

BLACK COWBOYS AND BLACK MASCULINTY: AFRICAN AMERICAN
RANCHERS, RODEO COWBOYS AND TRAILRIDERS

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

In this ethnographic study I use queer theory to consider how black cowboys interact with each other to produce counter or micro-narratives about Black male pathologies and socialization in multiple masculinities. Queer theory provides a model to analyze the social-cultural significance of considering the intersection of race and gender as constructed binaries without focusing on sexuality. The lack of information about Black cowboys from other disciplines creates a peculiar position regarding notions, representations, and understandings about the racially signified cowboys in three ways. First, Black cowboys' relegation to the past leaves contemporary Black cowboys nearly invisible. Second, dominant narratives about notable Black cowboys are written from a particular historical perspective. This perspective suggests that Black cowboys are a "thing of the past" and extinct figures in American society who were largely absent in the American west except as they proved to possess exceptional "cowboying" abilities. Finally, Black cowboys' roles and positionality within American history and sport, via rodeo, performs a limited function towards inserting and increasing awareness of alternative representations of (Black) cowboys and their masculinities in the contemporary moment.

DEDICATION

To the Black Cowboys- Ranchers, Rodeo Cowboys, and Trailriders- of Texas And
My Family

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: “THEY THINK IT AIN’T BLACK COWBOYS”



Figure 1. Two cowboys trying to separate a calf from its mother to be tagged with a number.

Black cowboys offer an interesting lens to interrogate concepts of masculinity beyond its relationship to (sex)uality and competition because notions of masculinity are reflected and refracted through experiences and perceptions of Blackness informed by shifting social-cultural rules, values, and norms (See Figure 1). For example, Black cowboys’ work with horses, bulls, and cattle challenge notions about gendered labor and what is considered “hard” work and therefore “man’s work.” The way cowboys care for a calf to ensure its survival by bottle feeding it morning, noon, and night for weeks until the cow, which is too weak from complications during the birthing process, is able to care for herself and her calf out in the pasture suggests how “man’s work” is also nurturing. Furthermore, the way Black

males, as cowboys, talk about performing this type of labor challenges notions about discrete boundaries around gendered work as well as how we might understand differences between “work” and “labor” in relationship to race and (social) positionality in the U.S.

This qualitative research project explores and describes perspectives on masculinities among Black cowboys in the Gulf Coast region of Texas. Theoretical frameworks supporting this research include race theory, gender theory and cultural studies theory. The research design involves ethnographic methods, including semi-structured interviews, participation, and observations of targeted trail riding clubs, ranchers, and rodeo participants in Houston, Texas. My discussions will implicate ways of understanding how people understand and cultivate boundaries to reinforce or diminish particular notions of Black male identities. The findings will add to understandings of gender studies on Black males and masculinities by exploring these subjectivities from the perspectives of Black males who experience “Blackness” and gender as complex and contradictory.

See, the Problem is...

The problem is that Black male identities are held in a liminal state between negotiating differing, and often times opposing, social-cultural rules that signify belonging and “authenticity” with two groups— Black communities and mainstream America — who are equally suspicious of each other for reasons ethnographic research can clarify. Through observations, interviews and narrative analysis, I explore how Black males negotiate meanings of Blackness and maleness on their own terms; I focused on areas dominated by either African-Americans or males in [Black] cowboy spaces. This project locates an area for improvement in social and humanities research. I consider how Black male interactions

among each other are producing counter or micro- narratives about Black male pathologies and socialization into manhood as having multiple masculinities.

Frameworks: Black Cowboys in Academic Inquiry

Currently, a significant amount of contextual literature on Black cowboys in the United States disproportionately represents historical approaches towards Black cowboy's experiences. Historical inquiries and their subsequent narratives offer accounts about the lives of specific Black cowboys in America's history. In addition to historical narratives about notable (Black, western) figures, few other publications about Black cowboys exist separate from historical perspectives (Stewart and Ponce 1986; Massey 2000). These studies consider issues of health in human sport via Black cowboys in rodeo competitions (Pearson 2004; 2007; 2009). The combined foundational literature on Black cowboys reveals aspects of their subjectivities that are largely unexplored in most other social science and humanities disciplines. The lack of information about Black cowboys from other disciplines creates a peculiar position regarding notions, representations, and understandings about the racially signified cowboy in three ways.

First, Black cowboys' relegation to the past leaves contemporary Black cowboys nearly invisible, except to other Black cowboys, friends, family, and their competitors in the case of rodeo cowboys. In short, separate from individuals who interact with Black cowboys, many people remain ignorant of both their historical presence and their contemporary existence. In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (2012), Michel-Rolph Trouillot describes the function of the word "history" in modern language in relationship to the significance of people's role in the making and telling of history "as actors and as narrators (2012:14)." He explains that

The inherent ambivalence of the word ‘history’ in many modern languages, including English, suggests this dual participation. In vernacular use, history means both the facts of the matter and a narrative of those facts, both ‘what happened’ and ‘that which is said to have happened.’ The first meaning places emphasis on the sociohistorical process, the second on our knowledge of that process or on a story about that process (14).

Some scholars argue that in the contemporary moment the (white) cowboy figure is regarded by most people as an extinct historical icon. Although questions of historical relevance are beyond the scope of this exploratory research, I could extend the aforementioned argument to add that this is true for the cowboy figure regardless of racial white-washing or signification. Nonetheless, given the available census and demographic information to represent racialized cowboy’s, it is noteworthy to explore their visibility in the media and broader notions about their relevance and impact on notions of racialized, gendered work and play in American culture and society¹.

The important thing to keep in mind when interpreting statistical and demographic data as one mode of representing cowboys is that cowboy culture is also broadly defined by and through the positionality of the horse. There are some ranchers who participate in rodeo competitions and trailrides just as some trailriders participate in rodeo competitions. Not all cowboys are farmers and/or rancher just like not all rodeo cowboys and trailriders discretely

¹ According to statistics and demographics from The United States Environmental Protection Agency, The United States Department of Agriculture, and the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, respectively, in 2007: less than 1% percent of America’s population claim farming as an occupation and about 2% actually live on farms;” Of “all [3,281,534] Farm Operators’ 1.3% are Black’ and of that 1.3%, 93% ‘derive < 50% of income from farming;” and The Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association does not breakdown their membership demographics by race. However, they do have a bi-monthly magazine that featured a story about the experiences of a registered professional Hawaiian cowboy.

practice and experience their respective western cultural practices. For example, some cowboys use horses, as material culture, to perform labor for farming and ranching- a tool- in the means of production. Rodeo cowboys' use of horses for work to perform at a competitive standard is another example of differing horse positionalities. Conversely, while some cowboys use horses for farm and ranch work and others use horses for competition/sport there is another cowboy "type" whose use of horses are symbolic. Trailriders, whose claim to the title "cowboy" is contestable by the aforementioned "types" of cowboys, use horses for "play," as opposed to work/labor, and is one symbolic aspect of (Black) western cultural representations.

Second, dominant narratives about notable Black cowboys are written from a particular historical perspective and suggest two things about Black cowboys:

1. Historical narratives suggest that Black cowboys are a "thing of the past" and extinct figures in American society.
2. Where cowboys are depicted as a social-cultural staple on the U.S. frontier during westward expansion and the subsequent cattle boom, literature suggests racialized cowboys were largely absent in the American west except if they proved to possess exceptional "cowboying" abilities.

These two points exemplify Trouillot's explanation of how silence intervenes in the re/making and re/telling of history and its narratives at four critical moments when he describes:

The moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making

of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance) (Trouillot 2012: 33).

Limited insights into the lives of Black cowboys of the past are highlighted by historical approaches and literature from other social and humanities research on Black cowboy identities. This knowledge gap hinders opportunities for bringing Black cowboys into narratives of the historical present or narratives of normalized subjectivities. The literature is characterized by an excessive focus on Black cowboys who performed well during their professional rodeo careers or significantly contributed to their profession. Black cowboys that are recognized and represented in academic research have contributed to their professions by inventing or innovating practices, processes, or techniques that are socially transmitted from generation to generation (See Figure 2). Focusing on historical trajectories of Black cowboys' contributions to contemporary western cultural practices facilitates dissociation of the subjects from the objects they created as well as erases notions and awareness of those subjectivities and their legacies in the contemporary moment (See Figure 3).



Figure 2. Team work getting that calf in the pen with the other cows and calves.

Finally, Black cowboys' roles and positionality within American history and sport performs a limited function towards inserting and increasing awareness of alternative representations of (Black) cowboys and their masculinities in the contemporary moment. The aforementioned limitations identified in current background literature on Black cowboys reveal a point of departure for my research, using ethnographic methods. My use of anthropological methods will address the three identified limitations and offer areas for future research on other aspects of Black masculinity among Black cowboys at the intersection of social-cultural performances of race and masculinity.

Performances of “Blackness” and Masculinity in the Community



Figure 3. Cowboy waiting to open the pen to hold the cows and calves for branding and tagging.

Black people have always had to perform their identities in the same way actors perform for an audience. Their bodily comportments are performance tactics that signal a negotiation of space and power in the presence of whites, in mainstream cultural venues, in the presence of other Blacks, and in “Black” cultural spaces. In particular social settings within Black communities, Black males who do not perform their “Blackness” the “right” way risk being ostracized for being an “Uncle Tom” and called a slew of derogatory terms. Space, too, is a mechanism that influences social order in the way members of a community

“read” each other’s presence as an “act” versus being their “authentic” self in interpersonal exchanges.

Africana scholarship observes that Black males are positioned to negotiate the ideologies, needs, and expectations of mainstream America and their own racialized communities. For example, Black males are either criminalized or inspected and assessed for their propensity towards criminal behavior by members of their own community and the dominant culture. However, the way privilege functions in American society, the benefits of being male and exhibiting socially unacceptable behaviors as a minority requires an awareness that the color of one’s skin might result in specific privileges being read by members of the dominant culture as negative traits that are indicative of racial pathologies. The result, in what may be read as male privilege and solidarity in the example above, is that Black males are dissociated from the privileged group. Conversely, the way that race functions in the U.S. Black males can neither dissociate their self, nor be dissociated from their Blackness and Black communities.

African-American males’ attempts to express progressive masculinities within U.S. racial and social hierarchies become integrated by U.S. mainstream culture industries (Mutua 2006). Mutua defines “progressive Black masculinities” as unique and innovative practices of the masculine self actively engaged in struggles to transform social structures domination. These structures and relations of domination constrain, restrict, and suppress the full development of the human personality (2006: xi).

Culture industries pay (or reward) Black males’ performances of gangstas, thugs, and otherwise criminal characters that in turn make them targets of the criminal justice system and subject to harsher punishments than white males as an example for their communities.

Similarly, in the comedy industry, scholars observe how Black males are placed in peculiar positions where the line between being the comedic relief and playing the “fool” is blurred at the behest of the dominant culture’s demand. As a result, some notable Black male comedians have exhibited a range of responses from drug overdose to abruptly resigning from a career of making jokes about the problems, issues, and concerns of Black communities (Iton 2008).

Race, Space, and the Media



Figure 4. Cowboy rest from roundin' up cattle

Limited representations of Black masculinities that challenge ideological stereotypes about them in the media and systematic racist practices have mounted significant challenges

to shifting commonly held beliefs around Black male identities. Representations of Black male identities in contemporary U.S. society that do not reinforce negative stereotypes are constructed in ways that position Black males in isolation from the rest of society, for example Will Smith in his 2004 film, *I, Robot* and 2007 film *I am Legend* (Johnson and Henderson 2005; S. Taylor 2008; Edwards 2012) (See Figure 4). Mainstream U.S. culture and society, neither supports nor welcomes Black male efforts toward self-discovery and (re)imagining of Black manhood that do not place them in compromising positions to be ostracized by members of the Black community and the public (Mutua 2006).

Race and Gender: Contemporary Issues

The issue with how African-American masculinity is represented is contentious in contemporary American social-political arenas. One issue is the idea of a homogenous, Black masculine pathology (Fairchild 1991). In the academic sphere, scholars such as Mark Anthony Neal, Athena Mutua, Riche Richardson, Shawn Taylor, and bell hooks have called for a re-imagining of Black male identities. These scholars argue that “identity” should be used in its plural form to begin the processes for many African-Americans and ethnic “others” to think of ascribing categories Black/African-American and boy/man – as having multiple representations and experiences (hooks 2004; Neal 2005; Mutua 2006; Richardson 2007; S. Taylor 2008). For example, Black males whose lives have become struggles against notions of Black masculinity as pathological run the risk of having their experiences as a Black male called into question or negated based on notions about authenticity (Rice 2008).

Conventional representations of Black masculinity in U.S. mainstream media have ranged from Uncle Tom to the Gangsta and have unreasonably relied on negative stereotypes generated by white Americans (Richardson 2007). Among the many problems, David W.

Rice identifies a lack of information about how social and historical contexts influence the ways Black males learn, understand, and assert their own masculinities during the formative years of socialization (Rice 2008). Social science and humanities scholars have taken issue with mainstream America's systematic practices towards criminalizing African-Americans and African-American culture as pathological since the 1800s.

Early evidence of African-American's interest in dispelling stereotypes and ending racist, prejudiced, and discriminatory treatment of African-Americans can be seen in the works of W. E. B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, and Carter G. Woodson. Although disciplinary approaches, individual motivations, and prescriptions for the perceived "Negro Problem" in America vary, one common issue that scholars reproach is the idea of a pathological and homogenous Black identity. As of late, there has been an increase in scholar's interest in questions about how Black males understand this particular intersection of race and gender (hooks 2004; Rice 2008). Furthermore, academic inquiries and articulations about the range of Black male sexuality remain charted by few (Johnson and Henderson 2005; Johnson 2008). The reasons for focusing on negative stereotypes that surround race and hyper-heterosexuality are ideological because characteristics associated with those categories are socially constructed. The worldview that consciously, or subconsciously, accepts male roles as dominant becomes complicated at the intersection of race and sex/gender in American society. Although U.S. racial ideology prescribes Black males to marginalized positions, they still enjoy the privileges of being a male in the patriarchal system that organizes U.S. society and social interactions.



Figure 5. Teamwork as two cowboys help a down (pregnant) cow get back on her feet so that she and her baby might live. This cow was very weak and visibly tired but she tried to help the cowboys help her- she wanted to live.

The contemporary moment shows that while Black males have and continue to hold positions of power that are associated with notions of respectability in U.S. society, they continue to be represented as subjects who lack the range and depth of character in popular representations and academic inquiries (Awkward 2005; Watts 2008; Friend 2009; Chandler 2011). For example, in popular media the angry Black man, Uncle Tom, magical Negro, and the token minority are few representations that have produced multiple narratives reinforcing stereotypes about Black males as either violent, hypersexual, beasts or not really, or authentically, “Black”² (See Figure 5). In addition, academic inquiries into Black male

² The angry Black man character type is typically depicted as a Black Nationalist who sees white people, or The Man, as an enemy. The Uncle Tom trope depicts a Black character that views White people as superior. The magical Negro trope is used to portray Black people “good” and having supernatural abilities. The token minority is a character inserted into the case to give the appearance of diversity in popular media.

representations have disproportionately focused on the ways in which popular media perpetuates negative imagery and stereotypes of Black masculinities as violent and hypersexual or inauthentic to “Blackness.”

Race and Personhood

Since the arrival of Africans to what would become United States, the abilities of enslaved Africans have been an area of fascination for European Americans (hooks 2004). To be more precise, White male fascination with how African slaves could perform was guided by systems of social and economic power relationships. These power relations are the hallmark of slavery and subsequent race/gender relations that transformed African ethnic diversity to a racialized “Blackness” in the United States. Social scientists, Michael Omi and Howard Winant, as well as cultural studies theorists Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy have theorized how identities are constructed in likeness to or in opposition of an “other” identity. Their theories evaluate the process as “being” and “becoming” cross-culturally. For example, auction blocks during the 1800s and the 1964 World’s Fair African Pavilion were public venues where Black/African bodies were evaluated for their “suitability” to perform slave labor and placed on display for public consumption of their prowess. This public consumption of Black bodies as a commodity and spectacle were sites of repetitive cultural performances that reiterated and reinforced racist, hegemonic, and patriarchal ideologies. This continues into the contemporary moment. However, the question remains whether male privilege is a factor among Black males in American society. This project’s focus is on how Black males negotiate and represent Black masculinity among each other.

Historically, Black men were considered 3/4ths of a man informing the prevailing ideology among the dominant culture in the United States that they are inferior, because of

their race. This worldview has caused scapegoating of African- American males in many forms, including: homogenizing, criminalizing, and their hyper-sexualization. Sociologists and African-American Studies scholars have documented consequences of white male scapegoating via negative mainstream imagery about African-American males based on race/gender and sexuality (Aptheker 2005; Awkward 2005; S. Taylor 2008). Their findings suggest that the difference between the past and the historical present is that Black male bodies invoke the same race-based and gender-based stereotypes from the 1600s. In the contemporary moment, Black cowboys' being and becoming active members of society is illustrated by Cultural theorist Stuart Hall's observation of how these processes create a sense of unity.

Why Anthropology?

Early anthropological models for studying minority identities and the race/gender nexus are limited. The work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz offers a model for exploring different aspects of social identities and intersectionality in Anthropological inquiry. For example, Geertz's "Deep Play: Notes on Balinese Cockfighting" (2005) lends itself to an anthropological discussion about masculinity in male dominated space, although his purpose was not to study male-male interactions. As a cultural and "racial" outsider, Clifford Geertz provides a model for navigating male dominated spaces characterized by aggression, competition, and play. As an African-American female my presence in a male dominated space adds to anthropological understandings of gender and representation. Furthermore, my likely participation in "cowboy" activities has the potential to facilitate a discussion about Black male perceptions of gendered work and ability.

My study builds on and diverges from established lines of inquiry in three ways. First, my study is interested in the diverse representations and understandings about masculinities at the race/gender nexus by exploring Black masculinities among African- American males. Studies on the intersection of race and sex/gender focused on sexuality and gender roles in excess (Fanon 1967; Fairchild 1991; hooks 2004; Johnson and Henderson, 2005). Finally, my study recognizes the social-cultural implications for discussing sexuality and masculinities, but does not regard sexuality as an essential component to its discussion about manhood and masculinity.

Interdisciplinary Dispatches

Studies on the intersection of race and sex/gender have disproportionately focused on sexuality and gender roles. For example, the race-based gender research looks at the implications of the white man's burden and the effects of "race mixing," or miscegenation at various levels of society based on the ideology of pure racial types (Fanon 1967; Fairchild 1991; hooks 2004; Johnson and Henderson, 2005). However, the intersection of race and male identities has left questions regarding identity construction and representation among minority males with each other.

