

Copyright

by

Briana Nicole Barner

2016

**The Thesis Committee for Briana Nicole Barner
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:**

The Creative (and Magical) Possibilities of Digital Black Girlhood

**APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Supervisor:

Mary Beltran

Gina Chen

The Creative (and Magical) Possibilities of Digital Black Girlhood

by

Briana Nicole Barner, BA, BASIS

Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2016

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to a reimagined future, where no one exists on the margins.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my wonderful thesis committee—Drs. Mary Beltran and Gina Chen. Mary, you have supported me at every step of this process and have offered amazing feedback. Thank you for helping me sort out my dreams, and for rooting for me to pursue the Ph.D. Gina, thank you for your brilliant contributions to digital feminism, and for helping me flesh out my ideas about social media. Thank you for offering me my first chance to be an officially published scholar.

I would like to thank my wonderful families—the Blues, the Barners, the Millers, the Yanceys, the Mayes, and so many other amazing families who have welcomed me into their homes and hearts. Your love and support of me throughout the years, but especially throughout this strenuous process, has lifted me up in ways that I can never repay you for.

I would like to thank the beautiful people that I'm blessed to call friends—some I've known since 4th grade, others I met in high school, many who I met in college, some who I've met since moving to Texas. This constant state of being a student has meant that at various points of our friendship, I was unavailable or hurried—and yet, you all have stood by me, listened to my frustrations and kept me company during my horrendous commute. Even when I probably wasn't as

great of a friend to you as you were to me, you all were still there, and I thank you for being there.

I would like to thank my parents—Donna and Al—for always believing in and supporting me. I have always been able to soar and fly because of the roots that you gave me, and I will always be grateful to you both because of that. I can never repay you.

I would like to thank my son, Harlem. You have always known me as Mama, but also as a student. You've been patient, and when you couldn't take anymore, you would shove my computer away and turn my face to yours. You helped me to take breaks, and you helped me to push through. I'm grateful that you understand that I will always be there for you, but that I also have work to do. You've helped me achieve that balance, and I thank you.

Lastly, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my husband, Reese. It is because of you that I am here at UT. You've been the ultimate example of a partner, and I can never say thank you enough. Being the partner of a student is never easy—it requires great patience, sacrifice and some loneliness. It has been even more amazing to go through this process with you also obtaining your Masters. We are making all of our dreams and goals and hopes come true, and I am thankful that all of this is happening with you by my side. I love you.

Abstract

The Creative (and Magical) Possibilities of Digital Black Girlhood

Briana Nicole Barner, MA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

Supervisor: Mary Beltran

Images of Black women in the media have relied on hurtful stereotypes that have traveled through time and space to be mapped onto the bodies of generations of Black women. The hashtag #BlackGirlMagic turns this dynamic on its head and gives Black girls and women a new vocabulary to combat this form of oppression in the media. The act of creating hashtags that can be shared, blogged and inserted into real and digital conversations and spaces is an act of resistance. Activism no longer solely takes place in physical space. This research will examine the ways that Black women have used digital and new media to provide counter narratives of their representations in traditional media. I will examine the ways that the hashtag #BlackGirlMagic has been used across social media platforms (mainly Twitter, but also Instagram, Facebook and Tumblr). This work will also explore the creative possibilities and potentials within digital Black girlhood studies. I am interested in exploring the fluidity of Black girlhood and womanhood, and how

this is being explored in digital spaces, such as the popularity of the #BlackGirlMagic by both adult women and Black girls. These spaces allow Black women the freedom to reimagine their own Black girlhood. This work will utilize Black feminist, hip hop feminist, Black girlhood studies and hashtag activism theoretical frameworks to analyze the implications of this hashtag in the representation of Black women and girls on the Internet.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	x
Introduction ‘She’s Telepathic... Call It Black Girl Magic!	1
Black Feminism	5
Hip HopFeminism.....	8
Digital Media.....	12
Methodology.....	17
Table of Contents.....	20
Chapter One A Celebration Of Black Girlhood: Hip Hop Style	22
Sing A Black Girl’s Song	25
The Miseducation of Girlhood Studies	29
Who Runs The World? (Girls)-: Empowerment vs. Enabling.....	36
If I Ruled The World (Imagine That!)-: Imagination as Black Girl Freedom.....	39
Chapter Two #BlackGirlInDigital Space.....	41
#BlackGirlMagic.....	43
Celebrating Black Womanhood.....	44
Recognizing Achievements.....	48
Beauty.....	52
Conclusion In Favor of Black Girlhood.....	61
Bibliography.....	65
Vita.....	71

List of Figures

Figure 1: Tumblr post by user using the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag, discussing an encounter on a college campus.....	45
Figure 2: Twitter post by user using the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag, discussing singer Rihanna’s beauty agency	47
Figure 3: Twitter posts by user using the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag, discussing a comic book and hair.....	49
Figure 4: Twitter post using the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag, discussing Serena Williams.....	51
Figure 5: Twitter post using the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag, a user posting a series of selfies.....	53
Figure 6: Twitter post using the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag, celebrating model Maria Borges.....	54
Figure 7: Twitter posts using the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag, celebrating model Maria Borges at the Victoria Secret’s Fashion Show.....	56

Introduction: ‘She’s Telepathic...Call It Black Girl Magic!’¹

“I’ve had this thought about what I love to call the “Magic of Black Women” for a very long time. Many years. But I’ve never been able to articulate it. I know it when I see it. I know it when I feel it, but it is such a phenomenal state of being and doing, that words always escape me when it comes time to write or talk about it. How does one describe something for which the definition is a visceral knowing and understanding of oneself?”- Cashawn Thompson, creator of the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag

“When we talk about #BlackGirlsAreMagic, we mean that we take the ordinary and make it extraordinary. We take the common and make it unusual. We take the standard and set new standards.”- blogger/activist Feminista Jones

“She’s telepathic, call it Black girl magic. She scares the government, deja vu of Tubman.”- lyrics from “blk girl soldier,” song written and performed by Jamila Woods

In this particular moment in time, Blackness is being reimagined and re(presented) in digital space. Hashtags are being created on various social media forms to draw attention to police brutality and the killings of Black people across the country—one of the most popular and widely spread being the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag. Created by three Black women (Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi²), this movement began as a response to the 2013 acquittal of George Zimmerman in the murdering of unarmed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, a Black male teen living in Sanford, Florida, and has grown rapidly in response to the 2014 acquittal of Darren Wilson in the murdering of

¹ This title is from Jamila Wood’s song “blk girl soldier,” in which she discusses her conception of Black girl magic. This is one of the first songs to name Black girl magic explicitly, and shows the wide reach of the hashtag.

² In their own words, #BlackLivesMatter was “a response to the anti-Black racism that permeates our society, and also, unfortunately, our movements.” “Black lives matter” was used in a Facebook post in response to Zimmerman's acquittal.

unarmed 18-year-old Michael Brown, a Black male teen living in Ferguson, Missouri.³

As the movement has risen, it has also brought attention to the violent murders of Renisha McBride, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, Rekia Boyd and Sandra Bland⁴—all Black women and girls whose murders were amplified by the hashtag #SayHerName.

#SayHerName was created by legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw in response to the heartbreaking silence surrounding the violent deaths of Black women and girls, while increased visibility has been given to the murders of Black men and boys. #SayHerName presents an intersectional lens to discuss #BlackLivesMatter by asserting and insisting that Black women and girls matter, too. The prevalence of these hashtags stand within a history of Black women speaking up for the injustices of other Black women, and refusing to accept the silence in media about their oppression (Collins; Williams).

As these hashtags rose—rooted in sorrow, anger, frustration and resilience, so did others—#BlackGirlsAreFromTheFuture, #BlackGirlJoy, and #BlackGirlMagic. The hashtags have been used in a variety of ways—to express joy at watching tennis player

³ Trayvon Martin was murdered on February 26, 2012 by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch captain. Martin was walking home when Zimmerman called 911 to report a suspicious person. Although he was instructed to remain in his vehicle, Zimmerman followed Martin and eventually shot him. Michael Brown was murdered on August 9, 2014 by Darren Wilson, a White police officer. Wilson claimed that Brown fit the description of a robbery suspect, and got into a verbal and physical altercation with Brown before shooting him.

⁴ Renisha McBride, 19, was shot in 2013 by Theodore Wafer when she knocked on his door and asked for help after being involved in an accident. Aiyana Stanley-Jones, 7, was murdered while sleeping on the couch in her home. Detroit police officers were looking for a murder suspect, and barged into the home, throwing a grenade that killed the child. Rekia Boyd, 22, was shot in the head by an off-duty Chicago police officer, who shot into a crowd following an altercation. Sandra Bland, 28, was pulled over by a Texas police officer for failing to use a turning signal while switching lanes. She was assaulted by the officer, and died several days later of an alleged suicide in her jail cell.

Serena Williams, happiness when actress Viola Davis made history as the first Black actress to win an Emmy for a drama television series, or simply marveling at the beauty of another Black woman. A simple yet powerful phrase: #BlackGirlsAreMagic. It is a counter narrative to how the Black woman subject is presented in the media. Its power lies in a new naming, a new alternative for Black women and girls to express Black womanhood and girlhood. This hashtag was created by a Black woman, Cashawn Thompson, and has been sustained by Black women and girls. They are in control of this particular representation of Black girlhood. Thompson, creator of the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag, was inspired by Black women's ability to persevere through the oppression that is unique to the Black woman and girl, one that intersects with their gender, race, class and sex. "I say 'magic' because it's something that people don't always understand. Sometimes our accomplishments might seem to come out of thin air, because a lot of times, the only people supporting us are other black women," Thompson said in an interview with the *L.A. Times*.

This research will examine the ways that Black women have used digital and new media to provide counter narratives of their representations in traditional media. To do so, I will examine the ways that #BlackGirlMagic has been used, primarily on the social media platform Twitter. This work will also explore the creative possibilities and potentials within digital Black girlhood studies. I am interested in exploring why so many of these liberatory spaces—which are targeted towards Black adult-aged women—are named for Black girls, instead of Black women. These spaces allow Black women the freedom to reimagine their own Black girlhood, and see the future in their past selves, to

be able to see themselves, from young ages as powerful, even if this wasn't the case in real life. In the next section, I will provide a review of some of the existing literature in Black feminism, hip hop feminism and digital media. I am choosing to review these topics because they provided frameworks for my theorizing about Black girlhood in digital spaces. Hip hop feminism provides a particularly rich area of scholarship that centers the lived experiences of Black girls. This is useful for my study because I am interested in the ways that Black girls and women are finding new ways to disrupt their narratives within traditional media. Black feminism lays the groundwork for a feminism that centers not only the lived experience of Black women, but privileges the voices of those who are the furthest from the academy. Hip hop feminism continues this tradition by focusing on the ways that hip hop privileges the voice of young people and their creative responses to the oppression that they've faced after the promises of the civil rights movement. Digital media's function as liberatory spaces is still being crafted and studied, and is on the cusp of being a groundbreaking field.

