

SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM: DID WE SAY WHAT WE MEANT TO SAY?

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SLUTWALK LOS ANGELES

HOSTED BY AMBER ROSE

By

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Abstract

This study examined the convergence of activism and social media to analyze how messages are conveyed using an online platform. Using the official Instagram page of SlutWalk Los Angeles as the object of study, this paper examined what messages were being communicated online and how it reflected the movement. As social activism continues today, this study is relevant because it will provide insight on using visual imagery as a form of protest. Through thematic analysis, several themes emerged which include, inclusion, sexual liberation, re-appropriation, and rape awareness. These themes are explored and detailed, ultimately confirming the complex, polysemic nature of the movement; nevertheless, the movement reinforced hypersexualized stereotype of women.

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Preface

The basis for this research originally stemmed from wanting to know and understand what motivates or influences teenagers. I work with low-income, first-generation high school students that are impressionable and heavily persuaded by social media influencers they have never met. They were constantly on social media, updating me on the latest gossip because I didn't have social media. So, I began to investigate Amber Rose and her infamous "SlutWalk Los Angeles." Although, the movement itself began in 2011, due to Amber Rose's celebrity status, it generated a lot more attention and excitement from the younger generation. From her sex appeal and attitude, it created discussion and dialogue amongst my students.

Therefore, I began to research and investigate the SlutWalk movement to see what the "fuss" was about. I wanted to see what the movement was communicating to have the attention of the young people.

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Introduction

When Michael Sanguinetti woke up on January 24, 2011, he could not have known his searing words would go viral and be the catalyst that launched the controversial, yet global, SlutWalk movement. Sanguinetti, along with another police officer, conducted a crime prevention forum at York University in Toronto, Canada. The university had been the scene of multiple sexual attacks and robberies over the years, so in response to the crimes, a safety forum was held in Osgoode Hall Law School. With only ten people in the audience, one would assume the forum futile and unworthy of media attention; that is, until the room came to complete silence as Sanguinetti interrupted his partner and declared, “women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized” (Rush, 2011). His statement asserted that women control the conditions that lead to sexual assault, perpetuating rape stereotypes that plague our culture: a culture in which rape is frequent, sexual violence is normalized and excused in the media and in popular culture, and it disregards women’s rights and safety. According to RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), one of every six women experience sexual assault, and out of every 1000 sexual assaults, 995 perpetrators will walk free (*The Criminal Justice System: Statistics* | RAINN, n.d.).

The very institution that is on the front line, which is sworn to Protect and Serve, had one member that embraced rape myths. His comment spread throughout media platforms and sparked controversy and anger, especially from Heather Jarvis and Sonya Barnett, the SlutWalk organizers. They contacted Toronto Police on three occasions with recommendations on how to reform the police training and education about sexual assault, apply for third-party reviews to improve police training, and

expand outreach programs to combat rape myths and stereotypes in Toronto (McCormack & Prostran, 2012). With no response to their request, it was evident that greater measures were needed.

Heather and Sonya responded by founding and organizing the first official SlutWalk in Toronto at Queen's Park on April 3, 2011. Jarvis stated, "we had just had enough" (Stampler, 2011, para. 3). "It isn't about just one idea or one police officer who practices victim blaming, it's about changing the system and doing something constructive with anger and frustration." Jarvis and Barnett wanted to change the system, or hegemonic culture, of victim-blaming and slut-shaming (criticizing or stigmatizing women for engaging in provocative or sexual behavior) and reclaim the word "slut." They asserted that being in charge of their sexual lives is not an invitation of violence or sexual assault, regardless if one participates in sex for pleasure or work (Dow & Wood, 2014). Through social media, a "fellow slut" or ally, no matter the age, identity, or gender received an invitation. McCormack et al. (2012) stated, "Twitter, Facebook, and the blogosphere had exploded with the details surrounding the first-ever SlutWalk Toronto" (p.410).

The SlutWalk Toronto Facebook page declared, "Our plan was to call foul on the comment made by a representative of our Toronto Police and speak to the bigger picture of common, persistent, and documented victim-blaming within Police Services, the justice system, and social spheres around us." SlutWalk organizers asserted Sanguinetti's statement was a social problem, rather than only a case of individual opinion. They foregrounded the ubiquity of rape logic and refused its gendered rhetoric

of personal responsibility. Expecting only 100 to 300 protestors, on April 3, 2011, 1,000 to 3,000 protestors showed up along with 50 organizations and businesses.

Several thousand people in Toronto protested against a rape culture that continued the myth that women's clothing is a key component of raped. The day consisted of speeches and a march to the Toronto Police Headquarters. Carr (2013) described how “they marched, they carried homemade signs, they had speak-outs, they danced, they cried, and they shared stories of sexual assault and humiliation” (p. 24). The atmosphere was electric, a combination of seriousness but also upbeat and humorous. “People in outrageous attire with drums beating, bodies painted and dressed in vamp couture, comingled with mothers in jeans strolling babies, men, transgender people, nuns, and others” (Carr, 2013, p. 24). O’Keefe (2014) added, “women who SlutWalk are often dressed scantily, and wear fishnets, stockings and suspenders, bras, basques and corsets, short skirts and dresses, heels, and other items associated with sexualisation of the female body in western societies. Some scrawl the word ‘slut’ across their naked flesh in lipstick or paint” (p. 6).

The movement wanted to challenge the hold that rape cultures had on societies by utilizing parody of the word “slut” and reclaiming the label. Instead of being defensive about one’s sexuality, Slutwalkers are becoming offensive using street theater (Carr, 2013). Homemade signs consisted of various messages such as, “My Dress is not a Yes. “It’s my hot body and I do want I want.” “We’re taking slut back.” “Stop slut-shaming.” “My pussy, my choice.” SlutWalks appeared to represent a new innovative and edgy protest against the misogynist culture that endorsed dress codes or sexuality codes to differentiate good girls from bad girls. Far too often, women who have

been sexually assaulted are blamed because of their attire or sexual behavior; therefore, SlutWalk's foundational principle is that it does not matter what anyone had on or whom they slept with; they were not asking for it. McCormack et al (2012) expressed, “we walked for the victims that had been blamed, to reclaim the word ‘slut,’ for gender equality, for awareness of racial inequity in Toronto and against rape culture. We marched for sexual liberation and for women’s safety” (p. 412).

The protest appeared to be powerful and relevant because SlutWalks were organized all over the country. One satellite city that protested was Los Angeles, which Amber Rose, a public figure who received fame from her high-profile relationships and breakups, organized and hosted. Since 2015, SlutWalk LA has captured the attention of thousands. Held every year in October (except 2019 and 2020 due to personal reasons and COVID), the march featured thousands of individuals who traveled to downtown Los Angeles to protest against the misogynist tradition. Nevertheless, with plenty of advertisement and publicity, the Walk was not just limited to participants and the people of Los Angeles. SlutWalk LA utilized Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, enabling SlutWalk LA to reach millions of people on a global scale.

Utilizing social media connected like-minded individuals giving them unfiltered, unrestrained access to the protesters, demonstrations, and more to spread awareness and garner support. The purpose of this study is to examine the messages shared on social media to determine what a nonparticipant may learn about the movement. The overall message for the SlutWalk movement is simple: There is no excuse for rape. Society needs to stop determining a woman’s credibility and worth on what she wore

and with whom she slept with. Therefore, the goal of the movement was to reclaim the word slut” and end slut-shaming and victim-blaming.

This thesis will explore the messages communicated through social media, specifically Instagram, to determine if the content shared on Instagram effectively challenged traditional gender norms or simply reinforced the very stereotypes it opposed. Research on social movements utilizing social media is a relevant study because several movements have received tremendous momentum from starting online. For example, Black Lives Matter and #MeToo have evolved and formed organizations to address the sociopolitical needs of specific communities; this paper, however, focused on the SlutWalk movement because of its unconventional approach for social change. By analyzing images, texts, and responses shared through social media, one can identify how unconventional movements aimed at fighting injustice through social media exposed societal ills or actually reinforced cultural traditions. It grants future activists insight in utilizing visual imagery towards their overall goal.

Therefore, this thesis will examine the content on SlutWalk LA Instagram page to discover the messages communicated through images, text, and advertised material. The method used to analyze and examine the data was thematic analysis to discuss themes and patterns and determine what the images and texts articulated about the purpose of the SlutWalk movement.

Three questions guide the analysis:

1. What do the images posted on the official SlutWalk LA Instagram page communicate about the movement?
2. Do the images and text refute or support traditional gender roles?

