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City Girls, hot girls and the re-imagining of Black women in hip hop and digital spaces

ABSTRACT

Through a hip hop feminist lens, how are we to interpret black girls' and women's self-identification in digital spaces that visibly resonate with new/remixed images? And more importantly, what happens when black female rap artists and their fan base disrupt, subvert or challenge dominant gender scripts in hip hop in order to navigate broader discourses on black female sexuality? Drawing on the work of Joan Morgan and hip hop feminist scholarship in general, this essay aims to offer a critical reading of 'hot girl summer'. Inspired by Houston rapper Megan Thee Stallion's lyrics on 'Cash Shit', where she raps about 'real hot girl shit', the phrase has morphed into a larger-than-life persona not only for Megan's rap superstar profile, but also for a number of black girls. According to Megan, a hot girl summer is 'about women and men being unapologetically them[selves] […] having a good-ass time, hyping up their friends, doing [them]'. What does 'hot girl summer' tell us about significant changes in the ways that black women cultivate community in digital spaces, how they construct their identities within systems of controlling images and grapple with respectability politics? In order to address these questions with a critical lens, using an interdisciplinary approach grounded in black feminism and hip hop feminism, this essay offers a theoretical approach to a digital hip hop feminist sensibility (DHHFS). Too little has been said about black women's representation in digital spaces where they imagine alternative gender performance, disrupt hegemonic tropes and engage in participatory culture.

Hip hop has entered into a renaissance period for women artists with the assistance of social media and SoundCloud, a user-generated streaming site. In the title of their article/video mashup, *The Root* contributors Jessica Moulite and Felice Leon declared that women in hip hop are 'grabbing feminism by the mic […] making a lane of their own' (2019: n.pag.). Although outlining the historical traditions contemporary women rappers are following is of importance, for this article, I am specifically interested in examining the ways in which black women, both cultural producers and consumers of hip hop, have 'grabbed feminism by the mic', which brings me to my main question: what happens when black female rap artists and their fan base disrupt, subvert or challenge dominant gender scripts in hip hop in order to navigate broader discourses on black female sexuality? To complicate matters further, through a hip hop feminist lens, how are we to interpret black girls' and women's self-identification in digital spaces, which visibly resonate with these new/remixed images?

In the summer of 2019, young black girls determined that it is, in fact, a hot girl summer. Inspired by Houston rapper Megan Thee Stallion's lyrics on 'Cash Shit', where she raps about 'real hot girl shit', the phrase has morphed into a larger-than-life persona, not only for Megan's rap superstar profile but also for a number of black girls. According to Megan, a hot girl summer is 'about women and men being unapologetically them[selves] […] having a good-ass time, hyping up their friends, doing [them]' (Megan cited in Lindsay 2019: n.pag.). Megan acknowledges that her catchphrase is gender fluid, which thus reveals a hip hop feminist sensibility as she also invites men (regardless of sexuality/gender) to participate. She later clarified that, at its core, it is an embrace of confidence by being unapologetically one's self, free of self-restricting definitions or labels. In short, hot girl summer is a designated seasonal period (i.e. summertime) for hot girls to fully embrace who they are.

Despite Megan's attempt to situate 'hot girls/hot girl summer' within a positive framework, the motto has been deemed as promoting sexual promiscuity, and even more alarming, the phrase has been associated with derogatory terminology towards women (i.e. thot, hoe, slut, loose, etc.). The criticism hot girl summer has received has primarily honed in on making judgements regarding the sexual lives of Megan and/or those who identify as having a hot girl summer, thus placing women in limited binary tropes of 'good girl/bad girl' or 'classy/ratchet'. As scholars Erica B. Edwards and Jennifer Esposito note, 'these tropes are simultaneously in play with many others in objectifying black and brown bodies' (2018: 342). This includes the controlling images identified by Patricia Hill Collins and the more historical understanding of black women as sexually immoral and hypersexual.

Hip hop feminists like Joan Morgan, Brittany Cooper, Aisha Durham and Susana Morris have posited valuable questions to move black feminist thought (BFT) forward. In Morgan's 'Why we get off: Moving towards a black feminist politics of pleasure', she asks, 'How can deepening our understanding of the multivalent ways black women produce, read and participate in pleasure complicate our understanding of black female subjectivities in ways that invigorate, inform and sharpen a contemporary black feminist agenda?' (2015: 36). Drawing on the work of Morgan and hip hop feminist scholarship in general, this article aims to offer a critical reading of 'hot girl summer'. In short, what does 'hot girl summer' tell us about significant changes in the ways that black women cultivate community in digital spaces? How are black women constructing their identities within systems of controlling images

and more importantly, how do they grapple with respectability politics? In order to address these questions with a critical lens, using an interdisciplinary approach grounded in black feminism and hip hop feminism, this article offers a theoretical framework to a digital hip hop feminist sensibility (DHHFS). Too little has been said about black women's representation in digital spaces, where they re-imagine alternative gender performance, disrupt hegemonic tropes and engage in participatory culture. A more in-depth look at the ways in which black women take on a hip hop feminist mantra in digital spaces will allow researchers access to understand how black women can use language, specifically hip hop discourse, to evoke politics of disrespectability, promote gender expansive performance and reverse traditional sexual dynamics. This framework reveals a shift in the agency of women as they construct their personas in digital spaces. As such, this article aims to advance the work of previous scholarship concerned with the intersections of black women's visibility, engagement and performance in digital spaces.

I begin with a detailed definition of what it means to embody a DHHFS. This is followed by a review of digital scholarship that centres black women's stories and experiences in online spaces. Next, I offer a brief overview of the 'hot girl summer' phenomenon followed by a brief historical outline of black feminism. In the pages that follow, I consider how social media and digital spaces impact the trajectory of hip hop feminism and unpack why the inter-section of pleasure politics and hip hop feminism is necessary for under-standing how we engage black women and girls in this current social-cultural landscape.

I then bring these ideas together by applying a digital hip hop sensibility methodological lens to the cultural phenomenon of 'hot girl summer', specifically taking a look at the hashtag on Instagram and Twitter. I conclude with an acknowledgement of the value of this theory to hip hop feminist scholarship. In short, this theory offers the necessary tools for black women to speak back against internalized '-isms' and contribute to the overall health and well-being of various marginalized groups within digital spaces.

