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“I’m not your SISTA”: An Intersectional Exploration of Queer Black Women’s Experiences in
LGBT+ Nightlife in the United Kingdom

by

Monisha Issano Jackson

Under the Direction of Veronica Newton, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores 18 queer Black British women's experiences of LGBT+ nightlife in the United Kingdom. Drawing on semi-structured interviews, I explore experiences of exclusion and inclusion within white, male-dominated LGBT+ nightlife and QTIPOC nightlife. My findings show that queer Black women are excluded by discrimination in the forms of physical violence, sexual violence, and fetishisation. Additionally, queer Black women experience exclusion through homonormativity which facilitates and privileges the comfort of gay white men, while excluding other intersecting marginalized groups. Homonormative processes were found through white patriarchal domination of space, heterosexual presence, and the music played within these night-time spaces. Queer Black women felt more included; they felt more comfortable and safer(r) within QTIPOC nightlife where their intersecting identities are affirmed, honoured, and valued.

INDEX WORDS: Queer Black women, LGBT nightlife, QTIPOC, Intersecting oppression, Violence, Homonormativity

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2022

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LGBT+ Nightlife in the United Kingdom

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December 2022

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to all queer women of colour, past, present, and future. To all the queer women of colour whose identities, selfhood, and spiritualities have been impacted by colonialism, imperialism, colonial legacies, and neo-colonialism. And to all those who have forged and continue to forge paths of resistance in order to challenge, disrupt, and imagine alternate worlds.

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I would like to acknowledge my mother, first and foremost. For without you, I would not be close to the woman I am today. Thank you for loving me through the brutality of the world, and the brutality of our home. Thank you for buying me Audre Lorde's *Zami* when I first spoke to you about loving women. Thank you for your criticality, your resilience, and your ongoing strength. Thank you for empowering me to always speak up and to always live my truth. Thank you for never trying to constrain my selfhood and my spirit. It is to you, I continue to owe my life to, and find the strength to persevere, fight, and love each day.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LGBT = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender

QTIPOC = Queer, Transgender, Intersex People of Colour

1 INTRODUCTION

“Placing black queer women in the center[...] at a time when black masculinity and white queers are at the forefront of struggle, is a courageous and revolutionary act” (Kiesling 2017:11)

My thesis focused on queer Black women’s experiences in a variety of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) nightlife in the United Kingdom (UK). LGBT nightlife refers to night-time spaces which centre explicitly and/or implicitly non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender identities. My research addressed the question: How do queer Black women navigate and negotiate LGBT+ nightlife? As a queer Black multiracial woman born in the United Kingdom to Afro- and Indo-Guyanese parents, I was drawn to this topic because I felt it crucial to document aspects of queer Black women’s daily lives in the UK which mainstream British society has historically ignored. I was also influenced by my own experiences of socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion throughout my life as well as my interdisciplinary academic background in both Geography and Sociology. This research is important to attend to the void of literature and documentation that explores queer Black women’s experiences in public spaces, both in the UK and globally.

I focused on nightlife due to how nightlife acts as a site for LGBT people to find and create networks and communities as well as explore their sexualities. In my research, I explored queer Black women’s experiences in a variety of nightlife: both white, male-dominated LGBT nightlife and Queer, Transgender, Intersex People of Colour (QTIPOC) nightlife across the United Kingdom. While LGBT+ nightlife purports to be race- and gender-neutral, QTIPOC spaces actively and intentionally prioritise queer people of colour. My prior research showed that LGBT nightlife that is not QTIPOC-centred is not neutral or inclusive spaces for all queer people and instead excludes queer Black women through micro- and macro-aggressions. On the other

hand, QTIPOC spaces were more inclusive for queer Black women, as they valued, affirmed, and honoured intersecting marginalised identities. This research aimed to understand how race and gender mediate the experiences of queer Black women within LGBT nightlife. Further, it documented the voices of queer Black woman in the UK who are largely erased from the fabric of UK society (Palmer 2020). Centring Black British feminism alongside United States (US) Black feminisms as my theoretical framework, methodological approach and analytic strategy allowed me to conduct this research in a way that elucidates the interlocking nature of systems of oppression, identities, and world-system processes such as neoliberal capitalism. This is crucial when exploring the lives of queer Black women who must continuously navigate intersecting systems of power that structure all aspects of our lives.

My research explored how queer Black women experience inclusion and exclusion when navigating LGBT nightlife, centring the emotional impacts of navigating public spaces while holding intersecting marginalised identities. Further, I problematised the binary of inclusion-exclusion by demonstrating how some individuals may experience both simultaneously. This MA thesis expanded on existing research that I conducted in 2019 where I interviewed seven queer Black women to explore their experiences of navigating white male-dominated LGBT+ nightlife and QTIPOC nightlife. Thus, there were two phases of the study. Phase 1 occurred in 2019 within my undergraduate studies and Phase 2 was conducted in 2022 for my Master's thesis. For Phase 2, I conducted 11 more interviews for a total of 18 interviews.

In both phases of the study, I found that queer Black women were excluded by physical, emotional, and sexual violence in the forms of microaggressions and macroaggressions within white male-dominated gay nightlife spaces. Additionally, institutional exclusion manifested through homonormative processes which further excluded and alienated queer Black women

while catering to white people. I also found that, for the queer Black women who had experienced both white, male-dominated *and* QTIPOC nightlife, QTIPOC nightlife offered increased inclusion - they felt more comfortable, safer, affirmed, recognised, and validated within QTIPOC nightlife.

This research has wider implications for understanding inclusionary and exclusionary practices in Western societies, as it will contribute to the growing field of critical intersectional research that demonstrates how systems of power and oppression are mutually co-constitutive. It also highlighted how intersecting oppressions are experienced by compounded marginalised groups such as queer Black women, paying particular attention to racialised patriarchies and gendered racism. Moreover, this research explored intersecting systems of power that subordinate groups of people and demonstrates how LGBT nightlife is neither race- nor gender-neutral. Findings from this research could be beneficial for organisers of LGBT nightlife, particularly those which tend to be white male-dominated, to engage in reflexivity and counter the ways in which individuals who exist at the intersections of multiple marginalised groups are excluded from their spaces. Finally, my thesis discussed wider socio-spatial processes of inclusion and exclusion in Western societies that centre and privilege white, cisgender, heterosexual, middle-class, non-disabled men.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Black Feminisms and Intersectionality

My research utilised both Black British feminism and US Black feminisms to explore the experiences of queer Black women in LGBT nightlife. Drawing on these theoretical frameworks requires an intersectional analysis, as Black feminists across these two nation-states reject the notion that individual or group experiences can be analysed through focusing on one identity or a singular oppression, or by utilising an additive approach, whereby identities are stacked upon one another. The concept of the *matrix of domination* (Hill Collins 2000) is a Black feminist tool, conceptualised within the US, that helps us understand and analyse experiences based on individuals privileged and oppressed intersecting identities. The matrix of domination “refers to how these intersecting oppressions are actually organized” (Hill Collins 2000:18), specifically as they relate to systems of power and domination. For example, there are interpersonal, disciplinary, hegemonic, and structural realms of power (Hill Collins 2000) which inform the lives of queer Black women. Black feminist thinkers in the UK and US have written extensively on how racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and other systems of oppression are interlocking (Bailey and Mobley 2019; Bryan, Dadzie, and Scafe 2018; Crenshaw 1989; Davis 1983; Hill Collins 2019; hooks 2015; Lorde 1984; Mirza 2015; Taylor 2017), which provides a useful theoretical starting point for exploring queer Black women’s experiences within LGBT nightlife.

Centring a Black British feminist theoretical approach acknowledges how Black womanhood in Britain is “entangled in the messy, racialised and classed desires of White English nationalism” (Palmer 2020:509). For this reason, it is important for me to utilise Black British feminism alongside US Black feminisms, as the specific experiences of queer Black

women in the UK cannot be separated from the socio-political, historical, and geographical context of this white-majority nation-state. Situated geographies, for example, local, national, and global contexts matter in shaping and analysing queer Black women's experiences.

While the UK and US have many similarities as they are both white-majority, male-dominated global North countries actively engaged in neo-colonialism in the global South, there remains several differences between the two. For example, there are divergent experiences of racial formation (Omi and Winant 1994), racial categorisation, and racialised social control. Further, there are significant dissimilarities in the histories of Euro-American settler-colonialism *within* the US compared with Britain's geographical "distance" from British imperialism and colonialism across the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia. Young (2000) poignantly notes the differences between African-American women and Black women in Britain:

There is an increasing recognition of the differences in our situations: for example, historically, the way in which social and sexual relations and hierarchies under slavery were organized differed in significant ways, and clearly the class system in Britain is far more institutionalized than it is in the United States and were closely connected to notions of community and national identity (48).

Thus, it is important to not homogenise or assume that the experiences of queer Black women in the UK would mirror the experiences of queer Black women in the US. The ways in which exclusion through intersecting systems of oppression occur both the UK and US are deeply connected with their specific colonial history and the historical and contemporary demographics of these nation-states.

Many theoretical frameworks are, however, interconnected globally. For example, Black British feminism is undeniably intertwined with African American feminism (Crenshaw 1989; Hill Collins 2000, 2019), decolonial feminism (Lugones 2008, 2010), and Third World feminism (Mohanty 2003) and it is crucial to acknowledge these theoretical conjunctures. Due to the extent

of US hegemony within academia across the global North, scholars such as Young (2000) have questioned the extent to which scholarship and literature focused on African-American women is applicable to a Black British context and argue that there must be greater “encouragement, awareness and validation of the work, experiences and opinions of black women in Britain” (49). Black British Feminism provides a nuanced and geographically contextualised lens to explore queer Black women’s experiences in the United Kingdom as it acknowledges the specific processes and influences of migration from Commonwealth countries as well as British legacies of imperialism and colonialism (Palmer 2020).

Black British feminism and its theoretical conjunctures with decolonial feminism and Third World feminism are all important to this research, as these theoretical frameworks all highlight the importance of acknowledging nationality, ethnicity, and citizenship status to the experiences of women worldwide. The relatively recent nature of 20th and 21st century migration from Commonwealth regions, such as the Caribbean and African continent, to the United Kingdom means that first and second-generation Black women in the UK often identify with their own, or their parents’ homelands rather than adopt a “Black-British” identity. Furthermore, according to the 2011 census, only 3% of the total population in the UK identified as “Black/African/Caribbean/Black British” (Census (ONS) 2021). Queer Black women in the UK therefore experience LGBT nightlife through a specific white colonial and white majority gaze as Black British people are yet to be accepted as historic and current parts of British society.

Moreover, Black British feminism and decolonial feminism explicitly engage with the role that colonialism and neo-colonialism play in mediating people’s experiences as well as within the formation of identity categories. Individual and group identities within contemporary understandings of race, gender, and sexuality have been influenced through colonialism, settler-

colonialism, and imperialism globally (Lowe and Manjapra 2019; Lugones 2008, 2010; Smith 1999). These colonial legacies have shaped “normative” ways of being, exacerbated binary ways of thinking, and influenced how different people are included and excluded within different spaces. These norms are often unmarked within public space but contribute to the recreation of public space through whiteness, patriarchy, and heteronormativity.

Being a queer Black woman defies colonial norms of existence and humanity: white, heterosexual, and male. As a result, queer Black women are “Othered” in unique ways that speak to intersecting systems of oppression, power, and domination. I assert that queer Black women’s experiences must include not only an understanding of intersecting systems of oppression, but also how these systems have been created in relation to colonial ideologies which dehumanise and vilify Blackness, queerness, and womanhood. Drawing on Black British feminist theory allows me to be “attentive to the political economy of gendered and sexualised racism in contemporary Britain” which are shaped by “processes of coloniality and imperialistic domination” (Palmer 2020:508). This geographical and historical context is crucial in fully analysing the experiences of queer Black women living in the UK.

