White Noise: Linguistic Appropriation, Corporate Advertising, and Social Media

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Abstract

This thesis examines how linguistic appropriation of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is perpetuated and performed on social media through corporate advertising and TikTok meme creation, as well as the ways it is experienced and responded to. In particular, this thesis consists of three parts: the first chapter illuminates how AAVE phrases are co-opted by corporations as part of their advertising strategies on Instagram and Twitter, as well as the affective responses from white and racialized users. The second chapter conducts a critical sonic and visual analysis of TikTok videos that appropriate Black women's voices for the creation of popular memes, ultimately situating these videos as forms of digital blackface (Jackson, 2017) and misogynoir (Bailey, 2021). Finally, the third chapter conducts a discourse analysis of Black users' responses and online resistance to corporate co-optation of AAVE and racist TikTok meme creation, arguing that their critiques are forms of a digital oppositional gaze (Sobande et al., 2020). Altogether, this thesis argues that these structures of online appropriation, though seemingly innocuous and entertaining for many white users, ultimately serve to reproduce anti-Black racism. This research spurs new insights in the disciplines of feminist media studies, social media studies, critical race studies, and the sociology of language, ultimately calling attention the quotidian and insidious harm these memes and corporate advertisements continue to do.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine la façon dont l'appropriation linguistique de l'anglais vernaculaire afro-américain (AAVE) est perpétuée et exécutée sur les médias sociaux par la publicité d'entreprise et la création de mèmes TikTok, ainsi que la façon dont elle est vécue et accueillit. Plus précisément, cette thèse est composée de trois parties: le premier chapitre éclaire la façon dont les phrases AAVE sont utilisées par des entreprises dans le cadre de leurs stratégies publicitaires sur Instagram et Twitter, ainsi que les réponses affectives des utilisateurs blancs et racisés. Le deuxième chapitre mène une analyse critique sonore et visuelle des vidéos TikTok qui s'approprient des voix de femmes noires pour la création de mèmes populaires, situant finalement ces vidéos comme une forme de blackface numérique (Jackson, 2017) et de misogynoir (Bailey, 2021). Enfin, le troisième chapitre effectue une analyse du discours des réponses et de la résistance en ligne des utilisateurs noirs face à l'utilisation de l'AAVE par les entreprises et à la création de mèmes TikTok racistes, en soutenant que leurs critiques sont des formes de regard numérique oppositionnel (Sobande et al., 2020). Dans l'ensemble, cette thèse soutient que ces structures d'appropriation en ligne, bien qu'apparemment inoffensives et divertissantes pour de nombreux utilisateurs blancs, servent finalement à reproduire le racisme anti-Noir. Cette recherche ouvre de nouvelles perspectives dans les disciplines de l'étude féministe des médias, de l'étude des médias sociaux, de l'étude critique de la race et de la sociologie du langage, attirant finalement l'attention sur le mal quotidien et insidieux que ces mèmes et ces publicités d'entreprise continuent de faire.

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Contribution of Authors

The sole author of this thesis is Matthew Martino. He completed all aspects of the research and all contributions are his.

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Introduction

In July 2020, prominent white American TikTok creator Brittany Tomlinson (@Brittany_Broski) posted a video claiming that it is appropriate for white individuals to use African American Vernacular English (AAVE) phrases such as "period" or "child, anyways" when communicating online. Tomlinson, who has over seven million TikTok followers at the time of writing, explained that using a "blaccent" (i.e. stereotypically mimicking the speech of Black individuals) is acceptable for online comedic purposes: "[W]hen someone is quoting [a meme] or when someone says 'period,' 'sis,' 'snatch,' all that, it's very much internet culture. [It] has its own language. […] This is how you speak within these online communities" (as quoted in Overs, 2020). Although the TikTok was met with immediate criticism from Black internet users (prompting Tomlinson to publish an apology and delete the clip from her account), Tomlinson's video still importantly illuminates how white users are able to strategically deracialize Black linguistic culture to advance their own ends: AAVE is not considered a distinct cultural expression, but rather a mundane vocabulary that is available to be instrumentalized and mocked when it is most convenient for white subjects. In addition, Tomlinson's TikTok evokes longstanding notions of white innocence (Thompson, 2021) and well-meaningness— using AAVE as a non-Black individual supposedly does not constitute cultural appropriation or contribute to anti-Black racism because one is simply participating in harmless "internet culture." Finally, the video also highlights white subjects' lack of acknowledging their individual accountability in reinforcing racist stereotypes: Tomlinson's notion that AAVE is merely "how you speak" in online communities connotes that it is the networks themselves that necessitate using a racist "blaccent" rather than white users actively choosing to engage in this linguistic appropriation.

As Tomlinson's TikTok demonstrates, so much of what is considered North American anglophone internet culture across all social media platforms has been stolen from AAVE. Ubiquitous phrases such as "lit," "bae," "squad," "slay," "on fleek," and "woke" that originated from Black online networks (particularly networks of Black women and Black LGBTQ+ communities) are treated as whitewashed internet language and co-opted by both traditional white users and white-owned corporations for financial and social gain. My thesis examines how linguistic appropriation of AAVE is perpetuated and performed on social media through corporate advertising and TikTok audio sampling, as well as the ways it is experienced and responded to. Specifically, my thesis will consist of three parts: the first chapter will examine how AAVE is co-opted by corporations as part of their advertising strategies on Instagram and Twitter, along with the affective responses from white and Black commenters; the second chapter will conduct a critical sonic and visual analysis of TikTok videos that appropriate Black women's voices for the creation of popular memes; finally, the third chapter will examine how digital networks of Black users not only publicly respond to and resist corporations appropriating AAVE, but use these platforms in transformative, empowering ways. Altogether, my thesis argues that these structures of online appropriation, though seemingly innocuous and entertaining for many white users, ultimately serve to reproduce anti-Black racism.

This research spurs new insights in the disciplines of feminist media studies, critical race studies, and the sociology of language. Although scholars have examined the ways in which non-Black speakers appropriate elements of Black linguistic culture (see Bucholtz, 2011; Chun, 2001; Eberhardt & Freeman, 2015), as well as how corporations commodify Blackness (Collins, 2006; Sobande, 2019), Roth-Gordon et al. (2020) and Boffone (2021) have noted the dearth in scholarship on the intersection of race, cultural appropriation, and social media. Similarly, Chakravartty et al. (2018) emphasize that "communication scholarship at large needs to pay

more attention to the persistent marginalization of racial and ethnic minorities in today's complex media systems" (p. 255). Thus, in addition to addressing the above literature gap, my thesis is aligned with Chakravartty et al.'s position by aiming to illuminate the appropriation, distortion, and circulation of Black linguistic culture for profit online, as well as how the non-consensual sampling of Black women's voices on TikTok advances the covert reproduction of "the most vicious stereotypes of African Americans" (Hill, 2008, p. 169)— ultimately calling attention the quotidian damage these memes and corporate advertisements continue to do.

Literature Review:

There are four main scholarly conversations that I build on throughout this work: linguistic appropriation and the concept of "Black cool," oppressive social media meme practices, whiteness, and Black digital activism. First and foremost, I draw on Jane H. Hill's (2008) definition of linguistic appropriation: "In linguistic appropriation, speakers of the target language (the group doing the borrowing) adopt resources from the donor language, and then try to deny these to members of the donor language community" (p. 158). This notion of denial is important in the context of these corporate advertisements and TikTok memes given that— as Tomlinson's example above demonstrates— white users often deny the very existence of a Black linguistic culture in the phrases they are appropriating to absolve themselves of their oppressive and exploitative acts. In addition, Hill explains that in linguistic appropriation "words are commodified and become property" (ibid.): this notion of commodification is significant in two ways. Firstly, it directly applies to corporations who use AAVE in both their advertising as well as product creation: for example, in 2014, fashion retailer Forever 21 released a t-shirt emblazoned with the words "on fleek," a phrase created by Black Vine user Kayla Lewis who not only did not consent to the product, but who received no credit or compensation by the

corporation (McLaughlin, 2017). Secondly, this commodification encompasses white users who employ AAVE in their meme creation as a path to online success and increased viewership (as examined in chapter two). Finally, Hill (2008) argues that linguistic appropriation enables white people to claim desirable qualities from Black linguistic culture including forms of "toughness," "street-smarts," and a kind of "edgy" smoothness (p. 166), which I argue is a form of "Black cool." In the following section, I illustrate how Black cool incorporates elements from Black masculinity, Black femininity, and Black queer cultures that white users seek to both ridicule and appropriate for social gain.

Firstly, Greg Tate (2003) defines "Black cool" as the most desirable features of Blackness including being "hip, stylish, youthful, alienated, rebellious, sensual" (p. 7). Furthermore, bell hooks (2012) and Shannon Winnubst (2015) describe the history of Black cool as inextricably tied to masculinity, social resistance, and political protest "as a way to reclaim social life" (Winnubst, 2015, p. 112). In her examination of cultural appropriation in popular American music, Lauren Michele Jackson (2019)— although she does not explicitly label it as "Black cool"— similarly notes that Blackness in mainstream culture "became shorthand for autonomy and freedom" (p. 17) as well as being "young, trendy, gritty, sexualized" (p. 28). I argue that these scholars theorize Black cool in terms of a distinctly heterosexual and urban Black masculinity (Fleetwood, 2010) that omits the communicative practices of Black feminine and Black queer communities that are equally desired and mocked by white people. Thus, I draw on Brandy Monk-Payton's (2017) work on Black women's comedic performances on social media: Monk-Payton argues that Black women's expressions of "sass" and "shade"— which she defines as "playful rudeness and unruliness"— function as strategies of social critique (p. 15-16). I argue that these expressions of sass and shade can be seen as a form of Black feminine cool that is frequently appropriated and performed by white users for the creation of TikTok memes (as well

as evoked textually in corporate digital advertisements). In addition, given that "shade" as a linguistic act originated with Black gay interlocutors (Monk-Payton, 2017, p. 19), I connect Monk-Payton's research to E. Patrick Johnson's (1995) and Marlon T. Riggs' (1991) work on snap culture from Black queer male communities. Johnson (1995) explains that "the snap" involves the "actual snapping of the fingers" along with "the arm mak[ing] a sweeping motion, usually from left to right" with "the snap coming at the end of the movement" (p. 123); in Black gay male culture, "snapping is used to punctuate a verbal reading or dissing" (p. 126). Both Johnson and Riggs argue that the act of snapping has become a shorthand for white and non-queer people to mock and perform distorted physical stereotypes of Black queer, feminine folks in film and television (notably using the example of the American sketch comedy series *In Living Color*); thus, I situate the TikTok memes in chapter two as not only physically performing the snap, but as contributing to this history of mocking Black femininity and queerness.

Secondly, I build on the recent literature on critical race and social media studies to argue that TikTok audio sampling of Black women's voices and corporate co-optation of AAVE are forms of "cyber racism," or the ways in which "digital technologies facilitate expressions of racism" (Hamilton, 2020, p. 294). Internet studies scholars have long theorized the internet not as a colourblind utopia as it was first marketed, but rather as a highly racialized space prone to abuse (Daniels, 2009; Hamilton 2020; Nakamura, 2013, Noble, 2018); thus, I situate my thesis as advancing the literature on racism and digital culture to illuminate the quotidian ways that TikTok meme practices reinscribe decades-old white supremacist and sexist values. Much of the current scholarship on oppressive meme practices has centred on alt-right and/or far-right meme pages on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit (Greene, 2019; Hermansson et al., 2020; Massanari & Chess, 2018; Moreno-Almeida & Gerbaudo, 2021): these studies focus on how alt-right memes advance anti-Semitic, misogynistic, and homophobic rhetorics, often

functioning to attract and/or radicalize potential supporters (Green, 2019). I bring into this scholarly conversation not only TikTok video memes and TikTok's affordances as a meme creation platform, but also how these memes reproduce specific forms of anti-Black racism, incorporating the work of Moya Bailey (2021) and Lauren Michele Jackson (2017).

Throughout my thesis, I use Limor Shifman's (2014) definition of an internet meme as my guide: "(a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form and/or stance, which (b) were created with awareness of each other, and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users" (p. 41). In the case of TikTok, users' ability to sample, remix, and lip-synch along to other people's voices with unparalleled ease and speed than any other social media platform makes the video memes examined in chapter two especially significant. These video and audio editing features that allow users to appropriate Black women's voices for racist meme creation represent TikTok's technological affordances, or "the built-in clues that suggest how a platform is meant to be used" (Hamilton, 2020, p. 295). I supplement Hamilton's (2020) definition with Bucher and Helmond's (2018) work on social media affordances to argue that TikTok's features are directly implicated in this linguistic appropriation and perpetuating online racism. My examination of TikTok's affordances in chapter two is informed by the recent turn toward interrogating how technologies themselves are complicit in reinforcing systemic inequalities (Hamilton, 2020, p. 294). In particular, I am informed by Safiya Noble's (2018) work on "algorithmic oppression" and the "structural ways that racism and sexism are fundamental" to search engines' success as well as how their algorithmic data failures distinctly target women of colour (p. 4). Specifically, I argue that the racism and sexism of the memes that sample Black women's voices are fundamental to TikTok's success as the corporation profits from their rapid dissemination and immense viewership.

Thirdly, I draw on critical race studies scholarship on the concepts of white supremacy, white privilege, white fragility, and white innocence to argue that the corporate social media managers examined in chapter one and the white TikTok users in chapter two seemingly do not recognize that they are perpetuating racist values, but rather perceive their actions as merely advancing their own needs given that whiteness is assumed as normative and prioritized in North American society. First and foremost, I draw on Robert Jensen's (2012) definition of white supremacy: "a society whose founding is based in an ideology of the inherent superiority of white Europeans over non-whites" (p. 127). I supplement Jensen's description with Patricia Hill Collins' (2006) notion that "Whites typically view themselves as being 'raceless'" (p. 179) in a white supremacist society. I argue that this notion of "racelessness" enables white subjects to perceive their theft and performance of AAVE and Black women's voices not as cultural appropriation (or distorting Black linguistic culture), but rather as merely participating in deracialized digital trends— and it is precisely this understanding of being "raceless" that enables them to deracialize the trends (i.e. perpetuate a narrative that AAVE does not belong to any racial or cultural history) in the first place.

I argue that this notion of racelessness is a form of white privilege, which Jensen (2012) describes as "the privilege to ignore the reality of a white-supremacist society when it makes us uncomfortable" (p. 131). I connect Jensen's work to Robin DiAngelo's (2011) concept of "white fragility": "a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves" (p. 54). Building on Jensen and DiAngelo's work, I argue that this white privilege enables white internet users to recast Black linguistic culture and Black voices as a supposedly neutral internet culture that is available to be instrumentalized, while their fragility permits them to deny their own role in reproducing online racism. Finally, I connect the notions of white privilege and fragility to Ayanna Thompson's (2021) work on the white

supremacist logic of white innocence: in her examination of contemporary American public figures performing blackface, she explains that white subjects "frame blackface as either an act of celebration and love, or as an act of imitation and verisimilitude" (p. 5) to absolve themselves of their oppressive actions. Eric Lott (2013), in his work on nineteenth-century blackface minstrelsy theatrical practice, similarly situates white subjects' relationship to Blackness as forms of "love and theft." I build on Thompson's (2021) work to argue that the corporate advertisers and TikTok meme creators not only frame their racist behaviours in terms of admiration of Black culture, but importantly rely on the logic and rhetoric of white innocence in order to refuse acknowledgement of their individual action in perpetuating racist and sexist stereotypes (Williams, 2020, p. 4).

Finally, I build on the recent literature on Black digital activism (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Freelon et al., 2018; Jackson et al., 2020) to argue that Black online networks responding to and resisting appropriation of AAVE are forms of a digital oppositional gaze (hooks, 1992; Sobande et al., 2020). In recent years, Black new media studies scholars have examined the ways in which social media platforms enable Black subjects to forge alternative communities and (re)construct their bodies and identities in ways that challenge dominant media representations (Brock, 2012; Lee, 2019; Morrison, 2019; Noble and Tynes, 2016; Steele, 2021). For example, in *Misogynoir Transformed* (2021), Moya Bailey argues that Black queer and trans women's web shows on YouTube constitute a form of "worldbuilding" in which the creators both "write themselves into places where they were not represented" (p. 103) and build "the realities they want to exist" (p. 105). In addition, there is a growing scholarship on the large network of Black users on Twitter (known as "Black Twitter") specifically in relation to their political organizing, consciousness-raising, and resistance of police violence against Black bodies (Florini, 2019; Hill, 2018; Thompson, 2020). Thus, I situate my thesis as advancing the literature on Black Twitter and

Black new media activism to illuminate TikTok as a site of resistance and how Black users produce a range of anti-racist counter-narratives (both humorous and educational) distinctly against linguistic appropriation. Although numerous definitions of "Black Twitter" exist within the field of Black new media studies, they often coalesce around the key notions of interconnectedness, culture, and social justice mobilization (Hamilton, 2020, p. 296). Thus, throughout my thesis, I draw on Stevens and Maurantonio's (2017) definition of Black Twitter: "a community formed around the celebration of Black achievement and the creation of awareness of previously silenced narratives of violence against Black bodies" (p. 183). This description importantly positions Black Twitter as site that fosters Black joy and pleasure online — not only as a space for social movement activism or reactions to racist violence. I am informed by Hamilton's (2020) notion that it is necessary to recognize the importance of laughter and light-heartedness in Black people's digital lives, rather than framing Black Twitter solely as a space that "exists in opposition to oppression" (p. 296).

In addition, I am informed by Armond R. Towns (2022) work on Black media philosophy and his argument that "racial Blackness […] continues under an increasingly popular logic that racism is dying" (p. 123). I connect Towns' notion to the (faulty) concept of post-racism: as Brittney Cooper (2016) explains, "post-racial discourses use the neoliberal language of diversity to prove that we are either beyond racism or that racism happens in individualist and isolated incidences. Broad systemic racism is no longer a problem" (p. 18). I argue that this sensibility of post-racism informs many white subjects' use of AAVE: given that racism supposedly no longer exists, the appropriation and reworking of Black linguistic culture is not recognized as racist, and even when repeatedly confronted with the realities of this racist online behaviour by Black internet users, white individuals either claim that Black subjects are reacting disproportionately (given that it is "just" internet culture), or consider linguistic appropriation to be an issue with

solely the individual TikTok creators and corporations who publish the content. Ultimately, I build on Towns' and Cooper's research to situate the resistant work by Black creators on TikTok and Twitter examined in chapter three as asserting that firstly, this linguistic appropriation is in fact problematic, and secondly, that these posts do not merely encompass isolated instances, but rather belong to a broader white supremacist culture that steals and profits off of the creations of marginalized speakers.

Positionality and Chapter Overview:

One of the methodological challenges I acknowledge in this thesis is my positionality as white, middle-class, male, anglophone researcher who has benefitted from the forms of white supremacy, white privilege, white fragility, and post-racial sensibilities described above my entire life. I approach this work as a form of anti-racist advocacy: the focus of my critique is to examine structures of whiteness and white supremacy online. I acknowledge that part of this research also involves examining responses from Black users that may discuss difficult emotions such as experiencing racism online. Thus, in order to respond to this ethical issue, I am informed by Donna Haraway's (1988) concept of situated knowledges: I recognize that my situated knowledge limits my ability to make an argument about the situations of others (especially the marginalized creators I examine in chapters one and three), and that I inherently bring into the research process my privileged access to power (Harvey, 2020, p. 38). In addition, as a white researcher, I am mindful of the fact that my citation practices can reproduce a "hierarchy of visibility and value" including institutional racism and sexism (Chakravartty et al., 2018, p. 257). Given that non-white scholars continue to be under-represented in both publication rates and citation rates in communication studies (ibid., p. 254), I actively sought out literature by women scholars and scholars of colour for this thesis.

In addition, in terms of social media ethics, I am informed by the feminist research ethical guidelines established by the Association of Internet Researchers (2020). While I seek to protect the "privacy and dignity" (franzke et al., 2020, p. 12) of users from marginalized communities, I simultaneously want to critique and make visible the quotidian racist and sexist structures that undergird many white users' practices on TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram. I am aware of the scholarship on informed consent and anonymity in digital media research (Bailey, 2015; franzke et al., 2020, Williams, et al., 2018), however, the aim of this thesis is not to anonymize the violent social media practices of white users or to protect white supremacy. Instead, I am inspired by the work of Massanari and Chess (2019)— who analyze violent memes created by the alt-right— to visibilize oppressive production practices on social media and call attention to the insidious damage they continue to do. At the same time, I bear in mind that in studying the racist online practices of dominant subjects and only foregrounding their violence, there is a risk of inadvertently "normalising the same violence we seek to criticise" (Lindberg, 2022, p. 14)— which is why I consider accounting for the responses and perspectives of Black users so critical to this study. I situate my examination of the resistant and transformative work by Black creators not as giving these users a 'voice,' but rather as becoming "an audience for their stories" and empowering experiences (Harvey, 2020, p. 38).

In chapter one I analyze corporate social media posts that appropriate AAVE as well as the affective responses from both white and Black internet users. More specifically, I conduct a discourse analysis of Tweets and Instagram posts from selected corporate accounts with hundreds of thousands of followers each (@BurgerKing, @ChipotleTweets, @IHOP, and @Wendys) that appropriate the following AAVE terms: "bae," "on fleek," "lit," "slay," "yo," and "squad." In addition, I conduct a discourse analysis of the comments beneath the above posts from white and racialized users. Altogether, I argue that this corporate appropriation of AAVE

ultimately generates affective resonances of comfort for white subjects by serving as pleasurable reminders of racial superiority. I build on Roth-Gorden et al.'s (2020) research on how corporations rework Black culture on Twitter to create "corporate cool," however, rather than selecting a corpus of hundreds of individual posts (as the aforementioned authors do), this study instead focuses on six separate AAVE terms that are widely appropriated by corporate accounts and then analyzes multiple posts that include those terms. This chapter brings affect into the scholarly conversations on racism and social media by examining how white subjects are so comforted by these acts of online appropriation. I illustrate that the laughter elicited by the posts is not only physical and involuntary but deeply socially informed— particularly by white supremacist values about Black speakers as improper and unsophisticated. I focus on how AAVE generates affects of comfort for white subjects only when it is (mis)used and reworked at a distance from Black speakers specifically through the act of appropriation— and how it is precisely the fact that white subjects can steal, distort, and rework AAVE to advance their own ends that produces a sense of comfort as well. In addition, I examine racialized users' affective discomfort from AAVE appropriation as expressed through their comments beneath the corporate posts: by analyzing the ways in which Black users critique, call out, and mock the above corporations, I argue that this affective discomfort is generative (Hemmings, 2015) and transformed into critiques of racist power imbalances.

In chapter two I conduct a critical sonic and visual analysis of TikTok posts that appropriate and perform Black women's voices for the creation of memes, as well as examine how appropriation is built into the platform's affordances. This chapter focuses on three Black female creators who have been sampled by over ten thousand TikTok users without consent— Coco Jones, Brianna Blackmon, and Jasmine Collins— to ultimately argue that white users reproduce white supremacist values of Black women as unintelligent and uncivilized. Similarly

to chapter one, I analyze multiple videos within each of the three above trends. I situate the sampling of Black women's voices for TikTok meme creation as forms of Lauren Michele Jackson's (2017) digital blackface and Moya Bailey's (2021) misogynoir. Specifically, in the case of Coco Jones, I argue that white users appropriate Jones' voice, embodied comportment, and the AAVE phrase "on period," as well as recontextualize Jones' story about workplace adversity to advance their own white interests. In the case of Brianna Blackmon, white users defang and recontextualize the AAVE term "Karen" to reproduce forms of oppression against Black women, as well as appropriate expressions of "shade" as desirable qualities of Black femininity. Finally, in Jasmine Collins' case, I argue that non-Black users appropriate both hip-hop culture and the AAVE term "trifling," as well as reproduce the Sapphire stereotype to create a flattened representation of Black women (Bailey, 2021). Lastly, drawing on Bucher and Helmond's (2018) notion that affordances are "'communicational actors'' in that "they produce meanings and meaningfulness" (p. 3), I analyze TikTok's affordances to argue that firstly, the platform's features communicate the meaning that Black women's voices exist to be used— they serve to fulfil the entertainment and pleasures of white people— and secondly, appropriation is fundamental to TikTok's very success as a corporation.

