

Chapter 12

Black Women and Girls Trending

A New(er) Autohistoria-Teoría

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As is demonstrated by the contemporary radical feminist project #ThisTweetCalledMyBack,¹ women of color have been leveraging digital spaces to tell their own stories while necessarily resisting white supremacy, misogynoir,² anti-blackness, and white feminism.³ Long after the first print publication of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*,⁴ women and girls of color are staking claim in digital spaces to re-envision an emancipatory logic whereby gender, race, class hierarchies, and sexual violence are no longer viable threats to liberation. In this chapter, Black women and girls are the focus. I invite readers to notice the ways in which Black women and girls reclaim space across social media platforms and place themselves in their stories and theories.⁵ Consider, too, how Black women and girls defy conventional ways of explaining social and cultural phenomena, which at the same time opens up space for others to remember self and community amid white supremacy and gender-based violence.

Drawing on Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of autohistoria-teoría, I highlight three transmedia storytelling projects that center Black women and girls' lived experiences: Zola's Twitter Tale (#TheStory), #BlackGirlMagic, and #BlackWomenAtWork.⁶ Each case characterizes a new(er) autohistoria-teoría,⁷ which 1) locates multimodal knowledge practices where lived experiences are catalysts for theories of self and community, and 2) identifies Black women and girls as shapeshifters and movement builders. In Anzaldúa's 2002 essay "now let us shift . . . the path of conocimiento . . . inner work, public acts," she briefly characterizes autohistoria-teoría in a footnote: "*Autohistoria* is a term I use to describe the genre of writing about one's personal and collective history using fictive elements, a sort of fictionalized autobiography or memoir; and autohistoria-teoría is a personal essay that theorizes."⁸ In mapping each case, I invite the reader to journey through an epistemological

process—“*tu camino de conocimiento*”⁹—whereby each hashtag functions as a resource to examine lived theories across time and space.

To illustrate my claims, I first outline relevant literature on the cultural production of hashtags and highlight foundational perspectives and new approaches to transmedia storytelling. Next, I examine Zola’s Twitter Tale (#TheStory), #BlackGirlMagic, and #BlackWomenAtWork from their origins to their influence in order to illustrate a genealogy of creative digital labor and theoretical standpoints grounded in lived experience and amplified through critical mass. Throughout these sections, I revisit Anzaldúa’s writings to reflect key elements of *autohistoria-teoría* that come through in Zola’s Twitter Tale (#TheStory), #BlackGirlMagic, and #BlackWomenAtWork; that is, by way of mythmaking, imagination, and reclaiming narrative, respectively. From this analysis, a new(er) perspective of *autohistoria-teoría* emerges to account for the multimodal practices of knowledge production that cut across media platforms and contexts.¹⁰

THE CULTURAL PRODUCTION OF HASHTAGS

Gloria Anzaldúa’s work takes up little-to-no space in conceptual and empirical analyses in communication and media studies. Google and academic database searches using keywords “Gloria Anzaldúa and digital media” yield very few results, with the exception of scholarship on digital literacy and composition.¹¹ There is, however, indication of Anzaldúa’s work re-emerging in Black feminist scholarship on digital cultures.¹² Indeed, Anzaldúa’s influence on the study of digital media is most salient outside of traditional communication and media studies scholarship, as is evident in the digital works of women of color creators, journalists, bloggers, and artists.¹³ The cases examined in this essay provide rich sites for analysis and exploration into new(er) forms of *autohistoria-teoría*. The goal of this chapter, in part, is to fill the gap in communication and media scholarship by drawing primarily on Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of *autohistoria-teoría*—these “eventful, traumatic, tragic, and beautiful” stranger-than-fiction stories¹⁴—as a theoretical resource for examining communicative practices and cultural phenomena generated online.

Within the last decade, media and communication scholars have begun to rigorously take up the study of hashtags, or more precisely, cultural production and social movements across new media landscapes.¹⁵ The advent and popularity of Twitter, the social media platform founded in 2006, is largely responsible for this uptick in scholarly inquiry. These scholars understand hashtags beyond their communication affordances and, in particular, the value added as sites to study cultural phenomena. I accept Ringrose’s

conceptualization of Twitter as a “machinic assemblage,” or a complex social configuration through which socio-political processes and informatics flow, a mode that captures territorialization (making) and deterritorialization (unmaking) of processes and flows.¹⁶ And as Sharma contends, Twitter is a powerful utility, “a key player in the colonization of the internet by corporate social media” that influences discourse, practices, and the architecture of digital space.¹⁷ Despite its utility to capture social and cultural processes and flows, the ways in which Twitter codes and decodes virality remains elusive. With Twitter’s algorithm kept secret, the work of understanding how hashtags trend and stories go viral presents methodological challenges for those studying cultural generativity among digital spaces. However, the focus of this analysis is on meaning ascribed to generativity and production while also recognizing the hidden functionality of technical systems whereby the affective labor of Black women and girls is most visibly carried out and consumed.¹⁸

