

Blogging while Black, British and female: a critical study on discursive activism

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ABSTRACT

This study explores Black British women's motivations for divulging racial and ethnic identity in the blogosphere (sometimes referred to as blogging while Black) and their use of blogs for discursive activism. It builds on previous research that gives voice to Black women's marginalized experiences through powerful counter narratives. The blogosphere is often perceived as a racially neutral space where shared interests across geographical and temporal boundaries limit the significance of racial and ethnic identity. However, the constructed narratives of Black British women in this study highlight their experiences of subtle forms of prejudice and discrimination perpetuated through dominant discourses in the mainstream media. The findings demonstrate how they use blogs as a medium for discursive activism to challenge stereotypical raced and gendered representation in the mainstream media. Much of the research on the blogosphere in Britain reflects its use by the White majority population. This study therefore extends understanding of the blogosphere and highlights alternative modes of political communication.

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Introduction

'Blogging while Black' is a term frequently used in an American context that denotes a moral obligation by people of African descent to blog openly on issues of concern to Black communities, using blogs as a platform for discursive activism (Rabb, 2005). Determining whether such activities exist in Britain among women is one of the key aims of this study, given the paucity of research on Black female bloggers. Blogs are frequently referred to as online journals but the wide availability of free web services and software widens their use for a variety of purposes. They form part of a complex media system where audiences are also content producers (Lasica, 2003; Reese, Rutigliano, Hyun, & Jeong, 2007) and have grown exponentially in popularity in recent years. According to Nielsenwire (2012), there were 181 million blogs worldwide in 2012, while Tumblr reported 227 million blog accounts in April 2015 (Statista, 2015). Blogs generally fall into three categories that denote their use. Personalized blogs are used primarily as online journals in which bloggers create posts about their everyday lives. Filter blogs are used for sharing information by posting links to other blogs and websites, and topic-driven blogs focus on specific subjects

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and can sometimes be journalistic in nature (Rettberg, 2008). Research suggests that the vast majority of blogs are personalized (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, & Wright, 2004; Fox & Lenhart, 2006; Papacharissi, 2007; Technorati, 2011) and fulfil an essential element of human desire as a medium for the expression of identity, creating community and structuring present and past experiences (Gurak & Antonijevic, 2008).

Literature review

Racial and ethnic identity online

Previous research suggests that individuals use the internet to construct and negotiate their identities and to experience a sense of community and racial identity (Brock, 2009; Byrne, 2008). The internet has been conceptualized as a 'third space' for discussing the meaning of Black identity (Brock, 2009, p. 17) and as a medium for 'political struggle over racial meaning, knowledge and values' (Daniels, 2012, p. 10). Online spaces do not necessarily change how an individual views their identity, nor the significance of power relations attached to racial hierarchies, since race, class and gender remain the most dominant dimensions of identity online, despite the promise of fluidity in cyberspace (Kendall, 1998). Nakamura (2002, p. 3) argues that the internet functions as an extension of western imperialism maintained through the process of *cybertyping*. This is defined as 'the distinctive ways that the internet propagates, disseminates and commodifies images of race and racism'. Central to understanding the process by which identities are constructed in the blogosphere is the concept of the internet as both a public and private space. In this regard, the blogosphere is a reflexive and rhetorical space while blogs are largely written both for the purpose of self-expression and with the aim of reaching a wider audience (Boylorn, 2013; Miller & Shepherd, 2004). Through this process, blogging can be conceptualized as a process of 'rewriting oneself' (Gurak & Antonijevic, 2008, p. 61). Most studies on motivations for blogging suggest that personal expression and documenting life experiences are primary factors (Huang, Shen, Lin, & Chang, 2007; Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004; Papacharissi, 2007). When race is factored into the equation, research suggests that motivations are often extrinsic, centred on filling gaps in the mainstream media, highlighting how social issues impact Black communities (Pole, 2005) and challenging negative constructions of Black identity (Brock, Kvasny, & Hales, 2010; Pole, 2009).

Black women and discursive activism in the blogosphere

Research on Black female bloggers is sparse; however, understanding how marginalized groups engage with new communication technologies helps to generate new levels of understanding on the blogosphere by revealing some of the complex, dynamic and innovative uses of the internet. Researching Black female bloggers challenges the Eurocentric conception of white western males and females as representing the normative experience and legitimate world view (Taylor, 1998). Political intent is not a precursor to political action and therefore it is possible for bloggers to engage in discursive practices that are counterhegemonic yet not explicitly political (Kahn & Kellner, 2004; Saleh, 2010; Steele, 2011). Steele (2011) argues that African-American women challenge dominant discourses through gossip blogs as a form of resistance against oppression. Black feminist epistemology serves as the central framework of Steele's study which draws on Collins (1990)

conceptualization of the matrix of domination, which refers to the interlocking and oppressive systems of race, class and gender that Black women experience in their everyday lives. Her study demonstrates how African-American women use gossip blogs as a discursive form of resistance and political communication centred on everyday issues.

