

# Tweeting About Women: A Critical Discourse Analysis of International Women's Day on Twitter

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# Abstract

This thesis is a work of critical digital sociology, investigating discourse which occurred on International Women's Day 2017 (IWD2017) on Twitter, a widely used social media network, using innovative methodology. The principle finding presented in this thesis is methodological. I demonstrate that it is possible and productive to bring together qualitative analysis and so-called 'big data', specifically a large quantity of tweets, via innovative and original methodology, while preserving the unique and valuable affordances of critical, qualitative, theory-informed analysis.

Alongside demonstrating this, I also present a range of analytic findings related to the discourse I have analysed. The analytic findings include the use of popular and 'fringe' hashtags in linking mainstream and right-wing/reactionary topics, the prominence of anti-feminism and anti-Islam sentiment in discourse associated with supporters of US president Donald Trump, the antifeminist discursive splitting of feminism and feminists into benign and maligned categories, and the ways women are constructed by Twitter accounts representing police and armed forces.

Methodologically, this thesis provides a detailed account of the practicalities, challenges and strategies involved in approaching big social media data as a critical researcher using qualitative analysis. In doing so I argue that big social media data may be a fruitful area for qualitative work, but that in approaching it we should not discard our previous theoretical, analytical and ethical frameworks.

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# Introduction

This short chapter will briefly introduce the goals on this thesis, provide some context and background, and outline how the reader may approach it as a whole. At the conclusion of this chapter I will also outline and discuss my research questions, before proceeding into the thesis proper.

## How to read this thesis

Here I will briefly describe the structure and content of this thesis in terms of the individual chapters it contains, to give the reader some sense of its structure and content. In linear order following this introduction, the main chapters of this thesis will proceed as follows.

After this chapter there will be a short chapter (chapter 1) discussion issues of my positionality as a male researcher in relation to elements of my thesis topic. Having this as the ‘first’ chapter is quite deliberate, as rather than confining this discussion to some subsection of a methodology chapter, I wish to explore it immediately. This is followed by two literature review chapters; one focusing on social research about the internet (chapter 2), the other on identity as it relates to the internet and social media (chapter 3).

After these chapters comes a chapter discussing and describing my methodology (chapter 4). This chapter details how I developed my methodology for applying qualitative analysis to a big data dataset of tweets, covering both the background and the actual process. After this the thesis transitions into more substantive and analytics chapters (chapters 5, 6 and 7). The first is a ‘data description’ chapter discussing (critically) the preliminary analysis of my data utilising Latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) topic modelling<sup>1</sup>. I interpret and discuss an array of outputs based on the entire dataset and justify my later selection of specific themes which I investigated in further detail.

This is followed by my main two analytic chapters where I apply CDA to a selection of tweets. The first of these analyses ‘positive’ discourse on IWD2017, mostly from accounts affiliated with businesses and organisations (chapter 6). The second analytic chapter

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<sup>1</sup> LDA is an automated process where a textual corpus (in this case a very large one) is explored and sorted automatically by a computer program, to identify potential ‘topics’. These topics may be inferred by factors such as the repeated close proximity of words within sentences over a corpus. For a more detailed explanation in lay terms, see page 99 of this thesis.

focuses on a mix of broadly ‘negative’ discourse, much of it originating from apparent supporters of Donald Trump (chapter 7). This latter chapter covered an array of reactionary (misogynistic, racist etc.) tweets.

In between these analytic chapters are three short pieces which are quite different in tone, focus and content from the rest of this thesis. These ‘vignettes’ are the result of fieldwork I undertook at a social media analytics industry conference called Big Boulder 2017, in Boulder Colorado. In them I discuss my experiences in this environment in relation to wider social issues under contemporary digital capitalism, and the themes of this thesis. In doing so, I adopt a freer and more narrative approach which draws on diverse sources and inspirations. While these vignettes may be unorthodox, I nonetheless see them as important, and hope the reader will find them enjoyable and interesting.

Following this is my final chapter (chapter 8), which contains my discussion and conclusions. Here I answer my research questions, offer some reflections on the thesis as a whole, and discuss its limitations as well as tentative suggestions for future research into this area. Having now given a brief overview of this thesis’ structure, I will now proceed with my introduction, and discuss some background issues to my topic area.

## **What is Twitter?**

Twitter has changed in many ways since it became open to the public around 2006, both in the addition of features and changes to how features operate, not to mention numerous changes to underlying algorithmic architecture which are less visible to the public and even researchers. Here, I will provide a brief summary of what Twitter is and some historical context for its emergence and development.

Twitter is a social media network, where users typically participate in ‘microblogging’: broadcasting written text in the form of short (initially 140 characters, later increased to 280, my data was captured before the increase) utterances, called tweets. While all tweets are public by default, users generally come into contact with them by ‘following’ the author, in which case the tweet appears in their feed, or via search functionality. Additionally, a user may ‘retweet’ a tweet, thereby sharing it with their followers, either on its own or embedded in their own tweet in the form of a ‘quote tweet’.

Twitter is thus contrasted from other social networks, such as Facebook, in a number of ways. Mainly this is related to audience, while Facebook centres on networks of ‘friends’ who may know each other outside of the platform, Twitter tends to forgo these ties in

favour of maximising the potential audience (Murthy, 2013). In this sense, Twitter is more akin to a massive network of public blogs than a friend-centred social network (Murthy, 2013).

Historically, Twitter emerged from a failed audio-blogging/podcasting network start-up that was made effectively obsolete when iTunes introduced similar features around mid-2005 (Siles, 2013). Relocating to the Bay Area of San Francisco California, the start-up's small crew of developers and engineers engaged in typical Bay Area tech-culture, and "began hackathons and brainstorming sessions" (Siles, 2013, p.2109) to rescue their venture. While several ideas emerged, one stuck: Jack Dorsey (then an engineer, now Twitter's CEO) proposed what would become Twitter, envisioning "a program for users to describe and report their activities and locations (which he referred to as "statuses") and share this information with groups of selected friends." (p.2110). Jokingly, developers initially referred to the project as "FriendStalker" (p.2111).

During its initial development, Twitter had numerous influences and facets in terms of which technologies and online practices the developers drew on; from blogging, diaries and instant messaging, to social networking and even online activism and protest organisation (p.2113). Twitter (then called 'Twtr') launched in July 2006, and its nature caused "some puzzlement" (p.2115) among news and media commentators, who did not seem to know what to make of it (p.2115). What followed was a period of constant and rapid remediation where features were added, removed and changed, during which "Innovation dynamics that characterize Silicon Valley played an important role" (p.2116). During this time many of 'Twtr's' users were themselves part of the Silicon Valley cultural milieu: developers, entrepreneurs and tech-geeks who "shared some of the same values and cultural ethos" (p.2116), many of whom participated in developing third-party applications which added new features, many of which were integrated in various ways.

This mix of early users were involved in Twitter's early development, and were themselves a mix of "influential figures in the Bay Area, skilled programmers and engineers with years of professional experience, or geeks who shared a fascination for Web technologies and services" (p.2116). Many features which have come to define Twitter emerged from these exchanges between Silicon Valley enthusiast, such as the "@" function and hashtagging (pp.2119-2120). While Twitter has since expanded far beyond this environment, it is important to keep in mind that its early historical context was firmly rooted in this very

specific cultural and geographical community, which will figure somewhat prominently later in this thesis.

### **What is International Women’s Day?**

International Women’s Day has a long and complex history. Here I will briefly discuss it to provide background and context for this thesis. Primarily, the history of International Women’s Day traces back to mass labour/socialist/communist/anarchist movements and protests of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Kaplan, 1985).

Its establishment relates to late 19<sup>th</sup> century socialist and anarchist attempts to establish political holidays. The first “International Woman’s [sic] day” (Kaplan, 1985, p.164), was held on February 23<sup>rd</sup> in the year 1909 by socialists in the US, as “a means by which to unite the popular community around a set of common goals” (p.164). Despite the title, it appears to have been confined to the United States, with the first European marking of International Woman’s Day occurring in 1911, as a deliberate homage to the Paris Commune 40 years earlier (p.166). More followed suit over the next few years.

During this time, these celebrations sometimes served as a relatively rare coming together of women belonging to radical left positions with women’s suffrage activists; while they disagreed strongly on wider political issues, they nonetheless marched together. They were also highly political in their scope, with a strong association not only to suffrage, socialism and communism, but also with the international movement against the First World War (Kaplan, 1985). The most momentous of these political mobilisations of women around International Women’s Day was what occurred in Tsarist Russia in 1917. Amidst the turmoil of Russia on the eve of the revolution, women marched against declining living conditions, rising rents and the extortionate cost of bread. On March 8<sup>th</sup> (by the Western calendar) working women led protests through St. Petersburg, joined by male workers. As thousands marched, demands for bread turned into demands for an end to the Tsar (Kaplan, 1985). It was the beginning of the February Revolution.

This solidified March 8<sup>th</sup> as the date, and from not long after International Women’s Day was inaugurated as an official holiday across the new Communist countries, while since the 1960s it has diversified (Kaplan, 1985). Today, International Women’s Day is especially publicly prominent, at least on Twitter, as a global initiative driven by the United Nations. This is the general context for International Women’s Day as it pertains to this thesis.

## **What this thesis is, and is not**

### **Why focus on discourse?**

In choosing to focus on discourse, primarily in the sense of *written language* in the form of tweets, I am possibly risking being out of step with contemporary developments in qualitative inquiry. In recent years ‘affect’ has emerged as an object of analysis – in the barest terms, generally meaning emotion, feeling and so on – sometimes treated as something which may be ‘pre-discursive’, or accompanying the discursive (Wetherell, 2012). It is absolutely not my intention to dismiss or diminish the importance of affect with my focus on written language. It is simply the case that I believe – especially in the context of my study and given the tools I have used – that “language in action” (Wetherell, 2012, p.52) is a worthy and fruitful object of analysis.

Partly this is due to Twitter’s nature as a primarily textual medium, partly it is likely related to my own history of working with written text, and partly it is related to my theoretical and political inclinations, the latter of which I will elaborate on briefly here. While my political and theoretical influences are somewhat diverse (both in this thesis and in the more general sense), I broadly identify my stance with Marxist materialist ontologies: I believe that social relations, including language and its meanings, are materially constructed relations which can be approached from positions rooted in the critique of existing society, politics and economy (neo/liberal, western, capitalist etc).

### **Why not Foucault?**

Given this focus on discourse, it bares briefly mentioning why I do not directly draw on the work of Michel Foucault and associated poststructuralist theorists. This is not necessarily a deliberate choice on my part. At no point during the planning or undertaking of this thesis did I make a ‘conscious’ decision to avoid or ignore Foucauldian discourse analysis, and I have no aversion or distain for Foucault or his work. It is simply the case that the discursive work I have chosen to draw on (broadly from the fields of critical discourse analysis, Marxian perspectives and social psychology) do not directly draw upon poststructuralism or Foucault in an acutely felt way.

### **Fragments of a broken thing**

Foucault's absence may be acutely felt in this thesis, but this thesis, like any piece of research, is necessarily beset by absences. Just as I do not draw on Foucault, I do not draw – at least not directly – on Deleuze and Guattari, Latour, Bourdieu or Habermas for example. Likewise, this thesis is not directly a work of computational criminology, STS, actor network theory, data science, virtual ethnography or conversation analysis, or any number of other disciplines and sub-disciplines. At the risk of stating the obvious, this thesis is only one particular (sometimes eclectic) approach. It is one of many that could have been taken to the same or similar topic, probably even using the same data. I do not in any way claim that the approach I have taken is the 'best' approach: it is simply the one I happened to arrive at.

In reconciling these acute absences, the many different theses this could have been, I turn to Walter Benjamin. In his essay '*The task of the translator*', Benjamin (1996) discusses translation as an art form in itself, and the relation between original, translation and greater meaning. What I am more interested in here however, is a specific segment of Benjamin's essay, where he employs the metaphor of a broken vessel to describe his position:

"Fragments of a vessel that are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of imitating the sense of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's way of meaning, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel."

(Benjamin, 1996, p.260)

Can something similar not be said for the way this particular thesis, as one of many potential theses, relates to some greater whole? Any specific theoretical or disciplinary approach to the subject of this thesis could by definition only ever be a partial glimpse at some kind of whole. While these approaches may have their own benefits and drawbacks by different standards, none could really capture this whole. What I have tried to do in this thesis, a critical qualitative investigation of discourses relating to IWD2017, is itself only one of these fragments.

### **Eclecticism and 'productive tensions'**

Following on from this point, I argue that the same logic applies to the often-eclectic selection of theoretical concepts, terms and works which have influenced this project, in both direct and indirect ways. This thesis is the result of several years of postgraduate study (one year at Masters, four years at PhD). As such it contains, either directly or indirectly, a diverse range of influences, and an eclectic register. The reader will notice a diverse range of nomenclature in my writing, and the key terms and concepts I use in this thesis will be defined and discussed as they come up. I will however briefly discuss some other terms and influences which, while not featuring prominently in my analysis, are nonetheless important for understanding my wider perspective on issues relevant to this thesis.

There are many direct influences here, both academic and non-academic. A principal, though ‘hidden’ influence in this thesis are the films of Adam Curtis, particularly *‘All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace’* (2011) and to a lesser extent *‘HyperNormalisation’* (2016). Both discuss the intersections of political power, the internet and digital technologies, culture and capitalism. The former was particularly influential, as much of it discusses the influence of tech-utopianism on wider society, a topic I touch on at multiple points in this thesis.

This is somewhat in contrast to other features and influences in this thesis. A substantial section of this thesis engages in data analysis and description (chapter 5) resembling work found in data science (albeit approached in a critical manner, as an outsider to these disciplines). Another engages in something resembling autoethnographic reflexive feminist work (chapter 1). While the reader may view my register and work as at times eclectic to the point of self-contradiction, I argue that if these tensions exist then they are *productive tensions*: they represent an eclectic approach which draws on many different areas in investigation, but all areas which have their own particular application and worth in their contexts.

## **Research questions**

My research questions are as follows:

- (1) What is the content and character of misogynistic, antifeminist and other discourse during International Women’s Day 2017 on Twitter? How do users construct these discourses?

- (2) What are the wider ideological implications of these discourses in the context of Twitter?
- (3) In what ways might technological utopian ideology relate to Twitter as a platform of digital capitalism? Will the findings of this project provide grounds for a critique of Twitter in this context?
- (4) How successfully can qualitative methods be applied to big data? What is a defensible methodology for this kind of approach?
- (5) What are the ethical implications of this kind of study?

# Chapter 1: Positionality, the cis-hetero-male researcher and feminism

## Introduction

This section has several aims. The foremost being the exploration of how my position, subjectivity and identity as a heterosexual, cisgender male researcher relates me to my topic area and the work I have tried to carry out in this project. This section will consist of a reflection on issues of researcher position relevant to my thesis. Namely I will try to explore and discuss the issues of myself, a cis-heterosexual male researcher, conducting a project which deals with subject matter more related to women's experiences online. The inclusion in the thesis of sections that address researcher positionality is increasingly popular, and I would like to develop my own attempt at this in a way that emphasises autobiography, reflexivity and self-critique.

Through this process I hope to arrive at a reflexive and somewhat transparent account of how my project relates to feminist theory and research, and how reflexive self-examination influences how I see myself and my research as a critical researcher. This section will therefore be partly autoethnographic: it will present a critical reflection and discussion of my own history, standpoint and subjectivity in relation to my research and personal history.

Much of the motivation for writing this chapter come from what I have come to see as a foundational disconnect in my project: that I have attempted to investigate something that by its very nature I can never be targeted or harmed by, which I have collected and studied in what has felt like an acutely disembodied, mediated way, and all the while never engaging with the very people who directly experience the very social issue I am investigating. Likewise, I have come to perceive a fundamental conflict between the analytic and methodological aspects of my project: between producing a meaningful critique of misogyny on Twitter, and developing new methodological approaches to the qualitative analysis of big Twitter data.

Through the process of conducting this project I have increasingly been concerned by the thought that the former has become something that could have been easily swapped out for any number of other topics that might be found on Twitter, hateful or otherwise,

turning what should be a key political focus of my research into just an unremarkable topic whose purpose is to test the feasibility of my methodology. In this situation, and as someone whose studies since his undergraduate dissertation have focused on misogyny and antifeminism as an analytic category, I increasingly recall a conversation with a senior academic, where she said something to the effect of “the risks of becoming a male researcher building a career off of misogyny”. These words have been extremely valuable and instructive for me in how I have tried to deal with my project’s design, my analysis, and my approach to the research process as a whole, but the fact remains that these multiple, related issues of positionality and research design have undoubtedly had a large influence on the analysis I present in this thesis.

In discussing some of the issues behind this, I will begin by exploring how my methodology and research design relate to and differ from feminist epistemology, arguing that my research design and subject have made typical feminist research practices difficult or problematic, before going on to reflexively examine how I relate to my research, and engage in a discussion of my status as a researcher and as a man, as well as how I have come to see myself in relation to feminism as a political project.

### **Feminism and feminist epistemology**

While there is obviously no single feminist epistemology, there are certain features that have come to broadly define feminist approaches to social research. These features tend to follow from feminist theory, ontology and politics: often focusing on power relations, inter-subjectivity and the social construction of knowledge. In a reflection on her own research, England (1994) goes into some detail on the features of feminist epistemology; feminist epistemology is an conscious response to positivist and neopositivist approaches to research that treat “impersonal, neutral detachment... distance and impartiality” (p.242) as “professional armor” (p.242) for the researcher, researchers who have historically mostly been White, middle class men. This way, feminist approaches emphasise that the knowledge produced through research is always mediated by the researcher as an actor, an actor that is not a “mysterious, impartial outsider... freed of personality and bias” (p.242), but a subject possessing biases, beliefs and so on.

On its own this is very much in line with broader social constructionist takes on epistemology; positions resembling this are relatively widespread in British sociology,

regardless of any links said research may have with feminism. Explicitly feminist research tends to develop this position along lines that directly and critically account for power, exploitation, reflexivity and the relative status of researcher and researched. According to England “Most feminists usually favour the role of supplicant, seeking reciprocal relationships based on empathy and mutual respect, and often sharing their knowledge with those they research” (p.243). Feminist epistemology tends to act on, rather than just acknowledge, the social relations involved in research: data (participant’s experiences, knowledge etc.) and the process of collecting data are treated as contingent with existing social and interpersonal power relations, rather than as abstract phenomena that the researcher is entitled to by virtue of their status as a researcher.

Efforts might be made to ‘give something back’ to participants by turning the research process into something positive and enriching, often by giving participants more control over how their data is used and presented. For England, a researcher-as-suppliant is one who “explicitly acknowledges her/his reliance on the research subject to provide insight into the subtle nuances of meaning that structure and shape everyday lives” (p.243), dealing with the inherent asymmetry in the relationship by focusing on how the researcher relies on the researched, who has greater positional knowledge when it comes to their own lives and experiences the researcher is interested in.

This desire for more equitable relations with participants, and the moving of participants (who in feminist research are often themselves women) from objects of research to participants in the co-creation of research, also tries to address issues of voyeurism and appropriation in the research process. For England “academic voyeurism” (p.247) essentially reframes the role of the ‘traditional’ researcher from disinterested, objective observer to an outsider who appropriates subjects for their own benefit or gratification. In a similar vein England’s approach to reflexive feminist epistemology emphasises confronting how the relationship between researcher and research subject can be appropriative, in the sense that researchers may risk ‘taking’ from the participant in a way that is not equitable. England emphasises that this is “uncomfortable for those of us who want to engage in truly critical social science by translating our academic endeavours into political action” (p.249), since critical social scientists risk appropriating and exploiting the very people they are sympathetic to.

England develops this further by discussing how reflexivity, the act of critical self-examination by the researcher, features in feminist research and epistemology. England

defines reflexivity in this context as meaning “self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious *analytical* scrutiny of the self as researcher” (emphasis in original, p.244), and treats it as something desirable and ethical when conducting research, especially research that involves participants. Here reflexivity goes beyond a critical approach to one’s research design or hypothesis, and is used as a tool that “induces self-discovery” (p.244) in the researcher as a person, rather than an abstract or disembodied observer. While positivist epistemology may see this as a failure of disinterested objectivity, feminist epistemology treats it as something positive for the project, participants, and researcher.

### **Feminist epistemology and my thesis**

How is this specific take on feminist epistemology relevant to my thesis? It is important to note that England’s paper was written as a reflection on what she describes as “my ‘failed research’” (p.249), namely it reflects on her abandonment of a planned research project that would have involved fieldwork in the “extensive lesbian communities of Toronto.” (p.245). England goes into some detail concerning her motivations for terminating her project, related to the points I have referred to above, as well as her identity as a straight, white academic. England’s reflections are both methodologically inciteful and quite personal. Reading them in the third year of my PhD, having committed to my epistemology and collected my data, I found many of my own nascent reservations and concerns reflected in her account.

The way I have designed this project seems to put it in an ambivalent relationship with the criteria of feminist research outlined by England, mostly in relation to who my research ‘subjects’ actually are. Like many takes on feminist epistemology (as well as humanistic and poststructuralist epistemology), England’s is more applicable to research that incorporates some form of fieldwork, especially fieldwork that has direct contact with participants whom the researcher is in some way sympathetic to. My research fundamentally differs; it is overwhelmingly ‘desk based’, having only the most minimal contact with participants, and even then it is driven by the need to satisfy institutional ethical guidelines rather than a desire to engage in dialogue. Do I even have ‘participants’? Who are they, besides pseudo-anonymous Twitter users? What exactly are they participating in, other than the everyday use of a public platform totally indifferent to my presence? The

Twitter users<sup>2</sup> whose discourse I have focused on are in many cases not only producing discourse that is profoundly regressive, offensive and hateful, but also totally opposed to the underlying political motivations of this project<sup>3</sup>. How can I shift power to the researched when these people are often politically reactionary, or fundamentally opposed to my political position and my research? I am not studying the discourse of marginal groups in secluded spaces, but a very public and often reactionary area of discourse.

Reading England's account leaves me with the impression that she was motivated by a combination of personal/political support for urban lesbian communities, and academic interest, commenting that she thought "the intersection of gender, sexual identities, and space is a very fruitful area for geographic research" (p.246). Despite this interest and opportunity, England did not progress "much beyond merely thinking about" (p.246) conducting her project, mostly for reasons related to ethical concerns for her potential participants concerns, her positionality, and issues of access.

England's motivations for research seem quite typical for many researchers: the intersection of a researcher's interest (whether from personal curiosity or ethical-political reasons), and the identification of a gap in existing literature. Speaking from my own experience these are the kind of motivations that have cropped up since my undergraduate studies, with much of my research interests and projects focusing on the intersections of the internet, misogyny and antifeminism. Whether planning undergraduate dissertations, or MSc and PhD proposals, the most consistent advice from academics and colleagues has been some variation of 'find something you're interested in that you can make an original contribution to'. Despite these seemingly common motivations, England found herself in a position where she felt she risked reproducing the same unethical practices her own feminist background position was highly critical of, specifically that her research risked putting her in the position of the appropriative academic voyeur outlined above. In her own words:

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<sup>2</sup> Although I refer to Twitter 'users' throughout this thesis, it is entirely possible that they are not all human beings. A detailed exploration of the role of bots is outside of the goals of this thesis, see Wilkie et al (2014) for a more detailed exploration of the role of bots in communication on Twitter.

<sup>3</sup> 'Oppositional' social research is by no means unheard of, especially when dealing with people who espouse reactionary or far-right beliefs and practices. For examples, see the work of Michael Billig (1978, 2001)

"I had to ask myself if I am guilty of something similar? Could I be accused of academic voyeurism? Am I trying to get on some cheap package tour of lesbianism in the hopes of gaining some fleeting understanding of, perhaps, the ultimate "other," given that lesbians are not male, heterosexual, not always middleclass, and often not white?... I worried that I might be, albeit unintentionally, colonizing lesbians in some kind of academic neoimperialism." (p.247)

England's concerns and feelings are pertinent to any researcher (including myself) that studies communities to which they do not 'belong', but her language use in particular is something I find quite relatable. Her use of "guilty", "accused", "cheap package tour", "fleeting understanding", "other", and "worried" are all relatable to feelings and thoughts that I have dealt with in conducting this project, particularly in considering reflexivity and positionality at this later stage, and especially when discussing my research with women. In a similar vain to England, I have to ask myself: am I guilty of something similar? Can I be accused of trying to build my career on the voyeuristic study of misogyny? On something I can never really experience or be harmed by? I too am worried, I worry that I have designed and conducted a study that will fail to produce any tangible benefit, other than my own advancement. I worry that I have unintentionally conducted a project that relies on the same methods that feminist scholarship has critiqued: a detached male researcher approaching a field of study they have little connection to, studying issues which do not affect them, using highly detached methodology (data collected automatically in huge quantities) with no interaction with the people affected by these issues. I worry that I have in effect used feminist scholarship as an outsider, to further my own career, and to protect myself as a man from self-examination or criticism.

### **Feminist politics, myself and this project**

The ways my project does – or does not – relate to feminist research has occupied a great deal of my thinking over the past four years, but perhaps more so has been how I, both as a researcher and as a man, relate to feminism and feminist politics. For the remainder of this chapter I will discuss some of these issues in a reflexive manner, relating literature on how men relate to feminism to my personal experiences and biography. Some of what I discuss formed the basis of a presentation I gave at the Bath University Qualitative Research Symposium 2018, and to a series of conversations I had as part of the recording for a podcast episode on men's attitudes to feminism, which is yet to be released.

Being born in 1991, I came of age at a time when high speed internet and ‘Web 2.0’ came to the fore, and fringe internet culture was something I developed an affinity with. A large part of this was an extensive use of 4chan<sup>4</sup>, and an immersion in and identification with much of its culture. While I want to avoid narrativizing my research focus as being somehow intimately related to my biography in a straightforward way, I find it hard to ignore that a researcher who spent a great deal of his teenage years immersed in an online culture that was often exceedingly hateful and misogynistic, has chosen to study hateful and misogynistic discourse. Suffice it to say, between time spent on 4chan and witnessing the outpouring of politicised online misogyny and antifeminism that followed ‘Gamergate’<sup>5</sup>, the critique of misogyny and antifeminism online has been a focus of mine for some time<sup>6</sup>.

Situating myself relatively closely to research goals which are at least nominally related to feminism has caused me to navigate my own personal politics a great deal over the past few years. Much of this has provoked varying levels of discomfort, especially since seemingly unprecedented conversations have occurred in the public sphere related to gender relations over the same period: #MeToo, the election of Donald Trump, the emerging backlash against trans people, the repeated public scandals around widespread sexual misconduct in multiple industries and sectors. All these events, many of them prominently taking place online and on Twitter, have provided an unintended backdrop to my own attempt to reconcile myself with feminism and feminist praxis.

A great deal of this has come down to a very specific dilemma: should I refer to myself as a feminist? While this might seem like a superfluous point, the issues related to praxis and reflexivity contained within it are things which I find quite important: what am I claiming knowledge of, what claims am I implicitly making about my values and actions, what claims relative to women am I making, if I call myself a feminist as a white, cisgendered

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<sup>4</sup> 4chan is a website hosting a range of image-focused, anonymised forums dedicated to a range of topics and interests; from animals, cooking and videogames to firearms, white supremacy and extreme pornography. Once relatively obscure and fringe, the site has received a great deal of journalistic and academic discussion over the past several years, particularly in the purported role it has played in shaping much of the now widespread internet culture, and contemporary neo-Nazism. For a general discussion of 4chan, see Knuttila (2011), for a detailed discussion of 4chan’s relation to the contemporary alt-right see Nagle (2017).

<sup>5</sup> Gamergate is the name given to an online movement that emerged around 2014 from videogame communities on the internet, particularly on 4chan and Reddit, and is highly associated with antifeminist harassment. For a detailed discussion see Massanari (2015), and again Nagle (2017).

<sup>6</sup> Both my undergraduate dissertation and Masters thesis focused on misogynistic discourse, the former drawing data from 4chan and ‘men’s rights’ Reddit communities.

heterosexual man? While addressing these thoughts, my goal is to not arrive at a ‘definitive’ answer to these questions, but rather to question and interrogate why I do not find it personally useful or desirable to label myself as a feminist. Much of my reluctance to apply this label to myself – to implicitly claim that my behaviour, beliefs and practices are less problematic than ‘non-feminist’ men – has been developed through conversations with women and through interaction with literature. When hearing and reading the accounts of women – whether feminist-identifying or otherwise – both inside and outside of academia, I am left with the impression that whether I ‘like’ it or not, how I relate to misogyny and patriarchy is fundamental to my subjectivity as a man.

In short, how can I call myself a feminist when I likely reproduce a whole array of patriarchal and misogynistic practices, and likely hold an array of subconscious dispositions and so on, without even necessarily realising? How can I call myself a feminist when my entire subjectivity – that of a white, heterosexual cis man – is itself contingent on the systemic exclusion and oppression of not only women, but an array of other excluded and minority subjectivities? The very fact that I have found myself in a privileged academic environment, able to study something which touches on areas completely outside of my experience, can be seen as testament to some of these structural issues. No matter how hard or earnestly I may attempt a ‘male-feminist’ praxis, I feel that these issues will always risk being outside of what I can address. If I were to call myself a feminist, I would risk that label functioning as a kind of armour against entirely legitimate critique<sup>7</sup>.

How then can I come to an understanding of these structural issues in a way that makes sense? Here I will briefly discuss approaches to this subject found in literature which similarly treat the issue of ‘male-feminist’ praxis as something inherently contradictory, but in ways which treat this approach as itself motivated by solidarity, and a political and moral attachment to feminism. Writing on the subject of men in feminism, Stephen Heath is similarly sceptical of the idea that men can claim feminist praxis:

“no matter how “sincere,” “sympathetic” or whatever, we are always also in a male position which brings with it all the implications of domination and appropriation... and my desire to be a subject there too in feminism—to be a feminist—is then only also the last feint in the long history of their colonization”

(1987, p.1)

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<sup>7</sup> While there are some alternative labels in semi-common use, such as ‘feminist ally’ or ‘pro-feminist’, I do not feel these address the underlying issues I have discussed. Additionally, ‘pro-feminist’ is worryingly close to ‘professional feminist’.

For me, the above captures many of my thoughts on my own relation to feminism: while I have a great deal of personal and political belief in the deconstruction of gender inequality, and an awareness that society is contingent upon these and other profoundly unequal relations, I also cannot separate myself from them as a male subject. In terms of this research project, I am left in a situation where the best I feel I can do is to reflexively account for and discuss this disconnect, as I have attempted here. Although this project touches on areas very related to feminism and the experiences of women, I am making no deliberate attempt to colonise these areas.

This impossibility is similarly discussed in quite different areas. Writing from a background that draws on Hegelian dialectics, Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Slavoj Žižek writes: “the relation between the sexes is by definition ‘impossible’, antagonistic; there is no final solution, and the only basis for a somewhat bearable relation between the sexes is an acknowledgment of this basic antagonism, this basic impossibility” (Žižek, 1989, p.5). For Žižek, this impossibility is not seen through a feminist perspective, but through an analysis based on the subject positions of men and women under ideology in modernity and capitalism: in short, the way we are structured and configured as subjects leaves us with irreconcilable interests, and the best situation we can hope for is a kind of *respectful distance* in which these differences are acknowledged and negotiated in an amicable and benign way.

Regardless of whether or not this critique is helpful, or whether Žižek is the best person to make it, it still serves to highlight how the antagonisms present under patriarchy transcend individual practice or belief: to some extent they are inscribed upon us as subjects, in ways we cannot necessarily escape. Lingering on Žižek for a moment, the role of the unconscious is pertinent here. Rather infamously, Žižek (2006) appropriates terminology coined by Donald Rumsfeld in relation to the war on terror, coining the phrase “unknown knowns... things we do not know that we know” (2006, p.137) to describe precisely these elements of the unconscious which nonetheless influence our beliefs and behaviour without our conscious awareness. What ‘unknown knowns’ do I carry as a man? No matter how much I may desire to be an ‘authentic male-feminist’ there are certain factors, from the material conditions of my subject position to the very nature of my unconscious mind, that I simply cannot escape.

Returning to a more concretely feminist critique, I will finish by drawing upon the work of bell hooks. In hook’s writing too there is a similar understanding of the issues of our

relationship to feminism, but in a way that offers tangible approaches: “the impossibility of men’s (and I would add, women’s) relationship to feminism does not imply that we can do nothing, but rather that the contradictions cannot be resolved. Accepting that, the challenge, it seems to me, is to develop political, theoretical strategies, all the while keeping in mind to what extent our radical project is a utopian one” (hooks, 1989, p.75). There is a surprising similarity between hook’s and Žižek’s position on this issue, despite the disciplinary differences between them. hooks likewise sees these issues and contradictions as to some extent impossible and irresolvable, but unlike Žižek recommends more than simple respectful distance as an approach. In accepting and working through these contradictions, we are encouraged to undergo a kind of mutual transformation toward this ideal system of relations: “if domination is to end, there must be personal transformation on both sides. For those of us who oppose and resist domination, whether we be dominated or dominators, there is the shared longing for personal transformation, for the remaking and reconstituting of ourselves so that we can be radical” (hooks, 1989, p.32).

## Conclusions

These various perspectives on the relation between an individual and feminist praxis broadly represent how I have come to see this issue, especially in the context of this research project. While my project touches on the experiences of women, I make no claim that the research I have done here is in any way especially feminist, and furthermore I have tried to argue that for me to claim otherwise would be even more problematic. In addition, I as a researcher make no claim that I have any sort of privileged relationship with feminism as a political or scholarly movement, and in addition I feel that to attempt otherwise would be even less desirable. What I have attempted to do with this project is research something that for personal and political reasons I believe is important, and done so to the best of my abilities and with as much sensitivity as I am able. Simultaneously however I completely and unreservedly admit that, from a feminist perspective, there are likely a great many issues with how I have attempted this.

A great deal has changed between the time I decided to investigate this area around 2014/2015, and today, both in terms of current events and personally. I began the study of this topic with good intentions, but a general lack of understanding concerning potential issues around researcher position in being a male researcher studying this topic area in

this manner. While I have tried to acknowledge some of these issues in this chapter, I am in no way suggesting that this mitigates them in a substantive way. I have ultimately, in some ways, played the typical role of the same kind of researcher critiqued by feminist scholarship: wandering into an area unrelated to my experience, possessing little understanding, employing highly detached methods, and using the study of phenomena which effect women as a vehicle to pursue my own research interests and test my own methods.

At the time I began this project, there was growing media attention around a pervasive strain of semi-political misogyny and antifeminism online. Not long after, the alt-right emerged as a political presence, alongside other related groups such as ‘incels’; espousing many of the same ideas, using much of the same language, and coming from many of the same online spaces that had been the subject of my initial critical interest (Nagle, 2017). In this sense, this project began during an awkward interregnum between gamergate and the rise of the alt-right: too late to study one, too early to study the other. The alt-right would likely have been a more suitable area of analysis for this project, given what I have discussed here, but by the time they came to public prominence with Trump’s election as US president, this PhD was very much already in motion.

In writing this short chapter, my goal has not been to absolve myself through some form of confessional, or to use critical reflexivity as a tool to ignore the issues involved in undertaking my project. Returning to England (1994), I find again that in discussing her ‘failed’ project, she captures issues very relevant to my own experiences: “...reflexivity alone cannot dissolve this tension. Reflexivity *can* make us more aware of asymmetrical or exploitative relationships, but it cannot remove them.” (England, 1984, p.450, emphasis in original). Hopefully in providing the reader with this chapter early on in the thesis, I have to some extent approached and discussed these issues.

# Chapter 2: Qualitative social science and the internet.

## History, genealogy, feminism and the Californian Ideology

In this chapter I will provide an overview and review of academic literature concerning the internet, including the intersections of culture and community online, with reference to influential theoretical perspectives and their numerous critics. In doing this I intend to not just provide a review of the relevant literature but also a review and critical discussion of the field of social science approaches to the internet as a whole from a historical perspective, as well as the ideological features of the various actors and cultures who have helped shape the modern internet. In doing this I hope to demonstrate how various evaluations have been made of the internet and social media, between generally optimistic early appraisals to more critical contemporary ones. I will also go into some detail on the role of feminist scholarship in this regard, and by necessity the history of feminism and feminist scholarship more broadly.

There are several reasons for this focus. As this project has been an investigation into Twitter, an online social network, this necessitates a discussion of literature concerning the internet and how appraisals of it have changed over time. As a social network, Twitter is at least nominally a site of online community, culture and sociality, so these aspects will also receive some discussion here. Additionally, the prominent role of feminism in this thesis means that feminism – both in the context of internet research and as a broader movement – warrant attention, particularly the debates around appraisals of the internet. Lastly, as a corporate platform emerging from the United States, Twitter comes out of a sector touched by particular ideological and cultural ideas, related to the imagined role and potential of communications technology, and this too will be discussed. Here I will review how qualitative social science scholarship into the internet has changed over the past decades, as well as a specific discussion about the implications of so-called ‘big data’, and contemporary critical approaches to the digital.

## **Introduction**

Academic literature focusing on the social impacts of what could loosely be called digital technologies – the internet, computers, mobile devices, ICT etc. – has been incredibly diverse in nomenclature, method, theoretical approaches and specific areas of study. Despite the very historically and technologically specific nature of many of its topics, this body of research has to a large extent been concerned with addressing the same fundamental concepts which have figured in social science throughout the history of the social sciences. Much of this has been focused on how these concepts may be “refocused, challenged and recontextualised” (Orton-Johnson & Prior, 2013, p.1) by the emergence of new technologies, and the ways people engage with them, and engage with each other through their use. Community, collectivism, individualisation, identity, culture, inequality, space, place and time have all been subject to rich and varied discussion and debate in the context of rapidly emerging (and later vanishing or diminishing) technologies, online spaces, communication mediums and patterns of use. Together these debates not only serve as an account of the ways the unprecedented expansion of the internet has provided a new medium to study these fundamental concepts, but also how these same technologies have challenged our understanding of these concepts in general. In the following pages I will discuss a selection of this literature by focusing on some of these core concepts, and attempting to critically trace out these debates in a way which frames them in their historical context, and as part of a broader genealogy of social research on the internet. Given this historical and genealogical focus, most of the literature I discuss here comes from the same time period the internet emerged as a more widespread system: the 1990s until around the present time.

## **Context: History, Romance, Hype and ‘Cyberbole’**

Commenting on the wealth of literature which emerged during the 1990s – a period where the internet began to seriously proliferate and gain attention from both media and academics – Woolgar (2002) provides a number of insights which have an interesting relevance today. For Woolgar much of this work was split between “narrow suspicion and uncritical enthusiasm” (pp.3-4) over what these new technologies meant for the individual and for society; on one hand arguing that new technologies would allow people to connect and express themselves in radically emancipatory or enriching ways, and on the other how such technologies would further limit and restrict us and expand the negative aspects of

modernity. While contradictory, both these positions relied on a kind of hyperbolic – or “cyberbolic” (p.9) – interpretation of the effects of these technologies, by assuming that their effects would be both predictable and universal (p.4). Along with these cyberbolic predictions, there also exists a kind of romanticism, especially in that literature which attempts to see the positively transformative potentials of technology, in the form of an “early exotic allure” (Curran, 2012, p.32) at the potentials for emancipation, sometimes characterised by a vocabulary which derived from the works of cyberpunk authors such as William Gibson.

Looking back on this early literature, Woolgar, writing in 2002, suggested that theorists were perhaps coming to the end of these cycles of “hype” (p.22) at the transformative power of new technologies, and that through the adoption of more empirical approaches, a general scepticism at the effects of technology on social change, and a reconsideration of our own assumptions and how we talk about technology could lead to a movement away from such repeating cycles of hype. Perhaps this was again linked to historical context, as Woolgar was himself writing at a time shortly after the infamous dot-com tech bubble of the late 90s, which burst in spectacular fashion near the turning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is clear that looking back from the fallout of this speculative period, one may have been inclined to anticipate a movement away from a preoccupation with ‘newness’ and hype at the promises of technology. Over a decade later, the notion that researchers are beyond technological hype is maybe as alien as it was in the 1990s. While in the 90s theorists poured over the romantic or malign implications of cyberspace, we are today perhaps equally immersed in the potentials, changes and problems of social media, mobile technologies and perhaps most of all by big data. Woolgar’s text helps to provide an overview of early literature, but from a position still nearly 20 years in the past relative to now. These observations function as an intermediate appraisal at a time when the internet was on the cusp of enormous expansion into a form more resembling what we use today. I will now turn to Hand (2014), who looks back at a much longer period from a point in time closer to our own.

## A brief genealogy of internet research

In providing an overview and discussion of qualitative social science scholarship related to the internet during the previous 25 years, Martin Hand (2014) helps to contextualise many of the changes in scholarship that have occurred over this time. Hand argues that one of

the major transformations over this time is a general shift from research which conceives of digital media as a distinct sphere of life separated from day-to-day life, to something which mediates and occupies our general daily lives (p.2). The reasons for this appear more material than intellectual: over this time the consumer internet has gone from a niche space primarily for enthusiasts and professionals to something far more widespread, whilst the massive expansion of networks and infrastructure, the use of digital technologies in the mundane production of capitalism, and the proliferation of devices have embedded these technologies throughout our economy and society (p.2).

Accompanying these material shifts, scholarship appears to have adjusted in kind.

In terms of scholarship, this shift has been characterised by a “multiplication and diversification of the objects, subjects and methods” in research (p.4). Much of this seems most clearly reflected in the kind of terminology found in research. In the earliest phases of the late 80s and early 90s, we see the use of “cyberspace” (p.4) to describe the digital: something ‘out there’, distinct of physical ‘meatspace’, transcendent and non-physical. It is in these accounts that, according to Hand, we tend to see those aforementioned accounts of digital technologies which are possessed of a certain utopian or optimistic outlook, interested in “the radical possibilities for self-transformation and community formation” (p.4) such a (so-called) bodyless space might afford.

Later, around the mid to late 90s, another term entered academic use, one which also speaks to how the digital was being conceived. Instead of cyberspace being the object of discussion it is ‘the virtual’, extending into concepts such as “virtual reality”... ‘virtual worlds’... [and] ‘virtual identity’” (p.4). Here, rather than a totally disembodied and ephemeral space of potentials, the digital is generally seen in terms of how certain kinds of spaces (online games, chat rooms and so on) allowed users to creatively and selectively articulate and perform identity, and create ‘communities’ around mutual interests (pp.4-5). Hand also points out that while these accounts tended to reproduce the concept of ‘cyberspace’, they often had a less utopian optimist outlook (p.4), often questioning whether these agglomerations of users constituted community in an ‘authentic’ sense.

Proceeding through the late 90s, Hand discusses the growing awareness of material factors and political economy which emerged in the field, mostly driven by empirical shifts. Partly this was due to the greater proliferation of digital infrastructure and technologies; the increased penetration of the digital into mundane, commercial and cultural aspects of life problematising the idea that there was a clear “offline and online distinction” (p.5). Put

plainly, the internet stopped being a space primarily used by niche enthusiasts and became something which touched aspects of regular life for a rapidly growing number of people, and the processes underlying contemporary capitalism. Another empirical change “dismantled cyberspace from the ground up” (p.5), through a growing body of ethnographic and related studies which tended to treat digital spaces and the activity of internet users as things which “incorporate and integrate (or not) elements of internet technology into the rhythms of space and practice” (p.5). Here, the digital tended to be seen not as something that functions independently of ‘offline’ spaces, but which can serve as an extension of it.

Again, what much of this has led to, Hand argues, is a general demystification of the internet from a cybernetic world accessed through static computer terminals and modems connected to phonelines, into something much more mundane and ubiquitous: an always-online world of ubiquitous screens, internet-connected objects, and the banal surveillance and data-accumulation which enters myriad aspects of life (p.7). I will now discuss more contemporary scholarship of the digital which focuses on these sorts of issues in a critical manner.

### **Later developments in study**

Cavanagh (2009), in discussing later developments in the study of the internet, argues that while research through the 90s showed a mix of promising research into the breadth of sociality found online and clashes over the use of concepts, later research has attempted to address these issues. In making this argument Cavanagh provides a useful overview of the study of online communities from a more current (for 2009) perspective. For Cavanagh, while the social study of the internet as a whole has become quite established as a field of inquiry, “the study of internet communities has atrophied and coagulated around entrenched and intractable problematics and concerns” (pp.1-2). This process has involved two tendencies in research: “a tendency to underestimate the problem of established interests and power dynamics, and... a tendency to follow technological trends, rather than to set an investigative agenda” (p.2), as well as issues around methodology and definitions.

As identified and discussed earlier, the ways studies of internet community have defined and treated community as a concept has been a problematic issue: a “rather unwelcome

legacy... received from community studies" (p.2) from at least the 1950s. Community has proved to be a complicated and somewhat amorphous concept subject to many definitions and typologies, which include "shared goals, common interests, shared activities and governance, mutual satisfaction of needs, co-operation, enjoyment, pleasure and location" (p.2). For Cavanaugh there are several reasons why definitions for community are so elusive: firstly community as a concept has been accorded a "central status" (p.2) in sociology, in the way it has been juxtaposed with the influences of wider society, and especially of modernity and social change, to the point that the way community has been "radically reconfigured as a result of modernity and the transition to urban industrial society... is the foundational problematic of the sociological project" (p.3). While the central status of community to sociology is one issue, another is the heavy moral and political meaning applied to it, and subsequently the ways in which its supposed loss or change under modernity is "seen as something to be applauded or reviled" (p.3). Community is therefore a highly loaded concept, which is highly contested between different political and theoretical positions both within sociology and in wider discourse. Being so contested community is also subject to constant redefinition based on salient issues within different academic and political fields and wider society, so much so that "the history of the term could as easily be written as the history of the value attached to place within it" (p.3). Within sociology community has undergone several waves of contested revision, from referring to "mutual purpose and belonging" (p.4) in early social theory before being "eroded to a synonym for co-location" (p.4) in the work of Parsons, to later definitions which moved away from a focus on place and proximity toward a focus on mutual feelings of subjectivity and belonging as argued by Weber, and to more empirical analysis of social linkages such as in social network analysis (Cavanaugh, 2009, p.4). What this means for the study of online communities, is that theorists have ended up working with "a rich but jumbled set of concepts... further exacerbated by the lack of overlap between theorists of community and theorists of online community" (p.4). Compounding this is what Cavanaugh sees as a lack of intersection between theorists of community interested in the internet as a novel medium, and theorists of the internet interested in online community, meaning that much research into online communities has operated with an understanding of community which is not grounded in previous theory, and as a result has in some cases "has paralleled and recapitulated the central disputes of community studies" (p.4). Here Cavanaugh analyses these disputes in a way which helps inform the above debates I have discussed, and argues that this disconnect is "nowhere

more in evidence that in the case of disputes over the status of place and locality" (p.4), between those writers who argued online communities had spatiality and place, and others who argued that online communities could not be the same as those communities situated in physical places. This helps to frame Rheingold's account of online communities as having a quality of physical space, as well as Jones' critique that such an account neglects the kind of moral responsibilities which can only emerge from the kinds of close linkages that exist in physical offline communities.

Cavanaugh also provides a discussion of some major strands of research which have influenced the analysis of online communities, which they divide into areas focusing on the impact of online communities, the experiences of people within online communities, and the ways online and offline communities are networked together. Research focusing on impact is "concerned with the effect that Internet involvement can have on other activities, especially offline social commitments" (p.6), and have tended to be polarised in their methodologies, stance with regard to traditional community, and the nature of their results. Much of this research operated with a concern that the involvement of people in internet communities would lead to a disengagement from existing communities and an online social experience which was inferior to those available offline. Cavanaugh argues that his research found contradictory results, with some studies indicating that individuals who used the internet more than others tended to have reduced social networks and time spent with family, and increased loneliness, while the majority of research returned more contradictory results (Cavanaugh, 2009, p.6). Some of these studies found that high internet use was actually associated with low levels of loneliness and isolation, while others suggested it lead to spending more time with other people. Still others argued that, as a facilitator of globalizing processes, the internet would encourage the mixing of global and local interactions and alter the kinds of social interaction people could engage in, rather than making people more isolated (Cavanaugh, 2009, p.6). Other researchers have argued that rather than the internet causing an undermining of communities based on physical place internet communities provide resources and support for the formation of communities around those interests and identities that may not be supported or represented in the immediate place around individuals (p.6). Others still have argued that the internet allows local place based communities to be augmented by use of the internet, reinforcing their sense of place such as through facilitating community based activism.

Research focusing on the experiences of those who identify as part of online communities “concerns the description and analysis of the formal features and composition of communities” (p.7), by examining what exactly made participants feel that they belonged to a community, how communities were made and retained identity, and the ways people interacted within communities. Cavanagh highlights a typology of factors which shape the form of online communities, including “external contexts, technical infrastructure, speed of connection, organisation of materials, temporal structure of the forum and personal characteristics of the users” (p.7). Cavanaugh points out that like much impact-focused research, organisation research on internet communities has tended toward the pessimistic, arguing that such communities may be liable to producing some of the same negative outcomes seen in real communities, rather than being utopian and inclusive. Such research has focused on concepts such as cyber-balkanisation, or “division into smaller and mutually exclusive groups” (p.8), due to their instability, rapid changes in relationships within communities, and a bias toward weak social ties that tended not to maintain over time.

Regarding the work of early optimists such as Rheingold, Cavanaugh argues that although they argue that the internet could represent a space to establish communities which functioned in more egalitarian ways to the traditional hierarchies of offline communities, research has failed to confirm “these largely utopian prospects” (Cavanaugh, 2009, p.8). In contrast, Cavanaugh argues that internet communities are subject to many of the same struggles around the use of power, competition for the favour of the community and its leaders, and the disproportionate power held by community moderators compared to ordinary users (pp.8-9). Cavanaugh argues that the reason such clear power imbalances exist between community members and moderators, and the ways this power is enforced, is related to the relatively high hostility which can be observed when disagreements arise among community members and the speed at which such disagreements can escalate. Cavanaugh highlights that there is a general split in research attempting to explain the phenomena, between those theorists who see the problem as being created through the medium of the internet, i.e. through online disinhibition, immediacy of interaction or relative anonymity, or alternatively as being the result of existing inequalities carried over from offline contexts (p.9). Regardless of the cause, Cavanaugh sees power and its enactment as “fraught and reactive, largely consisting in a need to police and mediate conflict” (p.10), and highly problematic in communities where transgression is seen as

deviating from the beliefs of the community, often taking the form of public shaming of different kinds.

One of the most prominent and infamous cases of this logic of naming and shaming is the ‘virtual rape’ which occurred on a ‘LambdaMOO’ online community<sup>8</sup>. Cavanaugh concludes that overall the study of online relationships and communities has arrived at a somewhat pessimistic outlook on their nature and quality, seeing them as “fragmentary, fleeting and ephemeral... univocal and inward facing” (p.10), begging the question of why many people seek out these situations and find fulfilment in them. Cavanaugh sees two broad approaches to explaining this which are themselves subject to much debate, and relate to broader approaches to theorising online community identified above: explanations which see people engaging in online communities as being pushed into them by the disintegration of offline community under modernity, and others which argue that people are able to find meaningful experiences online which augment their offline social worlds. Others still have simply seen the growth of online communities as a continuation of offline processes of modernity, rather than a retreat from them (pp.10-11).

In discussing the more recent developments in the research of online communities, Cavanaugh emphasises the role of various kinds of social network analysis. This form of analysis uses more quantitative methods and metrics to empirically map the links between internet users, the platforms they engage with, and how they relate to each other, in ways which would have been difficult to capture using previous methods of research, which focused on very situated studies of particular communities. This research takes advantage of “the widespread availability of tools for visualising and exploring online links” (p.11) between commercial websites and large-scale social networks and takes advantage over the ways these platforms are designed to link users and traffic between them. This research has raised several new issues in the field, such as arguments that the shifting of peoples’ sociality over these networks could represent new forms of highly mediated social life unique to an era of widespread internet use, and a move away from the highly situated sociality of pre-modern era, or the “one-to-many communicative forms

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<sup>8</sup> The ‘virtual rape’ incident is infamous in the history of online community research. To briefly summarise: around 1993 a user in a text-based online role-playing network, ‘raped’ other users via lurid, violent textual descriptions of sexual violence they were committing against their textual avatars, while embodying the character of a clown. What followed was a quasi-judicial community debate as to what should be done to the offending user, including turning their avatar into a ‘toad’ and deleting their post history. For a detailed contemporary account, see Dibbell (1994).

epitomised by broadcast media” (p.11). The nature of this sociality and its bearing on community is still a debated topic, especially questions around whether the moral aspects of community are lost in these disembedded social relations (p.11), as Jones has argued in assessing early online communities. Concluding, Cavanaugh makes a number of observations which have specific relevance to this project, arguing that two enduring issues in the study of online communities are a preoccupation with the novelty of new technologies, and a failure to look at the political implications of online communities. In terms of novelty, Cavanaugh argues theorists have been too focused on describing the novelty of new systems and the ways people utilise them, rather than focusing on the potential uses they could be put to, as well as ignoring the struggles between competing commercial and social interests involved in their use. “Equally less often explored” (p.12) are the more perverse consequences of new technologies and their negative or malign aspects, such as how power is exercised over members, the functions of surveillance and, crucially for my study, the ways in which “social exclusion and reinforcement of traditional hierarchies are equally if not more probable outcomes” (p.12). I have focused on Cavanaugh here because this account succinctly demonstrates changes in the general appraisal within scholarship concerning the internet, specifically community. Here we again see a general turn to ambivalence and critique over early optimism. Next, I will discuss more explicit critiques of the contemporary internet and social media, particularly ones which focus on social media.

### **Contemporary critique of the corporatized internet**

Here is will outline a range of contemporary critiques to the internet as it stands today, focusing on how corporate-owned platforms and networks have come to be seen as problematic by a range of writers and theorists. I will start by examining prominent internet scholarly whose critiques speak to growing concerns of the contemporary, corporatized internet, before turning to feminist appraisals of this area.

Legal scholar Tim Wu has produced a critique of America-based tech companies (Google, Amazon, Facebook etc) that invokes antitrust concepts, to criticise what he sees as increasingly powerful monopolies in the tech sector (2018). In it, Wu argues that the initial optimism that characterised the flourishing of multiple and diverse small platforms in the early years of the internet (which I have outlined to some extent previously) has been

largely replaced by a growing concern, as power online is increasingly held by a small number of large and powerful companies (p.86-87). Wu sees this massive consolidation as a serious issue for a democratic society, particularly in the case of Facebook, where enormous quantities of speech within the public sphere are centralised into a single conglomerate, which includes both Instagram and Whatsapp. In this situation the concentration of power leaves public speech open to manipulation, potentially in a way that is deleterious for democratic institutions (p.96).

Elsewhere, Wu (2016) has produced similar critiques of the contemporary internet, but with a focus on the attention economy: the commodification and monetisation of human attention (advertising etc), and its particular incarnation online. In this account, Wu also identifies a general waning of optimism that characterised the early internet, as tech companies such as Google moved away from an explicit anti-advertising ethos through the 1990's, toward the present state where Google derives substantial revenue from targeted advertising (pp.278-289). Likewise, Wu identifies a gradual turn in terms of the kind of content the internet offered through the 1990's and into the 00's. During this period, the internet transitioned from largely centralised and standardised forms of content found in legacy media, to an enormous proliferation of user-generated content of many varieties. This was typified by the rise in blogging from the year 2000 onward (pp.305-307), and particularly by the creation and rapid growth of YouTube in the mid 00's. From this massive proliferation of media, Wu locates the genesis of viral content (p.318), so-called 'clickbait', and contemporary social networks (p.324), which all enabled new forms of monetisation of users' attention. For Wu, social media sites are not only problematic in how they form part of an attention economy, but in how they can foster an alienating and inauthentic experience of social connection (p.338). Concerning Twitter specifically, Wu is similarly critical, characterising it as a platform that enrols users in a narcissistic program of acquiring a small measure of niche fame via cultivating followers of their content (pp.343-345).

One of the more notable contemporary critics of the corporatized internet bares mentioning here. Jaron Lanier is a computer scientist and philosophical writer who has published several critiques of the contemporary internet and social media, a selection of which I will outline here (2018, Lanier & Euchner, 2019). In the case of social media platforms – and the broader ecosystem of sites and apps designed to capture a user's attention – Lanier characterises them as both addictive and manipulative in their function

(2018, p.12). For Lanier, this addictive, behaviour modifying nature manifests itself in numerous ways: from the design of particular sites and services, to how social networking produces feedback (likes, interaction, followers, shares et al.) which serve to encourage more engagement and use on the part of the user, to explicitly negative feedback in the form of “senseless rejection, being belittled or ignored, outright sadism” (p.13). In both cases, these forms of feedback are argued to potentially influence a user’s behaviour into addictive patterns, at least in some measure of the population (p.12). Beyond the expected potential for personal harm this could cause, Lanier sees broader social harms at the scale social media operates, namely how these technologies could hold potential for mass-manipulation of behaviour, and alienation (p.12).

Elsewhere (Lanier & Euchner, 2019), Lanier has been explicit in what he sees as both the widespread negative social consequences of corporatized social media, and the similar negative changes that occurred in tech cultures over the previous decades. Referring to the aforementioned potential threats posed by social media to democracy and civil society (through surveillance, behaviour manipulation, targeted political advertising, fake news etc), he asserts that “social media, together with AIs hooked in with videos you see... Those sorts of things have been used in horrible ways and have disrupted politics all over the world... They’ve made the world a worse place” (p.14). For Lanier, these issues are not simply caused by technology in isolation, but are themselves symptoms of cultures within the broader tech industry since its inception. Lanier sees this early idealism as being characterised by an overly optimistic attitude toward the potentials of computer technology and networks, and an unwillingness to “consider the dark side of what they were doing” (p.14) in terms of the potential for an open attitude toward the sharing of information to lead to enormous data monopolies being held by corporate platforms, used for behavioural manipulation and profit.

Taken together, the critiques presented by Wu and Lanier speak to a perspective of the contemporary, corporatized internet which is a far cry from the optimism that characterised early tech-cultures, and the diversity of online platforms of the 1990’s. They highlight a contemporary online space which is characterised by the dominance of monopolistic companies, business models based on exploitative practices of behavioural manipulation and surveillance, and a range of perverse consequences which deeply affect civil society.

From a different perspective, feminist scholars have also made critiques of the internet and social media which are central to this area. Here I will outline a small selection of accounts on this topic, before moving into a more detailed and extended discussion of feminist scholarship and theory, both from a historical perspective and specifically relating to online misogyny and feminist activism.

Twenty years ago, during a time when mass-engagement with the internet was beginning to rapidly accelerate, Morahan-Martin (2000) reflected on the potentials the internet held for women as a class, both positive and negative. Arguing that characterisations of the internet as either a wholly positive or negative force are not satisfactory, she rather reflects that while the internet has created and unprecedented space for networking, support, activism, empowerment and support, it has also created a space for harassment, hostility and violence, often through the same mechanisms and technologies (p.683). This ambivalence about what the internet held for women is appropriate, as in the intervening years much scholarly attention has been paid to both the apparent positive and negative consequences.

Much feminist scholarship dealing with these negative consequences has focused on how online networks have served to extend misogynistic practices. Writing early in the decade, Mantilla (2013) asserts that “the advent of online communities has enabled new forms of virulent sexism... specifically misogynist variants” (p.563). For Mantilla gendered forms of online harassment are distinct both from pre-internet forms of gendered harassment and broader online hostility, in that it serves a specific function of limiting women’s engagement with the internet as a public sphere, and maintain it as a male-dominated space (p.569).

Likewise, some years later Ging and Siapera (2018) pointed to “growing concerns” (p.515) both in the public sphere and feminist scholarship, about the degree to which women experience gendered harassment and abuse online. In a similar vein to broader critiques of the internet outlined above, the authors locate the causes of these phenomena in the structural conditions of the corporatized internet, and the (predominantly masculine) culture of the tech industry (p.521). Here, the numerous negative and perilous aspects of the internet experienced by women are “the product of systemic misogyny and sexism in

wider culture, combined with the affordances of various platforms and their attendant (sub)cultures” (p.522).

## Feminist Scholarship and Theory

In this section I will build on the previous section, to outline and discuss feminist scholarship covering topics particularly pertinent to this thesis. This will begin with a brief outline of historical and contemporary tensions within feminist politics and scholarship (especially relating to neo/liberal feminism), before moving on to scholarship around misogyny and ‘backlash’, and concluding with a more detailed discussion of contemporary debates within feminist scholarship, pertaining to representation and activity online.

### Historical and contemporary tensions

While a comprehensive and detailed discussion of the historical trajectories of feminist activism, politics and scholarship is beyond the scope and purpose of this section, I will nonetheless attempt to provide the reader with a functional overview of this topic. In doing so, I will emphasise how divergent schools of thought have emerged, and the particular tensions and divisions between them.

It is common in historical narratives of feminism to demarcate its history – in both activist and academic forms – into a series of ‘waves’, which may resemble the following: a ‘first wave’ concerned with formal civil equality within liberal society, generally taking place between the mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> century until sometime after the First World War; a diverse and sometimes radical ‘second wave’ concerned with women’s liberation from patriarchal conditions (many of which also involving a focus on sexuality, and race/racism), generally taking place between and around the 1960’s and 1980’s; and a ‘third wave’ extending from the 1990’s onwards, sometimes involving a move away from systemic critique toward individualised understanding of gender inequality, other times involving the idea that an active feminist movement is no longer necessary.

Unsurprisingly, this is an imperfect way of dividing up an incredibly complex, global phenomenon. June Hannam (2014) highlights this, arguing that a historical narrative resembling the above is flawed not only in how it privileges those particular feminist thinkers and activists (generally white, generally western, often of more privileged social classes) whose accounts and activism have become ‘canonical’, but also in how the very

idea of ‘waves’ itself serves to obscure feminist thought and activism that occurred between these points (pp.4-5). Furthermore, this historical narrative is predominantly based around a reading of feminist history as it occurred in the Anglosphere (p.5). Nevertheless Hannam’s text does in part focus on the “broad trends and changes over time” (p.8) within feminism, which I will briefly outline here.

Hannam locates the origin of what we would today consider feminism within the European Enlightenment (p.11). While the Enlightenment produced modern concepts of universal rights, reason, liberty and so on, it did so in ways which ultimately excluded women (among many groups and classes of people), but nonetheless opened up spaces for some groups of women to “demand their voices be heard” (p.11). From here a series of feminist organisations and prominent thinkers emerge; from liberal thinkers calling for the equal involvement of women in the public sphere, to abolitionists who linked slavery to female subjugation, to utopian socialists who argued for radical restructuring of society so as to emancipate women as a gendered class and as workers (pp.12-16).

Thus, Hannam argues, ‘early’ currents and forms of feminism “developed as part of a much broader radical campaign” (p.18), one which often existed in tension between middle class women who wanted inclusion into civil society along the lines enjoyed by middle class men, and those demanding a much broader inclusion extended across society (p.18). Through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these early currents grew into national and international aspects of the broader ‘Women’s Movement’, which across many countries played major roles in bringing about greater inclusion for women in public life, education, and employment (p.28). While the first organised movements for women’s suffrage emerged in the 1860’s (p.30), these demands would not be broadly achieved until the 1920’s (p.46), during which period the various aspects of suffrage movements maintained a sometimes ambivalent relationship toward the extension of the franchise to non-whites, and toward support for the colonial and imperial projects of their own countries (pp.34-35). Outside of Europe and the Anglosphere, the struggle for franchise extended into the 1930’s and beyond the Second World War (pp.47-49).

Throughout this period, the various women’s movements contained tensions. This was particularly the case as feminist activists played roles in broader and overlapping political movements of the era such as nationalism, communism and so on: in many cases tensions

between sex, party and class (p.52). The global nature of the various feminist movements, and the tensions present within the wider context of national and international political projects, highlighted fundamental tensions within feminism. In particular, these tensions were present in how women from Western and non-western or colonised countries related to one another as a class, and the extent to which this problematised the idea of a universal feminist politics (p.54).

Hannam partly locates the growth of what can be called ‘Second Wave Feminism’ in the fact that despite being formally equal under the law in many countries, women did not necessarily experience much in the way of “fundamental change in their political, social and economic position” (p.76), and still widely experienced inequality within domestic and family contexts (p.78). Several areas of concern emerged out of this through the 1960’s and 70’s, key to which was the push to develop political understandings of what may otherwise be viewed as personal issues (p.81). These included media representations of women and the effects on their self-image, the body, the naming of ‘sexism’ as an issue (including within left and anti-war political groups), the need for single-sex political organisation, the effects and experiences of advertising and consumerism, sex and sexuality, relationships, identity, the political significance of the family, access to safe and legal abortion, equal pay, and contraception (pp.78-82).

Again, this period was one where internal tensions were present within feminist politics, particularly in relation to other structural and political issues. While liberal schools of feminist thought focused more on issues of rights and opportunity in relation to individuals, radical feminist thought tended to focus more on fundamental structural issues around patriarchy, male violence and systemic oppression, and prescribed radical social change in response (p.82). Marxist schools of thought also emerged, which integrated a critique of gender inequality and patriarchy in Marxist political economy (p.82). For Hannam, these tensions and disagreements over both the root cause(s) of oppression and the political remedies, signified the major divisions within feminist thought and politics, division which were often “based on class, race, religion and ethnicity” (p.88) as well as sexuality. Working class, black and lesbian feminists encountered widespread feelings of alienation from a movement that was “dominated by white, educated, middle class heterosexual women and their concerns” (p.87), particularly on issues such as the primacy of patriarchy over racism, the universality of women’s experiences, the nature of

the family, the role of heterosexuality in patriarchy, and the roles played by more privileged women in upholding these systems.

From the 1980's, changes in the economic, political and intellectual landscape around feminism lead to a general fragmentation and loss of momentum as a broad movement (p.90). Hannam locates the general causes of this as relating to widespread gains for women in terms of civil rights and economic opportunities, increasing scepticism toward 'women' as a meaningful category, and the widespread rightward shift in politics during this period (pp.90-92). In particular, there emerged during this period a widespread narrative in media and public discourse that the era was now one of "post-feminism" (p.90), which suggested not only that feminism was no longer necessary given apparently greater equality, but also an active rejection of previous eras of radical feminist politics, despite how endemic inequality still was for many women (p.91). Despite this apparent downturn in organised feminist activity, Hannam points out that the 1990's were still a period of collective activism for women, which raised the possibility of an emerging "third wave" (p.92).

Hannam points out the idea of a 'Third Wave' feminism is a contested topic (p.93), and yet again a site of tension. What unites all elements of the debate around contemporary feminism however, is a repudiation of the idea that society is post-feminist (p.93). The author points out that feminist activism leading up the 21<sup>st</sup> century focused on a diverse array of issues (ecology, human rights, poverty), and was still a site of debates and tensions which have been present throughout previous eras of feminist politics and thought (p.94).

### **Misogyny and 'backlash'**

During this period, Susan Faludi (1991) wrote about this supposed downturn in feminist organisation and political activity from the mid-80's, identifying it as a period of *antifeminist backlash*. For Faludi, the substantive rights and equality won by feminist organisation were actively stymied by widespread economic, political and media reaction. In this sense, the perception of feminism as being somehow in decline and the movement into 'post-feminism' was not caused by women achieving full meaningful equality, but as a reaction due to the possibility that full equality was increasingly possible (p.11). This has led to a situation, as outlined above, where while some more relatively privileged classes

of women (white, middle class, western etc) experience a greater degree of autonomy and inequality, many less privileged groups of women still do not (p.12).

For Faludi, this backlash is not necessarily the result of active counter-organisation against women at the political or economic level, but rather a much wider and more distributed set of reactionary phenomena lacking central organisation (p.13). Faludi highlights that, potentially, this nature has made it perversely more effective in how it in effect turns the systemic oppression of women its sets of discrete, private, individualised problems, and in effect blames women and feminist for wider social issues (p.14). Furthermore, Faludi argues that the phase of backlash she was writing about in the early 1990's was not at all unique to that period. Rather, this was simply a particular period of reaction, one of many that has occurred periodically throughout the history of the women's movement in response to heightened feminist organisation and political victories (p.62).

At the time of writing, Faludi identified several features of the current backlash. These included a diverse array of discourses which were coming to prominence: "invented" (p.70) statistics and reportage arguing that divorce and contraception/abortion were leading to a crisis in families and fertility, a false perception that the wage gap was disappearing, that sexual harassment at work was no longer a serious issue, and that rates of rape were static (p.70). Similarly, there emerging cultural trends which valorised 'traditional' femininity and (heterosexual) marriage over autonomy, and a renewed identification of women with the family and private sphere (pp.71-72).

