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Feminized Asians and Masculinized Blacks:

The Construction of Gendered Races in the United States

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Introduction

This study was originally intended to focus on the history of interracial marriage in the United States. In conducting preliminary research, it came to my attention that interracial marriage is most frequently examined through a racial lens, and this scholarly predilection leads to an ignorance of gender's role in the process of interracial marriage. For instance, a plethora of articles on interracial marriage conclude that interracial marriage is more concentrated among those with higher levels of education, in conjunction with other sociodemographic factors such as wealth, political affiliation, and religious affiliation (Fryer, 2007; Herman & Campbell, 2012; Qian, 1997; Golebiowska, 2007; Lee, 2010). And while it may be true that men and women with higher levels of education do, in fact, marry interracially at higher rates, this finding does not account for the differences in rates of interracial marriage by gender within each race. What makes men of a certain race marry at higher rates than women in the same race and vice versa? Regardless of the dearth of interest about gender's function in interracial marriage in the United States, stark differences exist in rates of interracial marriage among men and women in certain racial categories. Namely, there are significant statistics supporting the idea that Black women are less likely to marry interracially compared to their male counterparts, while Asian men are less likely to marry interracially than their female counterparts. In 2008, 20% of all Black male newlyweds married outside their race, compared to just 9% of Black female newlyweds. For Asians, the gender pattern ran opposite, with 40% of Asian female newlyweds marrying outside their race, compared with just 20% of Asian males (Lee, 2010). It becomes clear that these disparities cannot be explained solely in terms of race and, therefore, this study seeks to uncover the

interplay between race and gender. This study examines the ways race is gendered and the ways gender is racialized, both in historical and contemporary contexts in the United States.

Although gender has gradually been accepted by academia and the wider public as a socially constructed category, racial categories, which are socially constructed in a similar way to gender, seem to still be regarded as essential and innate. This study attempts to clarify how race and gender are both socially constructed categories, and mutually constituted in ways that promote White, heterosexual, patriarchal standards of masculinity and femininity. I argue throughout this paper that Black women are deemed less marriageable due in part to the fact that they have been masculinized throughout the history of the United States. Similarly, Asian men are deemed less marriageable due in part to the fact they have been feminized throughout the history of the United States. Through my research I hope to clarify the role that certain historical events played in the dual gendering of Asians as feminine and Blacks as masculine. I will also examine more contemporary media influences such as film and music, which continue to gender and marginalize Asian and Black bodies by perpetuating old myths and stereotypes today. Because gender and racial formation are both historically situated and subject to shifts in construction, in order to keep in step with societal flux, there are points of continuity that can be traced across eras, as well as novel developments and norms. Both of these facets will be examined in the ensuing study.

Gender as a Social Construct

Judith Butler famously theorized in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble* that gender is not an essential aspect of one's identity, but is merely an ongoing performance that

produces the effect of a static gender (Butler, 1990). Rather than being a fixed attribute

in a person, gender should be understood as a fluid concept—shifting and changing in

different contexts and at different times. Although one chooses to perform gender to a

certain extent, gender is also ascribed to bodies (some bodies more than others) from

birth—one doesn't have a complete say in the gender they're assigned as they exit the

womb. The history of interracial marriage provides rich evidence of formulations and

reformulations of gender categories, where gender is prescribed to certain races in ways

outside of their control. In a study that examined racial preferences in White internet

daters in 2009, White women who expressed height preferences were much more likely

to exclude Asian men as potential partners (Feliciano, Robnett & Kamaie, 2009). This

finding suggests that because Asian men tend to be below average in height, they do not

fit White women's ideal vision of maleness, and are thus excluded at high rates. In this

case masculinity is constructed by White women to value height, and thusly White men

are inherently idealized, as they tend to be taller than their Asian male counterparts.

Another example of the formulation of gender within the context of interracial marriage

can be taken from the post-World War II occupation of Japan. During this time, White

soldiers married Japanese women at high rates because Japanese women were thought to

be more innately "feminine" than their White female counterparts. Here, particular

constructions of femininity are exposed, in which Japanese women, in the wake of

Japan's defeat (and trauma) at the hands of Americans, are considered more feminine due

to their perceived inferiority and weakness by White, American soldiers. This

understanding of femininity is attached to Asian women, who are deemed more attractive

as a potential heterosexual partner than their White female counterparts in this postwar

context (Espiritu, 2008, p. 113).

Butler suggests that certain conceptions of gender have assumed a hegemonic

hold within the contemporary zeitgeist and are perceived as natural, fixed, and essential

(1990). For the purposes of this paper, I will primarily focus on two such gendered

racializations: the hyper-feminization of Asian men and women, and the hyper-

masculinization of Black men and women. The conceptions of gender that are embedded

into the current hegemony are conceptions which work (alongside conceptions of race

that have seized a hegemonic hold) to benefit White, male, heterosexuals. The concept of

hegemony is one I will return to and expand on below.

Race as a Social Construct

Although the concept of race invokes biologically based human characteristics,

the selection of salient features for racial identification is always embedded in a historical

and continuous process of construction. The courtroom is one arena in which race is

revealed to be a social construct. In 1982, Susie Guillory Phipps unsuccessfully sued the

Louisiana Bureau of Vital Records to change her racial classification from Black to

White. As a descendent of an 18th century White planter and a Black slave, Phipps was

designated Black in her birth certificate in accordance with the 1970 Louisiana state law,

which declared anyone with at least 1/32 "negro blood" to be Black (Omi, 1994, p. 53).

Here, we see the ways an arbitrary blood quantum standard has the power to dictate a

person's racial identification, and accordingly limit access to status and resources.

Although the law may seem arbitrary, the distinction between the lives of Blacks and

Whites remains vastly unequal, giving laws such as blood quantum standards incredible weight.

The trial of Marie Antoinette Monks of San Diego, California, in 1939 provides a parallel to the plight of Phipps. Monks' case was concerned with whether Monks could inherit her White, deceased husband's estate. The verdict was contingent upon whether their marriage was deemed valid, and the prosecution focused on whether Monks was considered Black or White by the court. The trial ended up lasting 6-weeks, and was primarily devoted to determining Monks' race (Pascoe, 1996, p. 57). There were outlandish and ridiculous claims made throughout the trial—one example being from Monks' hairdresser. The hairdresser stated that she could tell Monks was of "mixed blood" just by looking at the size of the moons of Monks' fingernails (Pascoe, 1996, p. 57). The cases of Monks' and Phipps' reveal the desperate necessity in law and science to determine the "fact" of race, despite repeated contradictions, gaps, and logical deficiencies in the process of racial classification. Despite the fact that racial classification is arbitrary and fluid, the concept of race continues to play a fundamental role in structuring and representing our social world.

Racial formation is historically situated, dependent upon certain contexts and cultures, and, accordingly, our understanding of race has changed over time. The racial categories we encounter today are outcomes of complex historical evolutions of racial formations and ideologies. Our modern conception of race coalesced during the ascendance of Europe and the arrival of Europeans in North America, beginning as early as the 10th century (Omi, 1994, p. 61). The concept of race was defined as a product of Europe's subjugation of the rest of the world (Omi, 1994, p. 62). Race was initially

represented in religious terms to justify social structures of exploitation, appropriation, and domination (Omi, 1994, p. 63). But, 18th century concerns over nation building, slavery, and the expulsion of native peoples were hard to justify in purely religious arguments (Omi, 1994, p. 63). Thus race was defined in scientific terms, leading to our current biological understanding of race in the United States. Scientific criteria created a natural basis of racial hierarchy, which fit into the popular discourses of the Enlightenment. Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae* (1735) devised a classification scheme of living organisms that scientists utilized to rank the human race throughout the 18th and 19th centuries (Omi, 1994, p. 63). Attempts to discern scientific meanings of race continue to this day, and can be seen across a variety of platforms and media.

It has taken scholars more than a century to reject biological notions of race, and to see race as a social construct, though some argue we have yet to fully accept the fact (Omi, 1994, p. 65). Transcending biological conceptions of race is key, but it is also critical to note that this transcendence does not constitute an excuse for racial injustice. Instead, moving beyond essential notions of race simply allow us to recognize that racial conflicts are framed by politics, to uphold White, heterosexual, patriarchal hegemony.

Race and Gender in Promoting Hegemony

For most of the United States' existence, either as colonial territory or as an independent nation, the country has routinely and systematically marginalized women and non-Whites from politics and mainstream society (Omi, 1994, p. 66). This structural marginalization made gendered and racial divisions fundamental to American society. This is made clear by the World's Columbian Exposition, also known as The Chicago World's Fair, held in Chicago in 1893 to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Christopher

Columbus's arrival in the New World in 1492. The exposition covered more than 600 acres, featuring nearly 200 buildings built for the occasion. More than 27 million people attended the exposition during its six-month run, and it became a symbol of emerging American Exceptionalism, or the sense that America's history and mission deemed it superior over all other nations (Bederman, 2008). Tellingly called the White City, the makers of the Chicago World's Fair conceived of future civilization as a utopia based on an ideal White male power (Bederman, 2008). By displaying "ethnological villages" and a "women's building" on the margins of the Exposition, it reminded White American men that they epitomized civilized advancement (Bederman, 2008). The Columbian Exposition utilized this picture of civilization to assert White male hegemony. This is just one example of how the history of systematic marginalization of women and non-Whites is understood as a norm against which American politics and society were measured, defining American identity with a White, male hegemonic rule (Omi, 1994, p. 66).

Antonio Gramsci, the social theorist behind the concept of cultural hegemony, defined hegemony as the ways in which states use cultural institutions to maintain power (Gramsci, 1971, p. 182). In order to efficiently consolidate their hegemony, Gramsci argues that ruling groups must maintain popular systems of ideas and practices or "common sense" through education, media, religion, folk wisdom etc. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 182). I argue that our current conceptions of race and gender are constructed in ways that promote a cultural hegemony that benefits White, heterosexual, men who have stood, and continue to stand, at the apex of American society. These conceptions of race and gender

are constructed through what Gramsci called "common sense" systems, such as the institution of marriage.

Marriage was originally a set of legal provisions that granted considerable powers to husbands and disadvantages to wives, built around gendered privileges and responsibilities (Pascoe, 2009, p. 24). The United States' long history of anti-miscegenation statutes demarcated and entrenched racial boundaries. On top of this, they defined White bourgeois sexual practices as normative and superior. Marriage is so strongly associated with Whiteness and propriety that interracial marriage threatened slavery in ways that interracial sex did not. Laws against interracial marriage did not prevent masters from having sex with their slave women or from having mixed race children, rather, laws prevented masters from turning the slaves they slept with into respectable wives who might claim freedom, demand citizenship rights, or inherit family property (Pascoe, 2009, p. 27). In this way, White men stood at the pinnacle of systems of gender and racial authority during slavery. The institution of marriage, and its support of inventing racial categories, fortified slavery—a race-based system which privileged the White race while dehumanizing Black people. Thus, marriage is a perfect example of a popular institution or a "common sense" practice that helps White heterosexual men maintain power through hegemony.

Interracial marriage laws provide rich evidence for formulations of gender and racial categories that uphold cultural hegemony. Miscegenation laws did not apply equally to all races and genders, and, in practice, legislators always had particular race/gender pairs in mind when enforcing laws (Pascoe, 2009, p. 10). For instance, when White women were in a race/gender pair, the laws tended to be enacted and enforced with

greater strictness, due to the history of protecting White female womanhood and purity

for the benefit of White men (Pascoe, 2009, p. 10). One of the first prohibitions on

interracial marriage, which passed in Maryland in 1664, was gender-specific: It

prohibited marriages between "freeborn English women" and "Negro slaves" (Pascoe,

1991, p. 7). Similarly, from the outset, images of Chinese immigrants were highly

gendered. From the 1870's-1960's miscegenation laws only utilized the category of

"Chinamen" rather than Chinese (Pascoe, 2009, p. 82). Through the utilization of

gendered terminology, these laws presumed that the prevented marriages solely involved

Chinese men and White women, or Black men and White women. Both laws existed in

contexts in which White women's sexuality was idealized and controlled, while White

men had unlimited sexual access to White, Black, and Asian women.

Marriage is still used as a tool of integration, through its perpetuation of social

stereotypes, invalidation of other forms of relationships, and promotion of certain

lifestyles deemed beneficial to society (particularly, a patriarchal, capitalist division of

labor that oppresses women and People of Color). In this way, as White men stood at the

pinnacle of systems of gender, sex, and racial authority during slavery, the institution of

marriage has assisted White men in maintaining their position in society today. Take for

instance the gay marriage movement, which was, for the most part, headed by prosperous

White gay men, arguably looking to integrate into the hegemonic order. On the other

side of the aisle, many queer, gender-nonconforming, People of Color groups tended to

reject the gay marriage movement, focusing their efforts instead on issues such as

poverty, racism, immigration, and health care—issues that challenge the current

hegemonic order. Hence, the institution of marriage (including interracial marriage)

exists to promote and support White, hegemonic family values, which privileges White, male heterosexuality.

The Feminization of Asian Men and Women

Through my research I hope to clarify the role that specific historical events played in the dual gendering of Asians as feminine and Blacks as masculine. In looking at the history of Asian-Americans, I will utilize Edward Said's (1979) theory of Orientalism, to understand how Asian men and women were feminized, even before they stepped foot on American soil in the 19th century. Upon their arrival, early immigration policies such as the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the Page Law played significant roles in the feminization of both Asian men and women. World War II and the postwar period were also key in the shifting of Asian American racial status in the United States, affecting Asian men and women in different ways, but feminizing them both in the process. Certain stereotypes of Asian men and women such as the postwar War Bride and the Chinese houseboy continue to resurface in more contemporary media influences which I examine—such as the movies *Madame Butterfly* (1995)*, The World of Suzie Wong* (1960)*, The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993) and *M. Butterfly* (1993). These films continue to marginalize Asians by reinforcing hyper-feminine images of Asian American men and women on screen.

The Masculinization of Black Men and Women

In examining the history of Black people in America, I will explore the role that slavery and emancipation played in the masculinization of Black women and men alike. During slavery, I will explain how White elites used this gendered notion to justify their hard labor and sexual abuse against Black women, who could not technically be raped in

the antebellum South. After emancipation, I will illustrate how the social construct of the

hyper-masculine Black male emerged, focusing in particular on how these constructs

were created by Whites to terrorize Black men into continued subservience after slavery

through the guise of protecting White female purity (D'Emilio & Freedman,

1988). These stereotypes of unrapeable Black women and rape-inclined Black men have

persisted in contemporary media, and notably so in: *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*

(1971)*, Crash* (2004)*, Monster's Ball* (2001)*, Boys n the Hood* (1991)*,* and *South Central*

(1992). These films construct an image of a hyper-masculine Black stereotype, an idea

that intersects with modern conceptions about race and gender, and one that parallels and

draws relevancy from the aforementioned historic conceptions.

Production of Meaning and Authorship in Film

The interrogation of popular media, specifically mainstream cinema, plays a

critical role in the formation of my thesis. Not unlike how the detrimental and normative

identities of masculinity and femininity have been, and are, prescribed to Black and

Asian bodies in the US, I will be relying on how spectatorship (and not

authorial/directorial intent) informs and produces the meanings/ramifications of the films

in question. When examining the relationship between the production of meaning and

authorship, several questions arise. Do we construe meaning from a film because of

specific attributes of its author (Kuhn, 1982)? For instance, is a film interpreted as anti-

racist solely based on the fact that the director is Black? In my analysis of both *Sweet*

Sweetback's Baadasssss Song and *Boys n the Hood*, it will become clear that these films

actively perpetuate racist, gendered images of the Black population, regardless of the race

of the director (who in both cases are Black).

If attributes of the author do not dictate meaning, then do we locate meaning through certain attributes contained within the work (Kuhn, 1982)? For instance, is a film interpreted as anti-Orientalist exclusively because the director's intent was to deconstruct the harmful concept? In my analysis of *M. Butterfly* it is made clear that regardless of the director's intent, this "anti-Orientalist" film ends up unconsciously perpetuating the same Orientalist myths that David Croneberg, the director, sought to invalidate. I argue that meaning is produced by the way films are "read" by the audience (Kuhn, 1982). An author incorporates themes, ideas, etc., in their films unconsciously, and films consequently generate meanings on their own, or at least meanings which go beyond the author's intentions. Thus, neither authorial intent nor attributes of a director—taken in isolation—guarantees a specific reading, even if both limit the range of plausible interpretations. Films necessitate an active, mutually constitutive relationship with its viewer, in which the film's meaning is deciphered by the audience members. Although one cannot totally discount the identity or intent of the author, the reception and interpretation produced by the spectator maintains a primary significance in this paper and beyond.

Research Objectives

People have been drawn to studying interracial marriage and intimacy because it seems to offer an optimistic foreshadowing for a harmonious transracial world, but as Foucault notes, sexuality functions as "an especially dense transfer point for relations of power" (Foucault, 1978, p. 103). In other words, interracial sex and sexuality on its own does not bring about racial harmony, but instead, is commonly used to maintain a harmful cultural hegemony through institutions such as marriage. By casting Black women as not

feminine enough and Asian women as too feminine, White forms of gender are racialized as normal and superior. In this way, White women are accorded the racial privilege of embodying an ideal femininity. Similarly, by casting Black men as too masculine and Asian men as not masculine enough, White men are accorded the racial privilege of embodying an ideal masculinity. Until we challenge the dominant racial and gender ideologies of our day, the United States will remain a country that routinely and systematically marginalizes women and non-Whites from politics and mainstream society, where White, heterosexual men continue to be the sole beneficiaries.