The title of the article *Black Women and Girls Trending* suggests not only the popularity of Black women and girls’ creative content but also points to the cultural conundrum having to do with contagion. As a technical concept, contagion refers to the rapid diffusion of information across a multitude of social networks.¹⁹ Hashtags make visible the spread and velocity of information as it circulates. The message relayed throughout popular culture suggests that Black women and girls are trendsetters; their ideas, talents, traditions, practices, and cultural attitudes are indeed infectious. Despite this, however, cultural anxieties still persist around racialized bodies, gender expression, sexuality, and youth development. Across institutional and juridical spaces, Black women and girls are criminalized in schools, pushed into prisons, and confront disproportionate rates of mortality.²⁰ Online, algorithms and Google searches represent Black women and girls as one-dimensional caricatures of contemporary life. Even the most accomplished are mocked in memes for their public visibility. There is a cost of being contained within these cultural spaces. In particular, online communication technologies make visible and visceral Black women and girls’ experiences of exploitation, discrimination, brutality, and other forms of dehumanization. Yet, it is among these spaces—these publics—where Black women and girls also (re)claim personhood and emerge as cultural shapeshifters and movement builders of a modern society.²¹ By documenting Zola’s Twitter Tale (#TheStory), #BlackGirl-Magic, and #BlackWomenAtWork, this analysis, in essence, highlights the conundrum of cultural contagion.

Adding to the function of hashtags as mechanisms that enable the diffusion of information, they also make visible Black women’s efforts to be seen and heard in public life. In particular, hashtags locate intervention strategies and social flows that, as Manuel Castells argues, “carve out a new public

space that is not limited to the Internet.”²² Take, for example, the hashtag’s role in locating the physical and affective labor of Black women organizers and mediamakers that protested and mobilized after Renisha McBride, a young, 19-year-old Black woman from Dearborn Heights, Michigan, was murdered.²³ And another: The hashtag’s purpose in documenting a simple love letter created by three queer Black women after the murder of Trayvon Martin. #Blacklivesmatter would eventually reactivate a global movement for Black power and Black lives on and offline.²⁴ Hashtags, in these cases, not only act as an apparatus of technical social systems, but they also function as cultural artifacts, resources, and archives that animate social movements and provide a means through which to navigate among sociopolitical processes and systems.

In describing the function of hashtags here, I am not suggesting a deterministic view of technology; that is to say, because of hashtags, Black women and girls can organize and tell their stories without consequence. Hashtags will not save Black women and girls, nor do they mediate a better version of their humanity. In theorizing the relationship between technologies and Black women’s experiences, I take cues from Black scholars like Alexander Weheliye and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson. Weheliye’s racializing assemblages pick up where Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage framework left off and describes a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline racialized bodies along a spectrum of human, non-quite-human, and nonhuman.²⁵ Jackson adds to the discourse and cautions against conventional appeals to move beyond the human (i.e., posthumanism) and calls attention to the meaning of “beyond” itself. Jackson asks, “[W]hose conception of humanity are we moving beyond?”²⁶ I keep Jackson’s question close in mind because it serves as reminder not to obscure humanity and history in the name of theorizing about modes of communication across time and space. For this reason, I highlight hashtags here as sites of cultural production; that is, where Black women and girls are continuously reproducing what it means to live among socio-political processes that discipline them along a spectrum of humanness.

Further, these sites wherein Black women and girls produce such stories are not safe havens. They are not home. When discussing stories as sites and the complacency of place, Anzaldúa cautions: “But there are no safe spaces. ‘Home’ can be unsafe and dangerous because it bears the likelihood of intimacy and thus thinner boundaries. Staying ‘home’ and not venturing out from our own groups comes from woundedness, and stagnates our growth. To bridge means loosening our borders, not closing off to others.”²⁷ Taking into account Anzaldúa’s caution about place, I propose another way of thinking about hashtags: as modes that make visible the bridging work where new(er) cultural forms are produced and consumed.

As a theoretical construct, the cultural production of hashtags enables us to see how lived experiences, be they familiar or unfamiliar, unfold and take shape, not just through meaning-making, but also by way of place-making. The process by which hashtags are produced and consumed points to the ways in which people, in this instance Black women and girls, can establish where, how, and by what means to belong. In the case of Zola's Twitter Tale (#TheStory), #BlackGirlMagic, and #BlackWomenAtWork, these sites narrate Black women and girls' everyday lives. They reveal both how Black women and girls view their place among systems of domination and how they respond, namely by centering their humanity in their stories.

TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING AND AUTOHISTORIA

The concept and practice of transmedia storytelling span a wide variety of disciplines, industries, and markets, and is generally understood as a story told across multiple platforms. Transmedia storytelling characterizes a practice by which individuals and communities employ various forms of writing and mediamaking to (re)tell stories. The genre is linked to its forescholar, Henry Jenkins, whose work on fandom and convergence culture built the foundation for the concepts and practices we know today. Jenkins describes transmedia storytelling as:

[A] process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story.²⁸

Jenkins has since expanded on the meaning and application of transmedia storytelling by incorporating the perspectives of other scholars and mediamakers in his own research. Since his seminal commentary and work,²⁹ scholars and mediamakers have formulated newer conceptions of transmedia storytelling, such as Costanza-Chock's and Castells' concepts of transmedia mobilization and organizing³⁰ and Soep's pedagogical perspective of transmedia making.³¹ Newer debates and critiques of transmedia storytelling have emerged as well, relating to participation and engagement,³² literacies and education,³³ media specificity and narrative,³⁴ and commodification and branding.³⁵

Newer iterations of transmedia storytelling respond to social and political unrest, and place a strong emphasis on civic engagement. For young mediamakers and activists in particular, transmedia storytelling has been a necessary tactic to engage in democratic practices that do not rely on a

singular entity or mode of communication. Jenkins and his coauthors provide a working definition for civic imagination as the capacity to reenvision “alternatives to current social, political, or economic institutions or problems.”³⁶ Transmedia storytellers create such alternatives by exerting political agency and amplifying their messages and calls to action across multiple platforms.

