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Black Feminist Thought, Interrupted¹

Dissecting the Voice of Black Feminists in the Blogosphere and their Engagement with Platform Affordances

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty at Virginia Commonwealth University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Media, Art, and Text Department in the College of Humanities and Sciences

**Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, VA**

February 2021

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¹ *Black Feminist Thought, Interrupted* – Title Discussed in Chapter Two

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my Mom, Patricia, for her love, encouragement, and her continued belief in me even though this project took entirely too long! It's this kind of love that inspired my desire to bring the voice of amazing and often unseen Black Women into the frame!

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Dawn G. Johnson

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BFT	Black Feminist Thought
CTDA	Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis
CFC	Crunk Feminist Collective
MAXQDA	Software program designed for computer-assisted qualitative and mixed methods data, text and multimedia analysis
TFW	The Feminist Wire

ABSTRACT

BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT, INTERRUPTED
DISSECTING THE VOICE OF BLACK FEMINISTS IN THE BLOGOSPHERE AND THEIR
ENGAGEMENT WITH PLATFORM AFFORDANCES

By Dawn G. Johnson, Ph.D

A dissertation submitted to the faculty at Virginia Commonwealth University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Media, Art, and Text Department in the College of Humanities and Sciences

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2021

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Archana Pathak, Associate Professor, Dept. of Gender, Sexuality & Women's Studies, Virginia Commonwealth University

Black women that have long searched for spaces to be creative and have voice due to their constant exclusion from mainstream media. In response to this exclusion, black feminists actively formed spaces outside of traditional media by developing black feminist blogs designed to empower the black feminist community and further the advancement of Black Feminist Thought and liberatory theory. This research examined the problem of whether the blogosphere has lived up to its promise of allowing black feminist engagement and dissemination of information, or whether the online arena (platform) represented a microcosm of societal dominant power structures and furthered white oppression and marginalization of black women. Applying Andre' Brock's Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) as methodology, this research explored whether online platforms afford or constrain black feminist voice. Brock's CTDA insisted on a multi-layered approach to theories of technology, one that captured diversity in culture and demographics and how these moments of diversity intersected with the

technological hardware and code. Through examining a purposive sample of 30 blogs from three black feminist blog sites, *Crunk Feminist Collective*, *For Harriet* and *The Feminist Wire*, the results provided that the blog spaces provided a location for the empowerment of black womanhood and did not directly constrain black feminist voice. But rather, black feminist blog writers actively resisted white discourse and focused on self-love and the act of healing the black community, and thus the blog platforms served as a true space of refuge. Yet, voice was indirectly impacted, because black feminist bloggers resisted addressing white oppression, and thus represented a missed opportunity and an attempt to play it safe.

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Dawn G. Johnson was born in Martinsville, Virginia. She graduated from Martinsville High School in Martinsville, Virginia in 1989. She received her Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Virginia in 1993. She received a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Richmond in 1998.

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Site Map (Introduction)

“Our mothers and grandmothers, some of them: moving to music not yet written. And they waited.” (Walker, 1983, p. 232)

My Why (Purpose Statement)

“Guided by my heritage of a love of beauty and a respect for strength—in search of my mother’s garden, I found my own” (Walker, 1983, p. 243). Borrowing from Alice Walker’s famous work, *In Search of Our Mother’s Garden*, my dissertation focused on black^{2 3} women ‘searching for their mother’s garden’, a space of beauty, empowerment, and oneness, as a tool to overcome exclusion from traditionally white media places. Furthermore, this research explored if and how these women carved out spaces for their artistry through their engagement with social media and blogging (Walker, 1983). The premise of searching for their mother’s garden, forged ‘MY WHY’ for the research; particularly, the way in which black feminist bloggers created and expanded spaces that allowed for black feminist enlightenment and expression.

² Throughout this dissertation, I will be using the term black rather than African American. Typically, I have often used these terms interchangeably. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, I am embracing the term black as the more expansive term that is inclusive of black people that extend beyond those of African descent. Further the use of the term black acknowledges both my African roots and my complicated United States existence.

“Today, some people view “black” and “African American” interchangeably. But many have strong opinions that “African American” is too restrictive for the current US population. In part, the term African American came into use to highlight that the experiences of the people here reflect both their origins in the African continent and their history on the American continent. But recent immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean have different combinations of history and experience, so some have argued that the term “black” is more inclusive of the collective experiences of the US population. About 10 percent of the 46.8 million black people in the United States are foreign born,” (Simms, 2018).

³ When using the term black, unless it begins a sentence, I will not use capitalization. I will however capitalize Black Feminist Thought (BFT) to describe a way of thinking, a way of being, and to pay tribute to Patricia Hill Collins’s iconic work.

As a writer, poet, advocate, and an often misunderstood black woman desiring to make an impact, I, too, found space in the blogging realm and created blogs entitled “The Primary Woman” and “The She-Spot--A Place for Female Discourse.” Admittedly, in the midst of my blogging journey, I struggled to balance all aspects of life--working, graduate school, and all of the labor required to develop a blog and add relevant and frequent content. Even more than balancing the work, I grappled to find my words. I struggled with expressing the voice that spoke to my soul in a way that would be appreciated in an online context. I asked myself, “Who am I?” I often used my blog writing as a catalyst for answering questions such as this. Yet, I did not feel that the platforms that I used for my writing spaces (blogger and a free website builder) facilitated my growth. Rather I was stifled in the pages of my content. In creating my own website, I was solely responsible for generating all content, marketing to others, and manually pushing out my message into what felt like an abyss! Using Blogger, I felt camaraderie amongst other bloggers, yet still isolated as I was not amongst my people – other black feminist women, other women that knew my oppression. I found it difficult to hone in on other voices that were like mine. I felt overly exposed and my writing suffered.

For several years, I wrestled with both finding and asserting my voice in online spaces. Ultimately, I realized my voice did not yet exist. In fact, my voice could not be uttered, because I had not learned the words -- the words of **black feminism and Black Feminist Thought**. With my exposure to these topics, my voice became more pronounced and a more accurate depiction of what mattered to me began to emerge. Consequently, as a result of my deep interest in black feminist thought, I began reading and exploring black feminist blogs. Moving through these sites, I recognized a captivating and compelling site for analysis, black

feminist voice. Voice⁴, here, refers to speaking truth. In considering how black feminists articulate their truths via the blog spaces or their voices, I grew deeply interested in three general questions: 1. What is the voice of black feminism that is being articulated in these blogs; 2. Through what platforms is the voice being shared; and 3. how is the voice being enabled or stifled through the platform that is being used? For me, the purpose of this study was to explore the black feminist voice through the online blogging framework.

Additionally, as part of this research, my engagement with the blog texts and my attempt to interrogate and analyze the black feminist voice in this research, it was important to consider how intersecting oppressions impact the voice that is being advanced. Moreover, through applying an intersectional lens to this research, when black feminist voice was considered with platform affordances, it was representative of the differences experienced by black women and white women who both are subject to varying limitations of internet platforms.

The What

“Don’t Let Her Speak, Don’t Let Her Speak!” (Gage, 1881; 1969)

Understanding the purpose for my dissertation began in taking a closer look at Sojourner Truth. Sojourner Truth, a once enslaved woman, and an abolitionist and women’s rights advocate, gave an impassioned speech, “Ain’t I A Woman” at the Women’s Rights Convention in Ohio in 1851. An angry mob of white women and men shouted at Sojourner Truth in an effort to stifle her advocacy for social equality for women. However, Truth persevered in her

⁴ My initial definition of Voice refers to speaking truth and more specifically speaking truth in alternative spaces – blog spaces. Yet, throughout this dissertation as I embrace the historical nature of voice and platform studies, the definition of Voice grows to include the site or dialectical process by which interruptions are enacted or resisted.

determination to speak publicly about women's rights and, in particular, the rights of black women, who were not viewed as human (hooks, 1981).

Sojourner Truth's story was perhaps one of the best-known early examples of how white society attempted to quell the voice of black women and black women's thought. Yet, it was the resolve and bravery of Sojourner Truth (and others) that facilitated access for other black women to speak publicly about injustice and to have a voice amidst the culture of white colonizers that actively seek to silence their voice (hooks, 1981). Additionally, Truth's speech not only provided an example of an attempt to stifle black feminist voice, but also Truth's speech represented historical revisionism. In fact, Truth's speech, initially transcribed by Marius Robinson, a journalist who was in the audience, was later revised by Frances Gage. The speech as given and transcribed by Robinson depicted Truth as a knowledgeable, composed, and well-spoken black woman. Yet, the original narrative was not the acceptable narrative of the time. Twelve years later, Frances Gage with the permission of Robinson, transcribed Truth's speech changing most of the words and layering in a southern slave dialect (Podell). For example, in the speech initially transcribed by Robinson, it is recorded that Truth began her speech by saying: "May I say a few words? I want to say a few words about this matter. I am a woman's rights," (Podell) (Library of Congress, 1851). In the Gage version, it was recorded that Truth began her speech by saying: "Well, chillen, whar dar's so much racket dar must be som'ting out o'kilter. I tink dat, 'twixt de niggers of de South and de women at de Norf, all a-talking 'bout rights, de white men will be in a fix pretty soon," (Podell). By brutally adapting Sojourner Truth's words, Gage's patriarchal slaughter of truth (Truth) provided an early demonstration of a black woman's actual voice being destructively transmuted through white gaze for political purposes—and portrayed

the enslaved and former enslaved persons as inhuman, white men's commodity, and as foolish negroes.

Historically, white supremacy systematically excluded blacks and other marginalized populations from participation in traditional forms of political engagement through law and social practice. As a result of this exclusion, blacks were forced to establish other spaces in which to engage (Hill, 1977). While dominant groups also engaged in spaces outside of public view, marginalized populations have been relegated to these spaces and have more at stake, making it a necessity to find and form spaces that reside outside of dominant culture. For many, the blogosphere had been co-opted as this space. In particular, since white media continued to mute or obscure black voices, the blogs of black people represented a rebellious entry into the political discussion and activism and have exemplified an uncharted venue for engagement (Steele, 2017). For black feminists (black women) that sit at the intersection of oppression, the blogosphere provided a place to engage in Black Feminist Thought; and through these black feminist blogs, we heard the resounding once suppressed voice of the oppressed, the shrieks and cries against injustice, the attempts to overcome the silence of the enslaved, and the resilience of resistance.

The Problem

As a result of the marginalization of black women in white media, black feminists actively formed spaces outside of dominant culture by developing black feminist blogs designed to empower the black feminist community and further the advancement of black feminist thought, or at least in theory. White media deprived blacks, writ large, from participation in discussions around politics and the injustices that marginalized people face. Yet, black people amplified their voices, formed online communities, and ultimately strengthened their opposition

to these white media attempts at suppression. The dialogue within these spaces was purposely obscured from white patriarchal systems and centered in black interests and black needs (Steele, 2017). In this research, I examined the problem of whether the blogosphere has lived up to its promise of allowing Black Feminist Thought and engagement to promulgate or whether the online arena was a microcosm of dominant power structures which inherently existed in the blog platform, at large.

The Framework

From the onset of the blogosphere in the 1990s until the present, millions of people found refuge in blogging and used it as a tool and space for expression. This was particularly true for black people that long searched for spaces to be creative and have voice despite their constant exclusion from mainstream media. In fact, black people used online forums as a way to connect with members of their community (Williams & Gonlin, 2017). Robin Boylorn, founder of *Crunk Feminist Collective*, asserted that she used her “platform as a blogger in much the same way as [she does] as a scholar, to bring visibility and voice to marginalized populations, and to raise awareness around social injustices,” (Boylorn, 2013). Whittling away at oppression and injustice, black feminist bloggers embodied spaces that allowed for enlightenment, empowerment, and voice.

To adequately consider the research questions around the black feminist voices that were being articulated in black feminist blogs, my research was informed by Black Feminist Thought and theorists such as the Combahee River Collective, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde and many others (Collins, 2009); (River Collective, 1981); (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). My research critically examined the voice of black feminist bloggers and deeply explored how it (voice) functions, as well as the ideologies that the voice represents. The

goal of the research was to advance the notion that black feminist voice has been steeped in multiple intersections and shared meanings. Further, this research delved into the community of black feminist bloggers excluded from mainstream media. Applying the theoretical frameworks of Black Feminist Thought, Intersectionality, and Platform Studies, my primary goal examined how Black Feminist Thought was communicated and shaped in these blogs and to highlight the black female narrative that existed in the blogs. Building on my primary goal, I sought to expand the field through integrating an analysis of the black feminist voice with an analysis of platform studies.

By confronting the premise that online platforms provided spaces that allowed for open participation and places that allowed people to connect and share individual perspectives, (Gillespie, 2017), I engaged the work using a platform studies analysis. As part of this research, I examined whether the platform allows for the full voice of black feminist thinkers. This work deepened the discussion regarding whether and/or how the internet has been structured with affordances and constraints that potentially stifle creative thought and the advancement of Black Feminist Thought. Further, my dissertation investigated a relatively not discussed topic, the engagement of Black Feminist thought in conjunction with platform studies.

Research Questions

While there was a growing interest by white media outlets of black bloggers, there remained much to be investigated about the voice of black feminist blogs themselves. As a goal for this research, I desired to amplify conversation in academic scholarship about black feminists' conversations online and to understand whether the platform was furthering or impeding the conversation. By continuing to investigate online sites and exploring three general questions, as part of this dissertation, I interrogated the following questions:

1. How is black feminist voice being articulated through black Feminist blogs?
 - a. How does this voice function?
2. How are black feminists operating in black feminist spaces in contrast with their ability to participate in traditional media spaces?
3. Through blogging, how do black feminists negotiate tensions between liberatory theory and platform affordances?

The Significance

As a black feminist, cultural studies, and digital media studies scholar, interrogating the voice of black feminists in blogs and examining how voice functioned and the ideologies represented was paramount to my research goals. My work became deeply significant, because it shined a light on Black Feminist Thought and the work of black feminists that had been completed online. My dissertation tackled naming this work and naming this voice, with all of its interjections (the platform). My dissertation provided an analysis of platform studies with respect to black feminist voice. My work intensified the discussion regarding whether and/or how the internet had been structured with affordances and constraints that potentially stifle creative thought and the advancement of liberatory theory. For me, I deemed that the greatest significance occurred through my ability to shine a light on my heroes--those amazing black feminists that shaped my future work and those that have provided voice for students like me--and for all the marginalized persons that have had to carve a space in which to be heard. Further, the findings provided that while the blog mission statements spoke to furthering liberatory theory, the collective voice of the black feminist blogs failed to address whiteness and white oppression. Thus, voice represented merely a whisper. As such, my research concluded that blogs had lost much of their power and had suffered a symbolic death, as the true work of

liberatory theory now took place in social media, a place that was dynamic and evolving, and one that demanded black feminists respond to white oppression.

The Process

My research applied Andre' Brock's method, Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis, which was a relatively new approach grounded in critical race theory and cultural research as a tool to examine power and privilege in online spaces. Brock developed a multi-pronged approach that studied the work generated by often marginalized voices and how these voices intersected with the technology or online platform. Brock provided that the use of this methodology would provide an enriched perspective that was not possible by only looking at the culture or the technology through white normative approaches.

Therefore, this critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) studied the content of three popular black feminist blogs that were established by predominately black female writers. I selected *Crunk Feminist Collective*, *The Feminist Wire*, and *For Harriet*⁵, well-known, popular sites with extensive readership and longevity. Both the *Crunk Feminist Collective* and *The Feminist Wire* touted more than one million in annual readership, (Press, 2017) ;(Wire, 2016). *For Harriet*, a multiplatform blog site, provided that it had over 2 million visitors per month and has been featured on distinguished media sites like the New York Times and Ebony and was chosen as a must share site of 2014 by News One, (Foster, 2016). These blogs and blog writers represented pioneers that focused on advancing a feminist agenda that specifically provided a lens for Black Feminist Thought. While the selected blogs varied in the way they

⁵ www.crunkfeministcollective.com; www.forharriet.com; www.thefeministwire.com

presented material relevant to topic of feminism, they shared the commonality of being created by black women and highly read.

Through using critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) as a method for examining the texts of *The Feminist Wire*, *Crunk Feminist Collective* & *For Harriet*, I interrogated the articulation of voice in these black feminist blogs; I also examined how the bloggers negotiated tensions between Black Feminist Thought and platform affordances. Using Black Feminist Thought and platform studies as my main frameworks, I analyzed whether the platforms being used by the blogs adequately enable liberatory theory as envisioned and represented through the blog's written mission statements, goals and blog entries.

Further, this dissertation incorporated a review of the mission statements written by the three blog founders – (*Dr. Tamara Lomax – TFW*), (*Dr. Brittney Cooper, Dr. Susana Morris, Dr. Robin Boylorn – CFC*), and (*Kimberly Foster- For Harriet*). These mission statements provided an additional method for understanding voice in black feminist spaces. Additionally, through deeply reading these mission statements, I was able to gain a better understanding of the work that was taking place in the blogs and the vision of the founders. Moreover, I used this method to engage the founders to understand whether the blog creators consider black feminist tenets in their routine decisions about the blogs.

The Definitions

Voice referred to the discourse of speaking one's truth. For the purposes of this dissertation, speaking truth required seeking alternative spaces—blog spaces where theoretically white patriarchy did not dominate. Throughout this dissertation, I embraced the historical nature of voice and platform studies. With that, the definition of voice matured to include the site or

dialectical process by which interruptions were enacted or resisted. Voice thus became the intervention between Black Feminist Thought and the platform constraints that exist in the blog space. (Defined in detail in Chapter 2). Throughout the research, voice was labeled as a singular voice for consistency. My research clarifies whether the voice remained singular or plural.

Throughout my dissertation, as indicated in the footnotes, I used the term black rather than African American. Applying Patricia Hill Collins' rationale, it was more important to consider the reasons why Black Feminist Thought exists rather than to obsess over naming and deciding whether Black Feminist Thought should be referred to as black feminism, African American feminist thought, womanism, and so forth (Collins, 1990). Yet for the purposes of consistency, I narrowed the words to black and Black Feminist Thought, both of which embraced black women, black women's theory, and black women's engagement with a feminist theoretical framework.

