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Trick(Ster)ing Ain't Easy: (Re)Discovering the Black Butch and (De)Stabilizing Gender in Street Lit

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Trick(Ster)ing Ain't Easy: (Re)Discovering the Black Butch and (De)Stabilizing Gender in Street Lit

by

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Dedication

Dear LaJuan,

Thanks for your daily inspiration in just being yourself. I owe you my heart. May one day we see each other *anyeverywhere*.

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Abstract

Trick(Ster)ing Ain't Easy: (Re)Discovering the Black Butch and (De)Stabilizing Gender in Street Lit

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The following project serves to question the effects of capitalism upon modes of eroticism, misogyny and sexism by focusing upon the black masculine female (butch/stud) within Street Lit. Chapter one defines Street Lit, its importance, and Trick(Ster)ing as a concept. Chapter 2 is a close analysis of two primary texts utilizing Trick(Ster)ing as a method of survival and resistance in a capitalist society. The final chapter discusses the relationship between black female masculinity and misogyny.

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Where I'm Coming From: Standpoint!

In "I Used to be Scared of the Dick: Queer Women of Color and Hip-Hop Masculinity," Andreana Clay asks "how do black queer feminists who love hip-hop deal with the reality that same sex desire and practice is sometimes played out over a sexist hip-hop beat?" I posit that the answer to this question resides in a Hip Hop antecedent, Street Lit.[1] Black queer feminists such as Audre Lorde and Alice Walker have prolifically written about their own lives, as well as those they love, in constant critique of hegemonic sexist, racist and homophobic systems. In the process, these black queer feminists also refused to differentiate between masculinist goals and misogynistic oppression, consequently disappearing and shaming the experiences of working class black butch/stud lesbian experience within the academic black/queer/diasporic historical lineage.[2] Clay's question highlights the importance of focusing on black female masculinity, particularly within a working class framework. Rather than focus upon black queer feminists, I wish to focus upon how black lesbian subjects relate to and identify with stereotypical masculinity in conjunction with an erotic idealization of the stereotypically feminine. What happens when we transform a celebrated source of erotic/political knowledge, the idealized black lesbian androgynous feminist poet (Audre Lorde) into the deviant black hustling masculinist hustler (stud/butch)? Analysis of this question complicates hegemonic notions of both masculinity and femininity, queer sexualites and contemporary collective understandings of gender(ed) desire, female objectification and misogyny.

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[1] Rice, 3. Rappers such as Nas and Ice Cube credit street lit with their success.

[2] see Allen, Jafari and Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley about the importance of imagining the historical (ancestral) black/queer/diaspora.

Before I begin this analysis, I wish to discuss my standpoint as an emerging scholar in the field of Women's and Gender Studies and perpetual meanderings into African Diaspora Studies. I enter these fields in an act of resistance against the urge to disappear into sameness and with the painful reminder that, regarding reading, writing, and being, "African American's are descendants of people who were forbidden, on the penalty of death, to engage in such pursuits. Then, as now, the oppressor understood that knowledge leads the dispossessed to power. That power is the springboard to freedom. And most importantly, that freedom can lead to bliss" (Keating, *Risking* 150). A part of that sameness I wish to avoid is my identity as femme, or a stereotypically feminine presenting lesbian, to be washed into the umbrella of queer as if all queers are the same. Additionally, I note that my erotic longings tend toward the black masculine female, and her disappearance within celebrated black lesbian literature has left me longing for a long time. I provide a brief synopsis of an adolescent experience that still fuels my fire today.

When I first read a short story entitled "Tar Beach," which later shows up in Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, I was shamed by Lord's anxiety concerning gender expression in black lesbian culture. In the short story, she discovers Afrekete, the only woman at the black house party that was not into "imitat[ing] the oppressive and stereotyped behavior so often associated with being men or acting like men" (Lorde, "From" 129). I found this story in a Joan Nestle's *The Persistent Desire*, which was my first access to Audre Lorde. I was inspired to read *Zami* and see what other types of black lesbians were more admirable, and oddly, although Lorde's biomythography is replete with erotic and emotional rollercoasters with a range of women in a range of spaces, the Tar Beach chapter is the only section in which Lorde is not one of a few black lesbians in New York city. Black queer anthologies have lovingly reprinted this chapter from *Zami*, but what is of interest is that the antagonistic sentiment

mentioned above is less obvious. Someone, either Lorde or her editors, removed the stigmatizing words. The question that immediately drives me is how or why did the editors, or the poet herself, choose which words to keep? How does the removal of these words contribute to the erasure of black butch/femme identities from a historical black queer narrative?

I further this point by highlighting that within the introduction to Afrekete: An Anthology of Black Lesbian Writing, black butch/femme couplings do not explicitly show up. "Tar Beach" does. Within the introduction, the editors state that black lesbian writers cannot focus on aspects of race, gender or sexual identity and the politics these identities may entail. They fear any "single representation of Black lesbians" and shun the focus on a "handful of generally recognized texts" (McKinley &Delaney xv). The editors call for inclusion and diversity within the range of portrayals of black lesbians. Despite this call, the editors fail to realize that, rather than providing an inclusive vision of what black lesbians are and do, they exclude a (sub)section of the black lesbian population through an editorial choice to use "Tar Beach" as printed in *Zami*, rather than "Tar Beach" as printed in earlier periodicals. Of course, this analysis is in no way meant to imply that the editors purposefully chose the *Zami* edition: copies of "Tar Beach" in periodicals are extremely obscure. Nevertheless, editorial rejection of other submissions about black butch/femme is still probable. I do wish to highlight that The Persistent Desire, where I found the original text, was published three years before *Afrekete*. The editors, purportedly unaware removal of the black butch/femme as a subject from their anthology, decidedly remove a population of women from a collection designed to illuminate experiences of those self-identifying as black lesbians. This erasure demonstrates the ease with which exclusion occurs.

Joan Nestle, within her own introduction of an inclusive anthological attempt, expresses frustration over such discrimination:

> For more than a hundred years now in America, the butch-femme couple has been the private and public face of lesbianism, and yet, we still understand little about this form of lesbian erotic identity. Everyone has taken a turn at denigrating the butch-femme couple - from the sexologist at the turn of the century who spoke about the predatory female masculine invert and the child woman who most easily fell her victim, to the early homophile activists of the fifties who pleaded with these 'obvious' women to tone down their style of self-presentation, to the lesbian-feminists of couples who did cross over into the new world of cultural feminism - yet this form of self - and communal - expression has persisted" (14).

Feminism made an attempt to airbrush butch/femme identity from lesbianism by aligning and co-conspiring with the patriarchal system it wished to critique and deconstruct. While Nestle avoids the conversation of race, Black feminists were not innocent in this erasure. Feminism attempted to close off the safe space of a woman-centered knowledge and refused to allow access to dialogue surrounding alternative oppressed identities. This particular longing for the black butch-femme in a historical/literary archive, is what drives me to search for the places and spaces in which they can be found. I find them, historically and now, in Street Lit, which in and of itself is replete with sexism, homophobia and materialistic elements, which seem to be a fact-of-life for black folk living within the lowest stratosphere of a capitalist system.[3]

Consequently, I begin my analysis with a short list of concerns regarding gender, sexism and homophobia within Street Lit through commentary on its musical cousin, Hip Hop.[4] In *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk about When We Talk about Hip Hop--and*

[3] Recognizing contemporary portrayals of butch/femme, the original impetus for this project is on the historical archive of black butch/femme, which consequently fueled my focus upon Street Lit as a genre.
[4] I choose to discuss critiques of Street Lit through the lens of Hip Hop due to the prolific amount of scholarship available about Hip Hop in comparison to the dearth of Street Lit commentary. The critiques of Hip Hop and Street Lit are extremely similar in regard to their sentiment and tone.

Why It Matters, Tricia Rose lays out arguments for and against hip hop in great detail. For this conversation, the most important concerns are the depiction of women as sex objects, discouragement of female MCs, blatant homophobic remarks, and the encouragement of the mistreatment of and violence against black women. Eric Pritchard and Maria Bibbs provide a more specific critique that places black lgbtq hip hop fans in an even more liminal space.[5] They advise that lgbtq youth of color must pick a primary identity, or focus upon their race or sexuality, as there is no space in mainstream hip hop for this duality. Consequently, the impossibility of this decision actually requires lgbtq youth of color to pick isolating self- acceptance or the invisibilizing fellowship of mainstream hip hop.[6] This argument is extremely similar to black butch-femme youth that must either refuse to see themselves through acclaimed black lesbian literature or find affirmation through alternative means. Critics have heavily scrutinized and demonized the misogyny and homophobia within hip hop lyrics and music videos but I argue that a critique of this "feminist" critique is available through close analysis of hip hop (however it manifests) through a critical queer of color lens amplified by an ethic grounded in hip hop aesthetics.

I refer to an ethic based in the contradiction of erotic desire and political awareness as expressed by Joan Morgan when she asks: "Am I no longer down for the cause if I admit that while total gender equality is an interesting intellectual concept, it doesn't do a damn thing for me erotically" (57). Morgan hints at a mind/body separation, a dichotomy that becomes blurred within mediums rooted in an Africanist aesthetic, such

[5] Pritchard, 23

[6] Ironically, Street Lit and hip hop are important modes of expression for working class black butch/femme subjects, as this project asserts. See *The Aggressives* for more information concerning black butch/femme and hip hop.

as hip hop.[7] Rapper Paradigm concurs with the complexity blackness brings to expressing desire, gender and sexuality in art when she states that people of the African diaspora "'have a very complex relationship to those structures'" (Pritchard 31). Paradigm insinuates the need to have a more nuanced conversation about the intersections of sexism and homophobia in relationship to race, and I will argue class, when discussing hip hop. Returning to the epigraph, Clay begins to question the impact of celebrating and loving oneself in the revelry of misogynistic music (and seemingly misogynist gender(ed) performances and events) while simultaneously dealing with sexism and homophobia in other consistent and hegemonic ways. While Clay focuses upon the impact of male-dominated music upon queer spaces, I wish to analyze another hip hop medium, Street Lit, in order interrogate the butch/stud subjects directly as they appear in Street Lit, rather than indirectly through their invisibility in hip hop.

Critical hip hop theory should practice more devoted interest in Street Lit since, as Danyel Smith puts it, "even the most average street-lit author rocks the pen like an old-fashioned 'dope MC'" (188). Quite unlike beloved black lesbian literature and hip hop, Street Lit conveys more than a few black butch/stud characters. While describing butch/stud presence in Street Lit as an abundance is a grand overstatement, this knowledge renders Street Lit significantly valuable to scholars interested in working class black butch/stud life from the mid-1970s to the present. While hip hop is considered a "marginal subculture pushing its way to the center of American pop culture," and thus worthy of scholarly study, Street Lit, "the usually self published [book] available on your finer 125th Street card tables…[is] - from a literary perspective - garbage" (Osumare 7, Mansbach 101). While hip hop's short lyrical prose warrants a complicated literary

[7] Osumare, 67

analysis, it seems Street Lit's tendency towards typos, deviant characters, and (auto)biographical plotlines renders it outside of a worthy literary status, nevermind that black feminist scholars have discussed the role of the (auto)biography in creating collective agency and subjectivity for black women within the African diaspora wherein subjecthood was otherwise impossible.[8] It seems some scholars are quick to dismiss the biographies - or subjecthood - of some black working class writers and their consistent expression of "dead-wrongness," even if the display of that deviance is characteristic of the black literary tradition (Smith 188).

What does the deviant black butch in Street Lit (my stand in for the black butch rapper in hip hop) reveal? In order to examine her in her self-ascribed agency, first we must remove the hegemonic gaze within which we work in order to practice "critical thinking outside of traditional institutional frames" (Osumare 155). While we find hip hop critiques of capitalism and racism within the poetry of MCs, we may find similar critiques of homophobia and sexism within the colloquial prose of Street Lit. Critical hip hop theory provides a means of analysis grounded in the experiences of youth of color but critical hip hop theory does not take into consideration the abundance of Street Lit readers, particularly lgbtq readers of color, and the visibility of black queer subjects within the rudimentary sentences within its pages. How are lgbtq youth of color (re)defining gender, sexuality and consequently, misogyny and sexism, as they relate to the black butch/stud characters? How do we read gender, sexuality, misogyny and sexism in hip hop and Street Lit in a specifically lgbtq youth of color context or within a hip hop generation ethic?

[8] Pough, Check It, 103

Imani Perry, in *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop*, provides a potential outline for releasing deviant subjects from aberrance. She advises that when discussing and analyzing the potentially inflammatory language within hip hop, we must remember to define such words by context (25). Such a reading is similar to understanding hip hop (and Street Lit) rhetorics as a second (or first) language. For example, rappers' consistent use of the word "bitch" is under regular scrutiny, but some hip hop enthusiasts argue that this word has many different meanings and some female singer/rappers have reclaimed the word out of all derogatory sense. While this outlook is contested it cannot be overlooked. If hip hop has affected black sexuality, then perhaps we need to study black sexuality on hip hop's terms.[9] While the black masculine female subjects within Street Lit (or on television, or in contemporary times, Youtube) may exhibit misogynistic behavior as seen from a white hegemonic feminist gaze, perhaps a gaze from an lgbtq youth of color angle will render a different significance in the masculinist performances of black butch/stud personages. As Clay advises, "before we can move entirely to the other spectrum of masculinity in popular culture, it is important to examine how these masculinities are performative, and how queer women...perform then...the rigidity of Black male masculinity is flipped to fit the context" (155). Rather than focus upon black males, we should ask how and why do black studs perform a particular type of masculinity.

In a black party space, how are these performances eroticized? When placed in the context of erotics, how are we to re-read black masculinity as it pertains to men and women? How are lgbtq youth of color understanding themselves as desirable subjects and how does Street Lit provide that lens/mirror? How are the black masculinist

[9] Rose, 174

performances of butches/studs simultaneously a celebration of same sex love and objectification of the black female body? In reading misogynistic performances of SGL loving, how are lgbtq youth of color igniting agency while redefining and speaking back against hegemonic notions of sexism? How are lgbtq youth, especially black butch/stud figures, refusing to see use "in assimilating into the American mainstream," including middle class black society, by wearing men's clothes, not to pass as men, but simply to present as black masculine females, exhibiting their bodies and gender(s) as sexually desirable and socially powerful despite mainstream opinion? How are they using their gender non-conformity as a power move - not to contribute to sexism but to be sexually explicit by indicating what their bodies do (as opposed to mainstream discipline that conveys what they should not do).[10] Finally, although our society normalizes sexism, Tricia Rose advises that this is not an excuse and that "reproducing it with consistency...replicate[s] it" (172). I complicate this thought by asking if sexist language somehow provides a way to undo sexism. Does this reproduction remove any of the power in sexism, particularly in queer spaces? The title of Clay's article, I used to be scared of the dick, evokes historical fear of the masculine, but eroticises a feminine desire. What does it mean for black females to strap on, insert and/or allow entry of the dick as a source of penetrative power? I wish to focus on some of these questions through an analysis of Street Lit written by black lesbians about black female masculinity. In the following pages, the first chapter will define Street Lit, its importance, and Trick(Ster)ing as a developing concept that allows me to analyze performative embodiments through a Street Code ethic. Chapter two is a close analysis of two primary texts utilizing Trick(ster)ing as a method of survival and resistance in a capitalist society.

[10] Perry, 182. "It is a delicate balance, but it is important to distinguish between sexual explicitness and internalized sexism."

Within the final chapter, I leave Trick(Ster)ing behind in order to dissect and complicate the relationship between black female masculinity and misogyny.

Why Street Literature?

Street Lit, as a genre, provides an alternative analysand for deconstructing hegemonic notions of gender. Generally understood as "raw, gritty, urban stories set in the violent, dangerous, familiar, and sometimes exhilarating landscape of the streets, featuring tough African American characters and focusing on themes of interpersonal relationships and survival by any means necessary," this genre is typically rife with expletives, violence and sex (Honig ix). This definition is idealistically broad enough to suit the array of personages and events within this genre but the diction provided hints at the social stigma surrounding not only this literature but the working class Black bodies represented within the text while simultaneously ignoring whose gaze is implicated in determining what is considered "raw" or "gritty."

Oftentimes described as Urban Street Literature, Urban Black Fiction, Urban Fiction or Black crime fiction, I use the term Street Lit here due to its vague connotation regarding setting since not all of the settings within this genre are urban (e.g., prisons in the countryside or rural towns with a significant proportion of lower to middle income blacks) and not all street literature includes crime (eg. dramatic romance/revenge novels). Street Lit is typically about African American subjects written by African Americans with an African American intended audience. When analyzing and discussing Street Lit, intended audience and actual readership are important aspects to keep in mind. Additionally, "street" is not simply a reference to a lack of rural spaces but it also connotes "a social space, where news and rumors travel, and where crime and violence grow largely unchecked. Many subjects and themes of street lit involve...drug dealing, prostitution, robberies, friendship, betrayal and revenge" (Honig x). Taboo themes and events occur from a specific point of view, one that directly references and questions the

author's life experiences. In order to prove and validate their street "cred", or authenticity, authors note that they speak from personal and familial experiences within book prefaces. Such experiences ideally provide authors with the pragmatism, or street code, so specific and necessary to street literature. Ethics are not simply based upon good and evil within this genre as characters must make difficult choices in order to acquire their basic needs: "shelter, providing for their families, freedom from abuse or mistreatment, respite from the pain of daily life, or respect of peers and community. Drug dealing, sex work, and violent crime are frequently seen as paths to getting one's needs met" (Honig xi). Analysis of subjects that live under a specific and customized set of ethics designed to enhance quotidian experiences must be undertaken under this same specific lens and an essentialized, hegemonic, or presumably universal set of rules must be tangential to this research. One of the premier scholars of Street Lit, LaMonda Stallings, advises that "Black underclass culture contains a different set of politics and a variety of contradictions as far as gender, sexuality, and race are concerned."[11] Street Lit not only demonstrates that street code exists, but characters within these narratives operate and prosper within a code that is already elusive and hidden away from the more traditional American narratives so acclaimed within classrooms.

Proudly operating within this code is a part of the reason for Street Lit's popularity with working class Black adolescents and young adults. In *Pimping Fictions: African American Crime Literature and the Untold Story of Black Pulp Publishing*, Street Lit scholar Justin Gifford advises that there may be two specific populations that tend to read street literature: Black inmates within the US prison system and Black adolescents. Other studies suggest that contemporary readers of Street Lit are Black women between

[11] "I'm Goin Pimp Whores," 3

the ages of 18 and 35, but librarians have noted Black males are drawn more to Street Lit than other genres.[12] Ironically, these studies privilege the readership of post-millennial audiences whereas analyses of Street Lit's readership since its mid-20th century dawn are few and far between, despite profit margins reaching millions of dollars and the expansion of the street publishing industry. Information science researchers and literary scholars alike rely on anecdotal evidence in order to determine the range of Street Lit's readership.[13]

In *Colorlines*, in addition to interviewing authors and readers of Street Lit, Almah LaVon Rice questions this purported popularity among young adults and the resulting intergenerational tension. She asserts that "people appear to be reading street lit to find themselves and escape themselves at the same time. Some readers enjoy losing themselves in portrayals of preternaturally lavish lifestyles, racy sex and ride-or-die dramas of the streets, while others enjoy the genre for its reflective qualities….many readers actually have a personal connection to what they are reading" (43). Notice the difference in diction here. Rice actually emphasizes the "lavish" lifestyle of folk normally forced to exist within subsistence lifestyles. Such portrayals provide an escape, and probably a pathway, for young readers looking to eventually fend for themselves. Sex within these texts also forms a type of escape but not in the usual fantastical form. Personal experience allows readers to enjoy the erotic scenes for pleasure as well as for self-reflection via th ethical musings of characters that share the readers' point of view. "Ride-or-die" is code for young, beautiful and cunning female characters that demonstrate loyalty through the support of their rich and respected male partners. What Rice alludes to through her own descriptor of Street Lit is a life in which societal outcasts

[12] Marcou, Daniel
[13] Honig, ix

have found other ways of valuing their own bodies, as royalty, at least in the streets. Such relatable depictions have been "credited for converting an entire generation into readers" and these young readers "get to indulge in the age-old pleasure of alarming their elders," providing young adults with "a voice that goes against established thinking" (44). While many literary scholars discuss the importance of finding self-reflections within published narratives, others decry Street Lit for the aforementioned representations of Black men and women and the negative sociological and emotional effects it may have upon Black youth: "Despite their popularity...urban street fiction texts are often objects of contention among teachers and other academic gatekeepers. This contentiousness stems from the extent to which authors...include sexually explicit and violent material" (Marshall 29). This tension between what is appropriate and inappropriate speaks to the lineage of respectability politics amongst Black political activists, the middle class and the working class. This particular contention around the genre of Street Lit demands analysis.

