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#SayHerName: Negotiating Issues of Victimhood, Violence, and Visibility

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#SayHerName: Negotiating Issues of Victimhood, Violence, and Visibility

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B.A., Quinnipiac University, 2013

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APPROVAL PAGE

Master of Arts Thesis

#SayHerName: Negotiating Issues of Victimhood, Violence, and Visibility

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2017

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God, though it is not said enough, I thank you for all you have done in my life, and for all that you are planning to do, for lighting the way and steering me in the way of my heart. I also thank you for putting so many people in my life who have been there to support and guide me along the way; I know they are a manifestation of your love and light.

To my mother Donna Jackson, and my father Donald Jackson- for your endless sacrifices, dedication, love and support I thank you, and love you with all of my heart. To my dear friends and soul sisters Jess, Tia, Krystal, and Brianna- your sisterhood and support carried me through, and I thank you for all that you do for me.

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Dedication

To Nasir, Cassandra, and Nadya,

*Always remember to walk by faith, and not by sight. While I never imagined I would get here,
God had a plan for me, as he has a plan for you. I love you.*

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Introduction

In 2015, the #SayHerName vigil and corresponding Twitter hashtag were launched in an effort to call attention to violence against black cis- and trans-women in the U.S. and to document stories of black women who have been killed by police, thus shining a spotlight on police brutality experienced disproportionately by women of color (AAPF 2015). Also in 2015, almost two dozen transgender women of color were killed, and a former police officer stood trial for raping thirteen black women while on duty. While these stories of brutality had the perfect elements to become national stories, the deaths of the transgender women of color did not make it to national network or cable news and the national newspaper and online news media coverage of the thirteen women from Oklahoma City were limited (Williams 2016). These cases are part of a larger societal issue. As Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Harris and a number of intersectional scholars argue, African American women are more than white women with color. African American men and women both are affected by racism, but in gender-specific ways.

Negative stereotypes applied to African American women have been fundamental to black women's oppression (Collins 1990). The social construction of black womanhood is inextricably tied to the lack of visibility, resources, and media attention that black cisgender and transgender women have received as crime victims. Blacks are often marginalized via "controlling images" or cultural stereotypes about black sexuality; with Black women being stereotyped as "Jezebels" who cannot be raped due to their sexual promiscuity and accessibility and other pejorative tropes, (Collins 1990, 2004) whereas White women are understood as "ideal victims" (Madriz 1997). This is particularly problematic, as Black women are outnumbered by white women by a five to one ratio in the United States, yet they are killed by police in nearly the

same numbers (AAPF 2015). Paradoxically, while Black women experience disproportionate rates of violence in comparison to White women, Black women victims are consistently ignored or disbelieved (Benedict 1993; Meyers 1997), while Black men are positioned as criminals (Entman and Rojecki 2000), and White women are considered “newsworthy” victims (Gilchrist 2010; Madriz 1997).

Prior research on media portrayals of race and gender have given significant attention to traditional media formats such as magazines and television (Collins 1990, 2004; Lykke 2015). While other research has explored how unilateral traditional media formats reify dominant and hegemonic White and male interests, this research considers how social media platforms, and the case of #SayHerName may add to the repertoire of understandings of black femininity—going beyond traditional controlling representations, and in doing so, may provide platforms for counter-hegemonic narratives to be generated. Accordingly, I ask the following question: what is the relationship between #SayHerName’s discourse and dominant ideologies about black femininity? Under this broader question, I seek to examine more specific questions such as (a) if the discourse challenges/reproduces stereotypes that underpin controlling images of black women? And also (b) how do conversations of victimization, violence and visibility (re)construct notions of black femininity. Most existing studies centered on black women have examined a variety of pervasive tropes of black women in the media (Abdullah 1998; Emerson 2002; Collins 1990; Thomas, Whitherspoon, and Speight 2004; West 1995), however, little attention has been given to representations of black women vis-à-vis social media platforms such as Twitter. In the current investigation, I conduct a content analysis to compare the way that black femininity is discursively constructed through #SayHerName with dominant controlling images of black women. In comparing these complicated and often contradictory representations, this thesis

provides an overview of how social media platforms provide a space to challenge racist, sexist and heteronormative media accounts which often deny black women's experience of victimhood, violence, and (in)visibility.

This research provides an examination of discourse generated by and surrounding the #SayHerName hashtag, drawing on a symbolic interactionist approach with respect to constructions of black femininity. Examining this issue helps us to better understand how notions of black femininity are grounded in constructs of race, gender and other socially constructed dimensions which intertwine in contextually and historically specific ways. Additionally, it is important to understand how racialized and gendered stereotypes underpin these notions and how media sources play an integral role in disseminating and reproducing understandings of black womanhood through often restricted and monolithic representations. This study will build on previous work by exploring how and if social media can be used to generate counterhegemonic narratives of black femininity.

Accordingly, my research is situated between the intersection of two main bodies of literature: black feminist studies and media studies centered on representation. I will divide the following discussion into three parts: First, I will provide an overview of studies that have examined black femininity; second, I will examine studies which have explored controlling images of black women, and third; I will examine literature which has investigated racialized and gendered media representations.

Constructing Black Femininity

In order to understand constructions of black femininity, it is first necessary to appreciate the way in which gender and femininity are performed among black women under the constraints of hegemonic white femininity (Collins 2004). According to Butler (1990) gender is the socially

constructed binary that defines “men” and “women” as two distinct classes of people. The discursive construction of gender assumes that there are certain bodies, behaviors, personality traits, and desires that neatly match up to one or the other category (Schippers 2006). This assumption results in hegemonic gender relations and heteronormativity which stigmatize non-conforming configurations of feminine characteristics, ensuring swift and severe social sanction for women who take on or enact masculinity (Schippers 2006). Adding race further complicates this picture. Normative ideals associated with white femininity produce a hegemonic constraint on the ways in which black women perform femininity which is racialized and gendered in ways that are paradoxical to the “norm.” While patriarchy is oppressive to all women, it is crucial to understand the ways in which racism intersects with the oppressive forces of patriarchy to exacerbate the marginalization of black women. Black women not only experience marginalization due to their gender, but also are oppressed due to the limitations of a hegemonic white standard of femininity which we are expected to operate according to. Some literature has examined the historical roots of gender performance among Black and white women. Historically, women were (and arguably still are) expected to cook, clean, and rear children. This type of gender performance became known as the cult of true womanhood (Welter 1966). Welter’s study examined the “cult of true [white] womanhood” and how it constructed oppressive standards for women. Welter looked at the antebellum decades of the nineteenth century, providing a historical analysis of what it meant to be a “true” woman. Welter found that according to this pervasive ideology, “true women” were supposed to possess four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness. Welter (1966:152) writes, “If anyone, male or female, dared to tamper with the complex of virtues that made up True Womanhood, he was damned immediately as the enemy of God, of civilization, and of the Republic. It was the

fearful obligation, a solemn responsibility, which the nineteenth-century American woman had - to uphold the pillars of the temple with her frail *white* hand.” I emphasize the word “white” because these standards at the time only took white women into consideration. This study offers important insights into the ways in which standards of femininity are constructed in ways that are oppressive and marginalize women. However, this study did not take into account how such standards are even more toxic for black women whose performance of gender historically and contemporarily conflict with such conceptualizations.

Unlike white women’s performance of the ideal femininity which was highly domestic, enslaved black women did “masculine” work right alongside their husbands and male partners (Smith 1985). Once the outside work was done, African women then performed duties that more resembled the roles of white women within the slave quarters. These tasks included cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing (Davis 1971). Thus, both Smith’s and Davis’ studies illuminate how performances of gender were largely shaped by the institution of slavery. Consequently, notions of black femininity and masculinity are paradoxical to notions of white femininity and masculinity. This, presents an issue, as black men and women are expected to conform to white gender norms, and the racialized differences in notions of masculinity and femininity are obscured by dominant “normative” white ideals.

Patricia Hill Collins (2004:41) argues:

Because racial normality has been defined in gender-specific terms, African American progress or lack thereof in achieving the gender norms attributed to Whites has long been used as a marker of racial progress. Stated differently, African Americans have been evaluated within the context of a sex role theory that by its very nature disadvantages Black people. Within a Western sex role ideology premised on ideas of strong men and

weak women, on active, virile masculinity and passive, dependent femininity, the seeming role reversal among African Americans has been used to stigmatize Black people.

Thus, black gender performances of masculinity and femininity exist in a constrained environment which make it difficult for black men and women to fully participate in the prescribed systems of patriarchy and ideal womanhood. While black femininity has been constrained by hegemonic and normative ideals, it has also been constrained by a number of pejorative tropes, or controlling images, that have been utilized to exercise domination over black women.

