

POWER TO THE PODCASTS:
PUBLICS, OPINIONS, AND THE ECONOMY OF BLACK PODCASTS

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ABSTRACT

Tegan R. Bratcher: Power to the Podcasts: Publics, Opinions, and the Economy of Black Podcasts (Under the direction of Dr. Joe Cabosky)

Since the early 2000s, podcasting has been a growing part of the media landscape. Many media outlets have declared podcasts to be the “next big thing,” stimulating discourse across various facets of our lives. This dissertation explored Black podcasts, particularly as they relate to public opinion, culture and rhetoric, social media and the history of Black media, and strategic communication more generally. In all of these subfields and areas of mass communication or media studies, the examination of podcasts from critical and diverse lenses have had major gaps in literature.

This dissertation uses multiple perspectives and theoretical frameworks to uncover the economy of podcasts, and in particular, how Black podcasters in a contemporary landscape are utilizing this revolutionizing platform. While scholarship has analyzed the larger, more commercially successful podcasts, what is less often examined are the everyday podcasts that more and more Americans are looking to for extracurricular fulfillment, selfpromotion/branding/marketing, community building, and potentially profit-inducing reasons. This study interviewed twenty active podcasters and analyzed four distinct Black podcasts with aims of revealing broader themes about podcasts and their influences on our communicative practices and spaces.

The dissertation’s focus on Black podcasters sheds light on how a historically disadvantaged and marginalized group in America has continued to evolve in communication

practices through the use of emerging digital technologies over time. Studies that focus our attention on marginalized communities are largely missing in the field of communication and in its subfields alike.

Findings show that the platform of podcasting is like no other media platform in that it provides a free space where media producers can authentically be themselves in an effort to create community and fill information gaps. Findings also revealed a host of implications that link podcasts to strategic communication, as well as the economy of the podcast industry. Mainly, podcasters' emphasis on audience engagement, social media, self-policing, and monetizing reflect a unique media platform that allows podcasters to easily promote their personal brands and businesses. Literature in the field of strategic communications should continue to agitate the linkages between podcasting, promotion, branding and public relations.

Lastly, findings indicated the significance of exploring and understanding traditional African American rhetoric to better identify the communicative practices of Black Americans and other distinct groups. When it comes to Black Americans in particular, the use of traditional rhetorical tools is a critical component of discourse that is facilitated on podcasts. Referencing the framework of everyday talk (Harris-Perry, 2004), the results of this dissertation illuminate the presence of everyday talk in mass mediated contexts that provide opportunities for public opinion and discourse and present a new space of opinion.

This study concludes by addressing its limitations and providing future extensions for scholars. First, this dissertation suggests that podcasts are both technically and functionally understudied in many areas. Specifically, social media scholars should continue to apply social media theories and perspectives to the study of podcasts because of the findings revealed in this study that suggest parallels between podcasting and traditional social media platforms. In

addition, findings also displayed implications that might be of interest to strategic communicators, specifically examining how marginalized communities utilize podcasts and how that might impact various means of strategic communications and niche or diverse audiences. One final discussion point advances the concept of mediated everyday talk, which aims to encourage a broader way of theorizing about minority communities, especially as they appear within digital or technological communicative spaces.

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INTRODUCTION

In the midst of a global pandemic, statewide mandated quarantine, and growing racial and partisan divides between American citizens, Kenan Thompson, longtime cast member of *Saturday Night Live*, announced via Twitter his plans to launch a podcast with longtime friend, Tani Marole. In a Twitter thread of three tweets, Thompson announced that due to boredom, having watched everything on Netflix, and looking for something new, the pair had decided to begin a podcast called *You Already Know*. Thompson and Marole join millions of other podcasters worldwide, some celebrities and highly influential people and some just your average American citizen, who choose to broadcast their everyday thoughts and perspective with fans and listeners.

As the writing process of this dissertation came to a conclusion, it had nearly been a year since the first episode of The *You Already Know* podcast. In just a year, Thompson and Marole have recorded and aired 50 episodes, and they are likely to continue in success given that there has been a significant increase in Black podcast listeners ages 18-34, from 2018 to 2019 (Edison Research, 2019). This increase in Black listeners also reflects the increase of Black podcasters. For example, some Black oriented online publications note the rise of Black podcasters, claiming how the ease of Apple and Spotify make the medium more accessible¹. The focus of the present

¹ 1 See Black Enterprise (2019) and Booker (2019) in references

study to examine the complexities of Black podcasting through an understanding of everyday rhetorics, conversations, and political talk.

In many ways, this dissertation attempts to provide broad implications for a host of fields as they relate to the phenomenon of podcasting. More narrowly, however, this dissertation offers a thorough understanding of how podcasts, specifically Black podcasts, operate within strategic communication. Though scholarship on podcasting is limited, some studies reveal the potential for podcasts to provide digital spaces for anyone to create and form audiences or networked communities. Moreover, by situating our understanding of Black podcasts within the historical purview of the Black press and Black media more generally, this dissertation explores the affordances of podcasts and theorizes podcasts as a digital space which offers the access and autonomy of mass media to Black podcasters.

Exploring Black podcasts through various theories

Podcasts challenge the ways in which we study media and Black media specifically. Though initial development dates back to more than a decade ago, scholars have still yet to fully theorize on podcasts. Though millions of podcast users (both producers and consumers) continue to interact with the medium daily (Whitner, 2020), we still know relatively little about how the medium truly functions within a communicative context. Though some scholars have started to pay close attention to Black podcasters (Florini, 2019; Spinelli & Dann, 2019), major gaps remain.

This dissertation aims to explore the phenomenon of Black podcasting as it relates to our social and political worlds. Due to the lack of literature on podcasting this dissertation utilizes interdisciplinary perspectives in order to theorize on the medium. Further, due to the lack of

literature on Black podcasts specifically, this dissertation employs critical cultural methodological analysis to adequately assess Black users of digital technology.

This dissertation proceeds as follows. Chapter One begins with a review of podcasting. Though podcasting has only been around since 2004, several studies have centered the medium in their empirical analysis. This research shows that while there have been larger generalizations drawn about podcasting, there are still large gaps that remain in the literature. Chapter Two scales back to review the importance of the history of the Black press. Before podcasts and digital media in general, the Black press persisted throughout the decades through print media. In this chapter, the history of this living institution serves as the basis for examining Black media today. More so, this chapter's sub-sections include discussions on the move from print to digital media – particularly as it affected Black media; and a discussion of convergence culture. Chapter Three explores African American Rhetoric (AAR) in communication literature. It identifies three main rhetorical strategies (oral tradition, call and response, signifying) Black Americans often employ within discourse. AAR was a key feature of the Black press and it still remains a critical feature in contemporary Black discourse. Chapter Four theorizes on publics, spaces of opinion, and everyday political talk. Using the frameworks from Squires (2002) and Warner (2002) on counterpublics and publics, Jacobs and Townsley's (2011) space of opinion, and Harris-Perry's (2004) everyday talk, this chapter reveals the strengths and weaknesses of each framework. With that being said, this chapter aims to challenge the core tenets of these frameworks to expand to include more diverse characteristics. Chapter Five concludes the literature review with a connection of social media theories to podcasting. This chapter investigates the concepts of affordances and authenticity especially as they relate to digital and social media. Chapter Six poses this study's research questions and methods. This chapter includes a description of critical

techno-cultural discourse analysis (CTDA) and the interview methods. This section also lists and describes the Black podcasts that will be included in the sample. Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine reveal the findings of this study. The final chapter of this dissertation ends with a lengthy discussion on the implications of this research and its potential extensions.

CHAPTER I: Podcasts

Podcasts are emerging as a powerful instrument for producing and broadcasting audio content by diverse organizations and individuals (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). Though podcasting is not necessarily a new phenomenon there still remains large gaps in the field of communication regarding podcasting theory and practice (Markman, 2012). This chapter discusses the gaps in knowledge about the platform in communication literature.

Podcasts are audio-enabled files that can be downloaded to desktop computers, iPods, tablets, or cellphones (Potter, 2006). Additionally, podcasting can be thought of as a “creative medium distinct from radio, with its own unique modes of not just dissemination but also production, listening, and engagement” (Spinelli & Dann, 2019, p. 2). Much early research on podcasting used survey methods which found more generalized and descriptive trends. More recent work on podcasts uses more diverse methods and theory (*see* Florini, 2019; Spinelli & Dann, 2019).

The growing popularity of podcasts

Research on podcasts suggested that the industry was growing rapidly (Rainie & Madden, 2005). In 2018, a report concluded that 73 million people in the US listen to a podcast at least monthly (Enberg & Lipsman, 2018). Even more, statistical data on podcasts showed that activity is likely to continue to increase, given that podcast use has more than doubled in five years, increasing 122% since 2014 (The Podcast Consumer, 2019). Currently, podcasts can be

accessed from a number of platforms, including Apple, Spotify, Google Play, Soundcloud and others (McMahon, 2017).

Potter (2006) wrote about podcasting as an emerging media two years after podcasting first began in 2004 (Markman, 2012). Potter's prediction was likely correct as audiences for podcasts grew quickly when Apple added podcasts to iTunes in June 2005, gaining one million podcast subscriptions in the first two days (Apple Computer, 2005). From 2006 to 2008, the number of adult internet users who had downloaded a podcast had risen from 12% to 19% (Markman, 2012). By 2011, there were more than 90,000 podcasts² and, in a study as recent as April 2020, there were more than 850,000 active podcasts and more than 30 million podcast episodes (Whitner, 2020). At the time of this writing, podcasting spans over 100 languages internationally and is gender balanced when it comes to audience – 52% men and 48% women (Whitner, 2020). Simply put, the study of podcasts is significant to communication research and is likely to appeal to a broad range of audiences.

Podcasts in communication literature

Various analytical frameworks and methods have been used to investigate podcasts in communication. Early research on podcasting compared the medium to radio, arguing that podcasts have the potential to reach listeners in new ways (Berry, 2006). Similarly, Menduni (2007) compared podcasting to native radio in Italy. Though those studies suggested that podcasts and radio were comparable media, questions remain about the similarities and differences between radio and podcasts (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). For example, Spinelli & Dann noted that the differences in how radio and podcasts are broadcast and disseminated make

² www.podcastalley.com

podcasts distinct. While radio shows are bound to corporate schedules, podcasts lack of schedule can allow for different kinds of voices and listeners (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). Even more, as

podcasts are interwoven into social media and can be seen as social media itself, the medium is further separated from radio.

Initial studies on podcasts employed survey methods and questionnaires similar to methods used in radio studies (Markman, 2012; Markman & Sawyer, 2014; McClung & Johnson, 2010). For instance, McClung and Johnson (2010) investigated the demographics and motives of podcast users. Using survey data (N=354), they indicated that podcast users were more often women (62.1%), well-educated (73.8%) and white (79.3%). Markman and Sawyer (2014) examined the motivations of independent podcaster with a follow-up web-based survey. They found that podcasting continued to be dominated by educated professionals over 30 years of age. While these studies provide generalizations and descriptions of podcast users in the earlier years of podcasting, they don't examine the full scope of podcasts. These studies also paint a profile of podcasters and podcast users to be generally wealthy, women, and white, though podcast use has grown to be increasingly diverse (Friess, 2017).

More substantive work on podcasts examined how podcasts can be iterated as enclaved digital social spaces (Florini, 2015), as well as how podcasts help to build informal networks and collective identity (Florini, 2017). For example, Florini found that Black podcasters and their audiences use mobile technologies and earphones to enjoy the benefits of an un-surveilled Black social space. Also, Florini (2017) examined a popular podcast network to understand how the space worked as a digital counterpublic and a harbor for Black users. She found that through a multimedia trans-platform space, networks of discursive formations are formed arising from the

combination of culture and technology (2017, p. 452). This work is important to understanding how Black podcasters can function as counterpublics or agents of counter-discourse, however from this scope the Black digital social spaces are narrowed into a category.

In Florini's (2019) most recent work *Beyond Hashtags*, her multi-method analysis of a network of podcasters and their various audiences, helps to explain how podcasts contribute to building communication networks. What her work showed was that podcasts had the power to circulate information and cultivate solidarity that is visible to mainstream media. Central to this dissertation is Florini's assertion that Black Americans use the media technologies for a number of reasons including forging community, organizing, and creating media alternatives. Florini's research fills important gaps in the literature about the development of podcast networks and their relationship to larger social issues. Spinelli & Dann's (2019) approach to understanding the complexity of podcasts was conducted through interviews and textual analysis some of most current culturally significant podcasts (p. 4). Their empirical analyses examined noteworthy and popular podcasts like *Serial*, *Radiolab*, and *The Heart* to observe how they are constructed, how they are consumed, and what meaning strategies and literary devices they employ (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). Still, what is left largely unexplored is how everyday Black Americans use the same media technologies as larger podcast networks, for public opinion, discussions, and debates. While Florini narrows in on a network of podcasters who are all working toward a common goal and Spinelli and Dann focus attention on highly successful, noteworthy podcasts; this dissertation aims to highlight other variations of podcasts that are less formal and visible.

Podcasting as participatory culture

As Markman (2012) noted, podcasts are emblematic of participatory culture, contributing to the reshaping of relationships between media producers and consumers. This present study extends that work, zeroing in on the independent podcaster. Participatory culture is an essential feature of *convergence* (Jenkins, 2006a; Markman, 2012) which refers to when old and new media interact with one another and, “where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways” (Jenkins, 2006a: 2). As Markman (2012) wrote, “Convergence is not strictly technological, but key elements of convergence, particularly participatory culture, are facilitated by technologies that allow for easier and cheaper access to the means of producing and distributing content, especially the internet” (Markman, 2012, p. 549).

In other words, media technology allows for greater access to disseminating various kinds of content that is often able to be more diverse in nature than mainstream or traditional media outlets. This is a key feature of convergence and participatory culture. Though Markman laid the foundations for investigating the dynamics between media and convergence culture, few studies further explore these dynamics, particularly from diverse and interdisciplinary perspectives.

As a whole, there is arguably still a lot to learn about podcasting, particularly as it operates within communicative contexts. Surveys on podcasts revealed descriptive data on who creates and uses podcasts, these assessments are surface based and lack nuanced portrayals of podcasters goals and objectives. Other scholarship that provided deeper analyses of podcasts tended to focus on the structural or networked aspect of podcasts. This dissertation intends to further our knowledge on podcasts by exploring everyday discourse on Black podcasts.

CHAPTER II: The history of the Black press

This chapter provides a review of the literature that has been conducted on the history of the Black press and the transition from print to digital media. Discussed here is how the history of the Black press contributes to our understanding of Black digital media, particularly the history of the Black press demonstrate how Black media has consistently showed community building, ideology circulation, and idea facilitation over time and media. Today the Black press still serves as a space that counters mainstream news depictions of blackness, yet, other components of the Black press have adapted to a new media landscape that evade standard definitions of what can be considered the black press (Fayne, 2019).

As Brock (2009) wrote, “Black people have always found time and space to discuss (with humor and wisdom) what it means to be Black” (2009: 33). This statement rings true, even throughout history when access to media and civil rights like freedom of speech weren’t afforded to all. Understanding the history of the Black press contextualizes this present study in three major ways. First, the history of Black press has served as a distinctive function in American society. Second the Black press functions as a means for community building and circulation of Black ideologies (Rhodes, 1998). Taken together, and third, the Black press has served as the distributor of ideas within the black community (Fayne, 2019).

The Freedom’s Journal, A unique function in American society

At its inception, the *Freedom's Journal* was directed at a small group of Black Americans that were literate and had resources to support the entity. Frederick Douglass had perhaps the best-known paper in those times – *Frederick Douglass' Paper and North Star* – but it wasn't until Cornish and Russwurm's collaboration began in 1827, where the history and dissemination of the Black press begins (Bacon, 2003). The reasons for starting the *Freedom Journal* are a point of debate for some scholars. Some argue for the Noah thesis, which contends that the Journal was in response to the racist rhetoric of Mordecai Noah, a racist Jew who published hateful content about African Americans in his own publication (Penn, 1891).

Jacqueline Bacon (2003) however argues that to reduce the objective of the *Freedom's Journal* to just responding to the racism of that time, is reductive of not just the goals of the Black press but the overall Black struggle and movement. Instead, the editors of the paper believed that it was important for Black people to have a forum where they can respond to the racist rhetoric in other papers. This too, is reductive of the objectives at the paper by insinuating that the paper's sole goal was to combat and respond to racism. While racism was an issue and Black people did express needs to create a forum, there were other things happening within the Black community that warranted the necessity of a newspaper. Specifically, in the 1820's Black communities were coming into awareness of their identity, needs and distinctive entities (Bacon, 2003; Lochard, 1947). Within this awareness a voice was developed, a voice for the community, and as Cornish and Russwurm write in their *Prospectus*, "Experience teaches us that the press is the most economical and convenient method by which [community improvement] is to be obtained" (Cornish & Russworm, 1827).

The *Freedom's Journal* was originally comprised of four pages with four columns and was later changed to eight pages with three columns on each page. An evolving format for

Freedom's Journal and other Black press publications throughout time are consistent with the evolving nature of media overtime. In addition, the paper also covered diverse topics which entailed domestic and foreign news, correspondents, editorials, literary offerings and advertisements. Most of the material was written by Black authors, though it wasn't uncommon to have White authors contribute pieces (Bacon, 2003; O'Kelly, 1982). While the paper was written during a time where majority of Black Americans were still oppressed under slavery, to say that the journal was an anti-slavery journal is again reductive of its objectives.

Certainly, the paper advocated for the freedom of slaves, anti-slavery oratory, and social injustice, but the newspaper also covered a variety of other topics including colonization, education, and gender roles in the home and society. As such, the paper itself promoted education and encouraged learning solely by reading its editions (Bacon, 2003). In the same year the paper began, Cornish announced his resignation from the paper and left the paper to be solely edited by Russwurm. For the next year and half – up until the cessation of the paper in 1829 – the changes in editing, responses to the journal, and readership reflected the diversity and heterogeneity of thought within the black community at that time (Bacon, 2003; Lochard, 1947; Strother, 1978). Specifically, as the journal endured changes, readers expressed concerns about the inclusion of certain material. It is important to note, however, that it is impossible to know what readers have wanted from the publication at that time (Bacon, 2003).

Despite its short amount of time in publication, the *Freedom's Journal* contributed significantly to the impact of Black journalism, the abolitionist movement, and generations of American activists. The journal not only helped to create an enlightened public but also illuminated the connection between the Black press to the Black community and the importance of an institution that has allowed Black Americans to *plead their cause* for more than 175 years.

Within those one hundred and seventy odd years, many great writers, orators, and publications have made their own contributions to the Black press.

By the late 1800s, the Black press was significant in Black communities across the nation including Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland (Friskien, 2012). These papers – most prominent in the North – were often circulated to different cities and often made their way to smaller towns in the South like rural Alabama and Mississippi. Ida B. Wells, a well-known journalist, orator, and crusader for anti-lynching movement was perhaps one of the most central figures to the Black press and to Black protest movements (Tucker, 1971). Miss. Wells contributions to the history of the Black press emphasizes the importance of individual Black voices in media.

Community advocacy, protest, and ideology

This history of the Black press plays a significant role in the way that current Black media is produced and examined. This section details how community advocacy and protest, morale, and ideology building have historically been functions of the Black press. As mentioned with the *Freedom's Journal*, they are one of the first to contribute to advocating for the Black people in America to plead their own cause. And, following Reconstruction, orators and journalists like Ida B. Wells and T. Thomas. Fortune, launched campaigns through the freedom of the press that advocated for the rights, and fair trials for Black people (Curry, 2012). In recalling this history of the Black press, distinctions between Black and mainstream media outlets are clearly defined; thus, providing insight to how current Black media has been shaped overtime up until and through digital technology.

From the inception of the *Freedom's Journal* into the early 20th century, community advocacy and Black protest movements went hand in hand with Black media. Though Bacon

(2003) pointed out the various objectives of Black newspapers at that time, it is evident that most Black press were aimed at targeting Black Americans and being their advocate. As multiple Black presses began to rise and be widely distributed, many protest organizations stemmed from these publications. For example, Black elites began to form coalitions like the National Association of Colored Women in 1895 (O’Kelly, 1982). Soon after, The Niagara Movement was started by W.E.B. Du Bois and a group of Black intellectuals in 1905. The Niagara Movement was the first national organization of Black Americans that petitioned for the equality of the races and advancement of Black people (Rudwick, 1957). The Niagara Movement laid the foundations for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or NAACP in 1909 (Rudwick, 1957). The NAACP would become the organ of the black protest movement for which at its core was grounded by the Black press as an advocate for civil rights for Blacks (O’Kelly, 1982). Florini’s (2019) work sheds light on how contemporary Black media functions in similar fashions. Explicitly, just like how Black elites used the print media to organize amongst each other, Black podcasters utilize the medium and other digital platforms like Twitter to forge communities and organize.

Additionally, the newspapers at this time played a critical role in promoting the Great Migration and encouraging Black Americans to migrate to other parts of the country as a means of escaping racism in the rural south (O’Kelly, 1982). The social movement of migration was prominently highlighted in Black newspapers and periodicals. As more concentrated populations of Black Americans moved to inner cities, newspapers were able to reap the benefits of larger readerships while in turn being an advocate for civil rights and a publicizer of events and issues of Black Americans. As more Black people began to migrate in closer proximities the development and advancement of Black institutions like businesses, schools, churches, fraternal organizations, and

newspapers began to progress (O’Kelly, 1982). This in turn gave rise to the Black middle class and the growth of the market for Black Americans (O’Kelly, 1982; Strother, 1978). The Black press established itself as a crucial part of the developing community and was the central point of every debate and every concern of Black people (O’Kelly, 1982). For contemporary media, advanced technology and the internet mirror the concentration of Black people in one location. For instance, Black Twitter (Clark, 2014) locates millions of Black users from all over the world to one social media platform. Similar to how the changing geographic locations of Black Americans contributed to the success of the Black press, digital media also contributes to the conglomeration of Black users and the continued significance of Black digital spaces.

These general functions of the Black press, however, are not to undermine the variety and diversity within Black communities and within the Black press itself. Because the mainstream media of the 19th and 20th centuries had either largely ignored the existence of Black people or projected undesirable images of them, the Black press advanced a race-consciousness which presented Blacks’ views, aspirations, struggles and perspectives (Strother, 1978). The *Chicago Defender* was known for having their race-advocacy function as an emphasis on the person rather than the issue or event. The editor and founder of *The Defender*, Robert S. Abbott, declared himself, “for the masses, not the classes” (Ottley, 1955: 136). In other words, he used his paper to highlight the individual stories of African Americans. Again, we see Black media today reflecting these traditional features of the Black press. With many Black journals, online publications, television shows, movies, podcasts, etc. varying forms of Black life are presented to the masses.

Even in the way Black papers were structured in that time, they sought to reflect the diversity of Black Americans (Lochard, 1947). Specifically, Abbott’s departmentalization of the

Chicago Defender created sections like theatre, sports, and editorials. Sections like this had never been seen in Black newspapers and opened up a variety of interests to some Black Americans who had yet to be exposed to the arts or education. Abbott's influence in the community further shaped Black opinion (Strother, 1978). Abbott's principles for which his paper survived on for years can be summed by saying that Abbott often made a call for integration – a perspective which exceeded beyond W.E.B. Du Bois' or Booker T. Washington's visions (Friskin, 2012). Despite varying perspectives of integration or emancipation each independent press could reflect any number of Black beliefs or ideology at that time. This helped to shape Black media into the fragmented media landscape it is today.

During WWI and the post-war years, the press demonstrated how morale and ideology can be developed within their Black readership (O'Kelly, 1982). For example, they made a point to emphasize Black consciousness. Particularly because segregation and discrimination in the military made Black people resentful, the Black press was able to use this sentiment to push for a large-scale social movement to carry forward the Black cause (O'Kelly, 1982). Especially in times of great fear both domestic and abroad, the Black press proved to be an important influence on the attitude of Black people and their place in American life (Friskin, 2012).

In the post-war years and into the Great Depression, the New Deal programs by President Roosevelt had a significant impact on Blacks' morale (O'Kelly, 1982). The minor recognition from the federal government gave Black communities across the nation hope. This gave way to increased urbanization and literacy for Black folks nationwide as the Black press was able to expand widely during this time. Clearly, the Black press proved to be influential and important the more it expanded to larger audiences. Against the background of the war, the press also proved to react and respond to events that took place around the world. With digitization and the

internet, not only are the audiences for Black media expanding, but Black podcasts also have the ability to respond and discuss world events (Friskin, 2012; Tucker, 1971). With the access of media and technology aspects of the Black press continue to be evident in Black media.

By WWII Black newspapers were the most important agencies for forming and reflecting Black public opinion (O’Kelly, 1982; Wolseley, 1990). In 1944 and 1945 some Black papers crusaded for the full integration of Black people into American culture. For example, papers like the Pittsburgh Courier had a “double-V” campaign for victory in the war abroad and the war plaguing Black Americans domestically. Also, The *Fortune* published an analysis in 1945 which revealed that the Negro press’ main priorities were to “advance in Negro-white relations, stories of discrimination, Fair Employment Practices legislation, activities of the NAACP, success of individuals and integration and discrimination in the armed forces” (O’Kelly, 1982: 13). They operated as an instrument to protest inequality, to show progress made by Blacks, and to cultivate good will between races. On the other hand, some papers called for Negro Nationalism which projected very different solutions for Black issues than that of integration. Specifically, Black elites like Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey were known for facilitating ideas throughout Black communities (O’Kelly, 1982). For example, Garvey’s radical ideas were widely circulated during this era through his paper *Negro World*; these ideas were often in contrast to the integrationist efforts of other prominent Black leaders and papers. Additionally, Robert S. Abbott and *The Defender* was known to be a defender of Black people at that time. Abbott’s style of writing, use of sarcasm and emphasis on telling diverse stories of Black people, served as a sense of hope for readers and publicized important Black issues. Even more than this, as society evolved, as did the *Defender* and the views of its editor. Readers of the various papers were then influenced by the differing opinions regarding race, ideology, and life

in America overall. As such, “Negroes began to learn the power of mass action and became acquainted with political ideologies.” (Frazier, 1939, p. 533). Regardless of the viewpoint or perspective, the Black press served and still serves to establish ideology and concepts of race for many Black people (Friskien, 2012; O’Kelly, 1982; Wolseley, 1990).

Even up until the digital age, the Black press remained as a means for community building and circulation of Black ideologies (Rhodes, 1998). As highlighted in the above paragraphs and mentioned by Jordan (2001), “black newspapers have acted as both a ‘mirror’ of black life in America and an institution that ‘defines the Negro group to the Negroes themselves’” (p. 3). The Black press has therefore provided a space that centers the needs and interests of Black Americans, allows the spread and development of cultural beliefs, and values assisting in the formation of community (Squires, 2002).

From print to digital media

Though the Black press continues through print media, the rise of the internet and digital media have challenged traditional modes of media. In this regard digital media affords Black press increased diversity of content, alternatives in format, and increased visibility (Fayne, 2019). And, with additional ways of reaching Black audiences, there are distinct differences between print and digital media. Even more, these differences point to how engagement with various media might differ. Important to this study is how digital media provides a space for diverse content; and how digital media creates a convergence culture potentially influencing collective identity.

The digital landscape offers more space for Black Americans to speak for themselves. As such, more people are able to voice their own concerns and speak for the black community. This

then provides a diversity of content within the Black press, where most legacy Black press publications represented one segment of the community. Even publications like *Jet* and *Ebony* magazine, Cohen (1999) argued, created a “secondary marginalization” for Black Americans as they overlooked heterogeneity within the community (pg. 207).

Particularly because historical publications like *The Chicago Defender* or *Ebony* were founded when there were limited media outlets for African Americans, they felt the need to cover all aspects of Black life. The range of Black press outlets online, however, permit more niche content. With unlimited online space, entertainment-focused websites have added to the heterogeneity of Black press online (Fayne, 2019). Not only does entertainment provide additional space for non-stereotyped or typically ignored coverage of Black people in media, but some publications and audiences might prefer entertainment to advocacy. For example, Prior (2005) found that people choose entertainment over the news in today’s high-choice media environment.

Despite potential divides between entertainment and news media however, black press writers tend to value both types of content (Stroman & Becker, 1978). Specifically, entertainment is often seen as another way to witness positive, non-stereotyped versions of Black life (Fayne, 2019). Thus, for Black media online, entertainment and advocacy can exist in tandem despite having disparate objectives (Fayne, 2019). Not only has diversity in content greatly increased the scope of Black media, but convergence culture has also contributed in the way individuals interact with media.

Convergence culture

Convergence culture is characterized by the unanticipated ways media move across platforms (Jenkins, 2006a). In other words, convergence is the various methods employed for the

development and delivery of media content through different modalities. This is emphasized by social media networks that tend to spill over onto multiple platforms i.e. debates or discussions that start on podcasts and continue on Twitter or Facebook after. Jenkins makes his arguments about convergence through case studies of a selection of contemporary entertainment at that time: the "Survivor" and "American Idol" programs, and the "Matrix," "Star Wars," and "Harry Potter" films.

All of these entertainment examples he found were important to the development of this convergence culture, as they all broke the mold for how media were being engaged with. For instance, *The Matrix*, *Survivor*, and *American Idol* all had consumers who experienced a deep involvement with transmedia content outside of the actual television shows. The additional content ranged from consumers being involved with online communities or being invested in video games that are based off the original show/film. As such, digital networks assist in the facilitation of media content and offers an array of participation that includes users' roles in disseminating and curating media (Jenkins, 2013).

Likewise, participatory culture, according to Jenkins, is the interplay among media producers and those using their products. Participatory culture references the process of sharing resources and services with other media consumers (Jenkins, 2006a). He wrote,

We should document the interactions that occur amongst media consumers, between media consumers and media texts, and between media consumers and media producers.

The new participatory culture is taking shape at the intersection between three trends: (1) new tools and technologies enable consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content, (2) a range of subcultures promote Do-It-Yourself (DIY)

media production, a discourse that shapes how consumers have deployed those technologies and, (3) economic trends favoring the horizontally integrated media conglomerates encourage the flow of images, ideas, and narratives across multiple media channels and demand more active modes of spectatorship. (Jenkins, 2006b, pgs. 135–136)

In this light, convergence and participatory culture are significant in terms of building networks as more people gain access and control over the circulation of various culture or information. While convergence highlights links between multimedia platforms, participatory culture informs the understanding of relationships between media, consumers and producers. Accordingly, both convergence and participatory culture play a role in how technology and media often intersect with publics and how discourse is disseminating among the various media networks. Further, as the current digital landscape connects individuals and circulates information at high speeds, both convergence and participatory media are more widespread than ever (Florini, 2019).

Studying Black communities online

Banks (2005) was one of the first scholars to study African American online sites by examining how members of an online website called BlackPlanet.com use African American Vernacular English or AAVE. He described how users draw upon AAVE to build online communities. Likewise, Brock (2009) examined how race, cultural rhetoric, and identity are enhanced in online spaces. He offered that internet serves as another context where Black identity is shaped by the in- and out-group. As such, digital spaces “add an interactive, discursive

dimension to exterior renditions of Black identity and thus enabling interior perspective on Black identity to become part of the conversation” (Brock, 2009, pgs. 15-16). Though all online spaces are susceptible to cybertypes (Nakamura, 2002) –which describe the distinctive ways that the internet propagates and disseminates images of race and racism– those same spaces often become a discursive structure which spans space and time and represents racial identity (Brock, 2009).

Moreover, *Beyond Hashtags* (2019) explores how networks were built and maintained over many years, particularly from a technological landscape where convergence and participatory media help to circulate information throughout various networks (Florini, 2019). Her work is consistent with Black media-making and communication that demonstrates how users use dominant racial discursive strategies to claim networked spaces and circulate Black epistemologies. As most studies of online Black communities involved important discussions of orality and discursive strategies, the present study next finds a discussion of African American Rhetoric relevant.

CHAPTER III: African American Rhetoric (AAR) in Communication

As the history and legacy of the Black press demonstrated, there was power in Black print media. From the early success of the *Freedom's Journal* even until present day, Black media is connected to deep traditions of spoken word and oral tradition. Though a host of scholarship in AAR traditions have engaged in rich and diverse discussions, their work is often from "a limited purview of public address" (Jackson & Richardson, 2003, p. xiii). Specifically, communication scholars rarely integrate AAR theories and methods to invite diverse discussions of rhetorical and communication practices. Because many dominant paradigms of the field are steeped in the centering of European American culture, AAR has been less acknowledged despite deep traditions which are laced in everyday discourse (Jackson & Richardson, 2003). This present study finds a discussion of AAR strategies in public spaces necessary for studying culturally specific phenomena.

African American rhetoric was developed by scholars like Charles Hurst, Molefi Asante, Jack Daniel, Dorthy Pennington, Lucia Hawthorne, and Lyndrey Niles who began to theorize the Black Rhetoric Institute (Jackson & Richardson, 2003). African American Rhetoric or AAR can be defined as the art of persuasion fused with African American ways of knowing in attempts to achieve in public realms personhood, dignity, and respect (Atwater, 2009). Though its traditions are interdisciplinary in nature, there is a particular connection to communication studies that broaden the scope of Black or other diverse publics. Understanding AAR and traditional strategies employed in Black orature, broadens our perspectives in how we study Black

individuals or publics. More so, it can strengthen communications studies by providing insight on discursive practices from a broad range of perspectives.

Some rhetorical studies in the communication tradition denote AAR as the conceptual dynamics of oration, verbal and nonverbal features (Jackson & Richardson, 2003). These dynamics of oration and nonverbal features ultimately shape how words are delivered and how experiences of Black African or American life are discussed. Garner and Calloway-Thomas (2003) make an important contribution to African American orality by claiming that African Americans are foregrounded or represented in terms of principled cultural experiences. In other words, they call for scholars to see “Blacks as the norm” and “automatically foreground Black perspectives” (Garner & Calloway-Thomas, 2003, p. 46). In that regard, general descriptions of some rhetorical strategies are highlighted here as oral tradition, call and response, and signifying. Exploring how these strategies function within African American discourse is central to the present discussion.

Oral tradition

Steeped in traditions of spirituality and African principles like Maat and Nommo, oral tradition is the basis for which to study language and rhetoric for African people (Alkebulan, 2003). Principally, oral tradition means that speech is performance, thus, when we debate traditional AAR, we are speaking of characteristic oral expressions and style. For the purposes of this study, understanding traditional rhetorical strategies helps to contextualize the examination of content on Black podcasts and the way in which Black podcasters form and present their discussions. These strategies can present in many forms, including songs, myths, poems, testifying, sermonizing, lecturing and many other modes of communication.

It is important to note is that African American oral traditions are different from many Western-style languages. According to African principles, orature is an art form that can be examined in accordance with a recognized set of traditional standards (Alkebulan, 2003; Garner & Calloway-Thomas, 2003). Further, the nature of speech among African peoples is drawn from African belief systems and traditions (Conteh-Morgan, 1992). A key tenet of African oral tradition is that it works in tandem with performance, “You cannot have one without the other” (p. 31)

In other words, for AAR to speak is to perform. Because traditional African culture exists alongside African languages it is not compartmentalized into separate and distinct categories as in Western traditions (Alkebulan, 2003). Rather, public speaking and performance go hand-inhand (Alkebulan, 2003). With increased visibility on Black digital social spaces, where Black orature is being performed, it is imperative that communication research understand the history and nature of communities who can be empirically studied.

