

**INTERNALIZING AND RESISTING THE BLACK FEMININE IDEAL:
BLACK LESBIANS' UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR GENDERED
SOCIALIZATION**

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	v
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Chapter

1	INTERNALIZING AND RESISTING THE BLACK FEMININE IDEAL: BLACK LESBIANS' UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR GENDERED SOCIALIZATION	1
	Introduction	1
	Black Femininity	3
	Black Family Socialization.....	7
	Black Lesbian Community	12
	Methods	16
	Findings	24
	Values	24
	Active negotiation with and (dis)engagement from gendered values ..	32
	Internalization of Womanhood and Femininity	40
	Discussion.....	49
	REFERENCES	56

Appendix

A	Demographic Breakdown of Sample.....	59
B	Gender Survey	60
C	IRB Letter	62

ABSTRACT

Black families socialize their daughters to uphold a black feminine ideal. This ideal is comprised of discourses of both strength and respectability (Johnson 2013). The discourse of strength encourages black women to be independent and strong, while the discourse of respectability promotes the importance of engaging in ladylike and feminine behavior, including marrying a man and presenting as feminine. The black feminine ideal emerged as a resistance strategy to oppose racism and stereotypical images of black women that permeate society. Thus, failure to uphold this ideal leaves black women susceptible to prejudice and acts of discrimination. However, because of its heteronormative nature, some black women, such as black lesbians, have a difficult time upholding this ideal. Simply by nature of their sexuality, black lesbians fail to maintain an aspect of the black feminine ideal. This paper examines how black lesbians understand their gendered socialization of the black feminine ideal and how they negotiate and engage with gendered values that can and do contradict with their lesbian identity. I conducted 17 in-depth interviews with black lesbian women and discussed their gendered socialization in terms of values. These gendered values confirmed the existence of the black feminine ideal. Furthermore, participants illuminated strategies they utilized to engage with and disengage from gendered values, and demonstrated how an internalization of femininity impacted their gender presentation. The study extends current literature on black lesbians and contributes to an understanding of the racialized aspect of gender and sexuality.

Chapter 1

INTERNALIZING AND RESISTING THE BLACK FEMININE IDEAL: BLACK LESBIANS' UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR GENDERED SOCIALIZATION

Introduction

Black families socialize women to uphold a racialized feminine ideal. This racialized femininity includes the expectation to demonstrate strength, through independence and self-reliance (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2009; Collins 2004), and respectability, which stresses the importance of “ladylike” behavior (Johnson 2013). These expectations are racialized because they originated as a response to slavery, and as efforts to cope with racism and prejudice (Collins 2004). Because of the economic discrimination against black men, black women needed to be able to provide for their families. Thus, inherent in the definition of black womanhood was the ability to succeed economically and not be dependent on men, in order to take care of the family. Furthermore, the discourse of respectability also served as a strategy to resist racism. This respectability for women was achieved through enacting ladylike behaviors, such as being nurturing and maintaining a feminine appearance (Johnson 2013), as well as getting married to a man (Miller and Parker 2009). Through these acts of respectability, black women, and in extension, black families, could emulate the traditional (white) mainstream image of a family to avoid racist depictions of the black family as unstable.

One avenue through which black women learn and internalize this racialized femininity is through familial socialization. While the gendered messages that black families express to black women may not differ greatly from those that white women are taught, (e.g. being ladylike and partnering with men are not only expectations for black women) there are more consequences for black women to resist this image of femininity. Because black femininity is partially rooted as a strategy to resist racism and discrimination, black women have more to lose by resisting this ideal than white women.

These expectations of strength and respectability create an ideal of black femininity. This ideal is particularly difficult for some women to attain, especially black lesbians. Black lesbians, by nature of their sexuality, immediately contradict the black feminine idea. Assumptions of heterosexuality and engagement in femininity are heteronormative components of the respectability ideal. Thus, black lesbians must negotiate their socialization and expectations of upholding the black feminine ideal while simultaneously upholding and maintaining their (homo)sexuality. While there is important literature on black lesbians and how they negotiate their own gender (Lane Steele 2011; Moore 2006), the focus has not been on how black lesbians manage familial expectations through socialization and how they cope with ideals they do not wish to uphold. This research aims to fill this gap by examining how black lesbians understand and negotiate their gendered socialization. It also speaks to how a marginalized community navigates conflicting ideals.

The paper answers three research questions: 1) What gendered messages and values do black lesbians recall receiving throughout their upbringing? 2) What strategies do they use to engage with or disengage from gendered messages and

values? 3) How did their gendered socialization impact their gender presentation? The following section illustrates the presence and importance of the black feminine ideal, and focuses on how black families socialize their children about gender. I then discuss the black lesbian community and the significance of gender presentation within black lesbian relationships. This background is critical in understanding the importance of black family socialization and the unique challenges that black lesbians face when attempting to maintain the black feminine ideal.

Black Femininity

Modern depictions of black femininity and sexuality are in part shaped by historical images of black women as the Jezebel, Mammy and Sapphire. These images came to fruition as a crude extension of a black woman's life experiences, which greatly differed from her white, "normalized" counterpart. The Jezebel image is depicted as a seductive, hypersexual black woman who is easily aroused and can exploit men (Jewell 1992). This image reflects the view of enslaved black women as profitable based on how many children they could provide their white slave-owner (Collins 2004). The Mammy represents a different type of servant, one that is obedient, family-oriented and faithful. She is overweight, not necessarily attractive, and self-sacrificing. This image reinforces the view of black women as happily seeking to work and take care of the family rather than doing it out of necessity (Valenti 2011; Jewell 1992). This image, too, is linked with racism, as it represents the 'ideal' slave, who takes care of her owners' children as well as her own. The Mammy also reflects the occurrence of other-mothering, where kin units tend to be women-centered. Lastly, the Sapphire represents the antithesis to the Mammy. This black woman emasculates men, is loud, aggressive and unfeminine. She spends too much

time away from home and is thought of as a bad mother who passes her bad values onto her children (Jewell 1992; Collins 2004). This image is a reflection of the fact that black women had to be part of the labor force because black men could not find jobs in a racist society. These three images help illustrate how gender is racialized and how society has an image of a black woman that is separate and different from the image of a white woman.

Discourses of strength and respectability emerged as a response to these negative stereotypes (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2009; Collins 2004; Johnson 2011). Upholding a black feminine ideal protects black women against being labeled as the Jezebel, Mammy or Sapphire because both strength and respectability directly contradict the traits suggested by these three images. Thus, the black feminine ideal is a critical resistance strategy for black women to avoid racism and prejudice.

Strength and respectability are complex and multilayered. One important aspect of respectability is the portrayal of black women's sexuality. Historically, the forced sexual victimization of female slaves led to the creation of many stereotypes, including viewing black women as sexually aggressive and promiscuous (Greene 2000). Greene discusses the emergence of "ethnosexual mythologies" which are the "sexual myths that a dominant culture generates and holds about men and women of color" (Greene 2000, p 242). The creation of the Jezebel image is an example of an ethnosexual mythology that dominates mainstream society. For black women, these images are very negative and leave them vulnerable to discrimination and sexual assault. It is in these contexts that the importance of respectability emerges, and the need for black women to avoid these hypersexual images. By maintaining respectability, in this case, by limiting their sexuality, black women can resist negative

stereotypes and uphold the black feminine ideal. Historically, there has been a silence surrounding black women's sexuality, which emerged as a middle-class response to accusations of immorality (Moore 2011). This is also a response to the hypersexual stereotypes and represents the need to appear respectable. Ignoring (and thus limiting) sexuality directly contradicts the Jezebel stereotype and protects black women against discrimination. There also was a shift for upper-middle class black women to create alternative self-images to avoid these negative portrayals of their sexuality (Moore 2011). This represents attempts at upholding the black feminine ideal, which are rooted as a resistance to racism.

Another important aspect of respectability, and connected to resistance of the negative stereotypes, is the need to behave and appear ladylike. Johnson (2013) cites women who define respectability as maintaining a feminine appearance by avoiding masculine behavior and the importance of being ladylike. Additionally, being ladylike is associated with heterosexuality. Black women are encouraged to find a man and get married; an expectation that largely stems out of the black church and its promotion of the traditional, patriarchal households (Collins 2004). By promoting the possibility for black families to resemble (white) traditional households, black families could reject the racist view of the black family as unstable. Resembling the traditional household requires adhering to heterosexual partnerships. Thus, part of upholding a feminine ideal requires engaging in heteronormative behaviors and actions. While these heteronormative expectations are the ideal for all women, regardless of race, black women have more at stake if they fail to uphold this ideal. Inability to represent the ideal black femininity leaves black women more susceptible to both interpersonal and institutional racism. Association with the negative stereotyped images makes black

women vulnerable to facing racist remarks from individuals, and can ultimately affect their access to resources, such as finding or maintaining a job. Additionally, failure to resemble traditional households (e.g. having a lesbian household) leaves black women susceptible to facing internal racism from members of the black community that do represent such traditional values and do not want to be associated with black individuals that reify the negative stereotypes.

In addition to this discourse of respectability, another response to the historical depictions of black womanhood was highlighting black women's strength. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) explores this discourse of strength and illustrates how it serves as both an expectation for black women and as a strategy. She argues that because of this dominant image, society views black women as invulnerable. Yet in response to this, black women must "fight strength with strength" and present themselves as capable of handling all adversity (p. 7). Implied in this discourse of strength is the expectation for black women to be independent and self-sufficient, which stems from their (necessary) success in the economy during the post-slavery era (Collins 1997). Ultimately, these messages of the importance of independence did reach white women. Because of the feminist movement, with researchers arguing that (white) women belong in the public sphere, (white) mainstream society saw a shift in its definitions of womanhood (Friedan 1963; Ortnier 1974). Thus this gendered message of independence and self-reliance is now reaching both black and white women. However, similar to images of respectability, black women have more to lose if they resist this ideal, because these definitions of womanhood are linked with resistance strategies. Thus, for black women, maintaining an ideal femininity is not only a gendered act but also a racialized one.

