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**KATE DRAZNER HOYT**  
University of Denver

# The affect of the hashtag: #HandsUpDontShoot and the body in peril

## ABSTRACT

1. *On 9 August 2014, Michael Brown, a young man of barely 18 years, was killed*
2. *by Ferguson, Missouri police officer Darren Wilson, which renewed discourse*
3. *surrounding the occurrences of racial violence in the United States enacted at the*
4. *hands of police. Brown's death led to the development of a hashtag movement called*
5. *#HandsUpDontShoot on Twitter, Facebook and other social media sites, which*
6. *critiqued the disparate treatment of racial minorities and the excessive use of (often*
7. *deadly) force by police on black bodies. #HandsUpDontShoot offers an example how*
8. *the convergence of subjectivities occurs affectively: the hashtag, while making a*
9. *discursive appeal to consider Michael Brown's rumoured stance of surrender when*
10. *he was shot by Wilson, also featured photos of movement participants recreating his*
11. *pose with their own bodies. Further, the embodied affect of the movement overlapped*
12. *and entangled with that of offline spaces, where protesters on the ground in Ferguson*
13. *and other communities began to raise their hands above their head in a desire to*
14. *not only create an external spectacle of Brown's victimhood, but to live within the*
15. *subjectivity of his abject body. Through a media ecology analysis, I argue that the*
16. *subjectivity of Brown's body was kept alive through the movement, as the hashtag*
17. *and associated imagery can be seen as material extensions of Michael Brown's body*
18. *and a desire to make sense of Brown's death through an affective exchange with the*
19. *body in peril. In this sense, the participants of #HandsUpDontShoot transformed the*
20. *movement from a space for standing with the victim to a state of standing within*  
*the body in peril.*

## KEYWORDS

digital media  
social movement  
protest rhetoric  
hashtag  
body in peril  
affect

In the summer of 2014, the American public awoke to the sound of an alarm that had been quietly droning in the background for years and even decades. The renewed discourse surrounding the fact that the 'land of the free' continued to experience profound levels of racial violence – at the hands of law enforcement, no less – was met with shock and even disbelief by those who had blissfully wrapped themselves in the cosy myth of the United States as a post-racial society. Despite deniers' efforts to argue otherwise, the pattern of racial minorities dying at the hands of police officers could no longer be ignored: that summer, seven unarmed black men were killed by the police (Juzwiak and Chan 2014). The event that blew the lid off this long-present – yet little-discussed – social reality was the shooting death of Michael Brown, a young man of barely 18 years who was killed by Ferguson, Missouri police officer Darren Wilson on 9 August 2014.

Brown's death led to public outcry, civil unrest and a series of public protests by residents and supporters of black communities in and around Ferguson. The event also led to the development of a hashtag movement called #HandsUpDontShoot on Twitter, Facebook and other social media sites, which critiqued the disparate treatment of racial minorities and the excessive use of (often deadly) force by police on black bodies. The protests – both online and offline – that arose in the wake of Brown's death placed Ferguson, Missouri at the centre of the discourse surrounding racial violence in the United States. However, before #HandsUpDontShoot there was #ICantBreathe, a hashtag movement that recalled 43-year-old Eric Garner's last plea before dying in a chokehold at the hands of NYPD officer Daniel Pantaleo (Izadi 2014). And both #HandsUpDontShoot and #ICantBreathe were, in sentiment, echoes of #HoodieSunday, which followed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin's shooting death by neighbourhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman. #HoodieSunday was intended to express solidarity with the slain Martin, whose death the conservative media justified with the fact that he was wearing a hoodie at the time of his shooting – an article of clothing referred to by media personality Geraldo Rivera as 'thug wear' (Mirkinson 2013).

These hashtag movements arose out of specific incidents that outraged the public in the wake of these events. However, the inequitable treatment of racial minorities through police aggression has been a long-standing social issue within civil society. Perhaps because of the ways such force is reminiscent of law enforcement's brutal suppression of the civil rights movement during the mid-twentieth century, the killing and maiming of unarmed black men by police, especially youth, has been a contentious issue within United States history. One has only to remember the Rodney King riots to recognize that the Ferguson protests have not been a reaction to the Michael Brown shooting in isolation, but rather a systematic and historical targeting of racial minorities by law enforcement. The hashtag movements #DrivingWhileBlack and #BlackLivesMatter have surfaced as attempts to spread awareness of the spectacle, suspicion and risk that follow black bodies like a shadow within a society that perpetuates – but does not openly discuss – white supremacist mentalities.

Further, #HandsUpDontShoot, #ICantBreathe, and #HoodieSunday are all attempts to convey solidarity with the slain – movements that express what Harold and DeLuca call a 'communion' (2005: 276) with the body in peril. These movements are advanced through discourse that continually reminds us that the 'abject is necessarily within each subject' (2005: 281), seen in protest slogans like 'Je suis Charlie', which sought to convey support for the victims of the January 2015 terror attack on French satirical weekly

1. newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*, or the Facebook group 'We Are All Khaled Said',  
 2. which responded with outrage to the torture and subsequent death of a young  
 3. Egyptian man whose killing is thought to have been an instigating factor in  
 4. the 2011 Egyptian revolution. Alongside such representational rhetoric that  
 5. compels us to see ourselves within the victims of violence, however, live other  
 6. flows of meaning that go beyond representation. Such is the impact of affective  
 7. entanglement, a process whereby the spaces of social movement afford  
 8. the convergence of subjectivities, identities and even bodies in a 'process of  
 9. social reorganization', as Hariman and Lucaites (2007: 62) discuss. Because an  
 10. affect is a felt intensity that is integrated into our perceptive sensibilities before  
 11. our cognitive faculties can even name it, an affective, non-representational  
 12. communion with the body in peril is felt through the body rather than cognitively  
 13. reasoned within the mind.

