Main Article

Transcending Instagram: Affective Swedish hashtags taking intimate feminist entanglements from viral to 'IRL'

Astri Moksnes Barbala (iD)
Nord University, Norway

Abstract

This article investigates how affective hashtags on Instagram can contribute to forming intimate feminist entanglements transcending the digital sphere, resulting in offline demonstrations and rallies. In tracing the use of three Swedish hashtags emerging in the wake of #metoo, all surrounding women's experiences with sexual harassment and violence, it is argued that affective hashtags can be a central component for explaining how social media-based campaigns can surpass online spaces and transition into more traditional forms of non-mediated feminist activity. Drawing from a 3-year immersion in feminist communities on Instagram, the article shows how hashtags here are reconceptualized into 'affect triggers', intimately entangling human and nonhuman entities along the way. It is suggested that a combination of feminist affect theory and insights from science and technology studies (STS) may offer a fruitful methodology for providing insights into the political potential of affect in forming augmented feminist realities.

Corresponding author:
Astri Moksnes Barbala, Faculty of Social Sciences, Nord University, Høgskoleveien 27, Levanger, 7600, Norway.
Email: astri.m.barbala@nord.no

Introduction

The enormous engagement the #metoo campaigns have generated pinpoints that feminist activism, previously deemed redundant in the 21st century (see e.g. Duggan, 2003; McRobbie, 2009), is thriving and has the ability to shape political agendas. In the aftermath of #metoo, the Scandinavian countries, and Sweden specifically, have seen a major public outcry permeate society, ranging from politics to culture and the police sector. Several of the most profiled cases in Sweden were built on posts originating on the social media platform Instagram, where stories of sexual harassment and abuse often are accompanied by a selfie, as well as the categorizing hashtag. In the wake of the campaign, similar 'ad hoc' hashtags (Bruns and Burgess, 2015) focusing on specific cases or issues started spreading throughout Swedish feminist Instagram communities, soon after leading to the organization of offline demonstrations taking place simultaneously with the use of the hashtags on the platform.

Zooming in on the networking possibilities that emerge from sharing similar first-person stories on social media platforms, this article argues that the use of Instagram shapes intimate feminist entanglements capable of transcending the digital sphere. It demonstrates how feminist activism in light of #metoo has reinforced the classic second-wave slogan, 'the personal is political': Through social media participation, most notably on Instagram, activists posting selfies, texts, videos, and hashtags position themselves as sites of resistance through the (re)production of affective sentiments, in turn, 'sticking' (Ahmed, 2004a, 2014) feminist networks together. I aim to show here how hashtags can function as affective vehicles into offline feminist activism, intimately entangling human and nonhuman entities along the way. These hashtags, I suggest, can be a component for explaining how social media-based campaigns may surpass online spaces and transition into more traditional forms of non-mediated feminist activity that also, arguably, have more direct political impact. Thus, I propose hashtags as re-conceptualized here from being solely defined as content categorizers into acting as 'affect triggers' for Instagram feminist communities, attaching participants through shared prior affective situations online.

Theoretically, the article first and foremost looks to Sara Ahmed's notions of 'feminist attachments' (2004b: 168–190) and 'intimate touches' (1997), explicating the intertwining of affect, intimacy, and politics in feminist encounters, combined with theories of socio-material entanglements from science and technology studies (STS). The empirical material encompasses 3 years of digital observations within Swedish Instagram feminist communities, and the analysis focuses on the examination of three #metoo-related hashtags originating on the platform as a reaction to sexual harassment and abuse cases in Sweden. I here regard the hashtags under analysis as 'affective extensions' (Colebrook, 2004) of #metoo, extending the campaign's sensibilities both through time and space. The article asks: How can feminist hashtags on Instagram contribute to the formations of intimate entanglements transcending the digital sphere?

To answer this, I combine Ahmed's (2010, 2014, 2019) affect-centered research technique of 'following words' with central STS scholar Bruno Latour's (1987, 1990, 1996) socio-technical account of actor-network theory, ANT. The latter provides an understanding of 'networked agentiality' (Paasonen, 2015), where nonhuman actors are

central in the merging of feminist entanglements in – and through – the Instagram sphere. The article traces the affective attachments of the following three hashtags: #Brinnförjosefin ('burn for Josefin'), started as a reaction to the domestic abuse suffered by deceased artist, Josefin Nilsson; #knytblusförsara ('pussy-bow blouse for Sara'), a tag utilized in solidarity with the secretary of the Swedish Academy for literature, Sara Danius, who stepped down from her position due to the Academy's failure to address sexual abuse allegations, and lastly; #rättslösa ('lawless'), emerging as part of a campaign against the Swedish police's supposed neglect in investigating reported rape cases. All hashtags gained popularity through their use on profiled feminist activists' Instagram posts and in the accompanying comments sections by their followers.