Boylorn argues that Black women appropriate blogs as a platform for 'crunk feminism', a form of feminist resistance rooted in the experiences and perspectives of the hip hop generation (2013, p. 77). Crunk feminism blends her love of hip hop with her identity as a Black female from the rural south of America. In her autoethnography, she reveals her use of blogs 'to bring voice and visibility to marginalised populations, and to raise awareness about social injustices'. She argues that her personal narratives through blogging around social injustice engenders a sense of community and activism and further that crunk feminism offers a platform for merging Black feminism with wider Black popular culture.

As a crunk space the blog is a house for my anger and frustrations, rage and redemption ... The blog offered me a public space to think about and through the racist, classist, sexist, ableist, heterosexist notions of reality in popular culture and everyday life. (Boylorn, 2013, p. 77)

A study by Rapp, Button, Fleury-Steiner, and Fleury-Steiner (2010) highlights Black female resistance online to the reactions of civil rights organizations in focusing on the treatment of Black male offenders while overlooking the rights of Black female victims in a case involving gang rape on a Black housing project in West Palm Beach, Florida, United States. In particular, they single out Gina McCauley, a prominent Black feminist blogger and founder of the blog 'What About Our Daughters?' In one of her posts, she writes: 'I guess their MISSION as it relates to Black on Black crime is to offer unconditional support for the Black criminal while the Black victims of crime aren't worth the trouble' (McCauley as cited in Rapp et al., 2010, p. 245). Dominant racial discourse in the mainstream media frequently represents people of colour as social problems, treating cultural differences as deficiencies and perpetuating negative stereotypes (Law, 2002; Van Dijk, 2000). In regard to violence against Black women, this is framed as symptomatic of deficient Black culture characterized by broken families, violent Black men and general deviancy. However, McCauley and other Black women appropriate the blogosphere and other online spaces to challenge dominant, male-centred racial injustice (Rapp et al., 2010). Contesting ideological spaces in the mainstream media is a strategy for challenging hegemony by demonstrating 'that there are alternative ways of seeing the world and other stories to be told' (Lievrouw, 2011, p. 372). The use of blogs by Black British women as a medium for discursive activism is explored in this study with an acknowledgement that political thought and action is often expressed through the pursuit of personal interests rather than through traditional political structures (Breindl, 2010).

Methods

Conceptual approach

This study draws on the theoretical framework of Black feminism. Black feminist thought is defined as 'theoretical interpretations of Black women's reality by those who live it' and is based on the concept of specialized knowledge created by Black women that defines 'a standpoint of and for Black women' (Collins, 1990, p. 22). It is rooted in the historical

experiences of Black women and a legacy of interlocking oppression based on race, gender and class, defined as the 'matrix of domination' (Collins, 1990, p. 22). Black feminist narratives are largely based on the experience of African-American women that have come to represent the normative experience of Black women globally (Barriteau, 2007; Blay, 2008; Reynolds, 2002; Young, 2000). However, despite the dominance of the United States within Black feminist literature, Black feminist standpoint theory is acknowledged as an important framework for engendering a collective consciousness and collective position from which to challenge dominant ideologies on race and gender (Reynolds, 2002; Young, 2000). In order to capture the complexity and diversity of Black women's lives, there is a need for greater contextualization of the specific geographical and historical context in which Black women's experiences are situated (Blay, 2008; Reynolds, 2002); hence, this study is focused on a Black British context. Crenshaw (1989) coined the term 'intersectionality' as a conceptual approach to expose the combined impact of race, class and gender on Black women in the labour market. Over the last 25 years, its use has expanded as an approach to 'make visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it' (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006, p. 187). Intersectionality is concerned with inequality, dominance and oppression. It aims to highlight the reality that a single identity category such as race or gender is insufficient to explain how individuals interact with others since people have multiple identities that are dynamic and fluid (Shields, 2008). Adopting an intersectional approach to this study serves to highlight both the multiple facets of the bloggers' identities and the way in which these impact their lived experiences as Black British women.