POLITICS OF RESPECTABILITY

The origins and genealogy of street literature are contested. Giffords provides the makeup of this genealogy and notes that some readers credit Chester Himes with the birth of Street Lit. Himes came of age during the Harlem Renaissance era and wrote fictional and autobiographical short stories and novels about prison life. He was the first person to write popular crime literature from the perspective of the black criminal, catering to black audiences during the 1960's (Gifford 9). Other debates focus upon even earlier works such as Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Ann Petry's *The Street*. Interestingly, this debate ranges between Street Lit's "devoted" readership and conservative Black scholars. Scholars claim that the above novels by Wright and Petry are "nuanced, complicated treatments of Black urban life, whereas" popularized Street Lit is "characterized by its

sensationalization of inner-city conditions [with] neglect of analysis or context" (Rice 44). My scholarship does not attempt to remain neutral in this debate. I align my work with rappers such as Ice-T and Nas who maintain that their artistic inspiration is derived from the works of successful authors such as Iceberg Slim and Donald Goines. As demonstrated, Street Lit is typically autobiographical or based upon familial events. Oftentimes, narratives are in first person. Lutie Johnson's and Bigger Thomas' lives are theorized through the perspective of a limited third person. Their personal perspectives are perpetually unknown. I argue that Street Lit does provide theory for understanding Black urban life through its depiction of such lives, not from a bird's eye view, but from first person perspective. This perspective is decidedly working class and operates outside of the politics of respectability sanctioned by and required to become a part of the Black middle class.

Street Lit, as a genre, works in contradiction to this politics of respectability.[14] Sociologists such as E. Franklin Frazier and Daniel Patrick Moynihan inspired mythical explanations in which "black men were inappropriately weak figures within the black family structure, and that black women were disproportionately strong, even emasculating" and this construction encouraged the notion of the "pathology" of the Black family (Jenkins 65). As a result of this construction of the Black working class, especially those within crowded, segregated and urban environments, the Black middle class adopted a politics of respectability in order to distinguish themselves as proper, decorous hegemonically masculine and feminine agents within a patriarchal kinship system rather than the supposedly matriarchal kinship system of the working class that produced effeminate men, masculine women, violence and filth. The word "street(s),"

[14] Gifford, Justin

taken in context with its denotation of the urban, the paved, the public, has an interesting relationship with its connotation within Black vernacular. The "street(s)" is where the private takes place in public. Drug shuffling and usage, sex, violence and other dramatic occurrences take place on the corner. On the corner, the dichotomy of public/private is not clear.[15] Respectability politics is about maintaining that divide.

Scholars that have taken the task of pulling theory from Street Lit, rather than theorizing about it, such as LaMonda Stallings, have consciously critiqued the lack of a critical analysis of this genre. In her essay, "I'm Goin Pimp Whores! The Goines Factor and the Theory of a Hip-Hop Neo-Slave Narrative," Stallings defines and analyzes what she believes to be a genealogy of contemporary hip-hop. She focuses upon the work and life of Donald Goines, a pioneer of contemporary Street Lit whose work was published in the mid 1970s. As previously mentioned, some hip-hop artists credit Street Lit as an inspiration. Stallings pushes this lineage further in citing slave narratives as potential inspiration for the Street Lit authors that have in turn inspired hip-hop artists. Within this text, she advises that:

> Like hip-hop culture does for those who live it, the themes and aesthetics of Goines' work demonstrate an in-depth understanding of class and the all-important difference between Negroes, niggers and Blacks...It's much more difficult to understand the importance of his work to Black culture as a whole, especially when so many critics would just as soon ignore the texts...very few black cultural critics have the appreciation that would lend itself to a rigorous critical analysis (2).

Stallings emphasizes the importance of analyzing not only hip-hop, but Street Lit as a theoretical model. Within this model, language and experience is offered as a tool for differentiating class. In choosing to ignore these texts, scholars continue to tacitly

[15] See Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* to understand how the public/private dichotomy and its relationship to racial segregation.

essentialize when theorizing about "the Black experience" by eliding certain perspectives. Stallings discusses the "white elephant" in the room full of Black academics by exposing "the field of African American cultural and literary criticism to its own class elitism" and calling for scholars to "reenvision the current criticism of hip-hop away from the traditional and limited ideologies that work to define hip-hop culture" and consequently argues for a similar outlook upon Street Lit as hip-hop's predecessor.

This aforementioned negative opinions of Street Lit has led not only to the refusal to examine and discuss Street Lit within the classroom setting but has also affected the structure of street publishing industry. Many authors self-published their work or found independent presses to disburse their work. Additionally, "street lit became popular through community channels and word of mouth, bypassing traditional book distributors and advertising venues" (Honig ix). Recognizing that many factors are considered when publishing a book, one of the most important factors is profitability.[16] Only until the 1990s have publishing houses began publishing Street Lit. Iceberg Slim and Donald Goines have received livable wages due to their unique yet exploitative lifetime contracts with Holloway House.[17] How authors get their work published and/or dispersed as well as how, when and where readers access this material is directly impacted by larger societal notions of respectability and value(s).[18] This oppressive relationship with publishing demonstrates Street Lit's undermining of hegemonic goals. Characteristically, narratives are presented in first-person, from the perspectives of black working-class lives in

[16] See Jonathan Yardley's "Publishing and Profits: The Plot Thickens" for a discussion concerning the effects of projected profit upon publishing decisions.

[17] See LaMonda Stallings "I'm Goin Pimp Whores!: The Goines Factor and the Theory of a Hip-Hop Neo-Slave Narrative" and Justin Gifford for a detailed conversation regarding the royalties scandal between Holloway House and Goines.

[18] I think this says something about the Marxism and the difficulty of using critiques of capitalism when discussing not only hip-hop but Street Lit as well. I have to hash this out more.

constant critique of the racist patriarchal structures within which they live. The first-person voice of the Street Lit deviant is very similar to the bravado of the seemingly angry MC insistent upon broadcasting his/her opinions.

QUEER DEVIANTS

Refusal to take Street Lit seriously speaks to what Queer of Color scholar Matt Richardson describes as a "queer limit to how we understand our history and ourselves" (Queer Limit 3). Stallings insistence upon reading hip-hop and Street Lit not only at face value but also as a theoretical tool underscores what Black feminist Barbara Christian has advised generations before: "people of color have always theorized - but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic" (68). Street Lit emphasizes that not only are these Black authors theorizing in a different form (via the first-person perspective of the Black working class) but they also theorize outside of Western logic itself (or theorize about street code). What does it mean to take this logic seriously? What does it mean to pay "notable attention to the conditions and bondage of the author" as Stallings asks in her critique of neo-slave narrative analyses, whether that restriction and impossibility is within slavery or within contemporary urban locations (8)?

Primarily, we must answer the question of how Street Lit is queer and how Queer of Color critique, when applied to analyses of Street Lit, can assist in deconstructing hegemonic notions of gender, sexuality and literature. In "Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?," Cathy Cohen does the critical work of linking Black pathology claims to queer theory and politics. Cohen acknowledges the similarities and differences between queer theory and queer politics in that both of these structures understand sexual expression as an always potentially flexible, mobile, redefining and mobile element within people's lives. Such instability in

sexual categories and sexual subjectivity make evident the vehicles and structures of power that render sexually deviant subjects invisible and thereby at risk. Cohen advises that "for those of us who find ourselves on the margins, operating through multiple identities and thus not fully served or recognized through traditional single-identity based politics, theoretical conceptualizations of queerness hold great political promise" (446). "Queer" here is not a simplistic representation for sexual minorities such as gays or lesbians but rather Cohen desires broad use of this term for all bodies that struggle through everyday survival and resistance across multiple sites of oppression based upon dominant constructs of race and gender. Such bodies challenge heteronormativity in that they illuminate how "institutional racism, patriarchy, and class exploitation" similarly and simultaneously create marginal subjects (446). In light of this reality, more visible identity structures outside of sexuality, such as the racial and gender hierarchies sometimes crucial to one's survival within communal spaces, are in direct contradiction to much of queer theory in which identity politics are perpetually challenged. So, what Cohen understands as theoretical conceptualizations of queerness are not necessarily based upon identity politics but "in our shared marginal relationship to dominant power which normalizes, legitimizes, and privileges" (458). Cohen's understanding of queerness includes not only lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender bodies, but also those bodies considered pathological and incorrigibly matriarchal. Street Lit, with its violent, sexual, illegal and perpetually reworked notions of kinship is queer theoretically.

Upon reviewing its tropes, peculiarities, academic opinions and its publishing history, Street Lit may be understood as "unmelodic, improvisational, unpredictable, and irresolute" as it represents a refusal to a "normative resolution to the question of Black familial pathology" by its inability to cover up its queerness (Richardson, *The Queer Limit*, 3). Street Lit refuses the politics of respectability demanded of it by the usual

readership and undermines these constraints through methods of self-publishing and word-of mouth. The street code, so pivotal to these works, represents "the agency of those on the outside, those who through their acts of nonconformity choose outsider status, at least temporarily" until they become the saints and heros of their moment, like Donald Goines, and buy their way into the Black middle class (Cohen, "Deviance," 27). This agency, constructed outside of a Western logic (who chooses to self-publish prolifically with little to no profit and who chooses to become a hustler or a ho), is a method of survival not only for the subjects within the texts but also for the authors who brave their voice. Street Lit not only complicates basic understandings of race as "fixed or natural, but rather represent[s] a social and historical category that is lived out in multiple ways with various political consequences...providing readers with complex representations of Black femininity [and masculinity] that can be taken up in a variety of ways" (Marshall 28). Within this genre, social stigma and class distinctions are the result of racial constructs and, as a result of this social stratification, Black subjects all struggle to survive and make it out of the Bottom but in variously gendered ways.

Some of these gendered ways of survival are and always will be outside of respectability politics defined by people that have already bought their way out. Hortense Spillers ponders the usefulness and integrity of biological sex and gender in her discussion of the names and perjoratives that haunt Black women. Her discussion rattles the assumption that gender means anything at all for Black folk. What does it mean not to question these nominative agents and consequently be them? In light of those many other names, for all Black folk and their numerous archetypes, I ponder if those labels mean more than slurs or do they point to a different type of identity politics - where gender means something else - for a subset of people?

While Street Lit is essentially queer in its topic and voice, focusing upon the utility of labels and archetypes, I now turn to portrayal of hegemonically queer subjects, particularly Black lesbians, within Street Lit.[19] Nominal constructions are local and specific to Black cultural spaces, especially queer spaces, and naming or labeling serve as an alternative to hegemonic blanket terms rendering bodies invisible in ways that naming resists.[20] This naming process is in and of itself subversive rather than limiting as many queer theorists would suggest. While the Black community has a plethora of names for both its lgbtq community and "everyone else" alike, portrayals of Black lesbians vary greatly between portrayals in Black lesbian literature and portrayals within Street Lit and popular films. Filmic and literary depictions tend to avoid the Black butch/stud or Black female masculinity altogether when discussing Black lesbians.[21] Black lesbians do tend to follow a certain politics of respectability, at least in the ability to visually appear less deviant. Ironically, the stud does appear in Blaxploitation films and television series, much like the stud appears in Street Lit. This split could be a result of stud/femme identities as generally working class or, similar to the issues of Street Lit and academic refusals to seriously undertake personages such as the hustler and the ho, simply politics of respectability in action.[22] This refusal, regarding queers of color and the other "queer" identities represented within this genre signal the imperative to exclude specific opinions and points of view from pivotal theory making processes within academe. A close analysis of Street Lit and its tropes, with the ethics and lens demanded by the street code in which the texts operate, will assist in undoing hegemonic notions of gender and

[19] I wish to evoke the contradiction here of separating the queerness of blackness (see Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens," from what is typically understood as queer (lgbtq).
[20] Richardson, "Good and Messy"
[21] Keeling, Kara
[22] Eves, Allison

sexuality undergirding theory formation across interdisciplinary realms. Below, I turn to two of the most popular and hailed tropes of Street Lit as theoretical devices.

HUSTLING, TRICKING AND THE TRICKSTER TROPE

The hustler and the ho are two polarized and deified figures of ideal masculinity and femininity within the genre of Street Lit. For the queer purposes of this argument, I will focus upon hustling and tricking as gendered performances and methods of survival and resistance, respectively. I emphasize this difference so as to note that identities are never stable, much like the conditions or labels normally referenced to specify a person within queer theory are never static. Hustling and tricking provide an alternative binary to Masculine and Feminine and similarly these two actions can represent opposing ends of a gender spectrum, with hustling standing in as masculinized actions and tricking as feminized actions. On the other hand, getting tricked and getting hustled signify the gendered subjects towards which actions are performed. Focusing upon traditionally gendered actions allows specific actions to render one's gender (rather than the prescribed sex of one's body). Consequently, one's perceived success at hustling and tricking determine how one's gender is perceived within street literature. Finally, I insist upon the verbal formulation, as opposed to the nominal forms (the hustler and the ho) in order to set up a forthcoming theoretical analysis based upon the trickster.

Patricia Hill Collins defines the hustler as "a simple 'player,' one who uses people to trick them out of something that he wants. Players always target women, trading sexuality for economic gain" (162). Within the diction of this description itself, the hustler is always and essentially male, additionally, Collins elides the differences between the player and the hustler which places an unspoken emphasis of sexuality onto the figure of the hustler that is particularly useful for a gendered analysis. Additionally,

contemporary hip-hop lyrics qualify the sex of hustlers: "A diva is the version of a female hustler."[23] A more useful definition specific to African-American vernacular articulates why hustling is more appropriate than pimping for this analysis. "Major: hustle; hustling; [a] hustle v., n. (1650s-1900s) making money by pimping or selling drugs or running a "game"' to survive by any means possible; self-employment on a makeshift job; to gesture at someone in an intense manner" (Major 247). Well articulated within the genre itself, pimping is not necessarily the epitome of masculinized behavior but just one variation amongst a lineage of deified lifestyles. Pimping, pushing and boosting are all just different variations of hustling or masculinized forms of survival.

On the other hand, the ho is historically essentialized as female. Similar to the hustler, the ho targets (usually) men in trades of sexuality (or turning tricks) for economic gain. In her critique of these archetypes, Collins does not provide a nuanced definition of either the feminized label or action. One source advises that a "main ho'" is oftentimes simply a "best girl friend" (Abrahams 266). This is not necessarily a pejorative as much as it is a feminine gender indicator. Yet, it is also important to note that it does literally mean "whore; a promiscuous female; prostitute" (Major 235). Such a diversion in meaning emphasizes the importance of focusing on context, rather than diction as perpetually pejorative or inherently absent of disdain, when analyzing Street Lit. Returning to the analysand, tricking is an inherently feminized mode of survival. "Tricks" are generally "the act of intercourse, itself, usually in the whorehose" (Abrahams 268). Women usually are responsible for "turning a trick" or successfully receiving payment from a client in exchange for sexual intercourse. In certain contexts, tricking usually connotes a certain amount of deception or distrust due to female wiles. "From the pimp's

[23] Beyonce. "Diva." *I am...Sasha Fierce*. Columbia Records, 2008. CD.

point of view, real men don't pay for sex, only chumps do, and they deserve to be the victims they are" (Major 484). The variations in negative, neutral and positive connotation also mimic similar variations in gender(ed) actions and gender performance for some subjects.

If hustling and tricking are, respectively, masculine and feminine performances, the getting tricked and getting hustled are their polar opposites. Essentialized male clients get tricked, yet this notion is complicated by the existence of gender indiscriminate prostitutes and clients. Thus, anybody that is interested can get tricked much like anybody that is open or forced into sex work can trick. Additionally, typically female bodies are hustled by male bodies. Yet, the limitless outlets for where hustling occurs requires that those getting hustled are not essentially female. Capitalizing upon profits and opportunity also requires that those hustling are not essentially male. The gendered connotations of these words and themes requires a certain amount of queer transmutability within street code and consequently within Street Lit.

Attention to Black vernacular outside the aforementioned terms prioritizes the notion of the transmutability of gender via language. The word "cock" was previously understood as "the female genitalia" in Black vernacular (Abrahams 264). Oddly, in more contemporary and well circulated oral and written works, cock is known as a penile or penetrative object. Thus, cock has specifically gendered connotations, varying between male and female (in reference to genitalia), depending upon temporality and location. Additionally, "stud" is known as "any male, especially one in the know" and it has an "obvious sexual origin" (Abrahams 268). Beginning in the 1940s this term also became synonymous with Black masculine female persons. While this term is consistently in reference to the masculine, it simultaneously varies, dependent upon temporality and location, between male and female. Therefore, terms and labels, rather than the typical

gender pronouns and subject terms, are particularly useful for analyzing gender and sexual identities within Street Lit. As previously discussed, as the authors are bound to authenticity, street code, audience and publishers, we must consider the condition of the authors and their bodies. These stories focusing upon the hustling and tricking, are from the viewpoint of those in bondage, therefore we must rethink how we see liberation and resistance, as well as gender and sexual politics.

How do gender performances and Black vernacular relate to and/or amplify rhetorical and literary conventions such as the trickster trope? In *Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism,* Henry Louis Gates, Jr. discusses the Yoruba god (lwa) Esu-Elegbara as a trickster figure. Esu is known as the gatekeeper or mediator between "here and the divine world" (4) with one foot standing in each location. According to Gates, he is characterized as male with a propensity for playful phallic dances, yet his characteristics and descriptions are endless, rendering Esu representative of contradiction and multiplicity with male and female manifestations. This contradiction is particularly evident in Esu's role in divine interpretation.

Esu's discourse is double-voiced; he beholds the responsibility of communication while simultaneously claiming ownership over interpretation. Esu is storyteller as well as interpreter of that story. He is speaker and listener. Gates understands *Signifyin(g)* as a rhetorical method of this divine trickster (as well as other trickster forms) within African-American oral and literary tradition. *Signifyin(g)* is speech that references multiplicitous meanings, much like the duplicity inherent within the speech previously discussed. The meaning of *Signifyin(g*) speech is always "deferred because the relationship between intent and meaning, between the speech act and its comprehension, is skewed by the figures of rhetoric or signification of which [the speech] consist" (53). This particular deferral and multiplicity in meaning is specific to what Gates terms "black vernacular."

Attending to cultural specificity, *Signifyin(g)* always signifies the need to code and (re)interpret meanings due to historical oppression based upon race. If Esu and other tricksters are masters of *Signifyin(g),* then they simultaneously speak and (re)interpret their own words. One meaning is never discernible or stable across time. Esu and the speech manifested in his honor (*Signifyin(g)*) represent the "uncertainty of explication" - the open-endedness of speech (21). For Gates, double voicedness represents the tension between what words mean and what words do. Is there tension between what words are said and what the bodily actions betray? I argue that this open-endedness and double-voice is not only available through *Signifyin(g)* but is also available within embodied actions, such as tricking, hustling, getting tricked and getting hustled - or Trick(Ster)ing.

