

**PHALLIC PRESENCE AND PHALLIC ABSENCE IN CHARACTERIZATIONS OF
BLACK GAY MEN**

A Thesis by

Parker Eugene Daniel

Bachelor of Arts, Wichita State University, 2008

Submitted to the Department of Liberal Studies
and the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Wichita State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

May 2013

© Copyright 2013 by Parker Eugene Daniel

All Rights Reserved

**PHALLIC PRESENCE AND PHALLIC ABSENCE IN CHARACTERIZATIONS OF
BLACK GAY MEN**

The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content,
and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts with a major in Liberal Studies

Angela Demovic, Committee Chair

Jens Kreinath, Committee Member

Doris Chang, Committee Member

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to my committee, to Angela Demovic for her infinite patience and belief in my research, to Jens Kreinath for his critical engagement with the text, and to Doris Chang for all her encouragement. I also thank Chinyere Okafor, Marché Fleming-Randle, and anyone else who encouraged me and showed interested in my research, as well as Kerry Jones, who has not only kept me employed, but has also kept me sane and with her perennial good cheer. Finally, Deana Gard has kept me up when I couldn't and has taught me the value of friendship, for which I am eternally grateful.

ABSTRACT

This study provides a critical analysis discourses about black gay men, using critical discourse analysis (CDA) as its methodology. First, the *white-institutional-phallus* is established as the greater discursive structure driving negating discourses about non-heterosexual black men. Second, languages of bereavement, of phallic "presence" and phallic "absence," are shown to constitute this discourse practice. The study then reveals how the repudiation of black gay men depends on the repudiation of the feminine and, particularly, how anal penetration and emasculation are used as heuristic tropes for the "racial failure" of black gay men because they are constructed by and constitutive of repudiations of the feminine. Finally, analyses of black gay characters in film show this discursive practice in the context of US popular culture and illustrate how black bodies are appropriated for ideological aims. Since phallic scripts ultimately standardize white phallic embodiment by rendering black phallic embodiment "deviant" or "pathological," black men should extricate themselves from phallic discourse and take control of their bodily self-determination, self-representation, and self-definition.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Phallic Readings of Race and Sexualities in Context	2
1.2	Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a Methodological Approach	3
1.3	What is at stake for black gay men?	7
2.	A GENEALOGY OF PHALLIC DISCOURSES ABOUT BLACK BODIES	9
2.1	The Architecture of the White-Institutional-Phallus	9
2.2	Discursive Repudiations of the Feminine	13
2.3	Repudiations of the Feminine and Tropes for "Racial Failure"	17
	2.3.1 Anal penetration as a trope for "racial failure"	18
	2.3.2 Emasculation as a trope for "racial failure"	19
3.	PHALLIC TROPES FOR RACIAL FAILURE IN BLACK GAY CHARACTERS	22
3.1	Character Analyses	22
	3.2.1 <i>The Salon</i> (Brown, 2005)	24
	3.2.2 <i>Holiday Heart</i> (Rosenthal & Townsend, 2002)	25
	3.2.3 <i>The Longest Yard</i> (Giarraputo & Segal, 2005)	27
	3.2.4 <i>Chasing Amy</i> (Mosier & Smith, 1997)	29
	3.2.5 <i>Revenge of the Nerds</i> (Field & Kanew, 1984)	31
	3.2.6 <i>Friday After Next</i> (Ice Cube & Raboy, 2002)	33
3.3	Films as Cultural Texts and Phallic Discourse Practice	34
4.	DISCUSSION	36
4.1	Reflections on Phallic Discourses	36
4.2	Recommendations for Future Research	38
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	41
	Bibliography	42
	Filmography	45

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

From traditional readings of black culture, one could certainly draw the conclusion that black manhood is in a perpetual state of recovery. Black men, in the historical narrative of sexual pathology, are at once "too much" and "never enough." After all, the sexually predatory black man, with his abnormally large penis and predilection for violence (Collins, 2005, p. 57; Marable, 1998, p. 21), and the weak black man—emasculated first by systematic cultural, political, and economic underdevelopment, then by the "strong black woman" who has taken his place as leader of the household (United States Department of Labor, 1965)—are one and the same, since both serve to standardize the white male body by rendering the black male body "deviant" or "pathological" in some way. In the following quote, Cole and Guy-Sheftall (2005) show how such sexual mythologizing has worked, particularly in negating discourses about homosexuality:

Among the myth Europeans have created about Africans, the myth that homosexuality is absent or incidental is the oldest and most enduring. For Europeans, Black Africans—of all the native people of the world—most epitomized "primitive man." Since primitive man is supposed to be close to nature, ruled by instinct, and culturally unsophisticated, he had to be heterosexual, his sexual energies and outlets demoted exclusively to their "natural" purpose: biological reproduction. If Black Africans were the most primitive people in all of humanity—if they were, indeed, human, which some debated—then they had to be the most heterosexual. (As quoted in Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003, p. 165)

These myths, along with many others about the sexual pathology of black Africans¹, stemmed from scientific racism² and "White Man's Burden"³ and served to rationalize the colonialist/imperialist political economy in which black bodies are commodities, competition between groups is natural and domination the true path to a nation's success. Moreover, such sexual mythologizing reveals how race is gendered and sexualized. As the study argues, the masculine, and, by extension, the phallus, is privileged unduly in discourses of race.

Phallic Readings of Race and Sexualities in Context

Evidence of discursive privileging abounds both in the academy and in anti-racist activism, and there is stake to be held in constructions of "damaged" black manhood (Scott, 1997, p. 64). In the United States, major politics of interracial equity have tended more toward legitimation and restoring "gender stability," i.e. the return of black men to their rightful places as the leaders of black families and authority figures in the black community (United States Department of Labor, 1965, para. 2), than toward liberation and extrication from Eurocentric systems of bodily meaning. Moynihan (1965), for example, attributed black pathology to reversed gender-roles in black families, arguing that it contributed to lack of education attainment, juvenile delinquency, and many other social ills.⁴ The male's domination of the female is taken to confirm the "fitness" of a given cultural or ethnic group and, if the men of that group fail, then they are deemed "emasculated." However, if culture is what is meaningful and the white political and economic elite have a monopoly on bodily meaning, then black bodies, apprehended through white lenses, must invariably be distorted bodies, bodies made docile

¹ *Black African* differentiates Sub-Saharan Africans from Northern Africans, who are beyond the scope of this study.

² For a concise definition, see Collins (2005, p. 352).

³ This slogan, popular during colonialism, originated from the famous poem by Rudyard Kipling.

⁴ See the Matriarchy section of Moynihan's *The Tangle of Pathology*, para. 2.

through categorization. The real trouble, however, is that the "black community" actively engage in discourse of phallic recovery. In other words, in the constant instating and reinstating of the phallus, only monolithic, incomplete images of black embodiment, which fail to account for the diversity of black subjectivities, can result.

For the purpose of destabilizing the phallus as the primary site of cultural meaning, this study analyses how the use of anal penetration and emasculation as discursive tropes for the "racial failure" of black gay men (and non-heterosexual blacks in general) enacts and reproduces masculine and heterosexual privileges; since the phallic primacy is a specifically European construct, the privileging of the phallus in black culture also enacts and reproduces a specifically Eurocentric system of bodily, which, for the purposes of the study, shall be referred to as the *white-institutional-phallus*. "Recovering the phallus," may ultimately be counterproductive as a strategy for racial progress. For, if in recovering the phallus the black male reproduces masculine and heterosexual privileges, then he concomitantly limits his own bodily reach to stereotypical embodiment, all while extending the white male body. In other words, contrary to the arguments of such intellectuals as Cleaver and Welsing, it may be that the need for black men to announce their phallic presence, and not the incidence of homosexuality in black men, that is the "final acquiescence" of black men to white supremacy.

Methodology: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

While Fanon rightfully argues that psychoanalysis has historically been a Eurocentric discipline⁵ for the purposes of this study, the discipline is useful in destabilizing both Eurocentrism and masculine and heterosexual privilege. The phallus serves as both the

⁵ Fanon (2008) argues that European psychoanalysts failed to address Africa, true enough, but he also argues that black boys do not experience the "oedipal tensions" that contribute to same-sex desire (p. 130).

discursive structure and the method of its own deconstruction (Spivak, 1974, pp. lxxv-lxxvi), in this case, because discourses about authentic black masculinity are so fraught with psychoanalytic languages of bereavement; the difference between phallic presence and absence becomes the difference between masculine and feminine, active and passive, agency and oppression, productivity and sterility, subject and object, penetrator and penetrated, and so on. CDA exposes how such binary configurations affect power relations and are naturalized and obscured in common parlance.