More relevant to the current study, understanding oral tradition becomes important for analyzing Black spaces of opinion in media. Jacobs and Townsley (2011) discussed the “Rhetorics in the Space of Contemporary U.S. Opinion,” where they asserted that there are multiple rhetorical styles employed with the space of opinion in U.S. media. Though they analyzed predominantly white media outlets, their analysis revealed spaces of opinion in US media are becoming increasingly large, interwoven, and internally differentiated (p. 137). This suggests that spaces of opinions will be significant as new forms of cultural intellectualism and journalism.

While a full discussion of the space of opinion is discussed later in this dissertation, critical analysis of Black podcast content warrants a discussion on traditional African orature. In

short, without theoretical understanding of how distinct cultures communicate, analyses of those cultures are inherently lacking. Subsequently, within oral tradition is the speech event referred to as a call and response. Within AAR call and response grounds the historically blurred lines between speaker and audience, informing our understanding of publics and public speech.

Call and response

The practice of call and response is best exemplified by the African American preacher. While preaching or teaching, the orator is never alone in their speech and is constantly involved in two-way communication with the audience (Gilyard & Banks, 2018). For call and response, a speaker needs an audience, and thus, a speaker needs a public of which to speak to (Knowles-Borishade, 1991). Within this subset of oral tradition, the speaker is typically thought to be performing before an audience (Alkebulan, 2003; Knowles-Borishade, 1991). Amidst the performance he/she is establishing a rapport by engaging the audience as active participants.

A major factor of call and response is indeed the audience or public. Naturally with the two-way communication of call and response the audience is an active participant and they are ones who let the speaker know whether his or her words have power (Alkebulan, 2003). Traditional examples of the typical call and response might be “teach,” “preach on,” “that’s right,” or “Amen!” Contemporary examples of call and response can be seen on Twitter. For example, Baratunde Thurston, Web editor of the *Onion* remarked, “Twitter works very naturally with that call-and-response tradition—it’s so short, so economical, and you get an instant signal validating the quality of your contribution.”³ Meaning, if people like what you say, they will

³ <https://www.slideshare.net/baratunde/how-to-be-black-online-by-baratunde>

retweet it.

The tradition of call and response is rooted in a communal or collective voice that represents the use of the pronoun *we* (Gilyard & Banks, 2018). This collective voice is significant specifically to our understanding of publics, particularly Black publics and participatory culture. Call-and-response is a necessary component for the reciprocal process of African oral tradition and without it, it is difficult to fully conceptualize about Black spaces.

Later in this dissertation, it is noted that publics are constituted by mere attention and is a social space created by reflexive discourse, among other things (Warner, 2002). Call and response is a part of the communicative practice of African peoples, which reflects these very characteristics of publics. Without concerning ourselves with the complexity of Black orature, it can be easy to neglect the various publics where these oratures, speeches, or conversations are performed.

African American oral tradition thrives on the call and response mechanism. Smitherman (1998) wrote “the only wrong thing you can do in a Black conversation is not respond at all because it suggests that one ‘ain’t wit the conversation’ i.e., disengaged, distant, emotionally disconnected with the speaker or speakers” (p. 208). In this same notion, Black digital publics often use call and response in their discourses. Accordingly, convergence and participatory culture ensures that the speakers’ message is circulated and given the opportunity to generate response throughout multimedia platforms.

Signifying

Signifying defines another speech event in African American oral tradition which is explained according to its functions as a rhetorical stance and a means of cultural self-definitions

(Gilyard & Banks, 2018). Plainly, it involves verbal strategy of indirection that manipulates the denotative and figurative meanings of words. A simple example of signifying would be to insult someone as a way to show affection. In AAR, signifying is the “trope of tropes” (2018: 51) that seeks to make meaning within a Black rhetorical world that exists in relation to a white one. In this context, the art of signifying is often in response to larger socio-political power structures.

Gates (1988) referred to this event as a “parallel discursive universe” (pg. 45).

Signifying is important because it can be used as a rhetorical tool in written and oral forms of communication, especially within Black discourse (Garner & Calloway-Thomas, 2003).

Additionally, the act of signifying indicates that there is shared knowledge existing as a part of the logic of everyday life (Gilyard & Banks, 2018). For example, because of obscurity in the interpretation of the meaning of message, the audience addressed, or the intent of the speaker; shared knowledge is important to help the audience interpret the speakers’ message.

Lee (1996) contributed that Black Americans use signifying as a communicative strategy and are able to read between the lines using cultural codes and systems of heuristics for interpretation. In this regard, an understanding of rhetorical strategies helps to frame our understanding of studying primarily Black publics. Harris-Perry’s (2004) noted use of rhetorical strategies like call and response in her analysis of everyday black political talk in a Missionary Baptist church. Part of much larger study (further explored elsewhere in this dissertation), Harris-Perry’s implication that rhetorical methods play a role in the study of Black discursive patterns as a whole, is substantial. Therefore, the solid grounding of oral tradition, call and response, and signifying helps to expand further on theories of publics, spaces of opinion, and everyday black political talk.

CHAPTER IV: Theorizing on publics

When trying to further explore how Black Americans use and are engaged with media, a discussion on publics and counterpublics is needed. As a marginalized group in America, Black people in media can often be examined in opposition to mainstream media as a counterpublic or not in opposition as a public. There is some ambiguity however, in assessing whether all Black media operates from a counterpublic perspective. Though Habermas' first coined the public sphere, there have been countless scholars since pushing back on and expanding his theory. This chapter explores Habermas' public theory amidst critiques from queer and Black scholars. It then uses Squires' (2002) and Warner's (2002) understanding of publics and counterpublics to theorize on spaces of opinion and everyday talk.

Habermas' public sphere

The public sphere has been conceptualized in a number of contexts across disciplines and scholarship. Habermas' (1962) influential explanation of the public sphere has evolved and influenced the way scholars theorize and investigate meaningful publics. In short, Habermas' model of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) describes the rise and fall of the liberal bourgeois public sphere (Haas, 2004). The model first began with a "representative public sphere" where power is displayed before a public; similar to that of a monarchy. He then claimed that through a host of societal and cultural developments throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, the public sphere was further developed (Habermas, 1962). These developments

included the rise of literacy, like newspapers and novels, and increased sociability, like coffeeshops or saloons (Habermas, 1962). Habermas' notion served as the conceptual foundation for many theorists to suggest the organizational and discursive contours of a more democratic media system (Garnham, 1992; Keane, 1991; Scannell, 1989).

In 1991, Habermas wrote about the public sphere as being a “domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed” (p.398). He further explained that the public sphere constituted every conversation that came together to form a public. He wrote,

Citizens act as a public when they deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion; thus, with the guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicize their opinions freely. When the public is large, this kind of communication requires certain means of dissemination and influence; today, newspapers and periodicals, radio and television are the media of the public sphere. (Habermas, 1991: 398)

He went on to argue that when discussions in the public sphere are concerned with the practice of the state, we are then speaking of political public spheres. In other words, the public represents the various discussions and debates that form within it. In large societies, like ours, media is a key component within public life (Habermas, 1991). As a result, political discourse that arise in tandem with the other functions of the public sphere highlight a divide between state and society. In concluding his essay, Habermas (1991) questioned if the idea of the public sphere itself will disintegrate as the mediums of public discussions transform.

While some scholars found Habermas' theory of the public sphere invaluable to democracy and theory, others raised concerns about its applicability to current, mass-mediated

societies (Haas, 2004). One critique of Habermas argued that his work was based on outdated ideals of public discourse that favors in-person dialogue over mediated discussion (Page, 1996; Schudson, 1997; Thompson, 1995). Other critiques maintained that inconsistencies in the theory lead to inaccurate assumptions about current political debates and a cessation of public debate (Curran, 1991, Stevenson, 1993, Verstraeten, 1996). At any point, scholars who seek to engage in meaningful discussions of contemporary political communication and public debate must negotiate with Habermas' public sphere.

Defining publics: Habermas amidst critique

Though Habermas' theory of the public sphere paved the way for understanding how civil society behaves and functions, many scholars pointed out the theory's flaws. For example, Squires (1999) debated about Habermas' negligence to fully incorporate all viewpoints of American public life in his theory, particularly that of the experiences of marginalized groups. She wrote, "his history of the public sphere is a history of the dominant class's public sphere, not an all-inclusive, multicultural public sphere" (1999: 3). While Habermas' painted a picture of an exclusive and monolithic public sphere, other scholars have paved the way for rethinking the public sphere (Fraser, 1992; Dawson, 1995; Holt, 1995).

Nancy Fraser's critique of Habermas is important to the present discussion in that she provides an alternative account that describes some problematic assumptions in Habermas' conceptualization of the public sphere. Fraser suggested that Habermas doesn't fully negotiate the complexity between the public and social strata. Her major critique being that he "fails to examine other, non-liberal, non-bourgeois, competing public spheres" (Fraser, 1992: 61).

Fraser's notions are foundational to our understanding and definitions of a public. Specifically, because of her challenges to the idea of a single public sphere and her push to

expand on conceptualizations of it. At a basic level, Fraser argued against four basic assumptions that Habermas' posited as the bourgeois public sphere. She found that first, the public sphere required the elimination of social inequality. Second, in both stratified and egalitarian societies the idea of a multiplicity of publics is preferable to a single public sphere. Thirdly, she concluded that full examinations of a public sphere would support an inclusion of diverse interests and issues. And finally, she conceptualized the idea of strong and weak publics and theorized about the relationships among them (Fraser, 1992). As a whole, these four assumptions emphasize the importance of diversity and inclusion when theorizing on public spheres.

The idea of a multiplicity of public spheres opposed to one single public sphere is central to defining and examining publics. For example, Dawson (1995) pushed for identifying multiple public spheres as well but focused on the institutional bases of a public sphere in light of the economy. It was Dawson who noted the success of the Black counterpublic – where institutions like the Black press, Black music and the arts served as conversation sites for Black publicity, rights, and interests to take place (Dawson, 2001; Squires, 1999). These sites typically served as a counter to the oppression of white supremacy. Though Dawson mentioned the Black counterpublic and the institutions that lie therein, this is sometimes taken as there is one large Black counterpublic.

Holt (1995) however grappled with the concept of one Black public sphere and was concerned about whether it could accurately articulate current Black life. He wrote,

African Americans find themselves more highly integrated into American life than ever before, and yet, in many ways, still as thoroughly segregated as at any time during this century... The analytical and political unity of the concept of a black public sphere will depend on its relevance to solving such paradoxes, and whether it proves a fruitful

starting point from which to reexamine the interrelations among African American political, cultural, and intellectual agendas... (Holt, 1995: 325, 328)

As a whole both Dawson and Holt's concerns about the black public sphere do two things: first, they expand beyond the boundaries of what we previously considered a public sphere, and second, they inadequately grapple with the diversity within Black publics themselves (Squires, 1999). While scholars have continued to complicate and expand on what we can consider a public sphere (Squires, 2002; Warner, 2002), there has been less research that contends with how Black publics may function and the diversity within Black publics.

Moreover, in attempt to draw more complete conceptualizations of public spheres, Squires (2002) contended that discussions centered around public spheres are ineffective if they do not deal with power. Indeed, it was the core of Fraser's argument that by grouping status differences you are only obscuring the power structures and institutional inequalities (Fraser, 1999). In fact, a host of the critique of and engagement with Habermas and his public sphere theory are adjacent with discussions of power, political deliberation, and democratic theorizing.

Amid critique, Habermas' initial notion of the public sphere inspired discourse throughout multiple fields. First, Fraser's (1991) contributions to the field are invaluable as they challenge the limits of a public, specifically from a capitalist perspective –considering power and inequality. Following suit, scholars like Dawson (1995), Holt (1995), and Squires (2002) emphasized complexities within multiple public spheres and continued to evolve the discussion. Even still, these critiques only somewhat grapple with a fully conceived idea of a public sphere. Though Dawson mentioned a Black counterpublic, he never conceptualizes on a Black public. In Holt's attempt to further expound on Black counterpublics he suggested that it was a useful starting point for examining African American life, but it should go further.

The following sections use existing theories on publics, spaces of opinions in media, and everyday talk politics to theorize on Black podcasts. Because of the elements of Black podcasts, there seems to be a fluidity between publics, media, and politics, that can help to investigate strategic and political communication processes. Though publics, media, and politics can be distinct entities on their own, how these three entities can work together, especially through the lens of Black podcasting, is relevant to this dissertation.

Reexamining counterpublics and publics

Squires' (2002) alternative vocabulary of public spheres and Warner's (2002) characteristics of what constitutes publics are foundational for observing publics in a more nuanced way. While Squires provides clear definitions of counterpublics, enclaved publics, and satellite publics, Warner (2002) details seven characteristics that make up a public. Juxtaposing both conceptualizations of counterpublics and publics, this section suggests that Black podcasts can sometimes behave as satellite publics or just publics.

Catherine Squires examined an African American public to present alternative descriptions for public spheres (Squires, 2002). Sharing in sentiment with other scholars, Squires contended that the language of the "public sphere" was abstract and failed to incorporate many distinct group identities or characteristics (Squires, 2002). In response to various socio-political constraints (Fraser, 1992), Squires' model provides clear vocabulary for public spheres and counterpublics.

Key viewpoints from Dawson (1995) and Holt's (1995) assessment of public spheres are the basis for Squires' questions about the malleability of our language surrounding publics. Specifically, she asked, how do we observe a Black public sphere and determine if it is engaged

in “mere idle talk?” and, “is our vocabulary for public spheres *flexible* enough to explain what constitutes constructive talk and action or to explain differences beyond identity markers?”

(Squires, 2002, p. 447, *emphasis added*) As such, Squires proposed a model that describes three responses marginalized publics can employ. A public can act as an enclave, a counterpublic, or a satellite.

An enclaved public is a public that is strategic and intentional in hiding counterhegemonic ideas (Squires, 2002, p. 457). Enclaved publics are careful to be hidden in order to survive or avoid sanctions from dominant publics. Recent examples of digital enclaves include groups like a network of podcasters who call themselves the “Chitlin Circuit” (Florini, 2015) who use cultural traditions to create a Black digital social space through podcasts. In most cases though, these publics do not wish or intend to be seen by other publics.

A counterpublic is described as a public that engages in debate with other publics to discuss ideas and facilitate social movement (Squires, 2002, p. 459). A popular exemplar of a digital counterpublic is Black Twitter (Brock, 2012; Clark, 2014; Florini, 2014) which refers to the overwhelming use – and cultural phenomenon – of social networking site Twitter, specifically by Black users (Clark, 2014). Black Twitter is often viewed as a counterpublic because it stands in contrast to “mainstream” or “dominant” norms in social media. Black Twitter has also been the site of many digital social movements and digital activism (Florini, 2019; Jackson et al., 2020; Jackson & Wells, 2015), further highlighting its role as a digital counterpublic.

Finally, Squires described a satellite public sphere as a public that seeks separation from other publics for non-power related reasons (Squires, 2002, p. 463). Arguably, this part of Squires’ vocabulary is yet to be fully probed, particularly from a media lens. Squires contended

that satellite publics are not motivated by oppression nor are they formed out of desire for discourse with other publics (Squires, 2002). However, she further suggests that satellite publics maintain solid group identities and only enter in wider discussions with other publics “when there is clear convergence of their interests with those of other publics” (Squires, 2002, p. 463). As discussed in the previous chapter, convergence culture is particular to the advancement of technology and the capacity for media lines to be blurred. That being said, with further development of satellite publics spheres, or a somewhat adjacent concept, theoretical links can be made between publics and the media.

Adding to this, Warner’s approach to publics is essential. Though Warner agreed with Fraser that some publics are understood to be in conflict with dominant publics, he posited, “There are as many shades of difference among publics as there are in modes of address, style, and spaces of circulation” (Warner, 2002, p. 116). Fraser terms a significant phenomenon that is counterpublics, but Warner questioned what made the spaces “counter” or “oppositional” (2002, p. 116). He wrote,

Fraser’s description of what counterpublics do – ‘formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs’ – sounds like the classically Habermasian description of rational-critical publics, with the word ‘oppositional’ inserted... This description aptly suggests the way a public is a multicontextual space of circulation, organized not by a place or an institution but by the circulation of discourse. This is true of any public, including counterpublics. (2002, pgs. 118-119)

In other words, Warner contended that Fraser is right to assert that there isn’t a single overarching public like Habermas suggested, however, publics where members are marginalized

people are also not always in counter to dominant publics. Warner added that while counterpublics maintain at some level of consciousness a subordinate status, many publics make no efforts to act as a subordinate public. These publics can be thought of as sub publics or specialized publics (Warner, 2002). The points made here reiterate the need to be flexible in conceptualizations of publics.

Even more, Dourish (2010) found Warner's concept of publics useful for studying social media and participation. He found that using Warner's (2002) publics for examining digital media helps to reframe social media from being thought of as "information flows" and "content evaluation" to "participation" and "identity" (Dourish, 2010, p. 4). Similar to this study, Dourish used Warner's framework as a means to expand of restrictive definitions of publics and digital media.

Various media spaces can be observed as publics, specifically when we use Warner's tenets as a framework. The first characteristic of a public is that it is *self-organized* (Warner, 2002, p. 67). Self-organized meaning that the public is a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself. On the first episode of Amanda Seales' podcast *Small Doses*, Seales opened up about why she began the podcast claiming that people were asking her to make one – so she did (Small Doses, 2018). This is an example of a self-organized public in the form of a podcast. Most independent podcasters or Twitter users represent a self-organized public, coming together by the sheer notion of self-organization. Subsequently, listeners of Seales' podcast will be self-organized as well, as they will have the option to engage with her discourse or not.

Second, a public is said to be *a relation among strangers* (Warner, 2002, p. 74). This means that the public has no specific addressee, it involves who wants to be involved. Consider the example of hashtags. A hashtag is a keyword allocated to information that describes a tweet,

groups archived content, and aides in searching (Small, 2011). Users of hashtags are typically strangers among each other but choose to be bound by the event, person or thing represented in the hashtag. For example, Beyoncé fans unite in the form of the hashtag #BeyHive, similarly popular television show Game of Thrones fans connect through #GOT. Rambukkana (2015) investigated the publics of hashtags, arguing that hashtags are publics' breaking from the mainstream and having their own role in ongoing discourse.

Third, within a public, *the address of public speech is both personal and impersonal* (Warner, 2002, p. 76). Some scholars point to a number of Barack Obama's speeches which often shift between various lexicons and speaking styles (Alim & Smitherman, 2012). One particular instance of President Obama singing Al Green (Bennett, 2012) can be read as both personal and impersonal. While on stage talking to a crowd of Americans, the president candidly broke into song. Though some chalked this gesture up to the charismatic nature of President Obama, many Black viewers thought as this as one of the many times where their Black president was speaking directly to them. In this sense we can see Warner's idea that public is "as addressed to us and as addressed to strangers" (Warner, 2002, p. 58), and can be examined in various communicative contexts regardless of whoever the *us* is referring to.

Fourth, a public is *constituted through mere attention* (Warner, 2002, p. 87). Simply, publics require engagement. Whether this be tuning in to a sporting event being aired on tv or listening to a weekly podcast, the fact that people are attentive is what matters. This tenet expands on our knowledge of publics particularly through media, because of new media technologies' capacity to be accessed by diverse publics. Specifically, the mere choice to listen to an episode of a podcast is consistent with publics being constituted by attention.

Fifth, a public is any social space that offers a *reflexive circulation of discourse* (Warner, 2002, p. 90). In doing so, publics are constantly involved in discussions and debates. These discussions are circulated between persons, networks, and other publics. Warner posited that only when previously existing discourses are assumed, can a responding discourse be proposed. For instance, Florini's (2019) examination of Black digital networks found that digital social spaces are used to circulate Black epistemologies among other things. Specifically, she demonstrated how various discourses are developed and channeled through a series of multimedia platforms. Therefore, digital spaces like Black Twitter or podcast networks serve as good examples of publics which express reflexive discourse through digital circulation.

Sixth, *publics act according to the temporality of their circulation* (Warner, 2002, p. 96). This means that a public has an ongoing life and is fluid in nature. There is no finite ending or beginning for a public but what matters is the way it circulates and becomes the basis for further representations and discussions. Finally, publics are *poetic world-making* (Warner, 2002, p. 114). In simpler terms, there is an art or swagger to publics. They are not just texts that are circulated and reflexive, but they are also expressed in poetic fashion that helps us to see the world in a certain way (2002, p. 82). For Warner this is the performative dimension necessary for a public to exist. Similar to the rhetorical strategies outlined in the preceding chapters, the characterization of publics here evolves the nature of publics to include a number of discursive strategies.

In this essence Warner's conceptualization of public spheres can be used to advance a broader understanding of publics. And, in particular, publics that are marginalized and are produced and accessed through media technology. Publics may or may not act in opposition to power structures at any given time and are therefore not bound to the definitional domains of a

counterpublic (Warner, 2002). Moreover, through the access and unlimited space of media technologies, both publics and counterpublics are more observable now than ever. This is especially important when a host of literature surrounding public sphere theory has arguably been constricting in its language and conceptualizations (Dawson, 1995; Squires, 2002).

Understanding publics then as more inclusive spaces of discourse extends the way we study marginalized groups. All too often Black and other communities of color, women, queer individuals, etc. are studied from a counterpublic lens. And, while counterpublics are important to investigate, it is important to note that not all spaces concocted by marginalized members of society are operating from oppositional positions. As such, the following section discusses Jacobs & Townsley's (2011) space of opinion theory to further connect publics and the media.

The space of opinion

Jacobs and Townsley (2011) called for a "closer empirical scrutiny" (p. 5) on media opinion and commentary in news media because of its increasing significance for public debate and political elites. They termed these media opinion commentaries as spaces of opinions where the space of opinion is identified as an intelligible analytical object constituted by social relationships, actors, institutions, and cultural traditions (2011, p. 12). The mediated nature of the space is essential to providing a range of different formats, norms, and rhetoric that citizens use to cultivate their opinions and engage with wider public discussion (Alexander, 2006; Jacobs & Townsley, 2011; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008).

Despite varied discussions on examining civil societies, the authors contended that public debate is organized most often through media (Jacobs & Townsley, 2011). In fact, today the space of opinion often attracts academics, political insiders and strategists, think tankers and a

range of other diverse professionals who want to contribute to public opinion regarding matters of civil society (Jacobs & Townsley, 2011). In an effort to represent the public interests, these various actors engage in conversations with journalists in opinion commentary, and they write op-editorials in respected publications, thus, circulating public opinion (Jacobs & Townsley, 2011).

To develop their theory, Jacobs and Townsley (2011) analyze what they refer to as contemporary U.S. spaces of opinion. This analysis includes sample commentary from *The New York Times* and *USA Today* and television transcripts from *NewsHour*, *Face the Nation*, *Crossfire*, and *Hannity & Colmes*. One limitation, however, was noted by the authors “to be sure, these spaces of media opinion are limited, fragmentary, exclusionary, contradictory and filled with artifice” (2011, p. 5). Indeed, the spaces that are often viewed as media opinion commentaries typically refer to the spaces that intersect between highly professional journalism and politics.

Expanding on the conceptualization of the opinion space, however, could help to reveal more diverse perspectives within public opinion. To be specific, when Jacobs and Townsley investigated who speaks in the space of opinion, they noted that privilege and power play key roles in who gets to speak in the spaces of opinion. As such, access and autonomy can explain lack of diversity and a variety of voices in the spaces examined.

Access rests on the distinctions between media insiders and media outsiders to what degree is the space of opinion open to media outsiders? (Jacobs & Townsley, 2011, p. 78) Media insiders refer to talk show hosts, professional columnists, editors etc. Outsiders are those who are not in journalism careers. Jacobs and Townsley found that media insiders occupied much of what consisted of the space of opinion. Though the space of opinion seems to expand and grow more

diverse overtime, access to the space is still largely restricted to journalists, academics, think tank intellectuals, and lobbyists. Podcasts, by contrast, allow access to both professional and non-professional individuals. Seeing as they are relatively easy and cheap to produce, anyone can talk about anything on podcasts (Sternbergh, 2019). Doubly, the mediated nature of podcasts allows for bigger audiences and more facilitation of opinions or ideas.

Autonomy of speech notions to who speaks in the space of opinion and is it in their own voices or do they represent other powerful social interests? (Jacobs & Townsley, 2011, p. 79) Autonomy is a major key for the opinion space as it is the best way for speakers to engage in dialogue, be self-reflexive and to debate any opposing viewpoint from a principled standpoint. The authors suspected and confirmed that autonomy looks different for various media insiders and is a complex phenomenon. Unclear about what the future of traditionalism journalism looks like they concluded that varying definitions of autonomy do not have to rely of traditional professional understandings of journalism (2011, p. 108). In this respect, podcasts make for an interesting empirical site to further explore autonomy in an opinion space. As a large number of Black podcasts operate independently, they represent a large number of autonomous voices contributing to space of opinion.

Additionally, the authors negotiated the diversity of formats with the space of opinion. Their analysis of sex differences revealed that gender structured access to the space of opinion. That is, there were significant differences in the access to certain media spaces between men and women. Their analysis suggested that questions on race, region, age and the like could be posed, particularly regarding diversity and media format and access (Jacobs & Townsley, 2011, p. 133). This dissertation attempts to answer that call by examining how Black podcasts represent a newer format within the space of opinion. Specifically, if some Black podcasts are less

professional or informal, and are not journalists or politicians, then how should they be understood as a part of a space that emphasizes deliberation and politics? One way is to understand everyday political talk by Black Americans.

Political underpinnings: everyday talk

For Jacobs and Townsley, analyzing spaces of opinion involve understanding how these spaces can be an influential to the political public sphere. As Harris-Perry (2004) pointed out, however, in order to understand the political attitudes of Black Americans one must analyze the mundane interactions and ordinary interactions of everyday Black life. She referred to these interactions of everyday talk. This section explores Harris-Perry's idea of everyday talk. While Harris-Perry's constructions of everyday talk are examined within a larger political perspective, what is missing is an analysis of everyday talk as it happens through media.

In her 2004 book, political scientist Melissa Harris-Perry explores how political ideology among Black Americans are closely tied to a concept called everyday talk. Simply, she asserted that the ordinary spaces where African Americans form dialogues and forums are where ideology is formed and continually shaped. Further, community discourse is a distinct process where ideology develops, and black political thought can be understood more wholly through everyday discourse (p. 3). By examining the everyday talk on podcasts, we are inherently then examining the political ideology of Black Americans.

Rooted in literatures from public opinion studies, social psychology, and discourse studies, ideology can be defined as an organized system of beliefs, values, and attitudes (Rokeach, 1968). Harris-Perry defined Black political ideology as serving six connected

functions. Five of the six functions described below help to explain how political ideology manifests through everyday talk (2004, pgs. 17-19).

The first function of ideology is that is an *interpreter of truth* (Harris-Perry, 2004, p.17). This means that for a social group the core ideas of any ideological perspective are assumed to be true, even if there are differing opinions within the ideology as a whole. For instance, while there may be many debates within Feminism, in order for one to ascribe themselves as a feminist means that they believe the core tenets of feminism to be true. By maintaining truth ideology also *reduces complexity* (p. 18). Meaning that ideology can work as a heuristic for some individuals. In that sense, individuals may use ideology as a shortcut for making sense of the world or solving problems. Harris-Perry (2004) wrote, ideology is meant to “filter information in the political world” (p. 18).

Ideology involves *linking individual experiences to group narratives* (Harris-Perry, 2004, p. 18). In other words, as individuals are linked to social groups through shared language they are also linked through experiences. As such, everyday talk creates social meaning by providing a lens for which to understand shared experiences. Similarly, and fourth, ideology *identifies friends and foes* (p. 18). This means that ideology defines who is in the in- and out-group. In this process, ideology defines what is desirable for the social group, though what is desirable can be ambiguous. Within both of these functions of ideology the connection of the individual to the group is emphasized. This is relevant in examining Black digital spaces representations of larger Black communities. Finally, ideology *provides a range of possible strategies for achieving desired outcomes* (pgs. 18-19). This means that when ideology functions it is not only providing visions for the future, but also providing ways of how that vision can be achieved.

Black political ideology, then, can be examined in everyday talk situations given that any one function or a combination of these functions are displayed. To demonstrate this, HarrisPerry's model of everyday talk hypothesized that through ordinary conversations various core beliefs contribute to various political ideologies. While her quantitative model identified six core beliefs to measure everyday talk, they are derived from what she asserted are four keys issues that political ideology responds to. Her model thus supports the presence and structure of Black political ideology as its linked with everyday talk. Additionally, this model can be applied in a media context to explore how political ideology and everyday talk play out through media technologies.

The first key issue is that ideology helps to define what it means to be Black in a current American political landscape. Second, ideology connects the individual to the collective by helping individuals to identify what the relative political significance of something is to the race compared to them as an individual. Third ideology determines to what extent Black people should solve their own problems as opposed to looking for assistance. Lastly, ideology helps to determine the required amount of separation from whiteness or white spaces (p. 85). In total, these beliefs are observable through everyday talk situations. As Black people engage online and in-person any one of these issues can be negotiated in discourse. By providing solid characterizations everyday talk and ideology as reviewed in this chapter, one can begin to conceptualize Black podcasts as a space of opinion.

CHAPTER V: Connecting social media theory: affordances and authenticity

While research on podcasts remains limited, there are many concepts developed within social media studies that highlight the unique transition from print to digital media in recent American history. Specifically, increased attention to social media in today's hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013) is focused on the dynamics between political actors, the public, and the media. Though it can be argued if podcasts are considered as social media, Zizi Papacharissi suggested "All media foster communication and by definition are social" (2015b: 1). She further contends that social media might consist of more broad studies of media as social entities and environments (Papacharissi, 2015b).

Bercovici defined social media as "places where they [people] can be entertained, communicate, and participate in a social environment." (Bercovici, 2010). Treem & Leonardi (2013) also suggested that current definitions of social media are either too broad or too application focused. As such, social media which can be seen broadly as "communicative spaces" like Schmidt (2014) argued, are not confined to Twitter (Schmidt 2014). In this light, observing social media from a wider scope to potentially include podcasts, informs what we know about affordances, authenticity and communication processes more generally.

Affordances

An affordance is described as the perceptions one has of an object's utility (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Affordances are not exclusively properties of people or of artifacts – they are constituted in relationships between people and the materiality of the things with which they come in contact. Even more, Kreiss, Lawrence, & McGregor (2017) recently defined affordances as “what platforms are *actually capable of doing* and *perceptions of what they enable*, along with the *actual practices that emerge as people interact with them*” (p. 12, emphasis in original). Important to this study is how affordances can explain variance in communication practices, despite using the same technology/media (Treem & Leonardi, 2013; Evans et al., 2017).

There are four relatively consistent affordances that Treem & Leonardi (2013, pgs. 150-163) argued to be enabled by new technology. *Visibility* indicates how social media afford users the ability to make their behaviors, preferences, opinions and networks, as visible to others in the space (Treem & Leonardi, 2013, 150). In other words, visibility is tied to the work one spends on finding information, and whether the information is difficult to access. *Persistence* maintains that communication remains accessible in the same form as the original display after the actor has finished his or her presentation (p. 155). This means that the media should be able to be reviewed and recorded. *Editability* refers to the idea the people have the ability to rehearse and edit their content before displaying it (p. 159). Finally, *associations* are established connections between individuals and content, or between an actor and a presentation (p. 162).

There are two forms of associations; one is a social tie which indicates a clear relationship between two individuals. Another form of associations is an association of an individual to a piece of information (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Recent examples of the latter form of association include social networking sites ability to allow individuals to post content, share, comment, “like” it, etc. (Daly et al. 2010; Wu et al., 2010). Other examples are blogging

(Dugan et al., 2010; Jackson et al., 2007) or using hashtags (#) and @ symbols (Ehrlich & Shami, 2010; Zhang et al., 2010).

Despite the increased adoption of social media by individuals, companies, or organizations, the implications of these affordances and new technology for diverse people are not yet wholly explored by communication researchers. While affordances are increasingly being studied in information and communication studies, there have been few studies in mass and political communication that address affordances (Bossetta, 2018; Kreiss, Lawrence, & McGregor, 2017). Even fewer studies address affordances specifically in relation to podcasting.

Authenticity

A number of social media scholars have highlighted the critical role that representations of authenticity play in social media entertainment. Banet-Weiser (2012) first problematized the term and Papacharissi (2015a) explained how authenticity operates in dialogue and in ways that are always being tested through affective interactions. Additionally, Goffman's (1956) understandings of the self as a dramatic identity performance offer valuable insights into the concept of authenticity. For Goffman, identity is a series of idealized performances that people present both consciously and unconsciously. The idealized performance mirrors Grazian's (2003) definition of authenticity as conforming to an idealized representation of reality. Social media affords a digital platform for individuals to experiment with idealized identity performance, for example, on Twitter users can discuss various topics with various other users and networks.

Marwick and boyd (2010) examine Twitter users online to explore how digital media content producers imagined their audiences. They found that various users on Twitter emphasize

maintaining authenticity. In other words, to maintain authenticity one must be true-to-self and free from expectations (Marwick & boyd, 2010). The bounds of authenticity are loose, however. For example, who decides what is and isn't authentic? Cheng (2004) determined that authenticity is constructed by discourse and context. Marwick & boyd (2010) added that authenticity is a construct and thus context and situation matter in terms of how one might be perceived as authentic or inauthentic online. To be specific, where it may be considered authentic for a fitness Instagram page to promote healthy lifestyle and food choices, wouldn't be the same for a food blogger. Nonetheless, for individuals who are engaged in social media, authenticity plays a vital role in connecting social media producers to their publics or audiences. Especially when it is used for political mobilization, networked publics, and civic discourse (Papacharissi, 2015a).

On Twitter or other digital social spaces, authenticity is represented when identity is constructed through discussions with others and these identities are maintained through positive impressions with others (Marwick & boyd, 2010). Additionally, Kreiss et al. (2017) show how political candidates try to display authenticity online, noting that it can be performative (p. 8). In other words, how authenticity plays out on digital media is not a narrowly defined construct. Authenticity is largely based on perceptions and impressions that often occur through digital communications.

Conceptual frameworks like authenticity allow us to examine how individuals who operate within mediated spaces of opinion can sometimes be performative and other times candid. While Kreiss et al. (2017) examine highly professional media personnel for politicians, how might the *problems* (p. 8) with authenticity be resolved by studying media spaces that are less renowned? Specifically, by refocusing empirical analyses on media spaces that may be lower in visibility (Treem & Leonardi, 2013, p. 169), concepts like authenticity could play out

differently. This expands knowledge of both affordances and authenticity in relation to digital media. The previously reviewed literature attempts to foreground the theory on how podcasts function within the media, publics, and various political discussions.

