

**MORE THAN A HASHTAG: AN EXAMINATION
OF THE #BLACKGIRLMAGIC
PHENOMENON**

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ABSTRACT

Cashawn Thompson, who is credited for coining the phrase “Black girls are magic” which was later shortened to Black Girl Magic, says in an interview with the Los Angeles Times that “at its core, the purpose of this movement is to create a platform where women of color can stand together against “the stereotyping, colorism, misogynoir and racism that is often their lived experience.” Julee Wilson, Fashion Senior Editor at Essence Magazine, reflects Thompson in her article written for HuffPost saying, “Black Girl Magic is a term used to illustrate the universal awesomeness of black women. It’s about celebrating anything we deem particularly dope, inspiring, or mind-blowing about ourselves.” (Wilson, 2016) Nielsen Media Research similarly defines #BlackGirlMagic as “a cross-platform gathering of empowered Black women who uplift each other and shine a light on the impressive accomplishments of Black women throughout the world, a hashtag which uncovers and addresses the daily racism that some black women face at work.”(Nielsen, 2017) As subliminally acknowledged throughout all of the aforementioned interpretations, #BlackGirlMagic has grown bigger than a mere symbol used to categorize a trending topic for Black women. #BlackGirlMagic has become a phenomenon that, if engaged with correctly, could produce an effective change in the everyday lives of the African community. This research examines #BlackGirlMagic as more than a hashtag, but rather a virtual movement that has the potential to create actual lived experiences. The #BlackGirlMagic Phenomenon, as I deem it, is a process in which the amount of positivity, visibility, and empowerment associated with Black women is gradually increased via the

virtual realm and translated to reality. The movement consists of the virtual and actual reactions of African/Black women against oppression and trademarks the unrivaled way black women adapt information that relates to their own specific experiences.

Social media continues to grow as a space used by African/Black women to empower themselves, discuss topics specific to them, and generate constructive visibility in the public sphere. With 117 million users in the United States, Instagram ranks number two in the United States' leading social media apps as of July 2018 with 39% of Instagram's users being women (Statista, 2018). Studies show that the majority of Instagram users are either Millennials and Post-Millennial (between the ages of 18-29) making up 59% of all Instagram users in the United States, or Generation X (between the ages of 30-49) making up 33% of all Instagram users in the United States (Sprout, 2018). According to Pew Research Center in January 2018, 43% of Instagram users are Black as opposed to 32% of Whites and 39% of Hispanics making Instagram the top social media platform used primarily by African Americans, followed closely by Twitter then LinkedIn (Pew Research, 2018). More thorough research completed by Nielsen Media Research in 2017 shows that among all social media platforms, Instagram ranked third to YouTube and Facebook among black women audiences. Even more astonishing was that findings show Black women spend more weekly time using apps and internet browsing than total women in the United States (Nielsen, 2018). Nielsen Media Research acknowledged the significance of black women on social media saying, "Black women, more than any demographic group, have taken social media and adopted it for higher purposes" (Nielsen,

2017). The findings shown in these studies have brought to reality the within this digital experience.

There has a been a significant amount of studies done on #BlackGirlMagic as a movement from a feministic approach. Some scholar's most recent work in this tone include: Feminista Jones' book, (2019) *Reclaiming Our Space: How Black Feminists Are Changing the World from the Tweets to the Streets*, Dr. Catherine Knight Steele's (2019) *Black Girl Labor as Magic: Toward an understanding of Digital Black Feminism*, Quenette L. Walton and Olubunmi Basirat Oyewuwo-Gassikia's work entitled, *The Case for #BlackGirlMagic: Application of a Strengths-Based, Intersectional Practice Framework for Working With Black Women With Depression*, Aria S. Halliday and Nadia E. Brown's online publication, *The Power of Black Girl Magic Anthems: Nicki Minaj, Beyoncé, and "Feeling Myself" as Political Empowerment*. Most popularly has been the use and study of #BlackGirlMagic as an adjective to discuss the achievements of African/Black women all over the world. Some work fashioned in this manner include Beverly Bond's *Black Girls Rock* which include thoughts on modern-day black feminism from Rebecca Walker, Melissa Harris-Perry, and Joan Morgan. This work, *More Than A Hashtag: An Examination of the #BlackGirlMagic Phenomenon*, however, seeks to give a more critical insight to this socio-political movement from an Afrocentric approach because we cannot accurately and ethically study African people from a paradigm outside of an African context.

In examining the #BlackGirlMagic phenomenon, this paper will seek to do the following: 1) observe the #BlackGirlMagic Movement as a manifestation of the essence of

African culture, 2) distinguish the threat feminism poses on the beneficial impact of #BlackGirlMagic, 3) suggest ways in which African people can combat the delimitations of #BlackGirlMagic and engage with this phenomenon Afrocentrically and 4) provide a communication model grounded in the Afrocentric Paradigm through which African people can intercept this potential movement and the detrimental portrayal of Africans in the media.

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CHAPTER 1

THE #BLACKGIRLMAGIC PHENOMENON

Introduction

Despite the structural oppressions inflicted on Black women, they have continued to show resilience and self-determination throughout history. We are living in a day and age where the media representation of black women is growing evidently present, natural hair and dark skin, seemably, are trending as more fashionable, and the voices and opinions of African women are in conversations related to national decision. The visibility and positive representation of African women in America has greatly evolved. We are living during an era of black women's empowerment. We are witnessing the formation of a movement strong enough to disrupt structural order if engaged with Afrocentrically. This chapter seeks to define and discuss the significance of the #BlackGirlMagic phenomenon, identify the benefits and limitations this event presents, and suggest necessary engagement for Afrocentric change.

The #BlackGirlMagic phenomenon, as I deem it, is an online, African community in which the amount of visibility, positivity, and empowerment associated with African women is gradually increased virtually and has translated to a distinguishable and cognizable phenomenon. The #BlackGirlMagic experience consists of the virtual and physical reactions of black women against oppression and discrimination. While the aesthetic of black women has become a fad and their accomplishments increasingly publicized, the systematic discriminations and injustices for African women, and in turn

African people, have not disappeared. Despite this reality, African women continue to attempt to create their own authentic spaces and negate derogatory perceptions attached to their identity. While this work focuses on a phenomenon that mostly showcases the virtual expressions of African women, this work has no intention of minimizing the lived experiences of African men. This work attempts to critically examine this occurrence and offer Afrocentric engagement for complementarity between African men and women and agency within this potential movement.

History of #BlackGirlMagic

CaShawn Thompson, a DMV native who is credited with coining the term “Black Girls are Magic” to embody the essence of Black women’s resilience, first used the term in the summer of 2013. In an interview with Thompson conducted by social worker, Michelle Taylor, infamously known as Feminista Jones, Thompson states in describing what she meant by the term “Black Girls are Magic”,

The difference was, I was the first person to use it and reference Black girl empowerment. Other times it was used before, it was always something about Black girl’s and Black women’s hair. I was the first person to use Black Girl Magic or Black Girls Are Magic in the realm of uplifting Black women. Not so much about our aesthetic but just who we are. ¹

In an interview with the Los Angeles Times, Thompson (2015) states, "I say 'magic' because it's something that people don't always understand."²

¹ Feminista Jones, “For CaShawn Thompson, Black Girl Magic Was Always the Truth”, 2019.

² Dexter Thomas, “Why everyone's saying 'Black Girls are Magic, 2015.

Almost simultaneously, Beverly Bond, former Wilhelmina model and celebrity DJ, also became closely associated with the term. Bond is credited with the creation of the phrase, “Black Girls Rock!”. This phrase additionally names Bond’s nonprofit organization focused on mentoring and providing girls with the tools necessary to achieve their fullest potential, as well as BET’s *Black Girls Rock* award show which Bond is credited with creating and executive producing. Bond most recently published her book, *Black Girls Rock! Owing Our Magic and Rocking Our Truth*³ where she recognizes the accomplishments of many well-known celebrities and shares their testimonies in hope of inspiring other Black women in the spirit of true #BlackGirlMagic. In an interview with reporter Samantha Hunter (2018), Bond describes her book saying,

I cannot possibly celebrate all of the brilliance of black women in a two-hour time slot on television, once a year. This book is a part of the tapestry of black girl magic that is being illuminated at this time. The emergence and convergence of our voices en masse are magical. There is this collective reckoning and maybe even a renaissance amongst black women to own our shared journeys, experiences, authenticity, power, and beauty and I am honored that Black Girls Rock! continues to be a leader in this revolution.⁴

While the #BlackGirlMagic phenomenon is quite remarkable in its unparalleled way of virtually organizing a massive community with no sole leader yet producing noticeable positivity and the collective desire to celebrate and acknowledge the achievements, beauty, and overall being of African women, this extraordinary event is in no way the first time African women have formed to protect their unique culture. African

³ Beverly Bond, “Black Girls Rock!: Owing Our Magic. Rocking Our Truth”, 2018

⁴ Samantha Hunter, “Beverly Bond Is on A Mission to Make A Difference”, 2018

people are also no stranger to cultivating spaces in which they can exercise freedom of speech and behavior.

Social Media and the #BlackGirlMagic Phenomenon

The internet provides for immediate response during an age that demands results and information quickly. Social media provides networks in which communication and interaction can transpire between miles of distance within a second. Social media also provides for a prompt and vast dispersion of content. Through social media's lack of restriction trans-continently, messages can be delivered to larger audiences. One of the biggest benefits of social media is the disruption of the medium process. Traditional processes of communication begin with a message sent from the messenger, through a medium, and eventually received by an audience. The problem, however, lies somewhere in between the messenger and the message itself. This is a very crucial process where the initial meaning of the message can become corrupted depending on the motive of the messenger. Of course, the interpretation of the message will always lie in the hands of the audience, but the chances of deciphering a well-presented, misleading message is rather slim. Social Media has always worked as a two-edged sword, providing society with nuanced benefits while concurrently introducing harmful disadvantages. Despite the detriments social media may pose, its existence is undeniable and must be dealt with. Social media makes for a space where a message can be authentically transmitted to the audience. Through social media, African women have been able to authentically voice their opinions and create a space where their thoughts, behaviors, and physical being is respected and

praised. African women have been able to utilize social media in order to define their future and empower themselves.

