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# A Black Feminist Quare Interrogation of Stud Misogyny in Black Queer Web Series

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# A Black Feminist Quare Interrogation of Stud Misogyny in Black Queer Web Series

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Taisha McMickens

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# Chapter 1: Investigating Stud Misogyny in Black Queer Web Series

## Introduction

I grew up during the 1980s where it was somewhat common to find media with all-Black casts such as *227*, *Family Matters*, *A Different World*, and *What's Happening Now*. These sitcoms were staples of my youth. They were shown across mainstream television free channels 2-13, making it easier to access shows. My family and many folks from my Black neighborhood faithfully consumed the sitcoms, good or bad, each week. We watched the shows so much that it was easy to reference lines from the shows during regular conversation. The sitcoms often addressed social problems Black folks dealt with in their communities, like self-esteem, poverty, education, family life, conflict, Black history, and oppression.

Looking at Black family shows in the 1980s gave me other perspectives about family life and building relationships that I envisioned for my future. Of course, the shows were not without problems. Most of these family-centered sitcoms had cisgender, heterosexual couples with males in dominant positions to female partners. Queerness was absent unless women dressed in men's clothing and vice versa as folly. E. Patrick Johnson (2003) aptly notes how the comedy show, *In Living* Color, utilized queer folly. He states that the show produced skits whereby men were mocking queer identity as they reviewed films in the spirit of the old movie review show, *Siskel and Ebert.*

The skits relied on a homophobic, misogynist epistemology in order to get a laugh (Johnson, 2003). This gesture attempts to further pathologize homosexuality and femininity as perverted, abnormal, and anti-Black. I admit that I did not trouble the shows I watched for their lack of queer visibility or problematic folly at a younger age. During that time, I watched the shows simply because I saw myself in characters and could relate to the storylines. I wanted to emulate their experiences as Black people having careers, healthy families, and humorous interactions. The shows were an escape from my reality of poverty and neighborhood violence, as most television shows can be for people. They brought people together by creating a sense of commonality through discourse and humor, despite lacking queer visibility.

Since "coming out" in the mid-90s, I have sought to replicate the positive experiences I was gifted through Black sitcoms during my youth in my current search for Black queer shows with Black leading casts. As, Sheena Howard (2018) states, "Representation on television in the 1990s speaks to the perseverance of Black creators demanding to be seen, heard, and represented" (p. 404). In these shows we saw ourselves humanized. Recently, I watched Black lesbian director, writer, and actress Lena Waithe participate in an informal interview on her social media. She spoke about having pride in seeing Black shows, but was particularly elated to see Black queerness in shows over the past few years. She also mentioned the importance of having racial-sexual minorities writing and in decision-making positions at film studios because that contributes to our stories being told unapologetically. Along with Howard and Waithe, I felt a desire to find media representations that felt like home and those to which I could relate. I believe, like

Jewelle Gomez (2005), that "only by telling our stories in the most specific, imagistic, and imaginative narratives do the lives of Black lesbians take on long-term literary and political significance" (p. 290). Otherwise, as Allen (2011) notes, media will continue to produce a culture that maintains and support only those with power (p. 34).

Waithe is currently leading the way in terms of Black queer women in mainstream media. She is a part of the current upswing of Black queer characters on mainstream TV. Shows such as *Twenties, Pose, Black Lightning, L Word Generation Q, Sex Education,* and *The Handmaid's Tale* are in a stride of Black queer excellence in television where racial diversity has increased over the past year. Most often, one queer character is surrounded by a group of heterosexual, cisgender characters (GLAAD, 2020).While this representation is an accomplishment, according to a GLAAD's (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation)*"Where We Are On TV*" report for 2019-2020, of the ten percent of queer characters appearing on mainstream television "gay men continue to make up the majority of the LGBTQ regular and recurring characters on broadcast" (p. 8).Thus, as we are seeing an increase in queerness mainstreamed, a nuance in gender identity and sexual expression is catching up. As a Black queer woman, I continually try to add shows that center Black queer women's experiences to my viewing repertoire.

Because of this, I engaged other Black queer creative works to fill the void. In 2016, I heard about an out, stud rapper named Young M.A. She was listed on Forbes.com as an independent artist who kickstarted her career using YouTube.com. She quickly rose to fame when her double platinum song, *Ooouuu,* reached over 145 million streams

(Robehmed, March 2017). Her stud presence broke barriers in mainstream media by creating new, positive perceptions of masculine-presenting lesbians. This did not stop her participation in the continued rap industry trope of hypersexualizing and degrading women, however. R&B music was in heavy rotation in my home, but I was intrigued by M.A. and started listening to her music more often. I was struck by the play between her queer visibility and her hypersexualized lyrics about women. Because I understood her to be speaking about personal experiences, I was curious about perceptions of normative dominance and power dynamics in stud-femme relationships that she spoke to in her songs. Kara Keeling (2007) claims that this relationship binary is useful for survival and "has sedimented into a range of Black lesbian common-sense conceptions of lesbianism, becoming a habituated mechanism for recognizing Black lesbians and for organizing Black lesbian sociality" (pp. 133-134).

Not only did I explore more of Young M.A.'s music, I decided to dig deeper into her framing of Black queer intimate relationships in comparison to other available Black queer media. Specifically, I was interested in knowing if misogyny persisted throughout media involving stud discourse and relationships because I never envisioned misogyny detached from men before M.A. This was not because of a lack of women rapper examples; it was just written off as a taken-for-granted commonality in rap music. What shifted in me and caught my attention was M.A.'s queerness and visibility. In an ode to Black queer solidarity, I wanted to see her thriving in the rap industry. Yet, I could not shake my curiosity about media and misogyny in our community, and because of that this project was born. In my experience, most Black queer women media content containing

multiple queer characters in leading roles are found through streaming services online. I started my investigation with YouTube.com web series.

Finding shows where Black queer folks are shown outside of racial-sexual stereotypes in mainstream media can be a challenge. Hill Collins (1989) explained that "the media, and other cultural institutions are generally skilled in establishing their view of reality as superior to alternative interpretations" (p. 749). The media as a system upholds White patriarchal views and stereotypes about Black queerness which makes it difficult to find works that offer those alternative interpretations. Sheena Howard (2018) points out one challenge in that "depictions of Black lesbians in the media have largely been absent, simplistic, or stereotypical" (p. 409).Brenda Allen (2011) equally found that television operates with heteronormative, patriarchal beliefs about sexuality and gender that creates norms for romance and sexual relationships.

Heteronormativity is "localize practices and those centralized institutions that legitimize and privilege heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships as fundamental and "natural" within society" (Johnson, 2005, p. 24). Because of this, females are portrayed "denying or devaluing their own sexual desire, seeking to please males, and trading their sexuality as a commodity" (Allen, 2011, p. 127). In addition, television is a means in which racial stereotypes are perpetuated by condensing and oversimplifying characters. Both media problems make it challenging to find Black queer shows outside of racial-sexual stereotypes. Media that represent the social realities of Black queer women are, instead, more likely to be found on internet streaming services. These media outlets contain web series with Black queer folks as lead characters, storylines that

resemble familiar issues in offscreen racial-sexual communities to which I belong, and a variety of content created by, and for, Black queer people.

Highlighting the race of web series' creators is salient because "Black lesbians navigate intersecting identities and social locations in ways that allow them to retain racial group commitments while simultaneously exposing themselves as autonomous sexual selves" (Moore, 2012, p. 37). This is true even when "outward expressions of sexuality may disrupt notions of middle-class Black respectability" (Moore, 2012, p. 37). Essentially, the creators speak from a dual positionality as having their own experiences as Black queer women, along with being connected to the larger Black queer community. Within their positionality lies the complex web of racial-sexual histories, policies, and oppressive structures bearing down on them.

After watching several Black queer women web series, I noticed a trend to depict "studs" as misogynists. Studs are Black masculine-identified lesbians. Their aesthetic may include wearing hats, men's clothing in a baggy manner, have short hair cuts or braids, and accessorizing with flashy jewelry (Lane-Steele, 2011; Moore, 2006). Most of the Black women who created the shows readily identify as queer or lesbian. The predominantly Black casted series claim to be about friendship, love, or everyday life of queer women of color. Mignon Moore (2006) states that Black queer women's romantic relationships include one partner displaying stereotypical feminine gender roles and behavior, while the other partner takes on more masculine roles. A two-stud romantic relationship is often frowned upon in the Black queer community (Moore, 2006).

## Misogyny

This study focuses on instances of stud misogyny. I note that stud identity alone is not the issue -- it is the conflation of stud with misogyny as a repetitive theme on web series that requires attention. Corey Johnson and Diane Samdahl (2006) define misogyny as "a range of negative emotions for, or actions toward, women. These negative emotions/actions can range from intense hatred to more subtle forms of dislike, oppression, and marginalization" (p. 332). Further, misogyny is a political ideology where women are deemed inferior which predisposes them to domination (Johnson & Samdahl, 2006, p. 332). This characterization explains the emotional and political aspects of misogyny. Kate Manne (2018) explained two important aspects of her view of systemic misogyny:

1. Misogyny ought to be understood as the system that operates within a patriarchal social order to police and enforce women's subordination and to uphold male dominance.

2. Misogyny is primarily a property of social systems or environments as a whole, in which women will tend to face hostility of various kinds because they are women in a man's world (i.e., patriarchy). (p. 33)

Manne concluded that misogyny is both political and psychological. In other words, she believed that reducing explanations of misogyny to mere hatred or dislike is too simplistic. She locates misogynistic hostility as a part of a system that polices, punishes, dominates, and condemns those women who are perceived as an enemy or threat to the patriarchy (p. 34). Women can experience misogyny through "condescending, mansplaining, moralizing, blaming, punishing, silencing, lampooning, satirizing, sexualizing, belittling, caricaturizing, exploiting, erasing, and evincing pointed

indifference" (Manne, 2018, p. 30). While these definitions of misogyny are clear and present the harms associated with the term, the authors do not outline characterizations that attend to sexuality and racial difference in a way that allows stud-femme entry into the conversation.

Manne (2018) for example, turns to Moya Bailey for perspectives about misogyny that center the lived experiences of Black women. Bailey (2014) coined the term Misogynoir to explain how Black women are pathologized in popular culture. "What happens to Black women in public space isn't about them being any woman of color. It is particular and has to do with the ways that anti-Blackness and misogyny combine to malign Black women in our world" (Bailey & Trudy, 2018, p. 763). Here, Bailey is noting that misogynoir is the property of our social settings that are inherently anti-Black. In applying misogynoir to digital platforms, Bailey (2012) argues that images representing Black women cause negative perceptions about them in society leading to racial-sexual violence, health problems, and death. I agree with Bailey (2012), Manne (2018), and Johnson & Samdahl's (2006) conceptualizations of misogyny, but they do not speak to the internalized misogyny enacted within and among racialized queer women toward each other. However, taken together with Mikki Kendall's (2020) notion of two-faces of misogyny and toxicity, I believe unpacking misogyny in Black queer web series will be understood at systemic, interpersonal, and individual levels.

Mikki Kendall (2020) also offered a view of toxicity and misogyny that centers Black women. She found that for Black people,

> Toxic narratives about masculinity are blurring the lines between sexual violence, misogyny, and homophobia with the more benign desires of being strong and

> courageous, creating a system that rewards prejudiced attitudes at the same time it undermines more positive ones. (p. 82)

This sentiment undergirds the first argument I make in this project which is that stud misogynists simultaneously challenge sexism and racism with their gender performance yet participate in the subjugation of women by enacting patriarchal oppression of feminine individuals. Second, studs take cues about misogyny from Black males who were stifled under White patriarchal gender norms that make it possible for feminine bodies to be dehumanized and dominated. For example, Faithe Day (2018) asserts,

> The performative nature of gender does not allow one's subjective gender performance to stand alone, as an expression of one's true self. Instead, gender performativity is already based on the repetitive norms of performance, which serve to fix the gender binary (p. 270).

This speaks to the coupling of stud and Black cisgender masculinity through socialization. Repetitive norms of masculinity get recycled through stud gender performance outlining how they should move through space and treat femmes. These norms of masculinity take place in the web series linking stud representations in the media with a reflection of social reality. It does not offer a perfect reflection, yet it can impact viewers' beliefs and thoughts about race, gender, class, and sexuality (Allen, 2011). In this case, it can paint a picture of romantic relationships for Black queer women. What is needed to address stud-femme experiences dealing with misogyny is the development of cultures of resistance (Carby, 1982). A culture of resistance embodies ways of organizing production and value systems that are critical of oppressive forces (Carby, 1982).

The purpose of this research study is to interrogate Black lesbian webseries where the stud (masculine-identified Black lesbian) characters enact misogyny. This project provides a Black feminist quare theoretical framework for examining stud masculinity, misogyny, and Black women's sexuality. It aims to answer the following two questions: 1. How do representations of stud misogyny in Black queer webseries display the histories of Black women's sexuality and gender in the U.S.? 2. How is stud misogyny represented in web series? A way that studs can resist media's insistence of misogynistic portrayals on stud bodies is through bell hook's steps for Black liberation outlined in a Love Ethic. (hooks b. , *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, 2004) A Love Ethic is a means of challenging patriarchal dominance by building communities of resistance focused on transforming our political and cultural climates. I further extrapolate the benefits of a Love Ethic upon evidencing stud misogyny in the web series analysis.

*Media Representation and Online Platforms*

Web series have shifted how traditional, mainstream shows are made and viewed (Day, 2018). YouTube is a platform hosting many of these web series promising to give everyone a voice, and improve the world through listening, sharing, and building community through story telling (YouTube.com, 2020). The platform is significant to this study because it "mobilizes a politics of recognition in which content creators work to produce videos that represent both themselves and their audience" (Day, 2018, p. 268). For example, Faithe Day (2018) found that viewers turn to platforms like YouTube because they want to see themselves represented in content and are frustrated by flat depictions of their identities. Flat depictions are wrapped up in stereotypes about Black

women's sexuality and gender. Further, Jade Petermon & Leland Spencer (2019) explain that "mediated representations flatten complexity, highlight sensationalism, and moderate political commitments" (p. 341). As such, "the stereotypes and assumptions that undergird gendered and sexual normativity still control the ways in which these women are represented in the media and the way(s) in which they engage with each other in real and virtual space" (Day, 2018, p. 267).

Rachel Griffin (2014) relates that throughout mainstream media, she can see images of how her body has been Othered within controlling images of "the mammy, jezebel, sapphire, matriarch, and the more contemporary welfare queen, hoodrat, freak, crazy Black bitch, superwoman, or some combination thereof" (p. 147).Griffin (2014) expresses anger about these representations saying, "The body that I cherish and the mind that I have worked hard to cultivate are continually maimed in song after song, image after image, and plot after plot" (p. 147). Mikki Kendall (2020) also understands that mainstream media constantly perpetuates stereotypes about women of color. For example, she found that the media portrayed "Black women and Latinas as promiscuous, American Indian and Asian women as submissive, and all women of color as inferior legitimizes their sexual abuse" (p. 59). In contrast, men of color are hypersexualized as predators seeking out frail White women in the media. Ultimately, I agree with Beverly Greene (2000) who said, "distorted images rather than realistic depictions have defined African Americans" (p. 241).

This stereotype about men of color contributes to what Kendall (2020) calls a "cultural obsession with Black-on-White stranger rape" (p. 59). Overall, stereotypes

about people of color are one reason that YouTube is an appealing alternative for them to create and share their stories. Tarleton Gillespie (2010) said,

> YouTube's dominance in the world of online video makes them one of just a handful of video platforms, search engines, blogging tools, and interactive online spaces that are now the primary keepers of the cultural discussion as it moves to the Internet. (p. 2)

Significant to this study is that Black queer cultural discussions are happening across internet platforms through web series and other creative means. Further, YouTube purports to be a space for freedom of expression, information, belonging, and opportunity (YouTube.com, 2020). The platform's freedom of expression vision claims to "believe people should be able to speak freely, share opinions, foster open dialogue, and that creative freedom leads to new voices, formats and possibilities" (YouTube, 2020).

Katherine Sender (2014) found that small cable channels contained adventurous representations of queerness, because lower budget productions include flexible labor and distinct audiences who allow and demand diverse images. By extension, the same is possible for web series where user control over content is a factor of adventurous representations for the platform. Like Rachel Griffin (2014) who was angered by onscreen depictions of Black women, Black queer women who watch web series are concerned about how they are being portrayed. Faithe Day (2018) said, "The lack of mediated representations of Black lesbians increases the weight of those representations within the media landscape" (p. 279). Day (2018) referred to this as the burden of representation whereby members of marginalized communities impose their expectations on those making content about groups to which they belong.

Audience concerns about representations speak to a lack of trust in how they are portrayed in the media based on how Black women have been depicted in the past. According to Griffin (2012), Black women are classified against hegemonic notions of White femininity and characteristics that fail to recognize their "innocence, beauty, worth, and virtue" (p. 148). Thus, when the media limits showing a range of characters with a variety of depth and roles, audiences struggle to comprehend that a wide range actually exists (Allen, 2011). This is what Griffin (2012) refers to as a relentless assault of negative representations that constantly stall the possibilities of being recognized outside of dehumanizing, controlling images of Black women as inferior.

This discussion about media representation and the importance of having platforms that allow more creative freedom and autonomy in telling stories about Black women and other people of color, is compounded by Black queer representations in the media. According to GLAAD (2020) there has been a forty-seven percent increase in diversity of LGBTQ characters on broadcast television, while streaming services saw a decrease. Queer of color characters saw a three percent increase with gay men make up the majority of this increase and they, like other queer characters, are often not in leading roles (GLAAD, 2020). Moreover, the organization found that streaming services like Hulu and Netflix had the lowest racial diversity among queer characters. GLAAD (2020) noted that the increase in diversity of queer of color characters will also drop because of show cancellations.

Anne van Eldik, Julia Kneer, Roal Lutkenhaus, & Jeroen Jansz (2019) discuss the influence of YouTube influencers saying that, "In their textual, visual, and audible

elements, the videos may present the city or its citizens in a variety of direct or symbolic ways" (p. 2). The authors describe an influencer as a role model who plays a part in their fans' identity construction. Based on viewership, I believe these Black queer web series are influential in how Black queer women are perceived and how they may perceive themselves. For example, by the end of its first season, *Choiices The Series* had about 475,000 episode views. Because of the issues outlined here with negative, limited, or absent representations in mainstream television, indeed, some viewers turn to YouTube.com for racially and sexually representative stories of Black queerness.

*Chapter Breakdown*

Now that I have established a foundation for Black queer media, studs, and misogyny, the remaining chapters offer a theoretical perspective, method of analysis, web series investigation, and discussion. Chapter two of this project explores the theoretical framework that explains stud misogynist's gender performances in relation to colonial gender constructs for Black women and men. The theoretical framework brings Black feminism and quare theory into conversation to expose hidden information within a text that would otherwise remain unseen, it reveals the impact of dominance, power, and heteropatriarchy in stud-femme interactions. Petermon & Spencer (2019) "see the queer Black feminist lens as a tool for hope, possibility, and survival—one that never only tears down the forces of oppression, but that also imagines and contributes to the construction of better, more just worlds" (p. 353). For them, this framework also centers queer Black women's lived experiences and uses them to implement critical strategies designed to bring about liberation from all types of oppression (Petermon & Spencer, 2019).

In Chapter three, I map the Matrix of Domination as a method to explore the web series characters' interpersonal representations of stud misogyny. For example, I explore the relationship between heteropatriarchal gender constructs and cisgender and Black male misogyny that positions studs in a victim-victimizer dichotomy. In Chapter four, I apply the matrix of domination to analyze stud/femme relationalities and quare futures. Finally, Chapter five explains potential implications of stud misogyny in Black lesbian web series for Black queer masculinities and offscreen relationships.

This study is important particularly because media is a storytelling tool that shapes perceptions and behaviors toward individuals and groups across difference. In sharing stories, the media helps "combat negative or dehumanizing headlines, create a culture shift that makes it safe for LGBTQ people to live authentically as ourselves and to offer hope and inspiration to young queer and trans* people around the world" (GLAAD, 2020, p. 4). For Brenda Allen (2011), "television is a crucial location in which relationships between social groups, stereotyping, group identity, and the like, are played out" (p. 81). As such, people from all backgrounds believe media portrayals about people of color to be true. Portrayals are used to confirm ideas about people of color among viewers. In turn, the group portrayed may experience a negative impact on their self-esteem (Allen, 2011). Thus, if I want to see media that represents my social reality as a Black queer woman, I turn to internet streaming services like YouTube.com. There, I find webseries with Black queer folks as lead characters, storylines that resemble familiar issues in offscreen racial-sexual communities to which I belong, and a variety of content created by, and for, Black queer people.

I examine studs represented on the Black lesbian webseries *New York Girls TV (NYGTV), Choiices The Series, The Best Friend,* and *Women of Atlanta TV (WOATV).* Each show was created by Black women, some who readily identify as queer or lesbian on their shows' webpages, and others who do not have that information listed. The series claim to be about friendship, love, or everyday life of queer women of color. The cast members are predominantly Black. Some commonalities in stud portrayals on these series are committing crimes, partner abuse, infidelity, and misogyny. Although there is a shift in romantic partnering, most Black lesbian relationships on the series fit within the stud-femme binary. Faithe Day (2018) states,

> Within communities formed by queer women of color, the performance of masculinity and femininity (or butch/femme) plays an important role in how one is read and recognized by those within, and outside of, the community. While femme-presenting lesbians tend to be more visibly aligned with heteronormative constructions of gender performance, masculine women tend to exhibit a performance that is visibly queer and influenced by racial and gendered norms within their own communities. (p. 267)

Griffin (2012) believes that "media does have the power to shape, influence, and suggest who people are and subsequently how they can acceptably be treated" (p. 148). It is with Griffin's understanding of media and Day's unpacking of the stud-femme binary that I begin my journey investigating Black queer women in web series.

# Chapter 2: A Quare Black Feminist Framework On "Stud" Misogyny Among Black Queer Women

*"Black women's lives are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as African-American women with our objectification as the Other"- Patricia Hill Collins*

Our transformation as women began with being seen as labor and sexual objects after losing patriarchal protection (Omolade, 1994). We were denied humanity and thus, kept under patriarchal control and subjugated as non-women. Many Black feminists sought to resist such oppression and liberate themselves from constricting sexism and racism; yet there remained some Black women who settled into the patriarchal ideals of women prioritizing heteronormative gender roles as a means of survival (Omolade, 1994).

Contemporary Black feminist theorizing challenges myths about Black women's sexuality as it works to liberate them from racial-sexual oppression. Black feminist theory has become receptive to centering broader social issues like lesbianism, sexual assault, domestic violence, rape, and homophobia to its powerful agenda (Omolade, 1994). Black lesbian feminists tried to make this happen throughout the history of the field but were met with traditional Black feminist requests to ignore their queerness in the battle against racism and sexism (Lorde, 1980).

The request for women to deny aspects of their identity to seek social justice for a particular issue is not new for feminism. It is problematic and one of the main reasons that intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) is so valuable. Intersectionality ensured that people were not forced to suspend the very aspects of their identity that resulted in their experiences with oppression. Because of intersectionality, we are forced to look at the unique ways in which the interconnectedness of our identities causes compounded experiences of oppression.

Audre Lorde (1980) was asked in Black feminist spaces to deny her queerness, and in White feminist spaces to deny her Blackness. Black feminism valued intersectionality because it allowed racial-sexual injustices to be contextualized, but it stopped short of openly welcoming queer women during this time. Black feminism needed to reconcile its homophobia, while White feminism continued to have the historical issue of wanting Black women to ignore their Blackness for supposed solidarity as women first. With each request, Lorde (1980) said she felt fragmented. Folks with fragmented identities will not gain liberation from systems of oppression. Because of her work along with other women helping expand Black feminism into its current contemporary moment, by and large, it is grappling with its homophobia.

In a patriarchal system where both Black men and women are socialized, it is clear to see how Black feminism resisted queer inclusion for so long. Under patriarchy, women were valued in association with men and heterosexual relationships were the norm. Women loving women would be a threat to that patriarchal system. Despite Black folks being oppressed inside of the system, many still attempted to participate within the

system as a means of seeking freedom from subjugation. In fact, hooks (2004) noted that Black men received a level of power from their participation in the patriarchal norms via sexual conquest and feminine domination.

Currently, Black feminists continues to theorize about racism and sexism, but black feminism also has turned attention to the way Black people relate to each other after continual oppression. Lorde (1980) said that we as Black people need to stop oppressing each other. It is at this point that I enter the conversation by looking at how Black queer women relate to each other. There is an ongoing issue in the Black queer community whereby some masculine identified queer women, largely "studs," enact misogyny.

Stud refers to Black lesbians who embody masculinity (Lane-Steele, 2011). It is used in Black queer women spaces akin to how "butch" is used in White queer women spaces. Stud and butch are used in contrast to feminine lesbian identity (Love, 2016). Brooke Love (2016) asserts that butch women "are masculine presenting, often wearing men's clothing, cologne, sporting short haircuts, and sometimes further minimizing markers of femininity such as flattening their breasts or intentionally lowering their voices" (p. 5). Studs may wear men's clothing in a baggy manner, have short hair cuts or braids, and accessorize with flashy jewelry (Lane-Steele, 2011; Moore, 2006). Moore (2006) believes that these "physical representations of gender, indicated by clothing, hair, physical stance, the presence or absence of makeup, and various other symbols, are extremely important markers of identification" (p. 114). Susan Kaiser (2012), who examines the impact of clothing and culture, agrees that we've been socialized to link

outward appearance and identity. Specifically, Kaiser (2012) found that clothing has historically been one way of reading sexuality. Society continues to hold on to the idea that one's clothes as a gender performance indicates sexuality and sexual preference (Kaiser, 2012). The description of studs is not applicable for every Black queer woman who embodies masculinity, but it is relevant in some communities.

Although "stud" can be used to describe general masculine attractiveness; when used by Black queer women, it is less about attractiveness and more about the high level of masculine gender performance. Some of these stud women engage with feminine identified folks in misogynistic ways. I am concerned about what takes place when stud and misogyny are conflated in both the everyday, and in Black queer media. Where necessary, I delineate between stud as simply masculine identified, or stud as misogynist. Primarily, I will refer to stud misogynists throughout the rest of this project with a shortened "studs."

Stud misogyny is a replication, once removed, from patriarchal sexism which consists of feminine domination. Just as Black males took patriarchal cues about masculinity from White male domination, studs take cues about masculinity from Black males who dominated them as women first. Thus, both Black males and studs can perform misogynistic masculinity. Because of their close cultural proximity, stud's gender performance is in some ways more likely to mirror the ways in which Black men perform masculinity after going through changes of sexual conquest, pop culture, and capitalism (hooks, 2004). I am noting that stud misogynists are performing masculinity that is race-specific. As such, if studs are mirroring a type of Black male masculinity and

arriving at misogyny, this has larger implications for further violence directed at Black women.

While Black feminism might claim that these women are seeking liberation over their gender expression, it would certainly hold them accountable for how they treat feminine bodies (femmes). Studs may learn how to engage and have relationships with femmes through an oppressive lens because Black people have historically had their sexuality and gender performances dictated by White male patriarchy (hooks, 2004). Thus, studs have knowledge about which gender norms, expectations, and masculine gender performance affords them a semblance of power.

I argue that stud misogynists present a conundrum for Black feminism because they challenge sexism and racism with their gender performance yet participate in the subjugation of women by enacting patriarchal oppression of femme individuals. Studs take cues about misogyny from Black males. Those enacting misogyny are complicit with the White male patriarchal gender norms that make it possible for feminine bodies to be dehumanized and dominated.

I use Black feminism and quare theory as a framework for understanding stud misogyny. Black Feminist Theory is a "way of reading inscriptions of race, gender, and class in modes of cultural expression" (Amoah, 1997, p. 97). E. Patrick Johnson (2005) defines Quare Theory as an approach for theorizing racialized sexuality in ways that disrupt Whiteness. It is a means of speaking across and articulating identities. Quare Theory "critiques stable notions of identity and concomitantly locates racialized and class knowledges" (Johnson, 2005, p. 127). Quare theory and Black feminist theory, taken

together, hold each other accountable for centering the multiplicity of Black and queer experiences. Of note for this study is that quare theory is tied to Southernness in the U.S. Apart from *New York Girls TV*, each web series I analyze for this project is set in the American South. The two theories prove to create a robust theoretical framework that can handle the complex systemic issues and lived experiences of Black queer women.