CHAPTER VI: Research questions and methods

This dissertation examines everyday discourse, rhetoric, and authenticity to explore Black podcasts. The goal of the study is to better understand how everyday talk is used for strategic communication on podcasts, especially by underrepresented voices who have traditionally lacked access to mass media. The following research questions will be answered using this multimethod analysis of Black podcasts and podcasters. They aim to clearly define the idea of everyday talk by exploring the roles rhetoric, authenticity, and affordances play on podcasts. More so, these research questions attempt to explore the role podcasting – as a medium – plays in broader discussions of strategic communication and public relations.

The research questions of this study are:

RQ1: What rhetorical strategies do Black podcasters use within the everyday discourse that occurs on the podcasts?

RQ2: What role does authenticity play in the success of a podcast, and how do podcasters view the value of authenticity?

RQ3a: How can the concept of affordances be used in the scholarship surrounding podcasts?

RQ4: What are the implications of using podcasts for strategic communication and what are the lessons for how this relates to the economy of podcasting, as well as what it means for the history of Black media with modern realities?

To answer these research questions, this study used CTDA (Brock, 2016) to survey content and discussions on Black podcasts. Additionally, interviews with select podcasters were done to further examine Black podcasters and their podcasts. This section will describe the processes of CTDA and interviewing, as well as, include a sample of the podcasters and podcasts this dissertation interviewed.

Critical Techno-cultural Discourse Analysis. CTDA is used for the investigations of digital phenomena, artifacts, and culture. This method is particularly useful for this study because it integrates an analysis of user discourse which is framed by cultural theory (Brock, 2016). CTDA is ideal for studying Black media users because it requires the use of critical theories to center the standpoint of historically marginalized groups (Brock, 2016). The present study utilized CTDA as a way to examine Black discursive patterns specifically as they formulate through digital technology.

CTDA uses a critical cultural framework to analyze the interactions between technology, cultural ideology, and technology practice (p. 2). For example, Brock (2012) employed CTDA on Black Twitter and found that Twitter's use of text messages played a role in the increasing use of Black users. CTDA was used to illustrate how Black Twitter's digital discursive practices drew from African American culture and rhetoric and how discourse can be used for implicit political action.

As a conceptual framework, CTDA requires two things: first, that the theory draws directly from the perspective of the group under examination; and second, that critical technoculture should be integrated with the cultural perspective(s) initiated (Brock, 2016). The

relevant theories reviewed in the literature review serve as the critical perspectives for this analysis⁴.

CTDA is similar to Herring's (2004) computer-mediated discourse analysis CMDA in that it analyzes discursive content online (Brock, 2016; Herring, 2004), but CTDA differs by also analyzing the ways that the medium makes them a technological user.

In Brock's framework, he noted that CTDA is most useful for researchers who are interested in digital media discourse and utilize qualitative or quantitative content analysis. CTDA was developed from Brock's "frustrations" (p. 3) with digital divide research that inadequately dealt with underrepresented groups. As such, it is ideal for studying marginalized groups in digital spaces given its emphasis with centering queer, feminist and critical race theories. Brock furthers that many discursive articulations of Blackness online are often drawn from offline understanding of racial identity. CTDA uses critical cultural theory to qualitatively analyze techno-cultural discourse.

CTDA coding and analysis process. As the CTDA approach is complex and interpretive, Brock wrote, "Neither interface analysis nor critical discourse analysis can be done succinctly. The former demands interpretive analysis based on deep description, while the latter requires extensive sociocultural context for validity and intelligibility." (2016: 12). This framework is appropriate to this study because of its emphasis on using critical cultural and interdisciplinary theories in order to better analyze the discourse under examination. CTDA allows the everyday talk theories, varying perspectives on publics, and traditional AAR to work

⁴ see Florini, 2019; Harris-Perry, 2004; Spinelli & Dann, 2019; Squires, 2002; Warner, 2002

together in attempt to contextualize the discourse on Black podcasts. Even more, Brock wrote that CTDA, “follows the tradition of critical discourse analysis by isolating and examining topical and/or site-based online discourses.” (2016: 14). For this reason, chapter XI is organized by each podcast and focuses on isolated topics discussed on the podcasts.

The procedure for the CTDA analysis of Black podcasts began with the first round of listening to podcast episodes. During the initial round of listening and coding, the researcher took a deductive approach by taking extremely detailed theoretical memos (Luker, 2009) about conversation topics, hosts’ tone/personality, and context of the discourse. A second round of listening and detailed memos allowed the researcher to isolate and examine topical categories within the discourse. The third round of listening was aimed at isolating other themes or trends in the data with an inductive approach. Theoretical memos, describing the context of conversations, were then organized in a spreadsheet by theme. All rounds of coding included a rigorous process of multiple listens of episodes while taking detailed theoretical memos.

Interviews. In supplement with the CTDA of podcast episodes, this study also utilized interviews. Hrastinski & Aghaee (2012) emphasize interviews with social media content producers to critically explore how they use and what they expect from social media. Moreover, Parmelee (2013) offers that interviews can provide additional insight into news processes and organization. We can think of podcasters as strategic organizational actors, similar to that of journalists, thus gaining more understanding of the media content through its producers.

Interview coding and analysis process. After receiving exemption from the University of North Carolina Institutional Review Board (IRB# 20-1988), potential podcast interviewees were contacted via email. In the email, podcasters were solicited to volunteer to discuss podcasting with the researcher. The two criteria the interviewees needed were to one, have a

podcast and two, identify as Black or African American. Once the researcher received responses via email from some podcasters, the snowball method was then employed encouraging podcasters to reach out to their various networks to be interviewed. Emailing inquiries and scheduling interviews were conducted primarily in October 2020 and continued sporadically throughout November and December. Between November 2020 and January 2021, the researcher interviewed 20 separate podcasters, representing a total of 15 podcasts. Some interviews were conducted with multiple hosts of one show, and some interviews were conducted with individuals who have yet to start their own podcast but have expertise and experience with the medium. Before interviews, interviewees were informed that their participation does not include anonymity and their real names will be used and that they will not be monetarily compensated for their interview. All of the interviewees were interviewed via Zoom video conferences, and all signed consent forms (Appendix A) giving their permission to be interviewed and recorded.

Interviews used a semi-structured format (McCracken, 1988), which utilizes open-ended questions to allow participants a chance to speak freely. Interview subjects were asked questions with respect to three major categories. The first category of questions asked about their podcast generally, i.e. the type of podcast it is, the topics discussed, the guests they invite and what are their objectives or goals for the podcast. The second category of questions asked more in-depth questions about podcasters motives, their perceived influence in community relations, how they operate within public opinion and how they see themselves within the realm of mass media. Finally, interviews were concluded with miscellaneous questions that purposely initiated an open forum of discussion about podcasting.

During interviews, the researcher took detailed notes of conversations and topics for further analysis. Also, following the interview, the researcher used Happy Scribe automated transcription software to transcribe interview scripts. The process of coding interviews included two rounds of coding, including initial coding then focused coding. The researcher listened to recordings along with using the transcriptions to separate and inspect themes that were revealed in interviews. Once themes were inductively finalized, the researcher created a spreadsheet categorizing trends which emerged from interview data by interviewee.

Samples. This study had two samples of data, one of which includes interview data from twenty podcasters and podcast experts (a description of interviewees is provided below). The other sample consisted of four Black podcasts totaling 57 episodes for discourse analysis data.

Three of the podcasts in the sample are hosted on the Apple ecosystem or on Spotify. Apple and Spotify are the two most commonly used platforms for podcast listening with 52% of people using Apple and 19% using Spotify, according to Edison research (Whitner, 2020). One podcast, *Hear to Slay*, is hosted on Luminary, a subscription podcast network with a collection of numerous award-winning podcasts.

The podcasts analyzed are as follows:

You Already Know. The *You Already Know* podcast is hosted by Kenan Thompson and Tani Marole. The two are long-time friends and popular culture fanatics. They share their unique perspectives on film, music, TV, sports, politics and more. This podcast began in May 2020 with just 9 episodes to date. Episodes are 90 minutes in length or longer.

Hear to Slay. The *Hear to Slay* podcast is a Black feminist podcast, hosted by acclaimed writers Roxane Gay and Tressie McMillan Cottom. This podcast offers incisive reads of politics

and popular culture that shape the worlds we live in. This podcast began April 2019. With 46 episodes to date, the episodes average 40-60 minutes in length.

The For Real, For Real Podcast. This podcast is hosted by three friends named Trevor, Sam, and Jeff. On this podcast, the three men vow to keep it real and they note on their podcast site that the podcast is, “Where keeping it real goes right – most of the time” (The For Real For Real, 2020). These friends engage in real conversations that give insight into the perspective of young Black men in America.

Friends Like Us. Marina Franklin is a comedian, writer, entertainer, and host of the Friends Like Us podcast. This podcast has been broadcast for seven years this year. This podcast features many different women of color, and sometimes men, who have and share different views on current events or topics of the day.

The profiles of the podcasters

The podcasters varied in age (24years – 60) and geographic location (all except one of the podcasters record in the United States; the other in the Bahamas). Seven of the podcasters are men and the remaining 14 women. The podcasts ranged in topics as well, as some podcasts revolved around topics within popular culture, entertainment and sports; other podcasts focused on being Black in Academia or how to live the seven principles of Kwanzaa all year long. Some of the podcasters are well-known entertainers, intellectuals, and thought provokers and therefore have large podcast followings. Others were largely unknown until their podcast gave them a voice and a following. Some podcasters were just starting up and learning how to build their audience or listenership. The following briefly profiles the podcasters interviewed and describes their shows. Throughout the findings and discussion, I refer to the podcasters typically by their

“stage name” or the names they use while podcasting. Though this breaks from a typical academic writing style, it emphasizes the familiarity and informality that the podcasters aim to have with their listeners – and that they had with the PI. The following profiles will also help to contextualize the quotes and themes further explained in the subsequent chapters.

Cortez from *The Gin Papi Podcast*. *Gin Papi* is a podcast based in the DMV (DC/MD/VA) area that features young Black people discussing various topics and current social media topics. This podcast is more of a colloquial podcast where listeners tune in to what sounds like a gathering with friends, where the hosts are drinking and conversing. Cortez is the main host of the show and typically leads the show with co-hosts and guests.

Tani Marole from *You Already Know*. Tani Marole co-hosts the *You Already Know* podcast with Kenan Thompson. While Kenan is widely known for his long-standing career in entertainment, comedy, and television, Tani joins him on the podcast as a long-time friend, entertainment industry insider, and popular culture buff. The show’s main premise is to discuss topics related to television and film, however they often end up discussing current events through the lens of film and popular culture.

Candi Lynn from *Pull Up the Podcast*. Candi Lynn and her brother ShawTime Shaw are a sibling duo who host a podcast dedicated to talk, sports, hip hop, culture and the news. *Pull Up* is designed to celebrate people while providing resources that connect their listeners to an urban lifestyle experience.

Marina Franklin from *Friends Like Us*. Marina is the creator of the *Friends Like Us* podcast that has been producing content for seven years, making it the longest running podcast out of all the interviewees. The podcast typically features women of color with diverse views on diverse topics. More recently, Marina has invited men on the podcasts, as well as women who do

not identify as people of color. Marina herself is a noted comedian and entertainer with a dedicated following.

Alieshia Nunnally from *Millennial Thoughts*. Nunnally was the youngest podcaster interviewed at the age of 24, and she hosts her podcast on topics that pertain to being a millennial. The podcast aims to help single millennials transition smoothly into adulthood, including on topics such as relationships, money, traveling, self-care and more.

Dr. Tressie McMillian Cottom and Dr. Roxane Gay from *Hear to Slay*. Both Cottom and Gay are noted writers, professors and thought leaders who come together in what they describe as the “black feminist podcast of your dreams” (Hear to Slay, 2021). The podcast features conversations that are compelling and crafted by Black women, inspired by current events, politics, and popular culture.

Finesse Mitchell from *Understand This*. Finesse is a comedian, actor, and writer who hosts his podcast *Understand This* and features many celebrity guest interviews and informal topics of conversation. During his casual conversations with friends, Finesse offers uncensored advice that aims to enlighten.

Drew Harmony from *A Beat and A Message*. *A Beat and A Message* is a podcast hosted by Bahamian recording artist Drew Harmony. Drew’s podcast often features one guest alongside himself discussing various topics about life, wellness, health and more. Drew’s podcast is both visual and audio, and the majority of his listenership are located in the Bahamas, the United States, and in Africa.

Nicole Walker from *WinHers United Podcast*. Nicole hosts *WinHers United*, a podcast focused on leadership insight, personal experiences, and business expertise from leading Women of Color (WOC) entrepreneurs. Nicole’s discussion topics include self-discovery, self-leadership,

mindset, personal/professional lessons learned, the landscape for women in business and many related topics. *WinHers United* aims to provide opportunities to make business connections, personal and professional growth, inspiration and motivation (WinHers United, 2021).

Olivia and Raven from *Intersectional Insights Podcast*. Olivia and Raven are two parts of the trio-hosted podcast, *Intersectional Insights*. Along with co-host Lakeria, Olivia and Raven are three blind women who want to raise awareness and share their perspectives on everyday issues of disabled people on their podcast.

Genie Dawkins from *The Parenting Cipher Podcast*. Genie created *The Parenting Cipher* to empower parents of color who are raising special needs kids. Genie's idea behind the podcast was to demystify the education system and therapeutic programs related to special needs children, as well as to advocate for the rights of special needs children. On *The Cipher*, Genie offers "parenting, advocacy, healthy living, and entrepreneur tips to parents who want to up level their children's experience." (The Parenting Cipher, 2021)

Yvette Walker from *Positively Joy*. Yvette's podcast is faith-focused and designed to spread the message of Christ. On her podcast, Yvette claims the listener will find God through her and others' testimonials of everyday blessings, everyday happiness and everyday sorrow. Yvette's personal faith and work inspired her to create this niche podcast intended for a vast audience.

Phyllis from *Living the Principles 365*. Phyllis and LaTricia's podcast emphasize the values and tenets of Kwanzaa all year around. Their mission is to "collaboratively foster empowered actions for the black diaspora and promote community growth" (Living the

Principles 365, 2020). The podcast was birthed with an intention to educate and empower the Black community. Both cohosts believe that principles are the powerful force to inner and outer transformation.

Trish from *Shit Black Girls Watch*. Trish and Meah are best friends, roommates, and film enthusiasts who dedicate their podcast to film and television. Trish is a Ph.D. student and Meah works in the entertainment industry; together they use their personal experiences as Black women to navigate topics within film and television.

Dr. Pat Sanders from *This Prof Life: Women of Color in Higher Education*. Dr. Pat tells the stories of women of color in academia. She focuses her episodes on mentoring, teaching, leadership, scholarship and entrepreneurship. Dr. Pat is a tenured professor of communication with a background in radio and journalism.

Three interviewees do not host their own podcasts but have had extensive experience with podcasts and the media industry. These interviewees in particular were introduced to the researcher by the snowball sample method. By making connections with volunteers through email, the researcher was also able to observe and engage with the natural and organic social networks that snowball sampling relies on (Noy, 2008). Interdisciplinary scholar, Chaim Noy, suggested that snowball sampling techniques employed in qualitative research “lead to dynamic moments where unique social knowledge of an interactional quality can be fruitfully generated” (Noy, 2008: 328). These interviewees – Roy Wood Jr., Talib Jasir, and Dr. Chioke I’Anson – have vested interests and expertise in podcasts by producing and developing podcasts, creating content for radio or television, working with large radio and television networks and creating big podcasting conferences, festivals, and networks.

Roy Wood Jr. is a stand-up comedian, actor, writer and producer who has served on Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* as a correspondent since 2015. Roy hails from a journalism and broadcast family where his father and two brothers held long careers as news anchors. Roy's start in radio combined with guest appearances on over 15 podcasts, made him an ideal interviewee for this study.

Talib Jasir is the founder of the New York based festival, Afros & Audio. This festival focuses on emphasizing Black podcasters and helping them to grow and expand their podcasts. While Talib has had his own podcast in the past, his expertise in the industry dons from producing multiple podcasts and helping others to develop their own content. Along with the festival, Talib's career is focused on developing the next generation of Black podcasters.

Dr. Chioke I'Anson is an assistant professor of African American Studies and the Voice of Underwriting for the National Public Radio's (NPR) newscasts and digital downloads. Dr. I'Anson's podcast pitch, "Do Over," is hosted with friend Kelly Jones and was selected by Radiotopia as one of 10 semifinalists in a national call for new podcast ideas. After the win, Jones and Dr. I'Anson applied for an NPR workshop for aspiring podcasters. Through this opportunity, Dr. I'Anson found himself in a position to be an underwriter for NPR (Schneider, 2017). Additionally, Dr. I'Anson teaches an African American studies course on podcasting called "Podcasting While Black," further demonstrating his extensive knowledge on the subject.

Findings

The following chapters detail the many trends that emerged from interviews with podcasters and the discourse analysis of podcast episodes. Chapter VII explores the overlapping trends between interviews and episodes. This dissertation starts with this chapter because the multi-method analysis gives an overall picture of podcasting. For instance, the circulation of themes between interviews and discourse analysis nicely illustrates the essence of podcasting as heard on the podcasts and by the podcasters themselves. Next, Chapter VIII investigates themes that were unique to interview data. Having this chapter follow the recurring themes in Chapter VII is logical because in this chapter, podcasters reinforce the importance of authenticity, community, and intellectualism – particularly as it relates to strategic branding and marketing of podcasts. Presenting the interview data by themes seemed natural as many of the topics that podcasters discussed build off each other and were brought up multiple times. Finally, Chapter IX presents discourse analysis of the four separate podcasts, fully contextualizing the discourse while illuminating the various themes that emerged. This chapter is presented last in the findings because discourse on podcasts further strengthens the ideas set forth by the podcasters. After hearing the perceptions and perspectives of podcasters in interviews, this chapter focuses on how the podcasters actually bring their ideas to fruition on air. This study's research questions were answered in many ways from both interview and content analysis data sets and are addressed throughout the chapters.

Chapter VII: Recurring themes

Three major themes emerged between both podcasts and interviews. First, was the emphasis of authenticity and being yourself on the podcast. Second, was the notion of creating a community; from there, two subthemes of networking and resource building also emerged. Third, intellectualism, studying, and research was the last prominent theme found on podcasts and in discussions with podcasters.

Always Keep it Real

This may sound cliché but be yourself. Be yourself and be an expert in your field. – Phyllis

Research question two asked: What role does authenticity play in the success of a podcast, and how do podcasters view the value of authenticity? To be clear, the term *success* here refers to how the podcasters view themselves and their podcast to be successful. Some interviewees were extremely excited to get 300 downloads others have accepted awards for their broadcasts, and others are strategically trying to find ways to make money. Everyone has different goals for their podcast and will therefore reach different milestones.

In answering the first part of the question, authenticity plays a huge role. For instance, fifteen podcasters of the twenty-one explicitly used the words “authentic” or “authenticity” when asked what contributes to a successful podcast. Understanding how they view the value of authenticity, however, was elaborated in many ways. Phyllis’ quote above is just one of the many

quotes where podcasters echoed the phrase “be yourself” when asked what makes a successful podcast, or what makes *their* podcast successful.

It became extremely evident throughout the months of data collection that being oneself is truly at the core of what podcasting, as a media form, is. Where in traditional spaces of opinion there is a certain level of decorum or professionalism expected, the whole point of podcasting is the exact opposite. Podcasting isn’t bound by professionalism or formalities but instead built upon the idea that we are flawed human beings and that is okay to see. As Yvette, host of *Positively Joy*, explained:

I’ve come to know that people love to see the flaws. They love to see that you are not perfect like them, so I’ve learned to be myself... I definitely think people like to see you recognizing that you are a flawed individual, and we all are. I say so many times when I’m talking to people. But when you can really show it... yea that’s what people like.

(Personal communication, November 20, 2020)

Similarly, Tressie (*Hear to Slay*) discussed breaking a certain level of decorum on podcasts when she noted, “Podcasts are still the space where you can hear people sound like human beings” (Personal communication, December 4, 2020). In context, she described how many media spaces are often inundated with celebrity and privileged voices, but podcasting creates a space where we can cut through the elite and celebrity to get real. In fact, most of the podcasters said this in some shape or form when asked what makes a successful podcast. Most found that even when they had a plan or a specific way to develop their show, they were more often happiest when they were being true to themselves. Nearly all of the podcasters mentioned the phrase *keeping it real*, meaning that they expect their shows, and everyone who joins in, to offer a level of honesty, candor, and realness.

Marina Franklin spoke to *keeping it real* frequently during her interview, stating that in the beginning she did not realize that she was trying to be something she wasn't.

I think it's okay in this time to admit yea, we're not all 100% politicians, I'm not a political leader, I'm not an activist, I'm just Marina Franklin, a comedian, this is who I am, and I just really want to get you to know these women on my show and hopefully I ask the right questions. (Personal communication, November 24, 2020)

As time went on and Marina interviewed more and more people on the show, she realized it was not her job to have the knowledge of a politician when discussing politics or to know everything about every topic. Instead, she found that there was much more power from being herself and being honest about that. She continued:

I've found that place to be much more honest, that is what I don't see or hear in a lot of shows even today – is just that honesty. *Friends Like Us* is about being real and having real conversations, we're funny people so the funny is going to happen anyway, but it's the real that we're aiming for. (Personal communication, November 24, 2020) On *Friends Like Us*, Marina is often the conversation facilitator and is good at directing discourse to where she wants it to go.

Similarly, Tani (*You Already Know*) spoke to the importance of being real and even mentioning how important it was to him to not have guests on the show the first season – to let their listeners really get to know who they are as people. He explained, “They need to hear us, grow with us” (Personal communication, November 9, 2020). Tani wants the audience to learn who he and Kenan are before they get dependent on guests and random people coming on. He went on to say:

Enjoy us and who we are, so, when we do have people on, it's going to take that conversation to the next level... Our "know it alls" (the *You Already Know* fan base) know who we are and know we are not being fake. (Personal communication, November 9, 2020)

And, while listening to multiple episodes of *You Already Know*, one does eventually come to know the personalities of the two hosts and the ebbs and flows of their conversation. Loyal fans expect Tani to go on more abstract, high energy rants on the show, usually followed by a mellow and often more logical-sounding Kenan. In episode four, "The Revolution will be Televised," the two are discussing social unrest in America amid George Floyd's murder. While discussing possible solutions to race issues in America, the two exchange in conversation. In a temperate tone, Kenan states:

We have to come together. It's only going to be won when we come together, you know what I'm saying? Everybody can't go for self. . . I can do my part and everybody has to start picking up their parts man. Whatever you can do, it's not necessarily a money thing – it's an—any conversation that you have that you feel is going left towards the representation of your culture or anything like that, it's your duty to teach the ignorant basically. If you can, in a peaceful manner. And if you can't, you have to leave that their and use your voting abilities for things that can't be talked about in the community.

(Marole & Thompson, 2020)

After this very positive and uplifting note from Kenan, Tani follows up:

What we need is a Black illuminati! I hate to be—it's not even funny, I'm not even joking, we need a Black illuminati bro. . . We need a fuckin' secret society of really powerful

Black people that's Frederick Smith or Will Smith, all the Smiths, Jaden Smith... they need to be out here pulling strings and helping. (Marole & Thompson, 2020)

This excerpt is a typical conversation to be heard on *YAK*, and Tani and Kenan's dichotomy of silly and serious or radical and conversative truly seems to work. Not only do the two seem authentically themselves, but their chemistry and friendship also feel real. In addition, as shown in this conversation and in many others, the two hosts will often discuss current events (particularly relating to being Black in America) and try to brainstorm avenues for solutions. This function of everyday talk to provide a range of possible strategies for a collective outcome further highlights podcasters emphasis on discussing real life events and issues as a part of keeping it real. It's like Tani mentioned elsewhere in episode four: "I have this little podcast, and I'm talking with my friend, and I'm saying my peace." (Marole & Thompson, 2020).

Tressie (*Hear to Slay*) speaks to this, saying, "We talk to celebrities real. Which is why I think people and celebs appreciate us and our show" (Personal communication, December 4, 2020). Additionally, Trish who co-hosts *Shit Black Girls Watch*, echoes that their podcast is, "just a place for those real-life discussions to take place for Black women – nothing profound about it just two Black girls discussing shit that's relevant to them" (Personal communication, December 4, 2020). Both of these quotes highlight the essence of *just being*.

Subsequent to being yourself is the idea that those who relate to you will eventually follow. For instance, when you are natural and organic, people view that as familiar. Reflecting back to traditional spaces of opinion that are often broadcast through professional forms of mass media, audiences typically expect perfection and flawless performance. Yet, it's just that: a performance. The nature of podcasts reflects everything but a performance and emphasizes a state of reality or naturality that is lesser seen in mass media. MiMi (*Mproper*) remarked,

“Transparency makes it relatable, I think people listen to what they’re familiar with... If they know that you’re honest, you’re sure about what you say, and funny – they can relate to that” (Personal communication, November 30, 2020). Candi Lynn (*Pull Up*) further explicated: I used to edit every breath then I learned that people like podcasts because it feels like a natural conversation. They like the fact it’s a natural conversation and it’s not as serious... You have to let people see the personality, you have to be knowledgeable, and you have to be entertaining. You want to give people the opportunity to laugh, teach them something, or make them feel naturally connected to you. (Personal communication, December 18, 2020).

The podcasters tended to use words like “real,” “authentic,” “transparent,” “relatable,” or “honest” to illuminate the importance of being true to oneself while podcasting. It’s clear that this medium is distinct in the levels of candor expected. Rather than having restrictive guidelines on content like radio and television have from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), podcasts follow more of a social media platform model, where podcasters maintain complete control over their content, and content is often more personable.

Along these lines of being personable, some podcasters have found that the act of podcasting itself has helped them to open up and be their authentic selves while recording. For podcasters like Kenan Thompson and Nicole Walker, it’s not just about making sure that the listeners are relating to them and can see their authenticity, but it’s also about their own personal journeys to self-discovery and authenticity. Tani Marole (*You Already Know*) explains the breakthrough Kenan had while recording:

Once we started recording Kenan ended up liking talking for hours, when at first, he was nervous about it. Kenan is a professional and this podcast kind of broke that wall down

where you think you know him, but you really don't. You learn him on this show, for real. Kenan's make up lady says she feels like she finally knows him now even though she's been doing his make up for 10 years. Because now she's getting to see who you are without that level of professional courtesy involved. (Personal communication, November 9, 2020)

Tani went on to discuss how Kenan felt about letting the walls down on the show and learning to open up more. He discussed how their podcast originally had a specific topic of film and popular culture but over time, as they began to record, topics came up where they both felt compelled to speak their own truths on the show. "Kenan has found his voice through the podcast, especially in the light of using his platform and voice for social justice." Tani then commented, "It became, as Kenan would say, his therapy" (Personal communication, November 9, 2020). Nicole Walker, also likens her show to feeling like a therapy session:

We talk about those tough topics. I even surprise myself sometimes with the stuff I share... I've even had a guest tell me, 'this feels like a therapy session' and I'm like 'yes!' Because she not going to give me those canned responses. Let's get to it on my podcast because we're here to help someone. (Personal communication, November 13, 2020)

Nicole and Tani's likening the podcast conversations to therapy sessions demonstrate such a tone is often present while on podcasts. It's clear that, like therapy, podcasts require honesty and openness between people and conversations. Podcasters believe that their authenticity will be reflective of the guests they host and the audience they wish to relate to. More so, by being authentic and honest, podcasters believe that everyone benefits. Specifically, if people on the podcasts are honest in sharing their personal experiences or testimonies – further explored in

Chapter IX – their story can help someone who is listening, just by speaking their truth. Nicole Walker furthers this idea when continuing her thought from above:

I was really surprised in the candor people had. They would really get deep and talk about marital problems, and some people talked about domestic violence, some people talked about depression... In season 6 I wanted to get to know the people more personally, so I started asking more personal questions like, “What kind of childhood did you have growing up?” To show that we’re all people who start from somewhere and based on the decisions that we make, something happens. (Personal communication, November 13, 2020)

Additionally, a lot of the podcasters mentioned they want their listeners to “get to know them,” and they stressed a common goal of aiming for listeners to be familiar and comfortable with them as personalities. Through comfort, podcasters can then build trust and community. For example, Drew (*A Beat and A Message*) expressed his concern with his own comfort, “I didn’t want to do the sports thing or the hip hop thing I wanted to do what I most comfortable with, for me” (Personal communication, November 9, 2020). He went on to explain that if he wasn’t comfortable with the content he was discussing, then the listeners won’t take him seriously or trust him.

In addition to being comfortable with their own content and show, podcasters also mentioned comfort between co-hosts or guests. Cortez, of the *Gin Papi Podcast*, discussed always being comfortable and not inviting guests onto the show that he doesn’t know. He explains, “When I say that anyone can come on my podcast and kick it then that’s what I mean” (Personal communication, November 4, 2020). For him, he has to feel comfortable, and in turn, the audience responds favorably to the candid nature between him and his on-air comrades.

Nicole (*WinHers United*) furthered this sentiment, “The best thing you want to hear from someone you interviewed on your show is ‘I never shared that before.’ Because then they are clearly comfortable” (Personal communication, November 13, 2020). Finesse Mitchell (*Understand This*) explained how when you keep it real (like he tries to do on his podcast), “you can get a lot of people to get real comfortable and people let their guard down” (Personal communication, November 14, 2020). For the podcasters, this is what it’s all about – getting real and making their community feel comfortable and included in the conversation.

Authenticity for podcasters is the most valuable part of podcasting because, without their audience, the people who are relying on them to be relatable and give them what they can’t get from other media, they have nothing. On the flip side, episode analyses revealed that podcasters do indeed emphasize their personalities on their shows. From sharing personal testimonies to using various rhetorical tools (both further explored in later chapters) to always reiterating that this is *real* conversation, they attempt to represent *real* thoughts. Thus, a key component of podcasting is authenticity. Like Candi Lynn (*Pull Up*) stated: “That’s what makes a successful podcast: the personalities” (Personal communication, January 8, 2021).

Building Community

It’s just conversation based. You’re trying to create that community where people really know you’re authentic. – Aleishia

Particular ideas on *building community* or *building a community* can vary from person-to-person, but, more generally, the consensus among podcasters was that you build community by either creating content around a niche topic or presenting broad content from a unique

perspective. In other words, if you can get people to relate to either you or what you're talking about, you can create a space where like-minded individuals will convene with you. Like Alieshia from *Millennial Thoughts* comments, it's about "trying to create that community where people know that you and your guests know what you are talking about and building that base and that buzz so people will go and listen to your podcast" (Personal communication, January 12, 2021).

Within podcasting, building community is two-fold. On one hand, podcasters build communities for themselves and their personal brands by *networking*. They use the platform to meet with, talk to, and network with other individuals. Many podcasters discussed the role guests served on their shows and often expressed feeling selfish and wanting to personally meet or learn more from their guests – as opposed to being audience-focused while booking guests. By building their own personal networks, the podcasters expand their brands, connections, and resources. This is how podcasters build community.

On the other hand, media production demonstrates how the podcasters then turn their personal networks into resources for their listeners, i.e., *resource building*. For instance, even though most podcasters discussed how they chose guests based on expertise and knowledge, podcast analyses revealed that guests are often presented as friends and experts. Furthermore, though many podcasters and guests on their shows held high and respected positions in their various fields, they were still portrayed as being accessible to the audience through the show.

For audio enthusiast and expert Talib, community and networking are at the core of podcasting, and even more so for Black podcasters. Talib founded the Afros & Audio festival held in New York City as an attempt to form community to understand more about what other

Black creatives were doing in drama and media. Frustrated by inevitable hinderances for Black creatives in other mediated spaces, Talib's main goal was to create community among Black audio creators and their audiences. Talib remarked, "it was a call to action for me because it's 2020 and I'm ready for us to stop looking outside ourselves to make things happen" (Personal communication, November 30, 2020). Talib refers specifically to Black people when he refers to "us" and highlights that we have plenty of agency and resources to build our own platforms and communities. More particularly, Afros & Audios was developed around building a community that reflects and discusses the diversity within the community.

One way to understand the ways in which podcasters build community is literally the name of Marina Franklin's podcast, *Friends Like Us*. Part of the notion of podcasting is to first obtain listeners familiar with the host, as previously discussed. But, it is also to introduce the listeners to other people, be they known or not. Marina was influenced by Marc Maron, a fellow comedian, whose podcast has been noted as paving the way for interview-style podcasts. In 2013, when Marina heard about there not being any Black women available to work on SNL, she wanted to create a space similar to Maron's that highlighted Black women in comedy. She contends that the podcast was intended to be an outlet or place to be seen or heard outside of comedy. And, while Marina's network to pull from was already large before the podcast, based on her extensive television and film credits, she recognized that the people she knew were not known to most people. Marina comments, "I just assumed that these were people and women that everyone was exposed to in our community – in the Black community... but they weren't" (Personal communication, November 24, 2020). When Marina began to receive feedback from live shows and emails that so many people were excited to be learning about all these women comedians, her response was, "I was shocked" (Personal communication, November 24, 2020).

This was a common thread throughout interviews, as podcasters were adamant about solidifying who was a part of their “on-air” community while also presenting this cohort of podcast guests to their listeners as the friend you haven’t met yet but need their advice. After years of doing the podcast, Marina found that her huge network of people and resources were the exact people she needed to enlist to grow her own network and to provide multiple resources to her listeners. Marina remarked, “It’s a much bigger thing than being number one, it’s a much bigger thing. It’s about this community that you’re reaching out to, it’s about...you know, there are people that need to connect” (Personal communication, November 24, 2020). And, even though Marina’s guests often hold the job title of comedian, she stresses that the conversations are always geared toward inspiring the listener, as talking about serious subjects creates more dialogue in the community.

For podcasters like MiMi, networking and leadership has always been a part of her forté. This makes it easier to find guests, and she noted that social media was key for networking. She stated:

Over the years I found myself giving people advice, working training and guiding people. So, this naturally spilled over onto the podcast and onto the guests. It’s reconnecting to the people and it’s talking to the people. Finding out things I didn’t know, from people who I’ve known for years... I really enjoy being able to find out new things and then share information with people. I mean, once we’re on the mic the conversation just flows.

(Personal communication, November 30, 2020)

Likewise, Cortez chooses his network wisely, stating that he only brings on people in the show who he knows, confirming that the conversation and the chemistry will be there. Cortez

considers himself a thought provoker and only wants to invite that same kind of energy onto his show, “I want someone who can facilitate dialogue, like me” (Personal communication, November 4, 2020). Drew shared similar sentiments, explaining that choosing his guests is a bit selfish for him because these are people who he wants to talk to and who he knows will answer the questions that he has:

For my show I invite people that I have seen done something remarkable, who are in the reach of my network. I want people who have proven themselves to be experts in their field... Whenever I’m having those conversations with these people off the mic, I’m thinking, I wish average people can hear us talk, expose ways to success, expose secrets. (Personal communication, November 9, 2020).

As a whole, these podcasters are just looking to expand their networks in many different ways. Like Candi Lynn remarked, "That's what podcasting is about, building your audiences... and the guests, crossing over from podcast to podcast, that just really builds a bigger network” (Personal communication, December 18, 2020). Candi talks about the industry as a whole and critically points out that when you expand your guests, you also expand your audience.