Sweden has been studied rigorously for its employment of 'the Nordic model' for gender equality and is deemed one of the most equal countries in the world by most standards (see e.g. Teigen and Skjeie, 2017). Contemporary digital feminist activism in Sweden has received much media coverage in the wake of #metoo, and feminist scholars have in recent years paid attention to how the #metoo cases have been framed in the media (Askanius and Hartley, 2019; Hansson et al., 2020). There is however a lack of scholarly insights into how online feminist efforts correspond to so-called 'IRL' – 'in real life'[1] – efforts, particularly so in Scandinavia. Furthermore, there is still little scholarship focusing on Instagram in terms of hashtag use (Ichau et al., 2019), and this article seeks to contribute to filling this gap.

I here offer a rethinking of the political potential of #metoo and similar campaigns through the lens of STS-informed affect theory, arguing that the extended use of such hashtags and the following media coverage in the Swedish context are bound up with these affective intimate entanglements' potential for flowing through feminist networks: Due to technological advances, women's political position and access to public spaces, I argue that feminist affect 'flows' easier in Sweden compared to most other countries in the world, and affective hashtag campaigns have hence a larger political potential. Thus, I here seek to shed light upon the spillover effects of hashtag activism into offline feminist action, while avoiding a simplistic dichotomy between the online and offline. Rather, I see the merging of online and offline feminist efforts under study as augmented into extended 'affect worlds' (Berlant, 2011), definable as 'augmented feminist realities' (see e.g. Jeong and Lee, 2018).

Instagram and intimacy

Instagram was launched in 2010 as a photo-sharing application, and surpassed two billion monthly active users worldwide in 2021. On the Instagram platform, hashtags are always embedded within utterings that involve multiple visual and textual elements simultaneously. With its visual focus and possibilities for various forms of communication, Leaver et al. (2020: 103) argue that Instagram has positioned itself as the social media platform offering users 'networked intimacy' due to its rhetoric of friendship and close-knit community. Similarly, McCosker et al. (2021: 1) describe the platform as giving 'intimate visual access to events, experiences and situations in a manner that is mobile and contextual'. Instagram can hence be seen as fulfilling a role as an intimate part of users' lives, where central players, often referred to as influencers if driven by

commercial interests, build what Abidin (2016) dubs 'parasocial relations' with their public: Relationships are hence produced through 'intimacy labor', resulting in followers feeling a sense of attachment to the influencer profile in question.

Hashtag activism, online political activity based on specific issues – and thus marked with an accompanying designated hashtag – has been connected to many different movements since the emergence of social media platforms. Rambukkana (2015: 5) proposes hashtags to be viewed as a form of digital intimacy, in which 'things in the world touch other things in the world and form networks with them; they are multiple, open-ended, and contingent phenomena'. In the same vein, Papacharissi's (2015) seminal studies of hashtag activism on Twitter build on the affect theory of Lauren Berlant to argue that public sentiments 'define modalities of belonging that are articulated as strangers connect and attach to each other' (p. 117).

Rethinking networked feminism

In the following, I contend that the 'intimate practices' (Dobson et al., 2018) of Instagram exceeds the digital sphere and create feminist networks navigating online and offline spaces synchronously. Thus, I here contribute to a growing body of writing investigating digital feminist activism and resistance through the lens of affect theory. For instance, Mendes et al.'s (2019) seminal study of feminists' experiences in navigating digital spaces found that participation in hashtag campaigns such as #BeenRapedNeverReported tied activists together through affective bonds, despite the unrecognized affective labor involved in the process. Digital environments, Mendes, Ringrose and Keller underline, were experienced as safer for feminists in sharing intimate stories compared to nondigital ones.

Similarly, Ringrose and Renold (2014, 2016) investigate the affective dimensions at play within contemporary feminist groupings, pinpointing 'the affective intensity' (2014) flowing through feminist assemblages. The notion of flowing intensities is central to this article, and is also taken up by feminist media scholar Paasonen (2015) in her study of students' dependency on – and attachment to – network media. Combining theorizations of affect with Latourian actor-network theory, Paasonen addresses the entanglements of human and nonhuman agency. She argues that the intimate connections between human users and the technology at hand makes for questioning the very notion of 'the user', as access to networks and resources to a large degree is dependent on the technological devices utilized.

The concept of entanglements is long established within STS, but recent literature (see e.g. Latimer and Lopez Gomez, 2019) has also seen an exploration of intimacy and affect as fruitful for gaining a deeper understanding of socio-material relations. Taking these insights together with feminist affect theory, then, I here build my arguments around the notion of Instagram hashtag activism in Sweden as making possible the formation of intimate feminist entanglements.

