What’s Sex got to do with it Anyway? Race, Sex, and Gender in the Black Panther Party

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Abstract

This paper analyzes how members of the Black Panther Party represented themselves as men and women in their newspaper—*The Black Panther*. I analyze a sample of issues from 1967-1971 to understand gender dynamics within the Party and ask how the newspaper framed gender and sexuality on both individual and societal levels. I employ the concept of controlling images to understand better how these representations are both constructed and contested by members of the Party. I examine assumptions in previous scholarship that present the Panthers' framing of gender and sexuality in dichotomous terms and argue for a more nuanced understanding of gender and sexuality in the Black Panther Party. I find that the Panthers both embraced and contested hegemonic notions of sexuality, gender roles, and gender relations.

Introduction

This paper examines representations of race, sexuality, and gender in the Black Panther movement of the 1960s and 1970s by examining *The Black Panther* (*TBP)* the official newspaper of the Black Panther Party. This research situates itself in a body of literature which discusses gender and sexuality in the party (Brown 2003; Cheddie 2010; Estes 2005; Hughey 2009; Lumsden 2009; Smith 2009; Spencer 2008). I draw on and add to these works by arguing that the Panthers put forth varied and fluid representations of Black masculinity and femininity. I argue that the way they constructed sexuality was nuanced, progressive, empowering, and contested negative conceptions of Black men's and women's sexuality. Rather than neatly conforming to traditional notions of gender and sexuality, the Panthers challenged hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality. In particular, the Black Panthers contested images which Collins (2004:350) deems *controlling images,* which are gender specific depictions of people of African descent and are closely tied to power relations of race, gender, class, and sexuality. Powerful

groups construct these representations with political purposes, and they are then carried throughout history in an attempt to explain or justify Black people's subjugation. In their newspaper, the Black Panthers both challenged and conformed to many prevailing sexual discourses of late 1960s and early 1970s America.

The Panthers' opposition to capitalism was also central to its platform (Cleaver 2001; Verge 2002). Connell (2005) argues that dominant or hegemonic constructs of masculinity are inextricable from capitalism. Hegemonic masculinity privileges the "nuclear family," with its male breadwinner, housewife, and subordinate children (Connell 2005:29). Hegemonic masculinity can also be seen as placing importance on Whiteness, financial stability, and male dominance. Part of challenging traditional roles, then, is breaking away from hegemonic and capitalistic conceptions of masculinity, which demand women's subjugation and the regulation of sexuality. Even though the Panthers' opposition to capitalism was a key part of their program, their rhetoric regarding gender roles and sexuality contradicted this stance much of the time, as their rhetoric often conformed to dominant conceptions of gender which are intertwined with capitalistic ideals. The Panthers' relationship to capitalism, gender, and sexuality can be understood as intertwined; they both contested and conformed to dominant conceptions of gender, sexuality, and economics.

Background

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was a revolutionary Black power group founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland, CA in 1966. The Black Panthers broke away from the more integrationist ideas of the civil rights movement, and challenged the status quo in many ways, including opposing capitalism and desiring to tear down the existing power structure in order to ensure that all people had access to the resources necessary to live

comfortable and secure lives (Cleaver 2001; Verge 2002). A discussion of race, gender, and sexuality and their interconnectedness is vital for understanding gender dynamics and sexuality within the Black Panther Party. The following review of literature on Black gender and sexual politics sets the stage for a discussion of race, sex, and gender in the Party.

Masculinity and The Black Panther Party

Many scholars argue that slavery as an institution emasculated Black men (Giddings (2000:60; hooks 1981:35). In her discussion of controlling images, Collins (2004:84) shows how White society established controlling images with political purposes, for instance to justify the subordination and exploitation of slaves, and sustained them over the years to keep Blacks in their "proper place." This, along with an understanding of the historical processes that affected the Black community is necessary for understanding gender and sexuality in the Black Panther Party. One controlling image of Black men portrays the Black man as ineffectual, unable to provide for his family, and ultimately, emasculated**.** As Collins (2004:179) argues, "The cluster of representations for Black working-class men deems them less manly than White men and therefore weaker…Their strength lies in their violence and sexual prowess."

The Panthers recognized the way that White society constructed Black men, particularly working class men, as weak and feminized. This is evidenced by the fact that during earlier stages of the civil rights movement, Black activists marched with signs proclaiming their manhood (Estes 2005; Nagel 2003). These signs read simply "I am a MAN!" railing against the exclusion of Black men from the political and economic sphere. In fact, Estes (2005:156**)** reports that Huey Newton understood Black civil rights activists' labeling of White men as "The Man" to be somewhat sarcastic and mocking toward a group of men who felt that they had exclusive

rights to masculinity. At the same time, he also argued that the term had negative effects on Black men who, despite using the term tongue-in-cheek, made the statement nonetheless.

In contrast to the notion of the emasculated Black man is the image of the big, strong, stupid, and violent Black man, whose sexuality is out of control. The Panthers' militant dress and behavior in addition to their promotion of armed resistance may have resonated with Whites as an example of this controlling image, particularly because the Panthers' demeanor and personae challenged prevailing notions of Blackness as weak and ineffectual (Nagel 2003:122).

Connell (2005:80) argues that hegemonic masculinity privileges certain types of masculinities, granting some access to dominant forms of masculinity and denying it to others. Types of masculinities that do not conform to the ideal are devalued and those who reject the hegemonic ideal of masculinity must be prepared to stake their own claim for respect .The Panthers made their own claims about what Black masculinity meant to them with race specific, sexualized representations.

Despite the fact that multiple representations of masculinity exist within and across cultures, hegemonic masculinity presents the ideal, whereas any other form of masculinity is considered a subordinate approximation (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:832). Men who most closely conform to the hegemonic ideal have more opportunities to exploit women and other men. In this context, men compete with one another for access to masculinity and there is something at stake for men who have access to prevent others from gaining access (Connell 2005:80).

Hegemonic masculinity has a key role in determining who is allowed full participation in society. Collins (2004:32) argues that embedded in the United States' conceptions of citizenship are certain ideas about race and masculinity and that one must conform to those ideals to be

granted citizenship. She also argues that historically Whites saw Black men's purported excessive sexual appetites and predilections for violence as needing to be controlled.

Despite the fact that the civil rights and black power movements were primarily geared toward racial equality, ideas about gender and sexuality were deeply embedded in both movements' ideals. Spencer (2008) argues that the notion of Black male emasculation at the hands of the powerful Black woman shaped the emergence of Black power. Spencer argues that as a result, the Black power movement has been linked to the belief in Black male dominance and that the restoration of manhood was separate from and even antagonistic to Black womanhood.