Part of this backlash too was an emerging split in gendered perceptions of feminist political issues. Faludi highlights that it was during the 1980's that polls found men, for the first time, were markedly less likely than women to support equal roles for women in the economy and politics, and that men were increasingly likely to support 'traditional' family structures, and saw feminism as being having had an actively negative effect of men's lives. For Faludi, this suggested that during this period "men's support for women's rights issues was not old lagging but might actually be eroding" (p.75). Similarly to the general trends of previous periods of backlash, Faludi argues that feelings of disempowerment, resentment and injury among men in the face of women's advancement have been a consistent feature of these periods of reaction (p.77).

In this sense, male resentment at the gains made by women represents a misrecognition of the systemic, wider negative economic circumstances which are often unintelligible to neoliberal subjects; a situation where the turmoil of the economy (general decreases in living standards, raising unemployment, alienation) are blamed on women, despite the fact that women often suffer more from these forces. In Faludi's words: "The economic victims of the era are men who know someone has made of their future – and they suspect the thief is a woman" (p.81).

Very recently, Susan Faludi was interviewed on the topic of backlash in relation to our current political moment (Faludi et al, 2020). Two decades later Faludi notes that, far from being something that generally occurs in a background manner, contemporary antifeminist backlash is far more open and declared by its proponents (p.338). While more subtle media and cultural discourse is still a central part, today's backlash is one which is more overt, particularly embodied in the election and presidency of Donald Trump, active efforts to reduce women's access to abortion in the United States, and the growth of antifeminist and misogynistic harassment online. Similar, however, to previous periods of backlash, the current one is also seen as a result of misrecognition on the part of people who feel fear at the massive changes to their lives caused by "deindustrialisation, the technological revolution [and] globalisation" (p.343). In this situation, Faludi highlights that once again a reactionary movement to position men as the class most harmed by these changes, with blame placed not only on women and feminism, but also a range of other minority groups and movements (p.339).

For the remainder of this section, I will discuss how contemporary forms of online feminism and misogyny have been framed in literature, and highlight how much of this area (particularly online misogyny) relates to backlash, particularly in the way feelings of injury and exclusion are mis/recognised by social actors.

### **Contemporary feminist scholarship relating to the internet**

Here, I will discuss a contemporary area of feminist scholarship which is closely related to topics covered in this thesis, namely the recent 'popularisation' of feminism and feminist discourse, primarily in online spaces. Much of the discourse analysed and discussed in later chapters consists of users (primarily corporate, government and NGO accounts) expressing support for ostensibly feminist political positions and projects. Beyond this, it is also likely

that a great many users (actual identifiable people, women, non-corporate accounts etc) also used IWD2017 as an opportunity to express positive sentiment toward feminist projects and ideas. Given this, and especially because of the arguments I make about corporate positivity in this area, I will in this section focus on recent feminist scholarship which has engaged with popular feminism in contemporary online spaces.

Central to this literature is the work of Sarah Banet-Weiser, particularly her 2018 text: 'Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny', and the various responses to this text and work in the broader topic it approaches. In her text, Banet-Weiser (2018) reflects on what she sees as the contemporary popularisation of feminist politics, discourse and sentiment, and the accompanying misogynistic backlash. In doing this, she also explores the related growth and characteristics of contemporary misogyny, particularly in how both relate to digital networks where visibility is a key factor.

For Banet-Weiser, contemporary 'popular' feminism is popular in three distinct but related ways, which encompass media, culture and politics; first through the prominence of feminist discourse and expression within 'popular media' (digital media, social media, Twitter), second through being 'popular' in the sense of having a certain positive association in particular social groups and cultural contexts, and third through being 'popular' in the sense of being part of the contested terrain of popular politics, the public sphere, and power (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p.1).

This popular feminism has its own distinct features, and similarly to the topics of this thesis many of these features relate to how feminism and female empowerment is presented and constructed within corporate discourse and advertising. Banet-Weiser remarks that the incorporation/appropriation of ostensibly feminist sentiment, and discourse associated with female empowerment, into advertising and consumerism constitutes "an important way that popular feminism itself is branded" (p.44).

Banet-Weiser identifies a number of themes and key discourses which are central to popular feminism, particularly in this corporatized form, but also to the reactive popular misogyny. Central to this is what she argues are the "twinned discourses of *capacity* and *injury*" (p.4, emphasis in original). Here, capacity and injury are seen as intimately related to contemporary neo/liberal ideology and culture: the individual's capacity as a neoliberal

subject to fulfil the goals that are presented to them as economic and social actors, and the injuries the individual perceives to be suffering that prevent them from fulfilling these goals adequately (p.4). In the case of some forms of popular feminism, these capacities may include women's capacity to be active economic agents on par with men (entrepreneurs, CEOs), and the injuries may be sexist hiring/promotion practices, workplace cultures of misogyny and harassment, lack of prominent women as heads of industry, and so on. While both popular feminism and popular misogyny approach these discourses, they do so in different ways. Thus, Banet-Weiser's approach to this set of phenomena not only situates contemporary popular feminism and its misogynistic reaction in relation to contemporary networked technologies, but also to neo/liberal systems of structural power, culture and ideology. This identification of neoliberalism, both as a background to these developments and as a core logic of certain forms of popular feminism, echoes Rottenberg's (2013) own writing on the topic.

As it relates to this thesis, another key element of popular feminism identified by Banet-Weiser is what she terms "*sentimental earnestness*" (2018, p.46, emphasis in original). This refers simultaneously to both "a central logic... and a mode of address" (p.46) within certain prominent forms of popular feminism, particularly corporatized forms such as advertising (a form which is prominently featured in this thesis). Here, sentimental earnestness refers to forms of advertising and public relations that centre the injuries and negative experiences of women under patriarchy, but in response "marshals entrepreneurialism and feminine capacity" (p.46). In short, this set of discourses expresses an ostensibly earnest recognition for the experiences of women and the inequalities they face, but ties responses to commodified forms of action: particularly to forms of consumption.

A key consequence of this mode of sentimental earnestness is the folding-in of practices previously seen as belonging more to the realm of feminist politics, such as educating a mass audience about particular forms of exclusion and inequality experienced by women (p.48). In this way, elements of feminism as a political project are appropriated; moved into a corporate, neoliberal mode where collective forms of action and critique are disavowed, replaced by patterns of consumption, and highly individualised action on the part of particular women (p.49). Taken together, popular feminism is here a form of

highly-contemporary feminist expression which is deeply related to neoliberal subjectivity, individualisation, corporate discourse, and the structure/function of online networks.

Deeply related to the growth of popular feminism, is what Banet-Weiser identifies as the growth of a reactive *popular misogyny*. While this relationship itself (the reactionary backlash against women and feminism) is not at all new, Banet-Weiser identifies this particular form as novel for similar and related reasons that contemporary popular feminism is novel; that is too takes place particularly in highly mediated sand digital spaces (social media etc), and likewise interacts with the economy of visibility (pp.2-4). As a reactionary turn, popular misogyny is a contemporary for of backlash which has taken advantage of the particular affordances of contemporary networked technology and culture. By reacting to the growth of popular feminism, particularly its visibility in popular culture, discourse and the public sphere, popular misogyny's apparent growth represents a movement of misogynistic discourse from previously enclosed environments (the home, workplaces, 'male' spaces) into a digital environment where it moves and is expressed at a great scale and with relative ease (p.5).

While inter/related with popular feminism, popular misogyny is not directly comparable in all senses, and cannot be characterised in exactly the same terms, and has its own particular features (p34). These include its profoundly *networked* nature: rather than patriarchy manifesting more as sets of discrete relations and institutions, this contemporary backlash manifests in the decentralised and asynchronous networks of communication whilst still being tied to patriarchal institutions (pp.34-35). As a profoundly networked form of reactionary politics, popular misogyny "refuses to sit still" (p.36). With the affordances of online networks, popular misogyny can take on not only more historically recognisable forms, but also forms created and facilitated by digital networks (e.g. harassment, abuse and hostility on social media), and at its most extreme, this network can include right wing misogynistic political violence (p.36). For Banet-Weiser, the incorporation of extreme violence within networks of popular misogyny has further perverse consequences. Specifically, these highly visible manifestations have the effect of obscuring the ultimately structural nature of patriarchy and misogynistic violence as a social system, as they may give the impression that these incidences are rather simply a case of political fringe groups and actors (pp.34-35).

Popular misogyny is also framed as a “recuperative project” (p.35), meaning that it presents its political project as recouping the losses and restoring the damage seen to have been caused by feminism, particularly contemporary popular feminism, by ‘taking back’ what has been lost (p.35). For Banet-Weiser, this situates popular misogyny as deeply related to other contemporary reactionary political projects, namely the contemporary extreme right and alt-right (p.35). In this context, feminist may be situated in relation to other political projects and concepts that are the targets of reactionary politics, such as equality, multiculturalism, tolerance etc., which are also seen as causing injuries to men as a class and reducing their capacities in society (p.35).

Similarly to popular feminism (particularly its corporatized, commodified forms), popular misogyny is deeply related to contemporary neoliberalism: indeed it is a “consolidation of the logic of neoliberal violence” (p.40). While much neoliberal popular feminist discourse focusses on individualised injuries (lack of personal confidence vs empowerment etc.), popular misogyny does so in ways which apply these logics to the perceived injuries of men as a result of women and feminism, and pursues often violent courses of action. A particular example of this is seen in the growth and persistence of the ‘seduction’ and ‘pickup-artist’ communities and industries. Here, the perceived lack of sexual and romantic self confidence felt by particular men is treated as an issue created by women (through their increased participation in society, increased ability to choose the terms of their relationships, or lack thereof, with men), and the solution is framed in terms of men developing their own capacity for self-confidence in profoundly misogynistic ways which reinforce rape culture (pp.123-126).

Popular feminism and popular misogyny, as mentioned previously, are seen by Banet-Weiser as deeply related phenomena: both relating to the popular and popularity in various ways, both produced by and reproducing neoliberal logics, and both deeply connected to the conditions of a networked society and social media. A final concept that links these phenomena is what the author sees as the particular nature of this visibility. Banet-Weiser frames her understanding of visibility within the context of contemporary media, and the networks found of capitalist media platforms (pp.21-22). While historically visibility has been a common aspect of politics, particularly feminist politics in relation to marginalised groups, in this context visibility it transformed from a tool toward a political goal or structural critique to and end in and of itself within the logics of neoliberal media

(p.23). Likewise, the primary structures available which facilitate this visibility for its own sake are highly mediated, corporate environments such as social media (p.24), where to be visible is deeply related to effective engagement with the tools of a social media platform, and where the individuals engaged in these practices perform roles of producers and consumers (p.28).

This visibility relates to popular misogyny in how it has allowed previously disparate misogynistic groups and movements (men's rights activists, pickup artists, right wing activists etc) to come together online and form networks (p.116). While many of these groups are seen as extreme outliers within popular misogynistic cultures, Banet-Weiser points out that their increased visibility and normalisation has had more far-reaching consequences, particularly in likely contributing to the election of President Donald Trump (p.177), and other more direct eruptions of violence (p.178).

Here, Banet-Weiser (2018) provides a convincing account which echoes and extends the account of antifeminist backlash outlined famously by Susan Faludi (1991), but in a way which is not only applied to a contemporary networked context with its own particular features, but also in a way that accounts for how contemporary feminism has developed (and been co-opted) in this context.

While Banet-Weiser (2018) tends to view popular feminism as being something that, while potentially positive in the sense that it draws attention to feminist issues, nonetheless has certain troubling features, other theorists have taken an overall more positive view toward popular formations of feminist discourse online. Across two co-publications, Emilie Lawrence and Jessica Ringrose (Lawrence and Ringrose, 2018, Ringrose and Lawrence, 2018) examine how networks of feminist activity on the internet and social media can form active responses to misogyny, particularly through the use of humour and irony. Similarly to Banet-Weiser (2018), Lawrence and Ringrose (2018) suggest that the contemporary moment may be one where we are witnessing a heightening of both pro and anti-feminist politics and discourse (p.19), particularly in online spaces, where the current wave of feminist action is especially evident within networks (p.4). Here, examples of popular pro-feminist accounts are examined which deploy humour, such as through parodying anti-feminist discourse (p.10) as a form of critique. In doing so, the authors argue that such accounts are formulating critique in novel ways which "offers participants

new, potentially empowering, ways to understand and engage with topics like the wage gap and sexual violence” (p.11). Particular attention is paid here to the ways in which these humorous approaches have been employed within intersectional feminist discourse, such as highlighting not just the inherent sexism of beauty standards, but the ways in which these beauty standards operate along racialised lines (p.12). Other functions of this approach to humour are highlighted, specifically how the humorous, ironic performance of ‘misandry’ online can perform two functions; acting both as a way to critique and refute the idea that men can suffer systemic exclusion from women, and as a way to build a kind of solidarity between female participants in this form of humour by functioning as an in-joke (p.18).

In a similar vein, the authors also discuss the productive implications of feminist humour as resistance in the context of Tumblr, a social networking site (Ringrose and Lawrence, 2018). Similar to the previously outlined, the authors here focus on the potential feminist humour has online for offering a set of tools which “differs dramatically from other forms of reacting to, and exposing, sexism and sexual violence, aiming to do something more than document and prove victimisation... *to change the meaning attributed to the reality being documented*” (p.687, emphasis in original). Again focusing on feminist ironisation of ‘misandry’, Ringrose and Lawrence highlight how this and other approaches to humour can allow forms of “feminist humour to emerge that call out and potentially transform masculine entitlement and dominance” (p.701).

In a slightly different online context – but still focusing on the potentially productive use of online platforms in feminist practice – Garcia and Vemuri (2017) have assessed the use of YouTube vlogs as a medium for young women to discuss their experiences of rape culture. In it, they observe that producers of these videos (testimonials and discussion of rape culture and feminist allyship) “actively use digital media tools to connect rape culture with lived experiences and to critique oppressive institutional structures” (p.39). These accounts were not only detailed in terms of personal experience, but also treated rape culture as a systemic issue that is contingent with the media, politics, and other social institutions (p.35). Taken together, the works outlined above do show that – as Banet-Weiser (2018) acknowledges – despite the potentially problematic nature of popular feminism, it is nonetheless a space for productive and positive feminist activity which responds to forms of systemic oppression.

This section has attempted to outline relevant historical and recent feminist scholarship, theory and how these relate to the broader feminist movement through its history. While not comprehensive, it has focused on those topics which are most relevant to this thesis and the data I will go on to analyse: the tensions around how contemporary, networked feminist activism can be understood, particularly in relation to the concept of antifeminist backlash, as well as the historical tensions within feminism. The tensions around the position of liberal notions of individualism in relation to activism, the critique of systemic inequality, and particularly the historical significance of misogyny and antifeminism will play a major part later in this thesis.

### **The Californian Ideology**

Much of this chapter has discussed historical research of the internet, both in terms of how social science researchers have tended to talk about it, and how non-academic actors such as prominent cultural figures like Rheingold, and tech entrepreneurs have conceived of it. As I have previously outlined, much early academic work concerning the internet has tended to have a more utopian and optimistic outlook on the potentials of the internet for community, culture and social transformation, which has generally been tempered over the past few decades. Contemporary perspectives, notably some feminist perspectives, often have a more ambivalent and critical appraisal.

However, this optimistic and even utopian outlook has a more prominent and possibly more formative manifestation when discussing platforms such as Twitter, which like so many platforms has emerged from the material and cultural milieu of California. Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron's influential discussion of what they termed "the Californian Ideology" (1996, p.44) goes into some detail on this cultural area, and most crucially does so in a way which critically centres it in the context of capitalism. In defining the Californian Ideology, Barbrook and Cameron look to a cultural milieu similar to that identified by Castells (2001) which I discussed earlier in this chapter: that of highly tech-savvy enthusiasts, venture capitalists, and disruptive thinkers who were active primarily in the West Coast of the United States while the internet was emerging. According to Barbrook and Cameron, it is this "loose alliance of writers, hackers, capitalists, and artists from the West Coast of the United States [who] have succeeded in defining a heterogeneous orthodoxy for the coming information age" (Barbrook & Cameron, p.44).

What prominently defines the Californian Ideology is this coming together of superficially dissimilar groups in the context of a rapidly expanding informational capitalism, specifically a “bizarre fusion of the cultural bohemianism of San Francisco with the hi-tech industries of Silicon Valley... the freewheeling spirit of the hippies and the entrepreneurial zeal of the yuppies” (pp.44-45). What united these apparently disparate subcultural demographics, one coming from a tradition of resistance to mainstream American capitalism and the other generally embracing it, is precisely the apparently utopian potentials that certain elements of both groups saw in the internet: “the emancipatory potential of the new information technologies” (p.45).

For Barbrook and Cameron however, the material realities of this culture – in terms of its background and the potentialities it may hold – mean that any future conforming to its vision would be far from utopian in any true sense. This is due to the Californian Ideology being based on the simultaneous dependence upon, and disavowal of, the material inequalities that which both West Coast American society, and digital capitalism in general, require in order to function (p.62). Instead, what the Californian Ideology represents is the combination of those tendencies within its respective groups which are “ultimately pessimistic about fundamental social change” (p.62) in any radical political sense. Instead of a vision which transcends capitalism, adherents of the Californian Ideology represent a combination of “the social liberalism of New Left and the economic liberalism of New Right” (p.63), in pursuit of some imagined ideal of technologically enabled libertarian utopia, which disavows the profound inequalities required to support such a situation. Barbrook and Cameron are deeply sceptical, writing that “by championing this seemingly admirable ideal, these techno-booster are at the same time reproducing some of the most atavistic features of American society... Their Utopian vision of California depends upon a wilful blindness toward the other— much less positive—features of life on the West Coast: racism, poverty, and environmental degradation” (p.45).

This vision is ultimately one which relies on the repression and disavowal of exclusion and inequality, and while it proports to “liberate individuals from the hierarchies of the state and private monopolies” (p.61), the Californian Ideology relies not only on existing repressive mechanisms of capital, but also hold the potential for new “machines of dominance” (p.61). Arguing that technological mediation has historically served to

distance ruling elites from the oppressive relations of production which support their society, Barbrook and Cameron argue that through the Californian Ideology “technology is once again being used to reinforce the differences between masters and slaves” (p.61). For the authors, the “Extropian cult fantasies” (p.62) of reliable artificial intelligence and total automation of labour suggest that a fundamental goal of tech-utopianism, the ‘emancipation’ of people from governance and hierarchy, is dependent upon “slavelike labour from inanimate machines” (p.62). The obscene, implicit issue of this imagined future is that, as Barbrook and Cameron point out: “Although technology can store or amplify labour, it can never remove the necessity for humans... Slave labour cannot be obtained without somebody being enslaved” (p.62). In short, while the Californian Ideology and other strains of pro-capitalist technological utopianism appear to envision a future where we are liberated via technology from old dominations and oppressions, they ultimately threaten to re-inscribe and amplify existing and new forms of oppression and exclusion.

Aside from being a tech company which emerged out of this cultural and geographic context, how does this relate to Twitter? According to their own website, “Twitter is what’s happening in the world and what people are talking about right now” (Twitter, 2019), a PR description which says little beyond presenting itself as a place where people across the world can communicate in the open<sup>9</sup>. Such banal descriptions hide the reality of Twitter as a prominent form of contemporary “Platform Capitalism” (Srnicek, 2017, p.7): contemporary business models which focus on providing a platform or service whose purpose, regardless of what it purports to provide users, is primarily in the accumulation and monetisation of user data and as a venue for directed advertising. While Twitter presents itself to users as a space of free personal and professional enjoyment, entertainment and information, it is fundamentally a space where user data and activity is acutely monetised, in effect extracting value from the clicks, likes and retweets of users (Poletti & Gray, 2019).

It may be the case that there is an apparent dissonance here between Twitter’s presentation as a space for users to engage in conversation, read and share news, like cat memes and retweet celebrities, and its material reality as a space which relentlessly gathers and monetises data on every single user and their interactions. The question that

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<sup>9</sup> For more information Twitter presents about itself, see [https://about.twitter.com/en\\_gb.html](https://about.twitter.com/en_gb.html)

follows from this is what other material oppressions and exclusions can be seen as manifesting on Twitter, given the aforementioned tendencies of systems related to the Californian Ideology to disavow the oppressions and exclusions that form their background?

## **Big data**

The key feature of my thesis is the bringing together of qualitative research and so-called ‘big data’: quantities of data, such as the kind I collected as part of this project, which are challenging in both their size and related factors. While I discuss how I handle big data during my methodology chapter (chapter 4), I will here briefly review some literature on the topic to provide groundwork and context. I use the term ‘big data’ somewhat critically, as although it is widely used it is also potentially problematic (boyd & Crawford, 2012), describing an often-nebulous concept which cuts across academic, scientific and social contexts. While it is often used to describe datasets which are exceptionally ‘large’, what counts as ‘large’ is contingent on the tools and methods available at any given time: in this sense, big data is not defined by ‘largeness’ as such, but rather by what counts as ‘large’ relative to our methods: it is “less about data that is big than it is about a capacity to search, aggregate, and cross-reference large datasets” (boyd & Crawford, 2012, p.663).

What this means is that disparate forms of big data – the billions upon billions of pictures stored on Facebook pages, the astronomical readings gathered from studying black holes, the records of all global financial transactions during any given year – are not big data in the same sense: they are only big data to the extent that they challenge our current capacity to meaningfully analyse them within their respective contexts and related analytic disciplines. Technology too is an inherent feature of big data (boyd & Crawford, 2012, p.663), and the upper limit of what can be practically analysed will always be dramatically lower for a single researcher with nothing but coloured highlighters and a notebook than a social media company with supercomputers and learning-AI, or the security and intelligence agencies of whole countries<sup>10</sup>. Likewise, this is a temporally contingent phenomenon.

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<sup>10</sup> This relates to much broader and longer running issues in how the social sciences and private companies relate to social research and research methodology. This has provoked a great deal of debate within academia, and an exhaustive exploration of it is beyond the scope of this chapter. For especially influential literature on the subject see Savage and Burrows (2007), as well as the later follow-up (Burrows & Savage, 2014).

Assuming the continuing advancement of technology, in a matter of decades data that currently requires whole buildings worth of supercomputers may be trivially easy for a lone researcher to analyse with commonly available tools. Consequently, in that hypothetical future, what we define as big data (if such a term is used at all) is likely to have similarly changed. To put it plainly in terms of qualitative research; an example of the difference between typical scales of data and big data is the difference between dozens of interview transcripts, and the hundreds of millions of tweets worth of user-generated textual data that is posted to Twitter on any given day.

My data is big data in terms of how it relates to these practical, technological and temporal factors. One of the main factors that seems to define big data here is how it can pose serious epistemological challenges for qualitative analysis - especially discourse analysis - through the sheer volume of text that constitutes a big data corpus. While these challenges also exist for more quantitative methodologies, or forms of analysis which deal with similar data in an abstracted form, they are felt in qualitative research especially acutely. Ultimately, qualitative discourse analysis requires a researcher to perform direct close reading and analysis of text, something that is exceedingly impractical when the dataset contains many millions of words. At the time this project began (and still presently) very little published research exists that seeks to reconcile big data and qualitative analysis. Indeed, when big data and qualitative analysis have been discussed together in literature, it is generally in terms of whether such approaches are desirable or even possible, a kind of 'Big data: friend or foe?' genre<sup>11</sup>. During the writing of this thesis, a specific paper was published (Davidson et al, 2018) which, while not dealing with big data generated from the internet and social media, nonetheless provides what is possibly the clearest methodology for approaching big data from a qualitative perspective at the time of writing. Coincidentally, the methodology described by the authors closely mirrored the approach I had developed in a number of ways, and a detailed review of this paper will occur in my methodology section (chapter 4), where I discuss these similarities.

## Critical digital social research

Broadly, I see this thesis as contributing to an emerging approach to the research of contemporary digital media and the internet, which emphasises critical understandings of

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<sup>11</sup> For some examples of these 'Friend or foe?' discussions in literature, see Delyser and Sui (2012), Smith (2014) and Mills (2018).

these systems. In this subsection I will review some relevant literature from researchers, as well as drawing from work I have published elsewhere on the topic: in '*Good data is critical data: an appeal for critical digital studies*' (Poletti & Gray, 2019).

A key underlying position to this perspective is treating the internet, particularly in this case social media platforms, as intimately linked with contemporary capitalism. Social media platforms, such as Twitter, are an important facet of contemporary capitalism through the collection, analysis and monetisation of user data and activity; clicks, likes, shares, and human attention are used on enormous scales for commercial purposes, such as targeted advertising and market research. This emerging form of commercial and productive relations has been referred to as "platform capitalism" (Srnicek, 2017) in literature.

This conception is in contrast to how social media tends to be presented to the public by platforms themselves: as enjoyable, entertaining or fulfilling environments for participation and sociality of various kinds. Critical approaches to social media, in contrast, tend to "challenge the positive idea... of 'participatory culture', by considering economic and political relations, and seeing social media as capitalist relations of production extended into an online space" (Poletti & Gray, p.267). In this frame, platforms such as Twitter are treated as the extension of capitalist relations of production into online spaces (Fuchs, 2007, 2014).

This perspective in turn has implications for researchers seeking to use data generated by these platforms, as I have done in the case of this thesis. Gregory & Winn (2016) have written on the implications this conception of platforms and digital data has for critical scholarship in the area. These authors highlight that what researchers do with digital data and methods can risk being influenced by the underlying material relations of these platforms, and so advocates transparency, reflexivity and a critical attitude to the research field. Involved in this is the understanding that digital social data, such as the data I draw on in this thesis, are in no way value-neutral (Gregory & Winn 2016): in my case they are shaped and influenced in a myriad of ways by the underlying material and technological relations of Twitter as a platform.

Writing as well on the topic of critical digital scholarship, Fuchs (2019) has argued that "Critical digital social research challenges the hegemony of digital positivism and instrumental digital reason" (p.15). For Fuchs this can be accomplished through numerous methods, such as through resistance to suggestions that social theory and traditional

research methods are somehow obsolete in the face of big data and computational forms of analysis. I argue that these are things I have set out to accomplish with this thesis, in applying both social theory and qualitative forms of analysis to a research project which has drawn on big social data in a critical manner.

The work of critical digital researchers such as Gregory and Fuchs is vital in this field. Their approaches to the nature of the contemporary social internet, and the methods by which it may be researched, provide other researchers with an ability to counter dominant positions in the field, largely cynically defined by platforms themselves (Poletti & Gray, 2019).

### **Critical discourse analysis applied to Twitter**

In applying critical discourse analysis to my data, I have principally drawn on the work of Fairclough, as well as Edley and Wetherell (2001), Wetherell, Stiven and Potter (1987) and Billig (1995, 2001). Here, I will discuss the overlapping approaches of these authors, in terms of how they have informed my approach to discourse, and discourse analysis as I have applied it to tweets. As a collection of interrelated schools of thought, those approaches which we collectively call ‘critical discourse analysis’ draw on critical traditions, traditions which are generally informed by an openly political approach and a critique of power systems under our prevailing sets of social relations: in Fairclough’s words, these approaches ask “how do existing societies provide people with the possibilities and resources for rich and fulfilling lives, how on the other hand do they deny people these possibilities and resources?” (2003, p.202). Inequality, power, privilege and class tend to be important features of the social world from the perspective of critical traditions of research. Although CDA can be highly varied in its applications, this approach tends to manifest through a focus on how language sustains and reproduces systems of power and inequality. Returning to Fairclough, discourse is identified as the location where “consent is achieved, ideologies are transmitted, and practices, meanings, values and identities are taught and learnt” (2013, p.531).

But what is discourse? A recent introductory textbook on the subject of discourse analysis offers the following three preliminary definitions: “1. Discourse is language ‘above the sentence’. 2. Discourse is language ‘in use’. 3. Discourse is a form of social practice in which language plays a central role.” (Cameron & Panovic, 2014, p.3). What is meant here, in the broadest sense, is that discourse refers to language in terms of how it is used and

the wider context of its usage; not only the literal lexical content or form of an utterance but the meanings transmitted, how it is used, how it relates to other utterances and concepts, and how it figures in social relations, whether interactional or broader.

Returning to Fairclough, we find definitions which are more complex, technical, and focused on critical approaches to discourse: discourse can be seen as “a complex set of relations between people who talk, write and in other ways communicate” (2013, p.3), simultaneously referring to “communicative events” (p.3) themselves (talk, media texts, government reports, tweets and so on) and “more abstract and enduring complex discursive ‘objects’... like languages, discourses and genres” (p.3). Further, discourse is also said to involve the relations between these more abstract systems/entities and “complex ‘objects’ including objects in the physical world” (p.3), from individual people and groups, to institutions.

For Fairclough then, discourse is not something that can be adequately defined as a singular object, but rather a term which refers to complex systems of relations that involve meaning, and how meaning is created, sustained and changed (p.3). Consequently, he emphasises that these relations are themselves *dialectical*: different, paradoxical, sometimes opposed or contradictory, but not able to be fully separated into discrete things wholly divorced from one another (p.4). This conception of discourse as relating to dialectics – and the implicit concepts of conflict, interrelation and transformation – indicates how critical approaches enter this definition. The dialectical conflict between groups is intimately related to power, and how power is manifested and excised in society. Discourse then is one of the forms through which the “relation of power between [those who control the modern state] and the rest of the people” (p.4) takes place, alongside forms of power which are not primarily discursive, such as physical violence and coercion. It is these features which more explicitly indicate the emancipatory political concerns which tend to accompany critical approaches to discourse.

The analysis and critique of systems of power, the inequalities between classes and the coercive power which sustains them, has long been a central concern of critical approaches, whether explicitly Marxist or otherwise. In the case of language this may be in the form of how hegemonic ideas are transmitted through media texts, how government or other institutions construct themselves and their work through reports and public relations, or how misogyny is articulated through tweets. For Fairclough (2013) the critique element of CDA is directed explicitly at emancipatory goals: “on what is wrong with a society... and how ‘wrongs’ might be ‘righted’ or mitigated, from a particular normative

standpoint... grounded in values, in particular views of the ‘good society’ and of human well-being” (p.7). CDA then is an approach which allows for explicitly political and politically motivated research and analysis, both in how social problems are identified, and in how inquiry into them is conducted.

With this in mind, Fairclough argues that the actual ‘discourse’ that is analysed by CDA is not simply the text, what is literally said or written, but these actual relations and how they are manifested in the text (p.4). In terms of *how* this analysis is meant to be approached, Fairclough emphasises that CDA should follow a “transdisciplinary” (p.4) methodology, since this conception of discourse cuts through so many traditional boundaries and conceives of its object of analysis in such wide terms. This is further summarised in three key points, said to define CDA as an approach distinct from other approaches to discourse: it is the systemic analysis of the relationship between text and social processes, it goes beyond commentary and description in its analysis, and it is morally normative with explicit political and ethical goals and motivations (pp.10-11).

I argue that Fairclough’s approach to CDA can be applied to Twitter discourse in a variety of ways. Much of these applications relate to how Twitter, due to the constraints placed on how tweets can be formatted, produces a somewhat uniform genre of mediated discourse. Fairclough (2003) argues that discourse can be seen as “figure[ing] in the main ways in social practice... Genres (ways of acting) ... Discourses (ways of representing) ... [and] Styles (ways of being)” (p.26). While interrelated, this typology can be useful for approaching the analysis of discourse in a systemic way. Genre, defined somewhat broadly by Fairclough as “different ways of (inter)acting discoursally” (p.26), is important here, particularly in how genre on Twitter relates to governance and promotion within a highly mediated, commercial environment. Governance again is used in a broad sense, meaning “any activity within an institution or organization directed at regulating or managing some other (network of) social practice(s)” (p.32). Genres of governance are contrasted with ‘practical genres’: “genres which figure in doing things rather than governing the way things are done” (p.32), although it is important to note that these are not mutually exclusive categories, and a text may occupy or hybridise multiple genres (p.34). Genres of governance seem particularly relevant in the case of Twitter, given their relation to “promotional genres... which have the purpose of ‘selling’ commodities, brands, organizations, or individuals” (p.33). Although Twitter may be used in a variety of ways, as a commercial platform widely utilised by companies, brands, celebrities and so on, it can be seen as an aspect of “the colonization of new areas of social life by markets” (p.33).

This concept of promotional genre as a form of governance is important in the case of Twitter, because of how it relates to the concepts of ‘promotional culture’ and the ‘aestheticization of everyday life’, also discussed by Fairclough. Promotional culture refers to how, under contemporary capitalism, genres and texts which primarily seem to fulfil other purposes are “simultaneously promoting” (Fairclough, 2003, p.113) some organisation or individual, while aestheticization refers to how this promotional culture may have an increasing preoccupation with appearance: “‘glossy’ productions... self-promotional language... [and] meticulous attention to physical appearance” (p.115). The role of aestheticization in self-promotion and public identities is further relevant in the specific case of Twitter discourse. This is defined by Fairclough as the pervasive application of aesthetic management to “social life, the private lives of consumers as well as public life... The preoccupation with ‘image’... into the individualism of consumerized private life” (p.183).

Though Fairclough is more concerned with this phenomenon in a political context – tracing the aestheticization of politics back to early 20<sup>th</sup> century Fascism – and especially in the context of New Labour political rhetoric, I argue that this framework is quite applicable to Twitter. Though obviously highly varied, Twitter can be a highly aesthetic medium, one where users can range from mundane individuals to accounts which directly represent politicians, celebrities and brands, all able to engage in forms of self-promotion in a highly public medium. Framed like this, Twitter can be seen as a highly mediated, commercial genre which encourages self-promotion and aestheticization among its users.

Moving on from the work of Fairclough, other discourse analysts were influential in how I approached this analysis, particularly in relation to the specific kinds of discourse I have attempted to analyse. By no means an exhaustive list, I will now discuss some specific work by certain analysts that was especially useful in how I approached this project. Edley and Wetherell (2001), and Wetherell, Stiven and Potter (1987) have been particularly important papers, not just because they discuss anti-feminism and misogyny, but also in the way they utilise concepts which deal with discourse more generally, specifically the concepts of ‘interpretative repertoires’ and ‘practical ideologies’. “Interpretative repertoires” (Edley & Wetherell, 2001) offers a way of reframing often abstract concepts of ‘discourses’ into a concept more directly related to how people use language in

practice, and how this language reflects and expresses certain interrelated ideas. Specifically, this concept is defined as “a recognisable routine of arguments, descriptions, and evaluations distinguished by familiar clichés, common places, tropes and characterizations of actors and situations... evident through repetition over a corpus” (p.443).

Viewing discourse in terms of interpretative repertoires has a number of advantages when investigating misogyny, antifeminism and so on via user-generated text. Fundamentally, an interpretative repertoire reflects a “collectively shared social consensus... often so established and so familiar that only a fragment of the argumentative chain needs to be formulated in talk to count as an adequate reference” (p.443). In this way the necessarily brief and potentially fragmentary nature of tweets can be taken into account when discussing discourse. What this means is that even fragments of talk produced by people over certain topics can reflect much wider collections of interrelated talk and ideas found in wider society. In the case of Edley and Wetherell’s paper (2001) this was evident in the different ways participants constructed feminists in talk: generally as either benign liberals or ‘grotesque’ radical man-haters. As the authors point out, these ways of ‘splitting’ feminism and feminists into a negative ‘extreme’ kind and a positive liberal (and mostly emptied of radical politics) kind is reflected in wider discourse, and was also something I found in the text I analysed during my Masters project (Gray, 2015). This approach to discourse is especially useful when analysing tweets, since it potentially allows the researcher to relate very short pieces of text produced by users to much broader, more commonplace discourse.

The second concept, “practical ideologies” (Wetherell, Stiven & Potter, 1987), is useful for understanding how ideology, in the critical sense familiar to CDA, is assembled in practice. Practical ideologies are defined as “the often contradictory and fragmentary complexes of notions, norms and models which guide conduct and allow for its justification and rationalization” (p.60). What this means is that the way people’s talk and language reflect wider ideologies is not necessary clear, consistent or even logical in any internal way. What distinguishes practical ideologies as a concept, is that it specifically accounts for the fact that the ideologies that talk and text reference, reproduce or relate to can be inconsistent, contradictory or otherwise idiosyncratic: “montages of incoherently related themes” (p.60). Again, this is a useful concept for the critical analysis of tweets: as short pieces of

user-generated text, often encountered in isolation, in an environment where lack of context and ambiguity can be issues, approaching text through the frame of practical ideologies can allow for ‘messiness’, fragmentation and contradiction.

Taken together, these theorists and their approaches toward critical discourse analysis have more-or-less formed the foundation for how I have approached critical discourse analysis within this project. They provide an approach which is politically motivated and critical, whilst also systematic, and geared toward the particulars of Twitter as a commercialised medium that can facilitate various kinds of aestheticized self-promotion. In terms of how they conceptualize discourse, they allow an analyst to deal with the potentially abstract interrelations of ideology and social action, along with additional concepts and frameworks more geared to how individuals may practically construct and express particular repertoires.

## **Summary**

This literature chapter has attempted to do several things. Partly, it has tried to cover the range of ways social scientific research has tended to conceive of and evaluate the internet and social media over the past few decades, and note the general shifts in this field. These sources have been chosen because they broadly illustrate an overall change in this tone: from a widespread optimism early on to a more ambivalent and critical appraisal seen today. Feminist scholarship has been key to this, and I have therefore also devoted some time to discussing feminist work in this specific context but also more broadly. Also discussed here are key concepts in literature which relate to the background ideological features of the tech industry and Silicon Valley cultures, and very contemporary work in the field of big data. All these concepts are relevant to this thesis, and the research questions it deals with. I will now move onto discuss further relevant concepts in the second literature chapter, namely social scientific research concerning topics related to Twitter, and Twitter specifically.

# Chapter 3: Identity, audience and Twitter

## Introduction

In this chapter I will examine and discuss a range of existing literature on identity and its significance on Twitter. This will cover the presentation of identity, including the specific method employed by ‘users’ in this process and their theoretical implications, the role of the audience in this process, and the ways in which the context of social media and the internet shape how this process happens. Investigating identity, audience and context is important for my research, because by investigating the construction and maintenance of misogynistic and other discourse on Twitter I am also drawn to investigate who is involved in this process (Who tweets? Who listens? Who agrees? Who objects?), and how Twitter as a communicative medium influences this process, through the particulars of its design.

I will begin by providing a brief overview of how identity has been theorised during the timeframe when internet social science research was emerging as a field, before moving on to focus on literature concerning identity on the internet in general and on Twitter as a specific platform. Here I will draw on literature discussing how the specific practices found on Twitter encourage a kind of identity performance which is subject to tensions around the visibility of a users’ talk, the nature and composition of the user’s imagined audience, and the possible tensions between appearing ‘authentic’ whilst maintaining privacy. I will go on to cover literature around how these practices and considerations manifest in specific communities, and among users who present or perform specific identities based on professional community, ethnicity, and both feminist and antifeminist activism.

## Identity

In *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Anthony Giddens<sup>12</sup> (1991) outlines a theory of identity which emphasises the role of reflexivity and the burden of choice and uncertainty on the individual found under late modernity. Late modernity is seen as an uncertain period, one which is “post-traditional... reflexively organised, permeated by abstract systems... in

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<sup>12</sup> While not specific to the internet, Giddens’ work on the topic is historically and temporally relevant, sharing a time-frame with internet scholarship and speaking to similar themes of individualization, and ‘the self’ as an ever-changing reflexive project. Just as Giddens writes of ‘individuals’, much internet scholarship refers to ‘users’ or similar, atomised persons online.

which the reordering of time and space realigns the local with the global” (p.80). For Giddens late modernity produces reflexivity in subjects because it separates time and space through technology and global systems, features disembedding mechanisms which mediate experiences, such as abstract tokens of exchange like money or systems of expert knowledge, and produces a constant institutional reflexivity in the way knowledge claims are constantly contested and refuted (p.20). In this situation individuals are confronted with the need to make constant choices in presenting their identity; about themselves, what they believe to be true and their lifestyle on a daily basis since, as a post-traditional order, late modernity confronts them with choices but “at the same time offers little help as to which options should be selected” (p.80).

In terms of specific consequences for individuals and their self-identity, Giddens outlines several effects of living under this kind of modernity. First is a concern with lifestyle, meaning routines and practices in what individuals do with themselves on a day to day basis “not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity” (p.81). Lifestyles form more or less coherent clusters of behaviours and dispositions out of the wide variety materially available to an individual, and in this way provide a security of meaning in an individual’s identity (p.82).

Second Giddens stresses the separation of an individual’s life world into distinct sectors which may not necessarily be directly related to each other, in contrast with pre-modern life, where an individual’s life would necessarily be limited both socially and geographically (p.83). In this late modern context, someone’s life may be divided clearly between various geographic, social and institutional contexts.

The third effect discussed by Giddens relates to the inherent insecurity of knowledge and truth under modernity: Giddens sees this as a perverse consequence of the Enlightenment project for the pursuit of greater rationality in place of arbitrary tradition and faith, where the promise of concrete understanding of the world has been replaced by “methodological doubt” (p.84). In this situation knowledge is constantly up for revision and a plurality of claims to truth exist from different sectors, forcing individuals to navigate an array of ideas and options in settling on their own beliefs and identities.

The fourth effect of late modernity which influences an individual’s plurality of choice is “the prevalence of mediated experience” (p.84), meaning the numerous opportunities individuals have to experience things that are outside of their immediate context via some

third party. Giddens points especially to the role of globalized mass media, which enable individuals “access to settings with which the individual may never personally come into contact” (p.84). This undermining of the historical links between the physical setting and the social has the effect of “construct[ing] new communalities – and differences – between preconstituted forms of social experiences” (p.84), an effect that is especially important when considering Twitter as a form of mediated experience.

The fifth effect Giddens outlines is the importance of “strategic *life-planning*” (Original emphasis, p.85) under late modernity. Giddens argues that since the self and self-identity are reflexively organised, the act of planning for future events and reconstituting previous events is necessary for forming a biographical understanding of one’s life and identity that is coherent. Although one’s ability to plan and the options available are constrained or augmented by material circumstances, Giddens argues that even in cases where plans are limited “possibilities... are experienced differently – that is, *as* possibilities” (Original emphasis, p.86).

Finally, Giddens highlights how dramatic changes to relationships and personal intimacy have influenced plurality of choice. Giddens argues that in a late modern context one’s sexual partners and friends are not entirely dictated or limited by tradition or geographical context, but rather “voluntarily chosen from a diversity of possibilities” (p.87). In the context of the self as a reflexive project, relationships are idealised in terms of the “pure relationship” (p.88): a relationship which is pursued out of personal choice rather than external traditional or material pressures, maintained based on mutual benefit, reflexively organised and maintained as a project, requires commitment and investment for its own sake, focused on emotional intimacy, depends upon trust and creates shared history (pp.88-97).

Taken together Giddens’s analysis of self-identity and its relationship with the pressures and conditions of late modernity produce a framework of identity which may be useful when discussing identity in the context of Twitter and social media. For Giddens individuals treat their identity as a self-reflexive project which must account for the multiplicity of options available to them in terms of what activities they engage in, who they associate with, how they conduct themselves and in what contexts they do so. From this perspective Twitter presents another highly mediated context which opens up access to an enormous variety of other mediated contexts and interactions with individuals and communities, on a platform that prioritises speed and connectivity. Given this, in reflexively presenting

identity in this space individuals must deal with a great deal of uncertainty around how to conduct themselves given the enormous but unseen wider audience they are potentially presenting themselves too, and I will go on to discuss this later. While Giddens is not a scholar especially associated with internet studies, his conception of the individual does appear to speak to how users are configured on the internet and social media. Having outlined Giddens, I will now move on to identity scholarship specific to the internet.

### **Identity and the Internet**

In looking at the intersection of computers and the internet with identity during the emergence of the internet as a consumer phenomenon, Sherry Turkle (1995) focuses on how interactions with different technologies and digital environments allow users to present and create distinct identities, and experiment with presenting multiple identities. Writing from a broadly social psychological position, Turkle argues that the internet leads us to consider “thinking about identity as multiplicity” (p.178) rather than something singular or fixed, as the internet, or at least the internet contexts popular at the time of Turkle’s analysis, constituted a “significant social laboratory for experimenting with the constructions and reconstructions of self that characterise postmodern life” (p.180). For Turkle, the kind of role play conducted by users engaged in multi-user-dungeons (MUDs<sup>13</sup>), and other user activities found on forums and other platforms help to ground theories that see the post/modern self as having multiple or fragmentary aspects (p.258). Using website homepages<sup>14</sup> as an illustrative example, Turkle argues that since such platforms allowed users to present many different interests, cultural artefacts, objects and links to an audience, identity “emerges from whom one knows, one’s associations and connection” (p.258). Similarly when discussing MUDs Turkle points to testimonies of users who take advantage of pseudo-anonymity to engage in a variety of identity play and presentation, such as presenting themselves as different genders or entirely invented characters, not necessarily similar to their ‘offline’ identity in personality and behaviour. Turkle argues that while these identities may seem fragmentary such users may still feel “in control of

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<sup>13</sup> MUDs are text-based online environments which, through descriptions written by users, simulate online worlds of various kinds. Users ‘inhabit’ these environments, rooms and so on, and interact with one another. Once quite popular, MUDs are now archaic, generally superseded by online role-playing games and so on.

<sup>14</sup> During the time before social networks (Myspace and so on) gave people standard pages to present themselves, homepages served a similar purpose.

‘themselves’ and ‘herselves’” (p.259), and in this sense these users are engaging in a kind of identity experimentation that challenges traditional notions of a unitary identity (p.260).

Turkle argues that this flexible self is “not unitary, nor are its parts stable entities... It is easy to cycle through its aspects and these are themselves changing through constant communication with each other” (p.261), in a way that Turkle compares to the revision of documents on a computer: each slightly different, none absolutely true, and each able to be moved between at will (p.261). Turkle theorised that this kind of fluid, flexible identity would “allow a greater capacity for acknowledging diversity... [and make it] easier to accept the array of our (and others’) inconsistent personae” (pp.261-262), since unlike traditional notions of unitary identity it does not exclude those aspects which do not fit together with others. Overall Turkle’s analysis of identity reflects the basic assertions of Giddens’, in that Turkle is outlining the use of the mediated experiences found online in constructing and presenting a self-identity which is reflexively organised, and contrasted to the kind of identity common in pre-modern society. Although Turkle’s analysis draws on internet services which are historically specific, her observations that people can use these kinds of services to present an identity which is reflexive, subject to revision, and not necessarily a unified and coherent reflection of their ‘offline’ identity is reflected in more contemporary literature focusing on Twitter<sup>15</sup>.

Writing some years later, during a time when Web 2.0 and social media had emerged as profound forces, Turkle (2011) had more to say on the subject of identity and the digital. Much of her conclusions are foreboding and ambivalent, concerned with the implications of networks and technology which “proposes itself as the architect of our intimacies” (2011, p.1); facilitating so much of our self and our emotional worlds. In a deeply reflexive account, Turkle looks back on her early career during the late 1970s at MIT – an institution intimately connected to the history of both the internet and the atomic bomb – with credulity at the idea that there was ever a time when researchers were tasked with “think[ing] of ways to keep technology busy” (p.279), to tentatively find new applications for what had previously been a tool for academia, government and the Cold War military machine.

Years later, when a user-centric social internet is increasingly ubiquitous for so many people, this seems very distant. Today, computer networks seem to generate their own

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<sup>15</sup> As is the case with Giddens, here we can see similarities with the work of ethnomethodologists such as Goffman.

activity and applications, in Turkle's words: "we know that once computers connected us to each other, once we became tethered to the network, we really didn't need to keep computers busy. *They keep us busy.* It is as though we have become their killer app" (emphasis in original, p.279). Rather than computers and networks reducing our labour, enhancing our emotional and social worlds, they become an assembled system which *requires* our interest, attention and labour; they generate an attentional vacuum which we are compelled to fill. This self-sustaining and accelerating ubiquity seems to have perverse consequences for the self and identity. Where the internet once offered a potential future of openness, play and community it now appears to generate the opposite.

"Online, we easily find "company" but are exhausted by the pressures of performance. We enjoy continual connection but rarely have each other's full attention. We can have instant audiences but flatten out what we say to each other in new reductive genres of abbreviation. We like it that the Web "knows" us, but this is only possible because we compromise our privacy, leaving electronic bread crumbs that can be easily exploited, both politically and commercially" (p.280)

Turkle notes, somewhat grimly, that while we may still dream of a time when the accelerating pace of technology and internet sociality may deliver 'authentic' connection, they seem to only serve to accelerate and multiply a kind of superficial sociality and community. At a time where social media allows us to quantify our friendships and 'followers', we tend to be lonelier in terms of meaningfully felt friendships (p.280). While this account risks drifting into the clichés of technological anxiety – complete with the classic image of family members who "are alone together, each in their own rooms, each on a networked computer or mobile device" (p.280-281) – it does speak to the potential concerns presented by social networks such as Twitter, and the kind of community and identity facilitated by these (corporate, commodified) platforms.

### **'Ambient audience' and 'ambient identity' on Twitter, and in microblogging**

Identity on Twitter is "continuously being constructed and reconstructed by users and for its users" (Budge et al. 2016, p.212). This is due to the ability users have to continually generate, interact with, and view talk. In this context *who is watching* becomes extremely important, not just in terms on a user's followers, but how a user imagines and relates to

the unseen wider public who could become their potential audience, and the tactics they deploy in managing their identities.

Writing from a socio-linguistic/Semiotics perspective, Zappavigna explores identity in a microblogging environment in a way which emphasises how people communicate using the medium. Twitter, as a microblogging site, elicits “ambient” (2014, p.211) forms of communication, relation and identity, since this environment “does not necessarily presume direct interaction between participants” (p.211). Exchanges that take place here are not necessarily structured as conversations. Rather, they take the form of multiple people discussing similar topics simultaneously to a wide audience that does not necessarily include each other.

Here Zappavigna focuses on the communicative functions of Twitter’s features, specifically hashtags. Hashtags allow users to attribute “aboutness” (p.211) to a particular post, indicating a relationship between a tweet and a particular type of concept or topic in a way which assumes that this association will be understood and reproduced by the audience, who may or may not share the specific values that the Twitter-user is expressing by associating their post with the topic, but nonetheless recognise that association. In illustrating this Zappavigna refers to corpora containing posts from tech and parenting communities, and shows the differing tactics employed by users in performing their identity as a member of these communities. Primarily Zappavigna focuses on how “microblogging texts propose social ‘bonds’ to their ambient audience” (p.212), and argues that by articulating interpersonal social bonds with the audience, users perform a particular identity since “sharing feelings is central to both fostering social interaction and communicating the values that signify who we are” (p.212). Through this kind of use, Zappavigna argues that identity in this context can be viewed as “patterns of bonds... in terms of the social relations they enact – and as patterns of values... in terms of meanings that they negotiate in discourse” (p.223). From this perspective, identity in a microblogging environment takes the form of whatever particular linkages of posts with wider concepts a user articulates, and the bonds with other users that these linkages create.

Out of these two corpora, Zappavigna discusses a few specific tactics employed by users in creating these bonds, and in doing so performing a particular kind of identity. These bonds utilised self-deprecating humour, references to the use of elements of daily life, and exasperation from activities associated with their particular community. In those tweets

associated with the parenting community (mostly apparently female) users employed self-deprecating, gendered humour by tagging statements about their own imperfect parenting with tags such as “#badmom” (p.217). Zappavigna argues that this kind of association serves not only to mock the ideal of a perfect mother, but also showed “preoccupation with status within the community” (p.217) as these same statements of inadequacy often contained examples of very diligent parenting. These examples also used the hashtag in novel ways by allowing users to “metacomment” (p.218) on their abilities as a parent, as well as reaching out to the wider audience of self-deprecating mothers. In doing this, users take a statement which conventionally might be reserved for quiet conversation, and turn it into something which is highly public, self-publicising and very searchable (p.218).

While these bonds focused on ironic self-deprecation to a sympathetic audience, others functioned by relating the user to objects which had some salience with their audience. In Zappavigna’s examples “The ‘addiction’ bond” (p.220) mostly took the form of users using hashtags to relate themselves to coffee or wine as “a form of parental panacea” (p.220) in response to their exasperation with domestic, parental or work duties, and relates the user “with an ambient community” (p.220) of other users who relate to their association. Similarly the third typology, called “the ‘frazzle’ bond” (p.221), relates the user to “a shared experience of fatigue or exasperation experienced by engaging in the core activity of a particular community of fellowship” (p.201). By doing this users confirm their identity as a member of a particular community through articulating bonds which “affirm that one is performing the particular community membership with appropriate gusto” (p.222), which in Zappavigna’s corpus often took the form of parents discussing their fatigue at taking good care of their children, or programmers working on their days off (pp.222-223). The demonstration of ‘appropriate gusto’ is especially important here, as reflecting on their exhaustion from working too much, being ‘too productive’, or being acutely aware of their inadequacies as a good mother not only affirms their identity as part of a community, but allows users to create a positive image of themselves as an especially productive member of that community without appearing impolite or self-aggrandising (p.223). This literature, while somewhat removed from my specific topic (reactionary discourse, right wing politics etc) is still relevant to this thesis. This literature demonstrates that Twitter is a platform where often highly specific forms of interaction, identity and community can be present, often associated with particular demographics of users.

The prominence of this kind of self-praise on Twitter is observed elsewhere. Dayter (2013), in discussing self-praise in Twitter's ballet community, echoes these findings on the 'frazzle' and addiction bonds. As before the author identifies genres of tweets treating a praiseworthy engagement with the community's ideals "as a complainable matter... coached in the form of a complaint" (p.100), or others which "show off various tokens of... extreme obsession" (p.100), such as the discomfort experienced from training, or the bruises sustained to their feet, which in the context of this community become matters of pride. While these experiences may be seen in other communities as legitimate complaints, users within the same ambient community are likely to read them as praiseworthy, and signs of dedication and engagement (p.101). For Dayter this demonstrates that Twitter users who engage in this kind of presentation have an acute awareness of the riskiness of self-praise and demonstrate an ability to negotiate their self-evaluation and identity presentation in a way which is acceptable within their community (p.101).

While Zappavigna's (2014) typology focuses on particular tactics of identity construction and group affiliation which may be quite specific to the communities in question, the nature of their tactics, underlying interpersonal relations and their use of the specific functions of Twitter as a platform can tell us something about how identity is constructed and performed in this space. As Zappavigna argues, these tactics of affiliation assume an audience which is ambient in the sense that the users do not necessarily interact directly, as is the case in other forms of communication over the internet, but rather participate in a "mass performance of hashtagging or contributing to iterations of internet memes" (p.209) to a mass audience. Rather than addressing to specific groups, hashtags are used to relate posts to distinct concepts or topics which are assumed to be recognisable to other users familiar with that hashtag. In doing this, users perform the identity of someone who has particular relational or sentimental bonds to these concepts, and by extension the ambient communities who know of them. It is these relations of bonds that form an ambient identity: the "particular discursive patterns of collective values that characterise different microblogging personae" (p.210). Here it is important to note that ambient identities on microblogging sites do not necessarily have to link to users' 'offline' identities but are rather the result of a performance specific to the microblogging environment. This is especially relevant in the case of my thesis. Though I often examine the tweets of users who appear to espouse right wing, sexist or otherwise reactionary beliefs, by labelling their tweets this way I am not necessarily linking this to the person doing the tweeting (if indeed

they are even a person at all). In this thesis my concern is not with whatever ‘authentic’ beliefs a particular user holds; I am interested in the content of their tweets as text.

### **Audience collapse**

Through its design Twitter challenges the settings and methods of self-presentation found in previous social networking platforms and creates a context where the enormous diversity of readers presents a variety of challenges for the presentation and performance of identity. According to Marwick and boyd: “The networked audience is an abstract concept and varies among Twitter users, in part because it is so difficult to ascertain who is actually there” (Marwick & boyd, 2010, p.123). Furthermore, the nature of Twitter as a space where, while a user’s tweets are immediately seen by followers, they can also reach an audience far in excess of this group “ruptures the ability to vary self-presentation based on audience, and thus manage discrete impressions” (Marwick & Boyd, 2010, p.117).

Marwick and boyd argue that by collapsing distinct audiences into one which is difficult to distinguish and represented through a primarily textual medium, identity performance on Twitter poses a challenge to previous literature, especially literature which has drawn much theory from observations of face-to-face interaction “where it is fairly easy to gage the gender, race, status etc. of the audience” (Marwick & Boyd, 2010, p.123). This can create tensions in how users manage their identity presentation. In this way Twitter “combines elements of broadcast media and face-to-face communication” (p.123). Providing the user with a potentially diverse and unknown audience leaves them unable to present distinct identities depending on context, in a way which does not account for the fact that, unlike people who appear in broadcast media, the vast majority of Twitter users may lack skills in professional image management. In this context the recipients of a Tweet may contain a mixture of family, friends, colleagues and strangers who may have similar or radically different sentiments and opinions to those of the user. Given this, Twitter users may be driven to “maintain impressions by balancing personal/public information, avoiding certain topics, and maintaining authenticity” (pp.123-124), and in doing so articulate a diverse array of ways in which they conceptualise their imagined audience, and how they maintain the impressions and identity they express to them.

The ways in which users imagine their audience influences how and what users tweet (p.124), and users have many ways of imagining their audience, which can vary depending

on how many follows a user has accumulated (p.119). Users with a relatively small number of followers may see their audience as consisting of friends and acquaintances, which may refer to those they know outside of Twitter or people they follow on Twitter, while those with large audiences may have “specific, pragmatic understandings of audience” (p.121). In the case of users with relatively few followers, users may tend to communicate in a way broadly in line with how they would communicate with friends in face to face conversation, including everyday social topics to improve and maintain social intimacy (p.118). Other users with small followings may treat their Twitter feed as being more for their own viewing than any specific external audience, either as a diary or a place to express opinions or ideas for themselves. While this may seem like a misunderstanding of the functions and public nature of Twitter, it can also constitute “a self-conscious, public rejection of audience” (p.118). In the latter case this has interesting implications for how some Twitter users may view the people who receive their tweets. Rather than “tweeting into the void” (p.199), by not deliberately imagining a particular audience these users may be treating Twitter as medium for personal expression where the gaze and evaluation of others does not matter enough to make them self-consciously cater or censor their content (p.119). It may also be the case that such users are attempting to avoid the perceived inauthenticity of deliberately constructing and maintaining a “personal brand” (p.119) to appeal to an audience, and instead decide to perform an identity they feel is an authentic representation of their own self (p.119). This deliberate rejection of the presentation of a particular identity and content which appeals to specific audiences can be seen as a rejection of the “self-conscious commodification” (p.119) seen in Twitter and other kinds of social networks. When deliberately appealing to an audience some users may utilise different kinds of tweets as well as other features of Twitter such as direct messaging to reach specific audiences whilst still using the same profile. In this sense these users treat Twitter as “a medium, like telephony or email, that can be used for many different purposes” (p.120).

While those users with relatively few followers may have a variety of ways of imagining a wider potential audience beyond the immediate friends or family who follow them, those with a large number of followers in the hundreds of thousands may have a clearer understanding of their audience and see them “as a fan base or community” (p.120). In this case the kind of identity performed by a user can be seen as a kind of celebrity, one which has “an audience that they can strategically maintain through ongoing communication and interaction” (p.121) via Twitter and other social media platforms. Such

users may have different approaches or goals in presenting an identity and interacting with their audience such as broadcasting specific genres of content around specific themes relevant to them, or strategically using different hashtags to direct specific tweets to parts of their audience who they believe will be interested. The tactics involved in deliberately maintaining a large specific audience and cultivating a very public identity are not exclusively employed by users with a large number of followers, and many users with comparatively little public presence on Twitter may still “consciously use Twitter as a platform to obtain and maintain attention” (p.123) by posting a variety of content they feel will be of particular interest to groups within an imagined or idealised audience, or balancing their content and presentation between different topic areas. Twitter’s design may indeed predispose it to these kind of micro-celebrity identity practices and their associated tactics of audience engagement: Twitter relates users who attach to others’ profiles as ‘followers’ rather than as friends as is the case in much other social media, in a similar way to YouTube’s ‘subscribers’. Numbers of followers are prominently displayed on a user’s page “creating a quantifiable metric of social status” (p.128), and numerous third-party services allow users to see how they ‘rank’ alongside others, or view detailed metrics about their followers. In this context direct interaction with followers and the strategic management of identity for different imagined audiences is incentivised, meaning that on Twitter “the ability to attract and command attention becomes a status symbol” (p.127).

Marwick and boyd argue that the diversity in the kinds of audiences users see as potential viewers of their content and performance of identity is due to the “heavily appropriated” (p.123) nature of Twitter as a platform. People and organisations may use Twitter for broadcasting news, maintaining and creating social relationships, spreading political opinions or as a platform for the cultivation of a community or a celebrity persona. Given the diversity of uses individuals and groups have found for Twitter, and the range of people and communities who operate on there, a user’s ability to perform identity in a way which is seen as convincing and authentic becomes important.

### **Identity and Authenticity**

Among both users who treat it as a personal space and those who use it a platform for celebrity self-promotion, Twitter is a space where identity “is constructed through conversations with others [and] Tweets are formulated based partially on social context constructed from the tweets of people one follows” (Marwick and boyd, 2010, p.124). The

presentation of identity on twitter is a process in tension between seeming authentic in one's expression, maintaining privacy and communicating in a way in keeping with the contextual social norms in place. The primary tension here is between presenting oneself as authentic and genuine by sharing information about activities, thoughts and feelings whilst also keeping certain information private "or at least concealed from certain audiences" (p.124). This process is "an ongoing front-stage identity performance" (p.124) and is dependent on how the user perceives their imagined audience, what topics they will find acceptable or unacceptable and how much personal disclosure is needed to appear authentic in one's self-presentation. Marwick and boyd argue that authenticity is a problematic concept in this context, as while it implies that an inherent and universal 'true' self is being presented, what is considered authentic is itself dependent on context and audience (p.124). This is especially the case on Twitter, where the priorities, values and interests of different audiences and communities can vary wildly but are blended into a collapsed audience, which makes the process of 'authentic' self-presentation more complicated for the user than in other contexts.

In navigating the unique challenges of presenting an authentic persona posed by Twitter's collapsed audience, Marwick and boyd argue that users employ two specific techniques: 'self-censorship', the avoidance of certain topics when posting, and 'balance', the inclusion of more personal information in otherwise impersonal tweets (p.124). Self-censorship is again related to how a given user imagines their audience, and the way twitter networks users: for many users the collapsed, undefined nature of the audience leads to it being imagined as made up of "its most sensitive members: parents, partners and bosses" (p.125). In this situation a user may imagine that there is always the potential that their audience may contain the 'worst case scenario' viewer who will be vocally opposed, harmed, offended or judgemental of what they say in a way that could have consequences either on or outside of Twitter. Due to this "lowest-common-denominator philosophy of sharing" (p.126), some participants may limit themselves to those topics which they feel are safe for viewing by any party, but in so doing avoid expressing the kind of personal phatic content which is more likely to be read as authentic.

According to Marwick and Boyd, balance as a tactic is used more by those Twitter users actively trying to build an audience wider than their existing acquaintances, who therefore have to deal with a wider variety of potentially conflicting audience expectations. Again the collapsed nature of the audience on Twitter means that a large group of followers is likely to not just have different preferences for the kind of topics a user posts about, but

also for the balance a user strikes between posting about informative topics and personal information in the performance of their identity (p.126). In maintaining a Twitter presence that primarily posts informative rather than phatic content, some users with larger followings may find themselves producing content which is seen as less ‘authentic’ as it lacks intimate emotional content or the disclosure of personal information, thoughts, feeling or details about their personal lives. Such content may be seen as inauthentic, and leads some users to strategically reveal more details of their personal lives in a way that reinforces their relationship with their followers, but by including personal topics that are still “relatively innocuous” (p.127), by including details on day to day moments rather than actually intimate feelings. These acts of tactically balancing the informative or instrumental purpose of one’s posts with more phatic, personal and superficially intimate content “exemplify highly self-conscious identity presentations that assume a primarily professional context” (p.127), such as bloggers, journalists and activists. In these cases, strategies of balancing may allow users to simultaneously manage an effective professional identity, and connect with acquaintances, friends or family in an effective and apparently authentic manner. While I do not especially draw on these approaches in my own analysis, this literature nonetheless serves to illustrate the general contours of identity and audience on Twitter.

## **Antagonistic and Resistant Identities**

Much of the literature presented so far, particularly the arguments and observations of Marwick and boyd (2010), mostly illustrate the practices of identity management and audience imagination of ‘typical’ Twitter users, that is to say ones who use the service for communication and sharing of ideas, information and day-to-day personal information with care and attention to presenting a persona which is largely uncontroversial and non-combative, rather than one who engages in disruptive or antagonistic practices. Given the subject matter of my investigation it is fruitful to spend some time discussing the use of Twitter in the presentation of both feminist, and misogynistic or antifeminist identities.

### **Feminist Activism and Identity on Twitter and “Hashtag feminism”**

Much of the literature on feminist activism and identity construction on Twitter has focused on the use of hashtags by users presenting a feminist identity. Dixon (2014)

identifies “hashtag feminism” (p.34) as the use of hashtags by an active community of users expressing a diverse array of feminist sentiment, who use the communicative features of Twitter to “control and maintain collective power through use of their narratives, hashtags, and identity” (p.34). Dixon is fairly unequivocal in describing the significance of hashtag feminism, seeing this emerging practice as “one of the most popular conduits of both Twitter and Facebook... [that] has truly redefined the ways in which we view the active components of feminism in our present society... the new wave of feminism” (p.34). Despite this, Dixon is less optimistic about narratives that see the practice as capable of creating entirely emancipatory spaces online where “victims of inequality can coexist... in a space that acknowledges their pain, narratives, and isolation” (p.34), which has been used to describe previous forms of feminist activity in online space. Rather, Dixon argues that the use of Twitter by feminist actors may present “dire consequences” (p.34) in the form of antifeminist and misogynistic backlash through hate speech and harassment, as well as disagreements and miscommunication between feminist actors around the meaning of feminism. For Dixon, the latter set of consequences extend “the ongoing debate that feminism does not acknowledge real life experiences outside of the academic terrain” (p.35) as actors who articulate various feminist identities conflict and collaborate in “redefining feminism in their generation” (p.35).

In giving specific examples of hashtag feminism/feminists Dixon cites popular hashtags covering topics of intersectionality concerning Black and Asian women’s experiences of feminism, feminist political activism, and discussions of patriarchal violence, including the well-known #YesAllWomen and #BringBackOurGirls. While most of these hashtags, some of which were shared and favoured hundreds of thousands of times, have identifiable authors others cannot be easily attributed to any one original author, but were still articulated and shared by a great number of users in order to “share their experiences of living in a male dominated society” (p.35) in a collaborative manner. Dixon is hesitant to apply any specific set of criteria in describing who a hashtag feminist is in terms of their relation to feminist theory and practice, and instead sees these activities as “alternative meaning systems associated with women sharing their real life experiences” (p.36) in a patriarchal culture, that makes this kind of highly public discourse difficult in most situations. While many of the sentiments attached to hashtag feminism are highly individual and personal, Dixon also discusses the communitarian aspects of their production, and the relation this has with self and group identity. Through the sharing and retweeting of feminist hashtag sentiments users construct a feminist community identity

in which “followers... develop feelings of connections with the lead hashtag feminist and feel as though the language used is a language they identify with in a social group setting” (p.37).

While Twitter has provided similar opportunities for women to define their feminism as those afforded by previous waves and mobilisations of feminism, Dixon sees some important differences related to the medium. The act of performing a feminist identity and sharing experiences online with other identifying users “is constituted through the social or symbolic change of those [who] may never meet to produce direct action” (p.38), and this lack of a more direct contact outside of Twitter’s primarily textual medium can lead to “the fear that not everyone in the ‘community’ is really real or passionate about the issues at hand” (p.38). For Dixon this anxiety about authenticity is most visible in users who deceptively present a feminist identity or engage in open feminist discourse in order to troll and harass feminists and feminist communities in order to “disrupt the community by aggravating the conversation into argument by writing deceptive responses in order to attract the maximum number of responses” (p.38). Interestingly Dixon makes the point that the same criteria that identify messages formulated for the purposes of trolling can also be applied to ‘sincere’ feminist beliefs which have a similar effect in inciting arguments within feminist communities.

In illustrating this Dixon points to a particular incident when feminist academic bell hooks made controversial comments regarding feminist/anti-feminist implications of Beyoncé, by arguing that aspects of the persona she presented could have a negative impact on young girls (p.38). These comments, partly taken out of context, “sparked a Twitter and Facebook war” (p.38) around the appropriateness of hook’s comments and the status of Black women involved in feminism. Dixon argues that the effect these comments had on the feminist Twitter community was the creation of heated argument which was ultimately disruptive (p.39). In this sense hook’s comments, though ‘sincere’, produced a similar effect to that ‘intended’ by users who purposefully ‘troll’ these communities, and as such she went on to use feminist hashtagging to “re-create a safe space for her virtual follower... to reconnect in an online community she established” (p.6), which helped to ameliorate the negative sentiment against her (p.39). For Dixon this illustrates how in these cases “disruptive incidents force group members to articulate explicit norms and rules... [which] may have the unexpected effect of strengthening an online group’s self-definition as a community” (p.49). This restorative practice where users were encouraged to participate in further feminist hashtagging around feminist identity suggests that these

women were not just challenging “the limitations of... women’s mobility, but [also] the limitations of being a feminist” (p.49) by using it as a space to define through action and self-presentation what a feminist is and what counts as feminist belief and practice, in a way specific to Twitter.