Trick(Ster)ing signifies the trickster trope while referencing the gendered actions previously discussed. While *Signifyin(g)* is a rhetorical method utilized by the trickster, there are other methods of demonstrating multiplicities. Similar to Esu, Collins describes the hustler as having "one foot on either side of the law" (162). He is a refined criminal, stealing from consenting women and exhibiting extreme cunning when engaging in illegal activity, blurring the lines between licit/illicit behavior. While the hustler's skill may involve sexual prowess, as Collins asserts, I argue that the hustler is different from the player and the pimp in that hustling is not always sexual. Emphasis is placed upon the hustler's dexterity and skill in acquiring economic gain which is not always a result of sexual/romantic encounters. On the other hand, the ho is essentially female or feminized and thus falls out of the traditional masculinist trickster paradigm as discussed by Gates. In *Mutha' is Half a Word*, LaMonda Stallings insists that contemporary feminine subjects are caught trickster-troping all of the time! Stallings describes trickster-troping as "acts of undecidability" amongst many other things (10). Inspiring this project, Stallings pushes the trickster figure from a trope to a discourse of embodiment and, in referencing Clifford

Geertz's "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," she reasons that "if he, trickster, could be [neither a god nor a man, neither human nor animal; he is all of them], the he could also be a she" (12). Stallings revitalizes the trickster from a mythical male contradiction and with "limited focus on the rhetoric of sex to a discourse of desire that is more invested in a foundational understanding of the broad spectrum of sexuality in African American female culture " (11).[24]

TRICK(STER)ING

If Esu is standing at a crossroads, the black female masculinized subject represents this gendered middle ground. While Stallings complicates the trickster as masculine in focusing on Black female subjects rather than the trickster as a masculinizing force, I choose to focus on the black stud (butch) subject as having one foot within a feminine realm and another within a masculine realm or as the embodiment of a dual-gendered trickster. Within Street Lit, standing on this axis would require her to utilize Trick(Ster)ing, or tricking, hustling, getting tricked and getting hustled as methods of survival and resistance within black urban environments. This site of contradiction allows her to access an alternative black masculinity that is deified within street literature.[25] Further complicating matters, the texts discussed below depend upon racialized constructs also outlined by street literature canon for the successful performance of black masculinity and necessary survival via black femininity. Trick(Ster)ing emphasizes the importance of multiplicity and chameleon-like transformations that allows queer black women access to a type of privilege or agency

[24] Stallings moves the trickster across the gender spectrum, from male to female, in order to discuss black female sexuality.

[25] see *Thiefing Sugar*: Tinsley insists upon utilizing feminine pronouns regardless of the subjects' gender presentation. She justifies this in her reference to diasporic languages' ability to name and evoke masculine presentations of female subjects without naming them as male.

where none should be for women. Within this genre, single bodies trick and become tricks, hustle and get hustled, as a rite of passage and survival. Signifyin(g) becomes not the action of speaking, but a queer black way of living to the fullest. The -ing is invaluable. One cannot be any of these deified figures without performing the actions and displaying the proof that renders oneself these ideals. That evidence is a part of the code. While these figures have god like status in the 'streets' - these figures require miracle style tangible proofs in order to exist- offerings of sorts. This need for evidence complicates the queer theory notions of gender performance and provide an alternative for understanding why "gender and racial realness" are so important for Black folk as a whole, not just LGBT folk.[26] Evidently, this gender and racial realness is not simply male/female but a various array of types, never static.

Utilizing a tradition of rhetorical strategies, Street Lit also emphasizes the importance of the openness of meaning to explore crossroads that the trickster represents in various masculinized formations and modes of living. Trick(Ster)ing is not a literary trope like "the trickster" but it is intended to signify an embodiment and a mode of life, offering endless possibilities for subjects that utilize this method in a similar fashion to the endless connotations *signifyin(g)* provides for whoever is reading and listening, always dependent upon temporality and location, never static. In the following pages, I will complicate traditional constructions of gender and sexuality through the analysis of the stud/butch figure within Street Lit. I will analyze the text within the context of street code utilizing Trick(Ster)ing as a theoretical tool. While all of the characters prove to be materialistic, or steeped in a capitalist ethic, Trick(Ster)ing allows them to navigate and survive within this patriarchal structure in ways they otherwise could not.

[26] Bailey, Marlon M. "Gender/Racial Realness: Theorizing the Gender System in Ballroom Culture."

THE TEXTS

Section 1: No Love in Money

This analysis begins with *The Bars Across Heaven*. In regular Street Lit fashion, Arobateau's novel evades the expected plot with climax, denouement and resolution. The Bars reads like a memoir, replete with changing temporalities and seemingly unrelated seques. Self-published by Red Jordan Arobateau in 1975, set in 1968, this book is an unedited, semi-autobiographical novel about a young, short, stylish and shy woman, Flip. Her stereotypically masculine embodiment or her "androgynous figure" earns her the title butch (Arobateau 3). Estranged from family in New York, she travels to Oakland in order to join other "glamorous butches" in pursuit of their "counterparts – fems [sic]." An all around hustler, Flip travels between Oakland and San Francisco selling drugs, shoplifting, getting high, drinking, loitering, having sex and many other activities associated with Street Lit's heros. Her activities are supplemented by a government welfare check, signifying on stereotypes of black inner-city poor women and youth. She receives financial assistance in exchange for attending 'rehabilitation groups' that resemble feminist consciousness raising groups more than counseling sessions. Flip's primary concern throughout the novel is a lack of love. She desires a relationship with another woman that is more fulfilling than the paid sex with women she occasionally experiences. Flip believes her crippling shyness and light skin prevent her from asking women in lesbian clubs to dance, let alone asking them out on a date. Cleo, dark femme-prostitute, womanizing black butch (supposedly), and Flip's best friend, coaches Flip out of her awkwardness around women. Flip lives in and cruises through Oakland's red light district in search of money, women, sex and love. In a rare critique of Arobateau's work, Lee Lynch writes:

> Iconoclastic and idiosyncratic, Red Jordan Arobateau writes with an exciting and

> uncontrolled energy. [His] work is erotic, political, violent, romantic. [His] female characters are, on some level, Everydyke, decidedly femme or butch. They are street kids and poverty-stricken couples. [His] mixed race butches are by turns abusive and abused. [His] femmes are betrayers and devoted 'wives,' occasionally both in the same character. Everyone gets high on chemicals. The world according to Arobateau is a trial and everyone is guilty, everyone sentenced to a hard time" (Lynch 16).

Unlike the other (very few) black lesbian writers of the seventies, Arobateau focuses on working class black butch/femme couples. He writes within an ethic that is antagonistic to and critical of mainstream society by utilizing street code and highlighting hustling as a means of survival. Arobateau's characters are full of contradiction and irresolution.[27] Flip's variations in gender performance as a means of survival - moving between hustling, getting hustled, tricking and getting tricked - represent one aspect of the aforementioned contradiction and irresolution.

HUSTLING AND GETTING HUSTLED: GETTING HER MANHOOD AND LEARNING FROM THE LADIES

Flip's queer identity allows her to perform various gender(ed) actions, all ranging within a feminine/masculine spectrum. Unique to Arobateau's work is a nuanced critique of racialized norms and stereotypes from the perspective of a mixed race person that desires to pass (or be recognized) as black.[28] This embodiment, combined with how Flip wishes to be perceived, is the foundation for Flip's irresolvable dilemmas and gender(ed) shifts throughout the novel. While her racial ambiguity serves as a necessary tool for her hustling, contradictorily, her skin tone also serves to make her an easy pawn for getting hustled.

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[27] see Richardson, Matt: *The Queer Limit of Black Memory*

[28] Flip's desire to pass as black differs from other books within the African-American literary tradition in which characters choose to pass as white for survival.

The ambiguity of her race, and others' perceptions of this physical feature, represent one aspect of Flip's varying gender(ed) performance. Flip travels from Oakland to Berkeley in order to shoplift. In white spaces, Flip is perceived as a white man which makes her less conspicuous when participating in illicit activities. Consequently, Cleo, her darker skinned accomplice, serves as an unwanted distraction while Flip easily collects and slips away with the loot. In other moments, Flip is perceived as black only due to her proximity to Cleo. Flip and Cleo sell drugs together as another form of hustling. Flip feels justified in this activity and states that she is "going to live like a king, even if [she] die[s]!...Her goal was to get it, in any way possible" (Arobateau 10). Flip's posturing as a hustler places her in the stereotypically male role of the drug dealer in Street Lit. Hustling is Flip's means to becoming a king, a right for which she is willing to fight. Unfortunately, Flip's proximity to Cleo in white spaces allow her to be perceived as black, which figuratively and literally marks Flip as female. Standing at the same corner where she once envisioned herself as a king, Flip and Cleo begin to feel self aware and threatened:

> Their faces held to a tight squinch, attempted to be expressionless. Their attitude was, 'I will not be hurt. I will hurt you'...A gang of men, big males, some 6'5" tall, passed by. Their male aggressiveness was apparent...One man shot Flip a glance, briefly. Flip's body tensed, she stiffened down into the fibers of her toes. She looked, eyes down, at the curb between the feet of the passing men. She was short, 5'3". The man's eyes had looked down, directly into hers, not shaded, avoiding eyes, as the gaze of women. This passerby's glance went into her as a knife. SMACK up into her skull. Her neck went rigid, as if she'd been threatened by an iron pipe. And so her own body had doubled, back-fist against her own self, to smash her soul...The smile on Flip's face persisted. Cold. Her cool exterior. 'I won't be hurt. But,' she thought, 'I feel drained.' (Arobateau 12/13)

While the race of the group of men is unmarked within the text, narrative elements allow the reader to assume that the group of men is white, since Flip and Cleo are on the Berkeley campus, near the same neighborhood where Flip passes as a white man in when

shoplifting. As the men walk by Flip and Cleo both maintain a fierce gaze while not looking into the men's eyes which serves as an allusion to Cleo and Flip's conditioning in a sexist society. This body language also alludes to the passerby's suspicion of Flip and Cleo's gender presentation. While the men do not speak to nor touch Flip and Cleo, they feel threatened nevertheless. This fear drains Flip of her confidence and self-worth, as the men violently uncover Flip as a trickster, or a black butch, rather than the white man they usually perceive.

Note that the men's gaze literally feminizes Flip and Cleo. On the other hand, it is important to consider the potential for analyzing Flip and Cleo as recognizable male subjects, in which they are figuratively feminized by the white male gaze. While Flip's gender non-conformity is violently evident in the aforementioned scene, Flip's race is also hyper-visible within this moment. It is unclear within the text that the men recognize Flip as a female, but it is very likely that they recognize both Flip and Cleo as black men, point blank, in a white space. In the documentary *It Gets Messy in Here*, participants along the FtM spectrum discuss their relationships with masculinity and the public's perception of their bodies. One participant advises that during his transition, public anxiety and antagonism against his body could stem from confusion over his gender identity but in certain spaces, anxiety may stem from recognizing him as a threatening black male. The latter awareness was an unfamiliar feeling for this participant. If Flip is recognized as a black man near a white college campus then Flip is recognized as a threat to be challenged or a nuisance to be removed. Additionally, it is important to note that Flip never passes as a white woman which also speaks to the stereotypically masculine attributes typically applied to blackness. It is the hint of Flip's blackness that prevents her from passing as a white woman.

The discomfort felt in this scene may simply be the result of being a black male in a white patriarchal space, where white women and black people are disallowed. Removal of black bodies may death - signifying upon the lynching of black men at the excuse of saving white women's purity - or racialized rape by white men against black women. Of lesser but still significant violence, another form of removal is racialized quarantine.[29] Within this text, Oakland represents this concrete jungle. Arobateau throws society's biggest deviants into the quarantined limits of the city. This diseased milieu represents a construct invented and proliferated since the mid-60's: black social pathology. In "The Black Pathology Biz," Ishmeal Reed provides a clever observation of Daniel Moynihan's assertion that the black condition is a "tangle of pathology": "How convenient it is to blame everything on a scapegoat, in this case black youth, who according to public superstitions, are responsible for all the crime in this country" (Moynihan 45, 597). Blackness (in conjunction with poverty) is closely aligned with deviance. In Arobateau's text, Police, businessmen, sailors and homeless men all venture to (or loiter in) this black sex and drug market. Within Oakland, or predominantly black working class spaces, Flip is read as a black woman.

An important assertion made by Moynihan is the pathology of an overt matriarchal structure within black society. Hortense Spillers provides a nuanced critique of Moynihan's report in analyzing the connotations and images associated with black women and their relationship to the foundations of racism inherent in America's development. She states that:

> nominative properties…[are] embedded in bizarre axiological ground, they demonstrate a sort of telegraphic coding; they are markers so loaded with mythical prepossession that there is no easy way for the agents buried beneath them to come clean…in order for me to speak a truer word concerning myself, I

[29] McGuire, Danielle.

> must strip down through layers of attenuated meanings, made an excess in time, over time, assigned by a particular historical order, and there await whatever marvels of my own inventiveness (65).

Spillers speaks to the loaded names and values assigned to the image of blackness. She asks an important question regarding self-awareness. How can Flip give voice to her own desires and articulate who she is if she has not stripped herself of the many names and labels used to define her. Perceptions of her as a white or black male allow her certain extralegal privileges whereas perceptions of her as a black female provides her with a different type of hustle: the Moynihan-esque welfare check. The welfare check, synonymous with black woman as discussed by Spillers, marks Flip as a black female. Yet, her acceptance of this welfare check as a hustle complicates hustling as a masculine performance. While Cleo receives a welfare check in order to take care of her child (she is also a femme-prostitute by night in order to make ends meet), Flip does not receive a check because of dependents. She receives a check from the "Minority Rehabilitation" assembly because she is considered an "aggressive, paranoid, and hostile" person. Since this form of payment is not based upon the need to care for dependants, the reader can assume that the "Minority Rehabilitation" assembly serves both male and female clients.[30] Additionally, Flip utilizes this payment in order to engage in stereotypically masculine actions, such as buying "gasoline for her truck, women, fancy clothes and the bars" (Arobateau 7). In this regard, the use of the welfare check can be seen as an embodied masculine act of hustling - or sweetbacking - which is just another form of hustling, wherein men utilize the earnings and welfare checks of women in order to perform the aforementioned activities. Flip is not the stereotypical black welfare mother as typified by those "nominative properties" Spillers discusses but rather she takes on the stereotypes associated with the black male. So while the welfare check signifies on Flip

[30] All dependent based welfare clients are not female but this is a common stereotype that affects reality.

as a black woman, the context of why she receives the check and how she chooses to use it marks her body as masculine. I have outlined how Flip's masculine gender performance of hustling marks her as a masculine subject. As a black butch, I argue that Flip is a trickster. How Flip gets hustled is as a black woman, demonstrating hustling as a masculine performance and getting hustled as a feminine performance. Through Trick(Ster)ing, or performing both black masculine and feminine embodiments simultaneously, I continue to argue that the black butch lesbian, as an embodiment of the trickster, consistently moves along a black gender(ed) spectrum, from the hustling to getting hustled.

Flip gets her hustle by embodying the actions of a black man, white man and black butch. Ironically, Flip's sometimes black and sometimes white skin is her only source of income. How she receives that income is a consequence of how her body's gender is perceived. When her body is perceived as female, she tends to get hustled. Returning to the subject of the welfare check, while Flip does not receive this welfare check because she is a stereotypical black woman, this check does feminize her in various ways. In the contradictory tradition of the trickster, I argue that this welfare check is indeed one form of Flip's masculine hustle but it is also how Flip gets hustled - Flip's feminine gender performance.

In order to attain her monthly checks from the State, Flip must attend weekly counseling sessions. It is in these counseling sessions where Flip begins to understand the effects of internalizing homophobia, racism and classism. The counseling sessions closely resemble feminist consciousness raising meetings wherein Flip is coached about the oppression of women. Flip acknowledges that while the sessions are a needed boost of confidence and support for white women, the group refuses to empathize with Flip's sense of loneliness and lack of self-worth. Flip believes that because she is black, lesbian

and masculine, that the coordinators of the session refuse to take her longing seriously. Flip notices impatience in the voices of the facilitators: "The room of women grew restless. Sighs. Fidgeting. Tiny noises. 'What is it…that you want from this group?'" (34). Flip advises them that she just wants them to listen to her and the women respond with wishes that Flip would be more specific. Arobateau provides another critique on second wave feminists' refusal to recognize the problems of minority women, especially within the inner city. They attempt to convince Flip that "the pig" is in her head, her inner dialogue that keeps her inactive and tense, rather than assist her in overcoming the social infrastructure that is a very real threat to Flip. They are quick to try and amend the problem with a simple solution rather than provide support. Ironically, Flip is not searching for a solution for her problems as much as she is in need of a space to talk. Despite expressing these desires, the facilitators insist that Flip simply needs to take more risks in "safe" spaces. In urging Flip to take action and risks whenever she is in a safe space, they refuse to acknowledge that she takes very dangerous risks everyday, that her life is at risk simply by existing as a gender non-conforming black woman, an oppression very different from the rest of the group, and finally, that there simply may not be a safe space for Flip in general. Her homework assignment never changes and Flip is forced to turn spaces of vulnerability, such as the street corner and the pool hall, into areas of opportunity. Another reading of the counseling sessions would require the acknowledgement of the facilitators as psychologists. They are representatives of the State responsible for reporting Flip's progress so that she can maintain her welfare checks. In this light, Flip is seen as a pathological black woman, whose "pig" in her head. The State will not acknowledge the systemic racism, homophobia, classism and sexism that all lead to Flip's lack of confidence and consequently, lack of love. In exchange for

hustling the checks, Flip is hustled out of the dignity of being taken seriously. In a way, these meetings concretize the feelings of self-worth that Flip already possesses.

Within these same meetings, Flip comes to understand the ways in which her class, sexuality and gender are viewed by society and the State which functions to hustle her out of a community, contributing to her feelings of loneliness. She asserts that a certain class of people, what she calls a "quality of people, it's impossible [for her] to get next to them…them black folks who work. Nurses or teachers or those who go to school. They all stick together and keep their shit to themselves. I knock, but the door is closed. The talk I've heard behind my back is, I'm trouble. A fighter. I'm low-lifted[sic]" (Arobateau 92). Here, Flip acknowledges the Moynihan-esque language used by State to define her? Ironically, these are the very same words the State uses to justify providing her with a "Minority Rehabilitation" check. While Flip hears the name-calling, she rejects the significance of these words by disidentifying with them, stating that those black folk stick together. Flip disassociates herself from the society that calls her a low-life and chooses to connect with a sub-culture she believes will accept her. While Flip can pass for white she chooses to align herself with her "black heritage" by "talking black vernacular," fully aware that "four hundred years of mix-marriage and rape had all but erased" any phenotypical markers of her African ancestry. Flip's association with blackness is based mostly on speech.[31] Her alignment with a racial construct is signified by the use of an invented dialect. Arobateau's utilization of this double- construct, race and language, points to the absurdity of racism and class division by questioning the boundaries of racial and hierarchal belonging. Flip's use of vernacular gives her entrance and passage through black street life and in particular, black women. Through the

[31] see Gates

experiences of Flip, readers may ascertain criticism of black scholars that buy into the crisis of black pathology.

Arobateau invites a deeper look into the "subculture" that haunts black middle class society. Cathy Cohen, in her essay "Deviance as Resistance," provides a refreshing methodology for acknowledging resistance in spaces of oppression. She states:

> Scholars must take up the charge to highlight and detail the agency of those on the outside, those who through their acts of nonconformity choose outsider status, at least temporarily…These individuals are not… satisfied with their outsider status, but they are also not willing to adapt completely, or to conform. The cumulative impact of such choices might be the creation of spaces or counter publics, where not only oppositional ideas and discourse happen, but lived opposition, or at least autonomy, is chosen daily…seemingly deviant, unconnected behavior can be transformed into conscious acts of resistance" (27).

Flip's refusal to identify with the aforementioned terms of black pathology, whether expressed by the State or by middle class blacks, represents her ability to choose autonomy. Flip's move away from her middle-class upbringing in New York, her refusal to permanently pass as white (male or female), and her refusal to pass as a non-deviant, non-homosexual (non-butch) woman of color all represent a resistance to the socially limiting structure in which she lives. Cohen adds that "the reification of the nuclear family, the conformity to institutionally prescribed and informally regulated gender roles and intimate sexual relations are but the tip of the normative moral super structure [people of color] confront daily" (29). Flip sees this reification of heteronomativity clearly. Cohen's focus on deconstructing heternormativity highlights that for Flip, getting hustled out of her dignity and confidence by the State and the State's various representatives, black or white, is also very closely linked to her sexuality and inability to find love.