Part of embracing a militant form of Black masculinity was the Panthers' dress. Their leather jackets, sunglasses, black clothing, and militant postures set them apart from other civil rights activists (Wolfe 1970:7-8). In adopting this uniform and body stylization, the Panthers not only set themselves apart from fellow activists, but they challenged established notions of Black men as emasculated and submissive to Whites as well. Cheddie (2010:335) argues that the Panthers put forth "an image of black masculinity that is heavily invested in dominant ideas of masculinity and sees men as an active, independent, economic agent" and embodies "elements of social protest, social transgression, and violence." This image was key to reclaiming Black masculinity. In fact, Eldridge Cleaver, Black Panther Minister of Information argued that the Party provided badly needed masculine role models for the Black male (Estes 2005:157). Despite these hyper-masculine portrayals the Panthers' representations of masculinity were fluid and did not conform neatly to preconceived notions of Black masculinity (Hughey 2009).

Multiple and Conflicting Representations: Women in the BPP

Collins (2000; 2004) reports that White slave owners created several controlling images in order to subjugate Black women, one of which is the "mammy," the sexless woman who happily cares for the children of her "owner." The function of this controlling image was to justify the exploitation of female house servants. Juxtaposed with this image is that of the matriarch. This domineering Black woman spends too much time away from home earning a living and thus may be blamed for the failure of Black children, providing an easy target to blame for these children's problems rather than addressing the issues of systemic racism, exploitation, and poverty (Collins 2000). These strong women can also be blamed for the emasculation of Black men. The third controlling image helpful here is the "Jezebel," the sexually insatiable Black woman. This image served to justify the sexual exploitation of Black women during slavery and beyond. It was also helpful in justifying the abuse of Black women—after all, women who insatiably desire sex cannot be raped. At times, male members of the Panthers deployed this construct against female Panthers, using their sexuality to discredit them (Smith 2009), showing how controlling images can be internalized and used by members within a group.

The role of women and the activities they could appropriately engage in during the Black Power and Civil Rights movement were contested and changed depending on context (Kuumba, 2001; Spencer 2008). Civil rights era organizations participated in non-violent action, which included strategies such as sit-ins and boycotts. Despite conservative gender ideologies in the organizations promoting these events, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) deemed these activities appropriate for both men and women. With the rise of Black Power and more militant organizations and strategies the climate of

gender equality began to shift. For instance, although women in the Panthers participated in a wide range of activities, the Party created a separate category of membership for women, which they named "the Pantherettes," which had its own membership structure. By 1968, this term disappeared from Panther documents and women were discursively integrated into the organizational structure under mostly male leadership (Spencer 2008).

Spencer (2008:91) argues that the Black Panther Party became a place where Black men and women could collectively challenge patriarchy and reconceptualize gender roles. Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal argued that women received no special treatment based on their gender: they participated in the same political education classes and were trained to take up arms just as the men were. In this sense the Panthers challenged prevailing notions of proper femininity, as the women adopted the same militarized postures as their male counterparts. Panther Afeni Shakur said that when she met two members of the Panthers, Sekou Odinga and Lumumba Shakur,

> it was the first time in my life when I met men who didn't abuse women…It had nothing to do with anything about political movements… never in my life had I met men who didn't abuse women, and who loved women because they were women and people (Abu-Jamal 2001:45).

In her analysis of the way the Panthers represented women in their newspaper, Lumsden (2009) finds that the paper framed women in a positive way and its writers made an effort to combat sexist language and representation. However these framing efforts did not correspond neatly to female Panthers experiences.

Despite its purported gender equality and attempts to establish "revolutionary economic, social, and political equality across color and gender lines" (Smith 2009:65), women were rarely in leadership positions in the Party. Newton appointed Elaine Brown as chairman of the Party during his exile. Brown suggests that male Party members found her leadership position threatening. Smith (2009:72) argues that Newton appointed Brown his successor strategically as

he hoped he could maintain control over the organization by proxy. Intersectional feminist theory is helpful here because it posits that an individual's location in what Collins (2000) deems "the matrix of domination" is relational and dependent on context (King 1988). For Black men who had been subordinated by wider society, expressing dominance over Black women within the Party could be seen as a way to regain the dominance and control that hegemonic masculinity contends is important. Spencer (2008:92) notes that the current Panther historiography is top-down in nature. This perspective amplifies Brown's experience and helps portray the Panthers as the quintessential male organization and emblematic of the Black Power Movement's misogyny. Spencer further argues that Brown's portrayal of gender relations within the Party ignores the experiences of rank-and-file female Panthers, whose experiences may have been different from Brown's.

This is an interesting paradox given that the mostly male Black Panther Party promoted gender equality, at least on paper. Though the Party philosophically promoted gender equality within the organization, female members often felt that this rhetoric was not true in practice (Spencer 2008). Spencer suggests that this was due in part to the fact that Black Power advocates suggested that the restoration of Black manhood was necessary in order to combat White supremacy (90-91). Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal (2001:102) said "For men who, often for the first time in their lives, exercised extraordinary power over others, sexism became a tool of sexual dominance over subordinates." This quote is an example of how race becomes prioritized over gender in nationalist struggles as well as how women's interests become trivialized in a struggle for racial justice. It shows how the experiences of Black women--who are located at the nexus of multiple axes of discrimination--are not adequately reflected in movements which focus on liberating "Blacks" or "women" (King 1988; Ongiri 2009; Smith 2009). Smith (2009:74) further

argues that by using the Black woman as a “scapegoat” for the way that the “system” has treated Black men, “the white patriarchal power structure has long been able to use its dominate ideology to do the work for it.” Thus, the philosophies of the White power structure have so deeply pervaded the psyches of Black men that they subjugate Black women, oppressing Black women and the entire Black race.

These paradoxes may be explained by the fact that as Newton writes, the Party had an ambivalent relationship to gender relations. In a position paper on the Women’s and Gay Liberation Movements, Newton (1973:153) wrote “We have not yet established a revolutionary value system, we are only in the process of establishing it.” Former Panther Kathleen Cleaver (2001:124) writes of her frustration at the simplicity with which contemporary scholars address gender relations within the Party. She argues that during the 1960s and 70s the Party had not developed much language to talk about gender inequality. With the bloody backdrop of Vietnam and the ghastly conditions in which Blacks lived, gender equality was not the issue foremost on people’s minds. The first order of business was “not [how] to advance our cause as women but how to empower the community of which we were a part, and how to protect our lives in the process.” Cleaver also notes that most studies of gender relations in the Party detract from the revolutionary critique that the Party posed, and ignore the central question of empowering an impoverished people who were struggling against racism, sexism, militarism, and terrorism.

The Black Panther Party and Sexuality

The fact that the civil rights movement was primarily led by ministers and based in the Black church (Standley 1993) influenced the way its members presented their sexuality. As West (1999:518) contends, historically, “most black churches shunned the streets, clubs, and dance halls in part because these black spaces seemed to confirm the very racist myths of black

sexuality to be rejected. Only by being 'respectable' black folk, they reasoned, would white America see their good works and shed its racist skin." The appearance of Civil Rights leaders who conformed to middle-class White notions of propriety exemplify these aspirations.