Phyllis (*Living the Principles* 365) also mentioned the idea of cross-connecting across shows, “When you visit other podcasts, you can gain new listeners and resources then. You can always cross-connect with different audiences” (Personal communication, November 23, 2020). What Phyllis refers to as cross-connecting is when podcasters guest visit on podcasts other than their own. Cross-connecting helps to create new contacts and networks for the podcasters. By inviting a guest onto their show (and being on others), podcasters are expanding their platform, voice, followings.

Finally, creating community in the form of networking is often centered on the notion of familiarity and likeness to one another. In other words, podcasters enjoyed simply talking to people like them. Where most of the podcasters did not explicitly mention race-motivated goals or behaviors for podcasts, when discussing who they wanted to have as guests, the podcasters almost explicitly mentioned wanting Black guests. Tressie summarizes why:

Because we were Black women and we knew how media interacted with Black women, we knew – well we thought – *we know how to talk to Black women*. We can talk to Black women in a way where if you come to our show, you're going to get questions you don't get elsewhere, you're going to get a space where you can talk about things that you don't get to talk about. (Personal communication, December 4, 2020)

The podcasters are keenly aware of their lack of representation in other forms of mass media. With this in mind, they are unyielding about exposing the natural realities and the intellectual depth of marginalized voices. Trish (*Shit Black Girls Watch*) recognized that her podcast's once niche topic was gaining traction and more and more people were beginning to talk about film and television. Easing her anxiety was the comfort in knowing that her and Meah's voices were unique. Trish commented:

We're about creating a community around Black people who are really interested in film and television media. Having chemistry between the hosts is important to contributing to the success of the pod, and even though other pods talk about tv and film, they don't have our perspectives. (Personal communication, December 4, 2020)

Finally, the notion of networking is evidenced by the reflexive nature of establishing oneself as an ally and resource. For example, Nicole Walker noted that after season one of her show, people started finding her directly to be on her program.

I found that instead of me having to reach out to people to find guests for the show, they were coming to me. I had built up my own network and reputation and people wanted to be a part of it. (Personal communication, November 13, 2020)

Walker's experience reflects how cyclical the idea of networking is in the podcasting industry. Like Marina Franklin mentioned, it's not about being number one but about connecting people. One one hand, these podcasters are self-serving, interested in expanding their personal networks and possible audience base. On the other, they try to be selfless in attempting to promote and expand the networks of their many friends and guests. Roy Wood Jr. perhaps articulated this best:

Podcasts are great for getting to know people you like through interviews by other people you like. You can't find that anywhere else. Doesn't happen on television, but it happens all the time in podcasts. You literally can search any person and see where they interviewed and choose your adventure. (Personal communication, November 23, 2020) While discussing podcasting with Roy, he likened many aspects of podcasts to radio, where he spent a lot of time professionally. Within this conversation (later discussed in this dissertation's discussion), Wood Jr. highlights the sense of community that he is seeing now in podcasts previously developed from radio. He comments:

There are podcasts that are huge, that are on shit that I really don't care anything about – but the people who do love, love it. And so, there's community in that, that I don't think that terrestrial radio has been able to create that outside of morning shows and a handful of nighttime shows. (Personal communication, November 23, 2020)

Here, Roy clarifies what he believes what makes podcasts special is their ability to create a sense of community. Roy further discussed how the freedom to choose your own content and who

speaks on that content was what made podcasting stand apart. What Roy is also alluding to in this quote is the impact that podcasting has had on giving niche audiences and niche topics a place for experts and enthusiasts to convene.

Intellectualism, Studying, and Research

“Podcasts seems to be more of an intellectual thing.” -Finesse Mitchell

The final theme that revealed itself throughout podcasts and came up frequently with podcasters is the idea of *intellectualism*. During the podcast episodes, the hosts often drop facts or knowledge about various topics. And, as reflected above, they like to bring on guests who they feel are experts in their fields. Talib noted that podcasting – as a form of oral storytelling – is an inherent contribution to intellectualism. Specifically, by *us* recording *our* lived experiences and histories, the “true and great part about podcasting is that it affords us the opportunity to contribute intellectually and historically in the space” (Personal communication, November 30, 2020). This theme echoed throughout interviews, as podcasters remarked how much time they put into their podcast doing research for shows and studying up on topics. More so, podcasters emphasized their own thirst for knowledge and how they suspect that their listeners are avid learners as well.

When it came to learning more about the craft of podcasting and the overall industry, many podcasters had a vested interest in researching the platform. Of the twenty interviewed, eight podcasters mentioned specifically doing research on podcasts before launching their own shows. Drew discussed first learning about podcasts on YouTube where he spends a lot of time consuming a lot of content. He referenced first listening to a lot of white males on YouTube,

adding that these podcasts often had visual components as well, which interested him. The more he learned about the space and the more he perceived it to be predominantly white and male, he then began developing *A Beat and A Message*. Nicole (*WinHers United*) also discussed hearing about podcasts from different business circles she was in and then doing the research on her own. Genie (*The Parenting Cipher*) discussed researching and understanding the space of podcasting more in-depth:

I was still learning; I was still in all the stuff. Every little thing I could be in I was in. I attended classes and I wanted to know more... Then I ended up winning a scholarship, from a young Caucasian woman and what she does for her business is she helps people launch podcasts. So, the reason I wanted the scholarship – because I was actually going to launch before I even got the scholarship – was because I wanted to ensure my consistency. I wanted to make sure that I was consistent and sustainable. (Personal communication, November 20, 2020)

Even with prior experience as an advocate, author, business leader and creator of audio and online content, Genie still wanted to put in the work to understand podcasting as a platform and achieve success. The bigger picture is, that while all of these podcasters volunteered to start podcasts and most are not getting paid, they still take podcasting very seriously and took the time to first understand the platform before using it. This reflects what is traditionally thought of in terms of a space of opinion. Though the authentic nature of podcasts pushes for more informal conversations and behavior, the level of professionalism for how the podcasters interact with the medium itself is consistent with other spaces of opinion. Like Marina mentioned, “It seems like it's loose talk, but I really do work hard on the framing of the conversation, I think of myself as

the DJ of these conversations... We're talking about serious subjects” (Personal communication, November 24, 2020).

There were some podcasters who put less thought into the production and development of podcasts, though these podcasters were typically bigger name podcasters who tended to have more resources and the luxury to relay that labor elsewhere. For example, before starting his podcast *Understand This*, Finesse Mitchell admitted to not being interested in podcasts. He commented, “Hell no, I wasn't even into it. I wasn't into the culture” (Personal communication, November 14, 2020). Finesse, as he had plenty of experience and connections in the entertainment industry, probably did not need to know as much before starting. More so, with a well-established fan base, he had the luxury of not needing to worry too much about the technical aspects of podcasting to build an initial audience.

Dr. Chioke I’Anson spoke about these dynamics by saying, “Some shows have a charismatic leader just talking – so there's no skill there. A lot of shows just have famous people and the famous people talking masks the lack of production” (Personal communication, December 15, 2020). This is certainly not to say that Finesse’s or any other celebrities’ podcasts lack production quality but rather to highlight that well-known people or people with an already established listenership might worry less about understanding a medium they can pay someone else to know about. Tressie and Roxane were definitely not interested in learning about the ins and outs of podcasting when starting *Hear to Slay*. Tressie and Roxane both got at this point, as Tressie started with, “We were not those people. We have 18 jobs, we just didn’t have the time to learn podcasts, we’re already experts in so many other things” (Personal communication, December 4, 2020). Roxane followed:

Well, a lot of people were wondering why we went with Luminary, and the thing is you're always going to give up something no matter where you go. But what you get with Luminary is getting the money you want. Having that kind of money means that we can pay a production team and pay them with their worth – which I think matters a lot for sound quality. (Personal communication, December 4, 2020)

For those podcasters who were starting from scratch with no listeners, they were careful to make the steps to explicate the medium fully before diving in. For other podcasters that lacked in their knowledge of the platform itself, they compensated for it by being well-researched on the show's content.

The idea of being well-researched or well-informed seemed to be natural to most podcasters, as they often described themselves as “leaders,” “thought-leaders,” “thoughtprovokers,” and “educators.” To be specific, Drew stated things like, “When I speak people pay attention... I realized I had a good way for getting people to come on board” (Personal communication, November 9, 2020). Likewise, Nicole stipulated, “yes, I consider myself to be a thought-leader” (Personal communication, November 13, 2020). Also, MiMi maintained that she is a natural networker:

I do a lot of research to create the content for the podcast. When I started, I thought a lot about different topics that would be important to Black women and who do I know that can expertly speak to this? (Personal communication, November 30, 2020)

Comparably, Dr. Pat Sanders (*This Prof Life*) deemed herself a problem-solver and described using that skill on the podcast, “I’m the person that people look at and go, ‘Can I talk to you?’ Then, I fix the problem” (Personal communication, January 8, 2021). If not a problem-solver or thought-provoker, most of the other podcasters spoke to spending a lot of time making sure

they are at least knowledgeable on current events and selected topics. Tressie mentioned: We've beefed up the research with this production team and our producers do a really good job of following us across our various social media, so they know what we're up

to... They also bring the stuff they [production team] been reading and we discuss how we're going to frame conversations... We put a lot of time into that. (Personal communication, December 4, 2020)

Trish from *Shit Black Girls Watch* concisely said, "Preparation is a big deal" (Personal communication, December 4, 2020). For her and co-host Meah, if they are not prepared or did not do enough research for the episode, they can tell that the conversation is usually not as interesting. Trish found that when she has done the preparation work, she can pull more out of the episode and conversation. In tandem, Trish found out how important it was for each host to be researched in their own topics/areas of interest. She mentioned learning a great deal from her co-host who often studies different topics to bring to the show. Yvette spoke to her history in journalism and night news radio in Oklahoma City as a key contributor to how she structures and researches for her podcast. Coupled with her experience in media, she is also an academic and online blogger which, she says, grounded her approach to podcasting. Consistently, MiMi was always involved in networking and leadership activities and continues to use those skills toward (and on) the podcast. She cited:

Over the years I found myself giving people advice, working training and guiding people... I research trending topics, or challenges for Black women and I use my networking skills to my benefit. I really enjoy being able to find out new things and share information with people... I think people listen to what they're familiar with and to learn something new. (Personal communication, November 30, 2020)

Alieshia simply stated, “I do my research to make sure my shows as informative as possible” (Personal communication, January 12, 2021). Even Tressie and Roxane – both scholars and wellknown writers – mentioned wanting a creative outlet that wasn't writing but still creating something that was informative and different. Tressie stated:

There was a woman on MSNBC talking about the Color of Money, and so we were like ‘ahh we’ve seen that, how do we talk about it differently? What can we say that’s different? Who can we pair that with that’s unexpected? And we talk about things that we’re working on for other projects too, right? Like, Roxane wrote something for the *New York Times* that we then discussed on the show. (Personal communication, December 4, 2020)

Information Gaps

There's a deliberate information gap and access gap. -Talib Jasir

Focusing on the content and the research behind said content also brought about the subtheme of information or education gaps. In other words, podcasters often referred to themselves as being education focused or information spreaders. Drew spoke a great deal about focusing on education when he mentioned, “You have a responsibility” (Personal communication, November 9, 2020). He went on to say:

I wanted people to be interested in getting educated or enlightened instead of being entertained. I want to make Black people think. The guests are people who have proven themselves in their fields and they have something to teach whoever is listening to the podcast... In the Bahamas the national grade average for a school kids is a “D.”

Education is really important to me and spreading that message is key... It's not average

conversations, or just regurgitated information, these are real people who have learned something and are willing to teach others. (Personal communication, November 9, 2020)

Tani (*You Already Know*) gestured to the idea of being responsible and informative. He commented, “We would be irresponsible socially to not be informed on what's going on politically. I mean yea we originally set out to talk all popular culture, but that would be irresponsible” (Personal communication, November 9, 2020). Tani found that he and Kenan had what he described as a “duty” to discuss the events of the current day and to “educate” their listeners. In the same manner, Marina stated, “People (listeners) will say that they're learning, and that was more important to me than anything. The fact that we are funny is just a plus, the fact that people are learning – yea that was the whole point” (Personal communication, November 24, 2020). She makes it a point for everyone to know that who she invites on the show are smart and serious people who have information to teach. She continued, “this show is about having a very smart, responsible conversation with people who may disagree, and agree” (Personal communication, November 24, 2020).

Even for podcasters who didn’t explicitly allude to it being their “responsibility” or “duty” to provide information, most alluded to the fact that such was the nature of podcasting. After a few years of podcasting, Marina realized that even when the listeners reach out to disagree, they are able to address issues where everyone can learn and hear from the perspective of Black women.

I realized, this show is not about you, you're not Barbara Walters, you're still a comic, you're still a person trying to be informed just like everyone else... you're a tool that, you know, you're being used to get the information out. Just get the information out, and if

you have a dumb question, who cares? There are no dumb questions. (Personal communication, November 24, 2020)

Shows like Phyllis and LaTricia's *Living the Principles 365* are naturally designed to produce information. Phyllis discusses what she hears from her listeners, and it is often that they don't know a lot about the topics on the show. So, she finds that their show is a way to share and give information about Kwanzaa and that people are coming to the show to learn. Nicole Walker's background, training and education played a role in her podcast as well. She laughed as she exclaimed, "Uh hello we're smart too" (Personal communication, November 13, 2020). She expressed that her show, primarily about leadership, was designed to inform:

There are a lot of folly podcasts out there but, in a lot of ways, people want to help other people overcome; and they're talking about mental health and taboo topics that were swept under the rug, and I think that that's super powerful... A lot of times people hoard information, and I don't agree with that. The more you give the more you receive, that was also a part of developing the podcast. There are no gatekeepers. (Personal communication, November 13, 2020)

Intersectional Insights hosts Raven and Olivia agreed with the sentiment of recognizing that listeners want to learn. Raven noted, "We attract anyone who is willing to learn; it's a realm where you can create with other creators and collaborate with like mind individuals" (Personal communication, November 14, 2020). All the more so, Genie Dawkins aptly spoke to contributing to information gaps:

What I do, I consume information. When people ask me what's your gift, I'm really good at consuming information and giving it back to people in an easy way... If I let people just be and breathe, it's so much content and information I can get from them... I love to

talk; I love to give the information. I didn't set up the show to be the specialist, I found that people want to be the specialist... it's beyond just being a host. You want to set up the information. (Personal communication, November 20, 2020)

Podcasters were immersed in knowledge in all types of ways. This knowledge was something that they found crucial to podcasting and to their own personal lives. Most podcasters continue to do their research weekly, reading articles, mining social media, and looking up experts to guest appear on their show. At the very least, podcasters were motivated to listen to other podcasts for information. Cortez's *Gin Papi Podcast* emphasizes real conversation about popular culture, yet he mentions, since starting his own podcast, he listens to other podcasts more to see what's out there. In similar fashion, Kenan Thompson never listened to podcasts before starting his own but now actively seeks out that kind of content, according to co-host Tani. Without a doubt, the idea of intellectualism and information gaining is a key component of podcasting. Candi Lynn summed this up by saying:

There are so many different things you can learn. There's so much information. For those that don't normally have access to education, for the info that is legit, it's valuable education. You can get all your information in one place. (Personal communication, December 18, 2020)

Chapter VIII: Interview-specific themes

Four themes unique to the interview data include *audience awareness*, “*the long game*”, *self-policing*, and the value of *social media*. Audience awareness echoes the importance of authenticity to podcasters, providing more insight on RQ2; the latter two themes directly connect with RQ4’s focus on the implications for strategic communication and the economy of podcasting. Audience awareness refers to the extent to which the podcasters have their audience, or imagined audiences, in mind while creating content for the show. Most podcasters have indeed imagined who their audience could be, and in turn, aim to create content specifically for those people. “The long game” is a phrase that many podcasters likened to podcasts. Podcasters understand that achieving success in the industry is not typically overnight – it’s done in the long game. This theme unveiled two subthemes of entrepreneurship and monetizing one’s podcast. Self-policing reveals how podcasters create their own unwritten rules or guidelines for their shows. Finally, podcasters discussed social media in a multitude of ways. No matter how they used it, all podcasters claim that social media is an important aspect of keeping their podcast going.

Audience Awareness

Everything I do is for the audience. -Genie Dawkins

When Marwick and boyd (2010) examined Twitter users and imagined audiences online, they maintained that authenticity is a construct dictated by situation and context. Adding more, they found that authenticity is revealed through discussions and maintained through positive impressions with others. Perhaps, this is why podcasters made it a point to emphasize understanding who their audiences are, as well as creating content that appeals to that imagined audience. Like Talib remarked, “I think that everyone has an audience, every single person has an audience. There are people who are waiting for someone to show up, who they can relate to, or whose content resonates with them” (Personal communication, November 30, 2020). These statements by Talib were echoed by all of the podcasters. Yet, a few, at the beginning, struggled to conceptualize who their audience might be. At the same time, other podcasters had hours of content recorded for their imagined listeners before they even launched.

As a comedian, producer, and writer, Roy knows a lot about creating content for audiences. “I was restricted by the type of content I wanted to produce [on radio] for the kind of audience I wanted to have, but podcasts alleviate that” (Personal communication, November 23, 2020). Roy’s distinction between radio and podcasts are key to understanding how the medium functions and sustains. He continued,

Podcasting is the most democratic form of audience testing that exists... The audience is the star power now, it used to be that having a television credit made you juicy enough.

Now you have to have the audience first. Hollywood is more inclined to look at someone with an audience than someone with talent. (Personal communication, November 23, 2020)

Roy’s sentiments about audience reflect why audience awareness is an important component to podcasting. After all, if you have no listeners then who are you putting out content for?

However, most podcasters weren't concerned about whether there would be an audience or not; what mattered was how their audience might perceive them and whether they'd enjoy the content. Tani explains this:

Whoever fucks with us is going to fuck with us, I think if we catered to people it would be the worst podcast ever. I'd rather have 10,000 loyal followers than 100,000 fickle listeners. The plan was to have a loyal listenership. (Personal communication, November 9, 2020)

In true *You Already Know* fashion, Tani begins to describe a scene from the 2006 film *300*. He likens the podcast followers to “warriors,” claiming that they are loyal listeners to the pod, and that’s what matters. When asked about audience, Drew replied, “I know that my content is for people who are self-aware and are willing to grow” (Personal communication, November 9, 2020). For both Tani and Drew, thinking about audience seemed to be less of a priority than having good content. Tani believes that catering to people would make for an awful podcast. Akin to this, Drew focuses his content on who he *thinks* his audience. He does not worry about if the audience is composed of self-aware individuals who are willing to grow, but in his mind, those types of people will seek out and listen to his content.

Comparably, Dr. Pat envisions all kinds of individuals listening to her podcast, even though the show is focused on the niche topic of women in color in academia. Her approach to achieving a broad audience is creating a space on the podcast where her guests are “real and relatable” (Personal communication, January 8, 2021). On this topic, she further commented, “anyone who has a business can relate to the personal stories or experiences shared on the show. Knowing who your audience is, is the most important part of the podcast” (Personal communication, January 8, 2021).

Black Speakers, Black Audiences?

Considering the relatively little information we have on Black content creators and their audiences, it matters who the podcasters perceive their audience to be. In particular, are these podcasts specifically geared toward Black people? This idea of “to have or not to have non-black listeners” was a reoccurring subtheme among the podcasters in this study. For example, MiMi (*MProper Podcast*) spoke about mentoring young Black women and how her podcast is specifically geared to talk to women who have empowered and mentored other women. She commented:

I think a lot about my audience and I really imagine my audience to be women who want to or already have started their own business; or single mothers who may be working or stressed and need a release. Empowering women is key and I’m looking for like-minded women to engage with me. We discuss a range of topics – sex therapy, dance, traveling, etc. So this is for women at all different stages of their life and across class. (Personal communication, November 30, 2020)

Nicole talks about how her show is geared toward women of color and Black women and how she conceived the show to only include persons who identified as women of color. Even more, Tressie and Roxane emphasize this point:

R: We were definitely imagining our audience primarily as Black women I'm frankly never concerned with anyone but Black women – ever.

T: Mhmm, I knew that Black women would appreciate our conversations.

R: As long as Black women are satisfied with the content we make, I’m fine. **T:** Yep, and we always assume Black women's knowledge. (Personal communication, December 4, 2020).

Moreover, Trish spoke to the idea that although they want to extend beyond just Black listeners, their topics and conversations always assume Black cultural knowledge and will be centered around topics important to Black people.

We wanted a Black audience, we wanted it to be Black people who were interested in film and television, but we aren't opposed to everyone listening, we discuss it all. And of course, most of the films we discuss are white films, but we discuss them from the lens of having Black audiences and what the Black perspective of the film was. It is content is created for Black people. (Personal communication, December 4, 2020)

Additionally, Trish spoke about learning more about her audience by looking at her analytics. For example, she described an episode that surpassed the other episodes in terms of how many people had listened, and she remarked that this told her a lot about their audience and what type of content they prefer. A few other podcasters spoke about looking at weekly or monthly analytics to gauge the characteristics of their audience, however it mostly seemed leisurely or out of general interest of the podcaster.

Within this sample, Black women tended to be the most vocal and explicit about creating content exclusively for Black people or Black women. As Marina said, “These are unfiltered conversations among Black women” (Personal communication, November 24, 2020). And, as most of the Black women podcasters acknowledged, this is one of the few spaces where Black women – who tend to be doubly marginalized – can just *be*. This trend seemed consistent with most of the Black women in the sample, as even when they didn’t specify Black women as their whole imagined audience, they certainly imagined Black women to be included in that number. This theme that emphasizes Black women’s presence on podcasts is elaborated later in these findings.

No matter how, when, or why the podcasters constructed their imagined audiences, one thing that was clear was that most podcasters did not create their shows to be purposefully exclusive. Raven and Olivia spoke to me about exclusion and how that is exactly what they wanted to combat on their podcast *Intersectional Insights*. Though they are three blind women, one goal they have is to educate non-disabled people. Olivia mentioned, “We want to educate non-disabled people. But it’s also important to relate to other disabled people, so we are really trying to reach anyone who wants to learn” (Personal communication, November 14, 2020). This same sentiment of exclusion and inclusion also came up in regard to race. While a lot of podcasters thought they would appeal to Black audiences because of relatability, most expressed wanting a broad audience and wanting *all* people to tune in to their show. Even while the topics and perspectives are Black-centered, that is all the more reason for someone who is non-Black to listen and learn.

For instance, Cortez imagines his audience is young, like him, and though he does not only imagine Black listeners, he understands that because his show is usually young Black people in conversation, the topics might be geared toward Black Americans. He mentioned, “We’re usually talking to our people” (Personal communication, November 4, 2020). The *Living the Principles 365* podcast has some “white allies” who listen to the show, as Phyllis put it, and they want to get listeners who want to learn about Kwanzaa.

As far as listeners, the age span is huge. Some of them are 19, some of them are 60.

Some are men and some are women. We imagine that the audience is someone who helps others and who is interested in the principles. In some sense all of listeners are people who share. (Personal communication, November 23, 2020).

Genie best imagines her audience to be people of color or people who have children of color but, most of all, are interested in learning more about different topics. Finesse Mitchell wanted to make sure he was capturing a broad audience:

I didn't want to be so pro-black that we sound anti-white. We have a lot of white listeners so I feel like that's why I police what people say because I want the audience who may not necessarily be Black – comfortable. (Personal communication, November 14, 2020) As someone who wants to spread God's message, Yvette imagines her audience to be everyone, and she hopes that all types of people are a part of her audience. Specifically, she speculates that her audience is largely a group of middle-aged women who are faith-filled and have a story to tell. Regardless of the audience though, Yvette stated, “The numbers are increasing, it's still very early but the numbers are growing. I'm happy with the growth so far” (Personal communication, November 20, 2020). Yvette's words are a testament to what most of the podcasters thought – be yourself, be authentic and no matter who your audience is, they will come, and it will grow.

The Long Game

You have to look beyond tomorrow or the next few weeks. This is the long game. I would encourage people not to give up. – Dr. Pat Sanders

One theme that emerged from the data was the notion that all the podcasters believed in the long game. Podcasters would repeatedly say, “this is the long game,” meaning they need to be patient and steadfast if they want to succeed, as well as ultimately making money. Talib remarked, “Podcasting is the long game it really is. There are celebrity podcasters not pulling numbers they would get on YouTube or they would writing a book, because simply not everyone

knows podcasting” (Personal communication, November 30, 2020). Even Finesse Mitchell – one of the podcasters in the sample who would be considered a celebrity podcaster – mentioned, “Everyone in LA is doing them and to me it's just the long game, honestly” (Personal communication, November 14, 2020). Finesse’s reference to Los Angeles noted how much podcasts have seemingly grown, especially within the entertainment industry, and even so, Finesse still expressed that this is not something (celebrity or not) where you are profitable or successful in the short run.

Nicole (*WinHers United*) spoke about knowing people who have been podcasting for a long time, but she still sees no end in sight. “I know of people who have been podcasting for 15 years, but it’s still just starting to ramp up and get popular.” Nicole continued, “I'm learning that podcasting is the long game. A lot of people are looking for get rich quick schemes and podcasting is not that. Podcasts is in its infancy stage, you know, it's up and coming” (Personal communication, November 13, 2020). Equivalently, Candi Lynn (*Pull Up*) said, “Podcasting is the long game. You may not get 1000 downloads your first episode but eventually you will. Podcasting is the new big thing” (Personal communication, December 18, 2020).

Along those same lines, Tani projected that it could take up to five years, at least, to become a truly successful podcast. He declared, “It's not going to happen overnight... it's going to take five years. Five years to get as big as we can be...when I look at all the top podcasts, it seems four-five years is the general trajectory” (Personal communication, November 9, 2020). Tani is just one of the podcasters who was thinking big – and long – about what he hopes could become countless opportunities stemming from the podcast in the future.

These podcasting catalogs are gonna be – on a fractional level – as valuable as tv catalogs. Because they’re going to be able to be spun forever! And that’s always been our

thesis. If we have all these pods, if we can kinda control them...we can resell these things for 50- or 100 times over the lifetime of the value of the content. Even when we're in the grave, these things can be resold and packaged as content packages in other subsequent deals. (Personal communication, November 9, 2020).

Dr. I'Anson added to the conversation surrounding the production cycle of podcasts in the long run. He stated, "There is certainly a cycle of production where podcasts become tv shows or a movie can become a podcast. The big industry of entertainment will mine you for ideas and content" (Personal communication, December 15, 2020). Both Tani and Dr. I'Anson have the same idea that good content will always be good content, and the entertainment industry will always be willing to buy into something meaningful that is produced well. In this regard, Tani simply stated: "I promise you; you check in on us in about 3 years, it's going to be night and day in the most positive way" (Personal communication, November 9, 2020).

The podcasters were generally positive as they looked toward the future. Roxane (*Hear to Slay*) predicted, "I think the barrier to entry will always be low, but I think the barrier to entry for success will get increasingly high" (Personal communication, December 4, 2020).

Correspondingly, Cortez wondered about the future of podcasts saying, "I'm very interested to see how podcasts transitions into that space where... I want to see how podcasts collide with tech and art in the future" (Personal communication, November 4, 2020). In that same manner, Drew

Harmony proposed, "Anything that black people do, anything we infiltrate, it just blows up. Right now, podcasting is extremely undervalued and there is so much more to gain from the industry" (Personal communication, November 9, 2020). Not many other podcasters pointedly spoke to the value of podcasting, but Phyllis did comment, "People are starting to respect it

more, and I think it will be something that brings great income” (Personal communication, November 23, 2020). As all the podcasters noted above, there is a tremendous opportunity, not just for the podcasters themselves but for the medium as a whole.

Whether the future was bright for everyone in the game, MiMi (*MProper*) wasn’t sure. She stated:

It's a fun hobby but I don't know if everyone will profit from it. I think it will be what people make of it. It's a way to hear and get insight from Black women, men, entrepreneurs, artists, and creatives. There's a lot for it to grow and I think there's a lot of potential for different people. (Personal communication, November 30, 2020)

The potential for success is the critical point that these podcasters have set their hopes on. In the long run, it’s everyone’s forecast that the industry continues to grow, thrive and expand. None of the podcasters can foresee a demise of the industry – and they are all doing their best to ensure that their own podcasts continue to thrive within it. Consider the following exchange between *Intersectional Insights* hosts Olivia and Raven:

Olivia: We would like it to go for years, ideally this is a long-term project. **Raven:**

Yea, I agree. Ideally, we're in the long game. Making money or really being huge, that is a long way off. (Personal communication, November 14, 2020)

As for Dr. I’Anson, who has been working in radio and broadcasting all of his career, he seemed to be a bit pessimistic, sort of optimistic, and somewhat surprised about what seems like a long future for the podcasting/audio industry. At first, he predicted that the future of podcasts would be bleak because the networks are sweeping up all the good shows and that the subscription model is going to claim a lot more podcasts. He commented:

In a certain sense, you have no choice but the long game, coming out the gate, but, if you don't know how to build your audience and get listeners you can be in the game as long as you want, and you'll never get followers or make money from it. (Personal communication, December 15, 2020)

While, Dr. I'Anson's views seem slightly pessimistic, but he furthered weighed in on the topic: I never thought it was going to be as big as it is. Like I never thought that I could get really good gigs from straight up just podcast projects. I never thought that there would be so many audio jobs that you couldn't go wrong being like an audio or podcast producer. Never thought that would be the case. (Personal communication, December 15, 2020)

Even though Dr. I'Anson couldn't have predicted the success of the industry thus far, it seems that he and the other podcasters certainly believe in the longevity of it. Even more, those involved in this industry aren't just interested in talking. Most have goals to extend their various business endeavors through the podcast or even begin to make profits from the medium.

Entrepreneurship

We create such good content we should be paid for it. – Trish

What seemed to be really important for the podcasters was the idea of entrepreneurship. For instance, many of the podcasters consider themselves to be businesspeople or overall leaders in their communities and respective spaces. Having said that, the podcasters pushed for an emphasis of utilizing one's leadership qualities and tapping into the experience of entrepreneurship in relation to podcasting.

Nicole began going to entrepreneurial events, when someone first suggested she look into podcasting.

Most podcasts are funnels to your business, right? I expected it to bring me business. I ended up inspiring people and being a leader and a thought provoker, but I wanted to bring in money, which didn't happen initially. (Personal communication, November 13, 2020)

Then, later, her business coach also suggested she take the activity seriously, and this is when she realized it was more business oriented than it was a hobby. Many other podcasters spoke to the seriousness of the platform as if it's their job. Trish (*Shit Black Girls Watch*) admitted to her and her cohost having multiple commitments outside the podcast and having to motivate herself to do the labor, even when there seems to be no time – much like a job.

Talib is no stranger to entrepreneurship, as he founded his own festival specifically aimed at networking around podcasting. When a friend first suggested to him that he create an event involving the idea of community and networking, he thought it was a good idea expressing, “The Harvest is ripe for us, it’s fresh. It’s up to us.” He supplementally explained, “Podcasting to me is having the entrepreneurial spirit” (Personal communication, November 30, 2020). As an attendee of Jasir’s Afros & Audios event, Genie learned that even if you don't want a podcast, it’s good to be featured on a podcast for your business. Businesswoman, blogger, and content creator are all words that described Genie before podcasting, yet she continues to utilize these characteristics through her podcast. Similarly, Marina’s lengthy experience in podcasting has developed her overall perspective on business and work ethics. Marina sees tremendous potential for podcasts to create opportunities for more people and to sharpen their communicative skills: I'm not used to delegating but that's what the podcast helped me with is delegating things for

other people to do; I know people see me and I have gained a lot of opportunity from this and I want to give other women of color that same opportunity. (Personal communication, November 24, 2020)

“There's a lot of entrepreneurial things going around,” is what Dr. I’Anson remarked when asked about the future of podcasts:

It seems like your paradigmatic podcasts are probably going to be entrepreneurial, probably kinda youngish people – like younger than me anyway – who are thinking about branding and development and who probably... like a podcast isn't going to be all they do. They are going to be very social media savvy. And the podcasts that aren't successful are going to be trying to imitate those podcasts. (Personal communication, December 15, 2020)

In formulating some sort of profile for podcasters, Dr. I’Anson alludes to the idea that those who continue to access the industry are seemingly ambitious people. These individuals are not just concerned with podcasting but are ultimately people who have brands to market and will use podcasts as a marketing tool. Dr. I’Anson summed his point, “Podcasting can be a branding opportunity for other things like business, and it can improve your skills – like skill acquisition. Professionally podcasting is a great way for Black people to get into media” (Personal communication, December 15, 2020).

Monetizing your Pod

If I could live off of podcasting money that would be the best thing. – Alieshia

All of the podcasters were not necessarily interested in entrepreneurship but, when it came to being money-focused, all of the podcasters had their eyes set on a profit in some shape or form. Though Drew (*A Beat and A Message*) claimed to not being interested in making money, he still expected to be profitable. Drew expressed: “Money is never my main objective, I’m always about adding value. Once I add value to people’s lives, I’m going to get paid” (Personal communication, November 9, 2020). Drew went on to say that because he spends a great deal of his time working on the podcast, he wants to be paid for his time. When he does eventually receive compensation, he plans to use it to grow the podcast more.

This sentiment about the podcast making a profit in order to sustain itself was echoed throughout interviews. Candi Lynn (*Pull Up*) said, “Monetized podcasts have the resources that they need to produce quality content consistently” (Personal communication, December 18, 2020). Also, Dr. Pat spoke about wanting to put a book out based on the experiences from the podcast. She predicts the book would be beneficial for expanding the podcast itself. Even more, she wants to begin selling merchandise in an attempt to keep the podcast going. Yvette Walker (*Positively Joy*) was on that same page saying, “Certainly, I would like to make some money to put into the podcast to make the show sound even better – as good as it can be” (Personal communication, November 20, 2020). Yvette discussed various networks she could join, such as the Blk Pod Collective, because they help to provide resources for podcasters. Certain groups like Blk Pod Collective do have membership and services so, Yvette suggested that if you are able to make money off a podcast, you can put that money right back into the pod to make it better.

Trish (*Shit Black Girls Watch*) was apprehensive at first about monetizing and making the pod into a brand. However, after having put the work into it, she expressed that her and Meah

want to monetize so it's worth their time. She commented, “Sometimes it takes me 2-3 hours to edit, so, yea this is fun but it’s also a lot of work, it's free labor” (Personal communication, December 4, 2020). Just the same, Phyllis (*Living the Principles 365*) mentioned, “It's a lot of work; if we can make the money to keep it going that would be ideal” (Personal communication, November 23, 2020). For a lot of the podcasters more money simply meant more investment into the podcast.

