The Daughters of Baartman Return the Gaze: Sexual Shaming and Africana Women's Perceptions of and Speculations on their Sexual Agency and Futures

Melanie Mccoy

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/aas_theses

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/aas_theses/50

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of African-American Studies at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in African-American Studies Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.
THE DAUGHTERS OF BAARTMAN RETURN THE GAZE: SEXUAL SHAMING AND AFRICANA WOMEN’S PERCEPTIONS OF AND SPECULATIONS ON THEIR SEXUAL AGENCY AND FUTURES

by

MELANIE “ZALIKA IBAORIMI” MCCOY

Under the Direction of Sarita Davis, Ph.D., MSW

ABSTRACT

The objective of this research study is to examine the lives and sexual and social relationships of 400 Africana women between the ages of 18-65. The following research questions are: 1) How do Africana women, based on their sexual and social relationships, believe they are perceived by Africana communities? 2) How do Africana women, based on their sexual and social relationships, imagine the creation of sexually and culturally affirming spaces for themselves and other Africana women in the future? This study uses a mixed methods approach including survey, interviews, and Photovoice to understand Africana women’s perceptions of the possibility of a sexually affirmed future. Participants were selected using purposive sampling methods. Afrofuturism is the guiding theoretical framework used for this study as well as Womanism.

INDEX WORDS: Black Women, Sexual Shaming, Afrofuturism, Black Possibility, Womanism, Otherness, Sex Positivity, Social Media, African Diaspora, Black Sexual Politics, Black Queer Theory
THE DAUGHTERS OF BAARTMAN RETURN THE GAZE: SEXUAL SHAMING AND AFRICANA WOMEN’S PERCEPTIONS OF AND SPECULATIONS ON THEIR SEXUAL AGENCY AND FUTURES

by

MELANIE “ZALIKA IBAORIMI” MCCOY

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2018
THE DAUGHTERS OF BAARTMAN SPEAK OUT: SEXUAL SHAMING AND AFRICANA

WOMEN’S PERCEPTIONS OF AND SPECULATIONS ON THEIR SEXUAL AGENCY

AND FUTURES

by

MELANIE “ZALIKA IBAORIMI” MCCOY

Committee Chair:     Sarita Davis

Committee:           Lia T. Bascomb
                        Jennifer Williams

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2018
DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my ancestor, my mother, Lezlie McCoy. You are a woman who filled me up with love and taught me never to hide. Thank you for guiding me through this process. I love you.

I dedicate this to my father, Orrin McCoy. Daddy thank you for acceptance and protection. I love you.

I dedicate this to my grandmother, Vencenia Walters. You instilled in me Grandma Vennie Womanist Politics. I love you.

I dedicate this to Saartjie Baartman. Your story encouraged me to look inward and outward. May your life influence the futures of Africana women.

Finally, I dedicate this to every jawn, hoe, hood girl, ratchet women, Black trans woman, Black sex worker and Black queer woman- you are the reason for this thesis. You, my sisters, are the daughters of Baartman.

AFROFUTURISM MATTERS.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to give thanks and honor to the Lord, the Orishas and my ancestors. Amen. Asé.
Thank you to my sister Nykia Harrison and my brother, Montez Smith. We have been through so much together and you saved my life. I love you two. Thank you to my best friend, Brittany Evans. May we forever be weird in piece. I love you sis. Thank you to the greatest scholarly mother and thesis chair of all time, Dr. Sarita Kaya Davis. I cannot wait to read the book! Thank you to my mentor and friend Dr. Jennifer Williams. I can see the future and YOU ARE IN IT. Your mind is absolutely incredible and you are going to change the world of Afrofuturism FOREVER. *Wakanda Forever* Thank you to my professor and committee member, Dr. Lia Bascomb. Thank you for pushing me and urging me to take a deep breath. Thank you to Beza Fekade and Dante Studamire for being part of the research team! *shouts* TU! *response* AF AM! Thank you to my Temple University Africology family. Thank you to the faculty, staff and students at Georgia State University. I would like to thank my godmother, Iya Darasia Selby. Alaafia! Thank you to the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement! Thank you to every woman who participated in the research study. Thank you to my family, church family and community. Thank you to Rashida and Timothy Welbeck. I am so appreciative of all of your prayers. Thank you to my aunt, Amber-Lanier Angeli, for your life and existence. Thank you to #BlackTwitter!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLOGUE ........................................................................................................................................... 1

1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................................. 8

1.1 Purpose of the Study ......................................................................................................................... 8

1.2 Background ........................................................................................................................................ 9

1.3 Problem Statement and Purpose .................................................................................................... 12

1.4 Significance of the Study .................................................................................................................. 14

1.5 Nature of Study .................................................................................................................................. 16

1.6 Research Questions ........................................................................................................................... 17

1.7 Operational Terms ............................................................................................................................. 17

1.8 Conceptual Framework ..................................................................................................................... 22

1.9 Limitations, Delimitations, Assumptions and Scope ......................................................................... 22

1.10 Conclusion ......................................................................................................................................... 24

2 LITERATURE REVIEW ..................................................................................................................... 24

2.1 A History of the Racialized Sexual Subjugation of Africana Women .............................................. 25

2.2 Her Sins, Their Salvation: Purity Culture and the Black Church ................................................. 47

2.3 The Queers, Freaks, Hoes and THOTS as Other: Sexual Shaming as a Dehumanizing Effort and It’s Effects ......................................................................................................................... 59

2.3.1 Transphobia Against Black Trans Women .................................................................................. 64

2.4 Deviant Blackness, Otherness, and Sex-Positivity .......................................................................... 74

2.5 “My Own Term for Such Women Would Be...” : Womanism as the Praxis of Black Womanhood and Sanctuary for the Future .............................................................................................................. 82

2.6 Race and Sexuality as Technology: Afrofuturism and a Culturally and Sexually Affirmed Future for Africana Women .................................................................................................................. 87
3 METHODOLOGY ........................................................................................................... 95

3.1 Approaches .............................................................................................................. 95

3.2 Research Questions ............................................................................................... 97

3.3 Participants ............................................................................................................. 97

3.4 Recruitment ............................................................................................................ 98

3.5 Measures ............................................................................................................... 98

3.6 Survey ..................................................................................................................... 99

3.7 Interview ............................................................................................................... 101

3.8 Photovoice ........................................................................................................... 102

3.9 Data Collection ...................................................................................................... 103

3.10 Reliability/Validity ............................................................................................... 104

3.11 Data Coding Interrater-Reliability ......................................................................... 105

3.12 Summary .............................................................................................................. 105

4 FINDINGS .................................................................................................................. 106

4.1 Survey ..................................................................................................................... 108

  4.1.1 Sociodemographics .......................................................................................... 108

  4.1.2 Sexual Shaming ............................................................................................... 111

4.2 The Participants ....................................................................................................... 116

4.3 The Interview ......................................................................................................... 117

4.4 Overview of Themes ............................................................................................... 130

4.5 Data Collection Procedure Applied to Data Analysis .............................................. 133

4.6 Data Presentation and Analysis ............................................................................. 135

4.7 Photovoice ............................................................................................................ 154

4.8 Sexual Shaming ..................................................................................................... 158
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Afrofuturism</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Implications for Africana Studies and Afrofuturism</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Recommendations for Future Research</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix A.1: Survey Informed Consent</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix A.2 Interview Informed Consent</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix B Flyer</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix C: Survey</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix D: Interview Demographics Form</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix E: Interview Guide</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix F: Photovoice Guide</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Sociodemographic Description of Africana Women Survey Participants............. 109
Table 2 Sexual Shaming Description of Africana Women Survey Participants............... 112
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Photo 1 ........................................................................................................................................ 155
Figure 2 Photo 2 ........................................................................................................................................ 156
Figure 3 Photo 1 ........................................................................................................................................ 157
Figure 4 Photo 2 ........................................................................................................................................ 157
PROLOGUE

At the age of 15, my rose-colored ideas about Black girlhood shifted. In the basement of my high school gym, I was sexually assaulted by a 17-year-old athlete, who was well on his way to his dream HBCU. As his dreams blossomed, my own dreams began to wither. I thought that being the daughter of a pastor and a God-fearing mother would demonstrate my “goodness” as a Black girl. I once believed that if I remained a virgin, I would one day be rewarded by God, because I saved my gift for the man that “He” chose for me. If I received excellent grades and went to college, all would be well in this imaginary exceptional world for Black women; that irrevocably changed after my “run-in” with the athlete.

I sat in the gym, a bit confused by which part of that floor I was in. I would learn later that it was a vacant boys’ bathroom. I tried to relieve myself with the thought of, “It’s only molestation,” but that thought could only comfort me but for so long. I replayed how my fear aroused him, and I recall the fluid-like residue from his excitement. I have lost aspects of my memory from this time, but I remember the pressure on the back of my head as he pushed it— “just kiss it.” All that I wanted to do was study for my World History exam; it was finals week and the exam was about an hour away. I needed to ace this thing. I was doing what a “good student” would do and he asked if he could speak to me. I heard those whispers behind a door— it was his voice and he was asking me something, but I could not hear what he was saying. I walked in unsuspecting, my wrist was pulled and suddenly another door shut behind me. Was I losing my mind? This could not happen. Here I was a girl 4’10” and less than 100 lbs., and he was closer to 200 pounds, or at least he looked that way, and a little over 6 feet tall. I can remember his hands around my neck, my body being pressed against a cold wall, air and nothingness below my feet and him trying to kiss me so passionately that I could not breath-
except, I was not kissing back. I whispered, “Please stop.” Why the whisper? I was embarrassed that someone would get the “wrong” idea, I was ashamed and I could not bear for the kids to find out that the Christian girl was caught with some boy, even if she did not want it. I thought if I spoke to him calmly he would stop. He was mostly quiet and I really wanted him to speak, because my senses caused me to lose my ability to see. He told me something- he said that I was “beautiful,” and ever since this time for years I found nothing but ugliness and grotesquerie within the word. My mind went into shock. He was so quiet, and I could feel him all over me. It reminded me of one of those Disneyworld attractions that my mother and father would take me to as a little girl- the alien escaped and we all enjoyed the thrill of being scared as the lights were turned out; we could hear the alien. But this time, there was nothing to enjoy, this was not Disneyworld and I was not 7. This was no alien; this was a person that I knew, and the only thing that felt alien was me.

In all honesty, I could not stand the boy. He observed me from September to June, and because I would hang out with my brother, who identified as my lesbian sister at the time, he would ask me vulgar questions. He asked me if I liked to go down on women and if I was a lesbian, and I would respond that if this were the case I would not be interested in him. A few days later, I would live out a day that would hollow my heart and my peace. Tuesday, June 12, 2007, he molested me and he came back a few minutes later to tell me that I was a waste of time because he could not get my pants down. He told me that I had to leave the area, because he did not want anyone to think that anything happened to me. I nodded in agreement; I just wanted a moment recuperate. I called my brother. He was at high school graduation rehearsal, and when he answered I told him that I felt strange. He was so worried and angry, because I was so confused, but he was not at all. The next day he and my sister came to fight. It was too late. His
friends had already gotten to me and told me that he was a young Black man and that if I told anyone that I would be ruining his future. What about mine?

I grew into silence, while finding refuge with “others”- Black girls with reputations: “whores” and “queers.” I felt ashamed for the thoughts that I had about “other” Black girls, because now with all of the rumors floating around about what he and I had “done,” there was no recovery. High school was a nightmare for me, before I revealed my assault to my family. Black boys offered to pay me money for sex, while Black girls would call me and ugly and sad ho. It did not matter what the truth was, because within this community a lie being told repeatedly became the truth. After my family found out the news, they tried their best to get justice for me, but sadly, they could not get the information needed from me to do so. Over time, the rumor circulated that I was a teenage sex worker who only had sex with older men; that broke my spirit. I felt alien. Within an 8-year span, I was diagnosed by therapists with PTSD, struggled with depression, and tried to take my life numerous times. My grades went from mostly A’s to mostly F’s, and as a result I almost did not make it into college, despite going to one of the best high schools in the city. The high school I attended cared more about their reputation than the fact that a student was assaulted. If I did not attend therapy, I would have been kicked out of school for my poor grades. Thankfully, my family advocated on my behalf and demanded justice. With the love and support of my family and friends, I was able to begin to heal.

Today, when I reflect on what happened, I have a much different perspective. What if I was the “hoe” everyone accused me of being; would that have meant that I was not worthy of love, kindness, or being treated like a human being? Whether I was sexually assaulted or not what if I did have sex with all of the boys that everyone said that I did - why would that alter the level of my humanness? Finally, why would I as the victim, be treated as if I were also the
attacker? I would not be the first Black girl or woman that this would happen to and I know that I am not going to be the last. Today, I ponder the respectability of those young people. I consider how their criticisms are the same criticisms against Black women with non-normative expressions of sexuality, orientation or identity by adult Black people. Walking around the streets of Philadelphia, it was then that I learned on Broad and Olney that a “bitch” was no woman, or maybe on Girard Avenue that “these females have no respect for themselves.” In West Philly, an “Afrocentric” man would say “Peace Queen” and even if I greeted him as long as it was not met with reciprocal romantic interest, I would understand in about seven seconds or less that I would go from being a “queen” to a “bitch.” This is equivocal to the echoes of “Hey soul-sister,” heard by Fran Sanders as she walked down the street in “Dear Black Man” (Bambara, 1970, p. 90). Like myself, she frequently heard this, and the initial feeling is to give Black men the benefit of the doubt. Sometimes, like Sanders, I would crack a smile in response and nod. However, most days I gained a mistrust after the hundredth “well, fuck you too then, bitch.” Sanders in her essay, negotiated what those greetings meant and there were times, and still are times, when those greetings are just euphemisms for “Hey, Bitch” (Bambara, 1970, p. 90). My brain rattles as I think about how Black men or even some women make it clear that not all Black “females” are women, even though the socially-constructed gender category for woman, for those who identify this way signifies human status. Misnaming, also affects women in other ways, especially trans women; they often experience misgendering. This kind of misgendering, and shaming, complicates what C. Riley Snorton identifies as the “psychic dimensions of passing” for trans people as their race and gender intersects (Snorton, 2009, p. 77). Misgendering is in opposition to the idea of passing, not as a physical characteristic, but one that involves matter of psyche.
My Aunt is a Black trans woman and my brother, a Black trans man has shown me another level of shaming that comes with not being cisgendered, straight, or a “model Black citizen.” The constant misgendering they endure is based on a sexual shaming practice rooted in a false notion of gender and sexuality. Although, experiencing sexual shaming from other Black people, I have never faced this level of scrutiny as a cisgendered heterosexual Black woman. What I do recognize is that what this comes with, whether it be from transphobia or the vilifying of Black women to their sexual and social relationships, are the unfavorable politics of the non-normative practices of Africana women.

Pertaining to sexual assault, it happened two more times between my college and early adult years. My teenage attacker assaulted numerous women, by way of rape and was even expelled from Morehouse because of it. Years later, he assaulted a young woman who went to high school with us. She was brave and pressed charges. I was tracked down and asked if I could testify against him. It ended up being a separate case. He got off with probation because 1) as a 15-year old Black girl of course I had sexual experience - that is what his Black lawyer implied by stating with a smile, “So you were 15 and had never seen or been around a penis?’ and 2) the other young women’s bisexual status and open sexual expression. This had everything to do with the notion that Black girls are inherently sexual, and that Black women are over-sexualized and deviant. The intersections of our race and gender, were being weaponized against us. In a study conducted by PerryUndem in 2017, 28 percent of Black women, from a sample size of 1,003 adults, who participated in the study stated that someone had sex with them without their consent. Other participants expressed something similar by using other language, which will be discussed in Chapter 1.
However, it is important to my formative teenage years to acknowledge something - it would be something that would protect me. I made over ten suicide attempts in high school. While in therapy at Women Organized Against Rape, I had to fill out intake forms. One of the questions was always about the future: “Do you believe you have a future?” / “Can you see yourself in future?” Sometimes I answered with the choices reflecting that I could, because I just wanted to get out of therapy even if I was lying, but most days I would say that I could not or that I did not know. As a means to escape, I would write short sci-fi stories about overcoming all of this sexual shaming and also about how this world of mine was so dystopian with my 15 to 16-year-old language. One day, I would be my own superheroine. Before the words Afrofuturism came to be in my mouth, it was then that I realized that Afrofuturism was always there and saved my life. It was Womanism, that provided to me sanctuary. I learned as a human how to become what Toni Morrison in *Sula*, a literary work on the coming of age of two Black women friends, one of whom is demonized by her community for her unconventional sexual relationships and experiences, refers to as “something else to be” (Morrison, 1973, p. 52). I decided to not let the past dictate my sexual future, even if it was upsetting to my community.

This thesis engages Afrofuturism, Womanism, and Black sexual politics to reconsider the idea of the “flesh” as imagined by Hortense Spillers as “something else to be”: a space allowing for practices that center Blackness and privilege sexual autonomy and pleasure. I am not the first Black woman to experience sexual violence, it is part of the fabric of enslaved African women’s history like Saartjie Baartman, who was not only placed on public display in London and Paris for the white and male gaze on her nude body as primitive, but also placed on display for the sake of science. Dying at the age of twenty-five, even after death, her body parts were severed,
mutilated and displayed in a museum. However, Baartman has become the mother of those who have chosen “something else to be.”

It is seminal to discussions of Black womanhood and feminism to consider the sexual expression of Africana women that are deemed unacceptable, shameful and downright nasty. However, in viewing Hip Hop, ratchet girl status, hood, ho culture, pornography, BDSM, internet cam girls, and social media culture, some Africana women may actually be heroines by broadening, reclaiming and reaffirming Black women’s sexuality and humanity. While racially essentialist systems and techniques aim to vilify these women as deviant and disgraces to Black communities, this same group of women aim to challenge the norms. Sexuality or sexual acts are processes of initiation, that often alter the life paths of Africana women, which also is a component of why sexual trauma is so devastating. Additionally, what some may categorize as overtly sexual is often categorized as something stemming from a traumatic event; some of the lives and practices of these women challenge that narrative. Sexuality should not share synonymy with trauma, as the politics of pleasure should engage desire as a healthy practice. Furthermore, not every sexual expression or act is immediately an act of pleasure, as it may be for monetary compensation or resource.

Sexual shaming, an operation that seeks to recognize this particular group of Africana women as anything less than fully-human, is not designed to uplift or sustain their capacity to live. It is a violence, expressed physically, systemically, emotionally and verbally that seeks to destroy any possible actualized or imagined future. It is an etymological fallacy that seeks to deny the humanity of women who are emphatically human. Sexual shaming, if not physically violent, can thrive off of rumor and falsehood as it pries into the sexual lives and histories of Africana women. If it pries and discovers that there is a truth to what is deemed a non-normative
ideation of sexuality through heterosexual pleasure, queer identity, or sex work, the victim of this shaming will be othered.

My intent is to affirm and explore how non-normative expressions disrupt oppressive systems and practices. I consider historically, the dichotomy of the perceived deviant nature of Blues women in comparison to Black women and middle-class values, reveals that not every historical Black woman figure reverted to tactics of respectability. Considering the efforts of the Blues women and the women like them of today, these actions are celebrated as sexual insurgency, as means to fight back and challenge the narrative that “goodness” or the political tactic of asexuality means human for Black women and that “deviance” or sexuality means otherness, inhuman, and a demotion of humanity for Black women. In reality, “difference” should not mean deviance, but for some Africana women the thought of sexual subversion through sexual practice, queer identity, occupation and rumor through reclamation is empowering and serves as narratives that are counter-human and counter-sexual; a means to be human, sexual and “something else to be.” This project is invested in understanding who sexually shamed Black women believe they are in the eyes of Black communities. Most imperative to this research study, the aim is to provide the space for them to carry out their imaginings of what it looks and feels like to be something else that challenges the current space of sexual shame- daughters of Baartman.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Study

This chapter illustrates the role of sexual shaming and how it impacts Africana women, particularly those who are marginalized by way of their sexual orientation and sexual and social relationships. The background of the research goes over the history of sexual shaming, reflects
on the research problem as well as the significance and purpose of the study. This chapter discusses the nature of the study, and the observation of the research questions and as a means to operationalize terms, this chapter also includes a glossary. Finally, the chapter confronts the assumptions, scope, limitations and delimitations of the research study.

1.2 Background

Sexual shaming is a dehumanizing endeavor. Sexual shaming can consist of: bullying or shaming based on a person’s sexual orientation; acts of sexual violence; misgendering and transphobia due to a person’s belief in strict boundaries for gender, sex, and sexual orientation. It can also include harmful actions or insults that are based on the assumptions of women’s allegedly inappropriate sexual practices, or negatively labeling women because of perceptions about her sexual autonomy and/or her comfortability with pleasure. Although, women’s practices are not the only people who can fall victim to sexual shaming, as men and gender non-conforming people can be sexually shamed, Black women are the focus of the study. While popularly known as slut-shaming, throughout this essay I will not refer to this shaming as “slut” shaming. I agree with author Toni Bell, who states in “Black Women’s Sexuality: Let’s Stop Trying to Reclaim the Past,” historically, Black women were the poster children of slut-shaming. They are still misrepresented as hypersexual, and often labeled derogatory terms when they are victims of sexual violence and harassment. I have no motivation to recover that labeling. The term slut may minimize or inadequately describe all of the harm this sexual-behavior-based shaming may cause women. This shaming is a dehumanizing practice, often in the form of verbal or physical violence or some other traumatizing act, originating from dominant moral beliefs about appropriate sexuality, particularly as they are influenced by a cisgendered heteronormativity.
Although, there is a lack of statistical data to show the extent to which Africana women are affected by sexual shaming, the literature found evidence of sexual shaming without the language sexual shaming. Sexual shaming, is identified as a dehumanizing act, therefore, the literature was able to find statistical data and historical evidence of sexual subjugation. Sexual shaming is an underbelly of external abuse that internally affects victims. It is oppressive, however, it could be connected and attached to sexual subjugation, which Patricia Hill Collins argues in Black Sexual Politics, can span from coerced or consensual submission to sexual intercourse (Collins, 2004, p. 236). There is overlap between sexual shaming and sexual subjugation; although, subjugation may just be identified as being a physical act.

PerryUndem conducted a broad study of “1,003 Black adults 18 and older from July 18 to August 7, 2017” regarding their views on racism, race and policy, the political climate, and the policies that affect their adaptnesss to maintain healthy families and raise healthy children; however, relevant to this study are the sections on “Black women and control over their bodies” (PerryUndem, 2017, p. 2). Thirty-seven percent of surveyed Black women say someone has pressured them to have sex when they did not want to, 33 percent have the feeling, at least once in a while, that other people feel entitled to their body, and 28 percent say that someone had sex with them without their consent (PerryUndem, 2017, p. 31). Additionally, “20 percent have been made to have sex without a condom, 16 percent have been made to have oral or anal sex, and half of Black women (51 percent) has experienced some type of sexual pressure or force (PerryUndem, 2017, p. 31). The study also states:

Black mothers of children under 18 are particularly likely to have been unsafe in their bodies. About six in ten (59 percent) have experienced sexual assault or pressure. Forty-four percent have been pressured to have sex when they did not want to. One in three (32
percent) says someone had sex with them without their consent. One in four (26 percent) has been made to have sex without a condom. More than four in ten (46 percent) could only afford to pay $10 or less for birth control if they needed it today. (PerryUndem, 2017)

These statistics represent examples of how sexual subjugation manifests into sexual shaming. Black women feel uncomfortable and unsafe in their bodies. Although the study presents data to support sexual pressure, how this pressure was implemented is unknown. Sexual shaming can often lead to feelings of powerlessness, and pressure. The PerryUndem study provides a way to further understand the layers of both sexual subjugation and shaming as some of these themes could possibly appear within the collected data.

Sexual orientation and gender identity are also factors in how sexual shaming practices are inflicted. With this factor present, Sexual shaming manifests in a different way for transgendered populations of Black women. GLAAD, a media monitoring organization founded by LGBTQIA people, regularly collects data on the murders of transgender people. As of 2017, 19 transgender women of color were murdered, 14 of which are Black (GLAAD). Additionally, as reported by Erin Fitzgerald, Sarah Elspeth Patterson, Darby Hickey Cherno Biko, and Harper Jean Tobin in Meaningful Work: Transgender Experiences in the Sex Trade, Black and Black Multiracial NTDS (The National Transgender Discrimination Survey) respondents had the highest rate of sex trade participation overall (39.9%), followed by those who identified as Hispanic or Latino/a (33.2%)” (2015). In comparison to the 13.1 percent of sex workers and transfeminine Black people, those identifying as “White only” had the lowest rate of participation at 6.3%. (2015).
The literature that substantiates the study, not only reviews other statistical data but also acknowledges the history of sexual shaming from the point of origin of the white construction of imposed ideas of pathology, difference and otherness through biology on Africana people, particularly the sexual histories of enslaved African women. The literature supports that these classifications lead to the dehumanization of a people, who later in an effort to reaffirm the humanities of themselves, as Africana people, problematize the lives of those who do not fit their mold.

1.3 Problem Statement and Purpose

The purpose of this mixed method study is to investigate and examine Black women’s perceptions of how their surrounding communities of Africana people perceive them as they approach their social and sexual relationships through survey, interviews and the participatory action research component, using Photovoice, considers how they imagine the creation of their own sexually and culturally affirming spaces in the future, as a population who is marginalized based on their intersections. Their race places them in marginalized positions, just as their gender does. With the prevalence of Black women’s sexual stereotyping, it is important to recognize Black women as full human beings, not limited to their communities’ expectations of them.

This research study visits the prevalence of the sexual shaming of Africana women within Africana communities, as well as existing movements, such as sex-positivity and frameworks that seek to push back against sexual shaming. However, when some of these movements seek to push back against sexual shaming, their goals are expressed in such a universal way, that it ignores the nuances and needs of some communities of non-white women. For Black women, there might be a pressure to not disappoint, and to serve their community. Black women exist in the binary vacuum between hypersexuality and desexualization, with
minimal room for the expression of their humanity. The incessant demand for Black women to recount their historicized pain and trauma as collective memory facilitates as a function of the erasure of their humanity - an erasure by way of the demonization of the recognition and exploration of their sexualities. The terms gender and sexuality are not interchangeably used, as they do differ from one another. In this study, gender will be recognized as a social construct, and not one that is biological. However, sexuality, will be recognized as the sexual orientation or expressions of Africana women who will be discussed in the study. In relationship to transgender identity, this study recognizes that transphobia is not only just a hateful act, but is often mislabeled and recognized as a sexual orientation. Although, gender and sexuality will not be synonyms of one another, it is important to recognize that in this study that the two identities may intersect. However, to fulfill the the larger goal of the study, the study seeks to answer the following research questions: 1) How do Africana women, based on their sexual and social relationships, believe they are perceived by Africana communities? And 2) How do Africana women, based on their sexual and social relationships, imagine the creation of sexually and culturally affirming spaces for themselves and other Africana women in the future? The 10 participants also participate in a data collection process known as Photovoice, which is explained later in this chapter. I would like to clarify that my justification for using the term “Africana” is because, the 400 participants can be from any part of the African diaspora. The justification for the 10 participants who must be from the United States, being called “Africana,” is because the United States is also part of the African diaspora. However, it is understood that participants may identify in other ways. Participants will be compensated.

This study also considers and validates Black sexual politics and the politics of pleasure, which Joan Morgan states serves as a function to improve Black women’s lives by rejecting the
embrace of troublesome racial and sexual histories in the United States as guilt while unproblematizing or simplifying the sexualities of Black women (Parlour Magazine, 2013). However, the study will not erase the prevalence of sexual trauma and subjugation as these histories of Africana women do matter. This study also acknowledges that the politics of pleasure may not always be the only measure taken to uplift the sexual ability and consensual practices of Black women, as the narrative may be different for the Africana sex worker population.

Using a mixed-methods approach, this study includes interviews with 10 Africana women between the ages of 18 and 65. They are identified through social networks such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Geographically, participants are from the United States. Interviews are conducted in-person and via video calls through Apple’s FaceTime or Google Hangouts.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Originally, this study took on various forms, considering theoretical frameworks, other topics and with enough conversation, lived experience. I knew Afrofuturism would be in the midst of this particular subject, but I experienced reluctance in attaching sexuality to Afrofuturism. This was not because I did not find value within the pairing, but the reluctance was due to just how this pairing related to my personal life. The innovation was in focusing on the pockets of marginalized Black women, within already marginalized spaces. This was not to uncover or make a case for victim statuses, but to expose and explore the taboo aspects of Black women’s sexuality. I am among the number of Black women who are part of this marginalized group I seek to explore- those who are shamed, due to their not heteronormative sexual and social relationships, or sexual or gender identity.
Through film and literature, there were various Black women characters who possessed these characteristics or experienced sexual shaming. Despite knowing women in my personal relationships having these very real painful experiences, through research I found that there was a large gap of this subject matter for women of all racial backgrounds. Sex-positivity was another avenue, but through scholarship there was very little information on this subject. As a result, there was an even larger gap in finding scholarship to support or recognize the intersections of race, as well as affirming those within the sexually nuanced pocket of this subject.

This study intends to be liberatory, and aligns with the goals, aims, and mission of Africana Studies. This study seeks to understand the envisioning of safe space as a means of liberation and community. Additionally, not only does the research seek to answer the overarching Black Studies question, “What does it mean to be human?,” it places an innovative spin on the question. Within Black Studies, the discipline must show a willingness to explore Africana women and gender and sexuality. Often the consideration of sexual-shaming falls under the white gaze, and if Africana women are included sometimes the dynamic often does not move toward seeking liberatory solutions. However, scholars such as Hortense Spillers, Sylvia Wynter, Jennifer Nash, Mireille Miller-Young, Ariane Cruz, and countless other scholars have fought to humanize Africana women in multiple ways. Afrofuturism, fairly young in coinage, but not in concept, has been set with numerous boundaries and limitations. The stipulation of boxing Afrofuturism into a singular practice is incompatible with the idea of imagination or speculation, which should serve as a limitless practice for Africana people. This view of Afrofuturism, creates a newer narrative and encourages the envisioning of other possibilities as it connects to gender and sexuality. As there is a vein of Afrofuturism that considers race as a form of technology the same could be applied to the idea of sexuality as a form of technology. The idea of sexually
shamed Africana people as not being human, captures the grotesque otherworldly deliberation of a sector of Afrofuturism, that seeks to dismantle and destroy any notion of Black people being less than human, subhuman, through the veil of whiteness that makes biological race arguments of their own superiority, and the reactionary response of some Africana scholars or people who claim a super-humanness to claim adequacy or superiority for Africana people. Neither one places Africana people in the position to be recognized as simply human.

This research could possibly expand and preserve Black Studies as it leans further into the intersections of Blackness, a New Black Studies, creating inclusivity for future scholars who desire to do work within the discipline, but feel their work may be better supported in other disciplines. This research will also encourage Afrofuturists to explore and imagine their own ideations of Black futures or Black future work. In considering the Black futures of Africana women, the sexual pleasures of Africana women, and the biopolitics or constructions of Africana women’s humanity, this work builds on the works of Alice Walker, Darlene Clark Hine, Sylvia Wynter, Hortense Spillers, Jennifer Nash, Ariane Cruz, and Mirielle Miller-Young.

1.5 Nature of Study

This mixed method study explores sexual shaming as a dehumanization project against self-identified Africana women of the diaspora and Africana women in the United States, as it also considers how the participants, Africana women, believe they are sexually perceived by their surrounding Africana communities. Methodologically, after examining the sexual perceptions of 400 Black women through survey (Survey Monkey), and then the interview process of ten of the participants, while using a method called Photovoice, participants will speculate and imagine the formation of their own sexually and culturally affirmed futures through their own creative production—photography.
1.6 Research Questions

The objective of this study is to examine the lives and sexual and social relationships of Africana women between the ages of 18-65. The following research questions are:

1) How do Africana women, based on their sexual and social relationships, believe they are perceived by Africana communities?

2) How do Black women, based on their sexual and social relationships, imagine the creation of sexually and culturally affirming spaces for themselves and other Black women in the future?

1.7 Operational Terms

Africana- Lewis Gordon defines Africana as “any African descended person who identifies as being part of the diaspora after modernity- “the sixteenth century onward” (2008).

African American- A person whose origins belong to Black ethnic groups in Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Afrofuturism- Originally coined by social critic, Mark Dery, I define it “as a concept, practice and movement that requires Africana people to ubiquitously conceptualize and deduce time from the past, present and future from an African cultural center. This cultural center operates as the technological component of African futures from which African people can architect their agency in memory and in practice; referring to the Akan principle of Sankofa” (McCoy, 2015).

Black- A type of “human being” with ancestral ties to Africa (Vocabulary).

BDSM (Bondage & Discipline/Dominance, Submission and Sadomasochism)- BDSM, not always sexual in nature, is defined by the University of California Merced LGBTQIA Resource Center Glossary, as an eroticized wide spectrum of interpersonal activities, that fall
outside of practices that are typically regarded as social norms of sexuality and human relationships. Ariane Cruz considers BDSM through a race lens, as pleasure surrounded in the arousal of racial submission and domination for Black women. This view considers the diverse nature of Black women’s sexual practice (Cruz, 2015, p. 14).

Cisgender/ Cis- One’s gender identity aligning with sex “morphology, s/he is said to be cisgender” (Johnson, 2013). “These definitions emphasize that sex and gender are most frequently identified in relationship to a stable and socially binding center when, in fact, the categories of sex and gender are constructed and performed” (Johnson, 2013). Sex does not denote gender.

Dehumanization- “To deprive of human qualities, personality, or spirit” (Merriam-Webster).

Full-Human- Despite European racially constructed efforts of defining humanity, it is the affirmation of claiming humanness or humanity of a marginalized group or person.

Ho/ Hoe- Typically a derogatory term to sexually shame a woman. However, it is also a term that affirms the reclamation and acknowledgement of Black women and their sexual expression and identities.

Human- “A person as distinguished from an animal or (in science fiction) an alien” (Oxford); also distinguished from machines. As race was socially constructed, whiteness mandated ideas of non-white’s alterity, and beliefs of their own superiority who was human.

Intersectionality- Oxford defines it as the interconnectedness or overlapping of social classifications such as race, gender and class (As quoted in YW Boston Blog, 2017). Coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in a 1989 essay “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist
Politics,” she asserts that antidiscrimination law, feminist theory, and antiracist politics all do not acknowledge the experiences of Black women holistically, because of how they each look at each factor singularly or separate. Intersectionality does not fragment race from gender; it acknowledges the full subordination of Black women.

Other- Anything to marginalize or dehumanize a person through race, class, sex, gender, sexuality and/or disability; separating them from ideas of what is considered “the norm.” It can be used as both, a noun and verb.

Plaçage- This system was practiced in Louisiana and other French and Spanish slaveholding territories, and was a system where women of color, not being allotted the legal right to marry- entered into long-standing, concubinage, formalized relationships with white European men (Kein, 2000, p. 58).

Purity Culture- No Shame Movement defines purity culture as the “simple view of any discussion of things of a sexual nature outside of the context of heterosexual marriage as taboo” within a Christian context (As quoted on the No Shame Movement website). It is the political stance of people, especially women remaining virgin until they marry, and that if they partake in any form of sexual pleasure they are committing acts of sin against God. Additionally, it insists on female modesty and responsibility to protect boys and men from sexual temptation (As quoted on the No Shame Movement website). It creates a fear of spiritual consequence. This concept has been rejected by radical theologians from the Christian church as they argue it comes from the virgin/whore paradigm. Within this fight and rejection, the idea of the virgin or whore is eradicated. This is an aspect of sexual shaming.

