

FROM THE MARGINS:
REPRESENTATIONS OF AFRICANA QUEER WOMEN IN VISUAL MEDIA

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by

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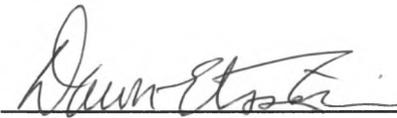
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *From the Margins: Representations of Africana Queer Women in Visual Media* by Arnetta Smith, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University.

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Arnetta Smith
San Francisco, California
2015

Using content analysis and a combination of manifest and latent coding to decipher meaning from messages found in media, *From the Margins: Representations of Africana Queer Women in Visual Media* is a qualitative thesis that examines the representation of masculine of center Africana queer women in visual media and answers the research questions: how do films and television series represent masculine of center Africana queer women and how do previous depictions of Africana women and men in film and television influence contemporary representations of MOC Africana queer women? This project focuses on two types of visual mediums from the past twenty years (1994-2014): films and television series. The first chapter introduces the project and discusses the justification for research. The next chapter examines and analyzes prior literature on social constructions, media socialization effects, and representation of populations. The “Methods” chapter outlines the entire research process. The “Results” chapter presents the themes found within the data. The last chapter, “Discussion” exposes prevalent tropes and implications found within the data.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis



Chair, Thesis Committee

5-21-15
Date

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Introduction

“Which doll looks like you?”

-The Clark Doll Study

In 1939, Dr. Mamie and Kenneth Clark conducted the Clark Doll Experiment and discovered that Black children were suffering from self-hatred and internalized racism; their experiment outlined the result of being racially segregated in the United States. The Clarks found that Black children associated most of the positive attributes with whiteness and negative attributes with blackness. While the entire experiment exposed the power of racism, the last and most revealing question, “Which doll looks like you?” exposed the participants’ (Black children) internalized inferiority and self-hatred. Decades later, high school student Kiri Davis (2005) replicated the Clark experiment in Harlem and found similar results; out of 21 participants, 15 associated positive traits with the white doll, another indication of Black inferiority. Davis's study was a part of her film “A Girl Like Me” where she discusses how messages from society and media informs self-conception and racial identity.

From the Margins: Representations of Africana Queer Women in Visual Media is a qualitative research project that continues the conversation of self-conception and identity formation by examining visual representations of Africana masculine of center lesbian characters in film and television. In an attempt to move the conversation

forward and make it relevant to the evolving concepts of identity, this project provides a more holistic examination of constructing identity and self-conception by looking at the intersectionality of race, gender and sexuality.

Previous research surrounding media, identity and representation disclosed several trends. On one hand, communication and media theorists agree that interaction with visual mediums such as film and television can inform the construction of a person's identity and their perspectives on other cultures and people (Berry, 1988; Greenberg, 1988, Kellner, 1995). On the other hand, communication, race and feminist theorists argue that by stereotyping characters, visual media acts as a way to manipulate and maintain the dominant social order, suggesting that visual media sends messages that support and perpetuate existing values and attitudes within normative society (Greenberg, 1988; Kellner, 1995; Collins, 2000; Ferguson, 2005). However, in all of their approaches, they privileged white, heterosexual, and male experiences by centering the discourse of identity construction and representation on their perspectives. Unfortunately, excluding identities that fall outside of the normalized representations result in a limited and segregated analysis. *From the Margins* fills this gap by focusing on subversive intersecting identities.

Before delving into the meat of this project, certain terms used throughout this thesis need to be defined for clarity purposes. The term Africana is used to label people of African descent throughout the diaspora (Carroll, 2008; Reid-Merritt, 2009). Additionally, the labels “Black”, “African American” and “of African descent” are used

interchangeably with Africana to reflect and indicate cultural differences between geographical locations. 'Queer' is also used throughout the thesis and is most commonly used as an umbrella term to represent the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning population. Additionally, queer is used instead of lesbian to act as an inclusive label that acknowledges women who may choose to identify as lesbian, bisexual, asexual, or pansexual. The term woman is used to identify cisgendered females that "identifies as the gender/sex they were assigned at birth" (Oxford, 2005). Lastly, masculine of center (MOC) refers to people who adopted masculine gender-scripted dress and behaviors used to identify their role in society and relationships (Cole, 2008). It is also used as an umbrella term to reflect the varied ways of naming MOC lesbians (i.e. butch, stud, gender-queer, and gender non-conforming).

This project creates a discursive context and space for intersectional identity construction by answering the following questions. How do films and television series represent Masculine of Center Africana queer women? Additionally, how do previous depictions of Africana women and men in film and television influence contemporary representations of MOC Africana queer women? By answering these two questions, my research will fill the gap in Ethnic Studies by going outside the racialized heterosexual paradigm and providing a text that can be added to the fledgling scholarship that discusses the intersectionality of race, gender and sexuality. Additionally, it will fill the gap in film and media history by providing a text that combines film history and representation with race, gender, and sexual identities. Finally, my work is

interdisciplinary, as it contributes to the overall discussion of visibility, representation and intersectional identity in media, ethnic, gender and queer studies.

From the Margins takes the typical approach to reporting a qualitative research project by following thesis guidelines for structure and format. Therefore following this introduction, Chapter II - "Review of Related Literature" reviews previous literature that examines social and identity constructions, the effects of media, and representation of populations. Next, contributions and trends found in the literature are examined and analyzed. Finally, limitations found within the scholarship are discussed.

Chapter III - "Methods" provides the theoretical frameworks and methods used to research and answer the guiding questions. In addition, this chapter discusses the process of breaking down and reviewing media so that replication is possible. Lastly, justifications for the media selected and analyzed are presented. Chapter IV - "Results" reveals the findings from the research. Specifically, this chapter examines and discusses the positionality of MOC Africana queer women by looking at how they perform their racial, sexual, and gender identities. In addition, this section is interested in the role of gender perception and how race and gender is negotiated to produce imagery that falls in line with the current social and cultural hegemony.

Chapter V, the discussion and conclusion of this thesis, provides a typology of MOC Africana Queer female images that emerged from the data. The social and political implications are discussed and suggestions of how to produce media messages that

contribute to oppositional knowledge, or “knowledge that is developed by, for, and/or in defense of oppressed groups interests” (Collins, 2000, p. 299) are mentioned. The need to hear all voices and to see every experience will help to understand the correlations between various forms of oppression and racial, hereto-normative societies.

Review of Related Literature

Representations of queerness in film and television are becoming more common. From shows like *Queer As Folk* (2000) and *The L Word* (2004), media has open doors that allow society to experience queer culture. However, the queer culture that's experienced is from a Eurocentric lens since a majority of the actors casted are white and the stories are rooted in their experience. What does this mean for queer people of color who have a different cultural experience? Contemporary scholarships discuss the history and representation of queerness, gender roles, and race in films and other visual mediums. In their examination, scholars found evidence of media socialization, social constructions, stereotypical tropes, and identity formation. The selected literature discussed research that examines Africana, queer, and/or female identities and their representations in visual media. Through a collection of peer-reviewed journal articles, anthologies, books, theses, and dissertations, the following is a review and critique of their evidence.

Identity Constructions within Media Culture

Examining the relationship between popular film and lesbian viewing practices, Dobinson & Young (2000) attempts to explain current ideas around audience engagement and forms of cultural reception. They argue that previous research surrounding lesbian visibility is only focusing on one aspect of lesbianism in media. To continue to research visibility, is to continue an incomplete picture, which includes the connection between lesbians and their viewing consumption. Therefore, using an interpretative paradigm, or

“a broad range of qualitative approaches to media reception and interpretation” (Dobinson & Young, 2000, p.98), the authors demonstrates the existence of active lesbian viewers and how their interpretations of films are informed by life experiences and cultural competencies.

They interviewed fifteen lesbians, who were primarily white, educated, and young. Only two women of color responded to the notice, only five respondents had less than four years of university education, and just four were over 30 years of age (of these four, two were in their thirties and two were in their forties)” (p. 105). Interviews were recorded on audiotape and participant's demographic information were kept separate from responses to interview questions. Additionally, Dobinson & Young (2000) reviewed several pieces of literature concerning the intertextual possibilities when viewing media. They found that lesbian viewers typically identified with characters that they found most desirable. For example, roles where women took control, were an outlaw, or had some form of autonomy, were identifiable as lesbians since they fell outside the constructed female role of submissiveness (Dobinson & Young, 2000). The authors suggest that lesbians identify with or desire these kinds of heterosexual female characters because of the lack of lesbian heroines in mainstream media with whom they can identify.

Dobinson & Young (2000) found that inadvertent lesbian verisimilitude also played a part of identifying with heterosexual characters. Inadvertent lesbian verisimilitude refers to knowing what a lesbian looks like (Dobinson & Young, 2000). This knowledge is based on the lesbian stereotype (non-feminine, unable to fit in

mainstream society, etc.). For example, the authors used the film *Wildcats* in which Susan, played by Goldie Hawn, is a football coach that leads her all male team to and ends up winning a championship game. During the entire film, several male characters warn her that she is outside of normal gender role for women. Her role of a football coach falls in line with a non-feminine role. Additionally, the implication of her going outside the gender role prescribed to women, indicates that she is unable or more accurately refusing to fit into mainstream society. Susan is obviously heterosexual (as seen by her relationship with a male colleague), but she is still inferred by lesbian viewers as being a lesbian character since she goes against the norm and is in a non-feminine role.

While I agree with Dobinson & Young's (2000) argument that analyzing lesbian viewership is important; I don't agree that we should stop focusing on lesbian visibility. To do so is to assume a position that there is enough scholarship on lesbian visibility and/or that lesbian visibility is no longer an issue. As my thesis project reveals, both are false assumptions. Additionally, the idea of inadvertent lesbian verisimilitude relies heavily on stereotypes of lesbians, which rarely includes femme-presenting (behavioral characteristics associated with “feminine” visual presentation in a given culture) women (Tate et al., 2013). Therefore, even in examining lesbian viewership, there must be an examination of lesbian visibility.

Another limitation included their population size. Fifteen participants are hardly enough to thoroughly examine lesbian viewership and identification. Additionally, there was no mention of the participants' cultural background. Dobinson & Young's (2000)

research was to explain current ideas around audience engagement and forms of cultural reception. Therefore, leaving out the participants' cultural background leaves out how their cultural background influences their response to the films and characters. Lastly, as they noted, there were only two women of color, which again leaves out the perspective of a large segment of lesbians.

Media theorist, Douglas Kellner (1995) argues that, “[m]edia culture also provides the materials out of which many people construct their sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality, of 'us' and 'them.' Media culture helps shape the prevalent views of the world and [its] deepest values: it defines what is considered good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil” (p.1). Echoing that sentiment, educational theorist, Gordon Berry (1988), concludes that media can consciously and unconsciously function as a way to either reinforce existing values and attitudes or influence audience members around ideas within normative society.

Berry (1988) also displayed the relationship between social attitudes, children acquire through traditional socialization, with the multicultural attitudes they *could* acquire through visual media, if used as a socializing tool. Television and other visual mediums, is inherently multicultural in the way that it displays diversity in its portrayals of different groups of people and cross-cultural in terms of the audience's demographic (Berry, 1988). The exposure of different groups of people, ideas, and cultures found in visual media, such as television and film, can allow the viewer, that is not a part of that group, to start forming their own perspectives about that group based on what they see

(Berry, 1988; Kellner, 1995). For Africana queer women, this is especially important since behavior normalized on-screen is often normalized in society (Berry, 1988; Kellner, 1995).

Berry's (1988) research revealed several limitations. The singular limitation included in the article, hinges on the idea of the level of influence television can have on an audience member's psyche. For example, how much influence can a television program have when it exhibits behaviors that *don't* align with the viewer's ideals and values? In this way, the level of influence is dependent on the viewer's level of knowledge on the subject and whether or not the visual media's subject falls within the viewer's current perspective (Berry, 1988).

Another limitation, not mentioned in the article, is the brevity of the analysis of Berry's television socialization theory. He cites several authors regarding the influence of television, but doesn't delve deeper into the type of influence it may have on the viewer's psyche. For example, is the influence positive or negative, helpful or harmful? Berry does offer guidelines for fair and desirable multicultural portrayals on television, which would indicate that he recognized, at the time of the article and I argue, currently, how media displays unfair and undesirable multicultural role portrayals. However, his use of the term multicultural is problematic because it indicates a fair (as in an equal amount of) representation of all peoples and ignores the white homogenous imagery that dominates mainstream media.

Communication author and scholar, Bradley Greenberg (1988) also acknowledges media's socialization effect and seems to answer the question unresolved in Berry's (1988) text. He argues that images and stereotypes are internalized much more by vivid or crucial programs than by others. He calls this "The Drench Effect". "The Drench Effect" (1988) asserts that, "not all portrayals have the same impact" (p. 98). In other words, what may affect one person may have a totally different or no effect at all on another person. This implies that an audience has control over whom they identify with and what they choose to internalize. For example, the author suggests that a program like *The Bill Cosby Show* could affect a person more than a program like *Sanford & Sons*. He states that positive portrayals of Blacks may supersede images of portrayals that are more negative. In simpler terms, Black audience viewers may choose to identify with the characters on *The Bill Cosby Show* since the character portrayals falls outside the historical negative stereotypical portrayals of blackness.

