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Seven Women And A Hashtag: A Qualitative Study Of The Founding Of A Twitter Hashtag Community For Women In Higher Education

Laurie A. Berry
Indiana State University

SEVEN WOMEN AND A HASHTAG: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE FOUNDING OF A TWITTER HASHTAG COMMUNITY FOR WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Laurie A. Berry

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CURRICULUM VITA

Laurie A. Berry

EDUCATION:

2022	PhD, Educational Administration, Leadership in Higher Education Specialization Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana
1991	MA in Education, Student Personnel Services Specialization Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky
1990	BA, English Literature Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

2015–Present	Assistant Dean of Students University of Southern Indiana, Evansville, Indiana
2007–2015	Director of Housing and Residence Life University of Southern Indiana, Evansville, Indiana
2006–2001	Associate Director of Residence Life University of Southern Indiana, Evansville, Indiana
2001–2000	Assistant Director of Facilities and Operations University of Southern Indiana, Evansville, Indiana
2000–1998	Assistant Director of Judicial Affairs University of Southern Indiana, Evansville, Indiana
1997–1994	Assistant Director University Housing University of Southern Indiana, Evansville, Indiana
1994–1992	Residence Life Program Coordinator University of Southern Indiana, Evansville, Indiana

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Committee Chair: Kandace G. Hinton, PhD

Raleigh Holmstead Distinguished Professor of Educational Leadership

Indiana State University

Committee Member: Mary Howard-Hamilton, EdD

Coffman Distinguished Research Professor of Educational Leadership

Indiana State University

Committee Member: Monica Marcelis Fochtman, PhD, CPRW

Career Clarity Coach, Resume Writing Expert

Sheldrake Consulting

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the use of social media, specifically Twitter, as a way for women in higher education to connect with one another. Seven women who developed a specific hashtag were interviewed in a semi-structured initial process followed by a reflective follow up. These interviews were transcribed, coded, and sent to the women for their review. The following major themes emerged from the women's stories as they reflected on their use of Twitter and the #wlsalt hashtag: (a) the origin story of the hashtag, (b) the purpose of the hashtag, (c) the impact of the hashtag community on the personal and professional development of the founders, and (d) the lasting impact of the hashtag.

Online communities in social media spaces have grown exponentially as people have begun to seek and connect with likeminded individuals as they share and curate information. Using feminist theory, social capital, and Oldenburg's third place theory as theoretical underpinnings, these women shared experiences and perceptions of the #wlsalt community they cocreated with other intentional users. The connections these women made with each other and those who used the #wlsalt hashtag exhibited how shared connections can be meaningful in personal and professional realms.

Leveraging the use of these community spaces was a significant source of support for women in higher education.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Women and Higher Education

Women have had a long journey to access higher education (Nidiffer, 2002; Solomon, 1985). For centuries, education was reserved for elite males (Rudolph, 1962). Oberlin College and Antioch College in the mid-1800s were the first postsecondary institutions to be coeducational (Nidiffer, 2002; Rudolf, 1962). The creation of community colleges in the late 1800s turned out to hold the most promise for women as these postsecondary institutions began to cater to women and women became the majority of students in this particular sector (Nidiffer, 2002). It was not until the late 1990s when women became majority participants in postsecondary education, regardless of institutional type. In 2015, women outnumbered men who attained a postsecondary degree by 2.5 million at the undergraduate level and by half a million at the postbaccalaureate level (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017a). These greater numbers of postsecondary degrees have not translated into equity nor parity in the workforce. Women receive the majority of degrees conferred at all postsecondary levels from associate degrees to doctoral degrees; yet, women still do not hold a majority of the leadership positions in the public or higher education sector (Mitchell, 2013).

Workforce Climate for Women in Higher Education

Gender equality in the workforce and in higher education has long been a challenge even as the gap between representation levels of genders in the workforce has narrowed. Although women comprised 50.5% of the U.S. population in 2021 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022), women made up 49% of the workforce in higher education administration, according to the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR, 2016). These numbers can be deceiving due to the several inequities that exist in the workplace. Allan (2011) described the representation of women in higher education as having fewer women occupy top positions in higher levels of administration or faculty rank. Gaps of inequity abound. CUPA-HR (2016) data showed there are gender inequities at various administrative levels that solidified the pattern Allan (2012) noted of women being a smaller percentage as positions ascend the administrative hierarchy. Women represent only 27% of the top executive office level of presidents, chancellors, and executive vice presidents (CUPA-HR, 2016). Women only comprise 42% of senior institutional officers and rise to majority status at 58% of institutional administrators and 54% of heads of divisions.

These statistics do not show the large gap based on percentages of women in the academy. The assumption that equality is closer to being achieved shatters when the gap in earnings is exposed. According to the 2021 American Association of University Women (AAUW) report, *The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap,* women have not seen much of a decrease in the wage gap that existed a decade ago. In 2020, women earn just 83% of their male counterparts in the workforce. Little-to-no change in earning power has occurred over the last decade. At this rate of change, women will not close the gap and gain pay equity until 2111. The gap exists even when educational levels are achieved and persists in almost all areas of

employment. By examining the metaphors used to conceptualize career experiences of men and women, the divide of equity and parity is clear.

Career Landscape

Careers have been described using many metaphors (Bryant, 1984; Fochtman, 2011; Gunz, 1989; Inkson, 2004; Powell & Butterfield, 1994). Metaphors take a complex concept and help explain the concept through imagery. The ladder has been used to describe how a person ascended in his career in a linear way The career ladder metaphor has several issues when applied to women in the workforce. The linear nature of the metaphor assumes career trajectory is systematic and the movement is always upward in progression (Gunz, 1989). Women, for a variety of reasons, often do not follow a linear career path as they work to negotiate the multiple roles they have both in and out of the workplace (Fochtman, 2011). Certainly, the economic reality because of the recession in December 2007 has had an impact on almost all job sectors regardless of gender. Assumptions of career trajectory became defined by surviving in the new economic landscape. The COVID-19 global pandemic has also impacted women in the workforce. Although it is too early to know the impact of permanent job loss, Dang and Viet (2021) found 10.9% of women in their study had permanently lost their jobs due to the pandemic, whereas only 6% of men reported having permanently lost their job. The almost 5% difference will certainly impact how women move in their career trajectories.

Gunz (1989) reconceptualized the persistent ladder metaphor with a jungle gym to highlight dynamic movement. Oftentimes, lateral, vertical, and diagonal movements are observed as a person moves through her career. Sandberg (2013) noted career trajectory was not a stepped ladder progression:

> There's only one way to get to the top of a ladder, but there are many ways to get to the top of a jungle gym. . . . The ability to forge a unique path with occasional dips, detours, and even dead ends presents a better chance for fulfillment. (p. 53)

Inkson (2004) shared the following metaphors for careers: (a) career as craft with construction as the delivery method, (b) career as path with a journey as the image, and (c) career as a network with relationships central to the metaphor. There are many ways to move through a career path. The starting point in a person's career journey is far from where they may land in retirement. Sandberg (2013) found the average U.S. worker had 11 jobs from the age of 18–64, noting the days of a person working for one organization and working their way up are long gone. These metaphors can be applied for any career path regardless of gender, and highlight career trajectory as rarely linear in nature.

When exploring career trajectory for women, a few more unique metaphors emerge to describe the experience of women in the workplace. The glass ceiling metaphor was first introduced by Bryant (1984) as she described women in middle management who reached an invisible barrier as they worked to rise in their careers. Throughout the latter part of the 20th century, this image dominated the landscape. The glass ceiling was viewed as an absolute barrier that could be seen from below but appeared to be invisible from above.

Though the glass ceiling metaphor began to become outdated as more and more women rose into leadership positions both in the corporate world and higher education administration, it has persisted as a visual image for women in career progression. When Hillary Clinton lost the Democratic nomination in 2008 to Barack Obama, she said in her endorsement speech, "Although we weren't able to shatter the hardest glass ceiling, thanks to you, it's got 18 million cracks" (Clinton, 2008, *21*, p. 20). In her introduction video 4 years later, Hillary Clinton was

seen shattering the glass after all male presidents before her were featured in a montage (Clinton, 2016, *1*, p. 7). In their study of U.S. federal government, Powell and Butterfield (1994) found when fair and standardized procedures are in place for senior executive service positions in a cabinet-level department, the glass ceiling effect can be minimized. Women in the workplace face persistent, pervasive obstacles no matter what metaphor is used to describe the career landscape. Not only are the numbers of women in the higher education field important, but so are the positions women hold in the organization if the goal is equity and parity in the workforce.

Social Media as Communication Platform

Social media has become part of the everyday lives of many. Facebook and Twitter are two social media platforms that dominate the current social media landscape. In September 2011, the *Financial Times* reported there were 750 million Facebook users worldwide and 100 million Twitter users with 230 million tweets sent per day. About 40% of Twitter users do not actively engage in tweeting but sign in to read others' posts (Serrano, 2011). The most recent data released by Pew Research noted almost 80% of all internet users are on Facebook and about 24% of internet users engage with Twitter (Greenwood et al., 2016). These social media platforms have become some of the many ways people share and receive information. Facebook is the dominant social media site, and 32% of internet users engage with Instagram (Greenwood et al., 2016). Other social media platforms, such as LinkedIn and Pinterest, are also tracked. In 2016, women use Twitter (25%) more than men (24%) and Twitter is more popular with those with a college degree or higher (29%) compared to those with a high school degree or less (20%). There are 310 million active members on Twitter monthly (Smith, 2016). The use of this social media platform by millions of people each month to communicate with one another makes Twitter worth studying. Over 80% of those who use Twitter actively access it through their smart phones

(Smith, 2016). Former President Donald Trump regularly tweeted and had 31.4 million followers according to his Twitter profile page before being permanently banned from Twitter near the end of 2021 (Trump, n.d.).

Twitter started in 2006 as a way to share a status of what a person was doing at the moment using 140 characters or less. Since 2006, the platform has grown into a concise format to share much more information (Jensen et al., 2010). With the sheer volume of people sharing information via a 140-character tweet, a single message can get lost in the sea of tweets that populate a person's Twitter stream. Because a tweet can get lost in a person's feed, hashtags (i.e., #) were developed by users in 2008 (Huang et al., 2010). A hashtag allows a user to track a conversation based on topic by placing the hashtag symbol in front of a keyword or phrase. These hashtags allow users to filter content based on the tag used in the tweet. Hashtags are added or embedded by the user in the 140-character limit. Much of this study covered the time when Twitter had the 140-character limit. In November 2017, Twitter expanded to the present 240-character limit (Perez, 2017).

The Student Affairs Twitter Landscape

Different hashtags have come into use through tweets and conversations using Twitter. Many practitioners in student affairs have developed and used hashtags to track topics and conversations of interest in the profession. *Inside Higher Ed* developed a Twitter directory for higher education; as of March 2020, the resource had 94 registered hashtags in use (Inside Higher Ed, n.d.). Additionally, this particular resource allows users to register hashtags and includes Twitter user account information on influential institutions and practitioners. The dynamic and organic nature of social media allows for the conversation to ebb and flow. A search of the resource for student affairs hashtags (#sa) shows seven different hashtags in use.

Women connect using social media including Twitter. A search of the same *Inside Higher Ed* Twitter directory yielded three hashtags (i.e., #sawomen, #wihsng, #wlsalt) devoted to women in higher education. The directory also shows one college account, @SalemCollege, and two other Twitter accounts devoted to women—@UVenus and @womeninhighered (Inside Higher Ed, n.d.). Each hashtag or account has an explanation of its general use and additional information if available.

Using hashtags to filter content is helpful. Using the # symbol before relevant words, phrases, or letters allows users to find or filter content. The help section of Twitter suggests using two hashtags, but there is no limit to the number of tags a post has beyond 240 characters (Twitter Help Center, n.d.). Creating and using hashtags developed around women in higher education could be a valuable source of information and connection to colleagues in the field.

Statement of the Problem

Social media permeates many aspects of modern life. The communities and bonds formed in those spaces are important to study and understand. Connections among and between people grow and are no longer tied to geography or real-time communication. Social media, specifically Twitter, has grown to include significant, asynchronous communication among the seven founding members who developed a hashtag to empower women and the people who use this specific hashtag.

Significance of the Study

The need for this study is imperative. Online communities in social media spaces have grown exponentially as people seek and connect with likeminded individuals to share and curate information. Clem (2011) noted the ease of communication through the use of social media can "directly influence the relationships needed to build and maintain social capital" (p. 15). The

participation of women in online communities has grown from 18% in 1996 to over 50% in 1999 (Lin, 2003). A Pew Research study (as cited by Duggin & Brenner, 2013) found the number of internet users who use Twitter has risen to 16%, double what was reported in November 2010. When looking at social media, Duggin and Brenner (2013) found women use social media at a higher level (71%) than men who engage in social media (62%).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, this study sought to discover the meaning women in higher education make when using social media to enhance their personal and professional development through intersections among feminist and social capital movements. Second, this study explored the "place" of the social media space created in the use of a specific hashtag. Specifically, the study explored the individual and collective meaning derived from the community these women have formed in their personal and professional lives.

Research Questions

The research was guided by the following research questions:

1. What meaning has been derived from forming a Twitter community based on a specific hashtag for women as leaders in higher education?
2. How has this meaning changed over time as women interact with each other and those contributing to the conversation in the social media spaces and in person?
3. How were the founders' personal and professional lives been changed by the use of social media, specifically Twitter?

Personal Statement

My interest in this topic stemmed from my interaction with social media as a female higher education administrator and higher education doctoral student. Over the years in my

career serving as an administrator in the Housing and Residence Life department and in the Dean of Students Office at the University of Southern Indiana, I found myself recently surrounded by female administrators; yet, many times, especially early in my career, I was the only female administrator in the room. For many years, I lacked female mentors. Once I found a female mentor, she often moved up and out of the institution or into a position where there was less time for direct interaction.

The advent of social media and the use of Twitter specifically made it easier to connect with likeminded individuals without barriers of time and distance. I came to use Twitter rather reluctantly. As an English literature major and writer, I found the prospect of sharing insightful and useful information in 140 characters or less too constraining. A colleague persistently challenged me to break out of my comfort zone and participate in a real-time Twitter discussion about student affairs. She reminded me she was simply asking me to sign up and create a Twitter account. I could just watch and see how the discussion went without feeling forced to participate. Lurking and learning was encouraged. I made the commitment, created the account, and followed along in the #sachat Twitter conversation in January 2009. Not long after the conversation began to flow, I jumped in on the #sachat conversation. I became a regular participant in the weekly conversations until my doctoral classes overlapped the designated chat time in August 2010.

I found my voice rather quickly and a forum both supportive and engaging for me professionally. Twitter was not just a social network for me; it was a place for professional connection and growth. My connection to the student affairs worldwide community started with the #sachat community but quickly expanded into conversations in other specialized communities. I was part of a small group of women housing professionals who started a Twitter

account for women in housing (i.e., @wihsng) after establishing the women in housing hashtag (#wihsng) in April 2010. This specialized account and hashtag grew from connections made with women in housing through Twitter. The use of the hashtag allowed me to have meaningful conversations and exchanges with women in the housing and residence life sector throughout the country and world.

Additionally, through regular participation in the #sachat community, I learned of another Twitter hashtag: #sadoc. This hashtag is used by doctoral students who are student affairs professionals. Through the #sadoc hashtag, I connected with many more doctoral students all over the country. As doctoral students, we were able to share our struggles over classes, projects, papers, proposals, and dissertations. I also connected with other professors and professionals who were supportive of our quest for camaraderie and information.

These student affairs-based Twitter communities were a new way to grow and nurture my professional networks. Conversations and information sharing that started in the online world grew into professional contacts and friendships in real life. These connections became the catalyst for growth in my professional life. I felt invigorated and rejuvenated in a way I had not in many years because I connected with professionals doing similar work on their respective campuses. Twitter was a catalyst for connection in a new space for many professionals and is used by many to share information and resources and transform the way many connect with others professionally. This platform made it possible for me to connect with professionals without having to attend conferences, regional, or national meetings.

Women Leadership Metaphor

Women leaders often walk a tightrope, delicately balancing the norms of society and her workplace along with her personal leadership style. On good days, her tightrope and support

systems are close to the ground with little-to-no crosswind. If a misstep occurs, it is not far to the ground. If her support systems are steady and in place, it is soft and forgiving when she falls. Other times, though, there can be a fierce crosswind. The rope itself can be slack and when she looks down, it appears to be miles below before there is a net or ground to catch her if she missteps. Occasionally, she will have coaches close by to share how they navigated their tightrope. Other times, she is up there alone or so it seems from her vantage point. Twitter helped my tightrope have less slack as I navigated the leadership landscape. Could other women leaders in student affairs use Twitter as part of their support network?

Conclusion

Exploring the personal landscape of leadership tightropes women walk is critically important to begin to understand the lived experiences of women in higher education. The use of social media to fill and enhance professional development continues to grow as new areas of interest begin to surface through the use of hashtags to filter content. This study was designed to explore and discover themes from the lived experiences of participants in one such community utilizing a framework based on intersections of feminist and social capital movements.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, this study sought to discover the meaning women in higher education make when using social media to enhance their personal and professional development through intersections among feminist and social capital movements. Second, this study explored the "place" of the social media space created via the use of a specific hashtag. To better understand the landscape of women in higher education, this chapter begins with women's access to higher education and an exploration of women in the academy and in student affairs administration through a feminist lens. Analysis of the literature focused on professional organizations and how these organizations address women's unique needs. The rise of social media and the role it can have in professional development was explored with a social capital lens. Finally, attention was given to the development of the communities that form in the social media space.

Women in Higher Education

Women have had different access to higher education than their male counterparts. Understanding women's historical access and women's leadership on campuses was essential background for studying how the specific hashtag developed into a community. Professional organizations in higher education and other associations that work with women's issues and the rise in social media provided the essential backdrop that was needed for this study.

Historical Access to Education

According to Solomon (1985), “What in the nineteenth century was an act of nonconformity became in the twentieth century a social necessity” (p. xviii). As stated in the introduction, women comprise the majority of students coming into postsecondary institutions in both undergraduate and graduate areas. In 2015, women outnumbered men in postsecondary institutions by 2 million at the undergraduate level and by a half million at the postbaccalaureate level (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017a). Women receive the majority of degrees conferred at all postsecondary levels from associate degrees to doctoral degrees (NCES, 2017b). Solomon (1985) captured the current climate of women in higher education by stating, “Even equity in numbers would not assure equality” (p. 208). Although women have come a long way in their fight for access to higher education, there is a long way to go to get to equality, much less equity.

Women’s access to higher education has been a long journey. Gender, race, and ethnicity have been barriers to access to higher education. The history presented largely covers the history of access to higher education for White women. Higher education in the United States began in 1636 with the founding of Harvard in the Massachusetts Colony (Rudolph, 1962). The primary goal of postsecondary education was the training of young men for future leadership in ministry. Several religiously affiliated institutions were founded in the 1700s (Rudolph, 1962). Because women were not part of ministry leadership nor part of civil leadership, women were not considered for attendance at these colleges (Nidiffer, 2002). In fact, women were thought to be inferior to men because colonial men assumed women had a smaller brain and weaker minds than men (Solomon, 1985). For this reason, women’s roles were centered on the functions of

supporting the family during this time. In this colonial family unit, women were subordinate to their husbands.

In New England, reading and writing were taught to boys and reading was taught to girls, so there was a need for teachers for the children. Educating women to become teachers gave rise to religious sects establishing schools (Solomon, 1985). The academic rigor of these schools was more akin to modern day high schools (Nidiffer, 2002).

19th Century

Higher education for women in the 1800s either entailed women's colleges or coeducational colleges. Sarah Pierce's Respectable Academy in Litchfield, Connecticut, was founded in 1791, Hartford Female Seminary was established in 1823, and Mount Holyoke Female Seminary opened in 1837 (Nidiffer, 2002). Oberlin College, which opened in 1837, was the first coeducational postsecondary institution (Solomon, 1985). Although coeducational, not all classes were jointly attended and many women took a less demanding literary course.

During the early to mid-1800s, the number of female elementary teachers grew substantially; yet, by the end of the 19th century, women were the overwhelming majority of teachers. Solomon (1985) wrote it was on a rare occasion that female teachers would earn more than half that of their male counterparts. It was far more likely women would make approximately a third of a male teacher's salary.

The passage of the Morrill Act in 1862 forever changed the landscape of higher education in United States. Prior to 1860, the majority of colleges were private (Rudolph, 1962). Although there was a significant number of private colleges for women—including the seven sister colleges of Mount Holyoke, Smith, Wellesley, Radcliffe, Barnard, Vassar, and Bryn Mawr—the greatest growth in institutions for women took place in the Midwest after 1870 (Nidiffer, 2002).

Although the Morrill Act created a new classification of college with the public sector, economics that were favorable for women entered the landscape. Serious economic pressures prompted these institutions to admit women, even if unenthusiastically (Nidiffer, 2002). The Civil War caused a drop in male enrollment and there was a higher demand for teachers. Nidiffer (2002) stated, “Women students paid tuition, so they were revenue; women teachers were paid only half of what men earned, so they were cheap labor” (p. 10).

Each area of the country had different ways in which women were admitted. Some institutions—like the City College of New York, which was established in 1847—refused to admit women and contributed directly to the creation of the normal school for women, which later became Hunter College. Although there were eight state universities, mainly in the Midwest (i.e., Iowa, Wisconsin, Kansas, Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Michigan, and California) that were the first to admit women, four institutions—California, Iowa, Kansas, and Minnesota—admitted only women from their home state (Solomon, 1985). The South did not begin admitting women to many of its institutions until as late as 1912, and the elite institutions of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton remained closed to women during this time (Solomon, 1985).

Another effect of the Morrill Act was growth in the curriculum. Prior to the addition of state universities, liberal arts and teacher education dominated the curriculum (Rudolph, 1962). With the growth of state universities came curricula expanded to include engineering, agriculture, and home economics (Graham, 1978). The normal schools of this era became state teaching colleges, then state colleges, and, finally state universities as higher education expanded over the decades (Jacobs, 1996).

