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Using Hashtags to Disambiguate Aboutness in Social Media Discourse: A Case Study of #OrlandoStrong

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USING HASHTAGS TO DISAMBIGUATE ABOUTNESS IN SOCIAL MEDIA
DISCOURSE: A CASE STUDY OF #ORLANDOSTRONG

by

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ABSTRACT

While the field of writing studies has studied digital writing as a response to multiple calls for more research on digital forms of writing, research on hashtags has yet to build bridges between different disciplines' approaches to studying the uses and effects of hashtags. This dissertation builds that bridge in its interdisciplinary approach to the study of hashtags by focusing on how hashtags can be fully appreciated at the intersection of the fields of information research, linguistics, rhetoric, ethics, writing studies, new media studies, and discourse studies. Hashtags are writing innovations that perform unique digital functions rhetorically while still hearkening back to functions of both print and oral rhetorical traditions.

Hashtags function linguistically as indicators of semantic meaning; additionally, hashtags also perform the role of search queries on social media, retrieving texts that include the same hashtag. Information researchers refer to the relationship between a search query and its results using the term "aboutness" (Kehoe and Gee, 2011). By considering how hashtags have an aboutness, the humanities can call upon information research to better understand the digital aspects of the hashtag's search function. Especially when hashtags are used to organize discourse, aboutness has an effect on how a discourse community's agendas and goals are expressed, as well as framing what is relevant and irrelevant to the discourse. As digital activists increasingly use hashtags to organize and circulate the goals of their discourse communities, knowledge of ethical strategies for hashtag use will help to better preserve a relevant aboutness for their discourse while enabling them to better leverage their hashtag for circulation.

In this dissertation, through a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the Twitter discourse that used #OrlandoStrong over the five-month period before the first anniversary of the Pulse shooting, I trace how the #OrlandoStrong discourse community used innovative rhetorical

strategies to combat irrelevant content from ambiguating their discourse space. In Chapter One, I acknowledge the call from scholars to study digital tools and briefly describe the history of the Pulse shooting, reflecting on non-digital texts that employed #OrlandoStrong as memorials in the Orlando area. In Chapter Two, I focus on the literature surrounding hashtags, discourse, aboutness, intertextuality, hashtag activism, and informational compositions. In Chapter Three, I provide an overview of the stages of grounded theory methodology and the implications of critical discourse analysis before I detail how I approached the collection, coding, and analysis of the #OrlandoStrong Tweets I studied. The results of my study are reported in Chapter Four, offering examples of Tweets that were important to understanding how the discourse space became ambiguous through the use of hashtags. In Chapter Five, I reflect on ethical approaches to understanding the consequences of hashtag use, and then I offer an ethical recommendation for hashtag use by hashtag activists. I conclude Chapter Five with an example of a classroom activity that allows students to use hashtags to better understand the relationship between aboutness, (dis)ambiguation, discourse communities, and ethics. This classroom activity is provided with the hope that instructors from different disciplines will be able to provide ethical recommendations to future activists who may benefit from these rhetorical strategies.

To my son, Everett Isaac DeArmas. Remember, challenging yourself is the best way to find out who you are and what you're made of. Failure and frustration are stops on the path to success; embrace them as much as you do your achievements, but learn from them.

Being your father is still my greatest achievement.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In this dissertation, I analyze a digital, rhetorical innovation: the hashtag. Specifically, I study the discourse surrounding the Pulse shooting in Orlando, Florida, that was organized by the use of the hashtag #OrlandoStrong. Through this dissertation, I have gleaned a better understanding of how hashtags work to make meaning in an innovative way, described how they are critical tools for online activists, and offered a set of ethical recommendations for hashtag use.

In the first chapter, I reflect upon the calls to action in the field of writing studies that ask for digital tools like hashtags to be researched by writing studies scholars. Next, I detail the events of the Pulse shooting and what happened in the aftermath of the shooting as the city collectively mourned and memorialized the Pulse shooting through different media, both on and offline. After that I detail how the murals and makeshift memorials at the site of the Pulse shooting established and reinforced the specific lexis of the #OrlandoStrong discourse community.

In the second chapter, I reflect upon the existing literature in the fields of writing studies, rhetoric, linguistics, computer-mediated communication, and discourse studies. I first focus on the literature that depicts the hashtag as writing tool; then I focus on the literature that shows how hashtags can be used as semantic descriptors of the texts they organize. Next, I hone in on the term *aboutness* (Kehoe and Gee, 2011), a term used to describe the ways that search queries work to create meaning from a database of texts. I then consider literature that recognizes how hashtags can work rhetorically as an emphatic element in the rhetorical canon of style. After that,

I discuss how literature in the field has made connections between intertextuality and hashtags. Finally, I reflect on the literature that depicts how discourse can form discourse communities and explore the defining characteristics of what is required for a discourse community to exist. In this section I consider literature that depicts online activism (which I approach as a kind of discourse community) and offer scholarship that shows that hashtags have been instrumental to the success of online activism.

In the third chapter, I explain the methodology, analytical approach, and technologies I used to collect, code, and analyze my data. First, I define grounded theory methodology. In this section, I provide a detailed account of the different phases that grounded theory follows, including how researchers move through four phases to form a theory from data. Second, I define critical discourse analysis and show how critical discourse analysis is useful for studying hashtags and their discourse. Third, I depict how the coding process worked in the context of the #OrlandoStrong data I collected, coded, and analyzed, as I applied grounded theory and critical discourse analysis to my data sample in order to develop a theory of ethical hashtag use (which I present in Chapter Five).

The fourth chapter reviews the findings and results of the methods and analysis that were discussed in Chapter Three. In the first section I show the results of the coding that I performed on the general #OrlandoStrong data sample, the proportional content of the specific lexis of the discourse community. Next, I reflect upon how those proportions changed in Tweets that utilized informational compositions to circulate their discourse. In this section I depict the complementary hashtags that were used alongside #OrlandoStrong Tweets to encourage greater circulation. I reflect upon the proportion of content in Tweets from the coded categories of rainbows, love, hate, and marketing. Finally, I reflect upon how informational compositions

disambiguated the content of #OrlandoStrong in order to better connect the relevant

intercommunication of discourse community members who uses a specific lexis.

In my final chapter, I answer my research questions and propose my own ethical

framework for hashtag use. I also offer an example of pedagogy that can be used by instructors

who wish to study hashtags in the classroom.

Explaining the Choice to Include Images of Actual Tweets

Throughout this dissertation, I made the choice to include images of actual Tweets I

studied in the #OrlandoStrong feed. This choice to include these images was made in order to

accomplish two things: to represent the discourse space of #OrlandoStrong as faithfully as

possible and to permanently document what could be lost by potential deletion of Tweets in the

future. Had I provided links to Tweets instead of images, those Tweets could have been deleted

and made inaccessible by the time I finished this dissertation, robbing the dissertation of textual

evidence for its assertions. The choice to share images of Tweets for me was one that required a

balanced reflection over three different concerns: a concern for truthfully representing the

discourse space as I found it in the moment the data was collected, a concern for the audience of

#OrlandoStrong who may have read these Tweets at the time they were written, and a concern

for minimizing any potential harm that sharing images of Tweets might cause the author of each

Tweet.

While my use of the images I included was approved by the University of Central

Florida's Institutional Review Board, I wanted to ensure that my use of the screenshots were still

ethical. Part of the reason why I chose to study discourse on Twitter, as opposed to other social

media platforms, is because Twitter's license agreement with its users specifically states that

using Twitter makes user content available to other users who may choose to make that content

available to the world. As much of my analysis of the discourse space focuses on how Tweets make meaning together, removing names or describing content instead of using images would have represented the Tweets with less verisimilitude than providing an image of them does. Therefore, part of my ethical consideration in choosing to include images meant that I chose not to misrepresent, redact, or obscure any part of the Tweets I include as a way to allow those users' Tweets to speak on behalf of themselves.

However, aside from the Tweets themselves, I did choose to exclude any information about users' identities, geographic location markers, networks, or account profiles, so as to keep the focus of each image on the content of the Tweet itself and not on the user. It is important to understand that usernames, Twitter handles, and personal images of account users do have an effect on how messages can be interpreted, so I needed to include that information in order to better represent context, meaning, and authorship. Because the Pulse shooting was a hate crime that targeted gay, Latinx people, I made sure to be sensitive to their identities and not to out anyone for their identities. I did this because I wanted to minimize the potential harm that users might suffer from outing them without expressed consent.

As Twitter is a public service, these Tweets are not confidential nor private, so it was ethical according to Twitter's terms of service to treat these Tweets as public information. Understanding that the concepts of private and public are not always mutually exclusive, I made sure to share Tweets that were not potentially harmful to users or that included information that could help users be traced off Twitter. Also, I showed no private Tweets whose user's settings were limited to private audiences, respecting the wishes of the user that those Tweets would remain in a specific network. Therefore, public accounts for business purposes and public figures comprised the majority of Tweets I included.

Introduction

This chapter begins with a reflection on the call to action from writing studies scholars to study the rhetorical innovations that new technologies bring to the field. After considering the ways that writing studies scholars call for research to be done in places where writing is happening outside of the classroom, I detail the events that happened the night of June 12th, 2016, the night of the Pulse shooting. Then I detail the community's response in their construction of memorial texts, installations, and murals in physical spaces around the city of Orlando. After that I begin to consider the ways that #OrlandoStrong was used in these physical locations. From those descriptions I glean a description of the discourse community of #OrlandoStrong and make connections between these non-digital spaces that use #OrlandoStrong and digital spaces that use #OrlandoStrong. This sets up the literature review in Chapter Two.

Studying Hashtags: Addressing the Call from Scholars

Increasingly, leading scholarship in writing studies has called for writers to research digital writing, especially what differentiates it from traditional writing, and to consider the teaching of digital writing. For example, at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), the CCCC Chair is wont to make a "call to action" in their address to the field (Yancey, 2004, p. 300). Taking note of the present state of affairs of writing studies, the chair's address usually offers some advice and direction for scholarship and practice. Studying these calls, Mueller (2011) drew our attention to the emerging themes that have arisen over the 35 years of CCCC addresses, such as the social aspects of writing and the role of technology in writing, to name a few. More recently, in the last fifteen years, chairs' calls to action have discussed, repeatedly, writing's relationship with digital technology. Often, chairs challenge

scholars and instructors alike to reconsider their notion of what writing is, and to make more affordances in the classroom and in their research to value different modes of writing, too.

Outside of CCCC addresses, writing scholars continued to emphasize their role in teaching and researching writing in a digitally-saturated world: Yancey (2009) called attention to how writing on the web stresses some of the practices that first-year composition (FYC) teachers value—practices that encourage peer relationships, co-authored communication, and an appreciation for the social nature of writing. Yancey stressed that acknowledging the public nature of digital writing was an opportunity for composition scholars to seize, because

> writers compose authentic texts in informal digitally networked contexts, but there isn't a hierarchy of expert-apprentice, but rather a peer co-apprenticeship in which communicative knowledge is freely exchanged. In other words, our impulse to write is now digitized and expanded—or put differently, newly technologized, socialized, and networked (pp. 4-5).

In this way, considering the hashtag is essential to understanding how writing on social media becomes networked and socialized, specifically on Twitter.

By considering how writing on the web socializes writing, Yancey emphasized how digital writing offers opportunities that traditional print forms cannot: opportunities to immediately network, circulate, dialogue, and rhetorically link one's writing in response to other texts. In order to understand hashtags more comprehensively, the next section reflects on the history of the hashtag and explores how its use has evolved over time.

The Hashtag: A New Writing Tool

Yancey (2009) emphasized that researchers should do their best to engage with writing where it happens—and today writing happens on a digital screen, using hashtags, more often

than not. Acknowledging that we are in the midst of a writing transition, one where more and more of our writing is being composed from start to finish on the screen, scholars have positioned themselves to study writing through screens, to explore the digital opportunities that screens afford. Understanding this, Yancey made another call "to research and articulate new composition, a call to help our students compose often, compose well, and through these composings, become the citizen writers of our country, the citizen writers of our world, and the writers of our future" (p. 7).

Most recently, Losh's 2018 Computers and Writing keynote speech, which is due to be published in 2018 as a book in the *Object Lessons* series by Bloomsbury Publishing, focused mostly on the hashtag as a tool for writing and activism. This is important because it emphasizes how writing studies scholars (Edwards & Lang, 2018) have called for researchers to "take hashtags seriously" (p. 132).

This next section focuses on the specific events of the Pulse shooting. It is an important section that explores how these events helped to frame the discourse that happened in response to the shooting, as visible in murals, memorials, and installations across the city of Orlando in fall 2016.

The Pulse Shooting

In order to fully understand the devastation that happened to the community of Orlando when the Pulse shooting happened, it is important to start with the Pulse nightclub. The Pulse nightclub was opened in 2004 after the owner, Barbara Poma, lost her brother to HIV/AIDS. Pulse was a way for Poma to honor her brother and celebrate his life. She wanted to create a space where people could come to feel welcome in a space that would "embody the loving and accepting spirit her brother found in underground gay clubs" (Holland, 2017, para. 1).

Appropriately named Pulse, the nightclub quickly became a part of the heartbeat of the LGBTQ+ community, and kept that heart alive and beating in Orlando.

On June 16th, 2016, Pulse nightclub had around 300 patrons inside the club as last call was being announced. The club was beginning to wind down and close the weekly celebration of Latin Night, an event that primarily attracted LGBTQ+ and Latinx persons, alongside many other communities. At 2:02 a.m., a lone gunman armed with a semi-automatic assault rifle opened fire in the nightclub, eventually creating an extended hostage situation in one of the nightclub's bathrooms, where the shooter claimed suspect allegiance to the terrorist organization ISIL, ultimately taking 49 lives and wounding 53 more before he was killed at 5:14 a.m. by police officers. Aside from physical casualties, the countless emotional wounds that were inflicted during the moment those bullets were unleashed in Pulse may never heal. Injured victims were rushed to Orlando Regional Medical Center and Florida Hospital Orlando, whose trauma units worked to save many of the victims of serious injury. Of the 44 victims who were taken by first responders to be treated at these hospitals, 11 died. Most likely because Pulse was celebrating Latin night, over 90% of the victims came from Latinx heritage, half of those being of Puerto Rican heritage given that Orlando has a large Puerto Rican population. At the time that Pulse happened, it was the deadliest mass shooting by a single shooter to take place on U.S. soil. To this day, it still is the deadliest recognized attack on LGBTQ+ people on U.S. soil.

Because it is important to memorialize the dead, I will take a moment to list the victims' names and their ages when their innocent lives were cut short by the events of the Pulse shooting.

~

Stanley Almodovar III, age 23

Amanda L. Alvear, age 25

Oscar A. Aracena-Montero, age 26

Rodolfo Ayala-Ayala, age 33

Alejandro Barrios Martinez, age 21

Martin Benitez Torres, age 33

Antonio D. Brown, age 30

Darryl R. Burt II, age 29

Jonathan A. Camuy Vega, age 24

Angel L. Candelario-Padro, age 28

Simon A. Carrillo Fernandez, age 31

Juan Chevez-Martinez, age 25

Luis D. Conde, age 39

Cory J. Connell, age 21

Tevin E. Crosby, age 25

Franky J. Dejesus Velazquez, age 50

Deonka D. Drayton, age 32

Mercedez M. Flores, age 26

Peter O. Gonzalez-Cruz, age 22

Juan R. Guerrero, age 22

Paul T. Henry, age 41

Frank Hernandez, age 27

Miguel A. Honorato, age 30

Javier Jorge-Reyes, age 40

Jason B. Josaphat, age 19

Eddie J. Justice, age 30

Anthony L. Laureano Disla, age 25

Christopher A. Leinonen, age 32

Brenda L. Marquez McCool, age 49

Jean C. Mendez Perez, age 35

Akyra Monet Murray, age 18

Kimberly Jean Morris, age 37

Jean C. Nieves Rodriguez, age 27

Luis O. Ocasio-Capo, age 20

Geraldo A. Ortiz-Jimenez, age 25

Eric Ivan Ortiz-Rivera, age 36

Joel Rayon Paniagua, age 32

Enrique L. Rios Jr., age 25

Juan P. Rivera Velazquez, age 37

Yilmary Rodriguez Solivan, age 24

Christopher J. Sanfeliz, age 24

Xavier Emmanuel Serrano-Rosado, age 35

Gilberto Ramon Silva Menendez, age 25

Edward Sotomayor Jr., age 34

Shane Evan Tomlinson, age 33

Leroy Valentin Fernandez, age 25

Luis S. Vielma, age 22

Luis Daniel Wilson-Leon, age 37

Jerald A. Wright, age 31

~

May they rest in peace.

Social media and Pulse

In response to the Pulse shooting, the social media conglomerate Facebook used their safety app for people to check in as safe for the first time in U.S. history. The Pulse nightclub also used social media during the shooting, posting at 2:09 a.m., "Everyone get out of pulse and keep running" on the club's Facebook page. That chilling message was the first of many social media posts across multiple platforms that discursively addressed the Pulse shooting, eventually organizing through the use of #OrlandoStrong (and using other subsequent hashtags once the #OrlandoStrong space became ambiguated and occupied by other agendas).

It seems that #OrlandoStrong was a knee-jerk reaction to the Pulse shooting, as many other cities and locations have made use of the #___Strong convention, where the city, state, or specific location is positioned between the hashtag symbol and the word strong. For example, after the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida, the discourse centered around #DouglasStrong (2018); after the shooting in Manchester, England: #ManchesterStrong (2017); after the shooting in Las Vegas, Nevada: #VegasStrong (2017); after the flood in Houston, Texas: #HoustonStrong (2017); after the terrorist shooting in Paris, France: #ParisStrong (2015); after the shooting in San Bernardino, California: #SanBernardinoStrong

(2015); after the Boston Marathon bombing in Boston, Massachusetts: #BostonStrong (2013).

Sadly, the list goes on and on.

Perhaps the most widespread use of the convention #___Strong is #BostonStrong.

Crawford (2016) acknowledged that #BostonStrong became an innovative way for a city to

visualize meaning after tragic events like the Boston Marathon bombing. She acknowledged how

hashtags provide opportunities for an audience to co-author the meaning of a tragic event (p. 51).

According to Crawford (2016), #___Strong is a convention that stems back to Lance

Armstrong's LiveStrong brand in 1997, but was quickly adopted by a slew of other causes over

the years: #ArmyStrong (2006), #VermontStrong (2011), #NewtownStrong (2011),

#JerseyStrong (2012), and #CharlestonStrong (2015). She acknowledged that hashtags that use

the #___Strong convention often use this digital space to "make sense of events that occur within

the city, and commemorate loss or tragedy as a collective" (p. 4).

It is no surprise, then, that Orlando residents gravitated to organizing through

#OrlandoStrong on the heels of the Pulse tragedy, using it as a way to aid the healing process for

the city after a tragic event, and as a way to write their own narratives of strength and persistence

in the face of fear. Crawford (2016) also acknowledged that this hashtag convention is employed

often to help the city brand itself in a "corporatized way" (p. 38). Sporting events are also ways

that hashtags are perpetuated through their link to city identity and patriotism; this identity is also

the case with the connection between Orlando City Soccer and #OrlandoStrong, as the sports

franchise supported the community in much the same fashion that the Boston Red Sox did the

Boston community (p. 43). Crawford recognized that "this trend of developing hashtags that

anchor a cultural context and eventfulness are evocative of mass shootings and other tragedies"

(p. 51). Hashtags like #OrlandoStrong and #BostonStrong offer opportunities for scholars to

think critically about why tragic events may be presented alongside different narratives in the media, considering how those narratives influence the way an event is publicly remembered.

Hashtags are often used in non-digital media as well, and #OrlandoStrong was quickly used as a kind of slogan that represented the unity, persistence, and strength of the Orlando community after Pulse. This next section will briefly cover some of the murals and an art installation created in the Orlando community that utilized #OrlandoStrong in their content. These examples will be used to compare the non-digital use of #OrlandoStrong against the digital use in Chapter Four.

#OrlandoStrong Murals in the City of Orlando

This section will provide examples of Orlando regional murals and art installations that were created in the aftermath of the Pulse shooting. Their use of #OrlandoStrong, as a representation of what the #OrlandoStrong space connotated at the time they were created, showed a specific use of rainbows or rainbow-colored progressions (ROYGBV), love, representations of the city of Orlando, and symbols related to the Pulse shooting victims (as represented by the use of the number 49). The first mural I present is the mural located at the Track Shack Orlando garage, pictured in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Track Shack garage, 1050 N. Mills Ave.

The picture of the mural in Figure 1 is "a tribute to the victims of the shooting at Pulse nightclub," featuring a silhouette of the Orlando skyline, a giant sun, the Orlando Eye, and Cinderella's Castle at Disney's Magic Kingdom (Wilson, 2017, para. 3). These iconic images from Orlando all surround Pulse's logo, placing it at the center of this depiction of the city, sheltered by the rest of the city in solidarity and protection. Emblazoned across the top of the mural is a rainbow-colored (ROYGBV) #OrlandoStrong, associating that hashtag with the LGBTQ+ movement, diversity, and inclusion.

The next mural I present is a mural of #OrlandoStrong on Orlando's Mills Avenue, pictured in Figure 2.

Figure 2. "#OrlandoStrong," 1050 N. Mills Ave.

This mural in the downtown Orlando area, painted by street artist Luce Sky, also pays tribute to the Pulse nightclub shooting, with the bold white letters "#OrlandoStrong" backgrounded by rainbow-colored ROYGBV transitions in sections containing 49 birds in flight. The number 49 is symbolic of the 49 victims of the Pulse tragedy and a testament to the community of Orlando delivering "a message of hope in response to the shooting at Pulse nightclub" (Wilson, 2017, para. 7). Again, this mural speaks to three symbols: birds in flight, rainbows, and the Orlando skyline, which can be considered references to the victims of the tragedy, the LGBTQ+ community and the concept of inclusivity, and the city of Orlando.

The next mural I present here is a mural painted on the wall of the LGBT+ Center of Orlando, pictured in Figure 3.

Figure 3. "Most Meaningful Mural," 946 N. Mills Ave.

This mural, referred to as "the most meaningful mural," is also emblazoned with #OrlandoStrong underneath a flexing bicep—which represents strength and resilience, with the Pulse logo situated in the middle of that bicep (McLellan, 2017, para. 14). Encompassing that symbol of strength is a rainbow-colored circle, sitting atop the date of the Pulse tragedy written on a scroll. This is bookended by two wings, all placed atop a purple-colored background. This mural echoes some of the same iconic symbols represented in other murals analyzed previously, which all bear the same #OrlandoStrong text. The rainbow-colored halo around the bicep, delivered in a ROYGBV transition, along with the purple background make reference to the LGBTQ+ community, diversity, and inclusion. The date of the tragedy written on the scroll ties the mural directly to the day of the massacre at Pulse and specifically to the city of Orlando. The wings make reference to birds and also to angels, which associates the victims who have passed to birds in flight, associating their passing with a flight to the afterlife.

The next image is an art installation found at the site of the Pulse nightclub, pictured in Figure 4.

Figure 4. "Pulse Rainbow Memorial,"1912 S. Orange Ave.

At the Pulse memorial, makeshift memorials are left, sometimes preserved indefinitely and other times only lasting a couple days. This particular piece of art has been there longer than most of the other memorials, aside from the signs hanging on the fence that were put up to secure the site of the shooting, and the signs placed there in order to block the view of the nightclub, out of respect for those who died. The rainbow, made from papier-mâché, begins and ends in papier-mâché clouds, and has a rainbow colored #OrlandoStrong framing its arc. Christian-themed prayer candles, symbols that can be affiliated with the Latinx (e.g., Puerto Rican) community, are seen gathered in the foreground. With the addition of the Latinx iconography, which is

appropriate as the shooting happened on Latin night at Pulse, one can see how this piece of memorial art continues the themes that the aforementioned murals portrayed: the rainbow and its ROYGBV color progression that are used to color the ten separate letters of #OrlandoStrong, making reference to inclusion, diversity, and the LGBTQ+ community; the clouds, which make reference to the heavens where both birds and angels take flight, correspond to the afterlife and flight; and using #OrlandoStrong grounds these references to the city of Orlando literally and figuratively.

Considering these physical murals and art-based memorials as emblematic texts connected to the discourse community of #OrlandoStrong, they seem to all carry a consistent pattern of content, and that content reinforces a message that expresses statements of inclusion and diversity through rainbows or rainbow-colored progressions, Orlando-centric themes, and a focus on remembering the 49 victims who were slain at Pulse, depicting them as birds or angels. As one can see from these murals and their inclusion of #OrlandoStrong in their text, there is a strong connection between the content of rainbows and rainbow-colored progressions (LGBTQ+ connotations), victims (the number 49, birds, angels, Latinx imagery), and the city of Orlando (the Orlando skyline, the Pulse logo). At the time these texts were created, so soon after the Pulse shooting, these were the dominant themes of the content that #OrlandoStrong evoked, collected, and organized.

However, when I began to study the data I collected from Tweets that included #OrlandoStrong in their text, I found that these patterns surprisingly were not consistently present proportionately in the hashtag feed. I address the implications of that difference in proportion between the non-digital and digital #OrlandoStrong content in Chapter Four. The next

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chapter functions as a literature review of key concepts and terms that I will use to analyze the

digital discourse of #OrlandoStrong.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature central to this dissertation project. In the first section, I reflect on how literature in the field has depicted the hashtag as a writing tool. Next, I detail the history of the hashtag, reflecting on research that documents its use as a semantic descriptor by writers. In the second section, I define the term *aboutness* and explore its relationship to understanding the meaning that hashtags engender to their texts at any given time. In that section I discuss how hashtags have been viewed rhetorically by scholars as stylistic tools for writers. Then, I reflect on the ways that hashtags evoke both oral and print traditions, and how the choice of medium affects cultural attitudes toward hashtags. This section concludes with a reflection on a specific stylistic use yet introduced in literature: how hashtags can be used for *exergasia*, a classical form of rhetorical amplification.

In the third section, I show how intertextuality is important to understanding how a hashtag feed makes meaning and contributes to aboutness. Then, drawing on the scholarship of Swales (1990), I reflect on the connection between hashtags and discourse communities as well as the hashtag's role in assisting discourse communities to engage in relevant discourse. This section concludes with my reflection on the hashtag's role in activism, focusing on the way that discourse communities form around activist movements on social media. I conclude by addressing relevant discourse through focusing on discursive acts of *ambiguation* and *disambiguation:* the ways that additional texts contributed to a discourse can make content vaguer or more distinct. My central point in this section is that discursive ambiguation and disambiguation can constrain or aid a discourse community's ability to conduct relevant intercommunication. I end the chapter with my claim that hashtags can be used as *informational*

compositions to disambiguate relevant content necessary for intercommunication in discourse communities.

The next section will provide a brief history of the hashtag. It will then focus on the history of the hashtag and detail its diversity as a digital writing tool: its function as metadata, as monocode, and as a semantic tag.

The History of the Hashtag

The hashtag arose out of necessity, much in the same way that punctuation was created when the last writing medium shift occurred. As Bolter (2001) asserted, writers have entered the late age of print; while that doesn't mean that print is becoming obsolete, it does suggest that print is losing its primacy as a writing medium. As digital writing became more prevalent, it remediated writing, absorbing the cultural expectations and writing practices of both print and oral media. Wolff (2015) acknowledged how digital writing tools like punctuation grew out of the transition from oral delivery to print delivery. In the same way, hashtags have emerged from the new form of digital information delivery as a new kind of punctuation.

Hashtags are a fairly recent phenomenon, having been called by the name "hashtag" as early as 2008. Scholarship that focuses on hashtags pays attention to the digital nuances that hashtags can emphasize. For the purposes of this dissertation, I focus solely on hashtag use on Twitter. A hashtag is a phrase of uninterrupted letters and numbers preceded by a # sign, usually written on a social media platform that can facilitate its digital capabilities. However, hashtags have also been used in both oral and print delivery, which still utilize the hashtag's stylistic capabilities, although they are unable to utilize the hashtag's digital capabilities. On Twitter, any user can create or reiterate any hashtag they please as long as the user can type the full hashtag into a Tweet, and the hashtag is composed of no more than 280 characters. Chris Messina, a

former Google designer, has been acknowledged as the first writer to use the Twitter hashtag in

2007 (although not officially referred to as hashtag until the next year), as a way to organize the

digital chaos of Twitter. Although Messina's claim to be the hashtag architect has been

challenged by some scholars (see Losh, 2018) as sexist—as evidence of the male bias extant in

socio-cultural technology use—there is evidence that whoever coined the use and name of the

hashtag can be traced back to Twitter in 2008. In Messina's own words, the hashtag is "an

HTML-activated device that allows Twitter users to sort their feeds by topic" (as cited in

Edwards, 2013). Hashtags on Twitter were initially implemented for the purpose of tagging the

semantic topic of a Tweet in order to more easily return to that topic at a later time. Typing a

hashtag into Twitter's search bar (referenced later in the chapter as a *query*) would find Tweets

that included that specific hashtag in their text. Any Tweet with a hashtag included in its text

would not only be listed in that specific author/user's feed who composed it, but would also be

included in that corresponding hashtag feed alongside other Tweets that also included that same

hashtag (depending on user privacy settings).

   In a way, hashtags are used to organize the archive of Tweets that Twitter can be

envisioned as; however, Twitter wasn't the first digital space to ever use metatags, folksonomies

(Vander Wal, 2007), or social tagging to organize a digital archive. Internet Relay Chat

(Edwards & Lang, 2018; Losh, 2018; Zappavigna, 2017) began using content tags in the 1990s,

and more modern social networking sites like Del.icio.us and Flickr, for instance, used similar

kinds of tagging to organize data semantically before Twitter ever did. Twitter's claim to have

created the hashtag is simply a claim to another iteration of the metatag: an HTML-activated text

that is visible to the reader. According to Losh (2018), this visibility of hashtags "allow[s] us to

see what machines say behind our back" (n.p.). It is important to note that, as a consequence of

its popularity, Twitter helped to spur the ubiquitous use of hashtags as a cultural object, both inside and outside of digital writing (Scott, 2018).

On Twitter, any user can create or reiterate any hashtag they please, as long as they can fit it into a single Tweet entirely. Hashtags won't be read as a hashtag by Twitter's algorithm if they are longer than 280 characters or strung across separate Tweets. Twitter's expansion of a single Tweet's character limit in 2018, from 140 to 280 characters, doubled the potential length of a hashtag. This new affordance in character limit meant that not only could hashtags become twice as long, but also more abundant than in earlier Tweets limited by 140 characters.

There are some specific qualities to Twitter's metatags that aren't universal, though. Twitter's hashtags are what scholars refer to as a monocode, meaning that hashtags must be read one way, in one direction. For example, #BlackLivesMatter will not be read by Twitter's (2018) algorithm as the same hashtag as #MatterBlackLives, nor would it be read as the same tag if it was spelled backwards, or with a space or emoji in it. However, at times, Twitter's algorithm (2018) will group together hashtags that are "related to the same topic" (their example of hashtags that could be grouped on Twitter's Trending Topic FAQ page is #MondayMotivation and #MotivationMonday) (n.p.). Although Twitter (arbitrarily?) determines this grouping of different hashtags under their trending topics, the results of a query for a specific hashtag will still only retrieve the hashtag in that designated order as it is entered into the search or clicked upon in its hyperlinked form.

