

[Double-Consciousness and the Digital Individual: Reflections on Black Thought 2.0](#)

by Faithe Day | HASTAC

A reoccurring theme during the Black Thought 2.0 conference, which is also reflected in Black Studies, was the idea of tensions between personas or a sense of double-consciousness. The main panel that discussed this tension was the second Panel titled “[On the Grid: Teaching and Researching in the Digital](#)” after the moderator brought up the question of having a public and private life in the digital world and in the real world. Howard Rambsy II discussed it in terms of a double-consciousness between the analog self and the digital self, while Allison Clark attributed this idea to “code-switching”. While only some of the panelists expressed a separation between their public and private selves in terms of their use of social media sites, I could not help but think of the idea of Black Twitter and the long history of doubleness when thinking about and/or enacting “acceptable” modes of cultural blackness and modes that are seen as “unacceptable”.

As [@ruthellenkocher](#) tweeted “The question of the public/private space inhabited by Black presence existed long before ‘We Wear the Mask.’ Do we foster it? #BT2Duke”. To me, this statement references a time that goes all the way back to slavery in which slaves were constantly under surveillance by their master or mistress and overseers that would punish them for anything that they did that would be considered out of line. Slaves cherished their free time because it gave them a chance to escape the tyranny of judgmental eyes in order to go back to a community of people that understood and supported them as Black people, not just Black property.

In many ways Black Twitter works in the same way because it tends to provide a place for Black people to leave the “White World” in order to become a part of a community that understands their struggle and their interests. Although Black Twitter has been used to mobilize a group of people around social action i.e. the Trayvon Martin tragedy, Black Twitter does not usually function in such a way. Many times Black Twitter comes to our attention because a topic that stereotypically represents the black community is trending i.e. #BasketballWives or #RHOA. At the same time, I go back to Ruth Ellen Kocher’s question because although it seems necessary to have a space in which we can discuss topics that might not be acceptable in a public space i.e. the latest exploits of Chris Brown, it seems problematic to separate what gives us private pleasure from more public spaces.

Who decides which modes of black cultural expression are acceptable or unacceptable? Is it only acceptable to discuss black cultural artifacts in an academic sense? As S. Craig Watkins discussed during his keynote there was a time in which it wasn’t considered academic to write about Hip-Hop and now there are many scholars that specialize in the field. While this is a movement from taking something that has given many people entertainment and enjoyment, will everything within black culture make that move and should it? Although I think that the final panel gave great feedback on how they balance entertainment and criticism (“[The Twitterati and Twitter-gentsia: Social Media and Public Intellectuals](#)”) I do wonder if turning a critical eye on these cultural expressions is just a part of being an academic or is it just continuing a history of differentiating between the spheres of blackness.

