

Kishonna L Gray, PhD

Assistant Professor of Communication
School of Social and Behavioral Sciences
Arizona State University

Email: klgray@asu.edu
Twitter: [@KishonnaGray](https://twitter.com/KishonnaGray)
www.kishonnagray.com

WORKING TITLE

"Black Cyberfeminism or How Intersectionality Went Viral"

OVERVIEW

We are currently witnessing a transformatory period within feminist communities and their ability to impact and influence physical spaces to effect and impact physical change. And with the continued expansion of digital platforms and tools, this impact is felt beyond Facebook groups, Hashtags, and DM's. The continued acknowledgement of the role that identity has on our digital experiences as well as how our identities influences our engagements online is being highlighted and centered. Especially the role that intersecting identities have on both.

On May 21, 2017, the Chronicle of Higher Education published a review on the term Intersectionality going viral. The author interviewed Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term discussing how Black women in particular are systematically erased residing at the intersection of Blackness and being women. But the impact of intersectionality, being rooted in Black feminism, was made apparent with thousands of articles trying to make sense of this theoretical framework and daily practice. Unfortunately, many of those articles actually suggested that intersectionality is dangerous and a scam that is attempting to usurp power from the established White, masculine, capitalist, elite. From #Gamergate to the reemergence of the vocal 'alt-right', intersectionality resides at a crossroad of emancipation for all marginalized bodies but also as the crux for White supremacists to build a platform for so-called 'right unity'.

While this text will focus on the why of intersectionality going viral, it's important to locate 'when' it went viral as well. Examining the increase in textual content, from news to blogs and tweets, one would have to assume the inauguration of President Trump and subsequent Women's march (January 2017) led to increased (negative) attention on intersectionality. The platform on which the Women's March was built outlined intersectional feminism centering the most marginalized of women:

"We believe Gender Justice is Racial Justice is Economic Justice," the document states. "We must create a society in which women, in particular women — in particular Black women, Native women, poor women, immigrant women, Muslim women, and queer and trans women — are free and able to care for and nurture their families, however they are formed, in safe and healthy environments free from structural impediments (Women's March on Washington Guiding Vision and Definition of Principles, pg. 2)."

Mainstream media mostly ignored the Women’s march and alternate media proved to be significant for the success of the march. Facebook and Twitter were the primary media utilized. NBC Nightly News covered the march two days before the march and ABC World News aired an “18-word sound bite” from one of the organizers the day before the march. New York Times mentioned the event several times during the week but mostly focused on the racial divisions and tensions among the organizers and marchers (Farhi, 2017). Employing alternate media was a practice perfected by the organizers of the Million Woman March in 1997 where Black women and others gathered in Philadelphia. The organizers, bypassing traditional outlets, relied on flyers, leaflets, black owned media, the Internet, and word-of-mouth. As Chapter 3 will explore, the lack of mainstream media engagement is not able to stop a movement.

The digital media praxis of women of color in particular reveals the levels of continued resistance and empowerment employing an intersectional approach an alternative means. As such, the purpose of this text is to explore historical and contemporary practices of Women to create and sustain social movements, activism, and mobilization as well as highlight continued inequalities associated with structural and institutional oppression - especially those supported by mediated technologies. Rightfully tying contemporary imaginations of intersectionality, this text situates historical actors such as Sojourner Truth, Maria Stewart, Anna Cooper, and others in the annals of molding intersectionality through visual, oral, and textual means. This text will also provide examples from the physical-social media era - examining movements and direct action rooted in other networked forms of the low-tech, analog era. These foundational chapters provide the context for understanding contemporary affordances of digital technology.

The contents of each chapter will examine digital tools or mediated platforms utilized by Women to highlight their innovative practices online and in physical spaces. These chapters will be discursively and theoretically bound within Black feminism - imagining what Black cyberfeminism is and could be. Black feminism can address these practices in the physical and online lives of marginalized individuals and groups leading toward a critical digital framework. As such, I modify the tenets of Black feminism to highlight oppression and empowerment as well as techno and cyber feminism to address the importance of the body in the digital. Existing at the intersection of Black feminism and cyberfeminism, Black Cyberfeminism concerns itself with three major themes: 1) social structural oppression of technology and digital spaces; 2) intersecting oppressions experienced in both physical and digital spaces; and 3) the distinctness of digital media praxis of women of color in particular.

