Journal of Research
on Women and Gender
Volume 10, Pages 43-70
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Black Twitter Representations of #Kavanaugh Hearings

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Abstract

This study employs Black Feminist and Critical Race theories to examine tweets that emerged on Black Twitter during the 2018 Kavanaugh Hearings. The primary frame that surfaced was Brett Kavanaugh's appointment to the post of Supreme Court Justice would be a step backward for both women and Black people. Twitter users voiced support for Blasey Ford while expressing concerns about a racial/political divide, white privilege, and flashbacks to the controversial SCOTUS hearing involving Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill in 1991. Calls to action encouraged people to protest and express their displeasure when they voted in future elections. Study implications provide support for the use of alternative platforms, such as Black Twitter, for women and marginalized groups, as traditional media outlets frequently overlook racial disparities. In this case, Black Twitter offered a viable and visible platform to not only express such concerns, but to also offer directives and solutions for how Black people might play a role in politics.

Keywords

Black Twitter, sexual assault, Black Feminist theory, Critical Race Theory, framing theory, #MeToo movement, Kavanaugh hearings, Supreme Court

Introduction

Much of the nation was riveted, and millions of people reacted quickly on social media as Christine Blasey Ford, a psychology professor, testified at a 2018 U.S. Senate hearing that she was sexually assaulted by Brett Kavanaugh as a teen. At the time of her testimony, he was an appellate court judge and nominee for the Supreme Court of the United States. On Sept. 27, 2018, the day that Blasey Ford testified that she was "100 percent" sure she had been sexually assaulted by Kavanaugh in Maryland as a teen, he

vehemently denied the allegations in a nationally televised U.S. Senate hearing. Her testimony was followed by Kavanaugh, who was sworn in as the 114th justice to serve on the SCOTUS on Oct. 6, 2018.

Reactions and news of the Kavanaugh hearings quickly trended on Twitter and other social media platforms. The Kavanaugh hearings took on heightened significance given the #MeToo Movement and the avalanche of accusations that have emerged, pointing fingers at powerful media figures, high-profile politicians, actors, journalists and executives. Since December 2016, more than 400 high-profile executives and others "have been outed" by the #MeToo Movement for sexual harassment or other misconduct (Green, 2018).

A variety of communication, sociology, psychology and women's studies scholars including Tuchman et al. (1978), Barker-Plummer (1995), Byerly and Ross (2006), Creedon (2003), Armstrong (2014), and Vickery and Everbach (2018) have documented feminist gender inequities in the workplace, objectification and subjugation of women. Byerly and Ross (2006) use feminism and its derivative feminist to reference "social movements through which women in various times and places have sought not only to obtain their equal rights with men, but also the ability to enter into public deliberation, institution-building, and other processes associated with citizenship in their societies" (p. 100).

Studies of the sexual assault culture have generally focused on media framing of the act, victim blaming and media framing of gender and race (Benedict, 1992; O'Hara, 2013; Barnett, 2012; Worthington, 2013). Conclusions frequently confirm findings from Benedict's (1992) landmark study that identified persistent rape myths perpetuated by journalistic accounts, such as the portrayal of survivors according to a "Madonna-whore" dichotomy that invites audiences to interrogate victim behaviors. This frame also includes the representation of perpetrators as isolated examples of abnormal behavior despite evidence their actions conformed to socially sanctioned gender norms (Moody, Lewis & Murray, 2015). Other studies have looked at the situational factors in blaming rape victims including victim attractiveness, dress, alcohol intake and timing of resistance to sexual advances (Moody, Lewis & Murray, 2015; Brown, Testa & Messman-Moore, 2007, O'Hara, 2012; Durham, 2013). For instance, Brown & Testa's (2007) study indicated that "exposure to negative social reactions toward a rape victim reduced willingness to provide emotional support to that victim" (pp. 490-92).

Previous studies and reports highlighted offer a great foundation for studies on rape and media coverage; however, there appears to be a gap in the literature on articles that explore how social media and user-generated content have changed the dynamics of media framing of rape particularly in highly political arenas. The feminist literature must be expanded using new media platforms and different theoretical designs. To address these gaps in the literature, this qualitative study explores key themes and sentiments that emerged on Black Twitter. Black Twitter's presence was noteworthy during the Kavanaugh Hearings, as many users took to the platform to voice their concerns regarding Kavanaugh's pending SCOTUS confirmation. The continued study of Black Twitter is an important and timely contribution to the literature, as scholars are encouraged to look at issues through diverse viewpoints and methodologies.

Black Twitter topics frequently dominate the top ten trending topics in the United States, and polls indicate Black people have displayed relatively high levels of Twitter use since the company began tracking the service as a stand-alone platform. The Kavanaugh Hearings and the abundance of content emphasizing the incident on Black Twitter offered a unique opportunity to look at a multifaceted case though both a CRT and Black feminist lens.