14. #HandsUpDontShoot offers an example how the convergence of subjectivities  
 15. occurs affectively: the hashtag, while making a discursive appeal to  
 16. consider Michael Brown's rumoured stance of surrender when he was shot by  
 17. Wilson, also featured photos of movement participants recreating his pose with  
 18. their own bodies. Further, the embodied affect of the movement overlapped  
 19. and entangled with that of offline spaces, where protesters on the ground in  
 20. Ferguson and other communities began to raise their hands above their head  
 21. in a desire to not only create an external spectacle of Brown's victimhood, but  
 22. to live within the subjectivity of his abject body. In this sense, the participants  
 23. of #HandsUpDontShoot transformed the movement from a space for *standing*  
 24. *with* the victim to a state of *standing within* the body in peril.

25. In this article, I trace the rhetorical features of the #HandsUpDontShoot  
 26. movement to show how the hashtag can be seen as an expression of a pre-  
 27. cognitive urge to make sense of Brown's death through an intersubjective  
 28. exchange with the body in peril. First, I discuss how the treatment of Brown's  
 29. body hauntingly echoes the historical use of lynched black bodies by white  
 30. supremacist authorities to intimidate and silence black communities. I then  
 31. show how the evolution of the hashtag movement centred around Brown's  
 32. body as a move to embrace the body in peril. Through a media ecology lens,  
 33. I look at the interplay between the hashtag, images and physical protests that  
 34. carry with them the flow of affective entanglement, explicating the movement  
 35. as an overflow of affective intensities surrounding racially motivated police  
 36. brutality. Through this analysis, we can see that the subjectivity of Brown's  
 37. body was kept alive through the movement, as the hashtag and associated  
 38. imagery can be seen as material extensions of Michael Brown's body in peril.  
 39. Finally, I discuss the need to complexify this transcendent notion of the virtual  
 40. body with the ways in which identities reveal material differences of lived  
 41. experience.

#### 42. **'THEY LEFT HIS BODY IN THE STREET TO LET YOU ALL KNOW THIS** 43. **COULD BE YOU': THE BLACK BODY IN PERIL**

44. The events leading up to Michael Brown's shooting on 9 August 2014 have  
 45. been highly contested: some reports indicate that Brown and Wilson strug-  
 46. gled through the police car window (Bosman and Fitzsimmons 2014) while  
 47. others maintain that Brown was 35 feet away from Wilson at the time of the  
 48. shooting (McLaughlin 2014). Reports also indicate that Brown had robbed a  
 49. liquor store shortly before the encounter with Wilson (Berman and Lowery  
 50. 2014), but information was soon released revealing that Wilson had no  
 51.  
 52.

knowledge of the robbery when he apprehended Brown; rather, when Wilson stopped Brown for jaywalking, it was unrelated to the earlier alleged robbery (Lopez 2014). After the shooting, Brown's body was left in the street for over four hours (Hunn and Bell 2014). The effects that this carelessness – intended or unintended – had on the community eerily paralleled the ways in which lynchings in the early twentieth century came to signify the control of black communities by the white power structure: 'They shot a black man, and they left his body in the street to let you all know this could be you', one Ferguson resident mused (Hunn and Bell 2014).

In 'Behold the corpse: Violent images and the case of Emmett Till', Harold and DeLuca (2005) explicate the impulse of the black community to organize and collectively cry out against racial violence in response to the murder of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African American boy who was lynched in 1950s Mississippi, as an embrace of the black body in peril. While previous lynching imagery had been used as a method of silencing and intimidating the black community – causing these communities to cast out the lynched body in shame and surrender – the recontextualizing of imagery surrounding Emmett Till's lynched body showed how the body in peril could be 'embrace[ed] and foreground[ed]' (Harold and DeLuca 2005: 266) through the open display of Till's body at his funeral, the dissemination of the photographic images of Till's corpse, and the continued and detailed verbal account by Till's mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, of how she came to identify the mutilated figure of her son. Harold and DeLuca (2005) show that the subjectivity of Emmett Till was kept alive through the way his body was both viscerally affective and widely disseminated by communities and audiences – and it was this embodied 'liveness' that moved black communities to embrace the body in peril, rather than exile it in shame.

The body in peril is a site of excess, 'provok[ing] a physical response that temporarily precedes and exceeds "sense"' (Harold and DeLuca 2005: 275). This is especially true in cases where the abject body is extended through disseminated imagery, where mediations of the body confront publics in their homes and communities. Such mediations can be thought of as spaces where the individual is subsumed within the collective: 'In the context of the African American community, the proliferation of the mortician's photograph and the open-casket memorial allowed witnesses, in a kind of visual communion, to consume the body of Emmett Till and be transformed by doing so' (Harold and DeLuca 2005: 276).