2.2 Homonormativity and Heteronormativity

Compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980) and heteronormativity work to exclude and oppress non-heterosexual people across global North nation-states. Heteronormativity describes “the numerous ways in which heterosexual privilege is woven into the fabric of social life, pervasively and insidiously ordering everyday existence” (Jackson 2006:180). Spaces do not have pre-existing sexual identities, instead, spaces are constantly (re)produced and invested with sexual meanings which adhere to heteronormativity (Bell and Valentine 1995; Oswin 2008).

Further, Johnston (2001) highlights the perceived threat that queerness poses to social order, as it manifests against normative ideas of heterosexuality. These combined exclusionary forces of homophobia and heteronormativity work to other minoritised sexual orientations while maintaining heterosexuality as a privileged identity within society. This rejection and exclusion of non-heterosexuals from every day public spaces and institutions, coupled with LGBT resistance to this exclusion, has led to the emergence of explicit LGBT spaces. In large urban cities, this often takes the form of “gay” villages and/or LGBT nightlife (Binnie and Skeggs 2004; Held 2015, 2017).

The term homonormativity was first coined by Susan Stryker in the 1990s (Stryker 2008). Since its inception, there have been numerous theorists within women’s, gender and sexuality studies and geographical studies who have expanded our understanding of homonormativity. In 2002, Duggan branded a “new homonormativity,” which refers to the ways in which LGBT spaces and visibility have privileged specific identities. Homonormativity functions as a means of social exclusion in LGBT nightlife, whereby marginalised people who live at the intersections of multiple systems of oppression, for example, LGBT individuals who are also non-white, non-cisgender, disabled, genderqueer, and/or lower income are further othered and marginalised. Homonormativity is a multi-dimensional concept and can refer to the infrastructure of LGBT nightlife; for example, the music, staff demographics, and performer’s/artists’ social identities who are invited into these spaces. Structural decisions and policies inform the setting and dynamics of LGBT nightlife and have significant implications on socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion within these spaces.

More recently, homonormativity was summarised as “an assimilative movement in LGBT communities that emphasises hegemonic norms in dominant society” (Knee 2019:502). In Western

capitalist societies such as the UK, LGBT people are viewed as undesirable for capital (Casey 2007) which impacts and excludes those who have intersecting marginalised identities from public space in unique ways. While there is a growing visibility of non-heterosexuals in the Western world, this representation is largely confined to desirable and/or (hetero)normalised expressions of LGBT identities (Casey 2007).

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 LGBT Nightlife, Gay Villages and Urban Spaces

Nightlife intertwines with concepts of leisure; for example, night-time spaces are leisure spaces that operate within the night-time economy. A (night-time) space for leisure is “more than a physical site, it is both negotiated and socially constructed” (Knee 2019:501). LGBT nightlife can often be found in gay villages which were supposedly created as “safe” spaces for gay and lesbian communities to forge their identities, build relationships, and express themselves freely without the threat of violence or discrimination (VICE Life 2016). These gay villages are most often found within large metropolitan cities (urban spaces) which are typically seen as embracing ethnic or cultural differences (Florida 2002). Adams (2018:338) also argues that LGBT nightlife consists of spaces where one can be temporarily reprieved from both “belligerent heterosexuals and homophobic not-so-out queers” (Adams 2018:338).

Previous studies have often focused on the ways in which space is heterosexually (re)produced, adhering to heteronormativity (Bell and Valentine 1995; Binnie 1997; Knopp 1992), or how LGBT spaces are gendered (Binnie and Skeggs 2004a; Oswin 2008; Pritchard, Morgan, and Sedgley 2002), but rarely have addressed the ways in which spaces are simultaneously racialised or classed (Goh 2018). LGBT nightlife spaces are not immune from interlocking systems of oppression such as classism, racism, ableism, or sexism (Held 2015). Within these supposed ‘safe’ spaces, homonormativity fails to recognise the diversity of queer identities and consequently excludes intersecting marginalized groups (Hubbard 2008:644). The idea of *who* is allowed to enter gay spaces and subsequent discrimination against minoritised groups within the LGBT+ community are important to note. There is a white utopian vision of

Western gay villages/spaces as sites of liberation, when, multiple forms of interlocking systemic discrimination and oppression occur (Caluya 2008).

3.2 Socio-Spatial Exclusion and Inclusion

Socio-spatial exclusion is defined by Pathak (2009) as “exclusion of a group of residents on biases of race, religion, income or regional origin, from access to everything that the city space has to offer.” This definition, however, ignores multiple identity characteristics such as gender and sexuality from the conceptualisation of socio-spatial exclusion. Exclusion and inclusion within spatial landscapes must be analysed through an intersectional lens, accounting for race, gender, and sexuality to fully analyse *anti-black heterotopias* (Bailey and Shabazz 2014). This acknowledgement and analysis are not present in most existing literature. Anti-black heterotopias expose how,

race, gender, and sexuality expressed and constituted in and through spatial landscapes, while highlighting how gender and sexual minorities’ subjection to public ridicule and violence their essential function in the overall erotic economy (Bailey and Shabazz 2014:318).

The concept of anti-black heterotopias is crucial in the theorisation of “gender and sexual geographies of blackness” (Bailey and Shabazz 2014:318). Black feminist scholar hooks (1991) names US society as a “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (10). This notion is largely applicable to the United Kingdom, given similar processes of elite white male domination. Institutions such as those within the night-time economy, serve an integral role in maintaining and (re)producing inclusion for privileged groups, especially white, cisgender, heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied men, while excluding all other groups.

Exclusion and inclusion are often seen through binary thinking; however, these processes can be experienced simultaneously in relation to different aspects of queer Black women’s

experiences. It is essential to disrupt Eurocentric ideologies which construct experiences, identities, and concepts as oppositional (Lugones 2008; Oyěwùmí 1997; Smith 1999). Instead, we can think of exclusion and inclusion operating on multiple spectrums and reject binary discourses, as queer Black women can experience moments of conflict, exclusion, and inclusion concurrently in different spaces.

3.3 Queer Black Women and LGBT Spaces

Queer Black women occupy a unique position within Western society and are often subjected to multiple intersecting systems of oppression, power, and domination. This experience can be emotionally overwhelming and isolating (Nayak 2015). To be a queer Black woman is to be often ignored, disregarded, or silenced within multiple communities where one would hope to feel a sense of inclusion and belonging – Black communities, LGBT communities and women’s communities (Bowleg 2008; Lorde 1984). Not only are our personal experiences often disavowed within our personal and intimate lives, but there is also a dearth of scholarship and literature which focuses on queer Black women’s experiences. Greene (2000) centres lesbian and bisexual African-American women in her study to argue that a holistic examination of race, gender, and sexuality is needed to understand queer Black women’s experiences. She furthers this argument by stating the importance of centring queer Black women in her field (Psychology) because of the empirical erasure within ethnic studies and Afrocentric psychologies (Greene 2000). Empirical erasure can be extended to address the erasure of queer Black women’s experiences in Sociology and other disciplines. Therefore, this thesis aims to partially fill a void of empirical research focused on queer Black women’s experiences within public space. Unfortunately, there is often a focus on a singular, often marginalised, identity around which

space is organised and so those who occupy intersecting marginalised identities are frequently ignored (Fox and Ore 2010). For example, research has explored how LGBT spaces are gendered (Bell and Binnie 2016; Binnie and Skeggs 2004b; Binnie and Valentine 1999); however, much of this research overlooks how LGBT spaces are also racialised (Fox and Ore 2010).

Despite this erasure, GALOP (2001) found that 57% of Black LGBT people in the United Kingdom experience discrimination within LGBT spaces. Similarly, Akhtar (2018) found that 61% of Black LGBT people experience negative treatment within local LGBT networks due to their race and/or ethnicity in the United Kingdom. Discrimination within LGBT nightlife is exemplified in racist and racialising practices such as door policies and denying entry into bars (Loiacano 1993); non-consensual touching, objectification and fetishisation (Angry Black Hoemo 2016; Held 2015, 2017); as well as intentionally avoiding “Black” music genres to discourage Black LGBT folks from entering these spaces (Mason-John and Khambatta 1993). Clearly, queer Black people in the UK are affected by racial discrimination within LGBT communities; however, less is known about the simultaneous racialised-gendered experiences specifically for queer Black women.

3.4 QTIPOC Spaces

Some queer people of colour prioritise fostering and building QTIPOC spaces and community over fighting for inclusion within white, male-dominated LGBT spaces (Leeds LGBT+ Mapping Project 2018; Opoku-Gyimah 2018). For example, Bernard, Balani, and Gupta (2014) state that the term QTIPOC is not only used as an identity category, but also as a practice of solidarity and a method of organising. Rather than focusing QTIPOC resistance through demanding inclusion in spaces that have been structured to intentionally exclude Black and

brown people, which can be exhausting and unsuccessful, some QTIPOC have directed their efforts and energies towards forming or finding QTIPOC-centred spaces. Johnson's (2005) work on Black gay vernacular and transgressive domestic spaces discusses how US-based Black gay dance clubs have provided a social space where queer Black men do not have to encounter racist door policies such as gatekeeping and dress codes that are so often present in predominantly white gay nightlife or the homophobia of heterosexual Black nightlife.

Patriarchy still pervades literature on queer people of colour and so similar research needs to be carried out to address the experiences of queer Black women. Loiacano's (1989) work highlights how lesbian communities can marginalise and exclude Black lesbians, leaving them in a liminal space. In taking a critical geographical approach to Black space and spatiality, Bailey and Shabazz (2014) argue that whilst Black bodies *always* exist outside of the boundaries of normative whiteness, Black queer people are additionally “rendered as outside the spatial formation of black communities” (318). They go on to further state that “black queer space, for example, is placeless, a space without geographical coordinates” (Bailey and Shabazz 2014:318). This placeless-ness is exacerbated for queer Black women due to how patriarchy intersects with racism and homophobia.

QTIPOC spaces could be one possibility in countering exclusion as a result of the intersecting oppression that queer Black women face within white, male-dominated LGBT nightlife. In the United Kingdom, there has been an emergence of nightlife that prioritises QTIPOC or queer, transgender, and intersex women of colour (QTIWOC). Many of these nightlife organisations, such as Pxssy Palace, BBZ, Urban World, and Queer Bruk in London, United Kingdom include policies which explicitly reject several forms of prejudice. For example, organisations such as Pxssy Palace – a space that prioritises women, femmes of colour, and other

QTIPOC centres a “zero tolerance to harassment of any kind” (ICA 2018) stating on their website and social media that:

Body shaming, slut shaming, racism, ableism, ageism, transphobia, homophobia, xenophobia, and fatphobia is not tolerated at Pxssy Palace nor do we have any prejudice based on class, language ability, religious beliefs, and gender presentation (ICA 2018)

Specifically, they market their nights as a celebration of “hip-hop and R&B music against a backdrop of discrimination facing people of colour in London’s nightclub culture” (ICA 2018).

Another space, BBZ, which is both an exhibition and “turn up” (club night) explicitly prioritises women, transgender and non-binary people of colour and asserts that:

...any behaviour deemed as homophobic, transphobic, xenophobic, ableist, classist, racist, disrespectful or hateful will not be tolerated (Tart 2019).

Although it is not clear what follows if discrimination occurs, by centring these policies in a very explicit, intentional, and visible way within their night-time spaces and promotional materials, these organisations seek to provide a more inclusive and safer space for QTIPOC, including queer Black women, to enjoy and be affirmed within nightlife. Additionally, much QTIPOC nightlife exists at the intersection of “political activism and a good night out” (Dazed 2018), connecting diasporic queer Black communities with queer Black communities in the global South. Pxssy Palace has raised money for LGBT youth in Jamaica and ensured that funds exist for trans femmes of colour to travel home safely within the UK (Dazed 2018). These connections with Black communities abroad are central to Black British feminism (Matiluko 2020; Palmer 2020; Young 2000) due to our diasporic identities and ties across UK borders. Organisations such as Pxssy Palace and BBZ are described by attendees as “a vision of what the future of nightlife should be” (Dazed 2018).

