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LET'S TALK ABOUT #TRANSLIVESMATTER: A CRITICAL INTERVENTION ON THE

DIGITAL RESISTANCE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST BLACK TRANSGENDER WOMEN

By

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A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

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University Honors

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ABSTRACT

On August 17, 2020, Eden Estrada, Jaslene Busanet, and Joslyn Allen, three transgender women of color, experienced a violent assault in West Hollywood, California. A group of reportedly five or more cisgender men of color harassed the three women, injured them, and live-streamed the attack through Instagram Live. After the assault video went viral on social media, an upsurge of support for both the survivors and the transgender community as a whole arose within public conversations on Twitter about anti-transgender violence. By documenting the emerging Twitter discourse from August 17 to 21, my paper implements a qualitative content analysis of sampled Twitter threads following the assault to illustrate how social media audiences have conceptualized justice for the transgender community. Through building and connecting literature from critical queer theory, media studies, and Black feminist thought, I situate social media discourse regarding anti-transgender violence as not only a medium for the mass recirculation of trauma porn, but also a producer of carceral logics and Black transgender erasure. In my intervention of digital conversations concerning violence against Black trans women, I contend that the contemporary #TransLivesMatter discourse is not only inadequately addressing the intersection of race, but is ultimately harming the communities in which they are supposedly fighting for.

Keywords: #TransLivesMatter, Twitter, transgender violence, content analysis, social media discourse, and social justice

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Reflecting sentiments can be extended upon the professors and TAs I've had the privilege of learning from in these last few years. Their encouragement and support have not only pushed me to pursue doctoral studies after graduation, but have instilled in me a holistic worldview of understanding my own positionality as it relates to the world around us. I will always be grateful for all of our interactions—both big and small—as they've made me into the person I am today.

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<u>DEDICATION</u>

My thesis is dedicated to my trans brothers, sisters, and siblings; both in my own personal circles and beyond. This is for our fallen siblings who are on longer with us and for those who are still struggling and surviving in this unforgiving world. Your beauty, authenticity, and resiliency is not gone unseen; rather, it is a testament to our collective movement in changing this Earth and establishing our chosen families. Below, I have provided a poem by my friend Wednesday—who I owe much gratitude for her willingness in sharing their moving words—to establish and emphasize this dedication in my overall thesis.

With Inanna, there is breath and the wind. With Inanna, there is intellect and music. The breath of life, a reminder of the time we have, a reminder of our vulnerability, and the importance of care, of promising life.

There is the wind, encouraging us to move forward and explore the world, while understanding some places aren't meant for us to stay. The wrath of a disrespected Earth, intellect to understand the ways of the world, knowing where to go, where to limit ourselves, and the importance of harmony and potential for life and fun.

Music to encourage us to keep moving, vibing with the universe, feeling our energy, and exploring variations, potentials, and harmony of our soul. The air is ripe at dawn, urging to get up, explore, and move with the promise of light, energy, and new things to see. The sky, giving direction, wonder and change. High planes, presenting the wonders of exploring life, feeling the dangers as well, seen and unseen. Vibrations to understand our connections with the universe, and when we need to move, change, and stabilize. Clouds to encourage moving wonder, but also warning and danger to the unprepared. Spring promises new life, change, growth, and a fast-paced world. It's a world of light. Get moving and go see it. - Wednesday Dahlen

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PERSONAL REFLEXIVE STATEMENT

As an activist scholar involved in #TransLivesMatter virtual spaces and the LGBTQ social movement, my research interests emerged from the needed urgency to examine—using critical theory and sociological tools—the conversation regarding transgender violence and online activism. The transphobic attack against three trans women of color in West Hollywood on August 2020 affected me personally as a femme trans person, a scholar activist, and a longtime resident of Southern California. Even before the recent upsurge of support for the Black Lives Matter and Trans Lives Matter movements, I was highly present in the protests and digital platforms against state violence, systemic racism, and transphobic culture—especially in conjunction to the discussion around transgender livelihood. During the unravelling of the events that happened in 2020, I closely followed community information and news coverage surrounding the deaths of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Dominique "Rem'mie" Fells, among other victims of police and transphobic violence. While protesting in the streets and on social media with other activists, I participated in the efforts of expanding conversations around the intersections and commonalities of multiple social justice movements. By following feminist praxis, I offer this reflexivity statement as a way to reflect on my own positionality as it informs my conducted research of this highly emotional subject and my overall intellectual orientation and worldview. With the goal of unveiling other pathways for the freedom of all communities, this thesis aims to inspire queer and trans youth and BIPOC youth – and especially QTBIPOC youth – to utilize technology to push the trans liberation movement to a more radical future.

INTRODUCTION

On Hollywood Boulevard in West Hollywood, California, Willie Walker, Carlton Callaway, and Davion Williams[1] live-streamed a physical and verbal public assault of Eden Estrada, Jaslene Busanet, and Joslyn Allen, three trans[2] women of color (Scott, 2020). From transphobic derogatory slurs to the women distressingly begging for help, the video leaves sympathetic viewers and community members distressed about the events that unraveled the morning of August 17, 2020. The Washington Post reported coverage of the video's content by depicting the role of the antagonistic bystanders in which they continued to mock and ignore the survivors' plea for help (Peiser, 2020). The West Hollywood Attack garnered national headlines and sparked a campaign of support, with large amounts of online conversations arising on social media (Michael, 2020; Peiser, 2020). Much of the intense outcry and public disdain was triggered by witness Steven Hurtado's (@stevofilmz) posting of the recorded assault on Instagram, a digital networking site centralized on multimedia interfacing. In the matter of hours succeeding the initial post, the recordings managed to go viral. Despite the original post and account being removed for either voluntary reasons (e.g., negative backlash) or per violation of Instagram community guideline policies, the video's digital presence continued to be circulated through the reposting from other online accounts. Notably, Eden Estrada (@edenthedoll), one of the survivors of the attack, shared a screen recording of the videos on her Instagram page. As widespread attention from a large number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ)[3] community organizations and young popular celebrities (e.g., Tyler Posey, Zhavia Ward, and Jackie Aina) expressed disgust towards the attack. In order to better understand how

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[1] These are the only confirmed names of the attackers, but this does not limit who was involved in the violence. The recorded footage revealed a large group of involved bystanders who were either assisting in the violence and/or laughing at the survivors while they were being hurt.
[2] The term trans, commonly shortened from transgender, is a collective term used to describe individuals whose gender expression and identity varies from the biological sex they were assigned at birth (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014; Schilt & Lagos, 2017).
[3] This particular acronym is referring to the LGBT+ or LGBTIA+ community. While the author acknowledges the "LGBT" acronym is outdated in terms of strides for inclusivity, this intentional literary tactic acts as a political and rhetorical strategy to differentiate the words "queer" from the broad and complex identities that makeup the "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender" community.

online social media audiences envision justice for these trans survivors, the digital process of how the recording entered social consciousness remains at the pinnacle of this analysis. For the purpose of creating a better understanding and future of transgender liberation from violence, I document further details of the manner in which online audiences were discussing this disturbing event by unpacking the West Holly attack and its subsequent responses.

Undoubtedly, the prevalence of violence towards trans women of color permeates U.S. society (Mogul et al., 2012; Spade, 2015; Stanley & Smith, 2015), a nation that profoundly remains informed and influential to the media, especially as it relates to young people using social media (Jackson et al., 2020). This direct act of violence prompted many to use social media to argue the engrained presence of patriarchal and racial violence in U.S. society and to reignite support for the Trans Lives Matter (TLM) movement. Ultimately, the need to directly focus upon the livelihood and envisioned justice for queer, transgender, and gender nonconforming folx, and especially those jointly existing with Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color identities (QTBIPOC)[4], has risen to the attention of the current trans liberation movement (Barry & Drak, 2019; Stanley & Smith, 2015). In conjunction with the transphobic sentiments projected during this West Hollywood attack, this act of violence aligns with a historical and extensive chain of misogyny, racism, and anti-blackness within the public sphere (Meyer, 2010). In 2022, one research study found that transgender women are at higher risk of sexual violence than cisgender women, with trans women of color reported to be at highest risk (Ussher et al., 2022). While the full details of the West Hollywood attack extend beyond the scope of this project, the reality of Eden Estrada, Jaslene Busanet, and Joslyn Allen's appalling assault demonstrates how hashtag activism addresses this violence and brings to light a familiar conversation in many disciplines of the intersectional aspects of violence: race, gender, class, and

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[4]QTBIPOC stands for Queer and Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color.

transness. Through these intersectional approaches to social media, hashtag activism has an immense impact on the material accomplishments of social movements, such as political recognition and legislative benefits (Jackson et al., 2020). Hashtag activism has propelled social justice efforts, like the Black Lives Matter Movement and their crucial work, but there is limited amount of research about what it does for Black trans women and there is little understanding as to how hashtag activism is negatively impacting violence towards Black trans women. Therefore, I ask: How are the current conditions and online conversations shaping trans politics? How are social media audiences conceptualizing liberation and justice in the aftermath of trans violence?

In this paper, I uncover how the influence of hashtag activism and violence impacts online interactions on Twitter—one of the most widely used online social networking websites, even with media researchers (Lupton, 2014). In an attempt to understand the intersectional approaches to identity and trans liberation politics on TLM discourse, I will begin by formulating an overview of pertinent literature concerning violence towards (Black) trans women of color and knowledge around hashtag activism. In analyzing Twitter online conversations—or threads—as it relates to the West Hollywood incident, I posit that the use of hashtag activism in digitally resisting violence towards Black trans women allows users to perpetuate further harm against them by upholding carceral logics and erasing Blackness. Statements like "hope you rot in jail" and "it doesn't matter the race of the [survivors]" are positioned in this thesis as a counterproductive approach to justice for trans communities. Using a critically synthesized framework rooted in intersectional feminist abolitionism (Davis et al., 2022) and Dean Spade's (2015) ideas around critical trans politics, specifically, I show how these counter-revolutionary practices of raising awareness about violence inflicted upon trans women of color can ultimately produce violence onto the communities they are fighting for. In analyzing Twitter online

conversations—or threads—as it relates to the West Hollywood incident, I also document the carceral logics behind this TLM discourse to illustrate how hashtag activism and social media users can influence pro-criminalization rhetoric on Twitter. Ultimately, I turn to C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn's (2014) concept of the "trans of color critique" to suggest that the methods of hashtag activism and some social media users' practices lead to the remarginalization of Black trans individuals. I end by offering new alternative ways to understand and organize against violence in order to combat the dominant discourses and structural issues impacting trans women of color's lives.

