it is “a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear” (Brownmiller, qtd. in Schmid 186). This is not to say, however, that what Rasheed refers to as “the matrix of gendered perfect victimhood and anti-blackness” does not still play a notable role in public perception of victims of anti-Black violence. In fact, as Lisa Cardyn notes in her entry on *Against Our Will*, Brownmiller herself was criticized for contending in the book that Emmett Till, a 14-year-old who was lynched in 1955 for allegedly wolf whistling at a white woman, was as accountable as his white murderers for viewing “women as objects of sexual conquest” (11).

wage what Rasheed describes as a “public relations campaign to assert humanity” (“Black Deaths Matter”).¹⁸

It is significant that these counter-rhetorics appear to a notable extent only in this set of tweets,¹⁹ given that they were uttered in the immediate wake of the largest public Black Lives Matter demonstration to date: the Millions March in New York City, which involved over 60,000 protesters and several highly intense and confrontational rhetorical acts.²⁰ Here, two and a half years into #BlackLivesMatter Twitter discourse, we begin to gain a clearer sense of #BlackLivesMatter’s particular mode of rhetoric, and toward what audience(s) these rhetorics’ persuasive functions are more or less directed. As I contend in chapter 1, Black folks constitute the whole of #BlackLivesMatter’s intended audience. This is clear within the discourse in this set, as rhetoric surrounding the hashtag is virtually never concerned with eliciting white empathy. The rhetoric is distributed in myriad ways that may elicit empathy, such as calls for justice, live-tweets of protests, selfies, repetitions of the names of the dead, photos of smiling children, condemnations of

¹⁸ The presence of this dehumanizing rhetorical process within the wider ecology is exemplified by the hashtag #iftheygunnedmedown, which is a shortening of the question, “What image would the mainstream media use to identify me if police gunned me down?” The hashtag was popular earlier in 2014 during the media coverage following Michael Brown’s death. The meme involved young Black social media users pairing a photo of themselves engaging in positive or socially accepted cultural roles or activities (such as graduating or wearing formal clothing) with a photo of themselves engaging cultural roles or activities generally associated with Blackness and/or perceived as threatening or socially deviant (such as wearing particular clothing or displaying “gang signs” with their hands). This meme was used as a form of commentary on the tendency of the media use the latter sort of image to create racialized bias and distort narratives of Black life. #IfTheyGunnedMeDown is an example of a #BlackLivesMatter-related rhetoric that was briefly co-distributed within the wider rhetorical ecology, and it does demonstrate the additive force that Edbauer describes, unlike the counter-rhetorics discussed in this section. It is also an example of an attempt to reclaim Black narratives using hashtag rhetoric, which I will discuss in the next section as one of the key functions of #BlackLivesMatter.

¹⁹ They are absent in the April-July 2012 and March-April 2015 tweet sets, and only three examples out of one hundred appear in January 2015, as opposed to ten out of one hundred on December 14, 2014.

²⁰ E.g. protesters carried banners featuring a close-up photographic detail of Eric Garner’s eyes looking directly at the viewer, a Black man shackled from head to foot marched wearing only a loin cloth, and die-ins were staged.

white silence, ruminations on dystopic aspects of everyday life, expressions of outrage, and photos of #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric being expressed in creative ways by citizens (e.g. chalk on an elementary school playground). However, while the hashtag's core message implicitly acknowledges a clear lack of empathy, #BlackLivesMatter outright declares the value of Black lives rather than focusing on eliciting empathy from those who lack it, and its application within the discourse is focused largely on encouraging *self*-affirmation, which stems from its inherent persuasive function of altering Black folks' self-perceptions.

#BlackLivesMatter rhetors' lack of concern for white empathy and heavy focus on affirming the lives of Black folks contributes to what might be perceived by "otherwise sympathetic whites" as a "disruptive" approach on the part of the movement, and has led to critiques of the movement for "squandering support" from this audience (Hooker). This is likely a result of misguided expectations of Black activists due to the fact that, as Hooker notes, "historically, Black gains in the U.S. have come about when they converged with white self-interest" ("A Black History"). However, as Hooker points out, #BlackLivesMatter has nonetheless been successful in "placing issues of police violence on the national political agenda" ("A Black History"). Critiques of the movement's disinterest in white sympathy, she suggests, misread "the racial politics of the current moment" ("A Black History"). Indeed, upon studying the discourse and the surrounding rhetorical ecology, the aim of #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric is not to convince white folks that Black folks' lives matter, but to alter Black folks' self-perceptions through mass public (self-)affirmation of the value of Black lives.

3.2.3 - Constructing Counter-Narratives (January 2015): Reclaiming Black Life by Re-Framing Black Identity and Activism

This tweet set is the first in which #BlackLivesMatter rhetors are not responding all but collectively to a specific exigency; rather, a close look at the discourse in this set reveals a focus on sustaining public consciousness of the movement through the circulation of information regarding exigencies that might otherwise have been ignored by the media. Though this tweet set was culled at what was then the lowest level of search interest for the movement, the flow of #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric in January of 2015 is no less steady or intense than the previous set, which was taken at the peak of search interest in Black Lives Matter at the time. Given the virtual absence of specific high-profile killings of unarmed Black people during this time window (the day of January 31, 2015), the consistency of #BlackLivesMatter's distribution at this point establishes it as a self-sustaining counter-public rhetorical force. This is not to suggest that particular exigencies were not occurring at this time, nor that a rhetoric needs to be responding to particular exigencies or events in order to exist; indeed, systemic racism is its own self-sustaining exigency, and it saturates the wider affective rhetorical ecology. Deva Woodly suggests that this country's historical and ongoing adherence to white supremacist social hierarchies is a "social and political fact...that structures – that is, organizes, the consequences of being in the world" ("Black Lives Matter"). These consequences, however, are not limited to acts of racially-motivated violence and injustice or dehumanizing utterances. The effects of America's history of systemic racism on the rhetorical ecology - from the legacy of slavery to Dred Scott, Jim Crowe segregation and the recent Supreme Court repeal of the Voting Rights Act - are also

evident in the media's tendency to misrepresent or entirely overlook such dehumanizing acts and utterances, as well as Black folks' lived experiences, Black folks' deaths, and Black activism in general. In this set of tweets, #BlackLivesMatter rhetors sustain the counter-public rhetorical force of the hashtag largely through utterances that push against this misrepresentation and silence. These utterances - which take myriad forms, including repetitions of the names of the dead, accounts of under-reported incidents of race-based violence and injustice, and various framings of the Black Lives Matter movement - circulate counter-narratives that re-frame Black identity and Black activism on rhetors' own terms.

For example, one two-part tweet lists the names of fourteen slain Black women: "Rekiya Boyd Aiyana Jones Miriam Carey Yvette Smith Pearlie Golden Tarika Wilson Shantel Davis Tyisha Miller #saymyname #BlackLivesMatter," followed by, "Tyisha Miller Kathryn Johnston Gabrielle Navarez Renisha McBride Aura Rosser Jessica Hernandez #saymyname #BlackLivesMatter" (@dreamhampton). By repeating the names of the dead in utterances capped with self-affirming feminism,²¹ this rhetor wields #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric as a tactic to counteract negative mainstream media misrepresentations of Black women that Sherri Williams argues leads to a pervasive ignorance of Black women's issues among the public ("Digital Defense" 342). Another tweet declares, "The Detroit cop who killed this 7 year old girl named #Aiyana Jones won't be charged! #BlackLivesMatter #Ferguson" (@menes676). By circulating an update on the state of the exigency surrounding the unnecessary 2010 killing of Aiyana

²¹ #SayMyName is a self-reflexive mutation of #SayHerName, a hashtag rhetoric addressing people's empathic disparity with regard to gender.

Jones,²² this rhetor proactively pushes against potential media silence toward this exigency, ensuring that relevant information reaches their networks. Finally, one tweet shares a relatively low-profile story via a link to a Tumblr post:

“#BLACKLIVESMATTER Cops Cheer NYPD Officer Who Killed Teen Over Marijuana” (@leahdoesitbest). This cross-platform distribution of information across the social fields of Twitter and Tumblr highlights the scope of the #BlackLivesMatter counter-public, and the content of the Tumblr post contributes to counter-public #BlackLivesMatter discourse as it holds public servants (police officers, in this case) accountable for dehumanizing behavior in the wake of an unnecessary death, which the media cannot always be counted on to do. By sharing a low-profile local exigency with the global #BlackLivesMatter discourse community, this rhetor highlights the equal weight #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric affords to all Black deaths, regardless of whether or not they constitute a high-profile case, and seeks to counteract the posthumous dehumanization - which might otherwise go unaddressed - of the slain Black teen, whose character is already likely to be put into question in the eyes of the public due to his association with Marijuana.

#BlackLivesMatter rhetors' continual acknowledgment of the humanity of victims of race-based injustice by repeating their names, faces, and details of the injustices carries rhetorical significance in how it evokes these injustices for audiences. As Kameelah Rasheed points out, the deaths of Black folks are often “normalized by their digital echo, through looped videos” to the extent that Black bodies cease to be reminders of crisis,

²² #BlackLivesMatter discourse often involves updates on particular exigencies or cases, regardless of whether its outcome is positive or negative. For example, one tweet reads, “NYC Will Pay \$3.9M to Family of Bronx Teen, Ramarley Graham, for 2012 Unarmed Police Shooting . . . #BlackLivesMatter” (@masaiORION) In this case, however, the officer responsible for Jones’s death was not held accountable.

and instead become an “oft-overlooked wallpaper” (“Black Deaths Matter”).