DIGITAL HIP HOP FEMINIST SENSIBILITY

I define a DHHFS as an encouragement towards a particular epistemology of self that is performed in digital spaces and embodies a hip hop feminist ethos, where participants co-opt pleasure politics for the purposes of celebrating behaviours that are often demeaned by broader culture. Space is also created to allow individuals the agency to subvert and redefine hegemonic views of particular identities. DHHFS can help us understand collective expressions voiced by black women, such as hot girl summer, or even Brown and Halliday's interest in 'feeling myself' and #blackgirlmagic. This is hallmarked by pleasure politics broadly defined and communal engagement, all within a digital space (i.e. Twitter, Instagram, etc.). Digital spaces like Twitter and Instagram offer the necessary tools to create meaning that is far more visible and accessible than other spaces allow, such as a concert setting. Scholar Alicia Corts argues that, 'by entering new virtual spaces of performance, we experience ways of performing that step outside the boundaries of the physical world, giving the illusion that virtual performance is unlimited' (2016: 113). Thus, I argue that the multimodal aspect of digital spaces (i.e. the combination of text, images and videos) is what heightens the need to do more than just

show up in person. Additionally, the ability to archive interactions amongst users is what makes digital spaces unique and more valuable.

HIP HOP FEMINISM AND DIGITAL MEDIA

Recent years have seen a wave of scholarship on digital media spaces and the intersections of race. With 72 million active Twitter users in the United States, black folks make up 26 per cent of Twitter's demographics (Tien 2018). Scholars such as Marc Lamont Hill, Latoya A. Lee, Sarah Florini, Sanjay Sharma, André Brock, Sarah J. Jackson, Moya Bailey, Brooke Foucault Welles, and Feminista Jones have all written about Twitter generally or iterations of Twitter – like Feminist Twitter and Black Twitter more specifically. Their research also focuses on the influence/impact of racial identities and use of the platform. While Brock approaches Twitter through the lens of critical race and technocultural theory to identify how cultural performances in the online space are understood, Sharma examines the materialization of online racialized identities by analysing racialized hashtags. On the other hand, Florini unpacks the linguistic practice and cultural tradition of signifyin' to acknowledge the cultural performance of black Twitter users, and Lee, Hill and Jones view Black Twitter as a tool for political resistance against anti-blackness. More specifically, Jones's work outlines the importance of black women's valuable participation in digital spaces. Together, Jackson, Bailey and Welles unpack the political power of Twitter, particularly Feminist Twitter, honing in on hashtags that were at the forefront of social movements prioritizing race and gender justice. Their interdisciplinary mixed methods approach further solidifies the value in digital activism.

Adding a new approach to this body of digital scholarship and race, hip hop feminists such as Regina Bradley, Aria S. Halliday and Nadia E. Brown have closely examined black women and girls' constructions of identity within digital spaces. In her article 'Awkwardly hysterical: Theorising black girl awkwardness and humor in social media', Bradley explores 'the significance of social media as a cultural workspace' to unpack 'black girl awkwardness' – a contemporary identity marker specifically for black girls that was made popular by comedienne Issa Rae (2018: 149). In addition, Bradley recognizes the importance of digital spaces such as YouTube, Twitter and Instagram, as they 'allow black women to visualize themselves, establish communities and share/document their experiences online' (2018: 149). Her article uses Rae's online web series to serve as an example of nuanced representations of black women's identities in a digital era. Rae's series also serves as a starting point for Bradley to historicize the presence of the awkward black girl trope in TV sitcoms.

Focusing on digital spaces like Bradley but instead offering a textual analysis, Aria S. Halliday, professor of Africana feminisms, and Nadia E. Brown, professor of political science and African American studies, examine the ways in which 'social media has become an integral site of black women's political empowerment' in their article, 'The power of black girl magic anthems: Nicki Minaj, Beyoncé, and "feeling myself" as political empowerment' (2018: 225). Although they discuss in detail black women's use of social media and the popularity of the celebratory catchphrases and hashtags such as #blackgirlmagic, their data is informed beyond digital media spaces. Instead, they prioritize focus groups as a methodological technique, which thus allows the authors to '[centralize] black women's cultural experiences within black

women's cultural production' (2018: 226). On the other hand, Margaret Hunter and Alhelí Cuenca offer an alternative cultural reading of Nicki Minaj in their article, 'Nicki Minaj and the changing politics of hip hop: Real blackness, real bodies, real feminism?'. They provide an analysis of Minaj's feminine presence in hip hop and focus more on her contradictory brand of feminism, arguing that:

> Minaj pushes the boundaries of blackness […] and creates her body as a 'body-product' for mass consumption by fans through social media. [For the authors] Minaj offers a 'brand' of feminism that is highly marketable because it merges a language of critique and oppression.
>
> (2017: 26)

They briefly address Minaj's digital presence and her intimate engagement with her fan base, but the analysis is far more interested in Minaj's performance online rather than the performance of her fan base. A textual analysis of hashtags associated with Minaj's online presence is not offered.

In comparison, in 'Hashtags and hip hop: Exploring the online performances of hip hop identified youth using Instagram', scholars Della V. Mosley, Roberto L. Abreu, Ashley Ruderman and Candice Crowell use hip hop feminism as a framework to further understand 'the impact of hip hop on youth gender performances' on Instagram (2017: 136). Unlike the previous works mentioned above, instead of focusing on black women and girls, this team of scholars centres black youth (boys and girls). By honing in on songs from three popular artists (Drake, Rihanna and Wale), they searched hashtags closely associated to the artist's songs in order to assess 'how users who associated themselves with the songs […] performed their gender online' (Della et al. 2017: 140). In a similar manner, the work of Kyra Gaunt examines the online gendered performances of adolescent black girls who twerk on YouTube. Gaunt is primarily concerned with the ways in which the appropriation of twerking has an effect of the self-presentation of black girls. Opposed to offering a critical reading of a particular set of hashtags, or an analysis of the black girls' performance, Gaunt uses the data collected from YouTube to 'examine how the phenomenon of context collapse affects the online self-presentation […] of black girls who twerk' on YouTube (2015: 245).

Based on my review of this recent wave of literature, it is clear that we need a theoretical framework that will allow researchers to examine the ways black women fully participate in digital spaces and engage within a community of other black women. More important, paying attention to black women digital hip hop feminist sensibilities offers space to undo respectability politics and calls for a more expansive understanding of a hip hop feminist ethos.

MEGAN THEE STALLION AND HER HOTTIES

It is not uncommon for celebrity fan bases to have unique monikers, whether prescribed by the celebrity or coined by a fan(s). The collective naming of fans is far more popular for mega pop artists like Justin Bieber, Lady Gaga, Rihanna and Beyoncé, in comparison to urban genres like hip hop and R&B. With the exception of Nicki Minaj and her Barbies, it could be argued that the naming of fans is not a 'thing' amongst hip hop artists (it is sometimes considered borderline corny). Most recently however, newly minted women rappers like Megan Thee Stallion, Cardi B and the City Girls have deemed it appropriate to

adopt their fans. With Cardi's *Bardigang*, Megan's *Hotties* and City Girls' identical replicas *City Girls*, women in hip hop across age, race, education and socioeconomic status have proudly identified with one or more of the collectives mentioned. What has not occurred before though is a signature catchphrase coined by an artist (of any genre) to capture the mood and essence of an entire season, and beyond that, an epistemology. In just a short amount of time, Megan's call for a hot girl summer has exceeded the realm of hip hop and is arguably not exclusive to just black women or hip hop; 'This hot girl shit apply to anybody lol no exceptions', Megan tweeted (@TheeStallion 2019a: n.pag.). Keep in mind though, since hip hop feminism 'insists that women and girls of color remain central', this article centres black women and their negotiations of digital hip hop feminist sensibilities (Durham et al. 2013: 722).