Black women's experiences as mothers have been "shaped by the dominant group's efforts to harness Black women's sexuality and fertility in a system of capitalist exploitation" (Collins 2000:50). Efforts to control Black women's sexuality were important for Whites during slavery to maintain race, class, and gender inequality that helped to buttress slavery. On the other hand, forbidding sexual relations between White women and Black men ensured that children of African descent would not be born to White women, maintaining White racial and social dominance (ibid.). Due in part to the fact that historically Black women lacked control over their reproductive abilities, the Black Power movement saw birth control as genocide (Davis 1981).

Historically, the relationship between Black women and the reproductive rights movement has been troublesome. Many proponents of the birth control movement bought into anti-Black and anti-immigrant sentiments of the time, as well as "race suicide" propaganda which purported that if poor women and women of color bore more children than White women the White race would be outnumbered and no longer retain its supremacy. Ultimately, the birth control movement was strongly influenced by the eugenics movement and the former's progressive potential was lost (Davis 1981:213). Guy Irving Birch, Director of the American Eugenics Society promoted birth control as a weapon to "prevent the American people from being replaced by alien or Negro stock, whether it be by immigration or overly high birth rates by *others* in this country" (Davis 1981:214, emphasis added). This passage shows how intertwined ideas about nationalism and sexuality are. Birch found the threat of Black people reproducing threatening to White supremacy. In this context one can understand why many

Black women and men were uneasy with the idea of birth control and abortion as well as a potential reason that the Black Panthers referred to birth control as Black genocide.

Sexuality is often used as a means to discredit a person or group and sexual boundaries are often used in maintaining nationalist boundaries. For instance, by maintaining White racial purity, anti-miscegenation laws have served as a way of maintaining White supremacy (Blair 1999; Yu 1999; Zimmerman 1999). In constructing the Panthers as sexually deviant, the FBI told parents of children participating in the Panthers' free breakfast program that the Panthers serving the food were "mostly infected with venereal disease" (Churchill 2001:89) employing the controlling image of African Americans as sexually promiscuous and unclean in their efforts to discredit them.

The Panthers' representation of gender and sexuality gave their antagonists ample fodder to discredit them. For instance, Payne (2006:169) reports that FBI agent William Cohendet poked fun at the Panthers and their sexual activities in a highly derogatory way that reveals intersections of race and sexuality: "the wives of Charles Bursey, Landon Williams, and Bobby Seale are about to give birth. All husbands have been in jail almost two years, thus indicating that the gestation period for male Panthers has increased to at least twice the normal time required. It should be noted that the African elephant only requires 21 months." Statements such as this are imbued with notions of the inferiority and moral ineptitude of Blacks. This statement is a particularly salient example an individual's sexuality being used to discredit him or her.

Historically, interracial sex has been a highly provocative and inflammatory topic for Americans of all races (Bardaglio 1999; Pascoe 1999; Yu 1999; Zimmerman 1999). Segregation limited interracial sexual relationships, particularly those between Black men and White women. Black Power activists found interracial sex a highly sensitive and provocative issue (Ongiri

2009:80). Black Power activists were united in their dissatisfaction with previous generations' approaches to securing Black autonomy, eager to see larger gains in self-determination, and perhaps most importantly, were eager to differentiate themselves from Whites (Verge 2002). A common view among young Black Power activists was that "Having no racial pride, the black bourgeoisie were… involved in a continual search for ways to alter their identity by mingling, mixing, and intermarrying with whites" (Van Deburg 1992:2). Thus, the growth of Black Pride became a deterrent to interracial sex for many young activists (Verge 2002:103).

Eldridge Cleaver, the Panther Minister of Information gained popular acclaim after the publication of his prison writings in 1968, *Soul on Ice.* In his text, Cleaver wrote frankly about raping Black women to refine his "technique" before moving on to raping White women. Cleaver wrote that he had since come to see that his actions were horrendous, but that at the time he felt that he was getting some sense of justice for Black women by raping White women—in a sense turning the tables in response to the atrocities committed against Black women by White men for centuries (Cleaver 1968:26).

This study adds to the broad body of research cited above on the role of gender and sexuality in shaping the Black Panther Party. By employing the concept of controlling images, my goal is to add to previous works, showing how the Panthers acknowledged the constructs that White society created to keep Black people subjugated and both contested and unintentionally conformed to these controlling images, as well as how they both criticized and attempted to gain access to hegemonic masculinity.

Methodology

I conducted my research by doing a qualitative document analysis (Babbie 2004) of *The Black Panther,* the Party's weekly newspaper. *TBP* offers us with unique insight into the

philosophy and activities of the Party. It consists of 537 issues, spanning thirteen years (1967-1980) and was one of the primary tools the Panthers used to disseminate information. By 1972 the paper's circulation reached over 200,000 copies, and in some months generated close to $40,000 in income (Hughey 2009). The bulk of my data are drawn from issues beginning at the year of its founding, 1967 to 1971, the year widely viewed as the end of the Party's heyday (Verge 2002). Some of my data are outside of these years, as I have included some useful data from a small pilot study I conducted in the winter of 2010, when I had not yet narrowed the parameters for my study.

I accessed *TBP* online through the "Black Thought and Culture" database (http://alexanderstreet.com/BLTC), and randomly selected which issue from 1967 to begin with. I then coded every fourth issue of the paper for these years, resulting in a total of 53 issues, ranging from 24-32 oversized pages, and containing a total of approximately 700 articles. I coded each article line by line, looking for themes of gender, masculinity, femininity, and sexuality. I then tried to understand how the Panthers constructed these themes. As I progressed in my coding, I began to notice more specific themes and trends in the data. For instance, the subthemes that emerged within the larger theme of masculinity were emasculation, redefining Black masculinity, and masculinity as a means of regaining pride and power.

It is important to note that I am interested not only in how the Panthers talk about themselves and explicitly address issues of sexuality and gender, but also how they more subtly address these issues and how they discuss them abstractly. For instance, a reference to the city of Oakland being in danger of becoming an "old worn out whore" with no place to go would be coded as both gender and sexuality, even if it is not making a specific reference to one person's sexual behavior or the gender of an individual. Because issues of masculinity, femininity, and

sexuality are inextricably linked and exist in dialectical relationship with one another, I coded several articles by more than one theme. Many articles are written anonymously, making the gender of the authors difficult to ascertain. Because my analysis is of gender relations and sexuality, my interpretation depends somewhat on whether the author is a male or female. In cases where the author is anonymous, I make assumptions about their gender in order to conduct my research. It is also worth noting that it is not my objective to make truth claims about the dynamics of gender and sexuality in the Party, but rather to shed light on the discourse members of the Party used to discuss gender and sexuality in the text of *The Black Panther.*

Findings

Part of the Black Panthers' mission was educating the Black and working class masses by establishing a radical and independent newspaper in order to communicate separately from the established press. *The Black Panther* was "a regional, national, and international journal of radical and black revolutionary news, analysis, and opinion" (Abu-Jamal 2001:47) and was highly successful, selling well over 100,000 copies per year, and thus was a target of FBI attention (Abu-Jamal 2001; Churchill 2001). That the paper warranted FBI attention was significant because, due to the level at which they had infiltrated the Party, it is likely that some of the articles the paper published may have been planted by the FBI (Cleaver 2001). It is possible that some of the data included in my analysis were planted by the FBI. However it is less likely that the FBI would have involved itself in a discussion of gender and sexuality than other topics in its quest to destroy the Panthers.