Black Feminism

'Just Who Else Might She Be': Black Womanhood/Girlhood

Patricia Hill Collins' seminal text *Black Feminist Thought*, asserts the standpoint and theory of, by, and about Black women and feminists. Black feminist thought and theory will be a major theoretical framework utilized in this research⁵.- Collins believes that "reclaiming the Black women's intellectual tradition involves examining the everyday ideas of Black women not previously considered intellectuals" (Collins, 15). The Black women and girls sharing the #BlackGirlMagic hashtags on various forms of social media (and in offline spaces) reflect this notion of the importance of valuing non-intellectual/academic spaces. The women and girls who are sharing these (and other) hashtags embody Black feminism in action.

Collins theorizes Black feminist thought as "theories created by African-American women which clarify a Black women's standpoint—in essence, an interpretation of Black women's experiences and ideas by those who participate in them" (Collins, 15). Black feminism is a particular strand of feminism, and it reflects and centers the lived experiences of Black women. "Reclaiming the Black feminist intellectual tradition involves searching for its expression in alternative institutional locations and among women who are not commonly perceived as intellectuals" (Collins, 14).

⁵ See also Black feminist works by bell hooks (*Ain't I A Woman; Feminism is for Everybody*), Kimberle Crenshaw ("Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color"), The Combahee River Collective, Alice Walker (*In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*) and Angela Y. Davis (*Women, Race & Class*).

An important goal of Black feminism is challenging what Collins describes as the controlling images of Black women. These controlling images, which appear in mainstream media, include “stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients and hot mommas” (Collins, 67). These controlling images are necessary to “the political economy of domination fostering Black women’s oppression,” and they also give power to those able to “define these symbols” (Collins, 67). The prevalence of #BlackGirlMagic speaks in direct opposition to these controlling images by offering alternative ones, and also by giving the power to Black women, as these hashtags are self-defined, and not produced by White men or mainstream media gatekeepers. The controlling images are harmful and damaging because they are “so uniformly negative that they almost necessitate resistance if Black women are to have any positive self images” (Collins, 95). African American literature scholar Myisha Priest offers an analysis of the ways that reimagining the image of the Black girl can empower the Black woman. In her essay, “Gospels According To Faith: Rewriting Black Girlhood Through The Quilt,” Priest’s theory models what I hope to achieve with this research. Priest’s work is one of the few that I have found that specifically examines the direct correlation between Black girlhood and its liberatory power for Black women. Priest uses the quilts and children’s books of artist Faith Ringgold to theorize about Black girlhood.

Priest explores the ways that Black girls’ experiences can be rendered visible: “just who else she might be, what other faces she might reveal, and how that expanded vision might open up foreclosed boundaries of belonging” (Priest, 461). Her work is interested in “reimagin[ing] Black female subjectivity” (Priest, 462). Black girls, Priest asserts,

have always been used as subjects within Black literature, specifically by Black adult women. An especially relevant portion of this article is Priest's insistence on not solely focusing on the harsh lived realities of Black girls, but also how they "might still emerge as a radical site of self-claiming" (Priest, 462). This project also seeks to focus on how Black women and girls are moving from victimization to freedom. Priest also uses Collins' theories as her theoretical framework around Ringgold's work, which "shares the aims of Black feminism, especially if we understand the movement not primarily or only as an intellectual effort, but, as Patricia Hill Collins defines it, "as a social justice project" (Priest, 462). The hashtag activism of Black girls and women is working within the aims of a social justice project.

According to Priest, Ringgold's work offers new ways to view Black women's meaning making of their identity. "Tellingly then, this moment of remaking the stories of Black girls is also an opportunity to empower the author: "Why not put myself in this work of art?" Ringgold asked: "Why not make [Alice] in my own image" (Priest, 465). By reimagining Black girlhood, Ringgold opens up new possibilities for how she (and other Black girls and women) see themselves. "The perspective of the freed subject changes the views: we do not look at her but through her eyes" (Priest, 471).

Hip Hop Feminism

In her article, “One Time For My Girls: African American Girlhood, Empowerment and Visual Culture,” historian Treva Lindsey centers the lived experiences of Black girls—a rare occurrence outside of work that views them through a deficit lens, or one of complete erasure. Building upon hip hop feminist theory, Lindsey offers a hip hop generation feminist theoretical framework to analyze Black girlhood in popular culture. Her methodology will be useful for this project because she acknowledges the limitations of applying Black feminist theory, which usually centers around Black women, to an analysis of Black girls⁶. This work centers around the question: How do stereotypes and controlling images impact Black girls, and do they experience this oppression differently than Black women⁷? This theory will be helpful in examining the ways that #BlackGirlMagic may have different meanings and layers for the Black girls who use them. Lindsey’s insistence on a theory grounded in empowerment for Black girls aligns with both Collins and Priest’s work, and is more useful than focusing on whether an image is positive (enough) or not.

This empowerment, according to Lindsey, includes “healthful expressivity, media literacy, self-affirming social networks, and the tools and resources to develop self-schema that affirm the uniqueness of black girlhood” (Lindsey, 26). This hip hop generation feminist discourse of empowerment for black girls continues Collins’ agenda

⁶ Works that center Black girlhood and womanhood include Regina Andrea Bernard’s (*Black & Brown Waves*) and Sheila Redford-Hill’s (*Further to Fly*).

⁷ Works that center Black girls include Venus E. Evans-Winters’ (*Teaching Black Girls*), Rebecca Carroll’s (*Sugar in the Raw*), Faye Z. Belgrave’s (*African American Girls*) and Heidi Safia Mirza’s (*Young, Female and Black*).

of Black feminism as a social project. It also aligns with the aim of this project—to not just stay within the academy but that it will become useful as a toolset for Black girls and women (re)navigating digital spaces.

Many of these digital spaces, such as the blog *Crunk Feminist Collective*, encourage important discussions about the lived experiences of Black women and girls. This blog, whose founders/major contributors include scholars Aisha Durham and Brittney Cooper, speaks from a hip hop feminist standpoint. “Hip hop feminism’s evolving digital presence is not only evidence of the movement’s relevance and strength but also reflect its continued interest in democratizing the creation and dissemination of knowledge as well as promoting open dialogues about issues important to communities of color” (Cooper et al., 733). Hip hop feminism, similar to Collins’ insistence that Black feminism must also be a social justice project, is invested in “being in but not of the academy, [and] has made social media attractive because it provides an opportunity to practice public pedagogy among nonacademic audiences” (Cooper et. al, 731). Hip hop feminism acknowledges the creative and intellectual potential within digital media spaces. In her essay “Alter Egos and Infinite Literacies, Part III: How to Build a Real Gyrl in 3 Easy Steps,” historian Jessica Marie Johnson discusses how she has used the Internet to help create a feminist of color community. “We operated online as we did in real life— as radical womyn of color making art and organizing for social justice, processing personal trauma, and loving each other for the lives we live and the world we survived” (Johnson, 48). Johnson discusses “digital subjectivity” as imperative for creating “space for women of color to create and survive” (Johnson, 48). The “digital

subjectivity” that Johnson refers to is the community building and meaning making that exists when Black feminists engage on the Internet.

Digital and social media became our playground and meeting place. Drawing on our own lives, we wrote our own stories in blog posts, tweets, .jpgs and .gifs. We operated online as we did in real life—as radical women of color making art and organizing for social justice, processing personal trauma, and loving each other for the lives we live and the worlds we survived.

(Johnson, 48).

This term will be useful for this research, because I am intending to add to this concept of digital subjectivity, through the exploration of the digital Black girl subject.

Hip hop feminism as a theoretical framework will be useful in examining the ways that the hashtags are used—being mindful of the ways that the hashtags might reflect the political resistances and struggles of youth that are at the foundation of hip hop culture. Hip hop feminism is a strand of feminism that I would consider to be of the Black feminist tradition, and one that can echo the unique standpoint and view of experiences of the Black women and girls of the hip hop generation. A term made famous by former journalist turned scholar Joan Morgan in 1999, hip hop feminism is one that demands a “feminism brave enough to fuck with the grays” and refuse[s] easy and essentialist political stances about what is right or wrong and who or what gets to be called feminist” (Cooper et al., 723). It has also been used as pedagogy, through Ruth Nicole Brown’s youth-centered after school program SOLHOT (Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths), and as a way to reimagine the spaces that Black women take up within the public sphere

(Brown, 2009, 2013; Pough, 2004). Brown's work on "the creative possibilities" within Black girlhood will be especially useful to this work, particularly her interviews with the adult facilitators who work with the young program participants, and the ways that this may have impacted their own self-making.

Digital Media

Much research has been done on hashtag use on the social media network Twitter (Davis; Sharma⁸). In their article, “The Internet as a Tool for Black Feminist Activism: Lessons From an Online Antirape Protest,” the authors detail how a cyber campaign organized by Black women bloggers helped to bring national attention to an ignored rape case. The authors state that they “found no study of Black feminist protest online” (Rupp, et al., 246)—though Sherri Williams’ article, “Digital Defense: Black Feminists Resist Violence With Hashtag Activism” continues this discussion. Both articles focus on Black women protesting against the silence surrounding instances of violence enacted on the Black female body, and how social media has been the outlet of choice for their resistance. Social media has been used to start and continue conversations that may not have happened otherwise. “Black women have historically been caught in a political catch-22 that makes their experiences largely invisible in dominant White female centered feminist and Black male centered antiracist law and politics” (Rupp et al., 247). The Internet has proven to be a place where Black women and girls, in “safe spaces” online, can reject the historical silence and use these spaces to center the narrative around their experiences. In the article, “Cooking Up Hashtag Activism: #PaulasBestDishes and Counternarratives of Southern Food,” Anjali Vats explores the #PaulasBestDishes

⁸ Work on race, gender and social media has also been done by Gina Chen (“Male Mammies: A Social-Comparison Perspective on How Exaggeratedly Overweight Media Portrayals of Madea, Rasputia, and Big Momma Affect How Black Women Feel About Themselves”), Treva Lindsey (“Searching for Climax: Black Erotic Lives in Slavery and Freedom”), Brittney Cooper (“The Stage Hip-Hop Feminism Built: A New Directions Essay” and Tara L. Conley (“From #RenishaMcBride to #RememberRenisha: Locating Our Stories and Finding Justice”).

hashtag that became popular in response to the firing of cooking show host Paula Deen over racist comments.

The conversation about race, gender and the Internet usually begins (and sometimes ends) with the concept of access, or more specifically, the digital divide. This digital divide, or as Lisa Nakamura posits, is a “lack of access to the Internet—often found along raced, classed, and still, to a narrowing extent, gendered lines—continues to cut particular bodies out of various histories in the making” (Nakamura, xii). Who does the digital divide affect? Answer: the most marginalized communities, including the community that I am studying: Black women and girls. When Nakamura wrote this text (2002), the digital divide was more pronounced—and social media had not yet made its impact.

