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Solidarity is for White Women

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Abstract

Can a simple hashtag constitute a social movement? The answer is a resounding yes. Using the definition of a social movement proposed in *the Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* as a framework, this paper illustrates that #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen is a perfect example of how social media and social movements have intersected to inspire profound change. Created by blogger and black feminist scholar Mikki Kendall, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen highlighted the justified resentment that many black feminists have against the white liberal feminist movement. This paper contends that Kendall's hashtag activism satisfies the fundamental characteristics of a social movement, because it was a coordinated, collective, and sustained attempt by marginalized voices outside of institutional channels to challenge the dominant paradigm: the practices of white liberal feminists. This paper also argues that #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen enabled black feminists to reclaim their intellectual traditions and advance black feminist thought by highlighting its expression among women who are not commonly perceived as intellectuals and who operate in alternative institutional settings.

Solidarity is for White Women

In the United States, there is a long history of tension between white liberal feminism, and the brand of feminism advocated by black feminists. White liberal feminists have long argued that gender discrimination is the pre-eminent form of discrimination that women face. They argue that both white and black women will benefit from the eradication of sexism, and that black feminists should therefore stand in solidarity to work towards this shared goal of inclusivity along gendered lines. In response, black feminists have argued that subsuming racism under the cause of sexism ignores the experiences of black women who experience intersecting patterns of racial and gender discrimination.¹ In a social movement entitled #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, black feminists stated that solidarity is a notion that once again centers on the white experience at the expense of racialized women.

To help situate my discussion on the #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen movement, I will first argue that because the goals of white liberal feminism are often ignorant of the experiences of people of color, their demand for solidarity in the feminist movement is problematic. Second, I will detail the origins of the #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen movement, and I will specifically outline the ways in which different types of discrimination intersect in the lives of racialized women. Third, I will consider the definitions of social movements advanced by Stanley Eitzen and Kenneth Stewart as well as in *the Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*; I will further argue that the definition posited by Eitzen and Stewart is inadequate because it is antiethical to the goals of social media-driven social movements. Alternatively, the *Blackwell* definition is

¹ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color," *Cahiers du genre* 39 (2005): 1243.

superior for understanding the way in which virtual communication gives rise to social movements. According to the definition proposed in the *Blackwell* text, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen was a social movement because: it was a form of collective action outside of institutional channels; it challenged existing institutional authority; it involved joint action, with some degree of coordination, in pursuit of a common objective; and it operated with some degree of temporal continuity. Finally, I briefly discuss the implications of #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen for the future of black feminist thought.

White Liberal Feminism and Black Feminism Are Not The Same

A brief glimpse into the history of the white liberal feminist movement in the United States not only highlights the tension that exists between the two strands of feminist thought, but also underpins the origins of #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen. Racial discrimination was a mainstay of the white liberal feminist movement. In 1870, several white American suffragists opposed the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment that allowed African American men to vote, because they felt that black men should not be enfranchised before white women.² One of the leaders of the American suffragist movement, Francis Willard, also endorsed the Klu Klux Klan's practice of lynching, as Southern blacks were perceived as a threat to the safety of women, children, and the home.³ When black suffragist Ida Wells confronted Willard, he and other white feminists unapologetically silenced her because she had transgressed a foundational principle of the

² Theodore Ross, "Mikki Kendall and Her Online Beefs with White Feminists," *Vice*, Published on May 30th 2014, http://www.vice.com/en_ca/read/their-eyes-were-watching-twitter-0000317-v21n5.