3. What is the response from the online audience?

To answer the research questions, I will be using gender role theory as a guide for my study. Gender role theory is a concept that argues an individual's behavior is predictable because of its social and cultural definitions. It generalizes one's behavior based on gender, status, or their role. Gender role theory is an important concept because it indicates that culture shapes one's identity and influences how one view themselves. This thesis will address previous literature on the SlutWalk protest. It will also look at the similarities of ideologies between the feminist movement and the Slutwalk movement as well as the praise and criticism that followed. This thesis then addresses the advent of the internet and its role in enabling social movements to integrate social media, fostering online activism to raise awareness.

Literature Review

SlutWalk Toronto attracted substantial media attention that quickly spread from local news to global news, including extensive coverage on the internet. The movement turned into a global phenomenon. The message resonated loudly with millions, creating similar grassroots movements throughout the world. Davis (2018) stated, “it has been taken up and adapted to resonate with issues, events, and needs of local cultures across the globe” (p. 301). To organize the protest, digital media and mass media were dedicated to SlutWalk events. For example, Facebook pages included plans, photos, video clips, purpose, and mission statements. Within six months, satellite groups planned and organized marches in more than 50 cities and regions in Canada and the United States, along with 33 cities around the world (Reger, 2014).

In 2011 alone, protests took place in over 200 cities, 70 of which were in the United States, and at least 40 countries. Locations included Spain, Hungary, Finland, Norway, South Korea, South Africa, Australia, Ukraine, Mexico, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Germany, Morocco, England, Canada, among others (Carr, 2013). Each SlutWalk reflected and resembled the social climate of their particular country. For example, in Morocco, Majdoline Lyazidi, SlutWalk founder, used the protest to challenge women being sexually harassed on the street; declaring, “stand up for yourselves and demand respect. Shame has to switch sides! (Carr, 2013, p. 25). In South Africa, the protest was renamed “My Short Skirt,” in response to President Zuma’s defense at his rape trial that his accuser was wearing a short skirt, thereby indicating consent to have sex with him (Carr, 2013).

The SlutWalk movement, though unique, is a product or extension of the feminist movement displaying similar ideologies. Originating in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York, the feminist movement has fought for political, economic, and cultural equality. Bell hooks (2000) simply stated, "feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (p. 1). The First Wave, known as the suffrage movement, led the way for women fighting for equality. During this wave, women advocated for legal rights, such as, having an education, owning property, or having a political voice. To be heard and gain attention, they used unconventional tactics. "The Suffragettes used tactics 'unladylike' such as hunger strikes, chaining themselves to public structures, and the destruction of public property to provoke arrest" (Smith-Taylor, 2015). Analogous to first-wave Suffragettes, SlutWalk activists used their bodies and lack of clothing as an unconventional tactic to combat the hegemonic, misogynist culture.

The second wave took place during the 1960s to 1980s. The movement utilized the mantra "The Personal is Political" (Smith-Taylor, 2015). This slogan represented the focus of the movement. The mantra summarized how women's personal lives reflected sexist power structures. For example, women only found their identity through their husbands or children. They were only considered useful in the home and limited to certain occupations such as, a nurse or secretary. Therefore, second-wave activists took on issues that involved workplace safety, equal pay, reproductive rights, domestic violence, and rape. They fought to change the negative, subordinate image of women during that time. The usage of the word "slut" and other sayings used during SlutWalks reflected second-wave feminism. Similarly, the SlutWalk protest used messages such as, "My dress is not a yes." "Don't tell me what to wear, tell men not to rape" and "still not asking

for it." These slogans used during the march challenged victim-blaming and slut-shaming along with reclaiming the word "slut."

In 2013, Galinsky and colleagues conducted several experiments that looked at re-appropriation of derogatory terms such as "bitch," "queer," and "slut." They explored why an individual would become a self-labeler and the consequences or results from self-labeling. The study found that power corresponded with self-labeling. Once a group begins to self-label their power is perceived to increase, and increased perception of power then weakens the stigma attached to the derogatory group label. Therefore, individuals are more willing to label themselves the derogatory term when they feel the group has sufficient power. As a result, self-labelers began to perceive their own power increase by attaching themselves to the label, and the observers perceived the increase of power by the self-labeler and the group. Similarly, the movement wanted to weaken the stigmatizing power of the word "slut" and transform it from demeaning to empowering. By embracing and identifying as a slut, the group's perceived power may reduce the negative stigma attached to sexual promiscuity.

The third wave of the feminist movement embraced individualism. They wanted to destabilize fixed definitions of gender and reject notions of uniformity for "woman" and "feminism." They embraced the ideas of contradiction, multiplicity, the ambiguity of gender and sexuality (Smith-Taylor, 2015). They seek to have inclusive qualities that highlight racial, ethnic, and religious differences (Kocięda, 2014). Similar to the third wave, Slutwalks wanted to eliminate the universal/fixed narrative about women. The movement embraced individuals that did not fit into the "fixed" gendered norms. It

embraced women who are normally judged because of their sexual freedom and it gave them a voice. McCormack et al (2012) stated,

The real feminist action and solidarity that took place at Toronto's SlutWalk had transformed us. We felt empowered. We felt stronger. We felt that we were not alone. That day at SlutWalk Toronto we felt like we had finally found our voices. We had found our voice in a society that so often tells us to settle down, to stop complaining, and to keep quiet about uncomfortable truths such as sexual assault and rape (p. 411).

By highlighting their own unique experiences, regardless if they are a stripper or schoolteacher, the movement embraced their sexuality; by doing so, it empowered and encouraged them. It allowed individuals who hid their identity because of shame or fear to get rid of the "wholesome" mask and "strut their stuff." The movement defied the patriarchal social control over female sexuality and its insistence on defining appropriate sexual behavior (Carr, 2013).

Second, the third wave refused to follow previous restrictive feminist ideologies that attempted to tell them how they should interact with society.

"Rebecca Walker, one of the original third-wave feminists, explained, for many of us, it seems that to be a feminist in the way that we have seen or understood feminism is to conform to an identity and way of living that doesn't allow for individuality, complexity, or less than perfect personal histories. We fear that the identity will dictate and regulate our lives, instantly putting us against someone, forcing us to choose sides"

(Smith-Taylor, 2015, p. 15).

Third-wave feminist rejected "esoteric theoretical texts" (Smith-Taylor, 2015), and, in turn, did not produce their own theoretical analysis to justify their behavior or beliefs. They were more interested in individual accounts or autobiographies.

Therefore, third wave feminist did not live or follow the restrictive ideologies from previous waves. For example, third wavers may choose to wear make-up, well aware that the cosmetic industry is a part of the hegemonic culture, thus displaying the contradiction third-wave feminist are known for. In the same manner, SlutWalks had no script. From India to Australia, Denmark to Mexico, every protest was locally organized and initiated without blueprints or bylaws (Carr, 2013). The march displayed deviance to the status quo based on the attire. By wearing fishnet stocking, black stilettos, or BDSM apparel they are not just rebelling against an oppressive culture but they are differing from previous feminist theory that declared women needed to receive higher education, employment, political voice, or independence for empowerment.

Third, in addition to individuality, third-wave feminist believed in freedom of choice. Regardless of the choice that supports the hegemonic culture, one was still empowered because she was able to make the choice. If marchers dressed raunchy or wore nothing at all during the march, they too are empowering and thus fought against the misogynist culture. If one chose to have multiple sex partners, which is their decision and should not be looked down upon but celebrated. Fourth, third-wave embraced pop culture. "Some of the strongest voices of the third wave came from those in the grrl culture which centered on music and zines, and paved the way for a relationship between feminism and popular culture" (Kocięda, 2014, p. 13). They incorporated media to help push their "agenda" similar to Slutwalk. The movement

utilized social media and clothing (or lack thereof) to push its message. The movement also included many celebrities that participated through various means such as donating money, time, or promoting events. SlutWalk resembled many of third-wave beliefs, nonetheless, the movement also shared similarities with third-wave predecessors. Overall, the movement resembled many facets of the feminist movement, and similar to their “older counterpart,” Slutwalks were controversial and ignited a heated, global debate. They were celebrated as bold challenges to sexist attitudes and actions but criticized as women's internalization of their pornification (Dow and Wood, 2014).

