

Blogging While Black: a critical analysis of resistance discourse by black female bloggers

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Abstract

Participation in public discourse has always been limited for marginalized groups in society. Previous research examines internet blogging as a place for individuals and communities to participate in the political process. Minority bloggers may use blogs as means of mobilizing their readers around particular political causes and issues. While this work causes us to consider blogging as an avenue of incorporation into mainstream political participation, it does not chart the ways in which blogging may be used as subversive act to resist oppression by Black women in particular. This analysis attempts to account for the ways community conversations can function as an act of resistance even when overt political motivations and advocacy are not the primary goal. Gossip has previously been considered for its usefulness in managing female relationships and as a subversive act by women. Within a Black Feminist Epistemology, Black female gossip blogs are considered a possible site for resistance to oppression at three levels: the personal, the communal and the institutional. This analysis considers how a black feminist dialectic is used by certain gossip bloggers and abandoned by others. A discussion follows with implications for new media space as a tool for the continued proliferation of resistance of oppression by Black women and other marginalized groups.

Keywords

black feminism; gossip; resistance; blogs.

While much of the internet, particularly the blogosphere is dominated by Western white men, there is increasingly an interest in discovering how marginalized groups may use blogs to further their own participation in the democratic process. Previous literature has examined the use of blogs by non-dominant groups, however the lens used for this examination is far too often that of the dominant culture. If we are to understand the use of new media technology by groups that have traditionally been kept out of the political process it is important that our epistemology is one that allows for diverse ways of understanding the production of knowledge and meaning making. Baym offers that qualitative inquiry, particularly in online spaces requires us to change our epistemologies from that of ‘discovering and finding’ to ‘constructing and making’ (Baym, 2009).

African American women are a group who exists in a unique position between multiple systems of oppression. This has traditionally placed the group, and discourse within the group, outside of the dominant structure of the confines scientific knowledge production. Therefore, it is important to explore blogs as sites where black women interrogate the intersectionality of race and gender from a black feminist perspective. Exclusion from the public discourse has led many marginalized groups to find alternate way to sustain themselves as a community and engage in democratic society. Forms of communication often change to accommodate positionality and lack of access to communication technologies. As new media technology expands it is increasingly important that research takes into account the perspectives of the media users/producers being studied and the interconnectedness between internet and life-world in which it is situated (Baym, 2009).

Communication research frequently explores the uses of blogs in self-expression, activism and political organization. However, a gap exists in the research that directly addresses how Black women in particular use blogs in ways that may differ in important ways from the dominant culture. Specifically, from a black feminist epistemology, research must interrogate spaces can be used in non-traditional ways to subvert dominant discourse and offer validation for personal ways of; knowing and writing, narrative and dialogue rather than debate, validation of emotion, and personal accountability. This analysis attempts to account for the ways community conversations can function as an act of resistance even when overt political motivations and advocacy are not the primary goal. Black gossip blogs are examined using a discourse analysis which evaluates the blogs for the ways they may be used to combat multiple levels of oppression including the personal, the communal and the institutional (Collins, 2000).

The previous literature in the fields of communication and sociology on blogging, gossip and African American feminist thought informs this study.

Blogging the Social and Political

Previous literature has explored blogging as a activity that serves varying purposes. Blogging motivations may be best understood as generally serving as a individual social activity or means of activism and political participation. Blogs are often considered a form of self-expression similar to that of journaling. This occurs mainly because the initial structure of blogs resembled that of a personal diary (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004). As a means of self expression blogging may be used to release tension, express opinion or form ideas in the process of 'thinking by writing and seeking feedback (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004). While blogging is often used as a means of self-expression, coalescence around activist causes is an increasingly important use of internet blogs. Community building, especially as it relates to activism is a tool used by bloggers to voice dissent with politics, organizations and societal institutions. Kahn and Keller (2004) describe the activism on the part of bloggers as revolutionary in its creation of new oppositional spaces which transform everyday life and discourse. They warn however, that even in these new spaces promotion of dominant discourses of domination may still exist. This 'contested terrain' is therefore a valid and important site for inquiry (p.94) as the environment continues to expand and include more voices outside of the mainstream (Ekdale, Namkoong, Fung, & Perlmutter, 2010). Researchers interested in the use of blogs to further an activist agenda have often focused on how organized political movements construct and maintain blogs (Best & Keller, 2001; Couldry & Curran, 2003). However, the literature has focused too often on literal expression of political organization. While political blogs certainly act as an organizing tool for communities, including marginalized groups, we must contend with the fact that these groups often organize and create dialogue in spaces outside of what may be traditionally expected.