But it’s important to note the ways that Black women disrupted this notion of a digital divide, at its peak. Media scholar Anna Everett mapped the Million Woman March (MWM) and the way that the Internet was used as a tool by the march’s organizers. The march was held on October 25, 1997 in Philadelphia, and received very little media coverage. Many participants stated that they heard about the march through its website, and not through traditional media. Within a span of two months, the march’s website received more than one million hits, which intervenes in the “crisis” of the digital divide. The #BlackGirlsMagic hashtag users stand within the history of Black women intervening, on behalf of themselves and other Black women, within digital spaces. Everett insists that we must “acknowledge the sass of black women who have already begun to bridge the divide” (Everett, 57). Digital space can be a place for radical organizing. The participants of the MWM shared the website with people around the

country, and for those who didn't have access to the Internet, they made photocopies of the webpages. This was a true disruption of the digital divide. The women chose who they wished to share the photocopied pages with, turning the "digital divide" on its head. Everett posits:

Rather than decry the disproportionate rate of computer technology diffusion within the black diasporic community, everyday African American women found an ingenious remedy, or tactic of cultural intervention, via the Internet (57).

Lisa Nakamura, however, posits that before the radical potential of the Internet can be declared, an acknowledgment of the ways that race is presented online must be discussed. She defines cyberspace as "the distinctive ways that the Internet propagates, disseminates, and commodifies images of race and racism" (Nakamura, 3). Nakamura also offers the notion of the "post-body" on the Internet. Not only can users be post-feminist, post-Civil rights, post-race, but also post-body. Can the Internet truly be a place where users can shed their identities and the related societal implications? Can the Internet present a raceless, classless, genderless, dis/ability free, user? Nakamura continues:

such is the stubborn power of cybertyping that even when substantial numbers of racial minorities do have the necessary computer hardware and Internet access to deploy themselves "fluidly" online they are often yanked back to the realities of racial discrimination and prejudice (Nakamura, 10).

This is not to say that there aren't spaces where radical feminist work online is possible—even if that work reproduces raced, classed and heteronormative exclusivity. Tanja Carstensen writes about feminism enacted within social media formats such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. These particular spaces that Carstensen describes, include users who discuss their “own privileges, as White, educated, and non-disabled women” (Carstensen, 489). So, are we to believe that digital radical feminist work only occurs between middle to upper class White women? This is a crucial reason why digital Black girlhood needs to be acknowledged and archived, so that this digital feminist work does not get erased or left out the conversation, continuing and expanding the definition of the digital divide. Carstensen insists that social media platforms “provide spaces for users to empower each other, to establish events and protests and mobilize for political action” (Carstensen, 489). In other words, social media can provide a space for users to create feminist communities where they can organize, discuss and critique cultural happenings and identify others who embody feminist beliefs (who, for various reasons, may be difficult to find in physical spaces).

Although Carstensen excludes the work of digital feminists of color, their work is very visible. One of the most notable examples is Issa Rae's web series *The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl*. Rae created the show to fill in the gap for representations of Black women. The “awkward Black girl” was not one that Rae saw in traditional media, so she took her talents to YouTube as the platform for her webseries. Cunningham writes that sites like YouTube “with its relatively open access and its more egalitarian audience—grants African American women a great deal of agency in shaping

their own images” (Cunningham, 411). The awkward Black girl was not a character trope that mainstream TV was willing to explore, so Rae instead crafted a digital Black girlhood of her own. The web offers space for exploration of the Black girl. The web holds out the promise of an outlet for alternative depictions of minorities and places where marginalizing and stereotypical racial portrayals can be challenged and refined (Cunningham, 402).

We can see this also with hashtags like #BlackGirlsAreFromTheFuture, #CarefreeBlackGirl and #BlackGirlMagic. While these are not necessarily social justice movements, they are social media movements. These hashtags, and the communities they create amongst their users, are spaces for this radical feminist possibilities, where digital Black girlhood is celebrated. As Carstensen’s article displays, these kinds of spaces are not often acknowledged or considered when discussing digital feminism. While this paper will specifically analyze the use of the hashtag #BlackGirlMagic, I will also place this hashtag (and others) within a tradition of Black women and girls crafting their own spaces to critique and resist harmful images that do not accurately depict the vastness of the Black female subject. This study examines #BlackGirlMagic as a hashtag, identity and community among Black women and girls.

Methodology

This research will engage in a study of the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag. The social media platform that will be the primary focus is Twitter, because this is where hashtag usage primarily occurs, although Facebook, Instagram and Tumblr will also be sites of analysis. From October 2015 to March 2016, I took screen shots of the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag on various social media outlet. I divided them into categories to effectively analyze.

Black girlhood studies, hip hop feminist studies, Black feminist theory and hip hop generation feminist discourse will be the theoretical foundations that ground this research. My work will center and privilege the lived experiences of Black women and girls throughout the study. I explore how Black women (and girls) are using the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag, and how their identity is formed through the use of the hashtag. I am interested in the types of community that are created surrounding this hashtag (i.e. are users responding to each other using the hashtag?). How can #BlackGirlMagic add to the development of Black feminism in digital spaces? My hypothesis is that the people that are using the hashtag are actually Black women, and not Black girls (based on informal observations, and my own personal use of the hashtag), so what does this mean? Does this help Black women reimagine their own Black girlhood, or their lives as adults?

There has been much written about the ways that Black women are presented in the media and the impact on how they see themselves (Adams-Bass, et al., Bell; Coleman). This project will examine media representations of Black women, so an important aspect

to consider when analyzing the naming of #BlackGirlMagic, are the notions of the meaning of “magic” in association to Black people in the media. While I believe that the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag is not meant to be malicious or stereotypical, I must acknowledge what magic has meant in regards to the representation of Black people in media formats. “As a result of Blacks' liminal status, the magical Negro has emerged as a new version of traditional racial stereotypes because most Hollywood screenwriters do not know much about Black people other than what they see or hear in other media form” (Glenn and Cunningham, 137). The authors assert that the one-dimensional, magical Negro character is created by Hollywood screenwriters in direct response to their lack of genuine interactions with Black people, which perpetuates a lack of depth to Black characters and no character development. “Although on the surface these characters appear to be harmless and even an improvement from the roles Blacks played in early-20th-century entertainment, some magical Negroes still resemble old, debasing racial stereotypes” (Glenn and Cunningham, 147). The “magical Negro” character remains in a subordinated, minimalized role. They are helpful but have no real dimensions. The #BlackGirlMagic hashtags, I believe, speak to a different kind of “magic,” one that Black girls and women are defining for themselves.

The limitations for this research include not being able to fully discern the identity of the users. Social media users can choose whatever picture they want as their avatar/profile picture, and can also choose whatever name they want for this display/user name. This means that anyone can use a picture of Beyonce, claim to be her, or have a user name that does not resemble their actual name. Unless the user posts a tweet, status,

etc. where they self-identify as a woman or girl, there is no actual way for me to know what their gender is (or if they identify with a gender). Knowledge of the identity of the users would have been beneficial to this study, but due to the limited timeframe, I was not able to obtain this information. A future study, with more time and resources, would include interviews with the users who engage with the hashtag. Although their identities were not known, I took the context of the tweet/post for my analysis. Tweets that only included #BlackGirlMagic were not helpful, but posts that used the hashtag along with a picture of a Black woman were helpful.

Table of Contents

Introduction: “She’s Telepathic, Call It Black Girl Magic!”

In this chapter, I will provide an introduction to the work. I have given a background on the existing literature regarding the theoretical frameworks most useful for this work. In the review of literature, I have cited theoretical frameworks that included Black feminist thought, strands of hip hop feminism and digital media. I have also discussed the limitations of this research, and how I would like to see it continued.

Chapter 1: The Creative Possibilities of Digital Black Girlhood as Magic

I begin the chapter by describing my personal relationship to programs aimed at mentoring Black girls—participating in them, and later facilitating similar programs. Next, I explore the choreopoem *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow is Enuf*, and its relationship to Black girlhood—many of the hip hop feminists mentioned in the chapter were impacted by the choreopoem, but had questions about what it looks like for young women in subsequent generation to read and embrace the text as representative of their Black girl lives. I then provide a brief history of activism in girlhood with the Riot Grrrl movement. In this chapter, I explore the different literature on girlhood studies, which has mirrored White feminism in centering the lived experiences and narratives of middle-class White girls. Black girlhood, and transnational girlhood studies are both burgeoning fields that center girls of color and their unique needs. I explore the empowerment vs. enabling framework presented by Sears and Treva Lindsey, and how both can be useful in analyzing Black girlhood.

Chapter 2: #BlackGirlInDigital Space

This chapter will provide the analysis of the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag, expanding the digital Black girlhood analysis that I lay out in the previous chapter. I will discuss my findings and define the categories that I divide the posts into. The categories are:

Celebrating Black Womanhood, Beauty, #BlackGirlMagic and Recognizing

Achievements. I will explain how the use of these hashtags, expand the ways that Black women move throughout and negotiate their interactions in digital spaces, and how they take control of harmful narratives. I will also address the various critiques that the hashtag has received, which include its perpetuation of White beauty standards imposed on the bodies of Black women and lack of inclusion for various representations of Black girlhood and womanhood.

Conclusion: In Favor of Girlhood

In this chapter, I discuss the importance of the fluidity of girlhood to this study. This is especially important when thinking about adult-aged Black women embracing and utilizing the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag, as opposed to it being strictly for Black girls. I will also discuss the limitations of only analyzing one hashtag as opposed to several. This includes not factoring the various ways that it can be used: #BlackGirlsAreMagic, #BlackGirlsMagic, etc. This also includes not considering the other hashtags that this hashtag is in conversation with, such as #CarefreeBlackGirl.

Chapter One: A Celebration Of Black Girlhood: Hip Hop Style

My (Big and Little) Black Girl Life (Project)

At different points in my Black girl life (both the little and big versions), I was involved in girl empowerment programs, most of them aimed at Black girls and/or “at risk” youth. When I was seventeen, I asked my mom to enroll me in an abstinence program that a few of my other cousins were in. My parents separated when I was two years old, and I struggled with growing up in a “broken family.” So when my best friend told me about an abstinence program that she participated in at her church, I became a very adamant supporter of abstinence. Unlike hers, my decision wasn’t steeped in religious beliefs. Mine was simple—a “sure” way to prevent my future children from dealing with the pain I felt every other Sunday when my father dropped my brother and I back at our mother’s house. Without being able to name it, I was using abstinence as my entry into a middle class world, complete with a marriage and 2.5 kids. I wanted to distance myself not only from the stereotype of the single Black mother, but also of the hypersexualized Black woman.