Since its global inception, SlutWalks have been a heated discussion with many varying perspectives. While these responses do not constitute each comment, nevertheless, it does capture several themes that emerged regarding SlutWalks and their street protest. 1) SlutWalks are the future of the feminist movement. 2) SlutWalks support and advance the hegemonic culture through the pornification of girls and women. 3) SlutWalks disregard the history and lives of women of color. 4) SlutWalks are insignificant in comparison to previous feminist movements and issues. Throughout its history, the feminist movement was always controversial and criticized for its lack of unity and different ideologies. For many, after the second wave, the feminist movement was indefinable. While each wave was distinct, nonetheless, the common goal was ensuring each individual was free to choose and follow her path without legal or societal restrictions (Smith- Taylor, 2015); however, in recent years the movement had become silent, if not dead. As a result, many praised and celebrated SlutWalks because the movement gave rise to the feminist movement once again. Crouse (2011) asserted, “SlutWalks were the

only sign in recent past decades that the feminist movement has any life.” The movement defied the claims of post-feminist’s that feminism is dead or outdated, and the only tasks left may be legal reform and the rescue of non-Western women (Hill, 2016). The movement had an unapologetic attitude that confronted contemporary issues that transcended globally.

There was no meetings, fundraising, or carefully planned strategies; the movement organically surfaced. Valenti (2011) stated, “unlike protests put on by mainstream national women’s organizations, which are carefully planned and fundraised for — even the signs are bulk-printed ahead of time — SlutWalks have cropped up organically, in city after city, fueled by the raw emotional and political energy of young women. And that’s the real reason SlutWalks have struck me as the future of feminism” (para. 16). SlutWalks represented a new day of feminist organizing. The movement, ignited by the anger of several Toronto natives and social media, transformed from local steps to global waves that sparked debate, controversy, and activism; which feminism was known for. Dow and Wood (2014) indicated SlutWalks’ usage of provocative dress and actions continued the established tactic of feminist protest that preceded the second wave.

As early as 1910, feminists during that time utilized militant street parades that were considered provocative in those days (Borda, 2002). In 1968, feminists took the national scene during the Miss America Pageant and threw away their bras, girdles, curlers, false eyelashes, and wigs into the Freedom Trash Can (Gay, 2018). Germaine Greer, the author of *The Female Eunuch*, described how the radical feminist action group W.I.T.C.H. casts hexes and the feminists made provocative announcements, such as, “if you consider yourself emancipated, you might consider the idea of tasting your own

menstrual blood. If it makes you sick, you've a long way to go baby" (p. 42). Additionally, during the 1980s the Guerrilla Girls wore ape masks to fight against sexism in art. Throughout its history, the feminist movement was comprised of radical statements made by radical individuals, and SlutWalks continued the tradition. Hill (2016) stated, while SlutWalk is a fresh articulation of feminist resistance, it takes part in a discursive legacy of feminism that combines protest, parody, and politicized visuals.

Another reason SlutWalks may be the future of feminism was because of its awareness of contemporary media politics. Everything, including the title, was intentional for mainstream media. "We called ourselves something controversial," Jarvis says. "Did we do it to get attention? Damn right we did!" (Valenti, 2011, para. 13). Katha Pollitt (2011) lauded the body protest as the "bold, original, do-it-yourself protest movement we've been waiting for, a rock-hard wall of female solidarity—an attack on one is an attack on all!—presented as media-savvy street theater that connects the personal and the political and is as fresh as the latest political scandal" (para. 2). The movement understood that to be noticeable and bring forth awareness or social change, a dramatic, controversial approach needed to be taken. Traister (2011) agreed, arguing that the most sophisticated attempts at attracting media coverage received the same ridicule and scorn but received a fraction of the attention that is given to SlutWalks.

Overall, the street theatrics garnered more media attention than less dramatic efforts used to fight victim-blaming. Furthermore, the protests translated online enthusiasm into in-person action in a way that has not been done before in feminism to this magnitude. It made feminism fun and contemporary; representing innovative ways that could help the feminist movement become relevant for future generations by re-

establishing grassroots and marketing to popular culture. For example, nineteen-year-old Miranda Mammen, who participated in SlutWalk at Stanford University, says the idea of “sluttiness” resonates with younger women in part because they are more likely than their older counterparts to be called sluts. “It’s also loud, angry, sexy in a way that going to a community activist meeting often isn’t” (Valenti, 2011, para. 14).

In addition to supporters of the movement; however, SlutWalks received heavy criticism for perpetuating stereotypes of the hegemonic culture. Feminists are supposed to be countercultural, yet by marching in fishnets and bras with the word “slut” scrawled on their bodies, is simply imitating a culture that objectifies and hypersexualizes women and girls (Powers, 2011). Many criticized the protest for women utilizing their bodies as a form of empowerment. Critics believed it was counter-productive and capitulated to the existing dominant culture. Vaes et al. (2011) stated, “we live in a man’s world, mostly heterosexual, that potentially objectifies the female body.” By using the body or sexual imagery to protest, SlutWalks resembled the hypersexualized content that permeated throughout America.

It was, for critics, just another space for women to be gazed upon sexually. “Sexualized gazing is potential for sexual objectification” (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). In 1990, Bartky stated, sexual objectification occurs whenever people's bodies, body parts, or sexual functions are separated from their identity, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they were capable of representing them. In other words, objectified women are reduced to their bodies. They are treated as objects or commodities, stripped of their individuality and personality. Their sole purpose is for the

use and pleasure of others. Melanie Phillips (2011) declared, that it was ridiculous the movement cannot see the contradictions in what they are doing. "For even though they demand that women should not be judged by what they are wearing, such a judgment is precisely what dressing as 'sluts' requires the watching world to make." Many assumptions and judgments are made from one's attire.

Clothing can communicate substantial and complex information about a person, without the observer having to meet or talk to the wearer. One's attire can convey character, sociability, competence, or intelligence (Howlett et al., 2013). Additionally, Damhorst (1990) stated, "dress is a systematic means of transmission of information about the wearer" (p. 1). A person's choice of clothing (or lack of clothing) can heavily influence the impression they convey and therefore is a powerful communication tool.

In 2013, Howlett et al. did a study on first impressions. They wanted to examine the effects that minor changes in clothing had on the perception of a male model. In an online study, 274 participants rated four images. The categories used in the study related to social and occupational significance: confidence, success, trustworthiness, salary, and flexibility. The man was portrayed faceless in a made-to-measure suit and an "off-the-peg" suit, which differed only in minor details. The participants only had five seconds to view the image. The results from the study showed that the man in the tailored suit rated more positively apart from trustworthiness.

In 2015, Howlett et al. continued their research in the UK. They examined how minor manipulations to female business attire affected the judgments of competence towards them by other females and whether the effects differ with occupational status.

The experiment included 144 female participants. They were asked to view 12 images (8 were distractions) in 5 seconds and rate each image based on their competence. The categories included: intelligence, confidence, trustworthiness, authority, and organization. The four images contained faceless women dressed in black mid-length skirts, black jackets, white blouses, and black flats. They also included women in provocative clothing with minor differences. The two provocative females wore shorter skirts (just above the knee) and a lower buttoned blouse with two buttons undone. The nonprovocative females wore a knee-length skirt (just below the knees) and a high-buttoned blouse with one button undone. The results showed that women who “subtly” sexualize their business attire are perceived negatively by other women in the workplace, asserting that a sexualized appearance is linked to negative stereotypes and results in women being judged more severely by other women. Meanwhile, the Slutwalk movement proclaimed their dress communicated satire.

SlutWalk organizers stated dressing like “sluts” that most men would associate with their favorite porn star is meant to be ironic, and even funny; however, Gail Dines, author of *Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, declared, there is no way those men are going to get the joke. The joke is on us, it’s on women (Powers, 2011). The joke is on women because a consequence of sexual objectification is dehumanization (Vaes et al., 2011). As stated earlier, once someone is sexually objectified, they are no longer viewed as an individual; rather, they are deprived of human qualities. There are two forms of dehumanization: one form associates humans with animals, and the other form associates humans as objects (Haslam, 2006).

Kasey Morris (2013) furthered the research by determining what portrayals of women were associated with the different forms of dehumanization. She discovered that when women are presented sexually, they were associated with animalistic dehumanization. Women who were associated with objects were beautified; their appearance was the focus. Nonetheless, both forms of dehumanization can overlap. As a result, women reduced to animals were viewed as lacking civility, refinement, moral sensibility, logic or rationality, and maturity. Women associated as objects were viewed as inert, cold, rigid, passive, or superficial (Haslam, 2006). SlutWalks grounding their sexuality on pornography displayed disconnection from and disregard for the porn industry. Gail Dines stated, there is a lack of understanding the context of the world they are living in. The average male gets his major sex education from porn. And the message they get is that women are 'sluts' (Powers, 2011), revealing that dehumanization was and is common practice in the porn industry.

Dines (2014) stated that nobody today in the industry talks about softcore or hardcore. Those words are gone. Why? Because most of the softcore porn has migrated into pop culture. What we're left with, mainly, in the porn industry online, is pretty much hardcore. Hardcore porn in the industry is called gonzo. She explained,

In gonzo porn, there's no such thing as a woman, but there's plenty of "bitches," "whores," "cum dumpsters," "sluts." And it's very important that you do this in pornography because what you have to do is you have to show that man, who is masturbating to that image, that that woman who is being abused is not like other women. Your mother, your daughter, your sister, your girlfriend, she wouldn't stand for this. But this filthy, dirty whore, she's different.