TABLE OF CONTENTS (and estimated length)

Foreword (Author TBD) (2,000 – 3,000 words)

Chapter One: Black Cyberfeminism or How Intersectionality Went Viral (8,533 words)

Chapter Two: ‘Tellin’ it like it is’: Oral, Visual, And Textual Traditions of Black Women’s Activism and Resistance (8,179 words)

Chapter Three: From Black Power to Black Lives Matter: Examining Mediated Resistance and Digitally Enhanced Activism (7,000 – 8,000 words)

Chapter Four: Calling Out, Leaning In, and Other forms of Hashtag Feminism (7,000 – 8,000 words)

Chapter Five: “Do It for the Vine:” Black Innovation “On Fleek” (5,000 – 6,000 words)

Chapter Six: Black Lives Don’t Matter in Gaming? (5,000 – 6,000 words)

Chapter Seven: #NoConviction: The Master’s (Digital) Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House (7,000 – 8,000 words)

TIMELINE AND LENGTH

The proposed timeline for completion of this manuscript is Spring 2018.

I anticipate the final manuscript to be between 50,000 and 55,000 words (unless otherwise dictated by the editor or publisher).

SIMILAR TEXTS

There are only a few books that engage digital feminism (many more that explore technofeminism but they are a bit dated). The current manuscript will supplement those texts well and also provide an additional focus on intersectionality and engage broadly with the digital and analog tools that are used. Often, texts singularly focus on hashtag feminism or women’s blogging. It’s necessary to also engage the ‘low-tech’ aspects of digital feminism and Black feminism requires this.

In *Feminist Activism and Digital Networks: Between Empowerment and Vulnerability* (Palgrave, 2017), powerfully written by Aristeia Fotopoulou, the author provides more of a descriptive overview of the use of digital tools and technology by women who participate in the online sphere. The overwhelming focus of feminist activism situates women’s online engagement in direct action and mobilization. And this is just one sphere of women’s digital practices. *Black Digital Feminism*, by expanding upon this great work, would show a more holistic engagement with theorizing the digital of women’s everyday practices. The digital media praxis of women of color in particular reveals the power of the intersectional approach as this text will explore.

Kylie Jarrett also meaningfully addresses Digital Media and Feminist Labor in her seminal text, *Feminism, Labour, and Digital Media: The Digital Housewife* (Routledge, 2016). Using Marxist feminist theorists, she complicates the role of domestic work,

capitalism, and the unpaid digital sphere. This feminist perspective expands on the “Digital Housewife” by critiquing consumer labor in digital media. While an important text, it doesn’t intersectionally address the interlocking nature of oppression based on marginalized identities. The singular focus on class simplifies the complex, as race is implicated in capitalist critiques.

MARKETING PLAN

The current text isn’t simply engaged with forward thinking scholars and discourses, but embraces these new ways of presenting material. With a dedicated Facebook page, Twitter, and other social media, as well as a Website with downloadable content, and relevant examples of contemporary issues in identity and digital culture, it stands apart both in terms of contents and its structure, its approach and its accessibility. Thus, the marketing plan will allow me to expand the books reach and be more responsive to today’s activist, student, academic, and public scholars by highlighting the mediated possibilities of the book. I see this as about marketing but also as a way to reimagine the ways that books can shape public conversations:

- A dedicated Facebook page with author updates and posts
- A twitter handle and associated hashtag that will be updated with news related to mediated activism
- A dedicated website with content associated with the author and text updated frequently; anticipate having blogs written by scholars in the fields of media studies, cultural studies, and even activists in physical and digital fields
- No website links in text – they are out of our control if they are broken. I will update information on the book’s website and social media outlets.

DETAILED CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter One: Black Cyberfeminism or how Intersectionality went viral (5,000 – 6,000 words)

On May 21, 2017, the Chronicle of Higher Education published a review on the framework ‘intersectionality’ going viral. The author interviewed Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term discussing how women of color are systematically erased residing at the intersection of Blackness and being women. Examining the increase in textual content, from news to blogs and tweets, one would have to assume the inauguration of President Trump and subsequent Women’s march (January 2017) led to increased attention on intersectionality. Even the platform on which the Women’s March was built outlined intersectional feminism centering the most marginalized of women. This approach greatly differs from previous instantiations of mainstream feminism in particular. White Feminism, has historically focus on the struggles of White women while failing to address the distinct forms of oppression often faced by Women of color, disabled women, poor women, and other marginalized women. Even more disturbing, and a trend that Jessie Daniels rightfully highlights, is White women’s continued investment in White supremacy. But even with the perceived success of the Women’s March, marginalized women still highlighted its overarching focus on cisnet, able-bodied white women.

