

The Gateway to Liberation and the Re-shaping
of the Black Female Image

by

Kaydeen Wright

A Capstone Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education

in

Social Justice and International Studies

Department of Educational Policy Studies

University of Alberta

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of Critical Education, Digital Humanities, and Black Feminist Theory in highlighting, uplifting, and re-shaping the black female image. This research will highlight works related to decolonization theory and respond to three main questions: 1. How has the black female 'image' been represented in societal institutions like universities and the media, and how has this impacted and generalized the public and personal understandings of black women in North American society? 2. What discourse is being promoted and facilitated on social media platforms concerning black women, their activism, their feminism, and their role in academia? 3. Can theoretical frameworks such as the Black Feminist Theory and Critical Pedagogy aid in black women's personal, political, and socio-economic liberation by helping them understand and connect theory and practice dialectically?

Keywords:

Black feminist theory, critical pedagogy, black woman liberation, black twitter, decolonization

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Literature Review	5
A Seat At The Table	7
Social Analytics-	11
Findings and Gaps	12
Summary of the Literature	13
When They See Us -	15
Education - Key to Success	18
#BlackTwitter	24
Conclusion	26
Reference	28

Introduction

“Representation is a crucial location of struggle for any exploited and oppressed people asserting subjectivity and decolonization of the mind.” -bell hooks

There is much to be said about the black female image, the history, the present and the future are all connected. The colonial past of the North American space has significantly contributed to the framings of black women today. The dichotomy that surrounds the black female form concerns the hyper visibility and invisibility positioning of the black female image. hooks (1988 p.ix) highlighted that “more often than not racist, sexist stereotypes characterized black females as loud, rude, overbearing, and in relationship to black males dominating and castrating.” The racist, sexist and ‘demasculating’ overtones attributed to black women are all connected to the colonial past that has sought to rob black women of their femininity, their dignity and their freedom. The push for the repetitive negative narrative of the black female image is outdated and lazy. In modern society a significant shift has been happening, where the exploitation, dehumanization and de-feminization of black women is no longer being accepted or is going unnoticed. This powerful shift in mindset and understanding can be placed under the umbrella of liberation. Liberation then is a signifier in the conversation concerning the reimagining and re-shaping of the black female image in the global North.

This research recognizes that many misunderstandings and misaligned tropes concerning black women are learned behaviour connected to the savagery and disillusion of European colonization

of the African continent and its remnants. This research paper will also explore tools and resources that can help heal and further resolve the 'damaged' black female image. Furthermore, my paper reflects Lewis's (2015, p.42) sentiments that "the research questions guiding this project [are] centered on the premise that the body, identity, and performance can function as "equipment" for teaching and learning."

Literature Review

When we speak to European colonization, we are highlighting the ideals and plagues of 'Eurocentrism and its disturbingly lasting effects on the mindsets of those it colonized. Escobar (2007, 184) upholds that Eurocentrism as a regime of knowledge is "a confusion between abstract universality and the concrete world hegemony derived from Europe's position as center." Escobar clarifies that colonial understandings have invaded and planted themselves in the very fabric of humanity and how we proceed to exist in this world today. This invasion of colonialism has used various societal institutions to spread its propaganda about Europe/whiteness being the ideal and the center of the world. This ideology of whiteness as supreme has been spread overtly and inertly through education (formal), "the production of knowledge, new knowledge and transformed 'old' knowledge, ideas about the nature of knowledge and the validity of specific forms of knowledge, became as much commodities of colonial exploitation as other natural resources" (Smith 2012, p.119). The literature highlights how any epistemological framework that is tied in with colonial exploitation ignites and reflects separatist, divisive, and exclusive ideologies. Also, Awatere (1984, 35) retorts that because "the white occupiers [] won [the

colonial war]," they have been able to "[create] the whole past and has taken and given the illusion of absolute truth."

So, where then does the black female image lie in colonial thinking and epistemology?

The black image, especially the female form, was made invisible, distorted, or oppressed within the Eurocentric pedagogy model. Wright (2020, 2) maintains that the "black body, in general, has been ostracized and negatively constructed by whiteness for their economic and political gain." Her thought is supported by Ben Zid (2019), who posits that "... cruelty, and subjection from the primeval years of bondage to those of colonization have created a massive load under which black women all over the world have attempted to survive." Much abuse and neglect have been laid against the black body that even archives and data do not factually and emphatically relay the damage and depravity that has been committed. Even though the black female form can now occupy significant and prominent spaces in various social intuitions, what do their occupancy in these spaces provide them with?