In summary, many condemned SlutWalks' attempts to reclaim and embrace the term "slut." Their sexual, provocative street theater was heavily scrutinized because many believed it was not empowering. They believed it continued and maintained the pornified world. "While the organizers of the SlutWalk might think that proudly calling themselves sluts is a way to empower women, they are in fact making life harder for girls who are trying to make their way through the tricky terrain of adolescence" (rmott62, 2011).

Additionally, the movement was considered trivial compared to the previous feminist movement. "SlutWalks are an expression of privileged women who mistake a costume party for a political cause" (McElroy, 2011). Several critics condemned SlutWalks for either dealing with an insignificant issue and/or dealing with an important issue superficially. Melanie Phillips (2011) stated, "the feminist pioneers battled to obtain political representation, equality in education and the workplace and other areas of public life. These truly heroic struggles against real, tangible discrimination are belittled and mocked by the vacuous, self-indulgent, and self-defeating posturing of SlutWalks" (para. 22). Manson (2017) expressed a similar perspective concerning "tangible discrimination." In his article "What's the Problem with Feminism?" he asserted that legal and political equality are definable, measurable, and social equality is murky. The movement is not a protest against unjust laws or sexist institutions as much as it is a protest against people's unconscious biases.

For example, in 1971, during the second wave, New York Radical Feminist organized the first speak-out on rape. It was followed by a conference several months

later that launched the feminist anti-rape movement (Matthews, 1994). The movement was influential in establishing rape crisis centers and sexual assault coalitions, the ritual of Take Back the Night (TBTN) marches across the nation, the incorporation of sexual assault education in colleges and universities, and the recognition of rape as a weapon of war and a human rights abuse (Dow and Wood, 2014). The anti-rape movement achieved societal change that was tangible and evident, which is why many argued that SlutWalks are trivial in comparison to earlier eras of feminist protest. For example, one blogger, Rebecca Mot (2011) wrote, the movement should march to end sex trade or against the “institutionalized” rape in the porn industry and prostitution.

Her assertion demeaned Slutwalks and their cause. Although the movement's mission was to end slut-shaming and victim-blaming, which was prevalent not only in America but in the world, it was still considered trivial in the grander scheme of things. Though the movement traveled globally and established many satellite cities, lasting results were unclear even with heavy media coverage. With no evidence of social change, SlutWalks were only perceived as women fighting for clothing rights. Coren (2011) mentioned feminism reduced to clothing. “Shorts, bras, bunny ears? Meh, leave that to Sex and the City. None of it matters. None of it means anything” (para. 18).

Lastly, the feminist movement was always viewed as an activist group only for upper-middle-class women that sought to break barriers in society's infrastructures, and though SlutWalks were considered contemporary and attracted the younger generation, but they too fell in that category. The protest continued the tradition of generalizing white women and women of color. As a result, women of color argued that SlutWalk organizers and participants disregarded the sexual history of women of color; a history of

“oppression, rape, and sexual exploitation” (Reger, 2015). On September 23, 2011, *Black Women’s Blueprint*, wrote a letter to SlutWalk organizers and declared,

As Black women and girls, we find no space in SlutWalk, no space for participation, and to unequivocally denounce rape and sexual assault as we have experienced it. We are perplexed by the use of the term "slut" and by any implication that this word, much like the word "Ho" or the "N" word should be re-appropriated. The way in which we are perceived and what happens to us before, during, and after sexual assault crosses the boundaries of our mode of dress. Much of this is tied to our particular history.... As Black women, we do not have the privilege or the space to call ourselves “slut” without validating the already historically entrenched ideology and recurring messages about what and who the Black woman is. We don’t have the privilege to play on destructive representations burned in our collective minds, on our bodies and souls for generations. (“An Open Letter from Black Women to the Slutwalk,” 2016)

The letter circulated cyberspace and received a resounding agreement that women of color do not share in the same experiences as white women. Danielle McGuire wrote a book entitled *At the Dark End of the Street*. The book detailed the white supremacist culture of sexual assault of black women in the South in the Jim Crow Era. In the first chapter, Recy Taylor was abducted and gang raped by a group of white men in 1944. The men later escaped prosecution because they claimed Ms. Taylor was a prostitute who enjoyed sexual assault. Unfortunately, Ms. Taylor’s story was not uncommon, especially during that time. “White men could, and often did, rape Black women with little fear of any repercussions” (Reger, 2015, p.104). As white women come from a

history of privilege, their inability to relate ultimately dismissed women of color and their plight. Bogado (2011) stated, “the event highlights its origins from a privileged position of relative power, replete with an entitlement of assumed safety that women of color [like me] would never even dream of. We do not come from communities in which it feels at all harmless to call ourselves ‘sluts.’ Aside from that our skin color, not our style of dress, often signifies slut-hood to the white gaze.

So many responses and critiques surrounded the protest which demonstrated the polysemic capacity of SlutWalks. Numerous individuals were against the movement; however, numerous individuals supported and participated in the movement. Supporters ranged from mothers to college students with various backgrounds; however, one commonality brought thousands together: their personal story or connection to the movement. For example, Nicole Sullivan, one of three organizers of the Boston SlutWalk, was scrutinized about her sexuality. She stated, “I was told that if I hadn’t owned a vibrator I wouldn’t have gotten raped” (Powers, 2011). Another example is Amber Rose. She founded SlutWalk LA because she experienced slut-shaming throughout her life. In an interview, Rose admitted, “a lot of things pertaining to SlutWalk happened to me” (Sayej, 2018).

I didn’t know how to articulate what was going on and why I was feeling this way. It was because I was sexually assaulted, I had been raped, and I was slut-shamed. I was victim-blamed, as well. I didn't really have words to those things that were happening to me until I started looking online and seeing things and realizing I wasn't alone, and that I now have a platform where I can help other women who are recovering and healing. (Sayej, 2018, para. 9)

Amber Rose, 36 years old, began her rise to fame in 2008 when she started dating legendary rapper, Kanye West. After two years, they broke up, but shortly after, she began dating Wiz Khalifa (another rapper) in 2011 and the couple was engaged in 2012 and married on July 8, 2013. Marital bliss was short-lived because the couple divorced on September 22, 2014. At the end of each break-up, Rose was slut-shamed. Kanye West took to Twitter and stated, "I had to take 30 showers after dating Amber Rose." Wiz Khalifa was featured on a song called *For Everybody* with Juicy J and declared, "Man I fell in love with a stripper. Funny thing is I fell back out of love quicker. They don't pay attention to love anyway, they only concerned with what the haters say. Bottles be turnin' these girls into thots, Instagram turnin' these wives into hoes."

Before her public slut-shaming, Rose experienced sexual assault and victim-blaming during her childhood. In an interview held in 2015, Rose stated, "this boy stuck his hand all the way up my skirt, I was sitting on the edge of the stage in the auditorium, and he sat down next to me and put his hand up my skirt... I went to the principal, and I told her that I felt extremely violated. I couldn't believe that he had touched me like that. And she blamed me. She said, 'You shouldn't even be wearing a skirt like that'" (Sayej, 2018). In 2017, she explained, "I can't tell you how many times I've been called a slut. From the time I was a young girl—even before I was sexually active—it was a label that was placed on me. As soon as I came into the public eye, I was immediately criticized for everything from my behavior to how I chose to dress" (Rose, 2017, para. 1).

With continuous criticism throughout her childhood and adulthood, Amber Rose decided to embrace it. She stated, "I began to realize that I'd be called a slut whether I

behaved according to other people's standards or not. So, I decided to take the power out of that word and reclaim it. I said fuck it, *hoe is life*. But don't get me wrong—this self-proclaimed hoe is a powerful woman and an unapologetic feminist" (A. Rose, 2017). Taking it a step farther, Rose not only embraced her sexuality, but she promoted it and encouraged other women to do so as well. Her clarion call to women all over the world to embrace one's sexuality and "inner slut" established the infamous, annual SlutWalk of Los Angeles.

Held in Los Angeles during October, the purpose of the event was for women to reclaim their bodies. Women and men traveled from various places and dressed scantily and provocatively with messages that dealt with various issues, such as rape, victim-blaming, and slut shaming. Aside from the theatrics and costumes or lack thereof, the event was aimed to promote gender equality and combat sexual violence, body-shaming, and victim-blaming through reclaiming derogatory terms. She reached a broad, diverse audience and created a safe place for them to come and be themselves. In 2015, the first SlutWalk had 2,500 participants and over the next four years the protest grew to over 20,000 participants.