Johnson’s (2005) work explores the importance of home for Black LGBT people. He argues that the notion of house parties derives from Black people’s practice of creating their own

spaces to socialise because of racist exclusion which has limited mobility and access to public spaces. Alternatively, house parties have acted as “agents of solidarity against racism but also communal sites where black homosexuals could love and support one another” (Johnson 2005:256).

4 METHODS

4.1 Building on Existing Research

This research expands upon undergraduate research that I conducted in 2019 theoretically, methodologically, and analytically. For example, I did not engage theoretically or analytically with Black British feminism in my prior research. My undergraduate research situated my findings within US Black feminism and decolonial theory which did not allow for a full understanding of how queer Black *British* women's experiences are situated within a particular history that is specific to the British context. Black British feminism not only strengthened my current work theoretically but will also contribute to Black British archives of queer Black British womanhood. Unearthing contemporary queer Black British women's experiences is important to counter colonial epistemological violence targeting Black women and other oppressed groups in the UK.

Methodologically, my research developed as I have substantially more knowledge on different types of feminist and/or decolonial methods and methodologies. Furthermore, I have learnt skills in qualitative analysis utilising software such as NVivo, MAXQDA and Dedoose, through both academic and program evaluation work. This research additionally benefitted from a growth in my coding strategy. Coding and analysis within Phase 1 took place by hand (with coloured highlighters) and did not allow for me to create child codes or order codes cohesively. In Phase 2, I utilised *Dedoose* to better organise and grow my research as well as enact intersectionality throughout the analytical process. Using various qualitative software over the past three years allowed me to conduct deeper analysis through features such as descriptors, visual charts, and analytical tools like *code x descriptors*. Furthermore, I revised and extended

my interview guide to reduce leading questions and to allow themes to emerge from the data in a more organic way (see Appendix 1 and 2).

Between Phases 1 and 2, I have been exposed to and engaged in a plethora of new literature, ways of thinking and Sociological thought. I have taken multiple women's, gender, and sexuality studies classes which expanded my thinking in an inter- or *anti*-disciplinary way. Conducting ten more interviews and incorporating the theoretical knowledge I gained since my inception into graduate school allowed this MA thesis to go above and beyond my prior research.

4.2 Methodology

I employed a Black feminist methodological approach that centres decoloniality and intersectionality, as Black feminism asks, in multiple ways, why the voices of the oppressed are not heard (Nayak 2015). This approach is particularly important due to the lack of research, documentation, and narratives of queer Black women within academia. A decolonial Black feminist methodology asserts that apolitical scholarship is not possible (Mohanty 1984). Additionally, it allows me to recognise that as a critical woman of colour scholar, "We are intimately connected to theory. It is part of our bodies and minds" (Esposito and Evans-Winters 2022:26). This rings true for both theory and methodology as they are deeply intertwined (Esposito and Evans-Winters 2022). In contrast to Eurocentric positivist measures of validity and reliability, the activism of Black feminist methodology is an erotic process of feeling which allows the researcher to be open about and reflexive of their positionality throughout the research process (Hill Collins 2000; Nayak 2015). My research exemplifies *emotionally invested research* (Travers 2018) as it recognises that there is "no way to separate theory from your research" because "theory and experience are intermingled" (Esposito and Evans-Winters 2022:26).

As I identify as a queer multiracial Black woman, I took an insider's position on the bases of my race, gender, and sexuality. Alcadipani, Westwood, and Rosa (2015) argue that one's social location can have significant implications for one's research, as a researcher's identities can determine what they can accomplish. For example, insider status can facilitate rapport and in interviews as well as allow for embodied research. Some scholars (see Bucerius 2013) suggest that being an insider can provoke issues of role conflict and confusion. However, by utilising Black feminist methodology, I can be reflexive of my positionality throughout my research. Further, although I shared identity characteristics with participants, I differed from some based on disability, age, class, educational status amongst other identity categories.

My research does not aim to be representative of *all* queer Black women; rather, it intends to document the lived experiences of some queer Black women, which will inherently speak to processes of socio-spatial exclusion for multiply marginalised individuals and groups. I embrace Christian's (1988) critique of the impetus within academia to create universalising theory on behalf of all queer Black women. My research aims to speak to similarities in contextually grounded experiences; however, it also recognises and affirms difference and variation within queer Black women's experiences (Stanley and Wise 1990).

4.3 Sampling and Data Collection

Interviews are a useful method for exploratory qualitative analysis (Gerring 2017). In 2019, I conducted seven interviews exploring how queer Black women navigate LGBT nightlife (Phase 1). For this MA research, I conducted 10 additional semi-structured interviews with queer Black women in the United Kingdom between March and July 2022 (Phase 2). Between Phase 1 and 2, the COVID-19 pandemic affected multiple aspects of society, including one's

ability to engage in nightlife. Phase 2 of this study was conducted transnationally, as I am currently based in the United States. Therefore, I utilised *Zoom* software to conduct interviews and complete Phase 2 of this research.

My interview guide was updated between Phase 1 and 2 of this study to lessen leading questions and allow for themes to emerge from the data more organically. I began the interview by asking several demographic questions which included questions about participants' racial and ethnic identity, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, class background, current class status, level of education, geographic location, and age (see Appendix A). This was crucial as I wanted to enact intersectionality at every stage of the research process. Allowing participants to self-identify their identities enabled me to document and analyse their experiences in relation to various aspects of their positionality in UK society. It also enabled me to identify possible differences in experience based on aspects of one's identity, beyond race, gender, and sexuality. Within my findings, I included self-descriptors following each participant's pseudonym. These descriptors reflect the specific language which participants used to identify themselves. While my study focused on queer Black women, during the gap between Phase 1 and Phase 2 of my study, one participant transitioned from identifying as a cis woman to identifying as non-binary. I chose to retain this participant's experience as gender identity transitions are a part of queer Black womanhood.

To recruit participants, I used a combination of purposive and snowball sampling strategies through existing personal networks as well as social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. On these social media platforms, I recruited from several affinity groups that centre LGBT communities and/or QTPOC communities. Combining purposive and snowball sampling was particularly effective as I collected data on the lived

experiences of a “hidden population” (Noy 2008:330) and these sampling strategies use and activate existing social networks. Snowball sampling is also useful as my research is focused on a group that is relatively low in numbers (Baltar and Brunet 2012). Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, employing virtual sampling strategies also helped me to facilitate access, expand the scope of the study and reduce time (Benfield and Szlemko 2006) as well as further my connections transnationally. Moreover, historically, snowball sampling has often been used in research that explores sexuality (Bell 1997) as it aids in finding individuals who live outside of the parameters of heteronormativity and who may not be publicly “out” or part of formal LGBT networks.

Interviews lasted between 1-2.5 hours, depending on rapport with the participant and their willingness to share. My interview guide consisted of 18 semi-structured questions and follow-up questions to guide the interview. Consent was gathered verbally and at the beginning of interviews. After I conducted my interviews, I used the online transcription service *otter.ai* to upload audio recordings of the interviews and begin my transcription process. Once my transcripts were transcribed on the service, I listened to each interview and corrected the transcripts to ensure that there were no errors. I allowed for participants to choose their own pseudonyms so that they will be able to identify themselves in future publications and labelled each transcript using their chosen pseudonym. Nightlife spaces were renamed to further ensure participants’ anonymity. After I finished cleaning up the transcripts, I uploaded the transcript as a Microsoft Word document to the qualitative coding software *Dedoose*.

4.4 Data Analysis

Utilising *Dedoose* enabled me to organise my transcripts in an ordered way to facilitate my coding strategy. I added descriptors such as a participant's self-identified racial and ethnic background, class background, current class position, age, educational background, disability status, and gender expression. Then, I conducted line-by-line coding to code for emerging and recurring themes utilising intersectionality as a methodological and analytical tool (Esposito and Evans-Winters 2022). After, I used *Dedoose*'s analytical tools to run descriptor x code tables to identify whether certain themes emerged more dependent on participants' varying demographics beyond their Blackness, womanhood, and queerness. Overall, I used 16 different descriptors and 73 codes. These codes were applied over 1000 codes across transcripts.

4.5 Research Population and Linguistic Limitations

Utilising any language comes with theoretical and methodological limitations. Eurocentric terms such as “lesbian,” “bisexual,” and, “queer” may exclude those with ties to the global South, where such terms less common or there are alternate local forms of language in relation to identities (Glave 2008). While I recognise the linguistic limitations of “queer,” “Black,” and, “woman,” I settled on these with an approach of utilising them in the most expansive and inclusive ways possible.

In my research, *queer* is used as an umbrella term to denote those whose sexuality and/or gender identities deviate from sex and gender binaries, heteronormativity, and cisnormativity. *Black* is a contested term within the United Kingdom due to histories of “political Blackness” whereby people of African and Asian descent banded together over a common oppression. This usage of Black has lost prominence and popularity in the last few decades due to the ways that it

homogenises experiences and erases people of African and Asian descent. For this reason, I utilised “Black” to refer to individuals who have African heritage, both from Africa and the Caribbean. I draw on a Black lesbian definition of Blackness as individuals “who are part of the African diaspora including Black, African, African-American, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Indigenous, Afro-Latina, Afro-Asian, Afro-European” (Beyond Bold and Brave n.d.). Due to histories of migration and Black demographics of the United Kingdom, all of my participants identified as from Africa or the Caribbean. Furthermore, as a multiracial Black woman, it was important for me to include multiracial Black people, whether they identify as mixed, mixed-race, biracial, or multiracial.

There are also limitations in using the terminology “Black British.” Black British is a fraught identifier due to the ways it erases our individual and group connections to the global South (i.e., identifying as Guyanese, Jamaican, or Nigerian) by collapsing these differences into one homogenous term. Terminology such as “Black British” is increasingly used by 3rd and 4th generations of immigrants and with increasing inter-cultural/-national/-ethnic/-racial relationships between Caribbean, Asian and African peoples in the UK. Additionally, my research included experiences of womanhood in the most inclusive way possible. I employed “women” to refer to all who self-identify as women.

I hoped to acknowledge and affirm both similarities and differences between queer Black women in order to understand our experiences holistically and with appropriate nuance and complexity. I intended to counter the “pathetic pretence” (Lorde 1984:2) whereby differences between women’s experiences are ignored or presumed not to exist, while also theorising about common themes among different queer Black women’s experiences. My research aims to ground

queer Black British women's experiences contextually while recognising and affirming their complexities.

4.6 Overview of Study

This study set out to answer the questions: (1) How are queer Black women included and excluded within LGBT nightlife in the UK, and (2) How do queer Black women navigate and negotiate LGBT nightlife in the UK? In the following section, I summarise my key findings through a focus on the discrimination and homonormativity that increased exclusion for queer Black women navigating white male-dominated LGBT nightlife. Within the theme of discrimination, I created three sub-themes which were: physical and sexual violence, fetishisation, and appropriation. For my homonormativity finding, I focused on white patriarchies; heterosexual presence; institutional violence; and music. For both major themes, I also discussed how QTPOC nightlife can serve as a counter-space, offering increased inclusion for queer Black women. These findings help to fill a void in literature across disciplines as queer Black women's experiences are rarely centred. Within literature focused on nightlife, there appear to be no existing studies focused solely on queer Black women's experiences across nations. Chapter 5 discusses my findings.

5 FINDINGS

In this section, I discuss the key findings of my study. I focused on the most prominent themes that emerged within the interviews with participants. I separated my findings into two categories: discrimination and homonormativity. In this chapter, I discuss discrimination and in Chapter 6 I discuss the theme of homonormativity. All participants experienced discrimination in a plethora of ways ranging from microaggressions (such as fetishisation and appropriation) to macro-aggressive acts (including physical and sexual violence). Participants not only experienced anti-Blackness, but also experienced misogynoir due to their racial and gender identities as Black women. Misogynoir, a term created by Black feminist scholar Moya Bailey, refers to the unique compounded experiences of Black women whereby their experiences of racism are gendered, and their experiences of sexism are racialised (Bailey 2010). I took an intersectional approach to analyse my findings to highlight these unique instances of gendered racism and racialised sexism from Black women's experiences. While my findings illustrate how gendered racism and racialised sexism exclude queer Black women in LGBT+ nightlife that is white- and male-dominated, queer Black women in my study also had to navigate other intersecting systems of oppression such as ableism, colourism, and classism, which simultaneously shaped these instances of discrimination and exclusion.

