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*Virginia Commonwealth University*

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Come and Get Your Capital, Sis: The Use of Twitter to Compensate for Gendered and Racialized Job Networks among Creatives

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Sociology at Virginia Commonwealth University.

By

Sasha Ayana Pierre- Louis  
M.S Sociology  
May 22, 2020

Director: Victor Chen, Assistant Professor, Sociology Department

Virginia Commonwealth University  
Richmond, Virginia  
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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	1
<b>Abstract</b>	3
<b>Introduction</b>	4
<b>Gender and Racial Differences in the Use of Social Networks for Job Searching</b>	6
<b>The Use of Social Media to Generate Social Capital</b>	9
<b>Searching for Jobs Online</b>	11
<b>Statement of the Problem</b>	13
<b>Methods</b>	14
Data Collection Using Hashtags	19
<b>Results</b>	21
Descriptive Results	21
General Uses of Hashtags	25
Racial Differences	27
Gender Differences	31
<b>Tables and Figures</b>	22 -25
<b>Discussion</b>	34
<b>Work Cited</b>	39

## Abstract

### COME AND GET YOUR CAPITAL SIS: THE USE OF TWITTER TO COMPENSATE FOR GENDERED AND RACIALIZED JOB NETWORKS AMONG CREATIVES

By Sasha Ayana Pierre- Louis, M.S

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Science at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2020.

Major Director: Victor Chen, Assistant Professor, Sociology

Due to racialized and gendered exclusion and discrimination, Black and women jobseekers do not have the same access to social ties in the labor market as white men. A number of Black Twitter users, particularly Black women, have cultivated networks on Twitter and elsewhere as explicit alternatives to this old boys' network. This study aimed to understand how workers in creative industries—which tend to be more reliant on referrals—use Twitter to expand their social networks and gain access to job opportunities, and how their use of Twitter differed by race and gender. Four hashtags were queried through the Twitter application programming interface—#Reignydayjobs, #blkcreatives, #creativejobs, and #jobsearch—the first two of which are used extensively by Black creatives seeking opportunities and networking within their field. The tweets gathered through this process were analyzed using digital ethnographic methods in order to illuminate how social media job searching and networking behaviors differ by race and gender. As a result of this study, there were some gender and racial differences in how hashtags were used to network and find opportunities, as well as the use of identity based hashtags among Black individuals, more specifically Black women.

The informal process by which individuals are matched to jobs, the exclusive “old boys” network, gives white men a competitive advantage in access to career opportunities and mobility (McDonald 2011). In theory, the internet and social media can provide women and racial and ethnic minorities with ways of compensating for the lack of social ties in their offline networks. This may be especially true for Black women, as previous research suggests that Black women use the internet to an extent that other racial and gender groups do not (Berry-McCrea 2017). The ways that racial and gender minorities use social media to build communities raise questions about how it can be used to supplement offline networks in other domains. This includes obtaining job opportunities otherwise blocked due to discrimination and structural barriers in the labor market (Collins 2009; Smith and Elliot 2002; Wolf 1998).

There is a lack of research, however, on how social media platforms like Twitter can facilitate career mobility for racial and gender minorities. Unlike relying on word of mouth within personal networks, whose efficacy varies across race, gender, and class, using Twitter to access certain career opportunities may encourage the exchange of information across and within communities (Extabe 2018). A Twitter user can potentially reach many people and amplify their voice when their offline networks do not yield the same results. While there are concerns about whether Twitter is representative of the views of nonwhites and the less educated (Scarborough 2018), recent research has highlighted the use of social media as a platform for activism and self-help within certain communities, including among Black women (Fortunati 2018). Given the success that activists have had in using social media to find others who care about the same cause and crowdsource important information and updates (Carney 2016; Freelon, McIlwain, Clark 2018), it would appear that jobseekers may also use Twitter as a way to broaden their

social capital (Lee-Won, White and Potocki 2018) and create opportunities that are similar to what offline networks provide when implicit or explicit exclusion is not present (Kajanová, Sedláček, and Soósová 2017; McDonald 2011; Riedl, Kobler, Goswami, and Krcmar 2013).

Workers in creative industries—artists, graphic designers, journalists, filmmakers, etc.—may rely on social media to find work more than other individuals do. “Creatives” have a highly visible presence on Twitter, where they routinely share their expertise, discuss their services, and network with others. While their jobs provide autonomy and opportunities to pursue their creative interests, they lack the stability of traditional jobs and the resources provided by employers (Neff, Wissinger and Zukin 2005). Personal branding and self-promotion through networks is especially important for freelance creatives who lack such institutional support to market their services (Vallas and Cummins 2015).

This research examines how creatives use Twitter to expand and cultivate their professional networks, and how the use of Twitter differs among racial minorities and women, particularly Black women, in these industries. By using the Twitter hashtags such as #ReignyDayJobs, and #blkcreatives, Black creatives can connect with other individuals searching for and posting opportunities. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis of tweets that mention these and other job search-related hashtags, this analysis illuminates the ways in which social media is used by people of different racial and gender backgrounds, and the extent to which these nontraditional forms of social capital can help individuals from less advantaged groups succeed in today’s labor market. As a result of this study, there were some gender and racial differences in how hashtags were used to network and find opportunities , as well as the use of identity based hashtags among Black individuals , more specifically Black women.

## **Gender and Racial Differences in the Use of Social Networks for Job Searching**

Though the Civil Rights Act banned discrimination by employers based on race and gender, these factors continue to influence job prospects (Correll, Bernard and Paik 2007; Rivera and Tilcsik 2016; Royster 2003). Research has consistently found that men and white individuals are generally more successful in their job searches than women and people of color, respectively (Hite 2004; McDonald, Lin, and Ao 2009). In particular, audit studies have found troubling evidence that racial discrimination continues to be a common practice by employers during the job-seeking process. Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) sent similar resumes of white and Black applicants to companies in the service and admin industry; resumes with white-sounding names received more call backs than those with Black-sounding names. Another classic audit study by Pager (2003) found that Black men with no criminal record were less likely than white felons to be called back for entry-level positions. More recent research has confirmed and extended these alarming findings. Pager, Bonikowski and Western (2009), for instance, found that Black and Latino men both do not fare better than white men released from prison in receiving a call back for job interviews.

Similar experimental research has found discrimination against job applicants from other demographic groups. Correll, Bernard and Paik (2007) identified a “motherhood penalty” whereby women job applicants who are perceived to have children are offered significantly lower salaries than their non-mother counterparts. Rivera and Tilcsik (2016) also found patterns of employer discrimination by socioeconomic status: higher-class male applicants, signaled



through details on fictitious resumes, had more callbacks than higher-class women, lower-class men, and lower-class women.