Jenkins’ transmedia storytelling and Anzaldúa’s autohistoria share a common feature relating to fictive elements of storytelling. Though these two thinkers occupy different disciplinary spaces and epistemological traditions, their formulations of storytelling emphasize the imagination. Whereas transmedia storytelling does not necessarily rely on the storyteller to write themselves into their own story, autohistoria relies on the self to produce knowledge about the world around them, even if fictive. Writers, mediamakers, and *teóricos* of the autohistoria tradition are not creating for fandom and corporate consumption, although they certainly can influence how stories are told and popularized across television, film, music, and other industries—as is evident in the three cases examined here.

Perhaps more significantly, however, is the way in which autohistoria *teorías* bring forth personal and community testimonies that reckon with history, which according to Anzaldúa is inherently fictive: “I call it ‘auto’ for self-writing, and ‘historia’ for history—as in collective, personal, cultural, and racial history—as well as for fiction, a story you make up. History is fiction because it’s made up, usually made up by the people who rule.”³⁷ To grasp the concept of autohistoria-*teoría*, one must dig into Anzaldúa’s writings, namely where she employs storytelling to theorize from a place of marginalization that necessitates personal and community transformation. Though Anzaldúa did not publish a comprehensive definition of the term, one can find the utility of autohistoria and autohistoria-*teoría* in some of her most popular works, such as “La Prieta,”³⁸ *Borderlands*,³⁹ and “now let us shift,” as well as among other non-published works and informal conversations with colleagues and close friends.

Throughout Anzaldúa’s work, one might conclude that autohistoria is less a form of political imaginary as it is an emancipatory logic. Autohistoria and autohistoria-*teoría* communicate an epistemology unbound by Western constructs about narrative practices. Perhaps there is a reason for this: autohistoria-*teoría* is both a practice and theoretical construct born out of a necessity. It reflects a way in which storytellers summon the imagination to, as Anzaldúa suggests, awaken the soul: “Imagination, a function of the soul, has the capacity to extend us beyond the confines of our skin, situation, and condition so we can choose our responses. It enables us to reimagine our lives, rewrite the self, and create guiding myths for our times.”⁴⁰ For creators, writers, and mediamakers of the autohistoria tradition, storytelling evokes awareness and functions as a retort to colonialism and systemic oppression.⁴¹

Thus, I posit that Anzaldúa's autohistoria enhances the tradition of trans-media storytelling. It centers the critical imaginations of women of color, in this case Black women and girls who reckon with a history that has failed them. A new(er) autohistoria-teoría is a lived theory told across multiple platforms, using text, image, sound, and body that creates spaces for others to fellowship and build community.

NEW(ER) AUTOHISTORIA-TEORIA AND AFFECTIVE DIGITAL LABOR

Affective frameworks help to situate the work Black women and girls produce across new media landscapes. Though the concept of affective economies has been studied extensively in critical studies,⁴² the digital labor of Black women and girls is a relatively newer area of inquiry. As Zola's Twitter Tale (#TheStory), #BlackGirlMagic, and #BlackWomenAtWork exhibit aspects of autohistoria-teorías, they also point to examples whereby media industries and everyday lurkers and users consume the labor of its storytellers online. Nakamura writes:

Social media platforms benefit from the crowd-sourced labour of internet users who, with varying degrees of gentleness or force, intervene in racist and sexist discourse online. This labour is uncompensated by wages, paid instead by affective currencies such as "likes," followers, and occasionally, acknowledgment or praise from the industry.⁴³

Granted, although the pedagogical practice of communicating ideas that critique racist and sexist discourse is inherently a low-to-no wage public service for women of color, it is often met with resistance to the point of harassment. This kind of invisible and emotional labor requires a wherewithal to navigate contentious and, at times, violent interactions online. The compensation women of color receive from labor involved in building such knowledge communities is in stark contrast to the compensation white men, for example, have historically received for building, managing, and creating knowledge communities online.⁴⁴ Whereas the former produces non-monetary compensation through collective knowledge production, the latter relies on users to generate a profit model for its creators and distributors.