The history of racial-sexual oppression of Black folks in America is an important backdrop for examining Black women's sexuality and gender constructs. Stud misogyny is deeply rooted in this history and, as such, is important to this project. The theoretical framework offers insight into the systemic and material conditions taking place in Black queer communities. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section explains the theoretical framework. The second section explains the theoretical ideas around stud gender performance within a patriarchal gender system. The third section provides insight into how the theoretical framework approaches instances of stud misogyny.

## A Black Feminist Quare Theoretical Framework

This section provides an overview of Black feminist theory, quare theory, and how they work together to create a theoretical framework capable of approaching stud misogyny. Audre Lorde (1979) reminds us that "Black feminism is not White feminism in Blackface" (p. 60). All Black women are oppressed in some way in the United States, yet their experiences with oppression may be different. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) confirms that "regardless of social class and other differences among U.S. Black women, all were in some way affected by intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class" (p. 12). To empower these oppressed women and non-Black WOC, an analytical framework

that provides a vision of self, community, and larger society was created to challenge racist sexist productions of knowledge (Hill Collins, 1990). The core themes of this framework that Hill Collins (1990) refers to as Black Feminist Thought are interpretive frameworks, epistemological stances, empowerment, and thematic content. Black feminist thought is used interchangeably with Black Feminist Theory.

This analytical framework was necessary because the U.S. political and economic systems that oppressed Black women curbed knowledge production of individual Black feminist thinkers (Hill Collins, 1990). Instead of curbing knowledge production, any framework concerned with Black women or other historically oppressed groups should be geared toward “finding ways to escape from, survive in, and/or oppose prevailing social and economic injustice" (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 9).

Beverly Guy-Sheftall (1995) outlined the five facets of Black Feminist Thought. Like Hill Collins (1990) and Lorde (1980), she claims that Black women experience a special kind of oppression and suffering because of their race and gender. This limits their economic prospects. Guy-Sheftall (1995) also claimed that Black women’s struggles happen simultaneously because, “There is no inherent contradiction in the struggle to eradicate racism and sexism as well as other ‘isms’ which plague the human community, such as classism and heterosexism” (p. 2). Finally, she shares that Black women's commitment to racial-sexual liberation is significantly rooted in their lived experience” (p. 2). These five facets of Black feminist thought, according to Guy-Sheftall (1995), are commonalities across each derivative of Black feminism.

For instance, Audre Lorde identified as a Black lesbian feminist who fought for the inclusion of queer issues like homophobia in Black feminist thought. Lorde (1979) contended that Black women have issues that need to be addressed because they are uniquely experienced by them alone. Black feminism is a means, then, for Black women to speak about those experiences for themselves (Lorde, 1979). Lorde also relied on Black feminism to challenge the American tradition of blaming the victim for their own subjugation. Black women were accused of inviting rape and violence into their lives because they were either not submissive or too seductive, for instance (Lorde, 1979). Their "entire existence from the day she first landed, a naked victim of the slave trade, has been degradation in its extremist forms" (hooks, 2004, p. 5). Black Feminist Thought contributes to understanding such marginalization and aims to liberate Black women from systemic oppression (Hill Collins, 1990; hooks, 2004; Lorde, 1979). This task is accomplished in part through Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991).

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) coined the term intersectionality in 1989 to mean, "The ways in which the location of women of color at the intersection of race and gender makes our actual experience of domestic violence, rape, and remedial reform qualitatively different than that of White women" (p. 1245). From its initial conception, the term examined ways in which "feminist and antiracist politics have, paradoxically, often helped to marginalize the issue of violence against women of color" (p. 1245). Intersectionality is "a way to articulate the interaction of racism and patriarchy, generally, and describes the location of women of color both within overlapping systems of

subordination and at the margins of feminism and antiracism" (p. 1245). For Hill Collins (1990),

> "Intersectionality refers to forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation. Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice. (p. 18)

Jennifer Nash (2011) also offered a definition of Intersectionality. Nash (2011) viewed Intersectionality as a "theory and practice that insisted on intellectual and political significance of Black women's experiences" (p. 446). As time progressed and the way intersectionality was used shifted, one constant was its concern with various aspects of Black and non-Black WOC's identities intersecting to shape how they live with a manifold of oppression.

In close contrast to Crenshaw's (1991) Intersectionality, Hill Collins (1990) developed the Matrix of Domination which is more concerned with how intersecting oppression is organized. She claims that specific intersections alone are not the primary issue, it is that "structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal, domains of power reappear across quite different forms of oppression" (p. 18). This is the case with stud queer women. They are oppressed racially and sexually in similar historical fashion as heterosexual Black women, yet their queerness adds a different racial-sexual experience with oppression for them. As such, Hill Collins (1990) believes that Black feminist thought must involve criticality in its social theorizing on Black women within such systems.

Critical social theorizing embedded in Black feminist thought is necessary considering that traditional knowledge production on matters of truth in experiences for

Black women are not up to the task of dealing with how systemic oppression has impacted their lives (Hill Collins, 1990). Intersectionality, the Matrix of Domination, and critical social theorizing are essentially meant to empower Black and non-Black WOC to seek liberation from oppression. The key to empowerment is developing a Black feminist politics that identifies the domains of power that devalue Black women (Hill Collins, 1990).

So, how do we seek liberation when some Black women behave in ways that stifle other Black women? This question is not asked to point fingers, or distract from systemic issues, it is a call for us Black women to come together and reflect on our collective survival. As Lorde (1979) points out, there are Black women who, at the expense of their own survival, go along with patriarchal sexist norms like homophobia. Here is where inviting quare theory into the discussion proves valuable to the theoretical framework. E. Patrick Johnson (2005) said that queer theory was important for introducing progressive and transgressive politics but, fails when it comes to discussions of identity and sexuality around race and class. Johnson (2005) explains the usefulness of quare theory by using the analogy of a pot of gumbo. Gumbo is "a dish that consists of whatever ingredients the cook wishes to use" (Johnson, 2005, p. 142). If you cook the gumbo too fast ingredients in the pot, which are aspects of identity, are spilled out and therefore left out. This spillage was the failure of queer theory and its refusal to address the issues impacting queer folks of color. Johnson (2005) asserts that quare theory "promises to reduce the spillage, allowing the various and multiple flavors to coexist—those different flavors that make it spicy, hot, unique, and sumptuously brown" (p. 147).

Johnson (2005) notes that quare theory lives up to its critical potential because it invites all forms of queerness into the theoretical pot creating new ways to theorize about gender and sexuality. Further, quare theory can analyze the nuances between Black folks and between Black folks and others. A site for looking at these nuances is the homeplace (Johnson, 2003). The homeplace is important for this project because it functions as the bridge between Black feminism and quare theory where we find space to articulate and address culturally specific issues that have been pushed to the margins. Stud misogyny among Black queer women is an example of a culturally specific type of issue that benefits from the homeplace where we can look at new possibilities for gender and sexuality in this community. Home is a place where people can be themselves. Here, we can celebrate the liberatory nature of existing in this society as a stud, while also looking at what happens when stud is conflated with misogyny and taken on as a gender performance.

Home, for Johnson (2003) is a place where Black gay men can return after being ostracized within various communities. It is a collective space that allows them to remake kinship, family, language, find supportive institutions, and their own subjectivity in resistance to homophobia and racism. Although Johnson (2003) was talking about Black gay men and their use of homeplace, it still speaks to the need for all Black queer folks and other POCs to collectively support and protect themselves from intolerance and discrimination on their own terms. bell hooks (2014) has a parallel definition of homeplace as applied to Black women. hook's (2014) vision of homeplace is about building a safe space where Black women could affirm each other and heal the traumas

of racial domination. She sees homeplace as radical and political, where discussions about confronting dehumanization happened.

Further, hooks (2014) believes that homeplace was the one space to escape White supremacy, while building a community of resistance to nurture the self. Black queer women have carved out a homeplace for themselves outside of the larger, White queer community that includes a Black queer vernacular, fashion styles, and norms of Black queer culture. Los Angeles based Black Lesbians United (BLU) organization is an example of this where they host Pride events, women's retreats, and social bonding activities throughout the city. The women's retreat has dialogues and round table discussions about issues and concerns facing Black lesbians. Black queer media is another example where Black queer creators are telling stories about their communities through their scripted webseries. Donnesha Blake (2019) refers to these Black spaces as BlaQueer Space (Black queer Space). For Blake (2019) a homeplace involves taking up figurative or literal space as a form of self-valuation. A Black queer space, then, is "the collection of place-making performances that Black queer people undertake to affirm their non-normative identities, bodies, and community values" (Blake, 2019, p. 14). Blake is fusing Johnson (2003) and hooks (2014) ideas of homeplace and highlighting what a homeplace looks like when it is about being Black, woman, and queer. Ultimately, the homeplace is particularly important to vulnerable groups, studs included, where their existence in public space can lead to verbal and physical violence, according to Blake (2019). Free of violence, carving out a homeplace is essential for Black queer women to

protect themselves from White supremacy, homophobia, sexism, and to handle issues created, in part, by oppressive systems affecting their community.

Quare theory centers Blackness in everyday experiences, and it identifies the consequences of embodied Blackness (Johnson, 2005). For example, Lorde (1980) noted that heterosexism and homophobia were present among Black women during women's movements and that heterosexual Black women devalued Black lesbians. Laura Harris (1996) asserts that queer Black feminism "can rupture the silences contained in the words and practices of these theories" (p. 3). It creates its own coalition of theories and practices that identify the production of queer Black female sexualities. Harris (2006) suggests that a theoretical coming-together foregrounds sexual politics of racialized-classed sexuality as feminist practice. In this way, it inquires about the intersections of feminism as embodied and as discourse. Using Harris' conceptualization for this study, Black Feminist Thought and Quare Theory in conjunction can bind the gaps between theory and praxis pointing to stud women's embodied experiences. This Black feminist quare framework can unpack instances of stud misogyny and its implications for Black queer masculine and feminine identified women. I hold their experiences in conversation with the history of Black women and men's sexuality construction in the U.S. I aim to understand how we arrive at studs enacting misogyny inside of U.S. patriarchal racism.

## Studs, Gender, and Patriarchy

> "Women of color in America have grown up within a symphony of anger, at being silenced, at being unchosen, at knowing that when we survive, it is in spite of a world that takes for granted our lack of humanness, and which hates our very existence outside of its service" (Lorde, 1981, p. 129).

Both Black feminist and quare theorists recognize the importance of people of color dealing with this anger by resisting patriarchal gender constructs that often work to further subjugate them. Queerness does not protect women from continued sexism and racism in and outside of the Black community. This includes racial-sexual violence from White and Black men. Stud experiences have roots in White ideologies about Black women's gender and sexuality, extending from U.S. slavery into contemporary society. At once, they are susceptible to being read as males because of homophobia or their masculine appearance and, subjugated as women because of racism and sexism. Because of her history the Black woman, queer or not, is victimized by patriarchy. Studs are victimized by misogyny and enact it toward other women.

To discuss this issue, I outline Black male masculinity and the violence Black women experience from Black males. I believe that the misogyny we see enacted by studs is directly related to current and past patriarchy inherited and claimed by Black males from their racist-sexist, White male counterparts. Thus, I must map patriarchy in the Black community to arrive at a holistic understanding of the inner workings of stud misogyny.

Black women's racial-sexual subjugation began with labeling us as masculine during slavery (hooks, 2004; Hill Collins 2000; Lorde, 1984). Our ancestors were forced into field labor alongside Black men and completed heavy tasks in the slave master's home. This limited their access to agency over their gender and sexuality, but it also had significant relational consequences between Black women and men. Under racist-patriarchy in the U.S., Black males are stereotyped as hypermasculine rapists, murderers,

unthinking, and uncivilized beings (hooks, 2004). That does not counter White patriarchal teachings inducting them into an allegiance to sexism, emotional neglect, and accepting domination of women. hooks (2004) believes that most Black males are uncritically accepting patriarchy, which is the breeding ground for various types of violence.

Prior to the influence of patriarchy, Black men and women were constructing their own gender norms and relationship rules. Yet after the educational trappings of patriarchy, Black men were taught to use their masculinity to enact violence to gain power in society and over women (hooks, 2004). However, access to any masculine power was an illusion for Black men unless it was over Black women. "Since the racist sexist White world sees Black women as angry bitches who must be kept in check, it turns away from relational violence in Black life" (hooks, 2004, p. 57). This has created what hooks (2004) refers to as a crisis of masculinity in the Black community. Some Black men ingest White patriarchy and use violence to control Black women (hooks, 2004). They raped, brutalized, and killed Black women (Lorde, 1979). In fact, hooks (2004) claimed that the U.S. has an ethos of violence. As such, its imperialist, White-supremacist, capitalist patriarchy has socialized Black males to be what hooks (2004) calls "rage-oholics" (p. 63). While this is untrue of all Black males, it is important to a discussion of misogyny. hooks (2004) also noted that with every civil right gained, Black people were more likely to support patriarchy, leaving Black women's liberation in limbo.

Black women continued to be blamed for everything that happened to them including Black male violence and homophobia. Cherry Hussain (2012) shared that every instance of sexual molestation she experienced happened at that hands of men, some of whom were family members. When she reported the molestation, she was asked what she did as to imply that sexual violence was her fault (in Johnson, 2018). She continued, stating that her lesbianism had nothing to do with the molestation. Hussain (2012) also spoke about homophobia in her family. She was coaxed into relationships with men by her mother to overcome being a lesbian. “My mother said it’s a phase you go through – get married and have a couple kids and you can live through it” (Hussain, 2012, p. 423). Hussain would go on to marry a man who violently abused her throughout her early teens, suppressing her queerness.

Like Hussain (2012), Laurinda (2013) had experiences with patriarchal violence. She is a married queer woman raising two daughters. When her teenage daughter “came out” to her she encouraged her to sleep with men before deciding to be in a same-sex relationship. She did not disclose a narrative about being a victim of male physical abuse, yet her story is stained by patriarchal sexism that figures women’s sexuality in relation to heterosexuality and maleness first. Laurinda’s own queerness could not silence that patriarchy when it came time to listen to her daughter.

Because of examples like these, and Black women’s history of oppression, Black feminist quare theory would assert that a stud’s gender performance is liberating within a society that tries to strip them of gender and sexuality altogether. “Female masculinity is an elusive, inherently paradoxical concept that slips away from efforts to pin it down”

(Gardiner, 2012, p. 597). Gardiner (2012) evokes Judith Butler to assert that gender performances can create a sense of gender identity. For studs, who have long histories of sexuality dehumanization, taking control of their gender identity is a powerful challenge to oppressive structures. As Amber Johnson and Robin Boylorn (2015) note, Black women are not typically afforded agency to see themselves as sexual beings instead of being sexualized. They were discussing media representation for Black queer women; however, their point of view is applicable to stud women who are resisting the norms of patriarchy by reclaiming agency over their sexuality and gender performance. This move is necessary in a society where "any call to Black women to love ourselves is a denial of, or threat to, his Black male identity!" (Lorde, 1979, p. 62).

Stud misogynists are unique in that their masculine gender performance is framed within patriarchal sexism in ways similar to heterosexual Black men and women. As Black women, studs are a part of the long history in the U.S. of simultaneously sexualizing and dehumanizing Black women's bodies. Black heterosexual women's masculinization is linked to U.S. slavery and living through the residual problems of enslavement. Masculinity was negatively ascribed to those women who were viewed as stronger domestic workers in comparison to images of White femininity as delicate (Lorde, 1984).

Stud masculinity, however, can imply agency insomuch that their gender performance within heteronormative patriarchy is personally constructed, which can be considered resistance. I speak of agency in a relational aspect regarding everyday lived experiences. This is significant given that some studs have an aesthetic that leads to them

being read as Black men because of their masculine gender performance. In turn, they may experience racist violence resulting from being stereotyped as violent, criminal, or threatening as they put their bodies on the line (Pasulka, 2016). Nicole Pasulka (2016) believes that media and society helps create an environment where Black queer women must be guarded because they have to respond to perceptions of themselves as threats or villains.

Any theorizing on studs must consider this discussion of their bodies as excess. Kai Green (2016) provides a good path toward theorizing on the problematics of excess for studs. This is accomplished through a trans*[1] critique of Black lesbian feminist politics. Green (2016) says that sometimes Black feminism denies the presence of Black trans bodies in attempts to categorize Black lesbians. She argues that Black feminist politics render trans people invisible because it sees them as excess. The author uses a Black lesbian erotic magazine to show the relationship between exclusionary politics of White feminism for Black women to a trans modifier of Black feminism involving the category "woman.'" Green (2016) is calling for a rethinking of the woman category that transcends cisgender Black women to bring about social transformation. Thinking through the difficulties for Black women to exist in oppressive gender systems, it is understandable that studs and trans people alike call attention to these gaps in Black feminism. Green (2016) seeks to use trans as an analytic rather than as a category. This

[1] The Oxford English Dictionary (2013) explains that the use of trans with an asterisk is sometimes used to abbreviate transsexual and transgender. It can also reflect the inclusion of all trans identities.

means that transing can expose the limits of Black feminism, while also welcoming them into the Black queer women spaces.

Essentially, Green's (2016) analytic offers reclamation for bodies seen as excess in Black queerness. This includes studs who are at once considered hypermasculine and racial-sexual others. Further, her claim spotlights Black lesbian feminism as narrow in that it struggles to explode how it views trans* subjectivity. "Historically, Black lesbian feminism challenged gender binaries because those women were embracing their masculinity" (Green, 2016, p. 68).

Judith Gardiner (2013) argues that the psychology of masculinity in transgender studies has led to trans* pathologizing around notions of choice in transitioning, gender variance, and sexuality. Gardiner (2013) was displeased with psychology for its failure to approach gender as a range of human experiences and expressions. She calls upon feminism to demonstrate trans positive perspectives. Gardiner (2013) also critiques psychology for viewing Western men's masculinity development as emotionally inept, afraid of intimacy, homophobic, misogynistic, and unhinged because of lacking parental connection. Gardiner (2013) analyzed transmen's masculinity at the point of their transitioning. She found that female-to-male trans folks were less invested in traditional masculinity which made them better men than those identified as male at birth. One explanation for this is that

> Stereotypical manifestations of traditional masculinity were often the overcompensation that masculine women indulged early in their transitions to full male status. On the other hand, according to Rubin, when their transitions were complete these transmen often remade masculinity with more flexible behavior and attitudes. (Gardiner, 2013, p. 119)

This trans* politic discussion is significant because it opens new possibilities for Black, masculine lesbians to reclaim agency over their gender performance. Gardiner's (2013) article, however, does not critically engage with transmen and women of color, which is useful to the discussion of stud misogyny here. Black Feminist Quare Theory supports the idea that stud bodies in various public spheres challenge oppressive structures and ideologies (Lorde, 1984; Johnson, 2005). Just as Green (2016) posited, it equally challenges categories of woman and sexuality that are often restrictive for stud bodies. In general, I believe that studs expressing their gender identity on their own terms, challenges gender norms and perceptions of them as excess.

The discussion of Black male masculinity being framed by White patriarchy, and the examples of patriarchal violence are meant to illustrate the complexity of victimization and oppression queer Black women face. It also demonstrates a connection to the next section where I conceptualize and unpack stud misogyny.

### *A Look at Stud Misogyny*

A concern with stud misogyny is that the layers of subjugation stud women experience is mainly recognized as homophobia alone. There is little consideration of the racial-sexual histories impacting their lived experiences. In this look at stud misogyny I highlight the possibility that Black males and studs perform a similar type of masculinity that leaves the door open to misogyny due to their patriarchal socialization. Next, I explain the possibility that reliance on a gender binary and internalized homophobia can assist in mapping the persistence of stud misogyny. Finally, I provide Black feminist

quare thoughts on the replication of stud misogyny in the media as there is potential for relational depictions of stud misogyny to impact Black queer women's lived experiences.

Andrea Smith (2016) said that there is a reliance on a gender binary system where only two genders exist, and any romantic or sexual relationships are between a man and a woman. Mignon Moore (2006) agrees that among Black queer women romantic relationships include one partner displaying stereotypical feminine gender roles and behavior, while the other partner takes on more masculine roles. Stud misogyny sets up exclusionary norms in the Black queer community. For example, there have been some shifts in relationship formation, but two stud women in an intimate relationship are largely marginalized outside of the dominant stud-femme binary in the Black queer community (Moore, 2006).

In addition to their social reality that to be masculine may imply adopting misogyny for some studs, others are thought to be misogynistic due to internalized homophobia (Walters, 2009). Renezetti (as cited in Walters, 2009) defined internalized homophobia as "personal acceptance and internalization of negative attitudes held by some members of society towards homosexuals" (p. 59). Walters (2009) said that internalized homophobia causes low self-esteem, feelings of powerlessness, and aggression against members of one's own group. Internalized homophobia is another possibility to consider when exploring stud misogyny.

Black feminist quare theory helps unpack masculinity in Black queer media with Black queer creators and casts. Marlon Moore (2015) conducted a study of Black masculine lesbians and the representation of Black queer women in various communities.

Not only were Black queer women underrepresented onscreen, Moore (2015) found that most depictions of these women were stereotypical where women wore their masculinity on their sleeves. Moore analyzed nine shows to provide insight into Black femmes, dykes, and bisexuals in American television. Looking at shows from the 1970s to 2011, Moore found that plotlines do not imagine the realities of Black lesbians. Black lesbians across the gender spectrum are framed as covertly queer, never seen displaying affection with lovers or de-sexualized (Richardson, 2009), stereotyped as having lower tones of voice or blending into violent situations or professions alongside men. Further, when Black lesbian relationships gain reoccurring spots on shows, Black lesbians are partnered with White lesbians.

Moore (2015) takes issue with how Black characters shown dating are often matched with White women. The Black woman is removed from her community of color and inserted in White settings. Moore (2015) goes on to demonstrate what happens when a show portraying Black queer characters on a gender spectrum, engaging in romance, is given a platform. They found that when this casting portrayal happens it "provides more opportunity for play between the spaces of sexuality and gender expression" (p. 210). When minority characters are situated in their communities, viewers are granted more realistic portrayals of the personal, social, or political problems Black lesbians experience than in other arenas of representation (Moore, 2015). For example, salient issues for Black queer folks are intimate partner violence, gun violence, policing, infidelity, desire, and Black church homophobia. These racial-queer issues remain ignored when media chooses to focus on reifying stereotypes of lesbian masculinity.

Moore (2015) sees benefits in exposing viewers to expanded depictions of masculine lesbians and a gender spectrum such as "creative images of Black queer women who mentor, nurture, fuck, love, motivate, marry, and parent each other in spite of mainstream media culture that overwhelmingly pretends they do not exist" (p. 214). While Moore's (2015) aim was to reimagine masculine lesbians on television, their work did not delve into the impact of stereotypical masculine lesbian representation on femme bodies and intimate relationships. Moore (2015) did not address how feminine women are harmed in a concrete way. Based on how Black feminist quare theory helped to lay out the problems with misogyny in the Black community, it is important to address this issue when a platform that reaches the masses is adhering to patriarchy. Moore's (2015) call to characterize Black lesbians along a gender spectrum, however, is beneficial to this stud misogyny project because it calls us to challenge the creators of queer media to rethink portrayals of Black lesbian gender performance and sexuality in broad and complex ways.

*Conclusion*

The Black feminist quare framework explains the complicated strands and layers connected to the issue of stud misogyny. It is meant to name the oppressive structures involved in constructing gender and sexuality for Black queer women that cause significant social and relational challenges for members of that community. A space for discussing those challenges is the homeplace (Johnson, 2005) where Black queer women can relate to each other, and then to others. As mentioned earlier, studs deal with racial-sexual oppression just as heterosexual Black women. Because studs cannot flee the

confines of patriarchal socialization, their path toward humanization follows that of Black males who viewed masculinity imbued with feminine domination as access to power (hooks, 2004). Studs enacting misogyny may tap into that power, gaining affirmation of their gender performance from other masculine identified folks in the Black community.

Since beginning this project a few years ago, there has been an increase in Black queerness in mainstream media. With this new uptick in representation, Julie Scanlon & Ruth Lewis (2017) argue that "Scholarly attention to these representations has not kept pace with these developments" (p. 1005). For instance, Johnson (2005) noted that Black Studies must be reminded to resist the compulsion to sideline work on queerness in its theory and praxis on racism, class, and gender. Should theorizing on Black queer women fail to do this, it is sure to unearth sexism and homophobia as it prioritizes race (Johnson, 2005).

Queer Theory also has a long history of issues with theorizing on sexual subjects in the margins within queerness (Cohen, 1997). Queer Theory viewed sexual subjects as "constructed and constrained by multiple practices of categorization and regulation that systematically marginalize and oppress those subjects, thereby defined as deviant and 'other'" (Cohen, 1997, p. 23). Cohen (1997) states that queer theory has not done enough to challenge the multifaceted systems of oppression and domination upholding the heteronormativity impacting Black queer women and people of color. Even where theorizing on Black queer women is taking place, there are often encounters in the research that parse out identities to prioritize one over others. Therefore, a Black Feminist

Quare framework is valuable to understanding studs and their masculinity, and ultimately stud misogyny.

# Chapter 3: Media. Misogyny. Matrix of Domination

Mainstream media has a history of perpetuating biased representations of Black people (Lee, 2017). “The media is central to what comes to represent many people’s social realities and also central to the spread of ideas worldwide” (Lee, 2017, p. 4). What is significant about this is that the media is couched in white supremacist, sexist ideologies about Black and Brown people that inform onscreen portrayals and silence our stories (Lee, 2017). As such, she found a relationship between media bias and how audiences of color sought out alternative spaces, like social media, to counter biased narratives (Lee, 2017). This critical rhetorical, media study relies on the Matrix of Domination as theorized by Patricia Hill Collins (2000) as a power analytic to examine gender performances in four Black lesbian web series found on YouTube.com, *New York Girls TV, Choiices, Women of Atlanta TV,* and *The Best Friend*. Each web series is a drama involving Black queer women in their 20s and 30s tackling issues around sexuality, relationships, and promiscuity. They were written by Black queer women, most of whom have described the need to create a show in which they felt represented in the characters onscreen. *New York Girls TV* was created by Amira Shaunice in 2014. Shaunice is a blogger, screenwriter, producer, and director of *NYGTV* (amirashaunice.com, 2019). Set in Brooklyn, NY, the drama series is about lesbians

navigating romantic relationships and careers (New York Girls TV, 2014). Although Shaunice departs from stereotypical stud-femme relationship partners by having a femme-femme couple, the rest of the couples adhere to a stud-femme binary. *Choiices The Series* was written and directed by Nadja Warith-Sharp. Warith-Sharp (2014) says that the issues facing these women are infidelity, insecurity, and gender identity. According to her Facebook profile which she uses to promote the show and other projects, she identifies as non-binary and female (Warith-Sharp, 2019). Both Shaunice and Warith-Sharp rely on crowdfunding to produce content. Next, *The Best Friend* web series is a product of iTiMiNaK Productions but the person who writes, acts, and edits the show is Kimberly Twiggs. The iTiMiNaK Production YouTube channel says that the show is "focused on LGBT+ works that represent the everyday person, but also presents relatable topics. We focus on quality, integrity, and the rawness of being human" (*The Best Friend,* 2018, Description section). The last web series analyzed is *Women of Atlanta TV (WOATV),* which was created by Jasmine Miller (JMillz) to discuss everyday Black lesbian life. JMillz is the only creator to identify as a stud. Each show will be analyzed in the following chapter. I now turn to a discussion of the Matrix of Domination.