The march in downtown Los Angeles, transformed into a massive event. It was a festival filled with activities, contests, giveaways, vendors, speakers, panelists, performances, live DJ's, sign-making, educational booths, photo fun, free breast cancer exams, HIV testing, and more. The trauma Amber Rose experienced from childhood to adulthood inspired her to empower individuals all over the world to embrace their sexuality and identity. Due to her image and platform, thousands of individuals were inspired and encouraged to participate in the SlutWalk movement in-person and online.

Bennett (2014) conducted a study that explored how modern celebrities utilized social media to mobilize audiences to support activist causes. The focus of the study investigated how Lady Gaga actively engaged with her fans and inspired those who never participated in the realm of activism to participate. The study incorporated an online survey to determine what motivated or inspired active engagement and the results revealed, “the perception of intimacy with Gaga through social media; Gaga as a good citizen; and a resulting inspiration to do similar work” (Bennett, 2014, p.143). Social media presented the opportunity for celebrities to speak and engage with their audience, without any filters of the news media. They could speak directly and immediately to their audience, creating a “perception of intimacy,” thus; allowing followers the ability to see the celebrities’ authenticity, consequently revealing their genuine nature.

Similar to Lady Gaga, Amber Rose has millions of followers and used social media to garner support for SlutWalk. She has amassed more than 20 million followers on Instagram, 4.4 million on Facebook, and 3.9 million Twitter followers. Her candid testimonials and expressed passion for the SlutWalk movement enabled her followers to share in her experiences, creating a digital space for connection. Her followers were enabled, through social media, to see “the real” Amber Rose and inspired thousands to participate in SlutWalk LA.

Another advantage social media provided for activism was expanding social movements to the online world, reaching countless individuals. The advent of the internet disrupted the traditional progression of social movements by displacing the focus of activity from the streets to the screens (Cornet et al., 2017). The online

platform created a public forum for individuals to share ideas. It provided accessibility. It allowed people often excluded because of status or background to engage in a public or social debate. It allowed individuals who were disabled, worked long-hours, or unable to participate physically, still contribute and have a voice.

Additionally, social media advocacy allowed social movements to travel at unprecedented speeds, spreading awareness and eliciting action. One of the key elements of digital advocacy is the “supersizing” of awareness issues (Vardeman & Sebesta, 2020). “Supersizing” is messages gone viral. Social media allowed messages to increase its reach and speed for lower transaction costs (Vardeman & Sebesta, 2020). For example, since the killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, Black Lives Matter has gained global prominence. The movement is a symbol of racism activism because of its virality.

In 2017, Alyssa Milano tweeted a request to her followers that stated, “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet” (*A Year Ago, Alyssa Milano started a Conversation about #MeToo. These Women Replied.*, 2018). Within 24 hours, the tweet went viral, generating thousands of replies, comments, and retweets. Later it was found that Tarana Burke created the hashtag in 2006 but it was not until the #MeToo hashtag went viral that it crystallized into a movement. Ultimately, the use of the internet by advocacy groups and social movements to promote their cause and communicate with mass audiences is now a common occurrence, due to the instant global reach of social media (Bennett, 2014).

While social media platforms afforded social movement groups to evolve and reach a greater audience, each platform has a different dynamic. Previous studies

looked at social movements that utilized Facebook and Twitter, which are primarily text-based social networking sites. Other platforms, such as Instagram emphasize images. Instagram is a mobile-first social media platform that enabled social movements to utilize visual communication as their central method for sharing information. It is one of the most popular media platforms with over 1 billion active users. Instagram allows users to take and share images with their followers. Cornet et al. (2017) stated, “Instagram sees more than 800 million photos shared per day” (p. 2475). It also allows users to discover new content using keywords or “hashtags” and using the “explore” feature for content the user may like.

SlutWalk Los Angeles, similar to other satellite cities, utilized Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to promote the event and bring awareness. The virtual spaces allowed the movement to communicate widely by uploading videos, images, and captions allowing online viewers to connect and interact. As a result, several media studies researched virtual domains because they were interested in seeing how gender performed on social media. Previously, many studies looked at how gender stereotypes were promoted in television, music, and advertising (Rasmussen & Densley, 2017; J. Rose et al., 2012; Ward, 2005); however, with the emergence of digital spaces, media studies turned their attention to how gender roles were being portrayed in the users’ self-created digital images (J. Rose et al., 2012).

According to gender role theory, people follow unwritten social and cultural rules as they behave “in ways that are different and predictable depending on their respective social identities and the situations they find themselves in” (Biddle, 1986, p.68). Simply put, gender roles theory stressed the behavioral aspect of men and

women. It argued that one's beliefs, values, or norms are socialized by time and culture and the various "roles" are considered acceptable or appropriate for the individual or group.

For example, during the 1950's it was customary for men to work while women took care of the household and children. The men's "role" was the provider and the women's "role" was the homemaker. Each role was considered "socially acceptable" during that time in the United States. In today's climate, it is culturally acceptable for men and women to work and financially support their families.

This theory generalized and offered stereotypes about one's group, "often maintaining and reinforcing the power of the in-group while subordinating members of out-groups" (Lauzen et al., 2008). For example, in 1984, Janet Mills studied nonverbal behaviors that upheld the hierarchal social order where females are considered submissive and males are considered dominant. She conducted a study that assessed how men and women would pose for social photographs without directions from the photographer.

The experiment consisted of two male and two female photographers. The participants were selected randomly during specific periods in the dorm's lobby. The photographers would inform the participants they are taking photographs of the "typical O.U. students for their photography class" (Mills, 1984, p. 635). The participants included 34 males and 34 female undergraduates. Mills predicted that females would smile more than males, females' heads tilt more than males, and females would orient their heads away from the camera. The results of her study supported her predictions. Mill's study showed that both male and female participants unknowingly displayed

hierarchical gender norms. Women were more inclined to pose submissively while the males posed dominantly.

In 2012, Jessica Rose and her colleagues studied gender stereotypes in Facebook profile images. Their objective was to “examine how gender portrayals manifest themselves in self-selected social media displays” (J. Rose et al., 2012, p.590). The following gender role traits include: Men are often portrayed in fairly active work roles, while women tend to be shown as more dependent on social roles involving romance, friendship, and family (Lauzen et al., 2008). Men usually choose to display “joke images” or images that appear more independent, while women display relatively sentimental, emotional images (Dominick, 1999). Men are often pictured as dominant, in elevated positions, showing victory, while women are pictured in more helpless, submissive positions (Goffman, 1976). Men act in comparatively “narrative ways” and women behave more submissively (Bell & Milic, 2002). Men and women display self-promoting and vain images to appear physically attractive and wear minimal clothing to appear sexy (Buffardi Laura & Campbell, Keith, 2008).

A random sample of 300 Facebook profile pictures was selected. They had a list of gender stereotypes that were isolated into eight traits: active, attractive, dependent, dominant, independent, sentimental, sexy, and submissive. To ensure coder reliability, the traits had operational definitions that were used to analyze the photos. The participants included 5-panel members. They each were shown 20 random images from the 300 images selected. They rated each profile picture in terms of the prominence of the eight gender stereotypes using 5-point Likert scales.

Overall, each image was coded eight times for a total of 800 judgments between the five panelists. Their research found that women's profile images rated higher in attractiveness and dependency. Male images rated higher for activeness, dominance, and independence. Lastly, sexiness was a feminine and masculine trait. However, previous research asserted that being sentimental and submissive was a feminine trait, but this was not supported during this study. Even with the time gap, both studies revealed that males and females display gender roles that support the hegemonic culture inadvertently. These gender roles are distinct to men and women, placing them in strict functions that promote society's agenda.

Therefore, as stated previously, this paper seeks to examine what messages are being communicated through the SlutWalk Los Angeles Instagrampage and if those messages posted reflect traditional gender roles or refute them. This paper will also look at the responses from the online community. To answer the following questions, the methodology utilized is thematic analysis.

Methods

To answer the research questions, thematic analysis was employed to examine the official Instagram page of SlutWalk LA. The images and text were analyzed using Braun & Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis to identify patterns or themes within the data. Phase 1 required in-depth immersion in the data. This included a repeated examination of the entire data set, an active search for meanings, patterns, or themes, and writing it down. Phase 2 involved generating codes based on interesting or specific features within the data. For example, diverse, safe space, belonging, embracing, unity, and relationship were codes that were communicated within the images. Once the data was coded and systematically arranged, phase 3 generated possible themes, and each code was placed in an identified theme.