Alok Vaid-Menon, a member of Darkmatter, a trans South Asian performance art duo, sums up my objectives perfectly: "As a queer South Asian I don't feel comfortable ascribing the identity of 'asexual' to my body. Part of the ways in which brown men have been oppressed in the Western world is by…de-sexualizing them" (Vaid-Menon, 2014). Here, Vaid-Menon argues that the way their sexuality has been constructed has everything to do with their race. They explain how colonialism has and continues to exert itself on their body through forced gender and sexual identities (2014). Vaid-Menon helps us understand our need to move our conceptions of race and gender away from essential narratives that reproduce biological essentialism (2014). Instead, we need to move toward narratives that appropriately account for the historical sufferings that have informed our various sexual, racial, and gendered understandings. "I am not as interested in the words that you affix to your body—I am interested in the journey that it took for you to get there" (Vaid-Menon, 2014).

There is scant literature that explores the gendered notions of race, and even less research that examines the specific incidences in history which have established these

conceptions. I hope to contribute to an understanding of why Black women are viewed as hyper-masculine, and thus less likely to marry interracially than their male counterparts, and similarly, why Asian men are viewed as hyper-feminine and thus less likely to marry interracially than their female counterparts. In revealing the etiology and contemporary drivers of these gendered notions of race, I hope to help deconstruct the pervasive social constructs of both race and gender and, most importantly, the intersections between the two.

Chapter One: The Feminization of Asian American Men

Introduction

The feminized image of the Asian male and female finds its origins within the concept of Orientalism, which reified dualisms that deemed the European and Western world to be the Occident—modern and masculine—while the non-European, non-Western world was deemed the Orient—traditional and feminine (Said, 1978). Edward Said's concept of Orientalism depicts "The East" broadly, including inhabitants of Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East (1978). Orientalism, and Western scholarship about the Eastern World, was and remains inextricably tied to the imperialist societies—such as Europe and the United States—who produced it (Said, 1978). Orientalism is therefore not concerned with a genuine study of Eastern cultures, but is rather a method of cultural discrimination and self-affirmation of European and American identity in order to establish and excuse colonial rule (Said, 1978).

Although the gendering of Asian men has a long history in Western narratives of Orientalism, it is not until the 19th century that Asian men actually enter the United States in significant numbers. These immigrants are quickly feminized by a combination of lingering Orientalist theory, their seemingly alien physical appearance, immigration policies, the types of jobs they were pushed into, public policies, and the model minority myth. Such notions of Asian American male femininity are maintained today by late twentieth century films such as, but not limited to, *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993) and *M. Butterfly* (1993). This feminization plays an important role in the low rates of interracial marriage among Asian men, who are perceived as too feminine by heterosexual women

and gay men, who have traditionally sought hegemonic notions of masculinity in a potential partner.

Although I will be discussing Asian Americans as a singular group in this analysis, my unilateral designation is the product of this paper's research material and the prejudices and racisms contained therein. The manifold cultures so assimilated (including, but not limited to, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino) all have unique cultural and historical factors that have shaped each group in different ways. Although these differences are real, Asian American identity formation in the United States is, and has been, more a reflection of the common experiences these groups find within the borders of the United States (Han, 2006b). What it means to be Asian from a Western perspective is primarily a fiction, largely based on Western expectations of what is normal and what is foreign. In the Western imagination, all Asians come to be represented by the singular image of the Orient, despite their points of origin or current locations (Han, 2006b). Hence, I will discuss Asian Americans and the Asian American experience as a homogenous group from this point on.

Asian Male Immigration to the United States

Beginning in the late 1840's, Chinese men (in search of work) were shipped to the United States as the first Asian immigrant group (Chen, 1996). These immigrants were, for the most part, all young male sojourners who lived in Chinatowns created to serve single men. The United States' need for Chinese immigrant labor, which was imminently cheap and exploitable, did not lead—obviously—to an equitable situation for said immigrants. Principal among these injustices was the United States' refusal to enfranchise these laborers as citizens (Eng, 2001, p. 36). The famous photograph of the

"Golden Spike Ceremony," taken on May 10th, 1869, and in Promontory Summit, Utah, which depicts the joining of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads, encapsulates this erasure of Asian American male masculinity. This accomplishment is often described as the nation's greatest technological feat of the 19th century, and while more than 10,000 Chinese American male laborers were integral to building the Western portion of the Central Pacific track, not one appears in this photograph (Eng, 2001, p. 36). In this case, Asian American male masculinity and identity are literally made invisible from American history.

Instead of an image of a masculine, Asian male railroad worker, the media depicted an Asian American physical appearance that was stereotypically feminine. Chinese immigrants tended to hold on to their traditional customs for fear of losing their ethnic and national identity in the States (Chen, 1996). They also tended to refuse to give up their ancestral conventions, for fear of being identified with Maoist revolutionaries in China (Chen, 1996). One aspect of traditional Chinese practice was the hairstyle known as the queue, where the hair is worn long, gathered up in a ponytail, and often braided. The queue was highly feminized in the United States, as women are traditionally the only ones to wear their hair long. This feminization of the queue hairstyle helped to create a feminized image of the Asian American male. Two newspaper articles from the early 1900's help reflect this practice of feminization.

Depictions of Asian Male Queue's in Print Media

Published in 1901 by the *Trenton Evening Times*—one of the leading newspapers in New Jersey—the article, "John Chinaman's Queue. Few of the Chinese in this Country Who Wear the 'Pigtail' Know" provides a crucial insight into the feminization

of Asian American men in the United States. By correlating the queue with a "Pigtail" in

its title, the article likens the queue to a childish, feminine hairstyle, worn by young girls

("John Chinaman's Queue", 1901). The use of the name "John Chinaman" also points to

the assimilative aspirations of such articles, reducing Chinese people to single attributes

and simple dispositions ("John Chinaman's Queue", 1901). The author of the article

goes on to discuss the history of the queue and how it came to be worn by the Chinese. It

states that "the queue will remain a tone of bondage for the Chinaman" referencing the

fact that the queue was imposed on the Han Chinese during the Qing dynasty by the

Manchu people during the Manchu conquest of China ("John Chinaman's Queue", 1901).

Although this history is accurate, the article assumes that Chinese men who wear this

hairstyle in the United States are doing so to continue to display their status as a servant.

It states, "The queue was originally, and still is, after two and a half centuries, a mark of

bondage" ("John Chinaman's Queue", 1901). Although it may be the case for some

Chinese men, it is inconceivable that all Chinese men wearing the queue in the United

States wore it to denote their servitude. Instead, a number of other reasons, such as

maintaining their Chinese identity in the United States, or even a lack of opportunity to

get a haircut, may explain the Chinese queue. This article fabricates the motives of

Chinese Americans to align them with feminine passivity and servitude. This article robs

Chinese men of their agency in their decision to wear the queue, and instead, prescribes a

narrative that feminizes them.

A second article, published in 1908 in Savannah, Georgia in the *Savannah*

Tribune is titled, "The Chinaman's Pride, His Queue" (Peacock, 1908). In this article,

Nan Peacock, the author, similarly describes the queue in gendered terms, feminizing the

hairstyle, as well as the men who take "pride" in them (Peacock, 1908). She labels the

queue "graceful", and that "no self-respecting Chinese gentleman would be seen with his

queue tied up in a knot; it must always hang its full glossy length, finished off at the tip

with a silk tassel" (Peacock, 1908). This description depicts Chinese men as frivolous,

caring too much about his hairstyle in ways parallel to stereotypically petty female

concerns. The author continues to use feminine descriptors to talk about the queue, such

as "full glossy length" and "silk tassel" (Peacock, 1908). She goes on to describe a

senseless Chinese man, reporting that he "devotes more time and attention to it (his

queue) than to any other portion of his person" (Peacock, 1908). Peacock justifies the

queue by emasculating Chinese men, and claims, to this effect, that "a Chinaman does

not have to shave his chin, since he can rarely cultivate more than a few stray hairs there"

(1908). Here, it becomes obvious that the author sees the queue as a feminine alternative

to masculine facial hair for Asian men, who supposedly do not fit into the masculine,

Western world. Regardless of whether the queue is a mark of submissiveness due to its

history in Chinese culture or due to its attachment to trivial feminine pursuits, American

popular culture appropriates the queue to paint a picture of an inferior, feminine Asian

American man.

Implications of Asian Male Immigration to the United States

Immigration policies emasculated Asian American men by treating Asian male

workers as temporary and individual units of labor, rather than members of family

groups. For instance, immigration restrictions limited the number of female immigrants

from Asia (Espiritu, 2008, p. 9). The capitalist American economy only required Asian

male workers, and therefore excluded whole Chinese families in order to ensure greater

profitability from the males' labor. Furthermore, in 1875, Congress passed the Page

Law, which forbid entry of Chinese prostitutes and greatly reduced the influx of Chinese

women. The law was open to a loose interpretation, and officials blacklisted basically all

the Chinese women who tried to enter the States (Espiritu, 2008, p. 18).

Chinese immigrants were pushed into demeaning careers that played a role in

their feminization. Initially Chinese immigrants worked with Whites as gold miners, and

later railroad construction workers, but the decline of gold production and completion of

the Central Pacific Railroad left White and Asian laborers without work (Chen, 1996).

During this time, the American economy was in throes of an economic depression, and

cheaper Chinese labor was favorable to the White workers who demanded higher wages.

An article from *Frank Leslies Weekly*, based in New York City titled, "The Coming Man:

What is to be the status of the Chinaman in America," published in 1869, describes the

Chinese male work ethic to be, "docile, obedient, quick to learn, frugal". In the same

year, an article from the *Vincennes Gazette*, based in Vincennes, Indiana titled, "The

Chinaman" similarly describes Chinese male workers: "His labor is cheap, his temper

good, his disposition is docile, his industry is unflagging" (1869). This competition

between White and Chinese laborers led to White workers stirring up anti-Chinese

sentiment (Chen, 1996). For instance, in California, an "anti-Chinaman" Ku-Klux-Klan

organization was formed to threaten employers of Chinese laborers ("There is an Anti-

Chinaman Ku-Klux-Klan in California", 1869). Thus, Chinese men were turned away

from factory production jobs that they had to compete with Whites for, and were pushed

into devalued jobs such as cooks, waiters, dishwashers, and laundrymen—all work which

was associated with the female sphere (Chen, 1996). Through the 1900's, Chinese

houseboys were a symbol of upper-class status in San Francisco, and as late as 1920, 50% of Chinese men in the United States were still employed as domestic servants (Kimmel, 1992).

Public policies feminized Asian men as well. In 1882, the Chinese were the first immigrant group to be suspended by the federal law from entry into the United States (Chen, 1996). At the same time, anti-miscegenation laws prohibited Asian men from marrying White women (Chen, 1996, p. 59). These laws forced Asian men in the United States to live a life of bachelorhood, with no opportunity to become a father or to look after and take care of a family. It was common for White men to break anti-miscegenation laws by sleeping with Asian women, but the law and the public demanded that White females adhere more rigidly to the prohibition, creating a "double standard of miscegenation" (Chen, 1996).

Parallel to these public policies, the Motion Picture Production Code was adopted in February 1930, stating that miscegenation in movies was undesirable (Chen, 1996, p. 59). The Motion Picture Production Code only further perpetuated this ongoing "double standard of miscegenation" into American popular culture, where only White men and Asian women were portrayed on screen, while Asian men and White women were rarely represented. Again, this was due to the rigid compliance to the Code when applied to White women.

To become acceptably represented in American culture, Asian American men had to be made "safe", demasculinized, and feminine. During the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movements, the media, largely controlled by White men, created the "model minority" image or myth of Asian Americans, which still exists today (Chen, 1996). The

term "model minority" was coined in 1966 by sociologist William Petersen in an article he wrote for the *New York Times Magazine* titled, "Success story: Japanese American Style" (Chin, 2001). In his article, Petersen emphasizes that through their hard work, Japanese Americans overcame the fierce discrimination they faced and achieved relative success in the United States (Petersen, 1966). He states, "No degradation affected this people…Denied citizenship, the Japanese were exceptionally law-abiding…often unable to marry for many years, they developed a family life both strong and flexible…denied access to many urban jobs…they undertook menial tasks with such perseverance" (Petersen, 1966). Petersen takes time to emphasize the successes that Japanese Americans obtained *on their own,* without the help from greater American institutions. This emphasis allows America's racist, sexist hegemony to continue its rule without critique, and places the responsibility of success on the shoulders of minorities. The model minority myth comprises a rubric for understanding Asian American men as inhabiting a feminized position of passivity and malleability, deliberately created to combat the then widespread social upheaval of the anti-Vietnam war and Civil Rights movements. The model minority myth was an attempt of White America to promulgate a representation that all other minorities could base their behavior on. It, of course, serves neither the interests of Asian Americans nor other minority groups, particularly Blacks and Latinos, who are blamed for their problems, as the model minority label justifies and affirms the workability of American social institutions.

World War II

World War II (1939-1945) marked an important turning point in the history of Asian Americans living in the United States. Lives of Chinese, Koreans, Filipinos and

Asian Indians improved because their nations were allied to the United States during the war (Espiritu, 2008, p. 42). The wartime services of these men did a great deal to reduce White prejudice against Asians (Espiritu, 2008, p. 42). The Philippine armed forces were incorporated into the United States armed forces, and the heroism and courage of Filipino troops was widely publicized in newspaper headlines across the United States (Espiritu, 2008, p. 49). A sizable number of Chinese men also joined the United States armed forces. Almost 40% of the Chinese population was drafted, which was the highest draft rate of any ethnic group (Espiritu, 2008, p. 50). This earned many Asian men American citizenship, helped rescind exclusion laws, and thus renewed immigration from Asia (Espiritu, 2008, p. 42). In particular, the War Brides Act of 1945 allowed Asian wives and children of American servicemen to enter as non-quota immigrants, which revitalized family life for Asians in the United States. In addition, wartime labor shortages and postwar economic prosperity generated unprecedented occupational opportunities not only for American-born Asian men, but also for many American-born Asian women (Espiritu, 2008, p. 42). These social and economic changes pushed more Asian Americans into contact with the larger American society, and granted more economic independence to American-born Asians (Espiritu 2008, p. 42).

While all of the other Asian American groups experienced widespread improvement in their lives, Japanese Americans had a starkly different experience. Immediately after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans faced unprecedented levels of discrimination, leading to rampant incarceration and the still-notorious internment camps. On December 7th, 1941, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) began taking people of Japanese ancestry who had connections to

the Japanese government into custody (Espiritu, 2008, p. 43). Initially, the federal

government differentiated between citizens and non-citizens, but this distinction

gradually faded. On February 19th, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order

9066, which permitted the forcible removal and exclusion of any person deemed

undesirable from designated military areas (Eng, 2001, p. 105). The immediate

detention, relocation, and incarceration of more than 112,000 people of Japanese ancestry

on the Pacific, of which roughly 2/3 were American-born citizens, commenced shortly

thereafter (Eng, 2001, p. 105).

Japanese internment shifted the balance of power in families by threatening

Japanese American male masculinity. Husbands' power over their wives diminished, as

did parents over their children. Until the internment, Issei (first generation Japanese

Americans) men had been the undisputed authority over their wives and children as the

sole breadwinner and decision maker in the family. Now "[Issei men] had no rights, no

home, no control over his own life" (Espiritu, 2008, p. 44). On the other hand, camp life

provided relative benefits to Issei women who had previously led restricted lives of

rearing children and taking care of a household on their own. However, in the camp,

Issei women were freed of domestic responsibilities, which enabled them to cultivate

themselves by taking adult classes, pursuing hobbies, attending religious meetings, and

cultural programs (Espiritu, 2008, p. 45). The War Relocation Authority gave American-

born children power over Issei parents as they privileged American citizenship and

American education. Only Nisei (second generation Japanese Americans) children could

vote and hold office in community council. Salary scales were also based on English

speaking ability and citizenship, so Nisei youth could earn relatively higher wages than

their fathers, further threatening male Issei masculinity (Espiritu, 2008, p. 49). An article

published in the *Springfield Republican* based in Springfield, Massachusetts in 1943

explains that, "There have been arguments and problems between the Nisei and Issei,

chiefly because only citizens were permitted places on the advisory counsel. The vesting

authority and responsibility in the younger Nisei clashed with the Japanese tradition that

the elders should be rulers" (*Springfield Republican*, 1943). Another article published the

same year in *Times-Picayune* in New Orleans, Louisiana even stated that the War

Relocation Authority instituted a program to exempt Nisei from internment: "Last July,

the WRA put in motion a program of permitting Nisei, whose loyalty was beyond

question, to leave the relocation centers and live outside" ("America's First Mass

Evacuation", 1943). The United States clearly favored the Nisei Japanese Americans

over their Issei parents, as the Nisei were thought to be more loyal, trustworthy, and

"American".

By the end of the war in 1945, Japanese Americans had lost much of the

economic ground they had gained over the course of more than a generation. Issei men

and women no longer had their farms, businesses, or financial savings, further eroding

parental authority because Issei men no longer had businesses to hand down to their Nisei

sons (Espiritu, 2008, p. 49).