According to sociologist R.W. Connell (1995), maleness and manhood have received critical attention since the mid-1400s with the development of the modern capitalist economy and scholars were principally concerned with sexuality and personhood in western societies. Masculinity, however, did not become an object of academic inquiry until the 1960s with the introduction of Women's Studies. Furthermore, the focus of explorations into male privilege concerned power and representation with regards to gender/sexuality and work/labor between males and females (R. Connell 1995). As a separate discipline, masculinity studies are less

than a half century old. My idea is that conversations about diversity disproportionately focus on overt differences between groups based on sex at the expense of “insider” perspectives on the effects of patriarchy.

Contributions to the Field

My focus on gender through masculinity, manhood, and male dominance, looks at diverse representations and understandings about Black masculinity among Black cowboys in Texas. Black cowboys present a unique look at the intersection of race and gender for a number of reasons which I will describe. First, Black cowboys have remained generally under-represented in popular media and because of that, they have not been subject to the extent of negative racial profiling that accompanies figures associated with Black culture in the U.S. Second, Black cowboys remain under-represented in official narratives about U.S. westward expansion. Their contributions to the building and expansion of U.S. territory and society rivals notions about Black males as lazy and offers counter narratives and representations of Black males’ contributions to U.S. society. Finally, for most Americans, the two identities captured in one subject seems unusual and challenges notions about the breadth and depth of character that Black males have the potential to be and become.

My analysis and narrative accounts of Black cowboys will present alternative perspectives on how Black cowboys understand masculinity, considering the influences of race and gender in the “private-public” space of barns, trailrides, and “Black” rodeos. Black males in the U.S. have few, if any spaces to safely negotiate their own identities. My discussion and analysis will show some of the ways Black males who share an identity privileged by sex yet oppressed, segregated, and ostracized because of “race,” model ways to (re) negotiate and understand (Black) masculinities among each other.

During my study, I employed anthropological applications of race and culture as a set of complex, socially defined aspects of individuals' identities (Baker 2010, Hall 1993).

Research questions for this study are (See Figure 6): Where can Black males re/imagine Black masculinities separated from the images forced upon them by dominant white males?

What does Black male dominance look like to Black males?

Opportunities for Improvement



Figure 6. Like father, like son. Father (L), a forer Bull rider, and son (R) saddling up to help P.G. out on the ranch with the cows.

Academic and popular narratives fail to call attention to the role of white male sexuality as the standard in the propagating fear of a Black nation and advancing towards understanding the terms in which Black males understand their own masculinities.

Representations of hypersexualized Black masculinities, under the influence of not just any Black male, but hypersexualized, heterosexual Black males, particularly in the media, garner critical attention to Black male sexuality. However, academic inquiry into this social phenomenon has produced few narratives attempting to explicate Black male identities from the perspective of Black males. In addition, methods for how to insert micro-narratives that complicate and resist commonsense notions about Black masculinities without focusing on sexuality are also lacking (S. Taylor 2008) ; Rose 2008).

This project interrogates the concepts of racialized masculinity through the experiences of Black males as (Black) cowboys. Black masculinity reflects and refracts experiences and perceptions of Blackness beyond its relationship to (sex)uality and competition. I identified three ways that limited information about Black cowboys creates a peculiar position regarding notions, representations, and understandings about the racially signified cowboys. One common issue regarding Black identity that scholars reproach is the idea that it is pathological and homogenous. Understanding how the media and Black cowboys understand and cultivate boundaries to reinforce or diminish particular notions of masculinity and racialized masculinities of Black males as Black cowboys is important to establish frameworks for further considerations about Black masculinity. Chapter 2 will consider traditional and contemporary frameworks for studying minorities and African Americans in academia. I will discuss my perceptions and methods for negotiating my own positionality as an African-American, female researcher, challenges I faced with data collection and (re)presentation.

CHAPTER II

“NOT EVERY MAN WITH A HORSE IS A COWBOY”

“Not Every Man with A Horse Is a Cowboy,” was a warning given to me to be careful about the males I approached for participation in my study. This statement was made, on May 5, 2013, on what I considered to be my first “official” day of doing field work, at the Glover Legacy Rodeo, in Madisonville, Texas. Little did I know it at the time, I would hear this phrase repeated to me, in different versions, by at least three more individuals over the course of conducting over 20 interviews. Whether they were cowboys or not remained to be determined, but, all were Black and one was a female. I would not come to fully realize the significance of this demographic make-up until later, when one of my study participants told me that “[She] would’a made a hell of a cowboy.” When I first heard the statement-turned chapter title- I knew that I was in for a complex and complicated journey of negotiations regarding how I would approach potential participants. Furthermore, the question of how to unpack and re-inscribe the many ways this phrase, which seemed self-explanatory, impacted how I understood myself as a researcher and author of multiple positionalities and masculinities suddenly became all too real. Also, as I composed this document with the care and attention cowboys pay to their horses and cattle, a most prized possession, I have yet to reconcile the most effective way to (re) present a group whose identities lay at the crossroads of both (gender/race) and (privilege/marginalization) in a manner that maintains the power derived from private aspects of Black culture politics and complicate public iconography of the cowboy, (as national folk hero) who popular media would tell us, is necessarily a white male.

In the beginning...

Early anthropological practices of data collection, analysis, and interpretations reflected the perspective of the researchers about (exotic) “others” and have since shifted towards considering observable social-cultural phenomena from the perspective of the group. This narrative is carefully constructed to illustrate my participant’s experiences as well as my own experiences in “the field.” My research on Black cowboys as “others” takes place in the “local” context meaning that I did not leave the country or culture that I explored. The circumstances of my identity as an African-American female, my participants as African-American males, and my project, unlike most “traditional” anthropological objects of inquiry, contributes to how this project focuses and frames “local” experiences with race, gender, and patriarchy. The historical trajectory of anthropological inquiry and focus required, on my part, another level of consideration regarding contemporary understandings and readings of race as the “Negro problem [and] moral dilemma” in the United States, according to sociologist Gunnar Myrdal (1944).

Ethical Dilemmas

In dealing with my positionality in various contexts and from different approaches, I considered examples to how positionality functions in ethnographic research and (re)presentation. Geertz’s essay “Deep Play” (2005) is an example of how positionality may be beyond the control of the researcher in terms of data collection for a thick description of deep play in this context, language of various theoretical frameworks does nothing to further his project until he employs Max Weber. Where Geertz is concerned with his relationship (or lack thereof) with the Balinese and how to get them to open up to him in “the field,” I too critically considered how, like his position as a researcher, my own would influence my

relationship with my study participants. The lesson learned from this literature is that in different situations, it would seem that, Geertz was, and I may be, left to the mercy of the people or forced to return home and find another group to “study.”

In, *Critical Ethnography: Methods, Ethics, and Performance* (2012), D. Soyini Madison suggests that researchers limit the possibilities that their ethnographic data has through familiarity only with theoretical (and to a lesser extent methodological) language used to (re) present a particular subject of study. I wondered if doing critical ethnography has a place for accounting for the transformation of man-made objects into ethnographic symbols of an unfamiliar culture by the function of linguistic interpretation and translation. What I am trying to convey is the way that language influences how we think about “artifacts as artifacts” and not just the way “outsider” ethnographer describes them versus the local people whom these artifacts are/were functioning parts of everyday life in their culture and society.

These articles caused me to reconsider my position on the function and types of distance between myself and my study participants. The way I imagined myself performing my status as a researcher and a female in the field was completely different from what actually happened. In fact, for a while, I struggled with how to manage distance between myself and my participants. For example, I began making weekend trips from College Station, Texas to the field, in Houston, and after spending that time conducting interviews and do observations, I often stressed about how difficult it was for me to reengage my participants at a later date. Initially, I thought that living a 2 hour drive away from the field was “local” and would not be a limiting factor for my data collection. I was wrong.

Summer 2013, I decided to live in Houston and be completely accessible to my study participants and attend as many events as I was able to attend. In these two months, I realized that my participants were responding differently to me. When I was commuting from College Station to Houston on the weekends, I would get an interview and if I was lucky, maybe a follow-up interview at a later date. However, after I decided to relocate to Houston and made it clear that I was moving back to the city I noticed that I did not have to initiate conversations as was the pattern during the previous semester. It seemed to me that all of a sudden individuals were calling me to attend various functions, events, and to observe what they were doing with horses or cattle on any given day. What became apparent to me was that I, for some reason or another, thought about ethical dilemmas in performance aspects of my presence as only a matter of representation and not my duty to maintain a full-time presence in the space of my participants. Just as some of the “so-called” weekend cowboys are limited by a lack of funding required to be full-time rodeo cowboys, I was limited by my inability to be present in their space (in the field) whether I was physically in “cowboy” spaces or not.

I realized that I created some false assumptions about collecting ethnographic data in a performance setting, during my attempts to be reflexive about shifting positionalities on ethical dilemmas in performance aspects of my status as a researcher. I considered the distance between research and interlocutor as a “safe” distance. By “safe,” I think that I imagined performance as somehow separate or removed from every day “happening” where people take on different roles. For example, my narrow understanding of “performance” as staged and understood as staged by my participants through schedule interviews. Through my consideration of the (imagined) differences between performances and production, the

ever changing field taught me that there are ethical dilemmas that present themselves in “the field” which could not be hypothesized in sum during formal instruction.

Ethics, Reflexivity, and Positionality

It is not enough to blindly follow tradition. Like hooks (2004), I found available models of researching the construction and representation of Black masculinity to be limiting in the types of discussions that can be had about interpreting and understanding subjugated masculinities in general and male privilege in particular. Fortunately, hooks has prescribed a method for doing critical research about an identity whose perceptions are most fragile in the minds of mainstream America for fear of the stereotypes presented and represented by mainstream media. The introduction to her book, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (2004) is aptly titled “Doing the work of Love,” hooks highlights the importance of researchers’ positionality and ethical issues as they relate to (re) presentations of subjectivity outside of one’s own group.

bell hooks offers some insight into how Black male researchers and those doing the work of helping to define or (re) present Black maleness can create new concepts of Black male being. She asserts the necessary understanding that other voices, besides Black male voices, can only go so far as to mediate between accounts and understandings of Black masculinity. By understanding the individual researcher’s positionality in relation to doing the work of helping to define and represent Black maleness, means doing the work of love. From a feminist theoretical framework hooks identifies and discusses the single most dangerous threat to Black masculinity as patriarchal masculinity. hooks supports her stated purpose by recounting her experiences with Black males and narratives of memories of the Black men in her family.

In “How to ‘Become’ a Black Man” (2011), Kimberly Chandler discusses how Black males perform gender and in doing so offers a model for how to approach an understanding of Black masculinities from a performance perspective. Chandler, like other scholars, has observed hegemonic forces imposing notions of racialized masculinity as pathological in nature and adds that representation of Black male voices, as the foundation of inquiry into literature on the subject, is minimal at best. She provides a way to further a discussion about Black masculinity by way of tensions, real or imagined, that her interlocutors experienced, from the intersection of performance and communication, everyday life, race/ethnicity, and gender. The way Chandler operationalizes performativity is most useful for drawing a line that illustrates the connection between self-assertions of masculinity and the performance of that performative.

I felt that it would also be beneficial to consider the positionality of my participants in broader social contexts of race and gender in terms of the history of race. Thus, where my findings and discussion might be read as examples from within about Black males as hypersexual “beasts” my choice to observe and participate was a means to begin the process of understanding how “official” historical narratives about Black males has already done the work of solidifying those notions in the minds of the dominant culture if not solidifying the tradition of passing on ways of “reading” Black bodies, male bodies, and Black males from generation to generation. Consequently, my approach towards understanding how and why these methods were most effective for the nature of my study was contemplated as an answer to the following question: what method or methods of data collection would yield the most effective and affective data for capturing “everyday” experiences of Black males as ranchers, rodeo cowboys, and trailriders.

Limitations of my Positionality (African-American, Female, Researcher)

This complicated scenario where the purpose of my own project about masculinity has the potential to lure me, an African-American female, “to a male who had his own agenda,” beyond participating in my study, also provided me with various insights to how multiple “others” against whom a particular identity is negotiated in relationship with does not have to be present in the same space at the same time. While not every man with a horse is a cowboy was meant to me to be a caution for my safety, I learned just how complex the statement is while trying to establish what it means to be a cowboy in this contemporary moment (long since the cattle boom and in Houston, the fourth largest U.S. city). I would learn this lesson many times and with some variation each time. This statement always came to mind when someone was defining what a cowboy is and what it means to be a cowboy. This statement also came to have significant implications for how I would articulate Blackness, masculinity, and the intersection of both among (Black) cowboys of Texas.

In addition to locating potential study participants other methodological considerations included the performative nature of our interactions as a researcher and participant. My considerations of performances and multiple positionalities require a considerable reckoning with conceptual frameworks for the types of identities that I proposed to explore³.

It is important to keep in mind that with each utterance of the words that are permanently fixed to these pages, both you and I are performing a sort of authority over Black masculinities that implies that there is a fixed quality about those identities based on

³ The South as a regional object in the context of national identity, the cowboy as a national icon and representation of a particular (White) American masculinity, Black cowboys in Texas as the object “other” to (white) masculinity, (White) American identity, and Regional identity.

our own particular notions of racial and gendered being. The Black masculinities that these words are crafted to describe formulations and contexts of, are constantly shifting to suit the real and imagined needs of Black male subjectivities discussed herein and throughout. To the aforementioned point, Stuart Hall is worth quoting at length because he suggests that Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices, then represent, we should think, instead of identity as a ‘production,’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation (Hall 1993: 222).

Methods

On Monday April 22, 2013, I emailed a professor in the Department of History to schedule a meeting during his Monday/Wednesday office hours. My goal was to get recommendations for sources about the historical presence of Black cowboys in West Texas. The next day, I received a reply that the professor was free to meet with me for 10 minutes the following day, Wednesday, April 24, 2013 at 2:50pm. Before I go any further with my experience, I want you to know how I came to be in search of this particular historian and why I chose to travel back in time using historical narratives for the purpose of anthropological inquiry into contemporary subjectivities.

I started building a reading list for background information about Black cowboys, knowing exactly where look for biographical information about specific historical individuals like William “Bill” Picket. What I did not know was where to locate sources for broader socio-historical contexts for Black cowboys of Texas (2000). One day as I was leaving from Evans Library, on campus, with a million and one things racing through my mind and my thumbs moving just as fast as I pecked out an email to myself- a reminder to

remind myself to look up a book or person, no doubt- I walked past a display case of books published by Texas A&M University Press. To my pleasant surprise, a book was sitting there at the just the right angle on the right side of the display case for me to notice it. The book was called *Black Cowboys of Texas* (2000). Had I walked out of the library on the opposite side of the main hall that is divided by a row of cushioned benches strategically placed to direct the flow of foot traffic into and out of the library, I would not have seen this book. It was almost as if someone somewhere knew...and I looked around as if someone was secretly watching me. I laughed at myself and then took a picture of the book so that I could look it up on my computer when I got back to my apartment. I later found out that the book was a historical text and had been published in 2000.

This book is the reason why I went to the History Department's website. I wanted to find someone who might be able to recommend sources that offer detailed information about social-cultural contexts of Black cowboys in Texas. Now that I think back to that time, though I was not completely aware of it then, I was looking for the starting point of an information trail that I now know exists in the minds of my study participants and within the pages of this document. Nevertheless, I found a historian who specialized in "Texas and [the] History of the South" and I scheduled a meeting with him. I arrived early and was eager to learn something new. He, however, did not seem to share the same level of excitement about the topic as me, at least not outwardly. He also made me feel as though there was nothing worth pursuing on the subject of Black cowboys.

Our meeting was brief. I walked into his office where he offered me a seat and said "so you wanna do a project about Black cowboys?" To which I said "yes" and nervously waited for more questions to follow. He replied, "you ever been to West Texas?" I said

“yeah, my uncle lives in El Paso [and] I flew [there] once [to visit]. We [some members of my mother’s side of my family and me] drove that way on another trip [to Nevada].” He then asked me if I had seen any Black cowboys out that way on either of my trips. I don’t remember what my answer to that question was, but I do remember feeling insulted and perceiving him to think that I was stupid. He told me that there are no Black cowboys in West Texas. In regards to Texas History, he told me that there were no Black cowboys. It was not until I mentioned the book Black Cowboys of Texas and Alwyn Barr that he then turned to his computer which was sitting on a stand to his right and pulled up two different websites that had information about Black cowboys and gave me an additional reference.

As I write this, I have yet to understand why this educator, historian, scholar, and specialist on Texas history would tell me that there are no Black cowboys in West Texas nor are there Black cowboys in Texas’ history. I had done my research on this person- he wrote an article that was published in a regional historical journal wherein he observes how memory is used to substitute history in the narratives of his own study’s participants about Texas borderlands and the cattle boom and draws on Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s observation of “the silencing of descent.” Since then, even now, and probably as you are reading this, I feel torn between two hypotheses about this situation. I want to believe that he was testing me for some reason unknown to me and by “name dropping” a notable historian and perfectly titled book on the subject that I had “passed.” However, I can’t let go of the idea that had I not known about Black cowboys outside of academic inquiry and demonstrated my knowledge of Black cowboys as (prominent) historical figures in Texas, I would have left his office doubting myself as a researcher and the validity of my study. On

the other hand, I felt like he intentionally withheld from me sources about Black's history in West Texas. Months later I shared this story with one of my participants:

Me: There's a history professor at [Texas] A&M that I went to talk to, because he's supposed to be someone who specializes in Texas... (Inaudible)...Texas... (Inaudible). He says "so you wanna do a project about Black cowboys?"

P.G.: They throw that shit away...

The goal of anthropological inquiry is to be able to understand particular social and cultural phenomena within or among groups of people. The reason for doing fieldwork, which typically consists of going "away" to live as the "other" lives, is to create a sense of authenticity for the research. However, the history of anthropological inquiry in the United States raised other issues for me regarding representation and authorship in the final product of this project. Early anthropological methods towards studying an "other" illustrated the propensity of early anthropologists towards the practice of ethnocentrism in their study. Euro-centrism, whether conscious and intentional or subconscious, produced results one would expect to find in the practice scientific racism (Fairchild 1991).

The flaw in "traditional" anthropological research on marginalized groups is narratives that (re) present an image of marginalized peoples through the beliefs and values of the researcher's own culture. This flaw led me to consider why participant-observation, despite researcher's intentions, is the most effective method for complicating and shifting naturalized understandings about social environments in terms of my positionality and approach to doing ethnography. However, the point is not to permit or prevent misinterpretations about groups of people based on characteristics that are commonly

understood as discrete features shared by particular groups, which are performed and experienced in a homogenous way. The goal is to raise levels of awareness about social-cultural environments, shift perspectives, and generate questions about naturalized beliefs that are ideological.