Even when women were on campus, there were stark inequities; for example, many universities in the Midwest did not provide housing, medical care, or physical education facilities

for women even though they were provided for men in attendance (Nidiffer, 2002). Scholarship money for women was also almost nonexistent. Not only were facilities and scholarship monies unequal, but so was the treatment of women by male students and faculty. What would now be considered a hostile classroom and living environment was not uncommon. Nidiffer (2002) stated, “Women were explicitly ridiculed under the guise of humor as misogynistic cartoon and stories filled campus newspapers, literary magazines and yearbooks” (p. 10). Many faculty members ignored women and institutional policy often excluded them. In response to this harsh treatment, women developed a separate student culture and despite unequal treatment, women entered college in droves.

20th Century and Beyond

Women’s access to higher education at the turn of the century ballooned. Nidiffer (2002) noted the increase in women at women’s colleges grew almost 350%, whereas at state colleges it was over 430%; at its zenith in the 1920s, women represented 47% of those enrolled. The onset of World War II also created a demand for women in the work force that “for the short time of national emergency the curriculum provided women with opportunities that seemed to belie sex labels” (Solomon, 1985, p. 188). Women began entering the fields of engineering and hard sciences in substantial numbers. Even Harvard University entered into an agreement with Radcliffe to admit women to its medical school and law school during this time period.

With the end of World War II and the enactment of the GI Bill, which gave millions of veterans an opportunity for higher education, women’s access to higher education diminished (Nidiffer, 2002). During this time, many women’s colleges changed to coeducation to take advantage of the influx of new male college students. Nidiffer (2002) stated, “The number of women’s colleges today has declined to fewer than 75 institutions, down from more than 200

institutions that were existence in 1960" (pp. 11–12). This decline in specialized institutions for women came because of the huge influx of veterans returning home and enrolling in colleges. By 1947, 49% of those enrolled in college were veterans. Men comprised 69% of the college population and women made up 31% (Solomon, 1985).

The rise of community or 2-year colleges in the late 1960s and 1970s created a place for women seeking higher education. Baker and Velez (1996) noted in 1960, only 38% of women attended college, but the percentage rose to 62% by 1989. During this same time period, male percentages stayed relatively stable, increasing only from 54% to 58%. Solomon (1985) credited the community college movement with government funding for giving women of low socioeconomic status the opportunity of higher education. In 1960, there was an explosive growth in community colleges when over 450 public community colleges opened, more than doubling what had been created in the previous decade (Cohen & Brewer, 1989). Community colleges catered to women who could not otherwise afford other educational settings such as nontraditional-aged women and first-generation students.

Women have graduated with degrees at a higher percentage than men in almost all degree categories since the mid-1990s. NCES (2017b) data for the 2014–2015 academic year showed women graduated with 79.8% of bachelor's degrees, 76.8% of master's degrees, and 67.4% of advanced professional degrees. Despite these strong completion numbers of degrees by women, there has not been corresponding growth in women leaders in top positions on campus.

Women Leadership on Campus

Although women earn more advanced degrees than ever before, there is not a matching proportion of women in leadership positions. Gains have been made, but there is much room for further growth. Branch-Brioso (2009) noted the American Association of University Professors

(AAUP) in a 2006 study reported women held 31% of tenured positions and 45% of tenure track positions. When looking into top administrative positions, Branch-Brioso (2009) found 23% of college presidents were women, according to the American Council on Education's Center for Policy Analysis. When considering presidencies of doctoral universities, women in the top administrative position drops to 14%.

Women comprise over 50% of the current work force in higher education and yet they do not hold leadership positions in the same proportion. As noted, women are not in tenured faculty positions in proportion to the number of women attaining advanced degrees. Progress remains slow.

Professional Organizations in Higher Education

Women have found ways to connect with each other since entering the academy in administrative positions. Connecting with one another became a necessity as women worked in an academy dominated by men. The issues facing women in administrative positions were unique, as many balanced their role in the family and workplace politics. Women administrators often felt marginalized as they competed in male-dominated culture (Alcalde & Subramaniam, 2020; Balas, 2020; Kersh, 2018). As noted in much of existing literature, professional organizations gave women a place to gather and provided a forum for women to learn from one another (Gangone, 2008; Schwartz, 1997; Weisman, 2002).

History

Women started in the academy in the mid-19th century as faculty members hired to teach women on campus how to become productive members of society (Solomon, 1985). As numbers of women on college campuses increased dramatically, there was an unmet need filled by the creation of the dean of women. In 1892, Alice Freeman Palmer was hired as the Dean of Women

at the University of Chicago (Schwartz, 1997). The dean of women positions were advocates for women by ensuring basic needs were met through equal access to the academy and supervising housing, among other student activities. Dean of women positions were also gateways for academic women into leadership positions at coeducational institutions (Gangone, 2008).

As deans of women became more common on college campuses, the need for a professional association for women in higher education increased. In 1903, the first meeting of deans of women occurred in Chicago (Weisman, 2002). The agenda of the meeting included housing, etiquette and social skills training, self-governance, leadership, and athletic opportunities for women (Schwartz, 1997). During the 1905 meeting—student topics such as admission, curriculum issues, leadership opportunities, and community on campus (Weisman, 2002).

National Association of Deans of Women

Several other meetings of deans of women took place over the years with the eventual establishment of National Association of Deans of Women (NADW) in 1916 (Weisman, 2002). The NADW offered networking and mentoring opportunities to women and provided a formal forum for women to learn from each other. The NADW compiled books, reports, and journals to address the needs of women on college campuses. A permanent office for NADW was established in Washington, D.C. in 1931, and a journal was published beginning in 1938 (Weisman, 2002). Gangone (2009) noted in 1938, NADW published two pamphlets: (a) “The Dean of Girls in High School,” and (b) “The Dean of Women in the Institution of Higher Learning.” Additionally, the NAWD published other works on the subjects of orientation, residence halls for women, and administrative principles and procedures. By the mid-1930s, the NADW was firmly established by hosting annual conferences and connecting deans of women

across the country. During this time, many deans of women wrote books, conducted research, and published articles while supporting their professional organization (Schwartz, 1997). These publications and the annual conferences "placed the association at the forefront of advocacy for women students" (Gangone, 2009, p. 5).

Rise of Student Personnel Movement

Even as dean of men positions started to show up on college campuses in the early 1920s, a growing movement of managing students based on the work of Walter Dill Scott at Northwestern University began to intrigue college leaders. According to Schwartz (1997), "Rather than leave vocation, personal satisfaction and social efficiency to whimsy and chance, the application of proper personnel and guidance techniques enabled the personnel directors to direct and support student's energies toward constructive and useful ends" (p. 13). In 1931, R.C. Clothier presented a report to the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) that introduced the concept of the whole student (Bloland, 1994). In 1937, the American Council on Education (ACE) published *The Student Personnel Point of View*, which incorporated Scott's (Schwartz, 1997), and Clothier's philosophies (Bloland, 1994). Essentially, this growing approach to educating the whole student led to a shift in roles for deans of women (Weisman, 2002). Coupled with the lingering effects of entering World War II, this shift meant many of the deans of women's positions began to give way to a dean of students position that was generally held by men (Weisman, 2002).

Shifting Focus of NADW

The shifting focus of women in society to return home and the pressure to centralize student personnel functions forced many deans of women into subordinate roles at the academy (Gangone, 2009). Weisman (2002) noted many of the deans of women became assistant or

associate deans, and there was a rise in counselor-level positions that prompted the NADW to change its name to include counselors (NAWDC) in 1956. This change came after attempts to merge with the American Personnel and Guidance Association in 1951. At stake for the leadership of NADW was the need to stay separate to provide significant leadership opportunities only possible in a single gendered environment.

In 1971, the NAWDC considered merging with National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). During the annual conference, NAWDC members decided to remain a single gender organization. This decision affirmed the desire of the membership to retain its focus on gender equity issues faced by female administrators (Gangone, 2009). By 1972, NAWDC changed its name to the National Association of Women Deans, Administrators, and Counselors (NAWDAC) and shifted its focus into professional areas of administration, activities and services, continuing education, counseling and individual development, government/agency special programs, and teaching and research (Weisman, 2002). The strong history of advocacy for women and commitment to the changing needs of its members led NAWDAC to remain intact for the next 2.5 decades, despite another name change.

Finances in the 1970s became an issue. To stay solvent, the NAWDAC decided to expand its base and appeal to all women in the higher education field. Adequate membership levels became hard to maintain because of the opportunities for involvement of women in other professional associations. In 1991, in another effort to expand its base membership but keep its focus on women in higher education, the NAWDAC became the National Association for Women in Education (NAWE). The name change was implemented at the 75th anniversary conference in Boston (Gangone, 2009). The NAWE established several professional development opportunities for women beyond its annual conference—including the National

Conference for College Women Student Leaders and the Institute for Emerging Women in Higher Education—before ultimately deciding to dissolve in 2000 (Weisman, 2002). The NAWE competed with other associations of broader appeal and fought the societal shift away from single-sex organizations. The legacy of NADW through NAWE was carried through by:

> The deans of women [who] would remind us not to be deterred – there is still work to be done, for the issue of women's educational equity and advancement, which they so boldly embraced at the turn of the 20th century, has yet to be achieved in the 21st. (Gangone, 2009, p. 19)

Other Associations' Work With Women's Issues

Many professional organizations continue to address the unique needs of their women members. NASPA began as the National Association of Deans and Advisors of Men in 1919. By 1971, NASPA had added a women's network (Weisman, 2002). NASPA currently has 28 knowledge communities, one of which is devoted to Womxn in Student Affairs (WISA). The purpose of WISA is to give voice to women in student affairs through opportunities both regionally and nationally to address gender equity (NASPA, n.d.-a). Additionally, NASPA offers the Alice Manicur Symposium once every 2 years for women who aspire to the senior student affairs officer position. This program offers an intense education and mentoring program, and provides needed support and encouragement for women venturing into this type of career path (NASPA, n.d.-a).

ACPA has the Standing Committee for Women (SCW), which exists as a centralized resource for the needs and concerns of women. The SCW serves to address gender inequity and discrimination of women in the higher education field (Payne-Kirchmeier et al., 2008). The American Association of Higher Education (AAHE) has a women's caucus that was established

in 1984. The Office of Women in Higher Education (OWHE), which was established by ACE in 1973, works to identify women leaders and provide leadership development support. The Higher Education Resources Service (HERS) cosponsors an institute with Bryn Mawr College to provide a residential summer program that addresses the unique needs of women administrators who aspire to leadership roles on campus (Weisman, 2002).

Each of these organizations acknowledges the unique needs of women administrators through the continued development of women in the field of higher education. NAWDAC catered to women until the 1970s and 1980s, when other national organizations began to recognize the needs of women in their associations. The ebb and flow of associations in working with women can be demonstrated through a closer examination of how the Association of College and University Housing Officers International (ACUHO-I) approached addressing the needs of women in the mid-2000s.

In Summer 2007, during the annual conference business meeting, it was announced the Women's Issues Network would be sunset (Payne-Kirchmeier et al., 2008). In the audience were two women who would become #wlsalt founders and at least one evangelist (i.e., me) who was actively a part of the initial group calling into question the sunsetting of the network. The Women's Issues Network had been in place to serve the unique needs of women in ACUHO-I. Key leaders in ACUHO-I cited the following reasons for discontinuing the network: (a) low productivity, (b) little-or-no involvement with members, and (c) confusion as to the role of the group. This decision did not sit well with several women in the organization who attended the ACUHO-I annual meeting and found the decision of the association a surprise because they were part of the network. Payne-Kirchmeier et al. (2008) noted there were unmet needs for women in the association and asked that a Women Issues Task Force be established to survey women in the

association about unmet needs and then establish measurable outcomes. The Women's Issues Task Force would be another way to show ACUHO-I visibly making a strong statement of inclusion and development of community.

In Summer 2008, ACUHO-I accepted the proposal drafted by the group of women led by Payne-Kirchmeier; later, during the 2010 Annual Conference and Exposition, the Women in Housing initiative began with informal connections through the creation of the @wihsng Twitter account and #wihsng hashtag. These women, who would eventually become part of the #wlsalt community, actively worked to generate support for women in the housing and student affairs fields. Additionally, the Women's Issues Task Force sponsored a Women in Housing Reception in the president's suite, a panel of listeners' formal mentoring program, a highlighted program on women's issues, and hosted a walk and talk or sit and chat event on one morning of the conference before the interest sessions for the day began (Great Lakes Association College and University Housing Officers, 2010). The efforts were well received, and the task force has continued to work with the membership to continue to address the needs of women in the association.

Mentoring

Only a fraction of women in the workforce are represented in middle or top administrative positions, so there are significant barriers to overcome. A majority of women in the workforce in higher education are in the lower to middle management levels (Bower & Hums, 2013). Spurling (1997) found a lack of mentors both internally and externally to be a factor in women moving to higher administrative or academic leadership positions. The most effective mentors tend to come from individuals with similar backgrounds and interests. Rhode and Kellerman (2007) documented finding a female mentor in organizations with few women

can be challenging. Additionally, many women may know about mentoring and the benefits of having a good one, but relatively few women have formal mentors. Straub (2005) found benefits of formal mentoring are widespread, including (a) retention of employees, (b) enhancement of career development, (c) development of leaders, and (d) support for high potential employees.

Formal Programs

Mentorship can take form of formal programs often sponsored by the company, institution, or professional organization. These formal programs can be time consuming and costly to run when they are fully supported (Straub, 2005). Women in administrative and academic roles on campus came to those roles, in part, because someone in those positions recognized their potential (Bower & Hums, 2013). By developing formal connections in the institution, women who are mentors show mentees it is possible to expand their spheres of influence. The mentor and mentee are able to share goals and evaluate performance so that more options for advancement become available. Even in 2015, it was difficult for women to mentor other women because there were so few in higher administrative positions and because of the demands placed on women—particularly if they were the only woman in upper management (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007).

Informal Programs

Although traditional mentorship programs or processes take a one-to-one approach, Darwin and Palmer (2009) explored mentoring circles as a more informal tactic for many approaches used to combat the lack of available mentors. By moving away from the dyadic relationship, mentoring circles typically involve one mentor and several mentees. Peer mentoring is another form of informal mentoring that can beneficial to women. With peer mentoring, the

pressure to be available to a mentee is lifted because there is a built-in level of understanding and flexibility that often comes with peer groups (Chandler, 1996).

Another form of informal mentorship can come from connections made through professional associations at annual conferences. NASPA, ACPA, and ACUHO-I have various formal and informal mentoring programs that match mentor with mentee and provide space for informal interactions (Payne-Kirchmeier et al., 2008). The participants can stay in touch between conferences to enhance these connections. Follow through on the connections is up to the individuals involved.

Rise of Social Media

The use of the internet by men and women has grown exponentially because social media has been made widely available for public consumption. The Pew Research Center report for 2016 (as cited by Greenwood et al., 2016) noted 79% of Internet users participate in some kind of social media. Facebook is the most popular social media platform by far, reaching 71% of those who are on the internet, followed by LinkedIn with 22% of internet users; Pinterest with 21%; and Twitter with 18% of internet users (Duggan & Smith, 2013). Of those who use social media, 42% used multiple social media sites. The focus of this study was on the meaning that seven founding members of a hashtag community derived from their interactions and participations in the community.

Twitter

Twitter rapidly became a platform for use with men and women, with a gain of 2% in 2012 (Duggan & Smith, 2013). This particular social media platform represents 18% of internet usage, with women surpassing men in general usage for the first time; 17% of users are men and 18% of users are women (Duggan & Smith, 2013). Kline and St. John (2013) opened their book

on intentional reflections for student affairs professionals with reference to a keynote given by Stoller who suggested Twitter will surpass email as the primary mode of communication on college campuses. The prevalence of use among women has begun to show Twitter's value as a subject for study with professional administrators in the higher education.

Twitter Basics

This microblogging platform is attractive to people because it is simple to use and has built-in limits of 140 characters per tweet. Twitter posts were originally limited to 140 characters due to data limits of short messages on cellular phones (Weller, 2011). There are many applications that allow a person to tweet (i.e., send a message over Twitter) from computers and cell phones, so the platform is easily accessible.

Twitter handles are the name a user creates. A handle can be any combination of alphanumeric characters after the @ symbol. Many higher education professionals have some variation of a user's name; for example, my Twitter handle is @laurieaberry. A hashtag, represented by the # symbol followed by alphanumeric word(s), is used to tag conversations and serves as a filter to aid in following conversations on topics of interest. The topic of this study was one hashtag used by professional women in higher education.

Hashtag Usage

Hashtags are used to filter information on a specific subject. By using a hashtag to filter a subject or conversation, a user does not have to follow the person posting nor be part of the user's network (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). Often, hashtags emerge in the community as a result of preplanning or quickly reached consensus among those in the conversation. Sometimes, though, there is protracted debate for an event or topic that may lead to the formation of competing

groups using different hashtags to share filtered content to a specific audience (Bruns & Burgess, 2011).

Twitter began in 2006 and did not have the functionality it does in 2022. There was no way to filter or group content in 2006. Twitter was designed to answer the simple question, "What are you doing?" in 140 characters or less (Burgess, 2011). Even before the introduction of the hashtag to filter content, conversations were happening via Twitter (Java et al., 2007). In mid-2007, Messina (2007) first suggested the use of a hashtag (then called channels) to filter content. The idea did not get much attention until the brush fires of San Diego showed utility in sharing breaking news and information around the situation (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). Since the introduction of the functionality, the Twitter community has embraced the concept of hashtags and used them to create streams limited only by the utility of those creating the hashtag (Conover et al., 2011).

There is an art to developing a hashtag. If a hashtag word or letter combination is too general, the conversation could be filled with noise from other users who are not contributing to the specific conversation the users tagged. The length of the hashtag is an important consideration because there are only 140 characters to carry the content. Some hashtags are meant to be broad, whereas others are specialized to cater to a smaller engaged audience. A good hashtag is sufficiently broad, yet specific enough to having meaning for those who follow the conversations.

Yang et al. (2012) noted there is a dual purpose for hashtags—they are place markers for filtering conversations and a symbol for community membership. Information shared in a specific hashtag can develop into many ongoing conversations in which users share thoughts, comments, and content to others following the hashtag stream (Cunha et al., 2011). These

conversations can be based on a specific event or broader concept. Many hashtags have been developed for specialty areas, conferences, and events. People passionate or interested in topic areas will develop and "claim" hashtags. These people will then get the word out to others and the crowd will begin to use the hashtag to identify information that relates to the subject.

Types of Conversations on Twitter

Part of the attractiveness of Twitter conversations is the asynchronous nature of this form of microblogging. Conversations using hashtags can take place over long distances and over longer spans of time. Twitter users can post or follow a hashtag conversation with a community of interest around a hashtag topic without going through the process of establishing a follower of the originator of the post or even be a formal user of Twitter (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). This flexibility allows for following and participation in a larger conversation based on interest over larger geographic areas and time zones.

Researchers have studied the political use of hashtags (Bode et al., 2011; Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Conover et al., 2011). Others have studied the reach of tweets and hashtags (Huang et al., 2010; Java et al., 2007; Romero et al., 2011). Clark and Aufderheide (2009) asserted there are five fundamental ways people's media habits have changed through (a) choice, (b) conversations, (c) curation, (d) creation, and (e) collaboration. They found users actively seek content of their choice; they actively engage in conversations and curate content for personal consumption, often collaborating and creating content through crowdsourcing. Although their study was encompassing of all forms of public media, including social media platforms, the social networks' change can be seen most readily in conversations and collaboration (Clark & Aufderheidi, 2009). Williams et al. (2013) researched how Twitter was studied from 2007–2010

and found over 80% of the studies concentrated their research around the message, user, and reach of the communication.

Most studies and research on Twitter have been conducted around large data sets, analyzing the content and reach of those tweets (Bode et al., 2011; Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Conover et al., 2011). Political content of tweets has been shown to coalesce and form ad hoc groups as discovered in Bruns and Burgess's (2011) study of 50,000 tweets from 11,800 unique users. Conover et al. (2011) showed when tweet content that was political in nature but was neutral or less polarizing was used in combination with an @ mention, the users engaged in cross-party communication. In a different type of Twitter study around elections, Bode et al. (2011) found liberals and conservatives clustered together and did not engage in conversations outside of defined party lines. The study did not have enough data with independents to rate because of the small number in the sample.

The use of Twitter to communicate many ways was the subject of Java et al.'s (2007) study, where they found among the daily chatter, content was designed to report news, share information through URLs and links, and engage in direct conversation with users. In the same study, Java et al. (2007) noted the main categories of users were those looking for information, friends conversing, and those seeking information. In their study of academic papers on Twitter, Williams et al. (2013) discovered most research centered on what was shared in the content of tweets and who the people were who engaged in sharing the content. The study categorized 575 papers on Twitter beginning in 2007—when only three papers were published, through 2011—where 320 papers were published about this particular social media platform.

Many studies on social media and particularly Twitter have focused on content and reach of tweets (Bode et al., 2011; Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Clark & Aufderheide, 2009; Conover et al.,

2011). There is a gap in the research around the meaning attached to using a particular hashtag in a Twitter community. This granular approach to a specific hashtag could provide a depth of meaning that users derive from engaging in the Twitter platform. Each user experiences the content of their Twitter feed uniquely as they decide who and what will populate their specific feed. This study was designed to explore the lived experiences and meaning attached to the women who created a specific hashtag and the community that formed around the use of a specific hashtag.

Theoretical Framework

In exploring themes for this study, I used three frameworks: (a) feminism, (b) virtual communities, and (c) social capital. Feminism was used because each of the founders was a woman in higher education or an adjacent industry and self-identified as feminists concerned with issues important to feminism. The hashtag used on the Twitter platform was part of a virtual community. Additionally, each founder leveraged social capital as they engaged with other women in the social media space.

Feminism

Feminism is not an easy concept to define. As Pasque and Nicholson (2011) noted, "Feminism is a complex notion that has vast differences in meaning and connotation for people spanning generations, ethnic identities, sexual orientations, social class, nationality and myriad identities" (p. 3). As Noddings (2009) added in her discussion of feminism, philosophy, and education, there are many feminist views and doctrines. Whereas Plato and other philosophers that followed addressed how men thought and learned, feminist philosophers began to explore the nature of women and began to assert women have skills and abilities that are vital and equal to those of their male counterparts. With regard to epistemology, feminists tend to follow

postmodern thought by accepting each person "men and women, blacks and whites, oppressors and oppressed, speak from different perspectives–different standpoints–but each may contribute something valuable to the discussion" (Noddings, 2009, p. 218). The simple definition for which hooks (2000) advocated was "feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression" (p. viii). This definition was common to all of the differing feminist views.