THE BLACK PANTHER 25 cents

Black Community News Service

THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

BLACK LIBERATION STRUGGLE SHOWS PROGRESS

Cover of The Black Panther*, Saturday, October 19, 1968*

My data show that though the Black Panthers attempted to break away from dominant conceptions of gender and sexuality, their efforts to do so were not fully realized. In the text of *The Black Panther*, the Panthers present reclaiming masculinity as central to Black power. Their masculinist rhetoric conformed to the tenets of hegemonic masculinity, especially in terms of idealizing the nuclear family and traditional gender roles. Despite the newspaper's adherence to traditional gender roles, its portrayal of sexuality was progressive for its time. The paper recognized the ways that White society employed controlling images to demean Black sexuality in gender-specific ways, and for the most part, presented Black sexuality in a positive manner.

Redefining Black Masculinity: From Emasculation to Power

Redefining Black masculinity is a key issue featured in the text of *TBP.* Central to this redefinition is an analysis of the way White society emasculated Black masculinity. Throughout the text of the newspaper, the Panthers urged Black men to embrace a rearticulated version of

Black masculinity, one that recognized militancy as a way to fight against the White power structure and racism and encouraged them to eschew feelings of inferiority. This is poignantly explicated in article entitled "The Truth on Sacramento" (*The Black Panther A*, May 15, 1967:5) which states, "The point is that in America the color of power is white and black is the color of weakness. What was clear from the appearance of armed black men at the capitol is that blacks are no longer ruled by fear, that not only are blacks still ready to die but now they are ready to kill." This statement demonstrates a recognition of not only how the Black Panthers emphasized militancy as part of their program, but also how important militancy was in their construction of Black masculinity. The latter part of this statement also raises the point of nonviolent protest. The Panthers railed against nonviolent protest, partly because it put Blacks in danger. Thus, armed defense was a way to level the playing field.

Black men and women shared these feelings. In a column entitled "Sisters Unite," a woman calling herself Barbara Author (May 15, 1967:6) writes that she is grateful to the men of the Black Panther Party, for they are "real men." She says that she and other Black women must feel proud of Black men who have come together for the protection of the Black race, to end police brutality and Black genocide. She also argues that respect and dignity have long been abstractions to Black men, but that the men of the Black Panther Party are changing these notions. This contributor says that seeing these men with pride, self-respect, and love for the brothers kindles in her, a Black woman, a feeling of duty to fight for the cause.

In her poem "Black Man," Ella Corrall (September 14, 1968:11) writes that her soul has been shattered by the "Negroe of today," and is in need of repair. She makes a call for Black men who need a Black woman to follow in their footsteps on their way to becoming men to recognize her. A poem called "Free By Any Means Necessary," reads "Black people, righteous people, the

black panthers are the holy men," (Sarah Webster Fabio, May 18, 1968:4) reifying the notion of the Panthers (in particular, Panther men) being a road to salvation. In "Hey Brothers and Sisters," the Panthers also make calls for "men of the people" to join the cause (*The Black Panther B*, July 20, 1967:15), showing the importance the Panthers placed on both manliness and an active involvement in the community. Indeed, an important part of joining the revolution and claiming one's manliness was picking up a gun, standing one one's feet, and demanding one's freedom from one's oppressor.

The importance of manliness comes up several times in *TBP*. In his frequently printed column, "In Defense of Self-Defense," (May 15, 1967:3-4) Huey Newton writes of the problems associated with being a Black male of the lower socioeconomic class. He says that particularly problematic for these men is the hostility that they face from society, which they then turn inwards. Newton argues that due to this hostility and the fact that Black men have been taught that they are something less than human, they may turn to their sexuality to reaffirm their masculinity and may father several illegitimate children with several different women in order to assure themselves of their manliness. Despite these efforts, society fails to recognize them as men. Newton also argues that feelings of inferiority and helplessness lead Black men to leave their wives out of desperation. In arguing so, Newton addresses the ways that White society prevented Black men access to the capitalistic system, and thus hegemonic masculinity, inadvertently tying his observations of Black men to dominant conceptions of Black men as ineffectual and emasculated (ibid.).

Newton writes that the man from a lower socioeconomic status feels that he is something less than a man, as is evident in his conversation deeming the White man "THE MAN:"

> 'THE MAN,' he got everything and he knows everything, and the nigger ain't nothing."
> In a society where a man is valued according to his occupation and material possession,

> he is without possessions. He is unskilled and more often than not either marginally employed or unemployed. Often his wife (who is able to secure a job as a maid cleaning for white people) is the breadwinner. He is, therefore, viewed as quite worthless by his wife and children…He cannot provide for or protect his family. He is invisible, a non-entity. Society will not acknowledge him as a man. He is a consumer and not a producer. He is dependent on the white man ("THE MAN") to feed his family, to give him a job, to educate his children, to serve as the model he tries to emulate. He is dependent and he hates "THE MAN" (ibid.).

Another revolutionary poem (Iris Wyse, September 14, 1968:11), argues that by calling the White man "the Man," or "Massa Charlie," Blacks are reifying the idea that the White man has superior claims to masculinity and that Black men are less than men and calls for a move away from this nomenclature. The fact that this poem presents these two names for White men in unison with one another makes it apparent how linked with the history of subjugation the term "the Man" was, and demonstrates the importance of the Panthers' moves to reclaim masculinity and redefine, on their own terms, Black masculinity.

This is made apparent in an article entitled "Black Activists in America," (*The Black Panther A*, May 15, 1967:7) which reads "The ghetto must not be a brothel which affords kicks for frustrated or perverted whites…the black man represents the new hope for America…if he fails, America will become truly a zombie, a blind, worn out, crippled whore with no place to go." Thus, *TBP* constructs the Black man as a savior of not only his race, but of America, a construction which is essential to reclaiming masculinity. A column entitled, "Remember the Words of Brother Malcolm X," makes a call for men, if they are "real men," to get their guns and be ready to protect themselves, their families and their race, and also to be on the offensive. In particular, Malcolm makes a call to men with "shoulders this wide, chests this big, muscles this big," (*The Black Panther A*, May 15, 1967:7) demonstrating the importance of strong musculature in defining the ideal body type in fighting the White power structure. It becomes

apparent that in addition to adopting a militaristic stance and being confident in one's manhood, the construction of the Black man as a savior was essential to the Black Panthers' notions of masculinity.