With data put together by the Nielsen Company, translation of the #BlackGirlMagic phenomena is made perceptible. According to a Nielsen Study entitled, *African-American Women Our Science, Her Magic*, African American women spend more time on social media than any other collective women group and rank number one in top online engagement. Majority of African American women in this group are within the ages of 18-34 (making up 52%), generationally known as millennials, and ages 35-49 (making up 30%), who are commonly referred to as Generation X. To break this data down even further to understand what media platforms are generating the most traffic from African women, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter receive the most engagement from Black women. However, it must be noted that only YouTube (which contains 69% of Black women as users), Instagram (51% of Black women), and Twitter (24% of Black women) carry a higher index of Black women to total women in the United States.⁵ Therefore, Black women use these social media sites more than any other women demographic. More recent research has been conducted by the Pew Research Center showing similar findings. Among an almost equal ratio gender split between Instagram users (50.3% female to 49.7% male), 43% of these women were African American with the remaining users to be 38% Hispanic and 32% White. Through research conducted by Pew Research in January of 2018, we also find, for the first time, YouTube leads the way with the greatest number of users in the United States, making up 73% of the total U.S. population. YouTube is followed closely

⁵ The Nielsen Company, "African-American Women Our Science, Her Magic", 2017

by Facebook containing 68% of the population as users, then Instagram with a quickly growing 35%.⁶ According to these studies, African American women are occupying majority of the space on some of the top used social media platforms. The reason for Black women's high social media use is also key for understanding the #BlackGirlMagic phenomenon. According to the same Nielsen study completed in 2017, 80% of Black woman use a smart phone with more than half percent admitting to using their cell phone for entertainment. This number is significant because African American women are 25% more likely to use social media for entertainment than any other women demographic. These findings have proved that African American women are not only the highest consumers of social media, but they have managed to develop an environment dedicated mainly to their own interests.

Hashtag Activism and Black Twitter

Twitter has been making an uproar with its innovative usage of the hashtag. The hashtag is used to connect an image or message with a mutual theme, usually short and catchy. In the case of #BlackGirlMagic, African women have been able to utilize this hashtag to bring together all positive images, messages, and accomplishments regarding Black women, essentially forming a space where the overall spirit of #BlackGirlMagic is maintained.

Social Media Activism, particularly hashtag activism, has been on the rise. Majority of today's youngest generations are taking to social media to express their thoughts on

⁶ Pew Research Center, "Demographics of Social Media Users and Adoption in the United States", 2018

politics and injustices. This type of activism quickly spreads and is a great form of increasing awareness within communities. Through hashtag activism, many participate through a form of citizen journalism (news and information usually by way of the Internet through the public rather than the media), making way for a more authentic news form. Unfortunately, many believe that by using a hashtag, posting a picture, or using a specifically themed filter on their pictures, they have done the most they can to respond to a social issue. Another problem with this type of activism is that its impact is limited to the amount of trending time. Majority of social activism campaigns are short lived while the issues initiating the campaigns persist. For example, highly trended hashtag #BringBackOurGirl (2014) has significantly diminished, yet the Nigerian girls who were kidnapped by Boko Haram have still not been returned. Other popular hashtag activism includes #BlackLivesMatter (2013) which exclusively fights against racism and violence against African people, #ICantBreathe (2014) which was a movement sparked by the last words of Eric Garner (an African man who was choked and killed at the hands of the New York City Police), #SayHerName (2015) which brings attention to African women victims of police brutality, sparking from the death of Sandra Bland (who was found hanging dead in a jail cell after being arrested for assaulting a police officer after being pulled over for a traffic violation), #MeToo (2018) which was started by Tarana Burke in efforts to support victims of sexual assault, and #TimesUp (2018) which followed #MeToo with attempt from celebrities to fight against sexual harassment in the media after the Weinstein scandal. These movements have given momentum to social advocacy that would not have previously been accessible before social media. The #BlackGirlMagic Movement contains

some of the very same pros and cons most social activism movements on social media endure, but overall has been able to sustain a powerful impact in the Black women's community. With hashtag activism, African people have been able to organize, retrieve, and discern news pertaining to themselves.

Black Twitter

Twitter is also known for its infamous online community of Black Twitter. In an article entitled "What is Black Twitter", Khiry Clements (2018) states,

Black Twitter is not a particular hashtag or subgroup on Twitter. It is a social movement that serves as a voice for primarily, although not exclusively, African-Americans to speak out against injustice, as well as issues involving their community that mainstream media does not cover.⁷

Black Twitter has been able to constitute an online community (much like that of the #BlackGirlMagic's community) dedicated to the concerns of the Black community. Most recently, the efforts and financial support of Black Twitter have helped in the production of a short film centered on a Black father's efforts to learn and understand his daughter's hair. Black Twitter, through the help of celebrities including Gabrielle Union, Gabby Sidibe, Ben Stiller and Gina Rodriguez, was able to help fund Director Matthew Cherry's vision in raising \$284,058 for the film *Hair Love* which was announced on March 20th, 2019 to be picked up by Sony Animation and brought to a wider audience.⁸ "The film

⁷ Khiry Clements, "What is Black Twitter", 2018

⁸ Dominic Patten, "Sony Animation Picks Up 'Hair Love' Short From 'BlackKKlansman' EP Matthew A. Cherry", 2019

project raised \$284,058 on Kickstarter, surpassing the original \$75,000 goal. According to Deadline, this is the most any short film has ever obtained on Kickstarter.”⁹

Influencers Within the #BlackGirlMagic Phenomenon

Even though the #BlackGirlMagic phenomenon has functioned in a grassroots style without one individual leader, the opinion, thoughts, and actions of the #BlackGirlMagic Movement are undeniably shaped by the beliefs and values of African women celebrities, politicians, and influencers during this day and age. Researching #BlackGirlMagic is hardly possible without discovering a myriad of inspiring statements and appreciation for the performance and achievements of famous African women.

Michelle Obama – “Forever FLOTUS”

The life, speeches, and behavior of former First Lady of the United States of America, Michelle Obama, has weighed heavy influence on the #BlackGirlMagic phenomenon. During her husband, Barack Obama’s, reign as President, Michelle received the nickname of “Forever FLOTUS” (First Lady of the United States) by people all over the United States. In a speech at the BET Black Girls Rock! Awards, Obama stated “Black Girls Rock...let me say those words again, Black Girls Rock and we have such big hopes and dreams for every single one of you.”¹⁰ Obama’s speech sparked a huge controversy on whether her remarks were racially prejudice to White women. In a conservative article,

⁹ Monique Jones, “‘Hair Love’: Sony Pictures Animation Picks Up Matthew A. Cherry's Short Film”, 2019

¹⁰ Michelle Obama, “Remarks by the First Lady at BET's ‘Black Girls Rock!’ Event”, 2015

which has since been removed entitled, “Michelle Obama Sends Message to White Girls That They Don’t Matter”, commentator Amanda Shea accused the former First Lady of racial bias by neglecting white women, “By her biased support, the First Lady. . . is essentially telling white girls they aren’t “good enough” since she doesn’t address them with the same overwhelming support she does her own race.”¹¹ This sparked immediate outrage from supporters and an increased pride over what it means to be a Black woman. Michelle Obama continues to inspire the masses with her charm, style, and advocacy for women all over the world. Michelle Obama has recently inspired many with her memoir *Becoming* which was released in the end of 2018.¹²

Misty Copeland

Misty Copeland, the American Ballet Theater’s first black prima ballerina also helped influence the #BlackGirlMagic movement, particularly in her conversation during a Time’s Magazine interview with former President Barack Obama.¹³ The interview’s subliminal theme was centered on the fact that both interviewees were multi-racial, raised in fatherless homes, and the first African Americans at the top of their fields, discrediting both as fully black and acknowledging their accomplishments as noteworthy only because they were the first blacks to be in that position. However, despite those suppressed critiques of the interview, the moment sparked major attention for being one of the earliest

¹¹ Kerry Anne, “Clueless Racists Can’t Handle Michelle Obama’s Heart-Stopping ‘Black Girls Rock’ Speech (VIDEO), 2015

¹² Michelle Obama, “Becoming”, 2018

¹³ “President Obama and Misty Copeland Interview”, 2017

conversations discussing #BlackGirlMagic publicly and is constantly brought up when discussing and defining #BlackGirlMagic.

Beyonce Knowles – “Queen Bey”

There is no separating the #BlackGirlMagic phenomenon from the profound influence of Beyonce Knowles-Carter. From her songs on women’s empowerment and uniqueness, her music has always attracted African American women. Women of all colors have emulated her as a mogul and most recently crowned her with the title of “Queen B”. Her most loyal and dedicated fans have been termed the ‘BeyHive’ and are willing to come to Queen Bey’s defense at any cost. While no prominent studies have been done to break down the exact number of members the BeyHive constitutes, Beyonce has over 126 million followers on Instagram and just under 15 million on Twitter, so the population can be imagined at a significant amount. The BeyHive is not merely just a term to describe Beyonce’s fans, but an online community created in 2012 on Beyonce’s personal website.¹⁴ Upon entry to the website, one is asked to join the BeyHive to receive advanced access to all things Beyonce. The BeyHive has now taken form on multiple online platforms forms including the high-trending #TheBeyHive on Twitter, the BeyHive website on Tumblr, and the BeyHive community on Facebook. The BeyHive is also notoriously known for attacking celebrities who pose any threat to Beyonce through mass comment attacks on social media. The list of the hive’s most popular victims according to a list created by *US*

¹⁴ Alyssa Berezna, “Inside the BeyHive”, 2016

Magazine include Tamera Mowry, Rachel Ray, Rachel Roy, Rita Ora, Azaelia Banks, Wendy Williams, Raven Symone, Rihanna, and Kim Kardashian.¹⁵

Beyonce undoubtedly has played a huge role in the implementation of feminist thought within the #BlackGirlMagic phenomenon as well. Her song *Flawless* sampled Chimamanda Adichie's speech entitled "We Should all be Feminists" in the prelude:

*We teach girls to shrink themselves
To make themselves smaller
We say to girls
"You can have ambition
But not too much
You should aim to be successful
But not too successful
Otherwise you will threaten the man"
Because I am female
I am expected to aspire to marriage
I am expected to make my life choices
Always keeping in mind that
Marriage is the most important
Now marriage can be a source of
Joy and love and mutual support
But why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage
And we don't teach boys the same?
We raise girls to each other as competitors
Not for jobs or for accomplishments
Which I think can be a good thing
But for the attention of men
We teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings
In the way that boys are
Feminist: the person who believes in the social
Political, and economic equality of the sexes¹⁶*

In her performance at the 2014 MTV's Video Music Awards, she performed *Flawless* as well as other hits and ended the show with the word 'feminist' lit up in the background

¹⁵ US Weekly Staff, "13 Times the Beyhive Attacked", 2019

¹⁶ Chimamanda Adichie, "We Should all be Feminists", 2012

behind her.¹⁷ According to Billboard Charts , the VMA’s pulled 8.3 million viewers and 13.7 million after repeated airings were calculated.¹⁸ This event led to a rise on social media and trend on the word feminist and Beyonce on Twitter. Jennifer Bennett from Time’s Magazine reported,

Beyoncé would become the subject of two-thirds of all tweets about feminism in the 24 hours after her appearance, according to a data analysis by Twitter, making Sunday the sixth-highest day for volume of conversation about feminism since Twitter began tracking this year (the top three were days during #YesAllWomen).¹⁹

This moment quickly introduced feminism to #BlackGirlMagic in a way that had never been seen before. Thus, creating an extreme trend in labeling celebrities as feminist or anti-feminist. The ramifications of this introduction of a Eurocentrically constructed framework into a presumably African space will be later discussed in future chapters of this work.

There are many other celebrities that have been instrumental in influencing the #BlackGirlMagic. This list includes but is not limited to, Willow Smith, Solange Knowles, Zendaya Coleman, Amandla Stenberg, Oprah Winfrey, Yara Shahidi, Serena Williams, Corinne Bailey Rae, Jamila Woods, Janelle Monáe whose efforts and contributions can be discovered in most work discussing #BlackGirlMagic. Politicians have also been an integral part in influencing the #BlackGirlMagic phenomenon including, but not limited to Keisha Lance Bottoms and Maxine Water.

¹⁷ Jessica Bennett, “VMAs 2014: Beyonce Performance Defines Feminism”, 2014

¹⁸ Phil Galo, “VMAs Ratings Down Despite Blue Ivy Surprise”, 2014

¹⁹ Jessica Bennett, “VMAs 2014: Beyonce Performance Defines Feminism”, 2014

Critiques of the #BlackGirlMagic Phenomenon

While this #BlackGirlMagic phenomenon is astonishing and worth observing, scholars need to be aware of both the benefits and detriments of such a revolutionary reaction from African women. This phenomenon calls for a critical understanding of the differentiations between visibility and victory for African people. The label of ‘accomplishment’ is quick to be attached to situations pertaining to an African or person of color being the first in a respective field. The realization that visibility does not always mean change for African people is a crucial lesson. Africans must focus less on the “achievements” or the attempt from oppressors to keep us satisfied, and more on the deconstruction of the system that was established to hinder this representation from being seen sooner and more proportionately accurate in the first place.

The #BlackGirlMagic phenomenon has and continues to be infiltrated by feminist agenda seeking to distort the benefits of this potential social movement. Feminism’s attack has come silently and swiftly, and we must be well equipped to decipher its detrimental influence from destroying African’s authentic space. A heavy deal will go into explaining how feminism continues to use public relations tactics in order to accomplish its Western-centered mission as well as a detailed observation of the ramifications of feminism within this movement.

Conclusion

Scholars must not continue to keep their truths sealed up in the constrains of African Study Departments, books, and exclusive conferences. Their lessons must start to reach the

realms of social media. According to research conducted by the American Psychological Association, only 20% of U.S. teens are reported to read a book, magazine, or newspaper daily, whereas 80% are reported to use social media daily.²⁰ In a study conducted by San Diego State University that provided information from over one million teens, “one-third of the teenagers polled had not read a book for pleasure in the last year.”²¹ While these findings are tragic and we must never cease to encourage students to continue to read, this findings also show the daunting reality that must be engaged. One cannot expect to reach and inspire future generations with the same tools once used in the past. Unfortunate as it may be, print and the tools of its generation are beginning to become outdated and upgraded with the implementation of technology. With advancements in technology, we are now able to upload books onto handheld devices, record audiobooks to aid in learning while multi-tasking, conduct reviews of scholarship through YouTube videos to reach the masses, and reveal powerful quotes from authors to massive audiences through social media. We have the power to connect and inspire the upcoming generations in a way that was unimaginable a few years ago and must not allow this opportunity to pass. The time has come to cease making excuses for virtual ignorance and utilize the help of African centered publicists, social media managers, and copywriters to market our work to a generation that will be here in the future.

However, it would be absurd to leave the work and future of Afrocentricity to social media alone. We must encourage students to apply critical thinking and understanding to

²⁰ Jean Twenge, “Teens Today Spend More Time on Digital Media, Less Time Reading”, 2018

²¹ Joe Concha, “Study: Only Two Percent of Teens Read Newspaper, One-Third Have Not Read Book for Pleasure in Last Year”, 2018

not only their schoolwork, but to the news and messages they are consuming through social media. There needs to be emphasis on the fact that social media is in no way neutral and must be treated as such. All information must be interrogated, and African people must be equipped with the tools and understanding necessary to do so.

We also must believe in the next generations; believe in the potential they have in order to spark change and change the world. History shows that younger generations are responsible for the sustainability of the biggest social movements for African people.

CHAPTER 2

WAR ON FEMINISM

Introduction

While the #BlackGirlMagic phenomenon is full of record-breaking statistics, monumental moments, and jaw-dropping accomplishments, the movement is plagued with dangerous ideals and misrepresentations that if ignored could cause serious hindrances to African people. The most efficacious of these forces is the adoption of feminist thought. There has been a significant and intentional rise of feminist ideology in most recent years. This movement has clouded the agenda of black women who participate by putting their struggle for racial justice secondary to the fight for gender equality. This war for equality, however, is quite bewildering. Should African women be fighting for the equality to that of white women who continue to hover over us in society's hierarchy? Or are African women to aspire to be equal to the top of the chain, white men? Where do African men come into this? Are they included in this plight for equality or are African women supposed to leave them somewhere on the bottom seeing as they do not benefit from a patriarchal society? The war for gender equality subversively aids in distracting African people from the bigger war on racial oppression. Unbeknown to many, all forms of oppression stem from racial oppression.

Feminism's influence in the #BlackGirlMagic phenomenon are explicit. In descriptions of #BlackGirlMagic its benefits are almost always tied to that of feminism or intersectionality. Natty Kasambala, a journalist at the "New Internationalist" writes,

“Through Instagram captions, Twitter retweets and Tumblr threads, the hashtag has provided a tangible mantra for the newest wave of intersectional feminism.”²² She echoes the thoughts of many interpreting this movement. Feminism has subtly taken control of #BlackGirlMagic phenomena and seeks to deprive African people of their bona fide agenda.

Somehow feminism continues to go unnoticed as a threatening ideology. The feminist agenda continues to permeate its dictating beliefs into the minds of African men and women. Many African Studies Departments unarguably agree that religion is a divisive tool used to keep African people in “conceptual incarceration”.²³ Yet somehow, feminism’s ramifications remain controversial. How can feminism’s harm to African people remain debatable when racism is so blatantly underlined in the very history of feminism’s inception? The lack of caution with this female-centered dogma only seeks to sabotage the thoughts, relationships, and agenda of African people.

Most Africanans do not share the same ideology with traditional white feminists. True, the two may share the same strategies for ending sexual discrimination, but they are divided on the methodology to change the entire political system that would end racial discrimination and sexual exploitation.²⁴

Eurocentrism and Feminism

The misconception that feminist ideology merely targets the thoughts of African women is imposturous. Not only is this false, but feminism’s attack on the African man is

²² Natty Kasambala, “Black Girl Magic”, 2018

²³ Wade Nobles, “African Philosophy Foundations for Black Psychology”, 1976

²⁴ Hudson-Weems, “African Womanist Literary Theory”, 2004, p. 27

quite insidious. Through a feminist framework, African men are designed to be criticized justified through a faux position they are speculated to play within a patriarchal society. Intersectionality, the concept termed by Dr. Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 used to explain the multiple forms of oppression an individual may receive because of their split identities, was created to ensure the black women's injustices were accounted. However, the severing of identity only created a distortion of reality uniting women of all color with little regard to the position this would leave African men. Intersectionality will encourage women of color to believe that because heterosexual African men only receive two forms of oppression, race and class, they still somehow benefit from being a man (one of his identities) living in a patriarchal society. This idea has adverse effects on the way African men see themselves, as well as the way African women view their male counterparts. African women are slowly separated from their men based on their imaginary, elevated position in society and their presumed apathy for "equality" which threatens the livelihood of African women. African men are constantly told they exist in this whimsical position and inevitably internalize this fabricated hierarchy by imitating the sexism they witness demonstrated from white males. Intersectionality's idea of comparing oppressions also distracts individuals by focusing on which group gets mistreated worse – a pattern that Dr. Marimba Ani says is a "key part of the European epistemology" (1994). African men and women should not participate in such bigotry because no matter what, they both suffer at the bottom of the totem pole.