Literature Review

Brooks and Hebert (2006) wrote, "A feminist critique is rooted in the struggle to end sexist oppression" (p. 298). Over the last half-century, feminist activists have led efforts to move sexual assault and harassment from the feminist agenda to become part of the public agenda. Bevacqua (2000) credited female legislators with pushing for more anti-rape policies and pro-victim legislation such as the Privacy Protection for Rape Victims Act, which became law in 1978. The law severely limits the admission of evidence about the reputation or opinion about a victim's past sexual behavior (Bevacqua, p. 214). Terms such as "sexual assault, acquaintance/date rape, wife battering, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and rape/incest survivor…did not exist before feminists coined them and gave them definitions" (Byerly & Hill, 2012, p. 10). GfK's national online survey in 2018 about sexual assault and harassment found about 81% of women and 43% of men reported sexual assault or harassment (Kearl, 2018), and sexual assault is defined as a "sexual act that someone was forced to do against their will and consent" (p. 6). In addition to sexual harassment being verbal, it can include the use of the Internet or mobile devices to harass someone as well as touching or brushing up against someone without consent. Everbach (2014) wrote that rape and other sex crimes are often underrepresented in the media. She added (RAINN, 2013, p. 22):

> *The truth is that someone is sexually assaulted in the United States every two minutes and 54 percent of cases are not reported to police, according to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), a nonprofit organization committed to ending sexual violence. Forty-four percent of those sexually assaulted are younger than 18 and nine out of 10 people who are sexually assaulted are female.*

The topic has also been studied from the perspective of activism. Byerly & Ross (2006) investigated women's media activism among 90 self-defined feminist media activists in the United States, United Kingdom, South Africa, India, among 16 other nations. Byerly and Ross identified four pathways for women activists to form female spheres of influence or power. The first was described as the "politics to media" path in which female activists moved from being activists to producing some type of media. The second path was the "media profession to politics," which described women trained in the media industry who use their "vantage point as insiders" to impact content or reform an industry's policies for women (p. 125). The third path was known as the "advocate change agent," and this way involved using research or mobilizing a group to write letters or take some action to effect change externally, and the fourth path was called "women's media enterprises" in which women were creating their own

business or news networks (pp. 126-127). Byerly and Ross posited the four paths to female activism, which served four functions to impact change: ritualistic, connective, educational and social alignment.

The #MeToo movement has been the most visible form of female activism in this decade. Tarana Burke, an African-American social activist and community organizer who was named the top influencer on *The Root* 100's 2018 list of most influential African Americans, is credited with being a founder of the MeToo Movement as early as 2006 (theroot.com, 2018) on MySpace after a 13-year-old sexual assault victim confided in her. The phrase went viral in 2017 after actress Alyssa Milano encouraged the use of the #MeToo to call attention to sexual assault and harassment. On May 25, 2018, the day that Weinstein was arrested and charged with rape, Milano wrote on Twitter, "Harvey Weinstein shattered the lives of an untold number of women. We stand with them, and remain in solidarity with women everywhere who have faced unsafe and abusive workplaces. We look forward to seeing justice prevail."

According to the Guardian.com, the #MeToo Movement is active in 85 countries (Sayej, 2017). The #MeToo movement has raised consciousness around the globe as largely privileged men of power have been accused of sexual assault by women they met or worked with years ago. Given the rise of the #MeToo Movement, sexual assault allegations have captured a plethora of media coverage over the last two years. Of those accused, 193 were fired or left their jobs, and 122 were suspended or under investigation, according to Green (2018). Particularly noteworthy was the sentencing of entertainment icon Bill Cosby to a 3- to 10-years Pennsylvania prison sentence for sexual assault the same week of the Kavanaugh hearings (Roebuck & McCrystal, 2018). Other prominent figures accused in recent sex scandals have included former Fox TV host Bill O'Reilly, former *CBS This Morning* anchor Charlie Rose, actor Kevin Spacey, U.S. President Donald Trump, former NPR executive Michael Oreskes and actress/director Asia Argento. Entertainment executive and film producer Harvey Weinstein, who faced felony charges related to sexual assault and rape in New York City (Patten, 2019), was convicted and is serving a 23-year prison sentence. Les Moonves, the former CBS chief executive, resigned from the company in 2018 after multiple sexual assault and harassment allegations surfaced (Farrow, 2018).

The #MeToo movement was significant during the Kavanaugh hearings, which occurred weeks before the 2018 midterm elections. Although Blasey Ford was reluctant to come forward with her decades-old claims, #MeToo activists and women across the country immediately supported her. Blasey Ford testified that the memory had traumatized her repeatedly over the years. The memory was one of forced silence: Kavanaugh, a 17-year-old high school athlete, putting his hand over her mouth to muffle her screams for help as he pinned her to a bed and assaulted her (Zernike & Steele, 2018). The partisan fight over Kavanaugh's nomination that ensued offers an illustration of how the dynamics of the #MeToo movement has begun to thread its way into American life.

Critics of Blasey Ford and other sexual assault victims often ask why people do not report experiences of alleged sexual harassment and assault sooner. In addition to self-blame and shame being primary reasons, "Many people who have been raped don't recognize it as a rape even when it fits the legal definition, a finding revealed in a review of 28 academic studies" (Ordway, 2018, para. 6). Given the intense interest in the Kavanaugh hearings, it is worth noting that The New York Times initially posted a Twitter poll to ask Twitter users about Blasey Ford's credibility, but quickly yanked it the same morning of the September 27th hearing after the Times received huge public backlash (Forgey, 2018). The news organization was widely criticized for the Twitter poll being in poor taste and speaks to concerns about sexual assault survivors often not being believed or being re-victimized when they go public.