CDA seeks to destabilize hegemony, i.e. taken-for-granted systems of power and privilege and asymmetrical power relations (Gramsci, 1985, p. 183-185), by making more transparent the processes through which it is "enacted, reproduced, and resisted" in a variety of discourses (van Dijk, 2001, p. 352). For a critical analysis of the discourse to be successful and constructive, scholars and students must, as Delany argues, "articulate the greater discursive structure they are fighting to dismantle" (Delany, 2007, p. 205). For the purposes of this research, that discursive structure is the *white-institutional-phallus*, i.e., the constitutive effects of languages of bereavement (phallic presence and phallic absence) that standardize white phallic embodiment, making non-white bodies docile by rendering non-white phallic embodiments "deviant."⁶ The specific discourse under inquiry is the use of these languages of bereavement in discourses about homosexuality and feminine gender affect in black men, i.e., the use of *penetration* and *emasculatation* as discursive tropes for the "racial failure" of gay black men. This reveals not only the extent to which race is unduly gendered and sexualized in US culture (Nagel, 2003, pp. 1-3), but also the heuristic, nearly unconscious ideological assumptions that allow for such discourse practice in cultural texts (Fairclough, 1995, p. 61). "Racial failure"

⁶ See Ahmed's "directionality of race" (2006) and Fanon's "black corporeal schema" (2008).

consists primarily of failures at correct or culturally agreed-upon performances of authentically black gender, and these failures are said to reflect the real or imagined acquiescence to white supremacy via "white" phallic domination. This study seeks to destabilize phallogocentrism in readings of black embodiment by exposing its discursive limitations.

As will be argued in this study, monolithic images of "authentic" blackness are not authentic at all, but rooted instead either in legitimation, through the approximation of white-bourgeois⁷ heteronorms, or in damaging stereotypes of animalistic hyper-heterosexuality in black Africans. Constructions of "effeminate" and "emasculated" characterizations of black gay men in film can be construed as reverse annunciations of "manhood," precisely because, as discourse practice, they standardize heterosexual black male embodiment, as phallically *present*, by rendering the embodiments of non-heterosexual black men deviant, as phallically *absent*. The order of discourse is abstract; the *genre* (comedy) is clear, with its particular thematic and schematic features, but the *discourse* is blurred. Consensus has yet to be reached about whether it is entertainment or ideology, and the potential for polysemic readings of what constitutes discourse suggests the need for an intertextual analysis of the discourse. *Intertextual analyses* look for traces of discourse practice in cultural texts and are particularly useful in the analysis of creative discourses (Fairclough, 1995, p. 61). Such a theoretical approach makes more transparent changes in the order of discourse, in the case of this study, changes in the use of languages of phallic presence and phallic absence.

Before, fictions of untamed, hypervirile black African men served to justify their continual subjugation and economic exploitation at the hands of colonialists and slave traders,

⁷ "White-bourgeois" refers specifically to the standard that is so often appealed to in measures of achievement.

and they did so by positioning black male bodies as dangerous in relation to "normal" white male bodies. In this characterization, black men benefitted from slave labor, which was an outlet for their sexual energies (Collins, 2005, p. 57); better for them to be working in the fields than to be posing a sexual threat to virtuous white women (Nagel, 2003, p. 112); black women, in stark contrast, were rendered promiscuous Jezebels and, in the prevailing myth, it was impossible for them to be raped because they were already promiscuous (Collins, 2005, pp. 58-59); again, this serves to standardize the white phallus as the "orientating" point of desire (Ahmed, 2006, pp. 70-71). Moreover, these assumptions became heuristic and influenced the future treatment of black men, as is evident in lynching and other instances of systematic violence, both physical and structural. However, even as the black male bodies have been problematized in this way, black men have uncritically appropriated these fictions of black sexuality, for example, the myth of the black male penis, to support their own sense of manhood and secure their own masculine and heterosexual privileges (Carbado, 2005, p. 199).

Here, structuralist determinism, evident in the binary configuration of presence and absence mentioned above, manifests as the naturalization of discourses of phallic primacy and discursive repudiations of the feminine, on either biologically reductive grounds, e.g., sexual dimorphism read as weakness, or *a priori* assumptions of female deficiency, e.g., Aristotle's discussion of "moral excellences" (Aristotle, 1995, pp. 91-94). Giddens' theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984, p. 16) provides basis not only to illustrate how annunciations of black phallic presence buttress the white-institutional-phallus, but also to reveal how phallic annunciations require repudiations of the feminine, and, in turn, to reveal what is at stake for the heterosexual black men who require such annunciations for their self-definition. As long as they participate in these scripts of phallic primacy, they perpetuate their own oppression because they deprive

themselves of discursive power and their bodies only exist as an extension of the *white-institutional-phallus*, which will be illustrated in the Review of the Literature.

What is at stake for black gay men?

As with all ideological discourses, phallic discourse practices about black bodies tend to be heuristic. Consumers can make decisions about how to perceive the bodies of black gay men on an unconscious level. Comedy relies on pre-existing stereotypes and, in doing so, meets the ideological needs of the audience in the cultural marketplace. The typical fast pace and scene changes have the effect of flattening any idiosyncrasy in favor of the specific point-of-view informing the film. Dissident voices are silenced when they are framed as obstacles to the resolution of the plot and are managed accordingly, which allows some creators can inject black gay characters in their films without really engaging with them. Such portrayals do not present real black gay men but caricatures, yet the bodies of black men are still appropriated for specially ideological purposes and this creates a hostile environment where black gay men cannot, in safety, look to other black men for affirmation, their bodies reduced to ideological commodities. Put another way, where socially prescriptive texts can easily turn proscriptive for those individuals who deviate from the standard line of desire, silencing them, the responsibility of the scholar is to draw these characters out, make their voices heard, and explore what their bodily presences mean, not only in the thematic and schematic structures, but also in the sociopolitical milieux that affect their apprehension and consumption.

Drawing from Fairclough's three dimensional framework for analyzing discourse (Fairclough, 1995, p. 57), the study's primary focus is on the dimension of "discourse-as-social-practice," which consists of "the ideological effects and hegemonic processes in which discourse is a feature" (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 449). Accordingly, this study identifies

phallogocentrism, which refers to how the phallus is privileged discursively in such languages of bereavement and then becomes a central locus of meaning, as a "large-scale hegemonic process" (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 449). Beyond bringing hidden hegemonies into the light, CDA should make recommendations for changes in discourses and operate from a spirit of activism, lending voice to the voiceless, empowering the powerless (Toolan, 1997, p. 100). This study proposes that black people, black men in particular, should extricate themselves from legitimating discourses, and, instead, take control of their bodily self-representation, self-determination, and self-definition, fostering more complex characterizations of black people and black bodies that account for the diversity of black subjectivities.

CHAPTER 2

A GENEALOGY OF PHALLIC DISCOURSES ABOUT BLACK BODIES

The review of the literature outlines the parameters of the analysis, i.e., it proposes a genealogy of negating discourses about homosexuality in black men and explores how such discourses depend on the phallus. The first section illustrates the white-institutional-phallus as a discursive structure allowing for discursive practices that standardize white phallic embodiment and, in doing so, reify negative stereotypes about black bodies. The second section explores how discursive repudiations of the feminine construct and are constitutive of discourse practice, since feminine gender affect is often the measure for "racial failure" in the simplified political arena of comedic film. In the last section, penetration and emasculation, as tropes for "racial failure," are observed as the traces of the discourse practice, particularly in black gay characters in comedic film. Summarily, this review illustrates the hidden genealogy of phallocentrism in readings of race, gender, and sexuality and its cultural by-products.

The Architecture of the White-institutional-phallus

The discursive structure in which the white phallic experience is privileged and made standard in Western culture is the *white-institutional-phallus*. It can be imagined as a tower too tall to support itself that must be buttressed by non-standard, non-white, "deviant" phalli. In other words, as long as phallic embodiment is upheld as the standard embodiment, as long as non-white men continue to invest in the illusion of phallic primacy, following the script dictating that "recovering the phallus" is a worthwhile project for their respective groups, white supremacy will prevail. This fits neatly into Sara Amides "directionality of race" (2006, pp. 112-113); that which is standard, i.e. an embodiment that is white, heterosexual, and male, follows a straight

line of desire, from which the non-standard deviates (Ahmed, 2006, p. 121). However, the process of "othering: is not only about negation, but also about extending the bodily reach of the standard, because making something other than one's self enables one to do things *with* it (Ahmed, 2006, p. 115), and therefore to objectify it. Additionally, the black gaze is not an affirming gaze, but one that follows the "hostile white gaze" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 111), partly to legitimate itself. It codifies and qualifies the black body according to that gaze, which explains why many colonial stereotypes about black African bodies persist today. This is precisely how the white-institutional-phallus works. It standardizes the white male's penis by rendering the penises of non-white males "deviant" and "pathological" in some way. In the US context, it follows a goldilocks script in which Asian penises are "too small," black African penises "too big" and white penises "just right."