As Tremayne (2007) explains, every new form of media research must concern itself with both the presentation of content and the way in which users consume said content. Pole (2010) suggests that minority bloggers may use blogs as means of mobilizing their readers around particular political causes and issues. While this work causes us to consider blogging as an avenue of incorporation into mainstream political participation, it does not chart the ways in which blogging may be used in seemingly apolitical ways as a means of resistance. Further, it does not allow for non political sites to be treated as equally valid as locations where important

political discourse about race, gender, sexuality may take place. Whether or not authors of blogs and their participants view their participation as political in nature, their actions may still act to resist dominant ideology (Scott, 1990). In this sense, they function very similarly to overtly political blogs, which as Farrell & Drezner (2008) explain “frame political debates and create focal points for the media as a whole”. This study seeks to offer gossip sites as a source of both intentional and non-intentional subversive resistance to dominant discourse and ideology. In this context a community can meet together and discuss and challenge oppression both through their writing and through their very existence outside of the control of popular press.

The Social and Subversive Uses of Gossip

Gossip has previously been considered for its usefulness in managing female relationships (Jones, 1980) and as a subversive act by women (Ayim, 1993; Collins L., 1993). Gossip manages the group identity as well as providing social space for women to negotiate femininity. While gossip as a communicative practice has a history as long as human communication itself, new media technology has provides a new space for exploration. Gossip is a form of cultural capital which affords those ‘in the loop’ with knowledge that affords power and status. Celebrity gossip in particular serves a particular function in strengthening bonds among women. Because this gossip is not specifically about anyone within the participant’s social circle, the fear of disparagement is avoided and instead is replaced with discourse that is unifying. As Feasey (2008) explains, “The latest gossip [is] understood as, and deliberately coveted because, it act[s] as a point of conversation among young women. It [is] as if an understanding of celebrity ‘trivia’ served as a connection between women, with readers being united by an appreciation of a particular media text”. While Feasey discusses readers use of gossip magazines, the use of gossip blogs holds the same possibility for communal sharing of knowledge and management of relationships online.

Recent research on celebrity gossip blogs discussed celebrity gossip as malicious discourse (Fairclough, 2009) or a resurgent trend of old practices of journalism (Meyers, 2009). This research again excludes the ways in which African American women use this activity in ways that may differ from dominant American culture. Because this online space provides the opportunity for feedback from readers, this communal work done in such a space becomes even more apparent. In the case of Black female gossip blogs, the online space may serve as a site of unification for a group of women who may otherwise be separated by geography or socio-economic status. Since gossip has been historically linked to women, it is often assumed a

trivial communicative act. However, previous literature has also demonstrated the use of gossip as a subversive practice by marginalized groups (Chidgey, Payne, & Zolb, 2009; Wickham, 1998). Gossip has often been crucial to the active resistance of domination and oppression.

Black Feminism and the Matrix of Domination

White feminism traditionally has focused on oppression in terms of gender while ignoring issues of race, class, and sexuality. In resistance to this marginalization, Black feminism and womanism were forged. Black feminism was developed to call attention to the multiple oppressions experienced by women of color, reflecting and defining their everyday experiences in their own terms. Within academic research, Patricia Hill Collins describes the experiences of Black scholars as “outsiders within” who possess a “distinct view of the contradictions between the dominant group’s actions and ideologies” (Hill Collins, 2000, p.11). However, research on the experiences of Black women in terms of the unique processes of knowledge distribution through personal and mediated communication often goes unexplored. Black feminist epistemology then requires scholars to grapple with ways of knowing that often fall outside of dominant societal constraints (Anderson and Collins, 1992). As womanist Anthropologist Linda Thomas (1998) explains,

Reconstructing knowledge means tearing down myths that have paralyzed communities, and recreating truths which have been buried in annals that contain vast sources of knowledge... Inclusive construction of knowledge denotes exploring sources that culturally may be vastly different from our own epistemological points of departure. It may be knowledge based on human experience as well as theory; and it decidedly involves inclusion of the ideas, theories, orientations, experiences, and worldviews of persons and groups who have previously been excluded.