In some ways, getting hustled by the State allows her to maintain the hustle of most importance to her: getting women. Through her vulnerability in the sessions, Flip begins to learn understand the underpinnings of society. Flip continues to feel diffident about finding emotional attachment, but advises that she can use some of the advice within the sessions to get dates with women. The sessions "had been paying off, a little anyway, these techniques. Flip saw it materialize. It had certainly helped her hustling! More bold, now she approached people without fear!" (Arobateau 57). One of these bold techniques is her utter disregard for the societal stigma and opinion concerning her body and the bodies of those within her area of racialized quarantine. The facilitators disregard of Flip's emotional needs, and contradictory opinions of Flip's lifestyle, cause Flip to distrust society's opinions as well. Flip finds comfort in and idolizes black working class people and spaces. Her narrative is not one of the desire to leave Oakland, but to stay in Oakland with love and money. Rather than take on the feminist admonition against butch/femme roles, Flip mocks straight white couples in the street, remarking that they, too, are playing the male and female role and wearing masks. She disregards the societal notion that prostitutes are lesser women or that "them whores are ugly" and brings renewed value to their efforts to maintain the appearance of a gendered role that larger society outcasts: "' there is some very attractive ladies out here! Some that dress like fashion models'…So they stood, stark raving real; the epitome of what a lady was supposed to be in this society. Hair straightened, straight out of Jet, Ebony, Harpers Bazaar, in hats and gloves, veils and some in church-going dresses – selling themselves on the avenue" (101). The prostitutes, in Flip's view, are not the fallen women society as categorized by society, but they are classy ladies available and open to Flip's sexual desires. In this dangerous and open space of the street, a space she finds safer than the counseling sessions, Flip is able to find sexual opportunity and fulfillment in the (paid)

advances of the women. Thus, Flip's hustle (the welfare check) hustles her out of her confidence and dignity. Trick(Ster)ing allows her to reframe societal opinions about her and her potential lovers, thereby allowing her to relish in getting tricked. The State's advice was for her to be bold and approach more women, and Flip finds herself in the arms of more prostitutes. For Flip, getting hustled leads to getting tricked as she becomes the prostitute's willing pawn. While getting hustled is Flip's feminine embodiment, I argue that getting tricked is a necessary aspect of Flip's masculine gender embodiment.

WHO IS TRICKING WHO?!: TRICK(ING) AIN'T EASY

Getting tricked or being tricked is a sexualized version of being hustled. These terms are relatively interchangeable yet one has a stronger sexual connotation, highlighting the importance of gender and the various ways in which gender is signified upon in language and in actions. Flip's positioning as a black butch allows her to vary between getting hustled and getting tricked, which I argue are feminine and masculine gender performances, respectively. The following scene demonstrates how getting hustled and getting tricked both hold the objective of obtaining something of value at someone else's expense, yet getting hustled and getting tricked have sexualized and gendered differences.

In the previous discussion, we learned that Flip was hustled out of her manhood by a white male gaze and additionally was hustled out of her dignity by attending counseling sessions in exchange for a welfare check. Flip is similarly hustled out of a date at a black pool hall. During this scene, Flip is playing a solitary game of pool while avoiding the rude advances of a man nearby. A woman named Maria enters the bar and Flip begins eyeing and flirting with her. Maria eventually leaves her seat to join Flip's

game (this can be read as Flip's attempt to hustle her) and, annoyed by this, the man walks over to the pool table and Maria nervously shuffles back to the bar:

> "Suddenly, blue and purple flooded Flip's brain. The big giant came up to her. The man towered over her. 'Say MAN, gimmie a light, BROTHER! WHOOPS! Ex[c]use me, sister!' His pool game was over, his stick clattered on the table, where he'd thrown it.
> 'Say, is you a man or a lady?'
> 'I'm a gay woman, man,' said the bulldagger, her angry face looking up from her poolgame.
> 'Can you dig it!'
> 'What's dat!'
> 'It's just my thang!'
> 'What's this GAY woman shit?'
> 'I can't talk about it right now, I got some business to do. I'll catch you later.' Flip moved off down the table, trying to shut out this man, who was bothering her. He followed her down the table.
> 'You can't talk about it! Why, is your man out here?'
> 'NO.'
> 'Aw, well say little bro, gimmie a light.'
> 'I don't smoke, I don't have any matches.'
> The man looked down at this small woman. He set his blue jaw at an ugly angle. He saw that she was deathly afraid of him, but that she was too strong to cop out into playing a bitch's role. He growled,
> 'But you got a nice smile, anyways.' The poolroom floor shook under his footsteps, as he walked off. Flip shrank back against the wall, chalking her stick." (Arobateau 28/29)

We understand the man as dark-skinned and larger than Flip due to the author's allusions of blue and purple colors that overwhelm Flip's consciousness. The man obviously recognizes Flip as a butch in that he sarcastically varies gender pronouns when addressing her and as black in his colloquial use of sister and bro. He violently throws his pool stick on the table, a non-verbal threat against Flip's well being. He continues to signify on Flip's gender non-conformity by asking her if she is a "man or a lady," despite the fact that he is sure she is female. Flip identifies herself as a "gay woman," physically aligning herself with other women within the bar while distinguishing her sexuality

which, in this case, explains away her gender presentation.[32] Flip then reasserts her masculinity by attempting to perform her hustle (playing pool which implies she is practicing for an eventual gamble but the man continues to interrogate her.[33] He wishes to humiliate this trickster by ridding her of the ability to move back and forth along a gender spectrum. He wishes to utilize his hypermasculinity and size in order to feminize Flip into the type woman she had previously been trying to seduce. He attempts to hustle her out of her masculinity by implying she has a controlling boyfriend, which would explain her refusal to talk to him or maybe even explain the men's clothing. If she is dressed in men's attire, that would ideally make her less attractive and less likely to leave said boyfriend. Ironically, the man asks Flip for a match, wherein he falls for the trickster gender trap. Reminiscent of the usual cinematic love story, the man usually offers the woman a light, a classic act of modern chivalry. In this scene, the man finds himself asking Flip for a light, hinting at the undeniable strength and unavoidable appeal of her masculinity. Despite her small stature, especially in comparison to the large man, her masculine performativity demonstrates that Flip will not "play the bitch's role" or get hustled (feminized) by this stranger.

While this scene demonstrates an instance of Flip fighting for her masculinity by refusing to get hustled, what immediately follows is Flip's realization that in this straight bar, she is also a trick in numerous ways. While the above scene reasserts her masculinity, it is not through the gender performance of hustling but through the masculine performance of getting tricked. We cannot ignore the role of Marie in this

[32] Even more complicating, at this time, Flip calls potential femme women "straight" and almost all lesbian women of varying gender presentations "butch."

[33] Within 1970s Street Lit and blaxploitation era films, gambling served as a primary source of income and sexual prowess amongst hustlers and pimps. Pool is one of many games.

scene; Flip is wide open to Marie's tricks. I rewind here to give a greater background in Flip's previous experiences with women and getting tricked before discussing Marie.

Black butch sexual agency is at the crux of Flip's journey. As previously discussed, the author's motivation is not to write a roller-coaster of a story but an autobiography of sorts. Pushing the distractions of random sexual encounters, selling drugs, and psychological evaluations aside, the quest for spiritual and physical love is persistently present. Flip's living quarters are bare and dingy. She lives in "a cold room" but as her mind wanders "it hit her, loneliness" and she proceeds to plead to God to "have mercy" on her (Arobateau 14). Towards the beginning of the novel, and consistently thereafter, Flip begs God to find her a physical and spirtual mate. Towards the end of the novel Flip comes to realize the difference between lust and love. Sex with prostitutes is no longer satisfying and she bitterly begins to feel that "'Yea, there's love for a minute, real love. Everything else in between is makeshift'"(91). Despite all of the wreckless behavior, these moments of Flip's consciousness make evident that love is her desire. In "Uses of the Erotic," Audre Lorde states that "the need for sharing deep feeling is a human need. But within the European-American tradition, this need is satisfied by certain proscribed erotic comings together, and these occasions are almost always characterized by a simultaneous looking away...the deed gives rise to that distortion which results in… the abuse of feeling" (55). Flip has learned through her experience with prostitutes that sex is not an equivalent for erotic love.

Regarding this "abuse of feeling," I wish to question the role of (paid) sex in Flip's life. That the majority of Flip's experiences within the text are with prostitutes hints at the public nature of Flip's sex life. Who she has had sexual relations with and what type of sex acts she performs are open discussion amongst the circle of prostitutes. Some women eagerly search her out because she pays well and other women avoid her

because they feel the experience would be too unpleasant. Regarding private matters being experienced and discussed in public, Flip also discusses drugs, money and sex within the public sphere, be it within the black space of quarantine or the hegemonic white spaces outside of Oakland. Flip and Cleo find themselves in another town engaging in discussion concerning Cleo's sexual prowess with other women. This open banter amongst two black butch women sitting atop bar stools outside of an open-air food stand in Berkeley refers to the extravagance and pervasiveness of black pathology. Their interactions are normalized. Their private lives are public. Their black corner rapping escapes the jungle to sully the quaint whiteness of a collegiate environment. Darieck Scott reiterates that "blackness itself is such a use-object on a cultural level, a thing stuffed and made – the invention of enslavers and conquerors and the offal-bin for their fears, especially about sexuality." Although Moynihan discusses an array of problems caused by black pathology, Scott's black queer lens emphasizes the use of sexuality in the subjugation of blackness. Money and drugs are secondary concerns in Flip's list of priorities - She "dwelled on her love life. It was her innermost concern. Her most powerful problem" (Arobateau 15). This sexuality and longing is what leads to her escapades with Cleo "in vertigo…hustling and barhopping…life. Her goal was to get it, in any way possible" (9). Pausing here at the imagery of vertigo, I refer back to Scott's discussion of sexuality and subjugation. Scott not only discusses the use of sexuality in the subjugation of blackness, as some scholars before have emphasized, he appeals to scholars to look closely at the defeat evident in not just sexual violation, but also in diasporic history, in order to figure out if there are elements of freedom and power within spaces usually categorized as oppressive. In other words, how may (black) power and resistance arise from instances of violence and abjection? Scott provides a useful interpretation of Fanon and Sartre's interplay dissecting the impact of vertigo upon

oppressed figures. Scott explains: "Thus vertigo, by unbalancing us, seats us in the state of being conscious of being…and thus in the very essence of what is to be a consciousness. Instead of unconscious absorption in our headlong flight toward a seemingly certain future …we linger, dangle, over the empty space of our possibilities" (82). Flip's vertiginous habits (dangerous street hustling and bar hopping) shifts her own understanding of the importance of her own happiness. While she consistently struggles to find a lover, persistently risking rejection and violence, Flip will not let her happiness "depend on fate! Or her power of rap and game. She might meet a woman tonight, good. If not she would enjoy a woman anyway!" (Arobateau 68) For Flip, life is love (at times conflated with sex) and her aim is to meet that objective regardless of the means she uses to acquire this happiness, even if that happiness is found within the short-lived and relatively passionless encounters of paid sex. Her headlong absorption into her possibilities within the space of desire is far from unconscious. In nearly every chapter, Flip laments over her lack of love, lack of sex, and annoyance at Cleo's perceived prowess and elusive lifestyle of dark pimps. Flip lingers alone over invisible possibilities – invisible women.

I wish to discuss Flip's sexual experiences with Ruby as an instance of the violence and abjection Scott discusses, from which the reader can gain a sense of how the author values black femininity as a mode of (black) power. Within the code of Street Lit, and when understood within a gendered ethics of hustling or tricking, this elevation of the black feminine, and consequently the tricking implied with femininity, becomes evident and is arguably valued at the expense and humiliation of Flip's black female masculinity. Flip's general attitude concerning the women surrounding her, black prostitutes, is already positioned against mainstream thoughts of prostitutes. Flip believes that "these prostituting women were selling themselves too cheap. She had told the hookers… 'A

lousy $20 for all the class and looks you all have! Jesus! You could be an actress or a fashion model or a dancer or ANYTHING! You dress so nice, your bodies is fine. The way you-all can rap and play on chumps. That takes brains!'" (Arobateau 134). While Flip's aspirations for these women outside of prostitution seems limiting and based solely upon the objectification of their bodies (acting, modeling), Flip's focus is on the value or worth of these women's bodies. If the women are forced to use their bodies as a survival mechanism, then Flip desires for them to acquire more wealth than they otherwise earn in sex work. Additionally, Flip admires that these women are skilled at tricking, or in her words, she places value on their ability to "rap and play on chumps." Thus, Flip's feminine ideal is adept at tricking or using men and other cunning mechanisms for personal gain much like Flip's masculine ideal is adept at hustling and using others for personal gain. Notice that tricking has a particularly sexualized and gendered connotation here, wherein this gendered action usually implies the feminine taking advantage of the masculine. Additionally, I do not wish to allude to the feminine or masculine as belonging to the realm of their respective anatomical sexes but I do wish to assert and reiterate that the feminine and masculine as represented within Street Lit are within the domain of whoever embodies the gendered actions discussed.

Within *The Bars Across Heaven*, Flip pays for sex not only to fulfill her erotic desires, but much like her choice to speak in a local black vernacular, her purchased intimacies provide her with connection to the black feminine. Flip purposefully and joyfully advertises her body as a john for feminine tricking. Flip not only highly regards prostitutes, but she is known for paying more than the average amount for the time she spends with prostitutes. Flip dreams of rescuing her most beloved prostitute, Ruby, from her abusive pimp and the other dangers of sex work. Flip's conversational and sexual exchanges with Ruby are the longest and most detailed within the book. Understanding

how Flip views her body and occupation in comparison to Ruby's demarcates a sexualized gender spectrum in which to view Trick(Dter)ing as a racialized mode of self-making. As Ruby is advised by another prostitute that Flip is looking for her, she immediately understands that she will earn the remaining money needed to end her labor early. Ruby's actions emphasize the feminine performance expected in the enactment of tricking. As she leaves the group of gossiping sex workers, "she flung her coat tight around her, did a quick dance step--she winked back over her shoulder, 'I'll be back, I got to go collect my money!'" (Arobateau 135). Ruby emphasizes the curves of her body through the tightening of her coat and displays joy and excitement through a performative dance step in which the side profile of her face, viewed from the rear, and the eye wink both evoke a black working class Jessica Rabbit and Marilyn Monroe.

As Ruby enters the bar to find Flip, Flip becomes aware that she is "buying power. She was in touch with a weird strength. Strength. A feeling she had rarely in life. But if she had cash dollars in her pocket, she knew she would be needed. She could GET" (Arobateau 138). In this moment, Flip reasserts herself as a hustler, in that she needs to get cash dollars, which further portrays her as a masculine subject. Additionally, her role as a pawn for Ruby's tricking, also solidifies Flip's presence as masculine. Nevertheless, Flip's black butch subjectivity allows her to fulfill the role of trickster, and her performativity slides across a gendered spectrum. In many ways, the very events that assert Flip's masculinity are the very same events that highlight her female body. While soliciting Ruby's sex is a hypermasculine tradition within Street Lit, Ruby and Flip's sexual exchanges undercut this masculinized performance.

In the aforementioned scene, while Flip's openness to being Ruby's trick reasserts her masculinity, Flip's unusual amount of payment feminizes her. Flip pays Ruby more than any of her male tricks, which places Flip outside of a stereotypically masculine

underappreciation for female sex workers. Flip's black butch body, gender performances and sexual dominance highlight her as a gender trickster in which the trick/prostitute dichotomy is extremely blurry. Trick(ster)ing makes gender unclear. Rather than maintain a purely "transactional" relationship with Ruby, Flip insists that Ruby go on dates in public with her. While Ruby receives more pay than usual, she reluctantly follows Flip around the ho stroll and through the valleys of gossiping prostitutes in order to get the extra money she is promised. Although Flip must pay Ruby for this charade , Flip aligns herself with the black pimps (hustlers) she admires by parading around the block with the most desirable prostitute. Flip is a walking gender contradiction, in which she openly manifests and values a deviant masculinity (hustling), while utilizing a deviant femininity (or tricking) in order to maintain the very masculinity she desires.

In the course of Ruby tricking Flip, Flip tricks Ruby as she turns the tables and arguably assumes the role of providing sexual pleasure, the primary responsibility of the prostitute. Flip spends the majority of their paid time together pleasing Ruby. It seems clear that Ruby's excitement is at the prospect of her earnings, but Arobateau complicates the reader's understanding of sexual pleasure within sex work for both the sex worker and the john, or for both Ruby and Flip. Ruby would "orgasm with Flip because it broke monotony," and therefore, the usual boredom or disinterest Ruby normally felt while working was removed while having intercourse with Flip. Not only does Ruby rightly take advantage of extra (fairer?) wages, she also enjoys the work itself. It is in their sexual intercourse that the violence and abjection Scott discusses becomes clear. Flip's sexual pleasure is derived from her role as the dominant lesbian partner, in which she performs oral and penetrative sex upon Ruby's body. A testament to the "stone-ness" of Flip's body, most of Flip's fantasies are in this dominant position. While the reader could easily overlook the author's ambiguities, I argue that Arobateau's occasional refusal to

clarify the subject of spent passion in the text also alludes to the typically taboo topic of stone butch pleasure. Arobateau writes: "Achieving orgasm, Flip lay panting, Ruby rocking her in her arms" (140). While Flip receives pleasure in fucking Ruby, Flip flips the reader's expectations of stoneness by forcing Ruby's head towards her vagina, motioning Ruby to provide her with oral sex. Consequently, Ruby quickly leaps up and away from Flip's body towards the bathroom, advising Flip to "'use this washrag...Put some soap on it! You know [she] hates to smell it! YUCK" (153). Ruby's distaste for Flip's sex organ signals a lack of desire for Flip's female body. Ruby's ability to find pleasure in Flip's masculine sex performance is not completely fulfilling for Flip. For Flip, one of Ruby's major sources of appeal consists of hegemonically demonized physical traits. Ruby is tall, dark-skinned (made all the more obvious by her yellow clothing and Flip's yellow skin) and her hair is not processed or straightened, but in corn-rows. Flip prefers to remove Ruby's wig during sex. Flip's careful pleasuring and valuing of Ruby's body represents a love for the black feminine, in its natural and adorned forms. I read this as a mode of (black) power in which the black feminine is idealized, regardless of classed status, in the moment of Flip's sexual abjection.Flip warns Ruby that she will never purchase Ruby's services again, after which Ruby thoroughly apologizes and begins what she probably considers her actual "work" in that she receives no pleasure from giving Flip oral sex. In this moment, Flip and the reader are reminded that this is a paid sex exchange rather than an act of love or passion, at least in Ruby's case.

Flip's consistent desire for Ruby, and Ruby's hesitant and rather violent compliance with Flip's social and sexual desires, prevents me from labeling her as femme.[34] Nevertheless, I hesitate in assigning her a sexual orientation, especially the

[34] I define femme here as a stereotypically feminine presenting lesbian or bi-sexual woman.

designation "straight," due to other prostitutes' outright refusal to sleep with Flip, Ruby's enjoyment of her sexual interactions with Flip, and her clarification that she doesn't "even like sucking dicks!...[She hates" having things in [her] mouth!" and further admits that she does not perform oral sex on her pimp either. Whether or not Ruby is lying is beside the point, as we are aware she will perform what the payment requires of her. What does matter is how Ruby conceives of her own sexuality, and things in her mouth, whether its a penis, vagina, lips or tongue (she also hates kissing), does not bring her pleasure. In this regard, we can read Ruby as a pillow princess of sorts, still a rather ambiguous but queer sexual orientation, that maintains a distinct passive femininity, but allows for her partners' erotic fulfillment through the enactment of masculinized dominant sex acts upon her body, regardless of her partners' anatomical sex.[35] Perhaps this is also a part of Ruby's feminine tricking appeal, in that she possibly tricks many johns into paying for her pleasure while (re)affirming their masculinity in the process. Perhaps this reaffirmation is Ruby's pleasure? Ruby's complicated and underdeveloped sexuality not only prevent me from assigning her a sexual orientation, but also prevents me from blaming Ruby for Flip's sexual abjection. Of importance here is the role money, or capitalism plays, in Flip's sexual abjection, which I will further discuss at the close of this chapter.

What happens when Flip finally bumps into the women she considers perfect? As discussed, unlike the majority of Street Lit, this queer speaker undergoes the task of valuing the feminine, especially the black feminine, while utilizing street themes such as tricking and hustling. As a result of satisfying her desire via paid sex, Flip is suspicious of all women and immediately assumes that the women interested in her are looking for

[35] The urban dictionary defines a pillow princess as a woman, usually in a of a curious/bisexual context, who wants to experience pleasure from oral sex, but who is unwilling to reciprocate.

money, not love. Lorde advises us that the "erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane...we have been taught to suspect this resource" (49). Rather than read Flip as misogynistic and inherently hateful of women, we have to take into consideration all of her experiences with women she finds sexually attractive, all of which are negative throughout the book. She laments the fact that "it was in this place, this jungle, that she had to find her mate" (19). The jungle alludes to the difficulty of finding a mate in a space in which her very life is perpetually threatened. As she peruses town "blue exhaust fumes carpeted the street. Sidewalk was full of females. (53% of the nation's population.) Flip stood and watched, but she saw no woman" (Arobateau 13). What exactly is Flip looking for? Flip encounters potential femme lovers only twice within the novel, Ruby and Marie. Both are dark, sweet and extremely elusive amidst the sea of prostitutes Arobateau paints but both experiences a traumatically violent and threatening for Flip in various ways. Ironically, as Lorde posits, Flip begins to suspect both lovers in order to open an opportunity for her own escape from love. The black femme, for Flip, is an impossibility, or a myth. As a result, Flip begins to see herself as "mongrel," referencing her body as a monster that no one would love. What would it mean for Flip to work through the violence, abjection and threat represented by Marie and Ruby's bodies? Is this impossibility for love found only at the site of the black butch body or is this generally the case for black folk - since we don't find love in the sites of any other black character in the novel either. Perhaps, as Lorde reminds us, that love and eroticism is neglected across genders as Arobateau's black working class characters suggest. Arobateau makes evident that Flip does not have a space in which she has easy access to women that would love her or, in other words, that see her as a sexually desirable black butch.