In fact, the abject body functions rhetorically to blur the boundaries between self and other in such a way that the witnessing subject sees traces of herself within it. This blurring of conventional boundaries – between, as Harold and DeLuca offer, 'self and others...life and death' (2005: 281) – constitutes the conceptual framework for this analysis. By searching beyond representational discourse in how the public made sense of Brown's death, I look to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of 'the flow' to describe a deliberately imprecise way of knowing or understanding meaning beyond, across and within the existing category of the form. By recognizing how traces of Brown's subjectivity could be seen in the embodied performances of the hashtag movement participants, the embrace of the abject helps to illustrate Harold and DeLuca's notion that 'the abject other never remains subserviently at the margins' (2005: 279), but rather bleeds into the feeling subjects that behold it. When Michael Brown's body was left in the street in Ferguson, the public was moved to embrace it, and subsequently, the creation of the hashtag movement #HandsUpDontShoot helped to foreground Brown's body even after it was buried.

**#HANDSUPDONTSHOOT: BROWN’S BODY ‘EMBRACED AND FOREGROUNDED’**

In the early evening of 12 August 2014 – three days after Brown’s death – a group of Howard University students posed for a photo as a response to the events in Ferguson. Twitter user Megan Sims, a student at Howard University, posted the photo to the social media platform with the caption ‘Powerful picture we took today at Howard University #Ferguson #MikeBrown #MyaWhite #DONTSHOOT’<sup>1</sup> (The\_Blackness48 2014: Figure 1). The photo depicted a sea of students – perhaps hundreds, filling up an entire side of an auditorium – with their hands raised above their heads, eyes wide and faces sombre. That particular Twitter post generated almost 15,000 retweets and 11,000 favourites (The\_Blackness48 2014). The original photo’s hashtag #DontShoot was then transformed into #HandsUpDontShoot by the Harvard Black Law Students Association (BLSA), who replicated the Howard University photo using the same ‘hands up’ pose with the caption: ‘Harvard Black Law

1. #MyaWhite refers to a Howard University graduate who was shot in the head on the way back from a protest in support of Michael Brown on 12 August 2014. After surgeons extracted it from her head, the bullet – a key piece of evidence in the investigation into who shot White – went missing; White asserts the police took it to obstruct an investigation into who fired the shot (Rhodan 2014).



Figure 1: The\_Blackness48 (2014).





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Figure 2: HarvardBLSA (2014).

Students Association Launches #HandsUpDontShoot Campaign and Releases Official Statement' (HarvardBLSA 2014, Figure 2). The statement released by the Harvard BLSA explains that:

This campaign [#HandsUpDontShoot] is part of HBLSA's new P.U.L.S.E. initiative (Powerfully Utilizing Law School Educations for Political and Social Justice), which seeks to track, report and respond to developing social issues affecting the black American community. The campaign includes visual media, an official statement and op-ed and various events throughout the school year regarding the criminal justice system as it affects black Americans.

(Arata 2014)

Although neither the statement nor the Twitter post credited the original Howard University photo, an article published by the online magazine *Elite Daily* linked the two and pointed out the similarities and presumed mutual influences of the posts (Arata 2014).

1. The evolution of the hashtag #DontShoot to #HandsUpDontShoot is tell-  
 2. ing in the way in which the movement came to implicate Brown's body. On  
 3. one hand, while the Howard University post came as an appeal to interrupt  
 4. triggers of violence in response to black bodies using the #DontShoot hash-  
 5. tag, the Harvard BLSA's post advanced the narrative of Brown's surrender and  
 6. innocence through the rhetorical pronouncement of his body in the 'hands  
 7. up' pose. This rhetorical entreaty functioned in two modes, side by side: while  
 8. validating an account of Brown raising his hands above his head before he  
 9. was shot can be seen as an appeal to reason – casting doubt upon the notion  
 10. that Brown's death was a 'justifiable homicide'<sup>2</sup> – the move to extend Brown's  
 11. rumoured pose to the bodies of movement participants through digital imagery  
 12. constituted more of an affective interchange, an embrace of the body in peril.  
 13. In seeing traces of oneself in the abject by performing an embodiment of the  
 14. 'hands up' pose, it became that much more difficult to dismiss Brown's death  
 15. as justifiable. This was due not to a rational, cognitive process but through a felt  
 16. perception of Brown's subjectivity via the somatic performance of the pose.

17. By introducing the 'hands up' image into the hashtag movement and  
 18. compelling participants to disseminate imagery of their own bodies adopting  
 19. the pose, the abject body that was once carelessly left in the street became both  
 20. visible and imbued with a sense of aliveness. The embrace of Brown's body by  
 21. the digital public paralleled the ways in which, almost 60 years earlier, black  
 22. communities across the United States embraced Emmett Till's lynched body  
 23. by disseminating both imagery and detailed verbal accounts of his disfigured  
 24. corpse. The deaths of Emmett Till and Michael Brown each, in their own way,  
 25. signified a breaking point wherein communities could no longer uphold a  
 26. conceptual separation between their own bodies and that of the abject. They  
 27. reflect moments in the collective imaginary that realized 'the abject is necessar-  
 28. ily within each subject' (Harold and DeLuca 2005: 281). In the case of Michael  
 29. Brown's death, such affective entanglement was not limited to digital spaces, as  
 30. the pose was also adopted on the streets where protesters gathered to demon-  
 31. strate the need for police accountability. By looking at the interplay between  
 32. the hashtag, disseminated imagery, posts, and on-the-ground developments  
 33. at physical protests, #HandsUpDontShoot can be explicated as an affective  
 34. overflow of the tension surrounding racially motivated police brutality.