The central questions guiding this study are: What are Black women's motivations for divulging racial and ethnic identity in the blogosphere (blogging while Black) and how does this relate to their use of blogs for discursive activism?

Sampling method

Participants were initially sourced from an online directory for Black bloggers owned by the researcher and sent email invitations, and further members recruited via invitations posted on Facebook and Twitter. This approach is based on accidental sampling; where the researcher determines the size of the sample and collects data on that number of individuals (Leming, 1997). There are obvious disadvantages to using non-probability sampling procedures, such as being unable to generalize the results to a larger population. However, in defence of this strategy, other methods employed by researchers to obtain random samples that involve using blog tracking sites such as Technorati are not feasible since the ethnicity of the blog owners is not recorded and the bloggers can be based anywhere in the world. This study required a specific sample of Black female bloggers based in Britain. Other practical considerations that influenced the choice of sampling procedures was that due to the relatively small population of Black British bloggers, accidental sampling was the most effective strategy for identifying individuals within this population. For the purpose of maintaining anonymity as an important ethical consideration, the bloggers' real names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Data collection and analysis

Twenty-six interviews were conducted with Black female bloggers resident in Britain. These were semi-structured with a draft guide prepared of areas for discussion. All of the interviews were captured on a digital recorder for the purpose of transcription for which informed consent was obtained. Fourteen interviews were conducted face to face at the British Library and 12 over the telephone. Thematic data analysis has been used to examine commonality, differences and relationships using an inductive approach to identify key themes emerging from the data, as outlined by Harding (2013), LeCompte (2000) and Thomas (2006). The interviews were transcribed and summarized, a priori codes were created to reflect categories linked to the research question and empirical codes were created to reflect commonalities, differences and relationships not previously considered that emerged from the data. Conceptual themes were then identified and analysed.

Strategies adopted to ensure the reliability, validity and rigour of this study include, but are not limited to, methodological coherence between the research question and the various components of the research methods; collecting and analysing data concurrently, thinking theoretically, ensuring that as new ideas emerge, they are verified in data already collected and in theory development. Reflexivity has also been implemented through the use of methodological memos to explain how participants' words have been interpreted, included or excluded from certain codes and categories as recommended by Harding (2013).

The interview was chosen as the most appropriate method to meet study objectives by facilitating the use of a technique called participatory witnessing, advanced by Taylor (1998) as an adapted version of participant observation. During the process of conducting interviews, researchers become 'participant witnesses' who bear testimony and listen in a way that encourages self-representation as opposed to other-representation. It is argued that researchers should consider an interview as an act of testimony and in doing so 'seek to tell the stories of self and others and to advocate for those who cannot' (Tarpley, 1995, p. 2). Bearing witness during the process of an interview 'involves an active engagement of the self in order to create the space in which to share in the experience of others' (Taylor, 1998, p. 58). Participatory witnessing contributes to a shift in the balance of power where the participants who bear testimony are elevated within the research process as co-creators of new knowledge.

Qualitative research methods frequently attract charges of subjectivity during a process of what it is often claimed should be an 'objective identification and gathering of evidence' (Hannabuss, 2000, p. 100). However, although an empirically based tradition, science is influenced by values (Humphries, Merten, & Truman, 2000). Claims of objectivity in any type of research are therefore problematic, since 'All research is value-laden and is inevitably political, since it represents the interests of particular (usually powerful, usually white male) groups' (Humphries, 2000, pp. 181–182). Therefore, the notion of 'fully objective and value-free research is a myth' (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 16).

Discussion of findings

Black women in this study consider it important for their audiences to identify them as Black, and there are two key factors linked to their motivation to divulge racial and ethnic identity on their blogs. The first relates to cultural authenticity, explained in

their narratives as a desire to speak on issues that impact Black people based on knowledge acquired through lived experience. The second relates to the desire to openly challenge negative stereotypes, which represents the use of blogs for discursive activism. While these findings relate to analysis of interviews, the latter part of this section features a layered analysis that includes an extract from an interview combined with an extract of the blog post referred to during interview by one of the participants. The language-in-use method of discourse analysis developed by Gee (2005, 2011) has been employed to capture the social, cultural and political meanings of the participant's narrative. While discourse analysis accounts for a tiny component of the qualitative analysis, this technique adds continuity and context and thereby enriches the findings.