Wilson & Miller (2016) reviewed 28 studies involving 5,917 women who had been raped after age 14 and found that 60.4% of the women "did not acknowledge that they had been raped, despite the fact that their experience could defined as rape" (p. 154). Rape is an unwanted sexual experience without consent. Weiss (2013) found teens who experience unwanted contact rarely report it because of uncertainty about whether it is a crime worth reporting and "adaptive indifference" that allows teens to remain loyal to their friends and peers in an effort to avoid stigma or ostracism. A Centers for Disease Control report based on the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey found that 40.8% of female rape victims reported being raped by an acquaintance (Black et al., 2011). It is worth noting that an analysis of 136 reported sexual assault cases over 10 years found that less than 6% were coded as false allegations (Lisak, Gardinier, Nicksa & Cote, 2010).

While Kavanaugh disputed Blasey Ford's allegations, between September 27th, 2018 (the day that Blasey Ford and Kavanaugh testified before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee) and September 30th, 2018, the Rape Abuse & Incest National Network saw a 338% increase in hotline traffic (RAINN, 2018). According to RAINN, "28,509 survivors and their loved ones, an average of 950 each day" contacted the hotline in September 2018 (para. 2). This issue is not likely to go away as April is recognized as Sexual Assault Awareness Month, and the National Sexual Violence Resource Center typically helps organize events across the nation to build awareness (Palumbo, 2018).

A 15-month study by the Women's Media Center of 15,228 news pieces in 14 of the nation's largest circulated newspapers found more than a 30% increase in news articles published about sexual assault between May 2017 and August 2018 (Women's Media Center, 2018). In the words of Julie Burton, president of the Women's Media Center (p. 1):

> *The #MeToo Movement has revealed previously hidden patterns of sexual harassment, wage discrimination, and hiring policies that excluded and intimidated women. By exposing horrible individual and institutional practice, we see an opportunity for a new transparency and permanent changes aimed at greater equality and power for women.*

Amidst the heated #MeToo Movement, the Kavanaugh nomination appeared as controversial as the televised showdown between Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas in his 1991 confirmation hearing. Both Hill and Thomas are African Americans, and Blasey Ford and Kavanaugh are both Anglo Americans. However, both hearings involved college-educated, working women accusing SCOTUS nominees of inappropriate sexual behavior. Hill (2018) wrote, "That the Senate Judiciary Committee still lacks a protocol for vetting sexual and assault claims that surface during a confirmation hearing suggests that the committee has learned little from the Thomas hearing, much less the more recent #MeToo movement" (para. 2). While the Thomas hearings were televised in 1991, Twitter did not exist at that time. In 2018, Twitter users posted a variety of hashtags, and The Wrap reported all ten U.S. Twitter trends on September 27th were about the Kavanaugh hearings with much discussion about sexual assault, politics and credibility issues.

Impact of Social Media, Black Twitter and Critical Race Theory

Given the long-term effect of mass media's marginalization of women, the growth of echo chambers and audience fragmentation on the Internet, there remains widespread concern that misogyny continues to persist (Vickery & Everbach, 2018). Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter have broadened news consumption patterns among U.S. consumers. Among the unfortunate consequences of the social media explosion is the disruption of traditional media as well as how quickly information can be spread like wildfire and manipulated online. According to a Pew Research Center (2017) study, about two-thirds of Americans get some news on social media, and nonwhites (about 74%) are more likely than whites (64%) to get news on social media sites (Bialik & Matsa, 2017, para. 4-5). It is also interesting to note that the overall percentage of U.S. adults using Twitter has shown a steady increase from about 13% in 2012 to about 24% in 2018.

According to the Pew Research Center Social Media Fact Sheet (2018), about 67% of Twitter users are under the age of 50, and Blacks outpace whites in terms of usage. As for the impact that social media has on people better understanding current events, results are mixed. Nearly half of those in a Pew study said it does not have much effect while more than a third "who get news on social media say it has helped them better understand current events" (Matsa & Shearer, 2018, para. 23). Another Pew Research Center survey on an activism and social media survey showed that the majority see value in social media "helping to give a voice to underrepresented groups; highlighting important issues that might otherwise go unnoticed; or helping hold powerful people accountable for their actions" (Pew Research Center, 2018).

In contrast to the convenience of social media, an Amnesty International study in partnership with Element AI found Twitter to be a "toxic place for women" because of online abuse (Haynes, 2018, para. 1). The Amnesty's International and AI study analyzed millions of tweets sent to 778 female journalists and politicians in the United States and United Kingdom. Researchers found about 1 in 15 tweets received by White women were

"problematic or abusive," and tweets to "women of color (Black, Asian, Latinx and mixed-race women) were 34% more likely to be mentioned in abusive or problematic tweets than white women" (Amnesty International, 2018, para. 6).

Although people of color tend to be underrepresented in traditional media, Black people's use of Twitter has outpaced that of white users (Clark, 2014), and that is why this study focuses on Black Twitter. The term, "Black Twitter," has evolved to include user-generated content shared by Black people on social media sites, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Williams (2015) added: The murders of Trayvon Martin and Mike Brown, the reality of street harassment, the racial crisis brewing in the Dominican Republic—were all stories that became of major importance because Black Twitter made sure the world understood what was happening.