(Sexual) Deviance- Richard Tewksbury defines it as the behaviors of people seeking erotic pleasure through practices that are deemed socially unacceptable, odd or different, (As
quoted in the Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology, 2007). Often used to describe a lack of morality of individuals, Ariane Cruz, uses the term in conjunction with sexual perversion to suggest insurgency against normative white heteropatriarchy (Cruz, 2016). It is “a mode of “oppositional politics” that might enable us to see power, agency, and resistance as well as pleasure differently” (Cruz, 2016, p. 16).

Sex Positivity- Emerging from the 1980s as part of the larger feminist movement, sex positivity has since energized people to accept all sexual identities and orientations as normal and healthy (Jones, 2016). As a movement aking no moral stance, it embraces women’s sexual and affirmatively consensual practices (@ZalUlbaorimi, 2017).

Sexual Shaming- Commonly referred to as slut-shaming, it is defined by the Huffington Post as “the experience of being labeled a sexually out-of-control girl or woman (a “slut” or “ho”) and then being punished socially for possessing this identity” (Tanenbaum, 2015).

Sex Work- “A broad term used to describe exchanges of sex or sexual activity. Sex work is also used as a non-stigmatizing term for “prostitution,” but in this report [Meaningful Work: Transgender Experiences in the Sex Trade] we use the term in its broader meaning. Using the term “sex work” reinforces the idea that sex work is work and allows for greater discussion of labor rights and conditions. Not every person in the sex trade defines themselves as a sex worker or their sexual exchange as work. Some may not regard what they do as labor at all, but simply a means to get what they need. Others may be operating within legal working conditions, such as pornography or exotic dancing, and wish to avoid the negative associations with illegal or informal forms of sex work. In addition to the exchange of money for sexual services, a person may exchange sex or sexual activity, or things they need or want, such as food, housing, hormones, drugs, gifts, or other resources” (Fitzgerald, Elspeth, Hickey, Biko, and Tobin, 2015).
Sex Industry- “An organized system of sexual exchange, which is not always the case when people are trading sexual services. The terms ‘sex trade’ or ‘sex trades’ remain more open, emphasizing the exchange aspect of these activities, while still allowing for both formal and informal conditions” (Fitzgerald, Elspeth, Hickey, Biko, and Tobin, 2015).

Transgender/ Trans- It is an umbrella term for persons who challenge gender normativity (Johnson, 2013). It is also defined by the University of California Merced LGBTQIA Resource Center Glossary, as an adjective used to describe the numerous identities and experiences of people whose gender and/or experiences deviate away from the sex or gender they were assigned at birth. “Trans*- (asterisk and hyphen) to signify gender nonconformity in multiple ways and to express that gender is best understood in its relationship with other courses of identity (Johnson, 2013). Gender does not denote sex.

Womanism- Building off of Black Feminism, and identifying feminism as an ideation designated for white women, Alice Walker coins the terminology in 1979, with a broad understanding of the praxis of Black womanhood and sisterhood, that also considers the wholeness of an entire people, Africana people (Walker, 1983). Like Black Feminism it critiques and seeks to dismantle the oppressions such as racism, sexism, classism and all that ails marginalized groups of people, but especially Black women. It also affirms the varying sexual identities of Black women without categorizing or placing limiters on them, as the Africana woman loves women sexually and non-sexually, and sometimes also loves men sexually and non-sexually (Walker, 1983). It centers Africana women with non-normative understandings of their sexuality.
1.8 Conceptual Framework

In considering methodology, Womanism, as coined by Alice Walker (1979), is the guiding theoretical framework as it also serves as a transformational action component. Sexual shaming is a symptom of oppression and marginalization, however, Womanism provides the space for Black women to be affirmed and recognized. Womanism is important, because it centers Black queer woman, and recognizes the everyday experiences of Black women outside of the academy. There is a lovingness associated with Womanism, one that considers and is committed to the wholeness of an entire people. It is solution oriented and affirms sisterhood as a means for healing and positive transformation.

Afrofuturism is employed through the research study’s second question as it will support the idea of how Africana women through photography and creativity come to understand a culturally and sexually affirmed future.

1.9 Limitations, Delimitations, Assumptions and Scope

This study’s goal is to survey 400 Black women and examine in-depth information about ten of the participants, without coming to any generalization. This study should gain insight on Africana women’s beliefs on how they are perceived sexually by Africana communities. Additionally, it should also gain insight on how Africana women imagine or envision futures that culturally and sexually affirm not only themselves, but other Africana women. I hope that a takeaway from this research study could be that Africana women, regardless of what they choose to do with their bodies, are fully human. Additionally, by Africana women sharing what they envision, perhaps readers will be able to find commonality. However, generalizations within the study are not possible due to the study’s small sample size. Sexual shaming has been harder to identify in qualitative-based research; however, it is a semantic issue and I had to use other
keywords to assess. Other limitations include the usage of social media and technology. By only selecting research participants through social media, this means that people without access cannot participate in this research study. Additionally, Afrofuturism is definitively broad, and based on the collected data it is possible that the definition will change.

Questions from the interview guide are carefully constructed in a way for participants to share their experiences as well as their perceptions of certain ideas. The questions are semi-formal, so that participants have the opportunity elaborate on their own stories and ideas about how they are perceived within their communities. As the researcher, I consider how not to take up space during the interview and allow for them to share more than I speak. Despite the similarities found within the questions within the interview guide (Appendix B), by asking questions in different ways each question may produce a different response. This may be a beneficial approach to use. During the interviews, I ask questions regarding “sex-positivity” and “Womanism,” however, I do ask participants directly about their knowledge of Afrofuturism. There is a possibility participants’ knowledge on sex-positivity or Womanism might hold a connection to social media or networking, as it has become not only an educational space, but the speculative space for their needs, expectations, and desires as they imagine the praxis of these concepts offline or as they approach the world. The social impact of social networks could be the technological instrument used to recruit participants—this is one approach to Afrofuturism. Participants will encounter aspects of Afrofuturism through the interview process. Questions are proposed during the interview to participants regarding the idea of their sexuality and identity in regards to the “future,” which is fundamental to the nature of Afrofuturism by way of Black possibility.
Efforts must be made not to pathologize participants, but show participants that the intent and purpose of the study is to work toward Black liberatory practices to create better Black futures for Africana women.

1.10 Conclusion

The introduction provided a synopsis for what is discussed within the research study, which discusses the background, purpose and significance. In addition to the nature of the research study being introduced the operational terms used, as well as the assumptions, limitations and delimitations of the study. This thesis includes five chapters: this introduction chapter being the first, Chapter 2: Literature Review, Chapter 3: Methodology, Chapter 4: Findings, and Chapter 5: Conclusion. Chapter 2 reviews the literature that was discussed within the Background section of this chapter and Chapter 3 provides information on data collection. Chapter 4 consolidates the results found from the data and are discussed with analysis and Chapter 5 will conclude with my future recommendations, results and other research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I chronologically explore the history of the sexual subjugation of Africana women, sexual shaming, and sex positivity. Although, this chapter acknowledges and affirms the experiences Africana women face within Africana communities, this chapter centers the experiences of those with a non-normative classification as result of their sexual and social relationships and identities. This chapter engages the injustice of these women being classified as subhuman based on their ways of being.

To understand sexual shaming as a violent and dehumanizing tool, this chapter will review the stories of the very specific populations of Black women ranging from sex workers, trans women, enjoyers of sex and intimacy, to those with queer identities and the spaces and
places who seek to mark or exclude them. The violence they experience ranges from the verbal to the physical, which in some cases escalates to death. The sections consider the roles religious and faith-based, homophobic, transphobic, media and entertainment, respectable, politically pleasurable, gendered, and the racial and culturally valued notions play in the dehumanization of Africana women, as a result of sexual shaming.

Some sections discuss the periods of U.S. chattel enslavement, Jim Crow, and Black Liberatory Movements such as Civil Rights and Black Power and the practices of sexual shaming and subjugation.

Using the theoretical framework of Womanism, recognized in this chapter as Africana womanhood in praxis and a space for Black women, as a foundation, allows for a shift from the defeatism of “othered” Africana women to the affirmative nature of humanizing them, as well as moving toward the Afroturist vision that provides a space of healing, acceptance, restoration and liberation. The literature explores Afrofuturism from an applied and practical perspective, which recognizes race and sexuality as forms of technology that seek to understand and challenge antithetical notions of Africana liberation.

2.1 A History of the Racialized Sexual Subjugation of Africana Women

This section reviews the historical timeline of the violence caused by sexual shaming and subjugation through verbal and physical attacks, all acts with the intention of dehumanizing women due to both their race and gender, through U.S. enslavement and plaçage, Jim Crow, the long Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power movement. Additionally, this chapter considers ideas of disability and Black sexuality as subhuman confronting the life of Saartjie Baartman. These reinforced ideations of Blackness, as a form of alterity and inferiority, and biology being tied to the social construction of race.
Harriet A. Washington in *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* states that “the science of race has always been an amalgam of logic and culture”; race is important but “nebulous shifting facet of scientific medical thought” (Washington, 2006, p. 33). Washington argues, historically the term *race* was used to signify that biologically different types of mankind only advanced in the eighteenth century, a period when the study of animal breeding augmented awareness of animal subspecies and the possibility of breeding animals to vitalize desired traits. It was not by chance, that the period harmonized with the spread of the slave trade - a time when the biological uniqueness of men became economically vital (Washington, 2006, p. 33).

Taxonomists like Swedish naturalist, Carl von Linne-Carolus Linnaeus, categorized Africans as *Homo afer*, “theorizing that Black men had different evolutionary forebears and had evolved along a separate evolutionary track from white men.” In 1735, the first edition of his Systema naturae, he “designated the subspecies *Homo sapiens americanus* for Native Americans, whom he described as “ruled by superstition”; *Homo sapiens asiaticus* for Asians, whom he believed were “ruled by ritual”; and *Homo sapiens europaeus* for whites, who were “ruled by intelligence” (Washington, 2006, p. 33). Washington states:

The use of the word race in the sense of a biologically distinct subset of *Homo sapiens* was popularized in 1749 by Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, a wealthy French intellectual who made contributions to medicine and natural history. He theorized that the resemblance between apes and humans hinted at a common ancestor. (Washington, 2006, p. 34)

Other theories were developed by both polygenists and monogenists. Polygenists believed “race indicated entirely different species of men, with different origins as well as different characteristics for Blacks and whites” (Washington, 2006, p. 34). Monogenists claim
that Black and white people shared a common ancestor, were once inherently equal and
maintained that Black people’s inferiority was as a result of environmental and social pressures
(Washington, 2006, p. 34). Others believed that Black people’s delegation had imparted terminal
inferiority (Washington, 2006, p. 34). The seventeenth to the early eighteenth centuries, periods
when the theories of scientific racism were informed by the Bible as well as science, aided the
political nature of abolitionism (Washington, 2006, p. 34). Black and white abolitionists argued
that enslavement was inhumane and un-Christian; this shifted global perception (Washington,
2006, p. 34). However, pro-slavery physician-scientists such as Josiah Clark Nott, Samuel
George Morton, Louis Agassiz, and George Robins Gliddon worked hard to combat these
notions. Through the American school of ethnology, they responded by portraying the enslaved
African as inherently devalued permanently so that no amount of training, education, or good
treatment could make him the equal of a white man (Washington, 2006, p. 35).

Polygenists found that Blacks were physically inferior, liars, malingerers, hypersexual,
and indolent (Washington, 2006, p. 35). Africans were most often compared to beasts, and later
were compared to European children - children who could never grow up, and the slave became
Peter Pan in blackface (Washington, 2006, p. 35). Identified as pet theories, the many physical
differences between Black and white people suggested a hierarchy of humanity to scientific
racists: “Different” from whites meant “inferior”- documented in entire catalogs of Black flaws
that filled medical journals and textbooks (Washington, 2006, p. 35). In 1838, Samuel George
Morton published *Crania Americana*, to demonstrate how human skull measurements indicated a
hierarchy of racial stereotypes (Washington, 2006, p. 35).

By 1848, Samuel A. Cartwright, through articles on Black people and medicine and his
paper “The Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race,” was able to continue the pro-
slavery legacy claiming that Black people were inferior based on Christianity and science (Washington, 2006, p. 35-36). According to ethnologists of the American school, Black people’s features marked them as a different species; the size of the skull and thick lips, suggesting an “apelike nature,” Washington argues is ironic because apes and chimpanzees have the thinnest of lips (Washington, 2006, p. 38). Black Americans were thought to be a race identical to the “African race.” Mulattoes, the progeny of Black-white matings, were considered to be a separate race as demonstrated in the system of plaçage (Washington, 2006, p. 38).

Physicians discovered many imaginary physical differences in Black people such as fingernail anomalies, a distinctive structure of the breasts, elongated penises, disproportionately large hands and feet and distended labia and clitorides - considered evidence of Black biological primitivism. Additionally, large buttocks and genitals indicated hypersexuality (Washington, 2006, p. 38), which serves as a marker for the life and experiences of Saartjie Baartman.

Janell Hobson discusses in “The “Batty” Politic: Toward an Aesthetic of the Black Female Body” representations of Black women's derrieres and utilizing a Black feminist disability theory, she revisits the history of the Hottentot Venus, Baartman, which contributed to the shaping of this representational trope (Hobson, 2003, p. 89). As reflected in the article, Rosemarie Garland Thomson’s ideas around the pairing of “female” bodies and disabled bodies within a disability theoretical framework, recognizes how these bodies are comparably "cast as deviant and inferior" (Hobson, 2003, p. 89). Hobson argues that this is reminiscent of Sander Gilman’s explanation of earlier racialized depictions by Europeans of Black bodies as “diseased” (Hobson, 2003, p. 89). It is necessary to understand that the very notion of just a “Black body” separates Africana people from their body, which is historically the intended purpose; evident in the case of Henrietta Lack and the HeLa cells. Gilman writes in *Difference and Pathology:*
Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness that although earlier stereotypes were created of the “Other” during the Enlightenment period regarding sexual fantasy, it is only the nineteenth century that the sexual becomes the feature of systems that relate to difference and pathology (Gilman, 1985, p. 38). Also, illness becomes linked to nineteenth-century European notions of the “Other” (Gilman, 1985, p. 38). The illness of tobacco farmer and housewife, Henrietta Lacks, aided in the engineering of human cells for medical treatment, is what Washington, argues is an example of medical technology devised through research on Black people from which they benefit less often than white people (Washington, 2006, p. 355). Dying from cervical cancer, her illness, her otherness, after death, served as a pathological experiment that without the consent of Lacks or her family resulted in the harvesting of her cells that would later transform medicine forever (Washington, 2006, p. 355). Her body was no longer hers, but became the world’s as it sold for research globally (Womack, 2013, p. 35). It is also important to highlight that it also belonged to the Universe, as HeLa, Lacks’ cells, were even sent in the first space missions to see what would happen to cells in zero gravity (Womack, 2013, p. 35).

Hobson shuns arguments of the stereotypical tropes of Black women such as "Hottentot Venus," "Jezebel," "mammy," "Sapphire," "welfare queen," and more recently "quota queen" and "baby mama" to understand Baartman and women like her who have been othered. She discusses the role of what Patricia Hill Collins calls “controlling images” in Black Feminist Thought which morphs the personal views of Black women and their views of other Black women; creating a process of "unmirroring.” Battling between discourses of the bodies of Black women being grotesque and the Black liberatory function of their bodies being beautiful, Hobson argues that Black Feminists, and relevant to this literature I argue Womanists, must strive to make the latter discourse dominant (Hobson, 2003, p. 89). Hobson asserts the classifications of beauty,
sexuality, and disability construct the cultural concepts projected onto certain bodies as "deviant" (Hobson, 2003, p. 89). Mireille Miller-Young in *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography* argues and agrees with Gilman, who embraces the label *pornographer*, that we must look at and engage in discussion about sexualized images of Black women, even if this is at times traumatic (Miller-Young, 2014, p. viii). “The idea that Black women could insert subjectivity, agency or even resistance into oppressive and alienating representations like pornography may seem unthinkable,” states Miller-Young (2014, viii). She argues that African Americans adopted conservative respectable values to combat perceptions of Black sexual deviance (Miller-Young, 2014, ix). Baartman, displayed as an aberration, becomes a public spectacle in Europe, by way of London and Paris, because of her ethnicity as a Khoisan woman of South Africa (Hobson, 2003, p. 90). Within the construction of her sexualized and "disabled" body, she is considered racially and culturally inferior by Westerners as they glorify themselves as superior beings (Hobson, 2003, p. 90). Robert Chambers recorded that only the most inferior and inhuman men belonging to Baartman’s ethnic group could find her body and “ugliness” attractive (Hobson, 2003, p. 91).

Hobson recounts the visual of “a white English- man ‘riding’” Baartman’s nude body (Hobson, 2003, p. 93), and also highlights the role gender plays within the constructions of difference and otherness. Considerations around the shape of Baartman's buttocks and genitalia led to colonial society’s idea of her sexuality and the sexualities of other Black women as deviant, despite her circumstances of sexual trauma (Hobson, 2003, p. 94). Even Baartman is added to the collection of scientific experimentation as her body was thought to be curious to her European spectators, even after her death at the age of twenty-six (*BBC News Magazine*, 2016). Her body was mutilated and dissected by Georges Cuvier, a naturalist, who danced with
Baartman at a party (BBC News Magazine, 2016). Her skeleton, brain and genitalia were placed on display at Paris's Museum of Man (BBC News Magazine, 2016).

J. Marion Sims, a gynecologist, made the ownership of and scientific experimentation of Wescott, Harris and Zimmerman his life’s work. If Sims is considered the father of gynecology, then they are the mothers. Dr. Vanessa Gamble explains in her interview with NPR along with poet and Black feminist scholar, Dr. Bettina Judd in “Remembering Anarcha, Lucy, and Betsey: The Mothers of Modern Gynecology,” that Sims, in an effort to advance science, experimented on these Black women unanesthetized. She argues that there was a belief that Black people could not feel pain in the same way as white people (NPR, 2017).

Judd in Patient (2014) marries biopolitics with poetry, as a means to humanize these women. She recognizes them in personal ways, referring to them by their first names, like they are old friends. Readers get to know “Anarcha,” “Betsey,” and “Lucy” in this intimate way. Betsey tells readers what love feels like, because there is more to her than going under Sims’ knife (Judd, 2014, p. 29). Lucy just wants to fix her dress, because perhaps that was the comfort she desired in that particular moment (Judd, 2014, p. 28). Historically, even under oppressive conditions Black women imagined and sought out ways to assert and affirm their own humanities, despite European scientists and taxonomists attempts at scrutinizing it.

Additionally, Hobson highlights the role gender plays within the constructions of difference and otherness. Baartman’s genitalia and buttocks as an indicator of deviant sexuality from the perspective of European society could not have been duplicated by a “Hottentot” male even if in a comparable manner his penis would have been deemed a signifier of racial difference, hypersexuality, and danger (Hobson, 2003, p. 94). Hobson argues in agreement with historian Paula Giddings that, black men’s deviance is linked to a race of "lascivious" women who, as
result of their gender, "were considered the foundation of a group's morality" (Hobson, 2003, p. 94). As the burden of humanity and morality falls upon Black women, the same burden falls upon them in extremely racially essentialist ways that deem Africana people inhuman.

Brenda E. Stevenson in “Gender Conventions, Ideals, and Identity Among Antebellum Virginia Slave Women” uses autobiographical accounts, tales and fantasies of Virginia enslaved African women to provide a surplus of information, collective and individual, existential and relational, about the private lives of bonded Black “females” [cis-gendered Black women], their families, their overseers, their masters, and their mistresses (Stevenson, 1995). A former enslaved African woman named Fannie Berry shares:

There wuz an ol’ lady patching a quilt an’ de paddyrollers wuz looking fo’ a slave named John. John wuz dar funnin’ an’ carrying on. All at once we herd a rap on de door. John took an’ runned between Mamy Lou’s legs. She hid him by spreading a quilt across her lap and kept on sewing an’, do you kno’, dem pattyrollers never found him? (Stevenson, 1995)

Stevenson argues although Berry’s “owners” would have viewed the symbol of “Mamy Lou” through the images signifying the passive domestic world enslaved African women occupied (the quilt) and their sexual surrender (“between her legs”), Mamy Lou is the embodiment of enslaved African women’s ability to give and nurture life as well as signifying their domestic productivity (the quilt) and their feminine sexuality (“between her legs”). Enslaved African women viewed as self-reliant, self-determined and heroic among other enslaved African women who understood this as a tactic for survival, were subject to defeminization by white southern residents, because of their conduct (Stevenson, 1995). Their conduct, however, ensured the preservation of their claim to womanhood that is their “female” sexuality and physicality [problematized for Black
trans women] and their roles as mothers, nurturers and wives. Subjugation and violent oppression through the tactics of the sexual violence and physical abuse of enslaved African women was justified through the belief of southern whites that Black women could not be raped, since they were naturally promiscuous or if they were a larger Black woman, asexual. Stevenson argues most enslaved African women could not fight back (and win), except perhaps in sharing their painful stories, which exonerated the images of their sexual morality (Stevenson, 1995). A more direct manner of resistance is found in the mythology and symbols of enslaved African women. Africana Studies scholar Molefi Kete Asante, in *The Afrocentric Idea*, argues a similar concept. He states African Americans use the idea of mythos because “myth becomes an explanation for the human condition and an answer to the problem of psychological existence in a racist society and the nature of myth in African American thought is a way to discover the values of a spiritual, traditional, and even mystical rhetoric as it confronts a technological, linear world and to develop ideas for an Afrocentric alternative to apocalyptic thinking” (Asante, 1998). A signifying character mirroring Stevenson’s argument is Harriet Tubman, who Asante states is an “extraordinary mythic figure in our rhetorical consciousness because she is a symbolic expression of our [African Americans’] epic journey” (Asante, 1998). This idea is also seen as Berry describes another enslaved African woman, Sukie Abbot. Abbot resisted both her owner’s sexual abuse and the slave trader’s physical violation (Stevenson, 1995).

Witnesses found Abbott [Sukie] vulgar and promiscuous, and she was sold. However, she demanded her new buyer to see her for what she was - a woman (Stevenson, 1995). Stevenson argues Abbott’s humanity by way of the description of woman was displayed through her physical reference to her sexual organs and not just a new work animal whose value was actualized by looking at its teeth (Stevenson, 1995). Notions of promiscuity and hypersexuality
are not just placed on adult Black women, but also young Black girls. Bryana French in her study “More than Jezebels and Freaks: Exploring How Black Girls Navigate Sexual Coercion and Sexual Scripts” (2013) asks 1) How do Black adolescent girls navigate sexual expectations and sexual coercion? and 2) What role do sexual scripts play in this navigation? The purpose of French’s study is to understand how Black girls confront sexual coercion and ways that racialized and gendered sexual scripts influence their resistance (French, 2013). French used Black feminist thought to investigate the intersection between race and gender in the adolescent realities she explored in this study, to better understand how Black girls navigated sexual scripts and sexual coercion (French, 2013). Four themes emerged from the focus groups, which included 17 Black high school girls as participants (French, 2013). Two themes—Personal Responsibility and Finding Sexual Agency and Desire—center on Black girls' individual responses and resistance strategies to sexual scripts and sexual coercion (French, 2013). The other two themes— Media Transformation and Giving Voice—focus on girls' suggestions to combat the dominant sexual scripts for Black girls within society and interpersonally (French, 2013). Within the study, participants explicitly cited the need to have more conversations about Black girl sexuality in general, and the pressures they face specifically, to bring awareness and potential solidarity to their experiences (French, 2013). This act of “giving voice” can reduce the isolation Black girls experience and increase support as they navigate difficult terrains of Black girl sexuality (French, 2013). This study discussed sexual agency and the importance of Black women/girls utilizing their “voice.”

Black women being either hypersexualized or defeminized, were often the envy of white women, the wives of slave owners. Despite the negative tropes they were becoming agents of their heroic identities, while white women, despite views of being “genteel” and “lady-like,”
were powerless, passive, second-class citizens as a by-product of patriarchy (Stevenson, 1995). Elizabeth R. Cole and Alyssa N. Zucker in “Black and white women's perspectives on femininity” (2007), discuss some of these factors within a study they conducted with Black and white women using a national platform. They asked 1) Given that Black and White women, as groups, are positioned differently in relation to hegemonic femininity, do they conceptualize the components of femininity in the same ways?, 2) Do they view themselves as equivalently feminine?, and 3) If hegemonic femininity functions through both coercion and consent, if femininity is the “velvet glove” that makes men’s dominance over women palatable, even pleasurable (Jackman, 1994), do their perceptions of their own femininity differentially predict their attitudes toward feminism, the movement that fosters social change on behalf of women (Crawford & Unger, 2000)? (Cole & Zucker, 2007). Their findings show Black women’s relationship to gender roles are complex, and although they may work, they “believed that men need to play the role of family provider in order to maintain their self-esteem and masculinity” (Cole & Zucker, 2007). The researchers discussed an oversight and limitation in the measurement of Feminism within participants, because of the lack of explanation (Cole & Zucker, 2007). However, they also argue feminine aesthetics are not recognized as antithetical to Feminism, especially from a third-wave lens (Cole & Zucker, 2007). Black women’s conceptualizations of Feminism, especially if they were trained in academic settings are different from white women’s conceptualizations (Cole & Zucker, 2007).

Nyasha Junior argues in An Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation nineteenth century white gendered ideals of “true womanhood” held up the vulnerable, fragile, upstanding white woman who was the “angel of the house” (Junior, 2006). African American women were
not considered to be “real” women in the same sense as wealthy white women. Junior argues, with this kind of subjugation, white women were afforded titles such as “lady”:

In particular, U.S. society did not grant to African American women the social status and courtesies granted to a civilized “lady,” who was by definition a white woman. Even before the true womanhood ideals became prevalent in the United States, European colonizers regarded African women as uncivilized and hypersexual, which supported the persistent view of African American women as masculine, licentious, primitive and without morals. (Junior, 2006)

However, there was a group of Africana women that warred with the ideas of being classified as ladies as well as being regarded as hypersexual beings. While, U.S. enslavement marked African women as a contradiction between hypersexual and asexual, by not being recognized as women, another system- an extension or symptom of the Transatlantic slave trade in the Caribbean, emerged. The emergence of this system was attached to the enslaved African women of Haiti, and eventually travelled to Louisiana, marking many mixed raced Africana women as part “lady” and part “African.” This led to aspects of this system leaning into other forms of a racialized sexual subjugation through the veil of exoticism.

Joan M. Martin in Sybil Kein’s text Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana’s Free People of Color, writes in “Plaçage: and the Louisiana Gens de Couleur Libre: How Race and Sex Defined the Lifestyles of Free Women of Color” that during the French rule in Louisiana, 1718-1768, sexual relations among European settlers, enslaved Africans, and Native Americans, triggered the creation of a third race of people neither white nor Black and neither slave nor completely free (Kein, 2000, p. 57). Martin discusses the history of the gens de couleur libre, free people of color, their tales of legendary beauty and the construction of their
“quadroon” status. The term quadroon is used interchangeably with “free people of color,” and “Creoles of color” by Kein (Kein, 2000, p. 58). However, not all free people of color were quadroon nor octoroon. The essay examines whether the results of sex (whether consensual, forced, or something in between) established a new race of people with ties to both Black and whites, itself more privileged than the one but less esteemed than the other (Kein, 2000, p. 57). Martin describes the rape of enslaved African women as forced sex, and also states that sex could fall between the lines of consensual and “forced sex.” As enslaved African women were considered the property (sexual or otherwise) of their Masters, consensual sex within these confines is a myth. Nonetheless, Martin argues free people of color, or the quadroons, cannot be discussed without the acknowledgement of plaçage, a system that created them as “other” (Kein, 2000, p. 57). This system was practiced in Louisiana and other French and Spanish slaveholding territories, and was a system where women of color, not being allotted the legal right to marry, entered into long-term, formalized relationships with white European men (Kein, 2000, p. 58). A controversial practice, laws were written to prevent these unions (Kein, 2000, p. 58). The essay also explores the degree the sexual relations were forced, why in some cases, the women willingly chose to live with white men over their own kind, and why those who were members of this elite group, male and female, seemed to be granted privileges that were mostly denied to their darker brothers, and sisters (Kein, 2000, p. 58).

Martin asserts the enslaved African woman and European man, made up the three-tiered racial classification system upon which the Louisiana society was built; this system was dependent on two criteria of differentiation: being legally free or not, and having African blood or not (Kein, 2000, p. 60). The manumitting of enslaved mixed-raced children and their mothers
set the precedent of privilege based on color and European status; these classifications made these alliances between African women and European men appealing (Kein, 2000, p. 60).

Plaçage, became more alluring as a system as high officials and their wives were few in number in the the French territories (Kein, 2000, p. 60). While the majority of the men were trappers, soldiers, miners, enslaved, and adventurers, white women were scarce in number as they were frequently former inmates of asylums and houses of correction in France, who had been brought to the frontier territory by force (Kein, 2000, p. 61). Their desirability was an issue as many men described them as “ugly, ignorant, irascible, and promiscuous,” but despite the scarcity in number, mulatto women were intentionally selected (Kein, 2000, p. 61). Martin argues the precedent was set two-hundred years prior when French planters from St. Domingue [Haiti] took [kidnapped] the “finest” enslaved women for their mistresses (Kein, 2000, p. 61). Lincoln Anthony Blades for Teen Vogue writes in “Why You Can’t Ever Call an Enslaved Woman a ‘Mistress,’” with a very self-explanatory title, a response to the restoration of Monticello, the plantation of the United States’ third president, Thomas Jefferson. However, the article addresses the nature of the relationship of Jefferson and Sally Hemings, who was purchased as a young Black girl by the Jefferson family. Hemings is often referred to as the “mistress” of Jefferson and her “relationship” is also imaginatively remembered as a love story. Blades argues this narrative is problematic, not just because it erases the abuse that Hemings endured along with generations of other enslaved Africans, but also because it recognizes Jefferson as a romantic, which reframes and cloaks his predacious behavior under the idea of mutual attraction (Blades, 2017)

While considering plaçage, Martin agrees that the actions of free women of color are both moral and ethical. Some women had the ability to purchase their enslaved relatives as a means to
free them. As Martin states, “They didn’t choose to live in concubinage, what they chose was to survive” (Kein, 2000, p. 64). Pairing eurocentric beauty standards, with the hierarchal stereotypes of Africana women, bred the hypersexualized status of placées. Their roles were no different than what was expected of their enslaved African ancestors- women. By assuming this position, the literature reveals the dehumanization of Black women even in the face of also having “white blood.” Whether free or enslaved, the Blackness of women reveals the outcomes of others dehumanizing perceptions of them, through sexuality.

By juxtaposing these two systems, U. S. enslavement and plaçage, history reveals the commonalities between both enslaved African and free women of the period were sexually viewed. They have faced sexual subjugation through sexual violence or the stereotypical hypersexualized perception of Black women. Nonetheless, even after the abolishment of U. S. enslavement and plaçage, the sexual subjugation of Africana women persisted into Jim Crow and the era of Black Power.

After the collapse of Reconstruction and the rise of Jim Crow, Danielle L. McGuire argues in At the Dark End of the Street, with unnerving regularity, “white men abducted and assaulted Black women” (McGuire, 2010). In her work, she explores how they lured Black women and girls away from home with the assurance of regular work, and better pay. This resulted in attacks in the workplace, and often the abduction of Black women and girls at gunpoint while they traveled from home, work, or church (McGuire, 2010, xviii). This act, acts of sexual humiliation and assault on streetcars and buses, in taxicabs and trains, and other public spaces, was a symbol and signifier of the retribution and the enforcing of racial and economic hierarchy (McGuire, 2010). McGuire argues that Black women, historically, did not keep their stories secret, and were able to reclaim their bodies and humanity by testifying about their assaults:
They launched the first public attacks on sexual violence as a “systemic abuse of women” in response to slavery and the wave of lynchings in the post-Emancipation South. Slave narratives offer stark testimony about the brutal sexual exploitation bondswomen faced. For example, Harriet Jacobs detailed her master’s lechery in her autobiography to “arouse the women of the North” and “convince the people of the Free States what Slavery is.” When African-American clubwomen began to organize antilynching campaigns during the late nineteenth century, they testified about decades of sexual abuse (McGuire, 2010, p. xix).

On October 5, 1892, in Lyric Hall in New York City, hundreds of Black women united to hear Ida B. Wells as she commanded their attention to discuss how despite the false accusations of Black men raping white women, “The rape of helpless Negro girls, which began in slavery days, still continues without reproof from church, state and press” (McGuire, 2010). Other freedom fighters like Fannie Barrier Williams and Anna Julia Cooper spoke out against the sexual subjugation of Black women (McGuire, 2010, p. xix). It was common for Black women to regularly denounce the sexual trauma inflicted onto their bodies (McGuire, 2010, p. xix). They used their own voices as a form of weaponry and technology against white supremacy in the church, courtroom or even congressional hearings. They were resisting what Martin Luther King, Jr. called the “thingification” of their humanity (McGuire, 2010, xx).

Margaret Garner, deemed either a hero, animal or villain, saw the cruel conditions of enslavement as inhumane and partook in an action that led others to accuse her of being inhumane- murdering her two-year-old daughter, after the entire Garner family planned to end their enslavement by absconding via the Underground Railroad (Bynum, 2010, p. 2). Garner did not attempt to murder her children and successfully murder her daughter for hateful reasons, she
did this as an act of love for family and self. She would have rather died before experiencing another day as an enslaved woman - a woman who had the status of not being human along with her husband and children. In an article published in *American Baptist* on February 12, 1856, written by minister, P.S. Bassett entitled “A Visit to a Slave Mother Who Killed Her Child” the words and sentiments of Garner further plead her case for wanting an end to the conditions she experienced by attempting to save her children (Bynum, 2010, p. 4). This article inspired Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and the background of the character, Sethe. Leon James Bynum in “Toni Morrison and the Translation of History in *Margaret Garner*” considers Morrison’s interest as details about Garner’s life and the incident mattered less to her than the symbolism of Garner’s choices - choices that asserted her basic human right (Bynum, 2010, p. 4). This was a choice that she ultimately believed could help keep at least one of her children, her daughter, away from the threat of what happens to enslaved African girls - rape.

The act and threat of rape is argued by Darlene Clark Hine to be the influencer in the development for what she refers to as the “culture of dissemblance” among Black women of the Midwest. She defines Black women’s dissemblance as their creation to appear open and disclosed while protecting the truth about their personal lives from their oppressors; it was a cloaking device. Historically, dissemblance may be a theme in the lives of all women, but the intersectional understanding and relationship for Black women is nuanced. Hine argues that the rape of women is a patriarchal practice that affirms the idea that they are complicit and inviting of their own attacks. The link between gender and Blackness, only added to the horror of the institutionalized rape of Black women (Hine, 1994, p. 37).

