

September 2021

Book Review Essay: Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance

Francesca Sobande

Follow this and additional works at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws>



Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sobande, Francesca (2021). Book Review Essay: Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(9), 496-499.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss9/46>

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

This journal and its contents may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Authors share joint copyright with the JIWS. ©2022 Journal of International Women's Studies.

Dr. Francesca Sobande
School of Journalism, Media and Culture – Cardiff University
sobandef@cardiff.ac.uk
+44 29225 11352

Book title: *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*. Author(s): Moya Bailey. Publication year: 2021. Publisher: NYU Press, City: New York, US. Total number of pages: 248. Illustrations: No. Photographs: No. Appendix, or index are included: No. Price for hardcover and/or paperback copy: US\$28.00/E-book: US\$27.79. Reviewed by Francesca Sobande

Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance by Moya Bailey is a much anticipated and infinitely insightful book that is sure to be one many people avidly read and return to time after time. This crucial work offers vital and incomparable contributions to areas of research, writing, and pedagogy including, but not limited to, Black feminist and women's studies, cultural studies, digital studies, queer studies, media studies, disability studies, communication studies, and sociology. Thanks to the continued work of many people, particularly Black scholars, the area of critical race and digital studies has considerably expanded over the course of the last decade, and Black digital studies is a vibrant space filled with essential scholarly, collaborative, and activist efforts. Indeed, *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance* is undoubtedly highly relevant to such areas of work, as well as many academic disciplines, but it is also a bold and exciting book that powerfully transcends disciplinary boundaries and refuses to be contained or constrained by the conventions that bolster much of academia.

Bailey's wonderful writing is richly reflexive and is in conversation with transformative work by scholars such as Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Patricia Hill Collins, and Faithe Day. *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance* provides the reader with a creative, detailed, and distinctly engaging account of what misogynoir is, how the term has developed since Bailey first coined it, and the many ways that Black women are actively reimagining the world with the use of different digital spaces and technologies. Furthermore, as Bailey states in *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*, "I offer an invitation to readers to see this book as the first of many that address misogynoir in several arenas and locales, where I and other writers take on the unfortunate dynamism of this noxious reality" (25).

Bailey's excellent book also involves "introducing a new framework of digital alchemy" (20) which illuminates how "Black women and girls use defensive and generative digital alchemy by speaking back to and advocating for new practices that better serve their collective needs" (176–177). The discussion of digital alchemy is one of numerous facets of *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance* that demonstrate Bailey's nuanced understanding and analysis of both the problems and possibilities involved in digital experiences. In the poignant words of Bailey (183):

Misogynoir causes harm, but Black women and Black nonbinary, agender, and gender-variant folks are using digital alchemy to transform that harm and reduce its negative impact. Through the hashtags created and challenged, the web shows launched and the Tumblrs tended, a new world is not only possible but essential if misogynoir is to be truly transformed.

Regardless of whether the reader is new to Bailey's work or has followed it for a long time, they are bound to learn lots from *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*. The brilliance of this book is evident from the start, including the "Preface" which evocatively sheds light on some of the experiences, events, moments in history, people, and places that have shaped this work and led to Bailey feeling "...awakened to the profundity of the unique nexus of experience that is Black and woman on this planet and throughout colonial history" (xi).

Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance draws on various methodological traditions such as those stemming from "Africana studies, women's, gender, and sexuality studies, digital humanities, and the social sciences" (2). Bailey emphasizes that this book, which conveys "the dynamic ways that Black women are using social media as a form of health praxis" (2), would not be possible without a mixed-method approach. Bailey's innovative methodological approach to this work includes "using the digital humanities tools Gephi and Voyant for network and text analysis, respectively" (2) and "the close reading of media texts in women's, gender, and sexuality studies and Africana studies, as well as the interview from sociology" (2).

Although some people ascribe a newness to the term "misogynoir" ("pronounced *mi-soj-uhn-nwar*") (1), as this book indicates, the dedicated work that led to the term's development spans more than a decade and includes Bailey's thinking and writing before the publishing of Bailey's (2010) Crunk Feminist Collective (CFC) blog piece "They Aren't Talking about Me..." which introduced many people to the term "misogynoir" for the first time. Relatedly, Bailey and Trudy's (2018) *Feminist Media Studies* work "On misogynoir: citation, erasure, and plagiarism" also provides an important account of their significant roles in how the term "misogynoir" was created and proliferated.