Upholding the black feminine ideal is a critical resistance strategy to avoid negative stereotypes. The discourse of strength and respectability came as a response to the images of the Jezebel, Mammy, and Sapphire in hopes to combat these images with more positive and highly regarded traits. However, while necessary, the ideal can be difficult to maintain, for strength and respectability can be interpreted as competing and contradictory. This demonstrates that for black women, gender can serve as either a source of protection or site for discrimination. Thus, learning about appropriate gendered expectations is critical for black women in order to thrive in society.

Black Family Socialization

There are many ways that black women come to learn about and internalize this black feminine ideal. Socialization occurs through many institutions, including through the family, schools, and media. Focusing on one route of socialization, in this case socialization from families, allows for the opportunity to understand the role families have in relaying the black feminine ideal to their black daughters. Honing in on family socialization thus can contribute to a larger discussion of how this ideal gets disseminated and ultimately internalized by black women.

The research on gendered socialization in black families is varied. Some research suggests that black families socialize their children in ways that reflect African values (Hill 2001). This socialization reflects strategies black men and women had to utilize during the slavery era. Researchers describing this method of socialization argue that the ideal of the two-parent household was a white phenomenon that took root during the slavery era (Hill 2001). When slavery ended, blacks sought to emulate the familial and gendered roles of the white family. However, because black men were denied jobs, black women's presence in the labor

force was crucial to the survival of the black family (Hill 2001). Black mothers thus became central to the family and represented the black feminine ideal. Because black women were not restricted by the same gender roles that applied to white women (since they had to take the responsibility for paid work, family, and community support) their definition of womanhood included strength, independence, achievement, and work (Hill 2001). This affected how black women socialized their daughters, by teaching them at an early age to hold strong family ties, be self-reliant and independent (Hill 2001).

Black family socialization research also suggests that black children are given more responsibility in the home than white children and have to perform more domestic and child-care work (Hill 2001). Some research suggests that black children are socialized in gender-neutral ways, where both sons and daughters are held to the same standards and have similar role expectations (Hill 2001; Hill and Sprague 1999). Even though their socialization is “gender neutral” it still suggests that black women are held to the same expectations of black men. Thus they still receive messages of the importance of success and independence. Additionally, while both sons and daughters are socialized to be independent and succeed, black daughters are ‘groomed’ at a young age to become prepared to support the black community (Collins 2000). This and the occurrence of other-mothering reflect the lack of success black men have had economically and the reliance on black women to support families. Conversely, because black daughters are socialized to be independent, they must at the same time defy the “glorified mammy work” image and learn how to be both independent and self-sufficient while resisting internalizing messages of their own subordination. Black daughters receive messages of success and independence alongside teachings of how

to express their gender in a way that negates racist stereotypical images. This struggle further highlights the racialized nature of black femininity.

Another view on socialization suggests that some black families are actually assimilating to the mainstream culture and thus hold traditional gender values. This view posits that black families who achieve middle-class status are more likely to have values and priorities of the dominant culture (Hill & Sprague 1999). The literature suggests that this is the case because blacks that achieve middle-class status want to distance themselves from racial stereotypes and emulate images of respectability (Hill 2002). They do this by conforming to and promoting hegemonic ideals of gender. Yet this theory negates the Afrocentric view of black socialization, where black families promote femininity that is unique to black women.

In order to account for the various methods of socialization, Hill (2002) proposes that black socialization research needs to take a multicultural feminist perspective, which suggests that race and class are key factors in defining gender. Various researchers point out that most research on black women and families focus on poor and/or single mothers, which creates a false universal image of how black families socialize their children (Hill and Sprague 1997; Johnson 2013). Hill (2002) also demonstrated that black families' ideologies about gender may not always align with their actions. She illuminated the discrepancy between black parents' ideologies about gender and how they actually do gender. She found that parents who were more educated were adamant in expressing support of gender equality. However, they also proposed conflicting images of femininity, wanting their daughter to be both "lady-like and a warrior" (Hill 2002). Hill theorizes that this contradiction reflects a middle class transitional position, where black families want to represent middle-class

respectability but do not want to sacrifice cultural tradition of strength as a major characteristic of a black woman. This highlights the intersection of class and race. Black families are aware of the racialized gendered ideal of the black woman, and while they want to promote this cultural image, they also want to promote their newer class status by distancing themselves from racial stereotypes. These conflicts highlight the unique decisions black families have to make and negotiate as they socialize their children, especially their daughters.

Research has also illustrated the heteronormative expectations that are a part of black family socialization. Black womanhood is grounded in a heterosexual framework that teaches daughters to fulfill traditional gender roles and identities (Stephens and Phillips 2005). Additionally, black mothers often teach their daughters about the importance of finding a man and getting married (Miller and Parker 2009). This speaks to the need to maintain respectability (Collins 2004). However, these messages can become problematic and difficult to attain, especially for black lesbians.

With the exception of Johnson's (2013) study on black daughters, little research has focused on the socialization experience of black women coming directly from the women themselves. The majority of the research on family socialization tends to focus on the parents. Focusing on the parents is important because it gets at the nuanced ways that gender is socialized and communicated to children. It also highlights the contradictions between gender ideologies and doing gender. However, what is missing in the literature is more attention to how this socialization has actually impacted black daughters. Johnson (2013) provides insight into this gap with her research on black women's perceptions of their relationships with their fathers and how those relationships influenced their ideals of black femininity. She suggests that

socialization conflicts are not only demonstrated by parents but also by black daughters. The women in her study described themselves as independent and success-driven, but also felt they needed to moderate their independence “within ideals of feminine respectability” (Johnson 2013, p. 896). These women illustrated the difficult contradiction between representing strength and respectability through the need to enact ladylike behaviors. They must navigate the ideal of strength, which traditionally can be defined as masculine, as well as engage in ladylike behavior, which serves as appropriate enactments of femininity.

By focusing on the parents, researchers can learn a lot about the methods black parents and families use to instill gendered expectations in their children. But more research needs to be done on black daughters’ perceptions of their socialization experience, how they make sense of it, and to what extent they exemplify the gendered expectations and behaviors that were instilled in them growing up. We need to further Johnson’s work in order to understand the connection between gendered socialization of black women and their perceptions of this gendered socialization.

Another extension of this research area is to examine black lesbians. Many black women are expected to uphold the black feminine ideal, whether they are socialized within an Afrocentric worldview, one that promotes gender-neutral roles where success and independence is valued for both men and women, or in an assimilationist framework, where traditional hegemonic views of gender are taught. Upholding this black feminine ideal becomes especially difficult for black lesbians, as they must represent an ideal that directly conflicts with multiple aspects of their identity. Because of the heteronormative nature of black femininity, black lesbians fail to uphold this ideal due to their sexuality, and possibly because of their gender

presentation (specifically masculine black lesbians). It is important to be familiar with the norms of the black lesbian community in order to understand how a black lesbian negotiates her sense of self, especially as a black woman, within a heteronormative context.

Black Lesbian Community

Within the black lesbian community, there are certain norms and expectations, especially surrounding gender presentation. During the 1970's, with lesbian feminism rising to the fore, women, especially lesbians, were encouraged to reject any gendered presentation of self and adopt an androgynous presentation (Moore 2006). This was in part a response to gendered oppression, and lesbian feminists viewed this rejection of gender as a resistance to this type of oppression. However, a majority of these lesbian feminists were white lesbian women. Black lesbians were largely separated from white lesbians during that time and therefore, they were less influenced by the attempts to replace gendered roles and identities (femme and butch) with more androgynous ones (Moore 2006). Furthermore, black lesbians were more resistant to giving up gender roles for fear of being further discriminated against. Thus, gendered roles and non-androgynous presentations in black lesbian communities still dominate the community's ideals.

Gender presentation is important in structuring black lesbian relationships. In these relationships, the norm is for masculine-presenting women to couple with feminine-presenting women (Moore 2006; Moore 2011; Reed et al. 2011). This historically has been the case for white lesbians as well, but with the rise of the lesbian feminist movement, a strict opposite gender coupling is no longer the norm (Moore 2006). In black lesbian communities, gender presentation tends to categorize into three

separate identities (Moore 2006; Valenti 2011; Reed et al. 2011; Wilson 2009). Moore (2006) identified these different gender presentations, using terminology that originated from her sample of black lesbians. “Transgressives” were women who presented as masculine, “femmes” were women who presented as feminine, and “gender-blenders” were women who changed their gender presentation for a variety of reasons, at times adopting feminine presentations of self and other times adopting more masculine ones. Moore (2011) discussed this expectation for how relationship dynamics should appear, and highlighted the eroticism of difference as a way to understand this coupling norm. She also highlighted that while there are gendered expectations in terms of presentation, gendered personality traits do not need to align with gendered presentation of self. For example, she noted that lesbians in her study did not state that transgressive women were expected to possess more masculine personality traits and femme women were expected to hold more feminine personality traits. The black lesbian community’s gender ideology therefore visibly reflects the hegemonic gender order but is more flexible when it comes to gendered behaviors.

Similar to the need to incorporate a multicultural feminist lens to understand how black families socialize their children, such a lens can also extend an understanding of the black lesbian community. Black lesbians as a whole are not a universal group. While, inherent to their group membership they all identify as black and lesbian, they were raised in different family contexts and come from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Moore (2011) found that while all the women in her sample currently identified as lesbian, their social class impacted how they came to understand and express their lesbian identity. She found that poor women growing up had to prioritize success and physical survival over identity expression. Thus, they had

less freedom in their younger years to worry about personal matters and could not prioritize exploration of a marginalized sexual identity. In contrast, for upwardly mobile women, openly possessing a marginalized sexual identity might risk their economic stability, which effectively delayed their process of openly accepting a lesbian identity (Moore 2011). Furthermore, class shaped the women's choices in gender presentation. Working-class women were more likely to resist gender-conformity and utilized their gender expression as resistance to the constraining racialized gendered image. In contrast, upper-middle class lesbians were more reluctant to claim membership to non-conforming gender identities even though their physical presentation may align with descriptions of gender-nonconformity. This rejection of the label reflects Hill's (2002) notion of the middle class transitional position, where women want to express middle-class respectability (in this case, rejection of gender non-conforming labels) even though their presentation was not necessarily conforming to the black feminine ideal. Rejecting the label allows these women to express respectability, at least in terms of their own understandings of their identity, while at the same time engage in appearances that resist the feminine ideal. This example illustrates one way that black lesbians (in this case, upper-middle class lesbians) negotiate and navigate the black feminine ideal within a homosexual context.