Ultimately, phallic primacy is not "natural" but merely arbitrary and contingent on the US cultural context of white-bourgeois privilege. This is neither an indictment against all white people in the US nor a claim that all white people are racist or support racism. In fact, it hasn't much to do with white people or white perspectives and is focused more on how black bodies are appropriated to perpetuate negating discourses. However, and it must be noted, we live in a moment where white people no longer have to be racist in order to support racism; all they need do is enjoy such bodily privileges in uncritical oblivion and indolence. Whereas white people are generally allowed to be complex, complexity in black people arouses bemusement, suspicion, contempt. Black people do not have the luxury of "innocent until proven guilty," if only because of negativity unduly inscribed onto their bodies. On the one hand, the declaration of black personhood is important because it counters the US legacy of black disembodiment, yet, on the other hand, that black people should be put upon to constantly prove their personhood to the

white political and economic majority suggest that this declaration is easily perverted; the announcement "Yes, I can!" to the resounding "No" of white supremacy, via white-dominated institutions, smacks of legitimation. Moreover, black people routinely deride each other for failure to meet the rigid expectations set for "black progress," which consist more of individual blacks acceding to white-bourgeois meritocracy than of the empowerment of the collective and have major implications for existing politics of black sexual propriety. In this context, John Hutnyk's discussion of hybridity provides basis for an explanation of how the phallus is discursively privileged in terms of "racial progress" and how that privileging has a performative and specifically androcentric effect on racial identity. In the current moment of pervasive cosmopolitanism, "diversity" is taken *ipso facto* as evidence of "progress," when one need only scratch the surface to see the hostilities underneath (Hutnyk, 2005, p. 96). This allows for those delicate, mostly non-black, middle class people to not see the ghetto for what it really is, a direct result of their privileges, and see hordes of "dangerous black" people instead. It also conceals how the urbanization of racial and other ethnic minorities is naturalized, even when urbanization might be forced on them by economic inequalities, among other things. The distortions of the white-bourgeois are reified in their encounters with blacks, as the *mise-en-scène* is already fixed.

Going back to "gender stability," "penetrated" and "emasculated" portrayals of black gay men (more generally of non-heterosexual black men) reflects a moral imperative for the archetypal black masculine to "recover his phallus," thereby restoring "gender stability" in black families and legitimating the black community. The specifically moral dimension of this imperative lies in the meritocratic way of perceiving "black progress," since "gender stability," i.e., male domination and female submission, is naturalized and procreative sex is conflated with other modes of production. The egregious notion that success be attributed to individual merit

and failure to individual pathology allows for victim blaming, because it conceals the real division of labor in which the privileged live at the expense of the oppressed. The lack of economic achievement and political participation in black men becomes the pathology of black men. "Pathology" then becomes the reason for "racial failure" and the systemic oppressions black people face go unnoticed. Accordingly, when black people are "dangerous," "predatory," "needy," or failed in some other way, that failure is invariably attributed to endemic pathology and they become embarrassments to the race, which gives successful black people incentive to remain "successful" and present the race well.

In this way, the white-institutional-phallus is not so much a matter of hybrid identities as a matter of hybrid forms of nationalism and group identity; this hybridity "lulls us to sleep" (Hutnyk , 2005, p. 97) in that it allows for the privileging of some politics over others. For example, the struggle for interracial equity becomes war; individual losses as inconsequential as long as groups can fight their respective battles against each other, groups anathema to each other apparently united in belligerence and "healthy competition;" as if to say, "as long as I pick a side to fight with, I'm actually doing something constructive." In a typically phallic fashion, the display of potency becomes more important to racial progress than interdependence and cooperation (Rycroft, 1995, p. 131). The constant need for the heterosexual black man to announce his "manhood" by repudiating the non-heterosexual black man as "deviant," thereby drawing a straight line like the one mentioned above, reveals his complicity in his own naturalized sexual subjugation. In following scripts of phallic primacy, he must accept that the phallic is necessarily a mechanism of control and penile penetration necessarily phallic domination, and, in turn, he must accept himself as having been emasculated in accordance with

that script, given his past failures at approximating white-bourgeois masculinity. And yet, masculine and heterosexual privileges insulate this archetypal black man from his truth.

Discursive Repudiations of the Feminine

To understand how masculine and heterosexual privileges are enacted in discourses about homosexual in black men, one must first understand how the feminine, and, by extension, the non-phallic, is repudiated. Cultural production is framed in terms of the gendered division of labor, with male labor discursively privileged as more important to cultural development. Historically, any challenges to this line of reasoning could be averted with appeals to the following binary opposition: female is to male as nature is to culture (Ortner, 1974, p. 71); the implication, that because nature is dominated by culture, the female is rightfully or naturally dominated by the male (MacCormack, 1980), has had many rationales. For Aristotle, it was a matter of women being morally deficient compared to men (Aristotle, 1995, p. 39) and "modest silence [was] a woman's crown" (Aristotle, 1995, p.36).⁸ For Engels, the management of female sexual behavior, for good or ill, constituted a capital advancement, since men who owned property could finally ensure consanguineal bequest (Engels, 2010, p. 10). The common thread with all such rationales is that the male's domination of the female has been given prestige value in the Western World (MacCormack, 1980, pp. 6-7). Women, in this characterization, are then inadequate and incomplete without male intervention and the female's cultural production is almost always secondary. Ehrenberg, in her excellent analysis of the gendered readings of evolution, destabilizes these rationales, arguing instead that female contributions have been just as important as, if not more important than, the contributions of men (Ehrenberg, 2005, p. 15). Most interesting is her argument that containers have been more important in human evolution

⁸ Aristotle (1995) cites philosopher and poet Gorgias.

than weapon and other "male" tools (Ehrenberg, 2005, p. 19), because it shows the discursive limitations of phallic primacy, as will be revealed shortly.

The container, turned on its head, also serves as an apt metaphor for "phallic absence" in psychoanalytical languages of bereavement. Here phallic presence is contingent on phallic absence (Spivak, 1974, p. lxxv) in the same way the white-institutional-phallus depends on non-white phalli for definition. Comfortably heuristic binaries create naturalized gender hierarchies. According to Lacan (1982), women's power consists only in the giving and withholding of access to her "container" (Lacan, 1982, p. 80); "penis-envy" becomes naturalized as an acceptable explanation for other, culturally created feminine deficiencies (Lacan, 1982, p. 75). This is evident in nominal biological constructions of procreation, the spermatozoon, the male's contribution to society, is flagellated, which is supposed to suggest activity and agency, while the ovum is rendered passive, reduced to a vessel or container holding the now fertilized zygote⁹ (read: reinstated with the phallic¹⁰). The difference between phallic presence and phallic absence quickly becomes the dividing line between agency and subjugation, which, as will be shown later, is reflected in modern intersections between race, gender, and sexualities. After all, only the phallic can "reveal" itself and thus "embody" a culture.

One can clearly see how cultural production is conflated with the phallic and with insemination/dissemination. One only has to observe the many ways the phallus works to privilege masculinity in discourses of patriotism and nationalism (Nagel, 2003, p. 30). Scepters and staffs, flags (read: *patriae*) penetrating "mother earth," obelisks, such as the Washington

⁹ See Martin (2007), for a succinct illustration of how this naturalizes gender hierarchies (p. 420).

¹⁰ See Irigaray (1985) for an explanation of this psychoanalytic rationale for penis-envy (p. 41).

Monument (which, incidentally, was satirized in Babbit's *Itty Bitty Titty Committee*¹¹), church steeples reaching toward a male god, skyscrapers proudly displaying the nation's wealth; all male-centric and phallic. All of these examples, even the religious ones, reveal the prestige value given to male labor and specifically bourgeois ideals of masculinity: land ownership, private property, one nation under a male god, and "healthy competition" in the global economic stage. And it doesn't stop there. The phallus has also worked its way into Black Nationalism and other ostensibly anti-racist discourses. While it is important to understand that he later changes his politics, Cleaver exemplifies this in *Soul on Ice*, reading the phallus into his racial oppression in an appeal toward women for heterosexual utopia, "Across the naked abyss of negated masculinity, of four hundred year minus my Balls, we face each other today, My Queen" (Cleaver 1991 p. 237). He frames his oppression as emasculation and must thence "recover his phallus." It is interesting how, even in his attempt to establish parity with the black woman, he uses the possessive and cannot help but follow the script, as though he is saying "Now that I've recovered my manhood, *we* can truly begin to fight racism." Moreover, his enactment of anti-racist "agency" is specifically belligerent, rooted not in extricating himself from phallic primacy but in using his penis for revenge, which is evident in the artless manner in which he earlier describes raping black women in preparation for the truly "insurrectionary" act of raping white women (Cleaver, 1991, p. 34); as though black women were interchangeable test dummies. This illustrates the extent to which "recovering the phallus" becomes a necessary condition for racial progress, to be achieved at all costs, even if at the expense of black women. This also smacks of legitimation, for, rather tautologically, to "reclaim his manhood" he must violate the "white man" in the same way he has been violated, emasculating him in the same way his ancestors were

¹¹ See Sperling & Babbit (2007).

supposedly emasculated. This plays straight into the hands of the architects of the white-institutional-phallus, because in the already fixed *mise-en-scène* of predatory hyper-heterosexuality in black African men the white elite can ignore black eroticism and black internal existence, reducing black sexual activity to animal "fucking" (Collins, 2005, p. 100).