The literature reflects that the black female form has been bruised, violated, and taken advantage of during the colonial era. However, it has not been depleted and completely removed from this existence of humanity. It is shown where the physical enslavement and bondage of the black female body has also created a mental and social suppression of the black woman and her personhood. It is then from these subjugated and disenfranchised forms such as (mamee, unattractive, welfare mom, b*tch, struggling single mom, unworthy of a good man, supporting

role, nappy-headed h*e, uneducated, big booty weave wearing, snooty, radical feminist man-hating academic) that the black female image needs liberation from.

“How do you keep the black female body present, and how do you own value for something that society won’t give value to? It’s a question I try to answer through my own life”

-Claudine Rankine

A Seat At The Table

The search for liberation, in general, is arduous and discombobulating. How then do we frame liberation? Liberation is conceptualized as "rest[ing] on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression and so of possibility" (Haraway, 1991, 149).

We can then ponder the liberation of the black female image as even more arduous, as it seeks liberation through the intersectional lens as framed by brilliant legal and scholarly minds such as Kimberlé Crenshaw and in a space that has been heavily colonized. Crenshaw's intersectionality concept has taken on a whole movement of itself, being used in all areas of oppressed and marginalized groups. Her observation on intersectionality was to highlight how discrimination affects black women concerning gender, racial and sexual biases as well. The recognition of this intersectionality regarding black women has led to the realization that black women have such a complex battle fighting in the social and economic sphere. The discussion around intersectionality has to lead to a global consciousness about the various roles of black women and the spaces that they occupy in society. A prominent space that has been advertised as a

liberating space is that of academia. Academia stands as a playground for revolutions and freedom-making, but the field of academia still stands as a space that "needs emancipation from hearing only the voices of Western Europe, [and it also needs] emancipation from generations of silence, and emancipation from seeing the world in one colour" (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 212).

What then does academia offer in the re-shaping of the black female image?

The epistemological frameworks of Critical Pedagogy, Black Feminism, and Digital Humanities stand as three significantly revolutionary schools of thought that offer radical re-shaping of the academic space. They are all unique in their development and deposition of knowledge and learning methodologies. However, they also seem to offer similar offerings concerning the undoing of colonial learnings, revolutionary thoughts, and a seat at the table for the liberation of the black female imagery.

Critical Pedagogy speaks to the branch of education and social movement that focuses on standardized knowledge and learning's political implications. This epistemological framework was made famous and brought to the spotlight by Paulo Freire's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). He referenced the traditional form of learning as the 'banking method.' Learning in the banking model presented the teacher as the 'source of knowledge, and learners as passive recipients of knowledge.' Critical Pedagogy has conscientiously allowed the learner and instructor to occupy revolutionized roles in these learning spaces that are more profound and focus on self-internalization (hooks, 1989, Allman, 1999). hooks (1989) further shared how this elevated version of thinking and learning has transformed the social landscape of those they

contact. While Critical Education provides a gateway to rethink how we learn and exist in the space of academia, can it then be significant in the positive re-shaping of the black female image? Allman (1999, 163) contributed that "critical education on its own is not capable of bringing about the transformation [], [but...]on the other hand, it is impossible to see how a society is capable of guaranteeing a better future for humanity will ever come into being without critical education." Both Allman and Hooks are brilliant black women who occupy immeasurable roles in the academic sphere. They pronounce liberation through both Critical Education, and Black Feminist thought.

Black Feminist thought is seditious in its disposition and offers "healing through its theory" (Allman 1999, Hooks, 1994 & Lemons, 2017). This theoretical framework positions itself on the intersectional framework conceptualized by Crenshaw. It addresses the black female image directly, and then it gives recognition to the complex existence of the black female form concerning its positioning to racism, sexism, classism, and sexuality. hooks (1994, p.62) posited that "the production of feminist theory is complex, [] it is an individual practice less often than we think and usually emerges from engagement with collective sources." Through the unpacking and engagement with Black Feminist Theory, black women are offered the "power to critique ways systemic oppression operates in [their] everyday lives... It also allowed us to begin a process of ridding [ourselves] of internalized ideas of domination grounded in myths of black self-devaluation" (Lemons (2017, p.4). Critical Pedagogy and Black Feminist Theory position themselves as more 'older' solutions concerning black women's liberation conversations. On the other hand, the literature offers Digital Humanities as both an 'older' and modern school of

thought that advances the reshaping of colonial frameworks' through its relationships with technological and sociological concepts.

Digital Humanities (DH) is described as being "more akin to a common methodological outlook than an investment in any specific set of texts or even technologies....However, Digital Humanities is also a social undertaking. "It harbours networks of people who have been working together, sharing research, arguing, competing, and collaborating for many years.... a culture that values collaboration, openness, nonhierarchical relations, and agility" (Kirschenbaum, 2010 & Johnson, 2018). The more contemporary epistemological framework of DH is Digital Black Studies. Jessica Johnson argues for Digital Humanities and its contemporaries as a primary gateway for decolonization for the black diaspora. She brings to the forefront how contemporary studies such as Digital Black Studies have been and continues to be revolutionized, thus bringing the black diasporas' lived experiences to the masses. "Invoking black digital practice draws attention to the many ways users, content creators, coders, and programmers have worked ethical, intentional praxis into their work in pursuit of more just and humane productions of knowledge" (Johnson, 2018, 66).