Capitalism, Emasculation, and Redefinition

The Black Panthers discuss capitalism as a White man's project. Throughout the text of the newspaper, the Panthers rail against capitalism, deeming it the White man's system and arguing that Black people should not take part in it. Despite their stated abhorrence of capitalism, at times they engage in capitalist rhetoric, particularly regarding gender roles. An article called "Massacre at Attica," (*The Black Panther C*, September 18,1971:3) discusses an uprising at New York's Attica Prison in 1971 during which prisoners overpowered guards and the situation evolved into a standoff between the prisoners and Governor Nelson Rockefellor's New York Guard. "We are MEN. We are not beasts and we do not intend to be beaten or driven as such. We will not compromise on any terms…" (ibid.). This very basic statement shows a lack of willingness to put up with the inhumane treatment that prisoners endured in Attica Prison, and more importantly associates this willpower with manliness—as being essential to redefining and reclaiming manliness. The Black Panthers posit that separating themselves from White men is crucial to the project of reclaiming Black masculinity. "A Letter from Jail" (August 16, 1969:18) by Curtis Powell posits:

> We are Black men. We must be what we are. We are not middle class white Americans. We are not free, white, and 21. … It is an illusion to believe we can become free and independent in this society…in this racist bullshit. It is an illusion to believe that capital will make us free and independent—this is his capital and his capitalist and imperialistic economic system. These are his laws, his order, his education. This is his system, his mother fucking system. And it is a mother fucking system.

From this excerpt, it seems that capitalism, racism, and Whiteness are inextricably combined in the mind of the Panthers. Part of reclaiming Black masculinity is breaking away from the idea that Black people can or should be part of the capitalistic system. Yet at times the Panthers contradict this notion and make it clear that they are seeking entrance to the system and hegemonic constructs of masculinity.

Another tension in *TBP* narratives of blame for Black men's victimization can be seen in Newton's indictment of Black women and capitalism as dually responsible for Black men's emasculation. In "In Defense of Self-Defense" (May 15, 1967:4) Newton argues that capitalism is the White man's machine, an inherently racist system, dependent on exploitation and inequality. Despite the fact that an abhorrence of capitalism is central to the Party's platform, they still implicitly search for access to the system, in part by presenting female breadwinners as undermining the authority of men. This claim both diminishes the work of women who support their families, and supports capitalist notions of hegemonic masculinity by suggesting that men must provide for their families in order to be considered "legitimate" men. In another "In Defense of Self-Defense," (July 3, 1967:3) Newton suggests that few Black men have rejected the handouts of the oppressors, recognizing that not many people are able to remove themselves from the system. Even though he acknowledges this, the way that he presents Black men as being stunted by Black women buys into the dominant ideology of capitalism and hegemonic masculinity, despite the Panthers' staunch rejection of the first (ibid.).

Black Women in the Party

The way that *The Black Panther* depicts women is fluid. At times, it features discussions of women as militants and argues that women are essential to the success of the movement, and in other instances the paper defines women's role as subordinate to men, or employs women's

sexuality against them. In some cases, *TBP* objectifies women. The paper published notices listing the names of members the organization purged for participating in what they considered anti-revolutionary behavior. “Kansas City Purge,” (*The Black Panther D,* August 16, 1969:18) lists several people’s names, two of them women. The Party expelled one woman for being a “fool and a renegade. She let her man […] put her back on the streets selling her stuff. She did not want to serve the people.” The Panthers expelled another woman because “She was a fool who joined the party to catch a man. When she could not she tried to disrupt the unity in the party.” One can reasonably assume by their names that the majority of people in this article were men, and the only man whose expulsion they provide a justification for was expelled for being a “renegade and an adventurist”— a vague and un-sensational reason for expulsion, whereas *TBP* employs both women’s sexuality to demean them and justify purging them from the party. In the first case, the author has internalized negative conceptions of Black sexuality propagated by White society and used them to demean this woman, while in the latter, the author robs the subject of any authenticity she may have had by suggesting that her only motives for joining the Party were sexual. Again, this author has internalized negative messages about Black sexuality and has used them to discredit a female Panther.

In his praise of one female Panther, the author finds it necessary to comment on her physical beauty in addition to the beauty of her personality. “Fascist Pigs Deny Freedom of the Press” (*The Black Panther D*, August 16, 1969:13) castigates the San Francisco police force for asking whether one Panther was a boy or a girl—the article says this is audacious treatment and to prove his point the author writes “Sharla has a large natural, was wearing large earrings and her measurements are 36-23-38 so you can see the harassment right there.” While it is likely that the police officer asked this question insincerely, the fact that the author of the article found it

necessary to publish the measurements of this woman shows that the editors of the paper found it acceptable to objectify women.

In contrast to the way that the newspaper objectified women, it presents Revolutionary Black womanhood as important for the Party's functioning and makes a recurring call for Black women to assist in the revolution. *TBP* encourages women's participation in various ways—from taking up arms and literally fighting beside men, to participating in the breakfast for children program, to bolstering the spirits of Black men who were active in the movement, and nurturing future warriors. The Panthers deemed it necessary that Black women play several major roles. Not only must they support their men in the revolution, they must fight beside their men and be soldiers themselves. In fact, *TBP* published "A Sister Pulls a Brother's Coat," in which a woman named Kituba X (March 16, 1968:3) wrote a letter to the editorial board of the paper reprimanding a man named Melvin for "being so foul" and tells him in no uncertain terms to get himself together "militarily." She writes, "Power only comes out of the barrel of a gun. I am a Black woman who has already picked up the gun, NOW BROTHER MELVIN, I'M WAITING FOR YOU." Kituba's writing frames her as a woman who is not subordinate to men, and who is taking initiative and fighting the fight herself. This woman's actions are one example of how women in the Party contested dominant gender roles and refused to act in subservient ways, even though they often faced negative gendered messages from Party members.

Black Women as Mothers

Women in the Party faced physical violence from those who opposed the movement, and in many cases were not afraid to fight back. One story entitled "Racist Mayfair Employee Attempts to Beat Black Youth with a Hammer" (*The Black Panther E*, June 20, 1967:8) applauds a woman named Mrs. Loud for defending a friend of her son from a store clerk who had chased

him into her home. When the clerk saw Mrs. Loud with “Black Power” [a gun] in her hands, he changed his mind and fled from the home. This passage is an example of how *TBP* presents Black women as both caretakers and militants. This woman takes up a weapon against the antagonist, but the text highlights that it is in defense of her son’s friend, a boy who was like a son to her.

Another article applauds the wives of imprisoned Panthers for carrying on their husbands’ work with the free breakfast program—thus constructing them as both militants and caretakers. In addition to writing that women cooked for the breakfast program and men served, the paper made several calls for all mothers and grandmothers to help with the breakfast program in any way they could, reifying the idea that cooking and caring for children was “women’s work.” Despite the fact that serving food might have been considered work for a woman, Panther men participated in the free breakfast program as the face of the movement, while the women did the behind-the-scenes work of the program. An article called “Apathy Hurts Children” (*The Black Panther F,* December 20, 1969:3) encourages mothers to bring their children to the breakfast program, disparaging those women who will not attend because they are afraid of what their “petty bourgeoisie” neighbors will think of them. The author urges them to face objective reality: their children are hungry.

