



# Racial justice activist hashtags: Counterpublics and discourse circulation

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## Abstract

Using critical discourse analysis and network analysis, I address how racial justice activist hashtags #NotYourAsianSideKick and #SolidarityisforWhiteWomen circulate discourse across networked online publics within and outside Twitter. These hashtags showcase relationships between feminist online publics, demonstrate ways that hashtags circulate racial justice discourse, and exemplify the fluidity and intersectionality of racialized and feminist online publics. I draw on critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) (Brock, 2012) as my technique in order to examine the hashtag's discursivity. In order to analyze message spread and network relationships, I then provide a network analysis that illustrates message circulation in online feminist spheres.

## Keywords

Activism, counterpublics, feminism, hashtags, intersectionality, networks, race, Twitter

While Twitter cannot serve as the only activist tool for social movements, its potential power as social platform lies in how networked clusters of people can coalesce, respond, and mobilize to amplify messages beyond individuals and specific communities. Social media tools, including Twitter, are both shaped and limited by their architecture: “programming codes set the range of usability” and “users’ actions are enabled and constrained by company policies and user terms” (Youmans and York, 2012: 316, 325). Examples of racial justice activist hashtags include #BlackLivesMatter, #RaceFail, and #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. These hashtags exemplify the use of Twitter as a medium for

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real-time conversation, demonstration, and dissemination as part of a larger protest around racial justice.

My study focuses specifically on the racial justice activist hashtags #Solidarityisforwhitewomen and #NotYourAsianSideKick. I broadly define racial justice activist hashtags as hashtags that offer a racial cue themselves or hashtags that are situated within a racially cued context, such as users, Tweet text, and links. These hashtags are intended to (a) demonstrate injustice, (b) re-frame discourse, and/or (c) promote policy change.<sup>1</sup> Their primary value may be in elevating and circulating discourse, but these hashtags also help establish grounds for participation, build individual and collective identity, and organize for collective action. In particular, online feminist of color enclaves serve as spaces for internal discourse production and identity construction. Circulating hashtags can help racial justice issues become more visible to publics who may not be aware or exposed to racial inequities.

Using discourse analysis and network analysis, I address the question: How do #NotYourAsianSideKick and #SolidarityisforWhiteWomen circulate discourse in feminist online publics within and outside of Twitter? Both of these hashtags showcase relationships between feminist and racialized online publics—here, I use “online” to specifically refer to publics established via networks on Twitter as well as websites. Both #NotYourAsianSidekick and #Solidarityisforwhitewomen demonstrate ways that hashtags circulate racial justice discourse and exemplify the fluidity and intersectionality of racialized public spheres. To situate my analysis, I first discuss and define online and networked processes of social movements and collective action; political intersectionality in online racialized publics; and the formation, function, and operation of racialized counterpublics on Twitter. Critical discourse analysis informed by network analysis function as descriptive tools to interpret how racialized counterpublics use hashtags to circulate messages across networked online publics.

## **Racial justice activist hashtags and networked social movements**

Originally developed to fit into a communication medium with a 140-character limit, the hashtag must be able to simplify complex messages into a compact phrase that is both culturally resonant and widely understood. Another dimension of a hashtag’s success is its repeated use, hashtags are reminiscent of movement slogans—more and more often, hashtags are also written onto posters or printed onto fliers, connecting the offline to the online. They mark people and actions as part of moment and movement. Nathan Rambukkana (2015) writes that hashtags are “hybrids in the taxonomy of types of information ... both text and metatext, information and tag” (p. 30). Hashtags are rarely used on their own, rather they are included with other texts. Because of their algorithmic construction, hashtags organize, link, and archive conversations and also make conversations more visible by trending them. In this way, when used to promote racial justice, they connect together salient issues, events, experiences, and beliefs that document unjust racial realities. The hashtag is an “indexing system in both the clerical sense and the semiotic sense” by providing a quick information retrieval system and also “marking the intended significance of an utterance”—users of a hashtag are able to simultaneously “file” and frame their comments to add specific meaning (Bonilla and Rosa, 2015: 5).

As part of a strategic process, these hashtags are unique from other forms of activist media in that there is active production beyond cascade and contagion. They are intentional actions aimed to drive discourse in particular directions and force race to be a salient part of the conversation. Online participation is based on relationships within social network. The importance of our relationships with others establishes and sustains the salience of various social identities, such as race and gender. In the online racial and feminist counterpublics of #Solidarityisforwhitewomen and #NotYourAsianSidekick, those participating in the discussion while using the hashtag navigate intersections of their own identities amid critics and opponents.