Other theorists have written about hashtag feminism, and cover many similar topics around identity construction, the activity around specific influential hashtags and the effects and responses to trolling. Rentschler (2015) focuses on #SafetyTipsForLadies, a satirical hashtag created to “mock the advice-giving tropes of traditional rape prevention discourse” (p.354) which place the responsibility for stopping rape on the targets of violence. Users engaging with this hashtag typically used “hyperbolic exaggeration” (p.345) such as suggesting women should wear body armour in public, or “leave their vaginas at home when they go out” (p.345), to express their frustration with victim blaming logic. In doing so these users utilized humour that resonated with other social media platforms and spaces, in a way that “nurtures the politics of joy and resilience” (p.355) as well as showing the effectiveness of Twitter as a medium for dissenting users to gain control of public discussions on issues (p.335), and in doing so assert their identities as feminists. Similarly, Eagle (2015) focuses on feminist hashtags that articulate women’s rights to be safe in public spaces such as #EverydaySexism, #StopStreetHarassment and #BoardTheBus, the latter of which referred to the violent rape of a woman on public transport in Delhi, India in 2013 (p.350). Eagle argues that while these hashtags allowed users from different cultural contexts to articulate their experiences and sentiments around street harassment and misogynistic violence, together they “speak to the global reality of restrictions on women’s mobility in public space” (p.352) in a way that transcends these specific contexts.

Unlike Dixon, Rodino-Colocino (2014) is hesitant to see hashtag feminism as constituting another distinct wave of feminist activism, but nonetheless describes the mobilization around #YesAllWomen as “a key moment in the genealogy of feminism” (p.1113) that represents the articulation of a very archetypal feminist sentiment, resistance to patriarchal violence, in a very contemporary medium. #YesAllWomen was coined by an anonymous “Muslim identifying woman of colour” (p.1113) to serve as a venue for the discussion of patriarchal violence following the 2014 Isla Vista mass shooting, and the “feminist-derailing argument” (p.1113) typified by the hashtag #NotAllMen, that criticism of patriarchal culture is synonymous with attacks on men as a group. This was especially relevant in the case of the Isla Vista killings, as the shooter described himself as targeting women as an act of revenge for his own experiences of sexual rejection (p.1113), which

users of #YesAllWomen generally saw as an example of sexual violence and heteronormative entitlement to women's bodies, rather than the unique pathological behaviour of an unstable individual. As well as extending this kind of critique, #YesAllWomen also serves to "problematic grounding feminist solidarity in white, middle-class, US-centric, heteronormative privilege" (p.1113) by providing a space for users to articulate identities which are intersectional and inclusive. Much of this was done through further hashtags which modified or elaborated on the original, or in response to the activities of trolls who attempted to co-opt them. Rodino-Colocino draws on specific examples of users who felt the feminist identity they were articulating was at odds with this concept of solidarity, such as the creation of #YesAllWhiteWomen by black feminists, #EachEveryWoman by users who found #YesAllWomen not inclusive, as well as other hashtags around poverty, class and disability. For Rodino-Colocino this kind of reflexivity is indicative of a desire amongst feminist identifying users on Twitter to be "mobilizing against sexual assault while doing the radical work of creating intersectional solidarity" (p.1113), but in doing so users face challenges of creating safe spaces in a very public environment, one which leaves them open to internal conflict, personal attacks, death and rape threats as well as infiltration and manipulation by trolls and other antagonistic actors.

In the specific discussion of #YesAllWomen, Thrift (2014) shares the position that these users were articulating personal stories and sentiments to refute the assertions that the Isla Vista shooter's feelings of disdain and entitlement towards women were at all exceptional, and goes on to argue that #YesAllWomen constituted a "feminist meme event" (p.1091). Thrift sees this as an event because it went beyond the specific topic of the shootings and became about users sharing personal stories that made their experiences of misogyny and sexism "eventful... worthy of documentation, of remembrance, and of public and political discussion" (p.1091). Thrift argues that in doing so these users were not just highlighting otherwise unspoken experiences, but were also "doing feminism in the network" (p.1091) by creating new networks of criticism and archives of testimonies that went beyond the immediate context of Twitter in a way that demonstrated the "political efficacy" (p.1092) of such events.

### **Antifeminist Trolls**

The tensions presented by trolls has been discussed elsewhere in more detail, and demonstrates not only the issues around this public vulnerability but also the tactics of

identity presentation employed by antagonistic users in discrediting or attacking feminist identity and activity on Twitter.

Ganzer (2014) discusses a particular example of organized trolling where the techniques of feminist hashtagging and identity presentation were used by antifeminists to discredit and attack feminists active on Twitter, in a way that extends some of Dixon's (2014) observations. "Operation: Lollipop" (Gazner, 2014, p.1098) was a pre-planned and coordinated "anti-feminist propaganda effort" (p.1098) launched in October 2013. Groups of antifeminist users created Twitter accounts which identified them as feminist women, in order to create incendiary or extreme personas. This included hashtags such as "#EndFathersDay and #WhitesCantBeRaped" (p.1098), with the intent of discrediting or mocking feminist users, and causing conflict between them. While these are extreme sentiments, these and other hoax feminist hashtags "garnered legitimate feminist followers and contributed to the dissemination of a radical feminist critique" (p.1099): the originating hoax tweet featuring #EndFathersDay was itself retweeted 171 times on the day it was posted, and gained a great deal of prominence after it was revealed to be a hoax. Users who retweeted hoax hashtags were themselves hit with backlash from other feminist identifying users.

Ganzer argues that the hoax was effective in that it caused "shame and embarrassment among legitimate women's rights activists who unwittingly retweeted the ludicrous hashtag" (2014, p.1099), and furthered antifeminist sentiment on Twitter by inciting conflict and alienating moderate users. Gazner returns to the issue of authenticity in identity presentation highlighted by other theorists I have discussed here, and concludes that the hoax was possible because Twitter represents an environment "where identity and authenticity are constantly up for grabs" (p.1100). In this context antifeminist users tried to achieve authenticity by presenting the kind of feminist identity that they felt authentically embodied feminists: as man-hating individuals preoccupied with a combative kind of intersectional discourse, an antifeminist image of feminism reflected in many people's stereotypes of feminism and feminists. That the trolls focused particularly on presenting non-white feminist identities is also seen as significant by Ganzer, who argues that this may indicate that the trolls saw such individuals as being important enough in feminist communities on Twitter that masquerading as them would be effective.

Elsewhere, communication and media scholar Emma Alice Jane has produced especially interesting and important work on the most extreme forms of misogynistic hate online. On

the topic of online misogyny, two of Jane's publications are of specific relevance (2014a, 2014b). Jane's work here focuses on what she calls "E-bile" (2014a, p.531), the most violent forms of misogynistic violence which incorporate gendered slurs, explicitly violent language and lurid threats/descriptions of rape and sexual violence directed at women online. Here Jane goes beyond simply defining this sort of discourse as trolling, and creates typologies to demonstrate how misogynistic hateful language online is not something unique to online mediums, but rather a new medium for a very old problem. In her own words: "The cyber medium is new but the E-bile message has roots in a much older discursive tradition: one which insists women are inferior and that their primary function is to provide sexual gratification for men – and then denigrates them for this self-same characterisation" (2014b, p.566).

The tweets I analyse in this thesis do not fit into this e-bile category; this is possibly due to Twitter's moderation policies being 'better' at removing *explicit* hateful misogyny (threats of rape and so on) over the period of time between my data collection and analysis (approximately a year). Despite this, I argue that the more 'banal' or 'everyday' misogyny, sexism and antifeminism that I examine here are nonetheless important in terms of the overall research of misogyny online. While the topic of Jane's analysis represents the most extreme examples, this does not diminish the seriousness of these more banal examples which I tend to analyse here. Additionally, Jane's observation that the presence of misogyny online is not a novel thing, but rather the reappearance of an 'old' form of oppression into a 'new' environment, is vitally important to the broader discussion of misogyny online.

### **Hate Speech on Twitter**

Adjacently related to this literature on antagonistic identities of Twitter – and quite relevant in light of my thesis' focus on reactionary discourse – is the wider literature concerning hate speech on Twitter. Writing from a computational criminology perspective, Williams and Burnap (2016) provide an account of "the manifestation, prevalence and propagation of cyberhate" (p.212) on Twitter following the murder of Lee Rigby in 2013 during the Woolwich terror attack. A key feature of this study is its investigation of hate speech (specifically hate speech targeted against Muslims, Islam and ethnic minority groups) in the aftermath of a "trigger' event" (p.212), seeing how hateful discourse and sentiment can emerge and propagate on social networks such as Twitter following 'real

'world' events (p.216). Additionally, much like my thesis the authors utilised COSMOS to collect their data, a corpus of over 400,000 tweets (p.218), although they utilised a computational hate speech classifier tool in their analysis (p.223), rather than the more qualitative methodology I employ here.

Several findings here are pertinent. Williams and Burnap (2016) demonstrate "evidence of cyberhate originating from individual Twitter users, in particular those identifying with right wing political groups, that was directly related to the trigger event" (p.232) in response to the Woolwich attack. The link between the production of hateful (anti-Muslim, racist and so on) tweets and political identification/affiliation is especially significant here, as it demonstrates an empirical link between the production of hateful speech on Twitter and reactionary political identities, in a way which links cyberhate with 'offline' hate crime. In the authors' words, this constitutes "The fanning of the flames on social media by individuals identifying with right-wing political groups, bolstered by traditional press coverage" (p.232), all based around an event which caused an uptick on Twitter.

In a separate paper on information propagation on Twitter in response to the Woolwich terrorist attack, Burnap et al (2014) produce other interesting findings on how different factors, including the negative sentiment of tweets, can influence how much they propagate in the network. In doing this, the authors utilise two key concepts: "information flow size and survival" (p.14). Meaning "the process of information spreading to a greater number of people over time via Twitter through the action of retweeting" (p.2), and "the duration between the first and last retweet" (p.2) respectively.

Using automated sentiment analysis to detect 'negativity' within the corpus, the authors demonstrate that more negative content (including tweets containing violent language, hate speech and so on) tended to not only propagate less than positive content (e.g. messages of support for victims), but also did not survive within the network as long (p.13). Put plainly, the authors empirically demonstrated that hateful, reactionary tweets tend to not spread or stick around for as long as more 'positive' tweets.

In the context of my thesis, this literature concerning hate speech on Twitter is relevant for a number of reasons, despite the fact I do not approach the topic from the field of computational criminology, and do not adopt 'hate speech' as an analytic term. Methodologically, these papers are relevant because they both approached large data sets of tweets from a social science perspective, collected using the same tool as I have used

(COSMOS). More broadly, they provide a justification for collecting/analysing tweets around temporal events (in their case the Woolwich terrorist attack, in my case IWD2017), and also have pertinent findings in terms of the nature of the tweets the focus on.

In both cases, negative sentiment and hate speech are treated as analytically important, and in the case of Williams and Burnap (2016), an explicit link is drawn between hateful tweets, the political ‘identification’ of users (right wing, reactionary), and offline incidents of hate crime. While the focus of my thesis is less extreme (in terms of precipitating event and the nature of discourse), it nonetheless also analyses this intersection of online hate, reactionary politics, and ‘offline’ events.

## **Professional Identities**

The general observations around the performance of identity and management of imagined audiences I have covered previously are reflected elsewhere, especially in studies focusing on professional identity construction on Twitter. In their narrative self-study of academic and artistic identities on Twitter, Budge et al (2016) focus on the “micro-level, personalised experience of using Twitter” (p.212), and how these specific identities are engaged and developed through its use. Here Budge et al discuss their conceptions of ‘audience’ and their concerns and deliberations around identity presentation, but approach these tensions in a way which they feel enables them to engage other users and perform their identities in a way which challenges the conventions and expectations of their professional communities. The connectivity afforded by Twitter allowed users to connect with an audience of other academics and artists in a way that was more “accessible and approachable” (p.217), and challenged what they saw as the “hierarchical nature of the academy” (p.217) by allowing connections to an audience that included users from various backgrounds across a range of institutions and locals. Likewise the authors reflect concerns around the tensions of identity presentation to a collapsed audience, especially ones that includes colleagues and employers, and discuss the “messiness” (p.218) and risk involved in their identity performance. The performance of multiple personal and professional identities to a collapsed, very public audience is acknowledged as a risky process, but this risk is seen as “an important element in... engagement of Twitter, and an activity that this place allows” (p.218), rather than something to be avoided through self-censorship and balancing tactics as observed by Marwick and boyd (2010). Here instead the tensions of performing a messy professional

identity are seen as opportunities to challenge perceived notions of what is acceptable professional identity and behaviour in academic circles (Budge et al. 2016. p.219).

Using social network analysis to examine the identity construction practices of public relations professionals on Twitter, Gilpin (2011) makes some further observations and arguments around identity presentation. PR professionals who were studied displayed a high awareness of the visible nature of their communications, and practiced self-censorship, mostly expressing positive sentiments on Twitter and saving more negative content for offline conversation or posts on linked blogs (p.236). Gilpin argues that this high level of positivity and awareness may “highlight the performative nature of professional conversations” (p.247) in contexts such as Twitter where public relations professionals are largely expected to be positive, and that this may in turn “reinforce group membership... or may indicate a desire to enter the core group from a peripheral tier” (p.247). While these observations may appear specific to public relations professionals they extend more general observations around identity performance into a particular context, and serve as an extension of the observations of Budge et al. (2016), suggesting that different users have different relationships with self-censorship in their identity presentation, and that these can be related to performative aspects of their community membership, and efforts to become more integrated within that communities network on Twitter.

## **Ethnicity and Identity**

In discussing ‘Black Twitter’: the performance of Black American cultural identity by users on Twitter, Florini (2014) argues that in a primarily textual context where the ‘real life’ signifiers of ethnicity are difficult to determine “Black users often perform their identities through displays of cultural competence and knowledge” (p.223). Florini defines Black Twitter as “not exist[ing] in any unified or monolithic sense” (p.225), but as being constituted by the “millions of Black users on Twitter networking, connecting, and engaging with others who have similar concerns, experiences, tastes, and cultural practices” (p.225). In this engagement with their community, Florini argues that users relate to each other through reproducing pre-existing Black cultural genres of communication though the use of hashtags and other features, in order to perform their ethnicity as “a mode of resistance to marginalization and erasure” (p.225).

This communication draws on the pre-existing black American cultural practice of “Signifiyin” (p.226), an oral tradition employing a collaborative “dexterous use of language and skilled verbal performance” (p.226) that relies and draws on the participants’ pre-existing cultural knowledge and competencies in order to recognise multiple levels of meaning being drawn on outside of the immediate context of the text. On Twitter this may require knowledge of a range of topics “from familiarity with Black popular culture and celebrity gossip to the experiential knowledge of navigating U.S. culture as a racialized subject” (p.227). What this amounts to is a kind of identity performance where users identifying as members of a particular ambient community draw on shared pre-existing experiences and cultural knowledge to engage in talk that is meant to mark them as belonging to that group, through various in-jokes, memes and styles of communication.

Florini argues that by marking themselves as racial subjects in an environment that makes ethnicity opaque or assumes whiteness, users of Black Twitter are engaging in social critique. The author gives examples of this, such as the use of “#blacknerdsunite” by Black tech enthusiasts to express shared frustration at the general perception of the popular understanding of Black cultural practice being “in opposition to all things intellectual and technological” (p.228), and to show their interest and proficiency in the activities and hobbies associated with the tech-enthusiast community. This critique also took the form of commentary on mainstream media, such as the use of parody and satire in critiquing the discussion of ethnicity and gender on a news debate program. What underlines these examples, and highlights their significance for understanding identity presentation on Twitter in a broader sense, is that these individuals are using Twitter’s features to engage in activities that can be read as a form of social critique or resistance to mainstream cultural or media representation of their group using a collaborative form of communication which relies on the knowledge and experience specific to their own group.

Florini identifies that in other cases practices on Black Twitter took the form of participatory games of ritualised insults and humour which prioritise “verbal dexterity, wit, and wordplay” (p.229). Rather than being antagonistic, such exchanges prioritise participation and encourage a mutual understanding that what is going on is “actually a creative performance” (p.229) where participants are either insulting each other within the parameters of a game, or insulting an imagined third party. In this context the point is not to mock or antagonise, but to see who can produce the most creative tweet while demonstrating appropriate cultural knowledge and “an understanding of forms of Black American slang” (p.229).

As is the case with other accounts of Twitter, Florini emphasises the role of the audience in witnessing and acting on a user's identity performance. In the kind of cultural performative traditions Florini argues are being replicated on Twitter, proactive audiences are crucial to the effectiveness of activities through the ways in which they "comment, cheer, laugh, and interject, ultimately pushing the game" (p.232). For both the followers of a given user and the general public audience retweeting, often with additional commentary such as text indicating they found a particular tweet especially funny or other interjections, including the use of hashtags to indicate a general approval for how the community is creating humour around the topic (p.232-233). Though these may be general features of how certain kinds of collaborative humour and identity performance function on Twitter, Florini argues that they have special significance in the case of Black American cultural expression by engaging in "ways that closely mirror longstanding traditions in Black American communities" (p.234). Through this process the users involved "seem to be prioritizing the performance of their racial identity" (p.234) in an environment where ethnicity is made opaque, a practice that Florini argues runs in stark contrast to popular liberal assertions that combating racism involves ignoring someone's identity as a member of an ethnic minority community (p.234)

Examining Black Twitter from a social network analysis perspective, Sharma (2013) is more critical of accounts like Florini's which focus on "the demographic distribution and supposed behaviour of (a sub-set of) African American users" (Sharma, 2013. p.52) and argues that such accounts rely on a pre-determined understanding of Blackness as an identity category and ignore the material effect that the design of Twitter may have in the production of racialized identity discourse. Sharma argues that the prevalence of Black Twitter related hashtags, or "Blacktags" (p.51), in Twitter's trending topics section should not be read as a representative sample of the kind of identity presentation and talk of a pre-existing community of Black Twitter users, but a product of the specific, unseen functions of Twitter's algorithms interacting with the structure and practice of ethnic minority communities on Twitter. According to Sharma, reading the general content of Blacktags, which are often banal, trivial or misogynistic, as the representative activity of Black users not only serves to fetishize the behaviour of a small number of Black people, but also has "the racialized implication... that Black users of Twitter are predominantly preoccupied with trivia and banal chatter, and white users are significantly more involved in engaging with serious social issues" (p.52).

In mounting a critique of this approach Sharma also problematizes how race can be classified in an environment like Twitter, arguing that since ethnicity is not recorded in user profile data unlike sex and age, empirical researchers often have to rely on identifying the ethnicity of users through viewing their profile pictures (p.53). Sharma argues that besides the obvious issue that profile images may have no relation to the actual appearance of a user, this practice serve to “effectively reproduce practices of racial profiling” (p.53) and reproduce practices of racial categorization associated with the colonial white gaze.

As an alternative to this approach Sharma argues that “user identities, representations and meanings in online spaces are produced by material processes vis-à-vis complex technological assemblages” (p.54), meaning that identity is understood in terms of the material technological processes at work on Twitter, and the practices of users as they interact with each other in this system and with the system itself. In a material sense racial identities do not exist on Twitter until their “discursive representation” (p.54) through the “informational logics of: user names and profile pictures, hashtags and trending algorithms, software interfaces and processes, data flows and networked relations, inclusion and exclusion, racial dis/ordering, contagious vernacular humour, meanings and affects” (p.54).

In the case of ‘Blacktags’, Sharma suggests that they are more likely to trend because they tend to emerge within clusters of users who are more likely to mutually follow each other and intensively retweet one another, which appears to be privileged by Twitter’s algorithm, and from there may be further shared by users with fewer ties to those groups. Thus Sharma argues that while Blacktags and the content associated with Black Twitter may originate from groups of Black American users, their “rapid diffusion... points to the involvement of other clusters, including other (ethnic) groups” (p.58), which suggests that Black Twitter in fact has multicultural aspects.

While ethnicity is not a focus on this thesis, the paper discussed above does broadly represent how my understanding of ‘identity’ on Twitter is informed: as something which is mediated and arrived at based on an assemblage of technologies in a (primarily) discursive environment. While many of the tweets I analyse are produced by users who may *appear* to identify themselves as various kinds of actors (Trump supporters, anti-

feminists, companies and so on) these are only ‘identities’ in terms of how they function as part of this assemblage. In plainer terms: I am not interested in whether the identity users appear to articulate on Twitter is in any way a reflection of whatever ‘authentic’ identity these users may or may not possess, I am interested in how the discourse they construct functions and how it can be critiqued.

## **Summary**

This chapter has examined a range of literature related to identity and audience online, and on Twitter specifically. This is necessary given that the discursive focus of my thesis ultimately deals with tweets from individual users, who are themselves involved in identity production in an environment where audience is a key issue. In reviewing literature related to this I have also examined feminist perspectives, particularly in relation to online trolling and misogyny. These are especially pertinent to the goals and research questions of this thesis. Having concluded my review of literature, I will now go on to discuss my methodology in detail, including a narrative overview of the process as it actually played out.

# Chapter 4: Methodology, Performing qualitative analysis on big social media data

## Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the methodological aspects of my project. Given the numerous ways research methodology featured in this specific project, this will consist of several different threads. Partly, this chapter has the typical practical and instrumental purpose of a thesis methodology chapter: describing the actual research methodologies I employed during my data collection and analysis, showing which areas of research I drew upon in formulating them, how I undertook the process, and the issues and limitations I encountered. Beyond this, it also serves as both an embodied narrative of the process (how I as a specific doctoral researcher undertook this specific project), and a reflexive account (my thoughts and experiences of the process). In taking this approach, this chapter hopes to potentially provide some guidance as to how other qualitative researchers might perform similar work. The analysis of social media within sociology is a constantly changing field, and at the time of writing qualitative approaches to Twitter of the kind attempted here are still very 'new' within that field. Ultimately then, I hope that this chapter may serve as a useable framework for conducting this kind of methodologically innovative research.

I have several motivations for this approach. When the time came to account for my methodology, to draw together the variety of methods and approaches I had assembled over the past few years, I became inclined to think that the research strategy I followed in this thesis cannot be outlined through straightforward reference to previous studies, and that transforming this process into a neat, uncomplicated, linear account would be problematic. Additionally, I feel that the conditions created for me by the relative lack of existing methodological work on this topic present a rare opportunity to explore the experience of one researcher in developing methodology within the context of a PhD thesis. Due to the innovative nature of this project - the application of qualitative analysis to a 'big' digital data set - few directly applicable research strategies existed at the time I began, a situation that has changed fairly little over the intervening years. What little there is that actually outlines specific research strategies in this area was published after the project began, and at present the application of qualitative analysis to this kind of data

seems to still be in its infancy. Given this, my approach to methodology was somewhat ‘ad-hoc’: drawing on relevant related areas when possible, finding solutions to the numerous methodological, theoretical and practical challenges which arose, but lacking a clear blueprint provided by previous studies. Methodology is rarely if ever ‘given’ in social science research, even PhD projects dealing with much more ‘established’ areas and methods can and do encounter situations where previous research cannot provide a simple blueprint. However, I also argue that there is an empirical difference between PhD projects of those sort and my own. An exploration of the use of qualitative methods in a research project using digital ‘big’ social data has been such a core focus of this project from the outset that it figures in my research goals, and actual research questions. This chapter reflects this focus.

In covering these topics in a way which resembles a guide, I will employ a more-or-less chronological approach, discussing each step of my research process roughly in the order I undertook them, moving from data collection to data management, and then from preliminary analysis and data description to the more traditional forms of qualitative analysis I employed (specifically critical discourse analysis). Before this, I will first discuss certain concepts that I feel have been foundational both to how I have approached the methodological aspects of my project, and this chapter specifically. A further key element of this chapter will be a detailed discussion of a specific piece of methodological literature: ‘Big data, qualitative style: a breadth-and-depth method for working with large amounts of secondary qualitative data’, published in 2018 by Davidson et al. This specific article appears to be one of the only such published discussions of the actual application of qualitative analysis to very large datasets at the time of writing, and even in this case the data in question is not digital social media data, but rather an exceptionally large amount of documents related to several ‘offline’ qualitative studies, fieldnotes and so on. This publication occupies an odd position relative to my methodology. Despite outlining what is a very similar method to my own for performing a qualitative analysis on big data, it was published some time after I had developed and implemented my own methods. Therefore, in discussing this paper here I present it more to make my own methodology defensible through comparison, rather than as an example of something I followed in a predetermined way, whilst also demonstrating how my own methodology differs from and develops these underlying ideas in a distinct area.

## **Why a Qualitative Approach?**

The decision to take a qualitative approach to this topic area has largely been in response to the general character of research which has focused on the analysis of big data derived from Twitter. As I have outlined when discussing research into Twitter cyberhate – and will discuss other elements of later in this chapter – a great deal of research into hateful discourse on Twitter utilising big data (including research which has developed the tools to do this research) has used methodology and analysis which have a generally quantitative and computational nature (Sloan et al, 2013, Procter, Vis and Vos, 2013, Procter et al, 2013, Burnap et al, 2014a and 2014b, Sloan et al, Burnap et al, 2015, 2015, Sloan and Morgan, 2015, Williams and Burnap, 2016, Ozalp et al, 2020). As a generally quantitative and computational field – with the interdisciplinary practice of computational criminology featuring prominently – I argue that there is a relative lack of qualitative, critical, theoretically informed sociological perspectives on these issues, tools, methodologies and forms of data. Indeed, this lack forms a central focus of this thesis.

I am absolutely not intending to advance the argument that these studies cited, or other similar studies, are in any way deficient or flawed in their approach. Without many of the above cited studies this thesis would not be possible, and they have made important and meaningful contributions to their fields, often dealing with very serious social problems of online and offline hate speech. What I am arguing, however, is that the dearth of qualitative social research may pose a serious issue for qualitative research which seeks to engage with social data, contemporarily and into the future. In a similar fashion to the observations of Savage and Burrows (2007) regarding (at the time) an impending threat to social science presented by corporatised social data analysis, I argue that there is a present crisis faced by qualitative, critical sociology posed by a relative lack of engagement with big social data. In this sense, the focus on qualitative, critical, theoretically informed analysis in this thesis is a tentative step in redressing this potential issue.

There are also other reasons beyond a basic lack of existing examples of qualitative approaches. Christian Fuchs (2019), mentioned in the literature review, has made convincing arguments for the merits of qualitative, critical approaches in digital social research. For Fuchs, critical qualitative approaches to this area of study offer the ability to study phenomena that are not necessarily available to quantitative approaches, namely “human motivations, feelings, experiences, norms, morals, values, interpretations, concerns, fears [and] hopes” (pp.12-13). These aspects of the social world are typically within the domain of qualitative methods. I argue their study is important, and the

particular need to study them in this context merits a qualitative approach such as the one I have adopted.

Highly relevant to my initial justification, for Fuchs the lack of critical and qualitative research in this field may pose the risk of an expanding digital positivism (positivism here is meant in the onto/epistemological sense). Mentioned previously, digital positivism is defined as “a paradigm that is about quantification, mathematics, and calculation... [which sets] out to explain the world based on the analysis of big stocks and flows of data” (p.12). Without the development of qualitative approaches and “alternative, critical digital methods” (p.13) that are experimental and creative in how they approach analysis, theory and research ethics, the analysis of digital sociality risks being dominated by a limited set of perspectives.

## **Revisiting my Research Questions**

Here, before proceeding with a summary of this project’s background, I will briefly revisit my research questions and discuss how they relate both to the content of my literature review and my methodology. This will hopefully leave the reader with a clearer idea of how these questions were grounded in literature, and how the research strategy was designed to answer them.

(1) What is the content and character of misogynistic, antifeminist and other discourse during International Women’s Day 2017 on Twitter? How do users construct these discourses?

(2) What are the wider ideological implications of these discourses in the context of Twitter?

(3) In what ways might technological utopian ideology relate to Twitter as a platform of digital capitalism? Will the findings of this project provide grounds for a critique of Twitter in this context?

(4) How successfully can qualitative methods be applied to big data? What is a defensible methodology for this kind of approach?

(5) What are the ethical implications of this kind of study?

These questions derive from the findings of the literature review chapters in a number of ways. Question 1 builds on my discussion of critical discourse analysis and feminist interactions with social media to examine ways in which discursive approaches may be applicable to analysis of discourse around this specific event, asking in what ways antifeminist discourse may be present and what features it may have. Question 2 focuses more so on a theoretical concern around this subject, particularly the ways these discourses, including antifeminist/misogynistic ones, may serve to extend them into this specific online environment. Both of these draw upon literature I have examined which examines online and social media discourse, particularly how they pertain to issues of exclusion online.

Question 3 is drawn particularly on the range of literature I have discussed, including feminist literature, which is concerned with wider ideological and political issues concerning online discourse and exclusion. As discussed in the literature review there have been gradual shifts in this evaluation over time, and while contemporary perspectives are often critical there is still recognition of the positive potential of online spaces like Twitter. Taken together with literature I have examined concerning the ideological history of Silicon Valley tech cultures, this question will allow me to examine these broader issues.

Questions 4 and 5 are drawn from the methodological literature I have examined, particularly literature pertaining to big data and the social sciences. As I will discuss in more detail in this chapter there is a lack of existing qualitative research into big social media data. These questions are intended to both attempt to redress this, and while doing so evaluate to what extent the methodological strategy I implement is effective. Similarly, the question of ethics will attempt to do similar things from an ethical perspective.

In this chapter I will discuss the methodological strategy I implemented. This strategy was designed to answer these questions by combining qualitative critical discourse analysis (specifically an approach focusing on power, inequality and critique) with innovative and original data collection and exploration tools.

## **Project Summary**

To help guide the reader further through this somewhat unorthodox methodology chapter, I will here outline the background and overall design of my project, its goals, and some of the significant developments that occurred while I was undertaking it. In the

briefest terms; this PhD project has been an attempt to study various kinds of discourse found on Twitter – especially misogynistic and sexist discourse – in the context of International Women’s Day 2017, using a mix of computational data collection methods and qualitative critical discourse analysis. This may sound somewhat straightforward to a fellow qualitative researcher, but the process entails several significant complicating factors which challenge established methodology, and potentially advance the qualitative study of social media in interesting and significant ways.

A Key issue in this project is that of big data. I have discussed some literature surround big data in chapter 2 so will avoid repeating my discussion here. Suffice to say, big data (specifically big social media data) presented a number of challenges for this project, specifically how to apply fine-grained, qualitative analysis to a data set that was prohibitively large for a lone researcher to approach using established methodology. Much of this project, therefore, has focused on developing a methodology to properly explore and sample a dataset of very large size.

With this project I intended to explore these potentials directly; to gather a large sample of social media data in the form of tweets, which I would then reduce in a defensible manner into a corpus small enough that I could apply critical discourse analysis. Beyond methodological curiosity there were other motivations for this project. The focus on sexist and misogynistic discourse, came from a long running interest I had in the topic, for personal and political reasons which go back to before I began my university degree, which I have discussed in a previous chapter on positionality (chapter1). My choice of critical discourse analysis was driven by my interest in discourse as data, and my own political and theoretical inclinations toward critical perspectives. As a (primarily) discursive medium, Twitter is a fruitful area for this kind of inquiry.

I designed this project with these twin interests in mind; on one hand advancing a critique of misogyny and antifeminism away from fringe communities and toward a widely used social media platform (at the time especially, Twitter was heavily criticised in press for allegedly failing to deal with misogynistic harassment), and on the other doing so in a way that advanced methodological practice in the field. I began designing this project in 2015 and intended it to be a logical development of my Masters research project (Gray, 2015). Indeed, that masters project was partially designed as a ‘proof of concept’ for this PhD research project. Like this project, my Masters project included the use of computational

tools to collect tweets, a focus on misogynistic and antifeminist discourse, and critical discourse analysis.

The key difference is one of scale, related to big data. My Masters project analysed a final sample of less than a dozen tweets and collected the initial data set in a fairly unfocused way: not in relation to any specific events that might potentially cause an increase in misogynistic discourse. In developing this I planned for my PhD project to analyse a much larger corpus, sampled from a much larger collection, collected around a specific event. International Women's Day was chosen because of the assumption that a relatively prominent event would provoke misogynistic and antifeminist counterspeech, as well as other discourse around women and feminism.

The decision to base my analysis on a larger corpus had two related principle aims. One was to test the applicability of qualitative analysis to big data, to see whether a defensible method could be designed which reconciled these approaches. Second was that, when linked with a purposive sampling approach, this larger dataset could potentially lead to a richer and analytically interesting final selection of cases. In short: a larger dataset sampled from a larger data collection could lead to a richer and more analytically interesting final selection of cases.

Beyond these analytical and methodological goals, there were other factors which informed this project. Due to the nature of the user agreement required to gather tweets directly (as opposed to, for example, simply browsing Twitter directly and taking screenshots of tweets) researchers must adhere to a list of practices set by Twitter (Williams, Burnap & Sloan, 2017, Bishop & Gray, 2018). This requirement, to adhere to the standards of platforms when engaging in this kind of study of those platforms, presented interesting questions, and I have argued elsewhere that this has potentially troubling implications for critical, political researchers (Bishop & Gray, 2018, Poletti & Gray, 2019).

These requirements figure alongside more general ethical issues of analysing user generated social media data in research, and raise issues of consent, harm and privacy (Williams, Burnap & Sloan, 2017). Interrogating these broader political and ethical issues therefore became another interest for this project. Finally, this project has also been guided by more macro political and theoretical ideas related to ideology and contemporary capitalism, specifically as they relate to social media and the internet. Central to this was my interest in what has been called the *Californian Ideology* (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996). Broadly speaking the Californian Ideology, which I discussed in greater

detail in an earlier chapter, is a form of what can be called ‘tech-utopianism’: a belief that the advancement of digital technology and communications networks will lead to a ‘better’ world of freedom and social harmony. Being both academically and politically influenced by Marxist traditions (among other broadly critical traditions), I am sceptical of idealist positions such as this, especially one that is connected to a sector so intimately related to systems of contemporary capitalism. As such, I wanted to see the ways in which tech-utopian ideology can be critiqued via my research project.

### **Developments and changes during this project**

Several things changed and developed during the course of this project. Much of this was a consequence of the lack of comparable pre-existing methodologies for a study combining qualitative methods with big social data, as well as the more mundane complications and issues that can arise in the course of any project. The most enduring challenge was developing a methodological process to refine my initial data collection (roughly 2.5 million tweets) into a final sample, in a way which was systematic, defensible and informed by my epistemological position and research goals. A discussion of the process I developed, and a comparable process found in a recently published study (Davidson et al, 2018), will form a large part of the remainder of this chapter.

Another major change was a shift in analytic focus from violent, extreme discourse to more ‘mundane’ antifeminist and misogynistic discourse, as well as toward the analysis of discourses of ‘positivity’, largely produced by corporate public relations Twitter accounts. While I had intended to focus heavily on especially hateful misogyny<sup>16</sup>, collecting and using this data proved problematic; tweets of this nature were not very represented in my collection, and did not seem to be shared widely, but most importantly many of them had since been deleted from Twitter, precluding them from use in my thesis (Twitter’s terms of use for researchers do not allow the publication of tweets that have been deleted<sup>17</sup>, an issue I will discuss later). This caused me to move away from extreme misogyny to the more ‘mundane’ kind.

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<sup>16</sup> See Jane, 2014a and 2014b for very interesting discussions of extreme misogynistic discourse online. These papers were very influential in the initial goals of my project in terms of their subject of analysis.

<sup>17</sup> See Williams, Burnap and Sloan (2017) for a detailed discussion of this and related issues. I have also discussed this elsewhere in relation to my previous work on the subject (Bishop & Gray, 2018).

Another change came from the election of Donald Trump. Trump won the US presidency shortly before I collected my data<sup>18</sup>, and analysing tweets expressing support for Trump during International Women's Day presented a unique opportunity, given widespread media accusations of misogyny against Trump and his supporters. The other change in analytic focus, the analysis of 'positivity' from corporate Twitter accounts, emerged out of a form of preliminary analysis I conducted in order to identify themes across my whole data collection. I will discuss this process in detail later in the chapter, but put briefly; conducting a form of automated thematic analysis appeared to identify a consistent topic which was strongly associated with 'positive' keywords ('inspirational', 'thank', 'happy', and so on). Exploring the data in more detail revealed many popular tweets featuring these words coming from companies and businesses, in a manner resembling public relations work specifically applied to International Women's Day. Seeing an opportunity to analyse and critique discourse that appeared to have features of neo/liberal feminism, and a kind of ideological neoliberal positivity, I decided to focus my analysis on these Tweets.

Having hopefully given the necessary background and context to guide the reader for the rest of this chapter, I will now proceed through discussing the actual methodological steps I took in the project, before discussing how my approach to methodology is supported by the coincidentally similar approach of Davidson et al (2018). This will be presented in a more-or-less chronological order, beginning with the tools I used for data collection and how this stage was accomplished, and then moving on through the methods and tools that relate to the steps outlined above. In doing this, I am also trying to give the reader a sense of what my own thoughts were throughout this process, the issues and questions undertaking this raised for me, and how I have attempted to address them.

## COSMOS

The data collection phase of this project was conducted using the Collaborative Online Social Media Observatory (COSMOS). COSMOS is a data collection and analysis application developed by an interdisciplinary team of researchers based at Cardiff University, for the purpose of carrying out social science research using large data sets derived from social media platforms, including tweets collected in real time via Twitter's API<sup>19</sup>. COSMOS is

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<sup>18</sup> I collected my data in March 2017. Trump won the election in November 2016, and took office in January 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Meaning "application programming interface"; the actual development tools that Twitter grant privileged access to, in order to enable companies and academics to design tools which interact

described as a “distributed digital social research platform, providing on-demand analytics for the purposes of observing and inductively interpreting socially significant evidence gathered via the emerging uptake of social computing” (Burnap et al, 2014a). Aside from its function as a data collection tool, able to harvest tweets in real time based on keyword searches, COSMOS also integrates tools for exploring tweets, conducting sentiment analysis<sup>20</sup>, and deriving demographic information from tweet metadata analysis (for examples of publications discussing COSMOS, and utilising it in research, see Sloan et al, 2013, Procter, Vis and Vos, 2013, Procter et al, 2013, Burnap et al, 2014a and 2014b, Sloan et al, Burnap et al, 2015, 2015, Sloan and Morgan, 2015).

Since its development, much published research utilising COSMOS has focused on event-based studies and sentiment analysis: for example, using sentiment analysis learning algorithms to infer the ‘positive’ versus ‘negative’ nature of discourse based on features such as key word usage (Burnap et al, 2014 and 2015, Williams and Burnap, 2016), to detect ‘tension’ and perform socially relevant analysis in the wake of events such as riots and terrorist attacks (Procter, Vis and Vos, 2013, Procter et al, 2013, Burnap et al 2014a), and the use of bespoke hate speech classifiers (Williams & Burnap, 2016). For the purposes of my study, COSMOS was almost exclusively used as a *data collection* tool, with the processing, exploration and analysis of the resulting data performed using other tools and programs, and by hand. This was due to a relative lack of capability COSMOS had at the time for handling large data sets in the ways I intended to. COSMOS is currently (as of mid-late 2019) undergoing development to a second, updated full version, so this may change in future.

### **Data collection**

Data was collected via COSMOS over a roughly 48-hour period<sup>21</sup> around International Women’s Day 2017, beginning on the evening of March 7<sup>th</sup> 2017, and ending the evening

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directly with Twitter at a higher level than users can. In the simplest terms, access to the API means being able to automatically collect millions of tweets a day in real time based on keywords, rather than using Twitter’s end-user search functions and copy-pasting tweets into a word document one by one.

<sup>20</sup> Sentiment analysis is a fairly widespread method in academia and industry. It generally uses an algorithm backed up by human testing to assign sentiment to tweets based on ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ keywords they contain , for more information see Williams and Burnap (2016)

<sup>21</sup> The rationale for this window was based on wanting to account for differences in time-zones, as well as collecting tweets which may have mentioned IWD2017 before or after the actual date.

of March 9<sup>th</sup> GMT. As COSMOS collects tweets based on specified keywords, I produced a list of terms which covered a range of relevant topics, from variations on official and topical hashtags associated with the day, to terms more closely related to feminism and anti-feminism/misogyny:

IWD, IWD2017, daywithoutawoman, daywithoutwomen, misogyny, misandry, feminist, feminism, feminazi, mensrights, MRA, TERF, equality.

The first four search terms were formatted to capture what I anticipated to be widespread ‘official’ hashtags, representing International Women’s Day and the Day Without a Woman protests which were scheduled, in the latter case I included an alternate formatting. The rest of the hashtags/keywords were more general and intended to capture tweets talking about topics which I was interested in analysing. I specifically collected for ‘misandry’, ‘feminazi’ ‘mensrights’ and ‘MRA’ (Men’s rights activism) as these are terms which occur in certain kinds of antifeminist talk, something I was interested in collecting and analysing. ‘Feminist’ and ‘feminism’ were – unsurprisingly - intended to collect tweets containing references to feminism and feminists, whether general or negative, as was my reasoning with the terms ‘misogyny’ and ‘equality’. ‘TERF’<sup>22</sup> was included because at the time I was considering looking into discourse around anti-transgender feminism as part of my analysis, but this aspect was not developed past data collection. I do not claim that the list of terms I collected for was in any way systematic or ideal. Rather it was arrived at pragmatically, informed by my previous work on the topic during my Masters thesis, which suggested that it is difficult to specifically collect misogynistic tweets in a straightforward way via keywords. While it may seem intuitive to, for example, collect tweets featuring gendered invective ('bitch', 'cunt', 'whore', 'slut' and do on) such as the kind discussed in Jane (2014a, 2014b), my attempt to do this during the data collection for my Masters mostly collected tweets featuring adverts for pornography. The relationship between pornography and misogynistic language is outside of the goals of this project, so I decided to forgo collecting using these terms. Exclusion of these terms also moved my data collection toward collecting the more ‘banal’, ‘subtle’, ‘everyday’ and ‘mundane’ examples of sexism and misogyny. Which, though less extreme, are potentially more widespread on

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<sup>22</sup> Colloquial, generally negative label standing for “Trans-exclusory Radical Feminist”. TERF is a complex term, which did not end up featuring in my analysis. My rationale for collecting this term was its controversial and ambivalent position within trans/feminist discourse; while some perceive it as a gendered slur, others see it as an important tool for resistance against forms of feminism which they perceive as anti-trans.

Twitter, as their use may be less likely to lead to suspensions, mandatory deletion and bans.

This approach to sampling and data collection raises some questions, which I will address here. First there is a question of what alternatives could have existed to the broad themes I have chosen to focus on both in my data collection and further sampling. As these processes are ultimately based on keyword usage, this introduces potential issues of what is collected/sampled, and what is potentially missed with a given set of keywords, and the possibility of bias. While the different iterative stages of case selection (a process I cover in some detail later in this chapter) ultimately resulted in a corpus broadly based around two analytic themes (corporate positivity vs Trump-support and antifeminism), it is important to acknowledge that I am by no means arguing that these are the natural or only themes that could have been yielded from my data collection, or from any other data collection during the same window of time. My motivations in selecting the particular list of terms for my initial data collection were varied, but primarily centred around collecting a large quantity of tweets directly referencing IWD2017, tweets that mentioned a particular incident of feminist political action occurring on the day, as well as tweets containing references to feminism, antifeminism and equality more broadly. The use of 'official' hashtags mentioned above was prominent here, as I was operating under the assumption that people and organisations tweeting specifically about IWD2017 use these terms to mark their tweets.

Given that I was interested in discourse in relation to IWD2017, this seemed logical. An obvious issue that may follow from this is that it biases my data collection in favour of those users (whether individuals or organisations) who would be inclined to use these particular hashtags. Focusing on these terms, though done for practical reasons related to the nature of the tools I am using, may have introduced a bias in favour of organisations, who may have been more inclined to use these hashtags, including the corporate and governmental bodies which feature prominently in my analysis. Many of the other terms I collected for (related to feminism, antifeminism etc) may likewise have introduced a bias in favour of users tweeting about these specific topics and using these specific terms. In this case, this was motivated by my analytic focus of analysing discourses concerning feminism, antifeminism and misogyny. It should be stated clearly here that there are many other terms that could have been used with this data collection strategy, which would have collected for topics corresponding to other themes, depending on what a researcher was interested in analysing.

## **Data cleaning and management: COSMOS to Notepad++**

Having collected my data, the next stage was processing the data files into a state that could be practically analysed, a process which presented numerous challenges. Many of these challenges were related to the sheer size of the data, which was approximately 15 gigabytes and comprised approximately 2.5 million tweets. Although this is relatively small in comparison to other big data corpora<sup>23</sup>, it was big enough to present numerous practical and epistemological challenges, given my intention to base my analysis on a selection of individual tweets.

The issue of finding tools to interact with my data was an immediate problem in this process. Totalling around 15GB and stored in a .json<sup>24</sup> file format, the dataset was beyond the capacity of COSMOS, as even attempting to view the entire dataset would cause it to crash. Additionally, the .json file format was incompatible with qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo, and although COSMOS can convert the raw .json files into .csv files (similar to spreadsheet file types used by Microsoft Excel), the aforementioned issue of COSMOS' scalability<sup>25</sup> precluded this. In this situation, my data became a kind of frustrating black box: huge, impractical and inscrutable.

The challenge then, was to find a tool which would allow me to interact with the data, and proceed to the next step on the way to analysis. After research, as well as talking to my supervisors and fellow PhD research students working in related areas, I turned my attention to 'R'. R is a free programming language and environment which can be used for interacting with large datasets, and provides many statistical modelling tools which can be

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<sup>23</sup> For a sense of scale, this is still a minuscule amount of 'big data' compared to other datasets in different disciplines, especially computer science and natural sciences. For example, the recently completed Event Horizon Research Project, which attempted to survey and image a black hole, collected over 5 petabytes (five million gigabytes) of astronomical data. Still, by the standards of qualitative social science research, my dataset was substantial enough to present fundamental challenges.

<sup>24</sup> A file type used in many contexts, designed to store a large array of values in a format readable by people and programs. For detailed information see <https://www.json.org/>

<sup>25</sup> 'Scalability' is a term used in computer science and data science, referring to the ability of tools and systems to cope with datasets as they become too large for existing hardware and software, for example through the addition of storage, processing power or more capable data analysis programs. In this case, the primary 'bottleneck' I encountered was COSMOS' ability to load and explore a dataset of this size in the way I needed to. For more discussion on this issue, see a big data industry blog post on the topic (<https://www.ngdata.com/the-importance-of-scalability-in-big-data-processing/>).

implemented in research<sup>26</sup>. While R was capable of both handling and processing my dataset, this presented a new set of problems: my lack of the necessary knowledge and skills required for using R. Unlike other data analysis programs researchers may use (SPSS, NVivo and so on), R lacks an intuitive user interface, and relies on a relatively high degree of knowledge on the part of the user: the ability to understand and write in R's programming language, and an understanding of the logics involved in computer programming. Even RStudio, a separate computer program which provides a more accessible graphical user interface when running R, does not solve the other issues involved in programming with R.

Computer programming is not generally taught or emphasised in sociology under/postgraduate education, even in quantitative social science modules. My experience in the field, an E grade in computing at AS-level<sup>27</sup> creating seven-segment clock displays in Microsoft Visual Basic, left me with little advantage compared to other qualitative social scientists. I was therefore confronted with a dilemma: although the only part of my methodology I needed R for was the initial cleaning and processing of my data (which I detail in the next subsection), R could be used for every stage of my methodology, given the right packages and enough training on my part. For example, R is quite capable of running algorithmic thematic analysis similar to LDA, running and returning text queries and so on: all of which are forms of analysis I would otherwise have to do using separate packages. Despite this, I decided to only use R for what I felt I absolutely needed it for. My reasoning for this was varied: pragmatically, learning how to work with and program in R would have presented additional challenges that were difficult to foresee, and was therefore not attractive to me given the existing challenges presented by my methodology. Secondly, I saw using a single tool for all stages of my analysis as potentially limiting, depending on where my analysis might go during the process. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I felt that linking so much of my methodology to a specific, highly unusual and specific tool would limit the applicability of my methodology for other qualitative researchers.

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<sup>26</sup> R has a history of use in quantitative social science, owing to its ability to run a variety of statistical tests, deal with large datasets, produce graphical outputs, and the availability of freely shared packages produced by other researchers. For some examples of quantitative social science research using R, see Vinod, 2010.

<sup>27</sup> An 'E' is the lowest possible passing grade at AS level. AS levels form the first half of a two-year post-16 education course in the UK. I did not continue computing into the second year, replacing it with sociology.

As I have said previously, arriving at a methodology for the qualitative analysis of big social data, one that is intelligible to other qualitative researchers, has been a key focus of this project. To answer the question “How do I analyse this big data corpus in a qualitative way?” with “learn computer programming” seemed unsatisfying to me as a researcher, and is not something I felt others would find helpful or meaningful. Rather, I decided to only use R for the most technically demanding aspect of this methodology and base the rest of the process around a variety of much more accessible tools, potentially more likely to be used by qualitative researchers. Settling on this approach, I reached out to a PhD colleague who had been learning R for their own research project, and they agreed to assist me in preparing my dataset, a process which I will now discuss.

Now that I had access to tools which could interact with the files in my dataset, my next issue became preparing the corpus for analysis: transforming it from a series of raw data files into a format that was suitable for analysis. This was necessary because in its initial state the data were still in the format it was captured, containing large amounts of metadata that were not relevant to my analysis<sup>28</sup>, and containing ‘junk’ data, such as duplicate tweets collected in the form of retweets, and textual corruptions caused by the capture process<sup>29</sup>. This process of data ‘cleaning’, also called ‘wrangling’, was led by the analytic interests of my research: to examine only unique tweets which had been retweeted to some extent. This process involved removing all duplicate tweets (mostly in the form of retweets), and all tweets that were retweeted fewer than five times, which was done to reflect what was at the time current best practice for dealing with Twitter data (Burnap et al, 2014b). This refined ‘5 retweets or more’ corpus (Corpus A, approximately 49,000 tweets) was much more manageable, and could be more easily subject to forms of analysis without requiring the specialist technical knowledge of R. I later produced a second ‘all uniques’ corpus (Corpus B, approximately 1,060,000 tweets), which consisted of only the unique tweets from my original collection (all retweeted text removed, etc.) without the additional refinement of only featuring tweets retweeted five or more times. I

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<sup>28</sup> Tweets collected via Twitter’s streaming API have over 100 different forms of metadata attributed to them, from public bio information (the brief description users can write for display on their profile) to timestamps and geolocation information, none of which was directly relevant to my analysis, which has focused more on tweets in the form they are encountered by users: as text in a social media environment. For more information on tweet metadata, see Twitter’s own developer guide on the topic (<https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs/tweets/data-dictionary/guides/tweet-timeline.html>).

<sup>29</sup> For example, the capture process converts ampersand symbols into a string of just text and punctuation (“&”), which would be problematic during the next step of automated thematic analysis, as it would influence the algorithm.

produced this in order to have the option of comparing the analytic outputs of both corpora, to see what effect (if any) the inclusion of less-retweeted tweets had.

Having my ‘wrangled’ datasets prepared, the next challenges were again fundamental: what to actually *do* with all this data that made analytic sense. My motivation here was to settle on a form of analysis that would both allow me to analyse the dataset as a whole, and in so doing provide analytic insights to guide the rest of the process toward detailed discourse analysis of individual tweets. This is also the point where the parallels between my methodology, and the one developed by Davidson et al (2018), begin to emerge. In line with Tornberg and Tornberg (2016) I decided to perform LDA topic modelling, partly to assist in and inform the selection of discursive genre to focus on in my analysis, but also to assess the performance, usability, practicality and implications of this kind of exercise for this kind of project. I will discuss this process in greater detail later in this chapter but will provide a brief overview of it here. In LDA topic modelling a textual corpus is processed algorithmically via a software package, in order to identify and group “themes” within said corpus. LDA treats a corpus as a “bag-of-words” (Tornberg & Tornberg, 2016, p.405), meaning that each word that is not removed through data cleaning and pre-processing is treated the same for the purposes of sorting and indexing, ignoring other lexical features such as grammar, as well as inferred characteristics such as ‘sentiment’. Words are grouped together into ‘topics’ based on their repeated co-occurrence across the corpus: if words occur repeatedly in close proximity, in this case within a 140-character tweet, they may be grouped into the same topics. This process and the outputs it produces can be adjusted by the researcher in a number of ways, generating ‘topic maps’, similar in appearance to Ven diagrams, which show the relative size of topics, any overlap they have, and graphs showing the relative occurrence of different words within a theme. Doing this, I was able to see the occurrence of potential themes across the entire corpus, in a way that would be impossible without computational tools, and to compare the thematic maps of my different corpora.

After producing these topic models and analysing them, the issue of finding the right tools and processes to interact with my dataset returned: although my data were now in a more usable format, and had been subjected to a ‘surface-level thematic analysis’, they still tested the capabilities of traditional qualitative analysis software. Although I had initially intended to use NVivo, this program struggled to handle my larger ‘all uniques’ corpus (Corpus B), which totalled around 1,060,000 tweets, and lacked features I felt I needed,

such as the ability to export the results of queries as documents. Faced with this problem, I again sought outside help, and after asking friends of mine who work in computer programming, I was made aware of a text editing program called Notepad++. Notepad ++ is a very simple program: a free text editor designed for reading and editing source code in computer programming. Being designed for this purpose, working with potentially very large amounts of textual data, Notepad++ is highly scalable and handled my datasets effectively. When opened in Notepad++ my cleaned data files were presented as a complete list, delineated into different lines by tweet and ordered chronologically. In this format it was quick and straightforward to return search queries, which would produce separate lists that could then be copied into spreadsheet documents while remaining delineated and ordered, or opened in NVivo. I later learned that Notepad++ not only allows the user to find and delete strings of text from files but is also compatible with .json files via an extension. Looking back, it appears that it may be possible for a researcher who, like myself, lacks the technical knowledge to use R, to handle much of the data wrangling and cleaning involved in this process through this very straightforward, intuitive program.

To conclude, this subsection has been an overview of the process I undertook to transform my dataset from its raw format into a format that can more easily be utilised for detailed, qualitative analysis, and the tools that can be used to accomplish this. It has also been a discussion of how I as a researcher actually undertook the process, as well my feelings and thoughts on the process, including recommendations for other researchers who may adopt a similar method. In the next section, I will discuss the LDA topic modelling stage, analogous to the ‘recursive surface thematic mapping’ of Davidson et al’s (2018) methodology, in greater detail, and how this figured in my actual analysis.

### **Data exploration and description: LDA automated thematic analysis**

Although LDA topic modelling can be conducted by a researcher directly via R and other packages, a number of browser-based software packages exist, which were more practically suited to my project. Nvivo 11 also has a function similar to topic modelling, but it was not fully implemented at the time. Browser-based packages have the potential to be more user friendly. They may have intuitive user-interfaces and do not necessarily require knowledge of coding. Additionally, they conduct the actual computational processing on their own servers, reducing the need for the researcher to have access to powerful

hardware when dealing with large data sets. Ideally, I would have used the same software package as Tornberg and Tornberg (2016), but this package, which they themselves had developed, was not publicly available at the time. I settled on using Cortex (<https://www.cortex.net/>). Cortex is a browser-based data analysis and visualisation tool, and while it has many functions, I used it to run LDA topic modelling and produce visualizations of the topic modelling process. These visualisations are done via LDAVis, a data visualisation tool integrated into Cortex, and designed by Sievert and Shirley (2015), a data scientist and statistician respectively. I found LDAVis a helpful addition, as it produced outputs (see chapter 5) which aided in interpreting my data, indicated relations between topics, and allowed certain metrics to be changed in real time. These outputs were also quite presentable and intelligible, helping me to explain my data to others, and the program appeared to be scalable; being able to process a large dataset of around 500MB at one point. Cortex's interface allowed me to manipulate a number of variables that altered how the topic model was conducted. The principal variables for my purposes were "number of topics", which sets how many topics I wanted the program to sort my data into, and "analysis iterations", which set how many times the model should run before settling on a final output (Blei and Lafferty, 2006). After producing outputs for 5, 10 and 20 topics I settled on 10 for my actual description, since this appeared to produce topics that were more intelligible. I increased the number of iterations from the default 20 to 100, as this again appeared to produce more intelligible lists of terms.

LDA topic modelling is related to the 'thematic mapping' described by Davidson et al (2018): it is a kind of automated thematic analysis. Like Davidson et al. however, Tornberg and Tornberg (2016) see this as a potentially problematic way of conceptualizing the process without maintaining some critical distance. While there are superficial similarities - in that both LDA topic modelling and processes of thematic or content analysis, or the identification of discursive themes in discourse work, produce things we call 'topics' - the role of automation in topic modelling makes comparisons problematic. Since topic modelling generates topics based entirely on the corpus, it is influenced by the structural and lexical nature of that corpus (Tornberg and Tornberg , 2016, p.406). For example, the structural and format differences between interview transcripts, diaries, forum posts and newspaper columns may lead to a model behaving very differently in each case. Given this, my use of LDA topic modelling of tweets - a research activity with relatively little existing literature in digital sociology - was also an attempt to see how effectively LDA topic modelling can identify topics for the purpose of informing discourse analysis. Another

problematic assumption often made of topic modelling is that the apparent ‘removal’<sup>30</sup> of the researcher from the identification process leads to more objective themes, with the researcher left to the interpretation of these themes (p.406). As Tornberg and Tornberg argue, such assertions fail to account for how subjectivity can never be totally removed from the process, even when work is taken up by algorithms: “Subjectivity not only leaks in through the theoretical assumptions underlying the model, but is also central throughout the entire research process” (p.406). Additionally, it is important to know that despite the automated nature of the LDA process, the researcher is still involved through setting the parameters of the algorithms, adjusting the number of iterations, the number of topics, and the relevance metrics of the models. What this means is that even if it may be tempting for some to see the apparent lack of direct human involvement as an example of part of the research process escaping the subjective ‘biases’ of a human researcher, human subjectivity is still imminent in this process, from human agency in the design of the algorithms, to the fundamental features of the research process. This is a critique that I strongly agree with, and given the wider relation of the critique of the supposed emancipatory power of algorithms and related technologies to my research, I would like to stress to the reader that even as I show you what I think are interesting and significant outputs, I am doing so with a critical eye.

### **Analytic strategy and critical discourse analysis of tweets**

As discussed in chapter 2 my approach to CDA in the context of this thesis has diverse influences but has largely been driven by selecting specific analytic concepts and tools from a range of analysts which are particularly useful when analysing and discussing tweets. In assembling these tools, I have drawn on my previous research on this topic during my Masters thesis (Gray, 2015) to build an approach which accounts for the often fragmentary nature of discourse as encountered in tweets. Using this approach as a basis, I have also drawn on specific pieces of critical work in the analysis and discussion. In this subsection, I will briefly outline the actual methodological aspects of how I conducted CDA on the tweets I collected. Before doing this I will first outline the main works I draw on in this analytic strategy.

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<sup>30</sup> In reality the researcher is still quite present in this process, despite the fact it is so mediated by algorithms and computer tools. Parameters can be adjusted in numerous ways, models can be run multiple times, and data sets can be adjusted.

As discussed in the literature review, I primarily draw on the work of Fairclough (2003, 2013) in constructing the basis for my analytic approach, looking at discourse in terms of “Genres (ways of acting) ... Discourses (ways of representing) ... [and] Styles (ways of being)” (2003, p.26). This is partly because Fairclough’s model gives a clear approach to distinct but overlapping aspects of discourse, partly because it is suitable for Twitter data, and also because his approach (as a critical one) is concerned with producing critiques of power. Other discursive work I draw on, particularly when analysing antifeminist discourse, include Edley and Wetherell (2001), and Wetherell, Stiven and Potter (1987). From Edley and Wetherell (2001) I take both the concept of *interpretative repertoires* (meaning how ideologies and discourse manifest in practice by individuals), and the typology they deploy for analysing how feminists and feminist are constructed in antifeminist discourse (a reasonable moderate feminism vs a monstrous unreasonable feminism). From Wetherell, Stiven & Potter (1987) I use the concept of practical ideologies, referring to (in a similar sense to interpretative repertoires) how the ways in which particular ways discourse works in practice can lack individual consistency and be idiosyncratic. Also featuring fairly prominently is the work of Billig (1995, 2013, 2018), whose work is used here to analyse discourses of banal nationalism, and the functions of managerial discourse, particularly around acronyms.

While these discursive analysts form a broad basis for my approach, during my analysis I draw on a range of other literature to support my analytic strategy. This includes membership categorisation analysis in relation to political discourse, derived from Leuder et al (2004). While Leuder et al deployed this in examining divisive political discourse following 9/11, I use the approach to elaborate on how reasonable/unreasonable forms of feminism are categorised. When discussing representations of women in the context of policing and military roles, I make reference to Inness (2004), Herbst (2004) and Brown (2012), particularly to look at how these styles and representations are gendered and fit into recruitment. I also refer to the work of Rottenberg (2013) when analysing corporatised feminist discourse, and make reference to Banet-Weiser (2018) in some detail when discussing both this topic and antifeminism/misogyny.

Later, I draw on an expanded range of sources when analysing tweets related to Trump support and reactionary discourse. These include Stolee and Caton (2018), who discuss the particulars of Trump’s own use of Twitter, Danesi (2016), who I utilise in analysis of emoji-use by Trump supporters, Holland and Fermor (2017), whose analysis of the slogan “MAGA” (Make America Great Again) is drawn on for the same subject, and Eddington

(2018), whose work focused on the same topic but from a network perspective. Also utilised in an analysis of networked pro-Trump discourse and the functions of hashtags is the work of Zappavigna (2015), Scott (2015), as well as Jackson and Welles (2015). Though they were writing pre-Trump, their observations on the various uses of hashtags on Twitter is used to analyse the particular uses I look at.

When the specific topics of Trump support and antifeminism overlap with anti-Islam/Muslim discourse, I draw on the work of Halliday (1999) to develop an understanding of the topic, and then apply this to my analysis via the work of Törnberg and Törnberg (2016), who discussed the relationship between antifeminism and anti-Islam/Muslim discourse. When discussing explicitly hateful, more violent forms of misogynistic discourse I draw directly from Jane (2014a, 2014b) in my analysis, as this was the focus of her research in these papers. Relatedly, the work of Rodríguez-Dariasa and Aguilera-Ávila (2018), and Kimmel (2012) is used to analyse the term “feminazi” specifically.

Together, the above broadly encompasses my main sources for the critical discursive and qualitative aspects of my analysis in this thesis. Having outlined this, I will now discuss the practicalities of actually conducting this analysis.

Once I had selected tweets, ensured that they had not been deleted, and satisfied the ethical criteria for each of them, I assembled them thematically. The broad categories I used are reflected in the focuses of my analytic chapters: on the one hand ‘positive’ tweets, mostly from corporate accounts, and on the other mostly ‘negative’ tweets from a range of accounts<sup>31</sup>. Generally, the latter tweets reflected themes including sexism, misogyny, antifeminism, nationalism and support for Donald Trump, with notable overlap.

This process involved further sampling of cases. As I will discuss toward the end of this chapter, the process of case selection closely mirrored the work of Davidson et al (2018). As these authors outline in their study – which similarly applied qualitative analysis to a big data corpus – purposive sampling as part of an iterative process was a key component in arriving at a final case selection. While I will discuss this process in practical detail later in this chapter, I will here outline it and reflect on some issues it may raise. Purposive sampling broadly refers to sampling strategies which are to some extent informed by the

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<sup>31</sup> To clarify, ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ are here mostly labels of convenience. While I do interrogate the meanings of ‘positivity’ I do not contrast it with the other tweets in a ‘straightforward’ or uncritical way

theoretical and analytical basis of the research being conducted (Davidson et al, 2018, p.371). Arriving at a final selection of cases in this manner involved reflecting on the outputs of the LDA topic modelling process in light of my research goals (an analytic focus on misogyny and antifeminism), using the keywords generated by this process for further explorations of the overall dataset, and reflecting on these outputs as well. The final broad themes I have analysed – and the individual cases that they cover – were arrived at through this process, informed by a purposive sampling strategy based on the analytically interesting themes that emerged.

By necessity, this focus on two broad themes has omitted other potential themes that could be arrived at from my overall dataset. As I will discuss in my data description chapter, the LDA topic modelling process showed what appeared to be a wide range of topic clusters, beyond the areas I have focused on. This focus on two themes was motivated to an extent by the prominence of what appeared to be more positive, celebratory tweets from organisation and corporate accounts revealed by data exploration, along with the presence of what appeared to be tweets relating to Trump and Trump support. In light of my research interest in antifeminism, the focus on these two themes emerged as something analytically interesting. As stated previously, these are by no means the only two topics/themes that emerged, and not the only ones which could have been focused on. As I will discuss in my data description chapter, several topics appeared to be quite coherent and could have formed the basis for analysis had I chosen to focus on them. There is also the matter than my sampling strategy has largely omitted genuinely progressive and pro-feminist tweets, and instead largely focused on corporate and governmental tweets which largely fit what Banet-Weiser (2018) has called popular feminism, a concept outlined in my literature review. During the data exploration phase some potential themes did emerge which may have indicated the presence of tweets more in line with non-corporate endorsement of feminism, and expressions of solidarity. A prominent example was what appeared to be a theme of pro-feminist discussions of intersectionality within feminism, and criticism of the perceived prominence of white women and feminists to the exclusion of non-white and trans women. This kind of discourse is obviously totally distinct from the antifeminism I have chosen to focus on; it represents the presence of emancipatory critique between feminists over the nature of feminism, particularly the public representation of feminism. Focusing on the themes of antifeminism, trump support and corporatised forms of feminist discourse was ultimately

the focus of my analysis, but a different project with different analytic interests and questions could absolutely have included these other discourses.

This sampling process, once broad themes had been identified, also had practical dimensions, which I will outline here. In arriving at the final selection of tweets analysed in my first analytic chapter, I took the list of “positive” salient terms in the LDA topic 1, and then used those keyowrds in an Nvivo query of the whole dataset, returning 10748 tweets. This is far too large for practical analysis, so I went on to select every 50<sup>th</sup> sequential tweet (tweets were ordered by timestamp), leaving me with a reasonable time, and by extension geographically, representative sample of 215 tweets. This is because that due to the duration of my data collection, the chronological order of the tweets somewhat reflected the dateline for IWD2017. Selecting every 50<sup>th</sup> tweet helped to sample across this dateline. These tweets were then manually coded thematically. In coding them I paid attention to discursive content and the nature of the account that had sent the tweet, in the context of positive and celebratory expressions. This produced a number of often overlapping topic codes. Government, national, corporate, business, media, military, neoliberalism and sport were quite prominent topics, for this reason, and because of a purposive interest in analysing these in more detail, they made up the majority of tweets I selected for analysis. Other notable but smaller topics included arts, literature, STEM, history, academia, publishing, entertainment and networking, as well as some that could be coded as explicitly feminist and intersectional, although these were quite few relative to the others. As mentioned previously, this indicated the existence of non-corporate pro-feminist discourse, but my analytic interests lead me to focus on the corporate.

Once the tweets were assembled, I analysed them broadly along the lines outlined by Fairclough (2003), looking for stylistic, generic and discursive features, and relating these to wider social and theoretical concepts in the ways I outlined in a chapter 2 when discussing his approach to discourse. Part of this analysis involved relating the discursive features of tweets to work done in wider social science literature; including but not limited to critiques of neo/liberal feminism, critiques of sexism, misogyny, nationalism and anti-Islam, which I detail in the respective sections of my analytic chapters.

## Ethics

Research ethics, specifically the ethical issues involved in a qualitative analysis of Tweets, have emerged as a focus of this project. These ethical issues, generally related to wider

issues of potential harm, contextual privacy and pseudo-anonymity in critical online research, also formed a prominent part of my Masters thesis (Gray, 2015) and have been a primary focus of my published literature over the past few years (Bishop & Gray, 2018, Poletti & Gray, 2019). While I will leave my substantive discussion and conclusions related to these ethical issues to my concluding chapter, I will here discuss the ethical standards this project was held to, how this was maintained, and the practical issues involved in achieving it.