Adopting Western philosophy is quite common because of its hegemonic imposition on other cultures. However, the differences in history are quite clear. African

men never had the same institutionalized power to oppress African women. In fact, not until Europeans invaded the continent, were there any substantive forms of sexism. African men and women shared unity in their complementary roles. Unlike the western male/female dynamic, African women were never forced into inferior roles in order for African men to exercise power. African people also did not view places such as the home or kitchen as subjugating. In an article about the private and public space dichotomy, Dr. Itai Muwati and Dr. Zifikle Gambahaya note,

In Shona ontology, the kitchen is the most important space in the setup of *musha* (home)...*Musha* is the aspiration and ultimate rallying point for the realization of individual and communal talents. Rather than being a symbol of confinement and subjugation of the female principle, the cultural and ontological merit of the kitchen space in fact identifies and locates the mother as the center of life.²⁵

To be able to nurture a family was powerful, to uphold the family was robust. African women were not confined to the home either. Contrary to popular belief, African women were powerful, dexterous, and venerated. According to Niara Sudarkasa in *The 'Status of Women' in Indigenous African Societies*, "They were queen-mothers; queen-sisters; princesses; chiefs; and holders of other offices in towns and villages; occasional warriors; and, in one well-known case, that of the Lovedu, the supreme monarch."²⁶ In African culture, it was not seen as taboo to see women in positions of power or consulted by a man. Feminist ideology constantly tries to homogenize women and impose on them one universal history - European history. Dr. Valetia Watkins notes, "The historical

²⁵ Itai Muwati and Zifikle Gambahaya, "The Private/Public Space Dichotomy: An Africana Womanist Analysis of the Gendering of Space and Power", 2012, p. 102

²⁶ Niara Sudarkasa, "The 'Status of Women' in Indigenous African Societies", 1987, p. 76

relationship between African and European women demonstrates that they do not share the same experiences, issues, agendas, problems, solutions, and cultural destiny; nor have they shared the same historical relationship with their men.”²⁷ Little to no attention is given to the differentiating histories each respective group of women actually faced within Women’s Studies.

Feminism Defined

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition of feminism is as states: the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes; organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests. This inadequate and rather vague definition continues to deceive men and women daily. This definition is imprecise and allows for any type of women’s empowerment and advocating against sexism and patriarchy to fit under the broad category. Feminism parades as if it is somehow the mother to all ideas conceived with women’s empowerment and positivity at the forefront. Feminism perfidiously takes credit for all thoughts and ideas advocating for the proper and fair treatment of women. The ideology has positioned itself in such a way that any thoughts of women’s acknowledgement and admiration are unequivocally tied to feminism and further the feminist agenda. In her chapter, “Black Feminism Online”, Valethia Watkins asserts,

The problem with the dictionary definition of feminism is that it not only sanitizes the meaning of feminism by grossly oversimplifying the meaning of the term, but it also promotes the false idea whenever a person believes

²⁷ Valethia Watkins, “*Black Feminist Gender Discourse: (from 1970-to the Present): A Critique*”, 1998, p. 250

women should have the same social, political, and economic rights, this fact alone, automatically and necessarily makes them a feminist.²⁸

A more realistic definition of feminism would include its racist origin. From its inception, feminism was blatantly racist. A better definition would also acknowledge feminist's acculturation of women as a collective group with a shared history of oppression. Lastly, there is no defining feminism without including its prioritization of gender oppression over racial and class oppression.

The term "white feminism" is used to somehow describe a separation and, ultimately, an isolated and distinct agenda apart from feminist who embrace equality amongst all races, but the term itself is simply tautological. All of feminism's expressions operate from the same Eurocentric paradigm. Therefore, there is no need to differentiate feminisms because they are all essentially the same. For the sake of clarity in this paper, I will entertain the idea that they are different and discuss one of the most accepted forms of feminism for Black women, Black Feminism.

Black Feminism – Feminism in Black Face

Interestingly enough, there is no concrete definition of Black Feminism able to be found, just descriptions. Dr. Patricia Hill-Collins, who is a professor of Sociology and who is also famous for advancing Black Feminist thought with her book, "Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment" describes Black Feminism as "...providing a community for Black women's activism and self-

²⁸ Valethia Watkins, "(Black) Feminism Online." *Africana Race and Communication: A Social Study of Film, Communication, and Social Media*, 2018, p. 183

determination.”²⁹ Black Feminism, is more accurately described as some black women’s futile attempt to fit into the constructs of an established white female paradigm. At best, Black Feminism can be understood as Feminism in blackface. Watkins asserts, “Black feminism is not the opposite of white feminism. Instead, there is a symbiotic relationship between the epistemologies of Black and mainstream feminist theories which makes them interdependent to such a degree they are truly co-dependent conceptually.”³⁰

All of the three interdependent dimensions that comprise the oppression that Black women face, as outlined by Hill-Collins, exploitation of labor, the exclusion of rights and privileges routinely extended to White male citizens, and controlling images that originated during enslavement can all be applied to Black men as well! Black Feminism is completely influenced by the feminist framework, its theory cannot even acknowledge that its male counterparts are just as affected. Dr. Clenora Hudson Weems says that “At best, black feminism may relate to sexual discrimination outside the Africana community, but cannot claim to resolve the critical problems within the Africana community that are influenced by racism and classism.”³¹

There are African women who claim to be black feminist and assert that black feminism, nonetheless, can adhere to the issues of black women. However, the issue here lies within the name “feminism” and Black Feminism’s lack of separation from this term. “Slaves and dogs are named by their masters. Free men (and women) name themselves.”

²⁹ Patricia Hill Collins, “Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment”, 2000, p.1

³⁰ Velethia Watkins, “Contested Memories: A Critical Analysis of the Black Feminist Revisionist History Project”, 2016, p. 279)

³¹ Hudson-Weems, 2004, p. 27

³² You cannot dis-attach a word from its meaning. What we see in Black feminist discourse is the assertion that black feminism operates differently from its foremother, yet it still carries the same name and inadvertently, its intent. In addition, many black feminists carry on traditional feminist beliefs that all men are misogynistic, and prioritize gender issues above racial issues, imitating White feminist. The idea that one needs to exclude their male counterpart in order to see peace is utterly Eurocentric and needs to be expelled from the thoughts of African women. Hudson-Weems in quoting Sofula says, “The world view of the African is rooted in philosophy of holistic harmony and communalism rather than in the individualistic isolationism of Europe.”³³ Now this is not to say that African women’s ideas and opinions have not been suppressed in Black organizations particularly during the Civil Rights Movement, but for African women to assume that this is the same form of oppression white women face or even a system of patriarchy that they are experiencing is preposterous. There are ways to address masculinist bias within an African framework.

Closely associated with Black Feminism is Alice Walker’s term ‘womanism’. In defining womanism in her memoir “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose”, Alice Walker states:

A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female... Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.³⁴

³² Hudson-Weems, 2004, p. xix

³³ Hudson-Weems, 2004, p. 56

³⁴ Alice Walker, “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose”, 1983

Feminist Agenda

The Feminist agenda is rather quite simple when one breaks it down: dichotomization and, of course, the imposition of white culture. Understanding the way feminism works is key to exploiting its Recidivist behavior. Once its agenda is exposed, the problems with this ideology are easily revealed.

All feminist thought begins with dichotomization. There is no feminism without separating men and women. The ideology engrains itself within the chaotic space created when men and women are divided into separate, competing entities. This is why the homogenization of women as one collective is so essential to its framework. With one shared and fictional history of oppression of men as a dominate collective, division is justified under the premise of injustice. Division does not stop amongst sex; feminism has introduced room for division within one's own identity (intersectionality) and gender identity which encapsulates categories such as genderqueer and non-binary identities. Division will always encourage pandemonium. Division also distorts the goal by causing distraction over strategy. The African person must realize that gender equality is an abstract concept. For if gender equality in all forms are achieved, the gender pay gap reconciled, the visibility in the work place amended, and the freedom of sexual reproduction given, the African man and woman will still never be equal to the white man and women. African people will still lose. Just like history has shown repeatedly, white people, have no interest in the concerns of Africans unless they are benefitted ad well.

The ultimate agenda for Feminists is and always has been power. Power over their male counterparts and continued power in society.

The dominant culture has elected to name and define Africana women outside of their cultural and historical context via the superimposition of an alien construct – Eurocentrism/Feminism. In essence, the dominant culture has held the position of identifying who we are and how we fit into the scheme of things with little regard for what we ourselves perceive as our authentic reality and identity.³⁵

Agency Reduction

As shown, feminism is not independent of the unbalanced, individualistic, racist influence of Western culture. African Americans who adopt feminist thought reduce their agency by existing on borrowed space. Dr. Ama Mazama asserts in *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, “we [African people] do not exist on our own terms, but on borrowed, European ones.”³⁶ In the acclaimed *Invisible Jim Crow*, Michael Tillotson defines ‘agency reduction formation’ as “any system of thought that distracts, neutralizes, or reduces the need and desire for assertive collective agency by African Americans.”³⁷ While feminism, seemingly, creates a place for all issues for all types of women to be addressed, it in turns strips them of their African agency.

Conclusion

Feminism is a type of psychological warfare that is dangerous because it divides the dynamic, complementary structure of the African man and woman. The ideology’s misconceptions seek to create a disdain that will only destroy the relationships of African men and women in the end. Feminism’s agenda of seeking liberation solitarily is

³⁵ Hudson-Weems, 2004, p.21

³⁶ Ama Mazama, “Afrocentric Paradigm”, p. 5

³⁷ Michael Tillotson, “Invisible Jim Crow”, 2011, p. 60

counterproductive for the African person. Black people will only be free when they come together, woman and man, to fight consistently and strategically against the injustices they face.

The threat of the female-centered, female-empowerment ideology of feminism undoubtedly has begun to diminish the significance of the traditional family-centered, race empowerment philosophy of the black liberation movement.³⁸

³⁸ Hudson-Weems, 2004, p. 83

CHAPTER 3

FEMINISM AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Introduction

The mobility of feminism has never changed, only its vehicle. The feminist agenda remains the same: for white women to seek power disguised as equality over their male counterparts. African women and men serve nothing, but pawns in the game of chess called the fight for gender equality - disposable at any time in order to protect the king. African people are nothing more than casualties in the egotistical, European power struggle. Enticed by promises of equality and justice, African women happily aid in what will eventually be their own destruction. On the contrary, African men help to perpetuate the feminist agenda with their imitation of the performance from the patriarchal white male, making it easier for white women to manipulate African woman's thoughts against them. Feminism, undoubtedly, is one of the most deceptive ideologies for African people. In order to combat the consequences of feminism, we must understand how its hegemonic behavior has infiltrated African spaces.