Respectability, particularly for Black women was predicated on creating counter-narratives and images to reconstruct the idea of the human, through the veil of Blackness. In
reconstructing the image of the Black human, respectability, first coined by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, has been reimagined and defined. Higginbotham, theorized “politics of respectability” in her book *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (1993). While this politic is recognized as a middle-class Black practice, Higginbotham clarified and explained what she meant with *For Harriet.* She stated in “Wrestling with Respectability in the Age of #BlackLivesMatter: A Dialogue,” that contrary to the belief of respectability being a Black middle-class value, that in her research it was Black low-income women she focused on. She argues, that respectability is a Christian ideology, but that does not necessarily mean “middle-class.” She also states, “The politics of respectability, and this is the key thing about it, gives you a moral authority to say to the outside world, ‘I am worthy of respect. You don't respect me, but I'm worthy of respect. You don't treat me like an equal person, but I know that I am an equal person, and because I am an equal person, I'm going to fight for my rights. I'm going to demand equality. I'm not going to let you treat me like a second-class citizen.’” While agreeing that respectability can be used to marginalize certain Black individuals, she believes that not only is respectability defiant, it is about the ability to gain respect. It is not just about performance, but also about standing on “moral authority to fight for your rights.”

This definition of respectability acknowledges the multiplicities of Black performance while declaring that Black people are worthy of respect. This narrative often manifested while trying to get the attention of the said dominant group of white people, through the idea of “intellect.” Black intellectuals becoming the fabric of what is considered the best and brightest of Black people in America, took on the role of being spokespersons of all things Black and racially conscious. In *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women* (2017) Brittney C. Cooper in her introduction “The Duty of the True Race Women,” argues that “race women”
were the first Black women intellectuals (Cooper, 2017, p. 11). By “proving the intellectual character of the race,” this reveals the role of respectability and the demand for white people to recognize their humanity - their exceptional humanity.

Treva B. Lindsey in *Colored No More: Reinventing Black Womanhood in Washington, D.C.* (2017) writes that in addition to intellectualism, physical appearance and aesthetic were crucial in the struggle to distance African Americans from the remnants of the enslavement period as they attempted to move toward the “New Negro” project. (Lindsey, 2017, p. 53). By also postulating Black women’s striking beauty, all that is aesthetically described via bodily adornment, was instrumental in the reconstruction of how Black people wanted to define themselves or be recognized as human. This notion more than likely is a byproduct of the belief of many Black people, before emancipation that light skin, straight hair and beauty was synonymous in the United States with freedom and opportunity as well as “membership in an elite class of African Americans” (Lindsey, 2017, p. 61). For Black women, the rules of the assertion of humanity were changing as it was even connected to the reimagining of feminine expression (Lindsey, 2017, p. 86).

For the Black political woman of the period, performance of “ladyhood” would also be vital to the construction of their humanity, as this was representative for the New Woman and New Negro man.

Race women of the period not only utilized “intellectualism” as a means to cloak their sexualities, they used aspects of their intellectualism to do sexual justice work; they fought for Black women to be free from rape. This development in American history serves as a counter-narrative to both the radical feminist and civil rights movements. While white radical feminists may argue they are responsible in the women’s movement for urging rape and other sexually
abused survivors to “speak out,” McGuire argues that Black women’s public protests incited local, national, and even international outrage and ignited larger campaigns for racial justice and human rights (McGuire, 2010). As for the civil rights movement, women like Jo Ann Robinson and Rosa Parks were either erased or reduced as historical figures. McGuire asserts that the evaluation of rape and sexualized violence is rarely acknowledged, let alone significant in most histories of the civil rights movement, narrated as a struggle between Black men and white men. Martin Luther King Jr. is the signifier of heroic leadership as he confronted white supremacists like “Bull” Connor” (McGuire, 2010). McGuire argues the long civil rights movement is also entrenched in Black women’s long battle against sexual violence (McGuire, 2010). For example, in 1944, it was Rosa Parks, along with her allies that stood and mobilized in defense of a 24-year-old, wife, mother and sharecropper, named Recy Taylor as she spoke out on her trauma and against her assailants. Taylor, who died in 2017, was raped by six white men (McGuire, 2010). McGuire carefully lays out Taylor’s story. One of her attackers said before raping her, “Act just like you do with your husband or I’ll cut your damn throat.” Days later, Montgomery, Alabama branch office of the NAACP was contacted, and local president, E.D. Nixon, sent his “best investigator” (McGuire, 2010, xvii).

The investigator was Parks, and McGuire describes Parks as a “militant race woman, a sharp detective, and an antirape activist long before she became the patron saint of the bus boycott” (McGuire, 2010, p. xvii). As a result of meeting Taylor, Parks assembled the Committee for Equal Justice (McGuire, 2010, p. xvii). Before Claudette Colvin’s and Parks’ refusals to give up their seat after sitting on the front of a bus, it was Jo Ann Robinson who also sat at the front of the bus but quickly gave up her seat out of fear of being beaten (McGuire, 2010, p. 78). In 1950, former leader of the Women’s Political Council, Mary Fair Burks, passed
the baton to Robinson, who was considered a fiery human rights activist, to become the new leader of this radical women’s organization (McGuire, 2010, p. 77). “…Robinson, an English professor at Alabama State and member [and later president] of the increasingly militant Women’s Political Council, argued that mistreatment on the buses was degrading shameful, and humiliating,” McGuire writes (2010, p. 71-72). “Black Americans… were still being treat as… things without feelings, not human beings...- bus drivers, Robinson recalled, disrespected Black women by hurling nasty sexualized insults their way.” Black women like, Ferdie Walker, from Fort Worth, Texas, recalled bus drivers sexually harassing her as she waited on the corner as they would even expose their genitals to her; she was scared to death (McGuire, 2010, p. 72). Drivers would often refer to Black women as “Black niggers,” “Black bitches,” “heifers,” and “whores.”

These events would only inspire the 24-hour long bus boycott organized by Parks, Robinson, the Women’s Political Council, numerous Black women and even Black men as allies, which grew into the Montgomery bus boycott many recognize today.

McGuire states sexual violence and interracial rape between the years 1940 and 1975, became issues that Black Americans used to destroy white supremacy and achieve personal and political independence. Civil rights campaigns from Selma, Alabama to Hattiesburg, Mississippi rooted themselves in organized resistant tactics against sexual violence and made appeals for protection of Black womanhood (McGuire, 2010).

Receiving a similar response as Taylor in 1944, the Black Power era’s Black women’s ability of self-defense was tested again during the 1975 trial of 21-year-old Joan Little. Little, an inmate from Washington, North Carolina, killed her white jailer after he sexually assaulted her, which incited the support and coalition of numerous organizations like the Black Panther Party and the National Organization for Women around Little. This caused the unity and intersection
of many fights that reflected the enormous social, political, and economic changes wrought by the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, and the emergence of the New Left and Black Power (McGuire, 2010, xxiii). The National Organization for Women, during the mid-1970s had the reputation of making progress when it came to legal and political issues, and as an organization they were able to carry on the legacy of the civil rights movement and Black activism on sexual assault (McGuire, 2010, p. 258). Although, in previous decades respectability was deemed a useful tactic, as it was in the 1965 case of Coates whose innocence became a focal point, this was not the case in 1975 for Little, argues McGuire (McGuire, 2010, p. 258). Little’s story spread throughout feminist circles, and Angela Davis’s article in Ms. magazine brought national attention to the trial (McGuire, 2010, p. 260). “All people who see themselves as members of the existing community of struggle for justice and equality, and progress,” Davis argued “have a responsibility to fulfill toward Joan Little” (McGuire, 2010, p. 261). Parks helped form a local branch in Detroit called the Joan Little Legal Defense Committee; there were numerous other branches across the country (McGuire, 2010, p. 262). After the Detroit branch announced a student rally at the University of Detroit, a march, and a fund-raising drive, they hoped “Miss Little” would be “acquitted of the charge of first degree murder” and asked the question “should a woman defend herself against a rapist?”, which was stated within the press release (McGuire, 2010, p. 262). Numerous national feminist groups and civil rights organizations rallied behind Little and her defiant stance against sexual violence, as the National NAACP maintained its historic hesitation to fully support “sex cases” and despite local chapters helping raise funds, they did not get involved (McGuire, 2010, p. 261). McGuire argues Little’s case, considering the verdict, “signaled the death knell of the rape of Black women that had been a feature of Southern race politics since slavery” (McGuire, 2010).
From U.S. enslavement, to plaçage, to post-Emancipation, to Jim Crow, to the long civil rights movement to Black Power, the sexual subjugation of Africana women explored within this section reveals how historically sexual subjugation was used via rape, sexual assault or survival; it could be physical or verbal. It reveals how historically even white supremacist patriarchal ideas of Africana women, even if a finger was never laid on certain women like the gens de couleur libre, is used as a subjugative tactic to mark Black women as inherently hypersexual despite ideals of “beauty” as discussed within the literature. This ideal, typically resulted in aspects of concubinage for the purposes of survival. Rape, other forms of sexual violence and sexual harassment are the most common forms of the racialized sexual subjugation of Africana women. The reconstruction of Black human identity, was necessary for survival and self-determination and sometimes as consequence of white supremacist beliefs of Black identity being inhuman and other for Africana people, especially for Africana women. Religion, was just one system of reconstructing Black humanity.

2.2 Her Sins, Their Salvation: Purity Culture and the Black Church

Miller-Young in *A Taste for Brown Sugar* argues that “a politics of African American women’s respectability first emerged in the late nineteenth century in post-emancipation Christian women’s activist circles”; a politics that seeks to counter the racist stereotype of the lascivious and deviant Black woman by endorsing and embodying an image of gender and sexual normativity reminiscent of a patriarchal ideal of feminine virtue (Miller-Young, 2014, p. viii). The problematic ideals of Black feminine virtue were often complicated by systems such as slavery.

The story of Baartman, an oppression outside of the confines of what many would deem a part of the system of Black enslavement, continued even after her death at the age of 25, as
scientists researched and kept her genitalia, that would later be on display as a resting site at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 34). Baartman was a signifier of what white culture believed to be the sexual embodiment of Black women and men (Brown Douglass, 1999, p. 34). Her dehumanizing treatment, acted as a deeper representation of the white tradition of Christianity’s attack on Black sexuality (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 34). In *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* by Kelly Brown Douglass, she argues in the section “Stereotypes, False Images, Terrorism: The White Assault upon Black Sexuality” that the prominence of Baartman connects ideas of Blackness and devaluing of women in white patriarchal society in a way that ultimately placed blame on Black women for Black depravity (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 35). Baartman became a symbol for one of the most prominent and typical Black woman stereotypes, “the Jezebel” - ruled by her sexual libido (Brown Douglass, 1999, p. 36). Becoming principal for white culture as it demonized Black womanhood, it has been used to signify an “evil, scheming, and seductive woman” (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 36). Coming from the passage of scripture in the bible, 1 Kings 16:29- 22:53, Jezebel was the ninth-century Phoenician princess and wife of the Israelite king Ahab, who was accused of destroying the kingdom with her idolatrous practices and otherwise dubious ways (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 36). However, as a stereotype for Black women, it is rooted in European travels to Africa (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 36). Travelers perceived African women, who did not wear a lot of clothing due to the climate of Africa, as a symbol of lascivious (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 37).

Brown Douglass argues, that “clothing signified one’s moral status as well as class and that while “the “respectable” white woman was “adorned” in layers of clothing,” the enslaved African woman “was often given barely enough clothing to cover her body” (Brown Douglass, 1999, p. 37). She also argues additionally that an enslaved African woman’s work in the fields
called for her to raise her dress above her knee, and for house servants to pull their skirts up for other household duties (Brown Douglass, 1999, p. 37). This style of dress coupled with work further perpetuated the idea that Black women were “loose creatures.” The the nude Jezebel image was often a requisite for slavery. Like Baartman, during slave auctions enslaved African women’s bodies were stripped nude to be examined and prodded. Like Baartman, during slave auctions enslaved African women’s bodies were stripped nude to be examined and prodded; this was a tactic used to be (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 337).

Brown Douglass asserts that the Black woman, “Jezebel,” as a counter-image of the nineteenth-century white woman, “Victorian,” “middle-class,” “pure, chaste and innocent,” “did not lead men and children to God” (Brown Douglass, 1999, p. 39). Despite of white men’s misnomer of venerating white women as virtuous and pure, they continuously violated the bodies of Black women, by keeping “mistresses,” who were ultimately victims of rape, and by “also patronizing Black-run houses of prostitution” (Brown Douglass, 1999, p. 39). Historically, if Africana women were deemed inherently promiscuous, then there would never be an opportunity to be “virgin” or pure, as they are inherently considered anti-pure weapons. Additionally, this contradicts the stereotypical view of Black women as the mammy, who was deemed asexual.

Mitzi J. Smith in I Found God in Me explores the virgin/whore binary found in the New Testament books of the bible, Matthew and Revelations, and argues that the construction of women as virgins and whores is neither of divine origin nor natural, in the sense of being biologically determined (Smith, 2015, p. 158). She argues that God did not create women as virgins or whores, but as women made in the image of God, and also that women who are viewed as whores, hoes, and sluts, are redesigned against the “supposed biological and social understanding of women as virgins” (Smith, 2015, p. 158). Virginity is defined based on the
notion of a woman not experiencing sexual intercourse with a man, and whose hymen is also intact, but Smith reveals how faulty the definition is as the hymen can be broken in numerous ways aside from sexual intercourse.

For these reasons, Smith argues that women in general, and Black woman especially should discard the labels of women as whores and virgins, along with any synonyms, because of its connection to patriarchy (Smith, 2015, p. 159). African women along with men, during 1692 Virginia, were considered “tithable persons”; “Black women could be forced to work in the fields” (Smith, 2015, p. 161). Black women were not deemed suitable domestic servants, like white indentured servants, because they were “‘wenches,’ ‘nasty,’” and “beastly” (Smith, 2015, p. 161). In 1662, Virginia legally recognized slavery as a hereditary condition and by 1668, they considered all Black women, free and enslaved, “tithable” (Smith, 2015, p. 158). Smith states, “Virginia passed legislation that said any mulatto children born of an English man and a Black woman would assume the social status of the mother and that ‘if any Christian shall commit fornication with a Negro man or woman, he shall pay double the fines of the former act’” (Smith, 2015, p. 162). Sexual relations with a Black person were considered “un-Christian,” leading to the self-affirmation of white bodies and devaluing of the bodies of Black people (Smith, 2015, p. 162).

Agreeing with Kelly Douglass, Smith acknowledges that the enslaved African woman in America was treated and marked as hypersexualized Jezebels; they were inhuman with biological female organs that white captors, through rape or coercion, had access to (Smith, 2015, p. 162). Smith reflects on Mary McLeod Bethune’s grandmother and mother, Sophie and Patsy, who one was whipped for resisting her overseer’s sexual advances, and the other for resisting, was burned with hot soap (Smith, 2015, p. 163). With Black women not holding the
right to resist or feel, as the humans that they were, Black women struggled to uphold the semblance of their own womanhood, virtue and purity, all while dealing with the effects and shame of being sexually assaulted (Smith, 2015, p. 163). As Ida B. Wells launched her anti-lynching campaign, in the face of the falsehood of Black men raping white women, the falsehood revealed that the belief of Black men’s actions was rooted in the sexually promiscuous and insatiable sexual appetite of Black women (Smith, 2015, p. 163). This happens during a time when men’s morality was dependent upon the moral character of the women they were in connection with, which was also discussed in the earlier section “White Constructions on Difference, Pathology and Otherness” (Smith, 2015, p. 163). Enslavement ensured that Black women had no virtue or virginity that should have been protected or honored, while also holding the white women’s motherhood and virginity to a high standard. White women’s children were valued, as the children of enslaved African women had to endure the same conditions of slavery as their mothers (Smith, 2015, p. 165). W.E.B. Du Bois argued that despite their physical and sexual bondage that this did not solidify that they were impure, despite the claims of a white dominant society.

Regardless of the reclamation of the idea of purity, the issue remains as discussed by Smith that the virgin/whore dichotomy found in the New Testament is informed by the Old Testament of the Bible (Smith, 2015, p. 166). While reviewing Old Testament law codes, Cheryl Anderson argues in her analysis of gender and violence found within the codes that from Exodus 20:23-23:19, and Deuteronomy 12-26, the Book of the Covenant and Deuteronomic Law, one of the most poignant characteristics of these scriptures is that female sexuality is inherently intended to be controlled by a male, which justifies systemic and patriarchal control and violence against women (Smith, 2015, p. 166). This has implications for how when uncritically
engaged, it negatively influences social realities (Smith, 2015, p. 166). Smith explores the Gospel of Matthew and chapters 17 and 18 of Revelation. Four biblical women figures are discussed as coming out of the genealogy of Jesus- Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba (Smith, 2015, p. 167). Smith appropriately discusses Jesus, the son of God’s, parents, Mary and Joseph:

In Matthew’s genealogy, Joseph is identified as the husband of Mary (1:16); whereas in Luke’s Gospel Joseph is the son of Heli (Luke 3:23). By inserting Mary at the end of his genealogy, Matthew provides a contrast between Mary who is later identified as virgin and the other women in the genealogy who would be known by Matthew’s Jewish readers as prostitutes and/or women who participated in illicit sexual relations in opposition to Mary as the virgin par excellence. Thus, this virgin/whore dichotomy is reinscribed within the story of Jesus’ life, as God with us. (Smith, 2015, p. 167).

Smith argues that although the inclusion of the four women, non-Israelite, in Jesus’ genealogy is considered as a positive revisioning; the women “have engaged in proper or illicit sexual relations with men, involuntarily or voluntarily” (Smith, 2015, p. 167). This elevates the women in the bible in a way that seeks to decolonize patriarchal understandings of Jesus Christ.

In Genesis 38 and Joshua 2:1-21, 6:22-25, Tamar, a Canaanite pretended to be a prostitute, and Rahab, also a Canaanite, by profession was a prostitute (Smith, 2015, p. 167). No longer wanting to wait on Judah’s, Tamar’s father-in-law’s, young son to grow up to fulfill his duties after her husband’s death, Tamar stopped behaving like a “widow” (Smith, 2015, p. 167). She veiled her face, and stood hon the roadside where she could have sex with Judah (Smith, 2015, p. 167). She was originally expected to have sex with one of her deceased husband’s brothers to provide an heir (Smith, 2015, p. 167). In Genesis 38:14-19, Judah had sex with Tamar, assuming that she was a prostitute, due to her hiding her true identity (Smith, 2015, p. 167). In Joshua 2:1-24,
Rahab, a sex worker or who Smith refers to as a prostitute, a zonah, as indicated in the scriptures, hid two Israelite spies who were surveying Jericho; they spent the night in her (Smith, 2015, p. 167). Smith also depicts Ruth, in a different light than most Christians would discuss her as. She argues that Ruth seduced Boaz in order to obtain a next-of-kin rescuer for Naomi, her mother-in-law and for herself (Smith, 2015, p. 167). Lastly, Found in 2 Samuel 11:1-5, Smiths argues Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, being was sent by King David to have sex with him, was a complete abuse of power-rape (Smith, 2015, p. 167). Smith argues that virgins elevate their status to become wives and that those who are not virgins, the other, may give birth to legitimate heirs of patriarchs, but their social realities do not change (Smith, 2015, p. 167-168). As others, the four women, are identified in relation to the children they gave birth to, and not in relation to the man for whom she bore them for (Smith, 2015, p. 169). Smith brilliantly juxtaposes this phenomena with the surrogacy of enslaved African women bearing the master’s mulatto children, and as a negative stereotype of asexuality, they were deemed “asexual, a loyal “Mammy” caring the Master’s white children and hopefully their own” (Smith, 2015, p. 169). I choose to recognize this description as a negative stereotype of asexuality, because it regards this sexual identity as inhuman and other, while asexuality is a legitimate sexual identity that should have no impact on a person’s status as human. Joseph’s refusal to expose Mary and showing a willingness to wed a pregnant Mary, was solely based on a preexisting dream where an angel of the Lord appeared and told him that she was alright to marry her because she was still a virgin (Smith, 2015, p. 167). Virgins, like Mary, are deserving of honor and are also marriage material, unlike whores, who should be shamed and exposed; this is according to the Hebrew Bible (Smith, 2015, p. 170). The “exposing” of the whore as metaphor, in Revelations 17 and 18 is the antithesis of the virginal bride found in Revelation 12:1-6, 13-17 (Smith, 2015, p. 172). Smith
argues along with Surekha Nelavala that “the whore” and the virgin as discussed in Revelation is metaphorical, but has harmful implications for the lives of real women (Smith, 2015, p. 167-168). This reinforces dangerous gendered relations (Smith, 2015, p. 172). “The use of the label “whore” implies its binary opposite, virgin, and both have implications for mother and the children they birth,” argues Smith (Smith, 2015, p. 167-168). “Black women as enslaved, taken-for—granted whores could only give birth to enslaved whores.” There are also class implications of the “whore” as described in Revelation as she is recognized to hold elitist or upper-class status, like an expensive call girl (Smith, 2015, p. 173). This position is demonstrated by her clothing, as she wears purple, the color of royalty, and scarlet, which is associated with sex work; Rahab wears this in Joshua 2 (Smith, 2015, p. 173). With the recognition of the social status of being a whore, these women can be violated during any time. The whore in Revelation is considered evil, dark and mysterious as she is “the great, mother of whores and earth’s abominations” (Smith, 2015, p. 175). This relates to “the constructed mythical mystery of Black women’s sexuality” as being hypersexual and, again, is revealed in the violence and gruesome experiences of Baartman who was placed on “scientific” display as a curiosity (Smith, 2015, p. 175). This sexual exploitation leads to a better understanding of white culture’s impact on the Black Church.

“White culture’s sexual exploitation has had a profound effect on Black spirituality and the Black church,” asserts Brown Douglass (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 83). “The manner in which Black women are treated in many Black churches reflects the Western Christian tradition’s notion of women as evil and its notions of Black women as Jezebels and seducers of men.” She provides examples of how the Black church treats Black women as some churches “require women to cover their legs with a blanket when sitting in a pew so they will not distract
men,” which is an excuse she argues is often used to “keep these women out of the pulpit and ordained ministry” (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 83). Many Black churches often publicly humiliate and chastise unwed mothers in front of the entire congregation (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 83). Brown Douglass writes that the sexist rituals stem from the historical times of the Black church as they expect Black women “to remain chaste after joining the church, a church that all the while said nothing about the sexual conduct of Black men” (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 84). White beliefs about Black women being solely responsible for the actions of the those who came from them affected the practices of Black spirituality within the context of the Black church (Brown Douglass, 1999, p. 84). Those who do not share this belief have been historically demonized. Brown Douglass acknowledges that many African cultures understood and recognized the connection between spirituality and sexuality; they removed the binary of what is distinguished as the sacred and secular because the all that is within the earth is God’s and anything belonging to God is sacred (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 84). For these reasons, sexual intercourse or acts were not considered bad or evil, but received and celebrated as sacred (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 84). “Human sexuality makes human relationships possible- including the relationships to the divine,” writes Brown Douglass (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 85). “The quality of a person’s relationship to God, therefore, hinges in many ways on her of his awareness and appreciation of her or his own sexuality.” Whiteness in the context of white supremacy, has estranged and warped Africana people’s ability to affirm these aspects of themselves. Not only has whiteness obstructed Black people’s ability to affirm themselves, it has interfered with their ability to know and build a relationship with God (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 85). This also is a reflection of the demonization of same-gender loving and Black queer people.
In “Our Lives Matter: A Womanist Queer Theology” by Pamela R. Lightsey surveys in her chapter “Black Women’s Experiences and Queer Black Women’s Lives” the work of many Womanist scholars as it relates to sexuality and Black homophobia (Lightsey, 2015, p. 2). She argues the absence of Black lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer voices representing their necessary perspectives is not good for the academy or the Black church (Lightsey, 2015, p. 2). The Black church must learn from these voices as the Black church has been both helpful and harmful (Lightsey, 2015, p. 2). She views the idea of the erotic or *eros* as something spiritual and writes that the majority of the Christian church’s homophobic attacks against LGBTQ persons from the church and outside are invested in how they use their genitals with their partners (Lightsey, 2015, p. 9).

“I can love the sinner, but not the sin,” “Homosexuality is an abomination,” “If we were supposed to be homosexual, God would have created Adam and Steve, not Adam and Eve,” “I don’t mind gay people, but why do they have to be so vocal and pushy about their rights,” “Homosexuality is a white thing,” “Africa did not have homosexuals before Europeans went there” and “Homosexuality is detrimental to the Black family” are comments Brown Douglass’ students often make whenever she addresses the issue of homophobia within the Black church (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 87). Homosexuality, within her years of teaching at Howard University School of Divinity, has been a touchy subject (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 87). “Black interlocutors have ended their arguments with some version of “The bottom line is that the Bible says homosexuality is wrong,” states Brown Douglass (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 90). “Whether they are churchgoers or not Black people often argue that the Bible makes clear that homosexuality is a sin.” She also argues that this idea is not just unique to Black people, but is also expressed and believed by other racial groups. Divinity takes on the role of power and
authority over the views of gay, lesbian, or queer people; troublesome, the Bible becomes a tool for censoring a group of people- the queer community (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 90). Brown Douglass finds irony in this because the Bible does not hold a clear stance on homosexuality; what most believe is evidence of homosexual practices being sinful, is just misconstrued interpretation (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 90). She asserts that biblical scholars have found that the Leviticus Holiness Codes, Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, Genesis 19:1-9, and Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, 1:26-17, are not grounded in strong arguments against homoerotism (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 90). Most importantly, as Christianity is centered on Jesus, Jesus by word or action has never exhibited an antigay or anti-lesbian stance; he and his disciples never truly expounded on sexual ethics but usually responded to urgent issues (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 90). At the most Jesus, discussed fidelity and in John 8:3-11 instead of punishing adulterers he expressed that self-examination was vital (Brown Douglass, 1999, p. 90).

Brown Douglass does not excuse the injustice of homophobia or transphobia, but does believe that “Black people’s utilization of the Bible to damn homosexuality is somewhat understandable in light of their history of oppression” (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 91). Black people’s mistrust of white people’s handling of the bible led to the oral/aural tradition of appropriation of the Bible as opposed to considerations of what is actually written in the bible (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 95). “The fact that homosexuality can be considered harmful to Black well-being is inextricably related to the sexual exploitation and denigraton of Black people by white culture,” argues Brown Douglass (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 97). “White culture racialized sex and “sexuated” race by equating Blackness with sexual deviance, the Black community has been diligent in its efforts to sever the link between such deviance and Blackness.” Barbara Smith analyzed the homophobia of Black women and considered how the “Black bulldagger”
image has affected them, lesbianism is definitely about something sexual—something deviant, which causes many Black women to close off (Brown Douglas, 1999, p. 97). Some Black nationalist and Afrocentric beliefs also continue to pull similar notions.

Brown Douglass looks at the role of Black nationalists and Afrocentrics. Brown Douglass refers to them as Afrocentrists, but that is incorrect, as Afrocentrism is deemed eurocentricity with a Black face according to Lewis Gordon in Introduction to Africana Philosophy (2008). Frances Cress Welsing and Molefi Kete Asante endorse homophobic beliefs outside of the Black Christian tradition (Brown Douglass, 1999, p. 98). Welsing discusses in The Isis Papers, Black queer identity as a medical condition: “Black male passivity, effeminization, bisexuality, and homosexuality are being encountered increasingly by Black psychiatrists working with Black patient populations…, although [these conditions were] an almost nonexistent behavioral phenomenon amongst indigenous Blacks in Africa” (Brown Douglass, 1999, p. 98). Asante agreeing with Welsing argues that homosexuality, a reflection of “European decadence”, is incompatible with a commitment to the Black community (Brown Douglass, 1999, p. 98). He states, “We can no longer allow our social lives to be controlled by European decadence. The time has come for us to redeem our manhood through planned Afrocentric action. All brothers who are homosexuals should know that they too can become committed to the collective will” (Brown Douglass, 1999, p. 98). This shows how homosexuality or Black queer identity is seen as something being in opposition to Black or Africana communities. Homosexuality, as a belief of some Black people, is considered “hostile to Black life” and erodes the Black family by threatening Black masculinity (Brown Douglass, 1999, p. 99). As result of “The Moynihan Report” which positioned white family structures as the nuclear family, it attacked the Black
family; “white culture created an image of Black people as sexually deviant,” which attacks the Black family. (Brown Douglass, 1999, p. 99).

This section reveals that some Black Christians show a willingness to help unlearn the practices developed in the Black Church. Whether it be the influence of the virgin/whore dichotomy, Black women’s bodies as anti-pure weapons or homophobia and transphobia running rampant as themes in the Black church, this all reveals how deep-seated the issue of sexual shaming is. The social script of the sexual shaming of Black women, from the lens of its perpetrators, are not only justifiable through biological argument, but also through religion and spirituality. The fabric of the Black church has influenced multiple spaces and lives of those who are not even Christian, particularly due to the impact of whiteness, chattel enslavement and patriarchy. The Black church has offered a perspective on faith, which can have positive implications, but has also been a negative vehicle; a weapon of sexual shame.

2.3 The Queers, Freaks, Hoes and THOTS as Other: Sexual Shaming as a Dehumanizing Effort and It’s Effects

This section discusses the populations of Africana women who are most affected by sexual shaming. This section begins with an examination of girlhood as it relates to Black girls’, particularly cisgendered, adultification. Rebecca Epstein, Jamilia J. Blake, and Thalia González in “Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls’ Childhood” (2017) surveyed 325 adults from numerous ethnic backgrounds and found that “cross all age ranges, participants viewed Black girls collectively as more adult than white girls” (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2017. Additionally, “responses revealed, in particular, that participants perceived Black girls as needing less protection and nurturing than white girls, and that Black girls were perceived to know more about adult topics and are more knowledgeable about sex than their white peers”
Sexual shaming does not just begin in the adulthood of Africana women, but it is seminal to recognize how Africana women are immortalized from birth as being adults, never allotted the opportunity to be recognized as children.

As of September 12, regularly updated by GLAAD, 19 transgender women of color were murdered in 2017, 14 of which are Black (GLAAD). As it relates to Africana women and sexual shaming, trans women should be at the center of discussions, because of how often gender identity conflates with sexual identity leading to several misconceptions about trans women, which adds to another tier of sexual shaming. Denying trans women’s status’ as “real women” denies them of their humanity, as it erases their womanhood. Africana trans women are at high risk for more than just verbal assault, they are more likely to be murdered or driven to suicide. Once people decide that someone does not exist, such as the belief that trans identity is invalid, they are no longer human. If someone is not recognized as human they will be met with harm. This narrative is also prevalent among Africana women within the sex work industry. The Huffington Post reports that “globally, sex workers have a 45 to 75% chance of experiencing sexual violence at some point in their careers and a 32 to 55% chance of experiencing sexual violence in a given year” (Koster, 2017). “Sex Workers are especially vulnerable to police violence, as police officers can threaten victims with arrest or stage an arrest and sexually assault victims,” states the Huffington Post. “Migrant sex workers, women (especially trans women) of color, drug users, and individuals with criminal records are especially vulnerable due to intersecting bias.” Also, in Africana communities, sex workers are deemed stains to Black identity and, therefore, are dehumanized. This has been seen in the case of the serial killer, “The Grim Sleeper,” who murdered numerous Black women, at least 25, but 9 who were identified, between 1985 and 2007, Lonnie David Franklin, Jr. (Rolling Stone, 2016). “The killer, one of
California’s most prolific, targeted victims who were generally young, vulnerable and, at times, ignored,” reports *Rolling Stone*. “…the Grim Sleeper proved to be the most persistent. He targeted women who were drug addicts or prostitutes and often dumped their naked bodies alongside roads or in the trash. Many of the women were initially listed as Jane Does. The deaths drew little, if any, media attention.” While some argue, that the “police kept the slayings quiet despite suspicions that a serial killer was stalking black women — a decision that led to outrage and condemnation from many who attribute Franklin's longevity as a killer to police indifference” (*Rolling Stone*), I argue it can also be attributed to the Black communities’ indifference toward anyone who might give Blackness a poor reputation. This is explored in the case of two teens, exotic dancers, who were found murdered. The section also examines the lives of other cisgendered queer women and cisgendered heterosexual women as it relates to sexual orientation, sexual agency and pleasure. Themes regarding the Black communities’ indifference toward Black women who are deemed as smudges to their communities in the U.S. also can be attributed to purity culture and the Black Church as discussed in the previous section.

In a 2014 study conducted by Philip Goff, the findings demonstrate that Black boys as young as 10, are perceived as older as well as being more likely to be found guilty in comparison to their white peers. Inspired by and expanded from this study, Rebecca Epstein, Jamilia J. Blake, and Thalia González in “Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls’ Childhood” (2017) conducted a quantitative study assessing the adultification of Black girls from ages 5-14 (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2014, p. 1). Adultification refers to the effects race and gender have on perceptions of Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than their white peers (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2014, p. 4). This study defines adultification in two ways: 1. *A process of socialization, in which children function at a more mature developmental stage*
because of situational context and necessity, especially in low-resource community environments
and 2. A social or cultural stereotype that is based on how adults perceive children “in the
absence of knowledge of children’s behavior and verbalizations (Epstein, Blake, & González,
2014, p. 4). However, the second definition of adultification, race and gender-based, is the
study’s focus (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2014, p. 4). Epstein, Blake and González’s literature
discusses how numerous scholars find that Black girls are also subjected to adultification
(Epstein, Blake, & González, 2014, p. 4). Dr. Monique W. Morris states that dominant societies respond to Black girls as if they are adults:

The assignment of more adult-like characteristics to the expressions of young Black girls
is a form of age compression. Along this truncated age continuum, Black girls are likened
more to adults than to children and are treated as if they are willfully engaging in
behaviors typically expected of Black women .... This compression ... [has] stripped
Black girls of their childhood freedoms [and] ... renders Black girlhood interchangeable
with Black womanhood. (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2014, p. 4)

Researchers surveyed 325 adults from numerous ethnic backgrounds, however, seventy-
four percent were white and sixty-two percent were female-identified (Epstein, Blake, &
González, 2014, p. 7). Occupations were not assessed; however, thirty-nine percent were
between the ages of 25-24 and and sixty-nine percent held a degree beyond a high school
diploma (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2014, p. 7). Additionally, researchers state:

Participants completed a nine-item questionnaire. Respondents were not informed
of the survey’s purpose, but instead were asked only to complete a questionnaire about
their beliefs about children’s development in the 21st century. Each participant was
randomly assigned either to a questionnaire that asked about the respondent’s perception of Black girls, or to a questionnaire that asked the same questions about the respondent’s perception of white girls. This allowed us to obtain an independent evaluation of respondents’ views of Black and white girls irrespective of girls of other ethnic/racial groups.

Although, Epstein, Blake and González focus on the various ways Black girls are adultified, this literature review highlights what is most relevant when discussing the sexualization of Black girls.