During the design of this project, the primary ethical concerns were broadly the same as in my Masters thesis, namely: what harm could internet users be potentially exposed to if their potentially compromising tweets are republished in a different context? In understanding these issues this project, being directed by a particular set of departmental and institutional ethical standards, has primarily been shaped by approaches to online user data which treat privacy as dependent on context (Nissenbaum, 2011). Broadly, this approach “ties adequate privacy protection to the preservation of informational norms within specific contexts” (Poletti & Gray, 2019, p.263), meaning that even if user data can be found voluntarily posted in a public online context, researchers should be sensitive to the fact that their analysis and republication of this data may take it into another context that the user did not anticipate and may not consent to (Williams et al. 2017). Put plainly: just because someone posts sensitive or potentially compromising information in a public forum in a way that makes them directly identifiable, this does not necessarily give researchers permission to appropriate it into another context (research papers, publication and so on).

In adhering to ethical standards that prioritised this approach, it was agreed with the SOCSI (Social Sciences) school ethics committee that this project would adhere to several conditions. Principal among these was the COSMOS Risk Assessment (Bishop and Gray, 2018, p.172), which sets out several criteria that determine whether permission to publish should be sought, and whether affirmative (as opposed to opt-out) consent is necessary (Williams et al. 2017). In following these criteria, I have not sought to use any tweets that I classify as ‘high risk’, all either being low risk (not from identifiable accounts, no permission needed) or medium risk (opt-out consent). Although many of these tweets contain language that is potentially inflammatory, I have treated these as medium risk, due to the fact that the political positions they sometimes appear to endorse are not especially unusual in the context of Twitter, do not contain sensitive information, although sometimes potentially offensive are not “overly personal [or] abusive” toward other

ordinary users. While my original data collection did contain many tweets I would have classified as high-risk (featuring direct abuse toward other users, extremely hateful misogynistic language and so on), the overwhelming majority of these had either been deleted since collection, or were posted by users who had since been suspended or permanently banned.

The justification for the opt-out nature of consent in the case of medium risk tweets is due to these tweets containing “mundane information of a nonsensitive nature” (Bishop and Gray, 2018, p.172), whilst still being posted by individual users (i.e. not organisations accounts, or public-facing accounts such as celebrities). Here mundane information of a nonsensitive nature is taken to include accounts that, though producing potentially problematic or reactionary discourse, do so without the explicit/violent/hateful nature that would be more in line with high-risk tweets. This interpretation was discussed and arrived at in agreement with this project’s supervisors, one of whom was an author of the risk assessment. It should be noted here that while the medium-risk tweets reproduced in this thesis were obtained under opt out consent, there were a small number of cases where the users who posted medium-risk tweets and were contacted did respond, and opted out. Obviously, their tweets have not been included in this thesis.

While many tweets I used as cases were from accounts not affiliated with individuals (but with companies, NGOs, government departments etc.) or from public-facing verified accounts, and therefore did not have to be contacted, others were from ‘normal’ individual users, and as such had to be contacted in order to publish. To achieve this, I first created an anonymous (in the sense that it did not use my name, mention my university and was not linked to my email or phone number<sup>32</sup>) Twitter account, openly presented as a research account created to make contact with users. The account bio read: “This is the account of a PhD social media researcher for the purpose of engaging with some Twitter users. If you have any questions please DM<sup>33</sup>”. Having created this account, I then proceeded to ‘contact’ users whose tweets I had selected as cases for analysis. Adopting the same strategy used in my Masters thesis, I made contact by directly replying to the

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<sup>32</sup> The rationale for this was that by contacting these users I may be exposing myself to harm as a researcher.

<sup>33</sup> Meaning ‘direct message’, a private message which is not publicly viewable. My rationale here was that participants could ask for clarification and so on. Ideally I would have contacted participants via DM, but many users choose to have closed DMs, meaning DMs can only be received from people they ‘follow’.

tweets I wanted to use, ‘tagging’ in other users when appropriate such as in threads featuring multiple users.

In the time between this project and my Masters thesis Twitter had doubled the character limit of a tweet to 280. Given this, I was no longer confined to what I had somewhat dismissively termed the “140-character consent form” (Bishop & Gray, 2018, p.175), instead settling on a 187-character tweet: “Hello! I’m a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.” While I could have fully exploited the higher character limit, I erred on the side of keeping my initial tweet succinct and inviting follow up questions in the form of direct messages. During this process I only received one affirmative opt-out, while the only other responses I received were affirmative, one in the form of a reply tweet and another over a series of direct messages initiated by them.

While this process was in theory quite straightforward, it presented its own challenges which seem to highlight the practical difficulties of gaining consent in this manner via Twitter. Over the course of repeatedly tweeting, the account I was using was flagged for suspicious activity. This may be a result of the near-identical nature and rapid succession of my tweets automatically flagging me as a potential spam bot<sup>34</sup>, I do not dismiss the possibility that my account may have been reported for suspicious activity by one or more of the users I contacted. I will discuss the potential implications of this in my conclusion, but suffice to say the possibility that users may try to actively undermine the attempts of researchers to gain ethical consent might have troubling implications. Although being flagged in this way did not lock or suspend my account, and left my existing tweets active, it meant I had to verify my account via phone and email in order to continue.

However, here I encountered one of the more banal issues involved with this kind of research: in the time between purchasing a sim card and verifying my account<sup>35</sup>, and my account being flagged, my sim had become inactive. This left the account effectively inaccessible to me, meaning I needed to purchase a new sim and create a new account in order to continue, in the middle of the process. While this seems like a relatively minor

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<sup>34</sup> Automated bot accounts, especially ones which post identical tweets as I did, are generally considered a nuisance on Twitter and suspended.

<sup>35</sup> Twitter requires either a unique email or unique phone number, and email services generally require these too. Not using my own email and phone number was another part of researcher protection.

inconvenience, it serves to highlight how this approach is often quite precarious: dependent not only on overlapping and interrelating digital and communications technologies (email accounts, twitter accounts, mobile phones etc.) but also on the specific functionality of Twitter as a platform. Navigating these issues in an attempt to satisfy these ethical standards, it often felt as if I was forced to use the platforms and tools ‘incorrectly’, as though by its nature Twitter is not well suited to this approach. To an extent this is unsurprising, given that the desire for obtaining consent from users is driven far more by the concerns of researchers and research councils than by Twitter, which generally has a far more laissez-faire attitude to the issue.

### **Big data and qualitative analysis**

To conclude this section, I will discuss a specific paper (Davidson et al, 2018), one of the very few examples of published research which attempts to bring together qualitative analysis with big data, and show how the methodology developed by the authors closely resembles my own, despite the two works being conducted independently of each other. Hopefully, this will help to demonstrate that what is being developed is a defensible methodology. The extent to which qualitative methods can, or indeed should, be paired with big data is an emerging area of scholarship within the social sciences. While studies have been conducted using more quantitative and computational methodologies (Burnap et al, 2015, Sloan et al, 2013, Procter, Vis and Vos, 2013, Procter et al, 2013, Burnap et al, 2014a and 2014b, Sloan et al, 2015, Sloan and Morgan, 2015, Williams and Burnap, 2016), there currently exists comparatively little published work that has had similar success in applying qualitative methods<sup>36</sup>, with much literature over the past several years focused on assessing the potentials for such research (see Delyser and Sui, 2012, Karamshuk et al, 2017, and Mills, 2018). Given this lack of clear cut, established methodology for blending qualitative analysis with a big data corpus, attempting to develop such an approach has been a primary focus of this project since its inception.

In Davidson et al (2018), the authors provide the outline of a methodological approach that was largely similar to my own: a multi-stage process for exploring a very large and varied textual dataset, that uses repeated smaller scale analysis to investigate themes,

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<sup>36</sup> One notable exception appears to be Karamshuk et al (2017), although it appears that what the authors describe as qualitative analysis involves extensive use of automated learning algorithms, rather than direct analysis by a human researcher.

which are then searched for specifically and analysed in greater detail. Finding a paper that implemented a methodology so fundamentally similar to the one I had been developing was both vindicating and somewhat disheartening<sup>37</sup>, and I argue that these similarities between our approaches demonstrate that the approaches we adopt may represent a viable approach for reconciling big data with qualitative analysis. Given what I see as similarities between my own methodology and that outlined by Davidson et al as well as its position as one of the few (perhaps only) comparable studies, I will briefly outline the features of their methodology, before demonstrating how it relates to and differs from my own, given the differences in data, analytic approach and the particulars of research fields.

The methodology outlined by Davidson et al. is focused on dealing with what the authors call ‘big qual’; a term they introduce to refer to “large volumes of qualitative data” (p.364), in the case of their study an archive of text files derived from multiple existing qualitative studies, amount to a set of secondary documents whose size “clearly exceeds the capacity of researchers to read all the data” (p.365). Here the authors effectively provide a criterion for big data that is specific to the methodological practicalities of qualitative research: a set of data that is beyond the practical scope for researchers to effectively analyse, given the detail and close reading required by their thematic analysis. In this sense, the ‘big qual’ being discussed by the authors is not the kind of data typically associated with the term when discussing big data in the social sciences, particularly in the context of digital sociology.

This is acknowledged by the authors, who admit that despite the volume of their particular dataset of ‘big qual’<sup>38</sup>, it is “unlikely to rival the scale of ‘big’ volumes of textual data generated by social media” (p.365). While this is probably correct in a very literal sense, I argue that a distinction between the ‘big qual’ typical of the authors’ study, and the (presumably) ‘huge qual’ of textual social media data is probably not helpful in the case of my project. Returning to my earlier discussion on what defines ‘big data’, in both cases the primary defining feature of the data in terms of the project is how its size precludes the capacity of qualitative researchers to analyse it in a ‘traditional’ way, whether that data is the accumulated documentation of several existing qualitative studies in the case of Davidson et al (p.365), or 2.5 million 140-character utterances, as is the case with my

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<sup>37</sup> Vindicating in the sense that a new publication reflected my own methodology so closely, disheartening in the sense that what I had developed effectively became less innovative.

<sup>38</sup> I do not find this term especially useful, for reasons similar to boyd and Crawford’s (2012) critique of the term ‘big data’, outlined previously.

project. In both situations, the qualitative researcher finds themselves in a position where particular methodological strategies involving software tools need to be employed, and in this case mine and the authors' studies took very similar trajectories, ones which often "blur disciplinary boundaries between computational sciences and social sciences" (p.366).

Computational tools enter the methodology of Davidson et al. in a number of ways, which are broadly mirrored in my own methodology. Drawing on archaeological metaphors (p.368) the authors frame their electronic interventions in terms of a "breadth-and-depth method" (p.368), that sees qualitative big data as something which possesses both a "whole vista to be mapped... and interesting features to be dug into in more depth and detail" (p.368). The distinction being made here is essentially between methods which focus on providing a broad analysis of a corpus, such as through algorithmic text mining<sup>39</sup>, and more in-depth analysis "of the type that is familiar to most qualitative researchers" (p.369). These two distinct analytic approaches are employed in what the authors see as a four-step process, which together make up their qualitative approach to big data. These steps are not linear, but rather meant to be moved back and forth between as required, repeated with insights gained from later steps. Broadly, this process consists of: (1) creating an actual corpus to be analysed, (2) a process of "surface level thematic mapping" (p.369), meaning employing the 'breadth' analysis in concurrence with the remaining two steps; (3) repeated preliminary analysis which, as part of their metaphor, are called "test pits" (p.372) and (4) traditional in-depth analysis.

Together, these steps describe a process where a qualitative researcher may analyse a very large dataset, using computational methods and light textual analysis to gain relatively 'shallow' insight into the content and nature of the dataset as a whole, and using the insights gained from this process to look 'deeper' into the dataset, examining specific themes and features, and using the reflexive interplay between these approaches to guide detailed, traditional qualitative methods of analysis. In the spirit of the authors' archaeological metaphor: an initial survey is made of the terrain, which might suggest sites with interesting features where test pits might be dug, which may in turn reveal objects that we as researchers can study in all their detail. Based on our degree of success in our test pits and analysis, we can go back and reevaluate where in the terrain we should be

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<sup>39</sup> Algorithmic text mining is a varied and complex procedure, and a sufficiently detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter, given the somewhat limited and specific manner I used in during the LDA process. In brief, algorithmic text mining is a set of instructions followed by a computer program to sift through large quantities of text based on user-defined parameters, to return meaningful results

looking. While as a researcher I am hesitant to employ extensive metaphor in situations like this, and I do not know how closely this process matches the process of actual archaeology, the scenario does chime with my experiences of working with a big social data set.

For the remainder of this section, I will discuss these authors' methodology, specifically the steps outlined above, in more detail, and show how my own approach reflected this. The first step covered by Davidson et al, unsurprisingly, covers the process of selecting data. Here there is a divergence between mine and the author's approach to our respective projects, namely that our corpuses of big data are quite different in nature and emerge in different contexts. In the author's study, their data was derived from multiple existing qualitative studies which had been archived, and as such assembling a corpus required scrutiny and awareness of "Meta data" (Davidson et al, 2018, p.369), in order to understand the "nature, quality, and suitability" (p.369) of the corpus being assembled, in reference to the goals of the project. Here, 'meta data' is not used in the sense it applies within computational science and in reference to big social data, but rather refers to qualities and attributes of the data itself, as well as the context in which it was collected and the characteristics of participants in the original studies. What is described in this step is reflected in my project in both the groundwork that went into the initial data collection, as well as the data 'cleaning' that occurred before the data was ready for even thematic mapping. In both cases, the goal of this step is to assemble a suitable corpus from the available data, which in the case of my own project relied on having a background understanding of Twitter discourse, a clear event around which to collect data, a clear idea of which keywords to collect for and why, as well as the knowledge and tools required to clean and process the data to the point where it was suitable for analysis.

Of the different steps and tools outlined by Davidson et al. the most salient in the case of my own methodology was the second step - recursive surface 'thematic' mapping - which was in my case fulfilled through a process of automated thematic analysis: LDA topic modelling. While Davidson et al do not mention LDA specifically they do endorse the efficacy of "thematic mapping including use of word frequency, searches for themes based on word proximity and association" (p.370), as well as tools that provide "keyword analysis and identification of keyness as indicative of potential themes" (p.370), which both describe LDA to some extent. Importantly, the authors also express a degree of caution in fully endorsing the ability of such methods to identify themes in the sense we are accustomed to in qualitative research (p.370). Rather, themes identified by these

automated processes should be treated as potentially indicative of meaningful themes and discursive genres, and should be subject to recursive investigation to eliminate irrelevant or ambiguous themes, rather than taken uncritically. I will return to the topic of LDA as a form of recursive surface ‘thematic’ mapping later in this chapter, when I come to discuss how this process was implemented in this project. Before moving on though, I will conclude discussing some of the other particulars of Davidson et al. and how their methodology related to my own.

The third phase of Davidson et al.’s methodology relates to preliminary analysis, the ‘test pits’ of their archaeological metaphor, a phase to show “whether anything of interest is present in the data extract being examined” (p.371). This consists of reading shorter extracts derived from areas of data identified during the previous step as representing particular themes and is the first point at which the researcher directly encounters the data in its original, unabridged state. The authors stress a few epistemological points here, namely that both the length and number of extracts examined per theme are very much dependent on the kinds of research questions being asked, and the overall research design (p.371). Similarly, they stress that this stage should be conducted “with mindfulness of the context in which extracts were generated” (p.371), something especially relevant in the case of my research, as it is user generated content from a specific online platform, collected at a specific time around a specific event. Additionally, the authors stress that in cases where sampling is being driven by a purposive epistemology, where a researcher is concerned with themes that are “substantively or theoretically more attention grabbing” (p.371), attention should still be paid to those areas which seem less promising during preliminary investigation.

Throughout these steps, but particularly the second and third, the authors advise a recursive approach, where researchers should be open to repeating previous stages based on insight gained during the process. This recursive approach can be informed by many things, from using insights gained from the preliminary analysis to investigate topics not necessarily identified by the thematic mapping, to re-running the entire process if it provides samples which are of “no analytical value” (p.372). In the case of my approach, this recursive element was especially important, since my data consisted of a huge amount of varied user generated content that had been collected in real time. For example, while initial searches for explicitly misogynistic discourse (of the nature discussed by Jane, 2014a and 2014b, which as previously mentioned was the initial analytic focus of my project)

returned only a fairly limited range of tweets, some of these tweets appeared to contain some pro-Trump sentiment.

Re-examining the initial LDA thematic mapping did not reveal a cohesive pro-Trump topic, but one of the topics did appear to identify “MAGA” (Make America Great Again) as a salient term. Sampling for tweets containing MAGA, and analysing them preliminarily, likewise revealed what appeared to be other adjacent pro-Trump hashtags (“#DrainTheSwamp”, “#AmericaFirst” and so on) and slogans, which I subsequently sampled for. Treating the corpus in this way, as something subject to a recursive process of investigation which can be adjusted and repeated fairly easily, allows a very open and approachable way to explore otherwise unassailably large datasets.

The final step comprises the detailed analysis typical of other qualitative research, where the work of the previous steps allows a previously unassailable dataset to be treated like a typical qualitative corpus. In the case of Davidson et al, this also represents the point “that brings depth back into conversation with breadth” (p.372). This involves several features of qualitative analysis, but especially the issue of cases in the traditional qualitative sense. The issue of case selection, both in terms of how many to select and by what criteria, is especially pertinent when employing this methodology, as any cases will be derived from an atypically large corpus and, in the case of Davidson et al, may not be clearly delineated (pp.372-373). Here the authors advise an awareness for the underlying research goals/questions, and ontological/epistemological features that form a background to the research, as well as an awareness of what the previous steps have involved, and what is pragmatic to do. The second issue, that of what constitutes an individual case, is where a substantive point of difference between their study and mine emerges: while the authors’ ‘big qual’ dataset consisted of a diverse array of qualitative documents from a range of studies<sup>40</sup>, mine consists of a vast number of individual tweets ( $N \sim 2.5$  million). While an individual tweet, or even a thread of many tweets may contain an array of features and media, the environment in which they are produced lends them a high degree of consistency in terms of form.

More than other digital social data – web pages, blogs, videos and so on – tweets are both highly limited and clearly delineated, and even in the case of metadata<sup>41</sup> have a similar

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<sup>40</sup> Which did not involve social media data

<sup>41</sup> Meaning the many forms of data associated with a tweet besides text. This can include geo-locational information, biographical information, user stated gender, timestamps, and so on.

clear structure. In the case of tweets, the issue of what makes a case, and how many cases to use, seems more a question of making quite specific decisions about a form that is already fairly neatly contained. For example, a researcher may choose to exclude certain forms of metadata – such as geolocation, number of likes/retweets and so on – when deciding on what a case is, or to treat whole threads of tweets as cases to see interaction between users. In these situations, as in qualitative research more generally, these decisions are guided by fundamental questions or analytic approach, research goals and practicality, and have particular consequences for a project. In my own project, the issue of *how many* is more ambiguous. While social science research that takes a more computational or empirical approach to Twitter data may analyse millions of individual tweets, owing to dealing with them in an abstracted form, the nature of my qualitative methodology excludes this. As a researcher performing discourse analysis, I am forced to eventually read and analyse individual tweets, and arriving at a ‘sufficient’ yet practical number has been a major concern of this project, as I have hopefully made clear by this point. In this situation, the advice offered by the authors is useful: to be aware of the goals of the research, to have an awareness of the previous steps in the process, and to have a pragmatic attitude.

### **Attempt at fieldwork**

During this project I attempted to conduct observational fieldwork and interviews at a social media tech-industry conference (Big Boulder 2017) in Boulder, Colorado. My intention was to set up interviews with social media industry insiders, in order to record their perspective on some of the issues pertinent to my project. While these interviews did not materialise, this fieldwork is still visible in my thesis, in the form of three short vignettes which punctuate the analytic chapters. In presenting these vignettes my intention is to explore and discuss the experience of being in this environment, in a way that is interesting and illuminating for the reader.

In these vignettes I adopt a much freer tone and a more ‘narrative’ structure, drawing inspiration from the writings of Mark Fisher – specifically ‘*Capitalist Realism*’ (2009) and ‘*The Weird and the Eerie*’ (2016) – to describe what was often a strange and alienating experience. Focusing on these themes of unease, weirdness and ‘horror’ is in contrast to the general tone of my thesis and may be somewhat atypical for social science literature. However, I argue that adopting these themes as a frame for the discussion of political and

social-scientific issues is broadly in line with some academic literature in the humanities, particularly the aforementioned work by Fisher, but also some philosophical publications by Eugene Thacker (2011) and Thomas Ligotti (2010), the latter of whom also makes a brief appearance in chapter 6. Additionally, the use of themes of horror to explore the linkages between the tech-industry, capitalism and its potentially dark and disturbing futures can be seen in '*Neoreaction a basilisk*', a collection of essays on the alt-right and fringe economics/philosophy by philosophical writer Elizabeth Sandifir (2017).

## **Summary of methodology**

In summary, my methodology in this project is an attempt to bring together big data collection and LDA topic modelling, with detailed, fine-grained qualitative analysis in the form of critical discourse analysis. At the time of writing, this approach is very under-developed in social science literature, so I see this methodology as being innovative and making an original contribution to the field of digital social science.

The process I have outlined is multi-stage and iterative, similar in structure to Davidson et al (2018), which I have discussed in some detail. My methodology begins with the collection of a large quantity of tweets, which are then pre-processed and cleaned, before being subject to a preliminary/exploratory thematic analysis via LDA topic modelling. These topic models are then (critically) interpreted by the researcher, and the topics they appear to present are treated as themes to be explored in more detail via word searches, in line with the specific research goals of the project.

Based on this more detailed exploration of the corpus the initial process may be repeated in an iterative and reflexive manner. Following this, individual tweets are purposefully sampled, exported and coded thematically, and assembled into more cohesive themes based on their content. Following this, tweets are risk-assessed and looked-up via Twitter's own search function to check if they still exist. At this point consent is sought from participants if deemed necessary by the risk assessment, and following the satisfaction of the risk assessment criteria are treated by the researcher as data for critical discourse analysis. Analysis is conducted by grouping the tweets based on discursive feature (genre, style and so on), and each tweet is treated as a case for analysis.

Conducted in this manner, this methodology represents one way in which a qualitative researcher may engage with big data derived from a social media platform such as Twitter,

whilst preserving flexibility and maintaining the fine-grained analysis that qualitative methods allow for.

# Chapter 5: Description of outputs from data, running the topic models, producing, describing and interpreting outputs

## Introduction

In this section I describe and discuss some outputs from LDA topic models of my data; what they show, how I interpret them and how they informed my later analysis, as well as some reflection on the whole process. My desire here is not to repeat points made in my methodology chapter, but to present the reader with my preliminary analysis and discuss it in some detail. Through this chapter I hope to demonstrate to the reader how this preliminary analysis informed my later analysis.

In select portions of this section I adopt the passive voice to indicate that I received assistance from colleagues in some of the parts of this process that required expertise in coding (in the computer science sense), particularly the data ‘cleaning’ and pre-processing. Most of this chapter is written in the first person, as I want to communicate the critical and personal reflection that was involved in the process, and the experience of conducting this research from the perspective of a researcher previously unfamiliar with this kind of methodology. As such, I will also explain the basic functions of LDA topic modelling, and provide guidance for how to interpret outputs.

The overall purpose of this section is to explore the usefulness of a methodology which, while widespread and established in other areas, is novel to qualitative social science research.

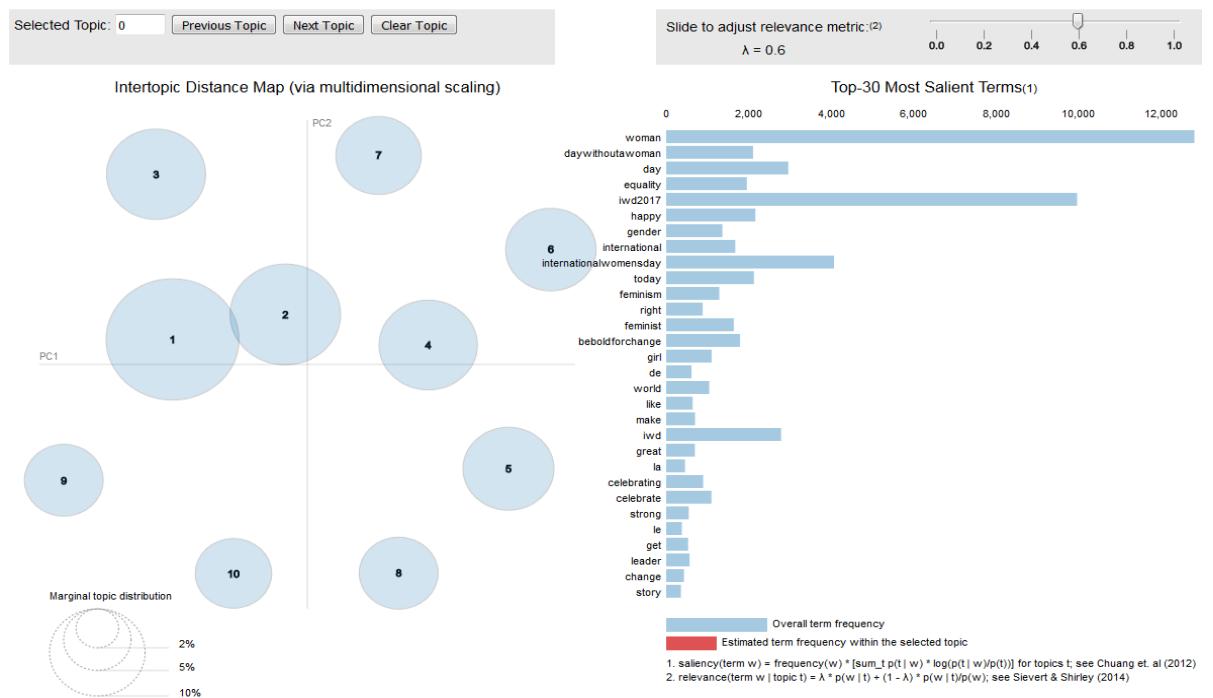
## Data Management and pre-processing

As discussed in my methodology chapter, my initial data collection produced a corpus of approximately 2.5 million tweets, which was refined via R through pre-processing into two corpora: Corpus A (n= approximately 49,000 tweets) and Corpus B (n= approximately 1,060,000 tweets). This process involved removing all duplicate tweets (mostly in the form of retweets), and all tweets that were retweeted fewer than five times. As stated previously, this was done as a reflection of current best practice for dealing with Twitter

data. This refined corpus (hereafter referred to as Corpus A) was much more manageable, and could be more easily subject to forms of analysis without requiring specialist technical knowledge. I later produced a second corpus (Corpus B) which consisted of *all the unique tweets from my original collection* (all retweeted text removed, etc., approximately 1,060,000 tweets) without the additional refinement of only featuring tweets retweeted five or more times. I produced this specifically to compare the LDA outputs of both corpora, to see what effect (if any) including those tweets which were not especially retweeted had on the composition of topics.

## Interpreting outputs from Cortex

Figure 1: Overview of topic models for Corpus A



Above shows an overall summary of Corpus A. The panel on the left displays an inter-topic distance map, with each topic sized proportionately to the overall corpus, and arranged based on a primary component analysis (Sievart & Shirley, 2015): the closer together topics are, the more related they were in the corpus in terms of salient terms. As the topics are fairly dispersed, the model suggests that each topic was somewhat distinct, with some close relation between topics 1 and 2, indicating that they shared some salient terms. In

addition, the interface allows a user to visualise topic distribution based on individual salient terms, by highlighting particular terms in the interface.

The panel on the right displays the 30 overall ‘most salient terms’ across the whole of Corpus A, along with a scale along the top indicating how many times these words occurred (i.e. “woman” occurred over 12,000 times). Saliency is a measure of how ‘important’ each term is to a specific topic, selected by mathematical formula that checks “how informative the specific term... is for determining the generating topic, versus a randomly-selected term... For example, if a word occurs in all topics, observing the word tells us little about the document’s topical mixture; thus the word would receive a low distinctiveness score.” (Chuang et al, 2012).

At the very top of the right panel is an interface bar which allows the user to adjust the ‘relevance metric’, signified with a lambda ( $\lambda$ ). As the designers explain,  $\lambda$  is a measure of specificity, with a low value showing a list of salient terms which were specific or unique to that topic, while a high value shows terms which were more general across the whole corpus but still more salient to that topic. In their documentation, Sievert and Shirley (2014) describe it as follows:

“Change the value of  $\lambda$  to adjust the term rankings -- small values of  $\lambda$  (near 0) highlight potentially rare, but exclusive terms for the selected topic, and large values of  $\lambda$  (near 1) highlight frequent, but not necessarily exclusive, terms for the selected topic. A user study described in our paper suggested that setting  $\lambda$  near 0.6 aids users in topic interpretation, although we expect this to vary across topics and data sets (hence our tool, which allows you to flexibly adjust  $\lambda$ ).”

It is worth noting that my initial perception, before reading the above, was that a smaller value for  $\lambda$  produced terms which I saw as richer and more interesting. The authors recommend a value of 0.6, so I used this as a benchmark for my analysis, compared with a value of 0.0 in order to see if the most specific terms in a topic could enrich and inform any description of the topics contents. While examining the various outputs for each topic, I will juxtapose the lists of salient terms at the 0.0 and 0.6 level to make any differences clearer to the reader.

Having provided a brief guide to assist the reader in interpreting these outputs, I now provide a description of the different topics identified by the models I ran, some of my thoughts and observations, and the implications for further analysis

## **Overview of Corpus A**

The topic overview above gives a general description of the distribution of topics and the 30 most salient terms across the entire corpus, as well as the overall frequency of those terms. The distribution of topics shown on the inter-topic distance map does not indicate much relation between topics, aside from topics 1 and 2, which are closely distributed and overlap slightly, indicating they shared some salient terms to a larger degree. This distribution suggests that the topics are fairly distinct from one another, although they were collected during the same time period, based on the keywords I initially collected for

The most salient terms are mostly as expected considering the event:

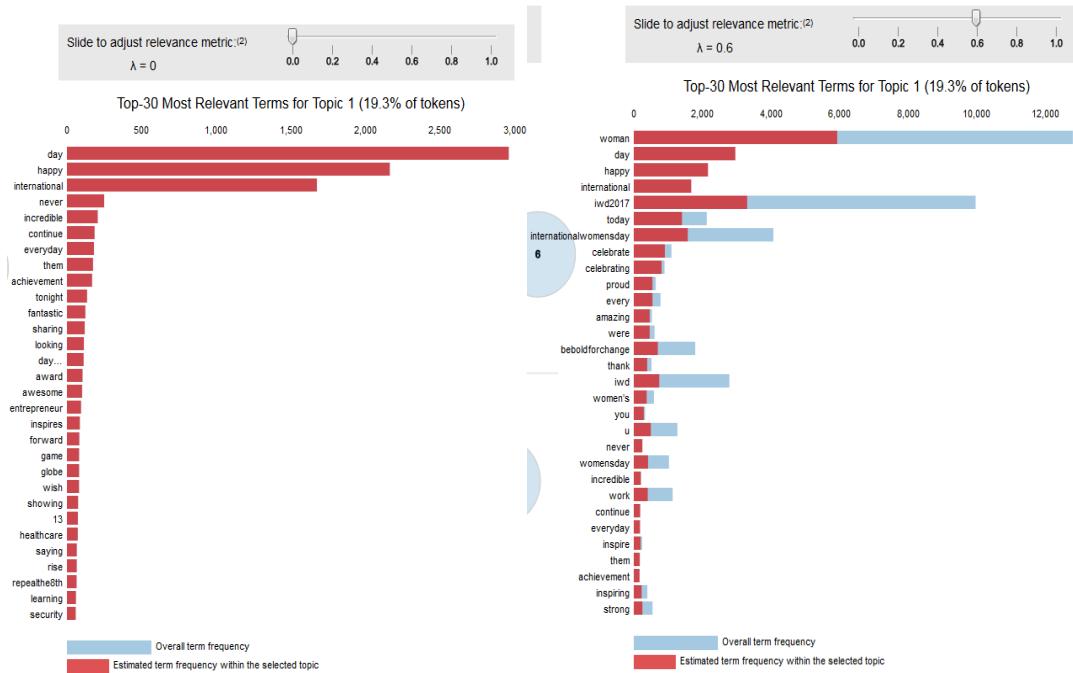
“woman”, “day”, “equality”, “happy”, “gender”, “international”, “feminism”, “girl” and “world” are all featured, as are prominent hashtags, including “#daywithoutawoman”, “#iwd2017”, “#iwd”, “#internationalwomensday”, and “#beboldforchange” (pre-processing removes symbols from the corpus, including “#”, but these terms can be identified as hashtags because of their lack of spacing and prominence/frequency).

The most frequent salient terms are “woman” (over 12,000), “#iwd2017” (around 10,000), “#iwd” (around 3000), and “day” (also around 3000). This frequency suggests that many tweets featured “official” hashtags, which makes sense since my initial collection was based on some of them. The overlap between topics 1 and 2 appears to be caused by a number of salient terms they share: “woman”, “#iwd2017”, “today”, “#beboldforchange”, “world”, “#iwd”, and “celebrate”, are salient terms for both topics.

What this appears to suggest is that while Corpus A is composed of mostly distinct topics with their own salient terms, topics 1 and 2 do share some overlap in their salient terms, specifically term which appear to be related to IWD2017, women, the world and celebration. I will now proceed through describing each topic from Corpus A in sequence, seeing what their salient terms are at the  $\lambda=0.0$  and  $\lambda=0.6$  level, and discussing what this may indicate about what each topic pertains to. While Context does not have a feature allowing me to view ‘exemplar’ tweets from each topic, tweets which fit the topic closest in terms of salient terms, I have subtitled each topic with a sentence which seems to summarise the topic as I interpret it based on those salient terms.

### **Topic 1: Celebrating International Women’s Day 2017**

Figure 2: (left) Topic 1 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 1 at  $\lambda=0.6$



Above shows the salient terms for topic 1 at two levels of relevance, ranging from the most specific terms at the  $\lambda=0.0$  level (left), to the more general terms at the  $\lambda=0.6$  level (right) as suggested by Sievert and Shirley (2014). The right-hand list also displays the estimated frequency of a given term with the selected topic, compared to the overall frequency for the whole corpus, for example showing that roughly half of the instances of “woman” occur in topic 1. Being the most specific terms more unique to that topic, the terms at  $\lambda=0.0$  appear to occur exclusively within the selected topic.

This topic contains multiple positive expressions and uses of positive affective language, as well as celebratory terms and prominent hashtags. Every use of “happy”, “incredible”, “achievement”, “incredible”, “fantastic”, “awesome” and “inspires” occurs here, as well as most uses of “celebrate”, “celebrating”, “amazing”, “proud” and “thank”. In addition, “#1wd2017”, “#internationalwomensday”, “#beboldforchange”, “#iwd”, “#womensday” and “strong” are classified as salient and were all ‘official’ hashtags for the day, “Be bold for change” being the slogan for IWD2017. The prominence of highly positive and celebratory language alongside terms associated with the day itself such as “woman”, “day”, “international”, “#iwd2017”, “today” “#internationalwomensday”, “#beboldforchange” and “#womensday” suggest that this topic might cover tweets which celebrate the day in a fairly unambiguously positive way. The topic suggests that tweets which celebrate the

achievements of women as amazing, inspirational, and worthy of pride and thanks are quite prominent in the corpus, and are communicated in a way that links them to prominent hashtags. Terms possibly suggesting time, audience, community and activity/action are also prominent: “continue”, “everyday”, “tonight” and “forward” can be seen especially at the  $\lambda=0.0$  level, indicating that were specific to this topic. This strong association might indicate that discourses in this topic talk about IWD2017 and its associated topics as a continuing and ongoing project, as well as something specific to that day.

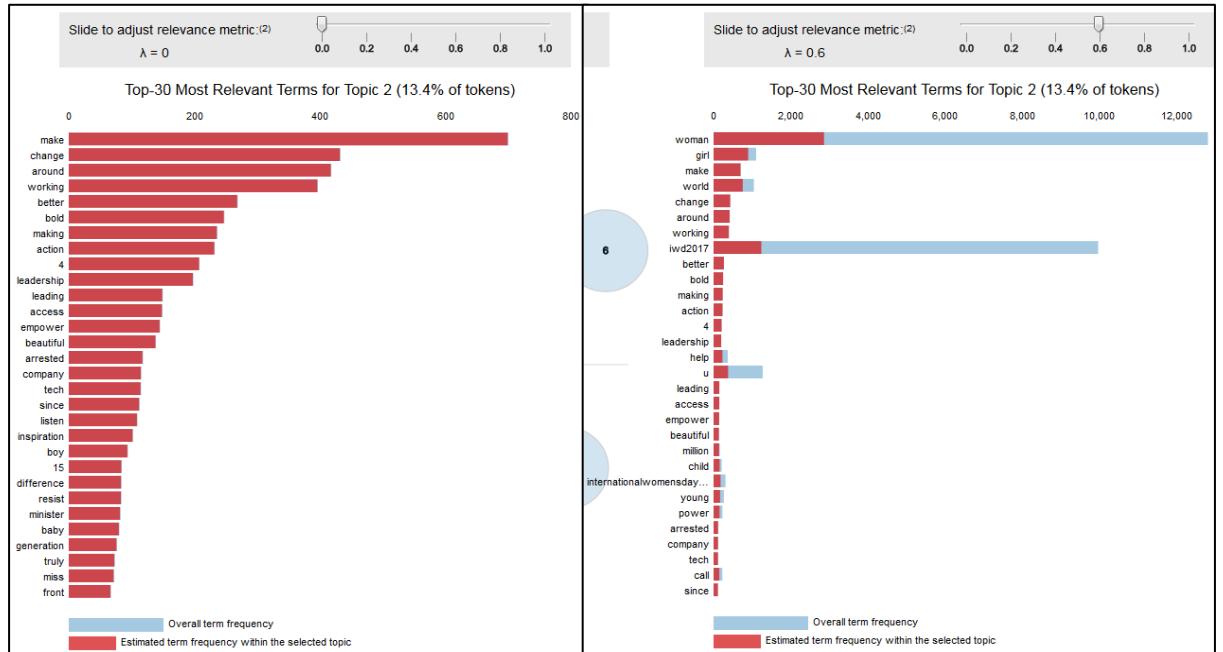
Audience and community can be seen in a few relevant terms: “you”, “u”, and “them” are all featured, suggesting that some of this discourse is directed toward or somehow appeals to an audience or community. The presence of verbs may also indicate an association of this celebration and positivity with a community or collective activities. “Sharing”, “looking”, “showing”, “learning” and “celebrating” seem to be consistent with the rest of this topic, suggesting that much of the discourse here is in the form of users sharing their positive sentiments for international women’s day, celebrating it, and sharing feelings of pride for inspirational women in a collective, motivational way. One small but notable feature of this topic can be found under fig 1.1: at the  $\lambda=0.0$  level “#repealthe8th” can be seen to occur exclusively within this topic, this hashtag is associated with the wider campaign by Irish activists to repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment to Ireland’s constitution, which heavily restricted the provision of abortions for Irish women.<sup>42</sup> It appears to be the only clear case of an activist hashtag in a topic made up of mostly uncontroversial and positive, celebratory terms, which is odd considering the presence of more ‘political’ and activist topics, and the occurrence of the term “abortion” in a separate topic. This may indicate the potential limitations of LDA topic modelling (or at least in the way I have implemented it) when applied to tweets, given the lack of what seems like an intuitive connection.

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<sup>42</sup> On the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2018, over a year after I collected this data, a referendum was held to repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment, resulting in the constitutional ban on abortion being removed.

## Topic 2: Making and leading change for women and girls internationally

Figure 3: (Left) Topic 2 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 2 at  $\lambda=0.6$



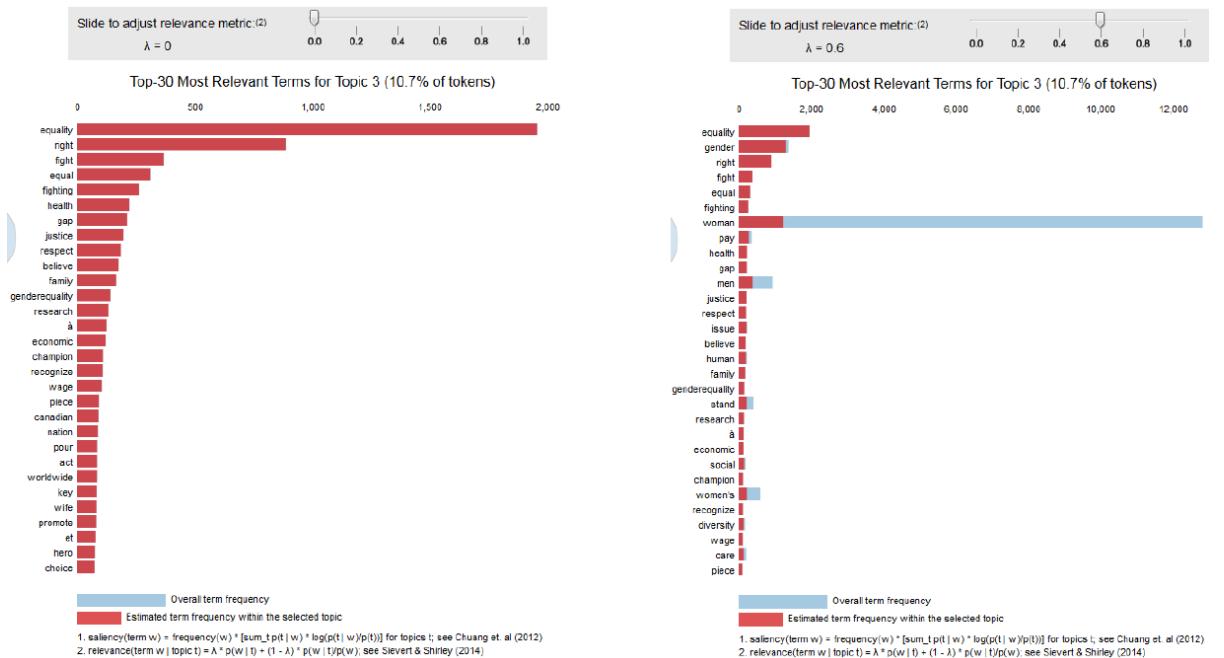
Topic 2 also features many positive terms, but unlike topic 1 features some terms which seem to link to women as a political class, as well as several instances of politicised language, and terms that emphasise leadership, struggle and change. Many terms here suggest working towards positive changes for women and girls at an international level. Both "woman" and "girl" are identified as very relevant, with almost all uses of "girl", "child" and "young" occurring in this topic, as well as all uses of "baby", suggesting that much of the discourse connects women and girls as members of an intergenerational political class, with every use of "generation" occurring here. Similarly, "world", "change", "around" and "working" are also identified as highly relevant, indicating that this topic may cover tweets advocating a plan for the future that requires some kind of action to make changes, on a global scale. Other terms also indicate positive change and development, as well as the activities and attitudes associated with achieving them: "better", "bold", "making", "action", "leadership", "help", "leading", "access", "empower" and "difference" all have connotations of positive difference and action toward completion of a project.

One relatively small but significant feature of this topic is a group of terms that may suggest that may relate to women and girls' access to tech industry jobs and companies in general, as well as women leading those fields. Together with the prominence of "beautiful", "leading", "leadership", and "inspiration", the prominence of "tech" and

“company” may suggest that prominent women in business and the tech industry are being cited as examples of inspiration or leadership. Additionally, all instances of “minister” occur in this topic, potentially suggesting that some of these tweets were in reference to political office. Another interesting and potentially counterfactual element here is the fact that along with the majority of instances of “girl” and “child”, every instance of “boy” occurs in this topic. The reason I flag this as potentially counterfactual, is that while I am inclined to read this topic as pertaining to the theme I have suggested here, the presence of “boy” may suggest that this topic is nowhere near as cohesive.

### Topic 3: Gender equality and fundamental justice

Figure 4: (Left) Topic 3 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 3 at  $\lambda=0.6$



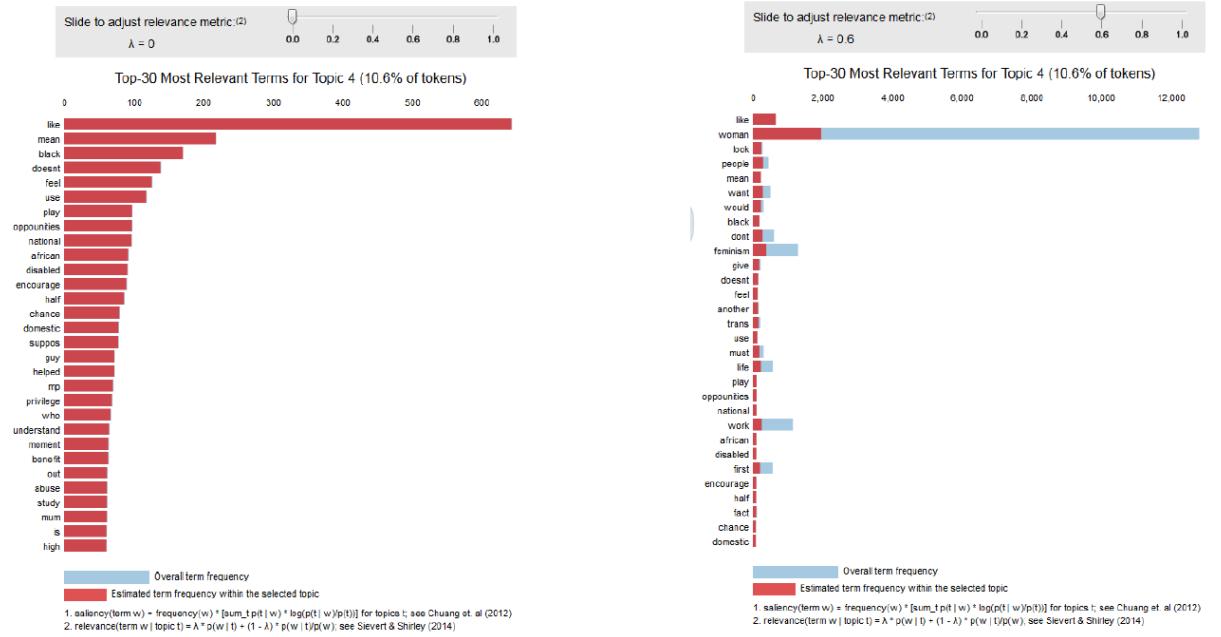
Topic 3 appears to cover tweets which explicitly discussed gender equality in a way that evokes struggle, activism and fighting for justice. The most relevant terms at the  $\lambda=0.6$  are especially explicit here: “equality”, “gender”, “right”, “fight”, “equal”, “fighting” and “woman” are very prominent, potentially suggesting that the tweets included featured gender equality as a political issue that had to be actively fought for, to the extent that “#genderequality” occurs exclusively in this topic. Furthermore, the terms also appear to suggest some of the specific political issues identified by users: “pay”, “health” and “gap”

occur almost exclusively here, suggesting that issues of women's access to health and disparities in pay between men and women were prominent issues in these tweets. This topic also features an extensive list of terms which, while not all so related to specific issues, still evoke more general issues of activism, equality and justice: "justice", "respect", "believe", "human", "family", "stand", "economic", "social", "champion", "women's", "recognize", "diversity", "wage", "care", "worldwide", "promote", "hero" and "choice" are all potentially identifiable with wide ranging and fundamental issues of women's activism and the political struggle for equality. Many of these terms are quite commanding, active and explicitly political, in contrast to some of the terms in topic 2, which appeared to potentially relate to change in a more individualised way.

One interesting feature here is that specifically Canadian activist issues are prominent at the 0.0 level: "Canadian" being the most obvious, but the presence of French in "pour", "et" and "a" may also suggest the activity of French-Canadian users tweeting in French. Additionally, the similar occurrence of "nation" may indicate that a comparatively small but relevant number of tweets may be related to inequality experienced by indigenous women in Canada (sometimes referred to as "First Nation" in a Canadian context). The wave of ritualised and extreme sexual violence and murder targeted at indigenous women in Canada, as well as general issues of inequality, was quite prominent in news at the time, so this may be being reflected in this topic. If further analysis found this to be the case, it may represent users taking international women's day as an opportunity to highlight issues and inequality experienced by women in a specific national context. While this was not an avenue I chose to investigate, the potential for LDA analysis of tweets to highlight these quite specific elements of topics may represent a potential advantage of it as a method for analysing a large corpus.

## Topic 4: Intersectional Feminism

Figure 5: (Left) Topic 4 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 4 at  $\lambda=0.6$



Topic 4 contains the first appearance of “feminism” as a relevant term, and also several terms which I am inclined to interpret as being related to issues of intersectionality and intersectional politics in this context. Here we see every instance of “black”, “African”, “privilege” and “disabled”, as well as almost every instance of “trans”, all of which are terms that factor into discussions of feminism and intersectionality in a wider context. The possible indication of discussions concerning intersectionality would reflect an earlier small preliminary analysis I conducted on a random sample of tweets via COSMOS, which I examined without any kind of topic modelling. In this exploration of a random sample of tweets I found that discussion of intersectional issues in feminism, or simply the mention of how feminism can, does or should apply and include black, trans, and disabled women, was quite prominent.

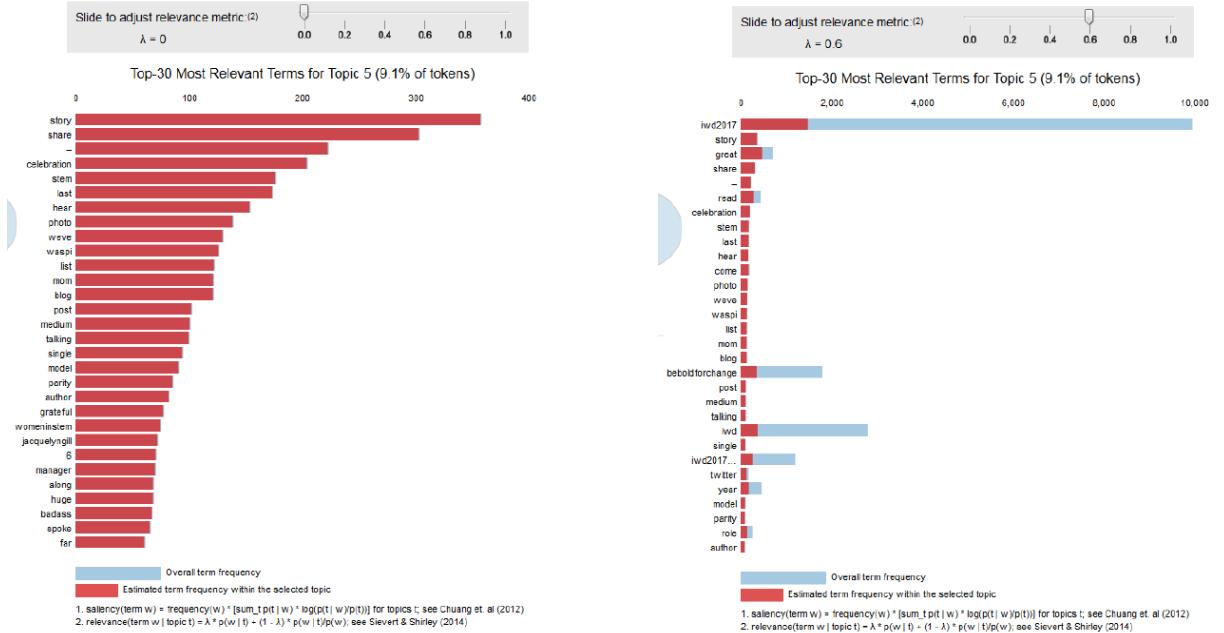
For me there are a few other notable elements of this output: every instance of the term “like” occurs here, though I think that it is unclear what can be inferred from this, apart from some of these may be uses of the term in the vernacular, conversational sense. Additionally some of the terms may suggest tweets concerning issues of support and access for women as a group, to some extent in a national context: “national”, “woman”, “people”, “use”, “encourage”, “chance”, “domestic”, “opportunities”, “supports” (“rt” is removed as part of data cleaning, as it stands for “retweet” and would skew the topic

model if not removed), “helped”, “benefit” and “abuse” are all classified as relevant terms, with some making of 100% of uses across the corpus. The relation of this language to issues of access to support and provisions for women in vulnerable situations may suggest some kind of discussion about this in the same topic as feminism. In addition, some of the tweets in this topic appear to use British-English: “mum” and “mp” (possibly “Member of Parliament”), as well as the use of “benefit” (as opposed to “welfare”, for example) may indicate that some salient proportion of this topic was originating from a British context.

This topic is the first of the examples listed so far that I find especially ‘awkward’ to interpret purely in terms of its LDA outputs. My experience is that this method of data analysis and visualization amounts to an exercise in inferring relation to discursive genera and wider issues based on what are essentially disembodied lists of words. A very general potential overview of a corpus, which though limited in terms of how ‘accurately’ it can interpret the themes in a corpus can nonetheless potentially provide an overview that would be otherwise impossible for a qualitative researcher working with such relatively large quantities of textual data. When discussing this process of interpreting LDA topics and their salient terms with colleagues, the phrase ‘word association game’ was quickly applied, and it stuck. While I find some of these comparatively ‘easy’ - with what seems to me like a clearer potential interpretation - others like topic 4 are more elusive. For me, and some colleagues who have also engaged in this word association game, this issue of interpretation seems to underscore the need for a diversity of researcher perspectives when inferring meaning from data which is at the same time so nebulous, and so intimately related to very concrete and intersectional issues. Ultimately, the process I am outlining here seems to function best as a way of suggesting *potential* topics within a corpus which the researcher can choose to investigate in more detail, as a preceding step to detailed qualitative analysis. The topics presented by LDA appear to be sometimes overlapping and vague, sometimes apparently distinct, and potentially suggesting interesting themes which can be investigated in more detail via word-searching and so on, but always to be approached with a critical perspective.

## Topic 5: Sharing, posting and blogging about STEM

Figure 6: (Left) Topic 5 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 5 at  $\lambda=0.6$



This topic appears to contain tweets which mention sharing stories and posts about a number of issues related to IWD2017, possibly around women's access to the STEM sector, possibly in a celebratory and collegial way. As with some other topics, the official hashtags ("#iwd2017" and "#beboldforchange") are identified as particularly salient here, perhaps suggesting that many of these posts incorporated them, and many of the terms may suggest a context of sharing, advocating and storytelling between users: "story", "great", "share", "read", "hear", "come", "photo", "wave" (possibly a contraction of 'we have', as inverted commas were excluded during pre-processing), "list", "blog", "post", "talking", "spoke", "twitter" and "celebration" are all relevant terms, many occurring only in this topic, and can be seen as possibly associated with the collective sharing and viewing of thoughts, feelings and information.

If these terms can be read as suggesting the mode and means of sharing in this sense, then the subjects themselves can possibly be inferred from some of the other relevant terms: "waspi" (perhaps "#WASPI"), refers to a UK-based activist organisation that campaigns against the equalisation of state pension age for men and women<sup>43</sup>, arguing that this would produce unfair outcomes for women affected by it (mostly those born around the

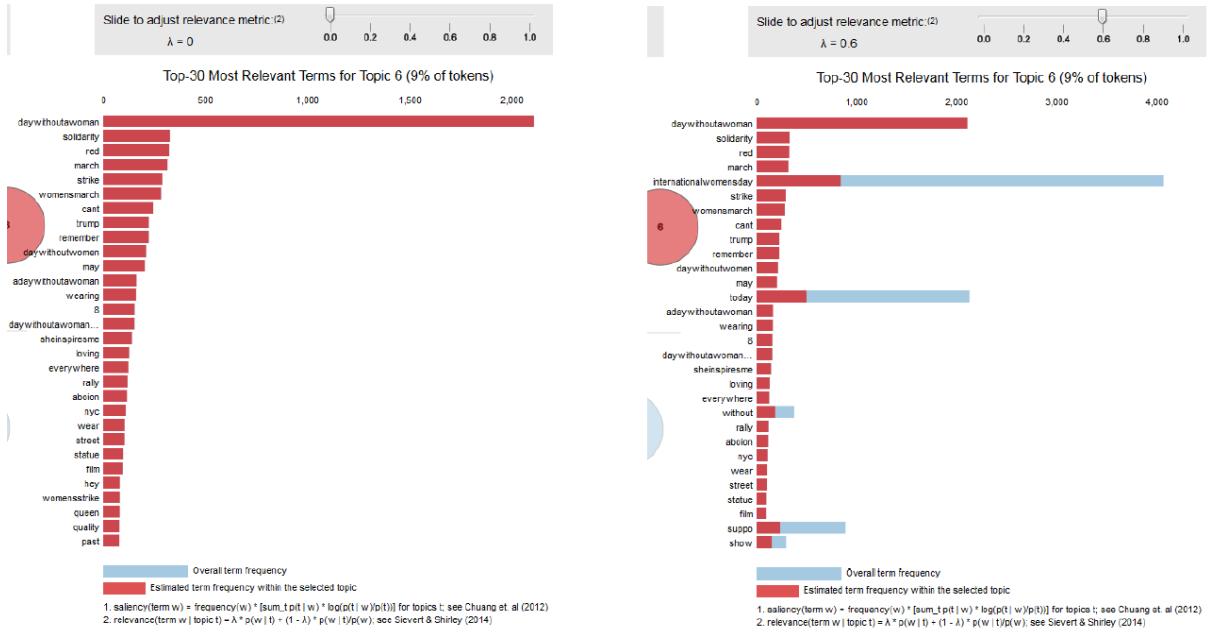
<sup>43</sup> The 'Women Against State Pension Inequality' website can be found here: <https://www.waspi.co.uk/>

1950s), and the term occurs entirely in this topic. Likewise, every use of “stem” occurs here, as well as every use of “#womeninstem”, and “jacquelyngill”. ‘@JacquelynGill’ (“@” symbols are also excluded by pre-processing) is the twitter handle of Dr Jacquelyn Gill, an American professor in Ice Age ecology who blogs about diversity in STEM fields, and women’s access to STEM. Given the presence of her twitter handle here, it would appear that a significant number of tweets took the form of mentions or replies to her and her tweets, along with a discussion about women’s access to STEM.

Other terms appear to suggest discussions of access, positivity, and possibly role models: “great”, “celebration”, “mom”, “model”, “role” (occurring in roughly equal numbers, this could suggest “role model” was a common phrase), “parity”, “grateful”, “manager” and “badass” are all relevant terms here. From this, I would tentatively suggest that these discussions about equitable access to STEM (and perhaps also state pensions) are mingled with the sharing celebratory stories about female role models who the users have found inspirational to them. While this was again a potential area which I did not investigate specifically, it still may represent a starting point for detailed analysis if a qualitative researcher was interested in how users talked about women’s access to STEM fields, and how this related to users’ methods of sharing inspirational stories.

## Topic 6: American activism

Figure 7: (Left) Topic 6 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 6 at  $\lambda=0.6$



Topic 6 features several terms which appear to suggest a specifically American context, focused around a particular activist event that occurred around this time, and in a collectivist manner. Every occurrence of "#daywithoutawoman" occurs here, as well as the very similar "#adaywithoutawoman", and the related "#womensmarch" and "#womensstrike". These hashtags all refer to a specific coordinated day of political action that occurred globally on international women's day 2017, where activists coordinated a women's general strike accompanied by a march against gender inequality. While this was international, the presence of other terms may suggest that this topic specifically relates to an American context, as some terms appear to relate to the then-new Trump presidency. Other terms outside of obvious hashtags reflect this: "solidarity", "march", "strike", "trump", "rally", "abortion" (listed as "aboion", since pre-processing removes every instance of "rt", even inside other words), and "nyc" (New York City, where one of the larger rallies was planned). These terms all relate to mass, collective activism and protest in an American context. While some of these terms are not especially specific to an American context, others are more specifically American, in terms of geography and political issues.

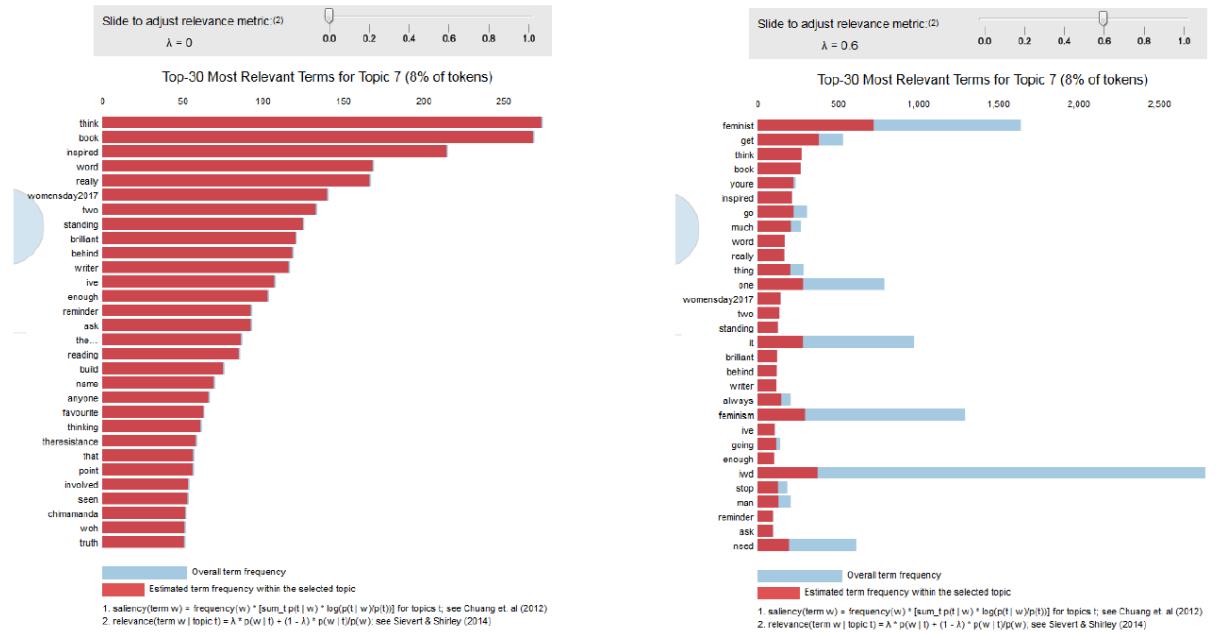
Several terms seem to relate to space, place and time: "today", "everywhere", and "street", perhaps indicating the sharing of time and location of protests, while others seem to relate to other elements of the protest: "red", "wearing" and "wear" are likely linked to

protesters wearing the colour red in solidarity, which was a feature of the protest, also done by some women who were not able to engage in the strike or march. As with several other topics some of the terms here seem to suggest support or admiration for women the users may have found inspirational, or support through solidarity: “remember”, “#sheinspiresme”, “loving”, “support” (again, sans “rt”), “show” (possibly in conjunction with “support”) and “queen” may suggest that in conjunction with discussions around the organisation and attendance of protest there were tweets expressing mutual support, especially since almost all of these occurred entirely in this topic.

Additionally, the possibility that organisation around this specific set of protests in an American context may indicate that this was a very prominent discourse in the wider corpus, and could provide a basis for further more detailed analysis if a researcher were interested in examining tweets which mentioned Donald Trump during IWD2017. This, along with the topic of positivity, especially in the context of topic 1, was an area which I was intrigued by, and my more detailed analysis mostly focused on these themes. Finally, it is important to mention that while I have chosen to identify this theme as being more related to tweets which occurred in an American context, this is purely inferred based on the salient terms, not derived from the examination of geolocation metadata, timestamp, profile information and so on. While this would have been possible, the tweets produced by American users was not the focus of my analysis as a proceeded forward in my research, rather I was interested in tweets that talked about and supported Donald Trump regardless of the location of the users.

## Topic 7: Inspirational feminist writers and feminist self-education

Figure 8: (Left) Topic 7 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 7 at  $\lambda=0.6$



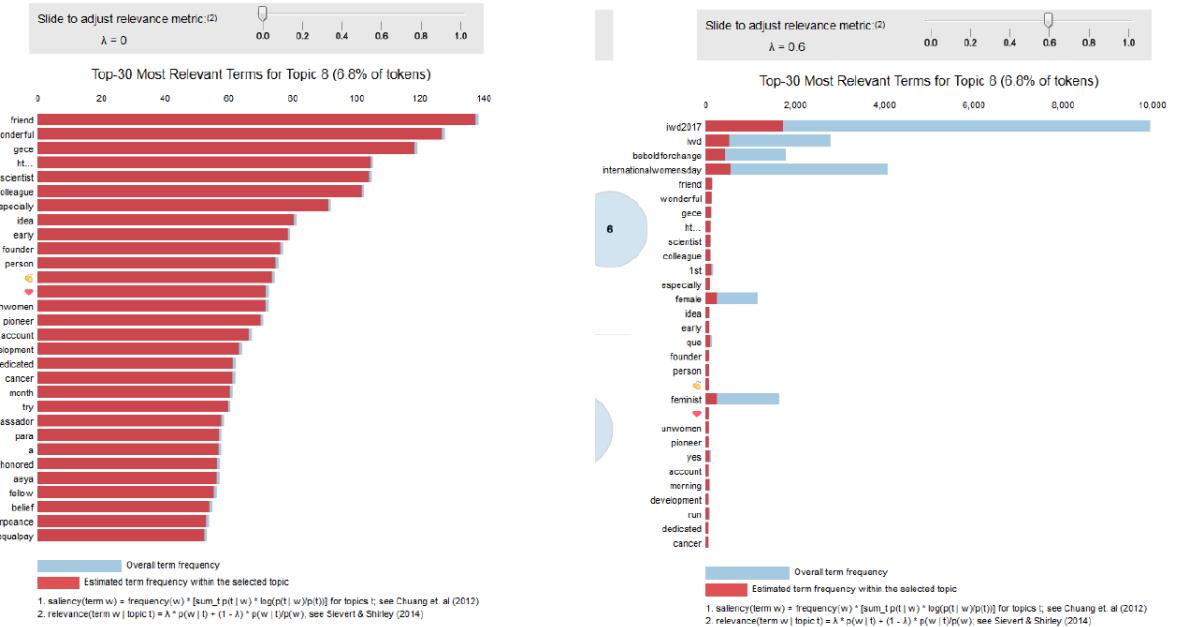
Topic 7 appears to relate to some form of ‘conversation’ between users on the topic of feminist writers, or feminist literature and writing in general. Nearly half of all uses of “feminist” occur here, as well as nearly a quarter of the uses of “feminism”, all uses of “#womensday2017”, and a fairly large proportion of uses of “#iwd”, possibly suggesting that this topic includes discussion related to feminism and feminists within the context of the day itself. Some of the most prominent terms appear to be specifically related to writing, reading and learning: “think”, “book”, “word”, “writer”, “reading” and “thinking” all exclusively occur in this topic, clearly indicating this was a key relevant part of this topic.

Other prominent terms may suggest that some of the tweets in this topic specifically related to users discussing authors they admired and identified as feminists, or as writing about feminism or in a feminist manner. Positive terms and terms of admiration occur: “inspired”, “brilliant”, “favourite” and “truth”. All these terms occur exclusively here, and the additional presence of “name”, “one”, “two”, “ask”, and “anyone” may suggest that some of these users were engaged in sharing and encouraging others to share feminist authors who inspired them. This appears to be supported by the occurrence of a specific author’s name: “chimamanda” is likely a reference to Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche, a Nigerian Anglophone author, whose writing, “We should all be feminists” TEDx talk

(excerpts of which were sampled by Beyoncé in the song “Flawless”) and related work may have made her a frequently mentioned author.