According to *Time* magazine, 'the hashtag #HotGirlSummer has been used over 170k times on Instagram, [and] on Twitter a whopping 2 million times [within a month] […] [t]he "hotties", for their part, have taken the call to have a hot girl summer seriously' (Lang 2019: n.pag.). In addition, major brands like Maybelline, Forever 21 and Wendy's have already co-opted the term in their marketing. Scholars, journalists and cultural critics have long ago acknowledged the fragile relationship between hip hop and major brands (see Tricia Rose *Black Noise* and *Hip hop Wars* and Steve Stout *The Tanning of America*). America's admiration for black culture is also no secret. When brands, particularly white brands, aim to profit off of, or gain clout or cool points off a black women's cultural product, it raises many eyebrows. In response to the unforeseen popularity of the phrase, Megan tweeted, 'told y'all I'm taking this hot girl shit global' (@TheeStallion 2019b: n.pag.). This phenomenon, invented by a black woman that directly affects other black women, is worth investigating.

THE LEGACY OF BLACK FEMINISM

Black feminism developed out of the urgency to meet the specific needs and desires of black women in order to achieve economic, political and social liberation. Due to the perils of racism and sexism, 'Black women could rely neither on black men nor on white women to assist them in their fight to be regarded as human beings with full rights deserving of dignity' argues activist and cultural commentator Feminista Jones (2019: 5). Indeed, for too long black women have been outright ignored and rendered invisible. Historically, feminist movements prioritize the voices of white privileged women, and black liberation movements too often regarded only the participation of black male activists as valuable. Jones writes that '[according to Angela Davis], black feminist work in the Americas [began during] the antebellum acts of resistance enacted by enslaved black women, where their struggle was an intrinsic element in the fight for black freedom' (Jones 2019: 5). This was well before black feminism became a popular term. However, other scholars identify 'the roots of black feminism in the United States [being traced to] the work of Anna Julia Cooper in *A Voice from the South* in 1892' (Jackson et al. 2020: 33).

The work of Cooper, along with Frances Beal, materialized the importance of black women's intersecting experiences. Over the past 100 plus years, the ideologies of black feminism have been influenced and transformed by other prominent black women intellectuals like Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Barbara Smith, Audre Lorde, Barbara Christian, bell hooks, The Combahee River Collective, Patricia Hill Collins, Alice Walker, Angela Davis and Kimberle' Crenshaw, just to name a few. Over time, black feminist thought has evolved

and benefited from multi-disciplinary frameworks. For example, in the early 90s, Collins noticed that 'theoretical analysis of black sexuality remained sparse' (Collins-Hill 2009: 134). This then created space for black women to have conversations around the intersecting oppressions of black women and sexual politics, as well as homophobia, within African American communities. Today, as noted by Jones, 'everything represented within and by the black feminist movement affirms the entirety and complexity of life at the intersections of not only race and gender, but also sexual identity, ethnicity, class, religion, size, (dis)ability, access, immigration status, and nationality' (2019: 8). In short, at its core, black feminism advocates for the liberation of *all* black folks – those who may be Queer, Trans, loud, ghetto, ratchet, a nerd or a hot girl.

Twenty years ago, however, this was not the case. Things were a lot different as the world still operated from a heteronormative lens, respectability politics ran rampant and there existed a generational disconnect between feminists. Furthermore, generally speaking, the words feminist and feminism were seen as derogatory, or more so, a badge of dishonour to most black women. Older generations of black women were accustomed to feminist discourse dominated by white women, whereas the younger generation could not grasp the rigid either-or model that was associated with feminism. In an exploration that is equally personal and communal, Joan Morgan's foundational feminist text, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost*, outlines the complexities of black feminist thought as she grapples with the unique struggles black women of the hip hop generation are faced with. Morgan acknowledges 'relying on older heads to redefine the struggle to encompass [her] generation's issues is not only lazy but dangerous' (1999: 22). This resulted in the imagining of a new wave of feminism that would meet the needs of round-the-way black women and girls. Coining the term hip hop feminism, Morgan made space for a feminism to exist that 'would allow [black women] to explore who [they] are as women – not victims. One that claimed the powerful richness […] complexities inherent in being black girls now' (1999: 56).

A HIP HOP FEMINIST ETHOS

In 1999, Morgan called for a feminism that was 'brave enough to fuck with the grays' (1999: 59). It was this call – a desire to create space for contradictions to exist – that laid the foundation for hip hop feminism. Other hip hop feminists such as Brittany Cooper, Aisha Durham and Susanna Morris extended Morgan's definition and outlined all that hip hop feminism and a hip hop feminist is, as well as all that it is not. Most important, 'hip hop feminists' refusal to conform to a feminism that draws lines in the sand should be seen as an affirmation of a kind of feminist theorising that seeks to create rather than merely to deconstruct or critique' (Durham et al. 2013: 723). It is important to point out that investigating black women's participation in online spaces through the lens of DHHFS does not assume that participants themselves identify as hip hop feminists, but rather, that their behaviour embodies a hip hop feminist sensibility. In short, it is the ideologies and aesthetics of hip hop feminism that have influenced their performance online, whether directly or indirectly.

Social media and digital spaces impact the trajectory of hip hop feminism by allowing us to go beyond simply theorizing what hip hop feminism is. What is happening is not imagined or a mere possibility; it can be explored, defined and measured, and other people can use and apply this methodology

(DHHFS) in order to further understand black women's performance in digital spaces and the ways in which it shapes public discourse. These user-generated examples offer visual testimonies that include a combination of written text, videos and images. Whereas in the past, hip hop feminists relied primarily on industry-generated content (i.e. music videos, song lyrics and oftentimes the artists themselves), or on the hip hop feminist scholar's anecdotal and/or personal experiences and connections to some aspect of the culture. Moreover, digital spaces like Twitter and Instagram provide unique access to feminist discourse that has been organically established from diverse groups of black women, whether via hashtags, Twitter threads and/or subcommunities on popular Instagram pages.

