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RESISTIVE BLACK MASCULINITIES: RACE, MACULINITY, AND THE HIP-HOP SENSIBILITIES OF BLACK POPULAR CULTURE

by

Keven James Rudrow

A Dissertation

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Abstract

This project examines representations about Black masculinity in Black popular culture, emphasizing how ideas about vulnerability and resistance converge. I draw from methods and theoretical assumptions in rhetorical and media studies to examine how these masculinities are represented. This project offers what I term "Resistive Black Masculinities" as a theoretical framework to examine how Black men in Black popular culture are represented both as socially vulnerable and as resisting their vulnerability. Additionally, this project considers how Resistive Black Masculinities are made legible in Black popular culture through what I refer to as a hip-hop sensibility. Through three case studies, I demonstrate how Resistive Black Masculinities and its related components manifest in Black popular culture. These case studies include analyses of Black masculinity in popular rapper J. Cole's album *2014 Forest Hills Drive* (2014), the interracial buddy movie *Blindspotting* (2018), and the first season of Fox's television show *Empire.* In doing so, this project offers a multifaceted conceptual framework for analyzing Black masculinities in conversation with vulnerability and resistance.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Contemporary work about Black masculinities committed to anti-racism in conversation with intersectional feminism shows that Black men are being written about in more complex and liberating ways, disrupting the reductive racialized and gendered models that have historically come to stand in for Black men. Speaking to how old and interwoven into United States history these oppressive models are, Collins (2006) states that understanding and depicting Black men as bestial originated as a defense for African colonialism and eventually led to the controlling image of the Black male buck as the prevailing template for framing Black masculinity. The Black male buck, as Curry (2017) points out, acts as the dominant template for understanding all Black men. Heteropatriarchal white supremacist society's understanding of Black men as bestial through this archetype showcased how racism could be used as a sociopolitical apparatus that positioned white people as humans and Black people as nonhuman beasts. This genocidal hierarchy, as Wynter (1994) points out, acted as a white justification for subjugating, mutilating, raping, and enslaving Black bodies. For instance, white ideas about Black men as more beast than human justified slavery as an institution; white colonizers argued that slavery promised to domesticate Black people from their savagery to increase economic productivity within the South's slave contingent agricultural economy (Collins, 2006). After emancipation, "free" Black men were still understood to possess bestial qualities, evidenced through claims about them as rapists and later thugs.

Recently, scholars invested in exploring representations and discourses about Black men, including myself, have sought to discern the transgressive, subversive, and

progressive Black masculinities from the ones understood to be limitedly rigid. The "Strong Black Man," for instance, "is the flagship product of nearly 400 years of lived experiences by black men in North America, black men who in the process of resisting enslavement, economic exploitation, random and calculated violence, and a host of other afflictions that usually befall those with a foot on their neck, created a functional myth on which the black nation could be built" (Neal 2006, p. 21). Despite being conceived to counter the controlling images about Black men as shiftless, threatening, and dangerous, this model reinforced a rigid idea about Black masculinity, allowing for little or no flexibility (Neal, 2006). Characteristically, the Strong Black Man loves his people, defends Black femininity, is the primary financial provider for his family, and provides discipline and stability for his children; however, this archetype also "championed a stunted, conservative, one-dimensional, and stridently heterosexual vision of black masculinity that has little to do with the vibrant, virile, visceral masculinities that are lived in the real world" (Neal, 2006, p. 24). This aspirational Black masculinity, more mythical than real, closely mirrored white patriarchal masculinity, which hooks (2004) contends became an accepted idea for Black men following emancipation. While the Strong Black Man may have been equipped by some to destabilize static and reductive ideas about Black men as dangerous, this model did so through approximating white patriarchal ideas. This was unsustainable given how racism as a sociopolitical apparatus committed to erasing Black people (Curry, 2017) was firmly inscribed in the United States of America's social fabric. In other words, the Strong Black Man model was mythical precisely because structural racism often prevented Black men from achieving the model's aspirations. Despite its resistive effort, the Strong Black Man seemed to

uncritically maintain and recreate heteropatriarchal white masculinity, which had imagined Black men as irresponsible and dangerous in the first place.

Whether accepted by just a few or the masses, the Strong Black Man failed to account for how racism persisted and how this racism continued to materialize in ways that situated Black men and people generally as socially, economically, and politically vulnerable. Theorizing about Black men as perpetually vulnerable, Curry (2017) contends that Black men are precariously positioned through their relationship to the social, economic, and political structures around them. Curry's (2017) mimetic thesis refers to how the academy has theorized about Black men in ways that treat all men and modern masculinities collectively as patriarchal rather than distinguishing how race complicates ideas about masculinity, patriarchy, and male privilege. The bodies of literature from disciplines such as communication studies, Black studies, American studies, and men and masculinities studies, sometimes competing, show that contemporary notions about Black men and masculinities are contested and ambivalent (Curry, 2017). As Perry (2004), Rose (2008), and Byrd and Guy Sheftall (2001) point out, the different ways that Black men are vulnerably positioned are not often meaningfully placed in conversation with how they are depicted, resulting in perspectives that can be narrow and unnuanced. For example, Castle Bell and Harris (2017) argue that the character Alex played by Michael B. Jordan in NBC's *Parenthood*, reinforces common stereotypes about Black men as emasculated through his representation as poor, fatherless, uneducated, and his tendency to drink and desire sex. Reading their work through the mimetic thesis, I suggest that Castle Bell and Harris' reading of Alex's character is understood through his failure to live up to white heteropatriarchal society's expectation therefore diminishing his

manhood and resulting in another “negative” Black male representation. While Alex could have very well been scripted from a heteropatriarchal white perspective, it could also be that this representation is not meaningfully placed in conversation with how Black men are positioned vulnerably in relation to social and economic structures. If this is the case, then such a conclusion about *Parenthood’s* Alex character not only fails to foreground Black men’s historical precarity and vulnerable situatedness but ignores how manhood may take on different racialized meaning. As long as theories and concepts such as patriarchy and male privilege are *a priori* concepts in theorizing Black male lives, a priority that is in discord with the long tradition of Black male feminists (Byrd & Guy Sheftall, 2001), Black men will always fall short as men since these ideas were never designed to account for their experiences in the first place. Acknowledging the white mainstream media’s investment in depicting Black men mostly through reductive stereotypes, moving beyond these white controlled spaces to those that are controlled or heavily influenced by Black media creators (e.g., writers, producers, executives, authors, directors, and artists) are imperative for examining and archiving more dynamic and complicated Black masculinities that speak to the current sociopolitical moment’s precarity around race and gender from Black perspectives.

To be clear, this project is not designed to move the needle closer on agreement about Black masculinities or even provide a concrete definition since this would not only be insurmountable but would eclipse how this disagreement may actually speak to a healthy scholarly discussion. Given this fragmentation, while also acknowledging that no academic project can account fully for Black masculinity scholarship’s expansiveness, this project aims to place some disciplinarily dispersed scholarship on Black

masculinities in conversation with a Communication Studies perspective and demonstrate the ways this scholarship might illuminate contemporary Black media expression. Acknowledging my intersectional identity as a Black identifying biracial cisgender male feminist from South Georgia, I wish to be upfront about my commitment to feminism. In the tradition of Black male feminists from at least as early as Frederick Douglass (Byrd & Guy Sheftall, 2001), I aim to consider how feminist theory about Black men and masculinities might move forward to productively "address and influence lived experiences in [my] community" (Byrd & Guy Sheftall, 2001, p. xv). I am guided by the following research question: *How do forms of cultural expression created by Black media creators (e.g., authors, artists, writers, directors, and producers) define the contours of Resistive Black Masculinities and what is the role of hip-hop sensibilities in this process?* In the next section, I provide an overview about what Resistive Black Masculinities entail within the framework of this project before overviewing this project's remaining chapters.

Resistive Black Masculinities

I conceptualize Resistive Black Masculinities to think specifically about how Black masculinities are represented against heteropatriarchal white supremacist assumptions about Black men and masculinities in Black popular culture. Careful not to essentialize, I use the term Black popular culture to attend specifically to media created by Black people about living life while Black. In conceptualizing Resistive Black Masculinities, I place the literature on Black masculinity by Black feminist scholars (Collins 2006a; hooks, 2004; Perry, 2004) in conversation with Black male studies work (Curry, 2017; Neal 2006; Byrd & Guy Sheftall, 2001) to hopefully provide a more nuanced and interdisciplinary approach to examining Black men and masculinities.

Drawing from media studies work informed by an anti-racist feminist perspective, I consider how Resistive Black Masculinities are (re)represented in Black popular culture. These representations not only contribute to public discussions about Black men and masculinities, they complicate while also sometimes reinforcing how Black men and masculinities are represented. Following Collins (2006), Gates (2018), and Gray (1995), I focus on Black popular culture texts since this is where representations, particularly resistive representations, about Blackness thrive from the perspectives of Black media creators. I suggest that Black popular culture is especially important for thinking about Resistive Black Masculinities during the Black Lives Matter Era to both illuminate and respond to the social injustices Black people and particularly Black men face, showing how civil rights issues persist. The term Resistive Black Masculinities is animated by thinking about how social and cultural politics converge with Black popular culture to respond to social injustice. As the term suggests, I am interested in thinking about the various Black masculinities that have been crafted by Black media creators, leaving open multiple possibilities rather than proposing a rigid template. In what proceeds, I propose four guidelines for Resistive Black Masculinities, which I will evidence in this project's case studies.

First, Resistive Black Masculinities, which are by definition subordinated, attempt to disrupt the dominant or hegemonic masculinity (i.e., the apparently desirable white male masculinity held by middle/upper class heterosexual white men in the U.S.). Representations and discourses about Resistive Black Masculinities draw attention to how Black men are socially vulnerable in relationship to the dominant masculinity. In addition, Resistive Black Masculinities illuminate Black men's resistive efforts against

heteropatriarchal white supremacy throughout history in ways that speak to what it means to be Black and male in the U.S. Acknowledging that hegemonic masculinity acts as a benchmark against which all men are assessed with few measuring up (Mutua, 2006), Resistive Black Masculinities are concerned with how this hierarchal relationship to white masculinity gets represented and problematized through how Black men are inscribed (see Jackson, 2006) and their lives imagined in Black popular culture. Based on this hierarchy, "Black men, *by definition*, cannot be real men, *because they are Black*. The fact of Blackness excludes Black men from participating fully in hegemonic masculinity because, if they do so, they decenter the assumed Whiteness of those installed in the center" (Collins, 2006, p. 193, emphasis original). This is an important observation that speaks to how scholarship about Black masculinities often fails to account for how race in addition to other intersecting identities not only complicate but determine which masculinities are hegemonic and which are supposed to be subordinate. Subsequently, I propose Resistive Black Masculinities to deliberately reject the general notion that Black men have access to hegemonic masculinity, and following Curry (2017), I trouble the idea that Black men generally seek hegemonic masculinity. A more nuanced reading of history, which I offer in the next chapter, reveals that Black men have often carved their own space while navigating the necessity of living within and resisting heteropatriarchal white supremacist society, often from a feminist perspective (Byrd & Guy Sheftall, 2001). This relationship to the dominant masculinity, as Curry (2017) points out, suggests that Black men organize their manhood differently from white men and in ways that foreground their vulnerability in the white male world around them, which they must navigate to survive. As Curry (2017), Wynter (1994), and Weheliye

(2014) point out, Black male vulnerability arises from heteropatriarchal white society's refusal to see Black men, and Black people generally, as human. Hegemonic masculinity, which is always about race, then, acts as a sociopolitical apparatus that attempts to maintain the social order where Black men are understood as not human. In response to this dehumanization, I propose Resistive Black Masculinities to examine how Black men and masculinities are represented by Black media creators through rhetorical strategies that name and disrupt such a hierarchy. Moreover, I propose Resistive Black Masculinities to attend to how Black men have always disrupted heteropatriarchal white supremacist ideas about Black men and masculinities through their self-representation.

Second, I conceptualize Resistive Black Masculinities as intersectional in ways that deliberately reject notions of a Black male patriarch and complicate without totally dismissing ideas about Black male privilege. Because Black males are understood as men despite how Collins (2006) points out that Black men are not understood as real men under hegemonic masculinity, they are often seen as possessing gender privilege. I propose the term Resistive Black Masculinities to deliberately reject the notion that Black men's gender works to universally grant them privilege and acknowledge that gender has always been much more complex for Black people. As Collins (2004), Curry (2017), Davis (1983), Weheliye (2014) and Wynter (1994) point out, Black bodies have not historically been conceived by heteropatriarchal white supremacist society as human bodies since they are Black. Subsequently, Curry (2017) contends that we should be cautious about projecting categories invented to organize white bodies onto Black bodies. As a category used to organize Black lives by Black people, ideas about Black gender held by Black people direct our attention to the ways race and gender intersect to inform

a unique social existence. Moreover, examining ideas about Black male gender is important given how Black men's oppression is located not just in their race but the ways their race and gender intersect (Mutua, 2006). In the same way Black feminism was a response to the failure of (white) feminism to meaningfully organize Black women's lives, lives and experiences that could not be conceived outside white femininity, work on Black masculinities should not accept that universal ideals about white gender apply to Black men. Characterizing Black women's rub with (white) feminism, Collins (2006) states that through "critiquing the assumed sisterhood thought to exist among all women, black feminist thinkers suggested that gender ideology operated in racially specific ways" (p. 77). Working from the position that mainstream feminism did not speak to Black women, Crenshaw (1989) conceptualized intersectionality to examine how race and gender intersect to shape Black women's lived experiences, which could not previously be meaningfully accounted for through universal deracialized approaches to identity. As Nash (2019) writes, this concept of intersectionality is useful for conversations outside of accounting for the lives of Black women, and it should not be limited to only discussing issues of Black femininity. Subsequently, I propose using the term Resistive Black Masculinities to think about how a universal Black male privilege is not a given and to illuminate how such an idea is incompatible with intersectionality. In this way, I demonstrate the utility of intersectionality beyond its original context, following Nash's (2019) observation that the cross application of this theory is useful and necessary for fully reaching intersectionality's potential contributions to the field. To this point, Mutua (2006) points out that Black men are often racially profiled specifically because they are Black men rather than being oppressed by their race and benefitting from their gender.

Furthermore, Mutua (2006) notes that "[t]he idea that black men were privileged by gender and subordinated by race [undermines] the potential of intersectional theory to further delineate differences among men" (p. 22). Therefore, I propose Resistive Black Masculinities, as an intersectional theory, to challenge a single-axis framework and illuminate how Black men are not only oppressed by their race but how they are also oppressed in unique ways by their gender in addition to other intersecting identities.

To be sure, recognizing that Black men face gendered oppression does not nullify the sexist and anti-queer behavior that Black men (and men of other races) have performed and are often socialized to accept. Indeed, this issue is "critical and divisive" and deserves more scholarly attention (Byrd & Guy Sheftall, 2001, p. xv). Therefore, I conceptualize Resistive Black Masculinities as cautioning against conceiving Black men's sexism and anti-queer behavior as universal characteristics since doing so pathologizes Black men while also ignoring the particular ways that Black masculinities are intersectional and therefore not monolithic. Collins (2006) notes that subordinated masculinities tend to possess hegemonic ideals, which ultimately provide rules about how manhood should be performed. These hegemonic ideals should be thought of as particular since they differ across Black masculinities and the different intersecting identities that inform these masculinities. These identities include but are not limited to class, sexuality, and nationality. To this end, I propose Resistive Black Masculinities to attend to Black hegemonic ideals and their messiness as they provide insight about how particular Black masculinities are constructed within a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society and how these masculinities may work to subvert controlling images (Collins, 2006) crafted and circulated about Black men.

Third, Resistive Black Masculinities are ambivalent and complicate our current understanding about Black popular culture representations as merely either positive or negative, carving important space for mapping insightfully complex Black masculinities. An ongoing academic endeavor, Neal (2006) points out that projects about conceiving Black masculinity in the contemporary moment must be comfortable with embracing the ambivalence and incompleteness of a masculinity that is always under construction in addition to Black men's complicated and progressive existence in America. I propose Resistive Black Masculinities to attend to representations about Black men's complex and progressive existence within a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society, which, at first glance, may appear neither complex nor progressive. As Gates (2018) and Neal (2006) caution, progressive and complex should not be confused with or understood as necessarily positive. Neal (2006) notes that the term positive is "often used by the traditional black bourgeoise to sanitize the [unsightlier] aspects of black life and culture" (p. 29). To be sure, it is this thinking that helped give rise to the rigidity of the mythical Strong Black Man I referenced earlier in this chapter. Similarly, Gates (2018) contends that the terms positive or negative in the conventional sense "support politics of respectability and close off possibilities for multilayered conceptions of and performances of identity" (p. 12). I conceptualize Resistive Black Masculinities as unconcerned with determining which representations are positive or negative, and instead eschewing the respectability politics implied by such determinations.

Fourth, I propose the term Resistive Black Masculinities to think about how resistive representations about Black men are increasingly guided by Black expressive culture's resistive sensibilities, which are often tied to Black liberation. Specifically, I

argue that Black Nationalism's attachment to hip-hop music has given rise in Black popular culture to what I refer to as Resistive Black Masculinity's hip-hop sensibilities, which not only work to inform and organize life for some Black men but acts as a way to legibly convey Resistive Black Masculinities in the contemporary moment. As a response to racism as a sociopolitical apparatus designed to configure Black bodies as inhuman bodies thereby justifying Black harm, death, and genocide, Black Nationalism, which I discuss in the following chapter, has been committed to interrogating heteropatriarchal white supremacist society's historical claim that Black bodies are disposable bodies and the material and psychological oppression and distress this violent history has caused Black people. Responding to this oppression has been central to Black liberation efforts. As I detail in the next chapter, this sentiment was echoed during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. explained that the proclamation Black Power acted as a psychological call to manhood and when Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi expressed "Black Lives Matter" in 2013. As Mutua (2006) points out, "affirming black humanity is meant in part to counter the potential inferiority complex engendered by racism but also to reflect the agency of the black personality manifest both before and after the colonial encounter" (p. 26). As a social and political endeavor, Black Nationalism also critiques structural racism and the challenges and obstacles this racism presents Black communities. Conceiving Black Nationalism primarily as a cultural endeavor however, Mutua (2006) highlights its emphasis on "black self-love, which by definition rejects white supremacist ideology that denigrates black people as inferior and without a history or agency" (p. 26). As Mutua (2006) continues, Black Nationalism "focuses on the way African Americans have survived and have

claimed human dignity despite the dehumanizing processes of American slavery, segregation, and industrialized racism. This survival turned on African Americans' cultural response to those oppressive conditions" (p. 26). Locating the habitation of this cultural response partially in music, Rose (1994) points to hip-hop where generations of activist-oriented artists have used the genre to critique white supremacy and its material manifestations while calling for the recognition of Black humanity. Speaking to hip-hop music's power, Gray (1995) points out that "Black popular forms such as rap and cinema mobilized and then helped to consolidate visions and representations of blackness that articulated the pains, fears, jobs, and aspirations of black youth" (Gray, 1995, p. 53). To this end, I propose Resistive Black Masculinities to explore how hip-hop sensibilities inform Black created cultural representations about Black masculinities in relationship to the project of Black Nationalism and what this relationship communicates about Resistive Black Masculinities. To be sure, Resistive Black Masculinities is not meant as an alternative to Black Nationalism but as a more focused lens attendant to how Black popular culture draws from Black Nationalism to craft representations about Black men and masculinities specifically that foreground resistance.

The four guidelines I have outlined make up the working parts of the Resistive Black Masculinities portrayed by Black media creators, which I argue is important for examining the different ways that Black masculinities manifest in relationship to cultural, social, and political resistance in the Black Lives Matter Era. Through analyzing how Black masculinities are represented by Black media creators in the Black Lives Matter Era, it is my hope that this project will help consider how Resistive Black Masculinities: (1) disrupt the heteropatriarchal order; (2) destabilize universal ideas about Black men as

patriarchs and, by extension, complicate ideas about Black male privilege as a universal given on the basis of gender; (3) are ambivalent and complicate our current understanding about Black popular culture representations as merely either positive or negative; (4) and are made legible through hip-hop sensibilities. In doing so, I hope to make two contributions. First, I hope to translate dispersed bodies of literature to build a generative Communication Studies framework for analyzing Resistive Black Masculinities. Second, I aim to contribute to the current literature that sometimes silences, erases, or distorts Black masculinities through a historically grounded Communication-based analysis of Black popular cultural texts authored by Black creators to help move the conversation from myth and pathology. It is my hope that this project may also follow in the footsteps of other historical Black male feminist thinkers (Byrd & Guy Sheftall, 2001) to contribute to discussions about Black men by highlighting and analyzing the intersectional oppressions that help organize ideas about what it means to be Black and male in the U.S. during the Black Lives Matter Era.

In the next chapter, I map the literature on Black masculinity, emphasizing Black men's struggle to articulate how they organize their manhood in a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society. In this chapter, I will trace the ways that Black men have been vulnerably situated from as early as the post emancipation era up until the contemporary moment. In doing so, I seek to contextualize Black masculinity across key historical moments, illuminating the various ways that Black men have fought to redefine what it means to be Black and male in a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society. Highlighting how Black men's resistive quest for self-definition became increasingly waged through mass media, I will then discuss popular culture discourses about Black

manhood and men's media representation, emphasizing hip-hop, television, and film. Lastly, I will argue that hip-hop music is not just an important site where the struggle over Black representation and representational meaning is waged. Drawing from Black Nationalist and feminist discourses about hip-hop, I will argue that hip-hop has given rise to critical sensibilities that extend beyond hip-hop into other popular media modes.

The third chapter will draw from media/cultural studies, rhetorical studies, and critical race work to outline the theoretical and methodological perspectives guiding this inquiry. In this chapter, I will provide context for the cultural artifacts I have selected for analysis and the criteria for selection to ensure each text is aligned with this project's goals. I will then describe the procedures I will use for analyzing this project's case studies. Engaging critical work on race in conversation with Communication Studies, I hope to contribute to the conversation about Black masculinity through rejecting monolithic ideas based on stereotypes and pathologies and instead theorize about Black masculinities from Black media creators' perspectives.

The remaining chapters are structured as case studies attendant to Resistive Black Masculinities and hip-hop sensibilities. Chapter 4 provides a case study of one of mainstream hip-hop's most socially conscious musical artists: J. Cole. In this case study, I am interested in the ways that Cole raps about what it means to live within and resist a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society as a Black male in the Black Lives Matter Era. Here, I examine how Cole draws on hip-hop sensibilities and how these sensibilities help render legible Resistive Black Masculinities. This case study analyzes Cole's autobiographic album *2014 Forest Hills Drive* (2014) since the album is autoethnographic, speaking to Cole's experiences as a Black man living within and

resisting a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society. Providing a social and historical backdrop for Cole's album, I map the literature on hip-hop masculinities and resistance in addition to events and promotional material circulating up to the album's debut.

In chapter 5, I use the film *Blindspotting* (2018) to explore how Black men are vulnerably situated in a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society. Specifically, I examine how the film's main character, Collin, exudes a Resistive Black Masculinity. Contrasting Collin's vulnerable Black Masculinity with how his white male best friend Miles' masculinity emerge in the movies, I complicate universal discourses about male patriarchy and privilege. Through Collin's relationship to Miles, his white male best friends, and a white male police officer, I argue that Collin develops and articulates a Resistive Black Masculinity, expressed primarily through rapping.

Chapter 6 examines the different ways that intersectional identities represented on television inform and complicate what it means to live within and resist a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society while Black and male. In addition to race, sex, and gender, I focus on axes of identity like sexuality and class. This case study explores the main Black male characters on FOX's popular television show *Empire.* Placing *Empire* within its social and historical context, I review the literature on Black masculinity on television and engage reviews and popular press articles related to the show. First, I use this case study to map the different Resistive Black Masculinities that emerge on the show. Second, I use this case study to explore representations around how Black men attend to certain hegemonic ideals sometimes upheld in Black communities (Byrd & Guy Sheftall, 2001). Third, I consider how the main characters' attachment to

hip-hop and other musical forms helps inform the Resistive Black Masculinities that emerge on the popular show.

My project concludes by discussing how Resistive Black Masculinities help to disrupt and reframe how Black men and masculinities are constructed. This final chapter discusses this project's implications, focusing specifically on the ways that Resistive Black Masculinities help to provide a contemporary portrait about being Black and male in the Black Lives Matter Era.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study focuses on the gendered and racialized portrayals of Black American manhood in popular cultural texts like music, television, and film. Specifically, this study examines the representations of Resistive Black Masculinities in popular cultural texts centered around what I term hip-hop sensibilities. Hip-hop sensibilities, in this study, concerns how politically charged movements such as Black Lives Matter have become part of hip-hop's aesthetics. While hip-hop has always but not exclusively been informed by resistive sensibilities, this study seeks to map how these sensibilities emerge in conversation to Resistive Black Masculinities in the Black Lives Matter Era. The Black Lives Matter Era refers to the contemporary milieu where Black people continue to endure gendered and racialized social symptoms including discrimination, mass incarceration, underemployment, and police brutality. The purpose of this chapter is to analytically review the literature vis-à-vis Black manhood, which is steered by the following research question: *How do forms of cultural expression by Black media creators (e.g., authors, artists, writers, directors, and producers) define the contours of Resistive Black Masculinities, and what is the role of hip-hop sensibilities in this process?*

Scholars have written about Black masculinities across disciplines including Sociology, Black Studies, and Feminist Studies, much of this scholarship remains dispersed, and this chapter seeks to organize these bodies of literature on Black masculinity into a Communication Studies framework, focusing especially around Black men's quest to articulate their own understanding of Black manhood in a white

patriarchal society that has defined and inscribed parodic Black masculinities onto Black men. As a starting point, this chapter first explores the literature on Black manhood and vulnerability. This chapter seeks to contextualize Black masculinity across key historical moments while highlighting the various ways that Black people, especially Black men, have fought to redefine what it means to be Black and male in a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society including through mass media.

Second, this chapter examines popular cultural discourses about Black masculinity around Black men's media representation. While the white controlled mass media circulated representations about Black men that sought to narrowly define and control them through racially charged caricatures, Black media creators have used media to carve resistive space for articulating counternarratives. Lastly, this study suggests that hip-hop music is not just an important site where the struggle over Black representation is waged; drawing from the Black Nationalist discourses about hip-hop, I argue that hip-hop has given rise to new critical sensibilities that extend beyond hip-hop into other modes such as television and film.

Historicizing Black Men as Vulnerable

Projects concerned with foregrounding vulnerability to examine Resistive Black Masculinities, I suggest, must historicize Black men's vulnerability in conversation with patriarchal white supremacy since Black men tend to be made vulnerable by heteropatriarchal white supremacy, necessitating their resistance against this oppressive system. In this section, I trace Black men's vulnerability through chattel slavery as a starting point for thinking about how Black men have been vulnerability situated in a white supremacist society. I then use this history as a foundation for thinking about Black

masculinity in relationship to vulnerability, highlighting how Black men continue to be vulnerable. Lastly, I consider how Black men's vulnerability has necessitated their resistance against a patriarchal white supremacist society. I trace Black men's resistance from chattel slavery to the Civil Rights Movement, emphasizing how mass media has been used as a key site for struggle over Blackness.

Tracing Black vulnerability through U.S. history shows that Black people have not historically been understood as actual men or actual women by heteropatriarchal white supremacist society but rather as genderless objects to be used and discarded (Collins, 2004; Curry, 2017; Davis, 1983). Chattel slavery, for instance, was a cruel system that reductively consigned Black people to laborers. As the term implies, chattel were enslaved Black people that were treated as personal possessions, objects to be discarded, owned, and traded in an open market. Under this system, enslaved Black people were subject to cruel and unusual treatment. While ideas about gender were largely irrelevant for enslaved Black people, this is not to say that there were no distinctions between how they were treated. Whether in cotton fields, in coal mines, or in iron production factories, enslaved Black women were not seen as too feminine for strenuous labor (Davis, 1983). Consequently, enslaved Black women were treated no differently from enslaved Black men when it was profitable to exploit their labor. Despite the parallels concerning what enslaved Black women and men endured, Davis (1983) and Collins (2004) contend that enslaved Black women were treated in ways reserved for women. Specifically, they point out that Black women were raped by elite white men to instill terror and reinforce the social order and in mechanizing their wombs for

reproduction, which had become important for the agricultural industry in the U.S. South after the slave trade ended.

While enslaved Black women were indeed subjected to rape by elite white men because they were figured to be less than human, Curry (2017) builds on Davis's (1983) work by extending this account to attend to how enslaved Black men were also vulnerable to rape. As Curry (2017) points out, understanding how Black men have historically been socially vulnerable is important for rethinking ideas about Black masculinity that do not take Black men's lived histories into account. Illuminating how Black men were also vulnerable to rape, Curry (2017) notes that "the account of slavery offered by Davis conceptualizes Black men as vulnerable to racial violence because of their lack of power within slavery to resist it, but her account does not imagine this same vulnerability to sexual violence within slavery because they are male" (Curry, 2017, p. 153). Not foreclosing the ways that enslaved Black men were subject to sexual violence despite not talking about rape specifically, Collins (2004) states that the "West African slave trade and Southern auction blocks treated both Black women's and men's bodies as objects for sale, yet women participated in sexual spectacles to a greater degree than did men" (p. 30). For Collins (2004), enslaved Black women were more likely to be subjected to sexual spectacles because of how Western ideas about women were attached to "physical beauty and sexual attractiveness" (p. 30). However, Curry (2017) downplays the role that gender played when making distinctions between enslaved Black people by contending that "[t]he problem with these accounts of slavery is that they assume slavery, an institution that denatured and distorted the very concept of the human, nonetheless preserved and cherished humanist categories such as race, gender, or worked as useful

designations applicable to enslaved Black bodies" (Curry, 2017, p. 153). Drawing from historians and literary scholarship, Curry (2017) ultimately concludes that "the rape of Black males by white men and white women during slavery was commonplace" (p. 153). Despite, Curry's contention that scholars like Angela Davis and Patricia Hill Collins may over emphasize or project gender onto enslaved Black people during chattel slavery, enslaved Black women were undeniably mechanized for reproductive purposes following the slave trade's abolishment when slave labor could no longer be imported (Davis, 1983). However, by not being direct and intentional about the ways that Black men faced sexual violence, some previous scholarship risks obscuring his historical fact, unintentionally helping to maintain ideas about Black men being impervious to sexual violence.