Racial justice activist hashtags can function as collective action framing tools and educational tools. “Collective action framing” is an active process of agency and contention at the level of reality construction, which frames an interpreted schemata that actors can “locate, perceive, identify, and label within their life space” (Goffman, 1974 in Benford and Snow, 2000). Within this model, racial justice activist hashtags enable a shared understanding of a problematic social condition and mobilize through the circulation of discourse. Hashtags offer discursive frame processes in articulating and circulating observed events and experiences. #Solidarityisforwhitewomen and #NotYourAsianSidekick are examples of ways a particular feminist counterpublic negotiates the framing and resonance (Benford and Snow, 2000) of the online feminist movement—who is included and excluded? Twitter also serves as the discursive terrain where racial justice meaning is contested by social movement and countermovement actors, the media, targets, the larger public, bystanders, and other clusters of individuals (Snow, 2004). Examining these hashtags as material and cultural artifacts produced by peripheral actors allow interpretation of the hashtags’ imagined purposes of generating solidarity and collective awareness.

By bringing together network analysis and discourse analysis, my research elaborates on the content of these networked processes and argues that different networks are necessary to promote activist interests to wider publics, which include but are not limited to hashtags. Doug McAdam’s and Ronnelle Paulsen’s study (1993) on the 1964 Freedom Summer Project looked at racial identity in social movement participation and also examined the strength and salience of social ties in movement networks. They found that potentially successful network structures are composed of large networks with weak bridging ties that linked multiple groups together (McAdam and Paulsen, 1993). They also found that identity salience reinforced through organizational or individual ties encouraged participation.

In addition to analyzing the discourse surrounding #Solidarityisforwhitewomen and #NotYourAsianSidekick, I look at how these hashtags are mentioned on different websites and also how these sites are connected. As a platform, Twitter is linked to other sites and also linked by other sites. “Hyperlinks [form] digital footprints of the way individuals make connections” (Schulman, 2008: 147). Juliette De Maeyer (2013: 742) discusses that hyperlinks signal communications networks between involved actors. Links also demonstrate inclusion or exclusion and show what is or isn’t important to an individual. Looking at how these sites are tied together shows how different racialized online publics are networked to circulate racial justice messages via hyperlinks. Next, I will more specifically define racialized online publics and discuss how relationships in networked publics can work as examples of political intersectionality.

## Political intersectionality and racialized online publics

Kimberlé W. Crenshaw's (1991) theory of political intersectionality offers a way to examine how relationships in online networks represent strategic coalitions and solidarity within or across various identities. Political intersectionality is described as "how inequalities and their intersections are relevant to political strategies and how strategies regarding one axis of inequality are seldom neutral toward other axes" (Verloo, 2013). For feminists of color, intersectionality helps them "inhabit identities that register the effects of differentiated and uneven power, permitting them to envision and enact new social relations grounded in multiple axes" (Chun et al., 2013: 917).

In the context of the United States, hashtags can address the issue of intersectionality (or lack of) within racial justice movements. To establish the ways that hashtags operate as social movement tools for communities of color online, I draw on Catherine Squires' (2002) model of the black public sphere as a way to find a common language for examining online, racially marginalized public spheres. Squires' model begins to account for nuances of ways a 'dominant' public may also simultaneously function as a marginalized sphere within the larger online public.

In an effort to use language flexible and inclusive enough to explain multi-issue discourse, mobilization, and intersectional identity markers, Squires' (2002) model includes enclaves, counterpublics, and satellite spheres (p. 448). Enclaved publics produce internal discourse while "hiding counterhegemonic ideas and strategies in order to survive" (Squires, 2002: 457). Counterpublics are aided by distribution channels, and their messages travel outside of enclave spaces to challenge dominant messages and launch persuasive campaigns to change the minds of dominant publics or seek solidarity with other marginal publics (Squires, 2002: 460). Satellite publics emerge from both dominant and marginalized groups to maintain group identity and also build independent institutions (Squires, 2002: 463).

Her model draws on Nancy Fraser's (1990) idea of "subaltern counterpublics," where members of marginalized groups circulate "counter discourses" that create different interpretations and representations of identities and interests. Fraser's conception of the subaltern public sphere discusses ways feminists have reframed hegemonic messages, demonstrated injustice, and recast identity and interests apart from the dominant public sphere (Fraser, 1990). Both Fraser and Squires indicate ways that public spheres can be fragmented and intersectional. What makes Squires' model compelling for my discussion of racialized publics is how it acknowledges the political intersections of identity. In working toward building social equity for all members of society, conceptualizing multiple spheres allows for acknowledgement of how privileged and oppressed identities intersect and overlap.