To reiterate, when anti-racist politics becomes gendered in this way, as a battle or a war, the feminine becomes secondary and women lose cultural capital. The struggle for recognition black feminists have encountered exemplifies this. Black feminist intellectuals, such as Angela Davis, Michele Wallace, Audre Lorde, and many other women have been told either that their concerns detract attention from the more important anti-racist discourses conducted by men or that the black woman's place is at home in the private sphere (Carbado, 2005, p. 207). The sentiment was also popular among Garveyites, who, under a doctrine of "racial purity," sought to reclaim their sexual propriety, espousing the view that slavery caused black sexual impropriety, via interracial sexual relations (Summers, 2002, p. 30). This doctrine centered on black men protecting the honor and virtue of "their women" (Summers, 2002, p. 29), which, again, requires that they "annunciate their manhood" by performing legitimate masculinity. Interestingly, the imperial conquest of Africa is discursively gendered, made akin to the European man's sexual assault of the black woman (Summers, 2002, p. 30), so the black woman can play an important role in racial equity (not "equality," because equality would have necessarily been predicated on the assumption of equal worth and equal status), insofar as her body is used as a container for "authentically black" life-blood, but only in displaying male accomplishments and promoting male causes. Accordingly, the Garveyite woman's only duties were to observe racial purity by producing authentically black children and indoctrinating them into authentically black ways of living (Summers, 2002, pp. 29-31); Black Cross Nurses were partially exempt, but only because

of their symbolic function for the movement (Summers, 2002, p. 31). In this sense, black women really are "the mules of the earth," since their worth is degraded by one more degree, from their bodies to only their uteri, their containers. Ultimately, this is how the feminine is repudiated; her cultural value is localized and diminished.

Repudiations of the Feminine and Tropes for "Racial Failure"

Since, in accordance with the psychoanalytical model, masculine identity formation results from and depends on the rejection and subsequent fear of the feminine, repudiations of the feminine can be construed as the linguistic capital for portrayals of "failed" black gay men. The dissolution of the Oedipal phase requires that the young male reject the feminine, i.e. his mother, and begin to identify with his father, thereby assuming his proper gender (Ryan & Lenos, 2012, p. 189); so, to a large degree, effeminacy in black men can safely be attributed to a lack of male role models in the home and to endemic sexual pathology, more often than not in the form of supposedly emasculating "strong black women," both of which are said to reflect the failure of black men to approximated white-bourgeois masculinities (United States Department of Labor, 1965, para. 2). Again, these languages of bereavement are used, in this case making appeals to the lack of phallic intervention and to the female's inadequacy in correctly socializing young males, to rhetorically frame visible homosexuality, i.e., feminine gender affect, as the castration of the black man at the hands of the white man. Frances Cress Welsing (1991) argues that homosexuality is but a eugenic machination of white supremacy, a conspiracy to systematically emasculate black men (pp. 91-92), and that "resisting homosexuality" is the only way to be a "real" black man.¹² Fear of the feminine as a threat to black masculinity, then

¹² McBride (1998) paraphrases Welsing (p. 370).

becomes the impetus for enacting black manhood.¹³ As the research will illustrate, the "black man" must announce his own manhood by repudiating the feminine, insofar as effeminacy in black men is deemed symptomatic of "racial failure," since this is the only reliable way for him to dispatch any such doubts to his own masculinity (Edelman, 1990, p. 50). Robert Reid-Pharr (2001) shows how such repudiations can only ever be performed in a posture of phallic legitimation, "To strike the homosexual, the scapegoat, the sign of chaos and crisis, is to return the community to normality, to create boundaries around blackness, rights that white men are obliged to recognize" (p. 104). It is interesting how white men would be obliged to recognize black heterosexual manhood in a Western legacy in which black humanity was and, in some less enlightened circles, still is a subject for debate. Both black and white men of every sexual orientation are the beneficiaries of masculine privilege, and masculine privilege, probably more than heterosexual privilege, seems to be the only purpose of phallic primacy. To this end, tropes of both anal penetration and emasculation, as phallic domination/subjugation and phallic potency/inertness respectively, rely on repudiations of the feminine for sustenance (Johnson, 2003, p. 55).

Anal penetration as a trope for "racial failure"

Insofar as the penetrated male anus is discursively reduced to a vessel or container in the same way a uterus would be, precisely because it *is used* by the phallic in such a configuration, *penetration* serves as a trope for "racial failure." In accordance with psychoanalytic languages of bereavement and their corresponding binary oppositions of present/absent, active/passive, masculine/feminine, because the penetrated male has allowed himself to *be used* by another man,

¹³ See Johnson (2003) and Butler (1993), wherein Freud's theories of mourning and melancholia (1931) shed new light on repudiations of the homosexual (Johnson, 2003, p. 49; Butler, 1993, p. 235).

he submits to phallic domination, since penetration necessarily means domination and subjugation. Moreover, penetration necessarily means effeminacy and emasculation, since, in the presence of the phallus, only the non-phallic can be objectified and thus used for pleasure. Boswell attributed this to popular fear about the penile penetration of the male anus, arguing that St. Thomas Aquinas' assertion that homosexual acts are "unnatural" is more "a concession to popular sentiment and parlance" than a conclusion drawn from traditional Christian principles (Boswell, 1980, p. 328). This makes sense in light of feudal European *chivalry*, which can be construed as an elaboration on the Aristotelian concept of "moral excellence" (Aristotle, 1995, pp. 35-36). After all, in an intellectual and theological tradition in which male virtue was considered the highest possible virtue and the only virtue involving agency (Aristotle, 1995), "homosexuality" was not amoral in itself (Boswell, 1980, p. 326-327), but the penetration of the male anus has since become demoralizing because it "feminizes" men.

Here, the failure of the male to protect himself from being used by another man becomes his failure "to be a man." Cleaver (1991), in his harangue against black gay literary icon James Baldwin, follows this script discursively, likening Baldwin's homosexuality to racial failure in the following: "It seems that man Negro homosexuals, acquiescing to this racial death-wish, are outraged and frustrated because in their sickness they are unable to have a baby by a White man" (p.127). Interestingly, this not only follows the script of phallic primacy by arguing in terms of phallic presence and phallic absence. It also precludes the possibility of same-sex desire between black men, as though such desire would also mean black acquiescence to white power. Again, such appeals have the limitation of engaging in the same disembodied script many claim to be destabilizing. In a culture where annunciation is contingent of the repudiation of the homosexual (Johnson, 2005, p. 55), penetration precludes the black gay men from "authentic" status.

Emasculation as a trope for "racial failure"

Insofar as the failure of the black man to "contain" the black feminine and *use* his penis to inseminate her, thereby reproducing authentic black culture, becomes a racial failure, *emasculation* serves as a trope for racial failure. In this phallic characterization, as mentioned above, sexual behavior becomes more a "display of potency" than "participation in a relationship" (Charles Rycroft, 1995, p. 131), let alone eroticism, which is also reflected in the abovementioned politics of "racial purity," insofar as black manhood is best demonstrated in the black man's ability to protect "his woman" from white men (Summers, 2002, p. 29). Samuel Delany (2007) captures this in his discussion of the "polluting power of race," specifically how coitus between black men and white women "extends" the race while coitus between white men and black women "weakens" the race (p. 207) under such rhetoric. As shown above, the woman is reduced to her genitalia and their reproductive capacities and again her power consists merely in the giving and withholding of access to her uterus, her container. Therefore, she is "contained [...] within the confines of motherhood (Summers, 2002, p. 29). Delany eloquently describes this woman as "the cherished/guarded/enslaved ground on which the game of pollution/procreation is played out" (Delany, 2004, p. 207).

Meanwhile, openly gay black men (and, more generally, black men who fail at authentically black gender performance), deemed effete and ineffectual (both meaning "spent" and "no longer productive"), face ridicule in both the "black community" and the larger popular culture for their willing emasculation. This emasculation results from their unwillingness to commit to these pollutive forms of black manhood through the abovementioned means. Moreover, "feminine" gender affect is taken as confirmation of the emasculation. Considering Cleaver's "act of insurrection," it becomes clear that pollution is the only real racial power the

black man has, since in all other respects he must come secondary to white men (Delany, 2007, p. 207), so this specifically hyper-heterosexual image of black manhood is upheld to reinforce the little power he has. He must, therefore, repudiate the black gay man, who is able to subvert such politics, whose existence presages the dissolution of phallic primacy and, perhaps, the discovery of new ways of being.

Toward wider acknowledgement of diversity in black personhood

In light of phallic discourse practice, naturalized assumptions about race, gender, and sexualities, for example, the erroneous notion that homosexuality originated in Europe and never occurred in pre-colonial Africa and the notion that because black African are closest to animals they must be the most heterosexual (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003, p.165), form legitimating discourses of sexual propriety, not only in these cultural texts, but also in the black community. However, if the monolithic image of blackness presented in popular culture were truly representative, empowerment would mean conformity to heteronorms and black gay men situated on the margins of anti-racist politics; this obscures their political potential. Moreover, because homosexuality in black men destabilizes white supremacy by destabilizing images of pathological black embodiments, deconstructing "feminized" and "emasculated" portrayals of black gay men benefits the black community as a whole, exposing such naturalized assumptions; this study promotes the wider acknowledgement of black personhood, of the diversity of black personhoods, and it does so by showing the political limitations of black gay characters within thematic and schematic configurations of these films.