While gender may not have applied to enslaved Black people in ways that gave them power amongst each other, gender helped organize white society in ways that helped build and sustain powerful hierarchies. White women and white men generally shared in performing within labor-oriented roles up until industrialization, which would confine white women to the home. Before industrialization, the economy had been based in the home where white women manufactured goods like clothing, candles, and soap, and men tilled the farmland surrounding the home often with women's assistance (Davis, 1983). This began to change when industrialization pushed manufacturing outside of the home, leading to womanhood as a salient ideological model for women where, as mothers, they were expected to reproduce for humanity's sake (Davis, 1983). Importantly, this shift mechanized white women's reproductive systems in ways similar to yet different from enslaved Black women. For instance, while white women were

understood as mothers and could be assigned womanhood, Black women were not. Davis (1983) notes that "slave women were not mothers at all; they were simply instruments guaranteeing the growth of the slave labor force. They were 'breeders' – animals, whose monetary value could be precisely calculated in terms of their ability to multiply in numbers" (p. 7). While the distinction between the public economy and the home had previously been nonexistent, industrial capitalism helped to further concretize the idea that white women were inferior to white men through being designated as mothers, housewives, or both, which was also popularized and circulated through literature targeted at white women like magazines and novels (Davis, 1983). In this way, white women who had children were seen as mothers and housewives that no longer had to labor. Unlike white women, Black women were forced to endure harsh labor and were not seen as mothers. These distinctions highlight how ideas about gender organized social life.

Ideas about gender and whiteness granted white people, but especially white men, structural power and privileges, which organized the social order both within enslaved life and society more broadly. Collins (2004) states that white men claimed "a White masculinity that granted them control over their wives and legal children as well as their property (slaves)" (p. 58). Furthermore, this masculinity, as Collins (2004) continues, "became defined in patriarchal terms, namely, their performance as 'masters' at home and in public activities of commerce and government" (p. 58). This system that encouraged white male supremacy and organized white society was fiercely guarded by elite white men and was generally not extended to either enslaved Black people or women. Highlighting how Black enslaved people were not fully afforded white society's

customs around gender, Davis (1983) states that “If Black women were hardly ‘women’ in the accepted sense, the slave system also discouraged male supremacy in Black men” (p. 7). As Davis (1993) continues “the promotion of male supremacy among the slaves might have promoted a dangerous rupture in the chain of command” (p. 8). To this end, the patriarchal privileges extended to elite white men did not exist for enslaved Black men on an economic, political, or social level. Subsequently, it is speculated that because enslaved Black men were not allowed patriarchal powers installing them as masters in their homes, enslaved Black families were more egalitarian (Collins, 2004). However, Collins (2004) notes that “historical and social science evidence cannot definitively gauge enslaved Black men’s and women’s perceptions of how slavery affected their ideas about gender and one another” (p. 60). Furthermore, Clifton and Mieroop (2016) observe that despite there being an enormous amount of data about slavery, very little of this data comes from actual enslaved people given the structural barriers that were in place to keep them from reading and writing. Naturally, much of what has been written about enslaved Black people’s gendered lives has been speculative (Collins, 2004). Given what is known about the hierarchies that structured white society and the lives of those enslaved, there were enormous structural powers and privileges granted to white men through patriarchal masculinity while enslaved Black people continued to live a vulnerable and precarious life where they were exploited, abused, murdered, and raped, which the social order not only allowed but required for its survival.

Mapping Black Masculinity in Relation to Vulnerability

Having historicized Black men as vulnerable to provide the necessary foundation for exploring Black manhood in ways honest to how Black men have historically been

socially situated vulnerably, this section turns to think about how Black men's vulnerability persists to help organize what it means to be Black and male in a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society. While Black men have historically been vulnerable, more contemporary work demonstrates that this vulnerability persists. Major and Billson (1992) note that being born a Black and male is greatly disadvantageous in the U.S. because they experience more mental health problems, poverty, injuries, unemployment, sexually transmitted diseases, homicide and suicide, imprisonment, and alcohol and drug abuse than their white male peers. Moreover, Black U.S. Americans experience unsafe housing conditions, poor health, illiteracy, unemployment and underemployment, family upheaval, and other social problems resulted from poverty and powerlessness, which collectively constitute new forms of colonialism's and slavery's negative effects (Collins, 2004). When their study was written, Major and Billson (1992) noted that Black men experience high rates of social stress indicators, making them second only to Native American men among those with the highest stress levels. These social challenges and their social and historical contexts are often eclipsed when Black men are represented in the mainstream media. When these factors are considered and represented, they are understood to be caused by the Black men that experience them rather social symptoms.

In addition to how Black men are greatly disadvantaged, this demographic must also cope with how heteropatriarchal white supremacist society perceives them, perceptions largely informed by decades old racist stereotypes about Black men. These perceptions can be fatal for Black boys and men when they come into contact with racists in the public and law enforcement. Even Black males that reject racist and sexist

stereotypes must cope with these stereotypes being imposed onto them (hooks, 2004; Coates, 2015). All of this comes with very few outlets for Black boys and men to safely express their emotions. Black boys and men in the U.S., at one point or another, often have had to repress their feelings at the risk of having their bodies attacked or destroyed (hooks, 2004). Black boys and young men are taught to contain their emotions at an early age because failure to do so could result in them being read as soft (hooks, 2004); soft boys cannot protect their bodies from harm and destruction or provide for others. These challenges and conditions are not just the new forms of an old and persistent racism; they help provide insight more broadly about what it means to live in the U.S. while Black and male.

Vulnerability informs Black male identity in ways that illuminate what it means to be Black and male in heteropatriarchal white supremacist society. As one historical way that young Black men organize their masculinities in response to vulnerability, according to Major and Billson (1992), the cool pose is used by some Black boys so that they can communicate pride, strength and control to those that they come in contact within their social lives. In their writing, the cool pose is used by young Black men to make them visible in a white supremacist patriarchal society that causes them considerable pain. In this way, the cool pose is a way of coping with that pain. For, Major and Billson (1992), the cool pose allows young Black men to carve space for meaning within their own lives while also putting them in risky situations. While much has been written about Black masculinities since Major and Billson’s (1992) study, many of their points remain salient. For example, Coates (2015) discusses watching the young Black men who lived near him wear certain styles of clothing to earn status in a world where Black men have little or no

status. Major and Billson (1992) do not argue that all young urban Black men can be understood through the cool pose but rather that the cool pose is one way to understand Black masculinity. Central to the cool pose is coolness, which Major and Billson (1992) characterize as "poise under pressure and the ability to maintain detachment, even during tense encounters" (p. 2), which "invigorates a life that would otherwise be degrading an empty" (p. 2). Simultaneously, the "cool pose may also be a kind of 'restrained masculinity': emotionless, stoic, and unflinching" (Major & Billson, 1992, p. 5). In this way, the cool pose offers one historical example of the ways scholarly and cultural perceptions can perpetuate problematic serotypes about Black men as being emotionless and, by extension, less human. Even still, the cool pose, unlike many theories about Black men and manhood, foregrounds vulnerability to meaningfully theorize about Black masculinity. This theory therefore remains a valuable contribution, even as many disciplines have continued to build more literature in this area. Despite how young Black men and boys are particularly vulnerable to the world around them, their lived realities are often not taken seriously as factors shaping Black manhood and what it means to be Black men. This is because these experiences do not align with ideas about hegemonic masculine and patriarchal privilege, ideological templates for understanding all men. In other words, Black male vulnerability points out the ways that race complicates universal ideas about masculinity and patriarchal privilege despite how these concepts often erase racialized differences.

Vulnerability, Resistance, and the Struggle for Manhood

Before discussing how contemporary Black popular culture has been used as a critical site for struggling over representational meanings around Black manhood, it is

important to note how Black manhood has been struggled for throughout history through varying modes. This struggle not only demonstrates how vulnerably situated Black men have fought over the meanings assigned to their bodies but also illustrates how these struggles represent a resistive sensibility that has evolved and expanded over time through different media formats. These resistive sensibilities, centered mostly around defiance, have become an important marker for legibly representing Resistive Black Masculinities in television, music, and literature where vulnerability and precarity are used as a heuristic for understanding what it means to be Black and male in a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society. Though Black people have historically been vulnerable, they have found ways to resist and fight against the structures that keep them vulnerable, which is just as important for thinking about an alternative Black manhood.

Having to rely on their resourcefulness, enslaved and formerly enslaved Black people as early as in the days of chattel slavery found ways to resist and generate awareness about the conditions they faced. Clifton and Mieroop (2016) note that despite there being few accounts of slavery written by enslaved Black people since the slave codes made it illegal to teach the enslaved to read and write and prevented access to resources like pen and paper, the autobiographical runaway narrative written by those who had escaped enslavement was a popular antebellum era genre. As Clifton and Mieroop (2016) point out, this genre often included descriptions about the challenges and conditions that enslaved Black people faced (e.g., abuse, exploitation, and suffering), realizing slavery's meaning, and eventually escaping to the North following a critical juncture such as choosing to resist a beating or fighting back. While resistance in this way relied on those formerly enslaved telling their narratives to increase awareness about

enslavement, there were other more direct ways that resistance took place. Discussing how Black men formed relationships and resisted their subjugation in the Antebellum South, Lussana (2016) notes the importance of the grapevine telegraph, a secret communication system linking plantation slave communities. This primarily word-of-mouth-based network was used for communicating daily events, plotting rebellions, and harboring runaway slaves (Lussana, 2016). To this end, enslaved Black women and men worked together to communicate important information across plantations and organize rebellions and safety networks. At the same time, enslaved Black people that had escaped to the North wrote about their experiences enslaved in the Southern states, generating awareness that helped advance abolitionist causes.

The Black Panther Party, along with other organizations that sought to use media to redefine what Blackness had come to mean during the civil rights era, was working against representations that had already been sewed into the nation's fabric. Collins (2004) notes that while ideas about Black people were previously confined mostly to the reading public, the mass media's growth allowed for stereotypes about both Black women and men that had originated during chattel slavery to be more rapidly circulated and to a wider audience than they had previously (Collins, 2004). Perhaps most notably was the production of the 1915 film *Birth of a Nation*, a Ku Klux Klan origin story depicting the white supremacist terrorist group as "a noble nationalist organization whose purpose is to save the American nation (and its White daughters) from a reign of Black terror" (Collins, 2004, p. 65). Over 50 years before the *Black Panther* newspaper was founded to resistively self-define Blackness and help create community, the images presented in *Birth of a Nation* had already taken White Americans by storm. Collins

(2004) notes that the film came to serve as a model for representing both Black men and women, which Black writers, directors, producers, artists, and actors would work toward destabilizing.

Contemporaneously, Black people continue to be represented in racist ways such as in television, showing that the struggle over Black equality and human dignity continues to be unsettled. Racist stereotypes about Black men rooted in chattel slavery show, as Davis (1983) and Collins (2004) recognize, the continual obsession over Black sexuality. Through common stereotypes like the Jezebel, the Sapphire, the Mammy, the Buck, and Uncle Tom, Black people have been and continue to be represented in ways that depict them as either asexual or uncontrollably hypersexual (West, 1993). Jackson (2006) argues that minstrel characters like the buck have transcended time albeit in new form. Raping white women, the buck's primary objective, showcased white men's fears and anxieties about having "their" women stolen and that white women may enjoy Black men's supposedly sexual nature (Jackson, 2006). This racist model for Black men has an extensive history and is prevalent in contemporary mass media.

During the Civil Rights Movement, the mass media was an important site for resistance through circulating images that sought to capture the real conditions that Black people faced. Importantly, the Civil Rights Movement was mobilized by the continuation of an old racism that refused to see Black Americans as fully human and, by extension, deserving of the same civil rights guaranteed to white Americans. While the path to the Civil Rights Movement was being paved since the end of the 1800s, by the early 1950s, organized resistance to Jim Crow began to swell exponentially. However, this resistance was met with opposition and violence from white society from police officers and

community members alike (Stevenson, 2017). Characterizing white society's opposition and violence in response to organized Black resistance, Stevenson (2017) states that "Black activists protesting racial segregation and disenfranchisement through boycotts, sit-ins, voter registration drives, and mass marches consistently faced physical attacks, riots, and bombing from whites" (Stevenson, 2017, p. 22). While Black activists and organizers, including children, faced opposition and violence when demonstrating, this cruelty was just another manifestation of what Black Americans, especially in the South, had already become acquainted with in their everyday lives when they were not demonstrating.

Mass media was important for capturing what had become the ordinary challenges and conditions that Black women and men experienced in their everyday lives. Foreshadowing the important role that media, especially photography, would play throughout the Civil Rights Movement following emancipation, *Jet* magazine famously published photos documenting Emmett Till's tortured and destroyed body. Harold and DeLuca (2005) note that "the photographic image of [Till's] corpse put a shocking and monstrous face on the most brutal extremes of American racial injustice. The grainy image was widely circulated in the black press" (p. 265). This demonstrated mass-media's power to circulate important discourses about both Black atrocity and resistance, which would serve as an especially important tool during the Civil Rights Movement. In doing so, vulnerability itself was leveraged as resistance. Wallace (2013) notes that events like Till's murder in 1955 in addition to the Montgomery bus boycott led to the nation becoming increasingly more aware about the actual challenges and conditions that Black Americans faced in the South. While the mass media was used as a site for

resistance, the mass media was also used to create and circulate messages designed to maintain the social order by preserving segregation in the South. While the media was used to create space for arguments against segregation in support of equality and justice, facets of Southern society that opposed desegregation also used the media to advance their causes (Wallace, 2013). A tool resource used for those on both sides, the media was a battleground for arguments that were made both for and against segregation, circulating nationally and around the globe.

While resistance in the media took multiple forms, photos that were taken and circulated by the press and on television were especially important during the Civil Rights Movement. Raiford (2007) notes that while television was paramount for familiarizing national audiences with the obstacles and cruelties that Black Americans faced in places like Birmingham and Selma, this footage was largely limited to network television, which was primarily controlled by white heteropatriarchal society. As a result, even when network television and popular newspapers did report on the Civil Rights Movement and its activities, they usually represented white perspectives or the perspectives held by well-known Black U.S. American participants such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Raiford, 2007). Unlike television, which was filmed, framed, and made viewable when network executives believed it was necessary, "photography proved a more accessible, contemplative, and democratic medium" (Raiford, 2007, p. 1131). Photographs capturing police violence, demonstrations, and other organizing activities and the ways these photos were circulated (e.g., pamphlets, newsletters, and posters) helped inform the histories behind Black social movements in the U.S. from a perspective that was not tethered to mainstream mass media and television (Raiford, 2007). These

photographs highlighted both the more well-known events in the Civil Rights Movement's timeline and the smaller everyday moments that visualized lived experiences by ordinary Black people.

As these photographs often sought to highlight, when Black Americans were not protesting state sanctioned racial violence, they had to find ways to live with how structural inequality impacted them and their families on an ordinary level between the boycotts, sit-ins, and marches. For instance, Stevenson (2017) highlights that King, the Civil Rights Movement's presumptive leader, "faced white law enforcement officials and private citizens who issued death threats, physically assaulted him at public lectures, and even bombed his Montgomery, Alabama, home with his wife and infant daughter were inside" (p. 22). While King was surely targeted for his instrumental and highly public role in the fight for civil rights, this terror was not reserved for movement organizers, icons, or leaders. As the destruction of Till's body shows, being Black and male alone is enough to justify murdering Black boy's and men's bodies. Baldwin (1963) highlights how being Black and poor influenced his relationship to the world around him, which organized what it meant to be Black and male. Focusing especially on race, Baldwin (1963) writes to his nephew "[y]ou were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and *for no other reason*" (emphasis in original, p. 7). Here, it is understood that to be born Black is to have a particular orientation to the world cultivated by the conditions you were born under, bearing a lasting resonance. Growing up Black in an anti-Black society, Black children learn, for instance, that their bodies are always vulnerable. Baldwin (1963) states that the "effort made by the child's elders to prepare him for a fate from which they cannot protect him causes him secretly,

in terror, to begin to await, without knowing that he is doing so, his mysterious and inexorable punishment" (p. 26). As Baldwin (1963) continues, this terror "filters into the child's consciousness through his parents' tone of voice as he is being exhorted, punished, or loved; in the sudden, uncontrollable note of fear heard in his mother's or his father's voice" (p. 26). This fear that comes with having a vulnerable body and how to keep it safe becomes an important way of understanding what it means to live every day while Black in America. This demonstrates not only how the Black body is vulnerable but how navigating that vulnerability becomes necessary to protect one's body.

Black boys believing that they can do anything white boys can and attempting to demonstrate this belief struck fear in Black parents because "challenging the white world's assumptions, was [to put oneself] in the path of destruction" (Baldwin, 1963, p. 27). Confronting this fear has largely been about Black American society refusing to accept the definitions that had been imposed on them by white heteropatriarchal society, which defined them narrowly and problematically in ways that justified their subjugation. Following the logic that "the power of the white world is threatened whenever a black man refuses to accept the white world's definitions" (Baldwin, 1963, p. 69), white society eagerly fought against the progress Black Americans hoped to achieve by curtailing Jim Crow Era polices that sought to deny Black people equal rights. While the refusal to accept the definitions inscribed onto Black Americans manifested differently, by the latter half of the 1960s, Black Power became an important ideologically charged rallying cry for the Civil Rights Movement, giving Black Americans hope. However, despite how Black Power energized the Civil Rights Movement, the term was widely contested. As Gregg, McCormack, and Pedersen (1969) note, Black Power is a potent rhetorical phrase

holding different meanings. For civil rights leaders like Stokely Carmichael, Malcom X, and King, the phrase represented a critical juncture where Black Americans asserting their humanity, claimed their right to citizenship and embraced their Blackness.

Examining the rhetoric of Black Power, Burgess (1968) explains that the phrase was a response to the expansive communicative history between Black people and white people in American culture and helped mobilize an offensive, claiming the right to humanity and citizenship. This was an important response to how Black people had historically been thought of and treated as animals, which had excused their subjugation (Davis, 1963; Collins, 2004; Curry, 2017). For Black youth, "Black Power represented a promise of control after forever being controlled, of power after being powerless, of embracing the beauty of blackness after being told for so long that black is ugly" (Dyson, 2001, p. 111). While the proclamation Black Power marked something positive for Black Americans, Gregg et al. (1969) notes that the call was "ready-made for the mass media to conjure with, and a good deal of conjuring [was] done" (p. 151). Despite the phrase's positive message for Black Americans, it was susceptible to distortion especially by white supremacist society. Much of the general public's uncertainty about the phrase Gregg et al. (1969) attributes to the media where "[most] American citizens must rely on second or third-hand impressions" (p. 151). As Gregg et al. (1969) points out, "society generally [felt] threated by the implications of the slogan, disappointed by the apparent reverse racism, and puzzled by the black man's sudden spurning of help from white society" (p. 151), suggesting a degree of ambivalence about the popular yet controversial phrase.

While Black Power rhetoric continued to be prominent throughout the Civil Rights Movement generally, the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Worker's Strike was a watershed moment during the movement (Green, 2004), pulling heavily from Black Power sentiments to assert Black men's manhood and, by extension, humanity. Prevalent discourses during the strike explicitly demonstrates how the Civil Rights Movement was a struggle over ideas about manhood. Garnering national and international attention, the strike became inextricably connected to the Civil Rights Movement when King announced that Memphis, Tennessee would be the launching point for his Poor People's Campaign (Green, 2004). King and the strike were further catapulted into the limelight when on March 28, 1968 a nonviolent march that he was leading turned violent. The marchers there to demonstrate in accordance with King's commitment to militant nonviolence, excluding the looters and rioters, marched in support for 1,300 sanitation worker strikers (Estes, 2000). Many of these strikers wore placards proclaiming "I Am a Man" (Estes, 2000; Green, 2004). While the call "I Am a Man" shared various meanings to protestors, the call, for many, was firmly situated in Black men's racial history of being seen as boys rather than men (Estes, 2000). For the young men participating in the march, and later the riots, manhood meant something entirely different and could be fought for outside the Civil Rights Movement's nonviolence commitment. These definitions show that both manhood and Blackness are discursively defined, struggled for, and therefore tied to resistance.

Similar to how the Memphis Sanitation Worker's strike used the I Am a Man mantra to demand dignity and respect following the ways that Black men continued to be vulnerable to mistreatment when they were viewed as less than human, the Black

Panthers used mass media to build a communal space there they could define themselves. The Black Panther's pamphlets and newspapers such as the *Black Panther Black Community News Service*, later known as the *Black Panther* newspaper, coalesced to create a discursive universe where the party could define itself (Rhodes, 2017). Even though the Black Panthers saw themselves as under siege by public discourse in addition to law enforcement, the *Black Panther* newspaper allowed the party to resistively participate in their representation (Rhodes, 2017). Having sprung into existence following the fatal shooting of Denzil Dowell by Richmond, California police in April 1967, the *Black Panther* newspaper in addition to other Black Panther Party media helped create a rhetorically resistive space that "presented adherents with an ideology, sense of purpose, group identity, and plan of action that had nothing to do with locale" (Rhodes, 2017, p. 97). As Rhodes (2017) continues, this revolutionary discursive space "enabled patterns of interaction and a sense of belonging" (p. 98). This allowed the Black Panthers to not only create and circulate a counternarrative but to create a collective space where the movement could grow and thrive.

Race, Masculinity, and Television

Television as a Site for Cultural Struggle

Having reviewed how Black people have resisted the stereotypes and characteristics ascribed onto them throughout American history and what that has meant for theorizing Black masculinity, this section turns to Black popular culture and the mass media. Focusing specifically on television, this section maps how Black popular culture and mass media have both advanced stereotypes about Black men and served as a site for resistance against these stereotypes. Reviewing the literature on television and

representation in the context of neoliberal colorblindness, this section first considers how the socio-political moment influenced representations about Black communities in mostly negative and monolithic ways. Second, this section considers major discourses around commercialism as they relate to authenticity. Rather than debates about representational accuracy, thinking about how converging factors related to television coalesce to influence representation may be a more generative enterprise (Gray, 1995).

Struggles over cultural hegemony have been waged in popular culture as much as they have been waged elsewhere and are never a zero-sum game. Instead, these struggles are about shifting the power balance (Hall, 1993). While television has been an especially important site for resistance, other factors beyond though still connected to television have been vital in the pursuit for self-definition. Gray (1995) notes that because of new production and circulation strategies, the convergence and combinations of music, technology, politics, and networks move the struggle for Blackness beyond television while still depending on and connecting to it. Television continues to play a central role in cultural politics because it remains an important site for struggle over representational meaning waged at multiple levels of national politics, moral authority, and expressive culture (Gray, 1995). For instance, televisual representations establishing and repeating implied links between insecurity and Blackness allowed neoconservatives making claims that if unchecked, Black Americans could threaten the nation's civil and moral order (Gray, 1995). Over time, these ideological representations "appear natural and universal rather than as the result of social and political struggles over power" (Gray, 1989, p. 377). Consequently, these mediated representations should be understood in their social and historical context so that they can be identified and interrogated.

In the decades following the Civil Rights Movement, Black families were increasingly represented on television. This representation took place at a time when neoconservative colorblind policies were dominating national discourses, which as Gray (1995) points out, influenced how Black people were represented. Crenshaw (1988) argues that despite progress made by civil rights era policies such as affirmative action, racism continued to exist albeit more subtly, through neoconservative colorblind policies. Morris and Kahlor (2014) explain that colorblindness "is rooted in the contention that racial inequality is no longer an issue that warrants attention because equal opportunities now exist for people of all races" (p. 416). These colorblind policies came at a time when neoconservatives were suggesting that racism no longer existed, referencing progress made during the Civil Rights Era against Jim Crow policies such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. In actuality, the Reagan Administration crafted an agenda that was hostile to the civil rights progress achieved in the previous decades (Crenshaw, 1988). In response to the administration's position on affirmative action, for instance, Reverend Jesse L. Jackson famously wrote in the *Chicago Tribune* "[t]wenty years ago, President Lyndon Johnson spoke at Howard University and said, 'We shall overcome.' Twenty years later, the civil rights policies of President Ronald Reagan are saying, 'We shall overturn'" (Jackson, 1985). Furthermore, McCann (2012) points out that during the Reagan-era "American politicians increasingly staked their political destinies on their capacity to be 'tough on crime' by pursing legislation that mandated harsh sentences for violent and nonviolent offenses, causing an explosion in the prison population" (p. 368). These policies, of course, were built on and helped perpetuate stereotypes about Black men.

Gray (1995) characterized the 1980s as being "rich with struggles, debates, and transformations in race relations, electronic media, cultural politics, and economic life" (p. 2). Examining *The Cosby Show*, a popular Black family situation comedy and a CBS News documentary titled *The Crisis of Black America: The Vanishing Family*, Gray (1989) argues that representations in these programs helped to produce an ideology that explains Black middle class success and urban poverty. Here, middle class values and individual choice are privileged while social structures are ignored. While *The Cosby Show* represented a Black middle class that embraces individual choice while ignoring social factors in a way that is welcoming to white people, *The Crisis of Black America* represented the Black underclass as morally bankrupt because of their unwillingness to accept individual responsibility and other principles comprising the American dream. Gray (1989) notes that these televisual representations are foregrounded in broader socio-cultural norms that continue to construct Black Americans as deviant. For example, Black men are represented as bad parents through common stereotypes such as being violent, lazy, and childlike. How structural racism like unarmed Black men being murdered by police and the prison industrial complex actually keeps Black men from parenting are, of course, excluded from the narrative. Televisual programming, then, expresses and reinforces dominant white beliefs about poor versus middle class Black Americans while excluding the social factors making Black communities and their inhabitants poor in the first place. In doing so, the social vulnerability that often helps organize Black masculinity disappears from view and ideas about Black men as violent, lazy, and childlike become ways to charting Black male experience.

Beyond Representational Accuracy

Despite globalization, commercial culture continues to be an important site for struggles over Blackness. Even though representations of Black men are mediated though a commercial culture, they continue to be an important site for definition and representational meaning. Gray (1995) states that commercial culture is an important site for the production, circulation, and enactment of Blackness. Although Black men are becoming increasingly visible on television, this has not meant that these representations are wide in scope. For instance, while Black men are highly visible as athletes and rappers, the mass media has obscured and, in some cases, commodified Black vulnerability. Despite Black American youth facing various social problems at an alarming rate, their mass-media representation tells a competing story (Collins, 2006). The mass-media representations of Black Americans, especially young Black men, narrowly depict them through "a seemingly authentic Black American culture that glamorized poverty, drugs, violence, and hypersexuality" (Collins, 2006, p. 4). Though there has been an increase in visibility of Black Americans in television, film, music, and sports, this visibility often narrowly depicts Black people through old racist stereotypes reemerging in new forms.

An important discourse related to Blackness concerns the tension between commercial culture and authenticity. In these instances, mass-media representations of Blackness often get dismissed as less genuine because of their industry influence. However, for Gray (1995), those doing media studies should be less burdened by whether or not media representations of Blackness are accurate. Instead, Gray (1995) argues that the focus should be on how the convergence of new media technologies and the interplay

between audiences, markets, and communities open space for theorizing about broader and more complex representations. In theorizing popular culture's role in Black body politics, Jackson (2006) uses terms such as the scripter (i.e., writers, producers, and directors who control representations), the scripted (i.e., the Black body), and the inscription (i.e., various representations that writers attach to the Black body), which make up an intricate social equation. This equation underscores how different factors converge to show how identities are negotiated and represented in popular culture. For Jackson (2006), scripting helps map how racial meanings get attached to the Black body, which, in turn, influences the attitudes and beliefs held by those coming into contact with these bodies. When the scripter adheres to certain racialized and gendered stereotypes about Black men, their inscription, mirrors these stereotypes in narrow ways.

Scripting can also be resistive when scripters attempt to disrupt normative ideas about how bodies are inscribed through their writing. Building on the Black television production and authorship literature, Martin (2015) examines how writers for television shows script gay Black characters in episodes about coming-out. Examining the role that Black writers' attitudes and beliefs play in representation, Martin (2015) notes that writer identity shapes how television episodes are developed. While mass-media representations of Blackness have been largely commercial driven since American television networks discovered that Black Americans comprised a profitable market, a small number of influential Black writers, producers, and directors such as Arsenio Hall, Quincy Jones, and Oprah Winfrey have carved out influential space for presenting Blackness through more complex stories, themes, and characters within commercial television's contours (Gray, 1995). Despite discourses claiming that commercial culture degrades

representational accuracy about Blackness, some writers, producers, and directors have used their influence to resist how Blackness is represented in popular culture.