### 35. **THE MEDIATED ECOLOGY OF #HANDSUPDONTSHOOT AND THE 36. FLOW OF AFFECT**

37. By explicating the body in peril as a site of excess, we can then look to its  
 38. mediation to see that this subjective interchange takes place within the materi-  
 39. al spaces – both physical and virtual – carved out by the movement. Such  
 40. an understanding takes up Postman's (2000) concept of media ecology,  
 41. which advocates seeing media as 'technology within which a culture grows...  
 42. [through] interactions among the elements of our [mediated] environment'  
 43. (2000: 10–11). In other words, within a media ecology lens, media should be  
 44. regarded as a space or network of spaces, rather than simply a tool. In embrac-  
 45. ing a media ecology approach, I liken the movement of #HandsUpDontShoot  
 46. across the mediasphere to the flow of a river, where every bend both carves  
 47. out new terrain but still contains the originating substance of the flow. In look-  
 48. ing at how the image evolved from the original post by Howard University  
 49. students, it is important to acknowledge that every new instantiation of the  
 50. hashtag was both shaped by previous embodiments of Brown's pose, and in  
 51. turn shaped future iterations of the movement.  
 52.

2. The Federal Bureau of Investigation defines justifiable homicide – which it used to sanction 410 fatal uses of force by police in 2012 – as 'the killing of a felon by a law enforcement officer in the line of duty' (Swartz 2014).

3. The term 'selfie' emerged around 2010 and refers to a self-portrait taken with a cell phone, frequently with the intended purpose of posting on one or more social media platforms (Losse 2013).

The complexity in tracing the emergence of the hashtag movement from its first tweet reveals the limitations of thinking of media as mere instruments. In a virtual sphere where rhetorical markers are rapidly disseminated and appropriated, the question of who leads or 'owns' a movement proves continually elusive. Due to the dispersed and democratic affordances of the media landscapes through which #HandsUpDontShoot was disseminated, the tactics used by those protesting the events on the ground in Ferguson cannot directly be traced back to the movement's virtual unfolding, or vice versa. Neither Harvard University nor Howard University is local to the event of Brown's death, yet these two institutions arguably helped to spread information about, favourable sentiment towards, and affective contagion for the movement by creating and disseminating the hashtag, which created a powerful and compelling image within the public imagination.

However, despite the impossibility of a linear timeline of developments, it is clear that the hashtag within the virtual movement and the pose among physical protesters emerged almost side-by-side. Photographs depicting protesters raising their hands above their head in Ferguson were posted as early as the very evening of Brown's death on 9 August 2014 (Skolnik 2014). Those images were disseminated via mainstream and alternative media outlets and may have influenced the social media posts by Howard and Harvard Universities, but it was the framing of the latter parties' posts within the genres of the 'selfie'<sup>3</sup> and the hashtag that afforded the virality of the movement by other social media users. Whereas depictions of local protesters in Ferguson (and, later, solidarity movements within other cities) reinforced the separation between the media audience and the events unfolding on the ground – events vastly separated by geographic location – the social media posts depicting participants turning the camera on themselves and recreating Brown's reported pose persuaded audiences to find traces of the abject within their own bodies through a process of self-reflexivity.

### HASHTAGS: SITES OF CONNECTIVITY AND EXTRA-DISCURSIVE MEANING

In addition to the photos posted of bodies adopting the 'hands up' pose, the hashtag itself is a site of subjectivity, an entryway into a physical embodiment of not only solidarity, but also, as I will go on to argue, a material extension of Michael Brown's body. In a new sphere of communication within the hyper-real, the hashtag infuses digitally disseminated media with both subtext and connectivity. The hashtag's original purpose of aggregation – a method of labelling and grouping online content for the purposes of linking, searching and tracking trends (Parker 2011) – helps weave disparate images, messages and events together to create a cohesive narrative. So although the participants of #HandsUpDontShoot were of various identities and in disparate geographic locations, the hashtags linked these posts together as a kind of virtual collective. The hashtag also responds to a common critique that virtual communication erases affective cues like communicative tone: now, hashtags can be used to generate irony or sarcasm through an addendum strategically placed to allow audiences to 'read between the lines' of messages. Weaving these two affordances together, the hashtag creates a flow of a narrative that is constantly being shaped by the mimesis of each user's re-appropriation of it.

For example, on 15 August, Twitter user Tim Bryant tweeted, '#Race is not a card. It's a construct that can determine whether u [sic] live or die in USA. Time



1. to end. #racism #Ferguson #HandsUpDontShoot' (2014). This tweet did not  
 2. contain an embedded image, but the content of the tweet could be conceived  
 3. as a caption for the #HandsUpDontShoot hashtag, meaning that the body of  
 4. the tweet – everything before the hashtag – explicates the phenomena of the  
 5. black body in peril in direct and descriptive terms, while the hashtag gives the  
 6. reader an immediate and embodied impression of its subjectivity. Another post,  
 7. tweeted by KateWoodsWalker, on 16 August, stated, 'Sometimes teens shop-  
 8. lift. Mine did, once. Had to complete classes. Record expunged. He's white.  
 9. #JusticeForMikeBrown #HandsUpDontShoot' (KateWoodsWalker 2014).  
 10. Again, the content of the tweet itself operates on a linear temporal frame that  
 11. mimics the logical building of an argument, and then is instantaneously juxta-  
 12. posed with the image of Michael Brown's form of 'justice'. While the reader  
 13. follows the poster's line of argument – weaving together all of the pieces of  
 14. her son's narrative, one by one – the hashtag delivers the affective punch that  
 15. takes the reaction out of the mind and into the body.