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) asserts that the Matrix of Domination (Matrix) deals with how power is organized in a society through history and socialization. Because it is situated in Black Feminist Theory, the Matrix has been used for critical theorizing (ex, Hill Collins, 2000; Jennifer James, 2016) and is applicable as praxis, such as the case in this study. Teun Van Dijk (1993) says that a critical approach gives insight to

sociopolitical issues of power abuse by dominant groups resulting in inequality. Similarly, Kent Ono and John Sloop (1995) claimed that critical rhetoricians should examine "important texts that gird and influence local cultures first, and then affect through the sheer number of local communities, cultures at large" (p. 19). They describe local texts as vernacular texts, discourses, and culture that can take non-traditional forms. This is particularly salient to studies involving historically oppressed groups.

In this study the texts are web series created by Black queer women speaking to their respective communities, but they can also be art, music and dance, and architecture, according to Ono and Sloop (1995). Vernacular texts are unique to the community in which they reside. Researchers, then, must be flexible and look to a group's local organizations and frequent gathering spots to engage in the everyday conversations necessary to "speak with" (Spivak, 1988) the group being studied (Ono & Sloop, 1995). Doing so opens possibilities for challenging dominant discourses and for understanding the racialized rhetoric of marginalized communities.

The Matrix of Domination is an appropriate analytical tool that helps answer culture-specific questions and challenge dominant discourses. The Matrix explains "how intersecting systems of power constitute strands or components of political domination" (Hill Collins, 2017, p. 22). Additionally, with its ability to recognize the conflicting nature of oppression, the Matrix reveals rhetorical messages in each web series shaping perceptions of Black lesbians and queer folks as having deeper roots in historical structures of inequality. Hill Collins developed a powerful tool, also considered a framework, with the dual function of naming and resisting oppression.

## The Matrix & Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a major aspect of this Matrix and Black feminism. It explains how various social realities are created to deny certain forms of knowledge, cause inequality, and change social worlds for Black women and other people of color. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) believed that because intersectionality is complex, analyses are particularized, provisional, and ongoing by their very nature. She explained that, "Black women can experience discrimination in any number of ways and that the contradiction arises from our assumptions that their claims of exclusion must be unidirectional" (p. 149). This means that based on how we are marginalized, the transgressions and harms we face are likely the result of more than one system of oppression.

The Matrix and Intersectionality in praxis are a power analytic involving different forms of domination with their own power grid, or matrix, of intersecting power dynamics (Hill Collins, 2017). Johnson and Boylorn (2013) contend that intersectionality recognizes the importance of multiple categories of explanatory power and intergroup differences instead single aspects of identity that remain separate and discrete. Importantly for a web series analysis is their claim that for social media, "social networks create space to study the ways in which people insert their intersectional identities into the virtual world through performativity" (Johnson & Boylorn, 2013, p. 5).

D. Soyini Madison (2013) agrees that cultural performances connect people to the larger public. Specifically, Madison (2013) says the "cultural performance becomes the venue for 'public discussion' of vital issues central to their communities, as well as an

arena for gaining visibility and staging their identity" (p. 829). Because of the media platform, the creators, cast members, and the viewers easily make contact through commenting and responding to episodes. This community-building between Black queer women on and off screen becomes a co-performative, dialogic space (Madison, 2013; Conquergood, 1985) where they engage in a "political act in the excavation of subjugated knowledges and belongings for the creation of alternative futures" (p. 829). Moreover, Madison (2013) argues that participants in cultural spaces question, critique, and reinvent themselves and continually grow through their endured suffering and power conflict which makes them stronger over time. This is the reason she believes we, as researchers and witnesses, need to keep their stories alive.

I have discussed the value of intersectionality to Black Feminist analyses, but when operationalized as a Method we see the intricate nature of how social inequities are organized experienced by ordinary people (Hill Collins, 2004). For Catherine MacKinnon (2013), "when intersectionality becomes a method, it aims at the moving substantive reality 'where systems of race, gender, and class discrimination converge,' not one or another, or even all static abstract classifications" (p. 1023). Intersectionality as a method begins with an analysis located in the group's lived experience, not in abstract, universal generalizations. It is critical of the ways social hierarchies discipline Black women. Staying true to its focus on power, intersectionality as a method relies on comparative statics to challenge social forces that reify power inequalities. Finally, the method moves from abstract realities to intersectional realities whereby conditions of inequality are named to expose discrimination and create outcomes. Intersectionality and the Matrix

have an interconnected relationship. Where they diverge is in what they attend to regarding systems of oppression. For Hill Collins (1990), intersectionality is concerned with not reducing oppression to single categories whereas the Matrix is concerned with how intersecting oppression is organized. Essentially, the Matrix is concerned with how domains of power shift across different forms of oppression.

### BFT Epistemology & The Matrix

I use the Matrix to analyze character relationships, behaviors, and viewer comments on Black queer web series where masculine Black lesbians, or "studs," are portrayed performing misogyny. The Matrix facilitates in revealing the power systems institutionalizing oppression for queer women of color (QWOC) related to gender constructs on web series. I focus primarily on racism, sexism, and heteropatriarchy. Other systems, like class, inevitably enter the conversation where applicable.

The Matrix is guided by a Black feminist epistemology. The epistemology involves dialogue, lived experience, personal accountability, and an ethics of caring (Hill Collins, 1990; hooks, 2004).

1. *Dialogue focused*. Dialogue has long been an Afrocentric way of building community where everyone has a voice. It is no different in the Matrix in which Black women share experiences that premeditate transformation and resistance to oppression.
2. *Lived Experience*. Each group has valid lived experiences and perspectives, which means that knowledge is situated. Black feminism understands that power inequity brings about subjugated knowledges that cannot be ignored.

Along these lines, Shannon Davis and Angela Hattery (2018) say that a feminist epistemology "advocates for including people – both researchers and participants – from a wide range of social locations and experiences in the knowledge production process so that subsequent data tell a more inclusive story" (p. 51).

3. *Personal Accountability*. Individuals have their own responsibilities in the fight for agency and humanity but can expect collective support and action for transformation.
4. *Ethics of caring.* Black women and other oppressed women develop and ethics of caring by engaging in empathy and solidarity to encourage each other's personal power (hooks, 2000).

I follow Jennifer James' (2016) work in which she developed and used Black feminist epistemology as a methodology. Using her approach, each facet of BFT epistemology was a guide for the researcher in their analysis of Black women. This held the researcher accountable for ensuring an ethics of care for the group studied, for discussing the lived experiences of said group, for using dialogue to unpacking experiences, and for personal accountability.

*Dialogue Focused.* Alisa Agozzino (2015) found, in her study of dialogic features on social media sites, that "social media have changed the nature of everyday communication by providing a platform for individuals and organizations alike to engage with each other in a dynamic, synchronized, and multidirectional dialogue that represents varied voices" (p. 2). During my first viewing of web series episodes, I read the viewer

comments exploring the dialogic relationship between them and either the cast or web series creators. I found that as shows released more episodes, the viewer comments shifted from initially being short, congratulatory remarks with a few comments about the attractiveness of various cast members, to being more involved and revealing about viewer's personal experiences. Jamal Cromity (2012) insists that social media can "facilitate building sustainable user communities more effectively" (p. 31). An outcome of social media engagement for Cromity (2012) is that as this type of public engagement increases, the community is positively impacted. Hence, sharing life experiences throughout the comments section of the web series can provide a sense of resistance and connection from life's hardships and oppression for these viewers.

*Personal Accountability.* Personal accountability involves the responsibility that I have to myself as a researcher, and to the larger group I am studying, to advocate for my entire project and the choices made in completion of the project. Hill Collins (1990) said that if we are to remain true to a Black feminist epistemology, then we need to inspire members of the groups we study to resist oppression. That involves modeling a social justice orientation in how I present theories and frameworks or speaking from a place of empowerment of Black women. It also involves demonstrating an understanding of the power constraints these women face (Hill Collins, 1990). She offered an example of personal accountability that resonated with me because she revealed that instead of using the words "they" or "them," she used "we" and "us" when talking about Black women. She did not want to distance herself from her own group. In doing so, she identified her position and participation in the discussion (Hill Collins, 1990). This is an example of

creating collective wisdom. Again, we Black women have knowledge and a standpoint based on our lived experiences on the margins.

As researchers, some have been trained to distance themselves from contributing their own credible and personal knowledge for fear of being discounted. I was trained to use impersonal language that was thought to enhance my credibility as a scholar, while my racial connection to the Black women I studied would disappear. Hill Collins (1990) thinks of minimizing the distance between the researcher and participants as an opportunity to create collective wisdom that can generate specialized knowledge in Black feminism and beyond. In effort to be personally accountable for how I conduct my research and for creating collective wisdom with texts and participants, I attempt to write in a personal way that demonstrates the value of subjugated knowledges.

*Lived Experiences.* Much of my research concentrates heavily on the studs' lived experiences represented in web series. Stud character's storylines, written by Black queer women, are privileged. But, I bridge those voices with that of viewers and fans of the series who often display a shared sense of community with characters and creators.

*Ethics of Care.* I found some of the experiences discussed on the shows to be relatable. Not only because most of the web series were set in low income to middle class neighborhoods, but as a person who has had relationships within the constraints of a stud-femme binary. I recognized either myself, friends, or communities in various episodes. Because of this, I entered each web series review with empathy in mind. Particularly, when characters living through poverty turned to selling drugs or engaging in violence to make money, I recognized that desperation in people that I knew growing up. With an

ethics of care, I empathized with how those living conditions could spark a set of survival behaviors that others may judge negatively. For example, two stud friends from *NYGTV* turned to selling drugs as a means of collecting enough money to buy a bar and go into business together. As I watched the show, I developed an investment in their safety while they were on the street selling. Admittedly, I wanted to see these two characters become successful in their dream of owning a business. I believe that growing up in a low-income neighborhood contributed to my familiarity with seeing people rely on alternative means of gaining capital. So, having an ethics of care for the plight of those characters, in what I felt would relieve their struggles, came easily.

To complete the analysis, I viewed all seasons of each web series multiple times, reviewed subscriber comments to document evidence of an asynchronous, dialogic, subscriber-creator relationship, and documented the characters' interactions during the episodes through rigorous note-taking. As the study progressed, I revisited some episodes of the four shows to clarify my notes or to further reflect on scenes. The media analysis is specifically focused on instances whereby masculinity is prioritized or used as currency in social situations which leads to reproducing hegemonic power to dehumanize the feminine. In other words, I looked for displays of misogynistic masculinity characterized by fetishizing, devaluing, and objectifying the stud's feminine lover or friends.

Some will take issue with the stud-femme binary as discussed here and, offscreen in the queer community, as a structure that should be dismantled. I believe that for this community of Black lesbians, the issue must be further complicated. Mignon Moore (2006), who examines gender expression in Black lesbian communities, found that

"Black lesbians use gender display to structure social interactions, and the order of these social interactions maintains social control in the community" (p. 129). Lourdes Follins, Ja'Nina Walker, & Michele Lewis (2014) looked at resilience among Black LGBTQ people and noted that Black feminism argues that the ability to self-define and self-evaluate is a means of developing resilience and resistance to systems of oppression. One aspect of self-definition is in allowing Black lesbians to define and label themselves how they want. For example, in labeling themselves as studs these women subvert the association with White butch identity and gain a form of validation and strength for their own identities(Follins, Walker, & Lewis, 2014). Likewise, Bianca Wilson (2009) noted that femme and stud labels,

> Do not attempt to replicate heterosexist norms but serve as mechanisms for de-gendering gendered lines by claiming masculinity in women's bodies. The butch lesbian functioned as "images to contradict the prevailing image of female sexuality as passive or even nonexistent." (p. 307)

This does not mean that the problems associated with the gender binary and how it is tethered to identity constraints and stereotypes are ignored; it means that there are salient social differences with positive implications for Black queer women's liberation that must be held in tension alongside the problems. As such, this analysis acknowledges the commitment of Black feminism in prioritizing the voices of the Black women web series creator's by highlighting the liberatory resistance inherent in showcasing queer of color stories for public consumption as powerful despite the ever-present gender binary.

As I watched the web series, I noted how studs and other characters performed gender and navigated societal challenges to explicate the tension in their lived experiences. Attending to these aspects of the stud's life was done to provide insight into

long histories of racism, sexism, and homophobia bearing down on them as Black queer women.

*The Matrix of Domination Power Analytic*

Jennifer Nash (2019) reminds us that the work of the Matrix is to "describe the specificities of social location and the violence that structures of domination inflict, in various ways and in differing severity, on everyone" (p. 11). Thus, the Matrix is important to this study because it attends to micro and macro level social-cultural contexts. I am able to have a dual discussion about the ways studs are primarily depicted as misogynists while concomitantly attending to the histo-political and social structures impacting them. This is accomplished through four domains of power: Structural, Disciplinary, Interpersonal, and Hegemonic (Hill Collins, 2000).

Each domain addresses dominating, oppressive forces and offers possible outcomes for resistance for Black women.

> Domination operates by seducing, pressuring, or forcing African American women, members of subordinated groups, and all individuals to replace individual and cultural ways of knowing with the dominant group's specialized thought – hegemonic ideologies that, in turn, justify practices of other domains of power. (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 287)

This speaks to the attempt to control and limit the way Black women move through time and space, and how they experience the world around them. Hill Collins (1989) explains that, "While an oppressed group's experiences may put them in a position to see things differently, their lack of control over the apparatuses of society that sustain ideological hegemony makes the articulation of their self-defined standpoint difficult" (p. 749). In other words, because they lack systemic power, Black women have been coerced by

oppressive force into abandoning their cultural traditions and ways of knowing. Thus, "groups unequal in power are correspondingly unequal in their access to the resources necessary to implement their perspectives outside their particular group" (Hill Collins, 1989, p. 749).

*Structural Domain.* The structural domain of the matrix deals with how legal, religious, and economic structures are organized to reproduce Black women's subordination over time (Hill Collins, 1989). This domain breaks down voting rights inequities for people of color, for example. Policies implemented by these structures have created injustice in housing, employment, education, and more while championing the rhetoric of equality. Hill Collins (2000) notes that the color-blind language of laws has masked the exclusion of Black women from full citizenship rights. Considered excessive, studs simultaneously resist, and are harmed, within these structures. They reside in structures that presume Black women's subordination but they queer gender constructs, which is a powerful form of resistance. A major component of the domain is its attention to the ways in which structures interlock to create unique forms of oppression (Hill Collins, 2000), as in stud experiences. The social world is likely to see slow overall changes to structures after the public has resisted oppression through large social movements, threats, or war because the structures were designed to produce unjust results (Hill Collins, 2000).

*Disciplinary Domain.* In the disciplinary domain oppression is managed through capitalist bureaucracies that discipline and control populations (Hill Collins, 2000). Bureaucracies voyeuristically police Black women to ensure their compliance with

subordinate positions. They are surveilled on the job, in the academy, and while incarcerated to keep them as second-class citizens. Even with upward mobility in jobs, they continue to battle with unfair rules that are applied to them and not their White peers (Hill Collins, 2000). She contends that these folks remain outsiders-within, promoted yet not respected or granted full access to the benefits others receive. The disciplinary domain protects Whiteness at the expense of Black liberation. For example, in the academy, Black feminist theories are welcomed while Black activism is devalued (Hill Collins, 2000). These women quickly find out that their degrees, promotions, and respectability is no match for the disciplinary power codified into larger structures meant to keep them oppressed. This treatment is applicable to non-Black people of color and folks existing outside of heteronormative structures.

Hill Collins (2000) believes that one significant way to resist the disciplinary domain is by working to deconstruct organizations and systems from the inside out. Despite struggles Black women face within an organization, being promoted is an opportunity to impact future hiring practices, change policies, or shift the organizational climate (Hill Collins, 2000).What is happening in this domain is important to an analysis of studs because they are likely to have experienced such disciplinary socialization which shapes how they are treated, and how they treat other women. Studs bear the burden of how the structures operate, yet many remain committed to fighting for better life possibilities.

*Interpersonal Domain.* The impact on our relationships is a substantial part of the operation and organization of power structures. The interpersonal domain of power is

responsible for relational influences on daily life that uphold subordination of marginalized people. This domain relies on people's thoughts and actions that uphold oppressive structures (Hill Collins, 2000). A central focus in this domain are the routine ways that people interact and how they are treated based on portrayals created by the other three interlocking power domains. She explains that Black women in the U.S. have been portrayed as passive and abused. The portrayals make it difficult for them to envision their lives in different, positive circumstances. For web series creators, a lack of envisioning different circumstances for Black queer women has contributed to a cycle of continued stud misogyny portrayals and gender performances on and off screen. Indeed, web series creators have yet to overcome binaristic views of masculinity for stud women that move away from domination and devaluing feminine women because they, too, may have limited examples of representation outside of stereotypical portrayals of studs. This is due to how we are socialized inside of a heteropatriarchal, racist society. Additionally, these women have experienced their own subordination that makes it difficult to envision any Black woman, queer or otherwise, outside of U.S. portrayals and oppressive structures. As a reminder, Black feminism posits that all Black women experience marginalization in some way.

Further, Hill Collins (2000) suggests that everyone is implicated in the privilege and penalties of systems of oppression because they shape our daily lives. Because of this, resistance in the interpersonal domain begins with the self. Hill Collins says that folks can seek coalition strategies to resist oppression at the micro level. Sharing experiences through dialogue is one example of a coalition strategy that impacts

relationships but has larger social implications for changing views and actions. The comment section of web series can be prime locations for dialogue with the web series creators and other viewers about misogyny in the Black queer woman community.

*Hegemonic Domain.* The Hegemonic domain justifies the bureaucratic practices of other domains in the Matrix of Domination. The power of this domain "lies in its ability to shape consciousness via the manipulation of ideas, images, symbols, and ideologies" (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 285). Hegemonic ideas about race, sexuality, gender, and class impact perceptions of Black women's worth. The negative ways in which we speak and think about Black women are reinforced by the absence of Black women's stories in schools, stereotyped displays in the media, and in the sexism permeating through religious institutions (Hill Collins, 2000). In the Hegemonic domain, old images about Black women as mammies or jezebels resurface of them as welfare mothers and hoochies (Hill Collins, 2000). Because controlling images are important to how Black women are framed and subjugated, I briefly unpack each of these images put forth by Hill Collins (2000). As Griffin (2014) claims, "Controlling imagery forecloses diverse representations of Black femininity beyond the pretense of the dominant imagination and orchestrates demoralized understandings of Black girls and women" (p. 183). Likewise, Fanon (as cited in Keeling, 2007) claimed that "the Black image has been equated with sin, rape, the genital, badness, ugliness," and so on (p. 30). For Black women, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) said that dominant ideologies during slavery created four socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood. Each image reflected the dominant group's goal of continual oppression of Black bodies.

The first controlling image is that of the Mammy who was a domestic, obedient servant (Hill Collins, 1990). Because the mammy image was that of nurturer, she was subjected to educating her own children about their roles within slavery, while showing affection to the children in the White family (Hill Collins, 1990). Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) said "Rather than admire the sacrifice of such women the popular re-articulation of mammy positions her as cold and callous, even neglectful of her own children and family; while simultaneously overly solicitous toward Whites" (p. 89). Mammy is also construed as asexual where her only desire is to care for the White family. The second image is the Matriarch. Because of her failure to conform to White dominant views of womanhood, she becomes the site of the Black culture's deficiency (Hill Collins, 1990). Labeling Black women matriarchs negatively impacts their self-confidence and ability to confront oppression. "African American women who must work are labeled mammies, then are stigmatized again as matriarchs for being strong figures in their own homes" (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 270).

The third image is the Welfare Mother. The welfare mother was objectified for her reproductive possibilities but had no reproductive rights. This control of Black women's fertility worked similarly to the mammy and matriarch images whereby Black women were casts as bad mothers (Hill Collins, 1990). The welfare mother is "portrayed as being content to sit around and collect welfare, shunning work and passing on her bad values to her offspring" (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 270). This view of the welfare mother is linked to stereotypes of Black people as lazy and as having no work ethic. The fourth image is the Jezebel. This woman is thought of as sexually aggressive and a whore. She is

central in the relationship between the White male imagination and Black womanhood. Importantly, controlling sexuality is the crux of Black women's oppression. She emasculates Black men because she is blamed for their denied access to patriarchy because she works and supports her family. This woman is also depicted as having an out-of-control sexuality and low morals (Hill Collins, 1990).

Taken together, controlling images of Black women's gender, sexuality, race, and class are designed to make their oppression appear natural and normative to their lived experiences. What is salient about this discussion of controlling images for analyzing stud misogyny is that Black queer women, essentially, have yet to escape these historical images of their gender and sexuality. As they navigate intimate relationships, the images can influence how they view their lesbian partners and vice versa. It can impact their expressions of sexuality, desire, and gender performance. Pointedly, racist-sexist structures need to consistently cycle through these images to gain public support for the domination of Black women. To see change in the hegemonic domain, we must "reverse historical patterns of social exclusion" invested in discrimination (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 285). This challenges us to reshape consciousness by reclaiming our own definitions of self. Studs are already involved in reshaping self-definitions of what it means to be a Black queer woman performing gender on their own terms. However, the discussion needs to extend toward how some masculine performances are situated in misogyny and create contradictions in discussions of oppression.

Oppression has many contradictions because of the failure to recognize that a matrix of domination contains few pure victims or oppressors (Hill Collins, 2000). Studs

are an example of this contradiction based on their treatment of femme women. When a stud uses discourse and behavior that degrades feminine women or treats them as sexual objects, she is flexing her belief in domination of their bodies. Patriarchal social structures reinforce this type of domination. Discussions about stud identity and gender performance as they impact relationships can bring about new knowledge. Sharing knowledge – subjugated knowledge – is a way to push back against controlling images and racist-sexist ideologies in domains of power (Hill Collins, 2000).

Felicia Briscoe & Muhammad Khalifa (2015) view power as "never here or there… [Rather it] is employed and exercised through a net-like organization…[Individuals] are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power" (p. 740). We, as people of color, are better served not by mere self-reflection of domination, but by clear resistance and challenge to White supremacist structures that thrive off inequality and marginalization of Black, brown, and queer bodies. The domains of power in the Matrix highlight the complicated nature of systems of oppression working to keep groups of people in subordinate locations. Hill Collins (2000) indicates that new constraints and opportunities are brought forth by examining the Matrix of Domination. Unpacking studs' experiences with multiple oppressions through the Matrix highlights hidden dimensions and patterns in their lives, and for other Black queer women.

The Matrix of Domination is closely related to Intersectionality, is undergirded by a Black feminist epistemology, is highly concerned with how domains of power are involved with social inequalities, and has a set of intersectional principles grounding

analyses of the racial, sexual, classed, and sexuality struggles facing Black women in their lived experiences. Therefore, I believe it to be a useful method of analyzing Black queer web series to investigate stud misogyny.

*Personal Reflection*

Before birthing this project, I watched each web series and read the accompanying comments section for various episodes because of my own need to see shows that represented folks who were Black and lesbian. In those initial viewings, I wanted to enjoy the shows and have unfiltered, personal reactions to what other viewers found interesting. I had to reconcile my reactions to some user comments, especially those tinged with internalized heteropatriarchy and stereotypes about Black queer women. For instance, I wanted to offer a rebuttal to another viewer's bi-phobic comment from the first episode of *NYGTV*. The comment read, "Lesbians don't date bisexual girls - well most lesbians, 'cause they always want a boyfriend and girlfriend" (New York Girls TV, 2014). It's no secret that I typically engage in those racialized, political internet spats but correcting other Black queer women in that space undoubtedly felt maternal at that time. What I gained from self-reflecting on my reactions to other's comments and refraining from internet arguments in the past is helpful to my study. I focused on centering a Black feminist epistemology's ethics of care and lived experiences to uplift, rather than subjugate, marginalized voices.

The second time reviewing the web series, I began looking for themes and focused on the individual stud characters, including verbal and non-verbal interactions between them and their friends and romantic interests. Christoffersen (2017) believed in

the strategy of analyzing and interpreting data from different angles. As such, a researcher can read data multiple times while looking to answer different questions which can unearth new information. I started my next viewing with a set of questions in mind. What systems are at play in viewer conversations, reactions to episodes, and beliefs? What are the viewer's points of agreement or disagreement with characters and scenes? What systems might be responsible for the connection, if found, between the comment sections and what I observe on the web series? How is misogyny mapped on to the stud's bodies? With these questions in mind as I re-watched the web series, I am focused on how the answers to the question and the emerging knowledge will contribute to answering my larger research questions.

For the third time revisiting the web series in their entirety, I used it as an opportunity to recall and clarify information. During this re-watching, I printed transcripts of the comment sections and began noting dialogic interactions. It was during this viewing period that I felt the most empathy for the characters. I had a heightened awareness for how they lived in poverty, sold drugs, engaged in physical violence, and interacted in intimate relationships. I felt connected to the characters and started "following" their social media pages. I discovered that most of the actresses' character representations regarding stud or femme identity onscreen were true to their offscreen identities. During my third time watching the shows, I was reminded of my position as a participant and observer. I expanded my knowledge about the characters' on and off screen lives, and I would classify myself as a fan of the web series at this stage.

Despite being invested in the shows as a fan, I remained committed to discussing stud misogyny. On a macro level, I was drawn toward a discussion of capitalism that has led to some of the situations these characters are depicted in, and that viewers can relate to. This was a new area of oppression that developed with each viewing of the shows. I then unpack gender constructs that are so vested in anti-Blackness that it's suffocating. And I want to unravel the racism that has seeped into the veins of Black and Brown folks dehumanizing them, even in their queer communities where there is the language of equality and tolerance espoused daily without recourse for queer folks of color.

I recall reaching a point where doing the rhetorical analysis had unearthed a criticality within me that I didn't know existed. Notably, this work has unearthed a lack of trust in things that I took for granted in queer communities. It has brought about an anger in me that at this point only comes out in tears but compels me to push further in seeking transformation for Black queer women and other queer women of color. The analysis of each web series that follows this chapter, will do the work of seeking transformation.

## Chapter 4: An Analysis of the Core Themes of Stud Misogyny

In this chapter, I discuss four core themes of stud misogyny as portrayed in Black lesbian web series: Internalized patriarchy, hostility toward femmes, stud persona, and criminality. These themes shape the meaning and role of misogynistic portrayals among studs to extrapolate undergirding systems of oppression and the accompanying ideologies impacting Black queer women. The relationship between the web series and their respective communities of viewers is demonstrated through viewer comments that offer insight into a connection between strands of influence on sexuality, race, and gender onscreen and offscreen. I identified four core themes of stud misogyny:

*Internalized patriarchy* - Patriarchy is one of the main roots of stud misogyny. Patriarchy reinforces sexist ideologies by assuming that women should be passive, they are weak, in need of saving, and are less intelligent. Women of color experience these assumptions in addition to racialized perceptions of them as angry, strong, and hypersexual. Because of its pervasive influence on people's thoughts and actions who are socialized within the same power structure, it is not uncommon for women to internalize patriarchy. Our social environments make it possible that women can reinforce the dominance privileged to masculinity which keeps women bound to rigid gender roles and expectations. For the web series, masculinity becomes prioritized in Black queer women

communities. For example, masculinity can be a deployed as currency whereby studs are viewed favorably by peers for having control in their romantic relationships or for their sexual conquests. Masculinity as currency is a means to gain social admiration among stud peers. The stud misogynist will use their currency to distance themselves from femmes and the stereotypes associated with their womanhood or femininity. This patriarchal system of power and the internalization of it result in another layer of marginalization for Black queer women in general and for femmes more specifically.

*Dominance and power* – An aspect of patriarchy is expressions of dominance and power. In the web series, most often it is the stud who holds relational power and dominance. It is through misogynistic behavior that power brings verbal and physical abuse to the relationship. Some ways that power and dominance were observed in the web series were through demands for unilateral monogamy and forgiveness, control over decision making, domestic violence and threats, and verbal abuse. There is a sense of entitlement attached to stud misogyny that assumes the femme partner will handle domestic responsibilities, be available for sex, have their clothing choices controlled, and more. Studs were observed expressing their relational power by expectations placed upon femme partners.

*Hostility toward femmes* – Hostility toward femmes can be subtle or overt. In each circumstance, sexist ideologies undergird language and behavior that subjects femmes to maltreatment. In overt circumstances, you see similar patterns to heterosexism where women are called derogatory names, their sexual behavior is equated with promiscuity, or their emotional expressiveness is viewed as irrational, dramatic, or unwarranted. These

claims against femmes are verbalized in various social settings. Subtle hostility takes place when femmes are treated as sexual objects or experience gaslighting where they are accused of overreacting to a transgression without cause. In other instances, a femme is dismissed as "crazy" or mentally unstable when their emotional displays are out of sync with gendered expectations. Femmes are considered either physically weak, or weak intellectually and logically. This can result in femmes being treated as if they need to be saved, or they may receive little to no empathy and care.