Tracing feminist entanglements

The methodological framework for this article relies on an understanding of affective feminist intimacies (Kolehmainen et al., 2021) as emerging through networks of human

and nonhuman entities. Combined with actor-network theory, Sara Ahmed's scholarship provides a fitting framework in this regard. Her focal point is what affect *does*: It 'sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects' (Ahmed, 2010: 29), and I adopt this stance in centering the *doings* of hashtags and how they function as affective calls to action for feminists on Instagram. By utilizing Ahmed's (2004b) framework, I can view the hashtags under analysis, all surrounding experiences with sexual harassment and gender-based violence, as 'the condition for the formation of a "we", made up of different stories of pain that cannot be reduced to a ground, identity or sameness' (p. 174).

In studying the translation of feminism across international spaces, Ahmed's (1997) essay 'Intimate touches: Proximity and distance in international feminist dialogues' provided an early theorization of how coming together for feminists involve 'embodied dialogues', and gives this paper valuable insights for re-thinking notions of intimate connections within feminist communities. Suggesting that what ultimately creates public spaces for feminism emerges through fantasies of intimacy, Ahmed (1997) here contends that physical proximity is not a must for enabling 'legitimate feminist dialogues' (p. 22); they can also be achieved through, for example, visualizations or texts.

Her perspective on the affective underpinnings of feminist attachments was redeveloped in the 2004 book *The cultural politics of emotion*. Pointing at the ways in which feminist arguments often are dismissed as irrational due to their sentimental aspects, Ahmed argues that the starting point for identifying as feminists is sensing one's surroundings: A feminist subject, then, can through Ahmed's lens be said to be formed through a politically-charged affective awakening. However, warning of fetishizing pain and making suffering the basis for feminist identity, Ahmed (2004b) insists instead on the importance of translating pain into the public domain. She contends that it is by reading the relations 'between affect and structure, between emotion and politics' (p. 174) one can connect the individual to the collective and ultimately provide conditions for the formation of a feminist 'we'.

Feminist attachments, Ahmed states, are crafted through movement, they 'connect' and form through feminist doings:

> Through the work of listening to others, of hearing the force of their pain and the energy of their anger, of learning to be surprised by all that one feels oneself to be against; through all of this, a "we" is formed, and an attachment is made. This is a feminist attachment and an attachment to feminism (Ahmed, 2004b: 188).

I here however see the notion of 'entanglements' as more fitting for encompassing the socio-material connections formed in and through Instagram use, as described previously.

Method and data

As Blackman (2015) notes, it has been a challenge within affect studies to develop 'methodological strategies that are sensitive to human and nonhuman agencies, entanglements and thresholds' (p. 26). Like Susanna Paasonen, Blackman frequently returns to

the work of Bruno Latour in order to address relations between affect, agentiality and embodiment, as his theory invites scholars to consider bodies 'as thoroughly entangled processes, and importantly defined by their capacities to affect and be affected' (Blackman and Venn, 2010: 9).

Actor-network theory allows for closely tracing the connections emerging in the interactions between human and nonhuman *actants*, defined by Latour (2005) as anything 'granted to be the source of action' (p. 373). Ethnographic methods such as observations, interviews and document studies are considered 'natural' choices for researchers influenced by ANT (see Nimmo, 2011), and non-participant observations were regarded the most suitable for the present study. Instead of seeing my observer role here as merely 'lurking', however, I follow Crawford (2009) in preferring the term 'listening in': This indicates a more active and receptive role than that of the lurker, performed with respect for the user activity taking place. Yet, in order to avoid the potential ethical pitfalls of digital observations, the data collection was conducted in line with NSD's (Norwegian center for research data) guidelines for research ethics. No personal data that could be traced back to any observed person were hence collected, unless the person in question was notified per NSD's recommendations.

In this study, hashtags are seen as central actants that enable feminist networks to emerge, functioning as attachments for flowing intensities. The hashtags under analysis were thus trailed through time and space to observe how other entities attach themselves to – and through – them online and offline. However, ANT does not account for how affect shapes worlds and bodies. In order to analyze the intricacy of the intimate feminist entanglements unfolding through Instagram communities, I employ Sara Ahmed's method of following words; the affect theory-informed lens through which her trilogy[2] traced the words 'happiness' (2010), 'willfulness' (2014) and 'use' (2019) studying '*where* they go, *how* they acquire associations, and in *what* or *whom* they are found' (2019: 3, Ahmed's emphasis).

Combining Ahmed's approach with ANT's incentive of 'following the actors' allowed me to study the affective interplay between feminist Instagram users and the technology in use, taking into account the complexities of the socio-technical sphere. Although stemming from different fields and with differing ontological emphases (see McCormack, 2020), what is crucial in both approaches is the assertion that action is dependent on what happens in the encounter between different actors, which is here utilized both as a frame of reference and a method for analysis. Affect, Sara Ahmed contends, is not something that is found *in* subjects, but rather something that circulates *between* bodies and is distributed across social fields (Ahmed, 2004a, 2004b). Similarly, ANT regards agency as being manifested in the relation between actants, focusing on which entities are involved in networked encounters and how these are related.