Post-War to Contemporary Periods

The 15 years after World War II marked a period of largely positive change for all

Asian Americans, including the Japanese. The United States economy emerged as a

leading urban industrial power, generating numerous high paying, semiskilled jobs in the

manufacturing sector. Infrastructure development, the housing boom, an increased

American military presence around the world, and the expanding role of both local and federal governments, all produced a wealth of high wage jobs as well (Espiritu, 2008, p. 52).

Today, despite superior levels of education, Asian American men still receive lower economic returns than White men. In 1990, highly educated Asian American men who worked full time, all year round, earned about 10% less than White men—even taking into account the fact that Asian Americans are much more likely to have graduate degrees (Espiritu, 2008, p. 67). Asian American men are also considerably less likely than White men to hold jobs as an executive, administrator, or manager (Espiritu, 2008, p. 67). By trapping Asian American men into the feminine sphere of serving White men—from taking on non-executive jobs to literally being erased from America's triumphant history of railroad building—American society perpetrates an androgynous, effeminate Asian American male stereotype.

The Ballad of Little Jo

The 1993 Western film, *The Ballad of Little Jo*, inspired by a true story, reinforces a feminized image of Asian males in American mass media and reveals some of the ways in which a stereotype that developed over the course of 150 years persists in popular culture. The film reminds us that Asian men are excluded from Eurocentric notions of masculinity, and thus do not benefit in the same ways from a patriarchal system as White men do. In this film, a White woman has the resources to take fuller advantage of a patriarchal society than an Asian man. Written and directed by Maggie Greenwald, *The Ballad of Little Jo* was nominated for the 1994 Independent Spirit Award for best female lead (Suzy Amis) and best supporting male actor (David Chung). The

film presumably takes place in the "Old West" or "Wild West", dating sometime in the

second half of the 19th century, and taking place somewhere in the Western United States.

The second half of the 19th century, as previously discussed, is marked by a lack of work

for both White and Asian laborers after the completion of the Central Pacific Railroad

and the decline of gold production. Cheaper Chinese labor was favorable to White

workers who demanded higher wages, resulting in White workers heightened animosity

toward Chinese laborers. Chinese laborers were turned away from jobs that they had to

compete with Whites for and were pushed into feminized work, such as as houseboys.

The dilemma of racialized job competition and the consequently female-gendered work

Chinese men were pushed into is taken up in the film.

This Western film focuses on a young woman named Josephine Monoghan who is

expelled from her family and home and decides to dress as a man to protect herself from

the harsh, sexist world. Reinventing herself as "Jo" she begins life at a male dominated

mining camp and takes on a job herding sheep in the mountains. One day in town, Jo

comes across a mob of cowboys who are about to lynch a Chinese laborer for trying to

take "their jobs", a sentiment that is in line with contemporary late 19th century America.

Jo intervenes, and is forced by the men to take the Chinese man, Tinman Wong, back

home with her to the mountains as her personal cook and housekeeper. Tinman quickly

discovers that Jo is a woman, and the two begin a love affair (Berner & Greenwald,

1993).

The relationship between Tinman and Jo is, from beginning to end, overtly

gendered, with Jo taking the masculine place in their relationship and Tinman taking the

feminine. Our introduction to Tinman, as previously noted, comes as a group of White

cowboys are pushing him around while he swings, suspended by a noose, about to be hung. Jo, who enters the scene on a horse, shoots her gun into the air and demands that the men free Tinman. Very much like the famous damsel in distress archetype, the hopeless Tinman is rescued by his equally recognizable knight-in-shining-armor, who happens to be, in this case, a White woman. When Jo takes Tinman home with her, she puts extra effort into asserting her female masculinity, in hopes that Tinman will not discover her secret. She yells at him, fists slamming down on her kitchen table, for not having dinner ready in time, to, which Tinman responds, "Yes, Mr. Jo" submissively (Berner & Greenwald, 1993).

In one scene, Jo wakes up to see Tinman outside her cabin bathing in the lake. This scene establishes Tinman as the passive subject, while Jo fulfills the role of the audience, employing what could be construed as a typical male gaze. The male gaze is a concept coined by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey (1975), referring to the way films depict the world from a masculine point of view. The male gaze consists of three separate gazes including: that of the person behind the camera, of the characters within the representation or film itself, and that of the spectator (Mulvey, 1975). In the context of *The Ballad of Little Jo*, Jo possesses the male gaze because she assumes the role of the gazer, objectifying Tinman by gazing at him like a man would a woman. Tinman is shown with his long unbraided hair stuck wet against his slim, feminine body, looking quite maidenly. The sun illuminates him as though it were a spotlight to focus our attention. Here, much like a woman's traditional role in film, Tinman is depicted from and by an audience, which holds the perspective of a heterosexual man. The camera lingers on his wet body and Tinman is displayed as an erotic object for both Jo and the

spectator who is watching the film. Tinman is merely passive to the active gaze from Jo and the presumably male audience (Berner & Greenwald, 1993).

This reversal of gender roles continues throughout the film, even once Tinman discovers that Jo is a woman. Tinman is portrayed as too weak to build his own shelter, and he fails to carry just one piece of lumber to its place. Jo is forced to take charge of the situation and is shown to be naturally better at manual labor, in contrast to Tinman who is portrayed as inherently better at cooking/cleaning. Tinman ends up passing her nails from below, while Jo stands on a ladder and takes the nails from him, hammering together all of the wood needed to build Tinman's new home for him. Tinman continues to cook and clean for Jo, even after they begin a romantic relationship, while Jo continues to do all of the manual labor around the home, such as skinning animals for all of their warm clothes and blankets. Even near the end of the film, and the end of Tinman's life, Jo cares for Tinman while he is extremely sick and weak until his death.

The Ballad of Little Jo reminds us that due to the exclusion of Asian men from Eurocentric notions of masculinity, not all men benefit equally from a patriarchal system. In this film's case, a White woman may embody masculinity and obtain more male privileges than an Asian man. Thus, *The Ballad of Little Jo* continues to abide by the "double standard of miscegenation" by representing the only type of acceptable miscegenation on screen: the union of a White man and an Asian woman. Although Jo is technically a woman, and Tinman a man, their relationship and roles throughout the film beg to differ (Berner & Greenwald, 1993).

Gay Asian Male Communities

The issues that the gay Asian male community face can be construed as representative of the experiences of Asian American men in general, regardless of their sexuality. Referring back to the Western narratives about the "Orient", which were filled with the complex sexual politics of colonization, early European writings marked the Oriental male as feminine (Said, 1978). Thus, it is argued that gendering the Oriental man as feminine allowed Western homoerotic desires to be disguised within the confines of heterosexuality through the concept of Orientalism (Han, 2006a). In other words, if the sexually attractive Asian man was not really understood to be a real man, then the homosexual desires held by Westerners were not really homosexual, and thusly validated and acceptable.

Today, we see a strong emphasis on masculinity in gay male spaces to the extent that the phrase "no femmes" is popularly used on queer social networking/dating sites to describe one's dating preferences ("No Fats, No Femmes Documentary", n.d.). As a result, Asian men are largely absent from images produced by mainstream gay and lesbian communities (Fung, 2005). When Asian men are present, they are often depicted as passive or overly feminine (Fung, 2005). In hardcore American porn, Asian men are used as vessels to fulfill White male sexual desires (Han, 2006b). White men are at the center of attention, and serve as the target of desire and as the active partner in sex (Han, 2006b). The Asian men on the other hand are utilized as props required for the White male to reach sexual climax. Furthermore, two Asian men starring in gay porn is viewed as analogous to lesbianism, where the porn is constructed by the White, gay, male gaze for White, gay, male gratification (Han 2006b). This construction is comparable to mainstream, "lesbian" porn, which is usually constructed not for a true lesbian audience,

but for the heterosexual male gaze. With regards to his desire for a "real" man (and not

an Asian man), a young gay man told Chong-suk Han, a researcher studying gay Asian

men: "If I wanted to fuck a girl, I would find one" (2006b). Furthermore, gay Asian

Americans are problematically perceived to be more attracted to much older White men

because they want to be taken care of emotionally and financially, tantamount to a

woman's place in a traditional relationship (Han, 2006a). A Filipino gay male remarks

that he stopped going to "Asian and Friends" parties in New York, run by a board of old

White men, which cater to newly arrived Asians.

Clearly, the gendering of Asian men, which has a long history in Western

narratives of Orientalism, still affect the ways in which Asian men are portrayed, and the

ways in which Asian men identify themselves. Asian men are deemed too feminine to be

attractive to the majority of White gay men, who put more value and emphasis on

hegemonic notions of masculinity in a potential partner. This distinction also

encompasses heterosexual relationships, in which Asian men are deemed too feminine for

women, who similarly seek hegemonic notions of masculinity, hence low rates in Asian

American male interracial marriages overall.

M. Butterfly

M. Butterfly, the 1993 romantic drama directed by David Croneberg is a prime

example of how the feminization of Asian men is utilized to make a homosexual

relationship more acceptable. The film, inspired by Giacomo Puccini's opera *Madame*

Butterfly, attempts to break down the binary stereotypes in the Orientalist fantasy of the

Oriental female and the Western male. Unsuccessfully, in the end, the film only

perpetuates this very mold by incorporating Asian men into the traditional Oriental

female role. *M. Butterfly* concerns Rene Gallimard, a French diplomat assigned to

Beijing in the 1960's. He begins a relationship with a Chinese opera performer, Song

Liling, that lasts for over 20 years. All the while, Gallimard is apparently (or willfully)

unaware of the fact that Liling is a man, spying on him for the Chinese government.

Eventually Gallimard is tried for treason, and is forced to publically face the truth about

his relationship. Faced with the unbearable reality that Liling is a man, and the pursuant

public humiliation, Gallimard reenacts the death of Butterfly in the famous Opera

Madame Butterfly and kills himself while wearing a traditionally Japanese female

kimono and Geisha makeup (Martinelli & Croneberg, 1993).

Gallimard's oversight about Liling's anatomy is reconcilable when understood

through the lens of a closeted or self-denying homosexuality. Over the course of a 20-

year intimate relationship, it is hard to believe that Gallimard was totally ignorant of the

fact that Liling was a man. Instead, by consciously denying that Liling had a penis,

Gallimard could cover up his shameful homosexual desire for the Asian male body.

David L. Eng, a scholar who brings together the fields of Asian American studies and

psychoanalytic theory, argues that this concept of "racial castration" feminizes Asian men

in order to maintain a racist and heterosexist structure upon which colonial order depends

(Eng, 2001). By denying Liling a penis, Gallimard symbolically castrates the Asian

male, placing him in a position of lesser masculinity more akin to femininity. This

position of femininity is one attributed to the Orient—regardless of gender—which helps

justify Western colonization. For if the East is backwards, inferior, and feminine,

European colonization can be rationalized as a sort of moral imperative (Martinelli &

Croneberg, 1993).

Gallimard's willingness to accept Liling as a woman is an extension of his perceptions of Asian men as feminized creatures. Gallimard overtly stereotypes Asian women as passive, subservient, and modest throughout the movie, which allows for Liling to mask his true gender by acting the part. Even after Liling comes out as a man to Gallimard, Liling does not radically change his appearance or behavior as one might typically do after removing such a disguise. Instead, Liling completely undresses in front of Gallimard in their small holding cell, and proceeds to kneel in front of a fully clothed Gallimard, begging Gallimard to love him. Liling desperately pleads Gallimard to love him, claiming that "I am your Butterfly" while crying. His requests are repeatedly rejected by Gallimard, who seems to hold all the power in this scene. Here we see the film maintain a position of femininity in both Liling as a woman and Liling as a man. The film therefore posits that Liling was not "acting" this whole time, but was innately feminine and therefore inclined to subordination (Martinelli & Croneberg, 1993).

Once it becomes public that Liling is a man, Gallimard rejects Liling by yelling, "get away from me!" In the end, we see Gallimard assume the role of Butterfly in the famous opera *Madame Butterfly* by dressing in a traditional Japanese female kimono and committing suicide in front of the whole prison he is detained in. In doing so, he "straightens", or forces heterosexuality onto his relationship with the exposed Chinese man by publically assuming the role of a woman. This act of reversing his gender to match that of his exposed lover allows Gallimard to die within the confines of a heterosexual relationship. Therefore, we see Gallimard justify his homosexual relationship with Liling in two ways: privately, before anyone else knew of their relationship, Gallimard racially castrates Liling to disguise his relationship within the

confines of heterosexuality through the concept of Orientalism. Gallimard justifies his homosexual relationship with Liling after Liling's gender was discovered by the public by putting himself in the position of an iconic woman, and once again, makes his relationship with Liling heterosexual, and thus acceptable. *M. Butterfly* does not deconstruct the Orientalist fantasy of the Oriental female and the Western male, but instead perpetrates these harmful, binary stereotypes by incorporating the Asian male into the feminine Oriental female sphere (Martinelli & Croneberg, 1993).

Conclusion

Asian American men are, and have been, feminized before they even set foot in the United States. The primary and generative vector of this feminization is the concept of Orientalism, which aligned the East with the feminine, and the West with being masculine. Since their first arrival in the 1840's, Asian men have continued to be emasculated and feminized through various media, such as newspaper articles, which depicted them as having feminine queues, and films, which rob Asian men of their masculinity and agency. In light of these realities it is reasonable to assume that this gendering of the Asian male body has been, and continues to be, a significant factor in low interracial marriage rates among Asian men when compared to their female counterparts. Femininity is sought after and valued only in heterosexual women, but not men, thus making Asian men highly undesirable to potential partners. Even in homosexual relations, as we have learned, Asian men are devalued for lacking masculinity. This effort to make Asian men demasculinized and "safe" in American culture serves and supports White male heterosexuality through possession and exploitation of Asian men and women.

Chapter Two: The Feminization of Asian American Women

Introduction

Asian American women have a unique history in the United States, differing in manifold ways from their Asian American male counterparts. This history, in part, has had a large role in the hyper-feminization of Asian American women, plausibly leading to high rates of interracial marriages between Asian-American women and White men, especially when compared to the number of marriages between Asian American *men* and White women.

Asian American women are hyper-feminized before they enter the United States, through laws such as the Page Law in 1875, that assumed their sexual promiscuity and suspected all Chinese women of being prostitutes. Following the end of World War II (1945), many immigration bans targeted at women were abolished, and Asian American women began immigrating in droves to the United States. Asian American racial status also changed in the postwar period, and the pairing of White men with Japanese women became hugely common after American troops occupied a defeated Japan. This prevalent pairing initiated powerful political ramifications; Japanese War Brides were seen as more complacent than their White female counterparts, hence embodying the ideal of passive femininity. This led to a proliferation of sexist stereotypes of Asian American women in the media; most notably the passive character of Butterfly in *Madame Butterfly* the Opera, first performed in 1904, as well as the image of the submissive prostitute, which was popularized by the character Suzie Wong in the 1960 film, *The World of Suzie Wong*. Today, we can still see these hyper-feminine stereotypes of the War Bride or Chinese Prostitute reincarnated in the demand for Asian mail order

bride websites. The hyper-feminization of Asian women sustains hegemonic, White

male heterosexual power by permitting the exploitation of Asian women, while

simultaneously granting White women the racial privilege of exemplifying the ideal of

femininity.

Female Asian Immigration to the United States

In 1875, Congress passed the Page Law, which forbid entry of Chinese prostitutes

into the United States. This law presupposed that all Chinese women were prostitutes,

thus hugely reducing the influx of Chinese women into the United States. Between 1875

and 1882, only 1,340 Chinese women entered the United States compared to over

100,000 Chinese men. The status of Chinese women in the United States was further

jeopardized by the 1903, 1907, and 1917 immigration laws, as each statute targeted

Chinese women suspected of being prostitutes (which, again, meant nearly all Chinese

women) for deportation. The Asian American scholar, Yen Le Espiritu, states, "No

Chinese woman, regardless of her social standing, was safe from harassment" (Espiritu,

2008, p. 18). These laws implied all Chinese women were prostitutes, deeming Chinese

women to be inherently hypersexual and hyper-feminine, existing only to serve and

please men. This effort to prevent female Asian immigrants was in part due to the needs

of the American capitalist economy at the time, which was interested in Asian male

laborers, but not their families. This practice ensured greater profitability from Asian

male labor and decreased the strain on the American economy by eliminating the many

expenses of feeding, clothing, and educating the Asian male worker's dependents (Eng,

2001, p. 61).

Unlike the immigration flow of previous eras, the Asian immigration patterns during the postwar period (1946-1965) were overwhelmingly female. The 1946 Act permitted Asian spouses of those with American citizenship to bypass the restrictive immigration quotas by entering as "non-quota immigrants" (Espiritu, 2008, p. 54). The War Brides Act of 1945, a principal factor in demographic shifts within the United States, granted veterans of Asian ancestry a three-year window to marry in Asia and bring their brides back to the United States. Both Acts drastically changed the previously male dominated bachelor societies (Espiritu, 2008, p. 54). Between 1945 and 1953, over 12,000 Chinese immigrants entered the United States, of which 89% were female (Espiritu, 2008, p. 55). This pattern continued throughout the 1950's as women constituted 50% to 90% of Chinese emigrants into the United States (Espiritu, 2008, p. 55).