The main limitation of Greenberg's (1988) text falls within its heavy theoretical approach. While Greenberg (1988) does provide a content analysis of gender in media discussed further in the social control section of this review, he challenges the opposing drip-drop hypothesis by simply positing an alternative one, the drench hypothesis. Additionally, he gives a theoretical example (*Cosby Show* vs. *Sanford and Son*) that is centered around the person's ability to critically read stereotypes. However, neither Berry's (1988) or Greenberg's (1988) texts approach media socialization from a position of praxis. This is where media theorist, Douglas Kellner fills the gap.

In “Media Culture” (1995), Kellner posits that while identities in pre-modern societies were fixed and dependent upon traditional social roles, identities emerging within modernity are more “mobile, multiple, personal, self-reflexive, and subject to change” (p. 231). Acknowledging that identities in modernity are still subject to and defined by “social norms, customs, and expectations” (p. 231), it allows for an examination and in some instances, rejection of an identity that doesn't fall in line with one's self-perception of themselves as an individual.

However, it is within post-modern societies where identities are linked to a physical manifestation of ‘self’ as opposed to a function of the collective community in pre-modern societies and the creation of a unique individuality found in modernity. In other words, post-modern societies are constructing their identities based on images, style and looks that most often come from images produced from mass media (Kellner, 1995). Using data from his content analysis of *Pretty Woman*, Kellner (1995) supports his argument by displaying the identity construction within the film, and the subliminal messages audiences receive that comes from that construction. “[*Pretty Woman*] illustrates the process of self-transformation through fashion, cosmetics, diction, and style, and the extent to which identity is mediated through image and look in contemporary culture. The result... was a new personality, a new identity, enabling her to get her man and become a success in the image identity market. The message of the film is thus that if you want to become a new you, to transform your identity, to become successful, you need to focus on image, style, and fashion” (Kellner, 1995, p. 245).

Due to the very nature of challenging other post-modernist theorists concerned with media effects, Kellner (1995) chooses films (*Pretty Woman*, *Miami Vice*) that overtly conflate identity construction with fashion, which ultimately supports his overarching argument of identity being influenced by a particular style and look. Instead, a more useful approach would've been to include films that possess both overt and subliminal identity construction within its narrative. This would provide a deeper analysis in displaying media's influence over an individual's identity construction. In light of this, he does a great job analyzing and critiquing racist (*Miami Vice*) and sexist (*Pretty Woman*) portrayals of non-normative characters and displaying the underlying messages of identity hegemony.

Media Messages and Identity Hegemony

Historically, normative behaviors were enforced through laws of exclusion (Takaki, 1989) and maintained through regions of hegemony or “social constructions influenced by the dominated group and used for signification within social structures” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 69). However, while currently, laws are changing to become more inclusive, media is taking the role of perpetuating exclusive imagery of normative and abnormative roles and identities in society. Positioning media in this way, determines who gets seen (visibility) and who doesn't (invisibility).

Critical race theorist, Roderick Ferguson (2005) expands on this notion of hegemony within queer discourse. In his chapter *Race-ing Homonormativity*, Ferguson (2005) attempts to connect sociology's designation of sexuality as a social phenomenon

to past and present social formations by way of racial exclusion and ethnic inclusion. He asserts that the concept of homonormativity is created out of the social formations that established the society's racial, gender and sexual norms. To support his argument, he cites articles such as the "The Homosexual Role" (1968), which utilized labeling theory as a tool to display homosexual traits that are in direct opposition to the sexual norm. Additionally, Ferguson (2005) extends his argument to include how "white homonormative formations understand class and race differences that suggest gender and sexual non-normativity as incoherent and thereby worthy of regulation" (p. 53). Ferguson (2005) states that assimilation is possible if differences, in opposition to the societal norm, were rejected. If the norm was whiteness, heterosexuality, and patriarchal ideals, then it was near impossible for any non-white groups, homosexual groups, and female or female identified groups to assimilate.

Ferguson's usage of the term, homonormativity, is based on the idea that homosexuals, who are able to assimilate by conforming to racial and gender norms do so by regulating their homosexuality to the private sphere (Ferguson, 2005). He argues that the regulation allows them to benefit from racial privilege, which indicates that Ferguson is conflating homonormativity with whiteness. This is problematic because it then ignores other ways homosexuals can assimilate when racial and gender identity is in opposition. Additionally, Ferguson (2005) briefly mentions a transition of homonormativity from one that included regulation to one that now includes visibility. However, he proves this argument by citing one scholar, Manalansan (1997), who posits that homonormativity

moved from concealment of sexuality to visibility through political participation. Simply citing a well-respected scholar doesn't provide the empirical evidence needed to adequately support his argument. In addition, using the term visibility without defining it, could lead to confusion since a discourse around invisibility and visibility could produce different meanings for different groups of people. He does go on to explain how visibility is now a homo-normative location, which is pertinent to the conversation since as argued previously, media imagery normalized on-screen helps to normalize those images in society.

Expanding the conversation around queer visibility, communication professor and author, Rob Cover (2000) examined the depiction of queerness in films and its effect on the construction of youth's sexuality. Acknowledging that media portrayals of sexuality in opposition to dominant culture might be the 'first contact' some youth has with other forms of sexuality, he questions the type of visibility that is being produced and shown in films. Operating within queer theory and using content analysis, Cover (2000) examines four mainstream movies with significant portrayals of queer content: *My Best Friend's Wedding*, *In and Out*, *Chasing Amy*, and *The Object of my Affection* (p. 72). He asserts that these films “operate within accepted discourses on sexuality that require both the notions of public self-disclosure and of the 'truth' of the hetero/homo binary” (p. 73). In other words, the selected films placed emphasis on public honesty about one's sexuality and a perpetuation of a rigid binary formation of sexuality.

Upon examination, Cover (2000) found several messages transmitted from the films that were problematic. One issue lies in the possible danger associated with publicly announcing or displaying your sexuality when it is in opposition to the dominant culture. Another message that didn't sit well with him was the lack of fluidity in the construction of sexuality, which ignores those whose sexuality doesn't neatly fall in the homo/hetero binary. In a deeper analysis of the films, he found other messages that could possibly influence sexuality formation. He cites a scene from the film *In and Out* in which the main character listens to a tape entitled "Getting a Grip". The message the main character and thus the audience receive from the tape suggests that sexuality is intrinsically linked to the physical capabilities of the body (Cover, 2000). Additionally, within the same scene, masculinity is conflated with heterosexuality suggesting that if you're a gay man, you somehow lose your masculine identity.

There are several limitations in this piece. First, the author only looks at White films. This in itself suggests that non-white queers are removed from the conversation. One could argue that the messages received are universal. However, positing universalism in an absence of representation looks at behavior without looking at experience or cultural context (Baldwin & Bell, 1985). Without taking these two aspects into consideration, the author falls short of contributing to a holistic theory of sexual formation. The lack of racial visibility in Cover's (2000) work inherently places whiteness over 'others', thus, creating a homonormative location within the dialogue of media's formation of sexuality (Ferguson, 2005).

In addition, Cover's (2000) decision to look at only Hollywood produced films assumes that youth only have access to mainstream media. Ignoring independently produced films ignores other possible messages that could be received and used in forming one's sexual identity. Lastly, the amount of films analyzed was not enough to support the writer's theory of identity formation. Thus, his analysis is incomplete, although it is a good first step in starting the conversation around media's influence on social formations.

While Ferguson (2005) looks at visibility and race hegemony and Cover (2000) looks at youth identity construction within a hegemonic society that conflates masculinity with heterosexuality, communication scholar, Diana Sargent (2013) uses her thesis to examine the "bromance" culture that has emerged in American society and to conceptualize how media relates to masculine hegemony. She defines bromance as a newly created social construction of masculinity that may allow for freer expression in male/male relationships. Sargent uses homosocial, queer, humor and masculinity theories along with a textual analysis of the films, *Superbad*, *I Love You, Man*, and the television series *How I Met Your Mother* to explain the transformation of masculinity. In addition, an ethnographic study of an audience viewing the film, *The Room* was conducted to better understand manifestations of homosocial environments in mediated texts and in real life settings.

Sargent (2013) found several themes after critiquing and examining the selected films. One theme, which was consistent throughout all of the media, was homophobia.

Instances of homophobia emerged as either directed toward a specific character or referencing a discomfort with male intimacy in general. Another theme found was an idea of codes of conduct for men. A book and a set of rules, the “Bro Code” (p.43) dictates the 'appropriate' and 'acceptable' behaviors between two male friends. The introduction of the book categorizes sex as a sport, thus suggesting that relationships are games, “with women as the game pieces or prizes to be won after successful pursuit” (p. 44). Therefore, the “code of conduct”, disguised as camaraderie and fraternity, is actually telling men to objectify and manipulate women. Sargent argues that the construction of masculinity is dependent upon the social structure and specific culture (p. 6). This indicates that masculinity is a performance of a fictional representation or symbolic gesture to society, meaning masculinity is fluid and not bound to the binary traits of gender.

As in most of the literature reviewed, Sargent (2013) privileges whiteness because of her selection of media. Again, this skews the conversation around masculinity and identity in media. How does reviewing white media help other groups of people when thinking about their identity construction? Additionally, she looked at heterosexual male relationship, which indicates that she is also conflating masculinity with heterosexuality. While this text provided a much needed discussion around masculinity and homophobia and challenges the notion of masculinity as a fixed opposite, Sargent's (2013) research still perpetuated a hegemonic discourse surrounding media and identity formation by examining masculinity through a heterosexual and Eurocentric lens.

Media Representations and Social Control

Cinema scholar and author, David Lugowski (1999) discusses the historic formation of queerness, identity, and hegemonic social control. He argues that queer imagery can be found in all types of U.S. cinema produced between the 1929 stock market crash and the United States' entry into WWII. Lugowski defines queer imagery as “lines of dialogue, and characters that represent behavior coded, according to widely accepted stereotypes, as cross-gendered in nature” (p. 4). He blames the regulation of these images on the Great Depression and the resulting economic decline on the reversal of gender roles. Where before the female was restricted to the private sphere, and thus most times economically dependent, the Great Depression and the rise of unemployment forced most men into a position of dependency that was once reserved for women. In the words of Robert McElvaine, "the Depression can be seen as having effected a 'feminization' of American society” (as cited in Lugowski, 1999, p. 3). In other words, if men associated their masculinity with work in the public sphere, then the loss of work is a loss of masculinity. This lost of masculinity, as Lugowski argues, caused the regulation of queer images in film.

Feminine men and masculine women became a signifier of the current economic status of the country (Lugowski, 1999) and there was an overwhelming concern over what was seen as the need for "suitable" representation in light of the Depression's crisis and the reversal of gender roles. Lugowski (1999) concluded that from 1932 to the middle of 1934, the worst years of the Depression, Hollywood produced more films that

included explicit references of homosexuality. As a result, Hollywood's Production Code Association (PCA) and its secretary, Olga Martin, proclaimed in the 1937's 'Hollywood's Movie Commandments' that “No hint of sex perversion may be introduced into a screen story. The characterization of a man as effeminate, or a woman as grossly masculine would be absolutely forbidden for screen portrayal.” (p. 5). Enforcement of regulating queerness from the screen proved to be an impossible task since the very people who censored the imagery relied on stereotypes. As a result, PCA, under the direction of Martin Breen, reshaped the queer image that was once overtly seen into one that could only be visible through subtextual inference (Lugowski, 1999). This is important because in order for many films to receive their certification or to be approved for public screening, scripts that were originally 'queer' in content was either rewritten without sexuality mentioned (and therefore implying heterosexuality) or relegated to hinting at queerness through visual cues (certain looks, touch, etc.), which then perpetuates stereotypical behaviors associated with being gay.

Out of the entire 34 pages of the article, race is only mentioned in one paragraph and as a passing reference to other films that displayed queerness (p. 22). Thus the focus of this article is that of the white queer image, which makes the article a one-sided examination of queer imagery in film history. In spite of this, the article's intent was to display the connection of a gender crisis vis-à-vis the Great Depression with the lack of overt queer imagery in film. In this way, Lugowski (1999) succeeded in reaching his goal. Another limitation goes to the lack of an in depth analysis of the emergence of the

“manly man” image that grew out of this idea of restoring masculinity in society (Epstein & Friedman, 1995), which came after the regulation of queer imagery. It's unfortunate because an analysis of the “manly man” image falls in line with the conversation around the perception and construction of masculine and feminine values asserted by the author's argument (Lugowski, 1999).

Mentioned previously, Greenberg's (1988) research focused on how Black, Latina and elderly women are depicted in television programs. Through content analysis of television series such as *Cagney and Lacey*, *Kate & Allie* and *Between Two Women*, and prior research, Greenberg (1988) attempts to show how female characters are restricted and limited in their role portrayals. First, he finds that women are under-represented on television. According to Greenberg (1988), if the norm is 50/50, then male characters outnumber female characters 3:1. He acknowledges deviations from his statement. For example, both female and male characters are more of an equal ratio when discussing representation in soap operas. The implications of the unbalanced ratio suggest that women are unimportant in society.