In her second edition of *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins acknowledged that 'developing black feminist thought also involves searching for its expression in alternative institutional locations and among women who are not commonly perceived as intellectuals', further emphasizing that 'black women intellectuals are neither all academics nor found primarily in the black middle class' (Collins-Hill 2009: 17). We are now at the point where we have a legit alternative space of inquiry – or more so, alternative digital spaces of inquiry. Indeed, some of the leading commentators are 'non-traditional' intellectuals like rappers Megan Thee Stallion and Cardi B. As one notable example of this realignment, Montinique McEachern argues that 'Cardi B is a legit black feminist baddie and exemplifies ratchet as a black feminist liberatory consciousness' (2017: 87). Unpacking the presence of black women in digital spaces, Feminista Jones points out that:

> Black feminist women are being heard in ways they have never been heard before. Social media networks provide platforms for conversations [to reside] on public display for all to access, learn from, and build upon. The ways in which knowledge is created and shared has transformed in large part due to the explosion of digital media.
>
> (2019: 6)

When Joan Morgan coined the term hip hop feminism in 1999, dial-up was still the primary method used to access the Internet. Although 'social networks' in the broader sense arguably existed within chat rooms, message boards and eventually blogs, they did not operate in the same robust manner as Twitter and Instagram do today. Imagine what provocative discourse on gender politics and hip hop could have occurred amongst black women both within and outside of the academy using images, texts and video within a virtual space in 1999. Instead, early conversations centring on Morgan's game-changing book took place inside college classrooms, academic conferences and book reviews, thus limiting the audience to a specific group of black women (i.e. educated black women) – this all despite the fact that Morgan, herself, recognized that 'if feminism intends to have any relevance in the lives of the majority of black women, if it intends to move past theory and become functional it has to rescue itself from the ivory towers of the academy' (1999: 76). Thankfully, in 2020, we no longer have to imagine what thought-provoking conversations within digital spaces on Morgan's book would look like. Today, these conversations are dynamic, open and widespread. And more importantly, we have access to examples of feminism functioning in innovative ways outside of academia.

#SMARTBROWNGIRLS BOOK CLUB

Social media influencer, cultural commentator and founder of #SmartBrownGirls, Jouelzy, launched The SmartBrownGirl book club on 6 January 2020, across multiple social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook). According to Jouelzy, the goal of the book club is to read books in community and 'provide accessibility to a diverse range of knowledge bases […] [that is] open to a wide breadth of readers' (Jouelzy 2020). More importantly, as the book club's mission states, SmartBrownGirl book club is 'for black girls in forgotten spaces' (SmartBrownGirl 2019: n.pag.). Jouelzy first grew her social media audience on YouTube during the height of natural hair video tutorials curated by black women. As YouTube eventually became oversaturated with hair and beauty vloggers, black women realized quickly that they received less support in comparison to their white or racially ambiguous counterparts from multi-channel networks (third-party service providers who offer assistance to content creators to help increase visibility and revenue). As a result, Jouelzy saw an opportunity to engage with her audience of 197,000 subscribers in more meaningful ways. She shifted her content from all things beauty and hair to examine the intersections of black history and popular culture.

The SmartBrownGirl book club's first reading was none other than Morgan's *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost.* Designed to have the ideas of black women intellectuals accessible for all black women and girls, the SmartBrownGirl book club facilitates two tracks of monthly reading – a general track, described as fun reads, and a complex theory track, which prioritizes and unpacks academic readings grounded in feminist theory for a broad audience. Participants are provided with a digital reading guide in the form of a syllabus produced by 'a collective of post-graduate black women who [ensure that] there is a historiographical component that opens access to all reading tracks to a wide range of knowledge bases' (SmartBrownGirl 2019: n.pag.). Within the syllabus for *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost* written by copywriter Regina Strong, under 'Discourse Objectives', the text is contextualized as being written through a 'hetero-normative lens, at a time when black women were still finding their place outside of contemporary feminism' (Strong 2020: 8). While acknowledging that 'Morgan's writings on black feminist theory still make for insightful and impactful conversations', the guide presents the following pre-reading questions that evoke a DHHFS, particularly as the guide encourages readers to grapple with the current state and relevance of hip hop feminism along with the current landscape of women in hip hop in general:

> Question if hip hop has grown in a way where less negotiation is required to be a black feminist and hip hop advocate.
> Critically assess if this generation needs to redefine the hip hop feminist, or decide if the term is still relevant.
> Is the rise of autonomous black female artist, think Megan the Stallion, Kash Doll, or City Girls proof that hip hop feminism is working? Does their sheer existence redefine the trope?
> And what do we make of their autonomy and reliance on highly sexualized branding?
>
> (Strong 2020: 8)

Jouelzy's digital cultural production presented through her brand, #SmartBrownGirls, offers a direct example as to how social media and digital spaces impact the trajectory of hip hop feminism. First and foremost, the discourse thrives outside of the academy. Also, it is important to point out that her commitment to forgotten black girls aligns with Morgan's commitment to round-the-way black girls, and Collins' commitment a broader understanding of the black woman intellectual. On the basis of these observations, I argue that digital spaces amplify these outlined commitments. Supporting this view, Jones points out:

> The immediacy, access, and connectivity of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram […] create and hold space for the often erased, generally ignored Black woman. Black women's voices have been refreshingly explosive in the self-affirming, self-preserving digital communities […] formed.
>
> (Jones 2019: 13–14)

As it relates to Jouelzy's SmartBrownGirl book club, social media foster a virtual environment for black women readers to engage with foundational texts that are twenty-plus years old, further proving that digital spaces have the ability to maintain the relevancy and importance of a black feminist and hip hop feminist cannon to those outside of the academy. This is an important group that previous cycles of both black feminism and hip hop feminism had little access to or engagement with.

In this article, my reading of DHHFS centres mostly Twitter and Instagram because those are the platforms where I am most present. In contrast, though her cultural and sociopolitical analysis is visible across all social media platforms, Jouelzy's impact/influence appears to be greater on YouTube. This suggests that a DHHFS theoretical framework can be of value to a wide range of social media platforms, as it allows us to offer critical readings and increase our understanding of how black women in digital spaces engage in contemporary feminist discourse. Simply put, it is not *just* about the hashtags.

'I AIN'T FINNA ARGUE BOUT TWERKING': PLEASURE POLITICS AND BLACK WOMEN'S SEXUAL LIBERATION

In an episode of the podcast *Bottom of the Map*, hosts Regina Bradley and Christina Lee make connections to what Bradley refers to as contemporary disrespectable women in southern hip hop and present historical understandings of the blues woman archetype. Bradley announces that 'we are in a moment where we are really starting to see what the gray looks like for [black women] […] and how [black women] maneuver through those gray spaces' (Bottom of the Map 2019). I am most interested in examining what the gray looks like in digital spaces, and more specifically how a DHHFS can help us understand identity-based attributions of agency. Jackson et al. point out that 'black women especially use social media platforms to grow awareness about intracommunity concerns' (2020: 33). Said concerns show up in a multitude of ways, including via memes. Popular memes posted on both Instagram and Twitter best depict how black women navigate not only the gray space but also fuck with the grays in meaningful ways as they fully embrace multiple identities.