I gathered information towards my discussion, conclusions, and implications about self-assertions and understandings of Black masculinity among cowboys by conducting participant-observations and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. I transcribed audio from interviews as well as video recordings from participant-observations. My data analysis consisted of coding my transcribed interviews based on recurring themes surrounding race and gender/sex regarding time, ability, skill, and responsibility. I chose to complete the coding process in multiple rounds, or sessions, during which I manually noted various key term in each narrative. With each successive round of coding, I would look for more general themes. During my final round of coding, I looked for a concept that would allow me to construct a narrative about how (Black) cowboys, as ranchers, rodeo cowboys and trailriders, negotiate their masculinities among each other.

I took an interdisciplinary approach to discussing understandings about race and gender among Black cowboys, because of the history and tradition of (systemic) racism and discrimination against African-Americans in U.S. social systems. Although anthropology facilitates methods for understanding ethnic groups from their own perspectives, anthropology does not offer insights about African-American's negotiations about their own racialized identity in the same ways as Sociology or Africana Studies. However, anthropological understandings of gender and gender roles provide a model for discussing

the conflation of sex and gender in everyday interactions that performances of gender complicate.

Data Collection: Locating Black Cowboys in Houston, Texas

Typically my second or third encounter with a person or group was more informal. I didn't learn about some aspects about the way I was perceived until about 5 months after first meeting one of my participants when he told me that before I first came out to his property, he thought I was "some little 'old white girl coming to get all in [his] business." I asked what made him think that about me and he said that it was because all he knew about me was that I was "a (female) researcher from [Texas] A&M." The conversation quickly changed because he thought of something else that he felt I needed to know about the men who trained him and whom he would not leave out of "the history books."

P.G: Cain't nobody [teach]...das a, das a [M.G.], L. Woods and D. Rodgers, T. Travis type of... let me tell you who taught them. [B.]...If D. Rodgers...He's tha teacher of all of them, his name is

T. Travis. He's older than you and I, he dead. He buried right down there in Rosharon [TX], but he was, he is the grandfather of...and we don't know where he learned it from, but he is the best of the best. Don't get no better than him. His name was T. Travis, he taught [B.].

M.C.B: Now, if he's the best of the best, is there anywhere I... is [his story] written down somewhere, has anybody written something about him?

P.G.: That's what we got you for right now! Nobody has written this stuff down. And I'm at fault as well 'cause I went to school, I know better and I just don't have time to do it. (P. G. 2013)

After this revelation about my perceived identity as “some little ‘ol white girl, I decided to follow-up with the “gatekeeper” to P.G. and the other cowboys, ranchers, and trailriders that I would subsequently meet through their mutual membership in a trail riding club. What I found out was that the ranch owner was told that I, “a researcher from A&M,” was coming to see what they do out on the property. I asked why he chose to introduce me in that way and learned that “race is irrelevant,” to him and “it shouldn’t matter in how people treat you.”

As a member of the local community where I conducted my research, I did not foresee barriers related to communication as they might exist for a researcher going to a foreign country. However, I did find myself actively trying to avoid cross-cultural comparisons of racial differences. I thought that being unable to translate what was being said to me from one language to another would be the least challenging obstacle to overcome. However, I was wrong in two instances. First was my expertise in anthropological jargon and discourses as well as experiential knowledge as an African - American female versus my participants’ expertise in rodeo and agricultural jargon, western cultural semantics, and experiential knowledge as Black males. For me, the obstacle was evident in the performative and linguistic exchange between me, as a researcher, and a participant, as Black male and rancher or rodeo cowboy or trailrider, who was an expert in his industry specific jargon. Fortunately for me, one of my key informants, seemingly aware of effective methods for teaching and the way people learn, would always explain or illustrate a process before using the specific term. He was always explaining in great detail and usually with an example or story.

I had not realized he was accounting for my ignorance of culturally specific terms and thereby eliminating a lot of what I was taught to expect and adjust for during interviews by asking more questions. When I started reviewing my interview transcripts during my data analysis, I noticed in one particular exchange that he described himself as a student. Learning from his own mentors he said that you have to want to know something and then have the discipline to learn when someone doesn't use formal teaching methods.

M.C.B: Now I hear you're learning, and training, listening, and paying attention to all that but...

P.T.G: oh yeah, for many years, but you have tuh...and these old timers like Blue and Buster and Glover, they're not teachers so you have to be educated enough, or be able to comprehend and learn enough without them bein there teachin'.

(P. G. 2013)

Observations and Participation



Figure 7. Youth Rodeo in Fresno, Texas

My observations were informed by personal experiences, others accounts of how individuals act. Theoretical foundations on my research topic and background information facilitated my engagement with data and analysis from the perspective of a subjective researcher balancing –emic (“insider”) and –etic (“outsider”) perspectives. Yet, both perspectives allowed me to engage my informants with research questions in nuanced, and specific, ways. Tailoring my questions to their experiences contribute to answering my broader research question about male dominance and male-male interactions in intra- ethnic social settings. Transitioning from theoretical approaches that I might consider when entering the field to applying aspects of ethnographic research methods initially did not give me the

foresight to know who is or is not an “ideal” study participant (See Figure 7). Nonetheless, the caution to be careful from the introductory narrative, was said to me also out of concern for how I might be treated by the (Black) males I, at the time, would meet at the rodeo that I was preparing to attend. Subsequent conversations between he and myself revealed additional concerns that were somewhat implicit in this caution. For example, his concern was how I might be treated by some of the (Black) cowboy [or males with horses] in this dominantly male occupied space. He further explained that not only in the male dominated space I would be one of few females, but that I was attractive and my physical attractiveness was a cause for concern.

This scenario, which raised a concern about the potential for me to be “lured” away by some male who had his own agenda, also provided me with various insights to how multiple “others” against whom a particular identity is negotiated in relationship to, do not have to be present in the same space at the same time. The perceived differences in masculinity, which were implicit, in the caution that became more explicit through my interactions with individuals self-identified or were ascribed the status of rancher, rodeo cowboy, to trailrider. These terms and my participants’ understanding of masculinity through the performance (or behaviors) of each “type” of cowboy became clearer over time after realizing just how complex the statement is while trying to establish what it means to be a cowboy in this contemporary moment.

In-depth, Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews allowed me to go beyond the theoretical foundations of my research and move toward the perspectives that challenge notions and representations of hetero- normative Black masculinities in the United States. Interviews also added levels of multi-vocality to my

project that expand upon notions of Black identity in the United States as something that cannot be. Using ethnographic methods of participant- observation and in-depth, semi-structured interviews also introduced many opportunities for me to be reflexive about multiple intersections of data collection and analysis that informed my interpretations through collaboration and critique.

The subject of this qualitative research project explores and describes the perspectives of Black cowboys in southern Texas about (Black) masculinities. I chose to start seeking out participants for my study by visiting familiar locations. For example, a feed store (Ray's Feed Store) and (Black) rodeos were all venues that afforded me the opportunity to show up without prior notification to do "passive" observations. Unlike the feed store, where I would have to build a rapport with the two female employees, rodeos allowed me to show up, pay the entry fee (typically \$10) and decide how I would proceed from there with passive observations.

Effective Methods towards (Re) Presentation (s): Data Collection

Obtaining information towards my discussion, conclusions, and implications about self-assertions and understandings of Black masculinities were largely obtained through participant-observations and semi-structured, in-depth interviews. However, as a as research canons in the social sciences are considered, fieldwork is the mark of anthropological research. To be clear the nature of the relationship between my interest in Black masculinities and this subsequent research project within the framework of Anthropological methods and theories is not a matter of happenstance. Indeed the journey towards this composition of ethnographic methods and inquiry was paved with many complex questions

captured in my unpacking of the following two questions frequently asked by my peers and participants “why anthropology” and “why Black cowboys.”

Methodological Considerations and Contributions to the Field

The data for this project will be obtained using ethnographic methods, which will encompass participant-observation and semi-structured interviews with Black cowboys in Houston, Texas. Cowboy culture is demographically dominated by males; Black males introduce an aspect of gender politics that goes beyond social differences. The component of my research question regarding masculinity requires that I acknowledge the gender politics of cowboy culture, as a female researcher, because the majority of my participants will be male. However, within the African-American community, respect is a necessary aspect of becoming successful in life, as no one achieved their success without support from their community and it is important to demonstrate knowledge about the history of the culture.

Data Analysis

It is my analytical perspective that the southern Black cowboys are one of many identities that come in response to the claim put forth by Black Popular Culture Studies Professor, Mark Anthony Neal. In his book entitled *New Black Man*, Neal states that, “while so many aspects of Black identity have flourished in post-civil-rights era, allowing for rich and diverse versions of Blackness, Black masculinity is still in need of radical reconstruction” (2005:28). Today, the Black male struggles against systemic forces such as neighborhood segregation, punitive criminal justice punishment, and severe isolation from mainstream America. These are added burdens coupled with the daily stresses of living in poverty, dysfunctional families, and high rates of unemployment.

Participation in venues for horse maintenance, training, and competitions will facilitate rapport building with Black cowboys. In the context of a researcher, engaging Black cowboys on the topic of race and gender with specific research goals is different from participating as someone with some experience with horses and cowboys. Yet, both perspectives will allow me to engage my research question and my informants in nuanced, and specific, ways that will contribute to answering the broader research question of my investigation: how do urban Black cowboys transmit information about southern Black masculinity through cowboy culture? Similarly, the nature of the struggles, conflicts, and contestations among Africana scholars about the “correct” way to do Africana research is a reflection of the struggles, conflicts, and contestations that characterize the lived experiences of Black people⁴.

Data Interpretation

Who is Black? What is Black...? When is Black...? Where is Black...? How is Black...? Why is Black...?⁵ These questions orient Africana researchers in their endeavors to explicate the contours and contexts of “the lived experience of the Black” in colonial and post-colonial societies (Rabaka 2010: 49). To explain the ways in which contemporary identity construction and representation, as a function of contemporary lived experience in the form of micro-narratives are informed by and inform understandings of socio-cultural and political contestation we must first understand the significance of the act of naming towards identities, their construction, and (re) presentation. Collectively, the methods,

⁴ In consideration of positions that understand the term “Black” to exclusive refer to African Americans, my use of the term “Black” in this paper refers to people of African descent.

⁵ (Hall 1993) (Clark-Hine 2009) (Cook 2011) (Johnson 2005) (Rabaka 2010) (Rose 2008)

theories, concepts, and categories that social science researchers employ to talk about “Black” subjectivities are numerous.

Additionally, the possibilities for combinations of methods, theories, concepts, and categories to discuss those issues in are exponential. Furthermore, the intellectual labor towards achieving my expressed purposes for Black masculinities is as varied as the answers to the questions that orient my research methods and theories. By understanding the individual researcher’s positionality in relation to doing the work of helping to define and represent Black maleness, means doing the work of love. From a feminist theoretical framework, bell hooks identifies and discusses the single most dangerous threat to Black masculinity as patriarchal masculinity. hooks supports her stated purpose by recounting narratives from Black men she has encountered in her life, but the most significant evidence that hooks uses to support these points are her own experiences and memories of the Black men in her family and the men she dated. Similarly, Ronald L. Jackson II, calls for a (re) construction of imagined singular racial masculinity, or “Black Masculinity,” in his book *Masculinity in the Black Imagination* (2011).

This question is important because current views suggest that “Black masculinity” is trapped within the material conditions that have caused people to imagine the identities as a singular pathologized Blackness. Jackson (2011) explains that all contributors to this text primarily use ethnographic data, however; the information used to synthesize the text in its entirety is content analysis that points to a common observation of hegemonic forces acting upon and forcing its own homogenizing ideas of Black masculinity into the minds of Black and other ethnic groups as well. Jackson provides a challenge to how I might call into question my observations to further my project, stating, “Only our imaginations may

properly assist us in comprehending the possibilities of liberation from a pathologized Blackness and perhaps, an even more sinister, a singular racial masculinity that has come to be known as “Black masculinity” (Jackson 2011: 3). Black cowboys challenge commonsense notions of masculinity at the intersection of sex/gender and race. Their contemporary experiences of Black masculinity illustrate mechanisms used to navigate the false dichotomy between privilege and marginalization.

In the context of this project, my understanding of “Black cowboy-ness,” is that Black cowboys poses a unique position from which to talk about the social and cultural present in the U.S. This historical present is informed by African-American history (as well as local language and geography) that inverts official narratives of identity and citizenship/belonging. The connection is based on identities rooted in experiences with a history of racism, prejudice, and discrimination, as well as triumphs over these systemic obstacles, and what this looks like in daily interactions. This connection goes beyond shared experiences and is manifested in the manner in which Black cowboys use material culture, their understanding of their relationship to work and the land/environment to represent identities (Black, Southern, Masculine) in “likeness of” or “opposition to” commonsense notions of the American cowboy.

Effective Methods towards Data Collection: Positionality (African-American, Female, Researcher)

During the process of conducting field work I was always present in the imperative to be mindful and reflexive about the delicate nature of studies regarding post-colonial subjectivities and their (re)presentations, because of the changing face of privileged subjectivities in the United States. Additionally, regarding the role of privilege and

positionality in our gaze upon the racialized or gendered “other,” history and Frantz Fanon reminds us “there are too many idiots in this world (1967: 7).” I said that to say we must avoid over generalizations and superficial analysis of subjectivities that are already marginalized based on race and to some extent, class. The use of multiple ethnographic methods was employed to complement the strengths and make-up for the limitations of one method versus other methods. This is also the reason behind my use of interdisciplinary approaches.

Similarly, considerations about my positionality as a female informed my methodological considerations for data interpretation, specifically regarding interactions that were relevant to the study with regard to masculinity but upon reflection, might be considered too revealing or too personal. The question of how personal is too personal was one that I continuously recon with and have recruited insights and models for reflexivity and writing masculinity as a woman of color.

Effective Methods towards Re-Presentation: Writing Black Masculinities

The most challenging thing to overcome when starting field work was approaching a “stranger” or potential informant about doing research on individuals who I identified as being a Black cowboy. My first challenge was learning the various meanings of “cowboys” that would grant me the access to individual who defined their self as such. In fact, many of the people I approached about participating in my study referred me to other individuals saying “[so and so] knows more about the history of cowboys than me, I’m just out here working you know, helping out.”

Throughout the course of research design, fieldwork and data analysis, I asked myself, how do I convey the “everyday” nature of cowboy identities as limited to the

category of subjectivities under consideration? In other words, how do I make explicit that the subjectivities are manifested and reproduced “everyday” through varying and various types of discursive texts and that the subjects themselves occupy a unique and particular position in American culture and society both in academic inquiry and popular texts. Black cowboys’ positionalities within broader social contexts are compounded by race and space/place as well as gendered hierarchies.

What method of re-presenting the data under consideration would be the most effective for conveying my experiences in the field, my participant’s account of their experiences, and the intersection of my female body being in their “male” space? My first attempt, at the ranch, I decided to look the part of a researcher and create time in-between their work to ask questions. This method did not work because I was not perceived as a complete outsider and regarding ideas of multiple positionalities and performances that contribute to the participant-observer, insider/outsider, researcher/subject roles and relationships. Initially, I was welcomed as and left to roam around while the rest of the guys were still arriving to help with the cow castrations. Eventually, I found someone else who seemed to be waiting for the rest of the crew to show and so that they could begin working, and I asked him if I would talk to him about Black cowboys.

As I figured out the three main categories of cowboys- ranchers, rodeo cowboys and arguably, trailriders- the next challenge was accessing information about manhood and masculinity as well as how to navigate the way I was perceived in different social settings. One of these issues took about the same amount of time to resolve as it took to build a rapport with my informants. However, whether I was seen as a researcher or a female in a male dominated space became something I had to navigate based on situational

circumstances. I attributed to my physical appearance contradicting the image of what comes to mind when one thinks “researcher,” to the seamless transition from formal to informal interactions. The conscious awareness of sex differences between myself and my participants never dissolved completely. Although, I was interested in male-male interactions my performance, and theirs, was to some extent dependent on our positionalities in relation to each in different social settings. For example, towards the end of my study and upon reflection throughout, I noticed that the character of interactions between myself one of my some of my informants shifted from teacher- student, to uncle-younger kin, to what anthropologist A.R. Radcliffe Brown observes as a “joking relationship” (Radcliffe-Brown 1940).

My idea that conversations about diversity disproportionately focus on overt differences between groups based on sex at the expense of “insider” perspectives on the effects of patriarchy challenges traditional definitions of masculinity, manhood, and male identities. This problematic was discussed in Chapter 2 as methods of collecting and (re)presenting data were fraught with ethical concerns. Chapter 3 will discuss the way Black male interactions among each other are producing counter or micro-narratives to theories about Black male pathologies and socialization into manhood as rodeo cowboys, ranchers, or trailriders. The following chapter will establish frameworks for understanding the way material culture and work/labor are used to differentiate different ‘types’ Black cowboys and varying masculinities.

CHAPTER III

“WE CAN MAKE WHITE FOLKS, BUT WHITE FOLKS CAIN’T MAKE BLACK FOLKS”

P.G.: well you have to understand Black folks, before there were any....I want you to think about this...see my color. We can make white folks but white folks cain’t make Black folks. What that tell you? ...Who was there first?...We can make them but they cain’t make us. First Indian in here was Black, did you read that? A Indian! First Indian here was Black...

MCB: In the cartoons they were depicted as red...

P.G.: Go back a lil farther. The first Indian was Black. Just about the first everything that was here was Black.

(P. G. 2013)

Cowboys in American Popular Culture Defined

The cowboy is, and some would argue was, an American (folk) hero whose identity is depicted in U.S. media and literature as a figure who captures the complexity of American ideals about its past, present, and national identity. In *Cow Boys and Cattle Men: Class and Masculinities on the Texas Frontier, 1865-1900*, Jackeline Moore talks about how “the cowboy has become an icon of Anglo masculinity to generations of Americans (2009: 19).” The different ways that popular media depict and represent cowboys as a particular type of masculinity is important for revealing the mechanics of the reciprocal relationship between popular imagery and cultural beliefs about race, gender, and iconography. Exploring and understanding this relationship gives insights into social interactions and self (re) presentations of masculinity among cowboys who do not share similar experiences and privileges of the dominant culture. The narrow focus of inquiries about cowboys in popular media representations does nothing more than help perpetuate a general lack of knowledge about the micro-narratives of individuals who inspired the, once derogatory and now “respectable” label, “cowboy.”

The reason observations like the one cited by Jackeline Moore, about what (white) cowboys stand for, can be articulated in that way is best captured by culture theorist, Stuart Hall, as he considers the question “What is the ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?” According to Hall (1993):

America has always had a series of ethnicities, and consequently, the construction of ethnic hierarchies has always defined its cultural politics.