Tani has big ambitions for the *You Already Know* brand with Kenan. Stating that he doesn't do anything “half ass,” he spoke about aiming to be a podcast company and being really concerned with the sound production and the growth of the podcast. “It’s going to put us in a position where *You Already Know* doesn't have to look for money” (Personal communication, November 9, 2020). He is careful to note however that monetizing for him won’t come at the expense of relinquishing his content. Tani expressed:

We control this. So why not keep controlling this until someone gives us so much money where we can say *go for it*. Otherwise, we'd rather have our autonomy, we'd rather have our protection, which turns it into... a safe space. Everything in Kenan's life has been for sale, this is the one thing for us, so we guard that. (Personal communication, November 9, 2020)

There is no doubt that podcasters have ambitions of making money from podcasting, but they also seem to have diverse strategies and perspectives on how to do so. As a few mentioned, the barriers to entry are very low, but the outcome of success is seemingly very low as well. In any instance, most find the risk worth it. As Tani advised: “Anything can come out of a great

podcast; you can make money and it didn't cost you an arm and a leg to create” (Personal communication, November 9, 2020).

There was minor skepticism regarding monetizing in the industry. Namely, Tressie questioned what monetizing really looks like in the future of podcasting. She articulated: Everybody is trying to figure out how to make money. We [the industry as a whole] haven't quite figured out monetization. Is it going to be subscriptions? Is it going to be

ads? I suspect it will be a combination of the two. (Personal communication, December 4, 2020)

To a greater degree, Genie (*The Parenting Cipher*) realized that monetization wasn't as clear cut as expected. She found that with her booming guests and podcasts, she was missing out on an opportunity to monetize, but the conversations about monetization and podcasts were sometimes conflicting. Specifically, she found that, depending on the type of space she was in (predominantly Black podcast groups or predominantly white groups), there was a disconnect in what was being communicated about monetization.

Is there a disconnect?

In her interview, Genie spoke in depth about noticing a disconnect between Black spaces and white spaces in relation to podcasting. She reflected:

I started to go to Black and white events with podcasts... and I started to notice that with our community, we have a money mindset issue. And limiting beliefs...like we talk about monetizing and we say things like, *oh you have to be in the game to monetize*. This is what people would tell me, but then I would go to the white spaces and immediately they were talking about monetizing your podcast. So, there's a disconnect. I kept hearing 'it's

the long game', I'm like long game for what – to get listeners? That's not the conversations I'm having in white spaces. (Personal communication, November 20, 2020)

While beyond the scope of the present study, if Genie's perspective that the long game idea may vary between race/culture within the industry, then it can be inferred that there may be stark differences among racial groups within the podcast community. Talib noted there's a difference in the opportunities and funding between race in the industry, citing why he founded his festival. All the more, this uncovers more about the economy of podcasting as it relates to historically embedded racism in technology and digital media. Genie's comments warrant further debate in the discussion chapter of this dissertation.

Regardless of race, it seems true for all podcasters that this is a space that is here to stay. And, as long as there is the medium that are podcasts, most podcasters have plans to stay and ride it out. Candi Lynn best described this theme, "There's always content for the space, there is a conversation for everything. When I become bored, I'll shut it down, but as long as the industry is available, I'll be in it trying to get something from it" (Personal communication, December 18, 2020).

Self-policing and re-defining professionalism

Podcasts are supposed to be laid back, but you should think about being professional and producing the best sounding podcasting to appeal to a larger audience. -Dr. Pat Sanders

When we think about spaces of opinion and spaces where intellectual conversations are being had, one must think about the role of professionalism. As this dissertation has show so far, podcasts are a space that are naturally colloquial and do not adhere to the strict guidelines of

“professionalism” in mass media. However, this does not mean that the podcasters are not thinking about professionalism at all, rather that podcasters make their own rules about what they deem to be appropriate or inappropriate on their show. Like Dr. Pat suggested above, podcasts are meant to be more relaxed, but there is still a level of professionalism involved, be it sound quality or appealing to broader audiences.

None of the podcasters in the sample were making a living from podcasting, so a lot of them mentioned having to be mindful of their conduct on the show and even self-policing what they say in order to protect their personal brands/reputations. For example, Candi Lynn described how she felt about professionalism on the pod:

I don't have to worry about being canned because I want to talk about my Black hair, or I can curse if I want to curse; knowing you're not going to be regulated, you know? It's a little more free range in podcasts right now. It's an unregulated market. But I still work a job, right? So, there are certain things where—as we got closer to the election this year, I had to less to say. There are just certain things you don't want coming back to bite you. Being that I'm a trained journalist, I understand my responsibility. I know how I feel about Mitch McConnell but a few years down the road someone who wants to sponsor or fund me may not like what I said about Mitch McConnell... So, it's a political game. It's a professional game. We're in a cancel culture society, so we have to mindful of what we say. (Personal communication, December 18, 2020)

In a similar fashion, Trish talked about being canceled by the public and being mindful of conversation topics on the show. She commented:

It's our shit and we get to control the content, but we want to make sure we're not doing anything that reflects badly on the Black community. We do try to censor some of the

things we say about White people, we don't want to get Nick Cannonned. We feel comfortable saying most of the things we say, but every now and then we have to edit things out. (Personal communication, December 4, 2020)

Trish mentions being “Nick Cannonned,” referring to the firing of actor Nick Cannon by ViacomCBS after he made what many viewed as racist and anti-Semitic comments on his own podcast (Vigdor, 2020). Both Candi and Trish point out that, though there are no written rules per se, it is important to keep in mind that some editorial decisions can cost one their reputation.

Tani Marole felt less apprehensive about self-policing on the podcast. Similar to how he spoke about his audience, he remarked, “I think if we catered to people it would be the worst podcast ever” (Personal communication, November 9, 2020). However, he also talked about thinking about his co-host Kenan, who has enormous star power and a lot resting on his career in entertainment. He said, “I don’t want to ruin Kenan's career so that helps me to gatekeep what I say on the pod and to keep it organized and professional” (Personal communication, November 9, 2020).

Yvette found it important to be careful about what she says on the podcast because she is representing Jesus. She struggled with self-policing however, discussing that she understands topics like social justice are hot topics and should be discussed when appropriate. Though, she noted, “I try not to tackle those tough issues because Jesus is love” (Personal communication, November 20, 2020). On top of that, Yvette talked about not wanting to offend people at her church or being offensive toward people by the things that she says. Yvette stressed that while she has free range to discuss anything, discernment is pivotal.

Finesse Mitchell also struggled with self-policing on his show and creating guidelines or rules for guests. He specified:

I'm stuck; I'm one of the few guys who actually gives a fuck. I don't like to say the word nigga and I don't like when cats come on my show saying nigga. If you actually trying to get a check from podcasting, you really going to have to appeal to white folks in mass so it's hard to talk about what you really want to talk about when you want a check.

(Personal communication, November 14, 2020)

The above podcasters alluded to the fact that there is a cost to the loose bounds of professionalism within podcasting. They have the agency and autonomy to run their podcast anyway they want, but it is important to remember that whatever they say will reflect on them and their brand. And, especially for podcasters who want to monetize their endeavors – self-policing is critical for expansion.

Contrastingly, some podcasters stick with a more laid-back approach to self-policing, professionalism, and podcasting. For instance, Cortez mentions that he does not talk politics on the show because that isn't his wheelhouse. For Cortez, any censorship on the podcast is up to him. He claimed that there are very few things that the podcast would not discuss, but if it's something that he feels shouldn't be discussed, it won't be. Aleishia (*Millennial Thoughts*) does self-police but she claims that she does so for herself. In other words, she expressed being concerned about things that she says on the podcast coming back to haunt her at some point. Like Cortez, she finds that she wields full control over podcast content and conduct and that she only talks about things she's comfortable with, "I don't think I'm restricted in what I talk about, it's more so up to my discretion about what I want to talk about" (Personal communication, January 12, 2021).

In the same manner, a few podcasters expressed being pretty comfortable to discuss any topics at anytime. Phyllis talked about this freedom:

I've tried to go into other spaces, and they'll say 'we really don't want to address that' or 'that's not a good topic' – so the thing about Kwanzaa is one of the principles is defining yourself. So, that's one of the things we get the opportunity to do, we get to define ourselves and say who we are. That's big for the Black diaspora, I think if we could tell our own stories we would look at ourselves differently, so it gives us a sense of power.

(Personal communication, November 23, 2020)

Phyllis notions the sense of freedom she feels on the podcast by referencing the power she feels by being able to define herself and brand. Phyllis echoes the principles of Kwanzaa by highlighting that this is a space where she should be able to *just be*. Phyllis sees more opportunity for freedom and free speech in this space than restriction. The same was true for Drew, who reflected on the barriers of podcasting:

I'm putting this up and whoever is supposed to listen to this is going to listen. I definitely didn't feel like there are any barriers, we're in 2020 there is nothing blocking me sending out a message to everyone... this is one of the most freest platforms for you to do what you want. Social media gave everyone a voice, and it's even more so with podcasts. I am Sirius XM! I am *Power 105*! I am *Ebro in the Morning*! (Personal communication, November 9, 2020)

This is the thrilling part of podcasting for Drew, as he is in charge, and he makes the decisions about everything that is appealing to him. This open forum is also appealing to Nicole (*WinHers United*), who feels comfortable talking about anything she is familiar with. She discussed, “We talk about those tough topics, I even surprise myself sometimes with the stuff I share” (Personal communication, November 13, 2020). Nicole found that while there was freedom in having such an open space, she is not thinking about self-policing and privacy. She said, “It just feels

comfortable. The space is safe. So, I have to work on respecting more of mine and people's privacy" (Personal communication, November 13, 2020). In any event, all the podcasters seemed to be keenly aware of the space they inhabit. With no formal rules, the podcasters assume discretion of any and all editorial decisions, which is a distinctive feature of this medium. How self-policing and nuanced portrayals of professionalism will play out as the podcast industry grows and expands is yet to be determined. Perhaps though, Marina Franklin summed up what we know about this aspect of podcasting most succinctly: "We say what we want on the show, but we're smart about it, you know?" (Personal communication, November 24, 2020).

Role of Social Media

Social media is the key to connecting everybody. – Drew Harmony

The final prominent theme that was revealed from interview data was the use and influence of social media networks on the podcasts. Two subthemes developed from podcaster discussions of social media. The first was the use of social media for marketing, promotion, branding and networking. Like many other organizations and individuals, the podcasters utilize various social networking sites (SNS), such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Clubhouse, and even Twitch to promote their shows. Another subtheme affirmed that podcasters also utilize SNS for audience engagement. This theme was mostly evident with podcasters who hosted podcasts with broad topics and encouraged their listeners to give them ideas/topics to discuss.

Marketing, Promotion, and Networking

There were only three podcasters in the sample who discussed not really thinking much or at all about social media when it came to their podcasts. Specifically, Finesse said that he's not big on social media and therefore does not use it. However, Finesse's extensive experience in entertainment and large fanbase may have given him the luxury of not needing to have a very active social media presence to retain listeners.

On the other side, Olivia and Raven, two parts of the blind trio podcast, admitted to not really knowing a lot about social media and still trying to navigate it. Olivia scoffed when asked about social media, saying "I'm not very good at" (Personal communication, November 14, 2020). Though the women find it important to use, they claim to not know how to be engaged with their listeners on social media without spamming them or annoying them about the podcast. Olivia laughed as she spoke, "There's definitely a method to the [social media] madness, I just don't know it" (Personal communication, November 14, 2020). Relatedly, Trish and Meah (*Shit Black Girls Watch*) admit to not really using social media. Trish stated, "As far as marketing goes, we haven't been doing it the way we should. We have about 200 listeners, which is pretty good for not having marketed anything" (Personal communication, December 4, 2020). Trish was optimistic about increasing their listenership as soon as she "figures out" the ins and outs of social networking across platforms.

Every other podcaster in the sample referred to social media as a critical and necessary component of a successful podcast. Explicitly, Dr. Pat (*This Prof Life*) discussed wanting to hire a social media manager for the next season of her podcast. She noted that one of the biggest challenges of the podcast is to stay present on social media and figuring out the nuances it entails. Nicole also talked about hiring someone to help with social media and networking. She mentioned that, by joining different online groups like Black Speakers Network, Essence, and

some Latino Magazines, she was able to find other powerful Black women to bring on the show. Social media also introduced several of the podcasters, including Nicole, to the Afros and Audio festival founded by interviewee Talib. Resembling social media, the festival emphasizes how to utilize the greatest powers of networking in order to gain success in the world of podcasting.

For the more social media savvy podcasters, they found that buying advertisements on various social media platforms is an inexpensive option to gain more listeners. Trish mentioned that her and Meah were looking into advertisements in their journey of discovering the “correct” way to use social media. Yvette (*Positively Joy*) also mentioned looking into expanding her use of social media, noting that she uses social media to promote but that, “I haven’t bought any ads... yet” (Personal communication, November 20, 2020). That said, Drew has made it a point to research all of the aspects of social media with the aim of making his podcast as successful as possible. He stated:

One-hundred percent social media is connected to promoting and marketing your podcast. I can boost my podcast stuff or advertise. So, spend money on ads on Facebook to get more people to listen to or tune into the pod. And if I’m smart about targeting different audiences with advertising, I can gain more followers in strategic ways. For example, if I see there are a lot of listeners in California, I can pay like \$20 toward ads in Cali. Or, if there are only a few listeners in West Virginia, I might put \$5 toward advertisements there. (Personal communication, November 9, 2020)

Though not many podcasters spoke as explicitly about advertising and utilizing social media in this manner as Drew, his sentiments are relatable to the other podcasters. Meaning, social media is a powerful tool, particularly for marketing and promotion. Marina opined that social media has changed over time. She explained that she used to just randomly use social media without having

a complete grasp of how it can aid her podcast. But, since joining a podcast network, she has the privilege of having someone helping with social media and branding the podcast. She expressed that since this addition of a social media manager, she now has merchandise to promote and all her SNS are more consistent.

With relation to using social media for promotion, the podcasters, as mentioned, often need social media to network with other podcasters and creatives. This concept was referred to by some of the podcasters as cross-pollination or cross connecting. Phyllis (*Living the Principles* 365) speaks to this by saying, “We cross-connect with different audiences too!” She further expounded:

As far as social media, LaTricia does the editing and I do the marketing and graphics for the pod. We have all the social medias (SNS) and that’s also how you cross pollinate and visit other podcasts to gain new listeners. (Personal communication, November 23, 2020)

MiMi (*MProper*) echoed this idea, saying that “social media is key to networking.” She elaborated:

Cross promotion is being on other people’s podcast and thinking about interviewing people who have a podcast to increase your listeners that way. There are so many ways to reach people through hashtags or having the visual aspect and graphics. That conversion from followers to listeners is not guaranteed (laughs) you know so you really have to find a way to get them to the platform to listen to the podcast. (Personal communication, November 30, 2020)

Audience Engagement

In addition to cross-promoting, MiMi's statements reflect the other aspect of social media, which is audience engagement. Naturally, these podcasters have found that social media is one way to stay in the loop and in tune with their listeners. For a lot of the podcasters with broadly-themed shows, opening their direct messages (DMs) to their followers creates a *suggestion box*-like feature for podcasts. In tandem, social media trending topics or viral videos can contribute to talking points or conversation topics on podcasts. Take Cortez, who said that social media has helped because it helps to organize the topics they talk about. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the topics on the *Gin Papi Podcast* originated from what the host wanted to talk about. Cortez explained, "Our topics came from being in the streets and being at parties. But with COVID and us being in the house, now we see topics on Twitter and try to talk about them in a different way" (Personal communication, November 4, 2020).

Aleishia uses her social media to talk to her listeners and to ask what they want to hear about on the podcasts. She commented, "Yea, through dms or comments on Instagram, social media is definitely an aid" (Personal communication, January 12, 2021). And, for Candi Lynn, she expressed relying on social media a great deal:

It's everything! Podcasts do not run in this society without social media, because how do people know you exist? I mean there is so much to choose from, Facebook Live, Instagram TV, I mean you can automatically upload your pod from the hosting site to Twitter now. So, yea, social media is the opportunity to get those listeners who aren't going to listen without the added engagement. (Personal communication, December 18, 2020)

Genie (*The Parent Cipher*) also added that social media is significant to connecting with the audience:

What I realized with my social media is that it should always be about the conversation you're having on the podcast. I realized that I have the content on the podcast, but I have to connect more with social media. The podcast is the content, but the social media is the connecting factor between the content and the people. (Personal communication,

November 20, 2020)

Tressie and Roxane (*Hear to Slay*) are two are big names with a lot of social media followers already, so they expressed to not necessarily needing social media. Roxane commented:

The show's social media has not taken off. But when Tressie and I post about the show on our social media, people do gravitate and respond to us. I think that Tressie and I are the brands for the show. (Personal communication, December 4, 2020)

Nevertheless, Tressie talked about how social media is good for reaching out to people, getting guests, and for audience engagement and feedback:

It's an audience feedback loop, that's how the audience feels that they know how to get in touch with us and if we just even periodically touch back with them, they feel that twoway loop, that I feel like makes them feel like the relationship is there. (Personal communication, December 4, 2020)

Because Tressie and Roxane both have very well-developed personal social media sites, their audience engagement works through their personal profiles as an indirect benefit with the podcast and its promotion and marketing.

Overall, these findings on audience engagement reflect Nancy Baym's (2015) work on relational labor. The relational labor concept provides a useful lens for understanding audience engagement within podcasting as relational labor is described as the regular, on-going communication with audiences over time, or work to construct social relationships that also advances paid work (Baym, 2015).

In Baym's work, primarily exploring musicians, she advanced that, with the ongoing evolution of social media and digital technology, musicians are paying attention to how they can best build relationships online that will eventually enhance their career goals and increase their finances. In this dissertation, the podcasters are also seemingly engaged in this relational labor that includes listening to others, facilitating conversation, and being genuine, all with the idea that this labor will lead to economic viability. This point is further discussed in Chapter X.

Chapter IX: Critical Techno-cultural Discourse Analysis on Podcasts

Through multiple discussions, there were countless instances of African American Rhetoric (AAR) at play, in addition to characteristics that reflect the various definitions of publics and spaces of opinion. Critical Techno-cultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) helps to draw on cultural references and discourse norms for Black Americans while providing a complex and critical analysis of the actual discourse. Further, by integrating critical theories, participants or scholars can incorporate more information about the sociocultural context within which the discourse is generated. In particular, those concepts which make up the space of opinion or satellite publics, are applied here.

As the CTDA approach is complex and interpretive, Brock wrote, “Neither interface analysis nor critical discourse analysis can be done succinctly. The former demands interpretive analysis based on deep description, while the latter requires extensive sociocultural context for validity and intelligibility.” (2016: 12). Even more, Brock wrote that CTDA “follows the tradition of critical discourse analysis by isolating and examining topical and/or site-based online discourses.” (2016: 14). For this reason, this chapter is organized by each podcast and focuses on isolated topics discussed on the podcasts.

Upon analyzing nearly 60 episodes between the four podcasts in the sample, the researcher found themes that echoed the actual words of the podcasters in interviews, as well as went beyond them. But, there was also ample evidence to believe that – through the depth of conversation and discussions on podcasts – characteristics of traditional spaces of opinion and

publics, and everyday political talk, were all prominent. Examining the discourse on podcasts can tend to be verbose and descriptive. Part of the affordances of the space is the idea that you are immersed in a live conversation. In other words, the analysis here aims to fully contextualize selected episodes of the podcasts by summarizing the discourse and highlighting significant themes within them.

You Already Know

As illustrated by the vibrant quotes from Tani Marole in the previous chapters, the *You Already Know* podcast is a lively show with a lot of laughter and diverse topics. Within this study's selected listening time period, the show aired 19 episodes that covered a wide range of matters, including current events. Of the overlapping themes, intellectualism and authenticity was most prevalent on this podcast. During this time, this podcast did not include any guests on their show and therefore displayed fewer characteristics of networking. Some of the discourse on the show, however, is aimed at creating community and emphasizing a culture of *we*. In episodes that are typically two hours in length or longer, the two men often hit on multiple topics of conversation with a lot of the conversations being focused on artifacts from popular culture, such as television shows or musical artists. And, while the aforementioned themes emerged from the data, the researcher also observed discourse strategies or techniques that further evidences AAR being a critical component of podcasting. Even more, the podcasters' *seemingly* subconscious use of rhetorical devices help to illustrate how they create their own publics and advance a different kind of space of opinion.

As a listening experience, Tani and Kenan are a lively duo with moments of high intensity – due to Tani going on a rant or explaining something in dramatic detail. Then, there are moments that take a slower pace and feel more serious. In their respective interviews, both

Tani and Tressie alluded to this pacing as the *rhythm* of the show. Like Tani suggested in his interview, fans of Kenan Thompson probably expected him to be “wild and crazy” on the show, however Tani is the bigger personality on the show. As he stated, “You listen to the podcast and you find out, I’m the crazy one and Kenan’s the straight guy” (Personal communication, November 9, 2020). Ultimately, the show’s dynamics reflect two men who bounce between different topics from unique perspectives. Kenan’s more laid-back personality is a nice compliment to the edgy and wild stories that Tani shares quite frequently. The pair typically give each other ample time to share their own thoughts and overall make a dynamic team.

Episode 2: “That One Time with DMX” aired May 22, 2020

The beginning of this episode starts with an edited audio clip of Tani sending his condolences to the family of Andre Harrell. Andre Harrell was an American music producer and executive and a friend to both Tani and Kenan. Andre comes up and is discussed in further detail later in the show. The short podcast intro follows, then the two kick off the show:

Tani: Yo, yo? Gang, gang, gang!

Kenan: Yoo, how you livin’?

T: I’m living large, how you homeboy?

K: Chillin’ man.

T: How’s the weather down there?

K: Are we rollin’?

The laid back, relaxed and friendly nature is something that is familiar to all the podcasts in the sample. Much like how the podcasters referenced authenticity in their interviews, this is a kind

of tone that is set at the beginning of each podcast – familiarity or catching up. After a little small talk, they then jump right into the first conversation:

K: Ahh, we lost two great ones today.

T: Two great ones in a couple hours, my shit was blown bro, on the wake up.

K: Ahh yea man it's hard. It's hard to find things to keep your head about bro, especially when it's left and right type hits are happening, as the springtime is approaching, you know what I mean?

T: Yea, and the report saying, you know, COVID is going down, and we're flattening the curve and we're over the mountain – and then it's like, we lose Little Richard, like boom!

Like, that man survived segregation, he survived the 80s, you know what I'm saying?

And couldn't survive fuckin' COVID?

K: Was it COVID that took him?

T: I don't know, was it a heart attack or COVID?

Even in this first beginning dialogue and before the conversation really begins, the hosts naturally express common themes demonstrated in traditional African American rhetoric. In a colloquial nature, both hosts express an extreme amount of sadness for the deaths of Little Richard (and Andre Harrell), and, in doing so, they reveal how multiple features of rhetoric are occurring within candid conversations. For instance, in 2003, Molefi Asante theorized on the future of African American rhetoric and the way rhetors of the future might organize their messages or discourse. Of the nine themes (spirituality, musicality/rhythm, emotional vitality, resilience, humanism, communism, orality and verbal expressiveness, realness, and soul style), Kenan and Tani both present emotional vitality and verbal expressiveness within the first five minutes of the show. They continue:

T: You know what, I'm not going to disrespect that man's legacy – I'm pulling up google right now... Little Richard– **K:** Eighty-something years old

T: Yes, he was. You're right on that one. Dudes like that, they live forever

K: Or you want them too...

T: Oh no, he didn't take away from COVID. I take that back, I retract that. He passed away of bone cancer...

K: ...now is even more of the time for us to stop and smell the roses, enjoy the say, seize the day, carpe diem, whatever you want to call it. You know what I mean?

T: Yup.

K: If you ever need an excuse to live life, once you get back to be able to do it... especially once we get back to full speed – if you don't appreciate your first concert, you're out of this world.

In this snippet of the conversation, the two move through a number of rhetorical strategies while also staying true to being informed or providing information. For example, when Tani isn't well informed on Little Richard's death (most likely because they had not planned on discussing this during show prep), he commits himself to looking it up on Google right then. This informal nature of podcasting is precisely what keeps the podcasters seeming authentic and natural. And, while they may be wrong, they show they are willing to do the research and be the one to fill in the information gap.

Furthermore, Kenan and Tani rely on call and response with each other while talking, constantly responding to each other's statements even when they are rhetorical. This is also observed by what was a frequently mentioned phrase, "You know?" or "You know what I mean?" These phrases are, of course, rhetorical and don't actually intend on the listener to

answer. However, that minor feature of oral tradition makes all the difference in the demonstrating the authenticity on podcasts. Call and response was common and frequent on all the podcasts.

After a 10-minute discussion of Little Richard and James Brown, Kenan and Tani get into conversation in their wheelhouse of popular culture. They stumble on the topic of the movie *Ray*, starring Jamie Foxx, and discuss what other biographic films (biopics) could compare to *Ray*. In comparing films, Kenan shares a story of running into Rami Malek who was the 2019 Oscar Award winner for Best Actor in *Bohemian Rhapsody* – a biopic of British rock band Queen. This story was one of the many instances on the show where Kenan shared a personal experience – most likely one that was unprompted. An instance where Kenan shares another personal experience comes right before the half-hour mark of the show, while the two are talking about the late Andre Harrell. Kenan shared:

He was just that real, and that awesome of a person... I would always wind up around Andre late at night or some shit like that and he was always cool... I remember this one time, very distinct interaction with him. I remember it was Russell Simmons birthday party at his house in LA or whatever, this was years and years ago and I went there with one of my mentors. I think this was around the time where Kimora and Rashida and like Aaliyah were all running around together...and Russell and Kimora had just got married or just started dating or something. That's how long ago that was...

Tani: Wowww...

Kenan: So, there was this outside table by the table so, Andre me and my mentor and I was happy to see somebody I knew, you know what I mean? So, I'm sitting next to

Andre and he's like barely rolling a joint – because he was at the end of his sack or whatever.

T: (laughs) one hundred percent! (laughs)

K: So, he says 'ain't nobody got no weed?' and I was like literally 18 or 19 or something and I was like 'this is my moment'! And I take this ginormous sack I had out of my pocket (laughs) because I just was like I want everyone to know I'm an adult type shit. My mentor looked at me like I was fuckin' crazy.

(Tani laughs)

K: And I'm like 'hey man, this is damn near a Black thing that's happening right now so don't even trip. Andre was like 'look at you growin' on up'... it was amazing.

Sharing personal experiences was a common thread for podcasters. Especially for Kenan and Tani, who more than likely have countless experiences with many well-known people in the entertainment industry, this podcast is a great outlet for sharing those experiences as they naturally evolve in conversation. Also, we see how podcasts are a space that are specifically intended to be from the hosts' perspectives. Because everything is from their own point of view and this is the expected norm, Kenan may worry less about how these anecdotes will affect his public image or what people might think. Sharing personal stories instead indicates a comfortability the hosts have with the medium where they can let their guard down.

Throughout the next hour, the conversation travels between various topics, from COVID to LeBron James to slavery to human cloning. In the end, they conclude with the topic that titles the episode at hand, "That One Time with DMX..." which really seems reflexive of the show's capacity to intertwine many personal stories and experiences into one big picture.

I'd be remiss if I didn't tell these true stories to end this. First story: on that Ruff Ryders Cash Money tour – that was the first major tour I've ever been on – I've been on a promotional tour with the Lox but at that time it was the first tour I'd ever been on. I was twenty-one years old you know, I was having lots of fun, I had my jewelry on, you know,

I travel with a backpack full of fuckin' prime' going crazy... I was going nuts!

Tani's story goes on to tell how he ended up in a room with DMX, who eventually asked Tani to rap for him and become a part of his crew. Tani's stories can hardly be depicted via diction or description and should be experienced audibly like it's intended. Nevertheless, the discourse which was described on this episode points to many instances of traditional AAR and characteristics of a public.

Namely so, what Tani and Kenan's conversations most often represent is public speech that is both personal and impersonal. Most of the *You Already Know* listeners are not famous entertainers or plugged into major executives behind the scenes – yet Tani and Kenan don't need that to be the case in order to speak candidly about these experiences on the show. The two speak to experiences that are personal to them but may not be personal to their listeners. More to this point, when Kenan states things like, "this is damn near a Black thing," or when he alludes to what he deems as common knowledge talking about Kimora, Rashida, and Aaliyah all running around together, he is demonstrating how some speech can be personal and relatable to some while others may find the speech impersonal or not relevant. Furthermore, the colloquialisms and slang that is often muttered on the show reflect the orality, verbal expressiveness, and soul style of the orators. This further supports the idea that oral tradition is at the foundation of Black discourse, no matter the technological medium.

Episode 12: “An Entanglement” aired July 21, 2021

On a particularly long episode of the *You Already Know* podcast, the hosts exhaust countless topics in a little over three hours. With a similar structure of discourse to the above, Tani and Kenan mention multiple cultural references, going the most in-depth on the popular television show *Game of Thrones*. Some of the discussion is elaborated here:

K: We got the pirate. The pirate dude is cool, I like the pirate dude, you know who I’m talking about?

T: Oh yea, that’s my guy, the missing stubs guy? Or— oh the Black pirate guy?

K: Yea the Black pirate guy, the missing stubs dude is his friend, right exactly. **T:** Right, but you see how they made the scammer a Nigerian dude? You see, they flipped it—

K: I mean it’s not a perfect world by any means because I have yet to see an Asian on the show, you know what I mean so, I don’t think they ever made it to that.

T: I mean, we didn’t have Black people in middle earth... I mean, they didn’t give us no Black people in fucking Lord of the Rings?

K: No they fuckin didn’t all they did was give us some fuckin orcs.

This exchange between Tani and Kenan is not only expressive of AAR strategies, including orality, verbal expressiveness, oral tradition, signifying, and call and response, but it also demonstrates the diverse nature of the discourse on podcasts. It further shows how many different topics can arise on podcasts and how they may take many different shapes and forms.

What *You Already Know* displays is that podcasts may not need to be as organized as other professional forms of media and they can be quite messy. Tani and Kenan’s topics often fluctuate between each other, and they will sometimes re-visit multiple points of conversation

after going off on side notes or tangents. In the above excerpt, you can see how the two were discussing *Game of Thrones* and *Lord of the Rings*, when the side-topic of race and sci-fi comes up. Mixing these serious topics of conversation among less serious topics is a critical way that, specifically for these two podcasters, remain true to their interests while also engaging in discourse that are reflexive. In other words, Tani and Kenan skillfully meld contemporary debates and discussions with the pop culture topics they plan for the show.

Moments later in the show, the two enter into a quite explicit conversation on social injustice in America in 2020. When Tani references a tweet about riots, the two divulge: **T:** Dudes *liberated* the Chanel store, and *liberated* the Moncler store during the riots that only took place 45 days ago. The riots were only 45 days ago people, the fucking nextlevel looting was only 45 days ago, don't be acting like that shit was two years ago. It was only 45 days ago that dudes were running through SoHo like World War Z.

K: That's crazy that it's been 45 days, like you know what I mean? Like the amount of news that you feel bombarded with, it feels like this shit was last week, it's a constant ongoing – well it's a good thing because it's on-going change, and its on-going attention on things that might have been swept up under the rug in the past... but at the same time it's such a long way to go on so many different levels, you know? We still need to arrest Breonna's murderers and you know we still need justice for all this other kind of shit.

In this exchange, we can see more appeals to the functions of everyday talk in tandem with emerging themes of AAR. Kenan continues to explicate a report of the Ft. Lauderdale police chief who was terminated for laughing at footage of the police shooting protestors with bullets.

Kenan comments:

So, yea he just lost his job. And that's a good step in the right direction but the bigger rhetoric I feel like is, the heir that allows that kind of mentality to think that that's funny – like that's what needs to really be addressed is the training, and you know, the mentality of that brotherhood of blue; to think that shooting somebody in the fuckin face – and they defended it by saying they were aiming it at a dude who was throwing teargas cannisters back – but that doesn't address the laughing factor of it all. A lot of people think that all this shit is like hoaxes or whatever but, misconduct is not some kind of hoax that some liberal can set up. We're not like creating these videos of all this misconduct. This shit is being recorded of what's actually happening.

Though this podcast is keen to shifting quickly between topics, with the above quote, we can see how explicit some of these conversations end up being in terms of promoting and shaping ideology – especially that of Black Americans.

Particularly, Tani demonstrates his attempt to reduce complexity at the very beginning of the conversation by likening the idea of looting to liberation. When he says, “dudes liberated Chanel,” he is doing a bit of signifying by saying that looting is only a form of liberation to some people. In that same light, Tani then makes larger appeals to group narratives when he repeats that the riots were 45 days ago – his repetition of the phrase emphasizes him trying to signal the significance of the riots to all us. Kenan follows up with this by making explicit appeals of “we” and “us.” When he says, “We still need to arrest Breonna's murderers,” he is linking that individual experience to the whole group and making it a group issue. This is building ideology.

In addition to this, Kenan's comments on the firing of the Ft. Lauderdale police chief emphasize even more characteristics of everyday talk. When he signals that firing the police chief was a “step in the right direction,” he is defining what is a desirable outcome for this

situation. And, when he says, “that brotherhood of blue,” he is clearly identifying friends and foes, the foes being the brotherhood of blue. Later in this conversation, Tani poses the question: “Is there going to be a race war or is it going to be a class war?” He continued:

It seems like the powers that be, they’re trying to spin a race war, when in reality it should be a class war. It should be a poor versus rich type shit, it shouldn’t be a Black versus white type thing. That’s almost like last millennium shit that people are trying to re-spin in order for the class war not to go on.

Kenan responds, “Yea man, you think there would need to be a Black Lives Matter movement if classism was equal or even more imbalanced? I highly doubt it.” And in this exchange, what the host demonstrate is the discussion of possible strategies for achieving desired outcomes for the group. For Tani and Kenan, the way we move past racial tension in this country is to focus on the true issue that is class.

Friends Like Us

Marina Franklin has been hosting the *Friends Like Us* podcast for seven years, the longest of any of these selected podcasts. Marina is a veteran comedian and podcast personality and utilizes her large network of comedian friends to join with her and other women comedians and comedians of color in discussing the day’s news. On *Friends*, Marina typically invites 2-3 other friends on to guest-host, and she never hosts the show alone. The show is very loosely structured with the Marina opening up with seeing how everyone has been, then they venture into the discussions and topics of the show from there. Because the podcasters are usually comedians, the tone of the show is usually always upbeat and funny. Even though they discuss serious topics, a crucial part of this show is to be funny and to embrace humor and intelligence.

The informal nature of this podcast sometimes gives way to a lot of people talking at one time, so the below transcribed excerpts leave out overlapping words or parts of the conversation that aren't contributing to the main topic of discourse.

“David Alan Grier, George Wallace, and Gina Yashere visit *Friends Like Us*” aired May 26, 2020

The start of all the *Friends Like Us* episodes are Marina's voiceover, introducing the show's guests and briefly previewing the episode. In this episode, she introduces American actors and comedians, David Alan Grier and George Wallace, as well as British comedian Gina Yashere. This is David's first time on the show; George has been on the show once when it first began; Gina Yashere has been on the show multiple times. After the introductions and advertising promotions, the show jumps right into the conversation.

Marina Franklin: It's so good to have you all here, welcome to *Friends Like Us*! Ahhh, I worried about David, I'm worried about your—

David Alan Grier: Yes?

(Marina Laughs)

George Wallace: I can't see you David, all I can see is your nose hairs! Pull back bitch!