Black women are in the unique position of being doubly disadvantaged because of their race and gender (Crenshaw 1989). The National Center for Education Statistics reported in 2009 that Black women are the fastest-growing population of those earning college degrees. Even so, they are more likely to be pushed into the lowest-paying jobs due to a preferential hierarchy of whiteness and maleness for many jobs (Branch 2007; Brown 2012). In instances where Black women do make it to mid-level positions, they are less likely to reach supervisory and or managerial roles compared to other minority groups (Hite 2004; Smith and Elliot 2002). Even in the women-dominated field of nursing, Harvey-Wingfield (2009) found that although Black men advanced more quickly than Black women due to their more useful networks and their workplace collegiality with other (white) male colleagues (see also Williams 1992).

Two important findings in the literature on job searching are that informal ties are critical for success, and that access to beneficial ties differs greatly among gender and racial groups. The research suggests that it is not close family and friends (strong ties) who generate new career opportunities for job seekers, but rather friends of friends (weak ties) (Granovetter 1973). While this pattern may not necessarily hold for certain groups, such as immigrants (Tegegne 2015), in general the research finds that strong ties provide emotional support while weak ties serve as resource-filled networks (Quinn 2016; Smith and Elliott 2004). The importance of these weak ties helps explain the lack of success for minority job applicants, given that individuals in their social networks are more likely to be unemployed or in the same type of (low-status) job positions as they are (Arekamp, Knijn, Van der Gaag, Bos 2015; Lee-Won, White, Potocki 2018;

Smith and Elliott 2004). However, the network deficits faced by certain groups can be compensated for, to some extent: for example, Yang, Chawlac, and Uzzi (2017) find that women benefit from wide access to job market information especially when they have an initially strong network to begin with.

Unequal access to social capital affects outcomes even within non-elite labor markets. For example, Royster (2003) finds that Black blue-collar workers have social networks that do not lead to as many favorable job opportunities as those available to their white counterparts. Black women are disproportionately placed into unfavorable positions in the service sector and are excluded from male-dominated positions. Having social networks with more helpful job leads gives white men credibility among their peers, allowing them to refer others and therefore gain status within their communities (McDonald 2011). In contrast, within poor, and Black networks, even those with access to job leads tend not to vouch for others for fear of being blamed for a bad hire (Smith 2005).

Analyzing data on white and minority workers from the 1992-1994 Multi-City Survey of Urban Inequality (MCSUI), Smith and Elliot (2004) finds that minorities tend to benefit less from network assistance than whites do in their efforts to advance their careers. They also conclude that Black women are more likely to experience direct discrimination in access to higher positions—even more so than Black men and Latinas do—after controlling for human capital and employment context (i.e., establishment size, whether the job was public- or private-sector, occupational location, and hours worked per week). In another study based on the MCSUI dataset, Smith and Elliot (2002) examine the relationship between the racial and ethnic concentration of Black, white, Latino, and Asian individuals within a workplace and the ability

of individuals of those groups to attain positions of power—operationalized as having supervisory authority and the ability to hire, fire, and set wages for employees. They find that individuals from disadvantaged groups were more likely to reach higher-level positions when they worked with individuals from the same racial or ethnic group.

This research raises questions about whether alternative social networks, particularly those connecting people of the same backgrounds, may be useful in offsetting existing inequalities in social capital and employment outcomes they influence. Specifically, individuals who lack expansive social networks that could help them in job searches may learn to network with others of the same social group by congregating in their communities or pursuing hobbies or other activities that can connect them to individuals who have job leads to share (McDonald 2011). Though racialized and gendered networks may not always be beneficial, little research to date has examined the ways that online ties and interactions allow women and people of color to cultivate relationships with people they may have not met otherwise, and thereby compensate for their lack of access to social capital useful within the job market (McDonald et. al 2009; Smith and Elliott 2002).

### **The Use of Social Media to Generate Social Capital**

While there has been much discussion of the “digital divide” in terms of access to the internet and its resources (Jung, Qui, and Kim 2001), another view is that new communication technologies may help lessen certain social inequalities, including the gaps between those who do and do not have significant amounts of social capital (Wolf 1998). Social media offers many opportunities to connect with strangers and acquaintances and therefore generate weak ties. The

use of hashtags, for example, allows people to find others with like interests. Social media also plays an integral role in sharing information across networks (Krämer, Rösner, Eimler, Winter, and Neubaum 2014). Twitter is seen as a particularly inclusive platform for “electronic word of mouth” across networks (Extabe 2018:351; Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, and Chowdury 2009); unlike Facebook and LinkedIn, which by default are restrictive of ties between strangers, Twitter’s public feed allows anyone to read an unprotected Twitter user’s feed regardless of whether users have an account on the site. Although instances of racial- and gender-based harassment and bullying are common on Twitter, the capabilities of the site allows users to form extended networks catering to the needs of their racial and gender groups. Some scholars have argued that the design of Twitter discourages exclusivity in social networks because the flow of information between accounts is not as segregated in the same way as it is in offline networks (Vergeer 2015; McDonald 2009).

While Scarborough (2018) cautions that the use of Twitter data by social scientists can produce results that overrepresent the views of socially privileged and underrepresent those of minorities, there is some evidence that Twitter is well-used by women and people of color. For example, Lee-Won and colleagues (2018) find that Black Americans are more likely to use Twitter than any other racial group. Furthermore, their survey data suggest that for Black Americans, strong feelings of identification with their racial group and offline experiences of discrimination specifically encourage their use of the platform. This line of research suggests that people of color and women are successfully using social media as a means to bond and organize with other people from their groups, perhaps compensating for racial and gender inequalities in offline networks (Choyko 2016). What has come to be known as “Black Twitter”—a community

of Black Americans who regularly tweet about popular culture, news, and their experiences of being Black in America—is rooted in a common language of call and response (tweets, retweets, and quote tweets) (Clark 2015), signifying (Florini 2014), and “cultural conversation” (Brock 2013). In particular, the use of hashtags helps set boundaries and identify important topics within Black Twitter (Clark 2015).

Scholars have found ways to gauge the effectiveness of using online platforms for the purposes of activism. Specifically, they have underscored the important role that Twitter played in the Black Lives Matter movement and other recent campaigns (Clark 2015; Carney 2016). Black Lives Matter in particular grew in visibility as many like-minded individuals shared real-time updates through their tweets. This showed the ways social media could be used to mobilize individuals for political and social causes. It also highlights the need for additional research on the usefulness of such platforms for information exchange and coordination in other domains, including the job market (Lawson 2018).