³ William F. Pinar, "The Emergence Of Ida B. Wells," *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue* 8, no. 1/2 (2006): 154.

white liberal feminist movement: “women don’t criticize other women. They stand in solidarity.”⁴

The assertion by white liberal feminists that all women should stand in solidarity and work towards their mutual goal of inclusivity is problematic because black feminists, who are cognizant about how race and class intersect in structuring gender, historically have not been equal participants in the white liberal feminist movement.⁵ Consequently, black feminists have condemned white feminists for being racist and fixated on the concerns of white, middle-class women.⁶ For example, the feminism espoused by white liberal feminists calls for equality and typically focuses on policies that privilege the integration of white women into the existing order.⁷ One of the most quoted policy prescriptions is ending the gender pay gap that pays women 77 cents for every dollar a man earns.⁸ In response, black feminists assert this commonly cited fact as being disingenuous and indicative of the lack of diversity in the white liberal feminist movement. In reality, white women earn 77 percent of white men’s earnings, and black women and Hispanic or Latina women earn 64 cents and 54 cents respectively for every dollar white men earn.⁹ White women also have a greater percentage of earnings relative to black, Hispanic or Latino, and aboriginal men.¹⁰ Ultimately, the ignorance of many white liberal feminists on the racial dynamics of the gender pay gap validates black

⁴ Pinar, "The Emergence of Ida B. Wells," 154.

⁵ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, (London; New York: Routledge), 5.

⁶ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 5.

⁷ Lola Okolosie, “As a black feminist, I see how the wider movement fails women like my mother,” *The Guardian*, Posted December 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/09/black-feminist-movement-fails-women-black-minority>.

⁸ Tara Culp-Ressler, “The Problem With Making Celebrities Like Patricia Arquette The Face Of Feminism,” *ThinkProgress*, <http://thinkprogress.org/culture/2015/02/23/3625824/problem-celebrity-feminists/>.

⁹ Culp-Ressler, “The Problem With Making Celebrities.”

¹⁰ Erin Gloria Ryan, “Our Favorite #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen Tweets,” *Jezebel*, August 2013, <http://jezebel.com/our-favorite-solidarityisforwhitewomen-tweets-1125272401>.

feminists' demands for justice as opposed to equality.¹¹ Black feminists recognize that because of America's history of discrimination based on race and class, current society needs to be fundamentally transformed before black women can successfully integrate into the system.¹²

At the academic level, many white liberal feminist scholars have resisted working with black women, and this historical suppression of black feminist thought has had a pronounced influence on feminist theory.¹³ First, the silencing of black feminism has created a pattern of omission.¹⁴ Upon closer examination, black feminists have realized that popular theories that are advanced as being applicable to all women are limited by the white middle-class origins of the scholars.¹⁵ For example, Nancy Chodorow's text on sex role socialization and Carol Gilligan's study on the moral development of women both rely heavily on white, middle-class samples.¹⁶ Although these two texts have made pronounced contributions to feminist practice, they simultaneously promote the idea of a universal woman who is white and from the middle-class.¹⁷ Most importantly, the absence of black feminist sensibilities from these and other studies places impedes their ability to challenge the supremacy of mainstream scholarship on behalf of all women.¹⁸

A second pattern of suppression is evident in the public advocating by white liberal feminists for diversity in broader society without diversifying the practices within

¹¹ Brittany Cooper, "Feminism's ugly internal clash: Why its future is not up to white women." *Salon*, Posted September 24th 2014, http://www.salon.com/2014/09/24/feminisms_ugly_internal_clash_why_its_future_is_not_up_to_white_women"

¹² Okolosie, "As a black feminist."

¹³ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 5.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, 6.

¹⁶ Ibid, 5.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, 6.

the white liberal feminist movement.¹⁹ Specifically, many of these women who could be researching and acknowledging a diversity of perspectives continue to omit women of color from their work.²⁰ They justify their exclusionary behavior by stating that they are unqualified to understand or discuss the experiences of black women because they themselves are not black.²¹ Other white liberal feminist scholars handpick a few token black feminist voices to avoid accusations of racism.²² This behavior fosters a climate where symbolic inclusion is substituted for significant substantive changes. Ultimately, both tendencies reflect the unwillingness by many white liberal feminists to alter the paradigms that influence their work.²³

#SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen

The historical tension between white liberal feminists and black feminists underpins the events that led to the creation of the hashtag #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen. #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen rose to prominence following Hugo Schwyzer's fall from grace.²⁴ Schwyzer was an American college professor of gender studies, a blogger, and a self-described male feminist.²⁵ Many black feminists were aggravated that white liberal feminism had allowed Schwyzer, who had admitted to the attempted murder of an ex-girlfriend and engaged in sexual relationships with students, to gain exposure from

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Rebecca Holman, "The rise and fall of America's most infamous 'male feminist': Hugo Schwyzer," *The Telegraph*, September 27th 2013. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10338624/The-rise-and-fall-of-Americas-most-infamous-male-feminist-Hugo-Schwzyer.html>. .