And, of course, silenced and unacknowledged, the fact of American popular culture itself, which has always contained within it, whether silencing or not, Black American popular vernacular traditions (105).

Moore's observation, articulation, and (re)presentation of the symbol, sign, and signified meanings of the cowboy exemplifies how and to what extent dominant cultural ideologies control generalized representations and perceptions about the identity as an American national folk hero as depicted in the media. As a national folk icon, the cowboy is a figure who micro-narratives suggest was de-racialized and would not exist as he is often reiterated by cultural hegemonies through popular culture. Representations of American cowboys reflect real individuals who work and live cowboy lifestyles in geographic locations and whose present and past are reflections of sociocultural, historical, political, and economic negotiations with multiple "others" regardless of race.

Hall describes these struggles against cultural hegemonies as "the result of the cultural politics of difference, of the struggles around difference, of the production of new identities, of the appearance of new subjects on the political and cultural stage" (1993: 104). These negotiations are constant, continuous, and most pointedly, they are resilient in their ability to adapt and complicate notions of contemporary cowboy identities further. In this respect, constant negotiations of identities and their organizing frameworks calls for perpetual explorations, interpretations, and understandings of the social-cultural interactions framing individual and group's identities as members with various roles to play in American society. For the contemporary American cowboy, his narrative begins in the 1800s in what would become the West (ern) part of the United States. Specifically, American cowboys

emerged on the frontier lands between Texas and Mexico in what were the Mexican states of Coahuila y Tejas until 1848.

The frontier was where the work and skills cowboys acquired to tame the land, animals, and, in the case of White American cowboys “tame,” the Mexicans and Native Americans as they implemented their plans to expand the U.S. territory from the Atlantic Ocean, westward to the Pacific Ocean. This is why

the masculine cowboy hero depicted in film and literature is typically a figure straddling the frontier between civilization and the wilderness, sometimes siding with the townspeople against the wilderness and sometimes with the mythical, noble, Indian savage against civilization (Moore 2009: 15).

The idea that cowboys “straddle” two sides of a situation presents the character and qualities that a man must have to obtain and cultivate those resources as well as illustrates broader social struggles over rights and resources. In this way, the cowboy is depicted as character that represents two or more competing ideals in American society. Thus adding voices to represent marginalized peoples threaten the image and personification of power and exposes what is at stake for the official narrative of American history.

Recognizing and normalizing notions of Black cowboys in American history changes the way current and future generations of Americans associate American masculinity as represented by White males. In the media cowboys are depicted as living between civilization and the wilderness. His character is depicted as either the respectable, manly hero and perfect gentleman or the scoundrel. Often times, the cowboy is a charismatic figure who outwardly oscillates between being the loner and the outlaw effortlessly. Scholars have noted how Americans understand cowboys as a figure who reconciles the paradox of being alone and in

a community. As the cowboy moved away from the ranch and onto the stage as the representation of the American hero, the myth of the cowboy began to take on a social life of its own. For that reason, the myth of the cowboy is what the icon and American hero became in the hearts and minds of generations of Americans.

For example, in the cattle industry, the cowboy, as an employee, was considered to be lower on the social hierarchy when compared to the cattleman, or the ranch owner, as a businessman. Among the tasks cowboys perform, the acquisition of knowledge of many different skills occurs through formal and informal training and practice. Some cowboys may become particularly knowledgeable, or specialize, in one area of agricultural practices and among the community of cowboys become known for their mastery of their particular skill set. The knowledge and demonstration of mastering a particular skill set is what individual cowboys may become known and respected for among other cowboys within the “folk occupation group.”

There are as many ways to define and (re)present the “cowboy” as there are cowboys in society. Popular representations would have us rely on the notion that cowboys are necessarily White males who straddle the line between civilized society and the “wild” (uncivilized) West and logically balances notions of justice and injustice as he fights to protect the culture of “civilized” man, woman and child. After many observations and conversations with my informants, I am led to the conclusion that ranch hands, too, straddle lines between popular media representations of American ideals about masculinity, everyday (ranch and rodeo) cowboys as a folk group, and the cowboy “country singer” as the exemplar of American national identity. Popular narratives in which definitions of the cowboy, as a ranch hand, in terms of particular occupational skills, are relatable to contemporary everyday

experiences. This framework for understanding the role and character of the hand points to the (ranch) “hand” as the cowboy who can “do it all.” These depictions of the cowboy as an occupational folk hero suggest that this “type” of cowboy is the intended figure when references are made to an “all-around cowboy,” “true cowboy,” or “real cowboy” in farming or ranching communities.

Defining “Cowboy”

It is generally good practice to begin any discussion about human subjectivities in the social sciences and humanities, with a series of frameworks and boundaries to outline the discussion, present a general sense of how the subject is defined, and, in some cases, are represented in different social settings. It is necessary that I call attention to the complexity and variety of ways people define the term “cowboy.” In one instance, considering historical versus contemporary notions about who is and who is not a cowboy suggests a strict dichotomy between “traditional” and “modern.” Alternately, lived experiences teach us that life is never Black and white and to understand people’s changing notions about identities requires a look at the space and time between “us” and “them” as well as “then” and “now.”

Historical depictions of the “cowboy” and by extension definitions of the character type demonstrate a particular “type” of male. For example, Jacqueline M. Moore also states that “the masculine cowboy hero depicted in film and literature is usually a figure straddling the frontier between civilization and the wilderness, sometimes siding with the townspeople against the wilderness and sometimes with the equally mythical, noble, Indian savage against civilization (Moore 2009: 15).” By illustrating the way the cowboy figure is defined and represented in popular media, Moore describes how “the [news] paper also participated in the cult of the cowboy hero, painting the men of the Wild West as manly heroes and perfect

gentleman (Moore 2009: 232).” To some, these historical accounts of “cowboy” identity in the media conspicuously neglect to inform readers that, among the ranks of (white, unmarked) cowboys, there were Black cowboys. For at least 35 years of United States history, as the title of the book, *Cow Boys and Cattle Men: Class and Masculinities on the Texas Frontier, 1865-1900* (2009), suggests the cowboy as an American hero and “perfect gentleman” was celebrated, emulated and he was, above all, not (re-presented as) Black.

Moore also identifies conflicting notions among (white) cowboys about who is and who is not a “real” cowboy in the 1920s. These debates about an authentic “cowboy” identity arose during a time in United States history when mainstream notions about who were cowboys had taken a turn towards having undesirable traits. Moore explains:

debates in the 1920s about ‘the real cowboy’ usually involved former cowboys (or cowboy admirers) objecting to overly rough or crude depiction of them as scoundrels. These defenses of the cowboy stressed his chivalry and code of honor and, often, his education and refinement. Old-time cowboys complained that rodeo cowboys were not ‘real’ cowboys because they drank and caroused with women too much, and had bad work habits such as quitting the ranch on a whim to follow the rodeos. Similarly, rodeo cowboys claimed they were cowboys because, aside from the roping and riding skills, they dressed and spoke like cowboys and followed a ‘cowboy code’ which included all the mythical ideals of chivalry (2009: 381).

Characterizations of cowboys like the ones depicted above are only one aspect of how cowboys may be defined or depicted. Historical literature and popular depictions of cowboys as symbolic of particular masculine identities is significantly broadened when my

participant's responses consider the questions "who are cowboys?" And "what does it mean to be a cowboy?" Contemporary notions among Black cowboys who take part in western culture gives pause to common sense notions and full acceptance of historical definitions for "the cowboy" as they are applied in the present.

However, before I turn to the range of responses from my participants outlining cowboy identity politics, it is worth reviewing an analysis of cinematic representations of Black identities in Black western films. The significance of African American's presence in (Black) western films during the 1930s is that the depiction of Black males as cowboys illustrates the same desires of all men to belong and be seen contributing to national cultural narratives of nation building. In "Black-Audience Westerns and the Politics of Cultural Identification in the 1930s (2002)," Julia Leyda argues "Black western films reconfigure African-American national identity in their casting but also by strategically using anachronism and geographical juxtaposition (2002: 46)." Leyda describes

the significance of these westerns in the history of American cinema is that they challenged the prevailing function of race as a signifier in American cinema [by] employing the metaphors of space and home, [which Toni] Morrison's question [in her essay "Home"]. The heart of the matter: the house, the cinema, and the nation are at stake for Black audiences of these westerns. The question of ownership, entitlement, and citizenship is quite literal at the story level in the ever-present motif of land disputes, as well as implicit in the genre itself, which has often been a vehicle for expressing not only whiteness but also white supremacy. The visual and spatial transgressions in Black westerns,

picturing Black men in the preserve of the white Hollywood cowboy, enact a geographic re-territorialization in addition to a cinematic one (2002: 50).

Notice that the motifs Leyda observes in the singing cowboys films of the 1930s, are related to questions raised by Toni Morrison's in essay, "Home," are present and significant in the way my participants talk about (Black) cowboy history and who is versus who is not a cowboy in the contemporary moment. However, before I present the voices of my study participants on the issues considered by Leyda, a review of different discursive trajectories taking place in historical literature on representations and the visibility of Blacks in the western history is necessary.

In the article "Recognition, Racism, and Reflections on the Writing of Western Black History (1975)," Lawrence B. de Graaf locates the 1960s as the point when historical literature about the impact of Black Americans in the western history began to experience a significant increase. According to de Graaf, the way history is written in terms of visibility and erasure occurred because "once the Old Northwest and Southwest [had] passed the frontier stage, the history of Blacks in those areas becomes indistinguishable from their major characteristics in non-frontier sections of the North and South, respectively (23)." As a result of shifting notions about how regional boundaries and Black populations occupying those spaces were mapped, de Graaf observes how "even the discussion of slavery was largely confined to the Old Southwest, leaving the impression that the West was devoid of the racial problems (except those involving Indians) that plagued other regions (24)." Before this time, he says "the treatment of Negroes in western history suffered from other problems which accentuated the effects of this 'invisibility' (27)."

He argues that the prominence of the civil rights issues during the 1950s and 1960s undoubtedly contributed to the substantial body of literature on the denial of such rights to Blacks on the frontier as well as obscure publications “titled ‘The Negro in...’ [and] other articles [that] dealt with the sectional controversy as it affected the West and treated Negroes strictly as an issue (1975: 27).” Furthermore, de Graff observes that among the publications considering the presence of Blacks on the frontier that “neither type of writing suggested that the experiences of Blacks called for new interpretations of the meaning of the frontier” and “an extensive volume of writing has continued to come forth on Negroes in Texas, but only few scholars have persevered in the view that the status of Blacks there was significantly different from their situation in other slave states (de Graaf 1975: 28-31).” The issues presented by de Graff reinforces the ideas that historical narratives relegate (Black) cowboys to remnants of the past as well as notions about race being inconsequential to defining the experiences of Black cowboys on frontier territory, two ideas that the following sections will expose.

Cowboy Identity Politics

During the course of about a year of interactions, interviews and observation of Black cowboys I asked about what makes a person a cowboy, which led, in turn, to further questions about how to tell if a person is a cowboy when I see them, and why someone might want to call themselves a cowboy if they were not a cowboy. The open-ended nature of my questions led to many interpretations of what I was asking about, which led to diverse responses that focused on different aspects that individuals felt were defining characteristics of cowboy identities. One interview, in particular, captured the range of issues that I noticed as recurring themes about cowboy identity politics. This interview captures the presence of

ideologies about authenticity as a “real” cowboy versus other aspects of western culture and uses of horses as material culture, cowboy fashion, notions of prestige and work ethic, and issues of race, gender and generation.

In September 2013, one month after I was first invited out to P.G.s property to observe cow castrations, I was riding with P.G. in his truck on the way to go check on a tire for his trailer and pick up some scraps of meat for his cow dogs. We started the conversation talking about when he was younger and working for another Black cowboy. He suggested that this cowboy, who was also his mentor, would also be a good person for me to interview. The conversation turned to how I met the cowboy who invited me to his property. I was telling him about another Black cowboy that I met while I was waiting for the mechanic to finish working on my car. These conversations about cowboys and the process I used find study participants caused him to stop and say:

P.G.: now everybody say they a cowboy ain't no damn cowboy. M.B.: I'm seeing it.

P.G.: just 'cause you got a horse, and know how to get up on him and wear some jeans don't make you no cowboy...

M.B.: What make you a cowboy? P.G.: I done this for you already.

M.B.: yeah, but yuh answer, you done it twice, you gave a different answer both times. So, that's fine im'a take 'em all.

P.G.: Well, instead [of] that hat an' them fancy boots, im'a tell you it's what's inside.

MCB: Why do people wanna be able to call they self a cowboy?

P.G.: you see what I do all day...

Well, you got cowboys that are arena cowboys, but... and the hands they can do it all, they can do both. But, uh, for the most part, those guys that are callin they self "cowboys" that are on the trailrides talkin bout they cowboy this an' cain't even spell cowboy they ain't a patch on a cowboy ass.

It really don't make a difference to me, I could care less. They can call they self "cowboys" all they want to. They ain't nothing that... I mean, I don't.... They can call they self "cowboys" from here on out for tomorrow, It don't bother me one bit. But you know, a lot of cowboys, they take offense to that. If you call 'em- the real cowboys- a trailrider, you got a fight on yuh hands. You got a serious fight on yuh hands.

MCB: so, then what are you saying?

P.G.: If you walk up to a P.R.C.A. [Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association] cowboy and call him a trail... "hey trailrider"- them fightin' words...literally. If he don't fight you his girlfriend gon fight yuh. That's like you sayin' "hey bitch," that's a slap in the face. And they know it. You might not know it, but you know real cowboys know that's just like a slap in the face.

MCB: so you gotta earn that

P.G.: oh yeah, you gotta earn it. It ain't nothing given. How many nights you think they've stayed up deliverin' a calf, pullin a calf out of a mamma

in the field, or having to bottle feed a calf for a week stayin up all night and make sure he live. Not ever. Not never. How many times you think they'd do it? Not never.

Cause they've never been taught they don't know that. They call em cow-boys for a reason.

MCB: why?

P.G.: they mess with cows...and...back in the days it was the Black guys that took care of the cows but they call em cowboys "them cowboys comin" that's who really did the work

MCB: so cowboys....

P.G.: they called us "boy"

MCB: if that was a derogatory term for the white boy to call Blacks, then when do you think they took it on?

P.G.: well it got glorified in the midst of the 1800s on down it got glorified cowboys were special

MCB: why?

P.G.: It takes a special breed to be a cowboy. Everybody cain't do this shit, not all day every day. You got to love it, you cain't just like it, you got to love it. You gotta feed cows, check fence...its 900 thangs to do and you cain't like this you got to love it with a passion. I may not get home till 9 o'clock. I gotta wait on some guys...normally I'm in the bed, I may not be sleep but I'm in the bed, by 8 between 7/8 but you

know any given night I may be out here till 9 o'clock huntin' coyotes.
(P. G. 2013)

This interview captured some of the defining characteristics of a cowboy and what a cowboy does not do or look like; it does not expand on particular characteristic about the “other” that “real” cowboys juxtapose their authentic identities against. In regards to the question of race, for some of my participants, the nature and function of the term “Black” as a signifier varied. I will talk about the ways this signifier functioned as a form of negative stereotyping within the group, as collective race-based segregation/marginalization, and is viewed as an insignificant practice in the next chapter. Nevertheless, from this interview, my question became, what do I call these individuals that dress like cowboys, ride, and care for horses?

“Us” and “Them”: Participants on “Cowboys” and “Trailriders”

In the earlier interview P.G. mentioned that calling a P.R.C.A. Cowboy a “trailrider” was fighting words. However, not everybody had the same views about the inclusion of trailriders or “weekend cowboys,” as they were often called, in the process of characterizing the “cowboy.” The following perspectives about cowboy identities were taken the same day in May 2013, when I attended a (Black) rodeo in Madisonville, Texas.

The first three perspectives are from different members of the same family representing three generations of cowboys. The third perspective about cowboy identities comes from a female cowboy who, by the time of this interview, had stopped barrel racing competitively to focus on school and other agricultural interests. My use of the phrase female cowboy as opposed to the term “cowgirl” was influenced by my interview with another female member of that family who called the former barrel racer a “cowboy” and then asked

me matter-of-factly “you didn’t know girls could be cowboys too?” This question raised another set of issues about racialized masculinity.

These issues extend beyond the scope of this project on male-male negotiations of masculinity but are worth exploring in the future.

“Ain’t no difference between cowboys and trailriders.”

“I went from being a regular cowboy to rodeo cowboy, because times change because they got expensive and had to charge more for a day’s work.”

M.G., May 4, 2013

“Cowboy can be many things: roper, bull rider, or just ride horses for fun. [A] Cowboy knows how to deal with and ride a horse, to me.”

J.G., May 4, 2013

“You can tell the difference between cowboys and trailriders by the way they dress, their demeanor, the kind of horse they ride. There’s a saying “you show me your horse and I’ll tell you the kind of man you are.”

“There is no Black cowboy or white cowboy.”

M.G. 3, May 4, 2013

The previous account demonstrates and reinforces notions about cowboy authenticity being rooted in time as well as space. The belief that cowboys are cowboys every day and it’s a lifestyle not just a hobby is succinctly captured as P.G. observes:

“Some people will tell you ‘No, I’m not no cowboy, I’m a weekend cowboy.’

They not gon sit up and... [he moves on the his next thought about who else I need to interview]

P.G. September 25, 2013

Background: The History of Black Cowboys as Told by Them

The following narratives are participant's accounts about the history of Black cowboys in the United States. These accounts, like some of the published historical narratives, cite African and African-American slaves as the first Black cowboys in the United States. After the first five excerpts from participant interviews, there is a significant portion that shifts the perspective about the way Black cowboys are defined from a broader social-historical perspective to the particular use of horses by the Buffalo Soldiers in the U.S. military.

“When the slaves got free, farming was all they knew so they learned how to ride a horse and became a cowboy.”

MG3., May 4, 2013

“People think it's not Black cowboys, but slaves did all the farming and ranch work; feedin', cattle work...”

M.G2., May 4, 2013

“Black folks been cowboys for a long time. They just wasn't heard of because they was Black and didn't have the opportunities they have now.”

M.G..., May 4, 2013

“Well, I take 'em back to letting them know that Black cowboys came from a long history, but they never put, they never say anything about the Black cowboys. It's always the white cowboys did this here. And it's mostly the Black cowboys did the breaking of the animals, back then. The Black man did it, but he [the white man] took the honor for doing it. That's what I try to get

them to understand. A whole lot of stuff that's being done we did it, but we didn't get our recognition on it."