This article draws from data collected during a 3-year-long immersion in Swedish feminist communities on Instagram between September 2017 and September 2020. Non-participant observations were conducted, first and foremost focusing on how feminism is practiced on the profiles of Swedish 'feminist influencers' whose following base exceeds 10,000 each. This user group can be defined as profiled digital opinion leaders known to 'expose, critique, and educate the public about sexism' (Mendes et al., 2019) first and foremost through Instagram, but also through their appearances in mass media,

highlighting feminist issues in op-eds and on debate shows. Their microcelebrity status is hence built on their visibility as influential feminists, also entailing that they are known to both initiate and be the face of political demonstrations both online and offline. For the purpose of this study, I focused on investigating Instagram posts that documented the *initiation* and *execution of* offline demonstrations, in order to best grasp the entanglements at play in the assemblage of the networks. During the observations, three hashtags emerged as particularly intense in terms of evoking posting of material, activity in the comments sections and the clear links between digital and non-digital activity.

In tracing the hashtags under analysis, data snowballed from the feminist influencer profiles following ANT research principles that encourage fieldwork to collect rich data, verbal, and behavioral interactions. Consequently data included Instagram posts, the comments section under said posts, the posts on the Instagram Stories function (videos, images, written text, and/or GIFs disappearing after 24 hours), screengrabs, archived comments, field notes and newspaper articles discussing the hashtags studied.

The three hashtags #brinnförjosefin, #knytblusförsara, and #rättslösa were identified as clear mediators that merged the online and offline feminist spheres, hence these hashtags were considered especially intensive actants and chosen for closer analysis. The starting point for an ANT-inspired analysis can be any actant that provides a suitable departure for the subject in question. Thus, the three hashtags were chosen for this purpose. Only traceable connections can be included as part of the data material in ANT driven research (Dankert, 2011), and for this study, human Instagram users, the Instagram technology, the outcome of these connections (hashtags, images, text, GIFs, videos), as well as the media coverage of said hashtags were regarded as central actants. As I discuss further, in this outlook, the affective and intimate intensities themselves are also to be considered actants in these feminist networks.

Transcending cyberspace: Three Swedish feminist hashtags

As underlined in Askanius and Hartley's (2019) study of news media's #metoo coverage, Swedish politicians and policy makers were extensively engaged in the campaigns that initially started rolling up in the autumn of 2017. This, then, arguably paved the way for relatable hashtags that likely would not have reached the proportions they did, had it not been for #metoo's impact and role of 'setting the stage': #Metoo can hence be regarded as an *antecedent*, an actant defining continuous action, which all other human and non-human actants presented in the following *entangle from*, including myself as a researcher.

One central actant that can be seen as directly connected to #metoo was the hashtag #brinnförjosefin, which was first used on Instagram March 22, 2018, the day when the documentary about the deceased Swedish artist Josefin Nilsson first was available for streaming through SVT,[3] the Swedish public service television. Telling the story of how Nilsson's mental and physical health had declined supposedly due to her being victim of domestic abuse by the hands of her partner, a well-known actor, the documentary instantly caused uproar. The origin of the hashtag #brinnförjosefin can be traced to a profiled Swedish feminist activist who wrote several posts on her Instagram profile relating to Nilsson's experiences on the same day as the documentary first aired. The third post was accompanied by the hashtag, which quickly started spreading throughout social

media networks. As well as other users 'tagging' their posts with the hashtag, the comments sections under profiled feminists' posts on the subject quickly added more and more voices: 'Burn for Josefin' was a direct call to arms, an incitement for others to 'burn' and facilitate anger for Nilsson's – and other women's – pain, to follow Ahmed's (2004b) theory on the collectiveness of feminist sensations.

Like a feminist mantra, many commenters simply responded to the posts with the #brinnförjosefin hashtag itself, others also added a fire or fist emoji, as if attempting to indicate which emotions were the affective underpinnings of the hashtag. Interestingly, there were altogether many more either angry or 'positive' fighter emojis (muscle emoji, fire emoji, angry emoji, fist emoji, etc.) utilized by commenters than those expressing sadness, such as the various crying emojis (which, in fact, only appeared in a few comments on the posts), that could have been the possibility due to the indisputably tragic event the Instagram posts in question describe. This hints at an insistence on focusing on *action* and aims for political change rather than sadness and feelings of despair, perhaps further encouraging feminist mobilization. Although, of course, it is too simplistic to understand the use of emojis as feminist Instagram users' expressions of 'feeling affected'. Yet, their choices of emojis, which consequently also must be seen as actants further entangling feminist networks, can in the Ahmedian understanding of affect be regarded as translated into political utterings. This translation also corresponds with central affect theorist Massumi's (2002) view of emotions as qualified and represented, or as 'intensity owned and recognized' (p. 28).

