Article

Black Bloggers and Their Varied Publics: The Everyday Politics of Black Discourse Online

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Abstract

This article analyzes African American–oriented blogs for their potential to foster varying kinds of alternate publics while engaging in discourse that is outside what is commonly considered political communication. Bloggers and their communities use satellite and enclave spaces to explore black representation in art and media, black feminism, and class consciousness. I use critical technocultural discourse analysis to explore the affordances and constraints of blogs in creating alternate publics for African Americans online. Capitalizing on African American oral culture, black bloggers can use spaces technically accessible to the masses, yet keep discourse hidden, intentionally opting out of engagement with the dominant group. Expanding sites of inquiry and bringing a historical understanding of offline patterns of communication allow for more rich, useful, and culturally responsible research into the online communication African Americans and other marginalized communities.

Keywords

race, blogs, black American culture, public sphere, cultural identity, discourse

African Americans have been systematically excluded from participation in traditional forms of political engagement through law and social practice (Hill 1977). Literacy laws, voting laws, and even public congregation laws were meant to prevent a formerly enslaved population from gaining political power and voice (Alexander 2011; Filer et al. 1991; Hill 1977). Although all groups engage in political discourse in spaces

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outside those reserved for traditional politics, marginalized populations have more motivation to form spaces outside the dominant purview for this activity. For populations whose gatherings are more heavily monitored by the state, blog posts that appear on nonpolitical blog websites may serve as political forums. Even conversations with little obvious political significance to the dominant group, like "natural" versus chemically "processed" hair, have consequences for racial group identity definition and resistance to assimilation (Jacobs-Huey 2006; Patton 2006).

Rather than operating at a deficit, African American[1] Internet users' mastery of social networking and other online platforms continues to challenge oppressive systems (Brock 2016; Everett 2009). African Americans have an increasing presence online (Fox et al. 2009; Purcell et al. 2010). Although every demographic group is participating more in social networking, African Americans over-index on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram use (Duggan 2015). African Americans contributions to online spaces mimic African American oral culture in both content and form (Brock 2009; Florini 2014; Steele 2016). Because of the shift to a secondary orality online within dominant western society (Ong 1988), groups such as African Americans who have retained an oral culture are in a unique position to capitalize on new digital technologies (Steele 2016). The age of electronic media, widely signaled a shift to a secondary orality for the dominant U.S. culture (McLuhan [1964] 1994; Ong 1988) and patterns of interaction online further signal a shift back to the oral (December 1993; Ferris and Wilder 2006; Fowler 1994; Harnad 1991; Rheingold 1993). In approaching black digital practice without a deficit lens, attention shifts to possibilities for black users of digital technology in articulating resistance in multiple forms.

Because many African American communities have relied upon nonpolitical spaces for political discourse historically, scholars might expect the formation of alternative publics online to foster this dialogue. Although recent work on black digital culture has focused largely on Twitter, I argue the features and resiliency of blogging as a platform warrants further attention. Past literature has focused on black political blogs (Pole 2010) and the formation of black political ideology (Harris-Lacewell 2004) assuming that an overt political agenda is a requirement for politically meaningful discourse. This assumption runs counter to our knowledge of how African American political communication has historically occurred in covert ways that keep this discourse hidden from the dominant group.

In this analysis that follows, I argue that blogging, as a platform most closely replicates the kind of oral cultural exchange central to the black community in the United States. Black Americans in the nine blogging communities in this study capitalize on this skill set to use their platforms in the creation of alternate publics that use covert methods to interrogate issues politically critical to the resistance of oppression. Not meant to be a survey of the black blogosphere writ large, this analysis provides insight into how bloggers may navigate the bounds of their medium to do important cultural and political work. Andre Brock's (2016) "Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis" as an approach offers a "holistic analysis of the interactions between technology, cultural ideology, and technology practice" guided by a conceptual framework. I rely upon Catherine Squires' vocabulary of counterpublic, enclaves, and satellites as the

critical cultural framework that guides me. Bloggers' use of seemingly nonpolitical discourse in the blogosphere allows us to broaden our future examinations of how marginalized groups organize into alternate publics online.