A seminal aspect of the adultification of Black girls is culturally rooted in the fantasies of their sexualization, which is attached to the common stereotype of Black girls as hypersexual; defined by the widely held belief of sex as part of the natural role of both Black women and girls (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2014, p. 5). This aspect of adultification is a form of dehumanization, which Epstein, Blake and González argue is robbing Black children, and due to the nature of their study, Black girls, of what makes childhood distinct from all other developmental periods; their innocence (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2014, p. 6). These factors affected adults’ responses to Black girls, who are victims of gender-based violence and they perceived Black girls as more knowledgeable about sex and adult topics (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2014, p. 13). As a result, these perceptions motivated officials to mark victims as complicit to their sexual trauma, assault or harassment, leading to Black girls’ criminalization (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2014, p. 13). Lines are blurred between assailants and perpetrators and who is the victim- Black girls. Additionally, Epstein, Blake, and González discuss the role that Black girls and women’s bodies play and applies this to:
Black female bodies have long been sites of trauma, carrying not only the weight of the past, present stereotypes that dehumanize and sexualize young girls before they even hit puberty. “The officer [Eric Casebolt] did not think he was restraining a helpless teenaged girl [Dajerria Becton, in 2015, (Dallas News, 2015)], but a ‘Black woman,’” with all the stereotypes and stigma that includes. This made her treatment all the more justified criminalization (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2014, p. 13).

Cisgendered Black girls grow up to be Black women, some of the same women that are being discussed within the literature. In an effort to understand how Black women are dehumanized through sexual shaming tactics, it is important to recognize that it begins before adulthood.

2.3.1 Transphobia Against Black Trans Women

Janet Mock in Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More (2014) states in 2012, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) documented twenty-five homicides of people in the United States who were murdered because of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation (Mock, 2014). Thirteen were trans women, all of whom were of color, comprising 53 percent of all anti-LGBTQ homicide victims, despite representing only 10.5 percent of survivors who reported incidents of hate violence to NCAVP (Mock, 2014). Larry Nuttbrock, Walter Bockting, Andrew Rosenblum, Sel Hwahng, Mona Mason, Monica Macri and Jeffrey Becker in “Gender Abuse and Major Depression Among Transgender Women: A Prospective Study of Vulnerability and Resilience” (2014) attempt in their study to better demonstrate and understand the “supposedly” causal relationship between gender abuse and depression among transgender women (Nuttbrock et. al., 2014). In proposing the question, What is the relationship between gender abuse and depression?, this study
collected data from 230 transgender women aged 19 to 59 years (Nuttbrock et. al., 2014).

Annecka Marshall in “Reclaiming the Erotic Power of Black Women” (2011) argues in agreement with Lorde stating heterosexism restricts women’s sexual pleasure and capacity to recognize one another and homophobia reduces women’s ability to value their differences as well as similarities (Marshall, 2011).

Lena Carla Palacios in “Killing Abstractions: Indigenous Women and Black Trans Girls Challenging Media Necropower in White Settler States” not only explores the lives of and movements of Indigenous or Black trans and gender-nonconforming women, girls and activists, but argues that within the United States they are inversely marked as “ineligible for personhood” in life and in death (Palacios, 2016, p. 39). Aspects of the article critique and hold activist-scholars accountable in the ways that we may contribute to the further marginalizing of trans women, particularly Black women. She states activist-scholars must reject recuperative social value- the act of attributing normative social value to one “object” over an “Other.” Palacios makes a call to activist-scholars to disavow these killing, abstracting practices and criminalizing stereotypes (Palacios, 2016, p. 37-38).

In 2013, Black trans woman, Islan Nettles, 21, was beat to death by James Dixon, 25, because he was attracted to her (McKinley, 2016). The New York Times writes that Nettles walking with two transgender friends encountered Dixon and a group of at least six other young men. According to prosecutors, Dixon crossed the street and began chatting with Nettles, whom he did not realize was transgender. “I remember asking her what is her name, where are you from,” he said. “That’s how I roll up.” Then, he said, he heard one of his friends mocking him, saying, “That’s a guy,” and he became enraged. “They were clowning me,” he told the detectives. It was not the first time he had been ridiculed, Mr. Dixon said in his videotaped
statement. A few days earlier, he had been deeply embarrassed when two transgender women approached him while he was doing pull-ups on a scaffolding at 138th Street and Eighth Avenue. Not realizing they were transgender, he flirted with them, and claimed he was teased badly by his friends. Three days after the assault, Mr. Dixon, of Classon Avenue in Brooklyn, turned himself in to the police and confessed, telling a detective he had flown into “a blind fury” when he discovered he was talking to a transgender woman. (McKinley, 2016).

Dixon was not charged with a hate crime, and also denied using transphobic slurs while beating Nettles (McKinley, 2016). In addition, he stated he did not have any hatred toward trans people as a group (McKinley, 2016). “I don’t care what they do,” he said. “I just didn’t want to be fooled.”

In an online publication by Allure magazine, Mock discusses the struggles she experienced before her medical transition with not being “pretty,” which is subjective (Mock, 2017). However, there may be ideas around classic beauty and eurocentric ideals that many subscribe to. Transgender women are not perceived as “real women,” therefore, they are not perceived as real or human at all. As a teenager, she felt anguish as she was faced with the constructs of cisnormativity, that she said began to subside once she commenced her medical transition at 15 (Mock, 2017). “…[how] I saw myself inside began to slowly and steadily reveal itself on my outsides,” she states. “I began to finally see myself.” By 16, she became aware of how her treatment often shifted, and that the stares at her body were less in a manner of bewilderment (Mock, 2017). She was no longer questioned about her gender, because she was able to “present herself as a girl,” which she understood ultimately meant a “cis girl” (Mock, 2017). She was able to blend in with other cis girls, and as the years went by she realized the societal advantages of what it meant to be cis-passing and pretty and also pretty privilege is
conditional based on race, ableism and age and size (Mock, 2017). Trans actress and activist, Laverne Cox, started the hashtag #TransIsBeautiful, because a trans person may not personify cisnormative standards of beauty and can still be viewed as attractive or pretty, just as a trans person can fall into cisnormative standards and not be viewed as pretty (Mock, 2017). Mock discusses how as a mixed raced Black woman, she understands how people find her attractive due to her mixed raced identity, because for many “Blackness does not equate to attractiveness” but those with mixed raced Black identity are placed higher on a measure of what Mock describes as white cis beauty hierarchy than Black women with two Black parents (Mock, 2017). Race complicates trans identity, or rather, the Black trans identity of women. Mock also states:

Still, my appearance is a conundrum to many, even within my own communities. Trans women like myself, whose transness often goes unchecked, are conditionally granted access and navigate spaces more safely than trans women who do not pass as easily. Being able to blend in is a gateway to survival, but many trans women do not benefit from my passing privilege or my pretty privilege. (Mock 2017)

Despite, this “privilege” this points back into the direction of the darker truth of cis people believing somehow that they are being “fooled” like Dixon or deceived when they come across cis-passing trans women. Some Black trans women may experience back-handed compliments that are outright transphobic as it implies the disillusionment of them actually being real women such as the statements that Mock has encountered: You don’t even look like a boy anymore,” “You look so real,” or “I can’t even tell” (Mock, 2017). However, Mock discusses the other issues:

It is also important to acknowledge that there are repercussions, too, specifically in spaces of desire. Cis men have often claimed that they were “deceived” or “tricked” by a
trans woman who was assumed to be cis and was thereby deserving of the violence she faced. This harmful yet all-too-pervasive belief has gone so far as to be used as defensive arguments in courts across the country, called the “trans panic defense.” (Mock, 2017) Palacios acknowledges the murders of Black and Latinx trans women and activists such as Marsha P. Johnson, Sanesha Stewart, Amanda Milan, Duanna Johnson and Ruby Ordeñana who were affirmed and acknowledged by their local communities, however, were also ignored by the media, lawmakers, and large nonprofits (Palacios, 2016, p. 42-43). Nettles’ murder at a local and national volume is being challenged (Palacios, 2016, p. 42-43). Race serves as a marker for how lawmakers and mainstream media will react to the murders of queer and trans communities, particularly if they are white (Palacios, 2016, p. 43). There has been dissention and debate over how Nettles, as a Black trans women will be portrayed in order for her murder to be declared a hate-crime. This could also affect antidiscrimination legislation (Palacios, 2016, p. 43). White trans activist, Dean Spade, considered inclusion centered on antidiscrimination and hate-crime law campaigns. Spade essentially argues, “we are just like you; we do not deserve this different treatment because of this one characteristic” (Palacios, 2016, p. 43). However, Black trans activists and others challenge notions of inclusion and visibility, that erase Nettles’ intersections with the exception of her gendered self-presentation - Blackness, youth, poverty and the affects her gentrifying neighborhood has on her mortality (Palacios, 2016, p. 43). Later, The New York Times reported that Dixon would be charged, as he pled guilty- he was sentenced to 12 years in prison (McKinley, 2016). Palacios wrote the article before anyone was charged. However, her claims of how gentrification relates to Nettles’ murder still remain an issue:

Nettles’s murder, which took place in “the more menacing stretches of Harlem,” alongside the well-publicized murder of Mark Carson in Greenwich Village, “a normally
peaceful and progressive part of Manhattan,” functions to effectively bracket their shared blackness—as if gendered and sexualized violence is not also racialized—and to portray them as two of many LGBTQ murder victims rather than exceptional cases that implicate larger structural inequalities specifically targeting Black female, trans, and queer bodies. (Palacios, 2016, p. 44).

On January 30, 2014, the Trans Women of Color Collective (TWOCC) of Greater New York, a group of trans women of color and their allies gathered outside of the New York City Police Department to demonstrate and protest “an unsatisfactory investigation and prosecution after Nettles’ murder (Palacios, 2016, p. 44-45). There were several statements made by activists regarding dehumanization by way of transphobia, police response or the lack thereof considering Nettles’ being beaten outside of a police station, gender and racism.

Palacios also critiques dominant norms and applauds the Black trans members of TWOCC’s daily acts to oppose them (Palacios, 2016, p. 46). Black trans activists disrupt universalist notions predicated on Western humanist beliefs, that historically privilege “free” white men and women (Palacios, 2016, p. 49). For Black trans women, Palacios argues that it requires as a “critical trans politic,” a call for collective self-awareness and a “turning away” from the carceral state (Palacios, 2016, p. 49):

The outlaw discourses and actions mobilized by Indigenous and trans Black girls and women—the unprotected and socially dead—who are overwhelmingly the targets of interpersonal, sexual, and carceral state violence in white settler societies are direct responses to their subjection, devaluation, and ineligibility for personhood. (Palacios, 2016, p. 54)
“You are just whores -- you can't be raped’: barriers to safer sex practices among women street sex workers in Cape Town” (2003) conducted by Ilse Pauw and Loren Brener, provides data on Africana women and sex work. Focus group participants mentioned that new or inexperienced sex workers were particularly at risk as clients often try to convince them that other sex workers do not use condoms (Pauw & Brener, 2003). Sex workers in the researchers’ sample also complained that some clients try to break or remove condoms during sex [which is considered rape] (Pauw & Brener, 2003). Street sex workers often work alone and usually late at night. In countries where sex work is criminalized, they may be forced to work in remote or poorly lit places where they are less visible. Once sex workers have solicited a client, they need to enter the client’s space (his car or home) (Pauw & Brener, 2003). All these factors make them especially vulnerable to physical violence, rape or forced unprotected sex by clients (Pauw & Brener, 2003). In two studies conducted in Kwa-Zulu Natal in South Africa, sex workers reported that clients beat them, raped them, abandoned them in isolated places, left them naked, and that they were forced to jump from moving vehicles (Marcus et al. 1995, Abdool Karim et al. 1995). Cape Town sex workers’ vulnerability was highlighted when a serial killer murdered 19 street sex workers during 1996 while fieldwork for this research was underway (Pauw & Brener, 2003). Eleven participants stated that they have been forced to have unprotected sex with clients (Pauw & Brener, 2003). In the target areas of this study, there are state funded clinics providing free primary health and STD care (Pauw & Brener, 2003). However, findings suggest that sex workers do not feel comfortable visiting clinics. Only six participants viewed state clinics favorably, while the majority (n=17) felt that these clinics had various shortcomings, most notably the negative attitudes of clinic staff (Pauw & Brener, 2003). Other South African studies have also highlighted sex worker complaints of discriminatory treatment by medical personnel
(Wojcicki and Malala 2001). Only eight participants said that they would tell staff that they were sex workers. Five feared disclosing their profession as they believed that this would not be kept confidential (Pauw & Brener, 2003). Additionally, sex workers are often abused by those who are supposed to protect them. Similar to other South African studies (Abdool Karim et al. 1995, Wojcicki and Malala 2001) as many as twelve participants reported rape or other acts of violence by the police (Pauw & Brener, 2003). 18 participants in this study stated that if they experienced problems with a client they would not take these up with the police (Pauw & Brener, 2003). Participants felt that the police did not take their complaints seriously, ‘[The police] say “you are just a whore, you can’t be raped”’ (Pauw & Brener, 2003). Although, this study does not focus on Africana women of the United States, the data provided is useful as it displays evidence of sexual shaming against African diasporic women. The survey portion of my research study will collect data from self-identified African diasporic women.

In September of 2014, two teenage friends’ bodies were found naked, one on top of the other, bound together by zip ties by the side of the road in Tampa, Florida (Lemieux, 2014). These Black teenage girls were 18 and 19, but most importantly they had names-Tjhisha Ball and Angelia Magnum. However, because of their sexual imagery and memory it made it just a little too difficult for Black communities to say or remember their names. The Tampa Bay Times reported, Ball dropped out of high school at 16, and both of them were in the sex adjacent industry of exotic dance. Although, a few articles and activists have suggested that these teenage murders were dismissed by police and members of the Black community because of sex work stigma, I argue it is also because of the ties sex work has to race, as an intersection. Despite, sex work being an industry where women are often subjected to harassment, exploitation and abuse by clients, employers and law enforcement, as stated by Jamilah Lemieux in “Black Girls
Murdered (But Do YOU Care?), this is not an opportunity for communities to dwell within a space that encourages the throwing of sticks and stones at Black sex workers. This should not present as an opportunity to banish them and revoke their status as full-human. Ball’s mother, Jerlean Moore asked ABC, "I feel like sometimes that I failed. What could I have done? What could I have taught her better?” and Lemieux showing empathy toward her in her essay extended commentary to the rest of Black communities stating:

We shouldn’t need for them to have been “good girls”—or White girls, or, perhaps good White girls—for this to be cause for national concern. There is a killer, or killers, on the loose. There is no shame in what those women allegedly did for a living. The shame is the way our society treats the ‘bad girls,’ and that we do not respect their humanity even in death.

To date, it is unclear of who murdered Ball and Magnum, however, what is clear is that to acknowledge their humanity further perpetuates the idea that what happened to these teenage girls was somehow deserved. Lemieux discusses the social and class implications of sex work while acknowledging how judgement and shaming are violent tactics:

We could discuss the lack of education and career opportunities that leads young women to the pole, but we’d be dismissing the fact that many exotic dancers choose that path because that is what they want to do. Who are we to judge? Especially considering how many of us are cogs in corporate wheels that hurt people in ways that a g-string never will.

Black sex worker, artist, and activist, Suprihmbé, shares her experiences being in the sex work industry as well as the mistreatment she faces from white cismale clients, Black men and white sex workers in “sex worker self-care: ebony edition, part one” (Suprihmbé, 2017):
The emotional abuse that Black sex workers endure is taxing. Our main clientele is cis het white men. Most porn and content is created for the white cismale gaze, although that is slowly changing (See: Shine Louise, Sinnamon Love, and the Crashpad Series). We receive constant requests for degrading role play (race play), free shows and products, or outright verbal abuse. Not only do we endure abuse from white men—we also receive a heaping pile of vitriol or indifference from Black men, white sex workers, and other women of color.

Suprihmbé shares the shame she has experienced from Black women who are not in the sex work industry. It hurts her as she struggles to be recognized and accepted by women she believes are part of her community:

…It hurts the most coming from Black women because you would think that there would be an understanding of the capitalist oppression and economic inequalities which led us to make the almost non-choice to engage in any type of sex work. Many of us are not ashamed of being sex workers. But there are other things we’d rather be doing than dealing with sh*tty men. Some of us just want to homeschool our kids. Some of us are artists. Some of us just want to make ends meet. Some of us are felons. Some of us have mental illnesses. Some of us are just tired and want some semblance of freedom.

What Suprihmbé offers about her experience as a sex worker, is the affirmation of her own humanity as well as the humanity of other sex workers. However, it is race that colors the tribulation she has experienced in this field a different way. Simply, she is a human being offering that the shame she has been most affected by has come from those belonging to her racial group, especially from Black women. Her words speak to the human experience of sex work that is often removed and reduced to anti-Black or inhuman waste; people further contribute to the emotional abuse that has already been inflicted on her by clients. Black moral
value and the capitalist critique of Black sex work holds no weight in comparison, when this trade is made of people, humans; spectators, critics and community members willfully look beyond this factor. The very absence of humanity in this discourse is disingenuous, dehumanizing and oppressive. Looking beyond humanity makes all arguments futile- it is abuse.

Despite the “othering” of Africana women with non-normative sexualities and identities, many are able to embrace and celebrate these identities in the face of their oppression and shaming.

2.4 Deviant Blackness, Otherness, and Sex-Positivity

The works of Jennifer Nash, Ariane Cruz, and Mireille Miller-Young, reveal that even when Black women try to make their own sexual decisions through sex-positivity, their sexual choices create the issue of being sexually subjugated by the community as “other” through language of deviance. In The Color of Kink: Black Women, BDSM, and Pornography Ariane Cruz examines the “foregrounding of Black female [women’s] sexuality in the landscape of BDSM and pornography and its revisiting of a politics of perversion as a springboard for thinking through the intersection of perversion with Black female [women’s] sexuality (Cruz, 2016).

Cruz defines “pervert” as the alteration of something from its original course, meaning, or state to a distortion or corruption of what was first intended; lead (someone) away from what is considered right, natural, or acceptable.” It can also be defined as a noun meaning “a person whose sexual behavior is regarded as abnormal and unacceptable” (Cruz, 2016, p. 11). The text explores and analyzes the themes of “the relationship between perversion and the queer limits and potentials of “non-“normative” sexual desires for Black women” (Cruz, 2016, p. 10). Cruz looks at the ways perversion can allot other ways of being for Africana women while also
recognizing the historical bondage, literally and symbolically, associated with Africana women and their bodies (Cruz, 2016, p. 10). The politics of perversion is wrapped up in the performances of race, gender and sexuality, which deviates from ideas of straightness or what is deemed normative sexual behavior and preference (Cruz, 2016, p. 10).

In “Archives of Pain: Reading the Black Feminist Theoretical Archive” from Jennifer C. Nash’s text, “The Black Body in Ecstasy” Renée Cox’s self-portrait Hot-En-Tot is unpacked, as Cox in this work “re-enacts the nineteenth century public display of Baartman (Nash, 2014, p. 27). She wears an “armature” of breasts and buttocks as a means to highlight “the most mythologized portions of Baartman’s body and to underscore what Baartman’s viewers,” even the contemporary as they view Cox’s work, “thought they would see”- the sexual overabundance of a Black woman (Nash, 2014, p. 27). Nash argues that “the strings that attach the exaggerated breasts and buttocks to Cox’s body call attention to the artifice of racial mythologies- which are always, it seems spectacular and larger than life”; these mythologies are also projected onto the bodies of Africana women (Nash, 2014, p. 27). While some may argue that Cox’s work only further objectifies and marks Baartman, Nash asserts that Cox flips the gaze back at Baartman’s spectators who invested in othering her, defying beliefs of Black female accessibility (Nash, 2014, p. 29). Cox declares that she is returning the gaze back from Baartman as she seeks to honor her (Nash, 2014, p. 29). Drawing off of Hobson’s work in “The Batty Politic,” Nash posits that Cox’s use of body, once a site of Baartman’s subjugation and trauma, recovers Baartman’s history while connecting her to contemporary Africana women’s lived experiences and lives (Nash, 2014, p. 29). These experiences, historically recognized by Spillers as discussed earlier in “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” shows how enslavement unraveled gender, making Africana people ungendered, it sexualized the bodies of Black people, and converted them back in Black
flesh (Nash, 2014, p. 41). Spillers notes that this discourse or vocabulary would ensure that Black women be in the conversations, adding on to a larger feminist project (Nash, 2014, p. 39). While arguing that the transformation of Black people’s bodies became a marketplace from the white subject to Black people as object, she recognizes the technology of gendered or different ways of fleshiness, particularly for Africana women:

Slavery did not transform the Black female [woman] into an embodiment of carnality at all, as the myth of the Black woman would tend to convince us, nor, alone, the primary receptacle of a highly-rewarding generative act. She became instead the principal point of passage between the human and the non-human world. Her issue became the focus of the cunning difference- visually, psychologically, ontologically- as the route by which dominant male decided the distinction between humanity and “other.” (Nash, 2014, p. 41)

Through her theory of pornotroping, as a process of objectification (or being “reduced to a thing”), but also a process of being reduced to “sensuality,” she highlights how the sexual labor that produces racial difference demonstrates the pornographic pleasure of producing race (Nash, 2014, p. 41).

As this conversation exists, the wholeness of Africana women and their sexuality can also be reimagined by visiting the site of injury, and despite how uncomfortable it may appear or be, there can sprout actions toward recovery. Because Nash believes that the Black Feminist project, is imaginative, restorative, world-making, generative and politically necessary, her interest is not in imagining pleasure outside the confines of pain or injury (Nash, 2014, p. 58). She recognizes the racial and sexual ecstasies that pornography can produce for Africana women spectators and pornographic protagonists (Nash, 2014, p. 58). I argue the same for Womanism, as this research study is based on the belief that it is more holistic and practical in the face of sexual shaming.
BDSM shares a relationship with the terminology “perversion” as in practice and theory it stems from the foundation of Marquis de Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch; in the nineteenth century people began to see sadism and masochism as psychosexual perversions (Cruz, 2016, p. 14). However, when intersecting race with BDSM, the concept of “skin” cannot be separated from either as Samira Kawash argues that “skin is an ambivalent but salient marker of racial classification” as skin, as an erotic racial fetish, is communicated through the visual of what is seen and unseen (Cruz, 2016, p. 91). Skin acts as a site of memory, especially while confronting Africana women’s traumatic past of racial and sexual violence during the enslavement period that encodes its memory on to the skin of Africana women to date. Morrison describes this as “skin memory”; skin is “a site that chronicles the remembrance of pain” and simultaneously the “body’s recollection of pleasure.” For Morrison, it is sexual and accumulates “its own sexual memories like tattoos” (Cruz, 2016, p. 93). This is the sum total of what BDSM is as it is a “carnal-psychic index of pain and pleasure” (Cruz, 2016, p. 92).

Cruz “remains concerned about what happens when we think about trauma as the formative element” of Black women’s sexuality and seeks to “depathologize Black women’s “non-heteronormative fantasies in performance of pornography and BDSM” (Cruz, 2016, p. 219). Because to pathologize Black women all over again regarding their traumatic pasts is to burden them once again with the responsibility of rejecting their sexual pleasures and freedoms. Although, for Africana sex workers history does often draw a line between the pleasurable, unpleasurable and sexual act for resource, it is important not to shame or guilt-trip these women for how they choose to receive resource.

Mireille Miller-Young in A Taste for Brown Sugar, posits that porn, beyond commodification and exploitation, is a powerful and important site for Black women’s
resistance. Positioning it as immoral rejects the arena at which Black women are able to construct their own images and specify their own desires, as well as setting the conditions for how they choose to engage the labor (Miller-Young, 2014). She argues that Black women perform other kinds of cultural labor beyond embodying injury, trauma, and abuse; something that is exceptionally oppressive for Black women in the sex work field (Miller-Young, 2014). Miller-Young highlights how, just like for the Black LGBTQ community, black women are often expunged from the discourse of Black communities, because of racial essentialism, which “legitimates and qualifies certain racial subjects to speak for (represent) ‘the race’ and excludes others from that very possibility”; the same happens for Black sex workers, they are marginalized within the digressive construction of Black community (Miller-Young, 2014, p. 163). As Blackness is often constructed based upon the notions of racial elevation and moral citizenship, hoes, women of similar names, and transgender women are deemed the antithesis; they complicate these beliefs (Miller-Young, 2014, p. 163):

Hoes exist as outcasts-part victim, part threatening force, because as a subaltern figure, the ho troubles Black heterosexist attempts to put her in her proper place in the home, in the church, or alongside a breadwinning husband, the violent disciplining and erasure of her role in Black community ties is legitimated. (Miller-Young, 2014, p. 163)

Being a “deviant” or a “hoe” within these practices can also function as insurgent and Black liberatory work (Miller-Young, 2014, p. 164). Ashleigh Shackelford in “Karrine Steffans Was Right: Our “Hoe” Histories Matter” (2016) discusses an incident that occurred on social media with New York Times Best-Selling Author of Confessions of a Video Vixen (2005), Karrine “Superhead” Steffans. The article centers Steffans series of tweets after she posted: “At 26, I was already a New York Times Best Selling Author, a millionaire, and sitting next to
Oprah. Be inspired. You can do it,” and a woman responded, “You sucked dick. Honestly, that ain’t the route I want.” Another user responded, “I look up to Oprah, I want to be a woman like Oprah not you. Everything you do is tasteless.” This prompted Steffans to respond, “Oprah was a hoe. She was promiscuous after her rape, admittedly. Same story. More money doesn’t erase the truth.” Shackelford affirms Steffans as a sexual assault survivor, sex worker, and entrepreneur and also recognizes the labeling of “hoe” as a politic. She argues that the label hoe is a systemic and structural issue for Black women, and it does not matter what they do (Shackelford, 2016). It is because of the preconceived idea, that Hortense Spillers mentions previously, that Black women’s bodies are inherently sites of sexual trauma. Shackelford argues that this results in sexual abuse survivors being battered by way of shaming, othering and marking.

“Deviant” identities are historical, are part of the now, and will be present in the future. There should be no shame or tradition of dehumanization, when Black communities regard sexual assault survivors, women who enjoy sex, and transgender women. However, there are many who choose not to affirm these Black women with counter-sexual and counter-human expressions; a way of living, being and performing in a way that is not perceived as normative, respectable or cisgendered and heterosexual. These Black women are human with queer/non-normative notions of Black humanity, and they are constructing spaces for themselves.

June Jordan in “A New Politics of Sexuality” argues the Politics of Sexuality subsumes all of the different ways in which some people seek to dictate to others what they should do, what they should desire, and what they should dream about, and how they should behave (As quoted in Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 407). Jordan affirms her “female,” motherly, bisexual, and nationalist identities because she chooses to recognize her own humanity. She makes a call for the validity of all of the components of social/sexual complexity as well as the equality or fair
recognition of these complexities (As quoted in Guy Sheftall, 1995, p. 407). Studies have been conducted on the identity of women loving or openly identifying as women being sexually attracted to other women. A study from “Reasons for having sex among lesbian women” conducted by Ashley Ronson, Robin Milhausen, and Jessica Wood asked What is the reason for lesbian women having sex, exploring lesbian identity as taboo. All participants identified as Caucasian with the exception of one woman who identified her ethnicity as aboriginal (Ronson, Milhausen, Wood, 2012).

Toni Morrison’s Sula, speaks of the subjugation of a Black woman who is shamed by her community and also comes from a family of women who thoroughly enjoys men and sometimes sex. Roderick A. Ferguson in Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique argues that the production of Sula as other, enabled those who sexually shamed her and her accusers to claim normativity for themselves (Ferguson, 2004, p. 131). Morrison is demonstrating Sula’s construction as other within the constraints of heteropatriarchal privilege, because it is the men who “fingerprint” her (Ferguson, 2004, p.131). As Sula was called “bitch,” Black lesbians and single Black mothers were addressed at various times as “little men,” “bulldaggers,” and “matriarchs” and signal toward non-normative branches within African American culture (Ferguson, 2004, p. 132).

In Sula, the “whores” were “little clothes-crazy things who were always embarrassed” and nasty but shamed (Morrison, 1973). However, Ferguson posits Sula allegorized not only the conditions of Black women’s gender and sexual directive, but also a desire to formulate identities and practices that were limitless; there was possibility for something else (Ferguson, 2004, p. 132).

Jeroen Vaes, Paola Paladino and Elisa Puvia in “Are sexualized women complete human beings? Why men and women dehumanize sexually objectified women” (2011) issue for their
study the question *Why do men and women dehumanize sexually objectified female targets?* In Study 2, only those female participants who distanced themselves from sexually objectified women did not associate them with human attributes (Vaes, Paladino and Puvia, 2011). Vaes, Paladino and Puvia realize future research should focus on why this might happen (Vaes, Paladino and Puvia, 2011). They proposed one possibility is that sexually objectified women constitute a threat for the female category at large (Vaes, Paladino and Puvia, 2011). Although, this research did not focus on race, there was an effort to measure dehumanization based on women who are “sexually-objectified”.

Ferguson highlights Morrison’s quote and writes:

> Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be.

> Being “something else” was not a task restricted to the realm of personal identity but extended to social practice as well. (Ferguson, 2004, p. 133)

Ferguson highlights Barbara Smith’s analysis, which asserts despite *Sula* having heterosexual women characters, Morrison’s work poses both lesbian and feminist questions about Black women’s autonomy, but also their impact upon each other’s lives (Ferguson, 2004, p. 133). Smith asserts *Sula* produced a political and theoretical engagement that acknowledges the spectrum of Black women’s identities and experiences, and in doing so disrupts essentialist articulations of Blackness and womanhood (Ferguson, 2004, p. 133).

> Morrison’s work acknowledges the bonds of Black women, while affirming their sexual identities and experiences. Theoretically, there are philosophies that mirror the real-life sexual and social relationships of Africana women.
2.5 “My Own Term for Such Women Would Be…”: Womanism as the Praxis of Black Womanhood and Sanctuary for the Future

Womanism acknowledges on a practical level, the everyday experiences and ethics of Black women— even sexual ethics. Womanism, as a guiding theoretical framework, acknowledges these factors as well as the heroism associated with Black womanhood. “Womanist” (1983), a set of guidelines written by Alice Walker, has one boundary and request, which is in order to take on the label of Womanist, the woman must be Black or a person of color. “Coming Apart” (1979), which is also published in Layli Phillips’ [Maparyan], The Womanist Reader, is an essay by Walker written in narrative format that situates itself as the catalyst for the philosophy of Womanism. It highlights how subjugation, experienced by Black women, in the midst of discussions surrounding the sexist oppression of white women and the racist oppression of Black men, is prioritized as least important in the hierarchal structured binary between whiteness and Blackness.

The two central characters of this prose are a Black wife and her Black husband. By narrating their interactions and the husband’s patriarchal and heterosexist understandings of sexuality and Black womanhood, Walker argues that many Black men are fighting for an access to power; it is the same kind of power white men possess. The husband has never truly made love to his wife, because not knowing how to make love to her without the fantasies fed to him by the media means for years “he has been fucking himself” (Maparyan, 2006, p. 10). Black women, like Black men, share an injurious history. This history of racist violence, trauma and oppression caused by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, is what makes some Black men feel ashamed of Black women, because they are aware at some point they could not protect Black women or help them even if they wanted to [they did]. He felt powerless, and Walker does
not use a shaming tactic to discuss why many Black men feel it necessary to gain access to white men’s power (Phillips, 2006, p. 9). The husband begins to consider his own “male privilege” and how sexism and misogynoir are agents within his own marriage. Walker, uses the voices of Black Feminist writers to facilitate the discourse around patriarchal power, Black women’s sexuality and pleasure, and Black women’s othering and trauma. As he grows in consciousness, and his wife leaves for a period, he is ready to evolve into a man who considers just how alone Black women feel and are, and wants to become an ally. The husband who was first filled with lesbophobia when reading “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” (1984) by Audre Lorde, was now being taught by a Black lesbian woman how to love Black women, “sexually and non-sexually.”

This is what strengthens Womanism as the sexual identity affirming theoretical framework that it is. Although, there are Black women who comfortably self-identify as lesbian, and this identity must be recognized by others in Black communities. The sexual and spiritual components of Black women’s holistic approach to loving is expounded on in Walker’s “Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson” (1981). She discusses sexuality as being fluid (As quoted in Phillips, 2006, p. 18). Sexual fluidity may allow some Black women to reject even a queer identity label or the label of lesbian, because their sexual identity is not fixed.

Walker argues that Black women have a concern for a culture that oppresses all Black people, including men, regardless of how they feel about them, she is also using this portion to acknowledge that Black women are also fighting against patriarchy. She also argues that the term “Womanist” regardless of the shortcomings of Black communities’ relationships to sexism, misogynoir, homophobia, and transphobia still must ensure an attachment to the entire community and world, rather than detachment by way of Black women only interacting with
other Black women (As quoted in Phillips, 2006, p. 18). Womanism is constantly being defined in real-time. Scholarly works are constantly being produced adding on to the definition as if it is living. As a living definition, Black women, as the authors and mothers, continue to pour life into it. E. Patrick Johnson has a similar engagement with Black sexuality and gender theory as he uses the works of Cathy Cohen to support his claims in ““Quare” Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother” (2001).

Johnson argues for a more culturally relevant non-normative theory. Quare theory, is the “vernacular rearticulation and deployment of queer theory to accommodate racialized sexual knowledge” (Johnson, 2001). Johnson poses the need for “Quare Studies,” not only to critique queer theory’s eurocentric lens, but also to de-center white gay men from queer discourse. He argues that queer theory erases categories of race and class (Johnson, 2001). Culture and the construct of race are seminal to the construction of a queered or non-normative performance (Johnson, 2001, p. 131). Johnson uses the work of Cohen and Lorde to engage the idea of queer identity as it relates to community. He states that “because transgendered people, lesbians, gays and bisexuals of color often ground their theorizing in a politics of identity, they frequently fall prey to accusations of “essentialism” or “Anti-intellectualism” (Johnson, 2001, p. 130). He argues that the traction around identity “is not always an unintentionally “essentialist” move” (Johnson, 2001, p. 130). He agrees with both Cohen and Lorde in response to this that “queer theorizing which calls for the elimination of fixed categories seems to ignore the ways in which some traditional social identities and communal ties can, in fact, be important to one’s survival” (Johnson, 2001, p. 130). Their arguments address how “queer theory” overlooks the cultural aspects of being that are relevant to the lives of queer people who are not white. This speaks to the nuance of not just being a monolith person of color, but a Black queer person. Lorde argues
theories that suspend communal identity, around subjects that call for the political mobilization of the oppressed, are not radical (Johnson, 2001, p. 131).

In examining the empirical research, theoretical frameworks, and issues surrounding the eurocentric interpretation of sex-positivity, other evidence found within this literature review shows in remembering and acknowledging the past, considering the intersections of race, sex, and gender, and affirming the full spectrum of Black women’s sexual identities and social relationships, an affirmative African-centered sexual ethic working toward a liberated Black future can be actualized and practiced. Finding power within the erotic is healing, and being free of sexual judgment and shame is stepping into the possibilities of a Black liberatory future. Politics that affirm the multiplicity of identities belonging to Black women function as the praxis of sanctuary. Furthermore, sanctuaries should not function as band-aids, but rather permanent fixtures of safety, regardless of time, place, and space, for Black women where they can consider their future possibilities. I hope for sanctuaries and safe spaces for those who need solace from an unrelenting racist world and a Black community that may continue to use sexual shaming practices to dehumanize them.