Feminism and its Transition to Social Media

Feminist history can be divided into different waves of distinction: 1st wave of feminism, 2nd wave of feminism, 3rd wave of feminism, and 4th wave of feminism. The first wave of feminism was the initial inception of feminist thought. During the second wave of feminism, sexual and reproductive rights were the main concerns of leading feminist. In

addition, the concerns and visibility of women of color grew rapidly. Beginning in the 60s and not ending until the 90s, this wave of feminists, in particular, were significantly more radical than the previous wave.³⁹ This wave of feminism grew simultaneously with some of the largest social movements in U.S. history: The Civil Rights Movement, Anti- War Movement, and the Environment Movement.

The 3rd wave of Feminism, beginning in the mid-1990s by daughters of the 2nd wave of Feminism, diversified feminists by, supposedly, address intricate issues regarding all types of women. Women and men who wanted gender, racial, economic, and social justice were able to come together. This wave of feminism provided a space for LGBTQIAPK (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, polygamous/polyamorous, kink) women as well as for those who did not want to be confined to “social norms” and ideas of what was expected of women in today’s day and age.⁴⁰ The third wave of feminism also provided a space for all ethnicities to convene in order to fight for what they believed were intersecting inequalities, or what Kimberlee Crenshaw terms ‘intersectionality’. American, feminist writer, Jessica Valenti said, “Feminism isn't simply about being a woman in a position of power. It's battling systemic inequities; it's a social justice movement that believes sexism, racism and classism exist and interconnect, and that they should be consistently challenged.”⁴¹ The 3rd wave of feminism is interesting because we see a significant decline in the term “feminist” and the willingness of women to label themselves as such. We also see women reclaiming the very

³⁹ Khan Academy, “2nd Wave Feminism”

⁴⁰ Martha Rampton, “Four Waves of Feminism”, 2018

⁴¹ Jessica Valenti, “Who Stole Feminism”, 2015

terms and ideas the previous wave of feminist worked hard to eradicate. During this wave we find that these women prefer to embrace the very terms and actions once seen as prerogative in order to empower themselves and each other.

The 4th wave of feminism is still in development but has brought in a flood of different sexual identity politics including queering of gender, transgender identity, and sexuality-based binaries. Body and sex positivity have also been densely implemented within this 4th wave. This movement also differs from the others because of its heavy reliance on the incorporation of the internet and social media as an instrument. This understanding of the agenda of 4th wave feminist is directly correlated to the phenomena observed in the #BlackGirlMagic movement. Valethia Watkins (1998) states, “Hence one of the strengths of feminism has been its ability to perpetually reinvent itself as necessary.”⁴² We are now seeing feminists attempt to adapt in an evolving social media driven world.

There are plenty of articles written on how social media has changed the feminist movement from huge news outlets including *MSNBC*, *The Nation*, and *the HuffPost*. This is by no coincidence. Feminists continue to use social media in their favor to drive publicity to their agenda. Valethia Watkins states, “They have understood the political potential of these digital platforms and they have leveraged this potential to great political dividends.”

⁴³ Feminism’s recidivist behavior has crept its way into one of the most nuanced forms of receiving education: social media. In order to do so, feminist have constructed one of the

⁴² Valethia Watkins, “Black Feminist Gender Discourse”, 1998, p.31

⁴³ Valethia Watkins, 2016, p.173

most exquisite publicity campaigns in history. Feminism continues to advance by using strategic public relation tactics to ensure publicity and eventually, loyalty.

Propaganda

Propaganda and persuasion are a common practice in receiving publicity and results for a specific brand, person, or story. Popular propaganda techniques include bandwagon, testimonial, transfer, repetition, and emotional words.⁴⁴ Bandwagon appeals to the desire for inclusiveness. This strategy emphasizes the fact that many others are doing something that the targeted audience may not, forcing a feeling of exclusivity and attracting a yearning to be included. We are seeing something identical here in feminists attempt to bring popularity to a feministic approach. Dr. Valethia Watkins, a professor in the African Studies Department at Howard University, has done extensive work on what she calls the *Black Feminist Revisionist History Project* in which she illustrates the deliberate way black feminist futilely attempt to label significant African women as Feminists. She defines the *Black Feminist Revisionist History Project* (BF-RHP) as

a development within Black Women's Studies...a subjective practice of indiscriminately and randomly labeling historically significant Black women as feminist, often posthumously...the tendency of certain feminists to claim the legacy of pivotal Black woman for themselves."⁴⁵

Testimonials and transfers work side by side to create popularization. Testimonials involve the affirmation of someone of notoriety to endorse a specific service, idea, or product while transfer associates that person with a product in such a way that the positive qualities of

⁴⁴ Manali Oak, "Types of Propaganda Techniques: A Detailed Explanation" 2019

⁴⁵ Valethia Watkins, 2016, p.271

that person are transferred onto the item being advertised. Feminist constantly use the process of testimonials and transfers to appeal to the celebrity-dominated societies today. Repetition uses the constant reiteration of a product or idea to assert familiarity and precedence in the audience's mind. Feminism uses this form of propaganda subliminally, as it is less desirable to hear the word "feminism" & "feminist". Feminists instead use images repetitively that are associated with women's empowerment which are then attached to the feminist brand because of transfer and the change of narrative. Lastly emotional words are used to provoke specific feelings to be associated with the product that is being advertisement. With the increased hyper-sensitivity to labels, feminists are careful of word placement to still stimulate a reaction from its audience without offense.

Changing the Narrative – Controlling the Story

Publicists are often taught to get in front of the story because, essentially, one has power to change the audience's opinion by dictating the story they want their audience to hear. Feminism controls the narrative through its neutralization of racism and the priority of gender over race. Other forms of feminist narrative include the generalization and homogenization of womanhood and manhood. Feminism has also limited the input of narrative by controlling legitimacy through the prioritization of professionalism in academia. "the concept of professionalism was often used to separate academic work from grassroots work for social change, and thus it was ultimately a rationale for inaction."⁴⁶ With this change of narrative, feminists have managed to perpetuate racism through

⁴⁶ Cole & Haniff, "Building a Home for Black Women's Studies". p. 31

exclusion and marginalization, include interchangeability between the term's "women" and "feminist", and promote the idea that women are sole victims.

Rebranding

With today's ever-growing sensitivity to discrimination and creating havens that exclude offensive verbiage, there is a fad of not wanting to be labeled. Labels are thought to be constraining and restrict multiplicity in behavior. We see this in the popularity of "situationships" (relationships without a label) and the establishments of non-binary identities. Feminism is not exempt from this fad. According to a study conducted by Huff Post, a very small percentage of those believing in the equality of men and women would actually ascribe to the feminist label: "While 82 percent of Americans stated that they indeed believe women and men should be equals, only 20 percent of them were willing to identify as feminists."⁴⁷ The study also showed that 63% of all Americans neither consider themselves feminist or anti-feminist. Researchers believe that this was due to a mere issue of branding in review of findings almost equally divided on connotations of the word itself:

The gulf between the percentage of people who identify as feminists and the percentage who believe in the equality of the sexes may be partly due to a branding problem for the word "feminism." Thirty-seven percent said they consider "feminist" to be a negative term, compared to only 26 percent who consider it a positive term. Twenty-nine percent said it's a neutral term.⁴⁸

These findings explain the use of propaganda tools to change the public's perception of feminism.

⁴⁷ Emily Swanson, "Poll", 2017

⁴⁸ Emily Swanson, "Poll", 2017

Separation in the Form of Intersectionality

One of the most common pieces of advice in tackling a problem bigger than you can handle is to take it piece by piece. Intersectionality does just that by separating identity into individual components to be observed independently before fully grasping the element as a whole. In Marimba Ani's book, *Yurugu, An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior*, she states, "Dichotomization, which is a key part of the European epistemology, operates in such a manner that 'realities are split, then evaluated, so that one part is 'better', which mandates its controlling function."⁴⁹ Intersectionality is used to justify the marginalization of race equality by separating one's identity into parts that battle against each other for primacy. Although Intersectionality seeks to account for multiple forms of oppression and give a narrative to those whose voices are often repressed, the theory proceeds in the same fashion as feminism in wrongly presuming that all women and men are all one collective group. Intersectionality makes for an inconsequential struggle for who gets mistreated more, rather than a proper dismantling of the systems of oppression that keep us restrained in the first place.

Watkins brilliantly asserts, "The concept of liberation cannot be dichotomized, for we are either both free or we are both in bondage."⁵⁰ The sooner we realize that division, in any shape or form, serves no benefit for the victory of African people, the better.

⁴⁹ Marimba Ani, "Yurugu, An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior", 1994, p. 33

⁵⁰ Valetia Watkins, 2016, p.269

Influencer Marketing

With the newest rise in social media, public relation specialists have been incorporating a new strategy to drive publicity for their clients. Influencer marketing (paid service from influencers), also known as influence public relations (unpaid service from influencer) is very prevalent in public relation campaigns. Influencer marketing is a matter of misdirection by attracting audiences with the popularity of the messenger rather than the product itself. Celebrities, media moguls, and any individual with a relatively large and engaging follower-base is eligible to be a social media influencer. Social media influencers usually specialize in at least one category (i.e. entertainment, beauty, fashion, photography, motherhood). For that reason, public relation and marketing specialists spend time creating influencer databases in order to organize influencers by category to ensure the right influencer is chosen for a particular brand.

Influence marketing and public relations is formed under the “two-step flow of communication model” which was formulated by Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaude This model is described as follows:

This theory asserts that information from the media moves in two distinct stages. First, individuals (opinion leaders) who pay close attention to the mass media and its messages receive the information. Opinion leaders pass on their own interpretations in addition to the actual media content.⁵¹

Feminism has used this strategy in changing the current negative stereotypes of feminism. Feminism has also managed to attain one of the biggest celebrity endorsements it could have ever imagined: Beyonce Knowles.

⁵¹ Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaude, “Two-step flow of communication model”, 1944

Beyonce

There is no question of Beyonce's powerful influence all over the world. With just shy of 127 million followers on Instagram, 23 Grammy's among many other prestigious awards, and devoted fans named "Fans of the Year" by GQ in 2014, there is no stripping Beyonce from her influence on the world.⁵² With her faithful fanbase publicly speaking on anything negative on Queen B, she is protected by the multitudes. In fact, in an article written for Elle Magazine, Michael Arceneaux (2017) warns readers on critical steps to avoid upsetting the BeyHive. Arceneaux advises readers to not say anything bad about Beyonce, if you ignore step one, lie and say you were hacked, do not proceed to play victim, change all account usernames and passwords, and finally, to realize your original negative opinion on Beyonce was inaccurate and you would serve best to become a fan.⁵³ Beyonce's fans are known for instantaneous and ruthless attacks on anyone who poses threat to their "queen".