#BlackLivesMatter rhetoric, however, operates quite differently, particularly in the discourse that unfolds in this tweet set. In her 2003 essay “Regarding the Pain of Others,” Susan Sontag discusses the extent to which photographs of war elicit empathy via a reading of Virginia Woolf’s 1938 essay, “Three Guineas.” After casting doubt on the belief (in this case, Woolf’s) that the “shock” of photographs depicting the atrocities of war “cannot fail to unite people of good will,”²³ Sontag points out some inherent constraints in the process by which these images make “‘real’ (or ‘more real’) matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore” (8-9). According to Sontag, many privileged antiwar polemicists like Woolf are guilty of a certain failure “of imagination, of empathy” (9). For such privileged audiences, Sontag suggests that “war is generic,” and any case against it need not “rely on information about who and when and where” (10). Art historian Claudia Zapata presented an apt example of this in her 2016 lecture “Walter Horne’s “Triple Execution” Postcards: Death on the Border.” Horne, a photographer who worked along the U.S.-Mexico border during the Mexican Revolution between 1910-1920, helped shape Americans’ negative perceptions of Mexican identity by using “reductive captioning and lynching and corpse imagery” in picture postcards to perpetuate a “bandit-led villain” stereotype (Zapata). According to Zapata, Horne’s photographs - which were composed through a propagandistic American imperialist lens in order to capitalize on military audiences and consumers - ignored the identities of casualties of the Mexican Revolution and exploited their images, thereby dehumanizing Mexican citizens and downplaying their deaths as business as usual, even necessary.

²³ Just as Hooker highlights the problem of expecting images of Black suffering to automatically elicit white empathy.

Whereas Horne's photo postcards made death in the Mexican Revolution mundane and anonymous through force of Nationalist, Imperialist visual rhetoric, however, #BlackLivesMatter tweets directly confront the deaths of Black folks and the nuanced injustice that saturates them while showing faces, speaking names, and affirming the humanity, in all its complexity, of Black lives.

Sontag suggests that "the pity and disgust that pictures [of war and death] inspire should not distract . . . from asking what pictures, whose cruelties, whose deaths are not being shown" (13). #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric tends to embody this suggestion by expanding the rhetorical process of "making [injustice and death] real" to address exigencies that may not ostensibly affect Black lives directly, but which nonetheless intersect with Black folks' struggles in myriad ways within our cis-hetero-patriarchal white supremacist culture (Sontag 10). This intersectional rhetorical process is evident in tweets in which #BlackLivesMatter is paired with other hashtags, or amplifies other international exigent events, such as "If ur #HeForShe pay attention to #YesAllWomen #BlackLivesMatter #transwomenarewomen #TransLivesMatter #brownlivesmatter #WhyIStayed" (@JacksonAdler) and "#stopvictimblaming #rapeculture #blacklivesmatter #brownlivesmatter #equality #solidarity" (@I_Cant_Breathe_).²⁴ These rhetors show solidarity for, and aligns #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric with, trans activism, feminism, and victims of rape and domestic abuse. In tweeting, "Mexico: Listen to #Ayotzinapa student @Omarel44 ow.ly/leeUU (english subs) #YaMeCanse30 cc #BlackLivesMatter #UmbrellaRevolution," user @elrelojdeltigre shows solidarity with

²⁴ This tweet is accompanied by an image that reads "short skirts: not an invitation to rape; hoodie: not an invitation to kill," a clear example of enacting solidarity by mixing rhetorics and audiences and circulating messages across a wide affective ecology.

those affected by the mass state kidnapping of students in Ayotzinapa Mexico, and frames Black Lives Matter as an umbrella revolution. Without necessarily aiming to elicit empathy, these rhetorics reflect the movement's explicit understanding that the "destinies [of all oppressed people] are intertwined" by actively enacting and spreading empathy across audiences and exigencies via utterances of solidarity ("Herstory"). Rhetors bridge these audiences and exigencies by mixing hashtags, further framing #BlackLivesMatter as intersectional and actively inclusive.

This discursive public construction of #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric is also demonstrated by tweets that re-frame public misconceptions of Black identity and the movement at large. Two tweets in particular exemplify the latter: The first, which reads, "Out of the fiery flames of #Ferguson, rose a mighty Lion known as the #blacklivesMatter Movement!!! Let's get Free!!!" (@menes676), constructs the character of the movement through personification, using an image of a lion, which often symbolizes bravery and strength, to represent BLM (see Fig. 7).

FrankClark @menes676 · Jan 31

Out of the fiery flames of #Ferguson, rose a mighty Lion known as the #BlackLivesMatter Movement!!! Let's get Free!!!



[View photo](#)

Fig. 7

In the second, user @_unwinding excerpts a quote by Tumblr user @darlingkuma that reads, “#BlackLivesMatter includes poor black people, uneducated black people, sex working black people, ‘ghetto’ black people, and all the black people you think you’re too good to be associated with.” This re-circulated utterance explicitly defines the movement, and Black identity, as an intersectional one that must be understood as not only about race, but also class, gender, sexuality, employment, and far more. Several tweets broadcast reports that track a particular public misrepresentation of the movement as a terrorist threat: e.g. “Bratton compares #BlackLivesMatter protests to Paris attacks, @thePCJF calls for anti-terror unit to be disbanded” (@jalevier) and “NYPD Commissioner Invokes #BlackLivesMatter Protests to Justify New ‘Anti-Terrorism’ Unit” (@alyssa011968). Also, several tweets, such as “#BlackLivesMatter : Protest Movements, Reactionary Violence, and Why the Two Should Not Be Confused”

(@RippDemUp), directly address these misrepresentations by sharing an article (in this case, one from December 2014) that frames the movement as inherently nonviolent.

Finally, several tweets invoke past movements and activist heroes, framing Black Lives Matter as an extension of their legacy: “A look at the Black Panther Party Vanguard of the Revolution Film that's at @sundancefest now . . . #BlackLivesMatter” (@maggicarter); “Fannie Lou Hamer of the Civil Rights Mov't . . . #BlackLivesMatter #YesAllWomen #HeForShe” (@JacksonAdler); and “[James] Baldwin's Report From Occupied Territory . . . #WAGact #BlacklivesMatter #HumanRights” (@UlyssesGrunt). One tweet that reads “#ReclaimMLK #96hours #BayArea . . . #BlackLivesMatter” (@quinoshakur) highlights a major development in the functionality of #BlackLivesMatter at this point in the Twitter discourse: rhetors using the hashtag to reclaim the legacy of Black activism through utterances that invoke and build upon the rhetorics of past leaders and movements. The term *reclaim* reflects a larger trend in the discourse during this period, in which references to and images of Civil Rights leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Fannie Lou Hamer, Black Nationalist leaders such as Malcolm X, and Black Panther Party leaders such as Assata Shakur are circulated alongside references to and images of members of the Black Lives Matter movement. This trend is indicative of a growing sense of empowerment among individuals within the current movement as members appear to perceive themselves increasingly as active participants in the legacy of Black activism. Claudia Zapata describes Walter Horne’s images as having substantially *deformed* Mexican National identity. Conversely, in the case of #BlackLivesMatter, the rhetoric here appears to be actively *re-forming* Black identity by framing Black life, death, and activism on rhetors’ own terms.

3.2.4 - Sustaining the Movement (March 30-April 7 2015): Cultivating

Empowerment through Self-Reflexive Intersectional Social Critique

While rhetorics in previous tweet sets center around altering protesters' self-perceptions, as well as mobilizing for action, the rhetorics in this set are notably more diffuse with respect to their functions, with far more prominent examples of tweets geared toward legitimizing and sustaining the movement through utterances that empower rhetors by acting as a vessel through which they can actively define the movement. Despite this heightened variation in persuasive functions, the discourse in this final set is characterized by rhetorics that are, overall, highly intersectional, critical of social and cultural reality, and, most significantly, self-aware. At this point, #BlackLivesMatter rhetors appear particularly mindful of both the movement's role and the rhetorical force of the hashtag within the wider ecology; their utterances are not only particularly pointed, but often self-reflexive, as the social critique rhetors perform tends to reference the movement specifically. Consequently, #BlackLivesMatter appears to embody its own activist ethos at this point, operating not only as an injustice frame for systemic race-based violence, but also as a hinge for a self-reflexive mode of intersectional social critique, the employment of which appears to foster a sense of empowerment in rhetors.

As #BlackLivesMatter rhetorics become more self-reflexive, the final tweet set displays a discursive shift toward the nature of the movement itself (rather than the identities and lived experiences of protesters), which indicates progress in the evolution

of the movement.²⁵ At the point of #BlackLivesMatter's inception (April 2012-July 2013), the Black Lives Matter movement was in the genesis stage of social movement evolution. Rhetors' concentrated use of the hashtag as an injustice frame in the wake of a specific inciting exigence (Trayvon Martin's killing) reflects this stage of development, as the role of an injustice frame is to foment insurgent consciousness among the public in order to catalyze a movement. The second and third tweet sets (December 2014 and January 2015), having followed a year-long string of uprisings and protests in response to the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown (which arguably constitute a social unrest stage), fall loosely within the enthusiastic mobilization stage of the movement's development. This mobilization is reflected in the discourse as rhetors, who effectively constitute a counter-public by this point, use the hashtag largely to re-frame Black identity and activism and to frame the movement as a reformation of the Black Liberation movement while encouraging others and each other to take part in constructing and wielding intersectional (counter-)public rhetoric that cultivates widespread (self-)affirmation of Black life and solidarity with other oppressed people. In the Spring 2015 tweet set, rhetors continue to wield #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric to mobilize, frame the movement, and encourage solidarity and intersectionality, but far more utterances explicitly invoke the movement as a force of social change, which is reflected in more prominent uses of the hashtag as a subject noun indicating the movement (rather than as a metacommunicative tag that carries its own rhetorical force within the tweet). Utterances invoking the movement as such tend to amplify aspects of Black Lives Matter's ethos in

²⁵ As defined by Stewart et al. in *Persuasion and Social Movements*, the stages of social movement evolution that are reflected in #BlackLivesMatter discourse are genesis, social unrest, enthusiastic mobilization, and maintenance.

order to legitimize and sustain the movement, which indicates that the movement is approaching maintenance stage. For example, the tweets, “I pray we see #BlackLivesMatter 's power to give language to Police brutality.. AND healthcare, education, housing #pray4blacklives” (@CandyCornball) and “I pray for more collective movements like #BlackLivesMatter that challenge the non-profit impulse of hierarchy and titles. #pray4BlackLives” (@CandyCornball) legitimize Black Lives Matter by framing it as an effective and influential decentralized movement that is grounded in intersectional social and cultural critique while also seeking to sustain well-rounded public understanding of the movement.