²⁵ Holman, "The rise and fall of America's 'male feminist'."

influential feminist bloggers.²⁶ Black women also criticized him for using his platform to exclude black feminists in a defense of white liberal feminism.²⁷ Specifically, Schwyzer stalked and targeted racialized women who criticized his narrow views of feminism and accused him of being opportunistic, abusive, and misogynistic.²⁸

In response to the denunciation of Schwyzer by these feminists, Hood Feminism blogger Mikki Kendall created #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen to express her frustration with many of the leading white liberal feminist bloggers. Her concern was that those who worked with Schwyzer failed to acknowledge his targeting of black feminists.²⁹ Their failure to critically condemn Schwyzer's racism represented a dismissal of his marginalization of black women. This approach favored of a type of "solidarity" that focuses on the experiences of white women only.³⁰ Ultimately, Kendall argued that in their handling of Schwyzer, white liberal feminists behaved in a "Willardesque" fashion that went unchallenged due to the same historical call for solidarity.³¹

What is a Social Movement?

Considering the racial tensions that led to the creation of the hashtag, it is unsurprising that #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen was an ideal forum for black women who were marginalized by white liberal feminist thought and practice to express their grievances. Stanley Eitzen and Kenneth Stewart define a social movement as a collective

²⁶ Mikki Kendall, "#SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen: women of color's issue with digital feminism," *The Guardian*, August 14th 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/14/solidarityisforwhitewomen-hashtag-feminism>.

²⁷ Kendall, "#SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen."

²⁸ Holman, "The rise and fall of America's 'male feminist'."

²⁹ Kendall, "#SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen."

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

attempt to promote, resist, or reverse change.³² For Eitzen and Stewart, a social movement requires “enduring organization with leaders, a division of labor, an ideology, a blueprint for collective action, and a set of roles and norms for the members.”³³ Although strategies and organizational skills are important, Eitzen and Stewart hold that ideology is the key to a movement’s success.³⁴ They argue that ideology can be elaborate (e.g. Christianity) or narrow (e.g. abortion), and that ideology provides the rationale for seeking change, unites diverse groups of people working towards a common cause, and prioritizes the movement over the individual.³⁵

Eitzen and Stewart’s definition is problematic because it is antithetical to the goals of hashtag campaigns and the nature of social media platforms such as Twitter. For example, the requirement that social movements have leaders and a division of labor is incompatible with #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen because the benefit of hashtag activism is that it allows for coordination without formal, sustained, or hierarchical organization.³⁶ Furthermore, the demand for a set of roles and norms for the members of a social movement is too restrictive and is incompatible with the fluid nature of social media.³⁷ Finally, the privileging of ideology, which calls for unity and the submersion of the individual in favor of the movement, echoes the restrictive call for solidarity made by white liberal feminists. Ultimately, it is the need for rigid structures and the prioritizing of ideology that tends to marginalize minority voices, as is evident in the white liberal feminist movement and therefore rendering this definition problematic.

³² D. Stanley Eitzen and Kenneth L. Stewart, *Solutions to social problems from the bottom up : successful social movements*, 1ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson Allyn and Bacon, 2007), 3.

³³ Eitzen and Stewart, *Solutions to social problems from the bottom up*, 4.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Anastasia Kavada, "Transnational Civil Society and Social Movements," in *The Handbook of Development Communication and Social Change* (2014): 6.