The program lasted a full school year, and culminated with an elaborate ceremony that included white wedding dresses and a male parent/figure placing a “purity ring” on our fingers, solidifying our commitment to maintain our virginity. (It is important to note that although there was a separate program for boys, they were not participating in this ceremony. Their virginites did not need to be preserved or controlled.) In hindsight, I realize that this program, in response to fears about teen pregnancy, reinscribed White,

middle-class, patriarchal and heterosexual standards for Black girlhood. At 17, I was among the oldest girls. The youngest, I'm sure, was between eleven and thirteen years old. We were told in order to be good girls and later good wives, our sexualities needed to be controlled and nonexistent until marriage. Then, and only then, should we acknowledge them. I truly believe that this program had good intentions, and I met some amazing women who were great mentors to me. But there are consequences to controlling the sexuality of Black girls, and basing their value using White, middle class standards—virgins or not, we are still Black and female and our sexuality is inherently tied to our supposed “deviance” and hypersexuality. White participants of the purity movement will not have those same histories mapped onto their bodies.

As a college senior, I volunteered with a local girls empowerment program. Like Ruth Nicole Brown describes, I was one of the “do-gooder” volunteer mentors interested in “giving back” to girls who looked like me. I began as an occasional volunteer, and eventually became a program coordinator of sorts, as the organization went through a period of transition. I didn't know it then, but I was very much invested in instilling a respectability politics mindset into the girls. As the adult facilitator, I had all the power and knowledge, and they needed me in order to receive it. How different things would have been if I had considered working with the girls, if I had considered their voices, instead of considering them as young people I was responsible for saving.

As a graduate student, I became a teaching artist for a performing arts program housed in a juvenile detention center. I walked into the program viewing the girls as “at risk.” Though I didn't know any of their crimes, I was instructed during training to view

them as criminals. What I met instead was a group of some of the most intelligent and complex young people, with a keen awareness of the world they lived in. I struggled with what we, a group of graduate students and professors, could teach them about racial injustice. I struggled with the fact that I was (primarily) the only person of color on the staff, while the majority of the participants were of color. I still struggle with throwing theory at the girls—how much of that will mean anything as they move through the institution as property of the state? I don't have the answers, but I am immensely dedicated to contributing to the growing activist/scholar field of Black girlhood studies.

Sing A Black Girl's Song⁹

Alice Walker's Celie, from the canonical womanist text *The Color Purple*, is arguably one of the most important and recognized Black girls in literature and film. The format of the book, letters written to God, allows the reader a layered look into what life was like for this rural Southern Black girl. Harriet Jacobs, a slave who was able to escape to freedom, describes Black girlhood as not fully existing: "She will become prematurely knowing in evil things" (Jacobs, 35). Both Jacobs and Celie echo the idea that Black girlhood is a perilous time for many Black girls, and this can be traced through space and time. Though Celie is a fictional character, her circumstances are rooted in real, material experiences that dictate the many obstacles she encounters: poor, illiterate, Black female, teen mother and survivor of sexual assault by her father and adult husband. Celie (and Jacobs) are not afforded the luxury of childhood, let alone able to embrace and celebrate their Black girlhood.

Harriet Jacobs first wrote of enslaved Black girlhood in her book *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Alice Walker introduced the world to Celie and the women who love her in 1982. In 1975, Ntozake Shange published the choreopoem *For Colored Girls Who Consider Suicide When The Rainbow Is ENUF*, which included these poignant lines:

somebody/anybody
sing a black girl's song
bring her out
to know herself
to know you

⁹ The title of this section is taken from Ntozake Shange's choreopoem *For Colored Girls Who Consider Suicide When The Rainbow is ENUF*.

The characters of the poem were women of all ages. None had names—they are only referred to by the color of their clothes (i.e. Lady in Red, Lady in Orange, etc.)

Throughout the text, each woman gets the chance to tell her story. Some are about their experiences as girls, some are about their experiences as women. Shange's call for "somebody/anybody [to] sing a black girl's song" still resonates with those who love/are loved by colored girls.

Hip hop feminist Joan Morgan was disappointed when her mother took Joan's father instead of her to see the play when it debuted in New York. In her book on hip hop feminism (*When Chickenheads Come Home To Roost*), Morgan writes: "In my pre-adolescent selfishness I failed to see that she too was a colored girl. The play held crucial parts of her—parts she needed to share with her husband and not her ten-year-old daughter" (Morgan, 20). The ten-year-old Morgan immediately connected with the cover of the book—the title in bright, bold colors along a subway-patterned wall, and the side profile of a Black woman with a beautiful orange headscarf (presumably meant to be the Lady in Orange). For both Morgan and her adult mother, there was something beautiful and sacred and Black and female about the space that the text and the play took up. It was indeed "for colored girls," and for Morgan, the play allowed her to connect both her own girlhood and the womanhood of her mother.

Black girlhood and performance studies scholar Ruth Nicole Brown shared a similar experience to Morgan when the play came to her hometown of Chicago. Brown's mother was intentional about taking her to events that celebrated Black womanhood, and this was a particularly special one. It caused her to think about the fluidity of Black

girlhood and womanhood:

Where do you draw the line between Black girlhood and womanhood, the choreopoem made me ask, because some of those Black women characters acted like girls, and some of those Black girl characters acted like women (Brown, 38).

So in other words, Black girlhood and womanhood are simultaneous and separate occurrences in the life of the Black female. This fluidity of Black girlhood and womanhood is a key component of Brown's theoretical frameworks, and will be a useful tool for this work.

Although Brown and Morgan both enjoyed the play and viewed experiencing it as a valuable point of their girlhood, they both also wrote about desiring more from the play that could relate to their girlhood identity. Morgan wanted a “for colored girls...of my own (Morgan, 22). Brown, however, wanted the play to be a thing of the past, for it to not ring true to the present:

But I want to be past For Colored Girls, really. Wouldn't it be nice to enjoy For Colored Girls as a historical artifact of our generation? (Brown, 39)

Can a Black girl's song ever be a thing of the past? My own experience with *For Colored Girls* is twofold. I was given the book as a sophomore in high school by my writing teacher. I was fascinated by the book and read it in one sitting. Tears welled in my eyes as I connected to each of the women. Like Morgan, I didn't quite understand everything I read, but I understood that a book that centered Black women in this way was rare. My

second experience with it was Tyler Perry's unfortunate film version. I was in college, and saw it with a group of good girlfriends. After the film, we discussed what it meant to see that many Black women on one screen, and about how powerful it was to have these women's lived experiences magnified. Sharing our own "for colored girls" stories was a healing moment: we were able to create a safe and sacred Black girl space.

Brown and Morgan went on to each write important contributions to hip hop feminism. Their work is a direct answer to Shange's plea that "somebody/anybody sing a black girls' song." With hip hop feminism, they are able to bring the Black girl's song into the new millenium. It sounds different in some ways, very similar in other ways. This chapter will explore the girl empowerment-as-feminism model of girlhood studies, the subsection of Black girlhood studies, and the ways that Black feminist thought as method provides the framework to analyze the ways that social media has allowed for a new (and faster) way to sing a Black girl's song.

The Miseducation of Girlhood Studies¹⁰

Eight-year-old me was beyond obsessed with all things Spice Girls. Everything I owned that year (1998) was Spice Girl themed. I even had a sweatshirt with their picture and “Girl Power!” written beneath in bold letters. This was my first mainstream introduction to feminism.

The “girl power” movement was made famous by the Spice Girls, but also in large parts to the underground work of the riot grrrls. These young women, situated in Olympia, WA and Washington, D.C., among other places in the United States, organized and rallied against the idea that girls were helpless victims who couldn’t think or make decisions for themselves. “Girl power” was a rallying cry—a slogan that promoted the self-actualization of empowerment among girls” (Hains, 13). The riot grrrls, much like the young Black Lives Matter activists of today, were inspired by rampant acts of police brutality across the country in the 1990s, according to media and girlhood studies scholar Rebecca Hains. These young women used punk rock music and zines to voice their rage and frustrations. “Their countercultural work presented an alternate discourse of girlhood, in which girls were not constructed as helpless victims; rather they knew they were mistreated by society and were angry about it” (Hains, 2).

But just who were the riot grrrls, and what girlhood were they attempting to change? According to Hains, there was a diverse group of girls participating, but they “seemed to have been in the minority” (Hains, 18). In other words, this diversity was a

¹⁰ The title of this section is taken from the title of hip hop artist Lauryn Hill’s album “The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill.

very limited one. “Perhaps because of the most visible riot grrrls’ relatively privileged backgrounds, members of the movement often “felt like they had the highest calling of rescuing girls’ lives and identities and trying to restore the self-esteem of women at a young age” (Hains, 18). The riot grrrls and girl power movement, much like the White feminist movement, did not make intersectionality a priority. Their focus was on their oppression as young women—gender was their defining identity marker. Their status as middle class citizens afforded them the privilege of not having to think about class, race, ability, sexuality or any other intersecting identities as sites for oppression¹¹.- Scholar Hilary Malatino writes the following about her love of the Riot Grrrl movement:

Let us jump into the way-back machine and head towards 1998. If you were a girl, liked girls, or aspired to be a girl, it was your year... You went to a Claire’s boutique in your favorite suburban shopping mall, and you could find “Girl Power” emblazoned upon whatever bauble caught your eye. If you were a slightly more subversive youth, with an ear toward whatever passed for an ‘underground’ in your particular hometown, you may have caught wind of a politico-cultural phenomenon termed “Riot Grrrl” (or Grrl, or Girl), a movement of young punk rock feminists with its primary nodes in Washington, D.C. and Olympia, WA (Malatino, 1).

Within this narrative, many exclusions occurred. Malatino situates the girl/“you” in this narrative as someone more than likely part of the middle class, who can have a “favorite suburban shopping mall.” The author continues by addressing “slightly more subversive

¹¹ Works on girlhood studies include Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh’s work *Seven Going on Seventeen : Tween Studies in the Culture of Girlhood*, Sara Shandler’s *Ophelia Speaks*, and Rebecca C. Hains’ *Growing Up With Girl Power*.

youth,” who have relationships with “whatever passed for an ‘underground’ in your particular hometown.” Hains established that the Riot Grrrl movement was primarily for White middle class girls, so girls who did not fall into this category may not have identified girl power with that particular movement. “Underground” and “subversive” communities mean different things in different groups. Subversive, or alternative, representations of girlhood can have disastrous effects, meaning that only certain groups are rewarded for rebelling against heteronormative and patriarchal standards for moving through the world.

Hains posits the following research question: “Having never known a world without girl power, what did girlhood mean to them?” I will further this research question by asking what world girlhood studies leaves out when its researchers assume a unified, one dimensional girlhood? What is at stake when the varied differences and nuances present in girls of different groups are silenced, in favor of a uniform Girl subject? The answer is that the stories and voices illuminated are those that are always illuminated: White and middle class. It means that Girlhood Studies, if it continues with this model, will be a limiting field.