Although Asian men were hopeful for their new, now more gender balanced societies, the previously male dominated communities were not well prepared for the enormous flood of female and child immigrants. The growing problems of substandard housing, underemployment, poor health conditions, and inadequate social services were aggravated by the arrival of women and children. With meager incomes, Asian American men had difficulties providing for their new families (Espiritu, 2008, p. 56). Thus, a majority of post World War II wives were disillusioned and disappointed with their new lives in the United States, and by extension, with their Asian American husbands who had let them down. Wives were disappointed with their husband's menial jobs as laundryman, cooks, and servants, as well as the lack of money that these job

brought to their struggling families, who took a chance and left everything they knew at home for a promise of a brighter future in the United States (Espiritu, 2008, p. 57).

There was a marked difference in the marriage patterns of Chinese War Brides, when compared to the habits of Japanese, Korean and Filipino wives, who almost exclusively married non-Asian men. Most of these women entered the United States not under the War Brides Act, but as spouses of American citizens, who could be considered non-quota immigrants (Espiritu, 2008, p. 56). This was particularly prominent among Japanese women, as American soldiers had the heightened opportunity to interact with Japanese women during their occupation of Japan at the end of World War II (Pascoe, 2009). During the 1950's, 80% of more than 45,000 Japanese immigrants were women, who were almost all wives of American servicemen stationed in postwar Japan (Espiritu, 2008, p. 56). Similarly, between 1950 and 1964, almost 40% of the 15,000 Korean immigrants came as G.I. wives; and nearly all of the 16,000 Filipinas who entered the United States in the postwar years entered as the wives of servicemen (Koshy, 2004, p. 11). These pairings, especially among Japanese War Brides, contained powerful political undertones, where War Brides were understood to be naturally compliant and sexually erotic spouses who embodied the ideal of good wifely behavior and femininity (Pascoe, 2009).

The real relationships and the cultural representations of the relationships between White servicemen and Japanese wives cannot be understood without the concept of Orientalism (Said, 1978). Because these unions were formed in the wake of Japan's defeat at the hands of the Americans, catastrophically capped-off by the horrors of nuclear warfare, the relationship's balance of power was intrinsically skewed in favor of

the American male. The relationships between Japanese War Brides and American soldiers allowed for Orientalist ideas of the feminine and inferior Japan and the masculine and imperialistic America to be played out in marriage (Said, 1978). Extraterritorial desire was key in forming the West's attraction to the Oriental woman, thus predicating their relationship on distance, and in turn, excluding Oriental women from the American nation. Orientalism relies on extraterritoriality as it inscribes a role of domination over an exotic "other world" that can be acquired and consumed. This reliance is typified by various examples from the media of the time.

The *Springfield Union* published an interview with a Japanese War Bride in 1954, who reportedly states, "Values of obedience, filial love, chastity and humility are instilled in every Japanese girl…many citizens of Japan prayed for an American victory" ("Japanese War Bride Speaks", 1954). The former part of the quote emphasizes Japanese women's embodiment of the ideal of good wifely behavior through their innate compliance and eroticism. The latter part of the quote, in reference to World War II, perpetuates the Orientalist idea that the East willingly consents to domination by the West. The popular relationships between Japanese women and American soldiers allowed White American men to reinforce their authority over their wives at a time when White feminism was threatening the traditional, patriarchal, marital power relationship.

Asian women were idealized to be more innately feminine than their "modern emancipated western sisters", as devoted wives, dependent on their husbands, and restricted to the domestic sphere (Espiritu, 2008, p. 113). In 1955, the *Springfield Union* published an interview with a Hollywood movie cast on the nature of Japanese women. One of the White, American male cast members stated, "I think Japanese women are

appealing because they aren't in competition with men…Here the women are masculinized. But in Japan they are completely feminine and are happy that way" ("Japanese Actress Explains Women's Role in the East", 1955). A Japanese woman from the cast is quoted in agreement saying, "Japanese women can now vote, divorce more easily and enjoy other privileges they didn't know before the occupation. But they still consider pleasing the males their prime duty in life" ("Japanese Actress Explains Women's Role in the East", 1955). In pitting Asian women against the threat of emerging feminist movements, it sent out a message to White feminists and possible White feminists that if they wanted to attain a husband someday, they would have to return to this idealized feminine nature.

Frank Kelly and Cornelius Ryan, American journalists reporting on Japan during the Occupation, reported that men were "swept off their feet by the deference and obedience of servile Japanese women", which made them feel that a Japanese woman's heart was "twice as big as those of her American Sisters" (Shibusawa 2006, pp. 39-42). If White feminists were not going to return to this idealized feminine nature, American pop culture made it clear that Asian American women will merely take the place of White women in marrying White men. John La Cerda, another journalist covering Japan during the Occupation, quoted an American soldier saying, "The American girls could take a lesson in respect from these people over here", with "these people" in reference to Japanese women (Shibusawa 2006, p. 42).

Madame Butterfly

The idea of Asian American hyper-feminization is reinforced and perpetrated in and by various art forms such as literature, film, television and theatre. Giacomo

Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly* provides a salient example of one such art form,

especially because it has been adapted, since premiering in 1904, for the cinema,

television, a musical album version, an animation version, and most recently in 2013, a

musical drama version. A review published in Portland, Oregon, in the *Oregonion* in

1908 on Puccini's 1904 premier in Milan, Italy states, "It was greeted…with whistling,

shrilling on house keys, grunting, roaring, bellowing and laughing" ("Musical Giants of

the Present Day", 1908). The article goes on to state that, "It has triumphed everywhere

in Europe, and become a prime favorite here" ("Musical Giants of the Present Day",

1908). *Madame Butterfly* has remained a staple among opera companies all over the

world, and thus plays a large role in continuing to expose the world to an image of an

inferior, sexually exotic Asian American hyper-femininity. It was so culturally

prominent that David Henry Hwang wrote a deconstructivist adaptation of *Madame

Butterfly* (which was previously discussed in Chapter 1: *M. Butterfly*) to counter the

Oriental myths he felt it perpetuated.

Puccinni's opera revised David Belasco's stage production from 1900, which was

adapted from John Luther Long's short story by the same name (*Madame Butterfly*).

Long's 1898 short story was the first American incarnation of a White, Asian interracial

romance that originated from Pierre Loti's popular travelogue novel from 1887 (Koshy,

2005, p. 29). Although Loti's novel was based on his own experiences in Japan as a

French businessman, much of it was told through the filter of his own biases and

preconceptions of Japan, which were embedded in late 19th century imperialist European

thinking (Koshy, 2005). Thus, Puccini's opera, *Madame Butterfly,* which can be traced

back to Loti's work (imbued with Orientalist ideas of the feminine Japan and the masculine West) resurrects an enduring Orientalist narrative.

I chose to watch *Madame Butterfly,* the 1995 film directed by Frédéric Mitterrand, starring Ying Huang as Cio-Cio-San/Butterfly and Richard Troxell as Pinkerton. Although this version of the narrative is released 91 years after Puccinni's opera, the storyline is essentially identical to that of the original. The numerous other productions remain essentially unaltered in terms of presentation, making this 1995 film just one example of a performance of this particular cultural form. The central narrative goes basically as follows: an American Naval officer named Pinkerton rents a house in Nagasaki, Japan for himself and his fifteen-year-old fiancé "Butterfly," or Cio-Cio-san, which is her real name (and the Japanese word for butterfly). Pinkerton marries Butterfly with the intent to leave her once he finds a suitable American wife. Pinkerton leaves Japan shortly after their wedding and Butterfly loyally waits for him for three years and eventually reveals that she has given birth to his son during this time. When Pinkerton finally returns, he brings with him his new American wife, Kate, who intends to take and raise the child. The heartbreak is too much for Butterfly, and in the end she kills herself (Mitterrand, 1995).

The film exemplifies the stereotype of ideal passivity maintained by Japanese War Brides during post World War II America. We can see Orientalist ideas of the feminine and inferior Japan, embodied by Butterfly's character versus the masculine and imperialistic Pinkerton, who represents the United States. These themes manifest most clearly in the scene preceding Pinkerton and Butterfly's wedding, while Pinkerton is talking to the American Consul, Sharpless. In the scene, Pinkerton claims Butterfly "has

enchanted me with her innocent charms. She's as fragile as blown glass, so tiny and dainty, like a figure on a painted screen…and like a butterfly flutters away…I get a wild urge to chase her even at the risk of snapping her wings". Pinkerton chooses his words wisely, highlighting Butterfly's passive traits, "innocent" "fragile" "tiny" and "dainty", all terms to describe a helpless dependent, or an ideal wife in the United States during post World War II America. Pinkerton expresses that he wants to pursue Butterfly, even though pursuing her may mean that he must "snap her wings", effectively cutting her off from the rest of the world, taking her freedom. Of course, "snapping her wings" is not a real concern for Pinkerton, as he does just this in marrying her (Mitterrand, 1995).

When Butterfly meets Pinkerton for the first time, she claims, "I am the happiest girl in Japan—no in the world". This blind idealization of Pinkerton, and thus the Western world, alludes to the glorification of imperialism, perpetuating the myth that the East (Butterfly) willingly consents to colonization by the West (Pinkerton). Said argues, "Women are usually the creatures of a male power fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing," a sentiment easily realized during Butterfly and Pinkerton's first conversation (1978, p. 207). When Butterfly solemnly describes the humiliations of taking a job as a Geisha to escape poverty, Pinkerton merely laughs and blurts to Sharpless, "she's like a porcelain doll", proving he is by no means paying attention to what she is saying. Like any good man (or mainstream media outlet), Pinkerton only cares about the image of Butterfly that he has created for himself to consume and believe in. As previously noted, Orientalism is not concerned with the genuine study of Eastern cultures but is merely a method to affirm and excuse colonial rule. In parallel, Pinkerton could care less about Butterfly's

character and utilizes her to assert and validate his superiority and domination (Mitterrand, 1995).

Butterfly's unidimensional character fulfills the stereotypical expectations of the inferior, Oriental, sexually exotic Japanese wife throughout the opera. She is shown to quickly renounce anything in her culture that Pinkerton doesn't like or finds to be too different from his conception of normal. While Butterfly is showing Pinkerton the small pouch of her belongings that she has brought to their new home, Pinkerton makes a slight comment about her makeup, to which she responds promptly by saying, "you don't like it, then away with it". Butterfly also gives up her ancestral religion, converting to Christianity in hopes to further please her new husband. She goes so far as to, "try to forget [her] people". Pinkerton and Butterfly's relationship embodies the skewed power dynamic between Japanese War Brides and American soldiers after World War II. During their wedding, we see Butterfly's Uncle, Bonze, crashing the wedding to guilt Butterfly for renouncing their ancestral religion. At this point, Pinkerton yells, "I'll have no hocus pocus in my house"—demeaning and exoticizing Japanese culture and religion by relating it to frivolous trickery. Butterfly also compares herself to an infant by suggesting to Pinkerton, "love me with a tiny love like you would a baby". This willful infantalization further promotes a picture of Asian Americans as inferior, docile, and hyper-feminine (Mitterrand, 1995).

Contrary to the idea that Asian women were idealized to embody ideal wifely character compared to their "modern emancipated western sisters", *Madame Butterfly* depicts a world in which Asian women are only a placeholder or a "pretty little plaything" in the words of Pinkerton. The film shows that regardless of the temptation of

Asian hyper-femininity, White men will always choose to settle down with a White woman. In the beginning of the film, Pinkerton extolls the looseness of Japanese marriage contracts, as they provide him with the option to back out of the marriage at any point and marry a suitable White woman. This highlights the ways in which Asian women are rendered too feminine and exotic to make a lifelong commitment to, while White women are, by contrast, accorded the racial privilege of embodying the ideal balance of femininity (Mitterrand, 1995).

The continued appeal of this story, as evidenced by its enduring status in popular culture, is proof of America's persisting interest in perceiving Asia and Asians through an Orientalist filter. In an article titled, "They're Bringing Home Japanese Wives", published in 1946 in *The Saturday Evening Post*—one of the most widely circulated and influential magazines for the American middle class during the time—refers to the six thousand Japanese War Brides who entered the US as "little Madame Butterflys" (Smith & Worden). The countless number of references to, and productions of, *Madame Butterfly* proves that the West is not interested in truly seeing Asia as it is, but in seeing it as they wish it to be, through the perspective and fantasy of White, colonialists. For Asian women, this means reducing Asian women to a helpless feminine victim. Edward Said (1974) advises that:

> We need not look for correspondence between the language used to depict the
>
> Orient and the Orient itself, not so much because the language is inaccurate but
>
> because it is not even trying to be accurate. What it is trying to do…is at one and
>
> the same time to characterize the Orient as alien and to incorporate it

schematically on a theatrical stage whose audience, manager, and actors are *for*

Europe, and only for Europe (p.71-72).

The World of Suzie Wong

The 1960 film, *The World of Suzie Wong,* directed by Richard Quine, helped

popularize the image of the sexy, submissive Asian American female prostitute. The film

was well received, as Nancy Kwan, the protagonist, was nominated for the Golden Globe

Award for Best Actress, and George Duning, the film's composer, was nominated for the

Golden Globe Award for Best Original Score. Released in 1960, *The World of Suzie*

Wong came out of the postwar period (1946-1965) that was marked by overwhelmingly

female Asian immigration patterns and the conception of a naturally compliant and

sexually erotic Asian War Bride. The film capitalizes on the popular postwar sentiment

that Asian women were more innately feminine than their "modern emancipated western

sisters". The 1960's is also often perceived today as a period of profound societal

change, especially with regards to sexual attitudes at the time. Sex became more socially

acceptable outside the previously strict boundaries of heterosexual marriage. From the

introduction of the birth control pill to the debut of the first adult erotic film, the 'Sexual

Revolution', as this period is often termed, laid the groundwork for *The World of Suzie*

Wong, as the film deals with topics such as prostitution and interracial intimacy in a

forthright, heretofore unprecedented, manner.

The plot revolves around a White American architect, Robert Lomax, who moves

to Hong Kong to pursue his dreams of being an artist. There, he meets Suzie Wong at his

run-down hotel. Robert, and the audience, soon find out that Suzie is a highly sought

after prostitute in the area. Robert asks Suzie to be his model and inspiration for his

paintings, and they consequently initiate a romantic relationship. *The World of Suzie Wong,* much like its spiritual predecessor, *Madame Butterfly,* portrays a helpless, submissive, exotic image of Asian American women, this time manifested in a more contemporary romantic drama (Stark & Quine, 1960).

Suzie's femininity is portrayed in two conflicting ways throughout the film. Firstly, Suzie is identified as excessively hyper-feminine, and thus an unsuitable wife when compared to White women (much like in *Madame Butterfly*). In addition, Suzie embodies an ideal hyper-femininity compared to White women. Ben, a White American businessman traveling in Hong Kong, begins a relationship with Suzie; this relationship represents Suzie's attempt to make Robert jealous. During this relationship, Ben constantly assures Suzie that he is planning on divorcing his White wife, with whom he is feuding. Suzie is pleased to hear this, but Ben never ends up divorcing his wife, and furthermore, we learn he is deceiving Suzie the whole time. Ben begs Robert to tell Suzie that he no longer wishes to be in a relationship with her since he has amended the issues with his wife. In this case, Suzie is taken advantage of for her hyper-sexuality and hyper-femininity, and is manipulated to believe she will soon become a wife to a man who has no intention of leaving his virtuous, White partner.

On the other hand, Suzie possesses a more ideal femininity when compared to Robert's White female admirer, Kay O'Neil. Kay is portrayed as an aggressive, scheming White woman, who manipulates her rich father into bankrolling Robert's artistic career in order to win Robert's love. A wealthy woman, Kay works as her father's secretary, and is deemed unattractive because she occupies a higher social status than Robert; she even offers to give him money during his financial difficulties (which

offends Robert's manly sensibilities). In contrast to Kay, Suzie is portrayed as a

submissive character, who consistently prioritizes Robert's desires over her own. Near

the end of the film, Suzie even states, "But I am not important, you are important,"

referring to Robert's dreams of being an artist, and persuading him to not give up his

hopes of fame. In *The World of Suzie Wong,* the theme (portrayed earlier in *Madame*

Butterfly) of Asian women's ineligibility for wifehood is prominent. But,

simultaneously, Asian women fulfill an ideal of femininity that White women should

return to. Shifting from being a sexual commodity to possessing sexual capital, Asian

American women move from being unmarrigeable to more marriageable. But, even as a

"sexual model minority" Asian women cannot displace White women, whose appeal is

reinforced by racial privilege and the power of embodying the norm (Koshy 2004).

Although Asian women cannot displace White women, they come to represent a

powerful, seductive form of femininity (Koshy, 2004). Hence, Asian women are cast as

hyper-feminine, which either leads to an unsuitable hyper-sexuality or a suitable hyper-

subservient femininity (Stark & Quine, 1960).

     The World of Suzie Wong also depicts the power relations between an imperialist,

White America, and an inferior, Oriental Asia. In one scene, Robert angrily rips off

Suzie's new Western style clothes that Ben purchases for her, calling her a "cheap

European Streetwalker". Compared to the outfits Suzie dons in the rest of the movie, this

one is no different in terms of what it reveals. The only thing that sets this outfit apart

from everything else she wears in the film is its distinctive Western style. Robert only

sees Suzie as representative of her exotic, Chinese, native culture, which is a figment of

Robert's manufactured projection, as we see he cannot handle her dressing in a non-

traditional manner. Again, Robert and the Western world's desire for the Oriental

woman is produced as a form of extraterritorial desire, on the foundational condition of

belonging to another world, and thus excluding Asian women from the American nation

as perpetual foreigners (Koshy, 2004, p. 71). In a subsequent scene, he presents Suzie

with a traditional Chinese costume that he claims was once worn by an "empress". He

declares that painting Suzie in this robe will make him famous because depicting

traditional Chinese culture is more marketable. Much like Pinkerton's denial of

Butterfly's autonomy and humanity, Robert is only interested in Suzie on account of his

ridiculous and abhorrent conception of her as a subservient Oriental, one who is put on

this earth solely for his consumption and ownership (Stark & Quine, 1960).