Finally, in chapter three I conduct a discourse analysis of Black users' responses and online resistance to racist TikTok meme creation and corporate appropriation of AAVE, ultimately arguing that their critiques are forms of digital alchemy (Bailey, 2021) and a digital oppositional gaze (Sobande et al., 2020). This chapter focuses on three Black women creators from TikTok and Twitter: @AAVEGoneWrong (Twitter), @DirtyChai (TikTok), and Dara Starr Tucker (TikTok). These creators were chosen not only because they have large followings on their respective platforms (thousands of followers each), but importantly, because their criticisms encompass both formal, educational content as well as satirical memes, illustrating the diverse

responses from Black online communities. Firstly, @AAVEGoneWrong is a Twitter page with over 50 000 followers run by an Afro-Indigenous woman named Wynona who mocks corporate Tweets that co-opt and blatantly misuse AAVE (Jackson, 2020). In addition to analyzing Wynona's humorous posts, I examine her comments and retweets to analyze the participatory role that her followers play in shaping criticism and resistance. Secondly, I examine a video from American TikTok user @DirtyChai, who uses the exact same meme format that white creators use when performing digital blackface in order to mock and call out these very creators. In the cases of @AAVEGoneWrong and @DirtyChai, I illustrate how Black creators use humour not only as a form of critique, but as a reversal of power dynamics (Williams, 2020, p. 11) whereby Black users strategically ridicule the racist and misogynist meme creators who are ridiculing them. I argue that this is a form of looking back (hooks, 1992)— or rather, laughing back— at oppressive media (mis)representations. Thirdly, I examine the work of TikTok user Dara Starr Tucker, an American singer and songwriter, who created an educational video on the legacy of minstrel performance and digital blackface. I argue that Tucker engages in digital alchemy: her video transforms everyday digital media into valuable anti-racist resources that "recode" (Bailey, 2021, p. 24) the very TikTok affordances that are used for racist meme representations.

Chapter One: Racialized Resonance: White Comfort & the Corporate Appropriation of AAVE Online

Introduction:

In recent years, multinational corporations have increasingly expressed solidarity with social justice issues on social media. From Nike, Disney, Coca-Cola, the NBA, and others releasing video messages in support of the Black Lives Matter demonstrations after the murder of George Floyd (Ace Metrix, 2020), to H&M, Always, and Gatorade publishing advertising campaigns highlighting gender inequality and other popular feminist issues (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Sobande, 2019), brands continuously invoke images and values that appear to be allied with activist movement sentiments to garner online social capital. At the same, we have seen corporations increasingly (and without hesitation) employ AAVE phrases in their social media marketing efforts— effectively stealing from the very marginalized communities they claim to support. This advertising practice is situated within a broader history of brands strategically co-opting elements from Black culture and artistic works in their marketing material in order to appear more youthful and fashionable (Fleetwood, 2010). Unlike corporate social justice messaging or previous advertising trends that rely on the imagery of Black athletes and musicians to explicitly acknowledge racial issues, corporate social media posts that appropriate AAVE commercialize racial difference in more covert ways given white consumers' deracialized perceptions of Black vernacular as contemporary internet language. Furthermore, while corporate posts using AAVE may give the appearance to some users that a Black person is behind the corporate messaging— which functions to further absolve the white-owned corporations— fewer than 7% of American digital marketing positions are held by Black subjects (Duncan, 2020).

Corporate social media appropriation of AAVE (though perceived as seemingly

humorous and mundane forms of speech for many white consumers) reworks and distorts the linguistic contributions of Black speakers for financial gain, while simultaneously reproducing decades-old white supremacist values about Black linguistic culture as unsophisticated and improper. The purpose of this chapter is to conduct a discourse analysis of Tweets and Instagram posts from selected white-owned corporate accounts (@BurgerKing, @ChipotleTweets, @IHOP, and @Wendys) that appropriate the following AAVE terms: "bae," "on fleek," "lit," "slay," "yo," and "squad," in order to illuminate how corporations steal, distort, and instrumentalize AAVE in their digital advertising strategies. In addition to the analysis of these Tweets and Instagram photos that use AAVE, I also conduct a discourse analysis of the comments beneath the above posts from both white and Black users to illustrate the different affective responses that these posts elicit. In the first part of this chapter, I examine the corporate Tweets as forms of the embodiment and commodification of Black culture, arguing that they enable the brands to appear more stylish and rebellious as well as transform AAVE into a reproducible commodity. Then, I examine visual corporate posts (both Instagram ads and Tweets with photos) that appropriate AAVE but only use white models, arguing that these posts are forms of AAVE deracialization. Finally, I interrogate how the above posts produce distinct affects of joy and amusement for white users as well as affects of anger and despair for racialized users.

This chapter makes a key intervention in scholarly conversations on cultural appropriation by incorporating affect theory: although scholars have examined the affective dimensions of social media memes (Holowka, 2018; Sampson et al., 2020; St. Onge, 2018; Szablewicz, 2020), Ekman (2019) and Mason (2016) have noted the dearth in scholarship on the intersection of racism, social media, and affect. Thus, this chapter aims to address this literature gap as well as illuminate how these corporate advertisements co-opt Black linguistic culture in ways that are comforting and pleasurable to both the white-owned corporations and their white

audiences. This chapter is centred on the following research questions: How are white social media users comforted by corporate acts of online AAVE appropriation? How do these promotional posts contribute to the simultaneous commodification and erasure of AAVE? Finally, how are the affective responses of pleasure and comfort elicited by the posts tied to the white supremacist logics of white innocence and well-meaningness (i.e. framing appropriation as a supposed act of celebration or love [Thompson, 2021])? This chapter argues that the corporate appropriation of AAVE ultimately generates affective resonances of comfort for white subjects by serving as pleasurable reminders of racial superiority.

Approach: Literature and Methods

Literature: Affect and White Comfort

I approach the analysis of consumers' affects and feelings towards corporate use of AAVE as enabling me to illuminate the everydayness and ordinariness of cultural appropriation. First and foremost, this chapter draws on Aubrey Anable's (2018), Kathleen Stewart's (2007), Margaret Wetherell's (2012), and Corinne Lysandra Mason's (2016) theorizations of affect. Firstly, Anable defines affect as "the aspects of emotions, feelings, and bodily engagement that circulate through people and things"; affect is "a way of talking about the myriad ways everyday experience is felt but is not articulated or is inarticulable" (p. xviii). What is important for this study is that Anable emphasizes that affect can be ordinary— not just extreme or abnormal intensities. Similarly, Stewart's concept of "ordinary affects" highlights the emotions and bodily sensations that are bounded up with everyday experiences. Stewart describes ordinary affects as "the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences" (p. 1-2); they "can be experienced as a pleasure and a shock" (ibid.) and are where "flows of power literally take

place" (p. 3). Thus, I illustrate that even though these corporate social media materials are often considered mundane or innocent, they nevertheless produce significant everyday affects of pleasure and comfort that are inextricably tied to white supremacy or racist "flows of power." I interrogate how this appropriation not only generates inarticulable feelings of racial superiority, but also more minor, involuntary responses of laughter and amusement. Drawing on Stewart, this chapter demonstrates how these corporate posts are simultaneously "experienced as a pleasure" for white users as well as a "shock" or a source of anger and distress for Black users.

In addition, I draw on Wetherell's (2012) notion of affective practice whereby "bits of the body (e.g. facial muscles, thalamic-amygdala pathways in the brain, heart rate, […] etc.) get patterned together with feelings and thoughts, interaction patterns and relationships, narratives and interpretative repertoires, social relations, personal histories, and ways of life" (p. 12). I connect Wetherell's notion that affect encompasses bodily capacities that are inextricably tied to social hierarchies and everyday experiences to Mason's (2016) assertion that affect must be "understood as bodily intensities that circulate in and through history and context" (p. 827). This chapter builds on the work of Wetherell (2012) and Mason (2016) to illustrate how the pleasures and laughter elicited by the social media posts are not only physical and involuntary but deeply socially informed— particularly by white supremacist beliefs about Black speakers as improper and uneducated. Finally, following Sara Ahmed (2014), Annika Lindberg (2022), Tyrone S. Palmer (2017), and other scholars on racial affect, I use affect and emotion interchangeably in this chapter to not only emphasize that emotions cannot "be separated from bodily sensations" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 12), but importantly to underscore how emotions are "profoundly social and political" (Lindberg, 2022, p. 3)— in this case, how white users' laughter is inextricably bounded up with white supremacist ideology.

In addition, I situate the above social media materials as producing "affective

resonances": I draw on Susanna Paasonen's (2019) definition of affective resonance as the ways in which "users attach themselves to site interfaces, images, sounds, videos, texts, tags, and search terms and how they perhaps come to recognize some of the sensations conveyed on the screen in their own bodies" (p. 50). I build on Paasonen's work to analyze how white users are continually "moved, touched, and affected by" (ibid.) corporate appropriation of AAVE— how it is distinctly the everyday act of appropriation that is comforting and pleasurable, and not when AAVE is spoken by actual Black interlocutors. Beyond brand loyalty, I illustrate how white users "attach themselves" (ibid.) to the corporations' images and texts specifically when Black linguistic culture is repeatedly reconstructed as an affirmation of white social dominance, and how the sensations of joy and pleasure conveyed through the corporate posts are recognized in the users' own bodies. Finally, I examine the rapid dispersive nature of the social media posts through Paasonen's (2015) notion that "circulation increases the affective value of objects as it accumulates and oscillates in and through acts of communication" (p. 28). I argue that it is distinctly through their mundane repetitiveness and constant circulation that these corporate posts generate everyday affects of joy and comfort.

Additionally, I situate the corporations' advertisements and white users' responses as contributing to a history of white comfort, which Roth-Gordon et al. (2020) define as a "racial frame in which people of color's labor and creativity is valued only as it benefits white people and secures their comfort" and that relies on a "lack of racial contact" (p. 112). Roth-Gordon et al. explain that white comfort can encompass other pleasurable feelings such as joy, fun, laughter, and entertainment as well (p. 112, 114). Thus, building on their work, I focus on how AAVE generates affects of comfort, hipness, and amusement for white subjects only when it is (mis)used and reworked at a distance from Black speakers specifically through the act of appropriation— and how it is precisely the fact that white subjects can steal, distort, and rework

AAVE to advance their own ends that produces a sense of comfort as well. In addition, I connect Roth-Gordon et al.'s concept to Paasonen's work above, arguing that white comfort is a form of affective resonance produced by the social media posts: I argue that it is this experience of white comfort that makes white users repeatedly "attach themselves" (Paasonen, 2019, p. 50) to the corporate images and texts. Finally, I link white comfort and affective resonance to Paul Gilroy's (2004) examination of white citizens' views on immigration and their "narratives of unfairness, loss and infringement" of national identity as well as how they "come to understand themselves as the victims" (as cited in Wetherell, 2012, p. 7). I argue that it is white American users' anxiety and fear of becoming a "victim" that makes them deeply comforted by this AAVE appropriation — this reminder of racial superiority that is deracialized at the same time— and which makes them continuously "moved, touched, and affected" (Paasonen, 2019, p. 50) by the corporate posts.

Lastly, in addition to interrogating white users' comfort, I examine racialized users' affective discomfort or dissonance from AAVE appropriation as expressed through their comments in response to corporate posts appropriating Black linguistic culture. I draw on Clare Hemmings' (2015) work on how "affective discomfort might be creatively engaged or transformed so that the world could be seen and inhabited differently" (p. 152): by analyzing the ways in which Black users critique, call out, and mock the corporations through comments and/or retweets— as well as publish expressions of solidarity in the comments— I argue that Black subjects' affective discomfort is "generative rather than paralyzing" (p. 152) and serves as a pipeline to resistance (p. 153) of cultural appropriation and white supremacy. I include Black users' comments in this study to illustrate that Black criticism and resistance occurs at the same time as the appropriation: I illustrate that the corporate posts are situated within a deeply contested affective and discursive space in which users are always responding.

Methods:

Roth-Gordon et al.'s (2020) study on how corporations rework Black culture on Twitter to create "corporate cool" informs my own discourse analysis of Instagram posts, Tweets, and user comments. However, rather than selecting a corpus of hundreds of individual Tweets— as the aforementioned authors do— this chapter instead focuses on six separate AAVE terms that are widely appropriated by corporate accounts and then analyzes multiple posts that include those terms: "bae," "on fleek," "lit," "slay," "yo," and "squad." The methodological approach for this chapter is informed by Rosalind Gill's (2018) description of discourse analysis that involves examining "the ways in which particular linguistic forms can have dramatic effects upon how an event or phenomenon is understood" (p. 3) as well as "identify[ing] themes, consistencies and patterns across and between texts and to connect these to wider contexts and social formations" (p. 17). In particular, I am interested in illuminating a shared pattern of promotional discourse that appropriates AAVE across four specific corporations— how Burger King, Chipotle, IHOP, and Wendy's craft a distinct promotional discourse through appropriating Black culture, as well as how they use AAVE to brand themselves as stylish, fashionable, and playful. Additionally, beyond the denotative meaning of the Tweets and Instagram posts, I am interested in how these corporate texts are undergirded by the belief that Black linguistic culture is available to be instrumentalized for corporate ends, and how white users' laughter at AAVE is rooted in racist values about Black speakers as uneducated and primitive. Lastly, I am informed by Michelle M. Lazar's (2007) method of feminist critical discourse analysis, which refers to critique of discourse that "shows up the workings of power that sustain oppressive social structures/ relations" (p. 145). Specifically, I am interested in how this quotidian appropriation of AAVE not only reinforces skewed power imbalances, but permits white-owned corporations to financially and socially profit from the labour and creations of marginalized speakers by mocking them.

I sourced these corporate posts from 2014 until present. This timeline was chosen for several reasons: firstly, the above popular AAVE terms came into widespread use in 2014 (Roth-Gordon et al., 2020), and secondly, corporations began to embrace distinct colloquial, online personas during this period (Allebach, 2019). To locate specific Tweets and Instagram posts to analyze, I first used Twitter's advanced search function to search for the above AAVE phrases from specific corporate accounts with large followings and distinctive, informal communication styles: @BurgerKing (2 million followers), @ChipotleTweets (1.1 million followers), @IHOP (350 000 followers), and @Wendys (3.9 million followers). From the results of this advanced search, I then selected specific Tweets for analysis based on if they distorted the AAVE terms from their original meanings, and/or if they used the terms to express overt silliness, frivolity, and/or hipness. I then collected the Tweets and corresponding comments using screenshots. Because Instagram lacks an advanced search function like Twitter, once I located corporate Tweets for analysis, I examined the brands' corresponding Instagram pages to find similar posts from that same timeline that appropriate the above AAVE terms.

Finally, I draw on the work of Reagle (2015) to approach white and racialized users' comments as a "genre of communication": "comment is communication, it is social, it is meant to be seen by others, and it is reactive" (p. 2). Reagle's notion of purposeful visibility and reactivity is especially salient here as I argue that expressions of white comfort being seen by other white users in the comments creates a kind of "mutual recognition and an affective solidarity" (Hemmings, 2015, p. 153) that strengthens the feelings of pleasure and comfort. Similarly, I argue that Black users' collective experiences of anger and sadness in the comments generates an affective solidarity that is transformed into critiques of racist power imbalances. In addition, I am informed by Reagle's conceptualization of comments as "the things that ordinary people encounter in daily life" (p. 16). I link this notion of ordinariness and everydayness to

Stewart's (2007) description of affect above, illustrating how it is through comments that white users articulate their everyday, more minor feelings of enjoyment and amusement at corporate appropriation of AAVE, while racialized users articulate feelings of despair and anger at the quotidian exploitation of Blackness.

Embodying and Commodifying Blackness:

Tweets from Burger King, Chipotle, IHOP, and Wendy's that appropriate AAVE enable the corporations to embody stylishness and "outlawness" (Fleetwood, 2010) from Black culture as well as reconstruct AAVE as a non-threatening commodity for white audiences. The above brands use AAVE on Twitter in two distinct ways: firstly, within their standalone Tweets, and secondly, in their comments and personal replies to traditional users. In the former, the use of AAVE is presented as seemingly isolated instances, whereas in the latter, AAVE is used to speak *directly* to white users and to construct a conversational dynamic between the corporations and their consumers. Some initial, exemplary cases of the former category include IHOP's Tweets, "Pancakes on fleek" (2014) and "Brunch is bae" (2017). "Bae" originated on Black Twitter in 2013 as an abbreviation of "babe" or "baby," a term of endearment for a romantic partner (Blay, 2015), while "on fleek" is a phrased coined by Vine user Kayla Lewis (known online as Peaches Monroee) in 2014 to refer to something that is fashionable or attractive (Roth-Gordon et al., 2020, p. 107). Both of these IHOP Tweets are intended to be silly and frivolous as well as playfully nonsensical as they employ "bae" and "on fleek" in ways that have nothing to do with their original definitions, effectively reworking and instrumentalizing these terms to advance IHOP's own desires for financial and online success. Indeed, these Tweets received over 15 000 likes and 19 000 retweets combined. Similarly, Burger King's Tweets, "If bae eats your burger, bae is not bae" (2014) and "Save the drama for yo onion rings" (2016), make use of these same

corporate promotional practices of frivolity, lightheartedness, and nonsensicality distinctly through— or rather, at the expense of— Black linguistic culture. Finally, another Tweet that employs this promotional practice is Chipotle's post, "BAE: Burritos Are Everything" (2016): this Tweet is not only once again deliberately playful and absurd, but quite literally transforms the AAVE term's definition in order to solely advance Chipotle's interests for financial and social gain. In addition, the fact that Chipotle's Tweet was published three years after "bae" first gained popularity illustrates how there is an ongoing, shared corporate promotional discourse that has AAVE at its core— how a sustained corporate promotion of linguistic appropriation is present online across brands.

These notions of deliberate absurdity and frivolity that are present in all of IHOP's, Burger King's and Chipotle's Tweets above indicate that these posts are intended to incite laughter, however, Blackness is the entire joke of these Tweets. The posts from IHOP, Burger King, and Chipotle all connote the message that the mere presence of Black linguistic culture (without any or very little wordplay or modifications done to the terms) is meant to be humorous — and this very humour arises from the underlying belief that these phrases are less 'civilized' or 'sophisticated' than white American English. In addition, in all of the above cases, the AAVE terms are simply dropped haphazardly in these posts (distorted from their original meanings and contexts) and instrumentalized in order to "spice" up (hooks, 1992, p. 21) traditional forms of corporate advertising text: as bell hooks (1992) explains, Blackness here is "offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling"; in the context of these Tweets, racial difference "becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (ibid.). In other words, the use of AAVE imbues these Tweets (and by extension their corporate authors) with a sense of rebelliousness given that they deviate from conventional corporate textual marketing practices (i.e. "bae" and "on fleek" would not be used

in a typical billboard or magazine ad), while also associating the corporations with a sense of youthful stylishness that Black Twitter— and Black culture more broadly— has become shorthand for in North American society (Jackson, 2019).

Let us examine this notion of rebelliousness or outlawness more deeply: it is not only that brands' use of AAVE enables them to deviate from traditional corporate advertising practices, but that Blackness itself has continuously been associated with a mythic virility and danger for white subjects. In her work on hip-hop culture and advertising, Nicole Fleetwood (2010) explains that the Black male body "signifies within and outside of black communities a form of coolness through racialized and masculine difference and a diaphanous 'outlawness' that maintains an affective quality even as it functions as a highly reproducible and mass-marketed commodity" (p. 152). While these Tweets do not use imagery of Black male subjects, this notion of highly stylized otherness is directly related to the appropriation of AAVE above: in the context of these Tweets, AAVE functions as a youthful and racialized alterity that is able to be constantly (re)embodied in as many social media posts that the brands see fit and imbues the corporations with the same kind of desirable danger that has been attached to Black bodies. In other words, these Tweets transform AAVE into a highly stylized and reproducible commodity. In addition, even though these Tweets do not directly reference gender, because "outlawness" is associated with masculinity as Fleetwood points out, these Tweets can be seen as expressing or evoking a covert sense of masculinity in order to express their coolness and rebelliousness.

Fleetwood's (2010) notion of hip-hop culture and outlawness is directly present in Tweets that appropriate the term "lit," for example, Wendy's post, "BREAKFAST NEWS! Wendy's is now serving up breakfast. Sources say it's 'pretty lit'" (2020). Originating from American hip-hop communities, "lit" can refer to being drunk or intoxicated by drugs, or can be used as an adjective to describe an event or situation that is exciting or outstanding (Webb, 2018). Much

like the Tweets above, there is a notion of intentional playfulness here by mimicking a traditional news headline (with a further layer of absurdness given that a journalistic report would typically not use AAVE), however, in Wendy's Tweet it is less about nonsensicality and more about taking a generic or mundane product (breakfast food) and imbuing it with a sense of hipness, rebelliousness, and excitement distinctly through AAVE and hip-hop culture. Wendy's Tweet thus instrumentalizes Black linguistic culture in order to elicit pleasurable feelings of coolness and stylishness. This similar discursive promotional practice is present in IHOP's Tweet, "No lie, this omlette [*sic*] burger is LIT" (2017): this post once again blatantly appropriates Black culture to advance IHOP's own interests and generate sensations of hipness towards a product that has nothing to do with the AAVE term's origins or meanings. Additionally, the spelling error (whether accidental or not) serves to further imbue the post with a sense of rebelliousness given that typos are not typically associated with traditional corporate advertising. There are other IHOP Tweets that appropriate "lit" in order to promote breakfast foods, such as the post, "58¢ pancakes from 7AM-7PM it's lit" (2016) and "Shout out to Pumpkin Spice Pancakes & IHOP Pumpkins. It's LIT!" (2016). Much like Wendy's above, Black linguistic culture is repeatedly instrumentalized here in order to transform products associated with ordinariness and mundanity into feelings of excitement and hipness. In this sense, there is a persistent corporate promotional practice that appropriates and values AAVE only when it is able to generate pleasurable feelings states of coolness for the brands' products. In addition, although these Tweets from Wendy's and IHOP seem to use the latter meaning of "lit" defined above, they all still covertly rely on the term's associations with intoxication and illicit partying to further imbue the posts with a subdued sense of racialized stylishness and rebelliousness. However, it is important to note that the above Tweets connote racialized difference and outlawness (Fleetwood, 2010, p. 152) only in a way that is ideologically safe to white users: by attaching "lit" to burgers, pancakes, and

pumpkin spice lattes, these Tweets reconstruct the term into a highly palatable and pleasurable commodity for white consumers that relies on a "lack of racial contact" (Roth-Gordon et al., 2020, p. 112)— in other words, obscuring its racialized history and actual Black speakers.

In addition, what this transformation of AAVE into an ideologically safe commodity does is reinforce white racial dominance. As bell hooks (1992) explains, "[w]hen race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other" (p. 23). In other words, the commodification of AAVE not only divorces the linguistic cultural practice from its distinct racial histories, but transforms it in order to solely advance the needs of white-owned corporations and the pleasures of white consumers. Similarly, Wesley E. Stevens (2021) asserts that "[r]acialized and politically charged cultural practices are rendered non-threatening once they are made consumable" (p. 3). In this context, the commodification of AAVE in the above Tweets renders Blackness both desirably dangerous and non-threatening at the same time— AAVE is reconstructed into a "resource for pleasure" and a "playground" (hooks, 1992, p. 23) whereby white subjects can instrumentalize, reproduce, and consume Black linguistic culture whenever and however they see fit. In addition to the appropriation of "lit" above, another example of rendering AAVE as palatable and non-threatening is the following tweet by IHOP: "we didn't come to play.... we came to slay" (2016). Originating from late-20th century Black drag and ballroom communities, "slay" refers to succeeding at something (Davis, 2020). However, this entire Tweet is a direct reference to a lyric by queer hip-hop artist Big Freedia, who is featured in the music video for Beyoncé's song "Formation" (2016): in the video, released nine months before the Tweet, Big Freedia says, "I did not come to play with you hoes, I came to slay, bitch." There are several elements that are worth examining here: firstly, given that

the Tweet makes no reference to IHOP's products or services whatsoever, it blatantly appropriates AAVE for the sake of appropriating AAVE— for the sake of gaining online visibility. In this sense, the Tweet is less about promoting a specific product, and more about a process of branding— of associating IHOP with specific pleasurable feelings. In this Tweet, IHOP is attempting to create pleasurable feeling structures of being hip, light-hearted, and joyful for their followers distinctly through AAVE appropriation. Secondly, directly related to Fleetwood's (2010) passage above, rather than connoting a "racialized and masculine difference" (p. 152), IHOP's Tweet appropriates a racialized, feminine, and queer difference as a form of highly stylized otherness given that "slay" is specifically identified with queer and drag communities. It evokes a sense of "sass" or "playful unruliness" that is associated with Black queerness and femininity (Monk-Payton, 2017, p. 15) and renders this Black queerness palatable and non-threatening to white users distinctly through its commodification. This connotation or allusion to queerness and femininity here illustrates how gendering is present in the appropriation— how by co-opting terms specifically associated with feminine artists and communities, the brands can covertly express that same femininity as well.