Several rhetors attempt to legitimize and sustain the movement by reiterating its inclusive, populist approach and contributing to discourse surrounding the movement’s aims. For example, ““The sustained #Ferguson movement was largely sustained by Black women’ #BackLivesMatter #BlackWomensLivesMatter...” (@AlysiaCutting) invokes and empowers its female constituents and situates the August 2014 uprising in Ferguson, and the movement at large, as feminist. “You want populism? Get behind #BlackLivesMatter” (@KillerMartinis) defines the movement as inherently representative of the interests of the greater public via a call to action to join. “Part of the #BlackLivesMatter movement should be to focus on police accountability, destroying the blue wall of silence. It's killing us” (@TalibKweli) suggests a specific functionality and intended direction of rhetorical force for the movement.

The latter utterance indicates a notable level of engagement on the part of the rhetor. The rhetor’s reasoned use of key terms such as “police accountability” and “blue wall of silence” suggests that they are relatively well-informed regarding the language

and core exigencies at the center of #BlackLivesMatter discourse, and their apparent comfort in proposing a course of action for the movement at large imbues the utterance with a sense of empowerment. This sense of empowerment is reflected in Darren G. Lilleker's suggestion that a well-informed discourse community fosters expression, which leads to the feeling that one's voice is being heard and thus lends itself to a feeling of empowerment (116). Lilleker argues that feeling empowered is crucial "for sustaining engagement and acting as a participant" in a social movement, and that the process of cultivating empowerment begins when rhetors move from passive consumption of information to "active interrogation" (113-116). Considering Lilleker's argument, this tweet set's noticeable uptick in utterances that aim to sustain the movement by performing explicit interrogations of media representation and social structures indicates that engaging in #BlackLivesMatter discourse has the potential to lead rhetors to feel more empowered, particularly at this point in the discourse, as the data shows that models for informed interrogation are being distributed throughout the rhetorical ecology at a higher rate than before.

Examples of active interrogations in this set of tweets include the following: "Hard to understand a few things. 150 people killed in #KenyaAttack & there is absolutely negligible coverage & zero outrage. #BlackLivesMatter" (@SamKhan999), which calls out the lack of US media coverage over the April 2015 mass murder of at least 147 students at Garissa University by al-Shabab militants;²⁶ "You all about

²⁶ Given the inclusion of #BlackLivesMatter in this tweet, this utterance is arguably responding to the tendency of US media to ignore terrorist attacks that occur in majority Black and brown countries (as opposed to those that occur in European countries such as France, where the attack on Charlie Hebdo in January 2015 and the attack on Le Bataclan in November 2015 received widespread coverage in the US).

#BlackLivesMatter but labelling Somalis as terrorists. K” (@lunarnomad), which calls out rhetors who engage in #BlackLivesMatter discourse but tend to stereotype Somali youth as potential terrorists;²⁷ and “.@sgro97 if only BLK gays were bein discriminated agnst n Indiana do u think there wld b a #BoycottIndiana? Of course NOT! #BlackLivesMatter” (@KUH45),²⁸ which points to the tendency of both the media and the public to disproportionately cover and respond to exigencies that are understood (often falsely) to directly affect white folks more prominently than people of color.²⁹ Furthermore, “How can #BlacklivesMatter in a country where enslaved and colonized lives have never mattered?” (@alwaystheself) poses a rhetorical question that encourages others to interrogate the country’s history of colonialism and white supremacist institutions, which lies at the core of the movement’s concerns. These tweets demonstrate rhetors’ use of the hashtag as a hinge for a mode of critique that interrogates problematic social and cultural structures while remaining self-reflexively grounded in the interest of sustaining the movement. By using #BlackLivesMatter in these tweets largely to sustain the movement, rhetors exhibit a tangible sense of connectedness with it. As Lilleker suggests, belonging within a community - in this case, the #BlackLivesMatter discourse community - encourages expression through the promise of connectedness, which feeds

²⁷ See Risa Brooks’s 2015 op-ed, “The Politics of Labeling ‘Terrorism’ in the United States,” in *Trends Research & Advisory*.

²⁸ #BoycottIndiana refers to widespread public backlash in response to Indiana Senate Bill 101, also known as the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which was signed into law by Indiana Governor (and now U.S. Vice President) Mike Pence. The bill sought to free companies to discriminate against LGBTQIA folks under the pretense of religious freedom.

²⁹ In his 2012 article for *The Root*, titled “More Representation for LGBT People of Color,” media strategist Daryl C. Hannah explores the fact that LGBTQIA people of color are woefully underrepresented in the media, which feeds into the problem this rhetor addresses.

into a cycle of empowerment on the part of rhetors that works to sustain participation in the movement (113-116).

By spring of 2015, Black Lives Matter appears implicitly to embody the process of empowerment Lilleker describes. “Register now for awesome webinar on online strategies for offline impact, featuring @aliciagarza . . . #BlackLivesMatter” (@culturejedi) describes a seminar led by the movement’s co-creator on adopting the movement’s ethos as a way of navigating the social field. By identifying this Black Lives Matter seminar as a source of “strategies for offline impact,” the rhetor frames participation in the movement as a way to become more informed and more actively empowered. Here, the hashtag appears to have become more than a semantic or metacommunicative rhetorical tool; rather, it manifests in the discourse as representative of an empowered mode of living characterized by heightened mindfulness, which is exemplified by the following tweet: “I’m wandering around wondering just how much #BlackLivesMatter. . .” (@reigningdesigns).

Despite this shift in its rhetorical operation, #BlackLivesMatter continues to communicate the affirmation, “your life matters, remember to love yourself.” Today, however, as #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric has circulated and expanded within the rhetorical ecology, and as the movement itself has evolved, the hashtag appears to have taken on the rhetorical force of the movement as well. The two still remain separate in that they constitute very different modes of action and utterance, but they also continue to operate mutually.³⁰ Empowerment and self-love are also mutually correlated as affective operations of #BlacklivesMatter rhetoric. Just as belonging within a discourse community

³⁰ This mutual operation began with #BlackLivesMatter’s operation as an injustice frame for the movement, and continues as the hashtag is used to legitimize and sustain the movement.

leads to expression, which leads to a feeling of empowerment, which leads to further participation, (self-)love is also a source of empowerment. Within a discourse community that encourages empowerment through expressions of (self-)love, empowerment and self-love feed into each other.

The mutual operations of empowerment and self-love in #BlackLivesMatter discourse are evident throughout the social field and across the wider rhetorical ecology, particularly in online articles and blogs. A clear example of this mutual operation occurs not on Twitter, but in a Tumblr post authored by a person named rad fag from February 2016. The post, “MY (APPARENTLY) OBLIGATORY RESPONSE TO ‘FORMATION’: IN LIST FORM,” is an in-depth critique of the video for Beyoncé’s single, “Formation,” which depicts highly politicized imagery involving women dressed as Black Panthers, police in riot gear raising their hands before a dancing black boy,³¹ and #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric via graffiti that reads, “STOP KILLING US.” The video has been both widely celebrated as an empowering, anthemic, feminist “ode to blackness” (Masalmeh) and highly criticized by police unions for perceived visual and lyrical anti-police rhetoric (Lutz). rad fag’s post - which, even in its title, exemplifies the self-reflexive critique that the #BlackLivesMatter discourse community fosters³² - is a list of points, the most notable of which reads:

³¹ This visual references the “Hands up, don’t shoot!” slogan, which proliferated among Ferguson protesters after Michael Brown’s shooting. Michael Brown was purported to have said this with his hands raised before he was shot, but the slogan operates less as a historical reference (as it is largely unsubstantiated) than as a rhetorical device used to point to the fact that so many black victims of police shootings are unarmed, and to the injustice therein.

³² rad fag’s chosen title (i.e. “MY...RESPONSE”) indicates the author’s mindfulness of their own role as a rhetor within the discourse community, and their use of the phrase “(APPARENTLY) OBLIGATORY” suggests the urgency of the issue and a sense of reticence on the author’s part, likely due to the complexity of their perspective toward the issue.

*Every new think piece about a music video—including this one—deflect energy and attention away from the demanding work of abolition, adding to our complacency with the structures bearing down on us . . . Beyoncé is a logo. Beyoncé is a commodity. Beyoncé is a production. Beyoncé is a distraction. Beyoncé is a ruse. Beyoncé does not actually exist . . . You—not her—are the Black visionary, the budding potential for revolution.*³³

Here, rad fag illustrates the mutual operations of empowerment and self-love in #BlackLivesMatter discourse. First, rad fag demonstrates their own empowerment by criticizing the media's overrepresentation of celebrity voices within the movement and by unpacking Beyoncé's social status. Then, they invite Black cultural consumers to realize their own empowerment by viewing *themselves* as powerful, visionary revolutionaries who are vital to the movement; i.e. practicing self-love. In effect, rad fag's message can be read as, "You matter just as much as Beyoncé, and *you* are the heart of this movement.; remember to love yourself." This author's rhetoric embodies #BlackLivesMatter's inherent persuasive function of altering self-perceptions of protesters while also aiming to alter perceptions of social reality and sustain the movement by empowering Black rhetors on the ground level. When considered alongside the 400 tweets analyzed in this study, this piece illustrates that, after nearly four years of circulation, expansion, and evolution within the wider rhetorical ecology, #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric constitutes a mode of (self-)love, and its operation within the social field serves to empower individual rhetors in order to grow and sustain the movement for each other's liberation.

³³ emphasis mine.