Rethinking the Public Sphere

When marginalized groups are excluded from public debate and political power, their individual and collective struggle for power on a personal level serve as resistance to a larger superstructure. Feminist scholars have long argued for the incorporation of the personal as a form of political discourse (Jones 1949; Mills 1967). The intersection between "public" and "private" spheres can create a new space for civic engagement (Papacharissi 2010). Patricia Hill Collins (2000, 226) explains, racism has created a separate communal structure for African Americans where a culture of resistance may exist apart from the dominant structure. Conversations that may appear apolitical involving relationships, popular culture, and work raise collective awareness and form community and create the potential for direct political action and acts of personal and community resistance. Resistance in public discourse includes "actions that not only reject subordination but do so by challenging the ideologies that support that subordination" (Weitz 2001, 670). Challenging these ideologies can occur outside the view of the dominant group.

Marginalized populations have created spaces separate from the singular public sphere, but scholars have failed to agree upon what constitutes a counterpublic and whether multiple counterpublics exist within each marginalized community. As Fraser (1990, 61) explains, "Virtually from the beginning, counterpublics contested the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, elaborating alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of public speech." She calls these publics "subaltern counterpublics" that serve the dual purpose of constituting places of retreat for marginalized communities and spaces for resistance to be nurtured. Rather than considering a singular counterpublic, or assuming homogeneity within marginalized communities, Catherine Squires (2002) asserts the need for a reconceptualization of the counterpublic. Squires asserts that the particular historical, socioeconomic, and political conditions of marginalized groups lead them to form enclaves, counterpublics, and satellites. Enclaves hide counterhegemonic ideas from the dominant group for protection and survival. Within an enclave, lively debate exists for the community but does not move beyond that space. Alternately, counterpublics seek to engage with other publics and may foster community actions, such as protests and boycotts. Finally, satellites find spaces separate from the dominant group but engage with other publics. The separation is not for purposes of physical protection, but to keep their cultural identity intact. Squires (2002, 457) asserts that the development of satellites, counterpublics, and enclaves are responses to "dominant social pressures, legal restrictions and other challenges from dominant publics and the state."

Past studies, such as those of Eckert and Chadha (2013) and S. J. Jackson and Welles (2016), position blogs as effectual counterpublics for marginalized communities responding to misrepresentation in the mainstream media and utilizing new

discursive strategies. Likewise, Kuo (2016), Graham and Smith (2016), and S. J. Jackson and Welles (2016) argue that African Americans' use of social media constitutes an online counterpublic. I argue that examining the African American blogosphere as a counterpublic erases the important work of enclaved communities and satellite publics. In disrupting the notion of a singular online counterpublic as the aim of black social media users, I attempt to reorient our consideration of other important black discourse online. To understand the complexity of the relationship between the public and the political, we should explore participation outside of traditional political institutions (Dahlgren 2013). This reorientation shifts our focus of this study to lifestyle and entertainment blogs wherein blackness is centralized and blogging communities address issues of importance within the affordances and constraints of the platform.

Alternate Publics in the Blogosphere

The dichotomy between public and private becomes muddy in online spaces. As Papacharissi (2010, 162) asserts,

> The cultural logic of capitalist production, together with the properties of electronic media, augmented by networked and converged technologies, rearrange the personal-to-political, and private-to-public, continuums. Activities may possess public and private essence, imperatives may be personal and political, communication may be intimate and mediated, and audiences may be individual or multiplied.

Squires' vocabulary provides a means to challenge the idea that formation of a counterpublic is the only productive means of African online engagement. Given the historical use of alternate publics by African Americans and the complexity that online discourse like blogging brings to the public–private dichotomy, this study seeks to explore the ways blogs, which are open to the public, create spaces that are understood and used as private by their community of followers.