I adopt Squires' terms to discuss ways racialized online publics relate to dominant groups, other marginalized groups, and within themselves. Racialized online publics are composed of people who engage across the intersections of their racial identity and pursue particularly defined racialized interests. "Racial identity serves as a common ground ... and as a primary determinant of one's right to participate" (Byrne, 2008: 18). Because this adaptation is centered around intersectionality, people can simultaneously be members of dominant and marginalized groups. #NotYourAsianSideKick and #Solidarityisforwhitewomen both demonstrate

how within the feminist counterpublic, there are feminist of color counterpublics, and within those counterpublics, there are additional enclaves, counterpublics, and satellite spheres that engage in different social identities (McIlwain, 2015). In this article, I focus on ways hashtags help constitute counterpublics and enclaves.

## Racialized digital enclaves and counterpublics

Twitter allows for discursive interaction with similarly identified people. With all of its algorithms constantly tracking and weighing trends, Twitter provides a digital place for people to congregate around interests and issues; it can also be a place for racial flocking, resulting in racial enclaves. Harris-Lacewell (2004: 4) describes how discourse within an enclave helps communities develop collective definitions of their political interests. Extended to conversations within and across communities of color, discourse that may not explicitly demand structural change may still circulate ideas about racism and inequity. As a racially unmarked and disembodied space, Twitter is perceived as white. “White participation in online activities is rarely understood as constitutive of White identity; instead we are trained to understand their online activities as stuff ‘people’ do” (Brock, 2012: 534). Having safe, separate spaces free of interference gets murkier online. Twitter is also perceived as a public space, and marginalized racial groups who attempt to create enclaves are unable to seek a completely safe space. While access to these public spaces may be perceived as unrestricted, not all participants are—or feel—equally welcome.

“Black Twitter” is an example of a racialized digital enclave that became noticed by the dominant public and then criticized (Brock, 2012: 530). Because hashtags are also specific racial and cultural codes, Black Twitter as a public “is formed through the uniting of individuals who share some of the interest and characteristics reflective of each participant’s physical and virtual identities” (Clark, 2015: 207). Hashtags allow individuals to constantly maintain self and group identities. “Hashtags enable Twitter to mediate communal identities in near-real time; allowing participants to act individually yet *en masse* while still being heard” (Brock, 2012: 539). As an enclave, Black Twitter doesn’t represent the entirety of Black online presence, but it came into public prominence because these culturally coded hashtags began to emerge on Twitter’s trending topics (Clark, 2015). When pursuing in-community conversations, tweets were also read and interpreted by others outside of the cultural context. Accordingly, Black Twitter, the enclave, became subject to the white gaze. Stuart Hall (1997) observes that racialized inequities are sustained by “the spectacle of the Other” which normalizes one imagined community and exiles others who are different. This intrusion and interference with a perceived safe space harms the ways communities discuss and disseminate ideas and, often, marginalized communities are in contention with dominant groups to defend these spaces both online and offline.

Racialized digital counterpublics “engage in debate with wider publics to test ideas and perhaps utilize traditional social movement tactics” (Squires, 2002: 448). Through activist hashtags, counterpublics can collectively disseminate, demonstrate, and demand their needs. Credibility and influence is established by numbers in the form of followers, retweets, comments, and favorites. Making subversive use of both visibility and

invisibility, members of a racialized digital counterpublic who have been perceived as “invisible” within the public at large utilize hashtags to make their presence and message more visible to publics dominated by whiteness. Both #Solidarityisforwhitewomen and #NotYourAsianSideKick are formations of such racialized digital counterpublics.

## **Method: critical discourse analysis informed by network analysis**

When I look at #Solidarityisforwhitewomen and #NotYourAsianSidekick and their mentions beyond Twitter, I examine (a) individual actors, websites, and clusters in overlapping and distinct public spheres; (b) how they are connected; and (c) how these connections enable discourse to circulate within and outside of enclaves and counterpublics. Using critical discourse analysis and network analysis together allows me to examine not only the conversation’s context and content but how the conversation circulates through different publics.

In order to analyze discourse, I outline the contours of discussion developed by each hashtag and examine message content of the circulated hashtags. I draw on widely circulated tweets either having a high number of retweets and likes and/or are mentioned in subsequent news articles about the hashtag. Bringing critical cultural analysis into digital media (Nakamura, 2006), I draw on critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) (Brock, 2012) as my technique in order to examine the hashtag’s discursivity in a way that connects Twitter’s form, users, and interface with underlying ideologies.

In order to analyze message spread and network relationships, I then provide a network analysis that illustrates message circulation in online feminist spheres. Tracing the hashtags outside of Twitter shows how online participants are networked together in clusters of different overlapping enclaves, satellites, and counterpublics. For the network analysis, I collected data by inputting hashtags into Google Search to ascertain the top website links where the hashtags were used. I then inserted the top 200 links into the Wayback Machine Per Year to determine a two-degree network of links to and from the original set of links where the hashtags were found. Using Gephi, a social network analysis tool, I mapped the links between the sites to better understand where and among what sites the hashtags circulated outside of Twitter.