(the show is being recorded via Zoom video) [All laugh]

Marina and the squad talk a little bit about the internet connection and continue to exchange pleasantries and jokes with each other. Around the 10-minute mark, the show began to get more structured when Marina starts with her Q&A format. Consider the following exchange: **MF:** How have you guys all been during this time? Like, I, you know, how are you doing right now?

DAG: I'm barely making it, I don't know. What day is it?

[all laugh]

DAG: I ain't going outside, the people across the street are Trump voters. And they—

MF: Oh really?

DAG: Yep, and they don't never wear masks.

Gina Yashere: Noooo! Where do you live?

DAG: I live in the Hollywood Hills

GY: And there are Trump voters?

DAG: Oh yea. And my cul-de-sac, all the young white ladies, mommies, bringing their kids over and having their playdates and stuff. Bootleg playdates, so I went out in flip flops and draws and stared at 'em, and they ain't never came back after that.

[laughter]

MF: ...Did you see this story where they ask the neighbors to wear bottoms when checking their mail? Because they kept going out, like naked.

This is precisely the structure of Marina's show, as there is no real apparent agenda, but when topics begin to come up, Marina is there to take charge and direction of the conversation. On most shows, Marina has several news stories that she will reference, explains the story, and then ask the guests how they feel about it. Even though Marina is interviewing big name entertainers, their easygoingness on the show makes them seem relatable and authentic.

What's more is that the comedians on the show, particularly David Alan Grier in the above exchange, are likely skillful orators. Because of this, the characteristics of oral tradition and signifying seem evident in his language. Like most comedians, Grier uses humor through signifying as a part of his rhetorical repertoire. In fact, all the comedians vocalized orality, verbal expressiveness, realness and soul style as they react to one another's jokes and personal stories.

MF: So, us versus them... I wanted to get into what you were just talking about because it's one of our hot topics about how further we get divided and how we, you know, like you can think you're on the right side of things, like Gina you are definitely one of the people who is on the right side of things and still the divisions can get even deeper, where it's like Black against Black ,you know, in America or Black against Africans and so, this article, 'Us versus them in a pandemic, researchers warn divisions could get dangerous as the pandemic moves from public health crisis to partisan flashpoint. The debate over the coronavirus response is becoming increasingly nasty and, in some cases, violent....' So, have you guys seen this...?

DAG: I try to be an objective observer. Alright, I was born and raised in Detroit Michigan, there are probably a population of 10 million people there, there were 100 protestors? A couple hundred protestors?

MF: Wow

DAG: That's not the majority of populous.

GW: Do you mean at the state house?

DAG: At the state house! Also, I saw footage of people protesting, in Florida, to get the gyms open – thirty-five people. That's not a movement, yet when it's presented like all Africans hate African Americans, that's not what I've found in personal basis. All African Americans hate Africans, that's not what I see on the streets, on the ground level but we are led to believe that there is this constant friction between us... I remember talking one time to a Jamaican woman, and I just asked her, I said what is the problem now that we supposedly have – between Jamaicans and African Americans – and she said, 'well you guys didn't fight hard enough,' I said what?

GY: She said that?

DAG: To get free from slavery, and I was uhh flummoxed, I didn't– I'm like–

GY: But Jamaican are descendants of slaves!

DAG: Well so am I, and I speak for Marina and George, so are they...

GY: But what she said doesn't make any sense.

DAG: I know, but I mean – that was the only time – and it wasn't an argument it was a discussion – that was the only that I really was confronted with that attitude. In the above exchange, the comedians engage in a serious discussion about societal divisions, particularly as they pertain to race. In this conversation, the comedians use their own personal experiences to contribute to the discussion exemplifying, yet again, a pivotal part of podcasting which relates to sharing experiences. Sharing personal experiences implies the guest or host on the show to be credible. Whereas, in a traditional space of opinion, one's resume or prior work experience deems them as an expert, the expertise in these spaces of opinion comes from life experience. For example, when Marina poses the talking point of racial division, Grier responds by first bringing up his hometown of Detroit and what he knows about what's been going on there. Grier doesn't need facts to give his perspective but, rather, his own take is what solidifies his information as valuable.

Adding to that, this above conversation epitomizes how complex and different conversations of race can be. Because all of the hosts have their own unique lived experiences as Black Americans or being Black while living in America, their conversations and perspectives are also unique. Within this discussion, function of everyday talk includes being an interpreter of truth, linking individual experiences to group narratives, and identifying friends and foes. Though Grier knows his experience is unique, he offers it anyway and therefore tries to link his individual experience to broader group connections. In that same manner, his personal anecdote

acts as an interpreter of truth by stating his own lived truths. Also, in this discussion, Grier and Yashere hint at identifying friends and foes when they lightly discuss possible issues between African Americans and other non-American African descendants. Again, these conversations are very nuanced in the way they approach age-old topics, such as racism.

“Gratitude for the People” aired August 5, 2020

On this episode of *Friends*, Prachi Gupta, Calise Hawkins, and Eman El-Husseini all rejoin the show as they all have guest starred before. Prachi Gupta is a journalist based in New York City who has interviewed high-profile people, such as Ivanka Trump and Michelle Obama, wrote a book about Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and won a Writers Guild Award in 2020. Calise Hawkins is a stand-up comedian and writer. She has performed on many television shows and specials and debuted a comedy album in August 2020. Finally, Eman ElHusseini has a decade-long comedy career with a comedy album that is regularly played on SiriusXM Radio.

In this episode, the friends discuss a host of topics for just under two hours, and the conversation turns political relatively quickly. Just after the seven-minute mark, Marina segues the conversation from light small talk and catching up between the women to a more centered talking point. She directed the show’s first question to Eman (who is from and currently resides in Canada):

MF: ... How does it feel looking at America from where you are?

Eman El-Husseini: Uhhh, I mean – I don’t remember who tweeted this, but it was the funniest tweet I had seen about America, as a Canadian – he just said, ‘Canadians feel like their neighbor downstairs is running a meth lab.’ I think that’s like the perfect

description of just like what – this is ridiculous, I can't believe this is true, I mean like every single day. And Americans also feel the same way. I mean I've been in the states since this guy got elected and just refreshing on Twitter is a nightmare on a daily basis.

So...

MF: Yes

EE: So, I think we all feel similar, it's just those people who are supporting him, that's what I don't understand. I just, I can't– it's complete chaos, the guy is totally moving towards a dictatorship. Just like getting these feds after his own citizens, I just – maybe I just don't understand American politics properly enough. But I cannot believe that he's still in power. And I don't know it will take for him to have to be removed. You guys will have to explain that to me, I guess.

MF: Well, I don't know what's going on. I mean like, I'm surprised as a Black individual how many Black people I've come into contact with who think he's doing good for, for Black people.

Calise Hawkins: Oh really? In real life?

MF: Yes. So, like, you know his numbers are down, but I don't trust it. Whenever they say that in the news, I just don't go with it the polls. I don't trust them anymore. I don't care what they say because I know that there are people out there who still believe in this man and whenever I encounter them, I been questioning myself as to why they are people in my life... I'm just like it throws me off, like emotionally, psychologically, I need to get rid of a lot of people. Some people I can't because they are my family.

In the above exchange between some of the women, they share their personal opinions on the current plight of America as it relates to COVID-19 and governance. Within this discourse, they are once again sharing their own perspectives and using that as a foundation for credibility in the opinion space. Eman demonstrates this point nicely when she speculates about how Americans feel based on her own feelings of being a foreigner. She uses her personal experience to express her feelings and supplementally mentions a tweet by another Canadian to signal that she has reason to believe that these feelings are shared among other Canadians.

This is once again a reflection of the autonomy of speech that spaces of opinion allow. Expressly, the podcasters represent their own voice and brand when they engage in dialogue. They are also self-reflexive and open to debate. On *Friends*, this is common when the discourse is open for questions, and one's self-reflection is necessary to contribute to this space. Additionally, Marina's references to news articles and Eman's reference to a tweet she saw are characteristic of a public. Plainly, the reflective circulation of discourse is illuminated throughout most of the *Friends* episodes and throughout most of the podcasts in this sample. Simply, these conversations are just ever revolving and frequently discussed through various social media. These conversations are not new; the questions asked are not ground-breaking per se, yet, that is the essential feature of the podcasting, as it allows for the circulation of conversation topics across social media networks. Finally, the shows then seem to have a propensity to have a distinct take on those topics.

Later in this episode, the women exemplify two emerging themes of AAR: emotional vitality and communalism. In a very honest discussion about discrimination in their respective careers, the women express many emotions and support for one another. The conversation surrounds an article Prachi wrote titled, "On Performing Gratitude," after which the episode was

named. In this article, Prachi confronted the challenges that Black and brown people face in the workplace, especially in predominantly white spaces:

Prachi Gupta: ...I've been super paranoid, super anxious, like I've felt so much shame and then there are pockets of I feel a little bit proud, I feel like, you know, then I feel shame about the shame, because I just said what's true. I said what most people know but don't actually say and that so many people experience but I actually said it and then I feel guilty for being like the – not face of it, but am I taking the spotlight from somebody else who suffered more shit– who should be there... it's definitely also a little isolating but I ultimately think that all of that discomfort is a good thing because I don't think anything – at least my art and my writing, it's such a personal- or it comes from such a personal place for me and I think that if I'm not doing things that push myself and that kind of terrify me, to be honest, then I'm not growing, I'm not really like living my truth...I've got a good base and I'll be okay and even if I don't have a feature in this industry anymore, I'll figure something else out. I'd rather show up in the world as who I am and I find it very hard to do that and if it's not through this work anymore then I will find a way to do that and that's definitely scary but it's not the end of the world.

EE: Yea, please keep writing. Never stop writing, you're so good.

MF: You're so good, and it's like when I think of John Lewis who just passed, when he writes about the good trouble, its good trouble. It's also, just so you know Prachi, we got you! *Friends Like Us* got you! You ain't got nowhere to go, come back on Friends, cuz' we got you.

(all laugh)

MF: But it's like Calise was saying, you have opened up a window for a lot of us who have read your article. You have empowered a lot of women who have felt like they couldn't speak, or they felt gaslit, and that's gotta feel good. I just need you to know that it's a great that thing you've done.

PG: Thank you. I appreciate it a lot.

MF: Because I know that feeling of going on social media and putting something out there... I think I didn't something recently where I was just like 'I don't know' (laughs) I shouldn't have said that, or I shouldn't have done that, and I wasn't quite sure. And it was an awkward feeling because you're in your own space and there's nowhere to go, right? **PG:** Yea, and you know this is the feeling that Calise mentioned earlier, just feeling— I don't know if you guys ever feel this way but like shame for doing something that you think is right and good but then it attracts attention, and you feel shame for getting attention for it.

This lengthy excerpt exemplifies emotional vitality and communalism through unreserved discussions by podcasters. Prachi feels comfortable enough to express the varied emotions of “shame,” “pride,” “isolation,” or “guilt.” In doing so, she creates speech that is both personal and impersonal and also interprets truth as it relates to her own truth.

When Prachi displays a point of vulnerability when she says, “if it's not through this work anymore then I will find a way to do that and that's definitely scary but it's not the end of the world,” Marina and Eman are quick to rally around her for support. This type of communalism was echoed in many instances during interviews and is illustrated nicely in this discussion. While this was a common thread among podcasts, the stress of community or communalism is to be expected on a podcast centered around *friends*. Similarly, when Prachi

fears losing her job, saying, “even if I don’t have a feature in the industry anymore, I’ll figure something out,” and when Marina responds, “come back on *Friends*, we got you,” they are both rhetorically displaying signs of resilience and functionally identifying who are friends and who are foes.

The For Real, For Real Podcast

The For Real For Real podcast is hosted by three friends, Trevor, Jeff, and Sam, who have been podcasting for the least amount of time, as their first episode aired June 8, 2020.

Perhaps their podcast is best described by how they put it in their opening sequence:

Welcome to the For Real, For Real podcast, where we share our reality and perspective on what’s going on in the world, pop culture, sports, relationships, society and much, much more. All while keepin’ it real and getting’ into the shits, as we like to say... (*The For Real, For Real Podcast*, 2020a)

The discourse on this podcast was similar to the other podcasts in that it pointed to many instances of everyday talk and spaces of opinion. The *For Real* podcast differed from *Friends* and *YAK* in that the conversations and topics were always much more explicitly political or aimed at creating a serious dialogue surrounding current events and societal issues. This is not to say that the hosts are less funny than the other podcasts but rather that their topics were more focused, and the tone of conversation was different from a podcast of comedians or entertainers. For example, in the very first episode, the squad begins by summarizing the events of George Floyd’s murder and waste no time diving deep into the topic.

Episode 1: “George Floyd: We Knew This Was Different” aired June 8, 2020

Like many podcasts, the hosts start their recordings the middle of a conversation, and it feels like you have just walked into the room where people are already talking. Within the first three minutes, the three men exchange their thoughts and feelings on the George Floyd murder. Jeff’s thoughts nicely articulate the feel of this conversation:

...So, I become somewhat numb and accepting of this reality because I’m exhausted. I’m exhausted of explaining our humanity. I think for years we’ve telling people our back hurts and the rest of America is telling us ‘no it doesn’t!’ and that’s how it is being Black in America, it’s having your experience being dismissed or invalidated. Things that are recorded right in front of your face – is justifiable. We say to ourselves, ‘I have the same eyes you have I know you’re seeing what I’m seeing, but you just don’t care.’ So, just so I can get on with life, and make money and smile, I don’t really– I didn’t find myself getting too affected. Just accept the reality and do your best to remain safe and affect change when you can.

In the above quote, Jeff illustrates many features of AAR, specifically emotional vitality, resilience, humanism, communalism and realness all in one monologue. Using all of these strategies jointly, he is signaling classic oral tradition. As he shares his unique perspective though, he still makes mentions to connect to a larger group: “that’s how it is being Black in America,” or “we say to ourselves.” In this one thought, Jeff’s discourse links his individual experiences with other Black people’s experiences, and, through this, he is also establishing his authenticity. He is saying how he honestly feels when it comes to being Black in America, and, by relating his personal experiences with that of the whole group, he is creating a space of

communalism and a space that is a relation among strangers. In other words, he signals that if anyone listening can relate to his experiences, then they can find community in this conversation.

At about the 15-minute mark, Trevor, Jeff, and Sam are still digesting the George Floyd murder when Trevor poses the question to the group:

Trevor: Do you remember the first interaction you had with police and what that was like? Don't all jump at once.

(all laugh)

Sam: So, I don't know if this is my first interaction – I would say this is the first interaction I remember. I was in the car with my dad and my brother, I was probably like 10 years old. Was not feeling well that day, my dad had like taken me to the doctor... I was sitting up and then at one point I was laying down in the back seat. In that moment, we got pulled over. Of course, you know Cop pulls my dad out the car, he frisks him and he says, 'what did your son put under the seat? I saw him go under, like what did he put under the seat?' And he was we just came from the hospital and shows him the prescriptions and stuff... but it was like 30 mins of this...

Jeff: You know, my first... I can't really recall much police interaction when I was a child, I remember the song "Fuck the Police," you know and "Cop Killer" when I was young, but I was taught the police were good, so I was confused by that you know? And I remember talking to my cousin and I said, 'why would you have a song called F the police?' and he said because they're crooked, and not at all was it a joke by Public Enemy... my cousin would tell me, 'you'll find out one day...'

T: I mean I probably phrased this as a tougher question than it should've been because as

I'm thinking about it, I don't necessarily remember my first time either, which I think speaks to how many interactions over the course of our lives we've had with police and neither of us is a career criminal, which I think speaks volumes... I remember, you know, the sirens behind me. When those sirens flick off, the instant fear that sets in when you see them, it's like your heart drops. And I don't know if everyone feels that, I don't if every ethnicity feels that, but that's what my feeling was and I never done anything and I never been around a cop personally to fear them, outside what I might have seen in tv or movies... luckily I had been brought and taught what to do in those situations... Each personal testimony of various interactions with the police are demonstrative of a space of opinion that encourages sharing personal experiences and relating truth to current societal issues. Though police brutality is a major topic in America, it is still arguably rare that we hear these kinds of stories or perspective on police brutality in other media formats.

For these kinds of conversations, podcasts allow the ability to have these real and honest conversations. While some AAR strategies, such as oral tradition, emotional vitality, verbal expressiveness, and realness, are not considered professional or normative in other mass media, podcasts may operate by different rules. The *For Real* pod, as illustrated above, demonstrates just how suited the medium is for telling participants' raw truth and not being afraid to do it – and may even be liberated by it.

Episode 6: "Black Athletes & White Women with Darian Barnes: A Silly Stereotype" aired July 13, 2020

On this episode of *The For Real* pod, the hosts welcome pro-football player Darian Barnes as a guest. The structure of the podcast remains intact, as most questions posed are directed toward their guest. This episode is also notably very sports focused and begins with talking about Patrick Mahomes' contract deal before transitioning into a discussion of athletes and their money habits. While sports programs on other media formats may typically have a show on sports, they may often focus on just that: sports. But, what the For Real and the other podcasts highlight about podcasting is that many topics are all mixed together. When talking about one subject, you can simultaneously be referring to multiple subjects and how they all interconnect. Take for instance the crew discussing the 2020 NFL Draft: **Sam:** On top of all the funny videos and memes we saw –

Darian Barnes: I saw the memes!

S: Yea, yea of girlfriends getting snatched off laps, yea that was funny. But some of this other stuff was a little more hurtful to us as a community, right? And ESPN had put up some graphics of some of the players' stories – as we know the league is 70% Black, right? So when you have a little graphic that might say 'hey this parent was on drugs for 15 years' that can't be a good look for anyone. A. it's not a good look for the player, right? It's also super insensitive, it takes some of like, our stories, our own stories that we want to share. What are kind of like your thoughts around... and I know you've touched on like media and the way they kinda portray the athletes and what are your thoughts on that?

DB: I– one of the reasons why I won't watch the draft is because of stories like that and not that they're not meaningful, not that they're not personal to the person it's happening to, it's that the media has trivialized these people's lives to the point where it's hard to

get to the NFL, it's hard to play in it, it's hard to stay...your story, whatever line these people have, they basically manifest this story about you so that they can present you to the world and you don't get a chance to do it yourself.

T: I hear that and what I get from you telling that the reasoning is almost that you're tired of the media kinda driving certain narratives—

DB: Yes

T: —and kind of reinforcing stereotypes...

The discourse here is a mixture of many different topics, including sports, race in the media, media ethics, and stereotypes. In a way, the joining together of multiple subjects into one subject shows the podcasters' commitment to intellectualism and being information sources. For example, the podcasters show their skill of being able to tie seemingly unrelated and complex events and issues together in discourse. Also, they show their knowledge of historically racist practices by the media and begin a conversation that could be considered quite distinctive from typical discussions of sports. Intellectualism was built on when Darian notes, "I make it a point to read constantly. The first thing I read in the morning, I'll read *New Scientist*, I'll read *Tech Radar*, then I'll go to like *Mother Jones*." This is just one instance of how podcasters are frequently alluding to their commitment to intellectualism from other sources.

Moreover, the above example shows how Darian is brought on the show as a resource and expert. Because of his life experience, particularly playing in the NFL, the hosts treat him as an expert guest on sports and related topics. Even more, Darian is presented as an information source rather than a celebrity. Similar to how podcasters revealed in interviews that they chose guests who they were interested in hearing from, the questions they ask Darian are aimed at learning more about the topic at hand rather than him as a person/public figure.

Episode 8: “Kanye West: Mental Health” aired July 27, 2020

In another episode of the *For Real* podcast, the podcasters masterfully talk about multiple issues within a host of discussions. The podcast episode starts with a discussion of the situation that happened between Megan the Stallion and Tory Lanez, popular musical artists. This tenminute conversation represents how discourse is circulated throughout various media channels.

To demonstrate this, in the summer of 2020, many social media sites, particularly Instagram and Black Twitter, were discussing the situation between Megan and Tory during a time when Megan was shot in both of her feet. This discourse circulated through many networks and platforms and many different conversations took place about the incident. Like many other podcasts, these types of discussions are circulated throughout other forms of media and podcasters simply aim to get their opinions into the conversation.

Concurrently, the reflexive circulation of discourse is depicted by the following conversation the gentlemen get into, as it relates to Kanye West and mental health:

T: Speaking of relationships, and how things can go awry, yall see this stuff with Kim and Kanye, man? What the hell is happening over there?

J: This is a classic example of mental illness going unchecked because it definitely blurs the line on being a celebrity and keeping something in-house. And, you know, even though we all would like to hear the tea, as they would say, some of the information that got out, at that presidential pep rally that Kanye threw in South Carolina, was none of our business. Um, really wasn't. And to be honest with you, I feel bad for Kim Kardashian, I think she gets a bad rep...

[the conversation continues about Kim Kardashian and how she has been a good wife to Kanye in their eyes]

S: I would say yes, props to Kim as she kinda has been open about this the entire time – Kanye is bi-polar, right? And what happens is when you're bi-polar you have a bunch of mood swings. So, sometimes your sky-high and sometimes you're super low and a lot of times what's kind of happening is, he can be in some manic stages so in the super high phase he's manic and raging and it might not make sense to us but it makes sense to him and like what he sees and what's sharing is his truth and how it sees it but might not be the truth based in reality. Being with someone like that has to be difficult, right? ... and unfortunately for him its something that he just can't control, he has poor impulse control. Why does he have poor impulse control? Because he's mentally ill...

J: Yea, no I mean you definitely spoke about his impulses. I mean, we've seen evidence of that since, I mean, him calling out George Bush for Hurricane Katrina, um him jumping on the VMAs—

S: But you could argue that's how he was from the very beginning...

In this conversation, the hosts are expressive and honest about the topic of mental health and dealing with loved ones with mental health. Again, the hosts appear to have complete freedom to direct the discourse in a manner of their choosing. This discussion refers to an incident in which rapper Kanye West exposed some family secrets at a campaign rally for his presidential run in 2020 (Iasimone, 2020). While West's outburst was widely discussed across many platforms, on this particular episode of the For Real podcast, they chose to discuss Kanye in light of mental health and family values.

J: There has still been a stigma associated with Black men going to therapy. I appreciate and commend Charlamagne tha god, for promoting Black men in therapy and speaking about his issues with anxiety because it's something that many Black men deal with and how could you not being a Black man in America, we all have some type or form of PTSD, for the most part, and just deal with a lot of trauma. And a lot of times we often suppress it with religious beliefs, we go to church, we self-medicate, or we just think that therapy is for pussies. And full transparency I been going to therapy for the last three years and my thing is why not? There were times when I was extremely low, I didn't know if I was coming or going. I felt really bad about life and my situations that wife and I were going through collectively, it took a toll on us. But because of therapy I'm better, I'm ready to present the best version of myself to the world.

Jeff's lengthy monologue on mental health depicts another example of the personal sharing that is typical of podcast shows. Within an analysis of someone else's situation or issue that's been widely discussed across networks, the key part of discussion is when the hosts get personal on the podcast.

Hear to Slay

This exclusive podcast aims to be something like *The Daily Show* but from the Black feminist perspective, according to hosts Dr. Tressie McMillian Cottom and Dr. Roxane Gay. And, of the podcasts analyzed in this sample, the listening experience of *Hear to Slay* sounds like it was produced with high sound quality and is the most professional sounding podcast. This was something that Tressie and Roxane noted many times in their interview – they were really concerned about the sound quality and producing the highest quality content. Of course, being a

part of the Luminary podcast network, they have access to resources to make their vision possible.

Perhaps this is what distinguished this podcast from the others in the sample is in its nearly flawless editing and the attention to production that contributes to a different “rhythm,” as Tressie would say. Where many other podcasts have a more upbeat, almost boisterous tone, on each episode of *Hear to Slay*, one enters into what feels like an intimate conversation with the hosts. If the other podcasts in the sample makes one feel like they’re sitting in a barbershop or hair salon, *Hear to Slay* sounds like the conversations that are happening in the back of the shop – i.e., much quieter and VIP only.

The two intellectuals are sometimes joined by guests who also help them to negotiate the episode’s topics. For example, on Season 2, episode 6, “Beauty Matters,” the hosts explore the beauty industry’s response to the pandemic and racial injustice. As guests on the show, they invite beauty reporter Darian Harvin and vegan beauty vlogger Lacresha Berry. Similar to *Friends Like Us* with Marina Franklin, *Hear to Slay* builds community through networking and resource building. The invited guests are presented as experts and resources for listeners to connect with and keep the conversation going. Episodes begin with edited clips that preview some of the talking points of the show, alternating between Tressie and Roxane’s best quotes.

Season 2, Episode 2: “Hair Politics” aired August 11, 2020

This episode’s opening – like most of their openings – contextualize the main premise of the show. It begins:

Tressie: I am the only child of the only child of the middle child, so let me tell you what that means...

Roxane: So, I grew up in Omaha, Nebraska and is not a city know for having a lot of Black people.

T: ...It means that my mother did not grow up playing in hair (laughs).

R: And we lived in West Omaha where the suburbs were and most of the Black people lived in North Omaha.

T: The way most Black girls learn how to do hair is you do your sisters hair, and you do your cousin's hair, and you do your babydolls' hair etc. My mom was not known for being what we might call domestic – and so what of her early outsourcing endeavors was her child's hair.

R: So, she would take me to North Omaha to get my hair done. She looked in the phone book and found this beauty school and took me there.

T: I had a lot of hair and it was the kind of hair when my mom would take me somewhere to get it done, the girl would look at me and go 'we charge extra for dat!' and so my hair was done by whomever took kinda pitty on me.

R: From five years old – that's when I got my first relaxer.

T: My mom had two hairstyles she could do, she could do the two ponytails– and you see this in the sequence of my school pictures throughout elementary school– it was two ponytails, or it was the two big fat cornrows, kinda parted off-center. Those are my classic Black girl hairstyles.

R: I just remember, because we lived in predominantly white areas, it was the first time I got to spend time around other Black people and it was always so amazing just to sit there – and of course, as you may know, Black children are not to be seen or heard– and

so I was just quiet as a little mouse, minding my little business just listening to the women talking about their lives, and their husbands, and their work. . .

T: I love the hairstyles of the girls in the neighborhood who had an older sister, right? Or an older cousin or an auntie or someone who could do their hair. Connie used to do my hair, and she did the whole ritual: we'd sit down, wash it in the bathtub, ahh, you know she'd blow it out—

R: All the while my scalp was burning off, it was incredibly terrifying knowing that this cold creamy substance soon was going to become very hot, and sometimes I would get my hair pressed and that was also terrifying because here came this hot comb at me that felt like it was 1000 degrees.

T: She'd pull out the hot comb that you put on the stove, by the way, I don't even think they sell one of these things or make them anymore but I would love one. The thing was rickety, and it weighed like eight pounds and you put the thing on top of the stove and get it hot on the end, and I loved, loved that.

The opening sequence quoted above is a brief overview of what will be covered on the show. In this sequence, we hear the two women discuss hair, and of course, through sharing their own personal experiences, they divulge on a topic unique to the Black community – particularly Black women.

Also, in this opening sequence, a lot of AAR work appears to be at play, particularly musicality and rhythm. Audibly listening to the show, there is a tone or beat that the women speak to and that is evident with the way they edited quotes to come in and out. This reflects a part of oral tradition for those in the Black diaspora, as musicality and rhythm contribute to the ways in which speech is performed and soul is used as a form of style. More notably, Tressie and

Roxane's authentic roles as Black women in this space illuminate many examples of everyday talk. Specifically, the personal testimonies point to being interpreters of truth and linking their individual experiences to the larger group – Black women in this case.

Like Roxane mentioned in her interview, she is mostly concerned with Black women, and this sentiment is evident on this episode where no one is going to understand the complexities and struggles of Black hair like a Black woman. In this essence, *Hear to Slay* displays prime characteristics of a public by being a relation among strangers and public speech that is both personal and impersonal:

T: It's amazing to me how the Black women at the salons also become part of our lives. Well, my mother still goes to Philomene and she's been seeing Philomene since I was 16 years old. I know Philomene's children and grandchildren. Her daughter got married this past summer, I got an invitation to the wedding, she sent me a graduation gift. She brings wonderful food into our lives because they are West African. So, there's like this cultural mélange that happens in Black hair salons especially when you start doing things like getting braids and etc. the diaspora effect kicks in, so it's not just Black American culture, it is Black in the broadest sense, going to the hair salon. It is one of those places where we experience like global Blackness in the US and that is saying a lot, because there aren't a lot of places where that happens. But the Black hair salon is global – every weekend.

R: You know what's interesting is that Black barbershops are similar, and I didn't start going to barbershops until I was an adult and that involves a lot of clippers... (both laugh)

T: So, how is it? I've only been in a Black barbershop once in my entire life, and it was so overwhelming... it was a wash in testosterone. It was both familiar and strange at the same time. I get the cadence of Blackness but when you add that edge of masculine in... but it was overwhelming, how was it walking into the barbershop for you?

R: It's terrifying, it's really quite terrifying I have to tell. And I've worked up the courage like two or three times and that prompted me recently to start looking for queer barbershops because I thought surely there's a place where I could walk in and say, 'take down the back, edge me up, make me look good,' without having to explain why, because a lot of Black male barbershops reinforce Black masculinity and Black femininity.

This exchange demonstrates how speech can be impersonal and personal because this topic is really quite specific to a group of people. While one does not need to be a Black woman to listen and enjoy the discourse, if one is a Black woman, the speech could be more personal to you.

This also furthers the network, arguably, for the hosts as well.

Season 2, Episode 3: "The Other Essential" aired June 14, 2020

"Hey girl, hey, how you doing?" says Tressie at the very start of this episode's *Hear to Slay*. This episode is all about talking about essential workers in the COVID-19 era. The episode is somewhat of a follow-up from the previous show titled, "Essential Who? Essential What?," where the hosts negotiated what it means to be an essential worker. In this episode however, their topic of interest is the jobs that are maybe essential but may not be viewed as such. Their discussion hits on many different points:

R: All kinds of work is essential, even if it's not as obviously essential as we might assume.

T: So, speaking of honest, in this episode we actually get a chance to talk to a few of those other essential workers, we might call them, we're going to talk to them about what life has been like during COVID, during the shutdowns, and now during all of the political protest and resistance, find out what life has been like for a sex educator in south Florida, a graphic designer in LA who decided to start feeding her community, and a harm reduction educator in the Bronx – now that's something we probably didn't think a lot about.

R: We did not–

T: And it's like yea, how are you gonna fuck and how you gonna get high? Those are like real human experiences– **R:** And frankly, real human needs

T: Yea!

R: Substances and sex are kinda the two things that are making this bearable.

T: Yep, they're fascinating.

R: I agree.

In the exchange between Tressie and Roxane above, they're able to share their opinions about sex and drugs and mention, “they are kinda the two things making this [quarantine] bearable.” There is a lot of use of attempted humanism and realness in this conversation, and this speaks to how Black rhetorical tactics create completely potentially unique conversations, as compared to traditional mass media.

Later in the show, as Tressie and Roxane converse with their guests, Jazzy Harvey (a Graphic Designer), Marla Stewart (Sexuality Advocate), and Jose Martinez (Harm Reductionist),

these characteristics of opinion space and community building continue, but, from a potentially more exclusive viewpoint. While these hosts may not be on other platforms, their podcast allows these people to share their stories whilst engaging in reflexive discourse that could be relevant to the listeners.

T: That's a big question I have, I think we had for everybody. What ended up being considered essential in your respective communities, versus non-essential, but that you know is actually essential. Right like, this was the thing. We thought of services as essential as frankly serving middle-class white people, and everything else is considered too dangerous, even though as I think Jose was pointing out, the danger wasn't not being there. So, what has essential and non-essential meant for yall, that might be different than the master narrative is about what is essential...

Jazzy Harvey is the first to reply to Tressie's question in a prolonged response that talks about the plight of art and artists in a pandemic:

JH: Because places are closing, people's funding are also closing. And I had like a client who was like, you know can't pay you, like we don't feel that this is essential for us, and that is always definitely tough to hear, but at the same time while there is those businesses, what I have seen is like other young people – there has been a big spurt of entrepreneurship within the past couple of months and especially from Black people. And I have been able to stay afloat in this time 100% because of other young Black people (laughs)... it is also to note, not to my surprise, that I have again been saved by other Black people (laughs) during this time.

T: Yeaaa

R: It's interesting you say that because as we've been seeing these public conversations about what is essential, for Marla whose clients are finding new ways of interacting with each other and of course, with all this disposable time – I mean, let's have some better sex! And you've done a start-up and you're being held up by other Black people, and Jose you're just giving the community what they need, and I love that you said you were meeting them where they're at! And so, one of the things that's been interesting is as the world moves on and deems what white people need as essential, it's interesting to see how we are filling the gap that the government isn't taking care of, and that our social net isn't taking care of. Have you guys found that to be the case also Jose and Marla? **T:**

Yea, did the government hold any of yall down in any way? Like we had all these things developed for small businesses and public health and– but did it actually operate that way for yall?

MS: Not for me personally, I did apply for the paycheck protection, because I have a few businesses... basically they were just like, it's sort of like in limbo, like oh you applied and I haven't heard back from any of those people, so I think it's interesting that Jazzy said Black people are once again holding you down, because it's the same for me as well.

In addition to some of the white guilt that people are having as well.

This whole exchange is reflective of a space of opinion that features the perspectives of people whose perspectives may not usually seen or heard. As such, it might be less common to find everyday Black political talk play out as organically as it does on podcasts. In this episode of *Hear to Slay*, both Jazzy and Marla kind of hinted at this idea that Black people have largely supported their business in the midst of the pandemic and, in doing so, both allude to this idea of identifying friends and foes. For both of them, they have personally learned that when all else

fails, they can depend on other Black people for support, pointing to the idea that as a community, they do have perceived friends and foes – i.e., people that can be called upon and those whom cannot be trusted.

In addition to identifying friends and foes, what *Hear to Slay* displays best is their function of reducing complexity – especially about the Black experience. This is illuminated on the “Hair Politics” episode when Tressie and Roxane really break down the history and complexity of Black women’s hair. Also, in the episode “The Other Essential,” Tressie and Roxane explicate the intricacies of these distinct professions that Jazzy, Marla, and Jose have, with the aim to personally understand and relate to these individuals. For Tressie and Roxane, the unguarded nature of their conversations is all about simplifying the Black experience and exploring Blackness wholly.

Summary of Findings

The findings presented demonstrate how podcasting has the potential to play a critical role in the current communicative world. First, the data from the multi-method analysis revealed that authenticity, community, and intellectualism were the three prominent characteristics of podcasts. Authenticity refers to the way that podcasters feel free to be themselves and the way they emphasize “keeping it real” on the podcasts. Community is the idea that podcasts create various communities, not just between podcasters and their listeners but also through communities created among listeners with other listeners and podcasters with other podcasters. The communities are reflected in a circulation of discourse and information between podcasters, listeners, and networks on social media. Intellectualism refers to the idea that podcasts act as information sources and that the podcasters’ goals are to inform. Podcasters aimed to present information to their listeners and spark conversation. They do so by being well researched on topics and inviting guests on the show who are often framed as experts.