Nonetheless, women of color writers and mediamakers have built new frameworks for understanding current and past social and political movements. By enriching others, including corporate onlookers, these women also recognize the inherent inequities that exist among networked spaces. Radical women of color who created #ThisTweetCalledMyBack assert:

We are your unwaged labour in our little corner of the internet that feeds a movement. Hours of teach-ins, hashtags, Twitter chats, video chats and phone calls to create a sustainable narrative and conversation around decolonization and anti blackness. As an online collective of Black, Afro-Indigenous, and NDN women, we have created an entire framework with which to understand gender violence and racial hierarchy in a global and U.S. context.⁴⁵

In other words, positioned from a so-called marginalized social standpoint, women of color find themselves having to speak louder with a careful, yet savvy tone, or choose to remain silent, as is evident in the social media blackout sparked by #ThisTweetCalledMyBack. Either way, they enact a narrative strategy to be heard and recognized amidst oppressive systems that normalize their unpaid labor. In the cases that follow, these hashtags function as currency, that is, as cultural resources through storytelling that serve both community and corporate interests.

ZOLA'S TWITTER TALE #THESTORY

Aziah “Zola” lies on a bed, fingers spread across a laptop looking directly at the camera lens like she already knew this day would come. She was being interviewed by *Rolling Stone Magazine* about a Twitter story she told one month before on October 27, 2015.⁴⁶ In 148 tweets, Zola tells a story about sex, violence, drugs, and, as Zola tells *Rolling Stone*, “hoeism.” At this point in the analysis, I offer readers a trigger warning and caution that some might find the events Zola describes distressing and traumatic.

#TheStory⁴⁷ begins with a single provocative line, a command heard across cyberspace: “Okay listen up. This story long. So I met this white bitch at Hooters.” The pace and development of Zola’s story iterates, requiring the reader’s undivided attention so as not to miss an important rhetorical cue. At times, the use of interspersed capitalization and missing punctuation make for a frustrating read. Zola continues to tell a story about the time when she and her companion traveled to a strip club in Florida. They went there to make money. During their travels, Zola, her companion, and several other men experience a series of unfortunate events. Zola helps prostitute her companion as they both try to avoid being assaulted. Graphic descriptions of prostitution, along with a shooting, abduction, and an attempted suicide all occur in a matter of 148 tweets. The reveal comes toward the end when Zola tweets that one of the men they encountered days before was a major sex trafficker. He was wanted for kidnapping underaged girls and several murders. He was eventually arrested. At the end, Zola jokingly turns the

gaze back on her audience and tweets: “If you stuck with that whole story you are hilarious lol.” Later she defends herself against claims that the story was made up by revealing, and further outing, the identities of her travel companions.

Zola’s Twitter Tale, tagged #TheStory, occupies a contentious space in narrative practice. #TheStory is a provocative parody that some might construe as brilliantly executed or deem wholly inappropriate. Zola does not position herself as victim. Yet, in exposing the identities of her castmates, she places them in a vulnerable position in public view. Zola’s comedic spin on sex trafficking might make some readers question their own ethical and moral compasses. Though she admits some embellishment, Zola does not apologize for telling the story the way she did. In fact, she defends the use of fictive elements suggesting they have a purpose. From the *Rolling Stone* article:

When [Zola] posted the story on Twitter, she was caught up in the moment, she explains, riffing on the reactions of her followers who were responding in real time. She had posted and removed the story twice before and no one cared. To garner more interest this time, she made it darkly funny while preserving the gist of what happened. And she has no regrets. “I made people who probably wouldn’t want to hear a sex trafficking story want to be a part of it,” she says, “because it was entertaining.”⁴⁸

Zola’s response here begs the question about whether or not stories of sex trafficking need to be entertaining for people to take notice. Further, one must also question whether or not these kinds of stories should rely on racialized language that also feeds into a culture obsessed with interpersonal violence and sexual assault against women.⁴⁹ One sex worker’s response takes up these concerns and reacts to the inherent contradiction of Zola’s Twitter Tale:

Praising an ostensibly funny story about the ways the lives of marginalized women are marked by violence is a tricky line to walk [. . .] One thing I do know: Easy reading is damned hard writing. If [Zola] writes something else, I will be swiping through it as fast as I can.⁵⁰

Since Zola sent out the first tweet of her saga, #TheStory has garnered national attention and been analyzed on blogs, news sites, and shared across Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest. Zola’s tweets have also been re-posted on websites, including Rap Genius, a social site and pedagogical tool where users annotated and added their own interpretations to Zola’s dramatic narrative. #TheStory is indeed a doozy, one that relies on Zola’s personal accounts and the full participation from readers that are as critical as they are captivated.

#TheStory and Mythmaking

*“I write the myths in me, the myths I am, the myths I want to become.”*⁵¹

Zola’s #TheStory locates the ways in which audiences are summoned through mythmaking. Readers encounter archetypes in the form of prostitutes and pimps and journey through a vernacular of tricks and traps. They experience a counter narrative about sex work that does not rely on the language of victimization. Anzaldúa writes, “[a] lot of our writing exposes what’s been hidden from us in terms of our sexuality and our bodies and exposes how women are conditioned and controlled.”⁵² #TheStory is an autobiographical account that, whether one agrees with its execution or not, resonates with audiences while at the same time reveals audiences’ social anxieties about racialized victimhood, gender-based violence, and sex as work.