Despite warnings on speaking critically about Beyonce, her influence within the #BlackGirlMagic phenomenon and the subsequent ramifications of her promotion of feminism for African women cannot be dismissed. While the intentions of these opinions and observations are not intended for defamation, ignoring Beyonce's heavy influence on the advancement of feminist thought would be a disservice to the analyzation of the #BlackGirlMagic.

⁵² GQ, "The Year in Hotness", 2014

⁵³ Michael Arceneaux, "A Beyoncé Stan's 6-Step Guide to Not Pissing Off the Beyhive," 2018

Beyonce's 2014 iHeart Radio winning song for Hip Hop/R&B song of the year, ****Flawless*, was the leading public relations campaign for feminists everywhere. The 33-year-old sung about looking and feeling good as an unapologetic woman and featured a sample of Nigerian, award-winning author, Chimamanda Adichie's (2012) famous TEDx Talk, "We Should all be Feminist". Adichie recites the dictionary definition of feminist as, "a person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes". The song progresses with Beyonce reminding female listeners to respect the hierarchy that places her at the top of the game. She instructs the audience to 'bow down', this also serves as the title of the first half of this song and was transferred from a song she did earlier that year entitled, "Bow Down/I Been On". In response to the aggressiveness of these lyrics, Beyonce states in an interview with iTunes radio (2013)

Anyone that says, 'Oh that is disrespectful,' just imagine the person that hates you. Imagine a person that doesn't believe in you. And look in the mirror and say, 'Bow down, bitch' and I guarantee you feel gangsta! ⁵⁴

The singer continues in her song that while she was living her life (referring to a slight hiatus without producing music because of her new family), she was in no way confined to just the role of wife. She makes it clear that she is capable of being a wife, mother, and artist. The interesting twist of the song lyrics are the fact that while the songs empowers women and proclaims their effortless flawlessness, none of Beyonce's lyrics speak about feminism or any form of feminism. The song times relatively short and is composed without verses until a remix (2014) later with rapper, Nicki Minaj. The chorus of the song which is sung twice is as follows:

⁵⁴ Amethyst Tate, "Beyoncé Explains 'Bow Down': 'It Was the Beyoncé That Was Angry'" Dec. 2013

You wake up, flawless
Post up, flawless
Ride round in it, flawless
Flossin on that, flawless
This diamond, flawless
My diamond, flawless
This rock, flawless
My rock, flawless
I woke up like this
I woke up like this
We flawless, ladies tell 'em
I woke up like this
I woke up like this
We flawless, ladies tell 'em
Say I, look so good tonight
God damn, God damn
Say I, look so good tonight
God damn, God damn

While these lyrics seem innocent, they wrongly associate feminism with only women's empowerment, flexibility within their roles in the home as well as in the public, unity amongst the family, and inner beauty translated as outer beauty. The song's message serves as distorting and misleading to its audience by utilizing propaganda to captivate its listeners. But can we solely blame Beyonce?

One of the biggest issues with the feminist ideology is its lack of clear definition of feminism itself. Valethia Watkins seamlessly put the dialogue of feminist thinkers on the ambiguity of the definition of feminism in her dissertation. An excerpt of this work is as follows:

Patricia Hill-Collins in addressing the perceived definitional dilemma concluded that the concept of "Black feminism" for example, was a term which was "...widely used but rarely defined...it encompasses diverse and contradictory meanings." Writer Carmen Vasquez observed, "feminism in America has come to mean anything you like honey...there are as many definitions of feminism as there are feminists..." bell hooks confirms this statement when she asserts, "currently feminism seems to be a term without

any clear significance. The ‘anything goes’ approach to the definition of the word has rendered itself meaningless.”⁵⁵

This lack of distinction provides room for feminism to mean anything to anyone willing to deem it so as long as it falls under the umbrella of women’s advocacy. For example, in an interview for an exclusive cover story with Elle Magazine (2016), Beyonce describes why she decided to incorporate feminism with her song:

I put the definition of feminist in my song ["Flawless"] and on my tour, not for propaganda or to proclaim to the world that I'm a feminist, but to give clarity to the true meaning. I'm not really sure people know or understand what a feminist is, but it's very simple. It's someone who believes in equal rights for men and women. I don't understand the negative connotation of the word, or why it should exclude the opposite sex.⁵⁶

Beyonce continues in describing her idea of feminism, “If you are a man who believes your daughter should have the same opportunities and rights as your son, then you're a feminist.” This interpretation of the word is not uncommon. Many assume that feminism is strictly advocating for women’s rights because feminism has set itself in a position to be broad in order to allure many.

In response to Beyonce’s definition, Chimamanda Adichie, who’s speech Beyonce sampled in the prelude of her song, thought otherwise of Beyonce’s thoughts on feminism and was rather uninterested in the association that followed. In an interview with Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant* she voiced her resentment over the fact that many believed she should be grateful over Beyonce making her famous and the fact that her work’s enlarged fame had come through a song rather than through her work itself stating, “are books really

⁵⁵ Valetia Watkins, “Black Feminist Gender Discourse”, 1998, p.267

⁵⁶ Tamar Gottesman, “Beyonce Wants to Change the Conversation,” 2018

that unimportant to you?” Adichie proceeded to make clear that Beyonce’s type of feminism was not hers at all.

Her type of feminism is not mine, as it is the kind that, at the same time, gives quite a lot of space to the necessity of men. I think men are lovely, but I don’t think that women should relate everything they do to men...We women should spend about 20 per cent of our time on men, because it’s fun, but otherwise we should also be talking about our own stuff.⁵⁷

In a Time’s article, journalist Jessica Bennett (2014) said, “As far as feminist endorsements are concerned, this was the holy grail: A word with a complicated history reclaimed by the most powerful celebrity in the world.” Beyonce’s single not only affirmed that being a feminist was “flawless” but influenced thousands to engage in conversations about feminism. Bennet continued in saying,

Beyoncé would become the subject of two-thirds of all tweets about feminism in the 24 hours after her appearance, according to a data analysis by Twitter, making Sunday the sixth-highest day for volume of conversation about feminism since Twitter began tracking this year (the top three were days during #YesAllWomen).⁵⁸

Not long after the song was produced, Knowles-Carter became the highest paid African American musician in history and was later named one of Time’s most influential people and featured as the cover of the magazine in 2014.⁵⁹

Conclusion

While the influence of feminism’s implementation of public relations strategy require a cause for concern on the actual beneficial impact of the #BlackGirlMagic

⁵⁷ Aimee Kiene, Kiene, Aimée. “Ngozi Adichie: Beyoncé’s Feminism Isn’t My Feminism,” 2016

⁵⁸ Jessica Valenti, “Who Stole Feminism”, 2015

⁵⁹ BBC, “Beyonce leads Time’s 100 most influential people,” 2014

movement, there is still time for Afrocentric scholars to intervene. More than any period before there is dire need for the understanding and engagement of social media from scholars. Gone are the days of limited reach without a huge expense. One has the ability to reach the masses with one post. With the utilization of compelling content, proper hashtag usage, and appropriate social media management, Afrocentric scholarship can make an all-important intervention within the #BlackGirlMagic phenomenon.

CHAPTER 4

COMPLEMENTARY THINKING

Introduction

African history shows that men and women shared unity in their relationships through complementary roles. Understandingly, if the gender dynamic between Africans and Europeans are contradictory, why is the structure of Western gender studies constantly imitated in African gender discourse.

The difference between the history of women's status in African societies versus the status of women in European societies is often overlooked and misunderstood for being one collective history. In western society, power has always been unequal between the man and the woman. This power has always been in favor of the European man and mistreatment of the European women, which has subsequently led to a longstanding power struggle within their dynamic. However, this Western history and gender dynamic must not be mistaken or substituted for one that is African.

African American men and women must not fall victim to the expanding unisexuality so prevalent in American society. They must preserve the uniqueness of their separate, complementary roles...They must also avoid the highly destructive macho notions of manhood which are feverishly trying to be realized by both men and women in their striving for a faulty liberation.⁶⁰

The African woman was powerful. Her opinion was considered in matters of the home, community affairs, and many times, war. She was strong and able to carry out

⁶⁰ Hudson-Weems, 2001, Weems quoting Na'im Akbar 1989 "Materialism and Chauvinism", pg. 8

multiple jobs, all while maintaining the family. The African women was interdependent, relying on the complementary differences in the role of her male counterpart. The dynamic of their roles made the African couple a powerful unit.

“From a western feminist vantage point, the private space is identified with femininities and, therefore, with powerlessness and worthlessness.”⁶¹ In African society, however, power is found in the dynamic differences between the roles of men and women. African women do not seek the same role as their counterpart, but rather to serve in their own distinct role cohesively with African men. Throughout history, African women also worked hard in and outside of the home. When African women were in positions of power, that did not excuse them from working, unlike European women. “It is noteworthy that in Africa, unlike Europe, women of privileged statuses (such as the kings’ or chiefs’ wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers) were not removed from the world of work.”⁶²

A great deal can be spent discussing gender in Kemet. Women were by no means an arbitrary part of existence. “The Eighteenth Dynasty was known for strong women who were important in their own right or as wives of the per-aas.”⁶³ Most history textbooks would not dare discuss names like Neftari, Queen, and later King Hatshepsut, or Queen Tiye other than a sentence stating that they were the wives of Pharaohs.