*Stud Persona* – Stud persona is a type of masculine presentation carried out by stud misogynists that involves the resistance to femininity through language, attire, and gender performance. It also encompasses internalized homophobia. Internalized homophobia takes place through stud opposition to emotional displays such as crying or being sentimental because it makes them "look gay." To "look gay" is to be weak and behave in ways that are stereotypically reserved for feminine women. Having a romantic interest in another stud is also considered gay. This is because having two masculine individuals in a romantic relationship violates the ghostly presence of heteronormative frames in queer communities that declare dating must include a feminine person and a masculine person. Therefore, two masculine women lovers are viewed with the same homophobic lens that finds gay male relationships abnormal or wrong. Another aspect of stud persona is having a masculine aesthetic. All studs across each web series wore masculine clothing, but the execution of clothing style is subjective. Studs wore t-shirts, athletic tank tops, button-down shirts, bow-ties, pants, shorts, hats, sneakers, or slides (open-toe sandals). Finally, stud persona involves how studs refer to each other using

masculine monikers such as bro, bruh, or the n-word. When a stud is observed by peers behaving in ways stereotypically associated with femininity, they may be called a bitch. By contrast, when femme friends reference studs, they oscillate between she/her, he/him, zaddy, daddy, and the n-word.

*Criminality* – There is a connection between criminality and studs in the web series. In three of the web series, for example, there are storylines involving drug dealing, gun violence, and criminal behavior that mirror how people of color have been portrayed in mainstream media. Mainstream media often connects Blackness with middle-to-low income neighborhoods, criminality, and violence at the hands of Black males or studs. *NYGTV*, *WOATV*, and *Choiices* continue this trend in some of their stud storylines. One does not need to be involved in criminal activity to be a stud misogynist; however, studs were the only women portrayed as criminals. This intersection affects how studs' experiences with conflict, incarceration, career choices, and other life outcomes. Studs display survival strategies that may be counter to certain politics of respectability. They tap into a piece of patriarchal power that they get from performing a tough type of masculinity; one that may be imbued with misogyny. As a reminder, their Blackness and how they can be read as Black males, exposes them to neighborhood violence in ways that differ from Black femme women.

Alone, each of these themes present their own set of issues and concerns. Taken together, we arrive at the complexity of stud gender performance and stud misogyny. Stud masculinity in which misogyny is absent was revealed during my analysis and will be discussed after I unpack each theme. I analyze the web series *Women of Atlanta TV*

*(WOATV), New York Girls TV (NYGTV), Choiices The Series*, and *The Best Friend* to investigate the core themes of stud misogyny through each series.

## Women of Atlanta TV

I begin this web series analysis with Women of Atlanta TV (*WOATV*) created by Jasmine "Millz" Miller. It is "a scripted drama series about friendships and relationships based in Atlanta" (WOATV, 2016, About section). Millz is the only creator to identify as a stud.

A substantial amount of queer of color web series have a pattern of prioritizing studs, their relationships, their criminality, and their gender performances in ways that contribute to thug, drug user/dealer, infidel, and other stereotypes about Black people across the board. These patterns are present in *WOATV* where the primary subject of the series is infidelity. Set in the city of Atlanta, the series follows the relationships of Jay and Tara, Adrina and Shay, Jade and Dalyn, and Millz and Lauren as they encounter issues in friendship and love. Jay, Shay, Dalyn, and Millz are portrayed as studs whereas, Tara, Adrina, Jade, and Lauren are portrayed as femmes. Of the four couples, three have experiences with cheating. Although I did not observe infidelity on the part of the remaining couple, accusations of cheating were a source of tension throughout their relationship. Through infidelity we are shown stark contrasts in how stud and femme characters respond to hurt and betrayal.

### *Internalized Patriarchy*

There is a clear social division in *WOATV* between stud and femme characters in how they interact with friends and create romantic relationships. Internalized patriarchy is

present among the studs beginning with two events that take place at the same party. These events set the tone for the entire season. The first event is a bet between three stud friends. Millz, Dalyn, and Jay are chatting at Dalyn's backyard party when Millz notices an attractive femme named Lauren. The friends banter with Millz because they doubt that she will be successful in securing a date with Lauren. As the banter continues Millz feels peer pressure and asserts, "Y'all must not know who I am. I'm finna work my magic" (WOATV, 2016).

The banter escalates into the friends making a $400 bet on whether Millz can get a date with Lauren in one month's time. In this example, what started off as attraction turned into a challenge of sexual conquest. Millz is willing to use her masculinity as currency, an aspect of internalized patriarchy, as she risks $400 to gain the social admiration of her friends by proving her romancing skills. hooks explained that being a player is akin to a glamorized, con artist (hooks, 2004). Millz as the player is seeking Lauren for sexual conquest which results in her behavior being glamourized by Jay and Dalyn. Placing a bet for that conquest calls up the con artist image. Because of patriarchal sex education people learn that sex is all that matters, hence, the behavior of betting on sex is normalized.

Lauren's reaction to Millz's advance was the beginning of her being branded as "too much," aggressive, rude, angry, and bougie on the show and among viewers. In contrast, Millz relies on her reputation for being a nice, even-tempered person to convince viewers that she is deserving of a date with Lauren. Agreeing that Millz is deserving, some viewers said,

S.K.: “I DON'T LIKE LAUREN. She needs to give Millz a chance!”

CrownM: Lauren need to stop playing an give my “dawg” a chance man.”

These viewers do not mention Millz’s bet. The scene and viewer comments reflect Kendall’s (2020) declaration where “too often comments that promote toxic masculinity are masked in language that valorizes dangerous mentalities” (p. 82). She believed that, dangerous mentalities suggest women need to be submissive, understanding, patient, and supportive even when a partner’s behavior ranges from cheating to abuse. Characteristics of dangerous mentalities are “respectability politics, victim blaming, and fetishization can only create a fundamentally flawed and dangerous response” (Kendall, 2000, pp. 60-61).

The expectation that Lauren give in to Millz’s request for a date is characteristic of dangerous mentalities and is emblematic of the language of rape culture. Kendall (2020) posits that rape culture is embedded into communities consciously and unconsciously because of societal norms. These norms insist that people buy into respectability politics to ensure their safety, then immediately retreats from responsibility when a person is violated (Kendall, 2020). She defines rape culture as,

> A system that positions some bodies as deserving to be attacked, hinges on ignoring the mistreatment of marginalized women, whether they are in the inner city, on a reservation, are migrant workers, or are incarcerated. Because their bodies are seen as available and often disposable, sexual violence is tacitly normalized even as people decry its impact on those with more privilege. (pp. 60-61)

Lauren is villainized for violating respectability politics placed on femme bodies when she rejects Millz. Through viewer comments, she is being pressured into consenting to Millz’s needs and reprimanded for not being sexually available. Being framed as sexually available prevents any violation of her body being read as rape because she is viewed

through the controlling image of the jezebel where autonomy over her sexual desires and attraction to another person is dictated and under attack. Misogyny perpetuates the idea of Black women as Jezebels (Kendall, 2020). As such, when Lauren resists this image, she is immediately disliked. Using a Black feminist lens, Kendall (2020) found that "rape culture is normalized and ratified not only by patriarchal notions of ownership and disposability but also by attempts to combat it by buying into the framing that the patriarchy creates" (pp. 60-61).To be clear, adhering to respectability politics for Black women is one way of buying into patriarchal framings. To combat these rape culture issues, Kendall (2020) stresses that we must examine the racist, sexist narratives about women of color as sexually available and un-rapeable" (p. 62).

When viewers made positive comments about Lauren they were often met with comments about her bad attitude. For example, two of them said,

> T.W.: Man I want Lauren, lol. I can handle that bougie attitude plus she's beautiful.
>
> AJ: I swear I love Lauren. You can't be weak when you're dealing with a female like her.

These comments imply that Lauren's behavior in rejecting Millz is unacceptable and that she can be tamed with a strong person. The comments reflect elements of internalized patriarchy because they privilege Millz's masculinity while reinforcing notions that feminine-identified people like Lauren should be bound to rigid gender roles and expectations.

The second event is when Shay brings a date to the same party as her live-in girlfriend, Adrina. An argument erupts after Shay introduces the date to the group of friends. Adrina throws a drink on Shay's date and the two women have a physical altercation. This scene is significant to the discussion of internalized patriarchy because the fight is on the heels of an earlier argument between the couple about Shay cheating. Adrina has forgiven Shay for cheating multiple times by this point and decides to end the relationship. When the couple meets up to get closure a few days after the fight, Shay has a hickey on her neck. Before leaving to meet Adrina, Shay told the woman she had just slept with, "get off me" when she needed to get dressed. Viewers responded,

> SusuThaDon: I was screaming! "Get off me" and elbowed sis' head LMAOO.
>
> Mental: "Get Off Me!" Talk about a one night stand.

The phrase, "I was screaming!" in this context means roaring laughter and speak to a downplaying of the violence in how Shay pushed the half-asleep woman and the way she was objectified in that moment. The following exchange took place during Adrina and Shay's meeting:

> Adrina: I called you over here because we need closure. We need to end it this is not working. It's not.
>
> Shay: I understand. I haven't been the girl that I was supposed to towards you. I'm all about us. I'm going to show you now.
>
> Adrina: No, Shay. You've proven to me time after time that you can't be trusted. I've given you numerous chances and what did you do? Fuck them up! So what's… what's another one? That's like…, what's the difference?

Shay: You haven't even been giving me attention. Our sex has been lacking so… I mean what you expect?

Adrina: Are you serious?

Shortly after her question, Adrina notices the hickey on Shay's neck and ends the relationship. In response, viewer JB commented,

JB: Shay is a player and not a good one! You gotta do the check before you see your main! Marks, smells, stains, all that.

JB refers to Adrina as "main" because she is officially Shay's girlfriend. Like JB's comment, the show glosses over Shay's behavior as expected and normalized. However, the situation changes when Adrina's ex-girlfriend Nae surprises her after being released from jail. Nae imposes by telling Adrina that she needs a place to stay and ignores Adrina's objection to the idea. Despite their break-up, Shay reacted to finding out about Nae by refusing to speak to Adrina and packing up her remaining clothes. Some viewers claimed that Adrina was a cheater and equated her situation with Nae to Shay's infidelity. Viewer T.B. said, "Adrina had a whole girlfriend but mad 'cause Shay was cheating." To be clear, before breaking up with Shay, I observed Adrina being faithful. They were not the only viewer to fault Adrina. In the following exchange between three viewers Adrina is accused of a pre-meditated transgression against Shay:

Le: I knew Adrina had someone else. She was doing dirt too! That's messed up. No loyal bishhhez [bitches] out here bruh.

Ky: You really can't say that because you don't know how long that girl been in jail vs how long Adrina and Shay been together. She could have moved on while she was locked up.

Le: But smiles when she comes back home? Either hold your girl down or don't. It's my opinion, Shordy.

C23: Right! Maybe Shay felt that there was someone else, so she started cheating. But for [Nae] to go straight to Adrina's crib after getting out and saying, "Hey baby!" & Adrina doofus-ass smile… they couldn't have been over.

Le: I feel that she been had the shit planned. Look at the smile.

This exchange highlights a clear disparity in viewer reactions to the storyline that privileges Shay's behavior and punishes Adrina. Adrina is supposed to be loyal and monogamous. She is expected to adhere to a passive, feminine gender role. Shay is protected by her stud friends who warn her that Adrina is at the party. She is given partiality by viewers who downplay her behavior as simply being a player. The storylines between Shay and Adrina and Millz and Lauren are central to season 1. All other storylines revolve around these two.

*Dominance and Power*. Dominance and Power was present across most characters. Adrina, Shay, Nae, Jade, Lauren, and Millz expressed power and dominance toward their romantic partners. I did not observe expressed dominance and power in the relationship between Jay and Tara. For most of the series, their storyline painted them as best friends with Jay longing to be lovers. Jay showed dominance in protecting her friends. Because she was not in a romantic relationship, her conversations with friends is the means

through which I understand her to subscribe to misogynistic frames about feminine women. For example, she bonds with Shay over sexual conquest and uses the language to objectify women. Similarly, in her relationship with Jade, Dalyn is egalitarian. Among friends, she participates and finds humor in how her friends discuss their sexual behavior, which implies complicity with misogyny, but not relational dominance. In the following examples, I explain the power dynamics observed in the series.

Lauren's car breaks down and Millz arrives to help. Lauren plays into the "damsel in distress" role, while Millz inspects the car and reveals that her battery is dead. During this scene, Lauren engages Millz in playful conversation, she softens her voice, and sheds her assertive character. After this scene, there was an increase in viewer comments about wanting to see Millz and Lauren end up together. Viewer comments did not delve into why people wanted them together but there was mention of Millz having the ability to tame Lauren. By the series finale, Lauren and Millz are dating and living together. Lauren is angry that Millz comes home late from work. Millz is annoyed by being questioned about why she arrived home late and says that she must pay the bills. Millz also makes it clear that Lauren does not complain when she receives gifts of shoes, jewelry, and clothes. The gifts are used to exert financial power over Lauren and keep her from questioning Millz's whereabouts. In another argument about the same topic, Lauren gets frustrated and says she is going out. She attempts to stand up twice and both times Millz pushes her back onto the bed telling her that she isn't going anywhere. Here, we see a shift in Millz character portrayed from being "the nice one" who has to deal with Lauren's verbal abuse and attitude, to someone controlling.

In another example, Dalyn, Jay, Millz, and Shay are working out at the gym when they start talking about Shay and Adrina's relationship. The friends tease Shay about the possibility of Adrina dating someone new in the near future. Shay proceeds to bet Dalyn and Jay $200 each that Adrina would not start dating anyone else:

Dalyn: So you don't think she's gonna get somebody else?

Shay: You must not know who she's fucking with.

In Shay's response, her sexual ego and self-confidence in gaining forgiveness from Adrina are on display. Her dominance is expressed through her belief that Adrina will remain sexually available to her and rekindle the relationship.

Next, I discuss Adrina's relationships because they involve verbal, physical, and emotional abuse by her stud lovers. In her relationship with Nae, Adrina is physically abused. On two occasions, Nae is observed striking and choking her. Shay, in contrast, is known as a player who is more non-committed than aggressive. This changed once Shay learned that Nae was living with Adrina and the two were dating. Shay showed up in the parking lot where Adrina and her friend Trevor were walking to their car demanding to talk privately with Adrina. She became angry about Nae living with Adrina and started cursing at Adrina. In this example, the relationship ended but Shay continued to demand monogamy in questioning Adrina about sleeping with Nae. Despite their break-up, she sought control and access to Adrina. Shay was portrayed as expressing dominance in becoming more demanding and aggressive,

In contrast, when Adrina is physically violent with Shay later in this episode, she is sexualized for her behavior. In one scene, Adrina grabbed Shay's tank top and pushed

her into the wall to stop Shay from removing her clothes. Adrina's violent behavior did not shift viewer perceptions of her regarding power or dominance. One viewer sexualized her violent behavior:

> Allure S: Man that was so sexy when Adrina jacked Shay up! I love an aggressive ass fem like that. Yasss!!!
>
> Brianna: I'll take a knock to the eye for that girl LMAO.

For Shay, violence and aggressiveness is seen as necessary for having control, and for Adrina those same traits were unattached to control and reassigned as an enticing quality. Greene (2000) claimed that while "assertiveness has been an important survival tool for African American women, it has also been used to depict them as inferior women" (244). Although Adrina is a Latinx woman, she is still read through the lens of inferiority by viewers. The enticing aspect of aggressiveness for her may also come from certain definitions for aggressive femme that are related to sex. Johnson (2018) described aggressive femmes as "passive in public but who take on a dominant role in the bedroom" (p. 138). She "is multiplicitous but can be characterized as a gender identity or presentation that takes charge, tops, actively initiates and participates in sexual intercourse. She takes no shit, appreciates the female body, and wants to please it" (Tinsley, 2018, p. 106).

Lastly, Jade fell into the media trope of women being angry and throwing their lovers clothes out of the home during a break-up (ex: *Diary of a Mad Black Woman, Waiting to Exhale, The Break Up*). She threatened to throw Dalyn's clothes out three times and ultimately followed through with that threat in the season finale. Jade kicked

Dalyn out of their home after finding out that she kissed another woman. She expressed dominance and power in making these decisions. However, she continued to be regarded as irrational and a troublemaker when juxtaposed with perceptions of Dalyn as non-dramatic.

### Hostility Toward Femmes

Millz's characters contributed to subtle and overt hostility toward femmes through having femme friends joke about the lack of cleanliness of each other's genitals, by placing them in roles where their sexual desire was equated to promiscuity, and in exposing them to name-calling rooted in sexist stereotypes and derogatory terms. On more than one occasion, Lauren was deemed to be a difficult person with a bad attitude, who did not give in to the desires of a "nice" stud. She was seen as rude for most of the season yet fell into the "damsel in distress" trope when her car battery died and she called to get help from Millz. Adrina was the subject of multiple instances of her partners infidelity. In offering excuses for cheating, Shay relied on gaslighting and expectations of femme forgiveness. In other circumstances, Shay blamed Adrina for a fizzled sex life to justify her cheating. Adrina was also a victim of domestic violence by Nae.

Jade's character is unique in that she is portrayed as irrational and violent in her romantic relationship with Dalyn and as untrustworthy in friendships. Jade is observed hitting Dalyn and threatening to remove her belongings from the home if Dalyn were to cheat. In the past she made incorrect accusations about Dalyn being unfaithful which was the source of a few arguments between them. When she accurately questioned and broke up with Dalyn for an instance of cheating, she was seen as the angry Black woman. Jade

is also portrayed as someone who is sneaky because she was eavesdropping on Dalyn, Millz, and Jay. Her character was shown as instigating conflict and gossiping.

*WOATV* viewers also show hostility toward femmes. Through her eavesdropping, Jade discovers that Millz is considering mending her relationship with her ex and her $400 bet on Lauren. Millz continues her pursuit of Lauren and they begin dating. Viewer reactions to Jade telling Lauren were not favorable,

> JR: Damn Jade! Why did she mess it up for Millz!?
>
> L.W.: Right! Like Millz couldn't even fix her situation before Jade got to running that mouth.

Millz popularity with viewers is unwavering. The majority of viewers thought she should have a chance to figure out where things were going to go with her ex. This is the second time viewers ignored Millz's misogynistic transgressions. By comparison, Shay's overt misogyny is recognized, but it is reduced to playfulness. To some degree, she is unapologetic about her behavior.

Viewers may not recognize misogyny in Millz because it is masked by perceptions of her as calm and nice. This is a covert way that misogyny operates (Manne, 2018). For instance,

> Nasir B: I want Millz and Lauren together.
>
> Dee B: Honestly, I think Millz can calm Lauren down.
>
> Delanna M: 'Cause Millz is a calm person and from the looks of it she hates gettin' upset or just arguing.

Millz's calmness is deployed in ways that any misogynistic or negative behavior she engages in is glossed over by viewers and downplayed in the series. Her "nice" reputation remains intact and she develops loyal following of viewers who believe that she can do no wrong. As such, viewers lashed out at Jade for not protecting Millz by remaining silent and keeping her secret from Lauren. Jade is cast as nosy, jealous, and salty, all of which mean that she is untrustworthy.

> M.Y.: It seems like Jade is salty about her friend [Lauren] finally being in somewhat of a relationship. Or, maybe she wants to be the only one happy.
>
> PD: Shorty [Jade] just made me so mad. Like, why did you lie on Millz like that?
>
> Ditra C: Jade is pissing me off. She's making it bad for the nice ones.

There is a sense that Jade owes Millz loyalty, but not her friend Lauren. Jade was not the only person to receive backlash about Millz. Lauren was already branded with stereotypes often attributed to Black women as angry, rude, too assertive. So, when she found out about Millz and expressed anger, viewers continued to write about disliking her,

> T.B.: Just the first 6 minutes into the episode I've come to the conclusion that "Lauren" is biiiittttteeeeer [bitter]. Like who hurt you, Sis? Sheesh.
>
> BB:I'm sorry… I woulda' smacked the Christmas lights out of Lauren with that damn mouth and attitude.

Other viewers felt that Lauren would remain alone/single because of her attitude. This sentiment brought up a short conversation between viewers:

> K.S.: Lauren will never find anybody acting like that.

Joi D: Lauren is gone be single for life with that attitude.

JTV: I can't stand women who can't stop talking.

BlqBC: Single for life? She is playing a regular hard-to-get girl that is no different from you and me, well, I guess not you, but me. Why y'all gotta hate on a character all the time even if they aren't the villain? Nah, the real question is why y'all hoes so easy though? Always want somebody to give it up to a pretty "boi" that talk nice. Y'all ain't never satisfied because I bet if she gave in so easy y'all would be right up here in these comments talking about how desperate Lauren is. Blah.

BlqBC refers to Millz as a "pretty boi." The substitution of "y" in boy for "i" is used in queer circles to signal a tomboy masculinity that is "usually playful, boisterous, and charming" (Urbandictionary.com, n.d.). Taken together with the euphemism for having sex, "give it up," BlqBC is questioning why other viewers expect Lauren to readily have sex simply because Millz is an attractive, masculine person. In contrast, one of the few viewers attempting to empathize with Lauren said,

iCount6: She's clearly been hurt before and she knows her worth so she's obvi[ously] hella guarded. I don't know about y'all but I gotta be more like her and not so soft with these damn girls tryna play me.

This comment both recognizes Lauren as someone who is self-confident in saying "not so soft," and pathologizes her as being self-confident because of past relational harms instead of that being a quality that she holds.

Stud Persona

All studs in *WOATV* have stud persona in which their attire, language, and refusal to appear feminine contributes to a gender performance that prioritizes masculinity and protects them from accusations of being gay. Studs' stylistic choices vary, but they are observed wearing some combination of pants, shorts, t-shirts, baseball caps, or loose athletic gear. In contrast, no studs wore dresses, skirts, or make-up.

In terms of language, some studs were observed using sexist language against femmes, calling them hoes and bitches, crazy, or alluding to promiscuity. When they referenced each other, they primarily used masculine pronouns and the n-word, however, feminine pronouns were not excluded. Taken together, the desire to be read as masculine influenced clothing, language, and behavior for studs. In the example below, stud persona impacts behavior expectations among the four stud friends at the gym.

The first example of stud persona involves the four studs resisting femininity by gendering exercises, referencing each other using masculine pronouns, and teasing each other about displaying "gay" behavior. Studs Millz, Dalyn, Shay, and Jay are working out at the gym when everyone notices Millz stretching her legs directly behind Dalyn. They tease her saying that she is "gay" for being so close to Dalyn while stretching. An embarrassed Millz moves to a new location. Jay says, "You're over here acting like a faggot" (WOATV, 2016). After a conversation among the friends, Jay reminds the group to get back to working out instead of "acting like we're at the beauty salon" by talking about their relationship issues (WOATV, 2016). Millz tells the group that she wants to do crunches instead of push-ups and the following short conversation begins:

Jay: Crunches is for bitches! Now, come on!

Millz: Well, if I do, I'm gonna do woman push-ups.

Shay: No, Bro!

Dalyn: Nah, I'm not doing no woman push-ups.

Jay: Man, I'll see y'all niggas later.

The exchanges at the gym are representative of the friends attempting to hold on to masculine power by distancing themselves from femininity. Femininity becomes synonymous with weakness, gossip, and inappropriate behavior among studs. Specifically, Jay, Dalyn, and Shay paint femininity as wrong when they assign gender to crunches and push-ups and imply weakness associated with doing crunches. The same applies to notions of stud behavior as gay or faggotry when they break proximity norms. This also speaks to a phobia against stud-stud intimacy and relationship pairings. Stud-stud phobia is a part of the internalized homophobia aspect of stud persona. The series drew attention to the limits possible when we do not disrupt the gender binary, but no position on the issue was offered. Because of this, the series' representation of stud-stud and even non-binary relationships are ostracized as they are left to the characters jokes against these relationships. Essentially, the series normalized the stud-femme gender binary as the only acceptable relationship. Viewer comments in this episode did not reference the gym scene outside of compliments about how "fine" the studs looked. As such, they were not included here.

Criminality

The series contained one storyline revealing that Millz and Jay were drug dealers in the past. The pair was robbed by Nae who also killed their friend during the robbery. In retaliation, Jay and Millz tricked Nae by dropping off a supply of drugs to her and then anonymously informing the police that they witnessed a drug deal. Nae was later incarcerated on a drug charge. When Jay and Millz discover that Nae is currently out of jail, they pistol-whip her and try to kill her, but she survives the attack. Viewer feedback about this scene pertained to frustration with the repetitive image of studs as criminals,

> CR: Ok really...? Another storyline with studs selling drugs. These females don't even be built to handle that type of life.
>
> DJ Jay: Why on every one of these lgbt series the studs sell drugs? That storyline is too repetitive and typical. It's old. Played out. Like, why can't they have real careers?"
>
> Clarissa: Next seasons storyline needs to be about some employed studs that are about their paper [money] the legal way. Show how Black studs can make moves owning their own business or running one. Let's stray away from drug dealing studs, studs that rap or studs that are security guards...y'all are better than that.

Clearly, viewers are familiar with media representations of stud criminalization and challenge the storyline as repetitive. There is frustration attached to their request for broad portrayals of studs who have careers and are not involved with drug dealing. While holding space for the importance of positive media representations of Black queer women, I contend that there is also room for a discussion about criminality in the

community. This is substantial considering that queer women of color are overrepresented in jails and prisons. (Meyer, 2019; Shange, 2019). Meyer et. al. (2017) suggests that "prejudice toward sexual minorities may lead to discriminatory treatment, from initial contact with police through various stages of the criminal justice system" (p. 271). As such, in having a crime storyline *WOATV* opens up a conversation about studs and oppressive experiences with incarceration.

### New York Girls TV (*NYGTV*)

*New York Girls TV* was created by Amira Shaunice who is a Black woman blogger, screenwriter, producer, and director (amirashaunice.com, 2020). The New York City drama series is about lesbian romantic relationships and careers. The series tackles sexuality, relationships, and promiscuity, according to Shaunice (YouTube.com, 2020). The series departs from primarily showing stud-femme romantic relationship and characters. Shaunice's show has a mixture of Latinx and Black characters who perform gender across a wider spectrum than *WOATV, The Best Friend,* and *Choiices*. *NYGTV* focuses on many aspects of life by addressing transgender experiences, parenting, racism in the workplace, and pursuing higher education. In a move to differentiate the series from the pack of Black queer media, Shaunice inserts social commentary on relevant injustices happening to people of color in the U.S. Events like police brutality, the death of Sandra Bland, Black Lives Matter march in New York City, and reactions to the election of Trump. These scenes give viewers a sense of what life is like in New York for her characters.

Across the series' four seasons, studs engage in criminal activities and perform a masculinity that hypersexualizes femmes. Their behavior falls within the four themes of stud misogyny. Examples of studs whose misogynistic behavior was present across all four themes of stud misogyny are Peyton and Tye. *The Best Friend*s are often observed in violent situations together, and it is through some of their conversations that we gain insight into their perception of femmes and femininity. Stud misogyny observations in *NYGTV* were complicated by Cameron "Cam" who performs misogyny but did not explicitly identify as a stud. She does not present with a stud aesthetic because she wears make-up, large earrings, acrylic nails, and feminine clothing. She refers to herself as "Papi," and her stud friends use "boy," "man," and "nigga" to reference her. In U.S. Latinx lesbian communities, "Papi" is a Spanish slang term used to describe a masculine gender expression (Morgan, 2017, p. 51). I believe Shaunice's decision to use the term Papi is paying homage both to the Afro-Boricua population in New York and her characters' offscreen bi-racial heritage. Peyton, Mya, and Tye identify as Afro-Boricua (African American and Puerto Rican). According to Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes & Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel (2018), since migration from Puerto Rico to New York in the 1920s, New York has had a large Puerto Rican population.