Phase 4 reviewed and refined the themes. In this phase, codes that were extracted from the data were reviewed to ensure they supported the theme, secondly, the themes were verified to ensure they captured the entire data set and did not overlap. Once the themes and codes were an accurate representation of the data, themes were renamed and defined for the final analysis in phase 5. Lastly, phase 6 involved producing the final analysis of the selected extracts, generating highlights and examples that related to the research questions.

A total of 978 posts from "SlutWalk_LA" Instagram page was examined and scrutinized. The images and text were viewed on a computer and phone. Using the previous research detailed above as a guide, phase 1 included immersing and familiarizing oneself with the data by continual examination of the images. Phase 2 included writing different codes or common characteristics within the data which lead to

creating themes in phase 3. Each code written in phase 2 would fall under a theme in phase 3. Afterwards, each theme was verified to ensure representation of the data without overlapping. Lastly, phase 6, included descriptions and detailed examples from selected images within the data set.

One advantage of utilizing thematic analysis for this study was the ability to summarize key features or patterns from a large data set. Secondly, the thematic analysis highlighted the similarities and differences between messages communicated through Instagram versus in-person. Lastly, the thematic analysis could provide new, unanticipated insights or claims.

Results

The first theme discovered on the Instagram page through thematic analysis was the movement's inclusiveness; diversity was one of the most reoccurring messages portrayed in the pictures. The images shared on Instagram suggested that everyone was accepted.

An example that displayed inclusion was a picture taken with 11 participants who attended the protest. The photo included six women and five males. In addition to gender, the individuals in the photo were of different races and ethnicity. The men appeared to be African American while the women African American, Hispanic, and White. The image also showed the participants in different clothing. Amber Rose, who was in the center of the photo, wore a short white dress accompanied by a white garter belt, white stockings, and white tennis shoes. Another woman in the photo wore a white plunging neck tie-front crop top with a yellow plaid skirt and black Vans. The other individuals in the photo wore ordinary "everyday" attire, which included, t-shirt/blouse, shorts, jeans, jackets, and tennis shoes. This image gained over 2100 likes and 16 comments, each expressing their praise and support of the movement.

Second, the images posted on Instagram not only displayed small-figured women and men but promoted heavy-set individuals as well. One post showed an overweight African American woman who differed from the typical fit and skinny images. The post displayed a "big, black woman" only wearing a bra and panty lace lingerie with thigh-high black suede boots. The photo garnered 1,300 likes and 13 comments that were all positive. Similarly, another post showed an overweight, Caucasian woman. She wore a black shirt, black shorts, and thigh-high black boots with the word "fat"

plastered on her entire outfit, including her boots, gaining more than 15,000 likes and 6 adoring comments. Another body-positive image that reinforced diversity was an image that displayed someone's feet standing on the scale. Instead of the scale showing the weight, it stated, "HEY BITCH, GO LIVE YOUR LIFE." The image received over 3,200 likes and a great response in the comments, except for one respondent, who stated, "STOP telling people that being overweight is okay. It isn't. You're encouraging them to stay unhealthy and treat their bodies like shit. 'GO LIVE YOUR LIFE.' They're not gonna have the life if they die of obesity at the age of 30." Moreover, the Instagram page also shared pictures of women from different generations and backgrounds.

One image showed a side-by-side photo of an African American woman wearing a black shirt tied in the back exposing her stomach with the words "MUVA" (slang for mother) written on it and pink panties with the words Hoe and whore inscribed on them. She is holding up a sign that contains a message on the front and back. The right photo displayed one message that stated, "I am a mother and a grandmother!! The left photo displayed the second message which stated, "3 daughters. 12 grandchildren. I live on Skidrow. I am not a homeless HOE." The post received close to 3,000 likes and 90 responses that mostly criticized the movement and the photo. One respondent replied, "Thot patrol." In addition to being called a thot, someone replied, "ratchet." Another commentator stated, "I'm glad I grew up in a generation where grandmas didn't do stuff like this."

While the aforementioned photo included a woman, whose role included being a mother and grandmother another post showed a teenager. In the picture, the young woman was holding a sign that read, "How could I have been 'asking for it' when I didn't

even know what 'it' was at the time..." She was wearing a Micky Mouse tie-dye shirt and black leather shorts with fishnet stockings underneath. The post garnered over 3100 likes and 27 comments. With no negative response, each comment was full of praise and admiration. One response, in particular, shared their story of being sexually assaulted. Another example that expressed inclusion was a picture of a little girl. The photo was comprised of several women in the background walking and holding signs; however, the little girl was the focus. She was standing alone dressed in regular attire holding a sign that read, "If you believe in equality, you are a Feminist." The caption read, "you can never be too young to learn about your rights." The photo did not have any responses but it did receive over 2600 likes. In addition to grandmother, teens, and children, the Instagram page also included photos of college students that supported the SlutWalk.

One post consisted of five women who attended the University of Southern California and volunteered for the movement. In the photo, four women wore pink ARSW (Amber Rose SlutWalk) volunteer shirts and the fifth volunteer wore a blue denim sleeveless shirt. Instead of holding signs, they had a table with various brochures, pamphlets, and merchandise. The merchandise included T-shirts that read, "Just because I am a sexual being, doesn't mean I want to have sex with you" and "If I am a whore, so is your mother." The image received significant praise in the comments, with many respondents commending the women and wanting a T-shirt. Overall, the images shared on Instagram appeared to include and accommodate anyone, especially individuals who are normally excluded. SlutWalk LA Instagram posted images that included but was not limited to, people of color, sex workers, college

students, mothers, and LGBTQ, emphasizing the idea of creating a space where all are included and have a voice. The page reemphasized the idea that there was not a specific age, gender, or identity that was embraced but anyone was accepted.

The next theme that was discovered through thematic analysis was sexual liberation. This theme suggested that people could do what pleases them sexually without being restrained by traditional behavioral codes or people's opinions. The images posted via Instagram conveyed that message. Numerous photos showed proud women and men, including Amber Rose, audaciously promoting and celebrating promiscuity. Several examples include pictures of Rose. In the first photo, Rose was sitting on a stool holding a sign that shielded her naked body and displayed the message, "being body positive is letting people do what they want with their bodies." Another photo depicted Amber Rose smiling radiantly with the caption "Hoe is Life, just do it." Aside from being a tool that is used for gardening, a hoe is considered a prostitute or someone promiscuous. The message communicated in each photo challenged traditional views on monogamous relationships and women, encouraging sexual freedom without commitment, shame, or guilt. The first image described received more than 4,000 likes and 23 comments, each supporting and loving the post. The second image received close to 5,000 likes and 80 comments that expressed their agreement, except for one. The respondent claimed, "pretty sure Jesus is Life," and they received one like for their comment.

Another image that embraced exploring one's sexuality included Rose holding a vibrator while biting her bottom lip. The caption stated, "Everyone should be able to enjoy intimate, personal pleasure to its fullest limits. It's a universal human right, one

that deserves respect.” Gaining close to 2,800 likes, this photo had many respondents loving Amber and the toy. They expressed their desire to use the toy on themselves and use it on Rose as well. Along with vibrators, additional sex toys and props were regularly used in images. One such post included a stripper pole and dildo. The picture consisted of two Caucasian women posing with a stripper pole in the middle. The woman on the left was kneeling and holding the pole with her left hand and a rainbow-colored dildo in her right hand. Her wardrobe consisted of a multicolored wig, leather panties with fishnet stockings underneath, and black boots. Completely naked at the top, her breasts were exposed only using pasties to cover her areolas and nipples. The other woman in the photo was standing up and holding the stripper pole in her right hand. She wore a blue wig, leather overall panties, white stockings, and black boots. Matching her counterpart, her breast was exposed using only tape to cover her nipples.

Although the image received over 4,000 likes it also received heavy criticism in the comments. One respondent stated, “Do we ever question if our kids could have access to these improper photos?? We claim to love our kids yet we support the things that pollute their minds, truth is we are self-seeking single-minded people, we don’t love our kids, we just love ourselves!” Another comment stated, “I would like to know how this is empowering? Just curious.” Lastly, one commentator shared, “put a dress on and smile like any normal women.” Another image with the stripper pole included a white woman posing on the pole, wearing a matching thong and bra set accompanied by platform stiletto heels. She wrapped one leg wrapped around the pole with a beaming smile. This image only garnered 2,700 likes compared to the former image; however, each comment was full of praise.