Cultural authenticity

It has been argued that cultural authenticity is impossible to define since there are a plethora of divergent views on its meaning (Fox & Short, 2003). It has been defined as a movement by and for people of colour to tell their own stories openly and honestly (Woodson, 2003), implying that cultural authenticity can only come from those within a particular cultural group. At the opposite end of the debate, cultural authenticity is defined as the ability of a writer to reflect the knowledge, values, attitudes and beliefs of a cultural group in a way that is considered relevant, meaningful and acceptable (Mo & Shen, 2003). In the context of this study and based on narratives of the participants, cultural authenticity refers to writing that is informed by real, lived experiences.

Cultural Authenticity is cited as the principal cause for divulging racial identity by several of the participants, including Grace, a 35-year-old creative writer, who states: 'It's important that people understand that it's written by a Black woman ... I think it's quite important in general when it comes to Black writing that it needs to come from us.' The importance of divulging her racial identity is also linked to her imagined audience:

I visualize people like me; my age, maybe between 20–35, Black women and men, but I think that because I'm writing from the eyes of a woman; I'm assuming it's women. I kind of bounce between women and men; I visualize Black people my age living in resistance in Britain going through the same old problems.

The imagined audience represents a mental conceptualization of those with whom we communicate and often consists of real people, such as friends and relatives who are known to read an individual's blog (Lit, 2012). However, as with the above example, bloggers often conceptualize the 'ideal reader', someone from a similar background with similar perspectives likely to engage with their writing (Marwick, 2011, p7). Past studies suggest that Black bloggers tend to imagine audiences of well-educated Blacks who are mostly female (Pole, 2010).

In writing from the perspective of a Black woman and visualizing a mostly Black female audience, Grace assumes a collective, Black female consciousness. Her narrative provides an important geographical context in alluding to everyday experiences of Black people in Britain that define an ongoing struggle against racism. The end of the twentieth century signalled the emergence of 'a distinctive and simultaneous blackness and Britishness' as an expression of a unique identity (Young, 2000, p. 46), rendering greater importance for Black women in locating their experiences within a British context (Amos &

Parmar, 2005, p. 46). Lisa, 33, who blogs about social issues also makes reference to cultural authenticity as an important factor around the divulgence of racial identity:

275 I am a Black woman who happens to write. I am also a writer who's a woman who happens to be Black. Whatever way you put it, I cannot in my way of how I view life eradicate the fact that I'm Black and that may have an effect on how I view things.

Both women demonstrate how Black women's lived experience as members of raced, gendered and classed groups greatly influence their world view (Collins, 1990). The significance Lisa attaches to cultural authenticity is linked to her imagined audience through which she seeks to 'cross racial boundaries'. She continues: 'Obviously I'll be speaking to Black people who it resonates with but if a White person happens to read it or an Asian person or whoever reads it and gets something from it, fine.' In accepting that many of her posts constructed from the perspective of a Black British woman will appeal largely to Black audiences, in common with Grace, there is an assumption of shared perspectives and experiences that denote a collective consciousness. But Lisa does not regard this as exclusionary towards other racial groups: 'Just because I'm talking about my hair I'm not rejecting other people. It's open for everyone.' In cultivating multicultural audiences while acknowledging a unique perspective shaped by lived experience as a Black woman in British society, Lisa embodies the concept of 'autonomy', defined as a position of strength and solidarity for Black women that recognizes the need to engage with different types of people and multiple issues (Collins, 1990).

290 Julia, a 21-year-old fashion blogger, says that it is important that her audience knows that she is Black when she writes specifically about issues concerning Black communities:

295 If I'm writing about something that affects our community then I'll want people to know that look, I'm not just a random person... I know what I'm saying. But then in other situations I don't think it's a big deal.

Central to her perception is the notion that being part of the Black British community denotes shared experiences and common understanding. In order to enact this sense of community and demonstrate a qualification to speak on Black issues, revealing one's racial and ethnic identity is central to this process as Julia further explains:

300 It shouldn't really matter but in some situations it would matter whereby you need to validate your point, like what does she know about us? And it's like yeah, I'm one of you so I really do think I know.

305 While cultural authenticity has been expressed by some of the women as a reason for divulging racial identity on their blogs, the authenticity of Black identity and the Black experience is highly contested. Efforts to challenge negative cultural representations of Black communities in Britain in the 1970s by presenting 'authentic' images of Blackness have been charged with reproducing essentialist notions of Black identity:

310 The cultural politics of the Black movement implies that it is only by allowing the other to speak that an authentic depiction of the Black experience is possible. This mimic approach to representation assumes that a real Black experience is out there in the world and that this experience is distorted and misrepresented when it originates from a privileged White position. (Marotta, 2001, p. 542)

315 For the women in this study, cultural authenticity as a dimension of blogging practice is about imparting knowledge based on their unique perspectives that serve as counter-

narratives to dominant discourses. It functions as a tool against raced and gendered oppression that does not necessarily reflect the belief of a homogenous Black identity (Marotta, 2001), but represents a standpoint from which Black women explore, negotiate and define their own subjective reality.

