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Studying #BlackLivesMatter through the MPC Program: 2016 Alumna Tacicia Bryan



Exploring and Discovering Research Interests

I have long had a passion for learning about black emancipation, leadership and activism. It was this passion that drove me to learn about the lives of Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Junior, Marcus Garvey, and Viola Desmond as well as the legacies of my own family recounted through stories passed through the generations. And it was this passion that motivated my research in the Masters in Professional Communication program where I explored the evolution of black identity and the varied expression of black narratives.

Through my Major Research Project, “#BlackLivesMatterToronto, A Qualitative Study of Twitter’s Social Discourse on Systemic Racism,” I analyzed the expression of black voices on the Twitter account of Black Lives Matter Toronto (BLMTO), an activist group that campaigns against police brutality and racial discrimination. To better understand the role of social media in anti-racist activism, I decided to collect and analyze tweets from BLMTO’s Twitter account from April 1st to 15th, 2016, during the group’s #BLMTOtencity campaign.

Mentorship & Academic Support

With the help of my MRP supervisor, Dr. John Shiga, and my second reader, Dr. Marty Fink, I surveyed the literature on the public sphere, critical race theory, media framing, and social identity theories. Through a blend of content and sentiment analysis, I identified patterns in the topics, themes and emotional tone of BLMTO’s tweets. I studied the way BLMTO uses Twitter as a collective identity-building platform, and observed narratives of identity, justice, accountability and transparency in tweets posted by both supporters and detractors of BLMTO. Each of the theoretical perspectives helped me explore how BLMTO uses Twitter, what issues or topics the group shares online, how Twitter is used to support critical-rational discourse, how current emancipation efforts are documented, and how activists and their messages are perceived by others around them.

Through my MRP I investigated the ways in which activists use Twitter to discuss the impact of social structures on their lives. With current and potential changes in the North American political climate, as well as recurring issues of racism, systemic oppression and structural barriers, there is so much to consider as a black person in Canada today. While I am extremely fortunate to live in this country and at this point in history, I also think it’s important to revisit and critically examine how power, communication and information in society impact the diverse experiences of black people in Canada and in other parts of the world.

MPC: Balancing Theoretical and Practical

I was drawn to the Masters in Professional Communication Program because it offers students a unique balance of theoretical and practical concepts. In addition to studying communication theories, I learned proposal writing and design concepts while bolstering my presentation skills and business communication knowledge. The MPC Program is much more than just course material; my instructors and peers also provided me with abundant support, mentorship and guidance.

After graduating I pursued volunteer work at my local church, empowering people to live above life’s circumstances, and assist other black female students with questions concerning their studies. I hope to use my voice, philanthropy, outreach and volunteer work to positively impact the black community in Canada. I also want to help build

an environment where diversity is our strength – or as my Jamaican family would say, “Out of many, one people.”

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