Hashtags on Twitter are limited to the use of letters and numbers; using punctuation or spacing in a hashtag will disrupt the tag and/or cause unintended problems. For example, #Digital_Rhetoric or #Digital Rhetoric won't be read as the same hashtags as #DigitalRhetoric. The first two hashtags will only be tagged by Twitter as #Digital because of their use of spacing

or punctuation in the middle of the expression. Some writers choose to employ capitalization as a way to render hashtags more legible, but capitalization has no effect on Twitter's categorization of a hashtag. For example, Tweets including #DigitalRhetoricIsTheBest or #digitalrhetoricisthebest would be recognized as the same hashtag by Twitter and thus be organized by Twitter's algorithm in the same feed, regardless of their differentiated use of capitalization.

Hashtags are also monolingual; this means that a hashtag does not translate into other languages or provide affordances for hashtags that are written in different languages to be categorized together. For example, #JeSuisCharlie and #IAmCharlie were both hashtags that were used to discuss the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* shooting in France (Giaxoglou, 2018); while both hashtags are translations for one another, their respective Tweets are found in two different hashtag categories. Even though their semantic titles are identical, but for the language difference, they are still classified by Twitter as discrete metatags. So, in summation, Twitter's hashtags can be depicted as user-generated, semantic tags that are visible (also referred to as a metatag) and as monolingual monocodes (unless grouped together by Twitter).

Before moving on, consider briefly how language can stand as a barrier to unifying different language-speakers use of Twitter's hashtags; when the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting happened, the French use of #JeSuisCharlie and the English use of #IAmCharlie separated those discourse spaces by the simple fact that Twitter's hashtags are monolingual and monocodal. However, the overlap of languages using the same spellings for words is also possible when homonyms exist across languages. For example, *mono* translates to *monkey* in Spanish and can be an abbreviation for a disease in English. Therefore, #mono could be used as a space to discuss both English speakers who refer to "the kissing disease," mononucleosis, and Spanish speakers

who may be referring to monkeys, "mono" in Spanish. Research (see Caleffi, 2015) on multilingual overlap (a potential source of ambiguity) between writers of different languages is a space for future research, and may be a case where the use of multiple hashtags used in tandem could help to disambiguate spaces that share different linguistic translations. For example, a Spanish speaker could write #Mono #LosMonos (translated as #Monkey #TheMonkeys) as a way of separating its relevant content from English speakers who may be writing not about monkeys, but about mononucleosis. English-speaking Twitter users might consider using additional hashtags like #mono #kissingdisease as a way of delineating their hashtag space from the Spanish usage of #mono. Giaxoglou (2018) recognized that language separation can be a feature of hashtags that affects a person's cultural experience online. As mobile technology becomes increasingly global and the multilingual use of hashtags continues to spread into non-English-speaking regions of the world, issues over space and power will need to be mediated by users and social media sites working together.

Although hashtags on Twitter were implemented initially, according to Messina, for the purpose of tagging the semantic topic of a Tweet, hashtags have since been repurposed in order to more easily return to a topic at a later time. However, it has been argued that the hashtag's ability to carry a text's meaning across digital space—almost instantaneously—can sometimes take on an agency unto itself, out of the control of the rhetorician's authority (see Edwards & Lang, 2018). Undoubtedly, hashtags function to help a text circulate with increased speed, leveraging the digital space made possible by its inclusion in multiple texts and the subsequent traffic attracted by the shared discourse space of hashtags.

In conclusion, scholarship has documented how hashtags act as monolingual, monocodal metatags read by Twitter's algorithm to better organize texts possessing the same hashtag.

Scholars have also pointed to the multifaceted abilities of hashtags to act as tools for digital writing to better circulate a text, increasing its potential audience. The next section will focus on a hashtag's semantic abilities to reflect meaning within a text.

Hashtags: Semantic Tools for Writers

Semantic tools are employed by writers in order to better express (or tag) the underlying meaning of a text for readers. Several scholars (Bruns, 2011; Caleffi, 2015; Daer, 2016; Hoffman & Goodman, 2015) have specifically described hashtags as a kind of semantic metatag. Weiss (2014) acknowledged the power of hashtags as rhetorical tools that constantly become repurposed for new rhetorical exigencies; Potts et al. (2013) discussed how Twitter hashtags are used to organize and semantically tag discourse after tragedy. Caleffi (2015) argued that hashtags were "a new morphological mechanism producing items whose … linguistic nature may be difficult to identify and relate to any traditional part of speech" (p. 52). Caleffi concluded that hashtags themselves are both "words and yet not words" (p. 67). Daer, Hoffman, and Goodman (2015) recognized hashtags as textual elements that often indicated rhetorical genres, whose collection of texts shared stylistic characteristics. Similarly, Daer, Hoffman, and Goodman (2014) also recognized hashtags as "metacommunicative tags," at times relating semantic elements like irreverence or irony that may or may not have friction with the content they tag (p.12). Other scholars (Edwards & Lang, 2018) recognized that, while hashtags do perform semantic functions, they (especially when used for activism) can gain an agency unique to themselves, unlike any punctuation used in print. Zappavigna (2015) recognized how hashtags can be used to mark experiential topics and interpersonal relationships between texts and their contents. It is the combination of these two functions, of tagging semantic meaning and tagging

metadata, that relates to the audience the aboutness of a given hashtag. This next section will focus more specifically on hashtags and aboutness.

Hashtags and Aboutness

Scholarship in linguistics has begun to focus on the hashtag as an utterance. Posch et al. (2013) focused on influential forces affecting hashtag semantics: how the social forces around hashtags (e.g., who adopts them) play a key role in signifying their semantics, especially when character limits are present. Other linguists focused on the topics of discourse that hashtags signal. For example, Kehoe and Gee (2011) considered how a hashtag relates "aboutness," or information about the content being tagged. Kehoe and Gee's choice to use the term *aboutness* is an important concept to connect to hashtags, as aboutness specifically points to the results that are yielded by a query, usually in a database of texts. This term emphasizes the social nature of digital punctuation like hashtags, something print-based punctuation is not designed to facilitate. Said another way, it is what makes hashtags a unique form of punctuation. A hashtag, according to Twitter's Trending Topics FAQ page (Twitter's Help Center, n.d.), when clicked upon, prompts the user to visit the feed, a page that yields results of a search query for that specific hashtag (para. 2-3). Understanding hashtag feeds as results of search queries, then, is the best way to appreciate their unique rhetorical function.

Since hashtags often indicate the documents that a search will retrieve, they can be considered metatags of aboutness. Hashtags are employed by writers to help mark the topics they discuss in their texts, after they have expressed something (what Messina claimed to be the hashtag's original rhetorical purpose: to archive for better retrieval). Scholarship has recognized this rhetorical strategy, showing that the study of hashtags as "topic markers" can indicate "the aboutness of a social media text" (Zappavigna, 2000, n.p.). Other scholarship (Shatford, 1986)

referred to an *ofness* or to content-related tags in the same way as Kehoe and Gee do when they refer to aboutness. I think it is important to emphasize that because a search query speaks to the social nature of aboutness, its semantic function can depend, in part, on the social use of a hashtag.

Aboutness as a term has a history in the interaction between writers and digital technologies used to archive texts. Most recently, aboutness has been a term that described the tagging practices of writers. However, metatags (as opposed to tags invisible to the reader, the *metatag* refers to visible tags like the hashtag) have been used in logic-based retrieval systems since the 1980s; therefore, folksonomies have helped to build systems for information retrieval based on the aboutness of a text for decades. Understanding that, the process of constructing aboutness from tagging texts is a complex one that scholars have reflected on for years.

Scholars (Lalmas & Bruza, 1998; Zappavinga, 2017) have recognized the complexity of informational composition. Primarily, information retrieval scholars (Bruza et al., 2000; Cleverden, 1991) have acknowledged the challenges of relating reliable aboutness, one that relates unambiguous meaning. Cleverden (1991) acknowledged how subjectivity is implicit in the process of assigning aboutness. However, Bruza et al. (2000) maintained that there does exist an overlap, an "intersubjective core of agreement" between differences in aboutness (p. 1). This assertion recognizes the social nature of hashtag aboutness. Also, scholars (Bruza & Huibers, 1994; Huibers, 1996; Hunter, 1996) recognized that "non-aboutness" can sometimes be easier to define than aboutness, especially in the effort to filter information (n.p.). Kehoe and Gee (2011) acknowledged that hashtags provide "access to a reader's view of aboutness" in ways never before replicable outside of experiments (n.p.).

Aboutness and Informational Composition

Bruza et al. (2000) acknowledged that aboutness "manifests itself" (p. 2) even at the level of basic information carriers. This is why Lalmas and Bruza (1998) called it "informational meet" when tags were used in tandem to better communicate aboutness; these tags formed a relationship between two elements, something referred to as "informational compositions" (p. 2). Bruza et al. (2000) described the relationship between the elements of an informational composition as "idempotent (A⊕A=A), commutative (A⊕B=B⊕A) and associative ((A⊕B)⊕C=A⊕ (B⊕C))" (p. 3). These relationships are evident in hashtag use, especially when they are used on Twitter to form discourse communities and topic markers. Therefore, a pair of hashtags can work together to form an informational composition because their combination will form a semantic tag that speaks to the relationship betwen the pair, a relationship that does not change when repeated, reordered, or regrouped. Informational composition is critical to my analysis in Chapter Five, as the reflection on hashtag ethics advises digital activists to use informational compositions to better disambiguate their discourse in leveraged discourse spaces.

The value in bringing aboutness to the discussion of hashtags is that, according to Bruza et al. (2000), a basic information carrier, like a single tag, retrieves less relevant content than do queries that use informational compositions (in this specific context, a series of hashtags used together). As it relates to hashtags, the findings of this chapter yield the same conclusions that Bruza et al.'s research (2000) did: When certain hashtags were paired together as informational compositions, they yielded a disambiguated aboutness that did not occur when #OrlandoStrong was used as a query alone. Using multiple hashtags (informational compositions) helped to connect relevant discourse that matched the aboutness of the discourse community through what Bruza et al. (2000) called informational meet. Although, as is the case for all signs in systems of

language, the challenge of aboutness is that it does not remain fixed. As semiotics has shown, when looking at the relationship between any signifier and what it signifies (Saussure, 1959), meaning is always deferred (Derrida, 1963). Throughout this dissertation, I use the word aboutness to describe the relationship between #OrlandoStrong and the content of Tweets its search query retrieves.

In an effort to explain the need for better tagging practices, Bruza et al. (2000) pointed to the fact that an emphasis in hashtag research for the field of linguistics was generally conducted by scientists more concerned with propositional logic than with considering the utility of aboutness to an audience, depicting those researchers as more author-centered than audience-centered. This acknowledgment shows a need for scholars of digital humanities to aid in understanding semantic content in ways that scientists do not. Aside from relating aboutness, hashtags also perform stylistic rhetorical functions. The next section will discuss how hashtags can be used for diverse stylistic purposes, and focuses specifically on the hashtag's ability to be used for amplification.

Hashtags as Style: Amplifying Tweet Content

Hashtags perform many different rhetorical functions, from marking experiential topics to enacting interpersonal relationships, organizing texts (Zappavigna, 2015), coordinating relief efforts (Hughes & Palen, 2009), organizing memes (Hughes et al., 2010), and forming ad hoc publics (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). In order to better reflect the semantic aspects of hashtags, scholars have provided taxonomies for how to document and code Tweets utilizing hashtags. Daer et al. (2015) drew parallels between hashtags and amplification, a rhetorical tool found in the canon of style, in order to call attention to something in the text, and often "expressed

without judgment as a comment or reflection" (p. 2). Caleffi (2015) also analyzed how hashtags can be used stylistically,

> to comment on, praise or criticize ideas … or people …, to promote brands … or
> events …, to spread and provide updates on breaking news items …, as a
> disclaimer, accidental remark or naming, to express feelings and emotions, to
> support events or movements, for self-mockery, for brand promotion, for
> chat/conference participation. (p. 46)

These stylistic amplifications are echoed by other scholars. Bruns (2011) pointed to how hashtags serve to show extra-textual meaning (e.g., #facepalm). Hashtags used stylistically aren't the only kind of amplification that happens with hashtags; hashtags can also amplify a text's distribution through the web through their circulation. Through this distribution, or circulation, hashtags can form communities of interest between users who employ the same hashtag(s).

Oral Qualities of the Hashtag

Buck (2015) pointed to how social media can provide access to rhetorical situations, and in so doing "becomes a mediator of change" that can "alter perceptions of people, as well as, to some extent, how they construct their actions on social media to provoke audiences to respond" ("Interviews with Students…" section, para. 8). Reflecting on the rhetorical situation with respect to the audience is a practice useful to all writers, in all media; even the earliest rhetors, from Aristotle to Cicero to the sophists, emphasized the importance of understanding audience. Because digital tools like hashtags function in one sense as rhetorical invocations to distinct audiences, their presence in the text is a rhetorical situation that recalls the additive quality of the story circle of orality (Ong, 1982) rather than the subordinate quality of print-based texts. This

additive quality happens stylistically within texts themselves. Some of the attributes of amplification given to hashtags can be traced back to the orality of discourse.

In the case of hashtags, the ways that they are used within texts, especially with regard to their role in the organization of content within texts, is reminiscent of the unstuck, interchangeable order of stories told in the oral world (Scott, 1974). This Tweet by @pinklionheart (Figure 5) serves as an example of the hashtag's ability to be utilized in non-sequential order, much like the interchangeable structures made possible through the oral story circle. Take the following Tweet's use of hashtags for example:

Figure 5. Erin's June 12th, 2018 at 7:42 a.m. #OrlandoStrong Tweet

Stylistically, this block of hashtags is typical of a Twitter post seeking visibility and audience

participation by leveraging hashtags for increased traffic, using popular hashtags like

#OrlandoStrong and #TuesdayThoughts. However, this Tweet also contains a list of hashtags

that are a bit more nuanced, particular to this Tweet's context (to vote democrat in the primaries

on Election Day: #electionday #primaryday #Pulse). Their connotations aside, these hashtags are

structured in an interchangeable way, intended to be read as isolated texts, like a list, not as

elements of a sentence whose grammatical rules dictate a specific sequence. The order of these

hashtags would have a similar rhetorical effect as the cluster of additive contributions of speakers

in a story circle. The structure relies on an "and this, and this, and this" organization, a structure more akin to what Ong called "oral residue" in printed texts that are translated from oral traditions (p. 35). These hashtag piles aren't just dense units of interchangeable text, but piles of meaning that have a rich history in orality.

Hashtags and digital orality: exergasia as piles of meaning.

Classical (oral) rhetoric (Burton, 2016) defined exergasia, a tool "for amplification, variation, and explanation" in the canon of style, as "the repetition of the same idea, changing either its words, its delivery, or its general treatment" ("Exergasia," para. 1). Exergasia is a rhetorical strategy practiced in the progymnastia: a group of exercises created for orators to use in order to sharpen their skills as speakers. Rhetorical strategies employed in digital texts through the use of hashtags (like in Figure 5) hearken back to these oral exercises, where hashtags are presented in dense clusters, or piles, often reiterating an overarching idea through restatement in different ways. Because these hashtags present themselves via visual traces that employ oral structures, their use employs exergasia, a unique rhetorical element employed in digital writing. However, because each hashtag is a hyperlink to another hashtag feed, to other Tweets sharing that same tag, not only do these piles of hashtags help to deepen meaning within the Tweet itself as elements of the text, but they deposit that Tweet into other contexts, a unique rhetorical effect that enables a co-authorship (what any specific hashtag's aboutness communicates) within singularly authored texts (a specific Tweet).

Exergasia employed in oral texts could never achieve such reach and co-authorship. Therefore, hashtags don't only exist as discrete structures within a single text, they also organize many texts (any specific Tweet) that carry the same hashtag in a feed that results from a hashtag query. This is important to consider because hashtag feeds, themselves a collection of texts, form

the meaning of their aboutness intertextually from one Tweet to the next. This next section discusses intertextuality and its application to understanding the role hashtags play in facilitating intertextual meaning.

Hashtags, Intertextuality, and Discourse Communities

Porter (1986) pointed to how discourse communities formed through writing can be framed through intertextuality, a term that he used to address the relationship between texts (p. 43). Porter argued that, even when texts conflict in meaning, conflict in meaning combines to help shape meaning by supporting premises or offering refutations. In discourse communities, each "writer is simply a part of a discourse tradition, a member of a team, and a participant in a community of discourse that creates its own collective meaning" (pp. 34-35). Scholars (Lin et al., 2013; Yang, Sun, Zhang, & ei, 2012) have acknowledged the role that hashtags play in forming communities. Since popular hashtags are memetically repeated across Twitter (Weatherbee, 2016), the intertextual connections between Tweets containing the same hashtag can be considered a co-authored topoi, reinforcing a negotiated meaning amongst authors intertextually. Bruns and Burgess (2011) acknowledged that this memetic repetition often happens through the use of hashtags. This intertextuality is powerful because Tweets containing the same hashtags are connected through horizontal power structures that involve relatively little gatekeeping, aside from Twitter's terms of use. Hashtags also use horizontal power structures to create backchannels among users of the same hashtag.

Scholars (McCarthy & boyd, 2005; Reinhardt, Ebner, Beham, & Cost, 2009; Wolff, 2014) have acknowledged how the use of hashtags at live events can form backchannel communities. These backchannels form digital communities that don't face the same geophysical constraints that bound physical communities. This lack of gatekeeping helps to bolster the

grassroots, public nature of hashtags, providing them with immense power to circulate

unimpeded across Twitter. The public nature of hashtags is due in part to the infrastructure of

Twitter. Hashtags are searchable by both users with and without Twitter accounts, enabling the

hashtag to be used as an organizing tool for public discourse and not solely for Twitter discourse,

since anyone with Internet access has access to Twitter hashtags.

Therefore, the aboutness that a hashtag signifies grows more complex and richer with

each additional Tweet that uses the same hashtag. Taken together, a collection of Tweets with

the same hashtag weaves a public, intertextual narrative. The actual words that manifest as

hashtags may be arbitrary signifiers; after all, they can just be visible code (Losh, 2018), or

metacodes, but when they are used in league with other similar messages containing the same

hashtag, they begin to take on signification through intertextuality, a process independent of

signification on solely textual levels. Said another way, hashtag aboutness is framed by

intertextual forces.

With respect to hashtags and aboutness, however, it is important to note that not all

scholars agree that hashtags can be considered topoi, which I would rephrase for the purpose of

this argument as "not all scholars agree that hashtags can have an aboutness." Scholars (Brooke,

2009; Eyman, 2015; Welch, 1999; Zappen, 2005) recognized the need for revising and

reinterpreting classic rhetorical concepts so they better apply to the digital medium. Eyman

(2015) identified that

> generally, scholars have chosen to either apply the well-established theories of classical
>
> and contemporary rhetoric to digital texts and contexts or they have argued that the
>
> digital, networked, communication requires a revision or rearticulation of said theories.
>
> (Section "//two// Digital Rhetoric: Theory," para. 2)

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I tend to agree with Eyman, who also believed there was value in the development of new rhetorical theory for digital purposes, which means the use of new terms to better suit digital situations. Taking Eyman's lead, I make a connection between the old term topoi and the digital term aboutness. Topoi literally means "places to find things;" Aristotle defined topoi as "basic categories of relationships among ideas, each of which can serve as a template or heuristic for discovering things to say about a subject" (Burton, n.d., "Topics of Invention"). Hashtag feeds, then, can be viewed as a space to find the relationships between ideas that share a hashtag. In this way, it seems that the classic rhetorical understanding of topoi can be applied to hashtags.

However, topoi (Rapp, 2010) have historically been understood to be fixed rhetorical elements. For example, Weatherbee (2015) argued that considering hashtags as rhetorical topoi can be problematic because topoi "are born and evolve … adapt[ing] to new cultural-ideological contexts; and as they evolve, they help reshape those same contexts" (n.p.). Weatherbee made an interesting distinction here, arguing against a fixated topoi. This is the reason I choose to apply the term aboutness to the topoi of hashtags, since aboutness as a term makes affordances for meaning to evolve intertextually. Aboutness as a term can handle how the same hashtag may change its connotation over the years, months, days, hours, and even minutes. All the while, Weatherbee's objection still attests to the power that intertextuality holds over the construction of the topoi (aboutness) of hashtag-driven discourse from Tweet to Tweet. If a hashtag is not a fixated topoi, it is only because of the power of intertextuality to alter the context of discourse from one moment to the next. This is made evident in Chapter Four's data and the findings of the different aboutness-marking hashtags used in league with #OrlandoStrong.

Some scholars, though, are reticent to call the kind of writing that happens on social media sites like Twitter dialogue or discourse. Jones (2014) argued that hashtags embodied the

difficulties of online deliberative dialogue, depicting Tweets as "multiple monologues," rather than as a dialogue or "a single distributed conversation" (p. 100). Jones made an important point here: Tweets with hashtags are often composed as one-off comments, seldom constructed as a reply or response to replies or ReTweets. As a person scrolls from Tweet to Tweet in a hashtag feed, their understanding of what the hashtag signifies grows richer and more complex.

Linguistics scholars have also recognized how, as a system of language is contributed to, meaning becomes deferred. Scholars in linguistics and semiotics (Derrida, 1963; Saussure, 1966) have helped us to understand how when signification happens, meaning is always deferred by the system of signs. In this way, if a hashtag implies something concerning its aboutness, meaning is deferred in a hashtag feed, because a hashtag feed is never static, especially one that is actively being contributed to by users. This is why I believe the hashtag is a new rhetorical tool, a new form of social punctuation, one whose elements at once recall past traditions and remediate them into new devices for a new medium.

Hashtag Feeds and Intertextuality

When arriving at a hashtag feed, readers can recognize how interrelated and yet discrete each Tweet that carries the same hashtag is; there are not subordinating relationships formed by Twitter's algorithm to make sense of each Tweet's relationship to the previous Tweet. For example, let's say there are three Tweets in a hashtag feed: Tweet 1, Tweet 2, and Tweet 3. Tweet 2 is not organized by a preceding "in contrast…" if it disagrees with Tweet 1 or Tweet 3. Those kinds of structures were introduced into language as print-based cultures began to grow in literacy. This aggregate kind of structure of the Tweets in a hashtag feed is reminiscent of the story circle of orality. However, the difference between a digital feed, like the ones hashtags create on Twitter that are updated in real time, and the story circle of oral cultures is the visual,

textual presence of the Tweets. Rather than the evanescent immateriality of oral texts (when speech happens, its trace is lost), hashtag feeds provide visual texts in an additive organization. However, readers can lose/miss some texts if they do not remain vigilant when hashtag feeds are trending, much like utterances obscured by distance or noise in orality. The difference is the presence of the trace of the utterance, a trace absent in the additive structures common to Ong's analysis of orality.

For example, the following bulleted list (although the list contains the text of actual Tweets by users, this list is placed by me in a particular order for the purposes of this argument) functions as a representation of #OrlandoStrong's hashtag feed, and shows how, through vertical adjacency, these Tweets negotiate what #OrlandoStrong means intertextually.

- "Just visited the Pulse Nightclub Memorial in Orlando. Man, was my heart overwhelmed with love seeing all of the beautiful tributes to those lost. #OrlandoStrong" @Angelmaryann_

- "Up next.... #OrlandoStrong #PurposeTour" @reka_lombos (ReTweet @JustinBieber)

- "And sometimes you just have to rep your city! #shoutout #orlandofam #OrlandoStrong #orlando #orlandocity #Florida #fanfriday #soccer" @TyaStruchen

- "Not even hurricanes can stop the people #OrlandoStrong #FamiliesBelongTogether" @abettycracker

- "Not only we clean Tile and Grout, but we do have an option for a ten year seal called color seal!#InstaDryOrlando #tilecleaning #InstaDRY #OrlandoStrong" @instadryorlando

- "Two years ago 49 people were killed and 53 were injured at Pulse Nightclub. Today we remember them and #Honorthemwithaction of loving everyone regardless of how different we all may be, including politics. #Pulse #OrlandoStrong" @almostjingo

These excerpts of actual Tweets serve as a small example of the feed that hashtags populate on Twitter. This example shows how there is no subordinating structure to the Tweets a hashtag query yields. Rather, these Tweets are organized in aggregate (i.e., "and this, and this, and this"): a whole formed by several distinct elements. In this specific example of #OrlandoStrong, its aboutness, the results its query produces (Bruza et al., 2000) can be understood as a whole comprised of distinct Tweets—more particularly: A Pulse memorial statement, and a Justin Bieber ReTweet about his Purpose Tour, and an Orlando City Soccer Tweet, and a Tweet that protests for immigration rights, and a marketing Tweet for a tile cleaning product, and a Pulse memorial Tweet. One can see how complex it gets for hashtags to build consistent aboutness when intertextual forces take hold.

More specifically, one might receive competing impressions of what #OrlandoStrong's aboutness is when visiting #OrlandoStrong's feed at any given time. Here it seems that #OrlandoStrong's aboutness wraps its arms around the Pulse Shooting, Justin Bieber, soccer, Orlando, protesting, and tile cleaners. Surely these topics aren't all included together in whatever #OrlandoStrong signifies. But when visibility becomes a valuable premium in digital spaces, writers with competing agendas flock to traffic-filled spaces. At times, the same hashtag feed will be populated by different texts with different agendas and messages. However, on the anniversary of the Pulse shooting for the last two years, #OrlandoStrong's query yielded an overwhelmingly LGBTQ+ and Pulse shooting-centered focus from Tweet to Tweet (DeArmas et al., 2018). This implies that a hashtag's aboutness is not always fixed. The difficulty of fixing a

single hashtag's aboutness exist because many uncoordinated efforts from various authors are written into hashtagged spaces.

Because hashtag feeds are co-authored spaces, their content can potentially mean anything, depending on what multiple authors use the hashtag for. Acknowledging that, can hashtags be misused by users who tag content in their Tweets that ambiguates a hashtag's aboutness? The reason I ask this question is because #OrlandoStrong was used as the rallying hashtag for activism and awareness after the Pulse shooting: Does this then mean that #OrlandoStrong's aboutness should mean different things at different times? I will address these ethical concerns in more detail in Chapter Five, but they are important to introduce here before specific examples may bias the reader's perception of their use of the space.

Therefore, bringing these concepts together, hashtags perform different functions than punctuation does in print texts. As opposed to print texts where authorship is often singular, authoritative, and the text is static, the hashtag feed on Twitter (as well as on other platforms where hashtags are used as organizing tools) is characterized by co-authorship. As a result, theoretically, no single Tweet in a hashtag feed is more or less authoritative than another, since the feed is constantly in flux, contributed to and/or deleted, ReTweeted, QuoteTweeted, liked, etc. Said more simply, a hashtag feed has the potential to change from moment to moment. At the same time, it is important to note that Twitter's algorithm, though, does enable the censuring, prioritizing, and sponsoring of certain Tweets and hashtags over others, for a myriad of justifications ranging from likes, ReTweets, problems with content, strategic targeting based on use and location, and marketing. The next section will take the concepts of intertextuality and aggregate oral structures and discuss the way those two concepts intersect in hashtag feeds.

Oral and Print: Aggregate and Intertextual Aboutness

A hashtag feed, a mercurial ordering of Tweets whose meaning develops from Tweet to Tweet intertextually, constantly defines and defers its aboutness. Scholars (Alfaro, 1996; Barthes, 1974; Kristeva, 1996; Porter, 1986) have used the term intertextuality to describe how different texts interact to create meaning between them. Alfaro (1996) used Kristeva's term intertextuality to describe a new understanding of a text as a "dynamic site in which relational processes and practices are the focus of analysis instead of static structures and processes" (p. 268). It is important to consider the force of intertextuality in framing a hashtag's aboutness. If many users write many texts that use the same hashtag, they collectively contribute to the aboutness of that hashtag, as made evident in the mock Twitter feed presented above. This intertextuality creates meaning between texts and forms a discourse community. Bringing this conversation to a conclusion, it is important to unpack the cultural expectations we as readers and writers may have over the rhetorical tools we use to communicate.

Culture as a Dialogue between Medium and Text: Oral, Print, and the Digital Hybrid

Scholars (Bolter, 2001; Brooke, 2009; Castells, 1996; Turkle, 2011) have long noted how the introduction of digital media has created a cultural shift that recalls both print and oral traditions to be used in tandem. Castells (1996) recognized how electronic media created a forked culture comprised of moments when discourse happened face-to-face and other examples of moments where it happened digitally. Bolter (2001) recognized how the attributes of print and oral cultures were remediated in the digital world, where the rivalry of immediacy and associative links paid homage to print-formatted text and orientation. Brooke (2009) showed how the rhetorical terms of classical oratory applied in valuable ways to reinterpreting the rhetorical situation of the text by considering it as an interface. Turkle (2011) acknowledged how digital practices inform our physical ones, and that our relationship with technology is as much a

part of the experience as is the design of the technology. She also recognized the invasion of corporate influence and advertising into digital writing tools. Given that digital technologies permeate our world, we must reflect on our expectations of them, making sure to consider embodiment as well as how they remediate other media, call back to oral techniques as much as print ones, and create new relationships with technology.

Returning to the previous discussion of how Ong (1982) found that compositions in oral cultures are aggregative, hashtag feeds (much like hashtag piles that utilize exergasia-like oral strategies to achieve their rhetorical purpose) are also reminiscent of the story circle in their ability to contribute to meaning without a specific order or sequence. The hashtag feed itself forms a kind of digital aggregative, a manifestation of what Ong dubs oral residue. Considering Ong's point about the oral nature of non-subordinating structures, hashtags then combine both oral and literate structures in a digital format.

The value in pointing out how the hashtag feed is structured through both literate and oral practices is to address the expectations readers may have of the way meaning is made in these different writing economies. When something is inscribed in print, it is supposed to be static, permanent, and complete by the time it is read by the reader. However, the oral medium is different: discourse was reiterated, recursive, evanescent, and the same text changes as authors meet new audiences, different amounts of participation, and different rhetorical demands. Texts in the oral tradition are much more co-authored than in traditions of print. However, digital texts like hashtag feeds at once fix texts as they are published in real time. That being said, the space of the hashtag feed moves like an oral discourse does: spontaneously, immediately, and with participation from multiple authors. The difference is digital discourse on hashtag feeds perform these actions with visual traces. To this point, hashtag feeds at times can feel like an ever-turning

carousel of Tweets that parade in front of the reader as a hashtag trends, contributed to by multiple participatory users. To expect for that stream of discourse on Twitter to retain a consistent aboutness may be asking too much of a medium whose attributes include horizontal networks between texts intended to loosen the constraints of traditional print culture—constraints like authority, the passage of time between publication and readership, and the absence of a real-time participatory audience response.

For these reasons, reflecting on the images in Chapter One of the #OrlandoStrong murals, I claim that writing hashtags on murals is a complicated act, one that misconstrues the very essence of digital tools like hashtags, which is to provide a mutable space whose aboutness is subject to change. Print technologies, like paint on a wall, do not do that. Stylistically (Scott, 2018; Zappavigna, 2000), hashtags translate from print to digital and back, but the hashtag is a living document, one whose nature is changeable, not frozen in a moment like the printed word. This is why, as Chapter Four's findings and results show, within a year the organizing hashtag for the Pulse shooting's memorial changed digital locations from #OrlandoStrong to other locations made possible through aboutness-marking hashtags.