In an article by Jessica Xiao, entitled *The White Feminism of the Women’s March is Still on My Mind*, she outlines the subtle machinations of White supremacy inherent in the movement. On the surface, it appears to adopt the tenets of intersectionality; in practice, it becomes apparent that mainstream feminisms cooptation of intersectionality largely ignores race, class, ability, citizenship status, among other experiences. The digital media praxis of women of color in particular continues to center all aspects of identity simultaneously. In particular, Moya Bailey rightfully reframed the concept of misogyny, which traditionally focuses on oppression of women; misogynoir, the concept coined by Bailey, examines both race and gender in treatment and outcomes for women of color. Social media has proven to be an innovative arena to express individual and collective examples of misogynoir, and these hashtags are examples of that: #SayHerName, #FastTAiledGirls, #NotYourAsianSidekick, #NotYourMami, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, and #MMIW (missing and murdered Indigenous Women). These hashtags embody the physical and digital experiences and realities of women of color. They have employed digital technologies to raise awareness and shows the levels of continued resistance and empowerment employing an intersectional approach.

While Bailey employed the term to specifically interrogate how anti-Blackness and misogyny combine to malign Black women, its guiding principles readily apply to all women of color. This chapter will delve into

Black cyberfeminism using examples of women of color employing Internet technologies for empowerment (as the above hashtags reveal).

New communication technologies have expanded the opportunities and potential for marginalized communities to mobilize in this context counter to the dominant, mainstream media. This growth reflects the mobilization of marginalized communities within virtual and real spaces reflecting a systematic change in who controls the narrative. No longer are mainstream media the only disseminators of messages or producers of content. Everyday people have employed websites, blogs, and social media to voice their issues, concerns, and lives. Women, in particular, are employing social media to highlight issues that are often ignored in dominant discourse (Shirky, 2011).

Chapter Two: 'Tellin' it like it is': Oral, Visual, And Textual Traditions of Black Women

While Black women's social media use has afforded the opportunity to communicate across boundaries and borders, this is not a new concept, but merely a new tool to continue the charge set forth by Sojourner Truth. She provided the foundation for what Kimberle Crenshaw coined, intersectionality, and what Moya Bailey and others demonstrate through daily examples of misogynoir.

Using the power of mediated platforms as well as innovative technology, Truth articulated an inclusive version of womanhood as well perfected the idea of defining your own narrative. The prolific reproduction and dissemination of her portrait via carte-de-visites directly informs the central tenet of Black feminism – defining one's own narrative. Those pictures affirmed her status as a sophisticated and respectable free woman and as a woman in control of her image. The public's fascination with carte-de-visites, small and collectible card-mounted photographs, allowed her to advance her abolitionist cause to a huge audience and earn a living through their sale. "I Sell the Shadow to Support the Substance," proclaimed the famous slogan for these pictures and could be compared to a tweet or a post on one's social media profile (and associated crowd funding that many Black activists utilize).

Other mediated examples are readily available to demonstrate the rich intellectual tradition of how Black women engaged in speaking and writing the truth of their experiences; specifically as a form of resistance, which is often rendered virtually invisible by those outside of it (Collins, 2009).

The digital praxis of many Black women is directly informed by the radical tradition of Anna Cooper, Sojourner Truth, and other women through their visual, textual, and oral narratives. Anna Cooper specifically develops a unique understanding of social justice that is exponentially more valid for Black women than anyone else due to the dual forms of exclusion and oppression Black women routinely encounter. As Cooper posits, "The colored woman of to-day occupies, one may say, a unique position in this country... She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and it is as yet an unknown or an

unacknowledged factor in both” (p. 134). From 1892 where Cooper was articulating, to current, Black women’s claims for justice are rejected by the White male establishment and ignored or minimized by White female reform workers and by their Black male civil rights counterparts. Black women, being farthest removed from positions of power, are primely situated because, according to Cooper, they are the least corrupted and morally purest, situating them as the most qualified to lead the charge for freedom and justice. Cooper is stating what the tweet proclaims: “Fuck it, I’ll do it”.

Chapter Three: From Black Power to Black Lives Matter: Examining Mediated Resistance and Digitally Enhanced Activism (5,000 – 6,000 words)

The crux of Chapter 3 will be to illuminate the intersectional platform of #BlackLivesMatter, the Women’s March, and other intersectional movements tracing their development from abolition to Black Power. The overarching focus will be to center the tools utilized by these movements to sustain their power. Specifically, exploring the significance of Black news during abolition and the Black Panther newspaper during the Civil Rights Era are essential to making sense of the low-tech networking that supporting their platforms. Even exploring savvy of Black women during the Million Woman’s March in Philadelphia in 1997 situates the tactics of Black women’s innovations that are often replicated by other movements.