All three theoretical frameworks do provide arguments supporting the gateway to the liberation of the black female image. They also provide different insights into incorporating their theoretical frameworks into the liberated/decolonized reconstruction of the black female image. Two critical understandings have been revealed from these theoretical frameworks. One, academia is a diverse and influential space with numerous offerings and insights, and these

insights are not stagnant. Two, academia, like media, "is an extension of man" (McLuhan, 1964). Essentially, if we search hard enough or research deeply enough, we can find some semblance of freedom in academia/educational spaces. It has to be understood that "the praxis is not blind action, deprived of intention or finality. It is action and reflection" (Freire 1972). There are principles of applying theory that are necessary to gain the most meaningful and individual revolutionary impact from theory/academia.

Social Analytics-

As some charmingly refer to it 'that bird app,' Twitter is a social media powerhouse that offers diverse, absurd, critical, and nonsensical thoughts and commentaries. Through this multimedia platform, numerous representations of black women are offered. These diverse representations also speak to Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality. Also, this social media platform offers openings for all to offer their perspectives and think pieces on how the black female imagery gets to position itself and exists. Kasana (2014, 242) resolves that "the need for media—whether electronic, print, or social—to play a supporting role in social and political change and the empowerment of disenfranchised people and advancement of political causes by strengthening the public sphere or, in social media's case, the online sphere is not a nascent phenomenon; it merely echoes the historical relationship between people and the [media]. She further posits that "social media has become a vital platform for us to use for our social justice gains. Nevertheless, social media alone cannot carry and implement the entire political process of change."

The space of social media provides the platform for a re-imagining and a confirmation of the black female image. Discourses are being led by black women concerning misandry, social injustice, gender inequality, radical body acceptance, entrepreneurship, sex work, academia, skin/hair care, upholding the patriarchy, and dismantling the patriarchy. The point is that social media is a revolutionary platform that both dismantles and upholds black female imagery's oppression.

The literature demonstrates that social media in the framing of Black Digital Studies offers a technological space to further the works of the three previously discussed theoretical frameworks, mainly as they concern academic concepts and the liberation of the black female image #blackwomenliberation.

Findings and Gaps

Engaging with the various literature concerning my research was purposeful and revealed vital understandings. Also, to uncover the fundamental concepts of my concerns, this paper took an empirical approach to speak on my findings profoundly. This paper's research method allowed me to tenaciously explore and address the cultural, political, and epistemological practices that were created and continue to create limitations in the journey to liberation for black women. My research process was theoretically focussed and allowed me to critically examine academic practices developed under popular epistemological frameworks in the North American learning spaces and the limitations and expansions that they offer to black women and their image. The majority of the readings I engaged with were collected over the last two years since I started my graduate program. Additionally, hooks and Freire's works have played a significant contribution to my journey to liberation. Researching for this project has served both a personal and public academic fulfillment.

Additionally, after engaging with readings from renowned Black Feminists, and prolific educators such as Paulo Freire, there is no denying that education is a mighty institution that can manifest the best or the worst out of a single idea. Intention greatly dictates the outcome of how people engage with academia. My findings also revealed specific negative characteristics associated with the black female image that any other radicalized group of women does not experience. These characteristics are connected to physical features and expressions of emotions. There was no considerable surprise with what the readings reveal, but what was troubling was the missing data concerning statistics on radicalized topics here in Canada and with Canadian

academic institutions. It needs to be addressed. I could not paint the picture about the genuine demographic representation of black women in Canadian post-graduate institutions because the Canadian society seems to shy away from addressing race in this country.

Data is essential in the telling of the Canadian black lived experiences. Additionally, by not collecting quantitative data on black female academics and instructors' demography, we are essentially erasing their collective presence and relevance.

Furthermore, my literature review demonstrates more research needs to be done to speak to the black experience, especially those of black women existing and living here in Canada. Only around 3.5% and black people make up the Canadian population, which is growing. Future research is needed to provide more positive and genuine representation for this 3.5%.