Additionally, throughout this dissertation, I embraced **platform studies** as part of my theoretical framework. **Platform studies** represented reviewing the connection between information and communication with culture and creativity, and it explored the relationship between the technology and culture – looking specifically at the platform. It facilitated examining whether and how the platform design shaped the work done on the platform, an important tool in understanding blogs and the work being accomplished on the blog site (Bogost & Montfort, 2009).

The Elders

As I contended with black feminist voice, I found it vital to carefully decide how to name the theorists of black feminism and Black Feminist Thought. As I think about traditional white

patriarchal text, if I were to throw out the name of a major theorist, Foucault, the reader nor the sentence would stop to acknowledge who this theorist is. Indeed, white patriarchal theorists and texts lay cemented in the fabric of our everyday lives and considered to be the authorities on everything that matters. Yet, I was challenged with bringing light to black feminist theorists that have often not been regarded by white patriarchal society in the same way. I was conflicted with the choice of elevating the voice of black feminist theorists by carefully naming them and their work, while also recognizing that their work was also canonic and should not have to be explained. Yet, “the presence of black women’s collective wisdom challenges [...] prevailing interpretations of the consciousness of oppressed groups,” (Collins, 2000). In that instance, I erred on the side of the thought that black feminist theorists have not been recognized and appreciated for their great work, and as such, I clarified their contributions and named them in each aspect of my work.

Black Feminist Thought Interrupted - What is interruption

For the purposes of this dissertation, I was primarily concerned with Voice – the voice of black women in black feminist blog spaces. Through my commitment to media studies and my focus on race and gender, I very quickly developed deep interest and concern in black feminist communication online, what’s being said online, how it’s being communicated, and whether these voices are being heard. However, as I interrogated black feminist participation online, I confronted the impacts of the platform. In particular, I examined the term “Platform”, now coined THE INTERRUPTER, and black feminist voice as articulated in, on, and through the platform all of which aggrandized into a central theme for this work.

“**Black Feminist Thought, Interrupted**” as the title of the dissertation was significant. In the 1993 memoir and film adaptation entitled, **Girl, Interrupted**, author Susanna

Kaysen grappled with mental illness. The title from the memoir was taken from Jan Vermeer's, Dutch painter, painting, "**Girl, Interrupted at Her Music**" (The Title of Girl, Interrupted, 2010). In her memoir Kaysen explains:

"The 'interruption' was of the predictable life that all of us think we're going to live. You know, 'First I'll do this, and then I'll graduate from high school, and then I'll go to college, or then I'll get a job, and then maybe I'll get married and have some children.' And my life just blew up. It took a very different turn. You certainly don't say when you're nine years old, 'Gee, I think I'd like to be in a mental hospital when I'm 18.' That's not anybody's ambition. And it's a real interruption. Especially when you're in for quite a long time, which I was." (The Title of Girl, Interrupted, 2010)

I selected "**Black Feminist Thought, Interrupted**" thinking particularly of Kaysen's statement "the interruption was of the predictable life that all of us think we're going to live." Specifically, I considered United States black women beaten by the impacts of slavery and the crushing weight of white patriarchal systems; and black women oppressed and marginalized in every way – through their identity, their respectability, their home, by the white man, by the white woman, by the black man; knowing that surely this is not the life we thought we would live. Black women continued to experience a "real interruption" in what anyone would think life would be. Mainly, black feminist writers experienced two types of interruptions that are in opposition to what is expected; the interruption of white patriarchal society that stifled their voices through traditional media formats and the online interruption by the platform that potentially shaped voice. With the awareness of THE INTERRUPTION and this frame in mind, I desired to accomplish the following goals: 1) Introduce internet studies and blogging as a medium; 2) Reframe black feminist thought in the context of the interruption; and 3) Discuss platforms as alternative spaces, technology, and political places.

The Outline

In Chapter One, the Introduction, I presented my study and stated the problem. Further, as part of the first chapter, I also outlined the theoretical framework, shared research questions, defined terms and expressed its significance to the field of digital media studies. Chapter Two, the Literature Review was intentionally broken into two sections, as it was designed to walk the reader through the theoretical framework of Black Feminist Thought and definition of voice as seen through the framework of platform studies. Section 1, “Black Feminist Thought Defined,” introduced the overall project, providing a brief overview of the scholarly, methodological and theoretical foundation for the work. I used Section 1 of the literature review to detail the primary theoretical frameworks focusing specifically on the concept of black feminist thought and cultural representation. Additionally, in the chapter, I leveraged intersectionality as a framework to address specifically navigating the intersections of race and gender and the shared meanings that existed as a result. Overall, the first section historically traced Black Feminist Thought and the need to find alternative spaces that allow for activism, political engagement, creativity, and black women’s voices. Further, Section 1 provided a road map for the dissertation and underscored the significance of the research. Section 2 “Voice: Black Feminist Thought Interrupted” represented the core of the dissertation. Specifically, leaning heavily on relevant research, Section 2 defined and operationalized the term voice. As part of Section 2, I illustrated that “voice” represented the contentious intersection between what is written in the blog space and how that text presents in the blogosphere. I demonstrated that voice is the combination of the black feminist blog and the impact of the platform potentially constraining, or not, the way that the voice was represented. Overall, the section illuminated the platform studies concept and featured how this area represented a relatively new focus for the study of digital media. Section 2 provided information about the misconceptions that exist in platform studies and made the case

for why this theory became important in understanding digital media. Applying concepts introduced by Andre Brock, Nakamura and Chow-White, section 2 of the chapter highlighted the problematic nature of the internet and how the internet continued to advance white patriarchal structures. Further, in this section, I sought to establish how platform studies was culturally situated and how platforms provided both affordances and constraints. Lastly, the final aspect of Section 2 detailed voice through speaking to black feminist blogging and the interruption of the platform on which they reside.

Chapter Three, “Platforms: Methodological Approach to Studying Black Feminist Blog Spaces” provided research design which detailed my methodology for this dissertation and explained my proposed method of using Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) in conjunction with an analysis of the blog mission statements as written by the blog founders. This chapter brought CTDA into the frame and introduced the concept of a relatively new methodological tool. Theorist, Andre’ Brock, developed CTDA, a method used to examine online discourse. Brock’s CTDA provided a multi-modal approach to studying discourse that happens online. Brock’s approach demanded engagement with the critical cultural framework, engagement with the online discourse or text, and understanding of the technology. This chapter detailed the methodology for sampling the blogs and detailing the black feminist voice in these blogs. Through using CTDA as methodology, in this chapter, I constructed my analysis regarding how black feminists negotiate the tensions between liberatory theory and platform affordances. Further, I interrogated the blog mission statements that were written by the founders as a qualitative method for gaining additional information about how black feminism is being furthered in the blog and the impacts of the platform.

Chapter Four, “Findings and Analysis,” the data analysis detailed the concepts and information that germinated through the close reading and the use of MAXQDA to review and code the data. Through the findings, I identified and brought understanding to the black feminist voice and discussed the impact to that voice as a result of the platform. The chapter also interrogated the blog mission summaries of the three blogs determining that the purpose in each of the three blogs was to advance Black Feminist Thought and to bring understanding and empowerment to black womanhood. This chapter further detailed the code and categories that originated out of applying the method. The larger categories for this section broke down into three categories: Furthering Liberatory Theory, Speaking to Whiteness, and Understanding and Empowering Black Womanhood. Further, this chapter detailed information regarding the accessibility of each of the platforms that were being used as blog sites. This chapter highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of this work and indicated how the information can be generalized to other research. In Chapter Four, the findings provided that even amidst a highly charged and marginalizing political time, the election and administration of President Donald Trump; black feminist bloggers were focused on understanding or empowering black womanhood, and did not directly speak to whiteness. Only a small percentage of the blogs provided a critique of whiteness. As such, while the findings provided that the platform did not directly constrain voice, voice in the black feminist blogs was indirectly mediated. The noble desire to understand and empower black womanhood and the black community only represented a missed opportunity to directly address whiteness and demonstrated that voice had been quelled and quietened. Lastly, in this chapter, I presented my analysis, as well as this chapter described areas for future research.

In Chapter Five, “The Journey, #Afterthoughts,” I further interrogated the analysis and my research questions by reflecting upon the journey and provided additional conclusions. Ultimately, blogs were created as spaces where voice could take place, and for black women and black feminist bloggers, blogs provided alternative spaces where Black Feminist Thought could flourish and be unencumbered. Throughout the research, I made the assumption that black feminists during this time were actively engaging in dialogue that addressed white oppression and that these blog sites would confront whiteness, patriarchy and racism. Yet, my research demonstrated that my assumption was inaccurate. While the platform provided ease of use, it represented an alternative space that was relatively low cost and low effort. In theory, it provided an adequate vehicle for advancing liberatory theory, empowering blackness, AND speaking to whiteness directly. My findings and analysis demonstrated that blog followers have been typically people that are interested in your material – and thus the black feminist blogs were focused mostly on understanding and empowering black womanhood. The findings further provided that while the mission statements spoke to furthering liberatory theory, the collective voice of the black feminist blogs was merely a whisper – not the loud resounding dialogue needed to address whiteness. Based on those findings and analysis, I concluded that my research study had uncovered the death of the blog. I determined that the true work of liberatory theory now took place in social media, a place that was dynamic, evolving, and required black feminists to respond to white oppression as the engagement within social media required a different type of interaction model.

Literature Review – Curated Content

“If you are silent about your pain, they’ll kill you and say you enjoyed it.” (Hurstun, 1986)

To explore Black Feminist Thought in the blogosphere, I delved into scholarly literature focused on black feminism / Black Feminist Thought, blogs, representation, and platform studies to provide the foundation for my research. In order to provide a systematic roadmap for engaging my work, I divided this literature review into three relevant parts. In part one, I closely examine the theoretical framework of BFT. Secondly, I probed the literature around the premise that black feminist blogs and black feminist thought are an attempt to redress black female representation in traditional media sources. In this section, I embraced literature that developed the concept of the interruption, where black feminist bloggers experience the interruption of white patriarchal society preventing voice in traditional media formats and the online interruption by the platform that potentially shapes these voices. Additionally, in section two, I closely examine the literature of platform studies by asking whether the interruption of BFT (via the platform) enables or inhibits voice in black feminist blogs. In the third section of the literature review, I engaged the concept of voice and reviewed literature which spoke to the notion that black feminist blogs and Black Feminist Thought, as a whole, represented a way to mitigate the all too often, silencing and the lack of voice typically experienced by black authors. I selected literature that was pertinent to the topic of Black Feminist Thought, representation of black feminist voices, and the impact of platforms on voice, as these topics were paramount to my current research.

Black Feminist Thought – Who, What, Why

Black Feminist Thought – The Theory, The History

Rather than beginning this discussion by first leaning into the absence of black women from the black liberation and the feminist movement, I chose to acknowledge and make visible that the concept of black feminism and black feminist thinking began well before the groundbreaking statement by the Combahee River Collective. This publication by the Combahee River Collective laid the foundation for revolutionary thinking regarding the topic of Black Feminist Thought.

Before diving into the development of Black Feminist Thought, it became important to lay the historical foundation. As such, the black liberation work that emerged in the United States in 1960's represented "a continuation of both intellectual and activist traditions whose seeds were sown during slavery and flowered during the antislavery fervor of the 1830s" (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 1). In fact, the conceptual history of Black Feminist Thought began with black women who endured the treachery of slavery after being seized from their homeland. As enslaved women living in bondage and abuse, they longed for freedom. In hopes of freedom, these women rebelled in spite of their circumstance and resisted violence, rape, sexual exploitation, mutilation, and family separation. As such, these enslaved women struggled to maintain dominion over their bodies and their voice through the use of rudimentary contraceptives, herbs for home abortions, and by making the heart-wrenching decision to take the lives of their female children to prevent them from being born into a life of such abuse and horror (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). As pioneers in black liberation and Black Feminist Thought, their efforts represented resistance and an attempt to change the narrative of black women for generations to come. While the resistance effort exemplified by modern day Black Feminist Thought can never be wholly juxtaposed against the cruelty of slavery and resistance efforts

employed by enslaved women, a correlation can be made that these women, did in fact, lay the foundation for activism and the early threads of black feminist theory. These threads shaped the creation of our tapestry of thought and resistance, Black Feminist Thought. Moving slightly beyond slavery, the work of the free black abolitionists in the early nineteenth century gave additional context to Black Feminist Thought. Some of the key abolitionists of this movement included Sojourner Truth and Maria Stewart. Both of these women moved in predominantly male dominated space. This was not only problematic because of their blackness, but also because of their woman-ness. In fact, their work was seen as a violation of the definition of womanhood.

Maria Stewart, a free black woman living in the north was very likely the first African American woman to give a lecture about women's rights (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). In this speech, Stewart called upon the daughters of Africa to awaken and demonstrate to the world (particularly the white world) power, nobility, and "exalted faculties," (Stewart, 1995). Stewart called on African American women to recognize their strength and to exude their royal born roots by refusing to succumb to the demands of domestic work but to participate in fields where activism can take place. Like Stewart, Sojourner Truth championed activism and ultimately Black Feminist Thought. During the mid 1800's, Truth was perhaps the most well-known black woman largely for her involvement in abolition and women's rights and for recognizing that black women existed in a double bind situation—oppressed for being black and for being women (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). While the work of these black feminists and activists was not labeled or categorized as BFT, this work set the stage for the work that was to come and provided the "link for black women to their activist foremothers," (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 35).

In general, drawing from their ancestral roots in activism, black feminists crafted Black Feminist Thought as a response to the Feminist Movement and Black Liberation Movement. Black women existed on the outside of both groups. They were racially oppressed by white feminists and sexually oppressed by black men, respectively. “All too often, “black” was equated with black men and “woman” was equated with white women. As a result, black women were an invisible group whose existence and needs were ignored,” (Hull, Bell-Scott, & Smith, 1995, p. 1). Recognizing the dichotomous nature of black women’s existence, Black Feminist Thought was born to bring to light theory and practices that would address the intersectional aspects of the black woman (Hull, Bell-Scott, & Smith, 1995).

Black Feminist Thought (BFT) became a framework for marginalized people, specifically black women, to contemplate and to resist the ever present patriarchal obstacles that served to silence their voices and diminished the unique experiences of marginalized groups. Black Feminist Thought operated in direct opposition to white male patriarchy and white feminism. Further, BFT provided a mechanism for understanding and sharing the lived experiences of black women and other marginalized people.

Black Feminist Thought represented an outcry against the white narrative that was ubiquitous in both First and Second Wave feminism. The First Wave, in the 19th century focused on women’s suffrage and the right to vote, while the Second Wave in the 1960’s – 1980’s focused on increasing equality for women through actions around equal pay, abortion, and so forth. Ultimately, the essentialist feminist movements provided an overarching message a message that all women were the same. However, this notion was based on the experiences of middle class white women (Collins, 1990) and thus represented a gross miscalculation related to black women. In fact, black women in the United States experienced a violent and tumultuous

history, and vastly different economic conditions and lived experiences. Unlike their feminist comrades, the fight for “Women’s Rights” was an altogether different fight for black women.

The Combahee River Collective, a black feminist group founded in 1974 represented a revolutionary attempt at activism and organization armed with the power of Black Feminist Thought. Appropriately so and demonstrative of its roots, the Combahee River Collective garnered its name from a river in South Carolina where Harriet Tubman led an effort to free hundreds of slaves during the Civil War. Leaning on the historical significance of the uprising led by Harriet Tubman, the Combahee River Collective launched its own uprising and published “A Black Feminist Statement”, which served as a philosophy for the evolution of black feminism and the concept that black women endure the burden of multiple oppressions (River Collective, 1981).

In the Combahee River Collective’s, “A Black Feminist Statement,” the group established its mission as “struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and [...saw as their] particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking,” (River Collective, 1981, p. 211). The Collective highlighted the premise that the feminist movement obscured the participation of black feminists. As a result of their disappointment with the feminist movement (as well as other black liberation movements), the group created a unifying statement that defined the mission of black feminism that would not only focus on the oppressions experienced by black women but would point out that “the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of political economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy,” (River Collective, 1981, p. 213).

Further, the Collective asserted that the work of identity politics is at the crux of Black Feminist Thought and they centered their work around black women (and our own identity) as represented radical politics. The Collective expanded on the notion of the personal is political and provided that we have “gone beyond white women’s revelations because we are dealing with the implications of race and class as well as sex. Even our Black women’s style of talking / testifying about what we have experienced has a resonance that is both cultural and political,” (p. 213). Additionally, the Collective recognized that they are pioneers in this effort by stating that “no one before has ever examined the multi-layered texture Black women’s lives,” (p. 214). The important work of the Collective emphasized that black women were often obscured from participation in mainstream organizations and movements that focus on singular identities (i.e., Feminism, Black Nationalism, Black Power, and etc.) and ultimately the mainstream white media. As a result, the Collective asserted that it became necessary to find other spaces where black feminist voices could be heard, places where black women could testify about our experiences, and places where we, as black women, could deal with the implications of our intersectional being. Notably, the Combahee River Collective constructed a trailblazing mission statement that served as the catalyst for developing Black Feminist Thought as a theoretical frame.

Relevant to the advancement of Black Feminist Thought, Patricia Hill Collins’ iconic work, *Black Feminist Thought*, initially written in 1990, described an innate tension that exists between oppression and activism. Through the binds of white patriarchal America, African American women’s creative thought and intellect have faced suppression, and this was the premise that shaped the concept of black feminist thought in America (Collins, 2009). Collins noted the tensions and restrictions that black women face regarding their voice. Collins (2009)

demonstrated the paramount importance in understanding the dichotomous relationship that causes this tension, which is fundamentally ingrained into the American society. Moreover, because of the marginalization of black women's ideas, their omission from academic dialogue and the difficult relationship that black women have with feminist theory—very often black women have found themselves in “outsider-within positions in many academic endeavors” (p. 15).