I bet people look at my Timeline and Wonder if She Spiritual, Ratchet, Professional or Ghetto
.
.
.
Me: I'm mixed

Figure 1: Black girl multiple identities: spiritual, ratchet, professional and ghetto.

Sophistiratchet

a person of highly educated pedigree (academically, socially & otherwise). Fluent in various forms of public etiquette yet is equally knowledgeable of the latest trap music, updated on most prime-time ratchet cable programs & conversant in the tongue of ratchet.

A sophistiratchet would make the perfect spouse for a corporate hood person.

Figure 3: Black girl multiple identities: sophisticated and ratchet.

Jhene' Aiko makes music for depressed freaky bitches that get their heartbroken way to often but meditate and thug it out. I am bitches

Figure 2: Black girl multiple identities: meditating thug.

clatchet

classy + ratchet.

Elegant women who dance to strip club music are "clatchet."

Figure 4: Black girl multiple identities: classy and ratchet.

In the memes above, we see examples of intracommunity discourse through colloquialisms that evoke hip hop feminists' aesthetics and ethos. Collectively, the memes reject all politics of respectability, which often attempts to offer a singular static view or understanding of black women. They also reject binaries and announce multiple identities, multiple interests, multiple mediums of expression and multiple forms of pleasure.

Scholar-activist Yaba Blay's work on #ProfessionalBlackGirl serves as another valuable example of navigating digital gray spaces. #ProfessionalBlackGirl operates within Instagram and YouTube as a hip hop feminist counterpublic and is defined as:

> A multi-platform digital community that celebrates the everyday, round-the-way culture of black women and girls. In OUR community, 'Black Girl Magic' isn't just reserved for those of us who have accomplished unprecedented achievements (the first one to do this, the only one to do that) – we ALL magical around here!
>
> (Professional Black Girl 2019: n.pag.)

One of the most profound aspects of Blay's work is the affirmation and permission she affords black girls like myself, by outlining that

#ProfessionalBlackGirls are, 'professional code-switchers […] hold Ph.D.s and listen to trap music […] [and most importantly] twerk' (Professional Black Girl 2019: n.pag.). Generally speaking, black women 45 and under enjoy twerking and do so whenever and wherever they can – even in digital spaces. Case in point, Sami Schalk, Assistant Professor of Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, identifies as a #Twerkademic in her Twitter profile. In October of 2019, Schalk made media headlines for twerking on stage with pop rap star Lizzo, after she initiated a campaign featuring the hashtag #TwerkwithLizzo to get the artist's attention. Jackson et al. point out that 'hashtags, which are discursive and user-generated, have become the default method to designate collective thoughts, ideas, arguments, and experiences that might otherwise be stand alone or be quickly subsumed within the fast-paced pastiche of Twitter' (2020: xxviii). I should also add hashtags, and social media platforms in general increase our proximity (though often only virtual proximity) to our favourite celebrities.

Moreover, social media platforms have morphed into challenge arenas, and with each week appears a new dance challenge. Black women artists have taken advantage of this creative outlet to engage with their fans, expand the reach of their music and overall monetize their brand. These include the City Girls #TwerkChallenge, where participants competed for $25,000 and a chance to be featured in their music video. They also include Megan Thee Stallion's #BigOleFreakChallenge, where fans and celebrities pulled up at gas stations to out twerk one another, and the #SavageChallenge, which was initiated by fan Keara Wilson. She choreographed boss-like moves on social media platform TikTok, which allows women to prove how savage they are. Megan Thee Stallion maintains consistency when it comes to black women's empowerment as her use of savage represents multiple identities (e.g. classy, bougie, ratchet). The challenge garnered participation from celebrities like Keke Palmer, Keri Washington and Janet Jackson. To be frank, black women often do not even need a challenge to twerk or dance in general in digital spaces. All that is needed is quality time with their closest girlfriends (which frequently appears documented on social media anyway).

Black women's sexual agency and expression have been policed since enslavement, so it is not surprising that black male artists like Meek Mill would offer an unrequested critique of black women twerking. The Philly rapper tweeted, 'Twerking is like a guy with big stacks of money hanging out of his pocket so everybody can see lol. [I'm] tired of seeing all that shit lol. Y'all burnt twerking out' (@MeekMill 2020). His tweets were in response to Megan Thee Stallion's viral twerking tutorial. Black women quickly came to Megan's defence posting images of the rapper posing with wads of money. The replies ranged from 'nobody cares' to 'shut up pleassee' to 'I disagree. But go off', suggesting that many black women are not interested in what Meek Mill had to say (@PSILOCYBIN 2020; @onikaIegend 2020; @marchx3rd 2020). Two users offered more critical defences of twerking. One posed the following question, 'So that means I can twerk as an expression of joy instead of for male attention now?' whereas the other, a queer male, reminded the rapper of the dance's connection to Africa, 'Twerking is just an African dance' (@Mellow_ Hielo 2020; @EscaflowneClown 2020).

In her research on twerking, black girlhood and YouTube, Gaunt offers a historical context of twerking noting, 'Twerking is correlated to a network of contemporary dances that share the erotic isolation of the hips in various ethnic contexts throughout the African continent and its diaspora' (2015: 245).

Originating from New Orleans Bounce music scene in the early 90s, twerking began as a non-gendered dance. According to Gaunt, twerking 'includes demonstrating dropping, popping, locking, and bouncing with the fleshy part of one's ass to articulate through kinetic orality different aspects of a rap song including miming lyrical bars or accenting styles of rhythm textures or beats' (2015: 248). Regina Bradley reminds us that '[twerking] doesn't necessarily have to be sexualized in such a way, but we have been trained as a society [to think] this is *only* supposed to be sexual' (Bottom of the Map 2019, emphasis added). The scope of this article does not allow me to provide a deep analysis of Meek Mill's innate misogynoir. What is most important is that many people, men and women included, thrive off of respectability and ignorance, which thus causes them to struggle with acknowledging that black women deserve access to pleasure on their own terms. Jones contends:

> We, as a people, continue to struggle with even talking about sex in the most basic terms, and it remains incredibly detrimental to our overall progress toward liberation. As a people whose bodies have been controlled for centuries, we still find it difficult not only to formulate our own ideas about how our bodies experience sex and pleasure, but also how to avoid making our judgements about other black people's sexual behavior based on our sex-negative socialization.
>
> (2019: 75)

As Megan Thee Stallion reminds us, 'it's 2020, I ain't finna argue 'bout twerking' (Megan Thee Stallion 2020). Therefore, in order to move past making judgements and assumptions about black women's sexuality or sexual expressions, the intersection of pleasure politics and hip hop feminism is necessary for understanding how we engage black women and girls in this current social-cultural landscape. Reflecting on her experience of twerking with Lizzo, Schalk admits '[she] gets pleasure from twerking […] because it makes [her] feel good about [her] body and dancing skills' (2019: n.pag.). According to her, 'pleasure is the way [she] love[s] and take[s] care of [herself]' (Schalk 2019: n.pag.). Her understanding of twerking aligns directly with the principles of DHHFS. I should also add that DHHFS helps articulate her desire to twerk in public and digital spaces.