But there are scholars and fields that are disrupting this, and creating a girlhood studies that is intersectional. Girlhood studies, these scholars insist, must be transnational¹².- Scholar Shakuntala Banaji insists that “...the one thing that would be more damaging than the shocking absence of Muslim and Hindu or Palestinian and Tamil

¹² Transnational girlhood studies scholars include Leigh Gilmore, Elizabeth Marshall, Lisa Weems and Nandini Manjrekar.

or Saudi and Turkish girls in research articles would be their presence in work which circumscribed and caricatured their experiences, contexts and words” (Banaji, 121). Research on transnational girlhood, especially done with Western theoretical frameworks, must take strides to view the unique circumstances in which these girls move through and thrive in their world. These girls, much like the riot grrrls, are not helpless victims, unaware of what is happening to them. In an article about South African girlhood, the author states that researchers must take into account that “schools can be a violent place for South African girls [due to] rape, sexual abuse, harassment and assault” (Moletsane, 158). There are circumstances that color the girlhood of South African girls, some of which prevent them from being able to participate in a full girlhood (HIV/AIDS, illness, loss of parents, having to leave school to work and/or head households, etc.) But research with South African girls’ voices at the helm can have real, material effects on the future of their lived experiences and those around them. The field of Girlhood Studies cannot afford to focus solely on North American girls. “An effect of these theoretical and empirical blindspots is that the lived experiences, cultural productions, political interventions, and theoretical contributions of “Third World Girls” remain somewhere between invisible and underexplored” (Weems, 180).

Lisa Weems, for instance, explores the ways that Sri Lankan hip hop artist M.I.A. offers a transnational girlhood-centered point of view in some of her music. Hip hop has proven to be a fertile site to interrogate and disrupt the girlhood studies that privileges the voices of young White women. But girlhood studies has not necessarily recognized this growing field’s contributions. In a special issue of the academic journal *Feminist Media*

Studies, which theorized about girlhood studies as a growing field, Linda Duits states that there were a “limited amount of ethnographic and interpretive empirical data which gives the girls voices” (Duits, 113). Her analysis failed to include the ethnographic work of hip hop feminist Ruth Nicole Brown, and sociologist Stephanie D. Sears. Through their close research of two after-school programs for Black girls, Brown and Sears’ ethnographic work gives voices to Black girls and the Black women who work with them.

I Am A Girl, I Am A Woman: Fluidity of Black Girlhood and Womanhood in Hip Hop Feminist Studies¹³

I return again to Ntozake Shange’s masterful choreopoem *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow is Enuf*. It is with this foundational text that I begin discussing hip hop feminist studies’ intervention and disruption of girlhood studies. As stated before, both Ruth Nicole Brown and Joan Morgan state that the choreopoem was an important event in their Black girl lives. Hip hop feminist and scholar Chyann L. Oliver uses the choreopoem as the foundation for her interview with three Black girls, focusing on how “Black girls grapple with Black womanhood in the hip hop era” (Oliver, 250). Like Shange, Oliver does not offer the real names of the girls, instead referring to them by colors (Lady in Mahogany, etc.) Oliver is interested in hearing from the girls how hip-hop’s relationship to Black women impacts their ideas about themselves.

In one of the one-on-one interviews, the “lady in mahogany” discusses her butt:

¹³ The title of this section is taken from R&B group Kindred the Family Soul’s song “I Am,” which features R&B singer Jazmine Sullivan.

“I know one time I went for an interview, and I had on a skirt, and I thought, oh God, my butt looks so big, I look like a ghetto girl! It’s funny that I connect big butt with ghetto girl, see automatically who said this?”

She appears to be trapped in between wanting to look like an authentically Black woman—like those in Nelly’s contest—when she is with her friends, and wanting to distance herself from this stereotypical view of the “ghetto girl” with the big butt when she attempts to navigate the white male public sphere (Oliver, 259).

Critiques of hip hop usually include disdain for its treatment of women as video vixens, or erasure as MCs (and this is a warranted critique). But girlhood studies with a hip hop feminist framework offers a chance to examine how hip hop as a global entity affects how young women they view themselves as girls and soon-to-be adults. The “lady in mahogany” draws a connection between how hip hop has defined the “ghetto girl,” and how it impacts how she moves through the world as a Black girl living in the age of hip hop. Black women are hypervisible in the world of hip hop—first as video vixens, now also as reality stars on popular shows such as “Love and Hip Hop.” But how does this impact Black girls, who are thus in(visible) on these same mediums?

Historian Treva B. Lindsey offers a theoretical framework that centers the lived experiences of Black girls. Steeped in Black feminism and hip hop feminism, Lindsey insists that Black girls and their experiences cannot be theorized about in the same capacity as Black women. Black feminism, and particularly hip hop feminism, Lindsey insists, presents a sex-positive framework for Black women, which would have to differ

for Black girls who do not fall under the legal age of sexual consent. So instead, Lindsey offers a “hip hop generation feminist discourse of empowerment for black girls including healthful expressivity, media literacy, self-affirming social networks, and the tools and resources to develop self-schema that affirm the uniqueness of black girlhood” (Lindsey, 26). This hip hop generation feminist discourse of empowerment will be a useful tool for expanding Black girlhood studies, as it centers the voices and meaning-making processes of Black girls. The following question that Lindsey posits will be useful in further discussing Black girlhood studies:

From a hip hop generation perspective, what constitutes empowered black girlhood and adolescence? More specifically, what are the possibilities for this empowered black girlhood to exist within public/popular cultures that continue to perpetuate damaging and controlling images of black womanhood? (Lindsey, 24)

Lindsey’s question examines how Black girls can be empowered by (and also damaged by) notions of Black womanhood within popular discourse. Her question further displays the fluidity and connection of Black girlhood to Black womanhood, but also recognizes the inherent differences within them. The controlling images discourse centers the experiences of Black adult women (even though these scripts can be written onto the bodies of Black girls, such as the jezebel and the welfare queen). Lindsey insists that we must also make room for the lived experiences of Black girls and the many intersecting identities that impact how they move through the world.

Who Runs The World? (Girls): Empowerment vs. Enabling¹⁴

We defined empower as giving someone power...allowing them to be in control—that if it wasn't for us they wouldn't be able to do anything. It was defined as we were going to find the power, the authority, the approval, for them to be engaged—versus enabling them to see for themselves that they could do anything. We were going to give them the tools, the opportunities, the space to really test out their own sense of what was correct, what they believed they should be doing. They would be allowed to make mistakes in this process of being able. Enabling for us suggested that girls already had the power and our job was only to help them uncover it (Sears, 66).

Treva Lindsey questions what the “possibilities are for this empowered black girlhood” could be, in spite of the “damaging and controlling images of black womanhood” (Lindsey, 24). What are the controlling images of black girlhood? What prohibits empowered Black girlhood? Sociologist Stephanie D. Sears conducted ethnographic research at an after-school program in California. The Girls Empowerment Project (GEP) was housed in a housing project, and involved residents, community workers and stakeholders working together to provide an after school program that combatted the teen pregnancy crisis. Sears was initially a founding board member of the organization, and then eventually became the Director of Programs, before terminating her position so that she could focus on her research. According to Sears, GEP's efforts were initially focused on saving the “Urban Girl.” The Urban Girl:

¹⁴ The title of this section is taken from R&B singer Beyonce's song “Who Run The World (Girls).”

is the young Black female face that haunts the workforce and welfare debates and floats through academic and social discourses on sexuality, female headed households, and urban poverty. As a result, both dominant and indigenous group members sought to control the sexuality, reproduction, and “dependency” of poor Black girls (Sears, 35).

GEP’s efforts to rescue the “Urban Girl” were rooted in conservative stances on welfare usage by young, Black, unwed and teen mothers. This viewpoint presents the young Black girl as an empty vessel that did not know her power or potential, without the assistance of the Black adults who came to the program to “save” her. Eventually, the program shifted to an enabling framework, detailed above. Instead of viewing the program’s participants as powerless, this framework views them as bringing knowledge to the table. This will be useful for future researchers doing work with Black girls, to not assume as adults, that they have all the knowledge to impart to the girls, but to focus on how their work can enable the voices that have been marginalized.

In her hip hop generation feminist discourse, Lindsey insists that Black girls need a framework that will empower them. Sears, however, disagrees on the use of the term empower:

“Within this paradigm, empowerment often implies a one-way process of power-sharing from women to girls that silently maintains power differentials. Moreover, this particular use of the term also overlooks the power that those “in need of empowerment,” or the girls, bring to the table (Sears, 50).

Ruth Nicole Brown, founder of the after school program Saving Our Lives, Hearing Our Truth (SOLHOT), also dislikes the empowerment discourse surrounding programs for Black girls/“at-risk youth.” Brown states, “While I do not believe in the rhetoric and practice of girl empowerment as currently commodified, I do believe in women and girls coming together and falling apart for a common purpose, understanding that it all is a valuable way of testifying who we are, what we have overcome, and our dreams yet realized” (Brown, 12). These scholars reject the earlier emphasis on “girl power,” which by design practiced exclusionary tactics to lift up certain kinds of girls. They were instead in favor of frameworks that center the voices of girls who have been not only silenced but marginalized. These frameworks will all be useful in expanding the Black girlhood studies strand of hip hop feminism (though admittedly, this should be expanded to include other girls of color, as well). A GEP staff member eloquently describes what empowerment brings to the Black girl liberation project:

I think that it is very political to be fostering self-love in young Black girls. Because I think empowered Black girls will hopefully grow up to be empowered Black women, and that is awesome because it has the power to really change the world. To change communities, families—to let people know, to just give them more power as they walk the path of being a Black woman, which means that if they are more powerful then they are hopefully going to demand that they have access to things and their rights are equal and hopefully they will pass it on and continue to empower people (Sears, 104).

If I Ruled The World (Imagine That!)¹⁵: Imagination as Black Girl Freedom

Returning once again to *For Colored Girls*, the hip hop feminists insisting on a Black girlhood studies framework are heeding Shange's call. They are singing a Black girl's song, and in turn, are singing their own song of freedom and liberation. The work that they do with the Black girls has a lasting impact on themselves, as well. "When Black women and girls hear ourselves spoken, rhymed, and sung back to us in a way that is appreciated and familiar, we should never miss the chance to celebrate" (Brown, 19). In order to foster a reciprocal relationship between SOLHOT's girl participants and the "homegirl" adult facilitators, Brown encourages the "homegirls" to never silence the Black girls, even if it makes them uncomfortable. In turn, the girls benefit from the knowledge that their opinions and lived experiences are respected and trusted. The "homegirls," in "remembering Black girlhood...forget themselves" (Brown, 19), or in other words, they forget any restrictions and limits placed on them by adulthood, and embrace the power to imagine. GEP staff members "were still in the process of developing the sense of self and strategies they were hired to teach the girls" (Sears, 87). These adult women and girls benefited from an intergenerational and intraracial development with each other. Black girls imagining a different kind of womanhood, and Black women imagining a girlhood different from the one they already had. They are imagining #BlackGirlMagic. Sears writes:

¹⁵ This section's title is taken from hip hop artists Nas and Lauryn Hill's song "If I Ruled The World."