In general, *TBP* presents motherhood as something to be revered. The paper also raises the point that that Black motherhood has been challenged by the State. It raises several instances in which the child welfare department took young Black children away from their families without due process. Here, the State employed the controlling image of the bad Black mother or matriarch when it removed Black children from their homes. This violence against Black families can be traced back to slavery when, as Collins (2000) asserts, Black families were often

ripped apart by slave-owners. This shows how ideas about Black women's (in)ability to be mothers have been perpetuated for hundreds of years. Constructing Black women as improper mothers doubtlessly made it easier for slave-owners to separate families and exploit Black women's reproductive abilities. The use of this controlling image made it easier for White society to perpetuate these actions hundreds of years later.

Reproduction was an important issue for the Black Panthers. In "The Torture of Panther Women" the Panthers say that one way White society subjugates Panther women was forcing imprisoned women to give birth in front of male prison guards (*The Black Panther G,* November 22, 1969:13). *TBP* argues that the State did its best to ensure that the Black Panthers did not produce another generation of Panther warriors by removing children from homes that it deemed "unfit." Such grievances can again be connected to the idea of controlling images—by labeling Black women as unfit mothers, the State gives itself the authority to remove children from their homes.

The Panthers argue that having children in healthy environments was one way to sustain a healthy revolution. In several instances the Panthers rail against White society for the inadequate care Black women received while giving birth. The Panthers saw this as a purposeful way to stunt the growth of the revolution. The paper mentions several cases wherein White police officers beat pregnant Panthers and where doctors were guilty in the death of Black babies—and sometimes mothers—due to their callous treatment. Numerous articles critique Congress for legislation that provided Black women with birth control, arguing that this is a purposeful attempt to limit the number of Black children born. One article entitled "They Told Me I Had to be Sterilized or Die: Racist Doctors Try to Give Black Panther Party Comrade Genocidal Hysterectomy*"* (*The Black Panther H,* July 15, 1972:3) argues that a White doctor

misdiagnosed a female Panther after insufficient investigation and then presented hysterectomy as the first and only resort for her, when in fact it later came to light that a hysterectomy was unnecessary for this woman. The paper constructs all of these occurrences as purposeful attempts to commit Black genocide—to limit the number and effectiveness of Blacks—particularly Black Panthers who were attempting to affect change.

Women Writing about Women's Place in the Movement

Of note is the way that *The Black Panther* constructs the archetype of The Black Revolutionary woman. *TBP* argues that The Black Revolutionary Woman's primary role is supporting her man so that he can be as effective as possible in the movement. By fulfilling this role, the Black Revolutionary Woman plays a vital role in the struggle and also fulfills herself. According to Linda Greene's article entitled "The Black Revolutionary," (September 28, 1968:11) this woman is different from other kinds of women; she is beautiful because of her participation in the movement. The Revolutionary woman has many roles: she is a mother, companion, and everything else her man and people need her to be. She is "militant, revolutionary, committed, strong and warm, feminine, loving, and kind." Greene posits that these qualities are not contradictory, but are present simultaneously in the true Black Revolutionary Woman.

Another gendered *TBP* theme stresses that the Black Revolutionary Woman must stand beside and support her man. "A Black Woman's Thoughts," by Gloria Bartholomew (September 28, 1968:11) suggests that Black women must stop trying to be equal with their men—and equates doing so with "acting White." Bartholomew argues that the Revolutionary Black Woman's needs, wants, and own individual life as previously understood must vanish if she hopes to be effective in the movement. She must not hope for too much attention from the men

she cares for—they are busy fighting the revolution. Embracing this thought process, Greene also suggests that standing behind Black men, reassuring them when they have lost their way, and letting them know that they have a completely faithful ally in Black women, is instrumental in assuring the success of Black men in the revolution.

> This woman is, and must be, a Black man's everything. …She is what her man, and what her people need her to be. She is the strength of the struggle. She is a worker for Black Liberation. It is her goal. Within this goal lies the fulfilling of Black man [men] in every day that they must be fulfilled in order to live and fight. If she is not for Black liberation, she will distract him, she will inactivize herself and the people around her (September 28, 1968:11).

As these quotes illustrate, the Panthers saw Black women's role in the movement as essential to ensuring the success of the movement. However, their role was a supportive one.

Not only does *TBP* define this support as essential to affirm Black men's manhood, but it instructs Black women to do these things in order to truly come "beautiful Black women." Bartholomew suggests a few pointers for ways that Black women can achieve this ideal. They include becoming secure with themselves, to stop playing the role of the man, and to "Smile when you pass a brother, instead of turning your nose up." Greene assures her readers that Black women play an important role in the struggle. In fact, she portrays the Black woman as "the strength of the struggle" (September 28, 1968:11). Without her the revolution will be lost.

A long passage in *TBP* entitled "Black Woman: By a Black Revolutionary" (*The Black Panther I,* September 14, 1968:6) speaks to some of the issues Black women faced both in their movement work and in their personal lives—which they saw as inextricably combined. The author writes of Black women's desire to be acknowledged by Black men--to be recognized for their beauty and the support they have given the men. The author argues, "Black women have exhibited the extreme in patience, waiting for the black man to discover himself and then to

discover her," speaking to the fact that the Black woman's role in the revolution was primarily supportive. Once women helped Black men redefine and reclaim their masculinity, it would then be their turn for liberation. In fact, the author states that bringing about the consciousness of the Black man should be the primary objective of the "Revolutionary Black Woman."

> It is a woman's duty to find the beauty in life and to unfold this beauty before the eyes of her man and children; to bring the truth of life out of the darkness and into the light. These things are stimulants to the blackman's mind, therefore, making it possible for him to function at his peak. Her main objective should be to learn and constantly seek a better way of life for her own (*The Black Panther I,* September 14, 1968:6).

The author further argues that Black women have been the sounding board for Black men's frustration since slavery, since the White man castrated him. This provides an interesting possibility for why Black women might stand behind Black men—in this woman's eyes, only when his life is fulfilled will hers also be. He must be able to be a man before she can actually be a woman. This also speaks to the fact that Black masculinity and femininity are inextricable; one must be healthy so the other can be, too. However, the author is afraid that many Black men do not realize this, that Black men have seen that they can have another life within the White world. She deems this his "Utopia (of) a dead white world" and fears that too many Black men are happy to leave Black women behind to gain access to this world (*The Black Panther I,* September 14, 1968:6). The author also argues that if Black men are so hasty to leave Black women for White women then they are not happy with, nor proud of, their heritage. This pride is essential for the race to be healthy.

Black women not only were expected to be militants, they also bore the responsibility of being "domestics." That is, they were responsible for cooking and cleaning. They were also responsible for reproducing warriors for the struggle. Valerie LeBeaux (October 19, 1968:13)

wrote a poem for the paper in which says that she lives and dies to give strength to her Black man, and simultaneously tells her child not to be afraid, because his mother will raise him right:

> I live and I love
> I weep and I cry
> I give strength to my Black Man;
> To shoot a gun or Die!
>
> My child does cry,
> And shivers in the night;
> Be silent my son;
> Mama will raise you right!

