

2017

Afro culture and performance within the bar space

Jessany Maldonado
University of Northern Iowa

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AFRO CULTURE AND PERFORMANCE WITHIN THE BAR SPACE

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Jessany Maldonado
University of Northern Iowa
July 2017

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I engaged in an ethnographic study of a predominantly Afro social space, specifically the bar setting. Utilizing autoethnobiographical and critical ethnographic methods, I established rapport with participants in order to learn the dynamics of their communication performances within the space of the bar. I explored the ways that Afro folk communicatively (re)established the Afro bar as a location of discursive performances and practices out of the dominant public gaze, indicative of a *counterpublic (enclave)* space.

My thesis sought to address two research questions. First, I wanted to know what communicative practices characterize Afro bar culture. In addressing these questions, I detailed how Afro folk characterized their cultures in the bar by engaging in communicative practices that utilized shared stories of migration, prized blood and fictive kinship ties to others, and engaged in hospitality rituals as ways of constituting the space as quintessentially Afro. Second, I wanted to explore how Afro folk's discursive performances in an Afro bar constitute an enclaved space that proliferates counterhegemonic discourses. I argue that the major themes I generated concerning Afro performance in the bar space shows how Afro folk use the bar as a place for healing, community, and avoiding white surveillance.

In addition to the theoretical implication for counterpublics, I utilize an autoethnobiographical lens to detail how the process of this thesis has influenced my thinking as a college-educated, working class, Afro woman of color. In the reflexive

section, I review the findings of my ethnography and return to reflexively explore how this project has been meaningful for me.

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THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

This study by: Jessany LaTrice Maldonado

Entitled: Afro Culture and Performance Within the Bar Space

Has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts

Date Dr. Charles Kyle Rudick, Chair, Thesis Committee

Date Dr. Danielle McGeough, Thesis Committee Member

Date Dr. Catherine H. Palczewski, Thesis Committee Member

Date Dr. Kavita Dhanwada, Dean, Graduate College

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the patrons at the bar who accepted me wholeheartedly to conduct my research, and to my Afro ethnic group as a whole, who I adore so much. We will impregnate academia not only with our presence, but our invaluable stories that have been hidden, marginalized, and forgotten for too long. Not today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to an ever so sly, self-identified transgender Afro man and a shady, privileged, cisgender, white male college professor. Your individual intersectional identities helped make this work phenomenal. Frankie, my main informant and ring leader, was responsible for bulldozing me into this bar culture to conduct my work; and also my thesis advisor, who kept pushing me to finish even though I had given up.

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CHAPTER 1

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE OF THESIS

This space is dimly lit with low colorful lights except for the abundance of light surrounding the bar counter that designates where people can sit, eat, and order drinks. The remaining portion of the floor plan is comprised of 10 round black tables that are surrounded by four stools suitable for more group-oriented socializing amongst patrons. In the front of the space is a small, wooden dance floor next to a disc jockey station where people can watch themselves dance in a floor-to-ceiling mirror that stands adjacent to the wooden dance floor. In the back of the establishment stands a kitchen with a small window for people to order and pick up soul food, and right beside it sits a pool table in the corner. The space functions well for a plethora of activities, including dancing, eating, drinking, playing pool, shooting darts, and socializing amongst patrons.

Purpose

I engaged in an ethnographic study of a predominantly Afro social space, specifically the bar setting. I chose City Central, a bar in Waterloo, Iowa, that is visited predominantly by Afro folk. Utilizing autoethnobiographical (i.e., self-reflexive perspectives and data) and critical ethnographic methods (i.e., naturalistic interviews and participant/observation; Esterberg, 2002; Madison, 2011), I established rapport with participants in order to learn the dynamics of their communication performances within the space of the bar. My goal was to depict Afro bar culture as accurately as possible to generate dialogue and discourse about Afro folk (Madison, 2011). I wanted this research to facilitate dialogue about an understudied population and provide an avenue for

possible interventions in order to challenge racist stereotypes about Afro folk, and their customs, traditions, and rituals (Madison, 2011).