Suzie is overtly portrayed as a hypersexual, childlike woman in need of rescue.

Her stilted speech reduces her to mere caricature, as is her constant struggle to prove her

subservience to Robert. In one scene, Suzie is violently attacked by a sailor whom she

refuses to have sex with. She enters the bar where all of her friends are congregated, and

brags to the crowd that Robert has beaten her up. She tells her friends that due to his

jealously, he beat her, to which all of her girlfriends begin praising her and expressing

envy of her and her relationship with Robert. Between the 60 years that separate the

premier of the opera *Madame Butterfly* with the debut of the film *The World of Suzie

Wong,* not much has changed in the portrayal of Asian American female femininity

(Stark & Quine, 1960).

Asian Mail Order Bride Websites

Today, these stereotypes of the War Bride and Chinese Prostitute have

resurfaced in the demand for Asian mail order bride websites. These mail order bride

websites are a product of an increasingly globalized world, made possible by advances in

telecommunication. The internet, arguably one of the most important infrastructures for

telecommunication, has been a major factor in globalization and the rise of mail order

bride websites. These sites have proliferated in cyberspace, offering brides of all

nationalities to a largely Western audience, leading to new forms of female oppression.

The mail order bride business has become a multimillion-dollar global industry, and in

1999, there were over 200 mail order bride agencies operating in the United States

(Ritzer, 2011). Between roughly 4,000 and 6,000 women are brought to the United

States each year by mail order bride agencies (Ritzer, 2011).

From just a cursory Google search for "Asian mail order bride websites" there

were over 10 pages worth of websites to browse through. I took a closer look at the first

page of results, which gave me enough evidence that degrading stereotypes of Asian

female femininity are alive and well today. The first site called "Asiandate.com"

featured, on its homepage, a large picture of a Vietnamese woman with the caption,

"explore the most beautiful women". This quote, in and of itself, perpetrates the myth

that Asian women are somehow more beautiful, more feminine, and more wifely than

any other race or ethnicity. The second result, "Japancupid.com", advertised the

organization's ability to help users, "meet Japanese singles." At first blush, this site

seemed gender neutral, because of the usage of "singles", but, like "Asiandate.com", the

homepage featured an Asian woman prominently, erasing any doubt that the website was

catered toward heterosexual Asian women in anyway. "China-women-dating.com" was

similar to the first two websites, as it presented itself with a large picture of a Chinese

woman on the front page, and an unending slideshow of different Chinese women at the bottom of the page to browse through.

"Rosebrides.com/Asian-brides" attempted to be more self-aware in its description, but ended up perpetuating the same old stereotypes. They state, "Though culture and tradition do tend to dictate that an Asian woman is more soft-spoken and devoted to family and perhaps even more subservient to a male head of household, there are obviously many exceptions…Remember that with an Asian Bride you can also spend your life with a thoroughly modern and ambitious person who just so happens to also be stunningly beautiful". This quote reveals, yet again, a binary in which modern and ambitious women are set in contrast with "stunningly beautiful" women. The website implies that to have personal independence and career success is not compatible with being feminine and beautiful. It evokes the attempt to pit Asian women against White women, therefore affirming White male identity in the face of a potentially destabilizing White feminist movement. "Internationallovescout.com/gallery/Asian" also protects White male identity against the threat of the emerging feminist movement by warning White women to return to the feminine sphere if they want to marry a man. The website states, "Of course, life is complicated…but the overwhelming majority of Asian women really want to be a great wife in a way that is a little unusual in the West today".

"Chinesewifes.com" was in no way subtle in its illustration of Chinese and Asian women as embodying the ideal of good wifely behavior, and thus femininity, similar to the way Japanese War Brides were portrayed in the 1940's and 50's after WWII. Their website states, "are you looking for the bride of your dreams? You are kindly recommended for Chinese brides, who are much more soft, tender, thoughtful, lovely and

romantic"—A quote that may as well be attributed to Pinkerton. The website continues

with, "In one word, Chinese wives are more lovely, money saving, capable, family

orientated and look much younger than western women at the same age". Asian women

are repeatedly set in contrast to Western women, pitting them against each other for the

advantage of White men.

Conclusion

Continually cast as sexually available, Asian women become just another

possession of White men. In most films and television, interracial sexuality always

occurs between White men and Asian women. Today, virtually all major metropolitan

markets across the United States have at least one Asian American female newscaster,

while there is a nearly total absence of Asian men (Espiritu, 2008, p. 95). With the

knowledge that hiring establishments are White male dominated, we can draw the

conclusion that the American public is more comfortable seeing a White male sitting next

to a minority female on TV than the other way around. I was curious to see if Googling,

"Asian dating websites" would produce results that reflected more gender neutral dating

sites with both Asian women and Asian men represented, but—unsurprisingly—the

outcomes were almost identical to my initial results for Googling "Asian mail order *bride*

websites"—proving that when talking about Asian interracial sexuality, it is always about

Asian women and White men.

These patterns have serious and tangible ramifications for the Asian American

female experience in the United States. Asian American women are more likely to

remain marginalized in the workplace, to encounter a 'glass ceiling,' and to earn less than

White men, Asian American men, and White women with comparable educational

backgrounds (Espiritu, 2008, p. 68). Due to the fact that Asian women are marginalized

by gender and race, interracial romance lures women with the promise of the American

dream (Espiritu 2008, p. 96). Kumiko Nemoto, a researcher studying relationships

between Asian American women and White men found that Asian American women

formed relationships with White men for various reasons, including: to gain middle class

status, material security, or an idea of an "egalitarian knighthood" (2006). The concept

of "egalitarian knighthood" is that if an Asian woman is able to secure a marriage with an

appropriate White man, she will be able to resist ethnic patriarchy and realize her ideal

independent womanhood (Nemoto, 2006). Karen Pyke and Denize Johnson, researchers

studying female Asian American femininity, found that their female Asian respondents

all had White employers and coworkers who expected them to be more passive and

deferential than their other employees (2003). These racial expectations exerted pressure

on women's gender performances (Pyke & Johnson, 2003). Some went to great lengths

to defy racial assumptions and be accepted into White dominated social groups, which

meant engaging in White standards of femininity by being outspoken and socially

gregarious. Others felt pressure to comply with caricatured notions of Asian femininity

(Pyke & Johnson, 2003).

As can be seen in the evidence presented, Asian American women have a

complicated relationship to interracial marriage, and expressions of their own femininity.

Rightly so, as American history and popular culture have both hyper-feminized Asian

American women, forcing Asian American women into roles of passive War Brides,

hypersexual prostitutes, and perpetually available and willing mail order brides. For the

same reasons that Asian men are emasculated, Asian women are sexualized to "define the

white man's virility and the white man's superiority" (Espiritu, 2008, p. 93).

Chapter Three: The Masculinization of Black Men

Introduction

The construction of Black men as hyper-masculine can be traced back to

emancipation (1860's) in the United States, when the need to retain White supremacy

was at its peak (Hodes, 1997). During this period, Whites focused on the taboo of sex

between White women and Black men with a renewed urgency. During this time, an

image of the "Black Male Rapist" was constructed in order to justify the continued

separation between Blacks and Whites after the Civil War (Hodes, 1997). The 1915 film,

Birth of a Nation, presents a salient example of a film that participated in the perpetuation

and creation of the image of the "Black Male Rapist," partly on account of its widespread

commercial success. Although the White mob violence celebrated in *Birth of a Nation* is

uniformly decried today, White violence towards Black male bodies is perpetuated in

somewhat dissonant, but still parallel ways. The image of a dangerous Black male is now

invoked to legitimize a criminal justice system that disproportionately penalizes Black

men, most notably in the crack cocaine crisis of the 80's (Covington, 2010).

Blaxploitation films from the 70's, such as *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song,* that

attempt to reclaim Black male agency and sexuality end up being overtaken by their

superficial representation of violence and hypersexuality. Contemporary films such as

Crash and *Monsters Ball,* which depict a post-racial, color-blind America, only serve to

reify old stereotypes of dangerous Black men who need to be controlled. Today, Black

men marry interracially at much higher rates than their Black female counterparts, a

phenomenon caused in part by the history of Black men being constructed as hyper-

masculine. This construction allows for our contemporary, White supremacist,

patriarchal society to thrive, while disempowering and disenfranchising Black men.

The Postbellum Period

The separation of Blacks and Whites was essential to Southern Whites determined

to retain supremacy after the Civil War. One of the primary methods of maintaining this

supremacy was to enforce the taboo of sex between White women and Black men with a

new emphasis (Hodes, 1997). The coupling of White women and Black men was

particularly problematic during American slavery because in the Antebellum South, a

child's legal status as slave or free was contingent upon the mother's status: If your

mother was free, you were free; if your mother was a slave, you were a slave (Hodes,

1997).   Thus, sex (and procreation) between White women and Black men threatened

White hegemony and racial slavery more than sex between White men and Black women.

In the Postbellum period, this taboo was taken to the next level, and an image of a

rapacious Black male, or the "Black Male Rapist" was created in order to justify the mass

lynchings that Whites used to terrorize Black men into subservience (Benson, 2012).

Due to the long-held association between rape and hypermasculinity in American

culture, the construction of the "Black Male Rapist" is easily apprehended as a hyper-

masculinization of Black men. Men are trained, in our culture, to be in control, self-

reliant, aggressive, homophobic, and inherently superior to women. When these ideas of

masculinity manifest into action, it isn't difficult to see how hypermasculinity is

conducive to violence, whether it be physical violence or sexual violence. bell hooks

asserts in her book, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*, "Patriarchal

masculinity teaches males to be pathologically narcissistic, infantile, and psychologically

dependent for self-definition on the privileges (however relative) that they receive from having been born male" (2004a, p. 117). Men are taught from a young age that by subscribing to the hegemonic patriarchal order they are rewarded with the right to dominate women (hooks, 2004a).

Rape has been linked to hypermasculinity since the Victorian era (1837-1901) when, in differentiating roles between men and women, it was declared that men, unlike "naturally good" women, were plagued by powerful gusts of sinful sexual desires (Bederman, 2008, p. 48). This passion, or predisposition to rape, was considered to be both the source of men's greatest danger and men's greatest power (Bederman, 2008, p. 48). However, it was believed that as men—specifically White men—evolved and became more civilized, their innate savagery and inclination to rape would dampen (Bederman, 2008, p. 161). Instead of his previous sinful sexual desires and passions, he developed chivalry toward women (Bederman, 2008, p. 161). Although this new masculine development was the case for White men, Black men were closely associated with animals and savagery, thus excluded from the developing, civilized world (Bederman, 2008, p. 49). As a result, Black men represented primitive masculinity in its purest most primal form: rape (Bederman, 2008, p. 49).

An article published in 1906 in the *Colorado Springs Gazette*, a newspaper self-described as "The oldest republican daily newspaper in Colorado", titled, "The 'Bad Nigger'" postulated that conflicts between Whites and Blacks would cease if all of the "bad niggers" were killed off ("The 'Bad Nigger'", 1906). This article describes the "Bad Nigger" as a Black man who thinks he is "just as good as a white man, and sometimes a little better, so he never loses an opportunity to…insult a white woman"

("The 'Bad Nigger'", 1906). This article alludes to the fact that the Black men who were

increasingly gaining independence and freedom were the most threatening to the

conglomeration of White supremacy. According to the article, these "Bad Niggers" were

thought not only to have a superiority complex over Whites, but were also "criminal" and

"a constant source of trouble to the police" ("The 'Bad Nigger'", 1906). Thus, White

people used the prospect of a criminal, dangerous Black male ("The Bad Nigger") to

justify the mass lynchings perpetrated by Whites during this time. The article goes on to

report that "The two blacks who were lynched at Springfield last week may have been

innocent of the crimes for which they died, but both of them were known as 'bad

niggers'" ("The 'Bad Nigger'", 1906). This final quote makes apparent that lynchings

were not executed necessarily to punish Black men for their petty crimes (for instance

"insulting white women"); their purpose was to eliminate any Black male who was seen

as a possible threat to the maintenance of White supremacy after the Civil War.

Accordingly, the Ku Klux Klan was most active in areas of the South where

economic and social inequality between Blacks and Whites was the smallest (Hodes,

1997). The KKK was a male-only organization, but stated that "females, friends,

widows, and their households shall ever be special objects of our regard and protection"

(Hodes, 1997, p. 409). The KKK raped and assaulted Black women, and this makes it

obvious that the "females, friends, widows" in question are strictly White. *The Christian*

Recorder, an African Methodist Episcopal Church publication based in Philadelphia, PA,

put out an article in 1893 titled, "The Negro's Blood Never Dried Up in Barnwell CO".

This article retells and critiques—presumably by a Black journalist—the hunt for the

Black perpetrator of an unnamed crime against a woman residing in Barnwell, Colorado.

The article reports: "Barnwell's reputation is at stake and some nigger must die" (Colelough, 1893). Colelough, the author, equates the violation of a (presumably White) woman from his town, as a perceived violation and offense to the reputation of his whole town. As a result, from the perspective of the White residents, the lynching of the Black perpetrator was justified, not only as a way to bring justice to the violated woman, but to continue to "protect" the entire town of Barnwell. The author states at the end of the article, "The whites in Barnwell Co; take a great pride in washing their hands in the Negro's blood. Eleven Negro's have been lynched in Barnwell" (Colelough, 1893).

Lynching reached its height in 1892, long after emancipation, and arguably continues to this day (Hodes, 1997). Most famously, 14-year-old Emmett Till was brutally murdered in 1955 after allegedly making sexual advances on a local White woman. As recently as June 17th, 2015, Dylann Roof, a 21 year old White gunman who killed nine people at a bible-study meeting in a historic African-American church in Charleston, South Caroline stated before his attack, "I have to do it. You rape our women and you're taking over our country" (Bouie, 2015). The KKK, and other White supremacists such as Roof continue to 'protect' White women, children, and families from an imagined "Black Male Rapist" that White supremacists have created in order to maintain their separation and supremacy to this day (Hodes, 1997).

Birth of a Nation

The 1915 film, *Birth of a Nation*, originally titled *The Clansman is American*, is a silent epic drama directed by D.W. Griffith and adapted from the novel and play *The Clansman*, by Thomas Dixon. This film was a box-office success and the first American motion picture to be screened at the White House. Coming out of the early 20th century,

Birth of a Nation was conceived around the height of lynching in the United States, where the deaths of so many Black men was justified under the guise of protecting White female purity. Consonant with the time period, *Birth of a Nation* depicts Black men (some of whom are played by White actors in blackface) as sexually aggressive toward White women, and portrays White men and the KKK to be the heroic force that save White women from dangerous Black men. The film reproduces the image of the "Black Male Rapist" that was created by Whites who used sexuality as a central means of reasserting White social control over Blacks post-slavery (Griffith, 1915).

The film centers on two families living in America during the Civil War and the Reconstruction eras: The Pro-Union, Northern Stonemans, and the Pro-Confederacy Southern Camerons. In the two scenes featuring the KKK, they heroically save White women from dangerous Black or interracial, "Mulatto" men. In the first instance, Flora Cameron, the cherubic little sister, goes out into the forest to fill a bucket with water. In the woods, a Black man begins to stalk Flora, watching her for an extended period from behind some bushes. He then proceeds to jump out of the bushes and asks Flora to marry him. Flora, afraid for her life, hits the man and runs away. The Black man chases after her and yells, "Missie, I won't hurt you". Flora ends up jumping off of a cliff with nowhere else to run. Her brother comes to the rescue a few seconds too late, and we watch Flora die in his arms. Later we see the KKK, led by Flora's brother, retrieve the same Black man who stalked and harassed Flora, and lynch him. The man's dead body is then placed on the steps of the Lieutenant Governor's office, with a sign on his chest that reads "KKK". The group states, "Brethren, this flag bears the red stain of the life of a Southern woman, a priceless sacrifice on the altar of an outraged civilization". Flora's

tragic death is blamed on the dangerous Black man, whose death at the hands of the KKK

is neatly justified in the film. The Black man on screen becomes the actualized fear of

White Americans during the Postbellum period, while the KKK becomes the actualized

hero (Griffith, 1915).

       The second instance in which KKK members save the day takes place at the

Governor's office. Governor Lynch, a "mulatto" or interracial man, proposes to Elsie,

the Northern Stonemans' immaculate daughter. This proposal is predicated on an earlier

scene in which laws are passed that repeal miscegenation statutes. Directly following the

law's passage, and similar to how Flora's Black male stalker inappropriately proposes to

her, the Black men in the film desperately chase White women in the courtroom as soon

as the bill is signed into law. When Elsie refuses Lynch's proposal, Lynch becomes

uncontrollably angry. She attempts to leave his office, but he holds her hostage, and

aggressively harasses her by sniffing her clothes and body without consent. The KKK

comes in on cue to rescue Elsie from Lynch's office. Elsie is reunited with her

triumphant ex-fiancé, a secret member of the KKK. In this scene, like the

aforementioned sequence, we are shown an image of an overly sexual, hyper-masculine

Black man who threatens the safety of a righteous White woman. The KKK arrive to

rescue the White woman, and balance is restored. *Birth of a Nation* clearly supports the

employment of the specter of Black sexual violence against White women to terrorize

Black men, justify lynching, and consolidate White power (Griffith, 1915).