Unlike Twitter or Instagram where users are connected via hashtag or by following certain accounts, blogs replicate the environment of the traditional offline alternate publics in several ways (Elsadda 2010; Jurkiewicz 2011; Lynch 2007). The spaces, while open to public view, create the illusion of privacy for the participants. They that exist apart from the public sphere yet foster exchange and debate for participants. Blogs, as used by African American blogging communities, build upon the enduring rhetoric of black oral culture and use black cultural mainstays to bound entry and participation in these spaces (Steele 2016). Hookway (2008, 140) defines blogs as "a series of frequently updated, reverse chronological ordered posts on a common webpage . . . characterized by instant text/graphic publishing, an archiving system . . . and a feedback mechanism in which readers can 'comment' on specific posts." Many scholars have heralded blogs for possibilities to voice political concerns (Scott 2007; Tremayne 2007), mobilize movements, and change the discourse in the mainstream media (Walker Rettberg 2008). More examples of online blogging communities that

are both race- and interest-based are emerging (Brock, Kvasny and Hales 2010; Igwe 2008; Kvasny, Payton and Hales 2009; Pole 2010). There are boundaries that exist for participation given the affordances of any platform. Blogs offer possibilities in expanding our understanding of political discourse and removing physical boundaries to the formation of alternate publics.

Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) of Blogs

CTDA works from the premise that populations other than the dominant group do not fundamentally lack technological capabilities, even though they have frequently been excluded from the literature (Brock 2009). CTDA provides an analysis of both the content of the blog posts using Squires' alternate publics as a critical framework and analysis how the affordances of blogging contribute to the content and discourse present within (Brock 2016; Sweeney and Brock 2014). Although similar to critical discourse analysis, Andre Brock's (2016, 1087) "Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis" adds the examination of "structural analysis of an artifact with a discourse analysis of the cultural means through which users interpolate themselves within relations to the artifact." In this case, CTDA allows for analysis of the structure of blogs created by African Americans users and experiences and interactions on the site while considering the culture of this community.

To complete a deep reading, I use a small sample of nine blogs from December 2013 to April 2014.[2] Specifically, I draw connections between the thematic content of black lifestyle and entertainment blogs, the political work of alternative publics, and technoculture. Squires' conceptual framework of counterpublics, enclaves, and satellites and utilizing CTDA allows me to consider how blogging as a means of online communication has specific possibilities and constraints in the formations of alternate publics. In the analysis that follows, I discuss these possibilities and constraints within the discourse of the blogging communities.

Blogging While Bou(r)gie or Bougie: Social Class and Alternate Publics Online

Long-form blogging, unlike microblogging, requires more sustained time, editing, and maintenance, making it a livelier activity for those with certain professions and lifestyles that afford privacy and free time. The bloggers in this study both directly and indirectly discuss their identification with the middle class. Some articulate an anxiety about their place within a privileged social class, while others fully embrace the idea of consumer capitalism. The first articulation of this tension is in the description of the term "bou(r)gie" in multiple blogging communities.

The term "bou(r)gie," among African Americans, has multiple interconnected meanings that indicate the intersection between race and class. Rather than simply describing one's economic condition, bourgie is commonly used as a signifier that

details the ways certain African Americans distance themselves from others by taste, class access, and opportunity. The separation is best demonstrated through connection to material acquisition and place within a social structure not usually afforded to others of their race. The term more recently has strayed from this connotation to one that recognizes those who were not born with class privilege but experience this separation from the community through the acquisition of education and some wealth. They now tow the line between community centeredness and assimilation to middle-class whiteness.

Rather than modeling the values and traits of the dominant group, "bougie" black people occupy a space with its own rhetoric, values, and cultural practices and challenges. Damon Young (2014), blogging for *Very Smart Brothas* on March 14, 2014, explains the distinction between "bourgie" and "bougie" this way:

> While the difference in spelling is minor, the R-inclusive "Bourgie" are a completely different type of Black people than the ones I'm talking about. "Bourgie" describes a certain upper-middle to lower-upper class lifestyle more dependent on and defined by activities, ancestry, and legacy than actual income . . .

> To an outsider, many of these shared traits may seem superficial. And, considering the fact that most Bougie Black People (BBP) don't exactly come from legacies of wealth, socially irresponsible. But, closer inspection reveals that they're largely rooted in a race conscious pragmatism that allows them to be upwardly mobile while still staying connected to "regular" Black folks.