Redefining Black Manhood through Hip-hop Music

Hip-Hop Music, Black Nationalism, Commercialism

While television has been central to studying Black popular culture and mass media representations about Black men and their masculinities throughout the 1980s and 1990s, hip-hop music has become an increasingly important resource and site for resisting stereotypes about Black men. This project suggests that hip-hop's political and socio-cultural history and its investments in Black Nationalism have made the popular genre a key site for (re)constructing ideas about Black manhood. This section considers how commercialism has been an important tool for popularizing hip-hop music and, by extension, spreading its resistive messaging despite coming to rely on racist stereotypes about Black men and masculinities. Additionally, this section considers the rise of Black Nationalism and how its sensibilities got entangled in popular music including hip-hop, which has become the voice for contemporary movements such as Black Lives Matter in the fight for equal rights and equality.

Black artists have used commercialized hip-hop music in constructive and resistive ways. Similar to how Gray (1995) argues that mass-media representations are negotiated through the convergence of various media related factors, creating space to think about broader and more complex mass-media representations, Rudrow (2019) argues that through close examination, hip-hop is a rich popular cultural site where alternative Black male masculinities are both negotiated. Black male rap artists have used their platforms to critique controlling images about Black men in ways that have given

them some control, albeit greatly limited, over how Black manhood defined. Underscoring how rap music is an important cultural site for the struggle over representation and meaning, Balaji's (2009) analysis shows how Black male artists critique ideas about Black men as hypermasculine through overtly mocking how Black masculinity is dominantly constructed. Similar to the points that Gray (1995), Jackson (2006), and Martin (2015) make concerning how television is a site for struggle over Blackness, Balaji (2009) notes that Black male identity in rap music videos is under constant negotiation by the artist, label demands and investments, and the audience, coming together to determine how artists are packaged as buyable products. Through this negotiation, Black male artists are able to leverage to some extent how they craft their identities, which for the most resistive artists, might include counter narratives about being Black in a white patriarchal society.

Despite how Black men are often constructed as violent, criminal, and hypersexual in dominant media discourses and representations, hip-hop music has been an important site for Black men to present alternative constructions about Black manhood containing resistive sensibilities to mass-media audiences. Popular Black forms of expression such as hip-hop have mobilized and helped consolidate representations of Blackness to articulate "the pains, fears, jobs, and aspirations of black youth. Because they catalyzed and drew together so many issues, these forms of black expressive commercial culture hovered at the center of contemporary black cultural politics" (Gray, 1995, p. 53). In this way, through popular culture and the marketplace, hip-hop music artists can popularize critical issues impacting their communities to generate discussion (Neal, 1997). Despite the interconnectedness between technology, commercialism, and

hip-hop music as a popular Black expressive form, hip-hop music artists craft provocative messages through the marketplace against charges that mainstream hip-hop music's relationship to the marketplace erodes its authenticity. Through the mainstream music recording industry, hip-hop's resistive sensibilities reach millions of listeners around the world.

Black Nationalism and the Struggle for Self-Identification

Despite how hip-hop's resistive messages have been re-popularized in recent times by mainstream artists like Kendrick Lamar and J. Cole particularly following Black Lives Matter's emergence on the scene following Michael Brown's murder, these messages speak to hip-hop's early days as a voice for socially and politically disposed Black Americans culturally thriving in this country's urban centers. Intricately embedded in this voice was hip-hop's resistive sensibilities, which borrowed largely from Black Nationalism. Black nationalism continues to be important to resistive or socially conscious hip-hop music's cultural politics.

What may make Black Nationalism so popular for many socially conscious artists thriving in the mainstream hip-hop music industry is its versatility and ability to mobilize a collective audience around addressing the issues that Black Americans continue to face. Because racism persists, albeit in more subtle ways, Crenshaw (1988) states that "the Black community must develop and maintain a distinct political consciousness in order to prevail against the coopting forces of legal reform" (p. 1136). History shows the ability for Black communities to coalesce around a collective identity and its collective political reality has shown to be a highly valuable political asset (Crenshaw, 1988). Rather than relying on the limiting dominant political discourses like the civil rights vision, visons

designed to deal with the present moment should maintain a progressive outlook focusing on Black American community needs (Crenshaw, 1988). West (1993) maps important issues concerning Black Americans, which includes nihilism and sexuality among others. In mapping this terrain, West (1993) understands these problems not as Black problems but rather as American society's problems. This framing is important because political liberals and conservatives often view Black people as a problem people and, by extension, fail to attend to how the problems Black people face demonstrate symptoms stemming from Western society's long and troubled history with racism (West, 1993). To this end, serious attempts at identifying and curtailing these problems and their effects should attend to American society's rampant racism and its contemporary manifestations.

Black Nationalism's resistive sensibilities have been especially helpful for addressing the challenges and conditions that Black communities continue to face. Black Nationalism, and the conditions from which it originates, helped mobilize Black American communities to establish a collective political identity. Black Nationalism is understood differently and has evolved over time. For West (1993), Black Nationalism is about Black Americans struggling against what it means to be American, which had been defined by whiteness' demand that Black Americans disown their Blackness. If white society demanded that Black Americans assimilate, Black Nationalism for younger Black Americans was about resisting assimilation through embracing Blackness. Furthermore, West (1993) argues that Black Nationalism is ideologically expansive, which accounts for "the moderate views of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas in his youth to those of Louis Farrakhan" (p. 3). Despite its ideological expansiveness, West (1993) points out that Black Nationalism rests upon the fundamental truth that "white America has been

historically weak-willed in ensuring racial justice and has continued to resist fully accepting the humanity of blacks" (p. 3). In other words, heteropatriarchal white supremacist society's divestment from issues impacting Black Americans helped to create the conditions that birthed Black Nationalism and is also what continues to keep Black Nationalist ideas alive.

Understanding that Black Nationalism has been interpreted differently with varying strains, Collins (2006) offers a vision for Black Nationalism foregrounded in its central ideals: self-reliance, self-determination, and self-definition. Importantly, Collins (2006) departs from conventional approaches to Black Nationalism as a political ideology taking on varying forms like socialism and integrationism. Instead, Collins (2006) contends that these conventional approaches are limiting because they ignore how Black Americans may mobilize Black Nationalism's central ideals to confront contemporary racism on an everyday level, perhaps otherwise obscured by privileging the major ideological approaches. Highlighting how Black Americans may use Black Nationalism practically as a meaning system in their everyday lives, Collins (2006) notes that "[d]espite the fact that the majority of African Americans most likely can define neither Black nationalism nor its major ideological strands, the ideas themselves may circulate in everyday life as a template for African American ethnicity" (p. 82). As Collins (2006) argues, Black Nationalism may be more useful for thinking about how it is employed by Black Americans as a meaning system when responding to racism and its new forms.

Black Nationalism, Popular Black Music, & Hip-Hop

The mid-to-late 1960s marked an important turning point for Black popular music's cultural politics. The period after saw performers begin to include social

movement elements in their music more often, making Black expressive culture more explicitly political (Watkins, 2001). The distinguishing factor between these two moments was the control that Black performers had over their art before and after the mid-to-late 1960s. Watkins (2001) points out that this shift came when Black performers began to have more control over the technologies and spaces for producing popular music, which gave them more expressive creativity. Prior to the 1960s, Black Americans lacked control over the technologies and spaces necessary for music production. Subsequently, artists were limited in their ability to express explicitly political messages critiquing heteropatriarchal white supremacist society and its injustices like police brutality and terror lynching. Furthermore, Black Nationalist themes, which were becoming fashionable, were commodified by the music recording industry (Watkins, 2001). Neal (1997) argues that as a polytonal expression, soul music, severed from its roots, "became a malleable market resource merchandised to black and white consumers alike in the form of music, television shows, and haircare products" (pp. 119-120). Neal (1997) points out that in soul music's commercialization, corporations were confronted with the challenge of shaping soul music into a commercial product that could still be read as authentic by Black audiences. This market fueled commodification broadened the audiences that Black popular music and its resistive themes were able to reach in the decades following.

Freeland (2009) points out that political activism, ideology, and music played an important role in developing and mobilizing and defining the Black Power Movement. During this time, popular music was seen as a catalyst for mobilization capable of challenging capitalism and racism (Freeland, 2009). Freeland (2009) notes that Curtis

Mayfield's songs were instrumental in shaping and defining the Black Power Movement, highlighting the song "We're a Winner." While these songs functioned as socio-political critiques, they also helped affirm Black culture, helpful in mobilizing and sustaining political action even when facing threatening circumstances (Freeland, 2009). Popular music helped activists communicate shared goals, cultivate courage, and foster identification with the Black Power Movement (Freeland, 2009). Freeland (2009) notes that there were two music types that were particularly popular for the movement. With differing aesthetics, these types included the mainstream socially conscious music from artists like the Temptations and the more creative socially conscious music by jazz musicians like John Coltrane (Freeland, 2009). To this end, popular Black music possessed resistive sensibilities, which extended from hip-hop's emergence in the 1970s into the 1980s when hip-hop began to break into the mainstream music recording industry.

Similar to Freeland's (2009) essay, Watkins' (2001) examines hip-hop music in relation to Black Nationalism explore hip-hop music's potential for political mobilization, fueled by the genre's commercialization. Rap music's hyperpoliticization in the late 1980s was a movement characterized by Black Nationalist sensibilities fusing with Black popular culture and was "facilitated by important social, economic, and technological shifts that enabled black youth to assert their vision of [Black Nationalism] in imaginative ways" (Watkins, 2001, p. 374). Serious discussions about Black Nationalism "must recognize how notions of black peoplehood, community, and collective struggle penetrate the sphere of black popular culture" (Watkins, 2001, p. 374). Such discussions should also recognize how Black expressive culture enlivens Black

Nationalist discourses since popular media is important to Black American life and modernizing Black Nationalism (Watkins, 2001). For these reasons, hip-hop music has been an important place for examining Black resistive sensibilities in Black popular culture.

Underscoring hip-hop's relationship to Black peoplehood, community, and collative struggle, Neal (1997) notes that hip-hop was developed as a response to the eroding public life in the postindustrial city. While hip-hop music is an expansive cultural form that includes themes like violence and misogyny, Neal (1997) suggests that we closely examine the contexts and process that generate these themes since they can provide important context otherwise unnoticed. In this way, hip-hop acts as a vessel into which the resistive politics of movements like civil rights, Black Nationalism, soul, and anti-lynching converge, informing a hip-hop sensibility.

Hip-Hop's Resistive Sensibilities

Hip-hop music emerged from the Bronx in New York City during the late 1970s and early 1980s in a cityscape haunted by the systemic racism that the civil rights movement had hoped to leave behind (Rose, 1994). As a response to these conditions and often equipping Black Power and Black Nationalist sensibilities, hip-hop music emerged as a voice for young Black Americans to tell their stories about the eroding material conditions they faced with the post-industrial city as their backdrop. The post-industrial city began with the loss of industrial jobs in urban areas to cheaper labor markets both domestic and abroad, housing policies that created Black urban centers and white suburbs, white society's fear of Black people who were imagined as criminals, and an increasing immigrant population, mostly poor, in urban areas (Chang, 2005; West, 1993).

These cities, plagued by unemployment, homelessness, underfunded schools, food insecurity, and the lack of healthcare were the result of an eroding tax base and cuts to support programs by the federal government under the premise that true equality had been achieved after the Civil Rights Movement and that social welfare programs and other policies were no longer necessary as a result of this achievement. In other words, the colorblind equal opportunity rhetoric fashioned by the Reagan Administration not only justified dispossessing urban centers, leaving them impoverished, unsheltered, undereducated, unhealthy, and unsafe but blamed the Black residents who occupied these centers for these conditions (Rose, 1994). After all, colorblind equal opportunity rhetoric understood everyone as having equal market access. When participation in the marketplace is unsuccessful, the blame is placed on the participant rather than systemic inequalities that may exist in society. When Black Americans were not successful in the marketplace, white society understood this unsuccess as a reaffirmation of stereotypes about Black people as childlike and incapable (Rose, 2008). Hip-hop became a way to resist dominant narratives about Black urban life through counternarratives drawing from Black Nationalism.

These musical discourses resulting from hip-hop's commercialization allowed the genre to expand beyond the New York City neighborhoods where hip-hop was originally conceived. If hip-hop's commercialization contributed to the rise of message rappers due to Black Nationalism's commercial appeal, it also contributed to the decline of message rappers since the hip-hop industry would eventually establish borders around what would count as production-worthy music (Watkins, 2001). While hip-hop's commercialization allowed for wider exposure to hip-hop's resistive sensibilities, the genre's arrival in the

mainstream meant that hip-hop music would become subservient to a white audience and its demands (Perry, 2004). As mainstream Black Nationalist hip-hop music began to fade in popularity during the mid-to-late 1990s and early 2000s, gangsta rap began to rise. Gangsta rap was largely divested from the political consciousness that was important throughout the 1980s and early 1990s (Rose, 2008). In gangsta rap, Black men and women were represented in ways that resembled past fantasy fueled racist and sexist stereotypes. While many Black male hip-hop artists continued to find ways to incorporate socially conscious and resistant themes in their music, many also quickly fashioned the hypermasculine and hypersexual themes gangsta rap demanded (McCann, 2017).

As a Black form of cultural expression that combines poetry, prose, and music, hip-hop manifests through various forms like narrative, autobiography and debate (Perry, 2004). Speaking to its investment in anti-racism, Perry (2004) points out that hip-hop draws from ideas about how demonized Blackness has been constructed as oppositional to whiteness, becoming part of the expressive mode's consciousness. Further highlighting its function as a Black form of cultural expression around resistance, Rose (1994) points out that hip-hop music "prioritizes black voices from the margins of urban America" (p. 2). In doing so, hip-hop acts as a culturally expressive form allowing Black men to chart their experiences in a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society. It is through this cultural resistance, as Rose (1994) points out, that hip-hop gains its drawing power. Cultural resistance, then, is central to hip-hop.

Black Nationalist discourses have taken many forms in hip-hop music despite its commercialization, allowing these messages to be broad in reach. Foregrounding how hip-hop has been used as a Black expressive form, I offer the term hip-hop sensibilities to

chart how the genre's investment in resistance manifests in the Black Lives Matter Era in addition to how these sensibilities appear in other media modes in ways that help render visible Resistive Black Masculinities. Emerging variously, hip-hop sensibilities deal with how ideas about resistance manifest in hip-hop music. For instance, Cummings and Roy (2002) points out how hip-hop artists sometimes use their music as a way to address oppression in addition to surviving in a hostile environment often through their own experiences. Similarly, Dyson (2004) expresses that hip-hop "projects a style of self into the world that generates forms of cultural resistance and transforms the ugly terrain of ghetto existence into a searing portrait of life as it must be lived by millions of voiceless people" (p. 68). In doing so, hip-hop music describes and analyzes factors such as drug addiction, teen pregnancy, police brutality, and material deprivation (Dyson, 2004). Speaking specifically to hip-hop's attachment to Black Nationalism, Dyson (2004) notes that the genre focused renewed attention on Black Nationalism specifically during the rise of gangsta rap. However, Watkins (2001) points out that although Black Nationalist discourses were becoming increasingly prevalent, there was never a consensus about how Black artists should embed these discourses in their music. Nonetheless, Watkins (2001) notes that groups like Public Enemy, K RS-One, and Sista Souljah filled voids for many alienated young Black American youths. These performers gave voice to the lived Black youth experiences and resonated with Black youth because they acted as educators, entertainers, and spokespersons. To this end, Hip-hop music acts as a container for Black resistive politics. In other words, Black Nationalism's ideals have been equipped and cicurated through the Black artistic form. Espousing Black Nationalism's central ideals, hip-hop music has come to act as a meaning system for navigating everyday life for

many. As a container absorbing Black resistive politics as they play out, the genre does not merely circulate preexisting attitudes and belief about being Black in an anti-Black society. Instead, hip-hop music helps shape Black resistive politics.

Having reviewed the literature for conceptualizing Resistive Black Masculinities, I provide an overview of this project's method and procedures in the next chapter. Employing a disciplinary approach, I will provide an overview of the theoretical and mythological perspectives guiding this inquiry before providing a rational for the cultural artifacts I have selected that explicate the cultural and rhetorical dimensions of Resistive Black Masculinities.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

Theoretical perspectives examining Black men and masculinity in Communication Studies is severely lacking. The scholarship that does exist about Black men and masculinities often fails to account for their unique cultural histories and instead maps onto them ideas about white men and masculinity such as patriarchy and male privilege (Curry, 2017). These reductive approaches do not account for the complex histories around Black men and masculinity that I suggest is imperative for understanding Black masculinity in relation to resistance in the Black Lives Matter Era. This project will use textual analysis to examine what I have termed Resistive Black Masculinities and hip-hop sensibilities represented in popular culture. These masculinities, which I historicized in chapter two, attend to how Black men both live within and resist a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society in ways that complicate and reject universal ideas about masculinity.

Drawing from media/cultural studies, rhetorical studies, and critical work about race, this chapter will first outline the theoretical and methodological perspectives guiding this inquiry. Second, I will provide context for the cultural artifacts I have selected for analysis and the criteria for selection to ensure each text is aligned with this project's goals. Third, I describe the procedures I will use for analyzing this project's case studies. In doing so, I emphasize Resistive Black Masculinities and hip-hop sensibilities, conceptualized in chapter one. Lastly, I provide some concluding remarks and summarize my overall aspirations for this project.

Assumptions of a Critical Methodology

My conceptualization of Resistive Black Masculinities as a site for depicting Black men and masculinities living within and resisting an oppressive society is foregrounded in the theoretical and methodological assumptions that animate media/cultural studies, contemporary rhetorical theory, and critical theories about race. Focusing on popular culture, this project will examine the popular media texts that depict everyday Black life. Foregrounding ideas about Black men's everyday lives in conversation with resistance, these media texts, as McKee (2003) points out, "are the material traces that are left of the practice of sense-making" (p. 15). In this project, I use textual analysis to attend to these material traces about how Black media creators (e.g., authors, writers, executives, producers, and artists) represent ideas about Black men and masculinity in the Black Lives Matter Era since, as McKee (2003) expresses, texts are interpreted to discover the ways people within particular cultures and at particular times organize the world around them. Using textual analysis, cultural studies scholars examine representations about everyday life with, as van Zoonen (1994) points out, emphasis on gender and race. Pointing out how ideas about everyday life are connected to popular culture, Hall (1993) expresses that "popular culture always has its base in the experiences, the pleasures, the memories, the traditions of the people" (p. 7) and that "[popular culture] has connections with local hopes and local aspirations, local tragedies, and local scenarios that are the everyday practices and the everyday experiences of ordinary folk" (pp. 107-108). Textual analysis in the context of popular culture, then, is about uncovering and interpreting the material traces that particular people within particular cultures leave behind, speaking to how people organize their everyday

practices and experiences. Based on this understanding, I hope to uncover and interpret the texts "left behind," so to speak, by Black media creators about Black men's everyday lives as they live within and resist a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society. In doing so, this project seeks to decenter white ontologies while centering Black ones through thinking about how popular culture texts about Black masculinity hail Black audiences, particularly Black men, in the contemporary moment. Following Gray (1995), I "focus on the kinds of [popular media texts] that African Americans, in particular watch with the expectation of finding black images" (p. 10). Specifically, I will focus on popular media texts about Resistive Black Masculinities in the contexts of music, television, and film.

Understanding popular culture as a rich sight for excavation, this project borrows from media/cultural studies' commitment to examining the complexities around cultural meaning. Thinking specifically about cultural politics and commercial culture, I will follow Gray's (1995) lead by foregrounding concerns around questions of power, inequality, and difference in this project's textual analysis. Moreover, this inquiry is shaped by Gray's (1995) argument that television and, following Hall, I would add other forms of popular culture, acts as "a place of struggle over the symbolic meanings (and uses) of blackness in the production of the nation" (p. xiv). Foregrounding media/cultural studies and its investment in theorizing about the complexities around representation, this project will use textual analysis to illuminate how Black media creators draw on Black resistance efforts (e.g., slavery, discrimination, racism) when representing Resistive Black masculinities. Speaking to textual analysis and its usefulness here, McKee (2003) points out that the method seeks to understand how representation takes form, the assumptions behind representation, and what representation reveals about how the world

is organized. Centrally, I suggest that understanding Black resistance efforts in relation to representations about Black masculinities in popular culture helps to conceptualize how Black masculinities are oriented in an oppressive anti-Black society.

In addition to drawing from media/cultural studies, this project draws from contemporary rhetorical theory given how it emphasizes symbolic meaning in ways that speak to how Resistive Black Masculinities are represented in the Black Lives Matter Era. Pointing out rhetorical criticism's various concerns, Flores (2016) specifically highlights politics and publics and rhetors and audiences in addition to cultural discourses and social meanings. Mindful of its various insistencies, Flores (2016) expresses that "rhetorical criticism—the study of rhetors and audiences, of public and presidential address, of bodies and meanings, of politics, culture, and practice—is, at its soul, deeply invested in meanings and matters, in judgment and evaluation" (p. 6). As a critical project in the context of race, rhetorical criticism attends to mundane performances of everyday life, which can be found in texts like novels, television, and movies, and gives rhetors the appropriate tools for analyzing and exposing "overt and inferential forms of racism, while highlighting and interpreting complex relationships and intersections" (Ono & Lacy, 2011, p. 4). I suggest that attending to popular culture through textual analysis in ways that point out racism in complex ways is central to mapping Resistive Black Masculinities in the contemporary moment.

Considering the role of the critic in rhetorical criticism as Flores (2016) discusses, I wish to be upfront about my role not merely as an observer but as a social actor guided by my theoretical and methodological knowledge ultimately seeking to bring insight and judgement about the texts I have selected for analysis. Clear about how personal

experience cannot be read independent from a critic's social situatedness, Wander and Jenkins (1972) expresses that "[t]he rhetorical critic seeks to unfold meaning in a body of verbal discourse, but the dimensions of meaning making up any symbol must be interpreted though [their] personal experience" (p. 443). Subsequently, my identity as a Black identifying biracial cisgender male feminist from South Georgia will surely be present throughout my analysis. Working in tandem, these identities have informed my lived experiences, the selection of the texts I purpose below, and how I will interpret these texts.

Data Selection and Procedures

I have chosen several popular culture artifacts that allow me to examine Resistive Black Masculinities and their related components appearing in different media formats. As stated elsewhere, I focus particularly on television and film with an emphasis on music. Specifically, I analyze popular hip-hop artist J. Cole's 2014 album *2014 Forest Hills Drive,* the 2018 comedy-drama film *Blindspotting,* and season one of FOX's popular television series *Empire*, which debuted in 2015. I have selected these cultural artifacts for various reasons. First, these texts prominently represent Black men as they navigate a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society. Second, each text troubles ideas about Black male privilege and patriarchy and offers generative potential for thinking about the particular ways that race and gender in addition to other intersecting identities such as sexuality and class operate oppressively for Black men. These cultural artifacts also represent how Black men find ways to resist an oppressive social order. Third, these texts speak to multiple Resistive Black masculinities. Taking intersectional theory seriously, these texts demonstrate how Black masculinities are not monolithic and how Black men differently situated by their subjectivities also resist differently. Fourth, each

text was composed by an array of Black media creators in the historical context that founded Black Lives Matter, which saw a reenergized but not new commitment to social consciousness and activism. This renewed commitment to exploring injustice in the Black Lives Matter Era, as this project argues, has been taken up in popular culture and represents the contemporary obstacles Black men continue to face in ways that reject the politics of respectability. Fifth, each text draws from hip-hop music's resistive style to constitute what I refer to as a hip-hop sensibility, which I argue connects Black men and their masculinities to a cultural history around struggle and resistance and helps make Resistive Black Masculinities legible in the contemporary moment. With these criteria in mind, I explain my methods of analysis.

Procedure for Analyzing Resistive Black Masculinities

To explore how Resistive Black Masculinities are rhetorically constructed as symbolic representations concerning ideas about Black life, I used textual analysis to examine the three case studies that I mentioned earlier in this chapter. Before analyzing each artifact, I critically listened to and watched each text to familiarize myself with how Resistive Black Masculinities were represented. In other words, I sat with these texts to give thorough consideration to the Black resistive efforts that the representations in these texts pulled from to rhetorically reconstruct Black masculinities. I emphasized how Black men are depicted as living within and resisting an oppressive society. In other words, I began with what Hall (1975) refers to as a "long preliminary soak" or by paying close attention to how Black men's intersectional identities are represented as converging to create particular experiences informing what it means to live within and resist a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society.

Having preliminarily screened each text several times with close attention to detail, I then watched and listened to the cultural artifacts I selected while taking notes. This process was guided by my research question: *How do forms of cultural expression created by Black media creators (e.g., authors, artists, writers, directors, and producers) define the contours of Resistive Black Masculinities and what is the role of hip-hop sensibilities in this process?* In using this question as a guide, I determined what themes were useful for this project's argument and which were tangential. Conceptualizing textual analysis broadly, I attended to verbal, sonic, and visual components of the texts I have selected.

After sitting with the data, I then organized this data around the particular themes in the text it originated from to think about how both Resistive Black Masculinities and hip-hop sensibilities emerge and are represented. First, regarding Resistive Black Masculinities, I took an inductive approach for thinking about the specific themes that organize each chapter. I guided this inquiry by paying particular attention to what the data says about each text's relevant main character(s) as they both live within and resist heteropatriarchal white supremacist society as Black men in addition to how their other intersecting identities inform and complicate Black manhood and resistance in an oppressive society. Second, I foregrounded my discussion about hip-hop sensibilities in this projects' chapter about hip-hop music. This particular chapter explored both Resistive Black Masculinities and hip-hop sensibilities, which I then traced through the remaining case studies.

Speaking to cultural and contemporary rhetorical studies' commitment to social and historical context (Ono and Lacy, 2011), I situated each case study's relevant media

format (e.g., music, television, film) in historical and cultural context vis-à-vis representation, Black masculinity, and resistance within that media format. In doing so, I mapped the broader cultural and historical terrain from which Resistive Black Masculinities emerged. This context was derived from the academic literature across disciplines and the popular press (e.g., fan blogs, reviews, interviews, and opinion pieces). I then analyzed and presented this data according to the theoretical and methodological assumptions discussed earlier in this chapter around the main themes identified within each case study.

Conclusion

This project draws from media studies/cultural studies, rhetorical theory, and critical theories about race to explore Resistive Black Masculinities and its various components as outlined in chapter one. Using textual analysis, this project maps how Resistive Black Masculinities are represented in popular culture and considers the cultural histories that these representations draw from. Additionally, project employs a Communication Studies framework informed by relevant works outside of a strictly Communication-based context. Through this project, I hope to offer generative insight about Black masculinities, which I believe is much needed given the current racial climate both within and outside the academy. Engaging critical work on race in conversation with Communication Studies, I hope to contribute to the conversation about Black men and masculinities through rejecting monolithic ideas about Black masculinity.

CHAPTER FOUR: "WE GOTTA COME TOGETHER": VULNERABILITY, SOCIAL AWARENESS, AND LOVE IN *2014 FOREST HILLS DRIVE*

On December 9, 2014, popular mainstream rapper J. Cole released his third studio album, *2014 Forest Hills Drive* (hereafter *14FHD*). Though Cole has since added additional studio albums like *4 Your Eyez Only* and *KOD* to his discography, Subbarao (2019) argues that the popular rapper's third studio album is widely considered his magnum opus. Highlighting the project's widespread success, *14FHD* was certified platinum and then double platinum in 2016 before being certified triple platinum in 2019 (Centeno, 2019; da Costa, 2019). This success was achieved without features from other music artists, emphasizing Cole's self-success during a time when many lean on collaborating with other artists to maximize their exposure. *14FHD's* album sales, however, is not what makes the North Carolina rapper's third studio album his magnum opus. Instead, I suggest, what makes the album an important contribution to the hip-hop genre and culture at large are the social issues represented in *14FHD*. A hip-hop autoethnography named after his childhood home address in Fayetteville, North Carolina (Ramirez, 2014), *14FHD* illuminates the challenges Cole faced and the lessons he learned while navigating community, relationships, and success. Subbarao (2019) notes that *14FHD* "tells the long and winding journey of losing and finding one's values in the pursuit of the American Salvation. The result is a deeply profound, beautiful, and visceral work of art about life, love, and the human condition." Foregrounding his identity as a Black male hip-hop artist growing up in the U.S. American South, *14FHD* illuminates

issues that Black boys and young Black men face while living within and resisting a patriarchal white supremacist society.

Many contemporary mainstream hip-hop albums function as a form of autoethnography to illuminate how Black men musically represent themselves as living within and resisting an oppressive society. Analyzing Tupac Shakur's *Me Against the World* album (1996), Rudrow (2019) points out that autobiographical albums by Black male hip-hop artists feature the challenges and obstacles many Black boys and Black men face from being societally dispossessed, illuminating how they are vulnerably situated in a patriarchal white supremacist society. Curry (2017) contends that this vulnerability necessitates new theorizing about Black masculinity. Since Black men are socially situated as vulnerable and because vulnerability is such an integral part of the stories that Black men tell about their lives, it is important to understand how vulnerability informs ideas about Black manhood. This, of course, includes representations about vulnerability in conversation with ideas about Black manhood that get represented in media formats including hip-hop. In a move that positions the album as relatable to many Black men through its communication of vulnerability, *14FHD* "is not afraid to be corny and cliché. It does not shirk the average experience; it embraces it and, somehow, makes you feel like we're all in this together" (Grant, 2014). Within this spirit, *14FHD* provides a window into how Black male hip-hop artists like Cole rhetorically construct ideas about Black masculinity in conversation with vulnerability in mainstream hip-hop by drawing on the seemingly ordinary experiences that many Black men face.