I highlight "space" because, in the case of the heteronormative bar scene where Flip encounters Marie, Marie expresses desire for Flip as a black butch, but the space prevents the opportunity for sex, love, or both from arising. Arobateau describes Marie as a "pink vision." As the confrontation with the male ensues, Flip is able to regain composure as she eyes Marie when she first walks in the bar:

> ...a beautiful brown woman entered. An African princess with full lips and soulful eyes...She weighed 170 pounds, 50 of them extra, but her face was sweet. In a fluffy pink dress, she was heavenly, a brown and pink cloud perched on a barstool. Her kissable lips sipped her drink, the hustler's special of the day, 'The Gold Cadillac.' She sat demurely. Her satiny brown skin and tan pink footsoles tapping in high, high mules. This woman could have been the answer to Flip's prayers. She appeared not to be a hooker, but a person who had been around, like Flip, and who came down on the stroll to socialize...the woman in the pink dress, like a sweet fat cloud, tipped to the pool table where Flip was playing. The room swayed under her 170 pounds. Placing her quarter on the next-game-up, she gave Flip a shy smile. She was challenging the table." (Arobateau26/27).

Marie is described in black femme-exuberance: all pink, pure, sweet, fluffy, tippy, high-heeled, heavenly gentleness perched like a soft bunny atop a barstool. The barstool signifies Marie's proximity to Flip, the hustling mongrel. It appears she has come from behind the bars of heaven to grace Flip with her presence. She even affirms Flip's masculine gambling hustle as she drops a quarter on the pool table. As previously discussed, it seems the black man-devil in the corner is there to ruin Flip's euphoric experience. While it seems the threatening man is provoked by Marie's presence, the reader is never absolutely sure since he never addresses Marie, only Flip. Is Marie a figment of Flip's imagination or an apparition of Flip's future?

On the other hand, after Flip's encounter with the man, Flip attempts to move her flirtations from silent to verbal when she determines that Marie is just too fat. Marie's size does not seem to bother Flip until after the violent encounter, which leaves the reader to ponder if Flip is inventing her distaste. For Flip, Marie's desire for her is represented

by her size: excessive. Love for a "mongrel" like Flip is impossible. While remorsefully we wish for a happy ending to Flip's loneliness, she never has a "mutural [sic] experience with a gay woman that…lasted over a month…she had begun to think of other women as sex objects" (40). If Flip constructs herself against these sex objects, then Flip constructs of herself as a sex subject. Jose Munoz's theory of disidentification may provide a methodology for understanding Flip's ability to align herself as a subject in opposition to other women: "Disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship" (4). Flip's same-sex preference illuminates her position as a contributor to the black pathology that typifies street-life. She must negotiate her non-reproductive habits in a larger heterosexual context and within a street-culture that perpetrates the illusion of heteronormativity through sex work and performance. Instead of Flip becoming a feminine gendered object through prostitution like the women she critiques and desires, Flip chooses to disidentify with women altogether by performing her masculinized hustle. *Let Flip tell it, all the women but her (including Cleo) are whores!* This act of disidentification stabilizes her position as a non-prostitute and a non-femme (seemingly the only feminine identities within the text). She firmly positions herself as a masculine subject with desires rather than as a feminine object of desire. Her trickster body and gender performance causes her to move back and forth from desiring subject to object of desire, as neither of these are ever fully possible for her within the text.

Returning to the previously mentioned impossibility of love for Flip, I must complicate Flip's conception of impossible love as solely the result of gender non-conformity. She seems to place equal weight upon her racial identity and her gender

identity (not sexual orientation) as factors contributing to her "awkwardness" (Arobateau 17). In the bars "no one noticed her… her chalk white face in the Afro-American sea of blackness" nor was she ever a part of "the IN CROWD." Sharon Holland discusses the role of quotidian racism on erotic life. She asserts that "racism requires one to participate in what I would call a project of belonging if the work of producing racial difference(s) is to reach fruition…a belonging that occurs at the level of family (blood relation)" and "a belonging usually imposed by a community or by one's own choice" (4). The "IN CROWD" Flip eyes are representative of unambiguously raced blacks. Her mixed heritage places her at the center of Holland's two types of relationships to racism. Flip is not white. The bar crowd has chosen to exclude her while simultaneously denying her kinship. Black is in her blood despite her appearance that betrays her right to kinship. This lack of kinship keeps a certain amount of distance and a lack of disclosure between herself and Cleo. Flip's yellow skin is reminiscent, to Cleo, of Flip's middle class background. This racial barrier, this racism, not only inhibits erotic possibility between Flip and Cleo, but it also inhibits the loving relationships she desires between herself and the women she admires. To make matters worse, Flip's "spirit shrank back from roles – both femininity, or hard masculinity, like a snake…and so it was her flame that was finally perceived" (Arobateau 4). Flip envies the sexual prowess and demanding power of the never-lonely, glamorous, fancy-car-driving pimps. On the other hand, she asserts that she "ain't no man either" in conversation with Cleo (51). In asking Cleo why the pimps are so successful, Cleo responds: "His dick" (60). This answer insufficient and irrelevant to Flip, Cleo adds: "He got personality. He a real nice person." In analyzing the crisis of manhood in another text, Matt Richardson asserts that 'the undoing and reworking of black gender categories is a key facet of social death" (361). Flip's refusal to conform to the seductive object role of the prostitute and her inability to live up to the phallic

dominance of the pimp leaves Flip in a gender quandary. Only within the spaces of the bar scene, where other butches and studs stroll, is Flip able to exist within a space of erotic potential. Yet, her racial ambiguity keeps her from connecting with women in even that space. At "2 am. The bar is closed. Gay life, as connected in a society, is dead" (Arobateau 22). If Flip cannot make connection to the life she yearns for within the only space available (even when it is open) she is socially exiled.

This exile causes Flip to internalize feelings of self-hate. Another night alone in a bar she watches a couple slow-dance. These public arenas tend to serve as spaces of internal dialogue for Flip. As the couple sensually locks into position, Flip thinks: "No woman is advanced enough to give me this much love I need desperately. Because this need, its been piling up for years! It's such a whole lot of need! I been unsatisfied for so long, it's not even normal anymore. It's a monster" (96). Flip learns to pathologize her own need for love due to its impossibility for her thus far. Upon her initial arrival to California, a program called "Minority Rehabilitation…paid her for being 'aggressive, paranoid…hostile and unable to function in society.' They sent her, voluntarily, to a psychological clinic once per week" (7). At these meetings, which she insists helps her feel better, Flip begins to see her problems as resolvable by therapy sessions and feminist consciousness raisings. The societal structures that affect her daily life become figments of her imagination. Her inability to find love becomes a result of her own insecurities and shyness rather than the result of any exterior social exclusions.

Flip teeters on the edge of the color line, walks between gender binaries, blends middle and low class status and even manages to display experiences ranging from the east to west coast! Flip's use of government assistance represents one of the white America's greatest fears: dependency. Yet, it may be easy for some readers to forget that Flip, in all of her deviancy, will have difficulty acquiring and holding a stable

job or career, as her body is too much of a reminder of the sins society has cast out to Oakland, but Flip does use her ambiguously raced, classed and gendered body as a vehicle of resistance. Rather than rely on the fate society provides, she takes control of her own fate by using her yellow skin and gray truck to take her back and forth between black and white spaces for survival and sometimes just for kicks. She refuses to allow society to lock its own vices up within the confines of black ghettos. While Flip uses prostitutes for sex, she focuses on the idea of mutual pleasure. Forgetting that she sees women as sex objects she expresses concern over their well-being. In providing these women with orgasms and tenderness, Flip literally flips the image of the selfless and unloveable prostitute. Her preference for dark-skinned women aligns her with the black power movement. She reverses the messages displayed and depicted by billboards and magazines by allowing her light body to cherish and value darker women she buys. Flip learns to "to accept [her] pig – and work with it" (84). Unable to change the infrastructure that shapes her life, as well as others, she works in and around the beliefs of black pathology, flipping stereotypes and false ideologies by insisting upon her sexual autonomy and agency. Only briefly discussed so far, I now turn to how Flip and those around also work in and around the hegemonic force of capitalism.

BLACK PATHOLOGY EXPERTS IGNORE CAPITALIST VENTURES:

The publishing industry, and Street Lit's awareness and cunning work-around the publishing industry's rejection, is in and of itself worthy of full analysis and consideration for its simultaneous embrace and subversion of capitalist tenets. Due to Hip Hop and Street Lit's very similar tenuous relationship with various industrial complexes (prison, publishing, music), I will provide a brief overview of some scholars that have claimed hip hop as a subversive force of rebellion in order to provide Street Lit with the

same sort of regenerative analysis. In *The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip-Hop: Power Moves*, Halifu Osumare includes hip hop in the genealogy of Africanist aesthetics. In doing so, hip hop, like other art forms based in this aesthetic, becomes a "mode of privileging the negotiation of self" (12). Thus, the artistic elements of hip hop such as MCing, DJing, or b-boying become corporeal manifestations and arguments meant to identify, acknowledge, concretize or demean a participant's presentation. Renaming is also an important part of (re)establishing one's role in society. Unfortunately, hip hop is perpetually critiqued for its misogynistic, homophobic and materialistic lyrics and music videos. Critics of this critique, such as Tricia Rose and Imani Perry have testified via television interviews, book publications and even Twitter feeds that hip hop is not the inventor of any of the aforementioned oppressions. Osumare advises that hip hop's visibility as a locus of oppression may be due to its vast transnational and cross-racial popularity. As a result, hip hop serves as a "reflection of American patriarchy, not creator of it," especially to audiences that regard hip hop as an "unfiltered" lens into a particular working class and racialized way of living within the United States (2).

If we are able to conceive of the body as instrument within hip hop, then how can we conceive of the body as instrument within Street Lit and how does the body, in and of itself, become a reflection of American patriarchy? In her analysis of Lil Kim's rap lyrics, Heather Duerre Humann advises that while Lil Kim's boats and toasts challenge hegemonic notions of gender, sexuality and power, Lil Kim' embraces capitalism within her set of ethics. She admonishes Lil Kim for "encourag[ing] the quest for wealth and material possessions"(97). While materialism presents a less radical epistemology within hip hop and terribly complicates the inherent radicalism of Lil' Kim's lyricism, Humann makes obvious how hip hop highlights the frame and structure of capitalism. I argue that the gendered performances discussed at length, such as hustling and tricking, reflect an

American capitalist ethic which is one of the forces that contribute and maintain patriarchy. While Flip's hustling ways may be read and dismissed as mindless and lazy Moynihan-esque pathology, hustling and tricking are illicit entrepreneurial methods of survival in a chattel slavery based economic system that sustains itself on working class labor and consumption. Osumare explains the term power moves in hip hop. Power moves are the skills utilized by hip hop artists, such as verbal dexterity or rapid movement. She argues that these skills become a " metaphor for the currency that hip-hop culture has garnered globally. Hip-hop culture shifts the center and the margins, even as it thoroughly participates in global capitalism. It moves power ever so imperceptibly with an Africanist aesthetic that lures and empowers local youths, while subverting existing social, cultural and economic systems" (3). While American Street Lit is not at all popular globally, its popularity and success is locally important amongst Black youth, especially black girls. What *power moves* does Street Lit exhibit? Why does hustling and tricking in Street Lit have just as much "visceral bodily appeal" as hip hop, and what is the "embodied philosophy" present within these black gender(ed) performances (22)?

If embodied performances and actions are a "superior mode of thought" in the Africanist aesthetic, then how can we come to think of hustling and tricking as theoretical and epistemological musings on gender, sexuality, race and consumption (26)? Flip is not completely dissatisfied with her erotic encounters with Ruby or other prostitutes. When she goes to the club, if she can't pick up a date for free, she seems content with paying for one: "Flip had it in mind. Tonight, if she didn't catch a woman in some kind of net, when closing time came, she would buy herself a date...A sure thing. Flip's sex went hot. She felt sex-power. A rigid lustbolt went up her spine, as the tips of her fingers touched the $42 in bills in her pocket. Power" (Arobateau 67/68). Flip's masculine hustling allows her to be a masculine trick. That Flip must "catch" a woman in a "net" is a direct

reference to her hustling abilities. Her inability to do that feminizes her but money returns her to the sphere of the masculine. Money, power, and sex (ironically, a Lil' Kim reference) allow Flip to fulfill her erotic desires.[36] While Flip yearns for love and bemoans its impossibilities throughout the text, in other moments she simply desires the sexual lifestyle of pimps. If Flip's intimate moments are only allowable in the context of paid sex, then it is evident that of most concern to Flip is always her hustle, which allows her money, which allows her sex, which makes her feel powerful. The touch of hands to dollar bills is an immediate and impulsive turn-on. Capital is directly tied to sex here. Power is somewhere in between capital and sex, if those are not somehow one in the same. Ruby holds a similar perspective. She would enjoy her time with Flip, but of utmost concern was "money. She saw after cash, love, marriage and happiness followed in natural accord" (143). The order speaks volumes to the importance of capital for those who have the least. Additionally, love does not necessarily yield happiness, contrary to Street Lit's white(ned) twin sister, the romance novel. Love is directly pitted against and always secondary to capital. Is love possible for those that directly bolster and support capitalism by their very existence? Returning to Scott, how is love (perhaps in the form of (black) power) possible for sites of violence and abjection (read: capitalism)? Finally, "Ruby was a public servant. She did her labor in an industrial society -- capitalizing on human NEED." In an industrial society in which the factories are closed, labor is in surplus. What theorists fail to take seriously is sex (leisure) as a real necessity. Ruby is capitalizing upon a very real and profitable demand in a space in which there should be no financial and economic exchanges. She (and her pimp) are entrepreneurs in a place in which businesses are no longer thriving. Without a college education and access to the

[36] Lil' Kim, The Lox, and DMX. *Money, Power & Respect*. Bad Boy Records, 1998. CD.

college across the bridge, Ruby and Flip both utilize a different type of knowledge in their daily work. They got street-smarts. Osumare critiques traditional views of hip-hop by utilizing a particular gaze, and I attempt to follow suit. She advises that "in order to capture the revisionist play inherent in hip-hop cultural practice (including its play with capitalism itself), critical thinking outside of traditional institutional frames must be promoted" (155). I insist that this instruction is applicable to Street Lit as well, as it also operates inside and outside of hegemonic forces.

Insisting upon survival in the perfect manipulation of illicit capitalist mores is inherently subversive and resistant. In *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop,* a book dedicated to uplifting hip hop rhetorics and aesthetics as revolutionary and poltical, Imani Perry asks:

> What, then, does a hip hop voice have to offer to understandings of the criminal law if it replaces the victimized excuse of poverty and abuse to mitigate criminal acts with a survivor explanation? I believe it provides an insightful and direct social critique, rather than individualized evaluation. It basically charges that as long as the United States allows children to be reared in poverty, with gross economic and social disparities, it will have individuals like these personifications to contend with (111).

I argue that one such survivor is the black butch/stud. She was not meant to survive historically, literally or figuratively in literature or in our collective consciousness.[37] Yet, through Street Lit, blaxploitation and hip hop (all of which began as black underground entrepreneurships), she has survived and we must contend with her hustling and tricking ways as survival and epistemology.

[37] Lorde, "A Litany for Survival."

Section 2: Love in No Money - Responding to Arobateau

Does survival in a capitalist game always make love an impossibility? Can Trick(ster)ing ever lead to love for a black butch/stud subject? Whether or not one is involved in sex work, what happens when our methods for survival and our means of profit depend upon a racialized sexuality for masculine and feminine subjects? For the purpose of this argument, I introduce Mo. Mo shows up in two short stories written by Laurinda D. Brown entitled "Mo" and "Strapped." These two stories are interlaced between a series of short stories about black lesbian women in an array of gender(ed) subjectivities and pairings. While short interviews with Brown avoid the topic of self-identifying, her appearance, development of femme subjects within the texts, and the gossip-train allow me to tentatively label her as a black femme. Accordingly, her positionality varies from that of Arobateau's. The stories appear within a collection entitled *Walk Like a Man,* which was originally self-published as Street Lit and later picked up by Q-boro books and occasionally categorized under erotica. Her collection has been very successful amongst the black lesbian circuit, eventually leading to a play staged along the East Coast and within U.S. Southern metroplexes.

"Mo" is a bildungsroman of Monique, black girl in mary-janes and dresses located in working class black any-town, replete with candy houses and train tracks. Her mother works perpetually and her father is absent, only to show up once in order to have sex with the mother and beat Monique. The mother works avidly to construct Monique's feminine gender, keeping her perpetually attired in ironed pastel dresses and tidy hair styles. As Monique reaches adolescence, she becomes susceptible to the creeping advances of Mr. Luther, the candy store keeper and her mother's romantic interest. During the climax of the story, Mr. Luther rapes Monique on the train tracks, Monique

slices his dick, and Monique escapes. As the denouement takes the speaker through an emotional depression, we are left with a new character, "that niggah they call Mo", who utterly rejects the feminine conditioning that she believes caused her sexual violation. A few short stories later, we learn that Mo survives in "Strapped." She is living in a nearby homeless shelter, presumably as a boy. Mostly due to trauma, but also due to her physical transition, she drops out of school and carries a gun in case she runs into Mr. Luther. She got an under the table job as a stock boy, buys her first dildo, and maintains a public relationship with an exotic dancer. The climax results in violence, yet again, as Mo points a gun in her mother's face for refusing to acknowledge Mo's pain. Happily, the denouement results in a living but absent mother and some affirming queer love-making. Similar to Arobateau, Brown writes in an ethic antagonistic to hegemonic notions of family and production, utilizing the very same epistemologies of hustling and tricking figures through Mo's trickster body, but her analysis of love and its possibilities in the face of capitalism are very different.

"MO": TRICK(STER)ING STARTS EARLY

What makes Mo's analysis so different from Flip's is that her story begins in childhood. Ideally, the gendered analysis for Flip would change after Flip comes of age because we are to assume, that like Mo, Flip was required to conform to the societal standards for her anatomical sex. While the reader knows that Flip has been butch since she was a teen, we have no context for her childhood. The revelation of Mo's childhood makes the Trick(ster)ing framework even more complicated, forcing me to leave tricking and hustling intertwined within this discussion. Instead of dividing this section into gendered embodiments of hustling and tricking, I choose instead to divide this section by story, which coincides with Mo's coming of age. Brown begins this story with the

emphasis upon the violent sexualization of (every)black girl in a certain era: "It happened at a time when there was no such thing as a sex offender. There were simply dirty old men who could have their way with little girls and dared them to tell anybody. Nobody did time, nor did anyone get counseling. Bribed with money, candy, toys, and whatever else didn't come easy, almost every girl in the neighborhood had touched Mr. Luther's dick" (Brown 19). Again, capital comes into direct contact with sex. The only difference is that this link begins at an extremely early pre-formative age, hinting that the absolute conditionalizing effects of patriarchal capitalism and the sexualization of black bodies. Capitalism forms the basis of even the earliest decision-making. Brown's story is a direct critique of the systemic measure put in place to enforce capitalist models.