### Topic 8: Assorted tweets around popular hashtags

Figure 9: (Left) Topic 8 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 8 at  $\lambda=0.6$

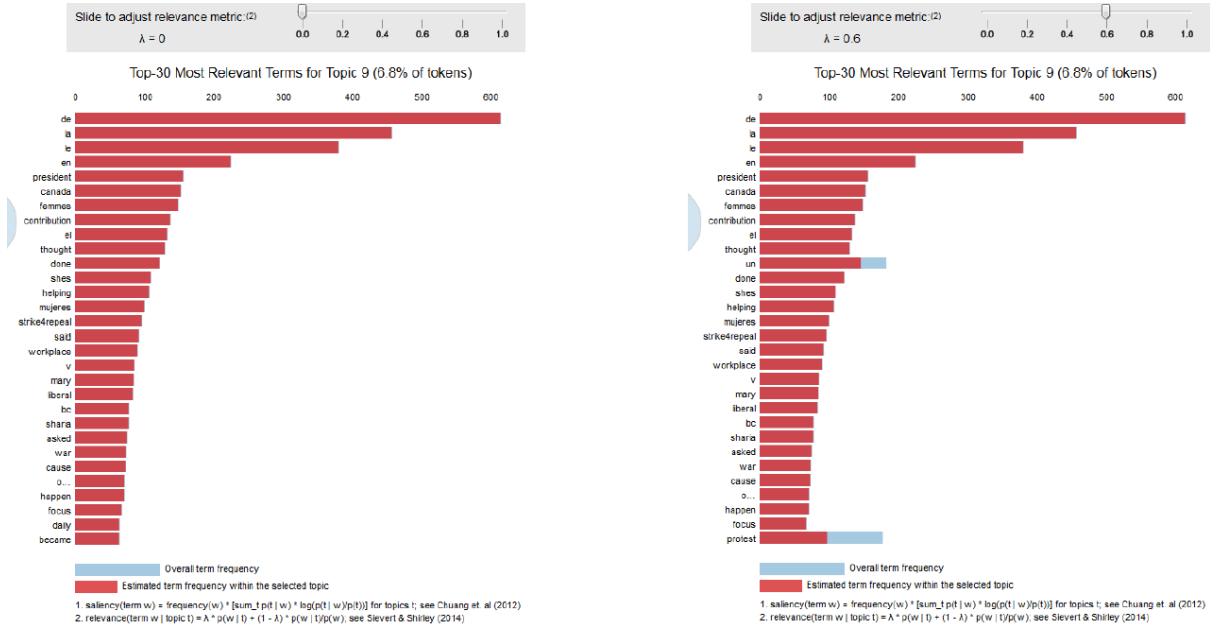


Topic 8 is among the most challenging to describe and discuss based purely on the LDA outputs. The topic appears to be made up of tweets that mostly shared hashtags in common. In terms of quantity, the most common terms were the popular hashtags “#iwd2017”, “#iwd”, “#beboldforchange” and “#internationalwomensday”, as well as the comparatively widely used “female” and “feminist”. These are the only terms which have the widest occurrence across the entire corpus, with the other salient terms being dramatically specific even at the  $\lambda=0.6$  level, perhaps suggesting a range of very specific sub-topics. Despite the especially diffuse nature of this topic, it is still possible to infer what this theme might be: as with other topics, though especially here, many of the terms are very positive, and cover personal relations and emotion. “friend”, “colleague” and “fellow” may suggest tweets about people who related to the user in some familial or personal way, while “scientist”, “founder”, “person”, “pioneer” and “ambassador” may also suggest that specific people are being tweeted about in this context.

As with other topics, much of the language here is very positive, could be used to accentuate positivity or applied to someone in a positive way: “wonderful”, “especially”, “dedicated” and “honoured”, as well as the “clapping hands” and “love heart” emojis could all suggest that whoever is being tweeted about here is being recognised, praised or in some way glorified. Additionally, “founder”, “first”, “pioneer” and “important” may suggest that some users are using the day and its hashtags as an opportunity for mentioning women they see as making significant progress in particular contexts. The nature of these contexts is less clear, though “scientist” and “cancer” may suggest someone who pioneered cancer treatment. As with some of the topics, these outputs are useful in the sense that they may provide guidance for deeper investigation and analysis, even though they are themselves more nebulous compared to other topics. In reviewing the potentials of LDA for other qualitative researchers, I suggest here that even in cases where what theme a particular topic is pertaining to is unclear, a researcher can potentially still identify analytically interesting salient terms which could provide an indication for further investigation.

## Topic 9: Non-Anglophone discourse and methodological issues

Figure 10: (Left) Topic 9 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 9 at  $\lambda=0.6$



When reading these tables, it is immediately clear that this topic displays extreme specificity, seen by the near symmetry of salient terms at the  $\lambda=0.0$  and  $\lambda=0.6$  levels, the only more general terms being “un” (possibly a reference to the UN, who are prominently involved in international women’s day), and “protest”, and in both cases these terms are still quite specific to the topic.

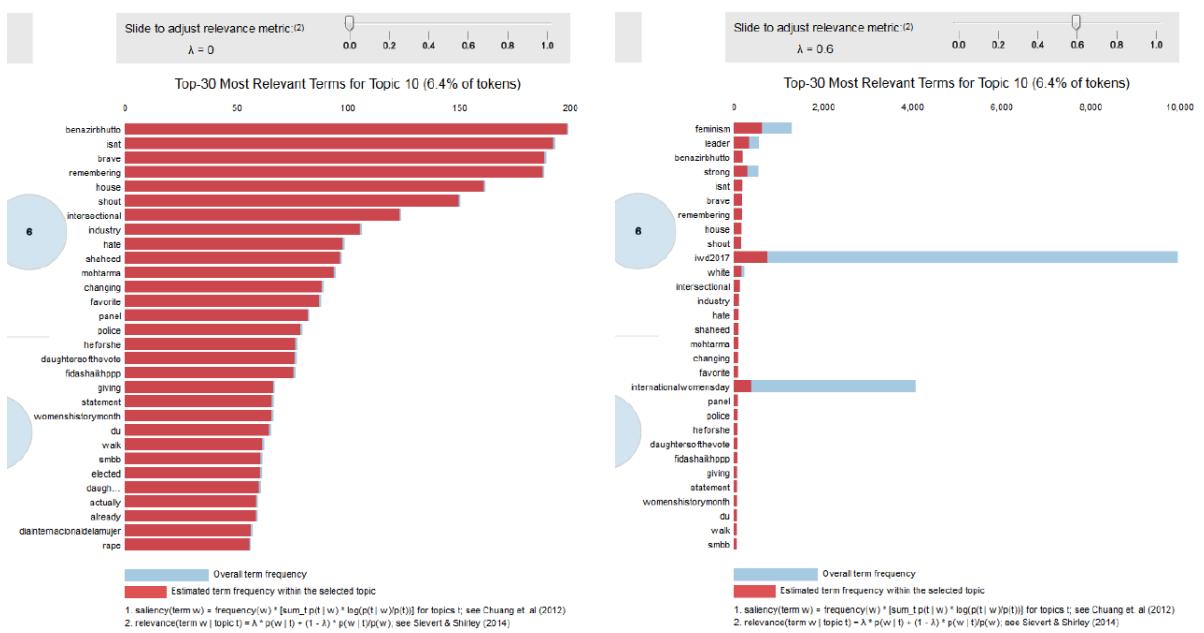
Another immediately clear thing is that many of these terms appear to be in languages other than English: “de”, “la”, “le”, “en”, “el”, “mujeres” (Spanish for “women”) and “femmes” (French for “women”). Part of pre-processing was intended to remove non-English stop words (short words such as prepositions and conjunctions that have little meaning in a topic modelling context), so their presence here, despite multiple attempts to remove them over successive model iterations, may indicate language recognition issues with the algorithm used by Cortex. Other terms indicating specific national contexts can be found here: “Canada”, “#strikeforrepeal” (hashtag employed by Irish pro-choice advocates, similar to “#repealthe8th” seen earlier), and “sharia” may suggest that these users were tweeting in non-English languages, or about issues related to specific national contexts. It is worth noting that evidence of users tweeting about specific Canadian and Irish women’s issues was seen in other topics, yet these apparently related terms are categorised into a separate topic. Despite the conflation of multiple languages by the topic modelling process, some terms associated issues can be identified: “workplace”, “war”,

“president” and “protest” would not necessarily be out of place in discussions of women’s issues in national contexts.

More so than other topics, the content of topic 9 may highlight certain limitations of topic modelling in this project, or issues with how I have pre-processed and handled my data up to this point. This also highlights how issues of language recognition are especially salient when dealing with twitter discourse in an international context.

## Topic 10: Benazir Bhutto, and tweets concerning non-Western contexts

Figure 11: (Left) Topic 10 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 10 at  $\lambda=0.6$



Similar to topic 9, topic 10 is both specific and appears to capture non-Anglosphere tweets, but is in some ways more intelligible to a researcher interested in labelling its theme. The widely occurring but still salient terms are again mostly hashtags: “#iwd2017” and “#internationalwomensday”, but also include “feminism” which may not necessarily have been used as a hashtag. Additionally some very specific hashtags can be seen: “#heforshe” (a campaign launched by the UN and officially promoted by actor and activist Emma Watson), “#daughtersofthevote” (a campaign by Canadian activists for women’s participation in Canadian parliamentary politics), “#womenshistorymonth” and “#diainternacionaldelamujer” (Spanish for international women’s day) are all highly specific and salient to this topic. In addition, some terms seem to indicate a context

specific to Pakistan: as well as “mohtarma” (Urdu for “woman”), “benazirbhutto” clearly refers to Benazir Bhutto, Pakistani politician and twice prime minister, who was assassinated in 2007. The co-occurrence of “leader”, “strong”, “brave”, “remembering” and perhaps most importantly “Shaheed” and “@fidashaikhppp” (a Pakistani journalist who advocates for remembrance of Benazir Bhutto), seem to suggest that some of these users were engaged in remembrance for Bhutto in ways intersecting with Islamic faith. “Shaheed” is a title found in the Quran, given to someone who has been unjustly killed. Given that 2017 marked ten years since Bhutto’s assassination, this quite possibly indicates that some users were tweeting about her in this context.

Aside from these terms, other significant terms appear more diffuse: “house”, “shout”, “intersectional”, “white”, “police”, “industry”, “rape” and “hate” all appear here. How, if at all, they relate to each other as a topic would need actual deeper analysis, and their presence here may be another case of overfitting by the LDA process.

### **Reflection on Corpus A topic models**

While this method seems to, in some cases, organise data into ‘themes’ which appear to be somewhat distinct and intelligible to a researcher, many appear more diffuse, nebulous and unclear, lacking any singular ‘clear’ interpretation. Running several models with different numbers of topics did not seem to address this issue: still producing a mix of topics which can be comparatively clearly interpreted, and others whose actual theme is consistently elusive. Whether I ran models to produce 5, 10 or 25 topics, or ran the model for more iterations, a proportion of themes were consistently unclear to me. Nevertheless, those which are more intelligible are potentially very helpful in guiding or informing an analytic strategy for identifying and investigating the corpus in more detail. Even in cases where the model appears to over-fit terms, it still shows that these terms exist and indicates other terms they may relate to. Likewise, even if a topic does not appear to have a singular, clear theme, there are often salient terms associated with them which appear to potentially be meaningfully related to each other.

Based on these topic models, a researcher can infer that contained within the corpus are tweets referring to feminism, specific protests, forms of organisation, ways of interacting and sharing, women and girls, access to STEM, Donald Trump, and a lot of text which seems to indicate a positive sentiment and celebratory tone. Depending on their specific

research goals, questions and analytic/theoretical approach, a researcher might find a great deal of different starting points in these outputs for follow up. In my case, the recurring use of terms appearing to indicate positivity and celebration were interesting to me, and I thought that they might provide an analytically interesting area alongside my predetermined topic of misogyny and antifeminism. Other researchers may see in these outputs more relatively interesting areas for follow up and would go on to search the corpus for samples of tweets containing these respective salient keywords. I will discuss my thoughts on the LDA process in more detail during the conclusion of this chapter, after I have discussed the outputs for Corpus B, my second corpus which contained all unique tweets regardless of how many times they were retweeted.

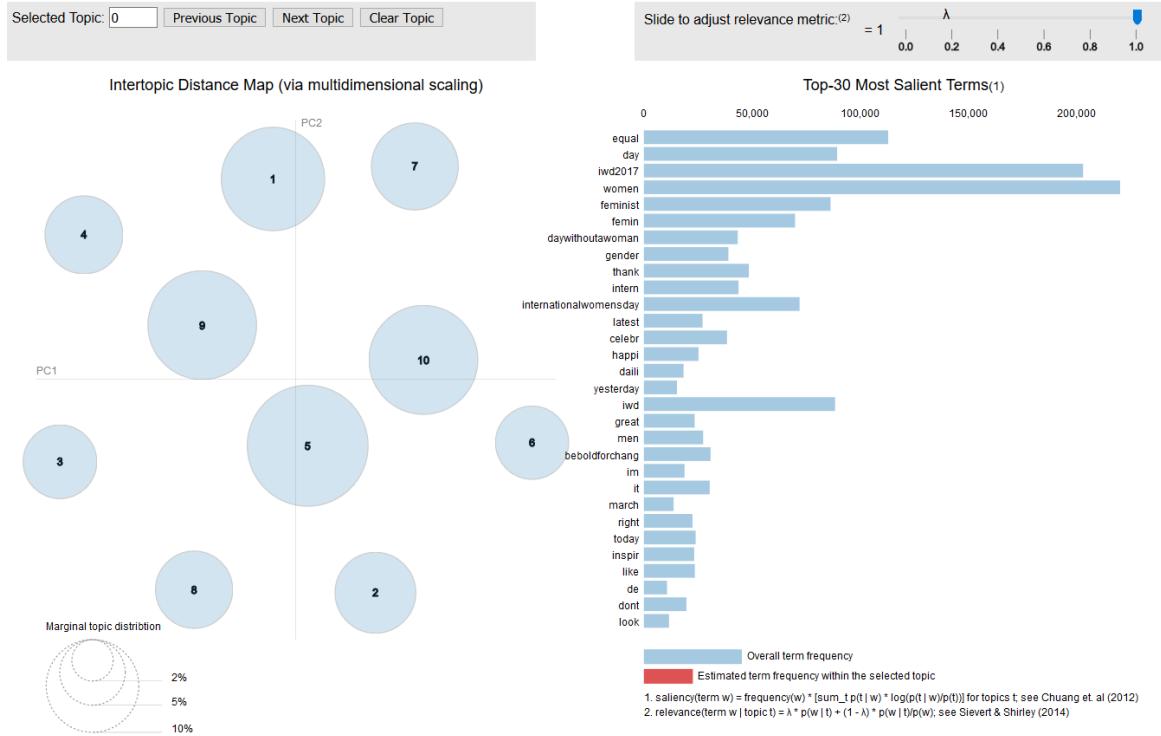
### **Overview of Corpus B:**

As I have said before, I found this method quite novel. Having come from a background that has generally approached digital sociology by combining qualitative analysis with data collection and management strategies which have been fairly established in the discipline for years, generally in the form of using Google searches, copying user generated data directly from forums and treating it as one would other bodies of text. For example, my undergraduate dissertation involved browsing 4chan posts and anti-feminist reddit pages, searching for analytically interesting data in more-or-less the same manner that a user would. This, combined with the relative lack of literature on using topic modelling in conjunction with qualitative analysis, left me with a somewhat ad-hoc approach, where I was consistently surprised, challenged and intrigued by the tools I was using and their capabilities.

During the process of producing these topic models, it occurred to me that I could use topic modelling to investigate what effect my data cleaning processes had on the actual topical content of my corpus. I thought that conducting a second LDA topic model for a larger, unprocessed corpus still containing all unique tweets, but retaining those tweets retweeted less than five times could not only provide methodological insight, but also allow me to see what kind of data was potentially being lost in the process of ‘tidying’. Here I will repeat the structure of the previous section, but with outputs derived from Corpus B (made up of roughly 1,060,000 unique tweets) and describe the differences and similarities with corpus A, as well as what the topic models for Corpus B may indicate about the themes of the data. What was immediately noticeable is that, with a few

exceptions, I found these outputs much harder to interpret clearly than those from Corpus A.

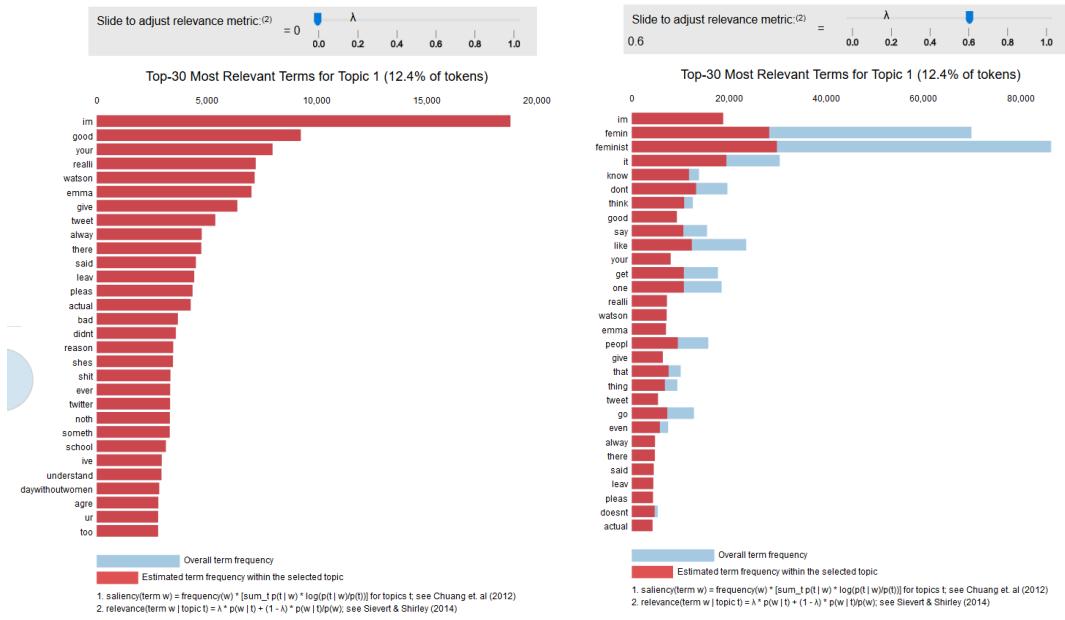
Figure 12: Overview of topic models for Corpus B



As shown by the inter-topic distance map, these topics are distributed quite widely, with no overlap, suggesting that they were quite distinct in the salient terms they contained. Comparing the overall most salient terms between corpuses 1 and 2 shows some differences. Most terms were shared by both: “woman”, “#iwd2017”, “feminist”, “day”, “feminism”, “#daywithoutawoman”, “gender”, “equal”, “#internationalwomensday”, “international”, “like”, “#iwd”, “great”, “#beboldforchange”, and “today” all occur in both (though as a result of ‘stemming’ some of the terms here are shortened). Looking back at corpus A “world”, “make”, “strong”, “get”, “leader”, “change” and “story” occur there, but not in corpus B. The terms found in B, but not A include: “thank”, “latest”, “men”, “it”, “don’t”, “I’m”, and “march”. What could be inferred here is that when topic modelling all unique tweets, rather than those which have at least five retweets, there is even less overlap in topics.

## Topic 1: Emma Watson and feminism

Figure 13: (Left) Topic 1 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 1 at  $\lambda=0.6$



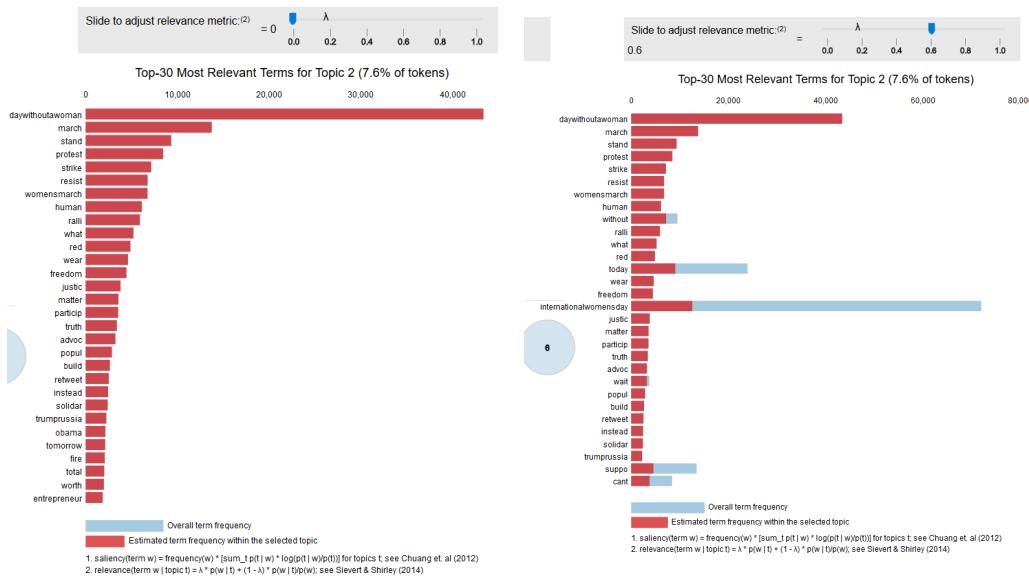
This topic may have a potentially clear theme: tweets pertaining to Emma Watson in relation to feminism. Around a third of all uses of “feminist” occur here, as well as a large proportion of the truncated “femin” keyword, and all instances of both “Emma” and “Watson”. Additionally: “good”, “bad”, “agree”, “she’s” “like” and “shit” are all marked as salient, in more cases with all instances grouped into this topic. Again, while there are likely many ways to interoperate and interrogate this output, I am inclined to read it as indicating that a significant proportion of the data contains tweets which mention Emma Watson, in relation to feminism, in a positive or negative way. Again, this is something that was reflected both in preliminary exploration of a random sample of data before the LDA analysis, and in the more in-depth searching of the corpus which took place after. In both cases, although this analysis was very preliminary, it suggested that Emma Watson was to some extent an ambivalent figure for some users in terms of how her activism related to feminism and feminist politics more broadly.

Why this topic does not appear in the outputs for Corpus A is unclear, possibly suggesting that this was a more ‘liminal’ topic in terms of what got retweeted more on IWD2017. Nonetheless, I think this may partly demonstrate how potentially interesting topics can still appear when a wider range of tweets are modelled in this way. While I did not focus on tweets discussing Emma Watson in more detail during my analysis, it could nonetheless present a potentially interesting avenue for further investigation, if a different researcher

were interested in the ways very prominent women associated with feminism were talked about on IWD2017, and if this links to wider debates about intersectionality, liberal feminism, antifeminism, celebrity culture, and so on.

## Topic 2: American Activism

Figure 14: (Left) Topic 2 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 2 at  $\lambda=0.6$



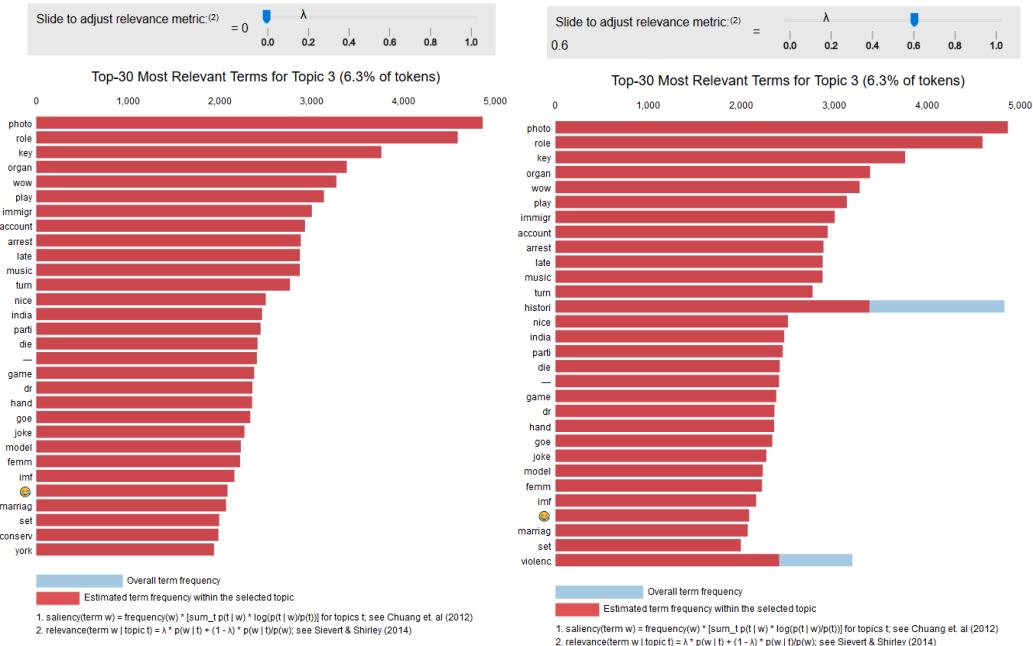
This topic appears to bear some similarity to topic 6 from Corpus A: both containing salient terms which may be related to the context of American politics, activism and protest on IWD2017. There are many terms here which appear to relate to this:

"#daywithoutawoman", "march", "stand", "protest", "strike", "resist", "#womensmarch", "red" (possibly in conjunction with "wear", relating to wearing red in relation to the protests as mentioned previously), "freedom", "justice", "participate", and "solidarity" all occur very strongly here. More specific to the American context there are other terms: "#trumprussia", a hashtag used to refer to Donald Trump's alleged political and financial links to the Russian state, and "Obama" also occur entirely in this topic.

One small but interesting point of comparison between this topic and topic 6 from Corpus A, is that while they are both potentially pertaining to similar topics of protest and activism in America on IWD2017, "Trump" does not appear in this topic, but does in its counterpart.

### Topic 3: Music, immigration, photos, violence, marriage, ‘die’

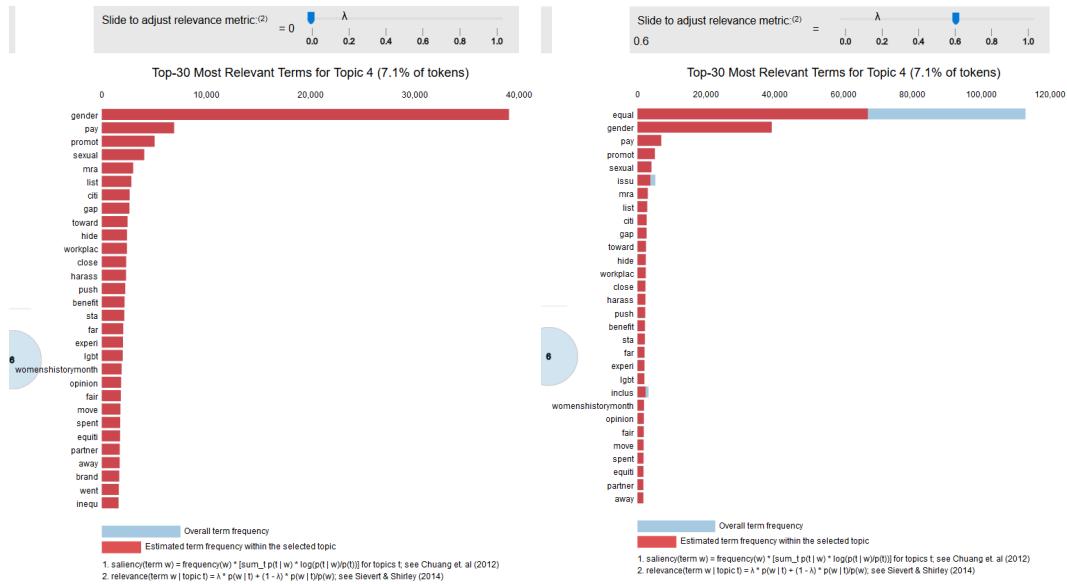
Figure 15: (Left) Topic 3 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 3 at  $\lambda=0.6$



This output, like several presented in this chapter, is quite hard for me to interpret in a meaningful or useful way in terms of how it may relate to a semi-cohesive topic. In addition, almost all the salient terms are identified as occurring mostly or completely in this topic, indicating that whatever it is possibly covering may be highly specific. What we are presented with seems to be more in line with LDA outputs as a ‘word association game’, in the manner I mentioned earlier in the chapter. Proceeding in this manner, it is still possible to infer some potential links between salient terms, which may indicate a theme or themes which a researcher could explore in more detail. For example, some of the terms could be read as indicating tweets mentioning domestic violence (“marriage”, “violence”, “arrest”, “die” are all salient) or media (“photo”, “music”, “play”). Overall however, this topic is especially difficult for me to interpret meaningfully, although this may be different for other researchers with different specific knowledge and research topics.

## Topic 4: The gender pay-gap and workplace sexual harassment

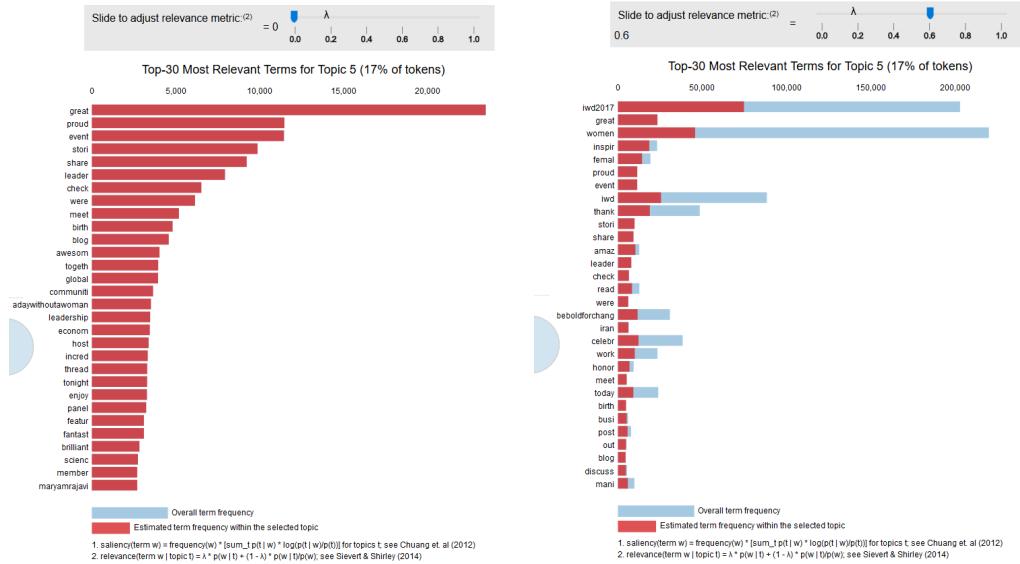
Figure 16: (Left) Topic 4 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 4 at  $\lambda=0.6$



In contrast to the previous topic, this topic appears to be potentially clearer in terms of the theme it may be indicating: that of gender in a workplace context, including sexual harassment and the gender pay gap. This can be inferred from the presence and salience of numerous terms: “equal”, “gender”, “pay” and “gap” primarily, but also “promot(ion)”, “sexual” and “harass”. In this context, more general salient terms could be read as relating to these issues, such as “opinion”, “benefit”, “close” (possibly “close the gender pay gap”), “experi(ence)”, and “inclus(ion)”, while “push” and “move” may be occurring in a figurative context related to these issues. For me, this appears to be one of the most cohesive topics presented in this chapter, potentially indicating that these issues were one of the clearer topics on IWD2017. While this is not necessarily surprising given the context of IWD2017, this topic model could still be useful for a researcher who was specifically interested in how these issues figured in tweets on the day. Aside from suggesting in a somewhat substantive way that this may be a topic, it might also suggest that this topic was more prominent in tweets which did not necessarily receive many retweets, as this topic does not appear as prominently in the Corpus A outputs. Additionally, the salient terms list may provide an indication as to which search terms a researcher could begin with if they were interested in exploring this potential topic in more depth.

## Topic 5: Positivity and celebration

Figure 17: (Left) Topic 5 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 5 at  $\lambda=0.6$



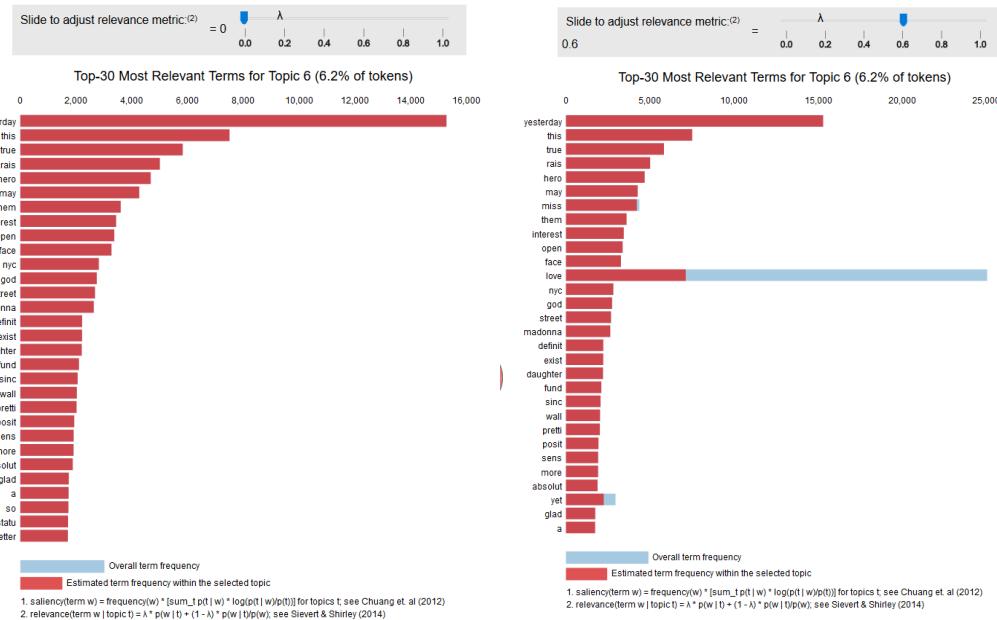
As seen in a few topics from Corpus A, but particularly topic 1, this topic appears to pertain to positivity and celebration which involved use of the “IWD2017” hashtag. Many salient terms appear to link to this, notably “great”, “women”, “inspir(ational)”, “incred(ible)”, “femal(e)”, “proud”, “thank”, “honor”, “celebr(ate)”, and “amaz(ing)” all potentially suggest some kind of positive or celebratory text. In this context, other salient terms may potentially link to this in certain ways, for example “share”, “stori(es)”, “check”, “read”, “work”, “discuss”, “togeth(er)” and “blog” may indicate that this positivity and celebration co-occurs with terms related to these sorts of actions, related to reading, sharing or stories/information, and discussion.

Beyond these terms, others potentially indicate a link to particular spheres where this celebration of women could be being directed: “leader”, “busi(ness)”, “panel”, “scienc(e)”, “host”, “leadership”, “global” and “econom(ic)” may indicate that the celebration potentially identified in this topic is directed toward women in global leadership positions in business, science and economic spheres, for example. Adjacent to this is what appears to be a direct reference a specific, identifiable woman, via what appears to be a hashtag: “#MaryamRajavi”, and the salience of “Iran”. This appears to refer to Maryam Rajavi, an Iranian political activist opposed to the current Iranian government, and her salience here

may indicate that she was especially mentioned in reference to the celebration of women in this global context<sup>44</sup>.

## Topic 6: Yesterday

Figure 18: (Left) Topic 6 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 6 at  $\lambda=0.6$

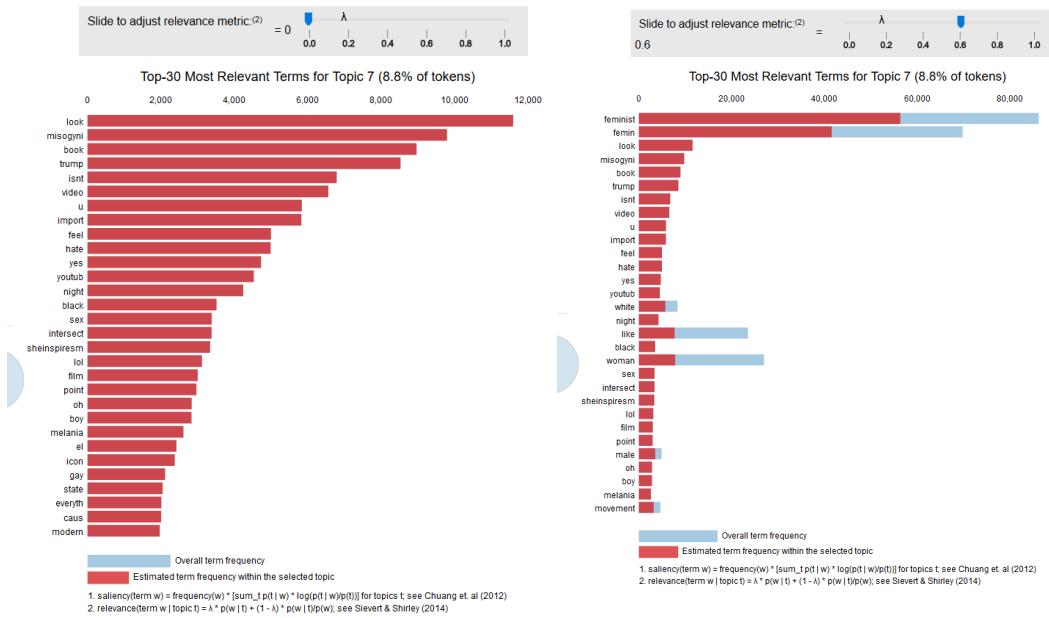


Similar to topic 3, I find this particular topic quite unclear and difficult to interpret meaningfully, and the salient terms also appear to be highly specific to this topic, with all but two terms having no frequency across the rest of the corpus. Given that the highest frequency term by far is “yesterday”, this may be a case of the model grouping together tweets that mentioned or made reference to the day before IWD2017, or possibly IWD2017 itself given that I collected data in a 48-hour window around the day based on GMT.

<sup>44</sup> Specifically, Rajavi is the President-elect of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, which describes itself as “the parliament-in-exile” of Iran. Based on the website of this organisation, their stated position on the social and political rights of women and girls appears concerned with equality in political and economic participation, freedom from various forms of violence, freedom to choose one’s garments, and related progressive issues. For more information, see <https://www.maryam-rajavi.com/en/viewpoints/women-rights-iran> and <https://www.maryam-rajavi.com/en/biography>

## Topic 7: Feminism, misogyny, Trump and conflicts

Figure 19: (Left) Topic 7 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 7 at  $\lambda=0.6$



The topic appears to relate to tweets which mention feminism and feminists, these being salient terms which occur here more so than in other topics. Beyond this, other salient terms may suggest that this topic contains tweets relating feminism/feminists to broader political and social topics, possibly related to the Trump presidency. Both “Trump” and “Melania” (Donald Trump’s wife) are salient here, as are terms that may suggest that gender, misogyny and possibly race/sexuality may feature in the topic, such as “misogyni(st/ic)”, “hate”, “white”, “black”, “woman”, “sex”, “intersect(ional)”, “male”, “boy”, “movement” and “gay”. Overall, this topic may suggest that a proportion of tweets mentioning feminism and feminists did so in relation to these terms.

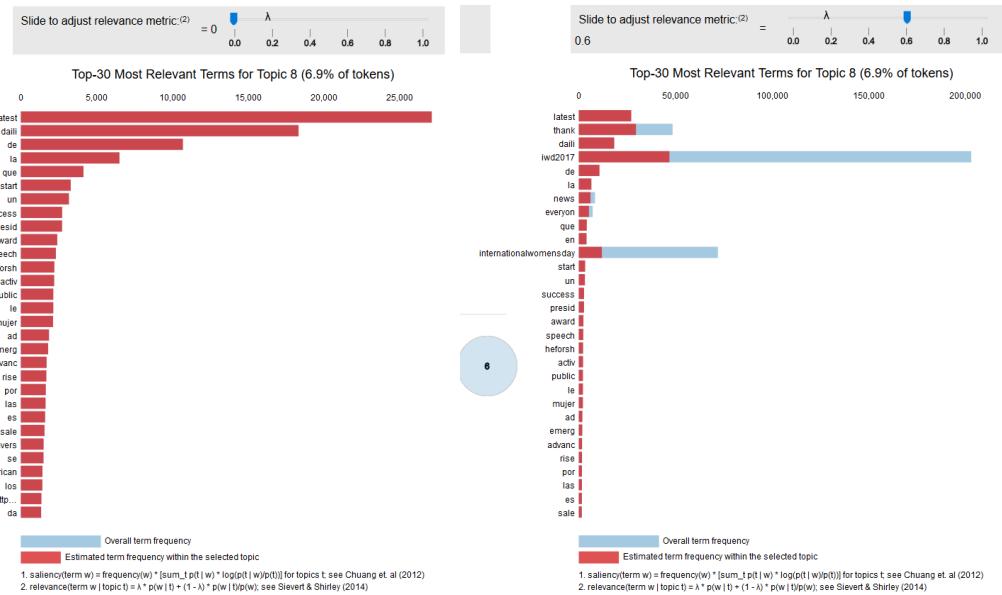
A few other salient terms seem interesting in this context: “#sheinspiresm(e)” may possibly be related to Melania Trump, given that she is a prominent woman in a position of nominal political power closely related to a powerful man. Both “YouTub(e)” and “video” are salient here, suggesting these tweets may have utilised embedded YouTube links or mentioned the platform or particular videos. Additionally, “lol” is identified as salient here, though how this related to the topic (if at all) would require more detailed exploration and analysis.

For me, this topic presented an interesting hook for deeper exploration and analysis, specifically an exploration of how these issues of Trump, feminism, misogyny and so on

could be seen in tweets. Given that one of my goals for this project was an exploration and critique of misogyny and antifeminism, it was this further analysis which lead to the selection of many final cases for the discourse analysis I finally undertook in this project.

## Topic 8: More non-Anglophone discourse and methodological issues

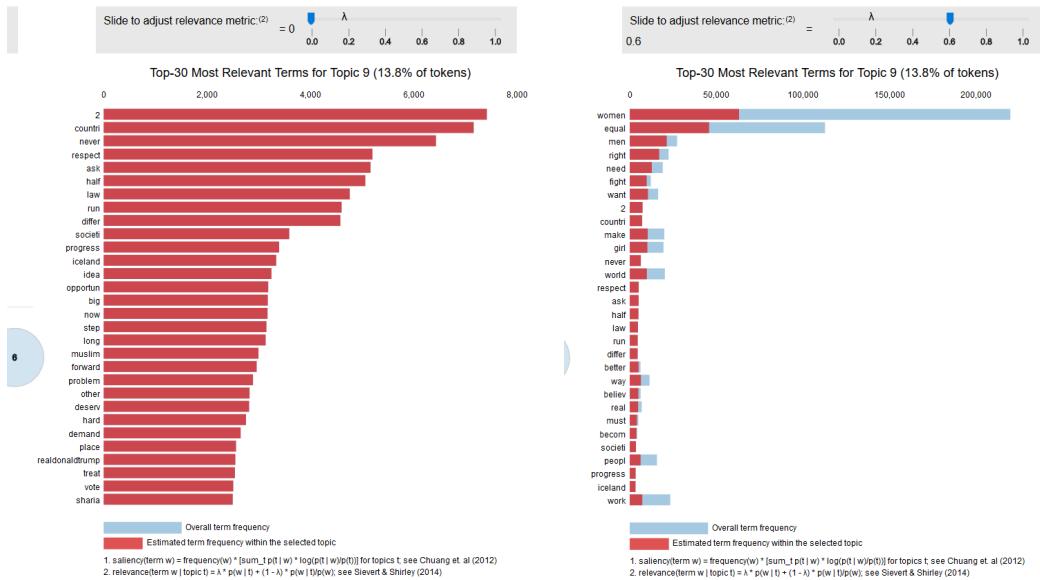
Figure 20: (Left) Topic 8 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 8 at  $\lambda=0.6$



Like topic 9 from Corpus A, this topic appears to be a result of the LDA process bringing together non-English language tweets into its own topic, with many of the same terms occurring here, and the resulting issues of that topic seem to apply here to. A notable feature here though is that the salient terms which tend to also occur outside of this topic ("thank", "#IWD2017" and "#internationalwomensday") are very general, potentially supporting the possibility that this topic is the result of the LDA process interpreting tweets mentioning the day in non-English languages as their own topic.

## Topic 9: Women, men and equality

Figure 21: (Left) Topic 9 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 9 at  $\lambda=0.6$

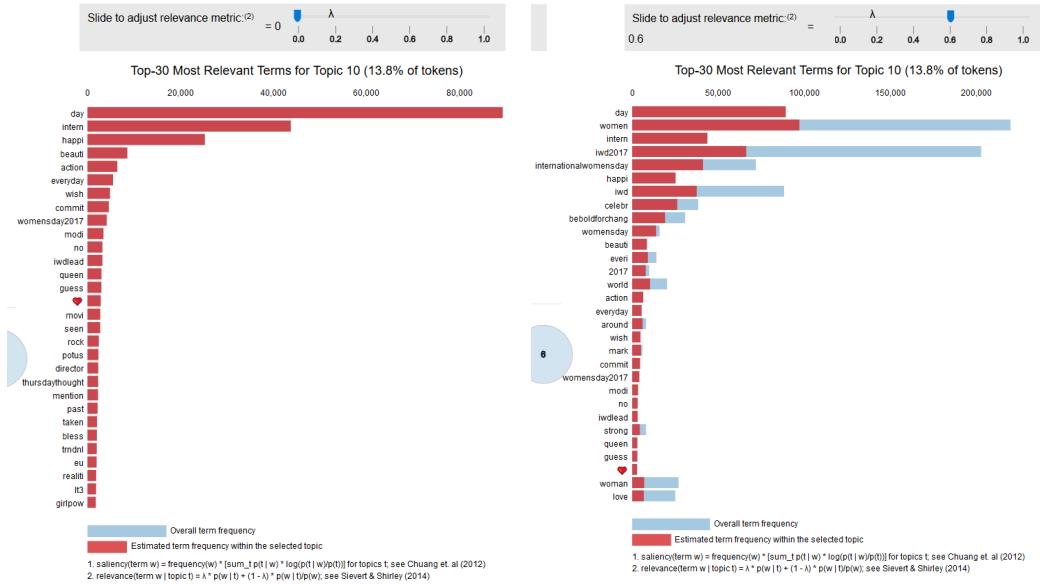


Several terms in this topic suggest that it may be related to tweets mentioning gender equality, possibly in a broader political context, and perhaps in a sense that is calling for progressive change. Terms which appear to relate to gender politics include the more direct “women”, “equal”, “men”, but also terms such as “right” (possibly referring to civil rights and so on), “need”, “fight”, “want”, “demand” (possibly referring to necessity or desire for equality, and the fight for it), “respect”, “law”, “must”, “better”, “forward”, “problem” and “progress”. Other tweets potentially situate this in a world or national context, for example “country(es)”, “world”, “society(es)” and “Iceland”.

Additionally, “@RealDonaldTrump” (Donald Trump’s Twitter username) may suggest that some of the tweets in this topic were directed at him or quote tweeting him in some way, so again Trump can be seen as potentially featuring in a topic. Another relatively specific but potentially interesting feature of this topic appears to be the salience of both “Muslim” and “Sharia”. The co-occurrence of these terms, in roughly equal frequency, is especially interesting given the way in which Sharia Law is framed as a topic within anti-Muslim discourse. This again was a feature of a topic which I chose to investigate in greater detail, going on to analyse tweets which talked about Trump, feminism and Islam.

## Topic 10: More celebration on IWD2017

Figure 22: (Left) Topic 10 at  $\lambda=0.0$ , (Right) Topic 10 at  $\lambda=0.6$



Like topic 5 in Corpus B and topic 1 in Corpus A, this topic appears to reflect tweets which featured some kind of celebratory or positive text, in relation to IWD2017 and featuring the use of official hashtags. Many salient terms suggest that these tweets tended to mention IWD2017 in some way: “day”, “women”, “intern(ational)”, “#IWD2017”, “#InternationalWomensDay” and “#IWD” all appear in relatively large frequency, while less frequent salient terms also appear to suggest this, such as “#BeBoldForChange”, “#WomensDay”, “2017”, and “#WomensDay2017”. Celebration and positivity can be inferred from the presence of salient terms which appear to suggest positive sentiment: “happi(ness)”, “celebr(at/ion)”, “beauti(ful)”, “(love heart symbol)”, “love”, “wish” and “bless” could be interpreted in this way. Additionally, “queen” could be interpreted in this context as possibly being used in an informal sense to denote a woman as worthy of praise etc. rather than to refer to anyone possessing that title officially.

The presence of topics which appeared to comprise positive and celebratory tweets across both corpora was again interesting to me from an analytical perspective, and I decided to investigate them in further detail. There were several motivations for this. Being apparently prominent across the LDA outputs suggested that they made up a large amount of the tweets which related to IWD2017, and therefore seemed like a logical area to investigate in more detail, while from an analytic standpoint the analysis of ‘positive’ tweets alongside

tweets potentially related to Trump, antifeminism and so on also seemed interesting. As such, I decided to focus on positivity and celebration in tweets for my deeper analysis.

### **Reflection on Corpus B topic models, and the LDA process as a whole**

While a detailed, systemic review of LDA as a method and the differences between outputs from my corpuses is outside of the goals and scope of this project, there are still some tentative observations I can make, having conducted this very preliminary form of analysis. The difference between these corpuses is that all tweets contained in Corpus A ( $N =$  approximately 49,000) were retweeted at least 5 times at the point of collection, while this condition was not applied to the tweets contained in Corpus B ( $N =$  approximately 1,060,000). However, what effect if any either the differences in scale or ‘popularity’ between the corpuses had on the LDA process is unclear. Overall, my impression is that while both corpora have produced outputs which are occasionally difficult to interpret as suggesting more cohesive themes, Corpus B seems lightly more prone to this. More so than Corpus A, Corpus B’s topic models appear slightly more prone to being especially nebulous. Potentially, this could be influenced by the tweets in Corpus A receiving more retweets, or by the difference in size between the two.

This is not to suggest that the topic models which appear ‘clearer’ and ‘more cohesive’ can be treated in an uncritical way. Throughout this chapter I have endeavoured to communicate my hesitancy and reluctance to treat these topic models as reflecting the thematic and topical content of the corpuses in a direct, uncomplicated way. LDA is one of many algorithmic processes which potentially allow a lone qualitative researcher to get a ‘10,000 metre’ view of very large textual datasets, one which would be practically impossible otherwise. Treated this way, this process has produced outputs and surface-level data description which is at the very least *interesting*. Based on these outputs we can infer, however tentatively, that a range of topics, several of them quite intelligible and intuitive given the context, are present somewhere within the tens of thousands of tweets (and potentially millions of words) that make up these data. I went on to explore only a few broad ‘non-trivial’<sup>45</sup> topics which appeared to be present in these models: tweets related to positivity and celebration, tweets related to Trump, and tweets related to feminism.

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<sup>45</sup> Here I use ‘non-trivial’ in the sense that these topics contained tweets that were more widely retweeted, appeared to be more popular over the course of my collection, and/or appeared more cohesive and meaningful in the context of my research goals.

Other researchers with other goals could explore completely different topics based on these same outputs, and through iterative exploration and further preliminary analysis arrive at a totally different final selection of cases for detailed qualitative analysis. It is worth mentioning that my final selection of cases reflected a tiny selection of the overall corpuses, roughly 100 individual tweets.<sup>46</sup> Corpus A alone contains roughly 49,000 tweets, meaning nearly 500 similarly sized final selections could be performed from the same data, without ever selecting the same individual tweets.

An obvious limitation of the work I have presented here is likely how I may have underutilised LDA in the process of case selection, surface level analysis and data exploration. It is quite conceivable that I could have, for example, created numerous sub-corpora based on certain keywords, or pre-processed my data by geographic region and timeframe, and processed them using LDA. What topics are present purely for tweets mentioning “Trump”, or “feminism”, or “equality”? In this sense, my use of LDA has been limited to only the very surface level preliminary analysis and description, but it could conceivably have been used in this manner as well. My reason for avoiding this is primarily that I did not want to utilise a tool in more aspects of my methodology than seemed necessary, given LDA’s lack of wide application in the qualitative social sciences, especially before the publication of Davidson et al (2018). Potentially, the other ways LDA could be utilised in this kind of study present further areas for investigation.

Overall, I consider this tentative exploration of LDA as a tool for conducting preliminary analysis and data description of a very large textual corpus to be one of the main findings of this project. As a researcher, it has allowed me to take a seemingly insurmountably large quantity of textual data and gain a cautious but vital overview of the kind of topics it may contain. While I conducted this process before the publication of Davidson et al (2018), the use of this tool as part of a qualitative methodology for analysing large datasets is very much in line with the method outlined by those authors in their own study, which I discussed to some extent in my methodology chapter. A key difference in my case is the use of LDA as a specific algorithmic tool, and its application to a large corpus of social media data in the form of tweets. Potentially, what I have presented here may represent a workable, useful approach that could contribute meaningfully to qualitative work on large

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<sup>46</sup> Despite the relatively small size of this final selection, it may still be seen as broadly representing at least three large topics within my overall corpora.

quantities of social media data, useful to other researchers working towards a more systematic approach to performing detailed, qualitative analysis in this field.

## Vignette #1: Ghosts in Boulder

"The most Gothic description of Capital is also the most accurate. Capital is an abstract parasite, an insatiable vampire and zombie-maker; but the living flesh it converts into dead labour is ours, and the zombies it makes are us." (Fisher, 2009)

In 2017, I went to America. Being a researcher who seems to have gone to great lengths to interact with people as little as possible in my work, I had never suspected that I would seriously attempt fieldwork. And yet, despite spending my entire postgraduate studies reading the online utterances of people I will never know, I found myself on a plane to attend a conference where I would observe them directly. Not an academic conference, an industry conference; a coming together of people who work for and operate companies related to the social media industry. 'Big Boulder 2017' was a conference held in Boulder Colorado, on June 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> that year, this would be the 6<sup>th</sup> annual conference, its mission "To establish the foundation for the long-term success of the social data industry" (BBI, 2017, p.36). I went hoping to network, to make contacts inside the industry who I could then interview about the topics covered in my project, my goal was to see how industry insiders perceived issues of misogyny and hate speech on their platforms.

These interviews did not materialise. I quickly came to feel that these delegates, mostly people completely enmeshed in the social media industry, had little interest in having their brains picked by a left-wing sociologist who had nothing to offer them. Far from a failure though, I have come to feel that this trip was something quite profound: an opportunity to move among the architects of contemporary digital capitalism in their own gated environment. What I present in this short chapter is the first of three *vignettes* which punctuate the substantive chapters of this thesis. In these vignettes I will relay to the reader my experiences of being in this privileged and sometimes surreal environment, based on my fieldnotes and the two years I have spent ruminating on the things which transpired there. I hope that the more narrative and 'free' style of prose I adopt here will serve to communicate the strong feelings I have come to have about this experience.

Having been trained in the methods of fieldwork and ethnography during my studies, and taught undergraduates on the same topics, I hear it repeated that part of the process of ethnographic work is to 'make the familiar strange': to open up the taken for granted

elements of a social setting, to see it as an outsider, and so on. While a long weekend hardly amounts to an ethnography, I will still draw on this technique in discussing the time I spent in this setting. In making this setting ‘strange’ I will be primarily drawing on work outside of ethnography, namely concepts of ‘the weird and the eerie’ found in radical cultural critique (Fisher, 2016). Here the weird and the eerie are treated as certain frameworks for critiquing and conceptualising the culture and settings of contemporary capitalism, drawing on Freud’s concept of the *uncanny*, they are highly concerned with the boundaries and interactions between the familiar and the strange.

In the briefest terms, the weird and the eerie are kinds of phenomena that occur when we encounter things in our daily lives which can be read as somehow strange, odd or unsettling: often in the forms of strange presences and absences, or the traces of agency which does not seem to come from humans. Consequently, being aware of the weird and the eerie can “allow us to see the inside from the perspective of the outside” (p.10). For Fisher, the weird is that which “brings to the familiar something which ordinarily lies beyond it, and which cannot be reconciled” (p.10), while the eerie concerns situations where agency and habitation are called into question by something from outside, “in a straightforwardly empirical as well as a more abstract transcendental sense” (p.11).

These concepts are deeply rooted in how we experience contemporary capitalism as human subjects: the often weird locations and arrangements of work, leisure and consumption, the eeriness of automation and digital technology, or simply of capitalism itself, that *thing* which though “conjured out of nothing... nevertheless exerts more influence than any allegedly substantial entity” (p.11), in the outcomes it seems to produce without direct human intention. What can be said to unite these overlapping concepts is how they relate to presence: the weird being a presence of something where it should not be - or in a way that exceeds our ability to represent it – and the eerie being a failure of something to be absent or present (p.61). As these fieldwork chapters will hopefully demonstrate, my time in Boulder was full of occasions where I encountered the weird and the eerie; present or absent in the places I went, the interactions I had and the things people were assembled to do in this very strange place and time.

The opening quote, also by the late social theorist Mark Fisher<sup>47</sup>, from his text on the nature of contemporary capitalism, has come to frame the things I experienced in Boulder. ‘Gothic descriptions of Capital’ are not especially new in Marxist theory, having a lineage dating back to Marx himself. In the Communist Manifesto (1967), Communism is famously a ‘spectre’ which ‘haunts’ old-Europe’s ancient reactionary powers with its revolutionary potential, who oppose it in a ‘Holy alliance’ of the proletarians’ class enemies. In *Eighteenth Brumaire* (1937), Marx lays on the language of horror in analysing the tragedy and/or farce that was the election of Bonaparte’s nephew. The retreat from revolutionary opportunity, back into the memories of lost French imperial glory which Louis Napoleon symbolised, is described as a “conjuring up of the dead” (p.5): Bonaparte’s cadaver brought back up from the grave, a sad parody of its former self. Indeed, from Marx’s perspective we are haunted by the dead, their traditions “weighing like a nightmare on the brains of the living” (p.5), a nightmare that limits our ability to even imagine an alternative, unable to transcend the stifling traditions of those who came before us. No matter how hard we may try, we remain haunted.

Boulder too was haunted. A small, leafy city an hour or so from Denver, sitting in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains: spectres of deep time that cut the horizon. A conference delegate quipped to me that Boulder was founded by those pioneering settlers who, upon seeing something so imposing it could have been shaped by the hand of God, said “Yeah, this is far enough West”. Those settlers and their successors conjured up the dead in how they named their streets. Chippewa drive, Pawnee drive, Mohawk drive, Sioux drive, Hopi place, Kiowa place, Inca parkway, Arapaho avenue; oblique memorials to dead indigenous people. Someone could drive for hours, past nice bourgeois houses with big lawns and down multi-lane arterial roads, over the names of people laid low by colonial genocide.

The dead found their way into my visit in other ways too. In 1996, A few blocks away from my hotel (its decor eerily echoing *The Shining*’s ‘Overlook Hotel’), the child beauty queen JonBenét Ramsey was found dead in the basement of one of those nice bourgeois houses, murdered at age six, her killer unknown to this day. After the conference, someone told me over drinks that shortly before my arrival in Boulder a man was shot to death in the city, supposedly killed by a Trump supporter following an argument at a party. The same day I was told this, the 2017 London Bridge terrorist attack occurred. Even Denver

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<sup>47</sup> Fisher, an influential academic writer on the topics of capitalism, critical theory and culture, committed suicide in 2017. Much of Fisher’s writing discussed his experiences of long-term depression and mental illness, framed in the context of being forced to exist under capitalism.

international airport set an unreal and eerie tone: its famously weird murals depicting apocalyptic scenes of tyranny and genocide alongside esoteric symbols, in a visual narrative of progress toward world peace. Conspiracy theorists have alleged over the years that the airport is everything from some kind of secret base for the New World Order and Illuminati, to the entrance to a world of our subterranean reptile masters.

A day before the conference began in earnest there was a drinks mixer scheduled at Twitter's Boulder headquarters. Walking there from my hotel was its own undertaking; as is often the case with American cities, distance is amplified relative to what you experience in Britain. Having been born and raised in a tiny village on a remote Scottish island, I feel this was acutely the case for me. The sheer size of America necessitates a different concept of space as it relates to anyone set on walking, and what looked like fifteen minutes turned into a near-hour trek down immaculately clean yet practically abandoned footpaths. Past the supermarkets, strip malls and warehouse-sized retail outlets that spread out from my hotel, a pedestrian passes across multi-lane arterial roads toward 'Old Boulder', close to which sits Twitter's HQ. This area was immediately different: crossing the bridge over Boulder Creek lead me into an area of fancy cafes and bistros, busy with the consumer foot-traffic of a balmy Wednesday evening.

I navigated my way through a 'farmers market' of fresh produce stalls that seemed wholly out of place, down a highstreet of quaint red-brick buildings containing upmarket shops. Days later a fellow delegate remarked humorously that this market, and much of Boulder itself, is what Americans describe as 'crunchy': possessing a kind of petit-bourgeois, commodified hippie aesthetic and character. Twitter's HQ itself was hard to locate. One floor of several in a featureless, opaque office building a couple blocks further along, covered in signs proclaiming: "office space for lease". I recall only recognising the correct building by the attendants standing inside behind the glass-fronted doors, dressed as they were in t-shirts bearing Twitter's logo. I was welcomed in and shown to an upscale open-plan office a few floors above street level, which had been set aside for the delegates to meet and mingle. Floor to ceiling windows offered a stunning view of the Rocky Mountains and the city itself, which stretched out toward their foothills.

Having arrived early I made what awkward conversation I could with the few delegates there, principally a young woman and man, who I later learned were some of the principle organisers of the conference and members of BBI's board of directors. They were exceedingly friendly, talking openly about their work, enthusiastically asking questions

about my research, professing their interest in what I did: “Oh you’re in academia? You’ll love a speaker we have on day two!”. As more delegates arrived however, attention shifted to them, and I was politely left on my own. Suddenly surrounded by these tech-industry professionals, I felt acutely out of place: out of my depth professionally, culturally and socially. I moved around, trying to find a delegate or a group who would engage me in conversation past the point they seemed to realise that networking with me had little chance of yielding a return on time invested.

Short conversations, looming at the edge of groups, and conversations overheard. A man drinking from a water bottle labelled “#WATERBOTTLE”, casually remarking that he went for a two-hour jog up a mountain that morning. Another delegate who, upon my asking what work they did, replied with deadpan irony and a chuckle: “I exploit users’ data for profit on behalf of corporations”. At another point I ended up looming at the edge of a group, overhearing a discussion on the potential for Twitter to start actively lobbying US politicians. Clearly, this was not so much an environment for social researchers, but rather the kind of space where business networking takes place. There were points of mutual interest however, mostly around our experiences of doing research on social media data. What they had to say on the matter was mostly similar to things I had heard in academic settings; context is a problem online, how can sentiment analysis detect irony? We need to work more with data scientists, and so on. What seemed conspicuously absent from many of these conversations was much of a concern for the ethical implications which come with the extraction of value from user data. While ethical issues would emerge at several times over the next few days, I left the event that evening feeling unnerved at the prospect of people handling vast quantities of data for commercial purposes, with apparently little more to say about it than an ironic aside about profiteering on behalf of companies.

Leaving the networking event, I returned to my hotel. Being in this environment, among people active in an industry with goals and views so different to my own, had been an acutely alienating culture shock. Up to and following this trip to Boulder, the majority of people inclined toward digital research with whom I have interacted with have been of a very different nature: academics, researchers, journalists, generally motivated by curiosity or politics, usually with an inclination toward how data can serve the public good, generally with a concern for people’s rights, and almost always possessing some deep ethical concerns for the potential of data in systems of control and profit. This was very different. I felt an acute sense of my own naivete, and a sense of something like horror, having had even a brief interaction with people involved in an industry which seemed to

openly and happily engage in practices which affronted me so seriously. This sense of horror would expand greatly over the coming days, as the conference seemed to reveal more; not only the specific data and analytic practices of the social media industry, but also the specific culture which seems to surround it. Much has been said about the supposed “crisis of empirical sociology” (Savage & Burrows, 2007, Burrows & Savage, 2014), the challenge posed to social research by industries such as the one I was in proximity to, industries that are generally enmeshed with capital and surveillance. The next few days would starkly illustrate the nature of this crisis to me.

# Chapter 6: Positivity as a void

## Case selection

The tweets analysed in this chapter have been grouped together based on a frame I am calling “positivity”. In practical terms, this is because they contained keywords identified as salient by the LDA process within the “positivity” topic area. As discussed in the previous chapter, one prominent topic area identified by the LDA process appeared to encompass tweets which had a positive, celebratory tone, and as such I labelled the topic area as “positivity”. In addition to selecting tweets based on my coding, I also present and briefly analyse a selection of tweets I collected *incidentally* to my formal data collection process, collecting them while searching twitter for the original instances of tweets I was interested in using. I will briefly analyse these incidental tweets as a preamble to my more substantive analysis, as I feel that they highlight some of the discursive elements found in my main corpus, and how they relate to positivity and celebration in the context of this chapter. Although these incidental tweets were not produced by my initial data collection and sampling, I do not see this as questioning the robustness of my data collection and sampling methodology. Firstly because they are not treated as analytically substantive in the same way as my main body of data, and secondly because finding them was not a complete accident: they were found as a direct result of the stage in my methodology where I searched Twitter to confirm that the tweets from my sample which I wanted to use still existed. My main analysis will be split into three subsections on the *genres, styles* and *discourses* found in these tweets (see Fairclough, 2003), but before progressing to this point, I will outline my critical position on ‘positivity’ that has guided much of this process, and engage in some brief analysis of a document produced by the United Nations affiliated website dedicated to International Women’s Day, which outlines how corporations, NGOs and so on are encouraged to tweet on IWD2017.

## On positivity

In purposively refining the thousands of tweets from this topic down to something manageable for a qualitative analysis I have chosen to take this somewhat cynical view of positivity, selecting tweets which I will use to highlight how problematic ostensibly positive and celebratory discourse can be in this context. To paraphrase Billig’s (2001) caveat in his

work on white supremacist humour: just because I am referring to these tweets as “positive”, this does not mean I think they are at all meaningfully beneficial or authentic in whatever form of positivity they seem to express.

Having written quite extensively on critiques of laughter and humour, it makes sense that the aforementioned Michael Billig has also produced critiques of the general discourses of positivity that are increasingly pervasive in society. In *Positive psychology: ‘Humour and the virtues of negative thinking’* (2018), Billig draws upon and develops the work of the Frankfurt School, especially Marcuse, who collectively took a dim view of “the positive virtues of accepted sense” (p.3). In a contemporary context, this takes the form of a kind of pervasive managerialism which draws upon the work of positive psychologists such as Martin Seligman (as well as the writings of Norman Vincent Peale and similar “self-help” writers), and related cultural attitudes which see a positive outlook as wholesome, beneficial and common sense. For Billig this position, which advocates and reproduces a kind of banal, individualised, conformist approach to happiness, is seen as ideological, fitting with “the neoliberal thinking of advanced capitalism” (p.4): and names it “ideological positivism”, not to be confused with the similarly named theory of knowledge. This ideology, which I believe much of what will be presented in this chapter reflects, is partly driven by approaches to psychology that are especially popular within the worlds of business and management, and construct positivity as something that can “bring economic success to individuals” (p.5) in a way that is totally divorced from critical perspectives, collective action or political ideas that run counter to the neoliberal status quo. Under ideological positivism, negative feelings which are the result of social processes are reduced to purely individual problems, and solving them treated as a matter of adjusting one’s outlook and attitude, by adopting a positive and resilient attitude, a process of “personal rather than social change” (p.9). This political disempowerment is troubling for those of us who seek to adopt a critical attitude to contemporary capitalism, and by extension patriarchy and gender relations.

In a broader sense, a certain cynicism in popular notions of positivity can also be found in philosophy. In his philosophical treatise on the existential hopelessness of the human condition, *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race* (2011), horror writer Thomas Ligotti advances a deeply bleak critique of any ‘positive’ appraisal of existence, a critique that draws on the somewhat niche field of philosophical pessimism. Being a modern horror writer, Ligotti’s prose is designed to provoke a sense of alienation in the reader, even when writing non-fiction. For Ligotti and others who have “gone to the pains of arguing for

a sullen appraisal of life” (p.14), human beings are pitiable, trapped in a state of self-awareness from which they cannot escape, their lives defined by suffering, angst and ennui by virtue of (unlike other organisms) having been born with *consciousness*, the “parent of all horrors” (p.15). In spite of this, and presumably to the frustration of existential pessimists, humans on the whole “have an unfalteringly good opinion of themselves and their condition... steadfastly confident that they are not a collection of self-conscious nothings” (p.14). Why am I drawing on such esoteric, niche philosophy? While Ligotti’s work lacks much in the way of substantive political-material critique, what it does contain is a profound hostility toward positivity, particularly positivity that serves to distract or reassure people from just how bleak and dire their situation ultimately is. As Ligotti puts it: “We must be happy, we must imagine Sisyphus to be happy... Positive illusions for positive persons” (p.277). While I am not seeking to make any explicit arguments about existential philosophy, I feel that in the context of my research a general scepticism toward positivity, of viewing it as a poor response to the issues of life in a world that is systematically unequal, oppressive, patriarchal and so on, is not only justified but necessary. I will return to Ligotti in a moment, but first I will discuss a more sociological critique of positivity.

Despite the disciplinary gulf between Ligotti and Billig, an explicit critique of this kind of ideological positivism and positive psychology typified by the work of Martin Seligman, Normal Vincent Peale and others is found in both. For Ligotti the existence and enduring popularity of such genres is indicative of the profound, natural dissatisfaction many feel toward a “deficiency of meaning” (Ligotti, 2011, p.39) at the nature of their lives, who they are, what they do and the universe they are forced to occupy as conscious beings. Again, while unlike Billig, Ligotti does not relate this dissatisfaction and alienation to the particulars of life under modern capitalism, he nonetheless confronts us with a perspective that is ruthlessly sceptical of common sense ‘positive thinking’, and sees any kind of ideological positivism as something that ultimately serves as a distraction from much more difficult and troubling thoughts.