Three Waves of Feminism and Generational Implications

Pasque and Nicholson (2011) described three waves of feminism. The first wave came in the 19th and early 20th century, when women began to fight for the basic rights to vote and more access to education. The second wave began during the 1960s and ushered in active protests along with the civil rights movement, Title IX, and the formation of the National Organization for Women (Kezar & Lester, 2009). The third wave began in the 1990s and was characterized "by breaking constraining boundaries of gender including what it sees as essentialist boundaries set by the earlier waves" (Pasque & Nicholson, 2011, p. 5). Madden (2005) used the terms developed by Leland and Astin (1993) to describe the feminist waves: (a) Predecessors, (b) Instigators, and (c) Inheritors.

Focusing on the general waves of feminism does not take into account all the various perspectives in each of these waves. Pasque and Nicholson (2011) acknowledged in feminism there are generally three perspectives: (a) leftist feminism, (b) radical feminism, and (c) liberal feminism. In each of these perspectives are varying philosophies. Liberal feminists were most closely related to Predecessors because their perspective, in essence, is these women want to have the same opportunities as men. Radical feminism, according to MacDonald (2002), believed the liberal feminists did not go far enough in rejecting the oppression of women by men. Radical feminists believed centuries of oppression needed to be addressed in the structure

of society. In radical feminism, there are two rather distinct groups: (a) libertarian radical feminists, and (b) cultural radical feminists. Libertarian radical feminists believed all genders should ideally be able to express themselves in feminine and masculine ways (Pasque & Nicholson, 2011). Cultural radical feminists believed the root cause of the issue was that the predominant patriarchy did not value feminine qualities (MacDonald, 2002). All radical feminists wanted to change the way society viewed the feminine traits. Radical feminists align more closely with the Instigators. Pasque and Nicholson (2011) went on to explain the differences and overlapping nature of feminism, including "womanist, Marxist, socialist, multicultural, psychoanalytic, gender, existentialist, postmodern, global, and eco-feminism" (p. 4).

The last two waves of Instigators and Inheritors have active members in the leadership of higher education. Although each wave benefitted from the gains made by the previous wave, there has been growing friction among these feminist perspectives because of generational differences. Kezar and Lester (2009) examined how the generations align with the waves of feminism. The generations who currently hold leadership positions in higher education align with Instigators and Inheritors. Instigators are those of the baby boomer generation and Inheritors align with Generation X. As Kezar and Lester (2009) noted, "This generation was shaped by a profound connection to politics and witnessed great changes in the world" (p. 55). Generation X was shaped by events in the 1980s and 1990s that included the widespread introduction of the internet, "globalization, the rise of consumerism, and the evolution of hip-hop and rap" (Kezar & Lester, 2009, p. 55).

Working With Instigators and Inheritors

Finding common ground in the feminist movement is critical for Instigators and Inheritors to continue moving the feminist agenda forward. Although the feminist movement does not follow the same breaking point as generations, there are common touchstones with the movement. Kezar and Lester (2009) called these conflict areas fault lines. They attributed the development of fault lines to the tenuous relationship when one generation tries to define itself from the other. In this case, Inheritors wanted to create a new identity from the Instigators. On a fundamental level, Inheritors have benefitted from the work done by Instigators. Inheritors have not seen the same level of discrimination that their Instigators predecessors have.

Because Instigators were successful at changing many areas, Inheritors have come to prefer changing areas from the inside. Although Instigators made hard choices with many women choosing career over family, for example, Inheritors have come to a place where they are not willing to make those same sacrifices (Fochtman, 2011). These Generation X Inheritors grew up with many Instigator parents who worked. Inheritors, unlike Instigators, view career and family as needs to be balanced. Many women who grew up as a part of Generation X often saw parents' divorce and family environments become unstable. Similarly, many Inheritors are not willing to make short-term sacrifices for long-term gains. Many Instigator baby boomers do not feel appreciated for the sacrifices they made for the Inheritors to enjoy.

Interestingly, many Inheritors have come to reject the feminist label. They often see stereotypical radical feminists as the people who embodied the feminist label (Kezar & Lester, 2009). These Inheritors tend to see the individual nature of feminism rather than the sweeping view that Instigators had. Although this group of Generation X Inheritors did not openly accept the feminist label, they have worked to eliminate sexism and oppression of women, thereby

connecting them to the feminist movement. Beyond the stereotypical label, all feminists—whether they were boomer or Generation Xers—demonstrate in their day-to-day actions they work toward greater equality and equity of women.

Current Campus Climate

There are those in the academy and society as a whole who believed the feminist movement has done what it set out to do in the educational arena—give equal access to women in education. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2012) "Gender in Education" report, women earned over 50% of all degrees from associate to doctoral, despite earning only 30% of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) degrees and certificates. Although women earn a majority of the degrees from postsecondary institutions, they do not hold a corresponding number of leadership positions (Branch-Brioso, 2009). That report, of course, assumes the feminist agenda was just about equal access to education. As hooks (2000) aptly captured, feminism is a movement to end sexism" (p. 1), and that will take more than just parity in graduates or leadership roles in higher education.

Virtual Communities

As established previously, women in higher education can benefit from meaningful mentoring connections, although these mentors are hard to find and maintain over time (Bower & Hums, 2013; Darwin & Palmer, 2009; Straub, 2005). For this reason, women have been connecting online using social media and specifically through Twitter (Burgess, 2009).

Soukup (2006) and McArthur and White (2016) explored virtual spaces as community spaces utilizing Oldenburg's (1999) third place theory. Oldenburg contended communities thrive when there are vibrant third places for community members to go and interact. For Oldenburg, third places were the neighborhood community spaces like a pub, coffee house, or café where

people gathered to socialize. Oldenburg differentiated these community places from a person's first place (i.e., home) or second place (i.e., work). Each of these third places had specific characteristics:

> (a) they are on neutral ground, (b) they are a leveler, (c) conversation is the main activity, (d) they are accessible, (e) as a home away from home, they have 'regulars', and (f) the mood is playful. (Soukup, 2006, p. 423)

Soukup (2006) explored whether computer-mediated communication and cyberspace could function as a third place. Soukup and Baym (1995) established chat rooms do fulfill many of the key criteria of Oldenburg's (1999) third place. Soukup advocated for the use of virtual third place to differentiate these spaces from physical spaces in meaningful ways. Part of the essential premise of Oldenburg's third place was this community was local. Virtual third places are not local in nature. They can have participation worldwide and in an asynchronous fashion. Virtual third places can also be hard to function as levels or be accessible in the same manner as physical third places (Soukup, 2006). For example, to join a virtual third place, a person needs tools to access the internet and create a profile. Both are limited by access to those spaces.

Foster (2013) found little research "that investigates the third place nature of online spaces for social connection" (p. 8). Foster's study focused on Facebook as a social media platform. McArthur and White (2016) studied the use of Twitter and specifically scheduled chats with hashtags to see how these chats can foster virtual third place communities. This study focused on the founding women who used a specific hashtag to build a community.

Social Capital

Social capital offered a valuable framework to use when studying Twitter and the use of a specific hashtag. Lin (2003) enumerated four essential elements to social capital that were

germane to this study: "(1) information, (2) influence, (3) social credentials, and (4) reinforcement" (p. 20). Information is the flow that goes through its members. Influence refers to the social ties of its members, whereas social credentials refers to the extent to which someone can stand behind the information. Reinforcement comes from the recognition of worthiness from others in the group. Examining the concept of social capital provided a conceptual framework and lens for the study of the particular hashtag through the lived experience of its founders. Though early research into social capital revolved around face-to-face interaction of people, Lin (2003) noted in her work that "we are witnessing *revolutionary rise of social capital"* (p. 214) as social media platforms, with the ease of use and with few time and space constraints. The prolific use of social media, in particular Twitter, by women in the higher education arena was of particular interest to this study.

Definition

Although Lin's (2003) work provided a framework for exploration of the meaning derived from studying a specific hashtag, the concept of social capital is multifaceted with no single definition. Beginning in the 1990s, sociologists have explored the notion of social capital as a way to understand how social ties can be capitalized in human relationships. Lin (2003) saw social capital as an investment in social relations where a person can expect returns. Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) view of social capital had an element of privilege when they stated, "Social capital is the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more of less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (p. 119). Field (2010) noted Bourdieu and Wacquant believed social capital was used by the privileged to maintain superiority as opposed to the widely held

beliefs of Coleman (1994) and Putnam (2000) that social capital could be found in any neighborhood regardless of social class.

Coleman (1994) believed social capital was functional and consisted of different entities that revolved around two common characteristics: (a) social structure, and (b) actions of individuals in that structure. Through his work in U.S. ghettos, Coleman (1994) showed social capital was not limited to the elite. Social capital represented a resource because it had the expectation of reciprocity (Field, 2010). To Coleman, social capital went beyond the individual who engaged in a wider network based on a high degree of trust and shared values. Field (2010) noted the following differences between Bourdieu and Coleman:

> Bourdieu's treatment of social capital is somewhat circular; in summary, it boils down to a thesis that privileged individuals maintain their positions by using their connections to privileged people. Coleman's view is more nuanced in that he discerns the value of connections for all actors, individual and collective, privileged and disadvantaged. (p. 31)

Another view of social capital came from Putnam (2000) who viewed social capital as features of social organizations (e.g., networks, norms, and social trust) that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. In his landmark work, *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (2000) used bowling as a metaphor to explain the decline in civic engagement in the United States since the 1950s. Bowling itself in the late 1990s had increased; yet, those bowling in leagues decreased sharply. To Putnam, the activity of bowling was a concrete way to show how civic engagement, which he saw as a measure of social capital, was declining and had been for decades. At the time, he saw the rise in technology creating ways for an individual to engage, thus eroding the involvement in civic engagement as demonstrated in declining civic association membership and voter turnout in elections.

Field (2010) noted the "central idea of social capital is that social networks are a valuable asset. Networks provide a basis for social cohesion because they enable people to cooperate with one another – and not just people they know directly – for mutual advantage" (p. 14). Putnam (1994) characterized social capital "features of social organization, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p. 7). Putnam's social capital features were the operational definition used to further explore in the particular Twitter hashtag community.

Social Capital in Social Media Communities

The use of social networks to enhance social capital was one of the central tenets of this study of a particular hashtag community. Further exploration on the way social capital is viewed in communities is important. Essentially, social capital on an elementary level is a person's family, friends, and colleagues who can be called upon by an individual when needed. These connections are an important asset in a crisis and can be leveraged when needed for material gain. When walking the tightrope of a crisis, the social network acts as a safety net or boundary keeping the tightrope walker safe from crosswinds. Studying the individual and groups or networks can show how social capital influences those in the network (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Prior to the advent of social media sites, social capital was experienced in the physical domain; however, now there is another major source exploration of social capital in social media spaces (Palvia & Pancaro, 2010). With the rise of usage of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, there is benefit to studying social capital concepts at work in the online communities.

Putnam (2007) showed there are two types of social capital: (a) bonding social capital, and (b) bridging social capital. Bonding social capital creates ties between people who are like each other in some important way, whereas bridging social capital creates ties with someone who

is different from others in some important way. Putnam (2007) studied race and diversity to see what impact social capital could have on successful immigrant communities to create new, stronger social solidarity communities. Putnam (2000) demonstrated where social capital was high, children grow up healthier and safer to become better-educated people who live longer, happier lives.

There has been some debate among the quantitative research community on whether social capital in social media spaces is complementary or supplementary to social capital in physical spaces. Ellison et al. (2007) found it is difficult to know how offline connections influence online social capital. People lead blended lives. Initially, researchers assumed connections made in the virtual world would not be influenced by those in the physical world. The influential lines began to blur due to the complex lives individuals led in both the online and offline communities (Blanchard & Horan, 1998; Palvia & Pancaro, 2010; Wellman et al., 2001). As early as 2001, Wellman et al. (2001) believed online interactions could enhance and fill the gaps individuals felt in offline communities. Research showed there were not distinct spheres in the online and offline communities; rather, people used whatever means made the most sense at the moment of participation. For example, if someone were already involved in an offline organization, the person would often extend participation to an online venue. Similarly, if a person were participating online in politics, the person would also get involved with physical organizations (Wellman et al., 2001).

Studying the bonding of strong ties and the bridging of weaker network ties in social media spaces beyond quantitative reach of previous studies aided in determining the meaning of those ties in specific social media communities. Putnam (2007) believed social networks have value to the people in the network. If social capital is an outcome of network membership (Riedl

et al., 2013) by referring to social relationships between social networks whether online or offline, then a study of the meaning members get from involvement could glean benefits to the individual and the group as a whole. Weak ties can build into strong ties through conveying information and connectivity among members (Gruzd et al., 2011).

The interactions of members in the online group are of interest to explore using a social capital lens as are studying the bystanders or *lurkers* in the group (Putnam, 2007). People can benefit from a social network by observing and not directly participating. Putnam believed social networks have powerful externalities. Online communities are one of the few places where listening to an online conversation through tracking a hashtag can be beneficial and build social capital. For example, in Fall 2010, I began to follow and listen to the weekly #sachat. I was encouraged to log onto Twitter at noon on Wednesdays and follow the hashtag. There was a moderator who asked us to introduce ourselves and where we worked. The moderator would then ask a question or announce a topic. I could observe the conversation and also make notes or compile a list of resources from the Twitter conversation.

The broadcast nature of the communication in online communities like Twitter features a one-to-many component. When the internet was introduced, webpages and information were static. The next evolution of the internet came with the development of blogs and social media. With Web 2.0, the relationship with information sharing went from one-way static communication to two-way user interactive communication (Wellman et al., 2001).

Keeping the online community vibrant through the growth of social capital is important. Chiu et al. (2006) found information sharing was of critical importance in the virtual online community. Because online communities have no visible tangible reward structure (Putnam, 2000), members must create and maintain a set of core and experienced individuals to keep the

culture of the community intact. This building community online is often done through information sharing, reciprocity, and a shared language and vision. Size or perceived influence in a virtual community contributes to satisfaction levels. When ratios are equal, Chiu et al. found members are satisfied; yet, when members do not feel reciprocity for the level of input shared, members can become demotivated to participate in the community.

Blanchard and Horan (1998) studied how social capital was impacted in networks of civic engagement. Key findings in this study were that social capital and civic engagement increased when the online community was developed around a physical-based community. Individuals learned about trustworthiness from personal interaction and through the relationships in a dense social network that included an online element. Blanchard and Horan (1998) differentiated between two types of virtual communities: (a) one that enhances a physical location and is completely virtual, or (b) a dispersed community that does not have a physical face-to-face element.

Missing from their study was a third type of community that blended the physical face-to-face network and the completely virtual dispersed community. This hybrid network is primarily virtual in that it exists and is used primarily by users who are not physically in the same location, but occasionally meet in person through conferences and other events to have face-to-face elements. These types of communities are on the rise given the ease with which hashtags can be developed and implemented.

Conferences offer an example of a hybrid community in action. Most conferences have a common hashtag associated with each event that creates a conference backchannel (Ross et al., 2011). During a conference, many users tweet information for consumption on the backchannel. The information is a combination of content delivered by the presenters during sessions, along

with thoughts and links to information shared by those tweeting. Ross et al. (2011) found the multiplicity of the conversations and information sharing is what those who follow the backchannel hope to gain while keeping up to date with what goes on at the conference. Information is shared with those attending the conference and anyone outside of the conference who follows or monitors the hashtag. Conference hashtag use is a form of hybrid online–offline community. There are elements of the physical conference shared online.

Another blending of online and offline communities is evident in meet ups that happen as a result of engagement in online communities. A meet up, also known as a tweet up, is a meeting in person of Twitter users who seek a location—often at a conference or in a larger city—and advertise a face-to-face meeting (Loureiro-Koechlin & Butcher, 2013). Can meeting in the offline world enhance the social capital those members share? Loureiro-Koechlin and Butcher (2013) found meeting in the offline world does enable what had been loose ties to become tighter, because stronger bonds are often shared.

Moody and Paxton (2009) found a rich area of exploration for social networks and social capital, particularly when exploring the "connections of friendship, trust, support and a sense of efficacy" (p. 1499). Engbers et al. (2017) offered a typology of social capital consisting of (a) trust, (b) formal membership and participation, (c) altruism and political engagement, (d) informal interaction, and (e) shared norms. Although the research structure Engbers et al. used was based on large scale national data, these types of social capital offer a way to track social capital as it is engaged in the social media communities. The density of the social network can interact with the type of social capital leveraged.

Social Capital and Women's Networking

Men and women experience networking in different ways (Wang, 2009). How women operate in various networks in the online community is of critical importance as social capital aspects are explored. As already established in this literature review, women are not represented at the same level in university administration despite constituting the majority of graduates at all levels of higher education. To aid in career development and advancement, women look to networking as one way to connect with one another. How social capital impacts women in their networking is of interest. Nanton and Alfred (2009) asserted, "For many years, women have practiced social capital networking and used it as agency for personal support, career advancement and community development" (p. 1).

Alfred (2009) contextualized the work of Coleman and Bourdieu in this space for women by comparing and contrasting their primary tenets. For Coleman, social capital was concerned with how women's social connections were embedded and helped connect women to develop children. Although this is a narrower view of social capital, Coleman emphasized that social capital was a resource for women because it involves an expectation of reciprocity. Alfred (2009) stated, "Trust and shared values are the underlying factors that bond members of a particular network" (p. 4). Bourdieu, however, emphasized the interconnectedness of social capital to aid in the leveraging of women in the social cultural context (Alfred, 2009).

Although Alfred (2009) saw the benefit of social capital as an asset that can be "used in times of need, leveraged for capital gain, or enjoyed purely for the human interaction it affords" (p. 5), Lin (2003), however, believed social capital was an investment with an expectation of a return. Lin explained the benefits of social networking as: (a) facilitates the flow of information,

(b) may influence those in power positions to help improve conditions for those in less desirable positions, and (c) may serve as social credentials for those who seeking to rise.

Types of Networks for Women

Researchers have explored the development of specific types of networks for women. Wang (2009) developed an understanding of networking for women by exploring the work of Ehrich (1994) and Ibarra (1995). By exploring the type of networks available to women, Wang established a framework to evaluate these types of networks for women. Ehrich identified three types of networks: (a) formal, (b) informal, and (c) community-based networks. Formal networks are professional associations or organizations that require members to pay dues and engage in membership activities. Informal networks are characterized as consisting of likeminded individuals with a common interest, whereas community-based networks are church groups or other broad-based social clubs.

Wang (2009) highlighted the work of Ibarra (1995) with respect to her categorized networks: (a) task networks, (b) career networks, and (c) friendship/social networks. Each of these categories served women in different ways. Task networks are facilitated by the exchange of information and resources associated with accomplishing a task. Similarly, career networks involved relationship building with those who can influence and aid in career advancement, whereas friendship social networks were based on common interests and tend to be informal (Wang, 2009). The development of types of networks aid women in their quest for equity in the workplace.

Purpose of Networks

Women participate in social media networks to connect with one another. As Alfred and Nanton (2009) noted:

> The concept of social capital is often viewed as a determinant of an individual's economic growth as a contributor to the well-being of communities and nations and has thus captured the attention of policy makers, researchers, educators, and community development practitioners worldwide. (p. 3)

Women participate in these networks to aid in career advancement, transitions, and connect with others in their fields. Burgess (2009) found women who connected with people outside their immediate network were able to close the social capital gap. Research shows social networks can assist in building those weak ties that are crucial for access to information, resources, and opportunities (Ellison et al., 2007).

Networks as Counterspaces

Burgess (2009) found online communities designed to be inclusive of women's experiences are often important social spaces where women can feel supported (p. 63). Tiernan (as cited in Burgess, 2009) recognized social networking allowed women "to carve out spaces for discussions relevant to their experiences" (p. 65). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) wrote about law scholars and activists of color in the 1980s who were "interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism and power" (p. 2). These scholars were interested in bringing attention to laws designed to ensure equality but that actually created greater racial divides. Critical race theory was applied to settings outside of law as these themes of inequality and marginalization transcended the legal setting and permeated society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Taylor et al., 2009). In the educational setting, the focus was on "a liberating and transformative experience for persons of color by exploring multiple cultural and personal contexts" (Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 23). Marginalized groups who share counterstories need a safe place to do so (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Counterspace is important for any

underrepresented group, such as women in higher education administration. These counterspaces give women a place to go to share experiences. Online communities designed to be inclusive of women's experiences can be important social spaces for women to feel supported (Burgess, 2009). As Alfred and Nanton (2009) noted:

> The case can legitimately be made for recognizing that social capital network concepts, instead of being something that women are "added to," become the definition of and description for women's historic means of coping with a multiplicity of role responsibilities that predate the conceptualization of social capital as a theoretical concept. (p. 86)

Conclusion

Although women have continued to make significant progress in their access to education and in the number of graduates in all postsecondary degrees, women are not proportionally represented in leadership roles in higher education (Branch-Brioso, 2009). Through feminist waves of progress, women have progressed in access to postsecondary education and representation in higher education administration (Pasque & Nicholson, 2011). Researchers found professional organizations have helped women connect with one another and advance issues for women in the academy (Gangone, 2009; Schwartz, 1997; Weisman, 2002). Mentoring is another way for women to connect to one another and advance in their field. Spurling (1997) and Rhode and Kellerman (2007) found access to female mentors is challenging. Formal mentoring programs can be costly and time consuming (Straub, 2005). Women often rely on informal mentoring opportunities to connect with one another (Payne-Kirchmeier et al., 2008).