Although, “Coming Part” is just the beginning of Womanist philosophy some critics, many of them being Black Feminists, have concerns about Womanism. Is Womanism too forgiving and passive when it comes to patriarchy? Are Womanists coddling Black men, and not holding them accountable? Renee McKenzie, an Episcopalian priest, who makes more of an argument for Black Feminism as a politic would argue Womanism faces the problem of being both an ethics and a politics (Gordon, 2008, p. 104). McKenzie, although arguing ethics can find itself in conflict with liberation politics, acknowledges there is a need for it.
Walker argues in “Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson” Black women who love other women (sexually or non-sexually) are nuanced because they not only have concern for other women, but they also hold concern in a culture that oppresses all Black people, which includes Black men. Although people should not only be concerned for Black women or men because they are related to them, it is still acknowledged Black women have concerns for their fathers, brothers and sons, despite how they feel about them as men [perpetuators of sexism and misogynoir] (As in quoted in Phillips, 2006, p. 18). Walker states:

My own term for such women would be “womanist.” At any rate, the word they chose would have to be both spiritual and concrete and it would have to be organic, characteristic, not simply applied. A word that said more than they choose women over men. More than they choose to live separate from men. In fact, to be consistent with Black cultural values (which, whatever their shortcomings, still have considerable worth) it would have to be a world that affirmed connectedness to the entire community and the world, rather than separation, *regardless* of who worked and slept with whom. (As quoted in Phillips, 2006, p. 18)

Within the Notes section of “Coming Apart” Walker also argues for the advantage of using “Womanist”:  
I needn’t preface it with the word “Black” (an awkward necessity and a problem I have with the world “feminist”), since Blackness is implicit in the term; just as for white women there is apparently no felt need to preface “feminist” with the world “white,” since the word “feminist” is accepted as coming out of white women’s culture. (As quoted in Phillips, 2006, p. 11)
This could be analyzed as a blow to the naming of Black Feminism, as it could be interpreted to mean that Black feminism is the Black variation of something designed for white women. However, Alice Walker constantly pays homage and gives voice to several Black Feminist thinkers. Womanists are the sisters of Black Feminists despite their political executions. *Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender* (As quoted in Phillips, 2006, p. 19). Again, the critique Womanists are excusing of patriarchy faces an irony for Walker’s *The Color Purple* novel where the character, Sofía, far from passive or excusing, declares in a discussion with Celie, another Black woman:

> All my my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. *A girl child ain’t safe in a family of men*. But I never thought I’d have to fight in my own house. [She let out her breath] I loves Harpo, [she say]. God knows I do. But I’ll kill him dead before I let him beat me. (Walker, 1983)

Both Black women characters, one loving other Black women sexually and non-sexually, and the other loving Black men sexually and non-sexually, share something in common—oppression specific to their gender at the hands of Black men. Walker does not excuse white male patriarchy, or sexism or misogynoir caused by Black men, however, she is pushing for a politic and ethic calling for healing, justice, and accountability.

### 2.6 Race and Sexuality as Technology: Afrofuturism and a Culturally and Sexually Affirmed Future for Africana Women

This section looks at the mode of sexuality as it intersects with race as a form of technology. Afrofuturism is a theoretical framework, coined by cultural critic, Mark Dery (1994), that enables the envisioning of sexually and culturally affirmed futures beyond what most people traditionally associate with Afrofuturism - science fiction. This idea of applied
Afrofuturism, via the genre of Black possibility, reviews how Black women have reimagined their lives through hyperbole and are engaging in the process of imagining their affirmed Black futures. This especially applies to Africana women who are deemed subhuman within their own communities, because they will operate and resist by reclaiming their humanity for themselves moving toward the future, as a liberation technology.

Teresa de Lauretis discussed in *Technologies of Gender* (1987) that “gender” like Michel Foucault’s theory of sexuality, a “technology of sex,” is a product of social technologies (De Lauretis, 1987, p. 2). She begins by first discussing the limitations around the idea of “sexual difference,” because of the “universal” approaches used to understand difference between “men” and “women”; it is this section where she notes Paul Laurence Dunbar’s “We Wear the Mask” (1896) as something often referenced by Black women writers and Audre Lorde’s radical [Black] feminist take on using “the Master’s tools.” Epistemologically, this places her in the position to understand that gender and sexual “difference” needs to be unpacked or deconstructed. This is, because this “difference” is based on colonized language and not what is actually “real”; it is imaginary. These social “technologies” of race, gender and sexuality are not estates of the body or originally found in humans; it is an effect of what is produced in “bodies, behaviors and social relationships” (De Lauretis, 1987, p. 3). It is political, which leads to what Donna Haraway discusses a few years earlier in *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1984).

Just as race difference is a creation of fiction, so are gender and sexuality just as Lauretis discusses; however, Haraway takes this idea of technology further be using the science-fiction concept of the “cyborg”- a coupling of organism and machine (Haraway, 1987, p. 150). She complicates Foucault’s idea of “biopolitics,” which she identifies as a flaccid definition of cyborg politics.” A cyborg is political in that it is the abbreviated version of the “imagination”
and “material” reality. She takes account of history in her work as she identifies Black women in the United States as being unable to speak as a “woman” or as a Black person (p. 156). “Thus, Black women were at the bottom of a cascade of negative identities, left out of even the privileged oppressed authorial categories called 'women and blacks', who claimed to make the important revolutions,” argues Haraway. “The category 'woman' negated all non-white women; 'black' negated all non-black people, as well as all black women.” For the Black woman, there was no “she” and no identity markers that would affirm her humanity. Haraway acknowledges the works of writers like Octavia Butler and Samuel Delaney who tease out the ideas through fiction. Through imagery and hyperbole, she looks at Black women or other women who are considered the “other” as the “cyborg,” and also notes the problems with viewing marginalized people as the other and not their oppressors (Haraway, 1984, p. 180). Harraway states that the bodies of cyborgs are are “maps of power and identity,” just as human bodies are. Their bodies are not innocent and creates “antagonistic dualisms,” until the world’s end. Cyborgs are not sinful and they are pleasurable beings. Gender is unimportant to the cyborg, as in terms of sex, they are female and they seek not to universalize gender identities. They might be sexually fluid. The machine does not desire to be worshipped or dominated (Haraway, 1984, p. 180). The cyborg appears to reject normative beliefs that are typically are associated with women, sexuality and seeks to elevate patriarchy.

Haraway’s idea is articulated through the lens of Afrofuturist music artist and actress, Janelle Monae. Monae has not only created a emancipatory and liberatory genre of music of her own, she is able to mythologize herself as an alterego, through the lens of three versions of herself- Janelle Monae, artist/ public figure, Janelle Monae, of a fictitious future Metropolis and gene-mother to a science experiment [Henrietta Lacks-like], and Cyndi Mayweather, also known

As the listener, Monae’s extensive lyrical detailing requires imagination. In “March of the Wolfmasters” it is conveyed that the android is in trouble. A call to action to destroy Mayweather is placed to the “cyber-boys” and “cyber-girls” of Metropolis, for falling in love with human, Sir Anthony Greendown. It is their duty to disassemble her. Droid control is also ordered to destroy her and their will be no reward until her “cyber-soul” is turned over to the “star commission” (Monae, 2007).

She is deemed a terrorist for falling in love with a human being. Monae suggests there is a greater issue; 57821 is an android capable of loving, which goes beyond her programming. Androids are different than typical robots, for robots are not programmed to have human qualities. Androids are programmed in the likeness of humans, but are deemed less than human. Monae conveys the message that in an apocalyptic future, androids are colonized Black people, but 57821 has developed a consciousness, which may be the key to freedom and liberation in Metropolis.

She becomes a “runaway slave android” who after being captured and imprisoned, was helped by Sir Anthony Greendown, her lover, to escape [Assata Shakur-like], because in the song “57821” from her *ArchAndroid* album states “I saved you so you’d save the world” (Monae, 2010). There is a third voice found within the song that operates not only as the storyteller of the myth of this powerful Black woman android, but they work to affirm her identity through spoken word. Greendown and Mayweather are not immediately aware they are
symbols, who are much part of a larger project. Eventually, the third voice transforms this love
song into a song between the heterosexual relationship of a man and woman, to a love song
about Mayweather’s light leading us all back to one. This spoken word inspires her to question
and believe if she is “the one,” which starts off as the romantic question Am I the one for him/is he the one for me? but evolves into the liberatory and emancipatory question Am I the one to save the world-Black people?. Overtime, the saga introduces other aspects of Mayweather’s
sexual orientation; “robot love is queer” (Monae, 2013).

Jennifer Williams in her dissertation discusses Monae and her technologies. Williams and
others propose the pantechnological perspective as a sub-theory of Afrofuturism in which
everything can be interpreted as a type of technology Williams, 2016, p. iii). She articulates race
as it is constructed as a form of technology. This places her in a category that many other
Afrofuturists have yet to acknowledge or even discover. Williams in her dissertation, The
Audacity to Imagine Alternative Futures: An Afrofuturist Analysis of Sojourner Truth and
Janelle Monae’s Performances of Black Womanhood as Instruments of Liberation argues for
liberation technology as a tool for Africana people (Williams, 2016). John Jennings proposes that
under oppressive conditions, Africana people acquire knowledge and skills to operate varying
technologies, both tangible and intangible, that assist them in achieving liberation (Williams,
2016). He states:

Throughout history, Black people, particularly oppressed Black people, have instantly
noticed the affordances of various types of technology while under various forms of control. The
most important affordances of these liberation technologies have always been freedom, equity,
and agency. (As quoted in Williams, 2016)

Using the term liberation technology classifies varying tactics, strategies, and implements
as being effectual in placing Africana people on the path to liberation (Williams, 2016). However, Williams argues Jennings’ definition of liberation technologies does not appear to be a complete explanation of the meaning and function of the concept and Williams provides her own explanation in order to enhance this idea (Williams, 2016). Williams argues, Africana people continually generate cultural manifestations for themselves and their social development, which is argued by bell hooks as a creative response to racism (Ugwu et. al. 1995). I argue that Africana women’s ideations of Black possibility and imagination while considering a sexually and culturally affirmed future, is a liberation technology. C. Riley Snorton argues that possibility for trans people, in the realm of passing, should be able to transcend surgical procedures, while also agreeing with Judith Butler in recognizing that in some regard “possibility” can become a normative value (Snorton, 2009, p. 90). This is not to say that “passing” is the goal for all trans people, but in the face of transphobia, reimagining what it means to “pass” removes the normative notion of trans people having to uphold cisgendered appearances. The Black imagination is radical, and the imagining of possibility is liberatory as it provides an alternative to a racist, sexist, misogynoiristic, homophobic, and transphobic world; a world that can also be inhabited by the very people who share an ethnic group with these Africana women.

In my article published in the Atlanta Black Star, “Black Futures Matter: Redefining Afrofuturism” I define Afrofuturism as a concept, practice and movement that requires Africana people to ubiquitously conceptualize and deduce time from the past, present and future from an African cultural center (McCoy, 2015). This cultural center operates as the technological component of African futures from which African people can construct their agency in memory and in practice (McCoy, 2015). I engage race as a form of technology:
Technology has been used as an oppressive tool for anti-Black/white supremacist gain because human life has become the technological tool. Africana people are the “other” within an anti-Black and patriarchal white supremacist society, creating dehumanizing and post-human classifications for Africans of the diaspora. Afrofuturism from the perspective of Africana Studies seeks to (or should) dismantle ideas of post-humanism by reinforcing Africana humanism. While white supremacy’s tools have been used to dismantle and distort the Africana personhood, Afrofuturists engage African culture as the technology most capable of enabling African futures.

Alexander Weheliye explores aspects of this technology as he visits racial formation as a form of technology or post-human iteration of it in *Habeas Viscus* (2014) (as quoted in Cruz, 2016, p. 179). He argues that while deconstructing the hegemonic Western white liberal conception of humanity, the post-human is discovered; post-humanism is “represented as having a body, but not having a body” because they were never “human.” He acknowledges the idea of humanity as a social construction and how this is a deciding factor in what makes people not “human,” because of the lengths of white supremacists and those who fall within the line of respectability to dictate who is “human.” Others play with the idea as they confront sexuality as it relates to queerness, because queerness distorts what was considered the norm for “humans,” thus creating a posthuman identity as a signifier.

Cyberspace and platforms like social media provide speculative worlds for Africana women users to exist in a space of resistance and find community. The cybering of Womanism and sexual freedoms are glimpses of the Afrofuture and the speculative. However more explicitly there are Womanists who committed to Afrofuturist plans. In “A “Place Prepared”: When Womanist Dreams Answer Needs” (2017) written by Candace Simpson and presented by the
Black Theology Project website, Simpson reimagines Jesus as an Afrofuturist and marries her Womanist beliefs to her Afrofuturist beliefs. She tells a story of Halloween season being “heavenly” for Black neighborhoods as it promotes imagination and dreaming. She states that imagination is a propellant of Afrofuturism. She states that Afrofuturism is “a unique blend of theologies, cosmologies, myths, political thought, art, and science fiction of the Diaspora” and that “dreaming is not just for Halloween.” She promotes her own imagination and dreams, where she imagines Octavia Butler and Janelle Monae, an anti-capitalist world, and a world where women are free from sexual harm.

Using John 14:2-3 NRSV, which states, “In my [Parent’s] house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also,” she reimagines the words of Jesus describing the “Place” as something beyond Heaven (Simpson, 2017). She argues that an “Afrofuturist Womanist” has the ability to see Heaven, because not only does she dream of it, she has also been there. She states that because of white supremacist theologies and Black Christian leaders many become misinformed about what Heaven actually is; is it often interpreted as a place people experience once they die. There are “rules” to getting into Heaven according to the people that she mentioned with these theologies. Womanists to “keep building sustainable trustworthy, honest, loving, and brave Places”: “Brunch matters. FaceTime giggles matter. Dates to the nail salon matter because they help us Know each other. We will not get free without Fellowship.”

To make an even larger point she argues that Heaven is also more than a place:

It is a relationship. Jesus describes heaven as a place where He is. Consider the often misremembered Harriet Tubman. Multiple times, Tubman went back and forth to bring
her folks somewhere to a Place that treated them less like property. On her deathbed nearly 100 years ago, she reportedly said to friends and family present, “I go to prepare a place for you.” (Simpson, 2017) Simpson believes that Heaven is tangible, as it must and can happen “here” (Simpson, 2017).

This concept can be applied to Afrofuturist sexual living, as Africana women, trans and cis, with non-normative understandings can imagine a Womanist future where they are sexually and culturally affirmed as full-human. Although, there are numerous Afrofuturist scholars, few have operationalized the term, especially through the lens of sexuality, Black possibility and imagination as forms of technology, for the purposes of a research study. It is this research study’s intent to fill this gap. This study intends to explore this issue using a mixed method approach through survey, interview and Photovoice; it will be explained within the upcoming chapter, “Methodology.”

3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the mixed methods approach used in the study, including surveys, interviews, and Photovoice. The chapter also explains the appropriateness of the study design, the recruitment process for participants, the construction of the research questions, and data collection techniques. Finally, the chapter describes the validation and reliability techniques used as well as the study limitations.

3.1 Approaches

Technology via social networks is featured prominently in this study as a means to increase community-based participation. Technology is used to access the target population, engage community in the development of the survey and interview questions, and to describe of images related to sexual shaming. Technology is the facilitator of Afrofuturism.
Janessa Bailey found in her research study, “An Examination of the Relationship Between Black Millennial Social Media Use and Political Activism,” that social media for Black millennials can be a strategic tool for informing the strategy of advancing Black communities (Bailey, 2017). Bailey, through survey, measured the attitudes of 126 Black millennials between the ages of 18 and 29. The study also revealed a strong relationship between social media use and political activism. In “Purposive Sampling on Twitter: A Case Study,” Christopher Sibona and Steven Walczac found that social media could facilitate the recruitment process for research. “Four methods were used to recruit survey takers to a survey about social networking sites, Twitter recruitment, Facebook recruitment for a pre-test, self-selected survey takers, and a retweet by an influential Twitter user” (2012). They determined within their results that “recruitment through online social network sites like Twitter is a viable recruitment method and may be helpful to understand emerging Internet-based phenomena” (2012). Researchers within the medical field have also examined whether or not social media would be a viable recruitment option. Penn Medicine, in their news release, “Tapping into Twitter to Help Recruit Cancer Patients into #ClinicalTrials,” found that Twitter could possibly be a useful resource that can boost interest in cancer clinical trials and enrollment (Sedrak, 2016). Physicians at the Abramson Cancer Center of the University of Pennsylvania reported in JAMA Oncology after analyzing thousands of lung cancer tweets on social media sites, that their findings revealed that a large number of posts were in regard to clinical trials; however, they were not used for recruitment (2016). They argue that recruitment through social media remains largely untapped. Additionally, Twitter now has a survey feature where users can administer surveys to their followers and also tweeters who do not follow them. This reveals that Twitter is a viable function for recruitment. However, I cannot use their survey feature, because questions can only be
constructed and administered singularly. By posting a survey link to a tweet, users can share the
tweet or click the tweet anonymously and answer the questions administered within the survey.
Facebook is also another platform that can be used as some of the researchers for their studies
have used this platform. As it relates to the interview, which is followed by Photovoice,
participants were recruited from Instagram, because the technology requires that users have
access to a phone with a camera. By recruiting participants through social media, it guarantees
that participants have internet access, which means they can easily access the online survey. For
the aforementioned reasons, I recruited via social media to yield large participation.

3.2 Research Questions

The objective of this study is to examine the lives and sexual and social relationships of
Africana women, their experiences with sexual shaming and the perceptions of their sexual
futures:

1) How do Africana women based on their sexual and social relationships believe they
are perceived by Africana communities?

2) How do Black women, based on their social and sexual relationships imagine the
creation of sexually affirming spaces for themselves and other Black women in the future?

3.3 Participants

The objectives of this research project require participants to subscribe to the following
criteria:

1. Identify as Africana women.

2. Range from age 18 to 65.

3. Be willing to discuss their personal history, sexual history, and views on race and sex.

4. Have experienced sexual shaming.
5. For the interview and Photovoice phases, they must be living in the United States.

Survey participants include a total of 400 Africana women across the globe, whether they are cisgendered, or transgendered. They are asked demographic questions and questions about the judgment they have faced from Black communities regarding their sexual and social relationships. Interview participants include a total of ten women, self-identified as Black in the United States. As the researcher, I only selected 10 participants based on time constraints.

Participants do not have to be sexually active, but when confronted with issues surrounding sex shaming must have been willing to share their thoughts on the issue and also must have experienced sex shaming.

3.4 Recruitment

Social media is utilized to identify participants for the survey, interview, and Photovoice. Participants for both the survey, interview and Photovoice are found through social media channels. Survey participants include a total of 400 Black women across the globe who are both cisgendered or transgendered. Ten participants were invited to participate via flyer invitation on social media through the networks of Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Interview participants were also recruited to take part in the Photovoice activity. They were asked to take two photographs with their cellphone and create captions to describe their own sexually and culturally affirmed future.

3.5 Measures

Sexual shaming and Womanism are measured in the survey, interviews, and Photovoice phases. Sexual shaming focuses on the gaze of judgement implemented by others onto a woman, whose identity, sexual or gendered, or experiences are deemed deviant. Womanism, a term coined by Alice Walker, affirms Black women of all sexual orientations. Sex-positivity, which is
a sexually affirmative practice that additionally advocates for affirmative consent practices, is measured through the interview and Photovoice phases. Sex-positivity is a means to affirm Black women’s sexual autonomy and experiences, and will be reflected within the open-ended questions. Afroturism, although it is measured toward the latter part of the interview, is primarily measured within Photovoice.

### 3.6 Survey

For a course exercise, a pilot survey was created as a way to involve stakeholders and participants to enhance the volume of their voice in the process as well as inform the questions to be fine-tuned to incorporate what was said by participants as important. I involved participants in every stage of conceptualizing the design of the process; I used their voices to inform every stage. Additionally, this pilot, with 197 respondents in four days, helped determine more viable options for recruitment strategy. This being a technology-driven study, added to the accessibility for participants.

SurveyMonkey, an online survey platform, was used to capture the survey data. The anonymous survey consisted of 12 open-ended questions on the prevalence and scope of the sexual shaming of Black women by members of Black communities. The survey questions are inspired by Deborah J. Kennett, Terry P. Humphreys, and Janette E. Bramley’s 2013 research study. “Sexual resourcefulness and gender roles as moderators of relationship satisfaction and consenting to unwanted sex in undergraduate women” (2013) investigates the relationship between gender norms and relationship satisfaction on sexual self-control (Kennett, Humphreys and Bramley, 2013). They hypothesize 1) Women who endorse more highly traditional gender norms will score lower in sexual resourcefulness, based on the finding that women low in sexual
resourcefulness strive to conform to the values they see portrayed in the media (Kennett et al., 2012a) and 2) Women who are more generally resourceful, have higher sexual self-efficacy and fewer reasons for consenting to unwanted sexual activities will be more highly sexually resourceful (Kennett, Humphreys and Bramley, 2013). Data was collected from 246 cis-heterosexual women undergraduates who were between 18 to 47 years of age (Kennett, Humphreys and Bramley, 2013).

The Sexual Self-Efficacy Scale (SES) (Kennett et al., 2009), a 6-item self-report measure, was used to assess women’s sexual self-efficacy, i.e., their belief in their ability to successfully deal with unwanted sexual advances (Kennett, Humphreys and Bramley, 2013). Responses to these items were rated on a 9-point Likert scale, with 0 representing “not at all like me” and 8 representing “very much like me” (Kennett, Humphreys and Bramley, 2013). Sample items from the scale included: “I feel comfortable dealing with unwanted sexual advances/activity” and “I believe that I am in full control when unwanted sexual advances are made toward me” (Kennett, Humphreys and Bramley, 2013). Possible scores could range from 0 to 48, with higher scores indicating that the participant feels she has the ability to control sexual situations (Kennett, Humphreys and Bramley, 2013). Kennett et al.’s (2009) reported average score in undergraduate women was 25.75 (SD ¼ 7.71), with a Cronbach alpha of .78, a moderate reliability. The Double Standard Scale (DSS) is a 10-item inventory that measures acceptance of the traditional double standard using a 5-point Likert scale (Caron et al., 1993). Participants were asked to rate how much they endorsed each statement with 1 representing strongly agree and 5 representing strongly disagree (Kennett, Humphreys and Bramley, 2013). The possible range of scores was from 10 to 50 with a lower score representing a higher endorsement of traditional gender norms (Kennett, Humphreys and Bramley, 2013). Sample items included: “It is up to the man to
initiate sex’’; “In sex the man should take the dominant role and the woman should assume the passive role”; and “It is important that the man be sexually experienced so as to teach the woman” (Kennett, Humphreys and Bramley, 2013). Caron et al. (1993) developed the DDS and reported an average score of 40.9 in a sample of female and male college students with a Cronbach’s alpha of .72, which also has moderate reliability (Kennett, Humphreys and Bramley, 2013). There were several limitations which were 1) Undergraduate women tend to be younger and to have less long-term relationship experience compared to older or married women, 2) The model proposed in this study also excluded women who did not report their sexual orientation as heterosexual which also limits the generalizability of the findings, 3) Even though prompted questions were included to assess correctness of reply and questionnaires were randomized to limit the risks that accompany the use of online surveys, the inadequacies of self-report and online designs cannot be entirely eliminated and 4) Another limitation is the use of a cross-sectional versus longitudinal approach (Kennett, Humphreys and Bramley, 2013). Women who participated in the study, regardless of sexual orientation, who were not happy or satisfied within relationships were more likely to engage in unwanted sex, but what must be also considered is the role of the other party (Kennett, Humphreys and Bramley, 2013).

The Kenneth, Humphreys, and Bramley’s survey opens up the dialogue of the double standards of sex. Their study questions helped shape my own understanding of what would be appropriate to ask in this study.

3.7 Interview

Participants were given $20 Amazon ecards as compensation. The instrument used for interviews, has in-depth, open-ended questions that are asked during interviews. To access if participants met the criteria for the research study, 10 of the respondents from the survey were
recruited and were asked a set of questions from Appendix A related to their background. If selected, 10 participants will go on to the interview phase of the research study. Interviews are conducted via Google Hangout and Apple’s Facetime. This study includes a preliminary questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. All participants read and signed informed consent forms, then interview times were scheduled. All interviews lasted approximately one hour.

The interview questions are listed in the Interview Guide located in Appendix B. For appropriateness, some collected questions use aspects of other qualitative and quantitative studies, however, to further ensure appropriateness and relevance I also constructed questions specific to this study.

The questionnaire beginning with Appendix E, includes preliminary information such as the interviewee’s pseudonym, age, level of education, whether they are employed and what they do, estimated income, Africana identity (preferred African diasporic identity), and anything else they are willing to share. The interview guide, Appendix F, serves as a means to create dialogue between the researcher and the participants. The most sensitive questions are placed at the midpoint of the interview and the questions regarding their hopes for the future are placed at the end to assure them as participants that the study’s goal is of self-determination and liberation.

3.8 Photovoice

The study also uses Photovoice, which was created out of the theoretical frameworks empowerment education for critical consciousness, feminist theory, and documentary photography. It considers the perspective of the person taking the photo and contextualizes the meanings of the photo, as a means to understand their realities and cultures (Sutton-Brown, 2014, p. 170). Created by Caroline Wang (15), Photovoice is a technique guided by the theoretical approach of community based participatory research (CBPR), where community
member participants use photographs to share with stakeholders and researchers a glimpse into their lived experiences.

“It oscillates between private and public worlds in its attempt to publicize and politicize personal struggle via photography, narratives, critical dialogue, and social action,” states Camille A. Sutton-Brown in “Photovoice: A Methodological Guide.” “Thus, Photovoice broadens the nature of photography from being a fine art form to being central to socially and politically engaged praxis.” It is also rooted within grassroots activism, which requires researchers to provide a camera in the hands of those participants, who are often marginalized, erased and silenced and use their voice to narrate their own stories (Sutton-Brown, 2014, p. 170). Photovoice is appropriate for the study as it seeks to center and give voice to participants.

Finally, Photovoice, also allows for the exploration of Afrofuturism. Ten participants from the interviews were asked to take pictures of two types of images using the camera on their own personal cellular phone or iPad. The images should symbolize what the participants perceive as representations of sexual shaming and culturally affirming futures. Each participant was also asked to caption the images and explain how they represented sexual shaming or affirmation. Participants then emailed or texted the images, captions, and explanations to mmccoy17@student.gsu.edu.

3.9 Data Collection

Social media through the platforms of Twitter, Facebook and Instagram is used to not only recruit participants, but through tweets and posts, it is also used to direct them to the survey’s link. Additionally, through tweet threading and other posts, social media users were notified that there were other stages to the research study. I asked if they have participated in the
survey if they felt comfortable volunteering to participate during the interview and Photovoice phases.

As it relates to the survey phase, SurveyMonkey was used to collect data from respondents for the sexual shaming survey. To access if participants met the criteria for the interview phase, they were asked a set of questions from Appendix E related to their background. If selected, participants were asked to read and sign the informed consent forms electronically. Participants went on to the interview phase of the research study after the forms were signed. On scheduled pre-interview dates the participants were asked to sign consent forms, and dates were scheduled for the interviews. The interviews were conducted on digital platforms, such as Google Hangouts and FaceTime. For the interview, they were asked questions from Appendix F, the interview guide. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. Using notes and recordings of the interview, data were transcribed and coded. Participants were asked to view transcripts to ensure validity. All participants selected their own pseudonym name. These same participants moved on to the Photovoice phase and emailed or texted their photos, captions and explanations. The researcher analyzed the photos, captions, and explanations.

Analysis

All demographic data use descriptive and frequency analysis. Interview and Photovoice data use thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was determined based on the appropriateness of the participants’ use of language.

3.10 Reliability/Validity

Questions were asked in different ways for both the survey and interview to ensure validity and reliability. Questions were also asked in ways that made participants comfortable
enough to engage in dialogue. To ensure credibility, participants were able to read the data to verify it.

3.11 Data Coding Interrater-Reliability

The raters to determine interrater-reliability are two graduate students, Beza Fekade and Dante Studamire. This research study centers the voices of Black women and queer people. One of the investigators was selected because of her relationship and understanding of digital technology as a safe space and Black women’s ideology such as Black feminism and Womanism. The second investigator, who identifies as a gay Black man, has a perspective that also centers Black women and others with non-normative expressions or identities. Together for approximately one month the investigators met for coding sessions. As it applies to the theories and measures, the investigators were asked to code accordingly. Although, they received unmarked transcripts with an inventory of codes, they were asked to incorporate and add their own codes to the inventory.

Raters were selected and emailed transcripts to ensure that the coding was appropriate. They were asked to highlight evidence specific to sexual shaming and a sexually and culturally affirmed future. In instances where raters did not agree, they discussed their differences until they found agreement.

3.12 Summary

The decidedly qualitative and technological study design drives the study to both understand how Africana women believe they are perceived as well as gaining insight on how they perceive the idea of sexually and culturally affirmed futures. I am aware that by participants sharing their stories and their relationships to sexual or sex-based shaming as a dehumanization effort within Black communities, it is possible participants may not be willing to engage with the
delicate and intimate aspects of the research, which would require and examination of self, their lives and the people in them. However, this study could be beneficial for self-determination and another avenue to moving toward a future of Black liberation through gender and sexuality.

4 FINDINGS

The purpose of this mixed method study was to investigate and examine self-identified Africana women’s perceptions of how their surrounding communities of Africana people perceive them as they approach their social and sexual relationships. The research questions informing the study were:

1) How do Africana women, based on their sexual and social relationships, believe they are perceived by Africana communities?

2) How do Africana women, based on their sexual and social relationships, imagine the creation of sexually and culturally affirming spaces for themselves and other Africana women in the future?

The institutional review boards at Georgia State University approved this study February 12, 2018. This study utilized a mixed method design and was conducted from February 2018 to March 2018. During this period, Africana women across the diaspora were recruited two ways: 1) by using purposive sampling via flyers, found on Appendix B, and posts on social media networks such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram for the survey, found on Appendix C, and 2) Africana women from the United States were recruited from Survey Monkey once they completed the survey for the interview and Photovoice phases. I posted the following to all three social networks, "ATTENTION: If you are a Black woman, are between the ages of 18-65, and have experienced sexual judgement or shame in the Black community, you are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose, in addition to other details about the study are on the
flyer. Thank you!” and Twitter proved to be the most effective medium. Twitter, Facebook and Instagram users retweeted, shared, posted and circulated the flyer numerous times. Four hundred- nineteen Africana women participated in the survey and 10 Africana women from the United States were recruited for an hour and twenty-minute interview and Photovoice. There were two informed consent forms included using Survey Monkey. The first was consent for participation in the survey and the second was for interview and Photovoice participation for compensation. The very last question, asked for participants to write a pseudonym name and a way to be contacted via phone number and email. Emails were sent to each possible participant until each replied with their availability of dates and times. One hundred and ninety-four Black women left their contact information.

The interviews took place over a video chatting application of their choice, FaceTime and Google Hangout. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the human transcription company, Rev. I explained to each participant before beginning the interview that they would receive a copy of the transcript for verification, and that if necessary, clarifying questions would be asked of them. They received the transcripts within a twenty-four to forty-eight hour time frame via email. All participants verified that the transcripts were mostly accurate and clarified over both a phone call and email any questions that I had. Each participant had a week from the date of their interview to complete the following questions for the Photovoice component, found on Appendix F:

1) Using the camera on your phone, could you capture an image of what it has looked or felt like to be sexually shamed by Black people within your community?
2) Based on your social and sexual relationships, using the camera on your phone, could you capture an image of how you imagine a future that affirms you and other Black women culturally and sexually? This will be a future where you are sexually free.

Participants were paid with $20 Amazon gift cards. Each participant received payment after they submitted their photos and captions.

In four sections, this chapter discusses the 419 participants, and the data and information that was collected for the survey. The second section presents individual profiles for the 10 participants who participated in both the interview and Photovoice. The third section presents the data from both phases from the participants. The final section provides a summation of the chapter.

4.1 Survey

The entire survey consisted of 15 questions, but 11 of the questions were designed specifically to gather demographics and sexual shaming data. The first question asked participants if they agreed to participate in the survey after reading the informed consent form, which can be found on Appendix A1. If participants answered “no,” participants could no longer continue on with the survey. To inform demographic data participants were asked questions regarding their geography and religiousity. Participants were able to skip questions, with the exception of Question 1. Once participants answered “yes,” they were provided with the mental health resource, Therapy for Black Girls, via a website link.

4.1.1 Sociodemographics

Questions 2 to 7 asked participants demographic questions:

2. Do you identify as Black or a person of African descent?

3. What is your age?
4. Do you agree or disagree with the gender assignment you were given at birth?

5. What is your sexual orientation?

6. Are you from the United States or Elsewhere? (If you are not from the United States please write where you are from in the comment box)

7. Do you or did you belong to a faith-based or religious community? (If yes, please write where in the comment box)

Here are the sociodemographic results as follows that can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1 Sociodemographic Description of Africana Women Survey Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sociodemographic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Skips</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Racial Classification</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Person of African descent</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>88.92</td>
<td>11.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age of participants (18-61)</strong></td>
<td>348</td>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
<td>21.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agreement with gender assignment at birth</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>94.80</td>
<td>5.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual Orientation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>171</td>
<td></td>
<td>50.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
<td>26.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same-Gender Loving</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asexual</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>.30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>From the United States or Elsewhere</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US (African diasporic comments from mostly outside of the US)</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td>50.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>26.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11.28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although, approximately 89 percent of the participants identified as Black and approximately 11 percent of them identified as a person of African descent, some participants shared within the comments section their preferred racial identification. Out of the 19 comments, some stated they preferred to be identified as African-American, a descendant of enslaved Africans in the US, Afro-Latina, a Caribbean woman of African and Indian descent, a Guyanese American, and a Black African.

The study recruited participants between the ages of 18-65, but the oldest participant that was willing to identify their age was 61. The average age of participants was approximately 21. Out of the 346 participants who answered questions regarding their gender assignment at birth, 18 indicated they were not in agreement with their gender assignment; however, at least 31 people, perhaps some reflected from the 18 that selected “I disagree (specify in the comment box), provided information about their gender identity that was not in alignment with what they were assigned at birth. Agreement with the gender assignment at birth indicates cisgender identity, and disagreement with the gender assignment at birth indicates transgender identity. Some participants shared that they identify as a gender non-conforming femme, a woman, a female, genderfluid, and bigender, as both boy and girl.

Relating to sexual orientation, 49.47 percent of participants that answered this question did not identify as heterosexual. 21 participants discussed their sexual orientations in more detail.
Some participant comments included “Demi-Bisexual (Demisexual/Bisexual),” “I’m unsure,” “mostly straight bisexual,” and “I’m gray-ace so I am open to dating and having sex with anyone but rarely.”

Of those who did not skip the question regarding location, 317 participants were from the United States, and 36 participants discussed where they were from if they were not from the United States. However, some participants from the United States commented with locations within the United States. Some of the participants were from South Africa, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Kenya, London, Ireland, Haiti, Botswana, Swaziland, Guyana, Mexico, the Bahamas and Puerto Rico.

A total of 346 participants answered the question regarding being part of religious or faith-based communities. Nearly 35 percent of participants belonged to a faith-based community and still do, while nearly 15 percent of participants answered that they have never been a part of this kind of community. However, 50 percent of the participants used to belong to this kind of community, but do not any longer. Most participants elaborated on the religious and faith-based communities that they are or were once part of which mostly included Protestant Christianity with some participants answering Islam and Catholicism.