Returning to Billig (2001), he advocates that when faced with a cultural climate which appears to valorise positivity and reject radical social change, critical researchers should adopt a more negative, sceptical attitude to the ostensibly positive, and I will attempt to do this during my analysis. As such, my selection of tweets emphasise how ideological positivism can act as a kind of *empty or floating signifier*: a category that lacks inherent meaning, into which can be placed different kinds of neoliberal, reactionary and troubling

discourses which a critical researcher may see as profoundly negative, or at the very least ambiguous. Many of these tweets come from companies and businesses, others come from various state sectors, while many express what I think are quite problematic ideas and positions under a category of positivity and celebration.

### To celebrate and declare

Celebration is central to the ‘official’ practice of International Women’s Day. The resources section of the United Nations affiliated website <sup>48</sup> specifically centres celebrating as important, the following appears prominently at the top of the document:

*Figure 23: Blurb taken from IWD2017 website*

Use International Women's Day (IWD) on March 8 as an important opportunity to:

- **celebrate** the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women because visibility and awareness help drive positive change for women
- **declare** bold actions you'll take as an individual or organization to help progress the gender agenda because purposeful action can accelerate gender parity across the world

Here both what is to be celebrated, and what other action is to be taken is concisely and explicitly stated, in a document aimed at the kinds of organisations and companies whose tweets make up the bulk of what is presented here. This is a document likely intended for social media managers and teams, to guide them in the production of acceptable discourse and toward good practice. While a close reading of the whole document is beyond the scope of this chapter, the above extract is interesting and significant in how it echoes themes of liberal (and neoliberal) positivity I will discuss later. We are told to celebrate ‘achievements’ of women over a number of spheres of civil society, and to ‘declare bold actions’ we will take to help advance further change. In both cases these imperative statements are supported by specific justifications. Celebration of achievements is urged because it will increase the ‘visibility and awareness’ of those achievements, ‘visibility and awareness’ is desirable because it will lead to positive change. Similarly, ‘bold actions’ are needed in order to progress the ‘gender agenda’, because these kinds of actions ‘can accelerate gender parity across the world’. Precisely what the gender agenda consists of is

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<sup>48</sup> See <https://www.internationalwomensday.com/Resources>

unclear from this document, but the way it is situated suggests it is related to gender parity.

This is discursively interesting in the way it frames actions within a liberal discourse. There is no mention here of systemic issues or material inequality (indeed, the full document does not specifically mention ‘inequality’ once), no mention of patriarchal systems, no demands for men as a class. There is no specific or general thing named that women have made achievements in spite of, and the only political tools offered – to celebrate the actions of others and to declare our own actions – are individualistic in their character and the kind of actions they may be suggesting. There is no indication as to the class or group of women whose achievements we are called to celebrate, potentially collapsing all women from all backgrounds and positions, from CEOs, to historical figures, sportswomen and even radical activists into a single amorphous category without any kind of material delineation, other than them having achieved something deemed worth celebrating in the various sectors of liberal society. The suggested outcomes have a similar discursive character, and in linking them together we can make some inferences about the overall goals these two demands put forward: that visibility and awareness, combined with purposeful action in progressing the gender agenda can achieve positive change and accelerate gender parity for women on a global scale. The use of ‘accelerate’ suggests that this process of achieving gender parity through positive change is a gradual process that can effectively be ‘sped up’ through our actions.

Here, positive change seems to mean arriving at a sort of zero-sum parity between men and women. This echoes common discursive themes found in liberal feminism and those discourses that appropriate it, where women’s emancipation is effectively seen as concerned with women achieving the same status, opportunities and representation that certain classes of men enjoy under capitalist liberal democracy, rather than more radical change<sup>49</sup>. Notably absent is any specific acknowledgement of inequality, conflict, class politics, intersectionality, patriarchy, male violence, systemic violence, exploitation, and so on<sup>50</sup>. What we are left with instead is a call to be positive, to celebrate, to show our

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<sup>49</sup> An analysis and critique of some of these themes in the context of antifeminism can also be found in the following chapter. In that chapter this is generally analysed in terms of how this ‘liberal’ image of feminism is contrasted with forms of feminism users tend to portray as negative, hateful and so on.

<sup>50</sup> Discussions of these material and radical issues were absolutely part of the wider discourse produced on IWD2017. Although they do not appear to be a major part of the themes I discuss in the current chapter, I am not suggesting that they were entirely absent.

commitments to accelerating a process of change that will bring about liberal equality, divorced from radical material critique of why and how women experience oppression. While the above extract is only a small part of a larger document, it is prominent within that document, and speaks to themes I found throughout my data, particularly in its rather vague call for positivity and celebration.

**Preamble: ‘We’re celebrating international women’s day. Happy #InternationalWomensDay Let’s celebrate the amazing contributions women make to our world and our future’**

Ideological positivism can possess an acutely banal character. In this section I will analyse a selection of tweets that often share repetitive discursive, thematic and lexical elements, even when they can be divided along their own genres, discourses and styles. Regardless of the different ways these tweets construct a positive discourse, they often share a repetitive, formulaic character. While this may well be influenced by my methods of data collection (collecting based on keywords), this was also exemplified in some tweets I stumbled on *incidentally* to my data collection, and I will now briefly analyse them before moving on to my main corpus. Checking that a tweet I wanted to analyse was still available involved entering its text into Twitter’s search function, and to my surprise on two occasions I found dozens of tweets with identical to near identical wording from a variety of groups and accounts. Most of these seem to have gone relatively unnoticed, not being widely liked or shared with a few exceptions.

In treating these tweets as data alongside those tweets I collected through my methodological process, I am partly drawing on principles of virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000). In confirming that the tweets I collected were still usable I was open to encountering related relevant tweets, whether in the form of replies to those tweets, or in this case tweets which incidentally had almost identical wording. Through analysing them here, I hope to provide a thicker description of the overall theme I examine in this chapter. These tweets are presented immediately below in two sets corresponding to the two shared phrases, with their shared words in bold. “We’re celebrating international women’s day” and “Let’s celebrate the amazing contributions women make to our world and our future” seem to have been popular turns of phrase for companies, NGOs and similar groups as well as some identifiable individuals, though a search of the official guidelines for tweeting on the day shows no mention of these specific phrases.

There is an acutely formulaic character to many of these tweets (Appendix 1), all of which I found after my main data collection. The NGOs, local government groups and companies presented above all seem to have settled on very similar, often completely identical wording in expressing their celebration and positivity. Brought together, this leaves a sense of ‘sameness’, banality and convergence. How are they ‘celebrating International Women’s Day today’, and what bold actions are they declaring? Infinity Marketing celebrates with a blog post: “International Women’s Day – Celebrating Powerful Women in Marketing”, the very first line of which reminds us that IWD “is a day for us all to celebrate the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women”. Core Health tech mentions that their company is owned by women, World Dance Theatre honours a specific woman from the history of dance, while Pop Walls UK elevates female interior designers, Tennis Victoria celebrates women in competitive tennis, a climate action group celebrates women “tackling climate change”, and a country music radio station (New Country 1035) celebrates strong women with a link to a now-unavailable facebook post, though I think it is reasonable to assume that these women were relevant to country music.

I later found a second set of tweets I found incidentally in the same manner as the first (Appendix 1): in effect through the “strolling and looking” (Tester, 2015, p.1) that goes along with internet use, in this case simply checking Twitter to see if my collected data still existed. In this sense, this process not only drew on virtual ethnographic methods, but more specifically the figure of the *flaneur* (Tester, 2015). Here “Happy #InternationalWomensDay Let’s celebrate the amazing contributions women make to our world and our future” was the phrase I searched for, and this phrase is repeated in these tweets even more consistently than the first was. These tweets are very similar to the previous set in their generic, stylistic and discursive character: a collection of private companies, NGOs, government bodies and other organisations performing some kind of disembodied PR focused around IWD2017, through a discourse of positivity and celebration. These tweets are notable in comparison to the first set in that they are perhaps even more vague and formulaic, none of them seeming to explicitly declare or celebrate anything in particular. In the absence of substantive content, a basic analysis can provide some interesting observations. These tweets also use a lot of logos and stock photographs, or photographs so generic as to be indistinguishable from stock photography: people having a meeting in an office, an attractive woman of colour applying makeup in traffic, Champagne in glasses, pseudo pop-art images of women visually coded as ‘beautiful’ and/or ‘inspirational’, a variation of Rosie the Riveter as a chef, and so on.

Perhaps most interesting here is that some of these organisations are from even more acutely commercial and neoliberal sectors than those in the previous set. Park Hyat Aviara, an American “Forbes Five-Star and AAA Five-Diamond luxury” Spa, resort and golf club accompanies their tweet with emojis of a heart and flexing arm, perhaps suggesting love and empowerment, but most prominently with the aforementioned glasses of champagne that seem to be in mid-toast. Here it seems that ‘celebration’ is very much within a visual discourse of conspicuous luxury consumption and leisure, not only divorced from any discernible centring of women as an oppressed class, but presented in a way that valorises some of the most exclusory forms of culture and practice. Millionaire Match is another notable example of this, as one might guess from the name this is a self-described “Millionaire Dating Site for Successful, Rich and Attractive Singles”, and other than the formulaic positive language they use in the tweet, the only obvious thing that at all relates this to the contributions of women is the stock image, where a white woman is shown speaking prominently in an office meeting setting. These two examples indicate another prominent discursive genre which can be seen in this chapter, namely direct and indirect advertising of companies in the context of positivity and celebration of IWD2017.

My point in presenting these specific tweets is that even beyond the high degree of lexical similarity, we can observe a kind of formula in them that relates to broader generic, stylistic and discursive elements. These tweets, like the ones I will analyse in more detail next in this chapter, represent part of a spectrum of highly managed genres encompassing public relations, advertising and the positive engagement of companies, NGOs, governments and so on, within the public sphere on IWD2017. They also tend to present highly managed and abstracted styles; they are broadly companies and organisations acting as an entity with a ‘voice’, trying to present positive, authentic-seeming discourse, celebration and sentiment on behalf of the organisation. Discursive elements too are often formulaic, and IWD is generally celebrated in a way closely linked to the organisation that is tweeting: sometimes a singular person in the sector, sometimes the employees of the organisation, while exactly what kind of change being advocated for often remains unnamed or assumed. Together, these tweets also form a microcosm of the ideological positivity I have outlined above and will discuss during the rest of this chapter: a celebratory, banal discourse that functions as a floating signifier for deeply ideological ideas and practices that maintain and extend a neo/liberal status-quo. Bearing this initial discussion in mind, I will now examine ‘positive’ tweets gathered from my actual data collection process, and draw on conceptual literature in analysing and critiquing their

construction of positivity, and how positivity appears to function as a floating signifier which can contain a variety of constructions.

Before proceeding, I will first clarify and discuss how the tweets I discuss in this chapter relate to other forms of pro-feminist discourse on Twitter, and how this relates to my sampling strategy. As I covered when discussing the sampling process in my methodology chapter, the process I used to arrive at this final selection of tweets was driven by an iterative process based on purposive sampling in light of my analytic interests and the LDA topic modelling. This process has served to exclude many tweets which fall outside of this topic of mostly corporatised expressions of positivity in relation to feminism. These excluded tweets would include pro-feminist tweets from individual users, rather than corporate accounts, this is not meant to suggest that tweets of this nature are absent from my overall data collection, or from actually occurring discourse during IWD2017.

Related to this, I will clarify and recognise some potential issues in the way I am reading the nature of the corporate forms of positivity in the tweets featured in this chapter. While I take a critical view of corporatised forms of positivity that are present in much of this data, I want to make it clear that such a reading is not necessarily the only possible one. Despite being part of a generally corporate or organisational discourse, much of what is presented here nevertheless highlights serious and genuine issues which are part of feminist political projects, and highlight instances of women which run counter to stereotypical forms of representation. In these ways, much of what is presented here is ‘genuinely’ positive. As discussed in my literature review (and discussed in specific detail later in my discussion chapter), much of what is presented here aligns broadly with Banet-Weiser’s (2018) observations around the nature of popular feminism online. Related to this, despite taking a critical attitude to many potentially problematic aspects of popular feminism, Banet-Weiser nonetheless argues that these discourses and representations do potentially represent genuinely positive and emancipatory critique, presented to a large audience. Given this, it is not my intention to entirely dismiss Twitter as a platform for feminist discourse and representation, only to analyse, explore and critique the particular forms and examples I have selected.

## Genres

The first genre I identify is what I would call *nation state PR*. The tweets immediately below fit into overlapping genres that I would argue are producing celebratory, positive public relations type discourse from the perspective of various sectors of nation states

(military and the nation state). These are in a PR genre because they communicate in a public way that these branches of the (British & Australian) state, and in one case the West Midlands Police Firearms Unit, celebrate IWD2017 and want to wish a happy IWD2017 to the public in an official capacity.

Figure 24: Tweet from Royal Air Force



Figure 25: Tweet from Defence Australia



Figure 26: Tweet from Firearms Operations Unit

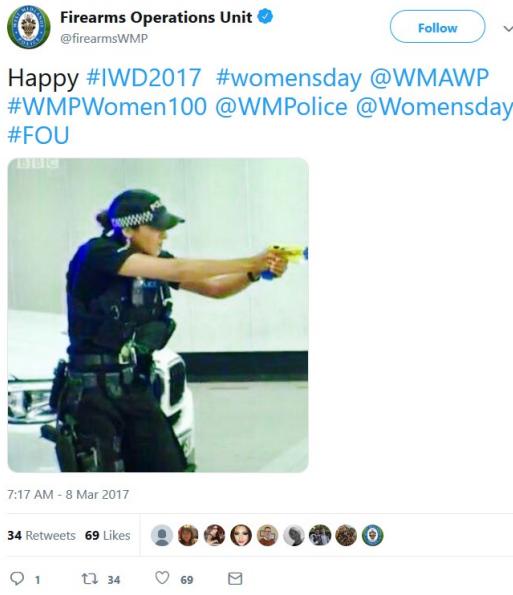


Figure 27: Tweet from ACC Edinburgh



The additional content they feature adds to the nation-state PR genre: All feature either an image or an embedded tweet that attempts to project a positive public image. The RAF tweet contains a .gif of an anonymous (presumably) RAF servicewoman doing press-ups while blankly staring into the POV. This .gif auto-plays, looping the same press-up infinitely as she stares unblinkingly at the viewer. It may be that as a piece of PR this is meant to project a sense of toughness and determination. The Defence Australia tweet has a standard publicity photo to accompany the tweet text: various military personnel arrayed in uniform, posing for the photo in a professional manner. The photo appears to be a still from the linked video. In a similar way to the picture in the RAF tweet this photo appears to be used to give a public impression, one of military professionalism. The Firearms

Operations Unit tweet is exceedingly direct: the image is of a female police officer pointing what appears to be a stun gun at something out of frame, again the PR image is one of professionalism from women, and in this case an implied capacity for causing harm. The ACC Edinburgh tweet draws on a separate piece of PR, a team of British Army affiliated women who have crossed the Antarctic, and frames this as an example of inspirational women involved in the army. This tweet could also be part of a separate genre, that of military recruitment: the use of “#findwhereyoubelong @armyjobs” both presents a common recruiting slogan and directly links to an army recruitment twitter account. In this case, the genre of army and nation state PR is linked to the genre of military recruitment, focused on women. Together, their genres are related to PR for the armed services and police, and particularly PR involving women who work within those sectors of the state.

The second genre I identify is what I would call *government PR*. The below items are all from governmental/super-governmental organisations, and all engage in a kind of PR activity which affirms a positive stance on IWD2017, and the status of women in general. While they are closely related to and could overlap with the previous genre, I think these are distinct in that their PR is more closely related to local/national/international governmental organisations, rather than the sectors of the nation state as seen in the previous genre.

*Figure 28: Tweet from Australian Bureau of Statistics*



Figure 29: Tweet from HFX Gov



Figure 30: Tweet from Transport for London Travel Alerts



Figure 31: Tweet from NL Hydro

NLHydro [@NLHydro](#) Follow

Highly skilled women work with Hydro across the province. Today, we celebrate their work and remain committed to driving gender parity. [#IWD](#)

Figure 32: Tweet from UK OPCW

UK Delegation OPCW [@UK\\_OP CW](#) Follow

We're proud to highlight important work of all the women here at @OPCW as we continue to strive for equality for women around the world [#IWD2017](#)

There are subtle differences and variations in how their genre is constructed within this frame. All but the AU Bureau of Stats tweet do this in a way that centres, in one way or another, people who work for these organisations: calling out “our many employees” (hfxgov, note that it does not specify their gender), by linking to a webpage detailing women who work for the organisation (TfL Travel Alerts) and by sharing pictures of women who work for the organisation or alongside it (NLHydro and UK Delegation OPCW). The Australian Bureau of Statistics tweet engages in a more traditional genre of PR, by posting statistics meant to show the increase in living standards for women in the country. Similar to the previous genre, which is more related to state power, the tweets in this genre all promote in some way their governmental organisation’s commitment to the general stated goals of International Women’s Day, often by relating this sentiment to some specific or general group of women related to the organisation.

Closely related to this genre and the previous is one specific tweet which I argue is a clear example of what I will call *political establishment PR*: public relations conducted on behalf of ruling political parties by non-governmental groups, in this case by a partisan media organisation.

Figure 33: Tweet from Liberty News 1776

The image shows a tweet from the account @LibertyNews1776. The tweet features a photo of Kellyanne Conway smiling, overlaid with text that reads "Kellyanne Conway FIRST WOMAN EVER TO RUN VICTORIOUS PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN". The tweet is dated 2:17 PM - 8 Mar 2017 and has received 1,196 retweets and 1,991 likes.

Here the above item is relating ideas of celebration at the achievements of women to a woman closely associated with the Republican party and Donald Trump's successful presidential campaign. The achievement and contribution being celebrated here is clearly her role in running this campaign, and she is touted in the image as the "first woman" to ever run such a campaign. This fits in a political PR genre in the context of IWD because it clearly states that the recent victory of Donald Trump, and by extension his presidency, is something that is not only worth celebrating, but is related to the professional success of a woman. Given the wider context of controversies surrounding Trump's specific behaviour and attitudes toward women, and the longstanding political stances of the Republican party, this tweet is performing an even more specific kind of PR: countering existing criticisms and contrary narratives.

The third genre I identify is what I will call *organisational PR*, which is related to the previous genres in that it encompasses tweets that construct a positive public image, but distinct in that rather than being done by or on behalf of governmental and national groups, it is generally done by businesses and other non-governmental organisations.

Figure 34: Tweet from Wakanow



Figure 35: Tweet from Impact Arabian Perfumes



Figure 36: Tweet from Divine Chocolate



Figure 37: Tweet from SPAR Nigeria



Figure 38: Tweet from Barbara Bush Foundation

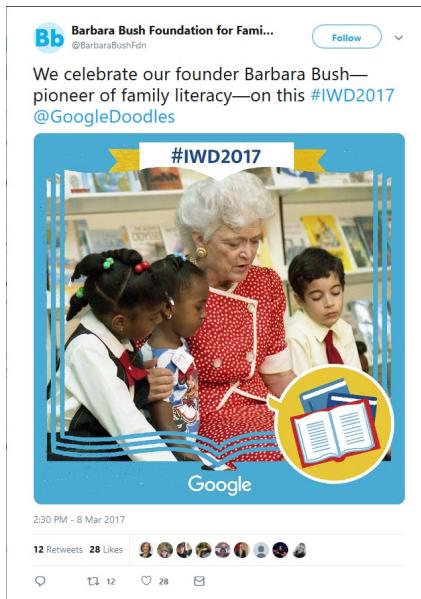


Figure 39: Tweet from US Quidditch



As I mentioned in the previous section, what we see here is organisations personifying themselves as celebrating IWD in some manner. All of the above are private companies and businesses, aside from the Barbara Bush foundation and US Quidditch, which are NGOs. In a now familiar theme, many of these organisations locate their celebration in some way to women working or associated with their specific organisation (Wakanow, Divine Chocolate, Barbara Bush Foundation, US Quidditch), while in the other cases the women being celebrated are more abstract: “women determined to rise” in the case of

SPAR Nigeria, and “women who carved a niche for themselves” in the case of Impact Arabian Perfumes, although we may be meant to read this as applying to Elanor Roosevelt in this case.

The fourth genre here is what I call the *influencer* genre, which includes tweets which are from or feature people who are presented as media personalities, or individuals seen as being especially influential. Together they locate ideas of celebration in a genre that seems to emphasise achievement, leadership and insights in the context of IWD in a way that is highly individualised.

Figure 40: Tweet from Julia Gichuru

Julie Gichuru [Follow](#)

I grew up wishing I was a boy. Now, there is little I appreciate more than my womanhood. Happy #IWD May we live up to the wonder of woman.

1:21 PM - 8 Mar 2017 from Washington, DC

19 Retweets 48 Likes

Figure 41: Tweet from Britney Spears



Figure 42: Tweet from TED Lagos



Figure 43: Tweet from Kerry Ann Collins



In contrast to the previous genres, three of the above are from identifiable individuals, all of whom are deemed significant enough to be verified users. While Britney Spears (who's tweet was by far the most widely shared) is a widely known celebrity, the others identify themselves on their profiles or in linked media as being entrepreneurs, business owners or 'influential' people in the context of business and/or social media. In the case of TEDLagos 2017, while this is not an identifiable individual it still operates in a genre that centres influencers and their actions, through the direct content of its tweet. The social media influencer is a particular kind of social actor acutely related to online, and especially social media sociality, defined by Freberg et al. as an "independent third party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media" (2010, p. 90). In the case of this genre, the attitudes being shaped are not directly related to products and services, but rather toward positivity and celebration of women in some form. In all cases this positivity and celebration is done in a quite individualised context by attaching it to the achievements of individuals: the words of the author in the case of Julie Gichuru's tweet, the achievements of two other artists in the case of Britney Spears' tweet, explicitly to influencers in the case of TEDLagos 2017, and "female leaders and innovators" in Kelly Ann Collins'. In all cases, celebration and importance is attached to the words, work and achievements of either the author or other people who are framed as influencers.

In summary, the genres seen here tend to be closely associated with PR of various forms, whether carried out in a banally nationalistic, governmental or commercial field.

## Styles

Many tweets across the PR genres have highly abstracted stylistic identities: they do not come from attributable individuals, and even though many use “we” it is clear that the “we” is the institution itself, not the individuals who formulated these tweets. This impersonal style then is consistent with corporate and nation-state PR. While the additional content presented by the Defence Australia (DA) tweet is still quite impersonal, a group photograph that would fit in with any kind of news story or press release, the content in the other tweets seems to ameliorate this impersonal style by focusing on individuals.

Figure 44: Tweet from RAF



Figure 45: Tweet from Defence Australia



*Figure 46: Tweet from Firearms Operations Unit*



Both the Royal Air Force (RAF) and Firearms Operations Unit (FOU) tweets present us with images of individual, though still unidentified, women. In the case of the RAF tweet the woman is engaged in physical training, and perhaps in this state she is meant to personify the act of “looking forward to” International Women’s Day (this tweet was sent in anticipation of the day) that the Royal Air Force is engaged in. The FOU tweet is more direct: the identity they co-opt in their style is a woman presented as having a capacity for violence in policing, as she is pointing a stun-gun, wearing police tactical gear and has a handgun holstered on her hip. Both these tweets seem to use these pictures to identify themselves with a kind of “female badass” style: women enacting behaviours associated with masculinity, here in the context of armed policing and military service. Such styles of identity have been studied in the context of fictional media representation (Inness, 2004), particularly how they may be empowering or positively-subversive, but also how they may themselves fail to escape patriarchal gendered binaries and may be “toned down to make them more palatable to a mass audience” (p.9).

Figure 47: Tweet from ACC Edinburgh

Happy #IWD2017 , we have to draw your attention to some of the most inspirational woman in the ARMY #findwhereyoubelong @armyjobs

**Ice Maiden** @exicemaiden  
The #sisterswithsledges have been flying the flag for women as they train to be the first all female team to cross Antarctica #IWD2017

6:57 AM - 8 Mar 2017

10 Retweets 28 Likes

This female badass style is also seen in the ACC Edinburgh (ACC) tweet, though in a less individualised way. Here the non-combat achievements of women associated with the army is linked to the style of the army recruiter. The content of the quoted tweet is relevant here: the twitter account is called “Ice Maiden”, which is a reference to their gender and the activity of crossing their Antarctic, but also presents a style of severity and cold coolness alongside a traditional marker of femininity, possibly in an ironic way. The representation of women in army recruitment has been studied in the United States context by Brown (2012), and I will expand on this and Inness (2004) when I discuss the discursive content of these tweets in the following subsection.

Being related to nation state PR, armed policing and army recruitment, all tweets display degrees of outright nationalism and banal nationalism (Billig, 1995). The display pictures of all the accounts feature the insignia and logos of their national or sub-national institutions, the DA, FOU and ACC tweets contain the names of countries or jurisdictions within countries, while the RAF tweet contains the word “Royal”, and the ACC’s display picture features a prominent British flag atop the slogan “ARMY. BE THE BEST”. The most outright nationalistic stylistic element here is the quoted tweet in ACC’s, which contains the metaphorical phrase “flying the flag”, a nationalistic cliché.

Given these elements I would argue that the PR styles at play here, while abstracted, tend to draw on representations of badass femininity in a banally nationalistic context to embody a style consistent with themes of celebrating women in a public way on behalf of nation state institutions.

Figure 48: Tweet from Australian Bureau of Statistics



Figure 49: Tweet from hfxgov



Figure 50: Tweet from TfL Travel Alerts



Figure 51: Tweet from NL Hydro



Figure 52: Tweet from UK Delegation OPCW



The more general government PR tweets: AU Bureau of Stats (AUBS), hfxgov, TfL Travel Alerts (TFL), NLHydro, and UK Delegation OPCW (UKOPCW) adopt much more benign and mundane styles, but in ways which are highly managed, often involving the use of pictures. The NLHydro and UKOPCW tweets are less abstracted, their style grounded in a direct celebration of the women who work with them, and actually showing these women in embedded images. In these cases the “we” that are doing the celebrating is a lot more concrete, and the style adopted is more collegial or in line with an employer praising their workers, as well as a government body conducting PR. The TFL tweet is somewhat of an exception to this, since although the linked material engages in this kind of style, the tweet itself adopts something more general. The extent of the tweet’s positivity is very broad,

thanking “all women from the past present and the future”. This combined with the image, a photograph of Marie Curie presented without context, give it a style more in line with a general kind of positivity, celebrating a woman from history with no clear association to the organisations sector.

Other tweets from more commercial and non-governmental organisations also engage in this style of presenting the company as having an identity that celebrates. Some do this in a way that, like the previous examples, links to the identities of women associated with the organisation, though some do this in a more abstract way.

Figure 53: Tweet from Wakanow



Figure 54: Tweet from US Quidditch



Figure 55: Tweet from Divine Chocolate



The above tweet from Wakanow (a travel agency) declares that the company is conducting some kind of training event for “Wakanow women” to celebrate the day, provided by other media companies. The accompanying images show a conference room, with various women engaging in taking the kinds of pictures typically associated with these kinds of events, photographs for sharing on social media. Here Wakanow seems to closely identify itself with women’s career development in a celebratory and positive manner. As with previous examples “Wakanow women” here seems to refer explicitly to women who work for this company. US Quidditch enacts a similar style that centres women associated with them, though in a far more deliberately direct way: “we feature front and centre” is especially direct in how it draws attention in a positive, celebratory manner to the accompanying pictures of women in the sport. Like in previous examples, the “we” that is celebrating is the organisation as an entity. Divine chocolate is interesting here, in that their tweet centres women associated with the company, but in a way that more directly engages with them. In a similar matter to tweets discussed previously, the style and identification of the “#DivineWomen” featured in this tweet is incorporated into the style that Divine Chocolate adopts: in this case being a company that centres its employees and associates, in a way that not only presents it as a good company, but one that cares about “women’s empowerment”.

## Discourses

What is being represented in these tweets and accompanying material, and how is that being accomplished? All the nation state PR tweets affirm some kind of celebration or wish of happy women's day on behalf of their institutions, but they do this in different ways.

The RAF tweet celebrates "the work of women in the RAF across the world", centring servicewomen in the context of the geopolitical reach of British military power, "across the world" presumably referring to the extent of military bases and operations the RAF is engaged in, or could potentially be engaged in, in foreign countries: an oblique, banally nationalistic reference to the projection of British military power. The DA tweet discursively links military and government by presenting the work of Australian government ministers at an official event, reserving a large amount of text to name and link to the respective ministers, their names and roles.

Figure 56: Tweet from RAF



Figure 57: Tweet from Defence Australia



Figure 58: Tweet from Firearms operations



The FOU tweet is comparatively sparse in terms of actual text: only the word “Happy” is not presented in the form of a hashtag or link to another account, the rest is a mix of official hashtags associated with IWD, and links to West Midlands Police and various ‘women in policing’ accounts. By far the most discursively interesting element here is the picture: it appears to be a cropped screenshot from a BBC television program, but beyond that its origin is ambiguous. It is likely from a news report or documentary, but the woman’s style and pose are dramatic and dynamic, so it could equally be from a fictional program or drama. Being presented without any explanation or context seems to suggest that it is intended to be read based on its form and content: a woman, arrayed as an

armed police officer, dynamically pointing a stun gun at something unseen with a pistol on her hip, a white police BMW in the background suggesting she has gotten out of her vehicle to engage some kind of threat. Even the graininess of the image seems to suggest a kind of dynamism and *verité*, rather than something cleanly posed for cameras. Overall the image is a representation of a police officer in a state of professionalism and power, from the uniform and gear to the ponytail seen at the back of her police cap, and yet she is still immediately indefinable as a (slim, white) woman.

In discussing media representations of “tough female character[s]”, Herbst (2004, p.28) focuses on the extreme, fully virtual representations seen in some videogames, namely the case of Lara Croft. There are obvious differences between the representations contained in items 1 and 5 and the “border[ing] on the pornographic” (p.28) ways in which Lara Croft was represented into the mid 00’s: for Herbst, those fully-virtual representations of tough women embodied a pairing of hyper-sexuality and hyper-violence, “an ongoing exchange... between sex and violence, one leading to and allowing for an amplification of the other” (p.28). These representations are different: both are un-sexualised, and any violence is either impending (item 1’s servicewoman training for her work) or normalised (item 5’s armed policewoman carrying out the comparatively day-to-day violence of armed policing). Both elements then are represented at very mundane levels. Despite this, I argue there are still some interesting comparison to be made, since Herbst’s piece on the subject is anticipating a time when such media depictions would become more normalised in wider society.

Herbst emphasises that Lara Croft’s body is represented as “hyperfunctional” (p.31): able to endure unending physical activity as an exemplar of military ideals, much like the case of item 1, where the nature of a looping .gif leads this servicewoman to do press-ups infinitely as she stares unblinkingly at the viewer. There is also a certain hyper functionality to the woman depicted in item 5, with her tactical gear, body armour and a pistol carried in a holster, or as Herbst puts it when referring to Croft: “a garter-like contraption that holds a gun... carried on her thigh” (p.33). Additionally, this representation of a hyper functional female guardian of the state, armed, armoured and dressed in black, does possess something of what Herbst identifies in Croft as the “Aggressive, pristine, and unsympathetic... fascist fantasies of hardness and toughness typically projected onto the male body.” (p.38).

Figure 59: Tweet from ACC Edinburgh

Happy #IWD2017 , we have to draw your attention to some of the most inspirational woman in the ARMY #findwhereyoubelong @armyjobs

**Ice Maiden @exicemaiden**  
The #sisterswithsledges have been flying the flag for women as they train to be the first all female team to cross Antarctica #IWD2017

6:57 AM - 8 Mar 2017

10 Retweets 28 Likes

The ACC Edinburgh tweet invites an analysis of how gender is constructed in the genre of army recruitment which is directed at women. Brown (2012) discusses this topic in the context of US military recruitment, emphasising how this process can serve to both normalize and minimize the participation of women in armed service, presenting women removed from the idea of combat, while preserving the “warriorhood” (p.151) associated with male soldiers. This seems to reflect the case of item 6, as Brown argues: “The idealized female service member [in recruitment adverts] gains skills and independence and faces challenges, but she is not martial” (p.172), and in turn the idea of martial service is conspicuously absent from this recruiting advert. The content here is the framing of an example of female soldiers undertaking something which is not only non-martial, but has no obvious relation with war, peacekeeping or general military service. Instead their work as soldiers is mostly incidental, what is being sold here is in effect the quality of character of servicewomen: their ability to achieve things, their inspirational nature and work, and the idea that a woman reading this advert can belong to this as well. This contrasts with those recruitment adverts directed toward men, which as Brown observes routinely depict men in proximity to combat, military hardware and firearms (p.155). Even in a UK context, there is a stark contrast between being recruited on the basis of an inspirational Antarctic crossing, and images of heavily-armed commandos in a patrol boat drifting down a misty, burning jungle river, as a gruff voice intones “Human beings are programmed to fear the unknown... as a Marine, you have to face the unknown, embrace it, ride into it head-first, whatever it holds” (RoyalMarinesRecruitment, 2018).

A prominent and analytically interesting set of discourses throughout this topic of positivity are those that reproduce aspects of liberal and particularly neoliberal feminism.

In discussing the development of neoliberal feminism as distinct from liberal feminism, Rottenberg (2013) offers a historically and analytically useful perspective, one which I will draw on here. For Rottenberg, a key differentiation between neo/liberal feminisms is how they relate to the prevailing order of capitalist liberal democracy and neoliberalism: while liberal feminism was and is, despite accepting it as a fundamentally correct project, still broadly critical of the ways in which the promises of liberal democracy have not been fulfilled for women as they have been for (some classes) of men, neoliberal feminism is “perfectly in sync with the evolving neoliberal order... [and]... offers no critique – immanent or otherwise – of neoliberalism” (p.419). Rottenberg goes on to offer insights into the causes and consequences of this development, and the kind of discourses and feminist subject it constructs. The neoliberal feminist subject is one that, while acknowledging that inequalities exist between men and women, denies that such inequalities are produced by structural forces, rather seeing them as a “an individual affair” (p.420), as a matter of individual responsibility that demands individual success. From this perspective, neoliberal feminism “hollows out” (p.420) any potential liberal feminism has for meaningful critique, instead extending and entrenching “neoliberal rationality and imperialist logic” (p.420) into yet another domain of life. To put it simply, neoliberal feminism sees success not even necessarily as being when women gain better representation within liberal democracy, but instead “Each woman’s success becomes a feminist success, which is then attributed to the USA’s enlightened political order, as well as to its moral and political superiority” (p.420). For me and my analysis, a key insight offered here is that having “spawned” (p.420) a form of feminist subjectivity and discourse, neoliberalism has extended its own wider logics of governance, individualisation and imperialism into a new area.

What are the specific features of neoliberal feminist discourse? Aside from what we may expect in terms of the application of wider neoliberal discourses of individualised achievement, “self-care... calculation, initiative... innovation” (p.428) and so on, what Rottenberg crucially identifies is neoliberal feminism’s particular focus on positive affect, in the form of helping individuals lead personally fulfilled, satisfying and happy lives through “*both* professional success and personal fulfilment” (p.428, emphasis in original). In short “Happiness... plays a crucial role in this new feminism” (p.429), a happiness that is predicated on helping individuals ‘succeed’ as professionals, while achieving “a *happy* work-family balance” (p.429, emphasis in original). Echoing my earlier discussion on the

limits of positive affect, this highly individualised “turn to a language of affect... [and]... the pursuit of *personal* happiness” (p.431, emphasis in original) is anathema to any politics that is critical of social and systemic inequalities, and sees ‘unhappiness’ as something caused by domination, patriarchy, discrimination and the inequalities of our current social order.

How then does this discourse appear in my data? Leaving aside for the moment a general critique of ‘positivity’ and ‘celebration’ as expressions of this, several tweets reproduce more general neoliberal and neoliberal feminist discourses.

Figure 60: Tweet from Kerry Ann Collins



Figure 61: Tweet from Impact Arabian Perfumes



Figure 62: Tweet from SPAR Nigeria



Figure 63: Tweet from Liberty News 1776



Figure 64: Tweet from Britney Spears



Rottenberg's observation that, in neoliberal feminism, "Each woman's success becomes a feminist success" (p.420) is quite present in the above examples, as all seem to locate a cause for happiness, pride or celebration in the exceptional achievements of women within a profoundly neoliberal frame. Impact Arabian Perfumes (IAP) uses the very specific phrasing and imagery of "carved a niche for themselves in industries where there were little opportunities", similarly SPAR Nigeria deploys more physical metaphor in constructing being "determined to rise" as an ultimately powerful "force". Both these tweets use language that valorises individual achievement and success in commercial sectors, in spite of perceived issues and barriers: to be "determined to rise" and to "carve a niche" for oneself deal in a language of resistance, but resistance that is entirely done by exceptional individuals in a way that does not challenge the fundamental logics of neoliberal systems. Instead the celebration here is not directed at any collective change or benefit, but at the very act of succeeding as an individual. Kelly Ann Collins' tweet too constructs a similar neoliberal discourse, specifically identifying "female leaders & innovators". What is left assumed here is the nature of what exactly is being "lead" and "innovated", but the use of "we" in the second sentence might suggest that the author is identifying themselves, an ostensibly successful entrepreneur, as one of these "leaders & innovators". The extensive use of emojis also suggests that professional success is the field being discussed here: the tweet ends with 12 emojis showing an ethnically diverse collection of women marked as belonging to an array of professions, from doctors and construction workers to judges and astronauts. If this is the case then this leadership and innovation, themselves distinctly neoliberal concepts, is very much anchored in a discourse of individualised professional success. To "change the world" might suggest some kind of collective benefit for women, but what the author means by this remains somewhat vague beyond an association with individual professional achievement. This focus on excellence and achievement in the pursuit of one's career is also present in the Britney Spears tweet. Here Spears is describing a very personal sense of happiness and celebration in the inspirational career achievements of her contemporary artists, Beyoncé and Madonna. Here "Always fierce throughout their careers" is an example of very gendered language ("fierce" is generally applied to women) to describe a kind of individualised, uncompromising attitude that allows them to succeed. This is a very specific case of a widely recognised women who is, by the standards of neoliberalism and the culture industry, exceedingly successful complimenting the success and attitude of two other women who occupy similar positions. Finally, Liberty News 1776's tweet performs a very

similar kind of celebration of success, but within a profoundly political frame. This tweet combines discourses of neoliberal feminism with a strong sense of banal nationalism: beyond the reference to “all Americans” (an exceedingly loaded phrase given the rhetoric of Trump’s election campaign and the broader situation in American conservative politics) the account’s very name combines a reference to the nationally coded word “Liberty” with the literal date of the American Revolution. Within the context of Trump’s election, from the allegations of sexual misconduct to the fact that Trump’s victory necessitated the loss of what would have been the USA’s first female president, this tweet does several things discursively to centre a woman in Trump’s victory. By highlighting the success of Conway in the roll of campaign manager, this tweet is still able to construct a “milestone for women” out of what was felt as a profound loss by women who had supported Clinton. Here we can see a very specific example of another feature of neoliberal feminism highlighted by Rottenberg, namely how neoliberal feminism can in effect valorise the United States in its discourse.

## **Summary**

This chapter has attempted to analyse the main genres, styles and discourses which occurred within my first analytic theme: tweets representing various forms of positivity and celebration of IWD2017, mostly from corporate and organisational accounts. My analysis has highlighted a range of genres relating to different forms of public relations, generally in a corporate or governmental/institutional context. Stylistic and discursive characteristics have also been analysed, again mostly pertaining to corporate and governmental genres, but embodying the act of celebration in specific ways. Discursively, I have highlighted the potentially problematic nature of much of this discourse, particularly in how it may relate to neo/liberal political frames. These aspects will be further developed in my discussion chapter. I will now move on to present another vignette related to my fieldwork, before reaching the second analytic chapter, which will examine tweets related to Trump support and reactionary discourse.

## Vignette #2: Hatred in the ‘Ecosystem’

“By integrating different technologies around common protocols, something is being created which is more than the sum of its parts.” (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996, p.1)

The conference began in earnest with a 6am jog up a mountain. We congregated in the lobby of the St Julian Hotel and Spa, around dawn on Thursday morning. Once again I was somewhat out of place; dressed in a t-shirt and jeans in a room full of sportswear lycra. I had no intention to jog, rather seeing this as an opportunity to witness something that seemed eminently odd; the hotel location on the edge of Boulder meant that intrepid delegates could manage a jog to one of the lower peaks that loomed above the city, before returning in time for the breakfast buffet and opening talks, and presumably a shower. I felt the need to joke about my obvious poor choice of attire, assuring people I would treat it as a leisurely walk. I was the only person taking this approach. There was no provision for the slow here, the ‘fast’ group agreed on aiming for 7-8 minutes per mile, there was no ‘slow’ group, just me walking on my own, occasionally catching up with people pausing their jog to catch their breath.

Leaving the conference site, I was quickly back alone in those empty lanes of Boulder, walking through parks and down lanes where the only ambulant humans were either joggers and cyclists clad in ‘pro-sume’ sportswear, or homeless people. One of the latter, an older women covered in heavy clothing despite the heat and pushing an overloaded shopping trolley, wished me a good morning as she proceeded through a park. Aside from the consumer areas of the city, those quaint highstreets, and less quaint parking lots, strip malls and gigantic superstores, Boulder felt like a town emptied of people. Passing through parks, walking under trees besides the creek which wound through the city, you would occasionally see evidence of humans. Heaps of discarded clothing under a tree, or a homeless person carrying their possessions, quickly lapped by a group of lean joggers who usually hushed their conversation as they went by.

In the cases where I would catch up with a delegate pausing their run, or walking back, one or two seemed relieved to walk and talk with me as a good excuse to catch their breath, though I couldn’t help but feel I was burdening them with my presence. One such delegate took the opportunity to tell me about their work: aggregating and analysing big data in real time to assist emergency services in disaster relief. Notably, they mentioned their moral

satisfaction at working in this area, something I rarely got a sense of when talking to delegates in more commercial areas.

Eventually, we all found our way back to the conference venue. Day one of the conference consisted of no less than 15 events, a mix of interviews and panels running from 9am to 5pm convened by the organisers, punctuated by coffee breaks and lunch. The conference hall was a large, dark room with rows of tables and chairs facing a well-lit stage with white leather couches and side-tables made of tree stumps, flanked by a pair of huge screens displaying the BBI logo, a sign reading “BIG BOULDER” at the rear. These talks covered a wide range of topics salient to the social media and data analytics industries: the uses of AI, news and government, machine learning, bots, marketing, commercial uses for user data, and particularly relevant for my interests an interview with Joel Lunenfeld, then vice-president of global brand strategy at Twitter<sup>51</sup>.

In this vignette I will mostly focus on this latter interview, but first I will present some observations on the others. The introductory welcome, presented by the organisers, served to set the tone for the rest of the conference in a number of ways. It was preceded by a musical queue, the inoffensive pop music which had been playing on loop as people took their seats and mingled giving way to “Blitzkrieg Bop” by the Ramones at high volume, the repetition of “Hey ho, let’s go!” seemingly meant to excite people for the opening and elicit a mood. The introductory talk, aside from the expected conference pleasantries of welcoming delegates (and in this case, thanking the numerous corporate sponsors<sup>52</sup>) and outlining the agenda, this talk brought up a few points which hinted – to me at least – at some of the cultural norms that may have been underlying this space. A key word here appeared to be ‘ecosystem’. Both in the introductory talk, later talks and general conversation between delegates ‘the ecosystem’ would often be mentioned, without further elaboration. Much of this seemed to relate to the phase ‘empowering the

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<sup>51</sup> Since BB2017, Lunenfeld left his job at Twitter to “operate a gym for underserved kids in [his] community” (Lunenfeld, 2019) In Oakland, California. Commenting on his time at Twitter in the same article, he wrote “My six years at Twitter taught me how much momentum one idea can create. I learned that 140 characters can change the world. A community can spark a movement. Influence and power don’t always go hand in hand. And sometimes a fight is the most noble cause”. Since then, he has also become Chief Marketing Officer of a California-based legal cannabis company (Norcal, 2019).

<sup>52</sup> It is worth mentioning that sponsorship of BB2017 was presented in the form of particular brands being associated with nearby mountain peaks. Twitter, sponsors of the welcome reception, were associated with Torrey’s Peak, which the conference booklet pointed out was 14,267’ above sea level, making it the highest peak. It is unclear whether the relative height of the peaks was indicative of how much money sponsors had provided to the conference.

'ecosystem', which was first mentioned at the introductory talk. Days later I asked a delegate what this word actually meant, and while they too seemed a little perplexed, they ventured to me that it was an industry term used to refer to various platforms, systems, companies and services related to the internet, in a way which saw them all as interlinked.

In this context, it seemed that to 'empower the ecosystem' was what they were gathered there to do; to network, to collaborate and share information in the interest of the social media and data industries. The conference handbook itself even trades in this ecological metaphor, saying "the goal of the Big Boulder Initiative is to bring together companies within the social data ecosystem to collectively address key challenges that face the industry as a whole" (BBI, 2017, p.36). As I mentioned, this metaphor was prominent throughout the conference, and used by delegates in such a way that suggested to me the meaning was mutually intelligible to most people there. Alongside this ecological metaphor, the introduction also mentioned spirituality, meditation, mindfulness and Buddhism to a lesser but positive extent.

What does it mean to conceive of the internet, its platforms, the enormous amounts of data produced and the companies which operate within it as an ecosystem or ecology? In chapter 2 I have talked to an extent about the so-called "Californian Ideology" (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996), the West Coast cultural milieu which blended counterculture hippies and tech entrepreneurs, both seeing networks and communications technology as liberatory. For me, this ideological tendency was perhaps visible in the wide use of this ecological metaphor. Writing at the very time and place that the Californian Ideology was born, the American writer Richard Brautigan composed a famous poem outlining his utopian vision, celebrating the kind of future that computer technology could bring for mankind. The final verse is illustrative in this case:

"I like to think  
(it has to be!)  
of a cybernetic ecology  
where we are free of our labors  
and joined back to nature,  
returned to our mammal  
brothers and sisters,  
and all watched over  
by machines of loving grace."

(Brautigan, 1968)

At BB2017, it seems Brautigan's "cybernetic ecology" is alive in some form, though perhaps not the one he envisioned<sup>53</sup>. What lived in BB2017, between the talk of ecosystems, AI, data analytics and corporate branding, is an ecology which is seemingly focused on the banal extraction of value from online manifestations of sociality itself. Whatever self-consciously utopian vision being advanced – if any at all – was mostly unclear, and I find it doubtful that most of the delegates would have had much knowledge of Brautigan, the Californian Ideology or its numerous early proponents. Nevertheless, the formative role played by writers such as Brautigan in shaping what became a dominant cultural strain of the tech industry may still be present in this talk of ecosystem. Returning to my opening vignette, I am reminded again of the weight of the past in forming present ideological conditions. As Marx famously wrote: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx, 1937, p.5). Regardless of how aware social media professionals may be of the Californian Ideology, to some extent they are nonetheless haunted by it.

What else can be said of this first day of the conference? When it came time for the Twitter delegate to be interviewed on stage, several things he mentioned were especially interesting to me, and pertinent to the wider background of this project. According to Lunenfeld, Twitter is something quite profound: it has become "the world's cultural operating system", it is "what's happening... what people are talking about", it has enabled "open dialogue with leaders", and to watch Twitter is nothing less than "watching culture move in real time". When the interviewer made an apparent effort at confronting Lunenfeld with some of the more obviously negative aspects of Twitter (hate speech, Trump and so on), Lunenfeld gave some quite interesting answers. While Twitter tries to do good, "Evil's had a larger marketing budget", while on the specific issue of abuse on the platform he was more pragmatic: "We think abuse is a solvable problem, through communicating our intentions on how to solve it, building tools to control your experience, and using our tools to solve the problem". Here, abuse and hatred on the platform seems to be seen in terms of a kind of 'error' in the ecosystem. Something that requires better

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<sup>53</sup> Brautigan wrote numerous novels, short stories and poetry collections, much of his early work was distributed for free by himself. In 1984, he committed suicide by shooting himself through the head with a .44 magnum revolver (Hjortsberg, 2012).

tools, better communication, and empowered individual users, rather than something more systemic.

Ultimately Lunenfeld defended Twitter in sentimental, positive terms; relaying to the delegates an anecdote about a teenage cancer patient who Tweeted Beyoncé and had an interaction with her, all because of Twitter being there to facilitate this meeting<sup>54</sup>. Likewise, Lunenfeld seemed to appeal to positivity and sentimentality in summarising his talk, stating: “We’ve always had a place to laugh and cry together, that is Twitter”. Here, Twitter is again seemingly presented as a platform which *fulfils some kind of innate human need*: as a public space for the cultural and communicative interactions of nothing less than the entire human race. In this context, the goal appears to be a kind of positive bringing together of individuals, with any excluded or disavowed element being a ‘glitch’ in the system Twitter are creating for us. Looming in Lunenfeld’s talk as well was the concept of free speech, as for Twitter “The worst thing that could happen is repressing free speech”.

The first day of this conference put me in a very strange environment, one where I was able to experience a small sliver of a specific industry culture for a brief time. While much of the first day, as I have relayed here, brought to mind some of the more optimistic and utopian aspects of this culture, later events would highlight what appeared to be the more unsettling aspects. In a return to the analytic devices of the weird and the eerie (Fisher, 2016), and horror, which I outlined in my opening vignette, my concluding vignette shall discuss how I came to view BB2017 in very unsettling terms.

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<sup>54</sup> It would appear that Lunenfeld was referring to a genuine incident, see this article in the Independent for details: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/beyonce-teenage-cancer-patient-facetime-video-ebony-banks-houston-a7645066.html>

## Chapter 7: Trump, Sexism, misogyny, antifeminism

While the previous chapter analysed text that could be broadly classified as positive and celebratory of IWD2017, albeit in what I argue are potentially very problematic ways, this chapter will look at the inverse: those discourses which represent interpretative repertoires which were broadly unsupportive, dismissive or hostile to IWD2017, feminism and feminists in various ways. My goal with this chapter is not to assess the extent of these sorts of discourses on Twitter, nor am I claiming that the data I present here are especially representative of the kinds of language and ideas found on Twitter. Rather, my goal here is to analyse and discuss these specific, often extreme, often banal kinds of discourse, and to discuss how they relate to broader political and ideological issues. As a note to the reader: This chapter makes reference to more figures than the previous two chapters combined, and as such they are referenced by number, but appear in appendix 2.

As discussed in my previous analytic chapter, my process of data collection and case selection – being largely based on the use of particular keywords – has had large impacts on the final selection of cases in this and the previous analysis chapter. As was the case previously, the focus here on tweets which broadly fit into a set of reactionary discourse is not intended to suggest that genuinely positive and pro-feminist discourse was absent, either from my initial data collection of the vast amounts of tweets that people and organisations posted during IWD2017. While the focus here is on reactionary discourse, including antifeminist discourse, there did appear to be emancipatory, intersectional discourse present in my data collection. As discussed in the methodology chapter, the focus on reactionary discourse here is not to suggest that this is the only discourse related to feminism that is of relevance in the broader analysis of this topic.

### **Introduction: Dataset and sampling**

In this chapter I will move on from my analysis of positivity, to focus on the kinds of discourses which were the initial interest of this project: misogyny and antifeminism. Collecting this data and getting it to the point where it can be analysed presented several challenges. Notably, my previous methodological practices around handling data and sampling have had to be put aside for the purposes of this section. Specifically, the data presented here ignored the ‘5 retweets or more’ rule used for sampling in the previous

section, instead drawing from the entire cleaned corpus, consisting of roughly 1,060,000 unique tweets. The main reason for this was necessity: Both the LDA topic modelling and numerous exploratory searches of the ‘5 retweets or more’ corpus yielded little in the way of interesting and useful data, acutely felt in a lack of the kind of more virulent antifeminism I have wanted to focus my analysis on in this chapter. This may be due to a tendency for especially virulent content to not necessarily propagate very effectively on Twitter, and not be widely retweeted (Williams and Burnap, 2016). I argue however, that the general (though not total) lack of retweets in the tweets I present here is not necessarily a methodological problem, if we consider the various ways tweets can be encountered by a user. For the user, the number of times something is retweeted is not a direct measure of how likely they are to see it. For example, users may search for particular terms, or see tweets in the form of subtweets (indirectly referring to a tweet, either by omitting/mistyping the user’s @-handle, or by embedding a screenshot of the tweet in question), quote-tweets or via replies to those tweets. Regardless, I take the position here that fixation on the number of retweets a tweet receives as a measure of significance is problematic. Writing nearly a decade ago, boyd et al (2010) provide at least ten potential reasons a user may choose to retweet a particular tweet (p.6), with diverse potential motivations, so it is potentially problematic to see the number of retweets a tweet receives as a measure of endorsement<sup>55</sup>.

The tweets analysed in this chapter are based on several word searches of my ‘All-Uniques’ dataset (Corpus B, the modified corpus containing every unique tweet, regardless of the number of retweets they received, as opposed to Corpus A: my corpus consisting of unique tweets with 5 or more retweets), and the wider sampling strategy was performed in line with the work of Davidson et al (2018) on qualitative approaches to big data: a recursive process where the data and themes were explored in a focused way, and observations made during this process helped to guide sampling. For an extensive discussion of this paper and method, see the preceding methodological chapter. In selecting these I initially searched for a variety of terms that I believed would lead to useful data, the LDA process having yielded little in terms of a single ‘misogyny’ topic, possibly due to the relatively small quantity of outright misogynistic tweets in the overall corpus, which would be consistent with the findings of previous research into hate speech on Twitter (Williams & Burnap 2016). Part of this process also involved reading tweets I found

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<sup>55</sup> Indeed, it is not unusual to see a statement to the effect of “RT’s do not = endorsement” appearing in the bio of some Twitter users.

while exploring the dataset and trying to get an idea of other terms and hashtags that might be used to find other relevant tweets. One obvious route was to look for tweets that expressed support for Donald Trump: Trump's campaign, presidency and supporters have been accused of expressing a variety of sexist and misogynistic attitudes and language<sup>56</sup>, and given the proximity of IWD2017 to Trump's inauguration, this seemed like a sensible avenue of investigation: searching for tweets containing keywords associated with Trump-supporting. Building on this, another approach I employed was to search for gendered slurs and terms associated with antifeminism, some from my existing knowledge and experience with antifeminist discourse, and others from reading tweets I was finding. Based on these searches, I also searched for terms which cooccurred prominently, but which I had not initially looked for. Overall, the tweets selected for analysis in this chapter were sampled based on a list of words<sup>57</sup>, including: "#MAGA" (Make America Great Again), "Feminazi", "antifeminist", "#FeminismIsCancer", "#WomenAgainstFeminism", "SJW" ("social justice warrior", a term of abuse used against perceived political progressives, including feminists, popular with reactionaries and the alt-right online), "Misandry" (a neologism denoting hatred or prejudice against men as a category, used in antifeminist discourse) and "cunt". It is important to note that these words on their own do not necessarily indicate the way in which they are used, and may be used in ways that are insulting, supportive or critical of in various ways. These ambiguities are interrogated during the analysis of tweets, and even then may still be ambiguous. As with the previous chapter, once I had a list of tweets where these terms occurred, I selected every n'th instance, either the 10<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> depending on the size of the initial list. Once I had refined the list, I coded the tweets, looking for any prominent themes. This coding process was quite straightforward, given the clear delineation and short length of tweets, and produced a number of themes, specifically relating to support for Trump, and apparent hostility toward feminists and Islam/Muslims. The main purpose of this coding was to allow me to arrive at a final sample of tweets that was to some extent informed by the general thematic features of the corpus, rather than as a form of analysis in and of itself.

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<sup>56</sup> Allegations of widespread sexism, misogyny, bigotry have featured prominently in liberal-leaning popular media, even from before Trump became the Republican presidential candidate or won the election: see Taub (2015) writing for Vox Media, and Philip (2016) writing in the Independent for examples. For a more contemporary, scholarly discussion of this phenomenon, see Valentino et al (2018).

<sup>57</sup> These are presented here as a mix of hashtags and non-hashtags based on how they tended to appear in my data, but word-search queries do not distinguish between hashtags and non-hashtags unless specified, so there is little meaningful distinction in terms of methodology. Any distinctions emerge at the point of analysis.

After selecting tweets from themes that were analytically relevant to my research questions, I then had to check they still existed outside of my data, in line with the ethical requirements of this project. In many cases, more so than the previous chapter, the tweets I selected were no longer in existence. This was especially the case with the tweets containing “cunt”, where only 9 of the 31 tweets that were selected still existed at the time of analysis.

### Preface: Trump and MAGA

Many of the tweets I will analyse relate to discourses produced by supporters of Donald Trump, and discourses that function as expressing support for Trump, and opposition to his perceived political and social opponents. Being collected in March 2017, this data comes from a point in time roughly two months after Trump’s inauguration, at a time when discourse related to this on Twitter was seen as increasingly politicised and marked by invective. Being International Women’s Day has added significance here, given that Trump’s victory was predicated on Hillary Clinton, who would have been the first female president in US history, losing the election. Additionally, Trump’s own alleged misogyny and chauvinism, both in his behaviour and rhetoric, have framed much of the counter discourse directed at him, particularly from feminists and supporters of Hillary Clinton within the Democratic party and elsewhere.

Before analysing how the genres, discourses and styles of these tweets contribute to the construction of reactionary discourse centred around Donald Trump, I will briefly discuss how Trump relates to Twitter, as I think my analysis of his supporters’ discourse should account for this. Since winning the 2016 presidential election Trump’s presence on, and relationship with, Twitter as a platform has been acutely felt and subject to much discussion and scrutiny. While this has mostly occurred within the public sphere, and among journalists and the media classes, there is some recent academic work on the topic. Writing from an linguistic anthropology perspective, Stolee and Caton (2018) provide us with an analysis of how Trump’s distinctive rhetoric and persona fits with the particulars of Twitter as a discursive medium and discuss whether this might explain his popularity. Familiar features of Twitter are singled out here: the enforced brevity of messages, the “synchronic, largely ahistorical engagement” (p.154) promoted by a reverse-chronological newsfeed, the potential use of retweets and hashtags in dialogue and identity formation, the pseudo-anonymity of the platform and the ‘trolling’ enabled by it, and the somewhat

lax enforcement on Twitter's part. Regarding Trump, the authors argue that Twitter "was always primed and ready to create his kind of persona; it was only waiting for Donald Trump to arrive" (p.157). For the authors, this is partly due to Trump's use of Twitter "reflect[ing] more closely the style of other Twitter users" (p.159): Trump's propensity for tweeting in short, 'authentic' posts characterised by strong, emotional messages, his immediate commentary on the news cycle, his direct engagement with other users, his cultivation of a personal brand, and his combativeness all appear to speak to a particular base of Twitter users, and have gained him support which they argue "has not waivered since" (p.156). In short then, Trump's presentation of self on Twitter is done in a way which works very effectively with certain features of Twitter, and in so doing his performance speaks to the kinds of users who tend to support him: by writing in short statements, ranting, commenting in a 'no-filter' style on current events, attacking and insulting politicians and public figures, and even making spelling and grammatical errors, Trump appears relatable and authentic.

What I feel is somewhat absent from Stolee and Caton's (2018) analysis, however, is a similarly critical attitude toward the inverse of Trump's Twitter use and discourse: the performative respectability and professionalism of liberal politicians, and their own base of supporters. Interestingly, much of the article itself is underscored by the general incredulous attitude towards Trump, his success, and his use of Twitter that is found throughout liberal spheres. His own brand of "Trump-speak" (p.157) is characterised by the authors in terms familiar to any of us who follow commentary on him: that he is often incoherent, uninhibited, and prone to lying. Just as Trump is denigrated, his more respectable political contemporaries are elevated. While Trump lies, Clinton produces "volumes of factually correct statements" (p.157), while Trump's Twitter rhetoric is "not crafted according to the rules of standard written English." (p.159), Obama's "echo a prized tradition of [American] political rhetoric" (p.159). Aside from this, the article seems to echo other problematic aspects of American liberal ideology, namely the classist suggestion that Trump's supporters are defined by a kind of ignorance. While not necessarily untrue, such an analysis risks failing in two specific ways in the context of analysing this kind of discourse. Firstly, it lacks the aforementioned critical approach to the ideologies and rhetoric of the liberal political establishment which Trump has to some extent disrupted, potentially presenting Trump and the discourses of his supporters as some kind of isolated problem, rather than part of a collection of problems, or a symptom

of contemporary conditions. Secondly, it obscures the ideologies and discourses against which much ‘Trump-speak’ may be being constructed in opposition to, potentially hampering any critical analysis of those discourses. In response to this, I have conducted this analysis with the awareness that these discourses are themselves opposed to other prevailing discourses found on Twitter and elsewhere.

### **Hashtags, emojis, Trump, genre**

As I mentioned previously, a prominent genre in my data consisted of tweets which expressed support for Donald Trump. These tweets were identified through their use of “#MAGA”, and in this sense they compose their own distinct sub-corpus within my data. Here I will treat these tweets as their own genre, as I feel they have a more-or-less uniform generic character in terms of the social activity they relate to, while also encompassing some distinct subgenres. Taken as a social activity, supporting Trump is accomplished here in several ways, including through the minimal use of traditional text in favour of emojis and hashtags, the use of political slogans and acronyms, humour and derision of political opponents. Along with expressing support for Trump, these tweets appeared to do so in a way that related to different kinds of reactionary discourse, especially misogynistic and antifeminist discourse, and discourse related to hostility toward Islam and Muslims. I will here discuss and analyse these different forms of Trump support as being examples of subgenre within the overall discursive genre of Trump support.

Many of these tweets belong to a subgenre I will call *minimal-text*: they express support in a way that does not utilise much regular text, relying instead on emojis and extensive hashtags (Figure 67, Figure 68, Figure 69, Figure 70, Figure 71, Figure 72, Figure 75, Figure 79, Figure 82, Figure 83). All these tweets use a mix of hashtags and occasionally emojis in the majority of their character limit, with little standard text, which when it occurs is usually in the form of short statements which somewhat frame or elaborate on the content of the tweets, without dominating it. Turning first to the ones principally featuring emojis: although in regular use emojis are generally used to enhance the ‘positive’ sentiment of a message (Danesi, 2016, p.51), they can also be used in more ‘negative’ ways, and are often somewhat ambiguous. Figure 67, Figure 68 and Figure 75 are notable here, Figure 68 featuring a series of handclap emojis and a thumbs-up, and the other two both featuring the ‘thinking face’ emoji. In the former case this is supplemented by an American flag emoji, and another of a light skinned woman raising her hand. Along with the selection of hashtags this seems to communicate enthusiastic support for Trump from

the position of white American women, in a banally nationalistic way. Even the emojis on their own can be read depicting celebration from specifically white American women, as Twitter has allowed users to pick the skin colour of emojis since 2015, before the data was collected. While I would not argue that this specific selection of emojis should necessarily be read as explicitly white supremacist in its representation, it does have a conspicuous absence of non-white emojis despite drawing on ‘women’ as a very broad category. Given this, I am inclined to read these emojis as an example of a particularly white banal nationalism. In the latter cases the ‘thinking face’ emoji is used. Denesi (2016) identifies this emoji as being a “contemplating metaphor, structured in such a way that it resembles the facial microexpression assumed in some cultures to convey thoughtful consideration, implying that one will get back to one’s interlocutor with an answer” (p.71). This is a somewhat literal description, and while it may be the ‘intended’ use of this emoji, a familiarity with Twitter discourse as a user leads me to suggest that this specific emoji is often deployed in a way which displays a sarcastic, facetious, sceptical or mocking manner. In both cases this is seemingly applied to the embedded/attached content, a quoted tweet in one case, and an image in the other. Here, it appears that the ‘thinking face’ communicates a kind of incredulity and mocking scepticism, made clearer by the use of “Hmmm” (Figure 67)<sup>58</sup> and “clueless” (Figure 75), the latter case being an outright insult that attacks the presumed intelligence of the target, which in this case appears to be ‘SJW’ feminists.

Including the emoji-focused tweets, the other tweets in this genre are ones which principally feature hashtags as the textual content (Figure 69, Figure 70, Figure 71, Figure 72, Figure 79, Figure 82 and Figure 83). A major hashtag that defines this genre is #MAGA, though there are other apparently pro-Trump hashtags that can be seen, such as “#Trump”, “#TrumpsArmy”, “#AmericaFirst”, “#DrainTheSwamp”, “#TrumpStrong” and “#NotMyProtest”, the latter a disparaging reference to the Women’s March which was occurring at the time. #MAGA is especially significant for the whole genre of pro-Trump tweets: originally a central campaign slogan, “Make America Great Again” has gone on to play a prominent role in the discourses of both Trump and his supporters. MAGA then, is an acronym emerging from a context of political election campaign rhetoric, and #MAGA is the transformation of this acronym into a hashtag. Discussing acronyms from a critical

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<sup>58</sup> This use of “Hmmm” here appears similar to the “Oh preface” discussed by Heritage (1998), where the prefacing of a response with “Oh” can indicate “that, from the viewpoint of the answerer, a question is problematic in terms of its relevance, presuppositions, or context” (p.291). Here both “Hmmm” and the thinking emoji may indicate incredulity in a similar way.

discourse analysis perspective, Billig (2013) offers some observations on their functions, purposes and historical context which I think can be applied to this analysis. For Billig, discussing them specifically within the context of academic writing, the proliferation of acronyms since the 1960s is symptomatic of wider structural changes in academia: a move towards increased managerialism, professional specialisation, and a research environment that incentivises academics to make their work appear more tangible, official-sounding and significant. Billig argues that acronyms are most visible in academia as stand-ins for noun phrases, such as the names of fields of study, departments, governing bodies, methodologies and so on. Here the acronym is seen as an extension of the tendency to provide “solidity to the ‘thing’ that the academic is writing about” (p.89): diverse ways of referring to nuanced or somewhat nebulous concepts are ‘solidified’ into a capitalised acronym, and in so doing gains the appearance of something official, widely accepted, valid and important. Billig notes that in this sense the acronym “bears witness to its own success – to the need for people to shorten something that is familiar to them” (p.89), it suggests that the concept it is representing is important enough to warrant its own acronym, regardless of the actual nature of the concept or entity being represented in the acronym.

This analysis, despite differences in context, can be related to the use of acronyms in the data presented in this chapter. While in the context of academic writing Billig is sceptical of the often-given excuse for the proliferation of acronyms – that they save space in journal writing – I argue that this is more of an acute issue in the context of Twitter. The shortening of “Make America Great Again”, 24 characters including spaces, to a four-character acronym makes instrumental sense given the limiting of tweets to 140 characters at the time, and yet the same is not seen for other long pro-Trump political slogans, such as “Drain the swamp” and “America First” seen elsewhere in these tweets. As in Billig’s analysis, the need for brevity in the medium is not likely the primary drive behind this, even if it is more pressing on a medium like Twitter, where meaning must often be truncated into character-limited portions. MAGA also differs from the topic of Billig’s analysis in that it is not a noun phrase: unlike the titles of university departments, research councils and methodological/analytic concepts MAGA is not the name of an entity, but a phrase that demands political action. MAGA, as a hashtag or otherwise, is perhaps a very acute example of a nebulous, ambiguous empty signifier of political discontent being solidified first into a phrase slogan, and then into an acronym. The ‘thing’

being made ‘solid’ here is a nationalistic call for political change, action and renewal along reactionary lines. As an acronym MAGA carries much of the prestige identified by Billig, but in a nationalistic political context: it is imposing, recognisable, official-looking and assumes that it is already so important as to be recognisable.

MAGA has indeed been a very successful slogan: discursively, MAGA has been described as a “remarkably affecting and effective” (Holland and Fermor, 2017, p.183) slogan, one which “reach[es] back into the foundational myths of US history (and exceptionalism), through a romanticised nostalgia for the recent past... and... promise[s] to deliver a glorious patriotic future, befitting of a great nation” (p.183). MAGA is notable not just for the nationalistic sentiment it expresses, but also for how it specifically “speaks to [the] nostalgia, fear and hope” (p.183) experienced by his supporters: the idea that a once-great America has experienced difficulties, and become diminished by (internal and external) forces, but through patriotism and with the work of Trump will become ‘great’ again, delivered into a “better, safer and more prosperous tomorrow” (p.183). These themes are reflected also in the related hashtags identified above; “#DrainTheSwamp” is another prominent slogan of Trump’s referring to his various promises to reform the American political establishment, particularly perceived corruption in the political and material culture of Washington DC, while “#TrumpStrong” and “#TrumpsArmy” express very strong political support for Trump, and the identification of membership with his supporters. Finally, “#AmericaFirst” is another significant, nationalistic slogan which Trump employed during and after the election, and which continues to figure in discourses associated with him. Related to #MAGA, #AmericaFirst functions to send a message of American exceptionalism in the face of adversity, and Trump’s stated commitment to this as a political goal. Despite being subject to derision, the success of these slogans, and the degree to which they resonated with people has “shocked the neo-liberal orthodoxy” (p.183), partly through their outright and unashamed appeals to populism, in sharp contrast to the “mastery of policy detail” (p.183) personified by the American political establishment, and figures such as Hillary Clinton.