BACKGROUND

The Emergence of #TransLivesMatter and #AllBlackLivesMatter in the year of 2020

After the murder of George Floyd[5] in Minneapolis, MN, in May 2020, #BlackLivesMatter[6] (BLM) garnered an upsurge of widespread prominence and became the rallying outcry for protesters just about two months before the West Hollywood attack. Originally ignited by the racial injustices pertaining to the death of Trayvon Martin and the subsequent state response involving the murder, three Black women activists, Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza started the BLM movement through their messaging on "Black Twitter" in 2013 (Garza, 2014). With a legacy of intergenerational African American protests, the BLM movement engaged a new generation of young people in social justice activism throughout the nation, and eventually across the globe, largely by utilizing social media and hashtag activism (Carney, 2016; Rickford, 2016; Woodly, 2022). The increasing popularity of BLM was a result of a raised consciousness of systemic racism, which manifested through the mass acknowledgment that Black communities disproportionately face racialized state-

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[5] Alongside George Floyd, some of the other notable and must-know names arising from the BLM protests include, but not limited to, Breonna Taylor, Daniel Prude, Ahmaud Arbery, and more recently Daunte Wright.
[6] Marcus Anthony Hunter is credited for inventing the #BlackLivesMatter Hashtag (Hunter 2020).

sanctioned violence and policing in the United States (Ritchie, 2017; Yglesias, 2019). Despite a year of physical isolation, 2020 marked a significant year for the BLM movement as it became the largest movement in U.S. history (Larry Buchanan et al., 2020). Based on the dynamics of online activism, digital efforts put forth by the BLM movement permeates and informs other social movements and their approaches to envisioning justice for their respective communities.

Through adopting various social media strategies, the BLM movement acts as a large influence to #TransLivesMatter (TLM) efforts, which is visibly illustrated through the linguistic similarities of their coined hashtags. The rising visibility concerning the BLM resurgence and the #TransLivesMatter movement altered the conversational dynamics involving racial, gender, and queer politics. According to the website, ''#BlackLivesMatter is working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically and intentionally targeted for demise ... The call for Black lives to matter is a rallying cry for ALL Black lives striving for liberation'' (Black Lives Matter: A Movement, Not a Moment; blacklivesmatter.com). The emergence of #AllBlackLivesMatter (Ransby, 2018), and even #SayHerName (Crenshaw et al., 2015), pays homage to the various identity intersections that are sometimes left out of larger conversations regarding anti-Black violence, such as Black women, Black queer and trans people, and (but not limited to) disabled Black folx. However, on the same street that was filled with 40,000 people on June 14th in solidarity of the All Black Lives Matter March, the West Hollywood attack occurred just a little over two months later (Hailey Branson-Potts & Matt Stiles, 2020). A few days after the attack, the city of Los Angeles announced a public honoring of the BLM Movement by creating a permanent mural of the words "All Black Lives Matter" on Hollywood Boulevard (Anh Do, 2020). The juxtaposition of these two events, both reaching public recognition within the popular LGBTQ agendas, serves to demonstrate how the complex

discourse dynamics involving racial, gender, and trans politics on social media and social movement—specifically public honorings of victims and survivors of violence—synchronously have the possibility to place QTPOC people within violent and unsafe spaces.

<div align="center">**LITERATURE REVIEW**</div>

Violence Against Black Trans Woman: A Synthesis of Critical Genealogies

As a collective community, trans folk have been—and currently still are—outlawed with not only government institutions (Riedel, 2022; Stanley & Smith, 2015), but also have endured centuries of violence. During the colonial project, from the time period of conquistadors to the early American settlements rooted in genocide (Mogul et al., 2012), trans and gender variant people experienced harm and systemic erasure, even in the beginning formation years of the relatively modern LGBTQ liberation movement (Morgensen, 2010; Stanley & Smith, 2015). A person's perceived sexual orientation and gender identity becomes as a site of contestation for being discerned as a "gender deceiver," or actively transgressing gender normative representations through expressing gender nonconformity (James et al., 2016; Bettcher, 2006, 2007; West & Zimmerman, 1987). According to heteronormative standards of gender and sexuality, transgender and gender variant people are typically more vulnerable to transphobic violence as they are supposedly enacting a moral contradiction and committing identity fraud from the concealed realities of their sex assigned at birth (Bettcher, 2006, 2007). In the eyes of many transphobic perpetrators, transness is not only the defiance of normative gender expression, but also serves as a panic inducing provocation of sexual and gendered aggression the legitimizes and renders trans people as disposable objects, especially when transmisogyny and racism is applicable (Salamon, 2018; Serano, 2016). Trans people's existence, bodies, and livelihood are captured within a literal and metaphorical warfare. Understanding and rethinking

the entirety of violence inflicted upon trans people is this project's focal point as I mainly propose that current trans politics and theories need to continue extensively analyzing violence against Black trans women.

In their youth, transgender people largely undergo high levels of violence, such as bullying and harassment (Reisner et al., 2014). One study found that on the national level, 77% of transgender youth (Grade K–12) reported experiencing some form of verbal (54%), physical (24%), or sexual violence (13%) (James et al., 2016). Latisha King, a 15-year-old Black trans student from E.O. Green Junior High School in Oxnard, CA, was taken too early from this world, and later was disturbingly further scrutinized for her trans feminine demeanor and posture within the trail of her murderer, Brandon McInerney, who attempted to justify his action on this basis of self-defense in response to the triggered "gay/trans panic" induced by Latisha's presence (Salamon, 2018). In the time period after Latisha's untimely death, one study recorded over 2,343 reported murders of transgender people globally between January 1, 2008, and December 1, 2016 (Nuttbrock et al., 2014; Reisner et al., 2014; TMM 2017).

More recently, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) reported a largely elevated number of fatal transphobic attacks that contributed to making 2020 the "deadliest year on record" for transgender people (Roberts, 2020). Despite HRC, a non-governmental LGBTQ organization, releasing comprehensive reports of "epidemic" level frequencies of transgender fatalities, the released information lacks the ability to confirm its reliable accuracy as the gathered information depends primarily on global media reports (Lenning et al., 2021)[7]. Considering the government's deprioritization of trans experiences, the high possibility of misgendering in reporting processes, and large amounts of unreported deaths of transgender women of color (James et al., 2016;

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[7] I choose to problematize HRC-source data in order to reflect evolving critical scholarship that critiques neoliberal discourses produced by national LGBTQ organizations (see Westbrook 2008, 2021; Snorton and Haritaworn 2019).

Lenning et al., 2021; Roberts, 2020; Stotzer, 2017), there are undoubtedly many other lost lives uncounted for that cause a higher number within this inconclusive report. In Washington, DC, a previously conducted study concluded that over 40% of transgender people of color reported experiences of violence, crime, and victimization, and 13% reported experiences of sexual violence (Xavier et al., 2005). Physical harm has been more disproportionately inflicted upon poor QTBIPOC populations compared to their white and wealthier, privileged counterparts (Boykin, 1996; Duggan, 2002; Meyer, 2008, 2010, 2012; Moore, 2015; Puar, 2008; Spade, 2006; Saffin 2011). Violence against transgender individuals has become central to social activism and scholarship, and therefore, analyzing how violence disproportionately affects those with intersecting identity categories is crucial to uncovering the reality of empirical data behind violence towards Black trans women.

In the words of trans sociologist Croix Saffin (2011: 156), "hate-motivated violence is an important issue, but one that must be examined through the lens of 'oppressive violence' and contextualized within intersecting systems of subordination, including racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism." Many queer and transgender people of color (QTBIPOC[8]) from financially disenfranchised communities sit outside the juxtaposition of privilege within BIPOC and LGBTQ communities (Saffin 2011)[9]. Although much attention has been drawn to the intersectional realities of LGBTQ violence, current scholarship has historically homogenized the portrayals of survivors and victims of violence (Dunbar, 2006; Mason, 2003). Trans women of color endure racialized transmisogyny, which many people of color in feminist and trans-

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[8] I use the acronym "QTBIPOC," or Queer and Trans Black, Indigenous, People of Color, as an "umbrella term" to encompass the vast experiences and identities of all queer and transgender people who hold non-white identities. I refrain from using the acronym "QTPOC" as I challenge it linguistic limitations in attempting to use "POC" for all non-white identities to reflects current social justice efforts in switching to the usage of "QTBIPOC".

[9] This study plans to further scholarly efforts of explicitly challenging epistemological effects of discussing and theorizing studies of gender and sexuality that exclude other systems of oppression and inherently center whiteness (Jiang et al. 2006).

feminist conversations[10] have defined as the explicit violent experiences, all embedded with misogyny, racism, and transphobia, endured by this specific population in consideration of the complexities of their intersecting identities (Koyama, 2020; Smith & LaDuke, 2015; Snorton, 2014; Vaid-Menon, 2014). Moya Bailey, digital humanities scholar activist, coined the term "misogynoir" in 2008 to explain the explicit ways in which racism, anti-Blackness, and patriarchal violence specifically targets Black femininity and womanhood. While it cannot be experienced by women of any other race, misogynoir not only has the ability to be perpetuated by people of any race or gender, but counters the particular usage of "violence against women of color" as it cannot adequately encompass the vastly different experiences of all non-white people (Bailey, 2018). Extending from Bailey's concept, transmisogynoir[11] is the violence, prejudice, and oppression that specifically harms Black trans women ("Transmisogynoir" 2014; Whipple, 2021). Transphobia as it affects Black trans women works in conjunction with racism and misogyny because heteronormativity and the construction of masculinity and femininity are theoretically and practically rooted in middle-class whiteness (Staffin, 2011; Krell, 2017).