The rise of social media has brought the promise of new technologies that women can leverage to connect with one another. Twitter accounts for 18% of internet use and women use

Twitter at a higher rate than men (Duggan & Smith, 2013). The development of the hashtag to filter conversations opened a new venue for online group development (Java et al., 2007). Social capital offers a valuable framework to use in studying the development and use of specific hashtag community. Because social capital involves the use and development of relationships in a specific group (Coleman, 1994; Field, 2010; Putnam, 2007), the impact of social media as a connector of women (Lin, 2003; Nanton & Alfred, 2009; Wang, 2009) is worth exploring in depth. Given the recent COVID-19 global pandemic, use of social media is on the rise—particularly Twitter, with 330 million daily users in Spring 2020 (Dubey & Tripathi, 2020). As has been the general metric for the past 5 years, roughly 70% of people worldwide used some form of social media, with Twitter usage reaching 23% during the same timeframe (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Connection to peers and friends and family became an important part of coping with pandemic-related challenges. These hashtag communities offer women counterspaces to discuss relevant experiences (Burgess, 2009). Exploring through the eyes of a participant and the founders of a hashtag and the community surrounding it on Twitter showed the impact of lived experiences of these women in the higher education field.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The purposes of this study were twofold. First, this study discovered the meaning women in higher education make when using social media to enhance their personal and professional development through the intersections among feminist and social capital movements. Second, this study explored the "place" of the social media space created in the use of a specific hashtag. This chapter shares (a) definition of terms; (b) the founding of the hashtag; (c) methodological approach, including the research design; (d) interview protocols; (e) data collection techniques; and (f) data analysis.

Definitions of Terms

For a better understanding of this study, the following terms were conceptually and operationally defined.

Extrovert describes a person who is primarily oriented to the outer world and gets energy from people outside of themselves (Myers et al., 1985).

Founders refers to the seven women who created the #wlsalt hashtag.

Hashtag community refers to the community the founders and the Twitter uses formed as they used the #wlsalt hashtag.

Introvert describes a person who is motivated by their inner world of ideas and concepts. Introverts are energized from within (Myers et al., 1985).

Salt Sisters is the term used by the founding seven women when referring to themselves, as they saw their relationship as being as close as sisters.

SAWomen Lead is the Student Affairs Women Lead WordPress site started by the seven founding women to complement the #wlsalt hashtag.

#wlsalt is the hashtag started by the seven founding women. The hashtag stands for women's leadership: support, affirm, lift, transform.

#wlsalt evangelists comprise the 50 Twitter and social media influencers the founding seven identified as they sought to get the #wlsalt hashtag onto Twitter for widespread use. These influencers were recruited to help spread the word about the hashtag. I was one of the 50 recruited.

The Founding of the Hashtag

Focusing on the specific #wlsalt hashtag provided insight into the meaning that derived from this particular community by the founding seven women. The relationship of the founding seven women with each other and the participants who use the #wlsalt hashtag demonstrated in this community that social capital and feminist theory intertwined in the lives of these women. Twitter, using specific hashtags, became a virtual counterspace for many underrepresented groups. Therefore, it was important to study how these communities have affected those who engage in the space.

Seven women who attended the Women's Leadership Institute in December 2010 developed a connection that would transcend the workshop and the dinner they shared at the conference. As documented on their website, SAWomen Lead, these women sought to:

> Support the leaders who are developing campus communities around the country, affirm the work being done to promote women leaders, lift up the voices that may be quieted in

> other venues, and transform how we create institutions of higher learning. (Student Affairs Women Lead, n.d.-a, para. 1)

The women did not want to lose the close connection they developed at the workshop when they returned to their regular lives. They found using the conventional @ symbol, followed by each Twitter name, left no room for dialogue. They chose #wlsalt. These women began using the #wlsalt hashtag in January 2011.

One of the founding seven captured the momentum in an email to the other six, and stated:

> I'm finding myself wanting to tweet at the 6 of you so often so I think we need our own hashtag. Any suggestions #wli? I want to use the hashtag to send tweets that support, lift, encourage, promote women leaders. And, to invite others who do the same to use it as well building a network of women focused on consciously choosing to push women forward. I watch the Twitter stream and women Student Affairs professionals are quick to devalue their work/skills/smarts. I send at least 1 DM [direct message] a day to someone who has publicly diminished herself. I'm looking to help build their self-esteem, self-respect, and encourage them to take their place at the table with confidence and the support of women like us. We can create a network of women who value what matters and will enthusiastically help each other achieve, score the best opportunities and see this world as their oyster. Are you in? (Student Affairs Women Lead, n.d.-b, para. 2)

By the next month, the women decided to intentionally grow the community by inviting 50 other likeminded professionals to become #wlsalt evangelists. They believed the dinner they had in Florida was more than women in higher education bonding. They sought:

> [To] support the leaders who are developing campus communities around the country, affirm the work being done to promote women leaders, lift up the voices that may be quieted in other venues, and transform how we create institutions of higher learning. (Student Affairs Women Lead, n.d.-a, para. 1)

They created a counterspace for women in the higher education community to connect with one another. I was one of the 50.

The meaning derived from their interactions with each other and the #wlsalt community that grew with the hashtag was important. As Erikson (1964) noted, meaning can be broken down into common and unique meanings. Common meanings are attributed to the group, whereas unique meaning derives solely from the individual. Studying the seven founders of the #wlsalt hashtag uncovered the individual meaning each founder experienced and at the same time showed common meanings that typify the #wlsalt community as a whole.

Social media permeates many aspects of modern life. The communities and bonds formed in those spaces are important to study and understand. The connections among and between people grow and are no longer tied to geography or real-time communication. Social media, specifically Twitter, has grown to include significant, asynchronous communication among these seven founding members and the people who use specific hashtags.

Focusing on the #wlsalt hashtag provided insight into the meaning derived from this particular counterspace by the founding seven women. The relationship of the founding seven women with each other and the participants who use the #wlsalt hashtag showed how, in this one community, social capital and feminist theory intertwined in the lives of these women. Twitter hashtag communities have become virtual counterspaces for underrepresented groups. It was important to study how these communities affect those who engage in the space.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to discover the meaning of the #wlsalt Twitter online community as experienced by the seven founding members. Specifically, the study explored the perceptions of these women as they formed the hashtag and the community and how interactions among each other and community participants created change and meaning in their lives. In-depth interviews aided in establishing the expectations of each of the founders and the impact the community has had in their professional and personal lives.

For this study, it was necessary to employ a qualitative methodology to uncover the deep and rich meaning experienced by the founders through their interactions with the #wlsalt hashtag and community. I used a phenomenological approach to allow for the essence of the shared experience to be studied (M. Q. Patton, 2002). Specifically, I used heuristic inquiry and autoethnography because I have personal experience with the #wlsalt hashtag and the founders as coresearchers share an intense experience with the hashtag community they started. Douglass and Moustakas (1985) noted, "Heuristics is concerned with meanings, not measurement; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quantity; with experience, not behavior" (p. 42). My connectedness with the founders can best be explored in the heuristic frame, as it encourages tacit knowledge operating behind the scenes and allows "creative synthesis" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 43) that "portrays the whole person" (p. 43) from a personal view. The study of the seven founding members of the #wlsalt community through a heuristic lens allowed my experience to be "front and center throughout" (M. Q. Patton, 2002, p. 109).

Following the five-stage heuristic analysis described by Moustakas (1990), the study covered immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis to uncover and describe the #wlsalt hashtag and community through the lens of the founders. Interviews were

real-time audio interviews. The interaction between the founders and me was an important aspect of the study and was carried through the interviews.

For this study, it was essential to use a qualitative methodology to undercover and examine the meaning made by each member of the founding seven women. Qualitative research allowed for (a) observing the natural setting, (b) considering context sensitivity, (c) delving into rich narrative description, and (d) focusing on the participant perspectives to find underlying and surface meanings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Each of these contexts were critical to use to understand emergent themes from data. In qualitative research, the investigator acts as an observer in the setting while being immersed in the space as the phenomenon is studied. This process allows the researcher to experience and live all the nuanced elements of what was studied. Contextual elements, "rich" descriptions, and participant perspectives are subsequently captured throughout the process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In the qualitative realm, the researcher interacts and becomes the primary instrument of those they study (Creswell, 2009). This inductive approach to the research allows for a greater understanding of the meaning proscribed to the setting, conditions, or culture of individuals.

As a form of qualitative research, constructivism holds that each person has a unique worldview and suggests each person's way of making sense of the world is as valid as anyone else (Crotty, 1998). Guba and Lincoln (1989) further asserted the primary assumptions of constructivism that need consideration in research design are (a) *truth* is a matter of consensus and does not correspond with reality, (b) *facts* have no meaning except in the specific framework, (c) *causes* and effects do not exist, and (d) phenomena derived from data represent another construction. Understanding a lived experience indicates not only a method of research, but a philosophy in and of itself (Creswell, 2009).

Heuristic Inquiry

I used heuristic inquiry, as it allowed me to be immersed in the phenomenon. I have been a part of the #wlsalt community as one of the original 50 invited evangelists. This phenomenological approach was essential to the subject matter as it emphasized the connection of the researcher to the phenomenon being studied. M. Q. Patton (2002) stated, "Heuristics is a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the fore the personal experience and insights of the researcher" (p. 107). I am a member of the #wlsalt community and have interacted with the founders prior to this study; therefore, the study is also an autoethnography.

As Douglass and Moustakas (1985) noted, "Heuristics is concerned with meanings, not measurements; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quality; with experience, not behavior" (p. 42). The design of this study to interview the founding seven members of the #wlsalt community uncovered how engagement in the community and each other were enhanced by their personal and professional development. Their experience as viewed through the lens of a participant in the community brought meaningful themes forward. According to M. Q. Patton (2002), "It is the combination of the personal experience and intensity that yields an understanding of the phenomenon" (p. 107). Immersion and understanding of the community added to the richness of the data and aided in understanding the significance in the context of their lived experience.

In this type of research, the voices of the participants were front and center. In the heuristic framework, depictions of the phenomenon are presented in stories, examples, conversations, metaphors, and analogies (Moustakas, 2001). To supplement interview data, I asked participants to share artifacts of meaning they have developed from the interactions they have had with the #wlsalt community. These artifacts could include items such as blogs, guest

posts, articles, presentations, reflections, or any item they felt captures additional meaning related to immersion in the hashtag community.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography has been used by social scientists to refer to the researcher serving as an integral part of the discovery process (Ellis, 2004; Hayano, 1979; Throne, 2019). Ellis (2004) defined autoethnography as "writing about the personal and its relationship to culture" (p. 37). Ellis (2004) painted a picture of the autoethnographer zooming in and out of the social and cultural aspects of the participants' personal experiences. By using a wide lens, along with a macro lens, the personal stories of the founders' and how they interacted with the #wlsalt hashtag and the hashtag community was developed over time. As an early evangelist for the hashtag, my interaction added to the hashtag community, but also added a layer of understanding because of my direct participation in the community I studied.

Research positionality in this study provided an added layer of meaning. This view of being neutral and detached from those being studied has been replaced with subjects being considered collaborators (Staller et al., 2008). A strength of interactive interviewing is the ability to explore the emotional connection to individuals' professional and personal lives on a deeper level (Ellis, 2004). By utilizing interactive interviewing, the focus on the founders' stories evolved as we discovered how our personal experiences influenced how we interacted with the #wlsalt hashtag.

Research Design

Data were collected using qualitative methods. Data were analyzed using inductive and abductive methods to uncover rich, textured meaning from the founders.

Data Collection

Data were collected through one-on-one interview format. The interviews took place at a time that fit in the founders' schedules. Each founder was asked not to speak with the others until all seven interviews were complete. Due to travel constraints, I interviewed all participants via cell phone with dual audio recording.

A phenomenological and an autoethnographic approach with an emphasis on interactive interviewing was used, as this approach was central to discovering the lived experiences of the founding seven women of the #wlsalt community. This was also a population study because all seven of the founding women were asked to participate. The research was guided by the following research questions:

1. What meaning has been derived from forming a Twitter community based on a specific hashtag for women as leaders in higher education?
2. How has this meaning changed over time as women interact with each other and those contributing to the conversation in the social media spaces and in person?
3. How were the founders' personal and professional lives enriched by the use of social media, specifically Twitter?

Interviews were semistructured using an interactive interviewing model to allow myself and participants the opportunity to expand and elaborate on responses. As the interview unfolded, questions were added, rearranged, or reordered depending on the direction of each interview (see Appendix A). Field notes and observations were reviewed with each interview so observations could be incorporated into the interview process moving forward.

Each interview was scheduled for 45–90 minutes to allow for introductions, time to go over the process of the interview, and leave ample time for questions. Each interview was

recorded using digital audio. The questions focused on the following six areas: (a) professional career advancement, (b) engagement with social media, (c) #wlsalt engagement, (d) enrichment in professional and personal life, (e) social media spaces beyond #wlsalt, and (f) support spaces. Field notes were taken and used in data analysis. These notes added to the thick description of the data collection process. Thick description is a detailed account of the research process and goes beyond simply recording details of the study (Hays & Singh, 2012). Denzin (1989, as cited by Hays & Singh, 2012) noted four components of thick description, "(1) context, (2) intentions, (3) evolution, (4) action of the research phenomenon" (p. 213).

Once the interviews were completed and transcribed, each participant received a copy of the transcript via email and was asked to provide clarification. Additionally, as the story of each founder was created from the interviews, it was sent via email to provide feedback on accuracy of the synthesis. Member checking was used with participants to ensure "goodness of fit" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 206) as the #wlsalt founders gave feedback on interview transcriptions and the synthesis of their individual stories. Member checking was a central part of the study because this protocol allowed the participants to assist in "fine tuning to better capture their perspectives" (Merriam, 2009, p. 217) in the interview. Participants were asked to review the transcript for accuracy and make corrections in the document using track changes. Additionally, participants were encouraged to expand on any responses in the transcript. Participation with the #wlsalt hashtag was used in the context of the study to add to the richness of data collected. Archival data were used to assist in setting context and providing a history of interaction with the participants and the #wlsalt hashtag.

Data Analysis

Inductive analysis let data drive the deeper meaning experienced by the #wlsalt founders. Abductive analysis provided additional insight by leading me to different shades of meaning experienced by each participant (Hays & Singh, 2012). Data analysis was done through transcribed interviews that I coded and member checked for themes. Field notes were used to capture any observations not recorded. Thematic analysis across the stories illuminated common and unique meanings each founder discovered as a result of their interactions with the #wlsalt hashtag, the hashtag community, and with each other (Ellis, 2004).

Peer debriefing was used in teasing out themes from the interviews to aid in validity of the findings (M. Q. Patton, 2002). In this instance, fellow qualitative researchers acted as a mirror to reflect responses to the research process providing essential accountability in the study (Hays & Singh, 2012). Peer debriefing was documented through field notes of the particular session and offered from the debriefers. Interviews were transcribed for verbatim accuracy. Coding was done by immersion into the data to develop relevant themes and subthemes. Hays and Singh (2012) suggested triangulation is a common strategy for "ensuring trustworthiness" (p. 207). Data were triangulated through (a) interviews, (b) thick and thin descriptions, (c) field notes, (d) Tweets using the #wlsalt hashtag by the founders, and (e) peer debriefing.

Conclusion

This chapter covered the methodological approach to the study. Details of research design, data collection, and data analysis were discussed. A phenomenological, autoethnography, heuristic study of the meaning making of the seven #wlsalt founders adds to the research base of social capital in women's networks. There was a corpus of quantitative studies, but a gap in research exists in qualitative analysis of these online groups. Discovering the rich meaning

derived from contributors of this Twitter hashtag community adds texture to existing research and spurs more interest in these types of communities.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purposes of this study were twofold. First, this study explored the meaning women in higher education make when using social media to enhance their personal and professional development through intersections among feminist and social capital movements. Second, this study explored the "place" of the social media space created via the use of a specific hashtag. To understand how these women found each other and developed the #wlsalt hashtag, they shared their respective journeys to the moment in time when they met and formed a lasting bond, resulting in the birth of the hashtag. Exploring each participant's background and connection to the higher education space and how they each came to use social media and, specifically, how Twitter was foundational to understanding the interactions and meanings derived from the bonds formed among members and their use of the #wlsalt hashtag.

Our Stories

In this chapter, I introduce Michelle, Tess, Sally, Betty, Diana, Kelly, and Maria, along with what drew them to the higher education space or a higher education-adjacent industry and their basic demographics. Because this study included autoethnographic elements, I begin this chapter with my own journey into social media, specifically how I found Twitter and this topic.

Laurie

I am a cisgendered White woman who at one time considered myself an early adopter of technology. I embraced the promise of how technology was going to make communication connection to others easier and more fulfilling. In the mid-1980s when I was in college, I was the only person on the residence hall floor with an IBM 8088. I used the professional write program, which was an early word processor, and a dot matrix printer that had the ability to print in several fonts. The computer and printer were incredibly helpful for me as an English major. I was able to edit papers with relative ease because a change did not mean retyping the entire paper. Hours of time were saved from typing and retyping information that could be stored and easily retrieved on a floppy disk. During this time, I was exposed to the internet through the Gopher protocol. The ability to search for documents worldwide was amazing. Gopher opened treasure trove of information at my fingertips—a library of information just waiting to be uncovered through searching for documents well beyond the office at Western Kentucky University. I spent hours online in the Office of Housing and Residence Life where one of the only computers with a data connection was available on campus. I gained special permission from the director to come in after hours and search the world wide web.

Fast forward decades, where early in my college administration career I was instrumental in working with the information technology department to secure email in the housing areas of campus. One fiber optic line came through campus and into a singular building in the heart of the housing department. A server hub needed to be established and housed in the corner of my office, and with that hub came email. By 1994, Gopher was gone and now the world wide web was dominated by Netscape and America On-Line (AOL). Personal computers were in most departments. The housing office had two computers for staff use. I wrote a disk operating system

(DOS) program to print documents from the WordPerfect word processor to the large format printer that was donated by a business in town. The department sought to move from handwritten carbonless forms to printed reports.

As the years moved forward, I worked with one of our entry-level professionals to design an in-house database for incident reports, conduct letters, and sanction tracking. I did not know how to write the complex html code, but did understand designing the database to be user friendly was desirable. My colleague took code he found in a virus from the web to merge letters before mail merge was a feature in word processing programs. The in-house resnet program became one of the protypes used to create the judicial module for Residential Management Systems (RMS). RMS as a company was a systems integrator and worked to establish the company as a one-software company for housing departments. The University of Southern Indiana became a beta school for the RMS judicial module in the early 2000s.

By January 2005, I had joined Facebook. Because of the way the University of Southern Indiana assigned email addresses, I could not join with the first wave of administrators. Facebook was designed for college students, and administrator emails were easily identified. Once on the platform, a couple of colleagues and I taught our division about the platform. For the next 4 years, I was content with using Facebook as my only social media platform. I found it interesting to share some of what I did and to see what others posted.

In January 2009, a colleague challenged me to join Twitter. In my first months, I sent a few tweets about what I was doing. The process seemed so unremarkable. I let my account largely go dormant. I found the 140 characters to be quite limiting. At that time, I did not personally see a professional use for the platform.

Then, my colleague—who was a moderator for a Twitter chat of student affairs professionals—challenged me to come to the Student Affairs Chat (i.e., #sachat) that happened on Tuesdays over my lunch hour. My colleague said to log into Twitter and watch. Participation was optional, so I intended to just lurk and learn. All I needed to do was follow the hashtag #sachat. That first #sachat on February 11, 2010, had me hooked. The moderator asked for a short introduction of our names, institutions, and departments. I watched as colleagues from all over the country began to reply, including someone in Iowa, another in Oregon, and another in New York; before long, I jumped in from southern Indiana. I was interested in seeing what these professionals thought about the questions asked by the moderator. I found the group started larger conversations that continued after the hour concluded.

I found myself conversing with these professionals beyond the chat times. I began to look forward to meeting these people when we attended common student affairs conferences. I helped coordinate a meet up of #sachat Twitter users at the NASPA conference in Philadelphia. This coordination was not something I would normally do as an introvert who generally stayed to myself at conferences, especially after conference sessions, but I did feel an affinity with these professionals whom I had been conversing with online. I felt as though I knew them well because we had been conversing for over a year.

I first started using the #wlsalt hashtag on May 27, 2011. As one of the original #wlsalt evangelists, I wanted to support, affirm, lift, and transform the space for women in higher education. My Twitter morphed over time to different higher education topics, including connecting with other student affairs doctoral students. My desire to engage with higher education professionals remained constant. I found a professional counterspace where I had meaningful conversations.

One of these Twitter conversations gave rise to two other colleagues and me planning a conference program on the #wlsalt hashtag. I did not know these women except through Twitter. Because we planned to attend the same regional conference and found the topic interesting, we turned in a proposal. We planned the session through conference calls and GoToMeetings. Our topic was #wlsalt and the intersection of our personal and professional lives. We bonded over the struggle to show leadership through supporting, affirming, lifting, and transforming daily. My social media connection led me to presenting a session with women I had met through a tweet using a specific hashtag. Reflecting on this session and the impact the hashtag had on me led me to research the impact creating the hashtag had on its founders.

Michelle

Michelle was a cisgendered White woman who described herself as a "Millennial in a Gen X body." As an early adopter of technology, she was on Xanga and other blog sites as a part of her identity. Although she was not the earliest adopter of social media platforms, including Twitter, she was one of the early adopters in the higher education space, including those in student affairs. She had an independent spirit much like her fellow Gen Xers in this group, though her age cohort was clearly in the millennial group.

I knew Michelle from common conferences we attended over the years. We first met at a regional housing conference and discovered through attending common sessions we both worked in judicial affairs. She was doing conduct work at a private liberal arts college and I was at a midsized public university. We were both introverts and came from a housing background into specializing in student conduct at the time. We continued to connect over our shared interest in higher education and introversion at conferences where it was common for us to find each other during social sessions.

At the time of our interview, Michelle was working as a college administrator at a large public research institution on the West Coast. She earned a PhD in organizational leadership from a Midwest university in a large city. Her journey into higher education and student affairs started as an undergraduate hall director, and then she spent 2 years as a graduate hall director. After finishing her PhD, she started looking for dean of student positions, as her current supervisor had no plans to leave; for her, it was time to look elsewhere to move up. Michelle was not a fan of the Midwest winters, so finding a dean of students job in a warmer climate would be a welcome change.

After her foray into Xanga to share what she read, Michelle dove into Facebook and then Twitter social media platforms as they started being picked up by students. She connected first with fellow students and then other professionals as those professionals began entering social media spaces.