³⁷ Kavada, "Transnational Civil Society and Social Movements," 6.

Conversely, the Blackwell text states that a social movement “can be thought of as collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture, or world order of which they are a part.”³⁸

This definition is superior for analyzing and trying to understand the way in which virtual communication might give rise to social movements because it is cognizant of the horizontal, disperse, and fluid organizing structures of hashtag activism, and is therefore a more inclusive definition of a social movement.³⁹

Kendall’s Social Movement

Using Blackwell’s definition as a framework, the remainder of this paper will illustrate why Kendall’s hashtag campaign fulfills the characteristics of a social movement.⁴⁰ First, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen was a form of collective action outside of institutional channels because the goal of Kendall’s hashtag was to subvert joint actions that are institutionalized or normatively sanctioned, specifically in the white liberal feminist movement. This hashtag campaign also entailed the pursuit of a common objective – namely, illustrating the flaws of the white liberal feminist movement – through joint action.⁴¹ #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen started a discussion among individuals who were marginalized by the mainstream feminist movement. For over four hours, it was the most popular Twitter hashtag in the United States, and for forty minutes

³⁸ David A. Snow, Sarah Anne Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi, *The Blackwell companion to social movements*, (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2004), 754.

³⁹ Snow, Soule, and Kriesi, *The Blackwell Companion*, 754.

⁴⁰ Stanley Eitzen and Kenneth Stewart provide a different definition of a social movement as a collective attempt to promote, resist, or reverse change.

⁴¹ Snow, Soule, and Kriesi, *The Blackwell Companion*, 6.

it was the third most popular in the world.⁴² The hashtag trended in sixty-one American cities, landed in first place in twenty-one of those regions, and was used by an estimated seven million people to offer support, curiosity, or condemnation.⁴³

For example, one tweeter stated that white liberal feminists were guilty of racially motivated bias when they condemned black feminist Rihanna's traditional Caribbean inspired outfit for being inappropriate, but later applauded white liberal feminist Lena Dunham for going topless.⁴⁴ Another tweeter denounced the willful ignorance of white feminists of the fact that white women earn higher wages than black, Hispanic or Latino, and aboriginal men, in their conversations about the gender pay gap.⁴⁵ Muslim feminists also joined the conversation, denouncing Femen's insistence on policing the attire of Muslim women and white liberal feminism's failure to evolve into a global movement.⁴⁶ Additionally, the hashtag sparked an honest conversation between feminists about the future of feminism.⁴⁷ A common critique of hashtag feminism is that the natural brevity encouraged by Twitter does not allow for meaningful conversations that some argue is integral to promoting change.⁴⁸ However, Kendall's movement started a productive conversation that spanned multiple days in spite of that brevity.⁴⁹

Critics of the hashtag maintained that it was an abusive weapon that was being used against individuals who were striving for inclusivity.⁵⁰ Other posts argued that instead of the infighting, supporters of #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen should target their

⁴² Ross, "Mikki Kendall and Her Online Beefs with White Feminists."

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Erin Gloria Ryan, "Our Favorite #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen Tweets," *Jezebel*, August 2013, <http://jezebel.com/our-favorite-solidarityisforwhitewomen-tweets-1125272401>.

⁴⁵ Ryan, "Our Favorite #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen Tweets."

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Kendall, "#SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen."

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

anger toward real oppressors rather than challenge the individuals who are actually allies.⁵¹ Participants in #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen were condemned, through racially charged language, for claiming that white women are more likely than black women to receive book deals and writing careers.⁵² The accusation was that black women were included in the broader feminist movement only as a token of diversity and that their contributions were not parlayed into career advancement opportunities.⁵³ One critic tweeted that instead of complaining that publishing companies are reluctant to publish works written by black women, black feminists should “either start their own publishing house, or do what the rest of us do and get their asses to work finding someone to publish them.”⁵⁴ These racist comments suggest that black women and other marginalized groups are overlooked for media attention, and have to struggle disproportionately in the broader society and within the white liberal feminist movement.⁵⁵ Ultimately, the analytics behind Kendall’s campaign show that the movement involved hundreds of individuals working together to challenge in an unprecedented way the implicit biases and the exclusivity that is entrenched within the white liberal feminist movement.