Despite this rich research on violence towards (Black) trans women of color, research has not really examined the violent realities of QTBIPOC experiences as it relates to social media, especially the occurrences in which violence is maintained online. Focusing on TLM Twitter threads that address the West Hollywood incident, this study extends the work on racialized transmisogyny and transmisogynoir by examining the conversational texts and images not just of violence, but of the avenues in which justice from violence is envisioned. In doing so, this paper

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[10] In order to divest from the recent emergence of white trans feminism and its privileging of academia as the genesis of trans theory, I refer to the historical and contemporary knowledge that has been circulating critical activist spaces, such as the blogosphere, for many years now (see Krell 2017 for more information regarding this critique).
[11] I redefine this term as earlier definitions have been problematized by earlier scholars (see Krell 2017 for more information regarding this critique).

extends literary and theoretical insights on how hashtag activism is central to digitally addressing this violence, and also takes part in influencing it.

Addressing Violence with Hashtag Activism: An Online Discursive Tool for Change

In just over the last decade, social media has gained widespread attention in both the speculation and study of digital technologies' influence on social change, politics, and activism; especially in the debates of social media's role in molding the online public sphere and, by proxy, our democracy (Jackson et al., 2020). Hashtags, a user-generated discursive method to group collective arguments, ideas, experiences, and thoughts, have been a critical component in how social media shifts political conversations both online and offline. According to internet sociologist Zeynep Tufekci (2014), hashtags as political tools not only challenge traditional and institutional-based politics, such as the U.S. government's legislation process, but instead encourage democratic involvement that participates in identity-based social movements and efforts. As to how the term was used by journalist Eric Augenbraun (2011), "hashtag activism" refers to the relatively recent emergence of using hashtags as a digital strategy for activism amongst social media users. For example, hashtags such as #OccupySeoul, #OccupyOakland, and #OccupyWallStreet were not only being used to garner attention for potential followers, but also for a supplemental array of crucial, on-the-ground tactics: reporting police activity, communicating the movement's goals, and highlighting the encamped protesters' immediate physical needs (Costanza-Chock, 2012; Orcutt, 2011). Whether it's the powerful impact of stating a name like #CyntoiaBrown or mobilizing for the freedom of incarcerated people through the repetition in the hashtag #FreeCece, the rise of online mobilization through hashtags—especially as it has garnered mass media interest—has caused hashtag activism to be a well-regarded strategy for young people participating in social change (Fischer, 2016; Lee, 2019).

While hashtag activism provides marginalized people an avenue for digital resistance, online activism has been labeled "slacktivism" or "arm-chair activism" as it is often considered less valid—and in competition—with direct action (Christie, 2015; Seay, 2014). Despite this, hashtag activism has been further constituted as not only an encompassing strategy employing political discourse about social justice and political inclusion, but is positioned through identity politics and reidentification as an online counterpublic (Jackson et al., 2016). Counterpublics, or the alternative mapping of different possibilities for social debate, refers to the ways in which marginalized communities disrupt and interject themselves into mainstream spaces through highlighting and legitimizing their experiences (Asen and Brouwer, 2001; Muñoz, 1999). In addition to envisioning a social utopia for them to occupy, queer people of color—and those on the margins—have formed counterpublics as vital means for survival (Muñoz, 1999; Jackson et al., 2020; Bailey, 2021). As empirical research using social media is a relatively newer academic field and popular topic, one needs to know that hashtags are not only creating social change, but have given digital access to online communities for many underrepresented people.

The online practice of researching and participating in digital counterpublics by on-the-ground organizers and social media scholars alike has shown that social media audiences have an immense impact on a social movements' material accomplishments, such as political recognition and legislative benefits (Jackson et al., 2020). Furthermore, social media scholarship has come to understand the ways in which LGBTQ youth and Black women engage on social media by adopting digital cultural strategies in order to cope, thrive, and resist in their personal environments (Jenzen, 2017; Barnet, 2015; Bailey, 2021). In 2011, #GirlsLikeUs, coined by author Janet Mock in light of Jenna Talackova's disqualification from the Miss Universe Pageant, was accepted by a mass social media audience of trans women as a discursive self-

organization that reflexively spoke to the communities' historical and contemporary realities (Bailey, 2021). In asserting considerations for intersectionality and misogynoir, communication scholars and global activists continue to shift the narratives of internet culture through adopting progressive race and gender politics (Jackson et al., 2020). Social media campaigns, including #SayHerName and #BlackTransLivesMatter, within Black feminist online spaces have attempted to call attention to and change the pervaded silence and ignorance of violence against Black women (Williams, 2016; Bailey, 2021; Jackson et al., 2020). These efforts are aligned with the recent emerging efforts put forth around violence as it relates to Black trans women because these movements have been inclusive of both Black cisgender and trans identities.

As it has become more evident that economically under-resourced QTBIPOC communities are more likely to experience physical harm, social activism is now starting to invest in online efforts to resist this violence, especially as it is towards (Black) transgender women of color (Brooks, 2021; Fischer, 2021). Significantly, online advocacy and community building amongst trans folk further nurture a trans counterpublic that is actively transforming U.S. politics, culture, and attitudes surrounding transgender and gender variant people (Jackson et al., 2020). In the words of K.J. Rawson, digital trans communities are an important form of activism because "cyberspace provides a revolutionary tool for creating, sharing, and preserving trans histories that would otherwise remain untold" (Rawson 2014: 38-60). However, activism and scholarship alike have come forward to reveal the increased visibility of trans women, and the media depictions of violence inflicted upon them, leads to additional violence (Tourmaline et al., 2017; Vähäpassi, 2019). In putting literature around hashtag activism in conversation with scholars addressing cyberspace more broadly, other studies have come forward to challenge the notions of online spaces existing as an utopian democratic world (Lessig, 2006; Robinson, 2015).

Even supposedly without constraining social inequalities of difference and government regulations, cyberspace is compromised in its online codes that produce power and culture within these digital networks and construct various social categories, such as gender and race, as salient (Nakamura, 2001, 2008). Despite the raised awareness around specific trans issues, both in mainstream media and online networks (Jackson et al., 2020), the visibility is not challenging cis and trans normativity as trans women are forced to continue negotiating threats against their livelihood (Capuzza, 2016; Snorton & Haritaworn, 2013; Saffin, 2011).

For many people, mainstream media and social media are the primary knowledge sources for their presumptions of the trans community. Instead of solely celebrating this accomplishment, widespread notions of visibility for the depictions, awareness, and framings of addressing violence needs to be closely investigated, complicated, and assessed as means for the liberation of trans people. Despite the importance in addressing violence inflicted upon (Black) trans women of color, this study critically intervenes in digital activist scholarship as it falls short in adequately addressing the full scope of racialized transmisogyny, specifically as it relates to symbolic violence and structural erasure. Scholarship surrounding hashtag activism significantly illuminates and interferes with the violent realities operating against trans people; however, they do not reveal how violence and activism can coexist with one another—something I take as a central task in this study.

<u>THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</u>

In this paper, I synthesize various critical theories from not only Black feminist thought, but also queer theory and abolition praxis. By bringing this work together, I formulate a framework that holistically considers the intersecting identities of Black trans women, but also the oppressive structures placed against them. The theorization of intersectionality provides a

mapping to examine the violence inflicted upon those with multi-faceted identities in conjunction with power dynamics of privilege and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991). In analyzing violence within an intersectional understanding, the harm placed towards Black trans women can be further investigated. C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn (2013) define the "trans of color critique" as the transnational and intersectional intervention within the nominal circulation and value extraction of trans of color death. A trans of color critique calls forward the current politics and theories of homonormativity, or the LGBTQ efforts rooted in neoliberalism to culturally assimilate into dominant white, cisheteronomrative hierarchies (Duggan, 2002; Stryker, 2008), vitalizing from the value of trans of color death (Snorton and Haritaworn, 2013). Based in the trans critique of color, the term "murderous inclusion" claims poor trans people of color are only deemed meaningful in the afterlife (Snorton and Haritaworn, 2013). Usually dependent on pro-corporate institutions (Duggan, 2002), liberal agendas of anti-violence activism find additional avenues that lead trans people to a murderous inclusion, or funnel them into the carceral state, or the institutions associated with courts, police, prosecution, and the system of prisons, parole, jails, and probation.

One primary way liberal LGBTQ approaches to anti-violence activism normalize violence toward (Black) trans people of color is through the production of carceral logics, a pro-criminalization paradigm embedded with racial capitalism (Blackmon, 2009; Oshinsky, 1996), colonialism (Agozino, 2003; Comack, 2012; Dobchuk-Land, 2017), and white supremacy (Saleh-Hanna, 2017). Within the shift from corporal punishment to carceral logic, the entire foundation of a carceral network surpassed a simple switch in criminal discipline, and invaded every aspect of modern society such as—but not limited to—businesses, schools, and military (Foucault, 1977; Nagel and Nocella, 2013). Carceral logic is not only identified as an organizing

principle of social space (Linebaugh, 2014) and crisis ideology (Gilmore, 2007), but also regarded as social policy (Brown and Schept, 2017) and the state itself (Gilmore, 2007). Scholars have come forward to challenge carceral logic for its depriving limitations for other possibilities of justice (Davis and Rodriguez, 2000), punitive properties rooted in its anachronistic nature (Davis, 2003), and the modern dystopias it generates (Coyle and Schept, 2017). These LGBTQ liberal politics concerning anti-violence responses fundamentally neglects and focuses on the depoliticization of the queer and trans liberation movement's radical root, or the abolitionist, decolonial, and anti-imperialist efforts put forth by Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, and Storme DeLarverie (DeFilippis, 2019; Spade, 2015). Instead, the neoliberal LGBTQ frameworks of "lock 'em up" narratives (e.g., hate crime legislation) and homonormative assimilationism (e.g., marriage equality) are adopted and centralized in this movement; one that ends up excluding less privileged queer and trans people (Duggan, 2002; Spade and Wilse, 2015; Spade, 2004; Stryker, 2008; Cohen, 1997; Moore, 2006; Ward, 2008). These counter-revolutionary efforts influenced approaches and discourses of championing single-issue reforms to center recognition, inclusion, and "formal legal equality gains that do not reach the most vulnerable targets of homophobia" (Spade 2015: 172). The contemporary LGBTQ movement was seen as achieving legal equality for only privileged community members, and as constructing hegemonic conditions in queer and trans liberation that ultimately sustain oppressive structures (Spade, 2015).