Additionally, women are relegated to traditional gender roles. For example, Greenberg (1988) found substantial evidence that women normally play the role of the wife and/or parent and are centered on relationships, family and interpersonal issues. Even when outside the home, Greenberg (1988) found that women roles still tend to focus on the family and personal matters. To show an example, he used soap opera as a backdrop since this is the genre that is mostly balanced in female and male role

portrayals. Greenberg (1988) states, “the setting of soaps... are primarily domestic and their major activity is conversation – about romance, family matters and other interpersonal relationships” (p. 89). He also found common traits associated with women portrayals. For example, women characters tend to be more emotional and in need of emotional support from men. They also tend to be in a subordinate role when in relationships with men (Greenberg, 1988). Both traits indicate a lack of control and a need to be controlled, which falls in line with dominant society's idealized role of womanhood.

In the second edition of her book, *Black Feminist Thought* (2000), author, Patricia Collins offers a Black feminist perspective on the history of the representation of African American women. Her purpose in writing the text was to “[foster] the empowerment of Black women and conditions of social justice” (p. x). She does this by analyzing different forms of oppression as it relates to the Black woman. As a part of her analysis of intersecting oppressions, she examines historical stereotypes as controlling imagery used to objectify the Black woman as the “Other” (p. 70). She states that perpetuating imagery that places Black women as the other justifies race, gender and class oppression. This justification is dependent upon binary thinking. Keller (1985) defines binary thinking as a way to “categorize people, things, and ideas in terms of their difference from one another” (as cited in Collins, 2000, p. 70). This is important because the fundamental part of binary thinking is presenting ‘difference’ in opposition to each other rather than them

coexisting. When something is objectified as the other in binary thinking, it is placed in the position of being manipulated and controlled (Collins, 2000).

Additionally, in her analysis of Black women's sexuality, Collins (2000) displays how controlling imagery of Black womanhood defined African American women's sexuality. She found that sexuality is one area where intersecting oppressions meet (heterosexism, class, race, gender, etc.). Out of this examination emerges an important category of deviant sexuality, homosexuality. As heterosexuality's opposite, homosexuality is categorized as the 'other' and thus falls in a position of being controlled. She connects the imagery of the “mannish” Black woman as a signifier of lesbianism. This falls in line with the notion of binary thinking where being associated with masculine features is in direct opposition to the hegemonic discourse of womanhood, where the woman is thought to be submissive and soft.

Character Stereotypes in Television and Film

In an independent analysis of queer representation, media scholar Carla Segurola's (2010) purpose was to see if the prevailing queered stereotypes outlined in the 1995 documentary *The Celluloid Closet* still held true. Using a method of critical analysis, the author-selected films that were based on the film's release date and genres that included queer content (gay and lesbian cinema). Television shows were selected on the basis of gay and lesbian lead characters and subject matter. The age range of the characters portrayed in both media includes teenagers and adults. In her discussion, she draws from several theories including, the theory of Priming Effects which suggest that “media

creatively controls which images we see as well as the plots involved” (p. 1), Bandura's Social Learning theory which posits that “humans learn through observation and model themselves after what they see through imitation” (p.1), “Individual Selection Theory” which states that “[v]iewers will ultimately retain information that supports their perspective” (p. 1) and finally, Cultivation theory, which states “that the longer a viewer is exposed to television, the greater their perception of social reality will be altered as a result of what they view” (p. 2). With these theories in mind, she then dissects the selected media to see the prevailing portrayals of queer stereotypes.

Some common stereotypes found were that of the criminal, the hypersexual, the druggie, the queer that came from a broken home and queer people who are suicidal or commit suicide. There were two additional types that stood out, although one could argue that they are also prevailing in queer stereotypes. One type consisted of pairing masculine and feminine people together (Segurolo, 2010). This pairing is unique to queer media because it lends to the stereotype of one person being the 'man' and the other the 'woman' (p.4), thus perpetuating a homonormative location rooted in the near portrayal of heterosexuals. Additionally, she found that characters' names most often identified the masculine character from the feminine character. This representation is not limited to queer representations of women. This is also constant in male dominated queer media. Other messages found in queer media consist of the denial and/or rejection of the gay labels. She cites dialogues within media that consist of statements such as “You know I ain't queer,” (Ennis Del Mar tells Jack Twist in *Brokeback Mountain*) (p. 5) or in the

comedy *But I'm A Cheerleader*, where the main character Megan denies she is a lesbian, using statements such as “I'm not perverted. I get good grades, I go to church, I'm a cheerleader!”

Just like in other publications discussing queer representation, one limitation is that race is ignored. Every film and television show Segurola (2010) reviewed consisted of casts dominated by white characters. Again, this removes non-white people from the conversation and also assumes a homonormative location within film. Another limitation is that the author focuses on negative stereotypes, which limits the discussion around media socialization, which would seem to be what her analysis was rooted in. A final limitation of her analysis depends on a strong subtextual inference in her work. In other words, she relies on the reader to draw the connection between negative stereotypes and social attitudes and behaviors. These limitations create a bias and incomplete analysis of film.

Media professor and author Andrew Platt's (2011) thesis suggest that society strongly influences the negative stereotypes of African Americans, and gays and lesbians in film. He researched and screened films such as *Birth of a Nation*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Imitation of Life*, *Foxy Brown*, *Chicago*, *Different from the Others*, *These Three*, *Victim*, *Making Love* and *Brokeback Mountain* to determine how African Americans and gay and lesbian individuals were portrayed. Platt (2011) argues that it should be the goal of Hollywood to represent characters with substance and remove the focus of only portraying stereotypes for financial profitability. He also argues for the need to create

more positive images of these groups. In Chapter 2, Platt focuses on African Americans in film. In his analysis, he found that Black women were almost exclusively positioned in stereotypical roles (i.e. the mammy and the Jezebel). He cites films such as *Monster's Ball* as an example of the Jezebel image, which, as the author admits, doesn't rely on lust but a deep connection. However, by begging the male character to make her feel better by using sexual intercourse, Berry's character falls in line with the Jezebel controlling image.

Platt (2011) also discusses the usage of Blackface in earlier films. He cites *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1903 as being the earliest film to utilize Blackface to represent Black characters. He dedicates an entire section to *The Birth of a Nation*, stating that it “remains one of the most controversial films ever made because of its anti-Black depictions and systematic, overt racism” (p. 7). The film rendered the traditional stereotype of African slavery; one that showed enslaved Africans as “docile, loyal slaves who are glad to be part of a benign, paternal slave system” (p.14). This characterization implied that Black men were brute and vicious rapists of White women, a stereotype that continues to be perpetuated. There are a couple of limitations. Focusing only on older depictions of Blackness in film limits the analysis of African American representation. While there is plenty of research concerning the negative stereotypes of Black people in media (and society), un-examining current media skews the perception of Black visibility in film. Additionally, his selections of films are problematic. When examining African American representation, Platt (2011) uses films that are centered on heterosexual relationships and

when he examines queer representation, he uses non-Black films. This is very disappointing especially when you think he viewed both identities separately instead of together. This text proves how race and sexual identity are often fragmented.

Racial, gender, and sexual oppression is the root cause of the absence of lesbianism. Within media, lesbian invisibility manifests in numerous ways. Internalized heterosexism and a negative stigma cause some queer women to assume a homonormative role by allowing them to regulate their homosexuality to the private sphere. Second, the continuous focus on white homosexuality and black heterosexuality in media almost completely removes the black lesbian experience from discourse. Again, the common limitation found in most articles consisted of the lack of representation among other racial groups when discussing queerness and the lack of queerness when discussing race. This is why my research surrounding the visibility and representation of Africana lesbianism is needed. Accordingly, my research will contribute to completing an unfinished picture of media representation.

Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review was to systematically review current and past research surrounding African American queer representation in visual media. The literature review included a combination of peer-reviewed journal articles and thesis and dissertations. In order to frame the conversation surrounding queer media representation social constructions, psychological effects of television and film and representation of African Americans and queerness are discussed. A common and largely problematic

limitation found in most of the articles consisted of the lack of representation among other racial groups. *From the Margins* solves this issue by examining queer MOC lesbianism in film and television and will contribute to completing an unfinished picture of media representation.

Methods

Analysis of films and television series utilized the method of content analysis. According to McDougal (2014), content analysis allows for systematic examination of visible and hidden messages in media. Additionally, several theories and paradigms were employed in order to fully grasp and deconstruct the complexity of the messages around identity and social realities. Because this study is specifically looking at MOC Africana queer women's representations, and will only speak to that community, the entire research process is fully outlined and explained so that other communities, cultures, and identities may replicate the study. Therefore, this chapter discusses typical sections found within the method section of a qualitative research project: theories and paradigms, methods, elements, instruments, and procedure.

Theoretical Frameworks and Paradigms

From the Margins was grounded in Africana history and experience and centered the discourse on MOC Africana queer women. This project seeks to emancipate and empower people, but specifically queer women of African descent by building a foundation for further discussion of and producing scholarship about intersectional subversive identities. Within the spirit of Sankofa, an Akan word that means "return to the past in order to go forward" (Turner & Kamdibe, 2007, p. 989), *From the Margins* examined the historical portrayals of U.S. Black people in media as the starting point and context for the discourse around MOC Africana queer female representation and visibility. Additionally, due to a grounding in and centering on the media representation

of MOC Africana queer women, critical race, black queer and black feminist theories (Collins, 2000; Holland & Cohen, 2005; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) were employed as a way to acknowledge the convergence of identities that places these communities in a unique position within the current structure of womanhood, patriarchy, and heteronormativity.

Beyond the African/Black-centered approaches, *From the Margins* examined media through both a colonial and conflict paradigm lens (McDougal, 2014) by examining media that was produced and replicated in a colonial society. The colonial paradigm was inherently relevant to this project because of the discussion around identities that fall within the dichotomy of dominate/subordinate groups prevalent in our social realities. For the reader of this work, examining media from a colonial lens provides a transparency of the social (re) positioning of imaginaries that places subversive identities in often negative or assimilating contexts used to stabilize and perpetuate the current social system.

Similarly, examining media through a conflict paradigm lens provided transparency of the power and privilege of these identities by looking at their level of access to social resources (i.e. education, jobs, money) and questioning how their social positioning affected their access to these resources. Performance theory was also inherent in the discussion around identity and representation. Not only because the project looks at representation, which in itself, represents performance, but also because identities are performed (Butler, 2002). Looking at how identities are performed (i.e. actions and

behavior), allowed for a deeper analysis of media messages, especially in regards to gender, race, and sexuality and the convergence of these identities. Lastly, this thesis operated within the key concepts of media literacy, which acknowledges that all media are constructions and have political, economic, and social implications (Duncan & Pungent, 1989).

Methods and Instruments

From the Margins replicates previous studies by utilizing content analysis as its primary method to examine and decipher media portrayals of Africana queer women. In general, content analysis allowed for a simultaneous exploration and observation of Africana queer female character portrayals in film and television series to systematically find themes and patterns within character representations. In particular, manifest and latent coding schemes allowed for a translation and categorization of themes and patterns based on surface level perceptions of identity (i.e. dress, occupation) and meaning in messages (i.e. gender presentation paired with gender roles) not clearly discernible to an audience's psyche. The coding scheme created for this project addresses both visible and hidden messages by examining the characters relationships and identity performance. As such, each scene was recorded and then categorized into one or more of the following groups.

Masculinity / Femininity looked at how gender was performed. It examined the character behavior and actions.

Masc/Fem-presenting noted the characters physical presentation (i.e. clothing and hairstyle).

Queerness looked at how the character performed their sexuality. Similar to masculinity, it examined the character behavior, actions and relationships.

Sexual Practices noted the scenes that displayed the character's sex life.

Outing reflected scenes where the character's sexuality was revealed without their permission.

Race displayed scenes that explicitly or implicitly mentioned race or displayed racism. This category also noted the character's skin complexion.

Gender roles looked at the type of gendered roles the characters portrayed.

Substance Use/Abuse looked at the character's relationship with drugs/alcohol.

Environment looked at the character's immediate environment and its effect on their behavior.

Profession/Career displayed scenes where the character was placed in a working environment. In cases, where it was only indicated through language, the character's profession was noted. It also noted the type of career the character was placed in (i.e. blue-collar, creative).

Relationships displayed scenes where characters interacted with their community (i.e. friends, coworkers). It also looked at whether they were in long-term or short-term relationships.

External Perception displayed scenes where other characters made explicit remarks about the examined character's personality, behavior or action.

Emotions displayed scenes that showed the character's reactions to situation and their emotional behavior in general.

Homophobia reflected scenes where the character experienced or were exposed to homophobia because of their sexuality or gender presentation.

Abuse (i.e. physical, sexual, verbal) reflected scenes where the character was being abused or inflicted violence on another person.

Elements

This thesis includes an exploration and analysis of narrative (fiction/scripted) films, and television series. The selection of films was informed by the "16 Must See Black LGBT Films" (Morgan, 2013) because the article indicated that these films are pertinent to black queer identity. Films, not on the list, were selected because of they portrayed MOC Africana Queer women in leading or recurring roles. Additionally, *The Wire* (2002) and *The L Word* (2004) were included because both series were the first to display MOC black lesbians on television. It must be noted that not all of the selected media fall within the queer genre or that the majority of the characters on a show or in a film identify as queer. Additionally, a majority of the media examined was considered 'mainstream' or produced and/or distributed by well-known large production companies and television networks, but there were a few selections that were independently

produced to allow for a comparative analysis in character portrayals. Most of the earlier films were independently produced due to scant depictions of Africana queer women within mainstream media during this time.