With care, candor, and a generative critical approach, in *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance* Bailey takes the reader on a meaningful journey which involves learning about many aspects of the lives of Black women, including societal experiences of invisibility and hypervisibility in the US, and significant forms of digital creativity and resistance. As Bailey explains early on in this book, "Misogynoir describes the uniquely co-constitutive racialized and sexist violence that befalls Black women as a result of their simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and gender marginalization" (1). In the process of articulating what misogynoir is and how it has come to be known as such, Bailey reflects on and highlights the extensive key and compelling writing of "womanist blogger Trudy at her now sunsetted *Gradient Lair*" (xiv), whose "work introduced online communities to the word, and she deftly articulated its utility. Her work and others helped the term reach a wide range of audiences, including an international one" (xiv).

The community-oriented underpinnings of *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance* are apparent throughout the book. In Bailey's words, "I hope that, in addition to creating a term that is useful, I have created a book that is useful to the communities with which I study. I hope that future efforts similar to the successful campaigns and actions I describe here will further improve the lives of Black women and their communities" (xiv). Examples of Bailey's impactful collaborative work such as the co-authored book *#HashtagActivism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice* (Jackson, Bailey, and Foucault Welles 2020) also demonstrate an ethos that centers on community.

Among the numerous great qualities of *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*, is the way Bailey carefully considers and clearly communicates choices and uses of words and terms related to this topic. In "Black Women ≠ Black Feminists", one of many sections of the book that particularly stands out, Bailey reflects on decisions that were made regarding language while working on *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*. As Bailey (18–19) puts it:

In writing this book, I struggled to come up with language that fully captured who is engaged with this transformation of misogynoir. The term "Black women" is often assumed to mean straight and cis, with queer and trans Black women identified explicitly because of this normative assumption. Additionally, the term "Black women" is not inclusive of nonbinary, agender, and gender-variant Black folks whose experiences of misogynoir are intimately connected with a misgendering of them. I struggled to reconcile my use of a term that is central to my definition of misogynoir yet excludes some of the people most invested in its transformation. For those of us on the margins of Black womanhood, "woman" is not what we name ourselves even as misogynoir colors our experiences of the world.

Reflections such as these are rare in many scholarly spaces and books, even within the field of women's studies. Few Black feminist and women's studies texts that are referred to as "canonical" have dealt with all that Bailey attends to in this section of *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*. As Bailey points out, in society the normative assumption that the term "Black women" means straight and cis often goes unacknowledged and, in turn, is reinforced. By taking the time to share such informed thoughts on language and power dynamics in relation to *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*, Bailey invites readers to engage with this vivid book with an approach that involves them accounting for exclusionary ways that the term and expectations of "Black womanhood" often function in society. In this same section of the book ("Black Women ≠ Black Feminists"), Bailey concisely challenges reductive and harmful assumptions that all Black women are Black feminists and that all Black feminists are Black women. It is not possible to name all the wide-ranging contributions that *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance* makes, but these undeniably include critical interventions such as those conveyed in the section titled "Black Women ≠ Black Feminists".

As *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance* alludes to, the relationship between media representations and material conditions is often trivialized in society, despite an evident connection between both. In this book, Bailey elucidates "how popular culture

representations influence Black women's treatment in society and medicine today" (xiii). Such work establishes the need to take seriously the ways that media and cultural depictions and the market logics that buttress them affect myriad elements of Black women's lives. In addition to this, *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance* is an in-depth account of how Bailey's conceptualization of misogynoir emerged and has developed since Bailey first "landed on the word 'misogynoir' to describe the particular venom directed at Black women through negative representations in media" (xiii). There are not words that can do this book and its brilliance justice. I look forward to returning to reading *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance* again, and know that this timeless work will help many to continue to reimagine and shape the future for the better.

References

Bailey, Moya. (2021) *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*. NYU Press: New York, US.

Bailey, Moya. & Trudy. (2018) 'On misogynoir: citation, erasure, and plagiarism.' *Feminist Media Studies*, 18(4), 762–768.

Bailey, Moya. (2010) 'They Aren't Talking about Me. . . .' *Crunk Feminist Collective* (blog), March 14, 2010. <http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2010/03/14/they-arent-talking-about-me/>

Jackson, Sarah J., Bailey, Moya., & Foucault Welles, Brooke. (2020) *#HashtagActivism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice*. The MIT Press: Cambridge, US.