Michelle found social media to be a comfortable space for her as an introvert. Social media, and specifically Twitter, allowed her to interact with people with whom she would not have interacted otherwise. She stated, “In a roomful of people, I am not going to walk up to a stranger and start a conversation.” Yet on Twitter, Michelle found she did not need to engage in small talk and it was not awkward to interact with people who she met in the social media space. On Twitter, it was easy to connect with someone who she saw post on something she found interesting or because she had something meaningful to contribute to the conversation. She stated, “There’s no small talk. And there’s none of this worry about like what are they thinking about me in a way that there is when you are in a large room full of people.”

Twitter and social media in general have their own challenges. For Michelle, the superficialness or simple judgments that can be made based on a tweet or two can be amplified. She shared an example, noting:

> People making assumptions of what someone might believe or how they may act outside of the social media world based on the personality presented online. It can be easy to believe person is always this way based on the information inferred from tweets.

At times, there can be the assumption of closeness that is simply not there just yet; for example, Michelle hired someone she knew from social media and stated, “The person they projected there did not match what I saw in person.” She stated she learned “you need to be more careful not making assumptions or judgements about people based on the persona that you see on social media.” Even deep conversation does not translate into real-world, real-life connections. Michelle stated, “It may feel like it [the connection made because Twitter] should or could very easily [carry into a real-life connection] but it doesn’t.”

Michelle noted Twitter and her perception of its usefulness has changed over time. Twitter was most useful for her when she used hashtags for conversations. She was a regular participant in #Sachat like many of the seven women. She found this forum was a good place to discuss issues related to student affairs and connect with professionals in the field; yet, when the hashtag and the chat exploded in popularity, Michelle found the conversations hard to follow and the content and connections became superficial. The larger #Sachat became, the more superficial it felt to Michelle and its usefulness declined.

Tess

Tess was a cisgendered White woman who, at the time of this study, was the director of student and academic affairs in a residential college in arts and humanities at a large, land-grant

institution in the upper Midwest. Tess earned a PhD in higher education and adult lifelong learning from the same institution. I met Tess through Diana (i.e., another founder) after the founders started using the #wlsalt hashtag. Tess was also a fellow introvert who loved working with students. We often talked about how to keep our energy up at conferences and what it was like to raise daughters who had an understanding of the importance of higher education.

Tess began her journey to the higher education field as a student worker in the alumni office. She was also a resident assistant and on the executive board of her sorority. Her undergraduate degree was in secondary education. Tess was not sure if she would pursue higher education or go into deaf education as she originally planned, but when she went full time as a residence hall director at a different Midwest university, she decided higher education was the field for her. She came back to the large land-grant institution in the upper Midwest and completed both her master's and PhD while working full time in student affairs. Tess "just loved college" and stated she "wanted to do for other students" what she had experienced.

Tess came to social media through Facebook as a student staff member, but found Twitter was most influential to her professionally. She stated, "I was working with public relations and advertising, and a couple of my PR students were trying to explain Twitter." This conversation with her students occurred in March 2009. Tess felt her students led her to the Twitter platform much earlier than many other student affairs professionals. Tess used Twitter as a news source. She followed many newspapers until she came across #Sachat. Through this Twitter chat, that she realized there was "a whole student affairs community out there and there was a whole academic advising community out there." She stated, "Once you know I found #Sachat. . . . It's like, you find your people."

As an introvert, Tess felt she could engage on whatever level she with which she was comfortable and not feel compelled to perform or contribute if she was not ready. Tess noted she likes to listen. Tess stated she "hates small talk at conferences." She said, "I met so many people so quickly and I felt I could skip the small talk and jump right into the meat" of those conversations about what is going on at a particular campus or what a person mentioned working on now. She stated, "I felt like we were really able to get to the heart of the conversations. And in doing so I the heart of the relationship." Tess started seeking people out on Twitter when she first started engaging, but now she enjoys a role reversal given by her leadership roles in NASPA.

Tess found it challenging on Twitter to find her people. Until she was introduced to the concept of a hashtag and found out about #Sachat, she used Twitter to get information. She subsequently found a small, engaged community with #Sachat for a bit, but the use of the #Sachat hashtag later exploded, making Twitter more ubiquitous and harder to navigate through the platform to find those intimate conversations she loved. The chat and overall platform evolved to include more global conversations, which made it a bit harder to connect in the same way with people. Tess thrived on the more intimate nature of Twitter and hashtag use when #Sachat and #wlsalt first started.

Sally

Sally was a cisgendered White woman who worked in a higher education-adjacent foundation. The foundation supports higher education initiatives on a national level. I met Sally through Diana at a conference. At the time, we were both doctoral students. We recognized we were both introverts who enjoyed connecting over where we could impact the higher education space. Sally assisted me in navigating some structural changes on my campus. At the time we

met, Sally worked at a campus on the West Coast. Twitter was a way to stay connected beyond the one national conference we attended.

Sally earned a PhD in educational leadership from a West Coast research university. Sally started as a student leader who completed an internship for the vice president for student affairs. After working there, she decided to pursue her master's degree in student affairs. Sally stayed in student affairs for 15 years before moving to the higher education-adjacent space. Sally noted she enjoys the impact and social good her industry can have in the higher education space where they facilitate change through philanthropy. Sally's work has focused on the national level, which involves any learning beyond the high school level. Her organization works with many partners to move agendas and programs forward. Sally's student affairs background and knowledge of how learning works has served as an asset when it comes to working through the silos of the higher education landscape.

Sally became involved with social media because her Midwest state university where she completed her undergraduate work was one of the first campuses outside of Harvard to have Facebook. Sally also had a Myspace account. She used Facebook mainly to connect with friends and family and a few work colleagues who were friends. Twitter brought with it professional value. At the time, Sally worked at a West Coast research-based doctoral university. As she moved through her student affairs career, Sally worked in the Southeast, Midwest, and South before moving to the West Coast. Along the way Sally became involved with NASPA and ACPA. She noted Twitter allowed her to "keep a connection to professional conversations that were happening across the country." Sally found many professionals at her West Coast institution were not as involved with professional organizations. Sally also noticed Twitter was a

way to connect with people she may not have found through traditional channels. She stated these conversations were:

> Really enlightening and then also that I could expand where I was getting traditional information from new sectors and spaces. And it allowed me to tap in and out of again new trends that had had not been available to me. . . . It was sort of a turning point.

There was a convergence of social media and her professional life. She made connections on Twitter and then met and reconnected with people at conferences or institutes. She stated:

> I found Diana was going to the Women's Leadership Conference and I knew her because we graduated from the same master's program and she interviewed me for my first job which I turned down but we weren't bitter. Be we just hadn't kept up with each other in any kind of way and then suddenly [through] Twitter discovered a group of us were going to attend the institute.

Social media, and specifically Twitter, became a tool for Sally to expand and engage with professionals around the world. Twitter was a way for small student affairs departments or for professionals who worked with others who did not have a traditional student affairs background to connect and exchange ideas. Although Sally had been involved with ACPA in the Midwest and with NASPA at previous institutions, she found there was not that same level of involvement when she moved to the West Coast. She stated she "felt so isolated because of that. And Twitter was a really strong connection point for me."

Engaging in conversations online with Twitter has its challenges. She stated:

> Some of it is managing expectations in 140 characters. How do I engage? When do I know it is an in person versus online conversation? What—how do I convey myself and

make sure that I am doing it in a way that I intend but also understanding that it may impact somebody differently?

Also gauging the familiarity of those connections. Sally was cognizant and said, “You cannot assume too much.” She also stated, “It is not appropriate to ask me to be a reference if we have just had a Twitter conversation.”

Betty

Betty was a cisgendered White woman who was the vice president over residence life and resimuter affairs at the time of this study. Resimuter affairs, as Betty explained, includes all students not living with parents in apartments close enough to campus that they could be residents. The term combines the words “resident” and “commuter.” Betty’s university was a private, religiously affiliated, doctoral-granting university in the Midwest. Betty’s highest degree was an MEd in clinical psychology and higher education. I met Betty through our work with a regional housing association. Betty was the first of many introverts to whom I was drawn because my office was filled with extroverts; at the time I first talked with Betty, she was one of the first housing administrators with whom I interacted who was also an introvert. Betty was a quiet but powerful influence on me. She showed me there were valuable skills that introverts can bring to organizations and campuses. Betty was also in a similar age demographic as me, and just a few years older than other founders. I approached Betty about developing a regional housing program on introverted leadership. We presented this idea at the Great Lakes Association of College and University Housing Officers (GLACUHO) conference and then Betty suggested we expand our panel to include Maria. We presented that program to the division at my university. All three of us presented as introverted leaders in unique ways. Betty became involved in higher education because both her parents worked in higher education. Her father was a college

professor and her mother was a college administrator. Betty was a resident assistant (RA). She stated, “As an RA, someone recognized I have some good skills so I made the decision to change career paths very late in the game.” Betty initially planned to go into medicine, though she was not sure what type as long as she was able to have time for family. After graduating with her biology degree, Betty lived with a friend she met as an RA. She noted:

> In August, the director of residence life at one on the colleges in town asked if I was interested in coming back as a graduate. I was committed to my roommate so I worked it out so she could come with me and I wanted a break from school. The director hired me and I decided to take classes after all.

Betty left higher education for 2 years to work with emotionally disturbed 12–18-year-old individuals. She was in that role almost 2 years before the dean at the college where her mother worked called to ask her to be the director of residence life. At first, Betty declined. She was worried about the awkwardness of working where her mother worked; however, the dean pled with Betty to come train the RAs. Betty did and found the role was different than what she expected. She interacted with her mother as much as someone would with the director of admissions. Betty worked in that role three years before getting engaged. At that time, she and her partner wanted to go someplace where they could establish themselves as a couple. Betty was in the nation’s capital at two institutions for 4 years. They later returned to the Midwest, where she was at one institution for over 20 years. Since that time, she has worked at two other universities in the large Midwest city.

Betty noted she finds working with younger professionals and students rewarding. This connection to younger professionals and students as kept her in the field despite finding those same professionals and students challenging along with challenging institutional policies. Betty

believed she has constantly grown and learned. She stated, “I have had enough opportunities where students or staff whom I work with told me I made a difference that I stick with it.” Although Betty had a Facebook account, she did not use it much. She only recalled logging in 10 times. She joined because she thought Facebook would be great to stay connected with old friends from high school. Betty shared, “Those pieces of social media I really loved.” Betty’s interaction with Twitter started on March 15, 2010, at 11:24 a.m. She was almost certain she started her account because Kelly (i.e., another founder) told her to start one. Betty did not believe she had a sense of what she was going to do with Twitter, but she was willing to give it a try. She figured Twitter was a good way to stay connected with people. Betty found Twitter allowed people to learn to put thoughts down concisely, which is a positive use for any professional. Betty found social media spaces had different utility. Facebook was where she socialized. Twitter was where she did more of her learning. She stated, “There was a time in my life that I would tell people that my exchanges and the amount of time I spent on Twitter were some of best professional development opportunities that I ever had.” Betty also noted:

> I can be engaged in a conversation with someone from around the world in real time. You just when we would have had an opportunity to become virtual friends, you know face to face friends, in real life friends you know just whatever hashtag you want to use. . . . It’s so profound the amount of learning that can take place as a result of social media. And sharing.

Betty noticed it could be difficult to infuse social media into her work and not feel guilty about the time spent there. As such, Betty worked to role model to people how beneficial social media could be when engaging in a responsible way.

Diana

Diana was a cisgendered White woman who, at the time of our interview, was the associate vice president and chief of staff for student affairs at a private research-based, doctoral-granting university in the Midwest. She had been at this university for six years and in her current position for the past two years. Diana was a colleague and then a supervisor of mine. Diana was a strong, confident extrovert. She challenged me to discover and refine my leadership style and skills. We discovered Facebook and educated ourselves and our division about it. We were challenged by the same friend to engage with Twitter. Diana, who had moved to a different university by that time, saw the value and promise of Twitter before I did.

Diana earned her PhD from a Midwest state university in educational leadership. Diana was a highly involved student at her undergraduate institution in the South. Diana admitted, "I didn't understand the field at first. . . . I was working on an undergraduate degree in genetics and found it to be very isolating and not matching my personality type." Diana had a life-changing conversation with one of her advisors when she returned to the sorority house. She stated:

> I remember talking with my advisor who happened to be coordinator of student organization at my large Southern university and her two questions to me were: One, What did you learn the most from your classroom experiences or out of classroom experiences? I thought about it and I came to the conclusion it was out of the classroom experiences were more salient to me. And then the second was, "Do you realize I get paid for what I do?"

After that conversation, Diana went into a program and became a hall director.

Diana moved to another university in the state and was a hall director, and became an assistant director one year later. When the director left, she was made interim director, and

stated, “At which point I realized I was not ready for that job two years out of graduate school.” That same director moved to a state university in the lower Midwest and ask Diana to join him as he reorganized the housing department. Diana joined the staff as manager of residence life and then became the assistant director of housing. When the director left, Diana was made interim director and then director. At this time, she was in her PhD program at a state university just north of her current university. Diana moved a state over when she was, as she stated, “tapped to apply for the housing director role” at that state university to run the housing and dining program. Diana was involved in GLACUHO in the presidential track. After finishing her PhD, Diana was tapped to colead the Garner Institute Foundations of Excellence First Year Experience in addition to her housing director position. After more turnover at the university, Diana became assistant provost for the university college, where the holistic student success program brought together orientation, career advancement, and learning support services. While in that position, Diana received an unsolicited email from a vice president whom she knew was moving to a private research doctoral-granting university in the Midwest. The vice president remembered Diana from an interview where Diana was second for the position for which the vice president sought to hire. They met for coffee when Diana was in town. During the meeting, the vice president shared with Diana the job description for the position that was posted a few months later. Diana came into her position as the assistant vice president, and oversaw all auxiliary enterprises of housing, information technology, and the university center.

Two years later, Diana was promoted to associate vice president and chief of staff, inherited a couple of new units, and created a few additional units. At the time of the interview, Diana oversaw all infrastructure services—the university center, facilities, human resources, budget for the student affairs division, and housing and dining.

Diana began teaching student development theory after completing her PhD. At the time of this interview, she had taught the course five times at two different universities. Diana also became involved in NASPA. Diana recalled when she and I worked together at the Midwest state university, we made significant changes on behalf of the students. Diana has continued to make similar fundamental changes on all the campuses where she has worked. Diana noted she finds the work she does meaningful and motivational. Diana enjoys working on the programmatic level with good assessment strategies and working with students who are in crisis.

Shifting expectations can be challenging to navigate. When student affairs does what it is supposed to do, many times the efforts go unnoticed. Diana felt there is an expectation of perfection in student affairs and once an issue arises, it should be able to be managed or fixed. Diana stated, “And that is really, the really difficult roller coaster to ride when you know you can’t control what students are doing to do nor would we want to.” For Diana there can be a lack of understanding that the students now are not the same as the students were five years ago. The shifting federal landscape has impacted the work Diana and other student affairs professionals do. No good rudimentary understanding exists of the complexities that present themselves with students by state legislatures or even the U.S. Department of Education.

Diana became involved with Facebook when she first became aware of the platform from students. She presented to the housing leadership team and then she did a presentation for the division of student affairs. Twitter involvement came about through Stacy and #Sachat. Diana got involved in the conversation and contributed in meaningful ways as the hashtag began to take off in popularity with other student affairs professionals. Diana viewed social media as a way to create a broader network and, if done well, noted that network can be supportive. Still, she cautioned that if the network is not broad and does not allow someone to see different

perspectives, it can create a bubble or echo chamber. Staying relevant with students continues to be an important part of staying engaged in social media. She stated, “If I can get my arms around it a little bit and even just develop an appreciation for what is important to them, I think it helps me and programs serve students better.”

Diana began to dig into Twitter once it was downloaded on her phone. She stated, “Twitter satisfied my activator. Oooh, I have an idea. Shoot it out there. Sometimes to my detriment. But at the end of the day, it allowed me to engage more broadly.” Diana used lists and engaged with hashtags. She followed and contributed to conference hashtags. It was fascinating to get information from a session that she did not attend while she shared content from the session she was in. She stated, “It opened up the conference in a way that previous to Twitter, we didn’t have access to.”

When these platforms and social media in general exploded, it created a place where Diana felt expertise and equality met in a different way than in other spaces. With Twitter, she stated:

> You give anyone access to a platform to share their opinion. The flip side becomes very difficult to verify who has an informed opinion and who does not. So, there is a random thought shooting out of my mouth or am I truly an expert in something and I am sharing that opinion. And so, you give equal weight to folx who may not deserve it from an expertise standpoint. On some level that sounds elitist but, on another level, I think it is responsible.

Kelly

Kelly was a cisgendered White woman and a first-generation master’s degree holder from a private university in the Northeast. At the time of this study, Kelly worked as a vice president

in a higher education-adjacent company in the private public housing sector. I met Kelly at one of many conferences we attended. Kelly had a personality that was larger than life and one with which it took me a bit to feel comfortable interacting. Her extraversion was on display continually and there was no better cheerleader and encourager of young talent than Kelly. Kelly was adept at finding talent and making introductions to those who influence organizations and campuses.

Kelly always felt she belonged in college and was identified early in her career as having potential as a student leader. Kelly was an orientation leader, sat on the foundation board for the alumni association, and became a resident assistant in her sophomore year. Kelly was highly sought after when she graduated and she took a job as an entry-level admissions counselor. She made the leap in 1990 to a private company because it gave her an opportunity to be a director of housing and residence life at 26. Kelly knew this role was a big job, and stated, “Not a school in the country would have thought I was qualified for it.” The organization was an entrepreneurial start up with one of the first public–private partnerships at a southern university. Kelly felt her 1 year as hall director was enough and she was ready for the job. For a few years, Kelly worked at a private school in the Northeast as an area director before she was recruited to work for a private company where her salary tripled along with what she described as “an awesome title,” and she has been with the company for more than 18 years.

Kelly noted everyone she works with is outstanding at what they do. She has been able to add value to the $7 billion real estate trust every year. She stated she has autonomy in decision making to continue to add value to the company. Although the competitive process can be challenging, her company has worked to figure out what a university wants and offer it to them

in a financially feasible way. Over the years, Kelly has been able to refine her job into two areas where she can contribute, stating:

> Does it help us make money; does it help us save money and does it improve the brand? Most of my work falls into improving the brand. But I am also in the position often of saving us money or making us money.

Kelly was a social person who noted she is always evolving. She did not see an endpoint to being a better version of herself. She stated, "Although people see me about being competitive, I am not. I am really into me and being better at being me." Social media for Kelly was another form of communication. Social media allowed her to help people, especially people who are marginalized. These platforms also give Kelly the opportunity to be a cheerleader for others. Kelly noted she does not like to write, so she stated the brevity of Twitter "is a lovely thing." She considered herself a "serial retweeter." Kelly was not someone who curated original content. Although Kelly did a few blogs, it was not where her heart was. Kelly stated she is about "applauding and celebrating other people's successes . . . highlighting great stuff from people that may not have the reach I did." Twitter allowed Kelly to use her relationship power. She stated, "I know a lot of people and it [Twitter] allowed me to highlight excellence on all levels that might not have gotten seen if I didn't retweet it." Kelly believed Twitter can get amazing young creatives some exposure. She stated:

> You know, I was always looking for those people who had something special to offer and it didn't say should of, could of, would of—they did it. And they just needed a little bit of light. It's a small field. It's a small fishbowl.

Kelly knew if she could highlight these women through a retweet, she could give them some exposure in places they may not have been able to reach otherwise. The darker side of Twitter, as

Kelly saw it, is the anonymity people use to be mean or cruel. Kelly observed higher education institutions struggling to graduate students of color and first-generation students. She said she cares deeply about these students and does not have the time to concentrate on those who use social media to criticize others. She used social media and stated she "played in talent acquisition" or engaged authors who "had things to say that were helpful to higher ed."

Maria

Maria was a cisgendered Latina woman who earned a PhD from a large land-grant institution in the Pacific Northwest. I met Maria when she worked in the Midwest. At the time, we shared a common interest in a software program we used on our campuses. We met at the user conference and found we had similar interests. Both of us are introverts and sought meaningful connections in our networks. Maria challenged me to continue to interact via Twitter, especially in the #Sachat community, where she connected me with a few of her colleagues. Those connections with colleagues led to some rich, meaningful professional relationships that have lasted for over a decade. Maria joined Betty and me in developing a series of workshops about introverted leadership.

Maria worked as an undergraduate in the student union. She loved her work there. Maria became involved in higher education while doing a variety of graduate assistantships. The final assistantships piqued her interest with research, assisting graduate students in securing research grants, fellowships, and dissertation research support. After this experience, Maria helped facilitate a first-year experience program. During this time, Maria found her calling—she wanted to work with students, yet not as a faculty member. In higher education administration, Maria learned she could make what she described as "systemic institutional change around how we support all students." As a TRIO director at university in the Northwest, she leveraged universal

design to make needed improvements. Maria took this love for systematic change to improve support for students with her when she moved to the Midwest where she was able to be a self-described “retention czar” and help the university push success to a new level. Maria noted she likes being a leader in the higher education space. At the university in the Midwest, she was an associate dean of students but had a portfolio akin to what most vice presidents would have. When she moved to the Northeast, she was able to have intervention units plus crisis intervention. After that, she moved back to the large land-grant, doctoral-granting institution in the Pacific Northwest. Maria found her place, as she stated, “in the world or organizational advancement, change management, and building proper structure to support them.” At the time of this interview, Maria and her staff were supporting students after a student-athlete suicide. She brought many departments to the table where they functioned as equals in working to find the best way to support students. The leaders were focused on, as Maria described, “sharing ideas that were interrelated and interconnected in a seamless way so that our students—our students don’t feel that we’re separated. They feel like we’re working together.” The leadership focused on pulling areas together that did not normally work together to leverage assets to become more effective together than separately.

Maria came to social media through using Facebook for family and friends. A colleague, Debra, showed Maria the community aspect that differed from Maria’s personal life. Maria noted she always tries to be where students are. People see her regularly at games and events on campus.

Maria’s use of Twitter changed as she moved into different roles. As a mid-level professional, Maria became a retweeter and engaged in direct messages. Maria had many private conversations. As Maria emerged into senior leadership roles, she grew in how she engaged with

social media and Twitter. Maria shared she enjoys social media because she can be present in the media.