More recently, Dates and Moody (2018) looked at humor on Black Twitter, and Moody and Cole (2018) looked at image repair theory on the platform. Black Twitter is a cultural identity consisting of "Black" Twitter users from around the world on the Twitter social network focused on issues of interest to the Black community, particularly in the United States. On Twitter, the role of audience members, or users, overlaps with those of content creators. Because of this interactivity and flexibility, new media offer greater influence and convenience for users. Many use Twitter to disseminate information on serious topics such as police brutality, colorism, racism and sexism.

According to Feminista Jones (2013), "Black Twitter" can be described as a "collective of active, primarily African-American Twitter users who have created a virtual community that participates in continuous real-time conversations. Manjoo (2010) documented "How Black People Use Twitter" for *Slate*. The article traced the origins of particular tweets and hashtags, in particular, #wordsthatleadtotrouble. Call #wordsthatleadtotrouble a "blacktag,"a trending topic initiated by a young African-American woman in Hollywood, that pushed to a wider audience by a Black woman in South Africa, and then pushed over the top by thousands of contributions from users who appear to be Black teenagers all over the United States.

In a report commissioned by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the researchers (Freelon, Lopez, Clark, & Jackson, 2017) helped explain the complex interactions between journalists and three specific Twitter subcultures: Black Twitter, Feminist Twitter and Asian-American Twitter. The report indicated that defining "community" online has never been an exact science. The scholars concluded news organizations posted to Black Twitter hashtags most often (33,579 tweets), then Feminist Twitter (5,965 tweets), then Asian American Twitter (2,816 tweets).

For Black Twitter, news accounts were interested in a variety of topics, including activism (#blacklivesmatter, #sayhername, #concernedstudent1950), political/cultural commentary (#oscarssowhite, #famousmelaniatrumpquotes), and formal and informal celebrations of blackness (#betawards, #blackgirlmagic). Greene, et. al (2019) explored the similarities and differences between the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements. Both movements were started by Black women, but the scholars point out that Black women's voices are often not as prominent

in mainstream media coverage. For example, comedian Bette Midler garnered national news coverage in the *Washington Post* and *USA Today* after she tweeted that Kavanaugh's appointment was evidence that "Women are the n-word of the world" and the "most disrespected creature on earth." After backlash, Midler apologized within hours of the tweet. In response to Midler's tweet, another tweet emphasized that Kavanaugh's appointment was inevitable on October 2018, ""Black Twitter" could have baked cookies for Bette and Kavanaugh would have gotten in. The fix was in from day one" (t b, 2018 October 7).

Black Feminist Theory and Black Twitter

CRT examines how messages portray underlying ideologies that reflect social relations of domination based on a pervasive yet unobtrusive racial hierarchy (Crenshaw, 1998). In direct opposition to emerging discourses that assert we live in a colorblind and a post-racial society, critical race theorists argue that social relations are fundamentally raced due to legal, social, and historical foundations among other forces (Bell, 1992). CRT's main tenets are that "racism is a common, everyday lived experience for people of color," and "individuals and their specific roles in society are socially constructed based on a system of power relations that favors the majority" (Crenshaw, 1998).

Because of obvious differences in experiences, hooks (1981) evoked the concepts of "interlocking identities" and "interlocking oppressions." She asserts that Black women's understandings of various issues are not separable from their experience of racism. hooks (1981) labeled this matrix a "politic of domination" and described how it operates along interlocking axes of race, class, and gender oppression. Black Feminist ideology explores these axes. Little (2014) wrote, "The question of intersectionality predates hashtags and Twitter feminism and goes all the way back to impasses such as the one between Black journalist Ida B. Wells and white suffragist Frances Willard." Wells crusaded against lynchings while Willard argued they were justified in the early 20th century. In the late 20th century and even today, Black female feminists such as hooks (1981, 1984), Collins (2000), Cooper (2018), and Jones (2019) have argued that intersectional racism, sexism, and classism continue to be challenges that have been ignored by many men as well as many white feminists. In her 2018 book, Cooper argues (pp. 184-185),

> *White feminism has worked hard to make the world safer for white women, but it has stridently refused to call out the ways that white women's sexuality and femininity is used not just as a tool of patriarchy but also as a tool for the maintenance of white supremacy.*

Once thought to be a passing fad, Black Twitter has held its own and has proven to be an important platform in moving the needle on important issues and movements. It has been particularly useful for Black Feminist causes. Popular hashtag campaigns emerged in the 2010s. For instance, #YouOKSis raised awareness for street harassment, while #BringBackOurGirls focused on the abduction of nearly 300 Nigerian school girls. #Blackgirlmagic is a hashtag that emphasizes the accomplishments of Black women and encourages them not to be

afraid to shine. Citizens also used the platform to share messages such as "Stay Mad Abby," which highlighted Abigail Fisher, whose case against affirmative action was argued in front of the U.S. Supreme Court after Fisher was rejected from the University of Texas at Austin in 2008. She claimed that she was rejected because she was white.