Social movements also serve as challengers to existing institutional authority. In the case of #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, Kendall was taking issue with white liberal feminism’s system of beliefs, and the practices reflective of those beliefs.⁵⁶ For example, many black feminists stated that the belief that racism experienced by black women is not

⁵¹ “Dear White Feminists Quit Goddamn Fucking Up,” Posted April 2008, <http://dearwhitefeminists.wordpress.com>.

⁵² “Dear White Feminists.”

⁵³ Michelle Goldberg, “Feminism’s Toxic Twitter Wars,” *The Nation*, Posted January 29th 2014, <http://www.thenation.com/article/178140/feminisms-toxic-twitter-wars?page=0,1#>.

⁵⁴ “Dear White Feminists.”

⁵⁵ Goldberg, “Feminism’s Toxic Twitter Wars.”

⁵⁶ Kendall, “#SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen.”

a feminist problem exemplifies some of the structural problems in the movement.⁵⁷ They maintained that white liberal feminists must not focus solely on the struggles of white middle-class, heterosexual, Western women, and instead must work toward alleviating the plight of racialized, non-middle-class, non-heterosexual, non-cis-gender, non-Western women, and their children.⁵⁸ Ultimately, the goal of #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen was to encourage the white liberal feminist movement to strive for a more expansive, inclusive, and just vision of the world.⁵⁹ This would require that white liberal feminists welcome the experiences of black feminists, who are cognizant of the intersection of race, gender, class, ability, and queer politics.⁶⁰

The Blackwell text also states that social movements, as a type of collective action, require joint action in pursuit of a common objective.⁶¹ Joint action of any kind requires some degree of coordination.⁶² Scholars debate the relationship between organization and social movements.⁶³ Some argue that organization is critical not only for assembling and utilizing resources needed for executing movement campaigns, but that they are also critical to the realization of a movement's goals.⁶⁴ Detractors maintain that excessive emphasis on coordination is antithetical to effectively mobilizing the voices of marginalized communities.⁶⁵ This problem is particularly salient among the working

⁵⁷ Kendall, "#SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen."

⁵⁸ Cooper, "Feminism's ugly internal clash."

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Snow, Soule, and Kriesi, *The Blackwell Companion*, 9.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ McCarthy, John D. 1976. Resource mobilization and social movements: A partial theory. *American Journal of Sociology* 82, (1): 1212.

⁶⁵ Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor people's movements: why they succeed, how they fail*, 1ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 381.

class and the poor, who because of their precarious economic situations may not be able to commit the time or resources needed to effectively coordinate a social movement.

#SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen serves as an example of a social movement that reconciled these two opposing viewpoints. It can be formally characterized as a multiple networked social movement with a tightly coupled degree of organization, mobilized primarily by members of the working class and working poor.⁶⁶ First, through the use of catchy hashtags with a high shelf life, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, and the sister-movements it triggered, is an effectively organized social movement. This organization is also facilitated by the technology of social media, which allows individuals to embed tweets into blogs and articles for popular magazines like *Salon*, and websites like *Storify* that let consumers compile multiple tweets to create a slide show. Furthermore, members of the working class and the working poor, who are disproportionately people of color, are not marginalized despite the high level of organization within the #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen movement. This is because Twitter users are more racially diverse than American Internet users as a whole.⁶⁷ Specifically, black, Hispanic, and Asian-American users together account for 41% of Twitter's 54 million American users, compared with 34% of the users of Facebook and 33% of all U.S. Internet users.⁶⁸

A second important aspect of hashtag campaigns that ensures the empowerment of underserved populations is that Twitter is a “leveler”: social media transcends the distance between people.⁶⁹ Since Ida B. Wells, white liberal feminists have dominated the narrative, and the black women have been pushed to the margins and silenced. However,

⁶⁶ Snow, Soule, and Kriesi, *The Blackwell*, 10.