Building on the assertion regarding the exclusion of black women in academic, political and social spaces, and the concepts provided by the Combahee River Collective, it was easy to draw a conclusion that there has not been space for black women in feminism (white feminism) nor in Black Liberation movements (black male liberation). Historically, black women have wrestled with the exclusionary nature of feminism and have continued to participate in what was accepted as white feminist activity. Moreover, most often black women were erased from both traditional feminist notions and the media simultaneously (Collins, 1996). By drawing on the work of both Patricia Hill Collins and the Combahee River Collective, this research demonstrated that historically, Black women doing feminist work had been excluded from traditional spaces. Yet, through their exclusion, black feminists have now seemingly found alternative spaces for their voices through the internet—a place that was deemed to be free from some of the restrictions that exists in mainstream media. This research scrutinized whether the internet was, in fact, free of the restrictions and whether black feminists were truly able to advance a liberatory theory via the internet, and more specifically an internet platform that had been shaped by and through white patriarchal society.

Black Feminist Thought – Alternative Spaces

Expanding on the concept of alternative spaces, Patricia Hill Collins offered that safe spaces for black women represented an area where black women are free to explore issues related to black women and black people. Collins concluded that alternative spaces have been created to allow room for empowerment and provide a vehicle for participating in social justice projects (Collins, 2009). Collins' book was centrally important in understanding that at the core of black feminist thought was empowerment. Through her work, Collins encouraged black women to achieve higher consciousness through knowledge leading to empowerment.

In her work, Collins spoke specifically about how coming into one's own voice often presented a repetitive struggle for black women writers. Referenced by Collins, Audre Lorde provided that "within this country where racial difference creates a constant, if unspoken, distortion of vision, Black women have on the one hand always been highly visible, and so, on the other hand, have been rendered invisible..." (Lorde, 1984, p. 42). Collins identified spaces, where even if only in the psyche of black women, they possess the determination to think and be. In these spaces, black women fought being deemed the other. In these spaces, black women worked towards self-definition and empowerment as a way of combating both dominant white society and patriarchal African American institutions (Collins, 2009).

Similar to Collins' concept of alternative spaces, bell hooks explored this issue and developed a term called oppositional gaze theory. Through this theory, hooks suggested that black people can establish spaces of agency where they can "interrogate the gaze of the other [and] also look back and at one another naming what we see" (hooks, 1992, p. 116). Considering the historical premise of the gaze, hooks recognized that black people can established a place where creativity, activism, and political engagement can take place if these spaces allow black people to gaze (study, understand, call-out) white society and where these spaces also facilitate

taking a candid look at the black community itself. Applying hooks' theory, black people could achieve a powerful stance through the embodiment of the critical gaze at the dominant culture. This critical gaze represented resistance of the dominant power by learning the way to look, to gaze, to understand—thereby facilitating agency through “awareness” and through “looking” (p. 116).

While Collins applauded access to alternative spaces for the purposes of black empowerment, hooks demanded that black women find alternative spaces by distinguishing between probing black contemplations that were concerned with issues of race and racism and the critical black female spectatorship. hooks provided that black women as the watchers can potentially represent a site of opposition when there is active defiance of the daunting dominant ways of knowing and looking. In fact, hooks charged black women with active engagement and raising of consciousness to repel white gaze and more specifically, white feminist ways of knowing and understanding (hooks, 1992). Through communicating a sense of urgency, hooks further strengthened the argument regarding the importance of black women in finding spaces of resistance and activism where they can interrogate white knowledge.

In both academic and non-academic settings, black women often eluded the piercing view of white gaze. Yet, while black women often worked to hide the effects of oppression, they participated in “acts of resistance” outside of what the white eye can see or imagine, (Collins, 2009, p. 107). Black women were always subjected to assaults by white patriarchy designed to ensure domination and to guarantee inferiority. However, even amidst the subjugation, black women, black mothers, and black girls found community in each other, spaces for resistance, and empowerment through self-definition. Black women resisted the controlling images designed to

stamp out their light. Black feminist blogs also found spaces of resistance and self definition and did not engage with topics surround whiteness.

By resisting the tropes of Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire, black women / black feminists made space by sharing their inside voice in a community that protected them from the bitter cruelty of racism and patriarchy (Collins, 2009). Black women shaped their identities—in private spaces—as a way to empower themselves. Through making space for themselves, black women provided the leeway for their own point of view, an essential component to the survival of black women in the United States. Systematic oppression strengthened when the oppressed succumb to the system. Thus, self-definition remained an act of resistance, an act of preservation, and an act of rejecting the controlling images imposed through oppression (Collins, 2009). Further, black women intellectuals in the United States “have long explored the private and hidden spaces of African American women’s consciousness, the “inside ideas that allow black women to cope [...and even] transcended the confines of intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality,” (Collins, 2009, p. 108).

Catherine Knight Steele in “Signifyin, Bitching, and Blogging,” further provided that black women’s writing often happens in spaces outside of white structures of knowledge. Steele further made space for black female bloggers by providing that black female bloggers “must be considered as part of the historical legacy of marginalized Black women writers,” (Steele, 2016, p. 90). Additionally, referencing hooks and *Talking Back*, Steele provided that blogging provided a space for black women to stand in resistance, to signify, to talk back to structures from which Black women are “excluded or exploited,” (p. 90).

Black Feminist Thought -- Intersectionality

Along with Black Feminist Thought, intersectionality also represented an important framework when considering the black feminist voice. The theoretical term intersectionality was coined in 1989 by Kimberle Crenshaw, a well-known critical race theorist and legal scholar (Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics*, 1989). Intersectionality resided at the crux of BFT and related to many areas of intersection, such as ableism, sexuality, class etc., (Collins, *Patricia Hill Collins: Intersecting Oppressions*). Intersectional theorists such as Kimberle Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins provided an expansive definition of intersectionality while recognizing that the intersection of race, gender and class constitute the experience of many black women. Crenshaw, in particular, offered that there are multiple ways where “structures of power intersect” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 96).

At the core of the black feminist discussion of intersectionality was the historical impact of slavery combined with decades of racial discrimination in conjunction with patriarchal oppression of women in the United States. This background created a social, political and economic structure that bell hooks labels the “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.” For hooks, the idea referred to the intertwining systems of domination that define a woman’s reality (Jhally, 1997). Drawing further from hooks, patriarchy was “institutionalized sexism,” (hooks, 2000, p. ix). It was based on the premise that the principles of intersectionality were founded. In a society that centered and affirmatively empowered white males, African American women struggled with oppression at the multiple intersecting dimensions of race, gender, and class. For black women, oppression remained a complex system where race, gender and class worked in combination, acting to shape their lives. The concept of intersectionality was vital to

understanding the ways in which these oppressions of race, gender and class play out in the selected blog texts.

Crenshaw's theory was informed by the work of the Combahee River Collective, which suggested that "sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often found it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously," (River Collective, 1981, p. 213). Specifically, Crenshaw employed the concept of intersectionality to describe the ways in which race and gender coincide to form black women's experiences. Moreover, Crenshaw expanded feminist theory by recognizing that an analysis of the black community and feminism must be centered in points of intersection (Crenshaw, 1989).

In Crenshaw's work, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," she challenged the concept that race and gender are mutually exclusive. This concept disrupted the single-axis frameworks that focus on either gender or race. In her estimation, Crenshaw suggested that a single-axis framework focus served to marginalize those that experience multiple burdens. Furthermore, she asserted that this type of framework distorts the multidimensional experiences of Black women.

Crenshaw provided that black women stood at the intersections of race and gender and that their experiences were not singly focused on either racial oppression or gender oppression. Crenshaw concluded that black women were most often excluded from both feminist theory and anti-racist policy discussions, because both were based on a concrete set of experiences and these perspectives failed to address the interaction between race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989).

Also, in the field of intersectionality, Patricia Hill Collins examined whether there was a correlation between empowerment, self-knowledge and self-definition and how these concepts

relate or impact Black women. Much of Collins' work focused on African American women, because she believed that Black women had a unique perspective in which two extreme systems of oppression come together in their lived experiences.

Collins put forth the idea that the issues concerning difference could be addressed through intersectionality. Collins defined intersectionality as a concept that “sheds light on the mutually constructing nature of systems of oppression, as well as social locations created by mutual constructions,” (Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*, 1998). To establish intersectionality, Collins drew from the framework of standpoint theory, a cornerstone of feminist theory, which provided that while black women may not share the same personal experience, yet they shared the same standpoint which has been shaped by the historical oppression of black women at large.

For Collins, intersectionality focused on how Black women resided amid unfair power circumstances. The principle of intersectionality allowed for greater understanding of the complexities that existed based on the intersections of race, class and gender and the multiple ways in which oppression intersects (Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*, 1998). In Collins' view of intersectionality, she indicated that intersectionality was most effective when the individual analyses of experiences remained on the level with structural analyses. (Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*, 1998).

Internet Studies

At the commencement of the internet and the launch of the WebSphere, theorists believed that the emergence of virtual environments would represent a means to escape from the constraints of race (for marginalized populations) and the shackles of racism, (Daniels, 2012). A

few scholars even theorized that the internet would provide a breeding ground for identity exploration, in which gamers would actively take on different racial and gender identities. However, these initial theories did not hold true. In fact, “race and racism persist online in ways that are both new and unique to the Internet, alongside vestiges of centuries-old forms that reverberate both offline and on” (Daniels, p. 2). Further, while new media provided a platform for conversation about race, rather than reducing racism, the digital realm allows the promulgation of racism and negative raced based images (Nakamura & Chow-White, 2012).

When determining how the race and racism present in the digital realm, it was important to consider a perspective held by Nakamura and Chow-White. These researchers stated that “the Internet and other computer-based technologies are complex topographies of power and privilege, made up of walled communities, new (plat)forms of economic and technological exclusion and both new and old styles of race as code, interaction, and image,” (Nakamura & Chow-White, p. 17). Critical race theorists such as Nakamura and Chow-White led the effort in examining race through the digital perspective and provide an interdisciplinary approach of both race and digital media and technology studies

Technology studies have offered many examples of how race is involved in the structure of the internet interface. For example, the DOS commands designate a Master Disk and a Slave Disk as part of the hard drive operating language. This relationship between the master disk and slave disk represented a hierarchy of command language (Daniels, 2012). Additionally, in the computer industry, "master" and "slave" referred to primary and secondary hard disk drives. Given the historical significance of the master and slave relationship, the language used represented a source of controversy. Along with the operating system language, aspects of the interface were racialized. According to Nakamura, menu categories and drop downs that were

used online provided tools to classify and define race online. Specifically, the choices made via the categories represented ways that marketers can target users (Nakamura, *Cybertyping and the Work of Race in the Age of Digital Reproduction*, 2002).

Lisa Nakamura in her book, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet*, investigated how the internet shapes and cultivates our views of race and identity. She coined the online images of racial identity that shaped the views of race and identity as cybertypes. For Nakamura, cybertypes existed because of racial stereotypes prevalent in society. Chapter one entitled, "Cybertyping and the Work of Race in the Age of Digital Reproduction," looked at how race gets coded in technology. Nakamura asserted that "cybertypes were images of race that arise when the fears, anxieties, and desires of the privileged Western users are scripted into a textual/graphical environment that is in constant flux and revision," (Nakamura, 2002, p. 19).

In general, the internet provided access to discussions about black identity between group members. According to Andre' Brock, the internet facilitated the exposure of white harshness much like television exposed the Jim Crow brutality that existed in the past (Brock A. , 2009, p. 31). Brock's view provided that blogs in black communities shaped modes of communication, opening up a new genre that offered an alternative view of black identity and black female subjectivity. The internet reshaped black identity and facilitated a space where there existed insight and visibility into racial identity and facilitated greater black participation in constructing and defining black identity—online identity (Brock A. , 2009).

Because Black female identity remained subject to unique forms of oppression based on race and gender, the establishment of black feminist blogs facilitated additional capabilities and access. Within the discussion of black feminism, blogs served as a unique space for those denied access to more traditional ways of communicating. Moreover, blogs provided a space for

complicating some of the central ideas of black feminist discourse. Digital black feminism expressed by bloggers often engaged in discourse that challenged the fairness of a capitalist system, yet bloggers in search of a space for their marginalized voices were willing to create within this system and work within this system (Steele, 2017, p. 9).

For this research, platform studies provided the basis for identifying the affordances and constraints that black feminist bloggers navigated to participate in the creative and cultural process. Platform studies represented a relatively new area of study focused on digital media. “A platform is a computing system of any sort upon which further computing development can be done. It can be implemented entirely in hardware, entirely in software... or in some combination of the two,” (Bogost & Montfort, 2009, p. 2). Platform studies provided an opportunity to connect information and communication with culture and creativity. Additionally, platform studies explored the connection between technology and culture. It allowed for examining whether and how the platform design shaped the work done on the platform, an important tool in understanding blogs and the work being accomplished on the blog site (Bogost & Montfort, 2009).

Enter blogging – The Medium

From its inception in the 1990s, millions of people have indulged in and leveraged blogs as a space for sharing their perspective. Not only have people posted within the blog space but also millions have created their own blogs as a way to define their space and their narrative (Chen, 2012). The term blog refers to “weblogs”, which initially represented websites that included news and diary-type entries authored by both journalists and non-journalists for public consumption (Harp, Loke, & Bachmann, 2014). In the beginning, weblogs was another word for

online journal (Safko and Brake, 2009, p. 162). However, unlike writing in a daily journal which is static, blogging provided a medium for rewriting and reinventing oneself (Gurak and Antinijevic, 2008). Further, “blogging refers to individual activities of adding content to a blog that includes periodically posting messages/photos about bloggers’ own interests on the internet and receiving comments about the postings from visitors,” (Jung, Song, & Vorderer, 2012, p. 1626).

Relevant to this research was the pervasiveness of blog use which perhaps demonstrated the need for individuals to find alternative spaces in which to engage. In fact, according to the 2015 Pew Internet & American Life Project, blogging had risen to be a fundamental part of online culture. The Pew Research Center also shared that as of 2015, 65% of adults use social networking sites, which represented a substantial increase within the last ten years (Penn, 2015). Further, while much of the initial research regarding blogging focused on political and news topics typically employed by men (Chen, 2012), as of late, the research centered on how personal blogs are being used.

Emerging research focused on critiquing personal blogs which represented content created by women. Customarily, these blogs have been concerned with women’s desire to express themselves, provide a document for their lives, and to find community through their blogging efforts (Jung, Song, & Vorderer, 2012). Women bloggers represented varied viewpoints, which confronted important issues that were not only personally relevant but also relevant to their communities and the world at large. (BlogHer Team to Bring Research and Insights about How Women Use Social Media, Blogs to the White House and Republican Leadership, 2009). Blogging communities and other social media outlets provided a forum for presenting diverse women’s voices often obscured or excluded from mainstream news media.

Similarly, this research effort focused on how black feminist used their personal blogs to have voice.

In many instances, black women employed social media and blogging to shape black women's narratives and to provide an alternative dialogue to raise awareness of black women's issues, to address the state of the black community, and to address the lifestyle issues that concern black women, black men, and the black community at large (Johnson, 2013). "Social media's asynchronous, yet ubiquitous and inviting structure yields a wide-open space for people to insert their bodies, performances, and narratives into the virtual realm," (p. 155). Based on this premise, black women consumed the blogosphere as a haven where they can share their narrative and where their voice could be heard outside of mainstream media.

Even still, not only was the blogosphere a place where black women could speak their truth, but in fact blogging provided a space for Black Feminist Thought. Here, in the blog margins, black women have done the work of black feminism. bell hooks posited that those who inhabit the margins were not in a place of domination but rather they sat in a space of resistance, an intervention to white patriarchal domination. This place allowed for creativity and power and dare one say freedom from oppression. In the spaces of the margin, the spaces of resistance – black feminist thinkers "recover [themselves], where [they] move in solidarity to erase the category colonized / colonizer," (hooks, 1990, p. 152). Much like the Zora Neale Hurston quote at the beginning of this section, for black feminist writers, blogging provided a tool to overcome the silence about the pain, a tool of resistance, and a tool that demonstrated that there is no enjoyment in oppression.

Emerging Black Feminism – Intersectionality and the Internet and Critiques

Much of the recent engagements and scholarly work around black feminism and intersectionality frameworks confronted whether black feminism and intersectionality as originally conceived provided the correct tools for understanding voice online. These emerging black feminisms remained both thought-provoking and challenging. Also, they were designed to help us explore whether the voice of Black women was truly unencumbered online. For example, in contrast to hooks' oppositional gaze theory, Jennifer Nash in her work *The Black Body in Ecstasy* summoned a "critical interrogation of black feminism's approach to representation, which treats visual culture, unless produced by black women, as presumptively problematic" (Nash, 2014, pp. 1 - 2). Nash provided that black women must navigate the "tightrope of representation" which is often constrained by various stereotypes (Nash, 2014, p. 6). This was key in thinking how black women engaged online in alternative spaces. How were black women able to have voice while navigating the impacts of the platform and representation? Nash further provided that black feminism often fails to celebrate self-representation (Nash, 2014, p. 6). In her work, Nash proposed not abandoning black feminism, but provided line of sight into areas where black feminist scholarship can expand through considering representation and bringing new energy and study to the topic. While Nash's research somewhat diverged from both Collins and hooks, the analysis advanced by Nash identified that there are potential areas in which the research around Black Feminist Thought can be further expanded. Along with Nash, I centered this research to bring new insight into black feminist scholarship. I recognized that there are limitations to voice inherent in the internet. Yet, it was urgent to identify areas of focus that can further enable liberatory theory and activism.

Brittney Cooper also critiqued black feminism in her work, "Love No Limit: Towards a Black Feminist Future (In Theory)." In this article, Cooper asserted that black feminism created a

“culture of justification,” in which black feminist theorists were asked to prove that the study of black Women’s lives, histories, representation, and theories were indicative of work that should be considered in the academy. She further asserted that black feminists of the past have missed the mark and have spent too much time justifying the work of black feminism rather than solidifying the structure of Black Feminist Thought (Cooper, 2015, p. 7). Interestingly, Cooper asserted that black feminists have yet to exercise the purported freedom, the standard to which they have held those that are new to the field of black feminism, as they justified their intellectual prowess to the oppressor seeking academic validation.