14FHD also provides a template for thinking about how Black men and communities more broadly might work to protect themselves against an oppressive U.S

American society. A writer for *XXL Magazine* points out that the track "Fire Squad," for example, "addresses and accuses white artists (particularly those in hip-hop and r&b) of robbing black culture" (Murrell, 2014). To be sure, highlighting important issues like cultural appropriation and commodification are not unique to Cole's artistry. Hip-hop artists have long used their music to accentuate important issues impacting their communities (Rose, 1994). As I discussed in Chapter 2, this was particularly popular in the 1980s when Black Nationalist ideas found their way into hip-hop, continuing to be pervasive in what some refer to as "socially conscious," "woke," or "message" rap. I not only argue that it is within this musical terrain that Resistive Black Masculinities thrive but that hip-hop sensibilities help to render these masculinities legible in the contemporary moment.

In this chapter, I use Cole's autoethnographic album *14FHD* as a case study examining how the popular artist musically portrays what it means to live within and resist a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society. Foregrounding his Black male identity, I argue that Cole's lyrics illustrate how Black men are situated vulnerably in an oppressive U.S. American society, as well as some ways they work to resist their vulnerable social situatedness. Cole represents a Resistive Black Masculinity where Black men are socially aware so that they can resist whiteness in addition to hegemonic ideals in Black communities, where love and struggle, often connected, act as conduits for unity, and where a strong Black brotherhood glued together by love helps to bring Black communities together. In doing so, Cole's album provides a template for understanding how Black men represent themselves both as vulnerable and resistant, illuminating what it means to be both Black and male in a U.S. American context.

Additionally, I argue that by examining Cole's Resistive Black Masculinities, insight can be gained about how these masculinities might be rendered legible in the contemporary moment. I suggest that by drawing on the genre's resistive politics and Black nationalism's emphasis on self-love, community, and brotherhood, Cole's lyrics represent a hip-hop sensibility helpful for making Resistive Black Masculinities knowable in the contemporary moment where Black lives seem not to matter.

Proceeding, I first historicize hip-hop's roots, consider hip-hop music as a Black expressive form, and then explore how hip-hop music acts as an important site for constructing ideas about Black male identity before turning to this chapter's analysis. In the analysis, I examine how Cole represents himself living within an oppressive society, his emphasis on social awareness as a way to resist an oppressive society and hegemonic ideas within the hip-hop genre, love and struggle as conduits for unity, and a strong Black brotherhood. I conclude this chapter by offering some implications.

Hip-Hop, Culture, and Black Manhood

Historicizing Hip-Hop's Roots

Hip-hop historians like Chang (2005) and Charnas (2010) trace the emergence of hip-hop back to the streets of New York City's Bronx neighborhood. Early hip-hop culture is commonly characterized as consisting of four central elements, which are breaking, DJing, MCing, and graffiti (Charnas, 2010). Over time, MCing would eventually become rapping, overwhelming the other four central elements. Despite how the creative energies associated with breaking, DJing, and graffiti eventually faded in comparison to MCing, much of these creative energies persisted though hip-hop's dynamic and innovate storytelling. Pinpointing the Bronx as hip-hop's birthplace, critics

and scholars like Rose (1994), Chang (2005), and Charnas (2010), have called attention to the importance of place and space in understanding hip-hop's roots. With the Bronx as hip-hop's starting point, challenges and obstacles around the post-industrial city helped create the social context and rhetorical exigencies therein that informed hip-hop music in its early years. At its earliest point during the mid-1970s, "hip-hop could be contained in a tiny seven-mile circle" (Chang, 2005, p. 109). Though extremely poor, the Bronx was a racially and ethnically diverse neighborhood comprised of Black American, Puerto Rican, and Jewish families that had been displaced from Manhattan's ghettos by urban revitalization projects, condemning neighborhoods and closing thriving businesses (Chang, 2005). While there was public housing available in neighborhoods like the South Bronx and East Brooklyn, post-industrialization ensured unemployment for many (Chang, 2005). Post-industrialization, as Rose (1994) points out, was characterized by shifts in economic conditions when well-paying jobs moved from urban centers to the white suburbs, housing access, and the concentration of displaced racial and ethnic minorities, which helped create the social climate and conditions that animated hip-hop culture. Though hip-hop culture was expansive, including several elements, Rose (1994) notes that hip-hop storytelling became an important language for dispossessed urban Black youth to share their social vulnerability in a patriarchal white supremacist society.

Breaking beyond the seven-mile circle that had previously contained the blossoming genre, "Rappers Delight" by Sugarhill Gang, released in 1979, is widely acknowledged as the first mainstream hip-hop song (Dyson, 2004). The groundbreaking Sugarhill Gang was produced by Sylvia Robinson who owned the Black independent label Sugar Hill Records (Chang, 2005). Watkins (2005) contends that Sugarhill Gang's

failure to pick up steam beyond their breakout song "Rappers Delight" was because they had no genuine connection to the streets where hip-hop emerged. Rather than the Bronx, the rap trio was from New Jersey, likely leading to their inability to gain traction (Watkins, 2005). Just a few years after Sugar Hill Records released Sugarhill Gang's "Rappers Delight," the same label released "The Message" by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. Dyson (2004) points out that the release of songs like "The Message" and "New York, New York" by Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five were watershed moments because they marked an awaking where the playful genre could be used for social protest (Dyson, 2004). With this pivot, rappers criticized the economic, political, and social factors that were responsible for creating the social conditions that situated Black people vulnerably, including drug addiction, teen pregnancy, and police brutality (Dyson, 2004). These social conditions among others in the post-industrial city were worsened by the Reagan Administration's equal opportunity rhetoric policies that reasoned that because civil rights progress had been made in the previous two decades, inequality in the present could not be caused by racism. Making matters worse, civil rights accomplishments were used as justification for reducing social welfare programs and repealing policies such as affirmative action, which made Black U.S. Americans who continued to face economic hardship more vulnerable.

Hip-hop's emphasis on illuminating issues around social justice continued into the 1980s. By this time, however, hip-hop as a culture looked vastly different than it had in the previous decade. Similar to Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, N.W.A.'s music, for example, reflected the harsh circumstances that defined the neighborhoods where most poor Black youth lived (Dyson, 2004). By the 1980s, hip-hop was no longer

confined to the Bronx. Because of "Rappers Delight," rap began to emerge in cities all over the country, including Los Angeles, California, the home of N.W.A. In addition to rapping about the cruelties of living while Black and male in the U.S., the notorious rap group, according to Chang (2005), are credited with cementing the importance of place in rap music. With *Straight Outta Compton*, where you were from became a staple of hip-hop and where everyone had stories to share about their own geographic location (Chang, 2005). Even though hip-hop began in the Bronx, hip-hop evolved into a global culture, consisting of music, books, film, television, fashion, and politics.

Hip-Hip as a Black Cultural Form

Despite hip-hop music's multicultural origins, Perry (2004) contends that is a Black form of cultural expression. Reasoning that that hip-hop can be a Black form of cultural expression and simultaneously influenced by other cultures and styles, Perry (2014) expresses "To deem something French or English rarely implies that there were no Germanic culture influences, or Irish, or Algerian" (Perry, 2004, p. 11). For Perry (2004), hip-hop is Black despite surely being impurely so. Discourses pertaining to hip-hop's Blackness are animated by concern for whether the genre's commercialization has diluted its cultural significance as a Black expressive form. Hip-hop's Blackness is foregrounded in the African American rhetorical tradition. For Hess (2005), it is within this tradition that hip-hop gets its concern with the authentic whereby rappers are understood to act as truth tellers by bearing witness to the real-life situations that many Black Americans face navigating an oppressive society. Implicit here is the way that hip-hop music draws on Black communicative practices. For example, Smitherman (1997) contends that hip-hop's communicative practices are foregrounded in the African

American speech community, referring to how Black Americans use language to constitute unique identities including discursive practices articulating Black struggle around survival. Hip-hop storytelling is perhaps one of the genre's most important commitments demonstrating its attachment to the Black rhetorical tradition and is observable today in some socially conscious music. Foregrounding storytelling's ancient roots, Cummings and Roy (2002) compare rappers to the African griot who served as the village oracle. As storytellers, rappers are both creators and critics of rhetoric (Cummings & Roy, 2002). In other words, rappers use their stories to share their experiences and the experiences of others while also using their narratives to critique. Through storytelling, socially conscious hip-hop music has become largely autobiographical, inviting audiences to listen and reflect on the obstacles and challenges that their favorite rappers face but also to identity through their own lived experiences.

While focus on the lyrics of hip-hop stories have been limited in communication and rhetorical studies, there has been some attention to this area. Cummings and Roy (2002) examine hip-hop music to explore how Afrocentricity manifests in its lyrics. In their study, the authors operationalize Afrocentricity as a discourse that seeks to bring harmony and transcendence in African American communities, focusing on authors the parts of *nommo* (i.e., the power of an orator to create harmony and community) (Cummings & Roy, 2002). The study concludes that hip-hop music in conversation with Afrocentricity helps to build a collective identity around a shared sense of social belonging, important to the African American rhetorical tradition. Similarly, Rudrow (2020) examines mainstream rapper J. Cole's autobiographical storytelling around having sex for the first time, arguing that while the popular rapper is able to discuss boyhood

vulnerabilities such as fear about having a small penis he must also navigate dominant rhetorical constraints placing limits on how much vulnerability Black men can convey within the genre's mainstream contours. Rudrow (2020) concludes that Cole's emphasis on Black boys' vulnerability through his autobiographical storytelling helps to extend the African American rhetorical tradition within mainstream hip-hop music by carving space for discussing issues that many young Black men may face but may not share.

Hip-Hop and Black Manhood

While hip-hop is a generative site for examining how Black men construct ideas about Black manhood in conversation with vulnerability (Rudrow, 2019), some scholars point out that mainstream hip-hop artists seem increasingly divested from presenting Black masculinities outside the dominant mold. Criticizing how some artists within the genre claim that hip-hop is about keeping it real, Rose (2008) argues that if this was really always hip-hop's commitment then there would be more tales about loss, the difficulty of living while Black post-incarceration, love, and vulnerability. Acknowledging that these themes are relegated to hip-hop's margins, Rose (2008) expresses "Love and intimacy require enormous sacrifice and sustained vulnerability; the models of black manhood promoted in commercial hip hop are allergic to both" (p. 14). Although this criticism is generally true, there has been some scholarship concerned with complicating representations of Black manhood in hip-hop music. Examining artists including Tupac Shakur, Jay-Z, Lil' Wayne, and R. Kelly, Jeffries (2009) argues that each perform within commercialized hip-hop's thug trope, but each also present how hip-hop manhood is negotiated in complex and distinct ways. Examining the fashioning of the term "thug" under the backdrop of love, Jeffries (2009) argues that hip-hop artists

have transformed the meaning of this word. In Tupac's case, for instance, it was about living live while knowing you are hated. Though differential use of the term thug highlights different takes on Black masculinity, Graham (2016) argues that even when artists destabilize notions of Black masculinity, they still have to find ways to maintain their legibility within the hip-hop genre. For instance, while an artist like Lil Wayne might use feminizing metaphors in his music, journalists reinforce a criminalized understanding of Black masculinity by focusing on his illicit activity outside of his musical performances. This, in turn, helps him maintain his Black masculine legibility within the mainstream music recording industry (Graham, 2016). Similarly, Rudrow (2020) points out that while mainstream rapper J. Cole can talk about his sexual insecurities around having sex for the first time during his boyhood through his autobiographic storytelling, the popular rapper must ensure that his vulnerable lyrics do not jeopardize his Black masculinity. For J. Cole, as Rudrow (2020) points out, this means finding ways to rearticulate his heterosexual masculinity such as emphasizing his penis' propensity to become erect when thinking about conventionally attractive women. These studies demonstrate how hip-hop functions as a culturally rich site for examining complex representations about Black manhood.

Some studies about Black manhood in hip-hop music argue the importance of distinguishing between ideas about Black manhood and white manhood. Problematizing the use of the term patriarch, Perry (2004) argues that the term has not been particularly helpful in understanding Black men's experiences since patriarchy has never truly been afforded to Black men in the way that it has been to white men. This reasoning is consistent with the work of other scholars like Curry (2017) who contends that Black

men and white men have historically been on different trajectories despite how ideas about male privilege and patriarchy are often deracialized. Because Black men have made sense of their manhood differently from white men, Black manhood must be theorized in ways distinct from white manhood. Additionally, scholars must also theorize about how white masculine patriarchy influences Black manhood within hip-hop.

Having briefly mapped the literature on hip-hop, culture, and identity, including the genre's early roots, hip-hop as Black cultural expression, and the genre in relationship to ideas about Black manhood, I turn to my analysis of *14FHD*. I suggest that the album chiefly demonstrates how Black boys and men simultaneously cope with and resist the racialized and gendered violence they routinely experience. By illuminating the vulnerabilities that Black men face and offering methods of resistance necessary for surviving a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society, I argue that Cole's album demonstrates how Resistive Black Masculinities contemporaneously manifest in mainstream hip-hop music through drawing on hip-hop's resistive politics.

Living within an Oppressive Society

14FHD attends to what it means for Black boys and men to live within an oppressive society, illuminating their social vulnerability. I argue that examining this social vulnerability helps to generate insight about how Black boys and men may organize ideas about manhood in relation to their social vulnerability. Specifically, I focus on Cole's lyrics about Black pain and loss, coping with pain and loss, and the necessity of informal mentorship. In doing so, I point out how Black boys and men are represented as navigating an oppressive society, emphasizing their social vulnerability, while also pointing out the various coping and make do strategies Black boys and Black

men are represented as practicing. I suggest that these strategies demonstrate how Black boys and men are resilient despite their social vulnerability.

Cole often discusses Black male loss and pain through his relationships to other Black men such as his friends, music industry peers, and his biological father. To be sure, I do not mean to suggest that all or even most of the loss and pain Cole raps about is caused directly by the Black men in and outside of his life. Instead, Cole shows that the loss and pain Black men often experience comes from their attachment to other Black men who are removed from or are at risk of being removed from their lives through dispossession and murder. Calling attention to his relational attachment to Black men on "January 28th," Cole raps "This for my niggas that was tossed in the graves / Every so often I fade deep in my thoughts / And then get lost in the days / We used to play before your coffin was made." Cole continues "Just got the call nigga got caught with a stray / Hope he's okay." Paying homage to the friends in his childhood that have died prematurely, Cole highlights how Black loss and pain manifests in Black men's lives through their relational attachments to those that have previously died or risk dying. When Cole raps "This for my niggas that was tossed in the graves," Cole reminds us that U.S. American society often figures Black men's lives as worthless and, by extension, disposable. In other words, Black men's lives can be "tossed" away with little concern and without recourse. Suffering in this way seems common in a white supremacist society ostensibly committed to the imprisonment, incarceration, and murder of Black boys and men. Cole's relationship to his friends who have died or face the risk of dying highlights his proximity to Black loss and pain in a society violent against Black men.

Living with the reality that Black men's lives are expendable, then, becomes key to understanding what it means to be Black and male in U.S. American society.

Cole's album lyrically depicts the ways he copes with pain and loss through owning up to the ways he has attempted to bury and mask his feelings. For Cole, this is understood as necessary for survival in a U.S. American society committed to the murdering of Black men. In "03' Adolescence," Cole raps about having an absent biological father and the disappointment he experienced as a result. Specifically, Cole raps "I ain't grow up with my father, I ain't thinkin' 'bout that now / Fast forward four years or so from now I'll probably cry / When I realize what I missed, but as of now my eyes are dry." Cole continues, "I'm trying to stay alive / In the city where too many niggas die / Dreamin' quiet trying to dodge a suit and tie." Rapping about the feelings of loss and pain that can come with having an absent father, Cole speaks to how Black boys and men often feel compelled to disallow themselves from thinking about the things that make them cry. For Cole, burring his feelings of loss and pain about not growing up with his biological father is necessary given his desire to live. Though admitting that he may cry about his absent biological father in the future when thinking about the impact of his absence, Cole points out that in the present his focus must be on staying alive in an oppressive society where too many Black men die. For Cole, crying about his absent father is an afterthought, a privilege he does not feel is readily afforded to him given more pressing concerns such as the surviving an oppressive society where Black boys and men are routinely murdered. Withholding feelings, then, as Cole points out, functions as a coping mechanism, allowing for survival in a patriarchal white supremacist society.

Cole's album frames Black boys' and men's struggle in an oppressive U.S. American society through mentorship. In doing so, Cole's music illuminates how patriarchal white supremacy's emphasis on material wealth manifests among Black boys and how they are forced to participate in the illegal economy to ensure their survival in a social context where they have little economic mobility. Reflecting on a conversation he had with a friend as a teenager, Cole raps in "03' Adolescence" "I complimented how I see him out here getting his cash / And just asked, 'What a nigga gotta do to get that? / Put me on,' he just laughed." Impressed by his friend's newfound wealth, Cole's lyrics highlight the social significance associated with materialism among teenage boys as a form of social capital inculcated by patriarchal white masculinity and how that increased social capital may mean participating in the illegal economy for some Black boys. Though Cole represents himself as naïve and immature in his desire to sell drugs, his friend is shown as wise vis-à-vis his limited though socially informative experiences. Authenticated through his struggle, Cole's friend is framed as a mentor for navigating Black boyhood when Cole recounts how his childhood friend responded to his inquiry about selling drugs: "'Nigga, you know how you sound right now? / If you wasn't my mans / I would think that you a clown right now.'" Cole's friend continues "'Listen, you everything I wanna be that's why I fucks with you / So how you looking up to me when I look up to you? / You bout to go get a degree.'" Despite his participation in the illegal economy, Cole's portrays his friend as a mentor, instructing him to go to college as an alternative. In addition to encouraging him to go to college, Cole's song highlights how Black boys and men draw on their own struggle to help mentor those around them. Still from his friend's perspective, Cole raps "I'ma be stuck with two choices: / Either

graduate to weight or selling number two / For what? A hundred bucks or two a week? / Do you think that you would know what to do if you was me?" Here, Cole's friend acts like a mentor by pointing out the very few options that Black boys and young Black men sometimes have with regard to their economic survival in an oppressive U.S. American society. As Cole represents in this song, it is his friend's experiential struggle that allows him to act as a mentor. His friend's informal mentorship, as Cole demonstrates in this song, can have a significant impact in Black boys' and young Black men's lives. For example, Cole raps "I felt ashamed to have ever complained about my lack of gear / And thought about how far we done came / From trailer park to a front yard with trees in the sky" following the exchange. To this end, Cole demonstrates how Black boys' and young Black men's friendships with each other can work as a form of mentorship authenticated by experiential struggle in a patriarchal white supremacist society.

Illuminating how Black boys and men are represented as socially vulnerable such as through their proximity to death, Cole's album demonstrates how Black boys and men are socially situated in an oppressive society. Cole's lyrics help map the experiences that many Black boys and men face, illuminating their experiences in relation to social vulnerability. Though represented in ways highlighting their social vulnerability navigating an oppressive society, *14FHD* also shows that Black boys and men are resilient in their ability to cope with loss and pain and to make do through informal mentorship offered by those in their communities such as a friend.

Social Awareness in an Oppressive Society

Foregrounding how Black men are situated as socially vulnerable in a patriarchal white supremacist society, *14FHD* presents a Resistive Black Masculinity where Black

men such as hip-hop artists cultivate social awareness about important issues facing Black people, communities, and Black musical genres. Specifically, Cole raps about how Black men are predominantly represented through stereotypes, limiting what it means to be a Black hero and how competitiveness among hip-hop artists within the genre can be harmful to Black communities. In doing so, Cole lyrics help cultivate social awareness about important issues that impact Black people and communities but that often go undiscussed. I suggest that Cole's investment in social awareness represents a hip-hop sensibility borrowing from the genre's historical commitment to illuminating white supremacist society's injustices against Black people and communities. Subsequently, I argue that this investment in social awareness, forming a hip-hop sensibility, helps render Resistive Black Masculinities legible in the contemporary moment.

Demonstrating his investment in cultivating social consciousness, Cole uses *14FHD* to point out how Black men have been narrowly defined in mass media through objectifying stereotypes that frame them as poverty stricken and unintelligent. These stereotypes about Black men have existed for centuries in ways that have functioned as mechanisms for controlling Black men through instilling fear and panic within the general public (Curry, 2017). Curry (2017) points out that these stereotypes have been so powerful in U.S. American society that they have been used as analytical frameworks for examining and Black maleness. In "G.O.M.D.," Cole raps "Why every rich black nigga gotta be famous / Why every broke black nigga gotta be brainless / Uh, that's a stereotype." By asking why poor and working-class Black men are so often represented as unintelligent, Cole points out how the mass media forecloses alternative analyses of poverty. These foreclosed alternatives could include various experiences of systemic

oppression related to race including racism-based unemployment, felony convictions that lead to a lack of job prospects, underemployment or underpayment, housing discrimination, and the costs of childcare. In other words, Cole calls attention to how being broke, Black, and male is often not meaningfully placed in conversation with important factors that help to economically disenfranchise Black men in the first place. Instead, Black men who are economically disenfranchised depicted as incompetent and therefore responsible for their economic deficiency. Simultaneously, Cole points out that when wealthy Black people are represented on television, they are often celebrities, highlighting how representations of Black success are narrow when the exist at all. In "January 28th," Cole raps "What's the price for a Black man life? / I check the toe tag, not one zero in sight / I turn the TV on, not one hero in sight / Unless he dribble or he fiddle with mics." In addition to pointing out how Black lives seem not to matter in a patriarchal white supremacist society through the symbolism of death that the toe tag beckons, Cole highlights the lack of Black heroes in mass media and particularly on television. As Cole notes, when there are representations of Black heroes on television, they are either basketball players or musicians. These limited representations provide very few heroes for Black children, leaving them with few Black role models and suggesting that Black men must be exceptional to be heroes. Moreover, Black heroes as musicians and basketball players that are represented, despite their importance, are not only narrowly conceived but are not often achievable. By calling attention to how Black men are represented through stereotypes, Cole's music helps generate awareness.

Related to the lack of prioritization exercised by Black hip-hop artists, Cole raps at length about how an emphasis on competitiveness among Black artists in hip-hop

music has been detrimental to the Black community. In “Fire Squad,” Cole does this through reframing what it means to be a King. Deconstructing this notion, Cole raps in the song’s outro “We all kings / (We all kings nigga) / Kings of ourselves first and foremost / (True),” emphasizing how important it is for Black male artists to make decisions about their actions within the industry. Cole continues rapping: “While the people debate who's the king of this rap game / Here comes lil' ol' Jermaine / With every ounce of strength in his veins / To snatch the crown from whoever y'all think has it.” Cole points out that while Black men are “Kings of ourselves,” the idea of any one man wearing a crown denoting him as the king of rap is merely discursive. Cole also represents himself as winning this elusive crown. Through the crown symbolizes power and competitiveness, Cole represents himself as mostly uninterested. For Cole, the fame that comes with winning a hip-hop crown acts as a way to identify and critique the power and competitiveness in mainstream hip-hop music to his audience, distinguishing him from other mainstream rappers. In other words, Cole represents himself as having achieved widespread success so he can circulate his socially conscious music aimed at deconstructing ideas about power and competitiveness within the mainstream genre. For example, Cole raps “But rather than place it on his head (…) / With a flash and a bang the crown disintegrates / And falls to the Earth from which it came / It's done / Ain't gonna be no more kings.” Cole then leaves his listeners with a warning: “Be wary of any man that claims [to be a king] / Because deep down he clings onto the need for power / The reality, he's a coward / Ultimately he's scared to die.” In doing so, Cole points to the importance of being skeptical of those claiming to be a king within the genre as it points

to a need for power. This social awareness becomes an important template for resisting and living within a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society as Black men.

Highlighting how Black men are socially vulnerable in an oppressive society, Cole's album represents a Resistive Black Masculinity where Black men such as hip-hop artists use their music to discuss issue like racist stereotypes in the media and how competitiveness among hip-hop artists can be harmful. In doing so, Cole's album presents a Resistive Black Masculinity, emphasizing awareness around issues impacting Black people, communities, and the genre. Drawing from early hip-hop's investment in illuminating issues around social justice, Cole's lyrics constitute a hip-hop sensibility that helps make Resistive Black Masculinities knowable in the contemporary moment.

Love, Struggle, and Unity

14FHD's frames love as central for working through pain. I argue that this emphasis on love is especially important for Black people and communities carving space for existence within a patriarchal white supremacist society. Specifically, Cole's album speaks to the importance of self-love, the ability to find the beauty in the struggle, and realizing the power in love. In doing so, love, an important component of Black nationalism invested in combating internal oppression and bringing Black people together, acts as a hip-hop sensibility. I suggest that this hip-hop sensibility, emerging throughout *14FHD*, helps to render Resistive Black Masculinities visible.

Rapping about self-love's importance, Cole draws on Black nationalist ideals that help to undo the psychological oppression Black people and communities have often faced. By drawing on Black nationalist ideals, Cole's album not only demonstrates a Resistive Black Masculinity in mainstream hip-hop music, his album offers tremendous

insight into how these masculinities are made knowable through their emphasis on hip-hop sensibilities such as self-love. In “Love Yourz,” which is about the importance of loving yourself and your life and not desiring to live other people’s lives, Cole raps “No such thing as a life that's better than yours / No such thing as a life that's better than yours (Love yours).” Here, Cole speaks to the importance of self-love, based on the idea that every life has intrinsic value, and, by extension, no life is quantifiably better than another’s. This message is particularly important for Black people and communities that are routinely exposed to media messages that suggest that the lives Black people live are trivial and unimportant unless they are exceptional (e.g., a professional athlete, musician). By telling his listeners that there is “No such thing as a life that's better than yours,” Cole reminds his listeners that their lives, regardless of their sex, gender, sexuality, and race, have value despite pervasive messages in the mass media suggesting otherwise. To be sure, I do not mean to suggest that Cole’s lyrics are important because they frame all people as equal or that individuals be content with their social situatedness. Instead, I argue that Cole’s lyrics emphasizes an individual’s intrinsic value despite their social situatedness, a message particularly important for Black people and communities and that echoes and refreshes the Black Lives Matter movement. Through rapping about the importance of self-love, Cole’s lyrics help to construct a Resistive Black Masculinity where Black men openly express the importance of love. Championed by a popular mainstream rapper like Cole, lyrics about love’s importance, becomes a defining component of Cole’s Resistive Black Masculinity. An emphasis on self-love, then, becomes one way that Resistive Black Masculinities are made legible.

Pointing out that there is “beauty in the struggle” and “ugliness in the success” *14FHD* encourages listeners to find value within their lives despite how ordinary their lives may seem while highlighting the complications that comes with success such as those Cole has experienced navigating the mainstream hip-hop music industry. In doing so, Cole’s lyrics work to destabilize notions about lives with struggle being unbearable and lives commonly considered as successful being without struggle or pain, reflecting his experience as both a Black man and popular mainstream hip-hop artist. In “Love Yourz,” for example, Cole raps “Fake niggas, mad snakes / Snakes in the grass let a nigga know that he arrived / Don't be sleepin' on your level / 'Cause it's beauty in the struggle, nigga (Beauty, beauty).” Drawing from his experiences as a mainstream hip-hop music artist, Cole points out that things such as “fake niggas” and “snakes in the grass” act as markers of success in the hip-hop music recording industry. In doing so, Cole highlights the difficulties that can come with success within the industry such as lacking trust and not being able to count on those around you. Moreover, Cole asks his listeners not to sleep on their level, which is to say not to devalue their lives just because they have not met the same success. Instead, Cole expresses to his audience that there is beauty in the struggle. In doing so, Cole asks his audience to consider what it means to live a fulfilling life beyond dominant ideas about what it means to be successful. This sentiment is echoed again in “Love Yourz” when Cole raps the following:

> It's beauty in the struggle, ugliness in the success / Hear my words or listen to my signal of distress / I grew up in the city and though sometimes we had less / Compared to some of my niggas / Down the block, man, we were blessed / And

> life can't be no fairytale, no once upon a time / But I be goddamned if a nigga don't be tryin'.

Cole also points out that despite struggling financially while growing up, he still believed that his family was blessed compared to the obstacles he understood his peers to be navigating. In addition, Cole acknowledges that though life cannot be a fairytale that is not to say that life cannot be better. Cole's notion of there being "beauty in the struggle," then, helps to destabilize discourses about a better life being one that is filled with money and material goods and instead points to the beauty that can be found in what appears to be the ordinary lives of Black people as Black nationalism emphasizes.. importantly, Cole points to the importance of loving oneself despite a lack of material items such as houses, cars, clothes, and bad "bitch[es]." For example, Cole raps in "Love Yourz":

> Always gon' be a bigger house somewhere, but nigga feel me / Long as the people in that motherfucker love you dearly / Always gon' be a whip that's better than the one you got / Always gon' be some clothes that's fresher than the ones you rock / Always gon' be a bitch that's badder out there on the tours / But you ain't never gon' be happy 'til you love yours.

Rejecting the importance of having "a bitch that's badder" and an excess of material goods such cars, houses, and clothes, Cole's album highlights the importance of loving yourself and the life that you do have as a prerequisite for happiness. Drawing on Black nationalism, Cole represents a Resistive Black Masculinity where women and material goods are decentered while love is prioritized. Love, then, acts as a hip-hop sensibility, helping to make Resistive Black Masculinities legible in the contemporary moment.

14FHD represents a Resistive Black Masculinity in mainstream hip-hop music where Black men not only express the importance of self-love as a prerequisite for happiness in a patriarchal white supremacist society where Black people and communities often struggle but highlights the importance of love for its ability to bind and unite people. Framing love as a glue for holding people together, Cole raps in "Note to Self "I've got a feeling that there's somethin' more / Something that holds us together / (…) / The strangest feeling but I can't be sure / Something that's old as forever / (…) / Love, love, love, love." Characterizing love as a strange feeling that is hard to identify and "old as forever," Cole underscores the important of love in constituting community.