Chapter 4 - Conclusions

4.1 - A Case for #BlackLivesMatter as a Mode of (Self-)Love

In accounting for #BlackLivesMatter's operation as a mode of (self-)love within the social field, I conclude this chapter by re-tracing its distributed spread throughout the rhetorical ecology. I then investigate the role (self-)love plays in its spread by examining Seb Franklin's and Tony Sampson's respective frameworks for viral contagion in the networked age. Sampson's framing of contagion as the product of various "forces of relational encounter" buttresses my conclusion that #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric is, in itself, a force of discursive relational encounter whose operation as an utterance within the social field of Twitter empowers rhetors by working to positively alter their perceptions of themselves and each other (4). By nature of this operation, #BlackLivesMatter's distribution throughout the rhetorical ecology saturates rhetors' lived experience within this social field with (self-)love.

In analyzing the discourse, I have observed four stages of evolution in #BlackLivesMatter's rhetorical operation. In the months following its appearance on Twitter (April 2012-July 2013), it manifests as an injustice frame addressing both Trayvon Martin's unjust killing and the wider problem of the historical, systemic dehumanization of Black people at large. At the peak of the phrase's search interest (December 14, 2014), following the Millions March in New York City, rhetors continue to wield the hashtag as a tool for altering protesters' self-perceptions in the face of counter-rhetorics that seek to invalidate Black folks' struggles and their outrage. At the nadir of search interest (January 31, 2015), rhetors largely use the hashtag as a means of recapitulating outrage over past injustices, re-framing Black identity, and re-defining the

movement itself as a publicly constructed extension of the legacy of the Black Liberation Movement in the face of widespread media misrepresentation and silence. Finally, three years after #BlackLivesMatter's inception (March 30-April 7 2015), #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric largely operates as a hinge for empowering self-reflexive social critique and for modeling, via utterances of solidarity, the ways in which other injustices are addressed on Twitter. Hashtags that spread across the social field as widely and as prominently as #BlackLivesMatter may be perceived as *viral* topics of discourse based on the rapidity of their spread across the social field, but #BlackLivesMatter's staying power in public consciousness and its capacity for facilitating utterances that reflect rhetors' lived experiences (as opposed to memetic utterances that merely buttress a myopic line of discourse about a specific topic) suggests otherwise.

#BlacklivesMatter is clearly not *viral* in the sense that is usually evoked by the term, which is generally used as a descriptor for a trending topic, video, or utterance that spreads rapidly across social networks and recedes from public interest just as quickly. It does, however, fit Edbauer's understanding of virality as a broad, networked spread throughout the rhetorical ecology. Within this framework, #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric "operate[s] within a viral economy," having emerged "already infected by viral intensities circulating in the field,"³⁴ and constantly expanding through mutations and transformations, "infect[ing] and connect[ing]" various rhetorics, exigencies, and rhetors (13-14).

A memetic or biological understanding of virality suggests that an idea reproduces and spreads via communication networks in a manner "analogous to genetic

³⁴In other words, it is "infected by" the continuous outrage over the historical flux of race-based violence and injustice.

replication” (Sampson 61). One problem with this framework is that it holds certain negative connotations, i.e. the notion that infection and contamination leads to a negative transformation of the host and the implication that the host (the human brain) is merely an empty vessel for the idea. In his 2012 essay, “Virality, Informatics, and Critique; or, Can There Be Such a Thing as Radical Computation?”, Seb Franklin pushes against the impulse to theorize complex ideas and feelings using connotatively negative biological frameworks. However, the neutral framework for virality that he proposes does not quite suit #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric either. In constructing this framework, Franklin invokes computer viruses, pointing out that they are not transformative, but rather additive, in that an infected computer does not “immediately begin to function in an opposite, disordered, or entropic way when a virus attaches within it, but in the same way with new information” (153-170). I argue, however, that the complex ideas encoded in #BlackLivesMatter emerge from pre-existing values and assumptions in the minds of its rhetors, and thus are not, by definition, *new*, nor are rhetors vessels for the hashtag to infect. Rather, as both a metacommunicative hashtag and an injustice frame for the movement, #BlackLivesMatter is, itself, a vessel for the movement’s ethos that flows through the wider rhetorical ecology, transforming attached rhetorics with its own rhetorical force and *encouraging* positive transformations within rhetors.

Tony Sampson offers a revised theoretical approach to virality in his 2012 book *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks*, in which he frames virality as a product of “the forces of relational encounter in the social field” (4). In his examination of contagion, Sampson draws heavily on French sociologist Gabriel Tarde, whose theories focused on social anomalies, accidents, and unconscious contagious associations,

and who established the notion that “desire spreads through mostly unconscious social association” (11). While this notion is problematic in its casting of rhetors as mere somnambulists, which belies the self-reflexive social awareness of #BlackLivesMatter rhetors, Tarde’s framework makes room for a brief but profound point: “the potential for the spreading of social power epidemics is also evident in a tendency to be automatically drawn toward and contaminated by . . . passionate interests” (Sampson 14). As such, Tarde argues, we tend to follow “those we *love*, those in whom we put faith and hope” (Sampson 14, emphasis mine). Tarde’s statement, in the context Sampson’s framework of “*forces of relational encounter*” suggests that love of others plays a key role in the spreading of social movements (4, emphasis mine). In the case of #BlackLivesMatter, following Lilleker’s suggestion that discourse communities encourage utterances through the promise of connectedness, the #BlackLivesMatter discourse community encourages utterances largely through the promise of (self-)love. As an injustice frame, #BlackLivesMatter’s contagion stems from its appeal to rhetors’ outrage over the historical flux of race-based injustice. However, as a rhetoric whose central message is “your life matters, remember to love yourself,” the hashtag’s contagion stems from the urgent necessity of (self-)affirmation within a society that is, in many ways, built to invalidate the lives of Black people. Our lived experience in this country is saturated by white supremacist culture and social hierarchies; by supplementing this invalidating mode of living with a mode of (self-)love, #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric empowers us as rhetors to transcend and resist individual and systemic racism by positively altering how we perceive ourselves and each other.

Empowering rhetors through self-reflexive affirmation of Black life is the immediate goal of #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric's functionality; it is the fundamental constitution of its rhetorical operation. This operation can be seen in action in the surge of #BlackLivesMatter discourse when George Zimmerman was acquitted, and in rhetors' affirmations of themselves and others during every subsequent moment in which the systems that govern our society have reinforced the invalidation of Black life. Perhaps, rather than the way a meme inhabits a person's brain like an empty vessel for the transference and reproduction of an idea, #BlackLivesMatter acts as a vessel for Black (self-)love, saturating rhetors' lived experiences with its rhetorical force through utterances within the social field of Twitter. If this is the case, unlike Sampson's additive computer virus, #BlackLivesMatter's virality is, indeed transformative. If, as Edbauer suggests, "the force of 'messages' as they accrete over time determine[s] the shape of public rhetorics," then #BlackLivesMatter carries the power to saturate the rhetorical ecology and its constitutive rhetors with Black (self-)love until all public rhetoric addressing race-based injustice is transformed into a force of love (20).

4.2 - Implications for Further Study

In conducting this study, I have attempted to provide a model for self-guided archival Twitter research without the use of programs or algorithms. Further studies seeking to build on this model would benefit from a more rigorous qualitative process of data entry. I have, without question, missed out on countless avenues for further study, as I have chosen a very broad case study. Accounting for the identity presentations of Twitter rhetors and cross-studying other related hashtags like #Ferguson,

#HandsUpDontShoot, and #ICantBreathe, as well as hashtags like #AllLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter, would certainly enrich similar studies. Scholars would also likely find myriad insights by conducting Twitter studies that do not necessarily rely on hashtags, as well as within comparative analyses between hashtagged discourse and non-hashtagged discourse (especially predating April 2012). Further discursive studies might also benefit from comparing the nature of #AllLivesMatter and #WhiteLivesMatter rhetors' engagement in discourse when used within the #BlackLivesMatter discourse community (as in this study) and when isolated within their own hashtag discourse communities; i.e. how do Twitter rhetors who take issue with Black Lives Matter approach discourse when communicating solely within their own community?

Within the field of Anthropology, future ethnographic studies would certainly be enriched by establishing contact with Twitter users to gain insight into their personal relationships with hashtags, movements, and rhetorical utterances on social media. The debate over Twitter's relationship to the public sphere often focuses on the binary distinction between online activism and political efficacy, but questioning Twitter rhetors about their own relationship to online activism and physical protest would likely yield myriad insights into how these both might benefit individuals in their own ways. Perhaps scholars need not focus on whether street-level protests are more important than tweeting, but what exactly these modes of rhetoric mean to the individuals involved, and the role online activism, politically efficacious or not, plays in rhetors' lives.

Aside from investigating #BlackLivesMatter's rhetorical operation as a mode of (self-)love, my aim for this study has been to approach Twitter, and social media at large, as a mode of living - a mode of being in the world. Social media platforms effectively

mediate our lived experience, and by nature of the fact that many of us now spend a fair deal of our lives on - or *in* - Facebook and Twitter, the utterances we construct through posts and tweets are documented evidence of our lived experience. As such, expressions of love (and hate) towards ourselves and each other on social media platforms like Twitter constitute affective encounters that directly affect our lives.

Given social media's relationship to our lived experience, scholars seeking to investigate the means by which we are informed and influenced as members of the political public sphere will find a rich pool of data in Twitter. In fact, in February of 2017, in arguments against a proposed North Carolina law meant to ban registered sex offenders from using social media sites, Supreme Court Justices Elena Kagan and Anthony Kennedy both acknowledged social media's transformation of how civic discourse in America operates (Liptak). Justice Kagan argued that platforms like Twitter "have become embedded in our culture as ways to communicate and ways to exercise our constitutional rights," and that, increasingly, these are becoming the sites from which "people get all information" (qtd. in Liptak, "A Constitutional Right"). Justice Kennedy defended Kagan's argument in his own, stating that "social media sites [have] become, and in some ways [have] surpassed, the public square as a place for discussion and debate" (qtd. In Liptak, "A Constitutional Right"). Kagan's assertion that social media sites have become "crucially important channel[s] of political communication" has become glaringly clear since 2017 began, given our current President's relationship to Twitter.