### **Searching for Jobs Online**

Over the past two decades, using the internet and automated hiring platforms (AHPs) to find jobs has become increasingly commonplace. AHPs—for example, SnagAJob or Recruit—assist employers in streamlining applicant information and reducing supposed bias in the hiring process (Ajunawa and Greene 2019). This has clearly helped employers shift away from costly and inconvenient paper listings and applications, but job seekers also state in surveys that they find job searching online to be more effective (Fountain 2005). One consequence of the move toward online job searching is that, in theory, job seekers do not need to rely as heavily on

word of mouth or referrals from family and friends (Faberman and Kudlyak 2016). In recent years, the use of social media for job searching has grown as well, with university students reporting that they regularly use social media platforms to look for a job (Kajanová, Sedláček and Soósová 2017). Little work, however, has been done on racial and gender differences in the success rates of online jobseekers. The previously cited research by Fountain found no such differences, but the online job seeking environment has dramatically changed since that 2005 study, and more research is also needed to examine how the use of social media for job seeking differs across demographic groups.

One group of workers who are well-known for using social media in their job searches is workers in the creative economy: writers, designers, artists, and promotional consultants (Vallas and Cummins 2015). “Creatives” are often freelancers who decide on the amount of work they take on and often have more autonomy in setting their working conditions (Neff, Wissinger and Zukin 2005). But without an institution behind them to market their services and solicit clients, freelance creatives must regularly network on their own to find new employment opportunities (Scolere 2019). Social media platforms have become critical resources for these workers, offering spaces where they can showcase their portfolios and find and obtain gigs (Neff and Zukin 2005; Soar 2002). The need to market themselves on these sites, in turn, puts pressure on creative workers to carefully curate the presentation of their personal brand, businesses, and/or products online (Scolere, Pruchniewska, and Duffy 2018). The impression that creatives give to potential employers on social media influences engagement, potentially affecting the types of opportunities and exposure they receive. In a recent qualitative study based on in-depth interviews and online observations of graphic designers, almost all the interview subjects agreed

that having an online social media presence was important for gaining exposure and obtaining work (Scolere 2019); being on social media also helped creatives target certain types of job opportunities. The extensive and diverse ways that creatives brand themselves on social media and secure employment point to the possibility that women and people of color may employ online networks in very different ways when searching for jobs—perhaps even to an extent that compensates for the limitations of their offline networks.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As a Black woman following the Black feminist tradition it was important to understand how race and gender influenced navigating the job search and networking process, especially when we are inundated with information on social media. More specifically, Collins and Crenshaw gave me the language to understand the challenges myself, and other Black women face in their personal and professional lives. I use social media, particularly Twitter, to engage in academic and non academic discussions. I actively engage -through tweeting , replying and quote tweeting- in the communities I interact with on Twitter while also observing and collecting digital data (i.e publicly available tweets) to understand how Twitter is used for professional pursuits.

There is no one way to approach research (Harding 1989) but it was important to use digital data as one of the sources for understanding job seeking behaviors. Digital data (i.e Tweets) also provides a primary source for people's behaviors in a different way than stand alone interviews and surveys. I wanted to do all I could to make sure I was taking the best feminist epistemological research approach to understand job seeking and networking behaviors

by individuals who may have under resourced networks or have been excluded from other types of networks. It is through my personal experiences and observing Black tweeters and other people of color use of the site, where it is possible to bridge the gap to create theory (hooks 1994) from a none male or white centered perspective.

While research continues to find that women and people of color do not benefit from the same levels of support in their social networks as white men do when searching for employment, little is known about the ways race and gender influence how individuals go about using social media (i.e. Twitter). Current research on digital spaces and their use by women and people of color has tended to examine social media platforms as places for activism and self-help. This study extends our understanding of the use of social media platforms for job-seeking purposes by examining the distinct behaviors that different demographic groups engage on Twitter. It focuses on creative workers, who tend to use such platforms more than workers in other industries, given their needs for self-branding and exposure.

## **METHODS**

This study draws on an analysis of public Twitter data. The Pew Research Center (2019) reports that 38 percent of U.S. adults between the ages of 19 to 29 use Twitter. According to Pew, 24 percent of those users are Black, and 21 percent are white; 21 percent of women use Twitter, compared to 24 percent of men. Twitter was chosen as a site for this study because it is so well-used, particularly among U.S. creative workers, who are so numerous on the site that they have developed race- and gender-specific online communities catering to the needs of these workers. Furthermore, Twitter allows users to browse the site without creating an account and



read posts by other users without a mutual connection, making it the ideal site to examine the possibilities for inclusive online networking—in contrast to platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn, which by default limit opportunities for strangers to connect with one another.

Past research has used Twitter data to examine the strategies that activists use to network and share information. For example, Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark (2018) analyzed Twitter data pertaining to police brutality—drawing from tweets with keywords related to Black Lives Matter and police killings—and found that the movement did indeed help bring national attention to the death of unarmed Black men. Much of this Twitter-based research has used hashtags as a means of focusing on particular groups of users and topics. For example, Carney (2016) conducted a qualitative textual analysis over a four-day period of two hashtags, #BlackLivesMatter and #AllLivesMatter, and found that Twitter helped youth of color organize quickly.

For this study of online job-seeking, four hashtags were queried through the Twitter application programming interface (API): #Reignydayjobs, #creativejobs, #blkcreatives, and #jobsearch. These hashtags allow users to alert other Twitter users that a position has become available within a company or that an individual is looking to hire. They are also used by tweeters to alert other users that they are looking for specific opportunities as creatives. Based on preliminary online observation, all four hashtags are regularly used in Twitter employment searches.

At the outset of the study, preliminary online observations were conducted to identify how often certain hashtags were used and which were the most popular. The hashtags #Reignydayjob and #blkcreatives are geared toward Black Twitter users; their creators are Black and have large Black Twitter followings. In 2017, Black Twitter user April Reign—known for

her viral hashtag #OscarsoWhite and her other work on issues of racial and gender representation—created #ReignyDayJobs to “help folks find/promote job opportunities” (Reign 2017). It is not clear whether this hashtag was created specifically for Black women; nevertheless, regular searches using the hashtag #reignydayjobs found that it is mostly used by Black women, judging from profile pictures and other profile information (see the discussion below about racial presentation online). Melissa Kimble, a writer and culture brand strategist, has publicly discussed how she created the #blkcreatives hashtag so that Black tweeters could “share tools, strategies and resources that help them grow professionally” (Kimble, 2019).