Highlighting the pain that Black people and communities face, Cole's album offers love as a way to carve space for living within an oppressive U.S. American society. Moreover, Cole speaks to the importance of self-love, the ability to find the "beauty in the struggle," which encourages audiences to love their lives, and realizing love's power in constituting community. Through love, Cole's album demonstrates a hip-hop sensibility, drawing on Black nationalism's emphasis on combating psychological oppression and building strong Black communities. This hip-hop sensibility, emphasizing the important of self-love and love for Black lives and communities, helps construct and make Resistive Black Masculinities legible in the Black Lives Matter era.

Building a Strong Black Brotherhood

Foregrounding love and social awareness as hip-hop sensibilities, Cole's album speaks to the importance of a strong Black brotherhood for building community and addressing issues impacting Black people. By speaking to the importance of a Black brotherhood, which goes beyond men to include all genders, in conversation with the

aforementioned hip-hop sensibilities, Cole's album demonstrates a Resistive Black Masculinity within contemporary mainstream hip-hop. Though not the only transgressive Black masculinity, Cole's Resistive Black Masculinity helps to deconstruct prominent stereotypes about Black men as emotionally divested from their communities.

Helping to frame his Resistive Black Masculinity in *14FHD* through a strong Black brotherhood, Cole openly expresses love for his brothers, emphasizing the importance of homosocial relationships for Black men. For example, Cole raps in "January 28th" "I brought you niggas with me cause I love you like my brothers / And your mothers' like my mother." Comparing his friends to his biological brothers and their mothers like his own, Cole's lyrics illuminate his bond with his male peers. This depiction offers a positive representation of Black male friendships, seemingly rare in mainstream hip-hop music (Rose, 2008). Preempting how competitiveness could work to ruin his brotherly friendships, Cole raps in "January 28th" "Think we need a plan of action / The bigger we get the more likely egos collide, it's just physics / Please let's put our egos aside, you my niggas." Cole then goes on to rap "And should our worst tendencies turn us into enemies / I hope that we remember these / Nights fulla Hennessey." Here, Cole points to the importance of bonding over alcohol consumption to bring Black men together. Comparing his friends to biological brothers that share the same mother, Cole constructs a brotherhood invested in togetherness over competition, success, and moving dominant discourse within hip-hop away from economic and material value. This emphasis on a strong Black brotherhood becomes important for understanding a Resistive Black Masculinity in the contemporary moment.

Similar to how a big brother often acts as a role model to his younger brother, Cole expresses the importance of modeling positive behavior based on his love for other mainstream hip-hop music artists like Drake, Kendrick Lamar, and Wale. In "Note to Self," Cole expresses "Man, shout out to Drizzy Drake, Kendrick Lamar, Wale, Im so happy to be peers with y'all niggas and consider y'all niggas friends." Characterizing Drake, Lamar, and Wale as friends, Cole then apologizes for having "snatch[ed] the crown right quick," a reference to his song on the album "Fire Squad" where Cole raps about the need for Black music artists to stop competing over crowns and instead focus on togetherness. Specifically, Cole states "I'm sorry I had to come snatch the crown right quick. I had to do it to show niggas it ain't no more motherfuckin' crowns man. We gotta be the example, we gotta show these niggas man, it's all love at the top." Emphasizing how important it is for Black male hip-hop artists to abandon the competitiveness they articulate through ideas about being kings and wearing crowns, Cole expresses the importance of showing others that some contemporary mainstream hip-hop's music motivated by love rather than an investment in competition that manifests through discourses about kingship. Specifically, Cole expresses "it's our responsibility to show these niggas man it's love up here. Niggas want beef, niggas want drama, fuck that we comin' together." Rejecting dominant themes in hip-hop music such as "beef" and "drama," Cole constructs a Resistive Black Masculinity where Black men reject these dominant themes within the industry and come together to model positive behavior much like how an older brother might serve as a role model for his younger brother.

The brotherhood that Cole's lyrics espouse as an extension of his Resistive Black Masculinity is one that is invested in coming together, looking at each other, and loving

each other to address important issues impacting Black communities. Cole draws specific attention to the turmoil that unfolded in Ferguson, Missouri following the death of Michael Brown on August 9, 2014. In "Note to Self," Cole expresses "Shout out to everyone in Ferguson right now still ridin', still ridin'." Cole, then, expresses "Everybody else asleep, y'all still ridin'." Here, Cole recognizes the ways that Black and anti-racist Ferguson residents are still working to illuminate issues around racial justice while also calling attention to how many white residents are paying little attention to the uprising. Importantly, Cole points out that the problems unfolding in Ferguson have roots that are much more extensive, playing out on a national level. Specifically, Cole expresses "it's bigger than Ferguson, man that shit is fucking nationwide man." Acknowledging the racial injustice that unfolded in Ferguson, Cole offers a way for affected people to address and cope with the pain and trauma of police violence and murder: "We gotta come together, look at each other, love each other." Speaking specifically to Black people, Cole expresses "We share a common story nigga that's pain, struggle. And guess what man, we can come together, and that's one thing that's goin' do it, that's love." Here, Cole speaks to the importance of unity, looking at each other, and loving one another. In doing so, Cole helps to frame a brotherhood invested in love, unity, and collective struggle. These characteristics around brotherhood help define and, by extension, illuminate Resistive Black Masculinities.

By emphasizing love and social awareness as hip-hop sensibilities, *14FHD* highlights the importance of a strong Black brotherhood for community building and attending to problems affecting Black people. In doing so, Cole's album demonstrates a Resistive Black Masculinity within contemporary mainstream hip-hop. Demonstrating an

investment in love and community, this Resistive Black Masculinity helps deconstruct prominent stereotypes about Black men as unexpressive and emotionally divested.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I used Cole's autoethnographic album *14FHD* as a case study examining how the popular artist musically portrays what it means to live within and resist an oppressive U.S. American society. I was guided by the following research question: *How do forms of cultural expression created by Black media creators (e.g., authors, artists, writers, directors, and producers) define the contours of Resistive Black Masculinities and what is the role of hip-hop sensibilities in this process?* In answering this question, I have argued that Cole's album represents a Resistive Black Masculinity where Black men resist the ways that they are socially vulnerable. For example, while Cole's album depicts how Black men are socially vulnerable through their relationship to Black male death and loss, *14FHD* also highlights how Black men cope with such loss through managing their emotional vulnerability. Additionally, Cole represents a Resistive Black Masculinity where Black men draw on Black nationalism to advocate for social awareness around how Black people are depicted in the media, love, including self-love, and coming together as a community to heal. In doing so, Cole's album not only transgress common stereotypes about Black men as invulnerable and unemotional but provides a template for understanding how Black men are represented both as socially vulnerable and resistant in mainstream hip-hop music during the Black Lives Matter era.

Additionally, I have argued that Cole's album demonstrates a hip-hop sensibility, which helps to render Resistive Black Masculinities legible during the Black Lives Matter era. This hip-hop sensibility manifests in Cole's album through how he discusses

Black male vulnerability, mirroring how hip-hop artists discussed urban Black poverty and related issues in an oppressive U.S. American society since the genre's conception. Borrowing from Black nationalism's resistive politics, this hip-hop sensibility also manifests through Cole's lyrics about self-love and community. To this end, the hip-hop sensibility that manifests through Cole's music can be characterized by speaking out about Black male vulnerability and the importance of love and community. Based on this case study, I contend that these components help make Resistive Black Masculinities legible in mainstream hip-hop music during the Black Lives Matter era.

This chapter focused on how Resistive Black Masculinities and the hip-hop sensibilities that help inform and render legible these masculinities are depicted in mainstream hip-hop music. In the following chapter, I explore how Black men are represented as socially vulnerable in movies. In doing so, I discuss the interracial buddy movie *Blindspotting* (2017) and argue that it depicts a vulnerable Black masculinity through the character Collin, contrasting with the masculinity represented by his white male best friend Miles in ways that work to deconstruct ideas about a universal male privilege. Thus, as I will argue in chapter five, Resistive Black Masculinities and the hip-hop sensibilities that inform them can include not only coping with Black male loss and an emphasis on Black social awareness, love, and community but also calling out white masculinity and using rap as a medium for critiquing patriarchal white supremacy during the Black Lives Matter era where Black men continue to be socially vulnerable.

CHAPTER FIVE: "FUCK YOU KNOW ABOUT BEING SCARED?": BLACK MASCULINITY, WHITENESS, AND MALE PRIVILEGE IN *BLINDSPOTTING*

On January 18, 2018, *Blindspotting* (2018) made its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival, and the film was released to general audiences six months later. Written by Daveed Diggs and Rafael Casal, who both also star in the movie, Carlos López Estrada's *Blindspotting* (2018) appears much like an interracial buddy comedy about two friends working for the same moving company in Oakland, California (Montague, 2018). Showcasing their artistic talent throughout the movie, Hamilton's Diggs, a biracial rapper, and Casal, a white spoken word poet, use the movie to illuminate the racial tensions and class differences heightened by Oakland's gentrification (Debruge, 2018). These racial and class tensions play out through the friendship between Collin (played by Diggs) and Miles (played by Casal). Highlighting how Collin and Miles are situated differently in a gentrifying and, by extension, whitening Oakland, Zacharek (2018) describes "[w]hite people with money are moving in, displacing longtime locals and changing the face of the city. Collin and Miles resent those changes, but it's clear that Collin has so much more to lose" (p. 53). Through this difference of experience, *Blindspotting* (2018) provides cultural insight about how Black men are situated vulnerably and how white men, even when sharing a lower-class status, still benefit from not being Black. Exploring the ways that race, gender, and class converge, Estrada's movie presents ideas about racialized masculinity that help provide a template for complicating universal ideas about male privilege and patriarchy. *Blindspotting* (2018) does so by drawing on prominent themes that also organize much of the hip-hop musical

genre. This connection, between the movie and hip-hop, is aided by the starring actors' real-life talent, which allows the film to "[blend] comedy with drama, adding a hip-hop flavor" (p. 16). Much like a hip-hop album, Estrada's movie addresses issues like racism, toxic masculinity, and the murdering of unarmed Black men by police.

Much of *Blindspotting's* (2018) focus on intersectional identity emerges through the increasingly complicated friendship between Collin and Miles. Referencing interracial buddy movies like *The Defiant Ones* (1958), *Lethal* Weapon (1987), and *48 Hours* (1982), Corey (2018) points out that *Blindspotting* (2018) is part of a U.S. American popular culture tradition "in which a [B]lack guy and a white guy face the world together" (p. 52). Corey (2018) continues that in these movies "the usual power dynamic is upended. It is the white guy who is more callow and has a less realistic understanding of the world" (p. 52). However, what makes the relationship between Collin and Miles unique is that they are more than "buddies." Instead, as Corey (2018) notes, "Miles (the 'white' one) and Collin are intensely connected friends who have had each other's backs since they were kids, and this conjoined identity is central to their understanding of their place in the world" (p. 52). However, Collin and Miles are just as different as they are similar. Pointing out this contrast, Lang (2018) notes that while Collin is a cautious Black man nearing the end of his parole, Miles, his reckless white friend, is focused on demonstrating his disidentification from whiteness and his identification with Black culture through his identity as an Oakland native. Though *Blindspotting* (2018) offers no answers, it does pose questions about "what it means to live, love, and interrogate the world around us in this current moment" (Montague, 2018, p. 72).

In this chapter, I use the interracial buddy movie *Blindspotting* (2017) as a case study for examining Black men's vulnerable relationship to the world around them including their relationship to whiteness and white masculinity. First, I argue that Blindspotting (2017) represents Black men as vulnerably situated in relation to gentrification, the criminal justice system, Black death and trauma, and white masculinity. Second, foregrounding how Black men are made vulnerable through their relationship to white masculinity specifically, I argue that *Blindspotting* (2017) represents Black men as resistant. Though Black men are victimized by white masculinity, this chapter highlights how Black men are also represented as working to resist this victimization and the vulnerability it causes. Specifically, I focus on how Collin identifies and characterizes Miles' white masculinity and how hip-hop in the movie acts as a way for Black men to critique patriarchal white supremacy. I point out how ideas about resistance help to nuance ideas about Black manhood.

Hood Movies, Hip-Hop Movies, and Black Masculinity

Directed by young Black men, New Black Realism movies became increasingly popular in the 1990s. At the time, movies within this genre typically included the postindustrial city as the backdrop, young Black men as main characters, and nihilistic attitudes and beliefs (Bauch, 2013). Movies like *Friday* (1995), for example, chronicled Black boys' and men's experiences growing up, surviving, and living preciously in dangerous neighborhoods while adopting apathetic attitudes about the poverty, violence, and hopelessness that surrounded them (Boylorn, 2017). As a cinematic style, Diawara (1993) points out that New Black Realism has often been used to characterize popular movies about Black people and ideas. Often including rap-actors, such as Ice Cube in

Boyz N the Hood (1991) and Tupac Shakur in *Juice* (1992), these movies used hip-hop culture, which had become synonymous with youth culture, to make the characters' clothing, vernacular, and worldview seem more real (Diawara, 1993). Bauch (2013) contends that New Black Realism movies were a response to Blaxploitation movies and their images about Black men, dismissed as being "rooted in a fantasy of liberation and Black Power rhetoric" (p. 258). More specifically, Bauch (2013) argues that those creating New Black Realism movies "exposed what they saw as the old fantasies of black masculinity, [revising] these images into a gritty reality" (p. 259). Further distinguishing between the two, Diawara (1993) points out that the Black masculinities represented in New Black Realism movies were far more complex than their predecessors. Whereas Blaxploitation movies represented Black men mostly as static from beginning to end, Black men in New Black Realism movies changed as they encountered and surmounted certain obstacles placed before them, maturing and developing a commitment to their community (Diawara, 1993). With hip-hop culture's prevalence in the 1990s, New Black Realism's Black masculinity resonated with many Black youth.

New Black Realism movies were also a response to what Bauch (2013) refers to as the politics of self-help, popularized during the Regan Administration and supported by some leaders in the Black communities. The politics of self-help asked Black youth to stop blaming others for their shortfalls and to, instead, take responsibility for their lives. Under this logic, individual action is perceived as solely responsible for determining an individual's character and success rather than a racial identity. Imbued in colorblindness, this rhetoric ignored how systemic oppression continued to wreak havoc in Black communities. Simpson (2008) explains that colorblindness emerges "from a

predominantly [w]hite experience of the world in which race is perceived not to influence our lived experience and negates the experience of people for whom race still matters very much" (p. 143). Ignoring centuries of racism, terror, enslavement, and genocide and their conceivable effects, Black youth were blamed for their oppression by political leaders in Washington, D.C. and by those in Black communities who bought into the politics of self-help and its colorblind logic. With popular culture rather than institutional politics as their vehicle for critique, young Black men, then, sought to illuminate the role that racisms continued to play in U.S. American society through New Black Realism (Bauch, 2013). Resisting the politics of self-help and its colorblind logic, New Black Realism acted as a response for young Black men to demonstrate how Black people and communities continued to be situated on the margins following the civil rights era. Advocating mostly for Black men, Diawara (1993) points out that New Black Realism movies were largely about this group's "initiation into manhood, the obstacles encountered that often result in death and separation, and the successful transition of some into manhood and responsibility toward the community" (p. 24). In effect, New Black Realism movies advocated for Black men who were viewed as endangered by New Black Realist movie makers (Diawara, 1993). Showing Black men maturing into adulthood, New Black Realism movies highlighted Black men's vulnerability in an oppressive society while resisting postracial fantasies about being Black and male following the Civil Rights era.

Boylorn (2017) points out that twenty-first-century hip-hop movies present Black men navigating new and old stereotypes and situations with hip-hop as the backdrop. Haupt (2017) points out that *Straight Outta Compton* (2015) draws on the conventions

employed in the hood movie genre and gangsta rap, such as trying to exercise agency, navigating social factors around racism, and surviving police brutality in a hostile environment. With fewer hip-hop movies featuring rapper-actors and narratives about hood violence, hip-hop movies from the early 2000s and throughout the 2010s centered Black men who survived their neighborhoods and who were trying to be fathers and citizens (Boylorn, 2017). While Black boys and young Black men rarely had the chance or the expectation of adulthood due to premature death, Boylorn (2017) argues that "twenty-first-century hip-hop films envision what black masculinity (and hence hip-hop) can look like when it is allowed to develop fully and mature" (p. 148). Foregrounding Black boys and young men's survival and maturation, Boylorn (2017) suggests that contemporary hip-hop movies may offer generative insight about Black masculinities, disrupting static and simplistic representations about Black men to showcase how these masculinities progress.

Vulnerability, Masculinity, and Black Lives Matter

Having mapped briefly mapped the literature on hood and hip-hop movie, I turn to the literature on movies created during the Black Lives Matter era. Locating these movies in same tradition of hood and hip-hop movies, I consider the ways that Black Lives Matter era movies continue to represent ideas about Black masculinity in conversation with vulnerability. Black Lives Matter was conceived following the murder of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman in 2013 and, as Linscott (2017) points out, the movement gained widespread recognition and increased membership after police murdered Michael Brown and Eric Garner in the months following. Subsequently, Black Lives Matter has come to be known for its activism around the murder of unarmed Black

men by vigilantes and police, illuminating the racism sewn into the nation's fabric. To be sure, Black Lives Matter has not limited itself to attend only to issues around racism and police brutality. Linscott (2017) points out that the movement, with various impetuses, includes support and activism around queerness, immigration reform, and economic justice. However, despite these impetuses, Black Lives Matter has come to be known by the public as a movement invested in highlighting anti-Black violence perpetrated by police against unarmed Black men. This public perception, of course, has been largely fueled by media discourses in the news and on social media, television, and in movies, representing the ways that Black Lives Matter has mobilized to illuminate and interrogate Black men's relationship to the U.S. American justice system. Given U.S. America's history with enslavement, genocide, and racial injustice and its long withstanding impact on attitudes and beliefs about racial minorities, these representations, of course, have not all been benevolent to the movement and its causes. Lipsitz (2015) points out that when unarmed Black men are fatally shot by police that hide evidence, the media blames the victim, and protestors are dismissed as racists for merely bringing up race. As Linscott (2017) points out, and as the current media terrain suggests, Black Lives Matter has made significant strides in shifting U.S. American political and cultural discourses about race and racial justice. However, few studies have sought to examine how Black Lives Matter has influenced political and cultural discourses in U.S. American popular culture. Emphasizing movies, this chapter attempts to alleviate this disparity.

Pointing to films such as *Selma* (2015), *12 Years a Slave* (2013), and *Straight Outta Compton* (2015), all released after Black Lives Matter emerged on the scene, Beverly (2017) contends that mourning, loss, Black bodies, and death have either

consciously or unconsciously been resurrected as major themes in movies. These movies, and similarly-themed television shows such as *Queen Sugar* (2016), "explore a range of issues, but each reshapes our thinking about loss and mourning by explicitly confronting the dialectics of visuality and visibility, centrality and marginalization, humanity and inhumanity" (Beverly, 2017, p. 89). Foregrounding how social conditions situate Black people as vulnerable in relation to the dominant culture, these themes centralize ideas about what it means to live within an oppressive white supremacist society. The vulnerability that Black people experience and navigate in U.S. American society, then, has come to act as way to think about Black ontology as represented in U.S. American popular culture. Using *Straight Outta Compton* (2015) to evidence how these themes emerge in movies specifically, Beverly (2017) describes:

> As members of the group leave an L.A. studio, a symbolic space of creative freedom, they are accosted by hostile police officers and made to lie prostrate on the concrete; this scene reenacts the ubiquity of surveillance and state power brought to bear on black bodies and against which #BlackLivesMatter constantly struggles (p. 90).

This scene from *Straight Outta Compton* (2015) illuminates how Black men specifically are often harassed by police merely for existing, which, while certainly not a new occurrence in U.S. American society, captures the rhetorical exigency motivating Black Lives Matter in the contemporary moment. Since *Straight Outta Compton* (2015) tells N.W.A.'s story as Black male rappers, the popular movie draws connections between the racial tensions in the 1980s and those mobilizing Black Lives Matter in the present and demonstrates the consistent presence of hip-hop in these discussions. This scene, like in

many of the movies that have been released following Black Lives Matter's conception, demonstrates the Black body's racialized vulnerability in relation to the state, which not only surveils Black men, but possess the power to harm and murder them without reproach both in the social context of the 1980s and today.

In hip-hop movies, both a mainstream and commercial phenomenon, attention is placed on the identities and aesthetics present in hip-hop music such as a focus on the working class, predominantly Black communities in urban settings, young Black men attempting to establish their agency, and a soundtrack featuring hip-hop music and its preceding genres like funk and soul (Bradley, 2017). Foregrounding hip-hop culture, these movies attempt to illustrate what it means to live within an oppressive white supremacist society. In doing so, these movies demonstrate the ways that Black men and communities in general continue to be socially situated in ways making them vulnerable. Simultaneously, these movies show, as hip-hop culture has, that Black men and communities are not just socially situated as vulnerable but that Black men and communities find ways to live within and resist an oppressive U.S. American society that refuses to acknowledge or take credit for Black people's social vulnerability.

Buddy Films, Whiteness, and Black Masculinity

Characterizing buddy movies as a genre, Gates (2004) contends that buddy movies usually feature two men and focus centrally on their relationship's growth and development. In these movies, Gillan (2001) notes that the pair usually overcomes their differences to form a singular heterosexual masculine identity. Tracing their trajectory, Guerrero (1993) points out that the interracial buddy movie was preceded by the 1960's white buddy movies, including *Easy Rider* (1969), *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*

(1969), and *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) as some of the most influential. Gates (2004) and Guerrero (1993) both note that white buddy movies during this time were understood as a critical reaction to the Women's Movement. Gates (2004) notes that with growing displeasure around women's desire for equality, white buddy films pivoted away from representing white men in romantic relationships with white women to instead represent relationships between two white buddies. Although interracial buddy movies like *The Defiant Ones* (1958) and *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), which both featured Sidney Poitier, were released in a cinematic climate that was dominated by white buddy films, these films, coupling a white male and Black male character, became more prominent during the 1980s. The interracial buddy movies of the 1980s, like many movies during this decade, focused on interracial bonding (Bauch, 2013). Guerrero (1993) and Gates (2004) contend that the move toward interracial buddy movies were incentivized by higher profits since they were believed to appeal to both Black and white audiences. Bonding in interracial buddy movies during this time often featured men coming together to solve a crime or another problem, obscuring issues around race (Bauch, 2013). Gates (2004) explains that while interracial buddy movies tend to feature both a Black man and a white man brought together for various reasons, these movies failed to address issues around racism or Black experiences in U.S. American society since these movies privileged representing problems that could be simplified and resolved between opening and closing credits. Representing ideas about Black men and masculinity narrowly, Gillan (2001) argues that the ideal Black character in an interracial buddy movie is one that is sanitized of a strong racial identity and demonstrates no significant cultural differences that have to be bridged before a relationship can be formed with their white

counterpart. Gillan (2001) also notes that in interracial buddy movies, the Black protagonist often imparts spiritual knowledge, heightens his buddy's heroism, guides his white buddy to maturity, and is willing to sacrifice himself for his white male friend.

In addition to acting as a promising site for exploring representations about Black masculinity, interracial buddy movies can offer valuable insight for exploring ideas about how white masculinity gets represented in these movies and in relation to Black masculinity. Considering how ideas about whiteness manifest ideologically, Banjo and Fraley (2014) contend that "Power, privilege and a divinely-given entitlement to dominate other cultures is loaded in the construct of whiteness, and over time, it has emerged as a naturalized and superior way of interpreting the world" (p. 44). This understanding about whiteness, when place in conversation with the literature about white representation in movies such as the interracial buddy movies mentioned above, help to provide some context about how white men are represented in movies. Banjo and Fraley (2014) examine representations about whiteness in movies primarily about Black people and issues to determine whether they reinforce ideas about privilege, cultural tourism, and ignorance. In characterizing these representations about whiteness, Banjo and Fraley (2014) employ colloquialisms including the man, wannabe, and whitebread. Banjo and Fraley (2014) explain these terms in the following way:

> The wannabe presumes dissociation from a white supremacist identity via cultural appropriation. The man highlights a whiteness embedded with notions of power and privilege, while the whitebread offers insight into a white identity fearing a racist label while denying that (…) advantage is linked to whiteness (p. 45).

Foregrounding ideas about whiteness, including privilege and power, these terms help map how white people are represented in movies primarily depicting Black people and problems pervasively impacting Black communities. Though representations about whiteness are more complex, this taxonomy helps provide a foundation for thinking about how Black writers, directors, and producers have depicted whiteness and the ways that ideas about whiteness are representing as orienting Black people and communities. In another study about white characters in movies foregrounding Black people and issues impacting their communities, Banjo and Jennings (2017) point out that 93% of white characters in these movies highlighted racial difference. Moreover, Banjo and Jennings (2017) concluded that in these movies white characters "were depicted as keenly aware of racial differences but also uneasy about race, cultures, or ethnicities; ranges were from mild distrust to violence against others" (p. 300). By examining representations of white male characters in relation to Black male characters and the problems impacting their communities, important insight can be gained about how Black men's relational orientation to whiteness helps organize ideas about their masculinity.

Having briefly mapped the relevant literature, I turn to this chapter's analysis. Proceeding, I explore how *Blindspotting* (2017) presents a Black masculinity that foregrounds how Black men are socially vulnerable to the world around them. This vulnerability manifests through Collin's relationship to gentrification, the criminal justice system, Black death and trauma, and white masculinity. Second, foregrounding how Black men are made vulnerable through their relationship to white masculinity, I consider the different ways that Black men are represented as resistant. Specifically, I focus on how Collin identifies and characterizes Miles' white masculinity as privileged and how

hip-hop acts throughout the movie as a way for Black men to archive and critique patriarchal white supremacy. I conclude by offering some implications.

Representations of Vulnerable Black Manhood

Blindspotting (2017) presents a Black masculinity where Black men are situated as socially vulnerable within an oppressive U.S. American social context. In the movie, this social vulnerability manifests primarily though Oakland, California's gentrification, the Black male character Collin's relegation to the under-class through the criminal justice system, Collin's proximity to Black male death, and Collin's relationship to his white male friend Miles. Importantly, the white masculinity demonstrated through the character Miles perpetually places Collin's Black body at risk to violence and death. By examining how movies like *Blindspotting* (2017) represent interracial homosocial relationships, valuable insight can be generated around how Black masculinities come into contact with white masculinities. Specifically, I argue that representations about Collin's relationship to his community, the criminal justice system, and white masculinity, demonstrates how Black men's social vulnerability helps to organize ideas about Black manhood within an oppressive U.S. American social context.

Gentrification, Whiteness, and Class Tension

Though Oakland is a diverse city with an extensive history around Black expressive musical forms, the movie focuses on its gentrification and, by extension, whitening as a way to allude to the racial conflict that transpires throughout the movie. This whitening is demonstrated in the movie's opening where Oakland, California is first introduced as the setting. In the movie's opening credits, viewers immediately hear police sirens blaring and are shown images of an urban cityscape including one highway sign

that reads “Downtown Oakland.” Coupling urban imagery with a soundtrack of blaring police sirens, the movie suggests some attention to the racialized experiences people face navigating Oakland, particularly in relationship to the police. After establishing the setting for the movie, viewers are then shown Black youth dancing; however, the police sirens have stopped, and opera is playing. This rhetorical arrangement between the movie’s visuals and sounds alludes to the racialized conflict that plays out throughout the movie between best friends Collin and Miles in a gentrifying and, by extension, whitening Oakland. This conflict is also alluded to when viewers are shown a split screen featuring houses being constructed or perhaps remodeled on the left while a makeshift tent community is shown on the right, speaking to a class divide. Similarly, another split screen is shown in the opening credits where a Black man and woman are shown standing outside “San Pablo Market,” advertising “Groceries, Beer, Wine, EBT,” on the left while “Wholefoods Market” is shown on the right. While the image of San Pablo Market gives the impression that it may have been there for decades given the building’s worn down and heavily trafficked appearance, the Whole Foods Market appears new, barely visited, and out of place within Oakland’s urban landscape. These visuals and the sonic shift from police sirens to opera in the opening credits represent a culturally complex and gentrifying Oakland, highlighting division between poor Black Oakland natives and upper-class white people who have relocated. Beyond the opening credits, Collin and Miles experience the effects of Oakland’s gentrification when the convenience store they regularly patronize begins selling “green juice” for $10 a bottle. Oakland’s gentrification and whitening are explicitly referenced when Collin and Miles spot a white man with a beard riding a “tall-ass” bicycle. Observing the cyclist from the sidewalk,

Collin expresses to his friend "Oh, shit, tall-ass bike, big-ass beard." Miles replies "Oh, gentrification on a whole other level. Who are these people?" By representing Oakland as becoming increasingly whiter and more gentrified, *Blindspotting* (2017) alludes to the racial tension and class anxieties that threaten the men's friendship. Moreover, these tensions and anxieties help define the overall social context that the pair navigate throughout the movie in ways that organize ideas about identity.