Maria described using social media for the connections it brings, as she has support from many places outside of social media, thus, social media is one place for her to give and receive support. Maria noted she is brand loyal and an active ambassador of the school where she works. She was intentional about using and developing content to support her students. Maria viewed social media as challenging her to be seen and heard. For Maria, she noted her voice is her voice, and what she says on social media can seem guarded or at least not truly representative of who she is as a whole person. As she stated:

> There is a place for Twitter and social media, but I don't see it as an end all be all thing. It is one of many places and frankly not a main place that I go for support. I got involved with Twitter to be where students are and found it helpful in making a connection with women at a conference. That is not to minimize that it has enhanced connections but it is one tool of many.

Maria saw herself as a connector, and Twitter allowed her to facilitate many connections. Maria noted she makes connections and then removes herself from the conversation so the people who connected can bond. I have benefited from her doing that through Twitter. I have at least two go-to colleagues whom I would have not met otherwise.

Conclusion

This chapter shared the stories of the women who created the #wlsalt hashtag and served as the participants in this study. Details of their journeys—including degrees acquired, career progression in higher education or higher education-adjacent industries, and how they came to use social media—were highlighted. A phenomenological, heuristic study of the meaning

making of the seven #wlsalt founders adds to the research base of social capital in women's networks. Discovering the rich meaning derived from contributors of this Twitter hashtag community adds texture to existing research and spurns more interest in these types of communities. The next chapter highlights the genesis of the #wlsalt hashtag and provides a discussion of themes discovered in the interviews with the founding seven women.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

The purposes of this study were twofold. First, this study discovered the meaning women in higher education make when using social media to enhance their personal and professional development through the intersections among feminist and social capital movements. Secondly, this study explored the "place" of the social media space created in the use of a specific hashtag. To understand how these women found each other and developed the #wlsalt hashtag, they shared their respective journeys to the moment in time when they met and formed a lasting bond, resulting in the birth of the #wlsalt hashtag. In this chapter, I reveal the common themes among the founders as they made meaning from the #wlsalt. Voices of the #wlsalt founders were used to illustrate themes that emerged from their lived experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012).

In this chapter, I explore the emergent themes that arose from the interviews with the founding seven members and archival data collected via emails and tweets. The emergent themes include the origin story of the hashtag, and the purpose of the hashtag as the founders used it. Participants shared their personal and professional development and the impact the other founders had on them. In this chapter, the support the founders have beyond #wlsalt and Twitter are explored, along with the lasting impact they hope the #wlsalt hashtag has on the higher education landscape.

The Hashtag

Participants in this study shared the origin of the #wlsalt hashtag with me in our interviews. The hashtag emerged as a result of the founders' participation in a conference they all attended in December 2010. At the leadership institute, they committed to using Twitter as a platform to connect with each other once they returned home and to continue conversation on topics of interest to women in the higher education space. The hashtag led to a community of Twitter users who engaged with the founders and other women in higher education to create a space for women to support one another.

Founding of #wlsalt

The participants of this study comprised seven women from across the country who worked at higher education institutions or an adjacent industry and went to the Women's Leadership Institute (WLI) in December 2010. These women bonded by spending time together at the conference and stayed in touch via Twitter. They were passionate about women's leadership and wanted to find a way to connect with others by using the Twitter platform and other social media spaces. After returning home from the WLI conference, Kelly shared with the other six:

> I'm finding myself wanting to tweet the six of you so often so I think we need our own hashtag [inspired by #usguys hashtag] Any suggestions #wli? I want to use the hashtag to send tweets that support, lift, encourage, promote women leaders & to invite others who do the same to use it as well.

Kelly was inspired to, as she noted, "build a network of women focused on consciously choosing to push women forward." She wanted to combat what she regularly saw in her Twitter stream of women who were quick to devalue the work and success these women achieved.

#wlsalt Beginnings and Last Use

Exploring the beginnings of the #wlsalt hashtag and noting when it was last actively used is important for context. The interviews with the participants took place between July 2017 and June 2018, at least two years after the participants had been actively using the #wlsalt hashtag. Each participant shared their recollection of the founding of the #wlsalt hashtag.

These seven women founders started a WordPress blog called Student Affairs Women Lead (n.d.) where they posted the #wlsalt story about beginning the use of the hashtag. The founders wrote:

> What began as a dinner among friends at a restaurant called SALT became a bond around the need for supporting other women in higher education. We seek to support the leaders who are developing campus communities around the country, affirm the work being done to promote women leaders, lift the voices that may be quieted in other venues, and transform how we create institutions of higher learning. Please join us for conversation and support. You're just in time for dessert. (Student Affairs Women Lead, n.d.-a)

The arch of the beginning of the #wlsalt hashtag use and when it was last used is of interest in the study to show the length of time the participants of the study and other women engaged within the community built around the hashtag.

Along with the WordPress blog, the founders began actively using the #wlsalt hashtag on Twitter. The space began as a natural conversation using Twitter because Maria's flight was delayed and she wanted to be connected to a session she was going to miss because of the delay; this platform helped the women continue the conversation beyond the conference. These women leaders in higher education also knew they wanted to carry forward the energy they experienced

to others. Sally recalled, “We had a planning call and said we wanted to continue to talk with each other, but we didn’t want to be just us talking to each other.” Michelle added:

> I don’t think we really had any idea what we wanted necessarily to become other than kind of a signal in the Twitter atmosphere that we were recognizing other women, affirming other women, supporting and lifting up and calling attention to women’s leadership issues.

All seven women made the commitment to use the hashtag and encourage others to do the same. Kelly reached out to me via email in February 2011 to be one of the 50 evangelists to help amplify the use of the hashtag among women leaders in higher education.

I was intrigued by the idea of creating a space for women to connect. I felt isolated during this time in my professional career. I was in doctoral classes and unable to travel to conferences, which is where I had previously found a safe place to have conversations with trusted colleagues from other campuses. I also found Twitter was a place to exchange ideas and share information because I participated in #sachat and active with #sadoc. Both hashtags helped connect me to individuals to have longer conversations, many times outside of Twitter.

Although the website and blog’s last activity was in 2012, the #wlsalt hashtag continued to be used by women in higher education for several years. The last time #wlsalt was used as a tag on Twitter was December 19, 2017. The last time a founder used the #wlsalt hashtag was October 26, 2015, by Sally tweeting about Maria.

Purpose of the Hashtag

In their interviews, the founding seven talked about the purpose of the hashtag or, more accurately, how the purpose began to evolve. Each of the participants used the hashtag in ways that were comfortable for them to connect with other women in the higher education space.

Diana recalled, “I don’t know that we had an end game in mind other than we wanted to change the environment.” The environment she described was one where women in high education did not have the ability to talk about issues that mattered to them. The hashtag provided a counterspace to process and share what professional women sometimes discussed with trusted friends and colleagues, a place for women to sustain the momentum they gained, affirm those gains and amplify others, and lift each other up instead of competing—thereby transforming the environment for women in higher education. Diana stated, “This platform was a game changer for women. That this could help you get the network that you didn’t have on your campus.” Tess stated she “wanted other women to feel that same kind of empowerment and support and lack of competition” and noted the group “could create a change of culture that was more supportive and not so condescending to each other.”

All founders—or Salt sisters, as they called themselves—wanted to create a safe space for women in higher education to encourage each other beyond their core group. Twitter gave them and any woman who chose to use the hashtag a platform and a safe place to process. The founders used their bonding capital as leaders on various campuses and in higher education-adjacent industries to share ideas and thoughts around the core areas of the hashtag of supporting, affirming, lifting, and transforming. Each founder used Twitter and the #wlsalt hashtag in their own way to support, affirm, lift, and transform women and women’s leadership issues.

Initially, both Kelly and Maria relied heavily on the direct connection through Twitter using direct messages. Direct messages are private messages sent between Twitter users. Kelly said:

> For me it started with doing DMs [direct messages] to work who were minimizing themselves and saying negative things. . . . You deserve better and it's to start with you taking credit for your contributions, for not minimizing your skill set. You are impressive; you are important. And we need to hear a confident voice from women with master's degrees in the field.

Kelly was on the faculty for the WLI, where she met the other founders. Kelly said she thrives on personal connections with women. Maria had a similar experience when she engaged with Twitter. She engaged through personal connections using DMs initially, and she would often retweet content she saw and wanted to amplify. The one-to-one connection allowed each participant to connect with the other person in a way that was comfortable for them, and it allowed them to leverage their bonding social capital with these women. Tess noted she felt the hashtag community was there for a reason:

> To role model . . . for younger women and hold me accountable . . . too. Making sure we were uplifting each other and not nitpicking each other. That we could create a change of culture that was not so condescending to each other.

Michelle recalled all the founders made a commitment to use the #wlsalt hashtag and to encourage other women in the field to do the same. They saw the use of the hashtag grow. Michelle stated, "Then we started to think but now what and we started talking more about the purpose." The SAWomen Lead website was subsequently formed, and the blog followed.

Diana recalled using Twitter was a matter of convenience for her at the institute. Twitter led her to finding her roommate, Tess. Conversations with Tess evolved into talking about a lack of what Diana described as "community or network engagement, or even a way to have those direct conversations with other women in a nonguard fashion." This realization led the to

thinking about how Twitter and #sachat had opened connections among student affairs professionals.

The founders began to talk more about women's leadership and how they might be able to leverage this social media platform to further the discussion. As Diana noted, they intentionally "provide support connections and resources for leadership, academic and career opportunities." The founders saw this platform as a way to connect women so they could ask a question, seek advice through a DM, and share accomplishments. Diana noticed, for example, after doing a search of national organizations, few women were recognized with awards. The Salt sisters wanted to highlight intentionally the good work being done by women leaders in the field including not just senior leaders, but all leaders in the field at all levels.

Sally found women in leadership roles can perceive, as women, there are deficits. But she stated women leaders have "strengths. We have wonderful things . . . you do this in a work where you are constantly fighting against barriers and things that send opposite messages." Diana noted:

> Lifting that whole elevating women not just through recognition but introduction, making connections, you know connecting that over to support. If someone's having a rough time, how you lift them up out of that to some degree or connect them to somebody who can help them saw as important function of the #wlsalt hashtag.

Each founder engaged with the hashtag to create a conversation among women in higher education where they exchanged ideas, talked through challenges, and shared resources.

Impact on Personal and Professional Lives

The blending of personal and professional lives with the participants was more intertwined than anticipated. I found in the interviews the founding seven women had both a

strong professional and strong personal bond with each other. They came together at a professional institute and discovered the passion they felt around issues with women in higher education. They were committed to finding a broad way to explore this bond with other women in the field using the #wlsalt hashtag and the SAWomenLead WordPress site.

The participants called themselves “Salt sisters” because they saw themselves as family. On Sally’s desk was a picture of the seven founders taken at the NASPA conference in Philadelphia that happened in spring after the WLI. The only other pictures Sally had in her office were pictures of her family. She considered these women as close as her family. In her interview, Sally said she sends individual or group texts to six of the seven women every day. Her personal and professional lives were so enhanced from these relationships that they became blended. In fact, she credited the support from these women for encouraging her to run for an office in a national organization. Sally also shared the relationship with these women had changed over time. Their relationship started out as a professional support group and eventually became more personal. In the interviews, I found each participant had a connection to the others in different ways, and each founder engaged with the other in ways that were comfortable for them. Strong friendships had emerged over the years.

Maria talked about how the Salt sisters use the group text that they established. She stated:

> We talk to each other about everything from a shitty day at work to . . . I’m really struggling with what happened in the field. What do you about this or this is what I am thinking? So, we do everything. It’s a family.

Maria also shared this group of women is one of many support systems she has and all serve different places and purposes for her.

As an example of where one Salt sister encouraged another to consider something that would stretch her professionally, Michelle shared Maria convinced her to take an interview at a school in the West, even though it was not exactly what Michelle was looking for in her next position. Maria made the case that if she wanted to get into a system school like this position, a good interview would be worth the effort to get Michelle's name out there, even if it did not lead to the acquisition of the job at that time. Maria believed system schools talk to one another. Michelle ended up liking the interview and the school so much that she took a position there.

When Diana spoke of her connections with the other Salt sisters, she shared how each one enhanced her life, both professionally and personally. She fostered deep connections with each one in different ways. All of the relationships were based on their unique lenses into higher education and their personal strengths. It became clear that every one of them would drop what they were doing to come to one another's aid.

Tess shared, "Now when my phone starts blowing up with texts, my daughters go, 'Is it your Salt sisters?'" Tess was also quick to point out that what she termed the "original crew" were there to help encourage her to become more involved. As she became more involved through #wlsalt, Tess began to challenge herself with personal and professional involvement.

Betty summed up the relationship with her Salt sisters by saying these women "are my go-to women if I have professional concerns. They know my personal concerns. I mean I would never" not find a way to connect with these women. Although each of the participants had different personal and professional relationships with each other, all seemed to be satisfied with their engagement with each other. Kelly stated a few times in our conversation that she was aware her relationship differed within the group. She felt comfortable engaging occasionally and

noted she had a good personal and professional relationship with the other six. She shared she does not participate regularly in the group texts.

Professional Use and Impact

Another theme brought forward by both Michelle and Maria was the connection through Twitter that allowed them to skip small talk. Michelle, Maria, Tess, Sally, and Betty all identified as introverts. Tess was the one most often put in the extrovert group with Diana and Kelly. Tess was close to Diana, and Tess was in conference mode when they all met, so it is quite possible she appeared more extroverted at the conference to her fellow founders. Being able to get to the heart of conversation was appealing to all founders, but especially to the self-identified introverts. The brevity of the Twitter format did not leave room for a lot of small talk.

Sally noted Twitter was a professional place for her when she was on the West Coast and felt isolated. She used Twitter to continue to build connections outside of her state and it eventually helped her make the leap from student affairs into the higher education-adjacent group.

Kelly shared she used Twitter and social media to promote women. She saw that objective as the best use because there are always young talented women who are not necessarily able to get in front of people. Kelly noted she has an extensive national network and she regularly introduces new talent to experienced professionals. She expressed concern that women will not be able to achieve parity with men if they do not work together and help each other.

Kelly did not create content as often as the others because she would see something and instead use her voice to amplify it. Kelly knew she had deep connections in the higher education space and others would pay attention to what she put out there. Kelly bridged her social capital to help women she saw as talented but not yet discovered.

The development of the WordPress website gave the founders a repository for the most recent uses of the #wlsalt hashtag and gave them a space for blogs to explore subjects more deeply than can be captured in a 140-character tweet. They created a page for links specifically for women in higher education and an origin page, along with the list of the original evangelists.

Supports Beyond #wlsalt and Twitter

Although Twitter and the WordPress site were the repositories for #wlsalt, the participants made clear they used social media spaces in different ways. The support beyond #wlsalt and Twitter was an emergent theme. Each founder used social media, and specifically Twitter, in different ways. All shared their engagement with Twitter, and the #wlsalt hashtag changed over time. Maria and Kelly used Twitter and #wlsalt initially more with DMs to connect with women individually. As Maria moved into senior leadership roles, her engagement with Twitter and social media in general changed. Maria began to curate information about her institution and higher education. Maria also made sure she was active on her campus beyond what others saw on social media. Maria knew her interactions with students on campus were paramount and social media was one of many tools and communities. Essentially, #wlsalt was not her primary community.

Diana noted she uses social media to share resources and information about issues that are salient to her and her students. Diana became aware that her tweets had caused much discussion—some discussions were not as productive as others. Diana was comfortable being authentic with her positions. She noted she does not have separate professional social media accounts, and she works for an institution supportive of her efforts.

All participants were involved in regional and/or national organizations. All the women said they used Facebook, and many founders noted they use Instagram as well. Online

communities were one of many professional and personal support systems each participant described having. Diana and Sally held top-level officer positions in national associations. Sally, Tess, and Maria also held senior leadership positions in national associations. Michelle and Kelly were also very active in their professional associations. All the founders talked about going into social media spaces where their students reside. Although they used the networks to enhance themselves and others professionals, all were driven by their commitment to students on some level.

Lasting Impact

The lasting impact of #wlsalt, as defined by each participant, was an emergent theme. The founders shared the impact of #wlsalt in many ways. Maria saw the impact of the hashtag was complicated and complex. She stated:

> If somebody asked me why #wlsalting is so hard it is because it is really easy to focus on a quick fix through a 140-character tweet that will try to make you feel better. But ultimately it is unsatisfying. And so, it won't satisfy the deep need that we have as human beings to connect with each other, to engage with each other, to argue with each other, and to love each other. It doesn't address that.

Maria felt Twitter's 140-character limit hindered sharing her thoughts. At one point in our conversation, Maria mentioned she was concerned the hashtag might become the only tool to connect women, as #wlsalt was one of many places that Maria could use to engage on a variety of topics for women. Sally stated she was proud the group "created an open space for women to feel empowered to be heard . . . in an open and safe environment where people felt safe enough to go on this public forum and talk about these issues together." Diana acknowledged from her

perspective she did not believe the founders entered this initiative with the end in mind. She stated:

> It wasn't like we said this is going to be the biggest Twitter account on the planet and it's going to be here forever. But we just needed to change some for women in higher education. We needed to help folks realize that this Twitter tool, not the Twitter account for sawomenlead or the hashtag for #wlsalt.

Kelly saw #wlaslt as being a place for women to connect and share information, especially about salaries and how to negotiate. She stated:

> The greatness of #wlsalt was that women came together to help other women. Until we have that happening in a genuine, consistent and pervasive way we won't see gender equity in higher education. And as much as people want to think that they are getting paid what other men are getting paid in higher ed, it not true. Women continue to leave money on the table. So, the biggest area where #wlsalt heled was on negotiation and access to opportunities.

Tess saw the #wlsalt hashtag as transitioning and making a place for other groups. She noted this transition involved "seeing it more from #wlsalt to #wisa to . . . however else women wanted to identify each other." She went on to give examples of the Student Affairs MomS (SAMS) Facebook group and a school-affiliated doctoral moms group, both of which are active in connecting and sharing information with members, especially resources. Tess also saw #wlsalt helped encourage other women to attend and connect with the WLI. She recalled being aware of at least "two generations" of women who were active in #wlsalt attending. One group of women who connected at WLI created "The Imposters" podcast, a podcast hosted by four creative

women who started it with a group text, then a Google hangout with wine that then morphed into a recorded podcast (Marfo et al., 2017). Tess stated:

> They found their own platform. For them it was a podcast and for us it was a hashtag. It is fun to see the different morphing that happened out of those communities. . . . It's all about finding your crew.

Betty shared she had been thinking around the time of our interview of the #MeToo movement and hashtag. She noted she often wondered "about the intersection of those two and what would or could have happened if #wlsalt had been in its heyday ant the same time that the #MeToo movement was really getting traction." She went on to say, "Wouldn't it be nice to think we may have instilled some confidence" for women to use their voices because "we've got your back." In essence, #wlsalt may have helped some women feel comfortable coming forward.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the meaning making that came from the founder's creation of the #wlsalt hashtag. Using the founder's own words, I painted a picture of the group as it existed when the hashtag formed and was being actively used. I added dimension to the emerging portrait of the #wlsalt hashtag by sharing the impact the founders saw upon reflecting on their interaction with the #wlsalt hashtag and the community of women who engaged with it. A phenomenological heuristic study of the meaning making of the seven #wlsalt founders adds to the research base of social capital in women's networks. Discovering the rich meaning derived from contributors of this Twitter hashtag community adds texture to the existing research and spurns more interest in these types of communities. The next chapter discusses implications and areas of research that can continue because of this study.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, this study discovered the meaning women in higher education make when using social media to enhance their personal and professional development through the intersections among feminist and social capital movements. Second, this study explored the "place" of the social media space created in the use of a specific hashtag. To understand how these women found each other and developed the #wlsalt hashtag, their respective journeys to the moment in time when they met and formed a lasting bond resulting in the birth of the #wlsalt hashtag were described. In Chapter 5, I explored common themes among the voices of the founders as they made meaning from the #wlsalt. In this chapter, I connect those themes to social capital in virtual communities, Tuckman and Jensen's (2010) theory of group development, and feminist standpoint theory.

Social Capital in Virtual Communities

In Chapter 2, Soukup (2006) established that virtual spaces can function in a similar way to that of physical third places. Although these spaces are not local in nature, a person can access the virtual space through the use of the internet and a profile.

Third Place

McArthur and White (2016) and Soukup (2006) explored virtual spaces as third places using Oldenburg's (1999) third place theory. The founders used a hashtag to create a virtual third

place for women in higher education to engage each other. Oldenburg (1999) defined a third place as being different from families (i.e., the first place). Work is considered the second place. A third place for Oldenburg was community space like a pub, coffee house, or café where people came to socialize.

Oldenburg's (1999) third places have six characteristics: (a) exist on neutral ground, (b) are levelers, (c) have conversations as the main activity, (d) are accessible, (e) function as a home away from home with regulars, and (f) have a playful mood. Although the third place was conceptualized as a physical space, those elements have been brought into virtual spaces. The #wlsalt community exists on neutral ground. The internet and Twitter are open forums where content is shared on an equal basis. A person did not need to be a member of any group to use the hashtag, and there was not emphasis on title to engage in conversations. A person simply needed to use the hashtag once they created a Twitter profile so it was accessible. The founders were regular users of the hashtag. Many other women used the hashtag regularly. There were playful moments, especially when other women recognized and encouraged others. Many tenets of #wlsalt (support, affirm, lift, and transform) have celebratory elements. In many ways, #wlsalt was a third place with a specific purpose. Women gathered to connect on a variety of ways through conversations using the #wlsalt hashtag and connecting outside of the Twitter space to support one another.

Social Capital Framework

Lin (2003) enumerated four essential elements to social capital: (a) information, (b) influence, (c) social credentials, and (d) reinforcement. Lin (2003) recognized the "revolutionary rise of social capital" (p. 214) through the use of social media platforms. The #wlsalt community has all of those elements. Information flows through its members. The use of the hashtag was

founded on connecting women in the higher education space by sharing information and resources. The founders and users of the #wlsalt hashtag formed social ties with one another. The founders had bonding social capital (Putnam, 2007). They occupied the same space in higher education administration or an adjacent industry. Users of the hashtag also demonstrated bonding and bridging social capital as they connected with one another over topics of interest.