CHAPTER 3

PHALLIC TROPES FOR RACIAL FAILURE IN BLACK GAY CHARACTERS

Films and television programs containing more affirming images of black gay men do exist, and this study does not intend to discredit those cultural texts or present an exhaustive about how non-homosexual black bodies are approached in US popular culture. Also, this study neither makes reductive claims about filmmaker's creative intentions or ideological stances nor endorses psychoanalytic readings of film. It merely shows phallic discourse practice in cultural context and draw attention to the explicit and tacit traces of such discourse in film. The character analyses illustrate how black gay characters and black bodies in general are appropriated and used to enact and reproduce masculine and heterosexual privilege, capitalizing on pre-existing scripts of phallic primacy and phallic recovery. Black gay characters serve as cultural texts, i.e., as discourse practice, and their ideological function informs this study. All the films are comedies, restricted to a specific discourse genre within the more general genre of film; while not intended, this trend allows for a clearer and more uniform interpretation of the data, which incidentally strengthens the study's internal validity. The six films under analysis are *The Salon* (2005), *Holliday Heart* (2000), *The Longest Yard* (2005), *Chasing Amy* (1997), *Revenge of the Nerds* (1984), and *Friday After Next* (2002). The films chosen met the following criteria; they contain at least one black gay character, feature feminine gender affect as a signifier of sexual difference, and contain observable traces of phallic discourse practice, explicit or tacit.

Character Analyses

The research problem—that "effeminate" and "emasculated" characterizations of black gay men constitute discourse practice and serve to standardize the bodies of heterosexual black

men by rendering the bodies of non-heterosexual black men "deviant," and they do so by relying on scripts of phallic presence versus phallic absence—affect the interpretive parameters of the character analyses. The annunciation of phallic presence and the repudiation of the feminine, more generally that which is non-phallic, defines these characterizations. The first parameter, *penetration*, as a discursive trope for the black man's failure to assume authentic masculinity, depends on the presumption that the phallus is a mechanism of control and phallic penetration is male domination. This is why exaggerated gender affect, both masculine and feminine, is used to signify sexual difference, i.e., to distinguish "real" men, who are phallically "present," from sissies, who are phallically "absent" because they do not penetrate and feminized because they are penetrated (notice how the active and passive voice reflects the male/female binary). Notwithstanding the realities of sex acts between men, feminine gender affect is also taken to confirm phallic subjugation, i.e., the penetration and thus feminization of the male anus.

This is where the second parameter, *emasculatation*, resonates most as a discursive trope of failure. Feminine gender affect can effectively signify impotence, both sexual and political, since the failure of the black man to use his penis to penetrate and inseminate is discursively conflated with his failure to reproduce "authentically" black culture. This is why "effeminate" black men tend to remain subject to the phallus in such portrayals, so that, whenever the heterosexual black phallus is annunciated, their phallic absences are made more acute. This is also why anal penetration is so often presented as the threat of emasculation and, by extension, why homosexuality requires the discursive incapacitation of at least one set of genitalia. More generally, this is read as lack of penile stimulation in men and lack of vaginal penetration in women, the latter being the logic used to justify the "corrective rape" of lesbians and other persons who live beyond phallic reach and thus warrant annihilation. The common thread in both

gendered experiences, however, is that phallic intervention is framed as a necessary condition for pleasure and fulfillment, which discounts other, non-phallic bodily pleasures and body politics. Most importantly, this is why the agency of black gay men is limited in such portrayals. Homosexuality apparently precludes black men from useful places in the black community and in the larger US popular culture, which, again serves to make phallic absence more acute; although, it can also be simply because the characters are not given enough to do for themselves within the confines of the plot. Summarily, these parameters outline the abovementioned conflation of the phallus with agency, as the following analyses will show.

The Salon (Brown, 2005)

D.D. (portrayed by De'Angelo Wilson) presents a reliable characterization of phallic absence, and his lack of agency in the film reflects his peripheral position among the normal, straight characters of the film. Of all the characters analyzed here, his is the most limited and stereotypical portrayal. His gender affect is stereotypical at best: finger snaps, swishy hips, neck rolls and mouth pops. He clearly serves as a contrast to the more "manly" in the film, including Ricky (portrayed by Deondre Whitfield), who is presumably in full possession of his "manhood." D.D.'s phallic absence, by virtue of his feminine gender affect, precludes him from agency in his hood, whereas Ricky's phallic presence is annunciated throughout, as is apparent not only in his constant declarations of sexual prowess but also in his heroism in the following scene. While walking down the street on his way back from lunch, D.D. is attacked, egged by a group of thugs, and his impotence is drawn out for comic effect through the stereotypically swishy manner in which he retreats to the protection of the salon. While he is clearly angry and wishes to retaliate, Ricky warns him not to, saying that they have guns, but then, in an uncharacteristic show of compassion, takes it upon himself to scare them away with what turns out to be a

concealed banana. Ricky's correct gender affect, via the display of his "potency," is what qualifies him to act against the thugs, who must accordingly recognize his phallic presence, while D.D. remains impotent.

***Holiday Heart* (Rosenthal & Townsend, 2002)**

This dynamic is also present, though with more subtlety, in the eponymous main character (portrayed by Ving Rhames). While affirming—Holiday is financially independent, owning two properties, tenacious, performing drag in the face of homophobia, and charitable, performing good works for his church and coming to Wanda's aid as she is about to be beaten—this portrayal never moves beyond body politics, because Holiday's gender affect, signifying his sexual difference, binds him to phallic absence in the phallic presence of Silas the drug dealer (portrayed by Mykelti Williamson). Aside from his experiences of rape in prison, he is already presumed to be the femme to his late partner's butch and the passive to his active, which incidentally ignores the possibility of "effeminate" men assuming an "active" sexual role. Essentially, Holiday's gender affect provides the basis for audience members to make heuristic assumptions about his phallic absence and project those assumptions onto his character.

While it is Holiday who acts—he saves Wanda from herself, if only for a time, and provides needed stability for her daughter Jennifer—his actions are commendable only when in service, as though the homosexual is only worthy of attention insofar as he or she is useful to the heterosexual majority. As the blurb accompanying the DVD reads, "When the mom hooks up with a dangerous drug-dealing boyfriend (Williamson), their worlds are again turned upside-down, forcing Holiday to confront his own prejudices if it means saving the two people he so desperately loves." What these prejudices are is never explicitly stated in the course of the plot, yet even this characterization fails to do justice to the character, given how Holiday works with

Silas to take care of Jennifer despite their differences and how, upon Wanda's death, they pledge to continue doing so.

Silas, in stark contrast, makes his prejudices clear when he moves in on the family, to which Holiday is forced to acquiesce when Silas threatens him in front of his fellow drag queens with the flourish of gun. He does this specifically to humiliate him and the gun, an obvious phallic symbol, serves as a mechanism for his domination and phallic authority, because Silas effectively coerces Holiday into keeping his distance from Wanda and Jennifer. Silas constitutes the missing link for the "real family" family Wanda says she wants for her daughter. Moreover, only when Silas permits him, can Holiday return to their aid; "You better step up!" Silas says in the imperative, "You tell Wanda I'll be back in a week." He essentially orders Holiday to make another sacrifice for the race family.¹⁴

It would seem that these "prejudices" are little more than Holiday's pragmatic responses to Wanda and Jennifer's unstable situation, yet the words above suggest a moral imperative toward sacrifice. Even while Holiday helps them of his own volition, it would seem that sacrifice means redemption for Holiday, which is interesting considering his rather saintly demeanor (why should he seek absolution?). Clearly, however, Silas must maintain as sense of authority in his interactions with Holiday; that authority is phallic. For example, while Holiday's adjustment predicates the story's resolution, Silas is never put upon to leave his dangerous drug-dealing behind, even though he put Jennifer in direct danger. His drug dealing, his income, and therefore his power and potency, must at least appear intact. Again, in the presence of Silas" heterosexual and thus properly functioning phallus, Holiday must be found deficient by comparison.

***The Longest Yard* (Giarraputo & Segal, 2005)**

¹⁴ 'Race family' rhetoric is broad enough to warrant its own study.

Ms. Tucker (portrayed by Tracy Morgan) and her fellow con-transvestites serve to signify phallic absence in *The Longest Yard* (2005). While in the original version the majority of the main characters are white (Ruddy & Aldrich, 1974), the gratuitous use of black bodies in the 2005 version seems an attempt toward modernity and verisimilitude, a slice-of-life portrayal of the penal system, but is really what Hutnyk calls a "festival of difference."¹⁵ This festival of difference allows for the filmmakers to inject scripts of phallic primacy into black bodies with relatively little censure, since the film calls for black men to use their bodies, not their minds,¹⁶ against the imagined white hegemony of prison wardens. Manhood and phallic presence are conflated here, with athleticism and vengeance, and, by comparison, Ms. Tucker and her con-transvestites are inadequate.