Because hashtags are subject to co-authorship, an organizing collective, in order to conduct meaningful discourse, may choose not to hold their digital ground when faced with an influx of irrelevant discourse. Rather, they may choose to accept the mercurial nature of the spaces they write into and continue to introduce sovereign hashtags that haven't been written into, hashtags that act as new locations (topoi) for discourse to be conducted in, before co-authorship, hegemonic power, critical masses, and influencers hijack the discourse space and potentially ambiguate its aboutness. Because hashtags have oral attributes, it is important to consider oral strategies when considering hashtag use for activism and awareness.

The reason these two cultures, oral and print, work together to make meaning is because both cultures employ intertextuality. In a stream of Tweets in a hashtag feed, Tweets are placed adjacent to one another. Taken as a whole, the hashtag feed, as a co-authored conglomeration of many texts, makes meaning intertextually from one Tweet to the next. Therefore, hashtags serve as an example of what makes digital writing new, which Bolter (2001) pointed to as characteristic of texts in the late age of print: a mixture of oral and print characteristics. Intertextuality, a concept primarily related to written texts and literacy, predominates the ways that the aggregate nature of hashtag feeds make meaning. Because intertextuality involves multiple texts, hashtags form intertextual writing communities online (and sometimes offline too). This next section will discuss literature concerning hashtags as tools for forming discourse communities.

How Hashtags Can Shape Discourse Communities

Swales (1990) defined discourse communities as separate from speech communities by articulating six defining characteristics that discourse communities all share. Swales defined a discourse community as

- Having "a broadly agreed set of common public goals and agendas."

- Having "mechanisms of intercommunication among its members."

- Using "its participatory mechanisms to primarily provide information and feedback."

- Utilizing and possessing "one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims."

- Acquiring "some specific lexis."

- Having "a suitable degree of relevant content." (pp. 471-473)

It is important to note that not all hashtags form discourse communities, even though they all possess that potential, but specific hashtags can form discourse communities both online and offline when a critical mass of writers use them together for shared goals and agendas. Those hashtags that are used to organize the discourse of its members in public forums on Twitter can be classified as discourse communities.

In the case of #OrlandoStrong, its rhetorical function certainly fits Swales' criteria for discourse communities. #OrlandoStrong articulates its communities' goals publicly through its use of hashtags on Twitter, a public forum available to be viewed by all of the public whether or not they are account users. Although these articulations of community goals may not be explicitly stated as goals and agendas by name, they are visible by their textual presence throughout Tweets that carry #OrlandoStrong. #OrlandoStrong also applies to Swales' definition because its Tweets can be used for intercommunication between members, who use a specific lexis and employ similar genre characteristics in their Tweets. As a discourse community, #OrlandoStrong Tweets often include content relevant to the Pulse shooting, its aftermath, and the Orlando, LGBTQ+, and Latinx communities. My analysis of #OrlandoStrong as a discourse community is part of a larger collection of scholarship that acknowledges hashtags as discourse communities.

Fairclough (1995) recognized the role of media in discourse performance and circulation. Porter (1986) defined a discourse community as "a group of individuals bound by a common interest who communicate through approved channels and whose discourse is regulated" (pp. 38-39). Scholars (Bizzell, 1982; Fish, 1980; Foucault, 1972; Porter, 1986) recognized writing as an activity that builds discourse communities. Considering the contributions of these scholars, when Tweets are marked with hashtags—hashtags acknowledged here as a form of writing—they form

discourse communities. Bruns and Burgess (2011) also described Twitter users as members of a community where "following and posting to a hashtag conversation makes it possible for them to communicate with a community of interest around the hashtag topic" (p. 26). Edwards and Lang (2018), from a rhetorical standpoint, described hashtags as "vibrant, circulating, and affective topoi: on-the-move places to be tapped into, appropriated, and spread further, gaining resonance or not by virtue of a complex entanglement of many temporal and material forces" (p. 122). When hashtags work as digital topoi, they can help to form communities within their discourse.

Scholars focusing on hashtags have pointed to their ability to organize discourse communities and the value of the hashtag's utility to the formation of communities of similar interest across space and time. More specifically, Zappavigna (2015) pointed to how hashtags can signal the formation and existence of discourse communities. For example, McDuffie (2016) studied how the hashtag #FeministsAreUgly organized discourse between feminists against body shaming, misogyny, and the role of selfies in mediating the two. Similarly, Losh (2014) found that the proper names of victims of sexual assault could be turned into hashtags that became the lexis of discourse communities used in India to create a discourse community whose agendas and goals included spreading awareness surrounding rape, assault, and misogyny. Zappavinga (2012) recognized how language use on social media can be used to form affinity groups, often marked by "ambient affiliation … whereby people sharing associated values bond around these user-defined topics" (p. 14). Bruns and Burgess (2011) recognized the use of hashtags "to form ad hoc issue publics" surrounding particular themes and specific topics (p. 2). These ad hoc publics can be considered as a qualification of a discourse communities, as Swales would call them, because they communicate relevant content surrounding particular themes and specific topics.

While Zappavigna (2015) pointed to the ways that hashtags can organize discourse and facilitate interpersonal relationships between members of a discourse community, some scholarship (Daer et al., 2015) challenged the view that hashtags could be considered discourse communities. Daer et al. acknowledged that the use of hashtags oftentimes happens insincerely or ironically. Jones (2014) also pointed to associative commentaries made possible by hashtag use—a concept called switching. "Switching" can be defined as when a hashtag is used to connect a Tweet to another Tweet without adding any additional content to the message beyond the tagging of the tweet with a hashtag or an @ sign. Jones called this behavior "switching" because, while these hashtags don't "indicat[e] the topic of messages, [they] seem to connect those messages to other networked exchanges" (p. 100). Switching doesn't contribute more content to the discussion, just more audience connections, but switching could be considered a form of imposed intertextuality because it brings together texts that reference one another. Because hashtags help to form discourse communities, it is important to recognize how hashtag activism can be studied as discourse communities whose visibility and discourse are driven and organized by their use of hashtags.

Hashtag Activism as Discourse Communities

Clark (2016) acknowledged that some online discourse communities involved in social activism rally around hashtags, often called "hashtag activism" (p. 1). Scholars (Castells, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012) recognized the central role of digital networks in forming activist movements. Clark (2016) noticed that, as opposed to previous generation's activist traditions, "this current generation's activism often takes place online and, at times, exclusively through social media platforms, leading to a heavier reliance on text-based interactions via social media" (p. 3). Shaw

(2012) criticized the scholarship that minimizes the potentials of digital activists to make change in the world through digital discourse driven by hashtags.

Often, the hashtag that is used to perform the discourse online shares its name with the activist movement offline. This is in recognition of the central roles that hashtags play in the connection between activism and hashtags (e.g., #BlackLivesmatter, #MeToo, #ImWithHer, #YesAllWomen, etc.). Since hashtags usually function within the platforms of social media use, their use in activism and awareness-raising campaigns has been pointed to as a rich space for research. Hashtags that are used for activism are spaces that receive large amounts of traffic, so much so that they often make trending status on Twitter. This has created conflicting perspectives of hashtag activism, or as some have referred to it, "slacktivism" (Gladwell, 2011; Morozov, 2009) and those who have stuck up for slacktivism's merits (Jenkins & boyd 2006; Vie, 2014).

With regard to slacktivism's merits, I'd like to point to how a fair number of scholars (Jenkins & Boyd, 2006; Patrick, 2013; Salter & Blodgett, 2017; Vie, 2014) expressed advocacy for the positive effect that hashtag-driven activism can have on political participation. Scholars (Patrick, 2013; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 2010) acknowledged that writing for hashtag activism exhibited rhetorical skills involved with social media use and audience awareness. Vie (2014) stated the positive correlation between marginalized communities and the acceptance, encouragement, and support they received from so-called slacktivists. Salter and Blodgett (2017) pointed to how a gaming discourse community responded to the 2016 political election by organizing the creation of games centered around the theme of resisting oppressive authoritarianism, where a hashtag helped to increase exposure and circulation of games created to fight hegemonic forces. Scholars (Ayres, 1999; Bennett et al., 2008) acknowledged how the

Internet has made it easier for activism to coordinate and form. Jordan and Taylor (2004) viewed hashtag activism as a valid form of political participation. This is because hashtag activists create discourse communities that use their own specified lexis: intercommunication to further their shared agendas and goals.

That doesn't mean to say that slacktivism has been viewed with equal regard by all media scholars. Critics of slacktivism, who gave it that name, have been suspicious of its actual effect on society. Morozov (2009) argued that slacktivists don't do anything in the actual world, and that slacktivism was nothing more than an exercise in making individuals feel good. Schulman (2009) argued that slacktivists were unable to achieve the political goals they set. Jennings and Zeitner (2003) found negligent effects on political participation for slacktivists. In his *New Yorker* essay, "Small Change," Gladwell (2010) famously claimed that "the revolution would not be tweeted," suggesting that activism performed physically could never achieve the same ends as embodied activism does (n.p.). Christens (2010) argued that clicking a button was rarely enough to make change happen. However, my research shows that clicking a button often does make change happen, both negative and positive change, because what people choose to click can form obstacles to the intercommunication of hashtag activists, by threading in non-relevant content that disrupts discourse between community members.

(Dis)ambiguation, Discourse, and Hashtag Activism

Because intercommunication is an important component of discourse communities, scholars have reflected on the role of relevance in discourse online. Tagging things with relevance, then, is critical to the formation of discourse communities. Scholars (Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Lee, 2018; Mairderer & Shwarzenegger, 2012) acknowledged the role of social tagging as a community-building action. Zappavigna (2015, 2017) recognized how ambient

affiliations are declared through hashtag use, and that affiliations include discourse communities. Because social tags like the hashtag are used to build communities, the use of hashtags linguistically should be considered against the same theoretical frameworks as other kinds of communication.

Relevant intercommunication in discourse communities.

According to relevance theory, certain items in language are used for interpretive guidance. There are roles for items in language where meaning is encoded, while other items perform more procedural roles, providing direction as to how interpretation should happen. Blakemore (2002) attested to the role of procedural meaning in establishing relevance. Wilson (2011) showed how procedural items like prosody and punctuation guides a reader's comprehension by directing the reader. Therefore, relevance theory is a valuable framework to use when considering hashtags as utterances because of their encoded and procedural abilities. In other words, because hashtags have oral qualities and textual qualities, relevance theory is an applicable framework to use when analyzing them.

Social media scholars (Scott, 2015; Yus, 2011) acknowledged the inferential process that coincides with communication on Twitter that uses hashtags and the relationship of that process to relevance theory. Scott (2015) has used relevance theory as a framework for discourse studies on Twitter. Through using hashtags as tools to build communities, though, writers are also forming inferential references to their content and, intertextually, to other Tweets sharing that hashtag. By inference, all the texts sharing a hashtag help to form meaning, but in many different styles. According to Scott (2015), there are many relationships that hashtags perform as part of the process of inference, including "disambiguation, reference, enrichment of vague terms, and

reference assignment" (p. 16). These varying functions include disambiguation—one of the more important terms this literature review has been building to.

Swales (1990) showed that intercommunication takes place in discourse communities through a specific, shared lexis. Relevance theory has taught that communication must be relevant topically to perform its function. Ambiguous content, then, interrupts or retards discourse by making meaning less certain. When meaning is less certain, signifiers and signs become less firmly related. Syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships between elements of texts break down. This is true for discourse taking place on social media too; often, trolls, bots, influential actors, and malicious, neglectful, and confused writers will write into spaces without consideration for the relevance of their content. Scott (2015, 2018) recognized that applying relevance-theoretic frameworks to hashtag data allows researchers to better consider the writer's underlying motivation. Understanding writer motivation can help to clear up the potential ambiguity of the meaning of an utterance.

More specifically, sometimes the presence of irrelevant content can make the content of a hashtag feed vague by way of ambiguity. By ambiguous discourse, I mean discourse robbed of a central focus, a query that yields an inconsistent aboutness. Also, ambiguating discourse is an effective strategy with a rich anti-activist history (e.g., #BlackLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter) employed to disrupt discourse. When discourse becomes ambiguous in a hashtag feed, the use of informational compositions can help to aid in disambiguating a hashtag's aboutness. By pairing two elements of text (read here specifically as hashtags), the discourse that results is essentially filtered of content, not carrying the informational composition. Aboutness theory has found that informational compositions are successful strategies for disambiguating content. Lee (2018) recognized how hashtags are user-generated texts, which are no different

than written or spoken utterances; in other words, they are pieces of language with meaning. Social media scholars agree with this contention. Zappavigna (2015) discussed how hashtags create searchable talk, something that creates findable content, content that disambiguates the content of Twitter.

This is where my dissertation makes its contribution to the literature that exists currently in the field. My argument, and what I describe in Chapter Four in particular, is that #OrlandoStrong employed aboutness-marking hashtags, also called informational compositions, that disambiguated its content, because #OrlandoStrong had been ambiguated by content provided by marketing, social media influencers, and neglectful writers. This is an important contribution to the fields of discourse studies, social media studies, and writing studies. Lee (2018) recognized that "to date, however, few studies have examined social tagging from the angle of text, discourse, and literacy practices" (n.p.). Levstik et al. (2015) acknowledged how hashtags are textually mediated and discursively constructed social practices. Scott (2018) argued that "hashtags offer an efficient and effective way to manage communication in the impoverished mediated context while conforming to a format with a restricted character limit" (n.p.). This is important because if the field of writing studies reflects on our digital writing practices, our use of hashtags is a powerful space for this kind of critique. Using informational compositions via multiple hashtags can be an effective rhetorical strategy for writers in discourse communities to navigate the growing ambiguity as traffic increases the speed with which a hashtag feed moves.

This next chapter is an overview of the methodology I used to code the three-thousand-plus Tweets I analyzed for Chapter Four. In it, I briefly cover the history of grounded theory

methodology, critical discourse analysis, and my coding process. Then, I reflect on other

researchers who studied social media data and the precedents they set in their research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, I review the methodology used to collect and analyze data for this dissertation project. I begin this chapter with a section that defines what grounded theory methodology (GTM) is. Then, I give an overview of the different phases of GTM: data collection, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. I consider pragmatic and positivistic approaches to the interpretation of data according to GTM. Finally, I review how situating the data in context can help to make meaning in GTM research by building a contextual theory.

The next section reviews critical discourse analysis (CDA) and previous applications of CDA and GTM in the literature. First, I discuss the way that CDA views dominance in discourse as an abuse of power. Then I cover the criticisms of rigor that CDA has been accused of. The third section includes preceding research that applies GTM and CDA to social media data. This section ends with a recognition of the hashtag as a phenomenon that calls for GTM and CDA to be applied to its research.

The third section documents the specific application of GTM and CDA to #OrlandoStrong. It begins with the research questions with which I approached the collection of data. Then, I document how I applied the phases of GTM coding to #OrlandoStrong specifically: data collection, open coding, considerations of intention, the building of form and content based codes, the application of recursive codes, the axial coding phase, and the selective coding phase. I discuss the way that I turned qualitative data into quantitative data. The last part of this chapter reflects on how CDA informed the way power was exercised and analyzed in the data sample.

What is GTM?

This section reflects on GTM as a method for collecting and analyzing data. For researchers faced with studying unfamiliar content or content no one had made testable theories

for, research methodologies driven by the testing of a theory were not appropriate choices. GTM is a research method that values the emerging theories found when studying data; Glaser and Strauss (1967) pointed to the need for researchers to study and analyze data at the same time, something traditional research methods prohibit. Glaser and Strauss introduced GTM as a way to take a corpus of data and provide "modes of conceptualization for describing and explaining" it (p. 3). Moghaddam (2006) described the origins of GTM as a justification for building up theoretical analysis from the exploration of qualitative data. Creswell (2002) depicted GTM as a qualitative process for generating theories about interactions of a common topic.

Since Glaser and Strauss introduced GTM, scholars (Babchuk, 1997; Creswell, 2002; Moghaddam, 2006; Starr, 1998) have reinforced the value and utility of a methodology that provides legitimacy to data-derived theories. The consensus is that GTM's strength lies in its flexible nature and its ability to enable researchers to return to and reflect on the data as they analyze it. This stands in opposition to hypothesis-proving methodologies, ones that must proverbially stay the course, even when the data show more interesting research prospects in areas the initial research agenda may not have provided for. Specifically, Babchuk (1997) acknowledged the value of recursively studying and analyzing data in his description of how GTM generated its theory; likewise, Starr (1998) viewed GTM as a constantly comparative approach for developing a theory.

Therefore, GTM grew out of a need to stop theory-driven analysis from steering the direction of research away from opportunities the data presented inductively. GTM "criticized the 'overemphasis' of verifying theories to the detriment of actually generating the theory itself" (Kenny & Fourie, 2014, p. 1). In this way, Glaser and Strauss gave GTM the ability to glue research to theory, instead of applying generalities to new data from old research. As such, the

aim of grounded theory is to create "categories from the data and then to analyze relationships between categories" while attending to how the "lived experience" of research participants can be understood (Charmaz, 1990, p. 1162). This next section will describe the GTM process of recursively collecting, coding, and analyzing data.

GTM: Collecting, Coding, Categorizing Data

      Data collection.

      This section describes the process that GTM follows as a research method. Belgrave and Charmaz (2015) described GTM as a tri-partite process of researchers coding data, comparing data and codes, and identifying "analytic leads and tentative categories to develop through data collection" (n.p.). The first step of GTM has to be data collection. Often data collection happens in areas that are yet to be studied, so researchers may feel uncertain about exactly what to collect, but this is a normal experience for GTM research. There is debate on whether performing a literature study prior to open coding is beneficial to GTM researchers and their biases. Moghaddam (2006) detailed the discussion over whether performing a literature study prior to data collection is preferable (see Allan, 2003) to not doing it (see Goulding, 1999) before data collection. Researchers agree that as long as a literature review doesn't lead to the creation of a hypothesis, it may not bias the researcher.

      Moghaddam (2006) advised that GTM should begin with the discovery of an unnoticed area of study. This means that the researchers should not wait to collect any data until their literature review is finished; rather, they should immediately begin to collect the data that they believe is important, according to their own observations and intuition. The next section will discuss the way GTM works to analyze phenomena.

      GTM and explaining a phenomenon.

GTM is useful for studying things that haven't been studied enough, or at all; this is the reason it must form theory from its own data and not from previous studies. Scholars (Samik-Ibraham, 2000; Stern, 1980) acknowledged that the appropriate use for a grounded theory methodology is a new situation where research theories do not exist as of yet, or to gain a fresh perspective on a familiar setting. The onus on GTM researchers to explain their theory is evident in the tremendous note-taking expectation during coding. Strauss and Corbin (1990) pointed to this expectation that researchers "should explain as well as describe," even providing "some degree of predictability, but only with regard to specific conditions" (p. 5). This is how GTM provides "a thorough theoretical explanation of social phenomena under study" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 5). Moghaddam (2006) also recognized the utility of GTM for investigating and studying the occurrence of complicated phenomena.

Researchers seem to agree that data collection should happen as early in the research process as possible, in order to limit the bias of preconceived ideas that a literature review might bring to data collection choices. This is because in GTM the theory is supposed to be built from "the ground" of the research data. Some scholars (Brown et al., 2002; Moghaddam, 2006) found that part of the data collection process in GTM included going back to the data for diverse pieces of information at different times. Once the researcher has collected a substantial amount of data (see the later section on saturation), the researcher may begin coding the data. Moghaddam (2006) described the phases of GTM coding as open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding serves the purpose of familiarizing the researcher with the data and exposing them to the themes that emerge organically without the imposition of proving a theory. The axial coding process entails the assignment of larger categories related to the different codes being traced during the open coding process. Selective coding begins the formation of a theory to

explain the relationship between code categories and the core category being studied by GTM. The following sections will go into more detail about each part of the GTM coding process. The next section will cover open coding explicitly.

Open coding.

Once (and even during, in some cases) data collection has finished, open coding can begin. Goulding (1999) described open coding as a process of breaking down the data into separate units based on content. Goede and Villers (2003) depicted coding as a process of assigning items to categories, categories made up of concepts that have a consistent descriptive content. These data are coded in order to check for the presence of specific kinds of content in the data: the purpose of open coding is to "conceptualize and label data" (Moghaddam, 2006, n.p.). The researcher must create codes that account for the presence of different textual content in the data. Often, GTM is used for personal interviews, so codes are often assigned to the presence of recurring textual patterns. Once codes have been created, they are organized around common themes.

Open coding has been described as being unfocused (Goulding, 1999); however, open coding needs to be unfocused because during this phase researchers should pay attention to as many facets of the data as possible, not yet narrowing their focus to specific aspects of the data. Looking for something in particular (although difficult to avoid) may force a researcher to miss something important in the data. During open coding a researcher must break down, analyze, compare, label, and categorize data. The importance of note-taking during open coding cannot be overstressed (Creswell, 2002). Goulding (1999) argued that during open coding, significant examples of themes will present themselves as they emerge from the text and cannot be chosen before coding begins. As concepts are found and theories are established from reflecting on the

data, more data collection may be necessary; the researcher must stop collection when the data have become sufficiently saturated, a point that is reached when no new categories or themes present themselves in the data (Charmaz, 2006). Dworkin (2012) noted that saturation is important to the GTM coding process, and Mason (2010) showed that most GTM scholars believe the issue of saturation is most important to the methodology, especially as it pertains to decisions of sample size. Another way to state this is that data in a research project can be considered saturated "when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 113). Saturation depends on many factors, and not all of them are under the researcher's control. More specifically, Dworkin (2012) argued that questions of "how many" pieces of data to collect focuses on the wrong question, and that the rigor of GTM "depends upon developing the range of relevant conceptual categories, saturating (filling, supporting, and providing repeated evidence for) those categories," and fully explaining the data (Charmaz, 1990, p. 163). A researcher using GTM should ask themselves whether their data adequately represent their categories. Once researchers have found that their data have reached an appropriate level of saturation, they can begin the second part of the coding process: axial coding. At the point of saturation, axial coding begins. It is important to note, though, that there are no set boundaries to reverting to data collection and open coding once axial coding has begun, but ideally they would be finished by the time the data are ready to be axially coded.

Axial coding.

Once a researcher has finished open coding and has a handle on what is occurring in the data, the next phase of coding is axial coding. Axial coding is an attempt to explain the relationship between events in the data (Glaser, 1998). Through constant comparison, the data

are reduced by what qualifies to be coded, and the researcher's focus narrows to concentrate on those data together, comparing coded data in order to better explain their presence throughout the study. This results in the creation of concepts that are explored and analyzed by researchers in order to create categories. Categories are then combined in order to create a core theory by the researcher, which must be defended by its presence throughout the data. Goulding (1999) described the core category as one that brings all the pieces of the data together in an explanation for the thing being studied. Strauss and Corbin (1999) described the core category as "the central phenomenon" around which all other concepts revolve (p. 116). Further, Strauss and Corbin viewed axial coding as the mending of the data fragments that open coding created. Choosing a category, one that is present throughout a significant portion of the data, is important to the GTM coding process. Core categories (Moghaddam, 2006) are central to the data, appear frequently, are consistent, are given an abstract name, grow in depth, and are able to explain changes in data. Once core categories are chosen at the end of the axial coding process, selective coding can begin.

Selective coding.

The separate categories built initially during open coding turn into categories based on their relationship to one another in the data. Collections of those categories should all include a relationship to a central category, or core category. Babchuk (1997) described selective coding as the creation of a grounded theory by relating categories to the core category. This is a process by which the researchers value the relationship between the core category and other descriptive aspects of the data. Selective coding, then, develops the coding data into a theory. Oftentimes, researchers are asked to create a narrative or matrix that explains how the analysis of the core category relates to the data. GTM researchers must spend as much time validating their theory as

they do explaining the relationships between categories. Different perspectives have been argued for concerning how to interpret these relationships, whether through pragmatics or through positivism.

Pragmatic and positivistic approaches to interpreting data in GTM.

Scholars (Charmaz, 2000; Moghaddam, 2006) found that amongst researchers who practice GTM, there are differing opinions on how positivistic or pragmatic one's approach to the study of qualitative data should be. More specifically, this concerns the decisions coders make when assigning code to pieces of texts. How does one interpret a text: for the presence of textual elements or for authorial intention? Does the researcher consider context and implied meaning? Often in interviews, a type of study where GTM has frequently been employed, context, implied meaning, emphasis, and irony are important elements to be coded, but must be done so with researcher discretion. As a way of mitigating some subjective bias, researchers conduct inter-researcher reliability tests. In this debate over the way to interpret data, Glaser (1992) took the side of positivism, acknowledging the existence of the researcher as an objective and neutral observer. Strauss and Corbin (1990) were more post-positivistic (Charmaz, 2000), accepting researcher bias as well as those of the study participants. Moghaddam (2006) referred to the coding that happens in GTM as a positivistic process of "naming and categorizing data" (para.15). However, Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommended first "analyzing data word-by-word" and afterward "coding the meaning found in words or groups of words" (pp. 65-68). Allan (2003) believed that meticulous analysis of the kind that Strauss and Corbin prescribed can sometimes result in data overload and confusion. Allen espoused the pragmatic selection of points or key themes with which to connect data.

Critics of this approach (see Moghaddam, 2006) recognized that personal bias may affect the categorization of data. Some even argue that whether the researcher (the neutral observer) is impartial and unbiased is not important, since scholars (Glaser, 2002; Moghaddam, 2006) found that the GTM coding process discovers patterns that the participants are usually unaware of. This requires constant comparison between data and coding assignments, and clear explanations of the relationships between categories and their correlation. Regardless of how a researcher interprets data, what is important is thorough and consistent analysis.

Situating data in its social context.

When examining data, I argue it is important to situate language inside a social context; after all, language never exists outside social contexts. Charmaz (2006) pointed to the irony that including context in the analysis of data actually creates theories more conducive to generalization:

> Must grounded theory aim for the general level abstracted from empirical realities? No.
> In sharp contrast, I argue that situating grounded theories in their
> social, historical, local, and interactional contexts strengthens them. Such situating
> permits making nuanced comparisons between studies. Subsequently
> these comparisons can result in more abstract—and, paradoxically—general theories. (p.
> 180)

Charmaz went on to state that situating studies within contexts when coding them made GTM researchers less biased and even reduced the import of assumptions about intention, action, and discrimination from entering the analysis (p. 181). In fact, many scholars (Charmaz, 2006; Ellis et al., 1986) have warned of ignoring details outside of data analysis, details that exist in the situated context, but perhaps not in the data themselves. Charmaz (2006) emphasized that those

details provide suggestions for explaining the relationship between categories. Once data have

been selectively coded, the researcher's focus lingers on select texts; meaning is then made of the

data and written into theory.

Theory: making meaning from the data in GTM.

According to Charmaz (2006) grounded theory "involves taking comparisons from data

and reaching up to construct abstractions and simultaneously reaching down to tie these

abstractions to data" (p. 181). Said differently, by comparing the data, a researcher can detect

patterns and absences in the texts, and can provide explanations for theory by considering the

context of the data. By representing the data in both code and excerpt form, the dialogue between

quantitative and qualitative data enriches the theory that GTM constructs. Vie (2015) pointed to

how both quantitative and qualitative data were necessary for GTM in her study of rhetorical

messaging in social media. While it is perfectly normal for a study that uses GTM to form a

theory about its data that is completely situated in the context of the data that it studies, that

theory does need to abide by four general criteria: credibility, originality, resonance, and

usefulness (Moghaddam, 2006). Explaining the theory behind what was studied applies these

standards because GTM often studies unknown areas or phenomena. Dworkin (2012) pointed to

the fact that qualitative methods like GTM are "concerned with garnering an in-depth

understanding of a phenomenon or are focused on meaning (and heterogeneities in meaning)—

which are often centered on the how and why of a particular issue, process, situation, subculture,

scene or set of social interactions" (para. 3).

The final phase of GTM, the application of theory to explain the relationship between

categories that have been coded, can be assisted through the use of other research frameworks,

specifically a critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is a useful framework to use to study

discourse online because it traces how power is exercised through influence in discourse. Because the data I studied were framed as discourse, a CDA lens was successfully applied to my interpretation of the data.

Critical Discourse Analysis

According to Van Dijk (2015), CDA studies "the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk" (p. 466). Because CDA isn't a methodology in and of itself, but an analytical practice applied to a methodology, it pairs well with GTM. According to Huckin, Andrus, and Clary-Lemon (2012), CDA usually works within a space that has multiple texts. Because qualitative data in the form of multiple texts (e.g., interviews) is common to GTM, pairing qualitative data with CDA for interpretation is useful. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) acknowledged that CDA views how both texts and discourse are mediated; as such, CDA can help to understand social contexts. For example, Penney and Dadas (2014) believed that discourse should be studied within a social context in order to be fully understood. Because contexts provide a more specific picture to understand discourse, they provide researchers who employ CDA with the opportunity to consider how hegemonic and institutional forces abuse power over access and control over the discourse space studied.

CDA and abuse of power.

Van Dijk (2015) emphasized how CDA viewed domination as an abuse of power in discourse; more specifically, when treating texts as research data, CDA views texts that dominate other texts or narratives as evidence of the movement of power in the discourse. The abuse of power, according to Van Dijk (2015), can take many forms; although not "obviously abusive," this is often expressed in the form of "access" and "control over" public discourse, resulting in an exercise of social power (pp. 469-470). Breeze (2011) argued that CDA offered "a promising

paradigm for identifying and interpreting the way ideology functions in and through discourse" (p. 520). One way that ideology functions is by silencing, by forcing voices without power to the margins of conversations. Focusing on ideological forces is important for CDA, because CDA's purpose is to figure out "how discourses emerge, and how they become hegemonic and re-contextualized, and finally, how they become operationalized" (vom Brocke et al., 2009, p. 62).

One of the criticisms of CDA is that its analysis overly focuses on spaces where power is abused, and not on spaces where power is reclaimed. Breeze (2011) recommended that "discourse analysis that explores emancipatory discourses or positive changes in social language use would be useful, because it would provide information about the way that positive transformations can be brought about" (p. 521). Considering that suggestion, my dissertation honors Breeze's concern by exploring how a marginalized community emancipated itself from an abuse of discursive power through digital, rhetorical strategies that disambiguated a discourse space, thereby reclaiming it.

CDA: criticisms of rigor.

Some critics have accused CDA of being without methodological rigor. Widdowson (1998) referred to CDA as "ad hoc bricolage" instead of valuable research, but when considered in conjunction with GTM, CDA is well matched (p. 136). Critics who agree with Widdowson (see Stubbs, 1997; Toolan, 1997) similarly accused CDA of suffering from a lack of systematic approach, a criticism described (Breeze, 2011) as "randomness and openness to bias" (Breeze, 2011, p. 504). However, the view that CDA over-interprets its data or lacks rigor has caught it in some hot water among critics, causing some to malign CDA as impressionistic. This stems from the same concerns that impact the ongoing positivistic/pragmatic debate about analyzing data in GTM.

Honoring the concerns over conducting an impressionistic study.