In addition to sexual identity, a significant nuance within the black lesbian community is gender presentation. It is important to understand how black lesbians negotiate black female masculinity. The research on black gendered socialization for women focuses on acceptable black femininity, concentrating especially on the importance for black women to promote respectability and strength. These are ideals

of black femininity. But how do masculine-presenting lesbians negotiate their black masculinity while also showcasing acceptable black standards of femininity?

Moore's (2011) interviews with transgressive lesbians illuminates some of the difficulties and dangers of presenting as a masculine black woman. Firstly, some communities of black lesbians, especially those with upper-middle class status are resistant to transgressive presentations of self, and resent this presentation because it reflects black men's disrespect towards women (Moore 2011). This also can be related back to Hill's (2002) concept of a middle class transitional position, and the importance of portraying self as respectable, while not giving up ideals of strength. These women reject the transgressive label, which is not a respectable identity, and also emulate strength as they distance themselves from a label that reflects men's power over women. These women illustrate another example of how they negotiate a black feminine ideal within the context of a lesbian identity. Distancing from transgressive women because their gender defies respectable presentations of self allows certain black lesbians to align themselves with the black feminine ideal while also identifying as lesbian.

Additionally, black masculinity is dangerous for women because it is often associated with violence. This is unique to black lesbians and does not apply to white masculine lesbians. White butch women's masculinity can be viewed as a distinct separation of white femininity, whereas black masculinity is linked with gendered racist images of black men (Moore 2011). Furthermore, black masculinity is punished more in American society and often leads to more harassment and discrimination (Moore 2011). Research has explored how black lesbians negotiate their masculinity and the strategies they take in order to avoid stigma and violence (Lane-Steele 2011).

However, the literature does not discuss how/whether their socialization as a black woman has shaped this negotiation process. Black masculine lesbians draw upon societal and cultural ideals of masculinity, specifically those that define black men. However, they still identify with and represent black women, and were socialized as such. Research has not focused specifically on this aspect of negotiating a gendered self and how black masculine lesbians in particular, make sense of their racialized gendered socialization.

While black lesbian masculinity is a clear example of black women's separation from the ideal standards of black femininity, black feminine lesbians also do not invoke traditional black femininity, at the very least, due to their sexuality. Therefore, it is important to understand how they make sense of their gendered socialization within the context of a lesbian identity. How does their gendered socialization, rooted in heteronormativity, impact their views on gender? This research serves as an important extension of existing literature on black lesbians. I focus specifically on how black lesbians understand their gendered socialization by examining what gendered messages and values they recall receiving in their upbringing. In doing so, I illustrate certain strategies that black lesbians enact while navigating discourses surrounding gender and how their internalization of the black feminine ideal has impacted their gender presentation.

Methods

I conducted this study at a time when race and racism were discussed all over the news. The interviews took place before, during, and after the Black Lives Matter movement emerged, in response to the killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner and decisions to not indict the white police officers who killed them (Robinson 2015).

While race has always been a sensitive topic in American society, the shootings of the two black men sparked uproar and upheaval from all people, and lead to many public debates, conversations, and movements to talk openly about race and its impact in America. It is in this context that I began and concluded my study, and being a white researcher, I was both excited and nervous about my interactions with the participants.

While not focusing explicitly on racism and the structural inequality and barriers that discriminate against black people, these concepts were implicit in my study: I wanted to learn how black lesbians make sense of their gendered socialization and how they engage with the gendered values they learn from their families. Yet black femininity and masculinity are distinctly racialized, and images of black femininity and masculinity are directly related to stereotypes and resistance strategies to avoid racism. Thus, I was nervous to begin data-collection, and was worried about how participants would react to me, a privileged white researcher, studying black lesbians. However, to my surprise and genuine humility, participants were eager to share their stories with me and seemed interested in offering me insight and educating me about their lives.

Between October 2014 and February 2015, I conducted 18 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with black women. In order to be selected for the study, women had to identify as black and lesbian. During the pre-screening, 17 women identified as black. However, when given the chance to self-identify their race, other categories emerged: 13 identified as Black/African American, 1 as African, 3 as mixed, and 1 as Creole. Ultimately I included 17 participants in my final sample. I removed one participant who self-identified as mixed and did not feel comfortable identifying as a black woman. Her white mother raised her and she did not have a relationship with her

black father. All participants identified as a lesbian except for one who identified as bisexual. However, I included her in my sample because my questions were about her relationships with women and her expectations surrounding these relationships.

In addition to the interview, I asked participants to complete a short survey about gender presentation and personality, as well as basic demographics. This survey was completed during the interview session but before the actual interview. Questions were adapted from Moore's (2006) study on black lesbians and gender presentation. Demographic variables included age, race, employment, family occupation, family's highest level of education completed, and religion. Participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very feminine and 10 being very masculine, how they perceive their own gender presentation, the gender presentation of their current (or former) partner, and of their ideal partner. They were also asked to rate their personality, that of their partner, and their personality preference of their ideal mate on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being laid back/introverted and 10 being outgoing/extroverted. For the purpose of this thesis, I only utilized the data from the survey that related to gender presentation and demographics See Appendix B for the survey.

I used several strategies to recruit my sample. I created flyers and posted them around my institution as well as another local University. In addition to flyers, I sent out recruitment emails to a variety of organizations, including LGBT groups of local universities, Black Student groups of local universities, gay community centers, black community centers, and engaged in face-to-face recruitment at different events. I attended a variety of events held by local community organizations that celebrated and promoted LGBT inclusivity. At these events, I was able to recruit a few participants to

participate in the research project. Ultimately, I recruited most of my sample from either face-to-face recruitment or snowball sampling. I recruited three participants through personal interactions at different LGBT events. Two participants heard about my project from a newsletter they received from a black community organization they were a part of. The rest of my participants were referred to me by other participants. While I was grateful to find participants willing to be interviewed, snowball sampling has its limitation. Particularly important is the principle of homophily, which suggests that individuals' networks will include likeminded people (Kelley 2010). Thus, by recruiting my sample mostly through snowball recruitment, I was not guaranteed a diverse sample. However, because of my outsider status and time restrictions, I continued with this recruitment strategy. Furthermore, while it has its limitations, it is still a useful strategy. I was able to have participants "vouch" for me, which provided easier access to a population that was mostly invisible to me. The participants also varied across demographic variables. Since most of my recruitment emails were sent to University organizations, I expected the majority of my participants to be college age. I surprisingly had a wide range of ages, ranging from 21-50 years old, with an average age of 32. Participants also had different family formations and socioeconomic background¹. See Appendix A for demographic breakdown of the sample.

Each interview began with a discussion of the consent form and the survey. Once the survey was completed, the interview began. All interviews were audio

¹ I assigned socioeconomic background/class based on participants' family's highest level of education completed. I assigned lower class to families that completed high school and upper class to those that completed college or above.

recorded. I asked participants questions about their childhood and family, values that were instilled in them, especially in terms of being a woman and femininity, and about their attraction preferences and relationship expectations. Interviews ranged from 40 minutes to 2 hours and 34 minutes, with an average of 1 hour and 24 minutes. I had no funding for this project, thus I could not provide participants with any compensation. However, some of the participants met me at coffee shops or local eateries, and so I would treat them to a drink of their choice. The rest of the interviews were conducted either at a library study room or at participants' homes. Each participant was given a pseudonym. Pseudonyms were picked strategically based on the participant's actual names, to reflect those that had traditionally black names and those that did not.

I relied on grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to inductively draw out conceptual themes that answered my research question. I had no hypotheses or preset ideas about how black lesbians understand their gendered socialization and did not predict or expect certain themes to emerge. Instead, I analyzed the narratives for common themes and experiences shared by the women. As I was conducting the interviews, I took extensive notes. After each interview was completed, I wrote down my reactions and thoughts to the interview, as well as how the progressing interviews related to each other. This process allowed me to recognize preliminary themes. As I transcribed my interviews, I was also able to interact with the data and draw out more preliminary themes. After transcribing, I read both the transcripts and my field notes, coding for broad themes, relying on my preliminary analysis to guide my coding. After I had this subsection of data, I recoded into more specific themes.

After my analysis, three major themes emerged. The first theme illustrates participants' recollections of gendered values, highlighting the presence of the black

feminine ideal in their upbringing. The second section examines how participants negotiated with and (dis)engaged from these gendered values, illustrating the strategies they used to make sense of the gendered values within a lesbian context. The last section focuses on the internalization of femininity and how this internalization has impacted their gender presentation. My analysis provides a story for how black lesbians make sense of their socialization. Because of this, within group differences are not central to my analysis. I do not analyze for differences across age, class², gender presentation, or other variables. However, I do bring these up when they are relevant, and when they could serve as an explanation to my findings.

Critical to my analysis is framing gendered socialization through an examination of values. While socialization can be understood and defined in multiple ways, by asking participants about the values their families taught them, my hope was illuminate the ideals that black families have for their daughters. Values are important because they reveal expectations. Asking about values allowed me to focus on the women's perceptions of what their families said, rather than did, for sometimes the gendered messages parents tell their children is not how they actually perform gender (Hill 2002). Thus, focusing on values helped to portray participants' perceptions of their family's ideal image of a black woman.