These questions were gathered to receive insight on the demographics to understand the next round of questions.

### 4.1.2 Sexual Shaming

Questions 8 through 12 informed the sexual shaming aspect of the survey as indicated in Table 2. The questions were:

8. How old were you when people started to look at you or notice you in a sexual way?
9. Have you experienced judgment from Black communities based on your sexual and social relationships?

10. Have you ever been called out of your name? (Ex. hoe, slut, bitch, thot, slur against your sexual orientation or gender identity, etc.)

11. Have you ever been made to feel slighted or bad about how you identify sexually or based on your sexual-decision making choices? (Could you explain in the comment box?)

12. How often have you experienced sexual shaming?

Table 2 Sexual Shaming Description of Africana Women Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Skips</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How old were you when people started to look at you or notice you in a sexual way? (ages 2-20)</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you experienced judgment from Black communities based on your sexual and social relationships?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>94.29</td>
<td>5.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever been called out of your name? (Ex. ho, slut, bitch, thot, slur against your sexual orientation or gender identity, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>93.41</td>
<td>6.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Have you ever been made to feel slighted or bad about how you identify sexually based on your sexual-decision making choices? (If yes, could you explain in the comment box)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever been made to feel slighted or bad about how you identify sexually based on your sexual-decision making choices?</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How often have you experienced sexual shaming?

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I never have</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have experienced it a few times</td>
<td>135</td>
<td></td>
<td>38.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have experienced it more than a few times</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>34.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have experienced it frequently</td>
<td>119</td>
<td></td>
<td>25.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“How old were you when people started to look at you or notice you in a sexual way”

Out of the 350 participants who answered the question, the average age of what they perceive as their sexualization was approximately 10. The youngest age was 2 and the oldest age was 20. The median age was 11.

“How you experienced judgment from Black communities based on your sexual and social relationships?”

350 participants answered the question and while approximately 94 percent of participants answered “yes,” only approximately 6 percent of participants answered “no.”

“How you ever been called out of your name? (Ex. ho, slut, bitch, thot, slur against your sexual orientation or gender identity, etc.)”
326 participants, approximately 93 percent, answered “yes” and 23 participants, approximately 7 percent, answered “no.” 350 participants answered this question.

“Have you ever been made to feel slighted or bad about how you identify sexually based on your sexual-decision making choices? (If yes, could you explain in the comment box)”

Out of the 350 participants who answered the question, 251 participants, approximately 72 percent, answered “yes.” 99 participants, approximately 28 percent, answered “no.” Over 191 participants explained their experiences. Below are excerpts from their comments:

**Respondent 1** - "People see bisexual women as people who are willing to screw anyone. We are seen as objects of lust, to satisfy the craving of others. In the lgbtq community we're not gay enough or shamed for not picking a side. Men have made me feel like my purpose as a bisexual woman was to let them have THEIR fun, not my own."

**Respondent 2** - "Numerous prayer meetings were organized in order to pray away my "queer demons". I was later asked to step down as a youth leader because I was dating a woman and that was a sign that I was possessed."

Some respondents emphasized the struggle of behaving like a lady, by not engaging in sex or practicing abstinence before marriage, some respondents struggled with non-normative or heterosexual desires, but having to present as if they are heterosexual to the world and some have been attacked for not dating cisgendered men. Additional responses also included being identified as dirty or abnormal by family members and church-going Black people, engaging in sex without emotional attachments, being shamed for being a lesbian that is “too pretty” and in need of a man, because of it, and being identified as promiscuous or abnormal for being a sex worker. Respondents stated that family members believe they are struggling, because God is
punishing them for their queer identity, and a few respondents were shamed for not desiring sex at all.

“How often have you experienced sexual shaming?”

This question was proposed in a way that measured the degree or severity to which participants have experienced sexual shaming. 6 participants, nearly 2 percent, answered that they have never experienced sexual shaming. 135 participants, nearly 39 percent, experienced sexual shaming a few times. 119 participants, 34 percent, have experienced sexual shaming more than a few times and 90 participants, nearly 26 percent, have frequently experienced sexual shaming.

Question 13 asked participants if they were interested in participating in the full study for compensation:

Are you interested in participating in the full study for compensation? The full study includes an interview and a process known as Photovoice, in addition to this survey. The interview will ask you questions regarding how you feel the Black community perceives your sexual and social relationships. You will also be asked about your own sexual attitudes and experiences. The interview will take place on FaceTime, Google Hangout or an application that is most accessible to you. The Photovoice section of the study requires you to submit four photos. They are visual examples of what it feels like to be sexually judged by Black people in your community and visual examples of a sexually and culturally relevant future where you are safe and free. If you are interested, please continue by writing an alternate name (do not write your real name), and a way for Student Principal Investigator, Melanie McCoy, to contact you, by writing your email address and phone number.
Out of the 350 participants who responded nearly 64 percent of them answered “yes” and they gained access to the informed consent form (Appendix A2) for the interview and Photovoice phases. Participants were given multiple opportunities to consent or not consent to participate in the full study, because I wanted to ensure they understood what was entailed in the full study. Nearly 36 percent of students answered “no” and they were thanked for participating in the study. For those who responded with “yes,” after reading over the informed consent form they were asked: *Please, select 'yes' to indicate agreement to participate in this study.

Approximately 99 percent of participants out of 211 agreed to participate, while .95 percent (2) did not agree to participate. Participants were asked to select an alternate name of their choosing as well as leave their email address and phone number. Potential participants were emailed regarding their interest and availability and participants were selected based on whether or not they responded. Some potential participants responded, but were not able to participate.

4.2 The Participants

Ten Black women living in the United States, ranging in age between 21 and 38 and have experienced sexual shaming have participated in the study. Tori James, Trina, Monet, Sapio Paz, Taylor Rose, Joyful Sunshine Wakandan, Courtney, Nnenni, Nethilia and Soul participated in semi-structured interviews. Every participant with the exception of Nethilia, participated within the Photovoice phase.

Each participant received a preliminary questionnaire, a demographics form, which can be found on Appendix D. The interview guide, found on Appendix E, consisted of 39 questions. The first part were preliminary while the rest were divided into Sexual Double Standard, Sexual Self-Efficacy and Decision- Making, Sexual and Gender Discrimination and Safe Space sections. All participants had an Associate’s degree, Bachelor’s degree, or higher. Most participants
identified themselves as being LGBTQ with the exception of two participants. The majority of participants indicated some sort of struggle with their mothers, but it should be noted that most emphasized their love for them.

Below are the individual profiles of the interview and Photovoice participants. To provide the appropriate context for their personas within the study, I use their own words.

4.3 The Interview

*Tori James.* From Lithonia, Georgia, Tori James is a bisexual 24-year-old, who graduated with her Bachelor’s degree. She has a boyfriend and she enjoys going to the movies and trying new restaurants with him. She enjoys engaging in sex with him and believes that sex is a healthy part of relationships. Although, she lives with her mother, she expressed that her relationship with her is “just okay” and “here and there.” She believes that it is harder to be a Black woman in America, because not only is it hard to be Black, being a woman makes things much worse.

She recalls the sexual double standards she faced with her peers during her college years. She knew a man who pledged for a fraternity during his sophomore or junior year of college, who had sex with at least 200 women and “the whole world was just dropping panties for him.” However, any woman who did what he was able to would be deemed a problem; “she’s a hoe.” Even if people deal with her they will still talk about her. She likened this double standard to the perceptions of Amber Rose and Blac Chyna, because “people talk about them all day long.” She argues that people do not know who they have had sex with; it is just speculation.

She believes that in comparison to women of other races, Black women are viewed more sexually. She notices this occurrence more within the media regarding the portrayal of Black “female” artists. “Sex sells” and a lot of white artists are not as sexually exploited as Black women. Tori James states that “Taylor Swift is not twerking” and jokingly adds that it is
probably because she cannot, but argues that you will not see her “boobs” out like a lot of Black “female” artists.

_Trina._ From Atlanta, Georgia, Trina is a heteroflexible 27-year-old, who is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and is currently pursuing her doctorate degree. Growing up in Southwest Atlanta she went to public schools for most of her K-12 education. Her being the young member of her doctoral program is a “salient” part of her identity.

Her parents have been together her entire life. Trina’s mother is brilliant, but dropped out of high school after becoming pregnant. She gave birth to a son and he “passed away.” Her father is good with his hands and dropped out of middle school. Growing up she was a “super-duper nerd,” the captain of the debate team and academic decathlon, but she was also a cheerleader. She was picked on and was called “white girl” due to the color of her skin. As her breasts developed at a young age, she was often called “fat ass.” However, she clarified that her parents never treated her this way. Her family, with the exception of her parents, were homophobic. Her father was homophobic, but after learning that his nephew was kicked out of his family’s home for being gay, he took him into their home. He thought what happened to him was wrong. Her home became a safe place for those who had no place to go or “needed something.”

She considers the struggles and joys of being a Black woman. She describes herself as a sex-positive Black feminist. Sometimes she wears a sex plus button, and it is an expression of her “embracing the fullness of what a liberal sexuality and sexual politic might look like.” Consent is important to her as she mentioned that even as she engaged in a foursome the weekend before our interview, that she constantly made sure that everyone was comfortable. She considers the roles of Black women. She states that after Trump’s election many people said that
they could not believe that so many women voted for him; however, she states, “No, no, no. We can’t believe so many white women voted for him.” For Trina, this is evidence that Black women are far more trustworthy, because “Black women be knowing,” they “know stuff,” and there are things that they “just inherently know.” However, some of her struggles of being a Black woman include being in the academy. Being a doctoral student she recalls her former professional advisor, a white woman saying to her, “Get out of my office, you ungrateful little bitch.” With her Black Feminist lens, she is challenged more by cis-het white adjunct professors to cite her sources.

Monet. Monet is 21-years-old, queer and from Chicago, Illinois and is into Afrofuturism. She loves reading, watching movies and television, spending time on beaches and having great conversations with people that she cares about. Although, she grew up in a non-religious household with her mother and father, her parents’ morals were grounded in Christian principles. She believes that this influenced some of the things that discouraged and encouraged some of her decisions. It was difficult for her going to a predominately white middle school, she was often ridiculed, because she did not have what was considered a “traditional” or “monolithic” Black identity.

She started having sex at 13 and did not have anyone to discuss what she was experiencing. She either received responses such as, “Oh yeah, no, this is a bad thing that you should be avoiding,” or “Why, why, um, do you think that you need to have sex with men to have them validate you in these ways.” At 16, her parents divorced and her father “passed” the same year. Her mother had some influence over her sexual identity; her mother has “very conservative views.” Monet was raped at 15 and even though she attended counseling sessions
she did not attend them for long. She says that she engaged in a lot of unhealthy practices, and as a result it made her mother question whether or not she was raped. This broke their trust and created a lot of distance between them in their relationship.

She identifies as sex-positive, as sex-positivity has created space for her to find community with people who feel the same way about sex as she does. She believes that Black people do not discuss sex enough and that only a small minority of Black people identify as sex-positive. “There’s not a lot of space for men or women to explore their sexualities other than being heterosexual,” states Monet. “The conversations tend to be really oppressive, but it’s complicated because of the ways in which Black people were so hypersexualized in slavery and under the white gaze.” She believes that Black people discuss sex in the ways that they do as a protective mechanism, but argues that it is time to move beyond that.

*Sapio Paz.* Born in Brooklyn, New York, Sapio Paz is 38-years-old, pansexual and asexual, a non-sexual dominatrix, a Pagan/African spiritualist, and single mother. She is the oldest of her siblings. Her father was a fireman and her mother was a dancer. Her father, having a lot of influence over her life died a couple of years ago. To display some sort of contrast, she discusses how her mother went from being a dancer to a “born again Christian,” which makes her laugh. Her parents were divorced. Her father remarried to a Black woman, and her mother married “a white dude” and had three mixed children. Once Sapio Paz moved to Westchester, she experienced culture shock being around a lot of “Caucasians.” Some of her siblings are white; therefore, being around a lot of white people was not a big deal to her. Her parents were financially well-off, and as a result she was able to travel to Europe as well as live in Spain for a period. She fluently speaks Spanish and Portuguese.
She rebelled “really hard” and became pregnant at the age of 17; her daughter is now 19. Sapio Paz was in a long-term abusive relationship with a European older man. She was twenty years younger than he was and he was emotionally and verbally abusive; this lasted ten years. “You can’t understand how a strong person can go through that, but that’s part of it,” states Sapio Paz. “Part of it is being a strong person and you think you can change people and you think it’s your fault, so you stick it out.” She attended therapy in the hopes to improve her relationship. However, her therapist expressed: “That's really fucking toxic and it's sociopathic and you're dealing with a sociopath. So, what do you hope to accomplish? You think you're gonna make him feel things? Are you God?”. She decided that she was not God, that she would change herself and that night she told her boyfriend, “Get the fuck out.”

After getting out of this relationship she realized that she did not “really like men that much.” She went through what she calls a “heteronormative cycle” and thought, “Men actually are pretty shitty at everything”; she asked herself, “Why am I doing this?”. This brought her to the realization that she enjoyed being with herself more than being with others sexually. She transitioned from being “really heterosexual” to being “really bisexual,” “almost borderline lesbian” to “almost asexual.” She is now a dominatrix with “subs” and slaves, believes in matriarchy and believes that men should be exposed to dom play, because it makes them better people.

*Taylor Rose.* Taylor Rose is 23-years-old, bisexual, and a graduate student. She grew up with both parents and her younger brother. Her mother is Black and from Guyana and her father is white. His family is from Massachusetts and were “just normal white people.” Growing up in a two-bedroom apartment and sharing a room with her brother until the age of 14, her family
moved to an affluent suburban neighborhood. Growing up attending private school, Taylor Rose was the first Black person in her grade and along her journey another Black girl joined her. She entered the school in third grade and was there until her senior year of high school. She graduated with at least five other Black students. Although, her parents were religious, Taylor Rose says that her parents were open and taught her and her brother to choose things for themselves. Her father did yoga and meditation and they participated with him. Her mother is “very Christian” but incorporated traditional African religion into her spirituality. She would “dress candles,” have an altar and stress the importance of having a relationship with your ancestors. Taylor Rose has had struggles in her relationship with her mother.

She considers what it feels like and means to be a Black woman. Even though she is experiencing growth and healing, she believes that being a Black woman comes with a great responsibility. One of the largest issues she believes Black women face is sexuality; “everyone” lusts or desires Black women. She argues that aside from people outside of the race, even Black men perpetuate these desires. Once starting her period at the age 11 or 12, she developed hips and her bra size began to increase. She felt there was a complete shift in how she was perceived. At, 12 “this guy” complimented her body and wanted her number; she was “very scared.” During her younger years she was fearful of men and public spaces. Overall, being a Black woman from her perspective means to be “super” visible and invisible, because “everybody” sees you but no one “really” sees you. Black women “stand out,” but are not a “full human” that deserves as much respect.

Taylor Rose started identifying as bisexual two or three years ago. She used to say that she was straight, although she was not. She started talking and being with girls at the same time she started doing the same with boys; she was 13 or 14. During our interview, she shared a
memory with me. She was 5 or 6-years-old at the time and she shared with her “very old-fashioned” mother that she thought that a girl in her class was “so pretty,” she liked her. She asked her mother, “Do girls ever like girls?” Her mother became angry with her and told her, “No. Girls are supposed to like boys.” From that point forward, Taylor Rose felt “very shameful” for being with women. She maintained relationships with women even though she would not consider them “official relationships.” When people would ask her this issue she became “very mean” and “super mean.”

Joyful Sunshine Wakandan. From Canton, Ohio, Joyful Sunshine Wakandan is 35-years-old, heterosexual, celibate and Christian. She grew up with a single mother. Her mother and father, from Somalia, met in college, and her mother became pregnant with Joyful Sunshine Wakandan her junior year. After giving birth to her, she finished her degree in Akron. Although, her mother “did the best that she knew how,” growing up was difficult for her. During her formative years, she and her mother were abused physically and sexually by her mother’s boyfriends. These experiences taught her a lot about human behavior, but she is grateful,” because it made her the woman that she is today. It gave her a “sense of empathy and strength.” In the midst of some of the trauma she and her mother experienced, there were still great times.

Joyful Sunshine Wakandan’s mother encouraged her to attend college and she received her Bachelor’s in Ethnic Studies. She later received her Master’s in Higher Education and is currently finishing her doctorate in Theories and Social Foundations in Education. She wants to focus on social justice within the educational system.

Joyful Sunshine Wakandan considers her experience being a Black woman, which she describes as going through life trying to find “beauty in pain.” She argues that being a Black woman in America means to reject the ideology of being devalued in our country and society.
The way that Black women wear their hair is “a political statement as self-care” and is a symbol of resistance. Joyful Sunshine Wakandan states that Black women have to go through life in a “defensive mode” because they constantly have their humanity attacked. Ultimately, for Joyful Sunshine Wakandan, being a Black woman means to affirm yourself in ways that are pan-African and a threat to the status quo and American ideologies.

Joyful Sunshine Wakandan is a supporter of sex-positivity, and is also celibate. This decision is influenced by her faith as a Christian. Although, she enjoys sex, she believes that celibacy is the best decision that she could make for her own emotional wellbeing. She wants to wait until she is married before she has sex again. She believes that Black women should be able to be recognized as fully human sexual beings, who do not have to deal with feelings of guilt or shame for their sexualities.

Courtney. From Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Courtney is 26-years-old, pansexual, “usually” agrees with her gender assignment at birth, is plus-sized and is a writer. She and her older sister were raised by her mother, a single parent. She and her sister have different fathers. Her mother became “religiously conservative” as she got older, which Courtney believes “made things interesting.” Courtney met her father at the age of 21 and they became close. She felt that “half” of her “was missing,” and the parts of herself that she never saw in her mother's side of the family, she “definitely saw reflected in him”; she says the same for her sister’s father on her side. She lived with her father for about a year and recently moved to relocate.

While on waitlist to attend a magnet school, Courtney was homeschooled for two years for fourth and fifth grade. She felt behind in school when she started the sixth grade, because other students already knew each other in fifth grade. Despite her mother not being “a math
teacher,” her mother taught her math; Courtney felt behind. Her childhood was “awkward,” because she was teased for being “fat” and dark skinned.

Today, Courtney loves her body and explains, “It’s mine. We've been through a whole lot of crap together. It's mine. It's the only one that I'll have.” Although, she believes that the “strong Black woman” trope is damaging, she believes it has helped her cope during times when she could have “laid down and died instead of moving through it.” However, she does not like how people react to her body. Where she lives currently, it makes people uncomfortable because she is “big” and “dark skinned.” She also wears her hair naturally and that factored in with her womanhood is what she believes also causes the discomfort for others. She is not into “hiding” herself the way she once did as a teenager. While sharing that she can “intimidate people” she expressed that she did not want to get emotional, but “it’s so screwed up.” “She’s taking up too much space and just watching her walk around is depressing me,” states Courtney as an example of what her roommates have whispered about her. “And just the fact that somebody can look at my body and be offended by it - that’s kind of wild to me.” As Courtney considers how Black women are viewed sexually in comparison to women of other races, she believes that Black women are perceived as oversexed. She says the next level of perception is that Black women are “untouchable” or as “somebody to only be associated with in the shadows, but not claim publicly”; it is “a weird tight rope walk to manage.” She argues that Black women are considered “available” and “unrapeable,” which she believes has ties to the enslavement of African people; bodies are not yours and are for conception. She discusses the impact of colorism. If “you’re a Black woman and happen to be a little bit on the darker side or the bigger side or the more muscular side, you’re not even really considered a woman,” argues Courtney. “You know what I mean? Like, you kind of get degendered.”
Courtney believes that if Black women are perceived by their communities to have too many sexual encounters, that they will be called a “thot”; they will be lectured about hoes and housewives. She provided the example of the viral video of the pastor discussing this dichotomy by stating, “You're walking in the spirit of a girlfriend. You need to be walking in the spirit of a wife.” She also discusses the hypocrisy of people who previously were called “the thots” and were “slut-shamed” months prior, but are now married or in committed relationships retweeting on Twitter tweets sexually shaming other Black women. However, sexually Courtney wants to be viewed by Black communities as “autonomous” and able to do whatever she wants; it is of no concern to them.

*Nnenni.* Nnenni is from South Florida, is 25-years-old, bisexual and a creative. Her family is “traditionally Black.” They eat, pray, even though she does not, and “congregate.” Her childhood was enjoyable. She did “everything” with her brother, sister and cousin. Growing up she was not “very sensitive.” She was “rough and tough,” but still “girly.” She has always been “pretty small” with a “big attitude,” and she did most of the fighting in and for the family.

She finds that being a Black woman is “laborious.” Black women must be “hyper-aware” of “everything and everyone” around them. However, she loves being a Black woman, because the experience is unique and beautiful. She argues that being a Black woman means to be “a mother to everybody you see, not just children.” Being a Black woman means “putting the needs of everyone around you before your own, and working tirelessly to make sure that everyone has everything that they need in order to function”; this leads to the abandoning a Black women’s own needs.
In Nnenni’s considerations of Black sexuality, she believes that Black people are naturally sexual people just like people of other races; however, she believes much of Black people’s sexuality is repressed because of the past. Stereotypes such as the “Jezebel” and “Buck” have contributed to the repression. She argues that Black people repress their sexualities in order to not be perceived as lascivious, carnal, lust-crazy people; she believes it must be unlearned. However, Nnenni has never struggled with sexuality like “a lot of people did,” because she was sexual before she knew what sex was and began to explore her sexuality at the age of 5. In her youth, people thought that her sexual awareness meant that she was partaking in sexual activities. In her sexual education course, she was the student who would ask about “gay sex” and “dental dams,” because her high school peers were having babies, contracting STDs, and were not engaging in healthy sexual practices. It became her “mission” to get people information if they wanted or needed to discuss sex in a safe environment. Her grandmother, a nurse, kept Nnenni informed on the issue of sexuality. Whatever Nnenni did not know she researched and passed onto friends. She was called a lot of names at school by other students, because of what she knew and not necessarily her practices. She would often get reprimanded and teased.

She believes sexual miseducation and repression is stifling to Black sexuality and creativity, and how people express themselves and their emotions.

Nethilia. Born in Wisconsin, and growing up in Houston, Texas, Nethilia is 37-years-old, bisexual, leaning toward lesbian, in a polyamorous marriage, a creative and is into Afrofuturism. She collects toys and is into “what they would call nowadays geek fandom.” She reads comic books, plays video games and enjoys crafting. She is a daughter of a single mother, who had children with three different men. Her mother is a Christian woman.
Nethilia was raised as part of the Church of Christ, and she was “so oppressed” until she attended college. The Church of Christ pushes the idea of “sex in the context of marriage.” “You do not have any sexuality before you are married” and “there is no homosexuality”; there is “a very literal interpretation of the Bible.” She believes these ideations “probably” affected her growing up. When first arriving to college she went through a “crisis of faith” and was unsure of what she believed in. Several months later, she decided that she was Pagan. She argues that “a lot” of Paganism is sex-positive, even though some factions of it can be oppressive. However, for Nethilia Paganism opened up her sexuality. She received a lot of support from friends within the Pagan community and her then boyfriend, now husband. Her husband helped her understand that it was “okay” to feel things for girls. She reflects back on her childhood and says. “God, I was a gay little child.” The first person that she ever kissed was a girl and she was 10-years-old. However, she was told around this age that “homosexuality is a sin,” “sex before marriage is a sin,” and “there are things you don’t feel and don’t do.” She “curled it in” and “repressed it.” She “came out” in college.

Her mother was unaware, but after Nethilia’s sister had a psychotic break she “outed” Nethilia. She was “outed” as both bisexual and polyamorous. She was not upset about what happened, but rather was ashamed for being outed to her Christian mother against her will. When some people learn that she is in a polymorous marriage, it has been controversial. At her previous job, some of her coworkers said, “You can justify it all you want to, but that’s still cheating.” Her bisexuality has also been labeled as an identity that implies that she would cheat on her husband. However, she has friends that now identify as bisexual and polyamorous and a few of them have expressed that her being unashamed of who she is publically inspired them.
Soul. Soul is 26-years-old, heterosexual, a graduate student and Nigerian. She comes from a “very diverse family” who is Caribbean and African. They are “very” tied to culture, collectivism and stay close to everyone in their family. She has a small circle of friends who are like her sisters and cousins. She moved a lot with her family and grew up in the Northern part of the United States. She moved to the South during middle school. It was a “culture shock” for her living in a place where having a Confederate flag was normalized. She believes that in the North racism is there but it is not as “in your face” as it is in the South. Her parents are divorced and she moved around a lot because of her mother experiencing financial issues. Many responsibilities of taking care of the family fell on her and she was the “second mom.” She lived with her grandmother for two years. Her father was more present after they experienced a few issues. They now have a good relationship.

Growing up, Soul’s mother was “very protective” of her, because as a child. Her mother experienced sexual abuse, “her mother had gone through sexual abuse and her mother's mother had gone through sexual abuse as a child.” From her mother’s perspective, it was like a pattern; she was “adamant” in trying to break the cycle with Soul. She thought, “Not my child- you’re not going through it.” Soul appreciates and loves her mother for it, but it did not allow her to express herself sexually. She was not allowed to wear certain outfits. She never wore shorts and still does not wear them to this day. Once in a while she may try to wear them, but she feels self-conscious because she feels as people are looking at her. She would wear long dresses and long skirts. If she wore jeans, she had to tie a sweater around her waist to “hide” her “butt.” She had big breasts and they were developed at a “very young” age. She wore big shirts and sweaters all of the time; should could not show cleavage. This is how things were living in the house and if she was being “fast,” there were repercussions for it. She resented her mother for it as a child,
and could not understand why she did that. After her mother explained to her why, she “felt” for her, but feels that is not her “life” or “narrative.” Soul alluded to her mother being concerned that her stepfather would do something by stating, “I don’t think my stepdad is like that. Why do you think that the man that you chose would do something like that to me?”

Soul has experienced abuse in one of her romantic relationships. She has also been judged by her friend for some of her sexual practices; however, Soul is very unbothered by it. She is careful about who she shares her sexual history or practices with. She does not broadcast this kind of information, because she is aware of the perception of those having multiple sexual partners.

4.4 Overview of Themes

The purpose of the study is to understand Black women’s beliefs on how Black communities view their sexual relationships and experiences and also Black women’s beliefs on how they imagine sexually or culturally freeing spaces in the future. Data analysis revealed four themes regarding sexual shaming, sexual agency and sex positivity, and their sexually and culturally affirmed futures. Most participants reported incidents of sexual shaming that began during their childhood. Typically, the sexual shaming occurred within their relationships with family members, and the shame was most often displayed through a Christian religious lens.

Much of what participants understand and know of sex-positivity, Womanism and Afrofuturism has been fueled by social media. Many participants have the view that the Black community’s relationship with sex is rooted within history and fear of how they will be perceived by racial groups that differ from their own- most often white. Additionally, they spoke of how race, sexuality and culture intersect as a means for non-Black racial groups to stigmatize Black people; some participants argue this is a means to fingerprint Black people as other or not
“fully human.” The participants provided historical examples of stereotypical tropes on Black women’s lasciviousness and desirability, the Jezebel, and a few participants believed that colorism also influenced the tropes. Other historical stereotypical tropes included “the mammy,” as they considered misinformed ideas of asexuality as it pertains to “fat Black women” and darker skin.

Many participants discussed how they sexually cloaked themselves as a means to not be shamed based on their sexual identities and practices; this was a means of protection. Mostly, all participants experienced some sort of abuse whether it be from family members, romantic partnerships or acts of sexual assault. At least two participants shared the role that their mental health plays in how they view themselves. Many participants shared incidents of being lied on regarding them having sex with and spreading information about their sexual history without their consent.

Additionally, popular culture or usage of famous iconography was often used as a means for participants to provide examples of sexual shaming or ideal sexual futures.

Some participants struggled with the Photovoice section, because they did not believe they were creative enough to take the photos; however, once encouraged they carefully reconsidered the questions and were able to complete the final phase. In many ways, Photo 1 represented a dystopian state of what it looks and feels like to be sexually shamed by members of their own Black communities. Photo 2 represented an Afrofuturist version of what their ideal and affirmed sexually and culturally future looks and feels like. Their captions and descriptions provide further information.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</th>
<th>THEMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) How do Africana women, based on their sexual and social relationships, believe they are perceived by Africana communities?</td>
<td>Sexual Shaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It's the idea that, a man who sleeps with 20 women is a stud. A woman who sleeps with 20 men is a whore. Very much the idea that, or that a key that can open all locks is a good key, a lock that opens to all keys is a bad lock. Very much the idea that, a woman is tainted by whatever sexual encounters she has. - Nethilia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) How do Africana women, based on their sexual and social relationships, imagine the creation of sexually and culturally affirming spaces for themselves and other Africana women in the future?</td>
<td>Womanism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>…be prepared to understand and to listen and to advocate on behalf of, trans women, but also to realize that through working together, through that solidarity, there's power and freedom for both trans and cis women. – Monet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexual-Positivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am vocal about what I like, what I don't like, what I want to happen, what I'm interested in. So, yes, I do feel like I'm sexually free. I read about sex- find ways to achieve whatever it is I'm trying to achieve. And I don't judge people for liking things that are different than me. - Nnenni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Afrofuturism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I want them to view other black women sexually without all of the ties to our painful past. I want them to view them as sexual beings without the shame, without the guilt, without the projections of fear and self-loathing, and as fully human. – Joyful Sunshine Wakandan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5 Data Collection Procedure Applied to Data Analysis

Participants filled out the demographics form and participated in the semi-structured interview. Participants were asked to answer questions that first addressed family and lifestyle and theory. Questions were then divided into categories such as *Sexual Double Standard, Sexual Self Efficacy and Decision-Making, Sexual and Gender Discrimination*, and *Safe Space*. Lifestyle and theoretical questions, were my way as the interviewer, to get to know the participants. Due to the nature of social media, as the researcher, I thought it would be helpful to share with the participants the usage of the theoretical frameworks. Social media has become a hub for such frameworks. The majority of participants had knowledge of Womanism, sex-positivity and Afrofuturism. I clarified to the participants that I am not assuming that they do know, but would ask them first if they knew. For what was unknown to them, I provided definitions to them. After gaining a better understanding, participants reflected on those ideas and entered their own perspectives and experiences to better relate to the frameworks.

Participants were emailed their transcript as a means to verify or clarify the information provided. The same was done for the Photovoice phase, where participants were asked to very and clarify their photos, captions and descriptions.

As the researcher, I used Rev, the human-transcription service and also transcribed the interviews in sections that the transcriber was not able to understand. Each transcript was uploaded and marked with a code using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software. According to Johnny Saldana (2009), a code is a word or short phrase that delegates a salient and/or evocative attribute to an aspect language-based or visual data (Saldana, 2009, p. 3). The participants’ transcriptions were marked with the following codes being Adultification, Afrofuturism, Family, Lying-Deception, Mental Health, Otherness, Pop Culture, Religion, Sex-
Positivity, Sexual Shaming, Subjugation-Exploitation-Hypersexualization and Womanism. I chose Descriptive coding because it is useful for coding answers that are based on reflective questions, which is also beneficial for tabular account and summary (Saldana, 2009, p. 72). I also selected In Vivo coding for first cycle coding, because this research study as a participatory action research-based study, seeks to elevate the voices of a marginalized population of Black women, who were already part of an already marginalized racial group (Saldana, 2009, p. 74). This code honors the terms and short phrases that participants use. Simultaneous coding was also useful for aspects of the data that required multiple codes (Saldana, 2009, p. 62). One of the primary aims of this code is to interpret terms that derive from the participants’ everyday lives, as opposed to terms that derived from academic spaces. However, all of the participants have attended college, many of them are in graduate programs, and at least two of those programs are at the doctoral level. First cycle coding revealed to me Pattern Coding was most appropriate for the second cycle coding process. Often conveyed metaphorically, codes that find commonality with other emergent themes, are patterns, which create a more concise theme (Saldana, 2009, p. 152). Similar codes are tied and assembled together to create a pattern code Saldana, 2009, p. 152). Patterns code are instrumental in the development of major themes pulled from data and are connected to if/then statements and outcomes Saldana, 2009, p. 154). The codes were determined by myself, as the researcher, but the themes were created by myself and those determining interrater-reliability, graduate students and raters, Beza Fekade and Dante Studamire. Fekade, Studamire and I met twice, and coded separately between the times that we met up until our last meeting.

Participant identities were protected, because they selected pseudonym names earlier on in the process.
4.6 Data Presentation and Analysis

1) How do Africana women, based on their sexual and social relationships, believe they are perceived by Africana communities?

*Sexual Shaming*

Sexual shaming as a theme was decided among the raters, based on the combining of the codes of otherness, lying-deception, religion, otherness, and subjugation-exploitation-hypersexuality. Participant discussions of oppressive attitudes towards gender and sexuality were deemed acts of sexual shaming.

A few participants discussed the historical implications of sexual shaming when asked about their views on Black communities and sex. Joyful Sunshine Wakandan discussed Black women being raped on “slave plantations” and how these women were deemed promiscuous Black women. Monet argued something similar by stating that the conversations on the Black community and sex are “really oppressive” because of the complicated history of enslaved Black people being labeled hypersexual. Courtney stated that Black women then and now were considered “oversexed,” “available,” and “unrapeable”; their bodies “aren’t really their own.” Additionally, Joyful Sunshine Wakandan discussed the trope of the “oversexed mulatto” or the “mixed biracial woman,” who was stereotyped historically and currently within the media as “very promiscuous” and “very over-sexualized.” However, “the mammy” was “desexualized” and was unable to “express herself sexually.” Courtney stated that if a Black woman happened to be “a little bit on the darker side,” on the “bigger side” or “more muscular side” then she is not “really considered a woman”; she is “degendered.” Taylor Rose believed that white women are viewed as more “child-like” and receive more “innocent treatment.” However, she believes that the historical and current perception of Black women is that they are “demonized,” which causes
them to be “more susceptible to a lot of trauma,” sexual trauma especially. She says it is because Black women are not perceived as “victims.”

This erasure of Black women’s victimhood lends itself to the adultification of Black girls. Trina discussed an incident on social media where an old high school classmate of hers posted a status that her “4 or 5-year-old son wanted to take candy to his little girlfriends at kindergarten.” The woman concluded her status with stating that she was “not taking no fast ass girl shit.” This bothered Trina who stated that she spoke up on behalf of the girls by stating, ”Well, why the girls fast as hell if your son just called ’em his girlfriend?” and the woman retorted with, “here you go with that woke shit.” Taylor Rose discussed several instances of being approached by older men when she was a little girl. She stated that Black women are already “more sexualized,” but Black girls are not perceived as “innocent,” because people believe that they are “adult” or look “older.” She explained that at the age of 11 or 12 men spoke to her as if she was a “grown woman,” even though she “clearly looked like a child.” Taylor Rose stated that Black women are never really able to ever be “children” or be “young for long.” She says that is a common experience and says this is also the experience of her Black women friends who also had men trying to speak to them in a sexual manner as children. Sapio Paz has observed “girls on the Internet who are just dressed cute,” while people state that the child is “fast” and in need of a beating. She argued that “there is nothing inherently sexual about a child, unless you are looking to sexualize” one.