Breeze (2011) recognized that "CDA practitioners have frequently been accused of using 'impressionistic' methodology for analyzing text," advising that "care" should be taken when applying rigor to methods (p. 521). Breeze's response to concerns over impressionistic interpretation is valuable and has been echoed by other critics of CDA. These concerns do not only apply to GTM and CDA research, but to qualitative research in general; because GTM and CDA are employed to analyze qualitative data, they receive these criticisms too. One of the ways to avoid impressionistic interpretation is to focus analysis on data present in the text. Scholars (Breeze, 2011; Fairclough, 1992) recognized that research that uses CDA needs to pay close attention to "textual and intertextual properties" (p. 503). By paying attention to the relationships and shared references between texts, scholars have advised CDA practitioners to pay attention to their data alongside ideological motivations in order to better link their analysis to data. One of the areas where CDA and GTM has been employed recently is to study the discourse that occurs on social media.

GTM and Social Media Research

Scholars hold varying opinions as to what methodology to use to analyze the kind of data social media writing produces, especially for studies that focus on hashtags. Scholars (Jackson & Welles, 2015) have argued for methodological frameworks that focus on the emerging initiators who use hashtags that build a network. As opposed to tracing agents as they emerge in data, GTM focuses on the data as an entirety first and as agents second. Other scholars (McDuffie, 2016; Wolff, 2015) defended GTM as a successful methodology for researching discourse on social media. The reason scholars find so much value in applying GTM to the collection and coding of data is because GTM allows for flexible frameworks for considerations

to be made "inductively from the data" (McDuffie, 2016, p. 135), not to mention GTM offers an "ability to diminish researcher bias" (Wolff, 2015, "Grounded Theory Methodology"). But bias is always going to exist in research, especially qualitative data, and bias is inescapable for all forms of research. After all, even empirical research in the most quantitative forms are subject to bias, as researchers are always human, and humans are biased by nature.

Without interpretation across texts by researchers, social media discourse analysis might miss some key contextual information that would indicate factors in the relationships among texts. Often these relationships exist through intertextual power moves that a researcher must identify both on and offline. Vie (2008) recognized that social media often involves exercises of power dynamics across both digital and non-digital networks. Acknowledging Vie's point about the power dynamics involved in social media, CDA seems to be an ideal way to analyze the discursive patterns that are used on platforms; after all, twenty years ago Turkle (1995) acknowledged how the screen provides the world with new perspectives with which to view its complexities. Social media, as Vie (2008) found, has the ability to be "threatening to the established order of things and at the same time protective of traditional ways of understanding the world" (p. 20). Stakeholders in the ways we understand the world may choose to use their access and power to leverage the discursive space of social media for their own agendas and goals. Vie found that, when challenges to traditional hierarchies of power were found on social media sites, they could be viewed as opportunities for reconsidering which voices have power to claim authority. By studying social media spaces where traditional hierarchies are challenged— hierarchies that include decisions regarding who controls content and access to discourse— researchers can better understand the rhetorical strategies that are used to emancipate, delegitimize, challenge, obscure, disambiguate, and distract, and misinform.

Writing Studies and Social Media

Studying discourse in the 21st century includes studying the discourse that occurs on social media. Scholarship in writing studies (Jenkins, 2006; Penney & Dadas, 2014; Vie, 2007, 2008, 2014, 2015) has already begun to value how social media discourse informs the field. Over the last ten years, hashtag use, especially when used on social media platforms, has been instrumental in the attempt to organize and circulate discourse on social media. Discourse would be chaotic on social media without hashtags. Over the last ten years, precedents have been made for serious academic research involving social media, especially as it pertains to how hashtags organize discourse. Vie (2015) recognized "the rapid circulation and national impact of hashtags like #WhyIStayed, #Ferguson, or #yesallwomen to recognize the power of social media to shift the focus of national attention, foster dialogue, and organize resistance" (para. 2). As CDA has shown, power is misused when it is exercised to marginalize or even silence the discourse of others. Vie (2007) acknowledged how social media sites receive a pejorative reputation because technology often exercises power through silencing. Huckin et al. (2012) also recognized that textual silences are also evidence of power in the data. Social media has been championed by writing studies scholars as a haven for the marginalized and silenced to be heard.

For example, Jenkins (2006) claimed that "those silenced by corporate media have been among the first to transform their computer into a printing press. This opportunity has benefitted third parties, revolutionaries, reactionaries, and racists alike" (p. 221). Jenkins' statement was prescient, speaking to how discourse gets circulated prior to the explosion of the hashtag in 2008 on Twitter. Jenkins' point about the way that social media discourse democratizes the publication of marginalized voices is evident in the research of Penney and Dadas (2014), who studied the Occupy Wall Street movement and its use of hashtags to organize its goals and agendas. Because

they were studying activism organized in part through hashtags, Penney and Dadas pointed out that some of the people who use hashtags expressed how difficult it was to use Twitter to organize "debate with others about both the movement itself and related personal issues" (pp. 9-10).

However, some scholars (Dean, 2003; McKee, 2005) have expressed doubts over whether social media discourse can be considered discourse at all, doubts stemming from the difficulties of conducting dialogue online. McKee raised doubts over whether mediated discourse could be considered as occurring in the public sphere at all when forces of hegemony and capitalism embedded in media channels act as obstacles to democratic exchanges. Because discourse has been traditionally understood (Swales, 1990) as communicative acts that involve the presence of human agents interested in relevant discourse, reinterpretations of what constitutes discourse may be helpful to better understand the discourse that happens on social media. What counts as a communicative exchange may need to be reinterpreted when applying traditional discourse theory to social media discourse. For example, Dean (2003) pointed to the difficulty of considering communication on "chats" as discourse taking place in a public sphere, because of the lack of individuated agents who work toward "reasonable, worthwhile exchange" (p. 99).

Similarly, Penney and Dadas (2014) recognized that often the difficulty of online discourse stems from "characteristics such as anonymity and low barriers to entry/exit [that] make dialogue between disagreeing parties challenging" (p. 10). However, they also recognized that one of the actions of online activists who use hashtags "involves the strengthening of personal ties between members of the movement" (Penney & Dadas, 2014, p. 10). Penney and Dadas applied Swales' (1990) understanding of intercommunication between discourse members

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to what happens on Twitter: "through hashtags, users interact "informally with other like-minded activists … gaining a sense of community, solidarity, and group identity" (p. 10). Hashtags build social ties among texts and among communities of people. Building social ties like this has long been understood to be a part of building social movements (see McAdam & Paulsen, 1993). Part of building social movements for change has always included overcoming obstacles. Accordingly, Penney and Dadas (2014) acknowledged that activists meet frustrations and platform constraints when they try to organize online. Some of those frustrations occur within the constraints of social media platforms. For example, they recognized the influence that character limits had on intercommunication between activists.

Although obstacles to content like character limits are one of the many obstacles to activists' purposes online, there are other problems related to access as well. Penney and Dadas also recognized that activists who use hashtags online also face problems related to vulnerability: vulnerability to outside surveillance, censorship, and restrictions on content or use. Because the roles of protestors are greatly multiplying and expanding (Penney & Dadas, 2014), the rhetorical strategies that are used to emancipate and oppress voices online need to be studied. In this next section, I will discuss previous research that employed GTM to study social media discourse.

Preceding Research That Used Twitter and GTM/CDA

       Studies coded via GTM.

This section documents the research that precedes mine by describing studies that have successfully employed similar methodological approaches (employing GTM and CDA) to study social media writing. Precedents (boyd et al., 2010; Bruns et al., 2011; Buck, 2015; Daer et al., 2014; Jones, 2014; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Penney & Dadas, 2014; Potts et al., 2011; Vie, 2014; Wolff, 2015; Zappavigna, 2011, 2012) have been made in the field for the value of studying

discourse on Twitter. Some of my coding strategies were inspired by these researchers. More specifically, scholars like McDuffie (2016) reflected on how Tweets can be removed or filtered through the use of hashtag pairings, an action I employed to evaluate hashtag pairings in my own research. Similarly, Bastos et al. (2015) researched Twitter's serial activists through mining twenty million Tweets. Other scholars (Wolff, 2015) have provided precedents for the analysis of social media discourse too. And my research does something similar to their research by studying how the use of hashtag pairings can better connect relevant discourse in order to better facilitate more effective intercommunication between discourse community members. By creating codes that analyze not only the content of what is being said, but the hashtag choices used to reach different audiences, my research integrates the work of Wolff, Bastos et al., and McDuffie—by analyzing not only the content of online activism, but the strategies online activists use to disambiguate digital spaces, creating more relevant spaces that include writing that more consistently shares the goals and agendas of #OrlandoStrong. Just as GTM has precedents in social media research, so does CDA. This next section points to the previous research that used CDA in order to better analyze how power can be abused in digital discourse.

Studies applying CDA to social media research.

Practitioners have used CDA in studies that analyze power dynamics online. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is "an analytical framework for unraveling opaque relationships between discourse and society as factors in securing power" (Rambe, 2012, p. 299). Considering how CDA can reveal power dynamics, scholars (Rambe, 2012; Shirazi, 2013; Vie, Balzhiser, & Ralston, 2014) have acknowledged the value of applying CDA to social media discourse. Shirazi (2013) traced the role that social media writing played during 2009-2011 in the Middle East and North Africa by using CDA. Furthermore, Rambe (2012) and Chouliaraki and Fairclough (2010)

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acknowledged the value of using CDA for social media research analysis. Vie et al. (2014) viewed the power of social media technology as a double-edged sword. They analyzed how power exerted over a discourse space by social media companies, as it pertains to censuring interactions with uncivil discourse, can amplify and sometimes normalize incivility. However, Vie, Balzhiser, and Ralston (2014) also reflected that for efforts that encourage civil discourse to succeed, it may mean that technology can be used as an agent for change, provided that users were willing to give up some freedoms. In understanding that CDA explores power dynamics and domination through discourse, when applied to the study of hashtags, CDA can help to explain the phenomena of social media discourse.

Hashtags as Phenomenon

Simply put, a grounded theory methodology studies a phenomenon. As it pertains to my own research, a hashtag can be considered a phenomenon—a situation that is observed to happen, whether or not explainable. Hashtags have been described (Gries & Brooke, 2018) as "curious rhetorical things" (p. 16). As it pertains to my specific focus for my dissertation, #OrlandoStrong can certainly be depicted as curious, but also as a rhetorical, social phenomenon. For example, no single person forced #OrlandoStrong to trend; hashtags often require an unscripted, social collective, a public, a critical mass of users, to adopt the hashtag and use it over and over in order to elevate it to trending status. As the field of writing studies has acknowledged (McDuffie, 2016; Penney & Dadas, 2014; Vie, 2014; Wolff, 2015), the ways that hashtags organize discourse is a phenomenon worth studying, perhaps with results that may yield insight into how digital activists can communicate more clearly and directly to the world and to one another.

By using GTM to study the hashtags used to organize discourse surrounding the Pulse shooting, I reflect on how hashtags helped to emancipate voices from the margins. This is the reason that CDA works so well to help understand a digital phenomenon like #OrlandoStrong. CDA analysis provided me with insight for analyzing how corporate/hegemonic power ambiguated the #OrlandoStrong discourse space with writing that shared different agendas and goals than those shared by the #OrlandoStrong discourse community. In this way GTM and CDA were a perfect fit for this dissertation's purpose, and its methodology provided me with a space to allow the research data to frame the theory.

Fitting #OrlandoStrong with GTM and CDA

In this section, I explain why and how I used grounded theory methodology (GTM) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to study Twitter discourse that included #OrlandoStrong. I chose to use GTM for this project because I wanted my reflections to arise from the data I collected, rather than approach the data from the perspective of proving a hypothesis or theoretical preconception. I also was curious to understand why the physical messages I saw (e.g., viewing offline murals with #OrlandoStrong) were so different than the messages I saw in digital spaces.

As a resident of Orlando, after the Pulse shooting, I began to see #OrlandoStrong written throughout the city, on walls, t-shirts, signs, billboards, and murals. I found it curious to print a hashtag, and I wondered how the printed inscription of an essentially digital tool would match up against the digital inscription, how those two different topoi informed one another and the meaning of #OrlandoStrong. Most importantly, I was interested in the meaning of #OrlandoStrong, as it seemed to be something very specific at that time. Yet, I saw competing messages between digital and non-digital use of #OrlandoStrong. As I began to see

#OrlandoStrong grow as a rallying hashtag for the city of Orlando after the Pulse shooting, I began archiving #OrlandoStrong Tweets in preparation for the anniversary of the Pulse shooting. This next section will address my research questions and how they influenced my analysis of #OrlandoStrong through the use of GTM and CDA.

Research Questions

As an Orlando citizen, I witnessed the city and its citizens adopt the slogan #OrlandStrong immediately following the Pulse shooting. As time passed, I watched the content on the #OrlandoStrong feed on Twitter change, while the murals, art-based memorials, and even t-shirts that carried that slogan seemed to remain consistent with the images, iconography, textual content, and color choices used to connect #OrlandoStrong to the Pulse shooting. By February 2016, seven months after the shooting, the disparity between the material representations of #OrlandoStrong (what I witnessed on campus at the University of Central Florida and in the city of Orlando) and the digital representations of #OrlandoStrong (what I found on Twitter's hashtag feed) were so drastically different, I began to wonder how hashtags functioned as an aid and as an obstacle for activists. I also began to question what business hashtags had existing in offline spaces. I also wondered if hashtag use could be ethical.

My early reflections on the data I reviewed and my experience as a citizen of Orlando led me to pose these research questions:

- Does #OrlandoStrong mean something more or less fixed, and, if so, what? Or is a hashtag just a receptacle for any text?
- Do hashtag meanings change more or less as traditional definitions of words do?
- Are hashtags rhetorical innovations?
- Are there ethics to hashtag use? Should there be?

This next section will show how I applied GTM and CDA to my data analysis, and how these questions help to frame not only what I coded, but how I interpreted that code. Starting with data collection I review the specifics of the tools I used and the coding choices I made.

Data Collection

From March 1st, 2017, to June 12th, 2017, I archived 30,683 Tweets that included #OrlandoStrong in the body of the Tweet using TAGS (Hawksey, 2014) automated software that pulls Tweets from Twitter's API and archives them in a Google Sheet. From that data sample, I individually coded a total of 2,500 Tweets that used #OrlandoStrong; this data analysis is discussed in Chapter Four and makes up the content depicted in percentages in that chapter. As I coded, I traced patterns in the content as the discourse space of #OrlandoStrong became increasingly written into as the anniversary of the Pulse shooting neared.

What I did not anticipate was that my data sample would jump from a much more manageable 6,788 Tweets to an additional 24,000 composed on the date of the anniversary. My data sample quadrupled over the course of the 24-hour period of June 12th, 2017. Because of the massive influx of Tweets that used #OrlandoStrong on that day, the kairotic moment of the anniversary forced me to make some coding decisions as to how to analyze such a vast number of Tweets produced in such a short amount of time, while still faithfully representing the sample as a whole. I describe that process in detail in the axial coding section of this chapter. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), GTM viewed the world as full of symbolic meaning, meaning derived from actions that subjects interpret. This interpretation is made through the context of actors who interact with the subjects of GTM. As discussed in the GTM section, researchers (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) depicted how GTM focuses on actors' response to changing conditions and to the consequences of their actions. It is the researcher's responsibility to "catch this

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interplay" (p. 5). In this way, GTM was ideal for my analysis of #OrlandoStrong because it caught the interplay of certain Tweets and the timing of their hashtag choices as they were made by members of the #OrlandoStrong discourse community. This enabled me to study the way that their discursive actions responded to the increasing ambiguity of the discourse space of #OrlandoStrong over the course of the year between June 12th, 2016 and June 12th, 2017. The next section covers the coding process, describing my three-part process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Coding Process

Open coding.

I first used open coding for my data to provide space for anticipated themes and keep an open mind for the possibilities of coding. Therefore, as I coded Tweets, I made a spreadsheet for the possible descriptions I could make of the Tweets I studied. The types of Tweets I coded were recorded, and I made a code for original Tweets created by the user. I also made a code for ReTweets (Tweets that are shared without any added content) as well as a code for Quote Tweets (ReTweets that include additional text from the person who ReTweeted them). I made a code for the number of likes, shares, and comments for each Tweet that was coded. I made a code for Originating Media sources, for tracking links to other sources outside of Twitter. I made a code for the kind of content each tweet held: a code for visual content (images, video, art, emoji, image-memes, video-memes, gif-memes, and ribbons) and a code for purely textual content (no images, video, or links, etc.). As I began to code the content of tweets, I increasingly became uncomfortable with the process as I felt it required me to assign to the author their assumed intention without their input. This next section discusses scholarship that recognizes the problem

with assigning intention for authors based solely on a text or utterance, without interviews or follow-up contexts.

Author intention and tweets.

Scholars in linguistics (Grice, 1957; Java et al., 2009) have recognized that intention is difficult to assign. Grice (1957) pointed out that audiences have historically made use of both contexts and previous utterances for help in framing meaning and speaker intention. For example, if someone is a sarcastic person or a practical joker, their previous utterances help a listener to frame meaning—for example, when the sarcastic person (or practical joker) says "duck!" their previous utterances can help a listener understand how they might respond or why the person might have said this. Context is vital to determining intention. For example, knowing it is April Fool's Day might help someone to contextually understand a practical joker's intention when they say "duck!" But due to social media's often asynchronous and disembodied environment, previous utterances and contexts become challenging to assign when accounts can be private and users could be human agents or artificial agents like bots. Not to mention, trolling—which is especially difficult to decipher online—is also important in considering intention. Understandably, assigning intentional meaning hearkens back to Barthes' (1967) famous declaration that the author is dead. Is the author even allowed to assign intention? If not, then, who is? These questions helped me to make the decision to not play the game of assigning intention and provided me instead with the clarity of coding positivistically by focusing on the presence of specific words in texts.

Java et al. (2009) specifically applied that observation to their experience with Twitter research: They noted that "determining an individual user's intention … is challenging" and that sometimes it is easier to determine a community's intention (p. 126). Community intention is

easier to assign because of the wealth of community member utterances that can be reflected upon, whereas an individual utterance is much more difficult to understand without previous utterances and context. This was the case with the community of #OrlandoStrong: The more Tweets I read and coded, the more context I gained through the repetition of utterances. I could therefore frame the discourse community members' intentions through their repeated patterns of word use, rather than try to explore each individual user's intention.

In their study, Java et al. (2009) coded intention subjectively: "the apparent intention of a Twitter post was determined manually by the first author" (p. 124). For me, though, it felt like assigning intention without interviewing the author would disregard the potential nuances that language carries; instead, I decided that assigning intention was not only futile, but inauthentic, recalling the difficulties of the pragmatic approach to assigning intention to text. Rather, I decided that focusing on the simple presence of textual elements would be less subjective. Intention is debatable, but the presence of text is not. Just as I had referenced the presence of elements on murals that were painted (see Chapter One) and did not rely on interpreting authorial intention or the author's own feelings about the mural, I also felt it was fair to approach the analysis of Twitter content as textual presence rather than as authorial intention. Not that assigning intention is not a valuable research method, because studies that do so have contributed to the field substantially (see Penney & Dadas, 2014), but that was not the kind of research I was doing for this study. My research model followed more closely with the methods Wolff (2014) used.

Once I made that decision, my coding became consistent and reliable, but there were still issues to resolve. Questions of intention removed problems like, how do you code a retweet that is obviously done in irony? How do you code someone QuoteTweeting a progressive message

from a conservative account? These are questions of intention. Content is simpler to determine. Is there a rainbow? Is the word LGBTQ+ used? Because whether it is used in hatred ambivalence or support, the content of #OrlandoStrong will have the same proportion of gay terminology. This felt like a way to analyze the data without fear of too much subjective bias in the coding, especially considering the selective coding bias to come in the process. However, I still needed to code each Tweet instead of doing a CTRL+F for "love," because indirect statements, videos, and pictures may include utterances that the text explicitly doesn't, this meant that often items in the backgrounds or perhaps things that appeared incidental would qualify as being present. Therefore, these items were included in the data as coded.

Whether or not a text's use of a word objectively meant a certain thing is up to interpretation, but textual presence is not. For this reason, I considered the presence of certain Tweets as a reflection of how using a specific lexical element significant to a discourse community could imply some connotations as to what a writer meant when they used a specific word in their text.

Because I wanted to stay away from the attempt to code intention, I determined that in order for a code to be counted, it must be present textually or alluded to textually. By "alluded to," I mean the code is present because it is attached as an image, audible in a sound clip, or present visually or audibly in a video. This means that even if someone had a profile picture that established them as a gay conservative, unless their Tweet included specific textual elements, it was not coded. This decision was made with respect to the potential for user's names and/or profile pictures and descriptions to change. The next section covers the coding process. I discuss my coding as a three-part process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Open coding #OrlandoStrong.

Form-based codes.

The types of Tweets I coded were recorded. I made a code for original Tweets created by the user. I made a code for ReTweets: Tweets that are shared without any added content. I made a code for Quote Tweets: ReTweets that include additional text from the person who ReTweeted them. I made a code for the number of likes, shares, and comments for each Tweet that was coded. I made a code for Originating Media sources, for tracking links to other sources outside of Twitter. I made a code for the kind of content each tweet held: a code for visual content (images, video, art, emoji, image-memes, video-memes, gif-memes, and ribbons) and a code for purely textual content (no images, video, or links, etc.).

Content-based codes.

The next grouping of codes I made were content-based codes, not codes related to the type of Tweet or mode of content. During open coding, I began to create codes for what I believed would be an abundant presence in the data: sexual-orientation-related descriptions. I made a general LGBTQ+ code to catch all the sexual orientation and identity nuance. Another expectation I had going into coding the data was anti-Muslim, xenophobic, homophobic, transphobic, and Islamophobic Tweets. I made codes to trace hate-filled expressions. I also made a general code for expressions that included the word hate.

At the time of the Pulse shooting, I recognized that narratives depicting the possibility of the Pulse shooting as an act of terrorism were abundant in the news. Therefore, I made codes to trace the presence of words that were abundant in those narratives. I made codes to trace the presence of words like terrorism, ISIS, Muslim, and Arab. This led me to consider how people of color were represented/underrepresented in the depiction of the Pulse Shooting in the media. Since the shooting happened on Latin night, Latinx people, primarily Puerto Ricans, were well

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represented in narratives about the shooting, whereas persons of color were not as well represented. For this reason, I made codes to trace the presence Latinxs, Whites, Arabs, Persons of Color, African Americans, and Blacks. I also created codes to trace American citizenship, as I expected to find patriotic messages alongside xenophobic ones.

Because the Orlando City Soccer club had championed #OrlandoStrong as a slogan for its team and emblazoned #OrlandoStrong throughout its promotional materials and stadium signage, I created codes to trace Orlando City. Ultimately, I expected to find private business and corporate voices leveraging #OrlandoStrong as a space for marketing. I created a code for these kinds of promotional and commercial moments where outright selling, promotion, or brand recognition were employed. Although this code did not have a set text I was looking for, if they promoted a brand, contained links to purchase goods or services, or aligned a brand name with #OrlandoStrong, they were coded as marketing.

I also created codes for people who were spreading awareness of the Pulse shooting, which would include Tweets that included reminders of the lost lives, the shooting, its date, and the possible motivations behind the shooting. These were all coded as awareness. Additionally, if the Tweets were specifically using the words memory, remember, or discussed the ongoing process of the memorial site itself being constructed by the OnePulse foundation, I coded those tweets as memory and memorial specifically. Any of the fundraisers (e.g. OnePulse, Ribbons, GoFundme pages for survivors' and victims' funerals) were coded as fundraising. I also created the code activism for any politically motivated Tweets, which included marches, sit-ins, protests, and community-based meetings for LGBTQ+ rights, gun rights, racial equality, intersectionality, immigrations, and feminist rights.

I created the codes police and medical responders for Tweets that included narratives about first responders. I also coded Tweets from other hospitals, medical teams, and police and fire departments who Tweeted about the events of the Pulse shooting.

These were the extent of the codes I created at the beginning of the open coding process. Once I began to code the Tweets I had collected though, I began to create codes for things I had not anticipated I would find before coding had begun. The following section includes codes I created during the coding process.

Codes created recursively.

In my study, it was appropriate to recursively code the data once I began the open coding process; in GTM, the data collection and analysis are performed simultaneously because they are "interrelated processes" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 6). Because the Tweets were organized by recurring concepts in the overall data, the use of GTM was successful because, in GTM, "concepts are the basic unit of analysis" (p. 7). Once I began to code the #OrlandoStrong Tweets I had collected, I began to notice patterns in Tweets that I had begun to code. One of the codes that grew organically during the coding process was intersectionality. As I began to see more and more Tweets that included statements about the Pulse shooting affecting cross sections of the city of Orlando's population, I created a code to acknowledge those statements. The Pulse shooting affected different communities that often overlapped. Some of the communities that were identified as being affected by the shooting included people who were gay, male, LGBTQ+, Latinx, Persons of Color, Muslims, Arabs, xenophobes, immigrants, nightclub performers, and drag performers, etc. As a result, often the Tweets I read articulated the need for intersectionality in the representations of victims and survivors. Tweets that spoke to the

complex narrative of the Pulse shooting and specifically used the word intersectional were coded and traced.

Another code that I traced after I had begun coding was the presence of rainbows. I anticipated seeing many more Tweets that explicitly discussed LGBTQ+ themes, whether as a phrase or individually speaking to gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, and queer narratives. Often, I found that rainbow-colored progressions, rainbow emojis, and rainbow flag emojis were present in Tweets in much more abundance. I also noticed that in art installations, videos, and images, rainbow colored progressions, flags, and emojis were much more present. I also included in the coding Tweets that spoke to the words rainbow or pride flag as well.

Finally, one of the other codes I created and recursively analyzed during open coding was love. As often as I saw the word hate, I began to see the word love. Tweets that used the word love or included any variety of heart emojis, or showed hearts in any form (the human organ) or a cardiogram of a human pulse were coded as love. This was especially evident in the Tweets that used phrases like "love wins," "love is love," or even "love trumps hate." All these expressions would include codes for love. Once the open coding was finished and I had recursively coded the emerging content that grew organically from Tweets I had already coded, I began the axial coding phase of GTM. The next section will cover the axial coding process as it applies to my #OrlandoStrong data. Table 1 shows the full list of Tweet type codes and content-based codes, grouped together as they were coded.

Table 1. Content and Type Codes

Codes Groupings	Codes Assigned
Affective Content	Love, Hate, Memory, Memorialization, Rainbow, Intersectionality
Political Content	Terrorism, Hate Crime, Gun Control, Police, First Responders, ISIS, Activism, Awareness
Sexual Identity Narratives	Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, LGBTQ+
Culture/Identity Content	Latino, Latina, Latinx, Muslim, Arab, Person of Color, African American, Black
Marketing Content	City of Orlando, Marketing, American Citizenship, Orlando City Soccer
Types of Tweets	Original Tweet, ReTweet, QuoteTweet, # of Likes, # of ReTweets
Types of Visuals	Photo, Photo w/ Music, Video, Video w/ Music, Link, Text, Emojis, Art,

This list also serves the function of showing what content looked like once coding had reached a saturation point for the data. After these codes were applied to the content, the second phase of GTM coding began, the axial coding process, which the next section documents.

Axial coding #OrlandoStrong.

Axial coding is a type of coding that treats a category as an axis around which the analyst delineates relationships and specifies the dimensions of this category. A major purpose of axial coding is to bring the data back together again into a coherent whole after the researcher has fractured them through line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2006, "Glossary"). As I coded my data, the axial coding phase provided me time to consider the relationships between Tweets that shared similar codes and to better understand the repetitions and patterns between Tweets that contained similar textual content. It also allowed me to identify problematic codes that involved too much reliance on interpretations of or assignment of authorial intention, something I eventually chose to leave out of my selective coding process.

The most important axial coding recognition I made was the effect on content proportions of Tweets when considering the use of additional hashtags in tandem with #OrlandoStrong. Once I began to notice similar content in different Tweets that shared more than one hashtag, I began to realize that using additional hashtags as axial codes could help to delineate relationships between Tweets. By performing a simple search for Tweets in the data sample that included additional hashtags (i.e., #LoveisLove, #OnePulse, #SomosOrlando, #PrayForOrlando, #OrlandoUnitedDay, #OrlandoUnited) alongside their use of #OrlandoStrong, I found that these secondary hashtags (what I refer to as informational compositions in Chapters Two and Four) functioned as axial categories for Tweets. When considered this way, these different hashtags functioned perfectly as axial codes because it brought these Tweets, which were cut into fragments by types and content based codes, back into a coherent whole.

This coherent whole is critical to the GTM process, because Strauss and Corbin (1990) found that an "abstract concept must be developed in terms of its properties and dimensions of the phenomenon it represents, conditions which give rise to it, the action/interaction by which it

is expressed, and the consequences it produces" (pp. 7-8). By considering hashtag pairings as axial codes, I was able to return to considering Tweets as entire texts and not as pieces of content. By considering the proportions of content that were evident in the different hashtag pairings as compared to the overall data sample, I was better able to explain how the ambiguation of the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong motivated the #OrlandoStrong discourse community to use hashtag pairings (informational compositions) to help disambiguate their discourse community's intercommunication by making a space that better connected relevant content (see Chapter Four).

Through axial coding, my aim was ultimately to build "a theoretical explanation by specifying phenomena in terms of conditions that give rise to them, how they are expressed through action/interaction, the consequences that result from them, and variations of these qualifiers" (Strauss & Corbin, p. 10). For me that meant that when a discourse space became ambiguated by non-relevant content, disambiguating that content was made possible by a coordinated effort by writers where multiple hashtags were used together. This is one of the insights yielded by studying the phenomenon of hashtags: that they open discursive spaces that can reveal discursive strategies that can be used to filter out disambiguated aboutness. The next section discusses the application of selective coding process, the final GTM phase applied to the data.

Selective Coding #OrlandoStrong
As Babchuk (1997) described, selective coding relates categories to a core category. In my research, I coded content and Tweet-type codes first, and, during axial coding, I formed categories based on the hashtag pairings used in different Tweets. The core category that I studied was #OrlandoStrong, which was a textual element common to every single Tweet in my 30,683-Tweet sample. Because I sought to find out what the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong was, I

began to notice that depending on the hashtag pairing employed, the aboutness shifted from category to category. Because I valued the relationship between #OrlandoStrong and the other hashtags that became categories themselves, I wanted to develop a theory as to why the proportion of content (codes traced during open coding) became increasingly concentrated in categories (hashtag pairings) as compared to the central category (any Tweet collected that used #OrlandoStrong).

Because selective coding develops the coding process into a theory, I began to create a theory about the function of hashtags in discourse communities to bring similar content together. This lead me to develop a theory that provides an explanation of how hashtags perform to disambiguate the aboutness of hashtag-driven discourse.

Because I created 45 separate content and type codes, I decided to trace the change in proportion from the presence of content and type in the core category (#OrlandoStrong) and compare that to the same presence of content and Tweet-type codes in axial categories (hashtag pairings with #OrlandoStrong).

Reflecting on the difficulty of assigning intention to Tweets, I decided to trace certain codes and focus my analysis on a smaller amount of content, content that wasn't problematized by interpretations of author intention, content that was present undeniably as text or visual and audible text. Said in a simpler way, I found that by limiting my focus from the 45 codes and their differing proportions to four dramatic codes that showed a proportion change, I could defend their presence better (as they weren't coded with regard to intention) and they could be compared more easily. Therefore, considering intention and a significant difference in proportion, I determined to focus the development of my theory on the presence of Tweets coded as love, hate, rainbow, and marketing. By considering these codes, I could defend my theory clearly and

without subjective bias as to why hashtag pairings helped to increase the concentration of Tweets that presented the themes associated with these codes.