Such research calls on us a scholars to reexamine ideas of intellectualism and the ways in which black women who do the work of intellectuals have historically been forced outside the world of academia. Hill Collins (2000) explains that we must examine the work of Black women writers and consider the ways in which their writings and behaviors are a philosophical statement which is both scholarly and activist in nature (p.15). The actions of Black women which actively challenge dominant discourse serve as a means of resistance to oppression.

Previous research insists that in order for an action to be considered resistant it must include both action and opposition (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). Weitz defines resistance as including “actions that not only reject subordination but do so by challenging the ideologies that support that subordination (Weitz, 2001, p.670). As she explains, resistance should be done in public, by the collective, within sight of the powerful. Hill Collins clarifies, racism has created separate communal structure for African Americans within which a culture of resistance may exist apart from the dominant structure (Hill Collins, 2000, p.226). This asks us to see oppression and resistance operating at multiple levels which function in a ‘both/and’ manner, rather than ‘either/or’. We must consider the activity of blogging as well as the decision to read and comment on another’s blog as action in this context. The primary focus of *Black Feminist Thought*, is the introduction of the ‘matrix of domination’ as a means of explaining the oppression experienced and resisted by women of color. The matrix is explored at three levels: the personal, the communal/cultural and the institutional.

Personal

Each individual possess a personal biography which holds within it all of the narratives, experiences and identities that construct the unified whole. For African American women, this may include race, gender, class, sexuality, etc. Because of the unique experiences and motivations of the individual, circumstances may be understood and internalized differently. Thusly, each personal biography is unique and recognizes the agency of the individual, seeing the individual body as both an object and agent in social practice. At the personal level, individual practices self-definition which is the first puzzle piece in forming a cohesive resistance discourse for the collective. However, the power of these individual acts of resistance should not be castigated as being of lesser importance that the work done by the community. As Hill Collins reminds us, “Black feminist thought speaks to the importance African American women thinkers place on consciousness as a sphere of freedom (Hill Collins, 2000, p.227).” Thusly, if the individual has the power to restructure their own biography and in essence free themselves from the dominant narrative they have in fact resisted oppression the personal level. Blogging may provide the space for Black women to participate in the re-telling of personal narrative and restructuring of one’s individual story.

Communal/Cultural

Blogging also acts as means of learning on the part of the cultural group and creating a shared sense of meaning through collective action. The personal biography is connected in significant way to culture which surrounds it and help provide a context of meaning. This level is particularly powerful as community ideology is infested with dominant thought which continues to oppress Black women from within. The power to control and dominate a group from within has been explored by the work of Fanon (1963) and Woodson (1933) as well. While these authors explore in brilliant ways, the ways in which people of color are oppressed at the communal level, Hill Collins complicates this literature by expressing the unique capacity of African American women to be communally oppressed at both a racial and gender level. Communal resistance by African American women exists in the relationships formed where experiences are both validated and challenged in the larger system of oppression.

Institutional

Bonilla-Silva (2006) articulates a profound change in the way racism is exercised and articulated. While Jim-crow racism was rooted in biologically based notions of inferiority of certain races, and usually overtly expressed by the public; Bonilla-Silva explains that covert behaviors and words are now used to reinforce discrimination, segregation and inequality at an institutional level. Oppression at the institutional levels marginalized the lives of Black women in spaces that could and should be used for empowerment such as schools, churches, media and other formal organizations (Hill Collins, 2000, p.228). However, black women have historically, and continue to produce work which challenges the hegemonic order and provides a critique within these institutions. Resistance of such institutions is inherently political in nature as it seeks to undermine the dominant legal or social structures that keep racism and sexism intact.