The media chosen had a release date within the past twenty years (1994-2014) because this period represented a transformation in cultural and identity politics, race relations, and media (from traditional to new media). Selected films included: *Go Fish* (1994), *Boys on the Side* (1995), *Set it Off* (1996), *The Watermelon Woman* (1996), *Pariah* (2011), and *Stud Life* (2012). Television series included: *The L Word* (2004-2009) and *The Wire* (2004-2010).

Procedure

Each film or episode was reviewed scene by scene and was broken down into two types of scenes. The first type of scene examined character portrayals when the characters were physically represented; the second type examined scenes where the character wasn't physically represented but was discussed or mentioned by other characters in the film/series (i.e. "I don't understand why Bette is acting this way"). Breaking it down in this way allowed for several things. It made the review and coding of media a more manageable task. It also presented quantifiable examples of the amount of representation exposed in the programs. Each scene was viewed and simultaneously coded using the categories previously discussed. After each piece of media was coded, the categories were used to find themes and trends between the examined characters. They were then grouped together and analyzed. The results are discussed in full detail in the following

chapter.

Limitations

It must be noted that although this project will be conducted in an ethical and systematic manner, the use of content analysis limits the ability for this project to explain any underlying reasons for social phenomena discussed. While content analysis is being used to identify themes and patterns, these themes and patterns cannot state, with any certainty, any affects it has on its audiences.

Results

There were two guiding questions for this thesis. The first question asks how do films and television series represent masculine of center Africana queer women? Additionally, how do previous depictions of Africana women and men in film and television influence contemporary representations of MOC Africana queer women? Six films and two television series were reviewed to answer these questions and eleven characters met the criteria for inclusion in the study. Media was reviewed over the course of three months from February 2015 to April 2015. All scenes were time-stamped and documented as “(S#E#, H:MM:SS)” for television series and “(H:MM:SS)” for films. The following are the results.

Tokenism

Tokenism, in a media representation context, refers to the characters racial, sexual, and gender identities that are portrayed in a physical space (i.e. community, friend group) as the sole version of that identity. A total of four characters were positioned as token identities. Two characters were positioned as the only Black women (racial tokens) in their group. One character, Cleo, was the only lesbian (sexual token) in their group and one character, Jane, was the only Black woman and lesbian (racial and sexual token) in her group. The following scenes describe their and their group’s identities.

Racial Token

Tasha. Tasha, who is portrayed racially as black and her best friend Papi walks into the club. Papi is portrayed racially as Latina. She introduces Tasha to the crew:

Alice, Shane, and Jenny, all racially portrayed as white (Stockwell, 2007). As Tasha's storyline continues, she ends up in a romantic relationship with Alice, a white female journalist.

(S4E6, 0:31:17) - Alice shows up to Tasha's service base to talk to her about how she felt about Tasha. She behaves flamboyantly and Tasha has to correct her behavior. Alice finally gets to the reason for her visit.

ALICE

"I wanted to tell you that ... I really like you. I wanted you to know that you're not a portal to me... I didn't want you to think that you are my foray into the land of hot army chicks."

TASHA

"Yea, hot black army chicks."

ALICE

"Are you black?"

Tasha laughs.

There are other scenes that refer to Tasha's physical blackness, either through overt or implied language. There are no scenes that display her blackness through culture, family, community or space.¹ Although, she plays a major role in Alice's life, Tasha's life is rendered invisible. Therefore, Tasha, a black character wouldn't exist if the relationship between herself and Alice, a white character, didn't exist.

¹ We never see Tasha's apartment, but we see her at Alice's apartment, Papi's apartment, and Tasha apartment hunting with Alice (Chaiken, 2007).

Kia. Kia, portrayed racially as black, lays in a 4-corner with Evie, portrayed racially as Latina, Daria and a girl she dates, both portrayed racially as white. They discuss Max and Eli, both white women, relationship. The only indication of her blackness is her dark skin (Troche, 1994).

In both cases, the non-existence of black culture, community, and people removes the characters' origin and experience while still displaying blackness through corporeal characteristics. Additionally, it positions them in a dependent state of existence, one where they are reliant upon the relationship with their white partner.

Sexuality Token

Cleo. Cleo, portrayed as a masculine of center lesbian, sit on top of a roof and hang out with her friends, Frankie, T.T., and Stoney, all portrayed as straight, feminine, black women. They're still in their brown and blue cleaning uniforms. Cleo wears French braids, although the style makes her appearance more masculine. Her friends all have traditional black female hairstyles. Cleo rolls a joint and passes it to the others; she then tries to touch Frankie's breast but Frankie stops her (Gray, 1996). While Cleo is not the sole representation of lesbianism, her girlfriend, Ursula, has no lines and is positioned only as Cleo's girlfriend, a prop used for her homosexual performance.

(0:14:45) Cleo, Frankie, T.T. and Stoney chill in their housing projects parking lot. They discuss robbing a bank. Cleo sees Ursula and tells her to come over.

CLEO

“Ursula! Ursula, come here.”

Ursula walks over to Cleo. She wears short, blond hair, a sleeveless halter-top and a short skirt.

STONEY

“How you doing, Ursula?”

Ursula says nothing. Cleo grabs her, pulls Ursula to her and kisses her. Stoney and Frankie roll their eyes and turn their heads. Frankie turns her head back.

FRANKIE - (to Ursula)

“What’s up?”

Ursula doesn’t respond and instead is fixated on Cleo.

FRANKIE - (to Stoney and T.T.)

“What the fuck is up with that? She don’t talk?”

T.T.

“Not really.”

Cleo scolds Ursula.

CLEO

“What’s up? You know better than that.... You’ve been gone all day. Girl, next time I page you, you better be calling me back.”

Cleo’s homosexuality is represented through her masculine presentation and abusive language. There is no other signifier of her queerness except her relationship with her girlfriend. The lack of queer culture and community coupled with the explicit markers of queerness and over-abundance of heterosexuality suggest that the purpose of

Cleo's lesbianism was to 'spice up' the character's portrayal to make the character and the film more interesting (Hooks, 2006).

Intersectional Identity Token

Jane. Jane is portrayed as a black lesbian. She meets Robin, who is portrayed as a heterosexual, white woman and is close friends with Holly, who's also portrayed as a white woman. Jane's blackness is only visible because of her dark hue. In fact, there was only one other black woman; the cashier at a mini golf place and her face isn't visible (Roos & Ross, 1995, 0:28:46). Jane's queerness is only visible through identity, performance, and external perceptions. Additionally, there is only one scene where both her sexuality and racial identity is mentioned.

(0:38:79) - Robin lies in the hospital bed, suffering from pneumonia as a result of AIDS. Jane visits her and they discuss Jane's queerness. Jane assures Robin that she wasn't "after her". Robin wants to know why.

ROBIN

"It's not a black/ white thing is it?"

JANE

"No."

Similar to other token characters, there are little external signifiers of Jane's sexual and racial identity. Her identities are reliant upon corporeal characteristics and language. Additionally, Jane's sexuality is presented in negative ways (i.e. through

derogatory language and harassment). Lastly, since Jane's origin and experience is removed, they are rendered invisible and insignificant.

Gender Performance and Roles

Gender performance/roles, refers to the overt expression of attitudes and behaviors that indicates the level of a character's masculinity and/or femininity. While most characters displayed a combination of masculine and feminine behaviors, three characters displayed hypermasculine attitudes and behaviors and six positioned themselves in the role of the protector. Below are descriptions that exemplify these characters' performance.

Hypermasculinity. Hypermasculinity refers to "a set of behaviors and beliefs characterized by unusually highly developed masculine forms as defined by existing cultural values" (Schroeder, 2004 418).

(0:02:01) – J.J. sits on her couch and looks into the camera to talk with the "audience" about why she hangs out with a gay guy instead of other lesbians. She breaks lesbians down into two categories, femme and studs. She indicates that she's unable to hang out with femme-presenting women as friends because things will get "complicated" (X, 2012).

J.J.

"Why am I so tight with a gay man? Well if I was tight with a femme, it might get kind of complicated. All right, so some of you're thinking right now, that's just ridiculous. I should be able to control myself? Yeah, you feel safe, send your girl to me, then we can do like a scientific experiment."

She laughs.

J.J. also indicates that she's unable to hang out with other masculine-presenting women because they would be in competition for the same women.

J.J.

“I guess the rest of you all thinking, ‘how come she ain’t hanging out with a stud?’ Well, if I was hanging out with a stud, I mean someone like me; we’d be checking the same talent.... No, no, no. I can’t have someone messing with my flow like that.”

J.J.’s hypermasculinity is prevalent through her presentation and attitude about women as being sexual objects (femmes) and competition (studs). This scene also indicates a sense of entitlement and a lack of self-control. Additionally, J.J.’s reasoning for hanging out with a (white) gay guy is problematic because it isolates her from connecting her from her community and prevents her from connecting with other black gay women.

(0:55:30) - Cleo lies across the hood of her car and between Ursula’s legs. Cleo wears a black full-body bra and blue work pants. Ursula wears black fishnet stockings and a one-piece, black see-through lingerie. Cleo smokes a joint and watches Ursula dance in front of her. Smooth music plays in the background. Frankie, T.T. and Stoney burst through the door. Cleo doesn’t pay attention and continues to focus on Ursula.

CLEO - (to Ursula)

“Oh, shit, girl. What is you doing?”

T.T. interrupts.

T.T.

“Cleo. How come you ain’t been to work in a week?”

Cleo looks at her friends.

CLEO

“Cause look what I got here. I bought my baby some new things. Check them out.”

Cleo then shows Ursula off to her friends. She turns her attention back to Ursula and starts kissing Ursula’s legs. Ursula says nothing.

As the scene continues, Cleo tries to assert her dominance by pulling a gun on Stoney after she refuses to do another robbery. This dominance, coupled with Cleo’s presentation and objectification of Ursula emulates an over-exaggeration of masculinity that is to be feared.

Snoop. Snoop works as a hit man and takes orders from Chris, who in turn takes orders from Marlo, two black heterosexual men (Simon, 2002). Snoop is the only female in her group. However, her femininity is removed by her masculine presentation and hypermasculine behavior when interacting with other men.

(S4E2, 33:19) - Snoop, Marlo, Chris and a few other unidentified black men are in the middle of the woods that they’re using as a firing range. Snoop wears a black baseball hat, an oversized black tee shirt with Al Pacino airbrushed on the front and a white undershirt. A young black man fires his gun toward several cans

and bottles positioned on a tree and misses them all. Snoop starts yelling at the kid.

SNOOP

“Quit yanking that bitch.”

The young man tries again. Chris walks over to him.

CHRIS

“Son. That ‘s too much knuckle.”

Snoop walks over to the boy and taps him.

SNOOP

“Let me show you how you do this right here man.”

She flips her hat backwards, aims the gun and starts firing. She barely flinches and hits most of the targets.

Snoop’s hypermasculinity is represented through performance and competition with the other black men within her group.

In the above scenes, hypermasculinity is displayed as competition with other masculine of center people (men and women) and objectification of and entitlement to women. Additionally, two of the three characters, Cleo and Snoop, are positioned as criminals, which suggest a possible connection between hypermasculine performance and criminality. Hypermasculinity, as performed by these characters, represents negative

traits that translate messages about female hypermasculinity that are untrustworthy and to be feared.

The Protector

Kima. Kima's profession as a police detective automatically situates her in the role of protector. Outside of protecting the public, there is a scene where she protects and defends one of her fellow officers.

(S1E3, 0:50:04) - There is a large drug bust at the Eastside projects. An officer has a suspect pinned to the car. The suspect turns around and hits the cop. Carver runs over and starts beating the guy. Kima runs over and starts beating him too. She yells.

KIMA

"You wanna hit a cop?"

She and Carver continue to beat the suspect when two other officers join in.

Kima as a character is rooted in hypermasculine performance while taking on the role as the protector. She shows that she's 'one of the boys' by joining in the beating of a suspect. The unnecessary violence associated with this scene positions Kima as a threat to and protector of the community while maintaining her position as a protector her fellow officers. Racially, Kima and Carver, both Black characters, beat the suspect, another Black character for hitting an officer, a white man. While this reflects current day

tragedies, it displays Kima's struggle of proving that she's one of the boys while maintaining that race is insignificant.

Laura. In several instances, Laura tries to protect Alike from different situations such as getting hurt by girls or physically assaulted.

(0:04:11) - Laura and Alike ride the bus home. Laura's stop comes up and Alike rings the bell for her. Laura tells her she's going to get off with Alike to make sure she 'gets home safe'.

ALIKE

"I don't need your protection. You ain't big."

For both Kima and Laura the role of protector is a part of their masculine performance. However, because Laura is positioned as Alike's 'queer mentor,' teaching her how to perform her 'butchness'. Laura is also placed in a motherly role. The act of protecting Alike is fueled by a sense of responsibility.

Jane. Jane also positions herself in the role of the protector.

(0:17:24) - Jane visits her friend Holly in Pittsburg. She knocks on Holly's door and Holly answers it, but only cracks it open. A male's voice, Nick - Holly's boyfriend, yells at Holly from inside.