Zola’s tale does not posit a perfect message about social justice. Anzaldúa’s friend and biographer (and my former professor), AnaLouise Keating, notes that autohistoria-teoría is a type of personal essay that is deeply reflective “in search for cultural meaning [and] in the service of social-justice work.”⁵³ Indeed, one could argue that #TheStory does not fit the model of a social justice narrative. Nor does it seemingly read as deeply reflective or theoretical. But humanity is messy, as are the stories and theories that attempt to explain culture and social life. #TheStory would appear beyond the scope of scholarly inquiry because it complicates conventional meaning ascribed to theoretical practice. Given that #TheStory also comes from an unlikely source, a Black cis female sex worker, it also challenges ideas about who gets to theorize about social phenomena. Anzaldúa writes:

Because we are not allowed to enter discourse, because we are often disqualified and excluded from it, because what passes for theory these days is forbidden territory for us, it is *vital* that we occupy theorizing space, that we not allow white men and women solely to occupy it. By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we transform that theorizing space.⁵⁴

Autohistoria-teorista projects like #TheStory disentangle conventional narrative and theoretical practices revealing uncomfortable realities about social life. Further elaborating on the utility of Anzaldúa’s autohistoria-teorista, Keating notes: “Anzaldúa and other autohistoria-teoristas expose the limitations in the existing paradigms and create new stories of healing, self-growth, cultural critique, and individual/collective transformation.”⁵⁵ #TheStory is a compelling narrative primarily because it locates cultural meaning among social life; it points to the ways in which readers, lurkers, and critics alike ascribe meaning to one Black woman’s account of sex work.

Though one may never fully know Zola's intent in telling #TheStory, Zola still managed to shape a narrative in public space that challenges assumptions about status, work, and agency. Zola evokes a street vernacular in her tweets that even Oscar-nominated Black film director Ava DuVernay mistakenly associated with a marginalized class status.⁵⁶ #TheStory epitomizes a topic none too trivial that shocks readers through alternative ways of languaging and perceiving fringe aspects of social life.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, it is a testament to Zola and others like her who leverage social spaces like Twitter to remind us about the forgotten and often hidden stories of sexual exploitation and violence that women—in particular Black women—experience everyday.

#BLACKGIRLMAGIC

In 2013, CaShawn Thompson, who tweets at @thepbg, created #BlackGirlMagic as a way to celebrate the achievements of Black women and girls and combat negative representations she saw throughout mainstream media. Thompson explained: "I say 'magic' because it's something that people don't always understand. Sometimes our accomplishments might seem to come out of thin air, because a lot of times, the only people supporting us are other black women."⁵⁸ Since then, the phrase has turned into a cultural movement. Four years after Thompson declared Black girls are magic on Twitter, one would be hard pressed not to find #BlackGirlMagic stamped across Teespring t-shirts, tagged on social media, discussed in classrooms, and name-dropped on television sitcoms, radio and podcast shows, and in motion picture movies. #BlackGirlMagic has also been quantified by marketing firms to examine the spending power of Black women in the United States.⁵⁹ Across all of these contexts, Black women and girls have attached their stories and self-presentations to a hashtag-turned-slogan that bears witness to the beauty, mystery, and mysticism of their everyday lives. #BlackGirlMagic is a celebration of self and collective identity and a critical clap back (that is, a comeback with an attitude) to the historical erasure and marginalization of Black women and girls throughout public and private life.

#BlackGirlMagic and Imagination

*"I preferred the world of imagination to the death of sleep."*⁶⁰

In her essay "The Path of the Red and Black Ink,"⁶¹ Anzaldúa journeys through the path of writing and artmaking. This journey through imagination engenders painful memories about cultures and language that have been under siege by the Western aesthetic. Anzaldúa writes, "[Western art]

is dedicated to the validation of itself [it is] always whole and always ‘in power.’”⁶² To counteract the psychological impact of western aesthetics on non-whites in particular, Anzaldúa uses writing and the imagination to move with, rather than away from anxiety and conflict. To Anzaldúa, the imagination is a metaphor for an awakening that counteracts slumber, challenges ethnocentrism, and resists complacency in the status quo.

Recall my discussion earlier in the essay of Anzaldúa’s take on the imagination and its significance as a function of protection and survival between and among inner and outer worlds. Anzaldúa writes: “To protect myself I had to invent this whole new world, the world of symbols and the imagination.”⁶³ As a new(er) autohistoria, #BlackGirlMagic documents Black women’s and girls’ creative acts throughout everyday life, and it also locates a desire to be affirmed by one’s own community. Ritualistic and performative aspects of #BlackGirlMagic play out across on and offline spaces. The stories Black women and girls tell are inextricably bound to their bodies, identities, and their capacity to see beyond the dominant views of social life. Anzaldúa describes this kind of capacity “to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface” as *la facultad*.⁶⁴ To Anzaldúa, a shift in perception—usually experienced by individuals that have systemically and historically been oppressed—is a lived theory that breaks from western epistemology and ‘rational’ thought. User @naturally-bellee illustrates in a tweet this kind of capacity, which represents a different way of knowing that is bound to the body:

Since black girls can never seem to love themselves here’s a thread of everything that gives black girls #blackgirlmagic. First of all your skin !! Are you crazy, have u seen melanin in the sun ??? It’s called that natural highlight. Aka ‘the glo.’ Secondly, that crown on top of your head. Stop calling it ‘nappy’ because it isn’t. Perms do not make you ‘popping.’ All your [sic] doing is down playing the gift that [God] gave you. Next, IN CASE YOU DIDN’T REALIZE THIS, EVERYONE WANTS TO BE US. So why are you ashamed of something as mesmerizing as your melanin? Lastly, every black girl is made of pure brown sugar, hone, and a little extra love to them lips (that’s why they’re so big) so you betta work baby girl.⁶⁵

As a mode of transmedia navigation, #BlackGirlMagic documents a way of writing oneself and perceptions of one’s community across time and space. It also summons a collective response from those who celebrate the experiences of Black women and girls as counter narratives to Western aesthetic and epistemology.