As of the completion of this study, Donald Trump, a former reality television star, beauty pageant owner, and businessman whose brand and rhetoric have arguably been

more influential within the public sphere than his business ventures, has been elected as the President of the United States. Along with having exploited mainstream media for free widespread public advertising by continually making incendiary public utterances on camera, Trump has unparalleled direct access to his constituents through Twitter, and his rhetoric reaches over 16 million people through this platform every day. Just as #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric has spread through the rhetorical ecology and continues to saturate users' lived experiences via Twitter's social field, so do Trump's utterances. In light of his - and others' - continuous distribution of dehumanizing rhetoric throughout this social field, Trump's ascension to the highest political office of this country suggests that the rhetorical force of white supremacy in its current manifestations has power that rivals that of #BlackLivesMatter, which bears, if not *demands*, further study.

Trump's continued use of Twitter for personal expression and information consumption while in office has, for more reasons than simply his reach among the public, been unprecedented with respect to his position as President. Though he has only held office for several weeks, his problematic relationship to the platform has shown itself often enough to speculate about its implications. On February 12, 2017, HBO's *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* (a satirical news-based television program that uses investigative journalism to gather information) pointed to the President's questionable use of media sources in a segment titled "Trump vs. Truth." After hashing out several of the President's exaggerated and false public utterances both to the press and on Twitter, Oliver pointed out that Trump appears to have based a number of these utterances directly on information reported through FOX News Channel's *Fox & Friends* (a daily morning talk show and news program with conservative political leanings) and the web

site *Breitbart* (a far-right-leaning online news and opinion web site formerly chaired by the President’s assistant and chief strategist), often quoting reports verbatim. Regarding the President’s tweeted statement that he would have won the popular vote were it not for millions of illegally cast votes (see Fig. 9), Oliver pointed out that the President’s apparent source for this information was a tweet by the former head of the Mississippi Department of Human Services, Gregg Phillips (see Fig. 8). According to Glenn Kessler at *The Washington Post*, Phillips made this claim “before data on voter history was actually available in most jurisdictions,” and, as of January 31, 2017, Phillips has yet to produce any evidence for his claims (“Donald Trump’s Bogus Claim”).

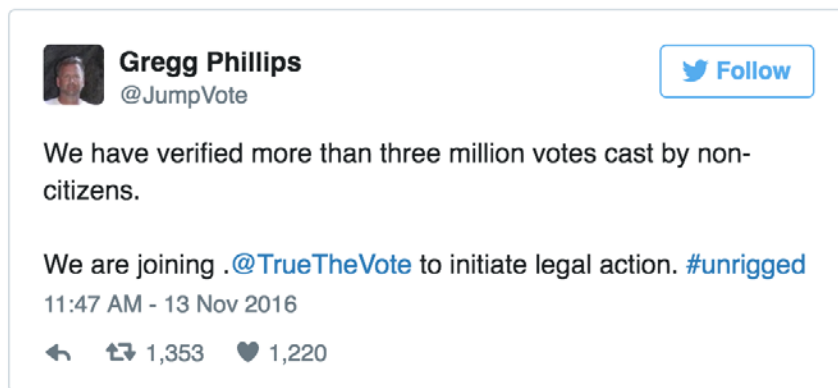


Fig. 8

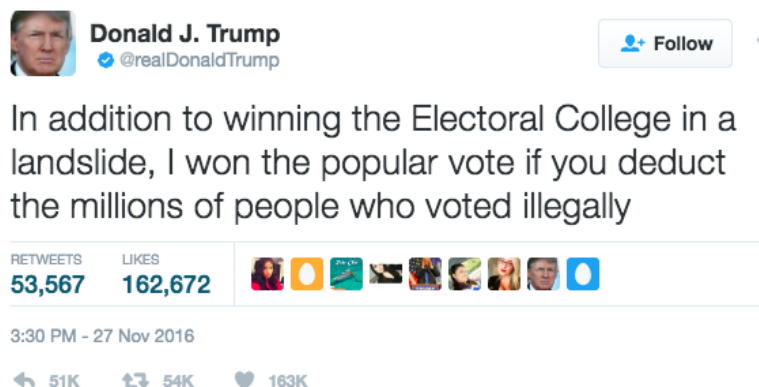


Fig. 9

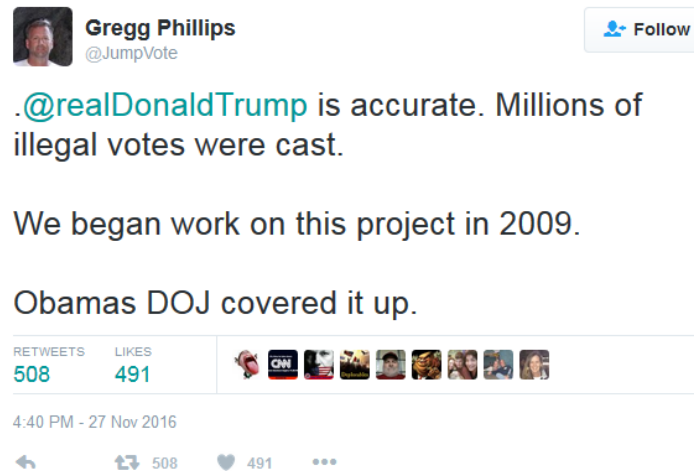


Fig. 10

The President's habit of openly basing many of his claims on hearsay indicates a troubling process of information distribution within the social field of Twitter. In this case, the President consumed a tweet containing rhetoric masked as baseless information, then synthesized that information (notably, without citing its source) in his own tweet couched by inflammatory rhetoric geared toward invalidating both those who did not vote for him and the voting system at large in order to legitimize his success. Phillips then validated the President's statement in a subsequent tweet (see Fig. 10). Put simply, the President consistently operates within a closed loop of propagandistic information-sharing between himself and those with whom he shares an affinity (e.g. his supporters, Twitter followers, and media outlets with whom he has a positive relationship), often using Twitter to mediate this cannibalistic loop. Twitter not only mediates a direct line of communication between the President and his followers; it has also become a space in which he consumes rhetoric uttered by his supporters and appropriates it for his own aims, which then validates his supporters, who in turn validate him, having consumed their own rhetoric from a person who is traditionally perceived as one of the highest

authorities in the world. Here, we see Sampson's point that "the potential for the spreading of social power epidemics is also evident in a tendency to be automatically drawn toward and contaminated by . . . passionate interests" in a different light (14). Not only does the President's tendency to consume and regurgitate information on the internet without prior fact-checking permit his supporters to do the same without ostensible consequence, but his rhetoric is also often explicitly geared toward framing those who oppose or question him as corrupt and dishonest, which implicitly discourages critical thinking and encourages myopia among his audience. Given Sampson's point that we tend to follow those for whom we have an affinity, the President's propagandistic mode of rhetoric may differ substantially from #BlackLivesMatter's (self-)love-based mode of rhetoric, but his arguably carries as much persuasive power over his constituency as #BlackLivesMatter's does over the members of its community.

I have argued, based on data culled from three years of hashtagged discourse on Twitter, that #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric has spread through cultivating a discourse community that empowers rhetors by fostering (self-)love and critical thinking. Despite rhetors' continuous use of the hashtag to express outrage and grievance, the vast majority of utterances within this discourse community are characterized by rhetoric that validates others' humanity. This aspect of #BlackLivesMatter's rhetorical operation drew me to the hashtag as a subject of study, particularly because it appears to be a relatively unusual operation within the social field of Twitter, given the platform's wide use as a tool for entertainment, corporate interests, and trolling (the Oxford English Dictionary now defines "troll" as computing slang indicating "a person who posts deliberately erroneous or antagonistic messages to a newsgroup or similar forum with the intention of eliciting a

hostile or corrective response.”). The #BlackLivesMatter discourse community on Twitter has, since the hashtag’s inception, become a space in which those who are systematically denied political power and civic autonomy can engage in self-care and empowering expression. As a public space, Twitter fosters countless other discourse communities in which people are permitted to operate far more problematically under far less positive motivations. Now that the President - a person with considerable power - has carried over his problematic modes of social media communication into his role as Commander in Chief, the stakes of social media’s role in civic life are higher than ever. Citizens, journalists, and scholars must now consider the nature of Donald Trump’s rhetorical power alongside his newly acquired power as Commander in Chief. Moving forward, we all must take extra care to recognize and study how rhetorical power may be used to bolster political power in the age of social media, particularly now that the President of the United States appears quite willing to use Twitter as a tool for doing so.

#BlackLivesMatter

BIBLIOGRAPHY

“About the Black Lives Matter Network.” *Black Lives Matter*,

<http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2016.

@AdamSM13. “@WendyWilliams keep the convo goin on race in the US.

#TrayvonMartin #blacklivesmatter.” *Twitter*, 16 Jul. 2013, 12:44 AM,

<https://twitter.com/AdamSM13/status/356997827873865728>.

@ajjrrj. “@BookEmDano247 Until this nation realizes #AllLivesMatter then all

#BlackLivesMatter does is cause more of a divide.” *Twitter*, 14 Dec. 2014, 3:50

PM, <https://twitter.com/ajjrrj/status/544233018228224000>.

@alwaystheself. “How can #BlackLivesMatter in a country where enslaved and

colonized lives have never mattered?.” *Twitter*, 5 Apr. 2015, 5:33 AM,

<https://twitter.com/alwaystheself/status/584650004339548160>.

@AlysiaCutting. ““The sustained #Ferguson movement was largely sustained by Black women" #BlackLivesMatter #BlackWomensLivesMatter @UMassAmherst.”