Controlling Images and Representation of Black Women

Patricia Hill Collins' concept of "controlling images" is foundational for understanding the relationship between racialized and gendered notions of black femininity and media representations. Hill Collins defines controlling images as imagery and symbols through which the dominant group exercises power over the subordinate group (2004:69). These images and symbols are embedded in and comprise the limited and often pejorative media representations which are used to exercise power over black women by constructing depictions and notions of black femininity. These images cumulatively combine to create a discourse which is comprised of a set of ideas and practices that when taken together, organize both the way a society defines certain truths about itself and the way it puts together social power (Collins 2004). Thus, controlling images have racialized and gendered ideological dimensions that work to organize social institutions (Collins 2004). For this reason, representations of African American women have increasingly become important sites of struggle. Collins highlights how controlling images are rooted in the maintenance of hegemonic power and serve to justify and legitimize the

continued marginalization of Black women. Further, controlling images of Black femininity contribute to, and in part comprise ideological justifications for racism and sexism (Collins 2004). Thus, controlling images provide a key theoretical concept for understanding notions of black femininity and how they come to be constructed and disseminated throughout society. In the following discussion I will provide an overview of various studies which have examined representations of black women, specifically analyzing studies that have explored tropes of black women in the media, news media, music videos, and hegemonic beauty standards.

Some literature has explored several tropes which have come to define common conceptualizations of black womanhood: The Mammy, The Jezebel, The Black Matriarch, The Welfare Queen/Mother, The Sapphire/Independent Black Woman, and the Black Lady (Abdullah 1998; Emerson 2002; Collins 2004; Thomas, Whitherspoon, and Speight 2004; West 1995). Out of this body of literature, some studies examine the historical roots of these tropes and the ways in which they are deeply embedded in racialized and sexist systems of oppression (Thomas, Whitherspoon, and Speight 2004; West 1995). These tropes originated in the 18th century during times of slavery and were used to justify the treatment of African American men and women (Abdullah 1998; Emerson 2002;). These studies highlight the ways in which controlling images of black women's sexuality was represented as deviant, and black women were cast as anti-feminine, thus black women's racial and sexual oppression was justified.

Additionally, these studies have examined the ways in which these tropes have been deployed via mass media technologies which have profoundly altered reliance on face-to-face interaction (Collins 2004). Thus, in the absence of lived experiences, media representations (especially from respected news sources) have often been interpreted as an authenticated version of reality. The meaning making capabilities of individuals then becomes dependent on exposure

to images and ideas which give them the tools to make sense of the world around them. Therefore what we see, and also just as importantly, what we do not see comes to have significant influence in the way that people understand the world. The ideological influence of the media can be seen in the absence of, as well as the contents of the messages that we receive, thus the recurrent themes and constructions of black femininity become heavily weighted.

Other studies have examined the racial and gendered representations of black women by analyzing hip-hop music videos (Delano Brown and Campbell 1986; Kaplan 1987; Lewis 1990; Peterson-Lewis and Chennault 1986; Aufderheide 1986; Dines and Humez 1995; Emerson 2002; Frith, Goodwin, and Grossberg 1993; Hurley 1994; Kaplan 1987; Vincent 1989; Vincent, Davis, and Boruszkowski 1987). These studies have highlighted the importance of analyzing hip-hop music videos which constitute cultural products that inform the everyday lives and make sense of many African Americans' participation with and within popular culture (Emerson 2002). Some of these studies have criticized music videos as being objectifying and exploitative due to their depictions of women of color which often represent Black women according to the controlling images discussed by Patricia Hill Collins (Aufderheide 1986; Dines and Humez 1995; Emerson 2002; Frith, Goodwin, and Grossberg 1993; Hurley 1994; Kaplan 1987; Vincent 1989; Vincent, Davis, and Boruszkowski 1987). These images heavily tend to lean towards portrayals of the hypersexualized "Jezebel," the asexual "mammy," the emasculating "matriarch," and the "welfare queen" or "baby mama" (Emerson 2002).

Other studies have examined the ways in which some representations counter the dominant ideological notions of Black womanhood by emphasizing the resistant counterhegemonic elements of the music video representation (Carby 1986; Davis 1998; Rose 1991). Consequently, the possibility that popular and expressive culture may exist as a site for

resistance and revision of these stereotypical representations emerges (Emerson 2002). Hazel Carby (1986) and Angela Davis (1998) explored artists such as “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Ethel Waters and the ways in which their music and stage performances asserted empowerment and sexual subjectivity. Both Carby’s and Davis’s asserts that female blues musical culture was grounded in a Black feminist consciousness. Additionally, Rose (1991, 1994) has connected Carby's (1986) work on the blues with the images and lyrics of female rappers and has proposed that rap music and hip-hop culture may actually enable Black women to assert independence, agency, and control of their sexuality instead of being entirely oppressive to women. Emerson’s (2002) study examines the cultural productions of black women through music videos and demonstrates how hegemonic and counterhegemonic themes often occur simultaneously and are interconnected, resulting in a complex, often contradictory and multifaceted representation of Black womanhood. While there has been a considerable amount of research which has investigated representations in popular culture sites such as music videos, there has also been important research which examines media formats such as television news, which tend to have a broader reach in terms of viewers.

Newspapers and television news have also been important sites for race and gender analyses. Lykke (2015) argues that media accounts of gender violence often ignore the interests of Blacks, particularly women. Some literature has examined the ways in which victimhood in the media is racialized and gendered (Benedict 1993; Gilchrist 2010; Jackson 2012; Lykke 2015). Black women are especially unlikely to appear in the news as victims of rape (Benedict 1993). In contrast, White women who are the victims of crimes are portrayed more compassionately and in greater detail by news media (Gilchrist 2010). When a Black female victim is the subject of news coverage, media coverage was minimal and ignored the importance

of racism and sexism to the crime (Jackson 2012). Other studies have highlighted the ways in which black women are often cast as perpetrators rather than victims (Jackson 2016; Wilcox 2005). Wilcox (2005) investigates how black women, who are culturally conceptualized as active, independent and sexually free, are more likely to be portrayed as dangerous and threatening, hence their “innocence” even as victims cannot be presumed, but rather must be established, to ensure they are deserving of state protection (Wilcox 2005: 518). Jackson (2016) studied how news media constructs victimhood and perpetrators through raced and gendered schemas. This study highlighted the way that newsmakers frame stories of racialized sexual violence in such a way as to take into consideration the way hierarchies of gender and race intersect, often violently in black women’s lives. These studies demonstrate how unilateral media formats such as newspapers and television news have been influential in constructing demeaning racialized and gendered representations that fail to connect with the complex realities of black womanhood.

In the following discussion, I provide a deeper examination of media studies centered on representation. Media portrayals of black women are often biased or distorted representations, yet in disseminating particular constructions of social problems, media sources reify these constructions (Best 2008; Lykke 2015; Ferrell and Websdale 1999). Thus, this body of literature provides in-depth and critical analyses of the relationship between the media and its role in producing, maintaining, and at times challenging hegemonic systems of power and control.

Media and Racialized and Gendered Representations

Media representations of socially marginalized groups are not only reflections of struggle over authority and resources. “The world of representation and of aesthetics is a site of struggle

where identities are created, where subjects are interpellated, where hegemonies can be challenged” (Kondo 1997: 4; Hughey and Hernandez 2012). Mastro (2015:1) explains:

Although a myriad of factors are known to contribute to racial/ethnic positions, for many, conceptualizations of race and ethnicity as well as interracial/interethnic dynamics are defined (at least in part) by the characterizations presented in the mass media—including both news and entertainment offerings. Indeed, media exposure has been determined to play a meaningful role in matters ranging from the construction and maintenance of racial/ethnic cognitions (and emotions) to expectations about intergroup relations to policy decision-making to perceptions of self and identity.

There are two dominant theories which have distinctly different views of the role of the media and the relationship between media images and social identities. In Grossberg, Wartella, Whitney, and Wise’s (2006) edited volume, they outline both theories in their assessment of the power of media and cultural representations. The first theory assumes an essentialist view, which assumes that every category exists naturally, and that the meaning of the category is always intrinsic to the category or group itself (Grossberg et. al 2006). According to this theory, representation is a matter of accuracy versus stereotyping. An alternate theory, which I will use to frame my work, is anti-essentialist, which completely rejects the assumptions of the first theory. It argues that categories are culturally constructed, and that there are no inherent defining traits or naturally occurring categories (Grossberg et. al 2006). Representation as cultural construction posits that identities are organized into relations of difference, and that these categories inherently create a hierarchy, with dominant categories defining the norm (Grossberg et. al 2006). The media plays a pivotal role in communicating the meanings of various categories and actively constructs the meanings and expectations that are associated with, or linked to

particular social groups and identities. While meanings can, and do change, it is important to recognize that articulations have a strong influence over the ways in which people think about themselves and behave towards others.