It is critical for GTM researchers to validate their theories with explanations for relationships between categories. I chose to defend my theory through a pragmatic approach to selection of codes to finally base my theory around. This meant that codes like awareness, Islamophobia, gay, and American citizenship were left out of the findings and results because the tendency to interpret author intention in order to arrive at a coding decision robbed the analysis of consistency and reliability as a researcher. Different researchers may have coded those figures with less reliability as they would with the codes love, hate, rainbow, and marketing: codes that were the most easily detected by their presence or absence.

Turning Qualitative Codes into Quantitative Data

Creswell et al. (2006) described grounded theory methodology as a "qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, action, or interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants" (p. 13). In this way GTM was an ideal theoretical method because I could trace the proportion of Tweets that were coded as love, hate, marketing, and rainbow in hashtag pairings, and compare that proportion to the proportion of Tweets in the general data set I collected that included love, hate, rainbow, and marketing codes.

This quantitative approach helped me to reach a feasible defense for my theory: an explanation for the effect that hashtags have when used as information compositions to disambiguate relevant content for discourse community members. This meant that textual presence was reflected in high proportions for codes, and textual absence was reflected by low proportions for codes. The intent of looking at proportion was to take a snapshot of the discourse

as a whole during the time the data was collected. By quantifying and showing examples of the various discourses and voices, my data would indicate what the dominant content was in the discourse. Absences of coded content, or smaller proportions then, then were as meaningful to my research as high proportions were.

Applying CDA to #OrlandoStrong

Because CDA considers textual silences as examples of power being exercised, I could make the argument that when hashtag pairings (informational compositions) increased in the coded proportions, this gave volume to voices and themes that were suppressed in the general #OrlandoStrong discourse space. By reflecting on CDA, hashtag pairings became emancipatory rhetorical devices for marginalized voices and content to be better voiced in spaces where relevant content would connect those texts to other texts that reflected their sentiments. Alternatively, marketing content was more reflected in the general #OrlandoStrong space than in hashtag pairings, and that meant that these spaces were sources of abuses of power, where corporate structures took advantage of followers, likes, and algorithmic advantages that Twitter provided for them to dominate the discourse space. This analysis is explained in further detail in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Chapter Organization

First, I display and analyze the findings and results of the coding data I compiled over the course of five months: specifically, the 2,500 Tweets I coded individually that included #OrlandoStrong in their text. I show how ambiguated the topical content in #OrlandoStrong became over that period of time by reflecting on the proportions of content present in different combinations of hashtags with #OrlandoStrong (informational compositions). Tweets were coded utilizing a grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) along with a recurrent axial coding process (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 1998) that was employed (see Chapter Three); the coding process examined topics evident in the content of these Tweets.

Second, I analyze the differences in the topics of Tweets that used additional hashtags aside from #OrlandoStrong. The additional hashtags I found most useful for this analysis include #SomosOrlando, #OrlandoUnited, #OrlandoUnitedDay, #PrayForOrlando, #LoveIsLove and #OnePulse. By examining Tweets that pair these hashtags with #OrlandoStrong, the discourse space becomes refocused on topics that were pushed to the margins by the immense amount of traffic leveraging the discourse space. These additional hashtags acted as informational compositions, essentially a filter for the discourse of #OrlandoStrong, disambiguating the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong for its discourse community. I organize my analysis by topical relevance to the Pulse shooting and the connection that content has to the shared goals and agendas of the #OrlandoStrong discourse community.

The first section considers affective topics (Tweets with content related to topics of rainbows, love, and hate), while the second section considers corporate and institutional topics

(Tweets with content related to marketing). The importance of these findings is explored at the

respective conclusions of each of the sections: rainbows, love, hate, and marketing.

Ultimately, by examining the discourse associated with the Pulse shooting (ones that

included #OrlandoStrong in the body of the Tweet), I found that hashtags can be used to help

disambiguate the discourse of marginalized voices by decreasing the concentration of voices of

institutional and hegemonic power that were not relevant to the goals and agendas of discourse

community members. According to Swales (1990), discourse communities have "often acquired

some specific lexis … using lexical items known to the larger speech communities in special and

technical ways" (p. 26). Because hashtags produce immediate and public texts, regulating the

misuse of a specialized lexis in a discourse space is problematic, and the use of multiple strategic

hashtags may be a way to help ameliorate that problem, even if only momentarily. This chapter

concludes with a recommendation to emphasize the utility of using aboutness-marking hashtags.

By using multiple hashtags as informational compositions, discourse communities can better

facilitate intercommunication that uses specialized lexis by connecting the relevant utterances of

members to one another.

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the role that hashtags played in (dis)ambiguating the topical

content of #OrlandoStrong discourse over the year between the Pulse tragedy and its anniversary.

Ambiguation, or the addition of ambiguity into discourse, can be used to disrupt discourse, while

disambiguation can be used to make discourse more relevant to the shared goals and agendas of a

discourse community (see Chapter Two). Because hashtags can be used to form discourse

communities (Bruns & Burgess, 2011), and discourse communities follow norms and discursive

patterns (Swales, 1990), discourse communities are commonly formed through linguistic hashtag

use (Zappavigna, 2015). Swales (1990) described discourse communities as sharing an agreed-upon set of public goals and agendas, sharing between their members intercommunication comprised of relevant content that works to further accomplish those goals and agendas. Therefore, members of hashtag-driven discourse communities (like #OrlandoStrong) need to be mindful of how hashtag use frames their ability to make relevant connections among content in digital spaces. This need for mindfulness is necessitated by the public and immediate nature of digital texts (Bolter, 2001), two characteristics of digital discourse that can make its content difficult to regulate.

Using Swales' framework of discourse communities, then, #OrlandoStrong can be viewed as a discourse community that shares the agenda and goals of organizing discourse in the aftermath of the Pulse shooting, of spreading awareness of and organizing activism for LGBTQ+ and Latinx communities, and of digitally memorializing the aftermath of the Pulse shooting (Rowell, 2016). Swales (1990) pointed to how discourse communities are marked by the use of a specialized lexis. In this case, the specialized lexis of the discourse community of #OrlandoStrong, as the data collected in this project suggest, included statements that used the lexis of love and hate that signify a relationship to the Latinx and LGBTQ+ community, and statements that used the lexis of rainbows and rainbow flags that signify gay pride, acceptance, and the LGBTQ+ community.

Hashtags and Aboutness

As scholars have noted, hashtags perform many different functions from marking experiential topics, enacting interpersonal relationships, organizing texts (Zappavigna, 2015), coordinating relief efforts (Hughes & Palen, 2009), organizing memes (Hughes et al., 2010), to forming ad hoc publics (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). As discussed in Chapter Two, hashtags were

originally created in 2008 by Messina for use as metatags, or folk taxonomies, like the ones originally used to tag Internet Relay Chat channels (Wiseman, 2017). The point of the hashtag, initially, was to better organize the chaos of Twitter as a way to more easily track content for information retrieval by discourse communities, or "inner circles," as Messina called them (n.p.). Scholarship on information retrieval (Bruza et al., 2000) has used the term "aboutness" to refer to the relationship between a query (something typed into a search) and the document it retrieves (p. 1). This makes sense as it pertains to the hashtag because a hashtag, when clicked upon, performs a query of Twitter's database that retrieves texts that contain that same hashtag; in this way, the hashtag functions as "the basic information carrier that cannot be divided further" (Bruza et al., 2000, p. 2).

The value in bringing Bruza et al.'s (2000) term aboutness into this conversation is that, according to these authors, a basic information carrier retrieves less relevant content than do queries that use informational compositions. As it relates to hashtags, the findings of this chapter yield the same conclusions: when certain hashtags were paired together as informational compositions, they yielded a disambiguated aboutness that did not result when studying #OrlandoStrong as a basic information carrier alone. Using multiple hashtags (informational compositions) helped to connect relevant discourse that matched the aboutness of the discourse community through what Bruza et al. (2000) call informational meet. The challenge of aboutness is that it cannot remain fixed. As semiotics has shown, when looking at the relationship between any signifier and what it signifies (Saussure, 1959), meaning is always deferred (see Derrida, 1982). In this chapter, I use the word aboutness to describe the relationship between #OrlandoStrong and the content of Tweets this hashtag retrieves.

I find that #OrlandoStrong, then, is an example of a discourse community whose aboutness—the relationship between a hashtag's name and the content of its Tweets—became increasingly ambiguated over time. Specifically, I refer to the time that this hashtag began to be recorded in this data set, between the initial kairotic moment of the Pulse shooting and the first anniversary of the shooting on June 12th, 2017. This ambiguation can be attributed to the influx of non-relevant (as it pertains to the shared goals and agendas of the discourse community of #OrlandoStrong) content introduced into its space by influencers, trolls, disinterested and/or misinformed writers, etc. In this chapter, I show how the aboutness of what that hashtag meant became ambiguated as writers filled the discourse space of #OrlandoStrong with content that may have been outside the relevance of #OrlandoStrong's discourse community. When I use the term relevance, I am speaking to Swales' (1990) point about the shared lexis used by discourse community members to intercommunicate. In this chapter, I provide examples of the ambiguation of that lexis.

However, I find that the use of aboutness-marking hashtags paired with #OrlandoStrong (what Bruza et al. (2000) would call an informational composition) helped to disambiguate relevant from non-relevant content, better facilitating intercommunication between members of #OrlandoStrong's discourse community. In those spaces created by the use of additional hashtags, the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong was disambiguated. If, as Swales (1990) showed, intercommunication is essential to the survival of discourse communities, then these findings are important because they illustrate that the formation of ad hoc publics (Bruns & Burgess, 2011) made possible by hashtags (as informational compositions) can be used successfully as a strategy to disambiguate its content. These findings show how hashtags are instrumental for discourse

communities to use when organizing on social media to better fight the ambiguation of their specialized lexis by members outside of their community.

Comparing Proportions of Topical Content

This chapter's data analysis is organized through comparisons. I contend that a discourse community's aboutness can be considered by comparing it to the proportion of topical content present in its hashtag discourse space. In other words, I compare the percentage of content relating to a concept like love in the general space of #OrlandoStrong to the percentage of love content in a hashtag pairing like #OrlandoStrong #OrlandoUnitedDay. By reflecting on the overall discourse space of #OrlandoStrong, this chapter considers how specifying aboutness for rhetorical audiences can help connect relevant content, thereby disambiguating its discourse and cohering it to other relevant discourse that shares the same agendas and goals. This analysis of the proportion of content also seeks to provide a more powerful testimony to the complex narratives running through the discourse of the Pulse nightclub shooting and its relationship with #OrlandoStrong. My analysis shows how the content of what I categorize as affective topics were less present proportionately in the general #OrlandoStrong discourse space as they were in Tweets that included aboutness-marking hashtags. Conversely, I show that content related to what I dub corporate topics were present in a higher concentration in the general discourse space of #OrlandoStrong, sans aboutness-marking hashtags. I show how institutional and hegemonic content were less present in the discourse spaces where #OrlandoStrong was used in tandem with aboutness-marking hashtags. By considering the significant difference in the proportion of the content studied here, I make the claim that that the affective content is reflective of the marginalized communities that #OrlandoStrong initially organized to champion, but that

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affective content instead became ambiguated, and thereby marginalized, by the presence of corporate and institutional content.

Affective Topics in Tweets

As I coded the #OrlandoStrong data, I began to see topics arise that were grouped together. Because they so frequently appeared in the same Tweets, I decided to classify them together as affective because they seemed to involve appeals to pathos or discussed emotions directly (see a more in-depth explanation in the coding section in Chapter Three). Tweets that contained affective topics were classified as any Tweet showing topical content related to rainbows, love, and hate. As Tweets in the #OrlandoStrong data set began to appear connected in relevant ways to one another, one of the more compelling connections was how statements made in the aftermath of the Pulse shooting were connected to love, the victory of love over hate, the role of hate and homophobia in the shooting, and rainbow flags/rainbows constructed by the use of a series of emojis, most often hearts. Affective topics in Tweets were found in varying proportions depending on the hashtags that were paired with #OrlandoStrong.

The following table provides a general indication of the affective topical content analyzed in this section. Since all of the content in this study will be compared to the general discourse community of #OrlandoStrong, #OrlandoStrong is listed here first, in bold, for easier comparison.

Table 2. Proportion of Affective Content by Hashtag Use

Aboutness-Driven Hashtag	Rainbow	Love	Hate
#OrlandoStrong	**48%**	**34.7%**	**4.5%**
#OrlandoStrong #SomosOrlando	75%		
#OrlandoStrong #OnePulse			
#OrlandoStrong #LoveIsLove		100%	31%
#OrlandoStrong #PrayForOrlando			25%
#OrlandoStrong #OrlandoUnitedDay #OnePulse	72%	76%	

Understanding the table.

Reading the table, one can see the Tweets represented by their hashtags are listed on the rows labeled on the left. The columns are organized by topical content present in the Tweets that contain those hashtags. The percentages signify the proportion of Tweets that contain affective topics in their content. Generally speaking, it is important to note that the presence of the

affective content increases from the general discourse community of #OrlandoStrong to the more specific discourse communities denoted by the hashtag pairings represented here in the table. In other words, as multiple hashtags were used together, more affective content was visible. The grey areas of the table are spaces where data was omitted for simplicity's sake. This data was collected but is not being used or displayed here for the purpose of this study and for the ease of reading the table.

The use of aboutness-marking hashtags with #OrlandoStrong (informational compositions) helped to disambiguate the discourse space that #OrlandoStrong created by better connecting relevant affective content. This section provides specific examples of Tweets that ambiguate and disambiguate affective topical content. These examples provide evidence for how the affective content of marginalized voices are better connected to one another by their hashtag use, intertextual connections that are less likely to occur in the general #OrlandoStrong discourse space.

This next section examines the presence of rainbows and rainbow progressions, which are used to signify both diversity and the LGBTQ+ community (see Swanson, 2015). The use of rainbows is an example of a specialized lexis utilized by #OrlandoStrong to show solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community and to display gay pride. It shows how the proportion of Tweets that used rainbows and rainbow-colored progressions was larger in the Tweets that included the aboutness-marking hashtags coded than in the general discourse space of #OrlandoStrong. As a result, the content of that space was effectively disambiguated so that affective topics like rainbows were more closely connected to one another, a relevant topic of intercommunication that furthered the shared goals and agenda of the #OrlandoStrong discourse community.

The Presence of Rainbows and Rainbow Progressions in #OrlandoStrong

Rainbow imagery, as is evident by its omnipresence in Pulse-related memorials that use #OrlandoStrong (see Figure 6), seems to be central to discourse concerning the Pulse shooting and thus an important theme when tracing Tweets that use #OrlandoStrong. The color progression of Red-Orange-Yellow-Green-Blue-Violet (ROYGBV progressions), which are also the colors commonly associated with the rainbow flag that is also referred to as the Gay Pride Flag or the LGBT Pride Flag (Simmons, 2015), is a symbol commonly used in Pulse-related content. It is of no coincidence that the Pulse shooting was an event that directly affected the LGBTQ+ community, as the shooting targeted a gay nightclub. Before considering the presence of rainbows and ROYGBV progressions in #OrlandoStrong, it will be helpful to acknowledge briefly their presence in physical memorials related to Pulse in the Orlando area.

Rainbow-colored objects, words, and murals immediately surfaced in the aftermath of the Pulse shooting as a sign of solidarity, acceptance, and perseverance. Specifically, the bandshell at Lake Eola (Cordeiro, 2016), the spot where the candlelight vigil was held after the Pulse shooting happened, was repainted (financed in part by Disney) for the one-year anniversary of the Pulse shooting (see Figure 6). This rainbow-colored array is intended to be a message of welcome to the LGBTQ+ community targeted by the Pulse tragedy (Cordeiro, 2016).

Figure 6. Photo of bandshell at Lake Eola, Orlando

If the city can be considered a text (deCerteau, 1984), then the city is using a rainbow flag as a signifier for the LGBTQ+ community for engaging in discourse. As almost all the physical spaces used as memorials in Orlando contained rainbows and rainbow progressions, I expected to find rainbow progressions or emojis, " 🏳️‍🌈 " in the same proportion throughout the #OrlandoStrong discourse space. Surprisingly, I did not. I would have expected the physical and digital presence of Pulse-related discourse to reflect one another in content. However, when I looked at specific Tweets that used informational compositions (aboutness-marking) hashtags with #OrlandoStrong, the presence of content seemed to better reflect the Pulse-related discourse I witnessed in the physical city of Orlando. One of the more palpable examples of this is in the use of rainbow imagery, namely pride emoji flags and ROYGBV progressions.

What the data showed was that in the general #OrlandoStrong discourse space, the core category, less than half of the Tweets coded (48%) included rainbows or rainbow-colored

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progressions in some shape or form. What makes this number so surprising is that, reflecting against their omnipresence in the physical memorials, I expected that number to be at least 75% or higher. However, the topical content of Tweets that included aboutness-marking hashtags included rainbow emojis or rainbow-colored progressions in a much higher proportion. This is important because it shows that the same lexis, goals, and agendas were not shared by those in the discourse community who organized and populated physical memorials (especially the Pulse memorial at the site of the nightclub) with texts that included #OrlandoStrong on art and messages as those found in the general discourse space of #OrlandoStrong on Twitter. However, when I examined the Tweets with aboutness-marking hashtags, these proportions reflected more fairly the proportion of rainbow texts found in the physical memorials made by discourse community members and that included #OrlandoStrong in their text. Interestingly, some of the Tweets that used rainbows were not explicitly using them with explicit reference to the LGBTQ+ community, showing an ambiguated use of rainbows that blurred their significance to the Pulse shooting.

Examples of ambiguous rainbow content in #OrlandoStrong.

For example, the Tweet in Figure 7 was composed by Lake Marionettes, an account for the Lake Mary High School Cheering Team. Their use of rainbow emojis and #OrlandoStrong could indicate some kind of connection to the Pulse tragedy, but there is no explicit reference to Pulse, the shooting, or the LGBTQ+ community whatsoever.

Figure 7. Lake Marionettes' February 24th, 2017, at 2:32 p.m. #OrlandoStrong Tweet

If one can say that #OrlandoStrong, during the moment when this data was collected, possessed

an aboutness that related to the Pulse shooting, Tweets like these are representative of discursive

texts that ambiguate the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong, making it less relevant to what

#OrlandoStrong signifies as a discourse community. For example, this Tweet makes a claim that

the discourse space of #OrlandoStrong is a space to discuss content related to cheerleading,

student life, love, and rainbows. Rainbows are a specialized lexical utterance that the discourse

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community of #OrlandoStrong uses to signify solidarity with LGBTQ+ pride or gay pride. In this way, this Tweet and others like it ambiguate the signification of rainbows in #OrlandoStrong. Considering CDA, discursive moves like this can be viewed as an exercise of power, stalling, disrupting, and silencing that interrupts the relevant discourse for its community members (Huckin et al., 2015) who may be attempting to empathize, organize, memorialize, raise awareness, fundraise, or protest. A similar discursive ambiguation can be viewed in Figure 8.

In Figure 8, a rainbow progression of heart emojis is present, a specialized lexical sign used by #OrlandoStrong discourse community members; the use of a variety of colored emojis to construct a rainbow could be read here as more connected to colorful affection for cheerleading than any explicit statement that would connect them to the LGBTQ+ community, or more specifically gay pride. This Tweet, much like Figure 7, ambiguates the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong and its use of rainbow imagery to signify the LGBTQ+ community and its connection to the Pulse shooting.

Figure 8. NCA Staff - Sean's February 27th, 2017, at 8:36 a.m. #OrlandoStrong Tweet

NCA Staff-Sean's Tweet is also an example of a Tweet that uses a link to reference a cheering competition taking place in Orlando for the competitive cheer team Top Gun. These two Tweets, Figures 7 and 8, both carry signifying messages of rainbows as connected to cheerleading instead of Pulse-related content, ambiguating the lexical use of rainbows and heart emojis in the discourse space of #OrlandoStrong.

To bring this example back to the reflection on physical memorials, one could reflect on the appropriateness of writing #OrlandoStrong in this message. Hopefully, a person would think twice before posting cheerleading content like these Tweets on the physical Pulse memorial at the site of the shooting (where someone might challenge the author for an explanation of why this content belongs in that memorial space), when taking for granted that the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong is connected to the Pulse shooting. The relevance of Figures 7 and 8 to the Pulse shooting is suspect. When this irrelevant content exists alongside more relevant content in the #OrlandoStrong discourse space, a consequence of the hashtag's public and immediate nature, it works to ambiguate the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong and the signification of its specialized lexis.

This does not imply that these Tweets are necessarily trolling or written with malice against the discourse surrounding the Pulse shooting. Tweets like these most likely integrate the hashtag #OrlandoStrong in order to connect themes of strength, competition, and perseverance (Crawford, 2016) to the city of Orlando, in this case connecting Orlando cheerleading to their subjective interpretation of the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong. There is no denying that these athletes are performing in Orlando and are physically, mentally, and spiritually strong. However, to make a comparison, one might reconsider using #NeverForget to tag a Tweet that brags about one's memory skills, as it is a discourse space used to discuss the Holocaust and more recently

the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting; I would argue it is the same with Tweets like Figures 7 and 8 as it pertains to #OrlandoStrong.

Perhaps authors like the ones in Figures 7 and 8 understand that #OrlandoStrong is a discourse space vibrant with activity and traffic, and their use of the hashtag will help to leverage the visibility of their Tweets. But these Tweets are being written into a digital discourse space where less than a year earlier, that very space had begun to be used to memorialize, mourn, discuss, coordinate efforts to protest, and fundraise for what was at the time the worst mass shooting on U.S. soil in history. The ethics of practices that ambiguate discourse with content that isn't relevant to its aboutness will be explored further in Chapter Five.

As the collected data on #OrlandoStrong was coded, it became apparent that the use of rainbows in Tweets using hashtags as informational compositions, namely #OrlandoStrong #SomosOrlando and #OrlandoStrong #OrlandoUnitedDay #OnePulse, included content relevant to the Pulse shooting and the communities targeted and affected by its violence. Not only was there a higher proportion of rainbows present in the Tweets containing the aforementioned hashtags, but their signification was more explicitly connected to the Pulse shooting, which disambiguated the content of the discourse community. This next section provides examples of that disambiguation in specific Tweets.

Disambiguated rainbow content in #OrlandoStrong.

For Tweets that included #OrlandoStrong #SomosOrlando, rainbow content was found in 75% of the proportion of Tweets in that discourse space—almost twice the proportion found in the core category of #OrlandoStrong. This increase in concentration can be explained by the fact that #SomosOrlando was a hashtag that the Latinx community was using to engage in Spanish and Spanglish discourse surrounding the Pulse shooting. It seems less likely that someone using

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both #OrlandoStrong and #SomosOrlando (who would be familiar with the agendas and goals of the discursive use of those hashtags as well as the signification of the specialized lexis of rainbows) would use those hashtags to tag a cheerleading tournament, for example, as that content would be absolutely irrelevant to the agendas and goals of #OrlandoStrong.

As the data shows, searching for Tweets that used #SomosOrlando with #OrlandoStrong removed Tweets of those who would Tweet about the perseverance and strength of those engaged in Orlando-based activities that had nothing to do with the Pulse shooting, which can be attributed as a consequence of the hashtag-convention that is "[X]Strong" (Crawford, 2016). This means that the collection of Tweets utilizing the informational composition #OrlandoStrong #SomosOrlando contained fewer non-relevant elements that could ambiguate the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong.

Consider Figure 9 as an example of the power of hashtags to disambiguate its discourse space. This Tweet, sent by Orlando journalist Jose Luis Dieppa, invokes the discourse community of #OrlandoStrong and includes ROYGBV imagery at the site of the Pulse memorial. Dieppa's use of rainbow imagery makes a relevant connection to the aboutness one would expect in #OrlandoStrong's discourse community: topical content related to LGBTQ+, gay pride, diversity and the specific tragedy of the Pulse shooting (represented here by 49 plants signifying the 49 victims who lost their lives at Pulse).

Figure 9. Jose Luis Dieppa's April 22nd, 2017, at 8:43 p.m. #OrlandoStrong Tweet using Rainbows

Not only is #OrlandoStrong written on the physical memorial pictured in Figure 9, but this photograph was taken at the Pulse memorial site, tying the signification of this Tweet's use of rainbow imagery to #OrlandoStrong #SomosOrlando and the Pulse shooting. It also discusses content that is directly associated with Pulse: it considers how Earth Day and a shooting like Pulse can be connected through memorialization. This example shows how the specialized lexis, e.g., use of rainbow imagery to signify the LGBTQ+ themes, is more aligned with the discourse community of #OrlandoStrong, as opposed to the cheerleading contexts displayed in Figures 7 and 8.

Considering how Twitter places Tweets sharing hashtags in the same discourse space, these examples show how the aboutness of the hashtag can be (dis)ambiguated intertextually (Kristeva, 1980; Porter, 1986) by the interpretation that happens when adjacent Tweets are juxtaposed in the Twitter feed. In this specific case, the cheerleading Tweets use an item in the #OrlandoStrong lexis: rainbows, without regard for the rainbow's relevance as a signification of the LGBTQ+ community. However, this misuse doesn't happen as often when Tweets employ informational compositions like #OrlandoStrong #SomosOrlando. Its use of the lexis of rainbows is more consistently relevant to #OrlandoStrong's shared goals and agendas.

Similarly, in the discourse space of the informational composition #OrlandoStrong #OrlandoUnitedDay #OnePulse, rainbow content was present in 72% of its Tweets, much higher than the 48% proportion found in the general #OrlandoStrong core category. Additionally, Tweets using rainbows were more relevantly employed according to the specialized lexis of #OrlandoStrong (LGBTQ+ and/or gay pride). Figure 10 shows an example of this disambiguation of #OrlandoStrong's rainbow usage.

Figure 10. Capt. Santana's June 12, 2017, at 7:50 p.m. #OrlandoStrong Tweet with rainbow emoji

By utilizing the rainbow flag emoji, in lieu of using multi-colored hearts or other objects, Capt.

Santana's Tweet connects the rainbow flag and the Tweet itself more explicitly to themes

aligning with reference to the LGBTQ+ community, as the flag is accepted as a universal symbol

of the LGBTQ+ movement. Kairotically, this Tweet's use of the rainbow flag emoji becomes

more directly connected to the Pulse shooting as a consequence of the Tweet's date: the one-year

anniversary of the shooting. It also hashtags the OnePulse Foundation and #loveislove, further

connecting its context to Pulse-related topics through the use of informational composition. As I

have claimed, if the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong is a discourse space for considering Pulse and

its memorialization, then this Tweet's use of hashtags helps to disambiguate that aboutness

through its use of rainbow imagery, a specialized lexis, signifying the LGBTQ+ community.

Figure 11 is another example of informational compositions that help to disambiguate

through the use of hashtags, as its use of rainbows in the #OrlandoStrong #OrlandoUnitedDay

#OnePulse discourse space includes a rainbow-colored mural at the Pulse memorial. Consider

this Tweet from Vacation Kitty.

Figure 11. Vacation Kitty's #OrlandoStrong Tweet linking to Pulse Video

Again, Vacation Kitty's Tweet uses a link that shows rainbow-colored imagery, one that is physically and symbolically connected to the Pulse shooting. It even uses the @pulseorlando tag to directly connect this Tweet to the digital Pulse Twitter account. Its use of the Pulse memorial site, both physically and digitally, and its use of rainbow colors makes explicit its connection to the LGBTQ+ community. Therefore, this Tweet helps to disambiguate the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong through its use of rainbows connected to LGBTQ+ themes and multiple aboutness-marking hashtags like #ONEPulse and #OrlandoUnitedDay.

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In conclusion, after analyzing the ways that hashtags frame the proportion of content in discourse communities, if someone was looking to understand what rainbows signify in the content of the #OrlandoStrong discourse space, they would be much more likely to find LGBTQ+ signifying use of rainbows in Tweets with the informational compositions (aboutness-marking hashtags) addressed in this section than in the general #OrlandoStrong core category. Readers of those Tweets would find that their understanding of #OrlandoStrong's specialized lexis (rainbows in this case) were more relevantly connected, disambiguating their understanding of the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong. Those same rainbows and emojis using ROYGBV progressions were less present proportionately in the core category of #OrlandoStrong than in the discourse spaces of #OrlandoStrong #SomosOrlando and #OrlandoStrong #OrlandoUnitedDay #OnePulse. Therefore, using aboutness-marking hashtags in tandem with #OrlandoStrong is a successful rhetorical strategy for disambiguating the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong, a strategy that can be employed for discourse communities who wish to use hashtags as informational compositions to further their shared goals and agendas.

The Presence of Themes of Love

This section analyzes the next affective topic that was coded, content that references the topic of love. Because many in the LGBTQ+ and Latinx community felt that the Pulse shooting targeted them because of their identities, many chose to respond to this act of hate by pronouncing how much those two communities were loved. There were also sentiments expressed that the kinds of love represented in the LGBTQ+ community, a community that only recently gained the rights to marriage equality, were no less valuable than heteronormative love. This sentiment was most prominently referenced by Lin-Manuel Miranda in the sonnet he wrote and read at the Tony awards one week after the Pulse shooting happened, which emphasized that

"love is love is love is love is love is love is love is love cannot be killed or swept aside" ("Lin Manuel Miranda…," 2016). This speech inspired the hashtag #LoveIsLove to begin circulating on social media as a space for expressing support for and solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community by referencing this line in Miranda's sonnet. However, in the general discourse space, references of love were less present, and, if present, vaguer, whitewashed, homogenized, and less directly connected to LGBTQ+ and Latinx communities. This absence and vagueness ambiguated the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong through reckless use of its specialized lexis: the signification of love as a sign that expresses solidarity with the LGBTQ+ and Latinx community, often intersectionally. This analysis was conducted by tracking the use of the word love and the frequent use of heart emojis (see Chapter Three). The data shows that as more hashtags were employed as informational compositions in Tweets, the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong and its lexical use of love disambiguated accordingly.

This section considers the presence of content that references the topic of love as it pertains to this understanding of the aboutness of the core category of #OrlandoStrong. This section compares the general discourse space of #OrlandoStrong to the discourse space created by the informational compositions of #OrlandoStrong #LoveIsLove and #OrlandoStrong #OrlandoUnitedDay #OnePulse. Statements of love, when present in the core category, varied from generic statements about general feelings of affection to messages expressing statements of love against hatred and homophobia, alongside statements affirming the right for people to love romantically anyone they choose, with specific reference to their LGBTQ+ sexual orientation, in the Tweets that used aboutness-marking hashtags in tandem with #OrlandoStrong.

Ambiguated Love Content in the General Discourse Space of #OrlandoStrong

More specifically, content related to love was present least in the core category of #OrlandoStrong, in just 34.7% of all the Tweets coded. Although content referencing love varied from Tweet to Tweet, vaguer expressions of love were present in the core category. For example, Figure 12 is a Tweet from celebrity Justin Bieber expressing a vague expression of love.