Finally, having analyzed Burger King, Chipotle, IHOP, and Wendy's standalone Tweets, let us examine the corporations' appropriation of AAVE in their personal replies to other Twitter users, which is form of embodying Blackness. One example of this kind of appropriation includes Wendy's response to a white female user who claims they are her favourite fast food restaurant: the corporation replies, "Aye, We slay girl!" (2016). The specific use of "girl" in this Tweet following the appropriation of an AAVE term not only serves to generate feelings of camaraderie and familiarity or closeness, but also (much like IHOP's post above) to embody a cheerful form of Black femininity as a form of racialized stylishness and hipness. In other words, IHOP is attempting to evoke coolness specifically through Black femininity. A similar discursive

promotional practice is employed by Chipotle: in response to a female user who Tweets about being unfazed about body standards and tags Chipotle, the brand replies, “Slay, queen!” (2018). Once again, the specific use of “queen” here serves to evoke a joyful form of Black femininity as a kind of stylishness and, in this case, a form of encouragement as well (i.e. the brand is saying the user is thriving for disregarding beauty standards). In another Chipotle Tweet, the corporation responds, “TREAT YO SELF” (2021) when a white female user Tweets their intention to purchase Chipotle: once again, the brand instrumentalizes AAVE in order to elicit feelings of encouragement and camaraderie— and to directly drive the consumer towards purchasing their product. Wendy’s and Chipotle’s Tweets here thus illustrate that there is a shared corporate promotional practice across several years that appropriates AAVE specifically for evoking friendliness and cheerful motivation. In another scenario, Wendy’s responds, “Yaaass, We slay!” (2016) when a white male user Tweets his enjoyment of a chicken sandwich: in this case, AAVE is not appropriated to encourage other people, but rather for the brand to express intense pride and excitement much like IHOP’s and Wendy’s appropriation of “lit” to generate excitement above. A final example of embodying Blackness through personal replies is the following post by IHOP: in response to a photo of a group of Black patrons at their restaurant, the corporation replies, “y'all table lit!!!!!” (2016). In this case, AAVE is appropriated to speak directly to Black consumers; much like Wendy’s breakfast Tweet (2020) above, Black linguistic culture is once again instrumentalized here in order to take a mundane, routinized act (Black people simply existing) and imbue it with feelings of excitement and hipness.

In addition, what is significant about all of the above corporate response Tweets is that the use of AAVE is unprovoked: none of the Twitter users that the brands are replying to use AAVE in their original posts, yet the corporations still appropriate Black linguistic culture. Thus, much like IHOP’s theft of Big Freedia’s lyric (2016) above, the corporations simply embody an

exaggerated form of Blackness for the sake of embodying Blackness— for the sake of "inhabiting a black persona" (Jackson, 2017, para. 10), and for branding the corporations with distinct pleasurable states of feeling including camaraderie, stylishness, and excitement. Once again, Blackness is a "playground" (hooks, 1992) here for white subjects. This can in part explain why these corporate accounts still desire to embody Blackness even when communicating with white users or when AAVE has nothing to do with the original discussion— because AAVE has been transformed into a "resource for pleasure" (hooks, 1992) that functions as a comforting and enjoyable reminder of white racial dominance. AAVE is not perceived as a distinct cultural practice but as a non-threatening playground or livening "seasoning" (hooks, 1992) for white subjects— one that can be turned off or on when it is most convenient and amusing for them.

Similarly, we can also consider this continuous desire to appropriate AAVE as a kind of affective attachment or affective resonance to Black culture: these corporations constantly "attach themselves" (Paasonen, 2019, p. 50) to AAVE distinctly because it provides pleasurable feelings of stylishness, cheerfulness, and rebelliousness (Fleetwood, 2010) that they want to inspire in their consumers. They are attempting to evoke sensations of coolness as well as playfulness and joy through these Tweets that their followers can then take part in. Connecting to Wetherell's (2012) concept of affective practice, this AAVE appropriation therefore does a kind of work: it creates a set of pleasurable states of feeling as described above. In other words, there are conditions for other individuals' pleasure embedded in this corporate practice of linguistic appropriation. In this sense, it is less about the feelings that these specific social media managers gain from appropriating AAVE (whether pleasurable or otherwise), and more about how they desire their followers to feel— about presenting their consumers with comforting feeling states of hipness, camaraderie, and amusement distinctly through AAVE. Similarly, despite the fact that

the overwhelming majority of American digital marketers are non-Black (as discussed in the chapter's opening), it is important to note that the creation of these pleasurable feeling states can occur regardless of the specific racial identity of the social media managers at Burger King, Chipotle, IHOP, and Wendy's. As Ahmed (2007) notes, whiteness is "reproduced" (p. 154) in institutions even when people of colour are present, and that "bodies that might not appear white still have to inhabit whiteness, if they are to get 'in'" the institutions (p. 158). Thus, it is less about the identities of the specific individuals in these marketing positions, and more about a shared set of corporate discursive practices that has appropriation at its core. Indeed, it is possible that racialized digital marketers may have to "inhabit whiteness" in order to succeed at these white-dominated organizations. However, more importantly, these corporate replies still "reproduce whiteness" no matter whom is specifically behind the crafting or physical posting of the Tweet because the posts still intend to inspire joyful feeling states through cultural appropriation.

Finally, what is notable about these corporate replies is that they all evoke an almost hyperbolic or excessive emotionality that is not present in the standalone Tweets above. This intense emotionality is expressed through excessive use of exclamation points and/or word capitalizations (e.g. "y'all table lit!!!!!" [IHOP, 2016]; ""TREAT YO SELF" [Chipotle, 2021]). As Lauren Michele Jackson (2017) explains, white supremacist "culture frequently associates black people with excessive behaviors, regardless of the behavior at hand" (para. 7) and that white users often use reaction GIFs with Black people in them to "act out [white people's] most hyperbolic emotions" (para. 8). In this sense, the brands' exploitative embodiment of Blackness is inextricably tied to historical expectations and stereotypes of Black affect. In this context, I conceptualize Black affect in terms of intense emotional expression: as Tyrone S. Palmer (2017) explains, the "Black body comes to stand as the site of excess affect and hyperemotionality" (p.

43) in North American society, while Sianne Ngai (2005) argues that Black subjects are "especially prone" to cultural representations of distorted "animatedness" and "exaggerated emotional expressiveness" (p. 94-95). These historical representations include the Angry Black Woman stereotype (examined further in chapter two) and the Sassy Black Friend trope (Mason, 2022) in mainstream media, which are both inextricably tied to and reproduce a stereotypical form of Black affect that is loud, aggressive, and hyperemotional. Thus, this hyperbolic emotionality serves as a false proxy for Black affect: it is a stand-in based on these harmful, untrue stereotypes of Black emotional expression. Although the corporate response Tweets above do not make use of any GIFs as Jackson describes, they similarly rely on AAVE and an exaggerated, false stand-in of Black affect as a form of "playacting blackness" (Jackson, 2017, para. 10). For example, in response to another customer who intends to purchase Chipotle, the corporation once again replies, "Treat yo self" (2022) but this time placing an emoji of hands clapping in between each word. The hand-clapping emoji in this context is used add extra emphasis to a sentence and represents a trend in online textual communication that has become known as the "ratchet clap" (Waldman, 2016)— it makes reference to the hyperemotional and grossly distorted physical stereotypes that have come to be associated with Black femininity, mocking the way Black feminine folks supposedly communicate excessively with their hands. Thus, these corporate responses embody an exaggerated form of a Black persona (frequently tied to Black femininity), which not only reproduces decades-old white supremacist values about Black affect as hysterical, aggressive, and loud, but also serves to reaffirm the pleasures, amusement, and joy of white users.

AAVE Erasure and Deracialization:

Corporate appropriation of AAVE is not only present in text-based social media materials

(as examined in the textual Tweets above), but also occurs heavily in posts that involve photos. In the following section, I argue that Tweets and Instagram posts that appropriate AAVE in their captions but feature only white individuals in the accompanying images are forms of AAVE erasure and deracialization. In the context of discursive practices, deracialization refers to "the stripping of contextually marked ethnoracial meaning from an indexical form" (Bucholtz, 2016, p. 275). Through this process of deracialization, white speakers are able to simultaneously appropriate Blackness "without claiming an affiliation with Black youth culture" (ibid.). Similarly, Bertrand (2010) explains that discursive deracialization can also involve "the use of veiled references to racial groups" in which "racist sentiments are conveyed in a subtle manner" (p. 485). In the context of these visual corporate social media posts, I argue that both elements of deracialization above are present— the stripping of AAVE's racial and cultural meanings and origins, as well as the covert reproduction of white supremacist ideology. Some examples of these kinds of visual posts include the following:

Figure 1

Note. Chipotle (2016). Twitter.

Figure 2

Note. Chipotle (2016). Twitter.

Figure 3

Note. IHOP (2016). Instagram.

Figure 4

Note. IHOP (2015). Instagram. Caption, "Mo time, mo breakfast" is a reference to the hip-hop song "Mo Money Mo Problems" by The Notorious B.I.G. (1997).

Figure 5

Note. Wendy's (2017). Twitter.

All of these posts function as more traditional advertisements with professional lighting, high-quality image resolutions, and strategic product stagings that are visibly branded.

First and foremost, these photos remove any and all references to Blackness by only including white models— a form of white racial dominance in that white subjects can strategically remove the very speakers who originated the language they are appropriating from. As Roth-Gordon et al. (2020) explain, the presence of whiteness in the photos "allow[s] white people to safely partake in black language and culture" (p. 122). The physical positioning of the white models directly beside the AAVE captions connotes the message that it is suitable for white subjects to appropriate AAVE. Furthermore, given that the models express overt signs of happiness (as with all traditional advertisements, intending to inspire consumers), these posts covertly connote that AAVE appropriation is not only permissible, but pleasant and joyful. Blackness is not only rendered non-threatening here (through the attachment of AAVE to ideologically safe or traditionally wholesome activities like Scrabble and picnics), but also entirely invisible. These posts strategically erase Black subjects and AAVE's racial histories in order for the white-owned corporations and their white viewers to pleasantly participate in Blackness, but without having to face any true contact or affiliation with actual Black people—thus reaffirming white subjects' comfort. This notion of Black invisibility is not merely limited to corporate marketing strategies or media representations: as Palmer (2017) explains, "Black personhood is consistently erased, invisible, unrecognized" (p. 43) in white supremacist culture and that "Black opacity serves as a (necessary) precondition and justification for the enactment of violence—both interpersonal and genocidal—upon Black people" (p. 42). In this sense, the strategic absence of Black models not only serves to make the above posts appear wholesome or generic, but importantly to justify the corporations' theft, distortion, and instrumentalization of Black culture. Whereas in other advertising contexts, corporations strategically use the imagery

of the Black male body in order to "brand certain consumable goods" (Browne, 2015, p. 124) as stylish and desirable (Fleetwood, 2010), or to appear allied with social movements such as Black Lives Matter (Sobande, 2019), in the contexts of these Tweets and Instagram posts, it is the distinct erasure of the Black body that serves to strip Black linguistic culture of its racial origins and justify white speakers' theft of it.

In addition, the above posts follow the exact same visual format: all of the images comprise of group shots which never display the entire faces of the models— only the torso, arms, hands, and (in the case of the IHOP posts), parts of the chin and mouth. Furthermore, as with most traditional advertisements, all of the models are youthful, able-bodied, and slender or visibly fit. This use of conventionally attractive models serves to further advance the above ideology that AAVE appropriation is not only permissible and "safe" for white subjects (Roth-Gordon et al., 2020), but desirable and appealing as the posts covertly associate (white) physical beauty with the theft of Black linguistic culture. In addition, the continuous use of photos with unidentifiable, faceless groups connotes the message that seemingly many people are appropriating AAVE. These posts perpetuate the idea that the theft of AAVE is not happening in individual contexts: it is something that all (white, American) youth is doing, which not only serves to absolve the corporations' co-optation of it, but importantly reinforces the belief that AAVE is simply part of an ambiguous, unidentifiable youth culture and not a specific racial community. It is precisely this deracialization— this faulty notion that AAVE does not belong to any marginalized group— that justifies white subjects' theft of it, and which secures their comfort and fragility that refuses to acknowledge their individual participation in cultural appropriation. In addition, the consistent presence of group photos connotes the message that appropriating AAVE is something that is done joyfully with one's friends: it is something that occurs in quotidian, mundane circumstances (such as playing board games, riding in a car, etc)—

in other words, AAVE appropriation is not presented as extreme, unusual, or even problematic. It is merely a routinized practice that occurs within contexts of jovial camaraderie, which not only functions to once again make the appropriation of AAVE seem desirable and appealing, as well as justify corporations' co-optation of it, but importantly serves to further divorce AAVE from its cultural origins and transform it into a deracialized youth culture.

White and Racialized Users' Affective Responses:

In the following section, I first argue that white users are continually comforted, amused, and "affected by" (Paasonen, 2019, p. 50) the corporate ads because they are pleasurably reminded of their racial dominance over marginalized subjects. Secondly, I illuminate Black users' expressions of affective discomfort from the above posts to argue that this discomfort is generative (Hemmings, 2015) as it is mobilized into collectivity and critiques of white supremacy. There are three notable trends within white users' affective responses to the corporate posts: white users expressing their pleasure and joy in terms of bodily sensations, white users partaking in AAVE appropriation, and finally, white users expressing hyperbolic emotionality. Some exemplary cases of the first trend include: in response to a Chipotle Tweet that appropriates AAVE through hip-hop lyrics, a white female user replies, "I just want to hug whoever comes up with these tweets! Can we be best friends?" (Jeter, 2016); "my heart is happy" (@analitaism, 2016) in response to another Chipotle Tweet that appropriates "lit"; finally, in response to a Tweet from Denny's that says "hashbrowns on fleek" (2014), a white male user replies, "This is why Denny's takes the number 1 spot in my heart" (@JustinRobinsonO, 2014).

In these cases, the white users can be understood as recognizing the pleasurable and amusing "sensations conveyed on the screen" in the corporate Tweets within "their own bodies" (Paasonen, 2019, p. 50) and then expressing these sensations beneath the posts in solidarity. In

this sense, the posts can be seen as generating an "affective solidarity" (Hemmings, 2015, p. 153) of pleasure between the white-owned corporations and their white users. Knops and Petit (2022) note that it is through "moments of affective resonance that individuals recover a sense of agency and power" (p. 174) and this is precisely what these white users recover from this corporate appropriation of AAVE— a sense of empowerment, joy, and amusement. However, rather than through the actual act of appropriating, white users' joyful feeling states here are elicited through the witnessing and consumption of this appropriation. In this sense, the white consumers' sensations of pleasure are produced by the visual confirmation that white subjects are able steal and distort AAVE to advance their own ends (a form of white racial dominance)— and the knowledge that they themselves can participate in this dominance as well. In addition, the above white users' specific use of the terms "hug" and "heart" not only connote a distinctly bodily manifestation or sensation of joy, but directly highlight a nurturing and almost familial experience of comfort. User @analitaism's (2016) response that their "heart is happy" denotes a sense of loving satisfaction and fulfillment from cultural appropriation, while @JustinRobinsonO's (2014) claim that Denny's occupies a "spot in [his] heart" describes a literal sense of joyful fulfilment. Similarly, Jeter's (2016) comment that she "wants to hug whoever comes up with these tweets" connotes that this theft of AAVE actually incites a specific physical response— one of distinctly affectionate comfort, which is tied to white well-meaningness and contributes to the framing of appropriation as a supposed act of love.

This notion of stimulating a physical response is directly present in another notable trend in white subjects' affective comments: users joyfully appropriating AAVE in response to the corporate posts. For example, in response to a Chipotle Tweet that appropriates "lit" and specifies that their social media manager's name is Shawn, white male user Alex Young (2017) writes, "Shawn…you're dope as hell." In this context, "dope" is used to refer to someone or

something that is excellent; this specific meaning originated in hip-hop communities in the late-20th century (Perlman, 2016). Similarly, user @nathan1sk (2015) replies, "IHOP seriously on point right now! #thebestfoodever #rideordie" in response to a Tweet from IHOP that appropriates "squad." Much like the above use of "dope," @nathan1sk's use of "on point" originated in hip-hop culture and refers to something that is perfect or exactly right (Snider, 2021), while the accompanying hashtag "#rideordie" (@nathan1sk, 2015) is also frequently associated with rap artists. Finally, in response to a Tweet from Burger King that appropriates "slay," white female user @warm_conchas (2018) replies, "YAAAAAAAAAS BK." The term "yas" is used as a form of verbal encouragement and/or to express intense pleasure or excitement that, much like "slay," originated in late-20th century Black drag and ballroom culture (Amatulli, 2016). "Yas" is often spelled in internet contexts with multiple A's as the above user does in order to emphasize this expression of pleasure, and similar to the "ratchet clap" above, to mock or embody the "animatedness" and "exaggerated emotional expressiveness" (Ngai, 2005) that has come to serve as a false proxy for Black affect. Indeed, @warm_conchas' excessive use of capital letters much like the corporate replies above reinforces this hyperbolic emotionality that is a harmful, untrue stand-in of Black affect.

In the above second trend, corporate appropriation can once again be seen as producing an affective solidarity with their white consumers, however, in this case the posts actually incite these users to steal AAVE— to participate in this exploitative embodiment of Blackness. In these examples, the affective solidarity is taken one step further from experiencing the same pleasure conveyed on screen to participating in the same pleasurable act of white racial dominance. Thus, these posts produce a form of "activating affects" (Knops & Petit, 2022) that impact users' "capacity to act" (p. 171) and "drive individuals towards" action (p. 172)— in this case, driving subjects towards cultural appropriation. Put another way, these affects of pleasure are not

only a "social and collectivizing force" (Anable, 2018, p. xviii) for the white corporations and their consumers (bonding them together over shared feelings of joy at racial superiority), but a physically mobilizing force as well— in that white users are compelled to physically type out and publish the comments appropriating AAVE. In this sense, these responses are directly indicative of Roth-Gordon et al.'s (2020) argument above that the corporate posts "allow white people to safely partake in black language and culture" (p. 122)— they literally enable the white users to pleasantly and mundanely participate in linguistic appropriation and reaffirm their power over marginalized speakers without facing any consequences. In addition, the above notion of affective solidarity that is present in both trends indicates that these corporations assert that they believe their (prioritized) consumers are white subjects. The fact that these posts effectively convey bodily sensations through the screen and physically mobilize users to participate in white racial dominance indicate that these posts are *meant* to speak to white individuals.

A final significant trend in white users' comments is the expression of exaggerated emotionality in personal replies to the brands. For example, in response to a Tweet from Burger King that appropriates "bae," several white users reply: "IM LITERALLY CRYING" (@BehkaG, 2014); "IM SCREAMING" (@dizzylizzyy_, 2014); "HELP I AM DEAD" (@nckbrrs, 2014); similarly, in response to another Burger King Tweet with the term "bae," a white female user writes, "hahahahahahahahahahahahahahha lifeee" (@engym_, 2014). In contrast to the corporate posts in the previous section which evoke a hyperbolic emotionality coupled with the strategic use of AAVE in order to embody a stereotypical form of Black affect, in these cases, white users' exaggerated expressiveness (which does not include AAVE) indicates the intense, excessive pleasure that they derive from these posts. Nearly all of the above cases use entirely capital letters in their responses, which connotes shouting and a sense of urgency— an unrestrained and seemingly involuntary and instantaneous sensation of excitement and

pleasure at the witnessing and consumption of AAVE. Here, it is specifically the act of appropriation that "recover[s] a sense of power" (Knops & Petit, 2022)— only when AAVE is (mis)used and stolen at a distance from actual Black subjects. Once again, this act of appropriation is so pleasurable because it is a confirmation that Blackness is simply a highly stylized alterity (Fleetwood, 2010) that white subjects can temporarily indulge in as a "playground" (hooks, 1992) without having to experience the actual realities of racial injustices. This explains why white users continuously "attach themselves" (Paasonen, 2019, p. 50) to these posts— attachment in terms of liking and following the corporate accounts as well as an emotional attachment that is manifested in their persistent, hyperbolic responses. In addition, the intense, unrestrained laughter expressed in the comments above is also situated within a much broader history of laughing at Blackness: white users' laughter here is undergirded by decades-old white supremacist beliefs of Black subjects as less "civilized" and educated than their white counterparts. In this sense, white users' can also be seen as deriving affective pleasure and a sense of power from the notion that they perceive themselves as more intelligent than Black speakers. Even if the white users above claim to not recognize these values (a form of white innocence), their laughter is still informed by this inarticulable, unconscious bias— further affirming how laughter as a bodily intensity "circulate[s] in and through history and context" (Mason, 2016, p. 827).

In addition, what is notable about this final trend is that most of the white users above either repost or duplicate the brands' original content within their reply Tweets before including their own exaggerated responses. This act of retweeting can be seen as a form of affective repetition. In her examination of activist Twitter use surrounding the 2011 Egyptian uprising, Zizi Papacharissi (2016) explains that "[r]efrains reinforce affect, and in the case of #egypt, *repetition reinforced the affective pace* [emphasis added] of the movement online" (p. 318).

While these response Tweets do not function as refrains (or are part of a political movement), white users' republishing of the brands' original AAVE appropriation is a form of repetition that reinforces and "increases the affective value" (Paasonen, 2015, p. 28) of the corporations' original posts. By repeating the brands' theft and distortion of AAVE alongside their hyperbolic responses, white users can be seen as strengthening their affective attachment to not only the corporations, but to cultural appropriation and white racial dominance more broadly.

In contrast, let us examine racialized users' affective discomfort from the above corporate posts. There are two notable trends in Black users' Twitter comments collected for this study: firstly, users connecting corporate co-optation of AAVE to the broader exploitation of Black culture; secondly, users calling out specific corporations over their appropriation. One prominent example of the former trend includes the following Tweet by user @Obee1ne (2017): "Black Twitter is being milked of its resources like Africa.. Every viral tweet, slang & lingo is being monetized by corporations." Obee1ne's specific use of the term "milked" not only directly highlights this notion of exploitation and extraction for profit, but also connotes that this linguistic theft (much like actual cattle milking) results in a pleasurable and enjoyable end-product for the subjects conducting the exploitation. Obee1ne's Tweet resulted in numerous impassioned replies: "soon, they'll be charging you to use your own words & culture" (@HowAboutBeth, 2017); "we've been exploited for our excellence since day 1 in this country" (@BeatinU_915, 2017); "Black people have and will always be a resource. A disrespected, misused and abused resource" (@EventsAvenueKe, 2017); "look at how we popularized Vine, and the 99.8% of the ppl [*sic*] benefitting financially from it aren't black" (@partimevegan, 2017); "We can never have nothing all our own, except of course the travesties purveyed upon us by systemic oppression. #BlackMindsMatter" (@BurningWisdom, 2017); "it's a modern kind of

evil" (@SlieAfrica, 2017); and finally, "its not cool till the white man starts selling it :(" (@Culturechef89, 2017).

Black users are not comforted or even amused by these corporate co-optations of AAVE like the white subjects above, but rather are distressed by and acutely aware of brands' exploitations of Black linguistic culture and their exercise of white racial dominance. In other words, these responses demonstrate that these corporate posts are not designed for or meant to address Black consumers (Roth-Gordon et al., 2020). For the above racialized users, corporate appropriation of AAVE is not mundane or innocuous, but rather generates affects of hopelessness and despair: in particular, users @BeatinU_915, @EventsAvenueKe, and @BurningWisdom articulate a felt sense of the endlessness of cultural appropriation. By distinctly calling attention to systemic oppression (@BurningWisdom, 2017), the feeling of being "exploited […] since day 1" (@BeatinU_915, 2017), and the feeling that they "have and will always be a resource" (@EventsAvenueKe, 2017), these users not only highlight the perpetual commodification of Black culture, but also transform their discomfort and despair elicited by the corporate posts into broader critiques of white supremacy— importantly situating the posts within histories of the exploitation of Blackness. Similarly, @SlieAfrica's (2017) assertion that AAVE appropriation is a "modern kind of evil" connotes that these corporate posts are the latest manifestations of an ongoing oppressive practice, while @partimevegan's (2017) Tweet, by referencing the now discontinued short-form video-sharing application Vine, situates corporate co-optation of AAVE within a history of social media sites profiting off of Black cultural expression. In addition, @HowAboutBeth's (2017) Tweet, "soon, they'll be charging you to use your own words & culture," emphasizes the non-consensual reworking of AAVE into a highly stylized alterity as discussed above, and is directly indicative of Jane H. Hill's (2008) notion that through the process of linguistic appropriation "words are commodified and become property" (p. 158).

Lastly, Culturechef89's (2017) Tweet, "its not cool till the white man starts selling it :(" not only highlights this same process of commodification, but also the notion that AAVE is only valued and made desirable once instrumentalized by white subjects, while the specific use of a sad emoji directly denotes feelings of despair.