Unlike #Reignydayjobs and #blkcreatives, the hashtags #creativejobs and #jobsearch are not, to my knowledge, specifically associated with Black users or any other racial or gender group. These generic hashtags may be popular to use because of their simplicity and ability to target large audiences. For example, the hashtag #jobsearch is often suggested by job blogs such as Social Hire, Payscale or TechFunnel as a useful Twitter search term for job-seekers. My use of these four hashtags for comparison was intended to illuminate the different ways that creatives of various racial and gender backgrounds use Twitter in their search for work.

This research uses a digital ethnographic approach to observe the online behaviors of jobseekers through their tweets and retweets. Digital ethnography involves observing and engaging with others on social networking sites, blogs, chat rooms and videos (Murthy 2008). Online platforms are treated as field sites in which researchers gather their information on a particular community. It is an especially useful method for gathering information on online communities that are opaque to outsiders, given the immersion (offline or online) that the process of conducting ethnography entails (Daniels 2015; Walstom 2004). To allow for the

observation of these communities on Twitter, the researcher's personal Twitter account and Twitter developer account were used for this study. The Twitter developer account allowed for the querying of Twitter's application programming interface (API) so that public Twitter data could be downloaded and stored in an external file. The developer account also provided a consumer key needed to use the Twitter Archiving Google Sheet (TAGS), a program that automatically pulled the content of tweets and information relating to them. Four TAGS were created, one for each hashtags, and then the application was set up to pull publicly available tweets that used those specific hashtags every hour. The tweets, their authors' usernames and profile pictures, and other information associated with each tweet were exported into an Excel spreadsheet. Data collection through TAGS took place from June 2019 to January 2020. Tweets outside the observed date were deleted from the sample. Amazon Quicksight was also used to calculate how often each of the hashtags was used per week. The tweets were sectioned off into four weeks.

Once the data were downloaded, the content of each tweet was reviewed for patterns in the conversations, with particular attention to what topics were covered, and how people were responding to and engaging with the hashtags. Each tweeter's profile picture and bio were also viewed to code the tweeter's race and gender. Tom Woodward in VCU's Academic Learning Transformation Lab created a script code that could display the profile pictures of tweeters. The spreadsheet identifier was entered into this formula and displayed on Codepen, which collected all of the profile pictures of the tweeters into a visual representation (see Figures 1 through 4 below). Most of the profile pictures were displayed in Codepen; in instances where they were not, a broken icon picture would be shown instead. This broken icon meant that the Twitter user

had changed their profile picture since the time the data was initially collected. The VCU Institutional Review Board approved this online data collection as well as the in-depth interviews that were initially proposed (because of time constraints, my planned interviews of individuals who used the four observed hashtags were not included in the present study).

It is important to note several limitations of this study's methodological approach. In the analysis of the collected tweets, there may have been instances in which the race and gender of users were misidentified due to the diverse ways that users present themselves in their profiles and profile pictures. Individuals may choose not to post a real profile picture or alter it due to privacy concerns; some may seek to deceive others about their true identity. Past studies have found that people are more likely to lie about their age and gender online than their race (Drouin, Miller, Wehle, and Hernandez 2016). Nevertheless, misclassifying of tweeters by race and gender introduces measurement error into my analysis of the online data. To the extent that people may misrepresent their racial identity online, this may also mean that there may be an inaccurate interpretation of what is being observed within the different uses of the hashtags.

The choice of hashtags as a way of identifying jobseekers from different groups also poses some limitations for this research. For example, individuals who include the hashtags #blkcreatives and #reigndayjobs in their tweets may be using them for goals other than job searching—for instance, finding individuals with similar interests (Kimble 2019). More generally, patterns observed among job seekers may to some extent reflect the absence of strong community bonds for users of the generic hashtags, or the unique histories of the non-generic hashtags, rather than racial or gender-based differences per se.

More broadly, this study is not representative of all creative workers looking for opportunities, or even those creatives looking online. For example, though this research aims to understand the use of hashtags by individuals on Twitter searching for opportunities and networks, job seekers are clearly not limited to this platform in terms of finding ways to augment offline networks. By focusing solely on job searching on Twitter, I am ignoring other sites that may be more commonly used for job searching, particularly that done by creatives. Creatives in other countries, for instance, are known to favor sites other than Twitter to look for job opportunities; in the US, Twitter is a major platform for some creatives, but it is not known the extent to which they favor this site over others. Furthermore, this study is limited to tweeters who have public profiles; individuals who use the hashtags but do not have publicly visible feeds will be missed by the data collection process. This may limit our understanding of racial and gender behavioral differences in online job seeking to those workers who are most visible, and most desirous of being so.

### **Data Collection Using Hashtags**

Tweets were collected from the hashtags #reignydayjobs, #blkcreatives, #creativejobs, and #jobsearch from July 2019 to January 2020 using the TAGS application. All four job search hashtags showed the most activity from October to November, with a decline in hashtag use in December. The #reignydayjobs hashtag had an average of 33 tweets per day, whereas the #Blkcreatives and #creativejobs averaged about 50 tweets per day. There were 6,603 total tweets and 5,851 unique tweets for #reignydayjobs. There were a total of 10,054 collected tweets for #blkcreatives, of which 8,759 were only tweeted one time without retweets. The #creativejobs

hashtag had a total of 10,262 tweets during the collection period, with 9,045 of those tweets being unique.

The #jobsearch hashtag data file was too big for Amazon Quicksights to analyze, with over 200,000 tweets collected from July 2019 to December 2019. For this study, I used the #jobsearch tweets from only December 1 through December 3; December 3 was the last day of data collection before the file became corrupt. These three days alone had 4,577 tweets, with a daily average of 1,526 per day.

Given the need to code racial and gender backgrounds for each individual, the data collection for the other three hashtags needed to be conducted during a sufficiently narrow window of time so that the analysis of these tags also remained manageable. I chose the second week of January, the first week after the New Year's holiday, when the usage of job searching hashtags began to increase. Each hashtag had at least 150 tweets sent out the week of January 6 through January 11 and at least 95 unique users who engaged with each hashtag.