Pleasure politics, within the framework of DHHFS, considers the questions posed by hip hop feminism's foremothers. It is also rooted in dismantling politics of respectability and embracing anti-respectability methodologies (or disrespectability frameworks). Black studies scholar Christina J. Carney reminds us that 'sex is messy, and pleasure in black studies is even messier' (2019: 135). She argues, 'Since anti-blackness is always requiring respectable negroes, the intersection of ideas about [B]lackness, sexuality, and pleasure can refuse this demand and add complexity to understandings about black freedom more broadly' (Carney 2019: 136). Furthermore, the work of Porshé R. Garner, Dominique C. Hill, Jessica L. Robinson and Durell M. Callier suggests that we consider black girlhood as a site of pleasure. In their article, 'Uncovering black girlhood(s): Black girl pleasures as anti-respectability methodology', their understanding of pleasure as 'inclusive of but not limited to sexuality' is important to understanding DHHFS (Garner et al. 2019: 192). The collective group of scholars poses a pertinent question that is relevant to the survival of black women and girls – 'can we be *for* black girls [and black women] and *against* their sexuality?' (Garner et al. 2019: 192, emphasis added).

The answer is a simple, but strong, no. A DHHFS framework allows space for black women and girls to experience pleasure without any limits. This includes celebratory videos of one twerking, posing in bathing suits or business attire. It also includes, as Carney points out, the celebration of '[B]lack women who laugh out loud, curse, sit with their legs open, and selfishly act on their desires' (Stallings cited in Carney 2019: 136). Hip hop feminists and black feminists have put forward important theories that are relevant to applying a DHHFS, such as Ratchet feminism, a subsection of black feminism made popular by Brittany Cooper and expanded by Montinique McEachern and Ashleigh Shackelford. In short, at its core, pleasure politics centred in DHHFS are interested in the general pleasure of self-expression in digital spaces, including the pleasure of personal display, the pleasure of getting likes, pleasure in community and the pleasure in being free.

#HOTGIRLSUMMER AND DHHFS

Historically, hip hop has had difficulty with misogynistic behaviour, images and lyrics that outright disrespect black women. With an increase of women demanding visibility as rappers, there has been a re-imagining or more so a redefining of black women's identities. Misogyny still exists, but social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram have created unique spaces where perpetrators risk being called out – not to mention, the impact/backlash is almost immediate. Other significant shifts within these digital spaces include twerking that reverses traditional sexual dynamics or broader discourses on black women's sexuality and gender performance. A close examination of the hot girl summer hashtag (#HotGirlSummer) on Instagram reveals images of black women across age and economic status evoking a DHHFS. Posts from celebrities and post from non-celebrities who have tagged their photos with #HotGirlSummer allows for me to distinguish a difference in economic status (i.e. rich vs. not rich). I was able to determine age through profile bios or general assumptions through an assessment of their pictures (i.e. 25 and under or 25 and up). What I noticed almost immediately is that, despite the negative sexual demeaning messaging applied to #HotGirlSummer, most photos tagged with the hashtag are non-sexual and display women celebrating, perhaps on vacation or memorializing happy moments of everyday life. Not to mention, the personal identities constructed falls within the boundaries of a hip hop feminist sensibility. For example, one post showed a young black woman presumably enjoying a night out, dressed in fashionable attire that allows her to highlight sex appeal. Her caption, 'Everything I do, I do it with a passion, If I gotta be a bitch, I'ma be a bad one', primarily accomplishes two things. First, she is unapologetic regarding her method of 'doing things', and she follows this up by redefining what it means to be a bitch, a word often used to mark black women as angry, aggressive, too difficult, etc. For this Instagram user, being a 'bitch' means she will be a 'bad one'. Black vernacular, which includes sub-categories of hip hop discourse and black feminist discourse, has defined 'bad bitch' as a woman who is confident and exudes strength. In many cases, it also refers to a woman who is considered to be very attractive. Moreover, the hashtags that accompany #HotGirlSummer under her photo reveal that she is celebrating her beauty (i.e. #blackgirlmagic, #melaninqueen), shifting attention to her brown skin which is of particular importance when considering the stark treatment lighter skinned black girls receive in comparison to brown skin/dark skin girls. For this user, despite the fact that

people treat black women derisively, her understanding of #HotGirlSummer treats black and beautiful as synonymous.

The use of #HotGirlSummer on another black woman's Instagram post presents a re-imagining of herself while displaying subtle sexiness and celebrating her curves. Again, here I can assume she is headed to have a night out on the town based on her attire along with considering the picture was snapped at night (the window in the picture shows that it was dark outside). Her hashtags are accompanied within her comments as opposed to with her caption, and similar to the post discussed above, they depict her agency in subverting and redefining hegemonic views of particular identities. In this case, the identity she prioritizes is a curvy/plus size black women as indicated by #MyStylishCurves #CurvyGoddess accompanied by #HotGirlSummer. In the same way, light-skinned black women receive preferential treatment in comparison to darker skinned black women, slimmer or 'thick' black women receive preferential treatment in comparison to plus size or curvy women. Within hip hop culture, women are expected to be curvy as long as they have a flat stomach and a small waist. It is rare for plus size women to be featured in music videos or ads. Most telling within this post, however, is one of the user's Instagram followers' comment: 'Babyyyyyyyy yes I am loving this version of you'. The acknowledgement of this particular photo accompanied with #HotGirlSummer as a one of her hashtags further proves DHHFS as an encouragement towards a particular epistemology of self where participants celebrate behaviour that are often demeaned by the broader culture. In short, for this young woman, a hot girl summer celebrates all shapes and sizes of black women. In following a feminist approach to ethics, I intentionally did not include the women's personal images as my goal is to honour black women's agency and privacy.

Figures 5–6: A user-generated meme and a viral tweet are examples of hip hop functioning as a fandom prioritizing the importance of creation to contribute to meaning-making, particularly meaning-making that places an emphasis on alternative gender performance and rejecting stereotypical gender or sexual scripts.