Yet, despite its function to conjure up collective celebration by centering Black women and girls’ bodies and experiences, #BlackGirlMagic also sparks critique. #BlackGirlMagic has received criticism for perpetuating a

narrative that Black women are unbreakable and superhuman, despite being treated as subhuman throughout public and private life.⁶⁶ Some, however, refute this claim and make the case for #BlackGirlMagic as a culturally relevant practice and strengths-based approach for addressing depression among Black women:⁶⁷

Black women need to be recognized for their accomplishments, no matter how small. #BlackGirlMagic gives women permission to hope and reach for their dreams in spite of the systemic barriers that try to keep Black women from achieving. When we say, “I see you,” we see this as a form of radical love as it acknowledges, recognizes, and celebrates Black women even when they are invisible to others.⁶⁸

Taking into account this view, as a storytelling project, #BlackGirlMagic constitutes a framework and practice through which Black women and girls tap into the imagination in ways that legitimize their worldviews, despite the bleak realities of the world around them.

In this way, #BlackGirlMagic serves as a narrative practice that invokes the imagination in order to strike a balance between Black women’s desires to rewrite themselves while rejecting social norms that invalidate their lived experiences. The vacillating process #BlackGirlMagic reveals is perhaps best characterized through a framework of the otherhuman, for which scholar Jalondra A. Davis poignantly argues:⁶⁹

Unlike the superhuman, which exaggerates the capacities of Man, or the posthuman, which overlooks the ways of being that preexisted and coexist with Man, the term otherhuman describes the being of non-white, non-male, non-property owning, and/or differently abled individuals. The otherhuman is marked by vulnerability—not only negative vulnerability to the violence exacted on non-white, non-male, or non-property-owning peoples, but also positive vulnerability in terms of exposure or openness to alternative sources of experience, affect, and knowledge beyond that of Western rationality.⁷⁰

#BlackGirlMagic marks a significant contradiction in Black women’s experiences, one that serves as a source of power through vulnerability and intimacy through exposure. Just like Anzaldúa’s idea of invoked art, #BlackGirlMagic is a cultural resource born out of conflict and resolution because “it speaks to everyday life [. . .] it makes people hopeful, happy, secure, and it can have negative affects as well, which propel one towards a search for validation.”⁷¹ Indeed, #BlackGirlMagic validates Black women and girls, and despite the negative discourse the hashtag might perpetuate, it also represents an autohistoria-teoría of personal proclamation and collective affirmation of hope.⁷²

#BLACKWOMENATWORK

The dark one.

On March 28, 2017, U.S. Congresswoman Maxine Waters tweeted, “I am a strong black woman. I cannot be intimidated, and I am not going anywhere. #BlackWomenAtWork.”⁷³ Waters was responding to cable news personality Bill O’Reilly, who mocked Waters by making fun of her hair as she stood on the floor of the House of Representatives to condemn President Donald Trump’s policies and questionable ties to a foreign adversary. That same day, during a briefing, then-Press Secretary Sean Spicer dismissed veteran journalist April Ryan’s line and tone of questioning about President Trump’s foreign ties. In both instances, two high-profile Black women were publicly singled out by two high-profile white men in their respective workplaces. Activist Brittany Packnett took notice of these events and created the hashtag #BlackWomenAtWork to elevate Black women’s stories about being dismissed, discriminated against, and policed in the workplace. Packnett tweeted:

Today, we were told a Black woman’s hair matters more than her voice, and our choices are under the control of others. This happens to black women everyday at work. Share your Maxine and April moments, so people don’t think this is rare. Use #BlackWomenAtWork.⁷⁴

Packnett’s tweets sparked online conversations where Black women in all aspects of work shared their stories about experiencing racial and gender-based discrimination at work. #BlackWomenAtWork is a collective homage to fearlessness and reclaiming power through narrative practice.

#BlackWomenAtWork and Reclaiming Narrative

Anzaldúa’s essay “La Prieta” illustrates an autohistoria-teoría of reclaiming personhood through narrative practice. In Spanish, *la prieta* loosely translates as a dark-skinned person usually of mixed-race. It is a derogatory term disguised as endearment for many young women who grew up in families that placed value on lighter skin as proxy to whiteness. Anzaldúa wrote about feeling alienated by her family and feeling as though her own body had betrayed her during some of the darkest moments of her life. She details the phenomenon of severing parts of oneself in order to assimilate and survive in a white heteropatriarchal society. Anzaldúa writes:

But it’s taken over thirty years to unlearn the belief instilled in me that white is better than brown—something that some people of color *never* will unlearn. And it is only now that the hatred of myself, which I spent the greater part of my adolescence cultivating, is turning into love.⁷⁵

As Anzaldúa comes to realize, it is through her body that she also learns how to resist conventions while transforming how she perceives the world around her.