Whereas Cam is biracially Black and White, it is suspected that her proximity to friends in the series and her geographic location in Afro-Latino/a/x enclaves in New York are the reasons she uses the term. Viewers did attempt to categorize Cam's gender performance, writing:

Sharlan K.: I personally don't get the 'aggressive fem' thing.

Rowdy: I don't get Cameron. She acts like an AG but she's a fem.

Divergent: She dresses feminine. Anyone can be aggressive.

Malinda Y.: The new term for studs-fems is stem! I had to ask my daughter.

"AG" means aggressive and it is often used as a synonym for stud. Natasha Omise'eke Tinsley (2018) defines AG as, "Aggressive – which signifies female masculinity as a noun, but female (sexual) dominance as an adjective" (p. 106). "Stem" or "stemme" describes a lesbian whose gender performance is not pinned down to femininity or masculinity. For instance, a feminine "tomboy" is a stem example. Cam avoids engaging in criminal behavior which means that she meets the stud misogyny criterion for internalized patriarchy, hostility toward femmes, and stud persona only. Because of her language about femmes and her behavior regarding sexual conquest, Cam stands out as one of the main examples of misogynistic behavior in the series.

Before unpacking internalized patriarchy, I want to note that Shaunice tells her character's stories in conjunction with powerful images of her women of color characters as writers for the *New York Times*, as artists, and business owners. Highlighting the successful careers of these women counters stereotypical portrayals where their jobs are ambiguous, and viewers understand that they work but are never told what they do. At other times, the women make money through their involvement in some kind of criminal activity.

## Internalized Patriarchy

*NYGTV* has storylines saturated with sexist ideologies that show feminine people as irrational and masculine people as dominant or violent. Internalized patriarchy is

prevalent in the stories involving studs but is also observed in other characters. For studs, Peyton, Tye, and Cam, this internalization is marked by their treatment of femmes. In the first two seasons, Peyton is in a committed relationship with a bisexual, femme woman named Jessica. In their relationship, Jessica is not allowed to socialize with men or studs. Peyton does not view femmes as a threat in the same way, and instead sees them as potential for threesomes. Peyton reinforces sexist ideologies and her biphobia is revealed in her enforcement of this relationship boundary. Peyton not only shows her disbelief that bisexual people can be monogamous, but her insecurity about their relationship stability is made clear. Michaela Meyer (2003) pointed out that "bisexuality has gained marginal acceptance as a transition phase, or a process of experimentation, but those who profess their bisexuality past this point of tolerance are seen as promiscuous swingers or sexual predators" (p. 156).In Peyton questioning Jessica, we see her underlying notion that Jessica is experimenting and could exit the relationship at any time because of her bisexual identity. Significantly, Meyer (2003) found that bi-phobic attitudes limits people's ability to define their bisexuality as a valid social identity. This is due in part to bi-phobic beliefs that claim bisexuality to be a passing phase between heterosexuality and homosexuality. This means that Jessica and other bisexual people are remanded to a liminal space where they are subjected to discrimination, bias, and suspicion (Meyer, 2003). Carla Peterson (1998), defined liminal space as a position from which Black women speakers lived their lives; existing "'betwixt' and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony" (p. 17).

Further, sexist ideologies manifest in Peyton binding the couple to specific gender roles and expectations. For instance, because Jessica is the femme partner, Peyton subscribes to the role of breadwinner. She buys Jessica gifts, gives her money, pays her bills, and asserts that she is supposed to take care of Jessica. Moreover, her attempts to curtail Jessica's sexual desire and control how she socializes with others is an expression of dominance and power. In the final two seasons, Peyton becomes single and examples of her using masculinity as currency are illustrated. During multiple interactions with stud friends, she is seen vying for their social admiration based on her sexual conquests. Once she begins having more sexual encounters, she refers to herself as "Papi" which means that someone has heightened sex appeal and believes they are attractive to many women. "Papi" is an abbreviation of "Papi Chulo" which linguistic origins are in Spanish and means "pimp daddy." Papi directly translates to a form of the word, father, and chulo means pimp, attractive, cocky, or cool. Moreover, "the term is more often used today as slang for a sexy, confident man who dresses well" (www.dictionary.com, 2020). When Peyton takes on the word "Papi" she is claiming that sexy, masculine identity for herself.

In another example, Cam is upset because she's dating Mona who has made her wait for three months to engage in sex. Mona previously contracted chlamydia from Cam and wants to be cautious. Cam talks to Mya about having to wait to have sex:

> Mya: You need to tighten up. Get Mona to settle down with you so you could have a babysitter. This way we could go.

Cam: Nah, let me tell you something right now, bro. First of all, Shorty 'bout to get the boot. She not tryin' to give up the panties, my patience is gone, I'm dead. I'm 'bout to cancel her. Like, I can't live like this no more.

Mya: Cameron, you gave her chlamydia.

Cam: It was an accident. That shit was like a boo-boo. Like, I done did everything ever since to make this shit right.

Mya: That's not a boo-boo and three months is not gon'…anyway.

Cam: I've been a good nigga for three months.

Shortly after their conversation, Cam seduces her co-worker, Kelly and they get caught by Kelly's boyfriend. When Cam returns home, Mona tells her that the wait to have sex is over because she believes Cam has proven that she can be a faithful girlfriend:

Mona: I have been thinking lately and… I think you're starting to prove yourself. So, maybe you deserve a treat.

Cam: A treat? Like a cookie or some shit?

Mona: Cameron, don't play dumb. You know what I mean.

Cam: Great, and you tell me while Camille is here.

Mona: Now you'll have something to look forward to.

Mona leaves and Cameron says, "Nice. The king is back!" The idea of coming back is about patriarchal notions of regaining control in her romantic relationship based on sexual conquest. She feels empowered because she has kept up the appearance of monogamy long enough to get what she wants from Mona which is sex. Further, Cam

and Mona exert dominance in their relationship. Mona gains power through withholding sex. Cam, on the other hand, delegates domestic responsibilities and childcare to Mona.

### Hostility Toward Femmes

The first example of hostility toward femmes is during a conversation between Tye and the woman she is cheating with. She reveals that she has a girlfriend after they have sex. She explains that her girlfriend Stacy has also been cheating and that she is unhappy and sick of the infidelity. The woman is surprised and angry that Tye waited until after sex to share that news:

> Tye: Well, I didn't think it was that big of a deal because the way things are going, we aren't going anywhere.
>
> Woman: That's something important! Vital information, you know!

Stacy is in a tumultuous relationship with Tye, who is responsible for her being harmed on more than one occasion. When Stacy saw another woman leave the apartment she shared with Tye, she punched Tye and then ran downstairs to fight the woman. The next day, the woman and a friend returned to Stacy and Tye's apartment and they jump Stacy. As Stacy tells Tye that she was jumped, Tye only gives her partial attention:

> Stacy: So, what do you have to say for yourself? I'm out here fightin' bitches. Bitches is coming to the place where I'm staying at to fight me and you not even here.
>
> Tye: Should've never went out there and started with her. You did that to yourself.

Tye displays no remorse for her infidelity. She shows a lack of compassion for Stacy's experience getting jumped. Since Stacy only saw the women leaving, Tye gaslights her in saying that they were only having lunch together and that Stacy refused to let her explain what was happening. The combination of gaslighting and accusations of overreacting to a transgression are examples of hostility toward femmes. In this example, Tye displayed hostility toward femmes and Stacy displayed relational dominance in her physical abuse of Tye.

Another example of hostility toward femmes is in Cameron's sexual behavior and treatment of femmes. She objectifies women, disregards their emotional expressions, and uses gaslighting to avoid responsibility for her actions. Cam also has an experience being on the receiving end of sexual objectification. We are introduced to the depth of Cam's character after she discovers she is pregnant at sixteen. Her character began as a femme-presenting, monogamous heterosexual who "came in" to herself and self-identified as a "predatory, aggressive, confident, and healthy hoe" who loves women(New York Girls TV, 2014). Regarding her sexual freedom, she claims to be greedy and has to feed her appetite saying, "It's too many fine ass women in New York to limit yourself to just one" (Shaunice, 2019). Cam's "hit it and quit it" mentality is illustrated in her sexual experiences with femmes. To be clear, she did not date femmes, she had one-night stands and quickly dismissed them. Cam's dismissiveness toward femmes and her sexual freedom are linked to the language of sexual conquest and that is where misogyny and hostility are accentuated.

For example, Cam meets a woman who tells her that she is not single. Cam responds, “I don’t care if you’re single. I’m just trying to kick it with you”(New York Girls TV, 2014). “Kick it” in this context means have sex with someone. Immediately following their sexual encounter, Cam wants the woman to leave. She says, “I’m not a stayer” which is interpreted as she does not cuddle or linger around after sex because the women started getting dressed after Cam made that statement. As the woman was sitting on the edge getting ready to leave, Cam accepted a phone call where she made plans to sleep with another person that evening. The woman is visibly upset as she hears Cam say, “Make sure you wear them panties that I like” (New York Girls TV, 2014). This lack of care for the woman in the room after sex is an example of sexual objectification. In response to this scene, one viewer said,

> Emoon: Cam is mad cool. But if I was into girls, I would be careful and stay away from "The Cam" of the world. That shit can be scary for anyone involved with too many random people. No responsibility.

Scenarios like this happened often with Cam’s sexual partners. For example, after sleeping with her femme friend Alex, she arrived at a party with a date she met while giving her a tattoo that same day. Alex was at the party and looked upset when she noticed Cam and the date kissing across the room.

Cam’s sexual partners are dehumanized as objects of sexual gratification. Once Cam’s sexual needs are met the women are no longer valued. She excuses her behavior through gaslighting her sexual partners. For instance, she is perceived as a charming and upfront person when she is courting someone for sex. Yet, she relies on non-committal,

flirtatious statements to shield her from conversations with her sexual partners about their feelings for her. Moreover, when women express any form of attachment after sex she asserts, “You know what it is,” “I don’t do that heart shit,” or “I just want to fuck and make money” for example(New York Girls TV, 2014). Her reliance on honesty with sexual partners about not looking for a relationship, allows her to side-steps responsibility for objectifying them.

In her sexual encounters with women who are not femme, like studs Peyton and Dani, she cuddles after sex, engages in conversation, and shows more romantic connection with them. These after-sex activities may have taken place because Peyton and Dani are her friends, but so is Alex. After sleeping with Cam, Alex wanted to talk about what happened. During their phone conversation below, she is frustrated by Cam’s avoidance:

> Alex: So, what’s up, Cam? You’ve been acting real funny lately.
>
> Cam: About that…Nah, we cool. Whatever happened, happened. I’m not trippin’ off that shit at all. We cool. Just let it be.
>
> Alex: So, we’re just gonna act like it never even happened? Alright.
>
> Cam: Look. I can’t entertain this right now. I’m ‘bout to go shopping for Camille. I gotta go. I’ll hit you up later.
>
> Alex: Nah. Fuck you, Cam!

One viewer who was invested in the couple said,

> Pretty Maya: I really thought Cameron was going to settle down but she did Alex wrong.

The difference in how Cam is portrayed interacting with her stud and femme sexual partners contributes to femme hostility. Despite Cam not identifying as femme, she is femme-presenting and Shaunice's depicts her entertaining the possibility of commitment with her stud partners, yet never considering commitment with multiple femmes partners, speaks to the trappings of the stud-femme binary when it comes to relationships for Cam. Cam and Dani were in a relationship for several years, but when Dani left for Spain to play basketball, Cam began sleeping with multiple women which ended the relationship. With Peyton, their relationship shifted from best friends who supported each other's sexual conquests to starting a relationship. Cam expressed romantic feelings for Peyton, but their relationship came to a halt after Peyton backed out of their plans to move to Atlanta together so that Cam could be near her daughter:

> Cam: Are you ready? We gotta get out of here. The plane leaves in two hours.
>
> Peyton: Oh, you thought I was serious? I'm not going to Atlanta. We're not taking it to that level. Let's just leave it for what it was…two friends who shared a moment. That's that!
>
> Cam: Are you dead-ass right now?
>
> Peyton: I mean, you thought I cared for you on that level? The sex was great. Immaculate. Don't get me wrong but, you and I both know this won't go anywhere. If you want, I'll ride with you to the airport.
>
> Cam: No, I'm cool. I'm cool. Fuck you.

In this instance, Cam was on the receiving end of sexual objectification. Peyton also sexually objectified her ex-girlfriend Jessica in retaliation for their break-up. The exes slept together and immediately following, Peyton tells Jessica that she used her:

> Peyton: I kept in touch with you just so I could tell you that you're nothing but an attention-seeking bitch. You practically left me for Mya after I provided for you for two years, Jess. Two! And then you wait ‘til she stopped fucking with you to beg me to fuck you. So, I did and I enjoyed it.
>
> Jessica: Are you fucking serious right now? Yo, I told you I was confused when I was with you and you didn't even try to fix our fucking relationship. You just ran off with another bitch. Not to mention, the bitch was waiting for me at the door when I was moving out. You know what? I fucking hate you. Get the fuck out, Stupid!
>
> Peyton: You got the nerve to be fucking mad.
>
> Jessica: Whatever Peyton.
>
> Peyton: I had fun though.
>
> Jessica: Leave! Go!
>
> Peyton: I did. Where’s Mya? You taste good.

By the final season of the series, Cam decided to go back to sleeping with multiple women, including Dani and Peyton. Dani was fine with Cam’s decision, but Peyton still hoped for a relationship between them and was hurt:

> Peyton: I don’t know what you want me to say. Like, you basically asked me to be one of your hoes and I’m not with that shit.

Cam: What does it matter if we're not even together? I could've been a fake nigga and not even told you.

Peyton: Yeah, I'm good. Like, I don't like fucking somebody that's fucking everybody. Like, that's disgusting.

Peyton felt as though Cam was attempting to objectify her by adding her to the list of women she was sleeping with. As the conversation went on, Cam accepted that the sexual part of their friendship was over. Peyton continued to be distant:

Peyton: I'm hurt. Like, what you want me to do? Like what?

Cam: Get over your feelings. Be my friend again. Let's fuck bitches together.

Peyton: Oh, Papi One and Papi Two? Anyway, I got some errands to run.

Both Cam and Peyton had experience objectifying women in the past. They played into their hypersexual, suave personas and they became Papi 1 and Papi 2. However, once Peyton entered into a relationship, she was monogamous. Cam was a non-monogamous person, so all three of her attempts to be in a committed relationship failed. I do not take issue with non-monogamous relationships. Instead, I am showing how the sexual objectification aspect of hostility toward femmes appears in the web series. I am also turning attention to the stud's attitude toward women before and after a sexual encounter to make visible the maltreatment, disregard, and devaluing of those women.

### Stud Persona

There are two salient facets of stud persona that takes place in *NYGTV*, distancing from femininity and internalized homophobia. In the series, stud characters perform masculinity by distancing themselves from the feminine. One way of doing this is evident

in how studs use masculine monikers to refer to each other such as bro, boy, man, and the n-word in the series. They are not opposed to being called “she” and “her,” but they use masculine monikers more often. Studs will use he/him pronouns as well.

Taking on a masculine moniker contributes to the way that they carry themselves, the language that they may use toward femmes or feminine behavior, and the way that they dress. For example, characters who identified as studs were not observed wearing make-up, dresses, skirts, blouses, heels, or other attire that would be perceived as feminine. Instead they opted for sneakers, jeans, t-shirts, tank tops, or button-down shirts. Each series had one or more storylines about infidelity and stability in the relationships, Sexual conquest storylines were present in all four web series. For example, *NYGTV’s* Cam had stud persona. This was not because she distanced herself from feminine gender performance, but because she chose not to define her gender performance or accentuate it with a stud aesthetic. For Cam, distance from femininity and stud persona was reserved for sexual conquests. As part of their stud persona, stud friends acted like a system of checks and balances for displays of feminine behavior. When a friend became emotional, cried, showed fear, or too much affection toward one another, they were called bitch or pussy to force a change in their behavior.

Ultimately, the studs equate emotional displays with genitals and a derogatory term that has been historically used to degrade women. This is more than a simple discussion about clothing and emotions, it is about an expression of masculinity that is keen on not appearing weak. hooks (2004) discussed the influence of patriarchy on perceptions of weakness and masculinity sharing that in patriarchal practice, men (and

studs) feel empowered to enact violence against those perceived weak and like women. This expression of masculinity is formulated by the heterosexist ideals injected into our community through socialization. Allen (2011) expressed that “socialization processes related to these hierarchies are powerful and persistent; they teach us to believe dominant ideas about matters of difference” (p. 184). Ja’nina Garrett, Dominique Broussard, & Whitneé Garrett-Walker (2019) said, “Patriarchy has placed a very limited view on what behaviors are deemed masculine, and who can partake in masculinity” (p. 70). Black lesbians are illegible inside of patriarchy because it promotes sexist, heteronormative ideologies. For example, “Patriarchal masculinity has also been viewed as a goal to achieve, which can only be accomplished by the enactment of very specific behaviors (i.e., anti-feminine, economic stability, heteronormativity, dominance, control, violence)” (Garrett, Broussard, & Garrett-Walker, 2019, p. 70).Moreover, Kendall (2020) found that “entitlement, intolerance, homophobia, misogyny, aggression, and sexual violence inside and outside marginalized communities are the antisocial behaviors that patriarchal systems create. There can be no doubt that patriarchal systems have oppressed, terrorized, and abused everyone” (pp. 81-82). Distancing from femininity by studs is connected to participation within historical frames of subjugated Black masculinity where one must behave in ways that avoid showing weakness. Hence, “Black feminist theory clearly articulates the power of the image to serve the hegemony of “White supremacist capitalist patriarchy” by controlling the way society views marginalized groups and how we view ourselves" (hooks, 1989, p. 14).

Another aspect of stud persona is internalized homophobia. In the series this type of homophobia appears through studs' rejection of romantic involvement between two masculine lesbian women in Season 2. With relationships adhering to the stud-femme binary, studs rely on heteronormative masculine-feminine gender roles and view two studs dating as taboo. This view follows heteronormative rejection of gay males as weak and wrong (ex. two men should not be together romantically). Thus, a stud's sense of masculinity refuses stud for stud dating. Peyton rejects the idea of stud-stud attraction and dating. During a scene where she and Cam attended a speed dating event together, she was approached by a stud and became angry:

> Peyton: I don't do that stud on stud! That's mad gay!
>
> Stud date: At the end of the day, a woman is a woman"
>
> Peyton: Next!

Sarah Reed & Maria Valenti (2012) studied the ways that Black lesbians managed their identities as sexual minorities. They help us understand that Peyton's position is a part of gender-based prejudice within the lesbian community. Specifically, the authors found that there are strict rules about dating, gender expression, sexual behavior(Reed & Valenti, 2012). For instance,

> Norms included: the belief that studs should only date femmes; lesbians, and especially studs, should not have sex with men, studs should not be pregnant; and stemmes are confused and need to decide whether to be a stud or a femme. Violators of these norms were teased, physically threatened, or ostracized. (Reed & Valenti, 2012, p. 709)

At work in these norms are systems of oppression. For example, Moore (2012) said, "sexuality is viewed as a specific site where heterosexism, class, race, nation, and

gender converge as systems of power and consequently shape the construction and experience of identities, behavior, and social relationships for Black gay women" (p. 35). Thus, being anti stud-stud dating or labeling "stemmes" confused for their attraction is the imposition of regulatory systems of oppression dictating Black women's sexual desires, behaviors, and sexuality.

Viewer reactions to this scene were split. Stephanie was upset and said,

> Stephanie: This homophobic attitude towards studs who date other studs needs to stop. I must be the only one who didn't find the scene between Peyton and that stud funny. I'm really hoping it's part of a bigger plan to tackle the topic of stud-for-stud in a more positive way as the season progresses instead of just another opportunity by another Black webseries to push this idea that stud-for-stud is somehow wrong.

She called out the storyline for contributing to anti-stud attitudes in the community. In contrast, viewer TH was happy to see stud-for-stud dating reflected on the series,

> TH: Thank you for the stud-on-stud speed dating scene. Even though some studs aren't into it, it's nice to see you acknowledge the ones that see past the label. All lesbian relationships aren't just stud and femme.

Similarly, viewer Tara G. sparked the following viewer reactions when she commented, "Please include a stud with stud relationship."

> Dorothy S.: Yeah that would be good for people to see.
>
> Clark B.: Yessss! A stud on stud relationship in the show would take it to another level.

SmartFashionFairy: I would LOVE to see that, Tara.

ShaBreka: Fuck no! That shit ain't what's happening.

Happy Thoughts: Shabreka, it happened anyway & the show is still great.

Viewer Shabreka opposed seeing stud-stud storyline. However, in this brief exchange there was a sense that others want to see expanded discussions about relationships outside of the stud-femme pairings.

Later in the scene, Peyton retells that speed dating story to Tye and Cam stating, “This fucking dyke gon’ sit at my table. Like, really tried to bag me on some real pussy, pussy stuff. She had a shape-up. I was ready to punch that nigga” (New York Girls TV, 2014). Peyton not only imposed her views of gender roles on her ex, Jessica, she followed a rigid set of rules that bound her to limited gender norms for dating. This aspect of stud persona is an example of internalization of homophobic vernacular and it makes possible comments such as “that’s gay” from lesbians. Comments like Peyton’s are the ramification of a reemergence of misogyny and hegemony of homophobia and heterosexism (Johnson, 2003). He posited, “Black masculinity secures its power by repudiating the (homosexual) Other” (Johnson, 2003, p. 55). To secure masculinity, then, one must distance themselves from, mock, or emphatically reject embodied femininity. A viewer took issue with the “that’s gay” comment and said,

Clark: I love that y'all brought up stud on stud attraction in the show. Yes, it is ignorant as hell to say, "No I don't do stud on stud, that's gay!" but that's truly what some people think and as a community we definitely need to talk about that. If you’re not attracted to masculine women just say that. But, shaming masculine

women who are attracted to other masculine women and using the word gay in the same derogatory context that homophobe's do is ignorant.

Viewers enjoyed the storyline overall and wanted to engage in more community-wide discussions about stud-stud relationships:

Shantell: I don't see nothing wrong with stud for stud relationships. What's the issue? It’s just the same as two fems being in a relationship. Me myself, I’m a fem. I wouldn’t mind dating a stud or a fem.

Divergent: I am a stud who dates other studs. We are never talked about unless it’s negative so when I saw that scene of course I got excited. Then I continued to watch and was disappointed because though the other stud stood her ground, it still hurt to watch then have to read some of the comments laughing and cheering the behavior on. But, I know that I can't always expect someone else to tell my story the right way.

However, some viewers had the same sentiment about stud-stud relationships as Peyton,

Sable: I agree though. That stud on stud shit is dead.

KJ: As far as stud for stud, I'm not into it but I'd never speak down on it.

The opposition to stud-stud dating not only demonstrates a commitment to the gender binary in romantic relationships for studs, it offers insight into how internalized homophobia can work among them. For the stud misogynist, they express parallel heteronormative notions that two masculine individuals in love is wrong, abnormal, and therefore unacceptable. The stereotype that gay males have inauthentic masculinity because they are effeminate is on display here. Stud-attracted-studs face similar societal

punishment from within their queer communities whereby they are ostracized, reprimanded, and degraded for their attraction.

Although the rejection of stud-stud dating persists in the Black queer community, viewer comments wanting to explore this storyline and see this type of relationship on the series, speaks to movement away from a binary in relationships. This movement will show the depth of relationships in our community that are underrepresented in Black queer web series in favor of stud-femme portrayals. Johnson (2005) talked about Black lesbian invisibility in literature: "The Black lesbian writer must recreate our home, unadultered, unsanitized, specific and not isolated from the generations that have nurtured us" (p. 297). Generations before us worked to offer insights into queer Black women's experience by unpacking issues around Black women's liberation from hegemonic (White) femininity, patriarchy, racism, sexism, gender rigidity and more (Johnson, 2005). He understood that Black women writers had to escape commercial markets (i.e., mainstream media) that were only "interested in Black queer characters who are singular, whose sexuality is marginal or ambivalent, and who are in transition, or tragic, or even better – comic" (Johnson, 2005, p. 293).

Essentially, these markets discounted the complexity of Black queerness among women. In essence, these Black women characters are held hostage by the heteropatriarchal imagination that only wants to see assimilated versions of their bodies (Johnson, 2005). In the case of gender and Peyton's feelings about stud-stud dating, she falls prey to the heteropatriarchal imagination in finding masculinity without a feminine partner to be wrong. Now, by extension, web series creators here are writers who tell

stories about Black queer women as well. Their community of viewers are calling for expanded views of Black lesbianism that, of course, speak to stereotypes and other community issues; but also ensures that Black lesbians are not offered up as one-dimensional stereotypes that reinforce limited views of Black culture and their lesbianhood (Johnson, 2005).

By Season 3, we are introduced to stud character Sam who complicates this discussion of stud-stud dating in her relationship with stud Bobbi. Sam previously dated only femme women but is attracted to Bobbi and the two begin dating. Sam experiences shame and fear in dating another stud. She is reluctant to talk about Bobbi with friends and avoids public displays of affection with her. Eventually, Sam "comes out" to Cam about dating Bobbi and to her surprise, Cam was accepting. Cam replies to the news saying, "A stud! Nigga, I'm not mad about that. Come on, you're not exactly the manliest person I know, Señorita" (New York Girls TV, 2014). Through Sam's struggle to accept her relationship, we understand that at some point she was resistant to stud-stud dating, and that she believed it was taboo among friends and the larger queer community. Cam's reaction to Sam and Bobbi shows a mutual understanding of anti-stud-stud sentiments in the Black lesbian community. Her acceptance of Sam's relationship was mitigated by undermining Sam's gender identity as a stud.

Even though Sam received acceptance from her friend group, she was unable to overcome her feeling of embarrassment in dating Bobbi. The tipping point in their relationship was Bobbi cutting off her shoulder-length dreadlocks and arriving home with a Caesar cut. A Caesar cut is modeled after the hairstyle of Julius Caesar. It is a short

hairstyle with straight-edged bangs. Sam has a negative reaction to this, especially since she had recently cut off her own dreadlocks in favor of a short, natural afro. After seeing Bobbi's new haircut, Cam teases Sam:

Cam: Oh! Y'all both got Caesar's now?

Sam: When she came home the other day with that fuckin' haircut, I'm like, where are your dreads at? What barbershop did you go to? Can we go pick those up?

Cam: Was it at the barbershop we was at yesterday?

Sam: I hope so, 'cause I'm going to pick those up and put them back in.

Sam is clearly upset by Bobbi's new haircut but the underlying reason for her negative reaction is shame and embarrassment. Cam offers no comfort in making fun of the couple to Sam,

Cam: Y'all look like the double dyke twins now.

Sam: Dead-ass finna make me look like "bottom" Sam.

In calling attention to the sexual position of being a "bottom," Sam reveals the root of her embarrassment about dating Bobbi. She is concerned that dating a stud takes away from her own masculinity and power in the relationship. She does not want to be perceived as a "bottom" which is the sexual position stereotyped as belonging to the femme, or the person who receives sex in queer relationships. In not wanting to be a "bottom," Sam reveals her commitment to a dominant, traditional masculinity among lesbians. According to Allen (2011), "the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power" (p. 27).

Thus, her statement shows that she views "bottoming" as weak and as having no control in the relationship or bedroom. For Allen (2011) "the act of labeling or defining social identity groups demonstrates power dynamics" (p. 27). Some people in our community take ownership of sexual labels like "top," "bottom," "versatile," and more, and the labels are attached to gender and a hierarchy of power. For example, Bianca Wilson (2009) found that it was important to some studs to maintain "the appearance of dominance in the sexual act for hard studs and how being touched sexually or being the 'bottom' took away that sense of dominance and control"(p. 304).For Sam, she expressed discontent in terms of her stud identity by not defining a clear "bottom" in her stud-stud relationship. It also makes clear that she continues to deal with internal stud-stud phobia. Interestingly, at the time of Sam and Bobbi's relationship, the show had a femme-femme couple storyline in Mya and her girlfriend Jessica. They did experience fetishization by Peyton who teased about wanting a threesome with them, but outright rejection of their relationship or shame did not follow the couple in the same way as Sam and Bobbi.