I titled this book *Imagining Black Womanhood* in an effort to highlight the powerful role of the imagination in Black women's and girls' identity work. Specifically, I wanted to emphasize the capacity of Black women's and girl's imaginations to "convert the given confines of here and now into an open horizon of possibilities" and to highlight the places where real girls must make sense of who they are in the midst of conflicting and often contradictory images and discourses of Black womanhood (Sears, 145).

To return to the beginning of the chapter, an empowered Black girlhood requires an imagination, an ability to reimagine the possibilities of Black female subjectivity. In the following chapter, I will further explore reimagined Black girlhood and womanhood. Digital space serves as the ideal forum for new possibilities of feminism, and of digital Black feminism.

Chapter Two: #BlackGirlInDigitalSpace

“It’s just Facebook!”

“It’s just Twitter!”

The impact of social media as a tool for social justice, or as a site of political resistance, is often dismissed in favor of positioning social media platforms as trivial sites. This is beginning to change. The impact of social media as a powerful tool, particularly in giving voice to marginalized and silenced people, is being realized. The hashtag, made popular by Twitter, contributes immensely to social media as a tool in social justice work. In the last nine months, the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag has been used over 9,000 times on Twitter. The hashtag was created in 2013 by Cashawn Thompson. According to Thompson:

“I say magic because it’s something that people don’t always understand. Sometimes our accomplishments might seem to come out of thin air, because a lot of times, the only people supporting us are other Black women.”

The hashtag was created as a way to acknowledge and affirm the accomplishments of Black women, and to counter the prevailing narrative and ultimate erasure of Black women in mainstream media.

This chapter will explore the ways that the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag is used as a radical tool by Black women to transform and take charge of the narrative of Black women in the media. This will be done by analyzing over one hundred tweets using the

hashtag. The #BlackGirlMagic hashtag was chosen because of its immense popularity, as evidenced by the amount of times that it has been used in nine months.

#BlackGirlMagic

The tweets have been divided into four categories. They are:

Celebrating Black Womanhood, Beauty, #BlackGirlMagic and Recognizing Achievements. These categories were chosen because they were the consistent themes that I pulled from the tweets. These themes will help to give more context to the importance of the hashtags for its users. I will now describe how each of the categories help to enhance the meaning of #BlackGirlMagic. “As digital artifacts, hashtags locate cultures across time and space. They are political actors, and most importantly, hashtags represent evidence of women and people of color resisting authority, opting out of conforming to the status quo, and seeking liberation, all by way of documentation in digital spaces” (Conley)

Celebrating Black Womanhood

In a recent article, blogger Lindsey E writes about what the hashtag means to her: “Black girl magic is a term black girls everywhere have adopted to describe that indescribable characteristic about us. It’s a statement I’m using to announce my pride in being a black woman and it connects me with other women who share that pride.” The tweets that fell into this category echoed what Lindsey feels about the hashtag. Many of the tweets expressed excitement over fellow Black women, specifically Maria Borges, Serena Douglas, Amandla Stenberg, Simone Biles and Gabrielle (Gabby) Douglas. Biles and Douglas are both young, Black gymnasts, who have each set historic records in a sport dominated by White athletes. Biles, 18, is the first Black athlete to be world all-around champion and the first woman to win three consecutive world all-around titles. Douglas, 19, is the first African American woman in Olympic history to become the individual all-around champion, and the first American gymnast to win gold in both the individual all-around and team competitions. Earlier this year, both gymnasts won awards—first place for Biles, second place for Douglas—in the all-around competition at the 2015 Gymnastic World Champions. The many tweets that discussed the two teens, using the hashtag, included pictures of the two embracing and looking excited for one another. The tweets, linking to pictures of them, would usually just include #BlackGirlMagic, with no additional explanations or definitions. Biles and Douglas seem to personify the term not only because of their accomplishments, but because of their genuine admiration for each other. They are modeling what it looks like to celebrate another Black woman.

So this just happened...

I'm walking on campus, heading to buy a smoothie when a WW (decked out in American flag regalia) says: "Hey, STOP, I want to read your (Assata) sweatshirt."

I looked at her & said: "No, I don't have to stop because you say so. I have somewhere to be, thank you."

Her response: "Ugh," as I kept walking.

*It's a new day folks. We ain't got to do what you say just cause YOU say it!



Her Feyoncé @profjalewis · 4h

Mood:

[#ItsANewDay](#) [#checkyourprivilege](#) [#assatataughtme](#)

Figure 1: Tumblr post by user using the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag., discussing an encounter on a college campus.

A tweet that shows a very compelling way that the hashtag is used is below. The text reads:

So this just happened...I'm walking on campus, heading to buy a smoothie when a WW (decked out in American flag regalia) says: "Hey, STOP, I want to read your (Assata) sweatshirt." I looked at her & said: "No, I don't have to stop because you say so. I have somewhere to be, thank you." Her response: "Ugh," as I kept walking. *It's a new day folks. We ain't got to do what you say just cause YOU say it!

#ItsANewDay #CheckYourPrivilege #AssataTaughtMe

This user utilizes multiple tweets in reaction to the story. The clothing items of both people are interesting: the White woman (WW) wearing "American flag regalia" demanding that the Black woman allow her to read her shirt, which presumably had either a quote or the actual image of the revolutionary Assata Shakur. The woman wearing the American flag regalia symbolizes the patriarchal, White supremacist and oppressive structures that have historically prevented Black women from leading full lives. The Assata sweatshirt symbolizes the "new day"—that Black women are continuing to fight against patriarchy and White supremacy. This is #BlackGirlMagic personified. The person was able to share this story for all to see, to let everyone know just how far #BlackGirlMagic can go. It is not just a term used on social media, it is also a verb, a call to action for Black women.

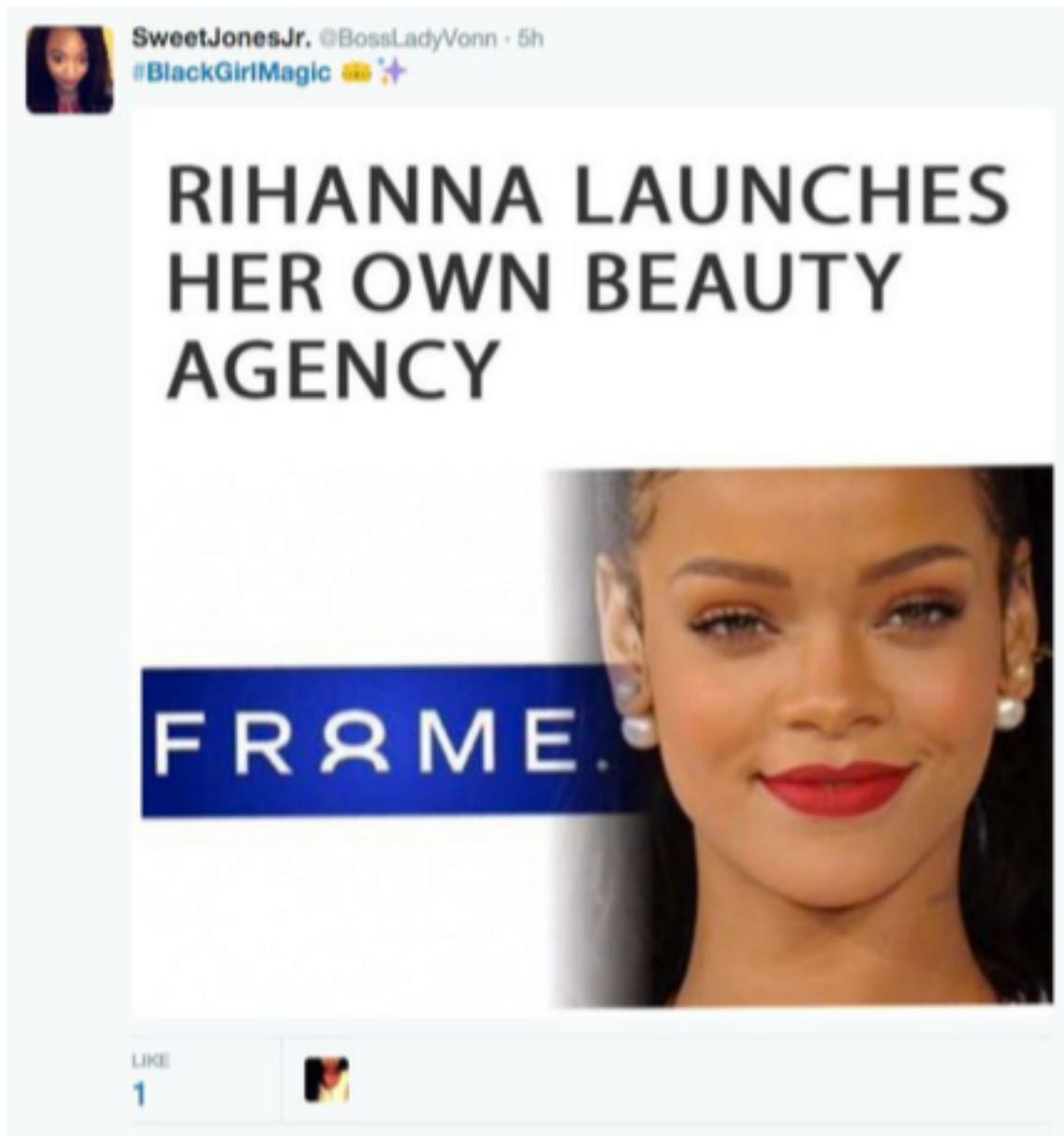


Figure 2: Twitter post by user using the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag, discussing singer Rihanna's beauty agency.

Recognizing Achievements

Blogger Lindsey E, in her attempt to grapple with what #BlackGirlMagic means to her, states, “I can easily recount even recent uneducated opinions about who I am, what I do, what I’m capable of and what my interests are simply because some people outside of my race consciously or subconsciously have diminished their opinion of me as a black woman.” #BlackGirlMagic tweets often celebrate and rejoice in the accomplishments of other Black women.

In the above tweet, the user shares that singer Rihanna is starting her own beauty agency, and they simply call it #BlackGirlMagic. There are multiple layers to a Black woman owning her own beauty/modeling agency. Rihanna, as the head of her company, potentially expands the access that women of color have to being involved in the beauty industry—not just as consumers, but also as potential business partners. This can also help to diversify the kinds of models that we see—a woman with curves, Rihanna could potentially seek women who look like her—with darker skin and a different range of body sizes.



Figure 3: Twitter posts by user using the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag, discussing a comic book and hair.