In much of the same way Anzaldúa had to learn how to navigate white spaces, Black women confront a similar battle throughout places of work. Black women's bodies are perhaps most visible in spaces where their labor is also consumed. Indeed, there is pressure to conform to a Western (white) aesthetic meant to hide aspects of Black bodies. For Black women in the workplace, hair is one particular aspect that is hyper-policed, as is language and other modes of communication. Such policing demonstrates one way in which Black women are marked by their skin and other physical traits, despite the labor they perform. As messages from mainstream media and society signal to Black women that they must dismember parts of their bodies that unsettle whiteness, #BlackWomenAtWork says otherwise.

#BlackWomenAtWork highlights Black women's personal anecdotes of racial and gender discrimination and biases at work. Black women attach their stories, statistics, images, memes, and other representations to the hashtag to illustrate their experiences confronting coworkers, bosses, customers, and clients. Some notable anecdotes:

Pulling into my own reserved parking space and being told by a random [white woman] that cleaning people can't park there. #BlackWomenAtWork.⁷⁶

#BlackWomenAtWork being told ur natural hair is unprofessional and makes u look aggressive.⁷⁷

Arrive to keynote. White faculty ask me to go get them some water. I get it. Then tell them why I'm really there. #BlackWomenAtWork.⁷⁸

Watching white lawyers wander around, wondering who the prosecutor is, never even considering that it could be me. #BlackWomenAtWork.⁷⁹

Similar to Zola's Twitter Tale (#TheStory) and #BlackGirlMagic, #BlackWomenAtWork makes visible the full humanity of Black women. These eventful and stranger-than-fiction tales are a testament to both the imaginations of Black women and the vulnerable, risky social spaces they occupy in public view.

CONCLUSION: BRIDGING ACROSS TIME AND SPACE

Taken together, Zola's Twitter Tale (#TheStory), #BlackGirlMagic, and #BlackWomenAtWork in many ways contradict each other. One is a messy myth about the very real dangers of sex work; another is a celebration of accomplishments and strength; and the last reminds us that despite Black women's work, the struggle to be seen and valued for the labor they produce

persists. Yet, despite these contradicting themes and representations of personhood, Zola's Twitter Tale (#TheStory), #BlackGirlMagic, and #BlackWomenAtWork connect the experiences of Black women and girls across time and space. They allow us to see the bridging work Black women and girls do across social and cultural divides.

As evident with these three examples, Zola's Twitter Tale (#TheStory), #BlackGirlMagic, and #BlackWomenAtWork locate and identify divides across gender, racial, class, theoretical, and ideological lines. To include *Black Women and Girls* in the title of this chapter is also intentional, because it calls attention to the bridging work being done online across generational lines as well. Anzaldúa was acutely aware of the ways in which identities and histories change overtime having lived through the early era of the Internet:

The identities and histories people have are not the same as those of our mothers or grandmothers. We're exposed to more in the world now. We're living in overlapping intercultural, multicultural societies. So how my mother sees reality and how I see reality are difference because the age I'm living in is the age of the Internet.⁸⁰

With these and many other examples from Black women and girls, hashtags—and the stories they usher in—provide another way to language these divides, while at the same time generating connection across differences. In this case, hashtags reveal a new(er) autohistoria-teoría whereby bridging work manifests as performative and multimodal practices. With these cultural artifacts, we see that modes of communication are lived precisely because they are born out of our histories and our stories.

NOTES

1. @girlinterruptd, @chiefelk, @bad_dominicana, @aurabogado, @blackamazon, and @thetrudz, "This Tweet Called My Back," *Model View Culture*. December 13, 2014, <https://modelviewculture.com/pieces/thistweetcalledmyback>.

2. Coined by queer black feminist scholar, Moya Bailey, misogynoir describes the ways in which "Black women are pathologized in popular culture [and how] anti-Blackness and misogyny combine to malign Black women in our world," *More on the origin of Misogynoir*, April 27, 2014 <http://moyazb.tumblr.com/post/84048113369/more-on-the-origin-of-misogynoir>.

3. White feminism is an epistemological standpoint that assumes (whether subtly or overtly) cisgender white women's oppression, usually based on economic and class inequality as the default position of systemic oppression that all women occupy. A white feminist framework is associated with 1st wave and 2nd wave feminist movements.

4. Cherríe L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Color* (Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press, 2002).

5. Kakie Urch, Michael L. Dorn, and J. Abraham, "Working the Borderlands, Becoming *Mestiza*: An interview with Gloria Anzaldúa," *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*, 4, 75–96.

6. These cases do not represent a definitive list of new(er) autohistoria teorías, rather they are demonstrative of transmedia storytelling projects that use hashtags to center black women and girls' lived experiences.

7. In claiming a "new(er)" autohistoria-teoría, I do not mean to suggest that these projects are divorced from Anzaldúa's earlier writings, but rather to build upon the influence of Anzaldúa's conceptual work.