Intersectional feminist abolitionism draws from abolitionist praxis and Black feminist theory to address gender, race, and economic violence without an involvement from the criminal punishment system (Critical Resistance & INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, 2016; Kim, 2018; Davis et al., 2021). Abolitionist groups, like Critical Resistance, argue the PIC fails

to rehabilitate prisoners and protect people, but rather "the PIC helps and maintains the authority of people who get their power through racial, economic and other privileges" ("What Is the PIC?," 2022). As this paper will illustrate, the prison system inhumanely supports cruel, punitive punishment and all liberal reforms to change the PIC's "bad parts" are in vain because the institution itself—not just bad laws or people facing criminalization—terrorizes marginalized people (Davis, 2003). Through focusing on abolitionist discourse within Black feminist theory, this approach builds political comradery from a multi-sited coalitional politics and offers an extension of critiquing single-axis frameworks, or "single issue" politics (Cohen, 1997; Lorde, 1982). Intersectional feminist abolitionism extends the knowledge of Black Feminist thought through considering how anti-violence rhetoric in social movements have adopted pro-criminalization tactics (Kim, 2018). Similar conceptions of radical frameworks have been practiced and adopted within the historical and contemporary trans liberation movement. In their book, Normal Life, Dean Spade (2015: 7) introduces critical trans politics as "questioning how these norms come to be and how they impact—and extinguish— the lives of trans people…[and] revising its resistance strategies as it observes their unattended consequences." Critical trans politics identifies transgender liberation as inherently conjoined with the struggle for racial and economic justice, and interrogates the logic of the state, especially the prison industrial complex (PIC), and the circulation of normativity (Spade, 2015). I use critical queer and trans politics as a framework to bridge social conversations of LGBTQ politics and abolitionism together.

In this study, I explore how TLM Twitter threads become constructed as an anti-violence response through hashtag activism. Using Spade's (2015) work on critical trans politics, I suggest that this discourse of carceral logic is disseminated through these online conversations, and it marks a form of murderous inclusion within usages of hashtag activism (Snorton and

Haritaworn, 2013). Through illuminating how hashtag activism holds the possibility to prolong oppressive structures, I show how violent media imagery and justice-seeking call-to-action influence dominant discourses to further carceral logics on cyberspace. Accordingly, through utilizing a trans of color critique (Snorton and Haritaworn, 2013), I specifically show how these neoliberal and transmisogynoir discourses lead to the symbolic violence and erasure of Black trans people.

METHODS

In order to develop a discursive depiction of digital discourses involving the high-profile public attack against Eden Estrada, Jaslene Busanet, and Joslyn Allen, this study consists of a qualitative content analysis of numerous Twitter threads from social media audiences conversing amongst #TransLivesMatter (TLM) discourses. Twitter is an online social media website, or "a well-known real-time public microblogging network where, frequently, news appears before than on official news media" (Pereira-Kohatsu, 2019: 2) comprised of largely text-based, tweets[12], threads, and hashtags devoted to specific community topics (Brooks, 2021). As of January 2022, according to the market and consumer data company Statista, Twitter is the 15th most visited site in the world and the 3rd most visited site in the United States. In reference to the overall time spent on mobile devices in accessing current news, the percentage of online activity increased by more than 215% in the United States between March 2019 and March 2020 (Nielsen Company, 2020). While everyday life is increasingly integrated with technology, Twitter is an important site of investigation as it allows social media audiences to conduct actions they would not necessarily perform in offline face-to-face environments, such as digitally speaking upon social issues and interacting with others online (Farber, 2017). Notwithstanding the possibility of online

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[12] The digital platform allows users to engage in online conversations with the exchange of 280-character messages (formerly 140 characters), more commonly referred to as "tweets." A single tweet contains a succinct message in which social media content creators usually conveys an inconsequential quote that leads to a large number of replies following a conversational format, or a thread.

comments, profiles, and behaviors being performatively, or maybe even falsely, formulated compared to offline realities (Preston et al., 2021), studying the cyberspace can document the methods in which users manage, negotiate, and reconstruct their identities (Robinson and Vidal-Ortiz, 2013; Ward, 2008). Moreover, the Internet provides an avenue for those unfamiliar with trans-related policies and issues to learn and apply them within offline interactions (Jenzen, 2017). In considering all these instances, my study emphasizes Twitter threads, rather than individual tweets, associated with specific hashtags to reflect the significantly varying nature of online TLM conversations and establish how users discursively challenge violence.

By following several studies that have collected social media content as pragmatic evidence (Carney, 2016), I examined a sample of Twitter threads from August 17 to August 21, 2020, or the time period directly following the West Hollywood attack. Using Twitter's advanced search feature to find threads, I performed relatively sophisticated searches for keywords such as ''#TransLivesMatter,'' ''#BlackTransLivesMatter," "Eden the Doll," and "Trans Lives Matter." In addition to these determined parameters, I limited and prioritized all threads with a minimum of five replies and fifty retweets in order to assure relevancy to the social dialogue regarding the incident. I should note that I attempted to explore Twitter in a way that a user would, especially as details regarding the mugging were mainly discussed within viral threads. I decided to withhold precise information of individual tweets outside of threads in my overall analysis because I found this information to be skewed, rather than encapsulating the diversity of Twitter conversations. Because Twitter does not allow users to easily download the search results from its digital database, I duplicated and archived all documented information onto a separate spreadsheet for the data processing and examination.

Similar to Carney's (2016) study about the various strategies that youth of color

employed to shape national discourse on Twitter posts regarding #BlackLivesMatter, I started with close readings of the selected threads to become familiar with the patterns of how users discussed the West Hollywood attack. From there, I began by gathering textual evidence, or the quantity of likes, replies, and retweets from the initial posts and subsequent replies[13]. Despite having access to usernames and partial socio-demographic details, I decided to not disclose identifying factors in my data collection because my study sought to one, remain ethically responsible in my confidential research protocols, and two, maintain consistency in my gathered statistics. Since certain socio-demographics around ethnicity, gender/sexual identity, and geographical location were not always available and/or necessarily unambiguous, I also excluded this information. In knowingly withholding private identifiable information of Twitter users, I absolved myself from conventional practices of requiring approval from the Institutional Review Board as all of my collected information is publicly available on the Twitter website; this follows developed working guidelines for research investigators.[14]

In observing online conversations following the assault, my study collected data from the most circulated Twitter threads. As this study yielded a limited number of threaded tweets, the number of recorded threads and their linked individual tweets fluctuated as Twitter's digital content remained continuously changing. As The Twitter Rules were enacted "to ensure all people can participate in the public conversation freely and safely," these digital community protocols prohibit violence, harassment, and other harmful messages on Twitter servers. Under Twitter surveillance, the general amount of available data was sometimes altered as some accounts were censored, or simply deleted. Specifically, when transcribing the documentation into my spreadsheet, there were multiple instances of missing messages from removed profiles,

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[13] Later in this study, I utilize this information to enhance arguments by clarifying the prevalence of certain messages amongst individual threads.
[14] See for example: Does my project need to be reviewed by the IRB? :: Institutional Review Board (bellevuecollege.edu); Considerations and Recommendations Concerning Internet Research and Human Subjects Research Regulations, with Revisions (hhs.gov); and Conducting Internet Research | Guides & Resources | How to Submit | Institutional Review Board | Teachers College, Columbia University

or accounts that have been forcibly deactivated by the Twitter support team. Another possible implication present within my data collection includes Twitter users' deliberate tampering of public conversations. This is primarily from accounts who initially started the threads and/or published their individual replies that are seeking to expunge comments by manually unpublishing original tweets, or even a self-imposed account deletion. Given these challenges, the initial sample was reduced to seventeen threads containing the selected keywords and criteria requirements.

From that remaining pool of available data archived nearly a year after the West Hollywood event[15], my sample contained exactly 702 tweets from 17 threads with an immense online impression of an overall impact of 70,957 retweets and 116,565 likes. Following an abductive analytical approach, or a "qualitative data analysis approach aimed at theory construction" (Timmermans and Tavory 2012: 169), I coded the final threads following self-established coding indicators to get an analytical grasp on how people were discussing the West Hollywood incident on the threads. While solely conducting my archival procedure, I processed all tweets through a self-constructed survey using eight separate coding indicators. The unit of analysis for this study were the threaded tweets, specifically their text images and content. In classifying the data figures, I binarized, or limited to two specific options, five of the indicators in my survey to efficiently enhance this project's coding process. Moreover, I also categorized the three remaining indicators to include specified groupings.

Coding Indicators for Surveying Online #TransLivesMatter Conversations

Drawing from literature concerning communications methods and social media activism (Billard, 2016; Fischer, 2016; Carney, 2016), a set of eight coding indicators were created to operationalize the gathered Twitter data for descriptive statistics. Collectively, these indicators

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[15] The exact dates for data retrieval were July 20-24, 2021.

survey the account of social media dialogue pertaining to the violence against Eden Estrada, Jaslene Busanet, and Joslyn Allen. On their own, these specific indicators were chosen to provide details on a certain aspect of the online discourses. Coding Indicators 1 and 2 evaluates the contextual impact of individual tweets amongst the threads to generalize the overall tone and intent of the overarching Twitter dialogue. Next, Coding Indicators 3 and 4 records the rhetoric and examines the positioning of the carceral state in conjunction with online conversations present on Twitter. Furthermore, Coding Indicators 5 and 6 specifically inspects the various forms of media being shared throughout the threads, while also dividing the data into marked brackets. Lastly, Coding Indicators 7 and 8 largely observes the conditions in which intersecting identity categories are explicitly and implicitly discussed within the collected data.

Coding Indicator #1: Tones were observed in consideration of their overall support for the survivors. An *affirmative* tone, usually demonstrating a general sympathetic sentiment for the survivors, was noted if present in the individual tweets. Otherwise, the remaining messages with an *unsupportive* tone, were coded as the opposite option.