Interview analysis revealed implications for strategic communication and the history of Black media as it relates to modern realities. Specifically, the four themes identified, including audience awareness, self-policing, the long game, and social media, imply that podcasters act as strategic communicators. Podcasters are keenly aware of their audiences, and this is how they structure their shows and the information they present. This is similar to how PR practitioners generally think about audience when it comes to engaging publics. Self-policing refers to the extent with which the podcaster is willing to censor themselves. Generally, even though podcasters feel like they have the freedom to say what they want, they are also aware that their words have power. They also know that, after the finished product has been made public, there is no chance of being able to edit your words. The long game speaks to the economy of podcasting

and its sustainability for the future. All of the podcasters agree that this is just the beginning and that the future of podcasting looks bright and profitable. The use of social media demonstrates how branding and marketing play a role in podcast promotion. Also, social media affords podcasters the opportunity to engage with their audiences and create two-way communication. Finally, discourse analysis of four distinct podcasts revealed a host of rhetorical techniques used by podcasters. In addition to the display of various AAR strategies, discourse analysis revealed how discussions on podcasts emerge from characteristics of Warner's (2002) conceptualization of public speech. Through everyday talk, podcasters use speech performance techniques and personal experiences to present ideas and opinions. This conglomeration of opinions, discussions, AAR, and other cultural referents point to a concept of everyday mediated talk that allows for the study of diverse groups on media.

Chapter XI: Discussion and conclusion

This chapter reports on this study's contributions to the field of knowledge by answering and discussing RQs 1-4 in-depth. In particular, RQ 4 (a three-part question), which asked about the economy of podcasting, as well as its parallels with the history of Black media, is discussed in-depth to illuminate the theoretical contributions this study has made to the emerging field of podcast studies. This chapter is concluded by offering limitations and final remarks.

Discussion of RQs 1-4

RQ1: *What rhetorical strategies do Black podcasters use within the everyday discourse that occurs on the podcasts?*

In order to fully explore discourse on podcasts – especially discourse in Black spaces – one must really engage with rhetoric and an understanding of traditional African American orature. For example, a critical analysis of the discourse revealed that podcasters utilize multiple AAR techniques during their podcast, often done so subconsciously. In the interview with Dr. Chioke I'Anson, an African American studies professor who teaches a course titled, "Podcasting While Black," Dr. I'Anson spoke to the notion that, quite often, orators of any kind are not aware of the rhetorical techniques they display. Specifically, he commented, "What I've studied is that if you don't have the explicit knowledge of rhetorical studies, you don't know you're using it, right?" (Personal communication, December 15, 2020). That said, the rhetorical techniques displayed on podcasts are mostly subconscious and deeply rooted in a rich history of oral

tradition and those traditions being passed down through generations. This is not to say that trained orators or educators in the sample, such as Roxane Gay, Marina Franklin, or Dr. Pat Sanders, are not strategic in the way they structure or present the discourse, rather that it was common to see a mixture of everyday talk, informality, and, what felt like, a second-nature utilization of many different AAR practices.

Both interviews and the CTDA analysis revealed that podcasters are rhetors of the 21st century – or those who interpret and expound on the current events of the day and speak and write for the public (Asante, 2003). In this sense, Asante’s explication of the characteristics of AAR apply to annotate how traditional Black orature manifests through themes and connections to African, and I would argue, African American or Black American culture. In simpler terms, upon contextualizing culture and history within the communicative practices of the podcasters, patterns of similar types of discourse with noted distinctions in rhythm and soul style emerge. As presented in the literature review, in traditional studies of AAR, to speak is to perform, thus, each minute of each podcast episode is a performance and can be categorized by its interchanging uses of AAR.

First, call and response is displayed on podcasts different forms. For example, on the *You Already Know* podcast, in a lot of their exchanges, the hosts frequently use the phrase “you know?” at the end or in the middle of their thoughts, be it speaking to one another or reaching out to the potential audience. It’s less about managing the conversation like a traditional “umm” would symbolize, but it’s more about constantly looking for an audience, for that feedback, and the reassurance that someone is still listening and understanding them. Marina’s podcast, *Friends*, is exemplary of multiple instances of call and response, as the show is largely based on ideas of communalism and the promotion of collectivity and community. A main tenet of call

and response reflects the promotion of *we* and a collective voice. That said, in any episode of *Friends*, one can listen to Marina and other comics, advocates, public figures, and intellectuals address and expound on issues related to the community. For example, on an episode, “America can’t take four more years of stupid,” Marina and her guests discuss the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and related political issues about the pandemic. They talk about what *we* have to do and about how *our* government should behave. On other episodes, like “Amy Schumer Visits Friends Like Us,” Marina’s communalism rhetoric remains predominant, even when there is a non-person of color on the show. During a lot of this episode, Amy Schumer spends a lot of time discussing the Black Lives Matter movement and her involvement with it. In compliment, Marina and guests Abbi Crutchfield and Mia Jackson listen and share their experiences with BLM as well, still notably making appeals to the *we*.

As far as *signifying*, it is a bit more difficult to show all the ways in which these podcasters utilized the tradition. Particularly because signifying is a speech event that is marked by cultural self-definitions, one may or may not recognize when a rhetor is signifying, however it is a key part of the realness and style of the speech performance. On *Friends* episode, “David Allan Grier, George Wallace, and Gina Yashere visits Friends Like Us,” the whole episode is filled with back-and-forth banter between David Allan Grier and George Wallace, where the two veteran comedians use signifying to incorporate humor into the discussions. Additionally, to interpret signifying is to be able to read between the lines or to understand unwritten cultural codes. In a sense, each of the podcasts explicitly or implicitly relied on some shared common knowledge or an existence of a shared logic for everyday life. This is why Tani was concerned with catering to an audience on the podcast. For Tani, the only listeners who matter are the ones

who are able to understand the perspectives of the hosts and use their own system of heuristics to engage fully with their content. Similarly, this is what Tressie was referring to when she said, “We always assume Black women’s knowledge” (Personal communication, December 9, 2020). By this, she means that she is not going to go out of her way to explain something that a typical Black woman would know. In other words, discourse on podcasts with non-white people is typically going to assume the knowledge of non-white cultures and experiences. It is thus shown how culture materializes through the organization of messages and discourse, especially in Black media.

This study attempted to negotiate Asante’s nine themes of the future of AAR. First is *spirituality*, which is the mention or belief of spiritual forces in life. *Musicality* and *rhythm* denote the connectedness of all movement as personified by musical beats. *Emotional vitality* is the openness conveyed by ordinary African American folk culture. *Resilience* refers to the ability to bounce from oppression or hardships. *Humanism* is the expression of concern for humans and *communalism* suggests that there is a sense of community when people come together. *Orality* and *verbal expressiveness* denote the cultivation of style of speech. *Realness* notions the need to face life the way it is. And, finally, *soul style* is the rhetors’ distinctive creativity.

As shown throughout these findings, almost any episode demonstrated instances of humanism, communalism, realness, or emotional vitality, often within a few sentences of one another. While spirituality was an AAR theme that was virtually absent within this analysis, the other themes often seemed to work in tandem. For instance, each podcaster displayed orality and verbal expressiveness by the mere essence of them existing as an individual in the space. But, the level of how emotional and open a podcaster is, varied. For example, relating back to the *For*

Real For Real podcast episode “George Floyd: We knew this was different,” when each of the hosts shared their first experiences with police officers, they all flexed their orality and verbal expressiveness in their own way. The level of emotional vitality – how much of the experience they were willing to share and how emotional actually sharing the experience was – is a key distinction among the various discourses.

Equivalently, themes like humanism, communalism, and resilience were often intermingled throughout discussions. Ideas of community were often in complement to ideas on humanitarianism and survival. For instance, when issues related to community arose in interviews with podcasters, the podcasters often spoke about wanting to be an advocate or catalyst for change for all people. Even when podcasters were adamant in being concerned with the well-being of the Black community, they also discussed extending beyond the Black community. The message of a lot of these podcasters is that these media entities are spaces where like-minded people convene and collaborate, thus speaking to communalism. Concurrently, another prominent message conveyed is aimed at providing information, aid, and resources, thus speaking to humanism.

On top of this, musicality/rhythm, realness, and soul style are traditional AAR themes that are often conglomerated within discourse on podcasts. Consider this quote from Tressie as an illustration of how musicality/rhythm are inherently incorporated in everyday Black discussions:

I kept saying I wanted to the rhythm of the show to match how Roxane and I talked. Like I kept saying the pacing should sound like me and Roxane talking (laughs). Because when we talk, because we are so similar in how we approach the world, we’re on the same rhythm. Right? Like we don’t have to slow down or speed up, we’re on the same

rhythm. And that's very common to how Black women talk. Black women's discourse has a rhythm, and the pacing of the show should sound like Black women. One of the things podcasts do, because it has been dominated by white people, it sounds like white people. (Personal communication, December 9, 2020).

Though Tressie's comments are specific to her show and the rhythm that her and Roxane envision for *Hear to Slay*, all of the other podcasts also exemplified a certain unique rhythm. This rhythm was often and arguably more upbeat or fast-paced than discourse on some other traditional media formats. This rhythm, whether fast or slow, is typical of African orature and is reflective of the importance of performance in speech. On *You Already Know*, the rhythm is a negotiation between Kenan's cool persona and Tani's flare for drama. In a similar fashion, the rhythm of the *For Real For Real* podcast is easy-going yet upbeat and distinctive to the three male co-hosts. Whatever the rhythm is, the realness and soul style is reflected by the unique personas of each podcaster.

As a final note on the use of rhetorical strategies on podcasts, what was rarely seen was the theme of spirituality or some sort of connection to a higher power. Notably, Yvette Walker's podcast, *Positively Joy*, is based on Christian values and spreading the message of God, yet other podcasters were less inclined to display such rhetoric. This is a particularly interesting finding from this study because it was really the only method of AAR that was not predominantly present. While other themes of AAR were intertwining and working together, why was rhetoric involving spirituality less present? Perhaps, this can be explained by an increase in African Americans who are religiously unaffiliated, according to a Pew Research Center study in 2018 (Masci, 2018). In other words, though African Americans are still more religious than other races in general, could this be a factor in the seemingly absence of spiritual rhetoric on these

podcasts? Furthermore, data also show us that younger Black Americans are less likely to be committed to a religion than older Black Americans (Masci, 2018). If this is the case, then maybe with the rise of younger voices and changing generational trends, the practices of traditional AAR approaches can also evolve.

This is not to say that non-Black Americans don't use rhetorical techniques to communicate, however, the point is that when these specific strategies are at play, it makes for a dynamic speech event that enlightens our understanding of the communicative practices of Black Americans – particularly as they are presented through digital media. What this study offered is a more critical look at rhetoric and the use of rhetorical studies within the field of communication in order to better understand diverse communities. When examining a media site like podcasts, scholars are often concerned with the technical features or capabilities of the media or the messages or discourses or texts which are presented through it. In this present study, it is the content on podcasts that is of concern, and a thorough analysis of that content would be remiss without this full deliberation on traditional African American rhetoric.

RQ2: *What role does authenticity play in the success of a podcast, and how do podcasters view the value of authenticity?*

In short, podcasters viewed the value of authenticity as extremely high, and it was clear that authenticity plays a major role in a podcast's success. Even if the podcasts did not have thousands of subscribers or followers, what the podcasters made clear was that their relationship to their audience was significant to them, and that relationship is largely maintained by authenticity.

In many ways, scholars have contended that authenticity through social media creates dialogue (Pappacharissi, 2015a) and interviews with podcasters revealed that podcasts are a great

way to be oneself and to start a conversation. This came up in every single interview, as all podcasters noted the importance of being yourself and how authenticity is a way for hosts to get guests to loosen up and let their guard down. In particular, Nicole Walker commonly spoke to this, especially as she discussed first starting her podcast and knowing exactly what she wanted. As a businesswoman and entrepreneur, she knew she wanted the podcast to be on leadership and how the podcast would be structured; but, overtime the more she started doing interviews on the show, she learned that when she was more informal and personal, guests would reciprocate and end up sharing deeper personal content. Likewise, Finesse Mitchell also spent a bit of time speaking to authenticity in his interview, and he even spoke about having to make sure he is staying on top of editing the podcast because sometimes he feels that the people he brings on the show might share too much or share something that they may regret later on. Even more, most everyone in the sample vouched for simply being real and allowing the realness to speak to one's credibility. This is reflexive of how comfortable the podcasters feel in their space and how there is no pressure to be something they are not.

Consistent with both interview data from this study and existing literature, it is known that there are few spaces in America where Black people feel like they can freely exist, illuminating the power of podcasts. Podcasters divulged that the autonomy that podcasting gives them allows them a space where there is no need to code-switch or to conform to traditional media norms. Code-switching refers to the practice of shifting the languages one uses or the way one expresses yourself in social situations (Thompson, 2013). While the term code-switching derives from linguistics which examine *when* it occurs, it is studied in sociology to understand *why* it occurs. Even before linguists and sociolinguists had begun to explore code-switching,

W.E.B. Du Bois, spoke about a “double consciousness” in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903): It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

Nearly 120 years later, Du Bois’ theory of double consciousness manifests in all parts of Black lives, particularly in professional and public spaces. Though the terminology has evolved over the years, the double consciousness inhabited by all Black Americans was expressed through interviews in this study and is likely consistent throughout the everyday lives of many Black Americans today. That said, this study unveiled that podcasts are a public space where Black Americans are actually free from the labor of double consciousness or code-switching.

Specifically, the podcasters alluded to this when they discussed self-policing and interviewing guests of the show. Like Nicole Walker or Genie Dawkins discussed, podcasts are not the place for rehearsed answers or scripted stories. Instead, there is an expectation of honesty, realness, and a strong commitment to telling the truth. Consistent with the literature examining other Black digital spaces like Black Twitter, Black users are able to appropriate the technology’s interface and features to present Black discursive culture (Brock, 2012), which creates communal bonds between groups and connects users from various networks. This Black discursive culture featuring traditional AAR strategies like signifying and call-and-response are what Brock (2012) suggested highlights Twitter’s role as a cultural communication medium. The present study, in a similar fashion, also argues that Black users utilize the podcast platform also as a cultural communication medium. In this case, Black podcasters use traditional AAR and

everyday talk as a means to encourage listeners and media users to participate in community-building and network-building.

Furthermore, with majority and other racial populations usually absent from the space, this may be why these podcasters felt safe enough not to code-switch. Even though podcasters know they have white and other non-Black listeners, the platform of podcasts affords the podcasters the safety to record and edit content without inhibition. The following section discusses affordances on podcasting more in-depth.

In one way, an argument can be made that the idea of authenticity contrasts from the idea that speech is performance. Indeed, the question could be posed: *how can one be keeping it real while also engaging in a performance?* However, look to Goffman's self-presentation theory to further negotiate this sentiment. Specifically, according to Goffman, all humans dictate how they present themselves to others in public. This is different from code-switching though, as selfpresentation is about performing to be an idealized version of oneself while code-switching is a form of performative expression that is used as a means for surviving (Harris, 2019). When the podcasters discussed self-policing and being aware of the things they say – even though they don't necessarily have to – this is a form of self-presentation where they try to maintain an idealized image of themselves. This seemed especially true when the podcast is representative of the person's brand or business. This is not to say that the podcasters are being fake, per se, but self-presentation and self-policing is a way for them to be cautious about letting go of their double consciousness in such a public space.

That said, it still seemed clear that the main performance of Black orators was typically through language and speech, meaning that the term performance here is not denoted through acting or pretending to be someone else. Rather the podcasters are attempting to be one-hundred

percent themselves and use rhetoric and speech as their performative communicative tools. As expressed in the preceding section, AAR strategies like orality, musicality, verbal expressiveness, rhythm, realness, and soul style contribute to how the discourse is organized by the rhetor and how it is received by the audience. Meaning the drama involved in these everyday talk-type podcasts comes from the use of African American rhetoric and its traditional ways of delivering oral messages. Other than colorful means of speech and instances of signifying, for the most part, Black podcasters emphasize keeping it real, making it plain, and speaking your truth.

As Marwick and boyd (2010) pointed out, authenticity is a construct; therefore, the definition of what it means to be authentic can differentiate by context and situation. In this sense, while the podcasters all generally meant to keep it real and to be themselves, the context of what “keeping it real” means could depend on the person and podcast. As an example, Finesse’s show is based on talking to celebrities in an interview-style format; when he refers to keeping it real, he’s meaning it in the most natural sense in that he wants to be the cool, charismatic guy (his words) that people know. On the other hand, Phyllis and LaTricia, on *Living the Principles 365*, take authenticity to mean that both hosts and all guests to the show are authentic in their knowledge of Kwanzaa and their commitment to the principles. In other words, depending on the context of the podcast, ideas involving authenticity may differ. Phyllis herself accentuated this notion when she noted the importance to “be yourself and be an expert in your field” (Personal communication, November 23, 2020).

Listening to the four podcasts in this study’s sample, one could allude to many instances of authenticity. Echoing what the podcasters mentioned in interviews, when one listens to the podcasts, the level of candor and realness comes from how informal the nature of the

conversation is. On *Friends*, the audience gets to know Marina and the reoccurring guests well by learning a lot about their families and day-to-day lives. Similarly, when listening to *Hear to Slay*, *You Already Know*, and *The For Real For Real* podcast, each podcaster feels like a friend to the audience based on all the personal information they share.

Furthermore, as was repeatedly shown in the findings, personal stories and sharing was a pronounced way to display authenticity. There was not an episode in this sample where the podcasters did not disclose something personal with hosts and listeners; often times, these stories were seemingly shared forthrightly, as opposed to being scripted. Like Roy Wood Jr. discussed, podcasts are a place where one can choose your adventure, choosing to following people that are known and then being able to get to know them even more. This may be due to the length of podcasts. Podcasts in the sample typically lasted at least an hour, and with no visuals (usually), hosts sometimes spent more than an hour verbally exhausting discussions and topics. With all this time to talk, the podcasters have the opportunity to not only provide the facts but also add in opinion and speak to broader domestic and global realities.

RQ3: *How can the concept of affordances be used in the scholarship surrounding podcasts?*

As Treem and Leonardi (2013) discussed, affordances are not exclusively properties of people or of artifacts, rather affordances can refer to the relationship between people and the way they use or apply media. In other words, understanding the use of podcasts as a communicative tool can be done through the concept of affordances. Interviews with all podcasters spoke to affordances, as each podcaster tried to account for what the podcast is capable of doing, perceptions of what it's doing, and the actual practices that evolve from interaction with podcasts.

At a broad level, podcasts seem basic. That is, the whole nature of podcasting is simply to speak into a mic, press record, and then upload the audio track to a hosting platform. However, when considering the full scope of affordances, the material or digital aspects of the technology can literally influence behaviors of those who interact with it, as the platforms are capable of broadcasting everyday conversations that are aimed at contributing to some sort of opinion space or public discussion.

This is precisely what the podcasters expressed in interviews when simply being asked what motivated them to start a podcast. Of the 20 in the sample, 12 of the podcasters communicated that they hold professional careers as writers, professors, content creators and entertainers. Still, those individuals, along with others in the sample, regarded this as a space where they can *talk* to people. For example, Drew Harmony has made a career in entertainment, writing, producing, and recording songs. While he is no stranger to the marketing aspects of producing media, he articulated being excited to “talk to the people” (Personal communication, November 9, 2020). And, even though he has a career where he earns his living organizing and broadcasting messages to mass audiences through song, he still found it important and unique to begin a podcast – something he does for free. Drew added, “My gift is my voice, because not only can I sing, I realize when I speak, people listen” (Personal communication, November 9, 2020).

Tressie and Roxane agreed about being burnt out on other creative projects and finding comfort in just being able to talk. Particularly for individuals who are not getting paid to podcast (all of the podcasters in the sample except for two), their motivation is the chance to talk, to start a discussion, and to let the audience listen in. In doing so, the podcasters perceive they are influencing the space by being opinion leaders and thought provokers. This is what Marina

Franklin meant when she voiced, “You’re a tool... you’re being used to get the information out” (Personal communication, November 24, 2020). In the same regard, Talib Jasir emphasized that there is value in content. He furthered that podcasting as oral storytelling contributes to the intellectual and historical spaces of mass media. This study revealed that podcasters use selfpresentation and a host of rhetorical strategies as a means to present discourse to the audience authentically. Using rhetoric to construct speech performance and current events to shape discourse topics, podcasters are able to provide a conversation that listeners can engage in whenever, wherever.

The four consistent affordances of visibility, editability, persistence, and associations (Treem & Leonardi, 2013) are applicable in the study of podcast research. First, visibility refers to the idea that social media affords users the ability to be visible in the space. Hosting platforms like Apple’s Podcast database, Spotify, Luminary, Stitcher and many more allow podcasts to be visible to users. Additionally, in an age of increasing digital technology and media, podcasts can be found through quick Google searches or through social media handles. Users can also download any podcast application to a smart phones for quick and easy access.

As it relates to visibility, even though podcasts are easily found if searched for, that’s also the irony: a person must search for it. This could complicate how visibility is examined on podcasts because, if one has to go looking for something, is it truly visible? This is where social media marketing and branding comes into play for podcasters as they have the option to ensure the visibility of their podcasts, at least throughout their own personal or social networks. There were only two interviewees who expressed not caring much about social media marketing; for everyone else, social media marketing was critical. Podcasters discussed many topics involving using social media to make their shows more visible, including trying to figure out social media

analytics, negotiating how to construct social media content, where, when and how to post the content, hiring graphic designers to develop logos and websites, and whether or not to purchase advertising.

Furthermore, this study points to the potential variances in the visibility of podcasts depending on whether the podcast is hosted by an elite voice (celebrity/public figure) or an ordinary (everyday, non-celebrity) voice. Dr. I'Anson expressed sentiments regarding the reach of podcasts for people who already have a big following versus those whom do not. When talking about the *Joe Budden Podcast*, a popular show, Dr. I'Anson remarked, "That show has a charismatic leader talking...a lot of shows just have famous people... if you were to make a clone of Joe Budden's podcast and you were the host, it would be as popular as you are now" (Personal communication, December 15, 2020). Dr. I'Anson alludes to the visibility that some podcasts have as a privilege that others do not have.

Simply put, if one is famous and already known, the podcast is likely to be more visible. Take the use of Twitter as an illustration. If two friends make Twitter profiles, then both are able to be searched and are visible to the public. However, if one friend never tweets and the other friend actively utilizes their profile to gain followers, retweets, and likes, the profile that is interactive is more likely to be seen. This is why podcasters stress social media as being pivotal because the only way to grow listenership is if the listeners know the podcaster is talking. Future scholarship on podcasts should deliberate levels or variations of visibility and its impact on the success of a podcast. In other words, is visibility a spectrum? Are some podcasts more visible than others due to considerable promotion on social media? Or, is the visibility of the podcast simply constituted by its existence and ability to be searched and found on the internet and within the digital media landscape?

Editability as an affordance means that the content can be rehearsed and edited before it is presented. Correspondingly, persistence maintains that content remains accessible in the same form as the original display after initial presentation. These two affordances characterize the technology of podcasts well because the technical process of podcasting means that recordings are not aired live. And, hosts have the opportunity to prep, plan, organize or do whatever is necessary before they record shows. The affordance of editability also speaks to the podcasters' autonomy in recording and editing. Because they have full control of their content, they can edit as they see fit. In this sense, editability is also reflected by the nature of everyday talk and the way podcasters behave in this space. Specifically, because audiences know podcasts are editable before posting, then they know that everything heard on podcasts is intended for the listener to hear. And, once podcasts are dropped (as most podcasters would say), they cannot be changed or altered and become audio artifacts that can be listened to as many times as possible.

Finally, Treem and Leonardi (2013) detail associations as the fourth consistent affordance, where associations indicate established connections between individuals and media content. Podcasting is a medium that contributes to building strong social ties, as well as building relationships between individuals and information – i.e., “informational ties.” Two kinds of social ties are observable. First, hosts create their own social ties with other individuals whom they invited to their podcast. This notion was uttered extensively in the findings section when podcasters discussed building community and growing their networks. Some podcasters' goals are, in-part, to try to promote their own personal or the podcast's overall brand; others are trying to build and market their businesses. Regardless of individual goals, each host has the possibility to expand their personal and professional networks by inviting guests to talk.

In addition to the social tie created between cohosts and guests, the podcasters may also believe that there is a social tie created between the listeners, whomever they may be, and the show's host(s). This idea warrants further investigation and can likely better be examined by a critical analysis of podcasters and their listeners. To be specific, podcasters articulated that they feel like they are creating a relationship with their audience by being authentic and engaging with them through social media. Despite this, given this study's present scope, discourse analysis allows scholars to infer much about how discourse on podcasts is organized and presented, but it cannot infer anything about what any given listener might interpret from the discourse. This type of social tie, in which the podcast itself is the literal connecting tool between content producer and content consumer, should be fully explicated in future work using other methods.

Existing literature contended that exemplars of an informational tie can be when one posts a link to a blogpost (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). In this case, the informational tie would exist between the content producer and the information provided. Likewise, if any blogpost readers are to come into contact with the link, an informational tie is thus created between the information and user. That said, the space of podcasting offers a unique perspective regarding informational ties. First, look at the findings concerning intellectualism. As exemplified in interviews, one of the main priorities for podcasters was to be well studied and to provide information. Podcasters described doing research on topics before shows and inviting guests on as experts, a form of providing information. Podcasters expressed benefiting greatly from their informational ties, as they are also continuously involved in learning from the podcast. More so, interviews illuminated the notion that the kind of people who are motivated to start a podcast may be more likely to be entrepreneurs, teachers, motivators, or thought leaders.

That said, the thirst for intellectualism and information is not likely one-sided. These podcasts continue to have followings, and no matter the size, there are audiences consistently engaging with the information they uncover while listening to podcasts. Again, a critical discussion of informational ties between information and user is beyond this study's scope. That said, this study offered insights that podcasters regard fact-based, truth-grounded information as the most valuable kind of content. Even if the podcast is based in opinion and is informal, the podcasters still aim to be intellectually sound.

The question then becomes how users develop and facilitate relationships with information through podcasts. Existing literature on podcasting and social media networks (Florini, 2019) might provide partial answers to such a question detailing the ways that podcasts have the potential to create multiple networks outside of the podcasting medium. That is to say that discourse on podcasts can often carry over to other media (i.e., tweeting about something heard on a podcast) and vice versa (discussing something on the podcast was seen on Twitter). Nevertheless, future scholarship should focus attention on the relationship between the podcast listener and the information that they receive from said podcast.

As discussed, podcasters' main concern is the content on their podcast and the ways in which that content connects people. This can be thought of as convergence culture or the unanticipated ways media move across platforms. An illustration of convergence culture is the Twitter example in the preceding paragraph where discourse, knowledge, media etc. overlap between multiple platforms. This is the very nature of podcasts and something that all the podcasters were explicit in discussing. They talked about creating community, and the way they think they do this is through information sharing and sparking conversation. Convergence culture thus potentially influences collective identity. This was observed when podcasters discussed how

they wanted to build community; even when the instances of everyday talk occurred on podcast episodes, the motivations and rhetoric of podcasters often refer to a collective *we*. In the case of podcasts, as discourse moves and flows from social media to podcasts to blogposts to the dinner table, digital media, and the actors who operate it, contribute to the facilitation of media content and advance the ways consumers, especially Black consumers, can participate in circulating and curating media.

Convergence culture on podcasts is often intertwined with participatory culture, which is the interplay among media producers and those who use their product. Participatory culture makes mention of the process of sharing resources and services with media consumers. As shown in the intellectualism chapter, one of podcasters' main goals is to be directly involved in the flow of information throughout audiences and networks.

Jenkins (2006b) discussed how the *new* participatory culture is marked by the intersection of three trends, trends that appeared in these findings. First, he wrote that "new tools and technologies enable consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content" (2006b, 135). Given the basic anatomy of how podcasts work and what was shown in these data, podcasts act as a communicative tool that archives and recirculates media content. The recirculation of media concept articulates that podcasters can join in on existing conversations but with their own perspectives and narratives attached. The autonomy and easy access of podcasting further creates a place where discourse can be as narrow or broad as the orator sees fit, counter to some more traditional forms of media. Discourse can also be revisited, interpreted, rearticulated and shared throughout many physical and digital networks.

Second, Jenkins suggested that, within this new participatory culture, a range of subcultures provide do-it-yourself ("DIY") media production and a discourse that shapes how

consumers have deployed those technologies. Podcasts are again reflective of this characteristic of participatory culture. For example, when Jenkins examined fandom in 2006, he remarked that the changing digital media landscape increased the speed of fan communication. Likewise, podcasts contribute to a media landscape that continues to evolve with technology. While podcasts are still an emerging media form with immense possibility, they are also relatively easy to engage with on both the production and consumer-related sides.

Finally, economic trends favoring horizontally integrated media organizations encourage the flow of images, narratives, and ideas across media. This economy of media integration, in turn, demands active modes of spectatorship, according to Jenkins (2006b, p. 135). In simpler terms, podcasts contribute to this trend by keeping the conversation going. It was evident through interviews that podcasting is not often about achieving fame or more success than another podcast. The podcasters did not express many ideas about them finding the market competitive, rather they found it to be a rich platform for horizontal networking – what some referred to as cross-pollination or cross-connecting. This process of horizontal networking keeps discourse flowing through multiple networks and creates more opportunities for spectators to engage. Even for the podcasters who are already famous or have achieved greater notoriety since launching their podcasts, they use social media engagement and marketing to increase spectatorship and engage in more horizontal modes of communication.

RQ4a: *What are the implications of using podcasts for strategic communication?* **RQ4b:** *What are the lessons for how this relates to the economy of podcasting?* **RQ4c:** *What does this mean for the history of Black media with modern realities?*

RQ4a: Implications for Strategic Communication. Building upon existing scholarship (Bratcher, 2021), more and more strategic communicators are using digital media, such as

podcasts, to engage diverse publics. Strategic communication refers to the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission (Hallahan et al, 2007). This study demonstrated that podcasters employed a host of communicative strategies, research, and organization in order to broadcast their messages. But, as the goals of strategic communicators are to communicate the messages, processes, or concepts of organizations through advanced planning and global technologies, it is appropriate to inquire how podcasts might assist the facilitations of those concepts and messages to larger publics. Also, since a common theme among interview data was how podcasting intersects with entrepreneurship, podcasters themselves used personal brand building, social media marketing, and other methods of promotion used by professional strategic communicators.

First, this study has shown how there can be blurred lines between social and strategic communication. While the podcasters seemingly represent shows that display social communication – or interactions/language used in social situations – it was shown how strategy and planning were a significant part of podcasting. From Nicole Walker, who attended business seminars and consulted a business coach throughout the process, to Dr. Pat Sanders, who lobbied to develop a podcast as creative content within her tenure packet, trends of strategic organization and directed motives for utilizing the medium of podcasts was shown. In fact, the backend work behind developing the podcast and promoting it almost entirely focuses on this strategic angle.

A question then becomes how social and strategic communication are merging as media technologies continue to change how people communicate. For example, Baker (2018) found that Twitter permitted organizations to alter their marketing tactics to interact directly with consumers. He also found that Twitter afforded organizations the capabilities to acquire a new identity and alter their perceptions in their consumers' eyes (Baker, 2018). If this is true, then the

trends seen developing on social media like Twitter mirror the trends that characterize podcasts. Referring back to affordances, podcasts afford organizations with both social and informational ties with consumers. Strategic communicators for these organizations who wish to reach individuals or niche communities might use podcasts to provide information and gain larger followings. Particularly, non-profit organizations could benefit from the low-cost production of podcasts, coupled with the widespread promotion of their organization's mission and goals.

The theories from strategic communication, specifically public relations models, can also aid scholars in understanding how minority groups in America communicate with each other and broader communities. For instance, the findings on podcaster autonomy and safety and its affordance in allowing the podcaster to share their own ideas becomes relevant. As this study demonstrated through the concept of opinion spaces, the promotion of ideas is consistent with strategic communication's goals to relay organizational messages to audiences. Furthermore, with the observation of everyday talk that is frequent on Black podcasts, findings demonstrate how collectivity and advocacy work can be strategically employed to advance the goals of the Black community. Understanding how activism and community advocacy operate more explicitly might be one offset of the present research. One question future research might be inclined to investigate is: *how can we use strategic communication theories and perspectives to understand how minority communities and marginalized groups in America, promote opinion messages in a socio-culture context?*

Understanding affordances of podcasts can also point to the ideal intersection between podcasts, as a communicative medium, and strategic communication. For example, the four consistent affordances that this study demonstrated could be applied to podcasts. First, podcasts would be a means for brands or organizations to increase visibility. Organizations have a vested

interest in staying visible and relevant among consumers, so podcasts would only expand that visibility among various digital networks and potentially invite new consumers. Also, organizations have the chance to remain persistent among audiences. Meaning, similar to social media, organizations can use podcasts to produce ongoing content that engages with publics through digital media technologies. The editability of podcasts ensures that organizations or brands have the ability to construct the exact messages or content they want before presenting it to the public. Finally, associations afforded by podcasts could be most useful for strategic communicators. Corporations or organizations that are looking to strategically communicate with various publics are most often concerned with an informational tie – that is creating a relationship between the organization’s information (i.e. mission, messages, goals) and the consumer. Podcasts are a fertile site to both present and disseminate information through diverse networks.

RQ4b: The economy of podcasting. While it is difficult to predict the future of the podcasting industry, there were some lessons learned from this study about the economy of podcasting. For example, the *long-game trend* was telling of how long podcasters assume the platform will be around. Most of the podcasters expressed patience with the platform, even going so far to say, “This is just the beginning” (Personal communication with Phyllis, November 23, 2020). Even though podcasts have been around for over a decade, these content creators are still adamant that they and others in the industry are only starting to scratch the surface of the potential influence of the platform. Data showing podcasting steadily increasing over the last few years would suggest that the impact of podcasting may only continue to grow.

This study revealed that podcasting is mostly about the discourse and the way that discourse has the power to create community. As long as discourse is present, there will be

opportunity to build and develop community around said discourse. And, while Black culture has been more examined through other forms of media, this study has shown how Black Americans continue to use emerging technologies, such as podcasts, for broader communication and community advancement purposes.

This dissertation adds to the scholarship on cultural work (Banks, 2007; Banks & Milestone, 2009; Beck, 2003; Gill & Pratt, 2008). Cultural industries refer to the production of symbolic goods and services of which core values are derived from their function as carriers of meaning through images, symbols, sounds, speech, and signs (Banks, 2007). Cultural work is considered the activities which take place within cultural industries that depend on the social and spatial contexts in which the work is performed. Podcasting is arguably one of the purest types of cultural work in that the podcasts are embedded with culture. From speech performance, to rhetoric, to discourse on the podcasts, podcasters use culture and cultural referents to maintain their podcasts and its audience. Future scholarship should continue to grapple with the intersection of marginalized groups, cultural work, and the growing podcasting environment.