It is important to root these strategies within theories of marginality which focus on both the oppressive and constructive aspects of belonging and not belonging to multiple and opposing communities at the same time. Most of Michel Foucault’s (1988) theorizing of human identity focused on the ways in which the self is objectified through scientific inquiry. Within this line of investigation, he examined the relationship between power and the production of knowledge and the discursive development of various disciplinary processes such as the gaze, which seeks to categorize, identify and control society’s individuals. In particular, he examined how discursive formations were defined in large part by identifying that which lay outside its boundaries. Such boundaries and boundary making are however areas of contestation and arenas for expressing domination in the production of knowledge. While Black users of analog, digital, and internet technologies have identified innovative ways to still participate within internet culture, this chapter will specifically focus on women of color who are often excluded from positions of power within their own organizations. Current cooptation of #BlackLivesMatter by cis-heterosexual Black men is an example of this trend.

Chapter Four: Calling Out, Leaning In, and Other forms of Hashtag Feminism (7,000 – 8,000 words)

Broadly, feminist engagements with technology and culture are limiting as they fail to capture race and other identifiers which must also be at the forefront

of analysis (Gray, 2015). The analytical frameworks needed to capture the virtual lives of women must have the capability of deconstructing structural inequalities within the space. So the constructing of a hashtag that reads, “Solidarity is for White women,” is largely rooted in the failure of White feminism to adequately address the realities of women of color. And as Jessie Daniels (2015) posits, the dominance of white women as architects and defenders of a framework of exclusive feminism has yet to be interrogated by mainstream feminism in meaningful ways. However, women of color have historically challenged universal feminism and currently employ social media to continue this practice.

While interrogating and coming to terms with being invisible, Black women have to also critically challenge the narrative associated when Black women are made visible. Hashtag culture on Twitter reveals the uproar associated when Black women attempt to create and reframe narratives but these attempts are often met with extreme backlash accusing Black women of being angry, hostile, and creators of toxic environments for White women. However, Twitter has allowed women of color to shape *herstory* within the hegemonic structures of digital media. Hashtag culture and other forms of microblogging while limited, in the aggregate allow for an intricate analysis involving sometimes thousands of individuals on a given topic. This form of meta-commentary directs the audience’s attention to specific issues.

While there is usually limited engagement on the origins of the racialized tensions within the feminist community, the purpose of this chapter is to situate contemporary issues within the digital feminist community within this much needed historical context introduced in Chapter 2. Using Black Cyberfeminism as a theoretical guide, this chapter incorporates the tenets of interconnected identities, interconnected social forces, and distinct circumstances to better theorize women operating within digital culture to capture the uniqueness of women who sometimes feel compelled to create hashtags to draw attention to their physical and digital realities.

Chapter Five: “Do It for the Vine:” Blackness“ On Fleek” (5,000 – 6,000 words)

While the capitalist death of Vine is significant to extrapolate, the focus of this chapter is on its life and innovative creations of Black Vine users. At one point, Vine boasted 40 million registered users. The six-second, video sharing platform may have seemed limited for those who preferred longer airtime, but the six seconds proved to be a challenge many Black users were willing to take on.

By situating Vines within a lens of transmediated culture, this chapter will explore vines as a place of convergence where digital users remix music, movies, TV, gaming, and other media to construct innovative content. By exploring vines within the frame of cultural production, Black users legitimized their own socio-lingual practices extending and remixing Black vernacular into the digital era. While unique, these practices are rooted in Black analog creative expression that previously existed and continues to thrive in physical

spaces - whether or not there is a platform.

The dissemination of trending Vine's highlights the its uniqueness as a form of transmedia. Borrowing from the new model of media production, I use "transmedia" to engage what Goran Bolin (2007) calls "textual production that travels over technologies" (243). The transmedia text involves intricate multi-platform narrative webs that, according to Henry Jenkins (2006), capitalize on the affordances of digital media convergence. The transmedia text, thus, requires cultural synergy of a multitude of mediated formats. The visual of this mapping creates an intricate nexus of analyzing what Blackness means across platforms. Vines specifically highlight the third tenet of Black cyberfeminism which is the distinctness of the Black digital praxis.