Cooper’s work suggested that black feminism had fallen by the wayside and failed to theorize about the important questions around our concepts of freedom, justice, and liberation. Additionally, based on Cooper’s critique, it appeared that we have failed to address the questions that were posed by black feminist theorists in the 1980’s. Cooper posed the questions that were previously asked by black feminist scholars and suggested that these questions have not been sufficiently addressed in the work that has followed. Cooper stated that the purpose of asking these questions was not to get answers but to provide the ground work for future research. Cooper charged black feminists to hold the white patriarchal academy accountable to defend their efforts to dismantle the space that is occupied by black feminist theory. Moreover, Cooper provided that black feminism was a “brick house” – mighty and strong (p. 18). Lastly, in this article, Cooper charged black feminist theorists to push against the limits that have been imposed. She provided that theory building was an innate part of the world in which we live. She requested that theorists recognize this fact and looked to new work as a place to inspire new growth and theoretical propositions in the field.

Both Nash and Cooper's research represented current and relevant work; work that opened the door for this dissertation and research. While informed by the theoretical works of Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, and The Combahee River Collective, I also aligned with Nash in her position that Black Feminist Thought has room for growth. Further, through my examination of Black Feminist Thought in blog space, I sought to expand the conversation. I remained inspired further by Brittany Cooper's position in "Love No Limit", as it provided the landscape for incoming black feminists.

While applying Andre' Brock, Safiya Noble and Brendesha Tynes in the *Intersectional Internet* brought together a collection of cutting-edge research geared towards examining power relations that exist in technologies. In particular, this book highlighted intersectionality as the framework to scrutinize the structure of power in the digital landscape. "In essence, this book engaged with a series of concerns about how race, gender, and sexuality often preclude intersectional interrogations of the structure, activities, representations, and materiality of the Internet. Buttressed by state policies and economic forces, these concerns interests of capitalism to expand its profits, in both local and global contexts," (Noble & Tynes, 2016).

Catherine Knight Steele further critiqued the possibilities and promise of the internet by acknowledging that the blogosphere provided a platform for marginalized populations to "seek and sustain voice in a society where they are prevented from meaningful participation," (Steele, 2016, p. 88). Steele pointed out, that through blogging, black women negotiated the intersections of their lives and the blog became a tool to contest oppression; however, self-policing and obedience to hegemonic control remained present. Steele acknowledged that at an individual, community, and systemic level, black women bloggers have done the written work to resist the white patriarchal view of black women. However, "at the institutional level the blogs challenge

systemic issues while also reifying systems of patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and an unjust legal system,” (p. 88). By fortifying systems of patriarchy, the interruption of Black Feminist Thought via the platform problematized the notion that the internet represents a place of freedom—freedom of voice.

Understanding how race, gender, and sexuality prevented adequate examination of the internet and representation was key for contemplating the #BlackLivesMatterMovement. Black Lives Matter represented an activist movement that was created in 2012 after Trayvon Martin’s murderer. The black community turned to social media as a way to resist our dehumanization in the aftermath of the trial when Trayvon Martin was further victimized by the justice system posthumously. The twitter hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was both a “call to action and response to the virulent anti-Black racism that permeates our society,” (About Black Lives Matter Network, n.d.). Black Lives Matter provided a chapter-based national organization working to place the relevance of black life in the forefront of the discussion. The effort focused on reorganizing and rebuilding the Black liberation movement (About Black Lives Matter Network, n.d.). “When we say Black Lives Matter, we are broadening the conversation around state violence to include all of the ways in which Black people are intentionally left powerless at the hands of the state. We are talking about the ways in which Black lives are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity,” (About Black Lives Matter Network, n.d.).

Brain-child of three black queer women, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometti, and Patrice Cullors, Black Lives Matter became a black activist campaign, inclusive and expansive beyond the limitations of hetero-patriarchal societal norms. In fact, BLM expanded beyond black nationalism which called on black people to love, live, and buy black and was centered around straight heterosexual black males and served to exclude black women, queers, trans, and the

disabled. Black Lives Matters affirmed all black lives along the gender spectrum. Moreover, it centered those previously marginalized within Black liberation efforts (About Black Lives Matter Network, n.d.).

Following the death of Trayvon Martin and the launch of the Black Lives Matter movement these three women began a movement on social media (Twitter) to amplify how black lives have been subjected to police violence and state sponsored genocide. The digital realm, specifically social media, provided a stage to expand coverage; yet this coverage created a media display about topics of black male criminality, which was highly profitable for the white-centric media (Tynes, Schuschke, & Noble, 2016). The attention from both the social media activists and the media centered around black males. Yet, black women were also victims of police violence and highly policed, and unfortunately black women were erased from the discussion even though the movement was started by three black women. Black women were left wondering how this online engagement was taken to the community leaving the black women behind.

Further, through my engagement with emerging feminisms and challenges to Black Feminist Thought in the context of the digital online interaction, I confronted the following juxtaposition: Was there truly freedom online for black feminist writers to have voice or had that voice been quelled by the platform, which inherently conformed to systems of white supremacy, patriarchy, and hegemonic masculinity? As I grappled with this dissertation, my immediate response was that there is no freedom online for black feminist writers, and I believed that this voice has been impacted by the platform. I theorized that my analysis of the blog entries and platforms will demonstrate this initial conclusion.

Platforms as Alternative Spaces

In considering the term platform, I initially focused only on the technology and computational aspect of the term, which I examined throughout this research in detail. Yet, the term platform commanded a more expanded definition which was symbolic in nature. As part of this research, I examined how the term ‘platform’ embodied multiple meanings.

Platform as Technology

In examining platform through the lens of technology, the review of the question “what is a platform?” has been informed by multiple theorists including Ian Bogost and Nick Montfort, each of whom have contributed greatly to the field. Initially, the computer industry embraced the term platform in the 90’s because Microsoft labeled Windows as a platform and Netscape described a “cross-platform” strategy for its web browser (Plantin, Lagoze, Edwards, & Sandvig, 2016, p. 4). However, to begin this discussion, I retrieved the archived work of Marc Andreessen represented one of the first theorists to bring clarity to the term platform. Additionally, Andreessen’s work had been cited in and informed the work of Bogost and Montfort. Marc Andreessen in his article provided that “a platform is a system that can be programmed and therefore customized by outside developers—users—and in that way, adapted to countless needs and niches that the platform’s original developers could not have possibly contemplated, much less had time to accommodate,” (Andreessen, 2007, p. 1). Based on Andreessen’s definition, to have a platform, there must be an ability to program it. According to Bogost and Montfort, a platform was a “computing system ... upon which further computing development can be done,” (Bogost & Montfort, 2009, p. 2). In short, a platform provided a framework that supported other programs and programming by a developer. A platform while rooted in the technology was also somewhat conceptual as it provided a scheme or design for which additional development can be done. While personally rejecting a technological

determinism argument (which suggests that society is more impacted by technology than by other sources), a platform was designed to be used in our culture directly and in order to do so, the platform became available in a physical sense (Bogost & Montfort, 2007).

The internet represented millions of arteries of networked computers that ran different kinds of software, and facilitated the development of three different types of platforms. An access API (application programming interface) was the type of platform that was most prevalent. For this type of platform, the developer's code existed outside of the platform and the code was executed in another location that was provided by the developer (Andreessen, 2007). This platform represented the simplest platform to create and was used by organizations like Google Search API, eBay, PayPal and etc. The pitfall of this type of platform was that it required a great amount of technical skill, because it required a developer to provide their own database, language and run-time system (Bogost & Montfort, 2009).

Another type of platform was the Plug-In API platform, which allowed applications to let developers create new functions that could be inserted or plugged in to the core system and its user interface. Facebook represented one of the first uses of this type of platform. Plug-In API allowed more integration with the original platform. Again, this type of platform required a high level of technical expertise on the part of the developer. (Andreessen, 2007).

The final platform type was a Runtime Environment platform. This platform was vastly different from the other platforms, in that the developer code ran inside the platform environment and was uploaded online. Andreessen referred to this platform type as "online platforms," (Andreessen, 2007).

Platform as Concept

Throughout the years, platform took new forms / definitions. In fact, social media companies like Facebook and YouTube embraced the term and applied it to services such as Uber and Airbnb. Over the past few years, platform exemplified economic attributes, functioning corporate capital, and taking on the principles of capitalism meaning that platform was marketed to serve a societal demand. While social media initially leaned on the term platform as a place that was programmable, it ultimately shifted definitions to basically mean that a platform represented any place in which social interaction can take place—i.e., a place where you can talk, chat, click, swipe and so forth. This new definition ultimately drew from the old architectural meaning of platform, in which you have a place by which to stand or have a stage for political views (Gillespie, 2017).

As the term, platform began to take on new meaning, many suggested that it should be constrained as a computer term, however these boundaries were never accepted by the industry. In fact, the term platform had been widely adopted by platform providers, users, regulators, and the press in an unconstrained way. Initially, Gillespie maintained the use of the term platform in this format was helpful to social media companies to appeal to multiple stakeholders. Through identifying as platforms, social media companies appeared as a space for open participation both as users and as those that market to the users (Gillespie, 2017). Moreover, the term platform set expectations for robust and open participation that facilitated a space for people to connect, to be vocal, and to share one's beliefs. The platform became a virtual soap box in a highly visible space.

Terms like platform had not grown or sprouted organically. Rather, terms like platform were placed into the computational universe by company stakeholders with strategic objectives, and these terms were pushed out to users with the goal of reaching specific audiences. Beyond selling or persuading, a term like platform was designed to make claims about what technology can and cannot do and what expectations the users can have of these technologies. According to Gillespie, terms like platform “represent an attempt to establish the very criteria by which these technologies will be judged, built directly into the terms by which we know them,” (Gillespie, 2010, p. 14). Gillespie further provided that terms like platform come with proverbial strings and these types of metaphors hide truths regarding the term and the expectations.

While platforms purported to allow free conversation, chatter, and beliefs, in fact they resembled traditional media and communications. Platforms and organizations that own them sought to create business models with sustainability, address the demands of regulations, and to become large conglomerates that are visible to their users and the public. Just like with traditional media and communications, “their choices about what can appear, how it is organized, how it is monetized, what can be removed and why, and what the technical architecture allows and prohibits, are all real and substantive interventions into the contours of public discourse,” (Gillespie, 2010, p. 14). Given the subversive nature of the term platform, it had been recommended that we bring out the creative tools and use another term instead. Furthermore, the word platform remained extremely problematized in that it was difficult to overcome the expansive power of the term that translated far beyond the technology (Gillespie, 2017). Gillespie’s analysis was particularly important for this research, as it planted the seeds that platforms operate in the same way as traditional media sources and were highly monitored and monetized.

Borrowing from Gillespie, Van Dijck explained that platforms carried multiple meanings including computer architecture in a technological sense or they can mean platforms in a sociocultural and political cultural view. Through applying actor-network theory, Van Dijck further provided that “a platform is mediator rather than an intermediary: it shapes the performance of social acts instead of merely facilitating them,” (Van Dijck, 2013, p. 29). Relevant to my research, Van Dijck’s application of platform as intermediary depicted the platform as an intervener, an interloper, and interrupter. Beyond just interrupting, Van Dijck gave weight to the ability of this intermediary to shape the voice that exists within the platform. This argument further cemented my view of the interruption experienced by black women when engaging in Black Feminist Thought online.

Politics, Power, and the Platform

Joss Hands in “Introduction: Politics, Power, and Platformivity,” confronted the premise of the endangered internet which faced extinction as a result of its fame. The internet had become less visible in the “production and experiences of network culture,” (Hands, 2013, p. 1). The functions that had been designated as internet functions in the past existed in the platforms. Hands suggested that we do not have just one internet but rather numerous platforms, with applications that compile content created by users. In fact, Hands asserted that the platform—broadly represented social networking through app-based interfaces with cloud-based computing and rather than being a place of freedom, represented a place of contradictions. For instance, using the platform, a software company became able to create an ecosystem of partners that were interdependent in an effort to generate money for the company’s bottom line. Yet, the dynamics of power in the platform remained unsettled (Hands, 2013).

Harry Halpin explored the platform as a function of social control. For Halpin, the platform intervened in the lives of all users from the moment the user woke up to the moment that the user went to bed (Halpin, 2013). Using Apple as an example in this analysis, Halpin told us that Apple controls its hardware and all applications, web browser and data services that access user's data. Halpin chided that with Apple we have been living in the midst of a virtual company town, ... "consisting entirely of Apple products: they wake in the morning with a buzzer from their iPhone, listen to Music via iTunes, and communicate via Apple Mail and iPhone apps," (Halpin, 2013, p. 2). While varying platforms maintained multiple strengths, every platform vendor had been highly motivated to capture all aspects of a user's online life, and failure to do so placed the vendor at risk of platform failure.

Halpin made another compelling argument by stating that the desire of platform vendors to control all of human life placed platforms that did not have all of the necessary components in the position to become strange bedfellows with other platforms. This control of online life represented great power and as a result, users became embroiled in these vendor power plays (Halpin, 2013). Ultimately, users, Halpin suggested, became nothing more than pawns in this larger platform chess game.

This view of the platform was particularly useful when considering whether the platform was designed to enable or restrict the voices of Black Feminist Thought. In applying both Hands and Halpin's analysis, I remained concerned with the deeply entrenched power structure that existed within the platform. Considering that the platform had been both a function of politics and capitalism, I confronted the realization that these were also the factors that served to restrict black women's voices in the traditional realm, and it was likely that the politics of power infringed on Black Feminist Thought.

So, What is Voice?

The History of Voice

As an instrument of enslavement, white society had historically and systematically prevented or impeded black peoples from fully engaging in pivotal aspects of society – law, politics, education, and media (Hill, 1977). However, amidst this attempt to thwart black people’s engagement, black society sought to create spaces outside of traditional realms. For example, Black people utilized atypical methods of communicating and exchanging messages, such as those used on Underground Railroad, hair designs and quilts code. Employed during the time of slavery and abolition, black women, for example, sewed patterns of code into the quilts to prepare enslaved persons for their upcoming escape to freedom. These quilts provided the enslaved with directions to the Underground Railroad and guided to safety in free states (Bohde). Even in the face of fear, whippings, or death, Black women, both enslaved and free, made quilts as a way to have voice and power in a time where black voice and black power was not acknowledged nor was it allowed. This voice heard in the form of codes and kept hidden from white view let freedom ring by providing the enslaved a mechanism needed to get to places free from the chains and horrors of slavery; causing white slave owners to lose their greatest commodity – black bodies.

While quilting represented secret code leading slaves to freedom, the creation of Black newspapers represented a direct confrontation with white media and white suppression. In essence, blacks used existing systems in subversive ways as methods to overcome the white attempt to enslave and restrain black voice and black thought. For approximately 150 years, Black newspapers represented a strong institution in Black America that helped to create black

life and served to stabilize black communities. “Black newspapers provided a forum for debate among blacks and gave voice to a people who were voiceless. With a pen as their weapon, they were Soldiers Without Swords,” (Nelson, 1998).

Freedom’s Journal, the first newspaper in the U.S. to be published by African Americans was created to combat the negative depiction and vilification of black people. The creation of the black newspaper was an attempt by black people to shape the narrative around black life (Nelson, 1998). It also represented an expansion from the previously utilized coded quilt language. Rather than work clandestinely, the creation of black voice through the news represented a soldier-like activism necessary to amplify black voice and their opposition towards whites and white media.

Additionally, black-owned radio represented another example in which Black peoples in an act of rebellion co-opted a traditional white medium in an effort to have voice. Through creating ownership in radio, Black people made room for black music and recognition of that music and black news. Black-owned radio afforded the black community the power to acknowledge and organize around the black community, black events, and social justice matters that have been dismissed by white media (Dawkins, 1996).

From stitching coded symbols in quilts to serve as guides through the Underground Railroad, to launching black owned newspapers and radio stations, Black people carved out ways to communicate important messaging and to be heard. Stuart Hall in “Encoding / Decoding” provided that:

“messages are complex structure of relations...[..]a structure produced and sustained through the articulation of linked but distinctive moments - production, circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction...[...] sustained through the articulation of connected practices, each of which, however, retains its distinctiveness and has its own specific modality, its own forms and conditions of existence” (Hall, 1973; 180, p. 128).

The hidden and secret voice of the quilt represented a powerful message to restore African-Americans’ basic rights—the right to be treated as human and to be free from bondage. The voice of newspapers epitomized a coordinated and overt act to portray black people authentically and without the bias of racism and oppression. The voice of the radio was also an overt act, but it is one that attempted to make room for black news, black knowledge, and black music. These varied communications methods demonstrated the ways in which black people located alternative spaces in which to project their voices and embody blackness; spaces designed to obtain freedom, to shape the depiction of the black community, and to make room for black excellence through music and news.

While these examples spoke to the black community as a whole, black women specifically remained subjected to an attempt to mute their voices. Black women, sitting on the intersection of race and gender, had been especially omitted from white media, from academic recognition, and from having a voice. Yet in the midst of this attempt at erasure, black women gravitated to blogging, just like code quilting or creating a black newspaper, as a vehicle for sharing news and perspectives and for having voice in white patriarchal society.

For black women, voice represented the site or dialectical process by which interruptions are enacted or resisted. Applying Collins, voice implied coming to terms with contradictions, as

black women struggled to give voice to their intersectional identities – being black and being a woman, and they have often sought alternative spaces that allowed black women to rise above the oppression of race and gender (Collins, 2009, p. 108). Collins provided that finding voice implied coming to terms with contradictions. Black women remained embattled when attempting to use the full range of their voice and to express their total identity. When seeking to find voice, black women confronted trying to make space for the collective voice (visibility as a group) and the individual self. Being seen collectively, black women together—one voice, was a strength. Yet, this collective view advanced essentialist rhetoric and opened the door to erasure of the individual black woman—thus the contradiction (Collins, 2009).

bell hooks in *Talking Back* discussed that when the radical voice spoke about oppression, the voice was often speaking to those in power. hooks asserted that “their presence changes the direction and shape of our words,” (hooks, 1989, p. 28). hooks’ premise illustrated a poignant perspective as she related the presence of white society to stifling words and language. hooks’ perspective remained relevant to my research, as this dissertation asserted that the platform created and owned by white patriarchal society directly impeded the work that was taking place online in the black feminist blogs. For hooks,

“Language is also a place of struggle. The oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves—to rewrite, to reconcile, to renew. Our words are not without meaning. They are an action—a resistance. Language is also a place of struggle,” (hooks, 1989, p. 28).