Being populist, nationalistic appeals to patriotic sentiment, feelings of national nostalgia and triumph in the face of adversity, slogans such as #MAGA, #AmericaFirst and so on require “the construction of numerous threatening others” (p.183). These others and the nature of the threats they pose can be varied and vague, but an important point is that

this rhetoric functions by enrolling Trump and a receptive audience together, in opposition to any such “dangerous and threatening other(s)” (p.183). These others are typically identified along the lines of right wing, nationalistic, conservative ideology, and the place of hashtags like #MAGA and #AmericaFirst in networks of right wing and white supremacist discourse has been documented in literature. Based on a semantic network analysis, Eddington (2018) demonstrates that both these hashtags are linked within discursive networks on Twitter to various white supremacist, sexist and xenophobic discourses, networks and actors, to the extent that the proliferation of #MAGA and its associated hashtag networks created “an organizing discursive space for extremist and White supremacist groups.” (p.9). Eddington further suggests that the very vagueness of these slogans, in terms of precisely what sort of threat is being faced, lends itself to use by extremist groups, as it reflects a kind of “coded, ‘dog whistle’ rhetoric” (p.9), allowing groups with more overtly far-right politics than Trump to utilise the network it creates. The use of #MAGA and #AmericaFirst in tweets that contain more explicitly reactionary discourse was present in other subgenres I observed within the #MAGA genre, and I will discuss them in more detail later in this chapter.

Returning to the minimal-text subgenre, what seems to define tweets in this genre beyond the primacy of hashtags (and emojis) and the relative lack of non-hashtag text, is the distinctive way hashtags are brought together. With the exception of Figure 71, these tweets do not incorporate hashtags into the actual sentences they construct, but rather present them in a way similar to a list of slogans, with very little context. While one of the initial purposes Twitter intended hashtags for was to aid in the searchability and indexing of topics (Zappavigna, 2015), hashtags have over the years “been appropriated by users to perform other roles in the communicative process.” (Scott, 2015, p.19), especially in ways that “activate certain contextual assumptions, thus guiding the reader’s inferential processes” (p.19). What this means is that hashtagging can be used to indicate how a tweet should be read, as a tool to guide the way another user may interpret the tweet. This can be accomplished in several ways; using the highlighting function of hashtagging to draw emphasis to certain words, relating a tweet clearly to a particular topic or concept, emphasising the relevance of particular words/topics over others, using the search functions of hashtags to allow the reader to follow the tweet to other tweets, expressing the user’s attitude toward a topic through hashtagging words that indicate sentiment, and to indicate what kind of conclusions and inferences a reader should draw from a tweet

(pp.14-19). How are these potential uses reflected in this genre, and how else are they used? Turning to Figure 71, we can see hashtags used in some of the ways outlined above: “#MAGA RED” here points out similarities between the colours worn by the protesters and the colour of the iconic MAGA baseball caps associated with Trump’s supporters. By treating the acronym MAGA as a hashtag the user has effectively emphasised and indexed a term that would not necessarily have been treated this way by someone who did not want to express support for Trump in the process. The two hashtags at the start identify the targets whose actions they are highlighting, while the final two hashtags communicate their sentiment and contextualise the tweet within the events on IWD2017. Both these pairs of hashtags help to place the tweet within a frame of reference that is related to a discourse of enthusiastic support for Trump. Additionally, the fact the user merged ‘Sharia Law’ into one word gives it the form of a hashtag, missing only the ‘#’ symbol which would index it. However, whether this was intended or not is unclear.

The use of hashtags here demonstrates some of the features discussed above, but the rest of the tweets in this genre use hashtags in slightly different ways. Overall, many of these tweets appear to use hashtags in order to maximise the searchability and indexicality of their tweets, and to take advantage of the networks this affords their tweets, while also potentially guiding users who view the tweets in how they might be interpreted in relation to political discourse, and support for Trump. Two recurring elements here are the ‘backloading’ of hashtags to the end of a tweet, and the mix of both pro-Trump and more general hashtags. Figure 67, Figure 68, Figure 69, Figure 70, Figure 72, Figure 75, Figure 76, Figure 79 and Figure 83 engage in this to varying extents, while Figure 82 forgoes regular text entirely. Together, they form a genre of tweets that manage to relate news stories, sentiments and opinions expressed in the tweets to both the more overtly reactionary #MAGA/pro-Trump hashtag networks, and to more ‘neutral’ or mundane networks. This tends to occur through the inclusion of hashtags which do not have a specific political currency alongside hashtags which are related to Trump and Trump support, and hashtags which relate to hateful or antagonistic discourse. Some notable examples include Figure 83, which uses the generic “Thursday thoughts” hashtag (a hashtag which can be used on Twitter to accompany observations a user shares on that day of the week) to share an anti-Islam video, linked to both pro-Trump hashtags and the “#BanIslam” hashtag. One potential outcome from this indexing of an apparently benign, widely used hashtag (#ThursdayThoughts) with hashtags that are related to Trump support and hostility toward Islam, is that a user choosing to view tweets featuring #ThursdayThoughts may come into

contact with this user's tweet, without searching for the more political or reactionary hashtags that appear in it. Figure 70 does a similar thing, but with a high degree of sarcasm: the inclusion of the final two hashtags may suggest that the support expressed for the previous hashtags is not serious. Here, making these into hashtags may be to take advantage of indexing, but also to visually highlight the groups being called out. Finally, Figure 67 goes to such an extent in indexing the tweet with hashtags that there is considerable overlap: aside from pro-Trump hashtags, and general hashtags related to IWD2017 and political action taking place on the day, the tweet uses three different hashtags that can apply to mothers (#women, #mothers, #parents). While the tweet it was presumably referring to has since been deleted, the presence of these hashtags may suggest it was relevant to these topics.

Overall then, this subgenre is defined by both the technical use of hashtags within tweets, in terms of the implications that this use has within Twitter as a platform, and for the discursive nature of the tweets. Tweets of this subgenre appear to use hashtags in order to index their discourse within pro-Trump networks and for various, higher-level purposes as observed in literature, such as to improve searchability, relate their tweets to other tweets, and potentially guide other users in how their tweets may be interpreted. Importantly though, this subgenre also tends to use hashtags in interesting and quite specific ways. Especially notable is the sheer volume of hashtags, and how the selection tends to include multiple pro-Trump hashtags, alongside more general or topical hashtags. A potential consequence of this is that the indexing of tweets via hashtags in a way which relates pro-Trump discourses to other current events and topics, makes these tweets easily searchable by other users, potentially including users who are not actively seeking out these more political or reactionary hashtags. Additionally, this mixing of mundane with more political or even potentially hateful hashtags may serve to broaden the appeal of these more problematic discourses. If this is the case, then this may represent an example of *issue hijacking*, on the part of Trump supporters. Issue hijacking on Twitter has received some attention in academic literature, broadly referring to a process where an issue which is framed in a particular way is reframed through a counternarrative, especially through the appropriation of hashtags. Jackson and Welles (2015) discuss this phenomenon in relation to a public relations hashtag (#MyNYPD) created by the New York Police Department. While intended to facilitate the sharing of 'positive' stories by citizens of their interactions with the NYPD, the hashtag was quickly appropriated and instead used to highlight issues of police brutality and overpolicing, particularly against black communities,

to the extent that the majority of the tweets featuring the hashtag were of this counternarrative genre (p.932). In this example, the authors frame issue hijacking in a positive light, seeing such incidents as demonstrating “the democratizing potential of Twitter and the evolving strategies of citizen activists in the age of new media” (p.933). In light of this, the inclusions of ‘official’ hashtags (#DayWithoutAWoman, #InternationalWomensDay, etc.) in tweets which appear to subvert the framing of these hashtags makes some sense: an attempt to appropriate these hashtags within counternarratives that denigrate feminists and protesters, express support for Donald Trump, and link these counternarratives to wider reactionary political sentiment. This is in sharp contrast to the more positive example found in Jackson and Welles (2015) and may suggest that this “democratising potential of Twitter” highlighted by phenomena such as issue hijacking may also apply to reactionary counterpublics. Broadly, I see this subgenre specifically as constituting a key finding of this project.

Other subgenres here are defined more by their political and ideological content than by their formal composition, lexical content or the way they use Twitter’s features to relate and link different contexts and topics. One such genre relates back to the tendency of #MAGA discourse to link to more overtly hateful discourse, in this case to *anti-Islam* and *anti-Muslim* discourse: tweets that express a hostile attitude toward Islam and/or Muslims within the context of showing support for Trump. Before analysing the tweets in this subgenre, I will briefly discuss the terminology used to refer to this kind of discourse, specifically why I am electing to not use the term ‘islamophobia’. In a 1999 review article discussing ‘islamophobia’ in relation to several publications of the topic, including one by the Runnymede Trust, international relations scholar Fred Halliday offers a critique of the term. Though he argues “That there is such a thing as denoted by the term ‘Islamophobia’ is undoubtedly true” (p.898), Halliday sees the term itself as unsuitable when naming the complex prejudices, hostilities, violence, discrimination as so on that the term has come to encompass. There are multiple reasons for this, mostly related to how the term oversimplifies very complex and historical processes, as well as how it constructs both ‘Islam’ and ‘the West’. The foremost simplification for Halliday is in these categories, by referring to ‘islamophobia’, the irrational fear and hatred of Islam, we are treating ‘Islam’ as a monolithic entity which is cohesive: “*one Islam*... something out there against which the phobia can be directed” (emphasis in original, p.898). By accepting the ‘Islam’ in this concept we also risk defining the people subject to islamophobia, with their vast differences in culture, history, geography, religious practices, even “relate to the

contemporary world, to each other or to the non-Muslim world” (p.893) as being mostly defined by our monolithic interpretation of Islam. This simplification has other perverse consequences, both in terms of how ‘Islamophobia’ is meant to be addressed, and how certain acts are conceived as ‘Islamophobic’. Halliday’s critique of proponents of the term at the time, such as the Runnymede Trust, is that if ‘Islamophobia’ is seen as an irrational fear or hatred based on misconception and prejudice of Islam, then the solution is constructed along the lines of an invitation to “respect, understand, [and] study ‘Islam’” (p.883). Rather, Halliday highlights how what constitutes ‘Islam’ is highly contested, complex and always changing, and that the idea there is any singular ‘Islam’ to be understood, or that a definitive ‘understanding’ is even possible, has tended to lead those opposed to anti-Muslim prejudice “to accept, *as the one true Muslim answer*, particular, and often conservative, versions of that tradition” (p.897) as being more ‘authentic’. What follows from this is that if the way to address ‘Islamophobia’ is simply to correct prejudice by learning about and ‘understanding’ Islam, and if the version of Islam constructed as more authentic tends to be more conservative interpretations, then this poses a challenge to “the possibility of dialogue based on universal principles” (p.899). What this means is that if we treat more conservative interpretations of Islam as being somehow more authentic, then we lose the ability to advance emancipatory critique, in those cases where Islamic communities, countries or groups violate universal rights. Additionally, this construction of a monolithic ‘Islam’ obscures the way that many grievances presented in ‘Islamic’ critiques of ‘the West’ are not related to religious differences or discrimination, but to much more fundamental issues of material and geopolitical power (p.899). The inverse of this is seen in issues that drive ‘Islamophobia’ in non-Muslim majority countries: rather than necessarily related to a ‘fear’ of ‘Islam’, Halliday argues that material issues such as “issues of immigration, housing, employment, racial prejudice, [and] anti-immigrant violence”, all acutely secular issues, have far more to do with the motivations for ‘Islamophobia’. Typifying this is the finding that so many victims of ‘Islamophobic’ hate crime and racism are not Muslims, but are rather people of diverse ethnic backgrounds who are labelled as Muslim, in a way that interacts with other forms of racism, so that “a Hindu, a Sikh or a Christian from Tamil Nadu” (p.899) may all be subject to ‘Islamophobia’. Rather than ‘Islamophobia’, Halliday proposes terminology that focuses on the actual people who are subject to those very real things which fall under ‘Islamophobia’, suggesting “anti-Muslimism”, and in this chapter the terminology I will use will be closer to this term.

How this applies to my analysis, beyond a clarification of the terminology I am employing, can be seen in Halliday's critique of how the term 'Islamophobia' conceives Islam and Muslims. Just as Halliday identifies the ways in which 'Islam' is treated by users of the term as an authentic, generally conservative othered identity that serves to erase the multiplicity of Islam and Muslims, so too does much of the *anti-Muslim* discourse I will discuss. In these tweets, Islam is constructed as a profoundly conservative, backward, dangerous ideology that presents a threat to (Western) women in an existential way, and Muslims are constructed as being determined by this conception of the religion. In a perverse mirror of what Halliday sees as the simplistic notion that there is a true 'Islam' against which 'Islamophobia' is ignorant, the discourse constructed by these tweets also treats Islam as something with a true and authentic nature, but constructs that true nature in a way which draws on racism and reactionary political ideology.

The most acute examples of this subgenre are seen in Figure 71, Figure 75, Figure 82 and Figure 83, all of which form a subgenre that links pro-Trump activity with both IWD2017-related topics, and anti-Muslim elements. This is accomplished in a consistent way between all the tweets: Through suggesting that Islam and/or Muslims represent a threat to women and linking this to perceived hypocrisy and double standards on the part of feminists in relation to this threat. In a similar way to the previous subgenre, this is sometimes accomplished through hashtags: Figure 82 and Figure 83 use "#muslims #rape", and "#BanIslam" respectively, but another prominent element of this genre is how the tweets use linked and embedded media. All these tweets do this in some way, either through linking to media and other tweets, or by embedding a picture. This is especially relevant in the case of Figure 75, which reveals the anti-Muslim nature of its sentiment solely through the context provided by the embedded picture. The other tweets are more overt in their anti-Muslim sentiment. Figure 83 utilises "#BanIslam", which has been explicitly identified elsewhere as a "problematic hash tag" (Waseem and Hovy, 2016, p.89) widely used by hate groups and in anti-Muslim discourses. Even in cases where anti-Muslim discourse is coded less explicitly, the effect is not subtle: as mentioned previously, Figure 71 brings up the topic of women "suffer[ing] with ShariaLaw" (sic.), here I would suggest Sharia Law functions as a dog whistle for the generalised existential threat Islam is seen to pose to the west, rather than an earnest critique of it as a legal system. Likewise, Figure 75 uses an image to apparently claim that a "love" of Islam by women is incompatible with opposition to misogyny, therefore implying that misogyny is in some way inherent to Islam. Here again, Islam is presented as a system which is inherently

misogynistic and dangerous to women, in a way which does not appear to engage in any kind of nuanced critique. Finally, the way Figure 82 juxtaposes Muslims with “rape” again serves to draw on established anti-Muslim discourses.

As I mentioned previously a key feature of this subgenre, one which is notable for its consistency within the subgenre and for its ideological importance to anti-Muslim discourse, antifeminism and pro-Trump discourse, is the way feminists and ‘liberal’ political opponents are framed as hypocritical or complicit in the threat that Islam is seen as posing. In a study that, like this thesis, combined CDA with topic modelling in reference to hateful discourse, Törnberg and Törnberg (2016) found that within the corpus of anti-Muslim and anti-feminist social media posts they studied, Islam was characterised as possessing “an immanent essence of female oppression” (p.413), and that simultaneously “feminists are perceived not to protest against male chauvinism and female oppression among immigrants in general and among Muslims in particular” (p.412). This line of criticism, the authors argue, is not done seriously or in good faith, but rather “used for the sake of the attack, rather than for any deeper, actual sympathies with feminism or concerns for gender equality” (p.414). This critical attitude toward feminists, and their imagined support for a construction of Islam as dangerous to women, extends to the wider left and progressive politics in general (p.414). This is also present in the tweets in this subgenre, through the criticism of the DNC (Democratic National Committee, the formal governing body of the American Democratic Party) and “SJWs” (an acronym generally used to refer to people perceived as espousing progressive or left politics). Overall these tweets fit into a subgenre, which has been observed in a different context, that uses “gender equality as a discursive strategy in order to criticize Islam and Muslims” (p.417), whilst also criticising perceived feminist and left/progressive groups. Specifically, this is done here in a way that additionally situates a support for Donald Trump and banal/overt nationalism within this field. It is worth mentioning that this apparently paradoxical enrolment of anti-Muslim and anti-feminist rhetoric in the apparent ‘defence’ of women’s rights and welfare is not especially unusual when viewed in light of related discourse analytic work. Notably, Wetherell et al (1987) have analysed the intermingling of apparently contradictory positions in peoples’ talk on issues of social justice, specifically the ways in which elements of liberal ideology can be used to endorse the principles of gender equality, whilst simultaneously justifying inequalities experienced by women, a position they call “unequal egalitarianism” (p.59). Wetherell and Potter noted that such “practical ideologies” (p.60), the actual ideas, beliefs and practices people adopt in daily life, do often appear

contradictory or idiosyncratic, or as they put it: “montages of incoherently related themes” (p.60). This position though, the deployment of anti-Islam and anti-feminism in the apparent defence of women, is not so incoherent when viewed in a wider context. While from a politically progressive perspective the categories of ‘Muslims’ and ‘women’ may be seen as groups whose struggle for equality is equally important, and even related, the same is not true from other perspectives. When dealing with a practical ideology that combines common reactionary ideas toward feminists and Muslims, there does not seem to be much contradiction in seeing these groups as presenting a threat to ‘women’.

Moving on from this anti-Islam subgenera, another subgenera here are tweets that were to some degree *antifeminist, sexist or misogynistic* in the generic characteristics, whilst still linked to support for Trump in some way.

Generally, this is done in the context of disparaging people and groups the users identified negatively as feminist, especially those associated with liberal politics and the Democrats, and therefore opposed to Trump. Tweets in this genre include Figure 65, Figure 70, Figure 78 and Figure 86. A consistent feature across tweets in this subgenre (those which occur within the pro-Trump genre) is the apparent use of a somewhat blasé, uninterested, unimpressed and or dismissive tone and sentiment, often with some element of humour. This is accomplished in a range of ways. Other tweets focus around ‘Day Without a Woman’, an international women’s strike which had been planned to occur on the day, during which women were encouraged to protest, avoid spending money, not engage in paid or domestic labour, and to wear red.

These tweets which mention Day Without a Woman tend to also be mocking and dismissive in various ways. All but Figure 70 specifically do this by suggesting in some way that women withdrawing their labour in protest will be a good thing, or will be counterproductive, and they tend to do this in a humorous or celebratory way. The use of “Sorry, we didn’t notice you were gone” in Figure 78 appears to frame those women striking and protesting in terms of their perceived unproductivity, the potential implication being that women’s labour in the workplace is unproductive, and therefore will not be missed. Additionally, the use of “we” potentially attempts to link this user’s sentiment with a group, and given their additional use of “#Daywithoutafeminist” and “#MAGA” this group may be perceived as Trump supporters and those who have a distain or opposition toward feminism and feminists. Another example of this more explicit antifeminism is found in Figure 86, which goes as far as to use “#Feminazis”, and like Figure 65, talks

explicitly about deriving a kind of antifeminist enjoyment from the protest, in the former from the prospect of women being fired, and in the latter from a humorous idea of stereotypical male behaviour being permitted in the context of a very literally interpreted (perhaps for comedic effect) "#DayWithoutAWoman".

In the context of this data selection, a separate genre that I will mention briefly are *counterfactuals*, which I use here to mean tweets which, despite containing #MAGA, do not appear to do so in a way which expresses support for Trump, and in so doing may suggest that the genre I have discussed is not cohesive. As I have discussed previously, the presence of counterfactuals is not surprising given my sampling method, and the always-somewhat ambiguous nature of hashtags and text on Twitter. I will however briefly discuss these tweets, and my reasoning for classifying them as counterfactuals. Figure 66, Figure 81 and possibly Figure 65 could be classified as counterfactuals here, for distinct reasons: Figure 66 is probably the clearest case of a counterfactual tweet: although it uses the MAGA hashtag, it does so within a tweet that accuses Trump and his supporters of "normalizing misogyny". Here the indexing of both "Trump" and "MAGA" may be done to take advantage of the indexing features, though for opposed reasons to many of the other tweets I have discussed that did so. Figure 81 is a little more ambiguous: the text appears to work as a caption for the already-captioned embedded media (a picture of a tweet rather than an actual retweet), with little in the way of hashtags to suggest how the tweet should be read, or what degree of irony it may be using. In comparison to other tweets I have discussed, the relative lack of clear hashtags here makes inferring meaning especially difficult. Finally Figure 65, which I have discussed previously under the antifeminist subgenre, can potentially be read as counterfactual. From the appending of "#irony", we could infer that this tweet is not meant earnestly, that the user is embodying some kind of character, and the humour they use here is not meant to be a serious endorsement of Trump, or in opposition to #DayWithoutAWoman. In this situation, we are left to decide how "#irony" changes a statement that does not appear to be especially ironic. Given the noted role of so-called "ironic humour" in propagating sexist and other reactionary discourses online (Drakett et al, 2018), I am inclined to stick to my original classification of this tweet.

To summarise, this overall genre and its constituent subgenres cover various ways of tweeting that generally appear to be supportive of Trump to some extent, within the context of a specific event and related to different topics, centred around but not

restricted to the use of a single, significant hashtag and related hashtags which appear to signal support for Trump. The genre has a general uniformity in how hashtags are employed: multiple, overlapping, used both to take advantage of indexing, and for the various higher-level functions discussed above. The #MAGA genre also comprises multiple subgenres that not only include distinct antifeminist content, but also anti-Muslim content and a distinctive discourse regime that merges the two.

Moving on from the MAGA genre and its associated subgenres, I will now move on to discuss a genre which I originally intended to be the focus of my thesis: *misogyny*. While at the inception of this project, I planned for misogynistic hate speech and serious gendered invective to be a prominent topic of analysis, collecting this kind of discourse has been a consistent challenge. As I have discussed previously, if we take gendered invective as a way to identify misogynistic discourse, then issues are encountered not only in the potential for such content to not propagate widely in terms of retweets, but perhaps more so in the fact that these tweets do not tend to ‘stick around’. Not only can tweets be deleted by users, or users required to delete offending tweets by Twitter’s moderators, but should the user’s account be suspended at any point after the data is collected, all their tweets become unreachable. As such, many of the tweets employing gendered slurs no longer exist outside of my raw dataset. Of those that do still exist on Twitter at the time of writing, Figure 121, Figure 123, Figure 124 and Figure 126 are the clearest examples of a gendered slur (“cunt”) being used in the production of outright misogynistic discourse. I argue that these tweets are misogynistic not simply because they use “cunt” (other, more ‘benign’ uses of which I will cover when I discuss counterfactuals), but because “cunt” is used in these tweets in explicitly abusive or virulent ways and is directed at women, either directly or via the category of feminists. In all cases, the gendered invective present in this genre is either directed at or in response to feminism in general, or feminists in particular. Figure 124 and Figure 126 do this in a way similar to tweets in the antifeminism genre: splitting feminism/feminists into two groups, the pathologized group being the “bitches and cunts”. In this way, these two tweets essentially use gendered invective to pathologize the negative feminist category in an overtly misogynistic way. Figure 121 and Figure 123, on the other hand, are more general in the use of gendered slurs. The former, a reply tweet to genderqueer food writer and activist Jack Monroe, dismisses the entire of IWD as “a circle jerk” (a vulgar phrase meaning a situation where the people involved act in a self-congratulatory manner), and does not seem to differentiate “cunt feminists” from any

other category of feminists in an explicit way. Additionally, given that Monroe's tweet was supportive of IWD, Monroe may be included in this category, making this an example of hateful misogynistic language targeted directly at an individual. Finally, Figure 123 employs gendered invective in an explicitly violently misogynistic way: "She needs a kick in the cunt", referring here to Caitlin Moran, a female journalist, mentioned in the quoted tweet (itself tweeted by Ian Miles Cheong, a somewhat notorious antifeminist writer), is violently misogynistic in an obvious manner. Moreover, the "kick in the cunt" is prescribed in response to something that this journalist is alleged to have said, which the user and Cheong have identified as expressing feminist politics. To what extent Cheong's and this user's interpretation of Moran's words is accurate is immaterial, the point is that here the imagery of misogynistic, physical/sexual violence is conjured and used against a woman, in response to the perception of her as a feminist. Overall, the tweets in this genre, particularly the latter two I have discussed, echo the kind of misogynistic discourse which has been identified as 'e-bile' by Emma Alice Jane (2014a, 2014b). For Jane, e-bile encompasses the more extreme end of sexist and misogynistic discourses, denoting an area of discourse that is "marked by graphic threats of sexual violence, explicit ad hominem invective and unapologetic misogyny" (2014a, p.558), and is "calculated to offend" (p.558). While the tweets in this genre are misogynistic, and employ gendered ad homonym, only the final example drifts into the kind of sexualised, violent misogynistic discourse that is discussed in the bulk of Jane's work on the topic. There are many potential reasons for this discrepancy between the most extreme discourses from my data and the kind discussed by Jane. Jane's corpus was largely auto-ethnographic, based on years of emails, private messages and forum posts she had collected, all very different online discursive mediums from Twitter. Additionally, as I have said previously much of the original tweets I collected have since become unavailable, either through deletion or the user becoming suspended in the future. I argue here that what is still extant within this genre may represent the 'milder' instances of misogynistic discourse found on Twitter, rather than the more extreme discourse often discussed in media, such as direct targeted harassment and threats of rape which have been the topic of media discussion. There are several possible reasons for this, which I will briefly discuss here, along with how this relates to my analysis and broader project, before moving on to discuss the next genera.

Twitter's changes to its moderation policy in the time between my data collection and analysis, or the fact that my collection methods focused on the general tweeting

associated with an event, rather than at other contexts on Twitter, may have both played a part in this relative lack of violent misogynistic discourse in my data. While selecting cases for this topic, it was notable how many of the tweets came from users who at some point since 2017 had been suspended, or whose tweets simply no longer existed, either through moderation or for some other reason. It is conceivable that if a user produces tweets which break Twitter's terms of use on a semi regular basis, then the more time passes the higher the likelihood that their account will be suspended or moderated. Similarly, the difficulty in finding acutely or violently misogynistic discourse when collecting tweets using these data collection methods was something I observed while conducting my masters thesis (Gray, 2015). What I am trying to make clear here is that the apparent lack of extant misogynistic discourse in my data in no way leads me to suggest that misogynistic discourse is not a serious issue on Twitter. Nor am I even suggesting that the fact so many of these tweets no longer exist should be seen as an endorsement of Twitter's ability to moderate misogynistic discourse and the users that produce it. An assessment of the extent of serious misogynistic discourse on Twitter is outside of the scope of this project and has never been one of my goals during it. Rather, I have tried to explore the possibilities that large volumes of Twitter data may hold for critical discourse analysis on topics such as this, using these very tentative and nascent methodologies. It may be the case that extreme misogynistic discourse is simply difficult to find when collecting around events like International Women's Day, or that the ethical requirement that tweets analysed must still exist presents strong limitations when it comes to studying this kind of discourse. Similarly, it is informative to imagine how this may have been different had my project instead engaged with women who use Twitter and are themselves subject to direct misogynistic attacks, either publicly or through private messages. Jane's work on the topic, which I discussed above, is among the most detailed and informative investigations of violent misogynistic speech online, and it is perhaps significant that her sources of data were predominantly autoethnographic, consisting of violently misogynistic messages that she had been sent, and collected into an archive. If what I have outlined above is the case, then this may have problematic implications for research which attempts to study hateful misogynistic discourse on Twitter in a qualitative manner via these sorts of methods. If it is the case that trying to collect extreme misogynistic tweets both around events and from the general stream of real-time tweets (as was the case during my Masters thesis) yields similarly little in the way of especially hateful discourse, then researchers may want to consider other avenues. As an internet user with a background and interest in hateful

online discourse, I can generally find quite extreme content easily on a platform like Twitter. This is, however, based more on an experiential and holistic knowledge, rather than feeding keywords into a streaming API: knowing what types of accounts to look for, the kinds of display pictures they tend to use, the innuendos employed, the ever-changing lexicon, all things which are hard to implement with something like big data collection, but immediately practical for a single user engaged directly with the platform. Future research may want to take account of these potential issues, perhaps focusing more on tweets made in response to specific women (journalists, politicians, activists etc), or investigating more specific genres of misogynistic discourse.

Moving on from outright misogyny, a very prominent genre here is *antifeminism*: tweets that produce a discourse that constructs feminism as being somehow negative, hateful, misguided, or something to be mocked in a way that does not engage in actual critique. This is a broad genre, which in a similar way to the #MAGA genre comprises multiple subgenres, defined by the way they construct feminism as a topic, and the approach they take in being negative toward it.

The first subgenre I will discuss is what I will call *dichotomous antifeminism*: tweets which construct feminism in a way that is split, typically between a kind seen as more ‘desirable’ and a kind that is pathologized in some way. Figure 100, Figure 104, Figure 105, Figure 106, Figure 107, Figure 112, Figure 113, Figure 119, Figure 127, Figure 129, Figure 130 and Figure 131 all fall into this subgenre, as they all split feminism/feminists in some manner, generally in a way that serves to dismiss more ‘political’ forms of feminism in favour of more ‘moderate’ forms. As I mentioned previously, these tweets and the discursive work they do are an example of ways feminism/feminists are constructed in wider discourse which have been notably discussed by Edley and Wetherell (2001), as well as Wetherell, Stiven and Potter (1987). To briefly summarise before I discuss this genre further, Edley and Wetherell’s influential study focused on the dual “interpretive repertoires of feminism and feminists” (2001, p.439) they observed in their (male) participants’ talk about the topic. The authors observed that when discussing feminism and feminists, the participants tended to construct them in terms of a binary of “reasonable versus extreme and monstrous” (p.439). The dichotomy created here is between an idea of ‘legitimate’ feminism as being steadily progressive, liberal, moderate and ‘sensible’, contrasted with ‘radical’ approaches which tended to be constructed as being extremist, irrational, unreasonable and motivated by the personal hatred of feminists towards men, while the

feminists themselves were characterised as monstrous, ugly and bigoted. This set of discourses has a number of consequences and features. When people identified with feminism they identified with this ‘reasonable’ position (p.447), but this position has serious issues as a form of feminist praxis, not only because it valorises a kind of ‘steady progress’ approach to gender relations, “emptied of any radical potential” (p. 453), but also because it tends to see the major issues and inequalities faced by women as being in the past, as having already been resolved.

Many of these tweets reproduce these ‘Jekyll and Hyde’ repertoires through the use of two terms I collected for: ‘feminazi’, and “misandry”. While there has not been a tremendous amount of attention paid to these terms in the literature, it has been observed that these specific terms in online spaces are used to “discredit and slander” (Rodríguez-Dariasa and Aguilera-Ávila, 2018, p.66) feminist arguments, specifically in contexts where feminist arguments are marked as extreme. ‘Feminazi’ is a term that is simultaneously extreme, clichéd and has been fairly widespread in popular discourse around feminism for some time. Coined by the American reactionary talk-show host Rush Limbaugh in the 1990s, this term is obviously ridiculous to anyone with a passing knowledge of either of the ideologies that it covers, but clearly functions to discredit feminism by marking it as hateful, extreme and seeking to control the lives of others. In discussing the term, masculinities theorist Michael Kimmel (2012) goes into some more detail, seeing it as explicitly linked to so-called “outrage media” (p.31): a media landscape that reacts to perceived threats to the “masculinity and male entitlement” (pp.43) of its target demographic. In this context, even liberal and modest feminist politics and issues such as “campaigns for wage equality, or safety from battery and rape, [are linked] to the organized, methodical genocide in the Third Reich”. (pp.42-43).

Moving on from Kimmel, who I would be remiss to not mention was himself recently accused of sexual impropriety in academia (Ratcliffe, 2018), ‘feminazi’ performs a number of functions in this genre. Primarily it seems to function as the ultimate label for the ‘Hyde’ feminism discussed by Edley and Wetherell (2001). The contrasting of feminists and feminazis occurs explicitly in several of these tweets; Figure 106 states that while feminists “wants equality” (sic), “Feminazis are the ones ruining it”, 46 responds to another tweet that appears to have since been deleted, but from the content we can infer that they are commenting on “Chivalry”, and stating that a feminazi would not approve of the practice, adding the aside “(they can’t sit with us)”, a reference to a scene in the popular 2004 American comedy film “Mean Girls”, in which a female high school student remarks that

another female character cannot sit with her group at lunch, because she is not dressed to a high enough standard<sup>59</sup>. In both these tweets, feminazis are constructed as being somehow in competition or antagonism with reasonable feminists, something also found in Figure 104 and Figure 105, but in these cases it is argued that feminazis have effectively either become interchangeable with reasonable feminists, or similarly “destroyed the image of feminism”.

Moving on from the use of feminazi as a specific term, the repertoires of Jekyll and Hyde can be found more generally in other tweets here. In Figure 112 and Figure 113, the extreme unreasonable feminist is constructed as a product of “modern feminism”. Figure 113 appears to reproduce the more misogynistic elements of this repertoire, calling ‘modern’ feminists “repellent... angry man hating lesbians... [who are] Not about equality now”. Similarly Figure 112, in a series of tweets, states “fuck the modern day feminist”, and states that they are “so brain dead [to think] that feminism is about over powering men”, while contrasting them with the “surrogates who took their lives in order for equality” (sic), and “the women who understand that equality has been met, and strive to keep it that way”.

I would argue that these final two tweets quite neatly demonstrate some features of this repertoire observed by Edley and Wetherell: that ‘equality’ here is meant is a largely unradical sense (2001, p.452), and that history is seen in terms of the steady improvement of women’s conditions (p.450), with the issues of patriarchy located in the past (p.449). In

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<sup>59</sup> For another example of this specific cultural reference on Twitter, see Thackeray et al (2013), who encountered many tweets (almost 200,000 out of an initial data collection of 1,744,271) which referenced this scene, while collecting data for a research project about breast cancer awareness on Twitter. although these tweets were classified as irrelevant to their research questions (having been collected automatically because they shared some keywords with breast cancer awareness discourse), they observe that the Mean Girls tweets “expressed a motivation for adolescent school girls to wear pink clothing to identify themselves as “Mean Girls”... (e.g., “We wear pink on Wednesdays if you don’t you cant sit withus #MeanGirls”[sic.]” (p.3). It is analytically interesting that in both the cases this cultural reference appears to be used by women to exclude another group of women who are constructed as not acceptable to the in-group the user seems to identify with. While it is quite possible that in both cases these references are tongue-in-cheek, its use in

Figure 108 nonetheless functions to delineate acceptable vs unacceptable feminism through a cultural reference that is fairly widespread, and draws on themes of particularly hegemonic femininity found in mass culture.

this regard, it is telling that 51 explicitly mentions the “surrogates” (given the rest of their tweets, I suggest that the user intended to write “suffragettes”) as a symbol of this kind of acceptable feminism, and in doing so can situate ‘modern’ feminists as not being concerned with ‘maintaining’ that equality, but rather gaining power over men.

Broadly, the above constructions of acceptable vs unacceptable feminism and feminists is a form of category work: “the procedures people employ to make sense of other people and their activities” (Leudar et al, 2004). Writing about membership categorization as it related to political discourse and violence in the wake of 9/11, Leuder et al demonstrate a number of ways membership categories are created, maintained and changed, the most relevant for my examples being how “personal characteristics [and] dispositions to act in a particular way” (p.262) are assigned to members of categories. In this case, the extreme, unreasonable feminist is very much characterised by their characteristics and dispositions: angry, hateful, irrational, extreme, repellent and so on. This is contrasted with another membership category, that of the reasonable feminist, who is constructed in terms of actions and dispositions seen as moderate and acceptable.

### **Styles of Trump support, styles of misogyny and antifeminism**

One style especially present within the MAGA genre, are those tweets which have a *celebratory* character, tweets which celebrate the perceived victories of Trump, often in a way that is done at the expense of another group.

A prominent style across these tweets is what I am calling *the wall of blue text*: tweets that are composed in such a way that the majority of the text is made of @’s and hashtags, with very little regular text. This style is obviously related to the minimal text genre I discussed while analysing the wider #MAGA genre, but here I treat it as a style, since it occurs in my wider data in a way that transects multiple genres and subgenres, becoming more of a style for articulating discourse.

Another style I identify is what I will call *the liberal moderator*: a style of tweeting, particularly about feminism, that tends to appeal to pseudo-liberal ideas of moderation, steady progress, and so on in relation to gender relations, and does so in such a way that excludes or pathologises more radical political approaches. Such constructions of feminism and feminists have been observed and commented on in discourse analysis literature, notably by Edley and Wetherell (2001) and Wetherell et al (1987), and the critique of this

style of discourse formed a large part of my own master's thesis (Gray, 2015). What appears to define this style is how a user positions themselves in relation the 'extreme' and 'benign' constructions of feminism I discussed previously. Some examples of this can be seen in Figure 115, Figure 119, Figure 129 and Figure 130. A key feature here appears to be how 'equality' is constructed in relation to feminism: the tweets generally seeming to construct gender 'equality' being a matter of arriving at an arrangement that does not 'favour' women over men, or vice versa.

Some kind of reference to 'equality' in this sense appears quite directly in Figure 119, Figure 129 and within the multi-user thread seen in Figure 130, and the former two examples explicitly articulate this in the form of equations which provide and compare definitions. The clearest case of this mathematical construction appears to be in Figure 129, where in the third tweet the users explicitly lays out this equation with emojis. The previous two tweets provide framing, seeming to construct feminism as being about "equal rights" in a way that does not diminish men or make "women better than men". The final tweet distils this with male/female silhouette emojis: Misogyny and "Misandry" occur when women or men are 'elevated' above one another, where the rights of one diminish the other in a kind of zero-sum construction. The final line appears to condense this liberal construction of feminism, in line with those observed by Edley and Wetherell (2001) and Wetherell et al (1987): a somewhat vague notion of 'equality' as social harmony emptied of radical potential, apparently signified by a rainbow. Written in plain text, it could be rendered as "Feminism: women in peace and harmony with men".

Some of these tweets seem to involve some kind of rejection of 'feminism' in how they arrive at their definitions of equality: Figure 119 states "(most) feminist[s] = Self-righteous SJW with a stick up their ass", echoing the 'Hyde' repertoire described by Edley and Wetherell (2001), but without any apparent definition of the 'good' feminist. Rather, in this case the 'good' feminist is the "Egalitarian", a separate category which is made distinct from 'feminist'. The reply thread shown in Figure 130 also negotiates a similar construction of feminism and 'equality', in the form of a thread between two users.

What appears to be happening is the negotiation of a definition of 'equality' between men and women that is seen as separate from feminism. One user writes "women having more rights isn't against feminism", and writes in a separate post that "feminism is the belief that women should have the same rights as men... that's why it's called FEMinism and not

equalism". What makes these tweets more interesting however, is their apparent lack of coherence or clearly definable line of argument.

As these definitions are negotiated, compared, contrasted and expanded on, what is produced is not so much a definitive, intelligible position of men, women and equality, but something which does not appear to make much clear sense. Rather than dismissing these tweets as unintelligible enough to not be useful in analysis, it is perhaps illustrative to still treat them as meaningful data, because of how they illustrate certain features of working with user-generated data.

Perhaps more so than other tweets I have presented here, Figure 130 represents a good example of what Wetherell et al (1987) call 'practical ideologies': "the often contradictory and fragmentary complexes of notions, norms and models which guide conduct and allow for its justification and rationalization" (p.60). The ideological position this user is constructing here is a practical ideology in the sense that it is precisely a fragmentary complex of notions emerging in practice.

## **Summary**

Together, the analysis I have presented here illustrates the diverse ways in which various reactionary discourse was articulated during IWD2017, and provides a critique and discussion of its form, nature and function. As with the previous chapter, genres styles and discourses have been analysed. This chapter has highlighted a few things, namely the diverse range of discourse that occurred within the broader range of Trump support. Especially pertinent here is the innovative use of hashtags, and the linking of antifeminism with anti-Islam/Muslim discourse. Having concluded my analysis, I will now move onto my final vignette, which concludes my narrative of fieldwork, before reaching my discussion chapter.

## Vignette #3 Moloch

"Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose soul is electricity  
and banks! Moloch whose poverty is the spectre of genius! Moloch whose fate  
is a cloud of sexless hydrogen! Moloch whose name is the Mind!"

(Ginsberg, 1956)

In this final vignette, I will conclude my account of Big Boulder 2017, tying together some of my previous discussion with a focus on some particularly unsettling things I encountered there. I will use this to highlight what I imagine as some of the darker potentialities of big data capitalism, particularly the potential (and already existing) uses of these technologies for repression.

During those two days of conference proceedings, in between the mundane industry talks and mixers, some strange things transpired. I started to feel as though there was some big joke I was not in on. The culture clash between myself and these people became apparent. One panel member poses the rhetorical question "What data does Facebook *not* have?", the other responds "Twitter data", raucous audience laughter follows. The entrepreneur who founded Geek Squad ironically opens cokes brought on stage by a Coca-Cola executive to replace the water jugs, more raucous laughter. A speaker is on first name terms with Mark Zuckerberg and refers to him as "Zuch" throughout the interview. An 'influencer marketer' on stage remarks on the issue of users' negative perceptions over how their data is exploited, that "as a society, we love to buy but hate to be sold". Nobody seems at all viscerally disgusted by this.

Much of this ignorance concerning the political and ethical dimensions of their work was to be expected given the context. These people were not activists or even academics, aside from one (admittedly very good and encouraging) presentation delivered by an academic on the issues of racism and misogyny in the use of algorithmic tech. Mostly however, the people I encountered barely professed any personal politics that went beyond benign progressive liberalism. This was predictable. What was not so predictable was when a current CIA deputy director took the stage to discuss "government use of social data" (BBI, 2017, p.6) as the conference booklet phrases it.

Noticing his panel on the schedule beforehand, I remarked – with implicit concern – to a delegate during an intermission: "so... they've got a guy from the CIA huh?". They replied with something to the effect of "ha, yeah, they do", in precisely the manner they might

politely rebuff someone suggesting 9/11 was an inside job. The presence of a representative from the CIA, an organisation with such an acutely oppressive and bloody history, at a conference dedicated to “establish[ing] the foundation for the long-term success of the social data industry” (BBI, 2017, p.36) may appear odd, but it is not. Ultimately, just like all the other delegates, he was there to talk about data. What he talked about during his interview, ironically opening cokes with the interviewer while people laughed and took photos, was the government use of social data. Partly it seemed like he was there to allay fears about misuse in wake of Snowden, maybe he was there to network like so many others.

This alliance of capital and state power around big data accumulation is part of what social psychologist Shoshana Zuboff (2015) has called ‘surveillance capitalism’. With this new logic of accumulation, the boundaries of corporate and state surveillance are blurring, and interdependencies are beginning to emerge around the control of big data. In a particularly grim forecast, Zuboff suggests that surveillance capitalism may represent the appropriation of reality itself in real-time. Just as capital has vampirically commodified human life into labour and the natural world into private property, now it does the same to reality in the form of “data about the behaviours of bodies, minds, and things take their place... within an infinite global domain of wired things.... the world-spanning organism and all the tiniest elements within it” (p.85).

A ‘world-spanning organism’, one which surveils and commodifies reality in real time, one which brings together the most potentially repressive elements of state and corporate power, one which is expanding and proliferating into new markets. Nick Land, prophet of neoreactionary nihilism, saw something in the accelerating pace of capitalist modernity, particularly its integration of digital technologies, which sets the bleakest tone for anyone who dreams of an alternative. The parallels between Nick Land and Mark Fisher are themselves interesting: both affiliated with the CCRU<sup>60</sup>, both emerging during the expansion of the internet, both struggling with mental illness<sup>61</sup>, both imagining technocapitalism as something utterly inhuman and abominable. Their main differences appear

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<sup>60</sup> The Cybernetic Cultural Research unit was a philosophy research group founded around the mid-90s in Warwick University, principally by Cyberfeminist philosopher Sadie Plant and the aforementioned Nick Land. While much of their output was fringe, it has had enduring and interesting influences (Mckay, 2013).

<sup>61</sup> While Fisher committed suicide following long-term depression, Land appears to have experienced a severe career-altering breakdown following a period of mental illness and intense amphetamine-use, after which his output gradually shifted to the far-right (Sandifer, 2017). Land details the experience in an essay (Land, 2011, pp.629-644).

political and philosophical. Fisher still dared to ask if we could conceive of something beyond capitalism (2009), while Land only saw a bottomless pit to willingly cast ourselves into. Despite the profound sadness which haunts much of Fisher's writing, he was still an optimist to dare to ask such a question. According to Land, there truly is no alternative to the vortex of techno-capitalism:

"The machines have sophisticated themselves beyond the possibility of socialist utility, incarnating market mechanics within their nano-assembled interstices and evolving themselves by quasi-darwinian algorithms that build hypercompetition into 'the infrastructure'. It is no longer just society, but time itself, that has taken the 'capitalist road'."

(Land, 2011, pp.625-626)

For Land, capitalism is expanding and accelerating forever. Sloughing off previous material and social relations like so much dead flesh as it grows and grows; consuming any potential future where it does not continue to exist. As it does, it colonises and transforms time and social reality. While those of us who consider ourselves on the left may talk endlessly of the 'new' – of something liberatory that might come after capitalism – Land sees nothing in the 'new' but an accelerationist darkness that operates beyond human interest and understanding:

"Life continues, and capitalism does life in a way it has never been done before. If that doesn't count as 'new', then the word 'new' has been stripped down to a hollow denunciation. It needs to be re-allocated to the sole thing that knows how to use it effectively, to the Shoggoth summoning regenerative anomalous of fate, to the runaway becoming of such infinite plasticity that nature warps and dissolves before it. To The

Thing. To Capitalism"

(Land, 2011, p.627)

What awaits us? At Boulder I heard cheerful coders and marketers tell me at length about their new tools. One man only a few years older than me told me about his company's tools for inferring sexual orientation based on how a social media user behaves and writes and interacts. Afterwards he recommended a local gun range to me and talked briefly about his firearm collection. In a keynote talk, another company talked of tools to derive demographic information through the visual recognition of Instagram feeds. Who are these people, their data brought before the algorithmic gaze? They are a man and a woman, they are both white, they are on a mountain in winter, they are wearing 'The

North Face' apparel (BBI, 2017, p.33). Here these technologies are applied to the most tediously banal forms of techno-capitalist analytics and market research: 'are your brand-users *happy* when they wear your clothes? Do they go on adventures? Do they have demographic features which suggest disposable income above the median?'. Beyond this though, what sort of processes do they extend?

Can we not foresee these same technologies with a bit more time to develop, and a radically different and darker application? The artefacts of 'old' oppressions are already visible throughout the application of algorithmic technology under big data capitalism. Misogyny and racism, all carried over alongside many others forms of iniquity, and intensified through the work of this industry (Noble, 2018), while vast image recognition databases classify people in disturbing ways<sup>62</sup>. Meanwhile Palantir, the big data analytics company owned by Peter Thiel, already sells its data analysis capabilities to the US federal government's immigration enforcement services (ICE). Big data capitalism and militarised state repression are already coming together to detain human beings, many of them children, in concentration camps to await processing<sup>63</sup>.

Who are *these* people, their data brought before the algorithmic gaze? They are a homosexual, a Muslim, an Arab, they are black, disabled, an anarchist, a criminal, an illegal immigrant, a Jew, a protester. Previously I spoke of a BBI2017 delegate who, with an unknowingly tragic irony, told me their job was to "exploit users' data for profit on behalf of corporations". They worked for IBM. I was immediately reminded how their company was instrumental in the Holocaust: happily selling punch-card technology to the Nazis (Black, 2001, Dillard, 2003). The Nazis needed machine-assisted census technology to catalogue Jewish populations across their imagined empire, just as they needed the more mundane technologies of capitalist modernity to murder them (Bauman, 1989). Jews, gays, gypsies, the disabled, the racial undesirables, the political enemies. All catalogued, transported, industrially murdered in their millions.

Truly, "something is being created which is more than the sum of its parts." (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996, p.1). We can already see its dark potentials in the gated meeting-grounds

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<sup>62</sup> In a recent provocative art project, social media and AI researcher Kate Crawford and artist Trevor Paglan released an application which allows users to feed pictures of humans into ImageNet. The results are often disturbing, misogynistic and racist (for a write-up by Crawford and Paglan, see <https://www.excavating.ai/>

<sup>63</sup> Palantir's involvement with ICE is a source of controversy among some of its workers, although at the time of writing the partnership continues. For more information, see <https://www.businessinsider.com/palantir-employees-ice-petition-alex-karp-2019-8?r=US&IR=T>

of these industries, such as Big Boulder. If Mark Fisher (2009) was right, and the most gothic description of capital is indeed the most correct, then to be in attendance at Big Boulder was to be in the presence of something unholy. How best to describe a setting where the agents of state-power and capital congregate to discuss how to implement its seemingly alien will? We have old words for such places and arrangements; words like ‘cabal’, ‘black mass’, and ‘*Akelarre*’. Places for the secluded meeting of the servants and directors of digital capitalism, that entity which brings us together in spider webs of communication, which knows our beliefs, preferences and faces, curating what we see and how we feel. That which may also offer the potential for the application of oppressions on scales previously undreamed of.

Such a setting is every bit as gothic as the most lurid conspiracy theory fantasies of human sacrifices carried out by US Presidents and billionaires in Bohemian Grove, in service of some pagan god or other. The less often-quoted second segment of Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl* (1956), with a portion of which I opened this vignette, gives it as good a name as any. Ginsberg draws the name ‘Moloch’ from the Biblical account of a supposed Cananite deity, to whom worshipers would sacrifice children by casting them into the furnaces of an idol in the likeness of a great bronze bull. The Old Testament proclaims: “And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech [sic], neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the Lord” (Leviticus 18:21, KJV).

Whatever historicity this Biblical account may have is immaterial, what matters in this context is how Ginsberg’s appropriation of it serves to eerily capture the *presence* and *unpresence* of capitalism, and I argue especially contemporary digital capitalism. Ginsberg’s description of the emerging post-war order is itself a gothic description of capitalism. Ginsberg’s (1956) Moloch is constituted by many hideous features, both abstract and concrete; its “eyes are a thousand blind windows” of monolithic skyscrapers, its blood the “running money” of financial markets, whose “smoke-stacks and antennae crown the cities” and whose factories “dream and croak in the fog”. At the same time Moloch is demonic and transcendent. An “incomprehensible prison... crossbones soulless jailhouse and Congress of sorrows”, an insane nightmare under which we are configured.

Can we not see the same in what has been constructed across the world, since early computing grew from Cold War infrastructure to increasingly encompass the Earth? Infrastructure extends, while more people come online every year. In the midst of this, the digital is something which is both eerily ephemeral and monstrously present. AI

development continues apace, algorithmic management and automation permeate more and more areas of production, and every year more and more data passes through networks. While it might feel ephemeral and surreal to users, it has always been deeply material in often obscured ways. The internet is sustained and manifested in giant datacentres and warehouses, carried across a million miles of copper and fibre optic, built atop the bones of Cold War infrastructure, fed by rare earth mineral mined at gunpoint in the Congo by extractive conglomerates and their hideously exploited workers. What it may promise us in the future, whether through massive automation, algorithmic management of policing, totalised surveillance or the dark potentials of existing oppression applied in even greater forms, remains to be seen.

For me, as these vignettes have probably made clear, death haunts all of this. Big Boulder itself died. By all accounts 2017 appears to be the final year that the conference ran, BBI's own website is mostly a collection of dead links and pages only accessible through archives<sup>64</sup>. Why it did not continue is unclear. There was no indication during the conference that 2017 would be the final one. Perhaps BBI accomplished its goals of enriching the ecosystem. Regardless, Big Boulder was only ever one such setting for the kinds of things I observed. While it is dead, many more such places live on.

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<sup>64</sup> See <http://web.archive.org/web/20181024023146/http://www.bbi.org/about/>

# Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusions

## Introduction

In this final, short chapter I shall draw together the analysis I have presented in previous chapters and discuss it in relation to my original research questions. In doing this I will assess to what extent I have successfully answered these questions, and present overall conclusions of the project, as well as a reflexive discussion of the project as a whole. This chapter will be broadly split between those research questions which dealt primarily with discursive elements of tweets (q's 1 and 2), those which discuss more methodological elements (q's 4 and 5), and finally a question which is more theoretically focused (q 3). Alongside revisiting and answering these initial research questions, this chapter will also return to the main analytic components of this thesis – principally the discursive features I have analysed in previous chapters – and discuss them in the context of my overall thesis, my literature and my research questions. Likewise, the main methodological findings of this thesis will be discussed in some more detail and given wider context. I will also, toward the very end of this final chapter, discuss the shortcoming and limitation of the project and offer a series of tentative suggestions as to how further research in this area could be conducted.

Before proceeding with my discussion and conclusions, I will make a few things clear to the reader. While much of the analysis, discussion and theoretical framing found in this thesis is influenced by a generally critical attitude toward social media platforms in general, and Twitter in particular, it is important that I make clear that this is by no means the only possible interpretation, and I did not start this project with the explicit intention of critiquing or evaluating Twitter. Rather, I have sought to explore and develop a particular methodological approach to the study of discourse on social media in the context of an issue I feel is important. While the themes, topics and discourse I have focused on in this thesis may appear to present Twitter in a more negative light – or suggest an argument that positive, affirming and liberatory discourse is impossible in this setting – I must make it clear that this was not my goal or intention. Providing evidence of Twitter's overall character was both outside of the goals of this thesis, and something that this thesis cannot even do, given its methodological approach and wider focus.

## **Findings of CDA and discursive structure**

Here, I will summarise and discuss the main findings of the critical discursive elements of my analysis; the genres, styles and discourses I have examined, reflect on them, and relate them to literature.

### **Genres**

Several genres related to various forms of public relations, particularly in the case of tweets within the positivity theme. These were: *nation state PR* which related the subject matter to institutions of nations states, particularly police and military, sometimes involving depictions of physical prowess or recruitment. Related but distinct from this was *Government PR*, which issues from governmental and super-governmental organisations at local, national and international levels, often promoting the organisations commitment to goals and sentiments associated with IWD2017. Also related was *political establishment PR*, which consisted of public relations related forms which tended to be enacted for the benefit of ruling political parties by partisan media. *Organisational PR* consisted of tweets issued by private companies and NGOs, in which the organisation embodies themselves as celebrating IWD2017. I identify these genres as belonging to a broader genre of public relations in the sense that they serve to cast the particular celebration of women and their achievements as related to the work of the organisations/entities issuing the tweets, or on behalf of entities they support.

Still within the broader theme of positivity, but somewhat distinct from the various PR genres, is what I have called the *influencer* genre. This encompasses tweets by individuals and organisations which present themselves as occupying positions of influence within the social media and business ecosystem. Tweets within this genre tended to emphasise celebration of individual achievement, innovation and entrepreneurship.

As I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, it is notable how much of these genres corresponds closely with the observations of Banet-Weiser (2018) regarding the general character and nature of ‘popular feminism’ found on social media.

Moving onto the genres identified in my second analytic chapter, while many of the tweets in genres related to the previous theme were forms of public relations, many tweets here consisted of support for Donald Trump. The first genre of Trump Support I identified is

what I have called *minimal text*. Here, tweets are defined by a relative absence of text in the form of coherent sentences, substituted for mostly emojis, hashtags, or a mix of the two. When more traditional forms of text did occur here, it tended to take the form of very short statements which may elaborate or add to the content of the tweet. Many of the emojis had a more ‘celebratory’ character (hand claps, thumbs up), while others personified sentiment or emotions, alongside emojis depicting the United States flag. While elsewhere (Danesi, 2016) emojis (particularly those which depict thought and emotion) have tended to be read in a more literal sense (i.e. a “thinking face” emoji being used to convey earnest contemplation), I have argued here that, given the wider context, the use of these emojis could convey sarcasm, or mockery.

Alongside these tweets which predominantly featured emojis, were the aforementioned tweets which predominantly featured hashtags. Many of these hashtags (in context) explicitly reflected a lexicon of Trump support: “#TrumpsArmy”, “#AmericaFirst”, “#DrainTheSwamp” and “#TrumpStrong” all featured prominently. Especially notable was the use of “#MAGA” (Make America Great Again), an enduringly popular slogan during the presidential election deployed by the Trump campaign, which was still in wide use at the time. I have argued that the use of these explicitly pro-Trump hashtags with both more mundane hashtags and other reactionary sentiment may serve to utilise Twitter’s architecture to link these previously unrelated networks as a reactionary form of ‘issue hijacking’, analysed in literature in the form of counter speech directed at racist over policing of black American communities (Jackson and Welles, 2015). In this context, what has been seen as a productive use of Twitter in activism may be being used for reactionary purposes.

Other subgenres of Trump support relate more to specific reactionary political issues. One such was tweets which fit into a distinctly *anti-Islam and anti-Muslim* category. In a similar manner to the use of hashtags in the previous, many tweets here linked anti-Islam/Muslim discourse (“#BanIslam”, “#Muslims #Rape”) with hashtags both related to Trump support, and the general topic of IWD2017. In this context Islam/Muslims tend to be framed as an existential threat to (Western, White) women as a class, combined with an apparent sentiment that political opponents of Trump supporters (feminists, liberals etc) are supporters of Islam/Muslims, and therefore complicit. Here, an anti-Islam sentiment is brought together with an antifeminist sentiment, whilst professing to be done in ‘defence’ of women. This finding strongly echoes existing CDA literature on the merging of anti-Islam and antifeminism online, seen in Törnberg and Törnberg (2016).

Another subgenre of Trump support were those tweets which had a more specifically *antifeminist, sexist or misogynistic* generic character. Generally, tweets in this genre appeared to present people/groups/users identified as feminist in a negative manner, especially in cases where they were characterised as associated with liberal politics and the Democratic Party. In some cases, this co-occurred with a tone that may suggest dismissiveness, or utilise humour. A prominent element here were tweets which seemed to mock or dismiss or mock mass protests by women which were occurring at the time.

Together, these various subgenres of Trump support are interesting for a number of reasons. They display potentially novel uses of hashtags to link Trump support with various political issues, more explicitly reactionary discourse, and banal/everyday networks of hashtags. They also may demonstrate how expressions of Trump support can serve as a centre for these more explicit forms of reactionary discourse, reflecting existing literature in some instances.

Distinct in that it was not explicitly tied to Trump support, the next genre I have identified is *misogyny*. While initially intended as the primary focus of this thesis, collecting tweets of this nature proved problematic, for reason I have discussed previously and will return to later in this chapter. In terms of analysis, tweets in this genre prominently featured the use of gendered slurs directed against women and feminists, in some cases in ways that proscribed violence.

Related to this genre are tweets which have a generally *antifeminist* character, meaning that they tended to construct feminism/feminists in a generally negative light. Much of this was done in a *dichotomous* manner: constructing some kind of distinction between ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ forms of feminism in a manner that serves to pathologise more radical and emancipatory forms, in favour of more moderate forms. In several cases, this was done by casting negative forms of feminism as hateful, monstrous, irrational or extreme. In this sense, my findings echo previous work into antifeminist discourse, particularly the work of Edley and Wetherell (2001), as well as Wetherell, Stiven and Potter (1987). Here, the ‘acceptable’ form of feminism is one that appeals to liberal notions of moderation, and a construction of equality that is generally emptied of a radical or emancipatory character. In some extremes the ‘negative’ form of feminist is labelled with the term ‘feminazi’, which as discussed has a long history of use in pathologizing feminism and feminists.

## Styles

Among the discursive genres associated with positivity and various forms of PR, there were some broadly common stylistic features. Generally these tweets, overwhelmingly sent by organisations, tended to adopt styles that personified the organisation as taking part in action, namely the action of celebrating IWD2017. In some cases this is accomplished linguistically (use of “we”), while in other cases it is individuals who are personified, typically through the use of images. Notably, in cases where the organisations were elements of various nation states (military, police etc) this personification tended to emphasise the capacity for action women held: in this context implicitly the capacity to enact state violence. In this context, these tweets may represent to enrolment of popular feminist discourse and sentiment within a frame of what Billig has called ‘banal nationalism’ (1995). Outside of state institutions, personification tended to be done in ways which emphasised individual accomplishments, and celebrated the themes of IWD2017 in terms of the individual achievements and capacity of women.

While the stylistic character of tweets within the first theme were fairly similar, this was more diverse in the second. Within the broader Trump support genre one style included tweets which were *celebratory*, meaning that they appeared to embody celebration at the apparent victories or Trump over groups politically opposed to him and his supporters. This is obviously a very different kind of celebratory character than the one seen in the previous theme, in which the themes and ideals ascribed to IWD2017 and the actions of women were celebrated. Another stylistic feature of many tweets here is what I have called *the wall of blue text*, which encompasses tweets which contain disproportionate amounts of hypertext (hashtags, @’s, links etc) which are blue coloured.

A prominent style found in many tweets which mentioned feminism in some respect, particularly those tweets which split feminism into acceptable/unacceptable forms, is what I have called *the liberal moderator*. What defined this style was the way users tended to present feminism in relation to broader notions of equality and progress. Generally, a more moderate form of feminism was constructed and valorised, which other forms were presented as extreme. Along with this comes the construction of an idea of ‘equality’ which appears separate from feminism, and rather as something feminism must be moderated in order to achieve. This construction of gender relations as a zero-sum, with feminism as a force that must be moderate to achieve gradual equality without ‘harming’

men again closely parallels the findings of Edley and Wetherell (2001), as well as Wetherell, Stiven and Potter (1987).

## Discourses

The discursive features build on the various genres and styles within the two themes I have analysed. Within the first theme a prominent feature of discourse has been how it reproduced elements of neoliberal feminism, particularly in how many represent the economic and political achievements/success of individual women as being representative of women as a class. This focus on professionalism and lack of systematic critique echoes observations on the topic by Rottenberg (2013), while also being very much in line with arguments made by Banet-Weiser (2018) about the character of certain forms of popular feminist discourse online. Another related though distinct set of discourse here was seen more in accounts associated with various state actors and institutions, particularly when related to defence, policing and military. Here the achievements and success of women was grounded in a context of service within these branches, sometimes in ways which emphasised physicality, sometimes in ways which echoed discourses of recruitment.

A great deal of this discursively relates to observations of popular feminist discourses made by Banet-Weiser (2018), especially the “twinned discourses of *capacity* and *injury*” (p.4, emphasis in original) found in online, corporatized popular feminism. In many cases these tweets deal with capacity, particularly the capacity of women to engage and succeed in field of business and entrepreneurship, and in the case of some state/institution tweets, the capacity to serve as agents of the state in military and policing contexts. Beyond that, another discursive feature identified by Banet-Weiser that is relevant here is “*sentimental earnestness*” (2018, p.46, emphasis in original). Across this theme the celebration of IWD2017 is articulated in what appear to be very earnest and sometimes sentimental ways. As observed by Banet-Weiser, this discourse is particularly pertinent in cases where the context is related to advertising and public relations (p.46).

Turning to discourses under the second analytic chapter, these too flow from the various sub/genres and styles I have identified, and also reflect discursive work by Banet-Weiser (2018). As I have outlined, many genres and styles of Trump supporting tweets are very influenced by the networked nature of Twitter, shown through their creative and specific use of hashtags and links, to the extent that in some cases this defines their style. As forms

of reactionary online discourse, this mirrors observations made by Banet-Weiser (2018) regarding the nature of popular misogyny (p.2); the contemporary online misogynistic and antifeminist backlash. For Banet-Weiser, popular misogyny is in part defined by its decentralised, networked ways of propagating and manifesting, whilst still including or relating to more ‘solid’ patriarchal institutions or systems (p.34). In light of this, this principle may apply to these tweets not only in the sense that they in part represent this kind of networked popular misogyny, but also in how they function similarly for other reactionary discourses, such as those against Islam and Muslims.

Also highlighted by Banet-Weiser is how popular misogyny also engages in discourses of capacity and injury, but in terms of a recuperative project (p.35), in the sense that it seems to claim that men as a class have been somehow diminished or injured by women, and must recuperate their lost capacity. In some of the tweets analysed in the previous chapter, something similar to this discourse may be present, namely how discourses of liberal moderation are brought into play which seem to conceptualise feminism in zero-sum terms, where feminism is seen as something which (if at all seen as tolerable) should be moderated against the potential harms it could do to men.

Taken together, these features of the genre, style and discourse of both corporatized expression of support for women and IWD2017, and reactionary kinds of discourse, both echo arguments made convincingly by Banet-Weiser (2018) around the features of popular feminism and popular misogyny.

## **Answering my research questions**

- 1. What is the content and character of misogynistic, antifeminist and other discourse during International Women’s Day on Twitter? How do users construct these discourses?**

While this project began with an intention to focus almost exclusively on hateful, abusive misogynistic language on Twitter on IWD2017, a mix of practical issues and the LDA topic modelling process led me to pursue a slightly different range of topics for analysis. The discourses I have focused on and analysed are related to a number of broad topics: ‘positivity’ and celebratory tweets, primarily from corporations and businesses, pro-Trump

tweets, and tweets related to anti-feminism or which talk about feminism and feminists, often in a negative or ambivalent way.

As I have said before, the kind of corporate, neo/liberal positivity which I have analysed IWD2017 has numerous problematic elements. Its positivity is one generally framed in terms of how women relate to existing social order, one which seems to valorise participation in corporate business, the military, the police, and so on. While it is positive, its positivity appears as an empty signifier, one which can be associated with anything from bourgeois achievement and class privilege to equal participation in the mechanisms of state violence. While this is by no means true in all cases, it is nonetheless potentially troubling for the state of radical critiques of patriarchy, male violence against women, and fundamental critiques of how women are oppressed as classed subjects. All these radical critiques doubtlessly occurred on Twitter during IWD2017, although it seems not nearly as prominently or widely as banal positivity. As I have mentioned before, this is however likely influenced by the particulars of my data collection and sampling, so a wider evaluation of Twitter or this kind of discourse along these lines may be problematic.

In contrast, the more ‘negative’ discourse I examined tended to approach IWD2017 in a very different way. Many seemed to use it to advance a range of reactionary discourse, using IWD2017 as a hinge for a range of sometimes hateful talk. Much of what I looked at was centred on expressions of support for US President Donald Trump. This was predictable, but the specifics of their discourse and approaches was interesting, and some of this represents key findings. This includes the creative use of popular and fringe hashtags in an apparent effort to link IWD2017 hashtags to reactional networks of tweets on topics such as anti-Islam, anti-feminism and right-wing misogyny and sexism. Additionally, the presence and form of these specific misogynistic and anti-feminist discourse extends previous work into the subject (Edley & Wetherell, 2001) into a very different venue of discourse.

## **2. What are the wider ideological implications of these discourses in the context of Twitter?**

As mentioned previously, ‘positivity’ in the context of my analysis seems to operate as a kind of empty signifier; something which, while appearing to be invested with inherent meaning, in practice functions as something within which all manner of discourse can be framed. In this case, a kind of discourse of banal celebration: corporatized, drenched in

public relations and the language of neo/liberal feminism. By singling this out it is not my intention to diminish the space found within IWD2017 on Twitter for radical gender politics, empowerment and the voices of women unrelated to this kind of genre. My intention in singling this out is to comment on its apparent prominence and uniformity in the context of my data.

In discussing these two broad genres of discourse I have been hesitant to label the latter ‘negative’: many of these tweets were very celebratory and ‘positive’ in their tone and expression, but celebratory and positive in spite of IWD2017. Discourses celebrating Trump, laughing and deriving enjoyment from resenting striking feminists and women in general, apparently right-wing women enjoying their contrast with feminists. Ultimately, both these broad genres often engaged in celebration and in ‘positivity’, though not always in a way we would intuitively recognise as positive in the banal everyday sense.

It is also important however, to discuss other potential readings of these features, and recognise that my reading outlined above is not the only one that may be suggested by the data. While I have taken the position that, broadly, the more positive tweets tend to represent a banal form of positivity which is in line with neo-liberal discourses, this is by no means the only interpretation. As discussed previously in my review of feminist literature dealing with feminism and social media, the nature of these kinds of discourse can be an ambivalent and contested topic.

Many of the tweets analysed could fit broadly within what Banet-Weiser (2018) has called ‘popular feminism’: discourses of feminism which express an ostensibly earnest and sentimental support for women, but tend to do so in a corporatized manner which centred individual forms of achievement and subjectivity. As elaborated on in the literature review however, even Banet-Weiser’s critical account of this phenomenon does not wholly repudiate popular feminism, rather seeing it as something which despite being potentially problematic does nonetheless have certain genuinely positive features. Although often related to neoliberal discourses and notions of subjectivity, popular feminism nonetheless potentially serves to normalise feminist politics, highlight genuine issues to huge audiences, and enrol enormous support.