Black Manhood, Criminal Justice, and the Underclass

Blindspotting (2017) presents a Black manhood where Black men are made vulnerable through their relationship to the criminal justice system. I argue that representations about Black men's relationship to the criminal justice system is important for understanding how Resistive Black Masculinities manifest in movies. Through a felony sentence, *Blindspotting* (2017) illustrates how Black men are relegated to an underclass that consequently exacerbates their precarity. Specifically, Collin is represented as being unable to find a place to live, being unable to report that he witnessed a police officer shoot an unarmed Black man in fear that it could result him being accused of a parole violation, and where his parole works to constrain his travel among other things. I suggest that these conditions help organize ideas about Collin's Black manhood, which, in turn, provides a foundation for understanding the character's Resistive Black Masculinity as represented in the movie. Moreover, despite Collin's status as a felon, which some may dismiss as a negative representation of Black masculinity, I suggest that the movie provides an illustration of Black male vulnerability that is not often represented.

First, *Blindspotting* (2017) represents Collin's Black manhood as oriented by the criminal justice system, exacerbating his social vulnerability. I argue that Collin's vulnerability, as represented in the movie, provides a foundation for understanding Resistive Black Masculinities since one must first be socially vulnerable before they can work to resist their vulnerability. For example, Collin is represented as socially vulnerable through his belief that it will be impossible to rent an apartment following his year-long probation sentence. When Collin's mother asks him why he can't get his own apartment rather than move back into the family home after his probation, Collin sarcastically remarks "Have you ever been convicted of a felony? If so, what is the nature of your crime?" Though encapsulated in sarcasm, Collin's belief that he will be unable to find a place to live following his probation demonstrates how Black men's relationship to the criminal justice system after having been convicted as a felon compounds their social vulnerability like denying them housing in ways consigning them to an underclass. In doing so, *Blindspotting* (2017) presents a Resistive Black Masculinity where Black men's social vulnerability is exacerbated by their relationship to the criminal justice system. This representation sheds light on how being convicted of a felony nuances Black men's vulnerability.

Second, *Blindspotting* (2017) conveys a Black masculinity where once Black men are relegated to an underclass due to their relationship to the justice system, they feel discouraged from reporting crimes and abuse since their proximity to conflict could threaten their freedom. For example, this happens when Colin decides not to reveal that he witnessed an unarmed Black man named Randall get murdered by a white male police officer. Since he witnessed the murder while out past his parole-mandated-curfew,

delayed by Miles' and a traffic light, he feels unable to report the incident at all. Collin expresses his rationale to Miles after being prompted by a news report on television that they both hear in a convenience store. Responding to the television reporter on the news who comments "After a pursuit in West Oakland last night, a dramatic standoff with police left one suspect dead," Miles asks Collin, "This the shit you saw?" and "What, then you just left?" Here, Miles suggests that Collin should have filed a report about the murder that he witnesses. This, however, speaks to Miles' privileged position as a white man who is not on probation, unlike his Black male friend who perpetually risks losing his freedom. Explaining his rationale to Miles, Collin expresses "I mean, it was after 11:00. What I'm supposed to do?" As Collin points out, he was out past his curfew. Subsequently, Collin expresses feeling that there were few available options since filing a report could mean being discovered for having violated the terms of his parole. In the same dialogue, Miles, confused by his decision not to file a report, reminds Collin "But you're a witness. You're not gonna leave like a statement or some shit?" Here again, Miles' suggestion illuminates his privileged position. Miles suggestion then prompts a sarcastic response from Collin who roleplays what he believes may have happened had he left a statement:

> Collin: "Oh, yeah. 'Hello, police? I'd like to report a murder you did. I was out after curfew. Yeah, I'm a convicted felon."
>
> Miles: "All right."
>
> Collin: "Back to jail? Yeah, tomorrow works for me. What time? For sho. Mmmm-hmmm. Yup. Okay."

Foregrounding his status as a convicted felon, Collin's response to Miles speaks to an underclass where Black men on probation choose not to report the crimes that they witness, including murder, because doing so could violate their parole. Simultaneously, Collin's response demonstrates how Black men may be especially cautious of reporting crimes to police since the same police are supposed to protect all citizens from harm and death but often murder unarmed Black men. In doing so, *Blindspotting* (2017) illustrates a Black male vulnerability that is not often discussed in popular movies. Collin's rationale contrasted by Miles' ignorance, precipitated by his white privileged, demonstrates how representations about Black men's vulnerability illustrates some of the challenges they must confront in an oppressive society.

Third, Colin's social vulnerability in relationship to the criminal justice system is represented in *Blindspotting* (2017) through various borders, acting as mechanisms for containment. Restricting when and where he can travel, these mechanisms include Collin's court mandated curfew and the Oakland parole boundary map. The parole map provides an illustration of the parameter that Collin cannot cross, restricting his mobility. In the movie, these borders work in ways harmfully impacting Black men. When viewers are first introduced to Collin, he is appearing before a judge following a two-month sentence. There, he is mandated to "proceed to a halfway house facility to begin [his] one-year probation period." The judge then tells Collin that he must abide by an 11:00 p.m. curfew, carry out designed chores, maintain employment, not travel outside Alameda County, and have no altercations with police under any circumstances. These mechanisms for containment help to police and discipline Collin's Black male body. In

addition, these mechanisms are what prevents Collin from filing a report after witnessing an unarmed Black man named Randall get murdered by a white police officer.

This is not the only way that Collin's life is impacted by the borders established by the criminal justice system. Collin's confinement to Alameda County prevents him from accepting work assignments from the moving company employing him. When briefed about an assigned job, Collin must reveal that he is unable to accept the assignment in Walnut Creek because his parole terms require him not to travel outside Alameda County. This leads to his assignment being given to someone else, potentially impacting Collin's livelihood. As represented in the movie these mechanisms for containment work in ways that are harmful to Black men. This includes discouraging Black men who are on parole from reporting crimes that they witness against other Black men. Consigned to an underclass by way of probation, *Blindspotting* (2017) presents a Black manhood where Black men cannot find housing, are discouraged from reporting crimes committed by police, and are forced to live within borders that act as mechanisms for containment. Illuminating many of the obstacles that Black men on probation face, *Blindspotting* (2017) represents a Black manhood where Black men's relationship to the criminal justice system exacerbates their social vulnerability in an oppressive society.

Highlighting how Black men on probation are made vulnerable through their relationship to the criminal justice, *Blindspotting* (2017) illustrates a Black male vulnerability that manifests through felony sentences, consigning Black men to an underclass. This underclass is one that is characterized by being unable to find a place to live, being unable to report witnessed crimes out of fear of being accused of a probation violation, and where parole can establish borders that are not supposed to be crossed,

constraining travel. These representations not only lay the foundation for a Resistive Black Masculinity, they illuminate many of the obstacles that Black men often face but that are often not meaningfully represented in popular movies.

Black Manhood, Murder, and Trauma

Blindspotting (2017) presents a Black masculinity where Black men understand the precariousness of their lives through watching Black men that look like them get murdered by police, demonstrating how Black men organize ideas about Black manhood in relation to their social vulnerability. Collin, who is on his way home after work, becomes frantic when the traffic light takes an excessive amount of time before finally turning green, putting him at risk of violating his parole. When the light finally does turn green and Collin begins to drive away, a terrified unarmed Black man named Randall runs up to the truck's hood. Collin, unsure about what is happening, yells "Yo! Yo, bruh!" before a police officer in pursuit demands Randall to "Stop!" Randall, however, continues to run while Collin asks himself "What the fuck?" Collin then watches the police officer draw his firearm and take aim before yelling "Stop!" again. Randall screams "Don't shoot! Don't shoot! Don't – " before Collin witnesses him get shot and murdered. Subsequently, Collin begins to panic, demonstrated through his heavy breathing. Collin, who is in shock, is then startled by another police officer arriving at the murder scene prompting him to leave: "Hey! Let's go. Hey, wake up! Let's go! Move! Move!" In this scene, Collin witnesses an unarmed Black man get murdered by a white male police officer, demonstrating how Black men are vulnerable to harm and death in a patriarchal white supremacist society. This not only causes Collin to panic after witnessing Randall's murder but traumatizes him. The trauma that Collin experiences

after witnessing Randall get murdered by police manifests through dreams and mental imagery that haunts him throughout the movie. When Collin wakes up the morning following the murder he witnesses to go on his regular run, he begins to relieve the traumatizing event through a flashback. Collin continues to relive this trauma every morning while running, demonstrating how severely he was traumatized. In addition to the unyielding mental imagery, Collin also comes across a roadside memorial, marking where Randall was murdered. As Collin begins to have his last flashback, specific attention is placed on the police officer's face. In this moment, it is clear that Collin is not only haunted by Randall's murder but also by the white male police officer that killed him. During this run, Collin passes a graveyard and begins to see Black men dressed in Black, many of them wearing hoodies, standing over each grave. With dozens if not hundreds of Black men standing over their graves, this scene invites audiences to think about Trayvon Martin and the murder of other Black boys and men by police, animating Black Lives Matter. Collin is not only unable to subdue the mental imagery that haunts him, other iconography like the roadside memorial and the graveyard he regularly runs by serve as material reminders that Black men live merely to die in a patriarchal white supremacist society. This representation in *Blindspotting* (2018) highlights how Black men, including convicted felons, are susceptible to mental health related issues despite how they are often stereotyped and represented as impervious to stress and trauma. Through representing how Black men experience stress and trauma through watching other men that look like them get murdered by police, the movie presents a vulnerable Black manhood where Black men learn through their exposure to Black male death that Black lives do not matter. Representations about Black male trauma and murder, then,

demonstrate how Black men are socially vulnerable and provides insight into the obstacles that Black men face living within a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society.

Vulnerable Black Manhood, Dangerous White Masculinity

Blindspotting (2017) presents a Black masculinity where Black men are made vulnerable through their relationship to white masculinity. This relational vulnerability helps to organize ideas about Black manhood in relation to white masculinity where Black men are the victims of white male privilege, illuminating how ideas about privilege are constructed as distinctively white and male throughout the movie. When the movie begins, for example, Collin and Miles are eating in their friend Deez's car when Miles finds a gun. This, of course, prompts Collin to become concerned since he only has three days left on probation: "Nigga, I got three days left on this probation, Miles, so let me on out of the car." Deez then confesses that he has various other guns in the car, making Collin, who does not want to violate his parole, even more uncomfortable. Despite voicing how uncomfortable he is in a car full of guns, Miles ignores his request while Deez expresses to Collin "Come on, quit being a bitch." After counting up to six guns, located in places all over the car, Collin expresses "Right, curfew. It's almost 11:00. I ain't trying to go back to jail." Miles then asks to purchase the gun Collin found in the backseat for $200, which Miles refers to as "Collin's gun." Before exiting the vehicle so that Deez can go on an Uber call, Collin proclaims a final time "Please let me out of this fucking car!" and "No Collin's gun. Let the record show this is not Collin's gun." This scene between Collin, Miles, and Deez, highlights how vulnerability helps to organize Black men's everyday lives while also highlighting how Black men may also come into contact with white male privilege in dangerous ways. Though Deez, a Black man, asks

Collin to "quit being a bitch," which does indeed perpetuate reductive hegemonic ideals about masculinity, this depiction does not evidence privilege. Though Deez, another Black man, does in fact place Collin in danger, it pales in comparison to the danger that Miles continually welcomes. In addition to being complicit with Deez in preventing Collins from exiting the vehicle despite numerous requests, risking a parole violation, Miles also demonstrates carelessness through continuing not to take his best friend's requests seriously. When Collin drops Miles off after leaving Deez's company, for example, Collin asks "When you got that gun on you, just don't tell me about it. Plausible deniability." In a joking manner, Miles responds "What gun are you talking about, Collin? Oh! Oh, do you mean this gun?" as he wields the gun. Collin then asks Miles to "Stop waving that shit around!" Miles, however, continues to not take Collin's request seriously: "This gun right here? This one right here, bruh?" Finally, Collin tells Miles "Get the fuck out. Get out. I gotta go. Curfew, nigga. Shit" before Miles tells Collin goodnight and leaves. Miles' behavior is reckless because it ignores the consequences it could have on Collin who could not only violate his parole through an altercation with police invited by Miles' gun but could also result in Collin missing his curfew. Never considering the consequences his actions could have for Collin, Miles' character exemplifies white male privilege. This white male privilege places Black men who are already situated vulnerably at risk by inviting danger for men that are not white.

Blindspotting (2017) presents a Black masculinity based on racist fantasies where Black men are made responsible for actions that they did not commit. For example, when Collin and Miles are doing a job together, Collin gets blamed for Miles' irresponsible actions, demonstrating how in a patriarchal white supremacist society Black man are

culpable even when innocent whereas white men are privileged insofar as they are rarely seen as or held responsible. Collin learns that he was blamed for Miles' actions when Val, his co-worker and former partner comes over to braid his hair. With only a few days left before regaining his freedom, Collin reminds Val "You know I'm a free bird tomorrow, right?" This prompts Val to share with Collin a report made against him.

Val: You gonna hang out of car window and curse at people then too?

Collin: Why would I do that?

Val: I don't know. You tell me. I got a complaint today that one of our trucks was just honking and yelling at people. A Black guy with dreads was just screaming at everyone.

Collin: Nah, nah, nah, that's… You don't have all the information.

Val: Okay.

Collin: So what happened, Miles was honking the horn because...

Val: Miles.

Collin: There was a dude that wouldn't get…

Val: Wait, Miles was honking?

Collin: He was the one who was honking the horn.

Despite Miles being the one behind the disturbance, which resulted in Val getting a phone call, Collin is the one who is blamed. Collin getting blamed for Miles' actions demonstrates how Black men are sometimes seen as guilty for the actions that they did not commit and that others project on them simply because they are Black and male. This wrongly assigned guilt also demonstrates how Collin's proximity to Miles, who is carefree and holds little regard for consequences, exacerbates his best friend's

vulnerability as not just a Black male but a Black male on probation; any trouble caused always risks jeopardizing Collin's safety, freedom, and life. To be sure, *Blindspotting* (2017) represents a Black masculinity where Black men are conscious about how Black men are often seen in stereotypical ways. Conveying his frustration about the mix-up to Val, Collin expresses "maybe this time it wasn't the Black guy with dreads." This representation about Black men's awareness in regard to often being wrongfully accused of actions and crimes they did not commit helps organize ideas about Black manhood in the movie.

Foregrounding representations about gentrification, Black men's relationship to the criminal justice system, their proximity to Black male death, and their relationship to white masculinity, *Blindspotting* (2017) illustrates how Black men are socially vulnerable within an oppressive U.S. American society. Having examined how Black men are represented as socially vulnerable in popular movies, I turn to the next section to consider how Black men work to resist their vulnerability. By considering how Black men are represented as vulnerable and resistant, I map the contours of a Resistive Black Masculinity as it emerges in popular movies.

White Masculinity, Black Masculinity, and Resistance

Blindspotting (2017) presents how Black men are often victimized by white masculinity through the movie's representation of Collin's and Miles' friendship. Though Black men are victimized by white masculinity, as I have argued throughout this chapter, Black men are also represented as working to resist the ways that they are situated as vulnerable. This is important for understanding Resistive Black Masculinities, foregrounding not only how Black men are situated vulnerably but also how Black men

work to resist this vulnerability. In *Blindspotting* (2017), this happens primarily in two ways. First, through the way that Collin eventually calls out Miles' privileged masculinity and, second, through the use of rapping as a way to organize Black men's seemingly ordinary experiences as they live within and resist an oppressive society. In doing so, I point out how ideas about resistance help to nuance ideas about Black masculinity.

First, *Blindspotting* (2017) presents a Resistive Black Masculinity through calling out and naming the ways that privileged white masculinities threaten Black men. After Miles and Collin run away from Sid's party, which became violent when Miles physically assaults Terry and begins shooting the gun he purchased, the pair begin to argue in an empty parking lot. A frustrated Collin shouts "Are you fucking crazy? It really had to go down like that, Miles, tonight? What the fuck, man, and then what? Then they gonna call the fucking cops, and they gonna shoot my Black ass and not you!" Miles responds with "What the fuck is wrong with you? You didn't do shit back there! "Furious at his decision to start a fight with Terry and discharge his gun, Collin criticizes Miles, highlighting his privilege as a white man. At the same time, Collin points out how Miles' recklessness could have resulted in getting his best friend killed. In other words, Collin points out how Miles' thoughtlessness as a rage filled, violent, and fragile white man could put his own body at risk. Despite Collin's important observation about Miles' recklessness, Miles can only acknowledge how Collin chose not to jump in the fight in support, further demonstrating his unawareness or concern for how his actions could endanger his Black male friend. After Collin reiterates how his friend's actions were "fucking stupid," Miles attempts to justify his actions by calling attention to his being a white man living in Oakland: "Look who the fuck I am. Where the fuck I am, Collin?

That's how the fuck I survive out here!" For Miles, rage and violence, act as a way to survive as a white man in Oakland. After some back and forth, Collin tells Miles "Nigga, you got something to prove to everybody!" In response, Miles expresses:

> Yeah? That's 'cause I'm livin' somewhere where everybody got me fucked up! You ain't gotta do shit! You ain't gotta… You ain't gotta worry about you changing up your clothes or your lifestyle. You ain't gotta worry about none of that shit! You're a big Black dude with fucking braids in Oakland! Nobody is misreading you, Collin."

Placing emphasis on clothing and lifestyle, Miles, again, articulates what he understands as necessary for survival as a white man in Oakland. Moreover, Miles points to Collin's size, Blackness, and braids as physical indicators ensuring his safety in Oakland. Speaking to Miles' privileged position in a whitening and increasingly gentrified city, he demonstrates no empathy or understanding about what it means for Collin to be "a big Black dude with fucking braids in Oakland." Calling Miles' privilege out, Collin expresses "You out here acting an ass like it ain't no fucking consequences for that shit. And every nigga who sees me thinks I do the same dumb, fuckin' ignorant, gun-carrying shit that you do!" Before turning around to walk away, Collin then expresses to Miles "But I've been taking care of my shit! I'm fucking… Don't I do our timecards every week? I pick us up. I keep you out of dumb shit, and then what do you do? You go out and you buy a fucking gun for what? For your family? You are the nigger that they are out here looking for!" In addition to pointing out Miles' privilege in never having to contemplate the consequences of his actions, Collin points out how he, unlike Miles, exercises responsibility and care for both himself and his best friend. Most importantly,

however, Collin points out how Miles' actions rather than the Black men who get racially stereotyped as violent criminals are what should be raising suspicion from police. Confronting Miles, Collin demonstrates a Resistive Black Masculinity where Black men identify and call out the ways that white masculinity are harmful to Black men. In doing so, *Blindspotting* (2017) presents a Resistive Black Masculinity where Black men, despite being socially vulnerable, work to resist white masculinity. Represented as something that Black men not only do not have but must resist, the harm that Miles' white masculinity risks causing Collin not only demonstrates how Black men are victims to white masculinity but how privilege helps to character white masculinity rather than Black masculinity during the Black Lives Matter era.

Second, *Blindspotting* (2017) presents a Resistive Black Masculinity through rapping. Though Collin and Miles often rap together, demonstrating their friendship and collective investment in Black forms of cultural expression, I focus particularly on the one instance in the movie where Collin raps without Miles' musical participation. This happens toward the end of the movie when Collin and Miles arrive on the job at a house in the suburbs with their moving truck. Upon arriving, the pair are greeted by an emotionally troubled white mother and her child who appear to be on their way out. Before departing, she mentions that her husband is in the basement. As Collin walks through the house, he notices several face down picture frames. Bitten by curiosity, Collin turns a picture frame over to discover a family photograph featuring the white male police officer he witnessed shoot and murder Randall. Overcome by emotion, Collin heads to the basement. Upon locating the officer, Collin eventually pulls out the gun belonging to Miles that he has kept in his possession. In this moment, Collin, who has

been haunted by Randall's murder, takes control over the power to determine who lives or dies, seizing this power from the white male police officer. With the gun still pointed in the officer's direction, Collin asks "Does this scare you, huh? Fuck you know about being scared? Were you afraid someone was gonna come find you? Huh?" Though emotions such as fear are not often associated with Black men because of racist stereotypes depriving them of the capacity to feel, Collin, by asking "Fuck you know about being scared," points out how Black men experience fear and trauma while also calling attention to how privileged white men carrying guns and with a license to murder do not experience fear like Black men in a white supremacist society. With Miles now having made his way into the basement, Collin begins to rap: "I'ma need you to open your fucking eyes now / And look and see / You might think you know what's happening / But you don't feel it like we do / To feel it, it has to be you / Cut you but you don't know what the cut do!" Here, Collin points out how as a white male police officer, he is incapable of understanding the pain that many people in Black communities, including himself, have experienced. Collin then goes on to rap about how Black men like himself are made to feel like monsters despite how police officers who murder Black men are the real monsters:

> How come every time you come around / You monsters got me feeling like a monster in my own town? I say it while I'm rapping, nigga / 'Cause everyone conditioned to / Listen to a rapping nigga / But I'm rapping to the active nigga / You the one cappin' niggas / (…) / Hittin' us till our headstones' stuck in the mud / We stuck it out it turned us into some thugs / Got a whole city brand new and they kickin' out us."

In addition to pointing out how it is actually police officers who are killing Black men like Randall in Oakland, Collin points out how it is often the ways that Black men cope with being situated vulnerably that "[turns] us into some thugs." Collin also highlights how a gentrifying Oakland has harmed Black people when he raps "Got a whole city brand new and they kickin' out us" highlighting how urban revitalization projects are often detrimental to Black people. As the tension builds between Collin and the officer who is now fearing for his life, Collin raps "Ain't too hard to figure that you probably never really felt / The pressure of a nigga but you know what? / I ain't never felt the pressure of a trigger" before lowering the gun. Contrasting himself, a Black man who has never killed anyone, from the police officer who is an actual killer, Collin calls attention to the violent criminal stereotype that is often attached to Black men, figuring them as killers. By drawing this contrast, Collin also highlights how white men such as police officers tend to be responsible for killing in a patriarchal white supremacist society. Rapping as a method for expression, Collin names and calls out how patriarchal white supremacy invokes fear and threatens Black men's lives while also pointing out how patriarchal white supremacy creates stereotypes about Black men as murderous while covering up the way's that patriarchal white supremacy actually kills Black men.

Though Black men are victimized by white masculinity, Black men are also represented as working to resist their social vulnerability, illustrating a Resistive Black Masculinity. Cole is represented as resisting his social vulnerability through Collin calling out Miles' white masculinity and rapping as a critique against patriarchal white supremacy. By contrasting Collin's vulnerable Black manhood with Miles' white

masculinity through their interracial friendship, *Blindspotting* (2017) deconstructs universal ideas about male privilege

Conclusion

In this chapter, I used the interracial buddy movie *Blindspotting* (2017) as a case study examining representations about Black men's vulnerable relationship to the world around them including their relationship to whiteness and white masculinity. I was guided by the following research question: *How do forms of cultural expression created by Black media creators (e.g., authors, artists, writers, directors, and producers) define the contours of Resistive Black Masculinities and what is the role of hip-hop sensibilities in this process?* In answering this question, I have argued that the interracial buddy movie *Blindspotting* (2017) represents a Resistive Black Masculinity where Black men resist their social vulnerability. Through the character Collin, who is a Black male on probation throughout most of the movie, Black men's social vulnerability emerges through their relationship to gentrification, the criminal justice system, Black male death and trauma, and privileged white masculinity. Additionally, I have argued that *Blindspotting's* (2017) represents how white masculinity can be harmful to Black men. This harm is demonstrated through Collin's complicated relationship with his white male best friend Miles. Despite his best friend being on probation, Miles is irresponsible, which is demonstrated through his decision to purchase and carry an unregistered firearm, getting in fights, and shooting his gun in the air at parties, putting Collin at risk of violating his parole and perhaps getting murdered by police. This distinction between Miles' white privilege and Collin's vulnerable Black manhood works to deconstruct ideas about universal male privilege.

In addition, I have argued that *Blindspotting* (2017) presents a hip-hop sensibility that helps make Resistive Black Masculinities knowable in the Black Lives Matter era. In two parts, this sensibility first manifests in the popular movie through Collin's decision to call out Miles for his white masculinity. Miles' white masculinity, as I have stated previously, places Collin at risk of violating his probation or being murdered by police. For example, when Collin calls Miles out, he mentions that his friend's irresponsible actions could result in the police arriving and shooting him merely because he is Black. In calling Miles out, *Blindspotting* (2017) represents a Resistive Black Masculinity illuminating the ways that Black men can be harmed by white masculinity despite being socially vulnerable. Second, the movie demonstrates a hip-hop sensibility through Collin's use of rap to confront the white male police officer responsible for murdering an unarmed Black man named Randall. In doing so, the movie draws on the ways that Black men have historically used hip-hop to identify and critique patriarchal white supremacy as I have argued in the previous chapter. Together, these two hip-hop sensibilities help render Resistive Black Masculinities legible in the contemporary moment.

This chapter explored how Resistive Black Masculinities and the hip-hop sensibilities that inform and make these masculinities knowable are depicted in popular movies. In the following chapter, I explore how Resistive Black Masculinities are complicated by class and sexuality as intersectional identities through the various Black male characters in the first season of Fox's *Empire* and argue that the television show's representations about class and sexuality complicate ideas about both Black men's vulnerability and resistance. Thus, as I will argue in chapter six, Resistive Black Masculinities and the hip-hop sensibilities that inform them can include not only coping

with Black male loss, Black social awareness, love, community, and calling out white masculinity but also Black male resilience though economic mobility and critiquing homophobia in Black communities and society generally through music.

CHAPTER SIX: INTERSECTIONAL RESISTIVE BLACK MASCULINITIES: RACE, SEXUALITY, AND CLASS IN FOX'S *EMPIRE*

On January 7, 2015, *Empire's* first episode premiered on *FOX*. The popular hip-hop drama co-created by Lee Daniels and Danny Strong emphasized cultural discourses in Black communities highlighting issues around race, class, gender, and sexuality. With a highly anticipated release, *Empire's* first season had urban mystique and mainstream backing, foreshadowing its positive reception. Speaking to the show's widespread popularity, Minnicks (2015) points out that audiences reported watching *Empire* for a variety of reasons; audiences enjoyed observing how Black voices are altering the music industry's terrain, they tuned in to see the relationship dynamics play out between lead characters such as the relationship between Lucious (played by Terrence Howard) and his former wife Cookie (played by Taraji P. Henson), and many viewers enjoyed various intertwining storylines related to issues around race, class, and sexuality.

In fact, this series reached living rooms with such force, Minnicks (2015) notes, that "no television series in 20 years has grown in popularity as quickly." In addition to the themes that the show explores through its entirely Black main cast, *Empire's* success could have much to do with the actors and artists that the show frequently features in its episodes and those who are in behind-the-scenes roles. For example, Timbaland, a Grammy-winning producer-rapper, landed a key role as *Empire's* executive music producer (Newman, 2015). Additionally, *Empire's* first season featured guest stars including musical artists Mary J. Blige, Snoop Dogg, and Gladys Knight, and award-winning actor Cuba Gooding, Jr. (Cruz, 2015). *Empire's* season one finale, which

debuted on March 18, 2015, had nearly 17 million views, making it the most watched finale for a first season series since *Grey's Anatomy* in 2005 (Rice, Hibberd, & Stack, 2015). Speaking to its massive though not exclusively Black following, Seale (2015) points out that the first season's twelfth episode was seen by 71% of U.S. Black American women under 50 who were watching television when the episode premiered.

Representing intersectional identities and oppressions, *Empire* illuminates various issues not just impacting Black communities but hip-hop culture and society as a whole (McLean, 2015). Discussing how *Empire's* strong character development helps to incorporate issues around identity, Goodman (2015) notes that "Lucious, a thug turned musical success story, can't shake his flaws, no matter how much money he makes or how much sophistication he aspires to" and that Lucious' oldest son, "Andre, for some, comes off as 'not black enough.'" Goodman (2015) continues stating that "[Jamal who is Lucious' middle son] struggles for acceptance because of his sexuality and [Hakeem who is] the youngest [son of Lucious'], (…) seems to be most in [tune] with what everybody around him wants to see and hear, may not be what he appears." Representing Black men and cultural discourses about Black manhood, *Empire*'s first season offered a multiplex of possibilities for imagining Black masculinities in intersectional and complex ways. To this point, Rodriguez (2018) notes that *Empire* "provides a prime platform to not only examine the stereotypes afforded to black male characters on mainstream television but also analyze the discourse used to frame and maintain black masculinity" (p. 226).

This chapter examines how intersectional identities represented on television inform and complicate what it means to live within and resist a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society while Black and male. In addition to race and gender, I focus on axes

of identity like sexuality and class. Specifically, this case study explores the main Black male characters on FOX's popular television show *Empire.* In this chapter I explore how Black masculinities are represented on the show through an intersectional framework, emphasizing how these masculinities are complicated by ideas about race, gender, class, and sexuality. Additionally, I consider how *Empire* represents issues of Black men attending to certain hegemonic ideals upheld within Black communities and the main characters' attachment to hip-hop and other musical forms. I consider how these factors help to organize the main characters' Black manhood as represented in the show. Diverse and complex in their representation, I argue that *Empire* presents Black masculinities informed by various axes of identities and that some of these identities, particularly the ones presented through the characters Lucious and Jamal, converge to demonstrate a Resistive Black Masculinity characterized by and complicated by axis of identity including race, gender, sexuality, and class.