WSS, August 3, 2013

P.G.: Well, you have to understand Black folks, before there were any.... I want you to think about this... see my color. We can make white folks, but white folks cain't make Black folks. What that tell you? Who was there first...We can make them, but they cain't make us. First Indian in here was Black did you read that? A' Indian. First Indian here was Black...

MCB: In the cartoons they were depicted as red...

P.G.: Go back a lil farther. The first Indian was Black. Just about the first everything that was here was Black.

September 25, 2013

Black Cowboys and the U.S. Military: The Case of the Buffalo Soldiers

On November 9, 2013, I attended the annual "Fall Round Up" for the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo's Black Heritage Committee held in the auditorium at a Catholic Church in what is considered a predominantly Black parish in Third Ward, Houston, Texas. This event was an opportunity to see a different aspect of the way Black western culture was represented and promoted through education and service. While I was there taking pictures and briefly talking to people I was told to introduce myself to a representative of the Houston chapter of the Buffalo Soldiers. During our conversation he referred me to another member of the Houston chapter of the Buffalo Soldiers, a sergeant who served in the Vietnam War, who then referred me to a Captain who also served in the Vietnam War. The Captain was not

at the “Fall Round Up” so I called the Houston Buffalo Soldiers Museum to schedule an interview and I was told the best decision was to just show up to the museum and find out. I said, “thank you,” put the museum’s address in the GPS on my cell phone and immediately left my house to conduct the following interview.

This interview offers a possible link between Black males, horses, manhood, citizenship, and belonging. The following interview differs from the earlier accounts about how Blacks became cowboys. It considers a particular aspect of U.S. history where Black males were using horses for a specific purpose in the military. When I arrived at the Buffalo Soldiers Museum I was not sure why I had been referred to this location for information about Black cowboys. As you read the exchange, it becomes clear that I’m trying to make some sense of the connection between Black cowboys and Buffalo Soldiers and the reason for my presence at the museum. For me, race was an obvious factor and I knew that Buffalo Soldiers used horses, but that was the extent of my connection. I held on to the idea that “not every man with a horse is a cowboy.” Nonetheless, I was referred to the Buffalo Soldier’s Museum and was determined to learn and understand the possible connection that the person who referred me to the Captain seemed to be making.

I chose to include this section of my interview because it demonstrates the negotiation of meaning based on each person’s focus on different aspects of culture, the narrative that informed my subsequent hypothesis about defining (Black) cowboys, and the negotiation between me and my informant as I attempt to explore my ideas about the possible link between Buffalo Soldiers and Black cowboys versus my informant’s point to explain the benefits of military service for Black males. This exchange is one of many moments where I was reminded how defining cultural identities is in no way an intuitive

process. In a different kind of way, this interview demonstrates how the nature of defining identities through cultural practices and material culture is situational and dependent upon discursive processes and practices.

PJM: The military in the Black community has always been thought of very highly. And I think the uh the precedence was set with Frederick Douglas. You know he said at the beginning of the Civil War “you give the colored man a uniform, a buckle with the U.S. on it, a button with an eagle on it and a musket, and you’ll make him a citizen, but you’ll also make him a man, “Cause what he was trying to do was make sure the civil war was being fought for freedom and not just to save the union. And the only way you can do that, gave the Black man a blue uniform. And I can show you a picture of that particular saying. You know I kind of paraphrased it. But I think that set the precedence in the Black community. And the same thing was said in World War I. DuBois and the famous Crisis Magazine article, he said “put aside your differences, go overseas, come back, be first class citizens.” World War II was the same thing; they said it a little differently. They said “Double D for victory. Victory against axis in Europe, victory against racism at home.” And so that phenomena of being in the army and the military being popular in the Black community went all the way through until you got the Vietnam. Vietnam was a little different because it wasn’t as popular.

MB: But was it the use of horses the main difference between all those other wars?

PJM: Ah well the horses stopped at uh World War I.

MCB: So then why are they putting Black men on horses [before World War I]?

PJM: oh well they all were on horses. It wasn't just they had Black men. The problem was that they usually had the worse horses. So, as a matter of fact, uh, during the Indian Wars, right after the Civil War the Black units got the left over equipment. You know, even General Custer had his commission with the 10th Cavalry. He refused to go. Said that Black men wouldn't fight. And it was almost 10 years to the day that he was wiped out at the Little Big Horn in 1876.

MCB: It's one thing to give African-American a uniform and then manhood and citizenship come along with that identity, but whose role was it to train and deal with horses in that way? Were Black folks doing that before then or were they just...

PJM: Oh yeah, I mean cowboys, African-American and Native Americans and Mexican, uh Spanish. Uh, I think the thing that you can make as a significance part of the army or the military as it relates to Black people is that it was the only place where Blacks would really advance and demonstrate patriotism, leadership, uh, you couldn't do it right after the Civil War anywhere else because if you were Black in America, in the southern states, prior to the Civil War you were

basically doing 4 things: picking cotton, cutting sugar cane, working tobacco fields, working on rice patties. Guess what you were doing after the Civil War? Picking cotton, and cutting sugar cane, none of that changed. But in the military there was an opportunity.

MCB: As far as the disconnect though, 'cause before [the Civil War] there were only 4 things and none of them involved horses, according to history. Who taught these people how to care for and deal with the animals?

PJM: The horses? Oh yeah, well they learned that you know on the plantations on the farms you know cause they were doing the work.

MCB: 'cause it's not like they're just a means of transportation, they could also be seen as a means of escape. So, there has to be something that explains the before and after because there aren't any narratives about Black cowboys which I think is part of why I was sent here. Black folks weren't in the fields and then all of a sudden they're on these horses fighting for the U.S.

PJM: But I think they were...I think they did know about horses and cows and things before because they did the work it wasn't the master that was out in the field that's breaking the horse and milking the cows they did do that. It was the field hand. And the field hands were Black people and so I mean that what made them even better soldiers than the cavalry soldiers because you had two types you had infantry and cavalry.

MCB: That in-between space is what I'm trying to figure out as far as the history and the lack of narrative about that. As far as most people they think of John Wayne you know the white cowboys and that's what you see on TV. And I think...how you go from the plantation and being kept away from all means of transportation, from tryin' to escape be it by horse train or otherwise and all of a sudden you're fighting for your country on an animal that is potentially dangerous.

PJM: yeah, you know that's a joke that I use with the seniors. So if you were traveling from San Antonio, Texas to El Paso, Texas between 1866 and 1876 and you were pinned down by the outlaws, you know the bad guys, who would most likely come to your rescue? And I'd give 'em multiple choice. A. Somebody from the 9th or 10th cavalry, which were the Buffalo Soldiers B. John

Wayne. And so if you're over the age of 60 and you grew up with John Wayne and you know and it just wasn't true. The vast majority of the people that protected you between 1866 and 1876 in West Texas were Black People. They were the Buffalo Soldiers because they had 'em all through all the forts and posts throughout West Texas. The men in blue were Black.

(M. 2013)

The chapter title and many of the sentiments about historical and contemporary definitions of "cowboy" also hint at the building and expansion of the U.S. on the Blacks of Blacks, slaves, who "made" or built the U.S. from the ground up. What I find most interesting

is when P.G. says that “we can make white folks, but white folks cain’t make Black folks” is that he alludes to a historical trajectory of “Black” culture being appropriated, or white washed, and represented as a dominant cultural practice. The intended interpretation of the statement “we can make white folks, but white folks cain’t make Black folks” signifies how P.G., the son of African-American parents is a very light completed African American male. This statement and subsequent definitions discussed in Chapter 3 illustrate challenges faced with establishing discrete boundaries around race-based and gendered categories and concepts we rely in on social interactions. The various ways that the term “cowboy” is defined” are dependent on a number of factors including: individual’s character, occupational work/labor, generational understandings of maturity, fashion and behavioral comportment. Chapter 4 explores how these definitions are operationalized and understood in their racialized gender context as performed in different “cowboy” settings such as on a ranch, at a trailride, and at a rodeo.

CHAPTER IV

“LOOK HERE MISTER WHITE MAN, I DO THIS SHIT FOR A LIVING”

P.G.: Well imma tell you...from that day, you may wanna get a lil bit of everything cause Molly Stevenson been trying to film us for years and we won't never...she aint gon never come and we aint gon finsta sit up and let her film that shit we aint got time...but if you came and film it you would have it. Its several people that done asked us to do it they had a, actually a anchorwoman wantedto come with us.

MCB: what happened?

P.G.: she aint gon sit here and talk to me like you, and I aint got time to be messin' with her. And Blue don't have enough...Blue can talk to you and I, but white folks [imitating Blue]“look here mister goddamn white mayne...” and that's just what he tell 'em...You might get anything from him...

“Look here mister white man I do this shit for a living...”

(P. G. 2013)

The narratives from my observations, interviews, and interactions draw interesting paths towards seemingly simple connections, or confluences, that inform commonly held notions about culture based on race and gender. As Black males participating in “western culture,” they are directly or indirectly separated from mainstream platforms that have the potential to showcase their prominence in American social and cultural history. Their semi-isolation, or the overrepresentation of (white) cowboys, presents a unique look at how race-based, gendered characteristics are constructed against their various manifestations. Through interactions and observations during the course of this project, the cowboys I came to know have challenged commonly held beliefs that Black cowboys do not exist, notions of a homogenous Black masculinity and about masculinity in general. Black cowboys are extraordinary to commonly held notions and representations about their racial identity as Black, gender/sex identity as masculine males, and cultural identity as cowboys.

For example, as cowboys, Black males challenge socially constructed ideologies about gender roles and gendered labor. As “Black cowboys”, Black males challenge mainstream notions about race-based cultural identities. In addition to challenging race-based notions of cultural identities, as cowboys, Black males challenge race-based notions of pathological behavior. The knowledge gained from my experiences and conversations with Black cowboys, defined here as ranchers, rodeo cowboys and trailriders, reveals that Black masculinity is predicated on the use of individual agency in the cultivation, manipulation, and adaptation of, and to, socio-political boundaries. The mere presence of Black cowboys (male and female) says that they are here and by many of their accounts the first cowboys were Black. Regardless of one’s previous knowledge about their existence, Black cowboys

live and transform their social and natural environments in ways that mark their experiences as Black cowboys.

Black ranchers who make their living on the land and receive help from friends and mentors have a relationship characterized by the idea behind the phrase “my brother’s keeper.” The honor that comes from being cowboys is derived from occupational practices that challenge anthropological notions and observations of the gendered division of labor and Black males as nurturers, or cultivators. Similarly, with rodeo cowboys, in the arena one might expect to witness displays of male dominance and aggression towards one another (See figure 8).



Figure 8. Warming up the horses for the "Black" Rodeo out in Madisonville, Texas.

Common sentiments about a cowboy concerns are that is that safety come first— respect the animal and it will respect you, help a fellow cowboys because he will be a position to help you, God’s will be done. These are all very different notions of dominant masculinity as it is communally understood. Many of the rodeo cowboys participating in

“Black” rodeos are not professionals, as a P.R.C.A. cowboy, and mostly compete on the weekends. The financial costs of becoming a professional cowboy are extensive and the reasons many of my participants gave for low representation in professional circuit vary.

Two of most recurring responses to the issue of representation in the professional rodeo circuit were financial sponsorship and lack of mentorship in navigating the dominantly white male culture industry. The group whose status as “cowboys” that seemed to be most subjective is trailriders because of their common use of horses as material culture. Their relationship to and use of land and horses differs from the first two “types” of cowboys and their use of these resources are temporally bound, often times, to weekends. For example, the temporary venues rodeo participants and spectators construct on borrowed land just outside of the Houston (TX) city limits or the makeshift rodeo grounds located a little ways down a city road, which you might not notice unless you are looking for the arena. Similarly, the land, horses, and cattle located adjacent to the Fort Bend county Toll Road belong to a Black rancher and his family. At first glance, this property might does not reveal much about its owner and his experiences.

However, here is where one of many narratives about the way Black males understand and represent Black masculinity through their identity as cowboys are negotiated.

Lessons Learned



Figure 9. Day One of my first Campout & Trailride.

One of the first lessons that I would learn as I prepared to go “out” into the “field” was said to me as caution to be careful about whom I approached about participating in my study. I was told, “Not every man with a horse is a cowboy.” This concern for my safety was expressed in many ways by many individual. However, no one had expressed the relationship between a man and his horse in a way that would be rhetorically and theoretically useful. This phrase helps to reveal the many implications it takes to describe the complex and complicated processes in male gender identity representation. It would take a few more rodeos and interviews before I would learn lesson number two, which expands and further clarifies the implicit distinction that was being made between cowboys and “males with horses” from lesson number one. Lesson number two is there are “cowboys” and there are “trailriders.” Through the various definitions provided to me about who are cowboys, I

would learn lesson number three- the ideas that there are no Black cowboys or white cowboy's just cowboys.

However, the differences between a cowboy and a trailrider that were described and pointed out to me began to situate the concern from lesson number 1 in a broader context of how Black males negotiate Black masculinity among each other. Trailriders, to the cowboy who taught me that not all males with a horse are cowboys, would be the equivalent to males with horses. Before I continue, it is important to note that while cowboys may go on trailrides, not all trailriders are "real" cowboys. I will get to what is meant by "real" in a later section where I distinguish the aspects of cowboy/horse culture using the rodeo cowboys, "real" cowboys, and trailriders to function as conceptual categories. For now, trailriders are those individuals who board their horse or horses at a barn that is owned by someone else and they gather, usually on the weekends, to party and socialize.

Trailriding organization structure stems from an Association. The Association is where the person(s) wanting to start a club gets the bylaws needed to create their own club and pay their monthly dues as a club. Clubs require membership and charge dues to help fund club events. Each club has a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. There are also Independent Clubs (or clubs that do not belong to an association).

Independent clubs are harder to hard to do/organize but there still a hierarchy per say, because each is different. Each trail-riding club has a minimum of two events per year. There is an annual "king and queen dance" and trailride. The money collected by the club is used to meet association guideline. In addition, each club has a calendar and throughout the year, everybody in a club (which is part of a larger association) goes to a trailride and event to support the other clubs in their association. To show support and in turn gain support, each

club will send members to represent their club at another club's event. The trailrider that I was interviewing made sure that I knew "Trail riding is not about the horses" and his narrative of a weekend trailride and campout casts a different image of what a cowboy is and what cowboys may do. He explained to me

In one weekend, you will spend about 5-6 hours dealing with your horse from going to the barn, loading up, driving to the trailride, taking the horse out of the trailer, rope off and on the day of the ride you will spend about 3-5 hours with your horse. It's all about social gathering, the party, the music, the dancing. Trail riding is a community in itself and trail riding is a way of life. It's all about support. The whole basis of trail riding is about support and to show love. Each club helps to entice individual members to attend events. They will have contests like, "most members in uniform/ most riders;" "most riders on horseback," "furthest distance traveled," and more recently the category of "crunkest party wagon (2 years)" or how hard you party on your party wagon and some clubs will make up their own categories (January 18, 2013).

The Right (of way) to the City



Figure 10. Some people campout in tents while other prefer their camper or horse trailer.

I had the opportunity to attend two (campout and) trailrides occurring one weekend after another and was able to observe differences in the way (independent) trailriders and trail riding clubs host their functions (See Figure 9). I observed many differences in the way the Black male participants interacted with each and developed ideas about particular notions of manhood and masculinity as it relates to leadership and providing for the community. During my first trailride observation, which was also my first trailride experience, many of the people I had the opportunity to talk to in passing as well as leadership among the group highlighted the fact that their club was part of the only, presumably African American, trail riding association that owned property.

Coincidentally, the former president of the association was also a member of this particular trail riding club and was instrumental in locating and acquiring the property. It was later explained to me part of the membership dues is allocated to paying for the property and,

therefore, gave members a sense of entitlement to as well as the privilege of being a land owner. At the time of these conversations, the members seemed to be especially proud because the land was a few thousand dollars from being paid in full and owned outright by the members of the association.

Conversely, trailriders and clubs that do not own land to host the campout day/night of the trailride weekend are not without options to lease land for their event (See Figure 10). The two particular trailrides that I attended were held at the same association property and my observations as well as experiences were noticeably different. During the second weekend I witnessed and experienced the shift that occurred from the sense of freedom or safety away from the gaze of cultural outsiders to situations reminiscent of frontier narratives about access to land during the trailride.



Figure 11. Cross county negotiations. (White, male) Pearland Police Officer and (African American, male) Houston Police Officer "standoff" over jurisdiction, belonging, and authority

On day two of the first trailride, which was the trailride day of the campout and trailride weekend, I was riding with members of the club that was part of the association that owned the property. There was much talk about the differences between their event the previous weekend and the current event. I had not witnessed the “full” experience of their event because the previous weekend was rained out and was subsequently turned into a barbecue/crawfish boil. However, there was one point during this ride when we approach the neighboring city line and were met by officers of local police department (See Figure 11). I didn’t expect what happened next to be the subsequent end of the ride.

As I stood in the field near the entrance of the property watching the rest of the parade of trailriders, wagons, party trailers and tricks to make their way onto the property and reorganize for the ride pack to the association property, multiple police cars arrived. One of the ladies sitting next to me explained that you can only have so many people on in your trailride before you have to get a “parade permit,” which I assumed was different because of the significantly larger amount of people on the road participating in the ride. The presence of the officers however, was not on account of the number of people (See Figure 12). As I sat watching and waiting to find out what was going on, one of the organizers began telling people located closes to the entrance gate of the property that everybody needs to get off the property or the police officer was going to write each and every person a ticket for trespassing.

Meanwhile, as people were moving quickly to comply and avoid being ticketed, a member of the Houston Police Department, who was hired to keep the peace and maintain order, was talking to the officer from the neighboring city. I overheard one of the scouts for the trailride saying that the HPD officer was trying to explain what was going on and that he

had everything under control. To this, the local P.O. from the neighboring said to him that he has no jurisdiction in that city.

Black Cowboys' Visibility in Popular Media and Defining Masculinities



Figure 12. At this point, I think I was spotted. Everybody who was not off the premises immediately would receive a ticket for trespassing.

Many people don't know that Black cowboys exist and while Black cowboys are aware of their virtual invisibility in national discourses and representations of western culture and history, some of my participants characterize their identity as (Black) cowboys as representative of "class and character." This depiction of Black western identity brings together notions of respectability within Black communities with the "rough" "rugged" imagery of mainstream depictions of cowboys as the manliest of (American) men. Black cowboys thinking about themselves as models of class and character in this way challenges notions about cowboys as anti-social, outlaws who simultaneously uphold the beliefs, values, and boundaries of "civilized" society on the frontier. Furthermore, as models of class and

character Black cowboys challenge mainstream depictions of their racialized masculinities as lacking breadth and depth of character beyond pathologized behaviors towards criminality or extraordinary and exaggerated physical strength.