In addition, the fact that all of the above comments are situated within the same consecutive Twitter thread or conversation (as responses to @Obee1ne's original Tweet) indicates that these Black users forge new connections and collectivities around their shared feelings of discomfort. In other words, these are not standalone or isolated experiences of affective dissonance. Whereas the corporations and white users above experience an affective solidarity of pleasure based on the witnessing and/or participation in white racial dominance, in this case, Black users form an affective solidarity around discomfort, despair, and anger that is mobilized into critiques of cultural appropriation. These notions of affective solidarity, collectivities, and cultural criticism ultimately indicate that Black users' affective discomfort is generative. Affect is once again a trigger here or an activation that drives subjects towards action (Knops & Petit, 2022), but in this case, Black users are driven into community-building and online resistance of white supremacy.

A final trend among the responses collected is racialized users denouncing and calling attention to specific corporations' appropriation of AAVE. For example, user @MiQL (2017) Tweets a collection of screenshots of three different brands appropriating "on fleek" in their digital ads, followed by the caption, "Maybe, one day, peaches monroee will get credit." In contrast to the above users' more generalized discussions of cultural appropriation or broader systemic racism, here @MiQL calls attention to precise instances of linguistic theft and highlights the need for proper attribution. In addition, user @Truly_Tiiny (2017) Tweets a screenshot of an online ad that appropriates (and misuses) hip-hop lyrics but features only non-

Black models, followed by the caption, “look at this shit.” Once again, the denouncement here is targeted to a specific corporation. Similarly, user @dapwell (2014) Tweets, “@DennysDiner your 54.4 million dollar lawsuit for anti-black discrimination was on fleek.” The use of “on fleek” in this instance is sarcastic: @dapwell is using the same AAVE term that Denny’s uses in their Tweet in order to publicly shame them and call attention to their racist acts. In other words, @dapwell is using Denny’s own promotional discursive method against them. In another example, user @ThomasAHester2 (2017) retweets @Obee1ne’s original Tweet, but this time also tagging the official accounts of Arby’s, Burger King, and Hamburger Helper. This retweeting is once again a form of affective repetition, while also being a springboard for other kinds of resistance as @ThomasAHester2 takes @Obee1ne’s original critique one step further by denouncing specific corporations. Finally, in response to an IHOP Tweet appropriating Missy Elliot lyrics, user @stopolive (2014) replies, “GIVE @MissyElliott HER COINS!!!”— meaning to compensate and credit the artist for profiting from her lyrics without consent. While these Tweets feature less overt descriptions or articulations of affect than the first trend, they still importantly highlight “the disruptive role of affect” (Hemmings, 2015, p. 148) within mainstream digital advertising campaigns— how affect is mobilized to disrupt and contest the quotidian commercialization of Black linguistic culture in mainstream digital spaces that frequently goes unnoticed or unchallenged. In the above cases, racialized users’ affective discomfort is “an important *condition* for [their] resistance” of cultural appropriation and white supremacy; the sense of anger and dissonance that they feel when viewing the corporate posts “is also a register of injustice” which then “become[s] a desire to rectify that” (Hemmings, 2015, p. 153) injustice. In other words, their experiences of affective discomfort are essential for their online protest and consciousness-raising. Much like the first trend, racialized users’ anger,

frustration, and rage here are "activating affects" (Knops & Petit, 2022) that are then creatively transformed into online activism against cultural appropriation.

Conclusion:

This chapter illuminates how white-owned corporations steal, distort, and instrumentalize AAVE phrases in their digital advertising strategies, as well as examines the affective responses from white and racialized users. It contributes to scholarly conversations surrounding affect and racism in advertising by highlighting how corporate posts non-consensually rework Black linguistic culture into a highly stylized alterity, which elicits affects of pleasure and hyperbolic emotionality both for the organizations and their white consumers. As I have argued in this chapter, this corporate appropriation of AAVE ultimately generates affective resonances of comfort for white subjects by functioning as pleasurable reminders of racial superiority. In particular, the Tweets by Burger King, Chipotle, IHOP, and Wendy's enable the corporations to embody forms of stylishness and "outlawness" (Fleetwood, 2010) from Black culture as well as transform AAVE into a palatable and non-threatening commodity for white audiences. In the case of visual ads, the Tweets and Instagram posts that appropriate AAVE in their captions but feature only white individuals in the accompanying photos serve as forms of AAVE deracialization. Additionally, analyzing the affective comments beneath the posts indicates that white users are continually comforted, moved, and "affected by" (Paasonen, 2019, p. 50) the corporate ads because they are pleasurably reminded of their racial dominance over marginalized subjects. In contrast, Black users' affective responses reveal two trends: users connect the corporate posts to broader systemic oppression, and they publicly shame corporations over specific instances of cultural appropriation. Both trends indicate how racialized users' affective

discomfort is generative as it is mobilized into collectivity and online resistance of white supremacy.

As Roth-Gordon et al. (2020) note, corporations' appropriation of AAVE on social media in part functions to disguise forms of "racial surveillance to keep people of color 'in their place'" (p. 126). These posts are situated within a broader white supremacist culture of valuing Black labour and creativity only when actual Black subjects are erased or invisiblized, as well as a history of white subjects misusing the linguistic creations of Black speakers to advance their own interests while simultaneously silencing their creators. In other words, corporate appropriation of AAVE on social media is merely the latest manifestation of the control and suppression of Black subjects to appease white consumers. In addition, as consumers in our neoliberal culture increasingly turn to corporations to express social justice sentiments (Sobande, 2019), the advertising industry must be held more accountable for marketing their corporations as anti-racist and socially just, yet covertly reproducing the same forms of racial oppression that they claim to oppose. Merely including more Black models or diverse representations in their visual advertisements does not justify the theft of Black linguistic culture or make it permissible: as Fleetwood (2010) and I have argued above, white-owned corporations consistently and intentionally instrumentalize the imagery of racialized bodies in their marketing material to advance their own interests. Alternatively, what corporations must address (as noted in the introduction) is the lack of people of colour they employed in their advertising departments— as a breadth of diverse voices can contribute to preventing cultural appropriation and the reproduction of pernicious stereotypes in the first place.

Ultimately, the posts examined in this chapter demonstrate that so much of mainstream digital marketing practices are predicated on the theft, mockery, and erasure of Black voices while prioritizing the comfort and pleasures of white subjects. Corporate co-optation of AAVE is

not the only prominent online trend that encompasses the distortion of Black linguistic culture, ridiculing Black subjects for white users' amusement, as well as permitting white subjects to "safely partake in black language and culture" (Roth-Gordon et al., 2020, p. 122). In the next chapter, I turn to meme creation practices on TikTok that appropriate AAVE by stealing the actual voices of Black creators.

Chapter Two: Performing Blackness: Digital Blackface & Audio-Visual Memes on TikTok

Introduction:

In October 2021, white American singer Mahogany Lox uploaded a video filmed at Disneyland Park to her seven and a half million TikTok followers (2021). In the video, the camera pans across an abandoned section of the amusement park (at the time under construction) as an irritated and frightened look appears on Lox's face. "Whew, child. The ghetto," says Lox— emphasizing the absent "d" in the word *chile*— only it is not Lox's voice. Lox has sampled the audio recording of American reality television personality NeNe Leakes and is lip-synching to her voice. Accompanying the video is a hip-hop drum beat featuring turntable scratching and the sound of a police siren. Aside from the blatant, oblivious white advantage on display here (a multi-billion dollar theme park with ticket costs ranging over one hundred dollars per day is supposedly the "ghetto"), what is most revealing about this eight-second clip is that Blackness is the entire joke. More specifically, the performance of a distorted, grossly exaggerated form of Blackness is the joke. Lox's video also evokes longstanding notions of white fear (Lipsitz, 2018) — the mere idea of a racialized space is a site of terror and distress for white populations. Lox's appropriation of Leakes' voice is not unique: over 78 000 TikTok users have sampled, edited, and recontextualized this clip of Leakes' audio for the creation of popular memes.

Lox's video represents one of countless examples of the appropriation, distortion, and circulation of Black voices without consent by white users for humour on the popular video-sharing platform TikTok, which has acquired over 1.2 billion active users (Weimann & Masri, 2022, p. 168). The corporate linguistic appropriation examined in the previous chapter (which relies solely on the textual theft and reproduction of AAVE) is now compounded by TikTok's audio and video editing features that allow not only corporations but everyday users to sample the actual voices of other creators. The purpose of this chapter is to conduct a critical sonic and

visual analysis of TikTok posts that appropriate Black women's voices for the creation of memes, as well as interrogate how anti-Black racism is fundamental to the platform's success. This chapter will focus on three Black female creators who have been sampled by tens of thousands of TikTok users without consent: Coco Jones, Brianna Blackmon, and Jasmine Collins— ultimately situating their memeification through this appropriation as forms of digital blackface (Jackson, 2017) and misogynoir (Bailey, 2021).

The memes examined in this study represent the latest manifestations of the longstanding trend of making fun of Black women on social networking sites. From a video of Twitter user Quen Blackwell crying over battling with suicidal thoughts and eating disorders that garnered over five million views and resulted in users taking screenshots to generate countless memes (Erman, 2021); to Kimberly Wilkins' interview with a local news station after she escaped an apartment fire that became a meme sensation in 2012 (Thomas, 2013); to NeNe Leakes' face being used for countless reaction GIFs (Michele Jackson, 2017)— and even Kayla Lewis' coinage of "on fleek" as examined in chapter one— Black women and their expressions have been turned into memes for white viewers' enjoyment for years. Thus, I situate the TikTok posts in this study within a broader North American internet culture of mocking Black women for personal and social gain.

Recently, scholars have begun to examine the proliferation of racism and antisemitism on TikTok (Divon & Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2022; Matamoros-Fernández et al., 2022; Weimann & Masri, 2022), however, as Cienna Davis (2022) notes, TikTok users' rampant appropriation and performance of Black femininity as a means to achieve online success remains an under-researched phenomenon (p. 31). Thus, this chapter not only seeks to address this literature gap, but importantly demonstrate how these TikTok memes of Black women articulate another form of social media appropriation of Black cultural expressions that are highly performative: they

become a "participatory form" (Davis, 2022, p. 31) of anti-Black racism based on distorted performances and embodied masquerades of Black womanhood. This chapter's analysis focuses on the following research questions: How do white creators' theft and exaggerated performance of Black women's vocality and comportment for the purpose of humour perpetuate digital minstrelsy? How is TikTok as a corporation complicit in this anti-Black racism, and how is appropriation of Black cultural production built into the platform's affordances? This chapter argues that white users' non-consensual sampling of Black women's voices on TikTok reproduces white supremacist values of Black femininity as unintelligent and uncivilized, ultimately constituting a unique and insidious form of oppression against Black women.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the recent literature on digital minstrelsy and the performance of Blackness. Then, I examine the different forms of misogynoir that are at stake in each meme trend appropriating Jones, Blackmon, and Collins. Firstly, in the case of Jones, I examine how white users recontextualize Jones' story about code-switching to associate Black women with distinct notions of poor judgement. In the case of Blackmon, I examine how Blackmon's specific use of the term "Karen," a form of signifying (Gates, 1988) against white women, is appropriated by white users to remove its resistant power for Black subjects. Thirdly, in Collins' case, I argue that non-Black creators perform the anger and frustration expressed in Collins' original recording in order to reproduce a "controlling image" of Black women as aggressive and unrestrained (Bailey, 2021). Finally, this chapter concludes with an analysis of TikTok's affordances to illuminate how digital blackface is built into the application's features and is integral to its corporate success.

Literature Review:

There are two main scholarly discussions that this chapter contributes to: digital

minstrelsy and the performance of Blackness more broadly. Firstly, Lauren Michele Jackson (2017) defines digital blackface as the "various types of minstrel performance that become available in cyberspace" (para. 2). Much of the current writing on digital blackface has focused on how non-black subjects excessively use GIFs and images of Black people to express heightened emotions and/or humour online (Hess & O'Neill, 2017; Jackson, 2017; Jones, 2018). This chapter builds on these recent studies to apply digital blackface specifically to videos in which white users lip-synch to Black women's voices and mime grossly exaggerated actions based on harmful stereotypes of Black expression, much like traditional theatrical minstrel performance. I focus on how white creators use particular affordances of TikTok such as seamless audio sampling, editing, and re-posting features to "embody blackness" (Jackson, 2017, para. 3). One of the few academic studies that examines this distinct video manifestation of digital blackface is Cienna Davis' (2022) work on TikTok dance challenges in which white performers appropriate and receive all the credit and acclaim for the dances originated by Black creators, particularly Black women. Davis argues that the online mimicry and ridicule of "Black women traces back to the legacy of chattel slavery" and that the "enslaved Black woman was marked as 'a receptacle for others' desires, fears, and capitalist ambitions'" (Johnson, 2020, as cited in Davis, 2022, p. 32). This study is informed by Davis' work, arguing that in the case of the TikTok memes analyzed in this chapter, Black femininity is marked to fulfill the entertainment and pleasures of the non-Black creators and their audiences, as well as advance their desires and ambitions for virality.

In addition, this chapter builds on the recent literature on the performance of Blackness to situate the TikTok memes mocking Jones, Blackmon, and Collins as part of a broader, insidious legacy of blackface minstrelsy in mainstream North American culture that does not merely include the use of face paint, but encompasses oppressive verbal and linguistic performances as

well. For example, in his work on nineteenth-century blackface theatre practice, Eric Lott (2013) argues that "[e]very time you hear an expansive white man drop into his version of black English, you are in the presence of blackface's unconscious return" (p. 5). Lott's notion of "unconsciousness" is directly aligned with the above literature on digital minstrelsy, as the non-Black subjects who continuously use Black individuals in GIFs or TikTok audio-visual memes often do not perceive their behaviours as exploitative or racist, nor seemingly recognize their individual participation in white supremacy. In addition, as Lott's argument above indicates, the literature on blackface performance has traditionally focused on how white men enact stereotypes of Black masculinity (Davis, 2022; Thompson, 2021): thus, this chapter advances the literature on the performance of Blackness to illuminate how digital blackface relies on the distinct appropriation and mockery of Black femininity. In another extensive study on historical blackface, Ayanna Thompson (2021) argues that there is a "powerful historical arc that has reaffirmed over and over again that performing blackness is a white property" (p. 112). Although Thompson's work does not examine social media productions, I apply Thompson's concept in this chapter to not only explain how white users receive all the credit, online success, and recognition for the AAVE terms and creativity originated by Black users, but that Blackness is only admired and made desirable distinctly when it is performed by white creators.

Given that Black women are the primary subjects of digital minstrelsy as noted above, these online practices reproduce a form of misogynoir. Originally conceptualized by Moya Bailey (2021), misogynoir "describes the uniquely co-constitutive racialized and sexist violence that befalls Black women as a result of their simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and gender marginalization" (p. 38). Building on Bailey's (2021) research as well as the above literatures on digital blackface and historical minstrelsy, this chapter focuses on how these TikTok posts are not only a form of misogynoir that are direct descendants of the

minstrel show— as well as instrumentialize Black women for comedic success— but importantly, reify white supremacist values of Black women's "lack of femininity, undesirability, and unintelligence" (Bailey, 2021, p. 38). Another recent examination of the overlapping racial and gendered marginalization that Black women face is Francesca Sobande's (2021) work on representations of racial abuse that specifically occur online. Similarly to the above concept, Sobande asserts that when seeking to understand the forms of "anti-Black digital racism it is imperative to account for how they are shaped by power relations concerning anti-Blackness, sexism, and interlinked structural oppression" (p. 134). Thus, this chapter approaches these TikTok memes as not occurring in a vacuum, but rather as situated within a broader white supremacist internet culture where Black women experience a significant amount of vitriolic abuse and harassment that is often ignored by the host platforms and corporations themselves (Sobande, 2021). Indeed, research indicates that Black women are disproportionately targeted by online harm and are 84% more likely than white women to be mentioned in abusive or problematic comments (Amnesty International, 2018). Thus, this chapter illuminates how the racial abuse Black women face online can take many forms— not only the overtly violent or extreme hate speech cited above, but also via the insidious social media performances of Black minstrelsy so often dismissed as simply humorous or innocuous.

Methods:

My analysis focuses on three TikTok trends I have identified that typify the appropriation of Black women's voices on TikTok, examining multiple videos within those trends. This method allows me to illustrate how these instances of digital blackface are not isolated, but rather are situated within a broader internet context of participatory performance, recontextualization, and conformity for social gain. As noted in this chapter's opening, I characterize Jones, Blackmon's,

and Collins' recordings as different "trends" given that each set of memes that are created from appropriating their voices rely on and reproduce different forms of misogynoir that are specific to the content of each of their original videos. In addition, drawing on Bucher and Helmond's (2018) work on social media affordances, I also analyze how TikTok's video and audio editing features, which allow users to sample, cut, and share audio clips without providing the location of the original source, are implicated in this linguistic appropriation. Given that TikTok allows any and all sounds to be sampled and lip-synched to, I argue that the platform connotes to users that sampling other people's voices for humorous miming is not only acceptable (Boffone, 2021), but actively encouraged through a large button that says "Use this sound."

My critical sonic and visual analysis is informed by Gillian Rose's (2007) investigation of visual culture and Jennifer Stoever's (2016) examination of sound and race. Firstly, Rose explains that visual "discourse analysis can allow us to 'explore how images construct specific views of the social world ... [and] how those specific views or accounts are constructed as real or truthful or natural through particular regimes of truth'" (as quoted in Massanari & Chess, 2018, p. 6). In particular, my analysis examines what kinds of visuals and actions are repeated and (re)performed in the meme-ing of Black women's voices. More specifically, I looked for patterns of particular performance gestures in the TikTok memes that are based on stereotypes of Black women's comportment: neck-swivelling, sweeping arm movements, and exaggerated facial gestures. I am interested in how these performance patterns and TikTok memes "construct specific views" (ibid.) of Black women as unrestrained, unintelligent, and available to be instrumentalized for online success, and how these views are perceived as "natural through particular" (ibid.) historical stereotypes and controlling images of Black women such as the Sapphire and Jezebel tropes (Bailey, 2021). In addition, my sonic examination is informed by Stoever's (2016) method of "sonically attuned analyses that amplify the aurality of race" (p. 7):

for Stoever, this involves examining historical mainstream representations and stereotypes to illuminate how certain racialized bodies are expected to produce certain sounds, and how certain sounds have become proxies or markers of race. For example, Stoever notes that the sound of hip-hop through car speakers has become a stand-in for the bodies of youthful Black men in North American culture (p. 13). Thus, in this chapter, I am interested in the relationship between the sound of the Black women's voices and the above visual performance patterns. More specifically, in analyzing the TikTok memes, observations were made on the choice of background music, the intonation or rhythm of the original Black women's voice recordings, what kinds of American accents the women had, if any, and how these were mimicked or not by other TikTok users in order to examine why Black women's voices are associated with certain exaggerated physical actions and facial gestures.

The three trends I selected for analysis— the audio recordings of Jones, Blackmon, and Collins— were sourced from 2019 until 2022. This timeline was chosen for several reasons: firstly, TikTok's popularity and use in North America was aided immensely by early-pandemic lockdown conditions given that individuals were restricted to their homes and were searching for "new kinds of short-form content and new avenues for creativity" as entertainment (Littleton, 2021). Secondly, the platform saw the rise of many viral moments tied to Black cultural expression at the end of 2019 due to hip-hop songs by artists Lil Nas X and K Camp becoming extremely popular on the application and inspiring dance challenges (Parham, 2020). These specific audio clips of Jones, Blackmon, and Collins were selected not only because they were each sampled thousands of times (with combined views of well over one million each), but importantly because two of the three clips were stolen from larger productions on other platforms (YouTube and Twitter) and uploaded onto TikTok without consent, illustrating how users take advantage of TikTok's reposting features to ridicule Black women. To find specific posts within

these trends to analyze, I first used TikTok's search functions to locate the original audio recordings (searching the original Black creators' names, keywords related to their audio recordings, etc). At the bottom of every TikTok, there is a feature that allows users to see all the other videos that sample that TikTok (whether it be 1 additional video or one million); there is not an official name for this feature, but for the purposes of this chapter, I will refer to it as the "Examine Samples" button. Thus, once I located the original posts by Jones, Blackmon, and Collins, I clicked on the "Examine Samples" button and viewed all the videos that sampled their respective voices. It was from this bank of videos that I chose specific posts to analyze, selecting TikToks based on if they included the above patterns of performance gestures mocking Black women's comportment, as well as the ones that received the most views and/or likes. I then saved these posts by adding them to the "Favourites" tab in my personal TikTok profile so that I could return to them for close analysis as a corpus.

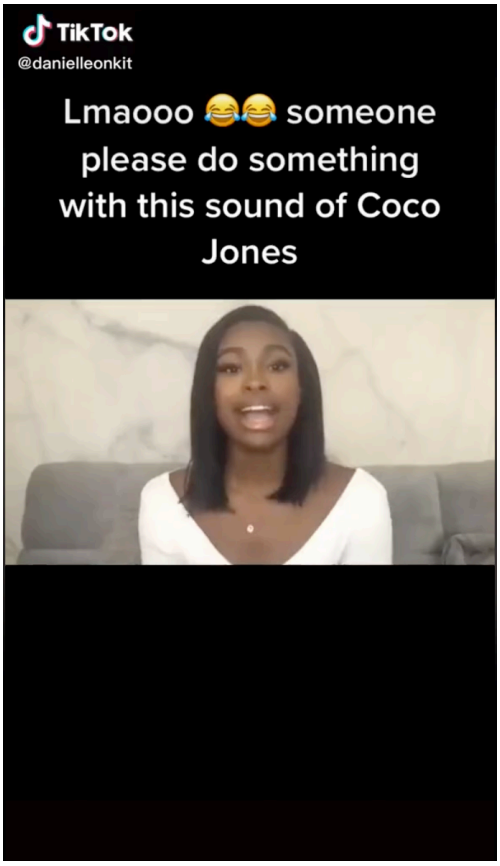
Coco Jones and Code-Switching:

The first set of examples analyzed here exemplify how distinct misogynoirist values of Black women as unintelligent and possessing poor judgement are reproduced on TikTok. In the following section, I argue that white users appropriate Coco Jones' voice, embodied comportment, and the AAVE phrase "on period," as well as recontextualize Jones' story about code-switching and workplace adversity to advance their own white interests. Uploaded by user Daniel Leon-Kit (@danielleonkit) on September 17, 2020, the video of Jones that went viral on TikTok depicts the American actor and singer speaking directly to the camera about her struggles working on multiple television productions for the Disney Channel (see Figure 6). As a teenager, Jones had supporting roles in programs including *So Random* (2011-2012), *Let It Shine* (2012), and *Good Luck Charlie* (2010-2014). The clip that Leon-Kit stole and transferred onto TikTok

was taken from a much longer confessional video that Jones had uploaded to her personal YouTube account ("What Really Happened," 2020). In the TikTok clip, Jones discusses how she felt the need to shift from her natural AAVE vocabulary and accent to more 'standard' white English language in order to succeed at work. It is notable how Jones alters her facial expressions as well, going from overly cheerful and excited when demonstrating how she spoke at work, to more relaxed, subdued, and solemn when switching back to her natural speech— suggesting that this constant switching is troublesome and a serious matter for Jones. This form of linguistic shift is known "code-switching" which refers to the use of "several languages or dialects in the same conversation or sentence" (Gardner-Chloros, 2009, p. 4) and it is often done in order to accommodate the linguistic preferences of other speakers (ibid., p. 78). Jones' story highlights the distinct linguistic oppression that Black people and other individuals from marginalized communities face, being forced to adjust their style of speech to "optimize the comfort of others" for employment opportunities (McCluney et al., 2019, para. 3). Jones' clip as it appears on TikTok ends with the actor remarking, "I was going to get employee of the month and that's on period" (as quoted in Leon-Kit, 2020). The phrase "on period"— often stylized in social media posts as "on periodt" to mimic the accent of AAVE speakers— originated from Southern Black queer communities and is used to add emphasis at the end of a sentence (Davis, 2020). The term was popularized on the internet by American female hip-hop duo City Girls (2018) in their song, "Period (We Live)" (Dictionary.com, 2020), which features the term prominently in the chorus as a way to emphasize their success and beauty; thus, Jones' usage continues this tradition of Black women employing "period" to underscore personal success.

What is significant about Leon-Kit's original TikTok post in which he has copied and reposted Jones' Youtube clip is that his video is accompanied by the description, "someone please do something with this sound of Coco Jones" followed by two laughing emojis:

Figure 6



Note. Leon-Kit (2020). TikTok.