⁶⁷ Yoree Koh, “Twitter Users’ Diversity Becomes Ad Selling Point,” *Wall Street Journal*, Posted January 20th 2014, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/SB100014240527023044191045793234423446646168>

⁶⁸ Koh, “Twitter Users’ Diversity Becomes Ad Selling Point.”

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

through hashtags, retweets, favorites, and other messages of support posted on this vast public forum, the status quo was disrupted.⁷⁰ Online activism highlights the unique injustices suffered by individuals who stand at multiple intersections of oppression, and illustrates the ability of platforms like Twitter to hold white liberal feminists accountable for their unwitting displays of privilege.⁷¹ The dialogue sparked by #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen has increased awareness of the various ways that privilege shapes white liberal feminists approach to work and community.⁷²

The final element of a social movement concerns the extent to which it operates with some degree of temporal continuity.⁷³ Similar to organization, continuity exists on a spectrum.⁷⁴ To constitute a social movement, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen had to work to pursue its objective through persistent collective action.⁷⁵ Accordingly, some degree of prolonged collective actions, and thus temporal continuity, must have been displayed in Kendall's campaign.⁷⁶ #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen fulfills the requirement of sustained collective action and temporal continuity because of the many sister movements that have been created as a consequence of its popularity. Specifically, the hashtag encouraged other marginalized groups to begin contesting the current social order.⁷⁷ This includes #NotYourNarrative, which challenged Western media's portrayal of Muslim women, and #NotYourAsianSidekick, which worked to dismantle corporate America, charging that it

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Piven and. Cloward, *Poor people's movements*, 381.

⁷⁴ Snow, Soule, and Kriesi, *The Blackwell*, 10.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Arit John, "The Year in #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen and Twitter Feminism," *The Wire*, December 31st 2013, <http://www.thewire.com/culture/2013/12/year-solidarityisforwhitewomen-and-twitter-feminism/356583/>.

favors white experience, hetero-normativity, and patriarchy.⁷⁸ Aboriginal women were also inspired by Kendall and created the #AmINext campaign, to highlight the issue of murdered and missing indigenous women.⁷⁹

The Implications of #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen

Ultimately, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen and the sister movements it inspired did generate considerable change in a variety of ways. It challenged the privileges of white liberal feminists by urging the dominant movement to be more attentive to the concerns of individuals standing at the intersection of multiple categories of oppression. Furthermore, it served as a tool to enable black women's broader desire for self-determination and self-expression.⁸⁰ In short, hashtag campaigns such as #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen provide a powerful forum for a wide-ranging community of academics, mothers, veterans, artists, and activists to debate ideas and share experiences.⁸¹

Furthermore, debating ideas and sharing the experiences of black women through #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen also advances the position of the black feminist movement. First, it allows black feminists to reclaim their intellectual traditions.⁸² This process is significant because they can then use this knowledge to help contextualize present day oppression. Social media is critical to the process of reclaiming black feminist scholarship because it provides a forum by which subgroups within the larger collectivity of African American women, can express their unique concerns.⁸³ Black

⁷⁸ John, "The Year in #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen."

⁷⁹ Rachel Giese, "#YouCantShutMeUp," *Chatelaine*, October 31st 2014, <http://www.chatelaine.com/living/youcantshutmeup/>.

⁸⁰ Giese, "#YouCantShutMeUp."

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 13.