She [Hatshepsut] remains the most dominant woman in antiquity in terms of her political and diplomatic achievements for her nation. As a woman serving as absolute ruler of a great country in antiquity, she has no equal. She revived the foreign policy portfolio of the country; erected the most beautiful and powerful tekken, appointed a new viceroy of Kush called

⁶¹ Muwati and Zifikele Gambahaya, “The Private/Public Space Dichotomy: An Africana Womanist Analysis of the Gendering of Space and Power”, 2012, p. 100-101

⁶² Niara Sudarkasa, “The ‘Status of Women’ in Indigenous African Societies”, 1987, p. 85

⁶³ Molefi Kete Asante, “The History of Africa: The Quest for Eternal Harmony”, 2015, p. 43

Ihebni to replace Seni, who had held the post since the time of Tuthmoses II, and defended the borders of the country.⁶⁴

Queen Tiye would be wife of a king, the mother of a king, the grandmother of a king, the sister of a king, and the mother of two queens.⁶⁵

Students are often only taught about pharaohs (appropriately termed the *pe-raa*) but in Kemet, the *pe-raa* and *pe-raat*, his wife, were unitary, each serving different roles in order to work as a stronger unit, unlike egalitarian European societies. In Niara Sudarkasa's article, *The Status of Women in Indigenous African Societies*, she brings to light the fact that there was an absence of pronouns used in *ciKam* or *medu netcher* (ancient Egyptian language) as well as the interchangeability of names. In West African culture, it was not taboo to see women in positions of power or consulted by men to solve issues either. Gender, which Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí asserts, did not even exist in Yoruba society until colonialism. She states in her book, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourse*:

In precolonial Yoruba society, body-type was not the basis of social hierarchy: males and females were not ranked according to anatomic distinction...Yoruba distinctions were superficial and did not assume any social hierarchy dimensions as they do in the West (Western social categories derive essentially from a perceived sexual dimorphism of the human body).⁶⁶

There were also cases in Yoruba culture where there was both a male and female leader, for example, the queen-mother and monarch son. The complementarity of the

⁶⁴ Molefi Kete Asante, "The History of Africa: The Quest for Eternal Harmony", 2007, p. 45

⁶⁵ Molefi Kete Asante, "The History of Africa: The Quest for Eternal Harmony", 2007, p. 50

⁶⁶ Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, "The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses", 2006, p. xii

relationship between the sexes was symbolized and codified in the highest offices of the land.

Yoruba Culture and the Status of African Women

Yoruba religion adheres to the betterment of elders, women, men, and children. The religion also has a great deal to say about the value of women. In 1999, Dr. Maulana Karenga completed a compelling project that translated the Odu Ifa which is said to have been constructed by Orunmila, a Yoruba god or *orisha* who was present at creation, 4000 years ago. This was an incredible feat in understanding Yoruba culture more immensely.

“Ifa, the deity who was with Olodumare when the universe was formed, is the source of the wisdom of the Ifa divination odus, the 256 odus that are used to determine how a person is applying himself or herself...Money, fame, education, and power do not work with Ifa because Ifa only wants iwa pele, good character”⁶⁷

The Odu Ifa is significant because it outlines the divination needed for Yoruba people to fulfill their destiny. The Odu Ifa was important in the training of Babalawo (high priests; “father of secrets”) as well.⁶⁸

Women are mentioned throughout the Odu Ifa, but two passages specifically address the value of women. In Odu Osa Meji 10:2, Odu, a Yoruba *orisha*, talks to Olodumare, the Supreme God, about the earth that Olodumare is about to create. She asks, “What will happen when we arrive there?” She continues by asking what her power entailed since Yoruba *orisha* Ogun could start war and Obarida could do anything he pleased.

⁶⁷ Asante, “History of Africa: The Quest for Eternal Harmony,” 2007, p. 146

⁶⁸ Asante, “History of Africa: The Quest for Eternal Harmony,” 2007, p. 147

Olodumare tells her that she would "be their mother forever" and that she "will also sustain the world."⁶⁹ Olodumare continued by giving women "the power and authority so that anything men wished to do, they could not dare to do it successfully without women." Men would have to include and respect women and then, only, would the world be in order. Olodumare tells Odu that this is because women bring everyone into being and women own the wisdom of the world. This first teaching gives the utmost respect to women and recognizes them as the mother of the world "making them joint equally with a father" Maulana says, and the sustainer of the world which is a distinct and powerful role for only the woman to have.⁷⁰ Cheikh Anta Diop also notes the significance of the women's role as mother in his book, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Patriarchy and of Matriarchy in Classical Antiquity*, "...the mother is sacred; her authority is so to speak, unlimited."⁷¹

The "Oshun Question", a popular Yoruba teaching, is found in Odu Ose Otura 248:1. The story of the female orisha Oshun is told. "Oshun was the embodiment of culture, learning, and human flourishing."⁷² She was sent by Olodumare with 400 male orishas on a mission to make the world good. When the orishas arrived on earth, none of the male orishas consulted Oshun. Oshun, bothered by the neglect of her companions, then used her power to make the work of the man unproductive. When the orishas gave report to Olodumare and informed him that every work they did was failing he asked them first,

⁶⁹ Karenga, "Odù Ifá: The Ethical Teachings", 1999, pg. 174

⁷⁰ Karenga, "Odù Ifá: The Ethical Teachings", 1999, pg. 77

⁷¹ Cheikh Anta Diop, "The Cultural Unity of Black Africa", 1959, p. 37

⁷² Karenga, "Odù Ifá: The Ethical Teachings", 1999, p. 144

"What about Oshun?" The male orishas had failed to even mention her to Olodumare. Olodumare then asked them, "Did you show her due respect?" They were then instructed to go back to earth and consult the one woman amongst them. After completing that task, their work was profitable in making the world good. This teaching highlights the value of the woman, even in small numbers. It should be brought to attention that 400 men still could not be productive without the voice of one woman. Karenga notes that this teaching urges that two questions are always asked, "What about the woman?" and "Is she being showed due respect?"⁷³ If values like these were being taught in the sacred teachings of the Yoruba, how can we deny that these values were being engrained in their everyday lives. This is not to say that there were not situations in which black men discriminated on black women in African society, or that every institution in Africa was made with the African woman's presence in mind. One can always find situations that will contradict the value system of a people, however, that does not negate the overall value system; it only proves that we are human, capable of fault.

Studying African Gender Appropriately: Africana Womanism

Africana Womanism, which was coined by Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems in 1987, is an African centered theory that seeks to fight issues of sexism in the African community by centering the family and prioritizing racial oppression, for it is the root of all other forms of oppression. Hudson-Weems decided on the name *Africana Womanism* because she understood the power of naming, *nommo*, is valued throughout African history. She also

⁷³ Karenga, "Odù Ifá: The Ethical Teachings", 1999, p. 412

wanted this name to be distinct, as to not be mistaken with the many other theories and forms of feminism. In describing why she chose the name *Africana Womanism*, Hudson-Weems says,

The term “woman,” and by extension “womanism,” is far more appropriate than “female” (“feminism”) because of one major distinction - only a female of the human race can be a woman. “Female,” on the other hand, can refer to a member of the animal or plant kingdom as well as to a member of the human race.⁷⁴

Throughout her work, Hudson-Weems clearly asserts that Feminism does not work for African people first because feminism is a white institution, and secondly because African men and women are not enemies, but quite the contrary. African men and women’s complementary roles promote balance within their relationships. Additionally, neither African men or women were confined in one specific role, they were flexible and able to play different roles be it necessary.

Within the Africana culture, there is that intrinsic, organic equality that was necessary for survival of the Africana culture, in spite of the individual personal problems of female subjugation infiltrating the family structure by the white male cultural system.⁷⁵

One of the most distinct features of Africana Womanism is its unpopular center on the family rather than the female. Throughout her work Hudson-Weems emphasizes the importance of family for African people. Without family there is no legacy, and without a legacy, there is no point of life for African people.

The threat of the female-centered, female empowerment ideology of feminism undoubtedly has begun to diminish the significance of the

⁷⁴ Clenora Hudson-Weems, “Womanist Literary Theory”, 2004, p. 157

⁷⁵ Clenora Hudson-Weems, “Womanist Literary Theory”, 2004, p. 29

traditional family-centered, race empowerment philosophy of the black liberation movement.⁷⁶

Hudson-Weems also uses Africana Womanism to shift the focus from gender equality to racial equality. Africana Womanism focuses on the liberation of black people as a whole because only when African men and women are both free can African people truly be victorious. African people do not make up an individualistic society. *Africana Womanism* also accounts for multiple forms of oppression that African women face, which Hudson-Weems refers to as the "tripartite flight" - race, class, and gender.⁷⁷ The significant difference between Africana Womanism and other popular ideologies is that Africana Womanism acknowledges that the African man is also affected by this "tripartite flight".

With Africana Womanism, African women, and men, are able to refer to their own distinct culture for answers. Africana Womanism allows for African people to address issues in their community through an African framework. Dr. Molefi Kete Asante, who is credited with coining the term 'Afrocentricity' reminds African people that, "In every instance, we must seek agency in order to understand the course and motivation of the African person."⁷⁸

Clenora Hudson-Weems also outlines 18 characteristics specific to the Africana women in her book *Africana Womanist Literary Theory*,

culturally derived Africana womanist characteristics, self-namer, self-definer, family-centered, in concert with male struggle, genuine in sisterhood, strong, whole, authentic, flexible role player, male compatible,

⁷⁶ Clenora Hudson-Weems, 2004, p. 83

⁷⁷ Clenora Hudson-Weems, 2004, p. 85

⁷⁸ Molefi Kete Asante, "Afrocentric Idea", 1998, p.44

respected, recognized, adaptable, respectful of elders, spiritual, ambitions, mothering, and nurturing.⁷⁹

While some may think that these characteristics are new and native to the culture created by African American women, these characteristics can be seen through African women well before the Maafa.

Throughout her work, Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems makes it evident that feminism will never adhere to the agency of African women. Feminism was never designed for black women, nor can feminism appropriately address the issues of black women.

Arguably, feminism, and by extension Black feminism, carries its own baggage that does not work within a Black historical and cultural context. Invariably it either directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly includes anti-male sentiments, and gender exclusivity, or at least the prioritization of gender issues at the risk of downplaying the critical significance of race priority for Africanans.⁸⁰

Attempting to fragment preconceived Eurocentric notions to African ideals is just another form of mental enslavement. The overall mission for the Africana women should be to fight for the liberation of her people in a racist society. While she may have desires to fix issues like sexism in her community, she understands she cannot do that by pushing away her men. She also understands that her mission to address sexism in her community can never supersede her mission to address race lest she fail at both. Feminism is the wrong tool for black women, it only serves to address, incorrectly, the issues of gender in society but does nothing to help free African people from oppression. It does not combat black women's issues through the Afrocentric paradigm.

