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## **#YESALLWOMEN (HAVE A COLLECTIVE STORY TO TELL): FEMINIST HASHTAGS AND THE INTERSECTION OF PERSONAL NARRATIVES, NETWORKED PUBLICS, AND INTIMATE CITIZENSHIP**

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“The personal is political” is a familiar (though often misunderstood) battle cry of second wave feminism. As part of the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) of the 1960s, women would come together to share personal stories of oppression, often related to the body and/or sex; in other words, stories that were related to their private experiences and intimate lives. Although critics dismissed this mode of engagement as apolitical or as merely therapeutic, the goal was always intentionally and deliberately political. The sessions were pivotal in helping women collectively identify their own experiences as part of male supremacy and systems of oppression, rather than their own individual failures. As Hanisch (1970) explained in her formative essay, the sharing of common experiences allowed women to stop blaming themselves for their own oppression. She writes, “One of the first things we discover in these groups is that the personal problems are political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution” (p. 4). The stories were intimate and individual, yet together they worked to reveal the collective aspects of oppression and served as a basis for collective action and social change.

Similarly, in this paper I analyze feminist hashtags on Twitter as a way to consider how personal experiences function as political and collective within networked publics. Boyd defines networked publics as, “publics that are restructured by networked technologies. As such, they are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice” (2010, p. 39). My research contributes to a growing body of work analyzing the potential for participatory activist practices within networked publics (Harris, 2008; Jenkins, Ito, & boyd, 2016; Rheingold, 2009). And this paper fits with the conference theme by examining the discourses – or “rules” – that shape women’s participation and collective activism in networked publics.

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Networked publics afford young women in particular opportunities to participate in non-conventional political and activist spheres (Harris, 2008). I demonstrate how women sharing individual narratives and personal experiences in online spaces can function in a similar way as the WLM meetings of the 1960s – but networked publics afford greater diversity, inclusion, and scalability. Specifically, I analyze how the socio-technical affordances of Twitter – as a networked public – provides opportunities for girls and women to share intimate stories alongside and within the context of collective hashtags. Through an analysis of several feminist hashtags, I argue that girls’ and women’s participation in networked publics is paradoxically and simultaneously private and public, personal and political; and that through the creation of new subjectivities collective feminist storytelling functions as part of “intimate citizenship” (Plummer, 2003).

When girls and women share private stories in networked publics via collective hashtags they reveal the relationship between their private lives and the larger public institutions and discourses that shape their subjectivities. In order to understand personal narratives – and how individuals choose to tell their stories – such stories must always be considered within the broader powers and institutions that construct and shape subjectivities. The public regulation of the female body – via discourse and institutions - is always political, yet simultaneously inherently personal. Likewise, women’s rejection and negotiation of these regulations is also always personal, yet collectively also political.

This paper analyzes collective feminist hashtags that girls and young women have employed as a way to speak out and speak back to the public discourses and institutions that shape and regulate their bodies and their intimate subjectivities. In order to place boundaries around the plethora of available hashtags, I narrow my focus to the inclusion of English-language hashtags that intentionally invite girls and women to participate and reflect on the unique gendered experiences of female subjectivity via storytelling and anecdotal narratives. I only include hashtags that organically originated in response to a social or media injustice and/or were created by an individual activist or advocacy organization. This is to the exclusion of female-centric hashtags that have been created as part of advertising campaigns. Lastly, I only focus on Twitter as a specific networked public. Although many of these hashtags have also been used in other spaces such as Instagram and Tumblr, the affordances of Twitter facilitate conversations, ephemeral subjectivities, temporal participation, and an amplification of participants’ voices that are conducive to analyzing the relationship between technology, intimate experiences, and the political.

I have organized the hashtags that fit the criteria into four categories that all reflect the ways in which public discourses and institutions aim to regulate the bodies and experiences of women: rape, domestic violence, sexual (street) harassment, and bodily autonomy. The rape category includes the hashtags #RapeCultureIsWhen and #SurvivorPrivilege; the domestic violence category includes #WhyIStayed and

#WhyILeft; sexual (street) harassment includes #YesAllWomen, #YouOkSis, and #EverydaySexism; and the bodily autonomy category includes #IAmMoreThanADistracted, #ShoutYourAbortion, #BirthWithoutFear, #GrowingUpAGirl, and #1in3.

I explore how each of these hashtags invokes gendered subjectivities in ways that transgress the boundaries of the personal and private spheres for political purposes. As Harris (2008) writes, “these activities may provide less intimidating, more familiar modes for doing politics and for acting as citizens. They also provide opportunities for placing matters on a public agenda that are not formally political, but are at the heart of contemporary issues” (p. 492). While the act of sharing one’s story may indeed be therapeutic, the goal of the hashtags is not to find personal solutions, but rather to raise collective awareness about systems of oppression. The political focus on the (female) body - as a site of (male) violence, desire, and control – positions this mode of collective activism within the sphere of intimate citizenship (Plummer, 2003). Similar to Simmon’s (2008) work, which argues that blogs are “indicative of a shift where the political is increasingly framed in terms of the personal” (p. 42), I argue that personal storytelling via collective hashtags demands public attention. The use of the hashtags – and the stories attached to them – can shape public discourse, media narratives and representations, and effectuate social change. Twitter hashtags invite women to participate in a more temporal, ephemeral, contextual manner – that is, to articulate a particular subjectivity – which is made visible in that moment, both individually and collectively. The goal is not to claim victimhood or merely highlight individual experiences, but rather is to challenge and change systems of power and representation vis-à-vis the collective sharing of personal stories within networked publics.

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