In the present socio-political climate, social media continues to grow in importance, particularly regarding issues related to politics. Studies such as this one are important because social media platforms arm average citizens with a tool to share their thoughts on a much grander scale than ever before. Using both CRT and Black feminist lenses, this study expands the literature on Black Twitter's impact on race, gender, and political communication issues on social media by addressing the following research questions:

1) How did Black Twitter users respond to the Kavanaugh hearings?

2) What topics emerged in Kavanaugh-themed tweets on Black Twitter?

3) How does this analysis of Kavanaugh-themed tweets extend Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Theory literature?

Table 1. Tweets captured by key words using NVivo 1

Black Twitter, Kavanaugh, Ford since: 2018-09-04 until:2018-10-06	3,900 Tweets captured
Black Twitter, Brett Kavanaugh since: 2018-09-04 until:2018-10-06	3,569 Tweets captured
Black Twitter, Christine Blasey Ford since: 2018-09-04 until:2018-10-06	696 Tweets captured
Total Tweets	8,165 Tweets captured

Methodology

Tweets containing various search terms were collected between September 4, 2018, when the Senate Judiciary Committee began Kavanaugh's confirmation hearing, to October 10, four days after the Senate voted 50–48 to confirm Kavanaugh's nomination to the Supreme Court. Using Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Theory as a lens, the framing of Kavanaugh and Ford was reviewed to understand how Black Twitter users discussed the Kavanaugh Hearings during the chosen timeframe.

Using NVivo 12, qualitative research software, we coded data and illuminated themes surrounding the framing of the incident (Appendix B). In this case, NVivo 12 captured 8,165 total Tweets using our originally designated keywords: "Black Twitter," "Brett Kavanaugh," and "Christine Blasey Ford," "Ford," and "Kavanaugh." However, there was some overlap in the tweets collected; therefore, we chose to look at the first subset of tweets. The final sample included 3,900 tweets and focused on the search terms "Black Twitter," "Kavanaugh," and "Ford." The keywords and frequencies from NVivo 12 provided a starting point for establishing the common categories in Kavanaugh-themed tweets (Appendix B). Using this information, we analyzed tweets through the lens of Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Theory to help develop overall themes in the sample.

Based on this analysis, the two primary researchers established that five major themes existed in Kavanaugh-themed tweets shared on Black Twitter: call to action, history repeating itself, steep racial/political divides, White privilege, and informational tweets. Each theme and the types of tweets they encompass are explored in the next section.

Findings and Discussion

Of the thousands of tweets that emerged during the Kavanaugh Hearings, we focused on those that had a direct correlation with the Black Twitter community, meaning they included the #BlackTwitter hashtag. The tweets primarily offered support for Blasey-Ford, followed by calls to action for Black people to make their voices heard. The overall tone of most tweets was negative with Twitter users expressing anger over how the hearings were handled, Blasey-Ford was treated, and the prevalence of white privilege.

Call to Action

Black Twitter users encouraged readers to respond to the atrocities revealed during the Kavanaugh hearings by voicing their opinion on Twitter. Using the hashtags, #BlackTwitter, #IBelieveHer, #IBelieveChristineBlaseyFord, #BlackWomen, #BlaseyFord, Black women were particularly vocal on Twitter expressing solidarity for Blasey-Ford. Tweets included messages encouraging Americans to "stay woke," pay attention to what is going on around them, and to vote in the upcoming election. The general consensus shared by Black Twitter users was if they banned together and voted, they might make a difference—if not in the Kavanaugh appointment—possibly future political issues.

Calls to action from the Black Twitter community highlighted getting out the vote, protesting and using other methods to speak up. Black Twitter users

shared information on voting locations and candidates running for office. They also used the platform to help educate audiences on government and politics. Several posts noted that there are three branches of government—one is appointed and two are voted in. The overarching theme in these tweets was although Blasey-Ford is a white woman, the Black community cared about her and was willing to take a stand. BlackPressRadio on October 7, 2018 tweeted (Figure 1):

> *PLEASE GO TO https://www.270towin.com/2018-senate-election/ … to learn more about YOUR state and who is running. Do what you can to get the RIGHT PERSON for your family and values elected. #BlackTwitter #Vote #BlackVote #TaylorSwift #iHeartOnCW #TheWalkingDead #90DayFiance #Kavanaughpic.*

Figure 1. Kavanaugh-themed tweet that contains call to action.

As mentioned in the literature review, alternative platforms such as Black Twitter are important for women in marginalized groups, as studies have noted that traditional media outlets including The New York Times, CNN, the Associated Press, Washington Post and Los Angeles Times frequently overlook racial disparities and focus largely on gender (Branigin, 2018). In this case, Black Twitter offered a viable and visible platform to not only express concerns about gender,but also about race. Black Twitter users did more than complain about Kavanaugh's alleged sexual assault on Blasey Ford; they offered directives and solutions for how Black people might make a difference by banning together and making their voices heard in an impactful collective community. There was an overwhelming show of support for Blasey Ford with Black activists, such as Tarana Burke, weighing in on the issue, and voicing their concerns about Kavanaugh's appointment and Blasey Ford's mistreatment. On Sept. 22, 2018, TaranaBurke posted the following:
"We believe Dr. Blasey Ford. We believe survivors. Join us for a national walkout in solidarity w/ survivors of sexual violence on Mon., Sept. 24 @ 1PM EST by wearing black and posting a message to say #BelieveSurvivors #MeToomvmt