⁸³ Giese, "#YouCantShutMeUp."

lesbians as well as black trans women can openly reveal their diverse and complex histories, or they can continue to contribute to black feminist thought without disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity.⁸⁴

Most importantly, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen helped to develop black feminist thought by highlighting its expression among women – who are not commonly perceived as intellectuals – in alternative institutional settings.⁸⁵ Historically, black feminist intellectuals were not all academics, nor were they all members of the black middle class.⁸⁶ For example, Sojourner Truth, a nineteenth-century Black feminist activist, was a former slave who did not know how to read and write.⁸⁷ Despite that, her most famous speech, *Ain't I A Woman*, delivered at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention, provides an insightful analysis into the construction of the word “woman” both in the mid-1800s and the present day.⁸⁸ She exposed the contradictions in her life as a black, second-class citizen: while she was subjected to performing hard, physical labor due to her socioeconomic status, women during this time period were portrayed as delicate and needing the assistance of men; through this contradiction, Sojourner Truth demonstrated that the term “woman” is socially constructed.⁸⁹ In asking, “and ain't I a woman?”, Truth illustrated the historical and present day contradictions inherent in monolithic uses of the term “woman”.⁹⁰ As opposed to accepting the existing assumptions about what constitutes a woman and then try to mold herself to that paradigm, Sojourner Truth

⁸⁴ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 13.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 14.

⁸⁷ Suzanne Pullon Fitch and Roseann M. Mandziuk, *Sojourner Truth as Orator: Wit, Story, and Song*, (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1997), 4.

⁸⁸ Fitch and Mandziuk, *Sojourner Truth as Orator*, 73.

⁸⁹ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 15.

⁹⁰ Fitch and Mandziuk, *Sojourner Truth as Orator*, 74.

challenged the paradigm itself.⁹¹ Demonstrating her capacity for impressive scholarship, Sojourner Truth' efforts demonstrate the process of deconstruction, specifically exposing a concept as socially constructed, rather than accepting it as an accurate reflection of reality.⁹²

Mikki Kendall's hashtag campaign mirrors the actions of Sojourner Truth. Kendall, born in south-side Chicago, is a veteran, a mother of two and works for the Department of Veteran Affairs.⁹³ However, her decision to harness the diversity of voices available on social media to help situate present day racism in the language and traditions of former black feminist scholars was a demonstration of considerable intuition. Race, class, and gender are intersecting oppressions in the lives of many black women; however, the ways in which these oppressions are now organized produces social injustice in different forms than in prior eras.⁹⁴ Kendall's awareness of this reality and her willingness to openly denounce white liberal feminists' exclusionary practices by magnifying the experiences of those who were formerly silenced has constituted a significant contribution to present-day black feminist practice.

Sojourner Truth's and Mikki Kendall's contributions to black feminist practice illustrate why the concept "the intellectual" must be deconstructed.⁹⁵ What their stories prove is that contributing to black feminist scholarship does not necessitate a career in academia or a post-graduate degree.⁹⁶ In reality, contributing to black feminist scholarship entails a process of self-conscious struggle and moral activism on behalf of

⁹¹ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 15.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ross, "Mikki Kendall and Her Online Beefs with White Feminists."

⁹⁴ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 15.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

black women, regardless of the actual social location where that work occurs.⁹⁷ Ultimately, reclaiming black feminist intellectual traditions through #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen involves much more than debating ideas and sharing the experiences of black women. It also involves deconstructing the terms of scholarly discourse itself and challenging the institutional locations in which intellectual tradition can be built.⁹⁸

Conclusion

On the authority of the Blackwell text, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen was a social movement because: it was a form of collective action outside of institutional channels; it challenged existing institutional authority; it involved joint action, with some degree of coordination, in pursuit of a common objective; and it operated with some degree of temporal continuity. Blackwell's definition was selected as the theoretical basis to prove that #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen is a social movement because, unlike Eitzen and Stewart, Blackwell is cognizant of the fluid and inclusive nature of hashtag campaigns and social media. Platforms like Twitter serve as a democratizing force because they magnify the voices of black women, who are rarely singled out as the leaders of social movements. Thus, it is unsurprising that black feminists who felt marginalized by the white liberal feminist movement used Twitter to express their grievances. Ultimately, by sharing the experiences of black women, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen enabled contemporary black feminists to reclaim their intellectual traditions and to develop black feminist thought by emphasizing its expression among women who are not commonly perceived as intellectuals and who operate in alternative institutional settings.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

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