During my research, I observed how patrons spoke of themselves, their ethnic group members, and their culture using vernacular language and performances within this space. Specifically, I explored the ways that Afro folk communicatively (re)establish the Afro bar as a location of discursive performances and practices out of the dominant public gaze, indicative of a *counterpublic (enclaves)*. “Marginalized groups” (e.g., those with identities such as nonwhite, working-class, queer, and woman) operate counterpublics through performing, practicing and communicating within and across multiple discourses and discursive locations to develop alternative interpretations of identity interests and needs (Fraser, 1990). Similarly, Squires (2002) defines enclaves as safe spaces for marginalized groups completely separated from the public sphere; however, they may have to reenter the public sphere to engage in the daily round (i.e., working, soliciting needs like government support and childcare services, and engaging in capitalistic ventures; Hunter, 2010).

The public sphere is typically conceptualized as a location where people gather to exchange ideas, debate the current conditions of the times, and engage in discourse with one another to elicit change (Fraser, 1990). Unfortunately, this opportunity is still generally only enjoyed to those who fit the mythical norm (i.e., white, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied, Christian/Catholic male; although women fitting these criteria are generally allowed into the public sphere; Lorde, 1984) and excludes anyone else who may not fit one or most of these intersectional identities (Fraser, 1990). In response, those

who do not fit the mythical norm and are excluded from the public sphere establish and utilize counterpublics to perform and engage in discourse (Felski, 1989; Fraser, 1990; Lorde, 1984; Squires, 2002; Warner, 2002).

Throughout United States history, Afro folk have fought to create counterpublics to organize and strategize against oppressive structures, safeguard one another from oppression and discrimination, and engage in activities of leisure (Austin, 1998; Hazzard-Gordon, 1990). These spaces allow marginalized groups to congregate outside of the surveilling gaze of the dominant public (Fraser, 1990) and undress themselves of the white cultural drag they use as a façade to successfully operate within the public space (i.e., performing in the work place and in daily interactions with non-in-group members; Goffman, 1959). As a result, members can perform their authentic identities (Austin, 1998; Goffman, 1959) and (re)produce their culture in discursive locations often created in their own communities (i.e., churches, clubs, dance halls, bars, and other communal establishments; Austin, 1998; Hazzard-Gordon, 1990). In these types of places, Afro folk of varying socio-economic classes form a collective unit and identify with one another (Hazzard-Gordon, 1990).

Rationale

Drawing upon the work of Warren (1999), I argue that the lack of literature based on Afro folks' experiences is a major concern for minorities in the social sciences and should be a concern for the entire academic field itself. Furthermore, Afrocentric studies in social science research are important because the academic community needs to adequately represent the experiences of diverse people in the U.S., instead of relying on

studies based overwhelmingly on white folk and their issues (Ferguson, 2004). There is a large discrepancy in the amount of published work that focuses on ethnic minority studies primarily due to the ways that white academics continue, consciously or not, to prioritize their questions, experiences, and agendas over those of color (Collins, 1991; Warren, 1999). As a result, many researchers believe that minorities should work harder to get their work published (i.e., engages a victim-blame tactic); however, there are many systematic obstacles that prevent faculty and students of color from conducting and/or publishing works that are based on improving and increasing access to minority studies (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996; Warren, 1999). Being aware of this knowledge, finding comfort with situating myself back into an Afro ethnic space, and creating minority-focused studies to contribute to academe are the main reasons why I chose Afro studies in which to focus my research.

Many of my academic and personal experiences have led me to pursue research topics in Afro culture. I am interested in studying how Afro folk communicate and perform their culture. The ultimate purpose of this work was to contribute Afro-based research to social science since the field has a scarcity of scholarship in minority studies. The lack of Afro studies is due to the ways that white supremacy maintains a lack of concern and care for diversifying academia, particularly social science research (Asante, 1991). This disregard deters Afro-focused research from being published and discourages (diverse) scholars from wanting to publish these pertinent works (Coker, 2003; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996).