Moreover, homonormative processes excluded participants. Homonormativity structured LGBT nightlife so that it was white male-dominated. Processes that enact homonormativity included institutional decisions about music genres; the presence of heterosexuals; and neoliberal capitalist forces such as rebranding and high entrance costs. Combined, discrimination and homonormativity othered, violated, and excluded queer Black women from a majority of LGBT nightlife. These recurring themes highlighted by participants are motivating factors in the

expansion of QTPOC centred nightlife which offered increased inclusion for queer Black women.

5.1 Discrimination

In this section, I discuss the how the queer Black women in my study experienced physical violence, sexual violence, and fetishisation. Participants experienced discrimination from both white men and white women. Some participants discussed white racism broadly while others specifically highlighted the intersection of whiteness and patriarchy. The latter speaks specifically to how white men have created and maintained white patriarchies within LGBT communities and/or spaces; thus, queer Black women face gendered racism and racialised sexism in the form of misogynoir. White women additionally uphold white patriarchies due to their allegiances to whiteness. Regardless of the enactor of discrimination, queer Black women were othered, alienated, and violated within white male-dominated LGBT nightlife. These experiences led many queer Black women to avoid white, male-dominated LGBT nightlife and to seek out QTPOC nightlife where white patriarchy is less present. In the first section I discuss participants' experiences of physical and sexual violence.

5.1.1 Physical and Sexual Violence

Several participants shared experiences of physical and sexual violence within white, male-dominated LGBT nightlife. White people physically and/or sexually violated queer Black women through non-consensual touch of hair and other body parts, grabbing hair and other body parts, placing genitalia on queer Black women, and spitting on queer Black women.

Deka, a mixed Afro-Caribbean and white lesbian, shared two experiences of physical and sexual violence. She experienced this violence in a white, male-dominated LGBT club. On one night out, she had her hair, which she wore in an Afro, spat on by a white man who she “presumes to be gay” who proceeded to laugh at her with his white friend:

...right at the end of the night, this guy spat on me, and I just felt it and I heard it and I was like... I kinda froze... I felt my hair and I could feel it and I turned around and he was laughing. When I clocked [realised] what happened I just ran outside. I was like I’m done. And I’ve not been back since.

This experience is not only rooted in anti-Blackness and misogynoir (Bailey 2010) but also the specific dehumanisation of Black women and our bodies (Jackson 2020). This white man felt not only emboldened enough to engage in this physical violence and non-consensual dissemination of his bodily fluids, but also laughed about it afterwards, demonstrating the ways in which violence towards Black women is trivialized and normalized by those who hold power and privilege within society, namely white men. Although not certain, Deka presumed this man to be gay as she shared with me that she’s “always had bad experiences with guys... whether gay or not” which demonstrates the ways in which sexuality does not serve as a solidarity mechanism between non-heterosexual white people and non-heterosexual Black people. Despite his non-heterosexual identity, his social location as a white male and own relationship to white patriarchy influenced him to carry out common acts of heterosexual white male violence. In this particular case, targeting a queer Black woman within this white, male-dominated LGBT night-time space.

On a separate night out to another white, male-dominated LGBT club, Deka had a white man insert his penis into her hand without consent. These horrific experiences can be related to the problematic typologies of Black women as sex objects (Caluya 2008) or the jezebel stereotype (Hill Collins 2000) which contributes to a hyper-sexualisation of Black women. Deka viewed these experiences as specific attacks on her intersecting identity as a queer Black woman.

She told me that she was often “the only one there” and that she felt like “there’s a target on my head.” This sentiment speaks to Dekka’s experiences in white male-dominated LGBT spaces whereby queer Black women are often hyper-visible due to the overwhelming whiteness within LGBT nightlife. Dekka wanted to wear her hair naturally, in an Afro, which white men specifically targeted, making her feel unsafe and attacked. Unfortunately, queer Black women are not exempt from facing violence within LGBT nightlife despite sharing non-heterosexual identities with the white male-majority clientele.

LGBT spaces are often conceptualised and considered safe spaces, however, white patriarchies in these spaces mean that often they are not always, or ever, inclusive of multiply marginalised identities such as queer Black women (Held 2015; 2017; Fox and Ore 2010). Despite gay white men’s marginalized sexual identity, they still enact white patriarchal violence against Black women, which mirrors power dynamics of broader heteronormative society. Violence within LGBT nightlife cannot be adequately understood without understanding interlocking systems of oppression. Dekka’s experiences exemplify how gendered racism, racialised sexism, and misogynoir operate within LGBT spaces.

Physical and sexual violations of queer people of colour is so common that some QTIPOC night-time spaces have created policies to alleviate the potential for risk and ensure attendees’ safety. While all of the participants identified as cisgender women or non-binary people, they highlighted the increased harm which Black transgender women face when navigating nightlife. For example, several participants discussed inclusive policies that one QTIPOC event instilled as a result of normative racialised transphobic violence. This specific event utilised ticket revenue to provide free taxis for Black transgender women to make sure that

they got home safe after a night out. E, a 27-year-old Nigerian queer/lesbian woman, discussed this reality of violence enacted against transgender women:

you know, in an ideal world, we wouldn't have to pay for taxis, for trans women to get home. You know, in an ideal world, we're not having to worry about, like, people who are not a part of our community trying to come in and disrupt, do you know what I mean? [...] because the reality is, these people are, you know, they're being killed. Like, they're not just being harassed in the street or drinks thrown in their face, or people shouting transphobic slurs... people are murdering them.

E's concern for Black trans women who attend LGBT nightlife speaks to the violence that is experienced both within these spaces and within broader society where there is heightened prevalence of physical and sexual violence towards Black transgender women (Halliwell 2018).

Those who choose to frequent night-time spaces must travel, and so the experience of a "night out" does not begin and end when queer Black women enter and exit these night-time spaces. Instead, a "night out" begins when queer Black women leave their homes and step out into UK society, which has been and is dominated by white, cisgender, heterosexual men. Understanding that LGBT nightlife incorporates travelling to and from LGBT night-time spaces is an important queer Black feminist observation because it demonstrates the hegemony of transphobia and homophobia within the fabric of UK society, where whiteness, cisnormativity and heteronormativity are embedded in interlocking systems that impact emotional, physical, and sexual geographies. While many queer Black cisgender women face violence daily, E's comments highlight the disturbing and fatal reality for many transgender women, particularly Black transgender women who are "especially vulnerable to attacks, sexual assault and murder" (Halliwell 2019:8).

Other participants discussed experiences of sexual violence or sexualising comments by both white club attendees and white security staff. For example, Zora, a mixed Nigerian, and white bisexual woman, had multiple experiences "being groped by random strangers" and Rita,

another mixed Nigerian and white bisexual woman, shared that a white man shouted at her, “I bet you’re a freak, aren’t you!” Additionally, Deka was told by both gay white men and women that, “I’ve never seen a Black vagina before” and “I’ve never been with a Black girl before.” These comments align with Greene’s (2000) work on the tendency of white gay men and white lesbians to eroticise and objectify lesbians of colour. The comments that participants shared with me were explicitly sexualised and dehumanised and objectified queer Black women’s bodies and personhood. White men and women within LGBT nightlife often view queer Black women through a white patriarchal gaze which constrains queer Black women’s freedom and agency over their own bodies while simultaneously reducing and dehumanising them to racialised-sexualised stereotypes and body parts (Hill Collins 2000; Jackson 2020).

Participants also experienced unwanted sexual harassment and assault from security staff at LGBT nightlife venues. Mya, a mixed Black, Jamaican and white British woman, shared that she experienced unwanted sexual contact from a bouncer at an LGBT club:

...there was an incident in first year [of university] where there was actually a Black bouncer who was being like... he was very touchy-feely... he wasn’t around for very long; I think he got fired but yeah, he was very touchy-feely...

Bouncers use their disciplinary power (Hill Collins 2000) to regulate people; however, this power is often used as a tool of harassment. Mya’s statement speaks to men’s position of power within society in the UK and globally whereby men weaponize their conferred dominance over women through non-consensual touching and other forms of violence (Johnson 2001). Though security staff are meant to ensure the safety of those attending an event, several queer Black women described inappropriate behaviours from these staff. This harassment ranged from unwanted sexual touch and sexualising comments to inadequate responses where security staff

did not remove white male club attendees who enacted sexual violence against queer Black women. For example, after Deka was sexually assaulted by a white man, she told me that:

“I’d seen him before on nights out and I did tell the bouncer and they did kick him out because he caused other problems, but they didn’t take him out straight away. Like I watched until he like went up to this girl and he was tryna kiss her neck and she pushed him off and then she went and reported it and then they kicked him out...”

Security staff play a role in upholding violence against queer Black women when they do not act immediately after violent incidents such as these occurring. By waiting for this man to sexually assault multiple women before he was removed from the club, a clear message is sent to women that sexual violence is not taken seriously. These experiences with security staff elucidate how interpersonal, disciplinary, and structural domains of power and control work in tandem to uphold white patriarchies and enact violence against queer Black women.

5.1.2 *Fetishisation*

In this section I discuss participants' experiences with fetishisation within these spaces. Fetishisation is defined by Stacey and Forbes (2022) as “fixation on a bodily part or characteristic that people associate with a member from a group based on racial sexual stereotypes” (373). Fetishisation was noted by numerous participants through experiences such as having their hair touched without consent as well as unwarranted comments about one’s hair and other racialised features. For example, Aaliyah, a Black Jamaican lesbian told me that:

I’ve had people in Nirvana and Aqueduct go like “O. M. G. Your hair! O. M. G. GIRL IT’S SO GOOOOOOD.” And I’m like, stop. Please stop. People have grabbed my hair multiple times.

In this instance, her use of the word “grabbed” is significant as it indicates the aggressive and forceful nature of this non-consensual touching. Deka also discussed having her hair touched without consent: “I always get someone touching my hair, some random person running their

dirty hands through my hair.” Aaliyah and Deka’s experiences exemplify white people’s sentiments of entitlement, possession, and disrespect towards queer Black women. Aaliyah stated that she viewed these experiences as “hands down fetishisation” demonstrating the ways in which queer Black women are objectified and fetishized within white male-dominated LGBT nightlife. In these night-time spaces, Black women’s bodies, including features such as Black hair textures and hairstyles, are viewed as “exotic” features for white people to ogle, comment on, and touch without consent. White people’s comfort in disregarding the bodily autonomy of queer Black women in these spaces speaks to the ways in which Black women are dehumanised, objectified and fetishised through white patriarchies.

Although some forms of touch may be desired by some within LGBT nightlife, the aforementioned instances occurred without consent. Experiences of fetishisation are highlighted by Held (2017) who writes about white desire to touch Black women’s hair as “racial exotification” (549). Touching in this way cannot be separated from the racialised power dynamics where the white people doing the touching feels entitled to consume the body of *the Other* (hooks 2015) – in this case, queer Black women. Nala, a 22-year-old Black British non-binary person, summarised this ideology as: “you’re not seen as a human being – you’re seen as a fetish.” This notion of dehumanisation is further discussed by The Leeds LGBT+ Mapping Project (2018), who highlight how racism is often expressed in ownership over non-white people’s bodies through touching queer Black women’s hair without permission. Further, hair is often a significant racial marker for Black people, particularly Black women, and so touching Black women’s hair non-consensually should be understood within the context of legacies of Black/African inferiority in societies that operate through Eurocentric beauty standards (Hunter 2005) such as the UK, where curly, coily, and kinky Black hair is devalued and stigmatised.