Media Representations, Race, and Gender

A number of studies have examined the importance of racial representation in media content (Engeln-Maddox 2006; Kapidzic 2015; Littlefield 2008; Mastro 2015; Milkie 1999). These studies suggest that the media have power to strategically define our picture of reality by controlling the images and the information that we receive (Engeln-Maddox 2006; Kapidzic 2015; Littlefield 2008; Milkie 1999). Mastro (2015) examines how American lifestyles are highly segregated by race and suggests that much of our interaction with diverse groups are likely to come in the form of “vicarious contact” via media. Further he argues that with such media-saturated lifestyles, the media’s potential to assume a profound role in shaping views on diverse groups is great.

Some research argues that selective reporting affects the ability of the populace to make objective, informed decisions because the information presented is biased and controlled (Murray, Schwartz, and Lichter 2001). The media is highly utilized as a tool by people to define and understand American society and the people who comprise it. Littlefield (2008) argues that due to the media’s power to shape and define, the media serve as a system of racialization in that they have historically been used to perpetuate the dominant culture’s perspective and create a public forum that defines and shapes ideas concerning race and ethnicity. Additionally, this same logic applies to conceptualizations of gender and sexuality, which are similarly shaped by the dominant culture’s perspective. Further, this study argues that the crucial issue with the negative images of African American women in today’s society is not merely the overabundance of

negative images but rather the absence of equal amounts of alternative, positive images.

Jackson's (2013) study examines the ways in which news coverage of people of color, women, and the poor frames members of these communities as deviant or weak, thus naturalizing their secondary social positions. This study demonstrates that the dominance of white, elite, male perspectives in the news has material implications for social and political policy and can reinforce the marginalization of anti-racist, feminist, class-conscious ways of knowing (Jackson 2016).

These studies have provided valuable insights through their critical analyzes of the media, highlighting the various problems and implications selective representations have on people of color. This body of literature has largely examined traditional news media sources such as television news and entertainment, newspapers and magazines. Traditional media such as music videos and television news and entertainment represent a one-to-many form of discourse, where a message is delivered by one source to a large audience (Careless 2015). However, there is a growing body of literature which has begun to explore representations that are produced via social media formats, and the ways that these representations may differ from those which are presented through traditional news sources.

Social Media Interrogations

While media messages certainly have contributed to the marginalization and distorted representation of black women, they can also be a site for empowerment and promoting anti-hegemonic narratives. Some studies have explored the ways that social media sites contribute to expanding and challenging representations that traditional mass media put forth (Brock 2012; Careless 2015; Florini 2014; Flores 2015; Florini 2014; Sharma 2013). For over 200 years, newspapers were the main source of news to the US public (Gonzales and Torres 2012).

However, social media sites have exploded as a sociocultural practice of communicating with others and sharing knowledge and people are now accessing these sites to obtain news and information. Social media in both form and content are defined as being “user created, user controlled, flexible, democratic, and both very transparent and very not so” (Careless 2015: 51). Flores’ (2015) study examined the ways in which Twitter has revolutionized the information flow of news. He argues that Twitter’s platform and popularity allow for the real-time propagation of information to large groups of users which has created and continually sustained an ideal environment for the dissemination of breaking news (Flores 2015). Further, he illuminates how user-generated content allows for messages to surface out of social media sites and into mainstream media; messages and media content shared on these sites have far surpassed the unilateral, one-way messages that were once extended by the traditional media outlets. Unlike traditional forms of media, social media sites experience a lack of gatekeeping, which consequently have potential effects on the validity of information that is created and shared as official (Flores 2015). Nonetheless, the lack of formal gatekeeping is beneficial, as it allows for users to utilize virtual platforms to create discussions that challenge what gets said, by whom, and how it may or may not contradict official media reports, as seen in the case of the arrest, detainment, and death of Sandra Bland.

Careless (2015) has investigated how social media allows for critical discourse to take place and challenges the mainstream and allows for individuals to produce their own images of themselves and their environment. Other research investigates the impact of social media sites and has focused on specific demographics and social events in an attempt to understand how social media sites are pragmatically used during certain social situations (Brock 2012; Flores 2015; Florini 2014; Sharma 2013). Brock (2012), Florini (2014) and Sharma (2013) explored

how users of specific demographics created and enacted cultural identifiers “online” in similar ways that cultural identifiers are used “offline.” Similarly, Thigo’s and Erstad’s (2013) research studied how user-generated creative control on social media sites operate to create a distinct space for users through a platform that is virtually constructed. Ems (2014) and Turner (2013) investigated how social media sites like Twitter played a significant role in certain social movements and how Twitter was used by demonstrators during the social movements. Their study focused on uncovering the ability Twitter gave demonstrators to organize and discuss the events among demonstrators through Twitter in real time.

I argue that while traditional media formats have produced controlling images that contribute to constructions of black femininity, #SayHerName’s discourse may challenge hegemonic conceptualizations of black womanhood through the utilization of social media platforms that allow for the generation of intersectional knowledge projects. The literature currently offers valuable insights into understanding the varied and complex ways in which notions of black femininity have been constructed through a number of controlling images which are rooted in racist and sexist historical socio-political processes of exclusion and marginalization. Additionally, the literature has demonstrated the power and influence of the media, as it constitutes a major social institution. These studies demonstrate the ways in which hegemonic ideologies become (re)produced through racialized and gendered depictions of black women and provide nuanced analyses of the way in which black womanhood becomes coded and is culturally understood, and the erasure and marginalization black women face consequently. While such studies offer important inroads to demystifying intersecting forces of oppression, there has been a gap in literature which examines the significance of social media platforms in providing a space to create intersectional knowledge projects which challenge these

dominant narratives. While it is of the utmost importance to understand how hegemony functions through discourse and representations, it is of equal importance and interest to investigate how and if intersectionality is able to be used as a heuristic and analytic tool to simultaneously deconstruct and reconstruct notions of black femininity and challenge intersecting forms of oppression in the lives of cis and trans black women's lives.

Data and Methods

Methodology

I conducted a content analysis in order to understand discourse generated by and surrounding #SayHerName in relation to existing debates about black femininity in the American context. I gathered a collection of news articles and tweets which offered me access to dominant ideologies, which in turn both reflect and inform constructions and understandings of black femininity. For the news articles, I performed a search using Google News (www.news.google.com). To identify these news sources, I first limited the sample by using the search term “#SayHerName” as a means to find coverage that specifically discussed the hashtag-movement. I then further restricted the sample by applying a precise time-frame. The start date was May 1, 2015 and the end date was November 30, 2016. The preliminary search for news articles discussing #SayHerName yielded 827 articles. After further restricting the search by removing any duplicate articles from the search by using the “hide duplicates” feature, the final number of articles I analyzed was reduced (N=355). The articles not only included mainstream online news sources such as the *Huffington Post*, *NBC News*, *The Washington Post*, *Ebony News*, *Teen Vogue*, and *The Chicago Tribune* but also a diverse range of niche websites such as *Hello Beautiful*, *Hip Hollywood*, and *Colorlines*. I employed the Google News articles search tool as it allowed me to obtain a high variation of news sources across the nation, which allowed for a

more representative analysis of the discussion and framing of the #SayHerName hashtag. Moreover, utilizing Google News articles also allows for the examination of a broad spectrum of news sources, allowing for the inclusion of less popular (and arguably marginalized) news sources. #SayHerName has generated a significant amount of dialogue about topics pertaining to black women, thus, utilizing Google News allows for an analysis of voices which typically may not be represented in major newspapers.¹

For the Twitter data, I created a collection of tweets via the Google Sheets Add-on “Twitter Archiver” (<https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/Twitter-archiver/pkanpfekacaojdnfcbjadedbgbbphi?hl=en>). This spreadsheet automatically archived all tweets that contained #SayHerName. While #SayHerName was initially launched in May of 2015, Twitter search restrictions prevented me from accessing historical information past a week’s time, thus I was unable to collect tweets from when the movement was first launched. The tweets comprising this data set were collected from May 28, 2016 to November 31, 2016. This time period resulted in a large population of tweets (N=41,467). Based on a confidence level of 99% and a confidence interval of 1%, I generated a randomly-constructed sample (n=11,876) from the original population (Babbie 2004). When the population of tweets (N=41,467) is divided by the sample size (n=11,876) there is a sampling interval of 3.491 which was rounded up to 4 (with a sampling ratio of 0.286).