Rationale for Study

Previous research has demonstrated the importance blogs may have in creating public forums for political discourse. Blogging has been examined in relation to its potential for fostering community activism and space for political debate. More recently minority bloggers have been considered for their potential to use online spaces to break into dominant discourse and emerge as new political sphere. However, these studies have excluded the possibility that blogs that exist outside of the overt political realm may also function in potentially political ways. Particularly, from a Black feminist epistemology, the conversations of black women may occur in settings that are often excluded as valid within academia. This study therefore seeks to

examine the online gossip behaviors of black women online for their potential to contribute to a discourse of resistance. Audre Lorde writes that black female writers must manage "the external manifestations of racism and sexism with the results of those distortions internalized within our consciousness of ourselves and one another" (Lorde, 1984, p.147). Using a typology crafted from Patricia Hill Collins' work on the levels of oppression faced by African American women, this study will examine Black celebrity gossip blogs and the ways in which they resist or tolerate oppression at three levels: the personal, the communal and the institutional, uncovering the ways in which Black women 'talk back' (Hooks, 1988) to systems and structure from which they are excluded or exploited.

Analysis

This study examined the content of two popular celebrity gossip blogs that were established by and are written by Black female authors: *The Young Black and Fabulous* (theybf.com), started by 'Natasha K.' and *Necole Bitchie* (necolebitchie.com) founded by 'Necole'. Both authors remain the primary contributors to the blogs. Each was selected for their popularity and the press they have received within African American media outlets. Necolebitchie.com is currently rated in the *Top 10 Urban Blogs on the internet* by Electronic Villager blog rankings and was nominated Best New Blog and Best Gossip Blog by the 2008 & 2010 *Black Weblog Awards*. TheYBF boasts of over 13 million readers a month, describing itself as the "perfect mix of gossip, entertainment, and swagger". The analysis occurred over the period of two months, from February 25th - April 25th. Original posted content was examined which included, pictures and stories posted on the main webpages as well as content links provided in the text. Links included archived content categorized by topic. On each sight, readers comments were totaled at the bottom of each blog entry. Comments were considered and explored for common themes which emerge en mass from readers. Additionally, the architectural structure of sights was considered along with frequency, type and distribution of advertising content. Each sight was updated with new blog posts with an average frequency of 4-5 times per day. Blog posting ranged in length from 100-600 words on average. Every post contained visual imagery which most often included a picture of a celebrity. Emergent themes within each level of oppression as outlined by Hill Collins (2000) are explored.

The Individual – Stepping in and out of the Feminist Box

The individual level of oppression provides the possibility of resistance through self-definition. On each site blog posts resist dominant discourse about black women and reject negative labeling and oppressive representations using both the voice of the author and the celebrities themselves. The nature of the blog posts on Necolebitchie differs from those on TheYBF in the use the celebrity's own words to clarify media rumors or negative press. Blog posts such as "Jennifer Hudson clears up rumors" or "Halle Berry says she's not the marrying kind" speak using the voice of black women discussing their careers and relationships from their own perspectives, often shunning public opinion. This use of personal narrative combats dominant discourse and provides the opportunity to black women to use their own voice in resistance of marginalization.

Self-definition on the part of black women is a political tool used as the first means of combating oppression. The structure of Necolebitchie lends itself more to the use of personal narrative as the blog's author is prominent in pictures and stories. The author, Necole, clarifies in her 'contact' page:

This is a 'blog' site, not a news site. All posts are based on *my opinions and thoughts* on what may already be reported in the media. I am not a journalist nor do I aspire to be. I am a blogger who created this site as a hobby. And yes, I am bias. I only report on artists/celebrities that I like or find interesting. Thanx – Necole (emphasis in original text, Necolebitchie.com).

The acknowledgement of subjectivity provides the opportunity for both the blog's author and readers to create and articulate meaning for themselves outside of the constraints of mainstream media. Each post is signed 'by Necole Bitchie', again demonstrating the voice of the author. Following each post a link to reader comments is represented by the number of people posting replies and the word 'bitching', for example '75 people bitching'. The tie in of the word bitching links the author and readers giving each a unique and equivalent voice on the site. In this way the readers participate in storytelling as well, crafting their own narrative and shaping the communal conversation. This act of self-definition was particularly salient in two areas of discussion: beauty and mothering.