From this perspective, other potential readings of much data presented in my analysis are possible. Many images and sentiments presented by corporate accounts nonetheless featured women in ways and situations incongruent with patriarchal gender norms; women taking part in historically male occupations, women leading fields, and women actively

participating in the public sphere. From this perspective, these tweets (but also importantly, positive interaction with these tweets from other users) could form a kind of popular, productive feminist activity. While their examples focused specifically on feminist humour, Ringrose and Lawrence's (2018) argument that certain forms of networked popular feminism offer novel ways of reacting to and exposing patriarchal gender relations can also be true here. This not only could be the case with the specific positive tweets discussed in this thesis. It stands to reason that my overall data collection (and certainly the vast quantity of tweets outside of it) very likely contain a diverse range of positive, popular sentiment toward feminism, including the forms seen as productive by contemporary feminist researchers (Lawrence and Ringrose, 2018, Ringrose and Lawrence 2018, Garcia and Vemuri, 2017). While these kinds of popular feminist tweets have not been the specific analytic focus of this thesis, their absence does not, and should not, be seen as evidence that popular feminism (even coming from explicitly corporate accounts) has a wholly negative character.

**3. In what ways might technological utopian ideology relate to Twitter as a platform of digital capitalism? Will the findings of this project provide grounds for a critique of Twitter in this context?**

While tech-utopianism was not a direct focus of the discursive analysis I conducted, Twitter's configuration as part of this wider milieu is something which looms over much of this thesis, particularly my fieldwork vignettes. Fundamentally, the other findings of this thesis should be understood within this context: that Twitter is a corporate social media platform, born within the professional technoculture of Southern California, developed and expanded while giving the impression that it is fulfilling and facilitating fundamental human communicative needs.

What we are presented with in Twitter is, at face value, a fun network where we can share our thoughts, engage with others, keep up with news, send tweets to Beyoncé, or any number of other things which we are supposed to find entertaining and fulfilling. This serves to mask the material nature of Twitter as a corporate platform predicated on the extraction of value from our use of it (Fuchs, 2014). In this context, the presence of misogynistic discourse, hate speech and so on in Twitter is only a problem for the platform in so far as the people it drives off impacts public image and the userbase.

There is not necessarily anything in the underlying ideological background of platforms such as Twitter that sees reactionary hateful discourse as a problem in and of itself: if

anything, their continued presence in spite of their awfulness and harm functions as a monument to freedom of speech. Though Twitter may delete and suspend the most egregious examples, this is not in any way a fundamental response. Even in these cases, hateful discourse is treated as a particular aberration, as a ‘glitch’; its remedy simply the matter of better moderation, more features for users, more consultation. While this thesis does not set out to advance a fundamental critique of Twitter itself – simply to use innovative methodology in the analysis of specific discourse – future research may focus on this. The tentative observations presented here broadly relate to critical writers such as Fuchs (2007, 2014) and Srnicek (2017), but also public intellectuals from within the tech industry, such as Lanier (2018, 2019).

#### **4. How successfully can qualitative methods be applied to big data? What is a defensible methodology for this kind of approach?**

This project has had a diverse range of analytical and methodological goals, and the latter set of goals have involved attempting to develop an innovative, systemic approach to conducting qualitative research on big data. At the time this project was planned there appeared to be little to no published literature outlining a clear approach to merging big data (more so big social data) with qualitative analysis, in a way that provided a systemic methodology for dealing with large quantities of social media data. At the close of this project this appears to still mostly be the case, with the exceptions of Davidson et al (2018) and Törnberg & Törnberg (2016), both of which I have discussed in some detail in previous chapters. While Törnberg & Törnberg (2016) present the results of a study which merged LDA topic modelling with CDA in the context of big social data (all similar to what I have presented here) their paper is less focused on methodological issues, and the specific LDA tool they used was not publicly available. Davidson et al (2018), as I have discussed in detail earlier, provides a very clear methodological approach to conducting qualitative analysis on a big data corpus, but does so in a way which does not use online social data.

In conducting this project I have attempted to, to some extent, demonstrate a methodological approach which is related to but develops approaches such as those found in these two specific publications: to produce not only a study which successfully applied qualitative research methods to big social data, but also a detailed account of how this was done, and account which is focused on being possible for other qualitative researchers to conduct fairly easily.

The methodology which I have conducted and outlined in this thesis is one which is focused on taking an initial corpus of big social data, and providing a series of steps in order to select a final sample of actual cases (individual tweets) which can then be

subjected to more traditional qualitative analysis, in this case CDA. Coincidentally mirroring Davidson et al (2018), this approach relies on first performing preliminary analysis in order to describe and explore the data and find potentially analytically interesting ‘topics’ which can be explored in more detail, depending on the research questions in play. In my case, similar to Törnberg & Törnberg (2016), I chose LDA topic modelling to perform this stage of analysis and found it (at least the specific LDA tool I used) to be intuitive and useful. My topic models, discussed in some detail in their corresponding chapter, did not provide a definitive description of what topics were present in the corpus, and they were not intended to. Rather, LDA has been used here to provide only surface level description and preliminary analysis from which a researcher can tentatively proceed with more detailed exploration.

I argue that the use of LDA in this manner, as the initial step in a process of investigation and analysis, as a tool to gain basic surface level insight into a corpus, has been broadly successful, and constitutes a key finding of this project that could inform future research. This approach, although I have used it in a particular way on a particular type of data, is broadly applicable to other sources of social media data and other final modes of qualitative analysis: there is nothing about this methodology which is inherently tied to either CDA or Twitter data.

As discussed in my methodology chapter, while I chose to only employ LDA topic modelling as a way to gain the broadest description of the entire corpus, LDA topic modelling could potentially be applied very effectively in other stages or in other ways, such as though splitting the corpus in various ways based on keywords and so on. As such, its use here was to a large extent as a proof of concept rather than an extensive investigation, and the potentials that LDA topic modelling could have in other stages and contexts may represent an area for future scholarship and development.

Finally, an important finding of this thesis has broader implications for its use in the study of hateful discourse on social media. As discussed at length, the process of undertaking this research has revealed a wide range of logistical, ethical, and methodological challenges and obstacles. These are likely to be challenges which would also surface for other researchers engaged in similar studies of this sort of discourse. Problematically, the specific challenges encountered in focusing on hateful discourse (ethical issues, issues of persistence of tweets, logistical barriers in gaining consent, researcher anonymity, and so on) may serve to render this kind of discourse invisible to scrutiny. Epistemological,

methodological and ethical issues in the study of hateful online discourse have been a recurrent feature over the history of its study (Jane, 2015). For example, a perverse consequence of the ethical framework required of this project (the seeking of opt-out consent from the most hateful tweets) has potentially served to privilege the producers of hateful discourse over the recipients, a long-standing issue in scholarship of the topic (Jane, 2015, p.78). While historically this has been due to a variety of reasons (views on hateful discourse as transgressive or productive, avoidance of reproducing verbatim quotes out of squeamishness), this research seems to suggest that even when hateful discourse is explicitly treated as a moral, ethical issue, other barriers present themselves. Surmounting these barriers is a potential area for further inquiry, particularly into methodology, ethics and the consequences of various platforms policies and architecture.

### **5. What are the ethical implications of this kind of study?**

Having discussed the ethical aspects of this project in chapter 4, I will here offer some concluding thoughts on the wider ethical implications of conducting the kind of research I have done here. In doing this I will be drawing partly on arguments I have made in two papers published in the area of ethics in digital social research (Bishop & Gray, 2018, Poletti & Gray, 2019). Drawing on this, other sources in literature and the ethical implications raised during this project, I will attempt to advance an argument that future digital research, especially critical digital research, should reconfigure its perspective on ethics to account more for the kinds of environments and platforms in which this kind of data is produced. What I mean specifically is that the ethical perspective that has driven this project is one which risks reproducing a particular logic, one which treats platform users as highly individualized neoliberal subjects, and does not account for the fact that their data is produced as part of a relation of production on corporate platforms.

Elsewhere (Bishop & Gray, 2018, Poletti & Gray, 2019) I have argued that critical digital research (especially research such as this thesis, which at times republishes tweets featuring hateful discourse), has the potential to be challenging to more established approaches to research ethics. In my case, this was very acute: collecting data via Twitter's API meant I was bound by their developer agreement, which meant I could not anonymise the tweets I republished.

As I have discussed previously, this led to the adoption of a risk assessment for republishing, where various degrees of consent had to be achieved. A perverse consequence of this however, is that by requiring a greater degree of informed consent for more hateful discourse, this risk assessment in effect turns the production of hateful discourse into a defence against the scrutiny of that discourse (Bishop & Gray, 2018).

An approach to ethics and informed consent on these lines is potentially very problematic for critical digital research which seeks to study this kind of area. Fuchs (2017) presents an almost identical scenario when discussing the limits of informed consent in online research: “Imagine you study online fascism or online harassment of women. In most of such cases, it is not feasible but rather dangerous for the researcher to ask for informed consent. ‘Dear Mr. Misogynist/Nazi, I am a social researcher gathering data from Twitter. Can you please give me the informed consent that I quote your violent threat against X?’” (Fuchs, 2017, p.45).

While I do not argue that this means we should adopt the cynical approach of platforms themselves in regard to ethics, or simply claim social media data is public enough to always be fair game, I nonetheless agree that approaches such as the one adopted in this project risk acting “as censorship of critical research” (Fuchs, 2017, p.45). Rather, I argue that as researchers we should consider taking an approach to ethics that accounts for platforms’ status as sites of digital capitalism, and the potential role research might inadvertently play in reproducing the logics of these platforms in regard to users and their data (Poletti & Gray, 2019). By treating users in an individualized manner, as subjects capable of making these informed decisions around the data attached to them, we may for example be reproducing bourgeois notions of privacy and subjectivity even in our critical research (Matzner & Ochs, 2017). Rather, we may need to consider how to develop post-individualist understandings of privacy (Matzner & Ochs, 2017).

## **Limitations**

There are, obviously, numerous limitations to this thesis. Many of these are the more general limitations which are necessarily the case in almost any piece of work of this type, others are much more specific.

In terms of the more general limitations, perhaps most prominent among them is this thesis’ more-or-less exclusive focus on qualitative methodologies and forms of analysis. By

not adopting more quantitative methods/analysis, or even attempting a more mixed-methods approach, there are certain hard epistemological limits placed on this research. For example, this thesis is unable to establish the actual empirical extent of the kinds of discourses I have discussed and analysed. A particular example of this is my focus on CDA as an analytic and theoretical tool. CDA, perhaps even more so than other forms of discourse analysis, is an approach which relies and draws upon the political and theoretical subjectivities and identity of the actual researcher. As such, ‘researcher bias’ is an inextricable part of the core analytic processes of this thesis.

While these are very common limitations for pieces of work with a qualitative, discursive focus, others are much more specific. A great deal of this thesis involves the use of computer tools, from the inner-workings of the particular LDA tool I used, to Twitter’s API and COSMOS itself as elements of the data collection process. As I made clear in a previous chapter: I am no computer programmer, and while I argue that I know enough about these processes to understand the fundamentals of how they function, there is still much technical detail which is out of my knowledge and experience. Given this, a limitation here is that a large degree of this thesis relies on the use of computer tools which I as a qualitative researcher do not have as great an understanding of as those tools more traditionally employed in qualitative research.

Another specific limitation is the possible biases introduced through my data collection and sampling, which I have discussed at several points in this thesis. This has likely led to an underrepresentation in my data of discourse which was pro-feminist in ways that were not problematic as is the case with corporate positivity.

Finally, another limitation of this project is that despite its focus on and interest in sexism, misogyny and reactionary discourse, it is unable to actually demonstrate the extent or severity of these discourse in any more generalisable or empirical manner. While this thesis has explored these (and other) discursive topics and features, it is outside of the scope of its methodology to generalise these findings in a concrete manner, make evaluations as to the nature of Twitter, or present and kind of numerical findings that might demonstrate the extent.

## **Suggestions for further scholarship**

This research project was itself designed as a continuation and development of my masters research project (Gray, 2015), drawing on and expanding upon the findings and suggestions produced by that project, which effectively functioned as a proof of concept in itself. As such, the suggestions I provide here are effectively based on an approach developed over several years, and the experiences I have had actually attempting to develop the findings of one project via a later project.

A few specific ways this project attempted to develop its precursor were in the inclusion of more final cases in analysis, the shift in focus to explicitly hateful misogynistic discourse, and the development of a methodology to handle big social data. While future research could continue in a similar vein, I do not necessarily think this would be particularly useful.

Useful future research in the area might consider how the use of tools such as LDA, and the initial collection of a large data set, might in fact be limiting factors given the goals of a critical investigation into this topic. If however, future research were to work on developing the methodology I have demonstrated here, then several things could be pursued. For example, LDA is relatively under-utilised here and could be extended in a number of ways that I have described previously. Similarly, the way my methodology investigates different themes within the dataset could be implemented quite differently.

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## Appendix 1: Incidentally collected tweets

### Incidental tweets, selection A:

Bury Venues @BuryVenues · Mar 8  
Today we're celebrating International Women's Day (IWD) and all the inspirational, economic, political and social achievements of women past, present and future #BeBoldForChange buff.ly/2n9qfpd



CMHA WW @CMHAWW · 8 Mar 2017  
We're celebrating International Women's Day today! #BeBoldForChange #IWD2017



Infinity Marketing @InfinityMktSC · 8 Mar 2017  
Today we're celebrating International Women's Day with this blog - bit.ly/2n7qhgg #BeBoldForChange #internationalwomensday



Little Mountain Rescue Team @LegoMRT · 8 Mar 2017  
We're celebrating International Women's Day today. #BeBoldForChange #IWD #IWD2017 @LegoMRT @DerbyMRT @mountrescueuk



CMHA Ottawa @CMHAOttawa · 8 Mar 2017  
We're celebrating International Women's Day today! #BeBoldForChange #IWD2017



CoreHealth Tech @CoreHealthTech · 8 Mar 2017  
We're celebrating International Women's Day today! Did you know CoreHealth is women owned? #InternationalWomensDay #beboldforchange



CMHA Niagara @cmhaniagara · 8 Mar 2017  
We're celebrating International Women's Day today! ow.ly/4MsI309TeS #BeBoldForChange #IWD2017



CMHA Kenora Branch @CMHAKenora · 8 Mar 2017  
We're celebrating International Women's Day today! #BeBoldForChange #IWD2017



**Free2Learn UK** @Free2LearnUK · 8 Mar 2017  
We're celebrating International Women's Day in our offices & in our classrooms today! #InternationalWomensDay #BeBoldForChange

**CMHA Ontario** @CMHAOntario · 8 Mar 2017  
We're celebrating International Women's Day today! [ow.ly/MW4v309HYG4](http://ow.ly/MW4v309HYG4) #BeBoldForChange #IWD2017

**CMHA Peel Dufferin** @CMHAPeelDuff · 8 Mar 2017  
We're celebrating International Women's Day today! Support Women's mental health #BeBoldForChange #IWD2017 [ow.ly/s7a3309HUh](http://ow.ly/s7a3309HUh)

**CMHA Oxford** @CMHAOxford · 8 Mar 2017  
We're celebrating International Women's Day today! #BeBoldForChange #IWD2017

**Calgary Kinettes** @CalgaryKinettes · 8 Mar 2017  
Today is March 8th & we're celebrating International Women's Day! #IWD2017 #BeBoldForChange #WomensDay #BeTheGood [fb.me/1TytdmGs7](http://fb.me/1TytdmGs7)

**IELTS Victoria** @IELTSEnglishCentreVictoria · 8 Mar 2017  
Today, we're celebrating International Women's Day. Tell us how you will #BeBoldForChange? #IWD2017

**Word Dance Theater** @worddancedc · 8 Mar 2017  
Today, we're celebrating Isadora Duncan & all other revolutionary women in honor of International Women's Day! #IWD2017 #BeBoldForChange

**pHformula** @pHformula · 8 Mar 2017  
For International Women's Day 2017, we're asking you to  
#BeBoldForChange.. Join pHformula in celebrating women all over the world today!

**CMHA Windsor** @CMHAWECB · 8 Mar 2017  
We're celebrating International Women's Day today! [ow.ly/nfnW309tt9e](http://ow.ly/nfnW309tt9e)  
#BeBoldForChange #IWD2017

CMHA celebrates International Women's Day  
#BeBoldForChange

**PopWallsUK** @PopWallsUK · 8 Mar 2017  
Today we're celebrating British, female #interior designers for International Women's Day #beboldforchange #IWD2017 [ow.ly/X8O6309B1zs](http://ow.ly/X8O6309B1zs)

**Techno Data Group** @TechnoDataGroup · 8 Mar 2017  
Today we're celebrating International Women's Day- check out everything we've going on here: [hubs.ly/H06B63X0](http://hubs.ly/H06B63X0) #BeBoldForChange

**Charity Challenge** @charitychall · 8 Mar 2017  
#BeBoldForChange We're celebrating International Women's Day today. Our bold & fearless challengers are always ready for change! #IWD

**New Country 1035** @NewCountry1035 · 8 Mar 2017  
<Sheilah> #BeBoldForChange Happy International Women's Day!  
We're celebrating strong women of yesterday, today &... [fb.me/1d9w22okt](http://fb.me/1d9w22okt)

**Charity Challenge** @charitychall · 8 Mar 2017  
#BeBoldForChange We're celebrating International Women's Day today. Our bold & fearless challengers are always ready for change! #IWD

**Technology for Social Impact (TSI)** @tsi\_bd · 8 Mar 2017  
We're celebrating International Women's Day in the office today! Meet the dedicated and energetic superwomen employees! #BeBoldForChange



**CMHA Grey Bruce Mental Health & Addiction Services** @... · 8 Mar 2017  
We're celebrating International Women's Day today! #BeBoldForChange  
#IWD2017 cmhagb.org/story/cmha-cel...



1



2



city...

CBES @CBESLimited · 8 Mar 2017

We're looking forward to celebrating equality in the industry today at the @WIPCentSoc International Women's Day lunch #BeBoldForChange



## International Women's Day



3



3



10:10 Climate Action @1010 · 8 Mar 2017

Happy International Women's Day! Today we're celebrating the amazing contributions women have made tackling climate change #beboldforchange



10



7

**Gateshead Council** @GMBCouncil · 8 Mar 2017

Today, we're celebrating International Women's Day  
[internationalwomensday.com](http://internationalwomensday.com) #BeBoldForChange



4



6



Wakefield Council

@MyWakefield · 8 Mar 2017

Today we're celebrating International Women's Day. Watch our Chief Exec @joanneroney at [vimeo.com/205539810](https://vimeo.com/205539810) #IWD2017 #BeBoldForChange



2



3



Uni of Leicester @uniofleicester · 8 Mar 2017

Today we're celebrating International Women's Day #BeBoldForChange  
[@womensday](http://le.ac.uk/iwd)

**Wednesday 8 March 2017**

#BeBoldForChange  
[www.le.ac.uk/iwd](http://www.le.ac.uk/iwd)



25



30

**Datum360** @Datum360 · 8 Mar 2017

We're at the @NOFEnergyLtd Conference today, we are also celebrating International Women's Day #BeBoldForChange [d360.am/2TwcnN](http://d360.am/2TwcnN)



**NewcastleCityCouncil** @NewcastleCC · 8 Mar 2017  
Today we're celebrating International Women's Day #BeBoldForChange #IWD2017 olderbolderNCL

**Essex Fire Service** @ECFRS · 8 Mar 2017  
Today is International Women's Day. We're celebrating our amazing females and striving to challenge stereotypes 🚒 #IWD2017 #BeBoldForChange

**HubSpot** @HubSpot · 8 Mar 2017  
Today we're celebrating International Women's Day- check out everything we've got going on here: <https://H06B63X0> #BeBoldForChange

**CUA** @CUA\_Connect · 8 Mar 2017  
We're celebrating International Women's Day today with our team members sharing their commitment to #BeBoldForChange. #IWD2017

**DK Australia** @DK\_Aus · 8 Mar 2017  
Happy International Women's Day! We're celebrating at DK today with our favourite new book - 100 Women Who Made History! #BeBoldForChange

**Tennis Victoria** @tennis\_vic · 7 Mar 2017  
Today we're celebrating International Women's Day and all of the women in our sport! #IWD2017 #BeBoldForChange #ChangeOurGame

**Flourish Australia** @FlourishAus · 7 Mar 2017  
Today we're celebrating International Women's Day with a breakfast at our Figtree Conference Centre #BeBoldForChange #IWD2017

## Incidental tweets, selection B:

**MillionaireMatch** @SuccessfulMatch · 8 Mar 2017  
 Happy International Women's Day, let's celebrate the amazing contributions women make to our world and our future. #internationalwomensday



2 2

**SA Chefs Association** @sa\_chefs · 8 Mar 2017  
 Happy International Women's Day.  
 Let's celebrate the amazing contributions women make to our world and our future. #InternationalWomensDay



1 1

**Air France Singapore** ✈️ @airfranceSG · 8 Mar 2017  
 Happy International Women's Day  
 Let's celebrate the amazing contributions women make to our world and our future. #InternationalWomensDay



4 10

**mediavandals** @mediavandals · 8 Mar 2017  
 Happy #Internationalwomensday! Let's celebrate the amazing contributions women make to our world and our future!



1 2

**Park Hyatt Aviara** @ParkHyattAviara · 8 Mar 2017  
 Let's celebrate the amazing contributions women make to our world and our future. Happy #InternationalWomensDay!! ❤️



5

**Huduma Kenya** 🇰🇪 @HudumaKenya · 8 Mar 2017  
 Happy #InternationalWomensDay Let's celebrate the amazing contributions women make to our world and our future.  
 #IWD2017



1 13 17

[www.hudumakenya.go.ke](http://www.hudumakenya.go.ke)

Email: info@hudumakenya.go.ke | Twitter: @hudumakenya | Facebook: hudumakenya | Huduma Helpline: +254206900029

## Appendix 2: Figures for chapter 7

Figure 65: "Tomorrow's gonna be epic!"

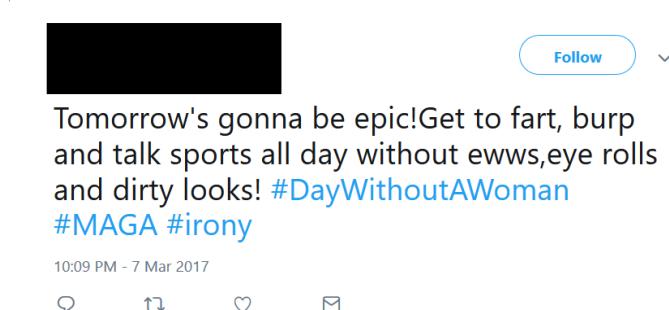


Figure 66: "Thank #Trump and #MAGA"



Figure 67: "Hmmm"



Figure 68: (Clapping hands)



Figure 69: (Hashtags)



Figure 70: "Showing my support"



Figure 71: "@POTUS #MAGA RED"



Figure 72 "Game Show for Liberals"



Figure 73: "false misogyny narr"

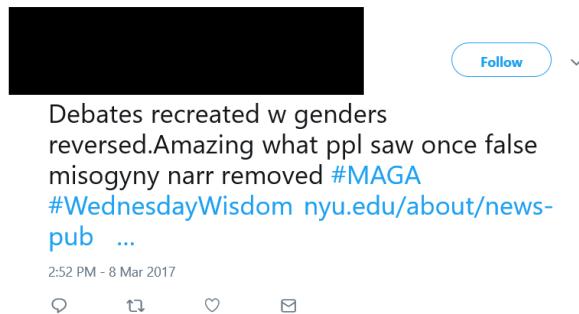


Figure 74: (Linked material in Figure 73)

**NEWS STORY**

## What if Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton Had Swapped Genders?

A restaging of the presidential debates with an actress playing Trump and an actor playing Clinton yielded surprising results.

Feb 28, 2017  
by Eileen Reynolds  
Modified Feb 28, 2017



Figure 75: "...clueless"



Figure 76 "#FauxFems"



Figure 77: "Can't wait"



Figure 78: "didn't notice you were gone"



Figure 79: "are you actually reporting truth??!!"



Figure 80: "Democrats face it, you lost"

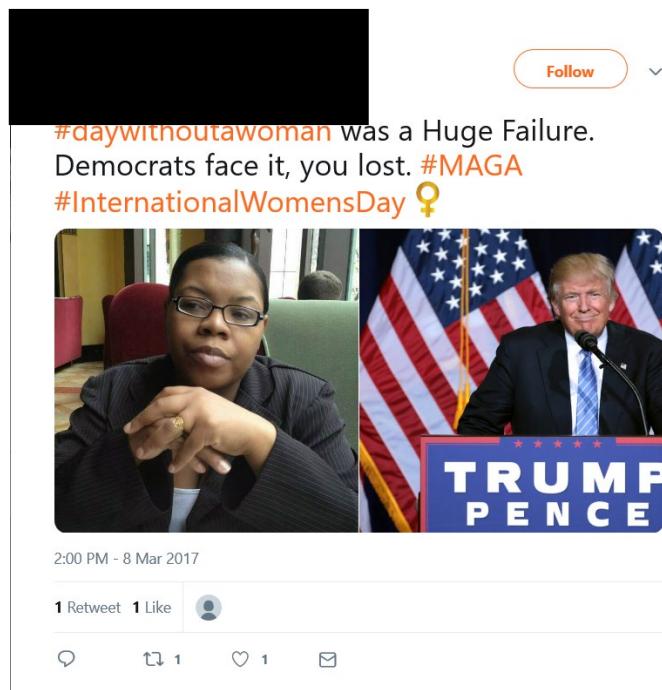


Figure 81: "Trump Admin celebrates"



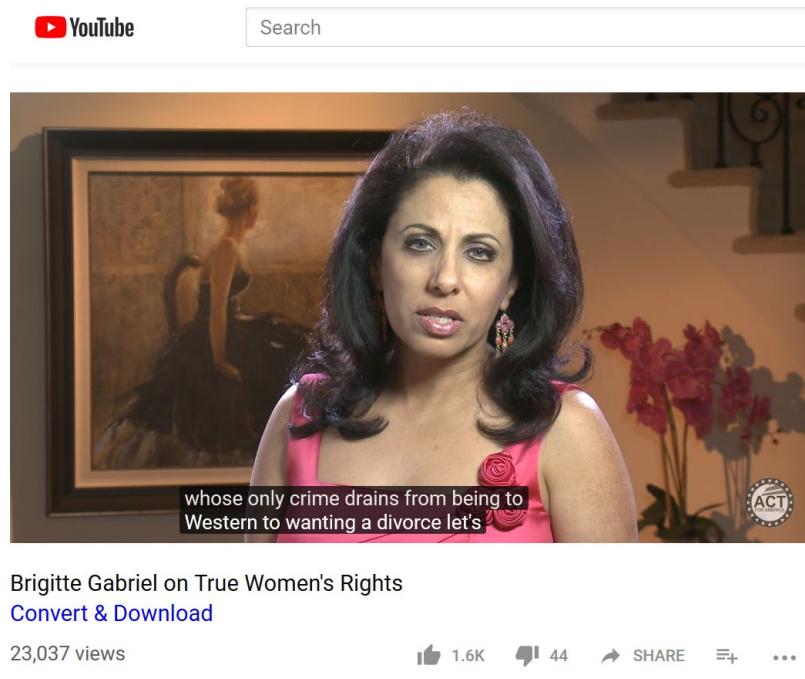
*Figure 82 (Hashtags)*



*Figure 83: "True Women's Rights"*



*Figure 84: (Linked material for previous)*



*Figure 85: "he'd wear a dress and heels"*

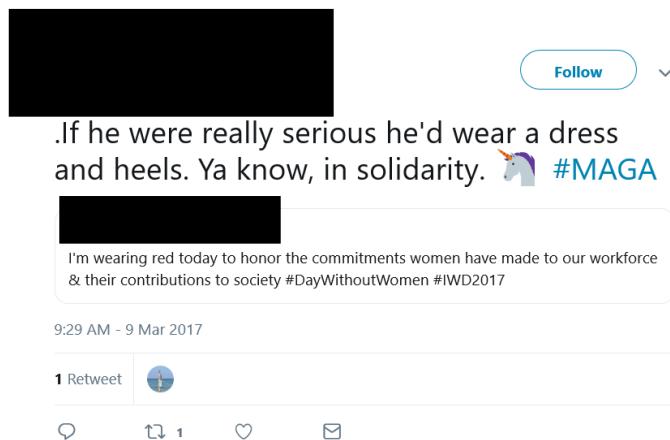


Figure 86: "#Feminazis get fired today"

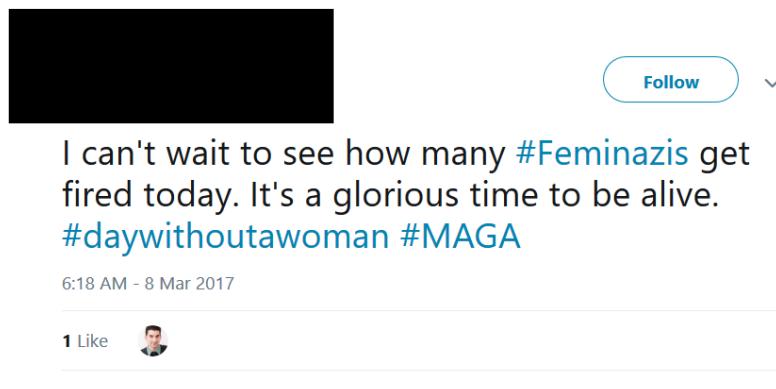


Figure 87: "#feminismiscancer"

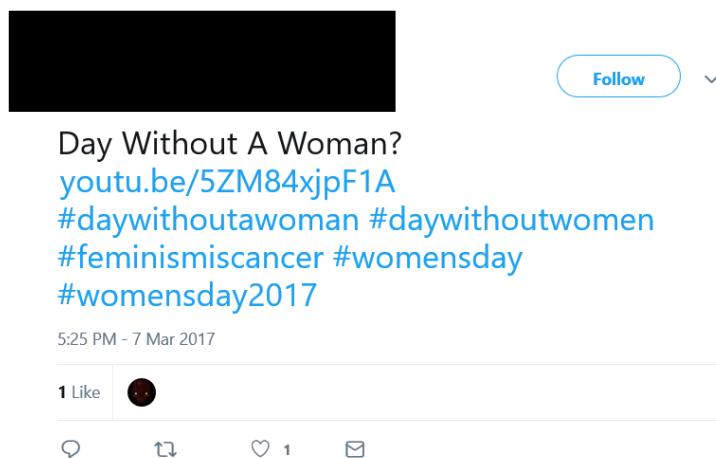


Figure 88: "#FeminismIsCancer"



Figure 89: "DumbAssLogicTRUTH"

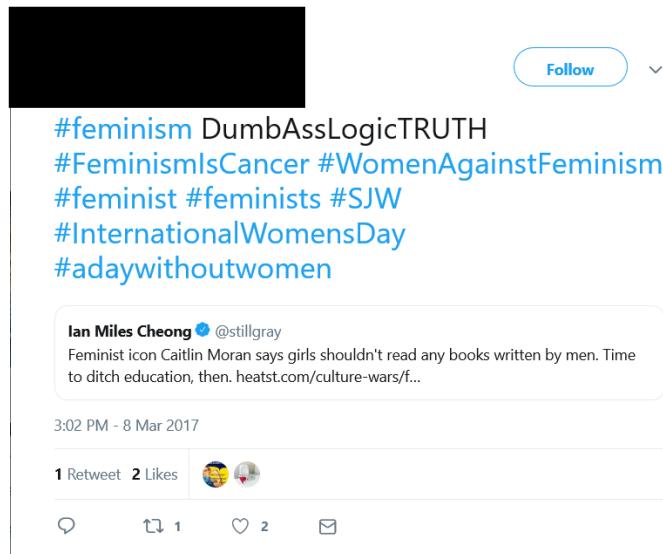


Figure 90: (Assorted antifeminist hashtags)



Figure 91: "TRUTH"



Figure 92: "#WomenAgainstFeminism"



Figure 93: "PLEASE STOP"

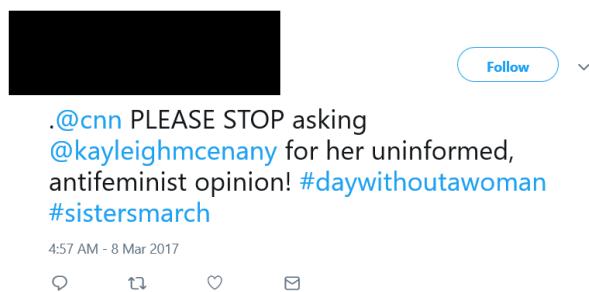


Figure 94: (Thread of antifeminism)



Figure 95: "my most #Feminist and #Antifeminist blog"



Figure 96: "Radical 'liberal' feminazis"



Figure 97: (Linked material for previous)

BuzzFeed News / REPORTING TO YOU BuzzFeed News Quizzes Videos Shopping

## Sophie Grégoire Trudeau Wants Us To Celebrate Male Allies For International Women's Day

Can we just have, like, one day?

Posted on March 7, 2017, at 6:52 p.m.

Lauren Strapagiel  
BuzzFeed News Reporter

[f](#) [t](#) [e](#)

Sophie Grégoire Trudeau — the wife of prime minister Justin Trudeau — has a suggestion for celebrating International Women's Day, but not everyone's a fan.

Figure 98: "Oh look, a feminazi"



Figure 99: ('Feminazi' conversation)

Feminazi: Feminism is about equal rights and not man hating.

Feminazi: Now pay for my dinner or you're a misogynistic piece of shit.

1:24 AM - 8 Mar 2017

1 Retweet 1 Like

Figure 100: (Reply to Piers Morgan)

Piers Morgan @piersmorgan · 8 Mar 2017

\*\*VIDEO\*\*

Full, very civilised debate re feminism with @AnnieLennox & Helen Pankhurst. @GMB #InternationalWomensDay

'Without men it won't change' - Annie Lennox and ...

For International Women's Day we invited two incredible women to join us to talk about what feminism means for them. Singer and activist Annie Lennox and Dr Helen

itv.com

13 27 105

Follow

Half the room prob didn't stand up because we've equality in the UK. Some feminazi's want more rights than men

3:21 AM - 8 Mar 2017

Figure 101: "ugly hair and goofy glasses"



Figure 102: "Unless Fox"



Figure 103: "feminazis preach"



Figure 104: "there's a difference...?"

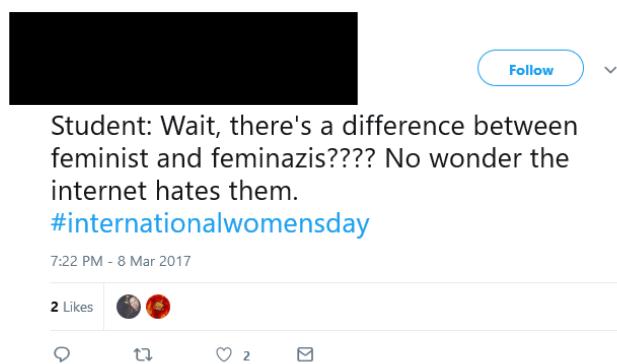


Figure 105: "destroyed the image of feminism"



Figure 106: (Thread on 'feminazis')

Language Portal of Canada @Our\_languages · Mar 8, 2017  
Q16 Belinda wants to be a \_\_\_\_ when she grows up.

firewoman 17%

**firefighter** 83%

11,122 votes · Final results

· Mar 8, 2017

Firewoman because Feminazis wants men dead

· Mar 9, 2017

Yup. Dead. Definitely not equal like we've been saying. Dead.

I mean Feminists are the ones who wants equality, Feminazis are the ones ruining it

3:20 PM · Mar 9, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

Figure 107: "they can't sit with us"

Follow

haha! A feminist would appreciate this, a feminazi not so much (they can't sit with us). Chivalry is beautiful ❤️❤️

9:25 AM - 9 Mar 2017

10 Likes

10

Figure 108: "#SJW"



Figure 109: "Disney Marvel"



Figure 110: "I'm so far from feminist"



Figure 111: "SJW Owned!"



Figure 112: "SJW retards"



Figure 113: "Modern feminism is repellent"



Figure 114: "#feminism TRUTH"



Figure 115: "I feel awkward"

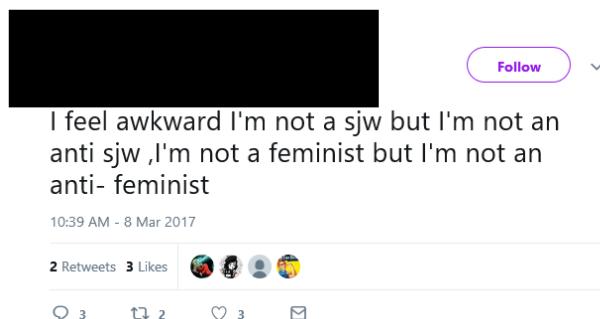


Figure 116: "Women have a resilience"

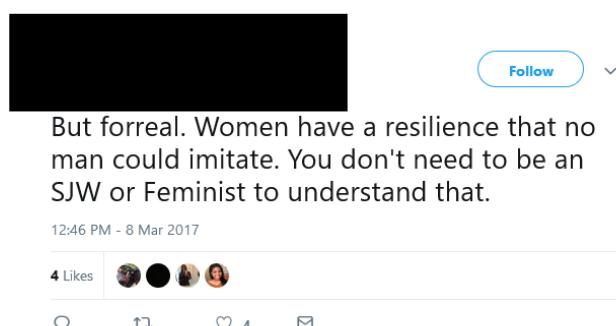


Figure 117: "self-imposed internalized oppression"

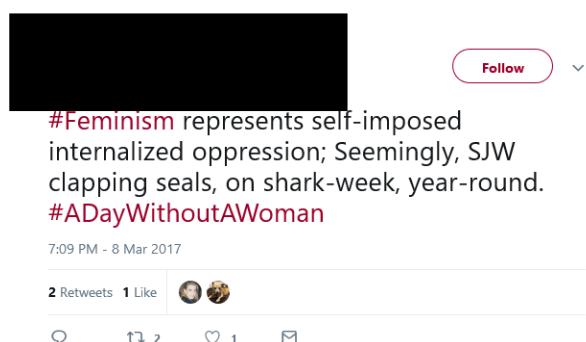


Figure 118: "ANTI-feminist"



Figure 119: "Equality = "



Figure 120: "man haters who call themselves feminist"



Figure 121: "a circle jerk for cunt feminists"



Figure 122: "seems like a cunt, no?"



Figure 123: "a kick"



Figure 124: "not the bitches"

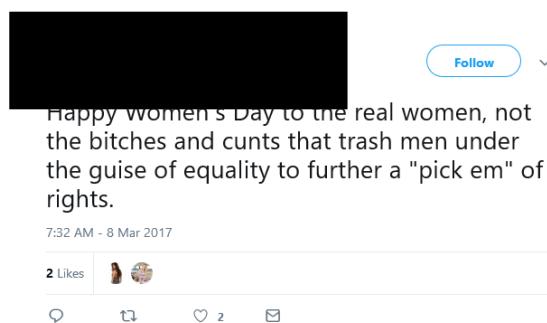


Figure 125: "for her own gain"

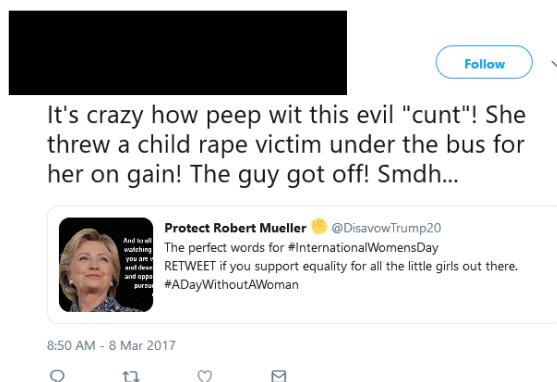


Figure 126: "you're not a fucking feminist"



Figure 127: "that's not female empowerment"



Figure 128: "Let us celebrate women today!"

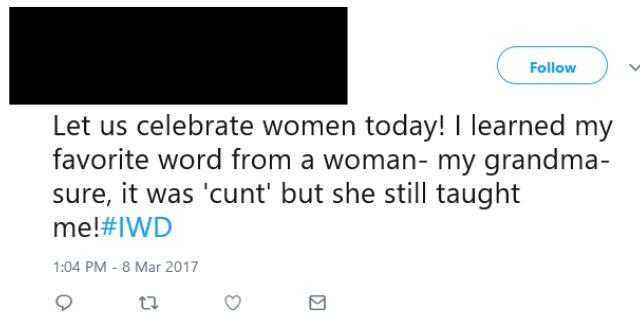


Figure 129: (Maths)

I think it's so funny when people think because the movement is called feminism it's not about equal rights. And they act like some crazy +

woman coined the term when it's really an old French MAN. If feminism was about making women better than men it's woundnt be +

feminism duhh.

Misogyny: ♂ > ♀

Misandry: ♂ < ♀

Feminism: ♀ = 🌈 = ♂

1 Retweet 1 Like

Figure 130: (Unclear thread)

Also if you think it's something that you really want to actively see you can organise a march as well.

I put this picture because of twitters character limit

Actually feminism is the belief that women should have the same rights as men, it says nothing about men being the same as women, that's why it's called FEMINISM and not equalism or something like that, if you believe that men should have the same right as women then your a masculist, any gender can be either or both, if you believe that women should not have the same rights as men then you are a chauvinist

5:54 pm - 8 Mar 2017

1 Retweet 2 Likes

Isn't women being equal 2 men & men being equal 2 women the same though?  
Asking for clarification

No because women having more rights isn't against feminism

Just gonna say there is a difference between misandry and feminism.

Yes you can be both feminism and masculinist but you can also be feminist and chauvinist

or you could be somewhere in the middle

*Figure 131: "It's like we are at war)*



## Appendix 3: Ethical approval



School of Social Sciences  
Ysgol Gwyddorau Cymdeithasol  
Head of School, Pennaeth yr Ysgol  
Dr Tom Hall

Cardiff University  
Glamorgan Building  
King Edward VII Avenue  
Cardiff CF10 3WT  
Wales UK  
Tel +44(0)29 2087 5179  
Fax +44(0)29 2087 4175  
[www.cardiff.ac.uk/social-sciences](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/social-sciences)

### APPROVAL LETTER

20 March 2017

Our ref: SREC/2218

Daniel Gray  
PhD Programme  
SOSCI

Prifysgol Caerdydd  
Adedai Morganwg  
Rhodfa'r Brenin Edward VII  
Caerdydd CF10 3WT  
Cymru, Y Deyrnas Unedig  
Ffôn +44(0)29 2087 5179  
Ffacs +44(0)29 2087 4175  
[www.caerdydd.ac.uk/social-sciences](http://www.caerdydd.ac.uk/social-sciences)

Dear Daniel,

Your project entitled '*Talking about Women: Misogyny on Twitter*' has now been approved by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Cardiff University and you can now commence the project.

If you make any substantial changes with ethical implications to the project as it progresses you need to inform the SREC about the nature of these changes. Such changes could be: 1) changes in the type of participants recruited (e.g. inclusion of a group of potentially vulnerable participants), 2) changes to questionnaires, interview guides etc. (e.g. including new questions on sensitive issues), 3) changes to the way data are handled (e.g. sharing of non-anonymised data with other researchers).

In addition, if anything occurs in your project from which you think the SREC might usefully learn, then please do share this information with us.

All ongoing projects will be monitored and you will be obliged periodically to complete and return a SREC monitoring form.

Please inform the SREC when the project has ended.

Please use the SREC's project reference number above in any future correspondence.

Yours sincerely

Professor Alan Felstead  
Chair of School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

THE QUEEN'S  
ANNIVERSARY PRIZE  
FOR EXCELLENCE IN  
TEACHING  
2009

INVESTORS  
IN PEOPLE

Athena  
SWAN  
Bronze Award

QAA  
UK Quality Assured  
Screydd Arwedd y DU

Registered Charity no. 1136855  
Elusen Goristedd y DU, nr 1136855

## Appendix 4: Consent documentation

The screenshot shows a Twitter interaction. The top part is a tweet from a user whose profile picture is blacked out, reading:  
Tomorrow's gonna be epic! Get to fart, burp and talk sports all day without ewws, eye rolls and dirty looks!  
#DayWithoutAWoman #MAGA #irony

Below it is a reply from the **Social Research Project** (@SocialResearc14) dated Aug 10:  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

Both tweets have standard Twitter interaction icons (comment, retweet, like, share) below them.

· Pete)

Thank #Trump and #MAGA for normalizing misogyny

· Mar 8, 2017

Officials are expecting a record low number of car crashes because of the #adaywithoutwomen protest.

9:13 AM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter Web Client



**Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replying to [REDACTED]

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



🤔 Hmmm ♦ #AmericaFirst #women #mothers  
#draintheswamp #Trump #MAGA #Trump45 #Parents  
#Womensrights #InternationalWomensDay  
#daywithoutawoman [twitter.com/hectormoreenco/...](http://twitter.com/hectormoreenco/)

This Tweet is unavailable.

12:28 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

1 Retweet



**Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replying to [\[REDACTED\]](#)

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



This Tweet is unavailable.

1:24 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

4 Retweets 5 Likes

**Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to   
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

, @IvankaTrump / @IvankaTrump love you  
#statueofliberty #daywithoutawoman #MAGA

1 reply · Mar 8, 2017

Women have spoken! Ivanka Trump's eponymous line sees jump in sales after several retailers drop the brand



1:54 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for Android

1 Like



**Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replying to

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



Showing my support for.....  
#daywithoutawoman #Feminism #WomensMarch #liberals  
#antifa #america #maga #trump

2:30 PM - Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

1 Like



**Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replying to

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



#DayWithoutWomen... #DNCFeminists wear @POTUS  
#MAGA RED, yet ignore sexism vs @GOP  &  
misogyny  suffer with ShariaLaw. #NotMyProtest  
#IWD2017

Mar 8, 2017  
Proud to join @HouseDemocrats to speak out on #InternationalWomensDay for  
#equalpay and affordable health care. #IWD2017



6:29 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

---

 **Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replies to  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people  
talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If  
you have any questions my DMs are open.

---

Game Show For Liberals #InternationalWomensDay  
#DaywithoutAwoman #EmbarrassedToAdmitIveNever  
#MAGA #tcot #notmyprotest

## THE NEW GAME SHOW FOR LIBERALS:



"I'M SORRY, JEANETTE WHILE YOUR  
ANSWER WAS CORRECT, WALTER WAS  
OFFENDED BY IT, SO HE GETS THE POINT."

6:52 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter Web Client



Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replying to

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



/omensDay  
#DayWithoutAWoman #ADayWithoutAWoman  
#Notmyprotest #MAGA



8:43 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

6 Retweets 3 Likes

Show more replies

 Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replies to [@SocialResearc14](#)  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

Debates recreated w genders reversed. Amazing what ppl saw once false misogyny narr removed #MAGA  
#WednesdayWisdom nyu.edu/about/news-pub...

10:52 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

---

Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replies to Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

We're kinda tired of your bullsh\*t too, #FauxFems.  
#NotMyProtest #WeShowUp #MAGA

 **Prerna Singh** @prernas15 · Mar 8, 2017  
If they want a wall, we'll build a human wall #InternationalWomensDay #IWD  
#democracy cc: @ecetweets @sarah\_guido

12:20 AM · Mar 9, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

---

1 Like

 **Social Research Project** @SocialResearch14 · Aug 10  
Replies to    
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

Can't wait for your next Kellyanne Conway joke. #MAGA

· Mar 8, 2017  
The Trump WH is so feminist, EVERY day is Day Without a Woman.



4:15 AM · Mar 9, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

4 Retweets 10 Likes

 Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

Sorry, we didn't notice you were gone.  
#Adaywithoutfeminism #MAGA

 Women's March @womensmarch · Mar 8, 2017  
"A #DayWithoutAWoman is a day without me!" #IStrikeFor #WhyIResist

0:26 8.6M views

4:50 AM · Mar 9, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

---

 Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to [REDACTED]  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

---

#daywithoutawoman was a Huge Failure. Democrats face it, you lost. #MAGA #InternationalWomensDay

10:00 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter Web App

1 Retweet 1 Like



Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replying to

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



@nypost are you actually reporting truth??!!  
#MiraclesDoHappen #MAGA #IWD2017 #CIA  
#ObamaGate #WakeUpAmerica

 **New York Post**  @nypost · Mar 8, 2017  
Government sources say the nearly 9,000 documents posted online by WikiLeaks largely appear to be genuine nyp.st/2mmHBQh

6:48 AM · Mar 9, 2017 from Dothan, AL · Twitter for iPhone

---

 **Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to @  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

---

#daywithoutwomen #MAGA #POTUS #TRUMP  
@womensmarch #muslims #rape #WomensMarch

Mar 8, 2017

FLIGHT OF FEMINISTS ACTIVISTS #daywithoutwomen HEADED TO SAUDI ARABIA TO PROTEST FOR WOMAN'S RIGHTS. Oh wait...

#MAGA #POTUS #TRUMP



10:09 AM · Mar 9, 2017 · Twitter Web Client

1 Retweet 1 Like



Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replying to [\[REDACTED\]](#)

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



Trump Admin celebrates Day Without Women  
#daywithoutawoman #maga



Full Frontal

@FullFrontalSamB

The Trump WH is so feminist, EVERY day is Day Without a Woman.



2:34 PM · Mar 9, 2017 · Twitter Web Client

1 Retweet



Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replying to

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



Brigitte Gabriel on True Women's Rights  
#ThursdayThoughts #TrumpStrong #MAGA #BanIslam  
#daywithoutawoman youtube.com/watch?v=gTkG6P...

4:05 PM · Mar 9, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

---

3 Retweets 1 Like

Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to @ [REDACTED]  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

.If he were really serious he'd wear a dress and heels. Ya know, in solidarity. 🦄 #MAGA

Tim Kaine @timkaine · Mar 8, 2017  
I'm wearing red today to honor the commitments women have made to our workforce & their contributions to society #DayWithoutWomen #IWD2017

5:29 PM · Mar 9, 2017 · tweechaPrime

---

1 Retweet

Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to @ [REDACTED]  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

I can't wait to see how many #Feminazis get fired today. It's a glorious time to be alive.  
#daywithoutawoman #MAGA

2:18 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for Android

---

1 Like

Replying to @ [REDACTED]

Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

Day Without A Woman?  
[youtu.be/5ZM84xjpF1A](https://youtu.be/5ZM84xjpF1A)  
#daywithoutawoman #daywithoutwomen  
#feminismiscancer #womensday #womensday2017

1:25 AM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter Web Client

---

1 Like

Replying to @ [REDACTED]

Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

#FeminismIsCancer #FreeMilo >>

[REDACTED] 8, 2017  
Replies to @HuffPost and @HuffingtonPost  
Another great example of why third wave feminism is cancer.

7:49 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter Web Client

---

 **Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replies to @  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

#feminism TRUTH #FeminismIsCancer  
#WomenAgainstFeminism #feminist #feminists #SJW  
#antifeminist #FeminismIsAwful

[REDACTED] · Mar 8, 2017  
Happy #internationalwomensday to #womenagainstfeminism- we may not get a day off but we do get the moral high ground!  
  
#ADayWithoutAWoman

12:30 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for Android

---

1 Retweet 3 Likes

---

 **Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to   
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

---

#InternationalWomensDay #SheInspiresMe  
#ADayWithoutAWoman #Feminism #FeminismIsCancer  
#GenderIsASocialConstruct #DontAssumeMyGender

**HOW CAN YOU HAVE WOMEN'S DAY**

**IF GENDER IS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT**

3:31 AM · Mar 9, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

---

 Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to @  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

---

#feminism DumbAssLogicTRUTH #FeminismIsCancer  
#WomenAgainstFeminism #feminist #feminists #SJW  
#InternationalWomensDay #adaywithoutwomen

辗 Ian Miles Cheong @stillgray · Mar 8, 2017  
Feminist icon Caitlin Moran says girls shouldn't read any books written by men.  
Time to ditch education, then. [heatst.com/culture-wars/f...](http://heatst.com/culture-wars/f...)

11:02 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for Android

1 Retweet 2 Likes

Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to @stillgray  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

#DayWithoutaWoman #internationalwomensday  
#WomenAgainstFeminism

6:57 PM - Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for Android

1 Retweet 1 Like

Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to @  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #WD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

...@cnn PLEASE STOP asking @kayleighmcenany for her uninformed, antifeminist opinion! #daywithoutawoman #sistersmarch

12:57 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter Web Client

---

 Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to @  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

---

This Tweet is unavailable.

Mar 8, 2017 · The laws are in place. But women have to advocate for themselves if the law is not being applied.

1 1 1

This Tweet is unavailable.

Mar 8, 2017 · Bc the claims are wildly exaggerated. I was in corp world for 25 yrs in and had access to compensation. ☺ were paid = to ☺

1 1 1

This Tweet is unavailable.

Mar 8, 2017 · I was involved in EEOC discrimination cases on behalf of my firm. Never wage cases, although 1 disc case was wage related.

1 1 1

This Tweet is unavailable.

Rep [REDACTED]

The new liberal feminism is a antifeminism. Liberal 🙀 r playing the oppression card & feel "entitled" regardless of reality.

4:16 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

1 Like

1 1 1

Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to [REDACTED]  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used these tweets in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

1 1 1

After #InternationalWomensDay here's my most #Feminist and #Antifeminist blog, enjoy.

1:28 PM · Mar 9, 2017 from Plymouth, England · Twitter Web Client

Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to [@SocialResearc14](#)

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

Radical "liberal" feminazis will undoubtedly oppose any such comments as misogynistic, even if it's pro-women

[buzzfeed.com/laurenstrapagi...](http://buzzfeed.com/laurenstrapagi...)

12:02 AM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for Android

Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to [@SocialResearc14](#)

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

Oh look, a feminazi and a femme-fatale hand in hand.  
So sweet. Who's who, you ask? Doesn't matter. They're  
interchangeable. #Equality



4:32 AM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter Web Client

38 Retweets 42 Likes

---

 **Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to   
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

Feminazi: Feminism is about equal rights and not man hating.

Feminazi: Now pay for my dinner or you're a misogynistic piece of shit.

9:24 AM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

1 Like

Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to @  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

Piers Morgan  @piersmorgan · Mar 8, 2017

\*\*VIDEO\*\*  
Full, very civilised debate re feminism with @AnnieLennox & Helen Pankhurst. @GMB #InternationalWomensDay

'Without men it won't change' - Annie Lennox and...  
For International Women's Day we invited two incredible women to join us to talk about what ...  
[itv.com](http://itv.com)

13 27 105

Half the room prob didn't stand up because we've equality in the UK. Some feminazi's want more rights than men

11:21 AM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter Web Client

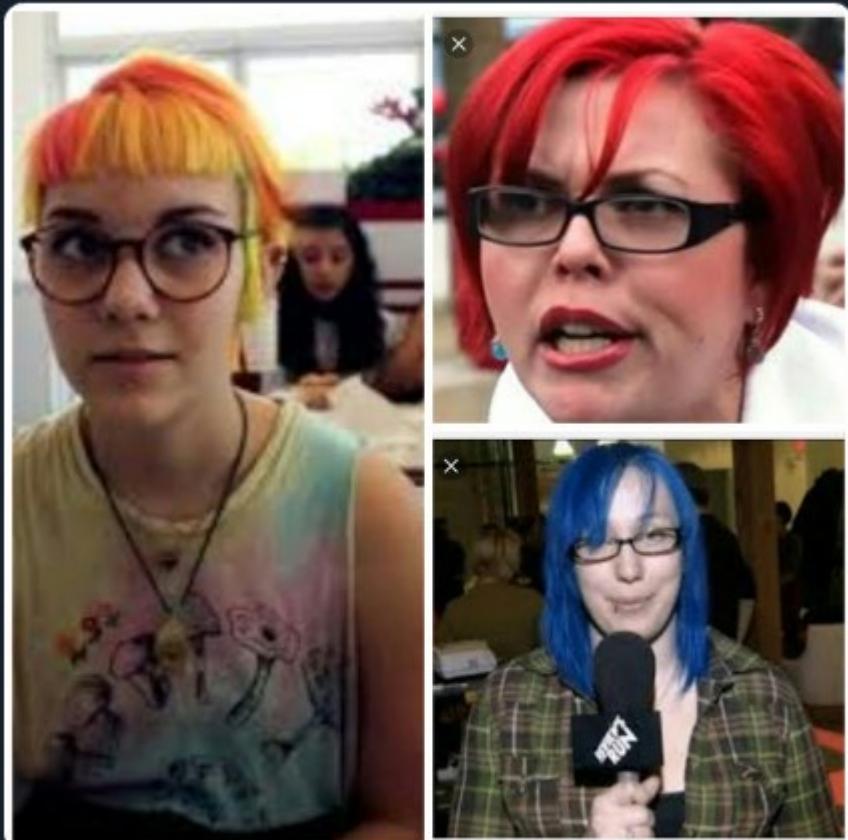
---

Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to [REDACTED]

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

323

What is up with the feminazi trend of ugly hair color  
and goofy glasses? #InternationalWomensDay  
#daywithoutawoman



8:04 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for Android



Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replying to @

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



Unless Fox takes a page from Rush's playbook and calls her a "femiNazi."

Mar 8, 2017

"Paid feminist protesters call for violence."  
-- How Fox News will describe this girl's sign

#InternationalWomensDay #SheInspiresMe



11:35 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter Web Client



Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replies to

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



I love how all these feminazis preach about equality yet grab every opportunity to cyberbully people

12:47 AM · Mar 9, 2017 · Twitter Web Client

1 Retweet 9 Likes

Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to [REDACTED]  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

Student: Wait, there's a difference between feminist and feminazis???? No wonder the internet hates them.  
**#internationalwomensday**

3:22 AM · Mar 9, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

2 Likes

Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to @ [REDACTED]  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



 **Language Portal of Canada**  @Our\_languages · Mar 8, 2017

Q16 Belinda wants to be a \_\_\_\_ when she grows up.

**firewoman** 17%

**firefighter** 83%

11,122 votes · Final results

30 29 100 

Mar 8, 2017

Firewoman because Feminazis wants men dead

2 4 

McVean · Mar 9, 2017

Yup. Dead. Definitely not equal like we've been saying. Dead.

2 1 

I mean Feminists are the one who wants equality,  
Feminazis are the ones ruining it

3:20 PM · Mar 9, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

---

 **Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replying to @ [REDACTED]

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used these tweets in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

This Tweet is unavailable.

haha! A feminist would appreciate this, a feminazi not so much (they can't sit with us). Chivalry is beautiful ❤️  
❤️

5:25 PM · Mar 9, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

10 Likes



**Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replying to @

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



#SJW - Think about it. Top 10 White Male Privileges  
According to Feminism (Gender Equality) 2017  
[youtu.be/XaWs\\_aD28TQ](https://youtu.be/XaWs_aD28TQ) via @YouTube

1:24 AM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter Web Client



**Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replying to @

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



[REDACTED] 7 Mar 2017

 **Comicbook.com**   
@ComicBook

ICYMI: BRIE LARSON talks Captain [@Marvel](#), and how she will show what a female hero truly is!- [bit.ly/2mijnA6](http://bit.ly/2mijnA6)







Q 7 T 203 L 361

[REDACTED] 7 Mar 2017

Oh no. A woman can't be like a male hero, she wins with being sensitive! Not kicking ass...WHAT?!

Q 1 T 1 L 4

[REDACTED] 7 Mar 2017

Seems like Wonder Woman is more progressive and CMarvel is more stereotypical, lol.

Q 2 T 1 L 15

[REDACTED] 7 Mar 2017

t's a dumb statement lol.  
A woman can be a hero doing the same thing as males..like soldiers, Drs..teachers etc



GIF

Q 2 T 1 L 12

[REDACTED] Mar 2017  
I agree. I think Disney Marvel is focusing too much on trying to profit off of feminism and "sjw" culture.

1 1 8

[REDACTED] Mar 2017  
Rather than trying to provide a more interesting, and unique take on how their heroes would/could be.

1 1 3

[REDACTED] Mar 2017  
Not a jab at anyone that enjoys their stuff. It's just something I constantly see in their comics and films.

1 1 4

[REDACTED] Mar 2017  
to be fair though, men and women ARE different. it makes sense in a heightened reality like -

1 1 1

[REDACTED] Mar 2017  
- Marvel to focus on those differences.

2 1 1

[REDACTED] Mar 2017  
They are, but Marvel seems to do it on an exaggerated level, and DC seems to do it on a more subtle level.

2 1

[REDACTED] Mar 2017  
Depends on what your preference is, I guess.

1 1



**Social Research Project**  
@SocialResearc14

Follow

Replying [REDACTED]

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on **#IWD2017**. Would it be okay if I used these tweets in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

7:32 am - 10 Aug 2019

1 1 1

I'm so far from feminist and/or "sjw" but oh my lawd yes. Because I believe white privileged males abuse both. I know because I do.

6:15 AM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for Android

---

1 Like

 **Social Rese**     Aug 10  
Replies 1 Retweets 1 Likes 1  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

SJW Owned! Gavin McInnes DESTROYS a Feminist Social Justice Warrior [youtu.be/Y7f-ahjt70c](https://youtu.be/Y7f-ahjt70c) via @YouTube

8:46 AM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter Web Client

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 **Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replies 1 Retweets 1 Likes 1  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

Happy women's day to the people who understand what feminism means and to the surrogates who took their lives in order for equality

2



3



And literally fuck the modern day feminist SJW's who are so brain dead that feminism is about over powering men. Fuck you

1



This is not a day for SJW retards like @femfreq , this is a day for the women who understand that equality has been met and strive to keep -

1



1



**It that way. Fuck your modern movement, long live equality**

11:56 AM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

2 Likes



**Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replies to @

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used these tweets in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



Bahaha!!Modern feminism is repellent.Full of angry man hating lesbians and SJW's.Not about equality now.

3:19 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for Android

---

 **Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replies to [REDACTED]

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

---

#feminism TRUTH #FeminismIsCancer  
#WomenAgainstFeminism #feminist #feminists #SJW  
#antifeminist #InternationalWomensDay  
#adaywithoutwomen

 **Martin Daubney MEP** → ✅ @MartinDaubney · Mar 8, 2017  
Hang on, isn't every day #InternationalWomensDay?



5:59 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for Android



**Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replying to @[REDACTED]

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



I feel awkward I'm not a sjw but I'm not an anti sjw ,I'm not a feminist but I'm not an anti- feminist

6:39 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter Web Client

2 Retweets 3 Likes



**Social Researcher** · [View Profile](#) · [Follow](#) · [Tweets](#) · [Following](#) · [Research14](#) · Aug 10

Replies to @

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



But forreal. Women have a resilience that no man could imitate. You don't need to be an SJW or Feminist to understand that.

8:46 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

4 Likes



**Social Researcher** · [View Profile](#) · [Follow](#) · [Tweets](#) · [Following](#) · [Research14](#) · Aug 10

Replies to @

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



#Feminism represents self-imposed internalized oppression; Seemingly, SJW clapping seals, on shark-week, year-round. #ADayWithoutAWoman

3:09 AM · Mar 9, 2017 · Twitter Web Client

---

2 Retweets 1 Like

 Social Researcher @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to @  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

Check out: Tamara Wolfe\_Lilwing @  
Writer. Sinti Gypsy/Chickasaw Native American. ANTI-Feminist/SJW/Religitar/Hypocrisy.

5:06 AM · Mar 9, 2017 · The Social Jukebox

---

1 Retweet

 Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to @  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

Equality = Egalitarian; (most) Feminist = Self-righteous SJW with a stick up their ass.

10:24 AM · Mar 9, 2017 · Twitter for Android

2 Retweets 1 Like



**Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replies to @

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



· Mar 9, 2017  
I dont understand why feminists get mad at me when I say that Im not a feminist or sjw  
Q 1 RT 1 Fave 1 Reply

· Mar 9, 2017  
I never said they're not allowed to be, just that I dont want to be one  
Q 1 RT 1 Fave 1 Reply

Theres too many man haters who call themselves feminists

"Not all of them hates men!"

True, but still too many for my taste.

2:16 PM · Mar 9, 2017 · Twitter Web Client

Replying to @  
**Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used these tweets in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.  
Q 1 RT 1 Fave 1 Reply

Pssst @MxJackMonroe #internationalwomensday isn't about equality it's just a circle jerk for cunt feminists

5:58 AM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

Replying to @  
**Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.  
Q 1 RT 1 Fave 1 Reply

Considering feminism is fundamentally about equality,  
quite simply any man who is NOT a feminist  
automatically seems like a cunt, no?

10:43 AM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter Web Client



**Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replying to @

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



She needs a kick in the cunt



**Ian Miles Cheong** @stillgray · Mar 8, 2017

Feminist icon Caitlin Moran says girls shouldn't read any books written by men. Time to ditch education, then. [heatst.com/culture-wars/f...](http://heatst.com/culture-wars/f...)

2:00 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for Android

1 Like



**Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replying to @

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



Happy Women's Day to the real women, not the bitches and cunts that trash men under the guise of equality to further a "pick em" of rights.

3:32 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for Android

2 Likes



**Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replying to [REDACTED]

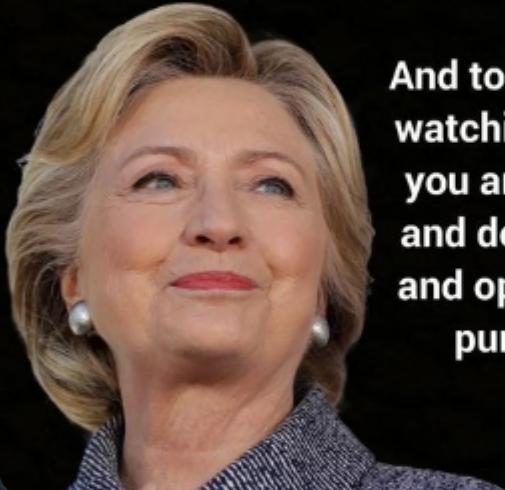
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



It's crazy how peep wit this evil "cunt"! She threw a child rape victim under the bus for her on gain! The guy got off! Smdh...

· Mar 8, 2017

The perfect words for #InternationalWomensDay  
RETWEET if you support equality for all the little girls out there.  
#ADayWithoutAWoman



**And to all the little girls who are watching this, never doubt that you are valuable and powerful and deserving of every chance and opportunity in the world to pursue and achieve your own dreams.**

©CBS EVENING NEWS

4:50 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone



**Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replies to @

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



If you have to constantly remind everyone that you're a feminist, you're not a fucking feminist. You're a whiny cunt. #LearnTheDifference

7:44 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

1 Retweet 8 Likes



**Social Research Project** @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10

Replying to @ [REDACTED]

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.



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Mar 8, 2017

#InternationalWomensDay is not here to belittle men. It's here to remind us of the great women throughout history 🙋

1 3 14

I'm tired of women trying to shut down men today because it's #IWD2017

That's not female empowerment; that's being a cunt 😐

8:01 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for Android

5 Retweets 20 Likes

Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to [REDACTED]  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used these tweets in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

[REDACTED]

Let us celebrate women today! I learned my favorite word from a woman- my grandma- sure, it was 'cunt' but she still taught me!#IWD

9:04 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

Social Research Project @SocialResearc14 · Aug 10  
Replying to [REDACTED]  
Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

I think it's so funny when people think because the movement is called feminism it's not about equal rights. And they act like some crazy +

1



1



woman coined the term when it's really an old French MAN. If feminism was about making women better than men it's woundnt be +

1



1



feminism duhh.

Misogyny: ♂ > ♀

Misandry: ♂ < ♀

Feminism: ♀ = 🌈 = ♂

[Translate Tweet](#)

6:23 PM · Mar 8, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

1 Retweet 1 Like



SocResearch · Aug 14

Replying to

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used these tweets in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.





I put this picture because of twitters character limit

Actually feminism is the belief that women should have the same rights as men, it says nothing about men being the same as women, that's why it's called FEMinism and not equalism or something like that, if you believe that men should have the same right as women then your a masculist, any gender can be either or both, if you believe that women should not have the same rights as men then you are a chauvinist

5:54 pm - 8 Mar 2017

1 Retweet 2 Likes



1 1 2

Isn't women being equal 2 men & men being equal 2 women the same though?  
Asking for clarification

1 1 1

No because women having more rights isn't against feminism

1 1 1

Just gonna say there is a difference between misandry and feminism.

1 1 1

Yes you can be both feminism and masculinist but you can also be feminist and chauvinist

1 1 1

or you could be somewhere in the middle

1 1 1

SocResearch @research\_soc · Aug 13

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used these tweets in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

What I find more concerning is the thin line between misandry and feminism (for some lately). It's like we are at war.

Mar 9, 2017

I personally responded yesterday. It concerned me that that is the face of feminism. Complete misinterpretation.

7:40 AM · Mar 9, 2017 · Twitter Web Client

1 Retweet 1 Like



**SocResearch** @research\_soc · Aug 14

Replying to @ [REDACTED]

Hello! I'm a PhD student doing a research project about the ways people talked on #IWD2017. Would it be okay if I used this tweet in my project? If you have any questions my DMs are open.