Pulling information from in-links, the visual maps show a network of sites that continue circulating discourse around the hashtag, demonstrate a site’s prominence within the network, and measure the strength and distance of relationships between two sites. My investigations include a variety of site-types, but I am focusing specifically at the top five clusters grouped around five loosely defined categories: (1) race-based sites focused on news and analysis of race and racism; (2) feminist sites focused on news and analysis on gender; (3) issue-based sites focused on various intersections around a specific political or social issue; (4) mainstream media sites with large, national viewership (these sites may have smaller, niche sites as well as broadcast or print extensions with similar scope of viewership); and (5) popular media sites that live primarily online with large viewership. These categories are not mutually exclusive.

Together, groups of sites create clusters, and analogous to the public spheres, they can overlap and intersect. The analysis overlaps Google search with page rank to weigh links



and clusters by the number of in-bound links in order to demonstrate cluster impact. Each node (or circle) on the graph indicates a website that mentions the hashtag in a post or article, and the sites represent extensions of Twitter participants' networks. Because I am focusing primarily on influence, I am looking at the degree centrality of a node, which quantifies its influence within the larger network via the number of ties it has to and from other nodes in the network (Hanneman and Riddle, 2011).

## **Intramovement online feminist discourse in #Solidarityisforwhitewomen**

There is an inherent desire to ignore race and ethnicity in virtual worlds (Kolko, 2000). In the summer of 2012, feminist bloggers created #FemFuture to discuss the unfunded work of online feminists. As debates about free labor and unwaged labor persisted, *Hoodfeminism* editor Mikki Kendall (@Karnythia) critiqued first-world, "white feminist" mentalities by writing, "Where is the space in all of these #Femfuture movements for people who don't have internet access?" A year later, Hugo Schwyzer, who worked often with popular feminist sites such as *Feministing* and *Jezebel*, confessed on Twitter about his complicity in the exclusion of women of color in feminism (Clark, 2015). After conversations with Sydette Harry (@Blackamazon), Kendall then launched #Solidarityisforwhitewomen:

#SolidarityisForWhiteWomen, when WOC are treated as teaching tools & resources, not actual people by Big Name Feminism. (Kendall M, @Karnythia, 12 August 2013)

Describing her motivation to launch #Solidarityisforwhitewomen, Kendall (2013) wrote in *The Guardian*, "I thought it would largely be a discussion between people impacted by the latest bout of problematic behavior from mainstream white feminists." To be clear, white feminism does not mean all of the feminist actions of white women. Cate Young (@battymamzelle) defines white feminism (2014) as "single-issue, non-intersectional [feminism] ... that doesn't understand western privilege, or cultural context." Kendall's hashtag, which first moved swiftly throughout Black Twitter, encouraged other feminist of color counterpublics to launch their own public discussions. For example, Rania Khalek and Roqayah Chamseddine started #NotYourNarrative to discuss Western media portrayal of Muslim women, *Ebony.com*'s Jamillah Lemeix started #Blackpowerisforblackmen to discuss sexism in the Black community, and Suey Park started #NotYourAsianSideKick to discuss feminism in the Asian American community. Feminists of color within the larger feminist counterpublic mobilized to demand a more intersectional feminist movement.

Writer Roxane Gay (2013) told *NPR Codeswitch*, "The #Solidarityisforwhitewomen hashtag reveals fractures in American feminism." Historically, racial differences were "divisive in second wave feminism [as] multiple women theorists of color challenged the universalist assumptions of previous feminisms" (Fernandez, 2002: 31). In the 1970s, the US feminists of color began to build coalitions across their intersectional social identities and "reinforced a common culture across difference ... generated by a subordinated citizenry compelled to live within similar realms of marginality" (Sandoval, 2000: 52 in

Loza, 2014). The hashtags help feminists of color counterpublics be seen and heard by other existing publics. Circulating by retweeting and/or contributing a new tweet while also repeating usage of the hashtag help make it trend, thus also pushing discussions about racial injustice into the spotlight, where it can be noticed by individuals outside the counterpublic who are checking their social media feeds:

What does it say that a twitter hashtag is giving more voice to WOC than feminist orgs and media outlets? #SolidarityisForWhiteWomen. (Khalek R, @RaniaKhalek, 12 August 2013)

#solidarityisforwhitewomen when it takes a white woman going to prison for us to start the convo about women in prison #OrangelsTheNewBlack. (Aurochs S, @TheSolarium, 12 August 2013)

#solidarityforwhitewomen when pink hair, tattoos, and piercings are “quirky” or “alt” on a white woman but “ghetto” on a black one.<sup>2</sup> (Blay Z, @zblay, 12 August 2013)

Archived under the #Solidarityisforwhitewomen hashtag, the many combined tweets offer examples of how women of color, particularly Black women, have been ignored and marginalized in online feminism (Clark, 2015). The hashtag centralizes discourse by offering one access point for individuals to lend support to each other’s voices and also results in message amplification.