For the development of themes and subthemes, and then later the formal coding process, I utilized NVIVO software. This development of themes unfolded in three stages. For the first

¹ I initially attempted to gather my news articles from academic search engines such as pro-quest and lexis nexus, however they provided limited results. Google News is a computer-generated news site that aggregates headlines from news sources worldwide. When I performed the search on Google News, I was able to enter keywords and limit my search criteria by date and specifically to news sources, which resulted in a final population of 355 results returned after an initial yield of 827.

stage, I began to acquaint myself with the data via the search for “sensitizing concepts” (Blumer 1954), which is distinguished from already formalized or “definitive concepts”:

A definitive concept refers precisely to what is common to a class of objects, by the aid of a clear definition in terms of attributes or fixed bench marks A sensitizing concept lacks such specification of attributes or bench marks and consequently it does not enable the user to move directly to the instance and its relevant content. Instead, it gives the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances. Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look. (Blumer 1954:7)

This initial search of both the data and literature was a starting point that helped me become attentive to the important features of what Kathy Charmaz (2003:259) calls “... those background ideas that inform the overall research problem [the] ways of seeing, organizing, and understanding experience . . . sensitizing concepts may deepen perception, they provide starting points for building analysis, not ending points for evading it.”

This initial exploration assisted me in my second stage, which was to construct initial operationalizations for controlling images of black femininity. I drew on the following definitions, or theoretically-informed possibilities, to further refine and better operationalize my themes when deductively searching through the data. Hill Collins defines controlling images as imagery and symbols through which the dominant group exercises power over the subordinate group (2004:69), which informed the selection of the four tropes which I selected for the deductive process. These tropes or images have come to symbolically represent black femininity and are embedded in and comprise the very limited and often pejorative media representations that are dominant in major media depictions of black women. Four controlling images are

outlined by the literature: The Mammy, The Jezebel, The Sapphire, and the Matriarch (cf. Abdullah 1998; Emerson 2002; Collins 2004; Thomas, Whitherspoon, and Speight 2004; West 1995]).

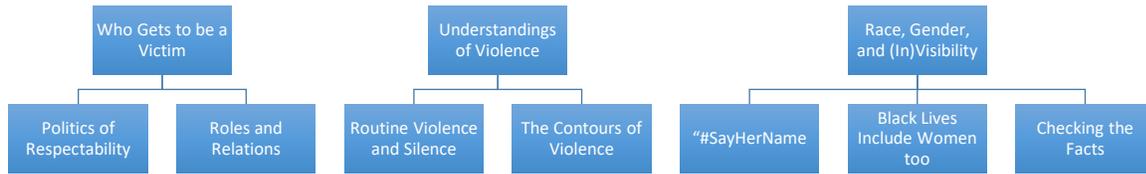
The first of these stereotypes uses imagery of a fat, smiling, happy black woman who is known as the mammy. This stereotype functioned to justify the cruelties of slavery, generating conceptions of black women who were happy, loving, but undesirable to white men. In contrast to the asexual joyful and fat Mammy, the second stereotype, The Jezebel, is hypersexual, seductive, and vulgar. The Jezebel exists to entice men and is not capable of being raped, as she exists for the purpose of engaging in sexual activities. A third controlling image is the Sapphire/Independent Black Woman, or the “angry black woman,” who is aggressive, combative, and loud (West 1995). The Sapphire is the polar opposite of idealized notions of white femininity; the latter is docile, submissive, and agreeable. The Black Matriarch or “Welfare Queen” is the fourth controlling image, and stereotypes the black woman to be controlling and dominant of her family and is a terrible mother to her children. The “welfare queen” is connected to historical conceptualizations of Black women as “breeders” dating back to slavery (Collins, 2004). Furthermore, this image propagates the stereotype of black women as uneducated, poor, single, and having many children in order to take advantage of public assistance (Rosenthal and Lobel 2016; Woodard and Mastin 2005).

This second deductive reading was refined by a third stage in the process in which I inductively searched the data. A second close reading allowed me to inductively find themes I could not have developed from only an initial scan of the data and literature or the second deductive reading of the data. I began the inductive analysis of the tweets and articles by reading through all of the articles and tweets to search for both recurring themes, new and pre-

established, which appear in the data. When I recognized pre-existing themes, I searched for variation within each theme to seek out information about black femininity that has not yet been discussed in the literature. The themes I developed were: (1) “Who Gets to be a Victim?” (how dominant narratives of victimhood were made sense of), (2) “Understandings of Violence” (how conceptualizations of violence were made sense of and/or challenged) and (3) “Race, Gender, and (In)Visibility” (how erasure and marginalization were explained). I then looked for greater variation within each of the three main themes and identified seven additional subthemes (1) “Politics of Respectability” (how respectable reputations of victims were reproduced and/or contested), (2) “Roles and Relations” (how victimhood is contingent upon women’s roles that exist in relation to men: as mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters), (3) “Routine Violence and Silence” (how Black women were positioned as victims of violence rather than perpetrators of it), (4) “The Contours of Violence” (how acts of violence were discussed and made sense of), (5) “#SayHerName” (the ways that victims’ stories were used to garner attention), (6) “Black Lives Include Women too” (how women were centered in discussions of racial injustice) and (7) “Checking the Facts” (how skepticism was used to garner visibility).

Tweets and articles were read in their entirety; memos were taken to obtain an overview of their respective content. The aforementioned three-stage process resulted in a schema of “themes” and “subthemes” (See Figure 1). The first theme, “Who Gets to be a Victim,” contained two subthemes “Politics of Respectability” and “Roles and Relations.” The second theme, “Understandings of Violence” also contained two subthemes: “Routine Violence and Silence” and “The Contours of Violence.” The third, and final theme was “Race, Gender, and (In)Visibility” and contained three subthemes: “#SayHerName,” “Black Lives Include Women too,” and “Checking the Facts.”

Figure 1. Themes and Subthemes



With the deductive and inductive steps completed, and my coding schema developed, I was then able to code the data. I selected a single article or tweet as the unit of analysis and adhered to a “one sentence rule”—if there was any clear mention of a theme or subtheme in the tweet or article, it was coded as present (“1”) or absent (“0”). During this stage, my coding was precise, as I only identified themes when it was clear that the unit of analysis reflected specific codes. Given that many themes were intricately linked, there were many instances in which the tweets and articles reflected overlapping categories (see Table 1).

Table 1 below presents each of the three over-arching themes, and the seven subtheme variations within them. It should be noted that while some themes comprise large portions of the data, other themes are much smaller. The focus of this thesis rests less upon quantitative analysis and is more concerned with analyzing the meanings and symbolism of each emergent theme, particularly ones which provide new insights to the discursive construction of black femininity.

Table 1. Distribution of Themes and Sub-themes

	Tweets		Google News Articles		Total	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
<i>Who Gets to be a Victim</i>	5,477	46.12	156	43.94	5,633	46.05
<i>Politics of Respectability</i>	200	1.68	6	1.69	206	1.68
<i>Roles and Relations</i>	1,439	12.12	103	29.01	1,542	12.61
<i>Understandings of Violence</i>	2,137	17.99	89	25.07	2,226	18.20
<i>Routine Violence and Silence</i>	495	4.17	14	3.94	509	4.16
<i>The Contours of Violence</i>	418	3.52	28	7.89	446	3.65
<i>Race, Gender and (In)Visibility</i>	2,433	20.49	81	22.82	2,514	20.55
<i><u>#SayHerName</u></i>	11,876	100.00	355	100.00	12,231	100.00
<i>Black Lives Include Women Too</i>	1,090	9.18	76	21.40	1,166	9.53
<i>Checking the Facts</i>	1,327	11.17	64	18.03	1,391	11.37

Tweets: $n=11,876$; Google News Articles: $n=355$; TOTAL: 12,231

Analytic Framework

The symbolic interactionist perspective provides a useful framework for critical analysis. The interactionist paradigm centers on how people make meaning of things (such as blackness and femininity), how meanings are derived from social interaction, and how then meanings are modified through a continual process of interpretation (Blumer 1969). Blumer's conceptual framework can be broken down into three core principles: (1) that people act toward things, including each other, on the basis of the meanings they have for them; (2) that these meanings are derived through social interaction with others; and (3) that these meanings are managed and transformed through an interpretive process that people use to make sense of and handle the objects that constitute their social worlds (Blumer 1969:2). Interactionist thought posits that communication is culture. Communication as culture must always be studied contextually, ritually, and relationally. Communication is a process involving two or more people in an authority, accountable, exchange, charismatic, intimate, tyrannic, or representative relationship (Carey 1989). Accordingly, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, society is socially

constructed, and there are no biological bases to understandings of black femininity, rather, understandings, such as the controlling images disseminated by the media have great power in generating ideas about black womanhood. These ideas are constructs that function based on what we believe to be true about people.