In this context, raising her son to be a warrior is considered "raising him right." This goes to show how women constructed themselves as caretakers, both for their partners and children. In addition to women explicitly defined as soldiers in the revolution, women who took up arms to defend themselves, their children, or their community are recognized as being revolutionary actors. Black women social workers, nurses, and nuns are portrayed as having an important role in the revolution, *if* they represent Black people's interests.

In "Black Woman" (*The Black Panther I,* September 14, 1968:6), the author makes it clear that there must be a distinction between the young Black women of the ghetto and the middle class Black woman who aspires to be a part of the bourgeoisie. The women in the latter category are not proud of Black culture, whereas the "new Black woman of today" is not only proud of this culture, but is active in creating it, in part by supporting Black men in the revolution. The author also warns that being a beautiful Black woman is not enough—"it is what the black woman can contribute to the black man that is important." The author sees race and class solidarity as essential to the functioning of the Black power movement and of the Black race in general. The author also argues that if Black men are trying to gain access to the White world then they are not truly proud of where they came from and are forsaking the Black race, in

particular their Black mothers, sisters, and wives. Black women need Black men's help in order to be free. So in this instance, Black men need to help Black women, not the other way around.

A column entitled "Support the Revolution" (*The Black Panther J,* July 3, 1967:2) tells women that they must support their man in the revolution. The author says it is not necessary to fight beside the men, but that women must take up other kinds of work, such as selling papers, collecting donations for guns, and secretarial work, pointing out that women's role in the revolution is one of support. The Black woman's role in the revolution was an essential, albeit primarily supportive one. Though it is easy to critique the writers of the paper for relegating women to a secondary role, the fact that the Panthers deemed women's role as integral to the revolution was in itself progressive.

Construction of Gender Inequality

The representations of gender inequality in the paper vary. Though one could argue that women in the Party were relegated to "women's work" and faced sexist treatment, some articles offer a profound analysis of gender inequality. One particularly good example is an article on beauty pageants. In an article called "Beauty Contests and the Third World," Eldridge Cleaver (November 22, 1967:9) argues that beauty pageants are another way of perpetuating White supremacy. By choosing one woman (almost always a White woman) and calling her "Miss Universe" or "Miss World," White society is dehumanizing all women who do not conform neatly to this ideal. Thus, Cleaver urges that the Black community should not participate in these pageants but instead create their own pageants honoring third world women's beauty. In these terms, Cleaver's recognition of the fact that both Black and White society often considered women of color less beautiful than White women is progressive in that he recognizes the concerns of feminists of color. These feminists challenge dominant, White conceptions that say

Black women are not as beautiful as White women (Collins 2000:79). However, this analysis does not confront the patriarchal notions that lay at the center of beauty pageants as an institution.

The paper also recognizes the consequences of intersectional oppression, publishing an article called "Organizense Chicanas!" by Enriqueta Longauex y Vasquez (August 16, 1969:8), who argued that as a woman organizing for racial equality, she faced multiple oppressions from society in addition to being treated unequally by male activists. The effects of intersectional oppression are present for Black women as well. The paper brings up the difficult position of many Black women in society as they face oppression due to both their race and gender. Several articles mention the difficulty women, particularly Black women, face while trying to raise children independently, due to the fact that their wages are lower than men's and that women must struggle with exploitative landlords, racist welfare departments, and having a lot of children. One article called "Family of Ten Threatened with Eviction" (Roland Young, January 17, 1970:5) notes that women bearing numerous children is a factor in women's hardship, but it does not advocate for birth control or decreased family size. Even though the Panthers recognized some of the problems faced by women with many children, they did not advocate contraceptives. That they did not advocate for birth control is likely due to the uncomfortable relationship between the State, the Black community, and reproduction discussed above.

In line with the Panthers' abhorrence of capitalism, "Seize the Time: Revolutionary Album Now Available" (Elaine Brown, January 17, 1970:17) also raises the point that sexism, racism, religious chauvinism, and unnatural divisions among the people are a by-product of a capitalist society. Even though the Black Panthers acknowledge the chauvinism of the capitalist system, both women and men Panthers often write in ways that reinforce hegemonic cultural

notions of gender roles. In particular, their rhetoric often neatly conforms to capitalist conceptions of gender roles.

Varying Representations: Sexuality and the Black Panther Party

The representations of sexuality found in the text of *TBP* are varied and at times conflicting. They address far-ranging themes, from discouraging men to "take liberties with women," the sexual abuse of Black women by White men, to describing the way White authorities used negative conceptions of Black sexuality to disparage members of the Panthers. Throughout the discussion of all of these topics, runs a theme of injustice. The Panthers argue that White society used Black sexuality to discredit Blacks. For instance, when UC-Berkeley asked Cleaver to teach at their campus, Ronald Reagan--the then Governor of California--decided he would not stand for it. In "An Aside to Ronald Reagan," the paper facetiously described Cleaver as "the apotheosis of the American nightmare: loudmouthed nigger, ex-convict, rapist, advocate of violence, Presidential candidate"[1] (Eldridge Cleaver, June 21, 1969:9). Reagan employed controlling images of Black men in his efforts to deny Cleaver to teach, as he warned the university, "If Eldridge Cleaver is allowed to teach our children, they may come home some night and slit our throats. Therefore the people of California will not stand for this!" (ibid.). The paper's description of both Cleaver and Reagan's admonition show how Black sexuality can be used against a person. In describing Cleaver as a violent rapist, the paper (albeit facetiously) plays into the controlling images of Black male sexuality as out of control, wild, and violent. However, for Reagan, these notions work to his advantage as he can threaten

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1 [1]In 1968, Cleaver was the Presidential nominee for the leftwing Peace and Freedom Party.

the public with the idea that if Cleaver is allowed to speak he will corrupt the minds and bodies of the White youth at the institution.

In fact, Cleaver's critics regularly took advantage of his admission of raping women. An article called "Profile of the Big Crook, WM Knowland" (Bob Avakian, November 16, 1968:5) argues that in the text of *Soul on Ice,* Cleaver admits to raping Black women for "practice" before raping White women as a means of getting back at the White community, and that Cleaver later recognizes his actions were misguided. In his attempt to discredit Cleaver, the White journalist, W.M. Knowland published an editorial focusing only on the fact that Cleaver admitted to raping women and does not include the fact that he regretted his actions. While the newspaper presents this as an explicit example of the ways White society used notions of Black sexuality to disparage a member of the Panthers, the newspaper also presents other less specific attempts to do so. It discusses several instances in which police officers degraded Panthers by calling them names such as "black bastards," "dirty niggers," and "pimps" (*The Black Panther K*, June 10, 1972:2; *The Black Panther I*, September 14, 1968:4).