A few of the participants mentioned frequenting nightlife that centres intersections of LGBT cultures and kink cultures. These night-time spaces are frequented by people of different races, genders, and sexual orientations. Lucinda, a Black British Caribbean female, told me that kink nightlife was an important part of her queer identity, however, she felt that fetishisation was exacerbated within LGTBQ+ kink nightlife compared with non-kink LGBT nightlife:

...there is also that fear, always that fear like within society and navigating the dating world of being like fetishised and things like that but it's a little bit more heightened when you're in a kink space, because you don't know if someone's into like race play and things like that. So, I know for some POC, they just feel a little bit uncomfortable.

Lucinda's sentiment speaks to the emotional labour and discomfort of racial fetishisation which occurs in both kink and non-kink nightlife. Specifically, Lucinda elucidates the ways in which racialised-sexualised fetishisation manifests within spaces explicitly centred around erotic pleasure. For example, people of colour are 17 times more likely to feel fetishised at BDSM events (Erickson et al. 2022). Although some women of colour enjoy sexualised race play, defined as "a whole range of erotic scenarios based on consensual humiliation and submission of the members of one race or ethnicity by the members of another" (Kuzmanovic 2018:71), Lucinda did not want to engage in this specific kink that can be linked to longstanding histories of white physical and/or sexual violence against Black women (Hill Collins 2004). Lucinda's sentiments are not uncommon – because of (gendered) racial fetishisation that Black and Brown people often experience in white-dominated kink spaces, those who enjoy and centre kink in their lives have created their own kink spaces whereby the intersections of race, pleasure, and pain can be enjoyed and honoured. As Ajanaku (2022) writes about one POC-centred kink space:

[it] was born from a very real frustration that many people of colour face in white-majority kink spaces wherein we become even more of a minority and colourful objects to gawk at and take photos of. You are left with nights where these tricky dynamics aren't handled respectfully within a context that acknowledges them.

Here, Ajanaku (2022) highlights the necessity for LGBT and/or kink spaces which affirm all aspects of one's identity and intentionally acknowledge those who exist at the intersections of multiple marginalised groups.

5.1.3 Cultural Appropriation

Five participants shared with me the prevalence of white male appropriation of Black culture, specifically Black queer culture, which made them feel uncomfortable, tokenised, and offended. There is a history of white co-optation and appropriation of Black culture within LGBT communities, especially non-heterosexual white men appropriating culture created by Black women (Davis 2021). Cultural appropriation refers to “the act of taking of a cultural product that is produced by members of another culture” (Mosley and Biernat 2021:309) whereby asymmetrical power relations also exist. Cultural appropriation can be seen as a form of discrimination when unequal power dynamics are present as it involves the extraction and co-optation of important historical artefacts, tangible or otherwise, for use by a more privileged group. Among the participants, appropriation of Black (women's) culture was found through white people's language, mannerisms, dancing and acts of tokenisation. These forms of appropriation were discussed by the participants as offensive and discriminatory.

Language was one way in which white gay men appropriated Black culture. Keisha discussed how she felt an “overwhelming discomfort” when white people would approach her within LGBT nightlife and say phrases to her such as “YASSS QUEEN! OH MY GOD! SERVE!” She elaborated on her discomfort stating that these white people:

don't understand, like, not even the repercussions, but just the backlog and the history of even just a movement or like the words or the phrases that people were saying.

Keisha told me she felt “angry but I think also upset” at the careless ways in which white people co-opted Black culture with a lack of awareness of the racialised historical context in which certain language has been created. As Davis (2021) writes the root of this language originates from “a deep and complex history of the Black and queer communities” (14) which accounts for the systematic oppression that comes with being both queer and Black.

Aaliyah and Nala discussed the ways in which they were discomforted by white gay men’s appropriation of stereotyped Black women’s mannerisms and speech. They viewed this as both fetishisation and appropriation of Black (queer) women and related cultures. Nala shared that white gay men “seem to use [queer Black women] as a prop to legitimise their gayness” and that she would be approached and viewed “as a token.” Further, Aaliyah told me:

...you know the way gay guys will be like... basically adopt Black women’s mannerisms and be like “yassss queen MmmHmm!” And I’m like don’t do that to me. ‘Cos I am not your SISTA.

Angry Black Hoemo (2016) discusses the ways in which white LGBT people, who he refers to as “WhiteGayze” both rationalise and perpetuate racist behaviour towards queer Black people through the appropriation of slang, mannerisms and trends created by Black and brown people. Moreover, phrases such as “Yasss queen” stem from Black and Latinx ballroom culture yet are “appropriated by the larger LGBT+ community and mainstream culture” (Davis 2021:15). The incorrect and inappropriate usage of language and mannerisms that derive from Black queer culture mean that queer Black people often “feel a loss of ownership” (Davis 2021:16) and the negative impacts of white co-optation.

Both Lucinda and E expressed that white people within these spaces were “doing too much” when they engaged in acts of appropriating Black culture. Lucinda then expounded on her experiences as being hyper-visible and fetishized within LGBT nightlife:

I noticed that I did get a lot of attention from like, white gay men who were there and it just made me very hyper aware of like, how much of white gay culture is just appropriated Black culture. And I was like, do they just love me that much because they realise that I'm their blueprint?

Lucinda demonstrated her understanding of how white gay culture extracts aspects of Black culture for white people's own gain. She discusses how she, as a queer Black woman is "their blueprint" illustrating the co-optation of Blackness. This was a common experience that the queer Black women in this study were forced to navigate and made them feel uncomfortable, upset, and angry. Mosley and Biernat (2021) explain how "Power relations and social structure among groups within societies may largely determine whether and when cultural appropriation is perceived" (308). Unequal power dynamics exist between white men and Black women (Collins 2000; 2004) within UK society and these interactions between white gay men and queer Black women in LGBT nightlife exemplified this, thus these interactions are clear appropriative acts. Acts of appropriation are particularly problematic due to the ways in which the white men appropriating did not have – or respect – the historical context or understanding of how queer Black language and mannerisms have developed (Davis 2021).

5.1.4 QTIPOC Spaces as Counter-Spaces to Discrimination

QTIPOC spaces – queer spaces that are non-white only or intentionally prioritise people of colour – offered many participants a refuge away from the repeated discrimination that they would face within white, male-dominated LGBT nightlife. The queer Black women in this study expressed that QTIPOC spaces were inclusive spaces where they felt safe and more comfortable, accepted, and affirmed. These positive experiences within QTIPOC nightlife were a stark contrast to white male-dominated LGBT nightlife where their racialised and gendered

experiences were either not acknowledged, or specifically targeted. After I asked Aaliyah why she felt safe(r) in QTIPOC spaces, she explained:

I would say it's freedom of expression, without fear of any kind of discrimination or violence towards you. It's a safe space to me, it's a space where you can be your honest self. Be unapologetically Black, unapologetically queer. And not have anyone turn around and say anything about it or do anything about it.

Here, Aaliyah specifically discusses the freedom and safety she feels when she attends QTIPOC nightlife. She discussed how she could be her authentic self and that there would be no negative repercussions in doing so as well as the absence of fear of experiencing violence within these spaces. This clearly juxtaposed with her experiences within white, male-dominated LGBT nightlife where she had concluded that she,

can't be in these white spaces with these people who really just don't understand the double entendre of living in my body, or a QTIPOC body. And behave like they do, like just because they're queer, they're oppressed when white people aren't suffering oppression.

After having experienced multiple accounts of discrimination within white, male-dominated LGBT nightlife and then being affirmed within QTIPOC nightlife, Aaliyah chose to no longer attend non-QTIPOC nightlife. Her experiences within QTIPOC night-time spaces showed her what experiencing nightlife, both without discrimination, and with intentional prioritisation could look like, demonstrating the importance of efforts to create empowering, affirmative, and culturally specific spaces for QTIPOC (Wilson 2009).

The importance of safety was also illustrated by Nala who spoke of how she was “not on defence” when attending QTIPOC nightlife; instead, she actively desired to engage and interact with those around her. Both Aaliyah and Nala's comments were echoed by other participants who consistently felt exhausted within white, male-dominated LGBT nightlife and sought out places where they could embrace their intersecting identities “unapologetically.” Pav Akhtar,

Director of UK Black Pride, wrote of these shared sentiments within research conducted by Stonewall where he emphasised that,

Being exposed to bigotry from all sides is exhausting and it leaves many black LGBT people seeking a retreat in safe spaces where we can just be. Without everyday judgements or micro-aggressions.

For many of the queer Black women in this study, QTIPOC nightlife provided this “retreat” and “safe space” from the discrimination they faced within white, male-dominated LGBT nightlife.

Participants also shared they felt represented, welcomed, and affirmed as queer Black women by QTIPOC nightlife organisers. There was a strong perceived difference in spaces that claim to welcome all LGBT people, and spaces that are designed with queer Black and brown people in mind. Nala shared that when frequenting QTIPOC nightlife, “I feel like the people organising the event want me to be there,” and that “that was the first time I had ever been in a space where I am in the majority.” Queer Black women were marginalised when navigating white, male-dominated LGBT nightlife due to both the lack of representation and experiences of explicit discrimination. Within QTIPOC nightlife, queer Black women were centred which made them feel a sense of belonging.

When Yara, a mixed-race Black lesbian/queer woman, spoke about her experiences in QTIPOC spaces as safe spaces, she became very emotional which she did not expect. This public display of emotion when she described her experiences of QTIPOC nightlife indicate how important they are for many queer Black women:

...actually feeling like you're held in your queerness and your Blackness, like actually feeling like you're supported and understood and seen. And that people like and love that about you. And therefore you don't even have to talk about it if you don't want to. Of course you can. But you don't have to talk about it. You don't have to explain it to anyone. You can just feel [breathes sigh of relief] I don't know how to describe it but um it happens very rarely; I feel like I feel completely safe in my queerness at the same time as feeling completely safe in my um race. And I think that only really happens when I'm

around other queer people of colour, especially queer women of colour. Um so that feeling actually – now I’m thinking about it – is very special and rare feeling and doesn’t happen very often. And I’m realising as I talk about it how much I need it cos I’m getting a bit emotional talking about it.

Yara speaks about being “held” in your queerness and your Blackness when attending QTIPOC nightlife due to the ways in which the most traditionally marginalised within UK society were centred. Her paralinguistic in breathing a sigh of relief is a literal manifestation of how Opoku-Gyimah (2018) – founder of UK Black Pride – talked about the necessity for queer Black people to have “spaces in which we can let out a collective sigh of relief.” Yara’s discussion of relief refers to how she experienced QTIPOC nightlife as a sanctuary away from intersecting oppressions within white, male-dominated LGBT nightlife and broader UK society in general. While at first, she highlights the importance of the intersection of her racial identity (Blackness) and her sexuality (queerness), she later stated that the rare times she feels safe are “especially” around “queer women of colour.” This demonstrates the importance of understanding queer Black women’s experiences as uniquely gendered, racialized, and sexualized simultaneously. Participants in this study felt increased safety and comfort within QTIPOC nightlife as they were spaces where they perceived discrimination would not occur and where they were brought from the margins to the centre (hooks 1984).

6 HOMONORMATIVITY

In this chapter, I discuss homonormativity within LGBT nightlife and its impact on excluding queer Black women. Homonormativity “does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them” (Duggan 2002:179) and creates “new “others” who are stigmatised because they do not fit into new gay normalisations” (Browne, Brown, and Nash 2021:1321). Thus, homonormativity facilitated increased comfort and safety for gay white men while working to exclude other groups of people, particularly those who hold compounded marginalised identities such as queer Black women. This theme provides us with a distinct but crucial understanding of the nature of interlocking racialised, gendered and sexualised dynamics of social interactions in LGBT nightlife. Queer Black women are excluded from LGBT nightlife based on their racial and gender identities simultaneously.

Homonormative socio-political politics and processes of exclusion manifested in both white male-dominated LGBT nightlife and QTIPOC nightlife in different ways, however, participants identified homonormativity more frequently in relation to white-majority LGBT spaces. For illustration, participants discussed the overwhelming whiteness and patriarchal nature of LGBT nightlife and held conflicting feelings about heterosexual presence in these spaces. Moreover, homonormativity worked to uphold and entrench existing heteronormative systems and institutions, such as white patriarchal demarcations of space, was through music as a form of exclusion.