All participants discussed the sexual trauma, abuse and/or coercion they faced with others. Trina discussed an incident where she was assaulted at someone’s home. She shared that she lied to her mother about her location but also clarified that she was not blaming herself for what happened to her. She told him, “Well, I don’t want to” and the boy told her that she did.
She remembered thinking in that moment, "Well, I put myself in this situation, now it's my fault. Like, I have to do it." Taylor Rose expressed that a majority of her relationships were abusive, but she perceived it as the norm at the time due to her family background. After accusing her boyfriend of cheating, Soul punched him and he slammed her on the wall, threw her on the couch and choked her. He cried and explained that she made him do that and cried because she was sorry. After refusing her boyfriend, Nethilia asked him to stop asking. Her boyfriend hit her and punched her on the side of her face causing her to hit a pole; she cracked two of her teeth. Monet was raped and so was Nnenni. Nnenni believes that attack happened because she was a woman, after being asked if she had ever been harmed because of her gender. “I feel like certain forms of physical assault, like even just people touching you without your consent, is only because I’m a woman.” When asked about Black women who are transgender, all participants weighed in on their struggles and were also very informed about the sexual and gender discrimination that they experienced. Nnenni believes that Black trans women are “ostracized,” “dehumanized,” and “demonized.” She stated that they are “just overall wildly disrespected, overlooked, under-protected, and undervalued.” Even as she considered the sexual futures of Black women she was skeptical of how Black cis women would receive them. She wanted to believe that Black cis and trans women could work together to create a safe and ideal future, but she was skeptical because cis women “uphold a lot of these fucked up standards.” She believes that cis women are “just as violent, mean and abusive as other people”- that they are “just as violent and abusive as cis men.” She questions if trans women would be safe with cis women. Sapio Paz believes that it is dangerous for Black trans women, and it is centered on the “hatred of the divine feminine, of all things feminine.” She believes that Black men see trans women as traitors and that they are violent toward them especially when they are attracted to them. Sapio
Paz argued that when they do not realize that she is trans woman and they find out, “they kill them all of the time.” She concluded by stating that Black men are killing them. Soul believed that even though she is not affiliated with the Black Christian church, that may be more open to receiving the Black LGBTQ community, and Black trans women. However, she recalled attending a panel on remembering transgender people, and some who left the program also behind a note. The note stated, “What would God think about this?”.

Trina is in the “talking” phase with “a guy,” and although she is “on the fence about him,” she likes him a lot. However, “one girl” told him that she could not believe that he was going out with her. She told him that Trina “has sex with everybody.” The woman and Trina are in a GroupMe chat together where Trina is very candid about her sexual history and politics. Some of her friends who are “super Christian” or are her sorority sisters ask her why she cannot “act better” because she is too “smart” to do what she is doing. Her “brilliance” is not “enhanced” by the fact that she has orgasms “all the time” “versus something else.” She stopped attending church, because she feels “good in the flesh” and that is what she is “going to do.” She believes in a higher power but is upset and states, “You gone tell me that because I done fucked a couple people that the fact that I buy laptop computers for inner city students is somehow less valuable? Get the fuck out of here.” Others, believe that because she has “sex with all of these people” that she should have sex with them. However, she is “still working through her own politics around eugenics,” because “Black women be having too many goddamn kids.” Taylor Rose discussed her struggles of sexual shaming whenever her own mother was the shamer. Her mother, being “very Christian,” and her father also participating gave her a “promise ring” when she was 13. The promise ring signified her promise to not have sex, and she wore it until she was 18. She was penetrated at 16, but felt ashamed of her “horniness.” She stated, “Whenever I
would be sleeping in too late on the weekends, her favorite line was always, ‘You have to wake up because only ... Only whores sleep this late because they've been out all night doing whatever,” and it was just so annoying.” Nnenni believed that the perception is that sex is what happens for men, but to women.

Religion was a consistent code that was addressed as being oppressive and salient in relation to sexual shaming.

2) How do Africana women, based on their sexual and social relationships, imagine the creation of sexually and culturally affirming spaces for themselves and other Africana women in the future?

*Womanism*

Womanism, as a theme was decided among the raters, based on the combining of the codes of the participants ideas of affirmative religion, their definitions of the theory, friendships and affirmed relationships with women. Most participants identified Womanism as an “intersectional” theoretical framework. It was often compared to Feminism, which was identified by most participants as being “white.” Nethilia believed that Feminism “tries to be broad but it can be very narrowly focused if it’s not intersectional.” Additionally, she believed feminism was mostly for white women, cis women, heterosexual women, middle class or above women, and was narrowly focused on what's needed for women to progress in the world.” Soul thought it was “necessary for Black women to recognize that feminism was not for them.” Trina identifies as a Black Feminist but recognizes Womanism as a “Black Feminist framework that decenters whiteness in ways that we understand feminism.” Nnenni argued that Womanism is “everything that feminism wanted and claimed to
be, but failed to be, in every way, shape, and form.” She believed that Black women were left out of feminist conversations.

Monet identified Womanism as being a response developed by Alice Walker “to the feminist movement being largely not welcoming to Black women.” She stated that feminists were “unwilling to be critical of the racism that was inherent in the movement” as well as the erasure of Black women’s voices throughout the history of feminism.” She argued that in feminist discourse there had to be a “qualifier in front of it to distinguish when you were talking about women who weren’t white.” “Black women did not have a space within feminism” as “feminism wasn’t necessarily a liberatory set of ideas for” Black women; however, “Womanism is.” Soul viewed Womanism as a creation by Black women and “a metaphor for Black women,” Trina identified it as a framework that centers the experiences of Black women and women of color; women “who’ve been historically marginalized by feminist movements. Tori James identifies with Womanism. Soul wished “a lot more Black women” identified with Womanism as it is something “for us.” Nethilia stated that Womanism focused on everyone, but primarily Black women, their needs and how they are specifically oppressed in society. She loosely quoted Audre Lorde who stated, “Some problems we share as women, some we do not. You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you; we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs on the reasons they are dying.” Womanism, from the lens of Sapio Paz, is the reclamation of the feminism that has been taken away from Black women. Sapio Paz, who is pushing for more matriarchal approaches argued that Womanism is “an attempt at explaining a matriarchal impulse,” which is not necessarily a cis biological woman perspective; it is “a queer perspective.” Taylor Rose reading
Walker’s *In Search of Our Mother’s Garden* as a graduate student, incorporates Womanism into her projects, because “it is more inclusive to her own experiences.”

Nethilia considered Black women who are transgender, as she has formed relationships with people in the trans community who are not Black. She discussed the importance of acknowledging the difference in each other’s oppressions, while also understanding that the importance of accepting Black trans women because they are a Black woman just like her:

I would accept them as much as I accept any Black woman because they are a black woman like me. They deserve the same respect they have ... They maybe have not gone through the same childhood I have or the same oppression I have, but they have gone through their own oppressions. They are as much part of the Black family and Black feminism, Black Womanism as I am. To exclude them from the discussions of feminism, exclude them from Black womanhood is offensive. They are as much a Black person, as much a Black woman as I'm a Black woman. They are as much part of the tent. I believe the phrase I've seen on all of them is “Support all your sisters, S-I-S-T-E-R-S, not just your cisters, C-I-S-T-E-R-S.” That's how I feel about the situation. All women are women. All Black women are Black women. To say that this lack woman is not a Black woman because of what was assumed at their birth is oppressive and is not unifying. I can't ask for my liberation on the back of someone else's oppression. I feel like Black women, Black trans-women and black cis-women should work together.

Taylor Rose also identified that when engaging in sex with women she feels that she shares that there is a shared control; both parties are “equal.” This can be identified as a sexual Womanist act. She believed that Black women are finding healing in forming spaces on social media together. Trina discussed the social networking spaces that she shares with other Black
women, because she realized that she “hangs out with a lot of liberal Black women.” She stated that she does not really spend her time thinking about non-Black women, because she does not care. She shared an example of a “Twitter thread” written by a Black woman on why she does not care. She stated, “…so the person went into an entire Twitter thread that talked about the ways in which white women confuse us as black women and women of color wanting the same privileges that they have with wanting to look like or be them.”

Trina shares the application GroupMe, with Black women, and shared with me some of the encouraging private messages she receives from them about her sexual openness; they tell her that she is brave. To demonstrate some of her Black feminist and Womanist politics, Trina shared that in college she interned for a reproductive justice organization for women of color in the South.

Some emphasized the importance of spirituality in conjunction with Womanism; however, these positive ideations of spirituality and religion were more reflective within the theme of Sex-positivity.

*Sex-Positivity*

Sex-positivity, as a theme was decided among the raters, based on the combining of the codes of the participants ideas of sexual agency, affirmative consent, definitions, a lack of sexual judgement for others and feelings of being unbothered by sexual shaming.

Joyful Sunshine Wakandan is celibate and Christian, but supports other Black women’s sexual journeys. She argues that in Black women’s fight for humanity “you can’t embrace who you are as a sexual being until you embrace who you are as a human being.” She does enjoy sex, but prefers not to have sex, for both reasons that are religious and emotional. Her not having sex has been an issue for many people. Members of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. placed a bet that one of the fraternity brothers would be able to have sex with her. She heard nothing else of
it, but did not care what they said about her, because she was aware of her truth. Despite, Nnenni being sexually shamed and bullied, because she was thought to be a “whore,” she always had witty responses to combat it:

People were calling me a whore or whatever. But I just took it in stride. People were saying that I slept with the whole basketball team, the football team. I was like, "Well, was I sleeping with the boys or the girls, because I want to sleep with whoever's winning the championship."

She said that to some extent it made her feel good to know that people would pay her the type of attention that they would start a rumor about her. She believed it made people interested in her, and if they were not, she was fine with either outcome. “I don't really care if people are talking about me, because you know I just feel like, you're obsessed with me,” stated Nnenni. “And that says more about you than it does about me.” Some of these factors denied her access to spaces socially, but she felt that she had no reason to be ashamed. She did not want to affiliate with anything that did not openly fight for freedom of expression. She just wants for people to “just mind their business,” because there is a benefit to “staying in our own lane.” Sexual shaming, does not make her enjoy sex less, it is just more of a source of agitation for her. As she envisioned a sexually and culturally affirmed future for Black women, she imagined that this place would consist of “very little to no men.” She wants to be in the company of individuals who are open and comfortable with her sexuality, while still recognizing her humanity:

I feel like I don't want these two to be mutually exclusive, my humanity and my sexuality, and you know, my worth. I would like people to stop equating sex with worth. I would like people to understand that women are just as complex and multifaceted as men. We can
handle sex just like men can. I feel like that's what I want for black women in general as well, for our humanity and sexuality to not be a direct correlation, and not be affected into our worth. When asked if she ever engaged in sexual activity for money she stated, “I was very vocal that I didn't care for someone, and he was just like, "I'll pay for it." And I was like, I like money. So yes.” Soul expressed a similar exchange; however, she did not have sex for money, but did engage in sex for survival purposes. She needed food:

I was going through some tough times and I did not want to ask my parents for help. It got really bad- I wasn't eating. There was this guy…in the situation it wasn't “here's a burger, let's have sex.” “Here's a burger or let's have sex, here's some salad.” It was like, I used him in a sense. It was a that's my guy type of thing, I just knew that I didn't have the money for things and he had the money for it so I had sex because I knew that if I was hungry, he would make sure I was good. If I did need money, I could ask and that was taken care of. If I needed anything, really. A ride somewhere, whatever it was. But I didn't like him.

Monet was a sugar baby for a “couple of months.” She had a “working relationship” with a man and was involved. In the beginning, they negotiated what the benefits were going to be, the resources that she would receive and the expectations that he would have for her. Sometimes they would meet in person, have phone conversations and text one another.

Sapio Paz is a dominatrix and although, she does sessions, they are not sexual. However, she has done sex adjacent work. She has “danced for money,” and “gone on many dates for money”; she did that for an entire year. Engaging in dom work is cathartic for her as she believed she is doing “a service for the world.” “Every man should be dominated, in some sense, by a woman. I feel like that's kinda the problem,” stated Sapio Paz. “They have such an imbalance, where they feel
like they're the dominant ones and once they're able to let that go, they actually become a lot more sensitive and caring and good natured.” She has an “asexual queer agenda” “which is to get people out of this binary of sex and romance and get people into a more holistic view of their sexual experience and personal experience”; “to be able to experience things without shame and without expectation or entitlement.”

Sapio Paz wants to increase sex-positive awareness and believes that foreign religion and dogma is repressing this idea:

I think the major problem with the black community and sexual liberation or sex positivity, matriarchy, all of these things, is our obsession with a Eurocentric religion that centers chastity, modesty, patrilineal lineages and we are spiritually colonized by this foreign religion and dogma, that we're going to continue to have problems.

Sexuality is very spiritual to Sapio Paz:

You're never disconnected from your creator. And I feel like, in sexual terms, when you understand that, when you understand you are one and everything is you, then you just have an intimacy with the rest of the world that you can't have when you have those heteronormative, cisnormative concepts of sex and intimacy and romance.

She desires for Black people, but Black women especially, to rebel against the norm. She believes that queerness is a way to expand that idea. “Fuck the stereotypes,” stated Sapio Paz. “You just do what the fuck you want to do because the thing is people are going to fucking say that they are going to feel some type of way no matter what you do.” Black women should do what they want as long as they are not hurting anyone; she stresses the importance of consent. Sapio Paz destigmatizes what it means to be asexual. Relating to sex, “having high standards is almost a certain kind of form of asexuality in this paradigm, jokes Sapio Paz, because “you
know, if you had really high standards, who are you fucking, really?” When she does have sex, she prefers sex with women and occasionally she enjoys having sex with men. She is polyamorous, and also discusses what she enjoys and does not enjoy sexually. She does not like “blow jobs”; however, she jokes and shares that “once in a while, there’s a dick you just want to suck and you’re just like, “This is a beautiful penis and I’m going to suck it right now.”

Taylor Rose shared a view similar to Sapio Paz, that sexuality is sacred and spiritual. She wanted for Black women to liberate themselves while also being conscious of the sexual decisions that they make. She wanted no Black woman to feel ashamed even if things “go the wrong way” or if “you make a decision” that makes you say, “Oh, I wish I didn’t do that.” She desired for Black women to say in response, “You know what? I did,” and not judge herself, because as she moves forward she will know what she will do in the future. Sex is “healing” and can be a “sacred engagement between two people” who can “co-create love” in a physical sense. She believed that it can be used to manifest wants and desires. She enjoyed walking around her home naked, because she lives alone; she sometimes randomly dances in the mirror because she can be herself. It made her more appreciative of her body and gave her feelings of being sexually freer.

Although, Soul has not done much “research” on sex-positivity she believed that it means to be strong in yourself. Instead of thinking that sex is “nasty” or “disgusting” she believed that the narrative should be changed to something that celebrates and embraces the enjoyment of sex. She does not believe that anyone should be judged for their sexual decision-making practices. She enjoys sex and sexual activities because it “feels good,” she is “good at it” and it is “fun.” “What I do with my body is what I do with my body,” she stated proudly. “My sexuality has
nothing to do with anybody else. I would like that for everybody too. I would love a world where we weren't judged by sexuality. That's nobody's business.”

Tori James loves her body, because it reminded her of the plus-sized models that she sees in the magazine. For her, sex-positivity means to take ownership of who you are; there should be no stigma or taboo.

Courtney believed that it is not Black women’s place to shrink and deprive themselves, because of the ignorance of others. People will judge and make assumptions, which is why Black women should be able to do what makes them happy:

The younger we start to teach people that people's bodies are their bodies and their choices of what to do with them as long as they're not hurting anyone else, that does not say anything about their character. The younger we start that the more we can eliminate stigma like teaching kids that their bodies are dirty. Give kids the anatomical language so that it's not a bad word if you're talking about your genitals or whatever. We have to remove the taboo because taboo is not inherent.

Courtney desired for Black cis women to be better allies to Black trans women to ensure that they have as much sexual freedom as anyone else.

Nethilia discussed her polyamorous marriage:

I'd say, almost six years, the only person who I've been intimate with is my husband.

Again, we have an agreement that if I give him even the slightest symbol of, I don't feel like doing anything, he lets me be. If he gives me the slightest indication where he's like, "Nah, I'm not feeling it." I let him be. We don't pressure each other. He doesn't pressure me into sex. I don't pressure him into sex. If he asks and I say no, or I'm busy, I've got something to do, then he leaves me be.
Nethilia also argues that sex-positivity is for the person who does not want to have sex to the person who loves to have sex. Additionally, she says that if people do not want to discuss sex, that the sex-positive thing to do is also respect those boundaries.

Afrofuturism

Afrofuturism as a theme was decided among the raters, based on the single code of Afrofuturism; however, codes of sex-positivity and Womanism overlapped within the code. Additionally, Afrofuturism was coded based on references and ideas of safe space and utopianism, affirmative usage of digital technology and liberatory articulations of technology.

Courtney understood Afrofuturism as “envisioning a future in which Black people or people of the African diaspora are empowered”; Black people have “used technology to free themselves” and as an “aid” of “decolonization.” She believed it was a “cool genre” and shared that within the media she has witnessed some of the “most creative” and “artistically avant garde” “afrofuturistic elements” ever. She is glad to see that Afrofuturism has become more mainstream, because “more accessible to younger generations.” Less than a week after the film release of Marvel’s Black Panther, directed by Ryan Coogler, many of the interviews with participants were conducted. As a result, there was a lot of excitement around the film in connection to Afrofuturism. “People are sending kids to go see Black Panther and stuff and giving them those images,” stated Courtney. “I just think that’s so cool that it’s mainsteaming a bit.” Joyful Sunshine Wakandan, inspired by Black Panther’s fictitious East African country, Wakanda, spoke of how, in the year 2018, it is a blessing to see films like Black Panther and Disney’s A Wrinkle in Time, directed by Ava Duvernay. She felt that these films and the digital technology of social media are facilitating the recognition of Black lives. When asked if she could envision a safe place in the future where Black women can be sexually free Joyful
Sunshine Wakandan cheerfully expressed, “That’s in Wakanda, girl. I love it.” Trina discussed her love for Marvel film and how she just started reading comic books; she mentioned Black Panther as well. She considered Afrofuturism, like Black Panther, to elevate the idea of “a Black world that isn’t consumed by white supremacy.” When also asked if she could envision a safe place in the future where Black women can be sexually free, she responded that she could not, but then also said Wakanda was that place.

Monet loved Afrofuturism and identified scholar, Samuel Delany and scifi writer, Octavia Butler as “the father and mother of Afrofuturism. She argued that because Delany “did a lot of work in genre theory” that literally he created the space for Afrofuturism to exist. Monet recognized Afrofuturism as something that is not only confined to literature, but also recognizes Afrofuturism as a “cultural aesthetic”; “music, fashion, dance in various aspects of culture.” She had other thoughts about Afrofuturism in the realm of Black possibility:

I think it's this really cool opportunity to envision futures that are not only possible and envisioning futures that include us, that have people like us in them. And then using those as a place of critical thought to judge what kind of changes need to be made in the present to aspire to this future that's more desirable, more equal, more free for everyone.

Nethilia identified as an Afrofuturist and said that growing up she was “the only Black kid” who was into “sci-fi, fantasy and fiction.” She, like most participants, discussed the role of the internet and how it perpetuated an Afrofuturist vision. She was not aware of the term until the internet and she learned as she got older on that medium that she was not the only one interested. She stated there were many Black people on the internet who were into” Blackness and sci-fi,” and “Blackness and the future.” The internet was also the place where she discovered a lot of sex-positive people.
Although, Nnenni did not know the operational definition of Afrofuturism, she believed it is how “people see Blackness in the future” in a “utopian” sense. It is what “Blackness will be, not necessarily it’s projected future,” and “no necessarily the trajectory that Blackness is going’; it is what Blackness can become, “if we’re given the proper tools.” She also considered the relationships between Blackness, technology and what Black people’s vision for the future is. She identified Erykah Badu and Janelle Monae as Afrofuturists.

Sapio Paz defined Afrofuturism as “Pan-Africanism 2.0,” that “re-centers” the Black experience and Blackness and “refocuses” who Black people are, as a “scattered people.” “We can’t go back to pre-slavery. We can’t go back to pre-colonialism,” stated Sapio Paz. “So, we need to find a Black future that we can go towards.”

Sapio Paz argued that colonized religions are preventing movement into the future. Nnenni shared a similar concern as she considered whether or not Black communities would be able to stop or subside the shaming of Black women. She believed with more [sexual] education that people could possibly stop shaming Black women; however, she held the belief that “as long as people are teaching sex and sexuality juxtaposed to religion” that things would not change. She argued that people’s social identity is rooted in Theology, and would have to be taught juxtaposed to Theology for any true change to occur. Sapio Paz considered Black people’s relationship with religion and their views on a culturally and sexually liberatory future:

…what are we praying for exactly? You know, like ... To be accepted? To find somebody who loves us? To find somebody who does what we want to do within the confines of this paradigm? Or are we looking for an Afrofuture, where we can all be sexually liberated and bring children into this world in a safe and loving environment when they're welcome, not as a mistake.
Her sex-positive ideas overlapped with ideas around sexually and culturally affirmed futures. Her “asexual queer agenda” is her idea of the future. She believed that Black people are “moving upward” and “vibrating higher.” She views children’s activist responses to school shootings as being part of that equation. She said that it is a reflection of “that energy, that rage, that divine, justice, that sense of belonging, that sense of not giving a fuck, of allowing people to see their emotions.” She said that if Black people could “let go of some these shackles of colonization,” such as “white Jesus,” “Islam” and “all these things that are keeping us in the heterosexual binary” that Afrofuturism is not “far away.”

Soul desired to see Black straight and LGBTQ people to come together and fight for each other in an effort to get to a sexually and culturally affirmed future. She imagined a world where Black women were not policed by their sexuality.

Taylor Rose believed that living in the digital era is pushing the thought of ideas sex, Black womanhood, and sexuality in a direction that is not normally discussed. “Black Twitter” and other “digital spaces” are “carving that out for us,” which is why she is becoming more interested in Afrofuturism. However, although Black women are finding spaces of “healing” on social networks, Taylor Rose would like to see these spaces develop in the “physical world.” She felt safe on social media, but this has become a pet peeve of hers, because she recognized that social media is not necessarily a safe space for all people. Sexually, she desired to be viewed with a more “humanizing” gaze in the future. She wanted to be viewed as “beautiful” and “sexy,” but overall, she wants to be viewed as “human.” She wanted to be viewed as an autonomous human who can “decide whether you’re worthy enough to share” her body with, and not have someone thinking, “Oh, she’s beautiful. I want her. Like, I can have her.”
Tori James envisioned a future where Black women could have sex with whoever they wanted, with however many people:

Whatever ways they can be open with their sexuality whether they are bisexual, lesbian or trans and not get criticized for it by anybody. Even their own family- I feel like it happens quite often. So just not getting criticism for whatever you do with your body as long as you’re safe.

This future could facilitate a “meet-up,” where Black women could engage in open discussions, share stories, receive support and drink.

Trina proposed questions about the idea of a sexually and culturally affirmed future for Black women. She argued that any space where trans women were not welcome was not a space for Black women. Social networks and other online spaces is a part of how Trina works to cultivate the future. Many of the networks she is part of empowers Black women and speaks from a “very liberatory” sort of framework.” Some of the women are religious, but seek ways to decolonize Christianity. She discussed the idea of “womanhood” being divorced from the “physical” Black “body.” Some women have “vaginas” and it cannot be ignored that it is often a space for violence and empowerment. However, she recognized that not all women have vaginas.

Nnenni as stated in the sex-positive section had a vision of how she wanted to be viewed sexually; however, this provided more context for the future:

I want black people to view me as someone who's open and comfortable with my sexuality, and still recognize my humanity. I feel like I don't want these two to be mutually exclusive, my humanity and my sexuality, and my worth. I would like people to stop equating sex with worth. I would like people to understand that women are just as complex and multifaceted as men. We can handle sex just like men can. I feel like that's
what I want for black women in general as well, for our humanity and sexuality to not be a direct correlation, and not be affected into our worth.

Monet reflected on a time when she felt most sexually free. She went to a club in London, and it was a “queer bar”; it was inclusive to “LGBTQIA plus.” The space was “welcoming” and “not oppressive,” “happy,” “joyful” and “free.” The energy was “orgasmic,” because of “the release” that she witnessed of people dancing, “meeting” and being “physically close.” She reflected further on the smiles, conversations and music. Monet felt like she could freely express her sex and sexuality. She wanted for that feeling to return, and wanted to experience that sensation in her future. She wanted for trans and cis Black women to work together in the future, even if it was difficult to imagine. Monet desired for the women to be prepared to understand, listen and advocate for trans women.

Nethilia had a full vision of what her sexually and culturally affirmed future would like like for herself and other Black women, sex workers and others with non-normative understandings of Black sexuality:

The main thing is I don't think I should be judged on what I do. I shouldn't have to go into detail about what I do, but if you hear what I do, if it becomes your business to know what I do, it's not your business to tell me I'm doing wrong for it. If my sexuality isn't hurting someone, if it's consensual, if it's safe, if it's respectful to who it is, then it's nobody else's business to tell me I'm doing it wrong.

For example, I have friends who are into the BDSM community for one aspect or another. Maybe that's not my cup of tea, but they should feel like they can talk to me about it even ... If I agree to be spoken to about it, part of that agreement is that I can't immediately turn around and start judging them on it. It's the same thing with my
sexuality. If you agree to hear my aspect and then you turn around and judge me, the message is clear, I can't trust you with my knowledge. I feel the same way about sexuality in general. A black woman should be able to speak openly about her experiences without being told that her experiences are invalid. If a black woman is a sex worker and she has chosen this willingly, she should be able to speak openly about her situation without being called a whore, a slut, what-you-have. A woman's sexuality, if she chooses to share it in whatever aspect she chooses to share it in, should be respected. If she chooses to share none of it, that should be respected too. She's like, “I don't want to talk about this. This is nobody else's business but my own.” That should be just as respected.

The information used to parse out the themes was based on relevance as there was a lot of useful information that was not reported within this section of the findings.

4.7 Photovoice

Nine out of ten participants completed the Photovoice section of this research study. Nethilia did not participate. Participants had a week from the date of their interview to send the photos, captions and descriptions that answered the following questions:

1) Using the camera on your phone, could you capture an image of what it has looked or felt like to be sexually shamed by Black people within your community?

2) Based on your social and sexual relationships, using the camera on your phone, could you capture an image of how you imagine a future that affirms you and other Black women culturally and sexually? This will be a future where you are sexually free.

Photo 1, which responds to Question 1 was coded as “sexual shaming,” because it represents the participant’s sexually dystopian expression. Photo 2, which responds to Question 2
was coded as “Afrofuturism,” because it represents the participant’s expression of what their sexually and culturally affirmed future looks and feels like.

Here are some of the most illustrative of images attached with comments:

Monet.

Figure 1 Photo 1

**Sexual Shaming**: “An image of what it has looked or felt like to be sexually shamed by Black people within my community. I am conflicted about the extent to which I can be vulnerable. There are times when I feel violently exposed to the ways people have tried to shame me. I do not want to feel shame, but I am made to feel as though I should. It is only safe to be myself sometimes around some people. This is uncomfortable. I am uncertain and afraid.”
Afrofuturism: “An image that captures how I imagine a future that affirms me and other Black women culturally and sexually. This is the future where I am sexually free. I am effortlessly and fearlessly sexy. I am happy and at peace with how I see myself and how others see me. My most honest self is what is being reflected to the world and I feel seen as I am. Not as I should be or could be. Who I am is enough. I am free to be who I am. Seeing my freedom is freeing for other people. It does not make them fearfully uncomfortable, it challenges them to find more freedom and encourages them to join me in my freedom.”
Sexual Shaming: “Before, I used to care what men thought of me. I was clearly lying. My femininity was sterile, and domestically inviting.”

Afrofuturism: “Now, I want them to see me, and wonder if they can be invited. My sisters, on the other hand, feel at home and excited.”
Afrofuturism may not hold the binary idea utopianism and dystopianism, but participant descriptions of their past, present and future did sometimes include this dichotomy within both the interviews and photovoice. Many of the photos in Photo 1, described sexual shaming and their feelings as a very frightening and deadly place to be and exist. This was interpreted as dystopian, because this was something that they did not want within their community that was harmful to them.

4.8 Sexual Shaming

In the first image, paired with the caption, Monet poetically captured the feelings of isolation and fear, as she cloaks her body from the sexual shaming. The cloaking is reminiscent of what Darlene Clark Hine called the “culture of dissemblace,” which was a historical tactic used for Black women of the Midwest to cloak their sexual identities, to keep themselves from sexual harm. The black and white imagery reflects a lifelessness. The black and white imagery could also signify just how the sexual shaming she has a experienced, has the ability to lack sexual nuance or oversimplify who she is. This idea of Black communities’ oversimplification was communicated by Trina. She took a photo from one of the classrooms from her doctoral program. On the wall there is a paper that says in mostly bold and red lettering, “New Face of FEMINISM.” On the other side of the wall, was a poster promoting the Paterson workers strike of 1913. She stated that the photo signifies the advocation of women’s rights. She paired the ideas and politics communicated through the imagery of the classroom to the politics of the Black community. She stated, “Being sexually shamed is a reminder of the ways in which the Black community continues to hold on to politics and perceptions that are detrimental to not only Black women but the community as an entirety.” The lack of inclusivity, not only effects the erased group, but it also effects the community.
Sapio Paz’s usage of black and white coloring similarly achieves the aims of what Monet articulated. There are mundane toiletries and sage that are neatly positioned on what can possibly considered a bathroom sink; a sink that appears to be simplistically clean. She describes how aspects of her femininity were stifled by the influences of men, and that what she presents is considered the “norm.”; it is what is acceptable.

Courtney demonstrated how sexual shaming can feel like an “attack”; the photo was titled “Don’t Tread on Me.” Sexual shaming, even based on the interviews can be a violent act. Their is imagery of a foot stepping on a piece of paper, with what appears to be a broken heart on it. Papers are thin, delicate and can be easily torn; this could be another way of considering how she feels as the person being sexually shamed. The foot, is from a human being, but papers are just materials that are frequently used. Sexual shaming is communicated as practice that dehumanizes Black women. Courtney’s imagery revealed a dichotomy between the human and the inhuman; once someone or something is deemed inhuman, violence becomes justifiable. Joyful Sunshine Wakandan also used inanimate objects or materials to communicate how sexual shaming also made her feel. She took a photo of a dirty blue dumpster; it is isolated in darkness. The darkness and isolation represented how sexual shaming made her feel; however, the dumpster not only represented her, it also represented the community who shames her. “The dumpster is a representation of the toxicity of the sexual shaming and also because the sexual shaming is not valid or valuable,” stated Joyful Sunshine Wakandan. “The toxic opinions are trash.” Consistant with the idea of harm, Taylor Rose’s photo, “Battle Scars,” showed an arm with a balled up fist. There were numerous cuts on the arm. Taylor Rose transparently stated that the photo is of her arm. “I chose this picture to exemplify what it feels like to be sexually shamed
because these are scars from self-inflicted wounds,” stated Taylor Rose. “I used to purposely hurt myself by cutting at my skin with razors due to the shame I felt about myself and my body.”

Tori James took a photo of a television. The photo was of a Nature Valley granola commercial, where one person stands around plant life. She discussed the surveillance issue of sexual shaming. “Being judged by others feels like you’re on television,” she stated. “Constantly being watched and reviewed by others.” Both Nnenni and Soul captured images of lifeless plants. “For me, being sexually shamed by black people feels like being suffocated by the same environment that is supposed to enable your growth,” stated Nnenni. “It’s damming and discouraging.” As for Photo 2, participants had clear ideas of who they did and did not want to be part of their future.

4.9 Afrofuturism

As I took their interviews into consideration and coupled it with their photos, many of the participants’ descriptions imagined a utopian Black sexual future; however, this was not the case for every participant. While some describe their ideal and perfect future, others communicated through imagery that their sexually and culturally affirmed future would be one of isolation; this is still due to the lack of acceptance.

In Photo 2, I blurred out the image of Monet’s face for privacy and protection. The photo is extremely warm with red and brown coloring and she boldly exposed the same body that she cloaked within the first image. In her future, everyone is welcome as long as they want to be free. In her future, no one is fearful of who she is. Additionally, if people are not accepting of her freedom, they more than likely are not welcome. Nnenni uses a Black woman’s body, more than likely her own, to communicate her sexual boldness. In her photo, Nnenni twirls around in a short red plaid skirt that has the potential to expose her buttocks; there is no fear or shame. She is
existing “as freely” as she pleases. This is communicated as her world, where she has the power and ability to do and say whatever she wants. Taylor Rose, in her photo entitled “Embracing Nudity,” also reveled in the imagery of her own body. However, instead of taking photos of her actual body she took photos of the shadow that her naked body casted on a wall. She recognizes the bodies of Black women in both their sexual and non-sexual forms. “I believe a future that is sexually free allows for Black women to fully showcase the beauty and art form that is our physical vessels,” Taylor Rose stated. “By loving and honoring Black women and their bodies in the nude instead of sexualizing and exploiting them, Black women will ultimately be freer and feel no shame in expressing their sexuality openly.”

Similarly to Monet’s first photo, I realized that Sapio Paz was cloaking her sexuality and desires. Pictured in vibrant coloring and lightning, other items were added to the sink- a menstruation cup, a mouth gag, which is symbolism for kink culture, menstrual cup, make up, and a spiked bracelet. Like, Monet in her own caption, Sapio Paz invites and welcomes women to follow her into a future of pleasure. She explained that the black spiked bracelet is something that wears to bed if she is sleeping in bed with a man. She uses it for protection. She said that if a man tried to violate her by grabbing her wrists in the middle of the night, that he would hurt himself on the bracelets; she wears two. Additionally, the first sentence of her caption, implies that she desires attention; however, she wants for men to question whether she actually wants them in her space or future.

Trina and Joyful Sunshine Wakandan’s visuals were extremely similar. They both took images of an empty beach or ocean. Trina entitled her photo, “Isolation,” which was a photo she took on her most recent travels; there was a boardwalk, sand, blue water and a blue sky. “Being sexually shamed and having to grow into my own freedom and sexual politic reminds me of how
isolating that can feel,” states Trina. “That one can be both within and outside of the community simply because they refuse to buy in to old school and mostly religious driven ideals.” Trina’s interpretation of her future shows how she is still aware of the prevalence of sexual shaming, and as a result, how it impacts her future. However, Joyful Sunshine had a different interpretation of her own photo. In the photo, there are silhouettes of flags and palm trees, as it looks out to an ocean in Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands; the sun is setting. Each aspect of the photo was communicated as having deeper meanings. Some aspects spoke to sexually free futures and other aspects of the photo represented possibility. “A sexually free future is represented by a picture of a sunrise over the ocean in Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands,” said Joyful Sunshine Wakandan. “The sun represents light and power and the ocean represents life-giving water and vast opportunities.” Soul communicated a similar idea through nature, as her photo depicted a living plant with a few torn and deal leaves:

We are women, Black women. No matter the journey, we succeed. Despite the bruises, we heal. Regardless of hate, we love. We are women, Black women. We are ONE.

The second picture shows how beautiful something can still be despite the imperfections. It also represents strength through solidarity. A culturally and sexually free future is one where all Black women can stand together, no matter their story.