The previous tweets celebrate actual Black girls, not women. The user @LisaBolekaja is excited about their signed copy of Amandla Stenberg's comic book "Niobe." Stenberg has been very vocal as a teen feminist, and has posted pictures of herself wearing a "Black Girls Are Magic" sweatshirt, which is derived from the hashtag. The comic book was created as a way to disrupt the very White (and male) nature of comic books. This tweet shows that #BlackGirlMagic is about challenging notions that White males are the standard. #Niobe is #BlackGirlMagic in print form. The user @YaniAndShani celebrates "little black girls." This is an intergenerational celebration of both Black women and girls. #BlackGirlMagic acknowledges the beauty in women and girls.



Miss Afadapa @Joce_Kemi29 · 3h

I can't really see another squad tryna cross us -Drake [#blackgirlmagic](#)



← ↻ 1 ❤️ 1 ⋮



greg kennedy @GregKennedyENT · 3h

Gorgeous! [#Model](#) [#VictoriasSecret](#) [#Natural](#) [#BlackIsBeautiful](#) [#BlackGirlMagic](#)
[#MariaBorges](#) fb.me/4qTiyaU4z

← ↻ ❤️ ⋮

Figure 4: Twitter post using the [#BlackGirlMagic](#) hashtag, discussing Serena Williams.

Beauty

With this tweet, the user posts a picture of their “squad,” which also includes Serena Williams. More than likely, tennis phenom Serena Williams is not part of their squad beyond taking this picture with them. But by including her in this group, the user is invoking a self-pride in Black women. The “other squad” that they reference could be another group of Black women—or patriarchy, structural inequalities, White supremacy, etc. These barriers cannot “cross” them because of their #BlackGirlMagic. The #BlackGirlMagic celebrates the achievements and power of Black women, instead of historically erasing and negating their accomplishments. Lindsey E states, “With technology at our fingertips and a new age of confidence we’ve reclaimed from the strength of black girls before us, we better use this time to celebrate who we are, build each other up, and connect with one another.”



Figure 5: Twitter post using the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag, a user posting a series of selfies.



Figure 6: Twitter post using the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag, celebrating model Maria Borges.

The tweet above showcases the beauty of Black women, and not just famous Black women, but every day, ordinary Black women and girls. With her caption, this user offers her pictures as “melanin appreciation.” They are darker skinned. Darker skinned women have not historically been praised or celebrated as the ideal beauty standard, so this user is disrupting this and inserting themselves as an alternative to traditional beauty standards. They also have what appears to be purple hair. On Black women, having their hair not be their natural color has been labeled as “ghetto,” “unprofessional,” etc because it deviates from the norm. This person embraces the idea that darker skin can be celebrated and viewed as beautiful. #BlackGirlMagic encourages and embraces acceptance of all kinds of Black beauty, including Maria Borges, the first Black Victoria’s Secret model to wear an afro on the runway (also pictured in the above screenshot of the tweets).



Global Grind @GlobalGrind · 2h

Meet the stunning models who brought **#BlackGirlMagic** to the VS Fashion Show bit.ly/1O4iMi1



45 46



Fat & Furious @berryflavord · 2h

When you're tryna stay awake under the dryer... lol **#BlackGirlMagic** **#HairTricks** **#ProtectiveStyling...** [instagram.com/p/99Pq-SCAd/](https://www.instagram.com/p/99Pq-SCAd/)

45 46



HIP-HOP Feed Hub @feedhub · 2h

The Stunning Models Who Brought **#BlackGirlMagic** To The VS Fashion Show ift.tt/1Mo8LcV **#FeedHub** Via **#GLOBALGRIND**

45 46

[View summary](#)



K-Indemand @KINDEMANDNEWS · 2h

K-IN DEMAND NEWS The Stunning Models Who Brought **#BlackGirlMagic** To The VS Fashion Show ow.ly/37Eghr

45 46

[View summary](#)

Figure 7: Twitter posts using the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag, celebrating model Maria Borges at the Victoria Secret's Fashion Show

Many of the tweets analyzed shared links to stories and pictures of not only Maria Borges, but the other Black models who walked in the 2015 Victoria Secret's Fashion Show. Many of the linked stories included headlines that included #BlackGirlMagic, showing its ever growing popularity and impact. The hashtag does not solely live in digital space but has made significant impact to become a way of moving through and being seen in the world.

#BlackGirlMagic

Listen to Black girls in relationship with Black women. What do you hear? -Ruth Nicole Brown

The beauty and complexity of #BlackGirlMagic lies in the inability to define it. The term means different things in different contexts. When pop singer Beyonce released her pro-Black song and video “Formation” in February 2016, social media users added #Formation to #BlackGirlMagic posts. This creates layered conversations and meaning for the term. When a protest was scheduled by people who were angered by Beyonce’s powerful visions of Blackness in the “Formation” video, fans showed up at the protest and tweeted about their experience—using both #BlackGirlMagic and #Formation hashtags.

A month earlier, scholar Linda Chavers wrote an elle.com article titled “Here’s My Problem With #BlackGirlMagic.” Chavers compared #BlackGirlMagic to the Strong Black Woman trope. The Strong Black Woman is a controlling image that has had devastating and concrete effects on the lives of Black women. For Chavers, #BlackGirlMagic is another controlling image that limits the scope of Black womanhood: Black girl magic suggests we are, again, something other than human. That might sound nitpicky, but it’s not nitpicky when we are still being treated as subhuman. And there’s a very long history of black women being treated as subhuman by the medical establishment, in spite of the debt Western medicine owes to them. It doesn’t begin or end with Henrietta Lacks and the cancer cells taken from her cervix without her or her family’s knowledge or permission. It doesn’t begin or end with black women receiving less anesthesia, if at all, in surgeries because of the widely held belief that black women felt no pain. It doesn’t begin or end with black women receiving

improper and dangerous prenatal care or compulsory sterilizations.

Chavers has chronic health issues, and feels that this excludes her from the magical hashtag. The categories chosen to analyze the hashtag are celebratory—so Chavers’ claim is valid. Where would the complex relationship that many Black women have with healthcare and medical treatment fit into the #BlackGirlMagic conversation? If someone struggles with depression, what role would #BlackGirlMagic play in their healing? The bigger concern that Chavers has is that like the Strong Black Woman trope, Black Girl Magic erases the complexity of Black womanhood.

The podcast “The Get,” hosted by two Black women, covered the hashtag and had somewhat similar critiques. The hosts, Rhiana and Ivy, also worried that there were Black women and girls who were excluded from the Black Girl Magic identity and community. Black Girl Magic, they reasoned, had respectability undertones—meaning that the community reinforced middle-class, heteronormative and patriarchal standards. Queer Black women, they reasoned, were not celebrated and lifted up by users of the hashtag. The celebrities who are most associated with the hashtag—Solange, Amandla Stenberg and Zoe Kravitz, to name a few—fit into a very heteronormative beauty ideal. These women are thin, with long hair and are lighter skinned. *Essence* magazine, whose primary audience is Black women, featured three Black women on three separate covers highlighting the hashtag. The women included Black Lives Matter activist Johnetta Elzie, a brown skinned woman of size and actress Teyonah Parris, who is darker skinned. By including Elzie, *Essence* expanded the range of the Black Girl Magic identity.

In closing, there are those, however, who identify with the hashtag. Blogger Ashley Ford wrote a response to Chavers' article:

Black girls and women have been routinely denied their humanity in the face of a world ruled by racism, sexism, colorism, classism, and the enduring belief that our backs were built to carry what others would consider unimaginable burden. When we call ourselves beautiful anyway, when we succeed anyway, when we cry though they might never have imagined we had the capacity to feel so deeply, and when they find themselves wanting to imitate us anyway, that's Black Girl Magic.

For Ford, the hashtag is a larger part of an identity that she holds dear, and a community that she feels part of. Black Girl Magic is a source of pride, and offers a new way to move through the world as a Black woman.

Conclusion: In Favor of Black Girlhood

What makes black girls magic is not an inherent access to some form of super strength. Magic is about knowing something that others don't know or refuse to see. When a black woman is successful, and the world refuses to see her blood, sweat, and tears behind the win, what does it look like? Magic. It's not for them. It's for us.-Ashley Ford

I'm in favor of Black girlhood. I have long since felt a pride about being exactly as I am with a Black girl identity ranking high in my list of defining identifications. Ascriptive, yes. Beloved also. Yet, I grew up knowing that something about who I was as a Black girl was discounted. Seen as illegitimate. I wasn't really "the one." Not based on some tragic incident, but, just the regularity of living as a Black girl in a particular time, space, and place translated back to me that I was not enough.-Ruth Nicole Brown

Education policy studies scholar Ruth Nicole Brown created SOLHOT (Saving Our Lives, Hearing Our Truth) as an after school program (of sorts) for Black girls in an Illinois town. Using a hip hop feminist curriculum, Brown prioritizes the Black girl, and encourages "homegirls" (adult facilitators) to remember their own Black girlhood while working with the program participants. Brown emphasizes the fluidity of Black girlhood and womanhood—Black girls are listened to in SOLHOT, and homegirls work *with*, not against them.

What I know from trying in earnest to create spaces of Black girlhood celebration as a grown woman is that celebrating Black girlhood with women and girls of diverse ages is rarely if ever about "childhood innocence." Neither can the work of celebrating Black girlhood be fully understood as "girl empowerment," "volunteering," nor "mentoring" as popular sloganeering would have us to believe. All too often this terminology lacks and devalues the political specificity of what it means to be with Black girls (Brown, 21).

The fluidity of Black girlhood and womanhood is an important aspect of #BlackGirlMagic, and one that I plan to explore further in future works. Black Girl

Magic requires Black women to recreate futures for themselves where they are celebrated, where their lives matter. Hip hop feminist scholar Brittney Cooper describes black girl as a verb. Continuing scholar Hortense Spillers' idea that Black women are "awaiting their verb," Cooper attributes Black Girl Magic to embodying this verb. "In this era of #BlackGirlMagic, Black women and girls are actively constituting and reconstructing a grammar of Black girlhood and Black womanhood. The active way that Black girls do the things we do constitutes new verbiage in its own right," Cooper writes. Black Girl Magic is an identity, a community and a hashtag. Black Girl Magic is a verb, it is a way to move through the world, to recognize others in your community, and to make sense of your girlhood and womanhood.

Reflection

There are limitations that lie in only analyzing one hashtag, as opposed to several. I am only analyzing a limited number of tweets, so they cannot possibly account for all of #BlackGirlMagic. This also doesn't account for the different variations of the hashtag, including #BlackGirlsMagic and #BlackGirlsAreMagic. This analysis also does not put the hashtag in context with similar hashtags (#BlackGirlsAreFromTheFuture, #CarefreeBlackGirl, #SayHerName, #StandWithBlackWomen) because of the limited timeframe. Ethnographers Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa study the hashtag #Ferguson as a mediated place created in response to the killing of Michael Brown, and the actual town of Ferguson, Missouri as a place of civil unrest after the "not guilty" verdict in November 2014.