Steep Racial/Political Divides

A national Quinnipiac University poll of 1,111 self-identified registered voters released on Oct. 1, 2018, highlighted steep racial/political divides in how people viewed Kavanaugh (Figure 1). It indicated Black and Hispanic voters strongly opposed his appointment to the Supreme Court. Specifically, the poll found 51% of white voters supported confirmation of Kavanaugh to SCOTUS while 81% of Black voters and 65% of Hispanic voters opposed the appointment. Posts in our sample frequently overlapped with the steep racial divides theme, as Twitter users emphasized race and the need to act. In one

post, the Twitter user stated, "We are NOT post-racial. Diversity is more important than ever. We must stand up, fight back & VOTE in EVERY election. Our very future depends on it. The Kavanaugh sham is only the latest evidence that we are not post racial." Rep. Maxine Waters posted:

> *#MaxineWaters NOT Happy-Vows #Kavanaugh Will NEVER Rest #JusticeKavanaugh Has ALL #Women/#BlackWomen #Law Clerks! #Moms #WomeninMedicine #WomeninBusiness #BlackTwitter #Hispanic #Latinos #Hispanics #girls #Students #LA #OrangeCounty #LosAngeles #SoCal #Cali #Democratshttps*

Another tweet highlighted a video featuring Louis Farrakhan expressing his support for Blasey Ford (Figure 2). On October 17, Chin. chin·wag /CHin wag/a. change posted "@LouisFarrakhan Speaks on Kavanaugh, Blasey Ford, & the Catholic Church on the Anniversary of the Million Man March 10/14 #EverybodyTalks #EverybodyHasAVoice #BlackTwitter #RetweetsAreLegal

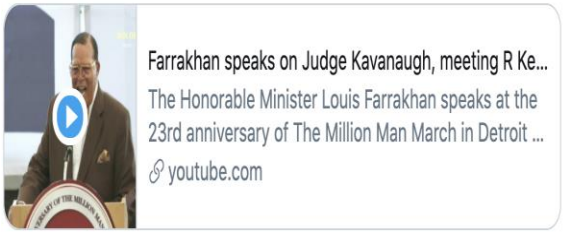

Figure 2. Kavanaugh-themed tweets express support for Blasey Ford.

Once again, the overarching theme was Black people support Dr. Christine Blasey Ford. Black Twitter reflected on the treatment of Black men in similar circumstances and pondered why it was out of line to look into the juvenile record of a SCOTUS nomination, but justified for an unarmed black man killed by a white police officer.

Illustrating the tenets of CRT, race-related issues were noted in many of the tweets. Black Twitter users highlighted Kavanaugh's stance on issues such as Affirmative Action and school busing,often referring to Kavanaugh documents released by Cory Booker (Appendix A). The tweets stated the emails reflect Kavanaugh's views on the Black community. One tweet, stated, "Wow, racists aren't even trying to hide it anymore. Also, notice how he acknowledges that to them "Conservative" simply means "racist" now. He's saying "Look, women & minorities are who you'll get with Democrats! How terrifying!" Another tweet highlighted Trump's support for the execution of five Black boys for a crime they didn't commit, while supporting Kavanaugh who Blasey Ford accused of sexual assault (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Tweet illustrating steep racial divides

Black Twitter users also questioned the appointment of Kavanaugh from a civil rights viewpoint highlighting his track record, views on race and racial profiling.

On August 31, 2018, Cheer-Up posted, "Kavanaugh has defended the mass surveillance of Americans' phone records https://goo.gl/7uUgp1 #maddow @LindseyGrahamSC @randpaul #tlot #TheResistance #Occupy #blacktwitter #BlackLivesMatter #Millennials #inners #MarchForOurLives #bluewave #p2 #topprog #libcrib #progressives."

Other tweets called out Trump for being racist and selecting Kavanaugh as a Supreme Court Justice nominee (Figure 3). On October 8 2018, Black Jesus com posted, "#Hardball #msnbc #Blacktwitter #cnn Racist Trump calls Kavanaugh innocent with no proof but says Central Park 5 are still guilty despite DNA proof exonerating them http://nbcnews.to/2d02t8g."

At one point, Twitter users blamed Black Twitter for Kavanaugh's appointment (Figure 4). On Oct. 7, 2018, Georger A posted: "kavanaugh will be nominated bc black twitter freaked out"???!!...bruh." In response to this subset of tweets, users explained that Black Twitter was not the impetus for Kavanaugh's appointment. On October 7, Coddiwomple posted, "Wtf? How in the fucknuts is Kavanaugh's nomination the fault of black twitter? White people led the charge on Kavanaugh & a white woman made sure it happened but... sure... blame black twitter 'cause, you know, they called out a racist quote."

The consensus on Black Twitter highlighted the idea that the appointment of Kavanaugh to the post of a supreme court justice would be a step backward for the black community and for women. They were deeply concerned that his appointment would provide no value to Black people and would be a slap in the face for women of all races.