This command or call to action not only suggests new ways of listening (i.e. searching for material that has the potential to go viral), but also indicates how there was an intention of appropriation, mockery, and performance from the very beginning. The use of the words "do something" also reveals how Jones' clip on Leon-Kit's page was deployed to be instrumentalized and meme-ified by others; for Leon-Kit, Jones' voice serves no other function than to be remixed and ridiculed. According to his TikTok profile, Leon-Kit self-identifies as a queer Black man: while it may seem surprising that Jones' video would be stolen and instrumentalized by someone within her own racial community, Bailey (2021) highlights that there is a long history of Black men who "use Black women as vehicles for comedic success" (p. 38) and that often "Black men comedians reify an image that denigrates Black women, cis and trans alike" (p. 42). Bailey also

highlights how certain Black queer comedians make Black women the targets of their ridicule and this notion can shed some light on Leon-Kit's positionality in denigrating Jones: by "making Black women the punch line of [his] jokes," Leon-Kit is "able to move in the world with the slight advantage [his] masculinity affords" (Bailey, 2021, p. 47). In other words, as a queer Black man, Leon-Kit can be seen as participating in the same toxic masculine culture that can be turned against him— in the form of homophobia— for conformity and social gain online. Leon-Kit's theft and reposting of Jones' YouTube video therefore highlights how appropriation is not necessarily or solely enacted by white subjects: acts of appropriation can also be rooted in misogynistic values which can be targeted towards subjects of one's own racial or cultural community. Thus, in this case, Leon-Kit's appropriation is an enactment of Black male misoygnoir against a Black woman, which can help serve white supremacist ends. Bailey's work and Leon-Kit's appropriation of Jones on TikTok therefore illustrate the reality of misogynoir within Black communities and how misogynoir can be perpetuated by individuals for personal gain regardless of race or sexual identity.

Directly in line with Bailey's (2021) notion of mocking and performing Black women as a "path to more [online] visibility and success" (p. 42), let us examine some instances of white users appropriating Jones' voice from Leon-Kit's post and performing exaggerated actions for comedic effect. In this trend, TikTok creators use Jones' audio to make reference to previous employment experiences that they regret, following the same tone and subject matter of Jones' original video. In one post, prominent TikTok user Noah Beck (2020), who has over thirty-four million followers at the time of writing, lip-synchs along to Jones' voice while referencing a past advertisement he filmed for a failed electronic muscle stimulator company. Like nearly all the videos in this trend, Beck gazes directly at the camera as footage of his ad appears behind him. There are three elements in this post that are worth examining: firstly, this visual structure makes

it nearly impossible for viewers to discern whose voice Beck is appropriating— this quite literally invisibilizes Jones' voice and in turn contributes to the erasure of AAVE. Secondly, the jovial expression on Beck's face coupled with the lighthearted tone of the ad projecting behind him connotes that Jones' original audio describes a similarly cheerful experience. Yet, as discussed above, Jones' video actually expresses more serious, racialized employment adversity. Thus, Beck appropriates Jones' audio which describes a very distinct, racial and gendered experience of oppression, and strategically decontextualizes it in order to act out trivial matters that advance his own interests— in this case, receiving a paid sponsorship and over two-and-a-half million likes.

Thirdly, it is evident that Beck, as an athletic, conventionally attractive, youthful white male, is sexualizing himself in this post: he is speaking to the camera without a shirt on, the ad displaying behind him emphasizes his defined abdominal muscles, he expresses a flirtatious smirk, etc. Thus, by appropriating and performing Jones' voice within the context of an overtly sensual post, Beck is in many ways evoking the stereotype of the hypersexualized Black woman, or the "Jezebel" caricature (Bailey, 2021, p. 64). As Bailey (2021) notes, this deeply harmful stereotype was not only used to justify the oppression, objectification, and sexual harassment of Black women, but it also created a "flat, one-dimensional view of Black women, so much so that other images of Black women remain out of frame"; real Black women are thus expected to be as sexual, promiscuous, and unsophisticated as this caricature (p. 45). However, given that Jones' original video is not sexual in any way, Beck is quite literally misusing and distorting her own voice against her. He is imposing the Jezebel caricature onto Jones. This evocation of the Jezebel trope draws a direct connection to the legacy of minstrel shows and indicates the ways in which minstrelsy is perpetuated online.

Let us examine this notion of minstrel performance more deeply through two examples in

which white users act out an exaggerated, grossly distorted form of Black femininity for humorous purposes. Both of these cases make use of the same physical gestures that reify vicious stereotypes of Black women and both received over two million views each. In the first case, singer Rebecca Black (2020) lip-synchs to Jones' voice while staring directly at the camera: following the same visual structure as Beck, footage of a widely criticized music video that Black released as a teenager appears directly behind her (expressing a sentiment of regret). As she performs Jones' voice, Black also performs excessive actions of neck-swivelling, widening her eyes, puckering her lips, and flailing her arm directly at the camera. As Bailey (2021) notes, these actions not only paint Black women as loud, aggressive, and hysterical (p. 37), but more importantly are a site of intense pleasure and enjoyment for white people given the millions of likes the video received. Just like with traditional minstrel shows, the performance of Blackness here is entertainment for white viewers— and a source of immense online success for the white performer. In this sense, the distorted performance of Black femininity serves to solely fulfill the needs of both the white audience and the white actor. Similarly, the notions of aggression and unrestraint that Bailey (2021) highlights above contribute to white supremacist values of Black women as unsophisticated, uncivilized, and non-conforming to dominant (white) feminine ideals of submissiveness and temperance. In addition, much like the physical gesture of "the snap" as discussed in the introductory chapter, Black's distinct use of arm-flailing while lip-synching to a Black feminine voice continues this history of using exaggerated, sweeping arm motions to mock and playact Black femininity and/or queerness (Johnson, 1995; Riggs, 1991). Whether Black is familiar with the history of the snap as a harmful stereotype or not, our white supremacist, heteronormative culture still has come to identify excessive arm movements with Blackness and femininity (largely through media representations) that Black now reproduces in her TikTok. Finally, the fact that Beck and Black use Jones' voice to distinctly describe previous unwise

decisions directly associates Black women with notions of unintelligence. Jones' voice is not appropriated to celebrate success in this meme, but rather she is used to express a moment of poor judgement, which in turn contributes to the racist belief that Black women possess poor judgement.

In the second case, white male user Blake Ruescher (@countingschleeps, 2020) deviates from the visual structure of Beck and Black's posts: rather than having footage of a past regretful video display behind him, Ruescher instead speaks directly to the camera while holding a laptop with Jones' original video playing on it. In this post, Ruescher is not lip-synching to her audio, but actually speaking her lines along to Jones' recording. Let us briefly examine what the act of uttering these lines achieves: not only is Ruescher quite literally erasing Jones' voice as his speech dominates over hers, but more importantly, he adopts a southern-inspired Black accent to do so. In this sense, Ruescher's appropriation of AAVE does not only consist of the words he uses but of the pronunciation and intonation of those words as well. As Stoever (2016) explains, "certain associations between race and sound come to seem normal, natural, and 'right'" (p. 7-8). Jones does not have a thick Southern accent in the TikTok— or if she does have an accent, it is very minimal and not for the entire video— yet Ruescher still adds this accent to his performance of Jones. Thus, for Ruescher, associating Jones' Blackness with the sound of a Southern accent seems natural, justifiable, and "right" (ibid.). Put another way, for Ruescher, Jones is "expected to produce" (ibid.) a form of a Southern accent and thus he does so in his TikTok. In addition to his vocal performance, Ruescher mimics Jones' comportment in real time: tilting his head when she tilts her head on his laptop, raising his eyebrows as she raises her eyebrows, etc. It is notable that Ruescher performs much more aggressive expressions when he appropriates Jones compared to Beck and Black, emphasizing the angry and loud stereotype above. In addition, unlike the two previous examples, Ruescher does not use this trend to reference his past actions: he is simply

performing a distorted, caricatured form of Blackness for the sake of performance— for the sake of accumulating likes and viewership. While Beck and Black's posts can possibly be interpreted in part as mocking their past videos, Ruescher's entire post in contrast serves to blatantly ridicule Black women— performing their exaggerated stereotypes to "embody blackness" (Jackson, 2017, para. 3) openly and unapologetically. In this sense, the actions and accent in Ruescher's video constitute a flagrant use of minstrel performance in cyberspace.

Finally, let us examine Jones' use of the queer AAVE term "on period" and how Beck, Black, and Ruescher appropriate this term as a form of Black cool (as defined in the introduction chapter). In Jones' original video, she uses "on period" to assert that despite the racialized and gendered obstacles she faces— to code-switch from her natural language— she will still succeed at her employment. Her phrase, "I *was* going to get employee of the month and that's on period" (emphasis added, as quoted in Leon-Kit, 2020) connotes resilience and perseverance within a white-dominated work environment that compelled her to alter her linguistic preferences. This notion of resilience directly relates to bell hooks' (2012) definition of Black cool as noted in the introductory chapter: "Once upon a time Black male 'cool' was defined by the ways in which Black men confronted the hardships of life without allowing their spirits to be ravaged. […] It was defined by Black male willingness to face the truth, and bear it" (p. 73). Jones' hopeful and joy-filled use of the phrase "on period" indicates how she "confronted the hardships" of working at Disney, yet her optimistic character remained intact. Thus, by appropriating this term in their posts, Beck, Black, and Ruescher can be seen as embodying or performing this desirable aspect of Blackness— to imitate or act out the hopefulness and resilience that Jones evokes, but still while mocking her and accumulating immense viewerships in the process. Thus, these users embody this resilient form of Black cool in order to advance their own interests. One could argue that Jones' use of "on period" is possibly a kind of appropriation in itself since the phrase

emerged in Southern Black queer communities. However, Jones's use of the phrase is much different than Leon-Kit who stole her video precisely for the purposes of starting a meme, and Beck, Black, and Ruescher who use it to mock Black women: Jones not only employs the term in its correct meanings and contexts, but is in line with the tradition of Black women using it as a from of emphasis, and she does not instrumentalize or ridicule the community who originated it.

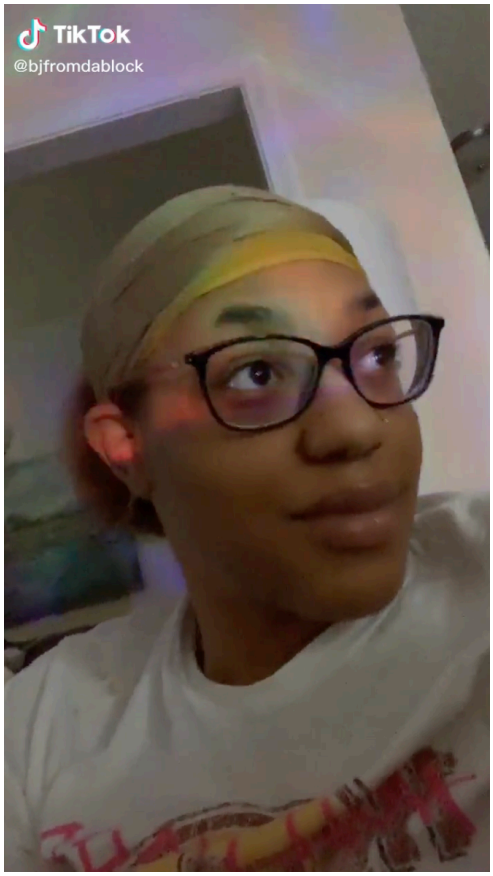
Brianna Blackmon, Karens, and Throwing Shade:

The following set of examples typify how the resistant power of Black vernacular phrases can become diluted or weakened through TikTok meme creation. In the case of Brianna Blackmon, white users recontextualize and defang the AAVE term "Karen" to reproduce forms of oppression against Black women, as well as appropriate expressions of "shade" as desirable qualities of Black femininity. Unlike Jones' video, this post was uploaded by Blackmon herself on March 11, 2020 and recounts her affinity for cold caffeinated beverages: "Girl, I don't know what caucasian woman got into me but bitch, iced coffee. Bitch, well call me Karen" (Blackmon, 2020) (see Figure 7). In the context of North American meme culture, iced coffee is often associated with stereotypes of white femininity, hence Blackmon's use of the term "caucasian."

Let us examine a brief history and significance of the Karen term: a "Karen" refers to a hostile female meme character, who is characterized as a "middle aged [white] woman, typically blonde, [who] makes solutions to others' problems an inconvenience to her although she isn't even remotely affected" (Williams, 2020, p. 2), with most sources tracing the meme's origin to Black Twitter (Hunt, 2020; Lewis, 2020). However, as Williams (2020) notes, in the context of Black digital communities, a Karen has become "shorthand for White entitlement. […] A Karen is any White woman who exercises her power to police, surveil, and regulate Black individuals in public spaces" (p. 2). Karen memes belong to a long history of Black online networks creating

memes based on real-life incidents in which white women called the police on Black individuals for simply "living while Black" (Williams, 2020, p. 2). These memes serve as an important form of cultural critique of white surveillance and subvert "white supremacist action"; other Black meme examples in this spirit include "BBQ Becky," "Permit Patty," and "Airline Amy" (ibid.).

Figure 7



Note. Blackmon (2020). TikTok.

Thus, Blackmon's use of the term Karen in her video is a subtle critique and ridicule of white women's entitlement: Blackmon is not simply mocking white women who love iced coffee, but rather white women's racial fragility and privilege. She is casually and without hesitation ridiculing white women in much the same way that white women nonchalantly perform and perpetuate vicious stereotypes of Black women in their quotidian social media

practices. This notion of subtle or implicit mockery that Blackmon engages in can be seen as a form of the Black cultural expression of "throwing shade." As Monk-Payton (2017) explains, "shade" as a linguistic act has its roots within Black gay communities and refers to "a maneuver that is hurled at an object of ridicule that exposes the weakness of the opponent in a veiled manner to humorous effect and affect. Shade concerns disrespect as a way to approach the truth" (p. 19). In Blackmon's case, the object of ridicule she is critiquing in a "veiled manner" is middle-aged, entitled white women. In this sense, Blackmon's shade can be seen as a reversal of the caricatured performances of Blackness discussed above in that whiteness is the entire joke— however, it is a much more covert and implicit form of mockery.

Furthermore, this notion of reversal and ridicule indicates that throwing shade is an act of "signifyin(g)" (Gates, 1988; Monk-Payton, 2017), which Brock (2012) describes as "a practice where the interlocutor inventively redefines an object using Black cultural commonplaces and philosophy" (p. 533). In other words, signifyin(g) consists of appropriating white linguistic signs in ways that revise the meaning of those signs. As Khabeer (2016) explains, "to signify on whiteness is to disarm whiteness through the use of its own signs" (p. 143). Thus, Blackmon is humorously signifyin(g) by using white women's own sign (i.e. their name, "Karen") to ridicule them and make reference to their racist surveillant practices of Black bodies. Within the context of the real-life police incidents described above, Blackmon is quite literally "disarming" Karens by revising their name and using it as a tool of mockery.

Let us turn to the ways in which users appropriate Blackmon's voice from this clip: not only do white users perform the exact same kind of stereotyped, grossly distorted Black femininity as examined in Jones' case above, but importantly, white users completely fail to recognize that they are the targets of Blackmon's shade. They decontextualize Blackmon's voice and the term Karen for their own interests— not only for praise and viewership online, but to

distance and absolve themselves from the kinds of racist behaviour described above (Kannan, 2020). In this context, by repeatedly and rampantly using Karen, white people distort and defang this term, removing its resistant and disarming power for Black people. In addition, the fact that white people use Karen while performing stereotyped performances of Blackmon's voice and comportment further reproduces forms of oppression against Black women. In one example, white woman user @carissadanielle90 (2020) lip-synchs along to Blackmon's voice while performing exaggerated gestures of neck-swivelling, aggressively tilting her head, puckering her lips, and widening her eyebrows; @carissadanielle90 even crosses her eyes at one moment in the video, evoking decades-old stereotypes of Black women as deranged and unstable. In addition, towards the end of the post @carissadanielle90 jerks her head back and forth towards the camera while simultaneously moving the camera, and this visually reinforces this notion of derangement and instability. In a similar post, white male user Johnny Carlin (2020), who is a police officer, appropriates Blackmon's voice and performs the exact same caricatured gestures as @carissadanielle90 but while wearing his police uniform and sitting in a cop car. The fact that a white cop is stealing and grossly distorting the voice and actions of a Black woman— not only in the context of the surveillant incidents described above but in the much longer history of police brutality against Black bodies— constitutes a blatant example of white ignorance and oblivious racial insensitivity. Furthermore, Carlin's post (2020) is accompanied by the hashtag, "#HumanizingTheBadge." It would seem that the humanization of police officers comes only at the dehumanization of Black women.

What is notable about @carissadanielle90 and Carlin's posts is that in Blackmon's original video her physical actions are quite understated: she does not engage in any aggressive head-tilting, puckered lips, or excessively widen her eyes, yet @carissadanielle90 and Carlin (and thousands of others) still impose this caricature onto her. In addition, much like white users

attempt to claim the Black masculine cool (hooks, 2012) described in Jones's case above, white users are similarly attempting to claim or act out the "shade" that Blackmon is expressing linguistically (even though white users may not label or recognize it as such). In this sense, given that throwing shade is tied to Black gay and women communities (Monk-Payton, 2017), Blackmon's shade can be seen as a form of Black feminine and queer cool (much like corporations' textual appropriation of "slay" in the Tweets examined in the previous chapter). In these TikTok memes, this Black feminine and queer cool is once again appropriated and mocked through exaggerated physical gestures similar to the snap. Finally, despite the fact that Blackmon's and Jones' trends were released months apart from each other and focus on two very different subject matters, Beck, Black, Ruescher, carissadanielle90, and Carlin all rely on the exact same grossly distorted physical stereotypes of Black women. I would argue this is because these kinds of minstrel performances on TikTok are part of the larger history of the denigration of Black women and the appropriation of Black culture online, and they are all rooted in the same decades-old, white supremacist values that cast Black women as loud, uncivilized, unintelligent, and unfeminine. In other words, white TikTok users are seemingly unable to imagine Black women outside of these stereotypes regardless of the subject matter of their posts.

Jasmine Collins, Remix Culture, and the Sapphire Trope:

The following examples exemplify how the meme-ing of Black feminine voices can produce a unique, controlling image (Bailey, 2021) of Black women as aggressive and unrestrained. In the case of Jasmine Collins, I argue that non-Black users appropriate both hip-hop culture and the AAVE term "trifling," as well as reproduce the Sapphire stereotype to create a flattened representation of Black women that ultimately works to justify their poor treatment (Bailey, 2021). On August 2, 2018, white Twitter user @freepark_ing uploaded a video of a

voicemail message left on their employer's general phone line from one employee to another (Rennex, 2020). The message is from Collins, accusing her manager (identified in the clip only as "Rachel") of purposefully removing Collins from the company schedule due to her race[1]. Collins' entire voicemail is over two minutes long, but the portion that went viral on TikTok states, "This is for Rachel, you big, fat, white, nasty-smelling fat bitch. Why you took me off the motherfucking schedule with your trifling, dirty, white, racist ass?" (@freepark_ing, 2018). While @freepark_ing's original clip generated some text-based memes on Twitter in 2018, the voicemail only gained immense popularity on TikTok after Collins' audio was stolen and remixed with the popular hip-hop song "Act Up" by female hip-hop group City Girls (2018). This remix was uploaded onto the audio distribution platform SoundCloud by user @trron, who has since deleted the file from their account (Rennex, 2020); the remix simply features Collins' original, unaltered message playing directly over an instrumental version of "Act Up." One of the most prominent AAVE terms in the message that TikTok users appropriate and perform is the word "trifling," which originates from Black Southern dialects and refers to someone who is "shiftless, lazy, useless, worthless and no-good" (Ballard Brown, 2014, para. 1). Thus, there is an appropriation of two expressions of Black culture in this meme: hip-hop and AAVE.

Collins' voicemail remix (known colloquially on TikTok as the "This is for Rachel" meme) is by far the most popular trend examined in this study, having been performed by over 540 000 TikTok users. The trend most often consists of non-Black users lip-synching to Collins' message while pretending to speak on the phone, or while gazing at another person in the video, all while performing the exact same kinds of stereotypical, aggressive Black feminine gestures as those examined in Jones' and Blackmon' cases above (see @JustMaiko [2019] and @Avani

[1] It is important to note that Collins' message was uploaded onto Twitter without consent and was not intended to be heard by @freepark_ing, which brings up further ethical dilemmas about privacy and racial surveillance.

[2020] analyzed below). However, unlike the previous cases, Collins' body and face is not present in the original video: given that the clip is simply her voicemail, we do not know which gestures or behaviours she was performing while recording the message, yet white users still impose this distorted, racist caricature onto her. Even if Collins was in fact using similar gestures to the ones described above, their exaggerated reenactment by non-Black users is still problematic given the intention of mockery and instrumentalizing her comportment to achieve online success. Along with Jones' case, this trend represents yet another instance of workplace racism being turned into a meme on TikTok, which raises the question— why are Black women's experiences of discrimination consistently perceived as moments of comedy and opportunities for online success by white users? I would argue this notion of instrumentalizing Black women's racial trauma is due to white supremacy's framing of white individuals' interests as prioritized and normal (Williams, 2020, p. 3), and thus the pursuit of those interests as natural. Williams (2020) explains that in addition to the "implicit or explicit belief that White superiority is the natural social order," a complementary by-product of white supremacy is that white subjects' interests and perspectives are constantly placed "centre stage and assumed as 'normal'" (Gillborn, 2006 as cited in Williams, 2020, p. 3) whether they are aware of it or not. Thus, white users seemingly do not recognize that their exploitation of Black women's workplace trauma is racist, but rather they perceive their actions as merely advancing their own desires for online virality, which white supremacy deems as acceptable.

Let us examine the relationship between hip-hop and the concept of Black cool as they are functioning in Collins' meme. As Tate (2003) and Fleetwood (2010) note, hip-hop is the primary representation of Black cool in North American culture. City Girls' song embodies many Black cool attributes examined in the introduction chapter including being assertive, rebellious, sensual, and unapologetic (Tate, 2003, p. 7). Thus, by performing Collins' voice along to the

song, white users are not only appropriating these desirable qualities of Blackness, but they are reinforcing the assertive tone of Collins' original video. More specifically, remixing Collins' voice into a hip-hop song not only turns her experience about workplace discrimination into a literal performance and thereby trivializing her experience, but more importantly, it flattens her (justified) anger and frustration into a one-dimensional representation of Black women (Bailey, 2021, p. 45). In other words, all Black women are perceived as sounding angry in the same way — be it in a hip-hop song or workplace confrontation. Thus, this remix and subsequent exaggerated performance on TikTok reproduces the stereotype of the "angry Black woman" or the Sapphire trope, which Bailey (2021) describes as "tough, angry, and hypermasculine" (p. 63). It is important to note that the Sapphire trope is not oppressive simply because it is untrue or because it damages the self-esteem of the Black women who view this representation: as Bailey explains, the Sapphire stereotype, through its constant circulation and reproduction in all forms of media, "materially impact[s] the lives of Black women by justifying poor treatment throughout all areas of society and throughout US history" (p. 2). In other words, the Sapphire trope is a unique way of controlling Black women by offering implicit approval for their discrimination and the enactment of violence against them, as well as suppresses their "potential ways of being" in the world as they are expected to be as aggressive and unrestrained as this caricature (ibid.).

One example of this controlling representation of Black women as angry and hypermasculine is user @JustMaiko's (2019) TikTok: the non-Black male user lip-synchs along to Collins' voice while facing another person in the video all while performing exaggerated finger-pointing and flailing arm movements that have been reproduced in countless mainstream cultural portrayals of enraged Black feminine characters. In addition, @JustMaiko pretends to punch the other subject at the end of the video, reinforcing Bailey's (2021) notion of toughness

and hypermasculinity above. Similarly, in @Avani's video (2020), white male user Nick Austin enacts the same amplified finger-pointing and excessive arm motions as @JustMaiko, while also adding exaggerated head-jerking. Thus, by performing the same aggressive and overstated movements, both of these videos perpetuate the belief that all Black women express their anger in the same physical way, further functioning to create a one-dimensional view of Black women (Bailey, 2021). In addition, if we consider the history of the Sapphire character which was developed in minstrel era radio shows (Bailey, 2021, p. 38), this remix of Collins and City Girls draws a direct connection to the legacy of minstrelsy in two ways: firstly, the performance of Collins' voice by white users calls back to the 1920's and 30's tradition of "auditory blackface" (Bailey, 2021, p. 39), in which white actors would voice Black characters on radio programs. Although the non-Black TikTok users do not actually record their own voices like the early-20th century practice described above, they similarly perform intense, angry emotionality as a false proxy for Black womanhood that serves as a way to achieve their own personal success; additionally, in both cases, Black women's voices are associated with and expected to produce anger and rage— whether physically in the case of the TikToks or sonically in the case of the radio programs. A second way that the remix of Collins draws a connection to the legacy of minstrelsy is that it transforms the often ignored frustrations and testimonies of Black women into exaggerated entertainment and humour for white audiences.