In following the hashtag, by trailing comments sections and searching in Instagram's search functions for its uses on the platform to see what kind of objects had attached itself to it, I noticed that several posts and comments also utilized the #metoo hashtag in relation to Nilsson's case. #Metoo hence appeared to symbolize an overarching topic, further underlining the entangled nature of the feminist networks. Yet others saw #brinnförjosefin as an incentive to share their own stories of domestic violence, stating 'I too am a Josefin' or 'I also know a Josefin'. The stories posted under the tag, then, accompanied by images and illustrations of Nilsson and texts expressing their frustration over her alleged experiences, directly functioned as 'accumulations of intensity' (Paasonen, 2015: 9), inviting others to join the digital feminist force of resistance. The hashtag, embedded as it was in a larger context with the above-mentioned visual components, hence functioned as a topic for discussion, a socio-technical welcome for anyone to participate and share their frustrations, on their own or on Nilsson's behalf.

Some responses in the comments sections under the feminist influencers' posts with the #brinnförjosefin hashtag concerned suggestions for ways to conduct activism outside of the Instagram sphere. One such comment suggested making not-so-subtle, guerrilla-style changes to the Wikipedia page of Nilsson's ex-partner. Others proposed arranging a demonstration in order to protest against the actor ex-partner's inclusion in a play at Stockholm theater, Dramaten. Shortly after, an arrangement outside Dramaten was shared as an 'event' on both Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, and some of the most profiled feminists on Instagram were later interviewed about their involvement in the arrangement.

The 'candlelight manifestation', as it was named, was arranged on March 23 and was extensively covered in news media as well as on Instagram, both through live streaming

at the time of the event and in the following days, when participants posted pictures on their profiles of (mostly) women with candlesticks, lighting up the crowds. Taken as one, as that is how the posts are perceived by followers, the interplay between these images of significant affective intensity, the #brinnförjosefin mantra paired with the choir of candle emojis, hearts and fists, makes for highly emotional multimodal expressions. These findings indicate both 'feminist attachment and an attachment to feminism' (Ahmed, 2004b: 188) and users' ability to *move* others within their 'fluid' (Latour, 2005) assemblage, both affectively and literally. This 'moving', then, implies the flow of intensity to transcend space, prompting feminist activity offline.

A few weeks later, on April 12, 2018, Sara Danius, the then-head of the Prize in literature, the Swedish Academy, which awards the Nobel Prize in Literature, was forced to leave her position after initiating an investigation into the alleged sexual harassment and assault of 18 women by a central figure within Swedish literary circles. This spawned major uproar both in Sweden and internationally, causing headlines worldwide[4] and initiating anger within feminist circles on social media platforms. In the translation of this dissonance into Instagrammable expressions, the hashtag #knytblusförsara started circulating the same day as Danius' departure. This hashtag attached itself to selfies depicting people wearing a pussy-bow blouse ('knytblus'), which Danius infamously wore on most occasions. The hashtag was not consistent, however, with some users writing #knytblusförsaradanius, or simply #knytblus. The next day, April 13, one feminist influencer posted a screengrab of a Facebook event set up to demonstrate against the treatment of Danius, where 13,600 people already had clicked 'attending'. The hashtag, now also traceable throughout Facebook, is changed to #knytblusmanifestation ('pussy-bow blouse manifestation'), and the post is accompanied by the tags #nuärdetnog ('it's enough now') and #krossapatriarkatet ('crush the patriarchy').

I now encountered a common challenge for anyone utilizing an ANT-inspired approach for research in particularly online spaces: With actants constantly evolving and in states of becoming, it is nearly impossible to – literally – follow through with the data collection, and the researcher must at some point abandon the trail. Here, then, it is useful to look to affect theory for attempting to explain the 'uncontrollable flow' of intensity that arguably is at stake. As Paasonen (2015) contends, '[o]verwhelming frustration and rage fail to fully translate into language' (p. 13), meaning that although social media platforms offer users multiple ways to communicate, they cannot offer direct vehicles for feminist attachments. Nevertheless, I propose that the hashtag networks under analysis are exactly that; non-conscious, emerging vehicles that flow through time and space and attach themselves to more or less fitting linguistic labels in form of hashtags, emojis or sentimental speech acts.