JANE

"Let me talk to him".

Holly says no but Jane forces her way in. Nick continues to behave abusively towards Holly and Jane steps in the way. Jane tells Holly to leave but Nick grabs Holly and pushes her down. Jane grabs Nick and yells.

JANE

"Hey man."

Nick turns around and slaps her.

NICK

"You dyke!"

Nick and Jane start fighting.

Jane's performance of the protector is a combination between Kima and Laura's performances. Similar to Kima's scene, there is physical violence that fuels this role into action. However, similar to Laura, Jane's motive is to safeguard Holly from both physical and emotional harm.

Tasha. Tasha professional career as military police automatically places her in a protector position. However, she also positioned herself as a protector in her personal life.

(S4:E6, 0:28:00) - Tasha and Papi go to Alice's apartment for a poker game. Papi invites a lot of people, including two women who both dated Papi previously. As the game ensues, the two women start fighting. Tasha immediately jumps in and

breaks up the fight. Later the same two women start fighting again and again Tasha tries to break them up. She loses her footing and elbows Alice in the eye.

Tasha and Papi are the only two masculine of center characters in the room; however, it is Tasha, the only black character in the room that jumps in and breaks up the fight; this positions Tasha as the black hero. Her chivalry presents her as invincible and proves her strength and the luxury of not needing protection, herself.

Snoop. Snoop is Marlo's muscle. Her main function is to protect him and enforce his rules. Similar to both Kima and Tasha, Snoop's job positions her in the role of protector.

(S4E3, 0:07:52) – Snoop, wearing an oversized black tee shirt, pulls up in a truck with Marlo and Chris. They all get out and walk over to a dealer. Marlo tells the dealer that he has to buy from him or get off the corner. Snoop stands there as Marlo's protection. Chris and Marlo leaves. Snoop stares the dealer up and down and then also walks away.

Snoop uses intimidation by way of gun violence and murder to prove that she's one just as tough as her male counterparts; it also instills a sense of fear in the community.

Performing the protector role is motivated by her responsibility to protect Marlo, enforce his laws, and defend his territory.

Cleo. Cleo positions herself as the protector of her friends. In one of the last scenes of the film, Cleo makes the ultimate sacrifice in order to save her friends.

(1:43:00) - The police chase Stoney, Frankie, and Cleo. The car chase stops in the middle of a tunnel. Police cars are blocking one end of the tunnel and a helicopter is blocking the other end.

CLEO

“Think, think, think... Alright get out. “

STONEY and FRANKIE

“What?!”

CLEO

“Look I want you to get out and lean up against the wall, and in 60 seconds, I want you to run that way.“

STONEY

“Cleo, fuck no. Hell no.”

CLEO

“Stoney, shut up! We gotta split up ok. We got to. Look, I’ll catch up to ya’ll later. I promise.”

Cleo is similar to Laura in that the threat of violence fuels the protector role into action. Although, this also positions her as a black hero, allowing her friends to flee while she takes on the police, it also portrays a form of black love and loyalty. She is sacrificing her life and freedom so that they can retain theirs.

Gender Presentation

Gender Presentation refers to the physical description of a character and how it reflects their gender (i.e. clothing, accessories, hairstyle). Five (5) characters were

presented as stud and the remaining characters (6) were presented as soft studs. The following scene descriptions give examples of each character's presentation.

Stud. Butch/Stud refers to the characters that exclusively dress in masculine clothing and take on the more dominant roles in relationships (Hampton, 1981; Lorde, 1983). They are sometimes read as male because of the removal of any of their physical feminine markers.

J.J. Throughout the film, J.J.'s physical presentation relies on both performance and markers of her masculinity. She sports a close-cut fade, wears oversized shirts and jeans, binds her breasts and sits with her legs spread wide open. She refers to herself as 'guy' and is mistaken by others as being male.

(0:11:01) - A client spills wine on J.J.'s white shirt. She goes into the bathroom and tries to clean the shirt. A white woman enters the bathroom and sees J.J. The woman looks at J.J. then at the sign on the door, then back at J.J. She marches over J.J.

WOMAN

"You're in the wrong, loo!"

J.J. looks at her and opens her shirt. The woman seemed disgusted. J.J. winked her eye and the woman storms off.

J.J.'s presentation is extremely masculine whereby she could pass as male and be placed somewhere on the transgender spectrum. Although she doesn't overtly claim female

gender identification and in fact, refers to herself in masculine language (i.e. guy, man), the action of exposing her breasts in response to the misidentification suggest that she does identify somewhat as cisgendered. While J.J. is in the women's bathroom and feels entitled to be in the bathroom because of her female-sexed body, the action of exposing her breasts, which is socially unacceptable for women, suggest that she doesn't conform to the hegemonic role of womanhood.

Snoop. There is nothing externally feminine about Snoop. Everything she does, from the way she dresses to the company she keeps, to her attitude and mannerisms, all display a strong masculine presentation. Additionally, her hard exterior and absence of a lover positions her as asexual and unapproachable.

(S3E7, 48:49) Snoop stands on a roof inside a bird coop with three other black men. She is the only female in the group. She's leaned back against a shelf and listens to Marlo discuss his plans for his selling his illegal product. She wears an oversized white tee shirt, an oversized watch, and baggy jeans. Her hair is french braided. She stands stoically.

Cleo. When Cleo is introduced (0:07:50), she attends a 70s party, wearing sun glasses, a black tee shirt, black Dickey's and black boots. Her hair is picked out into an afro. Cleo wears exclusively masculine clothing with the exception of one scene where she exposes her bra. Beyond Cleo's markers of masculinity, her behavior enhances her masculine presentation.

(0:39:33) - Cleo and her friends practice shooting guns at the gun range. She wears a blue tee with overalls. Everyone has one gun except Cleo. She shoots two guns simultaneously. She then walks over to talk to 'Black Sam' the owner of the guns. Another black male shoots a shotgun and it makes a loud noise.

CLEO

"Goddamn. Shit. "

She sits with her legs spread open and leans forward, with her elbows resting on her thighs.

BLACK SAM

"So what you need?"

CLEO

"I need a favor."

BLACK SAM

"Here we go... What else is new?"

CLEO

"Come on Black Sam. After all them cars I done stole for you? "

BLACK SAM

"Check it out. Ya'll can roll with that right there."

Cleo picks up a small revolver by the handle and looks at it with disgust.

CLEO

"Yo, we ain't robbin' stagecoaches. I need something I can set it off with."

Cleo's masculinity is represented by her behavior and reaction toward the small revolver. Although not explicit, Cleo's reaction gendered the gun because of its size. The gendering of an object calls into question the gender of a person when the gendered object is in opposition (Kirkham, 1996). In other words, Cleo gendered the gun as feminine because of its size and lack of power. Since she presents herself as masculine, rejecting the gun is a rejection of her perceived femininity.

Tasha. Tasha is presented as a stoic stud. She exclusively wears masculine clothes outside of her military uniform. Her hair is normally pulled back into a tight ponytail with very few occasions when she wears it down. Normally, her outfits consist of short-sleeve or sleeveless button-up shirts and jeans.

(S4E5, 36:39) - Tasha comes in with Papi and gets introduced to Alice, Shane, and Jenny. She wears a black short-sleeved button up shirt and her hair pulled back into a ponytail.

PAPI

"Ladies! This is my girl, Tasha. "

Alice stares at Tasha.

ALICE

"Do you guys wanna have a drink with us? "

PAPI

"Yea, what can I get you? "

ALICE

"I don't care."

PAPI

"Hey Tash, what you want?"

TASHA

"I can buy my own drink. "

PAPI

"Fuck that, man. This is your welcome back into the world. It's been a while since Tasha's been in the clubs, so you know..."

TASHA

"Shut up Papi! Shut up."

A person bumps into Tasha and she gets annoyed. Alice continues to stare at Tasha.

TASHA

"Yo Papi, Imma go smoke, aight. "

PAPI

"Well hold on a second cause Imma come with you."

TASHA

"Nah I'm cool."

Tasha is presented as a modern day Sapphire (Yarbrough & Bennett, 1999), an aggressive, angry black woman with a chip on her shoulder. This portrayal of Tasha

presents her as unapproachable and combative suggesting that the image of black female masculinity is connected to uncontrollable anger.

Laura. Laura is presented as a stud. She wears exclusively men clothing and hairstyles. Her presentation is mostly consist of oversize shirts and jackets, jeans and hats that are turned a bit to one side. She is seen with only femme-presenting females, although there is no one person that she's romantically involved with.

00:02:23 - Laura dances with a femme-presenting female she refers to as 'shorty'. Laura wears a baseball cap and an oversized plaid button-up shirt. Alike walks over and approaches them.

ALIKE

C'mon, we're late.

LAURA

Huh?

ALIKE

I gotta go!

LAURA

Hold on a minute.

ALIKE

C'mon, why you trippin'?

LAURA

What?

ALIKE

Why are you trippin', you know I gotta go!

LAURA

What?

ALIKE

You know I gotta go. Imma get in
trouble.

LAURA

Lemme dance with shorty first then I'll be ready.

Soft Stud – (Tom Boy). Soft Stud refers to characters that represent a blend of both “masculine and feminine ways in ... public expression and/or sexual behavior but with a purposeful leaning toward more masculine identity” (Wilson, 2009, p. 309). They present themselves as masculine but can sometimes be androgynous. On rare occasions they wear femme-presenting clothes for short periods.

Alike. Alike is introduced wearing a baseball cap with a wave cap on underneath it. She wears an oversized polo shirt that she keeps fidgeting at. She’s inside a club, where she watches a stripper dance. Alike is presented as a butch character, however, she changes her clothes from masculine to feminine when in the purview of her family. Others view her as a soft stud, which persuades her to push her masculine presentation further.

(0:17:08) - Alike overhears three girls discussing their weekend. One of them mentions Laura. Another one questions if she hangs out like that

GIRL 1

"Some of them AGs are kinda cute. I'm not saying I would, but I'd holla."

Mika spots Alike.

MIKA

“Isn't that one of them over there. What's her name? Yea, she's cute too.”

GIRL 1

”She's in the middle anyway.”

MIKA

”Yea, if she was just a little bit harder. ”

Later, Alike asks Laura to get a strap for her. Laura is surprised but agrees to help.

Alike is a baby dyke who is essentially learning how to be butch. Accordingly, her presentation isn't as masculine as those characterized as studs. While she does wear, and is comfortable in masculine clothing, she tries to hide her sexuality from her family by wearing feminine clothing. The request for a ‘strap’ suggest that Alike associates ‘hard’ studs with male-sexed bodies.

Cheryl. Cheryl is presented as a masculine. She wears a short fade and is sometimes mistaken as a male. However, upon a closer examination, she wears a mixture of clothing that is traditionally masculine and feminine with feminized accessories (i.e. earrings, makeup). Additionally, she's not that dominant when dealing with romantic situations.

(0:38:35) - Cheryl meets with Diane for dinner. She wears a black, cropped shirt that exposes her stomach, underneath an open, blue-striped button up shirt. She wears a bracelet, small hoop earrings and a chain necklace. They sit on Diane's bed and discuss the evening.

CHERYL

"You know what's so weird about this set up?"

DIANE

"What?"

CHERYL

"I don't know it just feels like, you know a set up, like... I don't know, all this dinner and friendly conversation."

DIANE

"Well I have to confess that I am a little, no I'm very attracted to you."

They both smile and Cheryl becomes visibly nervous.

DIANE

"What?"

CHERYL

"I was just gonna say that you're really a cute woman."

DIANE

"So now that we know we're attracted to each other, what do we do?"

CHERYL

"Um."

DIANE

"Don't you think we should kiss?"

Diane then leans over and kisses Cheryl and they start making out.

Although Cheryl's presentation leans toward the masculine side of the spectrum, her outfits are a combination of both masculine and feminine gendered clothing. Within the interaction between her and Diane, Cheryl plays the less assertive role, allowing Diane to take the dominant position in the relationship.

Tamara. Tamara is similar to Cheryl. At first glance, she would be considered masculine (i.e. a short haircut, partnered with a femme, sits with her legs wide open) and is a bit more assertive than Cheryl. However, she wears a mixture of feminine and masculine styles and her behavior is reminiscent of a flamboyant, gay man.

(0:02:17) - Cheryl and Tamara wrap up after videotaping a wedding. Tamara wears a black dress with an oversized light beige vest. She wears a straw choker and a small watch. Cheryl gives Tamara her pay and Tamara notices that it's short.

TAMARA

"Uh-un. My cut is \$50 short."

CHERYL

"You remember what Rose and Gwen said in the "Go Fish" book. If you wanna make a film, you gotta make some sacrifices. And besides we have to make money payments on the camera to get to Hollywood baby!"

TAMARA

"Excuse you. I'm not into making sacrifices for some quote-unquote future, all right. I want to take Stacey out this weekend for dinner, and for that I need cash today. Ok? So just gimme my money and cut the attitude."

As mentioned before, Tamara uses a lot of body language, in addition to her speech, which makes her personality reminiscent of a gay male character.

Kima. Kima is presented as a stud. When she sits, she either sits with her legs spread open or crossed in a figure 4 sitting position (S1E1, 19:18; 19:44). However, she wears makeup and on occasion, feminine presenting clothes. She's assertive and aggressive and positions herself in a lead role among her male co-workers. In her personal relationship, her position varies and doesn't fit neatly in either category.