Narratives about beauty emerged in relation to their propensity to deviate or adhere to dominant cultural ideology. While research demonstrates the cultural relativity of beauty, we know that western conceptions of beauty permeate American media content and are often

internalized by sub-cultures in the U.S. Discussions of beauty on both sites often revolve around fashion, hair and make-up. Singer/songwriter Solange receives praise from authors on both sites for deviating from traditional fashion attire and her decision to remove hair weaves and ‘go natural’. The decision of celebrities to show their natural, unprocessed hair occurred with some frequency. On TheYBF, actress Gabrielle Union’s twitpic of her hair without hair extensions or chemical relaxers was posted with headline “SHE IS NOT HER HAIR: Gabby Union Shows Off Her Natural Un-Relaxed, Un-Weaved Hair”. Carol’s Daughter, a beauty line exclusively for women of color is mentioned frequently in posts. These posts signal resistance in their use of personal narrative to define beauty by the individual. There are clear signs of adherence to dominant ideologies of beauty. However, the contrast of such overt acts of oppression with clear celebrations of difference and space provided for articulation of personal ideas of beauty illustrates resistance at the individual level.

Personal narratives regarding black mothering are another salient theme in the blog posts. In the dominant media landscape, professional women, including celebrities, are often judged and/or castigated due to lack of adherence to social norms regarding mothering. Blogs written by and for African American women provide the space to discuss mothering within a communal context but with implications for the individual. Mothers are discussed in a variety of contexts, however personal narrative is used primarily to explain how mothering impacts a female celebrity’s success or failure. Mothers of celebrities are discussed in relation to the success of their children. Women bearing children of celebrities are given a voice on the sites. In the dominant media landscape, often these women are relegated as ‘baby mamas’ with little attention or respect given to the personal endeavors. Both Necolebitchie.com and TheYBF make a point of telling the personal stories of these individuals. Necolebitchie frequently features interviews with Toya Carter, the ex-wife of rapper Lil’ Wayne. One blog post included, under the section heading ‘On holding her own’ this quote: “People thought Tiny and I were going to do a baby momma show. They only knew that I was married to Lil Wayne. But once we did season 2, they knew more about me. My life has changed, and I’m more in the public’s eye. I hear from people who are inspired by my story”. This use of personal narrative to reverses the dominant script, giving agency to the individual and promotes resistance to the oppressive nature of having one’s identity fashioned by others.

The Communal – Re-centering Black Relationships

Communal/cultural oppression is most damaging for its ability to operate from within. Resistance to this form of oppression for black women becomes possible through the nurturing of relationships and through challenges to popular myths and stereotypes about the relationships between African Americans. Each of the blogs has recurring themes of representing positive relationships of African American women with each other and with black men. When reporting on issues of violence within the community a decided stance is taken against such actions. However, as is often the case, oppression is often internalized and rearticulated in black women's writing as well.

Hegemonic masculinity is a pattern of practice that allows men to dominate women. It is not a personality trait of certain men, rather a way of normalizing gender stratification through institutions, culture and interpersonal dialogue (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Even those not enacting hegemonic masculinity per se, are often still complicit in its existence. Both blogs have frequent posts which celebrate the mythical black male hero. The prototype celebrated on the sites is often one that holds fast to patterns of hegemonic masculinity. This is particularly true in terms of physical appearance of black men in photos (body type). Many male athletes and entertainers are pictured with minimal clothing and their sexual exploits described as entertaining and favorable. The myth of the over-sexed black man is centuries old (Davis, 1981). Films, television shows, skewed news reports all play a role in keeping the myth alive. The origin of this damning myth began long before television, late night news reports and blog posts. However the willingness to hold fast to this falsehood must be better understood. In the context of black female writing, clinging to a hegemonic representation of masculinity can be understood as an attempt to create an archetype of a black male hero. Black men are frequently disparaged in mass media in ways that challenge traditional notions of masculinity (status, wealth, employment). Within this larger context celebrated representations of hegemonic masculinity begin to emerge as a way to validate black men in the larger cultural context.