The Criminal Justice System

       Although this overt White mob violence of the KKK, which was celebrated in

Birth of a Nation, is rejected today, White aggression towards Black people persists, and

the image of the rapist has followed Black men. The criminal justice system provides a new forum in which an image of a dangerous Black male is required to legitimize aggression against Blacks. In lieu of lynch mobs, Black men now face corrupt police officers and unjust court systems, which incarcerate Blacks at disproportionately higher rates and sentence them far more severely than their White counterparts.

The "War on Drugs" a term commonly applied to a prohibition of drugs, was popularized by the media after a press conference given in 1971 by Richard Nixon. Recently, in March 2016, a quote surfaced from Nixon's former Chief Domestic Advisor, John Ehrlichman, confirming that the "War on Drugs" had nothing to do with eradicating a drug epidemic (Bond, 2016). Ehrlichman states, "We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be…against…Black[s], but by getting the public to associate…Blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing…heavily, we could disrupt those communities" (Bond, 2016). Thus, the "War on Drugs" during Nixon's administration in 1969-1974 had nothing to do with eradicating a drug epidemic, but was instead a ploy to destroy the Black community. Through his use of anti-Back propaganda, Nixon taught our country to view Black communities as overflowing with dangerous criminals and addicts.

The 1980's continued the culture war against the Black population in order to justify undoing hard-won progress secured by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's. Conservatives tried to persuade the public that greater state surveillance over the Black population was necessary by concocting a crisis over the spread of crack cocaine (Covington, 2010, p. 13). Although the crack epidemic was miniscule in comparison to the powder cocaine abuse among White people, the Black crack problem was made more visible in the media (Covington, 2010, p. 13). Violent, drug dealing, Black youth gangs

were blamed for the spread of crack, when in reality crack was never especially popular

among these groups, and was not typically sold by Black youth gangs (Covington, 2010,

p. 13). An article titled, "Youth Gangs Are Ravaging the Cities of the West Coast"

published in Cleveland, Ohio's *Plain Dealer* in 1988 states, "While there are hundreds of

youth gangs of every ethnic variety, it is the black gangs that are the most potent and

violent".

Conservatives under the last few years of the Reagan administration were able to

justify the crackdown on Black communities by toughening penalties for crack use and

sales (Covington, 2010, p. 13). In 1986 and 1988, Congress passed legislation mandating

minimum prison terms for minute amounts of crack cocaine (Covington 2010, p. 13).

These laws had an immediate impact on the Black community, as an increasing number

of Black men were sent to prison for nonviolent use and sale of small amounts of crack

(Covington, 2010, p. 13).

In 1995, President Clinton signed into law a bill to continue punishing crack-

cocaine crimes far more severely than powder-cocaine crimes- an arbitrary differentiation

created to disproportionately convict Blacks (Denniston, 1995). Clinton justifies this bill

by arguing that "Trafficking in crack, and the violence it fosters has a devastating impact

on communities across America, especially inner-city communities. Tough penalties for

crack trafficking are required because of the effect on individuals and families…"

(Denniston,1995). Thus, conservative and liberal politicians from Nixon to Clinton

succeeded and continue to succeed in justifying the surge of Black incarcerations by

conjuring up similar images of dangerous, hyper-masculine, Black men from the

Reconstruction era.

Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song

Conservative politicians have, without reproach, used racial myths about dangerous, violent Black males. This is because the United States is, by and large, a racially segregated society, where Blacks and Whites are typically not privy to intimate details about each other (Covington, 2010, p. 20). We do not live together or go to school together, and as a result, we do not know each other very well. Consequently, Covington argues that much of what White Americans believe about Black people is based on what they see and hear in movies, television, newspapers, political campaigns, radio, blogs, and other media outlets (2010). In the absence of real contact and understanding, media representations of Black lives hold a lot of weight in our society.

Before the 1960's, Black people were only cast in assimilationist, sexless roles, such as toms, coons, and mammies (Covington, 2010, p. 40). By the late 1960's, Black audiences were tired and weary of this unassertive, "perfect" character. Partly motivated by the Black Power Movement, which offered Black men a new type of masculinity based on protest, Black men began to reject the racial inferiority and self-hatred that were widely portrayed in the mass media. As a backlash to those hateful and false depictions of Blackness, Blaxploitation films were created by Black people, and pictured highly sexed, assertive, arrogant Black male heroes in the action-adventure genre (Covington, 2010, p. 40). These films usually featured a Black hero and a White villain, and focused on problems of Black people living in impoverished, urban settings (Covington, 2010, p. 40). Blaxploitation films were Hollywood's response to not only the building pressures of the Black cultural and political revolutions at the time, but also to a deepening fiscal crisis that was on the verge of bringing down the film industry in 1968 (Guerrero, 2011).

The average weekly box office sank from a 90 million peak in post-WWII to 15.8 million

in 1971 (Guerrero, 2011). Hollywood recognized that the Black population had the

potential to contribute significantly to resolving the industry's pressing economic

problems. While Blacks made up 10 to 15 percent of the population, they made up more

than 30 percent of the audience in major-city theaters (Guerrero, 2011). Between 1969

and 1974, Hollywood made approximately 60 Blaxploitation movies (Covington, 2010,

p. 40). Although initially Black audiences were happy to see Black actors, directors, and

writers, by the mid 1970's a backlash against Blaxploitation films took hold. These films

were faulted for rewriting Black male characters in a way that preserved long standing

racial hierarchies, and Black civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, Core, and

SCLC protested them. By 1973 there was a significant decline in the number of

Blaxploitation films released, and by 1974, its genre's film cycle was officially over

(Covington, 2010, p. 48).

　　　Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song, a 1971 film written, produced, scored,

directed by, and starring Melvin Van Peebles is credited with pioneering the

Blaxploitation genre. As Van Peebles puts it, the film tells the story of a "Bad Nigger"

who challenges the oppressive White system and wins, articulating the main features of

the Blaxploitation formula (Guerrero, 2011). Instead of utilizing the epithet of "Bad

Nigger" as an excuse to lynch Black men as the previously mentioned *Colorado Springs*

Gazette article from 1906 did, Van Peebles turns this epithet on its head, by positioning

the "Bad Nigger" as an independent Black man. The film begins with a young Black

orphan who is taken in by a brothel in Los Angeles. While working at the brothel, he

loses his virginity at a young age to one of the prostitutes. The women at the brothel

decide to name him "Sweet Sweetback" in honor of his sexual expertise and large penis.

As an adult, Sweetback works as a performer in the whorehouse, entertaining customers

by putting on sex shows. One night, Sweetback is falsely arrested along with a young

Black Panther, Mu-Mu. After Mu-Mu insults the officers and gets badly beaten,

Sweetback retaliates by beating the officers into unconsciousness. The remainder of the

film chronicles Sweetback and Mu-Mu's flight from the law toward Mexico. *Sweet*

Sweetback's Baadasssss Song has some progressive cultural and political undertones, but

is overtaken by its superficial style of violence and hyper-sexuality. Regardless of its

possible impact on the Black community at the time, to all other audiences, we see a

stereotypical, hypersexual Black male character (Van Peebles, 1971).

Throughout the film, Sweetback gains people's trust and access to places solely

based on the size of his penis and sexual prowess. This is evident from the first scene of

the film, as Sweetback obtains a job and a home by having sex at a very young age.

Later in the film, after escaping the police, Sweetback realizes he is still in handcuffs, and

needs to find a way to get them off. In exchange for sex, another female character cuts

them off for him. In another scene, Sweetback, while on the run, encounters a

threatening Hell's Angels motorcycle gang. The female leader of the gang is impressed

by the size of Sweetback's penis and agrees to help him escape from the police in

exchange for sex. In each of these instances, Sweetback is defined by his sexuality. It is

not his wits or his intellect that allow him to navigate various obstacles, but his sexual

expertise and virility. Furthermore, a White gaze is attached to Sweetback's sexuality, as

he is constantly having sex in front of a White audience. In both his previous work at the

brothel and while he is having sex with the leader of the Hell's Angel's gang, the

spectators that surround him are mostly White. This White gaze establishes the audience

of the film, and determines the consumer of Black male hypersexuality to be White.

Although the two films were released 56 years apart, *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*

portrays the same image of the oversexed, hyper-masculine Black male as in D.W.

Grifiths 1915 *Birth of a Nation* (Van Peebles, 1971).

***Crash* and *Monster's* Ball in a "Post-Racial" America**

Under the Reagan Administration (1981-1989), America took on a post-racial,

color-blind identity (Covington, 2010, p. 53). In 1986, the United States celebrated the

first national holiday commemorating the life and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. where

Reagan misinterpreted King's vision to suit his own racist ends: "I salute all those who

have continued to work for brotherhood, for justice, for racial harmony—for a truly

colorblind America, where all people are judged by the content of their character, not the

color of their skin" (Laham, 1998). Within this post-racial, color-blind society, it was

assumed that Black people should be able to succeed by virtue of their hard work alone,

and no longer needed special privileges. Again, in 1986, Reagan reiterated his

commitment to King's ostensible vision: "We've seen that the affirmative action program

was becoming a quota system. Now I've lived long enough to have seen quotas when

they were employed…in my youth…as a means of discrimination…we want what I think

Martin Luther King asked for: We want a colorblind society" (Laham, 1998). To this

end, conservative White politicians promised to dismantle social safety nets, end school

busing, eliminate affirmative action, and so on (Covington, 2010, p. 53). The purpose of

quotas, of course, is not to "discriminate" against White men, but to guarantee minorities

and women access to the economic opportunities that they have long been denied.

Of course, a large number of Black people still lived in poverty, so conservatives had to find a way to explain the high levels of poverty without blaming racism. The fault was attributed to the dysfunctional values of the Black underclass culture, and focused on social problems such as Black on Black violence, low high school graduation rates, high unemployment rates, teen pregnancies, drug addiction, low marriage rates, and babies out of wedlock (Covington, 2010, p. 53). Black ghettos deteriorated as a result of racial segregation and left the majority of Black people without jobs between 1970 and 1990. White workingmen suburbanized, and took their manufacturing jobs with them, which led to high Black male unemployment rates, and this consequently contributed to a decline in marriage rates as unemployed men were incapable of supporting a family (Covington, 2010, p. 55).

Crash, a 2004 drama directed by Paul Haggis, adheres to the concept of America as a post-racial society. The film portrays racism as defined by individualized acts of discrimination and bigotry that only reflect personal biases and hatreds, and not a dominant White power that structures divisions of wealth and opportunity. *Crash* won best picture at the 78th Academy Awards, and was nominated for six other awards that night, proof of its commercial success. *Crash* presents a revival of Black representations shown in *Birth of a Nation,* in which the storyline requires the presence of a dangerous Black man in need of policing by White racial violence (Schulman et al. & Haggis, 2004).

The plot revolves around several character's interwoven stories over the course of two days in Los Angeles. The main characters are: a Black detective, his criminal younger brother and fellow gang member, a White district attorney and his White wife, a

racist White police officer, a Black Hollywood director and his Black wife, a Persian

store-owner, and a Hispanic locksmith. *Crash* manages to make White supremacy and

subsequent control of the Black population seem reasonable, necessary even. One of the

initial scenes presents Jean and Rick Cabot (the District Attorney and wife) walking

home from a restaurant at night. Jean clutches her purse and grabs her husband's arm for

security when she notices two young Black men walking past them on the street,

surmising that they intend to do the White couple harm. Anthony, one of the Black men,

remarks to his friend that Jean is a typical racist White woman for expressing fear in such

a safe situation, but then proceeds to steal her car. The scene makes the viewer deduce

that Jean *should*, in fact, be afraid because her car is indeed going to be stolen by the two

Black men. White fears are justified as Black men are depicted as dangerous criminals

(Schulman et al. & Haggis, 2004).

Regardless of their pasts, White characters in *Crash* seem to always come out on

top. In another narrative thread, an off-duty White police officer, Hansen, unknowingly

picks up a criminal, Peter, a Black male hitchhiker. The audience knows that Peter is a

criminal because we have seen him in previous scenes carjacking an SUV and hitting a

Korean man with the same truck. We also know that Hansen, the police officer, is a

"good guy" because in a preceding scene, he disapproves of his racist co-worker and

swaps partners to avoid working alongside a racist. In the car, Peter notices that Hansen

has a small statue of Saint Christopher, like his own, and begins laughing at the

coincidence. Hansen thinks that Peter is laughing at him and, when Peter moves his arm

to pull his identical statue out of his pocket in explanation, Hansen believes Peter is

pulling a gun out, and mistakenly shoots and kills Peter. Peter's death is justified in part

because of the audience's previous knowledge that he is a criminal, and thus not completely innocent. The audience is meant to sympathize with Hansen, who was previously shown to do the right thing in the face of racism. *Crash* depicts Hansen's racist act of murder as non-representative of Hansen's character on the whole, who figures to be a symbol for the "good guy"- a White person who proves himself not to be racist, while his racist mishaps are also justified and forgiven. *Crash* humanizes White men who work in a White-dominated criminal justice system by once again relying on images of dangerous Black men (Schulman et al. & Haggis, 2004).

Monster's Ball (2001) also implements Black images first shown in *Birth of a Nation.* The film is a 2001 romantic drama, directed by Marc Forster, starring Billy Bob Thornton, Halle Berry, and Heath Ledger. Berry won the Academy Award for Best Actress for her performance, and is the only Black woman to have won this award as of 2015. The film tells the story of Leticia, a poor, Southern Black woman who, after the execution of her husband, falls in love with Hank, a White, widowed prison-guard. The film begins with Hank overseeing the execution of Lawrence, Leticia's husband. Hank is portrayed as a cold, racist guard and father, who pushes his son to commit suicide. Hank lives with his overtly racist father, who Hank loyally protects and looks after. Leticia, on the other hand, is shown struggling to raise her son Tyrell. She struggles financially, leading to the loss of her car and home. One night, while Leticia and Tyrell are walking down the highway after her shift at work, a car hits Tyrell. Hank, who happens to be driving along the same road, picks the two of them up and takes them to the hospital. Tyrell dies upon arrival at the hospital, and Hank, at the suggestion of the authorities at the hospital, drives Leticia home. After running into each other again at the diner where

Leticia works, Leticia and Hank begin a romantic relationship. After a nasty incident

between Leticia and Hank's racist father, Hank decides to finally send his father to a

nursing home. Through incidents like these, we slowly see Hank transform into a kinder,

less-racist man throughout his relationship with Leticia. Hank invites Leticia, who is

now homeless, to move in with him. Even after she discovers that Hank oversaw her

husband's death, Leticia decides to remain in a relationship with him (Daniels & Forster,

2001).

In essence, *Monster's Ball* tells the story of a White man killing a Black man and

marrying his victim's Black widow. The bottom line seems to be that if you kill Black

husbands and get rid of the Black male children, Black females are left for White male

consumption. This storyline is not too different from the one represented in *Birth of a

Nation*, which depicted dangerous Black men who needed to be controlled or ultimately

lynched by White men in order to make peace. *Monster's Ball* shows that racial harmony

can only take place once threatening Black men are dead and out of the picture. Hank

kills Leticia's husband, helps dispose of her dead Black son's body, and essentially

assures Leticia and himself that there are no other threatening Black males around to

worry about. Hank's transformation from being as overtly racist as his own father to

kicking his own father out of his house could only occur once the danger of Black men

was eliminated. Much like *Crash*, which depicts a "post-racial" society, *Monster's Ball*

presents a world in which racism can be overcome, only after dangerous Black men are

controlled and dominated by White racial violence (Daniels & Forster, 2001).

Hip-Hop Culture

The image of a rapacious Black male created during Reconstruction is arguably most notably embodied and appropriated today by contemporary hip-hop, which again, embeds old fears in a new generation, reinvigorating a racist White America. This image of Black men perpetuates dangerous stereotypes that Black men are violent, misogynistic, sexist, homophobic, and hypermasculine. These are all traits that allow our capitalist, patriarchal society to thrive and function. Due to the desire of record label executives—who are mostly White—to generate huge profits, it is difficult to decipher what is "real" and what is a performance produced by the White gaze by Blacks (Belle 2014). Crystal Belle, a researcher studying how the evolution of hip-hop has impacted the visibility of Black men gives the example of two hip-hop artists, one who embodies mainstream hip-hop, or hip-hop for the White gaze, and one who represents underground hip-hop, or uncensored hip-hop, not made for the White gaze (2014).

The underground hip-hop group, Dead Prez, does not cross over to White and international audiences, due to their lack of emphasis on mainstream, profitable material, such as drugs, sex, crime, and violence (Belle, 2014). Instead, Dead Prez openly denounces corporate control over hip-hop music and culture, and raps about topics that range from freedom to Pan-Africanism. Belle argues that it is not surprising that mainstream audiences are not in love with Dead Prez, as the group actively critiques the White gaze and challenges its existence through its music (2014). Belle cites Jay-Z as a particularly salient example of a mainstream hip-hop artist, who became increasingly performative after gaining more mainstream attention. His debut album tells the tale of "gangsterism" and urban life as a drug dealer, addressing themes of making fast money and his desire to continue hustling despite his mainstream success (Belle, 2014). One of

Jay-Z's most popular singles, "99 Problems" is blatantly misogynistic, hypermasculine and violent, with a chorus that boasts, "If you're having girl problems I feel bad for you son/I got 99 problems but a bitch ain't one". Thus, Jay-Z acts out stereotypical images of Black masculinity in his hip-hop, feeding the dominant hypermasculine discourse (Belle, 2014). Because mainstream rap music is produced in a White, male-dominated patriarchal infrastructure, it encourages and feeds off of old ideas of hypermasculine, hypersexual, Black men.