This explanation shows the tensions in how bloggers and their communities discuss class. Class identification is a negotiated process accomplished by interaction with those affected by that identity. When bloggers identify with the term "bougie," they create a purposeful contrast with the dominant group's conception of their social and economic class status and how it interacts with their racial identity. To negotiate upon this identity, bloggers and communities test arguments, demand self-determination (Squires 2002, 460), and appreciate the complexity of how being a "bougie" black person necessitates increased interaction with the state and increased interpublic communication. The writers of *PostBourgie* (Demby 2008), in their explanation of the term explain,

> As young adults—news junkies, hip-hop heads, smart-asses and autodidacts—we were suddenly smack dab in the middle class, wielding much of the same privilege we'd always been distant from and criticized. We were skeptical toward the politics of respectability. And yet! We were now surrounded by and socializing with selfcongratulating Negroes who patted each other on the back because they were about something and self-congratulating white folks who patted themselves on the back because they had black friends. (But damn it if we ain't love the sushi!)

There is a tension between the necessity of interaction with the dominant group and the desire to retain an identity separate from the dominant American culture. This

interrogation of class identity involves interaction with the larger economic system and the larger mainstream public sphere. So, bloggers write about this interaction and strategize by fostering resistance to laws, policies, and social practices within enclaves and satellite communities.

Representation in the Mainstream but Resistance Online

When discussing black culture, the discourse of bloggers and their readers mirrors that of satellite communities that affirm African American culture. Satellite publics desire separation from the larger public to maintain group identity. They only enter into discussion with the larger public when there is a convergence of interests (Squires 2002). The satellite community, while having little connection to a mainstream public sphere, is an important political tool for the black community.

Rather than attempting to promote the assimilation of African Americans into the mainstream, bloggers and their readers use the blogs to build centripetally and reaffirm the right of people of African descent to produce art that speaks to and for them. An example of this affirmation emerges in an April 3, 2014, post on *Very Smart Brothas* titled "On Being Black and Having It Both Ways" where blogger Shamira Ibrahim discusses a *Saturday Night Live* sketch featuring two black cast members called "Black Jeopardy." The sketch used black rhetorical strategies, mocked elements of the community, and relied on signifying practices. Jeopardy style questions were used to point out that a white person's etic knowledge of the community is far different than the emic knowledge held by in-group members. Some critiqued the sketch for operating in view of the dominant group but for the benefit of a black audience. The blogger responds to this critique by explaining,

> I've never been explicitly concerned about how white people receive black content once it's been given the space for a large audience. While I understand other peoples valid concerns, I don't think putting content out removes the social responsibility of white people to see their privilege and know when they are able to jump in and when they should just step back and listen. (Ibrahim 2014)

In this assertion, the blogger claims that black art is created for black people. Expression of one's culture as a member of a marginalized community should not force an explanation or justification to the dominant group. The blogger goes on,

> In my opinion, desiring a space to depict the varying versions of the black experience is disserviced if we feel required to dilute the message to accommodate for the ignorant and the hopeless. The second we feel dictated by people who are already uninterested in our narratives is when we cede our power before mobilizing it.

The sketch referenced above is not meant to foster dialogue between African Americans and whites, neither should African Americans expect that those outside the culture will understand. Privilege dictates that when those of the dominant group

create art and entertainment, there is no burden of representation (Hall 1981). Instead, those who are a part of the dominant group have access to a plethora of representations in popular culture. The burden is not on the artist to create art that shifts the discourse nor does the work of creating equity in an industry based on inequality. The blogger admonishes the community not to hold black art to this standard. The argument about black art (in the *Saturday Night Live* sketch) parallels the discourse found on the blog *Very Smart Brothas*. The bloggers are operating within a medium that is accessible to anyone, yet the content is created specifically for a black audience. Black art and media, in this discussion, exists for the maintenance of group identity and the strengthening of institutions. The blog then functions as a satellite public, fostering protected space to do this work.

Another part of the preservation of identity in a satellite public is the critique and self-policing of institutions that are not to the benefit of that community. We see an example of this self-policing in Panama Jackson's analysis of the representation of black women on television. Specifically, he is concerned about the character Mary Jane on the BET series "*Being Mary Jane*" (2013-2017). Panama Jackson (2014b) of *Very Smart Brothas* writes, "Are Black women that starved for representation in the face of the "reality" shows out there that these shows which all seem to include Black women chasing married and unavailable men . . ." In this January 9, 2014, post, Jackson problematizes the idea that black women should celebrate any representation without careful attention to the ramifications.