The main plot has a disgraced quarterback, Paul Crewe (portrayed by Adam Sandler), training the Allenville Prison football, although the guards coerce him into doing so through violent means. Notably, while Ms. Tucker and the con-transvestites serve as contrasts reinforcing heterosexual masculinity as the standard, all the black men in this film, heterosexual and homosexual, are examples of failed masculinity, having succumbed to the criminality endemic to their race, and, while Crewe is redeemed with the help of his black people, their situations never change. While this should sufficiently put a crack in the façade of their masculine privileges, appeals toward their power and potency are all that is need to cover that up. The basketball game, for example, Crewe, despite his best efforts, can never match the black man's superior athleticism. He can, however, use it toward his own ends, which is readily apparent in the inciting incident giving way to the film's rising action, the training. When Earl Megget (portrayed by Nelly) shows promise as a running back, the warden move to intimidate him with

¹⁵ See Adorno (1991, p. 35) and Hutnyk (2005, p. 95).

¹⁶ See Collins (2005, p. 58).

various acts of violence; only at this point do the rest of the basketball convicts, all black (basketball being a sport at which black people are assumed to do exceptionally well), come to Crewe's aid. Winning, beating the guards at football, then becomes the ultimate goal. The guards represent "the man," against whom they must assert their greater dominance.

In this respect, the homosexuals are kept in their *rightful* place, i.e., outside of black anti-racist enterprise. The feminine must always be secondary. For example, when barred from participating in the sport, Miss Tucker and her gang volunteer their services as cheerleaders, which, at the final games, occasions the ridicule of the spectators. Also, Caretaker (portrayed by Chris Rock) introduces Ms. Tucker and the con-transvestites as sexual alternatives for biological women, adding jocularly, "After six months, they are going to look like Beyoncé". This portrayal capitalizes on penetration as a trope for racial failure in that their feminine gender affect is presumed to result from their being penetrated by more masculine inmates. For example, while Ms. Tucker is barred from playing her supposed booty call, Brucie (portrayed by Michael Turturro) is ridiculed but still allowed to play. More generally, this portrayal capitalizes on the notion that black homosexuality results from prison rape and, therefore, indicates "cultural decay," ostensibly due to black men being "penetrated" by the white-institutional-phallus, in this case the predominately white prison system wherein more black people are incarcerated. It would seem that this festival of difference serves to reify damaging stereotypes about black male criminality by naturalizing them, reducing said criminality to their bodies, and using black gay bodies to position this specific form of black straight embodiment as standard for the target audience; all of this positions the white male embodiment above all others, yet those black men who identify with the heterosexual black characters feature can rely on portrayals like these to rationalize stereotypically black behavior as correct.

***Chasing Amy* (Mosier & Smith, 1997)**

Hooper (portrayed by Dwight Ewell) illustrates the tacit understanding that to be homosexual is to lose political agency in the black community. His feminine gender affect is so diametrically opposed to "authentic" black manhood that he must assume a militant, Black Panther persona in order to sell his anti-racist-cum-racist title *White Hating Coon*. In what is arguably the most interesting scene in the film, Hooper's entrée encapsulates the difference between perception and misperception, which is the main theme of the film. He, at a comic book convention the main characters Holden and Banksy (portrayed by Ben Affleck and Jason Lee respectively) attend, takes the *Star Wars* franchise to task for its apparent racism, playing "militant black man" to the point of hyperbole. Evident in his flourish of a gun, displaying power and potency is necessary for the maintenance of this "authentically black" masculinity. In fact, when Holden asks, "How do you get away with this all the time?" Hooper says his publishers encourage such performances since they sell comics. Alyssa (portrayed by Joey Lauren Adams) then asks "Hooper, how come you sound like Minister Farrakhan when you're onstage and the King of Pop when you're not?" His inner conflict, reconciling his sexuality with his hypocritical public image, is clearly secondary to the main conflict, where Holden, in the social innocence his masculine and heterosexual privileges afford him, presumes Alyssa to be heterosexual and likely to return his affections and fails to see that his best friend and roommate Banksy's sexual desire for him. The ritualized stupidity of white men often reinforces the asymmetrical power relations skewed in their favor under the guise of innocence¹⁷, yet this stupidity drives not only the plot, but also all of Hooper's interactions with the two main characters.

¹⁷ See Halberstam (2011), for a discussion of the link between white male stupidity and privilege.

He clearly serves as an intermediary, through whom Holden and Alyssa meet, through whom Banksy eventually comes to terms with sexual longings, yet, for all his worldly knowledge and ability to see through Banksy's homophobic acts, he never rises above his own predicament. Indeed, Hooper's negotiating his existence is barely addressed in the film and the fact of his publishers encouraging such contrivances is reduced to a punch line. His interaction with the little black boy at the music store corroborates this. While he laments his situation, telling Holden "I'm gay black man, notoriously the most swishy of the bunch," he then proceeds to indoctrinate the boy into the racial separatism he himself does not believe in, telling the boy white men are "the devil." Hooper cannot use his body to advocate for himself, by must assume a traditional pose of masculinity for the benefit of the body politic, i.e. "manhood," phallic presence, and, by extension the buying power of his publishers. The film, while showing misperception, misses an opportunity for critical enrichment because it never commits to a specific point-of-view; whether Banksy's homosexual longings are the same as Hooper's homosexual identity is never broached; Alyssa's sexual orientation is only a point of interest because she presents an object choice for Holden; and, most significantly, homosexuality is only ever addressed in relation to the motivations of heterosexual, or ostensibly heterosexual characters. Moreover, Hooper's blackness is limited to his performance of "authentically black" gender affect, which he is better as than at affirming his lived experiences as a black gay man. Moreover, Hooper, in the spirit of the film's realist theatricality, is but a minstrel,¹⁸ entering and exiting the scene only when required, never to be a substantial part of the main character's everyday lives and, therefore, insignificant. In this way, he is discursively subjugated because he

¹⁸ *Minstrelsy* refers to blackface performances in minstrel shows and vaudeville acts.

is stripped of agency; his body relegated to forward the interests of white people and thus replicating the script that feminine gender affect confirms emasculation and impotence.

***Revenge of the Nerds* (Field & Kanew, 1984)**

Lamar Latrell (portrayed by Larry B. Scott), who is both the only black character and the only gay character in the group of protagonists, presents an example of phallic absence. *Revenge of the Nerds* is typical of the 1980s, reflecting the bourgeois aspirations of that milieu. The protagonists attend Adams College, a non-descript liberal arts institution. Labeled "nerds," because of their failed performances of masculinity, members of the jockish Alpha Beta fraternity subject them to various pranks. These jocks engage in the cavalier behaviors expected of them, such as binge drinking. In one scene, they set fire to their own frat house, which moves the plot forward when the football coach (portrayed by John Goodman) then forces the protagonists out of their rightful dormitory and into refugee-style living conditions in the gymnasium. In the rising action, they must retaliate, redeeming themselves by approximating the same conventional forms of "manhood" they claim to be combating in their subsequent struggle for recognition in the Greek system, which doubtlessly resonated with the conservative ethos of that milieu, that of personal responsibility and "healthy competition." In other words, *Real* men compete and, as Gilbert (portrayed by Anthony Edwards) exclaims, "We gotta beat 'em at their own game."

Lamar fails at this enterprise, his every attempt either drawn out for comic effect or met with derision. He, as well as token Asian Takashi (portrayed by Brian Tochi), seems an afterthought to Gilbert and Lewis (portrayed by Robert Carradine), the white protagonists dominating the plot, yet Lamar's feminine gender affect specifically serves to signify his sexual difference (femininity apparently being the only reliable signifier of sexual difference in men)

and to reinforce the familiarity of the heterosexual nerds, who are just like the jocks, only smarter and ostensibly better-rounded. Moreover, their successful annunciation of "manhood" is conflated with social mobility. For example, while Lewis' legitimation, through his sexual conquest of sorority sister Betty Childs (portrayed by Julia Montgomery), becomes a primary goal—a display of greater sexual potency greater than that of her Alpha Beta boyfriend Stan Gable (portrayed by Ted McGinley) and a confirmation of his "manhood"—Lamar's aerobics routine is only comical for its exaggerate feminine gender affect. Moreover, Lamar seems to not have any race-consciousness in the conventional sense and is therefore a safe and palatable sort of black person, unlike the original Tri-Lambdas, who enact the "militant black man" stereotype. Perhaps the biggest joke of all is that the protagonists petition to join an African American fraternity, which tacitly minimizes the very need for such a fraternity by reducing its members to caricature. When the nerds have their final confrontation with the Alpha Betas, the original Tri-Lambdas, all black, come to their aid, presenting a more imposing black masculinity the white jocks must recognize, the psychological presence of *real* black men apparent too strong for them to fight against. Here, the bodies of straight black men, again, not their minds or other aspects of their internal lives, are used toward a certain ideological end, in this case to render black bodies dangerous in relation to white bodies; "black power" is reduced to the body.