Conclusion

Reminiscent of the racial terror inspired by lynchings in the Antebellum South, Black men are faced with similar life-threatening consequences as a result of their hypermasculinization. Rampant police violence (and murders), akin to Post-Bellum lynchings, target Black men who are viewed as dangerous and hypermasculine. The Black Lives Matter movement, a movement determined to mitigate violence toward Black people, began on social media after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting and death of Trayvon Martin, a Black, 17-year old teenager. The death of an unarmed teenage boy can only be rationalized by a perverse conception of Black bodies—especially Black male bodies—as hypermasculine and thus dangerous and in need of control or death. Since 2013, when the Black Lives Matter movement began, participants in the movement have demonstrated against the deaths of numerous other Black men and women by police actions including, but not limited to: Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Eric Harris, Walter Scott, Jonathan Ferrell, Sandra Bland, Samuel DuBose and Freddie Gray.

With regards to interracial relationships, this gendering of Black men throughout the history of the United States has, in turn, made them a modern commodity in interracial relationships. Erica Childs quotes a college student she interviewed on the subject, stating, "White women just have this idea of it's so great to be with a Black guy because he's a big Black stud. You can tell the White girl that he's a dog and she still wants him probably even more" (2005, p. 157). One can determine, from this woman's statement, that White women are particularly attracted to the idea of Black men as being hypermasculine. "Big Black stud" and "dog" are direct testaments to the idea of Black male hypermasculinity and hyper-sexuality, as well as a certain dehumanization. The fact that a White woman would be more attracted to a Black man because he is a "dog"—as he is expected to be unrestrained in his sexual endeavors—reveals her desire for a Black man for his image as hypermasculine. Another female college student who was interviewed in the same study stated, "Black men are in fashion…a token, especially when it is a Black athlete…White girls are always saying, 'Oh, Black guys are so much cooler, so much cuter'" (Childs, 2005, p. 157). This woman claims, as many other women who were interviewed did, that interracial couples are seen as trendy, along with bisexuality on college campuses. However, not all interracial couples were perceived as trendy, as Black women went routinely unmentioned (Childs, 2005).

Alternatively, some argue that Black men seek out White women as partners due to the "forbidden fruit syndrome" (Romano, 2009, p. 233). The "forbidden fruit syndrome" thesis contends that Black men choose White women as partners because White women have been made into the symbol of Black male freedom (Romano, 2009, p. 233). Due to centuries of being severely punished or lynched for even looking at White

women, White women become "forbidden fruit" who hold the key to power and freedom for Black American men.

Black men have a complicated relationship with interracial intimacy, as their choice in partner involves much more than just love or lust, it carries with it years of historical baggage. Dating back to emancipation and reconstruction, the image of the "Black Male Rapist" was constructed in order for White Supremacists to maintain their separation and control over the Black population. This image intended to depict Black men as dangerous and hypermasculine, especially to the White female population. Through films such as *Birth of a Nation*, *Sweetback's Baadasssss Song, Crash* and *Monsters Ball,* these stereotypes have proliferated, and Black men continue to be depicted as in need of White control, as evidenced by the events leading up to the Black Lives Matter movement. Whether Black men are sought due to their perceived hypermasculinity or White women are sought due to their conception as "Forbidden Fruit", Black men continue to marry interracially at much higher rates than their female counterparts.

Chapter Four: The Masculinization of Black Women

Introduction

Black women have been masculinized since slavery (18th century) in the United States, when they were equated with Black men by profiteering slave owners. Black women provided White men with a sexual outlet that allowed White men to protect the purity of their White wives, while simultaneously defeminizing and dehumanizing Black women. The Black, oversexed Jezebel stereotype masculinized Black women through an image of their excessive sexual appetite, stereotypical of a man's desire for sex. In the 20th century, Black women are still depicted as unfeminine and masculine, such as in Patrick Moynihan's 1965 "The Negro Family" report, which focused on the roots of Black poverty in the United States. The report concluded that high rates of families headed by single mothers hindered the progression of Black Americans toward economic and political equality. Moynihan's report was crucial in the creation of the Sapphire stereotype, which masculinized Black women into domineering matriarchs who undermined and usurped men as head of the household. Hollywood continues to present depictions of Black women as Sapphires and Jezebels, shallow, hypersexual characters who demean and emasculate their husbands. *Crash, Monster's Ball, Boys n the Hood,* and *South Central*, are films that show the ways in which Black male violence is in part a product of Black male internalization of the "culture of poverty" values that are passed on to them by their mothers. Black women are accorded blame for Black underclass culture, and devalued for their lack of femininity and ineptitude as mothers. Today, as a potential consequence of this masculinization, Black women marry interracially into heterosexual relationships at much lower rates than their male counterparts. Interviews reveal that

Black women are perceived to be "too aggressive, too controlling", when compared to their "easier" more innately feminine White counterparts (Childs, 2005b, p. 159). These gendered assumptions about Black women also carry through to current White-dominated criminal justice systems, which pose a dangerous, disproportionate threat to Black female lives. For similar reasons that Asian women are deemed hyper-feminine in the United States, Black women are deemed not feminine enough to normalize and distinguish White forms of gender.

The Antebellum Period

Historically, Black women were defeminized because of differences in the ways in which Whites constructed heterosexuality amongst other Whites as opposed to the ways in which they constructed heterosexuality among Black people (Covington, 2010, p. 192). For Whites, heterosexuality was clearly demarcated between masculine and feminine roles and traits; hence, White women were traditionally depicted as "true women" based on their roles as wife and mother and embodying traits of innocence, weakness, nurturance, and lack of sexual passion (Covington, 2010, p. 192). These roles complemented the masculine roles assumed by White men; they were tasked with providing these helpless women with economic security and protection through traits such as strength, sexual agency and assertiveness (Covington, 2010, p. 192). Although White people made clear distinctions for themselves, little effort was made to differentiate between their female and male slaves (Covington, 2010, p. 192). Due to their role as slaves, it would have been impossible to apply to Black women the same feminine ideal developed for White women—Black female slaves could not be in the private sphere of the home/family as they were always in the public sphere of work.

Black women, who were thought to be subhuman by their White masters, were not protected from violence or placed on a pedestal like White women. Hence, Black women were not treated like "true women" (White women) in the antebellum period, but instead, were treated as if they were Black men. This expectation that Black women were akin to Black men allowed for greater profit for White male slave owners, who accordingly expected an equal output from both Black female and male labor.

Black women were punished in much the same way that Black men were during slavery, further defeminizing them (Covington, 2010, p. 193). Both Black men and women were often stripped naked and publically beaten by Whites in an effort to humiliate them (Covington, 2010, p. 193). Such punishments served to masculinize Black women by indicating to them that they were not deserving of the same protections and respectabilities granted to "true women".

Constructing Black female identity as divergent from the feminine sphere allowed for White men to assume sexual access to female slaves. Slavery gave abundant opportunity for White men to exercise sexual control over their White wives, poor White women, as well as their Black female slaves. Black women provided White men with a sexual outlet and a means of maintaining racial dominance in both antebellum and postbellum periods (D'emilio & Freedman, 1988). White men had sex with Black women (and poor White women who were excluded from the feminine sphere due to their economic status) to fulfill their lustful desires, while simultaneously protecting the purity and womanhood of their White wives (D'emilio & Freedman, 1988). As a matter of fact, law and social thought encouraged White men to assume sexual access to female slaves. Slaves could not be raped on the grounds that they were the legal property of

their master. Furthermore, popular White opinion held that Black women had strong

passions and always desired sexual relations with White men (D'emilio & Freedman,

1988). This ubiquitous opinion contributed to the creation of the Jezebel caricature, a

stereotype employed today to masculinize Black women.

The Postbellum Period

Sexuality became an integral means of reasserting White social control over

Black people after emancipation. As Black men were being lynched due to their

prescribed identity as uncontrollable rapists, Black women's vulnerability to sexual abuse

flourished as Southerners unleashed their rage against freed slaves by sexually assaulting

Black women (D'emilio & Freedman, 1988).

Between 1915 and 1960, approximately five million Southern Blacks migrated to

the North, an exodus dubbed the The Great Migration (Christensen, n.d.). Following

their manumission, Southern Black people were mired in a plantation economy that

offered little chance of upward mobility. Thus, better employment was a significant

factor for migrating North, along with Black people's hope to escape the oppressive

social conditions of the South, highlighted by the previously discussed rise in lynching

and rapes (Christensen, n.d.). Furthermore, World War I (1939-1945) created a huge

demand for workers in Northern factories, and some sectors of the economy were even

willing to pay for Black migration to the North (Christensen, n.d.).

During the Great Depression (1929-1939), a large number of poor Black women

living in the city could only find work as prostitutes, and they served White customers

who sought to fulfill their deviant erotic tastes. This dynamic reflected the longstanding

theme of White perception about perverse Black female sexuality. For White men, Black

brothels allowed them access to sexual services that they either could not find or were too shy to seek out in White women (D'emilio & Freedman, 1988). Stereotypes quickly arose of Black women as oversexed Jezebels who not only consented to these sexual liaisons with White men, but also initiated these sexual relationships (Covington, 2010, p. 194). The image of a Jezebel masculinizes the Black woman because her excessive sexual appetite is stereotypical of a man's desire for sex. Thus, just as in the Antebellum period, Black women could not be raped due to the myth that Black women initiated sex with White males. As loose, animalistic women who were obsessed with sex, the Black Jezebel myth perpetuates old antebellum stereotypes of Black women as perverted, non-feminine opposites to White women.

"The Negro Family"

In 1965, Patrick Moynihan, an American sociologist serving as Assistant Secretary of Labor under President Lyndon B. Johnson, published, "The Negro Family", a report that focused on the roots of Black poverty in the United States. This report emerged contemporaneously with a climate of increasing gender imbalance in the Black community (Romano, 2009, p. 232). As life expectancy for Black men shortened due to increased homicides and incarceration rates, the amount of available Black men declined. In 1950, there were 99 Black males for every 100 females. In 1970, this number shrunk to 88 Black males for every 100 females, and by 1976 there were only 74 Black males for every 100 females (Romano, 2009, p. 232). These numbers naturally led to a decline in marriage rates amongst the Black community, followed by high rates of non-marital births, joblessness, criminal activity and imprisonment of young Black men.

Although the above circumstances mark the "culture of poverty" that Black Americans were trapped in throughout the 1960's and onward, William Wilson, an American sociologist studying the development of the ghetto underclass culture, argues that these phenomena were mere symptoms of the problem and not the cause (1987). Wilson argues that the Black urban underclass culture can be explained by the racial tensions that arose from The Great Migration (1987). These racial tensions led to a White flight, or the large-scale migration of White people from urban regions to more racially homogenous suburban regions beginning in the 1940's (Wilson, 1987). White people took their low-skilled factory jobs with them, leaving Black people in the city, who were both not skilled enough to take the remaining jobs and unable to move to the wealthier suburban areas where their previous low-skilled work had gone (Wilson, 1987). This skill-gap and geographic realities led to Black men's exclusion from the labor market, a central factor in their involvement with the culture of poverty (Wilson, 1987). Thus, according to Wilson, the increase in Black urban poverty over the past few decades had not been the cause of an internalized culture of poverty value system, but rather the result of major shifts in economic systems, as jobs left the urban manufacturing sector.

Dismissive of these considerations in his report, Moynihan concluded, rather, that Black American economic and political equality was hindered by the high rate of Black families headed by single mothers. His assertion casts Black women as Sapphires, or aggressive, overbearing women, devoid of maternal compassion and understanding. Instead of focusing on discriminatory social policies and economic inequalities, Moynihan claimed that Black women's matriarchal dominance within their families was responsible for the unemployment and emasculation of Black men. Moynihan posited

that his devaluation of the Black men in Black families ultimately resulted in poverty,

single parenthood, and the production of criminally-inclined Black male children.

Moynihan states, "A fundamental fact of the Negro American family life is often

reversed roles of husband and wife", clearly alluding to the Sapphire stereotype of a

domineering female who consumes men and usurps their role as head of the family and

primary breadwinner (1997, p. 30). The Assistant Secretary argues that the lack of a

traditional, strong father figure and a stereotypical, maternal mother strips children of a

supportive environment needed to succeed and thrive. To this end, Moynihan states,

"This dependence on the mother's income undermines the position of the father and

deprives the children of the kind of attention, particularly in school matter" (1997, p. 25).

Moynihan criticizes Black women for disrupting the traditional, patriarchal, nuclear

family. He argues that since the nuclear family model has worked for White families,

Black poverty is not to be blamed on overarching institutional racism, but rather on Black

women for disturbing the traditional power relations that have benefited White families

for centuries. He writes, along these lines, "It is clearly a disadvantage for a minority

group to be operating on one principle, while the great majority of the population, is

operating on another" (Moynihan, 1997, p. 29). This argument gained popularity because

it not only simplified the matter by blaming Black women for larger societal problems,

but also reified the traditional, patriarchal, nuclear family. In Moynihan, and much of

White America's view, patriarchal fathers and submissive maternal mothers were

essential to a successful family because this was the common structure for White families

who were (and still are) benefitting from an unjust, racist society.

bell hooks, in her book *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, accurately asserts that patriarchal fathers are not the answer to Black family issues, but that "it is more important that Black children have loving homes than homes where men are present" (2004b, p. 102). By putting excess significance on fathers, and blaming Black mothers, it becomes clear that Moynihan is not interested in a sincere understanding of Black poverty, but in assimilating Black families into White, hegemonic, patriarchal family standards. By placing blame upon Black women for Black poverty in the United States, Moynihan perpetrates an image of a Black Sapphire, or an emasculating caricature, who is rejected from the sphere of femininity, due to her failure as a wife and mother. Black women are defeminized and deemed incapable of fulfilling the male roles prescribed to them, because—according to hegemonic family structures—only men, and preferably White men, should fulfill the role as father.

Boys n the Hood and *South Central*

The films *Boys n the Hood* and *South Central* both depict Black single mothers as the cause of rampant Black male violence. *Boys n the Hood* is a 1991 drama written and directed by John Singleton. It was nominated for both Best Director and Original Screenplay during the 1991 Academy Awards, making Singleton the first Black person to be nominated for the award of Best Director. In 2002, the United States Library of Congress deemed it "culturally significant" and selected it for preservation in the National Film Registry. The film depicts life in South Central Los Angeles, California, and follows the lives of three young Black boys growing up together. Tre, who has been sent to live with his father by his mother, escapes the endemic violence of his neighborhood by following the tutelage of his hard-nosed father. Tre's two friends, the

brothers Doughboy and Ricky, are both raised by the same single mother and consequently lack the support crucial to Tre's success and safety. The brothers are drawn into the neighborhood's booming drug and gang culture, with exponentially tragic results. The film's basic premise seems to be that Black women are incapable of raising healthy, strong, self-sufficient Black men on their own, and, furthermore, without a father present, Black boys will fail at a successful life and most likely end up dead in the streets (Nicolaides & Singleton, 1991).

We are given paltry information about the Black mothers in the film, encouraging the audience to stereotype these women. Although we encounter Tre's mother consistently throughout the film, we never find out what she does for a living. The only important fact we are provided with is that she made the moral, life-changing decision to send her son to live with his father so that he could stay out of trouble and lead a fulfilling life. As she hands Tre off to his father, she states, "I can't teach him how to be a man, that's your job". We never find out if Doughboy and Ricky's mother works or has a husband, and her depthless personality exists only to represent the reason for Doughboy and Ricky's failures. We are introduced to her as she is in her pajamas smoking a cigarette with curlers in her hair, yelling at her son Doughboy, calling him fat and lazy. She is aggressive, overbearing, and devoid of maternal compassion and understanding, all common traits of the Sapphire stereotype. Her shallow character is easy to detest and blame for the corruption and eventual deaths of both of her sons. The other prominent single mother in the film is an unnamed and neglectful crack addict who continuously lets her infant child wander out in the middle of the street outside her home. The only times we hear this woman speak is when she begs Tre for money to feed her

addiction, and solicits drugs from him in exchange for a blowjob. This woman also embodies the Sapphire stereotype, through her constant neglect of her child, her hyper-sexuality, and drug-addicted behavior. Through these superficial characters, Black single mothers are portrayed as universally inept at raising a child, and become easy targets to accuse for the corruption of their Black boys (Nicolaides & Singleton, 1991).