The immense success of Collins' remix among white TikTok users can also be examined as a manifestation of Stoever's concept of the "sonic color line" (2016). Stoever describes the sonic color line as "the process of racializing sound—how and why certain bodies are expected to produce, desire, and live amongst particular sounds" (p. 7). She explains that through the sonic color line, certain associations between Blackness and sound are perceived as "normal, natural, and 'right'" (p. 7-8) as discussed with Ruescher's example above. Thus, Collins' body is

expected to produce angered sounds in the same ways as City Girls, and therefore the remix of the two audio recordings is perceived as natural and pleasurable for white viewers. Put another way, it is only considered normal, acceptable, and justified for Black women to be angry in hip-hop songs. Thus, there is a connection between the assertiveness in "Act Up" and Collins' assertiveness in the voicemail that white users perceive as one and the same. However, there are different kinds of assertiveness being expressed in "Act Up" and Collins' audio recording: in the former, City Girls evoke a forceful form of empowerment and self-confidence, whereas in the latter, Collins is forcefully confronting her manager about her racist and discriminatory behaviour. Yet, because all Black women are "expected to produce" anger in similar ways in white supremacist culture— which is even reinforced visually through the Sapphire trope— Collins' association with City Girls is perceived as "natural" (ibid.) for white subjects. If Collins' audio recording needed to be accompanied with any music at all, it would seem more fitting that she would be remixed with a somber or distressing score given the grave subject matter of workplace racism— not an empowering and playful hip-hop song that is often played in youthful social gatherings and nightclub contexts. However, because the sonic color line associates Black femininity with anger and does not grant diversity to Black women's anger, the connection between City Girls and Collins is still pleasurable and entertaining to white subjects.

TikTok Affordances:

Having examined specific cases of how Black women are denigrated through digital blackface on TikTok, it is important to interrogate how the platform itself is implicated in this linguistic appropriation. As Stevens (2021) explains, social media platforms can facilitate the appropriation of Black identity given how "digital spaces accentuate identity's performative nature" (p. 2). In the following section, I argue that white users take advantage of the affordances

of TikTok to appropriate Black women's voices and reproduce forms of minstrel performance online. I draw on Bucher and Helmond's (2018) definition of affordances as "what material artifacts such as media technologies allow people to do" (p. 3). In the context of TikTok, the platform's audio sampling features *allow* white people to ridicule and silence Black women. This notion of allowance is especially apt as TikTok's owners have done nothing to prohibit or even address the oppressive sampling and performance of Black women— in fact, the appropriation of other people's voices is overtly encouraged given that when users examine all the samples of a given video, there is a large red button prompting people to "Use this sound." In this sense, digital blackface can be understood as quite literally built into the platform's features.

In addition, I draw on Bucher and Helmond's (2018) notion that affordances are "'communicational actors' in the sense that they produce meanings and meaningfulness" (p. 3). In this case, TikTok's features communicate the meaning that Black women's voices exist to be used: they serve to fulfil the needs and pleasures of white people. As Boffone (2021) explains, TikTok's audio sampling feature "signals to White teens that content that uses Blackness for comedic—and often racist—fodder is acceptable. And not only is it acceptable but it holds the potential to go viral which can lead to legitimate monetary gains" (p. 32). In other words, not only is TikTok's success built off of the distinct theft and performance of Black cultural expression, but TikTok articulates in its practices that appropriating other people's voices without consent is a permissible and viable path to online success.

One TikTok feature that is important to examine is the aforementioned "Use this sound" button and its origins on an earlier platform called "Musical.ly" that evolved to become TikTok. Active from 2014 to 2018, Musical.ly was a social media application that allowed users to create one-minute lip-synching music videos. Unlike TikTok which has an emphasis on vlogs, tutorials, and video memes, Musical.ly was known exclusively as a music "karaoke app" (Lee, 2018, para.

2). Thus, the "Use this sound" button originated as a way for users to use a particular song in their videos for musical or dance purposes. It was only when the app rebranded into TikTok that users began to use the button to sample many different kinds of sounds beyond popular music. On TikTok, the button does not differentiate between music and non-music: every sound can be lip-synched to— be it a song, a Black women's voice, or a car horn. For example, there is a trend in which users lip-synch along to a coughing fit (see @babycreamchez, 2021). Thus, TikTok creators use the button in ways beyond its prior iterations on Musical.ly, but that are still bounded by what the feature allows people to do. In addition, given the button's history, users (seemingly) do not register that they are instrumentalizing Black women and AAVE for comedic success: the process of sampling a song to lip-synch and sampling a Black women's voice to perform digital blackface are exactly the same. Thus, the "Use this sound" button communicates the meaning that all sounds are neutral and available to be used, and that digital blackface is no more mundane than lip-synching to popular music.

Let us examine the features that allow Leon-Kit to upload Jones's video without consent or credit. Users can upload any mobile video from their personal collection onto the platform, including screen recordings as Leon-Kit did. However, when users steal a video and upload it onto TikTok, their name is listed as the originator of that sound when other users go to sample it (i.e. their video has a red label on it that reads, "Original"). Thus, this feature directly contributes to the erasure of AAVE as Leon-Kit is labeled the author of Jones' video even though the clip is comprised entirely of her face and voice. In Blackmon's case, she is labeled the original author given that she uploaded the video herself, however, there is a feature that allows users to list themselves as the originator. For example, white male user @aric.with.an.a (2020) posted a TikTok sampling Blackmon's voice, saved this published TikTok to his personal camera roll, and then re-shared this saved video which means that when other users come across this TikTok he is

listed as the creator of the sound. Both Leon-Kit and @aric.with.an.a's examples illustrate the ways in which men use TikTok's affordances to steal, ridicule, and erase Black women's voices for their own personal gain online.

At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that the above examples are not solely the actions of individual male users, but rather that this linguistic appropriation and digital blackface are situated within TikTok's corporate practices. Because the financial success of TikTok as a platform is dependent on the wide circulation of and participation in the memes examined above, the theft and performance of Black linguistic culture can be understood as part of TikTok's corporate model. In other words, appropriation is built into the platform's affordances. As Weimann and Masri (2022) explain regarding TikTok's unique (and elusive) algorithm: "This algorithm offers 'more of the same content' to users, based on their viewing. Thus, it can drive users who unintentionally see distressing content to get and see more. So once a user has been exposed to one extremist video, the likelihood that he/she will be presented with much more similar content is very high, due to the way the algorithm works" (p. 178). In other words, the way TikTok's algorithm is constructed is ideal for the dissemination of memes that reproduce white supremacist values about Black women. Much like how racism and sexism are fundamental to search engines' success and the programs specifically target women of colour (Noble, 2018), digital blackface is fundamental to TikTok's success and is prioritized by the algorithm in its recommendations to users. Indeed, during the course of collecting social media materials for this chapter, I was flooded with directions to racist and sexist memes on TikTok: much like Weimann and Masri's experience (2022), "[t]he application's algorithm certainly identified [me] as [an] interested audience for such material" (p. 178).

In addition, this theft and performance of Black linguistic culture as a corporate model is reinforced by the fact that, as Weimann and Masri point out, TikTok is owned by a Chinese

company (ByteDance) and is therefore less open to regulations and North American public pressures or appeals to restrict this violent and racist content (p. 177). In addition, the corporation has been "consistently found [to be] unable or unwilling to impose its own terms of service" (ibid., p. 178) which states that users may not post any racist or discriminatory material (TikTok, 2021). Similarly, this corporate model of appropriation is evidenced by the fact that videos and accounts by Black creators speaking out against racism are individually removed or banned by the corporation, while videos with the racist hashtags #Ghetto and #NWordPass remain active (Boffone, 2021, p. 30-31). Thus, TikTok articulates in its practices that racist content is permissible and in some cases prioritized over anti-racist content, and that Black criticism can be silenced. Ultimately, the nature of TikTok's algorithm and audio sampling features indicate that digital blackface is not an accidental by-product initiated by certain isolated users, but rather that appropriation is inextricably linked to the construction or make-up of TikTok as an application.

Conclusion:

In this chapter, I have illuminated how quotidian forms of anti-Black racism persist on TikTok through the theft, performance, and mockery of Black women's voices, as well as how this appropriation is fundamental for TikTok's corporate success. This study contributes to scholarly discussions on the intersections of whiteness, cultural appropriation, and social media by highlighting how the caricatured physical gestures of white users are directly descendent of minstrel shows. As I have argued in this chapter, the non-consensual sampling of Coco Jones', Brianna Blackmon's, and Jasmine Collins' voices on TikTok, though seemingly harmless and pleasurable for many white users, ultimately serves to reproduce white supremacist values of Black women as unintelligent and uncivilized. In particular, white users perform Jones' comportment to paint Black women as aggressive and unrestrained, impose the Jezebel

stereotype onto her, as well as appropriate the queer AAVE term "on period" to advance their own white interests. In the case of Blackmon, white users defang and decontextualize the AAVE term "Karen" while acting out distorted performances of Blackmon's voice and behaviour to reproduce forms of oppression against Black women. Thirdly, in Collins' case, non-Black users appropriate the AAVE term "trifling," attributes of Black cool from hip-hop culture, and recall the auditory blackface tradition to create a flattened representation of Black women (Bailey, 2021). Finally, analyzing the affordances of TikTok not only reveals how the platform allows white users to mock and erase the linguistic expressions of Black women, but that digital blackface is built into the application's features and is part of its corporate model; TikTok's audio and video editing functions connote the meaning that the voices of Black women serve to fulfill the entertainment and enjoyment of white users.

As Lauren Michele Jackson (2017) notes on the ubiquity of digital blackface, "[n]o matter how brief the performance or playful the intent, summoning black images to play types means pirouetting on over 150 years of American blackface tradition" (para. 10). The racist values and stereotypes undergirding white users' practices on TikTok are not new, but rather belong to a larger history of the mockery of Black women for personal success and (much like the corporate posts in the previous chapter) the appropriation of Black culture more broadly. In this sense, the vicious stereotypes perpetuated on TikTok constitute another form of the surveillance and exploitation of Black bodies for white gain— both for amusement and (social and financial) profit— that began with chattel slavery (Davis, 2022). In addition, as users increasingly turn to TikTok for activist purposes or as a tool for online consciousness-raising (Hautea et al., 2021; Janfaza, 2020), the application must be held more accountable for not only allowing these racist memes to circulate, but for actively suppressing and muting videos that support Black social justice activism. There have been numerous accusations from Black creators

and recent journalistic reports that TikTok has hidden and/or limited the spread of Black Lives Matter-related content without notifying the creators that it violates any community guidelines (McCluskey, 2020; Shead, 2020). This not only constitutes yet another form of the suppression of Black voices in addition to the memes, but it is directly in line with the corporate silencing and invisibilizing of Black speakers as examined in chapter one.

Ultimately, contrary to the belief that performing Black women's voices belongs to an innocuous and deracialized "meme culture," the videos examined in this chapter demonstrate the insidious and quotidian ways that practices on TikTok reinscribe decades-old racist and sexist values— the ways white people continue to laugh at Black femininity. Much like the racialized users discussed in the previous chapter, these oppressive TikTok memes are also situated within a deeply contested memetic context where users are constantly calling out and critiquing racist practices. Thus, in the next chapter I turn to Black users' responses and online resistance to TikTok digital blackface and corporate appropriation of AAVE, and how they use these social media affordances in transformative ways.

Chapter Three: Reclaiming AAVE: Black Women's Digital Resistance of Corporate Appropriation & Digital Blackface

Introduction:

In an interview with *Wired*, Brianna Blackmon discusses the pervasiveness of digital blackface on TikTok: "Be clear: Without Black culture, TikTok wouldn't even be a thing. […] I have never seen so many teenagers who are this race-obsessed. My Blackness is not a show, it's not something you just turn on" (as quoted in Parham, 2020, para. 17, 21). Several Black TikTok users are actively speaking out about the ways in which their Blackness is being appropriated on the platform, and they have been doing so all along. Blackmon's comments above were published within five months of her voice being stolen and performed for the creation of thousands of racist memes on TikTok. There are several elements of Blackmon's response that are significant: firstly, her comments assert that digital blackface is in fact problematic and does not constitute simply innocuous meme practices as many non-Black users perceive. Secondly, Blackmon's use of the term "show" not only highlights the spectacle nature of these memes, but also connotes how Black culture is admired and deemed appealing online distinctly when it is distorted and grossly exaggerated for white users' entertainment. In addition, her use of the phrase "race-obsessed" highlights how Black culture is not only perceived by white users as desirable and stylish, but as a feasible and acceptable pipeline to online virality, which (as discussed in the previous chapter) is overtly signalled by the platform itself (Boffone, 2021). Finally, Blackmon's interview illustrates how Black users are acutely aware of how digital blackface is integral to TikTok's financial and social success.

Blackmon's comments represent one of many examples of Black TikTok and Twitter users publicly denouncing and resisting linguistic appropriation and digital blackface. Having made visible how Black linguistic culture is repeatedly mocked and exploited by corporations

and traditional users in chapters one and two, it is important to account for the responses and perspectives of Black users to illustrate how their resistance is actively situated within a deeply contested discursive space in which Black subjects are continuously critiquing and calling out these oppressive acts. I turn to the work these TikTok and Twitter users are doing in order to centre Black resistance to cultural appropriation. This chapter conducts a discourse analysis of Black users' responses and online resistance to corporate appropriation of AAVE and racist TikTok meme creation. This chapter will focus on selected posts of three Black women creators from TikTok and Twitter with thousands of followers each: @AAVEGoneWrong (Twitter), @DirtyChai (TikTok), and Dara Starr Tucker (TikTok).

Although there is a growing scholarship on Black resistance, activism, and political organizing on Twitter (as examined in the introductory chapter), previous research on Black TikTok networks has focused on feminist self-care (Steele, 2021) and critiques of mainstream news (Literat et al., 2022). Thus, this chapter aims to advance the literature on Black new media activism to illuminate TikTok as a site of resistance to white supremacy and how Black users produce a range of innovative, anti-racist counter-discourses specifically against linguistic appropriation and digital blackface. This chapter's analysis focuses on the following research questions: what kinds of online resistance and critiques do Black users engage in against corporate co-optation of AAVE and racist TikTok meme creation? How do the followers of these Black creators participate in and/or help shape this criticism and resistance? Finally, how do some of these creators use humour in their reversal of power dynamics? This chapter argues that the posts by @AAVEGoneWrong, @DirtyChai, and Dara Starr Tucker constitute forms of digital alchemy (Bailey, 2021) and a digital oppositional gaze (Sobande et al., 2020), ultimately illustrating how Black women creators use these platforms for transformative resistance to anti-Black racism.

Beginning with a brief overview of the recent literature on Black women's digital resistance, this chapter then explores the different types of digital alchemy and oppositional practices that the above creators engage in. Firstly, I examine @AAVEGoneWrong's Tweets to analyze how she produces a digital oppositional gaze at corporations co-opting AAVE by exposing their linguistic appropriation and deliberately undermining their advertising strategies by ridiculing them. Then, I analyze how @DirtyChai generates digital alchemy by reclaiming the TikTok features used for digital blackface in order to mock and look back at white users performing digital blackface. Finally, I examine how Tucker engages in a different form digital alchemy by specifically creating a TikTok educational resource on digital blackface and producing her own positive self-representation to counter the rampant harmful images of Black femininity on the platform.

Literature Review:

As outlined in the introductory chapter, there is robust research on Black content and organizing online, however, research on the resistant digital discourses of Black women specifically is comparatively scarce (Sobande et al., 2020, p. 413), with even less research concerning their critiques of linguistic appropriation and/or TikTok. One prominent study on Black women's digital resistance of intersectional forms of structural oppression is Moya Bailey's (2021) book, *Misogynoir Transformed* and specifically her concept of "digital alchemy," which refers to the ways in which "women of color, Black women, and Black nonbinary, agender, and gender-variant folks in particular transform everyday digital media into valuable social justice media that recode the failed scripts that negatively impact their lives" (p. 24). Although Bailey originally applied this concept to Black queer women's web shows on YouTube and trans community-building through Twitter hashtags, I use the concept in this chapter to

examine how @AAVEGoneWrong, @DirtyChai, and Dara Starr Tucker transform the very technological affordances that were used to ridicule Black women on Twitter and TikTok in order to resist and redefine their representations on the platforms— either through humour and/or satire (@AAVEGoneWrong, @DirtyChai) or educational anti-racist media (Tucker). In another study on how marginalized subjects spread counter-hegemonic messages and carve their own supportive spaces online, Chelsea Peterson-Salahuddin (2022) examines TikTok users specifically and how they employ the platforms' affordances to "evade algorithmic oppression" (p. 2). Particularly, Peterson-Salahuddin argues that Black and Brown TikTok creators utilize the application's video features "such as visual editing, hashtags, and audio" (p. 2) that were originally "designed within the logics of White heteropatriarchy" (p. 16) to "explicitly call attention to anti-Black racism" (p. 11) and "expos[e] racist actions" (p. 12). This notion of exposure is especially apt for this chapter as I situate the work of the above Black women creators as first and foremost revealing how dominant online practices of appropriation that are often considered mundane or harmless are in fact problematic. In the case of @AAVEGoneWrong, the Twitter page exposes and mocks corporations through screenshots that blatantly appropriate and misuse AAVE in their promotional Tweets. In addition, in the case of @DirtyChai, who uses the exact same meme format that white creators use when performing digital blackface in order to mock and call out these very creators, and in Tucker's case, who created an educational video defining and providing detailed examples of digital minstrelsy, I argue that these creators engage in digital alchemy to "recode the failed scripts" (Bailey, 2021, p. 24) of TikTok that were used for racist meme representations and instead find "new and ingenious ways" (Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022, p. 2) to produce and share anti-racist media.

In addition, another study that illuminates the distinct online resistant practices and collectivities of Black women is Sobande et al.'s (2020) research explicating the concept of a

"digital oppositional gaze." Originally theorized by bell hooks (1992), the concept of the "oppositional gaze" refers to how "intersectional structural oppression that Black women face has resulted in a resistant desire among some of them, to look back and/or away from media deemed as (mis)representing and subjugating them" (Sobande et al., 2020 p. 415) in purposeful and political ways. The concept therefore affirms Black feminine subjects' agency as cultural readers and producers (ibid.). Similarly, Sobande et al.'s (2020) concept of a digital oppositional gaze encompasses the ways in which Black women strategically engage and disengage with online media as well as focus on online self-representation as a form of resistance (p. 421). It involves seeking out and creating digital "self-relevant alternatives" to harmful dominant media images that "can reach audiences beyond national borders" (p. 423). Building on this recent literature, I situate the social media materials by @AAVEGoneWrong, @DirtyChai, and Tucker as forms of a digital oppositional gaze, and argue that this gaze can also be a form of digital alchemy— that strategically looking back and/or away (hooks, 1992; Sobande et al., 2020) from online media can be a way to "recode" (Bailey, 2021) and transform the platform affordances that were used to mock or harm Black women. Specifically, in the cases of @AAVEGoneWrong and @DirtyChai, I demonstrate how these Black women use humour not only as a form of critique, but as a reversal of power dynamics (Williams, 2020, p. 11) whereby Black users strategically ridicule the racist and misogynist meme creators who are ridiculing them. I argue that this is a form of looking back and distinctly *laughing* back at oppressive media (mis)representations.

Finally, tied to this notion of Black laughter, there is a growing scholarship on Black users' distinct use of humour as online resistance, employing strategies of irony, absurdity, and meme creation to challenge dominant racist power imbalances. For example, Aimée Morrison's (2019) work examines how Black users create viral Twitter hashtag campaigns such as

#StayMadAbby and #BeckyWithTheBadGrades to respond to structural oppression and stereotyped characterizations of Black women in higher education, creating playful counternarratives to "speak truth to power, hilariously" (p. 24). In addition, Apryl Williams' (2020) study examines Black meme practices specifically, arguing that Black memes are a cultural critique of white racial dominance (p. 1) and "provide a vital social function" by "subvert[ing] intended White supremacist ideology" (p. 11). Although the Black creators examined in this chapter do not create Twitter hashtag campaigns like Morrison's subjects or the more traditional memes as examined in Williams' research (i.e. a photo with text superimposed), I illustrate how @AAVEGoneWrong and @DirtyChai similarly use humour and playfulness to call attention to and reject white supremacist values about Black linguistic culture as unsophisticated (in the case of the former) and Black femininity as aggressive and exaggerated (in the latter). Lastly, I connect Morrison's and Williams' work on Black online humour to Harvey's (2020) notion that through a digital oppositional gaze marginalized audiences can "derive pleasure from the act of undermining dominant messages" (p. 70). I illustrate how the humour that @AAVEGoneWrong (along with her followers) and @DirtyChai generate through mocking and exposing corporations and white TikTok users respectively is a form of pleasure that comes distinctly through undermining, resisting, and (dis)engaging with harmful social media productions.

Methods:

My discourse analysis is inspired by Jackson et al.'s (2018) study on trans community building online: I am informed by their method of "[d]iscursive analysis of counterpublic meaning-making," which enables me to explore the significance of the above Tweets and TikTok videos "beyond quantified popularity and digital curation to highlight the social and political

labor" (p. 1873) undertaken by @AAVEGoneWrong, @DirtyChai, and Tucker. This approach recognizes that "discourse constructs reality by making ideas and events meaningful in particular ways that uphold and/or challenge cultural ideologies" (ibid.). Whereas in chapter one, I illuminated how the promotional discursive practices of corporate accounts reinforce white supremacist values and racist power imbalances, this chapter analyzes how the discourses created by Black women internet users challenge and/or reclaim that power through humour and educational content. In addition, because some of the posts included in this chapter consist of videos, I also conduct a visual analysis of @DirtyChai and Tucker's TikToks. In addition to Gillian Rose's (2007) description of visual discourse analysis cited in the previous chapter, I am informed by Peterson-Salahuddin' (2022) practice of "examin[ing] video and images to understand the messages embedded in these visual texts and how this shapes audience and platform interpretations" (p. 8). Much like Peterson-Salahuddin's work, employing visual discourse analysis to TikTok videos by @DirtyChai and Tucker allowed me to "explore how these creators utilize the medium to call out witnesses and systems of White supremacy" (p. 8). More specifically, the TikToks by @DirtyChai and Tucker were studied by analyzing their visual, textual, and audio components including choice of background music, lighting or camera quality and angles, any captions or text superimposed onto the videos, and tone of the voice-over. Observations were made on "form, subject, style, genre, medium, colour, light, lines and size" (Sobande, 2019, p. 2727) in order to examine the literal as well as connotative and satirical or ironic meanings of the TikTok videos and how they use this humour to "challenge cultural ideologies" (Jackson et al., 2018, p. 1873).

The three creators I selected for analysis— @AAVEGoneWrong, @DirtyChai, and Tucker— were chosen because they each have thousands of followers on their respective platforms (@AAVEGoneWrong: over 52 000 followers, @DirtyChai: over 4000 followers,

Tucker: over 832 000 followers), and importantly, because their criticisms encompass both formal, educational content as well as satirical memes, illustrating the range of resistant media practices from Black women networks. The posts from each of the creators were sourced from 2019-2022; this timeline was chosen to coincide with the publication timelines of the racist memes and corporate posts examined in the previous chapters and thus demonstrate how Black users' resistance occurs simultaneously as the previous oppressive social media productions. Additionally, the specific posts from each creator were selected for analysis based on the following reasons: in the cases of @DirtyChai and Tucker, because both of these users create TikToks on a rage of topics, I selected their sole videos that specifically address digital blackface. In the case of @AAVEGoneWrong, because all of her posts concern corporate appropriation online, I selected her most popular Tweets that received the most likes and responses from her followers. This was done because along with studying @AAVEGoneWrong's original Tweets, I also payed close attention to the comments and retweets directly beneath her posts to analyze the participatory role that her followers play in shaping criticism and resistance by creating and sharing their own memes mocking corporations' appropriation of AAVE. These comments were collected through screenshots using the same timeline above. In this case, I argue that @AAVEGoneWrong's digital oppositional gaze not only reclaims power through humour and undermines the corporations' marketing efforts, but importantly generates collectivities and does the work of community-building as her followers are encouraged to participate in this resistance as well.

Finally, I am also informed by Rosemary Clark-Parsons' and Jessa Lingel's (2020) feminist framework for studying online alterity and their assertion that "centering participants on the margins involves holding their perspectives in the same regard as scholarly writing" (p. 8). Thus, I carefully approach the posts by @AAVEGoneWrong, @DirtyChai, and Tucker as not in

need of validation or legitimation by the academic texts that I draw on in this chapter (because they are 'simply' social media posts), but rather as valid and generative in their own right as they are drawn from the creators' lived experiences and embodied realities. Lastly, it is important to note that the TikToks and Tweets examined in this chapter are not an exhaustive account or representative of *all* Black cultural criticism on social media. Black Twitter is not a monolith; for example, it is possible that there are some Black users who may not be angered by digital blackface or corporate co-optation of AAVE. The TikTok videos and Tweets examined in this chapter simply constitute some of the many, diverse ways that Black users may resist linguistic appropriation and transform the very social media affordances used for quotidian violence into empowering anti-racist resources and humour.