The first comment on the article addresses the author directly and repositions the characters as more than participants in infidelity. "CherieAnn" writes,

> We know she's more than just a side-piece- she's a daughter of a sick woman, the breadwinner of her entire family, a career woman, etc. So to just say she's a side-piece, isn't exactly fair . . . She's human. She's flawed. Also, we are more trusting of the shows because their creators are Black women- that's a biggie.

In this comment, CherieAnn complicates the initial reading of Mary Jane, arguing that her complexity be recognized, and the writing respected as a product of the black imagination. Created by Mara Brock Akil, and starring Gabrielle Union, "*Being Mary Jane*" chronicles the life of Mary Jane Paul, a black journalist in Atlanta who, in the first season of the show, has a relationship with a married man. The commenters push back against Panama's dismissal of this character as problematic by asserting that the people most equipped to tell the stories of marginalized communities are the people of those communities.

In the discourse surrounding black representations in mainstream media, the blog again takes on the functions of a satellite public. Barton (2005, 187) writes, "Blogs suffer from the same problem; though users are free to add comments, they are not allowed to modify an author's posts." Instead of seeing this as a deficiency of the platform, *Very Smart Brothas* uses this as a strength, creating a dialogue with readers and using the comment section to respond directly to readers' questions and critiques. Although desiring representation in the mainstream media, the community requires a

separate space to interrogate these representations and reflect upon their desirability, influence, and importance within black culture. These blogs are publically accessible yet function as space which is constructed by and for African Americans.

Squires' conceptualization of the satellite community is one that does not hide from the dominant group yet still avoids integration. This is achieved in blogging communities through the reliance on cultural mainstays that are separate from dominant popular culture. Without trending hashtags or "blacktags" (Sharma 2013) to alert the dominant group of their presence, blogs can interrogate black culture and art without engaging with the dominant group. Blogging as a platform can foster such a dialogue. But as Papacharissi (2009, 2) reminds us, "it is not the nature of technologies themselves, but rather, the discourse that surrounds them, that guides how these technologies are appropriated by a society."

In my analysis, *Very Smart Brothas* and the other blogs shifted goals over time based on the interrogation of particular political issues. Therefore, they also moved between the functions of a satellite and enclaved community. In the following section, I consider the use of enclaved discourse to explore digital black feminist thought.

Digital Black Feminism in Enclaved Spaces

Denied a space in public discourse, African American communities form enclaves to create "discursive strategies" and "gather oppositional resources" (Squires 2002). Discourse within these communities is intentionally hidden from the dominant group and is dedicated to black interests and needs. Within the discussion of black feminism, the blogs I studied reflect the form of enclaved communities to serve as safe spaces for those denied access to the dominant public sphere. The affordances of blogs provide a space for complicating some of the central ideas of black feminist discourse.

Digital black feminism expressed by bloggers at times engaged in discourse that challenged the fairness of a capitalist system, yet bloggers and commenters appeared willing to work within this system and tacitly accept it as inevitable. Neither *TheYBF* nor *NecoleBitchie* explicitly used the term feminism. Although first reluctant to embrace the term "feminist," Beyoncé displayed her new-found embrace of the identity with her self-titled album released on December 13, 2014. Even after her embrace of the term, some bloggers' focus remained on her business savvy. Bloggers in my sample admired her ability to control her fate within the music business, and build wealth without appearing to rely upon her husband, her father, or corporate sponsors. In a post from December 21, 2013, a staff writer on *NecoleBitchie* posted about Beyoncé's surprise trip to Walmart writing:

> Target must not know 'bout Bey! She can get another you in a minute! Now, we all know that Beyoncé used to love herself some Target but after the retailer vowed not to carry the queen's latest album since she let iTunes sell it exclusively for a week, she decided to throw major shade yesterday by high-tailing it right on into Walmart! What makes all of this even funnier, is that despite Target's decision to not carry her album in their stores, she's selling the new LP in 7000 Starbucks across the country, and guess what??