As mentioned earlier, my identity as a white researcher impacted my lens and approach during these interviews. I am an outsider to this group and reading scholarly

² While research has shown that socialization varies by class (Hill 2002; Lareau 2003) I diminish class difference by focusing on values. Despite class divide, participants all expressed the same values. Therefore, they all had to negotiate them. This also suggests that the black feminine ideal carries across class. However, while class is not a significant point of analysis in this research, I do bring it up when relevant.

work on black femininity, masculinity, and black families can only provide me with so much information. However, I do not feel that being an outsider limited my study. On the contrary, my participants were open to sharing and disclosing information about the black lesbian community and the black community at large. Additionally, despite being an in-group member in terms of sexuality, my identity often did not come up during my interviews, even though I assumed and expected that it would. I assumed participants would be interested in why I was doing this study, and while that question came up a few times, participants were more concerned with answering all my questions and making sure I had a solid understanding of their own perceptions of their socialization. Perhaps being white served as an advantage. Researchers have suggested that there are some benefits to being an out-group member, such as the tendency for participants to go over the taken-for-granted knowledge that an insider would have (Rhodes 1994). Perhaps because of my whiteness, participants were eager to answer my questions in depth because they wanted to be sure that I had a solid understanding of black family life.

Because my research question focused on the concepts of race and sexuality, I knew some questions could be challenging or emotionally strenuous for participants. Coming out can be a difficult process and I was prepared and conscious of the fact that some sensitive information could come up. However, I was unprepared for a different type of challenge that can come with qualitative inquiries. Early on in the interview process, one participant disclosed to me her history with sexual victimization. I was not prepared for this disclosure, because I did not specifically probe about sexual victimization. Retrospectively, I should have been cognizant of the fact that asking individuals about their childhood could hypothetically bring up some traumatic

histories. However at the time, I was caught off guard and worried about my reaction to this disclosure. Did I react appropriately? Was I sympathetic? Could she tell that I was caught off guard? Was she offended? This led me to critically assess the role of the researcher in qualitative methods. While as sociologists we are trained to be an interviewer and not a therapist, we are still conducting research with human beings, and thus it is our responsibility to show empathy. I thought about this interview and my reaction to it for some time after my interviews were completed and realized it impacted my interactions with the subsequent participants. After this one interview, I presented myself in a much more casual manner. Of course, I was still a researcher probing the individual about her childhood and conceptions of femininity, but I also related to them when they brought up their zodiac sign, joked with them about a television show, or connected with them on shared experiences.

When it came time in my research process to transcribe the interviews, I was very anxious to transcribe my interview with the participant who disclosed. However, after transcribing, I noticed that I reacted in a very appropriate manner. I was empathetic, I acknowledged the difficulty she must have faced, and I was able to continue to conduct an effective interview. I noticed that there were no awkward pauses in the interview during this time, and the audio recording did not reveal any indications of the participant feeling uncomfortable or offended by my reaction. It seems that I may have overreacted when there was actually no issue. However, I think that this experience was extremely beneficial for me and helped shape my perspective and future protocol as a researcher at large, and served as an important lesson for me in this academic journey.

Findings

In the sections to follow, I explore the major themes that emerged from conversations with the participants. In order to understand how the participants understand their gendered socialization, I start with a description of the values, both broad and specific to gender, that the participants recalled learning from their families. This section is primarily descriptive, and provides the foundation for a more analytic understanding of my participants' experiences. The second section explores the strategies participants used to negotiate gendered values. The last section examines how an internalization of gendered values and the feminine ideal has impacted some of the participants' gender presentation.

Values

I started the interview process by asking participants about their family background. I asked about their childhood and their relationships with family members. Then, I moved on to socialization. The first question I posed to my participants was about the values their families instilled in them, including any major life lessons they could recall. Understanding what values they were taught is critical for understanding their socialization, because it can illuminate the racial and gendered component of their upbringing. Participants all shared similar values, despite differences in class, age, and family formation. Imani brought up how her grandmother taught her the importance of “loving god...and being kind to one another... my family was very into being kind.... they gave a lot, they loved taking people in.” Similarly, Jasmine mentioned that what first came to mind was “religious teachings...do unto others as you would [want] them [to] do unto you. That was something that was said a lot and very pushed in my family.” In Imani's case, her

grandmother passed on these values to her. In Jasmine's case, she does not explicitly state who expressed the importance of religion, however she previously described her childhood and noted that mostly women raised her. The black church serves as an important institution for the black community, especially due to its attempts to build community and resist racism (Collins 2004). Furthermore, black women hold important positions in the church, such as their role as 'church mothers.' Researchers argue that the phenomenon of the church mother comes from the tradition of extended kin relationships (such as other-mothering) that typically occur among African American communities (Chatters et al. 1994). Thus, the importance of religious values is an indication of the women's racialized gendered socialization.

As a dialogue began about these values, the women brought up further examples of how their socialization was distinctly gendered (and racialized). They frequently mentioned the importance of hard work and the value of education:

Destiny: Working and being worthy in society, being of worth in society.
Cristina: Education played a big part. I can say that I remember having specific conversation about black women and you know, needing to be educated to make it.
Stephanie: They always talked about education.

This theme of hard work and education, and ultimately the drive for success is an aspect of socialization that is both gendered and raced. Research dating back to the Moynihan report (1967) has highlighted the tendency for black families to be structured in a matriarchal fashion, especially because of the difficulty for black men to enter the workforce. More recent research focusing on black parent socialization has noted that black parents (compared to white parents) stress the importance of education and finding a job (Hill and Sprague 1999). Furthermore, Hill (2001) points out that because, generally speaking, black women are not restricted by the same

gender roles that apply to white women, the definition of womanhood includes achievement and work.

This recollection of the importance of hard work and education tied in with the participants' discussions of the importance of success. Jasmine recollected a "very covert message about being successful and about being accomplished and about being smart [but with] the caveat of having to be more successful, smarter than, better than white people." Jasmine distinctly pointed out this socialization message of having to be more successful than her white counterparts, because of the fact that she is black. Aniyah expressed similar sentiments, where with her family, "the ultimate goal was to be able to be successful and take care of yourself and advance yourself in life." Jasmine and Aniyah's comments both illuminated the gendered nature of their socialization. Black women are expected to fight racism through strength, which is often characterized through success and self-reliance (Hill 2002; Johnson 2013). Jasmine and Aniyah's experience is consistent with this literature, as they illustrated how their families expected them to work hard and succeed.

Theresa also presented an example of the importance of success. Theresa recalled doing homework with her two younger brothers, and her dad communicated to them: "there is no such thing as can't. Can't is not in our vocabulary. You can do it, you just don't know how." This push for success was given to both Theresa and her brothers, and was not presented as a gendered expectation. Theresa's experience coincides with other researcher's findings that black family socialization can produce greater gender role equality (Hill and Sprague 1999). Despite the gender-neutral socialization that Theresa recalled, all three women received the similar message of

the importance of working hard and succeeding, which thus promotes the racialized component of black womanhood.

Another gendered value that came up in the participants' recollections was the importance of independence. When asked what her family taught her about the role of the woman, Ryleigh noted that because she was raised in a single parent household, she grew up without explicit gender roles. "My mom did everything. It just showed me that she could take care of everything, and I never once thought, oh this is a woman and she's taking care of it...it just taught me that as a person, a *person* could be strong [emphasis added]." Ryleigh illustrated that growing up in a single-parent household has taught her that anyone can be strong and successful. There were no gender expectations; instead you do whatever you need to do in order to succeed given your own personal circumstances. Imani, who stated that her parents instilled in her the importance of speaking up for yourself, also relayed this message: "That's the one thing we were taught, between my sister and my self, speak up for yourself. Don't be afraid. Know what you want, do for self. That's what they always said. Do for self." Imani and Ryleigh both described their family's messages of being able to succeed and thrive independently, without relying on others to help. This aspect of self-sufficiency was also expressed by some participants specifically in terms of succeeding without the help of a man. As Destiny recalled, "I remember having a conversation with someone saying don't depend on a man for anything, you don't need a man to make ends meet. You go out there and you work." Two values stand out from Destiny's statement. First, a family member relayed the value and importance of independence and self-sufficiency. Second, this independence is explicitly framed within a heterosexual context. Not only was Destiny instructed to succeed and strive

for success, but her family also made the assumption that she needed to be instructed to not rely on *men* for support. While this could be construed as her family's rejection of heteronormativity (by encouraging Destiny to avoid relying on men) Destiny later goes on to explain her family's "lesbian intervention" when she came out and their heterosexual expectations of her. Thus, this message represents a gendered component of her socialization.

This assumption of heterosexuality was present in many of the participant's descriptions of womanhood, as taught by their families. When Jayla explained what her family taught her about expectations for women, she noted that her parents stressed the importance of "taking care of your man," especially in the context of domestic work. Aniyah explained the contradictory messages of needing to be both independent as well as having a man support you. She recalled her family's statements that a woman was expected to take care of both her self and the family, and that doing these two things would "land you a man." When I asked her to expand on that, she explained:

That would link you to being able to have a companion and to have a family. Which would complete the equation. So the message definitely was, be able to stand alone and be independent...but if ever you should need someone, if you do these different things...then you'll have a man and he will take care of you and you won't have to really worry about taking care of yourself because you'll have him.

Johnson (2013) also talks about these contradictory messages in terms of the conflict between strength and respectability. Both strength and respectability are important because they respond to the negative stereotypes of black women as hypersexual, unfeminine, and lazy. In my sample, strength is represented through their families'

insistence on their success and independence, while respectability is the need to find a man and create a stable home life.

The importance of finding a man was so central that it came up when participants' described general values, not specific to femininity or womanhood. When I asked Devyn to recall what type of values her family taught her, she responded: "well first and foremost, no homosexuality. That's a big one. Family consists of a man and a woman and kids." Devyn's recollections illustrate the importance of family in black communities, which is consistent with the literature (Collins 2004). Especially critical is the definition of family as strictly heterosexual. Ryleigh conveyed similar messages, that with her family there was "this expectation that I was supposed to be interested in and partnered with a man. And that was clearly what my future was going to hold for me." Both Devyn and Ryleigh expressed these messages within the context of general family values, illustrating how prominent heterosexual partnership was in their socialization.