Coding Indicator #2: Intent, or the underlying purpose of which the Twitter user posted the tweet, was monitored throughout my textual examination. An indication of *informative* intent considers messages being curated for the purpose to disseminate information regarding the incident. If determined to be *expressive*, these messages involved an emotional basis in which Twitter users conveyed feelings regarding the incident in their subsequent replies. To note, there were some instances when certain threaded tweets held both informative and expressive intents. To ensure my final data reflected this consideration, I coded the tweets that contain both intents.

Coding Indicator #3: References to the carceral state, or the logics, ideologies, practices, and structures favoring, depending, and/or criticizing criminalization tactics and

punitive punishments of incarceration, were indicated in my coding survey. If either present or absent, this coding indicator determines the rate in which the carceral state was mentioned in the gathered data. This code also considered abolitionist critiques as they are also pertinent instances of mentions of the carceral state.

Coding Indicator #4: Critical and/or complicit attitudes were highlighted among tweets that did have a reference to the carceral state. Those determined *critical* impose any sort of critique against the carceral state. On the other hand, the tweets labeled *complicit* imply and/or propose carcerality as a solution. In a portion of this grouping, some tweets possessed both components of criticality and complicity, which was registered in my data.

Coding Indicator #5: The presence or absence of multimedia attachments was acknowledged in order to further designate these tweets in the subsequent coding indicator. This determined the rate at which Twitter users were attaching additional media.

Coding Indicator #6: The form of the multimedia attachments was clarified to illustrate the types of imagery being posted onto Twitter. Furthermore, this indicator demonstrates the rates and types of imagery being widely distributed on the TLM discourses.

Coding Indicator #7: Attention to additional identity categories, or an acknowledgment of any other social identity outside of transness—such as race, class, and gender— was noted. This code encompassed all data ranging from, but not limited to, any mentions of intersecting identities to explicit racist remarks within the message.

Coding Indicator #8: Mentioned names of the survivors and/or perpetrators in any of the archived messages were arranged into separate categories: (1) only mention of perpetrators' names; (2) only mention of Eden's name; (3) only mention of Jaslene and Joslyn's names; (4) and a mention of all names. This code was created to investigate the means and rates in which

particular individuals involved in the attack were being named amongst the TLM conversations.

FINDINGS

The following finding sections are representative of one type of tweet that dominated the TLM Twitter discourse in August 2020, immediately following the violent ambush of Eden Estrada, Jaslene Busanet, and Joslyn Allen. Going forward, I will not only provide information regarding the descriptive statistics of my collected data, but also analyze the dominant discourses present on the TLM Twitter threads. In these sections, I will present media imagery and textual evidence of the specific manner in which violence against Black trans women was present and being circulated on Twitter. Within distinguishing prominent ideologies, I will apply the same analysis into my close readings of online conversations in my findings' last two sections. Along with conducting a discursive examination of specific tweets, I will also reveal relevant rhetoric based within these online conversations and how they are perpetuating further violence onto trans communities of color.

Entertaining #TransLivesMatter (TLM) Activism: Problematizing A Call to Action

In exploring the insights around expressive and informative content sharing (C.I. 2), I found that 75.9% of the collected tweets posted on the threads held an expressive intent, yet only 24.1% possessed an informative basis. Based on the triggering reality of the brutal attack, these results concerning the reactionary expressive responses were expected to occur, especially considering my own initial emotional reaction. However, I recorded important details regarding attached multimedia files to fully understand the imagery being propagated within the collected threads (C.I. 5/6). Despite only 15.5% of the threaded tweets actually having any form of additional media, the included attachments being shared within these online conversations were majoritively (79.8%) videos and photos regarding the attack. From these results, I closely

analyzed the circulated media and discovered a massive trend in online responses to the survivors' plea for help in seeking support and justice.

As it follows the recent emergence of violent representations of trans murders, the original live-stream video from Steve Hurado's (@stevofilmz) Instagram account acts as user-generated reality entertainment, or social media content that has been posted under the framing and purpose of amusement (Vähäpassi, 2019). The horrific footage itself follows a recent alarming prevalence of bystander videos positioning violence against trans people as a spectacle for mass audiences (Stevenson and Broadus, 2016). When she saw the live stream being shared on another account, Eden Estrada (@edenthedoll) deployed a media campaign in reposting the brutal assault's explicit recording to gain online traction and attention. Rather than placing the video as purely enjoyment, I propose—that in reposting the recording on her own social media page—Eden used this violent imagery as a provision to bring attention to the West Hollywood attack. My research findings demonstrate that the mass public content sharing of the attack as reality entertainment has the ability to transcend multiple accounts and online platforms. Within my collected threads, one social media user replied through tweeting, "Yeah, I shared it on my Facebook to make people more aware of what the hell is going on. Made me tear up this morning seeing this!" Although she did not only need help identifying their attackers, Eden—as we can see in Figure 1—uses the footage in hopes of raising attention to the public attack and the specific violence endured by Jaslene and Joslyn. Figure 1 contains screenshots from Eden's Instagram stories that were being circulated amongst multiple Twitter threads.[16]

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[16] I initially contemplated including these violent images as I tried to avoid emotionally triggering my audiences and myself. I provide the following images to showcase my collected evidence, and challenge these images through my subsequent argument.

In their case study of another viral video containing violence against Black trans feminine

people on Flyvids.com, Valo Vähäpassi (2019) theorizes the repetition of invalidating one's

identity and violent imagery within user-generated reality entertainment legitimizes the endured

physical (face-to-face) encounter and further delegitimizes Black trans feminine survivors.

Vähäpassi (2019) explains reality enforcement, or anti-trans violence being justified by the

cultural ideologies that 'gender presentation represents genital status' (Bettcher 2007: 53), acts a

form of symbolic violence. As a form of non-physical violence that sustains hegemonic systems

of domination through reproducing power relations and complicity, symbolic violence is a

crucial component in understanding the full depth of harm against Black trans women

(McRobbie, 2004). In conversation with symbolic violence, the process in which media socially

reproduces power relations through compliance is in its media portrayals, narratives, and

dominant discourses (Lumsden and Morgan, 2017; McRobbie, 2004). By showing how the

survivors are actually resharing the original live-stream of their attack, I empirically build off of

Vähäpassi's (2019) predictions about how the cultural visibility of violence inflicted on trans

people reinforces the social reproduction of symbolic violence. Eden did not necessarily intend

to inflict violence by resharing the assault footage; rather, she engaged in media tactics of

posting the attack's violent footage—similar to the attackers attempting to humiliate the

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[17] Figure 1

survivors—but with the different intentions of raising awareness through the combination of identity politics and liberal anti-violence activism.

As Westbrook (2008, 2021) explains, vulnerable subjecthood is the unintended consequence in portraying vulnerability to violence as central to identifying as transgender, which ultimately produces an unlivable life of constantly fearing and possibly increasing violence towards trans people. One user commented on the unsettling feeling that occurred when witnessing the video by tweeting "the video of what happened to them is horrific. I couldn't finish it. I really hope they recover soon." As online audiences become a witness to this incident through a virtual interface, violence against trans women of color becomes entertainment for mass audiences and a form of trauma porn, or art and media made for the consumption and exploitation of marginalized people's trauma and violence. Social media users can access this trauma porn by simply clicking on the survivors' account page. The fear of violence is further permeated throughout online TLM discourses as the video reached multiple networking websites. For instance, one Twitter user responded to the video by stating, "I was heartbroken– especially because it happened in a mostly liberal area, in a big city too–just goes to show that they can face danger anywhere." The complexities of violence through the West Hollywood attack are heightened through the video's mass recirculation, especially as this fear extends beyond the city limits of Los Angeles. This virtual phenomena sustains symbolic violence through reinforcing imposed power relations against trans communities of color. In this instance of viral vulnerable subjecthood, violence against trans women of color is not only invoking fear into the social media users that come across the video, but it is also intentionally being pushed into the social awareness of online audiences.

As of April 9, 2022, the full reposted video of the West Hollywood attack on Jaslene Busanet's YouTube channel has reached an accumulation of 169,525 views, which is well over double the number of retweets that threads received on Twitter (YouTube, 2022). In the methods of user engagement, the logics behind video sharing on social media platforms are an essential component to the manner in which the video virally spread. To illustrate this, one comment linked within the TLM discourses, which received well-traction in the thread (489 likes and 119 retweets as of 24 July 2021), stated "Everyone please retweet & check out Eden The Doll on her Instagram story to see more of the story. There is literally a whole Instagram live of the whole incident." Not only does violence against trans people and bodies become visibly marked as a virtual commodity for attracting online attention, but also the ability to view the violent incident as a spectator—especially in conjunction to viral vulnerable subjecthood—is capitalized as a positive feature on Eden's Instagram account. The value produced by social media users for Eden, who currently has over 446,000 followers on Instagram and 288,000 subscribers on YouTube (as of 9 April 2022), is derived from the affective reactions accumulated during content circulation, which predominantly attributes to her status as an influencer. Therefore, the reposted footage was designed to evoke user engagement, such as retweeting and commenting on threads, as quick and easy as possible for the pace of circulation in spreading the content in order to gather attention from mass audiences. Although the majority of these messages invoke outrage, empathy, and overall solidarity in their responses, the evidence discussed in this paper also contained violence against (Black) trans women of color under the disguise of anti-violence activism purposes.

By linking the TLM hashtag with the call-to-action efforts related to online anti-violence activism, Eden's efforts in drawing attention to violence endured by Black trans women serves a

reminder of the implications of user-generated reality entertainment (Vähäpassi, 2019). The disturbing imagery present within TLM threads characterizes violence against trans women of color as an opportunistic media strategy to not only garner mass attention for online audiences, but also promote certain social media accounts with usage of violent imagery. Emily Lenning, · Sara Brightman, and Carrie L. Buis (2020) highlights the compared similarities of the trifecta of violence experienced by both Black people in the United States and transgender people, especially trans women of color, through showing that both groups have historically and contemporarily endured a web of violent actions, policies, and ideologies. However, with this espoused reinforcement of transphobic ideology on social media, Lenning and colleagues (2020) ponder how uninvestigated and ignored individual violent acts are currently presenting a similar pattern of violence as they were with lynching. As social media influences violence, digital logistics on mass recirculation are impacting the prevalence of trans misogynoir violence (Vähäpassi, 2019; Lenning et al., 2020). Through the popular media tactic of raising awareness about violence inflicted upon Black trans women—a strategy premised on anti-violence activism and capitalistic gains of online clout—users can, both knowingly and unknowingly, further sustain the violence in the form of circulating modern-day lynchings through a simple click on the screen.