In addition to these intertextual considerations, hashtags also have the interdiscursive capacity to lasso accompanying texts and their indexical meanings as part of a frame. Linkages across hashtags and their accompanying texts—which comprise both other hashtags (e.g., #Ferguson, #MichaelBrown, #HandsUp, etc.) and additional commentary—frame #Ferguson as a kind of mediated place.¹² It is in this sense that much like one could go to the library, stand in front of a call number, and find texts on a particular subject, one could go onto Twitter, type #Ferguson, and find a large number of posts on the subject at hand. But what is the relationship between this mediatized place—as it is experienced from outside the boundaries of the geographical context with which it is associated—and everyday life in what might be understood as Ferguson proper? How does the mediatization of Ferguson, Missouri, through #Ferguson lead to the formation of new “ad hoc publics” (Bonilla and Rosa, 5).

In continuing this research it will be interesting to examine the ways that users use different hashtags in conversation with each other, such as #BlackWomanMagic, #BlackOut (created to encourage self-pride among Black users), or the many other socially conscious hashtags that seem to spring up almost instantly in the wake of a particular moment in popular culture. It will be interesting to view the digital space as a “mediatized” place where Black lives are privileged, where Black girls can be truly carefree, and where Black people can share inside jokes, such as the popular #AskRachel hashtag that was inspired by former Spokane, WA NAACP president Rachel Dolezal, who claimed to be Black but was born biologically White.

Is mainstream feminism destined to remain the terrain of white women? Or can the digital media praxis of women of color, their hashtag feminism and tumblr activism,

their blogging and livejournaling, broader and radically redefine the very field of feminism? Hashtag and digital feminism is still a very new and burgeoning field, but it is not one that should be ignored. There is much power in, and minimal costs associated with, utilizing digital spaces as organizing tools, and spaces where serious critique occurs. Women of color are utilizing these spaces, and sprinkling their #BlackGirlMagic wherever they move throughout cyberspace. It will be interesting to see the additional scholarship that will be produced that truly acknowledges the real and exciting work that is happening online, as a way to reimagine what a feminist of color space could look like. #BlackGirlMagic will be an important part of that conversation.

Bibliography

- Adams-Bass, Valerie N., Keisha L. Bentley-Edwards and Howard C. Stevenson. “That’s Not Me I See on TV . . . : African American Youth Interpret Media Images of Black Females.” *Women, Gender, and Families of Color*. 2.1 (2014): 79-100.
- Banaji, Shakuntala. “Who are the Girls?”: Reflections on ethnicity, culture, and the idea of “girlhood.” *Commentary and Criticism, Feminist Media Studies*. 2009 (9:1), 118-121.
- Belgrave, Faye Z. *African American Girls*. Richmond, VA: Springer, 2009.
- Bell, Ella Louise. “Myths, Stereotypes, and Realities of Black Women.” *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*. 40.2 (2004): 146-159.
- Bernard, Regina Andrea. *Black and Brown Waves*. Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2009.
- Bobo, Jacqueline. *Black Women as Cultural Readers*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- Brown, Ruth Nicole. *Black Girlhood Celebration*. New York: Lang Publishing, 2009.
- Brown, Ruth Nicole. *Hear Our Truths*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2013.
- Calvin, Rich. *Gilmore Girls and the Politics of Identity*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008.
- Carroll, Rebecca. *Sugar in the Raw*. New York: Crown Trade Paperbacks, 1997.
- Chavers, Linda. “Here’s My Problem With #BlackGirlMagic.” 13 January 2016.
<http://www.elle.com/life-love/a33180/why-i-dont-love-blackgirlmagic/>

- Chen, Gina Masullo, Sherri Williams, Nicole Hendrickson, and Li Chen. “Male Mammies: A Social-Comparison Perspective on How Exaggeratedly Overweight Media Portrayals of Madea, Rasputia, and Big Momma Affect How Black Women Feel About Themselves.” *Mass Communication and Society*. 15.1 (2012): 115-135.
- Coleman, Robin Means. “Roll up your sleeves!” Black women, black feminism in *Feminist Media Studies*. 11.1 (2011): 35-41.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Conley, Tara L. “From #RenishaMcBride to #RememberRenisha:
- Cooper, Brittney. “Black Girl Is a Verb: A New American Grammar Book.” 28 March 2016. <http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2016/03/28/black-girl-is-a-verb-a-new-american-grammar-book/>
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review*. 43.6 (1991): 1241-1299.
- Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race & Class*. Vintage Books: New York, 1983.
- Davis, Crystal. “Black Twitter unwrapped.” *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*. 31.18 (2014): 5.
- Duits, Linda. “Against Amnesia: 30+ years of girls’ studies.” *Commentary and Criticism, Feminist Media Studies*. 2009 (9:1), 110-114.
- Durham, Aisha. “Hip Hop Feminist Media Studies.” *International Journal of Africana Studies*. 16.1 (2010): 117-140.
- Durham, Aisha, Brittney C. Cooper and Susana M. Morris. “The Stage Hip-Hop

Feminism Built: A New Directions Essay.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 38.3 (2013): 721-737.

- Evans-Winters, Venus E. *Teaching Black Girls*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005.
- Evans-Winters, Venus E. *Teaching Black Girls Revised Edition*. New York: Peter Lang, 2011.
- Everett, Anna. *Digital Diaspora*. SUNY Press: New York, 2009.
- Ford, Ashley. “There Is Nothing Wrong About Black Girl Magic.” 13 January 2016 <http://www.elle.com/life-love/a33251/there-is-nothing-wrong-with-black-girl-magic/>
- Ford, Tamara Villareal and Geneve Gil. “Radical Internet Use.” *Radical Media*. Ed. Downing, John H., Tamara Villareal Ford, Geneve Gil and Laura Stein. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2001.
- Gilmore, Leigh and Marshall, Elizabeth. “Girls in Crisis: Rescue and Transnational Feminist Autobiographical Resistance.” *Feminist Studies*. 36.3 (2010): 667-690.
- Glenn, Cerise L., and Landra J. Cunningham. "The Power of Black Magic: The Magical Negro and White Salvation in Film." *Journal of Black Studies* 40.2 (2009): 135-52.
- Hains, Rebecca C. *Growing Up With Girl Power*. New York: Peter Lang, 2012.
- hooks, bell. *Ain't I A Woman*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981.
- hooks, bell. *Feminism is for Everybody*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000.
- Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2005.

- Johnson, Jessica Marie and Nunez, Kismet. "Alter Egos and Infinite Literacies, Part III: How to Build a Real Gyrl in 3 Easy Steps." *The Black Scholar*. 45:4(2015): 47-61.
- Latina, Daniela and Docherty, Stevie. "Trending Participation, Trending Exclusion?" *Feminist Media Studies*. 14.6 (2014): 1103-1105.
- Lindsey, Treva B. "'One Time for My Girls': African-American Girlhood, Empowerment, and Popular Visual Culture." *Journal of African American Studies* 17.1 (2013): 22-34.
- Lindsey, Treva B. and Johnson, Jessica Marie. "Searching for Climax: Black Erotic Lives in Slavery and Freedom." *Meridians*. 12.2 (2014): 169-195.
- Malatino, Hilary. "The Becoming-Woman of the Young-Girls: Revisiting Riot Grrrl, Rethinking Girlhood." *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*. 2011 (22).
- Manjrekar, Nandini. "Ideals of Hindu girlhood: Reading Vidya Bharati's Balika Shikshan." *Childhood*. 18(3) 2011: 350-366.
- Mirza, Heidi Safia. *Young, Female and Black*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Mitchell, Claudia and Reid-Walsh, Jacqueline. *Seven Going On Seventeen: Tween Studies in the Culture of Girlhood*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005
- Moletsane, Relebohile. "South African Girlhood in the Age of AIDS: Towards Girlhood Studies." *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*. 2007 (72), 155-165.
- Morgan, Joan. *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1999.

- Nakamura, Lisa. *Cybertypes*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Oliver, Chyann L. “for sepia “for colored girls” who have considered self/when hip-hop is enuf.” *Home Girls Make Some Noise*. Ed. Pough, Gwendolyn D., Elaine Richardson, Aisha Durham and Rachel Raimist. Mira Loma, CA: Parker Publishing, LLC, 2007.
- Pough, Gwendolyn D. *Check It While I Wreck It*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004.
- Priest, Myisha. "Gospels According to Faith: Rewriting Black Girlhood through the Quilt." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 39.4 (2014): 461-81.
- Radford-Hill, Sheila. *Further to Fly*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. Rapp, Laura et al. “The Internet as a Tool for Black Feminist Activism: Lessons From an Online Antirape Protest.” *Feminist Criminology*. 5.3 (2010): 244-262.
- Reid-Walsh, Jacqueline and Mitchell, Claudia. *Seven Going On Seventeen: Tween Studies in the Culture of Girlhood*. Peter Lang: New York, 2005.
- Schuster, Julia. “Invisible feminists? Social media and young women’s political participation.” *SAGE*. 65.1 (2013): 8-24.
- Sears, Kimberly D. *Imagining Black Womanhood*. New York: SUNY Press, 2010.
- Shandler, Sara. *Ophelia Speaks*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1999.
- Shange, Ntozake. *For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow is ENUF*. New York: Scribner Poetry, 1975.
- Sharma, Sanjay. “Black twitter? Racial hashtags, networks and contagion.” *New*

Formations. 78.78 (2012): 46-64.

- The Combahee River Collective. "A Black Feminist Statement." *Still Brave*. Ed. James, Stanlie M., Frances Smith Foster and Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: Feminist Press, 2009.
 - Vats, Anjali. "Cooking Up Hashtag Activism: #PaulasBestDishes and Counternarratives of Southern Food." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*. 12.2 (2015): 209-213.
 - Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. Orlando: Harcourt Books, 1983.
 - Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 1982.
 - Weems, Lisa. "Chapter 11: Border Crossing with M.I.A. and Transnational Girlhood Studies." *Counterpoints: Postcolonial Challenges in Education*. 2009 (369) 178-194.
- Williams, Sherri. "Digital Defense: Black Feminists Resist Violence With Hashtag Activism." *Feminist Media Studies*. 15.2 (2015): 341-343.

Vita

Briana Nicole Barner was born in Chicago, Illinois. After completing her work at Morgan Park High School, Chicago, Illinois, in 2008, she entered Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina. She received the Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and Media Studies, and the Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in Africana Women's Studies from Bennett College in May 2012. In August 2014, she entered the Graduate School at The University of Texas at Austin. In August 2016, she will begin a doctoral program in Media Studies at The University of Texas at Austin.

Permanent Address: 148 Willow View

Cibolo, TX 78108

This thesis was typed by the author.