The theme of 'bitching' is carried through in blog author Necole's writings about fashion and beauty. A frequent recurring post is "Bitchie or Not", wherein a black celebrity is featured. Their wardrobe is up for review by the community who determines at large whether the community approves. A similar recurring post is "Who owned the look". This post, while similar in type to TheYBF's "Who ran it?", in which two celebrities (almost always women) are shown wearing the same or similar attire and the readers determine the celebrity who wore it

best. While this is similar to mainstream celebrity sites, the tone and tenor differ of reader responses are an interesting indicator of use of the site to provide communal sharing. On both sites, the authors simply provide an array of pictures with captions including the celebrity name, a description of the outfit in full and the location where the picture was taken. Readers were always divided on who should 'win the contest'. However, negative comments about certain celebrities were often met with backlash. One reader explained "Love Beyonce, but she cannot dress. Sorry." This constant validation was common on the site. Even as certain celebrities were disparaged for attire or actions readers prefaced comments with accolades or were met with backlash from others when too harsh a tone was used.

A frequent theme on both blogs are post regarding the romantic relationships between black celebrities. In cases where African American men are involved in intra-racial relationships, blog posts tend to be more positive in tone and frequent in occurrence. Discussion of these relationships often begins with the use of the husbands surname. For examples entertainers Jay-Z and Beyonce are often discussed as "The Carters" on TheYBF. Both blogs follow the relationship of NBA player Carmelo Anthony and long time girlfriend LaLa. Their recent wedding as the subsequent move to New York received multiple blog postings over the period of 3 weeks. Posts showing LaLa cheering on the sidelines are posted at least once a week. Other professional athletes are discussed but usually only those in their relationships with Black women. The one exception are the relationships of Kim and Khloe Kardashian who are Lebanese sisters who have both dated (or married) Black male athletes. The coverage of these inter-racial relationships does not evoke the same celebratory tone. Stories on the sisters included mockery of musical endeavors, interviews with other celebrities voicing their defense of the two and ridicule of their fashion and beauty. Black women as a group have the most negative views of interracial pairings between black men and white women (Childs, 2005). Often the resentment toward Black man/White woman pairings is dismissed as jealousy. Childs' research indicates it is in fact more readily explained as a reaction to white racism, Black internalization of racism, and what interracial relationships represent to Black women and signify about Black women's worth (Childs, 2005, p.558). Therefore celebration of black love relationships within these contexts acts as a community act of resistance to popular discourse which discounts the worth of black women as relational partners for successful black men.

The Institutional – Fighting the Power

The gaze of the law is not only Western, but as MacKinnon (1989) argues, male as well. While MacKinnon's argument does not deal directly with culture it asks us to interrogate how laws become normalized and unchallenged in society acting the benefit of some groups and the detriment of others. Values of dominant society are of mandated as law and, for many outside the dominant group, the problem with this correlation is obvious. Institutional oppression serves to provide justification for the separation of marginalized groups from organizations and institutions that serve the public good. When institutional oppression functions at its most oppressive, institutions in place to serve society act with specific detriment to certain groups within. Because laws often justify such oppression, resistance at this level challenges not only popular discourse or societal norms, but laws and regulations as well.

Legal issues faced by celebrities are a frequent theme in blog posts on both sites with TheYBF devoting a category section to 'Legal Woes'. Within this area most of the posts discuss celebrities being involved in civil disputes or being fined or given jail time because of tax issues. In most of these, the disdain is reserved for celebrities rather than the government. No challenge is posed to the system of taxation rather to hubris on the part of tax evaders. This framing of tax evaders as deviant differs greatly from the ways black protectionism operates en masse on both sites. Katheryn Russell-Brown (2004), explains that black protectionism is a form of group self-interest, wherein African Americans actively seek to protect other African American (usually men) from negative stereotypes or mistreatment by whites. Black protectionism operates regardless of the group's perception of innocence or guilt. When a black celebrity is accused of a crime, the discourse on the blog posts follow the same sequence of questions laid out by Russell-Brown:

Did he commit the offense? Even if he did commit it, was he set up? Would he risk everything he has to commit this offense? Is he the only person that has committed this offense? Are white people accused of committing this offense given the same scrutiny and treatment? Is this accusation a part of a government conspiracy to destroy the black race? (Russell-Brown, 2004, p.60).