Summary of the Literature

The literature is potent in demonstrating that liberation and a decolonized model of the black female image exist through theory and pedagogy. The theoretical frameworks of Critical Pedagogy, Black Feminist Theory, and Digital Humanities are the significant schools of thought in the discourse around the black women's liberation movement. Through the readings examined, we can see the evolving thoughts concerning knowledge, pedagogy, and theory; and the impact of each on socio-cultural-political understandings. The works of Freire, Allman, and Hooks allow us to explore Critical Pedagogy and frame it to black women's locality. The concept of 'critical thinking' rests heavily in these theoretical framings in a very general sense. Critical pedagogy is a liberation and revolution source for the marginalized and oppressed groups in our society, but it

needs guidance and more practice. Allman and hooks made it clear that theory without practice/ implementation/locality is ineffective and will not lead to the oppressed true liberation.

Furthermore, what is missing from this literature review is the specific dialogue concerning how the black female image is framed in the Canadian geographical context. It is not surprising as blackness exists in the Canadian space as both invisible and hyper-visible as well. More so, in academia, black female forms are erased and made to reflect a singular representation.

An underlying understanding garnered from the literature review is that the re-construction of the black female image from racism, sexism, capitalism, and Eurocentric beliefs may be an individual venture that encapsulates the support of everyone in the space of black women. To encourage liberation and decolonization, we have to recognize that "democratization involves a recognition of each individual's strengths and differences and an affirmation of how all of these contribute to and enrich whatever we are seeking to do, to learn or to understand more deeply and critically" (Freire, 1972).

The rest of this paper will explore the three questions that frame my research concerns. First, we will explore the representation of the black female 'image' in societal institutions like universities and the media, and examine the impact it has on the black female image, and the public perceptions of black women in North American society. Second, we will probe the discourse that is promoted and facilitated on social media platforms concerning black women, their activism, their feminism, and their role in academia. Last, this paper will unpack theoretical

frameworks such as the Black Feminist Theory and Critical Pedagogy concerning their location in the discussion concerning the liberation of the black female image.

When They See Us -

Malcolm X once retorted that “the black woman is the most disrespected person in America.” My lived experiences and observations of the global space have permitted me to agree with his statements. Brown (2007, p.18) contributed that “the crowded metahistory of black women’s representational subjection is well documented.” It is not just that black women are disrespected, but they are also gaslighted constantly and tremendously to believe that their inadequate treatments are figments of their imaginations. When we consider gaslighting, we are referencing “when someone denies, on the basis of another’s social identity, her testimony about a harm or wrong done to her, [also] on the other strand, gaslighting is described as a form of wrongful manipulation and, indeed, a form of emotional abuse” (Stark, 2019, p.221). Stark further highlights that gaslighting aims to get another to see her plausible perceptions, beliefs, or memories as groundless. Constructing the concerns of black women and how they are being treated and portrayed as baseless is very harmful and pushes an agenda that obscures the plight of black women to bring light to the systemic oppression that affects them and has been affecting us. The call for liberation and healing concerning the black female image is not a baseless one, considering the history of exploitation propelled and continued through colonial thinking and

actions. Black women in the global North have been subjected to underrepresentation or no representation in various areas considered prestigious and high opportunities. Even in primary social institutions and spaces, there seems to be a lack of representation (or positive representation) of the black female image. As I traverse through the grounds of formal and social spaces here in Canada, Edmonton, Alberta, to be specific, I hardly see a representation of the black female image.

In North American societies, I have observed similarities and differences in how black women occupy spaces. The United States of America stands as the trendsetter for the global stage, and this perception of the U.S is not because of its majority (whiteness), but through one of its 'minority groups, 'African-Americans.' Moreover, the innovative and trailblazing attitude associated with the U.S culture is entangled with black women occupying and who have occupied that country. On the other hand, we have Canada that sits right beside the U.S and shares a similar history, but Canada's history and relationship with the black female image is less hyper-visible as it is in the States. The black female form seems to be reduced or made invisible here in Canada. The history of Harriett Tubman leading the enslaved black men and women to freedom in Canada through the Underground Railroad is not readily taught or discussed in the positioning of Black Canadian History. This positioning of The U.S to Canada in the conversation concerning the lived experiences of black women is still relevant in today's context. The leading and majority scholars, works, and projects discussing and referencing black women are Americans and from American social institutions. This research is a clear example of this rhetoric, where the majority of my references are from American scholars and studies linked to the American experience of the black female image. The juxtaposition between Canada and the

U.S and the invisibility and hyper-visibility surrounding the black female form is very fitting. In Canada, black women's lived experiences and presence is imperceptible, while in the United States of America, it mainly occupies a space of extreme visibility (mainly in conversations concerning harmful racial and gendered tropes). These "conventional representations of black women have done [so much] violence to the image" (hooks, 1997, p.10).