In the same way, the bodies of gay black men are used to standardize masculine, heterosexual characters as potent, by rendering the effeminate black man impotent. Lamar's javelin throw exemplifies his impotence, since it is not the result of his will or athletic prowess, but of the engineering of Wormser (portrayed by Andrew Cassese), a white counterpart, "designed to go along with Lamar's limp-wristed throwing style." Here, the ideological function of his body manifests most clearly. Bereft of any sort of agency in this supposedly anti-

hegemonic enterprise, Lamar's body is bound to the test of Wormser's skill and thus reduced to machinery. His only task here is to fail at performing his proper gender identity. Lamar clearly does not have his own bodily reach, but instead extends the bodily reach of the protagonists, who, again, are heterosexual and mostly white. His body is appropriated to help the white majority accomplish their goal and then he fades into the background when his presence is no longer required. The falsetto delivery of his Miss-America-style speech drives home the laughability of his character. While Lamar seems a sign of the times, suggesting progressiveness, the film fails to address his homosexuality and gendered existence in any meaningful way, which may be too much to expect of a comedy of this milieu. Lamar's only value is in signifying sexual difference and, as this portrayal indicates, his feminine gender affect cancels out his "authentic" black masculinity and makes his phallic absence more acute.

Friday After Next (Ice Cube & Raboy, 2002)

Damon Pearly (portrayed by Terry Crews) also conforms to scripts of phallic presence and phallic absence, though not in the manner of previous portrayals. He presents to the main characters Craig and Day-Day (portrayed by Ice Cube and Mike Epps respectively) the threat of emasculation through penetration. An altercation the two have with landlord Mrs. Pearly ends with reference to Damon in the following threat, "When you spend twelve years on a level-four prison yard, you become quite fond of little old girls like yourselves, so either I'm a get my rent money today, or somebody gettin' their salad tossed tonight." Day-Day then asks "You like that your son is a fag?"; the implication being no respectable black mother would condone homosexuality in a son. While the film feminizes his same-sex desire, for instance, the effeminate manner in which he dances to Tupac Shakur, who is "so fine" in his estimation, Damon's predatory sexual behavior capitalizes not only on the image of untamed black

manhood, but also on the notion that homosexuality in black men is a product of the prison system. Accordingly, violence is glorified in this portrayal, evident in his attempted rape of Money Mike (portrayed by Katt Williams). For his part, Money Mike, with his effusive personality, pimp attire, and stereotypical falsetto, fails in his many attempts at masculinity, and Damon's attempt to rape him is only comical because, for all his "pimp juice," he too is deficient compared to the more manly men in the film.

Damon's sexually predatory behavior not only resonates with older stereotypes of black men as insatiable rapists, but, when combined with his same-sex desire, also signifies his sexual deviance, in accordance with the film's heteronormative tone. This explains Craig's urging him to "grab yourself one of these females and get your boogie on." Damon, instead, attempts to penetrate and "feminize" Money Mike, who, after clenching his testicles with vice grips, also urges him to return to heterosexual normalcy in the following: "I am a boy! You are not in prison anymore, Damon!" Indeed, this scene encapsulates scripts of phallic presence and phallic absence; in order to "protect his manhood," Money Mike must incapacitate Damon's phallic presence, thus emasculating him, which, for a time, give participating audience members to pleasure of seeing the homosexual get just desserts for his deviance. The phallic depends on phallic absence for sustenance. However, Damon reverts to pathology, chasing Money Mike, now unarmed, down the street, presumably to rape him. Damon's continual deviance ultimately standardizes the heterosexual embodiments of Craig and Day-Day and the target audience identifies with them on this heteronormative basis.

Films as cultural texts and phallic discourse practice

In a heuristic, nearly unconscious manner, the right sort of audience member can reinforce scripts of phallic absence internally, reading their own morals into the material. In

Marxist language, whether these portrayals reflect the particular ideological stances of their creators is nowhere near as important as whether they meet the demands of their target consumers in the cultural marketplace, since, obviously, these portrayals would not exist without the demand for them. While these films are creations unto themselves, they are not atemporal or ahistorical. Therefore, they cannot be divorced from their thematic contexts or their larger cultural and political contexts, which affect their composition, apprehension, and consumption. Ultimately, these characterizations of black gay men do ideological work. They do as colonial constructions of black sexual pathology have always done; they erect the phallus in a position of discursive privilege, standardizing black straight bodies by rendering black gay bodies deviant, i.e., effeminate, penetrated, emasculated, castrated, impotent. Moreover, this discursive privileging conflates phallic annunciation, i.e., those exaggerated declarations and performances of unequivocally well-endowed manhood are conflated with authentic blackness, so that feminine gender affect in black men is deemed symptomatic of racial failure. Notably, the gendered discourse of homosexual activity in black men, not the incidence of sexual activity itself, forms the basis for these "effeminate" and "emasculated" portrayals. In this way, much in the way black bodies in general are apprehended, the *mise-en-scène* is already fixed and the deviance of black gay bodies is reified in the minds of those consumers who rely on discourses of phallic presence and phallic absence for self-definition.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

This study explored how languages of bereavement, of presence and absence, constitute the traces of phallic discourse practice observable in discourses around black gay men, not only in the "black community," but also in the larger US culture. Evident in the films analyzed, feminine gender affect, and not the realities of same-sex desire and eroticism, was the sole signifier for feminization and emasculation, both of which serving as trope for "racial failure" precisely because "racial success" is contingent on the approximation of gender norms determined by the larger white-bourgeois cultural, political and economic hegemony. The white-institutional-phallus was established as the larger discursive structure under critique, sense phallic annunciation, i.e. the constant declaration of phallic presence through the labeling of homosexuals as absent, ultimately serves to reinforce standard white phallic embodiment by reifying damaging stereotypes about black sexual pathology.

Reflections of Phallic Discourses

These "effeminate" and "emasculated" portrayals of black gay men, all constructed by heterosexual filmmakers and portrayed by ostensibly heterosexual actors, can be construed as acts of political self-immolation. Black men, deeply invested in phallic privilege, sacrifice their bodies to become the palimpsests on which scripts of phallic presence and phallic absences are written. Put another way, in the traditional tough guise, the black male is disembodied because the discursive labor his body performs for the larger culture become more important than his own bodily experience; the realities of black people are secondary to the culturally agreed-upon, monolithic image of blackness. The black phallus, for that matter, may be reinstated discursively,

as is certainly the case in the myth of the black male penis and other such fictions, but only as an extension of the larger white-institutional-phallus (Mira Schor, 1988). For the black man to take control of his bodily self-determination and self-definition would seriously destabilize the script provided for him in white-domination institutions and other milieus, which reveals the importance of "deviant" blackness to characterizations of "deviant," impotent black gay men. The image of militant black masculinity depends on the discursive rendering of black bodies as dangerous enough to incite fear (e.g., Damon in *Friday After Next* and the original Tri-Lambdas in *Revenge of the Nerds*). After all, *real* men are dangerous and, if black men are to be "pathological," then their bodies must be somehow more dangerous than those of white men. Therefore, the black male's "potency" is reduced to his body, e.g., said abnormally larger penis, sexual prowess, superior athleticism, etc. Essentially, the black man discursively "emasculates" himself in such portrayals of black embodiment, actively participating in his own disembodiment, while shifting the blame to black gay men simply because they neither conform to heteronorms nor bear the costs of such limited masculinities.

Therefore, repudiations of the feminine, specifically of the feminine in "effeminate" black gay men, and the wrongful apprehension of black gay men through lenses of phallic primacy, are symptomatic of general black disembodiment, not of the non-heterosexual black person's "acquiescence" to a white way of being. If the opposite were true, then love and eroticism between non-heterosexual black people would also be somehow pathological, which certainly betrays the black community's collective self-denial. Such logic fails to account of the diverse realities of black sexual lives; complexity in black people goes unnoticed and is instead flattened under assumptions and appropriations of "authentic" blackness (Johnson, 2003). More plausibly, black gay men are not "emasculated" at all; homosexuality in persons of African descent and,

more generally, black African embodiments that are not monolithic destabilize white supremacy by destabilizing basic assumptions about black bodies, assumptions based on scientific racism, and the systematic sexual subjugation of black people. Furthermore, conformity to white-bourgeois heteronorms may be more acquiescence to white supremacy than homosexuality. While heterosexual white men, for the most part, can sustain themselves under phallocentrism, precisely because "phallic superintendence" is a Eurocentric construct in which white men are privileged most of all, black heterosexual men cannot; for, while they may always be able to look down on non-heterosexual men, they will always have to look up to the white-institutional-phallus, i.e., those institutions that keep their bodies docile through both privilege and oppression. There is potential here, for black men, both heterosexual and non-heterosexual, to unite in taking control over how their bodies are represented and apprehended in the same way black feminists, womanists, and many other black women have been able to. However, as long as masculine and heterosexual privileges insulate black men from their bodily subjugations, this will be impossible.

Recommendations for Future Research

Eurocentric meanings of the body are necessarily produced and reproduced when European social constructs are made standard in the negotiation of cultural meaning; these constructs need to be destabilized if a truly "authentic" politics of black empowerment is to take shape. The theoretical limitations of the phallus presents a challenge for scholars across social science disciplines, to extricate themselves from existing methodologies for researching privilege and oppression that might discursively reify distorted bodily images, and to interrogate race and sexualities in more organic and meaning ways, which is where CDA can be helpful. Moreover, masculine and heterosexual privileges cannot be separated from the larger, white-dominated and

bourgeois political economy, so racism, sexism, and heterosexism should be addressed as intersections of privilege as well as intersections of oppression. The paucity of studies doing this suggests the need for further, more exhaustive discourse analysis.