(S2E6 19:53) - Kima prepares to interview an informant. Her hair is down and she wears a white fitted dress shirt with a tan suede jacket. Cheryl, her girlfriend, sits on the couch, visibly upset.

KIMA

"You gonna sit there and pout?"

Cheryl ignores her.

KIMA

"I know you don't think I'm going down to that club just to look at pussy. I know you know me better than that."

Cheryl just looks at her.

KIMA

"I ain't even lookin'."

CHERYL

"Everybody's lookin'. Most of them women are dykes."

KIMA

"Cheryl its police work."

CHERYL

"What, so that's supposed to make me feel better? Kima's out on the street doing her detective thing."

Kima gets up to leave and Cheryl tells her she's going with her.

The scene illustrates a blending of Cheryl's female masculine presentation with masculine behaviors. The display of Cheryl's jealousy suggests that because Kima is a gay woman, she will automatically lose self-control when around other women. Loss of self-control is outside the hegemonic behavior of women.

Jane. Jane is also presented as a stud. She exclusively wears male clothing and presents herself in a masculine way (i.e. aggressive attitude, sitting positions). However, because she's still read as straight and female by outsiders, she's placed on the softer end of the spectrum of masculinity.

(34:03) - Robin and Holly have dinner. Holly outs Jane.

HOLLY

Jane's been so great to me. I mean, at first she just liked me because of the whole "gay thing."

ROBIN

Jane's gay?

HOLLY

Like, hello! You didn't know?

ROBIN

I don't know, I just...Don't look! It's okay. It's okay.

HOLLY

Anyway, she just got dumped so you know, rebound time.

ROBIN

Oh.

HOLLY

I know, ewe gross. But don't worry. She won't try anything, especially not after me. I told her that is was a real self-hating thing to get crushes on straight girls.

Jane is also presented as an angry black lesbian with a chip on her shoulder. However, when interacting with Robin, she allows Robin to take the dominant role. Additionally, the act of outing Jane, suggest that her queerness is only seen once it is explicitly revealed.

Kia. Kia's masculine presentation is performed through solely her visible appearance. She wears a short haircut and masculine presenting clothing. She's partnered with a woman who sees her as a stud.

(0:54:45) - Kia sits at a party with other women. She wears an oversized blazer with black slacks. They start to play "I've Never".

KIA

"Ok. I've never had sex on train that stopped because it was in an accident and the rain was..."

Other partygoers cut her off because her story was so unique and unbelievable.

DARIA

"If it wasn't for the rain, I'd be drinking right along with you."

EVIE

"A couple of studs. Oh my gosh."

Kia's masculinity is portrayed through her presentation. However, as revealed in the above scene, her masculinity is also tied to her sexual adventures. Besides this scene, there is no other behavior that is exclusively masculine, which suggest that she may be on the more gender-queer spectrum.

Relationships

Domestic relationships. Domestic relationships include any relationships that are established outside of employment or other professional environments. There were six characters' whose major storylines centered on domestic relationships. The following descriptions exemplify storylines for domestic relationships.

Tasha. Tasha is presented as a closeted butch who serves in the National Guards as military police. Her storyline revolves around Alice, her love interest. Tasha experiences flashbacks of war, a side effect of her PTSD, but there is no imagery of her family or her childhood. There exist, near the end of the series a brief conversation between Tasha and Jaime discussing their fathers' parenting skills.

(S6E6, 0:45:32) - Tasha, Jaime, and Alice sit at a gallery opening. Tasha wears her hair, pulled back into a ponytail, with a black shirt with grey dress slacks and black men's dress shoes. They discuss their fears about having children.

JAIME

"That's the one thing that scares me."

ALICE

"I thought you wanted them. "

JAIME,

"Oh, I do. Without question, but at some point, there's all this history you have to overcome. I, mean, just parents..."

Tasha shakes her head in agreement.

TASHA

"I know what you mean."

ALICE

"I thought you loved your parents. "

TASHA

"No I do, but it's, I don't know, like it scares the shit out of me when I ... when I see myself acting just like them. "

JAIME

"Behaving like them. "

TASHA

"Yea. Exactly. Like my dad, he was such an asshole. I don't know how my mom put up with it. "

JAIME

"He didn't ever? "

Jaime gestures with her fist a punch and makes a click sound with her teeth.

TASHA

"No. "

JAIME

"What about your bros? "

TASHA

"Yeah. "

Alice is surprised at this answer, but she says nothing and just listens.

TASHA

”He’d beat the shit out them. I remember one time; he beat my oldest brother so badly that my mom had to keep him out of school for, like, three days. And then she covered for my dad. ”

They continue on about how their fathers ignore them. Alice seems taken aback.

ALICE

”Why didn’t you tell me any of that, ever? ”

TASHA

”I don’t know. ”

ALICE

”Jaime, I got to thank you. Tasha’s just never opened up like that before.”

Alice gives a confused look.

Although this scene displays some of Tasha’s experiences, the emphasis is placed on Alice’s reactions, which removes the empathy from Tasha and places it on Alice.

J.J. J.J.’s storyline revolves around her friendship with Seb and her relationship with Elle. She is presented as a stone butch who is looking for love. She meets and falls in love with Elle, but the relationship interferes with J.J.’s friendship with Seb. J.J.’s constant back and forth with both Elle and Seb dominates her life. In fact, there is only

one scene that portrays J.J. in a work environment. The climax of the film revealed that J.J. fell in love with a sex worker, which cause her to break up with Elle.

(0:48:35) - J.J. and Elle lie on the floor. J.J. wears an oversized checked blue and green polo button-up shirt Elle asks J.J. to pass her, her phone. J.J. does. Elle scrolls through the phone and then hands it to J.J. J.J. looks at it.

ELLE

"My clients. "

J.J.

"What are you selling? "

ELLE

"Me... I sell what's... desired but forbidden. I sell the fantasy of being overpowered by a black woman. I'm a dominatrix. A mistress. "

J.J.

"You have sex, with guys, for money? "

ELLE

"It's like performance art. A show. I don't get turned on. "

J.J. gets up furious

J.J.

"Yea, but they do, right?! "

J.J. leaves and consequently tries to get over the relationship. However, she ends up forgiving Elle and getting back with her.

Jane. Jane's storyline revolves around her feelings for and friendship with Robin.

Once she meets Robin, Jane's life becomes almost invisible. The exception is Holly,

Jane's friend who ends up going with them on the road trip. However, even this friendship doesn't reveal much about Jane's history.

(1:13:00) - Robin calls her mother to come and visit her. They have dinner with Holly and her boyfriend. They discuss Jane because she called Holly to check in on Robin. Robin's mother inquires about Jane.

HOLLY

"[Jane] asked for my advice, so I told her she's anti-lesbian."

ROBIN

"I'm not."

HOLLY

"Not you. [Jane]. See this is her old problem. She creates a situation where she gets this rejection and everyone else sees it coming. "

Kia. Kia storyline is wrapped up in her roommate's love life. From the beginning, Kia sets Max up on a date with Eli and then narrates about their relationship throughout the film.

(0:17:00) - Kia, Evie, Daria, and Melanie lay in a four-corner square with their heads touching. You can only see their face.

DARIA

"That date was a bad scene, man."

KIA

"I don't think Max likes you very much, Daria. "

DARIA

"Hey, she'll come around. "

EVIE

”What are going to do about this Kate woman?”

DARIA

”Yea, That relationship has been over for a while.”

KIA

”Would you guys please remember that Kate is a friend of mine.”

DARIA

”She’s a friend of mine too Kia, but I know a dead relationship when I see one.”

KIA

”Yea, I guess you’re right. I can’t believe they’re still going out together. It’s a perfect example of how lesbians just never break up.”

DARIA

”Ok, that old lesbian bed death. They’re not even a couple.”

KIA

”I’ve got a good feeling about this Ely and Max thing though. I think it’s gonna work out great.”

Alike. Alike’s storyline revolves around her sexuality and how she deals with hiding it from her family, getting guidance from her best friend and having her first sexual experience with a girl. The climax of the film involves her finally revealing her sexuality to her parents.

(1:10:20) - Alike's parents, Audrey and Arthur, argue loudly about Arthur’s infidelity. Alike walks in and as soon as her mother sees her, she turns to her husband.

AUDREY

"Your daughter's turning into a damn man right before your eyes and you can't even see it.... Tell him where you hang out. Tell him about your butch-ass girlfriend. Tell him that you're a nasty-ass dyke."

ARTHUR

"Alike, you tell your mama that that's not true."

ALIKE

"Dad, you already know."

ARTHUR

"Tell your mama that it's just a phase."

ALIKE

"It's not a phase."

ARTHUR

"What's wrong with you."

ALIKE

"There's nothing wrong with me."

Arthur and Audrey continues yell at each other but Alike yells over them.

ALIKE

"Yea, I'm gay!"

Audrey pushes her to the wall and tells her to say it again.

ALIKE

"I'm a lesbian! Yea, I'm a dyke!"

Audrey starts beating Alike. Arthur pulls Audrey off and leaves Alike lying on the floor.

Cleo. Cleo's storyline focuses on her friendship with Stoney, Frankie and T.T. They are always together and in the few scenes that Cleo is not with them, she's with her girlfriend. Additionally, most of these latter scenes are less than a minute long because the crew enters the scene moments after.

(0:55:30) - After Stoney tells Cleo, she's not robbing another bank, Cleo pulls a gun on Stoney to try and convince her to change her mind.

STONE Y

"Cleo, you are real high and you're acting real stupid. You need to get that gun out my face."

Cleo lowers the gun and Stoney instantly slaps her.

STONE Y

"Don't you ever fucking raise a gun to me again! "

CLEO

"Or what? What? "

Cleo jumps at her but is blocked by T.T. and Frankie. Stoney grabs a 40oz beer bottle and raises it towards Cleo.

CLEO

"Oh you gonna hit me motherfucker? Stoney we go back to first grade! You been my peeps for 20 years! "

The emphasis on domesticity in these storylines reveals a historic trend that confines women to domestic focused roles (Ceulemans & Fauconnier, 1979; Berry, 1988). When considering that portrayal of the characters themselves (black lesbians) as subversive to the social norm, placing them within domestic storylines allows for some normalcy to be displayed and retained.

Professional relationships. Professional relationships include any relationships that are established at work or other professional environments. There were three characters' whose storylines emphasized professional relationships. The following scene descriptions represent the storylines for professional relationships.

Cheryl. Cheryl's main storyline focuses on producing a documentary film about the Watermelon Woman. Although the story shows her interaction with her friend Tamara, and her love interest, Diane, a majority of the film shows her researching the Watermelon Woman's background. Her one interaction with her mother is to find out information about the Watermelon Woman.

(0:16:30) - Cheryl interviews her mother about the Watermelon Woman and gets frustrated when she finds out her mother isn't familiar with the actress. Cheryl gets an attitude and her mother reminds her of her manners. She then shows her mom a picture of the Watermelon Woman and her mom tells her the woman used to sing in clubs.

CHERYL

"Did you like the clubs? "

MOM

"Oh, there were weirdoes... weird people were there. "

CHERYL

"Kind of sounds like my type of people."

It's later revealed that the actress that played the 'Watermelon Woman' was gay and carried on a relationship with a white female director. Cheryl compared her relationship with Diane, a white female, to the actress and director's relationship, which again focuses the story back on her research on the Watermelon Woman.

Kima. Kima's has several storylines throughout the series. However, most of her storylines focused on her career as a detective. There are occasions when her personal and professional lives cross but they are rare. Even when she's hanging out with her friends, her professional life comes up.

(S1E10, 38:22) - Kima and her friends all sit around the table taking shots. Kima wears a white tank top underneath an open black shirt and a Kango cap. One of her friends wanted to know how she knew she wanted to be a cop.

KIMA

"I remember when I was in the northeast, still field training as a cadet. I didn't know if I was gonna stick with it or not. And then we got this one call. We chased this purse-snatch up into these apartments. I got separated from my FTO and shit, I ain't even no police yet. You know, I'm just a trainee. And I'm alone. I don't know how but I find the guy. So I catch him and I hold on to him and I manage to get to my radio. And we in the middle of this parking lot and we rolling around and shit. And this motherfucker's steady kicking my ass tryna get away. I look over and I see these black patents and these uniform blue pants. I look up and it's Charlie Smoot. He looks down at smiles and me... He drops his cuffs and says, here you go rook.... And then he walks away. "

She looks at Cheryl.

KIMA

"I mean I know you don't like it. But shit, I was proud. "

Snoop. Snoop encompasses her 'work' life only. There is no imagery of her family, personal friends, or relationship.

(S4E5, 23:34) - Snoop & Chris offers a young kid a position. The boy says nothing. Snoop starts talking down to him.

SNOOP

"Motherfucker, you hear the n___er talking to you, giving you praises and shit. You standing her looking fucking stupid... I'm just saying the boy ain't right."

She is only shown in the context of her job, protecting, killing for and doing what Marlo wants. However, the emphasis on Snoop's professional life gives an alternative image to the expected imagery of domesticity.