In pondering the words, “language is [...] a place of struggle, I found that this statement exemplified the foreground of this research. In fact, black feminist thinkers engaging online often faced the struggle of language, the struggle that opened up voice, the struggle that

demanded that they speak for all black women, and the struggle that acts in resistance to white society.

Representation

To further shape this dissertation, I applied Stuart Hall's theory of representation to encapsulate my research, as Hall's work provided the crucial links between language, culture and how shared meanings are constructed and represented (Hall, 1997). This was particularly important to understanding the black feminist blog voice. According to Hall, understanding representation was central to studying culture. As I engaged with this work, I leaned on Hall to provide the foundation for understanding the black feminist culture that exists within the blog spaces. Hall defined representation as "using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people. ...representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture, (Hall, 1997, p. 1). Within a shared language, there existed shared understandings and cultural values of a group of people. Language operated as a "representational" system. Language symbolized shared cultural meanings. This was accomplished through spoken sounds and the written word, but also through any other way that meaning could be represented and understood. Language could represent through music, body language, gesture, arbitrary symbols and through objects (Hall, 1997, p. xxi). To understand the unique voice of black feminist bloggers, it became important to understand the epitome of shared meanings and culture –representation.

Further, Hall stated that culture had a specific meaning and was concerned with the production and exchange of meanings. According to Hall, culture was all encompassing and was everything in our lives that was not biological, physical or from nature. Further, culture was how members of a group shared their common understandings of their world. Different groups of

people held different understandings of the world. They developed different shared meanings and therefore different cultures. Hall indicated that language was the ‘privileged media’ through which meaning was created and shared. Language was not just the formal articulation of words, but rather language in this instance was that which is understood by the community in question, particularly for this research language was communication that is specific to black women. Language then represented the meanings of things as understood by different cultures. Cultural difference was represented in different languages. (Hall, *Representation: Culture Representation and Signifying Practices*, 1997). My goal was to explore the understandings of the world that existed within the black feminist blogs.

Voice - Black Feminist Thought Interrupted

Voice demanded that Black Feminist Thought and platforms be viewed in conjunction. Through engaging both Collins and Van Dijck, voice represented both the Black Feminist Thought written in the blog space and how that text presents in the blogosphere. The term voice described how the platform intervenes on Black Feminist Thought in the blog space. The platform was the sound system through which BFT is spoken. In this system, the speaker could amplify, distort, or deliver quality sound. Because the platform (sound system) interceded in Black Feminist Thought in blog spaces, this mediation either furthered or constrained the intended thought. Like Van Dijck’s work, this research interrogated how the platform mediated Black Feminist Thought. As we have become a society that was more heavily dependent on technology, there was urgency in understanding the social and cultural impacts of coding technologies. Particularly, as the software / platforms have become central in our daily lives, it became increasingly difficult to focus on the “embedded, hidden, off-shored and merely

forgotten about” structures in which we operate, (Van Dijck, 2013, p. 29). Van Dijck saw the challenge as one in which we make visible the ways in which software and computer language permeate our lives and social action / interaction. For example, just as platforms like Amazon and LinkedIn recorded customer tastes and job interests, the platforms “translate[d] these encoded social activities into programmed directives to steer user behavior,” (Van Dijck, 2013, p. 29). As part of this research, I stood in conversation with Van Dijck and further asserted that the platform not only steered behavior but the platform directly intervened and perhaps halted Black Feminist Thought through the invisible and hidden code that became the fabric of our online lives.

Additionally, the ways in which the platform mediated Black Feminist Thought was considered the platform affordance. The term affordance was indicative of the qualities of the technologies and media that mediated the affective processes of the people who engage within the platforms. Affordances were embedded within the technology as “qualities, features, or cues,” (Nagy & Neff, 2015). Further, technology affordance was also defined as the “mutuality of actor intentions and technology capabilities that provided the potential for a particular action,” (Majchrzak, Faraj, Kane, & Azad, 2013). Affordance referred to what can potentially happen within the technology and what action can take place. By applying a lens of affordance, the researcher was forced to consider “the symbiotic relationship between the action to be taken in the context and the capability of the technology,” (Majchrzak, Faraj, Kane, & Azad, 2013, p. 38). Therefore, ‘Voice’ became not just the way that BFT took shape online, but rather ‘Voice’ was the sound it made when interrupted by the bellow of white patriarchy... voice became the scream of artifact encapsulated in the platform. Voice was the active participation –the blogging that takes place within the platform. Voice became the interdependent relationship between the

writing, the oppression, and the platform. While in my findings, I determined that voice was indirectly impacted by the platform, as the black feminist bloggers sought centered the blogs on understanding and empowering black womanhood and did not address white oppression. As such, Voice became Black Feminist Thought – INTERRUPTED!

Method

Purpose of the Study

The black community always found spaces in which to be creative and share their voice despite widespread and prolific attempts by white America and white media to exclude them. For many, blogs and social media served as significant spaces that, in theory, provided room for diverse voices that have often been obscured from mainstream media. With this premise in mind, this research asserted that black feminists, in particular, forged a path into spaces where their voices could be heard by taking refuge in blogs and social media. These efforts enabled Black women to engage in and contribute using their voice as both a weapon and shield for combating white mainstream media. Influenced by Black Feminist Thought, I specifically focused on black feminist blogs as sites of interrogation to examine how Black feminist thinkers articulate their voice in these blog sites. I examined how Black Feminist Thought was communicated and shaped in these blogs and highlighted the black female narrative that existed within these spaces.

Along with exploring voice, I wanted to increase the field of knowledge by integrating an analysis of the black feminist voice with an analysis of platform studies. I approached this work to investigate the impact, if any, that the affordances and constraints inherent in the structure of the internet stifle or advance creative thought and the advancement of liberatory theory. To accomplish this goal, I utilized a method of analysis that allowed for a deep reading of the text. Additionally, I implemented methodology that afforded an in-depth review of multiple aspects of analysis which included mission statements, blog content analysis, and a review of the

technology / platform. Further, the guiding questions demanded a method that analyzed text within social and cultural context in order to understand the relationship between voice and power relations. Lastly, it was important to engage with a methodology that accounted for differing cultural uses of technology and the interaction between user and technology.

Research Questions

By using critical technocultural discourse analysis in conjunction with in-depth interrogation of blog mission statements, my research worked toward a better understanding of how users of the technology formed voice within the constructs and boundaries of the interface. In this case, blogging was the tool used by Black feminists to deploy their voice and make it available for others. I utilized the following research questions to guide my research:

- 1. *How is black feminist voice being articulated through Black Feminist blogs?***
 - a. *How does this voice function?***
- 2. *How are black feminists operating in Black Feminist spaces in contrast with their lack of access to participate in what is perceived as “traditional” media spaces?***
- 3. *Through blogging, how do Black Feminists negotiate tensions between liberatory theory and platform affordances?***

Research Design - Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis

Andre' Brock (2009) developed a method of examining online discourse which he terms “critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA).” Brock’s critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) relied on critical race theory and Nakamura’s cultural research to examine systemic cases of privilege and power in online spaces (Brock, *Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis*, 2016). Further, Brock called for the use of critical race theory, feminism, and queer

theory to understand technological objects as “assemblages of artifacts, practices, and cultural beliefs (Brock, 2016).” Brock provided that an analysis of discourse online should be grounded in an understanding of the environment, culture, internet, and audience.

The application of CTDA disrupted the view that white voices constructed the online experience, and forced the researcher to deconstruct normative claims about what people are doing online, and it required the researcher to clarify which people are being referenced, what they are doing, and what are the circumstances for the online action. Brock’s CTDA insisted on a multi-layered approach to theories of technology, one that captured diversity in culture and demographics and how these moments of diversity intersected with the technological hardware and code. The approach was a direct response to published work that ignored marginalized populations that were only understood or written about in relation to what is deemed normative standards. For Brock, understanding the experiences of those at the margins, through interactions between technological artifacts, cultural conventions, and personal experiences, not only enriched the array of knowledge, but also provided a uniquely sharp perspective that was unattainable through looking only at the technology, the culture or through centering white normative subjects.

This research relied heavily on critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) to explore the affordances and constraints of the blogs in articulating a liberatory theory perspective. I applied the CTDA method as I found it uniquely suited to take both black feminist voice and the platform into consideration—both of which are paramount to this research and analysis. “CTDA works from the premise that populations other than the dominant group do not fundamentally lack technological capabilities, even though they have frequently been excluded from the literature,” (Brock, 2009). Brock provided the following definition for CTDA:

“Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis” (CTDA) combines analyses of information technology material and virtual design with an inquiry into the production of meaning through information technology practice and the articulations of information technology users in situ. CTDA offers the opportunity to think about all three in parallel, using a conceptual framework interrogating power relations, in order to tease out the connections between them. This approach provides a holistic analysis of the interactions between technology, cultural ideology, and technology practice.” (Brock, 2016, p. 2)

Brock further provided that CTDA was a flexible approach that lent itself to any critical cultural study, and only required that the framework is applied twice – “once to the material, practical, and discursive properties of blogs, websites, and video games, and a second time to examine the cultural practices that take place in digital spaces” (Brock, 2016, p. 2). Further, Brock illuminated this method by providing that CTDA was concerned with the underlying rules that are built into the technology and how those rules were then taken by the users as they engage with the technology. This approach blended and revealed the constraints on technological use along with the beliefs and discursive practices taken by the users that were representative of those users. Further, Brock identified the crux in applying the CTDA framework in which he concluded that CTDA lent itself to making sense of the “offline understandings of racial identity (Black and non-Black), technocultural representations of Whiteness in code, and beliefs about “appropriate” technological use,” (Brock, 2016, p. 5). For the purposes of this research, understanding black feminist voice demanded an analysis of the black feminist identity in conjunction with the way that the platform engages with that voice—a voice that was represented by and through both race and gender.

Additionally, Brock instructed us that “there are three primary expectations for any CTDA analysis: 1. Multimodal data operationalization; 2. Multimodal interpretive research methods; 3. Critical cultural framework applied equally to all data modes,” (Brock, 2016, p. 12). From a multimodal perspective, CTDA labeled the information communication

technologies (ICTs) and the online discourse as texts. Thus, this methodology was particularly effective for blogs and social networks when the technology available shapes the discourse. Moreover, CTDA was a methodological approach that allowed for an analysis of both the content of the blog posts and how the affordances of blogging contributed to the content and discourse present within (Steele, 2017). CTDA was used to consider the culture of the communication and to provide critical engagement of the voice of the blogs created by black feminists while also examining how the internet platform affordances contribute to the content and discourse presented with in and whether these affordances enable or constrain this work.

Research Design – In Depth Review of Blog Mission Statements

Initially, in conjunction with the CTDA analysis, I sought to conduct semi-structured interviews. I surmised that interviews with blog founders would capture their first-hand experience and thus expand the context of my research. Additionally, the interviews would provide historical insight and context about the mission, black feminist voice, and the impact of the platform. However, due to time constraints and difficulty engaging with blog founders, I pivoted and used blog mission statements (the founders' own words) to better understand their mission and purpose. This analysis provided the additional context needed for this research. In my interrogation of the mission statements, I focused on the following questions:

Table 1

Questions for Reviewing Mission Statements

1. What is the mission and purpose of the blog?
2. What theories and values define / shape the blog?
3. Does the blog align with Black Feminism?

Developing a Purposive Sample of Blogs

I selected *Crunk Feminist Collective*, *The Feminist Wire*, and *For Harriet*, which are well-known, popular sites with extensive readership and longevity. Both the *Crunk Feminist Collective* and *The Feminist Wire* touted more than one million visitors relative to annual readership (Press, 2017); (Wire, 2016). *For Harriet* was a multiplatform blog site that has over 2 million visitors per month and had been featured on distinguished media sites such as the *New York Times* and *Ebony*, and was chosen as a must share site of 2014 by News One, (Foster, 2016). Taken collectively, these blogs were pioneers that focused on advancing a feminist agenda that specifically provided a lens for black feminist thought. While the selected blogs varied in the way they present material, they shared the commonality of being created by black women and widely read.

The *Crunk Feminist Collective* (www.thecrunkfeministcollective.com), founded in 2010 by Brittany Cooper, Robin Boylorn, and Susan Morris, strived to “create a space of support and camaraderie for hip hop generation feminists of color, queer and straight, in the academy and without, by building a rhetorical community, in which we [could] discuss our ideas, express our crunk feminist selves, fellowship with one another, debate and challenge one another, and support each other, as we [struggled] together to articulate our feminist goals, ideas, visions, and dreams in ways that are both personally and professionally beneficial (Collective).” The *Feminist Wire* (www.thefeministwire.com), founded in 2011 by Tamara Lomax, focused on ways to “provide socio-political and cultural critique of anti-feminist, racist, and imperialist politics pervasive in all forms and spaces of private and public lives of individuals globally. The *Feminist Wire* attempted to valorize and sustain pro-feminist representations and create alternative frameworks to build a just and equitable society” (Wire). Lastly, *For Harriet*,

(www.forharriet.com), founded in 2010 by Kimberly Foster was an online community for women of African ancestry. “We encourage women, through storytelling and journalism, to engage in candid, revelatory dialogue about the beauty and complexity of Black womanhood. We aspire to educate, inspire, and entertain” (Harriet).

Employing CTDA, I used a historical purposive sample-approach to obtain a sample of the blogs on each of the three selected sites. Because blogs represented alternate spaces for black feminist thinkers, I selected a historical moment in time (January 1, 2017 - December 31, 2017) for this purposive sample in an effort to provide context for exploring voice as it relates to black women’s identity, culture, and social climate. I selected this period of time, because it exemplified a major political upheaval in the United States with the election of Republican Donald Trump following eight years of the presidency of Democrat President Barack Obama. Essentially, the election of Donald Trump in November 2016 represented a significant political shift and provided rich fodder for discourse in the blog spaces. In particular, this point in time was ripe for a review of black feminist thought, which provided a tool for intellectual engagement, activism, and empowerment.

Each blog site was reviewed separately with a review of their mission statements, goals, and a sample of the blog entries. Methodologically, by approaching the blog sites in this way, the point in time review provided an expansive amount of information and provided insights into how the content was affected by external conditions like the economic constraints, power, and capitalism. I deployed three criteria for blog selection in my purposive sample: 1. They must occur during the stated time period of January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2017. 2. The authors must have been regular blog authors in the Black Feminist blog sites and not be guest contributors. In my estimation, regular authors better reflected the true voice of the site based on

their consistent contributions to the work. To be considered a regular author, the author must have at least three entries on the blog site. 3. The authors must identify and be identified as Black. While the blogs do accept non-black writers from various racial/cultural groups, for the purposes of this dissertation, it was key to hone in on the work of black feminist writers, as the theoretical framework centers around black women and their unique experience in U.S. history, being both oppressed by white people (men and women) and black men. Brock provided that authors could be identified as black through a review of their profile where they explicitly identify as black, through extensively reviewing their sites content, and lastly through explicitly indicating their loyalty to the black community through their online communication (Brock, 2007, p. 44). For each blog entry, I reviewed each author's profile and writing to ensure that they identified as black.

I further utilized CTDA to examine the interfaces and platforms on which the blogs were housed to review how the platform was impacting the work that is being shared. CTDA allowed for a deep reading of the blogs through an analysis of blog discourse and the interface in which the blog is enabled. CTDA was being employed here to examine the written content of the blogs. CTDA allowed for a more thorough understanding of representation and the construction of race in blogs (Brock, Kvasny, & Hales, 2012). Brock provided that researchers of blog spaces should consider the user interface in conjunction with the bloggers race and gender along with the constraints and social construction of the platform (Brock A., 2012). As such, CTDA was used in this research study to interpret meaning and how meaning was created in digital spaces (Williams & Gonlin, 2017). The blog entries selected for this study varied in genre, from political, opinion, lifestyle, entertainment, and relationships. The sample was comprised of 30 blogs entries (See Table 2).