Blogging while Black and discursive activism

The other key motivating factor for divulging racial and ethnic identity relates to a perceived obligation to blog as a strategy for challenging negative stereotypes, consistent with the concept of 'blogging while Black'. Jennifer, a 28-year-old business blogger, is not just concerned with challenging negative perceptions about Black people held by the wider society but also seeks to challenge negative perceptions that Black people hold about themselves:

It's as well to dispel and try and discourage some of the negative stereotypes that we have as Black people when it comes to business that we're not comfortable, that we don't do things properly, that kind of thing. I'm of the mindset that we need to be able to elevate and remove ourselves from the social stereotypes that even our own community imposes on ourselves and the fastest way to do that is online.

Internalized racism is defined as the acceptance of negative perceptions by members of oppressed groups perpetuated by dominant cultures. 'It is characterised by their not believing in others who look like them, and not believing in themselves' (Jones, 2000, p. 1213). Jennifer demonstrates an awareness of internalized racism and how it manifests through a lack of self-worth, self-value and a belief in limited capabilities. Her narrative demonstrates that the divulgence of racial and ethnic identity is used as a strategy for addressing internalized racism by showcasing Black businesses to disprove negative and stereotypical perceptions about Black business people. Michaela, another business blogger aged 44, also speaks explicitly about the need to tackle racial stereotypes:

I feel it's important for people to know I'm a Black woman and I'm not a stereotype. It's about this is who I am, this is my identity, it's holistic. It's really important. I don't want to give an idea that I'm White.

Her self-defined identity is reinforced through the conceptualization of an 'ideal' Black audience: 'Most of my audience is Black; because it's about Black female experience ... my posts are about myself as a Black woman and the experiences I have as a Black woman.' Counterhegemonic discourse through the articulation of a self-defined Black woman's standpoint is a strategy used by Black women to resist raced, classed and gendered oppression and represents spaces that Black women create to construct their own self-definitions and oppose dominant constructions of Black female identity (Collins, 1990). Black British women have always sought out spaces from which to speak (Young, 2000) and blogs have been appropriated by Black women as a platform 'to articulate their vision of Black womanhood' (Brock et al., 2010, p. 1056).

For Leona, a 29-year-old blogger who writes about African arts and culture, divulging her racial and ethnic identity is an essential component of her strategy to address the marginalization of Black creativity. Her cultivated audience is 'Africans both on the continent and in the Diaspora' who need to know her racial identity:

Because a lot of the content that I post is from my observation or things from my experience and those are directly coloured by who I am, so I think it's important for that. Also there's this whole question of representation and so I feel like I'm contributing to increasing the number of spaces there are for Africans and Diaspora Africans representing themselves and their culture and their experience.

Divulging racial and ethnic identity is used as by Leona as a mechanism for increasing representation of Black African culture within the public sphere. Her narrative highlights the adeptness of Black female bloggers in appropriating technology to harness cultural capital (Brock et al., 2010). For Nancy, self-representation is a powerful way of challenging negative stereotypes. The 33-year-old lifestyle blogger feels that there is an under-representation of positive Black role models in the mainstream, especially Black mothers. She therefore deems it important to divulge her racial identity to challenge dominant discourses around Black family life:

I definitely want to capture that Black audience and I want to show that Black people, that we do other things; we're not just doing one type of thing ... this is a Black woman writing about her life, her family.

Nancy's approach is linked to cultural authenticity, in terms of writing about her lived experience and as Woodson (2003) argues, challenging negative stereotypes of people of colour by telling her own story. For Nadine, a 31-year-old bridal blogger, divulging her racial and ethnicity identity is part of a strategy to challenge negative stereotypes by promoting other Black women:

I know for me, it's so valuable to look at images and see people that look like me ... I just feel like some of the mainstream magazines, if you look through them you would think that Black people didn't get married. What kind of message is that sending?

In providing a platform for promoting Black brides, her blog serves to highlight the racial and ethnic diversity of British identity that is widely associated with White, European identity and perpetuated through discourses that create boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (Campbell, 2008).

I think the whole premise of the blog is it celebrates where Black people are featured. It's about celebrating when Black women are in the mainstream, whether it's weddings or any kind of media.