## **Racialized digital enclave to counterpublic: #NotYourAsianSidekick**

Be warned. Tomorrow morning we will be have a convo about Asian American Feminism with hashtag #NotYourAsianSidekick, Spread the word!!!!!!!!!! (Park S, @suey\_park, 14 December 2013)

In mid-December, 2013, Suey Park launched #NotYourAsianSideKick, which begins with a call for response and for circulation. Because hashtags can be used and circulated by anyone with Internet access, they offer flexibility, inclusivity, and cultural resonance. Park’s construction of #NotYourAsianSidekick doesn’t actively mark the conversation as “Asian American feminism,” which created a wider entry point for conversation:

#NotYourAsianSideKick: This is beginning because for too long I’ve complained about not having an AAPI space that represents me. (Park S, @sueypark, 15 December 2013)

Nobody will GIVE us a space. We need to MAKE a space, to use our voices, build community, and be heard. #NotYourAsianSidekick. (Park S, @sueypark, 15 December 2013)

#NotYourAsianSidekick is a convo to discuss the problems within the AAPI community and issues with white feminism. (Park S, @sueypark, 15 December 2013)

#NotYourAsianSidekick is MAKING room for those of us silenced by the AAPI mainstream. Queer/disabled/mixed/South Asian/sex-positive. All. (Park S, @sueypark, 15 December 2013)



Park's opening tweets establish the wide parameters of conversation and note the lack of visibility, representation, and intersectionality with both the larger Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) "mainstream" public sphere.<sup>3</sup> She calls for an online space in order for AAPIs to discuss being left out of mainstream feminist public as well as for people to address being left out of the mainstream AAPI public. Another thread of conversation in #NotYourAsianSidekick focused how the model minority myth forces a wedge between AAPI communities and other communities of color:

Being "honorary whites" ≠ a compliment or a good thing. Also not something to aspire to #NotYourAsianSidekick #racialjustice #realsolidarity. (Samala CM, @samala, 15 December 2013)

I need Asian feminism that confronts, rejects, and dismantles the Model Minority Myth as a tool of anti-black racism #NotYourAsianSidekick. (Wong JC, @juliacarriew, 15 December 2013)

Other tweets situated the hashtags historically as a continuation of work done by earlier generations of activists, and they also connected the hashtag to existing activist demands (Figure 1).

We theorized #NotYourAsianSidekick ideas since the 70s but kids gotta learn it from a damn hashtag. Still no Asian Am Studies at most U's. (Matsuda M, @mari\_matsuda, 15 December 2013)

The discourse expanded in many directions across different issues ranging from mental health, violence, body image, family, immigration, and more. All of these issues represented the broad range of interests within the AAPI feminist counterpublic and were unified under the #NotYourAsianSideKick hashtag.

## **The circulation and relevance of racial discourse in the feminist digital public**

Twitter functions as a public space "made real in typed discursive exchanges—participants reflect, refine, reject, and reproduce social knowledge as informed by their offline experiences" (Byrne, 2008: 20). Just as their race impacts the experiences of women of color, whiteness is also crucial in structuring the experiences of White women (Daniels, 2013). While some white-identified feminists called to their white-identified peers to listen and reflect on the messages from the feminist of color counterpublic, other white-identified feminists rejected these circulated messages. Instead, they saw these demands for inclusion as "disruptions" (Smith, 2014) and misread the "critiques as attack" (Daniels, 2013).

On Twitter, racialized digital counterpublics are influenced by discursive interactions with wider publics. Because Twitter discourse relies on "call" and "response" and also allows users to tag one another, users are also then able to hold each other accountable and critique one another directly. Also, as Twitter is simultaneously impersonal in that there is rarely face-to-face interactions but also incredibly personal in-user interaction,



**Figure 1.** Mari Matsuda posted a tweet of a 2008 circular by Resist Racism that depicts herself and earlier activists including Yuri Kochiyama, Helen Zia, and Grace Lee Boggs. The circular text reads,

Your Asian Wasn't Quiet. She wasn't a model minority. Wasn't your Asian fantasy. Maybe chose a path other than Motherhood. She speaks truth to power. This is what Asian America looks like. Get used to it. Not created in your image. And she thinks critically about media propaganda.

sometimes these critical engagements can become hostile. After Park launched #NotYourAsianSideKick, white feminist Adele Wilde-Blavatsky (2013) authored a piece titled “*Stop Bashing White Women in the Name of Beyonce: We Need Unity Not Division*,” and Megan Murphy (2013) wrote an article describing the stream of feminist of color hashtags as a “mean girls–style popularity contest.” She turns the tables around and establishes herself as marginalized by writing, “Twitter tends to amplify certain perspectives and voices and erase others—either because they aren’t there or because they’re too scared to speak up, lest they become the next target” (Murphy, 2013). Later, in February 2014, Michelle Goldberg published a piece in *The Nation* discussing “feminism’s toxic Twitter wars” and “call out culture.” The piece exemplifies the white mainstreaming of

progressive politics as Goldberg plants an insidious seed suggesting that digital spaces are unsafe. Kendall gets depicted as a bully and a corrupter of safe space.