Black Masculinity and Television

Historically, Black masculinities have been represented primarily from white perspectives. To this point, Yep and Elia (2012) explain that a hegemonic heteropatriarchal Black masculinity has emerged "from the historical context of White racism, White supremacy, and White fear of Black sexuality" (p. 897). Emphasizing heterosexuality and the adherence to rigid gender norms, Yep and Elia (2012) point out that this brand of Black masculinity is often framed as more authentic. Collier (2016) points out that heteropatriarchal white supremacist society also often imagines Black men as hypersexual and aggressive. Mercer (1991) explains that Black men have been "defined and confined to 'being' purely sexual and nothing but sexual, hence

hypersexual, endowed with an excess of sexuality" (p. 187). For example, Castle Bell and Harris (2016) argue that NBC's *Parenthood* portrays the character Alex through the Black male buck stereotype, emphasizing his sexuality and sex drive. Additionally, the character Steve Hightower in *The Steve Harvey Show* is represented as misogynic by regularly making sexually inappropriate remarks about women (Williams, 2017). Representing Black men predominately as heterosexual and hypersexual, these shows provide reductive portrayals of Black men in ways that are consistent with heteropatriarchal white supremacist society's racist stereotypes.

In addition to being represented as heterosexual and hypersexual, heteropatriarchal white supremacist society has also represented Black men through criminality on television. Studying representations about race and crime on network news stations, Dixon, Azocar, and Casas (2003) point out that Black people were more likely to be shown as criminals whereas white people were more likely to be depicted as police officers and victims. To this point, Neal (2013) points out that the most legible Black masculinities are often those that are the most criminal. More specifically, Neal (2013) notes "That the most 'legible' black male body is often thought to be a criminal body and/or a body in need of policing and containment – incarceration – is just a reminder that the black male body that so seduces America is just as often the bogeyman that keeps America awake at night" (p. 5) Neal (2013) continues "Thus 'legible' black male bodies, ironically, bring welcome relief, a comforting knowingness casually reflected in notions like 'niggers will be niggers' (a distinctly gendered term) or 'they will always get away,' whether they are accessed on your iPad, Android, or local Fox News affiliate" (p. 5). This narrow though prominent understanding of Black masculinity through the lens of

criminality, of course, has overwhelmed alternative representations. Subsequently, stereotypes about Black men as criminals have heavily shaped how Black masculinity has been understood, particularly in terms of public interest and support of various legislative, cultural, and societal norms.

Discourses surrounding "positive" and "negative" representations of Black men and masculinity has been a central concern for those invested in presenting Black masculinities beyond racist stereotypes. Examining the television show *Survivor*, for example, Bell-Jordan (2008) contends that Black men who were considered to exhibit a "good" Black masculinity were portrayed as having integrated into white society whereas Black men who performed a "bad" Black masculinity were considered hood. In other words, Black masculinity can only be represented as "good" when it is represented as white. Movies like *Deep Cover* (1992) or television shows like *The Cosby Show* portray Black men through either a respectable Black masculinity (Gillespie, 2016; Smith, 2008). Gates (2018) contends that "negative" representations of Black men are necessary for the formation of "positive" representations. Gates (2018) explains that "texts determined to be 'positive' are more likely to be those that bear resemblance to 'proper' (i.e., white) films and television shows as far as the scenarios, characters, and behaviors that they portray" (p. 18) while "negative" representations are understood as the anthesis of whiteness. To this end, representing Black men and masculinities more "positively," in many cases, has resulted in the adherence of a respectability politics that whitens Black men and masculinities. Meanwhile, representations about Black men and masculinities that fall outside what is considered "positive" tend to be ghettoized and dismissed as

negative, even when these representations reflect the real, lived experiences of many Black men and boys.

There has been considerable attention around increasing and diversifying representations about Black men and masculinities in popular culture. Importantly, globalization has aided in expanding the representation of Black men and masculinities in animation, sketch comedy, and drama (Havens, 2013). Though representations about Black men and masculinities have been limited, Ellithorpe and Bleakley (2016) point out that representations about Black male youth have increased in recent years. While increased visibility alone does not rectify how Black men and masculinities are prominently represented through racist stereotypes, this increased visibility, in some cases, has also come with more diverse representations. For example, refusing to adhere to respectability politics, television shows like *Run's House* and *Snoop Dogg's Father Hood* present Black men as fathers present at home and as role models without deracializing them as Black men (Smith, 2008). In doing so, Black boys and young Black men are more likely to find characters on television that resonate with them. While more Black men on television does not guarantee nuanced explorations of Black masculinity, some television shows about Black men have offered more complex representations about Black masculinity in new and refreshing ways.

Black Masculinity and Intersectionality

Ideas about sexuality complicate Black masculinity. Black masculinity has been defined by cisgender heterosexual norms (Sewell, 2020). As a result, heteronormativity has worked to police representations about Black masculinity in media (Rodriguez, 2017). Eguchi, Calafell, and Files-Thompson (2014) point out that because of hyper-

heterosexuality, Black queer men are feminized and "whitened," excluding them from Black manhood. Moreover, Eguchi, Files-Thompson, and Calafell (2018) state that while Black queer men are situated "on the margins of their racial or ethnic groups because of their sexuality (p. 183)," they are also "on the periphery of White gay culture because of their race or ethnicity" (p. 183). In other words, Black queer men are often seen as neither Black enough to exist within the domain of Black masculinity nor white enough to be a part of mainstream gay culture. Because queer Black men are thought to fall outside Black masculinity, television writers often use white heteropatriarchal scripts to portray Black men's queerness. Guerrero and Leonard (2013) point out that most Black gay characters fall under the "white negro" stereotype, "whose incorporations of the feminine make their performances mere minstrelsy for white consumption" (p. 364). In other words, representations about queer Black men on television tend to include characters that are less Black and more heteronormative to better mirror queer white men. Other representations about queer Black men on television include those expressing their sexuality on the "down low" where Black men reject the femininity associated with queerness to maintain their Black masculinity (Eguchi et al., 2014). This representation about queer Black men expressing their sexuality secretly, so as not to jeopardize the perception of their heterosexuality and by extension their Black masculinity, has become a dominant depiction of queer Black manhood in popular culture.

Responding to how queer theory has often erased racialized difference, suggesting a universal queer experience, quare theory seeks to highlighting how race and sexuality converge to inform racialized queer experiences. Johnson (2001) points out that quare theory "offers a way to critique stable notions of identity and, at the same time, to locate

racialized and class knowledges" (p. 3). In the music video "Throw that Boy P***y," for example, quare theory offers a framework to explore Fly Young Red's racialized queerness (Eguchi & Roberts, 2015). Satirically, Eguchi and Roberts (2015) argue that Fly Young Red's queer though hypermasculine performance in "Throw that Boy P***y's" music video critiques Black masculinity through rapping about having sex with men in ways that mirror how Black men often rap about having sex with women. Additionally, Rodriguez (2018) performs a quare reading of Fox's television show *Empire*, arguing that the character Jamal uses "patriarchal forms of language and behaviors to be perceived as masculine" (p. 238). Through a quare reading, Rodriguez (2018) contends that Jamal's fear of being perceived as feminine leads him to adopt a more masculine performance. Taking seriously how identities like sexuality and race converge, quare theory highlights the complexities around Black male queerness.

Black masculinity is also complicated by class status. Payne (2016) examines how low-income Black men "seek the streets as a way to secure notions of coping and survival" (p. 114). Here, Black men are oriented by street life because their vulnerability within a white supremacist society necessitates that they survive through the illegal economy. Conversely, middle to upper-class Black men are often portrayed in opposition to low-income Black families. Black middle-class families on shows like *The Cosby Show*, *Amen*, and *Frank's Place* represented an experience absent of alienation violence, estrangement, divorce and other such ailments that stereotypically plague Black low-income families (Gray, 1989). Grundy (2012) contends that the racist perception of middle to upper-class Black men as exceptional to their race and ethnicity pit them against low-income Black men. For example, films like *Strictly Business* (1991), *Livin'*

Large (1991), *True Identity* (1991), and *The Associate* (1996) portray middle to upper-class Black men as sell-outs, trading their racial identity and masculinity in exchange for economic mobility (Gates, 2018). Black masculinity is portrayed as compromised when Black men move from a lower class to middle and upper-class.

Having briefly reviewed the literature on how Black masculinity is represented in television and Black masculinity in relation to intersectionality, I turn to this chapter's analysis. I argue that *Empire* presents several Resistive Black Masculinities complicated by class and sexuality as axis of identity. Proceeding in two parts, I first consider how race, class, and masculinity converge to represent Resistive Black Masculinities. Then I explore how representations about Black masculinity are further complicated by ideas about sexuality.

Race, Class, and Masculinity in *Empire*

Empire demonstrates how ideas about class in conversation with other axis of identity complicate Resistive Black Masculinities. Specifically, I focus on how representations about Resistive Black Masculinities are demonstrated through resilience in relation to class mobility, complicated by ideas about what constitutes a street orientation, and seemingly mitigated by class privilege. I argue that representations about class in conversation with other axis of identity including, race, gender, and sexuality complicate how Resistive Black Masculinities and the hip-hop sensibilities that help inform them manifest in television.

Empire represents a Resistive Black Masculinity where Black men, through their resilience, are not only able to survive but thrive beyond the hood and its harshness. This representation provides a template for television and other media creators for mapping

the conditions that Black men, especially hip-hop artists, might overcome on the road to success while living within and resisting an oppressive society. Drug dealer turned media mogul, *Empire's* character Lucious Lyon, for example, represents a Resistive Black Masculinity informed by his resilience as a Black man having survived the hood and entered the corporate world. Mirroring the real-life success stories of rapper-businessmen like 50 Cent and Jay-Z, Lucious represents a Resistive Black Masculinity through his ability to survive the streets, seemingly curtailing his economic vulnerability through his class mobility. Lucious' resilience is aided by his connection to the streets where hip-hop music became a coping mechanism. Lucious' connection to the streets and, by extension, hip-hop music is established in episode one when he shares a story about his childhood to Empire Entertainment executives about how he stayed alive. Lucious tells his executives "I started selling drugs when I was nine years old in Philadelphia. I did it to feed myself." The media mogul continues "But it was the music that played in my head that kept me alive when I thought I was gonna get shot. And it was the melodies that I dreamt about that kept me warm while I was sleeping in the streets." Not ignoring the importance of making money, Lucious foregrounds hip-hop's significance for his survival during his boyhood. Through the character Lucious, *Empire* represents a Black masculinity where hip-hop helps young Black men stay resilient despite their social vulnerability. However, more than just a coping mechanism, *Empire* represents hip-hop as an avenue for alleviating economic precarity for some Black men. In the same scene, Lucious experiences a flashback to his childhood where he is shown rapping, accentuating his long-standing investment in hip-hop music as a Black expressive form that helps him cope and eventually increase his economic location. In doing so, *Empire* represents a

Resistive Black Masculinity informed by hip-hop music's resistive sensibilities where Black men navigate an oppressive society and seemingly conquer their social vulnerability and economic vulnerability in ways that underscore Black masculine resilience.

Because Black masculinity is often understood through a street orientation, an important theme throughout *Empire's* first season, Black men without a clear relationship to the streets are often dismissed as inauthentic or as sellouts. In *Empire*, because Lucious has seemingly left his street life behind to pursue celebrity, importance, and fortune, he is seen as less authentic and as a sellout. For example, in a conversation with his assistant Becky, Lucious is represented as a social elite. This is evidenced through Becky's reminder to Lucious that he is supposed to sing on *The Tonight Show.* In that same episode, Becky delivers him an invitation from Barack Obama to attend the China state dinner to which he apathetically replies "Okay, tell Barack that … yes, but this is the last one or the next few months." Seemingly, uncontained by his former life as a drug dealer, Lucious' is shown as rich and powerful through his popularity and relationship to the political elite. In doing so, *Empire* represents a Black masculinity imagining Black men outside the spaces that they are usually confined to (e.g., streets, prisons, athletics, graves). However, it is Lucious' success off the streets and within the confines of the corporate world that leads to accusations against his authenticity by other characters in the show. For example, Lucious is framed as being out of touch with his experiences as a poor Black youth when he goes on talk show following a controversy around an Empire Entertainment artist's allegedly violent music. Defending his own work as Empire Entertainment's lead executive, Lucious expresses "That's how I grew up. Where you

either sold drugs, or you watched your children go hungry. Where half of your family is locked off in prison. Our music is more of a narration of an oppressed people." Lucious continues "You see, the Empire artists are telling the next generation that even though they live in a world where Trayvon Martin can get shot down like a dog without..." Becoming emotionally choked up as he describes the cultural climate around Trayvon Martin's music, a climate that Empire Entertainment professes to be aware of, Lucious again accentuates his relationship to the streets, claiming that this relationship has informed his music in addition to his artist's lyrics. Seeming to undermine his past experiences as a struggling drug dealer on Philadelphia's rough streets, the talk show host points out how Lucious' life has since evolved: "Do you feel that you can still speak to these kids, even though you're now living in penthouses and yachts?" Questioning Lucious' authenticity, effectively undermining his lived experiences on the streets as a Black boy and young Black man, *Empire* demonstrates how successful Black men are figured as inauthentic and too detached to discuss racialized oppression despite having been and being oppressed in ways that are racially specific themselves. Here, Black men's class privilege in the present obscures their class-related vulnerability and precarity in the past, seemingly eroding any authority to speak about poverty among other issues affecting Black communities. Similarly, Lucious' authenticity as an artist is questioned by his middle son Jamal in a conversation with his partner Michael. Claiming that Lucious has changed, Jamal remarks "Seen it my whole life. Hey, look at, look at my dad. That's a real artist. Well, he was. Now he's more concerned with selling T-shirts and watches and whatever." Lucious' success seems to work against his authenticity as an artist. Further demonstrating how Black men are narrowly conceived in relation to class,

Jamal suggests that his father's success as a businessman undermines Lucious' authenticity as an artist since real hip-hop artists are understood to have a strong relationship racialized urban poverty. Through beliefs about him and his interactions with other characters, *Empire* illuminates how Black men's success are seen as mitigating their authenticity as artists and advocates.

Empire presents a Black masculinity where Black men are removed from the class related struggles that many Black boys and young Black men face growing up in poor neighborhoods. This class-elevated iteration of Black masculinity, best demonstrated through Lucious' three sons, contrasts sharply with the Black masculinity Lucious' character exercises, as someone who grew up economically disadvantaged but was able to secure class and cultural privilege through his career. While Lucious' Resistive Black Masculinity can be characterized through its emphasis on resilience and determination to become a successful hip-hop artist and media mogul after living in abject poverty and selling drugs as a child, the Black masculinities that his children exercise are significantly informed by class privilege. In doing so, *Empire* provides a window into how Black masculinity manifests on television in ways that are not wedded to class struggle. For example, *Empire* presents a Black masculinity through Andre, Lucious' oldest son, that is successful in the corporate world, rich, and well educated, destabilizing prominent depictions about Black men in low wage jobs, living under the poverty level, and that are poorly educated. Growing into adulthood, Andre has been mostly unaffected by his father's street orientation. Though not a musical celebrity like his brothers Jamal and Hakeem who are signed to their father's label, Andre supports the family business in other ways. As the company's chief financial officer, Andre is represented as

instrumental to Empire Entertainment’s growth. In a family meeting, for instance, Lucious expresses “[Andre] and I have been working hard to turn Empire into a publicly traded company.” Whereas Lucious was abandoned and became a homeless orphan selling drugs at nine years old, Andre grew up with many more possibilities in reach given his father’s success. Reflecting on Andre’s childhood, Lucious asks his son "You remember when you were 11, sonny? Dressing up in a little suit, trying to run into the office, helping everybody, answering phones." Different from his father’s upbringing, Andre grew up in a way that kept him safe from the streets. In response to his father’s question, Andre recounts "Even during my finals at Penn, I was still coming back, doing your accounting." In a heartfelt moment, Lucious expresses to Andre “I mean, your whole life is Empire. You went on to grad school. Taught me a few things, too." Distinguishing him from his entire family, Andre has a master’s in business administration from the University of Pennsylvania, a privilege ivy league. *Empire* represents Andre as mature, private educated, and employed as the chief financial officer of a multimillion-dollar company. In doing so, *Empire* represents a Black masculinity where Black men are conventionally successful without having to first navigate racialized class struggle around poverty, mass incarceration, or poorly funded schools. This representation about not having to navigate urban Black poverty mirrors television shows like *The Cosby Show* where Black characters are shown as conventionally successful and without any context about the obstacles they may have faced during childhood and young adulthood.

Despite his conventional success made possible by his class status, Andre is not fully accepted by his father due to his ability to thrive in traditionally white spaces,

leading to distrust. By representing Lucious' distrust for Andre, *Empire* illuminates cultural discourses in Black communities about the politics of respectability. While at the University of Pennsylvania, a predominately white private ivy league school, Andre meets his wife Rhonda who is a white woman from an affluent family. However, Lucious does not support Andre marrying a white woman. In episode eight, for example, Lucious shares with Andre "The moment you brought that white woman into my house, I knew then I couldn't trust you. I knew then that you didn't want to be a part of my family." Dismissing his father's claims about his lack of trust being about Rhonda, Andre expresses "You know why my family hates me? I know why. Because I'm not talented. Not the way you want, right? Because I studied in school and got good grades and went to college. You hate me because I want to be accepted?" Here, Andre conveys his sense of not feeling accepted in his family despite, and perhaps even because of, his economic success. For Andre, feeling unaccepted has to do with having earned a formal education, not being musically talented, and wanting to be accepted. These feelings have less to do with class and more to do with his ability to thrive in white spaces despite his Blackness, which his father, who is skeptical of white people, finds threatening. In one scene, for example, Lucious tells Andre that despite his economic success he will never be truly accepted in white spaces because he is Black. Angrily, Lucious yells "And they will never accept you! They will accept your money, Dre, but they will never accept your Black ass. And I don't give a damn how many white women you marry." By representing this conflict about the relationship between economic success and race, *Empire* illuminates cultural discourses in Black communities about the politics of respectability.

Because Andre thrives in white spaces, he is understood as attempting to seek acceptance, which, for Lucious, is an impossibility given his race.

Unlike the Black masculinity represented through Lucious and Andre where Black men are represented as hardworking despite both their class status and upbringing, *Empire* also represents a Black masculinity where Black men are shown as financially dependent on their fathers in ways mirroring class privilege among wealthy white people's children but that rarely gets represented as a possibility for Black children. This Black masculinity, like Andre's Black masculinity, represents Black men in ways that are not tethered to class struggle. However, unlike Lucious' and Andre's Black masculinity, this Black masculinity is represented mostly though indulgence, leisure, and entitlement. This, however, does not mean that this Black masculinity cannot be resistive. Being scolded by his father for not having his act together, causing him to take out his phone, Lucious tells Hakeem, for example, "You gonna pull out a phone when I'm talking to you? But you're wasting your talents on bitches and booze." Frustrated by his father's lecture, Hakeem replies "I'm working on new stuff now, and you know that." Unsatisfied with his response, Lucious tells Hakeem "You ain't worked a day in your life, and you know that. You're spoiled." Whereas Lucious and Andre espouse a Black masculinity that foregrounds hard work, *Empire* represents Hakeem through a Black masculinity manifesting through rebellion, drinking, relationships with women, and leisure. Hakeem's class privilege is further highlighted when Cookie tells her son "You need to stop rapping like you're from the streets 'cause you're not 'bout that life." Pointing out that her son has no connection to the streets, or the experiences of economic struggle or violence he raps about, Cookie tells Hakeem to stop being inauthentic by suggesting

through his music that he does have a connection to racialized urban poverty. In doing so, *Empire* calls attention to how some hip-hop artists might posture about their connection to the streets since such a connection is prized within the genre. Similarly, Jamal, Lucious' middle son, is also represented as financially dependent on his father. Jamal's financial dependence on his father is pointed out in episode two when Lucious threatens his son around coming out as gay: "Look, if you make that announcement, I'm going to lose artists, which will hurt Empire." In response, Jamal tells Lucious "I'm sorry, dad. The world does not revolve around you." This ultimately leads Lucious to threaten Jamal: "Your world does. I pay for everything. Your clothes, that $12,000-a-month loft you live in, the credit card bills, your brand-new piano you just bought. Come out, and you're on your own. I'm done." After mounting tension between him and his father, Jamal eventually decides to move out in episode three, leaving his father in disbelief. When Jamal is forced to choose between continuing his financial dependence on his father but denying his sexuality or giving up his economic security to express his sexuality openly, he chooses the latter. In doing so, *Empire* represents a Resistive Black Masculinity through Jamal, demonstrated through his decision to disobey his father and live his truth. This scene also marks a pivotal moment for Jamal as he begins to find his own way, leaving has class privilege behind. Once on his own, for example, Jamal begins to buy studio time at "Ghetto-Ass Studios" after deciding not only to move from his loft but to stop accepting all resources from his father including studio time. Visiting the studio, for the first time with her son, Cookie tells Jamal, "You need to watch your back around here, Mal. Some real hungry, grimy types, you know?" In response, Jamal tells Cookie. "Well, this is all I can afford. Lucious can take all that money. They can give it to

Hakeem. This right here is mine." Proud of her son's determination, Cookie expresses to Jamal: "You keeping it ghetto, that's for sure. If this is the sound you want and you think it's gonna put you ahead of Hakeem, then this is what we doing, baby. Your daddy would be proud, even though he won't admit it." Rejecting his father's support, Jamal's class-privileged Black Masculinity becomes a Resistive Black Masculinity through turning to the streets to discover his musical identity. In doing so, *Empire* represents Black manhood that is intersectional and dynamic as characters like Jamal mature and overcome obstacles related to class and sexuality in conversation with race and gender. For Jamal, as represented in *Empire*, this growth meant giving up his class privilege to live his truth as a queer Black man, allowing him to cultivate his musical identity in the streets and its sights and sounds.

Highlighting how Resistive Black Masculinities are represented through resilience in relation to class mobility, complicated by ideas about what constitutes a street orientation, and seemingly mitigated by class privilege, *Empire* demonstrates how ideas about class in conversation with other axis of identity complicate Resistive Black Masculinities. In doing so, the television show's various representations of Black men demonstrate how Resistive Black Masculinities and hip-hop sensibilities are negotiated through ideas about identity.

Race, Sexuality, and Masculinity in *Empire*

Empire presents a Resistive Black Masculinity where queer Black men navigate hegemonic ideals in the Black community around being accepted and coming out and within hip-hop as a genre. This representation helps map the hegemonic ideals that queer Black men face while simultaneously pointing out how they resist these hegemonic ideals

that they routinely face. In *Empire,* this resistance is represented through using music to come out despite potential consequences and using the rap battle format to call out homophobia in Black communities. Representing music as a medium for resistance, the television show also demonstrates how hip-hop sensibilities emerge in television in ways that inform Resistive Black Masculinities.

Demonstrating how homophobia emerges as a hegemonic ideal in Black communities, Lucious refuses to acknowledge his son's relationship, effectively erasing his son's queerness. For example, calling Jamal into his office, Lucious asks his middle son "How's that roommate of yours, the one with the dreads?" In their exchange, Lucious is unable to acknowledge that Jamal's "roommate" is actually his boyfriend. Jamal responds to Lucious' question by saying "Uh, I'm seeing Michael now, dad. You met him twice," pointing out his father's inability to invest in his relational life. This scene demonstrates how young queer Black men may not be fully accepted by their fathers who refuse to acknowledge their queerness. In another scene, Lucious more directly erases his son's queerness by telling Jamal that he can choose his sexuality, demonstrating how ideas about sexuality as a choice functions as a hegemonic ideal in some Black communities. For example, calling Jamal into his office to discuss his sexuality, Lucious states "Look, Mal, this is the last time I'm gonna have this talk with you. Your sexuality–that's a choice, son. You can choose to sleep with women if you want." Lucious' inability to accept Jamal's sexuality is further demonstrated when the two share a flashback. During the flashback to Jamal's boyhood, before Cookie was imprisoned, Lucious is an up and coming gangsta rapper. In the scene, Lucious talks to his wife about a song she is producing with several friends and family members in the living room. Upstairs, a young

Jamal is seen trying on his mother's high heels before walking downstairs wearing them along with his mother's head scarf. As Jamal walks into the living room adorned in this markedly Black feminine attire, the guests in the Lyon house look troubled as they all silently stare at Jamal. Catching a glimpse of his son, Lucious lunges from the table while Cookie yells "Lucious!" Approaching Jamal, Lucious angrily yells "Are you out of your damn mind?" before hoisting him up by his arms. Taking Jamal outside, Lucious continues "Walking in here looking like a little bitch? Get over here." Cookie follows pleading her husband to stop. Though the flashback ends, it is later revealed that Lucious put his son in a garbage can. Calling his son, a "little bitch" for wearing his mother's high heels and head scarf, the television show highlights how young Black boys might be policed for their gender performances when they do not align with the heterosexual masculine norm. For Lucious, Jamal being straight is important for selling albums, in part, because his father fears what others might think. For example, Lucious states "there's people out in this country that don't appreciate people like you." Jamal, interrupting, responds "Yea, I know, dad." Finishing what he suspects will be his father's thought, Jamal states "'cause a sissy can't sell records to the Black community. I get it." Lucious, then, expands saying "or the white kids that make up 75% of our sales. And you really need to stop calling yourself that." Here, homophobia is not just represented as an issue in Black communities, it is represented as an issue permeating throughout U.S. American society. Heavily influenced by white teenage consumers in a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society, popular music often adheres to ridged stereotypes about Black men and masculinities to the exclusion Black queer masculinities. Representing Jamal's

difficulty around being accepted by his family, *Empire* highlights how homophobia helps to organize ideas about young queer Black men's masculinity.

Empire presents a Resistive Black masculinity where Black queer men struggle around coming out given their regular exposure to homophobic discourses within Black communities, U.S. American society more broadly, and frequent media representations that inflate homophobia in the Black community as compared with the rest of the world. Despite the struggle they may face around their sexuality, discouraging them from coming out, *Empire* presents a Resistive Black Masculinity where young queer Black men eventually do come out despite the homophobia they experience. In coming out publicly, young queer Black men learn that they are supported and can make a positive impact on others. For example, despite his desire to come out publicly, Jamal has some difficulty doing so, demonstrating the difficulty around disclosing his sexuality. This is especially difficulty for Jamal who has been told by his father not to come out since it could damage his career. In episode six, Jamal performs his new song on a radio show while Michael watches from home. After his performance, the radio show host, Sway, compliments Jamal's performance as evidence of a promising career, before asking him "So how does your lady feel about that?" Unprepared for the question, Jamal nervous laughs before answering "… um… I-I mean… who says I have a lady?" Michael, who is watching at home, is then shown looking disappointed. Sway, assuming that Jamal is heterosexual, responds "Wait. Wait. Hold up, man. You're gonna tell me there's no special girl in your life?" Choosing not to come out on Sway's radio show, Jamal answers "honestly, no. I'm… I'm just… I'm really in love with my music right now. No one special." Michael's disappointment turns to devastation as he watches from home.

Though Jamal waivers on coming out on Sway’s show, Jamal does come out in episode 8 at Empire Entertainment’s white party (i.e., guests are asked to wear clothing that is the color white). Before walking on stage to sing a version of his dad’s earlier songs “You’re So Beautiful,” Jamal tells his audience "Uh, the most brilliant man that I know told me that music is the truth. I'm honored tonight to be able to use his music to explain to you all some of my truths." Everyone sings and dances along until Jamal makes an important adjustment to the song. Changing a lyric in his dad’s song to "Say it's the kind of song / That makes a man love a man / A man love a man, a man love a man," Jamal effectively comes out at Empire Entertainment’s white party. Everyone else is supportive except for Lucious whose face goes blank, demonstrating his disapproval. In support, Jamal’s mother Cookie yells “Go, Mal!” Jamal also receives support from his younger brother ("I came, brother to brother, to tell you how proud I am of you" and “It's the bravest thing I seen in my life"), who witnesses him come out and from a fan that was inspired by Jamal’s decision to reveal his sexuality (“I wanted to tell you, um, that you coming out, that gave me the courage to come out to my brother”). Through Jamal’s decision to publicly come out, *Empire* presents a Resistive Black Masculinity where young queer Black men can disclose their sexual identity despite homophobic pressure in their communities and beyond telling them to withhold their sexual identity. Furthermore, the show presents a Resistive Black Masculinity where music itself becomes a means of communicating identity, even when it flies in the face of expectations. In resisting homophobic pressure to come out, young queer Black men find support where they perhaps thought such support did not exist and can positively impact other queer youth who may have few role models.

Empire presents a Resistive Black Masculinity where queer Black men confront those that perpetuate homophobia in Black communities through Black expressive forms, speaking to a hip-hop sensibility. For example, one Empire Entertainment artist, Black Rambo, confesses his homophobia toward Jamal when it is learned that he will be Lucious' heir. Representing hegemonic ideals in mainstream hip-hop music, Black Rambo causes a disturbance at a press conference after it is announced that artists participating in "The Lucious Lyon Sound," a tribute concert, have "all agreed to give ten percent of our proceeds to Black Lives Matter," earning a strong round of applause:

> Black Rambo: I'm not performing nothing if you running Empire, batty man [homophobic slur].
>
> Jamal: What the hell you just call me?
>
> Lucious: Wait, wait, wait, hold on, hold on, hold on. That's enough.
>
> Black Rambo: It's the death of hip-hop…
>
> Lucious: You can leave now.
>
> Black Rambo: I'll go, and so should every real emcee on your roster. Gonna put a fairy on the billboard…
>
> Jamal: Hey, get his ass up out of here.
>
> Black Rambo: Last time I checked, hip-hop was born from the struggle of real men. Or did you forget all that? Ain't no place in this game for them bitches.