One such post published in July 2011 under the headline: *Leading Lady Naomie Harris*, profiles the actress who was featured in the Huffington Post (2011) as a serious contender for a leading role in the upcoming James Bond film. Her blog post reads:

If the rumours are to be believed, the gorgeous Naomie Harris is going to be the next Bond Girl! I hope it is true, it's about time we had a Black British actress in that role. So in homage to Naomie and in the hope this comes to fruition I have taken the opportunity to profile a young lady who doesn't get enough attention in the press but I think she is a stellar actress and someone who I rate highly in the style stakes!

The above post celebrates the success of a Black actress and makes a political statement about the representation of Black women in the mainstream media. Harris is profiled as beautiful and talented and deserving of wider recognition but largely ignored by the press. There is also a broader critique of the paucity of Black actresses that secure leading roles in the popular James Bond movies, widely perceived as a British institution.

The emphasis on Harris as *British* serves as a reminder that British identity is often associated with whiteness (Campbell, 2008). This demonstrates how Black British women use blogs as counterhegemonic practice to dominant constructions of Black womanhood (Brock et al., 2010).

For Chioma, a 48-year-old Black feminist blogger, blogging while Black is necessary to challenge damaging stereotypes about Black women:

There was that whole thing about the lecturer who said that Black women weren't attractive. I was pissed off about that and ... it really got me thinking, you know, how we are seen. We are either demonised or fantasied, it's one extreme to the other.

The article Chioma refers to in the above narrative was written by Satoshi Kanazawa, a lecturer at the London School of Economics, originally published in *Psychology Today* (Scientific Fundamentalist, 2011). The headline read: 'Why are Black women rated less physically attractive than other women but Black men are rated better looking than other men?' In the article, Kanazawa claims that the findings of scientific research prove that Black women are perceived as less attractive than women from other ethnic groups. Black women have historically been constructed as the other and judged according to European standards of beauty that value light skin and straight hair (Hunter, 2004). Whiteness as the embodiment of beauty exists within a socially constructed system of privilege and superiority to Blackness (Collins, 1990). Chioma therefore makes a critical observation of the representation of Black women through dominant discourses of demonization and fantasy. Representations of Black women in the mainstream are largely negative and stereotypical (Brock et al., 2010; Collins, 1990) ranging from 'the sexual siren; the rotund, full-bosomed nurturing mother figure; the dominating matriarch incarnate, eternally ill-tempered wenches and wretched victims' (Bobo, 2001, p. 56).

According to Gloria, a 27-year-old arts and culture blogger, Blogging while Black is a mechanism for engaging with younger Black Britons to pass on the legacy of Black resistance through discursive activism.

I feel that it's important that if you do have a platform that you use it wisely. I feel it's important for bloggers who are Black and have a platform. We're using the technology that's up and coming and that is what people are following to use as a tool to connect with the next generation. I think it's quite important to do that.

Conclusion

Black women bloggers are part of an historical legacy of Black women writers who are innovative (Steele, 2011) and adept at harnessing Black technical and cultural capital (Brock et al., 2010). The concept of *blogging while Black* which originates from the United States is equally applicable to the Black British women in this study. Their motivations are centred on invoking cultural authenticity as a strategy for challenging negative representations of Black British female identity by sharing their everyday lived experiences as powerful counter-narratives. Their stories are directed at imagined audiences who they conceptualize to be largely Black, though the fact that some women express an interest in cultivating ethnically diverse audiences suggests that they do not regard the blogosphere as a racially segregated space, as indicated in earlier studies (Pole, 2010). The prominence of cultural authenticity in their narratives highlights the significance they attach to their lived

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experience as a source of knowledge on Black social life. This is consistent with Black feminist theory which positions Black women as 'agents of knowledge' while emphasizing the role knowledge plays in empowering Black communities. As 'agents of knowledge', Black women use their critical understandings to challenge intersectional experiences based on race, class and gender oppression (Collins, 1990, p. 221). Moreover, Black British women appropriate blogs as a strategy for challenging cybertypes – negative stereotypes perpetuated in cyberspace (Nakamura, 2002), and do so by deviating from the trend for anonymity and adopting cultural authenticity both to explore, negotiate and define their own subjective reality and to articulate their experiences within the context of a Black British female identity. Adopting Black feminism as a theoretical approach and placing Black British women at the centre of analysis in this study highlights how they adopt modes of political communication that are shaped by intersectional socio-historical experiences.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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