I argue that the utilization of the symbolic interactionist approach, allows for the examination of interpretive practices among both Twitter users and journalists alike. Understanding these interpretive practices allows me to deconstruct how discourse is embedded with symbols that are coded by both race and gender. This approach allows for the examination of how racialized and gendered meanings become part of our cultural logic. Interactionism allows for the examination of institutional media sites; the images, discourses, and symbols which produce the meanings and stories that work their ways into people's lives. The stories disseminated via the media hold meanings for everyday life, and thus daily experience is very much so connected to the larger institutional, mass media apparatuses that provide specific narratives about black femininity. Or as Mills argues, "between the human consciousness and material existence stand communications, and designs, patterns, and values which influence decisively such consciousness as they have (Mills 1963: 375).

Thus, it is important to note that both tweets and articles do not exist in a cultural vacuum, rather they are a product and cause of significant social expectations. Meanings are always sets of practices whereby reality is created, maintained, and transformed while they are also reified into a force seemingly independent of human action (Hughey 2010). Thus, tropes such as The Mammy or the Jezebel are not merely images that are disseminated through the media for purposes of entertainment. I argue that these controlling images in fact supplant the reality of black womanhood, thus limiting the ways in which black women are not only

understood- but then also treated and legitimized as victims. Drawing from the symbolic interactionist perspective when considering #SayHerName allows to analyze how discourse which challenges hegemonic constructions of black femininity has the potential to re-construct the very limited understandings of black womanhood. Because the tweets and news articles which are rooted in the dominant logic of today's racialized and gendered order and can both (re)produce, (re)construct and contest dominant notions of black femininity, a symbolic interactionist approach is not only useful but imperative.

Findings

The data from both the tweets and news articles collected from May of 2015 to November of 2016 indicate that discourse surrounding #SayHerName sometimes both contests and reproduces dominant notions of black femininity. I identified what codes cohered and supported larger, prominent, and overarching themes. I explicated the following three most prominent themes: (1) "Who Gets to be a Victim?" (how dominant narratives of victimhood were interpreted), (2) "Understandings of Violence" (how conceptualizations of violence were interpreted and/or challenged) and (3) "Race, Gender, and (In)Visibility" (how erasure and marginalization were explained). In the following discussion, each of the three aforementioned overarching themes will be presented and discussed individually to provide an examination of the relationship between #SayHerName's discourse and dominant ideologies about black femininity.

Who Gets to be a Victim?

Controlling images of black women operate as a symbolic representation of black femininity; the ways that it is understood, the ways in which it is embraced, the ways in which it is enacted and experienced, and the ways in which it is penalized. These controlling images are

part of a larger hegemonic racialized, gendered, and classed ideological and material relationship which impacts the lived experiences of black cis- and trans-women. Thus, in the case of the Jezebel, a controlling image which originates in the context of the U.S. Slave System, the black woman is constructed as hyper-sexual and sexually insatiable. The denial of black women's victimhood is rooted in their position as slaves; black women were not treated or regarded as full humans or citizens; therefore, they were not regarded as victims or afforded any protection under the law. Thus, a victim of sexual assault who is black, woman, property, and slave; who is not male or white, had her experiences of victimization discounted and denied. Media sources such as movies, music videos, and news stories often disseminate controlling images such as the Jezebel which continuously construct and reproduce notions of black femininity which frame black women as promiscuous. These controlling images serve to mystify structural factors (from surveillance to discrimination); consequently, black women frequently are excluded from dominant media narratives pertaining to victimhood.

Prior research on media representations of race, gender, and violence has established that media emphasize women's role in preventing their own victimization and omit Black women as victims (Lykke 2015). These representations act as controlling images; consequently, black women are relatively invisible as victims while white women whom experience similar instances of victimization are portrayed as omnipresent due to their relative hyper-visibility as victims (Lykke 2015). Thus, in the lived experiences of black cis- and trans- women, victimhood has perpetually been denied despite disproportionate rates of victimization.

Victimhood was a prominent theme present in the tweets and articles. In the following discussion, I will analyze the following themes: (1) "Politics of Respectability" (how respectable reputations of victims were reproduced and/or contested) and (2) "Roles and Relations" (how

victimhood is contingent upon women's roles that exist in relation to men: as mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters).

Politics of Respectability

Under the umbrella discussion of victimhood, politics of respectability emerged as a subtheme. Tweets and news articles included instances of contestation and at other times were reliant on hegemonic narratives surrounding politics of respectability. One such case became national: the death of Sandra Bland which prompted the highest number of articles and tweets to #SayHerName. Articles frequently drew on information such as education or employment status:

Just last week, Bland was a vibrant 28-year-old who was moving to Texas to start a new job at her alma mater, Prairie View A&M University. Like a lot of African American millennials, Bland was active on social media. She had been labeling her Facebook videos with #SandySpeaks to talk about a number of issues, including race relations, police brutality and Black Lives Matter. She was an activist.- *The Grio*

For those out of the loop, Bland was a black woman found dead in a Houston jail days after being detained following a routine traffic stop where she allegedly assaulted a police officer. According to reports, the Prairie View A&M graduate was on her way from Chicago for a position at the esteemed Historically Black College's agriculture department.- *Hip Hop DX*

This week, from Dallas to San Diego to the Midwest, activists and community members around the United States are answering a national call to demand justice for Sandra Bland, a Black woman and activist who died in police custody on July 13.-Truth out"

“Many activists and social media users said Bland had no reason to kill herself. They said she had a bright future, that she was an activist, that she looked happy. – Fusion

Other cases also employed similar techniques, such as the following excerpt from an article titled *#SayHerName: HBCU Student Unfairly Arrested*: “Kai Niambi, who just graduated from the HBCU Hampton University, was charged with reckless driving after she was "stopped three times in 30 minutes," according to her mother. –*BET National News*.”

These excerpts include information such as educational background and employment, as these status symbols translate into capital. Previous studies have found that Black women’s background and reputation are cast as highly significant, whether victim or offender; as these and their own social practice (deemed good or bad by dominant social mores) are represented as determining their fate (Wilcox 2005). Thus, if women are deemed “bad”, then the implication is that they deserve whatever happens to them. As Todeschini (2001: 147) argues, “Women and women’s bodies often become a kind of terrain where socio-cultural and symbolic contradictions are played out at different stages of the life cycle.” Thus, while black women are often excluded from representations of victims in dominant media narratives, the data frequently utilized status symbols to construct an alternate image of black women that was respectable and therefore valuable in order to convey why the victimization of black women is direly in need of recognition. By establishing that Sandra Bland was educated, successful, and thus respectable; the idea of a culturally deficient “Welfare Queen” or “Jezebel” could actively be dispelled.

However, the use of a politics of respectability framing is two-fold. While an alternate image is constructed that contests dominant notions of victimhood, it simultaneously relies on hegemonic ideologies. In order to be seen as “appropriate victims,” black women must often be

represented as “decent” and “respectable.” The assessment of such respectability is partly linked to women’s ethnicity, and their class background (Wilcox 2005). Consequently, race, gender, and class dynamics position those who do not fit this ideal in the margins. While less prevalent, there were a handful of articles which described this “catch 22” at length:

The demand for black women in the movement to perform respectability remains nearly unchanged since 1955. When the Ferguson prosecutor announced that no charges would be brought against officer Darren Wilson for killing Mike Brown, the teen’s mother, Lesley McSpadden wept uncontrollably. She was later caught on camera during the protests that night, shouting, “Some of you motherfuckers think this is a joke! Everybody want me to be calm? Do you know how them bullets hit my son? Ain’t nobody had to live through what I had to live through.” A number of news outlets then had the gall to suggest that she was contradicting previous calls for peace—as if it were her rage and pain, not police killings and impunity, that constituted a rupture in peace. We reinscribe the oppressive myth of the black superwoman when we expect the mothers of victims to call for calm and act demurely when they hear their son’s killer will walk free...

Respectability politics should not determine which black female voices garner attention and respect, and which get erased. – *Fusion*.

But I also wonder if black respectability politics is playing into the reason why many people in our community aren't being as supportive of Holtzclaw's alleged victims as we could be. Take, for example, the case of Claudette Colvin during the civil rights movement. She actually refused to give up her seat on a segregated bus long before Rosa Parks, but her narrative was ignored because she was a pregnant teenager whom many

religious leaders believed would shame the sanctity of the movement. – *The Huffington Post*.