In response to my first research question of "how is the black female image represented in the North American Society," it is fair to surmise that the black female form is overseen and underseen. Meaning that while there has been and continues to be a complete erasure of the positive representations of the black female image through misrepresentations and negative emphasis, the diverse lived experiences of black women have and continue to dismantle the comfort with which society tries to dismember and destroy our representations and identities. Brown (2007, p.25) posits that "people are too comfortable with black women in various states of sexual violence and unrest, too comfortable with their dismemberment and their utter corporeal destruction."

Even though it is known that the black female image significantly occupies social institutions such as universities (as a path to liberation and economic gain), the statistical data of our representation is erased by Canadian policies. It has been difficult for me to access quantitative data from my university and StatCan concerning the demographic representation of black girls and women enrolment in college and universities. This can be seen as an act of erasure.

Additionally, my own lived experience as a postgraduate student at my current university highlights the erasure of black women in academia. I have only encountered one black female professor since the beginning of my studies. And if there is freedom through academia, does the lack of black women professors indicate that the Canadian leg of the black women's liberation movement is not in motion or quietly contributing to the oppression of the black female image

Education - Key to Success

Where then is a safe space for black women?

The power of self-liberation is inadequately discussed in the field of academia. Its relevance is also overlooked in peoples' personal lives, but the untapped power that it holds has done wonders for the liberated, especially those liberated from intersectional oppression. Intersectional oppression is connected to the dialectical tensions that present themselves in forms of integration/separation and stability/change, and expressive/privacy; all of which speak to the presentation, comprehension, acknowledgment, and interpretation of the Black Female Image, especially in the locality of the Western society. hooks (1994, p.13) shared that "to educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn," suggesting that information can

be objective, but its presentation and distribution can be overwhelmingly subjective. The works of hooks and Allman reiterates and presents the idea of "healing through theory." The sentiments of "healing through theory" is recognized as a prolific phenomenon, but it is also not the end-all solution to all the oppressive issues that restrict and incarcerate the black female image. Healing through theory is not a band-aid, that once applied to the wound, will do the job of ameliorating said wound. The concept of 'healing through theory' requires critical thinking, reflection, consideration, individualization, community efforts, and support. hooks (1994, p.69) highlights that "within revolutionary feminist movements, within revolutionary black liberation struggles, we must continually claim theory as necessary practice within a holistic framework of 'liberatory' activism.

Furthermore, Lewis (2015, p.43-44) highlights through case studies how the space of academia has impacted three black women who occupy this space in roles of authority, instructors, and 'other.' Lewis (2015, p.43-44) further shares that the hyper visibility of Black women academics and the contemporary fascination with what bell hooks call the 'commodification of Otherness' means that Black women today find themselves precariously perched in the academy. Moreover, according to bell hooks, the Black woman student or professor is almost always at odds with the existing academic structure, which has not become accustomed to the Black female presence or physicality." Lewis shares with us as a junior faculty member at a state university on the East Coast with few Black students or faculty, Dr. Mariposa's understanding of her presence in her role as instructor. Dr. Mariposa recognizes that her "corporeal presence as the professor offers an oppositional challenge to the accuracy of these tropes [uneducated, sexualized, angry, welfare

dependent]. It is this disruption that arouses the curiosity of students and, often, the surveillance of colleagues and administrators" (Lewis, 2015, p.45). Dr. Mariposa's black female form's occupancy in the locality of academia is a disruption to the oppressed imageries of black female forms, while still having [her] body represents multiple racial, historical, sexual, and physical narratives that contest the possibility of the mind/body split as it "mediates the educational endeavor" (Lewis 2015, p. 45). Another case study highlighted through Lewis paper is that of Professor Deborah, who "describes herself as "an African feminist lesbian . . . that is how I've lived," and considers her institution to be "the safest environment" for her, noting that her identities are respected. Professor Deborah also proclaims that in her positioning in the field of academia she has "a lot of space" to be whom she wants to be. Professor Deborah also affirms that because she "meets a lot of quotas" with one body (black, woman, lesbian), she takes the space to be her authentic self and experience that curated space of self-liberation.

These two case studies bring together the dialectical environment that presides over the black female image in academia. Like Dr. Mariposa and Professor Deborah, they have ascended to positions of power and relevance; they have also garnered their versions of liberation through their critical studies. Nevertheless, through their tales of liberation, we recognized that their lived identities are 'minor' compared to a broader scope of their physical environment. They are both instructors at institutions predominantly attended by white students and operated by majority white and male staff. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that doc and prof were able to impact and affirm the collective and singular representations produced about the black women and our liberatory practices and internalizations through education and theoretical frameworks.

In addition to spaces occupied by black female forms in academia, we have to consider what is being taught and studied in the advocacy and protest of "healing through theory." The content is used to inform the positioning, understanding, and framing of the black female thought. It also sets the stage for how black women can function and perform under societal gazes. This paper explores in what capacity (if any) can pedagogy and theoretical frameworks such as Critical Education, Digital Humanities, and Black Feminist Theory aid in decolonizing the black female image. I mention these three schools of thought because I engage with them and the liberation ideologies, concepts, and resources they have provided and privileged other black women and me.