Table 2***Number of Blog Entries Included per Blog Site***

Blog Name	Number of Entries
Crunk Feminist Collective	10 Blog Entries
The Feminist Wire	8 Blog Entries
For Harriet	12 Blog Entries

Table 3***Blog Information and Links***

The following blog lists meet each of the determined criteria for my purposive sample:

1. Written between 01/01/2017 and 12/31/2017
2. Regular contributor - at least 3 entries on the blog site
3. Identify as a black author

BLOG SITE	TITLE / DATE	AUTHOR	AUTHOR STATUS	BLACK AUTHOR	LINK
	Criterion #1		Criterion #2	Criterion #3	
1. Crunk Feminist Collective	Trust Black Women and Then Show Up for Us. – Dec 13, 2017	“Crunkadelic” – Susana M. Morrison	Co-Founder / Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2017/12/13/trust-black-women-then-show-up-for-us/
2. Crunk Feminist Collective	In Search of Black Love – Aug 24, 2017	Rboylorn – Robin Boylorn	Co-Founder / Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2017/08/24/in-search-of-black-love/
3. Crunk Feminist Collective	Interview with Denene Miller – Apr 13, 2017	“Chanel” - CF Chanel	Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2017/04/13/interview-with-denene-millner/
4. Crunk Feminist Collective	Ben Carson’s Shame – Mar 7, 2017	“Crunkadelic” – Susana M. Morrison	Co-Founder / Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2017/03/07/ben-carsons-shame/
5. Crunk Feminist Collective	Being Reflected in Moonlight – Feb 27, 2017	“Crunkadelic” – Susana M. Morrison	Co-Founder / Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2017/02/27/being-reflected-in-moonlight/

6. Crunk Feminist Collective	Petty is as Petty Does – Feb 6, 2017	“Crunkadelic” – Susana M. Morrison	Co-Founder / Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2017/02/06/petty-is-as-petty-does/
7. Crunk Feminist Collective	Pussy Don’t Fail Me Now: The Place of Vaginas in Black Feminist Theory and Organizing – Jan 23, 2017	“Crunktastic” – Brittney C. Cooper	Co-Founder / Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2017/01/23/pussy-dont-fail-me-now-the-place-of-vaginas-in-black-feminist-theory-organizing/
8. Crunk Feminist Collective	Saving Ourselves – Jan 20, 2017	“Crunkadelic” – Susana M. Morrison	Co-Founder / Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2017/01/20/saving-ourselves/
9. Crunk Feminist Collective	Black Girl Running – Jan 15, 2017	“Crunkadelic” – Susana M. Morrison	Co-Founder / Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/category/beauty-industrial-complex/
10. Crunk Feminist Collective	New Year, Same Dope Me	“Crunkadelic” – Susana M. Morrison	Co-Founder / Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2017/01/05/new-year-same-dope-me/
11. The Feminist Wire	Black Power and Its Afterlives: A Conversation With Historian Ashley D. Farmer – Dec 21, 2017	Tanisha C Ford	Contributing Editor / Frequent Contributor	YES	https://thefeministwire.com/2017/12/black-power-afterlives-conversation-historian-ashley-d-farmer/
12. The Feminist Wire	Black Marriage Unshackled: An Interview with Historian Tera W. Hunter – May 22, 2017	Tanisha C Ford	Contributing Editor / Frequent Contributor	YES	https://thefeministwire.com/2017/05/black-intimacy-nineteenth-century-conversation-historian-tera-w-hunter/
13. The Feminist Wire	Two Years after Sandra Bland, Justice for Wakiesha Wilson – Apr 6, 2017	Sikivu Hutchinson	Frequent Contributor	YES	https://thefeministwire.com/author/shutchinson/
14. The Feminist Wire	Moonlight, Black Boy and Teachable Moments – Mar 6, 2017	Sikivu Hutchinson	Frequent Contributor	YES	https://thefeministwire.com/2017/03/moonlight-black-boy-teachable-moments/
15. The Feminist Wire	#BlackSkinWhiteSkin: From Pernicious Editing to Audacious Rescripting (Benediction) – Feb 17, 2017	Tamura Lomax	Founder / Frequent Contributor	YES	https://thefeministwire.com/2017/02/blackskinwhiteskin-from-pernicious-editing-to-audacious-rescripting-benediction/
16. The Feminist Wire	#BlackSkinWhiteSkin: What’s Next: a Bibliography, a Journal and You – Feb 16, 2017	Tamura Lomax	Founder / Frequent Contributor	YES	https://thefeministwire.com/2017/02/blackskinwhiteskin-whats-next-bibliography-journal/

17. The Feminist Wire	#BlackSkinWhiteS in: Black Feminist Thoughts on No More Sheets and Black Sexual Politics – Feb 15, 2017	Heidi R. Lewis	Frequent Contributor	YES	https://thefeministwire.com/2017/02/blackskinwhitesinblack-feminist-thoughts-on-no-more-sheets-and-black-sexual-politics/
18. The Feminist Wire	#BlackSkinWhiteS in: The Black Church, Black Women and Sexual Discourses of Resistance [Revised] – Feb 13, 2017	Tamura Lomax	Founder / Frequent Contributor	YES	https://thefeministwire.com/2017/02/blackskinwhitesin-black-church-black-women-sexual-discourses-resistance-revised/
19. For Harriet	Your Education or Social Status Won't Save You from Domestic Violence – Sep 7, 2017	Arlecia D. Simmons	Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.forharriet.com/2017/09/your-education-or-social-status-wont.html
20. For Harriet	No, I Don't Want to Cure My Bipolar Disorder – Jul 21, 2017	Arielle Gray	Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.forharriet.com/2017/07/no-i-dont-want-to-cure-my-bipolar.html
21. For Harriet	Passport to Peace of Mind: My International Egg Freezing Journey – Jul 20, 2017	Gina Loring	Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.forharriet.com/2017/07/passport-to-peace-of-mind-my.html
22. For Harriet	Blac Chyna: A Black Female Pedestal for White Female Supremacy – Jul 17, 2017	Catherine Saunders	Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.forharriet.com/2017/07/blac-chyna-black-female-pedestal-for.html
23. For Harriet	What Does Sexual Liberation Look Like – Jun 17, 2017	Kimberly Foster	Founder / Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.forharriet.com/2017/06/what-does-sexual-liberation-look-like.html
24. For Harriet	For Call-Out Culture to Matter, We Must Be About the Business of Healing – Jun 5, 2017	Briana Perry	Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.forharriet.com/2017/06/but-am-i-healing-on-navigating.html
25. For Harriet	Brit Bennet on Writing an Acclaimed Novel About Black Women's Complex Lives – Jun 2, 2017	Kimberly Foster	Founder / Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.forharriet.com/2017/06/brit-bennett-on-taking-literary-world.html
26. For Harriet	Bailing out Black Moms this Mother's Day – May 10, 2017	Brianna Perry	Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.forharriet.com/2017/05/bailing-out-black-moms-this-mothers-day.html
27. For Harriet	When Motherhood Wasn't in the Cards – May 3, 2017	Stephanie Gates	Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.forharriet.com/2017/05/shuffling-deck-of-motherhood.html

28. For Harriet	Self-Care Ain't the Same for Everyone – Apr 5, 2017	Lauren Dunn	Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.forharriet.com/2017/04/self-care-aint-same-for-everyone.html
29. For Harriet	What Chimamanda Gets Wrong: A Dialogue on Trans Experiences with Jarune Uwujaren-Mar 13, 2017	Kimberly Foster	Founder /Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.forharriet.com/2017/03/what-chimamanda-gets-wrong-dialogue-on.html
30. For Harriet	On Michelle Obama and Why the Devaluation of Black Women is as American as Apple Pie – Feb 21, 2017	Jallicia Jolly	Frequent Contributor	YES	http://www.forharriet.com/2017/02/on-michelle-obama-and-why-devaluation.html

Reading and Coding the Blogs

I read each blog with deep care employing a three-step process. Step one, I read each blog in a single blog site one time. For example, there were 11 blog entries from the Crunk Feminist Collective, and I read each of these 11 blogs in one sitting. This allowed me to get an understanding of the type of writing and method of writing that was taking place within the blog. Step two, I read each individual blog entry a second time (one at a time) for a deeper reading. In this deep reading step, I took notes about each blog. These notes were recorded in a google document to ensure that I was able to preserve the information. Step three, I imported each blog into MAXQDA for coding and the identification of themes. In my analysis, I ensured that the output using the technology aligned with my recorded notes.

MAXQDA was a system designed for qualitative and mixed methods analysis such as discourse analysis and content analysis. MAXQDA provided a system that is flexible to code text, documents, and visual artifacts through importing the information, (Lewins & Silver, 2007).

Analysis Process

The three key components of Brock's CTDA included a conceptual framework, an analysis of the user interface, and a critical discourse analysis (Brock, 2016). The framework that was applied was Black Feminist Thought and Stuart Hall's concept of representation. I

closely examined each blog through black feminist thought and representation lenses, looking specifically at whether the blog represented an aspect of BFT.. Additionally, , each of the blog posts were reviewed for key themes. The themes that emerged were reviewed to identify common synergies in light of Black feminism and representation..

This multilayered approach allowed for deep engagement with the topic of voice. To complete this analysis of blog entries, the following questions were leveraged.

Table 4

Reading the Blogs

Questions Applied in Reading the Blogs
1. What is the subject / context of the blog? Record common themes.
2. Does it provide a Black Feminist perspective (BFT, Intersectionality or other?) If so, provide details regarding this perspective.
3. What are the shared meanings and representations that exist in the blog entry?
4. Which theoretical perspective does it align with (if any) and why?
5. What can be determined about the author's voice, if anything?
6. What, if anything, is absent from this blog entry?
7. Discuss and describe the platform for this blog.

Each blog was rigorously reviewed using this question matrix. Additionally, common themes were recorded by hand and via the MAXQDA technology and analyzed for Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

Lastly, an analysis of the platform and how the platform functioned was the final aspect of the process. To understand how the platform functioned, I explored the platform architecture and functionality. In order to do so, I reviewed each platform using a method employed by Plantin and Edwards to examine the following platform properties: Architecture, Relationship between Components, Market Structure, Focal Interest, Standardization, Temporality, Scale, Funding, and Agency of Users (Plantin, Lagoze, Edwards, & Sandvig, 2016, p. 7). The examination of cultural studies with the power relations in platforms provided the back drop for

understanding the friction that existed between the platform and the users (Plantin, Lagoze, Edwards, & Sandvig, 2016).

Constraints of the Approach

Critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) provided a systematic qualitative approach that allowed for the analysis of the artifact (the blog) as interface and site of discourse. The CTDA method was designed to be situated in a cultural context and to facilitate deep reading, rather than a broad sample review. . Using the CTDA method allowed for in-depth reading, paying close attention to themes, and discourse as a way to identify and analyze comparisons between the users, the discourse, and the platform.

As a black feminist writer, I recognized potential biases that may exist in my work. I identified as a Black woman, who was highly focused on understanding the work of black feminism. Additionally, I have engaged in blogging experiences on several sites and was a regular reader of the blogs included in this study. Taking all of this into account, my ability to perform a critical analysis using CTDA was not unduly hindered by acknowledging my subjectivities and inherent biases. In fact, the complex and rigorous process for CTDA analysis required deep study of both the text and context and left little room for subjectivities. Further, because CTDA required a critical cultural lens to the approach, my frame strengthened the approach as long as the analysis remained centered in the framework.

Conclusion

By combining a review of mission statements of blogs using critical technocultural discourse analysis, this dissertation methodology allowed for deep reading and a careful analysis of the blog site features, platform structure and discourse of a purposive sample of 49 Black

feminist blog entries. An examination of Black feminist voice brought to the fore through the selection of blog entries of different lengths and themes from three blog sites. This analysis began with a careful review of blog posts and an analysis of the information obtained in the mission statements. This represented the preparation needed before proceeding with the critical technocultural discourse analysis.

Findings and Analysis

What is Black Feminist Voice Interrupted? – Digging into the Code

Introduction

Historically, black women have been excluded from white media. Through this exclusion, black women developed black feminist blogs as a tool for furthering black feminist thought. This research explored the relationship between the blogosphere and Black Feminist Thought, examining the directionality and power dynamic within the relationship. Further, this work examined whether the blogosphere provided a space or hindered Black Feminist Thought. In other words, did typical exclusion of black women's voices in mainstream white media extend to the BFT blog platform.

I investigated three black feminist blog sites, *Crunk Feminist Collective*, *For Harriet*, and *the Feminist Wire*. As part of this research, I also analyzed voice and Black Feminist Thought during a period of major political upheaval in the United States (January 1, 2017 – 12/31/2017). The purposive sample used in this study was comprised of 30 blog entries which were analyzed using a critical technocultural discourse analysis lens. The following research questions were examined:

1. How is black feminist voice being articulated through black Feminist blogs?
 - a. How does this voice function?
2. How are black feminists operating in black feminist spaces in contrast with their ability to participate in traditionally white-dominated media spaces?
3. Through blogging, how do black feminists negotiate tensions between liberatory theory and platform affordances?

Brock's critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) included examining the text (blogs) as part of a critical discourse analysis and analyzing the user interface. Further, Brock's theory required that the blogs were examined through an identified conceptual framework (Brock, 2016). Deploying a critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) to investigate the research questions, I utilized a two-pronged methodological approach, which encompassed the following steps: (1) conduct a critical technocultural discourse analysis of blog posts in *Crunk Feminist Collective*, *For Harriet*, and *The Feminist Wire*, as well as review the mission statements of each of the blogs to understand how blogging makes space for the voice of black feminists; and (2) review the user interface for each of the blogs to determine whether the blog platform affords or constrains black feminist voice. Additionally, I applied this analysis to uncover themes represented within the blog posts and mission statements. This analysis laid the foundation for connections related to Black Feminist Theory, and other emerging themes.

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the data obtained from the blog posts in *Crunk Feminist Collective*, *For Harriet*, and *The Feminist Wire*. I organized this chapter into two main sections with subsections in each. The main sections include a review of the findings and the corresponding analysis. In the first subsection of the findings section, I reviewed each of the mission statements and identified themes as part of the critical discourse analysis to closely examine *how black feminist voice is being articulated through the blogs and how this voice functions*. In the second subsection, I developed a code system based on the theory around Black Feminist Thought. This coding system also utilized Stuart Hall's theory of shared meanings and representation as well as the platform. Through applying Black Feminist Thought and Hall's theory of Representation, the code system honed in on the overarching concept of black womanhood and investigated the concept of whiteness as evidenced through white supremacy,

patriarchy, and white feminism. In the second section entitled “Digging into the Blogs – Black Womanhood and Black Feminism / Black Feminist Thought,” I closely investigated *how black feminists operate in black feminist spaces in contrast with their ability to participate in traditionally white dominated media spaces*. In this section, I also reviewed the findings concerning the platform as it relates to *how it affords or constrains the blog text and voice*.

Review of Findings

Blog Mission Summaries

This section provided a synopsis of each of the mission statements authored by the blog founders of the *Crunk Feminist Collective*, *For Harriet*, and *The Feminist Wire*.

Initially, as part of my methodology, I wanted to conduct semi-structured interviews to get first-hand experience from blog founders regarding their stated mission, space for black feminist voice, and the impact of the platform relative to their goals. However, I was unable to meet with the founders to conduct these interviews. Knowing that it was imperative to understand the perspectives of the blog founders as part of the discourse analysis, I incorporated an in-depth analysis of the mission statement of each blog, (written by the founders) in an attempt to describe the following:

- What is the mission and purpose of the blog?
- What theories and values define / shape the blog?
- Does the blog align with Black Feminism?

Crunk Feminist Collective (CFC) Mission Statement

Crunk Feminist Collective's (CFC) mission statement was to “create a space of support and camaraderie for hip generation feminists of color...” (Collective, 2008). The creators of the

space indicated that a main goal for CFC was to have a place for voice, fellowship, and expression. Fueled by the Black music trend, Crunk music, which is born of Hip Hop music and southern black sound, the Black feminists of CFC sought to bring together a multi-discipline, multi-identifying group of Black feminists to create a refuge for scholarly activists. Here, these activists could bring their intellect in the form of print for publication. The blog site *Crunk Feminist Collective* created a place where “we [sought] to speak our own truths, and to both magnify and encourage the feminist credos that shape and inform our lives and that we [used] to engage and transform our world” (Collective, 2008). Centered in feminist ideals and principles, Crunk Feminism represented an unapologetic nod to a new cultural representation and provided a place for resistance through crunk music and raw unfiltered written truth (Collective, 2008).

For Harriet Mission Statement

In the *For Harriet* mission statement, Kimberly Foster (founder) touted that *For Harriet* represented an “online community for women of African ancestry” (About *For Harriet*, 2010). *For Harriet* represented a blog space that facilitated storytelling and provided a space for women of African descent to participate in enlightening and inspiring dialogue about the “complexity of Black womanhood,” (About *For Harriet*, 2010). Further, as part of the mission, *For Harriet* sought to grow a multi-layered platform for Black women.

The Feminist Wire Mission Statement (TFW)

The Feminist Wire represented a blog site that critiqued anti-feminist, racist, and imperialist oppression. Specifically, *The Feminist Wire* aimed to create a space cemented in feminist politics to create a foundation for justice. In particular, *The Feminist Wire* was founded as a result of a recognition of the U.S. crisis and issues of oppression that affected feminist politics and matters that impact women and girls such as “the impact of neoliberal policies on

girls, women, and non-normatively gendered bodies throughout the world; the dangers besieging the most vulnerable because of cultures of war, militarism, and patriarchy,” (Wire, 2016). TFW created a blog space for highlighting patriarchy and to foster a sense of connection. *The Feminist Wire* provided an intervention to societal ills and allowed for multiple voices with a common cause (Wire, 2016).

Analysis of the Mission Statements

After a close reading of each of the mission statements, I analyzed them to identify frequently used words. This analysis enabled me to better understand the intent, the purpose, and focus of each of the blog sites. Designed for qualitative analysis, MAXQDA, allowed me to deeply examine the mission statements (Lewins & Silver, 2007). MAXQDA analysis included uploading the three mission statements into a query which provided word frequencies created a word cloud. After creating a “stop list” (a stop list instructs MAXQDA to not include common connective such as a, and, the, and so forth) MAXQDA retrieved 34 high frequency words from the mission statements. The following table provided a list of the 10 most frequently used words in the three blogs which were analyzed: (See Appendix for Full Table).

Table 5

Word Cloud Mission Statements – Word Frequencies

Word	Frequency	%	Rank
Feminist	15	9.74	1
Black	11	7.14	2
Women	11	7.14	2
Culture	9	5.84	4
Mission	8	5.19	5
Political	6	3.90	6
Share	6	3.90	6
Us	6	3.90	6

Feminism	5	3.25	9
Community	4	2.60	10
Cultural	4	2.60	10

To further highlight to the mission statements relative to the research questions and the questions used to closely read the blogs, I utilized MAXDA to create a visual representation of the blog missions, taken collectively, as well as the word frequencies through creating a word cloud.

Word clouds are frequently used for website and textual analysis. A word cloud is “visual presentations of a set of words, typically a set of tags, in which attributes of text such as size, weight, or color can be used to represent features (e.g., frequency) of associated terms,” (Havley & Kean). Word clouds organize words and display a visual that provide the assessment of interrelationships of the specific concepts (Depaolo & Wilkerson, 2014). Word clouds used in qualitative research provide good tools for mapping further research. While researchers have not claimed that a word cloud should replace detailed analysis, it has been applicable in various situations. Particularly, word clouds provided a graphical view of knowledge. Also, it provided a mechanism for sharing conceptual data related to the research (Depaolo & Wilkerson, 2014). For this research, the word cloud acted in conjunction with analysis of text from the blog mission statements and illuminated the commonality amongst the blog missions and visions.

Figure 1

Mission Statement Word Cloud

for an engagement with the topic of voice and the research questions. For this part of the analysis, I probed each blog using questions 1 – 6 in Table 5 to identify the emergent themes.