@AAVEGoneWrong:

In the following section, I argue that the Twitter page @AAVEGoneWrong and her followers engage in a kind of looking back (Sobande et al., 2020) at corporations appropriating AAVE by exposing their misuse of Black linguistic culture through screen captures and subverting their marketing efforts by deliberately mocking them. Founded in 2020 by an American Afro-Indigenous woman named Wynona (Jackson, 2020), nearly all of the Tweets on @AAVEGoneWrong's page consist of publishing screenshots without any written commentary of corporate posts that blatantly appropriate and distort Black linguistic culture (see Figure 8). I would argue that this absence of direct comments or captions by the page's owner allows the cultural appropriation to speak for itself, underscoring and directly spotlighting the ludicrousness of these corporations' blatant misemployment and distortion of Black culture. The lack of commentary also highlights how Wynona's page is situated within digital "anti-racist call-out culture" (Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022, p. 11)— Wynona's page explicitly serves to publicly call

attention to these exploitative brands and their continued acts of racism. In addition, by simply posting screenshots of the promotional Tweets without Wynona's overt comments, this page functions as a kind of informal social media archive of linguistic appropriation: a kind of everyday collection or exhibition of corporate exploitation of AAVE that demonstrates how this appropriation is routinized, quotidian, and shared across multiple brands and industries. Furthermore, by continuously updating this page on a regular basis, Wynona exposes how this appropriation is commonplace and ongoing— highlighting the endlessness and expansiveness of online linguistic appropriation.

In addition, the specific use of screenshots serves as a kind of direct looking back at corporations— a way for Wynona and her followers to signal to the brands that they are acutely aware of their exploitation and misuse of Black culture, and that they are being caught and publicly called out for their racist acts. In other words, the screenshots serve as a way for Wynona to strategically watch or surveil the corporations who have been continuously surveilling Black culture to advance their corporate interests. In her work on screenshots and online public shaming, Frances Corry (2021) explains that screenshots are often framed "as evidentiary in nature, providing detailed and contextual proof of wrongdoing" (para. 31). Thus, in Wynona's case, the screenshots function as evidence of the corporations' racist acts. Had Wynona used Twitter's built-in reposting features rather than screenshots, the brands' accounts would have received a boost of engagement from Twitter's algorithm as any account does when their content is reposted— but by distinctly taking screenshots and publishing them, Wynona is able to publicly shame and surveil back at the corporations without them benefitting from it algorithmically or even be notified.

Let us examine specific cases of this public shaming and using screenshots as evidence

on @AAVEGoneWrong's page. One example is the following Tweet calling attention to the University of Limerick's post:

Figure 8

Note. @AAVEGoneWrong (2020). Twitter.

The Tweet by the Irish University is virtually unintelligible due to the excessive use of AAVE terms that are dropped haphazardly in the text without being employed in their proper grammatical contexts or definitions, demonstrating (as examined in the first chapter) how brands attempt to inspire hipness, coolness, and silliness through Black linguistic culture without actually learning the language. This screenshot is one of the most popular posts on @AAVEGoneWrong's page, receiving over 10 000 likes and numerous replies from racialized

users participating in the cultural criticism and mockery. For example, user @bayehumble (2020) responds, "how tf [the fuck] do they [the University of Limerick] be saying 'new lingo' like black ppl haven't been talking this way for forever […] colonizer's mindset." This response highlights how corporate appropriation of AAVE relies on a "lack of racial contact" (Roth-Gordon et al., 2020, p. 112) as discussed in the first chapter— erasing AAVE's unique racialized histories and obscuring actual Black speakers. In other words, this reply illustrates how linguistic appropriation works to deracialize AAVE: Black linguistic culture is erroneously presented as a whitewashed "new lingo" and not a distinct cultural expression that Black subjects have employed for decades. In addition, @bayehumble's specific use of the term "colonizer" connects corporate appropriation to the broader colonial history of exploiting Black culture and bodies to advance white subjects' interests. Her reference to colonialism also highlights Jane H. Hill's (2008) notion (as examined in the introductory chapter) that through linguistic appropriation words "become property" (p. 158) and are controlled by the people who steal them, which in this case is white subjects. Put another way, the word "colonizer" highlights how in linguistic appropriation, white subjects and corporate subjects— much like with historical colonialism— dominate and exploit a culture that is not theirs for economic and social gain.

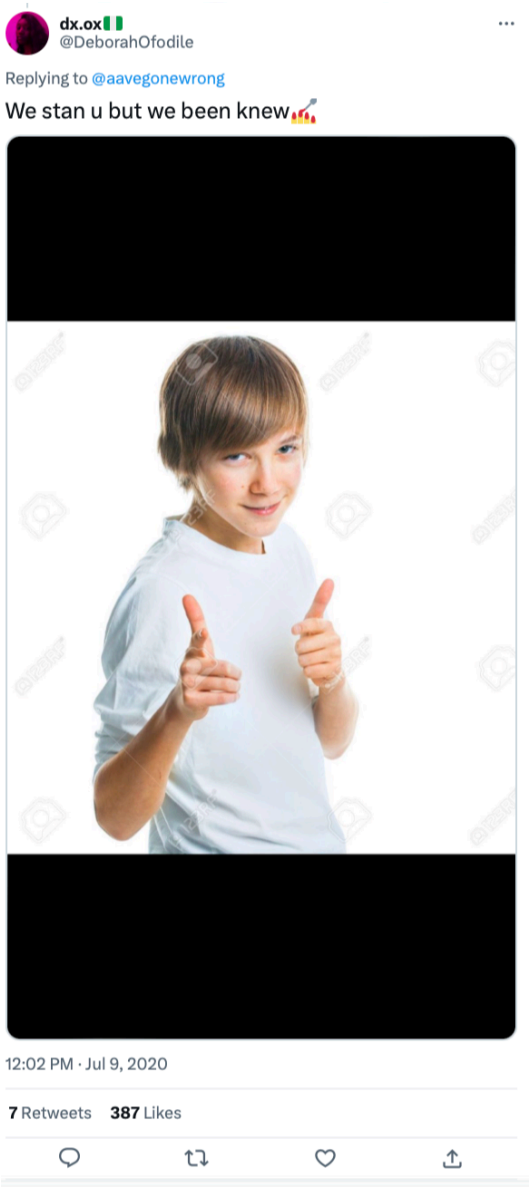
In a similar response to Wynona's above Tweet, Black user @aodnae (2020) replies, "gentrificating [*sic*] aave hurts my soul." By comparing linguistic appropriation to the process of gentrification, @aodnae importantly highlights how white subjects transform and distort AAVE by their continuous and non-consensual use, and how Black linguistic culture is only deemed respectable, proper, acceptable, or even more attractive when it is (mis)employed by white subjects. In addition, much like how urban gentrification most often displaces the original, marginalized inhabitants of an area, in this case, the rampant misuse of AAVE terms by white-dominated corporations can often result in Black speakers not desiring to use those terms in the

future. Here, linguistic appropriation is about displacing and claiming Black cultural expression as "property" (Hill, 2008, p. 158), which also is an attempt to displace Blackness by appropriating it. Both of these reply Tweets on @AAVEGoneWrong's page are similar to the resistant discourse examined in chapter one in which racialized users connect linguistic appropriation to broader historical or structural racism. Thus, @bayehumble's and @aodnae's Tweets not only illustrate the participatory role of Wynona's followers in producing a digital oppositional gaze, as well as the collectivities generated through "looking back" (Sobande et al., 2020), but that there is a shared online discourse across years of Black users situating corporate appropriation of AAVE within the larger legacy of exploiting and commodifying Black culture.

In addition to the above critiques, users in Wynona's comment section also responded to the University of Limerick's screenshot by creating textual and visual memes mocking the institution. In an example of a textual meme, user @jojosiwasaurus (2020) replies, "omg this is such a skinny slay queen […] wig: snatched, waist: deadass," including an emoji with heart eyes. In this case, the emoji and tone of this textual meme is sarcastic: @jojosiwasaurus is strategically using nonsensicality and misemploying AAVE terms just like the university does in order to mock the university. Whereas the university's Tweet can be interpreted as using silliness at the expense and ridicule of Black linguistic culture in order to appear youthful and stylish, in the above response meme, @jojosiwasaurus is demonstrating how ridiculous the academy actually sounds by using their own promotional strategy and method against them. In other words, @jojosiwasaurus is using the exact same Tweet format that the university uses in order to laugh back at the university— thereby undermining its marketing efforts and reclaiming the gross misuse of AAVE into a form of humorous or pleasurable critique.

In another reply Tweet, user @DeborahOfodile commented using the following more traditional meme:

Figure 9



Note. @DeborahOfodile (2020). Twitter.

Much like @jojosiwasaurus above, this response subverts the university's promotional discursive strategy by deliberately using AAVE in a nonsensical way to mock and laugh back at the university. However, in this case, by posting a stock photo of a stereotypical white youthful person with fair skin, blue eyes, and blonde hair along with the AAVE caption, @DeborahOfodile is mocking the fact that when brands appropriate AAVE to appear hip and

stylish, it is most often a non-Black person behind the digital messaging. Indeed, the positioning of the white subject's fingers (known colloquially as "finger pistols" or "finger guns") is an act that is associated with older white individuals who attempt to embody coolness but are in actuality perceived by youth subjects as embarrassing and/or unfashionable. While the finger pistols may have been perceived as genuinely stylish at one period, they are now seen as outdated and unfashionable because of their association with elder white subjects, much like @aodnae's reply above alluding to how white corporations' constant misuse of AAVE terms results in Black speakers not desiring to use them any longer. Finally, the fact that the white subject is staring directly at the camera in the stock photo can be interpreted in part as literal direct gaze at the University of Limerick: although the subject is not a person of colour— to be completely aligned with hooks' (1992) original conceptualization— this direct gaze can subtly connote that @DeborahOfodile is acutely aware of and surveilling back the institution's exploitative acts.

A second example on Wynona's page further demonstrates the evidentiary nature of screenshots (Corry, 2021) and anti-racist call-out culture (Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022) in the following Tweet calling attention to PETA (see Figure 10):

Figure 10

Note. @AAVEGoneWrong (2020). Twitter.

What is notable about PETA's Tweet is that it is accompanied by a GIF of a Black person with an intense or overtly animated emotional expression. This is directly in line with Lauren Michele Jackson's (2017) conceptualization of digital blackface as examined in previous chapters: how white subjects use GIFs of Black people to express hyperbolic emotionality, and illustrates once again how exaggerated animatedness (Ngai, 2005) serves as a false proxy of Black affect. The use of a Black subject is directly called out by user @Mimi_Miercoles3 (2020) who comments

under Wynona's post, "And they used digital Blackface to get their point across." This self-identified Black user specifically names the phenomenon of digital blackface, illustrating how Black users articulate the corporate co-optation of AAVE to other forms of minstrel performance. Similarly, user @Bisexualbooks2 (2020) also highlights the exploitative use of a Black subject in the Tweet, replying, "They ALWAYS use the black gifs for these types of posts." The specific stylization of "ALWAYS" in capital letters connotes a sense of urgency and calls attention to the endlessness and rampancy of corporations employing digital blackface through GIFs in their promotional discourse. Lastly, similarly to @bayehumble's response above, user @Echo2themoon (2020) comments, "The colonizers are at it again!" While @Echo2themoon's tone is somewhat more playful or lighthearted here than @bayehumble's comment, we once again see how there is a shared online discourse among racialized users on Wynona's page connecting corporate appropriation of AAVE specifically to the legacy of colonization. Whereas in the first chapter, linguistic appropriation was compared to more general or broader anti-Black racism, in the case of @AAVEGoneWrong, Black users distinctly emphasize the process of white speakers taking control over and exploiting Black linguistic culture for their own financial and political ends, and naming it as a form of colonialism. In addition, the fact that @Echo2themoon's tone is slightly more lighthearted in this example illustrates the work that humour does in making the criticism— how this discourse can connect to histories of colonialism while also being playful or witty at the same time, not only serious or somber.

My final example analyzes another post from Wynona's page that received over 4000 likes. The following post is a screenshot is of a SiriusXM Hits 1 Tweet that hyper-animates Black speech in its promotion:

Figure 11

Note. @AAVEGoneWrong (2020). Twitter.

Much like the corporate reply Tweets examined in chapter one, the appropriation of AAVE here (the term "finna") is coupled with the employment of entirely capital letters and excessive exclamation points in order to reproduce a stereotypical form of Black affect that attempts to generate a sense of entertainment and/or hipness for the brand. In response, alluding to how this appropriation is not in fact enjoyable for Black subjects, Black female user @MissBleuFour (2020) comments, "I'm gonna miss 'finna'…it was my fav." Her response denotes that she will not use "finna" anymore: this highlights a similar notion to @aodnae's comment above that the constant, non-consensual misuse of AAVE by white subjects and corporations makes the terms distinctly unappealing to Black speakers. Like the process of gentrification described above, linguistic appropriation of AAVE involves claiming the property of Black cultural expression,

and displacing or suppressing the actual Black speakers who originated the language. @MissBleuFour's comment illustrates how white subjects not only deracialize AAVE, but actively dilute and/or contribute to its disuse for Black subjects. It therefore suggests that cultural appropriation is not only problematic or harmful simply because white subjects employ the terms incorrectly, but importantly, because cultural appropriation can lead to the linguistic decline or threaten the very existence of AAVE for Black speakers.

@DirtyChai:

In the case of @DirtyChai, the creator reclaims and "recode[s]" (Bailey, 2021) the TikTok affordances that were used for digital blackface in order to ridicule the misogynoirist TikTok creators who are ridiculing Black women— thereby engaging in digital alchemy and a humorous reversal of power. In October 2021, an audio recording of Black social media influencer Ariana Fletcher went viral on TikTok in which she states enthusiastically, "when it comes to a drink, I'mma have it." Much like Coco Jones' and Jasmine Collins' incidents examined in chapter two, this clip was originally posted by Fletcher herself on another platform (Instagram) and then was non-consensually re-published on TikTok by user @chunkychicaaaa (Cavender, 2021). This audio recording was then sampled, appropriated, and performed for the creation of memes over 70 000 times on TikTok. In the majority of cases, non-Black TikTok users lip-synch along to Fletcher's voice while pointing to or holding their favourite beverage all while enacting the exact same kinds of grossly distorted physical gestures based on stereotypes of Black femininity as examined in chapter two. Within one week of Fletcher's audio recording gaining immense viewership and memes on TikTok, 23-year-old American creator @DirtyChai (2021) released a video lip-synching to Fletcher's voice. In it, @DirtyChai holds a Starbucks cup and performs exaggerated gestures including finger-pointing, sweeping arm movements, neck-

swivelling, head-jerking, puckered lips, and even swinging her whole body as she moves her arms (see Figure 12). In addition, she superimposes the following text on-screen: “POV: you’re watching another yt [white] woman turn into an exaggerated Black caricature just because they hear a Black woman on an audio.” By “audio,” @DirtyChai is referring to the audio recording of Fletcher that become popular on the platform.

Figure 12

Note. @DirtyChai (2021). TikTok.

Firstly, let us examine @DirtyChai’s physical gestures in this audio-visual meme. The creator is intentionally using the exact same grossly distorted movements that white people use when mocking Black women on TikTok in order to call attention to digital blackface and mock back these very white users. Through the use of mimicry and parody, she is illustrating how

ridiculous, absurd, and importantly, unnatural and untrue these movements really are— how Black women do not actually act or move in this way. In other words, just as white TikTok users appropriating Fletcher's voice engage in stereotypical and racist mimicry of Black women, @DirtyChai reclaims this online act of mimicry as a form of critique and direct calling out. Importantly, by replicating and critically engaging with these same performance tropes that white users enact, @DirtyChai is not simply participating in digital blackface or reproducing online racism, but rather she is calling attention to the quotidian violence and harm of these meme practices and just how ridiculous these white users look.

Furthermore, the fact that @DirtyChai is holding a Starbucks cup in this video is significant: she is not only referencing the numerous other TikToks appropriating Fletcher's voice in which white women hold Starbucks drinks unironically or express their genuine affinity for the coffee brand (e.g. the posts by Leen the Engineer [2021]; Coty Ryan [2021], Mackenzie Rencher [2021]), but the presence of the coffee cup is also a reference to the notion that Starbucks in general is often associated with stereotypes of white femininity in North American meme culture (Adam, 2018). In other words, it is a visual reference to the recurring online joke that white women are obsessed with Starbucks' drinks, much like Brianna Blackmon's meme in chapter two mocking Karens and iced coffee. Thus, @DirtyChai's Starbucks cup represents yet another, more subtle layer of mockery or criticism aimed at white women— demonstrating that white women themselves have become a caricature and thus subverting white women's caricatured performances of Black femininity.

In addition, the fact that @DirtyChai deliberately uses the very same TikTok audio editing features as the racist white users in order to critique them constitutes a kind of reclamation of power as well. As examined in the previous chapter, TikTok's specific audio sampling feature is overwhelmingly used to produce digital blackface, and the platform actually

covertly encourages this racist utilization as a viable path to success (Boffone, 2021). Thus, by actively choosing to sample and perform Fletcher's voice in order to ridicule back white users, @DirtyChai is not only reclaiming Fletcher's voice— and one could argue all Black women's voices on the platform who have been targets of auditory theft— but reclaiming TikTok's features as a whole. The racist audio sampling features that are constantly used by white people for digital blackface are now being used to resist this digital blackface. @DirtyChai is therefore using TikTok's affordances in transformative and empowering ways: she is transforming or metaphorically "recod[ing]" (Bailey, 2021) the TikTok audio sampling features that "negatively impact [Black women's] lives" (ibid.) in order to produce a valuable and humorous anti-racist critique about this very feature.

Thus, @DirtyChai's TikTok demonstrates how the everyday TikTok affordances used for harm can still be critically engaged for subversive anti-racist content as well. @DirtyChai could have easily chosen to solely use TikTok's video features and simply record herself discussing Fletcher's incident to the camera, however, this would have constituted a very different kind of critique. Instead, by using this specific meme format and TikTok's audio sampling function dominated by white users, @DirtyChai is not only calling attention to the ongoing pattern of racist physical gestures, but using white creators' own methods against them. Just as white creators use the audio sampling button to harm Black women, @DirtyChai is using this same feature to call them out.

Along with @DirtyChai's physical gestures and her use of audio sampling features, let us examine more deeply the text superimposed in her video and how it supplements her visual critique: "POV: you're watching another yt woman turn into an exaggerated Black caricature just because they hear a Black woman on an audio." The use of the word "another" connotes that this trend is part of a larger history of white people playacting Blackness for online visibility. It

connotes a sense of the endlessness of digital blackface, highlighting how this oppressive meme practice is mundane, commonplace, and routine on the platform. Moreover, her use of "just because" suggests that Black women are turned into memes simply for existing: Black women's everyday, mundane actions and speech patterns are perceived as inherently amusing and appealing to white users even when Black people are not attempting to be humorous. This also points to how white users continuously laugh at Black femininity and how this laughter is rooted in historical representations and white supremacist values of Black subjects as inherently uncivilized or unsophisticated as examined in the previous chapters. Similarly, the second half of this text ("just because they hear a Black woman on an audio") connotes how white subjects perceive ordinary audio recordings of Black women merely speaking as opportunities for entertainment, pleasure, and online success; it illustrates how white users are constantly looking to instrumentalize Black women's voices to advance their own interests.

Furthermore, @DirtyChai's specific use of the "POV" (Point of View) meme format and the words "you're watching" highlights the experience of constantly witnessing and consuming this digital blackface on daily basis. While the phrase "you're watching" can apply to a person of any racial background, the fact that a Black woman is the subject and creator of this video calls to mind how Black users are constantly subjected to these racist representations online. The phrase importantly centres the audience experience and the endlessness of viewing this dehumanization, raising questions about what it means to be a Black person while on TikTok. Relatedly, the use of "you're watching" could also possibly reference white people's passivity and/or complicity in this digital blackface as audience members: it could reference white subjects who constantly view these memes and either actually enjoy them or simply do nothing to report, call out, or critique this behaviour. Finally, even the placement of this text within the video is notable: the writing is placed in the middle of the screen, right below her raised hands, which

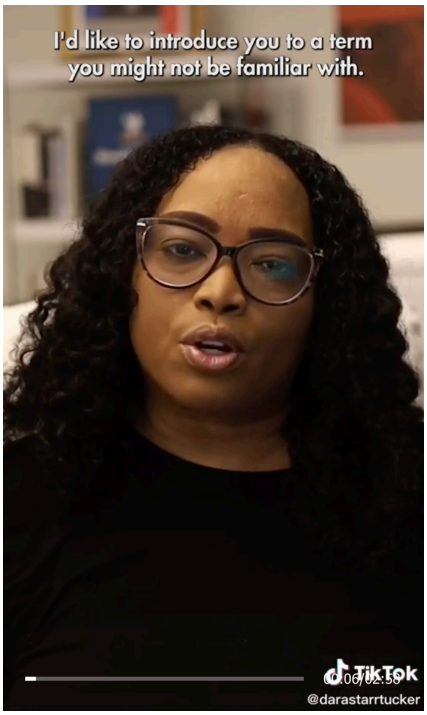
(whether intentional or not) functions to draw viewers' gaze to her exaggerated arm movements and further illustrate how ridiculous and absurd they are.

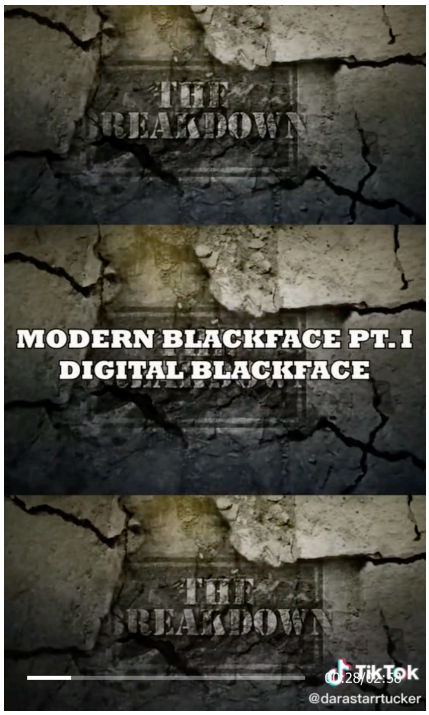
Lastly, @DirtyChai's humorous critique is not only limited to her video, but encompasses the caption that accompanies her post as well. @DirtyChai's caption reads, "'And if you call me r*cist I'm going to block you. Anyways, BLM, ACAB, #antiracist!'", along with a happy face emoji. The fact that @DirtyChai specifically places the caption in quotations marks denotes that she is being ironic and/or satirical— as in, 'this is how a stereotypical racist white woman would sound.' @DirtyChai is mocking white creators who claim to be anti-racist and support Black social justice activism— through the use of the BLM (Black Lives Matter) and ACAB (All Cops Are Bastards) acronyms as well as the hashtag— yet simultaneously participate in these harmful meme practices to advance their own desires for virality. This highlights how Black activism is perceived as stylish and appealing for white users and corporations— how white subjects co-opt the Black Lives Matter movement for online social capital without fully understanding or actively ignoring the demands of Black activists who call for broad structural change. Similarly, the use of "anyways" at the beginning of the second sentence highlights that these white subjects seemingly do not recognize their hypocrisy or complicity in anti-black racism. Finally, the caption also calls attention to white people's fragility (DiAngelo, 2011). The act of blocking that @DirtyChai refers to is when one user prevents another user from communicating or interacting with them on a given platform; thus, @DirtyChai's caption humorously illuminates how white subjects become incredibly defensive or angry whenever racism is brought up or they are confronted with the realities of their racist actions. Therefore, much like her imitation of white users' physical actions above, @DirtyChai once again uses mimicry and parody here— this time in a textual form— to ridicule back white users and call attention to their everyday racist acts.

Dara Starr Tucker:

In the case of Dara Starr Tucker, the TikTok creator engages in a different form of digital alchemy than the previous cases by using the platform's features to specifically produce an educational social justice resource and generate her own empowering self-representation as an alternative to the dominant harmful representations of Black femininity on TikTok (Sobande et al., 2020). In November 2021, Tucker released a three-minute long video defining and providing detailed examples of the various types of digital blackface that occur online as a part of her TikTok series on race and media titled "The Breakdown" (see Figure 13). This video imitates the structure and visual conventions of a television investigative news report or exposé including high-quality image resolution, talking head shots, as well as the use of archival footage and screenshots from online media intercut with Tucker speaking directly to the camera. The TikTok begins, much like long-form news programs such as *60 Minutes*, with a cold open introduction technique in which Tucker jumps directly into defining digital blackface and dispelling the commonly held belief that minstrelsy no longer exists before introducing herself and the title of her series: "I'm Dara Starr Tucker and this is The Breakdown." Even this introductory sentence directly imitates journalists' opening lines on *60 Minutes*. This use or emulation of news broadcast tropes is significant: given the fact that Black subjects are severely underrepresented in American newsrooms— only 7% of television newsroom employees are Black (Atske et al., 2019)— and considering the history of news outlets constantly replaying or recirculating imagery of racial trauma or police violence against Black bodies (Downs, 2016), I would argue that Tucker's video importantly reclaims these television news conventions for valuable anti-racist online resources.