Further, this dissertation elaborated on the ways in which podcasters were motivated to start their podcasts and how they plan to sustain in the industry. One reason podcasters were predominantly motivated to start a podcast was to connect with others and build communities. The act of making those connections however warrants further discussion. As mentioned in Chapter VIII, Baym's (2015) relational labor concept is useful. Though the podcasters mentioned time and time again that they are looking to create communities and make connections between others, interviews also reflected the idea that engaging communities through social media was less a choice and more of a need. Again, relational labor refers to the building of social

relationships aimed at beginning or increasing one's profit; it goes beyond managing other people's feelings and is instead based on building connections that are tied to making money (Baym, 2015).

While Baym's work primarily focused on musicians, this dissertation extends the relational labor literature by exploring how Black podcasters also adhere to relational labor practices. In the interviews with podcasters, they all spoke to how important they felt it was to connect to their audience on social media. Even for big names like Tressie and Roxane, making those connections with listeners on Twitter or Instagram are a critical part to the success of the podcast. Additionally, when it was suggested that podcasting was a relatively low maintenance task, podcasters often responded with laughter and disagreement. Principally, relational labor is an investment toward building relationships with an audience that will sustain a career. More than this, audiences are able to sequester the affordances of the internet to engage in these relationships based on shared cultures, practices, and meanings.

The work on relational labor suggests that hosting an audience or creating a community of people to talk with each other and other like-minded people is a main component of the concept. As was seen in this dissertation, social and digital media communication has shifted toward audience engagement and producing economically viable feelings. This means that a host of digital communicative practices and platforms are increasingly dependent on what the audience wants and how they feel. In this way, the audience has become an integral part of media in that the very relationship between media producers and consumers likely effects the economic vitality of, in this case, one's podcast.

Further, this dissertation has echoed the sentiment that evolution of the relational labor is a "delicate balance of the professional and the personal" (Baym, 2015: 9). Certainly, the

podcasters in this study have shown this in many ways. For example, the podcasters emphasize authenticity and keeping it real – a nod to being personal; however, self-policing, doing research, and being organized are all nods to the ways that podcasters keep things professional. The dichotomy between the professional and the personal should be further probed by scholars in this area. Specifically, how do podcasters define professionalism? How do they define or actualize being “personal” on their podcasts? Even more than this, in a post-COVID era, how does the concept of relational labor continue to evolve and manifest in media?

To a greater extent, the ways that podcasters perceived convergence and participatory culture to be emerging through podcast engagement spoke to the ways in which podcasts contribute to a transmedia content landscape. For instance, both Tani Marole and Roy Wood Jr. speculated that podcasts are starting to enter into a continuous media cycle where podcasts are going to be adapted to television shows and vice versa. Both men also speculated that podcasts with big and loyal followings will have the most success in transitioning their content between media spaces. Roy Wood Jr. spoke directly to this when talking about audience:

The audience is the star power now, it used to be that having a television credit made you juicy enough. Now you have to have the audience first. Hollywood is more inclined to look at someone with an audience than someone with talent. (Personal communication, November 23, 2020)

The notion advanced by Wood Jr. is consistent with literature that suggests that podcasting as a storytelling genre continues to grow (Keinonen, 2016; Lindgreen, 2016; McHugh, 2016; Wake & Bahfen, 2016) and may continue to lead to other platforms. As Candi Lynn stated, “There’s always content in the space, there’s a conversation for everything” (Personal communication, December 18, 2020).

Additionally, this study revealed how the relatively easy access to an open, unregulated market like podcasts contributes to two things. First, anyone can potentially enter into the opinion space of podcasts given they have a recording device and the minimal skills needed to upload the audio onto a streaming site. This means that anyone can have a platform to speak through podcasts if they are able to access the right tools and resources. Thus, ordinary people, people of color, marginalized communities, women, people with disabilities, niche groups and others may continue to seek access to the medium. Scholars should continue to study these diverse content creators and audiences, as well as the conversations that are had on these platforms, as they relate to more traditional forms of media.

For some of the more seasoned podcasters, the possibility of podcast networks was something to think about. Podcast networks are collections of podcasts that are produced and disseminated to advertisers through a single corporation, or network (Hammer, 2021). As Dr. I'Anson explained, being a part of a podcast network is like having a record deal versus being an independent artist. In other words, podcast networks can provide numerous resources that aid a podcast; whereas, independent podcasters assume all the responsibilities of podcasting on their own. Tressie and Roxane were familiar with podcast networks, as their podcast started through the Luminary network. As shown, both women agreed that the reliance on a podcast network was necessary in order for them to even begin a podcast, due to their demanding careers and schedules. Marina Franklin also joined the Be Frank network, after independently producing her podcast for years. She also expressed relief after joining the network because she can now access additional resources she needs to improve her show. Both of these podcasts demonstrate, that notwithstanding the low barrier access to entry, larger networks or companies have already stepped in to contribute to the economy of podcasting, implying potential future growth.

RQ4c: From the *Freedom's Journal* to present. In 2003, when Asante spoke about the future of rhetoric, he was not just making claims about the future of rhetorical studies but also speaking to the future of Black Americans more generally:

One can examine our past centuries to gain some appreciation of the future of African American rhetoric. During the seventeenth century, our rhetoric was merely the pleadings of the enslaved who remembered the gods of our own traditions. In the eighteenth century, we petitioned colonial legislatures on the basis of their own documents. By the nineteenth century, we had Maria Stewart, David Walker, Henry Highland Garnett, Frederick Douglass, and Booker T. Washington. When the twentieth century opened, Du Bois was out front, but there was also Marcus Garvey, Ida B. Wells, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Fannie Lou Hamer. While we do not know who the personalities will be that will define the twenty-first century, we do know what issues will be predominant.

(Asante, 2003: 286)

This dissertation contributes to the literature (Banks, 2005; Brock, 2009; Florini, 2019; McIlwain, 2019) that demonstrates how Black Americans have continuously embraced changing media landscapes and evolving technologies throughout history. As Fayne (2019) suggested, because of a fluctuating media environment, components of the Black press may begin to elude standard norms of what is even considered the Black press. Implications for the intersection of the Black press and Black podcasting thus become apparent.

To be specific, the podcasters have made clear that their goal with podcasting is to create and build community through dialogue. Unequivocally, this was also the goal of the Black press as early as the nineteenth century – to create a forum for Black Americans to discuss and express

their woes, triumphs, and everyday life. Marina Franklin honed in on this point when she spoke about community, “Friends Like Us is about being real and having real conversations... I think of myself as the DJ of these conversations – I’m mixing these girls” (Personal communication, November 24, 2020). For Marina, she is deeply concerned about the forum she is creating and how that forum discourse will contribute to overall community. Further, when Marina realized that some of the topics and issues discussed on the show were not issues that were widely exposed in the Black community, she realized how important her role as a Black woman podcaster was. Like the newspapers of the 19th and 20th centuries, the news was distributed to facilitate discussions in the homes of Black Americans. Even in the 1800s, when other mainstream media neglected to include experiences of Black Americans, such perspectives could be found in the *Freedoms Journal* or *The Chicago Defender*. Now, nearly two centuries following the publishing of America’s first independently owned Black newspaper, digital media like podcasts are used to project the viewpoints and experiences of Black Americans at a time when mainstream media may lack this diversity and representation.

In addition, scholars of the Black press contended that notions of ideology circulation, community building, and idea facilitation frequently arose from community discourse through print media. In the same fashion, CTDA analysis of podcasts in this study also illuminated how podcasters aim to build community and circulate and re-circulate ideas and ideology. As the episodes in this study were produced and/or analyzed during the racially charged summer of 2020 in America, discourse analysis disclosed the many ways in which podcasters grappled with race, community advancement and enhancement, racism, and their relationships with/to white Americans and related matter. Whenever podcasters are sharing personal experiences on the podcast or even explicitly discussing means of community enhancement, they are engaging in

ideology circulation and idea facilitation, be it is subconscious or not. For example, when the *For Real, For Real* podcast members shared their experiences with police officers, they were essentially creating an idea about police officers – or at least demonstrating the idea that *they* have of police officers. While the podcasters do not tell you how to think about issues, they are promoting and circulating what they think and feel. Though further audience analysis would be required to fully explore how ideology circulation and idea facilitation are received through podcasts, it should be noted how these historical features of the Black press are visible within current practices of Black media.

This study also advances the fertile space podcasts provide for the diversity within groups to be highlighted and reflected. As an illustration, this dissertation set out to investigate diverse individuals who identified as Black podcasters. As a result, the researcher interviewed individuals who ranged in age, personality, career, genre, and abilities. These podcasters were anything but a monolith and were adamant at showcasing how unique each voice is – even for those who hosted shows with multiple people. The diversity showcased in this study points to the need to wholly understand minority racial and ethnic groups in America. The differences between elite versus more ordinary Black podcasters in this study demonstrates these realities. While Finesse Mitchell is able to call on a host of interesting people to interview, someone like Trish from *Shit Black Girls Watch* brainstorms how to invite relevant guests on her lesser-known podcast. Likewise, while Candi Lynn has had ample experience in radio, communications, and marketing and is able to coordinate her social media effectively to gain more listeners, others like Raven and Olivia struggle to manage social media to their benefit. All in all, communication and media scholars who seek to explore how disparate groups interact with media must do so in a manner that exhaustively explicates the community of interest.

The timeframe under which this study took place offers a unique look at how Black public opinion on podcasts is relatable to Black public opinion through traditional forms of the Black press. The ways in which discourse on podcasts stemmed from national current debates on race and police brutality are parallel to the ways that Black Americans facilitated discourse and response to WWII in the mid 20th century (O’Kelly, 1982; Wolseley, 1990). To illustrate, Burma (1947) wrote that during WWII, the Black press, along with the Black church, were a significant force for social control, racial solidarity, and public opinion among Black Americans. Likewise, as shown, podcasts took on the role of at least attempting to advance racial solidarity and shape public opinion through everyday talk. Especially during the racial tension that plagued America in 2020, the podcasts illuminated messages that fed off of the national unrest and projected different ideas and ideologies. Even through perspectives of film and television, Tani and Kenan addressed concern regarding national events of social injustice. Marina Franklin and various guests expounded on many discussions about the state of the country and their individual responses to it. It is clear then that digital media platforms represent modern versions of the Black press by providing an avenue for Black citizens to respond and react publicly to the current events of the time.

In total, the Black press can historically be seen as a “mirror” (Jordan, 2001: 3) of Black life with aims to center the needs and interests of Black Americans at the time. This study showed how podcasts continue the tradition of Black media as a mirror of everyday Black life. This sentiment is reflected in the theme of authenticity that was presented. As podcasters aim to show their authentic selves on podcasts, they contribute to the display of ordinary Black life through media technologies. These messages are told through referents of cultural artifacts,

traditional African orature, and experiences of Black life that are unique to Black diaspora in America.

Spaces of Opinion

This study set out to explore how podcasts contribute to larger communicative worlds as spaces of opinion and how they function as publics in a contemporary media environment. In many ways, this study has shown how spaces of opinion can be reconceptualized through podcasts. First, podcasts are a space that is constituted by social relationships, actors, institutions, and cultural traditions. Whether that be social relationships between hosts, hosts and guests, or between podcasters and their listeners, the aspect of podcasting that centers on community development and building is reflective of space where social relationships develop and actors convene with one another for discourse. Even for the *You Already Know* podcast, which did not start featuring guests on their show until their second season, the podcast is defined by the relationship between Tani and Kenan. As Tani said, “They need to hear us, grow with us. This is us at our natural core, going in on conversation” (Personal communication, November 9, 2020).

This study has shown how the podcasting space is largely defined by the actors in the space and their seeming relationships to one another and to their audience. The common use of AAR on podcasts and the podcasters’ unapologetic claims to authenticity support the sentiment that cultural traditions also constitute a large part of the space of podcasting. Future scholarship should center on other distinct communities in America and their relationship to culturally centered media. This scholarship should also then examine how cultural traditions within media opinion spaces influence or impact a listener’s reception to the space.

How institutions play a role in the podcasting opinion space should also be studied.

Podcasting can be seen as an oppositional space to institutions, as shown by this study's focus on Black Americans; the opinions and discourse which were observed attempt to resist institutional structures of racism, classism and other system barriers for Black Americans. From responses to the murder of George Floyd to critical debates about political polarization and voting in 2020 to deliberations on Black hair and identity, the people represented on the podcasts alluded to their adjacent or oppositional positions to various institutions. Thus, an examination of how AAR or other traditional referents of African American culture play out on podcasts with Black hosts within professionally oriented podcast families like NPR or *The New York Times* should be explored.

Jacobs and Townsley also contended that the nature of the space of opinion is necessary to offer a variety of formats, norms, and rhetoric. Citizens then use the norms and rhetoric of the space to help foster their opinions and engage with a wider public discussion. Podcasts reflect this aspect of the space of opinion in the fact that there is so much variety for audiences to choose from. With the traditional opinion spaces Jacobs and Townsley examined, there were only a certain number of media sites available for consumers to engage with. Meaning that their work only portrayed a handful of political talk shows and newspapers which sought to represent the interests of over 300 million Americans. Podcasts expand the boundaries of how this space is viewed or understood, especially as it relates to content that may not be as professionally delivered or speaks to a more diverse America.

Furthermore, this study showed how podcasts complicate access and autonomy in the opinion space. Access in traditional spaces of opinion set the bounds between media insiders (journalists, academics, and lobbyists) and media outsiders; the insiders have access to speak on talk shows or the opportunities to write and publish in newspapers. Yet, the ease of starting and

broadcasting a podcast helps media outsiders to level the playing field with media insiders by providing technology that can broadcast anyone's viewpoints to large audiences. Some podcasters in the sample pointed to the idea of podcasts opening up access to other spaces in entertainment media. Specifically, by networking and having a successful podcast, a media outsider could use the platform to become a media insider. As the study of the medium continues to develop, it would be of interest to examine how podcasts will begin to build celebrities or produce future influential voices.

The independent podcasters in this study were essentially autonomous and only represented the interests of themselves and their brands. This is a key feature of podcasting and shows how maintaining authenticity, building community, and everyday political talk are made possible through easy-to-use technology that can broadcast one's message to the masses. While radio is a comparable medium in that individuals are able to construct mass mediated messages, the freedom to say whatever you want and not be bound by institutional codes or guidelines marks a unique element of the podcast platform. Scholars should continue to monitor how podcast networks will infiltrate the market and what that means regarding autonomy in the space. Both *Hear to Slay* and *Friends Like Us* are part of podcast networks yet still maintain autonomy and ownership of their content; however, both are hosted by known names and have larger followings. The question becomes, can Olivia, Raven, and Lakeria – three blind women with a smaller following – secure the same opportunities as Tressie and Roxane or Marina? Thus, if networks are to become a norm in the industry, could podcasts like *Intersectional Insights* or *Living the Principles 365* be subject to eventual elimination if the larger networks find no value in them?

Publics

This dissertation also incorporated frameworks investigating publics and understandings of what constitutes a public. This study showed that marginalized groups do not always constitute counter publics or publics that exist in opposition to power. Instead, the essence of everyday podcasts showcase Black people *just being* and, with the help of digital media, the once clandestine nature of ordinary Black American life emerges through mediated public spheres. The Black counterpublic, as Dawson (1995) and Holt (1995) imagined over 20 years ago, was a space solely dedicated to the political aims of Black Americans. Political scientists Dawson and Holt contended that if such Black “counterpublics” are not actively involved in critiquing the dominant order and transforming that order then they are not representative of Black counterpublics. This study, however, did not wish to observe how counterpublics develop through media but rather how media makes it possible for diverse people to participate in the public sphere. While podcast discourse often has political underpinnings and podcasters regularly engage in everyday political talk, what this study has shown is that this is almost never a main goal of the podcasters – that is, to be political actors or commentators. More than often, if issues related to politics or power come up on podcasts, it is typically discussed within a broader conversation and in relation to current events. So, for podcasters who do engage in discourse involving political or economic advancement of the community, they are not doing so from a counter perspective or with explicit aims at criticizing power.

Further, this study advances the idea that if there is a more flexible vocabulary of publics, like Squires (2002) suggested, podcasts afford people the media space to be presented as counterpublics just as much as they afford them to be presented as simply...publics. This is significant for historically discounted communities who may not always choose to tell stories,

spread messages, or share information in opposition to a majority power. The idea of a Black public space in this study does not mean that there is an absence of politics or community advancement but rather the whole space is not encompassed by a political motive. Certainly, this reflects a changing media environment, as well as an everchanging society. In other words, when Dawson and Holt conceptualized the Black counterpublic in the mid-90s, their conceptualizations were colored by a tumultuous racial landscape and limited technological advancement. Today, one can argue whether or not the racial terrains of America can be described as tumultuous or not, but what is not to be argued is the ways in which digital media has altered traditional communicative practices.

Additionally, building upon Warner's (2002) framework of what constitutes a public, many different versions of publics through different forms of media seem to appear. For instance, since Warner's conceptualizations of publics are largely characterized by the content or discourse within publics, podcast shows – which are centered on discourse – are in natural symmetry with publics. Podcasts were shown to be self-organized, in that podcasters chose to start their podcasts, and they also dictate podcasts topics and conversations. Podcasts are also organized by whomever wants to engage with that discourse. Podcasts are also a relation among strangers because they have the power to connect strangers through discourse. This refers back to authenticity in that podcasters perceived listeners to develop relationships with personalities who are authentic, even though they are likely strangers.

In addition, networks that may form between listeners of any one podcast might infer how discourse on podcasts permits relations between strangers. Speech on podcasts was often personal and impersonal, as podcasters shared personal experiences with mass audiences who may or may not receive the speech as personal. The affordances of podcasts also allow for the

discourse to be constituted by mere attention, meaning that the visibility aspect of podcasts, coupled with the use of social media, allows users to engage, or not, with podcasts as they come to the users' attention. The active characteristics of convergence and participatory culture shown in this dissertation advance the notions that discourse on podcasts are a reflexive circulation of discourse and that the discourse acts according to the temporality of the circulation. Finally, what this dissertation describes is that each podcast analyzed in the sample exhibited its own unique poetic world-making. That is to say that these podcasters want to tell their stories and present their messages in their own way.

Concept of Mediated Everyday Talk

This dissertation has discussed how podcasts appear as spaces of opinion and mediated publics. It also supports an analytical framework called mediated everyday talk, giving scholarship a new analytical angle at understanding diverse groups in media. While Melissa Harris-Perry (2004) developed this notion of everyday talk, her perspective emphasized the nonmediated environments where everyday talk takes place. This dissertation proposes to accept and then build upon everyday talk within mediated environments, especially digital platforms like podcasts and social media. Mediated everyday talk (MET) refers to the informal, colloquial conversations that take place between friends, family, and colleagues which may then be broadcast to mass audiences through digital technologies. MET is a unique feature of contemporary digital tech that emphasizes a non-scripted, non-professional voice or discourse. This concept is novel because it pushes scholarly definitions of a public and how scholars think about public spaces. For Habermas, the public sphere was a “domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed” (1991: 398); even though Habermas' theories and ideas were not without issue, this dissertation would like to return to the simplicity of

understanding publics as domains of social worlds where public opinions are formed. While arguably neglected by Habermas neglected, scholarship should fully incorporate all viewpoints within a public sphere and fully negotiate the complexity between the public and social strata. What this means is that scholars must gain richer understandings of all groups of people in America in order to meaningfully understand what it means to be a public. Otherwise, by characterizing diverse or distinct groups of people as counterpublics categorizes *who* makes up public spaces and *who* is the counter. This is why Warner's (2002) and Squires' (2002) conceptualizations of publics are the ideal frameworks to ground the concept of MET; if scholarship broadens its understanding of who is seen as part of a public, then it alters the way scholars have witnessed, examined, and recorded most of American history.

This dissertation proposes that the MET concept is developed from the idea that a contemporary media landscape emphasizes a more informal mode of communication. In thinking about how organizations use social media, such as Twitter or Facebook, to conversationally engage with their consumers, MET similarly uses the strategy of everyday talk within media to engage audiences in a more in-depth manner. But, MET on podcasts differs from Twitter discourse by providing the space for ideas and discourse to fully be conceptualized. For example, this dissertation has shown how podcasts allow individuals the space to exhaust conversational topics. Like Tani said in his interview, "Podcasting is the only industry where you can do it at a high level for the least amount of money put in. Where you can get three to four hours of engagement versus 20-30 minutes on TV" (Personal communication, November 9, 2020). This extended amount of time gives podcasters the chance to not just promote ideas but to fully expand on them by discussing them from various perspectives, arguing and debating, identifying

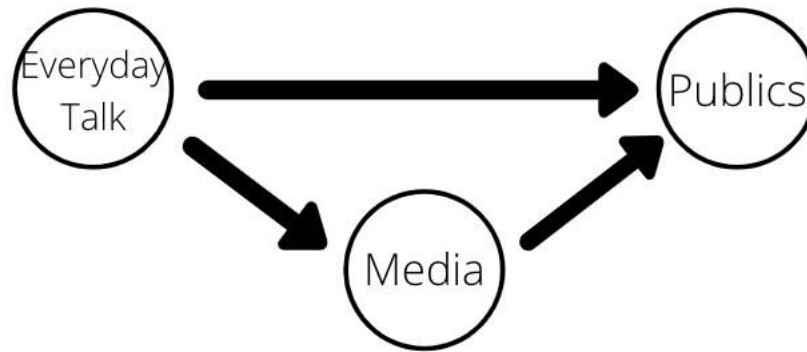
problems, suggesting solutions and more. Podcasting is particularly relevant among diverse audiences as it relates to these ideas.

MET emphasizes everyday talk, which is relevant to Black American political behavior and discourse (Harris-Perry, 2004). However, this dissertation argues that everyday talk is also a result of the ways in which marginalized voices have continued to talk, even when they were given no platform to do so. This goes back to the *Freedom's Journal*, where Black Americans developed their own space to promote and disseminate ideas; it continues to present day, as the internet and the digital landscape provides more opportunities for content creation. Along with this newer “space” to construct and develop discourse, individuals or communities who take advantage of such spaces find that they are less bound by rules and formality. Essentially, this dissertation argues scholars know less about the communication practices of diverse communities because there have been so few spaces for these audiences to be observed. And, when scholarship does attempt to understand public opinion and public opinion spaces, it often focuses on the highly mediated, professional, scripted examples of media content which often lack diversity. MET gives scholars the framework to emphasize a range of voices in a space regardless of status, celebrity, context, tone, and eloquence.

The concept of MET is described in figure one. The illustration characterizes the flow of everyday talk through media which provides observable publics. The concept of MET uses interdisciplinary theories to reconceptualize scholarly thoughts about who and what is a public. This concept argues scholarship must recognize the ways in which diverse communities exist in public spaces – including the diverse communicative practices that vary between ethnic, racial, and social groups in America. Black American speech is often rhythmic and typically involves call-and-response, signifying, and other markers of oral tradition; but, are these realities covered

by mainstream media? And, when they are visible in mainstream media, are scholars using intersectional and critical approaches to fully negotiate the complexity of the discursive practice?

Figure 1. *The Concept of Mediated Everyday Talk*



With this concept, minority groups and their distinct communicative practices are less invisible to current communication scholarship. In fact, according to Buzzsprout (2019), podcast listener diversity has radically increased since 2008, when the percentage of white podcast listeners was 73%. By 2019, that number had dropped to 59%. This shows that, as more people engage with the space of podcasting, there is greater opportunity to learn about different people and communities. If scholars are serious about studying minority groups in the media, particularly Black Americans, they must realize that traditional communication theories and approaches in media are not sufficient. The concept of MET adds to existing theoretical repertoires by using interdisciplinary theories to ground nuanced conceptualizations of publics and how they are displayed in media.

Other spaces in media, specifically social media sites like those that have been mentioned throughout this dissertation, feature MET and are eligible to be examined through the framework of the MET concept. Take a Facebook status discussing the 2020 Presidential election as an example. Such a Facebook post has the potential to generate discourse through comments on

posts (without a word character limit). In this situation, traditional methods might employ discourse analysis or qualitative or quantitative content analysis to examine the media text. However, these methods are not ideal if the text under examination needs to be culturally contextualized. Specifically, if the post is authored by a Black American, discourse may be vastly different than if it was authored by an Asian American or an Indian American. Discourse can get to be quite complex if a variety of people are engaging and interacting with the post. In this case, the use and application of more traditional communication theories and methods may not suffice. The MET concept instead suggests that critical cultural theories be applied.

A Space to hear Black Women and Hush Harbors

As far as me being a black woman, I hate to say this but even with podcasts I think it's still twice as hard to be half as good or successful. -Phyllis

Finally, this dissertation would be remiss without a discussion of how podcasting is a unique platform for Black women – a topic that arose frequently in interviews with podcasters. Seven of the podcasters specifically mentioned how podcasting is great for Black women who are generally unseen and unheard in public arenas. Even when Black women are represented in mainstream media, how often are they portrayed in their natural state of existing? For the women in the study, they found podcasting is a place where they can just *be*, as mentioned. MiMi spoke to this by suggesting that her podcast is aimed at empowering and relating to Black women, something she has rarely seen in other forms of media. Also, Tressie and Roxane echoed this when they discussed having the skill and relatability to talk to Black women on their podcast. This is something they felt like other media outlets lacked – a certain sophistication or knowledge to be able to engage with Black women. For the women who spoke to this sentiment, podcasting is revolutionary for them and their cause.

While literature about Black women in the media often focuses on the visual representations of Black women (Gammage, 2016) or how Black women are portrayed visibly through film and television (Griffin, 2014; Joseph, 2018), less scholarship devotes its time to hearing and examining texts of Black women. Of course, exemplars like Ida B. Wells, Mary Virginia Montgomery, Anna Julia Cooper, Fannie Lou Hamer, Maya Angelou and other popular Black women orators receive scholarly attention and have been examined from countless perspectives. But other Black women's voices or Black women who have not been deemed great orators, writers or may not be as famous, are largely missing in modern media analyses.

This is not to say that this space is only unique for Black women, but this dissertation would suggest that podcasting is a unique space for any marginalized voice – including women. This allows for additional questions, such as whether other women of color feel similar sentiments about podcasting as Black women? And do white women hold the same thoughts as Black women when it comes to the space of podcasting and their sense of belonging?

Even more, Vorris Nunley's (2011) work on hush harbors seems relevant within this discussion. The term African American Hushed Harbor Rhetoric (AAHHR) defines how AAR contains and conveys epistemes and rationales central to African American life and culture, free from the white gaze (Nunley, 2011). In his book, *Keepin' It Hushed: The Barbershop and African American Hush Harbor Rhetoric*, Nunley argues that AAR emerges from enclaved spaces and places and that these spatialities are known as hush harbors.

Like the Black women podcasters involved in this project have pointed out, there are so few spaces that incorporate the ideas and perspectives of Black women that they felt like they had a chance to tell their own stories on this particular platform. Even more, with an unregulated market and the freedom to say and do as one pleases, podcasts are a contemporary form of

traditional hush harbors. For example, hush harbors represent spaces where Blackness is not anchored with the concern of countering whiteness, “They are singularities – aspects of Black civil society. They are Black lifeworlds” (Nunley, 2011: 36). And, even though podcasters sometimes feel the need to self-police, they do so for themselves and not because they feel unsafe from outsiders or majority group members.

Furthermore, Nunley suggested that Black spaces, whether physical or digital, are important to Black American culture, knowledge, politics, and life. These hush harbors, or spaces are often overlooked in communication scholarship but are illuminated in this dissertation. Especially at a critical time in society when there is a dire need for inclusion, equity, and understanding, podcasts provide a space free of intrusion for the hosts but are easily accessible for all. As the space continues to grow, how will the concept of hush harbors continue to evolve? More than this, future work on podcasts might explicitly explore its parallels with African American hush harbor rhetoric.

Limitations

While this study uncovered some of the modern realities of podcasting, limitations remain. First, the podcast sample pre-selected four podcasts out of thousands of potential shows to assess. Also, this study interviewed twenty podcasters and experts out of the thousands of Black podcasters nationally; therefore scholars should be mindful about how one generalizes the findings. This dissertation attempted to show diversity within the Black American community, but that is not to undermine the number of diverse individuals who were not part of the project. The emerging field of podcast studies should continue to grapple with sampling procedures, especially in a space where many units of analyses exist.

Second, this study was limited in its ability to fully understand audience receptions of podcasts. What was shown here were the goals, motivations, and intentions of Black podcasters, but future research should examine how these goals and intentions are received by listeners. Specifically, future research should continue to explore the networks and social relationships that are formed from podcasting. This research will further expound on the ways in which diverse groups in America use media to circulate and re-circulate ideas, opinions, cultural traditions, and information.

Finally, because this study utilized qualitative approaches to investigate the medium, future work might benefit from mixed-method approaches aimed at fully contextualizing the innerworkings of podcasts, as well as their reach. For example, survey analysis and network analysis of podcast listeners could provide implications for podcast audience reception. Combining qualitative and quantitative measures on podcasts will continue to document the trends that emerge between media producers and consumers.

Conclusion and Future Research

This dissertation provided a comprehensive exploration of the ways in which Black podcasts exist as spaces of opinion through everyday talk. By critically examining discourse on four distinct podcasts during the summer of 2020 and speaking with 20 podcasters about their goals and perspectives on the industry, this study has shown the many ways in which podcasting becomes a space for public forum and idea circulation. This study offers a comprehensive and unapologetic look at the ordinary lives of Black Americans, which are so rarely highlighted in literature. By centering on a non-white community at the forefront of this study, scholars can learn more about the complexities of culture, race, class, publicness and humanity and the

various intersections with media and communication. Scholars are also able to create a record of the perspectives, words, challenges and ideas of Black Americans that will no doubt continue to shape how media is used overtime.

Emerging research in podcast studies can go many different ways. This dissertation has shown how important interdisciplinary research is for examining digital media within communication – especially when examining the communicative practices of Black Americans. Thus, exploring podcasts from theoretical perspectives situated in sociology, psychology, political science, sociolinguistics and more seem of essence. Additionally, what can audiences reveal about podcasts’ impact on contemporary society? Future studies might be able to address this by using focus groups or questionnaires to gain more clarity on listeners’ motivations and their takeaways from listening to podcasts. Researchers should focus attention on specific podcasts and their specific audiences. For example, a future study that would best complement the present one might solicit listeners of *Friends Like Us* or *You Already Know* to participate in a questionnaire or focus group. Combined data from interviews with the podcasters and their listeners could provide insight into the fuller media production-consumer cycle that exists with podcasts.

Other scholars who focus their work on diverse/marginalized/minority groups in America should use this study as a guide to understand how diverse racial and social minority groups function within media. While scholars may or may not apply concepts like AAR to the communicative practices of white women, Asian Americans or LGBTQ+ people, similar or other frameworks or concepts may be used to examine distinct groups. The concept of MET emphasizes the use of these frameworks and presents a schema for examining all types of groups within society.

The concept of MET advances that everyday talk is not exclusive to podcasts. Rather, MET is also seen on social media networking sites and other digital sites like blogging or vlogging. Future research should use this concept while studying minorities on social media and the internet. Some questions of interest might be how MET looks similar or different across media platforms, as well as what other digital technology allows for MET? Furthermore, research might investigate the role of MET in strategic communication. As organizations are utilizing social and digital media more, the standards of formality and the distance between media producer and consumer are increasingly becoming blurred. This could mean that research in a field like public relations – which is also aimed at impacting the professional practice of PR – can use the concept of MET to draw inferences on niche audiences and diverse communities. Though this study left many questions for future scholars to consider, it also answered many questions about the platform of podcasting and the diverse individuals occupying the space. As a whole, this project set out to map the ways in which podcasts inform communicative worlds, both politically and strategically. By utilizing a platform that is distinct from other forms of media, podcasters have a unique opportunity to craft communicative messages separate from an institution or a particular group ideology. As a result, podcasts amplify marginalized voices through a culture of informality and authenticity.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

IRB Study #20-1988 - Consent Form – Version Date: September 17, 2020

Study Title: Power to the Podcasts: Publics, Opinions, and the Economy of Black Podcasts

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Tegan Bratcher

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Faculty Advisor:

Joseph Cabosky, Assistant Professor

DESCRIPTION:

Tegan is conducting a dissertation research study (as a PhD student at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) on Black podcasters and their influence on social, strategic, and political communication. She is interviewing Black Americans who have started and host their own podcast. Tegan may publish the results of this research in academic journals, as part of her dissertation, in professional news media, or within a research book. She may also discuss her research in lectures to academic and non-academic organizations.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:

While risk appears remote, it is possible there is risk to your standing within the industry or community if you disclose information that may look unfavorably upon you, another person or organization. It is advised you only disclose information with this limited risk in mind. While this study may offer you no direct benefit, your participation in this research will help illuminate the social, political, and economic impact of these communication efforts and processes.

INTERVIEW FORMAT, TIME, AND PAYMENT:

If you agree to take part in this study, Tegan will interview you for between twenty minutes and a few hours, depending on your preference and availability. This interview will take place via Zoom video communications (unless otherwise arranged to interview via phone). The format of the interview will be open ended, meaning that she will ask open ended questions and the interview will likely proceed conversationally. Questions during the interview will focus on your podcast specifically (topics, audience, preparation) and on the podcasting industry in general. Additional questions will ask about your own personal insights to podcasts, Blackness, politics and popular culture.

You will not be compensated for your participation in this study.

SUBJECT'S RIGHTS:

If you have read this form and decided to participate in this project, your participation is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. When reporting her research, Tegan will use your name as it may be impossible to guarantee you anonymity, even with the use of a pseudonym. If you wish to go by pseudonym or limit descriptions about your professional affiliation or role, you may request to do so, but, as mentioned, it may be impossible to guarantee your anonymity, based on your comments. You do have the right to declare any statement as ‘off-the-record,’ ‘on background,’ or ‘not for attribution’ at your discretion. Tegan has explained this study to you and answered your questions. If you have questions or research-related problems you may reach her at teganrae@live.unc.edu.

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu

AUDIO & VIDEO RECORDING:

As part of this project, an audio and video recording (via Zoom videoconferencing) will be made of you during the time of your participation. The primary purpose of this audio/videotape is to serve as a back-up to the interviewer’s written notes. Please indicate below the uses of these audio recordings to which you are willing to consent. This is completely voluntary. If you do not wish to be audio/video recorded, you can still be interviewed by checking the “No” boxes below regarding audio recordings and by only checking the line that asks if you are willing to participate in the study and have your interview used in the research. You may ask to stop and erase the recording at any time during the interview. If you would like, a copy of this will be made available to you at no charge.

During your active participation within this project all identifying information (your contact information) and interview recordings will be stored on Tegan’s personal computer that is password protected. Video/audio recordings will be kept on Tegan’s password protected computer for one year from the date of the original interview. After one year, the recording(s) will be discarded from Tegan’s personal computer files.

By signing below, you agree that Tegan may use your interview in his research study for the purposes listed above.

If you wish to participate in this research, please return this consent form.

I consent to participate in this study and allow my comments and interactions with the researcher to be used in this study for use in the study and any accompanying publication:

____ Yes ____ No

I consent to be audio and video recorded during this study for use in the research project:

_____ Yes _____ No

I consent for the audio/videotapes to be quoted in full or in part for publication (print or electronic) or for use in classroom or professional settings for educational purposes (excluding any remarks you have declared “off the record” during the interview)

_____ Yes _____ No

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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