Black cowboys interacting in each other's company during campouts and trailrides displayed "class and character" in the policing of each other behaviors with respect to the fact that many of the people in this public-private space had occupations that granted them social responsibility and required them to perform the class status associated with their occupation. This sort of policing was meant to facilitate and maintain a space where Black males could cast aside, at least temporarily, the veil of twoness observed by W.E.B. DuBois. The campout part of the weekend long event consisting of a campout and trailride, was ideally a space where negotiations of male identities could occur on terms other than racialized or perceived racialized behaviors that might otherwise be interpreted as "boys/men being boys/men."

Black Males as Cultivators

Black ranchers and agriculturalists understand their roles as bearers of cultural knowledge within their communities, official narratives of (Black western) history, and the agriculture industry. They teach each other, they learn from each other, and they help each other with work that requires a collective and collaborative effort where many larger operations have hired employees (See Figures 13-20). Among my participants there were three generations of Black cowboys who mentored and helped one another for varying periods of time throughout their lives. Each of these cowboys participated in different aspects of western culture, for example, there was a rancher, a rodeo cowboy, and both were members

of the same trail riding club which allowed me access to individuals who were exclusively trailriders.

The sense of support and responsibility for another man's mastery of skill was more than just a matter of occupation hazard when unpredictable animals decide to charge or a herd of cattle is startled and take off in various directions. Similarly, the same rancher would act as a practice partner for a younger "brother-like" rodeo cowboys and the sense of competition between the two is a source of encouragement to perform better.

P.G.: Oh it's a lot of people don't know. It's a lot of people don't know it's a bunch of cowboys that don't know. These so called cowboys they don't know who Tony Travis is. Blue know and the guys that help us down there on the ranch there know. But Tony Travis was phenomenal and we had one other guy, his name was uh, I can't leave him out the history books cause he is the reason well one of the reasons I know so much I know about horses. His name is Buster Thorn. He's still livin' he 80 years old. He still drank a lil beer, talk a lil noise. And I you know and I'm gon do this, I'm gonna start doing this before he dies, let me knock on wood, before he dies, but I want him to go with me, he taught me, and the things that he taught me to do I've made more money doin' what he taught me to do than I ever have on my job a year- shoein' horses. He knows more about horses than a Vet[erinarian] knows. I've been with him when I was, and I started with him was I was 8 or 9 shoein horses with him. Yeah I started at ay young age. He took me

in and had me shoein horses, oh I wasn't shoein' horses I was trimming 'em. 'Cause he wouldn't let me shoe 'em then. I didn't get to start shoein' horses till I turned maybe 20, 21.

M.B.: That's a long time...

P.G.: Yeah I was in training for a long time. But what he was doing was laying a format that nobody could ever say I messed up a horse cause he wasn't gon let me get to that point. You got a bunch of horse shoers out there that they'll screw your horse up. Cause theydon't know what the hell they doin'. They go to school for 6 weeks. I was in training for damn near 18 years.

I can tell you the inside out of a horse- his anatomy. You can it's almost like a mechanic, you can call me on the phone and tell me what he doin an' I'll tell you what's wrong with him. And I have people do that. All the time. "P.G. I know you busy, you can't get over here, but let me tell you what he doin'" And 99% of the time I'm right. I get to the rides or wherever I'm going I have people horses fall out heat exhaustion and cramping and different, just small stuff, a Vet would charge you first of all they gon' charge you \$200 to come out there another \$200, you lookin' at \$350 to \$400 for the Vet to come out. So I charge 'em

\$100 and give the horse a shot and be done with it. Now it's up to you, you can call the Vet but if you want me to look at it, I want, dealing with Black folks, I want my money right here. Give it to Blue, I know he

ain't gon give it to nobody else. [Imitating Blue] "Fuck that, this P.G. money," I can hear him now.

M.B.: Now I hear you learning, and training, listening, and paying attention to all that but...

P.G.: Oh yeah, for many years, but you have tuh, and these old timers like Blue and Buster and Glover, they're not teacher so you have to be educated enough, or be able to comprehend and learn enough without them bein' their teachin'... Now, Blue can teach you everything there is about trainin' a horse. Buster can teach you the anatomy of the horse. Glover know, he has more cow sense than any man in this part of the country right now. He know cows inside out. Bulls and cows, he is the man. He-is-the- man.

[Imitating Glover] "They not gon go that way, they not gon go that way I'm tellin' you what way they goin'" But uh Buster, you can't leave him out the book he is, he shoed horses for just about everybody. Put it like this Blue wouldn't let me shoe his horses until Buster retired. That's how deep it was.

They have a bond like that...

He would let me, He knew... Blue know that Buster taught me but he would let me do, he wouldn't let me mess with them horses till he [Buster] retired. But when he retired, Blue came an' told... Buster came and told, he said "Now hey yuh do there... buddy you take care ah old Blue now, hear"

I said, “Alright”...I said “Alright”

(P. G. 2013)

However, in terms of cultivations as a nurturing and commonly understood as gendered labor which females perform Black ranchers challenge those notions of gendered labor and what it means to be masculine. For example palpating a cow and staying up all night making sure it survives then feeding the calf from a bottle regularly for a period of weeks to make sure it will survive when/if the cow (mother) is too weak to care for the calf herself. This type of work, which has been described and illustrated to support notions of masculinity in “man’s work” show’s that females (women) possess equal strength and ability as males or that males (men) are capable of demonstrating acts of care and nurturing most often associated with the female sex and described as a biologically innate sense.



Figure 13. After arriving at Paul's new property he discovers one of his pregnant cows is down.



Figure 14. The two cowboys discuss their thoughts on whether or not she will die and what they can do to try to help save her.



Figure 15. J.R. is trying to encourage this pregnant cow get up but she is too weak.



Figure 16. The two cowboys question whether or not she will survive.



Figure 17. J.R. trying to help the weak cow to her feet.



Figure 18. The two cowboys decide to try, unsuccessfully, to help the cow get on her feet.



Figure 19. Ultimately, I learned that the cow and unborn calf would eventually die. The two cowboys drag the dying cow to the back of the property and I stood watching from a distance.



Figure 20. After repeated attempts to help this cow she is too tired to keep trying to get up.

P.G.: If you walk up to a P.R.C.A. cowboy and call him a trail- “hey trailrider” them fightin’ words...literally. If he don’t fight you his girlfriend gon fight yuh. That’s like you sayin’ “hey bitch,” that’s a slap in the face. And they know it, you might not know it. But you know, real cowboys know that’s just like a slap in the face.

M.B.: so you gotta earn that...

P.G.: oh yeah you gotta earn it. It aint nothing given. How many nights you think they’ve stayed up deliverin a calf, pullin a calf out of a mamma in the field, or or having to bottle feed a calf for a week satyin up all night and make sure he live. Not ever. Not never. How many time you think they’d do it? Not never. (P. G. 2013)

Black (female) cowboys queering notions of man's work as a female-cowboy. Not only do Black males fuck with notions of gendered labor in the tasks they perform as hands-on caregivers and nurturers to baby calves when a cow is "down." Female cowboys (or cowgirl's as some have called them) also shift patriarchal notions of gendered behavior and work. For example, P.G. talks about how

M.G.3grew up in the cowboy lifestyle and how "she would have made on hell of a cowboy" had she not gone so far away to school and becoming interested in "them lil' boys." Similarly, in a previous conversation that had taken place months earlier at her family's newest annual rodeo I spoke with her mother who said of her daughter that "she used to be a cowboy." The context was that she was the only girl out on the family's homestead and grew up spending a lot of time with her brothers, grandfather, and uncles.

P.G.'s account of one time when he, M.G.3's grandfather and uncle left on trip to deliver some bulls and horses to a rodeo in Georgia

P.G.: Have gone as for...we've hauled rodeo stock across country but we all left here on a Wednesday going to Atlanta, Georgia...for a rodeo and we took the bull...took the bulls and the horses and the buckin' horses.

M.B.: How long it take yall to get there travelin' with all them animals? P.G.:

Ohhh we got there by the weekend.

M.B.: oh ok

P.G.: All of ‘em was with us, Michelle. She use to...you know...to be truthful and honest with you...Michelle could be one hell of a cowboy. Michelle rope with us. Michelle grew up... you gotta understand how Michelle grew up. Michelle grew up, she was a little bitty thang until she got old enough to ride. When she got old enough to ride, we had her on a horse. We was pinnin bulls, we was older, a lot older than she was. We – me and Blue and her grandpa – Michelle was on a horse, we pinnin bulls [and] she was with us. She don’t have no choice but to ride.

M.B.: yeah

P.G.: And this was a everyday thang for her...she don’t really ride no mo’ she ride but she don’t rope as much. Now she can rope, She – can – rope. She don’t rope as good as she...we...Let me tell you sumthin,’ we get to the rodeo and Michelle would run out of entry fee money because so many people would wanna rope with her and they would pay it [imitating what people would say] “don’t worry about it I got it.

(P. G. 2013)

Black males challenge popular representations and notions about their roles and abilities as nurturers and caregivers. Media representations of Black have depicted “the” Black family as commonly happen “other” assume that the child or property being cared for does not belong to the Black man. (Example when PG says “we got to preserve out damn culture” and when he talks about when people try to indirectly inquire about his animals and property). The media and dominant culture are suspicious of Black males and view them as

predators. These actions, with no predatory gain are progressive in the way Black masculinities and predominantly fractured to frame and focus on Black males as absentee father figures. The lack of depictions of Black males as nurtures and caregivers for future generations who will carry on “Black” culture suggests that instances of these actions are not only unusual but that when it does

M.B.: Now with that said and you talkin’ bout man and his little brother the next generation and we in trouble. Why is that, then?

P.G.: cause they thugs

M.B.: so that ain’t got nothing to do with the teachers with your generation bein’ the teachers?

P.G.: Nope. ‘Cause I tried, I tried with “Mann” Mann ain’t even my son, ain’t my child, ain’t nothing to me and I took him in. tried and he would he would steal he would lie. All he wanted tuh do was make babies. And not go to school. I told him as long as you in school you can get anything you want from me.

That negro went back to school, I bought him school clothes, all he wanted was some Wrangler, some shirts. I give him my old my old shirts and stuff, my boots that nigger stayed in school about a month.

He ain’t... He never got out the tenth grade. Put it like this; he cain’t read, he cain’t write but I bet you this year [2013] alone he’s won over \$50,000.

(P. G. 2013)

The way this Black rancher discuss the differences between trailriders and cowboys via work/labor and points to notions of manhood and masculinity based on notions of work versus play or work as play and play as work. For example a dichotomous relationship would suggest that cowboys and cowboyin' is work whereas trailriders and trail riding is play. However, the result of work with horses for some cowboys is competition as a form of play. Similarly, the work that trailriders put into training their horses to remain calm around vehicles on the street, how to walk [certain gates] a certain way, and to play or perform for onlookers comes after the countless hours of work and training. The important thing to note is the way Black males' express the value of work and how work is defined in relationship to making a living (by breaking a horse, to do what you need it to do, versus mastering a "wild" or "unbroken" animal for pleasure, play, or show. Especially when I asked him

M.B.: Why do people wanna be able to call they self a cowboy?

P.G.: you see what I do all day...

Well you go cowboys that are arena cowboys but and the hands they can do it all they can do both but uh for the most part those guys that are callin they self "cowboys" that are on the trailrides talkin bout they cowboy this an caint even spell cowboy they aint a patch on a cowboy ass.

It really don't make a difference to me I could care less. They can call they self "cowboys" all they want to they aint nothing that I mean I don't....they can call they self "cowboys" form here on out to tomorrow. It don't bother me one bit but you know a lot of cowboys it they take offence to that. if you call 'em, the real cowboys, a

trailrider you got a fight on yuh hands. You got a serious fight on yuh hands.

M.B.: so then what are you saying?

P.G.: If you walk up to a P.R.C.A. cowboy and call him a trail- “hey trailrider” them fightin’ words...literally. If he don’t ifhgt you his girlfriend gon fight yuh. That’s like you sayin’ “hey bitch” that’s a slap in the face. And they know it, you might not know it but you know real cowboys know that just like a slap in the face.

M.B.: so you gotta earn that

P.G.: oh yeah you gotta earn it. It aint nothing given. How many nights you think they’ve stayed up deliverin a calf, pullin a calf out of a mamma in the field, or or having to bottle feed a calf for a week satyin up all night and make sure he live. Not ever. Not never. How many time you think they’d do it? Not never. Cause they’ve never been taught they don’t know that. they call em cow boys for a reason

(P. G. 2013)

By this account trailriders are afraid to get dirty and walk in cow shit whereas “real” cowboys are not afraid to get dirty. However, regardless of these implications with respect to notions about masculinity and femininity in the conflation of gendered behavior, biological instincts, and sex the context of this example reveals a perspective about masculinity in relation to an “other” that is not viewed as a biological opposite (See Figure 21). The

example of cowboy/masculine work was described to me as an illustration of how trailriders are not cowboys because they are “boys” as opposed to “men” and not interested in doing “hard” the work exemplified in the narrative. Typically child care and nurturing is thought of as female’s responsibility, especially in patriarchal societies. However, in this instance that kind of work viewed as “hard work” which separates the boys from the men and masculinity in this sense marks generational separations among males.



Figure 21. P.G. trying to locate the momma cow to this brand new baby bull (calf).

P.G.: It’s a lot of people say it’s not Black cowboys. I’ve heard that several times.

There are people here in Houston say that they live here, been here all they life [say] “aint no Black cowboys in Houston.” And then they drive by a colored somewhere and say “I never seen so many Black cowboys.” Them Black trailriders. Just cause they on a horse they cowboys [in a questioningly tone]. You get ‘em [trailriders] out here

to do this they have a fit. [Imitating what a trailrider would say] “Man you steppin’ in cow shit!” That’s recycled grass.

And after a while you don’t look at it like that. They not like dog manure they don’t smell like that. Hell it’s always all in my damn truck I smell it all the time. It’s just recycled grass. It’s so much of it on the ground you don’t pay no attention to it after you start walkin’. I walk right in it don’t even pay no attention. Somebody had to tell me “you know you walkin’ in cow shit” I’m so use to being out here it don’t even bother me. But most people, them trail... I tell you what....you get one of them trailriders and I want you tell him “man, I want you to come somewhere with me, I want you to walk about with me”...watch how they do [imitating in an effeminate tone] “oh its cow shit out here.” You watch what I tell you...just pick you one and call me and we gon meet over here.

Tell him you wanna do an interview with him over here.

Watch what he say “ooh it’s so much cow shit out here! Ooh this a pretty horse but it’s a lot of cow shit out here” watch I bet you...

(P. G. 2013)

In this chapter I took a closer look at the way Black cowboys as ranchers, rodeo cowboys, and trailriders understand their representation and other’s as a type of masculinity based on class status, occupation, and generation/maturity. We also explored how Black ranchers, rodeo cowboys, and trailriders view their self and other’s representations of Blackness as significant or insignificant to (Black) cowboy identities. Black cowboys as

Black males experience masculinity in different ways through the occupational or leisurely practices of ranching, trailriding, and/or rodeoing. Similarly each “type” of (Black) cowboy experiences, or feels, their “Blackness” on ranches, trailrides, and rodeos among other types of cowboys. Based on the information presented in this Chapter 4, racial signification is interpreted as something undesirable except for when it is talked about in the context of the present moment when groups of Black males are communing as family, extended family, and close friends. Chapter 5 brings knowledge, history, and everyday experiences of Black masculinity into conversation with models for understanding processes of identity construction and representation discussed in previous chapters.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS: “SHE WOULD’A MADE [ONE] HELL OF A COWBOY”

My use of anthropological theory to explore representations and understandings of Black masculinities from a more holistic perspective required additional theoretical models and constructs from outside of the discipline. It is necessary to complement anthropological theory with cultural studies theory, social theory, and gender theory in my exploration of Black masculinities for a number of reasons which I will explain. First, the history of scientific inquiry in academia is characterized by intentions to support social hierarchies in which Black males were deemed inferior. Second, classical theories of modern man do not recognize “Black people” as members of (civilized) societies. Third, contemporary theories about the way human interaction has adapted to modern technology does not give an adequate model for analyzing identities of belonging among Blacks in the United States. Historically Black males have been rejected or prevented from belonging (or embedding) through systematic denial of citizenship based on land ownership and unequal access to resources. The subjectivities explored in this study have not been completely embedded in the sense of belonging within a national society as “first class” citizens who have equal access to land, rights, and privileges. Lack of Black male representation in official historical and contemporary narratives highlight where and how histories of cultural ideologies of social inferiority fail to explain Black male’s social and cultural experiences.

Knowledge

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault defines “history” as the mapping out of identities through discursive formations or practices [see especially Part IV Chapter I]. Foucault deploys his understanding of memory as notions informed by social, cultural, and “scientific” practices. The relationship that Foucault draws between the two is illustrated through the science of how we acquire knowledge. For example, the science of epistemology is a discursive formation informed by the discourse, or mapping, of identities through discursive formations as practices of the historical present. The mechanisms Black cowboys use to interpret their experiences with race and masculinity are informed by cultural rules for masculinity and the broader notions about race; as it is experienced through gender privilege.

Foucault embraces and rejects the notion of a “beginning” and an “end” – or history as linear—because it suggests that the historical present exists in its condition because discursive practices set particular trajectories that can only result in one contemporary moment. The way these definitions might be operationalized through performance, defined as acts with a culturally prescribed way of execution. For example, the way researchers conduct their methodology is informed by discourses for generating specific kinds of knowledge. Therefore, culturally prescribed ways of performing an action suggests that there is only one correct way of deriving and transmitting knowledge about the world. Similarly, this model may be applied to analyze social interactions as discourses of race, gender, and particular cultural identities that deviate from discursive cultural hegemonies, such as Black cowboys.

On the other hand, in Chapter 1 of *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003), Diana Taylor suggests that history is a record of past “events” that is transferred or transmitted through written, verbal, or embodied text. Memory is mimetic; the unoriginal, mimetic practices, or restored behaviors (real or imagined) observed in the cultural production, epistemologies, and knowledge of “essential facts” of a cultural practice necessarily cannot be characterized as human intention. Furthermore, memory is realized through culturally recognized, learned, and transmitted rules in ways that allow members of a particular culture to read an event as “existent.” For this to occur there must be epistemological frameworks to organize cultural discourses (languages, codices) that bring events into a recognized existence by cultural groups.

The relationship between the history and memory, according to Taylor, is through written and embodied performances (scenarios). Taylor mobilizes these by offering the process of shaping (becoming) that humans do to systems of cultural knowledge and production, which are subjective and a product of embodying practices. For example when P.G. recalls how you have to be smart enough to know how to learn from older generations of cowboys without formal instructions. Cultural practices, rules and the ways of Black cowboys as a Black man perform and behave in (Black) western subcultures.