For posts related to the #knytblus demonstration, arranged in Stockholm on 19 April, but soon spreading to other Swedish cities such as Gothenburg,[5] it is the event version of the hashtag that is the most used; however the pussy-bow blouse selfies also seemed to stick to the initial #knytblusförsara during and after the offline events. In the comments sections, people responded with either the hashtag or with emojis; this time with the bow symbol, often accompanied by a fist, a flexing muscle or hearts.

That the posts related to Danius' case were not consistent with regard to hashtag use also points to how the contextualization of hashtags is different on Instagram than on

Twitter, where tagging is done more consistently in order to categorize content. On Instagram, it is first and foremost the images visible in the feed that give users an impression of 'collective postings', which were also distinguishable in the case of #brinnförjosefin, where the same few images or illustrations of Josefin Nilsson, or later, pictures from the candlelight manifestation, were utilized by most posters. This suggests further the use of hashtags as affect triggers rather than content categorizers for feminist users on Instagram: Hashtags are seemingly more connected to the sensation of 'being-as-one' (Ahmed, 1997) in the *act of* posting them as well as the possibility of 'intimately touching' likeminded followers who see them, rather than improving the reach to random users searching for said hashtag.

Still, feminist entanglements are thus, through such hashtagging practices, created, made visible – and to follow ANT; 'mediated through' (Law, 1992: 381) – Instagram's algorithmic architecture, where the image of the pussy-bow blouse came to stand as a visual synonym for the hashtags, which still functioned as the categorizing 'glue' that clustered the cause. In addition to underscoring the affective power of visual actants, the variations of the hashtag, that soon were signified by selfies in the pussy-bow blouse, also point to a central ANT principle, namely that an actant may 'stand in' for another without changing the nature of the network in question. Since, the pussy-bow blouse has continued to be worn by feminists as a symbol of standing up against sexism, and many posted selfies picturing such blouses accompanied by the hashtags #knytblus and #knytblusförsara on Instagram as an homage to Sara Danius after her death in October 2019.

Although affect cannot be said to operate through language structures per se (Blackman and Venn, 2010), I propose the use of this hashtag as a good example of how the multimodal user possibilities of Instagram provide feminists with a larger affective arsenal of resistance in its translated, emotional sense, which they can continue to utilize for future posts and 'exercise, rather like a muscle, in everyday life' (Ahmed, 2019: 3) in order to draw attention to similar cases. When a specific hashtag or visual symbol, as here; both a selfie wearing the blouse or simply the bow emoji, has gained traction within the Instagram sphere, it can later be employed to raise awareness of the wider societal discourses around similar topics. The Danius case not only caused uproar within established feminist circles, it also led to a trial and eventually a prison sentence for the man who made Danius resign. Additionally, in tracing the hashtag through newspaper clippings, both politicians and commercial media outlets eventually discussed the case within a larger context of institutionalized sexism, likely partly due to the efforts, consciousness-raising and affective visual symbols of feminist Instagrammers.

The third hashtag analyzed, #rättslösa, employed a different tactic than the two above. First used on Instagram on August 21, 2019, the #rättslösa tag was an initiative central to the launching of the radical feminist grouping Gardet, a Swedish word meaning 'guard'. This was a formation established in May 2019 by several of the most prominent voices within the Swedish Instagram feminist community. The #rättslösa tag did not seem to concern one specific case or event, but rather sought to highlight how reported rapes are arguably not prioritized by the Swedish police. I soon trailed the tag to pictures of demonstrators with gaffer tape covering their mouths, the hashtag written on it with black marker pen. I hence interpreted this hashtag as though it was made seemingly with the intent to be used in rallies offline. First arranged in Stockholm, the Gardet-arranged #rättslösa demonstrations were shortly after organized outside police stations and district

courts also elsewhere in Sweden. The initiative has continued to receive press coverage predominantly in the local press, and Gardet's website[6] states that there have been #rätt-slösa demonstrations outside police stations in 35 Swedish cities.

Here, then, the hashtag is less ad hoc and rather indefinitely fluctuates between online and offline spheres. The Instagram use of the tag is utilized predominantly in conjunction with organizations of – or documentations of – the events, and similarly, the offline use of the hashtag – on mouth-covering gaffer tape – likely functions as a way of directing onlookers back to the online sphere to see the larger picture through Gardet's radical feminist program as discussed by Instagram profiles and followers. In analyzing the hashtag, and its seemingly pre-planned nature, I get the impression of a pre-made feminist 'we' (Ahmed, 2004b) in advance of the creation of #rättslösa, arguably due to the feminist networks already established in the wake of #metoo.

In fact, by following the hashtag's first use on Instagram, I was directed to the profiles of some of the central voices from the two cases previously discussed here, and one of them elaborated in an Instagram post from early 2019, one of these women elaborated on how the idea behind the group came to fruition during earlier hashtag-initiated campaigns. Using a picture from the candlelight manifestation in support of Josefin Nilsson as an illustration, the poster described how they had planned the latter demonstration in a group chat where one of the participants suggested the highly affective, soon-to-go-viral hashtag, #brinnförjosefin, and another one in the group had started 'spamming social media with images' from the candlelight event. She stated: 'We acted, like a "guard"... Our own media platform is the natural next step'.