Lock 'Em Up & Throw Away the Key: The Production of Digital Carceral Logics

After reposting clips of her assault via Instagram stories, Eden pleaded for help from her social media followers in assisting in identifying all of the attackers and reporting them to the Los Angeles Police Department (Figure 2). Additionally, her call-to-action, which emphasizes law enforcement's involvement in the capturing the assaulters, reveals how this instance of anti-violence activism operates on the digital sphere:

Please help us find
ALL THEIR NAMES.

Please call LAPD
(Hollywood) and REPORT!
The more callers the faster
they will work on catching
them.

[18]

In Eden's invocation of a mass collective response in physically reporting the attackers to LAPD, one can understand how her plea to expedite the assaulters' arrest is shaped by and through prevalent carceral logics. Similar to critical trans politics, intersectional feminist abolitionism would interject with the critique that the criminal punishment system cannot effectively provide justice. In her post, Eden emphasizes community action as means to obtain justice for Joslyn, Jaslene, and herself. Her initiation of these media strategies employs a familiar tactic used by feminist anti-violence movements that generally respond with investments in criminalization (Kim, 2018). Carceral feminism, a recently developed term to articulate the mobilization of carcerality amongst mainstream feminist responses to gender violence, encapsulates the decades of dominant anti-violence rhetoric being ingrained with the carceral state (Bernstein, 2012). The projected carceral logic in Eden's plea emphasizes the capture of the assailants as the only primary solution to seeking justice. To understand how Eden's call-to-action impacts the anti-violence discourse on Twitter, I once again turn to descriptive statistics to reveal how carceral logics are inhabiting TLM threads.

In exploring the collected data around mentions of the carceral state (C.I. 3), I found that only 12.4% of the collected tweets posted on the threads actually provided any type of formal or informal indication, either being critical or complicit. In terms of placing the mentioning rates in consideration for Eden's call-to-action, not all respondents participating in the attack's reporting

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[18] Figure 2

would not have necessarily confirmed their contribution on the TLM threads, especially in view of its prevalence on multiple social media websites. However, my data reveals important details regarding dominant rhetoric amongst carceral state mentions within Twitter TLM discourses. Despite over 87.6% of the threaded tweets presenting nothing regarding the carceral system (C.I 3), the state in which it was being brought up was predominately (79.3%) complicit in pro-criminalization rhetoric (C.I. 4), which reflects similar sentiments from Eden Estrada. Based on these results, I was inclined to further investigate the dominant discourses' circulation in these subsections, especially as Eden's post produced further carceral logics in the responses.

As the call-to-action reached widespread audiences, the conversation on Twitter evolved rapidly in the days following as people strived to identify the perpetrators. The tweets below represent immediate responses that emerged in the first two days following news of the violent attack:

- "These are the men who DIRECTLY assaulted Eden and her friends. If you know the other men who were there, CALL THEM OUT they are as guilty as these three" (This message included screenshot pictures of the attackers from the live-stream video).

- "Here you got all the suspects, do your magic, Twitter" (This message includes a picture containing a list of all the supposed perpetrators' personal info).

In these listed tweets, social media users primarily continued to utilize the TLM Twitter feed to support Eden's call-to-action through the informative approaches of identifying the unnamed assailants. While the perpetrators' faces were eventually connected to their names, their portrait images, even past mugshots, and identities were permeated throughout my collected data and beyond into other social media platforms. Despite these initiatives of finding the attackers, this rhetoric of calling out the attackers through digital activism leads to carceral logics. The

evolution of digital accountability praxis, arising from its roots in Black vernacular tradition, has adopted practices of social media callout in applying useful anger by minoritized communities to effectively garner a raised social consciousness within social media spaces to extant social problems (Clark, 2020; Ng, 2020). Eden's call-to-action, and her role as a popular YouTube influencer, contributes and evokes the problematized misuse of social media strategies that misrepresent its legacy within Black Twitter. Furthermore, as I continue to explore the rippling effects caused by the initial plea, the apparent usage of digital accountability can further illuminate the production of digital carceral logics amongst TLM threads.

The succeeding discourse consisted of distinctive mentions of the carceral state. These next four tweets are exemplary instances of the manner in which justice for trans people is conceptualized in conjunction with the carceral state:

- "@LAPDHQ what is being done to remove these dangerous monsters off the street?"

- "A @LAPDHQ cop drove by while she was unconscious and then kept driving. The FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] is the best place to report hate crimes as they're more likely to react."

- "Fucking animals... hope you rot in jail hope someone will fuck your up so bad you'll have to eat through a plastic tube for the rest of you life."

- "I really can't believe grown adults act like this..how can you brutally attack someone, film, and especially laughing about it?? I have no words, but it's more than evil & disgusting! I hope those folks are all found & put in jail!!"

As shown in the tweets above, these Twitter users interacting on the threads conflate justice for the trans survivors with carceral punishment, which reflects the dominant rhetoric being discussed about the carceral state. By invoking the involvement of law enforcement—both

LAPD and the FBI—to resolve this hateful act, the first two tweets not only have a somewhat informative basis, but also shift attention away from the physical violence to solely reporting the crimes. Even with noticing a moment in the video when a LAPD vehicle drives by the incident without stopping to help the clearly distressed women, the above social media user still recommends the FBI as another alternative for reporting a hate crime. In addition to this message, one newspaper reported coverage of the video's content by confirming law enforcement quickly drove up and left the scene as the assailants, and even the bystanders, continued to mock and ignore the survivors' cries for help (Michael, 2020). This occurrence of police violence acts as a discernible reality that the structural institutions of the carceral state cannot adequately provide justice, as they often participate in the violence in which they are formally serving to protect us from. The basis of seeking lawful interference from agents of the carceral state reinforces a larger context of the growing prison industrial complex, and the structural violence that has been placed upon LGBTQ communites. Historically and increasingly in recent years, gender-nonconforming and trans people have endured heightened vulnerabilities to not only their community and through interpersonal violence, but have also been specific targets of state violence (Mogul, Ritchie, & Whitlock, 2011; Smith & Stanley, 2015; Spade, 2015). Police institutions have perpetuated transphobia across multiple centuries, and the West Hollywood attack is no different.

Even when physical violence is the pinnacle of their argument's justification, the last two tweets illustrate a heightened sense of intense carceral logic pertaining to the assailants' incarceration. Along with Eden's initial post, this trend of messages using anti-violence rhetoric, depending on punitive criminal punishment, refuses to recognize their own complicity in maintaining systemic subjection, or the manner of how larger structures subject marginalized

people to systems of domination and control (Spade, 2015). Although it is a necessary avenue in addressing the crime, holding individual perpetrators accountable through limited means of targeting and punishing them through the apparatuses of the carceral state promotes more oppressive violence (Saffin, 2011). When they are simply pushed into being locked up, incarcerated people—especially those who commit violent crimes—are not receiving rehabilitation, engagement, and education on repairing the harm they created. In projecting additional isolation, devastation, and damage onto their communities, people forced into incarceration—which are often disproportionately those of BIPOC identities—are also separated from their support networks and families (Davis, 2003; Alexander, 2010; Spade, 2015). In pushing for the criminal punishment of the West Hollywood attacks, Eden Estrada, alongside those reflecting and producing similar carceral logic, are sustaining a system that upholds a legacy of classism, racism, and transphobia that has and continues to prevail throughout all components of the criminal punishment system.

As I place a large emphasis on critiquing the actions of Eden Estrada in this thesis, I need to also once again emphasize and acknowledge carceral logic—and its pervasive nature—leaves no part of society untouched (Foucault, 1977; Nagel and Nocella, 2013), even in the already limiting ways in which survivors are able to seek agency. While my arguments challenge the methods in which Eden sought justice, all survivors are entitled to determine their own paths for justice, including seeking criminal punishment in courts. While she is not Black and did not experience as much severe physical harm compared to Joslyn and Jaslene, Eden is still a trans woman of color and indeed endured mental and emotional trauma the night of the West Hollywood attack. Eden, as a social media influencer, has depended on social media's capitalist nature and work opportunities to survive as a trans woman of color in Los Angeles. In

consideration for the need of an immediate reactionary response, Eden posted on her platform as it provided her with the means necessary to help her Black trans sisters in light of such an horrific event. This thesis in no means attempts to delegitimize the experiences of trans women of color, especially as they already face constant delegitimization in the everyday. My goal is to help further the agency of trans survivors, not suppress them. I offer this synthesis of critical theory and a trans radical analysis to propose a transformative solution to address the extensive problems of transphobia in all of its forms, ramifications, and realities.

While there is significance in utilizing social media to disseminate crucial information and advocate with hashtag activism, the dominant trend amongst my sample reveals how carceral logics are influencing and operating within these conversations. In these widely circulated discourses on Twitter, there is an overwhelming refusal to acknowledge a possibility for justice without oppressive systems of domination, and specifically without carceral institutional involvement. As seen in this production of digital carceral logics, an emotional response leads to a dominant discourse around gender-based violence to perpetrate an impulsive rhetorical reasoning to resort to and depend on punitive punishment practices. These embedded carceral logics being deployed by Twitter users unknowingly reference tactics and debates previously consumed by mass audiences in enhancing the prison industrial complex (Kim, 2018; Spade, 2015). In implicitly undermining the social justice efforts put forth by BLM and TLM, these digital carceral logics work against the heart of these social movements, which is the liberation for each respective marginalized community. There needs to not only be a questioning of the methods and ideologies behind anti-trans violence, but also a reconfiguration of centering Black trans women with hashtag activism efforts.