6.1 White Patriarchy

Within LGBT nightlife that is not demarcated as QTIPOC nightlife, people exist on a spectrum of white patriarchal desirability. One’s desirability within that space thus influences how welcome and included they feel within an LGBT night-time space. Participants discussed this notion of “desirable” and “undesirable” clientele within LGBT+ nightlife (Casey 2007) in

relation to multiple cities across the UK. Queer Black women shared a strong, mutual feeling that much of LGBT nightlife is catered to white people and were not “for them” as queer Black women. Some participants highlighted their discomfort with whiteness and maleness at distinct times in relation to specific sexist or racist instances occurring. Others discussed gendered racism or racialised sexism from both specific experiences with white people as well as the general atmosphere of LGBT nightlife. The myriad of racist-sexist experiences highlighted how whiteness and patriarchy intersect to exclude queer Black women from LGBT nightlife.

All participants mentioned whiteness at least one time during our interview. When I asked E about her experience at a very well-known LGBT club in London, she emphasised: “It was just white. It was just white.” Later in the interview, she reflected on the juxtaposition of her experiences in Black LGBT nightlife compared with white male-dominated LGBT nightlife:

because the first time I went to a queer space, I just felt comfortable. Yeah, cos it was just Black people as well, because obviously, I'm used to just spending loads of time with Black people, like, 99.9% of my friends are black, like, or like mixed black. So, it was just like, Yeah, I think just being in a room full of drunk white people was just not nice because you just never know...

E felt comfortable within the first queer space she mentions because it “was just Black people” however, when she was in a white-majority LGBTQ+ night-time space, she alluded to the risk of violence which comes from being around intoxicated white people as a queer Black woman when she stated “you just never know...” Although E did not overtly speak about violence, she did not feel comfortable or safe around drunk white people due to the potential for harm.

In line with related scholarship, I found that attending LGBT nightlife was a common and important means of exploration of one’s sexual identity for queer Black women. Thus, queer Black women’s experiences in LGBT nightlife is particularly important as their experiences demonstrate the obstacles and barriers that racialised non-heterosexual women face when

exploring and negotiating their sexual identity and/or gender identity outside of cisnormativity and heteronormativity which pervade public space in the UK.

Keisha, a mixed white and Black African lesbian went out to LGBT nightlife in Northern England, particularly when she was first exploring her sexual identity. Attending LGBT nightlife was found to be a common and important means of inception into one's queer identity; thus, queer Black women's experiences in these instances are particularly important, as they speak to the obstacles and barriers that these women face when exploring their sexual identity and/or gender identity outside of After Keisha went out to LGBT nightlife in Northern England, she told me that,

I felt uncomfortable because just being in like, a space that's queer, but white, like, the difference was crazy. And I think that was maybe a time that I started to clock [realise] all the nuances of being queer and not white.

Her sentiment elucidates how Black women feel othered in these spaces and the importance of spaces that acknowledge and embrace those who have intersecting marginalised identities. For Keisha, who discussed how her ADHD meant that she hyper-focused on visual conceptualisation of spaces and experiences, over other senses, entering an LGBT space and only seeing whiteness was deeply troubling to her:

I think the visual side of not, just not seeing anyone that was Black and queer, and I think also knowing that that existed... And then having that frustration of like, it's not a thing that then that like, they're not here, or they don't exist, and they're just not like... There are Black queer people in [Northern city], but they're not in this space. And that says something.

The lack of Black people and an overwhelming amount of white people in this queer space sent a clear message to Keisha that this space is not for Black queer people. Here, Keisha highlights how there are institutional mechanisms within LGBT spaces that maintain whiteness, because of the existence of Black queer people across the United Kingdom and their desires to participate in

inclusive nightlife. Her statement demonstrates her frustration with spaces for nightlife, stating that Black people are not present because they do not exist in a particular space when the reality is that these institutions reinforce whiteness through structural domains of power – policies and advertising – as well as interpersonal domains of power – white networks.

Other participants highlighted the intersection of whiteness and patriarchy, specifically discussing the ways that LGBT nightlife caters to white gay men. For example, Mya shared, “They definitely don’t cater or like consider people of colour. It’s very much like... I’d say like every single LGBT venue caters to white cis gay men.” This quote from Mya reflects how LGBT nightlife specifically centres and privileges white gay men which is reflected in existing literature (Baggs 2018). Mya additionally states that LGBT nightlife does not “consider people of colour” showing how QTIPOC are not thought about or valued within these night-time spaces. Other participants such as Ida, a Black British/Nigerian queer genderfluid person, echoed this feeling, stating that LGBT nightlife caters to “White gays. White gay men” and Nala stated that LGBT nightlife is “overwhelmingly white and overwhelmingly male.” Mya, Ida, and Nala’s quotes show the prevalence of white patriarchies within LGBT nightlife. Therefore, those with intersecting marginalised racial identities (e.g., queer people of colour) are not welcome and excluded. This was poignantly highlighted when Nala went on to say, “if you’re not white, you’re not seen” and that as a queer Black woman, she doesn’t “even exist to them in those spaces.” Queer Black women are both hyper-visible through their experiences of violence but also invisibilised through the white patriarchal construction of space.

Participants attended to how extensive white patriarchies are within non-QTIPOC LGBT nightlife. When discussing non-QTIPOC LGBT nightlife, Mya shared that she felt that LGBT nightlife catered to white gay men in “every single LGBT venue,” demonstrating that white

patriarchies within LGBT nightlife are consistent across different spaces and events. Aaliyah mirrored Mya's sentiment:

They cater to gay white men. They cater to gay white men, and I mean like that in Leeds, I mean that in London, I mean that all over the world. When I've gone on holiday, I've tried to look for the LGBT clubs, very rarely it is a club that is for women or for women of colour like when I went to Barcelona last summer with my girlfriend and we were looking for LGBT clubs – it was gay man this, it was gay man that. ONE NIGHT... that was not... one night a month that was for... and that's just like... it's a funny reflection because if you look at wider society, women are not centred. And if you think about the LGBT society which is meant to be much more progressive because we all go through this struggle, but then it still doesn't centre women... and it especially does not centre women of colour...

Here, Aaliyah demonstrates that white patriarchies are present within other countries within the global North such as Spain. Even when she goes on holiday to Barcelona, she navigates similar processes of white patriarchal constructions of space when navigating LGBT nightlife. She also emphasises the specific ways in which LGBT nightlife “reflects” broader society, in which “women are not centred.” In this statement, she demonstrates the ways that patriarchy dominates and structures space as well as the need for women of colour-centred spaces.

These responses highlight how LGBT nightlife centres white maleness. This shows how LGBT nightlife upholds racism and sexism. Queer Black women's experiences show how despite shared non-heterosexual or non-cisgender identities existing across LGBT individuals, racial and gender identities remain a marker of difference, and consequent exclusion. Solidarities do not often exist between white and non-white LGBT individuals and communities. White patriarchy still operates within LGBT communities, excluding queer Black women and queer women of colour at the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality. These experiences support and bolster existing literature that show how LGBT nightlife in Manchester privileges able-bodied, white, middle-class, young men (Held 2015).

6.2 Music as Whiteness

An additional tool of whiteness was the type of music played within LGBT nightlife. Over half the participants discussed their discontent with the music that is played within white, male-dominated homonormative nightlife. With histories of LGBT clubs only playing certain music to maintain a white clientele (John and Khambatta 1993), institutional choices about music represent intentional decisions to uphold whiteness. Participants discussed music in relation to discomfort, exclusion, and how LGBT nightlife upholds and perpetuates whiteness within these spaces. John and Khambatta (1993) noted that LGBT venues avoided stereotypically “Black” genres of music such as hip-hop, reggae, and dancehall in order to discourage Black people from attending. While Black people’s music tastes are not monolithic, several queer Black women in this study felt excluded by the music played within LGBT nightlife. Further, they felt unable and uncomfortable to bring other Black and Brown people into LGBT night-time spaces because of the “overwhelmingly white” music played. When asked about her general experiences of mainstream LGBT nightlife, Nala states,

You must listen to Madonna. You must listen to Ariana Grande... it was an insult ‘cos it’s like oh, well if you’re gay you MUST listen to Madonna, you must be white and you must be male. There were NO spaces for people like me.

In Nala’s response, she viewed the music played as a key factor in how LGBT nightlife assumes a white male identity. These music choices catered to and centred the comfort of non-heterosexual white men and did not consider non-heterosexual people of colour. Nala stated that these institutional decisions were an “insult” to her as a queer Black woman who desired to be represented by both the demographics and music within LGBT nightlife. The racial and gender dynamics of who is being catered to in these clubs sends a clear message of exclusion to Black queer women.

For other participants, the desire to be able to “express my identity” overrode their distaste towards the music. For example, Mya stated, “I wasn’t a fan of the music either. But for me, it was the only place that I could go to express my [queer] identity.” Here, Mya complicates the binary between inclusion and exclusion for queer Black women within LGBT nightlife. Mya does not enjoy the (white) music within these spaces, however, she also does not want to sacrifice the ability and space to explore her sexuality. This illustrates the complexity, confusion, and difficulty among queer Black women in navigating our intersecting identities within LGBT spaces that cater to whiteness, and specifically gay white men. These women must negotiate their intersecting identities in this space by tolerating the white-centric music in order to explore their sexuality.

Most participants were uncomfortable with the music played within LGBT nightlife. Consequently, I asked participants what their ideal music would be within their ideal LGBT nightlife. The queer Black women in my study expressed an overwhelming desire for culturally representative music. They wanted to hear music made by Black people. Nala told me her ideal night-time space would be “an actual club night playing MY music, you know, with MY people. That’s ideal.” Nala wanted music genres that were created and dominated by Black people to be played as well as to be surrounded by other Black people within LGBT nightlife. Other participants were even more specific, sharing with me the importance of culturally and regionally specific representations of music within LGBT nightlife. When sharing her ideal music, Zora, becomes increasingly animated as she speaks,

it would be so nice to have some dancehall... that would be so nice. OH MY GOD. Can you imagine? Like a queer Black space with dancehall music, that would be so nice. Oh, wow I’m getting excited just thinking about it!

Due to Black migration patterns to the UK from African nation-states and the Caribbean, many queer Black women discussed their desire to hear music deriving from their homelands such as soca, dancehall, bashment, reggae, and Afrobeats. Zora became increasingly excited as she imagined the possibility of being in a “queer Black space with dancehall music.” As a mixed Caribbean woman, the importance of her Caribbean identity, was central to her music enjoyment as dancehall is a popular music genre deriving from the Caribbean. E echoed this sentiment telling me that in her ideal LGBT night-time space she would like,

a variety of DJ’s so I want to hear, I want to have some soca, I wanna hear some bashment, some dancehall, I wanna hear some Afrobeats, of course, some grime, R&B, some hip-hop, just good vibes.

For E, a plethora of music would play in her ideal night-time space; however, all of these music genres (dancehall, bashment, Afrobeats, grime, R&B, and hip-hop) are dominated by Black people, demonstrating the importance for racially representative music to play in LGBT nightlife. Many participants, including Zora and E, became visibly and audibly excited when exploring the possibilities of a space that centred their queer Black identities simultaneously. All of their intersecting identities were important to them, but their racial identities became even more salient within white, male-dominated LGBT nightlife. Attending these spaces while being excluded by institutional decisions to play only white-centric music made them feel uncomfortable.