⁷⁹ Clenora Hudson-Weems, 2004, p. xix

⁸⁰ Clenora Hudson-Weems, 2004, p. xx

Conclusion

The construction of African gender continues to be abused uncritically within Gender Studies. Not only is the construction of gender incorrect, the Eurocentric idea of that the private space is for women and the public space belongs to men must be rejected.

We have numerous examples of African women in public spaces.

African women today must understand the importance of working from their African systems in order to handle sexism issues in our community. We can no longer rely on a faulty Western framework to assist us with the tools we need in order to fix issues within our communities. We need to stop relying on the “insight” of other cultural perspectives and exert agency by speaking our own narratives and centering our ideologies in that of African culture and history. The schemes of perpetuating the Western way of thinking are constantly disguised by enforcement of equality and fairness yet have no intention of implementation. The African women living in the #BlackGirlMagic Era need not concern herself with systems whose focus is not the liberation of African people as a whole for she understands that freedom outside of the collective community is not a victory in the long run.

CHAPTER 5
AFROCENTRIC ENGAGEMENT WITH THE #BLACKGIRLMAGIC
PHENOMENON

Introduction

We live in a day and age where one's level of popularity and social media presence are directly related to the impact of influence they will have on a given audience. Directly related, the #BlackGirlMagic Phenomenon is led by the thoughts and opinions of celebrities and prominent influencers. The ideas and theories these socialites advocate have become the ideas and theories that African women emulate. Through social media there, undoubtedly, has been a popularization of ideas and theories that are detrimental to the needs of African people, but what if that could be controlled? What if the celebrities we look to claimed theories such as Africana Womanism and spoke out about the importance of Afrocentricity? What if there were more movies told by African people and about African people without the infiltration of a white savior? What if the influencers our children followed on social media encouraged the readings of books such as *The Afrocentric Paradigm* by Dr. Ama Mazama and the *History of Africa* by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante? What if the articles published in black journals were read by world leaders? These hypothetical scenarios can become reality if a serious Afrocentric intervention occurs within the #BlackGirlMagic Phenomenon. There is a dire need for an engagement that is intentional in gearing to the liberation of Africans.

Scholars need to first understand that there has been a shift in the visibility of African Americans, specifically African American women, through social media. These changes cannot be exaggerated or minimized. The increase in empowerment during this period has not removed or resolved the oppressions that African American men and women face every day, nor has it merely been a trending conversation or hashtag on social media. This phenomenon needs to be deeply analyzed regularly seeing as social media and the media are constantly changing. The era of #BlackGirlMagic needs ideological intervention and direction from educated, Afrocentric individuals to see its fullest potential.

It is crucial, then, for Africanan men and women to work diligently toward tailoring their own agenda, so that their needs and concerns may be more accurately and expediently addressed.⁸¹

Before engaging with this movement, scholars must understand the existent limitations within the culture of social media.

Celebrity Obsession

Social media has made it easier to follow the lives of celebrities and has introduced an unhealthy amount of exploitation into individual's lives creating a craving for more information. With 15.2 million followers, *The Shade Room* was ranked the second most popular publisher on Instagram in 2018 behind *9GAG*, a Hong Kong-based meme account. *The Shade Room* focuses on posting hourly content on the lives of celebrities (predominately African American). In an interview with *Elle Magazine*, founder Angelica

⁸¹ Clenora Hudson-Weems, 2004, p. 91

Nwandu states, *The Shade Room* “exists to serve the Black community.”⁸² While also reporting breaking news and trending topics, *The Shade Room* tends to focus on these celebrities’ interactions with social media (i.e. controversial tweets, provocative photos and videos, heated exchanges with other celebrities, relationship updates, or revealing videos.) *The Shade Room* was started in 2014 by Angelica Nwandu, who, ironically, prefers to keep her personal life as private as possible in order to maintain an intrigue to the infamous social media account. *The Shade Room* thrives on the gossip tips from its fans and followers, who are referred to “Roommates”. Elle Magazine boldly published that “The Shade Room is an authentic expression of Black culture that can’t be easily imitated.”⁸³ While many would disagree that the celebrity gossip account “authentically expresses Black culture”, *The Shade Room* does reflect a significant rise in influence from celebrities on society seen today. *The Shade Room* along with other social media accounts, has created a dangerous obsession with celebrities that must be addressed.

Social Media Credibility

With the rise of social media also comes social media’s influence on credibility. In today’s society, one’s credibility is directly correlated to the number of followers they acquire. “The term instafamous refers to ordinary, everyday people who have amassed large followings on social media, in particular Instagram.”⁸⁴ When public relation and marketing teams look for influencers for a particular brand, basic criterion consists of at

⁸² Chloe Hall, “The Shade Room Is Ruthless, Uplifting and Unapologetically Black”, 2019

⁸³ Hall, Chloe. “The Shade Room Is Ruthless, Uplifting and Unapologetically Black”, 2019

⁸⁴ Tom Mulraney, “What Is Instafame And How Are Brands Taking Advantage of It?”, 2015

least ten thousand followers to be considered. In addition to that, teams are looking for influencers that also have a high engagement from their following. The need for followers and engagement with content goes far beyond influencing. Users want a large number of followers to receive popularity in general. To achieve this social media induced standard, users opt for buying followers for their accounts, likes on their content, and comments under their picture. In most recent years, the number of users attempting to achieve “InstaFame” through inauthentic ways was at such an all-time high that Instagram changed their social media site’s algorithm and incorporated new rules to social media usage on its platform.

We’ve built machine learning tools to help identify accounts that use these services and remove the inauthentic activity. This type of behavior is bad for the community, and third-party apps that generate inauthentic likes, follows and comments violate our community guidelines and terms of service.⁸⁵

The desire to be popular on social media has come to be appreciated at any cost, even for a short amount of time. The phrase “going viral” is closely associated with “InstaFame”, but is used to describe any content on social media that has been reproduced and viewed by the masses over a relatively short period of time. With the use of hashtag placement and reposting of content on popular social media accounts, users continue to look for opportunities to go viral and eventually become famous on social media.

⁸⁵ Newcomb, Alyssa. “Instagram to Crack down on Fake Likes and Followers,” November 2019

Placing Scholars in Positions to Influence

The challenge for Afrocentric scholars becomes getting positioned in places to inspire and influence the masses. Once scholars are in these positions, their focus ought to be for change, not just visibility.

A great example of an individual who has used her platform as an African American educator to influence the world is Valencia D. Clay, known as @valencia_valencia on social media. Clay, a Harlem native, began teaching as an 8th grade Humanities teacher at the Baltimore Freedom Academy in Maryland and a Critical Theory professor. Clay also started a non-profit organization called “The Flourishing Blossoms Society for Girls”. The non-profit organization serves to be “a support network for young girls from urban areas, with a mission to mentor and provide service opportunities.”⁸⁶ Valencia posts videos passionately teaching her classes lessons in English and Literature on multiple social media platforms including Instagram and Twitter. What makes her teaching style unique and her videos so popular is how she always ties in the importance of pride in African culture, the importance of self-worth, and the spirit of confidence. Clay constantly reminds her students of their undeniable connection to Africa. Clay is also well known for emphasizing the importance of “promoting literacy and self-education as form of freedom from oppression.” She always teaches her students to read twice before having a discourse. One of her most significant projects is a published collection of essays from her students entitled, *Soundless Cries Don’t Lead to Healing: A Critical Thinking Guide to Cultural*

⁸⁶ Valencia Clay, “Efflorescent Memories”

Consciousness. Clay has just under 160 thousand followers on Instagram and receives over 100,000 views on her videos teaching and engaging with her class. Her videos include raw thoughts from her students and sincere advice from her experience. In an interview on the Today Show in 2018, Clay says, “I am not editing and making things cute. You are going to get the raw real me and the raw real of these kids.”⁸⁷ Through social media, Clay is able to connect with people around the world, inspire educators to teach authentically, and encourage younger generations everywhere to believe in themselves. Valencia has been featured in Essence Magazine, NBC News, and multiple other media outlets. In January 2019, Clay was featured wearing African American fashion designer Pyer Moss’ designs in Vogue Magazine. Moss also invited Clay’s 8th grade boys to his show in New York Fashion Week.

Afrocentric Engagement with the #BlackGirlMagic Phenomenon

Afrocentric engagement with the #BlackGirlMagic phenomenon primarily consists of getting engaged with social media. Being on the correct battlefield is half the battle. While this may be unknown territory for some, education and experimentation are key. For those who are new on social media sites, begin by first discovering your specific niche. One does not need to be popular or even present on every social media platform, however, staying fully engaged on a social media platform that is comfortable and convenient for one’s own lifestyle is significantly more productive than minimal engagement on multiple platforms. Secondly, once a specific social media platform is

⁸⁷ Kelley, Megyn. “How a Baltimore Teacher Is 'Bridging Education and Activism',” Today Show, Sept. 2018

chosen, meaningful and intentional content should be posted regularly. Regularly does not necessarily mean daily, but consistently. Content should always be intentional and strive to enter into conversation with harmful messages being commonly popularized on social media without interrogation. Content can be in the form of videos of educators teaching or simply speaking on an interesting topic. Sharing meaningful content can also take place in the form of an intriguing quotes or thoughts used as a “tweet” (post on Twitter) or caption under a picture posted on any social media site. Thirdly, creativity is a huge asset within Afrocentric engagement with the #BlackGirlMagic phenomenon. Instead of just defining a theory, creativity would seek to use a pop culture reference to explain a concept or theory to a younger audience that craves that type of connection.

Conclusion

Social Media provides a space for many benefits and harms. Despite constraints, social media also creates an opportunity for African educators and academic influencers to join a community where they can inspire the generations within this digital presence.

As noted in chapter one, we cannot solely rely on engaging with social media to see a positive impact within this potential movement. Consumers of social media need to be constantly reminded to think critically about the content they are viewing and consider the hidden agendas that may be lurking within these messages.

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