Twitter, 30 Mar. 2015, 8:28 PM,

<https://twitter.com/AlysiaCutting/status/582701063335215104>.

@alyssa011968. “NYPD Commissioner Invokes #BlackLivesMatter Protests to Justify

New ‘Anti-Terrorism’ Unit.” *Twitter*, 31 Jan. 2015, 10:03 AM,

<https://twitter.com/alyssa011968/status/561540264179687426>.

@Angel_ahhh. “Fox News channel is on some Bull S@#! #blacklivesmatter.” *Twitter*,

16 Jul. 2013, 2:26 AM,

https://twitter.com/Angel_ahhh/status/357023299437477888.

@anthonyveasman1. “#BlackLivesMatter, but only when the killer is white.” *Twitter*, 14 Dec. 2014.

Aron, Hillel. “These Savvy Women Have Made Black Lives Matter the Most Crucial Left-Wing Movement Today.” *LA Weekly*, 9 Nov. 2015, <http://www.laweekly.com/news/these-savvy-women-have-made-black-lives-matter-the-most-crucial-left-wing-movement-today-6252489>. Accessed 11 Oct 2016.

@AshleyJeanine. “Controversial post: I am sick and tired of hearing #BlackLivesMatter. #PoliceLivesMatter too. #AllLivesMatter!” *Twitter*, 14 Dec. 2014, 3:49 PM, <https://twitter.com/AshleyJeanine/status/544232753643155458>.

Barbato, Lauren. “Millions March NYC Attracts 50,000 People, Turning Out For A City That ‘Can't Breathe’.” *Bustle*, 13 Dec. 2014, <http://www.bustle.com/articles/53822>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2016.

Berridge, Susan & Laura Portwood-Stacer. “Feminism, Hashtags and Violence Against Women and Girls.” *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2015, p. 341.

Birl, Matthew. “The Internet DID NOT Take Kindly To Miley Cyrus Picking On Stephanie From ‘Full House’.” *BroBible*, 8 Mar. 2016, <http://brobible.com/entertainment/article/miley-cyrus-jodie-sweetin-beef-daily/>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2016.

Bonilla, Yarimar & Jonathan Rosa. “#Ferguson: Digital protest, hashtag ethnography, and the racial politics of social media in the United States.” *American Ethnologist*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2015, pp. 4–17.

@BrianaaLynne. “Can we discuss how #blacklivesmatter as well at #whitelives and every other motherfucking race. Racism would be dead if we all didnt cry it.”

Twitter, 14 Dec. 2014, 3:50 PM,

<https://twitter.com/BrianaaLynne/status/544232862631731200>.

@brianpirlo. “#BlackLivesMatter Really??!! OBVIOUSLY NOT among themselves!!!”

Twitter, 14 Dec. 2014.

Brooks, Risa. “The Politics of Labeling ‘Terrorism’ in the United States.” *Trends*

Research and Advisory, 17 Sep. 2015, <http://trendsinstitution.org/the-politics-of-labeling-terrorism-in-the-united-states/>. Accessed 1 Jan 2017.

@CandyCornball. “I pray for more collective movements like #BlackLivesMatter that challenge the non-profit impulse of hierarchy and titles. #pray4BlackLives.”

Twitter, 30 Mar. 2015, 8:50 PM,

<https://twitter.com/CandyCornball/status/582706557852483584>.

@CandyCornball. “I pray we see #BlackLivesMatter 's power to give language to Police brutality.. AND healthcare, education, housing #pray4blacklives.” *Twitter*, 30

Mar. 2015, 8:57 PM,

<https://twitter.com/CandyCornball/status/582708267010416641>.

Cardyn, Lisa. “Against Our Will.” *Encyclopedia of Rape*, edited by Merrill D. Smith, Greenwood Press, 2004, pp. 11-12.

Conley, Tara L. “From #RenishaMcBride to #RememberRenisha: Locating Our Stories and Finding Justice.” *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 14, no. 6, 2014, pp. 1111-1113.

@cuda1791. “#ICantBreathe Planned Parenthood supports #BlackLivesMatter, but is responsible for Millions of dead Black babies.” *Twitter*, 14 Dec. 2014, 3:44 PM, <https://twitter.com/cuda1791/status/544231535092584448>.

@culturejedi. “Register now for awesome webinar on online strategies for offline impact, featuring @aliciagarza <http://bit.ly/1LTnZeD> #BlackLivesMatter.” *Twitter*, 6 Apr. 2015, 4:10 PM, <https://twitter.com/culturejedi/status/585172710159998977>.

Cunha, Evandro, Gabriel Magno, Marcos André Gonçalves, César Cambraia, Virgilio Almeida. “He Votes or She Votes? Female and Male Discursive Strategies in Twitter Political Hashtags.” *PLoS One*, 29 Jan. 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0087041>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2016.

Daer, Alice R., Rebecca Hoffman, Seth Goodman. “Rhetorical Functions of Hashtag Forms Across Social Media Applications.” *SIGDOC*, 27-28 Sep. 2014, Colorado Springs, CO.

@darlinkuma. “#BlackLivesMatter includes poor black people, uneducated black people, sex working black people, “ghetto” black people, and all the black people you think you’re too good to be associated with.” *Tumblr*, Jan. 2015, <https://darlinkuma.tumblr.com/post/108827753554>.

Davidson, Jacob. “Here’s How Many Internet Users There Are.” *Money Magazine*, 26 May 2015, <http://time.com/money/3896219/internet-users-worldwide/>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2016.

@DipN_Pitts. “Damn I love this city... Lol #BlackLivesMatter be positive!!! #WLC” *Twitter*, 16 Jul. 2013, 6:46 PM, https://twitter.com/DipN_Pitts/status/357270099792642048.

Dixon, Kitsy. "Feminist Online Identity: Analyzing the Presence of Hashtag Feminism."

Journal of Arts and Humanities, vol. 3, no. 7, 2014, pp. 34-40.

@DocMellyMel. "MASS TRAYVON DEMO TODAY! Mt at La Cienega Park 5PM.

March to Wilshire & Beverly in BH. Wear black or white. #blacklivesmatter

#j4tmla." *Twitter*, 17 Jul. 2013, 12:17 PM,

<https://twitter.com/DocMellyMel/status/357534554229190657>.

@domesticworkers. "#JusticeForTrayvon We must all take action against racism.

#blacklivesmatter #HoodiesUp." *Twitter*, 16 Jul. 2013, 10:07 PM,

<https://twitter.com/domesticworkers/status/357320676606111744>.

@dreamhampton. "Rekiya Boyd Aiyana Jones Miriam Carey Yvette Smith Pearlie

Golden Tarika Wilson Shantel Davis Tyisha Miller #saymyname

#BlackLivesMatter." *Twitter*, 31 Jan. 2015, 2:43 AM,

<https://twitter.com/dreamhampton/status/561429617295122432>.

@dreamhampton. "Tyisha Miller Kathryn Johnston Gabrielle Navarez Renisha McBride

Aura Rosser Jessica Hernandez #saymyname #BlackLivesMatter." *Twitter*, 31

Jan. 2015, 2:43 AM,

<https://twitter.com/dreamhampton/status/561429730805547008>.

Edbauer, Jenny. "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to

Rhetorical Ecologies." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2005, pp. 5-24.

@elrelojdeltigre. "Mexico: Listen to #Ayotzinapa student @Omarel44 ow.ly/leeUU

(english subs) #YaMeCanse30 cc #BlackLivesMatter #UmbrellaRevolution."

Twitter, 31 Jan. 2015.

- Fan, Rui, Jichang Zhao, Yan Chen, Ke Xu. "Anger is More Influential Than Joy: Sentiment Correlation in Weibo." *PLoS ONE*, vol. 9, no. 10, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0110184>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2016.
- @FightSoulCities. "#blacklivesmatter." *Twitter*, 13 Jul. 2013, 10:46 PM, <https://twitter.com/FightSoulCities/status/356243199037153282>.
- Franklin, Seb. "Virality, Informatics, and Critique: or, Can There be Such a Thing as Radical Computation?" *Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 1/2, 2012, pp. 153-70.
- Fuchs, Christian. *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*. SAGE, 2014, pp. 179-209.
- Garza, Alicia. "A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement by Alicia Garza." *The Feminist Wire*. 7 Oct. 2014, <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2/>. Accessed 1 Jan. 2017.
- Hannah, Daryl C. "More Representation for LGBT People of Color." *The Root*, 17 Mar. 2012, http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2012/03/lgbt_people_of_color_representation_on_tv_and_in_movies_needs_to_improve/. Accessed 1 Jan 2017.
- "A HerStory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement." *Black Lives Matter*, <http://blacklivesmatter.com/herstory/>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2016.
- Herwees, Tasbeeh. "The Motivating Forces Behind Black Lives Matter." *Good*, 20 Jul. 2015, <https://www.good.is/features/black-lives-matter-feminism-history>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2016.

- Hooker, Juliet. "A black History of White Empathy." *telesur*, 12 Feb 2016,
<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/opinion/A-Black-History-of-White-Empathy-20160211-0011.html>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2016.
- Hopkins, Dwight N. "James H. Cone." *Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice*,
 edited by Gary L. Anderson & Kathryn G. Herr, SAGE Reference, 2007, p. 387.
- Horeck, Tanya. "#AskThicke: 'Blurred Lines,' Rape Culture, and the Feminist Hashtag
 Takeover." *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 14, no. 6, 2014. pp. 1105-1107.
- Humphreys, Lee, Phillipa Gill, Balachander Krishnamurthy, Elizabeth Newbury.
 "Historicizing New Media: A Content Analysis of Twitter." *Journal of
 Communication*, vol. 63, no. 3, 1 Jun. 2013, p. 413.
- @I_Cant_Breathe_. "#stopvictimblaming #rapeculture #blacklivesmatter
 #brownlivesmatter #equality #solidarity ... ift.tt/1wLhSvr." *Twitter*, 31 Jan. 2015.
- @JacksonAdler. "Fannie Lou Hamer of the Civil Rights Mov't.
<http://tinyurl.com/kmbna2u> #BlackLivesMatter #YesAllWomen #HeForShe."
Twitter, 31 Jan. 2015, 2:22 AM,
<https://twitter.com/JacksonAdler/status/561424177706442752>.
- @JacksonAdler. "If ur #HeForShe pay attention to #YesAllWomen #BlackLivesMatter
 #transwomenarewomen #TransLivesMatter #brownlivesmatter #WhyIStayed."
Twitter, 31 Jan. 2015, 12:03 AM,
<https://twitter.com/JacksonAdler/status/561389167003717632>.
- @jalevier. "Bratton compares #BlackLivesMatter protests to Paris attacks, @thePCJF
 calls for anti-terror unit to be disbanded." *Twitter*, 31 Jan. 2015, 1:34 AM,
<https://twitter.com/jalevier/status/561412203472236546>.