Peter McLaren asks the question, "can a renewed and revived critical pedagogy . . . serve as a point of departure for a politics of resistance and counter-hegemonic struggle in the twenty-first century? (1998, p. 448). In response to McLaren's question, Allman (2010, p.161) affirmed that "not only can a "renewed" and "revived" critical pedagogy do this—it must. Moreover, it can do more; however, whether it will do anything that impacts directly on improving the human condition and thus revolutionary social transformation depends on what is meant by critical pedagogy."

Critical Education/Pedagogy describes the branch of education and social movement that focuses on standardized knowledge and learning's political implications. This epistemological framework was made famous and brought to the spotlight by Paulo Freire's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). The tenets of Critical Pedagogy rests on "education [being] what happens to the other

person, [and] not what comes out of the mouth of the educator" (Horton, Kohl & Kohl, 1990, p. 135). Furthermore, Critical education encourages positive social transformation that impacts the individual, their understanding, their processing, and their learning. Like Allman explained, critical education fosters critical, internalized, and reflective thinking. It imposes on the individual to utilize and unify the abstract and the practical, leading to praxis. Praxis is the gap between theory and practice, the text and the world; ideas translated into actions. Freire (1972) posits that "praxis is not blind action, deprived of intention or finality. It is action and reflection," so for the black female image to gain liberation through education, it has to be done purposefully and intentionally.

Even though Digital Humanities (DH) establishment or public profile is rooted in collaboration and "harbors networks of people who have been working together," it still exists in spaces that favor the colonial hegemonic construct of power and distribution of power. Everything we experience digitally and in any media form is an extension of us and our intentions. We should recognize that Digital Humanities is also a social undertaking, meaning that it engages and confronts the society that we have formed and how we operate in it. DH, as a contemporary study of Critical Education, reminds us that "ideas are tools: [and] you can play with them, turn them around, look at them, use and test them" (Horton, Kohl & Kohl, 1990, p. 137). DH offers technological, contemporary, and fused insights into perceiving and studying societal and cultural understandings. Academic pursuits are promises of freedom and grace in various forms (financial, understandings, and self-relegations). Even though there are remnants of the depravity of colonial ideologies in our contemporary society that is also evident in DH, academic fields such as Digital Humanities do offer the continuum for 'minorities' or 'others' in the North

American geographical space to reimagine and re-conceptualize who they are, who they can be and the spaces they can occupy. It is a duplicitous space that the advocacy and practice for the liberation of the black female image exist.

Digital Humanities cleverly utilizes mixed methodologies to combine technology/computational understandings with the Arts to uncover and understand various historical events. This collaboration between traditional and contemporary should allow for more than a numbers-based retelling and reimagining of the archived data. This is where DH's field contributes to the decolonization of black bodies and their historical framings.

Jessica Johnson's (2018) 'Markup Bodies Black [Life] Studies and Slavery [Death] Studies at the Digital Crossroads' is a paper that makes and ensures that the humanistic appeal is not hidden or becomes lost in the field of Digital Humanities. Johnson (2018) makes the argument or lays the foundation to make the argument for Digital Humanities and its contemporaries as a primary gateway for decolonization for black forms. She brings to the forefront how contemporary studies such as Digital Black Studies have been and continues to be revolutionized, thus bringing the black diasporas' lived experiences to the masses. Johnson's arguments also implicate the complicit and implicit role that academia has facilitated in certain dehumanizing groups of people and their existence. The world of academia has been used to aid in the spreading of propaganda that has promoted and normalized the discriminatory and biased construction of the black diaspora as 'other.' The utilization of digital media by the black community has allowed, and continues to allow for first-hand perspectives of their (our) lives, which provides us with ownership in the telling of the black experience. There is a significant push for the current

contemporary and futuristic retelling, re-shaping, and re-constructing the black female image to be framed outside of colonial understandings.

Johnson (2018) and Haraway (1991) uplift the decolonization movement by demonstrating how being 'other' is not inherently something to detest but something to embrace in all of its alternative forms. Furthermore, Haraway's cyborg manifesto encourages the black female image to embrace her locality as 'other,' like a cyborg. "The cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations, [and] the cyborg skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense," and "is no longer structured in by the polarity of public and private" (Haraway, 1991, p.151). The gateway to liberation for the black female form does not lie in hating or fearing being the 'other,' but rather it lies in optimizing the genuine acceptance of being that alien galactic being. "Liberation rests on the construction of consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility" (Haraway, 1991, p.149).