After demonstrating his homophobia by calling Jamal a "fairy" and other queer Black men "bitches," Black Rambo is then hauled away by security. In addition to his string of homophobic remarks, Black Rambo expresses that with Jamal running Empire Entertainment, it will be the end of hip-hop, demonstrating how homophobia functions as

a hegemonic ideal within the genre. After Black Rambo causes this disturbance, Jamal ventures into his turf and the two engage in a rap battle. As Black Rambo takes the stage in a furry of audience applause and screaming, he states "All right, all right! Chill, chill, chill, chill! I got you. I'm 'bout to boom on this batty man's head," invoking laughter. Black Rambo then begins his homophobic rap:

> On the microphone, putting you in check / You see me / I'm in the Lyon's den with no respect / No time for lil homos / Rambo, he goin' solo, you rockin' / Pink tutus and biker shorts got me heated / I'm seein' him up in court / It's gettin' critical fuse is goin' short / I know a bitch that look just like you / Toes out, butt out / Chest out like you, ha / Boom, boom, boom, Black Rambo / Boom, boom, boom, Black Rambo!

As Black Rambo finishes, the crowd cheers in support of his homophobia before Jamal takes the microphone and begins to sing:

> So what, I'm gay / It don't matter / God ain't made you no better than me / When I pray / He still answers maybe / You need to get on your knees [Jamal then winks at Black Rambo] / No weapon shall prosper / No weapon / Shall prosper / Your sin ain't no better than my sin / Your skin aint no better than my skin / So point all the finger you want / Bitch.

With the crowd cheering, Jamal walks off stage. In a number of ways, this moment represents a Resistive Black Masculinity informed by hip-hop sensibility where Black men have historically used the genre to carve out space for highlighting how they are situated within an oppressive society and to negotiate the cultural politics of how identities intersect with race. For Jamal, this means using the rap battle format for calling

attention to how young Black queer men are oppressively situated within the hip-hop genre. In doing so, *Empire* represents a Resistive Black Masculinity informed by a hip-hop sensibility where young queer Black men can use the genre and its expressive forms to call out homophobia and other conceivable oppressions.

Navigating hegemonic ideals in the hip-hop genre and in the Black community around being accepted and coming out, *Empire* presents a Resistive Black Masculinity complicated by sexuality in conversation with other axis of identity. In doing so, the television show highlights many of the obstacles that Black queer men face while also showing how they resist these obstacles. In *Empire*, this resistance is represented though music, demonstrating how hip-hop sensibilities inform Resistive Black Masculinities and are depicted in television.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I used the first season of Fox's *Empire* as a case study examining how intersectional identities represented on television inform and complicate what it means to live within and resist a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society while Black and male. I was guided by the following research question: *How do forms of cultural expression created by Black media creators (e.g., authors, artists, writers, directors, and producers) define the contours of Resistive Black Masculinities and what is the role of hip-hop sensibilities in this process?* I argued that *Empire* presents various Resistive Black Masculinities that are complicated by class and sexuality. For example, the television show represents a Resistive Black Masculinity through the character Lucious. This Resistive Black Masculinity manifests in the television show through his resilience as a drug dealer turned multimillionaire business executive. Conversely, *Empire* presents

a Resistive Black Masculinity through Jamal's character that must leave behind his class privilege so that he can resistively embrace his sexuality in a homophobic society. To this end, axis of identity such as class and sexuality are shown as complicating the ways that Resistive Black Masculinities manifest in television.

In addition, I have argued that *Empire* represents a hip-hop sensibility through Lucious' resilience and Jamal's use of music to call out homophobia. Lucious' success story as a drug dealer turned businessman in the television show mirrors the stories of real-world artists like Jay-Z and 50 Cent, making Lucious' Resistive Black Masculinity seem more authentic. Like Jay-Z and 50 Cent, Lucious is represented as having to navigate the streets in addition to the corporate world, which, of course, is a space that Black men are rarely shown as entering. Jamal, like Collin in the previous chapter, represents a hip-hop sensibility through his use of music as critique. However, unlike the character Collin who uses rapping to call out patriarchal white supremacy as I discussed in the previous chapter, Jamal uses his music to combat homophobia within heteropatriarchal white supremacist society and in some Black communities. Hip-hop sensibilities in television, then, manifests through resilience and class mobility in addition to giving up class privilege to embrace one's sexuality in a homophobic society, helping to render Resistive Black Masculinities in television visible during the Black Lives Matter era.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This project was inspired by my observation that despite how Black masculinities in conversation with ideas about vulnerability and resistance are being represented in Black popular culture in the contemporary moment, Black men continue to be explored by Communication Studies scholars in limited and sometimes problematic ways. Therefore, the purpose of this project has been to examine how Black masculinities are represented in conversation with ideas about vulnerability and resistance in music, television, and movies written, directed, produced, and performed by Black people during the Black Lives Matter era. In doing so, I sought to expand the ways Communication Studies literature understands Black masculinities. I was guided by the question *How do forms of cultural expression by Black media creators (e.g., authors, artists, writers, directors, and producers) define the contours of Resistive Black Masculinities, and what is the role of hip-hop sensibilities in this process?* In chapter one, I contextualize dominant understandings about Black masculinity by engaging the work by Black feminist scholars like Collins (2006), hooks (2004), and Perry (2004) in conversation with work on Black men written by scholars like Curry (2017) and Neal (2006), arguing that, in tandem, these bodies of literature offer a more interdisciplinary and, by extension, more nuanced understanding of Black men's experiences in a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society. By drawing on the work of Black feminists and those doing work on Black men and masculinities in sociology, Black studies, hip-hop studies, communication studies, and other fields, I propose Restive Black Masculinities as a conceptual framework. This perspective on Black masculinity takes a critical perspective, resisting

universal ideas about male patriarchy and privilege to explore how Black masculinities are represented in ways that contrast heteropatriarchal white supremacist assumptions about Black masculinities in popular media about Black people. Resistive Black Masculinities emphasizes the ways that Black men are represented as socially vulnerable and highlights representations of Black men resisting their vulnerable situatedness in an oppressive U.S. society. I further develop this conceptual framework in chapter two, taking an interdisciplinary approach by engaging the literature on Black men and masculinities in various disciplines to contextualize Black masculinity in relationship to ideas about vulnerability and resistance within a U.S. American context. As a conceptual framework, Resistive Black Masculinities can be understood through four related components: disruption of hegemonic masculinity, engagement with intersectionality, demonstration of ambivalence, and possession of a resistive sensibility. Before discussing these later in this chapter, I operationalize each tenet before moving to the next section where I summarize this project's findings.

First, working to disrupt hegemonic masculinity draws particular attention to how Black men are socially vulnerable in relationship to the dominant masculinity. This tenet is grounded in how Black men have resisted heteropatriarchal white supremacy throughout U.S. American history, as I demonstrated in chapter two. Acknowledging how hegemonic masculinity acts as a benchmark against which all men are assessed (Mutua, 2006), the tenet of disrupting hegemonic masculinity foregrounds how Black men's hierarchal relationship to white masculinity can be represented and problematized through how Black men are represented in media like music, television, and movies. Additionally, contending that Black men disrupt hegemonic masculinity draws attention

to how Black men are unable to exercise hegemonic masculinity approximations of patriarchal white masculine ideals. Curry (2017), Wynter (1994), and Weheliye (2014) point out that Black men's social vulnerability arises from heteropatriarchal white society's refusal to see Black men as human. This refusal has influenced how Black men in relation to white men have experienced the world. Foregrounding their vulnerability in an oppressive U.S. society that they must navigate to survive, Curry (2017) argues that Black men organize their manhood differently from white men. Illuminating these racialized differences, disrupting hegemonic masculinity refers to how Black men are represented by Black media creators through rhetorical strategies that name and disrupt such a hierarchy.

Second, in the framework of Resistive Black Masculinities, intersectionality grounds the examination of how Black men are oppressed by the intersection of their race and gender, despite how Black men are often thought to be only oppressed on the basis of their race while gaining privilege from their gender. Crenshaw (1989) conceptualized intersectionality to explore how race and gender intersect to shape Black women's lived experiences in ways that had been obscured. Contending that universal Black male privilege is not a given, Mutua (2006) points out that Black men are often racially profiled specifically because they are Black men, emphasizing how race and gender converge. Mutua (2006) also notes that because Black men are often thought of as privileged by gender while being subordinated by race, intersectionality has been limited in its use to examine differences among men, a theoretical weakness that also limits our understanding of intersectionality. This project contributes to filling that gap, by considering how intersectional identities such as class and sexuality further complicate

ideas about Black manhood and how these intersectional differences may lead to hegemonic ideals in some Black communities. Resistive Black Masculinities as an intersectional theory, then, challenges a single-axis framework to illuminate how Black men are oppressed in ways that speak to how gender and race converge in complex ways.

Third, the centrality of ambivalence in Resistive Black Masculinities refers to how the theory nuances our understanding of representations about Black men as either positive or negative, opening new possibilities for understanding Black manhood. Neal (2006) points out that projects that theorize Black masculinity must be comfortable with embracing the ambivalence of a Black masculinity always under construction. Ambivalence in relation to Resistive Black Masculinities, then, attends to representations about Black men's complex and progressive existence within a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society, which, at first glance, may appear neither complex nor progressive. Neal (2006) points out that progressive and complex should not be mistaken for positive, which upholds a politics of respectability. Furthermore, Gates (2018) contends that the terms positive or negative in the conventional sense adhere to a politics of respectability while foreclosing more complex constructions and performances of Black identity. Therefore, ambivalence within Resistive Black Masculinities is unconcerned with distinguishing positive and negative representations, eschewing the respectability politics implied by such determinations.

Fourth, hip-hop sensibilities describe how representations about Black masculinity in the Black Lives Matter era are informed by the musical genre's resistive politics. Hip-hop sensibilities not only help inform and organize Black life but also act as a way to make Resistive Black Masculinities knowable in the contemporary moment. As

a response to racism as a sociopolitical apparatus designed to configure Black bodies as inhuman bodies, thereby justifying Black harm, death, and genocide, Black Nationalism has been committed to interrogating white supremacist society's historical claim that Black bodies are disposable, as well as taking seriously the material and psychological oppression and distress this violent history has caused Black people. Foregrounding how Black men resist their vulnerable situatedness, hip-hop sensibilities, informed heavily by Black resistive politics like Black Nationalism, is tied to how Black writers, producers, directors, and artists construct Resistive Black Masculinities in music, television, and movies about Black people and the challenges they face in a patriarchal white supremacist society seemingly incapable of valuing Black lives.

The four related concepts make up the working parts of Resistive Black Masculinities as a conceptual framework. I argue that Resistive Black Masculinities provides a model for examining how Black masculinities manifest in relationship to cultural, social, and political resistance in the Black Lives Matter Era. In the following section, I provide an overview of this project's case studies, which applied Resistive Black Masculinities as a conceptual framework to three contemporary media artifacts.

Summary of Findings

This project's case studies examined how Black men are represented as living within and resisting a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society in music, television, and movies created by Black directors, writers, actors, producers, and artists. I begin in chapter four by exploring Cole's autobiographical album *2014 Forest Hills Drive* to examine how the popular rapper is represented as socially vulnerable as a young Black man in a patriarchal white supremacist society. Foregrounding how Black people are

situated vulnerably in relation to the dominant culture, I explored how Cole offers a model for resistance within his music, emphasizing social awareness, community, and love. In chapter five, my case study examining the interracial buddy film *Blindspotting* (2017) builds on my discussion of the hip-hop genre's resistive politics to consider how hip-hop sensibilities inform movies about Black men and masculinity during the Black Lives Matter era. Framing the movie as a modern interracial buddy movie, this chapter allowed me to explore representations about how Black masculinity is oriented by white masculinity through the friendship represented between the two main characters. Chapter six, this project's final case study exploring Fox's television series *Empire* examined how intersectional identities like race, gender, sexuality, and class organize and nuance Black masculinities and how vulnerability and resistance manifest differently in relation to these masculinities. In addition to focusing on how Black men are represented as vulnerable and resistant in an oppressive U.S. American society, I consider how Black men are represented as navigating certain hegemonic ideals in some Black communities. In each of this project's three case studies, I emphasized how ideas about social vulnerability and resistance to that vulnerability help organize ideas about Black masculinity in an oppressive U.S. American context that necessitated and continue to necessitate Black Lives Matter.

Chapter four's analysis of Cole's autoethnographic album *2014 Forest Hills Drive* focuses on how Black male hip-hop artists musically portray what it means to live within and resist a patriarchal white supremacist society. Foregrounding his gendered and racialized identity, Cole's album highlights his experiences navigating the hip-hop music industry and U.S. American society generally as a Black male from Fayetteville, North

Carolina. First, representing a Resistive Black Masculinity, Cole highlights the various ways that Black boys and young Black men live within an oppressive society through lyrics with themes like experiencing and coping with loss and learning through the pain that other Black boys and young Black men experience. Second, Cole's album represents a Resistive Black Masculinity where Black men, despite being socially situated as vulnerable, enact methods for resistance. In the album, this manifests through being socially aware about the conditions that Black people and hip-hop artists face in an oppressive U.S. American society and an emphasis on love and unity as a way to bring Black people together. Drawing on the hip-hop genre's resistive politics, Cole's album demonstrates how Black men articulate their understanding about what it means to live while Black and male during the Black Lives Matter era. Like past artists including DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, Tupac Shakur, Nas, and the Notorious B.I.G., Cole's album demonstrates that despite being socially situated as vulnerable, Black men find ways to resist. Understanding representations about both Black men's vulnerability and their resistance methods in tandem, then, are important for theorizing how Black popular media organize ideas about Black manhood.

Chapter five's analysis of Carlos López Estrada's *Blindspotting* (2018) focuses on how Black masculinity is represented in relation to white masculinity in interracial buddy movies. Foregrounding the racial and class tensions animated by gentrification, the award-winning movie represents an increasingly contentious friendship between best friends and Oakland residents Collin, a Black male nearing the end of his probation, and Miles, a white man with a serious temper problem. First, Collin is represented as socially vulnerable through his relationship to gentrification, which has aggravated racial and

class tension, the criminal justice system, Black death and trauma, and privileged white masculinity. Collin's Resistive Black Masculinity in the movie combats prominent stereotypes about Black men as unemotional and invulnerable. Second, foregrounding Collin's relationship to his white male best friend Miles, Collin presents a Resistive Black Masculinity by speaking out and naming white male privilege through emotionally vulnerable conversation and rapping. Though Black men are represented as threated by privileged white masculinity, the movie demonstrates that Black men resist this vulnerability. In doing so, Estrada's movie transgresses norms about how Black masculinity is represented in interracial buddy movies. Additionally, the movie's hip-hop sensibility, demonstrated through its emphasis on rapping about various issues including patriarchal white supremacy, extends and builds on previous literature about how hip-hop sensibilities manifest in movies.

Chapter six's analysis of the first season of Fox's *Empire* focuses on how intersectional identities are represented on television, informing and complicating ideas about what it means to live within and resist a patriarchal white supremacist society as Black men. Co-created by Lee Daniels, Fox's popular television show features a Black main cast and highlights issues impacting Black families and communities and the hip-hop and R&B music recording industry. These issues include struggle around class mobility, homophobia, and Black skepticism toward white people. Foregrounding an intersectional framework, the television show represents Resistive Black Masculinities as complicated by class in conversation with other axis of identity. Lucious, for example, demonstrates a Resistive Black Masculinity through his resilience having had survived the streets as homeless and as drug dealer during his childhood to become a

multimillionaire. Simultaneously, Lucious' son Jamal is represented through a Resistive Black Masculinity despite never having to face the conditions that this father did. Instead, Jamal's Resistive Black Masculinity manifests through his decision to give up his class privilege and embrace his sexuality after Lucious threatens to no longer support his son should he decide to come out as queer. While manifesting differently, both characters demonstrate a Resistive Black Masculinity through their relationship to class privilege, with Lucious embracing his and Jamal giving his up. Second, the show represents how Resistive Black Masculinities are complicated by sexuality in conversation with other intersectional identities. Due to his sexuality, for example, Jamal is represented as having to attend to obstacles unique to Black queer men such as anxiety around whether he should come out and blatant homophobia. Jamal's Resistive Black Masculinity manifests through his use of music to attend to hegemonic masculinity's homophobia and how this homophobia gets leveraged in Black communities. This case study demonstrates that like music and movies, music as medium for critique functions as a hip-hop sensibility, helping to inform how Resistive Black Masculinities are represented on network television during the Black Lives Matter era.

Implications and Contributions

Having summarized this project's findings, which demonstrate how Resistive Black Masculinities emerge across music, movies, and television, I turn to my implications and contributions. In response to how Black masculinity has sometimes been conceived in narrow ways (Curry, 2017; Jackson, 2006; Rudrow, 2019; Rudrow, 2020), this project set out to conceptualize a theory of Black masculinity acknowledging the ways that Black men are represented in Black popular culture as vulnerable though

resistant. I refer to this conceptual framework as Resistive Black Masculinities. By exploring this project's three case studies, four tenets emerged that, when considered collectively, comprise Resistive Black Masculinities' mechanics. They are: (1) Resistive Black Masculinities attempt to disrupt the hegemonic masculinity; (2) Resistive Black Masculinities are intersectional; (3) Resistive Black Masculinities are ambivalent; (4) and Resistive Black Masculinities rely on a hip-hop sensibility, making these masculinities knowable in the contemporary moment. I conceptualized each of these four mechanics earlier in this chapter. In this section, I discuss how these four tenets manifested in my case studies.

First, Resistive Black Masculinities disrupt hegemonic masculinity. In a patriarchal white supremacist society dominated by white men and their understandings of race and gender, Black popular culture offers a space where Black men can be represented as resisting racist stereotypes and working against the social order. Transgressing dominant stereotypes about Black men being invulnerable, chapter four, an analysis of Cole's autobiographical album *2014 Forest Hills Drive,* features the popular rapper discussing Black male loss and pain through his relationship to other Black men in his life like his friends, music industry peers, and his father. Cole's album also points out how Black men are stereotyped within a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society as poverty stricken, unintelligent objects. In illuminating the ways that Black men are stereotyped within a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society, Cole's album disrupts hegemonic masculinity by pointing out how the acceptable social order is harmful to Black men. This disruption also appears in chapter five, when the main character Collin, a Black male on probation, calls out his white male best friend Miles for his privileged

white masculinity, which seems to continually place his friend at risk of harm. By calling out Miles for his privilege, Collin illuminates and questions how hegemonic masculinity threatens Black men who are represented as neither patriarch nor privileged. In chapter six, an analysis of Fox's *Empire*, Jamal is represented as possessing a Resistive Black Masculinity when he challenges Black Rambo to a music battle after he uses homophobic slurs against the R&B artist upon learning that he will be Empire Entertainment's heir. After Black Rambo finishes delivering a homophobic rap, Jamal responds by singing "So what, I'm gay / It don't matter / God ain't made you no better than me." Equipping music as his medium, Jamal confronts Black Rambo for his homophobia much like hip-hop artists have used the genre to illuminate other issues in Black communities and society generally. In doing so, the television show represents a Resistive Black Masculinity where Black queer men call out hegemonic masculinity leveraged by cishetero Black men. Disrupting hegemonic masculinity, then, pertains to how socially vulnerable Black men identify and call out how hegemonic masculinity negatively impact Black men and communities.

Second, Resistive Black Masculinities are intersectional. Intersectionality originated as a tool that was useful for examining how Black women experience the world differently from white women, emphasizing how issues of race and class complicate gender. Despite this observation about how Black women experience the world differently from white women, much of the literature in Communication Studies and other fields has been slow to consider how intersectional identities like gender, race, and class may complicate ideas about what it means to be a man. In chapter four, an analysis of Cole's album autobiographical album *2014 Forest Hills Drive*, the popular

rapper discusses his pain around the deaths of his male friends. Highlighting the intersection between race and gender, this discourse highlights how Black men are placed at a higher risk of death or dying than their white male counterparts. Cole not only highlights that this is an issue but also models a way of coping that engages emotional vulnerability. This discourse is particularly important in the Black Lives Mater era where unarmed Black men continue to be shot murdered by police in ways that seem specific to Black men. In chapter five, an analysis of the movie *Blindspotting* (2017), Collin is represented as at risk of harm or death not only because he is Black but specifically because he is a Black male. This happens early in the movie when Collin witnesses an unarmed Black man named Randall get shot and killed by a white police officer. Emphasizing his race and gender, Randall is represented as another Black man unjustly murdered by a white police officer. After witnessing this murder, Collin is traumatized by watching an unarmed Black man that looks like him get murdered in the streets by a police officer. Illustrating this increasingly common occurrence of unarmed Black men being murdered by police and how it impacts Black men's mental health, Collin is shown as seeing dozens if not hundreds of Black men standing in a graveyard. While Collin is represented as only imagining this as a consequence of how his mental health has been impacted, this imagery highlights how Black men specifically are represented at risk for death when coming into to contact by police and how such risk may impact their mental health, highlighting how their race and gender converge. Going beyond race and gender to consider sexuality as well, chapter six, an analysis of Fox's television show *Empire,* shows how ideas about Black masculinity are complicated by queerness. As Black, male, and queer, Jamal is represented as having to navigate homophobia in U.S. American

society and straightness as a hegemonic ideal in some Black communities. Through embracing his queerness, Jamal is represented as resisting an oppressive society that says mainstream artists cannot be openly gay while also resisting hegemonic ideals such as the beliefs held by his father through most of the season that real men cannot be queer.

Third, Resistive Black Masculinities are ambivalent. Many scholars, political leaders, and media critics denounce representations about Black masculinity seen as negative such as the "thug" persona represented in some mainstream hip-hop music in favor of a more respectable Black masculinity. However, Resistive Black Masculinities maintain that media representations about Black men are ambivalent. In other words, Resistive Black Masculinities do not adhere to ideas about Black masculinity as positive nor negative. In doing so, Resistive Black Masculinities insists on finding how ideas about resistance can be attached to a wide variety of representations of Black men. In chapter four, an analysis of Cole's autobiographical album *2014 Forest Hills Drive,* the popular rapper represents a discussion he had as a young man with a friend. Impressed by the amount of money his friend has made by selling drugs, a young Cole asks his friend what he would have to do to join the lucrative venture. Dismissing Cole's request, Cole's friend explains how selling drugs for him is necessary due to his parents' absence and how he should instead embrace going to college. Through his conversation with his friend, Cole learns to be thankful for his parents and to appreciate what he does have in his life. Here, Cole represents a Resistive Black Masculinity that is ambivalent. On the one hand, Cole wants to sell drugs like his friend to make more money. On the other, Cole learns through his friend's narrative to appreciate what is in reach and to love himself. In doing so, Cole is able to avoid how Black men's social vulnerability often

leads them to selling drugs, exacerbating their vulnerability. In chapter five, an analysis of *Blindspotting* (2017), Collin is a Black man on probation after being incarcerated for two months following a felony sentence. Subsequently, Collin's Black male vulnerability materializes through his relationship to the criminal justice system. For example, Collin is unable to find a place to live, unable to leave the county in which he lives, and unable to stay outside his home past an externally set curfew. Otherwise, Collin risks violating his parole. Despite being formerly convicted of a felony, which some might argue shows a retreat into stereotypes about Black men as criminals, Collin transgresses common stereotypes about Black men as invulnerable and irresponsible. In the movie, Collin is represented as the responsible one between him and his best friend Miles, and he experiences acute trauma after watching an unarmed Black man named Randall get murdered by a white male police officer. Though his representation may not be considered by some as positive given his former felony conviction, the movie's character Collin highlights how Black men who have formerly been convicted of felons are socially situated in ways exacerbating their vulnerability and how they might resist this vulnerability by distancing themselves from their irresponsible and privileged friends. In chapter seven, an analysis of *Empire,* Resistive Black Masculinities' ambivalence emerges through the ways that Lucious is represented as remaining attached to his former life as a drug dealer despite being the lead executive of Empire Entertainment, a multibillion-dollar company on the verge of becoming publicly traded. While some might say that these representations about Black masculinity hinges on problematic stereotypes about Black men as drug dealers, criminals, and thugs, Resistive Black Masculinities eschews the preoccupation with ideas about what is negative or positive to instead focus

on how these representations inform ideas about what it means to live while Black and male in a heteropatriarchal white supremacist society.

Fourth, Resistive Black Masculinities are made legible through hip-hop sensibilities. These sensibilities draw on the genre's resistive politics, which have been influenced by factors both within and outside hip-hop like Black Nationalism. Hip-hop as a genre has come to be understood as a Black form of cultural expression whereby Black people, mostly Black men, archive and critique the ways that their communities are socially vulnerable due to unemployment, racism, mass incarceration, and police brutality in addition to other social factors. In addition to hip-hop, these themes have been important in organizing ideas about Black men as vulnerable in other media formats like movies and television. In the Black Lives Matter era, hip-hop sensibilities help make Resistive Black Masculinities knowable across media formats. In chapter four, an analysis of Cole's autobiographical album *2014 Forest Hills Drive*, a hip-hop sensibility emerges through the popular rapper's emphasis on illuminating how Black men are represented as socially situated in ways that highlight their vulnerability in an oppressive U.S. American society. Cole discusses loss and pain, selling drugs as way to cope with being vulnerably situated, and having an absent father. Additionally, the album represents a hip-hop sensibility where through the popular genre, artists discuss the importance of social awareness about racism and love, community, and brotherhood. These themes draw on Black Nationalist ideals and can be seen across hip-hop's history. In chapter five, an analysis of the movie *Blindspotting* (2017), Resistive Black Masculinities' hip-hop sensibility emerges not only through Collin's experiences as a Black man navigating a gentrifying Oakland, California, but also through how he raps throughout the movie.

Toward the end of the movie, Collin raps to the police officer who killed Randall, discussing issues like systematic racism, gentrification, and white privilege. It is through rapping, that Collin confronts the police officer who represents heteropatriarchal white supremacy, demonstrating hip-hop's history of facilitating a public critique of issues facing Black people. In chapter six, an analysis of the television show *Empire,* Jamal, a queer Black man, uses the battle rap format to confront Black Rambo's homophobia. Black Rambo confesses his homophobia toward Jamal when it is learned that he will be Lucious' heir, having proven himself to the media mogul despite his sexuality. Highlighting Black men's social vulnerability and presenting rap music as a tool for confronting heteropatriarchal white supremacy and hegemonic ideals in some Black communities, these examples demonstrate how a hip-hop sensibility emerges across media formats, helping to make Resistive Black Masculinities knowable during the Black Lives Matter Era.

Together, these four tenets offer a way to conceptualize Resistive Black Masculinities, which I have argued is important for theorizing about Black men and masculinities in more complex and nuanced ways. Having discussed these four tenets of Resistive Black Masculinities, I turn to this project's limitations and propose some directions for future research.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Though this project makes a valuable contribution to the area of Black masculinity in Communication Studies, it is not without limitations. In this section, I will discuss three limitations of this project and give suggestions for future research. First, in the tradition of rhetorical studies, I focused primarily on analyzing transcribed spoken

language in this project's three case studies. In chapters five and six, I described and analyzed important scenes, placing them in context with the transcribed spoken language I analyze throughout the project. However, rhetorical scholars are increasingly interested in the ways that the voice itself acts rhetorically. While focusing on transcribed spoken language in music, television, and movies allowed me to adequately demonstrate how Resistive Black Masculinities emerge through these texts, focus on the spoken voice may have added an additional dimension that this project does not take into consideration. Future studies about Resistive Black Masculinities may consider how these masculinities are culturally represented through the voice as a rhetorical dimension in conversation with transcribed spoken language.

Second, this project focuses on the ways that Resistive Black Masculinities emerge in Black-created music, movies, and television. I chose to focus on these media formats because they house common representations about Black men and masculinities, as crafted by Black creators, and because they reach a substantial audience, underscoring their significance in U.S. American popular culture. While these media formats are commonly studied by rhetorical and media scholars, there exists a whole range of other media contexts that this project did not include like radio, podcasts, novels, and YouTube videos. Like music, television, and movies, these media formats bear the potential of offering tremendous insight about how Resistive Black Masculinities are represented despite often being overlooked. Future research about Resistive Black Masculinities may consider how these masculinities emerge in texts that are not music, movies, and television. Future research could also consider how media formats like music, television,

and movies converge with other formats to explore the resulting narrative about how Resistive Black Masculinities are represented in popular culture.

Third, this project focused primarily on the how Black media writers, producers, directors, and artists represent Resistive Black Masculinities through music, television, and movies. I intentionally chose to focus on these specific case studies because they were created by or were heavily influenced by Black media creators. Importantly, most of these creators were Black men to the exclusion of Black women. Perhaps this is perhaps because the media production continues to be dominated by men, a claim that seems particularly true in hip-hop as a musical genre. Acknowledging this gender disparity, future research might consider how Resistive Black Masculinities are represented from women's perspectives and perhaps in conversation with Black women's social vulnerability in a patriarchal white supremacist society.

Conclusion

As I expressed at the beginning of this chapter, this project was motivated by my observation that Black masculinity continues to be researched in ways that do not account for the complexity of Black men's experiences. Despite my own observation and experiences that Black men often lack the privilege and patriarchal power afforded to white men, I was troubled by a copious amount of research that theorized about manhood as a universal experience. In some of these studies, Black men were discussed as privileged patriarchs despite how these accounts seem ahistorical. While many special issues, journal articles, opinion pieces, and monographs address how Black feminism was necessitated by the need to distinguish the differential experiences of Black women from white women, Black men continue to be understood as sharing a universal brotherhood

with white men. Within the field of Communication Studies, a limited number of scholars, including myself, have sought to confront this theoretical oversight. In much of the work that does exist about Black masculinity, Black men are often represented merely as vulnerable despite the ways that Black men have also resisted our socially vulnerable situatedness. Taking these observations into account, this project sought to make a meaningful contribution to theorizing Black masculinity in conversation with ideas about vulnerability and resistance in Black popular culture.

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