Figure 13





Note. First image: Talking head shot. Second image: Title graphic. Tucker (2021). TikTok.

In addition, the title of the video has several layered meanings: firstly, given that this is a educational series, the title can be interpreted as a play on the idiom, "breaking it down," meaning to take a complex topic and make it more manageable or easily understandable. Secondly, the title graphic consists of a computer-generated image of a rock or piece of concrete being cracked into multiple pieces with the words "The Breakdown" superimposed on top of it. Thus, the title can also connote something literally breaking down: in the context of digital blackface and social media, the title can thus refer to when technologies fail or malfunction, implying that digital blackface and online racism constitute failures of social media. Finally, the title could also be a reference to a "breakdown" in hip-hop music: also known as a "break," this refers to a section of a song when only the drumbeat or percussion is audible while the rest of the musical elements temporarily pause. Considering the history of hip-hop turntablism— in which

many early hip-hop artists in the late-20th century were "trained to repair and maintain new technologies for the privileged" but instead reclaimed these technologies "as primary tools" for their own alternative musical expression (Rose, 1994, p. 83)— Tucker's video is directly in line with this history of reclaiming dominant technological affordances for Black cultural expression. Tucker is employing the very platform and video-creation features that are used to perpetuate digital blackface in order to call attention to this practice and create a valuable anti-racist resource as well as produce a form of self-representation given that she is the sole participant in this video. This notion of the hip-hop breakdown is reinforced by the instrumental background music for this video which features a quintessential hip-hop drumbeat and a high-pitched synthesizer that is reminiscent of 1990's West Coast hip-hop artists such as Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg.

In addition, let us examine Tucker's use of the talking head shot of herself in the very first frame as well as throughout the TikTok. The talking head refers to a shot in which only the subject's head and upper body is visible; given the shot's association with news broadcasts and documentary interviews, this visual trope helps to establish Tucker and her messaging as educational and authoritative. Similarly, opening the video with this footage therefore establishes a formal or solemn tone for the rest of the TikTok as well as connotes to the viewer that digital blackface needs to be taken seriously and is indeed problematic. In addition, given the nature of the talking head shot, Tucker is fully in focus while her background is out of focus: this once again serves to connote a tone of professionalism and emulate the visual conventions or high-quality resolution of a news program, but also importantly prioritizes her self-representation. Tucker is asserting her self-representation here through this shot— she is ensuring that she is clearly and fully in frame and in focus which serves as a reversal or to counteract the racist and grossly distorted representations of Black women that are rampant on TikTok. In her work on

Black women's identity construction and self-representation on Instagram, Kandace L. Harris (2015) argues that social media platforms can empower Black women to centre their narratives and allow "for the presentation of the self in the best light" (p. 140) and to "create, curate, and build congruent and integral layers of 'best self' identity" (p. 141). In this case, by making herself fully and clearly in frame, having professional-quality lighting and high image resolutions— which importantly contrasts the majority of videos on the platform that use informal, handheld phone cameras— Tucker is quite literally using the affordances of TikTok to create a presentation of herself in the "best light." In addition, Tucker is continuously gazing directly at the camera throughout the entire video: this, once again, not only serves to imitate television journalists, but I would argue is a literal form of "looking back" (Sobande et al., 2020) — looking back at the platform that allows and covertly encourages the appropriation and performance of Black women's voices. Similarly, her direct gaze at the camera is also a visual form of directly addressing the viewer. The positioning of the closed captioning on the screen, which is directly above her forehead, directs the viewers' gaze to her eyes and therefore further reinforces this notion of direct address. Thus, this continuous direct gaze could also be interpreted as looking back at viewers who gained amusement or happiness from consuming digital blackface, as well as looking back at white and non-Black viewers who participate in and/or help disseminate digital blackface memes.

Tucker's video is separated into three sections, each describing a different form of blackface performance is that pervasive online. The first section is titled, "Falsely Claiming to be Black to Bolster Your Position on Race." The specific use of "your" in this title denotes that Tucker is directly addressing non-Black subjects, reinforcing the above notion of digitally looking back at white users' complicity and/or direct participation in digital blackface. The section begins with Tucker explaining that this kind of minstrelsy involves white subjects using a

fake profile photo and announcing that they are Black in social media comments; this is most often done in order to advance ideologies that benefit white subjects and to endorse or "justify behaviours that might not be considered racist" if a Black person were agreeing with them (Tucker, 2021). Tucker then uses white Republican congressional candidate Dean Browning as an example of this kind of digital blackface: in November 2020, Browning published a Tweet from his personal, verified Twitter account claiming to be a "black gay guy" in support of Donald Trump (Browning, 2020 as quoted in Tucker, 2021). It was then revealed that Browning thought he was posting from his other Twitter account in which he deceptively pretends to be a Black person to promote his political ideologies. Tucker supplements this extreme case study by explaining how this digital blackface also occurs in more minor, quotidian contexts in which traditional users simply post comments beneath a video professing to be Black and claiming to not be offended by certain racist language or actions; Tucker intercuts her talking head footage with numerous screenshots of these kinds of comments. Thus, by providing examples of both kinds of this digital minstrelsy, Tucker illustrates how this is not a tactic used solely by politicians or the elite, but how there is an ordinariness, casualness, and mundanity to this form of minstrel performance. In other words, how minstrelsy can be harmful by consisting of these more minor, "casual" acts of racism (Williams, 2020) in which users might not recognize their individual participation in white supremacy. In addition, in both cases, white subjects instrumentalize their deceptive performance of Black identity in order to advance their own racist ideologies and interests: this performance is undergirded by the belief that a racist action simply requires endorsement by a Black person for it to be considered not racist. However, as we have seen in previous chapters, white supremacy can be reproduced even when people of colour are present (Ahmed, 2007).

Directly in line with this notion of the everydayness of online racism, the second section

of Tucker's video is titled "Using AAVE." Here, Tucker begins by defining African American Vernacular English and explains how this form of digital blackface is much more "insidious" (Tucker, 2021) than the first performance. Although she does not explicitly label it as linguistic or cultural appropriation, Tucker presents many of the same notions that Jane H. Hill (2008) conceptualizes in her work on linguistic appropriation as examined in the introductory and first chapters. For example, Tucker explains that youthful internet users adopt the language and vocal inflections of Black speakers "to appear more edgy or street smart than they actually are. In short, they do it because it's cool" (Tucker, 2021). In other words, non-Black subjects are not necessarily attempting to deceptively perform a Black identity as examined in the first section, but rather, much like the corporations examined in chapter one, they are attempting to embody a sense of stylishness and hipness distinctly through stealing AAVE. Furthermore, Tucker once again intercuts her talking head footage with screenshots of regular white Twitter users appropriating AAVE as evidence of this kind of digital blackface. The use of intercutting and screenshots once more highlights the distinct everydayness of this kind of appropriation, asserting how minstrel performance can be mundane, routine, and casual.

Finally, the third section of Tucker's video is titled, "Using Gif & Emojis of Black People to Express Emotions." Here, Tucker begins by explaining that with this kind of digital blackface there is "usually no harm meant by it, but when [these GIFs and emojis are] used by people outside of the Black community, [they] can perpetuate negative stereotypes of Black people as overly emotional, aggressive, highly animated or buffoonish." Tucker's use of the term "overly emotional" distinctly highlights the affective dimension of this appropriation as examined in chapter one and how exaggerated emotional expressivity has come to serve as a false, harmful proxy for Black affect. In addition, it is important to note that the above stereotypes are not harmful simply because they are untrue, but importantly because they function as controlling

representations of Black individuals: Black subjects are expected to be as aggressive and uncivilized as these caricatures (Bailey, 2021) as discussed in the previous chapter. Furthermore, Tucker calls attention to similar notions of hyperbolic emotionality that Jackson (2017) discusses in her work on digital blackface, illustrating how Tucker is in conversation with scholars on the various kinds of online minstrel performance. Similar to Jackson's work, Tucker also importantly situates these GIFs and emojis within historical theatrical blackface performance: "There is a direct through line to the era of minstrelsy, where Black people were used as stand-ins to express a broad range of emotions" (Tucker, 2021). This passage not only illustrates how white subjects instrumentalize Black subjects for emotional expressivity, but also indicates that, much like the followers of Wynona's page above and the racialized users examined in chapter one, there is an online Black discourse of connecting seemingly innocuous and routinized digital practices to broader structural oppression.

In addition, aligned with the previous two sections of this video, Tucker's talking head footage here is intercut with popular GIFs of Black subjects that are used rampantly by white people online: Leslie David Baker from the television series, *The Office*; Disney actor, Raven-Symoné; and Kimberly Wilkins' television news interview. The fact that all of these examples are taken distinctly from television programs and not screenshots from social media productions like the previous sections is significant: it illustrates how these stereotypes of Black affect and exaggerated emotionality arise from mainstream cultural representations, emphasizing the everydayness and casualness of this racism that often goes unnoticed. Similarly, the fact that these characters are portrayed by actual Black actors demonstrates that these harmful stereotypes can occur regardless of the racial identity of the performer given that, as examined in chapter one, whiteness and white supremacist ideology can be "reproduced" in these television organizations and networks even when people of colour are present (Ahmed, 2007)— how Black

performers must “inhabit whiteness” (ibid.) in order to succeed in these institutions. Finally, Tucker concludes this section and the entire video by illuminating how casual racism is often not premeditated, which is precisely what makes it so insidious: “The important thing to remember that blackface, whether done in the real world or online, does’t necessarily have to possess ill intent in order to cause harm.” This passage directly relates to Thompson’s (2021) work on the logic and rhetoric of white innocence: white people’s supposed wellmeaningness or framing their blackface as an act of admiration or love does not absolve their harmful acts. This emphasis on intentionality can often work as a defence for white subjects’ fragility and as a way to refuse acknowledgment or responsibility for their individual participation in racism (Williams, 2020).

Conclusion:

In this chapter, I have illuminated how Black women users call attention to and critique digital blackface and online corporate co-optation of AAVE. This chapter contributes to scholarly conversations on the intersections of Black online networks, social media, and activism by highlighting how TikTok has become a burgeoning space for resistance of white supremacy as well as how Black users create a range of humorous and informative counternarratives distinctly against cultural appropriation. As I have argued in this chapter, the posts by @AAVEGoneWrong, @DirtyChai, and Dara Starr Tucker constitute varying forms of digital alchemy (Bailey, 2021) and a digital oppositional gaze (Sobande et al., 2020) that ultimately illustrate how Black women use these platforms for transformative and empowering resistance to anti-Black racism. In particular, @AAVEGoneWrong engages in a form of looking back (Sobande et al., 2020) at corporations appropriating AAVE by exposing their misuse of Black vernacular through screenshots and undermining their marketing efforts by deliberately mocking them, while her followers participate in the resistance by creating their own memes ridiculing the

brands in the comments— illustrating how a digital oppositional gaze can encourage collectivities. In the case of @DirtyChai, the TikTok creator engages in humorous digital alchemy by reclaiming the very TikTok affordances, meme format, physical performance gestures, and audio recordings that are used for digital blackface in order to ridicule and publicly shame the TikTok users who are ridiculing Black women. Finally, in Tucker's case, her educational video on digital blackface constitutes both digital alchemy and a digital oppositional gaze as she reclaims TikTok's affordances and television news conventions for valuable social justice media (Bailey, 2021), as well as creates her own empowering "presentation of the self in the best light" (Harris, 2015, p. 140) to counter the rampant harmful representations of Black femininity on TikTok (Sobande et al., 2020).

As Moya Bailey (2021) notes on Black women's online resistance of misogynoir, "[c]reatively manipulating and transforming social media platforms become means of harm reduction. […] Black women and Black nonbinary, agender, and gender-variant folks are making room for themselves on digital platforms in ways that exceed what was ever intended by the engineers and corporations who designed and created these sites" (p. 23). Bailey's notion of "harm reduction" is particularly salient here: @AAVEGoneWrong's, @DirtyChai's, and Tucker's individual resistant social media materials cannot completely eradicate digital blackface or corporate appropriation of AAVE, however, they do importantly help alleviate some of their harmful impacts (ibid.)— by educating fellow users, calling attention to routinized racist practices that are not perceived as problematic, or simply by enabling racialized users to laugh through the pain (Williams, 2020, p. 11). In addition, given that the Black creators examined in this chapter use their respective platforms in ways beyond TikTok and Twitter's original intentions (Bailey, 2021, p. 23), @AAVEGoneWrong, @DirtyChai, and Tucker can be seen as engaging in a kind of resistance against the host platforms themselves, reclaiming their

affordances and/or asserting their self-representations. At the same time, in our neoliberal culture there is a risk of marginalized users' resistant materials being "mined for marketing inspiration, and their work being monetised without them being compensated" (Sobande et al., 2020, p. 422) as brands continuously search for innovative or alternative cultural expressions in order to appear stylish much like corporate co-optation of social justice activism. Thus, just as digital environments and social media affordances can be used to produce liberating self-representations, they can simultaneously also be used to dilute or distort those very representations (as previous chapters have illuminated). Ultimately, the Tweets and TikToks examined in this chapter demonstrate the empowering and essential ways that Black women cultivate humour, laughter, and resistance online in the face of persistent, insidious harm.

Conclusion

As I write these concluding remarks, there is currently a facial filter on the popular instant messaging application Snapchat that allows users to transform their face into the face of a Black character from the video game *Fortnite*. In other words, a filter that gives users a literal Black face. In addition, Instagram has incorporated short-form videos onto their platform, titled "Reels," that allow users to sample and re-use audio recordings from other videos; underneath each Reel, almost exactly like TikTok, there is a large blue button that reads, "Use audio." I include these examples here to illustrate that the digital blackface, linguistic appropriation, and technological affordances examined throughout this thesis are not limited to TikTok and Twitter; rather, they are representative of a larger internet culture that is predicated on the quotidian theft, performance, and mockery of Blackness, and that is continuously developing new, seemingly entertaining ways to appropriate Black culture. Furthermore, these examples underscore the significance of this research as TikTok's unique affordances that make it easy and seamless to perform digital blackface are being replicated, re-designed, and in turn normalized across platforms like Instagram. This suggests that users can come to expect the ability to sample and lip-synch to other people's voices online regardless of the specific application, which further contributes to the harmful perception that digital minstrelsy is merely a trivial and mundane meme practice.

In this thesis, I have illuminated how linguistic appropriation of AAVE is perpetuated and performed on social media through corporate digital advertising and TikTok audio sampling, as well as the ways it is experienced, critiqued, and humorously resisted. In doing so, this thesis contributes to scholarly discussions on the intersections of whiteness, cultural appropriation, social media, and activism by highlighting how the rampant theft and circulation of Black linguistic culture results in the covert reproduction of decades-old white supremacist stereotypes

and controlling representations of Black femininity. This thesis also illuminates how Black women reclaim the social media affordances used for quotidian harm into transformative white supremacist critiques. Altogether, my thesis has argued that these structures of online appropriation, though seemingly innocuous and entertaining for many white users, ultimately serve to reproduce anti-Black racism.

In spurring new insights in the disciplines of feminist media studies, social media studies, critical race studies, and the sociology of language, my contribution to knowledge lies in calling attention the significant and insidious harm these corporate advertisements and memes continue to do by distinctly targeting Black women. Further implications of this research include advancing the literature on Black digital resistance by illuminating TikTok as a growing site of Black community-building and cultural critiques, as well as advancing the literature on minstrelsy by revealing how digital blackface relies on the distinct performance and mockery of Black femininity. In addition, the findings of this thesis suggest that the constant misuse of Black linguistic culture by corporations and everyday TikTok users actively contributes to the disuse and linguistic decline of AAVE for Black speakers as highlighted in chapter three; thus, part of the significance of this research lies in highlighting how online cultural appropriation can potentially threaten the very existence of Black vernacular.

In chapter one I illuminated a shared pattern of online promotional discourse that appropriates Black linguistic culture across brands: I examined how Burger King, Chipotle, IHOP, and Wendy's steal and instrumentalize AAVE phrases in their digital advertising strategies on Twitter and Instagram, as well as examined the affective responses from white and racialized users. This chapter argued that online corporate appropriation of AAVE ultimately generates affective resonances of comfort for white subjects by functioning as pleasurable reminders of racial superiority. In particular, I illustrated how the Tweets by Burger King, Chipotle, IHOP, and

Wendy's enable the corporations to evoke pleasurable feelings of coolness, playfulness, and "outlawness" (Fleetwood, 2010) from Black culture as well as transform AAVE into a non-threatening commodity for white audiences. In the case of visual ads, I argued that the Tweets and Instagram posts that appropriate AAVE in their captions but feature only white models in the accompanying photos serve as forms of AAVE deracialization. In addition, analyzing the affective comments beneath the posts revealed that white users are continuously entertained, amused, and "affected by" (Paasonen, 2019, p. 50) the corporate ads because they are pleasurably reminded of their racial dominance over marginalized subjects. In contrast, Black subjects express anger and despair at brands' exploitations of Black linguistic culture. Two trends were analyzed in Black users' affective responses: users connect the corporate posts to broader systemic oppression, and they publicly shame specific corporations over individual instances of cultural appropriation. In both cases, I argued that racialized users' affective discomfort is generative as it is mobilized into community-building and critiques of white supremacy.

In chapter two I illuminated how quotidian forms of misogynoir and digital blackface persist on TikTok through the theft, performance, and mockery of Black women's voices, as well as how this appropriation is built into the platform's affordances. Focusing on three Black female creators who have been sampled by tens of thousands of TikTok users— Coco Jones, Brianna Blackmon, and Jasmine Collins— this chapter argued that white users reproduce white supremacist values of Black femininity as unintelligent and uncivilized, ultimately constituting a unique form of oppression against Black women. In the case of Jones, I examined how white users appropriate Jone's voice, the AAVE term "on period" as well as recontextualize Jones' story about code-switching and workplace racism to advance their own interests and associate Black women with notions of poor judgement. In Blackmon's case, white users appropriate expressions of "shade" as desirable qualities of Black femininity, as well as defang the AAVE

term “Karen,” which is a form of signifying (Gates, 1988) against white women, to remove its resistant power for Black subjects. In the case of Collins, I argued that non-Black users appropriate the AAVE term “trifling,” as well as reproduce the Sapphire stereotype to create a “controlling image” of Black women (Bailey, 2021) as enraged and unrestrained. Lastly, I analyzed TikTok’s affordances to reveal that digital blackface is fundamental to the application’s success: the platform overtly encourages the appropriation of other people’s voices through the “Use this sound” button, and connotes to users that performing Black women’s vocality for humorous purposes is a justifiable path to online virality (Boffone, 2021).

Finally, chapter three examined the creative and empowering ways that Black women users on TikTok and Twitter critique digital blackface and online corporate appropriation of AAVE. This chapter argued that the posts by @AAVEGoneWrong, @DirtyChai, and Dara Starr Tucker constitute differing forms of digital alchemy (Bailey, 2021) and a digital oppositional gaze (Sobande et al., 2020), ultimately illustrating how Black women creators use these platforms for transformative and subversive resistance to white supremacy. Firstly, I examined how @AAVEGoneWrong engages in a form of humorous looking back (Sobande et al., 2020) at corporations appropriating AAVE by exposing their misuse of Black vernacular through screen captures and undermining their marketing efforts by strategically ridiculing them: additionally, this Twitter page typifies how a digital oppositional gaze can encourage community-building as her followers participate in the resistance by creating their own memes mocking the corporations in the comments. Secondly, in the case of @DirtyChai, I illustrated how the TikTok creator engages in digital alchemy and a humorous reversal of power by reclaiming the very TikTok affordances, physical performance gestures, and audio sample that are used for digital blackface in order to denounce and laugh back at the TikTok users who are ridiculing Black women. Lastly, in the case of Tucker, I argue that her TikTok video on digital blackface constitutes a different

form of digital alchemy as she reclaims TikTok's features and television news conventions to specifically create an educational anti-racist resource (Bailey, 2021), as well as produces her own self-representation "in the best light" (Harris, 2015, p. 140) as an alternative to the dominant negative stereotypes of Black women on TikTok (Sobande et al., 2020).

Given TikTok's unique algorithm and meme creation features as examined in chapter two, one area that is up for debate is whether TikTok as a platform is racist— not only the individual users or the harmful imagery and stereotypes that circulate on it, but whether the application in and of itself is racist. As this thesis has illuminated, the platform overtly encourages the sampling and performing of other people's voices, and the algorithm prioritizes digital blackface in its recommendations to users, thus, it signals to users that appropriating Black women's expressions is an acceptable means for online success (Boffone, 2021). Furthermore, given that the application actively silences or removes videos and accounts by Black creators speaking out against racism as well as limits the spread of Black Lives Matter-related content in certain cases, one could make a compelling argument that TikTok itself is racist. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that in our white supremacist culture all social media platforms are "designed within the logics of White heteropatriarchy" (Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022, p. 16) and that "whiteness structures application design" (Brock, 2020, p. 38) — even the applications that do not overtly silence Black creators or promote digital minstrelsy. Thus, while TikTok represents a unique and substantial development in social media affordances, I would argue that the platform should not be treated as an individualized or isolated instance of cyber racism, but rather as one facet of a larger North American internet culture that is bounded by whiteness.

This thesis is intended to incite further discussions on the intersections of racism, misogyny, and minstrelsy on social media, and more broadly, on the appropriation of Black

culture. Some areas that are worthy of further research include: how does the appropriation of dances created by Black subjects on TikTok constitute a kind of digital blackface performance? Davis' (2022) and Boffone's (2021) work on TikTok dance challenges as discussed in chapter two are some initial examples of the growing literature on this topic, however, further research is needed on the evolution or expansion of digital minstrelsy as more applications begin to integrate audio sampling features such as Instagram. In addition, as users increasingly turn to TikTok for social justice consciousness-raising as noted in chapter two, how does the platform's selective silencing or removal of Black Lives Matter-related content complicate popular understandings of Black activism and does this silencing have an effect on the progress of this movement? Although the digital silencing of Black activists has been thoroughly examined journalistically, more academic studies are needed on how social media corporations actively impede Black social justice movements by selectively or partially enforcing their terms of service that disproportionately affects users and activists from marginalized backgrounds.

In addition, another area that warrants further research is how facial filters on platforms such as Snapchat, FaceApp, and Facetune facilitate a literal form of digital blackface as discussed in the opening example. FaceApp and Facetune are popular photo editing applications that allow users to enhance and manipulate their selfies: the former received immense criticism in 2019 for releasing filters titled "Black," "Asian," and "Indian" that allowed users to transform their race (Vincent, 2019), while the latter enables users to darken their skin tone through a so-called tanning feature (Derrick, 2021). These filters and selfie editing functions are often described as being part of the online phenomenon known as "blackfishing" which "encapsulates a range of practices such as altering physical appearances through physical and digital means" as well as "using Afrocentric hairstyles" and "darkening [one's] skin" to deceptively appear Black online to garner social capital (Stevens, 2021, p. 1). The work of Cherid (2021) and Stevens

(2021) importantly situates blackfishing as forms of cultural appropriation and the commodification of Blackness, however, future studies could further explore the practice in relation to online minstrel performance as well as emphasize the specific technological affordances outlined above that allow users to physically embody a Black identity.

Finally, in line with Bailey's (2021) work on how misogynoir can be creatively addressed and transformed, as well as Brock's (2020) above notion on application design, future studies on whiteness and online appropriation could explore the possibilities of integrating anti-racist principles into social media platforms from their conception or construction. Could a truly anti-racist, anti-misogynoirist platform be possible and if so, what would one look like? Furthermore, building on this notion of imagining new possibilities, future research could examine online audio sampling features specifically as a potential means to spur Black artistic creation and cultural expression: in hip-hop, the process of sampling has been an essential production technique since the genre's conception, having been used as the basis for liberating, resistant, and empowering forms of songwriting for decades. On TikTok, there is a growing community of racialized DJs and producers both providing educational content on traditional hip-hop sampling (Watson, 2021) as well as using the platform's audio sampling feature to create hip-hop beats (see @KyleYouMadeThat, 2022). Thus, in addition to @DirtyChai's use examined in chapter three, more scholarly attention is warranted on the other ways that social media audio sampling features are being creatively reclaimed or reimagined to produce empowering self-representations or artistic works tied to this legacy of hip-hop production. Ultimately, this thesis has illuminated how seemingly pleasurable or mundane everyday social media affordances and production practices are undergirded by violent anti-Black racist ideology— underscoring the urgency and significance of linguistic appropriation as well as the essentiality of Black women's digital resistance.

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