This protection on the part of black women is particular significant in the ways it is used to challenge social and legal institutions. Blogs within the sample period discussed prosecutions and incarceration of black men from crimes ranging from weapons charges, violent crimes, prostitution and drug offenses.

The new ‘Jim Crow’, according to Michelle Alexander is a system of criminal prosecution and incarceration that prevents African Americans from becoming full participants in dominant U.S. society. Through unfair and discriminatory law enforcements practices, sentencing laws and access to adequate defense African Americans are disproportionately imprisoned and have rights taken away after they are released or paroled. The new ‘Jim Crow’ impacts housing, education, access to government resources, voting and jury participation. Each of these means of participating in the economy and in the social fabric of this country has been historically taken away from African Americans as a population since the formation of the U.S. The new ‘Jim Crow’ emerges as a means to both redact laws and civil rights for a population and ensure the economic fortitude of the dominant group through the prison-industrial complex. When celebrities are in jail/prison, the posts tend to regard their release as a celebration with little consideration paid to the reasons behind their incarceration.

Possibilities and Promise

As the literature indicates, the blogosphere provides a platform for marginalized groups to seek and sustain voice in a democracy. Too often scholars have excluded the ways in which these groups may make use of media in ways that are outside of the dominant culture. Gossip has previously been discussed in its use as a means of subversion of dominant discourse on the part of women. Feminist scholars have long argued that the communication patterns of women are often discarded as less valuable and important as political discourse. However, recognizing the possibility of gossip as subversive discourse allows scholars to interrogate the expansion of the public sphere into communities previously excluded from participation.

Patricia Hill Collins (2000), in her seminal work *Black Feminist Thought*, outlines the ways in which black women are uniquely positioned between multiple systems of oppression; including race and gender. From this position of ‘intersectionality’, she argues for a Black Feminist Epistemology which preferences: personal ways of knowing and writing, narrative and dialogue rather than debate, validation of emotion and personal accountability. Black feminist thought and writing combat multiple levels of oppression including the personal, the communal and the institutional. As this study demonstrates, Black women’s writing often happens in spaces outside of Eurocentric positivist systems of knowledge. Writers like Audre Lorde and Alice Walker insist that theory and systems of knowledge that exist outside of what is normalized as scientific, such as narrative, poems, and songs should be considered valuable as well. Hill Collins (2000) explains, “Subjugated knowledges, such as a Black women's culture of

resistance, develop in cultural contexts controlled by oppressed groups” (Collins P. H., 2000, p.230). Black female bloggers must therefore be considered for the ways in which they both are a part of a historical legacy of marginalized black women writers and as an agent of innovation in a new media context. However, as we examine the use of celebrity gossip blogs using this lens, it is imperative that we do not assume that only possibilities of resistance to oppression emerge in this space.

As this study demonstrates, resistance occurs in all levels of oppression: the individual/personal, the communal/cultural and the institutional. At the individual level resistance functions through the use of personal narrative to combat oppression. Communal spaces involved the crafting of shared meaning. Finally the institutional level provides space for challenges to legal and social institutions including media, education and the legal system which may act to marginalize and oppress certain groups. At each of these levels themes emerged in the text which demonstrated the power blogs may have to resist dominant ideology through the voice of black women writers and readers. However validation and support of dominant ideology persists as well. As new media scholar, Zizi Papacharissi explains, “a new public space is not synonymous with a new public sphere. As public space, the internet provides yet another forum for political deliberation. As public sphere, the internet could facilitate discussion that promotes a democratic exchange of ideas and opinions. A virtual space enhances discussion a virtual sphere enhances democracy” (Papacharissi 2002, p.11). This distinction forces us to contend with the promise of the blogosphere as a virtual space and the possibilities that it may become a virtual sphere.

This study provides validation for this space which exists outside of the boundaries of what is traditionally considered appropriate for political discourse and intellectual discussion. Beyond the boundaries of academic positivist research are the everyday conversations through which communities navigate identity and culture. Future research must continue to investigate the use of non-traditional spaces as sites of inquiry and interrogation by black women and other marginalized groups. As scholars, a shift in epistemology creates the potential for incorporation of new ideas and possibilities of resistance to oppression through participation in political discourse.

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