Romantic Pairing. Romantic pairing refers to a romantic coupling between two characters. Ten out of eleven characters were in a romantic relationship or had a romantic interest and were paired with a feminine-presenting partner. Five (5) characters were paired with Black women. Three (3) characters were paired with white women and one character (Kia) was paired with a Latina. The emphasis placed on pairing masculine presenting women with feminine presenting women perpetuates heterosexism while still maintaining queer identities.

Social Oppression

Homophobia. Homophobia refers to the experience of mistreatment by and encounters with people who fear, dislike, or hatred of people (Defining homophobia, n.d.). A total of five characters experienced homophobia.

Alike. Alike is in the closet about her sexuality because of her family's homophobia. Her mother, Audrey, is vocal about her dislike of Alike's friend, Laura. Although she doesn't explicitly say it's because of Laura's queerness, seen through her masculinity, she forces Alike to hang out with an assumed heterosexual girl because of her feminine presentation.

(0:28:07) - Alike sits in the car, waiting for her mother. Audrey comes to the car and tells Alike to meet Bina. Bina is presented as a femme-presenting female with a light-medium complexion. Audrey tells Alike that from now on, she will be hanging out with Bina and staying away from Laura.

Laura also experiences homophobia from Audrey. Audrey makes it know that she doesn't like Laura.

(0:38:38) – Laura shows up to pick up Alike. Audrey answers the door and is extremely rude to Laura. She tells her that Alike is out for the evening.

AUDREY

Hello.

LAURA

Hello Mrs. Freeman. Is Lee home please?

AUDREY

She's out with her friend right now, Laura. You take care.

Audrey starts to close the door. Laura stops it with her hand.

LAURA

Oh. Um. Do you know when she'll be back?

AUDREY

No, I believe she's out for the evening.

LAURA

Oh, because we had um... alright then... Thank you.

AUDREY

Goodnight.

Audrey shuts the door in Laura's face.

J.J. J.J. experiences violence as a result of her gender presentation.

(0:26:49) – J.J. walks home. She wears a stripped baseball cap and a letterman jacket. She passes a group of men who start harassing her.

MAN 1

”Batty boy”

J.J.

”Look I don’t have no beef with you.”

MAN 1

”Swear down, it’s a girl.”

Another man grabs and yells at her.

MAN 2

”What you gonna do now, you bitch?! ”

They push her to the wall and the other guy, possibly Latino hits her in the stomach. She hits back and runs away. They chase her into a store.

Jane. Jane is bullied and pressured to out herself while testifying at Holly’s murder trial.

(1:20:00) - Holly is on trial for the murder of her ex-boyfriend Nick. Jane is called as a witness. The prosecutor questions Holly and Jane's relationship because of Jane's sexuality.

PROSECUTOR

"Is there a romantic character to your friendship? "

JANE

"No. Mr. Maserati. There is not."

PROSECUTOR

"You are however one of these gay women that we read about or do you prefer lesbians? Are you gay?"

JANE

"Do I look gay? "

PROSECUTOR

"Are you gay? "

JANE

"Yes, I am. "

Jane is badgered on the witness stand without any objections, indicating that the behavior the prosecutor showed was appropriate.

Tasha. A soldier named Brown catches Tasha on a date with Alice and her lesbian friends. Brown reports this to Tasha's commanding officer and as a result, Tasha gets investigated for 'homosexual conduct' (S4E10, 24:28).

(S5E1, 0:12: 32) - Tasha seeks council from a friend, Beech, who greets her warmly. When she reveals why she's being investigated, Beech turns cold.

BEECH

“Once you're out, the military doesn't want you anymore. Which is understandable, don't you think?”

Tasha eventually decide to come out of the closet and as a result is discharged from the service.

The characters' varied experience of homophobia reflects societal norms and its reaction to subversive identities. The characters experienced both discrimination and bullying to control and punish their behavior. The allowance of homophobic actions against these characters suggest that the characters with these identities (black, masculine, female) are demonized and therefore worthy of punishment.

Racism. Racism refers to the experience of mistreatment by and encounters with people who fear, dislike, or hatred of people based on the color of their skin. A total of four characters experienced racism.

Cleo. Throughout the film, police officers displayed several instances of racism, from racial profiling (killing an innocent Black man), to accusing Frankie of being a part of the robbery since she lived in the same neighborhood as the bank robbers. However, it is when Cleo is at the end of the police chase, that we experience another instance of police racism, through overkill.

(1:45:00) - Cleo is at the end of the police chase, she finds herself surrounded. She decides to go out in a blaze of glory. She lights a cigarette and starts the car. She speeds through the blockade and ducks down while officers shoot at the car.

The car stops. Cleo steps out and starts firing her gun. Police return fire and killing her instantly. Although, you can see that she's incapacitated and essentially dead, they continue firing.

Kima. Although not explicit, the racism and sexism in the following scene displays the microaggression that women experience when in all male spaces. Kima, the only Black woman in the scene, is giving clerical work by McNulty, a white man, even though her Lieutenant wants her to help interrogate a suspect. It is only when she tells McNulty that's she has already checked the tags that McNulty's attitude changes.

(S1E1, 25:25) - The Lieutenant ordered McNulty to take Kima in which him to interrogate a suspect. McNulty protests, but then eventually gives in. After the Lt leaves, McNulty tells Kima to run titles and tags on the trucks associated with the suspect and passes her by as if she was invisible. Kima tells McNulty that she's "been there" and that the info is already in the file. She walks away with confidence.

Cheryl. The following scene shows racism through police harassment.

(1:05:46) - Cheryl goes to an old club for footage. She wears a blue bandana tied around her head, green shirt and carries her video camera and book bag. Two officers, one black, one white, walk down the street and see her.

WHITE OFFICER

“Looks like one of our crackhead friends. ”

They question her about why she's there. She tells them she's minding her business. The white officer mistakes her for a man.

WHITE OFFICER

”Boy, don't you know this is private property? Where'd you get that camera?”

CHERYL

”I'm not a boy and the camera's mine.”

BLACK OFFICER

”Well, you look like one, you little crackhead freak.”

The implication that Cheryl is a ‘crackhead freak’ automatically positions the harassment as racist and homophobic, since crackheads are normally prescribed as black and freak was in response to him misidentifying her (Yuen, 2010).

Jane. In the following scene, a white woman mistakes Jane as wait staff, even though just moments before Jane was on stage performing. Mistaking Jane as wait staff has a racial implication since historically black women were positioned as servers, subservient to their white employers.

(0:01:57) - Jane performs in a club. During her performance a white couple talks loudly making it impossible to hear Jane's singing. When the set is over, Jane, annoyed approaches the woman.

WOMAN

“Do you need to clear something here? You can go ahead and take everything, just leave the glasses.”

Positionality

Employment. Employment refers to the character’s trade or profession. Ten characters were employed. Six characters worked blue-collar (service-oriented) jobs. Three characters worked yellow-collar (creative) jobs. Two characters worked black-collar (illegal) jobs and one character, Kia, worked in a white-collar (professional) job. The following are descriptions that portray the character’s employment position.

Multiple Positions

Cheryl. Cheryl is a video clerk by day and sometimes work as a freelance videographer. In her free time, she works on her video project about the Watermelon woman. In her freelance work, she holds a position of power because of the assertiveness needed to get the shots she wants (i.e. telling Tamara where to hold the reflector, setting up the shots with her clients). Additionally, this puts her in a self-reliant role since she’s an independent contractor and has to find and maintain her clients.

(0:01:12) - Tamara sets up the shot for Cheryl and gives directions to the wedding party.

TAMARA

”Ok. Let me just tighten you guys up in here. Very nice. Would you just angle it a little bit more? Great. Come over. You two switch places. ”

A white man wearing a yamaka walks in front of the main camera and in front of the group just positioned by Tamara. He sets up his camera and starts moving people around.

MAN

"Looks great. Oh. Could you two guys in the back switch places, please?"

CHERYL

"Sir? Excuse me, sir? We're working with the family right now."

MAN

"Oh."

CHERYL

"Don't you even see the video equipment? Why don't you just like wait your turn?"

MAN

"Okay."

CHERYL

"Thank you..."

Cheryl exhales and walks back behind the main camera.

It is assumed that her freelance work doesn't allow her to be fully independent because she also works at a video store as a clerk. She loses her position of power by working at a job that places her in a subordinate role and reliant on Bob (the video store manager) to maintain her independence (money).

Jane. Jane is a struggling musician who wants to travel to CA to become a big time player. However, she doesn't have the money for the trip. She answers an ad for a driver, but doesn't vibe with Robin.

(0:06:45) - Jane meets Robin at a restaurant. During the entire conversation, Robin, a white woman, continually cuts Jane off. Jane gets annoyed with Robin's disrespectful manner.

JANE

“I'm sure there's somebody who wants to go cross-country with the whitest woman on the face of the earth but it ain't me.”

Jane leaves and sees her car being towed. Robin tells her its going to be \$200 to get out of tow, implying that Jane can earn that money by driving Robin to CA. Jane agrees and ends up traveling cross-country with her and Jane's friend Holly, two white women.

Although Jane is presented originally as a musician, she is reduced to becoming a driver for a white woman and is placed in a subservient role. Additionally, when Robin becomes sick, Jane is placed in the position of caretaker.

Cleo. Cleo works for Luther's cleaning service as a janitor. She wears a blue and grey cleaning uniform and cleans mostly rich white people homes. However, she ends up robbing banks with her friends to make extra money.

(0:19:30) - Cleo, Frankie, T.T. and Stoney clean a large home. Cleo wears her cleaning uniform with “Luther's Janitorial” stitched to the front. She starts polishing a picture of a white family.

CLEO

”Look at this motherfucker. Bet you, he ain’t never held a broom in his life. And she ain’t did no dishes or washed no clothes. This is an ugly-ass baby! Yo, white people be having some old water head, crying ass, ugly babies. ”

Cleo as a bank robber puts her in a unique position. On one hand, because of her criminal background and access to guns and other skills needed to pull off a successful bank robbery, she is an integral part of the team. However, Frankie is the leader, creating the plans and giving everyone a part in the robbery. This places Cleo in a subordinate position, reliant on Frankie’s instructions and control.

Yellow Collar (Creative)

J.J. J.J.’s job as a wedding photographer positions her as an independent contractor, which allows her more autonomy than working for a company. However, this type of job is reliant on having clients and thus also places her in a service-oriented position. Additionally, it places her in a power position because Seb appears to be her assistant. However, unlike Cheryl, J.J. doesn’t have any other job, which assumes that she makes enough money to support herself doing freelance work.

(0:10:59) J.J. and Seb prepare to take photos of a wedding.

SEB

”Bruv, I need a bigger reflector. ”

J.J.

”Ok, Ok, I said I’ll get you one. All right, you two ready.”

MALE CLIENT

”We are. We are camera ready. ”

Kia. Kia is introduced as a professor. It's unknown what she teaches but is later revealed that it's Women Studies. She has one lone scene that places her in her professorship and it's at the beginning of the film.

(0:00:30) – Kia stands at the board discussing queerness with her students.

KIA

"Ok. Let's make a list of women that you think are lesbians or that you know are lesbians through history or present time."

Kia's class yells out names of well-known women and Kia writes the list on the board.

STUDENT

"Excuse me. I have a question. Why are we making this list. I mean it's completely speculation."

KIA

"That's a really good question. Throughout lesbian history, there has been a serious lack of evidence that will tell us what these women's lives are truly about. Lesbian lives and lesbian relationships barely exist on paper and it's with that in mind and understanding the meaning and power of history that we begin to want to change history."

Kia is presented as articulate and well versed on women and gender studies. She's in a position of power because of her placement of a professor.

Blue Collar

Tamara. Tamara works with Cheryl at the video store as a clerk and assist Cheryl when doing freelance videography. Both positions place her in a service-orient subordinate role reliant on both Cheryl and Bob (Video Store) to maintain her independence (money).

(0:00:10) - Tamara holds a large reflector and carries a large camera bag. There are people milling about behind her. She looks into the camera.

TAMARA

“Where do you want it? Where do you want it? Where do you want it? Oh shit.”

CHERYL

“Tamara, Tamara, go stand over there. Go stand over there with them. It’s kind of dark.”

Tamara walks back into the scene with her reflector and starts shining it on a young girl.

CHERYL

“Why don’t you move it? Why don’t you move it over there?”

Tasha. Tasha serves in the National Guard as a military police officer. However, she ends up being discharged due to homosexual conduct. She gets a job as store security, but is visibly unhappy. She then decides to join the police academy.

(S5E12, 30:33) - Tasha sits at the computer wearing a white tank top. She smiles and seems excited.

TASHA

“Guess what I just did.”

ALICE

“What ?”

TASHA

”I signed up for the police academy.”

ALICE

”For the LAPD?”

TASHA

”Yea. J.J. took me down. She teaches one of the training courses. They love the fact that I’m ex-military and they’re really pro-gay. ”

She walks over and sits next to Alice on the couch. She shows her the training manual.

TASHA

”They even have domestic partner benefits.”

Alice looks at her and smiles apprehensively.

ALICE

”You wanna be a cop? ”

TASHA

”Yea. I’m really excited. ”

Tasha is displaced. She works as a security officer, which doesn’t present the same challenges she faced as military police. However, she’s also proactive, signing up to

become an officer. This shows her self-reliance and power in the ability to make decisions that are best for her.