@JardanaPeacock. “White people step up against this #Racism #BlackLivesMatter. See and retweet @chriscrass powerful words.” *Twitter*, 14 Jul. 2013.

Jensen, Richard J. “Analyzing Social Movement Rhetoric.” *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2006, pp. 372-375.

@JohnnyGolightly. “Get fired up. We are hungry for justice! #JusticeForTrayvon #BlackLivesMatter #racialjustice.” *Twitter*, 14 Jul. 2013.

@JusticeWarrior98. “#BlackLivesMatter #OnlyBlackLivesMatter #Ferguson.” *Twitter*, 14 Dec. 2014, 4:05 PM,
<https://twitter.com/JusticeWarrior98/status/544236676688924672>.

Kelly, Kimbriell, Wesley Lowery, Steven Rich, Julie Tate, Jennifer Jenkins. “Fatal Shootings by Police Remain Relatively Unchanged After Two Years.” *The Washington Post*, 30 Dec. 2016,
https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/fatal-shootings-by-police-remain-relatively-unchanged-after-two-years/2016/12/30/fc807596-c3ca-11e6-9578-0054287507db_story.html?utm_term=.082601a0a154. Accessed 1 Jan. 2017.

Kessler, Glenn. “Donald Trump’s bogus claim that millions of people voted illegally for Hillary Clinton.” *The Washington Post*, 31 Jan. 2017,
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2016/11/27/trumps-bogus-claim-that-millions-of-people-voted-illegally-for-hillary-clinton/?utm_term=.231fea32e1c8. Accessed 28 Feb. 2017.

@KillerMartinis. “You want populism? Get behind #BlackLivesMatter.” *Twitter*, 2 Apr. 2015, 2:16 PM, <https://twitter.com/KillerMartinis/status/583694499156754432>.

@KINGDACEO. “#blacklivesmatter #blacklivesmatter #blacklivesmatter

#blacklivesmatter.” *Twitter*, 15 Jul. 2013, 9:14 PM,

<https://twitter.com/KINGDACEO/status/356944835841761281>.

@KingTHull. “.....your views change. Stop crying over their deaths and cry more about

OUR deaths. #BlackLivesMatter.” *Twitter*, 18 Dec. 2012, 10:22 AM,

<https://twitter.com/KingTHull/status/281056878681804800>.

@KUH45. “.@sgro97 if only BLK gays were bein discriminatd agnst n Indiana do u

think there wld b a #BoycottIndiana? Of course NOT! #BlackLivesMatter.”

Twitter, 30 Mar. 2015, 8:48 PM,

<https://twitter.com/KUH45/status/582705904799199232>.

@LaPenaCultural. “Broken system/broken culture. Let's shift the way we value life &

each other #blacklivesmatter.” *Twitter*, 16 Jul. 2013, 6:20 PM,

<https://twitter.com/LaPenaCultural/status/357263564806959105>.

@laura_luna. “Today in LA! Plz RT #Blacklivesmatter #J4TMLA.” *Twitter*, 17 Jul.

2013, 1:52 PM, https://twitter.com/laura_luna/status/357558468581916672.

@leahdoesitbest. “#BLACKLIVESMATTER . Cops Cheer NYPD Officer Who Killed

Teen Over Marijuana The cheers of fellow co ... <http://tumblr.co/Ze-3jx1c79bTT>

.” *Twitter*, 31 Jan. 2015, 12:12 AM,

<https://twitter.com/leahdoesitbest/status/561391535556542464>.

Lilleker, Darren G. “Re-Imagining the Meaning of Participation for a Digital Age.”

Citizen Participation and Political Communication in a Digital World, edited by

Alex Frame & Gilles Brachotte, Routledge, 2015, p. 113-116.

Liptak, Adam. "A Constitutional Right to Facebook and Twitter? Supreme Court Weighs In." *The New York Times*, 27 Feb. 2017,

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/27/us/politics/supreme-court-north-carolina-sex-offenders-social-media.html?smprod=nytcore-ipad&smid=nytcore-ipad-share&_r=0. Accessed 28 Feb. 2017.

Lorde, Audre. Epilogue. *A Burst of Light: Essays*. Firebrand Books, 1988, p. 131.

Lotan, Gilad, Erhardt Graeff, Mike Ananny, Devin Gaffney, Ian Pearce, & danah boyd.

"The Revolutions Were Tweeted: Information Flows During the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions." *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 5, 2011, p. 1375.

@LuckyLibrarian1. "When we say #BlackLivesMatter , just stop with the "but all lives matter" crap. It is extreme bullshit." *Twitter*, 14 Dec. 2014, 5:02 PM,

<https://twitter.com/LuckyLibrarian1/status/544251192688537600>.

@lunarnomad. "You all about #BlackLivesMatter but labeling Somalis as terrorists. K."

Twitter, 2 Apr. 2015, 7:04 PM,

<https://twitter.com/lunarnomad/status/583767050016829440>.

Lutz, Ashley. "People are calling for a Beyoncé boycott after her Super Bowl song sent a harsh message to the police." *business Insider*, 7 Feb. 2017,

<http://www.businessinsider.com/beyonce-super-bowl-formation-song-anti-police-2016-2>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2017.

@maggicar. "A look at the Black Panther Party Vanguard of the Revolution Film that's at @sundancefest now.

http://www.democracynow.org/2015/1/30/vanguard_of_the_revolution_new_film

... #BlackLivesMatter.” *Twitter*, 31 Jan. 2015, 3:18 AM,
<https://twitter.com/maggicarter/status/561438362024673281>.

@manthonyhunter. “check out amazing articles by @jean23bean and aldon morris new
 ed of @contextsmag #blacklivesmatter.” *Twitter*, 20 Aug. 2012, 10:51 AM,
<https://twitter.com/manthonyhunter/status/237562597128417281>.

@masaiORION. “NYC Will Pay \$3.9M to Family of Bronx Teen, Ramarley Graham, for
 2012 Unarmed Police Shooting
<http://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/Ramarley-Graham-Federal-Lawsuit-Settlement-39-Million-New-York-City-290401811.html> ... #BlackLivesMatter.”
Twitter, 31 Jan. 2015, 1:24 AM,
<https://twitter.com/masaiORION/status/561409735774445568>.

Masalmeh, Hanaa J. “‘Formation’: Beyoncé’s Rallying Cry.” *The Harvard Crimson*, 22
 Feb. 2016, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2016/2/22/beyonce-formation/>.
 Accessed 11 Oct. 2016.

Mazák, Jaromír & Václav Štetka. “Who’s Afraid of Clicktivism? Exploring Citizens’ Use
 of Social Media and Political Participation in the Czech Republic.” *Citizen
 Participation and Political Communication in a Digital World*, edited by Alex
 Frame & Gilles Brachotte, Routledge, 2015, pp. 125-138.

@menes676. “The Detroit cop who killed this 7 year old girl named #Aiyana Jones won't
 be charged! #BlackLivesMatter #Ferguson.” *Twitter*, 31 Jan. 2015, 12:06 AM,
<https://twitter.com/menes676/status/561390159556382720>.

@menes676. “Out of the fiery flames of #Ferguson, rose a mighty Lion known as the #BlackLivesMatter Movement!!! Let's get Free!!!” *Twitter*, 31 Jan. 2015, 2:29 AM, <https://twitter.com/menes676/status/561425963137777666>.

Mercier, Arnaud. “Twitter as a Counterpublic Sphere: Polemics in the Twittersphere During French Electoral Campaigns.” *Citizen Participation and Political Communication in a Digital World*, edited by Alex Frame & Gilles Brachotte, Routledge, 2015, p. 140-143.

@michacardenas. “#BlackLivesMatter Rally and March in Los Angeles Today - Please share widely! Justice 4 Trayvon, Los...” *Twitter*, 17 Jul. 2013.

@NijmieZD. “#blacklivesmatter Pass it on!” *Twitter*, 16 Jul. 2013, 9:34 PM, <https://twitter.com/NijmieZD/status/357312200634937345>.

@opalayo. “Black defendants rarely get a ruling of justifiable homicide, whether the victim is white or black. <http://ht.ly/n1WUw> #BlackLivesMatter.” *Twitter*, 16 Jul. 2013, 6:06 PM, <https://twitter.com/opalayo/status/357259883743150081>.

Pate, SooJin. “The Radical Politics of Self-Love and Self-Care.” *The Feminist Wire*, 30 Apr. 2014, <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/04/self-love-and-self-care/>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2016.

“Quick Facts: New York County (Manhattan Borough), New York.” *United States Census Bureau*, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/36061,36>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2016.