Anthropology of Sex, Gender, and Masculinity



Figure 22. One example of a “real” cowboy versus a “trailrider” was the way they dress. Notice the street shoes and his baseball cap...

In “Trafficking in Men: The Anthropology of Masculinity,” Matthew Gutzmann notes how the American School of Anthropology has been dominated by discussions of “men talking to men about men.” He observes that since its start in the early 19th century “very few [anthropologists] within the discipline of the ‘study of man’ had truly examined men as men (1997: 385).” This has resulted in areas of improvement regarding limited models for anthropological inquiry into masculinities and interpretations of masculinity based on deductive reasoning from empirical data about females (1997: 387). Today, gender remains a term that is readily associated with Women’s Studies, even with increased academic interest in the Anthropology of Gender and the introduction of gender studies

programs into the academy. As a consequence, contemporary anthropological scholarship on masculinity operationalizes the concept in at least four ways which, according to Gutzmann, do little to clarify the fluidity between notions of male roles, manliness, manhood, and male identity (1997: 386)⁶.

Historically, “the male” in anthropology has been a construct of ethnographers’ fashioning. Ethnographers create the categories of maleness they use to interpret their data in much the same way colonizers “discovered,” exoticized, and marginalized “native” populations based on perceptions of variation as discrete markers of difference between the two (1997: 387). Gutzmann, references the works of Bronislaw Malinowski and Margaret Mead to show how perceived markers of gender difference by “ethnographers [...] have always rested on the central contributions of anthropologists themselves in the creation of categories of maleness and its opposites in diverse cultural milieus (1997: 387).” His point is that, traditionally, definitions of “manliness” have been what are at stake for colonizers in their quests to conquer foreign lands occupied by cultural “others” (See Figure 22).

This observation of how early ethnographers pigeonhole notions of maleness is not limited to gender. The same observation can be seen in the way race and Blackness are treated in Anthropology. In Chapter 3, my participants’ notion of Blackness broadens anthropological conceptions of race into realms which Africana Studies engages.

Blackness, in these instances, is marked by more than phenotype. Blackness is experiential.

This raises questions such as can one class their self out of Blackness. The notions are worth

⁶ According to Gutzmann, “the first concept of masculinity holds that it is, by definition, anything that men think and do. The second is that masculinity is anything men think and so to be men. The third is that some men are inherently or by ascription considered ‘more manly’ than other men. The final manner of approaching masculinity emphasizes the general and central importance of male-female relations, so that masculinity is considered anything that women are not (Gutzmann 1997: 386).”

further exploration considering the amount of capital is required to care for and maintain the needs of a horse and/or cattle.

In “The Cultural Economies of Masculinity (1997),” Gutzmann discusses questions of cultural regions and boundaries and the gender division of labor through the notions of family, kinship, marriage, parenting, and male friendship as the focus of research in the 1970s. By the early 1990s, anthropologists began focusing on the male body in same-sex relationships as distinct from male friendships on the basis of erotic components of sexual expression and desire. Major anthropological studies of the 1990s have brought to light what Gutzmann terms “sexual fault lines” in his discussion of third-genders, two-spirit people, and Hijras (Gutzmann 1997: 395). While “sexual fault lines” have received much attention by anthropologists, Gutzmann, observes “the subject of male spaces, men’s segregations, and what E.K. Sedgwick calls homosociality has received ethnographic attention but little systematic analysis (Gutzmann 1997: 393).”

Another approach that was gaining prominence among anthropologists in the 1990s was the use of performance theory in the anthropological study of sex and gender. Specifically, gender performativity, was being used to explore sex and gender beyond “traditional” models of theorizing the material body as a way of understanding subjectivities once historically theorized as possessing discrete gender identities. In “All Made Up: Performance Theory and the New Anthropology of Sex and Gender (1995),” Rosalind C. Morris locates Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* (1976) as a social constructionist model from which anthropologists could use to explore sex and gender “ambiguity [through] practice and community membership rather than genitality determined gender status (Morris 1995: 568).” This development was significant to an *Anthropology of Masculinity*, which

seeks to understand male roles, manliness, manhood, and male identity because it transcended feminist anthropologists' arguments "who differentiated between gender and sex in an effort to refute the conflation of the universality with biological necessity of gender asymmetry (Morris: 1995: 568)."

According to Morris, Foucault's theory is that "the very perception of sex identity presumes a regulatory discourse in which the surface of bodies are differently marked, signified, and charged with sensitivity (1995: 568)." However, these foundational studies of gender and masculinity in anthropology do not consider Moore's account of how "the constructedness of bodies becomes most visible when it deviates from the expectations of the dominant ideology from whence the writer comes" as a function of ideologies about racialized gender subjectivities (1995: 570). For example, the gaze upon Black cowboys in western cultural practices are read as deviant because the male body performing a particular type of masculinity ascribed to a particular cultural figure is not associated with the color, or race, of the body or the masculinity in dominant ideologies.

Boundaries, Place/Space, and Trust: Mediating Masculinities among African-Americans Males

The history and tradition of socially and geographically marginalizing African-Americans in the United States is also a history of mistrust between African-Americans and agents acting on behalf of the dominant culture industries and power structures. These structures were created to maintain social hierarchies based on race and usurp minority's agency towards shifting hegemonic ideologies about their identities. In, *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990), Anthony Giddens discusses "the problem of [social] order" in relationship to the influence of notions about time and space that regulate degrees of

embeddedness, or distanciation. Degrees of embeddedness or disembedding, according to Giddens, are also influenced by disembedding mechanisms such as “symbolic tokens” or expert systems. Expert systems, such as cultural industries, function on individual’s levels of trust and confidence in those systems as well as their perceptions of risk and danger.

Trust, according to Giddens (1990), functions in expert systems based on transparency, or having full information about intent and reliability given contingent outcomes. Giddens also identifies trust as “the link between faith and confidence” in the expert system (1990: 33). He goes on to describe how trust in “expert systems rests upon faith in the correctness of principles” that are unknown to the individuals (1990: 33).” Specifically, “trust may be defined as confidence in the reliability of a person or system, regarding a given set of outcomes or events where that confidence expresses a faith in the correctness of abstract principles (1990: 34).” For Giddens, “trust on a personal level becomes a project to be ‘worked at’ by parties involves and demands the opening out of the individual to the other (1990: 121).” For example, space as a disembedding mechanism which collapses perceptions of time allows for increased human productivity. This begs the questions what about groups of people who have historically been disproportionately underrepresented among landowners. When popular platforms of mass dissemination of cultural representation erase or ignore the presence of a group of people in time or in a physical space, this perpetuates the loss of particular types of social-cultural knowledge. The question then becomes, how does negotiation of a collective identity based on race and gender identity influence interpersonal negotiations of the meanings of that identity separate from the dominant culture’s ideology about them?

Mainstream images of American life and culture suggest that people have become disembedded from here and now because methods of instant communication has altered perceptions of time and, more noticeably, space. Giddens argues that “in a situation [where] many aspects of modernity have become globalized, no one can completely opt out of the abstract systems involved in modern institutions (1990: 84).”

Culture industry’s pervasive influences provide us with closer connections to people who are “worlds” away, but do very little towards erasing social boundaries between privileged and disadvantaged members of the same community. They also cause us to sometimes act as though we must remain bound to the disembedded world for reasons that Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno argue in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002).

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002) Horkheimer and Adorno suggest that people act as though they must remain bound to the disembedded world because they do not have as much agency as they think. They argue that in modern societies, people have, in a sense, become “industry groupies” and are hooked on the products and ideologies that agents of culture industries say are acceptable to maintain the “insider” or “privileged” status. It is would be interesting to note the way social interactions predicated on a history of mistrust, physical and geographic separation of racialized sexes manifest to support and complicate these notions in the contemporary moment. Giddens also argues that we firmly hold on to things which disembedded us from the bigger picture and from “local” community ties because we feel like we are “stuck in a world of events that we do not fully understand and seem largely out of our control (Giddens 1990: 2).” I find this problematic because Giddens does not offer a causal mechanism as an entry point into the debate about whether or not and

how people with some degree of agency negotiate their positionality when left to the mercy of dominant cultural ideologies.

By considering “racialized” cowboy masculinities using Giddens theory about the role of trust in intimate relationships, individual relationships, and abstract systems the limitations of Giddens theory is revealed and a paradigmatic shift is required. Giddens explains how the U.S. culture industry engages in the mass dissemination of propaganda, from the power elites, about what it is and means to live in the “modern” era, while aspects of “traditional” society characterized by intimate relationships on the basis of one’s status as an “insider” versus being the “outsider” are diminished. The end result, according to Giddens, is the enculturation of whole societies into the abstract system of the modern culture industry. However, the questions remains, who is considered “modern” in respect to notions of personhood and the treatment of (hu)man who are socially deemed 3/4th of an uncivilized (hu) man?

The fate of “modern” (hu) man (s) is exemplified in strong connections between individual’s intimate relationship and disembedding mechanisms, such as space and place, in regards to social definitions of belonging to relationship to trust and we no longer see trust built on personal connections within local communities. Giddens says that

We should reformulate the question of order as a problem of how it comes about that social systems "bind" time and space. The problem of order is here seen as one of time-space distancing-the conditions under which time and space are organized so as to connect presence and absence. This issue has to be conceptually distinguished from that of the "boundedness" of social systems (1990: 14).

However, this begs the question: what happens when sharing borrowed space, or land, and the same ascribed race-based gender identity is one of the few ways that facilitate everyday negotiations of that identity?

Everyday Experiences



Figure 23. Father/Son teaching moment before the rodeo begins.

Everyday experiences, understood within the context of practices, as tactics and strategies are ways of understanding how individuals navigate their social-cultural and natural environments as reciprocal manifestations of the use of boundaries and individual relationships to those boundaries (Figure 23). In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (2002), Michel de Certeau's investigation is concerned with gauging differences between the

production of images and the secondary production of the hidden processes of the way images are utilized. de Certeau's investigation into these processes elaborates on a theory of practices, mixtures of rituals, makeshifts, manipulations of space, and operators of networks. For example, de Certeau explains how procedures of everyday creativity show how the grid of surveillance is everywhere and becoming clearer and more extensive. Because of this expansion, de Certeau argues that it is becoming more urgent that people discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it. To explore possible answers to how people resist the panoptic gaze, he poses three exploratory questions:

1. What popular procedures manipulate surveillance mechanisms?
2. What popular procedures conform to surveillance mechanisms only to evade them?
3. What "way (s) of operating" forms the counterpart of the subjugated side of mute processes that organize the establishment of socioeconomic order? (de Certeau: 2002)

de Certeau's investigation describes the procedures of everyday interactions relative to structures of expectation, negotiation, and "improvisation proper" to ordinary language in the domains of action, time, and modalisation. The relation of procedures to the fields of force, in which they act, therefore, must lead to a polemological analysis of culture. This investigation demonstrates a political dimension to everyday practice whereby actors in society employ tactics in order to "make do," change, or maintain the "strategies" of the status quo.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (2002), de Certeau analyzes images, as

representational text, and individual's behavior while consuming the meaning given to those images complemented by what people "male" or "do" during their time consuming the meaning(s) ascribed to those images. De Certeau's analysis draws a contrast between the practices of consumption and usage and is applicable to understanding processes and practices of "othering" within colonial and patriarchal systems that outwardly to assimilate individuals. For example, the cultural mapping of social behaviors and characteristics ascribed to an individual's gender identity based on their biological sex.

The use of physical space, behavioral comportment, and bodily adornment, associated with gender identity with the individual's identified as either male or female, according to "expert" medical practitioners, or "elites" produces a new language and way of negotiating what it means to be/become or achieve a particular gender (boy/man or girl/woman). The presence and circulation of a representation tells members of a society nothing about that it is to mean to its users. To do this "we" analyze the manipulation of images, or tests, by users who are also not its makers. However, in this theory of analysis does not allow for the analysis of Black cowboys because, according to many of my participants, they are participants in another form of "Black" culture because Black men were the original cowboys.

Discursive Formations & Fields of Masculine Productions



Figure 24. It's more than just being able to just "get up on a horse."

In “A Common Place: An Ordinary Language (2002),” de Certeau discusses the socio-political effects of using terms like “Everyman,” “nobody,” “anyone,” and “everyone.” The generalizing reference to a collective body of individuals as “Everyman,” according to de Certeau is a name that betrays the absence of a name (See Figure). Therefore, the anti-hero is also “nobody.” Every man, as nobody is always the other, without his own responsibilities (“it’s not my fault, it’s the other: destiny”) or particular properties which limit a home (death effaces all differences). Rather than being represented in the literature the ordinary man acts out the text itself, in and by the text. Additionally, he makes plausible the

universal character of the particular place in which the discourse of a knowing wisdom is pronounced. However, the elitists writing the “vulgar” speaker as a disguise for a meta-language about themselves allows us to see what dislodges the elitist from their privilege and draws privilege outside of itself: an Other who is no longer God or Muse, but the anonymous.

Michel de Certeau offers the use of contemporary historicity which provides several reasons to support a “concentration of the ‘ways of speaking’ of ordinary or everyday language.” First, the usual ways of speaking do not have any equivalent in philosophical discourse and they cannot be translated into it because they are richer and more varied than philosophical discourse. Second, ordinary language constitutes a reserve of ‘distinctions’ and ‘connections’ accumulated by historical experiences and stored up in everyday speech. Finally, as linguistic practices, ordinary language manifests logical complexities unnoticed by scientific formalization. Each of these linguistic challenges present in translating philosophical jargon into everyday language and vice versa are compounded by the way subcultures whose history of marginalization informs coded vernacular created out of necessity to communicate among each other while experiencing the dominant cultures negative gaze.

Further, contemporary historicity cannot erase the historical context of which de Certeau provides three indicative aspects. First, a “purity” and reserve mark the style of an engagement in contemporary history, a philosophical politics of culture. Second, by combining technical rigor with respect for its “object,” there is no profit from knowledge by exchanging it against the right to speak in its name; the object retains its exactingness but not its mastery. Finally, this science of the ordinary is defined by threefold foreignness, the

foreignness of the specialist and of the wealthy bourgeois to common life, of the scientist to philosophy, and of the German with the everyday English language.

The way Black cowboys use language to illustrate and perform their individual understandings about the privileges and obstructions of both in U.S. social cultural hierarchies transcends the language of philosophical discourse. The cultural rhythm acquired through lived experiences and nuanced meanings that are attached to standardized language reveal much information about how internal and external cultural representations of Blackness and masculinity are interpreted, processed, and performed. For example, Black cowboys who employ “Black” cultural practices that they associate with ‘making-do’ in a society where they are disadvantaged because of their race. A description of this process of “making-do,” as an African American within a predominantly white male business industry speaks to representations and the foregrounding and silencing of particular social cultural characteristics.

de Certeau’s analysis of images broadcast on television, as representations, and behaviors while watching television is complemented by what consumers “make” or “do” during this time with these images. The analysis draws a contrast between the practice of consumption and usage applies to practices of becoming an “other” within the colonialist system that outwardly assimilates individuals. For example, the way that Black cowboys use the dominant social order of gender hierarchies to deflect its power over racial marginalization and discrimination demonstrates the use made by “common people” of culture disseminated and imposed by “elites” producing a new language. The presence and circulation of a representation tells us nothing about what it is for its users. To do this we analyze its manipulation by users who are not its makers. The manipulation of systems of

power by Black cowboys reveals the false dichotomy between power and marginalization and create the potential to change the way we discuss the way people negotiate multiple subjectivities that are ascribed privileges and experience marginalization.

Michel de Certeau's investigation is concerned with gauging the difference or similarity between the production of the image and the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization. For example, de Certeau's explanation of procedures of everyday creativity demonstrates if the grid of surveillance is everywhere becoming clearer and extensive, then it is becoming urgent that we discover how and entire society resists being reduced to it. The questions he raises are what popular procedures manipulate the mechanisms of surveillance and conform to them only in order to evade them and what "way of operating" forms the counterpart of the subjugated side of the mute processes that organize the establishment of socioeconomic order.

This investigation describes the procedures of everyday interactions relative to structures of expectation, negotiation, and improvisation proper to ordinary language into the domains of action, time, and modalisation. The relation of procedures to the fields of force in which they act must therefore lead to a polemological analysis of culture. His investigation demonstrates a political dimension to everyday practice whereby actors in society employ tactics or strategies to "make do," change, or maintain the status quo. To this extent, marginality is today no longer limited to minority groups, but it is rather massive and pervasive. It is becoming universal. Shifting discursive formations about masculinity in the social sciences from its use in the singular—"masculinity"—to its plural form—"masculinities"—because the former exerts a gendered hegemony over multifaceted points of contention between masculinities or different forms of masculinity.

Similarly, common interests in Black experiences do not oblige harmonious collaborations among social science scholars working to understand and improve the overall conditions of minorities, and Blacks in particular, in post-colonial societies (Rabaka 2009). By defining who can claim Blackness, scholars delineate who is not Black thereby excluding peoples, cultures, and experiences that offer additional narratives and counter narratives from the disproportionate research focus on African-Americans (Clark-Hine 2009). Africana scholars' efforts to extend the African Diasporic community and, by doing so, extend notions about Black identities offers alternative ways to think about the agency Blacks use to challenge or make negotiations within hegemonic systems of domination. Similarly, the nature of the struggles, conflicts, and contests among Africana scholars about the "correct" or "right" way to do Africana research is a reflection of the struggles, conflicts, and contests that characterize the lived experiences of Black people.

Today, Black males struggles against systemic forces such as neighborhood segregation, punitive criminal justice punishment, and severe isolation from the mainstream America, which are added burdens to the daily stresses of living in poverty, dysfunctional families, and high rates of unemployment. In *Advancing Identity Theory by Engaging the Black Male Adolescent* (2008), Davis Wall Rice emphasizes

as with the construction of 'Culture,' we have come to realize the characteristics by which both culture and identity are associated and dynamic, fluid and unstable, despite their consistency... this negotiation is complex, nuanced and though not always socially acceptable is a success in its own right considering

the perils of progressing as a Black male in the Western Hemisphere (2008: xi-xv).

Furthermore, scholarship that theorizes colonialism and westward expansion in the United States positions Texas as the West. Conversely, scholarship about Black Texans (re)locates the state as a part of the South in the context of Civil War and Civil Rights movement activities. It has been observed that discourses about race relations regarding Blacks in America redraw regional boundaries of the U.S. only considering the North and South alone. This varying conceptualization about Texas' cultural character in regards to race warrants a closer reading of regional identities as race is mapped onto the land and vice versa with shifting regional histories and the masculine identities of Texas' Black cowboys.