After being reminded of the importance of my people's relevance to academic

literature by reviewing the harmful impact of their minority exclusion from social science research (Coker, 2003; Ferguson, 2004; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996), I aimed to center myself in studies of Afro culture. My personal and educational achievements are how my circular movement of progression travels counterclockwise to (re)arrive at where I initially began. Referencing Berry (2013), I have traveled as a “historied” body from being fearful of my own ethnic group to finding refuge in an intra-ethnic discursive location. I sought to explore spaces of my culture that signify leisure and community within a particular space and place of the bar. Even though this location included gender and culture enforcement officials, I allowed myself to perform in front of them for the purpose of my research, and our presence and advancement in academia.

Fully completing my progression backwards from where I currently am in a predominately white academic setting to my cultural roots in Afro discursive settings meant attaining deeper consciousness and knowledge of the self. My goal in this project is to study the self and others similar to the self. Through the experience of completing this research, I traveled yet again counterclockwise in my circular path of progression on the wings of the participants’ stories, sayin’s (Boylorn, 2013), and life lessons. The “lessons” (Boylorn, 2013) I refer to are the experiences that have shaped my outlook on life. Therefore, in the next section, I work to situation myself as an Afro identifying woman within this research project.

Autoethnobiography/Self Reflexivity

This autoethnobiography, similar to Anderson’s (2006) autoethnography where the researcher is part of the researched group, symbolizes progressive movement in a circular

fashion. Drawing from Berry's (2013) stance that individuals "spin" their histories and experiences, I gathered experience and history in a circular fashion to perform my culture and, thus, observe other ethnic group members perform our shared culture. Most importantly, as I went through my circle of progression, I intentionally vacillated between white-deemed "professional" academic language to Afro vernacular (Boylorn, 2013), which is a creolized, informal adaptation of English created by Afro folk during slavery still often used in social spaces (Labov, 1972). This vacillation demonstrated my continuous transition between the front stage (i.e., performing, writing, and speaking professionally by white standards) and back stages of quotidian social performances (i.e., performing and speaking by Afro vernacular; Goffman, 1959).

Through my journey of starting as an inquisitive girl and finishing as a college-educated woman, I demonstrated that the circular movement is not limited, but instead progressive in both a figurative and literary motion. Leaving one's community and returning is not a waste, but a fruitful and fulfilling journey of learning and self-discovery. Pursuing ventures outside of my community and familiar social circles has helped me better acknowledge and understand the challenges that linger in my community, and identify possible solutions to mediate the problems (Berry, 2013; Robertson, 2002). This self-exploration entails acquiring experiences and histories through performing, critiquing, and negotiating multiple selves to learn more about myself and, ultimately, my communities and/or cultures. One does this investigation by referencing what they know about their position within that group for personal and research purposes (Berry, 2013).

According to Berry (2013), autoethnographers examine their historical, processing, breaching, contested, unapologetic, and hopeful selves, in which each type of self prescribes separate methods for constructing, deconstructing, and critiquing their life performances and/or group's performances. Thus, through autoethnography, I used the tools of critiquing rhetoric and performances of myself and of my community to make space for Afro cultural studies in scholarship and research. I start this introduction with my evolution from a girl into a woman, interested with exploring the components that bring Afro folk together in social spaces.

Pre-Critical Consciousness

Before I developed my own understanding of the world, my consciousness was mostly influenced by my mother and fellow ethnic group peers, who attempted to impose their body politics, gender, and ethnic ideologies upon me. On a daily basis, others, who believed they knew the best for me, subjugated my body, behavior, social groups, and intra-ethnic relations to frequent review, and, unfortunately, I felt pressured to heed their critiques. These "lessons" often occurred in the forms of condescending suggestions, hints, and taunts to which I have always had trouble conforming. I use Berry's (2013) method of "historied" bodies to track my forward progression in escaping my cultural roots and seeking refuge in academia where I did not have to face challenges with those who wanted to confirm the authenticity of both my gender and ethnicity¹. However, I

¹ I reconstruct the meaning of the term *ethnicity* to replace the social construction of *race* since it is important to me to point out there is only one race, and that is the human. With this reconstructed meaning, I argue that there are several ethnicities, not several races of people. Therefore, I replace the terms *racist* and *racism* with *ethnicist* and *ethnicism*.

soon discovered that this progression would eventually lead me back to the same counterpublics I had wished to escape, which sets up my claim to circular progression.