**Table 1.** Number of Times a Hashtag Was Used, July 2019 to January 2020

	(N) Total Tweets	(N) Average Daily Tweets	(N) Observed Tweets
#blkcreatives	10,054	51	484
#creativejobs	10,262	52	431
#reignydayjobs	6,603	33	169
#jobsearch	4,577	1526	300

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Results

Tables 2 through 5 indicate the observed racial and gender distributions for the tweeters who used #reignydayjobs, #creativejobs, #blkcreatives, and #jobsearch.<sup>1</sup> Accompanying each table is a photo gallery of all the accounts who tweeted each particular hashtags. As the tables show, there were more white-presenting tweeters using #creativejobs and #jobsearch than #blkcreatives and #reignydayjobs. Notably, more Black-presenting women used #blkcreatives and #reignydayjobs hashtags.

The focus of my analysis was on tweets by individuals, rather than companies and brands. That said, it should be noted that tweets by companies and brands dominated #creativejobs and #jobsearch. For the #jobsearch hashtag, 63 percent of all tweets were by companies, compared to 60 percent for #creativejobs, 4 percent for #reignydayjobs, and 17 percent for #blkcreatives.

Overall, women tended to use each tag more than men: for #reignydayjobs, 68 percent of tweeters were women; for #blkcreatives, 70 percent; and for #creativejobs, 56 percent. The #jobsearch hashtag was the only hashtag that men (61 percent of tweeters) used more than women. The #creativejobs tag had the highest proportion of white tweeters (76 percent), followed by #jobsearch (60 percent). Conversely, #blkcreatives had the highest proportion of black tweeters (87 percent), followed by #reignydayjobs (64 percent). The proportion of tweets by individuals in the “Other” racial category (e.g. Asians and Latinx-presenting individuals)

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<sup>1</sup> As discussed earlier, I categorized tweeters by race and gender using observed characteristics from profile pictures and bio info. However, individuals might identify differently than they were coded. When discussing the race or gender of any tweeter in my analysis, I drop the term “presenting” (as in “Black-presenting”) to simplify the language.

ranged from 6 percent in #reignydayjobs , to 1 percent in #blkcreatives, 2 percent in #creativejobs and 16 percent in #jobsearch

White women were 46 percent of all individual tweeters for the #creativejobs hashtag, which means they tweeted more than any other racial and gender group; this was the most popular hashtag for white women in terms of their use relative to other groups. The most popular hashtag for white men was #jobsearch, whose tweeters were 39 percent white men. Black women made up 64 percent of individuals who used the #blkcreatives hashtag and 51 percent of those who used #reignydayjobs. Black men tweeted relatively less than other racial and ethnic groups, though their use of #reignydayjobs (9 percent of individual tweeters) and #blkcreatives, (19 percent) was greater relative to other groups than their use of #jobsearch and #creativejobs.

**Table 2.** Observed Race and Gender of Individuals who Used the #reignydayjobs Hashtag On Twitter

		Gender						Total
		Male		Female		Unidentified		
		(N)	(N%)	(N)	(N%)	(N)	(N%)	
Race	Black	9	9%	51	51%	4	4%	64
	White	12	12%	12	12%	0	0%	24
	Other	1	1%	4	4%	1	1%	6
	Unidentified	1	1%	1	1%	4	4%	6
Companies		0		0		5		
	Total	23		68		14		100

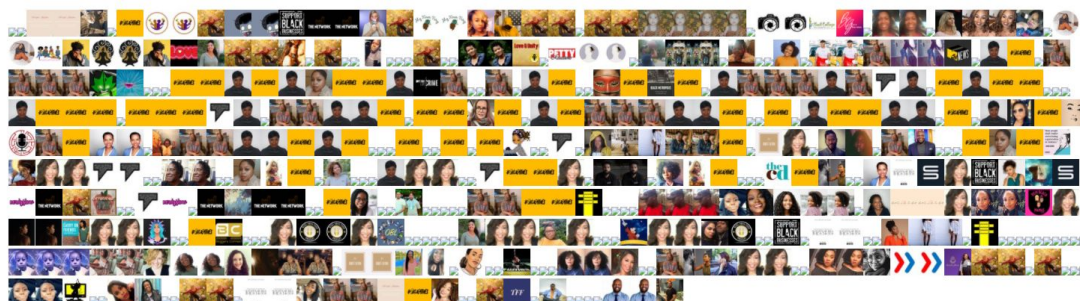
Note: The N% is calculated by dividing N by the total number of individual observed Twitter accounts.



**Figure 1.** Profile Pictures of #reignydayjobs Hashtag**Table 3.** Observed Race and Gender of Individuals who Used the #blkcreatives Hashtag On Twitter

		Gender						Total
		Male		Female		Unidentified		
		(N)	(N%)	(N)	(N%)	(N)	(N%)	
Race	Black	33	19.2%	110	64.3%	7	4%	150
	White	1	0.58%	8	4.6%	0	0%	9
	Other	1	0.58%	2	1.1%	0	0%	3
	Unidentified	1	0.58%	1	0.58%	7	4%	9
Companies		0		0		36		
Total		36		121		50		171

Note: The N% is calculated by dividing N by the total number of individual observed Twitter accounts.

**Figure 2.** Profile Pictures of #blkcreatives Hashtag



**Table 5.** Observed Race and Gender of Individuals who Used the #jobsearch Hashtag On Twitter

		Gender						Total
		Male		Female		Unidentified		
		(N)	(N%)	(N)	(N%)	(N)	(N%)	
Race	Black	6	7.4%	2	2.4%	0	0%	8
	White	32	39.5%	17	21%	0	0%	49
	Other	9	11.1%	4	4.9%	0	0%	13
	Unidentified	3	3.7%	0	0%	8	9.8%	11
Companies		0		0		151		
Total		50		23		159		81

Note The N% is calculated by dividing N by the total number of individual observed Twitter accounts

**Figure 4.** Profile Pictures of #jobsearch Hashtag

### General Use of Hashtags

The retweet (“RT”) function was used across all hashtags as a way to disseminate information about opportunities, share the work of others, or publicize that the tweeter was looking for a specific job opportunity. Tweeters quote-tweeted (i.e, sharing a retweet while

adding a comment of their own) with a hashtag as another way to increase visibility outside of their followers. The observed hashtags were also used when tweeters made a statement or comment in addition to seeking and sharing information related to job searching and networking.

As noted earlier, organizations and companies used #creativejobs and #jobsearch more than individual tweeters, while the opposite was true for #reignydayjobs and #blkcreatives. The tweets by corporations and organizations focused on advertising position openings. Those individuals who did use the #jobsearch and #creativejobs hashtags tended to retweet the tweets by companies and organizations rather than sharing their own inquiries about job opportunities. My general impression of the #reignydayjobs and #blkcreatives hashtags was that there seemed to be more interaction between Twitter users across those tags.