Retrieving a dill pickle for her mother's pleasure is the primary reason for most of Monique's visits to Mr. Luther's candy house. As Monique grows older, with each and every visit to the candy house and with each salty, sour, smelly dill pickle purchase, Mr. Luther charms his way into the mother's life. Mr. Luther's dill pickles materialize into his old dick. As Monique requests more pickles, Mr. Luther's dick appears and he offers her money to cooperate with his abuse. Monique "couldn't resist that. [Her] moms loved those pickles, and could use the twenty dollars to go to the mall" (24). Having bought, or hustled his way into, Monique's home on a regular basis allows him to repeatedly sexually abuse Monique. Monique is not the only girl-child that Mr. Luther molests. Seemingly, it appears as if Monique's mother has pimped Monique out for dill pickles, despite the fact that the mother is perfectly capable, and definitely does, retrieve her own dill pickles from various sources around town. If every one in town knows that Mr. Luther is a pedophile, then the mother must have some cognizance of Mr. Luther's abuse, especially once she notices that Monique has new clothes and new gadgets with money that she never gave her. It appears as if the mother's pimping of Monique has

consequently allowed Monique to trick her body. Much like a sex worker, Monique's sexual exchanges with Mr. Luther provide her with a source of income that her perpetually working mother otherwise would not have. That Monique cooperates with Mr. Luther and receives monetary compensation does not excuse Mr. Luther nor does it mean that Monique is not being abused. We must not forget that she is an adolescent girl in this story, and questions of consent must be central and she never asked to see nor touch Mr. Luther's dick. This becomes clearer once Mr. Luther begins to consistently enter Monique's home and we understand that it is impossible to escape him. In this context, unlike the butch/stud figure, it appears Mr. Luther's masculine body and Monique's feminine body have concretized gender performances, hustling and tricking, respectively. The background of this story makes capitalism's implications extremely evident.

As Brown begins the climax, we find Monique walking, not from Mr. Luther's candy store, but from Mr. Chu's, "the Korean store on the other side of the railroad tracks. He sold the red, white and blue firecracker bomb pops that I loved" (27). Mr. Chu's shop represents not only the multi-cultural successes boasted by a democratic United States, it also smacks at the face of the impossibility of the successful black entrepreneur and certain sentiments regarding Korean corner stores.[38] As Monique opens the inherently violent (bombpop) patriotic phallus, she is violently attacked by Mr. Luther. While Mr. Luther rapes Monique, she grabs a piece of glass shard from the tracks and as he finishes and stands up "still erect, [Monique], in one fierce swing, sliced him across his dick. As he fell to the ground and rolled to his back, [she] jabbed him in his balls with the shard of glass one final time" (28). That Mr. Luther is still erect when he is

[38]see Chang, Jeff to understand racialized tensions between Korean store-owners, black residents and white police officers, in conjunction with the Rodney King beating incited riots in L.A.

supposedly finishing speaks to the persistent violence of patriarchy. Despite its violations, it is always menacing, always threatening, as the bombpop suggests. Monique does not slice off Mr. Luther's dick, but presumably, she leaves him impotent, in a state of erectile disfunction. Mr. Luther's penis rematerializes back into the wrinkled and warped dill pickle. Mr. Luther's phallic power is displaced, taken by Monique, as the remaining scenes and final story will depict.

Monique runs home from the train tracks, soiled and in pain. When she arrives, expectedly her mother is not a home, but working. She goes to the bathroom:

> "I removed my pink dress and placed it back on the hanger. I hung it in the bathroom with me as a reminder of what hell had been like for me...I went to the bedroom and packed a bag with jeans, T-shirts, a jacket, and some tennis shoes, then I returned to the bathroom and pulled out a pair of scissors and cut my hair off down to the scalp...In the sink was the femininity I was prepared to leave behind. Next to the pomade were two Ace bandages. I took them and wrapped them around my bosom until I was flat...In that moment, I'd made up in my mind that I wasn't going to stay around any longer to deal with anything that reminded me of Li'l Miss Monique. I didn't care if that bastard bled to death out there in the field. No more dresses, no more hair bows, and no more Mary Janes - ever...Oh, by the way, I'm now that niggah they call Mo" (Brown 29).

Monique removes the pink uber-femininity, resonant of Marie's pink femininity. She equates her feminine subjectivity with hell, as she slices off her hair, signifying a feminine marker. She changes her attire and binds her breasts. The refusal to wear dresses, hair bows and cute Mary Janes signals her decision to pass as unavailable to anyone similar to Mr. Luther. She blames her attack not on her female body but instead she believes the attack is a result of the way her body was displayed. She believes Mr. Luther was attracted to a feminine girlish innocence which she has washed away for jeans, t-shirt and sneakers. She now goes by that "niggah they call Mo," signifying that she is not necessarily passing as male, but as masculine, as my nigga suggests. She passes as unavailable and undesirable to heterosexual male subjects, or at the very least - other

niggas. She is too close to the hustler along the gendered masculine spectrum, which she considers to be a place of safety in comparison to her previous tricking performance. Mo has now placed herself in the role of the trickster, as she embraces ambiguity, in the form of the nigga. She has become an outlaw in her own family as well as in society by assuming a black female masculinity that is hegemonically unattractive. In discussing black outlaw types, Imani Perry quotes Cornel West at length. He states that this black marginalist tradition "'encompasses a highly individualistic rebellion of Afro-Americans who are marginal to, or exist on the edges of, Afro-American culture and see little use in assimilating into the American mainstream. It expresses a critical disposition toward Afro-American culture and American society'"(103). Mo's refusal to gender conform isolates her from black and mainstream society. Taking West's statement further, I argue that the nigga as an outlaw is not necessarily individualistic but fraternal and focused around friendship. We understand that Monique has changed her name, which may be a part of the project of self-naming but also signifies upon the tendency to self-name a group, particular to hip hop gangs and other black fraternal networks. In the following story, we understand that Mo has strong fraternal ties with a homeless brotherhood (quasi-gang) that would ride-or-die for one another. Additionally, Mo adds even more masculinized traits to her persona, building her street cred through sexualized and violent hustling.

"STRAPPED": TAKING UP THE DICK

Imani Perry advises that in hip hop, "the movement from objectification to subject status happens on various levels...self-assertion...in the vocal text is primary, but the visual symbolism of dress and body decoration is another, and the objectification of women's bodies yet another. Hypermasculinity in this moment marks one way of

challenging a sense of race and gender powerlessness" (122). I will mark how in these various ways, through gendered performances that are working through and with and around patriarchal capitalism, Mo re-establishes her subjectivity in ways that bring her a violent eroticized power.

Brown not only titles but begins the short story "Strapped" with allusions to Mo's newfound violently erotic prowess: "My mom's didn't know I was packing heat" (Brown 132). At this point in the text, it is clear that Mo is packing a gun because she intends to kill Mr. Luther if she sees him again. She has a close-knit group of young men she hangs with at the homeless shelter where she is currently living. Her friend, Jamal, provided her with the gun and her friends seem to be aware that she is anatomically female. Contributing to Mo's growing hustling performativity, she gets a job as a stockboy, establishing herself as producer, rather than consumer, within an environment resonant of Mr. Luther's candyshop. That this position pays her under-the-table references her decision to drop out of school and the requirement for her to survive through illicit economies. Her mother visits her within two days of her being in the shelter and she has been fully informed about the trauma Mo experienced. Rather than acknowledge her daughter's experiences, she dwells upon Mo's masculine appearance and what she perceives as the soiling of Mo's given name. Becoming fed up with the parental abuse and obvious neglect, the counselors ask Mo's mother to leave the premises. That Mo's mom did not know that she was "packing heat" is a reference to the mom's refusal to admit that Mo was raped, arguably, due to her mother's obsession with wrinkly sour pickles. Mo's access to the gun wields protective power to her and her friends that is necessary for youth abused and subject to even more abuse in a racially and sexually hostile environment. Perry advises that "it is possible to draw parallels between the train of blue singers and the gun of modern-day MCs in a multitude of provocative ways. Both

are strong phallic images, not only in their material design but also in terms of their power, force, and speed. Both represent technologies from which black men and women were historically restricted" (161). The gun is a strong reference not only in hip hop but in Street Lit. Simply rapping the gun through speech is a masculinizing project which evokes fear and threat. This power is drastically different from that which Mo was forced to touch in the form of the sour dill pickle or Mr. Luther's penis (now obsolete). The gun is life threatening; an ultimate source of power.

While the short story begins and, as I will discuss, ends with violent allusions to the gun, the majority of the story refers to Mo's sexual prowess and virility that comes from being strapped. Mo is not simply strapped for defense. The consequences of presenting as a black masculine female is the attraction of the black femme - that which Arobateau seems to find elusive and impossible. This may be a result of the author's black femme standpoint. I also note that I decidedly argue for Mo's passing as a black masculine cisgender female, rather than cisgender male, not only because of the author's subjectivity but I also believe in a femme desirability that requires Mo to be seen in this way.[39] Mo's new job provides her with better clothing and the ability to maintain a short fade. In the space of her main-hustle, the store, Mo comes into a black queer sexual subjectivity. A woman walks in search of a can of greens, and Mo notices everything that she's wearing and thinks "other than that I didn't pay no more attention to her than I would have anybody else" (134). Contradictorily, that Mo notices the woman's clothing

[39] C. Riley Snorton, in discussing the figure of Joseline Hernandez and the persistent questions from audience members noting her body as a transwoman body instead of a cisgender female body, states that these remarks are made from a place of transphobia. The transphobic audience looks for something "perceptibally unnatural, off, or askew that allows one to identify the transgender in one's midst" (175). Essentially, hegemonic audiences see what they wish to see. In the case of Mo, I am arguing here for a butch-femme audience, in which the readership wishes to see images of itself. Rather than that something askew come from some place transphobic, I wonder what it would mean for that something askew to be a source of erotic desire; a femme desire to see the black masculine female and the erotic subversiveness of that intimate secret?

means that she was more attentive than usual in this moment. After work she hangs with her male friends on the corner, the black masculine space of the hustler, but even more masculinizing, that corner happens to be outside of a strip club, the Kitty Kat Club. The same young woman walks toward the club, sees Mo and, leaning in, asks Mo if this is her "nightjob," signifying and affirming Mo's status as hustler. Mo thinks to herself that the woman "had to have felt [her] piece tucked inside of [her] jeans" as she nonchalantly mentions the greens the woman previously purchased. After she leaves, Mo's friends ask if she is "gonna handle that," meaning is Mo going to either date or have sex with the woman (135). The eroticized scene here hints at the double entendre of being strapped. While it is evident and stated that Mo carries a gun, what is understated is that Mo is probably (or expected) to be wearing a strap-on dildo underneath her clothing. That Mo immediately goes out and buys a strap-on further concretizes this idea. The store clerk tells her that "for the first few days [Mo is] probably going to look like [she] got [her] hands on some Viagra" hints at the masculine virility and excess signified by her black body. Mo embraces the idea of wearing the harness every day, even during her period, stabilizing her body as both masculine and feminine, in the realm of the trickster. That very same night, Mo hangs out on the corner in new clothes and meets the woman, whose name is revealed as LaQuita, and she once again presses her body against Mo. This time the feeling is unmistakable: "She had to feel that bulge in [Mo's] pants" (136). LaQuita offers to come see Mo at the store the next day, afterwhich Mo feels like she has "much game." The dick and gun both serve as violent eroticized traits of masculinity that now belong to Mo. Perry advises that "whereas previous generations of black Americans utilized various means to establish a self-definition that negated the construction of blackness as demonic or depraved, many members of the hip hop generation have chosen instead to appropriate and exploit those constructions as metaphoric tools for expressing

power"(47). The big black dick, once a violent, threatening and abusive body part now serves as a source of still violent but erotic, alluring and consensual desire. This leaves open the possibility for finding the erotic in violence - a source of antagonism for black folk. The slicing of Mr. Luther's dick transfers sexually violent power to erotic possibility and protection when displaced from Mr. Luther's male form to Mo's female form. The dysfunctional, warped and traumatic sour pickle becomes the perpetually erect and pleasurable "rubber dick" with which Mo's masculinity and penetrative power are indefinitely secured. In this moment, the patriarchical phallic force attributed to the dick is morphed and actualized into a queer erotic allure that LaQuita can feel.

Here is an important place to stop and discuss the fact of Mo's sexuality. Mo's flirtations with LaQuita are not the first displays of Mo's sexual agency. In "Mo," we learned that as an adolescent feminine girl, Mo started to notice the boys. She made sure she looked nice daily so as to impress them. When Jamal warns Mo about the potential violence she could experience if she is a lesbian and begins a relationship with a female, Mo responds that she "'ain't never said nothin' 'bout likin' chicks no way'"(138). While Mo's perpetually erect penis signifies on her virility and thus arousal and readiness to penetrate someone, the penis is in fact rubber and thus keeps open the possibility that it is not signifying her sexuality at all, just her gender. I rewind the conversation to reiterate that Mo's gender is also unclear, as we are never sure if Mo identifies as male or female or both. Hustling establishes Mo's masculine gender identity, not her sexuality. As a result, it is unclear whether Mo is straight, lesbian or bisexual. This ambiguity highlights that while sexuality and gender are related, they are still very separate and at times contradictory. Additionally, this issue raises questions of the malleability of sexuality when affected by gender and gender presentation. What does matter is that Mo is actively exploring her sexuality; And for the sake of this argument and for reasons previously

stated, I am left to speculate: I read Mo as a black masculine female or butch/stud who more than likely would prefer to perform penetrative sex (or top) with an ambiguous or undefined sexual preference.

Returning to Jamal's foreboding of the violent repercussions of queer sexualities, Jamal shares the death of his mother's female lover. Jamal's step-dad orally raped him in front of his mother as a warning against keeping her female lover, eventually murdering his wife's lover. Jamal's story further instills that violence cannot be detached from sexuality, especially for black folk, as Darieck Scott emphasizes. Jamal is haunted by the loss of a woman who also served a motherly role for him. While this emphasizes the role of violence in sexual development, Mo's own violent history begs the question of whether or not it is personal and collective histories that are tied to sexuality rather than some form of violence. In "Reconstructing Manhood; or, The Drag of Black Masculinity," Rinaldo Walcott advises that "history is always in question when black masculinity is in discussion" (75). Walcott is struck by the way images around and upon the black masculine body evoke personal and collective histories, which urge us to reformulate how we believe masculinity is constructed. The historical is dragged into the present or vice versa, the present is dragged into the historical. Mo's own violent history is dragged into the present by the purchase of the dildo or, rather, Mo's present is dragged in to the historical, wherein Mr. Luther's physical emasculation results in Mo's masculinization, in tit for tat Street Lit ethic. Thus, while Mo's masculinity and sexuality are tethered to violence, masculinity does not necessitate a historical violence but just the historical. In this way, the dildo has the potential to be restored from the phallic, depending upon the past it drags in, or the present that drags it back. If Mo's present dildo, a site of erotic power and potential, gets dragged back to a violent history in order

to rectify the damage done, then rather than represent phallic power, Mo's dildo represents a liberating present.

Mo's purchase of the dildo represents her subjectivity as a black masculine female with a sexual agency that allows her to begin a residential and romantic relationship with a femme woman. LaQuita fulfills her promise that she would visit Mo at her job. As Mo walks out of the store, she notices LaQuita across the street holding a greasy brown paper bag. Mo begins her hustling performance in which she'd "developed this trot like [her] partners and had even learned how to hold [her] dick while [she] was doing it," displaying her masculine penetrative sexual prowess to LaQuita, and whoever else is watching (136). As suspected, the bag is full of homemade greens and cornbread. That LaQuita comes by Mo's job dropping off home cooked meals signifies Mo's status as a hustler. Presumably, Mo has enough swag to attract a lady that works in the Kitty Kat Club, at least more swag than her male friends, and/or LaQuita is a femme and has recognized Mo as a black butch/stud whom she wishes to date. She made the food because she knew Mo lived in the shelter, and at this admission, Mo "wondered what else she knew" (137). As Mo continues the conversation on this corner date, she confirms that LaQuita is an exotic dancer and asks if the men touch her body. LaQuita affirms that men are not allowed to touch her in the club, after which Mo reveals more clues about her sexuality, in that her relief betrays a possessiveness not typical of a pimp-type hustler, but more typical of a serious, caring lover. In this moment, Mo's black butch body drags her own experiences as a violated woman into the present, allowing her to feel compassion and relief for LaQuita, whose tricking places her in perpetual danger of rape and abuse. What would it mean for LaQuita to be able to read this history on Mo's body? Is this history the particular thing askew about her that allows a femme to recognize Mo as queer?

The thing askew about Mo is that while she and her friends read her as black cisgender male, they seem to be unaware of a femme presence. Kara Keeling discusses the elusive femme at great length in *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense*. She describes a (black) butch-femme common sense in which this alternative and specific "[conception] of the world and the modes of sensory-motor habituation through which [it is] supported and expressed harbor viable alternatives to a white bourgeoisie North American common sense" (21). Keeling analyzes the black butch character Cleo from the film Set It Off. This film's context is closely aligned with the strereotypical tropes of Street Lit and thus Keeling's analysis of the butch-femme common sense useful to establishing LaQuita as a femme. In the film, a queer common sense would read Cleo, the black masculine female, as butch. To a hegemonically heterosexist audience, Cleo is not read as butch until the appearance of her hegemonically feminine and thus, femme, girlfriend, Ursula. A hustling lifestyle of crime leads to Cleo's death. Ursula has no speaking roles throughout the film. Her role consists of an "invisible, affective labor [she] performs...render[ing] Cleo's masculinity perceptible" (129). Additionally, "had Ursula not appeared as Cleo's girlfriend, the image I am recognizing...as 'the black lesbian femme' could not have appeared to ghettocentric common sense at all...Ursula would have appeared to be...an attractive black woman assumed to be hetersexual." Keeling concludes her analysis of Ursula's silence by advising that her lack of speech but plentiful tears "directs hegemonic common senses, including ghettocentrism, toward a recognition that there exists within them alternative organizations of cinematic reality" (131). Keeling's theoretical cinematic reading is applicable to understanding notions of femme silence and elusiveness in regards to LaQuita.

While Keeling's analysis references a white hegemonic heteronormative gaze that allows the possibility to read Cleo as simply a black masculine woman, desexualized, Brown's Street Lit and/or erotic novel's self-published format and eventual success in a black publishing house, along with the publisher's marketing strategies to a black queer audience, leaves little likelihood for a diverse audience of straight white readers. The front cover of *Walk Like a Man* depicts an amber colored female form with wet, full lip-glossed lips, men's button down, undone, black trousers, rainbow patterned necktie, undone, and for the final touch (my favorite part!) an uncut cigar, pointing crotch-ward, wedged between a curved pointer finger and a fully erect and ready middle finger. The appeal of Brown's work is decidedly black, gender non-conforming and sexy. Any reader ready to crack open the pages should be well prepared for its queer content.

While Cleo is not read as a butch under a certain gaze until the appearance of her femme girlfriend, I argue that Mo is read as butch as early as the site of her self-naming. Mo signifies the transformation from masculine to feminine but the reader is made to understand that Mo does not live far from home. Jamal is only aware of Mo's "secret" because they knew each other before the Mo's transition. Jamal was able to share the death of his mother's lover, and Mo was able to sympathise with Jamal because she remembers "that body they found in the river a while back" (Brown 138). Thus, when Jamal states "if that girl ever finds out that you walking around with a plastic dick on, she's gonna have your business all out in the streets," the statement may serve as a warning to protect Mo's gender as male, but it may be simpler than that. It may be a warning protecting Mo's sexuality, as Jamal's story implies. Perhaps everyone in the town/city is aware of Mo's previous life, and her sudden change of appearance, and it is likely that like Cleo's audience, they hold a hegemonic gaze preventing them from seeing her as a sexually active black masculine female subject. Rather, their hegemonic common

sense allows them to see her adolescent frame and existence within the homeless shelter as the life of just another tomboy girl who will eventually grow out of that stage. Brown leaves these moments ambiguous, allowing the queer common sense to be just as elusive as Keeling and Arobateau's black femme.

What makes the black femme particularly elusive in Brown's work is the refusal to name her as such. In a book in which she labels her characters as butch or femme, the stories of Mo remain highly ambiguous. The reader is left up to his/her own interpretation. The appearance of LaQuita, like Ursula, does further establish Mo as a desirable black masculine subject, but is never stated, only alluded to, that LaQuita knows Mo is anatomically female. Here is where Keeling's assertion of black butch-femme common sense makes most sense. Keeling affirms that "butch-femme surface[d] as a set of aesthetic codes through which lesbians could be visible to each other (and, often, to others) and as a set of behavioral codes that allowed for a certain degree of erotic tension and fulfillment and social stability through which...lesbian communities could survive in a violently oppressive world" (132). While Keeling's definition is historical, Mo's historical and current world is violently oppressive. If LaQuita has any knowledge of the past dragging on Mo, then she is also aware of Mo's anatomical sex, which means she reads Mo as somewhere along the black butch - FtM spectrum. Butch-femme common sense would advise her to stick to "aesthetic codes" rather than discuss Mo's anatomical identity in front of a group of people or even within an intimate setting if that conversation is traumatic and unnecessary. Why discuss something like Mo's gender and anatomical sex that, to LaQuita, is common sense? LaQuita's silence on Mo's identity then is a means of survival, and her consistent leaning against Mo's crotch and homecooking is a method of fulfilling a gendered erotic tension that they cannot discuss.