“You’re taller than the average female. Do you play basketball or volleyball?” A question that people of all creeds would impose upon me. I stand 5’10 tall, have broad, straight shoulders, and skeletomuscular structures that I have been told signify characteristics of a man’s typical build. Did the unsolicited social critique of my body have an impact on my self-esteem growing up? Hell yeah, and for years I have tried to hide my body’s masculine features by hyper-feminizing myself in form-fitting clothing and female-approved communal interests. By receiving compliments on my successful presentation of the polarized female gender display, I felt that I had succeeded with representing the feminine ideal (Moore, 2006). This sense of success would persist until I would again fail when someone else would critique my body unfavorably, bringing awareness, yet again, to my so-called masculine traits. In a cycle of successes and failures, I tended to my wounded pride of performing “girl” to try to succeed at presenting again in an improved way.

“You have some pretty hair! Is it all yours?” is another question that I would receive. Thankfully, based on what I have been told by my family and courteous dating partners, I have been blessed with physical attractiveness in addition to having an impressively-sized mane of hair. I remember thanking my lucky stars that at least one thing about me was “unmanly” and was considered beautiful by feminine standards (Moore, 2006). As I grew in age and learned the skills to tie random phenomena together, I began to realize that maybe my level of perceived attractiveness was the main reason

that others, mostly other young women, would taunt and squint their eyes at me.

“I should’ve had another girl besides you and your brother, because you need to learn how to act like a lady,” my mother would always joke with me. *Acting lady-like* has never been a forte of my mine. First of all, my body did not allow it, and second, I simply *sucked* at performing the requirements of being a woman (i.e., having a gentle, sweet sounding voice, calm demeanor and disposition, caring and understanding, staying still, roaming in cliques, and abiding by authority figures; Murphy, Acosta, & Kennedy-Lewis, 2013). Although I repeatedly *attempted* to do “woman,” I could never come into *being* “woman” (Butler, 2004). Although outside influences made a point of policing my body and its politics, I could not help my natural ability to perform “boyish” or “mannish” termed traits (Butler, 2004). I am not suggesting that I identify as transgender, but merely performing that androgynous spectrum of girlhood that is suppressed by society (Murphy et al., 2013). I preferred to hang with the boys, wrestle, walk, and sit awkwardly when I knew that I was being watched by gender policing officials (i.e., my female peers), and publicly propose controversial ideas in class. Luckily for me, I suppose, I only had to deal with issues of sexism from other Afro girls and not ethnicism from other ethnicities during my formative years.

“You live on 34th street in those apartments, right? I live right on Butler!” I lived and went to school was on the east side of Indianapolis, Indiana, which situates cheaper, lower-income housing. Naturally, rental properties such as these attract renters who are in the market for affordable living, but Afro folk tend to disproportionately make up this type of market (Anderson et al., 2003). As a result, my institutions of primary education were

made up of primarily students of color compared to white students (StartClass, 2015). Therefore, my community was primarily Afro and so were my social groups in school. Consequently, my social groups and I upheld and reinforced Afro ideals, and saw any sign of assimilation to the dominant group as betrayal or “selling out” (Hazzard-Gordon, 1990; Johnson, 2003).