Black Feminism is a revolution unto itself, and "it uses theory to address the personal dealings and experiences of black women mainly located in the Western World" (hooks 1994, p.62). It has also significantly catapulted the women's liberation movement and continues to do so. The Black Feminist Theory emerged in the 19th century, making its debut during the time of slavery (as lived during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade period), and it encapsulates a wide range of understandings and has the range to effectively and purposefully move from theory to practice. The diversity and impact that exists within the learnings and teachings of the Black Feminist

Theory are undeniable. This theory is so powerful because it exposes and highlights the intersectionality in oppression, especially the oppression of the black woman.

Black Feminist Theory both dismantles and re-constructs what it means to be a black woman in the North American space. It offers the black female image the opportunity to move from the margin of colonial oppression and exploitation through its practical and purposeful ability to move from theory to practice. Black Feminist Theory is upheld and formalized by the brilliant minds of black women such as bell hooks, Paula Allman, Beyoncé, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and so many others like myself.

#BlackTwitter

Johnson (2018, p.66) contributes that "the digital, like any tool, institution, or system across society, from law and medicine to the academy, will be radical or transformative only to the extent that researchers, programmers, designers, hackers, and users make an effort to dismantle the residue of commodification" that has been left behind and made present the eurocentric propaganda and ill actions. We live in a technological fuelled existence, everything is screen time, and our lived experiences are now curated for constant public consumption through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. I want to use this research to highlight the role of utilizing the social media platform Twitter has played in the liberated conceptualization of the black female image. Twitter's unique identifier in the social networking sphere is that it focuses on the wit and writing capacities of its users; even though it incorporates images and audio-visual (gifs, videos), its focus is on what is being written and expressed through the written

form in 280 or fewer characters. Twitter is fifteen years old and positions itself as a microblogging site. Through this platform, I have been exposed to the black female image in numerous and diverse categories. I engage with thoughts and perceptions of black women, especially those in the global North, and it has taught me that the black female form does not only sit in the oppressive colonial framings, but it occupies so many other spaces. For me is liberating. I engage with black women who are misandrists, non-binary, sex workers, academics, moms, business owners, bad b*tches, 'pick-me,' astrologers, content creators, news analysts, entertainers, advocates, students, scientists, medical experts, beauty experts. The point is that the black female image is not coded into one contrived, controlled image. There are black women such as "PeoplesOracle" who positions herself as 'thee Sidereal Astrologer,' and advocate for the divination of liberation and the reimagining of decolonization outside of the learnings of whiteness/Eurocentrism and capitalism. There are users such as "Libgyal" who present the black female image through the perfect blend of humour, profound social insights, misandry, and entrepreneurship in the same breath. The point is that the black female image, in its experience of intersectionality, has now revisioned who she is, whom she gets to be, and how she is experienced having nothing to do with whiteness.

Furthermore, liberation through contemporary technological modes is possible. It will continue to be possible, but it has to exist and has been existing outside of the traditional spaces, especially the realm of academia. The black digital practice has allowed for decolonization from the eurocentric telling of the black narrative to take place in the digital verse, which spills over in the academic sphere and eventually into today's social and political interactions.

The black form in 2021 is not a singular representation of any negative or overbearing stereotype. She is not mammee; she is not welfare mom, she is not invisible, she is not bootylicious, she is not a strong black woman; as well as she is not Beyoncé, she is not Hottentot Venus, she is not Viola Davis, she is not drawn in some one-dimensional representation. Instead, the black female image is a duplicitous concoction of the best, neutral and worst construction of humanity as it is in this dimension. The black female form occupies various spaces, with both limitations and no limitations. Twitter is a modern platform that allows the global space to engage with and relate to black women outside of the colonial framings of our femininity and blackness.

Conclusion

Theory has the space for 'liberatory' practice, but it has to be learned, internalized, and connected to the lived experiences of black women from the various status in society. hooks (1994, p.61) posits that "[theory] fulfills this function [of liberating] only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end." She confirms that if the black female image is to be reshaped through academia, it must be intentional and purposeful. There is no overnight cure for repairing the years of systemic oppression that has been placed against us.

The gateway to liberation for the black female image is not located in any one space, social institution, ideologies, epistemology; just as how black women are not a singular representation, there is no one size fits for us and our struggles as black women in the neo-colonial Global

North. Horton, Kohl & Kohl (1990, p. 140) reminds us that "these concepts, [epistemologies] and hunches are a matter of experience and then testing. You have a hypothesis, and you then test it out. You find some of it is good and some of it is bad. Then you revise it, and you have another hypothesis that you can test out." The black female image has been held captive. Black women have fought for their liberation and continue to assert themselves in the decolonization process against their bodies' struggles and exploitation. The literature encourages us to embrace being "other." In this embrace, we can genuinely find more ownership of ourselves, our image, and the freedom to claim this ownership. My liberation is my own to internalize and practice. My liberation is also not an individual effort because freeing oneself from mental enslavement is about community and observing how those who are similar to me resolve and practice their lived identities. I conceptualize my own liberation by observing the lived identities and experiences of other black women.