6.3 Heterosexual Presence

Gay villages, gay quarters, or LGBT nightlife have been used to promote cities as progressive and inclusive (Florida 2002). LGBT spaces have been used to promote tourism, or fun “nights out,” increasing the number of heterosexuals within these spaces. Bell and Binnie

(2004) discuss how heterosexual presence can be problematic and a means of “diluting gayness” (1813) within LGBT spaces. For heterosexual women, LGBT nightlife can offer a source of safety and comfort, away from heterosexual men (Binnie and Skeggs 2004). Further, processes of rebranding from LGBT-only or queer-only to LGBT-friendly or queer-friendly (Ekenkorst and Van Aalst 2019) encourages greater heterosexual presence within spaces that were historically demarcated as more rigidly gay or LGBT-only (Hartless 2019).

More than half of the participants discussed their feelings towards heterosexual presence within LGBT nightlife. Participants felt less comfortable with heterosexual men’s presence in these spaces, while there was a broader array of sentiments regarding heterosexual women. Aaliyah highlighted shared sentiments of discomfort with heterosexual men’s presence within LGBT nightlife and told me that she,

had straight guys kinda come on to us and this was like somewhere I came in first year [of university] and I was like “I’m so safe here, I love it.” Then I began feeling really really uncomfortable.

For Aaliyah, the club that she mentions had operated as a safe space for her as an 18-year-old moving to another city for university; however, as time passed, the demographics of the club changed, and heterosexual men and women started attending. Once a safe space to explore her sexuality and feel freer to express herself, this space turned into somewhere where she experienced the same types of sexual harassment that are often present in heterosexual nightlife. Zora discussed a similar process happening in a different northern city in the United Kingdom:

I went out to the Gay Village last Summer actually and there was like all these straight couples there and loads of the men especially were literally looking at people weird when queer couples were making out and stuff. Like why would you come? Why are you here? Like you’re obviously uncomfortable with everything going on. So just leave, like it’s not for you. Just straight men being so annoying, generally.

Both the presence of individual heterosexuals and heterosexual couples frustrated Zora. She states “it’s not for you” demonstrating the necessity for LGBT spaces to exist without heterosexuals co-opting these spaces. Zora also asks, “why are you here?” which emphasises the shared disdain for those with heterosexual privilege to be present in these spaces. A few moments later in the interview, Zora told me that she felt that these experiences were like heterosexuals “going to a zoo” and that “it’s horrible.” These sentiments align with Johnston’s (2001) work on non-heterosexual bodies being treated as a spectacle for heterosexuals to gaze at, exacerbating notions of sexual minorities as exotic others. Other participants shared with me that LGBT spaces were “overrun by straights” and described specific highly frequented venues as “the straightest gay place” which demonstrates how heterosexual presence can entirely alter the dynamics of an existing LGBT space.

Participants did not all share the same sentiments towards heterosexual presence within LGBT nightlife. For some, heterosexual women’s presence was acceptable but heterosexual men’s presence was not; for others no heterosexual presence was warranted. Kyra and Zelda respectively told me that “there’s a freeness, I think, for the kind of self-identified heterosexual women as well in that space,” and that “it’s so normalised for straight women to use gay spaces, because of like, straight men. Obviously, they want to avoid them.” Here, Kyra and Zelda call attention to the ways in which heterosexual patriarchies impact heterosexual women. Kyra used the word “freeness” while Zelda discussed the “obvious” reasons as to why heterosexual women would want to avoid heterosexual men, which shows how heterosexual dominated nightlife is structured in a way that facilitates (male) violence against women and contributes to geographies of (heterosexual) women’s fear (Held 2015). While their queer feminist assessments of heterosexual women’s motives for attending LGBT nightlife are accurate, it is exhausting to do

this type of emotional labour in order to reason the prevalence of heterosexuals, regardless of gender, within spaces that were historically created to prioritise non-heterosexual individuals and communities.

For some femme/feminine-presenting queer Black women, the presence of heterosexual women was frustrating due to misrecognition and an invisibilisation of their own queer identities, thus demonstrating the dilution of gayness which Bell and Binnie (2004) discuss. A few participants discussed this process. For example, Ivy shared with me:

I had a friend move to [flirt with] someone and they were just like "I'm not gay" and I'm just thinking why are you getting an attitude cos you're in a mostly queer space... So why are you getting offended if someone's coming to you, what did you expect? So, it is slightly annoying.

Here, Ivy questions the negative responses of heterosexual women who frequent LGBT nightlife when they are approached by other women who may be romantically or sexually interested in them. She states that their attitudes are “annoying” because they are in a majority queer space and so interest from queer women in that space should be expected. Ivy, like other participants, did not state explicitly that heterosexual women should not be allowed in these spaces; however, she desired for them to be more respectful and aware of their presence within a LGBT majority space. Aaliyah also commented on the phenomenon of heterosexual presence within LGBT nightlife. She told me,

It's weird because like before you would go there and be like yeah, I can come on to that girl – she's most likely queer – whereas now you would get backlash. And like obviously there's this whole idea about the visibility of queerness – there is more of like a queer dress – more of a like lesbian dress – but yeah you do have to second guess yourself sometimes. And then you'll get like dirty looks or stuff like that and it's kind of like you're in OUR space – it is a queer space – it was a queer space way before you came in here and you are taking over that. So, you can't turn around to me and give me a dirty look for tryna chat to you or some of my friends trying to flirt with you.

Aaliyah specifically felt frustrated that heterosexual women's presence in this space meant that there was increased confusion as to who was queer and who was not. Further, she was annoyed by the responses of these heterosexual women, who gave queer women a "dirty look" when they were approached. Aaliyah felt that heterosexual women who choose to attend LGBT nightlife should be mindful of their presence within these spaces and not respond with negativity if they are approached by queer women. She states that heterosexual women are "taking over" the space and later told me that, "they are still the majority, and we still a minority. You have your spaces. Why must you now come and infiltrate ours?!" Here, the word "infiltrate" suggests that this attendance of heterosexual women within LGBT nightlife is both unwanted and surreptitious. These statements allude to the heterosexual co-optation of spaces previously designated for LGBT individuals and communities. These spaces were created to provide refuge for non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people who often experience exclusion in cisnormative and heteronormative public spaces. Thus, the presence of heterosexuals within these spaces involves a hetero-sexualising of space that was/is not intended for those who receive privileges based on compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980).

6.4 QTIPOC Spaces as Counter-Spaces to Homonormativity

QTIPOC nightlife countered homonormativity as they centre the "new "others" who are stigmatised because they do not fit into new gay normalisations" (Browne, Brown, and Nash 2021:1321). QTIPOC nightlife within the UK is built with these "others" at the centre. The music played within these spaces represent those who exist at the intersections of multiply marginalised groups which counters persistent whiteness which shows up within music in white, male-dominated LGBT nightlife. Further, some events instil policies to create sliding scales

based on one's social location and access to resources. For example, to limit heterosexual presence events such as Pxsy Palace implement higher ticket costs for heterosexual and/or white people to attend (Dazed 2018).

Twelve participants discussed how QTIPOC nightlife holds space for intersecting marginalised identities. Nala shared:

What is LGBTQ+ culture?! Within the QTIPOC space I don't feel like there are norms that I have to adhere to – when I'm with you lot – I don't feel like I have to say oh I like Beyonce, you know? I can just be myself because in this space – I think what makes it so special – is that we respect even though we're from such a small margin – we are so diverse! We are such different people! And I love how the only thing we have in common is our queerness and our Blackness. Because we don't have to be – how do you say the word – is it homogeny?

In this quote, Nala begins by questioning “What is LGBTQ+ culture?!” and later goes on to critique the ways in which white, male dominated LGBT nightlife homogenises LGBT communities, erasing intra-group differences that exist based on race, gender, and other social identities. She is able to “be myself,” and that differences amongst queer Black people are also affirmed within QTIPOC nightlife. Counter to non-QTIPOC nightlife, diversity within queer Blackness can flourish despite being from “such a small margin” within broader white, male, heterosexual-dominated society. Within QTIPOC nightlife, other intersections of identity such as disability were more commonly spoken about. Deka, who identified as having both mental and physical disabilities expressed her ability to discuss these less visible parts of her identity when in QTIPOC spaces such as QTIPOC nightlife said,

I've spoken more about my mental health and stuff just because like with people I've just met because there's better reception whereas a lot of other people just don't get it.

Deka felt freer within QTIPOC spaces to share struggles that extended beyond her identity as a queer Black woman. These quotes demonstrate the importance of QTIPOC nightlife as spaces

where there are new racial, gender, and sexuality norms. This provided the space for Deka to discuss other aspects of her identity which were important to her.

Being surrounded by other queer people of colour was of central importance to the queer Black women in this research. Ida specifically discussed the importance of being around other queer people of colour, within both QTIPOC nightlife and other QTIPOC spaces such as university societies.

I don't even know where I would be if I hadn't reached out and talked to like other queer people of colour and like seen other queer people of colour... in real life. Like wow do you exist. I don't know where I'd be. I think just Like it would be devastating. Especially with like family, with like having homophobic parents and stuff like I sound like I'm getting emotional.

For Ida, being around other QTIPOC was crucial for her as someone who had to navigate homophobia at home which she felt was “meant to be a safe space.” QTIPOC nightlife is a space where queer Black women could connect with other people who had similar experiences, and not navigate white patriarchies that are present within white, male-dominated LGBT nightlife.

QTIPOC nightlife also provided a space to enjoy racially and culturally representative music outside of non-white heterosexual nightlife. This enabled participants to feel represented and affirmed within all aspects of their identity. Aaliyah spoke about QTIPOC nightlife as inclusive for multiple reasons, one being the music, “To have even like the music – the music was so good. It was more geared towards me! It wasn't like campy bullshit. It was like good songs.” She felt that the music was “geared towards” her as a queer Black Jamaican woman. This was supported by Nala who said that QTIPOC nightlife differed because there was “better music, you know, like actual good music.” QTIPOC nightlife tends to play an array of music which represents different QTIPOC music tastes. For example, some QTIPOC nights specifically play bashment, dancehall and soca, whereas others have multiple rooms which play a range of

Afrobeats, hip-hop, Bollywood and techno music. Zora, who had just begun to explore QTIPOC nightlife became very excited at the possibility of QTIPOC nightlife which played dancehall:

it would be so nice to have some dancehall... that would be so nice. OH MY GOD. Can you imagine? Like a Black queer space with dancehall music, that would be so nice. Oh, wow I'm getting excited just thinking about it!

As an insider to this research, I was able to share with her some events that she did not know about which align with her ideal vision of a queer night out. Her overwhelming enthusiasm towards a space which affirmed her Caribbean identity clearly demonstrates the importance of institutional decisions about music for queer Black women navigating LGBT nightlife.

Institutional choices extend beyond music genres and several participants discussed how important QTIPOC policies are in shaping the environment of QTIPOC nightlife. Ivy highlighted one club night which instilled sliding ticket prices depending on one's social identities:

if you're a cis-het white male, you have to pay 200 pounds for a ticket, and they all just said "but why!?" But I was thinking you know... because it's our safe space. You can't just come up in here and make people feel uncomfortable cos more time... they might not be okay with it...

All participants who mentioned policies like these avidly supported them as they felt these policies prioritised the safety of QTIPOC nightlife attendees. QTIPOC often experience violence and other forms of discrimination within public spaces, including white male-dominated LGBT nightlife, so many queer Black women felt more comfortable and safer when policies to limit whiteness and heterosexuality were in place. To further illustrate, Reyna felt that her increased comfort within QTIPOC nightlife came from these spaces "being very, very, very, very, very, very intentional and very, very loud about being super inclusive." Her repetition of the word "very," before "intentional" elucidates the explicit and deliberate thought and planning that organisers of QTIPOC nightlife embed within their nights out.

CONCLUSION

6.5 Discussion

My research revealed that although LGBT communities and LGBT nightlife are often conceptualised by mainstream society as inclusive groups or spaces for all LGBT individuals, queer Black women are largely excluded from LGBT nightlife. Lorde (1984) writes that there can be a “pathetic pretense” where differences between women are presumed to not exist. This same notion can be applied to intra-group differences within LGBT communities. This research has focused on difference based on both race and gender. As a collective group, non-heterosexual women are impacted by patriarchy and the sexist division of labour and space within UK society (Binnie and Skeggs 2004; Oswin 2008; Pritchard, Morgan, and Sedgley 2002). Analyses of patriarchy and sexism demonstrate how gender mediates one’s comfort, inclusion, and access to LGBT nightlife. Few studies have explored how analysing race and gender simultaneously can elucidate intra-group differences among women. This research aimed to fill the void of literature and analysis on queer Black women’s experiences as well as more broadly intersectional analyses of LGBT spaces such as LGBT nightlife.