The Struggle over Racial Identity: The Erasure of Black Trans Existence

Based on the figures available from my data collection, just a little under half (44.6%) of the tweets did mention a specific name stated the perpetrators' names (C.I. 8). This presented information follows the efforts of identifying the assailants, and also raising attention to Steve Hurado's (@stevofilmz) original live stream post. Additionally, Eden Estrada was the second most widely specified name (42.9%) of these categorized tweets (C.I. 8). This specific detail can be reasoned with Eden's status as a social media influencer, or a digital socialite, and her individual reposting of the initial live stream. However, Joslyn Allen and Jaslene Busanet's names were indicated at a disproportionately less rate (12.5%) (C.I. 8)[19]. Although there were some tweets that did state all of the survivors' names in their message, a large instance of tweets that broadly discussed the survivors as subjects—rather than people— failed to actually type out Jaslene's and/or Joslyn's names; instead, "Eden and her friends" was a common reference. My data not only exemplifies the lacking representation of Jaslene and Joslyn in the Twitter discourses, but can also highlight the anti-Black racism amongst the TLM Twitter threads, a critical dilemma that I will explain in this last findings section.

When analyzing the current transgender social movement in alignment with trans necropolitics, C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn (2013) theorized the concept of "murderous inclusion" in light of their trans of color critique. Beyond the value extraction of trans of color death that vitalizes dominate trans politics, murderous inclusion—the immobilization of poor trans people of color in their subaltern lives, yet sudden inclusion within mainstream agenda only in the afterlife (Snorton and Haritaworn, 2013)—can be extend onto how social media conversations discuss the violent experiences of (Black) trans women of color. Even with reflecting on the manners in which she reposted and responded to the West Hollywood attack,

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[19] In terms of the remaining data (C.I. 8), only 2.7% of these tweets mentioned all of the names involved.

Eden—as I have asserted in the aforementioned findings—not only perpetuated additional violence positioned against trans people of color by affirming vulnerable subjecthood, but also weaponized Joslyn's and Jaslene's violent experiences through projecting carceral logics. In following a trans of color critique (Snorton and Haritaworn, 2013), Eden's actions, along with the ensuing responses, are quite literally falling into dominant transnormative agendas that intensify racialized transmisogyny; which are ironically tagged with #TransLivesMatter or any of its variations. While the hashtag itself brings attention to the intersectional nature of transphobic violence, #BlackTransLivesMatter was subsequently used by Eden and her supporters as a simple anti-violence response within online conversations. However, out of all the collected tweets, only 8.8% account for any messages including identities categories other than transgender and women (C.I. 7); including the previously mentioned tagged hashtag, positive intersectional critiques, and comments lined with racism. With this breakdown of the tweets, this subsection of the gathered data did not only discuss race as a considerable component in their comments, but also primarily justified racism and made race a site of contestation within conversations.

Even with the unwitting, or perhaps intentional, disregard for all of the survivor's names, my collected documentation can still further reveal additional racist rhetoric amongst online conversations. For instance, some Twitter users interject themselves into the thread conversations by solely critiquing the race and ethnicity of the assailants. Here are three examples showcasing the ways in which race, specifically Blackness, was disputed on the TLM Twitter threads:

- "i thought black lives mattered to black people then why are all these black guys just standing there laughing after a black guy just hit and robbed a black trans because it's all bullshit black on black crime is black people's biggest problem."

- "Another proof that black people are hurt more by other black people than cops or whites. Listen up BLM!"

- "It's so bizarre they say they protect trans women of colour, yet it's men of colour attacking them...."

This paradigm of problematizing the attackers' race in conjunction with their actions insinuates explicitly racist arguments. Such discourse of problematizing the attackers' race engenders notions of white supremacy and neglects to acknowledge deeper systems of domination. In his review of the longstanding violence against Black communities, Elliott Currie (2020) argues modern U.S. society views Black people as not only a deserving victim, but also as a dangerous agent of violence. This dominant ideology is not only a refusal to address the structural realities of violence, but also continues to reinforce anti-Black racism (Currie, 2020). Drawing attention to the underlying factors is not to excuse or deny the hateful act committed by the attackers, but rather to bring forth the political, social, economic, and colonial contexts involved with such violence. As they have illustrated race as a social construct arising from assigning particular bodies with a racial meaning, Omi and Winant (1994) explain that the European colonizers established themselves as superior to African and indigenous people through mass genocide, coercive assimilationist tactics, and the institution of chattel slavery (Smith, 2005; Roberts, 1997). The historical and apparently modern discourse behind "black-on-black crime" leads to narratives that continue participating in the racialized criminalization of BIPOC communities, and in turn invests in anti-Blackness. In understanding and recognizing

"crime" as an indicative symptom of prolonged social inequalities and injustices, one can move beyond the critique of individual "bad choices" and head towards implementing critical strategies in reducing harm through situating violence at its root causes.

In my data, the discourses discussed transgender identities in alignment with race primarily with an overarching rhetoric based in a "new racism" called color-blind racism, a racial ideology that consolidates liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and the minimization of race through color-abrasive logic (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Color-blind racism has arisen in contemporary white supremacy—including those that who claim not be racist in a "post-racial" world—through fueling white rationale in their resentment toward communites of color, the problematic arguments of "reverse-racism", and the demoralization of BIPOC work ethic, values, and morality (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). In this era of "racism without racists" (Bonilla-Silva, 2003), color blindness defines the racial battlefield. As similar to "black-on-black" crime discourse, colorblind racism reinforces the underlying systems of racial oppression, but doing so under the facade of a denatured incorporation of demands for equality, inclusion, and justice rooted in liberalism (Omi and Winant, 2008). One Twitter user responded by typing: "That is so messed up it doesn't matter if she's transgender that's a human being and these punk asses on the corner making fun. That's how come I say ALL LIVES MATTER not just black lives." This particular user actually continues on by attempting to debunk the BLM movement by circling back to a "black-on-black" crime argument. On the contrary, when race was positioned as a key aspect to the violent experiences of all three survivors, this was met with opposition. Based on clarifying all of the survivor's race, another user stated, "Stop saying 'black' first of all cos Eden the doll isn't black. No matter what their race is, three transgender woman were robbed and beaten!!! It's terrible no matter what skin color one has. #AllLivesMatters." Here is another

specific and short example of a conversational debate discussing racial and trans identity with one another:

- "Three black transwomen were robbed and beaten in Hollywood last night including influencer Eden the Doll. This NEEDS to be talked about, this needs to trend. One woman had her head bashed open, a group of men watched, recorded, and laughed. #JusticeForBlackTransWomen" (This tweet attached screenshots with all of the survivors' Instagram accounts).
  - "One was black and 2 white passing Latino Women."
  - "It doesn't matter the race of the person, what matters is that it's horrific and it shouldn't be happening to any transwoman or any person at all for that matter."

In this thread, we see Twitter users taking a number of different approaches to decipher the race component within the use of the #JusticeForBlackTransWomen. The first of these replies in particular seeks to provide an informative based clarification on the survivors' racial backgrounds. A specific emphasis on color-blind racism was prevalent in these conversations mentioning race when discussing the survivors' trans identity as it relates to transphobic violence. In the subsequent response, an argument extrapolating color-abrasive rhetoric misconstrues the notion of race being inherently inconsequential with violence towards trans women. Even though this thread expresses a general support for #TransLivesMatter movement, the survivors' race becomes a site of opposition and controversy in claiming impartiality—and perhaps even superiority—in their consciousness of intersecting identities. Color abrasive rhetoric is centralized when the survivors' racial identity becomes a site of contestation within these conversations envisioning the survivors'—and perhaps the whole trans community's—justice. While some users have indirect disregard for the trans survivors' racial identities, this

additional logic being applied in other tweets contest the survivors' race as a key component to critiquing this violent event and labeling this a Black trans issue. Although its singular portrayal of the positive—yet still abysmal—discussion around race and trans identity, one user did assert the violence placed against Black trans women in the last provided thread conversation by interjecting: "Valid but black trans women have an even higher rate of being murdered than other trans women. Race is intersected into a lot more than we think. It matters." I highlight this quote to show my audience the presence of critical conversations on the TLM threads, but—as I have shown through the descriptive statistics in my paper—it's still not enough.

Regardless of online discourses failing to assert racial aspects in their comments, the finite amount of available data containing any mentions of other intersecting identities is still significantly confined to the dictation of "#BlackTransLivesMatter"—or a variation of some sort. My documentation reveals the discursive realities of online conversations discussing race in conjunction with trans identities. Eden's original post not only places the violence inflicted upon Jaslene and Joslyn under a liberalist response of murderous inclusion labeled as "#BlackTransLivesMatter," but continues to influence rising racist ideologies of "black-on-black" crime discourse and color-blind racism. While this hashtag has foundations of acknowledging the dire need to protect and legitimize Black trans people, dominant trans politics utilize hashtag activism to extract the value of the trans violent experiences to sustain racist ideologies and oppressive structures that harm Black trans communities.

DISCUSSION

In discursively analyzing TLM Twitter threads addressing both the West Hollywood attack and violence towards Black trans women, I documented how hashtag activism, or specifically liberal anti-violence interpretations of online activism, are working against trans

liberation through counter-revolutionary measures. Through resharing the assault's live stream recording, the mass circulation of violent media imagery—which is considered a form of user-generated entertainment in this study—indeed reproduced power relations that reinforce vulnerable subjecthood through symbolic violence. Through problematizing usages of hashtag activism that seek criminal punishment and incarceration as means for justice, I revealed how carceral logic has roots in the digital anti-violence responses from the survivors' plea and their supporters. In this study, I positioned how in this rising era of hashtag activism—where online counterpublics have provided digital community spaces for marginalized people—(Black) trans women of color are facing erasure through color-abrasive rhetoric from mainstream hashtag activism that places their value in and through murderous inclusion, or only being deemed valuable in their death (Snorton and Haritaworn, 2013). My overarching intervention into the digital resistance of violence towards Black transgender women is that antiviolence activism must simultaneously fight for anti-racism and anti-prison struggles at the center of efforts for queer and trans liberation—both offline and online. The trans liberation movement must take critical frameworks and apply them to not only on-the-ground resistance work, but also into the center of online activism.