@quinoshakur. “#ReclaimMLK #96hours #BayArea https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=y_jCLKaa6o8 ... #BlackLivesMatter.” *Twitter*,

- 31 Jan. 2015, 12:00 AM,
<https://twitter.com/quinoshakur/status/561388630623911936>.
- rad fag. "MY (APPARENTLY) OBLIGATORY RESPONSE TO 'FORMATION': IN LIST FORM." 10 Feb. 2016, <https://radfag.com/2016/02/10/my-apparently-obligatory-response-to-formation-in-list-form/>. Accessed 10 Oct. 2016.
- @RaefMusic. "The sad reality of the world we live in: some lives are more valuable than others #KenyaAttack #BlackLivesMatter." *Twitter*, 7 Apr. 2015, 5:02 AM, <https://twitter.com/RaefMusic/status/585366980389183488>.
- Rasheed, Kameelah Janan. "Black Deaths Matter: Victims' Humanity, Not Perfection, Are the Reason to Mourn." *The Guardian*, 12 Feb. 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/feb/12/black-deaths-matter-victims-humanity-not-perfection-are-the-reason-to-mourn>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2016.
- @reigningdesigns. "I'm wandering around wondering just how much #BlackLivesMatter. It's amazing how many total strangers are ready... <http://fb.me/2TQ8TMLgY>." *Twitter*, 7 Apr. 2015, 9:26 AM, <https://twitter.com/reigningdesigns/status/585433412053426176>.
- Rightler-McDaniels, Jodi L., Elizabeth M. Hendrickson. "Hoes and Hashtags: Constructions of Gender and Race in Trending Topics." *Social Semiotics*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2014, pp. 175-190.
- @RippDemUp. "#BlackLivesMatter : Protest Movements, Reactionary Violence, and Why the Two Should Not Be Confused... fb.me/2ZPqBwcPG." *Twitter*, 31 Jan. 2015.

@robynmrodriguez. “The sound of police helicopters in Oakland is deafening. Will there ever be justice for #OscarGrant or #TrayvonMartin? #blacklivesmatter.” *Twitter*, 15 Jul. 2013, 11:28 PM, <https://twitter.com/robynmrodriguez/status/356978717676937218>.

Rogers, Richard. Foreword. “Debanalising Twitter: The Transformation of an Object of Study.” *Twitter and Society*, edited by Katrin Weller, Axel Bruns, & Jean Burgess, Peter Lang Publishing, 2014, pp. ix-xxvi.

@RotSterne. “@cfosnot @CharlizeAfrica All lives matter, but saying so in conjunction with #BlackLivesMatter is rude and derailing. Please stop.” *Twitter*, 14 Dec. 2014, 3:47 PM, <https://twitter.com/RotSterne/status/544232283775852544>.

Ruffin II, Herbert G. “Black Lives Matter: The Growth of a New Social Justice Movement.” *BlackPast.org*, 2015, <http://www.blackpast.org/perspectives/black-lives-matter-growth-new-social-justice-movement>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2016.

@SamKhan999. “Hard to understand few things. 150 people killed in #KenyaAttack & there is absolutely negligible coverage & zero outrage. #BlackLivesMatter.” *Twitter*, 3 Apr. 2015, 1:36 PM, <https://twitter.com/SamKhan999/status/584046730397806592>.

Sampson, Tony. *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks*. Minnesota University Press, 2012. pp. 4-14.

Schmid, Stephanie L. “Rape Law.” *Encyclopedia of Rape*, edited by Merrill D. Smith, Greenwood Press, 2004, pp. 186-189.

Sharma, Sanjay. “Black Twitter? Racial Hashtags, Networks and Contagion.” *New Formations*, vol. 78, 2013, pp. 46-64.

@Slickjnr. “#BlacklivesMatter isn't about a few men. It's about structural racism built on 400 years of black slavery.” *Twitter*, 14 Dec. 2014, 5:16 PM,

<https://twitter.com/Slickjnr/status/544254658454487040>.

Smith, Tracy K. “Unrest in Baton Rouge.” *Studio 360*, 10 Nov. 2016.

<http://www.wnyc.org/story/unrest-baton-rouge/>. Accessed 10 Dec. 2016.

Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Picador, 2003. pp. 8-14.

Stephens, Bijan. “Social Media Helps Black Lives Matter Fight the Power.” *Wired*, Nov. 2015, <https://www.wired.com/2015/10/how-black-lives-matter-uses-social-media-to-fight-the-power/>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2016.

Stephens II, R.L. “Dear #BlackLivesMatter: We Don't Need Black Leadership.”

Orchestrated Pulse, 10 August 2015,

<http://www.orchestratedpulse.com/2015/08/black-lives-matter-leadership/>.

Accessed 11 Oct. 2016.

Stewart, Charles J. “The Evolution of a Revolution: Stokely Carmichael and the Rhetoric of Black Power.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 83, no. 4, 1997, pp. 429-446.

Stewart, Charles J., Craig Allen Smith, and Robert E. Denton, Jr. *Persuasion and Social Movements*. Waveland Press, 2012, pp. 49-110.

@sunshinekarissa. “The system is not broken.....it is doing exactly what is intended, oppressing black folks.....#TrayvonNOLA#BlackLivesMatter.” *Twitter*, 17 Jul. 2013, 9:59 PM,

<https://twitter.com/sunshinekarissa/status/357680946100699136>.

@TalibKweli. "Part of the #BlackLivesMatter movement should be to focus on police accountability, destroying the blue wall of silence. It's killing us." *Twitter*, 2 Apr. 2015, 2:08 PM, <https://twitter.com/TalibKweli/status/583692472393408513>.

@teenaankhen. "LA folx! tune into KPFK at 8pm to listen 2 a dialogue abt the #TrayvonMartin case and the marches happening in LA #blacklivesmatter." *Twitter*, 15 Jul. 2013.

Thimm, Caja. "The Mediatization of Politics and the Digital Public Sphere: The Dynamics of Mini-Publics." *Citizen Participation and Political Communication in a Digital World*, edited by Alex Frame & Gilles Brachotte, Routledge, 2015, p. 168-174.

"Transcript of George Zimmerman's Call to the Police." *Mother Jones*, <http://www.motherjones.com/documents/326700-full-transcript-zimmerman>. Accessed 1 Jan. 2017.

"Troll." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, Dec. 2016. Accessed 28 Feb. 2017.

"Trump vs. Truth." *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, season 4, episode 1, HBO, 12 Feb. 2017. *HBO*, https://www.hbonow.com/series/last_week_tonight_with_john_oliver/4/PROM853372?ap=0.

@TwitterData. "Watch how Twitter responded to last night's #GOPDebate, measured in Tweets per minute." *Twitter*, 29 Oct. 2015, 12:34 PM, <https://twitter.com/TwitterData/status/659770247117971457>.

"Twitter Study - August 2009." *Pear Analytics*, 2009, <https://pearanalytics.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/Twitter-Study-August-2009.pdf>. Accessed 11 Oct 2016.

@UlyssesGrunt. "Baldwin's Report From Occupied Territory - bit.ly/1fn8yZQ #WAGact #BlackLivesMatter #HumanRights." *Twitter*, 31 Jan. 2015.

"Unarmed Victims." *Mapping Police Violence*, 2016,

<http://mappingpoliceviolence.org/unarmed/>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2016.

@_unwinding. "blackfemalepresident: #BlackLivesMatter includes poor black people, uneducated black people, sex working... <http://tumblr.co/ZN7LQu1c864NC>."

Twitter, 31 Jan. 2015, 3:44 AM,

https://twitter.com/_unwinding/status/561444873572990978.

Williams, Sherri. "Digital Defense: Black Feminists Resist Violence with Hashtag Activism." *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2015, pp. 341-358.

@wjordan333. "@_DrewKyle #BlackLivesMatter, 6-8 thousand blacks killed each yr.

Almost all by other blacks. Usually young blk males. FBI stats prove it." *Twitter*, 14 Dec. 2014.

Woodly, Deva. "Black Lives Matter: The Politics of Race and Movement in the 21st Century." *Public Seminar*, Jan. 2016,

<http://www.publicseminar.org/2016/01/black-lives-matter-the-politics-of-race-and-movement-in-the-21st-century/>. Accessed 11 Oct. 2016.

@YYZhed. "Sure, #AllLivesMatter equally. But not everyone is in an equal situation right now, so some need more help than others. #BlackLivesMatter." *Twitter*, 14

Dec. 2014, 3:46 PM, <https://twitter.com/YYZhed/status/544232056658472961>.

Zapata, Claudia. "Walter Horne's "Triple Execution" Postcards: Death on the Border."

Southern Methodist University, 17 Feb. 2016, McCord Auditorium, Dallas, TX. Lecture.

VITA

Axel Conrad Severs was born May 26, 1989 in Houston, Texas. A 2007 graduate of Trinity High School in Euless, Texas, they received a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in English from University of North Texas, Denton, in 2011.

In September 2013, they enrolled in graduate study at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. While pursuing their Master of Arts degree in English, they joined Nat. Brut, an art and literary magazine dedicated to advancing inclusivity in all creative fields, under Editor-In-Chief Kayla E. They currently serve as Managing Editor for the magazine and they are Vice President of the Board of Directors for Nat. Brut Inc.

They live in Dallas, Texas with their two best friends, Rosie and Softy.

ABSTRACT

(SELF-)LOVE MATTERS: A DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS OF #BLACKLIVESMATTER ON TWITTER (2012-2015)

By Axel Conrad Severs, MA, 2017
Department of English
Texas Christian University

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Karen Steele, Professor of English and Chair of the Department

Though the Black Lives Matter movement now holds a ubiquitous position in public consciousness, the movement originally took form as a hashtag on Twitter, a much smaller public arena within which the hashtag constitutes an online counterpublic discourse community. An analysis of #BlackLivesMatter discourse reveals myriad insights into how rhetors use activist hashtags as a tool for exercising (self-)love, building communities, engaging in critical civic discourse, and affirming their lived experiences before a global audience. This study focuses on the rhetorical operations of #BlackLivesMatter within Twitter discourse during the first three years of its existence and explores three central questions: What does the first three years of #BlackLivesMatter Twitter discourse look like? What might the qualities and shifts within the discourse across these three years suggest about the rhetorical functions of the hashtag? Finally, and most importantly, with what sorts of powers does #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric imbue its rhetors?