16. In the week after Brown's death, the vast majority of Twitter posts that  
 17. utilized the #HandsUpDontShoot hashtag did so as a form of live-tweeting  
 18. protest events from various cities around the United States. These posts  
 19. would sometimes include a picture or video and would often contain  
 20. descriptive details from the scene: '#HandsUpDontShoot moving down  
 21. Broadway.. From 14th st currently on 30th' (BeckDeeMyG 2014); 'Seeing a  
 22. 3 year old hold up his hands for the entirety of #NMOS14 is a chilling thing.  
 23. #HandsUpDontShoot #BlackLivesMatter' (Khwaja 2014). In these posts, since  
 24. the content was mostly descriptive, the support for Michael Brown and the  
 25. protest movement was more implicit than explicit, but the use of the hash-  
 26. tag to progress the narrative of the protesters remained clear. Other posts  
 27. functioned to make explicit their rhetorical support for Brown and the move-  
 28. ment: '#HandsUpDontShoot .. Because I have the weight of my family on  
 29. my shoulders and I refuse to let them down. I have too much to lose and  
 30. the world to GAIN. #handsuptally #justiceformikebrown...' (@2Much\_SOLE  
 31. 2014); 'Formerly a sign of surrender, now a sign of strength & support... A  
 32. UNIFYING gesture! #HandsUpDontShoot #Ferguson #NMOS14' (Stovall  
 33. 2014). Still others used the hashtag to spread news and updates on the Brown  
 34. case: 'what you didn't [sic] see on the news.. raw footage of michael browns  
 35. [sic] body laying [sic] in the street.. #handsupdontshoot...' (becca\_beckers\_  
 36. 2014). However, in nearly all of the social media posts that included the hash-  
 37. tag, #HandsUpDontShoot was used to punctuate a more traditionally repre-  
 38. sentational rhetorical appeal with an affective image of Michael Brown's body,  
 39. signalling a foregrounding and embrace of the body in peril.<sup>4</sup>

40. #HandsUpDontShoot has become a visual signal for the embodied act of  
 41. raising one's hands above one's head in surrender; after a while, one stops  
 42. reading hashtags in a linear manner and begins recognizing its visual sign as a  
 43. whole, the same way one might recognize an iconic image. This allows audi-  
 44. ences to insert themselves as extensions of the body in peril and feel the its  
 45. somatic effects on the body. Whether or not one physically raises one's hands  
 46. above one's head upon seeing the visual signifier, the body's somatic imagi-  
 47. nation is awakened, stirring up feelings of exposure and vulnerability, allow-  
 48. ing for an affective interchange of subjectivities with Michael Brown. With the  
 49. hashtag #HandsUpDontShoot, all of this is achieved without the use of an  
 50. actual image. The set of characters within the hashtag compels the subject to  
 51. immediately recognize its narrative meaning as a whole and to recall – as an  
 52. automatic process – its associated imagery. I argue that this process evokes an

4. Although outside the scope of this article, it is significant to note that a small fraction (about one percent) of the #HandsUpDontShoot posts that surfaced within a week of the hashtag's formation co-opted the hashtag to promote rhetoric against the movement, for example: 'Won't it be funny when we find out this kid tried to attack the police officer instead of #HandsUpDontShoot' (Suder 2014).

immediate intensive response in the body through affects that produce vulnerability, fear and helplessness. This affective response constitutes a material extension of Michael Brown's body in a holistic and immediate performance, revealing an atemporal and embodied rhetoric inherent within the hashtag.

### #IMAGE

Unlike language, where each unit of meaning depends on the one laid out before it in a linear model, images function on a non-linear temporal plane: the image contains the past, present and future within a single snapshot, a 'vertigo of time defeated' (Barthes 1981: 97). When we see an image, the body extends its understanding of the self, the visual phenomena and the milieu in which the two exist – a sensing that goes beyond our limited positionality within time, space and perspective. The idea of an immediate, impressionistic sensing of an interlocking network of movement, patterns and flux echoes Henri Bergson's (trans. 1983) concept of 'automated vision', which asserts that a human can 'see with the body' rather than with the eye in isolation: 'Bergson goes on to insist that perception is always mixed with affection and memory, bodily faculties that mark the positive contribution of the body to the process of perception' (Hansen 2004: 59).

The way in which bodies carry affective intensities in the images that constitute the hashtag movement #HandsUpDontShoot, once again, echoes Harold and DeLuca's assessment of the Emmett Till case, in the sense that 'bodies, perhaps more than eloquence, moved a nation' (2005: 267). In elucidating a *New York Times* review of the increasingly popular book *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, which states that '[t]hese images make the past present' (Smith 2000, par. 13), Harold and DeLuca posit that 'lynching images, such as those of Emmett Till, are too visually provocative, too viscerally challenging, to be contained by time or distance' (2005: 266). The viewer of lynching imagery, seeing with her body, is rendered affectively open and porous, allowing bodily intensities to entangle with the disfigured corpse depicted in the photograph.