Other women brought up the expectation to be with a man when describing their family's definition of womanhood. Jayla described that her parents "always did the whole, take care of your man thing. My mom and my dad, both of them. They always wanted me to be in the kitchen cooking...they'll be like this is how you should be, you should always cook when *he* comes home" [emphasis added]. Jayla described her socialization as if her parents were grooming her to become an ideal partner to a husband. Gabrielle also conveyed the heterosexual expectations when she described her perception of her mom's definition of womanhood: "she feels like it's not ladylike to like ladies." Therefore, extending this logic would mean that being a lady means being with a man. All these women demonstrated how they were socialized with clear

heteronormative expectations. These expectations of partnering with a man are clearly gendered. Furthermore, this heterosexual assumption and expectation is not only the case for black women. In fact, heterosexuality is assumed and normalized within white households as well (Martin 2009). However, the consequences for resisting these expectations are higher for black women, because heterosexuality and the creation of a stable family life are rooted as a resistance strategy to avoid racism. Therefore, while these gendered values may not in and of themselves be raced, there is a racialized component to maintaining these values, which demonstrate the importance of the black feminine ideal.

Participants' definitions of womanhood and femininity were linked with (hetero)sexuality. It is interesting to note that participants brought up sexuality even though I only asked them about gender expectations. This illuminates the intersection between sexuality and gender. Moreover, a common response to expectations surrounding womanhood was a link to gender presentation and behavior. Being a woman equated to looking and acting like a woman, and this ideal image of a woman carried across age and class. As Gabrielle recalls, her mother's portrayal of womanhood was almost as if she "had this old dusty list of rules that she brought from the 1950s with her: must cross legs, must eat with one hand, elbow on the table." Makayla brought up behavioral expectations that originated from her grandmother, such as recalling her grandmother holding "very traditional gender roles...[and doing] most of the cooking...and all of the cleaning." Aniyah defined ladylike behavior as "making sure you always sit up straight, cross your legs, if nothing else, cross your legs at your ankles...You don't have to be really loud."

Other participants often associated their families' definitions of womanhood and femininity to wearing dresses and maintaining a feminine presentation:

Imani: My mom wanted me to be a little girl

T: how so?

Imani: The dresses and all that shit. Oh yeah, I wore the lace, socks, all that frilly shit around the sides...Easter dresses, frilly ass socks and patent leather shoes. And bows in my hair.

Stephanie: My mom would always try to make me into that little girl she always wanted...most of the femininity that I was taught had to do with dress. Like when you wear a dress sit with your legs crossed.

Devyn: Dresses, definitely...and curls in your hair. Hair is very important to my mom.

Jasmine: Having long dresses, ruffles, having my hair done, meaning like laid or in some kind of style where it wasn't all over the place.

The women were all able to convey certain expectations about what womanhood means and these were rooted in physical appearances and behavior. Keeping up with appearances is a gendered, racialized message. Presenting as a "lady" is an aspect of respectability for black women (Johnson 2013). This presentation is an aspect of the black feminine ideal that these black women were taught to uphold.

The women in my sample explicitly conveyed these values of the importance of hard work, success, independence, and what womanhood means. They illustrate the prominence of the black feminine ideal as a large part of their gendered socialization. The next section explores how women made sense of these values and what strategies they utilized to maintain the ideal of femininity but also live feel comfortable with their lesbian identity. Some women distanced themselves from the traditional heterosexual gender roles their families both emulated during their childhood and/or outright expressed to them. Some internalized certain values in order to reject others, and some employed strategies of cognitive reframing in order to normalize their identity and presentation.

Active negotiation with and (dis)engagement from gendered values

Heterosexual expectations are a component of socialization about gender. Miller and Parker (2009) discuss that it is common for black mothers to teach their daughters skills that are steeped in a heterosexism, such as the importance of finding a man. The women in my sample relayed examples of such heterosexual expectations and expressed a rejection of these heterosexual norms and gender roles. For example, when asked what her relationship preferences are in terms of roles, Amari explained that she:

likes the roles to be even. That's what I like. Cuz a lot of people get this idea...it's like that heterosexual thinking. It's like I'm more so the aggressive one so you do the cooking. Like no! You know? Like maybe I don't feel like cooking tonight.... Within our home we're a unit. And what needs to be done needs to be done regardless if you're feminine one or whether or not you're the masculine one. It doesn't matter in the household.

Amari outright rejected the heterosexual norm and refused to uphold the gendered expectations that come with femininity and masculinity within the household. This is consistent with Moore's (2006) finding that with black lesbians, presentation does not necessarily link with behavior, where masculine women are not necessarily expected to possess masculine traits. In Amari's lifestyle, domestic chores are evenly split up, regardless of gender. The masculine-presenting partner is expected to help with the domestic chores just as much as the feminine-presenting partner. Carrington (1999) discusses the "egalitarian myth" that occurs in lesbian and gay relationships, which suggests a commitment to equal division of labor. While this can serve as an explanation of Amari's comments, she describes the division of labor as "heterosexual thinking," which is one she grew up in, and situates herself in opposition to this lifestyle. Even though, according to the literature, it is not surprising that Amari prefers an egalitarian lifestyle, what is important here is her perception of this lifestyle

as a rejection of the heterosexual one she grew up in, where women were expected to do more of the domestic chores and take care of the man. This represents her distancing from gendered values. Implicit in her explanation is the rejection of inequality. Thus, she is distancing herself from gendered values and the black feminine ideal in a complex fashion: because of her identity as a woman she rejects having to be the one to engage in all the domestic labor, yet because of her identity as masculine-presenting (she identifies as a “7”), she is rejecting the idea that the masculine partner (which, in a heterosexual partnership would most likely be the man) does not engage in any domestic labor. Her stance on the importance of equality allows her to distance herself from certain components of the black feminine ideal, such as the heteronormative division of labor.

Cristina brought up an example from her childhood, and illustrated how her socialization informed her current perspective. She elaborated on how her brother engaged in different chores than her and her sister. “I mean he did chores but it wasn’t the same level. He was out helping my dad build stuff or tear stuff up, and you know, he took the trash out... Definitely those kinds of roles, which I always in my head rebelled against.” Similar to Amari, Cristina also rejected the gendered roles that she was socialized with. With her family, her brother was responsible for more physical tasks, a reflection of gendered socialization. Yet Cristina rejected the idea that only men could engage in these types of behaviors, and distanced herself from these expectations, especially due to her own identity as a more masculine-presenting lesbian. Similar to Amari, Cristina also relied on her conceptualization of equality to normalize her masculinity and desire to engage in traditionally masculine behaviors and presentation.

These gendered strategies were introduced by Hochschild (1989) to illustrate the ways men and women use constructions of gender to solve problems in their lives. Since Hochschild, various researchers have extended these gendered strategies to examine various marginalized groups (Chen 1999; McQueeney 2009). McQueeney (2009) discusses gender strategies that lesbian and gay men use to resist notions of homosexuality as a sin specifically within their church congregations. Amari and Cristina's emphasis on equality over homosexuality is similar to McQueeney's description of the strategy of minimization, where men and women minimize homosexuality by treating it as secondary to Christian identity. In this case, Amari and Cristina are minimizing their lesbian identity and relying on their notions of equality to uphold their engagement in masculinity and resistance of the black feminine ideal.

Devyn illuminated an internal struggle with gendered expectations, especially due to her own masculine presentation. She explained that her family taught her that "a male is supposed to be this and a female is supposed to be that. And now because I kinda play the male role it feels weird to think that way...It feels weird to think that only a man can play the male role." Devyn rejected the gendered expectations that stem from her parent's heteronormative standard of living, especially because she identifies as a lesbian and presents as masculine. Throughout her childhood, she was socialized about what it means to be a woman, and included in that definition was "letting [her] brothers hold the door" for her, or "letting [her] dad protect [her]." Her own experiences of "playing the male role" led to her distancing from and rejection of these behaviors. Because she herself, as an adult, engages in masculine behavior but does not identify as a man, she had to navigate the conflicting socialization message that asserted that only men can engage in masculinity. This gender strategy is similar

to the repudiation strategy that Chen (1999) observed in his sample of Chinese American men achieving masculinity. Repudiation refers to the rejection of symbolic or cultural assumptions about gender norms (in his study, this referred to masculinity) that make stereotypes possible. Devyn is engaging in a similar strategy by repudiating the expectation that only men can engage in masculinity. This is a great example of how a black lesbian must negotiate understandings of her socialization about gender. As a black woman, her family had certain gendered expectations of her. Yet as a masculine black lesbian, she refused to accept certain expectations, and instead, used what her father taught her brothers about masculinity to inform her own behavior. Devyn went on to describe that with her current partner, she often holds the door and enjoys being the ‘protector;’ all behaviors that her father socialized her *brothers* to perform in order to engage in appropriate masculinity.

Another common trend among the sample was the acceptance of several values in order to distance self from certain gendered expectations. Jayla exemplified this phenomenon as she discussed her relationship with her mother. Jayla explained that her mother would text her every morning telling her “god is going to bring a man for you that is going to love you for you.” Jayla explained that she relied on respect, a value that her parents instilled in her, to handle her mom’s texts. “As long as there’s respect, even if it’s on my end, I’m not going to cause any havoc. I’m just going to let you be you. So whenever she texts me [that], I say ok, I respect what you say, this is what I feel.” Jayla was able to rely on the value of respect in order to cope with her mother’s comments, and distance herself from those gendered expectations. She perceived to be employing moral values by allowing her mom to say what she needs to say. She exemplified a more important value—being respectful—and used it to deflect

the heterosexist messages her mom relayed to her. This strategy was also found in McQueeney's (2009) sample. She described this strategy of moralizing, where individuals defined themselves as more generous and moral than condemning Christians who excluded homosexuals. In this case, Jayla views herself as more moral than her mom, which allows her to normalize her identity and resist heterosexist expectations.

Madison's story is similar to Jayla's in that she rejected certain values while embodying others. However, in her case, she embodied behaviors of values she wants to reject. Towards the end of the interview, Madison opened up about her discontent with her current relationship situation. "It drives me crazy because I feel like I am becoming my mom sometimes. Like right now I have to, I *have* to go home instead of going to this modern jazz dance class that I really want to go to." Madison described the obligation of needing to go home because her more masculine-presenting partner expects her to be home and help with dinner. She wants to reject the gendered expectation of women needing to take care of their partners (which is made clear by her reference of becoming more like her mother). While Madison closely embodies a heterosexual coupling pattern and gendered behavior (Madison identifies as a "4" and listed her partner as a "10" on the gender presentation scale) with the expectation to go home and take care of her partner, she wished that she was less like her mom in the sense that she could be more independent and do what she wants to do for herself. She wants to embody the values of being strong and independent, but instead is emulating (as much as possible in a lesbian relationship) the gendered norms of heterosexual relationships, which includes the feminine partner coming home to make dinner. In Madison's case, she is upholding an aspect of the black feminine ideal, one that

requires her to take care of her masculine partner. Yet she wishes she could embody the strength ideal, which would allow her to be more independent and self-sufficient.