Framed as oppressive, this excerpt provides a critical decoding of the politics of respectability as a cultural logic which not only requires that victims fit a respectable description to be valued, but also constrains the ways in which black women must react and respond to trauma and victimization. Additionally, one article made specific mention of the ineffectiveness of a politics of respectability when it collides with a racist and sexist system:

Since the death of Sandra Bland there have been questions swirling around the grounds for her arrest, the actions of the officer who arrested her and her response. Those answers will take time (and an independent special prosecutor). However there is one answer I can supply for us all right now, without the wait —RESPECTABILITY POLITICS WILL NOT SAVE YOU. Let me write this one more time for those who may not have seen it above— RESPECTABILITY POLITICS WILL NOT SAVE YOU. Everyone on the same page now? Good. You see, we've been taught or rather socialized to believe that if you "act right", "wear your hair neatly", "pull up your pants" and so on that you will be treated with respect and dignity just like your white peers. – *NBC News*

This article highlights the ways in which the culture and skin color of blacks supersede the importance or effectiveness of a politics of respectability.

Discussion

The subtheme of politics of respectability was framed in three ways: positive, negative, and infective. Articles and tweets in which politics of respectability was framed as positive drew

on status symbols to generate a back-story of victims that could aid in (re)imaging a notion of black femininity which actively dispels stereotypical images of black women such as being over-promiscuous or aggressive. Articles and tweets in which politics of respectability was framed as negative and critiqued usage of such framing as being reproductive of inequality as it requires that victims fit a respectable description to be valued and constrains the ways in which black women must react and respond to trauma and victimization. Lastly, politics of respectability was framed to be ineffective in a racist/sexist system which devalues blacks regardless of status.

Roles and Relations

Black women's roles and relations constituted a second theme. Gendered status symbols frequently were present in both tweets and articles and functioned similarly to traits such as employment status and educational attainment. Tweets and articles contained gendered roles such as "daughter," "sister," or "wife" which provided status information that construct notions of black women that exist in relation to the family, such as these six re-tweets (RT): (1) "RT @NolanHack: #JaquelineSalyers #SayHerName #DeathByCop #SheWasPregnant #SheHad4Kids #StopNativeGenocide #MMIW," (2) "RT @EnlaceDiversity: 22-Year-Old Mother Dies in Police Custody @blackyouthproj #SayHerName #SymoneMarshall died..." (3) "RT @BLACKGIRLSROCK: #SAYHERNAME: Symone Marshall, mother of 3-year-old daughter. #blacklivesmatter #blackgirlsrock," (4) "RT @whywomen: Sarah could have been your daughter, sister or friend. #SayHerName #SarahReed #BlackLivesMatter," (5) "RT @WritersofColour: #SarahReed's family are demanding to know how & why their beloved daughter, sister, & mother was failed #SayHerName ht..." (6) "RT @UCUSenateHouse: "Sarah Reed was a vulnerable young mother" #BlackLivesMatter #JusticeForSarahReed #SayHerName." These gendered roles were also seen in news articles: "Beaten by a

Metropolitan police officer in 2012. Found dead in a prison cell in 2016. Sarah Reed, a black woman, mother, daughter, sister, whose smile could light up a room.”

This discourse challenges images such as The Angry Black Woman (who is portrayed as being independent, angry and bitter) and The Matriarch (who is portrayed as being an abusive and bad mother), two prevalent controlling images that construct black women as detached from loving family members. Winthrop Jordan (1974) argues that the black–white (skin color) opposition is based in the emotional loading of these concepts in the English language; where “white” represents “goodness, purity, virginity” – hence innocence, and “black” represents death, evil and debasement – hence guilt. Gendered status symbols were often used in framing and provide context around the victim to construct an alternative narrative that portrays black women as important and valuable and having loved ones. This framing challenges the racialized and gendered stereotypes which map deviance and worthlessness onto the bodies of black cis and trans women.

On one hand, value and innocence are established and actively re-construct notions of black femininity that dispel racist and sexist cultural myths. However, on the other hand, the usage of this framing results in reproducing a moral logic which stratifies victimhood based on an individual’s social position, relation to men, race, class, and gender. Thus, black women’s background and reputation are cast as highly significant, whether victim or offender. If women are deemed “bad”, then the implication is that they deserve whatever happens to them (Wilcox 2005). Thus, gendered status symbols such as “daughter” or “mother” reify and maintain a patriarchal system which attributes value to women based on their relation to men. This counter-narrative simultaneously relies on a hegemonic use of gendered status symbols vis-à-vis a reliance on a moral logic that presupposes that value and innocence must be established.

Framing of victimhood that drew on a politics of respectability and black women's roles and relations both challenged and at other times relied on hegemonic framing of victimhood. Controlling images such as *The Jezebel*, *The Angry Black Woman*, and *The Matriarch* were dispelled by providing alternate imagery of black women that constructed ideas of respectability and innocence. Nonetheless, these frames may be "subsuming the complexity and contingency of contemporary crime problems within a fabular moral structure" (Sparks 1992: 161). This moral structure consists of frameworks of explanation in the press which explore women's deviance "in terms of the gender discourse of appropriate feminine behavior" (160). Thus, notions of appropriate femininity are both contested and reproduced, providing a complicated set of opposing dialectics that simultaneously counter and reify dominant narratives that prohibit black women from being considered victims.

Understandings of Violence

Gender studies have found that violence and perceived threat of violence are central features of the gendered world (Hollander 2001). Stories in both the news and entertainment often reserve victimhood for white women, as the intersection of black cis- and trans- women's race and gender discredits them as worthy victims. The discrediting of black women's claims is the consequence of a complex intersection of a gendered sexual system, one that constructs rules appropriate for good and bad women, and a race code that provides images defining the allegedly essential nature of Black women (Crenshaw 1993). On both entertainment and television news and in the cultural imagination, Black women are often represented with controlling images which depict them as promiscuous and deviant instead of depictions which highlight their vulnerability and the routine experiences of violence that black cis and trans women endure in their day to day lives. Controlling images such as *The Welfare Queen* and *The Matriarch*

construct a deviant, fraud-committing, responsibility-evading imagery that naturalizes Black women as perpetrators of violence rather than victims of it.

Violence constitutes a second major theme in the data. In the following discussion, I will analyze how notions of black femininity were constructed through the following themes: (1) “Routine Violence and Silence” (how Black women were positioned as victims of violence rather than perpetrators of it) and (2) “The Contours of Violence” (how acts of violence were discussed and made sense of). The narratives both challenged and relied on hegemonic ideologies to re-construct understandings of the relationship between violence and black women.

Routine Violence and Silence

Under the umbrella discussion of violence, routine violence emerged as a subtheme. Both the articles and tweets made specific mention of the disproportionate amount of violence that black cis and trans women endure in their day to day lives. For instance, many tweets and articles contained information similar to the below excerpt:

Black women are all too often unseen in the national conversation about racial profiling, police brutality, and lethal force,” said Andrea Ritchie, who co-authored the report. “This report begins to shine a light on the ways that Black women are policed in ways that are similar to other members of our communities - whether it’s police killings, ‘stop and frisk,’ ‘broken windows policing,’ or the ‘war on drugs.’

These retweets also indicate this information: “RT @Blackballaduk: We must not forget that black women are most at risk in society. #SarahReed #SayHerName #BlackLivesMatter.”; “RT @BlkGirlTragic: For #JessicaHampton & other black women we've lost to senseless violence

#SayHerName #blackgirltragic,” and; “RT @RaquelWillis_ : Lifting up #SkyeMockabee and #KorrynGaines simultaneously! Violence against ALL Black women must end! #SayHerName.”

These accounts describe the various ways that black women have been excluded from conversations of actual and symbolic violence and challenge dominant understandings of police brutality by providing an alternate narrative that brings black women into the center of the discussion. While violence and victimhood have often been reserved for white women, these accounts illuminate the myriad ways in which black women are victimized. While controlling images often reproduce imagery of culturally deficient and criminal black women such as The Welfare Queen who cheats and steals from the government, this discourse reconstructs black women as being victims of violence as opposed to perpetrators of it. Accounts such as the excerpts below specifically illuminate how understandings of police brutality are understood through a gendered lens: “However, stories like that of Oklahoma police officer Daniel Holtzclaw, recently charged with raping eight black women, don't result in the kind of demonstrations now associated with police brutality against black men. -*Mashable*.”

Furthermore:

Although hers is perhaps a rare case that made headlines, Sandra Bland is by no means alone — there are other Black women who have suffered abuse at the hands of law enforcement. But the vast majority of Black female victims of police violence die and fade away without us ever knowing their names, a chilling new report by the African American Policy Forum at Columbia University Law School finds. -*Refinery29*.

Black women and women of color can no longer be expected to lead movements challenging police brutality but be silent about our own experiences," wrote coauthor Andrea Ritchie in an introduction to the report. Ritchie, a police misconduct attorney in

New York, has fought against inappropriate policing of black women and LGBT citizens for two decades. –*Mother Jones*.