The #creativejobs, #jobsearch, and #reignydayjobs hashtags seemed to be more focused on job searching. Tweeters hunting for jobs tended to use hashtags related to their field (e.g., #webdesigner) or indicate the location where they were looking for an opportunity (e.g., #LosAngeles). They also tended to use multiple hashtags to target a wider or specific audience; some of the #reignydayjobs tweets, for example, were accompanied by the tags #blkcreativejobs (not to be confused with #blkcreatives) and #creativesgethired.

There was a wider range of job listings—full-time, freelance, temporary, and internship positions—tweeted with #reignydayjobs than with #jobsearch, #creativejobs, and #blkcreatives. Most of the positions posted with the #creativejobs and #jobsearch tags were full-time. The types of jobs that were discussed in #blkcreatives were not limited to freelance work, but they did tend to be more short-term and project-based than was the case for the other three hashtags.

While tweeters also used #blkcreatives to search for work or advertise positions, it also contained motivational posts, personal narratives about being “a creative,” and discussions of inspiration for new projects. At one point within the observation period, for example, users of the #blkcreatives hashtag engaged in a question-and-answer Twitterchat to identify best practices that creatives could adopt. A Twitterchat provides a space for tweeters to answer questions, provide their perspective on a topic, and otherwise engage with other users of the hashtag. Tweeters responded to each other and offered advice and reflections through the retweet and quote-tweet function. I observed more of this sort of online behavior within the #blkcreatives hashtag than the #reignydayjobs, #jobsearch, and #creativejobs tags. When engaging in this conversation, #blkcreatives tweeters would not tweet job- or location- related hashtags, though they would do so when looking for jobs.

### **Racial Differences in the Use of Hashtags**

There were noteworthy patterns in how different racial groups used each of the hashtags. Black individuals used all of the observed hashtags, but they tended to use the hashtags in different ways than their white counterparts did. The Black tweeters not only retweeted opportunities, but they tweeted about opportunities they were looking for, or tweeted as a way to advertise their skillsets, businesses, aspirations, or ideas. Consider these two tweets by Black-presenting individuals:

I really wish I knew how to write pitches... I see so many opportunities and don't know where to begin. #creativesgethired #blkcreativesjobs #reignydayjobs #JobAlert

I can't wait until I'm able to fully fund (or at least give a substantial amount) GoFundMes + Kickstarter projects for those that need it, especially #blkcreatives. I hate that we drive the culture + yet have to fend for ourselves when it comes to getting money, resources, etc

These two tweets were representative of efforts to self-promote and seek resources in conversational ways, strategies that tended to be more common among Black tweeters. Black tweeters seemed to be more willing to explicitly signal their intentions or deliberately solicit job advice, using the tags #reignydayjobs or #blkcreatives while doing so in order to make sure others responded. Outside the use of #reignydayjobs and #blkcreatives Black tweeters retweeted opportunities shared in #jobsearch and #creativejobs. Likewise, Black tweeters were also more likely than white tweeters to create original tweets containing their own job leads or suggestions whenever they used the #reignydayjobs and #blkcreatives tags. Some provided advice on personal branding, using the observed hashtags in order to increase the visibility of their messages. For example, this Black male tweeter stated:

Watch relatable news from our POV <https://t.co/e0Ro6RYzMt> #BlackTwitter #realnews #stream #DigitalMarketing #streamer #TrumpsWar #Educate #blkcreatives #KNOWLEDGE #BlackTwitter #SupportBlackBusiness #Namaste #SupportSmallStreamers #wakeup <https://t.co/KfshFyhBjY>

In addition to using the #blkcreatives hashtag to advertise his own work, the tweeter here also used multiple hashtags—notably, with the word “Black” in front of many of his words, in apparent effort to reach a wide spectrum of the Black Twitter community.

Black tweeters used other identity-based hashtags along with the hashtags observed for this research. For example, Black tweeters would include #blkindieauthors, #blackpodcastnetwork, #blkcreativesjobs, and #blackandstem alongside #jobsearch, #blkcreatives, or #reignydayjobs. The only hashtag that was not used with other identity-based

hashtags was #creativejobs; this tag was used by only one Black woman and one Black man during the observed time period, and neither of their tweets contained identity-based tags.

The following tweet, by a Black male tweeter, also used identity-based hashtags:

EVERYTHING IN THE SHOP IS 30% OFF!!!  
<https://t.co/dRI7KBFbeK>  
 Dolls, Customs, Patterns, etc!!!  
 🚫🚫 SALE ENDS TONIGHT AT 11:59pm EST 🚫🚫  
 #blackdolls #blackdollmakers #blackgirlmagic #blackgirlsrock #mbib #blkcreatives  
<https://t.co/q5hMMPCAtA>

This tweet—which appears to be advertising the sale of a creative’s Black-themed dolls—uses multiple identity-based hashtags for both race (“Black”) and gender (“girl”). The hashtag #blackgirlmagic is particularly well-used in the Black Twitter community as a positive affirmation and recognition, created in 2013 by CaShawna Thompson, to what Black girls and women can do (Wilson 2016). Although almost all the use of identity based-hashtags during the observed period was by Black tweeters, I identified one instance where such a tag was used by a non-Black individual, someone who appeared to be Indo-Caribbean:

@oecscommission #Caribbean #jobs. #Careers #JobSearch #employment #climate  
<https://t.co/p74qXf5QWP>

The hashtag #Caribbean used here signals that people living in the Caribbean or those who identify as Caribbean might be interested in this position. However, this tweet is notable for how different it is from tweets that use identity-based hashtags among Black tweeters. The tweet advertises a (non-creative) position within the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, and it uses the generic #jobsearch tag; the use of #Caribbean also seems like a generic use of a hashtag

rather than one appealing to a well-defined online community like #blackgirlmagic.