This phenomenon was crucial to the rhetorical power of lynching photography, the circulation of which was a popular tactic taken up by both the prolynching and antilynching movements in the first half of the 20th century. While prolynching circulation of the images was aimed at progressing the racial myths of the animalistic black man versus the enlightened, civilized whites by depicting '[d]ignified, confident white men...pos[ing] with the debased black body' (Finnegan et al. 2011: 102), antilynching efforts attempted to capture the violence behind the scenes of the photographs, which the prolynching movement left out. In using the pictures as 'gruesome but necessary tools to arouse the national conscience' (Wood 2009: 202), the NAACP and other antilynching activist groups were able to expose 'white mobs as savage threats to American civilization' (2009: 184). These rhetorical entreaties relied on the affective power of the body to stir up visceral intensities in the viewer. Just as '[l]ynchings were "made spectacular" by the display of bodies, body parts and souvenirs and by the circulation of photographs, ballads, news, "lurid narratives," and popular film' (Finnegan et al. 2011: 101), antilynching efforts relied on image circulation to engender the recognition of the viewer's trace within the abject body, in contrast to the violent, barbaric white mob.

Similarly, what the #HandsUpDontShoot images offer rhetorically is the contrast between the militarized, mostly white police force and the non-violent,

1. composed, mostly black protesters. Although the majority of tweeted photos  
 2. that contained the #HandsUpDontShoot hashtag depicted black protest-  
 3. ers – either in the streets or in their homes, workplaces or schools – looking  
 4. solemnly at the camera with their hands raised, a handful others showed the  
 5. protesters facing off against police forces that responded with unprecedented  
 6. levels of militarization (Bonilla and Rosa 2015). In one photo, posted on 15  
 7. August, a line of protesters stands with their hands in the air as two police  
 8. officers lead a snarling German Shepherd towards them (dupekillla 2014:  
 9. Figure 3). In another, three officers wearing military uniforms, gas masks and  
 10. armour point assault rifles – at point-blank range – at a young black protester  
 11. with his hands raised (Prince 2014, Figure 4). Finally, a number of images  
 12. depict whole teams of police dressed in full riot gear as armoured tanks roll  
 13. down the street (Bonnet 2014, Figure 5).

14. In many instances, the interplay between the images and the hashtag was  
 15. central in creating the juxtaposition between the protesters and the police force.



51. *Figure 3: dupekillla (2014).*  
 52.



Figure 4: Prince (2014).

While many photos depicted only the protesting crowd or only militarized law enforcement teams, the hashtag linked these two sets of images together to foreground this juxtaposition. Because of the connectivity and contextualization afforded by the hashtag, composed and solemn protesters – both on the ground and within the virtual movement – could be viewed in vast contrast to the threatening and aggressive police teams.

This juxtaposition of images undermines the narrative of the peace-keeping police force working to restrain the rioting mobs of black protesters, a narrative prominently circulated by the conservative media in response to the events in Ferguson: '[Wilson] was menaced by a 6-foot 4-inch, 300-pound kid, 10 minutes fresh from a strong-armed robbery. The officer was defending himself' (Marshall and Watson 2014); 'Their slogan is: no justice, no peace. I guess that's lynch-mob justice' (Marshall and Watson 2014);

And that's, you know, what the common thread between ISIS and what's going on in Ferguson is you have these people who basically believe that to correct a perceived injustice, it's perfectly OK to inflict all kinds of new injustices. Behead guys who have nothing to do with it.

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Figure 5: Bonnet (2014).

Go and loot shops from business owners who are not part of the original problem whatsoever. (Seales 2014)

In the face of rhetoric that continued to paint the black community as animalistic or wild, the public was confronted with an image of the composed black victim of police violence, putting her hands up only to be violently attacked by the savage white authority.

Thus, the affective rhetoric used to combat the narrative about Michael Brown's 'uncontrollable' body was extended to the bodies of the protesters, both virtual and physical. Such a convergence points to the deliberate use of the 'hands up' pose as a remediation, reincarnation, and material extension of Michael Brown's body in peril. This extension, while imbuing the abject body with a sense of liveness that compels us to respond, also marked a certain vulnerability of the protestors. The protestors as extensions of the body in peril made the protest site particularly ironic, because the stance that failed to prevent Brown's death was then taunting police to do it again. This



irony points to a necessary attribute of what Delicath and DeLuca (2003) call *image events*, or images that come to symbolize much larger social phenomena, which transform publics' understandings of the world. As an image event must be, paradoxically, both staged to generate spectacle and revelatory of a social reality, the protesters' performed face-off with the police, captured in the images of #HandsUpDontShoot, revealed the vulnerability of the black body in everyday America, a reality of which the mainstream public continued to demand proof, despite the number of unarmed people of colour dying at the hands of police.

The image as a site of excess is what makes the photos of #HandsUpDontShoot so powerful – these images became a way to focus the overflow of affect surrounding racial profiling, police brutality and the racially disparate application of force within law enforcement. The image of the black body in peril adopting the 'hands up' position constitutes a condensation symbol at which racially marginalized communities may direct their frustration, anger, fear and a whole coterie of other affects that arise from both the specific events of unarmed people of colour being killed by police, and the general experiences of racial subjugation. Hariman and Lucaites offer condensation symbols as words, phrases or images, which surface and focus dispersed fields of intensities and 'provide public audience with sufficient means for comprehending potentially unmanageable events' (2007: 38). In this sense, we may think of the 'hands up' image as a boundary for affective force, operating in the same way that the stream bed can intensify the flow of water by constraining the space through which it travels. While it is impossible to convey the lifetime of experiences contained within the black body, we can come to recognize the images of #HandsUpDontShoot as an infinite regress of meaning, containing phenomena that the white majoritarian public will never fully understand.