Some women were able to make sense of their gendered socialization by cognitively reframing certain values that they were taught. This strategy of cognitive reframing of the values and ideals they were taught allowed the women to feel satisfied and comfortable with their own sexuality and presentation. In a study of young black lesbians, Reed and Valenti (2012) found a similar strategy employed by these youth to cope with sexual prejudice. In their sample, cognitive reframing was defined as “the cognitive restructuring of heterosexist messages” in order to defend against or counteract stigmatizing messages (p 711). Reed and Valenti’s (2012) participants employed cognitive reframing as a response to religious condemnation and to refute negative messages emanating from within the gay community. For my sample, cognitive reframing was used to refute familial ideals about gender, mostly relying on morality as a guiding principle in order to oppose heterosexist ideologies.

For Destiny, her family reacted in a negative way when she came out to them. She recalled her family holding a “lesbian intervention.” She described that in addition to homophobic comments, her family also quoted bible scriptures about homosexuality and expressed their expectation for her to be with men. She recalled: “oh you’re supposed to be straight, you’re supposed to be with men. So there was that. [But] those aren’t values, you know? Those are things you do in life, those are your actions....Cuz I followed all those values. There was never a point where I was lying or stealing.” Destiny cognitively reframed her family’s ideals in order to feel comfortable and satisfied with her lifestyle. To negate the possibility of disappointing her family and struggling with issues of self-worth, Destiny reframed her

understanding of what her family taught her. She roots her restructuring of values in morality. She still identifies as a moral being, and reifying these values allowed her to deflect and reject the “value” of heterosexuality. She separates behaviors from values and frames heterosexual behavior as separate and distinct from moral values.

Aniyah also employed cognitive reframing in order to feel comfortable with the life she was leading, despite it not aligning with her mother’s wishes. Aniyah, who identified as an “8” on the gender presentation scale, discussed her mom’s transition to accepting her gender presentation. She described that her mom had to deal with “the loss of me not being the daughter that she expected...she had put all this time and energy into sending me to modeling classes and etiquette classes for me to be this stellar woman...I’m still a stellar woman. I just don’t look the way you thought I was going to look.” Aniyah explained that her mom taught her that being a stellar woman means “doing whatever it is that you want for you, to create your own happiness, and not living for other people’s happiness.” Aniyah’s mom ingrained in her the importance of being a “stellar woman.” For Aniyah, that meant dressing the way that made her feel most comfortable, and being unapologetic about her appearance. She reframed her mom’s definition of “stellar woman” in a way that allowed her to live her life the way she wants. She rejected her mother’s desires to present as more feminine (a gendered value) and instead personified the image of a stellar woman, a woman that lives for her own happiness, not for other’s. She is simultaneously living up to and rejecting the gendered ideals her family expected of her.

Ryleigh similarly employed strategies of cognitive reframing in order to find a connection to the church. Ryleigh recalled that when she was first coming out, she had trouble relating to the church, due to the “hypocrisy of having such deep instilled

religious values and believing in all these different things that the bible teaches, but then on the other hand having your life look a very different way.” She explained that she could not understand how the church preached that homosexuality was a sin, yet the same people who would preach these messages would engage in other activities (such as extramarital affairs) that were frowned upon by the bible. In her example, in order to allow herself to have a religious identity, she reframed her perceptions of this phenomenon as reflections of *actions* of specific people, not as a reflection of religious values. This allowed her to foster a religious identity by connecting with church denominations that did not preach homophobic messages. In fact, she ultimately attended seminary and had plans to be ordained. By reframing her perceptions of homophobic messages as reflecting individuals’ ideologies and not the church’s, she was able to create a religious identity, identify as a lesbian, and not have these two identities conflict with each other.

Chen’s (1999) gender strategies that Chinese American men adopt to achieve masculinity are similar to the cognitive reframing strategy employed by these black lesbians. One of the gender strategies they used was denial, which served to reject the existence of negative stereotypes and claim that they do not apply to the self. Cognitive reframing of the gendered values involves using denial and repudiation (defined earlier) in order to reframe understandings of their family’s values. This suggests that marginalized communities rely on similar gender strategies in order to cope with and normalize their identities. Cognitive reframing as a strategy helped women in the sample destigmatize their identity and allowed them to feel comfortable and satisfied with the lives they were leading, despite it not aligning with their family’s (or church members’) wants and expectations.

Internalization of Womanhood and Femininity

The previous section focused on the women's active engagement with and disengagement from their gendered values. The women also, both implicitly and explicitly, demonstrated an internalization of values. In this section, I will expand on this internalization, specifically in terms of womanhood and femininity. I highlight how this internalization has impacted and shaped, at least partially, the women's gender presentation. This is important because these women were socialized with values that are steeped in heteronormative assumptions and expectations. Therefore, I illustrate how the internalization of a (heterosexual) definition of black womanhood and femininity impacted how black lesbians express their own gender within a homosexual context.

The women in the sample demonstrated an internalization of racialized gendered expectations, such as the necessity of success in both the public and private sphere. For Jasmine, this became difficult, as her professional life began to blossom and thus limited the amount of time she could devote to growing her family:

It was never hard for me before because I now have this expectation of myself that I should be able to do all. Like to do everything. That I should be able to have a successful career, that I should be able to have a family and have time to raise children and be there with my partner and do all these things, as well as have this successful, you know, very fulfilling outside world in terms of my academic and professional goals.

These expectations were brought up in response to my question inquiring about what it means to be a black woman. Jasmine has internalized the importance of success as central to her identity as a black woman, and only now is struggling to balance it all; for it was never brought up in her family that there was any other option. In this context, being a black woman and being a lesbian are not conflicting; maintaining a lesbian identity does not negate or challenge these gendered values of success.

Interestingly, Jasmine does bring up her family's expectation for her to have children. But she does not perceive these expectations to be in conflict with her lesbian identity.

Another example of participants' internalization of a racialized gendered expectation was when some of the women expressed disgust towards seeing two masculine-presenting women together in a relationship. Cristina explained: "It's just in my head even as a kid, like ew that's gross." Ryleigh also noted that she did not understand how one of her masculine-presenting friends could find another masculine-presenting lesbian attractive: "I never once said to her, how are you attracted to her? Cuz that's just disrespectful. But I thought, how are you attracted to that?" This is an example of how gendered socialization, especially because of its heteronormative nature, has impacted black lesbians' own views on gender. Cristina and Ryleigh both express disgust at the idea of seeing two masculine-presenting women together. While heteronormativity is, by definition, ubiquitous, and black lesbians receive messages about heteronormativity through various social institutions, their gendered socialization and internalization of femininity serves to reinforce the heteronormative structure of relationships. Through their gendered socialization, black lesbians internalize aspects of the ideal of black femininity, which includes being ladylike and getting a man. All black lesbians challenge this ideal due to their sexuality, and some resist it due to their masculine presentation. However, the opposite-gender coupling and attraction preferences represent an internalization of the black feminine ideal to a certain extent, where relationships (while not comprised of a man and a woman) usually consist of one masculine-presenting and one feminine-presenting partner.

The women in my sample also demonstrated an internalization of femininity when it came to their understanding of their own gendered behavior and presentation.

For example, Devyn described what a “10” on the gender presentation scale would look like: “They talk in these deep voices, they walk around grabbing themselves, and they’re just men. Almost all the way. They’re kinda like transgender almost. But I still appreciate my femininity. Like, there will be times when I’ll sit and I’ll probably cross my legs.” While she does not state explicitly that her family taught her that crossing her legs is an aspect of femininity, her family had an impact on her understanding of how women are expected to present themselves. Even though Devyn identified as an “8” on the gender presentation scale, she still practiced femininity. She distances herself from “10”s with her explanation that she still embraces some aspects of femininity. She also linked being a “10” to being “just like men.” Despite the gender presentation scale asking specifically about presentation, Devyn inserted gender identity into her understanding of gender presentation. She is able to distance herself from being a “10” because she identifies as a woman, and expresses certain aspects of femininity in order to convey that. Thus, her internalization of femininity allows her to present as masculine, yet still identify as a woman by performing certain feminine behaviors. Similarly, Gabrielle explained that her biological mom taught her to “always be a lady. I don’t know what that means... cross your legs and wear a purse I guess.” She explained that the importance of looks was implied in her mom’s definition and links this to her own presentation: “And that’s probably why I don’t wear many pairs of pants.” Unlike Devyn, Gabrielle actively linked her socialization to her own gender presentation. She has internalized aspects of femininity that was taught to her by her family. This suggests that despite holding a non-normative identity, black lesbians still internalize certain heteronormative gender norms. This

internalization of femininity, while not necessarily surprising, becomes more interesting when it, ironically, leads to a more masculine presentation.

Destiny expressed an internalization of femininity, which is then used as an explanation for her masculine presentation. She explained: “I don’t femme. Like if you ask me my bra size, I’d say medium. You know, like I don’t know bra size. I don’t wear panties.” Destiny believed that because she does not have knowledge about gendered garments, she cannot be feminine. Her family has socialized her to view dress and presentation as an aspect of femininity and womanhood. Her definition of femininity involved wearing dresses and stockings. Instead of utilizing cognitive reframing, for example, to redefine femininity and womanhood in a way that would normalize her presentation, she instead rejects femininity, and presents and identifies as masculine. Aniyah also presented an example of how her internalization of femininity actually led her to present as more masculine. She explained that in middle school, she was teased for being skinny. She explained

because in terms of being feminine and being a girl, many of my friends in 6th grade were already starting to go through puberty. So they were already filling up their bras and all these different things. And puberty happened really late for me. So in middle school I went through a teasing of being a stick figure and boys having much more of an interest in the girls that were much more curvaceous.