Ironically, after Jamal's warnings, LaQuita and Mo find themselves in each other's company for the remainder of the story, in which the climactic finale takes place. We learn that two months have passed and thanks to LaQuita, Mo owns a loveseat and a television. After months of what is utterly neglect for her teenage daughter, Mo's mother violent interrupts these joyful moments. At the sound of the door pounding, LaQuita does not Flinch as Mo retrieves her pistol, ready to kill who she believes to be Mr. Luther. As her mother responds to Mo's request to identify herself, LaQuita becomes excited at the prospect of meeting her beau's mother. Mo becomes anxious that whatever secrets she is (or is not) successfully hiding will come to light. She tells LaQuita, "'Before I open that door, I need you to know I love you...no matter what'" (140). LaQuita smiles and says OK. As the mother storms in, she side-eyes LaQuita, asking Mo who she is, and persistently refers to Mo as Monique. She asks Mo why she never came home and Mo advises her mother that she can blame herself, as she recounts how she sliced Mr. Luther's dick. As the mother eyes LaQuita, she asks a rhetorical question: "So I guess you dyking now?" and persists to call LaQuita a tramp. At this remark, the following scene ensues:

> I pulled my nine from the back of my pants. I'd had enough. 'Get out.' Her eyes were like tiny balls of fire. Through them, I saw the woman I used to get pickles for - the one who I wore the dress, hairbows, and Mary Janes for. And I hated her.
> "Oh, so now you bad 'cuz you call yourself being strapped? Well, lemme tell you something, You going to hell All this shit you dun brought on yourself ain't gonna do nothing but get you a first-class ticket to hell," she screamed at me.
> By now, LaQuita had gotten up from the loveseat and was standing by my side with her hand resting on my arm, "Give me the gun, baby. Don't do this."
> Pulling a gun on Moms was something I never thought I'd do. But as I looked at her, I felt nothing - no love, no compassion, no connection to her at all...Moms was like a pit bull. She just wouldn't stop. She kept at me, hurting me more with every word. "You must still have some girl in you 'cuz you standing over there crying like a ol' bitch." With that said, she stormed past LaQuita toward the door, slamming it when she left (Brown 140).

LaQuita and Mo have spent a significant amount of time together over the course of two months. Obviously, LaQuita cares a lot for Mo and assists in making Mo's small place a home by purchasing expensive comforts. LaQuita's purchase of these things signifies Mo's status as a hustler. LaQuita seems unsurprised that Mo owns a gun, which either means Mo is involved in dangerous illicit activity, which is never stated, or LaQuita has enough common sense to know that Mo is running from someone in her past, which explains Mo's sudden appearance at the homeless shelter. The mother's violent entrance simultaneously raises anxiety and excitement for Mo and LaQuita, respectively. Mo's anxiety stems from initially realizing that she will have to kill Mr. Luther if he is behind the door and finally from the involuntary memories provoked by her mother. LaQuita's excitement stems from meeting potential family and meeting the woman she ideally replaces (Mo compares LaQuita's cooking/caring to her mother's neglect). Mo's assertion that she loves LaQuita marks their romantic friendship since LaQuita does not say return the sentiment. Or perhaps she does, perhaps it should be common sense that LaQuita loves Mo based on all the affective labor she has exhibited for Mo.

The mother's persistent reference to Mo's historical name (Monique) and various other feminized versions of Mo infuriates Mo. The mother's consistent references to Mo's female body make her trickster identity hypervisible and her tricking past becomes a topic of discussion in the present. Not only is the mother recalling a historical narrative that Mo wishes to forget, but she is also undermining Mo's gender performance in front of her LaQuita, whose gender never gets called into question but is actually affirmed by the mother (ho/tramp). This signifies the ease with which the mother can seemingly love someone else more than Mo, a reference to the time the mother would spend with various boyfriends, including Mo's father, instead of bonding with Mo. Ironically, it is the

mother's recognition and shaming of the couple's gender performances that incite Mo to pull her gun. Had she not recognized LaQuita and Mo as a couple but as best girl-friends, perhaps she would be more likely to address LaQuita as an ally rather than as a threat to the possibility of her daughter's return to tricking (or return to the mother's home). The mother recognizes that they are "dyking," something not yet fully established, at least through speech, within the stories thus far. Thus, it is significant that it is the mother who is the first person to openly acknowledge Mo's sexuality, despite the fact that the mother is in complete and utter denial and unapologetic about Mo's rape. These issues are compacted upon one another, as the memories of Mo's childhood also become stigmatized. At this point, the reader, as well as Mo, realizes that the dresses, hairbows, and Mary Janes were all to please her mother, not herself. Worst of all, the symbolic and literal pickles were always for her mother, who refuses to realize that Mo's tricking began out of love for her mother.

Mo's love for her mother, she realizes, has always been unrequited. As Mo pulls her gun, the mother critiques her hustling masculinity. In calling Mo strapped, she recognizes the gun but also signifies her daughter's penetrative performativity in a joking manner. The mother only recognizes her daughter's masculinity as a threat for which she should, and asserts that she will, be punished. In this moment, LaQuita speaks, and the mother's refusal to love her daughter's masculinity is placed in juxtaposition to LaQuita's caring. The mother refuses to see an independent masculine person and insists on viewing Mo as the young, afraid girl (bitch) she neglected. Mo's love for LaQuita stands in direct contradistinction to her lack of love for her mother. LaQuita's unconditional mothering stands in direct contradistinction to the mother's neglect. Thus, LaQuita's affective labor of silence, leaning, homemaking and pleading make Mo visible as a black butch, but I

insist that this affective labor also makes LaQuita visible as an aware and supportive black femme.

The close of this story allows me to return to the opening question: Does survival in a capitalist game always make love an impossibility? Can Trick(ster)ing ever lead to love for a black butch/stud subject? While Street Lit certainly provides a critique against capitalism, this genre is steeped in contradiction. Mo cannot rely alone on the not-for-profit/socialist stand in (the homeless shelter) to take care of her. While the shelter stands in for an immediate solution to her food and shelter, the assist her in finding an under-the-table job, which obviously helps the store owner's profits by reducing taxes and health insurance (along with all of the other reasons a business owner would wish to pay under-the table). We can read both of these sources of food and shelter as a part of Mo's masculine hustle. While a capitalist model completely benefits the owner at the expense of an at-risk youth, this same job allows Mo to move out on her own and come into a gendered sexual agency she otherwise would not have. It seems that both the homeless shelter and the low-wage job are both necessary for Mo's survival. Since, under this analysis, most of Mo's femininity is tied in historical memory, her hustle allows her to disregard those memories and become a totally different person. Trauma (especially at such a young age) prevents Mo from easily and willingly moving back and forth along a black gender spectrum. Thus, Mo's status as trickster, in this case, is tethered to a shifting temporality, in which Mo desperately clings to the present. A perpetual concern over money and forces Mo to remain in the present and on guard, as signified by her pistol and her always-erect dick, but love complicates Mo's comfort in the quest for capital.

Returning to Keeling's theories about butch-femme common sense, she advises that while Ursula does not speak, she sheds plenty of tears, which "directs hegemonic common senses...toward a recognition that there exists within them

alternative organizations of...reality" (131). LaQuita's affective labor allows a hegemonic audience to love Mo as a black masculine subject, despite the mother's impossibility, and presents LaQuita as a loving black femme, outside of the capitalist ethic of tricking. While LaQuita does literally speak and is very present throughout the story, she is always silent concerning Mo's anatomical sex, even right before they have sex. After the mother leaves, Mo assumes that LaQuita is ready to leave as well, but LaQuita decides to stay:

> "Sitting there kissing my muscles, LaQuita took me by the hand and said,'Actually, I thought I might hang around to get to know you better.' With those words, LaQuita, the twenty-one-year-old dancer who'd never let any man at the club touch her and who could cook greens better than Moms ever could, and who'd kept me from ruining the rest of my life (because I was going to kill Mom's ass), made love to Mo that night and rescued me from my nightmare"(142/143).

LaQuita's insistence that a man has not touched her in her tricking role speaks both to Mo's fear for LaQuita's safety and a lack of affective labor for her clients. Mo recognizes this affective labor (or love) in the form of LaQuita's caring that is juxtaposed against her mother's neglect (cooking better and protecting life vs. ruining it). While LaQuita does not state that she loves Mo in response to Mo's admission, she does make love to Mo as a nurturing and restorative function of caring, rescuing Mo from her historical tricking past and her present hustling mode of non-feeling. When LaQuita asks Mo to tell her about Monique (establishing Monique as an historical embodiment), Mo advises her that Monique is dead. LaQuita's presence does not make Monique's death a loss but a rebirth, in which Mo can experience a range of emotive thoughts and actions, such as requited love and consensual sex. The introduction of love does not remove the capitalist function from the story in that hustling and tricking, for both Mo and LaQuita, were necessary tools to help them survive and find one another. Realistically, had Mo not been on the corner and at the corner store and had LaQuita not been on her way to work,

perhaps they would not have met. Evidently, capitalism plays a role in structuring lives, especially in Street Lit, and characters work in and around this structure in order to find fulfillment in various ways.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING: ADDRESSING CONCERNS

The purpose of this final chapter is to serve not only as a conclusion to this thesis but as a segue into a larger future project. I leave Trick(Ster)ing in this moment in order to provide an example of how our perceptions of gender affect how we view, critique and resolve gender(ed) oppressions. I return to the character Flip, in order to address misogyny mode of masculinity.

Black Female Masculinity's Relationship with Misogyny

In *The Bars Across Heaven*, Flip's consistent lack of success with women eventually allows her to disidentify with women altogether. This act of disidentification stabilizes her position as a non-prostitute and a non-femme. She firmly positions herself as a subject with desires rather than as an object of desire. Flip's disassociation from women in conjunction with her inability to maintain a long-term relationship leads to loneliness. Unlike Mo, Flip is in a space in which monogamous, long-term relationships are unfathomable. For Flip, women (or more specifically for this discussion, femmes or feminine centered women) are useful only for having short-term sexual relationships without emotional interest. This belief purportedly leads to a host of misogynist actions against women by Flip. What are the effects of class and race upon feminist constructs of misogyny and gender? How does a close reading of fictional working class black queer women require theorists to redefine and complicate traditional feminist definitions of misogyny? How does such a reworking additionally require theorists to think outside of hegemonic binaries and assumptions when defining masculinity, femininity and power dynamics within and across sexual relationships?

I begin this analysis by attempting to define feminist hegemonic understandings of misogyny. I utilize anti-pornograpy arguments and attempt to complicate this position by including the voices of black feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins. While this argument is focused upon the oppression of women through bodily commodification, I argue that such positions do not take into consideration Black queer female formations and, as a result, leave their arguments concerning misogyny underdeveloped. In an effort to turn to a work that analyzes Black queer female formations and politics, including misogyny, I turn to Gloria Wekker's work in Suriname. Wekker provides a particularly western lens through which she analyzes mati work and "male/female" roles in relationships between women that is very similar to white feminist arguments against seemingly misogynistic butch/femme couplings in the United States. I argue that such positions do not take into consideration race, class, gender and sexuality when dissecting these sub-cultures and rather theorists base their analyses upon white hegemonic understandings of gender and sexuality. Finally, I focus upon an established feminist understanding of rape as the epitome of misogyny. Here, I analyze a rape scene between two Black women and take into consideration the aforementioned constructs in order to provide an alternative analysis to a stereotypically misogynistic event.

THE TROUBLE WITH DEFINING MISOGYNY

Defining misogyny initially seems like an uncomplicated task. Since the beginning of feminist stances on suffrage and equal work and pay, women have been speaking out and against societal structures designed to keep them subordinated. In the 1980s, Joan Smith took to task a full description and analysis of an inherent sociological hatred of women in her book *Misogynies*. Rather than simply a hatred of women, she advises that misogyny is "a whole series of slighting and dismissive attitudes. At the

heart of it is the idea that women are defined and limited by gender in a way men aren't." (11). Such attitudes affect job roles, gender roles within relationships, finances, and even what car women tend to drive. Contemporary feminists' focus upon misogyny leads arguments against misogyny away from traditional concerns of equal work for equal pay and towards a critique against what journalist Ariel Levy describes as "raunch culture" or the commodification and objectification of female bodies40. Levy's focus upon pornographic films such as *Girls Gone Wild* and dissection of *Playboy's* mostly female editorial staff highlight misogyny as a societal problem enforced by people across genders. Smith states that "we are all exposed to the prevailing ideology of our culture, and some women learn early that they can prosper by aping the misogyny of men; these are the women that win provisional favor by denigrating other women [and] by playing on male prejudices" (16). While Smith and Levy point to the complicity of women in their own subjugation they do not discuss the role of racism in complicating and sometimes undermining the power of misogyny.

In *Black Sexual Politics*, Patricia Hill Collins discusses this divide and the importance of understanding that misogyny is not resolvable without simultaneously addressing racism. Collins coins "new racism" as the understanding that "African American men and women [are] both affected by racism, but in gender-specific ways" (5). She provides and describes a lineage of black gendered archetypes, ranging from the Mammy and the Uncle Tom to the Bad Bitch and the Player. Concerned with both how black people are represented and how they are actually embodied, Collins advises that "Western social thought associates Blackness with an imagined uncivilized, wild sexuality and uses this association as one lynchpin of racial difference" for both black

[40] see Levy, Ariel, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*

men and women (27). As a result, traditional and current portrayals of Black women and men depict them as untamed and perpetually desirous of sex and violence or, on the other end of the spectrum, civilized maternal caretakers and best friends of wealthy and socially significant white citizens. Such mass media portrayals lead to the replication of these images within the literal embodied lives of Black folk.

While Collins attempts an inclusive perspective regarding gender and sexuality, she carefully avoids a nuanced conversation regarding queer formations. Collins' spectrum of gender is decidedly male/female and masculine/feminine with no allowances for valuable variations along such a spectrum. Any variations along this spectrum represent stereotypical racialized failures inept at living into societal standards such as monetary wealth, appropriate familial hierarchies and beauty. Collins asserts the existence of an alternative "Black gender ideology" based upon the aforementioned archetypes while excluding Black queer genders (except for what she describes as the gay buddy) that allow for variations along a masculine/feminine spectrum. This gender ideology is based upon a white heterosexist assumption that queer identities and bodies do not exist and are not carefully formulated and understood wherever Black bodies mingle and reside.

While Collins describes at length various gendered embodiments and representations of Black folk within her text, she focuses more upon Black gender ideology than on sexual politics or the actual politics of sexual intercourse. Some of this difficulty results from the perpetual requirement of defining male/female against gender stereotypes rather than physical anatomy. Representative of the schism between Feminist Studies and Sexuality Studies, Collins unknowingly maintains the conflation of sex with

gender in refusing to detangle biology from social constructs.[41] Is there a method for simplifying an analysis of gender identity in order to understand misogyny? What would an analysis of exclusively female relationships reveal?

GENDER VARIATIONS BETWEEN WOMEN

Beginning with the second wave feminists, scholars have discussed the politics of sex between women with very peculiar results and conclusions. Butch and femme have been previously theorized as imitative of male/female relationships.[42] Feminists credited the prevalence of butch/femme couples with displaying tacit approval of social inequalities between men and women. Butch imitations of stereotypical men displayed a desire to be more like heterosexual men: sexist. Femme imitations of stereotypical women displayed a desire to more like heterosexual women: subordinate to men. Unlike Collins, sex acts were discussed in detail, with penetration and reciprocity at the forefront of the discussion. The use of dildos was "prohibited" in lesbian circles and representative of the desire for phallic power.[43] Desire for penetration was representative of feminine weakness and the need for consciousness raising. Sex was a political act. Such an understanding of gender presentation led to a trend in overall hippy androgyny in the sixties and seventies, particularly in white middle class circles, with a contemporary comeback in the late 80s of butch/femme identities. This supposed comeback of butch/femme identities resulted in pivotal studies concerning sexuality, gender and trans-identities. Such studies focus upon gender and sexuality both as fluid and malleable wherein gender identity changes over time and sexual desire may or may not be related to gender performance. I remark this comeback as hypothetical due to artists and scholars

[41] Butler, Judith "Against Proper Objects"
[42] Eves, Allison
[43] Califia, Pat

such as Cheryl Dunye and Audre Lorde who have pointed to the prevalence of Black butch/femme couplings throughout history despite visible admonitions against them within white lesbian feminist discourse. That these couplings existed despite antagonistic feminist rhetoric does not mean that they were valued by Black lesbian scholars and Black feminists of the time, further highlighting the problems posed by Black lesbian feminists as more complex than sexism and homophobia.

A study of Black queer formations may provide a more critical lense for understanding not only misogyny but, as Collins suggests, racism as well. In *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora*, Gloria Wekker describes with much detail the history and contemporary lives of women that do mati work. Mati are Black women in Suriname that maintain short and long-term loving and sexual relationships with other women. Wekker's position within that community allows readers a glance into the sexual politics between women. Similar to the butch/femme formations described above, there are male and female sexual roles between mati women that Wekker describes as unequal.[44] Similar to a hegemonic Western understanding of the relationships between women and men, mati women that "play" the dominant or male role are responsible for monetary support, are generally older than their "female" counterparts, and are allowed to have sexual encounters outside of their primary relationship. Additionally, the sex act is political and Wekker advises that "the roles say something about the sexual division of labor in the relationship; the 'male' lies on top or can tell the 'female' to be on top...the polarization in roles is deemed necessary and 'natural,' and almost all women agreed that two 'women' or two 'men' cannot be

[44] I choose to utilize Wekker's work on Afro-Surinamese women as an analysand for African-American women because at this point it represents the most complicated and detailed sociological work on violence and gender roles amongst Afro-diasporic women in same-gender-loving relationships.

together" (194). Here, mati women are clarifying a distinction between sex and gender, one's biological attributes do not determine one's sexual role and gender presentation. Additionally, while some mati women in the "male" role wear men's clothing, Wekker describes this as a fairly recent trend within her studies and thus gender presentation is based less on outward appearance and more upon age and sexual preference.

Violence against the "female" partner, or misogynistic actions, are of significant importance to Wekker's understanding of gender roles within mati relationships. "Male" mati are known to exhibit violence against their "female" partners if they are suspected of infidelity or simply untimely meals. Wekker advises that these are sometimes literal exhibitions wherein the failings of the "female" mati are performed in public. On another note, "male" matis are also typified as performing desire for other women in public spaces through coded song. Within the text there is only one exchange between Wekker and a woman that defends hypothetical violence against her own body. Within this conversation, the woman advises that if her partner did not respond with violence to accusations of infidelity she would not feel the love was strong enough. Regarding violence, Wekker states that "there is a paradox built into this element of the mati work that, on the one hand, mirrors the dominant cross-sex relationships and connections, while, on the other hand, the dangers and tensions in the polarized roles of mati are attractive and seductive" (199). If violence is permissible within mati relationships, then why is it impermissible within cross-sex relationships? These violent actions are not mirrors of cross-sex relationships but rather they serve as contradictions to them. Gendered polarization between women within one relationship prove desirous and sexy for the women that actually find themselves in a polarized relationship.