After conducting 18 semi-structured interviews, I found that white people and white institutions excluded queer Black women through racialised sexism or gendered racism. These intersecting systems of oppression (racism and sexism) are a queer form of misogynoir (Bailey 2010). The queer Black women in this study experienced heightened exclusion within LGBT nightlife that was dominated by whiteness and maleness. They did not feel comfortable, represented, or valued within a majority of LGBT nightlife due to the ways that both individuals and institutions upheld and recreated white patriarchal domination within these spaces. The queer Black women in my study were subjected to discrimination through physical and sexual

violence, fetishisation, and appropriation. They experienced this discrimination from both white men and women, although white men were more commonly the perpetrators of overt violent physical and sexual abuse as well as appropriating queer Black culture. An important finding was that overall, both white men and white women partook in discriminatory acts of exclusion which disrupts mainstream assumptions that there are solidarities amongst and between non-heterosexual women and highlights racism as an exclusionary act that separates white and non-white LGBT women. These acts of discrimination demonstrated how whiteness and patriarchy intersect and how both white men and women maintain and uphold white patriarchies. White men and women engaged in fetishizing queer Black women and other micro-aggressive acts such as looking and non-consensual touching. Queer Black women's race, gender, and sexuality all interact to inform these experiences of intersecting oppressions (Bailey and Shabazz 2014; Held 2015). Participants were racialised and gendered within LGBT nightlife consistently. While processes of exclusion are often reduced to racism, sexism, homophobia, or queer-phobia distinctly, this research illustrates the ways in which these systems of oppression interlock to alienate, other, and violate queer Black womanhood within LGBT nightlife.

Queer Black women were also excluded within LGBT nightlife through homonormativity. Homonormativity furthered exclusion within LGBT nightlife whereby hierarchies were embedded on the grounds of gender, race, class, and other social identities. The participants in this research strongly felt that LGBT nightlife caters to white gay men. The white male-dominated LGBT+ nightlife which queer Black women attended recreated broader systems of oppression that are present in UK society. These intersecting systems of oppression were not limited to one UK city and were instead found to exist across the UK. I explored homonormativity through identifying themes surrounding whiteness, patriarchy and more

specifically, white patriarchies. Thus, LGBT nightlife mirrored the heterosexual construction of public space in the UK whereby whiteness and maleness are privileged, and other identities are oppressed.

I also found that homonormativity manifested through the music played within LGBT nightlife as well as heterosexual presence within these night-time spaces. As Browne, Brown, and Nash (2021) write, “Homonormative politics and forms of social acceptance create new ‘others’ who are stigmatised because they do not fit into new gay normalisations” (1321). Gay “normalisations” refer to privileged identities such as white, middle-class, able-bodied, young, and male. Queer Black women are one multiply marginalised group who are stigmatised and othered as they do not conform to normative and privileged white male gay identities. The music played in these spaces (re)inscribed gay white patriarchies and were exclusionary of non-white music genres. Most participants experienced music as a specific form of exclusion and a means of maintaining whiteness, thus rejecting Blackness.

Gay normalisations, i.e., the normalisation of gay white men within the UK, has facilitated the shift from many LGBT night-time spaces as LGBT-only to LGBT-friendly (Ekenhorst and Van Aalst 2019). This shift has exacerbated heterosexual presence within white, male-dominated LGBT nightlife. Participants shared varying sentiments towards heterosexual presence within LGBT nightlife, depending on gender. The queer Black women expressed strong feelings that heterosexual men should not be present in LGBT nightlife, however, had more conflicting feelings about heterosexual women’s presence due to acknowledging gendered emotional geographies of fear (Held 2015). These gendered emotional geographies of fear helped participants to understand why heterosexual women would seek refuge from heterosexual men within LGBT nightlife, however, their presence created new issues. For example, feminine

queer Black women felt that they were misread as heterosexual due to the prevalence of heterosexual women's presence. Further, queer Black women in general were frustrated by heterosexual women responding in offensive or hostile ways when approached by women within LGBT nightlife. While some participants expressed understanding of heterosexual women's presence within these LGBT night-time spaces, they felt that these women needed to be more aware about their entitlement to these spaces, and the space that they consequently took up when frequenting LGBT nightlife as well as the specific impact their presence has on non-heterosexual women who have different needs and desires within LGBT nightlife.

Furthermore, homonormativity upholds and maintains ideas of "progression" in the global North, existing in opposition to "backwards" societies in the global South (Browne, Brown, 2021). All of the queer Black women in this study have diasporic identities in connection to the global South, thus, their identities and existence within homonormative nightlife were further devalued. Homonormativity reinscribed colonial ideologies of 'us vs them' whereby the global North is placed on an imaginary pedestal for gender and sexual inclusivity despite colonial processes of eradicating gender and sexual fluidity and diversity within formerly colonised nations. In reality, queer Black women are excluded from LGBT nightlife in the UK, where white patriarchies dominate, and music conforms to whiteness. Furthermore, as white gay identities are increasingly normalised within the fabric of UK society, spaces that were formerly exclusive for LGBT folks, are becoming increasingly frequented by heterosexuals. This by-product of homonormativity further excludes queer Black women who deal with homophobia from heterosexual women. Specifically for femme queer Black women, there is an additional frustration with being confused, mistaken and mis-read as heterosexual in spaces where they desire romantic and/or sexual contact.

At times, the participants navigated processes of exclusion and inclusion simultaneously. While this study sought to understand the interlocking nature of identities and systems of oppression (Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Hill-Collins 2019; Mirza 2015), participants' racial and gendered identities became more salient at different times. While some participants no longer desired to frequent white male-dominated LGBT nightlife due to their negative, and often violent, experiences within these spaces; others discussed how these spaces were the only places where they could explore and (partially) express their sexual identity, sometimes due to geographical location and inability to access QTIPOC nightlife as QTIPOC nightlife tends to be concentrated within London. This forced some queer Black women to negotiate their own intersecting identities and temporarily prioritise exploring a non-heterosexual space, over their comfort as Black women in these spaces.

QTIPOC spaces (spaces that restrict whiteness and/or centre queer people of colour) offered queer Black women a more inclusive nightlife experience. They felt more affirmed, represented, and valued within these spaces as white patriarchies were altogether not present and the demographics and structure mirrored and centred their identities as queer Black women. For queer Black women, who are so often the recipients of white, heterosexual, male violence, imagining a future, alternate or ideal space stimulated our imaginations and allowed us to engage in collective dialogue about transformational and liberatory futures. Some participants spoke of existing QTIPOC nightlife as a blueprint for their ideal LGBT night-time space whereas others allowed their imagination to roam beyond realism.

When imagining ideal spaces, the queer Black women in my study spoke of the importance of a majority POC and/or Black clientele. Most participants did not want white men to be present, and some did not want white women in these spaces either. They desired the

founders and decision-makers within LGBT nightlife to play music genres created by Black and Brown people and told me of the importance of accessibility within their ideal LGBT nightlife. These ideal spaces would ensure accessibility in relation to (1) physical and mental disabilities; (2) travel; and (3) cost. Others expressed desire for atypical nightlife, for example, sober spaces, educational spaces and/or wellness spaces.

6.6 Sociological Implications

This study has several sociological implications. First, the findings disrupt the mainstream notion and conceptualisation of LGBT communities and spaces as safe spaces for all. Spaces are not experienced equally by all and queer Black women's racialised and gendered identities within LGBT nightlife are often unwelcome. This research demonstrates the need for intersectional approaches and analyses to adequately understand experiences of exclusion in LGBT spaces as well as broader society. Binaries between inclusion-exclusion, comfort-discomfort and safety-unsafety should also be problematised as multiply marginalised groups must negotiate and navigate their intersecting identities in spaces which may offer refuge for one identity, but not others.

6.7 Limitations

There are limitations to this research which should be considered and could be a possible source of future inquiry. For example, my sample was "highly"-educated through traditional metrics of education, with all participants holding or currently completing a four-year degree. This could differentiate experience based on educational background(s). Further, only one participant was over 30 years old and demonstrated some alternate beliefs based on their experiences of LGBT nightlife in a different historical context. Lastly, no transgender women

participated in this study which resulted in my findings being limited to cisgender queer Black women.

6.8 Future Research Directions

This research could also be taken forward in various ways. Future research should include individuals with a greater variety in educational background, gender identity, and age. The experiences of monoracial and multiracial people within this study were both overlapping and divergent. Experiences of colourism as well as multiracial exclusion based on external perceptions of whiteness would be interesting to explore in order to complicate and interrogate notions of light(er) skinned privilege and the homogenisation of multiracial and monoracial Black experiences.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A 2022 Interview Protocol

Run through informed consent

- anonymous, can pick own pseudonym (think about during interview)
- don't have to answer anything you're uncomfortable with
- can withdraw answers at any point or add to info
- will make notes throughout interview if you hear me typing
- are you happy to be recorded?
- do you have questions for me?
- first some background demo questions to ensure i'm writing of your experiences in the way that you want to be written about

Demographic Questions

Can you tell me about how you identify?

- Race/ethnicity
- Gender (expression & identity)
- Sexuality
- Class background/status
- Working class, lower class, lower-middle class, middle class, middle to upper class, upper class
- Geographic location
- Now and growing up
- Education
- Disability
- Age

Intro Questions

1. Can you tell me a little more about your background?
 - Where did you grow up?
 - What were your experiences there like?
3. How did you navigate/make sense of your identities growing up?
 - How, if at all, have your identities changed over time?
 - how did you come into your queerness?

Content Questions

4. When did you start participating in LGBT nightlife?
5. Why did you start participating in LGBT nightlife?
6. Tell me about your experiences of LGBT night-time spaces
7. How do you feel within mainstream LGBT+ night-time spaces?
 - Included? Excluded? Comfortable? Safe?
8. Have you ever experienced exclusion/discrimination in a mainstream LGBT+ night-time space?
 - If you are comfortable sharing, what happened?
 - How did you feel?

- How do you understand your identity impacting these experiences, if at all?
- 9. Do you think mainstream LGBT+ night-time spaces cater to certain people?
 - How and why?
- 10. Do you view mainstream LGBT+ night-time spaces as safe spaces?
 - Why/why not?
- 11. Do you feel there are differences between mainstream LGBT+ night-life and QTPOC night-life
- 12. What are your experiences of QTPOC night-time spaces like?
- 13. How do you feel within QTPOC night-time spaces?
 - Ask about policies
- 14. Have you ever experienced exclusion/discrimination in a QTPOC night-time space?
- 15. Do you view QTPOC spaces as safe spaces?
 - How do you understand safety in QTPOC spaces?
- 16. Do you feel COVID has impacted your relationship to clubbing and LGBT+ community?
- 17. What does your ideal LGBT+ night-time space look like?
- 18. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B

2019 Interview Protocol

1. How do you identify in terms of race, gender, age, sexuality, disability etc.?
2. Where did you grow up?
3. When did you start partaking in LGBT nightlife?
4. Have you partaken in both general LGBT and QTPOC nightlife?
5. What are your experiences of general LGBT nighttime spaces?
6. Have you ever suffered from any form of discrimination in a mainstream LGBT night-time space?
7. How do you think your identity impacted experiences of discrimination, if at all?
8. Do you think mainstream LGBT night-time spaces cater to specific identities?
 1. How and why?
9. How do QTPOC night-time spaces differ?
 1. What are your experiences of them?
10. Have you ever suffered from discrimination in QTPOC spaces?
11. Do you view QTPOC spaces as safe spaces?
12. What does your ideal queer night-time space look like?
13. Do you want to add anything else?