The visibility of violence against (Black) trans women of color constructs user-generated entertainment—or video sharing for the purpose of gaining mass audiences—as a discursive tool that reproduces systems of domination through symbolic violence (Lumsden and Morgan, 2017; McRobbie, 2004). These power relations are fortified through vulnerable subjecthood—centralizing violence as a fear-inducing requirement for those with transgender identities (Westbrook, 2008, 2021). Placing the visibility of harm within online conversations, these disturbing images of the West Hollywood attack become trauma porn for mass audiences and

further pushes dominant discourses of Black trans women solely as victims of violence. By building on Westbrook's concept, I propose that—with taking intersectionality and race into account—Black trans women are being constructed within viral vulnerable subjecthood, and that mainstream digital activism only sees them through violence, murder, and death. While the sparked online and offline campaigns call attention to the routine violence of murders of trans people of color, I posit that, even with the survivors posting their own assault footage, violent imagery on the online public sphere ultimately harms these communites and fails to challenge the dominant representations of violence. These digital resistance efforts are raising awareness about hate-motivated harm, yet they are affirming and enacting violence through their organizing measures. Instead of relieving Black trans women of harm, these counter revolutionary efforts ultimately lead to more violence inflicted upon this marginalized community. The resharing of racialized transmisogynist violence on digital public spheres works against the freedom of trans people through projecting symbolic violence and seriously damages the overall transgender liberation movement. This virtual practice of user-generated reality entertainment as a form of hashtag activism is one way in which critical trans politics can intervene by calling forward and critiquing the carceral logics within this digital media age.

Institutions of incarceration—or the carceral state—and cultural presumptions of carceral logics limit trans liberation. On TLM Twitter threads, online interactions continued to misappropriate digital accountability through an individual approach of justice; a method that I suggest projects and produces carceral logics in these dominant discourses. Although there has been great progress in establishing social media campaigns that raise social consciousness around race and gender politics (Jackson et al., 2020; Bailey, 2021), hashtag activism was hijacked by mainstream anti-violence advocacy that embrace and equate imprisonment with

justice (Kim, 2018). This follows prominent anti-violence feminist politics that embrace the carceral state as a primary solution to gendered violence (Kim, 2018; Critical Resistance and INCITE!, 2016). However, trans people of color have innovatively begun to analyze the intersectional aspects of violence and have demanded for critical trans political strategies challenging these carceral complicit movements (Smith & Stanley, 2015; Spade, 2015). Spade (2015) theorized that these liberal LGBTQ agendas of prioritizing incarceration may limit liberatory frameworks and influence trans politics for the assimilation into existing systems of domination. In rethinking these neoliberal anti-violence approaches, I don't only suggest that online trans liberation efforts adopt intersectional feminist abolitionism (Critical Resistance & INCITE!, 2016; Ritchie, 2017; Kim, 2018; Davis et al., 2021), but also continue implementing trans of color counterpublics that intervene in mainstream media and—by de facto—pay respect to the legacies left behind by our radical trans ancestors. While this crucial work has been done since the early days of the LGBTQ+ movement (e.g., Stonewall Riots [see Filippis 2019]), radical queer efforts have continued on with on-the-ground activism and advocacy networks in recent years (Stanley and Smith, 2015; Spade, 2015). By extending their work's critical knowledge and intervention, I firmly believe that these radical politics need to be further implemented into mainstream LGBTQ usages of hashtag activism.

Aside from the projected carceral logic amongst the TLM Twitter threads, social media users depend on racist ideologies—like "black-on-black" crime discourse and color-blind racism—to mask how dominant cultural politics influence their concepts of justice. Online conversations are still blaming transphobic violence on BIPOC communities, and abundantly adopting this form of new racism, where Twitter users are explicitly tweeting racist remarks but not seeing them as such. However, this discourse is not independent of the oppressive systems as

these liberal discourses place justice within these dominant structures (Spade, 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Historically, trans people of color, and Black trans women, have struggled with the prosecution of their livelihood and being seen as only valuable in their death (Snorton and Haritaworn, 2013). This "black-on-black" crime discourse and new racism works in tandem with the liberal efforts of justice that remain complicit with the violence and racism set against BIPOC and LGBTQ communites. As Snorton and Haritaworn (2013) theorized, trans of color death vitalizes transformative politics because racialized transmisogynist violence fuels the contemporary social movement, and therefore, (Black) trans women of color are deemed invaluable until their deaths, or as I propose until they have experienced violence. Moving in alignment with their claims, the TLM threads were often directed toward anti-Blackness, where race was contested and criminalized as the source of violence—or even as an irrelevant component to violence. Utilizing a trans of color critique (Snorton and Haritaworn, 2013), I revealed how murderous inclusion affected the usage of hashtag activism within neoliberal anti-violence responses. This form of hashtag activism may affect how trans people of color, especially Black trans women, are treated and talked about within cyberspace and beyond. As I have continued to contend throughout this paper, the intersectionality of Black trans existence brings these movements together, yet the usage of TLM hashtag activism in conjunction with Eden's plea works against the true liberation for women of color, BIPOC communities, and trans folk. Nonetheless, anti-violence activism, both in regard to transgender and cisgender folx (Spade, 2015; Kim, 2018), needs to uproot its internalized foundations of liberalism that reinforce the oppressive structures of anti-Blackness and transphobia.

Despite critically analyzing mainstream liberal approaches of hashtag activism, I need to recognize there have been positive instances of trans and queer online counterpublics (Jackson et

al., 2020; Bailey, 2021). With addressing the silence over racialized transmisogyny, important social media campaigns like #SayHerName and #BlackTransLivesMatter have attempted to raise awareness on the intersectional realities of violence and even change these issues (Williams, 2016); however, this violence is sometimes reported in an unserious and sensationalistic manner that perpetuates more harm onto our communities (Westbrook, 2008). All visibility for transgender people, even representations of violence against Black trans women, is not working towards the true emancipation and liberation for all of the trans community (Vähäpassi, 2019). Online activism needs not only critical intersectional frameworks, but also needs to adopt radical approaches to the ways in which we envision and fight for trans people's justice. By moving away from neoliberal organizing on centralized whiteness and concepts of "recognition," there is a possibility of developing hashtag activism as it holds a transformative and radical potential to truly intervene in the disturbing violence that has been and continues to marginalize and threaten the lives of (Black) trans people of color.

An example of violence against Black trans women being framed with intersectionality and radical politics is the story and resistance behind CeCe McDonald—specifically her unjust prison sentencing after the convicting judge ignored her claims of self-defense. In a convergence of online (#FreeCeCe) and offline activism (CeCe Support Committee), the efforts to support CeCe rose to public consciousness, where a national spotlight focusing on Black trans women's vulnerability to carcerality emerged (Fischer, 2016). In response to the news around CeCe's sentencing and imprisonment, Laverne Cox, a prominent actress and trans activist, produced the documentary *Free CeCe!* on McDonald's story to go public with this critical case and its revolving oppressive issues around systemic violence towards (Black) trans women of color. Now that she has been released, CeCe has widely spoken against the U.S. prisons industrial

complex throughout many platforms and continues to inform herself and others about the wider context of state-sanctioned violence, anti-Black racism, and trans exclusion (Anderson, 2016; Sptanley, 2015). In this political formation of intersectional and radical activism, these efforts not only spoke about survivors of violence in a critical and serious way, but also refrained from concentrating on anti-violence liberalism.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I provide theoretical insights and concepts as critical analytical tools to investigate the issues surrounding violence towards Black trans women, and subsequently the digital resistance against such harm. Despite this, my study design has some caveats. Since I was unable to cross-examine my data with intercoder reliability procedures, the measure of all coding indicators is based on self-reports and perceptions of the threads' contextual and representative details. However, a strength of this research project is the focus of digital imagery; multimedia images were achieved to be recorded on their prevalence and frequency across TLM threads. In addition to the relatively small sample size of the collected tweets, one flaw with focusing on Twitter discourse is that my methods fell short in including socio-demographics variables related to social media users. Future research—perhaps with methods other than textual and content analysis—should not only collect demographic details, but also look at how these larger issues considered in the aforementioned discussion unfold on other social networking websites, such as Instagram and YouTube. Finally, my analysis of the West Hollywood attack only illuminates recovered documentation and responses arising from social media; I do not have all of the particulars on exactly what happened the morning of August 17—one just knows what is disclosed online. Analyses that solely focus on interpersonal and trans aspects of the harm inflicted upon Black trans women fail to account for the many sexual, gendered, and racial

nuances in this social and systemic dilemma. Further research on racialized transmisogyny in all of its intersectional and structural aspects—even as it relates to online spaces—is needed.

Nevertheless, this study contributes to the literature on hashtag activism and violence in Black trans women's lives. In combining Dean Spade's (2015) ideas around critical trans politics with Riley C. Snorton and Jin Haritaworn's (2013) conception of the trans of color critique, this study has shown how violence is not only addressed, but has been perpetuated in online TLM spaces. As an empirical exploration of dominant TLM discourses, this paper suggests that resharing violent images for the purpose of user-generated entertainment and hashtag activism, in addition to the misappropriation of digital accountability in mainstream social media, can indeed participate in the violence towards Black trans women. Although social media users are resisting violence, these carceral logics are so ingrained in the ways people conceptualize justice within online anti-violence activism that the hegemonic structures of domination—the criminal punishment system—are reified as obsolete solutions. Resisting the carceral state as means to combat violence against Black trans women will challenge white supremacy and the complementary power structure of cis-heteronormativity. Through exposing how color-abrasive rhetoric underlie the TLM twitter discourse, this paper not only adds to the general qualitative literature on intersectional aspects of anti-trans violence and hashtag activism, but it also reveals how digital conversations and cultural assumptions cause the existence of Black trans women to become effaced. The racialized transmisogynist violence furthered through these discourses, as well as the mainstream anti-violence responses to transphobia, need to be challenged in order for (Black) trans people of color to be truly alleviated and liberated from harm.

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