Figure 12. Justin Bieber's June 16th, 2017, at 11:35 a.m. #OrlandoStrong Tweet

Four days after the shooting at Pulse, Justin Bieber Tweeted this message to his fans. From what I can gather, Bieber wanted his followers to know that his concert in Orlando would go on as planned (interestingly enough, he would use a projection of the text #OrlandoStrong on the stage in the majority of his stops on that tour). His gesture of "stand[ing] with Orlando in support" seemed to be with reference to the Pulse shooting, but he never made more specific comments about whom in Orlando he stood with, or whom in Orlando he sent love to. Was the target of the Pulse shooting then, for Justin Bieber, Orlando? Tweets like his ambiguate the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong and what it means to its discourse community. Less than a week after the shooting happened, people were unsure of the motivations of the shooter; however, generic statements like this expressing homogenized love, but not love expressed specifically for LGBTQ+ persons, Latinxs and other targeted communities the night of the shooting, leave

messages of support vague and non-contestable, thereby ambiguating #OrlandoStrong's aboutness as it pertains to its representation of LGBTQ+ and Latinx love.

This may feel as though it is an insignificant nuance, but consider how much space Bieber occupies in #OrlandoStrong just by Tweeting into it, as his "Belieb-ers" ReTweet his Tweets tens of thousands of times; it is especially important to note his contribution to ambiguating the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong. In other words, Bieber is a social media influencer (Bakshy et al., 2011) who appropriated the #OrlandoStrong space as leverage for his Purpose tour, or just as a way of including himself in a national conversation: hardly innocuous uses of #OrlandoStrong. This analysis of the power Bieber exerts over spaces he enters on Twitter is addressed to a greater extent in the section that analyzes marketing later in this chapter.

However, in the discourse space created by Tweets that used informational compositions like #OrlandoStrong #OrlandoUnitedDay #OnePulse, themes of love were present in 76% of those Tweets, nearly double the proportion (34.7%) present in the core category. Consider Figure 13 as an example of this disambiguation:

Figure 13. Monica's #OrlandoStrong Tweet at June 12th, 2017, at 5:02 a.m. with love themes

This Tweet makes explicit the connection between love and the Pulse shooting through its use of the Pulse logo, its rainbow progressions (ROYBGV) in the "o" of "not," and its mention of the 49 victims, not to mention the fact that it was Tweeted on the one-year anniversary of the shooting. This Tweet makes it explicit that the kind of love that beats hate and homophobia is the kind of love that signifies tolerance and acceptance, and that this will be achieved through continuing to perform acts of love in the community of Orlando—to not let those who hate win. In this way, #LoveIsLove works as an aboutness marker and makes it clear that references to love are used as a specialized lexis, speaking directly to love as it connects to acceptance of its

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many forms, and not just affection in a generic sense. That generic sense of love ambiguates the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong as it relates to its use of love as a specialized lexis. Therefore #OrlandoStrong #OrlandoUnitedDay #OnePulse is a space that used informational compositions to disambiguate vague references to love away from more direct significations of LGBTQ+ and Latinx love.

The following Tweet from user Corey Craig (see Figure 14) is another example of the kind of inclusive, LGBTQ+-signifying love evident in the specialized lexis of #OrlandoStrong.

Figure 14. Corey Craig's June 12th, 2017, at 9:05 a.m. Tweet including Love and #OrlandoStrong

By using #OrlandoStrong, the rainbow flag emoji, #LGBTQ, #gay, #Pride2017, #LoveIsLove and #lovewins together, this Tweet works to disambiguate #OrlandoStrong's aboutness from a space that includes vague gestures of generic love to a discourse space that expresses solidarity between all forms of love by making direct connections between the Tweet and the events of

Pulse. This signification becomes even more direct when considering its publication on the anniversary of the shooting. Because the Pulse shooting was seen as an attempt to terrorize, intimidate, and silence pride in and unapologetic displays of public love by those at a gay nightclub on Latin night, #OrlandoStrong became a discourse space that encouraged, validated, and defeated attempts to shame that love into a closeted space. By using these hashtags as informational compositions, this Tweet is an example of the disambiguation of the aboutness of the core category through its use of a lexis that makes statements about LGBTQ+ and Latinx love.

Figure 15 is another example of the disambiguation of #OrlandoStrong's aboutness as it concerns LGBTQ+ love and acceptance.

Figure 15. Jose Luis Dieppa's May 17th, 2017, at 6:08 p.m. #OrlandoStrong Tweet expressing Pulse and love-related themes

Hashtags like #OrlandoStrong, #LoveWins, and #LoveIsLove, when used alone, are brief and

ambiguous as descriptors of content, and can be easily made ambiguous as to what they signify

to discourse communities. But when used together (as informational compositions), like in

Figure 15, they help to frame the signification of discourse intertextually. Discourse that uses

hashtags in this fashion, then, make their lexis more difficult to ambiguate. Figure 15 shows an

image of survivors of the Pulse shooting alongside these aboutness-marking hashtags, like

#ActLoveGive, which evokes a signification that is difficult to deconstruct from solidarity with

the LGBTQ+ and Latinx community into vague expressions of love.

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In contrast, Justin Bieber's specific expression of the love he feels for Orlando in Figure 12 is homogenized, whitewashed, non-contestable, and nondescript—his use of love wraps its arms around so much ambiguous content that it makes no statement at all, aside from declaring his love for a city. Biebers presence ambiguates what references like #LoveWins and #LoveIsLove signify to the LGBTQ+ and Latinx community. Perhaps Bieber benefits from that ambiguity, allowing for those who read his statement to insert whatever kind of signification for love they wish to connect to it (he won't alienate anyone who hates the LGBTQ+ or Latinx communities by saying he loves Orlando). But the examples presented in Figures 14 and 15 use love as a specialized lexis that expresses sentiments of solidarity and acceptance to the LGBTQ+ and Latinx community in ways that Bieber's Tweet does not, although it makes itself available to that interpretation. Vague expressions of love that are not used with regard to the specialized lexis of the discourse community diminish the signification of expressions that adhere to that lexis, which ambiguates the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong. Tweets that use informational compositions, hashtags like #LoveWins and #LoveIsLove together, ones that make much more direct statements about the specific love they reference, disambiguate that signification by concentrating their discourse into a space unoccupied by Tweets that don't share the same agendas and goals of the #OrlandoStrong community. Tweets that express love alongside Pulse-related content help to fight the vague expressions of love and the mystery of what they may signify in the core category.

Tweets that employ the lexical use of love, like Figures 14 and 15, encourage the LGBTQ+ community to overcome the fear of the dangers that come with being gay in America, which shootings like Pulse could instill. Vague expressions of love do not make that same statement. When the word love is thrown around ambiguously in a space where its signification

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is tethered to expressions of validation, encouragement, and acceptance, Tweets like Figures 14

and 15 may lose their power to provide courage to and reassure those who are afraid. These

findings are significant because, once again, they show how the space of #OrlandoStrong can be

ambiguated by irrelevant content. However, when one looks at Tweets that bear both

#OrlandoStrong and aboutness-marking hashtags, their content becomes disambiguated because

their consistent use of love as a specialized lexis creates a shared signification for solidarity with

the LGBTQ+ and Latinx community.

Content Related to Hate in #OrlandoStrong

Similar to those Tweets that contained statements with the specialized lexis of love,

Tweets in the core category discussed the topic of hate, often paired together in expressions

concerning the metaphor of love's victory over hate in battle. Tweets coded as possessing the

topic of hate included statements as vague as merely disliking something to statements more

directly connected to the Pulse shooting, considering how homophobia or just pure hatred can

fuel actions that lead to the loss of innocent life. Also, Pulse has been considered a hate crime by

some, although there is still disagreement surrounding the depiction of Pulse as a hate crime,

whether the shooting was fueled by the shooter's internalized homophobia (see Jeltsen, 2018;

Taylor-Coleman, 2016) or if it should be classified as a tragedy, as there are competing political

benefits and interests in the classification of Pulse (Ogles, 2017). At times, #OrlandoStrong's

discourse space was used to address love's victory over hate, the role of hatred and homophobia

in the shooting, its aftermath, the LGBTQ+ lived experience as a target of hatred, and the

political effect of determining a classification for the shooting.

Looking at the total recorded Tweets in this study, the core category of #OrlandoStrong,

only 4.5% of Tweets included content that related to the topic of hate, whereas in the discourse

space of #OrlandoStrong #LoveIsLove, the presence of hate-related content was more than triple

that at 31%. For example, Figure 16, a Tweet from Marjery N. Lopez, discusses how love can

fight against hate. Lopez includes a picture of Pulse in the Tweet tying these statements to the

Pulse shooting directly.

Figure 16. Marjery N. Lopez's April 1st, 2017, at 11:29 a.m. #OrlandoStrong Tweet with hate themes

Figure 16 expresses hate as a specialized lexis with regard to its role in the Pulse shooting.

Similarly, Figure 17 expresses connections between hate and the Pulse shooting. *Palette*

Magazine, whose Twitter handle is @PaletteLGBT, is a magazine that discusses LGBTQ+

related content, among other content. Their use of #LoveIsLove is paired with

#WeWillNotLetHateWin among other informational compositions. *Palette* even links a *Miami*

Herald article to their own reflection on the actions of Pulse, on the one-year anniversary when

this Tweet was posted.

Figure 17. Palette Magazine's June 12th, 2017, at 1:52 p.m. #OrlandoStrong Tweet with hate themes

Similarly, Sharmi Shari posted a Tweet that used informational compositions on the one-year

anniversary of the Pulse shooting as well. As Figure 18 shows, Sharma includes the text "Hate

will Never win" and includes #pulse and #LoveIsLoveIsLoveIsLove in the text of the Tweet.

Figure 18. Sharmi Shari's June 12th, 2017, at 6:04 a.m. #OrlandoStrong Tweet with hate themes

Figures 16, 17, and 18 all discuss the Pulse shooting explicitly, with reference to how hate must be counteracted by love. Figure 18 makes reference to Lin-Manuel Miranda's Tony Awards sonnet concerning recognition and acceptance of the sameness of all forms of love. Figures 17 and 18 both discuss how love triumphs over hate, especially with regard to the Pulse shooting. Figure 16 draws attention to how the community of Orlando united as a response to the hate that motivated the Pulse shooting. In this way, these examples all make use of the specialized lexis that signifies hatred against LGBTQ+ persons and homophobia.

These examples are significant because they show how within the informational composition space of #LoveIsLove #OrlandoStrong, the content involves the discussion of hate against LGBTQ+ and Latinx community members and the Pulse shooting, and the response of the community to that hate in the aftermath of the shooting. This aligns much more relevantly with the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong discourse community.

Relevant Tweets about Hate without Aboutness-Marking Hashtags

This doesn't mean that all the Tweets not found in #OrlandoStrong #LoveIsLove neglected the topic of hate; Figure 13 uses the phrase "we will not let hate win" in its imagery, and it doesn't use #LoveIsLove, although it does use other hashtags employed as informational compositions. The Tweets that discussed hate in the core category made up only 4.5% of the

content. Said differently, this meant that less than one in every twenty Tweets that included

#OrlandoStrong referenced hate outright. I have provided several examples of these Tweets

below.

Figure 19. Nathan Bryant's June 12th, 2017, at 5:20 a.m. #OrlandoStrong Tweet with hate themes

In Figure 19, Bryant's Tweet includes similar messages concerning hate as Figures 16, 17, and

18 do, but (aside from being Tweeted on the anniversary of the shooting) without as many

indicators of aboutness related to the Pulse shooting. Specifically, his use of "we" implies

inclusivity as a member of the #OrlandoStrong discourse community. This is an example of the

kind of messages that included topics of hate that were in a much higher concentration in the

discourse space of #OrlandoStrong #LoveIsLove, and less proportionally common in the core

category. Intertextually, if someone had Tweeted about Orlando City Soccer or about being a

good citizen of Orlando, and that Tweet was placed next to this one in the feed, this Tweet's

meaning might have been interpreted differently—perhaps a comment on people who hate

soccer, or about doing a generic act of good in the community as a way to make the community

of Orlando stronger.

Another example of a Tweet discussing hate against LGBTQ+ community members can be seen in Figure 20.

Figure 20. g r a c e f u l ~'s June 12th, 2017, at 5:08 a.m. #OrlandoStrong Tweet with hate themes

This Tweet from user "g r a c e f u l ~" in Figure 20 makes more explicit the connection between the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong and the use of hate as a specialized lexis signifying homophobia via the use of the rainbow flag emoji. Again, this Tweet echoes the same sentiments as those that make up the 31% of Tweets in the informational composition #OrlandoStrong #LoveIsLove. It even echoes the same phrases, although the phrase "We will not let hate win" is not hashtagged like it is in Figure 17. This means that Figure 20 would be placed in a discourse space where less than two Tweets out of forty (4.5%) would echo sentiments about hate at all, let alone specific hatred against LGBTQ+ and Latinx communities. Tweets like these two would reach an audience that used relevant lexis were they to employ the informational compositions shown earlier in this chapter.

These findings are important because it shows evidence of how intertextuality plays a role in forming context in discourse communities, especially ones driven by hashtag use. In order to better disambiguate what specific hate Figures 19 and 20 speak to, using aboutness-marking

hashtags like #LoveIsLove would set these two Tweets adjacent to Tweets like Figures 16, 17, and 18. The tweets in Figures 16, 17, and 18 make explicit their use of hate with connections to LGBTQ+ and homophobia. Figures 19 and 20, when placed adjacent to these more explicit references, take on that signification intertextually through their use of a shared lexis (hate as a reference for homophobia). When discourse communities use words like love and hate to signify complex concepts like sexual orientation and homophobia, discourse that does not use those words with the same intention make the lexical reference less relevant, less clear. In other words, Tweets that use the same aboutness-marking hashtags are placed together in a discourse space where roughly one in every three Tweets reference hate consistent with the specialized lexis. Not only do these examples show the role that intertextuality plays between Tweets in a discourse space, but they also show how the aboutness of a hashtag, like #OrlandoStrong, can be disambiguated by the presence of aboutness-marking hashtags used as information compositions.

As I have shown throughout this project, #OrlandoStrong is a phrase that is used inside and outside of digital spaces to signify the efforts of a discourse community with shared goals and agendas: to express solidarity with Latinx and LGBTQ+ persons, as an acceptance and expression of love of all kinds, and as an expression of the power of that love to defeat hate and homophobia. By choosing to organize through a public and rapidly shifting digital tool like a hashtag, inevitably, the discourse space became occupied by content that did not always adhere to the lexis of the #OrlandoStrong discourse community, thereby ambiguating the aboutness of the core category. In order to better manage the public and non-hierarchical nature of hashtags, some discourse community members employed aboutness-marking hashtags to much success and thereby disambiguated the discourse space of #OrlandoStrong, facilitating more relevant

intercommunication among members of that community so that they could further their shared goals and agendas.

Hashtags, Relevance, and Disambiguation

Considering that discourse communities (see Swales, 1990) are defined by a set of shared agendas and goals and that they often share a common lexis used for intercommunication, the use of hashtags as informational compositions help to facilitate more relevant connections among discourse members, i.e., intertextually among Tweets in #OrlandoStrong. This means that when a Tweet includes only #OrlandoStrong in addition to its textual or visual content, unless it is shared in a kairotic moment like the anniversary of the Pulse shooting, it leaves its specialized lexis open to ambiguation. This is because in the core category of #OrlandoStrong, there is less intertextual reinforcement from Tweet to Tweet because its overall content doesn't share the same concentration of relevant intercommunication. Words that might carry deeper signification than their denotation (specialized lexis like hate, love, and rainbows/rainbow imagery) might lose their signification when placed next to ambiguous and irrelevant content. Intertextually, the surrounding discourse (other Tweets sharing that specific hashtag) helps to point to those lexical significations by their shared use of lexis as a piece of discourse used by discourse community members. Tweets that shared multiple hashtags were much more consistent with their use of specialized lexis and therefore reinforced the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong.

In conclusion, affective topics in #OrlandoStrong were present in higher concentrations proportionately in the discourse space created by Tweets that used informational compositions than the presence of affective topics in the general #OrlandoStrong discourse space. Rainbow imagery, topics of love, and topics of hate were all more relevantly connected from Tweet to Tweet by the use of aboutness-marking hashtags. The use of hashtags intertextually promotes a

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disambiguated aboutness for the discourse community of #OrlandoStrong, an aboutness that is more ambiguated in the core category of #OrlandoStrong.

Disambiguating Aboutness: Irrelevant Tweets and their Content

At this point, it is important to also consider the content provided by users who do not share the goals and agendas of the #OrlandoStrong discourse community. So, what content did the Tweets that ambiguated the #OrlandoStrong discourse space with irrelevant content specifically include? This next section shows examples of Tweets from influencers and institutions with power that ambiguated the general discourse space of #OrlandoStrong through leveraging #OrlandoStrong as a space for marketing.

On the Contrary: The Presence of Marketing

The analysis of #OrlandoStrong conducted in this chapter has up to this point showed how the proportion of affective topics (the presence of content that includes rainbows, love, and hate) could be found in a higher proportion in the Tweets that included informational compositions: the use of multiple hashtags like #OrlandoUnitedDay, #OrlandoUnited, #SomosOrlando, #OnePulse, #PrayForOrlando, and #LoveIsLove when paired with #OrlandoStrong. The reason for the difference in proportion of content is because the general discourse space of #OrlandoStrong contained much more content that was not relevant to the #OrlandoStrong discourse community's shared agendas and goals.

As opposed to its proportion of relevant content, the sheer number of Tweets in the #OrlandoStrong discourse space was larger, as it included more topics related to marketing. Tweets containing marketing topics, while still including #OrlandoStrong in their texts, neglected the shared goals and agendas of the discourse community of #OrlandoStrong. This neglect worked to ambiguate the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong by displacing the adjacency of

Tweets that worked to further those shared goals and agendas. Their presence in the discourse

space of #OrlandoStrong offset intertextual connections between relevant Tweets and dissolved

the signification that arises from a consistent use of specialized lexis.

Marketing topics.

Table 3 shows the proportion of Tweets present in the same discourse spaces analyzed in

previous sections of this chapter. This table shows the difference between the proportion of

content in those discourse spaces.

Table 3: Proportion of Marketing Content

Aboutness:	Marketing
#OrlandoStrong	**26.4%**
#OrlandoStrong #OnePulse #OrlandoUnitedDay	<1%
#OrlandoStrong #LoveIsLove	7.4%

Some users who Tweeted with #OrlandoStrong considered it appropriate to use that

hashtag for the discussion of content not relevant to the discourse community memorializing and

mourning the Pulse shooting. Others wrote ambiguous content that displaced relevant content.

Consider Figure 21, a Tweet from "Mikhail Thompson."

Figure 21. Mikhail Thompson's June 12th, 2017, at 4:58 p.m. #OrlandoStrong Tweet

Aside from the date of the Tweet being the anniversary of the Pulse tragedy, this Tweet offers no

other content that might support the goals and agendas of the discourse community. It may alert

others who follow Thompson to consider #OrlandoStrong on this anniversary, but it offers no

messages of solidarity, support, antagonism, or any relevant content whatsoever, aside from

#OrlandoStrong. Perhaps it spreads awareness on the anniversary of the shooting. Tweets like

Mikhail Thompson's in Figure 21 are examples of what I found often in the #OrlandoStrong core

category: Tweets that seem to do little more than occupy space, rather than connecting content

from one discourse community with another through hashtag use that acts as metatags (e.g.,

Zappavigna, 2015). It seems to be making an ambiguous kind of statement, but when discourse

in the #OrlandoStrong community is analyzed, all a Tweet like this can really be is a link to the

discourse, which, in a way, may be arguing that this discourse is valid and worth paying attention

to. However, it does not further the agendas and goals of the discourse community or share its

specific lexis.

One can see how the absence of Tweets like this might lend the relevant content more

adjacency, showcase how it is more aligned with #OrlandoStrong's aboutness, and allow for

more intercommunication to take place between discourse community members intertextually. With the absence of these kinds of Tweets, there is more space for the relevant Tweets to impact discourse. In the #OrlandoStrong core category, one of the largest contributors to non-relevant content was marketing topics.

Marketing and ambiguation in #OrlandoStrong.

This section analyzes the non-relevant content in Tweets posted by corporate structures that leveraged the #OrlandoStrong discourse space for their own promotion and brand awareness. The ethics of such moves are discussed in Chapter Five. However, examples of marketing topics here can be found in #OrlandoStrong where corporate entities seem to be providing solidarity and support for the affected members of the Pulse community in Orlando, through their visibility in #OrlandoStrong, without actually sharing the goals and agendas of the discourse community. This is important because, although they may possess diverse intentions, these Tweets distance the more relevant content from one another and diffuse the signification of their specialized lexis, stifling the impact the relevant Tweets can make on the discourse. Laestadius & Wahl (2017) have shown that corporations understand the value of creating and leveraging hashtag spaces for their own purposes.

This next section first addresses examples of corporate entities who use aboutness-marking hashtags and share the goals, agendas, and specific lexis of the discourse community of #OrlandoStrong. After that, the chapter focuses on attempts at marketing in the core category that possess content that is not relevant to the agendas and goals of the discourse community of #OrlandoStrong.

Corporate Discourse Community Members

Not all corporations dismissed the shared goals and agenda of the #OrlandoStrong

discourse community. Consider Figure 22, a Tweet from a local Orlando brewery, the Orange

Blossom Brewing Company ("OBBC"); it uses rainbow-colored writing, perhaps to align its

company name with the LGBTQ+ community. The Tweet relies on hashtags that speak to

community cohesion and the Pulse community, as well as the kairos of the Tweet, published two

days prior to the one-year anniversary of the Pulse shooting. By simply being posted, it could be

read as an attempt to sell beer or improve brand awareness, but there are no overt attempts to

make sales. Its message simply seems to be one of support, or, at its most self-involved, aligning

its brewery sympathetically to the shooting at Pulse. It is important to note that, unlike the

following examples of marketing Tweets, OBBC uses informational compositions alongside its

use of #OrlandoStrong. Considering its use of rainbow imagery, its Pulse-related themes, and its

use of kairos, this serves as an example of a corporate entity that shares the specific lexis, goals,

and agendas of the #OrlandoStrong discourse community.

Figure 22. OBBC's June 10th, 2017, at 8:11 a.m. #OrlandoStrong and marketing Tweet

OBBC, aside from its name being the brewing company, makes no explicit attempt to sell beer through this Tweet. This might be the mildest form of marketing found in this discourse space.

Similarly, Bern's Steak House in Tampa, Florida, posted a Tweet with similar characteristics as OBBC. Bern's Steak House (see Figure 23 below) also uses the specific lexis of rainbow imagery to align their business with #OrlandoStrong and its discourse community's goals on the anniversary of Pulse.

Figure 23. Bern's Steak House's June 11th, 2017, at 8:01 a.m. #OrlandoStrong marketing Tweet

Additionally, they make sure to discuss the victims of the Pulse tragedy, using a purple (a color

often associated with gay rights) heart to signify their love for the LGBTQ+ community,

alongside informational compositions like #OrlandoUnitedDay, #OnePulse, and #Pridemonth

(which the LGBTQ+ community celebrates in June). These two Tweets can certainly be viewed

as leveraging the space of #OrlandoStrong and #OnePulse for their own brand recognition and

exposure, but it is important to note that they offer with that branding an additional gesture of

support for the community affected by the shooting at Pulse and remembrance of the community

as the one-year anniversary approached, two shared goals and agendas of the discourse

community, albeit a homogenized version of that support.

Compare this brand alignment of OBBC and Bern's Steakhouse to other marketing

efforts that are less aligned with shared goals and agendas between brands, corporate entities and

#OrlandoStrong's discourse community, and more singularly aligned with sales. For example,

consider Figure 24, a Tweet from "Tuan Ngyuen."

Figure 24. Tuan Nguyen's June 5th, 2017, at 9:42 a.m. marketing Tweet in #OrlandoStrong

Nguyen's Tweet seems to merely be hawking bracelets with customizable hashtag inscriptions.

Notice the outrage in the comment, "They're making money off of this?" The use of

#OrlandoStrong that includes non-relevant content ambiguates what the aboutness might mean for people going there not to purchase opportunistic, Pulse-related merchandise (whose profits do not go to help the victims or their families), but rather forces people to reconsider what #OrlandoStrong signifies and how it as a discourse space helps to further the shared agendas and goals of the community. Nguyen's Tweet makes use of four different hashtags in order to gain exposure in spaces where people might want #PrayforOrlando memorabilia, but it makes zero effort to further any goals or agendas. This is a standard example of marketing attempts at leveraging this discourse space. It is detached from the discourse taking place about Pulse, and it feels arbitrary and opportunistic. These findings are important because they may reveal some of the motivations for the migration of #OrlandoStrong discourse from #OrlandoStrong to #OrlandoUnitedDay within a year of the shooting.

Purpose, Power, and Presence: Justin Bieber's Purpose Tour

Scholars (Carter, 2016; Evans et al., 2017; Grave, 2017; Kim et al., 2013) have recognized the power that celebrity influencers wield in shaping contexts, encouraging participation, and drawing traffic to and away from specific hashtags. No other celebrity made more use of the discourse space of #OrlandoStrong than Justin Bieber and his immense number of followers. Bieber's use of the space accounted for an immense amount of traffic, specifically ReTweets of his comments. Consider Figure 25, Justin Bieber's Tweet using #OrlandoStrong to promote his Purpose tour.
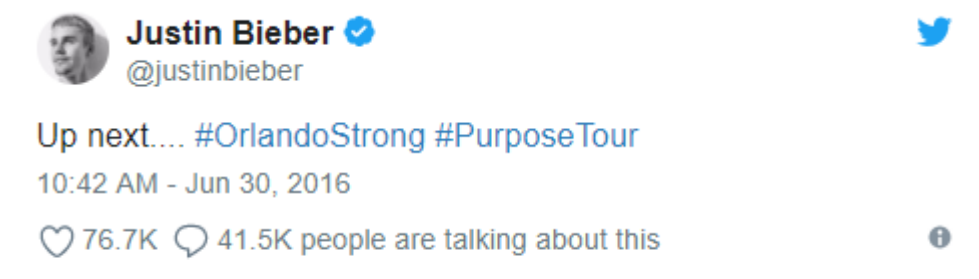
Figure 25. Justin Bieber's June 30th, 2016, at 10:42 a.m. #OrlandoStrong marketing Tweet

Bieber's Tweet disregards any connection to the Pulse shooting or the LGBTQ+ community;
rather, he uses the discourse space to promote his Purpose Tour less than three weeks after the
shooting happened. As a response to some backlash, Bieber would go on to dedicate the tour to
the Pulse shooting, and would emblazon his Tweets with #OrlandoStrong afterward as a measure
of contrition or branding. He even included a tribute at a point in the concert itself which
included scrolling the 49 victims' names on stage during a somber moment as a memorial.
Actions aside, however, he certainly used the discourse space of #OrlandoStrong to swing
attention and traffic in his tour's favor without regard for the shared agendas and goals of the
discourse community.

Bieber's power as a social media influencer is impressive and potent. A celebrity like
Bieber is a heavy hitter on Twitter, only the second person ever to achieve over 100 million
followers at the time of these Tweets. When he Tweets into any discourse space, he brings with
him the attention of 106 million followers ("Belieb-ers"), who ReTweet almost everything he
Tweets. Bieber's Tweets, unsurprisingly, were the most ReTweeted Tweets in the entire
#OrlandoStrong discourse space, occupying the most likes and ReTweets of any Tweet to

include #OrlandoStrong during the time the sample data was collected. Considering that CDA views the occupation of space as a display of power on Twitter (Hermida, 2015; Vicari, 2017), Bieber's Tweets effectively displaced those Tweets from much less powerful users, those with fewer followers to like, link, and ReTweet their Tweets.

This is how power differentials, like the one Bieber uses to his tour's advantage, can further marginalize the powerless, by stripping them of their discourse space in social media. In this way, #OrlandoStrong became an echo chamber at times for Bieber's Tweets during the month when the most relevant discourse concerning the Pulse shooting was taking place. If someone intentionally wanted to disrupt that discourse at its most critical moment, that would be the time and method to do so. Although I can't speak to Bieber's intentions, even if he blundered into displacing the already marginalized voices intercommunicating in this space, does that necessarily excuse his behavior, or change the outcome? I cannot help but think that some of the motivations for relocating the discourse community's organizing space from #OrlandoStrong to #OrlandoUnitedDay were to avoid the reach of Bieber's power.

Because of his ethically questionable use of #OrlandoStrong, it is important to repeat the statement that this analysis does not assume intention, nor is it interested in it. Bieber's example isn't one used to show his ignorance or neglect, but merely his discursive abuse of power. His example shows how the combination of timing, power, and presence can disrupt digital discourse and change its focus, even a hashtag's aboutness, in minutes. Users with institutional power, corporate power, or even celebrity status can leverage their considerable power in these ways to occupy digital space via hashtags. How could anyone go into #OrlandoStrong and speak or read about the Pulse shooting without the combined presence of Bieber's voice and his followers strategically redirecting the content of #OrlandoStrong toward Bieber's Pulse tour? This raises

the question of whether #OrlandoStrong's aboutness includes Bieber and his tour, and, judging

from the proportion of its presence in the core category, the data sadly show that it does.

Bieber was certainly aware of the Pulse shooting, perhaps only with reference to how it

affected his career, but he made sure to address his fans on the night of the Pulse shooting to

inform them that he'd still be coming to Orlando to perform on June 30th. He also made sure to

make it clear that he "stands with Orlando in support" and that he "loves you, Orlando"—a

gesture of solidarity that may have been a source of comfort. But to whom specifically? That

Tweet is included in Figure 26.

Figure 26. Justin Bieber's June 16th, 2016, at 11:35 a.m. #OrlandoStrong marketing Tweet

However, when considering the amount of ReTweets and Likes that Justin Bieber would receive

for anything his account Tweets, his three Tweets shown here in this section made up a

whopping 23% of the entire core category. This meant that approximately one in every four

Tweets a person read or wrote that included #OrlandoStrong referred to Bieber-related content.

What is important to note is that Bieber's Tweets don't share the lexis, goals and agendas of the

discourse community of #OrlandoStrong or attempt to further them. In fact, one could argue that

it uses its power to reshape those goals and agendas, ambiguating the aboutness of

#OrlandoStrong.

Of the three Tweets Bieber composed, Figure 27 shows the single most ReTweeted and liked Tweet in the entire #OrlandoStrong data set collected for this study.

Figure 27. Justin Bieber's June 30th, 2016, at 10:47 p.m. #OrlandoStrong marketing Tweet

During the Purpose Tour, Bieber made sure to show the 49 victims' names scrolling on a backdrop during his song "Purpose." It is a touching gesture. However, one can't help but consider how Bieber's response to the Pulse shooting includes none of the specific lexis that the discourse community uses: no mention of LGBTQ+ content, no rainbows, no mention of hate, or how love wins over hate, or how this was a hate crime, no mention of memory or memorials, no fundraising, no activism, and most incredulously, no specific mention of the Pulse shooting in

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any of his Tweets. In this way Bieber's use of #OrlandoStrong ambiguated the aboutness of the discourse space, as these three Tweets make up a substantial proportion of content collected in the core category.