### THE BODY IN PERIL AND PARTICIPANT IDENTITY: ADDRESSING DIFFERENCES OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

By framing the images of #HandsUpDontShoot as material extensions of Michael Brown's body, I am not positing a conflation between the identity of Michael Brown and that of a hashtag movement participant recreating his reported pose in a digital image. In analysing the flow of convergence in these subjectivities, I do not wish to undermine the significant role that identity plays in the different ways in which an image is interpellated by diverse bodies, nor do I wish to erase the significance of lived experiential differences. Rather, I believe that there are compelling somatic, embodied impacts to adopting the 'hands up' pose that connect bodies and subjectivities on an affective plane. In exploring the ways in which subjectivity might expand beyond the barriers of the skin, interrogating a possibility of multiplicity in the convergence of bodies does not necessarily preclude maintaining and celebrating the differences among them.

Harold and DeLuca point to a similar tension in blurring the boundaries between subject and object in describing the rhetorical power of Till's body:

...we would not suggest that the experience of viewing this body is easily described as an unproblematic recognition of one's self (and hence, one's vulnerability) in the corpse, but more of an inability to ignore the witnessing as an event – a rhetorical event that requires a response.

(2005: 280)

1. In noting that the #HandsUpDontShoot movement was taken up by white partic-  
 2. ipants as well as participants of colour, there is certainly room for a critique of such  
 3. appropriation of black causes by white bodies. However, rather than unprob-  
 4. lematicly dismissing these lived differences, I look to #HandsUpDontShoot as  
 5. a fielding of a *desire* to make sense of the affective overflow sprung forth from  
 6. Brown's shooting through an intersubjective exchange. We may understand this  
 7. extension of subjectivity as the rhetorical impact of the body in peril – a call to  
 8. not only bear witness, but to respond – although that response, as I will demon-  
 9. strate, materializes differently according to different lived experiences.

10. The flow of affect that circulated through the hashtag movement reveals  
 11. powerful insights, not only about #HandsUpDontShoot as a desire for an  
 12. intersubjective exchange with the body in peril, but about the different ways in  
 13. which participants with varying positionalities incorporated the performance  
 14. within their own lived experiences. Participants of colour were more likely to  
 15. take up the 'hands up' pose outside of the context of the street protests – for  
 16. example within their homes, places of work and schools (Figure 6) – while



Figure 6: FatBoogie214 (2014).



Figure 7: MayaJRodriguez (2014).

white bodies were more frequently depicted adopting the pose as part of a street protest (Figure 7). This distinction can be attributed to the two different intensive desires inherent in these images: the ‘hands up’ pose-as-spectacle versus the ‘hands up’ pose-as-embodiment.

In the first, images depicting participants of colour adopting the pose create visibility around the often-invisible vulnerability that black bodies continue to face in a society that retains historical legacies of colonialism, slavery and segregation. ‘Othered’ bodies are often consumed as spectacles within the public – especially in the sense that the black body is constructed as inherently suspicious in the eyes of law enforcement. The hashtag movement #DrivingWhileBlack attempts to shed light on this phenomenon, by framing the very act of being a person of colour as a punishable crime, which police continually use to validate acts of racial profiling (Harris 1999; Hayne 2014). #HandsUpDontShoot, by confronting the digital public with the embodied narrative of vulnerability inherent in the ‘hands up’ pose, forces us to consider the image of the black body not as an object of scrutiny, but as an extension of the subjectivity possessed by the black body in peril. The fact that these images depict black bodies adopting the pose outside of the contexts of the Ferguson protests and within private life illustrates that the consumption of the black body continues to haunt and follow these communities within whatever spaces they happen to inhabit.

In the second instance, the pose-as-embodiment may reveal an attempt to create an intersubjective exchange with Brown’s body by participants of

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1. colour as well as white participants. Perhaps an attempt to avoid the further-  
 2. ing of racial violence in consuming the black body-as-spectacle and to instead  
 3. *be consumed* by the movement, the adoption of the pose by white protest  
 4. participants may illustrate that in the case of Michael Brown, the recognition  
 5. of the trace of the self within the body in peril may reach across certain identity  
 6. barriers. The bodies that could not participate in the pose-as-spectacle  
 7. phenomenon because of the differences in the way those bodies are consumed  
 8. by the public were interpellated by the pose-as-embodiment call as their  
 9. mode of participation, indicating, perhaps, a desire to achieve an intersubjective  
 10. exchange with the black body in peril as an embodied way of knowing.

11. Although these affective calls surfaced differently within the movement  
 12. according to different positionalities and identities, the subjective transforma-  
 13. tion that they revealed indicates more of a convergence than a separation. As  
 14. Harold and DeLuca discuss in terms of how Emmett Till's body rhetorically  
 15. affected audiences of varying identities:

16. Till's body forced a reconfiguration of the self along different lines. The  
 17. utter horror of his death for some who witnessed his corpse surely punc-  
 18. tured a sense of a safe, complete self. For others, it simply intensified  
 19. a vulnerability of which they were already well aware. Either way, the  
 20. boundaries of the witnessing subject were, in some sense, transformed.  
 21. (2005: 280)

22. Again, the act of witnessing can be seen as a rhetorical event that compels a  
 23. response. The response of embracing and foregrounding the body in peril –  
 24. while not wholly unproblematic in the ways that the appropriation of the  
 25. cause by white participants may be seen as recentring whiteness – reveals a  
 26. desire that was stirred by Michael Brown's abject body. The affect embodied  
 27. in the 'hands up' pose – encompassing the vulnerability that racial minorities  
 28. experience in everyday society – was interpellated and then enacted by hash-  
 29. tag movement participants in an effort to expose and embrace the abject. In  
 30. a performance of embodiment, Brown's subjectivity was expanded into the  
 31. virtual, where the body in peril could be made visible as an agent of social  
 32. discourse.