In response to this teasing, Aniyah decided to start wearing baggier clothes. She said: “I felt comfortable. I felt like it just, there wasn’t a certain way that I had to wear it, it just worked out. I didn’t, I already sort of met the expectation when I had on baggy clothes because it was less judgment. Like no one could see my body.” Aniyah explained that wearing baggier clothing released her from the social pressures of acting feminine. She internalized the feminine ideal and realized that she was teased

due to her lack of a feminine body type. She decided to wear baggier, more masculine clothing, which excused her of the need to enact ladylike behaviors. Her internalization of femininity, and the understanding that her body did not reflect these ideals, led her to present as more masculine. These examples demonstrate how the internalization of femininity and definitions of womanhood impacted these women's gender presentation. Yet because they identify as lesbian, this internalization and rejection of femininity become more nuanced. Black female masculinity is not a component of the ideal black femininity. In fact, it represents the opposite. However, black masculine lesbians have a place within the black lesbian community. Thus, a lesbian identity provides black women with more flexibility in determining their gender presentation, yet also impedes their ability to represent an ideal black femininity.

Imani also described a situation which exemplifies how internalization of femininity impacts black lesbians' gender presentation. She provided an example that illustrates the intersection of sexuality, race, and gender through her perception of her self and her perceptions of the black lesbian community. "It's still not popular to be an overweight woman. Which is unfortunate. You can be an overweight man all you want. You can be an overweight butch all you want too. You get all the girls." Imani explained that not only is masculinity an acceptable presentation for overweight lesbians, but it also results in more sexual capital and attention. She extended this further by describing other butch black lesbians, questioning if their gender presentation is a result of their own gender preferences or if it is a result of societal expectations of what women are expected to look like. Either way, Imani's comments illustrate an internalization of femininity, and its culmination in a more masculine

presentation. Her comments also highlight the intersection of gender, sexuality and race. Overweight black lesbians cannot portray an ideal black femininity, as they defy both sexual and gendered expectations. Masculinity serves as an acceptable outlet for these women, and in the lesbian context, it even results in more sexual attention. Here again, homosexuality allows for more flexibility with gender presentation while directly disputing the black feminine ideal.

Ryleigh's example speaks to this internalization of femininity in the context of beauty ideals. She explained that her friends would describe her as a "soft butch." According to her friends, she "couldn't be a hard butch because [she's] pretty." Soft butch is a lesbian who still engages in femininity, while a hard butch is one that exemplifies masculinity. Ryleigh described her analysis of this phenomenon: "So hard butches are ugly? I never got that...so [when talking to hard butches,] I go into the fact that well did you become a hard butch because you didn't think you were pretty? So I'm really...curious about why lesbians choose how they present their gender." Ryleigh's comments speak to the internalization of femininity and the use of masculinity as a coping mechanism for failing to adhere to feminine beauty ideals. Similar to Imani, Ryleigh questions whether women who present as "hard butch" are doing so because they want to present that way or because they feel that they do not represent the feminine beauty ideal and therefore *must* present as masculine. In Ryleigh's case, this phenomenon is not necessarily racialized, for she does not specify that this happened specifically with her black lesbian friends. This suggests that the internalization of femininity resulting in the use of masculinity as a coping mechanism carries across race.

Another demonstration of an internalization of femininity was participants' discussion of a limited amount of masculinity that they felt comfortable expressing, which I term "masculine threshold." This concept of a limited amount of acceptable masculinity was first illuminated through an analysis of the gender presentation scale. None of the 17 participants identified as a "10" even though I had a few that described themselves as masculine and even mentioned situations in the past where they "passed" as men. They appeared to be linking identifying as a "10" with wanting to *be* a man. When I explored this further, it became evident that participants felt that they could only express a certain amount of masculinity. There was a threshold for acceptable masculinity. While this was not described as explicitly related to their socialization, I suggest that their gendered socialization about femininity, and a rejection of black male masculinity has impacted their ideologies of appropriate black female masculinity.

A masculine threshold came up when participants discussed their presentation at work. Brooklyn explained that at work she needed to be more "humble," which translates to dressing more feminine. She explained that she "softens up" her appearance in order to appease others. Gendered socialization, and the internalization of femininity serves as a possible explanation for this need to limit her masculinity. Destiny and Cristina also discussed the need to limit their masculinity. They both gave specific examples of certain gendered garments that they do not feel comfortable wearing at work, such as ties or suits. Even though they are both known lesbians in their workplace, they explain that they do not want to "dress like a full on dude." Thus, masculine threshold is context dependent, and occurs when the women are in certain public spaces.

Not only did women express the need to limit their masculinity, they also explained that in a perfect world, their ideal gender presentation would be much more masculine. In my conversation with Cristina she illuminated this conflict:

Cristina: I guess I am conscious sometimes. Like I don't want to appear super gay...so instead of me wearing what I really wanted to wear, what I think I'd look really cool in or whatever, I wore a scaled-down version of it.

T: What's the fear?

Cristina: I don't know. It's all mental. It's just fear of being judged.

T: Because you're lesbian? Because you're black?

Cristina: I think both. Like I remember having cornrows, I went somewhere on the weekend and they braided my hair. I remember [thinking] oh I can't wear this to work. So I think that goes into being gay, but I think some of it goes to being a black woman, and wanting to appear professional. And your hairstyle choice goes with you being professional or unprofessional

T: But in a perfect world you would do that? If you knew for sure that you were free of judgment.

Cristina: Oh absolutely...That would be my ideal.

Cristina demonstrated the masculine threshold. In her ideal world she would present as very masculine. Yet she feels restricted due to stereotypes and expectations about what it means to be a black woman. She has internalized messages about black femininity. Because of her gay identity, she already feels that she is not upholding the standard of being a black woman, and so she feels the need to limit her masculinity in order to avoid further distancing herself from that ideal. While white women may also experience a masculine threshold, I hypothesize that this threshold is stronger for black women. Maintaining a feminine presentation is not only about upholding certain gendered values; for black women this serves as a strategy to resist racism. Furthermore, when black lesbians engage in masculinity, they become associated with negative stereotypes that plague black men. As Moore (2011) points out, black masculinity is linked to racist images of black men, which can lead to harassment and discrimination. Thus, by engaging in masculinity, not only are black women prone to

face racist messages about their womanhood, but they are also exposing themselves to racism associated with black men. Therefore, having a masculine threshold protects black masculine lesbians from being associated with the negative depictions of black male masculinity.

Perhaps not surprisingly, most of the women that illuminated a masculine threshold identified as more masculine (between 7-8 on the gender presentation scale). Interestingly, Madison identified on the feminine side, yet still struggled with a threshold of masculinity, especially as a result of her work in the entertainment industry.

Madison: I think femininity sells more in the industry I'm in. Of course you want to [stick to] your virtue and who you are but at the same time you want to sell.

T: So you think if you weren't, if that wasn't your business you'd shift more towards the masculine?

Madison: Definitely.

Madison identified as a "4" on the gender presentation scale, yet in her ideal world she would dress more masculine. In this case, she is not limiting her masculinity; rather, she is choosing to not engage in it at all. This illustrates the impact of the internalization of femininity and the internal conflict that some black lesbians need to negotiate. The masculine threshold carries across class, age, and gender presentation. It also appears to be context-dependent, and especially prominent in the context of work. While the masculine threshold may have a variety of different variables that reinforce its hegemony, (such as media, neighborhood context, school socialization, etc.) gendered socialization and the internalization of femininity serve as one of these factors that works together with other forces to limit the acceptable masculinity options for black lesbians. Ultimately, masculine threshold seems to be a protective

strategy that certain black lesbians employed in order to resist racism and distance themselves from the negative stereotypes surrounding black male masculinity. The masculine threshold allowed them to present as masculine (and reject the black feminine ideal) and simultaneously not be associated with black male masculinity, and be protected from the racism that emerges from those images.

Discussion

I started this project because I was interested in how race impacts a black woman's lesbian identity, specifically in terms of her gender presentation and behavior. To narrow down this broad question, I focused on how black lesbians make sense of their gendered socialization, and how this socialization has impacted their own gender. Throughout the research process, the participants illustrated how their families socialized them to uphold a black feminine ideal. Through the conversations we had, they described strategies of resisting this ideal in order to feel comfortable with their own lesbian identity, as well as an internalization of this ideal and how it in part, shaped their gender presentation. Thus, by focusing on their perceptions of their gendered socialization, this research contributed to multiple fields of sociology, including the family, gender, sexuality, and race literature.

Consistent with existing research (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2009; Collins 2004; Johnson 2013; Miller and Parker 2009), through a description of family values, participants expressed the existence of a black feminine ideal. Yet this study extends the literature by showcasing how a specific group of black women, specifically black lesbians, negotiate their understandings of this ideal. The values included the importance of hard work, success, independence, and maintaining a ladylike appearance and behavior. While these values are not in and of themselves racialized,

they are important for black women to uphold because they are a response to the negative racial stereotypes that permeate society. Thus, there are bigger consequences for black woman for resisting these images, as it leaves them susceptible to prejudice and acts of discrimination. Furthermore, the heteronormative nature of the values, such as the importance of finding a man and expectations of heterosexuality, makes upholding the black feminine ideal further complicated for black lesbians. It is important to understand how they negotiate these values because their sexuality contradicts a crucial aspect of the black feminine ideal.

Despite the importance of upholding a black feminine ideal, some black lesbians resisted this ideal and distanced themselves from the gendered values their families taught them. The participants illuminated strategies that they used as they engaged with and disengaged from the gendered values. These gender strategies are similar to those that other researchers have found when researching other marginalized communities (Chen 1999; McQueeney 2009). Such strategies included using morality and stances against inequality as a justification for their lifestyle. Others internalized ethical values, such as respect, and relied on those to distance self from gendered expectations. Relying on these ethical principles allowed some women to validate their chosen presentation or lifestyle. They viewed ethics as more important than upholding their family's ideals. This strategy speaks to how a marginalized community copes with its own marginalization. Relying on an ethical rhetoric allows individuals to dispel negative images and attitudes directed towards them. This corresponded with another strategy that the women used to distance themselves from the feminine ideal. Some women cognitively reframed the values their families taught

them in a way that allowed them to feel satisfied and comfortable with their own presentation and lifestyle.