As well as pointing to the 'intimacy labor' (Abidin, 2016) of these feminist influencers, whose knowledge of the affective nature of social media platforms means they seemingly can predict the way feminist messages trail through and beyond the digital sphere, it seems as though this hashtag does not 'flow' in the same way the ad hoc hashtags do. Similarly, as it is traced mainly to a handful of well-known feminist profiles, this hashtag does not accumulate entangled, far-reaching networks such as the hashtags previously discussed. Here, then, it becomes clear how both affect and intimacy *are in themselves* vital components within feminist networks, attaching themselves to human and nonhuman entities along their way. This tag was not inaugurated due to specific events causing uproar, and was not rooted in a feminist 'snap' (Ahmed, 2017) prompting affective action. This suggests the impossibility of attempting to 'construct' these components: Gardet's effort to create an affective hashtag for the sake of connecting networks of people to their cause failed because affective, intimate entanglements must emerge from non-conscious experiences and not from pre-defined political categories, no matter how genuine their endeavor. Thus, the initiative lacked the 'augmented dissent' (Jurgenson, 2011) flowing through the entangled feminist networks as described above.

Discussion: Augmented feminist entanglements

I here elaborate on the formations of augmented feminist entanglements as arguably initiated by affective Instagram hashtags. As amplified previously, in following the actor-network theoretical approach, one can view both humans, technology and affect as entities defined through their connections. Paasonen (2015) argues that technologies 'press themselves' on the people engaging with them, and I will argue that this is also true of

the notions of affect and intimacy that flow through feminist actor-networks. Being part of these networks means being touched by and attuned to the affective intimacies present within the networks, where intimacy is 'made of and with multiple entangled materialities' (Latimer and Lopez Gomez, 2019: 254). Yet, as seen in the analysis above with the 'failed' #rättslösa hashtag, in order for affect – and the other entities in the networks – to have an ability to *touch* and *attach*, the connections transcending through hashtag use must *begin* with such sensations and be allowed to emerge freely through the networks for the affective intensity to have a political impact.

The flows of affective intensities in these networks might also help explain how the dichotomy between online and offline is largely considered an outdated divide unprofitable for studying contemporary feminist networks (see e.g. Handyside and Ringrose, 2017; Jeong and Lee, 2018). Following Sara Ahmed's re-thinking of feminist intimacy, it can be contended that online attachments through sharing private experiences of suffering, such as in Instagram comments sections as exemplified here, may provide the same foundations for 'stickiness' as meeting physically offline.

However, profiled feminists' sharing of images *depicting physical nearness* where followers get to see and visualize actual collective feminist bodies through the Instagram technology might also contribute to feelings of sameness and furthering notions of affective attachment to the feminist cause, even for those not contributing. They are still 'there' by seeing the action unfold through Instagram and share the experiences through the utilization of the same hashtags the offline demonstrations are based upon, no matter their physical proximities to each other and the offline events. These sphere-defying 'embodied dialogues' (Ahmed, 1997) are arguably central to the augmentation of Swedish feminist activism's 'co-extensive spaces' (Saker and Frith, 2020) as analyzed in the present study. These shared feminist experiences, both digital and non-digital, may thus further contribute to the 'being-as-one' (Ahmed, 1997) that arguably is an underlying parameter for feminist politics to have direct political impact.

'Feminism begins with sensation' (2017: 21), Sara Ahmed states, and for many, recognizing others' stories as 'plurals of the self' (Lewis, 2016: 8) means feeling understood and being part of a collective. It can also mean viewing experiences through a feminist lens, perhaps for the first time. For each post shared under the same hashtag, the underlying structures of these experiences become clearer, and simultaneously, the bar for sharing one's own stories is lowered. Hashtags hence open up moments in time that provide opportunities for speaking out – and being listened to – without having one's motive questioned. A time and space when personal stories matter and can snowball into collective political action, when the mere act of posting a hashtag on one's social media account synchronically symbolizes believing in and sympathizing with other's stories, which, as a consequence, merge with offline feminist efforts. Instagram's multimodal qualities also arguably contextualize hashtags within an 'emotional architecture' (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019) to a larger degree than for example Twitter and Facebook, in turn enhancing the affective effects of hashtags.