When Mya talked to Cam about missing her friendship with Jessica before their relationship was complicated by sex, Cam said that Mya was being gay for her expressing sentimental feelings:

Mya: It was fun while it lasted. The real shame is that I miss our friendship and I don't feel like I can get that back.

Cam: You're so sentimental.

Mya: It's the truth. It sucks.

Cam: You're mad gay

Mya: I'm not that gay. Uno was gay.

Again, we see this idea of expressing loving or kind emotions gets one labeled gay. This time, Mya called up her former stud persona, Uno, which further illustrates the use of the homophobic stereotype toward femininity in studs. Black Quare Theory recognizes the resistance to authoritative discourses about Black women's sexuality and gender in the gendered play between Mya and Uno. The creation of a revolving masculine or feminine self through a cognitive cloning results in confining her identity as monolithic (Johnson, 2003). In this scene, her need to retain status as a strong, feminine woman while ascribing gayness to Uno for "soft" emotional expressions kept her bound to a rigid, normative gender binary.

As Black queer women, we wander around the confines of normative gender structures, carefully reminded that we don't belong; simultaneously being expected to comply with paternalistic influence on our sexual desires and relationships. These structures have always limited the way our Black bodies moved along the spectrum of gender. Still, there is heavy buy-in to these gender norms that get recycled in our community through stud-stud phobia. The racialized, restrictive nature of heterosexist gender norms for Black people demands complicity in dominant ideologies such as homophobia toward gay men and by proximity, stud-attracted studs. Studs, and Black people in general, are caught in the wake of these oppressive structures. Thus, as a means of survival some slip between resisting and complying with dominant ideologies. This was the case in the examples mapped here for studs in *NYGTV*.

Criminality

Tye and Peyton were consistently involved in criminal activity. Tye lived in the projects and was focused on financial growth. Peyton worked in construction but did not feel she made money at the pace she needed. When we explore how systemic oppression has ruptured and abandoned low-income neighborhoods with large populations of people of color, it highlights some of the violence and lack of resources we see in these neighborhoods. Living in violent neighborhoods, like the projects, increases the likelihood of witnessing or participating in gun violence, drug dealing, and criminal behavior that mirrors representations of people of color in mainstream media. To be clear, mainstream media often connects Blackness with low-income neighborhoods, criminality, and violence at the hands of Black males or studs. *NYGTV* continues this trend. The intersection of neighborhoods and crime affects how studs handle conflict, career choices, incarceration, and other life outcomes. I am not pointing fingers at the web series creator, who stated that she simply did not see the stories that represented her and her friends' experiences living in Brooklyn, NY. She wanted the show to depict the "grit" and real situations taking place in the city. In her characters, we understand her point and viewers are also able to gauge the impact of systemic issues around violence, class, race, and gender.

Turning a critical lens on this criminality issue among studs and the larger, low-income communities of color, illustrates how exposure to violence and a lack of resources forces some to develop survival strategies that may be counter to certain politics of respectability. For studs in the series, it meant tapping into a semblance of

power that they get from performing a type of masculinity invested in misogyny and criminality. By season two, Tye and Payton decide to start robbing people to make quick cash. When Peyton is nervous about the plan, Tye equates her nervousness to being weak, and therefore, less masculine. Tye tells Peyton, “Stop acting mad scary. Stop acting like a bitch and put your big boy drawers on” (New York Girls TV, 2014). The man they robbed later retaliated against Tye by shooting her in the arm.

Gun violence impacted Tye on more than one occasion. She got into an argument with Tee, a stud who was selling drugs without permission inside of Tye’s strip club. When the two began to fist fight, Tee grabbed a gun from her car and threatened to kill Tye. In response, Tye heads home and finds her gun with the intention of shooting Tee. Before she made it back to shoot Tee, her girlfriend Stacy unexpectedly entered the room and Tye shot her. Tye went to jail for attempted murder. The shooting was the second time Stacy experienced violence because of Tye. Stacy previously received a broken ankle when a man Tye owed money to ran her over with his car to show Tye he was serious about collecting the debt. Viewers demonstrated their understanding of violence and the repercussions associated with “hustling” and “street life;” both of which are codes for participating in dangerous, non-traditional ways of making money:

> Queen Z: This show is dealing with real life issues.
>
> Takia: I’m so sad that she got her money from a hustler. She should’ve known better but she's accustomed to the street life.

Tye was involved in criminal activity, but she was also criminalized after being read as a male. Tye was stopped and harassed by an undercover, White, male police

officer when walking down the street. The officer approached Tye and immediately misgenders her saying, “Hey, young man! Come here” (New York Girls TV, 2014). Although Tye asked a few times why she was being stopped and searched, no answer was given. When she corrects him about her pronouns, he asks for her ID and searches her backpack and pulls out her sex toy. She becomes upset and exchanges insults with the officer. He chokes her, slams her to the ground, and handcuffs her. One viewer saw the severity of escalating an encounter with police officers and commented:

> DjCj: Real people dying out here and Tye talking back to the police. It will get you dead [killed]. Things she did will get you choked out. Let's be safe. Don't poke a bear. For what? Even if you’re complying, they will kill you. So be cool people!

DjCj’s comment put the web series in conversation with larger discussion of police brutality in the Black community that have resulted in violence and death for citizens. Kali Gross & Cheryl Hicks (2015) note that “In the last fifteen years, Black women and girls have accounted for 20 percent of the slain, unarmed Black victims of police brutality” (p. 362).

As the scene progressed, Tye is restrained and the male officer asks her, “Where are your titties?” and kept insisting she was male(New York Girls TV, 2014). A woman officer is present and tells him that they need to let Tye go because there is nothing illegal in her backpack. She approached Tye and says, “There’s no reason to hold you, Cutie” (New York Girls TV, 2014). The woman made flirtatious comments to Tye while trying to calm the situation. In response, viewers engaged in the following conversation:

Sharlan: Please tell me why both of these so-called cops are being so disrespectful? This is a damn shame because nonsense like this actually happens in real life.

DB Handsome: That cop scene pissed me off. That's some typical shit.

Emoon: The lady cop already let Tye go and was being nice and professional. Why cause more problems for yourself and continue throwing unpleasant words? Then when things happen, we like to holla out "It's all the cop fault!" Yea, a lot of cops out there are bad, not all, but we need to just follow the law instructions to save our lives in a time like that one. We live through it and take it up with proper legal actions as soon as we can. Because, you're dealing not with just a cop organization, but people with different personalities and triggers. A lot of things Tye said, I just wouldn't say. That's a danger zone.

Tye's experience with the officer speaks to violence facing studs. Their Blackness and misgendering as cisgender males, exposes them to neighborhood and police violence in ways that differ from other Black women. We live in a society whereby violence in communities of color is normalized and hyperextended to males and those who are read as males. This is state-sanctioned violence that is embedded in our laws and law enforcement. I am not glossing over Tye's criminal behavior in this violence discussion, but I am saying that she exists in a systemic cycle of violence that is maintained by a lack of resources, racism, sexism, and homophobia, all of which contribute to the choices she makes for her own survival. Hill Collins (2004) mentions that Black people born after the civil rights movement experience a new racism, absent of democratic fairness and equal

economic opportunities. Instead, they are left with "disappearing jobs, crumbling schools, drugs, crime, and the weakening of African American community institutions" (Hill Collins, 2004, p. 35). All of these issues factor into how some Black people, including Tye, make decisions about their survival.

Further, Gross & Hicks (2015) traced historical patterns of racial and gendered violence among Black women finding that because of systemic oppression, they continue to process their psychological violence. Examples of the violence for Black women are poverty, alienation, racism, and an unfair criminal justice system (Gross & Hicks, 2015). Talitha Leflouria (2015) articulated potential reasons for Black women's decisions to commit crimes:

> The motives that shaped African American women's decisions to commit violent crime were far-reaching. Some used violent behaviors, such as shooting, stabbing, and fire starting, to defend themselves against abusive spouses, fathers, brothers, or lovers. For others, violence emanated from jealousy, fear, rage, or socioeconomic pressures, or from a hypersensitive reaction to disrespect. (p. 37)

Based on Tye's scenes where she robbed people with Peyton or physically assaulted her rivals, resulted from socioeconomic pressures, jealousy, and a response to disrespect. Leflouria (2015) notes that in the aftermath of slavery and then Jim Crow laws, Black women used violence as a means of power and revenge, instead of relying on the protection of the state to obtain justice. Heather Thompson (2019) also looked at reasons for crime and victimization among people of color. She found that as state resources declined, the rates of incarceration for Black and Brown folks increased. For example, she looked at the state of Michigan and found that "as education budgets fell, corrections budgets rose. Ninety-eight cents of every dollar spent on higher education went to

corrections, to be clear" (Thompson, 2019, p. 230). The same is true for the welfare system where access to welfare resources decreased while simultaneously, imprisonment increased (Thompson, 2019). Therefore, when we look at a Tye's criminal history, it should be held in tension with her difficulty to meet basic needs because of depleted opportunities and resources, and overarching systems of oppression she faces.

The web series juxtaposed news coverage of Sandra Bland's death following Tye's scene along with video clips from subsequent Black Lives Matter protests. Sandra Bland was pulled over for a minor traffic stop and was later found deceased inside of her jail cell. Tears filled my eyes as I re-watched that news coverage. It was news that I followed closely when the event took place five years ago, and yet I felt a deep hurt and pain resurface watching the clips about Ms. Bland. In response to the scene viewers commented:

> Littleredbird: Seeing all the protesting brought tears to my eyes. 695 people have lost their lives to police officers in 2015 and the year isn't even over yet. When will the hashtags stop?
>
> Paris: That was so dope to put the scene in the show about Sandra Bland!!! The scene with Tye and the police was amazing also. It's good that y'all are using y'alls platform to showcase stuff that's really going on in the world.

Other instances of criminality attached to stud gender performance is in drug dealing. As with hostility toward femmes theme of stud misogyny, being involved in criminal activity dictated that studs distanced themselves from femininity to appear strong and gritty enough to handle the violence associated with the drug business. Mya is a series regular

and is mostly depicted as a femme in seasons two through four. However, in season one she is a drug dealer selling weed and cocaine under the pseudonym, Uno. Uno has a stud gender performance complete with the stud aesthetic of wearing a baseball cap, a thick gold chain, sneakers, pants, t-shirt, and corn-rowed hair. The move to shift her character into a femme Mya illustrates the over-representation of studs as criminals in the web series. When Uno left the drug business for good, she shed her stud aesthetic and, as Mya, transformed her image into a high-femme newspaper columnist. Her cousin Cam noticed the change and teased, "You dressin' like a girl now"(New York Girls TV, 2014). Viewers shared their opinions about Mya's gender performance as well:

> Justanother: It's crazy how clothing and hair can make such a huge difference.
>
> Amber W.: I don't ever wanna see Mya as a stud again. It don't fit her. Fem is where it's at for her 100%."
>
> Khadijah: Mya makes a cute stud tho.

Kendall (2020) posited that performing gender and sexuality in ways that do not threaten traditional ideas of masculinity was a way for women to achieve respectability. Thus, to be taken seriously as a columnist, Mya attempted to following respectability politics forpatriarchal womanhood and subscribe to its norms of femininity. Hill Collins (2005) rejected such controlling images because they limited ways of being for Black women in the world. In other words, that gendered shift in Mya informed audiences that for women to be professional, they had to embrace a visible feminine aesthetic. In contrast, she reserved the masculine, tough aesthetic for a job where she needed to be perceived as strong and unflinching. Sara Ahmed (2017) claimed, "By virtue of having been brought

up in a male society, we have internalized the male culture's definition of ourselves. That definition consigns us to sexual and family functions, and excludes us from defining and shaping the terms of our lives" (p. 225). This is similar to Mya's internalization of patriarchal views on gender dynamics. There were no viewer comments pertaining to Mya's gender performance and criminality.

Meyers et. al. (2017) claim that sexual minority women may be perceived as masculine or aggressive because they do not conform to norms of White femininity. This leads to them being stereotyped as a danger or threat which increases their exposure to state violence. Additionally, Hill Collins (2004) emphasizes that Black femininity is a marginalized gender identity that was constructed in opposition to White women as the standard of femininity. This standard creates "a discourse of a hegemonic (White) femininity that becomes a normative yardstick for all femininities in which Black women typically are relegated to the bottom of the gender hierarchy" (Hill Collins, 2004, p. 193). Meaning, when Black women assert themselves or behaves in ways figured outside of White femininity, like selling drugs or being assertive, they are punished.

In each example of criminality in *NYGTV,* we are shown how close studs are to carceral punishment. We are also given a glimpse into the pressing issue of overrepresentation of queer folks of color in prison. This is particularly evident in Tye's experience with the police officers who sought to unjustly arrest her.

### *Choiices* The Series

At the intersection of gender identity, infidelity, and uncertainty, *Choiices The Series* shares the experiences of Black queer women in Atlanta. The two-season series

was created by Nadja Warith-Sharp and shows Black queer women in community, encouraging each other through life's ups and downs. The tight-knit group of friends challenge normative representations of masculinity in the way they approach dating, the gender binary, domestic abuse, and friendship. The series revolves around five lesbian friends, their respective partners, and a gay male couple. Studs Kai, Cree, Mari, and Bree show a variety of ways to perform masculinity while femme Savannah exudes #Blackgirlmagic as the mature, no-nonsense friend who is a reminder of the importance of support and friendship. Ryan and Shane are a gay couple who meet as Ryan is transitioning.

The four themes of stud misogyny are present in *Choiices*, but only Cree was involved in criminality. Internalized patriarchy, hostility toward femmes, and stud persona are found in Kai, Mari, and Bree. Ryan's transition as a transman places him in an interesting position in this analysis because he is not a stud or woman, but he enacted misogyny toward his effeminate partner. In season one, we meet each character and learn about their romantic and social lives. We see how they are impacted by violence and betrayal, and how their friendships have developed. By season two, each episode builds toward the wedding of Mari and Angel while the characters are dealing with the depth of their experiences.

Internalized patriarchy

In the following examples of internalized patriarchy in *Choiices*, characters demonstrate sexist ideologies and gendered expectations in the way that they treat their romantic partners, and in how they speak about gender roles for themselves and others.

These sexist ideologies lead to femmes being perceived as weak, unintelligent, dramatic, or in need of rescue. In addition, studs enact masculinity as currency in seeking social admiration for their sexual interactions. In the first example, Mari and her new co-worker Asha are on a construction site when the new acquaintances discuss their girlfriends:

> Asha: She's a handful, but I love her. You know how that shit goes.
>
> Mari: Yeah, man. I feel you. My fiancé Angel is the same damn way. But, um, maybe we can get together for a double date? Maybe your girl can help my girl out with this wedding shit?
>
> Asha: Yea, Sonya can do that planning, so this should be cool.

Sexist ideals are revealed through feminizing of wedding planning which allows them as studs to escape participation. They are also displaying control over the decisions of their absent partners who they agree are both handfuls. While their conversation is a means of bonding, describing their girlfriends as handfuls implies that they need to be regulated or that they are "too much." Kendall (2020) explains that patriarchal narratives and structures in our society leave space for toxic masculinity to thrive. As such, sexism, racism, and homophobia get conflated with what we view as positive masculine behaviors. Mari and Asha exhibit positive masculine behavior of bonding and supporting each other's minor complaints about their femme lovers. However, this bonding is predicated on seeing the femme body as excess. As excess, Black women must "manage their identities and sexual reputations in order to fit into a mixture of virgin and vixen constructs" (Kendall, 2020, p 83). In labeling their girlfriends "too much" or "a handful," Mari and Asha are reading them outside of the acceptable identity and reputation.

As Mari and Asha's friendship grows, the pair discuss relationship problems more often. Mari is upset one day because Angel said she made more money and it made Mari feel insecure in her masculinity. She asks Asha how she would feel if her girlfriend Sonya made more money. Asha says, "I don't really mind if she's the dominant one in the relationship as long as we both gettin' money and we both payin' our bills. I don't care"(Choiices The Series, 2014). Asha's comment does two things in this conversation about internalized patriarchy. At once she downplayed sexist ideas about masculinity and financial power by expressing an egalitarian outlook; yet, in talking about dominance, she acknowledges that the person who makes more money in the relationship has more power. Because they are talking about their femme partners, the implication is that femmes being financially dominant is atypical. Bree's ex-girlfriend Dj offers another example of financial dominance related to studs. Dj is in a stud-stud relationship. She gives her new girlfriend Nakie her wallet to pay for food:

> Nakie: What? You giving me the debit card? You really tryin' to be daddy now, huh?
>
> Dj: Girl, I been daddy. What you talkin' 'bout?
>
> Nakie: That's what you say.
>
> Dj: That's what you say too!

In this playful banter between lovers we see that whoever is paying or has money, assumes more masculine power even in stud-stud relationships. As such, the person who pays gets to be "daddy." The idea that breadwinning belongs to masculinity is rooted in

heterosexism, and therefore when we see studs verbalizing their beliefs about money and power, we see the internalization of patriarchy.

Internalized patriarchy also showed up in *Choiices* through femme perceptions and expectations of gender roles for their stud partners. For example, Asha and Sonya have an argument over Sonya flirting with Mari. Sonya is a femme who was observed in past episodes complaining that her stud girlfriend Asha was being too feminine. In this scene, Asha's femininity is portrayed as excessive. For instance, Keeling (2007) informs us that, "hegemonic conceptualizations of femininity are not visible in the Black woman as 'natural' attributes; in the Black woman femininity appears as either excessive or deficient" (p. 80).Likewise, In *Female Masculinity,* Jack Halberstam (1998) says, "The femme is generally only read as lesbian when she is seen in relation to a masculine woman who gives an 'aura of authenticity' to the femme" (p. 176). In this case, Sonya seeks to be read as femme by demanding that Asha perform a more concrete type of masculinity. For example, Asha calls Sonya out for flirting with stud Mari. She believes that Sonya is attracted to Mari because of Mari's hyper-masculinity:

> Asha: I want you to be honest with me. You like her because of the way she dress, huh? Always talking about how I'm a fake stud or how I'm confused, and it's not even like that. That shit gettin' real old. I mean, I understand you have a preference. I get that but I need you to see something (takes off her clothes).
>
> Sonya: Asha, what are you doing?
>
> Asha: These clothes are just clothes. No matter what the fuck I wear, I'm still a woman. Man, the community relies so much on labels. That shit is ridiculous! I

mean, I want to be able to wear what the fuck I want to wear. If you can't accept that, maybe we don't need to be together.

In this example, Asha points out the limitations that people have regarding stud gender identity. She is resistant to the confines of the stereotypical stud aesthetic and wants to dress in clothing that makes her feel comfortable. That includes dresses, heels, and other clothing items typically deemed socially unacceptable for studs. In noting that as a femme Sonya prefers studs, and then in removing her clothes to reveal her womanhood, Asha attempts to disrupt the rigidity of gender roles in her relationship by presenting a challenge to Sonya's internalized patriarchy. An important aspect of such patriarchy is dominance and power.

*Dominance and Power.* Dominance and power involve controlling another's behavior, abuse, demands for unilateral monogamy, threats, stud entitlement, and decision-making control. There is an assumption that the femme will take care of household duties and provide sex, for example. Many elements of dominance and power were observed in *Choiices*, but they were not only observed in studs. For instance, in the gay partnership, Shane is frustrated that Ryan tells him he cannot invite a friend to their home. Shane dismisses Ryan using the tone of a sassy, gay "queen" and says, "Girl, bye!" Ryan is instantly angered by that comment and grabs Shane's wrist asking him to repeat what he said:

Ryan: Imma tell you this one time and one time only. Respect my fucking pronouns!

Shane: It was a joke. Calm down. It wasn't even that serious.

In this scenario Ryan calls attention to the constant barrage of violence facing trans* people, one of which is misgendering. At the same time, he ignores Shane using popular queer vernacular in "Girl, bye!" which has many interpretations depending on the context. While this situation happened at the intersection of transphobia and Black gay cultural norms, what is still apparent is Ryan using his dominance and the threat of violence against Shane.

In another example of dominance and power by non-stud characters, subtle forms of dominance escalate to domestic violence between Kai and her girlfriend Monique "MooMoo." Initially, MooMoo is portrayed as a confident, assertive woman. She takes Kai's cellphone, hangs up mid-conversation, and inputs her phone number. Before exiting MooMoo says, "You can call your little boo back later"(Choiices The Series, 2014). The power move came across as assertively flirtatious because Kai responded positively to that behavior. However, MooMoo would later become physically violent and stalk Kai. In contrast to how domestic violence by femmes fetishized them as being dramatic in *WOATV*, in *Choiices* femme violence toward stud partners was depicted in a serious manner. Savannah, Cree, and Mari show up at MooMoo's to intervene. Savannah is enraged after Kai says she is in love and wants them to be happy for her. Savannah yells:

> Savannah: That's what Tina was saying when Ike was beating her ass! Be happy for you? I'm sorry. Look, it's hard to be happy for a friend who's dating somebody that's disrespecting her. And beating on her. And she talks to you like you're beneath her, Kai! Are you fucking serious?

Viewer's also commented on MooMoo's behavior:

oodief88: Moo crazy, but she fine.

A Jones: All the crazy ones are fine lol.

T Holland: Yess laawwd.

By season one's finale, Kai ends the relationship. As she tries to leave, MooMoo shoots her. The relationship between Kai and MooMoo reminds us that domestic abuse takes place in queer communities, and masculinity does not prevent someone from experiencing harm. The sexist ideas that view femininity as weak hinder the views of them as abusers. *Choiices* attempts to disrupt the belief that the stud is going to be the abuser in a stud-femme relationship.

Next, I paint a picture of Bree's experiences with dominance and power in her stud-stud relationship with Tyler. Before they are in a relationship, Tyler exerts dominance in Bree's dating life. She used her financial power to bribe Bree's date into leaving while Bree was in the restroom. She then convinces Bree to "dine and ditch" by not paying for her food. This was the beginning of Bree's depiction as someone excited by an adventurous lover and willing to engage in risky behaviors. As their relationship grows, Tyler is using cocaine. Feeling pressured to keep up, Bree begins using and becomes addicted. Tyler fueled her addiction, but when Bree lost control of the habit, Tyler ended the relationship. The scathing remarks and callousness used during the break-up show the depth of Tyler's power over Bree. Tyler said, "You're a crackhead and I don't do crackheads. You let yourself go. I just wanted to spice up your life, but you can't handle it. You're not functioning"(Choiices The Series, 2014). She then sprinkled

cocaine on the carpet, leaving Bree obsessively sweeping up the drug with her bare hands.

We witness her character begin having the "girl next door," innocent image while dealing with struggles with her stud-stud attraction transform into someone who visits a street pharmacist in the middle of the night to purchase cocaine. Tyler used manipulation, seduction, and power to begin and end her relationship with Bree. Thus, the way in which Bree was left sweeping up cocaine dust with her bare hands brought up conversations about drugs, "crackhead" stereotypes, and discontent with Tyler's dominance and involvement with Bree's drug use. Viewers commented on her experience:

> Chante: Bree a whole crackhead out hea. Got the Felicia walk and all.
>
> Rashawnda: Bree done let that girl mess her up ...but that was funny when her best friend said you walk like a crackhead.
>
> Jersey: Tyler lil pimpin junky ass is too smooth for words. Po' Bree just lost in the sauce in these streets.
>
> Tisha R.: Tyler is a whole ass pimp bruh. Why tf [the fuck] Bree letting that bih [bitch] call her gf daddy tho? Tf.

I deploy Black quare feminism to question Bree's disappearance into the stereotypical portrayal of drug dealer or drug user. Pasulka (2016) noted how anti-Black media depictions result in severe consequences for Black queer folks in society. Andrea Ritchie (2017) confirms that along with other folks of color, we may experience racial profiling as drug users or "drug mules" when traveling, and this impacts perceptions of us that "extends into highways, streets, and communities across the country" (p. 7). According to

Ritchie (2017), women of color are negatively impacted and targeted by carceral punishment for drug offenses. In addition to Tyler's dominant portrayal, Mari also expressed dominance and power with her girlfriend Angel and with her mistress, Layla. Mari and Angel have a turbulent relationship after Mari's multiple infidelities. Mari is lukewarm in her love for Angel until she suspects that she is having an affair. She then attempts to control Angel by blocking the front door to prevent her from leaving until she reveals exactly where she is going. When Angel initially refuses, Mari snatches her keys and demands an answer before returning them. The demand for loyalty and unilateral monogamy provokes dominant behaviors in Mari. With Layla, she cannot guarantee monogamy because Layla has a husband. This does not stop her from seeking evidence of commitment to their affair. She tells Layla, "Take that ring off. You don't need to be wearing it around me" (Choiices The Series, 2014). Mari's behavior is an example of relational control over decision making that is expressed by limiting her partner's movement and requiring one-sided commitment and monogamy.

### Hostility Toward Femmes

In *Choiices*, hostility toward femmes appears in discounting their emotional expression as unwarranted, dramatic, and irrational. It also shows up in language and behavior undergirded by sexist ideologies, in sexual objectification, gaslighting, and in other dismissive behaviors. For instance, during a conversation with her cousin Dom, Mari confesses that she is cheating on Angel and has fallen in love with Layla. She is convinced that Layla will leave her husband,

Dom: Bro, listen to yourself. You really think that lady is going to leave her husband for you? I swear you don't deserve Angel. You got a good girl back there and you talking about leaving her for a married woman.

Mari: Wait, wait, wait! Listen, bro. I love Angel and everything, but you don't know half the shit that girl be putting me through man.

The notion of "putting her through" something is similar to the idiom "being a handful" in that they both mean Angel is creating problems for Mari. Other than Angel questioning her whereabouts, I did not observe behaviors indicating that she was causing any problems for Mari. Instead, Mari utilizes the idiom as a way of dismissing and gaslighting Angel to distract from her own infidelity.

Stud Dom demonstrates hostility toward femmes as well. In one scene, she wakes up and rushes to get dressed after sleeping with femme Londyn who noticed her urgency and offered a key to her apartment. Dom refuses,

Dom: See…about that, um, I'm not coming back.

Londyn: So, that's it? You're just gonna fuck me and then leave? Yeah, you and your cousin are definitely one and the same.

Dom: Aye, man! You need to watch yo' mouth. You don't know me or my cousin. Ok. What you thought. You was just gon' meet me and we was gon' have this happy relationship? And just live happily ever after? But now you mad 'cause you just a Atlanta booty call. Yeah, think about that shit next time you open your legs to a stranger.

Londyn: Oh! You big and bad now, huh? That's why your sex is whack. Get the fuck out my house.

Dom: Man, Imma call you next time I'm in town and smash again.

Londyn: Fuck you.

Dom admits to using Londyn as a sexual object, is unapologetic about her sexual conquest skills, and shamed her for being promiscuous. The language of "opening your legs" is rooted in the sexist belief that women are readily available for sex. Mari mirrors this accusation of promiscuity during a meeting with Dom. Dom explains why she exposed Mari's cheating to Angel and Layla's husband. She recalled a moment in their past when Mari slept with a woman she loved. Mari offers an excuse:

Mari: Dom, Look. That shit happened in college. I was smashing everybody's girl back then. You know how dumb we were.

Dom: So, that don't make it right… smash my girl.

Mari: Shit! Shameka's ass was a hoe so technically, she was really cheating on you.

Dom: Aye, man. Don't talk about my girl. Back then, she was the love of my life.

Mari: Bro, she was the love of everybody's life.

In this example of femme hostility, Mari's sexual behavior is written off as "being dumb" or making careless decisions, while the woman is restricted to being promiscuous. Her gaslighting and devaluing femmes trend continued when Angel asked if she was faithful,

Mari: Oh my God, Angel! We have to be in a relationship for me to be cheating on you. But am I seeing someone else? No, I'm not. I wish you would stop asking me that shit! Your insecurities are the reason we aren't together now, Angel.

Angel: Do you even love me? You're like, never even here. Whoever that Bitch is or whatever has your attention, they can keep it 'cause I'm tired of the bullshit!

Mari: Baby, stop. I'm not cheating on you and there's nobody else, it's just you alright. I love you.