Another image that expressed sexual liberation included five women dressed casually. No props, no crazy outfits, just mischievous grins and a sign that stated, "Make sucking dick great again." The photo gained over 2,500 likes and 72 comments. Many respondents were aghast and reveling at the thought; however, one comment stated, "this needs to stop." Lastly, one final example was a photo that suggested an orgy. It included five individuals, two women and three males, lying in the same bed and touching one another. Amber Rose was in the center of the photo between two men. She was wearing BDSM lingerie with a choker and lying on her back seductively placing her right hand on the man to her left who was also wearing BDSM lingerie. To the right of Amber, a man wearing a blond wig and fishnet lingerie was grasping Rose's breast. Above Rose were the second woman and third male. She too wore black lingerie and lay seductively on the third man's chest while he grasped her breasts. Each individual was touching and groping someone while seductively posing. The photo received numerous praises but one respondent did state, "why name the organization after the word slut, it nullifies it."

Sexual liberation was a frequent message throughout the Instagram page. Many photos included women that were topless, not using pasties to cover their breasts, while other images portrayed women completely naked. Other images showed the LGBTQ community wearing BDSM lingerie leaving nothing to the imagination. The Instagram page portrayed many unapologetic, explicit images of women and men that who "comfortable in their skin."

The third reoccurring theme that was portrayed from the images and text posted was re-appropriation, which suggests reclaiming a word or phrase and removing the

stigma that was considered degrading and demeaning to individuals or groups. Many photos and text shared on Instagram displayed women and men reclaiming or attaching to the word “slut” by self-identifying or self-labeling as one. One example of self-labeling featured the “Wall of No Shame” as the backdrop for an image.

The “Wall of No Shame” was a long, black chalkboard with various words and phrases scribbled in chalk across the entire board by protest participants. Some of the words included: hoe was here, pussy, consent, hoe=life, and work that pussy. While the penmanship was illegible, one word was not. Above every written confession or phrase was the word #SLUT written in bold, capitalized letters. In front of the backdrop, under #SLUT, was a Caucasian woman wearing an everyday outfit (an Adidas dress, shades, head wrap); however, around her neck she branded a SLUT choker necklace smiling brightly. She proudly labeled herself a slut utilizing the “Wall of No Shame” and the diamond-studded slut necklace. The image received close to 4,000 likes and 40 mixed comments. Several comments loved the photo; however, some comments criticized the label and behavior. For example, one respondent stated, “why can’t we just come up with a new word?” Another commentator stated, “there’s nothing wrong with shaming people who practice behaviors that erode the foundations of society.”

Another post was an image of a Caucasian woman from the shoulders down highlighting her breasts, shirt, and “SlutBox.” The message on the shirt read I AM A SLUT of the people, for the people, by the people, #slutbox. The shirt was rolled up exposing her breast and the heart-shaped pasties, with “slut” continuously inscribed on it, which covered her nipples. The final touch was the SlutBox (goodies box for the SlutWalk), that covered her nude private area. The photo received over 1,600 likes 20

comments. Along with the word “slut,” other posts shared on Instagram displayed individuals self-identifying with other words like hoe, whore, and thot. One instance is an image of an African American woman who was wearing a leopard-print dress while her male counterpart was wearing a black suit. His suit jacket contained white, hand-written words such as hoe, slut, hoodrat, skank, and manwhore. The caption read, “We all are entitled to live free and equal.” The photo received over 600 likes and five comments that expressed their agreement. One comment stated, “couldn’t agree more with the message.”

The next photo showed numerous women behind a steel barricade. Although the photo captured a considerable number of women, the main attraction was an African American woman. She was posing seductively, sticking her tongue out, while holding a plain white t-shirt that displayed the word “Thot” in the center. One comment stated, “Yusssss yallllll let’s ho.” Another respondent shared, “I love thots.” However, one comment expressed their disdain. They stated, “why are people so proud to be a slut? That’s really a BAD thing to be.”

One final example of re-appropriation was an image with two Caucasian women that branded their chest. The women were standing side by side facing the camera. The woman on the right had the words “HOE F’SHO” painted in black on her chest while holding a sign that read, “my pussy my choice.” The woman on the left had the word “SLUT” painted in black on her chest and holding a sign that reads, “Stop Fucking shaming.” While the post received close to 5000 likes, the responses included heavy criticism. One comment stated, “there’s really no point in this ‘slutwalk’ shit, y’all wearing stupid ass clothes how is a dude supposed to respect you? Or anyone at this

point? This is so gross, have some self-respect and cover yourself, you peasants.”

Another respondent cited religion and stated, “God gave us humans these bodies, they actually belong to Him...”

The final theme that was discovered through thematic analysis was rape awareness. Many photos and messages shared on Instagram sought to inform and educate individuals about sexual assault with the hope of influencing or altering one’s attitude or beliefs about rape. For example, the page continually posted images or messages that read, “no means no” or “I was never asking for it,” phrases and slogans heavily utilized in sexual assault campaigns. Second, many images displayed captions that addressed victim-blaming. For example, one image included Amber Rose wearing a white wedding dress and veil. The caption in the picture stated, “we’re allowed to be sexy. We’re allowed to dress how we want. It’s not an invitation to touch us inappropriately...we’re just not taking that shit anymore....” The image received over 11,000 likes and 160 comments. A similar post shared on Instagram stated, “my clothes do not determine my consent,” which received over 4,300 likes.

Each post asserted that one’s outfit does not give consent, removing the blame of the victim, which directly opposed the argument made by the Toronto officer. Many responses echoed agreement and sang praises for each post; however, several commentators strongly disagreed. One wrote about the hypocrisy and contradiction of trying to “tell” a man how to behave while telling women NOT to let anyone tell you how to behave. “Telling girls it’s okay to have their tits and ass hanging out if they want or to say they can fuck any amount of guys is dangerous... it will create more rape than prevent.” Additionally, some comments emphasized the responsibility women do play in

how they dress. One wrote, “you’re definitely trying to get someone’s attention though...” Similarly, one stated, “yeah just be careful not to cry rape when a guy is checking you out.” Both comments allude to the woman “asking for it” or even “crying wolf.”

Lastly, SlutWalk Instagram continued to raise awareness with several posts that addressed injustice. For example, an image with the message, “what frustrates me at my school is that we’ve had people expelled for cheating, but nobody has ever been expelled for rape.” It received close to 800 likes and 50 comments that shared the same sentiments. One wrote, “it’s always ‘what was she wearing’ or ‘why was she out late?’ Rape culture NEEDS to stop being promoted asking such silly questions about rape victims.” Another responded and wrote, “I feel that cause it happened to me and my school didn’t do shit.” Similarly, another message shared on Instagram stated, “we want all survivors of sexual harassment, everywhere, to be heard, to be believed, and to know that accountability is possible.”

Discussion

This study analyzed images and text to discover what messages SlutWalk LA communicated in a digital-mediated space, such as Instagram, and if that message supported or refuted traditional gender roles. The findings revealed that the Instagram page had several reoccurring messages such as inclusion, sexual liberation, re-appropriation, and rape awareness. Analogous to SlutWalk Toronto and SlutWalk Los Angeles street protest, the online platform encouraged anyone to participate and supported everyone from all races and backgrounds. The images posted consisted of men, women, teens, children, whites, blacks, LGBTQ, moms, grandmothers, college students, etc. There was also diversity with the clothing. Although many images included partial to full nudity, there were images that displayed women and men fully dressed in everyday attire. The images captured women, men, and children in jeans, T-shirts, and tennis shoes who supported the movement. Diversity was a clear and loud message that was communicated via Instagram. Secondly, the images also communicated sexual liberation. Sexual restraint, modesty, or discretion was rare on the SlutWalk LA Instagram page.

Promiscuity was heavily celebrated and even portrayed as empowerment. The online platform promoted the idea that women do not have to be confined to traditional rules like monogamous relationships or sexual repression. The message of sexual liberation was expressed through the clothing, body language, props, art, and text. The Instagram images branded and displayed women naked or partially naked wearing lingerie, bustier tops, or panties that were paired with fishnet stockings and nipple pasties. In addition to the clothing, the images included seductive, erotic poses. For

example, several images captured women with their tongues sticking out. Other images displayed women putting their fingers or other objects in their mouths to suckle or lick. Women were also seen bending or squatting so one could see their breast or butt. The platform included artwork as well that consisted of naked women posing in various sexual positions leaving nothing to the imagination. The Instagram page also shared unambiguous text or signs that encouraged and supported women to be free sexually. Messages included slogans like, “no shame in no pants” or “pussy power” or “my pussy, my choice.” Overall, the online platform displayed several things concerning sexual liberation (a) it allowed individuals to share and express their sexual freedom; (b) it gave permission to not be ashamed or feel guilty because of their sexual behavior; and (c) sexual liberation is empowering.