Note that neither one of the images has to do with being sexual promiscuous (and if it did, through a hip hop feminist lens that would be okay) or not respecting one's self. In fact, Figure 5 is all about bettering one's self, remaining committed to goals and maintaining community. The caption associated with Figure 5 on @TheShadeRoom Instagram reads '#TSRMorningInspiration: Summer 2019 is dedicated to all of the ladies working to do MORE in their lives! Let's make this hot girl summer a progressive one. Drop a number for all of the things you hope to do this summer' (@TheShadeRoom 2019). I argue the explicitness and detail of the rhetorical choices made within the caption makes it clear that women are interested in maintaining their agency as it relates to defining who they are and how they are viewed. The items listed in Figure 5 fall within the broad realm of pleasure politics, i.e. pleasure in friendships and sisterhood, pleasure in agency, pleasure in self-care and the pleasure in dating, just to name a few. Not surprisingly however, there were competing contradictory comments under @TheShadeRoom's post that included:

- 'This ain't what Meg meant'
- 'This sound like a married with two kids summer'
- 'This sound like a Golden Girls summer'
- 'This hot girl list must've came from Taylor Swift'
- 'Nice list, but it's definitely not for the Hot Girls'.

These kinds of comments, although humorous and entertaining, reveal that (1) a hot girl summer can mean different things to different people, as black women are not monolithic; (2) black people's use of social media typically includes a digital version of signifyin' or playing the dozens (i.e. who can get the most laughs or likes); (3) black feminists and hip hop feminists have done the work to get black women to make space for *all* types/versions of black women (i.e. classy, conservative, professional, sophisticated, ghetto, loud, hood) and yet some remain hesitant and committed to being anti-black women. Nonetheless, the creation of this post demonstrates the co-opting of pleasure and the agency to subvert and redefine hegemonic views of particular identities.

In a similar manner, Figure 6 redefines hot girl summer as a 'healing woman summer'. Despite conflicting ideas comparable to those Figure 5 received, the user's co-opting of the term still maintains a DHHFS, and followers of @Glouponem collectively determined that one can in fact do both – thus a hot girl summer includes and prioritizes healing. However, @Glouponem's caption ('Plot Twist') can also be read as suggesting that the original plot i.e. the original meaning of 'Hot Girl Summer', fits stereotypical gender or sexual scripts dominated by mainstream. The opposing responses in the comments of @Glouponem's Instagram supports this view as there were some remarks that attempted to create negative binaries such as, 'YESSSSS leave all that hot girl summer mentality for the birds' only to be refuted by users whose responses revealed they understood the complexities that come with black womanhood. One user responded with 'Pshhh I'm a healing hot girl all summer' whereas another user responded with 'Can you do both, asking for a friend?'. What is important about Figures 5 and 6 is the self-generated ideas that contribute to communal discourse on hot girl summer, a feature that could only occur in a digital space.

Figure 5: *Hot girl summer to-do list.*

Figure 6: *Healing woman summer.*

THE DANGERS OF ROMANTICIZING DIGITAL SPACES

Black women whose work is centred within digital spaces have put out fair warnings of the 'dangers' that may occur. The open accessibility of digital platforms like Twitter and Instagram leave black women vulnerable to being judged and/or targets of misogynoir and perhaps racists behaviours. Gaunt points out that in particular, 'YouTube reduce[s] spatial, temporal, and social boundaries in distinct ways for black girls' (2015: 247). Although Twitter and Instagram operate in unique ways in comparison to YouTube, Jones argues:

> when you identify as both a Black person and a woman, you should expect to be met with naysayers and antagonists who are wholeheart-edly invested in countering whatever messages you might be sharing with others just because you are black and you are a woman.
>
> (Jones 2019: 98)

I would also argue that for black women who fail to fit neatly into society's problematic standards of beauty or respectability, that is if they are fat, queer, overtly sexual or 'too ghetto or hood' (or even if just their name is identified as ghetto), they are at risk of having little to no protection. The reactions to the online behaviours of Megan Thee Stallion and Lizzo show that Lizzo is critiqued and shamed for the same exact behaviour Megan and The City Girls are consistently praised for – the only difference between Lizzo and the other girls is her size. Oddly enough, when Megan Thee Stallion twerked adjacent to R&B songstress Ciara, some users read Ciara's popping of her booty as classier than Megan's, despite the fact that the two had on similar attire and danced in an equally provocative manner. The underlying difference though is that Ciara is married, and Megan is not; therefore, Ciara is deemed as more worthy. Binaries and empty discourse around whose twerk as classier proves that society in many ways still struggle with black women identity and agency. It also points to a more troubling truth – social media can be a place of toxicity. It is important for me to point out that two things can be true at the same time. Jamie Nesbitt Golden, co-creator of the hashtag #FastTailedGirls, an online social movement that highlighted black women's sexuality and critiqued the dehumanizing and sexualization of young black girls, outlines the value of social media while at the same time warns readers of the impor-tance of having community. Golden states:

> [Social media] has given social capital to those previously without. It has democratized communication. It has given people the ability not only to shape their own narratives but also share those narratives with the world. The role of Twitter and other forms of social media will always be to amplify, connect, and nurture marginalized voices. I say nurture because this work will tax you, body and soul. The importance of find-ing a community that nurtures you cannot be overstated. […] you won't make it without one.
>
> (cited in Jackson et al. 2020: 36)

Community in digital spaces is what affords black women protection and they often appear in the comment section of Instagram or within a thread on Twitter. Community showed up for Lizzo, pointing out the wack contra-dictions between her and Megan Thee Stallion, and they also showed up

for Megan when rapper Meek Mill offered his unwanted opinion on twerking. Jackson et al. argue that the 'internet has enabled networks of solidarity beyond geographic boundaries [and] fostered [an element of] consciousness raising' (2020: 3). After posting a video on her #ProfessionalBlackGirl Instagram page of black girls, approximately around the age of eight-years-old, in their dance attire displaying confidence and sass, Yaba Blay directly addressed the inappropriate criticism that appeared in the comment section. In a new post, she wrote:

> It's unfortunate that I have to continue to repeat myself, but THIS page is no space for your negative comments about Black girls. Keep your 'too grown' … 'too fast' … comments to yourself. Scrolling past is free. So is unfollowing.
>
> (@professionalblackgirl 2020)

Blay's acknowledgement of the repetitive unwanted behaviour is an example of the reduction of social boundaries that Kyra Gaunt spoke on. Gaunt's research argues that 'stigmatized and stereotypical views of […] childhood adolescence and black girls' sexuality' is heightened in digital spaces – which is true (2015: 247). What is equally true is that digital spaces create room for dialogue and also allows users to restrict other users from engaging. Blay's response to the inappropriateness extends the work of Kendall and Golden's #FastTailedGirls as she directly points out the dangers of sexualizing young black girls. With over 10,000 likes and 900+ comments on her post, she introduces a discourse on black girlhood and sexuality to a broad audience. What is also important is Blay's safeguarding of the communal space she curated for black women and girls is that she announces what she is not going to tolerate and dismissed the commenter by blocking them. Her post includes instructions on how to disengage for those who may operate within an anti-black girl mindset. Feminista Jones suggests:

> The best thing a black woman with high visibility can do to preserve her own mental health is to put into place protections that can make her social experience more enjoyable, productive, and fruitful, so blocking, muting, and filtering act as armor that guards us from unwanted engagement.
>
> (2019: 99)

Blocking folks, though quite useful, can potentially disrupt the raising of consciousness. Another option to confront tension in digital spaces is to address it head on. I argue that this is all a part of fucking with the grays and enacting a hip hop feminist ethos. Black women are resilient, and as Jones point out:

> [they] thrive in call-and-response dynamics […] [as] there is power in the ability to control the narrative in real time, and black women have harnessed this power to shut down much of the opposition they face when simply trying to share their experiences as black women in this world.
>
> (2019: 45)

In considering the dangers of romanticizing digital spaces, Gaunt's research includes a thorough discussion on context collapse and how it 'affects the online self-presentation […] of black girls who twerk in YouTube's music media ecology' (2015: 245). Though she makes a number of valid points, her concern that 'It's far easier to generalize all black girls who twerk by stigmatizing their social play as too "black" or "ghetto" as "ratchet" or "thots"' suggests why a DHHFS is needed (2015: 247). As demonstrated earlier via the memes constructed by and for black women, some black women have found joy in reclaiming negative colloquialisms by redefining and embracing being ratchet and/or ghetto. Again, Megan Thee Stallion tells us this in the lyrics to her newest single rapping, 'I'm a savage, classy, bougie, ratchet … Sassy, moody, nasty' (Megan Thee Stallion 2020). Historically, black people have a way of using and/or remixing language in unique ways, especially on social media. Additionally, black people in general take *honour* in being what some may perceive as 'too black'. In fact, this act is referred to as being 'blackity black' – a phrase that has been branded on T-shirts, stickers, and cups for black folks to display their blackness with the world. Furthermore, in her article, Gaunt also maintains:

> Mainstream appropriation by mega-artists tends to stigmatize and stereotype both twerking and black girls, leading to consistent and repetitive racist discourse around being loud, ratchet hood rats, or hypersexual thots. Engagement with videos of black girls twerking often predictably features slut-shaming, sexually objectifying requests for hook-ups, or reactionary respectability politics.
>
> (2015: 251)

Her observation is accurate. However, like Feminista Jones, I challenge the use of the term slut-shaming and do not subscribe to any ideas of a ho, thot or slut existing (2019: 79). As Jones argues, 'Ho's don't exist' and 'applying the logic of the phrase [slut-shaming] […] ultimately accepts the fact that a "slut" exists and that women are being shamed for being "sluts"' (2019: 78–79). I argue that it is important for black girls and women to have a nuanced understanding of sex-positivity, which will thus allow them to reject all derogatory views of black women as it relates to their sexuality. More importantly, learning early on about black women's sexuality and how gender, race, homophobia and patriarchy are often hell-bent on constructing irrelevant rules about what one should or should not do will lead to a generation of black women who are liberated and have the ability to navigate being hypersexualized and make more informed choices when it comes to sex. Not to mention, they will be able to navigate various ways of accessing pleasure and joy.

DHHFS gives black women the permission to clap back in online spaces in non-polite aggressive ways. It also offers the tools to speak up against respectability politics and defend black girls who are often othered. DHHFS is what is visible within the comment section as black women point out sexist contradictions. DHHFS is what protects young black girls when they are demeaned for the way they dress and/or dance on social media platforms. DHHFS challenges dominant gender scripts particularly in hip hop in order to navigate broader discourses on black female sexuality, and it defends and supports black girls' and women's self-identification.

CONCLUSION

Following in the steps of other black feminists and hip hop feminists, applying a digital hip hop feminist lens requires both messy and humanizing research. As Bettina Love points out, 'Messiness invites researchers to embrace the interconnections [and] inconsistencies [it also] [...] seeks to humanize black [women] who are invisible and hyper-visible at the same time' (2017: 541). It is important to point out that the use of a DHHFS does not imply there will be a sense of unity or homogenous ideas presented at the same time (although a sense of unity in ideas may occur). Black women are multi-layered; thus, their ideas and performance will also be multi-layered.

As a methodological perspective, DHHFS allows researchers a way to further understand black women's construction of their identities through their online performances and more important acknowledge/identify the hip hop feminist ideologies embedded in their construction. It also allows research-ers a way to assess/measure the agency performed when it comes to black women going against the grain. This can be useful for a thorough explora-tion of other expressions besides #HotGirlSummer. Ultimately, DHHFS gives validation to black women's expressions. Hot girl summer and other black collective expressions created by Black women are not just a thing; they have important cultural meanings. Some limitations to consider would be the use of collective expressions created by black women used by non-black women. What does it mean for non-black women to acknowledge they are having a hot girl summer? More specifically, what does it mean for pop star Miley Cyrus to use the hashtag while underwhelmingly twerking at best? This is a pertinent question particularly after she publicly separated herself from black culture after receiving success collaborating with multiple hip hop artists, ulti-mately placing blame upon the materialistic values of hip hop. Can a DHHFS offer a cultural reading of non-black women? The short answer is no since hip hop feminism is invested in the experiences of black women. The questions proposed above however are worth investigating.

For this article, my analysis section only applied the methodology to Instagram, despite the fact that I collected valuable content from Twitter as well. Future studies may benefit from a large qualitative analysis across social media platforms of the hashtag #HotGirlSummer. Future studies that apply a DHHFS may also benefit from incorporating methodological techniques that 'centralizes black women's cultural experiences within black women's cultural production' (Halliday and Brown 2018: 226). This would consist of conduct-ing focus groups with black women whose social media profile, Instagram or Tweet, a researcher may examine. I am also interested in using DHHFS to produce a cultural analysis of Yaba Blay's multi-platform digital community #ProfessionalBlackGirl. Moreover, I have also been thinking about the ways in which I can apply DHHFS to non-academic conversations about black women and girls and am intrigued by the current diverse influx of women in hip hop.

As suggested by Love, a DHHFS as a:

> methodological perspective is heavily dependent on a knowledge base robust in the fields of black studies, hip hop studies, black feminism, and [hip hop feminism]. Thus, this methodological perspective should only be used by researchers with a robust historical and present-day under-standing of their participants' community and how it has been impacted by [a host of isms and phobias].
>
> (2017: 545)

Even though hot girl summer has been used as a pejorative, black women's performance in digital spaces that accompany the hashtag have demonstrated a host of behaviours or characteristics and celebrated said behaviour or characteristic by normalizing it. In short, DHHFS allows black women to learn to celebrate self. It is epistemological and contributes to identifying black women's relationships to the world and assists with rejecting negative ideas concerning black women.

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SUGGESTED CITATION

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