The implications this study has for the role of agency in black cultural production bear further study. Agency may be too simplistic and, for that reason, needs to be problematized. Johnson (2003) observes the problem of agency in appropriations of queer performance: "No longer visible under the colonizer's scopophilic gaze, blackness resides in the liminal space of the psyche where its manifestation is neither solely volitional nor without agency" (p.8). A dialectical relationship exists in this country, between lived blackness and perceived blackness, and consensus has yet to be reached about whether black assimilation into white-bourgeois heteronorms results from acculturation, diffusion, both, or neither.¹⁹ On the one hand, agents create their realities through their performances (Bauman & Briggs, 1990, p. 69); on the other hand, however, the amount of agency black people have had has obviously been contingent on the opportunities they have been afforded. While creators of such black gay characters are agents because they are cultural producers, performances are also affected by performatives of black sexual propriety resulting from politics of respectability, authenticity, and legitimacy, which is why further study on the role of agency in performances would lend tremendous insight to studies of discourse practice.

Also, more attention should be given to how non-heterosexuals participate in phallic discourses. First, non-heterosexual men, for better or worse, are the beneficiaries of masculine privilege and the gay community is just as complicit in phallocentrism, as is evident in popular discourse practice in gay pornography. Terms like "bitch" and "man pussy," clearly operate from

¹⁹ Herskovits (1949) and Frazier (1949) debated this very issue.

the assumption that the phallus is a mechanism of control and penile penetration is male domination, and, while this study does not begrudge gay men their particular forms of eroticism, such discourse practice also follows scripts of phallic presence and phallic absence, which begs the question, "What if gay men were able to extricate themselves from phallic discourses that standardize relatively static ideals for gay masculinity and repudiate the feminine?" CDA can benefit the gay community as well by addressing its femme-phobia and racism.

While it is not my wish to engage in internecine debates with the black establishment, if such a thing exists, about who should have authority to speak for the race, as McBride (1998) argues, many of these "feminizations" and "emasculations" predicate themselves on the perceived loss of authority (p. 364). A Subaltern reading of emasculation in racial discourse would be most salient here, since obviously the majority of men still have functioning penises and perceived emasculation, i.e., feminine gender affect in black men, constitutes not only a space of conflict in the black community, but also the only space in which men can extricate themselves from the discursive privileging of the phallus that silences and makes docile through categorization any outlying embodiments. The questions of whether we ought to prescribe blackness for the uneducated hoi polloi and, more importantly, whether there is to be a line between prescription and proscription need to be addressed adequately in new ways that do not resort to legitimating bourgeois ideals for cultural representation. There needs to be more openness to a diversity of black subjectivities. In other words, authority in the US context impedes agency and, perhaps, should not exist.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bibliography

- Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Aristotle (1995). *Politics*. (E. Barker, Trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bauman, R. & Briggs, C. L. (1990). Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives of Language and Social Life. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 19(1990), 59-88.
- Blommaert, J. & Bulcaen, C. (2000). Critical Discourse Analysis. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 29(2000), 447-466.
- Boswell, J. (1980). Intellectual Change: Men, Beasts, and "Nature." *Christianity, social tolerance, and homosexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 303-332.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1995). Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification. M. Berger, B. Wallis, & S. Watson (Eds.), *Constructing Masculinity*. New York: Routledge. pp. 21-36.
- Carbado, D. W. (2005). Privilege. E. P. Johnson & M. G. Henderson (eds.), *Black Queer Studies: a critical anthology*. Durham: Duke University Press. pp. 190-212.
- Cleaver, E. (1991). *Soul on Ice*. New York: Delta Publishing.
- Cole, J. B. & Guy-Sheftall, B. (2003). *Gender Talk: The struggle for women's equality in African American communities*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Collins, P. H. (2005). *Black sexual politics: African Americans, gender, and the new racism*. New York: Routledge.
- Delany, S. R. (2004). Some Queer Notions About Race. D. Carlin & J. DiGrazia (eds.), *Queer Cultures*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc. pp. 199-224.
- Derrida, J. (1981). *Dissemination*. (B. Johnson, Trans.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Edelman, L. (1990). Redeeming the Phallus: Wallace Stevens, Frank Lentricchia, and the Politics of (Hetero)sexuality. J. A. Boone & M. Cadden (eds.), *Engendering Men: the Question of Male Feminist Criticism*. New York: Routledge.
- Ehrenberg, M. (2005). The Role of Women in Human Evolution. C. B. Brettel & C. F. Sargent (eds.), *Gender in Cross-cultural Perspective* (4th ed.). Durham: Duke University Press. pp. 417-427.
- Engels, F. (2010). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (2nd ed.). London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media Discourse*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Fanon, F. (2008) *Black Skin, White Masks*. (R. Philcox, Trans.). New York: Grove Press, Inc.
- Frazier, E. F. (1949). *The Negro in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The Construction of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Gramsci, A. (1985) *Selections from Cultural Writings*. D. Forgacs & G. Nowell-Smith (eds.) (W. Boelhower, Trans.) London: Lawrence & Wishart.

- Halberstam, J. (2011). *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Herskovits, M. (1949). *The Myth of the Negro Past*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishing.
- Hutnyk, J. (2005) Hybridity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28(1), 79-102.
- Irigaray, L. (1985). *This Sex Which Is Not One*. (C. Burke, Trans.). Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Johnson, E. P. (2003). *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Lacan, J. (1982). The Meaning of the Phallus. (J. Rose, Trans.). J. Mitchell & J. Rose (eds.), *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. pp. 74-85.
- MacCormack, C. P. (1980). Nature, culture, and gender: a critique. C. P. MacCormack & M. Strathern (eds.), *Nature, culture, and gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 1-24.
- Marable, M. (1998). The Black Male: searching beyond stereotype. M. S. Kimmel & M. A. Messner (eds.), *Men's Lives*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc. pp. 21-24.
- Martin, E. (2007). The Egg and the Sperm: How Science has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles. M. Lock & J. Farquhar (eds.), *Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life*. Durham: Duke University Press. pp. 417-427.
- McBride, D. A. (1998). Can the Queen Speak? Racial Essentialism, Sexuality, and the Problem of Authority. [special issue]. *Callaloo*, 21(2), 363-379.
- Nagel, J. (2003). *Race, ethnicity, and sexuality: intimate intersections, forbidden frontiers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ortner S. B. (1974). Is the Female to Male as Nature is to Culture? M. Z. Rosaldo & L. Lamphere (eds.), *Woman, Culture, and Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Reid-Pharr, R. F. (2001). *Black Gay Man: Essays*. New York: New York University Press.
- Ryan, M & Lenos M. (2012). *An Introduction to Film Analyses: Technique and Meaning in Narrative Film*. New York: Continuum.
- Rycroft, C. (1995). *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (2nd ed.). London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Schor, M. (1988) Representations of the Penis. *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* 4(Nov. 1988), pp. 3-17.
- Scott, D. M. (1997). *Contempt and pity: social policy and the image of the damaged Black psyche*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Spivak, G. C. (1976). Translator's Preface. J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. pp. xi-lxxxii.
- Summers, M. (2002). "This Immoral Practice": The Prehistory of Homophobia in Black Nationalist Thought. Toni Lester (ed.), *Gender Nonconformity, Race, and Sexuality: Charting the Connections*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press. pp. 21-43.
- Toolan, M. (1997). What is critical discourse analysis and why are people saying such terrible things about it? *Lang. Lit.*, 6(2), 83-103.

- United States Department of Labor. (1965). The Tangle of Pathology. D. P. Moynihan (ed.). *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. Retrieved from <http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/moynchapter4htm#.UL1yuIM0WSo>.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Critical discourse analysis. D. Tannen, D. Schiffrin, & H. Hamilton (eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Welsing, F. C. (1991). The Politics Behind Black Male Passivity, Effeminization, Bestiality and Homosexuality. *The Isis Papers: the keys to the colors*. Chicago: Third World. pp. 81-92.

Filmography

Brown, M. (Producer & Director). (2005). *The Salon* [Motion picture]. United States: CodeBlack Entertainment.

Field, T. (Producer) & Kanew, J. (Director). (1984). *Revenge of the Nerds* [Motion picture]. United States: Twentieth Century Fox.

Giarraputo, J. (Producer) & Segal, P. (Director). (2005). *The Longest Yard* [Motion picture]. United States: Paramount Pictures.

Ice Cube (Producer) & Raboy, M. (Director). (2002). *Friday After Next* [Motion picture]. United States: Miramax Films.

Mosier, S. (Producer) & Smith, K. (Director). (1997). *Chasing Amy* [Motion picture]. United States: Miramax Films.

Rosenthal, J. et al (Producers) & Townsend, R. (Director). (2000). *Holiday Heart* [Motion picture]. United States: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Ruddy, A. S. (Producer) & Aldrich, R. (Director). (1974). *The Longest Yard* [Motion picture]. United States: Paramount Pictures.

Sperling, A. et al. (Producers) & Babbit, J. (Director). (2007). *Itty Bitty Titty Committee* [Motion picture]. United States: Pocket Releasing.