Mari manipulates Angel by telling her she loves her to keep her infidelity hidden. Mari and Angel live together and have been together for two years. In Mari's refusal to officially label their relationship, she distances herself from expectations of monogamy. Because of their unofficial relationship status, Mari can now lodge accusations of overreacting without cause against Angel, which is another strand of hostility toward femmes. Two episodes later, Angel has an affair with Mari's cousin Dom. Angel is remorseful and speaks to Dom about telling Mari. Dom gets defensive and threatens her saying, "Who is she going to believe, her fake ass girlfriend or her favorite cousin? If I was you, I'd play nice and shut up, okay?" (Choiices The Series, 2014). Dom calls upon both dominance and power and hostility through this threatening line of questions. She attempts to control Angel's behavior and silence her.

The hostility is not limited to studs' interactions, however. Ryan and Shane have issues involving the perception that Ryan is weak because he is an effeminate person. Ryan wants revenge for a hate crime committed against him and plans to stakeout the

attacker's home with his stud best friend T. When Shane gets excited about participating, Ryan shuts him down:

Ryan: About that…it's just gonna be the boys this time.

Shane: The boys! T ain't no damn boy.

Ryan: And neither is you.

Shane: Oop! Don't come for me.

Ryan: I'm just playin' with you. Shane, stop playin' with me.

Shane:  Imma go find me a man who appreciates me.

Ryan: Well, you wear them wigs all the time.

Ryan associates Shane's femininity with weakness and further questions his manhood by drawing attention to him wearing wigs. This association removes him from participating in a potentially dangerous activity like the stakeout.

In some circumstances, curt verbal expressions of hostility toward femmes are portrayed. T and Kai treat femmes as objects through rejection after or during sex. T is cuddling with a woman when her friends visit. She compliments the woman for sex and then says, "But real shit though, you gotta get the fuck out. My friends here and we gotta handle some business real quick so…" (Choiices The Series, 2014). Kai similarly could not wait to dismiss her sexual partner. She received a call during the oral sex, lifted the blanket to make eye contact and said, "You gotta go." In both instances, the woman is reduced to an object of sexual gratification and dismissed when she is no longer needed.

In this final example of hostility toward femmes, I look broadly at femme representation in web series as mentally ill or unstable, irrational, crazy, and dramatic.

We revisit the violent relationship between Kai and MooMoo. Before abuse started in their relationship, Kai claimed that MooMoo was crazy for simply expressing anger or setting boundaries, like wanting her car door opened by Kai. MooMoo's character began with being stereotyped as an angry Black woman and later was revealed to suffer from a mental illness. Warith-Sharp was successful in her aspiration to portray a character who could spark conversations about mental illness in the Black community. Yet, like other femmes in the series being called crazy, her storyline remained limited to the derogatory frame of craziness. Her mental illness, therefore, was eclipsed by the stereotype of the crazy girlfriend who is emotionally unstable. For instance, Kai jokingly tells a friend that since breaking up with MooMoo she has developed "crazy bitch detector" vision that she will use to examine her future partners before dating. Thus, while the subject is broached, a conversation about ableism and the sexist conflation of femininity with mental instability is missed.

Stud Persona

Three main examples of stud persona provided in this section are internalized homophobia in gendered expectations for studs, internalized homophobia in stud-stud relationships, and separation from femininity. Sonya is a femme who is attracted to studs. Her girlfriend Asha identifies as a stud who prefers a feminine aesthetic. Sonya is unable to accept Asha's feminine presentation and it is a source of conflict for the couple. Sonya provides a significant example of separating studs from femininity and internalized homophobia based on gendered expectations. In the first example, Asha is in the restroom putting on eyeliner. Sonya enters and gets upset:

Sonya: Is that my eyeliner?

Asha: Yeah, I broke mine yesterday, so I figured I'd just use your 'til I got another one.

Sonya: But you didn't ask. And, why do you want to wear eyeliner anyway. It's bad enough you have on that dress! I'm really starting to feel like I'm dating a femme.

Sonya's belief in the stud-femme binary means that she adheres to strict gender roles and expects Asha to comply and distance herself from femininity. She says, "I'm supposed to wear makeup. I'm the femme! And you…I don't even know what you are"(Choiices The Series, 2014). Feeling pressured, Asha changes clothes and returns to the room in a backwards hat, jeans, and a cropped t-shirt where Sonya rewards her with a smile. Sonya's inflexibility about Asha's outward appearance is undergirded by sexist ideologies that views it contradictory to both identify as a stud and also enjoy wearing makeup and dresses. Sonya's perception that Asha is less masculine is further solidified when a stud expresses interest in her:

Stud: Well, um, I was just really trying to figure out if your friend is single.

Sonya: No. She's not. And you do know she's a stud, right?

Stud: You sure? 'Cause, she sure don't look like one."

Sonya: Yes, I'm sure!

In another example, Asha is approached by a stud during her date night with Sonya. The stud puts her drink down on the table remarks:

Stud: Shit. Me and my patna' tryin to get at you and your girl. You know we like that femme for femme shit.

Asha: First of all, you not even our type. And second, I ain't no damn femme. I'm more of a stud than you probably even are.

Stud: So what you sayin'? Oh…You must be one of them confused dykes. I swear y'all be giving us such a bad name. You want to dress like a femme. You a whole bitch.

Asha: Ok, and so what are you?

Stud: Aye! I'm finna punch this hoe in her face.

Asha: Girl, you ain't 'bout to punch nobody. You just mad 'cause you came over here to holla at me and I shut that ass down.

Asha is wearing a hooded sweatshirt under a fitted jean jacket and jeans, with flat ironed, shoulder length hair and no make-up. In this example, the stud challenges Asha's gender identity, threatens physical violence, and disciplines her for existing outside of the gender binary. This experience is a part of a larger conversation about women surviving within heterosexist structures.

Women are exposed to physical violence and death when they reject the sexual advances of males, and in this case, a masculine-identified lesbian who threatened to punch Asha in the face. This experience is not uncommon among women offscreen. For instance, in November 2019, nineteen-year-old Ruth George was sexually assaulted and strangled after ignoring the advances of a male stranger (Karimi, November 2019). I hold space for the victims of misogynistic violence in society and for Asha, who was nearly

harmed for rejecting a stranger. After that experience with the stud, Asha is victimized again by her girlfriend who is upset:

> Asha: What did I do now?
>
> Sonya: Asha, we just almost got into a whole bar fight over the way that you dress!
>
> Asha: Are you serious? That wasn't my fault. They started that shit and you know it.
>
> Sonya: Why can't you just be normal? The way you dress and the way you act…the whole way you want to be, it draws too much attention. The stares and the whispers… I did not sign up for this. Just be normal! Dress normal. Act normal. Be a stud, a normal stud.
>
> Asha: How the fuck do you think I feel? I gotta hear this shit from you and people on the street.

Sonya decides to end the relationship after this argument. I grieve for Asha. I cannot deny my investment in queer liberation and a healthy relationship for her. The sting of Sonya's words about being normal are too familiar. In Sonya, we see that her commitment to the stud-femme binary took precedence over Asha's safety and autonomy in defining masculinity for herself. Asha is unable to develop and define her own stud persona. Asha is vying for an alternative way to perform masculinity that does not follow heteronormative performances of cisgender men. In doing so she is disrupting or "playing" with gender (Johnson, 2018, p. 139). Johnson refers to the play as disidentification (Muñoz, 1999) "whereby queers of color perform within dominant

ideologies in order to resist those same hegemonic structures" (p. 39). Significantly, Asha subverts and disrupts heteronormativity by creating stud masculinity for herself.

Bree is a stud trying to come to terms with her attraction for other studs. She demonstrates an understanding of stud persona in performing a masculinity that strays from femininity and deals with perceptions that being attracted to another stud somehow feminizes her. Importantly, Bree is aware of negative perceptions about stud-stud dating in the community. Bree is attracted to Dj but after a friendly get together, she denies being stud-attracted:

> Dj: Are you into studs?
>
> Bree: No. Don't get me wrong. I think you're cool, but I don't like studs.
>
> Dj: See, it's studs like you. I can't stand y'all. You stay going on all these stud-for-stud pages, liking and commenting, and flirting with me. Then when somebody starts feeling yo' ass, then it's 'Oh no. I don't like studs.' Femmes only. That's that shit I don't got time for. I think you're cool and all, but I can't fuck with you if you're not cool with yourself.

By chance, Mari is at the same location with Layla and witnesses Dj and Bree's spat:

> Mari: I've never understood that whole stud-for-stud thing.
>
> Layla: Some things aren't meant to be understood. And besides, they're both women so I don't get what the problem is.

After her date, Bree calls her femme ex-girlfriend Erica over for sex. She does not feel satisfied and says:

> Bree: Can I get some "head" or even penetration?

Erica: Penetration! So what, you dick-dyking now? So are you stud-for-stud now? You ain't no stud for real!

Bree: What the fuck is a real stud?

Erica: Not you apparently!

Bree points out the double standard of Erica liking penetration but being appalled by Bree finding pleasure from the same act. Erica challenges Bree's stud persona in both saying that she was not a real stud, and in associating her request for penetration as being a dyke. Erica uses dyke to feminize Bree and force her to maintain stud persona.

Stud persona can also be maintained through social reminders and playfulness intended to regulate the stud's gender performance. For instance, when Dj expresses loving feelings to her rekindled flame Nakie, she is teased about becoming "soft:"

Nakie: Look at you being all sweet and shit. Don't be getting all soft on me -- going all sensitive and shit.

Dj: Right. Because I am not that type.

In *Choiices*, stud persona was primarily questioned and demanded by someone close to the stud. This was done through violence, threats, playful teasing, or in anger. With stud persona, the expectation is that a stud will perform a visible masculinity that allows them to be read as strong or tough. It is a persona that distances itself from femininity through clothing, language, opposition to stud-stud dating, and the internalization of homophobia. Bree was the only character that had internal battles related to stud persona.

Criminality

The web series differentiated itself by not creating multiple instances of characters committing crimes. Cree was the only stud involved in criminal behavior or experiencing incarceration. She reluctantly agreed to participate in a threesome with her wife Simone and Ryan and felt insecure and jealous the next day. Cree believed that Simone and Ryan were having an affair because Simone enjoyed the experience. Seeking vengeance, Cree paid her cousin and two friends $200 to jump Ryan. During the beating, Ryan was called “tranny” which intensified his attack to a hate crime. What happened to Ryan is the result of Cree’s insecurity, clearly, but for Black quare feminism it brings up a history of continued violent subordination of Black trans* folks and other folks of color.

On the heels of Trans* Day of Visibility in the U.S. on March 31st, this is an important topic to address. Trans* Day of Visibility is about celebrating the accomplishments of trans* and gender non-binary folks. Over the past seven years, eighty-four percent of transgender people killed in the U.S. were people of color. The Human Rights Campaign lists Black, Southern transwomen under the age of 30 as comprising most of those deaths (McBride, 2019). The attack on Ryan exposes the uptick in anti-trans* violence, particularly in conjunction with the current political climate being hostile for LGBTQ people. After sleeping with Cree and Simone, Ryan was unsuspecting of any tensions between them, making him vulnerable to the set-up and attack. Cree’s decision to incite violence, resulted in her arrest for assault and battery.

The hate crime was a turning point for Ryan. Despite Cree going to jail, he wanted to personally disseminate justice. He visited Simone at her job searching for Cree. He hints at shooting her in the stomach if he cannot find Cree. Simone asks if he was threatening her and he responds, “This ain’t no threat, Beautiful. This a promise. Here’s a little something for your troubles (throws cash at her). Yo’, Simone. Tell Cree if she act right, I may go for a round two. I kinda miss how you taste”(Choiices The Series, 2014). Ryan puts his plan for Cree into action as he hires a crew, gathers information about her whereabouts, and kidnaps both her and Simone. Cree’s jealousy and need to exert control set a chain of events in motion that introduced her to the prison system and jeopardized her family.

## The Best Friend

*The Best Friend* opens the spectrum of Black dating, love, and experiences outside of despair and hardship that has been cast upon many Black representations in the media. Created by Kimberly Twiggs., the show is “focused on LGBT+ works that represent the everyday person, but also present relatable topics. We focus on quality, integrity, and the rawness of being human” (The Best Friend, 2018). Although there is some evidence of power inequity in the relationship between Brit and her mother, however, I did not observe stud misogyny in this series. The web series is significant, however, because it provides insight into relationships without a reliance on gender roles, ample violence, or masculine privilege. The series, like two others analyzed here, is set in Atlanta, Georgia but does not rely on the backdrop of crime and poverty in low-income neighborhoods to tell a story about Black queer life. The series departs from these

confined depictions by offering a view of Black queer women experiences at the intersection of love, mental health, family turmoil, sexuality, desire, and friendship in ways that create distance from violence and negative stereotypes. One viewer was warmed by how the series addressed sexuality:

> Kasen: It's touching to see women of color with whom I can identify (ex: Hair, bodies, issues). In my family and elsewhere in the Black community, sexuality is hardly discussed.

Twiggs' writing moves away from the need to have queer characters verbally identify and perform within the gender binary. In reply to a viewer comment referring to Brit and Mina, the two femme main characters, Twiggs said, "We honestly just consider the characters to be queer, but I guess the world would see them as femmes!" (The Best Friend, 2018). Because there was no reliance on a binary, the stud/femme power dynamic was disrupted in meaningful ways. The studs who made guest appearances on the series show a range of possibilities for masculinity in lesbian communities beyond misogynistic performances.

Twiggs' characters showed the resilience of Black queer women to function within systems that devalue Black bodies. She explained one of her goals in writing the show was to "expose these extremely vulnerable parts - we are still a large part of the Black community but also a part that is denied OR not accepted. It's time to change that and rewire the way we view sex and sexuality"(The Best Friend, 2018).

In Mina and Brit, we see them contradicting popular media images of Black women as angry, oversexed, or lacking sexual desire. Mina is "out," experienced with

dating, and has a supportive family, and therefore, is more comfortable with her sexual identity. Brit is coming to terms with her sexuality and dealing with a homophobic mother. She is in the process of breaking up with her boyfriend. Because of these experiences, Brit's mental health is impacted, and her life is out of control. Seemingly, Mina's stability in the area of sexuality and self-confidence gave her a semblance of relational power, but it was never deployed in the show. This departure in privileging one partner with more power in the relationship, often the stud, allowed viewers to see the characters as multifaceted beings such as in the following comment:

> Michelle D.: Thank you for producing a dope show. This is important especially for Black queer women who rarely have their stories told. Our culture literally shapes our coming out and acceptance of our sexuality. You can feel stifled like Brit's character or free like Mina's character, but the choice is up to us to make.

Viewers were also given a chance to see Black women as successful, working professionals, navigating relationships without physical violence. Twiggs said,

> I think the 'best friend' story happens all too often (in different ways) and our characters are representations of our own stories. Having experienced them in separate ways and coming together to bring this story life makes it realistic. (The Best Friend, 2018)

Relating to the experience of falling for a best friend, one viewer commented:

> Javita: I was married, when I met my best friend and she was there through all the cheating and abuse I had to deal with [in a past relationship]. I was just curious about being with her and one day we just went for it and we've been happy together ever since -- soon to be my wife, so thank you for this.

Both comments speak to the gap in media in depicting Black queer women's relational experiences.

The main focus of all episodes is on Brit and Mina's relationship as best friends turned lovers, and on how Brit handles coming out to her mother. I want to make sure to note that research looking at queer of color communities and coming out that critically focus on the intersection of race and racism, family, and safety, demonstrate that coming out is not always feasible or a priority for these communities. In agreement, a viewer wrote,

> Holyrebel: Hey if someone doesn't want anybody to know their personal life forever, it's nothing wrong with it! They don't need to know. For what? My life, my business, no problem.

However, for Brit, coming out was portrayed as somewhat of a necessity for her own sense of self, and later for the relationship she has with her mother. There's was a sense that not coming out created so much desperation and mental agitation because it disrupted her relationship with Mina.

With each episode, viewers were taken on a journey following the progression of the two main storylines. Claiming to be curious about being sexually intimate with a woman, Brit initiated a sexual encounter during a movie night. Mina was reluctant but agreed to a one-time tryst to satisfy Brit's curiosity. This was the entry point for Brit's reflection on her sexuality. Brit dated a man for seven years, despite having feelings for Mina for the same amount of time. Her desire to be intimate with Mina was relatable but speaks to the unlearning that must take place regarding notions of fluidity around

sexuality. Queer folks are often forced to mask their sexualities behind "one-time-curiosity" sex.

> Shandrea: I think women of color don't always get the chance to fully express themselves and take control of their own sexuality.

Curiosity is that pendulum or tipping point for many people on the road to unearthing sexual desires and coming to terms with their sexuality. Claiming curiosity shields folks from having to deal with their queerness when they are not ready to face personal and societal backlash. It allows folks to rely on heterosexual privilege under the guise of innocent exploration or play.

This is not a critique of queer folks or how they come to terms with their sexuality. I am explaining how deploying curiosity can be a mechanism of protection from homophobic violence. Racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia contribute to people of color's decisions about coming out. For instance, Johnson (2018) found that in maintaining familial bonds with parents who were homophobic, Black women retained their support system as they navigated other "isms" affecting their lives. Sharita's narrative in Johnson's (2018) *Black. Queer. Southern. Women.* explains the concerns some face when considering coming out. She said,

> I always commend people who can come out to be gay because it's not an easy life to live. You have to be really, really comfortable with who you are. And, be comfortable with even knowing that you a lot of times, are going to be on the outside. Because people are still just judgmental. (p. 128)

Another way to examine this situation of coming out for Brit and other queer folks of color is through Dwight Conquergood's (2013) discussion of epistemic violence. He said, "Subordinated people do not have the privilege of explicitness, the luxury of

transparency, the presumptive norm of clear and direct communication, free and open debate on a level playing field that the privileged classes take for granted" (p. 34). Significantly, queer people of color are subjugated and do not always have the privilege to come out because of other violence and oppression they face. Returning to the discussion of curiosity, one problematic issue is that when the word curiosity is used by self-identified straight women seeking a same-sex, sexual experience, queer women are fetishized. In Brit's case, however, it was more about curiosity as protection, which is why viewers found her inner sexuality struggles and her relationship with Mina so relatable in the first few episodes:

> Imani: I love how this show told the story of what people at times go through when coming out like depression, rejection from family, and using substances as a coping mechanism.
>
> Michelle D.: In these episodes we are witnessing the stages of coming out. When you come to terms with your sexuality and accepting yourself while others are rejecting you, it is difficult to see the real from the fake, the temporary from the long lasting. This show is hitting on something deep.

Later in the season, Brit confesses her love for Mina, says she is gay, and leaves her boyfriend. As Brit and Mina are building their romantic relationship, Brit's mother escalates her homophobic rants and manipulation to reconnect Brit with her ex-boyfriend. The main tactics used to justify her homophobia are religion and the need for males in the family. The lineage of homophobia and absent males in Black households was explained in chapter 2 of this project as a part of histo-political racial oppression of Black people.

Here, Twiggs is calling out both systems of oppression that reinforce homophobia and the internalizing of that oppressive rhetoric in some families. The mother refers to Mina as a dyke, butch, and expressed disgust at her friendship with Brit. Further, Brit's mother threatened that she would not be allowed home if she starts dating women. Those hateful statements negatively impacted Brit who was unable to sleep, started excessively drinking, was couch surfing to avoid living with her mother, and struggled to balance her feelings for Mina with the need to have her mother's love.

In response to mid-season episodes, viewers commented about the series' relatability. They also shared their own experiences with homophobic parents and family members in solidarity/co-misery with the mental anguish Brit was having:

> Scorp941: This series is so realistic it's scary.
>
> Freshair: it's taking us on a journey of what one actually goes through physically and mentally… the flashbacks, voices of negativity ringing in one's head, scared of being accepted, etc. I can't wait for the next episode.
>
> Tranquil: My mom freaked out when I said gay people were born gay once and made me take it back and ask God for forgiveness for saying something so blasphemous.
>
> Kymeshia: Definitely shed a tear, or five, when Brit sat in the living room and her mom's words kept replaying. For anyone going through it...I lived through it with overly religious parents and it does get better. Acceptance takes a while (took mine 12 years) in some cases, but they love you even if it feels like they don't.

Greene (2000) locates this "theological homophobia" within the Black church as a manifestation of misogyny in ministries. She claimed that "belief in male dominance and superiority is an active ingredient in homophobia; in the context of this belief, social action is predicated on the devaluation of women, lesbians, gays, and transgendered persons" (p. 246). Like Brit, viewers shared painful experiences with parents who use religion to reject queerness:

> Hardi1: Omg, Brit's mom reminds me of my mom when she first realized I was a lesbian. We had almost word for word the same conversation about my friends with the name calling and everything else. I cried while watching this. Fortunately, things are better now with my family. Thank God because there were months I didn't speak to them.

Toward the end of the first season, Brit and her mother have an explosive argument about Brit's sexuality and relationship with Mina. Because of this, Mina and Brit part ways for a month. During that time, Brit's friend suggests she see a therapist to help her through her mother's rejection and her drinking problem. Over the past few years, there has been a push in psychology and social services to transform their relationship with Black women seeking help for mental health issues. For example, Lani Valencia Jones and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (2015) note that because of the tumultuous relationship with mental health services, by the time Black women seek help they are at a crisis point in their lives. By the time Brit sought therapy for coming out, she had been excommunicated by her mother, had been drunk for a month straight, had no job, and had damaged her relationship with Mina. Further, Black women "are more likely to be

misdiagnosed and may delay or withdraw from treatment early because their ethnic, cultural, or gender needs go unrecognized or mistreated" (Jones & Guy-Sheftall, 2015, p. 346). Thus, Brit attending therapy sessions was a positive move for her personal journey and for Black women viewers who may feel that they have little or no access to therapy. Because of this, one viewer expressed gratitude:

> FirstLast: Thank you for promoting mental wellness. Thank you for authenticity. Thank you for a story we can all see ourselves in! Can't wait for season 2.

After some therapy sessions Brit is ready to reconnect with Mina to try and work on their relationship. They unknowingly attend the same house party and are forced to be partners during an activity. Brit unsuccessfully apologizes for allowing her mother to degrade Mina and then avoiding her for a month. Yet, over time and through Brit's persistence, the couple finds their way back to each other in the final episode. Mina teases Brit for going to therapy but is also pleased to see her working on her life. Overall, the web series took two Black queer women and showed audiences the complexities of their love and lives in a way that separates it from the pack of other Black queer women web series. Viewers agreed saying:

> Bee: Not dissing the other shows but I was tired of the stud living the gang-banging lifestyle and the femme barely working plot. Or, everybody screwing each other etc.
>
> Neish9: We thirsty out here for some lesbian web series that are well thought out and take time to develop logical, sensible, mature (not just thuggin-ass, aimless characters) storylines that cultivate the relationships and time to create GOOD

character development. That allows the audience to take it all in, so it feels authentic.

*Conclusion*

This study analyzed four Black lesbian web series *Women of Atlanta TV, New York Girls TV, Choiices The Series,* and *The Best Friend* to investigate how misogyny is performed and enacted by masculine-identified Black queer women, often referred to as "studs." I employed a Black feminist-quare theoretical framework to argue that stud misogyny is a product of the White supremacist patriarchal gaze on Black women's bodies that attempts to dictate how their sexuality and gender is performed. My goal was to extrapolate undergirding systems of oppression and the accompanying ideologies impacting Black queer women to explain why stud misogyny might be replicated across various Black queer web series. Additionally, the relationship between the web series and their respective community of viewers is demonstrated through viewer comments to offer insight into strands of media influence on sexuality, race, and gender onscreen and offscreen among Black lesbians. As such, I unpacked how the stud misogynist impacts feminine bodies and how she, herself is affected by a misogynistic gender performance.

This chapter contains an analysis of the core themes of stud misogyny in Black lesbian web series. Three core themes, Internalized Patriarchy, Hostility Toward Femmes, and Stud Persona are central to misogynistic portrayals of studs. The fourth core theme, Criminality, was found unrelated to stud misogyny; but was relevant to Blackness and lesbian masculinity. Again, a stud's involvement in criminal activity did not translate into a misogynistic performance. Furthermore, three of the four web series

analyzed had instances of stud misogyny in one or more characters: *WOATV, NYGTV,* and *Choiices The Series. The Best Friend* web series was primarily focused on two Black lesbian women who were not studs or misogynists. The series, instead, was used as an example of relationships formed without a reliance on binary gender roles, violence, or masculine privilege. This critical rhetorical media analysis is an interdisciplinary body of work that engages Black Feminism in Communication Studies to confront hegemonic ideas about culture, identity, and power. In centering Black Feminism, new possibilities are created for theorizing and dialogue about Black queer women in media.

# Chapter 5: Discussion: The breakdown of stud misogyny observations

*"There is very little psychological disassociation between the past and the present when we talk about slavery. What happened during that period directly affects our present" - Morgan Jerkins*

I advanced this Black queer web series analysis to investigate stud misogyny in web series and show how studs enacted and were victimized by misogyny. While the web series did portray stud misogyny, they also offered a robust social commentary on Black queerness and masculinities at the intersection of systems of inequality. The inclusion of viewer comments demonstrated a connection between characters and their experiences to individuals offscreen. Unpacking the complexity of experiences involved in stud misogyny presents important benefits and challenges to those within the community and informs others about the structural and relational issues they face. The core themes of stud misogyny in web series highlight areas of need in future research such as continued discussion of inclusivity and support strategies for stud-attracted studs, the carceral implications of misgendering masculine Black lesbians, and understanding the impact of internalized homophobia and patriarchy among women in this community.

## Core Themes of Stud Misogyny

I traced the core themes of stud misogyny across each series discovering that criminality was not salient to stud misogyny. These themes allow us to see how studs enact misogyny. Stud misogyny was the combination of internalized patriarchy with expressions of dominance and power, hostility toward femmes, and stud persona. For example, hostility toward femmes was absent in lesbian masculinity, but proved to be a prominent component of stud misogyny. All three themes were present in the stud misogynist's behavior.

When observed, criminality was related to studs but in some cases, they were not also misogynists. To be clear, criminality had more to do with racism, queer masculinity, and social environment but was not tethered to misogyny. The structural and disciplinary domains of power within the Matrix (Hill Collins, 2000) highlight how Black women are surveilled and criminalized before participating in criminal behavior. Once they do commit a crime, they receive harsher punishments because of the long history of the racism and the media linking criminality to race, sexual orientation, and gender for Black lesbians (Pasulka, 2016, p. 2).The media shapes perceptions of their Black queerness as criminal which breeds disdain for them offscreen. (p. 2). Hence, they are negatively impacted by the discriminatory actions of law enforcement and the criminal justice system (Meyer, et al., 2017).

For example, Pasulka (2016) found that masculine, trans-masculine, and gender non-conforming Black lesbians are treated aggressively by police and the criminal justice system (p. 5). Studs involved in domestic disputes are often arrested because police

assume that “the bigger, stronger, more masculine presenting partner is the abuser” (p. 6). These racial-sexist pervasive stereotypes of Black lesbians also impact how they are discussed in news stories. Pasulka (2016) said they are often described as perverts, insane, or abnormal in headlines. Particularly, when there is domestic violence between Black lesbians, news reports describe the relationship as perverted affection (p. 4). As Black feminism acknowledges, these images create carceral consequences for Black women who are then blamed for their own experiences with state violence (hooks, 2004). By foregrounding intersectionality in the Matrix of Domination we see the differential systems of interlocking oppression at work in criminalizing studs and other queer folks of color. At once, whether she engages in crime or not, she is villainized at the intersection of media, law, gender, and race. Because of her visibility, the stud’s Black lesbian body offers a critique of the anti-Black, heterosexist criminal justice system. The presumption of criminality attached to her troubles notions of justice and liberty put forth by democratic politics (Keeling K. , 2005). “’Black lesbian’ can be invoked as an illustration of the threats facing the moral fabric of the nation” (Keeling., p. 221, 2005).