The founders and users of the hashtag showed social credentials as they stood behind the information they shared. Some conversations led to larger activities such as when Mohr (2012), through her connection to Kelly, offered to host a workshop on February 29, 2012, for the #wlsalt community on playing big based on her 10 Rules for Brilliant Women. Tara presented four 60-minute conversations with the #wlsalt community. The mini-workshop also supported Putnam's (2000) belief that social capital facilitates coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits of the community. The conversations around how to negotiate salaries or ask for more compensation also showed the #wlsalt community as positively building social capital.

Many tenets of the hashtag worked to reinforce those connections made among users of the #wlsalt hashtag. When a person needed a pick-me-up or needed to connect with someone after a particularly hard day or situation, engaging with one another helped members see they had support beyond their campuses. Tess saw the strength the of #wlsalt community and described it as being in "the forefront of a lot of those hashtags and online communities supporting each other." As she continued, the #wlsalt community existed to "jumpstart these conversations of women lifting other women."

Blended Existence

Many founders were aware of each other in the field and a few had met prior to connecting at the Women's Leadership Institute (WLI). All had some familiarity with social

media, but none used Twitter in the way they envisioned after their experiences at the WLI. Part of the strength of what they formed was rooted in a real-life connection. They shared an in-person experience they wanted to continue beyond the conference itself. Many student affairs practitioners have experiences at conferences that they work to capture and bring back to their campuses with varying levels of success. Given this initial experience was one outside of the virtual community space, it made sense there would be a blended characteristic to the community with the founders and others. As Betty said, "When we left, we all experienced this powerful connection in a short period of time that we were trying to harness."

Wellman et al. (2001) noted individuals lead complex lives that blend with their online interactions. Tess noted the users of the #wlsalt hashtag "are connecting with people we already know in a different way. I was intrigued to see the ebb and flow of it." The participants found connections with each other and those who interacted with the hashtag. Sally stated, "You start to have personal connections with people who then become part of my network." Sally went on to say, "It was more about connecting people, helping them find and feel affirmed in their voice."

When someone asked her why #wlsalting was so hard, Maria replied:

> It's easy to focus on a quick fix through a 140-character tweet that will try to make you feel better. But ultimately it is unsatisfying, It won't satisfy the deep need that we as human beings have to connect with each other, to engage with each other, to argue with each other, to love each other.

Tuckman's Stages of Small Group Development

Although Tuckman was not one of the underpinning models used as I began to research the founders and the hashtag community that formed around #wlsalt, it became evident based on

the interviews that the founders went through Tuckman and Jensen's (2010) five stages of small group development: (a) forming, (b) storming, (c) norming, (d) performing, and (e) adjourning.

Forming

The first stage of Tuckman and Jensen's (2010) model is where the group becomes oriented to the task or purpose (Bonebright, 2010). The founders came together around the WLI in 2010. At the time, they were enjoying each other's company; at the restaurant, Salt on Amelia Island, Florida, they decided they wanted to keep the connection alive and open the conversation they had to a wider audience. They tossed around hashtag ideas and landed on #wlsalt (i.e., women's leadership, support, affirm, lift, and transform) as the ideals around a larger conversation would happen.

At the time, the founders were scattered across several times zones and in different areas of the country: Michelle, Diana, and Betty were in the same upper Midwest city, Tess was in a different state in the upper Midwest, Maria was in the central Midwest, Sally was on the West Coast, and Kelly was in a different state in the Midwest. During the time the #wlsalt hashtag was active, the founders moved around. Betty went to the West Coast for a bit before landing in the South; Maria was on the East Coast for a couple of years before coming back to the Northwest; Sally left the West Coast to go to the Midwest; Kelly moved from the Midwest to the West; and Tess, Betty, and Diana stayed in the Midwest, although Betty changed institutions. Geography and changes in leadership opportunities affected engagement with the #wlsalt hashtag. The founders developed and used social media, including #wlsalt, in different ways as they grew both personally and professionally.

Storming

During the second stage, storming, group members work through conflicts (Bonebright, 2010). Storming began as the founders were determined to operationalize the #wlsalt hashtag and community. Twitter was a powerful platform, but they wanted to have a more permanent presence to help tell their story and engage with women through more than just 140-character tweets. The women decided to create SAWomenLead as a landing space for a blog and resources.

There were passionate discussions about not only the building of the website but also how to engage and how often to engage with the #wlsalt hashtag. Some differences of opinion were voiced to the group, whereas others were processed individually. Betty stated she felt "the pressure to always feel like you have to be engaged every day or a certain amount or with certain people." The founders developed a schedule for blog postings. Michelle shared how the blog postings came about. She stated, "We would each write a blog post occasionally." Maria and Kelly did not consider blogs their forte, thus, although they participated, blogging was not their preferred way to engage with the #wlsalt community. When they decided as a group to blog, it was to have a larger platform for some of the discussions.

Blogs. There were challenges to creating and maintaining a space for women in higher education to connect, share resources, and support one another. Betty recalled there may have been perceived pressure to engage using the hashtag every day. In planning calls, Maria mentioned there were many ideas of how to engage. Each founder committed to doing a blog post for the website and find ways to engage using the hashtag.

Michelle's blog post centered on her realization there was a double standard in how assertiveness in women can be perceived. At the time, she received feedback from her male

supervisor that she was too direct, assertive, and mean in her conduct role. She stated, “If I wanted to be a dean of students, I would need to learn to me more empathetic.” This conversation was the first time Michelle recalled being confronted with this double standard that is all too common for women leaders. She wondered if the feedback would have been the same if she were a man. She stated, “It opened my eyes a little bit more to the way gender impacts our work and the way people perceive the work that we do.” Sally recalled:

> I worked on the blog going back to setting the table. How do we make sure the table is set and really inclusive for everyone? And trying to figure out how we were intentional about including communities of color, queer communities. . . . We were trying to have a gendered conversation without being overly gendered.

Sally felt this lack of a way to be fully inclusive became a constant challenge that was never fully addressed in her blog nor with the #wlsalt community.

Race and Equity. All the founders identified as cisgendered. All but one were White women. Each said, when they created the #wlsalt counterspace, they meant for the space to be a place for all women. They had several conversations around how to be as inclusive as possible. Although they attempted to create a space for all women, they could not escape the layer of White feminism.

Diana noted even in promoting equal pay day, there were issues that went back to how the founders perceived creating a space for all women. Equal Pay Day has been promoted as a day representative of just one race—White women. Diana stated, “That is not the time of year that a Black woman would have to work to hit equal pay or a Latino woman or an Asian American woman.” Maria and Betty pushed the conversation of how this community was as inclusive of all women as they could, but, as Diana admitted, she was not yet as evolved as she

was at the time of the interview. Sally remembered there were "some moments where people were questioned about their commitment to social justice and equity." Sally was concerned about the impact this lack of inclusivity could have on how people perceived the hashtag, and questioned whether everyone would see a place for themselves in the community.

The founders had major discussions on how to sustain and engage using the @SALeads blog and regular engagement with the #wlsalt hashtag. Each founder chose a topic for their and wrote a narrative for the website. They wrote about setting the table; workplace observations about leadership traits; asking for help; and using the hashtag, other support networks, and listening. There were a couple of guest blog posts, and by the second year, they had enlisted several guests to write for the website. The feature went over so well that the Women in Student Affairs (WISA) NASPA community picked it up as a regular feature. When looking over those who wrote for the blog, it was difficult to see a wide range of voices that represent all women in the field. There was concern that although women of color used the #wlsalt hashtag, were their concerns being addressed? Betty remembered, "There were some extremely difficult conversations around equity and race and how we presented in the space as white women or as a woman of color."

For Diana, the realization that the space was not as inclusive as she may have thought came from a tweet where a colleague pointed to an article about tension as a result of intersectionality of race and gender. The article was *When White Women Cry: How White Women's Tears Oppress Women of Color* by Mamta Motwani Accapadi. Diana had not considered her Whiteness a blind spot for her. When she looked back at the tweets from that time period, she stated, "There were women of color connecting with it [#wlsalt], but we were not

necessarily addressing the needs of women of color." Being invited to participate with the #wlslat hashtag did not equate to the needs of women of color being met within the community.

Kelly saw the hashtag as a place where women could come in and have a conversation and connect to other networks. She noted Maria was able to connect with Latinx women. Kelly believed the space they created had an influence on hashtags and groups such as #SAMS (student affairs moms) and #sadoc (student affairs doctoral students), including connecting Latina doctoral students to a network. She stated, "So, I think it crossed race even though six of the seven of us are White women."

Many of the founders' discussions and efforts to grapple with race and gender issues mirrored issues facing student affairs. Creating a space that is inclusive of the diversity present in the field is difficult, especially when those who created the space do not share the same characteristics of all who might become a part of the space. Maria observed building and maintaining communities online can be difficult. Although, these issues appeared to be the same as problems that may be faced when building community in person, and it is different. In social media spaces, it is easier to walk away from the community when the differences become uncomfortable. As Maria stated, with "human beings, [it] is not that easy." Although this community was primarily online, the founders were also connected in personal relationships with one another.

Recognizing blind spots is critical, along with remaining open to finding ways to address concerns from women of color. Yet, there were other communities who may not have felt represented when all the founders identified as cisgendered. There was concern about the connectedness with other identities (gender fluid, queer, or lesbian women) feeling they had a place in the community.

Additions to the Core Group. Although the original seven founders were the ones who met at WLI, Kelly tried to expand the core group as the #wlsalt hashtag grew and met with some resistance. The seven women agreed the conversation around women's issues and the climate in higher education needed to expand,yet, they were divided on if the core founders' group should expand. Sally, Betty, Maria, and Diana mentioned although they sought to expand the conversation around the #wlsalt hashtag, they were not in favor of expanding the founders. Many of the founders wanted to have a space for them to remain exclusively connected, so they used group texting. Kelly wanted to expand the core group by adding people to the group text. The resistance of adding to the group changed the way Kelly chose to interact with the other six. Kelly acknowledged she viewed the group differently and was in favor of expanding. Kelly's interaction with the texting group changed, although she remains close with each of the six founders.

Most of the women felt the bond shared because of the WLI in 2010 needed to remain intact in some form. Although they were open to conversations and relationships beyond those formed there, they believed there was something special as Salt sisters. All participants discussed texting and seeing each other at conferences and professional functions throughout the year.

Norming

During this third phase, group members begin to resolve the conflicts presented in the storming phase by accepting differences and finding common ground (Bonebright, 2010). Norming began as the founders came to understand they created a counterspace for women to connect with each other. They had not solved the issues around race and equity, but they had the conversation. Betty described #wlsalt and its community as a place where "there was just a lot of really great conversations, thoughts, and support there." Women in higher education started

using the hashtag. Tess shared how she felt when she saw #wlsalt being used by someone outside of the founding seven. She stated:

> The first time I saw the hashtag not being used by one of us that someone else had picked it up was really kind of cool. Just like . . . oh, they kind of get it . . . you know what I mean. And being able to share our story of why we started it and having other people share was amazing.

Diana saw the platform as being a game changer for women. She stated, "This could help you get the network that you didn't have access to on your campus." Diana acknowledged #wlsalt was just one of those spaces for women to connect with one another. Kelly knew #wlsalt gave women access to information on topics they had not discussed prior. She noted, "It created a space for where women asked questions and talked to each other about critical things." Sally described #wlaslt as "an open space for women to feel empowered in that space to be heard. . . . People felt safe enough to do something on a public forum and talk about these issues together."

The forum being open to women to discuss, support, affirm, lift, and transform using the #wlsalt hashtag was a uniting factor for the seven founders. Each had a different way of engaging and actively promoting the use of the hashtag and the SAWomen lead website. They engaged and encouraged others to engage in using the hashtag and blogging for the website. Tess stated the group created a "change of culture that was much more supportive and not so condescending to each other." These women took what they learned at WLI and used a social media platform to help continue the conversation.

Performing

The last stage of the original model, performing, is where the group takes on the role of problem solving as it moves forward (Bonebright, 2010). As the use of #wlsalt began to rise in

mid-2011, the founders hoped it would create a conversation among colleagues who wanted to have a safe place to exchange ideas and help each other in their careers. Kelly saw #wsalt as a way to give younger women a nudge or push to know that what they brought to their work mattered. She stated, “They needed to hear from people their thoughts, their words, their work was significant, and it gave them permission to do more.”

In some ways, this community they created gave the illusion that the founders had discovered something that put them above others in the field. I attended a NASPA regional conference for Women in Student Affairs (WISA) in 2011. During the conference, there was a session on #wlsalt. Five of the seven founders presented and shared how they found each other and started the hashtag. A few of the women in attendance actively used the hashtag, but many were just hearing about it. There was a buzz of excitement in the room as these women talked about how, together, we could help each other. One of the topics was salary negotiation. Women are notorious for not negotiating and often leave money on the table (Compton & Palmer, 2009). Kelly and Diana, prior to being a part of #wlsalt, presented on how to negotiate salaries and other benefits. Tess, Betty, and Michelle spoke about how they engaged with the hashtag. The young professionals in the room were captivated and committed to helping spread the word. The evangelists for #wlsalt grew by 40 because of that conference presentation. At that session, I believed I had found a topic worthy of research. I had been a part of presentations that resonated with audiences before, but there was a different kind of energy that permeated the room. These women began engaging with the hashtag while the presentation was in session.

As use of the hashtag continued to increase, the founders noticed they were being treated like celebrities instead of colleagues. In particular, this treatment became a particular concern when it happened with younger professionals. Betty recalled taking time to talk with one

professional at a conference. It was not uncommon for the founders to meet with women when they attended conferences. Often at the national and regional level there would be "tweetups," which are meetups so users can interact in person. Betty wanted to connect with this particular person who the founders were concerned about based on an interaction with the hashtag. The founders were concerned that the young professional saw them as student affairs celebrities when the founders worked to be seen as practitioners like many who engaged with the hashtag. No doubt this was a transformative conversation between two professional women. Betty's goal was to engage in a conversation to show this colleague that she and the other founders were not any different than any other colleague she might encounter. They were engaged in supporting women just like many other professionals in the field.

In March 2011, Stoller (2011) wrote about how the #wlsalt hashtag came about in a piece for *Inside Higher Ed*

> [The hashtag was] an effort to build a network of women focused on and consciously choosing to push women forward at all levels in higher education. They are confident that the hashtag can create a network of women on Twitter who enthusiastically help each other in generating amazing professional opportunities. (para. 2)

Stoller also highlighted there would be a tweetup at the NASPA conference the next week in Philadelphia. Drawing attention through a mainstream media outlet in the higher education area helped #wlsalt reach a wider audience.

Mohr (2012), who wrote *Playing Big*, had come across the #wlsalt hashtag. Mohr) engaged in a conversation via Twitter about #WLSalt and talked with Kelly about what she and the founders were doing. Several women who were engaging in the #wlsalt community had read

her book and actively sent relevant quotes that highlighted commonalities. The founders posted the following on February 14, 2012:

> We are often asked by tweeter's [sic] both outside and inside higher education to share the story of #WLSalt and Student Affairs Women Lead. We received the question a few weeks ago from Tara Sophia Mohr, a nationally recognized author and speaker on women's leadership. In the conversation, Tara spoke of her appreciation for the #WLSalt community, our retweeting and our sharing of her stunning quotes and powerful writing. Additionally, Tara extended an incredibly generous offer to provide a workshop for us. We are thrilled to share this opportunity with you and we now invite you to spread the word! (Student Affairs Women Lead, n.d.-c)

In conjunction with the NASPA WISA Knowledge Community on February 29, 2012, Mohr gave a free mini workshop to talk about how women can use the principles of her book and use the #wlsalt community for support. The workshop was recorded and shared with those who could not attend live.

Adjourning

The last stage added to Tuckman's theory in 1977 is adjourning, where the group members separate and the group begins to disband (Bonebright, 2010). Geography and changes in leadership opportunities affected engagement with the #wlsalt hashtag. During the time the #wlsalt hashtag was active, the founders moved around.

The SAWomenLead WordPress website continues to be accessible, although it has largely been dormant for years. The last blog post was in May 2012. The last tweets in the Twitter feed were 7 years ago. A search of Twitter for the #wlsalt hashtag showed the last tweet with the hashtag was posted on December 19, 2017.

Tess became involved in NASPA and specifically the WISA knowledge community. She saw #wlsalt naturally move into that space. Having a #wlsalt founder involved helped influence how #wisa would develop and open up to women in the profession. Having a national association infrastructure to also support the community helped with resources.

Michelle saw #wlsalt as more than a hashtag. For her, the hashtag was emblematic of the WLI and those who continued to be her friends and confidantes. She also believed the hashtag community helped encourage women to take on leadership roles and support other women and to focus on their identities. When reflecting on concerns that may have arisen in the #wlsalt community, Michelle, Diana, Sally, Tess, and Maria all mentioned not finding a way to address the race and equity issues fully as having an impact on those who may have chosen to engage with the community.

Feminist Standpoint Theories

Feminist standpoint theories have been one of the most influential and controversial theories to emerge from second wave feminists because they place descriptive and normative narratives with political and social power and knowledge front and center (Bowell, n.d.). Feminist standpoint theories provide a response to those who have been historically marginalized in the patriarchal societal construct (LeSavoy & Bergeron, 2011). Feminist standpoint theories seek to see and hear women's lived experiences outside of the patriarchal norms (Gurung, 2020). Using feminist standpoint theory to analyze the founders and how they interacted with each other in the higher education space offered a unique view into the power structures the founders tried to level by using their leadership to support, affirm, lift, and transform the higher education space for women. Through the intentionality of the hashtag #wlsalt, women's leadership was leveraged to bring about support for other women in the higher education space.

Each of the founders in some way or another were second wave feminists or had benefited from second wave feminist movements. They occupied spaces in higher education or higher education-adjacent industries through private housing development companies or educational philanthropy agencies. Most self-identified as feminists. All but one of the founders were cisgendered White women with advanced college degrees. Several had terminal degrees. One of the founders was a cisgendered Latina woman with a terminal degree. They were familiar with the patriarchal nature of higher education leadership. I am a feminist, and as Gurung (2020) noted, as a female researcher, I had a standpoint of an "insider" because I work in the higher education space as the founders do, but I was an "outsider" to the #wlsalt sister group made up of the founding seven. These unique standpoints had benefits to understanding the underlying power structures and realities the founders faced.

Supportive Space

Hearing these participants use their voices and language helped me better understand their reality in the higher education landscape as it related to the use of the #wlsalt hashtag and the space it created from them and those who followed the hashtag. Kelly saw the space created by the hashtag community as allowing women to share information and have intelligence particularly around information not generally shared among women. Tess noted she wanted to "create a change of culture that was much more supportive and not so condescending to each other." Kelly emphasized, "One of the biggest issues with women is that they don't talk with each other. And it [#wlsalt] created a space where women asked questions and talked to each other about critical things." Sally saw the space created by the hashtag as place that was open enough for women to feel, as she noted, "safe enough to do something on a public platform and talk about all these issues together." Diana described the space as taking the lift aspect to a place

beyond award recognition, stating, “but introduction, making connections . . . connecting that over to support.” Maria pushed for a group of women who moved beyond what was done with the hashtag. She looked for women who showed activism—or, as she described, women “doing some sustainable change work who are on the ground, in the policy, pushing the agenda.” To varying degrees, each of the founders saw aspects of these ideals show up in the #wlsalt hashtag community**.**

Kelly saw the greatness of #wlsalt was what she described as “women came together to help other women.” She also stated, “Until we have that happening in a genuine, consistent and pervasive way, we won’t see gender equity in higher education.” Although the #wlsalt hashtag is not actively used anymore, the founders have seen the growing influence of the hashtag and the WLI. There is a large Student Affairs Mom (SAMS) Facebook group where a few of the founders have gone and actively contributed. A different class of WLI developed a podcast as a different way to engage with the larger women’s community beyond the institute. A few founders went on to work with women’s committees through professional organizations. Tess stated from her point of view, for many professionals the search for connection is about women finding “their crew . . . it’s about finding your support network.”

Connections Beyond the Hashtag

Although the founders used the hashtag to connect with one another and with other women in the higher education space, they also realized it was but one tool to bring about connections. Maria was intentional about her interactions with the hashtag. She often would see a person using the hashtag and make note of the substance of the conversation. Maria shared:

> I connect a lot of people via DM [direct message]. I have somebody I hear something or see something on Twitter, I pull that person in and connect them with another person. I

> often say, “You two need to talk. You are saying the same things.” I know you, they are not following each other. It is the connectedness piece.

Betty found some of her connections came because of interaction with the hashtag, but then she would see the person at a professional conference. She connected with those relationships sometimes over personal experiences beyond the work space and then had the connection in person at the conference. This connection also happened to several of the founders when they presented about the hashtag at a WISA conference in 2011. Five of the founders spoke about their experience at the WLI and how the hashtag was formed. They talked about their vision for engaging with other women in the higher education space via Twitter and the #wlsalt blog. They spoke about the transformation they hoped to be a part of as the influence of women in the field were embraced and how networking, such as what was done at the conference, would assist the women in attendance.

Knowledge is Power

> Diana saw early on the power that Twitter could provide the group. She asked:
>
> How do we provide supportive connections and resources for leadership, academic and career opportunities? So, if we see a job announcement, we can project it out there. If someone has a question, they can direct message you and say, “What should the appropriate salary range be?”

Kelly also saw the connections made through the #wlsalt community as being powerfully helpful for women. Kelly emphasized, “Women continue to leave money on the table. So, the biggest area where #wlsalt can help was on negotiation, access to opportunities.” Kelly went on to say, “People don’t like to see women owning their power, whether it be their positional power or their credibility power or their specialization whatever it might be.”

Kelly also shared she believed each of the founders carried with them a great deal of power and influence in their respective spaces. Kelly was an excellent connector, noting she regularly championed younger professionals by introducing them to women in housing and student affairs. Kelly's company had sponsored many women's events at these conferences. Diana, Betty, Maria, and Tess served on regional and national governing boards. Michelle was active with younger professionals through conference presentations and work in her associations. Sally's work through her higher education-adjacent philanthropic organization had her interacting with policy development and funding initiatives, which connected her to many institutional leaders. All the founders noted they regularly engage with their professional associations by giving presentations, serving on their boards, and often being mentors through different initiatives offered at the conferences.