8. Gloria E. Anzaldúa, "now let us shift . . . the path of conocimiento . . . inner work, public acts," in *This Bridge We Call Home*, eds. Gloria E. Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 578.

9. *Ibid.*, 540.

10. Andrea J. Pitts, "Gloria E. Anzaldúa *autohistoria-teoría* as an epistemology of self-knowledge/ignorance," *Hypatia*, 31 no. 2 (2016): 352–369. I expand on Pitts' key features of autohistoria-teoría as collaborative, sensually embodied, and productive.

11. See for example, Damián Baca, *Mestiz@ scripts, digital migrations, and the territories of writing* (New York: NY. Palgrave MacMillan, 2008); Cristina Migliaccio, "Toward a mestiza/o consciousness: Translingualism and working-class students," *Persons*, March 21, 2016, <http://www.pearsoned.com/pedagogy-practice/toward-a-mestizao-consciousness-translingualism-and-working-class-students/>.

12. Jessica Marie Johnson and Kismet Nuñez, "Alter egos and infinite literacies, part III: How to build a real gyrl in 3 easy steps," *The Black Scholar* 45, no. 4 (2015): 47–61.

13. See, for example: Cam Be. Aja Monet Autohistoria Teoría. Filmed 2013. Vimeo video, 6:01. Posted 2013. <https://vimeo.com/69281660>; Tara L. Conley, "An open letter to Amanda Marcotte," *The Feminist Wire*, March 4, 2013, <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2013/03/an-open-letter-to-amanda-marcotte/>; Maya Schenwar, "Freedom from other people's definitions: An interview with Janet Mock." *Truth Out*, July 23, 2014, <http://www.truth-out.org/progressivepicks/item/24998-freedom-from-other-peoples-definitions-an-interview-with-janet-mock>.

14. Kakie Urch, Michael L. Dorm, and J. Abraham, "Working the Borderlands, Becoming *Mestiza*: An Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa," *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*, 4 (1995): 75–96. In this interview, Anzaldúa describes the lives and works of women of color: "Our lives are so eventful, traumatic, tragic, beautiful, we don't have to make up fictions--this is the *autohistoria* I was talking about. I can retell experiences that I've had, episodes in my life that sound stranger than fiction" (p. 88).

15. For relevant critical scholarship, see: André Brock, "From the Blackhand Side: Twitter as a Cultural Conversation," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 56, no. 4 (2012): 529–549; André Brock, "Deeper data: A Response to boyd and Crawford," *Crosscurrents Special Section: Debating Big Data* 37, no. 7 (2015): 1084–1088; Carrie A. Rentschler, "Bystander Intervention, Feminist Hashtag

Activism, and the Anti-Carceral Politics of Care,” *Feminist Media Studies* 17, no. 4 (2017): 565–584; Sanjay Sharma, “Black Twitter? Racial Hashtags, Networks and Contagion,” *New Formations* 79 (2013): 46–64; Sarah Florini, “Tweets, tweeps, and Signifyin’: Communication and Cultural Performance on ‘Black Twitter’,” *Television and New Media* 15, no. 3 (2014): 223–37; Sarah J. Jackson, “(Re)Imagining Intersectional Democracy from Black Feminism to Hashtag Activism,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 39, no. 4 (2016): 375–379; Sarah J. Jackson and Brooke Foucault Welles, “#Ferguson Is Everywhere: Initiators in Emerging Counterpublic Networks,” *Information, Communication & Society* 19, no. 3 (2016): 397–418; Sherri Williams, “Digital Defense: Black Feminists Resist Violence with Hashtag Activism,” *Feminist Media Studies* 15, no. 2 (2015): 341–344; Sherri Williams, “#SayHerName: Using Digital Activism to Document Violence Against Black Women,” *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no. 5 (2016): 922–925; Tara L. Conley, “Decoding Black Feminist Hashtags as Becoming,” *The Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research* 47, no. 3 (2017): 22–32; Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa, “#Ferguson: Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States,” *American Ethnologist: Journal of the American Ethnological Society* 42, no. 1 (2015): 4–17.

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20. For more ethnographic cases on these disparities see, Monique W. Morris’ work, *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2016); Nina Martin and Renee Montagne, “Nothing Protects Black Women from Dying in Pregnancy and Childbirth,” *Propublica*, December 7, 2017, <https://www.propublica.org/article/nothing-protects-black-women-from-dying-in-pregnancy-and-childbirth>.

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institutional networked space. Castells writes, “Since the institutional public space is occupied by the interests of the dominant elites and their networks, social movements need to carve out a new public space that is not limited to the Internet, but makes itself visible in the spaces of public life,” 10.

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39. Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).
40. Anzaldúa, "(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces," 3.
41. Anzaldúa, "now let us shift . . . the path of conocimiento . . . inner work, public acts. Anzaldúa writes: [s]taying despierta becomes a survival tool," 549.
42. See for example, Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
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53. *Ibid.*, 221.
54. Gloria E. Anzaldúa, "Haciendo Caras, Una Entrada: An Introduction by Gloria Anzaldúa," in *Making Face, Making Soul Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, ed. Gloria E. Anzaldúa (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1990), xxv.

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