Internalized Patriarchy

Internalized patriarchy is the overarching system of oppression that undergirds the remaining core themes of stud misogyny. The pervasiveness of internalized patriarchy makes it possible to have an influence on people beyond the scope of stud gender performances. I find that Internalized patriarchy invokes each domain of power within the Matrix of Domination because it seeps into all systems of oppression. For instance, in talking about gender, Garrett, Broussard, & Garrett-Walker (2019) say that society’s

undertanding of masculinity is learned by people and our social settings that we are exposed to from birth. This means that our understandings of gender and gender norms are constructed in patriarchal masculinity (p. 73). Some femmes in this study evidenced internalized patriarchy through a shared a commitment to rigid gender roles and expectations that prioritize masculinity. The Matrix of Domination makes it clear that Patriarchy inflicts harm to Black queer women through the disciplinary surveillance of bodies, through the shaping ideologies about sex, gender, and sexuality, and through a reliance on relational policing of its norms to keep people on the margins subordinated (Hill Collins, Black sexual politics: African Americans, gender, and the new racism, 2004). Each of these examples are facets of the four domains of power. Further, Hortense Spillers (as cited in Katherine McKittrick, 2006) suggests that "the language and stipulations of patriarchy and White European sex-gender systems, produce a Black female body "in crisis"" (p. 81). The crisis, as Black quare feminism argues, lies in a lack of freedom and how "anti-Blackness perpetuates restrictive gender categories and norms that none of us can fully embody" (Carruthers, 2018, p. 35).

Indeed, the demise of Asha and Sonya's relationship in *Choiices The Series* was Sonya's internalized patriarchal beliefs that sought to limit Asha's stud gender performance to a hyper-stud aesthetic against her will. The Matrix of Domination challenges such restrictive gender and sexuality categories by naming the social forces that lead to power inequities(Fogg-Davis, 2006). Sexist ideologies also assume that women are weak and unintelligent. For stud misogynists, internalized patriarchy meant that they could try to distance themselves from femininity by using their masculinity as

currency. This resulted in social admiration from peers, especially during discussions about sexual conquest. While studs are "figured 'outside' of the order of normative gender constructs, the coordinates of our outsideness are still mapped onto the languages and logics of normative gender" (Shange 2019, p. 42). This means that while Black queer women are not males who benefit from patriarchy, they can internalize it to seek masculine privilege; particularly, through sexual conquest (hooks, 2004; Shange, 2019).

The ideologies present in associating masculinity with power is rooted in Whiteness. Patriarchal norms and expectations are set such that social privileges are granted to White bodies as it marginalizes Others (Guess, 2006). Any attempts by people of color to chase masculine privilege inside of that structure is, therefore, futile because it is a structure that never recognized our humanity. hooks (2004) acknowledges this dilemma and notes that knowledge of how the structure marginalizes folks, does not prevent Black masculine people and others from seeking power within the structure. The intersectional optics of the Matrix of Domination reminds us that power-seeking among studs and in the offscreen Black community, cannot simply be reduced to a personal problem (Crenshaw K. , 1991). I believe that internalizing patriarchy and power-seeking is the result of what hooks describes as systemic dehumanization and continually placement in a category outside of human (hooks b., *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, 2004). She is speaking about Black males; however, I believe because they operate from a similar source of masculine socialization that her statement applies to studs who are sometimes misgendered as Black males. Through a Love Ethic, Black

males and studs are able to resist patriarchal violence by re-imagining masculinity for themselves.

Differences in how internalized patriarchy appeared across the gender spectrum was noted in expressions of dominance and power in the web series.

*Dominance and Power*. Dominance and Power involves control over decisions in the relationship, threats, verbal and physical violence, and demands for unilateral monogamy. Regarding monogamy, there was an outstanding prevalence of storylines about cheating and sexual conquest in each web series. *WOATV* stands out in this discussion because the entire series revolved around infidelity and the circumstances that cheating created for couples. Lying and womanizing are forms of power within patriarchal cultures (hooks b. , We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity, 2004). Seeing threads of infidelity across the web series, then, provides examples of the influence of patriarchal culture in this community or in the web series creator's life. Moreover, dominance and power include expectations that femme partners will be available for sex and take care of domestic responsibilities. Dominance and power dynamics were unrelated to stud misogyny in some cases. For instance, *Choiices* addressed dominance and violence enacted by a femme person. There were also couples who existed outside of the stud-femme binary or were in relationships where the stud partner did not attempt to dominate or exert power. Each series still indicated a clear power structure among couples.

Most studs expressed dominance and power in and out of their relationships, but those expressions did not directly translate into having actual power. In this sense, actual

power refers to systemic power. The stud faces heteropatriarchy, racism, and sexism that prevents them from accessing power through masculine privilege in the way that it would for cisgender, straight, White men or cisgender, straight men of color (hooks, 2004).Hawley Fogg-Davis (2006) expressed that Black lesbians "structural location is also continuous with Black patriarchal control of all Black women" (62). Therefore, they are unable to access systemic power which would grant them societal privileges.

To explain further, I draw a parallel with hooks' (2000) explanation of Black men in the U.S. She says that Black men are striving for an out-of-reach "fantasy of masculinity that is socially constructed by ruling groups in capitalist patriarchy" (p. 122). hooks' explanation concerns Black cisgender men and an idea of masculinity constructed by White men; however, some studs in the web series are also committed to a fantasy of racialized masculinity whereby they expect to gain power over their lovers or others. The problem with studs chasing this fantasy is that "the old sexual power relationships based on a dominant/subordinate model between unequals have not served us as a people, nor as individuals" (Lorde, 1984, p. 46). The stud's Black womanhood and homosexuality prevent her from accessing a masculine privilege that would translate into dominance and power. Clearly, the Black queer woman is a challenge to heteropatriarchy and is therefore illegible inside of the oppressive structure she is forced to exist in. In the web series, the distribution of power and dominance hinged on multiple factors including a partner having more financial status, a stable career, perception of rationality and maturity, housing stability, conflict management style, wielding sex as a tool, and personality.

Instead, Lorde (1984) calls in Black feminism in her belief that Black women in the U.S. should contribute to power in their communities by recognizing their social, political, cultural, and emotional commonalities (p. 46). In this way, a collective attention is turned to liberating Black people from systems of oppression as opposed to fighting for power and dominance amongst each other. Hill Collins (2004) insists that the anecdote to a gender-specific racial oppression is to "rescue and redefine sexuality as a source of power rooted in spirituality, expressiveness, and love" (p. 51). These things create new visions of Black masculinity and femininity that benefit a progressive Black sexual politics. It is also a means of resisting the norms of patriarchy touted by Lorde (1979) and other Black feminists who understood the call of Black feminism to liberate all women through reclaiming agency over their gender and sexuality.

Conversely, femmes had relational power quite often. Some were in control of decision making, were verbally and physically abusive to stud partners, expected unilateral monogamy, and had control in their romantic relationships. Femmes also deployed femininity as currency in withholding love and sex to meet their needs. Evidence of femme relational power was visible, but they were often portrayed in negative ways which flattened perceptions of power for them. For example, femmes who expressed dominance were viewed within angry Black woman stereotypes or were dismissed in ableist, misogynistic tropes of craziness, irrationality, and mental illness. Femmes were objectified and seen as non-threatening during scenes where they showed dominance through violent means. Instead of indicating violence, their femininity was used to identify them as a challenging person who simply needed the right stud to tame

them. Thus, femme attempts to express dominance and power are sexualized. This is because sexist ideologies, birthed in patriarchy, prevent them from being taken seriously and continue trends of binding them to rigid gender roles (Garrett, Broussard, & Garrett-Walker, 2019). For femmes (and studs), expressions of power are illegible at the systemic level because patriarchal structures are sexist and racist (p. 71). This means that Black women are not allowed to seek tenets of femininity because it was rooted in whiteness" (p. 71). The Black woman's body is a site of lost sexuality; thus, she is incomprehensible (McKittrick, 2006, p. 82).Because of these issues, exerting agency through expressions of dominance and power fail. The Black femme struggles for access to power because her body is "a target for discursive and bodily violence" (p. 82).

Tinsley (2018) said,

> Black Southern femme-ininity makes room for itself: it weaponizes, Africanizes, sexualizes the "proper" Black womanliness inherited from our badass grandmothers, like a pair of heirloom earrings we lovingly turn into nipple rings. It conjures possibilities for us not only to get on the bus where we want but to get off where we want, too. (p. 102)

### Hostility Toward Femmes

Internalized patriarchy, with attention to dominance and power, solidify as a structure that breeds hostility toward femmes. Hostility toward femmes was revealed throughout each web series in subtle and overt ways. It was observed during sexist patterns of calling femmes derogatory names like bitch and hoe. It was also seen in promiscuity accusations, sexual objectification, gaslighting, physical or emotional dismissal, and in sexist behaviors and language. Femmes were called crazy when they were assertive, expressed emotions, or reacted in anger to infidelity. Accusations of being

mentally ill or crazy are a manifestation of misogyny that disregards femmes' lived experiences. This discussion is nuanced by social justice movements to improve mental health care in the Black community. Pathologizing femmes as crazy becomes a distraction from seeking care for those who are truly suffering from a mental illness. By dismissing concerns as crazy, the stud maintains a reputation for being rational and logical in the relationship.

Sexual objectification is another view of hostility toward femmes. Sexist language, behaviors, and name calling were often attached to episodes portraying studs objectifying other women. In sexual objectification, women are valued based on sex appeal and appearance, and reduced to their body parts. Crenshaw (1991) recognizes this hostility toward femmes as an everyday form of domination where they are made vulnerable to various types of abuse. Although there were examples of this behavior in *Choiices*, it was most prevalent in the characters Cam from *NYGTV* and Shay from *WOATV*. These characters are womanizers who had multiple scenes using women for their bodies or talking with friends about women as objects of sexual gratification. Their manipulative, "Jekyll and Hyde" approach to sexual conquest followed a pattern of flirtatious kindness-turned-callous dismissal when their sexual needs were met. Outside of sex, femmes were casually referred to as bitches, shortys, and hoes in conversations with stud friends. These instances are examples of patriarchal sex education (hooks b. , We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity, 2004). Cam and Shay were more upfront about their sexual conquests, but other studs participated in sexual objectification which is a large component of hostility toward femmes.  Essentially, this is "fucknigga"

behavior among studs including objectifying women, manipulation, using derogatory terms for women, and gaslighting about mental illness. Shange (2019) defines "fucknigga" as related to "fuckboy" but used in the Black queer community to mean "A Black masculine person with all of the patriarchal trappings that spark desire in the beloved, and none of the ethics that make loving such a person sustainable" (p. 46). A byproduct of studs' "fucknigga" behavior is femme solidarity in the web series.

Femmes solidarity was shown in how they came together to offer support, encouragement, and advice for issues they were experiences in life and romantic relationships. It is through femme solidarity that we saw Jade share information with Lauren about her girlfriend cheating in *WOATV*, for example. Femme solidarity may also include listening, physically holding space together to express emotions, or keeping each other accountable for setting boundaries with stud lovers. This is important considering the hostility they face requiring them to take up less space and make room for Black masculinity (Shange, 2019, p. 45). Femmes are at once invisible and visible because of hostility toward them. For Keeling (2007) this means, "The Black femme function points to a radical Elsewhere that is "outside homogenous space and time" and that "does not belong to the order of the visible" (p. 137).The femme dichotomy happens through the refusal of a masculine female image and reduction to her sexuality(p. 94). Black Feminist Quare theory sees that homogenous space and femme solidarity as an example of the homeplace. Hill Collins said that Black women affirm each other's humanity through conversations among peers (Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. 2nd ed, 2000). Further, the homeplace

can be liberating when peers are able to speak openly about issues and reinforce their identities in their private spheres. (Goins, 2011). The homeplace, ultimately, was their space of resistance to hostility.

The Matrix of Domination centers the experiences of people of color by moving their issues from the margins, to the center (Crenshaw K. , 1991). This is significant because in creating web series that center the experiences of Black queer women, parts of the community found a homeplace. For example, in finding the show to be relatable, viewers (myself included) were able to share an internal environment – a safe space (Goins, 2011). Viewers gave feedback to the web series creators and cast, who interacted in the video comments section. They shared personal experiences related to episodes and displayed a sense of freedom in not being discounted as with mainstream media and other systems of oppression. This freedom happens in the homeplace when Black queer folks create an environment to help manage tensions brought up from various scenes and create dialogue in their own way (hooks, 1990).

Stud Persona

A stud persona involves the external and internal adoption of a masculine "swagger" that is performed through language, attire, and a resistance to femininity being read on the stud bodies. One method of demonstrating a distinct separation from femininity is in internalizing homophobia such that stud behaviors are regulated and disciplined. One aspect of the Matrix of Domination is to discipline bodies into heteronormative compliance (Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. 2nd ed, 2000). A part of this discipline

is in marking stud-stud relational proximity through homophobic frames used against gay men. Because of this, stud-stud relationships and attraction is deemed "gay" which, in this context, meant abhorrent and unacceptable. In talking about stud-stud romance, Black lesbian RonAmber from *Black. Queer. Southern. Women.* said it "is something that a lot of people think is gay, is like two boys" (Johnson, 2018, p. 159).

*NYGTV* and *Choiices* addressed the issue of stud-for-stud phobia in the relationships of Sam and Bobbi and Bree and Dj, respectively. Sam and Bree were portrayed as struggling to accept their attraction to another stud, while Bobbi and Dj were confident in their stud-stud attraction. Sam and Bree's storylines tackled coming out to friends about being S4S and critiques or jokes about their relationships. They also dealt with experiencing shame as they, too, had to unlearn harmful messages of internal homophobia. *WOATV* did not have stud-stud relationship storyline but characters did demonstrate a belief that the relationship type was unacceptable. They disciplined the behavior of other studs who expressed too many "soft" or feminine emotions, or who behaved in ways that were read as "gay" like participating in activities stereotyped as feminine. Consequently, the stigma facing stud-stud couples renders them illegible yet hypervisible. "The hypervisibility of Blacks and the organizations of space that rationalize their hypervisibility are crucial techniques through which colonial power and White supremacy were maintained" (Keeling, 2019, p. 100). Thus, stud-stud phobia is another manifestation of the colonial imagination on Black sexuality and gender that is deployed within the community.

Androgynous Sharon in *Black. Queer. Southern. Women.* illustrated this stigma when she said, “I don’t find androgynous bois attractive. I don’t know what to do with them. You know, we can hang out. We could watch soccer. And then, you know, we could go shopping together. We could do a whole lot of things, but sexually I don’t find them attractive” (p. 163). In this example Sharon uses androgynous to replace the category stud, but still speaks to a resistance to stud-stud romantic involvement. In this moment, I call upon Hill Collins who reminds us that *all* Black queer women are ensnarled within the Matrix of Domination. As folks trying to survive and deal with the “isms” of systemic oppression, Black feminism obliges us to rethink the rigid boundaries of race, gender, and sexuality to seek liberation for all women of color. Stud-stud couples are not excluded from that obligation. The position whereby, “if you like another woman who’s dominant like you, okay. The point is we’re lesbians. We like women” (Johnson, 2018, p. 153) not only offers a representation of Black queer women’s gender and sexuality with more fluidity; but it avoids stifling stud attracted stud’s self-determination in forming relationships and in their own expressions of masculinity.

Another aspect of stud persona on web series is attire. “Studs visibly express their masculinity through dress” (Valenti, 2011, p. 8). Across all four web series and their various seasons, only stud-identified Asha from *Choiices* resisted being confined to masculine-only attire. Her character’s attire was fluid. Other studs dressed similarly to Keturah’s description of a stereotypical lesbian in *Black. Queer. Southern. Women.* She described these women as exuding masculine energy in their attire and walk. For example, they wore baggy pants, bowties, braided hair, and have a masculine, cocky walk

(p. 146). In web series, stud attire was stereotypically masculine. The stud misogynist will adhere to the norms of masculine attire and express or understand internalized homophobic norms and behave in ways that distance them from femininity and being labeled "gay." *Choiices*' Asha, however, provides an example of how we can think about new possibilities for Black lesbian sexuality and gender performances that are more expansive. Johnson (2018) notably found that uprooting the connection between sexual identity, gender presentation, and sexual expression can lead to alternative ways of being masculine (p. 138). Undoubtedly, intersectionality does not aim to do away with the gender binary. As a means of resisting the multiple barriers to liberation for Black queer women, it calls us to form coalitions to address power differences that restrict us from dressing, dating, and living in ways that the individual deems appropriate for their survival (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). In the Matrix of Domination, this is a disruption of the binary toward expansion that welcomes self-determination as it addresses multiple dimensions of difference and privilege (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). To be clear, the intersectional Matrix seeks to dismantle structures, not identities. For example, stud identity is not the target. Instead, restrictive gender norms, racism, and sexism are the target for dismantling; essentially, the domains of power are interrogated and taken to task for how they work together to marginalize Black bodies.

### Criminality

There was no connection between criminality and misogyny among studs. Although studs are primarily depicted having criminal involvement, that was not limited to stud misogynists. In *WOATV* studs Jay, Millz, and Nae were involved in selling drugs,

gun violence, and domestic violence; all of which can result in incarceration. In *Choiices*, stud Cree's decision to pay others to assault Ryan, incitement, landed her in jail. Further, Bree and Tyler's cocaine use and purchasing could have negatively impacted their lives if they were caught. I mention this because racial-political disparities in carceral punishment inflict harsher consequences on people of color. (Gross & Hicks, 2015; Meyer, et al., 2017). Specific to the stud discussion is that women were excessively policed and criminalized as well. No criminality was observed in *The Best Friend*. Lastly, in *NYGTV* Tye, Peyton, and Tee were involved in criminal activities ranging from robbery, credit card fraud, drug dealing, and gun violence.

An aspect of the Matrix of Domination is to name the systems responsible for oppression and marginalization of people of color (Crenshaw K. , 1991). Intersectionality promptsus to focus "on structure of power that consitute subjects in particular sociopolitical formations" (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, p. 807, 2013). Hence, the intersection of racism, white supremacy, mass incarceration, and homophobia is named for the disproportionate incarceration rates, harsher judicial sentencing, and brutal encounters with law enforcement because it creates narratives of criminality for studs and Black people that increase their exposure to maltreatment. (Gross & Hicks, 2015).

The relationships between criminality and studs on the web series is better explained by looking at the systemic criminalization of Black masculinity and their social environments. Penal institutions are disproportionately filled with Black bodies because of a long history of equating criminality with Blackness (Thompson, 2019, p. 223). I originally investigated how studs who performed a high level of masculinity may be read

as cisgender males were exposed to state violence (Shange, 2019). In *NYGTV*, I did find that connection but by only focusing on the stud's masculinity related to criminality, her womanhood was segregated which denied a history of systemic policing and punishment. The connection was made with Tye's character. For example, viewers commented about stud Tye from *NYGTV* asking if Tye was a transman. Tye has a light mustache and unshaved armpits, but she does not identify as trans*. Viewers struggled to see Tye's womanhood and her construction of masculinity. The same was true during a scene where she encountered police and was misgendered, dehumanized, and nearly arrested without cause. That scene is important to the discussion of criminality sexual harassment for studs. Charlene Carruthers (2018) declare, "The fiction of the United States of America allows independence to exist alongside slavery and freedom to exist alongside systemic sexual violence and a vast network of prisons" (p. 135).

While three web series depicted studs involve in criminal activity, I am struck not only by their lesbian masculinity and proximity to men as a prevalent explanation of their experiences with criminality; but by how histories of homophobia, sexism, and anti-Blackness merge as a reminder that Black womanhood is always criminalized. Guy-Sheftall says, "The criminal justice and law enforcement systems have been the worst offenders in perpetuating violence against Black people" (p. 401). In the U.S., forty-two percent of incarcerated women in prisons are queers of color (Meyer et. al., 2017, p. 267). In only portraying studs as criminals, or only focusing on their masculinity, it ignores the fact that Black women across the gender spectrum are disproportionally policed and

imprisoned. In other words, a femme gender expression does not necessarily isolate one from state harm.

*Conclusion*

The core themes of stud misogyny are produced through, and maintained in, white supremacist heteropatriarchy. This means that people of color endure racial-sexual inferiority (Smith, 2016). On the surface, this stud misogyny issue can easily be read as one whereby there are power struggles in social environments and interpersonal relationships for Black queer women; however, the Matrix of Domination reveals how multiple systems of oppression come together to silence and marginalize all people of color. (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). This was evident in the web series in how characters internalized oppressive rhetoric and behaviors, and in some viewer comments. The complexity of stud misogyny in web series creates a dilemma where on the one hand, the stud body resists heteronormativity; yet the gender performance is conflated with misogyny and acts on the internalization of patriarchy and homophobia. I have a contentious relationship with Black queer web series because that representation is a great source of comfort and pride to me as they are defiant to heterosexism, racism, and homonormativity. Yet, the portrayals of Black masculine lesbianism can be trapped in similar mainstream media voyeurism that thrives off of seeing Blackness criminalized, hypersexualized, and violent. Like Allen (2011), I understand that the ramifications of such representation impact outward perceptions of Black lesbian masculinity that may lead to some of us experiencing harm, discrimination, and brutality.

In Black Feminism, Quare Theory, Communication Studies, and in the Black lesbian community, we need to re-energize conversations about what Black queer masculinity looks like in media, academic scholarship, relationally and beyond. This re-thinking Black masculinities (hooks, 2004) must move theory into praxis where it pierces and protrudes into the kitchen conversations of people in our communities who are actually impacted by what others only theorize about. Johnson (2005) said that "quare praxis must interrogate and negotiate the difference among our differences, including our political strategies for dealing with oppression and our politics of life choice maintenance" (p. 149).He is asking that in quare praxis we attend to multifaceted issues experienced in our community. Further, he contends that quare praxis has to take place in our communities – in the places where Black queer folks live out their everyday lives (Johnson, 2005).

Within the four core themes, my analysis revealed hostility toward femmes, dominance and power, and stud persona to be associated with the conflation of stud with misogyny in *WOATV, NYGTV,* and *Choiices The Series.* Although some characters were portrayed in stereotypical, racial-sexual ways, examples of studs and femmes expressing complex, nuanced gender performances were displayed as well. The gender binary continues to be a way of self-determining gender performance and identity for Black queer women (Moore, 2006). Therefore, queer activists' calls to dismantle the binary, may not be a welcomed strategy of liberation for this group. Instead, I suggest expanding the possibilities for new ways to enact masculinity, and a re-articulation of gender performances outside of the heteropatriarchal imagination can create a path of liberation

for marginalized bodies. Importantly, in conjunction with this re-articulation we must challenge and resist systems of oppression in every aspect of our lives. One means of resistance is created in the presence of Black queer web series and their respective community of viewers.

In commenting and responding to each other, and to the cast who actively participated in the comment section, a sense of community, or "homeplace" was created. I believe the web series, themselves, are homeplaces. Indeed, a homeplace gives Black queer women and other folks of color, "equipment for living in a racist society" (Johnson, 2005, p. 149). In the web series homeplace the predominantly Black and Brown viewers expressed relatability through recognizing their neighborhoods onscreen, commenting in Black English to parallel web series' characters, showing an understanding of portrayals of street and social violence, and in commenting about having similar interpersonal experiences as characters. For example, viewers commented about instances of police brutality, domestic violence, "hustling," love, and the importance of finding a good career. They expressed pride in queer of color media representation and in seeing people of color thriving in life. The homeplace is one offscreen, community benefit of Black queer web series.

Based on my Black quare feminist research, I anticipated finding portrayals of the stud as both a misogynist and a victim of misogyny. While this double-bind is true in theoretical research, there were limited portrayals of such victimization in the web series analyzed here. There were two instances of stud-stud dating, and one instance with a police officer that are examples of the studs being victimized by misogyny. I found sexist

ideologies were internalized and regurgitated by femmes onto stud bodies in the web series. Both stud and femmes portrayed stud-stud phobia, which is one way that misogyny appeared in the series. On the surface, studs in these web series may be reduced to controlling, womanizing, rough and tumble drug dealer portrayals. Instead, the Matrix of Domination "snatches the wig" off systemic oppression laying bare the impact of racism and sexism on Black sexuality and gender. For Keeling (2019), "This violence is an index of the imposition of straight times and the constraints they place on Black and queer and trans* possibility and existence" (p. 104). Revealing and naming social systems of oppression is one focus of the Matrix of Domination (Hill Collins, 1990). It calls attention to the power structures stifling Black lesbians life outcomes. Without attending to and naming the systems of oppression, the powerful way that studs seek self-determination over their sexuality and gender performance might be discounted as personal problems. (Crenshaw, 1991). Self-determination is a key aspect of Black feminism and liberation (Shange, 2019). However, because studs are ensnared in violence and limited romantic relationships in web series, the fluidity of sexuality and gender in the Black queer community is undermined (Johnson, 2018). Moreover, Johnson (2018) found that sexual expression, sexual identity, and gender performance have been conflicted in this community not because of the people, but because media paints inaccurate portrayals of Black women as only being studs or femmes.

Regarding femmes in the web series, they were the objects of sexual conquest and faced partner verbal and physical abuse more often. These are common scripts for Black women in media (Tinsley, 2018). I am more interested in how the web series offers an

equally important perspective of femmes forming bonds of support with each other, nurturing friends through different experiences, or showing the strength and alongside harsh stories happening around them. Tinsley (2018) discusses feminine solidarity and the importance of femme support for survival within sexist frames that often fail to recognize queerness on their bodies or hypersexualizes them. She asserts that femme women can reclaim that sexualization for themselves by taking control of their sexual desires and sexuality without concern for masculine pleasure.

For media, I heed Allen's (2011) call to increase cultural and communication competence across all sources. She also says that media literacy about privilege and difference must improve. This is significant because the reproduction of ideologies about race, gender, and sexuality cause racial-sexual stereotypes, leaving a trail of real life consequences facing those on the margins. Make no mistake, Black people have always resisted the structures and systems of oppression. My call to rethink masculinities through a Love Ethic is meant to re-energize our quest for liberation.

Because of each characters' experiences and viewers' investment in the web series, I was drawn to the necessity of a Love Ethic (hooks, 2004) in this analysis and believe that it is important in seeking Black liberation in media and beyond. There is room for healing in the Black queer community. Particularly because we are "in the wake" (Sharpe, 2016) of heteropatriarchal racist, sexist oppression that continues to try to control our sexuality, gender, and reject our Blackness. A love ethic is designed to challenge and change patriarchy. It is built from a "partnership model that encompasses new ways to build family and community without domination as a core principle" (hooks,

2004, p. 66). In other words, this is one way can seek Black liberation. Nash (2019) refers to Love Ethic as a Black Feminist Love Politic. She notes that "Black feminism is distinctive in its commitment to love as a political practice" (Nash, 2019, p. 115). Black feminist love is about collective, community building. hooks (2004) claims that through Love Ethics one is able to raise their consciousness and create alternatives to their lived realities. She views Love as a radical, progressive way to resist patriarchal violence (hooks, 2004). While hooks' (2004) focus of deploying a Love Ethic is on males as central to patriarchy, I suggest that it is applicable to studs and other systems of oppression such as race, class, gender; and sexuality, all of which are implicated in patriarchy; but I find naming them separately to be powerful. Nash (2019) also believed that the principle of "Love operates as a principle of vulnerability and accountability, of solidarity and transformation" (p. 115).

Because of the communicative aspect of the web series and their viewers, a Love Ethic can be extended to the screen. For instance, viewers can hold the cast and creators accountable by sharing their experiences with gender expression and identity, racism, sexism, and more. In turn, creators are able to broaden their horizons about Black queerness, to create robust depictions across in-group difference should they choose. Nash (2019) argues that the radical potential of Love is through our openness. She explains that openness involved being open to possible ostracization or visibility as a target once you are known for resisting power structures (Nash, 2019). For media, Love is the means through which we reject our criminalization and hypersexualization. In the sense of being "each other's keeper" a Love Ethic requires bilateral vulnerability that is

committed to exploring possibilities of liberation for all. (Nash, 2019). Lorde (1979) declared that by nurturing each other, women gain knowledge necessary to rediscover our power. She explains that "Interdependency between women is the way to a freedom which allows the I to be, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative" (p. 111).Nash echoes this idea of women coming together, realizing that we are affected by each other, and working together to challenge and resist our oppression (Nash, 2019).

> *"I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own. And I am not free as long as one person of Color remains chained. Nor is any one of you" – Audre Lorde*

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