Tina Grillo and Stephanie Wildman (1991) discuss how dominant groups feel entitled to the center, perceiving marginalized members as “usurpers,” and sometimes react by “stealing back” the center. “New media publicness and the overwhelming popularity of online communities is unequivocally tied to creating and defining borders” (Byrne, 2008: 21). Specific forms of racism as well as broader social practices and expressions that reinforce racism work to negotiate spatial and racial control on Twitter (Hall, 1980 cited in Chari, 2008). “The reaction white feminists are having to women of color feminists entering Twitter tends to problematize those who point out racism rather than question the integrity of the framework being critiqued” (Leonard and Park, 2014).

Scholars of feminist technologies, such as Maria Fernandez and Jessie Daniels, have called for a “more multidimensional view of inequality of access that allows for individual agency” which demands ways that marginalized communities excluded from the mainstream can include themselves in digital technologies on their own terms as “protagonists” (Daniels, 2009: 106). Twitter is one of the few spaces that “allows for counter-narratives and resistance” yet “women of color are already excluded from major publishing platforms [but] are reprimanded for using available platforms such as Twitter to write their own stories” (Leonard and Park, 2014). In an interview with Jia Tolentino at the *Hairpin*, Flavia Dzodan said (2013), “Race is about being tokenized in spaces that are coded white but attempt to offer a veneer of inclusivity while pushing ideologies that perpetuate the very same white supremacy that leaves us out of the resource distribution”. The struggle for the recognition of race and other social identities in the feminist movement revolves around what is perceived as relevant within the feminist framework. Hashtags such as #Solidarityisforwhitewomen and #NotYourAsianSideKick demand attention to race in social movements both online and off. As Kang wrote (2014), “If we are honest with ourselves ... we can admit that one reason we may find Twitter activism distasteful is because it interrupts our online socializing with questions we might not want to answer.”

## **Networking from periphery to center: #Solidarityisforwhitewomen**

Through the network analysis, we look at principle actors in these clusters and degrees around each node to see how discourse amplifies in similar and connected networks as people expand the hashtag’s message through posting articles and comments. The degree of a node is the number of connections it has to other nodes in the network. The size of the node is determined by how many sites link to that particular network, and relationship strength is determined by the repeated number of times an actor or node has linked to another actor or node. Users with more followers have a larger network reach, and thus the potential of becoming more influential, particularly if the follower base also comprises others with large bases and networks.

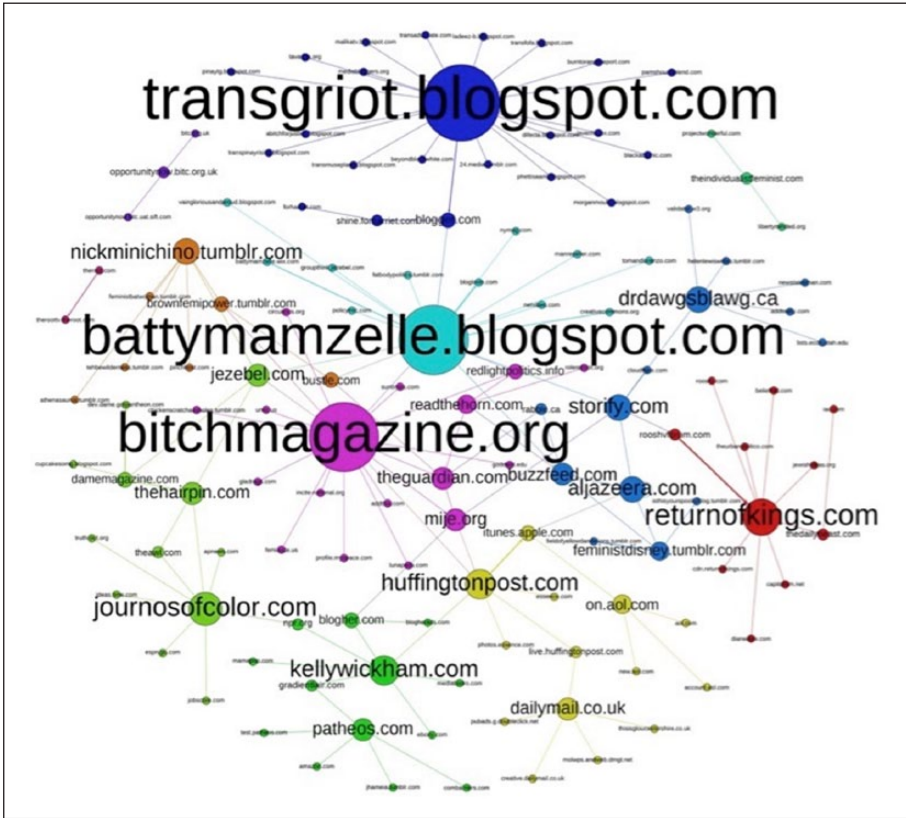
The network of sites disseminating #Solidarityisforwhitewomen is not very dense, because most nodes are connected to each other by only one degree. There are 12