These strategies helped the women in the sample negotiate their family's expectations of them. However, they are also important in resisting multiple sites of oppression. Black lesbians specifically are prone to discrimination because of their race and because of their sexuality. The black feminine ideal serves as a resistance strategy to avoid racism. By rejecting and distancing from the ideal, not only are black lesbians susceptible to discrimination associated with their femininity, they are also susceptible to facing prejudice and racism emanating from within the black community due to their sexuality and depictions of the negative racial stereotypes. Because of the importance of respectability, researchers cite a tendency for black women to discriminate against other black women who they see as reinforcing negative stereotypes (Collins 2000; Moore 2011). Collins (2000) discusses the propensity for black women to eschew black lesbians. She suggests this happens because heterosexual privilege is the only source of power that heterosexual black women are afforded, and therefore are resistant to giving that up by being inclusive and supportive of black lesbians. Furthermore Moore (2011) discusses the tendency in her sample of upper class black lesbians of shunning lesbians who present as more masculine, because their presentation does not reflect an ideal of respectability. Thus, by not upholding the black feminine ideal, black lesbians are susceptible to facing prejudice and discrimination from multiple sites. Therefore, these strategies become crucial for navigating these various sources of oppression and conflicting ideals. Relying on a rhetoric of ethics or cognitively reframing values and ideals can protect

black lesbians against both racism stemming from society at large and from racism stemming from within the black community.

These strategies extend beyond the black lesbian population, and can be used by any marginalized community that is stigmatized within society. They can assist communities in navigating multiple sources of oppression. By reframing values to align with their standards of living, individuals can resist stigma. By relying on a rhetoric of ethics and morality, stigmatized communities can justify their various identities and normalize their identity.

In addition to the strategies women used to distance from gendered values, they also internalized aspects of the black feminine ideal, and this in part may have impacted their gender presentation. The masculine threshold provides an example of how socialization has influenced black lesbians' presentation. Some women rejected aspects of the feminine ideal and presented as masculine. However, in order to maintain respectability, they could not engage in hypermasculinity. The women expressed a threshold for acceptable masculinity, which typically presented itself in the context of work. Their internalization of the black feminine ideal materialized in a need to limit their masculinity.

The masculine threshold also represents a rejection of black male masculinity. Thus, the masculine threshold can serve to protect black lesbians against racist images that are associated with black male masculinity. This suggests that black masculinity exists on one spectrum, and is not separate for black men and women. This spectrum implies that black female masculinity is a toned down version of black male masculinity. Further research can explore if this is the case for white communities. However, because black masculinity is heavily stigmatized within society, and is

linked to violent images of black men, I hypothesize that white lesbians do not experience white masculinity limitations in the same manner. Because white masculinity is not linked with such negative stereotypes, white lesbians do not need to fear being associated with this type of masculinity, and thus have more freedom in engaging in more acceptable masculinity. I also hypothesize that the spectrum of black masculinity is smaller than white masculinity. Because of the racist stereotypes of black males in society, black masculinity is quickly associated with violence. On the other hand, (white) masculinity is celebrated and embraced, with hegemonic masculinity reflecting the most honored way of being a man (Connel and Messerschmidt 2009). The existence of a masculine threshold for black lesbians therefore illustrates the constraining nature of black masculinity, not only for black lesbians, but also as it relates to black men. It also highlights the racialized nature of masculinity, especially when reflecting on who actually can achieve hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, masculine threshold speaks to the stigma surrounding female masculinity and how this stigma is racialized.

There are a few limitations that require addressing. First, this study is retrospective in nature. Usually, socialization research is conducted with parents, examining the strategies and decisions that parents make when socializing their children. Asking adults about their childhood socialization involves the need to recall memories. Therefore, the data that emerged from this type of study is not necessarily a representation of what their socialization *was* in actuality, but rather, their present day interpretations of their socialization. While this has drawbacks, it also aligns with the study's main goals. I was not interested in exactly how the participants' families socialized them. Instead, I was interested in their perceptions of their socialization, and

how these perceptions have influenced and guided their own understandings about gender. By focusing on their recollections, and discussing their current beliefs and behaviors, I was able to gather how the women understood their socialization, engaged with the values, and how it has impacted their own gender presentation.

Another limitation is my lack of analysis of within group differences, especially in terms of age and class. Even though I had a wide age range, most of my sample clustered around their twenties and thirties. However, it is reasonable to suspect that age and generation impacted the socialization of black women. Surprisingly, after initial analysis, I found little generational differences between participants and their socialization experiences. In fact, my youngest and oldest participants had similar definitions of femininity and familial expectations of womanhood. However, further studies should examine different generations to expand on this and investigate if further variances exist. I also did not analyze for class-based differences. This is a significant limitation because research suggests that class impacts black lesbians' coming out experiences and experimentation with sexuality (Moore 2011). Moreover, research has found that class impacts black parents' socialization of their children (Hill 2001). While I was able to point out the times when participants' class was relevant in the findings, class was not a central component of my analysis. Additionally, the sample was not very diverse in terms of class, with only five participants classified as lower class. Future studies should explore how class impacts black lesbians' understandings of their socialization and examine if class affects the types of strategies black lesbians use to negotiate gendered values.

In addition to addressing these limitations and gaps, there are other directions for future research. First, while the women confirmed the existence of a black feminine ideal, a comparative study would help further illuminate how gendered socialization is racialized. By interviewing both black and white lesbians, researchers could directly compare the different socialization values and examine their various impacts on black and white lesbians. Such a comparative study could also address the masculine threshold and examine whether such threshold exists for white lesbians as well. Moreover, the masculine threshold serves as a necessary concept to examine outside of the context of socialization. Expanding our understanding of this threshold can speak to the literature on hypermasculinity, hegemonic masculinity, and can help address stigma surrounding female masculinity. It would also be interesting and necessary to compare how (and if) the masculine threshold impacts other racial and ethnic minority lesbians to see if this threshold carries across marginalized races and ethnicities.

By focusing on black lesbians, this research study gave voice to a marginalized community. Because of their membership in various stigmatized communities, black lesbians must at times, negotiate conflicting ideals. Understanding the impact of the black feminine ideal through personal experiences illuminated the strategies and challenges that some black lesbians must face. While there is still more research to be done, this study contributed to conversations surrounding black families, black women and black lesbians, and pointed to exciting areas that need further exploring and developing.

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Appendix A

Demographic Breakdown of Sample

Name	Age	Race	Gender Presentation	Class	Family Formation
Jayla	21	African	3	Upper	Parents Married
Destiny	32	Black/Hispanic	8	Lower	Teen Mom; Distant Dad
Alexis	21	African American	5	Upper	Distant Mom; Foster Family
Madison	21	Black	4	Lower	Mom and Stepdad
Amari	38	Black	7	Lower	Single Mom
Cristina	29	Black/African American	8	Upper	Parents Married
Imani	33	African American	8	Upper	Parents Married
Devyn	32	African American	8	Upper	Parents Married
Sephanie	42	Black	8	Lower	Parents Married
Ryleigh	37	African American	7	Lower	Parents Divorced
Jasmine	29	Black	3	Upper	Teen Mom; Raised by Grandma and Mom
Aniyah	33	African American	8	Upper	Mom and Stepfather
Brooklyn	50	Creole	8	Upper	Single Mom
Gabrielle	27	African American	3	Upper	Lived with Mom; Foster Family
Thheresa	28	Black	“Depends on Day”	Upper	Parents Married, Recently Divorced
Makayla	27	Black/White	4	Upper	Single White Mom; Distant Black Dad
Taniya	37	Black	5	Upper	Parents Married

Appendix B

Gender Survey

Physical Presentation of Gender Scale and Personality Scale

On a scale from one to ten, with “1” being a person whose PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES including clothing, hair, style of dress, way of walking, or way of talking are “very feminine” and consistent with those stereotypically assigned to women, and “10” being a person whose clothing, hair, style of dress, way of walking, and way of talking are “very masculine” or most like those stereotypically assigned to men, which number best represents YOUR OWN physical attributes?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very “feminine”			Somewhere in-between “feminine” and “masculine”				Very “masculine”		

The physical attributes of YOUR MATE?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very “feminine”			Somewhere in-between “feminine” and “masculine”				Very “masculine”		

The IDEAL attributes of someone you would be attracted to?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very “feminine”			Somewhere in-between “feminine” and “masculine”				Very “masculine”		

Now, on a different scale from one to ten, with “1” representing someone whose PERSONALITY and interaction style with others would be considered laid back, quiet, or introverted, and “10” representing someone who might be thought of as outgoing, expressive, or extroverted in social interactions with others, which number best represents YOUR OWN interaction style?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Laid back introverted			Somewhere in-between laid back and outspoken				Outgoing/extroverted		

The personality or interaction style of YOUR MATE?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Laid back introverted			Somewhere in-between laid back and outspoken				Outgoing/extroverted		

The IDEAL personality or interaction style of someone you would be attracted to?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Laid back introverted			Somewhere in-between laid back and outspoken				Outgoing/extroverted		

Demographics

Age

Race

Highest level of education completed

Employment

Family (those who raised you) highest level of education completed

Family Occupation

City grew up in

Religion

Appendix C

IRB Letter



RESEARCH OFFICE

210 Hullihen Hall
University of Delaware
Newark, Delaware 19716-1551
Ph: 302/831-2136
Fax: 302/831-2828

DATE: September 30, 2014

TO: Tom Albert
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [659774-1] Black Families, Black Lesbians: Understanding Gender Behavior and Gender Presentation

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: September 30, 2014
EXPIRATION DATE: September 29, 2015
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # (6,7)

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

- 1 -

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Based on the risks, this project requires Continuing Review by this office on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate renewal forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Farnese-McFarlane at (302) 831-1119 or nicolefm@udel.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

- 2 -

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