Joining with sexual liberation, the platform also showed women who embraced and celebrated being labeled derogatory words such as slut, hoe, or whore. Self-labeling was heavily communicated throughout the images. The labels were engraved or written on their bodies or outfits and even used as captions or text in a picture. The SlutWalk apparel and merchandise also utilized derogatory labels to challenge the statement made by the Toronto police officer, “Women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized.” Instagram intentionally promoted being labeled a “slut” or “whore” for (a) satire and mockery and (b) to reclaim the word “slut.” The images demonstrated they were no longer allowing negative labels to demean and humiliate them. They wanted to take control over the label and their sexual lives. By embracing the term and making it more common, it would potentially diffuse the power of the outside groups that would use those labels to demean and belittle.

Lastly, the Instagram page contributed to the ongoing discussion about sexual assault. Analogous to “Take Back the Night” and the #MeToo movement, the online platform addressed the prevalent issue of rape. It included signs and text captions that opposed sexual assault like, “no does not mean convince me” or “I was never asking for it” or “no is a complete sentence.”

The page brought attention to numerous women who were sexually assaulted, many of which did not receive justice or were afraid to come forward. One post included a quote from Vice President Kamala Harris stating, “to all survivors of sexual assault: We hear you. We see you. We will give you dignity. Don’t let this process bully you into silence.” Based off the post, one can conclude that rape victims were not heard and there was a fear to come forward because of the blame and shame that they will face; however, the Instagram page provided a space for the victims to be seen and heard. It allowed sexual assault victims to come forward, band together, and support one another; ultimately, giving them more confidence and strength to tell or embrace their story.

Based off previous studies, many criticized the movement because it promoted the current hegemonic culture that objectified and pornified women, it disregarded the history and plight of African American women, and it was insignificant compared to previous feminist movements. Differing from the feminist movement and contradicting critiques, the SlutWalk Instagram page encompassed a wide spectrum of individuals. Many of the images and posts showed consistent representation of all races and ethnicities. It even included lower to middle-class individuals (the signs they held, provided that information). Women of color, specifically African Americans, were

prevalent on the online platform dismantling the argument. African American women were not ashamed to be a part of the movement. They were more concerned with the sexual injustices that continued versus the name of the movement. Once analyzing the online platform, one could sense the unity and togetherness. The Instagram page also contradicted critiques because it was NOT insignificant compared to the feminist movement because it advocated for rape victims. SlutWalk provided a voice for the voiceless.

Although the method of body protesting may overshadow the message of the movement, the online platform did address and raise awareness for rape. It enabled users and sexual assault victims the ability to come forward and advocate. It added to the continued discussion of sexual assault and reached other individuals that “Take Back the Night” or the #MeToo movement was unable to reach. As previously stated, college students were really engaged and thrilled about participating in the movement. It was a movement where they could join and have a presence. Overall, the Instagram page did highlight some of the movement’s merits; however, the Instagram page also coincided with previous literature that criticized the movement for endorsing and supporting the cultural pornification of women.

It must be noted that SlutWalks are very complex to analyze. Women’s sexuality has always been controversial, and the movement does contribute to the on-going conversation of rape, activism, and patriarchy. Nevertheless, if the goal of the SlutWalk movement is to end sexual injustice and derogatory labeling by tearing down stereotypical traditions, telling a woman she can dress and act as she pleases is counterproductive.

The Instagram page declared it is empowering to sleep with as many men or women as you want. This perspective is dangerous, and various consequences could result from being promiscuous such as being molested, raped, increasing one's chance of contracting diseases and promoting the male-gaze that leads to sexual objectification. If the movement is fighting and protesting for respect and justice, they need to "look" the part. Studies have shown how the media can suggest and impart stereotypical roles into one's consciousness unknowingly (Wood, 2001). Dressing provocatively as a form of parody, only reinforced the prevailing stereotypes that society promotes. Based off gender role theory, behavioral expectations are already in place for women and men.

From previous literature, women are expected to be the weaker, sexier vessels while men are supposed to dominate and conquer. Once the images and post were analyzed, women were portrayed as sexy and seductive. The signs they held or props they branded only reinforced hypersexualized content. Similarly, re-appropriating derogatory labels such as "slut" may increase perceived power to the self-labeler but if an observer is conditioned to dehumanize women as animals or objects, then identifying as a "slut" or "whore" plays into the hand of the observer and ultimately into society's traditional gender roles.

Furthermore, the Instagram page only addressed the men. They heavily criticized the behavior and actions of individual men; however, to shift the traditional gender roles, the movement needs to affect the political. The men are just symptoms to a greater issue. Therefore, dressing scantily and encouraging sexual liberation can and will encourage men to continue to exploit and stereotype women. Although, the

SlutWalk movement never officially branded themselves as a part of the feminist movement, there were many similarities between each movement; however, there was some key differences.

As the feminist movement confronted men and challenged society demanding respect, they wanted to be more than a “piece of meat” or their spouse’s “property.” They wanted to be looked upon as intelligent, hard working women that can do more than lay on their back. They did utilize drastic measures; however, they did not have to get naked to prove a point. By endorsing sexual liberty, the Instagram page of SlutWalk Los Angeles reinforced stereotypes prevalent in Western society. It was quite delusional to assume that because one chooses to have sexual freedom, that they have control or respect. They still support and encourage the sexist and exploitive mindset of males. Sexual liberation only feeds a perpetual cycle of sexism, exploitation, oppression, and objectification which confirmed the arguments and responses made by online users.

The Instagram page had many supporters that applauded and commended the movement’s efforts, but it also had many who opposed the movement and shared their contempt. Many of the opposers believed the movement was senseless. They detested the name and hated the movement. Some commentators were even bold enough to continue blame assault victims, asserting it was the victim’s fault because of how they dressed and behaved. Responders believed victims acted knowingly. That they wear certain things and act a certain way for attention and once they receive the attention, and once they receive the attention, they cry wolf.

Other respondents expressed disdain for the raunchy, nasty behavior and would reference the Bible and God. After analyzing the posts, images that involved individuals that were fully dressed and did not label themselves received more praise than provocative or self-labeling images. Ultimately, the images and messages were better received if individuals were captured in everyday attire without promiscuous text.

Conclusion

The advent of social media has enabled social movements to have a consistent voice and be a consistent presence. They no longer need to plan or prepare for the next street protest to be heard; with social media, social movements could protest digitally. Online activism is advantageous because social movements are able to reach a greater audience at quicker speeds and receive greater participation; thus, the messages communicated online are important because it reflects the movement.

This paper examined the Instagram page of SlutWalk Los Angeles to determine what messages were being communicated about the SlutWalk movement: a movement that was controversial and complex. By analyzing the content, future activism that utilizes an online platform and visual imagery can gain better knowledge and understanding of what strategies are advantageous and beneficial. In addition, the SlutWalk movement can modify some of its practices in order to garner more support and respect.

Thematic analysis explored the content shared via Instagram and it was discovered that the images and text communicate inclusion and rape awareness: two advantageous themes that were consistently portrayed. The images communicated a sense of “belonging.” Regardless of shape, size, race, or gender, no one was excluded. Everyone was embraced despite their background or story. The images communicated no judgment, only acceptance.

Nevertheless, the Instagram page also portrayed sexual liberation and re-appropriation that confirmed the argument of previous literature and critiques argument that the movement reinforced and supported the hypersexualized stereotype of women

in the hegemonic culture. By posting unconventional, provocative images to “reject” conventional gender roles, the women unconsciously supported and contributed to sexual objectification. Reducing themselves to “sluts,” mere objects or animals, for the pleasure of others. Ultimately, the images portrayed women inadvertently conforming to cultural gender roles. One could argue the contradictory messages expressed on Instagram may have contributed to the demise of the LA Slutwalk. As it became extreme in its message and embrace of sexual liberation, it lost mainstream support. Indeed, its strong connection to Amber Rose helped win early support but also alienated those who did not embrace the uninhibited message and dress.

Within the confines of my research and analysis, I did experience some limitations. The first limitation pertains to the data. While SlutWalk are still being held in other cities and countries such as Denver, Arizona, Detroit, and Holland, SlutWalk Los Angeles has not had a protest since 2018. Another limitation included the methodology. Some of the images contained blurry posters or messages, so I was unable to clearly read or distinguish what message was being communicated. Future research should incorporate an analysis of other satellite cities and how the way they incorporate social media and produce messages. They can also compare SlutWalk to other activist movements that combat sexual assault to determine which strategies are more effective.

While this study looked at the messages communicated through Instagram and the response of the online audience, more research is needed to examine why the SlutWalk movement was moderately successful compared to the #MeToo movement. Future research can analyze and examine the strategies and tactics utilized for the

#Metoo movement as well as tangible results. Each movement are predominately women that protest sexual abuse; however, each movement operates differently.

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