Table 6

Mission Statements

Questions Applied When Reviewing Blog Missions
1. What is the subject / context of the blog? Record common themes.
2. Does it provide a Black Feminist perspective either BFT, Intersectionality or other? If so, provide details regarding this perspective.
3. What are the shared meanings and representations that exist in the blog entry?
4. Which theoretical perspective does it align with (if any) and why?
5. What is able to be determined about the author's voice, if anything?
6. What if anything is absent from this blog entry?
7. Discuss and describe the platform for this blog.

In my initial read of the blogs, I noticed emerging themes. These themes corresponded with the theoretical framework highlighted in this study i.e. Black Feminist Thought. As stated earlier, Collins characterized the features of Black Feminist Thought by providing that “U.S. Black women participate in a dialectical relationship linking African-American women’s oppression and activism,” (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 2009, p. 25). Collins further provided that Black Feminist Thought affords an avenue to resist oppression and to empower black women within the context of social justice, (Collins, pp. 25-26). In applying Collin’s analysis of the features of Black Feminist Thought during the manual and electronic reviews of text, I noticed emerging themes and developed a coding system to aggregate them. The emerging themes for the blogs included:

Table 7

Codes

Code	Documents	Coded Segments (all documents)	% Coded Segments (all documents)
------	-----------	--------------------------------	----------------------------------

Black Feminism / Black Feminist Thought	9	18	10.91
Intersectionality	2	2	1.21
Liberatory Theory	3	3	1.82
Platform / Platform Affordances	1	1	0.61
Shared Meanings / Representations	5	9	5.45
Theory	10	21	12.73
Voice	6	6	3.64
White Feminism	1	3	1.82
White Supremacy / Patriarchy	6	7	4.24
Whiteness	7	10	6.06
Anti-Black Womanhood	3	5	3.03
Black Motherhood	6	10	6.06
Black Queer and Trans Women	4	5	3.03
Black Womanhood	21	45	27.27
Black Women and Mental Health	1	2	1.21
Black Women Trauma	3	3	1.82
Black Women's Bodies	8	15	9.09

By closely examining each of these emerging themes using Collin's features of Black Feminist Thought as a reference, I developed three overarching categories in which I placed each of the codes (each code into one of the categories). The overarching categories developed are: Furthering Liberatory Theory, Speaking to Whiteness, and Understanding or Empowering Black Womanhood. The category "Furthering Liberatory Theory" included relevant theoretical frameworks that relate to this dissertation, specifically Black Feminist Thought, Intersectionality, and Representation. The category related to addressing topics surrounding marginalization and oppression through white supremacy and patriarchy. Finally, the category "Understanding and Empowering Black Womanhood" included all blog entries that relate to black womanhood.

Table 8

Categories and Codes

Parent code	Code	Coded Segments (all documents)	% Coded Segments (all documents)
Furthering Liberatory Theory	Black Feminism / Black Feminist Thought	21	12.73
	Intersectionality	2	1.21
	Liberatory Theory	3	1.82
	Platform / Platform Affordances	1	0.61
	Shared Meanings / Representations	9	5.45
	Theory	18	10.91
	Voice	6	3.64
TOTAL CODED SEGMENTS		60	36.37
Speaking to Whiteness	White Feminism	3	1.82
	White Supremacy / Patriarchy	7	4.24
	Whiteness	10	6.06
TOTAL CODED SEGMENTS		20	12.12
Understanding and Empowering Black Womanhood	Anti-Black Womanhood	5	3.03
	Black Motherhood	10	6.06
	Black Queer and Trans Women	5	3.03
	Black Womanhood	45	27.27
	Black Women and Mental Health	2	1.21
	Black Women Trauma	3	1.82
	Black Women's Bodies	15	9.09
TOTAL CODED SEGMENTS		85	51.51
TOTAL % Of CODED SEGMENTS			100

Digging into the Blogs – Black Womanhood and Black Feminism / Black Feminist Thought

Based on the coded and categorized blogs, Understanding and Empowering Black Womanhood represented the greatest category. In fact, the black feminist blogs focused on themes surrounding black womanhood, black feminism and Black Feminist Thought 52% and 13% of the time respectively. The category for black womanhood was coded 45 times amongst

the blogs. In the analysis section of this research process, I deeply examined the blogs and their meanings in order to engage with the research questions.

For instance, in Jalicia Jolly's blog post entitled: "On Michelle Obama and Why the Devaluation of Black Women is American as Apple Pie" on the For Harriet site, she wrote the following

"Michelle's inauguration face registered the moral meaning of public contempt. It renders visible the compromised space Black woman navigate as they are forced to adhere to the logics of U.S. patriotism and its blatant disregard and subjugation of people of color generally, and Black people in particular," (Jolly, 17).

In this post, Jolly specifically addressed Michelle Obama's facial expressions at the inauguration of Donald Trump. She stated that Obama's expression was complete with all of the disappointment and future onslaught of oppression that black women will soon feel. The author goes on to say that this experience was yet another example of the daily conundrum that black women face as they negotiate 'American' values which often served to exclude, marginalize, and erase them.

In Tanisha Ford's blog posted in the Feminist Wire, she discussed the activism and intellectual engagement of black women during the Black Power era (Ford, 2017). In an interview with historian Ashley D. Farmer, Ford engaged with the topic that black women fought for a reiteration of Black Power to include the contribution of black women in the movement, as well as a more expansive view of Black Power—one that was not conflated with sexism (Ford, 2017). Farmer's discussion centered around the book *Remaking Black Power*, the first of its kind celebrating the work of black women during this era (2017).

In "Saving Ourselves", Susana Morrison of Crunk Feminist Collective interrogated her purpose for her "feminist ministry," (Morrison S. , *Saving Ourselves*, 2017). Relevant to this

research, Morrison discussed the aftermath of the Donald Trump election in November 2016. While Morrison's blog represents a stinging account of the individual racism of white people that participated in the election of Donald Trump, Morrison emphatically stated that her work is not for the white tears of white people. Rather, Morrison implored black people to not get bogged down in the distractions and to continue to do the work and focus on self-care (Morrison S. , *Saving Ourselves*, 2017). It seemed that Morrison's black feminism was one that is solely focused on black people and black people's engagement in the process. Taken holistically, the blogs provided a deeply engaging content relative to the theory of black feminism, Black Feminist Thought and black womanhood.

About the Blog Platforms

Through examining the source code, I determined that The Crunk Feminist Collective and the Feminist Wire both use WordPress as the platform for their blog site. For Harriet uses Blogger, (a.k.a Blogspot) as the platform. After locating the source code, I applied Plantin and Edwards' theory to examine blog platforms to the blog sites for an examination the platform properties. These platform properties are Architecture, Relationship between Components, Market Structure, Focal Interest, Standardization, Temporality, Scale, Funding, and Agency of Users (Plantin, Lagoze, Edwards, & Sandvig, 2016, p. 7).

Blogger provided a free blogging platform that enabled users to create a blog and blogsite and publish it online immediately. Blogger provided users with a URL based on the name chosen by the user. For example, if your blog site was entitled Black Feminists Rock, your web address would be blackfeministsrock.blogspot.com. Additionally, users could register a domain for a registration fee of approximately \$10.00.

Blogger, owned by Google and as such, afforded users access to other Google products, such as photo-sharing and social networking. If a user decided to use the basic blog designs provided by Blogger, the ease of use allowed the user to get a new blog site up in little to no time (Grabianowski). While Blogger provided ease of use and access for the novice, it was also a platform that facilitated the needs of more experienced users. Blogger was fully integrated with Google+, Picasa, and Google AdSense and with the many options for customizations, a more experienced user can design a completely unique blog design and still be able to leverage the backend controls that Blogger provides.

WordPress provided a full Content Management System, designed to help users build content online. WordPress could create any type of website. Like Blogger, WordPress was also free, but users chose their own hosting plan outside of WordPress. While users were able to select a domain name and hosting plan through Blogger, WordPress users chose a hosting plan and domain name. After doing so, WordPress users were able to install and set up their WordPress site. (Hughes, 2019). Using WordPress, users could also create posts and pages for their blogs, edit settings, and add additional users. Like Blogger, WordPress users maintained multiple theme options for their site layout and appearance. Also, WordPress allowed users to install plugins to create more functional blog sites, including adding contact forms and eCommerce functionality.(Hughes, 2019).

In general, both Blogger and WordPress had pros and cons. In terms of pros, users find the no cost of Blogger a positive aspect of the platform. Users also reported that Blogger was easier to use with a platform that allows users to create and post content quickly. Users also found it easier to learn and use the main features immediately on Blogger and to personalize one's blog site, totally free as you do not need a hosting plan. Users noted some issues with

Blogger including the basic functionality of the platform which is restrictive after the creation and posting of a standard blog. Customization options were limited and users did not own the content on Blogger since all of the content resides on Google's servers (Hughes, 2019).

When describing WordPress users highlighted the ease of use in starting a blog with the WordPress platform that was easy to use, especially for a novice. Users also enjoyed the multiple customization options in the form of plugins, which enabled users to design their blog site to their own specifications. More experienced users could add custom coding, as desired. WordPress' major limitations included the initial financial investment needed to secure a host and domain.

Black Feminist Thought and Voice Revealed - The Analysis

Summary of the Problem

Black women have currently and historically have been left out of white media. With the growing impact of social media, black women have focused on obliterating the barriers inherent in white media by opening up their own spaces into the blogosphere, thus providing an alternative space for themselves. These spaces offered the promise of amplifying voice, enabling communication, and facilitating the construction of Black Feminist Thought that can then be shared with the black community and the world. While the blogosphere yielded great promise for black women, I theorized that it fell short of the its promise of enabling Black Feminist Thought and engagement. This alternative space continues to reflect the dominate society and thus I further theorized that systemic racism exists at the core of blog platforms, thus inhibiting unfiltered Black Feminist voice.

Whether the research questions are supported?

In general, research findings supported the initial argument that black feminists have been excluded from white media in general, and as such they have created their own space for their voice through blogs.

RQ1 – How is black feminist voice being articulated through black feminist blogs? How does voice function?

To bring light to Research Question 1, I delved into the mission statements. The mission statements elucidated the voice of the blog founders since in-depth interviews were not possible. Each blog's mission amplified the purpose and voice of each of the founders and provided the rationale for the initial development of the blog as an alternative space. In particular, the

mission statement of *Crunk Feminist Collective* detailed the desire of the founders to create an alternative space for hip hop feminists of color, a space where voice and fellowship could take place. *For Harriet* highlighted the use of the blog site as an online community for black women that facilitated storytelling and allowed for the empowerment of complex non-monolithic black womanhood. *The Feminist Wire* created a space to hone in on feminist theory and to facilitate voice around issues of oppression and patriarchy in society.

Through my review and analysis of each of the blogs and applying the categories determined in Chapter 4, I concluded that each of the blog sites were created to further liberatory theory.

Liberatory Theory represented an umbrella category for advancing theoretical frameworks that were relevant to this research and to black women/black feminism as a whole. In particular, the mission statements advanced Black Feminist Thought through their reliance on Alternative Spaces, Representation, and Voice, each of which is a pillar of Patricia Hill Collins Black Feminist Thought (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 2009). Additionally, engagement with alternative spaces, representation, and voice remained an aspect of liberatory theory as outlined in section 1. The idea of Liberatory Theory represented 36% of the coded segments within the blog mission statements and blogs. Looking specifically at the mission statements, the words feminist black, women and culture were most frequently used. The use of this language is directly aligned with the objective to further liberatory theory.

Alternative Spaces

Using the theory advanced by Patricia Hill Collin as a barometer, each of the blog sites represented an alternative space, a safe space for black women and empowerment. The founders of these blog sites forged spaces that represent the freedom to be empowered and to advance

social justice matters (Collins, 2009). The alternative spaces in which the blogs reside represented collective “acts of resistance” and adeptness at navigating white attempts to exclude these voices from white media spaces (Collins, p. 107). In *the Crunk Feminist Collective, For Harriet, and the Feminist Wire*, black women lean into Black Feminist Thought in order to resist the oppression and suppression that exists in white media spaces. *Crunk Feminist Collective* stated that their mission was to create alternative spaces for hip hop feminists of color (Collective, 2008). *For Harriet* provided that the site was one that provided an alternative space to “educate, inspire, and entertain,” (Foster, 2016). Moreover, *For Harriet* proclaimed that the space was one that was “alternative to mainstream media representations of black womanhood,” (Foster, 2016). *The Feminist Wire* asserted that the site was designed to “create alternative frameworks to build a just and equitable society,” (Wire, 2016).

Representation

Additionally, as part of the black feminist efforts to further liberatory theory in blog spaces, the founders of the blogs were keenly focused on representation. Stuart Hall’s theory of representation provided the theoretical backdrop for understanding how shared meanings are created and represented and how culture and language are demonstrated in spaces such as black feminist blog sites. In fact, representation was key to understanding culture (Hall, 1997). *For Harriet* specifically spoke in terms of representation. The mission of *For Harriet* provided that the purpose of the blog was to represent the “beauty and complexity of black womanhood,” ...and to “raise the level of discourse surrounding black women,” (Foster, 2016). *The Feminist Wire* provided that its mission was to “valorize and sustain pro-feminist representations,” meaning that the representation that was taking place was one that provided black feminist

representation, (Wire, 2016). Each of these three blogs are unified in representing black womanhood and Black Feminist Thought.

Voice

Throughout this research, I have focused on the voice of black feminists and Black Feminist Thought in alternative blog spaces. As outlined in Chapter 1, voice was defined for black women and black feminists in its mature state as, *representing the site or dialectical process by which interruptions are enacted or resisted*. Patricia Hill Collins engaged with the concept of voice through the act of embracing alternative spaces. She argued that black women have often sought out spaces to give voice to the many ways that their day-to-day experiences intersection. For instance, as black women grappled with being black, being women, in addition to many other intersections, they have retreated to space that provided room for collective and individual voice (Collins, Black Feminist Thought, 2009). In particular, *Crunk Feminist Collective* provided that the blog site provided a space to articulate “our feminist goals, ideas, visions, and dreams” (Collective, 2008). Further, aligning with the definition, *Crunk Feminist Collective* provided that the site delivered space to speak truth and to enact crunkness, “our mode of resistance” (Collective, 2008). *The Feminist Wire* stated that its voice was one that sought to “intervene by making common cause with voices and visions similar to our own” (Wire, 2016). In considering how voice is represented in the mission statements, voice became written speech centered in furthering liberatory theory.

RQ2 – How are black feminists operating in black feminist spaces in contrast with their ability to participate in traditional media spaces?

In order to engage with research question two, I delved into the blogs using in depth reading and a MAXQDA analysis. The findings showed that approximately 52% of the

examined content focused on Understanding and Empowering Black Womanhood, which represented the code category with the highest percentage rate. Within this category, Black Womanhood, Black Motherhood, and Black Women's Bodies were the coded most often and accounted for approximately 42% (of the 52%) for the entire code category. Black womanhood alone, black women's bodies, and black motherhood represented 27%, 9%, and 6%, respectively.

On Black Womanhood, Black Women's Bodies, and Black Motherhood

In revisiting Jalicia Jolly's blog post in For Harriet entitled, "On Michelle Obama and Why the Devaluation of Black Women is American as Apple Pie," she described the pain experienced by one of our most beloved, Michelle Obama. Jolly made one of the most poignant statements about black women / black womanhood during the aftermath of Obama in this new Trump regime. Jolly stated:

"It was in Michelle's sullen face and watery eyes that I, yet again, felt the weight of what it means to live while Black and women in this country. We are low priority on the national agenda. We are hyper visible in a toxic moral landscape historically invested in our violent denigration. We are in a state of being perpetually disposable as we are told defenseless, unpitiable, and, thus, undeserving. We juggle national and communal expectations as we manage the imposition of values, beliefs, and behaviors that are against our very existence. It requires a process that almost never encourages us to just be, forbidding us to invest in any form of full selfhood unless it services the interests and needs of anything and anyone but us—white men, white women, and Black men. As I watched the torch passing of this new age of American empire, I thought about the ongoing exchanges and sacrifices Black women are often forced to participate in—resistance for "patriotism" and racial solidarity for gender equality, to name a couple." (Jolly, 17)

Jolly's depiction related greatly to the intersectional plight of black women, being both black and a woman in a society that has failed to accept or appreciate our intersections. Sitting on Kimberle Crenshaw's margins while bearing the weight of slavery on our back, black women

marginalized and oppressed have often been FORCED to sacrifice for the good of women and for the good of black men!

Similarly, in “Trust Black Women – Then Show Up for Us,” blogger Susan Morrison, also known as Crunkadelic, of Crunk Feminist Collective, wrote about the white Alabama senate race between Doug Jones and Roy Moore. Roy Moore, a known pedophile, was being supported by the Republican party even in the midst of their purported conservative family values. Crunkadelic specifically referenced the obligation that black women take on, as they jump in to save American values. Crunkadelic stated, “Black folk—Black women, as per usual—showed up and showed out at the polls. White supremacists think in terms of a long game, but Black folk [Black women] do too” (Morrison S. M., Trust Black Women. Then Show Up for Us., 2017). Crunkadelic again referenced, while somewhat essentialist in nature, how in general black women (in all their black womanhood) most often show up to support American values and the American dream.

Also, in the blog, “Black Girl Running,” by Susanna Morrison, she discussed how black girls and women were not allowed to be care-free in a world in which their body is under a microscope for all the world to see. In discussing her own personal story, Crunkadelic (Morrison) told the reader that she knew she was not the only one who had “their Black girl body watched, mocked, and surveilled damn near to death,” (Morrison S. M., Black Girl Running, 2017). Morrison juxtaposed the freeness she felt as a child with her now hyperawareness of how others view her body. Also, Morrison talked about the concept of weight in her blog post. She colorfully described how her overweight body became an “albatross that [she] wore around [her] neck, the way the older girls in [her] neighborhood wore gold nameplates,” (Morrison S. M., Black Girl Running, 2017). Morrison further details how she disassociated from her body

and lost the carefree joy that she once held based on the hate and contempt people launched at her (Morrison S. M., *Black Girl Running*, 2017).