Interestingly, no white tweeters were observed using identity-based hashtags. This included white women tweeters, who could have used popular feminism-related tags (e.g., #womeninstem or #womenauthors), but did not do so during the observed time period. White tweeters in general included other hashtags, but those tended to relate to specific job titles or other employment-related words or phrases, such as #resume, #creativeindustries, #journajobs, #writer, #webdeveloper. Consider these tweets by white-presenting individuals:

Are you looking to use your #Compliance / #ConductRisk experience in a contract role, spearheading the development of a #ConflictsOfInterest framework? Click the link for more details <https://t.co/IIYw8pswku>. #assetmanagement #jobs #jobsearch #recruiting #compliance #fca #pra <https://t.co/GvobsDa26I>

We have tons of great jobs at @denverlibrary! Marketing Manager, HR Recruiter, Librarian, Peer Navigator, and more! Please share with your networks, too <https://t.co/0SERfGvTwY> #ReignyDayJobs #libraryjobs #Denver (ww)#Video: Imagine waking up every morning with the promise of the #sunrise. St. Joe #Hospitality is now #hiring an #Equipment #Operator in #Florida. #Applynow! #groundskeeper #hotels #resort #loveyourjob #jobs #jobsearch #career #travel <https://t.co/MEK8B9GyYB>

Multiple job-based hashtags are meant to disseminate the job listing to wider audiences, who might stumble across the position when using the search function. The use of these hashtags by white tweeters is more instrumentally focused, whereas for Black tweeters, they also use it as a tool but there is the aim to seek others of a similar cultural and social background. In the text above, the tweeters appear to be searching for individuals to fill positions rather than looking for a position. This underscores the more general differences in how white tweeters use their job searching tweets and hashtags compared to Black tweeters that I alluded to earlier: across all four hashtags, white individuals tweeted or retweeted available job opportunities and offered job



advice to a greater extent than Black tweeters did. When they used the #reignydayjobs and #blkcreatives hashtags, white tweeters retweeted information, advertisements, and other statements that were originally written by Black tweeters. Their tweets were much less likely than those for Black tweeters to express a personal interest in seeking out job opportunities. For example:

RT @Sesimag: Yep, you heard right. We're hiring freelance writers. 🖱️ Details here >> <https://t.co/f2crki3eZD> #blkcreatives <https://t.co/O...>

RT @ReignOfApril: #ReignyDayJobs <https://t.co/bkOzfG5pMU>

These tweets illustrate how white individuals chose to engage in very limited ways with the #reignydayjobs and #blkcreatives hashtags. Particularly when using #blkcreatives, white tweeters did not write original tweets to the same extent as Black individuals did. When they did use these tags, they engaged mainly by retweeting tweets as a way to share information within their networks. This may not be too surprising, given that they may have seen these two hashtags as meant for Black individuals. In contrast, white tweeters were no less likely to create original tweets that advertised job openings or gave job advice when they used the other two tags, #creativejobs and #jobsearch.

### **Gender Differences in the Use of Hashtags**

As noted earlier, women used #creativejobs, #blkcreatives, and #reignydayjobs more than men did, whereas the #jobsearch hashtag was dominated by (white) men. Across all the observed hashtags, men were more likely than women to advertise position openings or offer advice on how to best secure a job. Below are a few examples of how men tweeted about job opportunities:

Our Farnham office is looking for a very experienced STUDIO MANAGER. A very competitive package. Let me know if you would like to be considered or know anyone

who would suit. #creativity #studiomanager #Advertising #creativejobs  
#artwork\_in\_studio

Here to network if you need flyers, marketing or ads we can help! #BlackBusiness  
#Network #NETWORKMARKETING #SmallBiz #SupportBlackBusiness  
#WednesdayThoughts #blackculture #BlackTwitter #BlackTechTwitter #gta2020  
#blackwallstreet #blackideas #blackdesigners #blkcreatives #va #ga  
<https://t.co/Vf6XQYJMdS>

The first tweet was from a white male tweeter sharing an opportunity, and the second was from a Black male tweeter offering to assist with networking. Neither tweeted to seek advice or job leads from others in the community. In contrast, women tweeters sought opportunities for themselves and shared the work of others through retweets and quote-tweets. Consider these tweets by women:

Seeking an associate level marketing, content development position in Atlanta. Looking for companies where I can polish my data analysis and research skills. MS Ed. Research. BA Creative Writing. DM me for resume and more information. #ReignyDayJobs  
<https://t.co/H9Ud9k9yXq>

starting off 2020 finishing up my third music supervising gig! aiming to get on @IMDb & @netflix this year. if you or any creative you know are working on an indie film/pilot/web series with a budget, let's link and create a beautiful soundtrack together! #blkcreatives <https://t.co/AhCqmAf4DA>

RT @Stay\_Networking: Recent logo done... #GraphicDesign #blackdesigners #DigitalMarketing #blkcreatives #SupportBlackBusiness #logos #expand

A Black woman tweeted the first tweet in which she is advertising her skill set and looking for a position where she can use her skills. The second tweet is also by a Black woman seeking to network with other creatives or Black creatives to work on a project. The third tweet is a retweet shared by a white woman. This tweeter is passively engaging and sharing the skill set of another tweeter to, what i assume, advertise their skill set with her followers who may need a logo done.

Furthermore, women were more likely than men to use the quote-tweet function with one of the four hashtags to share an opportunity or advertise the work of others. Men also used quote-tweets, but they seemed to be more focused on getting the word out immediately to their followers through the retweet function rather than spending time to insert their own thoughts through the quote-tweet function. Black and white women appeared to favor different hashtags when tweeting on topics other than posted job listings. Black women specifically used #blkcreatives as a place share their ideas, inspire others, and advertise the work of others, while white women were more likely to use #creativejobs to do the same thing. For example:

You know those things you've always wanted to do? You should go DO them.  
#garyveechallenge #webdesigner #entrepreneur #starttoday #keepgoing #creativejobs

We need to realize where our opportunities are and capitalize on them, before we're appropriated out of existence. ❤️❤️❤️ #BlackLove #BlackCulture #ProBlack  
#BlackPride #BlackMillenials #BlackNews #BlackMedia #BlackBrands  
#BlackExcellence #BlackCreatives #BlkCreatives #Influencer <https://t.co/nh10BL2fFG>

In both examples, women tweeters are sharing their aspiration and inspirations for the future. Their tweets imply to others that there is a community of like-minded individuals within #blkcreatives or #creativejobs, and such inspirational messages may reinforce such a sense of community: other tweeters may agree with their sentiments and therefore become more likely to engage with those tweets or the hashtag in general. However, the first tweet is by a white woman using #creativejobs, and the second is by a Black woman using #blkcreatives. Furthermore, the second tweet includes numerous identity-based hashtags for Black individuals, especially Black women. The first tweet seems to be more focused on creating inspiration with other individuals and their creative process whereas the second tweet is more of a call to action to an entire

community but also inspiring at the same time. The second tweet also uses multiple identity based hashtags to create visibility with this tweet. Black women used identity-based hashtags to a greater extent than Black men did. For example, when tweeting or quote-tweeting job opportunities, Black women would use hashtags like #wocinstem or #blackgirlmagic:

#blackandSTEM #wocinstem #reignydayjobs <https://t.co/70Y49F9HR7>

There may not be a cure for this type of love, but a simple remedy might numb the pain.  
 THE BLUE LABYRINTH coming soon...#swipeleft #thebluelabyrinth #blackgirlmagic  
 #director #actress #blkcreatives #blackfilmmakers #blackmen #nycfilm #njactors  
 #laactors <https://t.co/22sValDwlK>

The first tweet is a quote-tweet in which the user (a Black woman) hashtagged two identity-based hashtags and promoted a job opportunity. The second tweet, also by a Black woman, advertises a local play that this individual was apparently participating in. When using these identity-based hashtags through quote-tweeting, Black women appeared to have an additional goal beyond creating visibility through their network of followers; they also seemed to be implying and reinforcing the existence of a larger community.