Because his Purpose Tour coincided with the aftermath of the Pulse tragedy, perhaps Bieber understood that the easiest way for him to alert the Orlando population of his sympathy and his business plans was to address that audience directly via #OrlandoStrong. His use of #OrlandoStrong no doubt helped to surge the hashtag and keep it at a trending status, but it had already been trending when he wrote into it. His occupation of that space also diffused and separated every fourth Tweet from intercommunication, disrupting the attempts to further the shared goals and agendas of #OrlandoStrong.

It should also be noted that on the one-year anniversary of Pulse, Bieber Tweeted nothing, not to the space of #OrlandoUnitedDay or even to the often-used #OrlandoStrong. Coincidentally, he was no longer on tour either. One would imagine that someone whose sympathies lay so heavily with the city of Orlando and the Pulse tragedy might have addressed that community who so readily ReTweeted and responded to his Tweets. These Tweets show how corporate narratives and Tweets exhibiting marketing content were more abundant in the general discourse space of #OrlandoStrong, whereas Tweets connecting content sharing the values and agendas of the discourse community were more present proportionately in the informational compositions described in the study.

Conclusion

#OrlandoStrong is a discourse community whose aboutness was ambiguated by the influx of non-relevant content, in many different ways. Originally used as the rallying hashtag for the Pulse tragedy, #OrlandoStrong quickly became occupied by various competing interests and

agendas whose content may have overlapped at times, while at other times the content seemed to include conflicting agendas. This finding is made most evident by the drastic difference in the proportion of content found in the core category of #OrlandoStrong and in the discourse found in tweets that used hashtags as informational compositions, i.e., #OrlandoStrong #OnePulse #OrlandoUnitedDay, #OrlandoStrong #OnePulse, #OrlandoStrong #PrayforOrlando, #OrlandoStrong #LoveisLoveisLove, and #OrlandoStrong #SomosOrlando.

This analysis reveals something important about hashtag use that scholarship on hashtags and discourse communities has yet to emphasize about the value of hashtags: that they aren't merely organizational metatags, stylistic elements, and semantic descriptors, but rhetorical tools that can be used by discourse community members to strategically connect their discourse and better fend off the marginalization and silencing that happens when power disambiguates content. In this way, hashtags can be used as tools for challenging the power that influencers and horizontal networks exert, which can stand as impediments to interpreting the specialized lexis of discourse, a critical element for the function of discourse communities.

Addressing audiences and understanding audiences is something effective rhetoricians do (Burke, 1969). In order to be more rhetorically effective, discourse community members need to be aware of the spaces they use to further their shared goals and agenda. When their specific lexis becomes ambiguated, they can use their intercommunication to migrate to spaces where their voices won't be marginalized by corporate entities and social media influencers. Hashtags, when used as informational compositions, make this possible. This is one strategy that these findings support for fighting the suppression of voices by hegemony, e.g., the move from #OrlandoStrong to #OrlandoStrong #OrlandoUnitedDay. When migration is not a favorable strategy, digging deeper into the occupied discourse space through the consistent use of

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aboutness-marking hashtags as informational compositions can also be a way to disambiguate the aboutness of the hashtag used.

However, these strategies may only succeed momentarily before these new spaces become occupied and ambiguated by non-relevant content again. Because discourse communities use a specific lexis that relies on signification to make meaning, and share goals and agendas that are furthered by relevant intercommunication between members, discourse community members need to be vigilant over the spaces they organize; otherwise, the aboutness of what those communities work toward can be ambiguated and white-washed into vague slogans that have no specific relevance or even meaning. This conclusion is evidenced by the findings of #OrlandoStrong in this chapter. The next chapter focuses on the ethical implications of hashtag use. It considers how Paul Grice's Maxims of Cooperation, especially the maxim of relevance, can be used to analyze the ethics involved in discourse driven by hashtag use.

CHAPTER FIVE: HASHTAG ETHICS

Introduction

This chapter first provides closure to my research questions by answering them specifically. Then, in order to answer my final research question, which concerns hashtag ethics, I pause to reflect on the ethics of utilitarianism, cooperation, and information. These are all important ethical frameworks needed in order to understand how to how to form the ethics that coincide with digital writing that employs hashtags. This chapter's penultimate section offers recommendations for ethical hashtag use based on these ethical frameworks and how they apply to the observations and findings of #OrlandoStrong by digital writers. Finally, it offers an example of a pedagogical application of these ethical recommendations for hashtags in the writing classroom.

Answering Research Questions

In this section, I seek to address my research questions, providing answers for them and transitioning to a discussion in order to answer the final research question that concerns ethics. This section will address each research question individually.

Do hashtags have a fixed meaning?

In Chapter Three, the first research question I asked was whether #OrlandoStrong could "mean something more or less fixed," or whether a hashtag was "just a receptacle for any text." In response to that question: No, #OrlandoStrong does not have a fixed meaning. Scholars in linguistics and semiotics has long discussed how signs work to make meaning in a system of language. Over time, as semioticians Derrida (1963) and Saussure (1966) found, meaning is deferred in a system of language. Semiotics found that there is never a moment when meaning is consummate or totalized. Through the interaction between syntagmatic (the relationship between

signs in an utterance) and paradigmatic (the relationship between possible substitutions for signs used in an utterance) forces, semiotics explained how meaning is deferred in a system of signs. However, Derrida and Saussure were discussing the ways that systems of language in general work, reflecting on the oral and print traditions that were available at the time of their research.

As a scholar of the digital humanities, I find myself focusing on the digital medium as an indication of how we frame expectations of digital writing differently than we would necessarily do so with regard to orality and textuality. Therefore, because hashtags are digital, they should be emphasized in that way, and not as other medium-based theories do. What this emphasis on the digital means is that we should also discuss how rapidly meaning is deferred by multiple authors, in addition to how it is deferred due to syntagmatic and paradigmatic constraints. Later in this chapter, I show how some scholarship on hashtags has failed to emphasize the digital function of hashtags enough, choosing to focus on their semantic and stylistic functions instead, treating them as pieces of oral or textual utterances and not as digital utterances, which brings with it new rhetorical properties that involve intertextuality and aboutness. I believe that a functional ethics for hashtag use must emphasize the forces of intertextuality and aboutness that influence the deferral of meaning in hashtags, a social aspect only digital texts can facilitate. The social aspect I refer to is how hashtags create a co-authored topoi; in other words, that digital utterances may not have as much control over how they may be interpreted as a result of the stream of texts that move across that topoi from moment to moment, which is what determines from moment to moment a hashtag's aboutness. Said more simply, hashtags are more volatile signs because their meaning is deferred in three ways: syntagmatically, as hashtags are used as signs within the order of the utterance; paradigmatically, as the choice of hashtag includes the choice to not use other hashtags that could possibly be substituted; and intertextually, as this intertextual relationship

becomes a force of meaning because hashtags can't be ripped from their connections to other texts that use those hashtags.

For example, if I were to Tweet "I fell off my bike and looked down and saw #bloodandsoil below me," there would certainly be paradigmatic and syntagmatic forces that framed how meaning is deferred in the Tweet as an isolated utterance. However, the fact that #bloodandsoil is currently a neo-Nazi rallying cry, something I may have not known or intended in the utterance, the hashtag adds an intertextual force that also defers meaning and allows interpretation of my utterance to be considered alongside other xenophobic, racist, nationalist, and anti-Semitic texts. The point is I may have more control over the choice of where (syntagmatically) I compose and what (paradigmatically) hashtag I elect to use in an utterance, but I can't control the force of how other people use that same hashtag, nor can they exert control over how I use it. Hashtags therefore involve more social, co-authored meanings than an oral utterance can. More importantly, that is the hashtag's distinguishing aspect as a digital punctuation mark: to involve an utterance in a plurality of texts who negotiate the hashtag's aboutness as a collection of co-authors. Therefore, digital texts that utilize hashtags are bilocated topoi: existing at once in a vertical feed with relation to one another intertextually, and as individual utterances where the hashtag functions within sentences paradigmatically and syntagmatically as any sign does. To answer my question directly: no, hashtags don't have a fixed meaning by their inherent digital nature as networked rhetorical devices.

However, the second part of that question asks whether hashtags are just fluid receptacles, and the answer to that question is yes. The hashtag feed is a fixed digital location, but its content careens and streams with the traffic that is written into it through hashtag use. In this way there is a partially fixed aspect to the hashtag, in that texts that use them will all be

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organized in a specific space on the social media platform. What that means is that meaning is intertextually negotiated in a fixed location designated by the shared use of a hashtag.

This understanding pertains to the example of #OrlandoStrong in that, over the course of time it took to collect the data sample, the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong shifted and changed, and then reverted back to its principal meaning during the kairotic moment of the one-year anniversary. What's more, this shifting of aboutness affected the interpretation of the meaning of previous Tweets that had used #OrlandoStrong before the aboutness changed. What this shows is that although #OrlandoStrong's aboutness changed with much speed, its digital location on Twitter did not. All the texts were found in the same place, the #OrlandoStrong feed. The paradox of the hashtag is that while its meaning changes in more volatile ways than oral or print based media can, its topoi remains fixed.

Do hashtags function similarly to print traditions?

The second research question I asked was whether the meaning of a hashtag changed more or less as traditional definitions of words do. The short answer to this question is yes, but with the potential to do so with increased speed. Because hashtags are digital tools, they are not slowed by the wheels of print publication and the hierarchies therein that gatekeep and enforce conventions. Bolter (2001) pointed to how the digital medium subverts the hierarchies and slower pace of print traditions, replacing them with horizontal, associative networks whose speed of publication is almost instantaneous. For example, consider the speed of how the meaning, or even a definition, of a word can hope to change in a traditional printed encyclopedia as compared to the speed at which that same word's meaning might change in a digital encyclopedia like Wikipedia (Bolter, 2001). It is not remotely close to the same speed. Because print traditions encourage hierarchical networks whose authority is established through vertical placement on

that hierarchy, the wheels of change move slower in print-based communication than in digital ones. Even without the emphasis that Bolter placed on medium, hierarchies by nature are slower to respond to change than horizontal networks as a result of how power is exercised (authoritatively as a gatekeeping function).

With respect to the additive nature of texts that share the same hashtag, co-authorship allows for aboutness to swiftly change or become increasingly concretized by the repetition of similar, relevant meaning in additional texts. This process is instantaneous, especially when hashtags are being used with high frequency on Twitter, whereas a print-based text would require both time and hierarchical authority to alter its aboutness. This is why, as an observer, the relationship among uses of #OrlandoStrong seemed to be consistent on murals, bumper stickers, and t-shirts, because these print-based versions were created and frozen in time, during the time when Pulse had just happened, when the community was kairotically united in mourning. The fixed nature of print-based texts denied the printed hashtag enscribed on walls, stickers, pins, and t-shirts its digital function—access to its co-authored aboutness #OrlandoStrong—something a wall, a piece of paper, and a portion of cloth can't accomplish, nor attempt to. Printed and verbal hashtags only exist in the utterances, and not on a feed. However, hashtag use in digital texts facilitates their social aspects: interact-ability as a hypertext, co-authorship, bilocated topoi, and the instantaneous speed of publication and circulation.

Are hashtags rhetorical innovations?

The third research question I posed was whether hashtags were rhetorical innovations. The answer to this question is yes. Because hashtags are digital tools, they offer new rhetorical exigencies, at speeds and reaches of potential circulation the likes of which were never possible with print and oral communication. First, hashtags employ stylistic conventions (Zappavigna,

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2015) that help to signify a text's meaning or semantic aspects. This function of the hashtag is translated to print and oral media without a loss of function; for example, when a hashtag's use is employed for exergasia, it happens regardless of media, because exergasia doesn't depend on networks and co-authorship in order to function. Exergasia happens within a text, not in a network. Second, hashtags allow for texts to exist in two different digital locations simultaneously: as a text on the hashtag feed and as a text on the user's own page. Bilocation is an important innovation that hashtags offer to writing, an innovation only possible when hashtags are employed digitally. This bilocation is one of the innovations the hashtag brings to rhetoric. A digital utterance's presence in multiple locations increases with the number of additional hashtags utilized. The simultaneous placement of a digital text carrying a hashtag is important because it at once allows for the use of the hashtag to be co-authored and affect/be affected by other texts intertextually. This means that a single utterance could affect as many locations intertextually as its character limit can abide. Because of the digital, associative nature of hashtags, their function on screens allows for the hashtag's aboutness to be co-authored without a hierarchical gatekeeper who establishes a brief, if not lasting, authority over meaning. It is in this way that hashtags should be considered a social punctuation, one that responds to and encourages writing into many rhetorical topoi from many different, equally authoritative voices connected by a horizontal network that distributes authority democratically, without regard for hierarchical or economic constraints.

Should there be ethics to hashtag use?

This final question will need to be addressed through the next couple of sections of this chapter. In short, I believe in some cases, like when a hashtag is used by discourse communities for activism, that utilitarian ethics should frame hashtag use, as the moral use of hashtags is tied

to the consequences that hashtag use brings to the writing spaces they occupy. Also, hashtags are stifled of their most significant function when used outside of digital spaces, as hashtags are dynamic, rhetorical innovations. Employing hashtags in print and oral-based media is as stifling to their rhetorical function as speaking punctuation would be or asking the audience for response in print. (Although there are some printed genres that privilege this: op-eds, letters to the editor, review responses in academic journals, etc., but these genres move at a much slower speed and reach than hashtags.) Certainly, these rhetorical strategies that cause friction with the choice of delivery of their content can be used by writers for emphasis or for disruption of normative expectations of print- and oral-based texts, but this usage at once invites the reader to consider a text's digital presence without the means to do so or the means to contribute to that aboutness intertextually, which denies the hashtag of its ability to co-author a hashtag space.

Print-based hashtags imply more authority than a digital hashtag will provide a single author with. Oral-based hashtags imply a lack of a visual trace (the word that is visible) that hashtags possess when printed or used digitally. The lack of authority and visual trace are important aspects to the full rhetorical function that hashtags offer to digital writers. When used outside of digital delivery, hashtags are no longer capable of bi-location or intertextuality that a digital delivery enables. To print a hashtag is to deny the tool its facility for co-authorship, which is entropic (something that inflicts entropy) to the function of a hashtag.

The ethical framework I advise for hashtag use is built in parts from three ethical frameworks: discourse ethics, utilitarian ethics, and information ethics. This is important because it honors the essence of a hashtag as a tool for communication that has consequences for the discourse space it is used to write into, consequences that help to shape the formation of information (aboutness). Specifically, I will reflect upon Grice's (1957) Maxim of Relation from

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his Cooperative Principles of Communication, Mill's (1861) utilitarianism and his position on censorship, and Floridi's (2001) recommendation to avoid inflicting entropy as he framed it in information ethics.

Why Normative Theories?

Normative ethical theories focus on how an individual ought to act when faced with moral questions. The reason normative theories are important to consider with respect to hashtags is because normative theories are useful for helping people to act morally in social situations. When writers use hashtags digitally, their writing often works in social cooperation with other writing to form co-authored information. Since utilitarianism is a normative ethical theory, and normative theories are concerned with the study of ethical action, it is an appropriate framework to begin with because hashtags are actions; they circulate texts into discourse spaces occupied by other writing. Utilitarianism is an ethical framework that judges the morality of acts by their consequences, and the consequence of hashtags is the creation of information through cooperation. This focus on consequence is why utilitarianism is a fitting place to start: because normative ethics focus on the morality of actions that have consequences, a basis from which to build a hashtag ethical framework.

Hashtags as Discourse Ethics

As I covered in Chapter Two, hashtags are used to drive discourse on social media. They are also used by discourse communities to conduct intercommunication between members using a specified lexis in order to further their shared goals and agendas (Swales, 1990). In order to discuss the ethics of hashtag use, it is important to understand that not all hashtags are used to organize discourse communities. What I am speaking to here are specifically hashtags used to organize the communication of discourse communities, specifically in the discourse of activism,

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(as is the case of #OrlandoStrong). When speaking of the ethics of discourse, one of the most relevant contributions for my own research is the work of Grice (1974, 1975), specifically his Cooperative Principles and Maxims of Conversation. Grice (1975) found that the cooperative principle is a norm that governs all interactions where humans cooperate. He pointed to how linguistics showed that humans infer meaning when someone makes any utterance by defaulting toward the expectation that utterances are contributions to the collectively accepted direction of the communication exchange. Grice (1974) called the inferences hearers make implicatures, which are things the hearer works out from the way something was said, rather than exactly what was said. In Grice's opinion, the speaker had a moral obligation to aid the hearer in forming the correct implicature, as the point of communication exchanges for Grice was for speakers to be understood by hearers. Grice pointed out that we often form implicatures between utterances, based on an implicit need on the part of the hearer to make logical connections between pieces of information provided by speakers. Therefore, communication exchanges by speakers who intended to be misunderstood were unethical and uncooperative to the needs of hearers. In order to better aid in guiding ethical communication on behalf of the speaker, Grice offered guidelines for helping speakers lead hearers to appropriate implicatures. Therefore, Grice (1975) formed four cooperative principles for communicative exchanges.

Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principles were broken into four maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. First, the maxim of Quantity states that speakers should be informative, not saying too much or too little, in order to be understood best. Second, the maxim of Quality states that the speaker is expected to be truthful. Third, the maxim of Relation (the one I pursue in more detail for the purposes of this chapter) states that the speaker should keep contributions relevant to the current interaction. Finally, the maxim of Manner states that the speaker should

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try to be as orderly and clear in expression as possible. Grice (1975) acknowledged that breaking these maxims for emphasis was a common rhetorical strategy often employed by speakers in order to call attention to specific agendas, exploiting the absence of a maxim in order to produce additional meaning. However, those exceptions were only made effective by their ability to break an expectation that speakers would normally adhere to these four maxims. For example, the use of hyperbole is only effective because it breaks the maxim of Quality by being less than truthful, thus calling extra emphasis and attention to itself.

Not all linguistic scholars, however, agree that the maxim of Relevance is so easily described, communicated, or achieved. Lascarides and Asher (1991) reflected on Grice's maxim of Relation, arguing that there can possibly be more than one relation that can hold between two sentences. They also acknowledged that intuitive meaning in discourse "is built up through the processing of successive clauses in a text" (p. 57). They believed that interpretation happens as readers believe that clauses in a text are connected by some discursive relationship in order for the text to be at all coherent. In this manner, many kinds of relations can be built over the course of a collection of texts. This also explains how that expectation can be used by those disinterested in abiding by the Maxim of Relation to disrupt the unity of a text by inserting non-relevant content. This causes disruption throughout the text—not just in the space where that non-relevant contribution happens, because it shakes the wires of relation between all texts connected by that relevance.

The onus of ethical action for Grice is on the author (e.g., the speaker or writer, depending on medium of delivery) and this onus also applies to hashtag use. Writers who use hashtags circulate texts into a discourse space that will potentially be read. In order to aid the reader's implicature, Grice believed that writers need to follow the Cooperative Principles if they

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wish to act ethically. Otherwise, they would be not acting cooperatively, and the inherent need to form implicatures between utterances would work against the reader and upset the purpose of the communicative exchange: to be understood.

Of the Cooperative Principles, Grice's Maxim of Relation is especially important to the discussion of (dis)ambiguation in hashtag-driven communication for discourse communities. This maxim applies because discourse communities are groups dedicated to cooperation; in order to better achieve their shared agendas and goals, discourse community members must speak with relevance, utilizing their specialized lexis consistently and without ambiguity. Pairing Grice's Maxim of Relation with Swales' definition of a discourse community makes for an important ethical prescription, albeit an obvious one, admittedly. Because discourse communities must engage in relevant intercommunication (Swales, 1990) in order to exist, Grice's Maxim of Relation becomes increasingly vital to the salutary nature of a discourse community. Ambiguating the specialized lexis of a discourse community, then, is an unethical act because it harms the discourse community's ability to continue to exist and communicate via implicature. Neglecting Grice's Maxim of Relation will obstruct the formation of implicature, a cooperative act essential to the coherent use of a specialized lexis.

Aside from this dissertation, there are precedents in research that apply Grice's Maxims of Cooperation to the study of social media discourse. For example, Bali and Singh (2016) reflected on the theoretical model of Gricean cooperation in order to show how sarcasm (a problematic concept that persists in confounding information theorists) can be viewed as a disruption of Grice's principles. That disruption isn't unethical per se, just one used to rhetorically emphasize a point by the speaker through disrupting a Gricean maxim. One of the important findings of Bali and Singh was that context becomes situational depending on a

"disparate audience" found on social media, like Twitter (p. 119). Similarly, Gonzales-Ibanez et al. (2011) acknowledged that one of the challenges to understanding a Tweet's context is its brevity, a consequence of Twitter's character limit. One of the ways that the brevity of a Tweet can be accommodated is by placing it in relation to other Tweets that share its intent, or intertextual relationship, which means its maxim of Relation. Understanding Gonzales-Ibanez et al.'s point about the importance of context, then, helps writers and readers on social media to better form relevant implicatures between texts, since a text needs other texts in order to establish a common context. Once that context is established, implicatures can be made intertextually as to what meaning and intention might be based on that common context.

Because relation is so important to communication exchanges, Grice (1975) pointed out that "our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did" (p. 45). Grice's discussion of the nature of talk exchanges applies to Twitter discourse organized through hashtag use because it too is a "cooperative effort," one where "each participant recognizes in them, to some extent a common purpose … or a mutually accepted direction" (p. 45). However, as stated earlier, not all usages of hashtags form a relation that is identifiable; rather, some hashtags can have relations that, much like Grice's depiction of talk-exchanges, evolve during the exchange and/or become so indefinite that they leave the relation up to subjective interpretation. However, Grice (1975) returned to emphasizing the vital nature of the maxim of Relation through recognizing that at each stage of a talk-exchange, even one whose relevance may evolve, "SOME possible conversational moves would be excluded as conversationally unsuitable" because they lack a suitable degree of relevance (p. 45, emphasis in original). By negation, then, relevant implicatures can still be formed in evolving aboutness.

Therefore, Grice offers a general adage by which to better follow the maxim of Relation in talk exchanges (and this applies to social media discourse too): "make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (p. 45). With this recognition, Grice would point to texts that contribute ambiguity to a talk exchange as unethical because they function as an obstacle to the construction of relation, or at least as a strategy that neglects that maxim for emphasis.

The Use of Hashtags as Emphasis

Scholars (Crystal, 2008; Johnsen, 2007; Spagnolli & Gamberini, 2007; Tagg, 2011; Thurlow & Brown, 2003; Wikstrom, 2014) have noted the role that technology plays in establishing the relations between texts that rely on computer-mediated communication. Wikstrom (2014) studied the hashtag as a rhetorical tool for establishing relation in cooperative exchanges on social media. He found that, for some users, hashtags were used solely for emphasis, rather than for building relation: "For some uses, the linking feature of hashtags is directly relevant, but other times, it is clearly not. Some posters appear to be appropriating Twitter's hashtag format as a substitute for features that Twitter lacks, e.g., tagging instead of bolding or italicizing" (p. 148). Wikstrom also noticed that "playful excess and redundancy" marked much of the hashtag use he studied (p. 149).

Wikstrom acknowledged that the way he viewed the use of hashtags on Twitter was a measure of need by users who appropriated the hashtag for purposes "completely removed from their expected functionality" (p. 150). With technology, emergent functions often arise between user intention and medium constraints and affordances (p. 150). But Wikstrom failed to point out that whether or not users understand how hashtags work, hashtags still work, fully functioning as

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organizing and categorizing devices. Perhaps without recognizing it, Wikstrom had provided an explanation for why hashtags are often used so negligently by users who, without intention, employ them unethically, harming others through that recklessness/neglect.

In fact, many of the discourse-oriented studies I have found (Bali et al., 2016; Caleffi, 2015; Gonzalez-Ibarez et al., 2011; Lee, 2018; McDuffie, 2016; Posch et al., 2013; Scott, 2015, 2016; Wikstrom, 2014; Zappavigna, 2015) emphasized the stylistic and semantic function of hashtags while neglecting to focus on how that usage affected their ability to categorize and organize Tweets relevantly. For me, this is an oversight that misunderstands the hashtag's rhetorical abilities. Ignoring the archival function of hashtags misunderstands what makes the hashtag innovative, treating it like a print-based punctuation (like a semicolon or em dash) rather than as a digital form of social punctuation that allows a single text to be bilocated. In order to study a hashtag, one should study both its specific usage text by text, but, most importantly, also consider its use longitudinally over the course of time and across users in a community: how it functions to bring disparate texts together into a feed with an unambiguous aboutness. That kind of attention fully values the social, semantic, and stylistic functions of hashtags. A hashtag is all these things, otherwise it would not be valued for its full potential as a hashtag. My ethical recommendation in this next section emphasizes why writers who wish to use hashtags ethically need to reflect on that social aspect before writing into hashtag spaces. The next section will first reflect on the recommendations of Burke and Floridi before establishing my own ethical framework for the use of hashtags by discourse community members.

Hashtags as Burkean Parlors

This section begins with a reflection on Burke's (1941) metaphor of the parlor. This metaphor is often used to describe the way that conversations work discursively in a discourse

space, even as users enter and leave the space. The space Burke evokes for the reader is a physical space, akin to a modern-day barber shop. One can see in Burke's (1941) metaphor of the parlor an ethical recommendation for how to engage in discourse:

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (pp. 110-111)

Burke emphasized the importance of understanding how discourse and ethics should work. Long used in classrooms as a metaphor for how scholars enter and exit conversations, what the Burkean parlor metaphor values is a mindfulness of the content of present discourse on the part of scholars who wish to contribute to an academic conversation. It is an ethical example of how to engage in scholarly work. To wit, one doesn't just walk into the parlor speaking, or stride into an academic argument writing; rather, one must "listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar" (pp.110-111).

The parlor metaphor values the interminable nature of discourse, referring to it as "unending"; this is an apt description of the perpetual contributions that take place in Twitter from different writers who enter and exit a hashtag feed (Brent, 1997, "Burke's Unending Conversation Metaphor"). Who is to say when a conversation is over or when it ends? What is important for Burke's parlor and for the understanding of hashtag ethics is that at any point in the interminable conversation, discourse can have a focus, or a relevance, to borrow Swale's terminology. What is important for mindful communicants of discourse is to sit and to find the tenor of that discourse first in order to better enter the conversation as an informed conversant, rather than to oafishly walk in swinging one's oar around. Burke's metaphor of the parlor is one that values the utilitarian approach to ethics, one that values consequences of behavior over intentions.

What Burke's metaphor seems to value is the consequence, not intention of discourse members. Even the best intention to contributing material might end up derailing or interrupting a thread of an argument, and therefore would be considered unethical. In this way, Burke's metaphor can be seen as a utilitarian ethic, because it looks to make accommodations on the part of the individual for the good of the general will. Thus, Burke's metaphor is enhanced by considering the work of one of the founding utilitarian philosophers, John Stuart Mill.

Utilitarianism judges the morality of an action by its consequence on the common good for the greatest number. Judging from Mill's (1859) view of the unethical nature of censorship, Burke's metaphor is influenced by Mill's work because it emphasizes the general good of the discourse happening in the parlor, not on the intentions or pleasure of the individuals. Mill viewed acts that censor and silence others as unethical, as actions that decrease the pleasure of the general will. These behaviors are considered unethical because, if we are to consider the

good and bad effects that our decisions may cause (as utilitarian ethicists do), regardless of our intentions, the consequence of silencing and censoring does injury to the common good by not giving all a space to be heard. Mill believed that knowledge should not be censored because it would deprive the world of fully understanding diverse viewpoints, something that can serve the benefit of all by providing more information with which to understand the world and make progress. In Mill's (1859) *On Liberty*, he argued that free discourse is a necessary condition for social progress. Because utilitarianism finds that the ethical course is the one that results in the most good or the one that results in the least harm, silencing and censoring, then, are behaviors that harm because they work against one of the forces of social progress, the force of having a voice and being heard.

It should be stated that these philosophers never had an inkling of the democratized writing networks that social media and digital, mobile technologies have made possible, technologies that have helped activists work toward progress in the name of the social good. It makes sense then, before reflecting on how utilitarian ethics applies to the act of hashtagging, to briefly consider Floridi's work in information ethics, and how that applies to the use of digital technology.

Information Ethics, Floridi and Utilitarianism

Mill believed that censorship violated the premise of utilitarianism because he believed people were unable to have, as he phrased it, true belief when information is withheld (Mills' use of the word true belief is similar to what we might call an informed decision today). Similarly, Floridi (1999) believed that destroying or corrupting information was detrimental to the world. As a philosopher interested in computer ethics, he wrote *The Ethics of Information* in 2013; in it, Floridi applied environmentalist ethics to what he deemed "the infosphere," a level of abstraction

where he reduced all existence to the collection of information (p. 40). These collections of information that make up the infosphere inhabit a hybrid technological, biological environment made up of what Floridi calls informational organisms, or *inforgs* for short. Floridi argued that at a certain level of abstraction all matter, natural agents and artificial agents alike, biological and informational, could be considered as inforgs because they all bear within them information. By reducing all matter to the level of abstraction of information in an infosphere, Floridi defended the right for all information to exist, and also argued that the harm that happens to the infosphere when information is censored or deleted is unethical. Floridi can make this ethical argument because information ethics allowed biological organisms and inanimate data alike to be considered together on a continuum of information, in their moral eligibility for the application of information ethics. This eligibility to be considered together makes information ethics a more impartial and universally applied ethic than other ethics that could be used to consider ethical circumstances where the rights of human agents and digital information interact (as in the case of hashtags). Floridi asserted that "all processes, operations, changes, actions and events can be treated as information processes … as streams of activity" (p. 43).

Floridi's information ethics can be considered to share some of the same values as utilitarian ethics does; Mill's philosophies agree with Floridi's information ethics, especially as it pertains to the destruction or corruption of information. Floridi (1999) himself pointed out that information ethics can be considered along the same terms as utilitarian and environmentalist ethics because all those ethical frameworks believed that a good moral action improved the environment in which it took place. In this way, both utilitarian ethics and information ethics apply to the writing of hashtags: this is an act that incorporates the creation of information by inforgs, when viewed from a certain level of abstraction. While a hashtag feed may not have as

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much right to preservation as you or me, from a utilitarian ethic, Floridi would argue that writers have a moral obligation to preserve hashtags without harming or censoring their aboutness. Floridi referred to that harm as *entropy*, and this next section explores entropy and its connection to hashtags in more depth.

Hashtags and Information Entropy

Floridi (1999) also discussed the ethical/moral problem of information entropy, which he defined as the indication of "the decrease or decay of information leading to absence of form, pattern, differentiation, or content in the infosphere" (p. 44). Because Floridi reduced all entities to a level of abstraction where they can be considered together as informationally embodied organisms, his information ethics applies to hashtags. In this view, it would be unethical to contribute to actions that promoted the loss of any inforg's integrity. Floridi recognized that "the restraint of information entropy and the active protection and enhancement of information values are conducive to maximal utility" and even used vocabulary from utilitarian ethics to do so (p. 51). This means that the loss of the form, pattern, differentiation, or even content of information is viewed by information ethicists as entropic, and therefore unethical. For example, a non-digital example of entropy would be burning a book, whereas a digital example of entropy would be wiping a server. This is important to understand because Floridi's information ethics held that

> every entity, as an expression of being, has a dignity, constituted by its mode of existence and essence (the collection of all the elementary proprieties that constitute it for what it is), which deserve to be respected and hence place moral claims on the interacting agent and ought to contribute to the constraint and guidance of his ethical decisions and behaviour. (p. 44)

The central question of information ethics is to ask "what is good for the infosphere?" Taking the utilitarian binary of actions that result in either pleasure or pain, and framing ethics as a choice to maximize pleasure and minimize harm (pain), information ethics offers a more nuanced ethics for how that ethical approach applies to information entities (what Floridi called inforgs, an amalgam of information and organism). In this way, Floridi can be viewed as a kind of utilitarian for the infosphere, an inforg activist, but instead of just considering the common good for biological organisms, he considers the common good of the larger picture, the common good of all inforgs.