Lasting Impact

The founders shared the impact of #wlsalt in many ways. Maria saw the impact of the hashtag was complicated and complex. She stated:

> If somebody asked me why #wlsalting is so hard it is because it is really easy to focus on a quick fix through a 140-character tweet that will try to make you feel better. But ultimately it is unsatisfying. And so, it won't satisfy the deep need that we have as human beings to connect with each other, to engage with each other, to argue with each other, and to love each other. It doesn't address that.

Diana acknowledged from her perspective she did not believe the founders went in with the end in mind. She stated:

> It wasn't like we said this is going to be the biggest Twitter account on the planet and it's going to be here forever. But we just needed to change some for women in higher

> education. We needed to help folks realize that this Twitter tool, not the Twitter account for SAWomenLead or the hashtag for #wlsalt.

Kelly saw #wlaslt as being a place for women to connect and share information, especially information about salaries and how to negotiate. She noted:

> The greatness of #wlsalt was that women came together to help other women. Until we have that happening in a genuine, consistent and pervasive way we won't see gender equity in higher education. And as much as people want to think that they are getting paid what other men are getting paid in higher ed, it not true. Women continue to leave money on the table. So, the biggest area where #wlsalt heled was on negotiation and access to opportunities.

Tess saw the #wlsalt hashtag transitioning and making a place for other groups. She stated it was "seeing it more from #wlsalt to #wisa to, you know, however else women wanted to identify each other." She went on to give the examples of the SAMS Facebook group and a school-affiliated doctoral moms group, both of which are active in connecting and sharing information and resources with members. Tess also saw #wlsalt helped encourage other women to attend and connect with the WLI. She said she was aware of at least "two generations" of women who were active in #wlsalt attending. Tess stated, "They found their own platform. For them it was a podcast and for us it was a hashtag. It is fun to see the different morphing that happened out of those communities. . . . It's all about finding your crew."

Betty shared she had been thinking around the time of our interview of the #MeToo movement and hashtag. She said she wondered "about the intersection of those two and what would or could have happened if #wlsalt had been in its heyday at the same time the #MeToo movement was really getting traction." She went on to say, "Wouldn't it be nice to think we may

have instilled some confidence" for women to use their voice because "we've got your back." Perhaps the engagement with the #wlsalt hashtag had helped student affairs women find confidence in their voice and had an impact on women feeling comfortable sharing their stories via Twitter.

Women Leadership Metaphor Reexamined

In Chapter 1, I introduced the metaphor that women leaders often walk a tightrope when trying to navigate the norms of society with their personal leadership style. When women leaders have a strong compatible style represented by the rope itself, then the rope is taut and stable. Walking across a taut stable rope is relatively easy, particularly when the rope is stable and not so high up in the air that a fall off would be devastating. Many times, leaders have coaches and those around to help guide them across the rope. The coaches can observe the environment from a different view than the tightrope walker. These coaches are particularly beneficial when the tightrope becomes slack, when the tightrope walker questions their leadership style, or when cross winds blow in from the campus environment underneath the rope.

The founders coached each other. Because of their experience attending the WLI, they knew they needed to find a way to help coach other women. They leveraged Twitter and used the #wlsalt hashtag and the SAWomenLeads Word Press site to create a hashtag community of women that challenged themselves and each other to support, affirm, lift, and transform themselves and others to be their best in the higher education field.

The founders, who called themselves Salt sisters, took a deeply personal relationship they formed and nurtured over time and leveraged it to help other women in higher education using Twitter and the #wlsalt hashtag. They experienced a profound awakening that moved them to want to connect and share with other women. The #wlsalt hashtag was rooted in the personal

connection of these seven professional women. The #wlsalt hashtag became the digital manifestation of their connection and was meant to take that connection to a much larger platform to connect other women in higher education.

Interpretation

After spending time with each founder in our in-depth interviews and interacting with these women through #wlsalt and the community over the years, I was struck by the interwoven nature of their personal and professional relationships. Although a couple of the founders talked about the professional and personal side of the relationships with some distance, many of the founders shared they were intertwined in a way that when they talk with each other, they jump topics between personal and professional. They called themselves Salt sisters and considered these relationships as close as their immediate family members.

A connection that started at a conference over a meal at Salt restaurant grew into a decade-long friendship among these women. The bond they have with each other was different and distinct from the bonds they developed with other women. They experienced an awakening and awareness at the WLI in 2010 that led them to come together to work to change the landscape in higher education for women. To what extent they were successful is hard to measure directly. To the women who engaged in connecting with each other and talking about issues that mattered to them, the hashtag was successful in growing awareness and growing networks. Many of the women who interacted with the community have remained in the profession and have taken those principles and woven them into their leadership styles and practices.

As I reflected on the information and insights gleaned from my time with the founders, I was drawn back to the leadership metaphor introduced in Chapter 2 of women in higher

education walking a tightrope. Coaches on the side to help each woman navigate her rope come in the form of mentors and trusted advisors. Certainly, the founders of the #wlsalt community are coaches for each other and for many of us in the field. Yet, the net that can form to help lessen any slips or falls comes from communities of support. The net formed by the #wlsalt community of founders and users was a pleasant discovery. Coaches are important, but so is a supportive community to help those in the field navigate their way across their own tightropes. For me, #wlsalt hashtag community was a net that lessened any slips or falls I have had. I believe the hashtag has served as that net for many women in the field. My hope is women will continue to have nets like the #wlsalt hashtag for women in the student affairs field.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the meaning making that came from the founders' creation of the #wlsalt hashtag. Because the relationships formed from attending the WLI were integral to how the founders interacted with the hashtag, I explored small-group dynamics and the ways their interaction with the #wlsalt hashtag and each other may have influenced both their personal and professional lives. A phenomenological heuristic study of the meaning making of the seven #wlsalt founders adds to the research base of social capital in women's networks. Discovering the rich meaning derived from contributors of this Twitter hashtag community adds texture to the existing research and spurs more interest in these types of communities. The next chapter presents a discussion of implications and areas of research that can continue because of this study.

CHAPTER 7

IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, this study discovered the meaning women in higher education make when using social media to enhance their personal and professional development through the intersections among feminist and social capital movements. Second, this study explored the "place" of the social media space created in the use of a specific hashtag. I explored the common themes among the voices of the founders as they made meaning from the #wlsalt. In the last chapter, I connected those themes to social capital in virtual communities, Tuckman and Jensen's (2010) theory of group development, and feminist standpoint theory. In this chapter, I discuss implications, recommendations, and limitations of the study.

Implications

Although studying a specific hashtag developed by seven women in higher education cannot be looked upon as definitive way to connect and support all women in the higher education space, the study showed how social media can be leveraged to enhance both the professional and personal lives of the women who started a hashtag to connect themselves and bring in other women to connect through a community of support.

Tuckman and Jensen's (2010) theory of group development was evident as I explored the lived experiences of the founders. I did not expect to be able to see evidence at all stages. I expected I would encounter the forming stage, and as time went on, storming would perhaps

come forward. After all, the participants were strong, educated women leaders in the higher education and higher education-adjacent industries. They met while attending the same Women's Leadership Institute (WLI) as participants or an instructor in the program. It is plausible and likely that Tuckman's theory of group development would be applicable to many other communities that formed under similar conditions.

Empowerment hashtags such as #wlsalt shape how the founders and users interact with one another. In this case, the founders emphasized supporting and sustaining positive relationships, affirming each other's worth and work, lifting each other up, and transforming the culture in higher education, specifically student affairs. Researchers should continue to study how these types of hashtags shape conversations and ultimately the higher education and student affairs field.

Although it might be tempting to view this community as the support group for these women, this platform was just one of many places these women received support. Although these relationships were close as family to most of them, they got support from their professional organizations, their institutions, and other groups. One of the participants, Maria, pointed out #wlsalt was a place for her to get some support, but it was not where she got her primary support. Maria already had a complex multilayered support network before meeting the other founders. She had built strong relationships with most of the founders. Maria's network was a well-developed safety net beyond the #wlsalt group. An implication of this research was there are places for support that can be found in community built in social media spaces. Studying this place in isolation may give a false sense of importance to the support of these women.

The support these women found in each other and the #wlsalt community was complex and multilayered. Each had a different way of viewing the impact and importance the hashtag

had on the climate for women in student affairs. Connecting women to each other certainly helped elevate conversations around salary and negotiation. Though race and equity were not fully addressed by the founders, their conversations were similar to the conversations happening nationally and regionally around race and equity.

Niche hashtags such as #wlsalt helped pave the way for other affinity-related hashtags such as NASPA's #wisa for Women in Student Affairs. The blog that was a part of the SAWomenLeads WordPress site was effectively transferred to the WISA group and has continued to this day. Other affinity related hashtags began to emerge, including #blksap (Black student affairs professionals) and #satech (student affairs technology professionals).

Recommendations for Higher Education Practitioners

Based on this study, there are several recommendations for further study. Social media is a good platform for community building in higher education or any affinity group.

Recommendation 1

Using Twitter with specific hashtags can connect content with users. Once a specific hashtag has been established and goes through the crowd sourcing process, users will establish when the particular hashtag can and should be used. Groups or individuals can come together to discuss if there is a niche to connect or a specific event to highlight.

Hashtags can be developed around student affairs as a whole or subsets of the population based on job function or area of expertise; for example, there are many women's committees or communities attached to national and regional associations. Many of these affinity groups have ways to connect using various social media platform. Twitter hashtags can be one way to curate and filter content that is meaningful to those in the affinity group.

Using an affinity group and how it connects through a hashtag could be studied. There is a Black student affairs professional group (i.e., #blksap). Similarly, there is a #sadoc group of student affairs doctoral students who connect through that hashtag. #satech is a hashtag developed and used by women in student affairs who work in technology. The hashtag #sagrad is used for connecting student affairs graduate students. There is a #salatinx hashtag used by Latinx grads and professionals. More hashtags will surely develop as issues or affinity groups find ways to connect with one another.

Where there are group connections, meaning is made from those interactions. Some of the groups will also begin to form group bonds based on the interactions. This phenomenon is particularly true of the #blksap group. This particular group has had tweetup meetings at regional and national conferences. In this way, the #blksap group is similar to the #wlsalt founders as they have both in person and virtual relationships. The blended interaction would be an important element to continue studying.

Recommendation 2

Studying leaders in the field of higher education and higher education-adjacent industries was a major part of this study. Expanding a study beyond these women to see how leaders use social media to connect with who they may define as their community is worthwhile research. Ahlquist (2020) has worked with student affairs leaders in the past few years to develop strategies to leverage social media to connect with students. She built her company on teaching senior-level educational leaders how to engage with students using social media platforms.

Studying a group of digital leaders in the higher education field to see how they use and interact with digital platforms is a worthwhile subject. Many educational executives interact with

Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok because that is where students are, most notably in the latter two spaces currently (Ahlquist, 2020).

Recommendation 3

This study focused on leaders in higher education and higher education-adjacent spaces and the space they created to connect with one another and other women in the field. Studying graduate spaces for those in master's and doctoral programs could be beneficial. Doctoral students can connect in myriad ways using the hashtag #sadoc. There are Facebook groups for master's and doctoral students, along with programs for students who may be languishing as they move through the thesis and dissertation process.

Finding those spaces for students would be of interest to study. Future researchers could explore the connections students make along with the reasons the students connected. Another aspect to study would entail the type of community that forms and the support students derive from the space.

Recommendations for Women in Higher Education

As established in Chapter 1, women in higher education have a long way to go to establish equality in numbers with male counterparts in the higher leadership roles and have a significant gap with salary equity (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 2021; Certified Unified Program Agencies – Human Resources, 2016).

Recommendation 1

Part of the strength of this study was being able to observe the founders' use of the #wlsalt hashtag and its community over time. Hashtags come and go, although some tend to be around for years even if use ebbs and flows. Part of the power of this study also entailed talking with the founders about how the hashtag started, how it grew, and then eventually how it was

used less frequently over time. There were two years where the #wlsalt hashtag was used and written about by social media influencers in student affairs. In the fourth year, the hashtag was used only by some of the founders and core evangelists.

Studying how users find a hashtag group and how the interaction changes over time could reveal how users perceive and make meaning of the group in which they take part. Such change over time could also reflect the way those in student affairs view the topic or group. Examining what drove the discussions in that space and how those issues were resolved, tracking whether the social media platforms were exclusively used or if other platforms were used, or noting the origin of the topic and whether it emerged from a national, regional, or local issues on campus would be a beneficial area of future study.

Recommendation 2

The founders in this study led blended lives. Although participants enumerated how their professional and personal lives had been enhanced by the connections made through the #wlsalt community and interactions with other founders, this blending was much more closely tied than I had anticipated. Multiple founders talked about having some separation between personal and professional postings and accounts, but the majority of these founders had one account and persona they portrayed in their Twitter accounts.

Additionally, the founders saw each other as close friends and family members. Although time and distance had separated the founding seven for almost a decade, they remained close and had developed relationships with each other outside of the group itself. They have made sure to connect when they are in each other's hometowns. The founders regularly connected at conferences before the COVID-19 global pandemic. Most recently, a few of them connected on a multiday vacation.

Exploring bonds among and between users who interact with a particular hashtag on a particular social media platform could reveal insight into bonds that develop through topic or affinity driven groups. Research could explore how the counterspace that may be created is used by its members.

Recommendation 3

This study focused on one hashtag and how it provided support for the women who created the space for themselves and others in the higher education space. Additional options would be to expand the study into other social media spaces women use for support, explore whether affinity groups prefer certain platforms, and examine the other digital spaces where women go for support. The #wlsalt hashtag also had a blog component with the SAWomenLead WordPress site.

Recommendation 4

This study focused on the founding of the #wlsalt hashtag and the meaning making of the founders at a moment in time. In the time since this research was conducted, many of the founding women have moved positions within the field. It would be beneficial to bring the founding seven back together to see what has changed and if additional meaning making has happened as a result of the #wlsalt experience.

Recommendation 5

This study focused on the founding seven and their interactions with each other and the hashtag. There were 50 #wlsalt evangelists who also developed bonds and made meaning of the #wlsalt hashtag. Studying the 50 evangelists to explore how the hashtag and involvement in the

#wlsalt community impacted their personal and professional lives could be of interest to researchers.

Recommendation 6

Though this study focused on the founding seven and mentioned the 50 evangelists for context, it could be of interest to bring the founding seven together with the 50 evangelists to study how interactions in the community enhanced their personal and professional lives and to study how they may have maintained some of those connections after the #wlsalt hashtag halted active use. Researchers could take a retroactive look to find meaning that has since moved forward and capture data related to those bonds built while using the hashtag.

Recommendations for Colleges and Universities

Based on this study, several recommendations for further study with implications for colleges and university administration emerged. Given the proliferation of social media platforms with which employees engage in their daily lives, how these employees interact with users—whether they are other professionals or students—should be of interest to researchers.

Recommendation 1

The COVID-19 global pandemic and funding issues have hit college and university budgets hard, whether the institution is public, private, or for-profit (Kelchen et al., 2021). Although many institutions leverage social media to attract students, there also exists a need to leverage social media to attract and retain employees. Niche hashtags (e.g., #wisa, #satech, #blksap) could be used to engage employees in important conversations and present unique opportunities for professional development. Institutional officials need to consider devoting dedicated time to allow employees to engage with these communities. Researchers could study

those who engage with the niche communities to explore how they are retained to the institution or to the profession.

Recommendation 2

Amid budget constraints, institutional administrators could explore how to create content by using a niche hashtag or creating one. Longer conversations and collaborations can be leveraged when making connections worldwide. The asynchronous nature of communicating using hashtags across social media platforms could make for unique and powerful collaborations for faculty and administrative staff. Additionally, studying what works and what challenges collaborations when using social media platforms for communication should be of interest to scholars. New strategies for leveraging social media platforms presents long-term implications for institutions.

Recommendations for Future Researchers

Based on this study, several recommendations for further study emerged. Given the proliferation of social media platforms and the rapid adoption of these platforms in daily lives, how individuals use and connect through these platforms should be of interest to researchers.

Recommendation 1

Hashtags initially developed via Twitter, but have become regular features of most social media programs. Although this study was bound by the Twitter platform, studying a particular hashtag could show how professionals interact and bond with other users around content drive or affinity-based hashtag use. Many professionals interact with several social media platforms; for instance, the founders in this study mentioned working in Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Future researchers could study hashtag use on another particular platform or similar interactions across social media platforms.

Recommendation 2

This study focused on the establishment of the specific hashtag as viewed from the perspective of the founders. There are several affinity and niche hashtags on Twitter and other social media platforms that can be studied from the user perspective. Further researchers could study why a particular hashtag became useful to a user or delve into the meaning a user ascribes to their experience. For example, #wlsalt centered on women's leadership issues and more specifically around supporting women, affirming women, lifting women, and transforming the culture for women in the higher education space. Another option would be to explore current users of the #wlsalt hashtag, making note of whether the women used the core principles outlined by the founding seven.

In a similar emphasis on benefitting a largely female audience online, the #metoo hashtag served as a way for women to share their stories and connect with other women who may have experienced something similar (Ohlheiser, 2017). For too long, women who were subject to abuse of power by men and who were taken advantage of sexually felt isolated and alone. Part of a good defense with these alleged perpetrators was to show the female's recollection of the event was a misunderstanding through gaslighting and isolating the victims. Further researchers could explore the connection #metoo users have with men and women who may have had a similar experience. These researchers could study the level of support users found when engaging with the hashtag.

Limitations

This study entailed a population study of the seven founding members of the #wlsalt hashtag. The research centered on the lived experience of the participants and included my voice as the researcher front and center in the project (M. Q. Patton, 2002). The personal viewpoint I

had as a professional woman helped bring other women into the conversation and added to the richness and authenticity of the study (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). This added layer of understanding allowed me to better understand the context of the founders' lived experiences. Although an essential part of the study, this immersion into the subject I studied was a limitation

Additionally, hashtags almost spontaneously appear on the Twitter landscape and it is often hard to find when a particular hashtag was first used. Sometimes the origin came from one person who saw a hashtag in a tweet and then retweeted or added to the content of the tweet or hashtag. This particular hashtag, #wlsalt, was created by a group of women to help connect other women in the higher education field. The hashtag served as a way not only for these seven women to stay connected, but also a way to bring others into the discussion. The hashtag became a way to keep an important conversation going on a rapidly growing social media platform. As a curated hashtag, its origins and the meaning attached to the founders were able to be explored in more depth than other hashtags. Even so, these limitations do not negate the importance of the study, nor its findings.

Conclusion

Studying the lived experience of the #wlsalt founders through their voices and combined with my experience in the hashtag community was a valuable research project. Women have found ways to connect with each other using the #wlsalt hashtag, but also through relationships built on the bond we had around women's leadership and empowering one another. This autoethnographic study lends itself to storytelling as a way of showing the #wlsalt community phenomenon as experienced through meaning making with the founders. Researcher positionality within the #wlsalt community allowed me to contextualize comments and stories because I was in and a part of the community. Understanding the community as an insider who

was a part of the community's development and implementation added to the effectiveness of capturing the story of the hashtag and the meaning made of it by the founding seven. Heuristic inquiry was my chosen method of study with the layer of autoethnography. My story and contributions were presented alongside the founders to show the context of women in the higher education within this space at those moments in time. This autoethnographic layer of research added to the richness of the story as someone experiencing the community alongside the founders.

Meaning making of the founders was front and center, and my story added context and richness to the data and phenomenon studied. Other research methods could have been used to study this group of women and the hashtag community that they created. I do not believe that these methods would have brought forward the same findings or layers of meaning I was able to uncover using this heuristic method layered with autoethnography.

The relationships and bonds formed in the group allowed these women to have conversations about race and equity that would become a conversation held nationally. The founders shared they did not think they were able to address those concerns adequately as a group, much like the current struggle nationally around race, equity, and justice. It is my hope we continue to have spaces similar to what was created by #wlsalt to have these important conversations around topics of interest to the participants.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduction

As you are aware I am conducting research on the #wlsalt community. Specifically, I am interested in learning about the community and its impact on you personally and professionally. As a member of the founding seven you have a unique perspective on the community. The strength of this study is that will use the words and perceptions of the founders to paint a detailed picture of the lived experience of someone participating in a hashtag community. Much of the research on Twitter centers on reach of information and my research is interested in the meaning found in participation. This interview will have topics and areas to cover as we talk, I will adapt my follow up questions.

- statement of informed consent and confidentially of transcripts
- statement about being recorded

Demographics verification

Personal information

- years of experience in higher education field
    - current position
    - years in current position
    - years at current institution
- size and classification of current institution (small private Liberal arts, large research oriented public land grant institution)

- degree attainment
    - highest degree attained
    - discipline and school
    - bachelors, master's or terminal degree

Professional and career advancement

- How did you become involved with higher education?
- Describe to me your career path to date.
- What do you find the most enjoyable about your career?
- What do you find the most challenging?
- What has kept you in the higher education field?

Engagement with social media

- Describe to me how you became involved with social media?
- How did you come to using Twitter?
- What do you find most engaging about social media?
- What do you find most challenging with social media?
- What do you find most engaging about Twitter?
- What is most challenging about Twitter?

#wlsalt engagement

- Share with me how #wlsalt came about?
- What did you hope #wlsalt would become?
- How have your personally engaged in the #wlsalt community?
- Do you have an instance or two that strike you as being indicative of what you hoped #wlsalt engagement would look like?

- What about these instances stick out to you?
- #wlsalt has been around since the beginning of 2011 how has your involvement in the community changed over the past four years?
- Can you share with me a time when discussions in the #wlsalt community challenged your thoughts or perceptions of a topic?
- What do you see as the future for #wlsalt?
- What concerns do you have about the #wlsalt community?

Enrichment in professional and professional life

- Can you share with me how your professional life has been impacted by participation in the #wlsalt community?
- Can you share with me how your interactions with other #wlsalt founders have impacted your professional life?
- Can you share with me how your personal life has been impacted by participation in the #wlsalt community?
- Can you share with me how your personal life has been impacted by interactions with other #wlsalt founders?

Social media spaces beyond #wlsalt

- You are an active person in social media can you share with me other communities or platforms you have become involved with?
- How have these spaces added to your professional and personal experience?
- What concerns do you have with engaging in these spaces?

Support spaces

- What other places beyond #wlsalt and social media do you engage in for professional support?
- How do these enhance your professional life?
- What other places beyond #wlsalt and social media do you engage in for personal support?
- How do these enhance your personal life?