Chapter Six: Black Lives Don't Matter in Gaming (5,000 – 6,000 words)

August 2014 proved a pivotal moment within the gaming community as the controversy surrounding GamerGate reached a peak with the harassment of Zoe Quinn, Brianna Wu, and Anita Sarkeesian among other feminist game scholars and gaming critics. Additionally, tension during the month of August intensified with the shooting death of Mike Brown propelling the growth of the #BlackLivesMatter movement and increased awareness around police violence against the Black community. Many digital users employed a variety of means to express support and opposition to each movement utilizing social media, blogs, YouTube, and even gaming spaces.

The presence of the #BlackLivesMatter campaign within Xbox Live specifically has generated a significant amount of controversy among gamers. Some contend video gaming is not the place for social activism while others feel that any platform that can reach a wide demographic of individuals is a great place to spread awareness for unarmed citizens being killed by law enforcement. But expressing support for Black lives has subjected many individuals to digital violence as well as threats of actual, physical violence.

A video uploaded by the Free Thought Project captured a cop on Xbox Live expressing that he gets "paid to beat up niggers." While this officer was eventually identified and fired from a jurisdiction that is mostly Black, his individual firing does nothing to dismantle the systematic racism that privileges Whiteness, sustains White supremacy, and unjustly denies Blacks full access and inclusion to participate in society. This chapter will demonstrate why Black lives don't matter in gaming focusing on the hypervisibility of Black masculinity and the relative invisibility and hidden realities of Black women.

Chapter Seven: #NoConviction: The Master's (Digital) Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House (8,000 - 8,500 words)

Increased criticism of police use and abuse of power have been a central focus of those organizing and mobilizing for Black lives. As an Intersectional organization, the #BlackLivesMatter movement in particular has been centrally

focused on illuminating the various facets of state violence from police brutality, to immigrant issues, to mass incarceration, and other forms of state sanctioned violence.

The emergence of the hashtag #NoConviction is rooted in this call to illustrate the lack of conviction for high profile cases involving the death of Black victims. In 15 recent cases that include Akai Gurley, Walter L Scott, Sandra Bland, and Philando Castile, only two resulted in guilty pleas or convictions. Using #NoConviction, social media users share the names of whose murderers have escaped justice. The power of the #NoConviction hashtag and subsequent conversations urges for a recognition of structural inequalities (especially along axes of intersectionality) and institutional nature of racism embedded in policing. These are central to Black cyberfeminism. Far too often, policing applies individualistic language and the coded ‘bad apple’ metaphor to explain away systematic racism in everyday police practices. This trend was popularized by LAPD Chief Daryl Gates to describe the Rodney King beating. He deflected criticism of a broken system of policing by referring to this ‘isolated’ incident as an “aberration.” A common feature of political language and political news, a ‘bad apples’ explanation deflects attention from organizational-level deviance by individualizing wrongdoing (Cavender, Gray, and Miller, 2010).

Although the diffusion of technology within policing, from dash cameras, to body cameras won’t dismantle practices of overuse of power, abuse, brutality, and violence, we are able to better document what many marginalized people have so often said about discriminatory police practices. As the non-indictment of Daniel Pantaleo (the NYPD officer who choked Eric Garner to death) revealed, even when documented, recorded, archived, and witnessed by dozens, our justice system operates in a manner that will protect the hegemonic establishment and process Black and Brown bodies into a system of White supremacy. Several reasoning citizens, acting as an extension of the criminal justice apparatus decided there was not enough evidence to warrant an indictment. And Black women mobilizing online highlight that this is what our American justice system is and has always been. It’s not broken. People are seeking justice when it has never existed for many marginalized groups in this country. There is no flaw in the system - this is the design.

Highlighting Audre Lorde’s speech where she famously said, “For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” this chapter argues for the reformation of the master’s digital tools and cites the strategies employed by women of color within the #NoConviction community that speak to this radical re-envisioning.

As this chapter will examine, “using the master’s tools” provides a way to center racism, sexism, and other inequalities, but this does not mean that the tools can tear these “isms” apart. Under racism, sexism, class exploitation, heterosexism, and similar systems of oppression, elite groups use their power to uphold privilege through the economic political or ideological domination of blacks, women, poor people, and LGBT people. This perspective sees power

relations as a zero-sum game—one in which less powerful people gain power when it is redistributed to them from more powerful groups (Collins, 2006, p. 21). Waiting for the powerful to allocate equal access to subordinate groups often leads to resistance, which can mean taking the power often by force, revolt, or revolution (Collins, 2006).