'Emotions are what moves us' (2004b: 171), Ahmed argues, and it can be contended that they are also what transcend feminist activism from Instagram into the offline sphere, vehicled by, as I have shown in this article, affective hashtags. Largely because of hashtags' simplified messages, significant policy changes took place in the wake of

#metoo (see e.g. Askanius and Hartley, 2019), and agenda-setting debates occured in light of the hashtags discussed here: Millions of people worldwide *act upon*, personalize and 'move' hashtags into their offline lives through demonstrations, complaints, petitions or face-to-face conversations.

Relating this to Sara Ahmed's insistence on going beyond merely speaking of pain for a feminist project, then, one can argue that transcending the feminist issues as highlighted by Instagram hashtags into the public domain is an example of the call to action that can position affect as political, rather than merely being 'named' (Hooks, 1984) on an Instagram profile with limited views – despite the simplicity of the hashtag that first initiated the offline activism in question. Additionally, one might compare the process of *moving* the issues as underscored by hashtags into the non-digital world to the ways in which pain transforms into public feelings of anger. In other words, a hashtag can be an affective steppingstone for lifting feminist issues out of the private sphere into the public sphere, transforming fragmented feelings of pain into collective bodies of feminist anger.

Importantly, however, the political potential of feminist hashtags as spurred by intimate socio-material entanglements is undoubtedly also connected to social, cultural and political factors, including access to technological devices, public spaces and media news outlets. Thus, an arguably gender-equal country such as Sweden almost certainly offers a better breeding ground for the flow of intensities that successful feminist hashtag campaigns demand. As Teigen and Wängnerud (2009: 40) argue in their seminal study of gender equality in Norway and Sweden, 'the way gender equality is understood and discussed in public seems to have a decisive impact on the actual gender-equality situation'. In other words, in order for an activist project to reach beyond the digital sphere, it is vital that mainstream media outlets, profiled politicians and public arenas are available actants for further entangling the feminist causes as embedded in hashtags, such as those in the present study.

Concluding remarks

This article has shown how networked feminist intimacies are produced through platform materialities, providing new insights into the ways that socio-technical processes of feminist attachments move digital intimacy into the non-mediated world. The data underpin the conclusion that social media, and arguably especially Instagram, inhabit the ability to enhance the flow of affective intensities, that in turn both encourage and justify the sharing of intimate experiences.

Additionally, I have offered a novel perspective on the political potentiality of feminist hashtags, that, despite its Swedish focus, also to some extent might translate to other geographical contexts. One example of a feminist activist campaign bridging the gap between online and offline is the performance 'Un violador en tu camino' ('A rapist in your path'), that originated in Chile in 2019. Although mainly relying on offline performances, the initiative soon became a global phenomenon partly due to hashtag use and social media mobilizations (see e.g. Serafini, 2020). However, few studies of feminist hashtag campaigns' offline significance to date centralize the experiences of non-western, non-white feminists and I hence urge other scholars to take up this challenge.

As emphasized throughout this paper, hashtags can be seen as 'sticky' (Ahmed, 2014) and the foundations of what both human and nonhuman actants attach themselves to and organize themselves around, allowing for seeing agentiality as networked. Hashtag use also directly impacts the algorithmic structuring of the Instagram feed, determining what will be visible to other users (see e.g. Gerrard, 2018). Consequently, hashtags must be seen as vital components both for contemporary feminist movements and raising awareness of feminist issues for a wider audience.

In simplistic terms, the #metoo campaign and other ad hoc hashtags that followed stand as exemplifications of how affective dissonance can emerge into augmented forms of 'affective solidarity' (Hemmings, 2012): These hashtags are feminist 'snaps' cracking open spaces, both online and eventually offline, for women – and others – to break their silence and bring attention to sexual harassment and gendered violence as structural problems.

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ORCID iD

Astri Moksnes Barbala https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3087-3350

Notes

1. 'In real life' is used here merely as 'IRL' is commonly utilized as a synonym for offline experiences. As the article establishes, it does not subscribe to a dualist view of online/offline experiences. See for example, Slater (2002) and Jurgenson (2011) for further discussions regarding digital dualism and augmented realities.
2. Sara Ahmed explains in the Introduction to *The uses of use* (2019) how she sees this book, together with the previously released *The Promise of Happiness* (*2010*) and *Willful Subjects* (2014) as a trilogy.
3. SVT first aired the hour-long documentary 'Josefin Nilsson – Älska mig för den jag är' (translated to 'Love me for who I am') on March 22, 2019. It broke viewing records for SVT with 900,000 viewers the first week it was online, and has seen large viewing numbers all over Scandinavia. It has since been removed, due to 'violation of privacy', after Nilsson's ex-boyfriend filed a formal complaint to The Swedish Press Council.
4. See for example, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/12/world/europe/sara-danius-swedish-nobel-scandal.html
5. See for example, https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vast/knytblusmanifestation-i-goteborg
6. https://www.gardets.nu/lsvrt/rttslsa-ett-slag-i-luften-eller-en-revolution

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