Unlike the photos that revolved around nature, Tori James use inanimate objects to discuss how they imagine their sexually and culturally affirmed futures. Tori James, used the image of a thermos with a tea bag dangling from the lid. It stated, “You are unlimited.” She discussed how it would feel for Black women to be sexually free in the future. “A world where we are sexually free makes us feel unlimited,” Tori James. “As if we have no worries because we don’t have to fear ridicule.” Courtney attacks the idea of “traditional gender roles” that are forced
onto women. Marriage can be considered to be part of the traditional act of what is considered the norm between two cisgendered and heterosexual people. Courtney’s ring is symbolic of it; however, instead of the expression of her commitment being of the ring placed on the “ring” finger, she placed it on her “middle finger.” Courtney is demonstrated a literal interpretation of the expression “fuck you,” which is addressed toward the gender norms that help facilitate sexual shaming.

4.10 Conclusion

The survey was instrumental in quantifying sexual shaming as a phenomenon. Additionally, the survey facilitated identifying ten participants. Before creating themes, there were 27 codes of Adultification, 120 codes of Afrofuturism, 71 codes of Family, 39 codes of Lying-Deception, 10 codes of Mental Health, 136 codes of Otherness, 53 codes of Pop Culture, 87 codes of Religion, 273 codes of Sex-Positivity, 198 codes of Sexual Shaming, 273 codes of Subjugation-Exploitation-Hypersexuality, and 91 codes of Womanism. However, after combining codes to create themes there were 760 codes for the theme for Sexual Shaming, 249 codes for Womanism. Other themes maintained the same amount of codes. All of the participants experienced some sort of abuse or trauma, and all participants expressed an awareness on Black women who are transgender.

Originally, I defined Afrofuturism in a way that operationalized race and culture as the technological component of African futures. Additionally, I identified this aspect of Afrofuturism as a means to construct their agency in memory and in practice. After interviewing the participants and analyzing their photovoice, I believe that aspects of my original definition of Afrofuturism has changed and/or expanded. So much of the original definition was rooted in race, just as racial essentialism often does; however, the participants highlighted the larger goals
of the study. Their approaches to Afrofuturism was intersectional and there was no compartmentalization of race, gender and sexuality; the participants considered their own wholeness. Based on their responses and their photos they communicated that there was something radical and liberatory about their imaginations, which somewhat aligns with the original definition. The radical or liberatory imagination is an aspect of Afrofuturism, which is consistent with the literature that discussed Black possibility; their radical imaginations could be interpreted as a form of technology. Their memories and recollections, whether they were joyous or painful set the precedence for how they were able to imagine the futures that they did and did not want, which was an aspect that also aligns with the original definition. What deviates from it, is how they are articulate their sexuality and how they articulate the feeling of being recognized as human in the future. The original definition acknowledged Afrofuturism on a more collective or communal level, but many of the participants discussed their lives and identities in terms of isolation. Their individual articulations of their sexual futures was not necessarily individualistic, but their personal identities are what fueled the palettibility of how they were able to receive Afrofuturism; this is what made Afrofuturism or an affirmative Black sexual future make sense for themselves.

The next chapter, the Conclusion, will discuss the relationship between Chapter 2 and this chapter (Findings), the implications for Africana Studies, sexual shaming and Afrofuturism, the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study, using a mixed method approach, examines the lives and sexual social relationships, and perceived sexual futures of 400 Africana women, between the ages of 18-65,
who have experienced sexual shaming. The research questions guiding the study were as
follows:
1) How do Africana women, based on their sexual and social relationships, believe they are
perceived by Africana communities?
2) How do Africana women, based on their sexual and social relationships, imagine the creation
of sexually and culturally affirming spaces for themselves and other Africana women in the
future?
419 Africana women between the ages of 18-61 from the diaspora, participated in this research
study. 419 Africana women participated in the survey, 10 Africana women living in the United
States participated in the interview, and 9 Africana women living in the United States
participated in the Photovoice section.

Common themes were revealed as part of the analysis of the study. Overall, Africana
women shared in the survey that their sexualization, as described as “adultification” within the
“Literature Review” section, begins in Black girlhood; the youngest age being two. From the
perspective of survey and interview participants, sexual shaming within Black communities is
often experienced within their families, churches, friendships, and schools. Participants overall
perception of how they believed Black women are perceived by Black communities based on
their social and sexual relationships is that they are the “other.” Sexually, they believed that
Black women particularly were perceived as the “other” if they have had multiple sexual
partnerships, if they are declared a “hoe,” if they are not heterosexual, if they are a sex worker,
and/or if they are transgender. Interview participants attributed Black beliefs of Black women’s
sexual deviance and otherness to the enslavement of African peoples and white Christianity,
what many believed perpetuated the stereotypes of Black people as “other” or inhuman.
Through, the Photovoice component the visuals along with their descriptions described the sexual shaming of Black women perpetuated by Black communities as “suffocating” and violent. However, they used their imaginations to focus on sexually and culturally affirmed futures, that were welcome to Black women like themselves. Their photos and captions sought to resist imposed sexual norms and sexual shaming.

This concluding chapter includes a comprehensive discussion regarding the conclusions of the study, the implications for the discipline of Africana Studies and Afrofuturism and the limitations of the study. Furthermore, this section will conclude with recommendations for future research.

1. Africana women believe based on their sexual and social relationships, that Black communities perceive them as whores or the “other,” as a symptom of Black communities’ historically-rooted marginalization.

2. Africana women are able to imagine that sexually and culturally affirmed futures are possible; however, it is not deemed possible if normative understandings of Black sexuality continue into the future.

Africana women believe based on their sexual and social relationships, that Black communities perceive them as whores or the “other,” as a symptom of Black communities’ marginalization. Sexual shaming, is most often referred to as slut-shaming. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, Toni Bell argues that historically, Black women were the poster children of slut-shaming. With this consideration, this research study wanted to explore a different way to discuss the punishment Africana women often face that acknowledges the intersections of their race, gender and sexuality. The sexual terrorization of Black women physically and philosophically was also explored in Chapter 2. Darlene Clark Hine’s idea of the culture of dissemblance (1994), where
historically, Black women of the Midwest cloaked their sexualities to avoid their oppressors is a symptom of the terrorization that Bell refers to. However, many of the comments made by the participants during the interview phase aligned with the historical literature that was discussed in Chapter 2. Many participants believed that the sexual shaming was often attributed to a sexual repression and cloaking, because of the generational fear of eurocentric notions and philosophies regarding Black sexual identity and politics.

Although, no participant referenced Saartjie Baartman, their descriptions of historical accounts aligned with the terrorization experienced by Baartman. Taylor Rose discussed within her interview how Black women’s bodies are different or perceived as different in that they are “thicker.” Courtney and other participants discussed the idea that larger Black women are either asexualized or historically perceived by white people as “undesirable”; she concluded that statement by stating that larger, darker or and muscular Black women during the period of enslavement were “degendered” or not considered a woman at all. The concept of being “degendered” is what Hortense Spillers refers to as “ungendering” (Spillers, 1987, p. 68); it is a process of dehumanization. Some participant comments aligned with the aspects of colorism and racial identity as discussed in Chapter 2.

No participant directly discussed the system of plaçage; however, a few participants acknowledged the eurocentric perceptions of lighter skinned or mixed race women, which was reminiscent of the literature. Some believed that they were perceived as more desirable, but also lascivious; they are deemed hypersexual. As Joan M. Martin states, “They didn’t choose to live in concubinage, what they chose was to survive” (Kein, 2000, p. 64), which was paired with eurocentric beauty standards. This hierarchal pairing resulted in the hypersexualized status of placées, because of aspects of Black identity.
The literature tackles the work being done by Black women and other Black liberatory organizations around sexual violence, which is sexual justice work, as discussed by Danielle McGuire (2010), Britney Cooper (2017) and Treva Lindsey (2017) who discussed in their works the role of “race women” as a means to reestablish a new Black humanity; this was a politically “respectable,” known as the politics of respectability as coined and popularized by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham in *Righteous Discontent* (1993), means toward deviating away from hypersexualized and inhuman standing. The Black church has also participated within this practice by using Christianity as an ideal standard of humanity, which is something that participants believed strongly. This was discussed by Kelly Brown Douglas (1999), Mitzi J. Smith (2015) and Pamela R. Lightsey in Chapter 2. Mireille Miller-Young stated that “a politics of African American women’s respectability first emerged in the late nineteenth century in post-emancipation Christian women’s activist circles” (Miller-Young, 2014, p. viii). This can be seen in Chapter 4, as Taylor Rose discusses the “promise ring,” which was supposed to represent her promise to remain “pure”; something asked by her “very Christian” mother and her father. To combat racist stereotyping of the lascivious and deviant Black woman, Black women and their communities endorsed an image of gender and sexual normativity evocative of a patriarchal ideation of feminine virtue. The adopted politics are some of what participants described in being a key factor in why Black people have “othered” Black women with non-normative sexual expressions and identities in the ways that they do or have. The history has prevented Black communities from having open conversations and educating themselves communally around issues of Black sexuality; participants identified this phenomenon as being a hindrance to progress. As a result, they have experienced shame from their mothers or family members who
do not want for Black women or girls in their families to be identified as whatever they perceive as negative, un-Christian, a whore or as the “other.”

Rapper and former stripper, Cardi B discussed the roles of video vixens and strippers within the #MeToo movement (Gonzales, 2018), which was founded by a Black woman, Tarana Burke (Garcia, 2017); it was coopted or popularized by white celebrities like, Rose McGowan (Zacharek, Dockterman, & Sweetland Edwards, 2017). This is similar to what Karrine Steffans discussed in the Literature Review. Cardi B states, "A lot of video vixens have spoke about this and nobody gives a fuck.” Additionally, she states:

When I was trying to be a vixen, people were like, ‘You want to be on the cover of this magazine?’ Then they pull their dicks out," she told the magazine. "I bet if one of these women stands up and talks about it, people are going to say, ‘So what? You’re a ho. It don’t matter."

She discusses how many criticize her for discussing her history as a stripper, but in a way, she argues what Ashleigh Shackeford also argues within the literature- “ho histories do matter.” Stripping is not a reflection of a lack of intelligence and in defense of women who do still strip she states, “Because y’all don’t respect me because of it, and y’all going to respect these strippers from now on.” Black sex and sex adjacent workers are not the only Black women who are not identified as individuals undeserving of respect, but so are Black women who are transgender. Black women when who are transgender can also be sex worker, as indicated by Erin Fitzgerald, Sarah Elspeth, Darby Hickey, and Cherno Biko (2015).

Black women who are transgender experience murder at much higher rates than cisgendered Black women and other trans people from other communities; the participants acknowledged this troublesome fact. They also spoke of the idea that some Black men believe
that Black women who are transgender are traitors or deceptive; if they are attracted to them, they become embarrassed and murder them. In Chapter 2 of this research study, Lena Carla Palacios discussed the murder of Islan Nettles, 21, at the hands of a black man named James Dixon, 25, in 2013 (2016). He flirted with her and after his friends teased him he was embarrassed. He said that his friends were “clowning” him, because she was “a guy.” GLAAD has started collecting new information on the murders of transgender people for the 2018 year and most were Black women.

Sexual shaming is life-threatening, and as mentioned before, the participants, all affected by sexual shaming in some way, believed that the phenomenon has historical roots. *Africana women are able to imagine that sexually and culturally affirmed futures are possible; however, it is not deemed possible if normative understandings of Black sexuality continue into the future.*

While some participants were confident in the possibility of a sexually and culturally affirmed future for Black women with non-normative understandings of sexuality like themselves, some were skeptical of the idea; it was difficult for them to imagine. Some participants who imagined this future to complete the Photovoice phase, admitted that to achieve this future it would mean to be “isolated.” They understood their “otherness” or “difference” as something that many would associate with negativity or social abomination, as discussed by Donna Haraway (1984) and Teresa de Lauretis (1987). Mostly, Black women or people who were accepting of their identities and lifestyles were welcomed to their imagined futures.

*Sapio Paz, Nnenni and Trina directly identified Black communities’ eurocentric interpretations of Christianity as a barrier between their imagined Black futures and ideas surrounding what is possible. Despite these concerns, participants are relatively unbothered by*
what Black communities think of them, and the participants embraced their feelings as their own personal sites of freedom, liberation and resistance. This was reminiscent of the recovery work of Afrofuturist, Renée Cox, as discussed by Jennifer Nash (2014), through her self-portrait that embodies Saartjie Baartman. Her work honors Baartman, "othered" Black women and future "othered" Black women. Cox is an aspect of Baartman's future and her work has implications on the sexual and gender identities of future Black women. The ways that Cox reimagines Baartman show that the idea of the imagination, sexuality and gender are forms of technology. This is similar to the ways that Photovoice participants saw themselves.

Additionally, this research study was able to determine that the usage of the definition of Afrofuturism changed based on the participants’ responses. The radical imagination is not only participants’ forms of technology, but it is also an aspect of Afrofuturism; this is element of Black possibility as they consider their Black sexual futures.

5.1 Implications for Africana Studies and Afrofuturism

This study adds on to a larger body of Africana Studies work. Historically, Africana Studies, although being strong in its racial politics, often struggled with identity politics outside of race. This phenomenon has been harmful to Black people, but Black women who are not identified as good “Black moral citizens. The works of Darlene Clark Hine, Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynter held Africana Studies accountable in a way that promoted the growth of Africana Studies, to consider gender outside of the context of Black manhood. Crunk Feminist scholars, like Brittney Cooper and Treva Lindsey look back at Africana women’s history in a way to contextualize and understand the practice of what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham defined as respectability. Many historical accounts of what happened to Africana women like Saartjie Baartman have been damaging. In an effort to heighten awareness around Baartman’s tragedy,
she has been “othered” further within the discipline. She is often discussed as a cautionary tale for Black women to not be “whores,” “thots,” or “hoes,” because it is reminiscent of the dehumanizing legacy of Baartman. This research wanted to restart the conversation of what happened to Baartman through an Afrofuturist lens; however, after research I found that Janell Hobson, Mireille Miller-Young, Ariane Cruz, Jennifer Nash and Renee Cox, were just a few of many Black women scholars, who sought to do the work to humanize and recover Baartman. Miller-Young, Cruz, and Nash’s work expands how Africana Studies considers feminisms and womanisms, by moving discourse into the fourth-wave. My work sought to expand on their works, by adding Afrofuturism to the discussion as a means of articulating other means to Black liberation.

This research study is also impactful, because it sought to operationalize through mixed methods, an often-neglected genre of theory- Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism being operationalized with Womanism, helped introduce itself to Black Sexual Politics and deviant Blackness. There is not enough literature or study on Afrofuturism, and in the discipline of Africana Studies, there is an even larger gap. Additionally, because much of Afrofuturism is rooted in discourse around cultural aesthetics and art, this research study was able to use the “imagination” as a technology to understand the perceptions of Black women. This research innovatively utilized a creative participatory action research component such as Photovoice, as a means to maintain the integrity of the participants’ imaginations and sexual and gender politics.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

Being able to only survey 419 Africana women and interview 10 of them as participants, I was not able to come to a concrete generalization. Although, Black women who were
transgender participated within the survey, that was not reflected within the interview and Photovoice phases. However, I do acknowledge that participants were recruited based on who responded to the emails. Gender assignments at birth were unknown until participants filled out the demographics form. As the researcher, it was my desire to not further “other” or fragment any Black woman who has been sexually shamed; however, participants were encouraged to share how they identify via their gender and sexuality. Courtney expressed that she “usually” is in agreement with her gender assignment, and after emailing her for clarification I did not receive a response. Additionally, all of the interview participants graduated with at least a Bachelor’s, but the 419 survey participants’ educational and class statuses were unknown variables. Students who attended college were not the target, but I hoped to also learn from participants who did not attend college.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

1. Researchers could ask questions regarding the creation of inclusive spaces for Africana women both transgender and cisgender who are considered the “other” and ask them how these spaces can combat sexual shaming.

2. Further research can be conducted around the Black technology of sexualities and gender from an Afrofuturist and Black sexually political lens.

3. Research can be done specifically on the relationships between sexual shaming and Black women who are transgender.

4. Research can be conducted on Saartjie Baartman that affirms her humanity.

5. This study could be expanded to focus on the Black LGBTQIA community of men.

6. Research could be done to further tease out and define “sexual shame.”
7. Further research could also be done to understand Black women’s ideations of sex-positivity and pleasure, like Jennifer Nash, Ariane Cruz and Mireille Miller-Young’s work.

8. This study could be expanded by collecting information from older Black women.

9. This study could also look at Africana women beyond the internet, and identify participants who have not attended college.

5.4 Conclusion

This study aims to examine the lives and sexual and social relationships of Africana women, as well as understand how they imagine a sexually and culturally affirmed future. This mixed method study identified how Africana women who have experienced sexual shaming believe they are perceived by Africana communities. Additionally, the study identified what they deemed was “possible” within what they imagine in their sexual and cultural futures. With the data that was collected, this study extended the “imagination” of Afrofuturism, Womanism, and Black Sexual Politics to show what is possible through academic discourse and study. Many participants, identified that how they were perceived by Black communities was a reflection of their communities were historically perceived by those who colonized their ancestors- enslaved Africans.

Derived from the collected data of 419 survey participants, 10 interview participants and 9 Photovoice participants, two general conclusions were made. They included: 1) Africana women believe based on their sexual and social relationships, that Black communities perceive them as whores or the “other,” as a symptom of Black communities’ historically-rooted marginalization and 2) Africana women are able to imagine that sexually and culturally affirmed
futures are possible; however, it is not deemed possible if normative understandings of Black sexuality continue into the future. Along with these conclusions was the discussion for the implications of Africana Studies and Afrofuturism, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future study.
REFERENCES


Cruz, A. (2016). The color of kink: Black women, BDSM, and pornography. NYU Press.


Monáe, J., Badu, E., GianArthur, R., Miguel, Parker, K., Prince, ... & Nate" Rocket" Wonder. (2013). The electric lady. Bad Boy Records.


APPENDICES

Appendix A.1: Survey Informed Consent

Georgia State University

Department of African American Studies

Informed Consent

Title: The Daughters of Baartman Speak Out: Sexual Shaming and Africana Women’s Perceptions of and Speculations on their Sexual Agency and Future

Principal Investigator: Dr. Sarita Davis

Student Principal Investigator: Melanie McCoy

I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to understand Black women’s beliefs on how Black communities view their sexual relationships and experiences and also Black women’s beliefs on how they imagine sexually or culturally freeing spaces in the future. You are invited to participate because you are a Black woman, who has experienced sexual shaming or judgement from Black communities based on your sexual relationships or experiences, between the ages of 18-65 who lives in the African diaspora. A total of 400 participants will be used for this part of the study. Participation will require about 15 minutes of your time.

II. Procedures:

In this part of the study you will answer a 12-question survey regarding sexual shaming or sexual judgement you have faced by Black people in your community.

III. Risks:

There is a chance that if you take part in the study that you may feel stressed and depressed. Resources will be shared with you by appearing at the end of the survey. You will be provided with contact information from Therapy for Black Girls.

IV. Benefits:
Participation in this study may or may not benefit you. Overall, we hope to understand Black women’s beliefs on how Black communities see them based on their sexual relationships. Also, mental health resources will be shared.

V. Voluntary Participation and No Longer Wanting to Participate:

Participation in research is your choice. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. If you no longer want to be involved with the interview and the Photovoice process, you will not be paid.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private based on what is allowed by the law. Dr. Sarita Davis and Melanie McCoy, will have access to what you share. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). We will use a name that is not your own rather than your name on study records. The information you share will be protected in Google Drive. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not be shown when we share this study or publish its results. The findings will be shortened and reported with a group. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Reach out to Dr. Sarita Davis and Melanie McCoy at (404) 413-5140 (saritadavis@gsu.edu) or (267) 254-4492 (mmccoy17@students.gsu.edu) if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu if you want to talk to someone who is not part
of the study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, share your thoughts, get information, or suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions about your rights in this study.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Participant:

Please save or print a copy of this consent form for your records.

If you are willing to part of this study, please continue with the survey.

* Please check the box below to if you want to be part of the study.
Appendix A.2 Interview Informed Consent

Georgia State University
Department of African American Studies
Informed Consent

Title: The Daughters of Baartman Speak Out: Sexual Shaming and Africana Women’s Perceptions of and Speculations on their Sexual Agency and Future

Principal Investigator: Dr. Sarita Davis
Student Principal Investigator: Melanie McCoy

I. Purpose:
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to understand Black women’s beliefs on how Black communities view their sexual relationships and experiences and also Black women’s beliefs on how they imagine sexually or culturally freeing spaces in the future. You are invited to participate because you are a Black woman, who has experienced sexual shaming or judgement from Black communities based on your sexual relationships or experiences, between the ages of 18-65 who lives in the United States. A total of 10 participants will be used for this part of the research study. Participation for the interview will require an hour and twenty minutes of your time. Participation for the picture-taking section will require only thirty minutes to a

II. Procedures:
If you decide to take part, there are three parts to this study. The first part is a 12-question survey, which you have already completed. The second part includes an interview that will ask you questions about your beliefs on what the Black community feels about your sexual
relationships. You will also be asked about your own sexual experiences and thoughts. The interview will take place on FaceTime, Google Hangout or something that you are able to use. This part of the study will last about an hour and twenty minutes and will be audio recorded. For the photo-taking part of the study, you will have one week from the date of the interview to email photos that you capture to Melanie McCoy. The pictures that you email, will not include your face, other people’s faces, your real name or other people’s names. You will send four pictures. They are examples of what it feels like to be sexually judged by Black people in your community and examples of a future where you are safe and sexually free as a Black woman. The pictures will be included in a published record.

III. Risks:

There is a chance that if you take part in the study that you may feel stressed and depressed. If you are uncomfortable, we will skip certain questions or we can take a break or stop at any time. Information from Therapy for Black Girls will be shared with you. The list of mental health resources will be shared with all participants.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may or may not benefit you. Overall, we hope to understand Black women’s beliefs on how Black communities see them based on their sexual relationships. Also, mental health resources will be shared.

V. Compensation:

You will receive a $20 gift card for participating in this study. Compensation will be provided only if you complete both portions of the study (interview and Photovoice).

VI. Voluntary Participation and No Longer Wanting to Participate:
Participation in research is your choice. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. If you no longer want to participate in both the interview and the Photovoice phases, you will not be compensated.

VII. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Dr. Sarita Davis and Melanie McCoy, will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). We will use a name that is not your own rather than your name on study records. The information you share will be the data and photographs and it will be protected in Google Drive. The recordings will also be stored on a voice recorder, with a USB port, for protection and also as a backup. No video will be recorded, but audio will be recorded. Audio recordings will be destroyed after you read what is written from the recorded audio and state that the information is correct. The pictures will be included in a published record. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not be shown when we share this study or publish its results. The findings will be shortened and reported with a group. You will not be identified personally.

VIII. Contact Persons:

Reach out to Dr. Sarita Davis and Melanie McCoy at (404) 413-5140 (saritadavis@gsu.edu) or (267) 254-4492 (mmccoy17@students.gsu.edu) if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study.
team. You can talk about questions, concerns, share your thoughts, get information, or suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

IX. Copy of Consent Form to Participant:

Please save or print a copy of this consent form for your records.

In an hour of your time.

If you are willing to participate in this study, be audio recorded, and are willing to share photos, please continue with the interview.

* Please check the box below to indicate agreement to participate in this study.
Appendix B Flyer

YOU ARE INVITED TO...

You are invited to participate in an anonymous online survey for a research study to understand Black women's beliefs on how Black communities perceive them as it pertains to their sexual and social relationships and experiences.

In order to participate in this online survey you must:
- Identify as a Black woman
- Be between the ages of 18 to 65
- Have experienced sexual shaming or judgement from others, regarding your sexual and social relationships/experiences

This online survey is just one portion of a three part study and requires 400 Black women.

You will remain anonymous to the public.

If you are interested in participating in the full research study for compensation:

You will receive $20 to participate in a 1 hour and 20 minute online interview and photovoice phase. These two phases require 10 Black identified women from United States, as well as, what is specified for participation in the survey. All information that you provide will remain confidential.

If you are interested in the full study or have questions please contact:
Student Principal Investigator, Melanie McCoy - mmccoy17@student.gsu.edu
Principal Investigator, Dr. Sarita Davis, - saritadavis@gsu.edu

Research Institution - Georgia State University
Appendix C: Survey

Survey Monkey: Sexual Shaming Survey

**Question 1:** Do you identify as Black or a person of African descent?

**Question 2:** What is your age?

**Question 3:** Do you agree or disagree with the gender assignment you were given at birth?

**Question 4:** What is your sexual orientation?

**Question 5:** Are you from the United States or Elsewhere? (If you are not from the United States please write where are from in the comment box)

**Question 6:** Do you or did you belong to a faith-based or religious community? (If yes, please write where in the comment box)

**Question 7:** How old were you when people started to look at you or notice you in a sexual way?

**Question 8:** Have you experienced judgment from Black communities based on your sexual and social relationships?

**Question 9:** Have you ever been called out of your name? (Ex. hoe, slut, bitch, thot, slur against your sexual orientation or gender identity, etc.)

**Question 10:** Have you ever been made to feel slighted or bad about how you identify sexually or based on your sexual-decision making choices? (Could you explain the comment box)

**Question 11:** How often have you experienced sexual shaming?

**Question 12:** Are you interested in participating in the full study for compensation? The full study includes an interview and a process known as Photovoice, in addition to this survey.
The interview will ask you questions regarding how you feel the Black community perceives your sexual and social relationships. You will also be asked about your own sexual attitudes and experiences. The interview will take place on FaceTime, Google Hangout or an application that is most accessible to you. The Photovoice section of the study requires you to submit four photos. They are visual examples of what it feels like to be sexually judged by Black people in your community and visual examples of a sexually and culturally relevant future where you are safe and free. If you are interested, please continue by writing an alternate name (do not write your real name), and a way for Student Principal Investigator, Melanie McCoy, to contact you, by writing your email address and phone number.
Appendix D: Interview Demographics Form

Interviewee Pseudonym: ___________________

**Personal questions (Check the box that BEST describes you):**

1. How old are you?
   ________________

2. Do you agree or disagree with the gender assignment you were given at birth?
   ________________

3. What is your level of education?
   [ ] middle school [ ] high school [ ] diploma or GED [ ] associates, bachelors or higher
   [ ] I don’t know

4. Do you work?
   [ ] yes [ ] no

   If yes, what is your profession?
   ________________

   What is your estimated income? ________________

5. How do you identify?
   [ ] Black or African American [ ] Of African descent (please specify)
   ________________

   [ ] Other (please specify) ________________

6. What is your sexual orientation? *(Please write the answer that best describes you)*

   ____________________________
7. Do you belong to any faith-based groups? If so, could you share that?

________________________________________________________________________

If there is any additional information that you would like to share please write the information below.

________________________________________________________________________
Appendix E: Interview Guide

NOTE: Please do not use any names or share information that can identify other people.

Research Questions:

1) How do Africana (Black) women based on their sexual and social relationships believe they are perceived by Black (Africana) communities?

2) How do Black women, based on their social and sexual relationships imagine the creation of sexually and culturally affirming spaces for themselves and other Black women in the future?

Interview Guide:

1. Could you tell me about yourself (family, friends, where you grew up, what you enjoy doing, etc.)?

2. What was your childhood like?

3. Could you describe what it is like to be a Black woman?

4. Womanism acknowledged on a practical level many of the everyday experiences and ethics of Black women- even sexual ethics. “Womanist” (1983), a set of guidelines written by Walker, has one boundary and request, which is in order to take on the label of Womanist, the woman must be Black. Womanists love music, dance, the moon, the Spirit, “love,” food, roundness, struggle, the “Folk,” and herself, regardless (Maparyan, 2006, p. 19). What are your thoughts on Womanism?

5. Emerging from the 1980s as part of the larger feminist movement, sex positivity has since energized people to accept all sexual identities and orientations as normal and healthy (Jones, 2016). Taking no moral stance, it embraces women’s sexual and
affirmatively consensual practices (Ibaorimi (@ZalUIbaorimi), 2016). What do you think about this?

6. I define Afrofuturism as a concept, practice and movement that requires Africana people to ubiquitously conceptualize and deduce time from the past, present and future from an African cultural center (McCoy, 2015). This cultural center operates as the technological component of African futures from which African people can construct their agency in memory and in practice, which Afrofuturism as a concept uses the Akan principle of Sankofa (McCoy, 2015). I engage race as a form of technology. What do you think about this?

*Sexual Double Standard*

1. What are your thoughts on the Black community and sex?
2. Is there a double standard when it comes to Black women having sex and Black men having sex? Please explain.
3. Is it more acceptable for a man to have multiple sexual partners than it is for a woman? If so could you explain? Please explain.
4. How are Black women viewed sexually in comparison to women of other races? Please explain.
5. Should Black women be more careful about sex, because of some of the stereotypes that exist about Black women? Please explain.

*Sexual Self Efficacy and Decision-Making*

1. Do you enjoy sex or engaging in sexual activity? Please explain.
2. What are some reasons that will stop you from engaging in sexual activity with someone?
3. What do you like about your body?
4. What don’t you like about your body?

5. Do you feel like you are in control when you engage in sexual activity? Please explain.

6. Do you feel sexually free or as if sometimes you are pressured to do things you do not want to do? Please explain.

7. Have you ever felt pressured at any point in your life to do something sexually that you did not want to do? Could you explain your experience?


9. Do you believe any religious or faith-based affiliations you have or have had has had an effect on your sexual decision making? Please explain.

10. If so, would any of these faith-based groups not agree with your sexual decision-making choices? Please explain

   Sexual and Gender Discrimination

1. How are Black women received by Black communities if they are considered to have too many sexual encounters?

2. How are Black women who are transgender received by Black communities?

3. How does race have an effect on how people view you sexually? Please explain.

4. Has anyone lied about engaging in sexual activity with you- if this has happened, could you tell me about how that made you feel?

5. Has anyone ever told stories about your sexual history to others without your permission- if so, how did that make you feel?

6. Have you ever been made to feel ashamed about things you have done sexually with your body? Could you explain more?

7. Do people criticize you for having too many sexual partners? Please explain.
8. Has anyone ever physically hurt you relating to your gender? Please explain.

9. Have you ever experienced abuse from someone you were romantically involved with?
   Please explain.

10. Has anyone ever physically hurt you in general in a way you believe impacted your life?
    Please explain.

11. Have people avoided getting into relationships with you because of the amount of people
    you have been with sexually? Please explain.

   Safe Space

1. Do you believe with education or more knowledge people will not shame you in the
    future, based on what you choose to do in your social and sexual relationships? Please
    explain.

2. Can you envision a safe place in the future where Black women can be sexually free?
    Please explain.

3. Do you have a space where you can go to enjoy yourself sexually without judgment?
    What is that space like?

4. Would you want cis and trans Black women to work together to create safe spaces in the
    future for other cis and trans Black women? Please explain.

5. How do you want Black people to view you sexually?

6. How do you want Black people to view other Black women sexually?
Appendix F: Photovoice Guide

You will take 2 photos- one for each question. However, you can submit more than two if you like. Please caption each photo, and in two to three sentences please describe the caption and image. Please do not capture any images of anything that would directly identify you or someone else, which would include your name or someone else’s name.

1) Using the camera on your phone, could you capture an image of what it has looked or felt like to be sexually shamed by Black people within your community?

2) Based on your social and sexual relationships, using the camera on your phone, could you capture an image of how you imagine a future that affirms you and other Black women culturally and sexually? This will be a future where you are sexually free.

Taylor Rose

1. Caption: Battle Scars
I chose this picture to exemplify what it feels like to be sexually shamed because these are scars from self-inflicted wounds. I used to purposely hurt myself by cutting at my skin with razors due to the shame I felt about myself and my body.

2. Caption: Embracing Nudity

This is a silhouette of my naked body. I believe a future that is sexually free allows for Black women to fully showcase the beauty and art form that is our physical vessels. By loving and honoring Black women and their bodies in the nude instead of sexualizing and exploiting them, Black women will ultimately be freer and feel no shame in expressing their sexuality openly.
1. "Don't tread on me."

Sexual shaming feels like an attack on my womanhood. My personhood. It is also used as a means to elevate the shamer, as if they are literally stepping on others to raise their own position.
2. "Committed to myself first."

I put the "wedding ring" on my middle finger to signify a rejection of traditional gender roles being forced onto women. This photo says, "I don't care whether or not my decisions make me 'wife material' because I'm committed to my happiness and satisfaction first."
Monet

1. An image of what it has looked or felt like to be sexually shamed by Black people within my community. I am conflicted about the extent to which I can be vulnerable. There are times when I feel violently exposed to the ways people have tried to shame me. I do not want to feel shame, but I am made to feel as though I should. It is only safe to be myself sometimes around some people. This is uncomfortable. I am uncertain and afraid.
2. An image that captures how I imagine a future that affirms me and other Black women culturally and sexually. This is the future where I am sexually free. I am effortlessly and fearlessly sexy. I am happy and at peace with how I see myself and how others see me. My most honest self is what is being reflected to the world and I feel seen as I am. Not as I should be or could be. Who I am is enough. I am free to be who I am. Seeing my freedom is freeing for other people. It does not make them fearfully uncomfortable, it challenges them to find more freedom and encourages them to join me in my freedom.
1. “Regression.” This picture is from a classroom roleplay advocating for women's rights. Being sexually shamed is a reminder of the ways in which the Black community continues to hold on to politics and perceptions that are detrimental to not only Black women but the community as an entirety.
2. "Isolation." This is a picture of my recent travels and represents isolation. Being sexually shamed and having to grow into my own freedom and sexual politic reminds me of how isolating that can feel. That one can be both within and outside of the community simply because they refuse to buy in to old school and mostly religious driven ideals.
1. Being judged by others feels like you’re on television. Constantly being watched and reviewed by others (NOTE: image from Nature Valley granola bars commercial)
2. A world where we are sexually free makes us feel unlimited. As if we have no worries because we don’t have to fear ridicule.
1. For me, being sexually shamed by black people feels like being suffocated by the same environment that is supposed to enable your growth. It’s damning and discouraging.
2. A future that affirms me culturally and sexually is a future where I'm allowed to exist as freely as I please. It means having the power to say, do, and be what I want.”
1. Before, I used to care what men thought of me. I was clearly lying. My femininity was sterile, and domestically inviting.

1. Now, I want them to see me, and wonder if they can be invited. My sisters, on the other hand, feel at home and excited.
1. I included a picture of a single isolated dumpster in the dark. As a self-identifying Black woman, it feels very dark and isolating when someone sexually shames you. The dumpster is a representation of the toxicity of the sexual shaming and also because the sexual shaming is not valid or valuable. The toxic opinions are trash.
2. A sexually free future is representatives by a picture of a sunrise over the ocean in Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands. The sun represents light and power and the ocean represents life-giving water and vast opportunities.
1. In the midst of perfection, there I was... different, broken, dead.

The first picture depicts a plant barely standing. It barely survives amongst the full, untainted bushes. This plant was full of life at one point, now it’s broken.
2. We are women, Black women. No matter the journey, we succeed. Despite the bruises, we heal. Regardless of hate, we love. We are women, Black women. We are ONE.

The second picture shows how beautiful something can still be despite the imperfections. It also represents strength through solidarity. A culturally and sexually free future is one where all Black women can stand together, no matter their story.