"Profile of the Big Crook, WM Knowland" (Bob Avakian, November 16, 1968:5) posits that in another attempt to use conceptions of sexuality against individuals, welfare agents conducted what the paper calls "midnight bed raids," during which any woman who was not sleeping alone was denied the welfare check she had been receiving and was prosecuted by the District Attorney for defrauding the welfare department. Avakian argues that this sent the message that by having male visitors, these women were violating standards of proper sexual behavior. By embracing their sexuality, in fact simply by having sexual relationships, these women were deemed unworthy of State assistance and unworthy as mothers. Labeling them sexually promiscuous served as a method of demeaning these women.

"Shellie Bursey and Brenda Presley Face Fascist U.S. Courts," (*The Black Panther L,* October 17, 1970:14) describes an incident, which is less explicitly controlling but still humiliating. The newspaper posits that a female Panther was arrested, taken to jail, and once incarcerated, the prison officials took away her tampons and underwear and gave her a pad with no belt to hold it up, using her gender as a way to make harsher an already harsh punishment. In all of these cases, then, *TBP* presents sexuality as a means to disparage, discredit, and in some cases dehumanize an individual. By framing the sexual mistreatment of male and female Panthers as an egregious act, the Black Panthers acknowledge the way that White society has discredited, demeaned, and subjugated Black sexuality, as well as a wish to reclaim their sexuality and perhaps even use it as a method of empowerment.

The issue of forcible rape is a common theme in the text of *TBP,* placing the text in a progressive position in the realm of sexuality, as the discussion of rape was something many considered taboo—particularly in a publication. In fact, the Panthers seemed to recognize this, as they published a column called "On Revolutionary Art," (*The Black Panther E,* June 20, 1967:1) of which one line reads "Painting a revolutionary thing—whities raping Black women," raising the issue of the rape of Black women by White men during slavery and encouraging people to bring it to light. "Panther Kidnapped and Beaten by Special Gestapo Pigs" details the arrest of one Panther woman. The newspaper tells how the police officers detaining the woman told her that they would have sex with her until she would die (*The Black Panther M,* February 7, 1971:7). This illustrates how effective the controlling image of the Jezebel was in dehumanizing and demoralizing Black women. By constructing Black women as lascivious, the Jezebel narrative presents Black women as constantly desiring sex, thus unable to be raped. The fact that

the police officers found the threat of deadly rape an "appropriate" one demonstrates to what extent myths of depraved Black sexuality had pervaded their minds.

"Prostitution Runs Rampant in the Black Community of Trenton N.J., Supplying Sisters for Pigs" (*The Black Panther N,* September 19, 1970:4) mentions the problem of White men exploiting Black women sexually in exchange for money. It critiques not only these men, but also the structural problems that forced Black women into this situation. It goes on to say that White men approached female Panthers who were selling papers on the street because they confused the women for sex workers. The article concludes by warning that all "buyers of Black flesh" will be stopped—that if they continue to do so, they will be dealt with in one way or another. Again, this article addresses the issue in a progressive manner. Though one might infer a sense of paternalism from the article, the article is commendable for its understanding of structural factors which force women into these jobs, for not disparaging them for their actions, and its defense of these most marginalized women. An article called "The Black Panther Party/A Force Against U.S. Imperialism" argues that the Party also demonstrated sexual progressiveness by holding workshops for numerous marginalized groups—national minorities, women, street people, and gays and lesbians (*The Black Panther N,* September 19, 1970:12). In sum, the discussions of sexuality in *TBP* cover a variety of topics. These discussions describe the ways that sexuality could be used against individuals, the special problems that women and sexual minorities faced, as well as the way that men's sexuality could be used as a method to discredit them.

In "An Exclusive Interview with Huey Newton," with writers from the *Los Angeles Times, the Saturday Evening Post,* and *Ranparte Magazine,* (March 16, 1968:4) Newton argued that as Europeans constructed themselves in the image of God, they needed a scapegoat for their

sexual desires, as these impulses were not “God-like.” Upon coming into contact with Africans they found a group on which to blame these very impulses, constructing a powerful barrier between the two groups. White men policed this boundary particularly harshly between Black men and White women. When Black men crossed these lines, there were harsh consequences. The newspaper posits that in some cases, Black men were not arrested on these suspicions, but that instead police officers gunned them down for “trying to escape.” One article by Kathleen Cleaver called “The Black Mass Needs but One Crucifixion” also likens these actions to a lynching—describing the White men as lynch mobs who were “Ritualizing their insanity and inhumanity with castration and death by fire”(March 16, 1968:22).

Though one might consider the Panther’s representation of sexuality in the text progressive, there are instances in which this does not hold true. The primary example would be the fact that, despite a recognition of the way that Black sexuality was used by White society as a way to demean them, the Panthers used sexual epithets to demean others with whom they did not agree. In particular, they often used the term “faggot,” reflecting a narrow heterosexist view of sexual liberation.

Conclusion

The representations of gender and sexuality featured in *The Black Panther* are various and fluid. There is no one description or image which best describes these constructions. Instead, it is apparent that the Black Panthers define Black masculinity and femininity as existing in dialectical relationship to one another. It is possible to critique the organization for what some might call conservative gender ideologies, but I argue that this too simplistic of an analysis. Though the Black Panthers’ representation of masculinity is conflicting and at times attempts to conform to the construct of hegemonic masculinity, at other times it breaks sharply away from

this construct and attempts to define a new conception of Black masculinity that was empowering without exploiting others. As Kathleen Cleaver (2001:124) argues, during the 1960s, society in general had not developed much language to talk about eliminating gender discrimination. She encourages those who castigate the Black Panther Party for its gender politics to examine the historical and political context in which the Party existed. She writes:

> When women suffered hostility, abuse, neglect, and assault—this was not something arising from the policies or structures of the Black Panther Party, something absent from the world—that's what was going on in the world. The difference that being in the Black Panther Party made was that it put a woman in a position when such treatment occurred to contest it (Cleaver 2001:126).

Cleaver then describes an instance in which a female Panther brought allegations of rape against a male Panther, and the man was promptly voted out of the Party. This story is in line with "Black Revolutionary Poetry," which frequently addresses the rape of Black women and calls for the men of the Party to avenge this injustice. Cleaver juxtaposes this incident with gender politics in wider society, citing the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment and the general lack of anti-gender discrimination policies in order to argue that while the Black Panther Party's stance on gender relations may not have been perfectly progressive by the standards of twenty-first century America, it made certain steps to improve the status of women within and outside of the organization that the wider society had not made.

The Panthers also struggled in their efforts to create a new definition of Black femininity—one that broke away from controlling images of Black female gender roles and sexuality and that was supportive and instrumental in furthering the Black freedom struggle. The Panthers' representation of Black sexuality contested controlling images of Black sexuality in numerous ways, but sometimes foundered on the heteronormative stereotypes and assumptions of the time. Through their analyses in the pages of *The Black Panther,* the Party's revolutionary

thinkers attempted to challenge dominant racial and sexual controlling images, heal the wounds of longstanding injustices, and define both Black male and female sexuality as autonomous and empowering. That they were not always successful is testimony to the enduring power of traditional cultural formations of gender and sexuality to withstand efforts at revision and revolution.

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