I provide that statement in order to question if the women Wekker interviewed were dissatisfied with their gender role within the relationship. Were their roles

desirously polarized? In other words were their gender roles chosen or forced upon them by the mati preferring the "male" role? Given the dearth of women interviewed that preferred the "female" role and the abundance of women that preferred the "male" role, the reader is left to assume that the "male" role is inherently misogynistic or oppressive against the "female" partner and the "female" role is generally never a coveted position. Should Wekker have done more work to find women that preferred the "female" role? Are there women that prefer the "female" role? If Wekker interviewed women that preferred the "female" role, did their viewpoint make the final edit? Wekker admits that within her own new mati relationship, one in which the reader is able to assume that Wekker played the "female" role due to age difference, gender roles were a major point of contention mostly due to Wekker's academic feminist standpoint and her lifelong placement outside of mati culture and her acclimation to white lesbian spaces. Wekker's desire to begin and maintain a non-monogamous relationship, her open flirtations with other women and her public responses against her lover's chastisements scandalized and embarrassed a lover that was unfamiliar with and unaccustomed to the sexual and social norms of a world in which neither of them existed in the moment of their coupling. Wekker admits that "in hindsight [she] learned most intensely on occasions of conflict and misunderstanding, moments when my ideas and values as a Europe-centered lesbian sharply with [her lover's] mati world…[she] caused wounds and a cultural crisis by...unspeakable behavior…[Wekker's] job, the prescribed way of placating [her lover], was to make her feel that [her] eyes were on her only, whatever it took. [Wekker] could not do that" (51). Ironically, Wekker's European feminist pro-sex and polyamorous standpoint appears to inherently fulfill the "male" role within the mati world. Is it that a possible inclination to fulfill the mati "male" role prevents Wekker from interviewing women that prefer the "female" role? Would they disassociate themselves from her out of

respect to a mati code that Wekker refuses? Is it that "female" mati opinions of themselves and their lovers do not fit a presumably feminist agenda undertaken by the book? I lay out this speculation in order to highlight how, at least for Wekker's understanding of gender roles within mati relationships, race, class and culture define our understandings of misogyny. While Wekker's analysis provides some detail into black queer female spaces, deconstructing hegemonic constructions of masculinity is still tethered to hegemonic constructions of masculinity and dominance. In order to facilitate a more simplistic discussion, I turn toward a more concrete and established understanding of misogyny: rape as a violent manifestation of the hatred of women.

EPITOMIZING MISOGYNY?

Here, I turn to Flip, the main character in The Bars Across Heaven. Flip is a young, mixed race stud on welfare, living in the red light district in Oakland, California in the early 1970's. Flip is the antagonistic opposite to Audre Lorde and Alice Walker's Black lesbian feminist personages within classic texts such as: *Zami A New Spelling of My Name* and *The Color Purple*. Flip makes no attempts at improving her lifestyle by fighting for equal rights or defining Black womanhood. Flip has a sense of entitlement and cockiness normally reserved for the male protagonists found within critically acclaimed African American literature. An affront to both a Black politics of respectability and white lesbian feminist ideologies against masculinity, Flip laments over a lack of love and sex for nearly two hundred pages. Walking down the street in search of a prostitute she frequently 'dates', Flip is approached by a drunken Pootsie, who was ready to "talk business" with "dollar signs in her eyes" until she notices that Flip is not a "white boy."[45] Rejected by Pootsie, Flip imagines kidnapping the woman in

[45] To facilitate an easier understanding of this analysis, I have included a copy of this passage in the appendix.

order to beat and rape her at gunpoint in a motel room. A feminist analysis would ridicule Flip for desiring to sexually assault a woman in order to defend a hegemonic factor of manhood: rape. Some feminist theories cite rape as the ultimate embodiment of misogyny. Katherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin inspired the" sex wars" or anti-pornogrophy movement by theorizing hetorosexual sex as inherently misogynistic.[46] Females are the sexual subordinates to males based on the theorization of penetration as a phallic powerful weapon. All heterosexual penetrative sex, given this reasoning, is rape. This concern led to a feminist understanding of rape as inherently misogynistic.

The racialized differences (skin tone) and cultural similarities (class and shared language patterns) between the characters also point toward a history of racialized sexual violence. Including racist colonial legacies within a gendered analysis of rape, scholars grounded in Black feminist theory such as Danielle McGuire and Toni Irving illuminate a historical culture of racialized sexual crimes alongside discrepancies and missteps in the rape investigations of black women before the Civil Rights Era and currently within major metropolitan areas.[47] Their analysis supports a diasporic awareness of Black women as always willing and never rapeable while simultaneously pointing toward violent crimes against black men that include sexual violence yet such crimes are not legally recognized as rape. Resonant of the Black archetypes previously discussed, stereotypes affect the realities and injustices of racialized sexual violence. A history of racialized sexual violence and chattel slavery supersedes the need to rape in order to render Black bodies as property. Historically, legal understandings of Black women as property prevented the ability to punish rapists for their crimes and contemporary racism

[46] Butler, Judith, *Undoing Gender*

[47] see Irving, Toni, "Decoding Black Women: Policing Practices and Rape Prosecution on the Streets of Philadelphia" and Danielle McGuire *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape and Resistance - A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*.

contributes to the refusal to investigate sex crimes against Black women. Legally, during chattel slavery and structurally, in the current decade, Black women are not considered rapeable. Not only is Flip misogynistic within this analysis, but due to racism and her momentary alignment with white masculinity, Pootsie's body should have been open and available to Flip, rendering rape theoretically impossible.

I wish to offer an alternative analysis. Perhaps rape in this instance is theoretically impossible between an entitled historically propertied white man and a black always open, willing and unrapeable black woman yet these characters only exist within the first few sentences of the scene. Yet, what spurs this scene is the rejection experienced by Flip upon Pootsie's realizing that Flip is not a man and presumably, upon hearing Flip speak, realizing that Flip is not white. Flip is an historically unpropertied black woman and Pootsie is open and available (not just in a white masculine imaginary) to whoever is paying, as long as the customer is not a woman. She is unwilling and unopen to female customers. This opens the argument against sex work as solely transactional in that attraction and desire play a part in who Pootsie chooses. Unfortunately for Flip, Pootsie has redefined her own sexual agency and will not do anything or anyone for money. Flip is offered and accepts "dates" with prostitutes in various scenes throughout the book and it is evident that these women are not attracted to Flip and their desire for money is apparent. A reversal of the usual "woman as sex object" argument occurs in that it is Pootsie in search of men to commoditize. Flip's female body, supposedly objectified in white feminist rhetoric, prevents Pootsie from viewing Flip as a viable sex object. On the other hand, for Flip, it is only Pootsie's occupation that renders her sexually open and available, not her black female body. As stated near the end of the scene, Flip's money spends and her money is just as good as anyone else's. Contradictorily, of importance is the refusal of a paid service based upon gender and race rather than a claim of ownership

over Pootsie's body. Is this a rape scene or a theft of offered and then refused services? Is this misogyny or retaliation?

Returning to Pootsie as unwilling specifically to female clients, Pootsie is defining her body as concretely rapeable against a narrative that states she is always willing. What does it mean for the rapist to appear in female form? For MacKinnon and Dworkin, "gender is the congealed form that the sexualization of inequality takes" meaning that gender performances or woman and man are the embodied manifestations of inequality based upon anatomical differences (Butler, Undoing Gender 53). This reasoning then means inequality based upon anatomical differences precludes constructions of gender. Sociological constructs of gender then are based upon an original inequality spawned by who is able to penetrate and who is being penetrated. Male is defined as the ability to penetrate or rape; Female is defined as the ability to be penetrated or be raped. Based solely upon notions of essentialized gender, this anti-pornographic and anti-penetrative sex argument renders the violences of rape invisible by highlighting the penetrative intercourse itself as a misogynistic act. Within this scene, it is the militaristic use of the gun and beating with combat boots that contributes to the violent act of rape. This scene takes place in Flip's imaginary which points to a number of impossibilities represented by Flip's racially ambiguous and gender-non conforming body, one of which is her lack of a penis or penetrative object. Sexual scenes with other women throughout the book highlight that Flip is able to penetrate women via other means but she refuses to do so within this particular "sadistic fantasy." I argue that Pootsie is penetrated within this scene, complicating MacKinnon and Dworkin's assertion of rapist as male and victim as female. Flip stands above Pootsie and "cram[s] her pussy into the woman's lips." The penetrative object in this case is female and the object being penetrated is ambiguously gendered; a mouth. If heterosexual sex, or rape,

serves as a precursor defining gender, then this scenario would place rapist as male or female and victim as male or female. Rape, then, would not necessarily place women in the subordinate position. This is not about the usual radical feminist penis-in-vagina admonition so hailed by MacKinnon and Dworkin. This act of forced penetration, or rape, is not inherently misogynistic but about something else.

What does it mean that Flip experiences and desires oral sex via violence? Under discussed sexual politics is crucial in this moment. While Collins avoids queer bodies and the politics of having sex, Wekker's work explores some of the sexual politics involved between women. Similar to MacKinnon and Dworkin's assertion that hetersexual sex is rape, Wekker's construction of top/bottom or passive/aggressive is similarly loaded with hierarchical sentiment. This is not necessarily Wekker's fault, as it seems all of the women she interviews prefer the top position. On another note, Wekker does not actually define what "top" or "bottom" means and leaves the reader to assume, based on their own queer positionality, or lack thereof, that these formations refer to some form of sexual dominance via implied penetration. Her work leaves this construction unclear and there are few academic studies concerned with the sexual politics between Black queer women. Leslie Feinberg, author of *Stone Butch Blues*, has discussed the sexual politics of white working class butch/femme couples at some length. Prior to publishing the aforementioned novel, she wrote "A Letter to a Fifties Femme from a Stone Butch" wherein she describes the unspoken and assumed requirements of a stone butch and the social stigma they experience.[48] She describes a date with a democratic feminist who advises her that "she hates this society for what it's done to 'women like [Feinberg] who

[48] Feinberg currently is an advocate for transgender awareness. He identifies as a transman. I choose to refer to Feinberg utilizing female pronouns in order to maintain the context of the article/letter originally published wherein he is describing the life of a stone butch that identifies as female.

hate themselves so much that they have to look and act like men" (102). Feinberg quickly sets the record straight by advising her that butch women have existed throughout history and that style has nothing to do with oppression. This conversation represents the shift in feminist politics and anti-masculine sentiment during second wave feminism previously discussed. Social stigma from feminists was an addition to the physical oppression experienced during bar raids and street sweeps in which butch women were beaten, jailed and raped for their failure to conform to feminine gender stereotypes. On top of that, sexual politics within the bedroom remained assumed and unspoken...sexual preference became coded within the way one dressed and performed masculinity. Feinberg writes this letter to a woman to whom she cannot see nor speak. Stoneness is more than just attire, swagger and brawn: "melting stone" is a part of the sexual politics between some butch/femme couples. For Feinberg, being touched, is not only difficult to do but is difficult to discuss. Here, I return to Flip's desire.

Throughout the text, Flip struggles to find a femme lover. She states that she is attracted to Black feminine women and as a result pays prostitutes for sex. While there are gay clubs in Oakland that Flip haphazardly mentions, she seems to only find women she is attracted to in predominantly straight bars and on the "ho stroll." This problem may be the lack of diversity found within the gay bars in the area, they could either be full of men or non-Black women. While Flip is a stud that occasionally is able to pass as a man, she is not stone to the extent that Feinberg describes. While she predominantly has dominant penetrative sex with prostitutes, occasionally Flip desires to be touched by these women and this desire becomes construed with what Flip describes as "love." During another moment within the text, Flip watches a lesbian couple on the dance floor in an intimate embrace:

> the couple was loving each other on the dance floor...as Flip watched these women, the living shape of her needs became apparent. Deep within her physical body, the dark waters of desire were set, moving...She knew the women who worked the corners by her kitchenette...She'd bought love from them before. She saw it in a new way tonight. Instead of frenching and straight-fucking, she thought, 'I'll buy a woman's mind.' (98)

Following this scene, Flip has another fantasy involving consensual sex. Flip desires to buy a woman's "mind" could be a reference to receiving "head" or oral sex but this is simultaneously a reference to love and/or desire. During this fantasy, while the woman is providing Flip with oral sex, she is able to "talk and be sucking a mouthful of pussy at the sametime" while praising Flip with words of love and desire; replete with descriptions of why Flip is so desirous. This scene never happens for Flip in reality. This script is always in reverse, with Flip responsible for the pleasure of prostitutes while lauding them with words of love and desire, generally to the woman's annoyance. In essence, Flip pays women to pleasure them and pays extra whenever she does insist upon receiving oral sex. Flip, then, while she is not a stone butch or in other vernacular 'no-touch stud", is treated as such.

Returning to the rape fantasy, within the text, Flip's body is rarely read as a sexually desirable masculine subject. Hatred of the black masculine female body is the impetus behind the rape. That Flip must experience sexual touch via violence signals a societal lack of desire for her female masculine body, but not her typically penetrative dominant sex acts. Flip's perpetual lamentations and fantasized violence point to the invisibility of a black gender formation that scholars such as Collins ignores in her spectrum of black gender ideologies: the Black femme.[49] The above argument refers back to the titular sentiment of sexual relationships with women without emotional interest.

[49] Keeling, Kara

Flip's paid sex is not merely transactional. As previously analyzed, Flip's feelings move backwards and forwards through depression and elation during her sexual escapades. Flip desires emotional attachment from the women she has sex with but they do not offer that attachment back. Earlier in the book, while cruising for women, Flip encounters more rejection from a woman passing by. She thought "'Aw you bitches are a snob...all I do is walk around and cry...Aw, I don't want no bitch...None of these. They too snobbish'...She set her face, tough, for the faces that she would meet. This was her shell...but inside Flip's smug manner, she was honestly plagued by loneliness" (5). Flips reference to "none of these" points to the invisibility of a femme woman or what she calls "femme counterpart." She does not exist thus far in Flip's life or exist at all in the book for that matter. The bitches that Flip refers to do not desire her although Flip is very much attracted to them. Much like the black gender formations Collin's discusses, archetypes arise out of a bloody and traumatic history. Flip's bloody spectacle is simultaneously the projection of a desire never experienced: to find a woman that would not be sick to the stomach and that would not stop until Flip orgasms. Hatred of the black female masculine body is misogynistic. Here, Flip reclaims her vagina as a desirably masculine source of pleasure. Flip's rape represents an attempt to reclaim and assert her black masculine female body as desirable and, at the very least, as worthy as Pootsie's male clients.

While Pootsie's male clients may utilize their penis as a primary marker of masculinity, war studies show that women are usually raped by the force of a gun and penetrated with an object or body part. Here, I focus upon the gun and remark that Flip goes to a motel in her fantasy. Flip does not own a gun and ironically does not possess the money for a motel in which to take the prostitute in order to enact her kidnapping. This lack of funds may signal the impossibility of Flip living into a hegemonic understanding of masculinity, much like it is impossible (at this time) for Flip to

biologically possess a penis. Flip is unable to provide for herself, let alone anyone else. Ironically, Flip's favorite prostitutes tend to have motel rooms already set up for use. This refusal points to the ties gender shares with both race and class. Hegemonic masculinity requires wealth and wealth, especially in 1970s Oakland, requires the right skin tone. Ironically, Flip's obsession with dark-skinned pimps, their money and their hos represents a further shift in redefining hegemonic masculinity. The men revered in Arobateau's novel are not white presidents and politicians. In redefining masculinity, as represented by Flip, hegemonic understandings of misogyny must be redrawn. Flip redefines what it means to be able to inflict the threat of rape. The penis is not a requirement but in this case wealth and dark skin tone, things Flip does not have, are necessary. In considering misogyny, and masculinity for that matter, race, class gender and sexuality must all be in conversation with one another.

This close analysis of rape between women assists in reformulating masculinity and as a result rethinking misogyny or the hatred of women. Additionally, penetration as an inherently forced and violent event is challenged within this context as cunnilingus is not generally understood as a forcible act. What does it mean that women can rape one another or even a male in this manner? Is rape then inherently misogynistic? Can misogyny be hatred of the masculine? I do not intend to make an essentialist proclamation that misogyny does not exist within larger social formations or even black working class lesbian spaces, but I wish to critically consider and evaluate how we understand misogyny and how it may manifest differently and contradictorily across gender, race, sexuality and class. Finally, because these gendered actions are between two women does not render them void of sexist implications but keep in mind that we cannot view them as exclusively misogynistic much like we would not render deviant actions as solely agentic and freeing. I believe that such a critical analysis of hegemonic misogyny

will assist in deconstructing hegemonic masculinity and assist in seriously considering alternative masculinist representations and subjectivities. I believe a follow up discussion to this analysis should focus upon temporality and history as additional requirements for understanding and critiquing masculinity and misogyny. In reference to Rinaldo Walcott's "The Drag of Black Masculinity" and Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds*, gendered performances (including sexual acts) always tug upon the historical moments that have led up to their creation. The performance of masculinity, for Flip, always tugs upon or drags in her own history of racialized and sexualized victimization. How would this change the discourse surrounding misogyny? Finally, the outline of misogyny provided here demonstrates that its meaning is based upon heteronormative gender norms and a heteronormative gender binary: male and female. If rape is understood as the epitome of misogynistic embodiment but rape is not an inherently male power, then how can we redefine misogyny or the type of domination or sentiment behind what gives rape its power? Is that force always equated with masculinity?

Future Considerations

That Flip has a "sadistic fantasy" also speaks to the possibility of BDSM, which I do not address here. For a future project, I wish to contextualize and analyze this text from that particular perspective, which I believe will also affect and buttress how I wish to complicate misogyny here. Additionally, BDSM may allow me to bring Trick(Ster)ing into this segment of the discussion, replacing misogyny as the core topic. Additionally, I still end this project with a sense of longing, no longer for the appearance of black butch/femme, but specifically for the black femme. I implore myself to push this project further, not only in understanding how she loves the black butch, but in how she loves

herself. Finally, I am particularly interested in the ways in which black lgbtq youth construct and (re)affirm themselves through the medium of Street Lit.

Appendix

The Bars Across Heaven by Red Jordan Arobateau
pp. 113- 115

Looking down the street, a weary prostitute spotted a trick. She wore a short miniskirt and black leather three-quarter coat, which this girl would flash open to show her customers, propositioning them at curb service. Showed her half-naked body with all its scars from pimp whippings and fights with sadistic tricks and rival girls. Her wig of white folks hair, curls cascading down to her shoulders, has slipped into ace-duce position. And silver lipstick is smeared on her mouth. Pootsie was in a belligerent attitude, for she was high on pills. Downers called "red devils."

She drunkenly spotted a figure which appeared to be a white boy, a trick, walking towards her. "HEY BABY!" She called out to Flip, "Come here, I want to talk to you!" Flashed open her coat to reveal her naked tan breasts. "Come here baby and get some!"

Eagerly, hoping she was about to get her money right, this ho hustled along the street to approach Flip; her hard face smiled. Dollar signs glinted in her eye, ready to talk business. But as the two women approached each other, Pootsie saw it was a woman like herself. A freak. Pootsie didn't know how to handle this situation.

"Aw pardon me, I thought you was a dude." She scowled. And retreated on her high heels quickly back into her doorway.

"You don't dig women?" Flip asked, glared at the prostitute, just to agitate. She hadn't been trying to get a date with this ugly, messed-up bitch, but she felt the sting of the girl's rejection. Flip hated this competition between herself and males.

Flip stood, hands clenched, raising up on the toes of her combat boots. "You ain't never had a woman, huh!"

"Naw, uh, uh. I don't do that, not me." The whore said. "Go find you somebody else...shit." Disgustedly turning her head, her curls flopping.

Flip kept walking down the stroll; hate was bottled up in her. "You DAWG!" She imagined the whore in her mind's eye, long after the girl passed out of sight. "YOU BITCH! YOU PIG!" Her hate that kept trying to get loose!

As she walked, Flip made a sadistic fantasy. Her yellow mouth snarled. She saw herself taking this woman at gunpoint off the stroll. Kidnap! She got the bitch up in a motel--in her mind's eye this sorry pig had been doctored into prettiness and was neatly dressed. With her combat boots, Flip kicked the woman in the ribs, knocking her onto the floor helplessly at her feet. Slapping the bitch's face till her wig fell off and blood started running out of the girl's mouth and nose. Then like a giant, Flip stood above her, forcing the woman to her knees. Flip pulled her pants down, cramming her pussy into the woman's lips.

“I hope it make you sick to the stomach, bitch. ‘Cause I ain’t going to stop ‘till I come.”

Huffing, she pumped her sex into the woman’s mouth with with wet slaps, until her thighs were wet; full of the woman’s saliva and blood, and of her own sex juice.

“Suck it bitch! Suck it good! Suck it! Suck it!

“My money’s good as anybody’s.”

Confidence flooded her once again. “You are a fool bitch! My money spends!”

Anger subsided. Now, neon-lit blues took over. Flip felt hollow. A weary mad dog, this figure shook its head. Tried to fight the emptiness that had filled her. She figured it was just that she needed some coffee to pep her up.

In her olive jumpsuit, this woman, who was a guerilla street fighter, ambled into Dorothy’s Club. Behind her, the door closed.

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