### 33. CONCLUSION

34. In the aftermath of Brown's shooting, #HandsUpDontShoot and similar  
 35. movements meant to generate an intersubjective exchange with the body in  
 36. peril continued to elude common classifications of hashtags as ephemeral  
 37. trends and flashes in the pan. Perhaps this is due to the continual resurfacing  
 38. of justice denied to Michael Brown and his family: in November 2014, a grand  
 39. jury declined to indict Darren Wilson, and in March 2015, a federal investiga-  
 40. tion of Ferguson police found a pattern and practice of discriminatory policing  
 41. as well as the circulation of racist e-mails among employees (Cloherty and  
 42. Levine 2015). Furthermore, the awakened scrutiny surrounding police treat-  
 43. ment of racial minorities did not prevent the subsequent deaths of additional  
 44. unarmed men of colour: of the 62 unarmed victims of lethal force by police in  
 45. the first half of 2015, two-thirds were black or Hispanic (Kindy 2015), includ-  
 46. ing Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old black man who died in police custody from a  
 47. spinal injury after being transported unsecured and handcuffed in the back of  
 48. a police van (Payne et al. 2015).

Or perhaps the #HandsUpDontShoot movement constitutes both a reflection and shaping force of a raised collective consciousness regarding racially based police killings in the United States. For example, the weeks and months following Brown's death saw a resurgence of the affective intensity surrounding the choking death of Eric Garner. The phrase 'I can't breathe' – the last words heard uttered by Garner before he was killed – began to make its way through the discursive space (also in the form of the hashtag #ICantBreathe). Numerous athletes from the National Football League and National Basketball Association wore 'I Can't Breathe' shirts before games to protest Garner's death, and similarly, five members of the St. Louis Rams walked onto a field for a game with their hands raised in the 'hands up' pose to show solidarity with the Ferguson protesters (Martin 2014).

Disturbingly, these athletes received death threats after they used their public profiles to speak out against racially motivated police brutality (Martin 2014), illustrating how the flow of affect emanating from the virtual extension of Brown's body constitutes a transference of bodily peril from victim to activist. Of course, these athletes' demonstrations took place on playing fields, not on Twitter, but it would be difficult to argue that the pose-as-trope would have circulated or taken on its distinct meaning without the formation of the hashtag movements. By taking an ecological approach to the media landscape of #HandsUpDontShoot, the reframing of embodied risk – through the reconceptualization of what a virtual body is and how it can function – can be seen as a response to critics of digital activism, which some have classified as 'slacktivism' because it does not put one's body on the line to the same extent as 'high-risk activism' (Gladwell 2010). However, a virtual embrace of the body in peril can engender very real consequences to movement participants, who subsume themselves in the vulnerability that invites such lethal force. By looking at the flow of subjectivity from the body in peril to those of the movement participants, the virtual can be seen as a material sphere where the body – rather than being passive or absent – is active in its entanglement within affective assemblages. The body within the virtual can be remapped so that online protests that begin by *standing with* become transformed by the act of *standing within* the body in peril.

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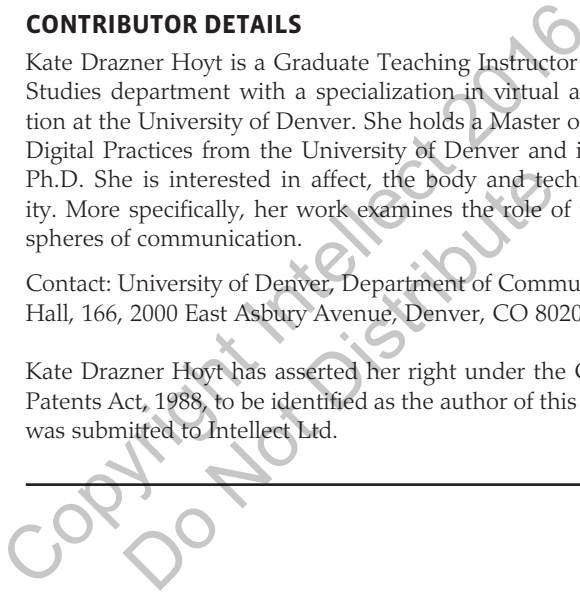
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**CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS**

Kate Drazner Hoyt is a Graduate Teaching Instructor in the Communication  
 Studies department with a specialization in virtual and digital communica-  
 tion at the University of Denver. She holds a Master of Fine Arts in Emergent  
 Digital Practices from the University of Denver and is working towards her  
 Ph.D. She is interested in affect, the body and technology-human hybrid-  
 ity. More specifically, her work examines the role of the body within virtual  
 spheres of communication.

Contact: University of Denver, Department of Communication Studies, Sturm  
 Hall, 166, 2000 East Asbury Avenue, Denver, CO 80208, USA.

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