mainstream media sites in the network, including *New York Magazine*, *Time*, *The Guardian*, and *Al Jazeera*, and also 12 popular media sites, such as *Buzzfeed* and *Huffington Post*. Some of the popular media sites include race-based sites such as *Essence.com* and *Ebony.com* and popular feminist sites such as *Jezebel* and *Bitch Magazine*. While these numbers are lower, they wield a considerable amount of influence in terms of audience reach and message circulation. Mainstream and popular sites are able to move the message more broadly across networks and move the message from the periphery to the center.

The largest cluster centers around race-based feminist site *Transgriot.blogspot.com*. The URL extension indicating a third-party host shows that this is likely a personal blog. Ranking at a high degree of 20, compared with the network average of 1, the site is run by Monica Roberts (@transgriot), who identifies as a Black trans woman, writer, and activist living in Texas. Many of the sites connected in the *Transgriot.blogspot.com* cluster are race-based and feminist sites run by other trans women, many of whom also identify as women of color. Messages around #Solidarityisforwhitewomen circulating from this cluster discuss the marginalization of trans women of color in the feminist online public.<sup>4</sup> In Figure 2, the *Transgriot.blogspotspot.com* cluster is spatially distant from the rest of the network, demonstrating their peripheral standing in the larger network.

The second largest cluster in the network surrounds the node *BitchMagazine.org*, the online magazine for Bitch Media that boasts a broad reach of over 9000 unique daily visitors, as well as 80,000 readers for their offline magazine distributed to 2000 US retail organizations (Bitch Media, 2014). In this cluster, *BitchMagazine.org* connects feminist of color sites such as *Brownfemipower* and Flavia Dzodan's *Redlightpolitics.info* to mainstream and popular news sites such as *The Guardian* and *Bustle*. The densest and third largest cluster is made up of several high-degree nodes includes race-based site *Journos of Color* as well as feminist sites *The Hairpin*, *Dame Magazine*, and *Jezebel*. *Journos of Color*, a site that promotes news articles written by people of color, indirectly connects to *Jezebel* and *Dame Magazine* through *Hairpin*. The fourth largest cluster comprises mainstream media site *Huffington Post* and race-based site and personal blog *Mocha Momma* run by educator Kelly Wickham (@mochamomma). *Battymamzelle.blogspot.com*, a personal blog run by freelance writer Cate Young, makes up the fifth largest cluster with 12 nodes. Both Wickham and Young are connected to the mainstream feminist public; Wickham's blog is part of the feminist blog network Blogher, and Young has guest-blogged for *Jezebel* (Figure 3).

As a visual that demonstrates Fraser and Squires' fragmented and/or intersected public spheres, the feminist online public incorporates various racial enclaves, satellites, and counterpublics. Digital spaces are sites of struggle over racial meaning, and the culture of the digital realm complicates race and racism in ways that are still tied to a politics of representation (Daniels, 2013). Here, the center clusters are still made up of a mix of predominantly white mainstream and popular media sites, with race-based sites run by black feminist bloggers such as Cate Young and Kelly Wickham stuck on the periphery. This demonstrates the spatial marginalization of women of color online and the control dominant publics maintain over digital spaces. "Although counter-publics create more opportunities for intersphere discussions, the members of dominant publics may monopolize these opportunities" (Squires, 2002: 461). Mainstream and popular sites, such as



**Figure 2.** The #Solidarityisforwhitewomen network consists of 132 different nodes, separated into 13 clusters that are marked by different colors.

*Jezebel*, *Buzzfeed*, and the *Guardian*, have a higher degree of in-links and end up being the reference points in the network. In this network, the largest clusters belong to sites that have a high degree of out-links (*Transgriot.blogspot.com*, *Bitchmagazine.org*, and *Battymamzelle.blogspot.com*), indicating these clusters are largely responsible for circulating the message throughout the network.