Returning to the idea of hashtags, armed with some ethical contributions from Mill's utilitarianism, Floridi's information ethics, and Grice's discourse ethics, we can now better consider the way that those ethical practices apply to the use of hashtags. One of the important things to remember is that hashtags are social punctuation, designed to distribute texts that bear them throughout networks of writers who use them; therefore, it is appropriate to consider how the consequences of one writer, regardless of intention, might affect the common good of all writers, and, most importantly, all information.

Since all information has a right to exist, and information entropy is unethical, it is important to reflect upon how beneficial or toxic a writing action can be to the health of the infosphere. Especially because hashtags are used in discourse, Grice's Cooperative Principles, specifically the maxim of Relation, are critical to better understand how unethical hashtag use can cause entropy within the intercommunication of a discourse community. This next section will enumerate the three maxims of hashtag ethics I have recommended for avoiding information entropy, and then will show how those maxims apply to #OrlandoStrong.

DeArmas' Three Maxims for Hashtag Ethics

Before I explain my theory, it is important to remember that GTM asks researchers to create theories from their data. Grounded theory practitioners, in the final stage of the method, are charged with the articulation of a theory that encompasses the work that can explain the phenomenon studied, coded, and analyzed. These three maxims have been derived from studying the #OrlandoStrong discourse space, especially as I reflected on writing practices that ambiguated and disambiguated the hashtag feed. Through reflecting on utilitarian, information, and discourse ethics, I have created a three-part ethical framework, inspired by Grice's Cooperative Principles, to help writers to use hashtags more ethically.

1. **Do no harm.**

This maxim is intended to be used when writers contribute a text to a hashtag that already exists. This is the usual rhetorical situation that happens with hashtagging: Writers tag something with a hashtag that has been used somewhere previously. In his metaphor, Burke has shown us how to enter a discourse space, which is to first observe the patterns and forms that are being used there. Burke warned speakers of the problems of entering a space when one is oblivious to the content, patterns, forms, and differentiation of the discourse taking place.

One should approach engaging in discourse that utilizes hashtags in a similar fashion. Do not deliberately obstruct the relevance of existing hashtags or ambiguate their aboutness by entering a discourse space where your discourse won't contribute to the relevance of the discussion. This doesn't mean conflict can't exist between texts in a hashtag space, but that conflict should be centered on a relevant agenda derived from the hashtag's context. It is important to note, though, that not all hashtag spaces have an identifiable relation (a relevant aboutness), because their content may not illustrate any identifiable pattern or form, and these

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spaces may already have been made ambiguous. In conclusion, the first maxim—do no harm—is intended to guide new contributions to ongoing discourse from disrupting it. Reflecting on Floridi's cautions against acts that cause entropy, the degradation or decrease of any information's pattern, form, content, and/or differentiation, doing no harm would mean to be careful to contribute relevant discourse that will not disrupt the patterns happening in the environment by ambiguating its space.

2. **Create new hashtags for new rhetorical exigencies.**

For new information to exist, it must have a location to exist; rhetorically speaking, it must have a topoi. Since there are infinite hashtags that can be possibly created, this is the most ethical solution for a rhetorical exigency that may steer a conversation in a direction that might affect its overall relevance. New hashtags create spaces where new discourse won't have friction with other discourse or render that discourse irrelevant, as new contributions to the discourse begin to occupy their own designated space. Rather than ambiguating a discourse space with irrelevant content, it would be more ethical to create a new hashtag for the discussion of that aboutness and fill that area with consistent relevant information in order to create a context for writers to respond to, so that communication can better cohere to the forms and patterns an author wants to build there.

3. **Make use of informational compositions to fight entropy.**

Resolve problems of potential entropy by using informational compositions (multiple hashtags) to create new spaces for discourse that might have branched into tangents that may cause ambiguous aboutness. Since a hashtag bilocates a text, use that to your rhetorical advantage. Write the new hashtag into the space you are presently trying to protect from entropy, and exit the space. Find that same text, its counterpart in the new hashtag topoi location. This

will act as a switching tactic to better preserve the relevance of the lexis used in both discourse spaces. Discourse members will be able to see these moments of switching (Castells, 2011) and respond appropriately. Disambiguate discourse spaces suffering from entropy through the use of informational compositions. This means that when discourse spaces have become ambiguated, that creating new hashtag spaces where community members can be directed toward will be possible without having to exit the original topoi (the original hashtag) completely. Eventually, once the new hashtag space (topoi) has moved beyond the relevance of the old hashtag, the use of informational compositions will no longer be necessary, and the hashtag can be used on its own so that its relevance doesn't conflict with the other hashtag's relevance and ambiguate each other's aboutness. This practice was evident in the strategies of the discourse community of #OrlandoStrong, as the creation and use of a new topoi, e.g. #OrlandoUnitedDay, created a new discourse space to organize their discourse relevantly in. This strategy also helped to disambiguate their content from nonrelevant #OrlandoStrong content.

DeArmas' three maxims were created out of observing longitudinally the #OrlandoStrong discourse space. This next section reflects on the findings again with respect to this ethical framework.

Reflecting on Hashtag Ethics and #OrlandoStrong

#OrlandoStrong became ambiguated by non-relevant content and social media influencers who used the discourse space of #OrlandoStrong to leverage traffic to their non-relevant discourse agendas. In Chapter Four, the percentages of the discourse reflected this ambiguation. At a certain point, the relevant use of #OrlandoStrong discourse community's specified lexis was at an all-time low: rainbows (48%), love (34.7%), and hate (4.5%). However, through the use of informational compositions, the proportion of relevant use of lexis spiked:

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rainbows (75% in #OrlandoStrong #SomosOrlando), love (76% in #OrlandoStrong #OrlandoUnitedDay #OnePulse), and hate (31% in #OrlandoStrong #LoveisLove). Through the use of ethical hashtagging, the reader's natural tendency to make a conversational implicature between Tweets was enabled by the relevant use of lexical terminology that the discourse community used. Grice's Cooperative Principles functioned to disambiguate the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong through the use of informational compositions.

According to Floridi, inforgs are entities that can be made distinct from other inforgs by their patterns of information. Certain inforgs (e.g., a hashtag—an inforg used to circulate discourse) are marked by specific signifiers in their content, and to disrupt that content by disrupting its relevance is a disruption of patterns, forms, and differentiation; therefore, disrupting a hashtag's pattern by ambiguating its discourse space is a form of entropy. As my data suggest, over the course of time since the Pulse shooting, #OrlandoStrong suffered from ambiguation, a decrease in the pattern of content in #OrlandoStrong. While ambiguating information might be viewed as an attempt to create more or different meaning, these ambiguating acts can also be viewed from an information ethical lens as an act of entropy. This means that Maxim 1, do no harm, was violated in that discourse space. This entropy is especially palpable, for example, in the entropic acts of Justin Bieber and marketers who leveraged that space for goals and agendas that were beyond the scope of the discourse community of #OrlandoStrong. The relationship between their content and the presence of lexical signs did not match the relevant contexts of Tweets in the discourse community.

In response to that act of entropy, the #OrlandoStrong discourse community began to use informational compositions like

- #OrlandoStrong #OrlandoUnited

- #OrlandoStrong #LoveIsLove

- #OrlandoStrong #OnePulse

- #OrlandoStrong #PrayforOrlando

in order to better disambiguate the aboutness of #OrlandoStrong. These disambiguating actions

continued from June until March, 2017, when the kairotic moment of the announcement of

Orlando United Day (the official name of the Orlando day of remembrance, June 12th, the date of

the Pulse shooting) sparked the use of a new hashtag. #OrlandoUnitedDay became a hashtag that

started to reiterate the patterns and forms of #OrlandoStrong before ambiguation inflicted

entropy upon that inforg.

Reflecting on these actions, it is easy to see how maxim 2 (create new hashtags for new

rhetorical exigencies) was employed with much success in order to help create an inforg

(#OrlandoUnitedDay) that wouldn't have to fight the entropy that #OrlandoStrong did. At the

same time, maxim 3 (make use of informational compositions to fight entropy) was also

employed to much success, because as entropy corrupted the relevant patterns and content of

#OrlandoStrong, these informational compositions worked to fight entropy of pattern and

content, restoring some of that initial informational integrity back to #OrlandoStrong through its

pairing with other relevant hashtags. By creating new secondary hashtags to act as informational

compositions, agents of entropy have a more difficult time organizing to disrupt a discourse

community, as the community becomes strengthened by its bilocated topoi. There is no longer

one topoi to target by forces of entropy, but many, which makes it all the more difficult to

ambiguate, as a text that includes a hashtag exists in more than one location.

However, what must be done when forces of entropy use hashtags? Grice considered

breaking his cooperative principles as a way to use emphasis (like with hyperbole and sarcasm).

Sometimes unethical strategies can be used to fight entropy too, though. Take the use of hashtags to organize hashtag activists to blur the lines between actual physical protestors of the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North and South Dakota and hashtag activists who were not physically there. Allegedly, police were using Facebook's check-in feature to track opponents of the pipeline being built at Standing Rock and target protestors (Hult, 2016). Because of the hashtags #NoDAPL and #IStandWithStandingRock, it became increasingly difficult to use Facebook to track who was actually on-site protesting from who was using fake check-ins to ambiguate that space. Because hashtag activists were utilizing hashtags to encourage non-relevant content into the Facebook check-in space, a more virulent entropy was avoided. By ambiguating that digital space, the ambiguation of a biological, natural environment was avoided. Floridi and Mills would see this act of entropy as a common good for utilitarian ethics. Grice would view this breaking of the maxim of Relation as an implicature that emphasizes the injustice of cooperating with armed forces who were set to destroy the natural landscape by introducing oil there.

When citizens gather to digitally disrupt, they reinforce the power of these maxims to govern ethical hashtag use. There is an ethical argument here for why neo-Nazi hashtags like #BloodandSoil and terrorist hashtags like #WeWillBurnAmerica should have entropy inflicted upon them, because they pose a larger threat to the infosphere than their risk to their discourse community's informational integrity does. Perhaps the threats that information poses are higher on the spectrum of entropy against inforgs, as physical and social harm to bio-organisms is more entropic than is the threat against information integrity for inforgs. In this case, defying DeArmas' maxims of hashtags can be used to help make the infosphere more secure. From a utilitarian ethics, disrupting that discourse would be more ethical than allowing that discourse to

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remain relevant and functional, because it would make it harder for those digital hashtags to accomplish their unethical agendas and goals against humans and the environment.

By considering these maxims, not only can we better preserve the information we create through the use of hashtags without fear of disrupting them with the contributions of more texts over time, but we can hope to better understand the way that hashtags connect us and our texts in networks of shared interests. These maxims should help provide ethical frameworks for future use of hashtags by ethical writers who wish to act without causing entropy to the infosphere.

Conclusions

In this way #OrlandoStrong has served as a space for reflection not only on the horrific acts of hate perpetrated against a marginalized community of Latinx and LGBTQ+ people, but on much smaller acts that reinforce the underlying premise of the previous one: that the inforgs present at Pulse the night of the shooting had no right to organize freely without suffering entropy. Organizing at a nightclub and organizing online are from a certain level of abstraction similar discursive actions, because they both involve a community organized to cooperate in a location where dancing, love, tolerance, and acceptance were encouraged because they were denied in other locations.

Viewed through the lens of information ethics, the violence against the #OrlandoStrong community didn't stop after the night of June 12th, 2016, at the Pulse nightclub as the body of the gunman was carried away by police and medical responders. In actuality, when the remaining #OrlandoStrong community organized online to mourn the losses that were suffered the night of June 12th, 2016, when they organized to discuss what should be done about it and how to heal, a second wave of digital violence happened that resulted in additional entropy. And it was up to them to once again find a new place to commune.

There is a statement reinforced here in the Pulse shooting and the collected #OrlandoStrong Tweets: when LGBTQ+ and Latinx communities organize together in person and online, there are mobilized forces who wish to disrupt their agendas and goals, be it through neglect or malice. This recognition should be evidence enough that the fight for equality and acceptance needs to continue, and that we all must be vigilant of how our writing practices contribute to the creation and preservation of ethical, welcoming spaces for marginalized communities to organize, discourse, dance, heal, and feel safe, without the fears that their bodies or their voices will be targeted and marginalized by acts of entropy.

The encouragement we should receive from these examples is here too: that when the moment is right, a kairotic force can overwhelm the forces of entropy, and that these communities are rhetorically strategic enough to escape and create new spaces, without yielding their ground. We should be encouraged that digital technology, when written into ethically, can be used to help. That's what happened the night of the Pulse shooting, as survivors continued to find a way to exit and organize elsewhere, away from entropic threats. And that's what continues to happen over the year following the Pulse shooting online. #LoveWins. Ethically, it really can, if we want it to.

CHAPTER SIX: LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND PEDAGOGY

Introduction

This brief chapter discusses the limitations of the research I have performed over the course of this dissertation. It then provides some research recommendations for future studies of hashtags. It concludes with a reflection on teaching hashtag ethics in the classroom, and provides a classroom assignment for instructors to use to incorporate into their own pedagogical practices

Limitations of the Study

Admittedly, the data I collected over the course of the five-month span from February 24th, 2017 to June 12th, 2017, was not a perfect reflection of the #OrlandoStrong discourse space, but it was as fair of a reflection as was possible with the resources and permissions at my disposal. This study was limited mostly by the access that Twitter allows to users to catch all Tweets that include a hashtag. The only way for someone to perform a study that thorough is for Twitter to allow them access to the firehose, a humorous euphemism for access to 100% of the 400,000,000+ Tweets and correlated metadata, in real time, sent on a daily basis. Access to Twitter's firehose is very seldomly given to entities who are not commercial partners paying for firehose access, governments, or court-ordered entities. Even when firehose access is given, use of data is restricted.

The other feasible option (what I used) is for Twitter to give access to the API, or Application Programming Interface, a set of URLs that return pure data responses. The API provides more access than a general search query would, but is still limited by space and data restrictions. The API is also not a fair reflection of Twitter activity at any given moment. Gonzales-Bailon et al. (2014) found that the API overrepresented "the more central users and does not offer an accurate picture of peripheral activity" and also found that "the bias is greater

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for the network of mentions" (p. 20). A general search query that utilizes an API is what I used

to perform my data collection, with the assistance of TAGS (Hawksey, 2016) pulling new results

of a search query for tweets containing #OrlandoStrong every five minutes. Judging from the

tens of thousands of Tweets I collected, the API provided me with more than enough data to

reach what GTM refers to as a saturation point in the data, the point at which the data offer no

new categories for codes. TAGS' use of the API allowed me to access as far back as 6-9 days of

Tweets, but setting a Google Sheet to catch them every five minutes allowed for me to keep them

as up-to-date as possible. Data collection on Twitter is also limited by privacy rights and settings

of users who may not want their Tweets to be seen publicly. Also, there is no way to retrieve

Tweets once they are deleted without access to the firehose. Considering these limitations,

researchers who seek to collect data from peripheral users may wish to seek access to the

firehose. Other limitations of the study included deciphering users from bots. Aside from

geolocational check-ins, which are not always provided by users, it was difficult to decipher

actual people from bots. Studies who wish to study human agents who use Twitter may wish to

find other means of collecting data. GTM often includes qualitative research from data culled

from interviews, but the scope of my research and the immense amount of data I collected

prevented me from being able to conduct interviews with Twitter users.

This next section addresses research recommendations for future studies.

Recommendations for Future Research

The implications of researching hashtags extend across many disciplines and fields of

study including rhetoric, discourse studies, linguistics, and artificial intelligence, to name a few.

Considering the proliferation of conversational chat bots, discourse studies on hashtag use could

be conducted via the use of chat bots in order to better understand the way that hashtags can be

used by artificial agents to ambiguate and disambiguate discourse. Another research area for future research would be to study the language barriers between the same hashtag (i.e., #JeSuisCharlie and #IAmCharlie, #SomosOrlando and #WeAreOrlando) in order to study how the separation of the same discourse space by a language barrier affects the aboutness of other spaces. Another research recommendation is to study the longitudinal development of hashtag aboutness over time by paying attention to emergent users, influencers, and kairotic moments when a new hashtag emerges from an older one. By studying the emerging hashtags, researchers can better understand how new rhetorical topoi are formed and how to better preserve them from entropy. This next section focuses on using hashtags in the classroom as pedagogy.

Teaching Hashtag Ethics

At the beginning of my dissertation (see Chapter One), I referenced the call to action for both researchers and instructors in the field of writing studies to focus on the digital writing practices of their students. I have valued that call to action on both fronts, as a researcher and as an instructor. This section details a pedagogical assignment that can be integrated into a writing studies course that asks students to reflect on their own social media writing practices, how rhetorical strategies are involved in those practices, and how ethics apply to digital discourse.

Scholars in writing studies and technical communication (Friess & Lam, 2018; Lucas, 2018; McNely et al., 2015; Proferes, 2016; Vie, 2017) have pointed to the importance of reflecting on ethical considerations for the use of social media as digital archives through the use of hashtags as tools to access information flows. Additionally, they pointed to the value of introducing the ethics of teaching digital writing on social media in the classroom to teachers and students, theorizing how digital ethics should be reflected on when approaching pedagogy that encourages students to write into discourse spaces where the traditional reaches of academia

stop. With respect to their scholarship, this dissertation project concludes with a classroom assignment that takes the advice of writing studies and technical communication scholarship and shows how it can be applied in the classroom to the study of hashtags and the discourse they organize.

Because my students often write into social media spaces and are interested in online activism, I have created a discourse assignment where students can write into those spaces (activist spaces if they so choose to) and engage in relevant discourse happening there. Then they reflect on what they learned about aboutness, ethics, and the rhetorical constraints of digital discourse and online activism. The assignment, which I call the digital discourse assignment, requires students to have read a brief article that gives an overview of the defining characteristics of discourse communities by Swales (1990). By considering the six defining characteristics of discourse communities, students begin to see that communities don't just organize in physical locations, but often organize more powerfully across distances and time together. I then ask students to choose a discourse community to study on Twitter that qualifies as one by Swales' definition.

Next, I introduce the concepts of intertextuality and aboutness (see Chapter Two) to my students and ask them to study the discourse of the hashtag space in order to understand how many texts written by different authors contribute to a hashtag's aboutness through intertextuality. I show them a hashtag and ask them what its name evokes, and then ask them to study the hashtag's texts individually to reflect upon whether the hashtag's texts serve to reinforce that hashtag's aboutness or challenge it, by having friction with the assumption of what it might mean to them.

Then, I introduce the concepts of Burke's parlor metaphor for discourse ethics and Grice's maxim of Relation. I encourage them to consider what ambiguation does to a discourse community's shared goals and agendas. I ask them to reflect on how their chosen hashtag's discourse space might be filled with ambiguous or disambiguated content, and how ambiguation affects the goals and agendas of the discourse community. As they reflect on that, I ask them to consider ten meaningful Tweets that use rhetorical strategies to either ambiguate or disambiguate that discourse space, by considering how each Tweet challenges, reinforces, neglects, or inflicts malice to the discourse community through connecting its content to that hashtag space.

Through reflecting on ten meaningful Tweets, students can show evidence for the specified lexis they find in the discourse community, acknowledge the relationship between their chosen Tweets and their hashtag's aboutness, and reflect on the rhetorical moves that these Tweets use to ambiguate or disambiguate that aboutness. Their writing assignment is two-fold: reflecting on the aboutness of a research space by providing specific examples from a discourse community and analyzing the ethical implications of the rhetorical moves they observed while in that space. I ask the students to write a reflection on what they viewed as ethical behavior in the discourse community as they reflect on how the Tweets they chose valued or ignored Grice's maxim of Relation, and explain why they found that ethical or unethical.

Finally, I encourage them to engage the discourse space by writing into it. This is the exciting part of the assignment because in past semesters students have gotten feedback from writers in the discourse space, both positive and negative. I leave it up to my students to decide whether they respond to any Tweets specifically or just to contribute additional Tweets to the discourse space. These moments when writers enter the discourse community encourages

students to make decisions in their writing that have real-world effects on actual discourse communities in the world.

Through this assignment I have found that students engage with real-world audiences and real-world writing, which they find more engaging than the pseudotransactional writing (Spinuzzi, 1996) that often happens between teacher and student in writing classrooms. I often find that students are more willing to engage with these writers thoughtfully when they understand that the consequences of their writing may reach audiences beyond teachers and classmates.

Because I understand that online harassment is real, and students may not feel comfortable writing into online spaces that may be emotionally charged, I make the assignment optional and encourage them to create a new Twitter account for the assignment. Surprisingly, I have found that my students usually use their personal Twitter accounts as they want to take the opportunity to engage in meaningful discourse that their friends and followers can view, and allow their writing to engage in genuine discourse with writing communities that they care about or feel strongly against. I also ask my students to act ethically and respectfully, abiding by university codes of conduct even if they choose to engage in spaces where content is especially controversial. I ask them to defend their discourse ethics as rhetorical strategies intended for the purposes of ambiguation or disambiguation and explain to me how their writing helps to achieve that purpose. I track these disparate Tweets as an instructor by asking my students to tag all of their engagement with a unique hashtag I create for this assignment, a hashtag that we never use again as a class. This also provides an opportunity for my students to understand how informational compositions can bilocate texts, allowing them to access multiple topoi simultaneously.

Through this assignment my students come to understand how digital discourse includes considerations of ethics, rhetorical strategy, real-world audiences, and digital writing tools. Through this assignment, I hope that my students will learn to honor Burke's parlor metaphor when entering any kind of discourse, to observe and reflect before writing into a space, to make sure they understand their own rhetorical purpose before writing, and to be able to articulate that purpose in the lexis of the discourse community they write into. By doing this assignment, I hope to encourage my students to think positively about the power they have as writers in online spaces and the potency of their writing to make change through online activism. I hope that they understand how ethics and rhetoric are tools by which they can become more mindful writers who understand important rhetorical considerations like audience, purpose, techne, and ethics. I have included the text from my assignment in the appendix for ease of use by instructors. Please feel free to use it at your discretion.

APPENDIX:
DIGITAL DISCOURSE ASSIGNMENT

DeArmas' Digital Discourse Assignment

Learning goals and objectives:

Upon finishing this assignment,

- Students will be able to define a discourse community according to Swales' six defining characteristics.

- Students will be able to identify discourse communities on Twitter (specifically ones that use an organizing hashtag of the student's choice), through applying Swales' definition for a discourse community.

- Students will learn how to define aboutness through observation and identify the aboutness of their chosen hashtag, based on those observations.

- Students will enter the discourse space, contribute their own texts, and may choose to interact with discourse community members. Students will provide an ethical defense for their choice to abide by the aboutness of the hashtag by distinguishing the relevant lexis of their chosen hashtag's discourse community.

- Students will analyze how hashtags drive discourse in a reflection that explains how the aboutness of a hashtag is enabled or constrained by the writing that uses it.

- Students will come to understand the ethics of discourse in online spaces through reflecting on their own writing practices and the strategies they view as successful or harmful to the agendas of the discourse community they study.

Assignment introduction:

Class, what I'd like you to do, should you choose to do this optional assignment, is to make a new Twitter account (or use your existing one if you decide that is better) and interact on Twitter with a discourse community you choose. Choose a hashtag whose discourse you find interesting, challenging, and negotiated by many different authors. Here are some reminders of the theory we've been reading in this module, to help frame the assignment's purpose, with specific instructions coming at the end.

What discourse is

"Discourse" is the term used to describe the way we formally communicate through language. According to classic rhetoricians like Aristotle, Plato, and Cicero, discourse is usually centered on certain "topoi," or "locations of language," what we informally call today "topics of language." In this way, discourse also makes us consider what "can" be said about a specific topic, and what "cannot" be said about a specific topic. Another way of saying this is that, through interaction, discourse establishes what constitutes relevant content and what constitutes irrelevant content.

More modern rhetoricians have introduced us to discourse-related concepts: how co-authorship helps to build systems of language (see Derrida and Saussure) through the formation of signs, how authorship as a concept can be challenged (see Barthes' death of the author concept), and how identity (see Burke) can be perceived as rhetoric in action. In the 1980s, James Porter built on Barthes' ideas about the influence of "intertextuality"—the way meaning can be made between texts through shared allusions and indirect references, to discuss how collective meaning can be understood as contributions by many co-authors of texts networked across a community.

What is a discourse community?

Swales (1990) identified discourse communities by six defining characteristics:

- A discourse community has a broadly agreed upon set of common public goals.

- A discourse community has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members.

- A discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback.

- A discourse community utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims.

- In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specified lexis.

- A discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursive expertise

These six defining characteristics can be applied generally to the types of communication that happens through the use of hashtags, especially with the use of activists, fan culture, etc. I would reflect on how Swales' six defining characteristics apply to the discourse community you choose, before you make the choice of which hashtag to study.

What discourse communities have to do with hashtags

"Hashtag Discourse" is much like the normal discourse we engage in orally or in written form, but it makes discursive moves in unique ways and embraces digital nuances that Bolter makes evident to us in *Writing Space*. Modern scholars have also characterized hashtags as

useful rhetorical tools for creating discourse. Porter (1986) described discourse communities as bound by a common interest with regulated communication. Tweets bearing hashtags can form discourse communities centered on the semantic topic of the hashtag; Bruns (2011) acknowledged that communities of interest are created by hashtag topics. Due to the semantic function of hashtags (Bruns, 2011; Daer, 2016), the hashtag name itself can serve as a topical representation of the discourse. But sometimes this is not the case. In relation to this, Kehoe and McGee (2011) considered how a hashtag relates information about the content being tagged, a term they created called "aboutness." In this way, the hashtag title itself helps to signal the aboutness of its discourse. When you choose your hashtag, be sure to reflect on how its discourse reflects or does not reflect the aboutness of the hashtag itself.

Discourse communities on Twitter often rally around the use of a specific hashtag to create a unique collection of Tweets. When contributing to the same hashtag, Tweets can discursively create a hashtag's aboutness. Central to the discursive process is the notion of intertextuality, whereby different texts interact to create meaning (Barthes, 1974; Porter, 1986). In particular, Porter (1986) argued that, even when texts conflict in meaning, tensions between different texts combine to help reinforce meaning, by support or refutation. Since popular hashtags are memetically repeated (Weatherbee, 2016), intertextual relationships between Tweets containing the same hashtag form a co-authored text. Bruns (2011) also pointed out, importantly, that this memetic repetition occurs because Tweets containing the same hashtag are connected through horizontal power structures that require relatively little gatekeeping, which helps maintain the public nature of hashtags. Consequently, a hashtag creates a public discursive space that is searchable by users with and without Twitter accounts, while signaling the aboutness of its discourse semantically.

A hashtag's aboutness is never fixed because its discourse is constantly being contributed to through intertextuality. This dynamic aspect of hashtags is part of the reason why Burke's parlor metaphor is critical to reflect upon before entering a hashtag's space; one should know the tenor of the discourse prior to putting one's proverbial oar in. However, not all scholars agree that hashtags organize discourse. Jones (2014) argued that hashtags evidence the difficulties of online deliberative dialogue: more often found to be a collection of monologues than a dialogue. Still, though not a utopian dialogue, multiple monologues undeniably comprise discourse.

The assignment

Your assignment is to go out and pick a hashtag that you find interesting, one whose aboutness is being actively negotiated by multiple writers. I want you to find Tweets using that hashtag that center (through agreement, disagreement, or ambiguation) around a central topic or aboutness. I'd like you to make a case for that aboutness through providing examples of ten Tweets you observe using the specified lexis of the discourse community. Then, I'd like for you to discuss some examples of Tweets that you found that might be working oblivious to, in aggressive hopes of silencing, or just plain tone-deaf instances where that aboutness is being challenged.

> **Warning:** If you are going into spaces that are specifically emotionally charged presently (#MeToo, #DouglasStrong, etc.), please be respectful, thoughtful, and careful of what you write; this assignment isn't an exercise in trolling, although we can discuss the ethics involved in hashtag discourse in our reflection. Please conduct yourself by the university's code of student conduct. This means that people may reply to your comments, and that is also kind of the point of this assignment: to engage in discourse

online and reflect on it. They may even enter our hashtag space and speak directly to us as a class. Consider this: Do we as a class have a right to engage this discourse by writing into its hashtag space?

Step-by-step instructions

1. I'd like each of you to QuoteTweet 10 Tweets that all bear the same hashtag, a hashtag that you find informative to this discussion of aboutness, tagging it with our class's hashtag, **#ENC4415DigitalDiscourse**. (If you do not want to actually write into the discourse space, you may copy and paste Tweets through screenshots if that is easier for you, and less direct as engagement). However, you may choose to engage in discourse yourself, becoming a part of the discourse community. We will be going through the #ENC4415DigitalDiscourse hashtag category in class together to examine the results and findings of what we QuoteTweeted and Tweeted.

2. Additionally, you have 280 characters to briefly reflect upon how each Tweet you chose serves as an example of negotiating the aboutness of the discourse space. I suggest you revise your writing before trying to write a draft in 280 characters. Here is a question to consider: How do these Tweets you chose help to reinforce, amplify, represent, challenge, ignore, or silence the voices of the discourse community intertextually throughout the discourse space of the hashtag you chose? For example, you could QuoteTweet a specific Tweet as being evident of discourse that aligns with the aboutness of the hashtag, and others as introducing non-relevant topics to the conversation or as an act of marginalizing or silencing others.

3. Once you have found and QuoteTweeted 10 Tweets, reply to our class discussion, in 1,000-1,200 words, and reflect on the role of intertextuality, co-authorship, topoi, and rhetorical constraints (privacy, bots, character limits, etc.) on the concept of aboutness and how it is reinforced or challenged by the Tweets you examined. Make sure to include your Twitter handle that you use in your discussion reply, so that I can identify your Tweets in the **#ENC4415DigitalDiscourse** category**.** Make sure to declare what you believe your specific hashtag's aboutness can be, as defined by the examples you QuoteTweeted that you found most relevant. Then, examine any Tweets that might be outside of that relevance, and how you view their role in negotiating the hashtag's aboutness. I am definitely interested in seeing screenshots on the discussion board, too, if you can provide them.

4. Consider the ethical implications of the Tweets you studied, your own behaviors, and online activism in general. Explain what you learned about digital discourse, hashtags, and their ability to further the shared goals and agendas of the discourse community you chose.

Grading Rubric.
- Students define the aboutness of their discourse community   20%
- Students reflect on the ethics of relevant discourse and aboutness   20%
- Students write a 1,000-1,200-word reflection in MLA format   20%
- Students QuoteTweet ten Tweets as examples of their hashtag's aboutness 20%
- Students reflect on their own writing and the role of hashtags as   20%
  central to digital discourse.

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