Tre's father is without question the reason for Tre's escape from the cycle of violence. Near the end of the film, when Tre is preparing to take his revolver to get revenge on the Bloods for killing Ricky, his father convinces Tre to abandon his plans. However, shortly after their interaction, Tre sneaks out of his bedroom window to join Doughboy. That night, as Doughboy drives around the city, looking for their target, Tre asks to be let out of the car and returns home. This sudden change of heart reveals how Tre realizes that his father was right. That night, Doughboy tracks down the Bloods and kills the remaining gang members responsible for his brother's death, which ultimately leads to Doughboy's own death by revenge on the part of the Bloods. Here, we clearly see Tre's potential negative life trajectory (symbolized by Doughboy's tragic death) salvaged and reversed by his father. His father accurately foreshadows this, as he says to Tre, "Your friends across the street, they don't have anybody to show them how to do that, they don't. You gonna see how they end up too". The logic put forth by the film assumes that if Tre remained living with his mother, he would have had nobody to stop him from going out and taking part in the gang violence. Tre, Doughboy, and Ricky all grow up on the same street, are exposed to the same conditions, with the only difference being that Tre is raised by a father and Doughboy and Ricky are raised by a single mother.

Boys n the Hood posits that for Black families, who are denied (by dint of their race and socioeconomic status) access to becoming a hegemonic nuclear White family, the next best thing is to have a strong male figure. While this strong male figure may not necessarily end Black poverty and violence—he is capable of at least shielding his own from the terrors of the Black community. In this way, John Singleton, a Black man ostensibly seeking acceptance into White mainstream Hollywood, chooses to tell a story that celebrates Black masculinity by denigrating the hypermasculine Black women. *Boys n the Hood*, like Moynihan's report, perpetuates hegemonic family values, which dictate that women should assume the role as passive wife and mother, and men should assume the role as active husband and father. The film's perpetuation of these hegemonic family values appeal to mainstream White audiences because White families are the ones who benefit most from such structures, as previously discussed in Moynihan's report. *Boyz n the Hood* recapitulates Moynihan's conclusion that Black single mothers, lacking in their feminine traits, are the reason for the Black underclass culture, a culture laden with violence. The commercial success of these films is due in part to how they affirm highly gendered White family structures, which prescribe ultimate power and influence to fathers and men (Nicolaides & Singleton, 1991).

South Central similarly depicts Black single mothers as being the cause of Black male violence. A 1992 film, written and directed by Stephan Milburn Anderson, was adapted from the 1987 novel, *Crips* by Donald Bakeer. The movie received wide critical acclaim; the *New Yorker Magazine* praised it as one of the year's best independent films, and Rotten Tomatoes, an aggregate film review website, gave the film a 100%. The salient parts of the narrative go as follows: during a 10-year prison sentence for murder,

Bobby Johnson finds religion and rehabilitation with the help of a Muslim inmate, Ali. Upon his release, Bobby returns home to find that his young son, Jimmie—in the care of Bobby's drug-addict girlfriend—has joined the same gang that landed Bobby in jail. Tensions arise, as Bobby struggles, and ultimately succeeds, in convincing Jimmie to leave the gang. *South Central* tells a similar story to *Boyz n the Hood,* which is that fathers are the only ones with the power to save their Black children from a permanent life of crime and inevitable early deaths. Black single mothers, on the other hand, are portrayed as the antithesis of maternal: drug-addicted whores who neglect their helpless children (Steakey, Stone & Yang & Andersen, 1992).

Carole, Jimmie's mother and Bobby's girlfriend, is a heroine addict who works as a prostitute to support her drug habit, which leads to her neglect of her son. She is cast as a Jezebel character on account of her preoccupation with sex and drugs, and consequently negligent mothering. She does not cook for Jimmie or ensure that he attends school, and as a result, Jimmy finds support with the local neighborhood gang, the same gang that previously landed Jimmy's father Bobby in jail. At the age of 10, Jimmy is stealing car stereos for the gang, and gets shot in the back by a local neighbor who catches him in the act. While at the hospital, Carole visits Jimmy in a tight fitting red dress and leaves almost immediately after realizing that her son is unable to hold a conversation due to his critical condition. She asks the nurse, "does he talk" and goes on to add, "maybe I'll wait until he can talk, no point in staring at him". Carole's cold and unloving interaction with Jimmy urges the nurse to involve Child Protective Services. The audience is urged to root for Carole's loss of custody, as we are privy to the ongoing abuse Jimmy faces at home from his mother.

What ultimately saves Jimmy from a life of gang association and violence is, unsurprisingly, his father. The sagacious Ali, who Bobby befriends in prison, literally tells Bobby to, "go find your boy and save his life", indicating that a father is the only one that has the power to save his son's life. In the final scene of the film, Bobby, just released from prison, confronts the neighborhood gang leader Ray-Ray, Bobby's former partner, who has recruited young Jimmy into the gang. Bobby convinces Ray-Ray to hand Jimmy back to him from the gang by asserting, "I just want to give him something you or I never had, a father", insinuating that the reason Ray-Ray, and all of the other gang members, live a life of crime is because none of them had a father figure growing up. Bobby argues that if he could give Jimmy the gift of a father, it would spare Jimmy's life.

South Central employs and imparts a parallel logic to *Boys n the Hood,* which is that Black male violence is in part a product of Black children's internalization of the culture of poverty values that are passed onto them by their mothers—an argument that was first popularized in Moynihan's 1965 report. This argument assumes that Black women lack the appropriate femininity to nurture their children, and instead, are only fit to be Jezebels and Sapphires, and are thusly domineering, hypersexual, drug addicts (Steakey, Stone & Yang & Andersen, 1992).

Crash and *Monsters Ball*

The films *Crash* and *Monsters Ball,* which were previously discussed in Chapter Three, are also prime examples of films which depict Black women as underdeveloped, defeminized characters. In *Crash,* one storyline involves White LAPD officer John Ryan and his White partner Tom Hansen pulling over a car in which they notice the passenger

performing oral sex on the driver. The couple they pull over is a Black television

director, Cameron Thayer and his Black wife Christine. The Thayers are ordered to exit

the vehicle, to which Cameron, the television director is cooperative, but Christine, his

wife is disobliging and argumentative. Officer Ryan then proceeds to molest Christine

while administering an unnecessary pat down of the couple. Clearly intimidated by the

power dynamics at play—and similar, perhaps, to the power dynamics established by

White slave owners' sexual license—Cameron says nothing during this pat down, and the

couple is released without a citation. Once home, Christine exhibits her unfiltered rage at

the fact that her husband, Cameron, did nothing while she was being violated. This scene

presents Christine as a Sapphire, emasculating to a point which makes the audience pity

her husband, Cameron, for having to endure her aggression. Christine does not exhibit

sadness or vulnerability in response to her harassment, but instead, unleashes pure anger

and resentment toward her levelheaded husband, to which we, the audience, end up

sympathizing with. In presenting Christine as a defeminized, emasculating Sapphire, the

filmmakers succeed in justifying her exemption from protections that are generally

extended to White female characters. It enables the audience to watch a suffering Black

woman on screen with disregard because she is cast outside the sphere of true

womanhood and femininity (Schulman et al. & Haggis, 2004).

  In *Monsters Ball*, Leticia's character is similarly underdeveloped and shallow; she

too is presented as a Jezebel. Instead of showing a grieving widow, Leticia is portrayed

as being only interested in sexual gratification throughout the film. She is shown to be

utterly disinterested in her career as a waitress or her role as a mother, and only exhibits

passion for her sexual relationship with Hank. Leticia pursues this racist, White male

character purely for sexual pleasure, giving Hank no reason to go through a courting process due to their explicitly sexual relationship. Black women are commonly excluded from traditionally feminine romantic roles, and instead, are cast as "bad girls: who pursue relationships with men based on sex rather than romance" (Covington, 2010, p. 209). Usually, men are the ones who pursue relationships based on sex, and thus, Black women are masculinized by roles such as Leticia's (Daniels & Forster, 2001). Black women have long been represented as masculine in the media, whether through embodying the role of hypersexual Jezebel or emasculating Sapphire. In all of the aforementioned films, Black women who head single-parent households are depicted as masculine matriarchs that have wrested control of the family from Black men. This (ultimately unsuccessful) usurpation of the traditional male role emasculates and damages Black men in the process.

Conclusion

A conceivable result of Black women's masculinization is that they are viewed as less desirable as potential partners in heterosexual relationships. Erica Chito Childs (2005a) studied Black women's perspectives on interracial relationships by interviewing Black college women, as well as Black women who were married to White men. She found that White women were viewed as embodying the ideal of femininity because of their physical appearance and submissiveness. Black women on the other hand were viewed as "difficult" compared to "easy" White women, alluding to Black women's lack of submissiveness and femininity (Childs, 2005a). Childs states, "Light skin for women is valued, which makes Black women devalued", again pitting Black women against the physical White standard of femininity and beauty (Childs, 2005a, p. 553). A student

from Colgate University states, "Perception of Black women as more confrontational, too much trouble, White girls are easy, easy to control" (Childs, 2005b, p. 159). Another Black college student she interviewed states, "Black guys feel that White girls are easier, sexually loose, and on the flipside, that Black women are too aggressive, too controlling, have an attitude, not confidence, but nasty, gold-digger" (Childs, 2005b, p. 159). We can trace these wide-held perceptions of Black women as "more confrontational" "too aggressive" and "too controlling" to their history of masculinization in the United States. Unlike Black men who are sought out for their masculinity and Asian women who are sought out for their femininity, Black women are deemed unmarrigeable due to their history of masculinization in the United States.

There are life-threatening consequences to this masculinization of Black women as well. While police are far less likely to arrest White women suspected of crimes than White males suspected of crimes, Black women are every bit as likely to be arrested as their male counterparts (Covington, 2010, p. 301). As a result, tragically, in domestic violence cases, black women who call the police to report their male partners find themselves being arrested along side the men who abuse them (Covington, 2010, p. 301). Evidence that law enforcement construct Black women as un-feminine and just as dangerous as their male counterparts is exemplified by the story of Margaret Mitchell. Margaret Mitchell was a 5 foot tall, 55-year-old Black homeless woman living in LA. In 1999, two police officers confronted Mitchell over a stolen shopping cart, and ended up killing her; they reported that one of the officers "feared for his safety against this…Black woman holding a screwdriver" (Covington, 2010, p. 301). More recently, in 2015, 130 pound Natasha McKenna was tased to death with a stun gun while shackled in

a Virginia jail in February (Alter, 2015). Mitchell and her screwdriver and a shackled McKenna were in no way a serious threat to either the two fully armed police officers or the team of 6 prison emergency response members, but because of their race, both women were perceived to be an imminent danger, and this racist misconception cost these women their lives.

The history of the masculinization of Black women can be traced back to slavery, when little effort was made to differentiate between female and male slaves. Because Black women were constructed outside the sphere of femininity, they were frequently raped by White male slave owners without consequence. Emancipation did little to change Black women's vulnerability to sexual abuse, as Southerners focused their rage against freed slaves by sexually assaulting Black women. Stereotypes of Black women as oversexed Jezebels perpetuated assumptions, once again, that Black women could not be raped because they initiated and constantly desired sexual relations with White men. Moynihan's 1965 report, "The Negro Family" was key in deeming Black women to be unfit mothers, lacking the necessary feminine traits to nurture their sons. This explanation implicated Black women in the creation of fatherless, female-headed households in the ghetto, suggesting that they were such overbearing and domineering matriarchs that Black men refused to marry them or ultimately abandoned them because they felt emasculated by these intimidating women. Films such as *Boys n the Hood*, *South Central*, *Crash* and *Monsters Ball* redisplay this image of Black Sapphires, or overbearing and domineering matriarchs, a notable example being Christine's character in *Crash.* This continued effort to masculinize Black women in American culture exists to promote and support White, hegemonic family values, which privileges White, male

heterosexuality. Black women are both defeminized and deemed incapable of fulfilling

the male roles ascribed to them. As a result of blaming Black women for breaking out of

the feminine sphere and corrupting their Black families, White, heterosexual men are

considered the ideal, and the only ones able to fulfill the role of the father, as was typified

in *Boys n the Hood* and *South Central*. By casting Asian women as too feminine and

Black women as not feminine enough, both conceptions serve to construct White forms

of gender to be "normal" and superior. As White men are constructed to epitomize an

ideal of masculinity and fatherhood, White women are also accorded racial privilege

through protections and a perceived embodiment of a perfect femininity.

Conclusion

Research Summary

　　There is no denying that in the United States, particular races are gendered, and this gendering serves the interests of the White, capitalist, patriarchy that dictates the structure of power in American society. Asian American men and women have been feminized since their arrival in the 1840's in the United States. Asian men are demasculinized and made "safe" in American culture to serve White male heterosexuality through exploitation of the Asian male body. Repeatedly cast as sexually available, Asian women also become just another possession of White men. Alternatively, Black men and women have been masculinized since their forced arrival to the US as slaves in the 18th century. Through the maintenance of the dangerous Black male stereotype, Black men are perceived as in need of White control, and this perception excuses violence against the Black male population. Black women on the other hand are masculinized and blamed for corrupting their Black families, and are thusly used to promote White, hegemonic family values.

Moving Forward

　　Judith Butler argues that everyone performs gender moment to moment, and therefore the issue is not *if* we put on a gender performance, but *what form* that performance will take (Omi, 1994, p. 71). Inherent to this thinking is a post-structuralist departure from White supremacist ideals and hegemony, and Butler accordingly calls for a rebellion against our current hegemonic notions of gender—a "gender trouble" in which we confuse and destroy certain harmful cultural configurations of gender (Omi, 1994, p. 71). By choosing to act out gender in expansive and alternative ways, we create a

proliferation of genders that destabilize our current binary understanding of masculinity and femininity which upholds a White, heterosexual, patriarchal hegemony. Not unlike gender, challenging dominant racial ideologies requires a reconceptualization of one's own racial identity, in conjunction with a reformulation of the meaning of race in general. To challenge your position as a hyper-masculine Black male in society is also to challenge the position of the idealized masculine White male in society. By refusing the "common sense" understandings which the hegemonic order imposes, you help to reconstruct and transform our current understandings of gender and race.

Josef Benson, a researcher studying the conflicting images of hypermasculine pimps in the United States, argues that Black men must stop striving to reach an idealized masculinity and instead embrace new constructions of gender and masculinity that are less destructive to the Black population (2012). As has been displayed throughout this essay, our current conception of masculinity valorizes despicable traits such as sexual abuse, violence and greed—all principles which allow our contemporary White supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist society to thrive, all while disenfranchising Black men and women. hooks argues that the only difference between Black male hustlers and White men working in mainstream corporate jobs is that White men go unprosecuted for their crimes (2004). Black men will never attain equality with White men if Black men continue to reproduce and imitate White defined versions of masculinity, as this reasoning fails to recognize the inherent flaws in White patriarchy. Only by creating new representations/constructions of masculinity can Black men (and women) shed the definition of Blackness that Whites have created to oppress the Black community. Benson argues that without new constructions of gender, Black men will continue to fight

a losing battle, where the gender they embrace (or are prescribed) continues to be the

reason for their destruction (2004). Unfortunately, as we have seen, for most Black men,

hyper-masculinity is assigned to their bodies through historical and contemporary drivers.

In this way, it is not so much Black men's responsibilities to disrupt the current,

dominant, gender ideologies, but more so that of people who hold a privileged identity,

such as White men and women.

Similarly, Asian men should not strive to embody our current notions of

masculinity but instead use their status (as de-masculinized humans in male bodies that

are accorded a certain privilege) to give new meanings to masculinity. Although the

erasure of Asian American men from the construction of the transcontinental railroad was

problematic, it would not be beneficial to reclaim this history as a mere symbol of

masculine power and prowess (Eng, 2001, p. 98). This type of reclamation would only

integrate Asian men into the current, harmful hegemonic notions of gender, and would in

turn subjugate Asian men into a similar marginalized space that Black men and women

hold today. Instead of integrating into the mainstream discourse around masculinity,

Asian men should resist the White supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist notions of

masculinity, and utilize their unique position as a feminized male to advocate on behalf

of femininity and broaden the definition of what it means to be a man.

We need to destigmatize femininity and create novel definitions of masculinity

that are negotiated outside the realm of our current White supremacist, patriarchal,

capitalist society. The intersections of race and gender discussed throughout this paper

present opportunities for transforming the existing hierarchical structure of both race and

gender. The populations who embody cross-categories such as Asian men who have

been feminized in the United States are uniquely situated to attest to and fight against patriarchal oppression. Similarly, if White women recognize that ideologies of womanhood have as much to do with race as they have to do with gender, then they can better work with women and men of color to break down racial inequality. Thus, to name the categories of oppression and to identify their interconnections gives us space to explore and fortify across gender and racial lines.

Ideally, femininity would be destigmatized—being feminine would not equate to being subordinate and the hierarchical binary of masculine over feminine would be eliminated. In an ideal world, a new-formed masculinity would be feminist, anti-homophobic, and anti-capitalist. A feminist masculinity would reject patriarchal behaviors and thought. A real-world example might look like a world in which childcare and parental caregiving is not considered exclusively women's work and children are nurtured by both their female and male parents equally. This new type of masculinity would be anti-homophobic through sexual openness and experimentation, where heterosexuality is not the unmarked norm but is disclosed and unveiled as simply one way to identify your sexuality amongst many others. Finally, this new type of masculinity would reject the fantasy that wealth brings happiness and contentment, perhaps by sharing resources and investing in community building. This vision for a destigmatized femininity and a feminist, anti-homophobic, and anti-capitalist ideal of masculinity is easier said than done, as the people who have the power to make this shift are the same people who benefit from the current hegemonic notions of gender and race. Therefore, the cross-gender, cross-racial alliances discussed above will prove to be important forces in initiating and advancing these changes.

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