In Sikivu Hutchinson's blog "Two Years After Sandra Bland, Justice for Wakeisha Wilson" in *The Feminist Wire*, she revisited the death of Sandra Bland and Wakeisha Wilson because of. Bland's death highlighted that not only are black men brutalized by the police, but black women are subjected to the long harsh arm of the law. Hutchinson focused on this as she pointed out that Bland's death, like the death of many others, was a stark reminder that many black women die at the hands of the police, often for minor offense, and are incarcerated for minor crimes which places them further at risk of being victimized further (Hutchinson, 2017).

Hutchinson pointed out that in 2017, Wilson also suffered the same fate as Bland. Wilson's death remained in dispute as to whether it was a police incident or an attempted suicide. Using these two incidents as a foundation, Hutchinson focused her blog on the tragic victimization of black women at the hands of those that are sworn to protect and serve.

Other blog posts take on topics other than police brutality. In "Bailing out Black Mom's This Mother's Day," Briana Perry used the *For Harriet* platform to contrast Mother's Day and the concept of motherhood for black women as compared to white women. Historically, the joys of motherhood have been synonymous with middle class white women. Perry stated:

"The experiences of poor and women of color mothers have often been overlooked and erased in the dominant narrative around motherhood. Black mothers, specifically, have had a complicated experience with motherhood and exercising their right to parent. This experience dates back to chattel slavery when enslaved women's bodies were controlled, and they were not afforded the same praise and honor with motherhood as White women. Instead of being viewed as mothers, they were considered tools to breed as intensively as possible for revenue. Enslaved women worked during their pregnancies and were expected to return to the dehumanizing labor promptly after delivery," (Perry, 2017).

To date, black mothers and their bodies continued to be regulated. For instance, Black women's bodies have been repeatedly subjected to sterilization. Additionally, there remained a

high rate of incarceration for low income black mothers and black women who continued to face systemic oppression on the basis of motherhood, and continue to be denied the same joy in mothering as white women (Perry, 2017).

RQ-3 Through blogging, how do black feminists negotiate tensions between liberatory theory and platform affordances?

Black women and black feminists have long been prohibited from engaging in white media spaces, or as the saying goes, ‘black women are prohibited from bringing their whole selves to work’. Further, it became clear that black feminists took advantage of various platforms to engage in conversations of theory, empower themselves, connect through shared meanings and representations, and participate in revolutionary acts of resistance. Thus, it was important to investigate whether these spaces truly allowed for liberatory work or whether the platform afforded or constrained.

To engage with Research Question 3, I examined what was missing in the blogs and looked closely at the platforms. Brock’s Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) provided the mechanism for looking closely at blog platforms and the ways in which black feminists negotiate tensions between liberatory theory and platform affordances. In particular, CTDA facilitated an engagement with the platform in conjunction with the meaning that is being produced within the platforms (Brock A. , 2016). In general, the platforms used by Crunk Feminist Collect, For Harriet, and The Feminist Wire provide an accessible solution to an alternative space. Both Word Press and Blogger are relatively easy to use and require little financial investment, if any.

Considering Research Questions 1 and 2 and the ways that black feminist operate in blog spaces, black feminist bloggers have engaged in theoretical discussions of Black Feminist

Thought, as well as the Understanding and Empowerment of black womanhood. So, we were left asking the question, what was missing within the platforms? Based on the coded content and the blog sample from January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2017, approximately 88% of the blog mission statements and blog text centered around Furthering Liberatory Theory and Understanding and Empowering Black Womanhood. The category of Speaking to Whiteness was only minimally included within these black feminist blog spaces. In fact, approximately only 12% of the blog text was dedicated to speaking to whiteness through topics around white feminism, white supremacy, patriarchy and whiteness in general. bell hooks advised that through oppositional gaze, black feminists needed to establish spaces of agency where they could politically and critically interrogate white gaze. She stated that oppositional gaze represented a method to resisting the dominant power of oppression (hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, 1992). Notably, even amidst tumultuous time of a presidency change in the United States, black feminist blogs were not discussing whiteness and white oppression. Rather, these black feminist blogs have retreated to the seemingly safe space where they can focus on connecting through empowering blackness, redefining the story of black womanhood, and sharing in their cultural meanings and representations. As such, I posited that black feminists in these blog spaces are operating differently than hooks proposed in her discussions or lack of discussions about white gaze. Rather than resisting through oppositional gaze, black feminists resisted through building up self and the black community. Research Question 3 drew us into investigating the tensions of liberatory theory and platform affordances. I surmised that in order to remain safe, black feminists are not addressing white gaze, and are spending their time leaning into blackness.

Conclusion – Black Feminist Thought Interrupted

In this study, online blogging platforms, although user-friendly and accessible, indirectly mediated Black Feminist Thought. These blog spaces provided affordances relative to the way in which the technologies impact the processes of the people who engage within them. These affordances were embedded within the technology as “qualities, features, or cues” (Nagy & Neff, 2015). Applying a framework, by Majchrzak et al, and thus looking at the affordances within various platforms, I considered the interdependent relationship between the capability of the technology and the action taken by the user on the platform.

While black feminists carved a dynamic space for their voices to be heard in the blogosphere, their blogs seemingly did not provide a critique of white oppression and white supremacy. Collectively, these acts of resistance empowered their blackness. Yet, absent the critique of that which oppresses them, there remained yet a great opportunity to expand the voice that exists within these blog spaces.

In Chapter 2, I asserted that ‘Voice’ was not just the way that Black Feminist Thought took shape online, but rather ‘Voice’ was the sound it made when interrupted by the bellow of white oppression... voice existed as often the suppressed sound of the text captured in the platform. Voice represented the active participation – the blogging that took place within the platform. For this research, voice represented the codependent relationship between the writing, the oppression, and the platform. Voice has been somewhat narrowed in these blogs by not actively addressing the ever-present whiteness that choked language, stifled empowerment, and stamped out blackness. This tapering of voice represented the interruption to Black Feminist Thought and ‘Voice’. While it certainly was the prerogative of black feminist bloggers to focus on black womanhood and empowerment, I asserted that the blogs seemed to promise more. I

began asking what was missing from the blogs, and not speaking to whiteness and addressing the oppression represented a glaring opportunity to do more within the blog space. It seemed that these black feminists blogs, even with the best hopes of attaining freedom, safety, and the ability to speak their truths were still under the cloak of white oppression, which limited their voice.

VOICE became and remained Black Feminist Thought – INTERRUPTED!

Limitations

There were two limitations to this study. Initially, as the researcher, I planned to conduct interviews with each of the blog founders to get an in-depth understanding of the mission and purpose of the blogs to understand the relationship to Black Feminist Thought, and to get a look at the platform affordances. As mentioned in chapters 3 and 4, I was unable to conduct these interviews due to inaccessibility of the founders. However, to address this potential gap, I thoroughly analyzed the blog mission statements of each of the blogsites.

Additionally, I have taken sample from a particular a point in time in order to not only look closely at the individual samples but to generalize about the ways in which black feminists operate within the blogs at other points in time. Given the context of this research with the evolving state of the Presidency, in particular, I believe that an examination of samples over an expanded period of time would provide additional information to assist with answering the research questions.

Suggestions for Future Research

The results of this research serve as the foundation for future research in the area of black feminists in the digital social media space. Not only should blogs be a point of entry to

understand how black feminists are using their voice, but also social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram should be included in this research as well. In particular, the three blogs used in this research study have an active practice of engaging in social media social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Individuals on these blog platforms also use social media individually.

Social media is immediate and most often there is a more extensive amount of brief content. By performing a similar analysis of black feminist social media spaces, the researcher can include comments to posts and tweets as a way to examine voice. Additionally, because these platforms allow for more visible engagement, it will be relevant to examine negotiations of liberatory theory. This research focused on a snapshot to examine voice as it pertained to the year after Donald Trump was elected as President. Now in 2020 and following the November 2020 election, the rhetoric, racism, and oppressive policies of Donald Trump's administration over these last four years has been extensive. As such, an additional recommendation for future research is to increase the time frame covered in this research. It would be advantageous to look closely at how black feminist voice changes over the four years in which Donald Trump has been President.

Despite what may come from this research, as the researcher, I have strived to bring Black Feminist Thought in alternative spaces to the forefront of conversations in academic scholarship. Blogs have afforded black women and black feminists with a place in which to empower and to further the goals of black womanhood. As such, the ways that blogs have come into view are key to understanding the impacts of platforms and the ways in which black feminists negotiate the dynamics of platforms.

The Journey #Afterthoughts

I came to the end of chapter four, and it felt like an abrupt slamming on of brakes, as if I just could not go any further. Truthfully, I believe that feeling was caused by a couple of things. The first perhaps the most obvious was my overall desire to finish this dissertation and close this chapter of my academic studies. However, as I reached the end of my dissertation, I questioned whether I had thoroughly answered the research questions. I wondered if I initially asked the right questions to satisfy this multi-year quest in which I had journeyed. As I dig into the literal exhilaration of being nearly complete, my thirst has not yet been quenched. Rather, I endeavor to ponder this work once more, this dissertation once more, and this journey once more.

To summarize my current study, I asked the following research questions:

1. How is black feminist voice being articulated through black feminist blogs?
 - a. How does this voice function?
2. How are black feminists operating in black feminist spaces in contrast with their ability to participate in traditionally white? media spaces?
3. Through blogging, how do black feminists negotiate tensions between liberatory theory and platform affordances?

As part of my initial thinking and investigation, I believed that the research would demonstrate that black feminists find alternative social media spaces because of their exclusion from white mainstream media. I reasoned that black feminists would find in these places, a vehicle for articulating and demonstrating their voice. I remain confident that the research and findings continue to align with my initial theories. Also, as part of my initial thinking I asserted that black feminists in blog spaces articulate a voice that “represents the site of dialectical process by which interruptions are enacted or resisted”. In particular, the interruptions

represented both external oppression and the oppressive platform on which these blogs reside. Additionally, black feminists in these blog spaces armed with Black Feminist Thought are forced to negotiate the tensions between liberatory theory and the platform affordances. In particular, I selected a highly charged and volatile period of time to examine voice in the blogs by choosing the time period following the election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States. This time period, I believed, would clearly illuminate the tensions of liberatory theory and voice within platforms.

I began my journey with a foundational theory embedded in, Black Feminist Thought. As I was seeking to examine and better understand the voice of black feminists in blog spaces, I was also seeking a space for my own voice to be heard, a place where my voice would not remain suppressed by my inability to access the words of Black Feminist Thought. I embraced Black Feminist Thought as a way to create access for myself and to help me in uncovering the voice of black feminists in blog spaces.

As I began this quest, I made several assumptions. I assumed that black feminists were actively engaging in dialogue that addressed white oppression and that these blog sites would directly take on whiteness, white patriarchy, and racism. I also assumed that the context of the time period mattered – that Donald Trump’s election, the election of white nationalism, would drive the conversation and the voice. Further, I assumed that the blog platform used by black feminists shaped the conversation, and that the racist structures of the internet and blog platforms would also drive the conversation. I chuckle when I think of the colloquialism, “You know what happens when you assume ...”

Based on my research, the platform did not inherently shape voice. In fact, the blog platforms provided an easy and accessible way to collaborate on topics of blackness and to

disseminate this information. However, it is important to note, I do not devalue the work of theorists such as Brock and Nakamara. In fact, I firmly believe that the internet and digital media spaces are inherently racist. Yet, my review of the blog sites illustrated that the platform did not directly inhibit voice. While racism may exist in platform infrastructures, in this case, voice was not impeded. Thus, I am left asking the question of whether the engagement with platform affordances mattered in my research.

In other reflections on this research study and the results that it yield, I also remain wondering whether the historical time frame, that was a focus in the study, mattered. In essence, as a black feminist and digital media scholar, I firmly believed that the context of the time period would provide rich blogs about the atrocities that were being committed against American Democracy with the election of Trump and his racist and sexist stance on just about every issue. I assumed that the blogs would directly address oppression and provide a tool for overcoming whiteness. Results of the study determined that while the Trump presidency lingered in the background of the work that was being done in these blog sites, there was very little writing that centered around Trump, his policies, or whiteness. This was both astonishing and troubling to me. Surely, these black feminist writers and their sites that I admired so much would directly critique Trump and his oppression centered divisive politics. Surely, these black feminist blog sites would put whiteness and white gaze on ‘front street’ for all to see. It did not.

Thus, I looked again at the theory of Black Feminist Thought to determine where “we” (black feminists and the researcher) had gone wrong. Weren’t these alternative spaces supposed to be a place where black feminists could lash out at the wrongdoing of white America –a place that allowed for inclusion rather than exclusion? Why didn’t the context and the platform matter in this research? Had Black Feminist Thought let me down?

When Patricia Hill Collins discussed alternative spaces, she spoke of safe spaces. Collins provided that the mere act of black women's resistance demands that the "the realm of relatively safe discourse..." is a necessity (Collins, 2009, p. 111). Collin's further stipulates that in these safe spaces self-definition and black women's empowerment are being advanced, and they become spaces to "resist the dominant ideology" (p. 111). Collin's premise is paramount to the questions that dwelled at the conclusion of my dissertation project.

Once again focusing on Black Feminist Thought, I realized that my expectation of the blog spaces was somewhat amiss. My research question asked how black feminists are operating in black feminist spaces in contrast with their ability to participate in traditional media spaces. Yet, I believe that perhaps this question should have been framed differently for a couple of reasons. First, black feminist are not operating in blog spaces in contrast with traditional media spaces, because they have been unable to gain full access to traditional media spaces. Thus, the question should be: How are black feminists engaging in black feminist blog spaces? What I realized is that the engagement in black feminist blog spaces is a total act of self-love, community love and demonstrative of the love of black womanhood.

Black feminist blog spaces escape 'othering' and represent a sanctuary for black empowerment, a place where black women and black feminists can collaborate and participate in the act of healing and love. The blog sites and blog entries are free from white gaze. Thus, these sites represent acts of resistance—the decision to be free from the peering othering gaze of white society.

In reflection on this study, I believe the second part of the research question should have included: For what audience are the blogs written? By asking this question, my research would have focused on the representation and shared meanings that are taking place in the blogs. I

assert that the blogs are written for black feminists and black women, and written by black feminists since much of the content is narrowly focused on facilitating the growth of black women and the black community as a whole.

Additionally, in my third research question, I ask how black feminists negotiate tensions between liberatory theory and platforms. I also believe that this question needs to be altered. Admittedly, I will have to do more research on this, but I posit that there is less negotiation of liberatory theory when there is not a direct threat to white oppression. Blog platforms are relatively free from critique, as the people that access them are most often people that desire to engage with the content. As such, based on the platforms reviewed in this research, the platforms did not actively restrict voice.

Upon further reflection, blogs may not be the medium in which to review the negotiation between liberatory theory and platform affordances. I believe that what I uncovered in this research is the death of the blog! Unless a blog attains some type of national notoriety, the labor that takes place within these spaces often goes unnoticed. The spaces are low cost, low investment, low effort – and thus low reward. Specifically, I assert that the platforms provide ease of use and are free from encumbrances, because there is little to no gain for the platform designer.

In hindsight, my research question should have asked whether in using the platform are there negotiations that take place, and if so, what are they? I affirmatively believe that blogs are NOW antiquated. Even in 2017, blogs were fading into nonexistence. It is my belief that the true work of liberatory theory is not being championed within blogs. In fact, I believe that today, liberatory theory exists within social media channels that allow for a call and response type

setting. Specifically, the same theorists that founded the blogs in this research also engage heavily in social media / social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and etc.

The work of liberatory theory is taking place in settings where people can rapidly share theory and even messages of black empowerment with a larger audience and at a more rapid pace. These social media sites provide a more dynamic environment and they are able to facilitate the ability for individuals to engage through comments, tweets, shares, and the like. And here, on these social media platforms, there is often a greater need to negotiate the tensions between liberatory theory and the platform affordances – since social media has inherently restricted voice. Whether it is the restriction on characters or the scrutiny of posts by administration, the platform plays a greater role in the expression of ideas and voice. Additionally, if we factor in the policing that takes place on these sites, this can provide a more accurate depiction of the voice of black feminists. For this research, however, voice is whatever the blogger deems necessary. Voice in these blogs is the voice of empowerment. Voice is freedom!

Initially, I felt disappointed that there was not a direct engagement with white society on the blog posts identified in the research study. I wondered whether the black feminists in these blogs failed to embody the very theory of which they spoke and wrote about. I posited that the history of marginalization that has existed in the black community continues to limit our voices --even when we have the platform. While I greatly respect the work of the founders of these blog sites, I think that more could have been said and more could have been done. Brittney Cooper, founder of Crunk Feminist Collective, states that she does not think that the black feminist theorists such as hooks and Collins adequately addressed the work and charges emerging feminists to push harder against the limits (Cooper B. C., 2015). I deem that while

black empowerment is always needed that the blog sites played it safe by failing to engage with white oppression. Thus, the alternative space / safe space turned voice into a whisper!

Appendix

Table 9

Mission Statements – Word Frequencies (Extended List)

Word	Frequency	%	Rank
Feminist	15	9.74	1
Black	11	7.14	2
Women	11	7.14	2
Culture	9	5.84	4
Mission	8	5.19	5
Political	6	3.90	6
Share	6	3.90	6
Us	6	3.90	6
Feminism	5	3.25	9
Community	4	2.60	10
Cultural	4	2.60	10
Blog	3	1.95	12
Collective	3	1.95	12
Color	3	1.95	12
Commitment	3	1.95	12
Country	3	1.95	12
Own	3	1.95	12
Policy	3	1.95	12
Potential	3	1.95	12
Provide	3	1.95	12
Public	3	1.95	12
Resistance	3	1.95	12
Right	3	1.95	12
Seeks	3	1.95	12
Social	3	1.95	12
Society	3	1.95	12
Statement	3	1.95	12
Storytelling	3	1.95	12
Violence	3	1.95	12
Visions	3	1.95	12
Ways	3	1.95	12
While	3	1.95	12
Will	3	1.95	12
Womanhood	3	1.95	12

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