Figure 4. Blame for Black Twitter in Kavanaugh-themed tweets

History Repeating Itself

Tweets encouraged readers to #BelieveWomen, #BelieveSurvivors and to #resist. #MeToo was referenced to inspire the group to discuss this issue. Tweets emphasized the parallel between the circumstances surrounding Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court nomination and those of Clarence Thomas, 27 years earlier. In both cases, late-breaking allegations threatened but failed to derail the confirmation process. Both nominees defended themselves with passionate denials of wrongdoing. Don Lemon, the CNN anchor, shared his MeToo experience as well as others in response to the allegations against Kavanaugh. Comedian DL Hughley also weighed in on the hearings when he wrote, "If you'll rape a woman you have no respect for a woman or her body, and you shouldn't be making life time decisions."

Others were hopeful that the Kavanaugh hearings would end differently. An optimistic post stated, "Maybe now the outcome will be different with the

Kavanaugh hearings and his accuser, Dr. Ford. I met Anita Hill last Spring when this picture was taken, She is still a credible force of change. And her courage speaks to the trail she blazed way back in 1991. #BlackTwitter." Still others inserted humor and popular culture references into their posts. One person posted, "Ummm Imma need #oliviapope to come up out of retirement for this one folks. @shondarhimes @kerrywashington Investigations need to be had…"

White privilege

Tweets containing the white privilege theme emphasized the difference in how black defendants and disadvantaged individuals were required two act (Figure 6). They characterized Kavanaugh and Republican cabinet members as elite and out of touch. Morehouse College President David Thomas provides context for why many of Black Twitter users voiced concerns about white privilege and the double standards facing blacks. "Men of color are often treated as guilty until proven innocent of an accusation or crime. Their punishment is swift and severe. The loss of their college and career. Dreams. Imprisonment. Death" he wrote in a column for Diverse Issues of Higher Education (Thomas, 2018). An example from the Twitter study period follows:

@Yamiche @CapehartJ @realDonaldTrump supporters #Republican always screaming abt #Elite s yet #Kavanaugh #Kavanaughvote member of elite all male dinner club. @amjoyshow @CNN @MSNBC @FoxNews as well as #Trump #cabinet full of extreme wealth and corporate influence. #BlackTwitter. #Corruption

Figure 6. Kavanaugh-themed tweet illustrating the white privilege frame.

Black Twitter users also made references to Kavanaugh's behavior during the hearings and how he appeared to be overacting. Tweets referred to him crying while on the stand and called him out on this type of behavior that would be deemed inappropriate for a woman. One tweet stated, "@BrettKavanaugh is the quintessential angry white man! Yelling like a mad man during his testimony, solely because a woman would dare tell the truth about him & that America would dare question his white privilege! He is angry & guilty. #MeToo #BlackTwitter."

Informational Tweets

Informational tweets provided facts about the Kavanaugh Hearings, and his final nomination. They were void of judgement and frequently linked to stories published by newspapers and blogs. Three examples pulled from Twitter during the study period included:

- Trump nominates Brett Kavanaugh to Supreme Court
- White House Withholds 100,000 Pages of Judge Brett Kavanaugh's

Records https://nyti.ms/2Caj0s4 #blacktwitter .@

- CoryBooker released Kavanaugh's emails about racial profiling. #BlackTwitter

Our analysis illustrates how Kavanaugh-themed memes served as a new avenue for supporting women (e.g., hooks, 1992; Collins, 2004). From a feminist perspective, individual tweets often highlighted the idea that women should support women. Others focused on the betrayal of Blasey Ford by women. Smith (2018) wrote that the U.S. vote of U.S. Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, supporting Kavanaugh was the "ultimate betrayal" and evidence that "white women are not their allies." CBS's John Dickerson (2018) wrote there were no winners as both Blasey Ford and Kavanaugh's lives were scrutinized and vilified in the media.

Many Twitter users sounding off on Black Twitter opposed Kavanaugh's confirmation, often highlighting the idea that a double standard for people of color exists in that whites people are innocent until proven guilty and Black people do not get that benefit. CRT scholars Delgado and Stefancic (2001) posit that racism is often institutional, that white privilege dominates American culture and color blindness is a myth. They also posit racism is normal in terms of how our society and businesses operate as it advances the interests of white elites. The tweets in our sample illustrate this point as well as perceptions of white privilege. CRT literature indicates too often the stories of people of color have been excluded in mainstream media, and that is why it is important to look through the lens of critical race theory.

Conclusion

Using Black Feminist and Critical Race theories, this study analyzed how Black Twitter users framed the 2018 Kavanaugh hearings. Specifically, we looked at the framing of the Kavanaugh incident in thousands of tweets that emerged between September 27, 2018, when the Senate Judiciary Committee began televised testimony from Blasey Ford and Kavanaugh until four days after the Senate confirmed his nomination on Oct. 10, 2018.

As with any study, this one had limitations. The purposive sample in the Twitterverse was limited to the search time frame as documented earlier. Therefore, findings may not be generalized as there are more than 500 million tweets posted per day (Aslam, 2019). The comments analyzed were those present when data were collected and may differ from comments viewed at another time as Twitter users can delete tweets at any time. This study specifically focused only on Black Twitter, and comparative analysis with another social media platform such as Facebook would be another study. This research could be strengthened with more sentiment analysis.