Mainstream Representations and Reading Black Male Bodies

Studies on the intersection of race and sex/gender have disproportionately focused on sexuality and gender roles. For example, the race-based gender research looks at the implications of the white man's burden and the effects of "race mixing," or miscegenation at various levels of society based on the ideology of pure racial types (Fanon 1967; Fairchild 1991; hooks 2004; Johnson and Henderson 2005). However, the intersection of race and male identities has left questions regarding identity construction and representation among minority males with each other.

Similarly, Kimberly Chandler (2011) discusses how Black males perform gender and offers a model for how to approach an understanding of Black masculinities from a performance studies perspective. Chandler has observed how hegemonic forces impose notions of racialized masculinity as pathological in nature. She adds that representation of

Black male voices, as the foundation of inquiry into the literature on the subject, is minimal at best. Her work provides a way to further a discussion about Black masculinity by way of tensions, real or imagined, that Black males experience, from the intersection of performance and communication, everyday life, race/ethnicity, and gender. Chandler's operationalization of performativity will be most useful for drawing a line that illustrated the connection between self-assertions of masculinity and the performance of masculinity and "Blackness." However, to build upon notions of masculinity a clearly defined model for the socially constructed racial category of "Blackness" is necessary.

Conversely, in *Masculinity in the Black Imagination* (2011), Ronald L. Jackson calls for a (re) construction of imagined singular racial masculinity, or "Black masculinity." In the introduction to his book, Jackson notes that currently "Black masculinity" is trapped within the material conditions that have caused people to imagine the identities as a singular pathologized Blackness as the importance of this process. Jackson explains that all contributors to this text primarily use ethnographic data, however; the information used to synthesize the text in its entirety is content analysis that points to a common observation of hegemonic forces acting upon and forcing its own homogenizing ideas of Black masculinity into the minds of Black and other ethnic groups. Jackson challenges the researcher to be critical of their interpretations based on their observations of Black male subjectivities by explaining that "only our imaginations may properly assist us in comprehending the possibilities of liberation from a pathologized Blackness and perhaps, an even more sinister, a singular racial masculinity that has come to be known as "Black masculinity" (2011: 3).

Region, Race & Masculinity

The ways that “Blackness” informs the types of masculinities, as socialization and enculturation into a particular regional history of the racial contestations requires a consideration of social-political significance of the way Southern identity influences notions about race. Dr. Riché Richardson approaches regional variants of Southern Black masculinity between Black men from the South in her book, *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: from Uncle Tom to Gangsta* (2007). Her research on literary representations of Black maleness suggests that Black males in different states within a particular region have notions of Black masculinity that vary and take on an antagonistic relationship. Richardson begins her exploration of Southern Black masculinity by noting the social and political significance of the Civil War and lived experiences during the antebellum period and the constant presence of the dominant hegemonic white male patriarchal figure as an active agent in the construction of Black masculinity.

Similarly, in *Southern Masculinity* (2009), Craig Friend provides a historical narrative of how (White) masculinity in the United States operates before the American Civil War. Craig Friend provides a historical narrative of how masculinity in the United States operates before the American Civil War and operationalizes the word “masculinity,” in the singular. While homogenizing, in effect, the narrative offers a point of departure for a discussion of masculinities, in the plural, that accounts for regional differences in its construction. This text considers what implications the end of enslavement had on Black and white men in the South, as stakeholders in the land on which their personhood was established.

Moreover, this text introduced political implications of the intersection of region, race, and masculinity in a discussion about citizenship, visibility/invisibility, and the American Dream. Friend's analysis of masculinity as a function of regional identity, where regionalism became a significant characteristic of identity construction and formation, speaks to male aggression and pride. Insofar as the South losing the Civil War to the North resulted in the emancipation of enslaved Blacks in the South this caused (former) white slave, owners and newly freed Black men consciously renegotiated what it meant to be Southern and to be a man.

Further, Trent Watts' *White Masculinity in the Recent South* (2008) discusses the post-WWII years during which variations of Southern white manhood and masculinity have flourished, either in opposition to or in addition to the "ignorant, smirking, chest-out, crotch-forward triumphalism," of the period (2008: 2). This text complicates the homogenized "dominant hegemonic white male patriarchy" that some feminists invoke to defend the honor of males of color in a post-colonial but not quite post-racial America. Watts provides a trajectory of Southern white masculinity that has too been molded and reconfigured by the outcome of the distant Civil War and, far less removed, WWII from white American males' imaginations. He discusses the role of print media in fictionalizing "the good ole boys and rednecks" in the minds of Americans and those abroad and points to how the media represent Southern white masculinity in its extreme (racist) forms as often and as consistently as it portrays the stereotypes, from fear of the Black body, of Black men on the whole.

In the discourse of marked and un-marked categories, there is much to be said about how official and unofficial narratives and by extension History, without the signifying

marker, operates to subvert the experiences of those American citizens whose history is one of struggle to be seen, heard, and written into American History. The process of marking categories can be applied to all instances where an “other” that the dominant group in power identifies as subordinate, inferior, or a threat to what they define as the “rightful” order of society. Another consideration for the marking of categories is that it occurs after a significant event that had broader implications for any level of social-political life.

For example, the building of America was done on the backs of slaves, which were introduced to “America” by European-Americans (or whites, to use the un-marked “American” category). Before, emancipation the start of slavery citizenship was a discourse of religious affiliation where Americans were Christian-Protestant males and Africans were seen as heathens in need of saving from their self by whites. However, when Africans sought legal citizenship to acquire land in America, they converted to Christianity. To prevent the fruition of equality for African-Americans was the birth of racial categories, marking, and “othering” based on phenotypical characteristics in the United States.

Friend (2009) operationalizes the word "masculinity," in the singular and while it is homogenizing, in effect, he offers a point of departure for a discussion of masculinities, in the plural, that accounts for regional differences in its construction. This text considers what implications the end of enslavement had on Black and white men in the South, as stakeholders in the land on which their personhood was established. This introduction speaks to pride and male aggression in that the emancipation of Blacks in the South that caused (former) white slave owners and newly freed Black men to have consciously renegotiated what it meant to be Southern and to be a man because of losing a war. Moreover, this text

can be used to introduce political implications of the intersection of region, race, and masculinity in a discussion about citizenship, visibility/invisibility, and the American Dream.

However, a study of contemporary Southern Black masculinity requires an account of contemporary constructions of Southern White masculinity. Trent Watts discusses Southern white masculinity in the post-WWII years during which variations of Southern white manhood and masculinity have flourished, either in opposition to or in addition to the “ignorant, smirking, chest-out, crotch-forward triumphalism,” of the period (2008: 2). This introduction complicates the homogenized “dominant hegemonic white male patriarchy” that some feminists invoke to defend the honor of males of color in a post-colonial but not quite post-racial America. Watts provides a trajectory of Southern white masculinity that has too been molded and reconfigured by the outcome of the distant Civil War and, far less removed, WWII from American males’ imaginations. He discusses the role of print media in fictionalizing “the good ole boys and rednecks” in the minds of Americans and those abroad and points to how the media represents Southern white masculinity in its extreme (racist) forms as often and as consistently as it portrays the stereotypes, from fear of the Black body, of Black men on the whole.

Gender

In the case of Black heterosexual males, the racial binary deconstruction remains destabilized by shifting hetero-normative ideas about masculinity to either end by using “normal”/ mainstream representations in American society. This process functions the same way Cohen observes, “there are straight queers [...] in every single street in this apathetic country of ours” (Johnson 2005: 37). However, the implication of this point suggests that work still needs to be done to challenge the historical mapping of gender onto biology.

Based on my reading and extension of Cohen's definition of "queer" and the examples from *Black Queer Studies* (2005) and *Exhibiting Blackness* (2011), I think my theoretical argument about how to queer hetero-normative masculinity, based on race and space, and count it among the queer identities in America's society serves two functions for "the master's." In the case of Black heterosexual males, the racial binary deconstruction remains destabilized by shifting hetero-normative ideas about masculinity to either end by using "normal"/ mainstream representations in American society. This process functions the same way Cohen observes, "there are straight queers [...] in every single street in this apathetic country of ours" (Johnson 2005: 37). However, the implication of this point suggests that work still needs to be done bringing me to the second function. A space has been created discourses about queering "White, heterosexual, and male (s)" in mainstream American society.

Other studies that analyze performances of masculinity and identity construction, scholar discuss how popular images and understandings of Black masculinity are such that violence, material wealth, and violent retaliation, nihilism, and the objectification of women is the extent of Black masculinity (Rose 2008; Awkward 2005; Jackson II and Hopson 2011). The performance of masculinity and identity construction discuss how popular images and understandings of Black masculinity are such that violence, material wealth and violent retaliation, nihilism, and the objectification of women is the extent of Black masculinity (Rose 2008; Awkward 2005; Jackson 2011; Neal). These changes are part of many covert processes that serve to maintain social, cultural, economic, and political status quos of overt racism and discrimination that, for the most part, have been outlawed in North America since the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Understanding the socio-historical contexts that

affect the identities of these Black cowboys, who also have the ability to establish identity and exert social control through their performances of masculinity when interacting with each other, is important when making the connection that living and growing up as a Black male in the American South is, by itself, an accomplishment. Black identity as defined by racial opposition in Michael Omi and Howard Winant's book, *Racial Formation in the United States* (1986), may have been a motivation to emphasize Black solidarity as opposed to attaching other signifiers to the racialized category.

Blackness Masculinity Queering... Space?

According to sociologist R.W. Connell, maleness and manhood have received critical attention since the mid-1400s with the development of the modern capitalist economy and scholars were concerned primarily with sexuality and personhood in western societies (Connell 1995). Masculinity, however, did not become an object of academic inquiry until the 1960s with the introduction of Women's Studies.

Furthermore, the focus of explorations into male privilege concerned power and representation with regards to gender/sexuality and work/labor between males and females (Connell 1995). As a separate discipline, masculinity studies are less than a half century old. My idea is that conversations about diversity disproportionately focus on overt differences between groups based on sex at the expense of "insider" perspectives on the effects of patriarchy.

Interanimating Black Studies and Queer Studies in E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson's *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*. *Interanimating Black Studies and Queer Studies* (2005) facilitates a way to understand and talk about different experiences with oppression based on race and sex/gender. The language of racial and gendered

oppression functions inside of two extremes of their respective binaries. For example, racially offensive language is made possible by a culture of privileging whiteness. Similarly, sexually offensive language is made possible by a culture of privileging the male sex and heterosexuality. The point is that both categories must use oppressive and offensive terms supported by socially defined binaries in order to challenge mainstream, or popular, views on race and sexuality. Activating experiences of Black(s) and “queer” subjectivities adds to the available possibilities for challenging and shifting commonsense notions about what is “authentic” for each category.

Even though the book depicts Black Studies and Queer Studies as “destabilizing fixed notions of identity by deconstructing binaries,” the use of these hegemonic terms by the oppressed groups must be considered for its exclusionary effect on at least one particular group- Black heterosexual males in “White” mainstream social spaces. I argue that Black Studies, Queer Studies, and Black Queer Studies engage in equal acts of exclusion to cause social change at the expense groups who straddle the line between dominant and marginalized social identities.

In “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” by Cathy Cohen, she defines queer as “to fuck with gender” (Johnson 2005: 37). This definition of queering an identity includes Black males, regardless of sexuality, because the signifier “Black” is often read as deviant when attached to any of the (un)marked norms listed above. In regards to Black masculinity the privileges Black males enjoy because of their sex are limited because of their race. The limitations of male privilege become visible when Black male bodies enter social spaces historically reserved for White (male) s. Johnson and Henderson illustrate this point specifically regarding the use of binary racial categories and the way

“Dominant Black male leadership, [during the] Civil Rights and Black Power movements of [the late 1960s and early 1970s], provided the historical backdrop and social street scene, fueling interventions [that] brought pressure to bear on white administrators as predominantly white institutions of higher learning around the United States” (Johnson 2005: 3)

I would extend this definition of queering an identity to include Black males, regardless of sexuality, because the signifier “Black” is often read as deviant when attached to any of the (un)marked norms listed above. Their cultural identity as Black cowboys depicts two subjugated groups discriminating against the dominant/“master” for two reasons.

First, the master, in this instance, is an over generalizing term used to signify or symbolize all persons who are members of dominant American society and who have the power to construct and enforce social norms. Second, In the case of Black Studies, the specific intersection of Black, heterosexual, and male that mastermind Black Studies’ boundaries has the propensity to be “queered,” in spaces that are commonly thought of and historically reserved for “White (male) s only.”

These two examples demonstrate how social, political, and historical processes may change the socio-political conditions and environments in which Black, heterosexual males may be queer, because of their presence regardless of sexuality, is a deviation from the social demographic norm historically established and maintained through cultural hegemonies. Cohen’s definition of “queer,” and the inclusion of queer hetero-normative masculinities, based on race and space, include it among the queer identities in America’s society and offer an alternative understanding about post coloniality and systemizing strategies.

My argument about the visibility of Black (male) subjects in mainstream (White) Americans cultural spaces is twofold. First, the racial designation of the body negatively influenced responses to identities that are appropriated by the dominant culture. I would add that the severity of the negative responses increases when the cultural figure is positioned as a national icon, which introduces issues of national citizenship and representation that I will not consider. Second, where non-Blacks encounter Black bodies outside of their socially prescribed and sanctioned spaces that are policed by governmentality, they are in the exhibition “Black Male,” and non-Black artists’ paintings of Black Male bodies also receive a negative response. The negative response in each case demonstrates the general character of America’s mainstream cultural context, which Cooks describes, as that “of suspicion [and] institutional complicity in the perpetuation of stereotypes of Black men as dangerous, violent, hypersexualized, [and lazy]” (Cooks 2011: 112).

I believe these two reasons position my argument as an expansion of understandings of Black Studies and Queer Studies’ relationship as bridging the gap between the two disciplines. I believe the privileges Black males enjoy because of their sex are limited because of their race. The limitations of male privilege become visible when Black male bodies enter social spaces historically reserved for White (male)s.

Johnson and Henderson illustrate this point specifically regarding the use of binary racial categories and the way “dominant Black male leadership, [during the] Civil Rights and

Black Power movements of [the late 1960s and early 1970s], provided the historical backdrop and social street scene fueling interventions [that] brought

pressure to bear on white administrators as predominantly white institutions of higher learning around the United States” (Johnson 2005: 3).

Similarly, I observe a more contemporary example of Black males’ bodies as deviating from its ascribed social space, thus queer, because of its presence in America’s mainstream art world. In *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum*, Bridget R. Cooks describes art critics’ negative reactions to Black male artists in America’s mainstream art world. In her depiction Cooks describes how “art critics, some of whom were faced with viewing an exhibition of art by Black American artist for the first time[...] shifted from their regular approaches because their understanding of racial Blackness disqualified the show as an art exhibit” (Cooks 2011:88). These two examples demonstrate how social, political, and historical processes may change the socio-political conditions and environments in which Black, heterosexual males may be queer, because the presence of Black males, regardless of sexuality, is a deviation from the social demographic norm historically established and maintained.

Based on my reading and extension of Cohen’s definition of “queer” and the examples from *Black Queer Studies* (2005) and *Exhibiting Blackness* (2011), I think my theoretical argument about how to queer hetero-normative masculinity, based on race and space, and count it among the queer identities in America’s society serves two functions for the dominant culture’s ideologies about race and gender. In the case of Black heterosexual males, the racial binary deconstruction remains destabilized by shifting heteronormative ideas about masculinity to either end by using “normal”/ mainstream representations in American society. However, the implication of this point suggests that work still needs to be done bringing me to the second function. A space has been created discourses about queering

“White, heterosexual, and male (s)” in mainstream American society. I would suggest that a case could be made for the queering of White, heterosexual, male, rapper Eminem. Further, and the significance of maintaining the “pressure brought to bear on white [society]” that E. Patrick Johnson describes on the grounds of race, is tantamount to the unequivocal and, wherever possible, the simultaneous dismantling of heteronormative racial binaries that structure formal and informal knowledge transmission.

Returning to the Johnson and Henderson’s interanimation of Black Studies and Queer Studies in regards to the archaeology of the Black Queer Studies in the academy, I understand their social-political significance of maintaining mainstream society’s binaries to highlight how they create and perpetuate hierarchies. Similarly, Johnson and Henderson also observe the how “the deconstruction of binaries and the explicit “unmarking” of difference have serious implication for those for whom these other differences “matter” (2005: 5). However, in regards to theories for African research, Black Queer Studies offers the lesson that discrimination survives because of over generalizing categories and, by extension, experiences of the complex intersections of multiple identities.

African-American studies scholar, Michael Awkward provides an interesting way to incorporate Erica R. Edwards’ discussion of charisma in her book *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership* (2012) with his reformation of the concept of desire as it is negatively associated with African-American men to further negatively stereotype the group. Awkward observes, “with few exceptions, Black feminist discourse remains unlikely to explore Black masculinity except as social, domestic, and intellectual forces whose oppression of Black women is energetic, self-conscious and remitting (Awkward 2005: 137).” One notable exception worth acknowledging is bell hooks whose observations in *We Real Cool* (2004)

not only focuses on the multiplicity of Black masculinities, but also traces the histories of transformation and memories that allow scholars like Awkward to observe and characterize Black feminist discourse as such.

Awkward's perspective on Black feminist research is useful in his exploration into how Black feminism might help to elucidate "representation of the politics of Black male heterosexual desire (Awkward 2005: 138)." He challenges Black intellectuals, as expansive thinkers, to "transcend," or at least incorporate ideological analysis [about Black males] into their own readings of [Black female bodies] in ways that see [women] as more than Black feminists have ever imagined (Awkward 2005: 141)." Black Queer Studies caused me to think that locating and framing the marginalized binary construct within mainstream society is detrimental to the work of deconstructing the binary construct as a whole. For example, when a Black cowboy is among other Black cowboys, why might occupation and class status be emphasized and cause me to question whether one can "class" their self out of Blackness.

Similarly, when that same Black cowboy who, for consistency let's just say, can afford to be a member of the P.R.C.A and attends a rodeo where he is the demographic minority. How or why might this (Black) cowboy want to distance himself from other Black cowboys at the event and how or why might he want to emphasize the ascribed characteristics associated with class status, or (white) middle class values. Because the power dynamic of binary constructs and marginalized identities being viewed as emulating the mainstream (White) society reinforces the binary. I think Africana researchers should locate the significance of their projects within the binaries that Black identities have the power to cause individuals to critically consider when, where, how, and why we emphasize one identifying marker of

another. The crossroads and intersections where human manipulation of social identities are where the transformative power of self, groups and other is greatest.

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