Starbucks is located in most Targets! #BowDown

The post made no comment on Beyoncé's embrace of capitalism and tacit support of Walmart, a retailer frequently critiqued by progressives for unequal pay for women and reduced benefits for employees (Cascio 2006). The blogs were a mode of entrepreneurial enterprise for many of the bloggers in the sample. The spaces they have created provide financial gain for themselves and their families. Therefore, bloggers' attachment to consumer capitalism is not surprising. Posts often situated success within a capitalist system as important, while offering a measured critique of the system that disproportionately harmed the marginalized communities to which they belong.

An example of the heterogeneity of the blogs in this study, the conversation about Beyoncé as a feminist thrives in other blogging communities where black women had space and power to negotiate a new conception of black feminism. On December 17, 2013, Demetria Lucas D'Oyley of *A Belle in Brooklyn* posts "6 Thing I Care About on "Beyoncé" more Than Her Feminism" both on her blog and *The Root.* In this post, she dismissed the idea that one can determine if Beyoncé is a feminist based solely on an album release. She asserts that the debate is not necessary or interesting. Lucas's list highlights the individual agency over labeling the singer as feminist, patriarchal, or progressive.

Digital black feminism constructed in the enclaved discourse of blogs is concerned with the individual agency over collective implications. The bloggers and commenters in this sample are less concerned with a debate regarding feminism, or the ability to label artists or entertainers as feminist. They do not feel pressured to speak on behalf of or defend other women/feminists within enclaved discourse as there is an understanding that the views presented are not intended to be consumed by the dominant group. Instead, this form of black feminism places the onus on the individual to determine and voice their politics, and their label. Beyoncé's embrace of capitalism continues to be a contentious debate within the black blogosphere; however, the embrace of her music, her claims to feminism, and her espousal of a capitalist ideology permeate black feminist dialogue online. Bloggers and blogging communities do not engage with Beyoncé as a figure of hegemonic American popular culture. Instead, Beyoncé is an archetype for the complicated relationships bloggers themselves have with black feminism. Given the affordances of blogging as a platform, many bloggers would draw parallels of Beyoncé's brand of black feminism and their own. Outside of this space, co-option of Beyoncé and interaction with fandom hinder this level of complexity in the discussion of Beyoncé's feminism.

Blogging as a medium of social engagement for African Americans has the possibility to break with the often-gendered spaces of black alternative publics, like the barber or beauty shop, to address gender norms and heteronormativity. For example, a December 4, 2013, post on *Very Smart Brothas*, written by Panama Jackson is titled "7 Reasons Why Men Should Watch *Scandal* According to an Actual Man." While not free of heteronormative language and assumptions, the post, and others like it, challenges readers to recognize patriarchy as oppressive to men and women. Black men

are involved in this discourse, not merely as allies for women, but as a means to free themselves from the oppressive forces of patriarchy. Engaged in dialogue together about entertainment, relationships and lifestyle blogs demonstrate a reimagined black feminist enclaved discourse to which men can contribute.

Black and other intersectional feminisms, unlike white feminism, centralizes intersections of race, class, and sexuality (hooks 1981; Ortega 2006). Exclusion from traditional white feminism has led to the parallel development of black feminist thought and womanist theory and praxis. Perhaps, incongruity with traditional black feminism has resulted in the formation of digital black feminism in an enclave online. As an enclave public denied entry to both traditional feminism and traditional black feminism, digital black feminism operates without access to the political resources of either group. Instead digital black feminists creatively reposition the blogosphere as a space to foster resistance and create strategies for the future. The conversation places the bloggers as central facilitators constructing arguments yet requires comments and links others to original content to enable dialogue. Collins (1998) explains that present strategies of activism for black women within the current system of segregation and surveillance may not be adequate to meet their needs as independent political actors. She explains black feminists as holding a "confined yet visible location" (Collins 1998, 35). It is in this circumstance that the blog's function as an enclaved community is most pressing. Black women and men as proprietors of blogs and facilitators of this conversation can refine and debate a modern conception of black feminism outside of academia or traditional journalism yet must contend with the realities of A-list blogging which places additional economic demands on bloggers and readers.