Portraying stereotypical images of African American women in a way that dehumanizes them stems from a societal need to place a group of people in the “Other” category, which objectifies their existence and suggests that they are not really human and so deserve the unfair treatment that they receive (Collins, 2004). While mainstream media outlets have ignored black women as victims and made them hyper-visible through narratives of deviance, the #SayHerName tweets and articles provide an alternate narrative that affords black women vulnerability and identifies the persistent violence that is present in their lives.

Discussions of the routine violence that black cis and trans women experience often included gender analyses of police brutality being solely predicated on the experiences of black men. A counter-hegemonic discourse prevailed in which understandings of police brutality were reconstructed to include the experiences of women. Consequently, this discourse (re)constructs black and gender nonconforming women’s experience with violence through an alternate-narrative which reveals the complex and layered policing from authorities that effects both the ways that black cis and trans women are perceived and legitimated as victims (Williams 2016).

The Contours of Violence

Accordingly, a second major theme that I identified was the “contours of violence.” This theme highlighted the many instances of police brutality that black women endure. For example, the following three tweets state: “RT @BEautifully_C: #KorrynGaines police brutality touches black women TOO. #SayHerName,” “What is it gonna take for people to see police brutality exists? Apparently a 5 yr old getting shot isn't enough. #KorrynGaines #SayHerName,” and “RT

@AmericanIndian8: #SayHerName: Women Across the Country go Topless to Protest Police Brutality Against Women.” This discourse was expanded upon here:

Building on the Black Lives Matter movement, the #SayHerName campaign has shifted the focus from just unarmed black men to the women who fall victim to the badge. Cases of police committing heinous acts against women don’t often get media attention, but supporters of #SayHerName have made it their mission to not let these victims slip between the cracks of our system. We need to add faces and names to these victims: Sandra Bland, Korryn Gaines, Jessica Williams, Kisha Michael and so many others lost their lives because of an abuse of police power. –*The Daily Orange*.

While discussions of violence provided a counter-narrative which bring black women into the center, it simultaneously limits the conversation to focus specifically on police brutality. While black women are victims of police brutality, they also are disproportionately victims of a number of other forms of gendered violence such as rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence, and hate crimes. With a sole focus on police brutality, other forms of violence were excluded from the discussion. While the acknowledgement of black cis and trans women’s experiences of systematic violence provides a crucial spotlight on issues of police brutality, other forms of violence are pushed to the margins. In this way, the discourse simultaneously provides visibility to a crucial issue pressing upon black women while also constraining understandings of the relationship between black women and violence to acts that are committed solely by the state and ignoring the routine personal violence that black women endure.

Operating under the umbrella discussion of police brutality, other forms of violence experienced by black and gender nonconforming women were present less frequently. Some articles described issues of sexual violence and domestic abuse:

“Seventy percent of women have experienced physical/ and or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime,” according to the European Agency for Fundamental Rights. Globally, it is estimated that almost half of women victims of homicide were killed by intimate partners or family members compared to less than six percent of men victims of homicide in that same year, according to 2014 data from United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.- *The Huffington Post.*”

While others honed in on hate crimes which are disproportionately experienced by black trans women:

“Transgender people, especially black transgender women like India Clarke, are at particular risk for violence. Between 2013 and 2015, the year of India's killing, at least 53 transgender people were killed in the United States, according to a report from the Human Rights Campaign and the Trans People of Color Coalition. Forty-six were transgender women, and 46 were transgender people of color.- *CNN.*”

“It’s important to understand the unique experiences of trans men, even as we recognize that trans women often bear the brunt of violence as cis women often do. Gotta love that patriarchy. It manages to screw all genders equally. –*The Mary Sue.*” Although limited, these narratives constituted an additional counter-narrative which expand discussion of violence to not only

include the violence that is disproportionately experienced by both black men and women but to include gendered violence that specifically affect black cis- and trans- women.

Dominant media representations often constrict representations of black women to controlling images such as The Welfare Queen, a stereotypical image of black women which portrays them as lazy, uneducated single mothers who take advantage of public assistance. This stereotype underpins beliefs about black women's deviance, and therefore has subsumed that black women are perpetrators of violence rather than victims of it. Alternate narratives were constructed surrounding police brutality that challenged the exclusion of gendered forms of police brutality that impact black women. This counter-narrative constructed black women as victims of violence, affording them value and visibility.

Race, Gender, and (In)Visibility

Invisibility and hypervisibility are fundamental aspects of black women's lived experiences within a White and male dominated society. The viewing of Black women's bodies as spectacles is rooted in racialized and gendered intersections of power, privilege and oppression (Mowatt, French, and Malebranche 2013). Black women's bodies have historically been considered grotesque, animalistic, and unnatural and has had long-standing impacts on understanding Black women's bodies as hypersexualized spectacles for consumption (Durham 2012; Harris-Perry 2011). Thus, Black women have become hyper-visible through a myriad of controlling images which have significant implications in their lived experiences. Likewise, black women experience invisibility in relation to systemic oppression that is evident in their overrepresentation in poverty and unemployment, homelessness, and incarceration (Mowatt, French, and Malebranche 2013).

The (in)visibility of black women was a third prominent theme in the data. Violence was often highlighted in both tweets and articles: “We need to say #BlackGirlsMatter because the violence of women is often silenced or misappropriated to blaming the victim. –*Higher Education*” and “RT @ErikaLSanchez: I'm tired of living in a world in which brown women are invisible. #SayHerName: Maylin Reynoso.”

“African American women are three times more likely to be incarcerated than their white counterparts, and young black girls are suspended from school at six times the rate of their white female peers. Add to that the increased risk of poverty, violence, and sexual assault, and it's clear that African American girls are not all right. – *Take Part.*”

While dominant media representations typically rely on controlling images when making black women visible, the discourse provided a counter-narrative that centered black cis and gender nonconforming women through the use of (1) “#SayHerName” (the ways that victims' stories were used to garner attention), (2) “Black Lives Include Women too” (how women were centered in discussions of racial injustice), and (3) “Checking the Facts” (how skepticism was used to garner visibility).

#SayHerName

Tweets and news articles often told the stories of black cis and trans women who were victims yet virtually absent from dominant news coverage. Consider the following five tweets and one news article: (1) “RT @ColorOfChange: Symone Marshall, died while in custody at a Texas jail. #SayHerName,” (2) “RT @APTAction: #Justice4JessicaWilliams march to #BayViewPD #SayHerName,” (3) “#iammyfamilyskeeper #blacklivesmatter,” (4) “#jessicanelson #theydidnthavetokillher #SayHerName,” and (5) “This weekend we

#SayHerName #IndiaKager to remember veterans killed by police #BlackLivesMatter,” The news article stated, “In the wake of Symone Marshall, who died in jail last month in Walker County, Texas, NewsOne remembers other African-American women who have died in the custody of law enforcement officers in recent years. -*News One.*”

These stories centered on black cis and trans women, bringing their stories of discrimination, injustice, and victimhood into the spotlight. The plight of women has often been reserved for white women while the plight of blacks has been reserved for men, consequently black women have been absent from discussions of issues, resources and solutions. The discourse generated by and surrounding #SayHerName creates a space for black cis and trans women to exist and have their issues acknowledged. Many news articles and tweets made exclusive mention of the absence of black women from dominant media accounts; the #SayHerName hashtag and the news articles surrounding it allow for voices from the margins to “type back” and speak out about the systemic silencing and erasure of Black women. The stories made mention of various black and trans women whom had been victimized: “RT @postmoderneel: Crystal Edmonds is the latest victim in an epidemic of attacks against black trans women. Protect and uplift black trans...” and “RT @ur_fav_leo: RIP Birdell Beeks. Innocent bystander. Victim of one of the shootings that happened on Thursday over North. #SayHerName.”

By “saying her name,” the discourse actively (re)constructs and challenges the denial of victimhood, the routine experiences of violence, and the marginalization and invisibility that has become persistent in the lives of black women. These tweets and articles create alternate narratives that tell their stories, thus shining a light on the systemic injustices that often intersect

violently in the lives of black women and silence them. Through the use of #SayHerName, discourse is generated that allows this silence to be broken.

Black Lives Include Women Too

Another prominent subtheme found in both tweets and articles centered around the lack of attention black women receive as victims of state and personal violence in comparison to black men. These narratives challenge dominant ideologies that have solely focused on racial issues pertaining to black men. The following excerpt was recurrent:

In the quest for justice for black male victims of police brutality, such as Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and Eric Garner in New York, feminist activists have noticed black women in similar situations have been ignored in this public conversation. This spawned the #SayHerName hashtag, to call attention to the stories of women like Chicago's Rekia Boyd, shot and killed in 2012 by an off-duty Chicago police officer."