## DISCUSSION

Though the patterns I observed in my sample cannot be generalized to all creatives looking for opportunities, my analysis suggests that creatives of various gender and racial backgrounds may use Twitter in different ways. Three main themes emerged. Job searching behaviors could be observed within all racial and gender groups, but to a greater extent white and male individuals used the observed hashtags to fill opportunities and give advice. Black and female tweeters were more likely to use them to seek information on opportunities, advertise their work, or engage in conversations on creative-related topics. Finally, identity-based hashtags

were exclusively used by Black tweeters, especially Black women.

The pattern I observed of white men being more likely to advertise position openings and give job advice than other groups underscores the fact that white men are often in a position of not needing much in the way of job leads. Given their dominance in management, white men are more often the source for information on opportunities and advice in the job search process. Black and women tweeters tended to be the recipients of such opportunities and advice, though they also made proactive use of these spaces to seek out opportunities and create bonds with other creatives. This is important because individuals from these groups are more at risk of experiencing discrimination in offline networks; my observation suggests that they use Twitter to compensate for that exclusion in a variety of ways, including advertising exactly what jobs they are looking for.

Beside the use of job-searching hashtags, Black tweeters also used identity-based hashtags. Tags like #blackdesigners and #blackindieauthors seemed to be of particular importance for Black creatives, especially Black women. The use of such identity tags can help individuals build their networks and increase their visibility, signaling to larger audiences of other Black and non-Black creatives that opportunities are available. Identity-based hashtags provide the opportunity for those with a specific identity to connect, share, and highlight their experiences. While outsiders can also use these hashtags passively through retweets, as white tweeters sometimes did to share job opportunities or other information, Black tweeters clearly used them more actively with original content and attempts to stimulate discussion. Indeed, the #blkcreatives hashtag is itself an example of an identity-based hashtag (more so than #reignydayjobs, which does not express an explicit racial identity) that not only provides

information and other support but offers tweeters a way to self-promote, proactively seek jobs, and gain exposure within their fields.

Even though white women also face discrimination in the job market, I found no instances of white-presenting tweeters using identity-based hashtags to connect with others or search for opportunities. Regardless, some white tweeters were clearly listening in on the conversations within Black-themed hashtags, and at times they seemed to be aware of the valuable information and discussion that comes out of a strong (race-based) online community (e.g., #blkcreative's Twitterchats). They used identity-based hashtags and other tags created by Black tweeters or other people of color to pass along job leads to disadvantaged groups, passively share information without engaging through the quote-tweet function or by hashtagging other job- and opportunity-related words.

Though women and minorities alike face discrimination in job searching and access to networks, white women and Black men did not engage as much in the wide range of Twitter behaviors that Black women did, such as using identity-based hashtags or quote-tweeting opportunities with #reignydayjobs and #blkcreatives. This research is in line with previous research that finds that women, especially Black women, use social media to a greater extent than men do for self-help, to create communal bonds, and to find opportunities in their field (Berry-McCrea 2017). These types of spaces appear to be especially important for Black women, who may have a greater need to access weak ties and information they have not received from other networks.

This research used a qualitative approach to the analysis of digital data that limits the generalizability of its findings. Clearly, the overall population of creatives who use Twitter for

networking or job search is not the same as those sampled across the four hashtags used in this study. Nevertheless, this qualitative analysis suggests that there may be important racial and gender patterns in Twitter usage for job searching that future research with more representative samples can assess. This research also still presents the opportunity to complete interviews of individuals who use the observed to understand the identified roles and behaviors when looking for opportunities and networking. Future studies could also examine the behaviors of non-white, non-Black, individuals and others largely excluded from this analysis because of its narrow focus on hashtags with a strong appeal within the Black Twitter community.

There were also some methodological challenges that came with using digital data for this analysis. Hashtags provide a useful way for sociologists to easily gather data on large numbers of online users, but the simpler the hashtag, the more likely it is to generate an overwhelming number of tweets within a short time frame. The use of hashtags for social science research can also be problematic because, for idiosyncratic reasons, some hashtags may be more popular than others even though they are used for the same purpose. For example, the racial and gender differences I appeared to observe in the use of #reignydayjobs and #blkcreatives vis-a-vis #jobsearch and #creativejobs could be partly due to the popularity and name recognition of the first two hashtags, which are both associated with charismatic Black social media personalities.

As noted earlier, this study employs a novel approach of harvesting and analyzing online profile pictures and bio information to code the racial and gender identities of specific users. While this approach somewhat compensated for the lack of interview data, it is important to emphasize that the coding of individuals by race and gender relied upon the author's judgments; future research could use multiple coders to improve the validity of this approach, or confirm the

visual coding based on separate surveys or interviews. Despite its shortcomings, this approach may be helpful to other scholars interested in qualitative content analysis of online data who need to generate information about individuals' demographic backgrounds; profile pictures, biographical information, and other information provided on their account offer clues in this regard, and the technologies used here to scrape and analyze such data open up ample possibilities for future research on racial, gender, and other differences in online spaces.

Overall, this study suggests that although there are still inequalities in who is able to provide opportunities and advice to others online. The wide array of ways to use social media may give women and people of color a better chance at obtaining jobs and other opportunities than they would have with offline networks. While scholars worry that social media may be increasing the segregation of networks, it is also apparent that online communities can complement offline ones by giving minorities and women opportunities to meet others and obtain insider knowledge they otherwise would not have been able to acquire. If creative uses of social media sites have helped women and people of color to energize and mobilize today's social movements, this study suggests that the diverse ways that such groups are using social media can also enhance their career prospects.



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