## Relationships across networked publics: #NotYourAsianSideKick

Next, looking at the #NotYourAsianSidekick network, the network is also not dense because most nodes are connected by only one degree. The increased number of nodes in this network may be because the hashtag was deployed in December, 3 months after #Solidarityisforwhitewomen, so more actors joined the discourse. Many of the nodes in the two networks overlap. The largest clusters in #NotYourAsianSidekick's network show a high number mainstream and popular media sites. The top 10 sites circulating the









**Table 1.** This shows the in/out degrees of high-degree mainstream and popular media sites listed in order of total degree. A higher in-degree represents the site's influence as a reference point, and a higher out-degree represents the site's circulation activity.

| #Solidarityisforwhitewomen site | In-degree | Out-degree | #NotYourAsianSideKick site | In-degree | Out-degree |
|---------------------------------|-----------|------------|----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Bitchmagazine.org               | 2         | 16         | Ideas.time.com             | 2         | 40         |
| Huffingtonpost.com              | 3         | 4          | Blogs.wsj.com              | 3         | 36         |
| Aljazeera.com                   | 2         | 4          | Feministe.us               | 2         | 26         |
| Storify.com                     | 5         | 1          | Salon.com                  | 7         | 16         |
| TheGuardian.com                 | 5         | 0          | Bitchmagazine.org          | 2         | 20         |
| Buzzfeed.com                    | 5         | 0          | Nymag.com                  | 9         | 9          |
| Dailymail.co.uk                 | 0         | 5          | Buzzfeed.com               | 9         | 9          |
| Jezebel.com                     | 5         | 0          | Feministing.com            | 0         | 18         |
| Bustle.com                      | 1         | 2          | Aljazeera.com              | 8         | 0          |
| NPR.org                         | 2         | 0          | TheGuardian.com            | 6         | 5          |

communities of color. Similarly important is having established relationships with mainstream and popular sites that have access to dominant publics. For example, Jeff Yang has a race-based blog the “*Tao Jones*,” which is part of the *Wall Street Journal* company. Thus, the *Wall Street Journal*, a mainstream site that is not often part of a racialized public, becomes one of the largest clusters (Figure 5).

Looking more closely at the spread of #NotYourAsianSideKick allows us to see how the salient racial message of the hashtag helps support collective identity development and to mobilize collective action around identities. “When these processes of identity amplification and identity/movement linkage take place, activism is likely to follow” (McAdam and Paulsen, 1993: 663). Asian American writers, journalists, scholars, bloggers, and activists are able to form a digital counterpublic that circulates discourse to multiple publics. As individual actors identify with the hashtag’s message, they’re also able to continue circulate discussion of #NotYourAsianSidekick it to their own networks while also cross-referencing each other. The network shows the simultaneous need for both circulators and central references. Often, race-based feminist sites were the circulators, nodes with higher out-degrees, and mainstream and popular sites were the reference points, nodes with higher in-degrees.

## Summary and conclusion

Because of the fragmented and intersectional nature of racialized public spheres, the connections within the #Solidarityisforwhitewomen and #NotYourAsianSidekick networks are sparse. While each person is connected to another person, they are not connected to everyone else; yet, there are key figures within each network that serve as the primary connectors. The networks’ low densities and high numbers of one-degree nodes also show how they are similar to word of mouth spread in earlier social movements. The hashtags resonate across different individual actors, who in turn have different connections across media and platforms. Because Twitter’s algorithms are designed to value group



organizing efforts by building a broader network base. The question is no longer whether hashtag activism is or is not effective. Many racial justice movements already see and use them as a valuable tool for demonstration and discussion. Analyzing the connections of actors, websites, and clusters in different networks provides insight into *how* hashtags are effective. Future studies could examine how hashtags propagate between different users across Twitter's specific networks, understanding ways hashtags and other forms of social media activism can enhance historical and current social movement tactics.

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### Notes

1. In his discussion of "race-activist hashtags," Rambukkana (2015) discusses how the political nature of the hashtag "unfixes" communication patterns to refigure public conversation about racial justice issues and topics.
2. This tweet from @zblay reflects the double standards on ways bodies of color are perceived. Her observation reflects Kate Davy's "politics of respectability" (1995) as a system of values and behaviors by which white women claimed moral superiority to women of color.
3. I refer to the Asian American and Pacific Islander community as AAPI in this article to echo what Park used in her tweets.
4. In her August 2013 post reflecting on #Solidarityisforwhitewomen, Roberts (2013) wrote,

I took the predominately white feminist world to task for their four decade long pattern of attacking trans women and their ignoring or silencing of Black, Latina voices in the feminist movement ... feminism is the radical notion that women are people, too. Many feminists have forgotten over the years that the word 'people' also includes their Black, Latina, Asian and Native American sisters as well as their transgender ones.

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