The following four examples also demonstrate the challenge to exclusively black male representations: (1) "Much of the debate surrounding police behavior in the United States has revolved around fatal confrontations between unarmed black men and law enforcement, but a new movement wants to remind Americans that black women are also victims-RT," (2) "Now I see exactly why #SayHerName was created. People don't think about violence against black women, only black men," (3) "RT @_plantain: but black men don't account for all of the black PEOPLE killed by police. #sayhername #ALLblacklivedmatter," and (4) "It's not just black men #blm Margaret Mitchell, Pearlie Smith, Tyisha Miller, Gabriella Nevarez, Eleanor Bumpurs, Kindra Chapman #sayhername."

These counter-narratives directly address issues of black women's absence from discussions of problems and solutions. Black women remain subject to the twin dimensions of hypervisibility and substantive erasure. While they are present in the stereotypical images of Black families at risk, they are virtually absent as a focal point of the millions of dollars strategically distributed by foundations and local governments under the promise of rescuing Black boys and saving Black families (Crenshaw 1993). Black women will continue to be excluded from solutions aimed at ameliorating black communities if they are continuously absent from discussions centering on racial issues. Consequently, discourse generated by and around #SayHerName intentionally includes not the notable deaths of black male victims but also included the names of black cis and trans women who have been victimized and ignored by main stream news outlets. This discourse challenges dominant narratives that have excluded black women as victims or made them visible as hypersexual subjects by (re)telling and (Re)constructing a narrative that emphasizes the racialized and gendered injustices that black women endure.

Checking the Facts

A third way that visibility was garnered was through the use of skepticism of formal institutions and official reports. The following eight tweets questioned the legitimacy of official news reports: (1) “#SayHerName #SymoneMarshall Tell @TheJusticeDept to investigate the deaths of Black Women in custody,” (2) “RT @ColorOfChange: Symone Marshall, died while in custody at a Texas jail. #SayHerName <https://t.co/v4yT0xF50V> <https://t.co/EmkAaPQYLQ>,” (3) “RT @mnxmoosi: #JusticeForJulieka #StopBlackDeathsInCustody #SayHerName 2 officers involved in her death have ALREADY BEEN PROMOTED,” (4) “RT @Braunginn: #SayHerName Genele Laird beat up by two Madison, WI police officers.

#HandsOffBlackWomen,” (5) “RT @KingGreggles: A grand jury did not indict the officer who killed #SalahRidgeway. #SayHerName,” (6) “RT @voluptuouswitch: violent officers must be held accountable #korryngaines #sayhername #blacklivesmatter” (7) “RT @SheBeShonuff: Pfc Johnson's family deserves the truth about her death. She fought for our country so #SayHerName #JusticeForLavena,” and (8) “RT @mothermade: The truth will emerge. #SandraBland #SayHerName #BlackLivesMatter.”

Tweets such as the above constituted a major trend in which users tweeted and re-tweeted the deaths and responses/unresponsiveness of law enforcement agencies in order to garner visibility. While dominant outlets may not have made mention of these injustices, the users comprising the #SayHerName movement created an alternate space to tell the stories of the victims, and raise awareness about the questionable “facts” that appeared in official reports and news stories. News articles covering #SayHerName provided additional detail, often providing background information on the need to #SayHerName:

Our confidence in the local investigation to date has been shaken by numerous inconsistencies. Our family has been given limited information about the case, while Waller County, Texas, jailers have had unfettered access to the crime scene. Almost everything we know about what happened to my sister has come from the media, not the prosecutor’s office that is responsible for helping to ensure justice for my family.-*BET News*.

Moreover, this article from *The Root* stated, “It is hard to describe the frustration of these past two months. Texas State Trooper Brian Encinia has yet to be fired or prosecuted, despite an

infuriating video that shows him violently arresting my sister, which he later denied in a falsified police report. *The Root* while *The Guardian* stated:

The family of Anderson, 37, was watching from her rambling Victorian family house in east Cleveland when she was taken into custody last November and, they say, slammed onto the pavement and handcuffed. At some point during the fatal police encounter – one of the many overlooked cases of women killed by police – she stopped breathing.

Anderson was dead by the time she arrived at the hospital. The coroner ruled Anderson's death a homicide, but prosecutors have yet to announce whether charges will be brought. The officers' individual answers to a civil complaint by the family are due to a court on Saturday, but the Andersons say they know what they saw. –*The Guardian*.

Accounts such as these frequently challenged the responses of law enforcement agencies. The skepticism embedded in the discourse brought attention to racialized and gendered injustices that have positioned black women at the margins. While controlling images have relegated black women as hypervisible jezebels and invisible victims, this discourse reconstructs a narrative that illuminates the staggering instances of personal and state violence that black women endure and adds to the repertoire of understandings of black femininity.

Discussion

Through discussions centered on victimhood, violence, and visibility, the prevailing controlling images of black women which reinforce a normative racist, sexist, and heteronormative environment are challenged. Unilateral media sources often perpetuate ideas about race, ethnicity, and gender that place Black cis and trans women at a disadvantage. While ideas of race and gender are constantly changing, their effects are profoundly impactful in areas

of education, employment, health care, and treatment by law enforcement agencies (to name a few). Consequently, the way that black women are represented have significant power to either reproduce or interrupt an oppressive cycle of marginalization and erasure. Controlling images which often depict black women as aggressive, poverty-stricken, loud, and promiscuous actively construct notions of black femininity— and the ways that is is understood, embraced, enacted, and penalized. These controlling images serve to mystify structural factors (from surveillance to discrimination); consequently, black women are frequently hyper-visible in music videos and yet are excluded from dominant media narratives pertaining to victimhood.

The common-sense understandings of black women being promiscuous, aggressive, and deviant were challenged with alternative narratives which afford black women victimhood and visibility while highlighting their experiences of violence. Through the use of social media platforms such as Twitter, counterhegemonic discourses were produced and circulated to reconstruct the ways that black femininity is imagined, understood, and embraced. Through discussions of victimhood, violence and visibility, alternative constructions of black cis and trans women were produced and shared through tweets and articles. While these counter-narratives often illuminated and challenged hegemonic forces, they also relied on them; this illuminated a complicated and contradictory set of black feminine representations.

Conclusion

Negative stereotypes applied to African American women have been fundamental to black women's oppression (Collins 1990). Representations generate ideas about race, gender, sexuality and class that not only impact the ways that black cis and trans women experience violence, but for how they are regarded as and responded to as victims. In summary, dominant narratives about the black female body have very real material realities which effect black

women's lives and their deaths. Prior research on media representations of race, gender and violence has found that black women have been denied visibility as victims in media portrayals of gendered violence, which has contributed to the social problem of black women's marginalization as their experiences of injustice become invalidated. This thesis provided a critical decoding of black feminine representations through a content analysis of tweets collected from Twitter and news articles collected using Google News to ascertain the ways in which black femininity is discursively constructed using the #SayHerName hashtag.

The data indicate that discourse surrounding #SayHerName at times contests and at other times reproduces dominant notions of black femininity. I identified what codes cohered and supported larger, prominent, and overarching themes: (1) "Who Gets to be a Victim?" (how dominant narratives of victimhood were made sense of), (2) "Understandings of Violence" (how conceptualizations of violence were understood in relation to pre-existing conversations surrounding police brutality) and (3) "Race, Gender, and (In)Visibility" (how erasure and marginalization were explained). These themes illuminate the complicated and at times contradictory set of black feminine representations that continuously inform and (re)construct notions of black femininity.

Black womanhood has frequently been framed negatively in the media, and it is often discussed from a perspective of inequality and injustice in academic writing. But black womanhood is also powerful, it is resistant, resilient, it is strong, it is enduring. While it is of the utmost importance to understand the shapes and contours of the intersecting forms of oppression that black cis and trans women experience, it is equally important to understand how black women persist, seeking change for themselves, their communities, and the world. Thus, while controlling images may relegate black women to being deviant, and therefore unworthy of

visibility, protection, and respect; black women are finding avenues such as platforms like Twitter to #SayHerName and (re)construct understandings of black womanhood. Through the use of tweets and articles, black women have utilized social media to embrace intersectionality as a heuristic and analytic tool to remedy racist and sexist ideologies that have perpetually marginalized black women, relegating them to invisible victims of state and personal violence. This research demonstrates that constructions of black feminine representations are informed from both the top and bottom. Two potential questions that would be suited for future research in this arena could explore how and if controlling images apply to both cis and trans women in the same ways, and the “reach” of counter-narratives that are generated via social media platforms.

This research furthers understandings of the relationship between the media and racialized and gendered constructions, specifically giving attention to black trans-women of color who have largely been excluded from analyses on race, gender, and the media. The findings demonstrate that social media sites such as Twitter can be used to generate narratives that both oppose and at times rely on widely shared conceptions of black femininity predicated on controlling images such as The Jezebel or The Mammy. Together these dialectics illuminate a complicated and contradictory set of black feminine representations.

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