Even with these shortcomings, this study is important, as it shines light on how the Kavanaugh hearings were framed on Black Twitter. The memes in our sample illustrate the importance of having alternative platforms for Black people to express themselves regarding current events and hot-button topics, such as the Kavanaugh hearings. It adds a new chapter to previous studies noting that traditional media outlets overlook racial disparities and focus largely on gender and primarily

women from the dominant group. Alternative platforms such as Black Twitter offer a voice for women in marginalized groups. In this case, Black Twitter offered a viable and visible platform to not only express concerns, but to also offer directives and solutions for how Black people might play a role in politics. The act of creating, sharing and resharing Kavanaugh-themed tweets provided an outlet for Black people to form a collective voice regarding the historic Kavanaugh hearings and to garner support for Blasey Ford.■

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#Kavanaugh Will NEVER Rest #JusticeKavanaugh Has ALL #Women/#BlackWomen #Law Clerks! #Moms #WomeninMedicine #WomeninBusiness #BlackTwitter #Hispanic #Latinos #Hispanics #girls #Students #LA #OrangeCounty #LosAngeles #SoCal #Cali #Democrats https://twitter.com/ChuckCallesto/status/1054347398963752961 [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/sunnyherring1/status/1054361254029131776

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Appendix A.

Table 2. Tweets from Kavanaugh, Black Twitter sample.

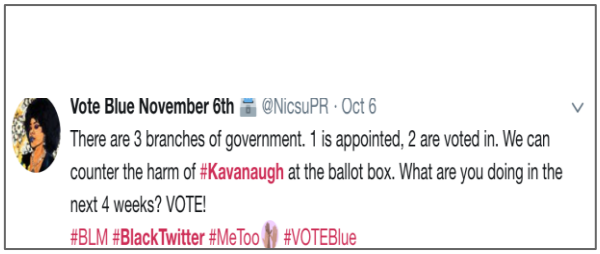
Tweet	Description
	Figure 1: Tweet from @NicsuPR on Oct. 6, 2018.
	Figure 2: Tweet from @ynotjones on Oct. 5, 2018.
	Figure 3: Tweet from @BlackSoulFood on Sept. 28, 2018.
	Figures 4-5: Tweets from @CityNinjaDC on Oct. 1, 2018 and @ynotjones on Oct. 5, 2018.

Figure 6: Tweet from @itsmeimtheone on Sept. 28, 2018.

Figure 7: Tweet from @PreachLove on Oct. 6, 2018.

Figures 8: Tweets from @BlackJesuscom on Sept. 25, 2018 and on Oct. 8, 2018.

Figure 9: Tweet from @GlobalCarole on Sept. 17, 2018.

Figure 10: Tweet from @TucsonVoice28 on Sept. 23, 2018.

Appendix B.

Table 2. NVivo Capture of tweets containing Black Twitter, Kavanaugh, Ford

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage	Similar Words
blacked	7	3005	4.20%	#black, black, blacked
college	7	2938	4.11%	college
boys	4	2300	3.21%	'boys, boys
brett	5	1861	2.60%	#brettlying, 'brett, brett
judge	5	1730	2.42%	judge, judges
friends	7	1476	2.06%	friend, friendly, friends
two	3	1468	2.05%	two
media	5	1463	2.04%	media
shifts	6	1461	2.04%	shift, shifts
analyzing	9	1457	2.04%	analyzing
inebriation	11	1457	2.04%	inebriation
quotes	6	1457	2.04%	quotes
stages	6	1457	2.04%	stages
@senorrinhatch	14	1456	2.03%	@senorrinhatch, senorrinhatch
never	5	1226	1.71%	never
voters	6	1026	1.43%	#voters, voter, voters
calling	7	1024	1.43%	call, called, calling, calls
@realcandaceo	13	1020	1.43%	@realcandaceo
democrat	8	1015	1.42%	democrat, democratic, democrats
helping	7	1011	1.41%	help, helping

leader	6	1010	1.41%	leader, leaders
candice	7	1008	1.41%	candice
owens	5	1008	1.41%	owens
patriots	8	1008	1.41%	patriots
policies	8	1008	1.41%	policies
rather	6	1008	1.41%	rather
tied	4	1008	1.41%	tied
@sxdoc	6	1006	1.41%	@sxdoc
supporters	10	928	1.30%	support, supporters, supporting, supportive, supports
like	4	824	1.15%	like, likely, likes
reasoning	9	767	1.07%	reason, reasoning
applied	7	766	1.07%	applied, apply
@nowthisnews	12	753	1.05%	@nowthisnews
trayvon	7	753	1.05%	trayvon
saw	3	457	0.64%	saw
https	5	370	0.52%	https
christine	9	333	0.47%	christine
ford	4	332	0.46%	ford, fords
yale	4	328	0.46%	yale
blasey	6	326	0.46%	blasey
people	6	281	0.39%	people
one	3	247	0.35%	one

reporting	9	241	0.34%	report, reported, reporting, reports
fact	4	240	0.34%	fact
ludington	9	237	0.33%	ludington
racial	6	237	0.33%	racial
divides	7	235	0.33%	divides
steep	5	235	0.33%	steep
view	4	235	0.33%	view
yet	3	235	0.33%	yet