References

- Allman, P. (1999). *Revolutionary Social Transformation: Democratic Hopes, Political Possibilities and Critical Education*. Westport CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Allman, P. (2010). *Critical education against global capitalism: Karl Marx and revolutionary Critical Education*. Sense Publishers.
- Awatere, D. (1984). Maori Sovereignty. Broadsheet.
- Brown, K. J. (2007). "Black Rapture: Sally Hemings, Chica Da Silva, and the Slave Body of Sexual Supremacy." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 35, nos. 1–2, 45–66
- Carpenter, T. R. (2012). Construction of the crack mother icon. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 36(4), 264–275.
- Carr, P. (2008). "But what can I do?" Fifteen things education students can do to transform themselves in/through/with education. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 1(2), 81-97.
- Chávez, K. R., & Griffin, C. L. (2012). Standing at the intersections of feminisms, intersectionality, and communication studies. In C. L. Griffin, and K. R. Chavez (Ed.), *Standing in the intersection: Feminist voices, feminist practices in communication studies* (pp. 1–34). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: *Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color*. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299. doi:10.2307/1229039
- Dietze, G. (2014). Decolonizing Gender—Gendering Decolonial Theory: *Crosscurrents and Archaeologies*. *Decoloniality, Postcoloniality, Black Critique: Joints and Fissures*, 245-69.
- Escobar, Arturo (2007). "Worlds of Knowledges Otherwise. *The Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Research Program*." *Cultural Studies*, 21.2/3: 129–210.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.
- Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (2005) Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences. In: *Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., Eds., The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research, 3rd Edition*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, 191-215.
- Haraway, D.(1991). A Cyborg Manifesto: *Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*. In: *D. Hearsay, ed., Simians, Cyborgs, and Women, 1st ed.* New York: Routledge, pp.149-181.
- Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- Hooks, B. (1988). *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black*. Toronto: Between the Lines.
- Hooks, B. (2003). "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones. London: Routledge, 97.
- Horton, M., Kohl, J.& Kohl, H. (1990). *The Long Haul*. New York: Routledge
- Jacobs, C. E. (2016). Developing the "Oppositional gaze": Using critical media pedagogy and black feminist thought to promote black girls' identity development. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 85(3):225

- Johnson, J. M. (2018). Markup Bodies. *Social Text*, vol 36, no. 4, pp. 57-79. Duke University Press, doi:10.1215/01642472-7145658.
- Kasana, M. (2014). Feminisms and the Social Media Sphere. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 42(3/4), 236-249. Retrieved March 4, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24365006>
- Kirschenbaum, M. G. (2010). "What Is Digital Humanities And What's It Doing In English Departments?". *ADE Bulletin. Modern Language Association (MLA)*, doi:10.1632/ade.150.55.
- Lemons, G. L. (2017). Caught up in the spirit! *Teaching for womanist liberation*. Hauppauge, N.Y.: Nova Science Publishers, Inc.
- Lewis, M. (2015). Corporeal Presence: Engaging the Black Lesbian Pedagogical Body in Feminist Classrooms and College Communities. In T. Melancon and J. M. Braxton (Eds.), *Contemporary Black Female Sexualities*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. (pp. 41-56).
- Melancon, T., Braxton, J.M., Harris-Perry, M., Melancon, T., Brown, K.J., & Patterson, C.J. (2015). *Contemporary Black Female Sexualities*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding Media*. The MIT Press, pp. 3-21.
- Morrissey, M. E., & Kimball, K. Y. (2017). #SpoiledMilk: Blacktavists, visibility, and the exploitation of the black breast. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 40(1), 48-66.
- Nakata, M., Nakata, V., Keech, S., & Bolt, R. (2012). Decolonial goals and pedagogies for Indigenous studies. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, education & society*, 1(1), pp.120-140
- Smith, L. T. (2012). Decolonizing methodologies: *Research and indigenous peoples*.
- Stark, C. A. (2019). Gaslighting, misogyny, and psychological oppression. *Monist*, 102(2), 221-235. doi:10.1093/monist/onz007
- University of Alberta. (2021). The Institutional Strategic Plan 2016 -2021 (For the Public Good). Retrieved from <https://www.ualberta.ca/strategic-plan/index.html>
- Wright, K. (2020). Decolonizing: *Black Feminist Theory: The Gateway to Liberation of the Black Female Image*.
- Wynter, S. (2003) 'Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, afterman, its overrepresentation-an argument', *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3:3: 257-337.