Kima. Kima is presented as a career-focused police detective. Although, she's not in a leading position at her job (i.e. sergeant, lieutenant), she places herself in a position of power by her assertive demeanor.

(S1E1, 0:17:55) - Kima leaves her post and gives Carver and Herc orders to continue to take photos of anyone Bubs put a hat on. Herc asks where Kima's going but she ignores him and leaves.

HERC

"Notice most of the time, its like Kima thinks she's above us or something? I mean I don't see any fucking stripes on her sleeve... All I see is some stuck up dyke bitch who ain't been in CID half the time of you or me and she's fucking telling us what to do."

The overabundance of characters working blue collar jobs and being positioned as a servant falls in line with other historical portrayals of black womanhood where they were confined to subservient positions (Collins, 2000; Bogle, 2001).

Black Collar

Snoop. Snoop is muscle and a hit man for Marlo. She is in a unique position because on one hand, she is placed in a power position solely because of the fear she instills in the community. On the other hand, she works for Marlo and follows Chris' lead, which removes any autonomy she has.

(S4E8, 29:50) – On Marlo’s request, Snoop and Chris go out to eliminate the New York dealers who have started selling their product in Baltimore. Snoop ensures that the person is from NY by asking something only a Baltimore person would know.

SNOOP

”Who’s your favorite one on the Big Phat Morning Show, yo?”

DEALER

”What, you a New York girl? Sanjay.”

SNOOP

”Who? Who?”

Snoop pulls out her gun and is about to shoot the dealer. Chris quickly interjects.

CHRIS

”Snoop, Snoop. Yo! Chill! Sanjay be on the show, too.”

He pulls her off and they leave.

Summary

The data presented in this chapter displayed detailed information about the characters positionality within their relationships and their work lives. It discussed the characters’ gender performance and experience with oppression. A majority of the characters were represented in submissive roles. Most were positioned as blue-collared workers and creative freelancers. They mimicked heterosexual relationships and

displayed hypermasculine behaviors. Some of the negative portrayals showed them as competitive and misogynistic. However, they also displayed instances of loyalty, love, and compassion. A more in-depth discussion follows this chapter.

Discussion

Examining, deconstructing, and decoding images of Black MOC lesbian women exposed the various ways Black female masculinities are depicted in films and television. Characters displayed performances and messages that are reminiscent of historical Black gendered stereotypes (Collins, 2000; Bogle, 2001; Pilgrim, 2008), where their gendered roles were a mixture of both feminine and masculine actions and behaviors. The major difference, however, is that the characters' performance of masculinized gender roles were an attempt to depict masculinity as a part of the female-sexed body and not a result of an absence of Black patriarchy (Collins, 2000). The following chapter discusses these findings and provides answers to the critical research questions proposed earlier in this thesis. The discussion is divided into the following sections: Stereotypes, Implications, Limitations, and Conclusion.

Black MOC Queer Female Tropes

The Black Homo-Heterosexual. The Black Homo-heterosexual was the most prevalent trope in the data. Portrayed by nine out of eleven characters, this stereotype is more visible in romantic pairings than in individual performance. These characters are not exclusively stone butches but tend to be partnered with femme-presenting women who can assume female gendered-roles in the relationship. This portrayal replicates the gendered sexual norms while maintaining the subversive queer image.

The Black Homo-Heterosexual trope was the most prevalent stereotype because every character that had a primary romantic interest, were partnered with feminine-presenting women. The relationship also enforces heterosexism by situating queer relationships in a homonormative position.

The Angry Black Butch. The second type that emerged from the data was The Angry Black Butch. Portrayed by three characters, this queer image is easily angered and irritated. She is a descendent of the Angry Black Man and the Sapphire (Pilgrim, 2008). She's generally harmless, but is presented as stoic and aggressive, worthy of being feared. They're hard to please and are sometimes portrayed as one-dimensional having a limited spectrum of emotion. They are constantly in self-protection mode, which indicates emotional damage for reasons unclear or unknown.

Tasha's character in *The L Word* (2007) is a prime example of this stereotype. As soon as Tasha is introduced into show, the other characters view her as angry; the show provided partial explanations, but not until later in the series. The explanation for her anger is unclear, which indicates that it is an immutable characteristic. The same goes for Jane's character in the film *Boys on the Side* (1995), when she's first presented, she's go into an exaggerated ploy to get even with rude, racist, customers. Then right after, Jane spewed racist remarks to a taxi driver. In both instances, they instances, they fall in love with white women and end up softening up. In the *Watermelon Woman* (2007), Tamara's character, reminiscent of a combination of the Sapphire and Nat stereotype, is pro-Black, has a constant attitude and gets visibly annoyed by white people.

The Black Blundering Hero. The third stereotype is “The Black Blundering Hero”. Portrayed by three characters, this figure comes in and saves the day, but rarely leaves a scene without causing another tragedy. They are portrayed as courageous as they often are placed in physically and emotionally dangerous situations. They play the protector role well and are usually the most dominant character in their romantic relationships. They often compete with men, and hold jobs that allow them to play the protector or position them in leadership roles.

In *Set It Off* (1996), Cleo is faced with situations that push her into the role of the Black Blundering Hero. In one scene, she is put to the test when a police car blocks the get-away car, while they're in the middle of robbing the bank. Cleo calmly exits the car and disappears around the corner. The next scene shows her crashing through a wall in a SUV, picking up the girls, and then driving off. While the girls are on the verge of getting caught, Cleo swoops in and saves the day. Cleo's last display of heroism resulted in her death. In the last part of *Set It Off* (1996), Cleo forces her friends out the car and decides to take the police on her own. When she finally faces them, she's gunned down and killed.

Tasha is another example of the Black Blundering Hero. She's employed as military police and is more dominant than Alice in their relationship. Additionally, in a fight scene between two women, Tasha takes it upon herself to break it up and save the party. However, she ends up slipping and elbowing Alice in the eye. Lastly, Kima is also positioned as the Black Blundering Hero. In season one of *The Wire* (2002), Kima is

placed as the lead detective on a large drug case. She volunteered to go undercover to move the case forward. When undercover, she and the informer drove into a trap. They both were shot several times. The informer died and Kima went into a coma. Each of these characters played the hero but ended up causing another misfortune.

The Black Butch Brute. The last stereotype is reminiscent of the historical “Brute” stereotype that labeled Black men as hypermasculine and dangerous criminals (Pilgrim, 2000; Bogle, 2001). Portrayed by three characters, the Black Butch Brute exhibits similar characteristics as the original archetype: hypermasculinity, a lack of self-control, and criminality. They are rarely in positions of power and feel comfortable objectifying women. A deconstruction of this type revealed two specific sub-types of Black Butch Brutes. **The Criminal** is either unemployed or works in a low-level blue-collar position. They are good at instilling fear either through the stature of their size or their unpredictable behavior. Most often, they are portrayed as the ‘muscle’ of the group and are rarely in leadership roles. They are hyperactive and generally lack self-control. **The Misogynist** is bad at maintaining boundaries when it comes to women. In fact, they objectify and feel entitled to them. If they are in relationships, they are sometimes controlling and jealous. In some instances, the misogynist is in constant competition with men and other masculine of center people.

Snoop is the ultimate Black Butch Brute who’s also a criminal. She works as a hit man for a drug lord and shows no compassion. She’s portrayed as loving to kill. In season five of *The Wire* (2008), Snoop gets really excited when she hears that Marlo has a ‘job’

for her. Her partner, Chris explains that she's just eager to kill someone since she hasn't been able to due to police surveillance. In *Set It Off* (1996), after T.T. shoots and kills Luther, Cleo walks over to the surviving witness, a white woman, takes her id, and tells her not to say anything. The white woman is visibly shaken and afraid. In *Stud Life* (2012), J.J. explicitly states why she can't be friends with femmes, (lack of control) nor studs (competiveness).

Implications

Although fictional films and television series are not reality, they reflect a social reality that contributes to the creation of individuals' self-conception and perception of other communities (Berry, 1988; Greenberg, 1988, Kellner, 1995). Most often, people who create these imaginary worlds are writing from an outsider's perspective (Collins, 2000), indicating that they are relying on existing images of blackness. Historically, Black men and women were stereotyped into controlling images used to maintain the social order in the United States. Deconstructing the portrayals of queer images of Black, masculine women revealed a similar project of creating images that are used to maintain hegemonic portrayals of blackness and heterosexuality.

The data suggest that the characters' queerness is not located in their sexuality, but through their masculinity, it is through their performance of masculinity that their queerness is revealed. Absent the female sexed body, the tropes associated with Black masculinity persist. Three out of the four tropes that emerged from the data were rooted

in existing portrayals of Black men. The one trope that labels the character as queer, the homo-heterosexual, is rooted in heterosexism and is based on the logic that romantic relationships must include a man (a dominant masculine identity) and a woman (a submissive feminine identity). The Black butch is positioned as the dominant masculine identity and therefore the 'man' of the relationship.

The social implications of these images support existing racial, gender, and sexual oppression found within the United States. For example, most of the images of Black MOC lesbianism portray them as culturally deficient since there is no mention or examination of their history or community. The notion of cultural deficiency has been placed on Black people for centuries and is used as a way to explain the rejection of dominant cultural norms (Cultural Deficiency, 2008). They are positioned as tokens to increase the entertainment value of the story, but have no or little life experience that is separate from the lives of their present romantic interest. It also positions them as the subversive 'Other' or different from the hegemonic norm, which justifies the objectification of them and implies that they need guidance and control to become a part of 'civilized' society.

Additionally, given the previous research around media socialization and its effect on self-conception and perception of other communities (Berry, 1988; Greenberg, 1988, Kellner, 1995), these images send messages that paints Africana MOC lesbians as deviant, competitive, and misogynistic, while physically separating them from other people that identifies in the same/similar way. If these are the images that saturate the

proverbial screen, then similar to the Black youth that revealed their internalized hatred of blackness (Clark & Clark, 1939; Davis, 2005), Africana MOC lesbians are going to start internalizing these characteristics as true to their identity and thus start behaving in a similar manner. Additionally, people who are outside the community will also accept these images as true and will start treating this community as outsiders, fearful that they will be harmed if they do interact with them.

Politically, these images justify the continuous murder and imprisonment of Black people. Similar to their male counterparts, who are often portrayed as thugs, gangster and other criminal tropes, the characterization of Black female masculinity paints them as dangerous and dishonest, worthy of being eliminated from normal society. Even the most positive portrayal, *The Black Blundering Hero*, creates harmful situations in an effort of eliminating one. The overabundance of negative portrayals of Black MOC lesbianism suggest that more diverse images are needed to be more reflective of the communities' culture and experiences. The performance of Black masculinity varies and it shouldn't only portray images of blackness and masculinity that is based on past stereotypes of Black men constructed to control black bodies.

Media messages that develop knowledge by, for, and/or in defense of Black Africana MOC lesbians are needed. In other words, more stories written for and about Black MOC lesbians should be written and directed from an insider's perspective. Their personal experience within the community will help develop more robust character portrayals based on lived experiences, emotion, and issues. In addition, it would prove

beneficial to create more resources through projects that record and document Africana MOC lesbian experiences and histories. Oral and visual histories and written documentation about MOC lesbians would provide a wealth of first-hand information and imagery that could be used later when portraying this identity.

It would also be useful if various films and media programs that produce a majority of working screenwriters, directors, and producers, examine their current syllabi and content to ensure that Black lesbians in general and Black MOC lesbians in particular are represented through discussion, authorship of materials, and visual screenings. Additionally, the examination of existing Black queer images is needed to ensure that the portrayals of these identities are not saturated in one or more controlling stereotypes.

Africana, Queer and Gender Studies programs would also benefit from constructing courses and subject expertise that highlights the Black MOC queer female experience. Providing space and support to investigate the lives of this community contributes to the creation of experts in the field of Black gender and sexuality and will also create more research on the Black female queer image. More visibility helps to situate them within normal society (Berry, 1988; Kellner, 1995). Similar to the suggestion for film and media courses, the construction of courses should include discussion, authorship of materials and the examination and deconstruction of visual imagery by and of Africana queer women.

In general, educators could use the information provided in this thesis to construct or update existing syllabi and courses. The data could be used as a beginning point for discussing media representations of Africana MOC lesbianism and oppression. The characters used in this project could be used as examples to practice and test media literacy and display how previous depictions of Blackness connects to current portrayals of Black gender and sexuality.

Limitations

This project has several limitations. First, it examines the representation of Black masculine of center lesbians. The selection process relied on physical markers of masculinity rather than self-identification. Additionally, the results focused specifically on the portrayal of Black female masculinity and cannot speak to the portrayals of Black lesbians that identify outside of the masculine spectrum. The examination consisted of films and television series, which, with the explosion of the Internet, may not be as representative of all the images of Black queer female masculinities available to date. Lastly, because this project relied upon content analysis of moving images, it can only theorize about and not speak to the socialization effects on the Black MOC Community.

Conclusion

The original intention of this project was to expose the different ways queer female masculinity was portrayed in film and television, as a way to include them in the discourse around media representation. The exposure presented rigid portrayals of Black masculine lesbianism; ones that are stunted inside historically negative images of blackness. This revelation empowers the Black MOC lesbian community with critical awareness of how they're represented. It also tasks them to take action by creating images that reject these stereotypes, replacing them with more diverse portrayals of their communities.

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