Centralizing Black Discourse in Online Research

The Internet does not create a unique experience regarding community interaction. Instead, like other communication technologies, the Internet has the potential to be used by marginalized communities to challenge, extend, and refashion already existent resistant communication practices. This potential is mitigated by issues of access, competence, outside control, and the affordances of the platform. In the case of African Americans, platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and blogs are each used in ways that mirror offline dialogue within the community. Blogs afford a measure of autonomy in the creation and facilitation of space for online community. Black Twitter, while a noteworthy online phenomenon, is an outgrowth of Twitter. Therefore, discourse is limited by the same restraints as the larger platform. Although Facebook allows for the creation of Groups pages, wherein membership can be limited, the visual dimensions of the page are restricted by the architectural features of the platform. Users also cannot manipulate the algorithm which determine how content is distributed on the site. Bloggers, given different levels of technical skill and motivations for blogging, can create sites wherein they are responsible for managing the visual elements, moderating and facilitating dialogue, determining the revenue structure (if any), and enabling engagement and participation.

By utilizing different rhetorical strategies, bloggers and their communities create spaces that serve different purposes for the African American community, including preservation of culture, public resistance, and strengthening of group institutions. Although frequently regarded as "diary-like" in structure (Papacharissi 2004), blogs in this study also demonstrate the potential of communal discourse that more closely mimics a barber or beauty shop than an individual's journal. The discourse is personal, political, private, and communal simultaneously, complicating the dichotomies used to discuss new media engagement. Whether attempting to foster dialogue, reacting to exclusion from the mainstream, or crafting strategies for inclusion in the public sphere, blogs in this sample are making the everyday political. Blogging allows for the public display of discord and complex and fluid political positions within the African American community. The affordances of the platform also create complicated relationships to capitalism, open enclaved communities to intrusion, and are most accessible to those with the time and financial security necessary to do the long form writing required to maintain a successful blog. Studying blogs that are not overtly political in their orientation reminds researchers that excluding blogs that are not politically oriented does not exclude politically consequential dialogue.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Notes

1. I make a distinction between the terms *black* and *African American*. "African American" refers specifically to a population within the United States with African ancestry who trace their ancestry through the American slave trade. Although descendants may have little direct connection with the continent of Africa, African American culture combines elements of dominant U.S. culture with many cultural traditions from African ancestors to create a cultural identity shared by other African Americans. The classification "black" is a racial marker given, based on an assumed linkage, to those who are a part of the African Diaspora regardless of their citizenship and cultural connection to the United States or transatlantic slave trade. "Black," when used in this study refers to the race of an individual or group based on classification with the system of racial hierarchy. "Black" may be used by bloggers and commenters to refer to themselves or to their community. When this is the case, the term may appear differently in context than the above distinction indicates.

2. I identify blogs for study using The Root and The Black Weblog Awards as a source. Each blog met four criteria for inclusion: black or African American authored, be oriented toward the African American and black community, have an active comments section available for readers and the ability to comment using either one's name or a created avatar, and not espouse a political agenda. The blogs chosen for study were all identified by The Root and Black Weblog Awards as the "best" in their category or as "bloggers you should know" in 2013/2014.

Blog	Author/creator	Content
Very Smart Brothas	Damon Young/Panama Jackson	Lifestyle/humor
A Belle in Brooklyn	Demetria Lucas	Lifestyle/Relationships
Until I get Married	Jozen Cummings	Relationships
Black Girl Long Hair	Leila Noelliste	Lifestyle
NecoleBitchie	Necole Kane (Bitchie)	Entertainment/Celebrity
The Young Black and Fabulous	Natasha Eubanks	Entertainment/Celebrity
AfroBella	Patrice Yursik	Fashion
PostBourgie	Gene Demby	News/Opinion
The Field Negro	Wayne Bennett	News/Opinion

Posted content was archived, including pictures, posts, and content links provided in the text. A total of 1670 posts were archived and analyzed. Comments in addition to the blogger posted content were archived and analyzed for common themes that emerge. I archived a total of 36,271 comments on April 4 for all contents posted between December 4, 2013, and April 4, 2014.

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