“You sound so proper... Why are you acting white?” As I reflect back, I recognize that white supremacy was not an issue to me then as it is for me now. As a matter of fact, there seemed to be an Afro supremacy in the groups that I was affiliated with in my youth. I found that the dominant Afro social group reprimanded anyone who assimilated or took even the smallest interest in “white-people shit” (i.e., any white-standard English linguistic capabilities, manners, activities, music, sports, and clothing not associated with contemporary Afroness, rap, or hip-hop culture; Lander, 2008; Walton & Jaffe, 2011) with questionable looks, sounds of sucked teeth, ostracism, heavy breaths of annoyance, and intimidating threats of social group expulsion. This is where my intersectional identities of ethnicity, class, and gender comes into counterpublic review. As a young Afro girl coming from a low-income household and community, I was expected to perform my gender a certain way in alignment with Afro working class expectations (i.e., always being on guard and ready to retaliate, fight-worthy, attitude bearing, mean mugging, and available for sex; Johnson, 2003). However, how could I perform these qualifications when I spoke with white articulation, could never spend the night over friends’ houses to practice the working-class Afro girl authenticity or was too poor to afford expensive clothing, too socially awkward to be sexy, too interested in

reading and studying to socialize, too nice to mean mug, and too intimidated by school expulsion to fight? Thus, I always felt the need to suppress my sheltered and educated aura and tendencies within intra-group spaces because I was already on thin ice with my social group by not performing my gender, class, and ethnicity correctly.

These questions plagued and undermined my attempts at performing how and what I was prescribed to perform until I went to college. During the time that I was applying to different universities, I felt a rush of freedom once I realized the ethnic and gender enforcers that I had gone to school with since elementary school would either be going to different institutions that I did not apply to or pursuing other fields that did not require post-secondary education. That is when I realized that I could finally be free from the restraints of Afro social expectations and reinvent myself to be who I wanted to be: a conscious and culturally liberated woman.

Emerging Critical Consciousness

Starting my undergraduate career at Purdue University signified traveling along the oval path of my circular progression, away from the starting line of my upbringing and socialization. I wanted to travel from my ethnic group as far as possible by pursuing other discursive locations since I had never received much authentic love from my own ethnic group – only constant harassment. So, I buried myself in my work and shied away from any Afro student union callouts, Afro-focused social space recruitment efforts, and related activities. I had learned from my experience as a “historied” individual (Berry, 2013) to avoid those women who looked like me for fear I would face repercussions of gender and ethnic enforcement policies. So, I sought opportunities to explore my

emerging sexual identity as a young, sexually-fluid Afro woman instead.

As I persevered in college and took advantage of coming into my own through formulating my own philosophies, ideologies, and critiques about myself and the social and academic spaces that I occupied, I realized that I did not have to stay in the boxes (e.g., heterosexual, hyper-feminine, and polite) that society and my culture predetermined me to belong (Butler, 2004). Rather than sticking to the presumption of being “born into” a particular orientation (Butler, 2004), I uprooted and positioned myself onto the spectrum of sexuality that I chose to inhabit (i.e., sexually fluid and loving of all genders) so that I would not be only limited to romantic affairs and explorations with the opposite sex (i.e., men) due to the traditional notions of gender performance and sexuality.

Consequently, through utilizing my privileges of having physical attractiveness and an athletically-built body to waver on the spectrum of gender presentation (i.e., passing as a hyperfeminine lesbian with makeup and form-fitting clothing or passing as a “pretty” stud with baggy, masculine clothing; Moore, 2006), I sought to experience myself by building relationships with people that inhabited spaces outside of the heteronormative box (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). I did so by situating my body directly in these counterpublics (Cobb, 2000; Squires, 2002) and speaking with others who were “out” with their nonheteronormative gender and sexual identities. With my ease of moving from heteronormative Afro counterpublics into “quare” Afro counterpublics (Johnson, 2001), I noticed that my often-critiqued tall and athletic body actually functioned as a passport for movement within smaller, gay Afro locations of discursive performances, such as gay bars and dance clubs. For once, I finally found my body useful

in being a key to enter spaces to learn more about the people and activities that distinguished them from the larger heteronormative Afro counterpublic.

Using my body, again, I became another type of “other” (i.e., sexual deviant) for my dominant Afro community, and I did not care. For once, I found peace and solidarity with other people of color, particularly “*quare*” women (Johnson, 2001), who identified with the sexual identity that I had and still hold. As I reflect back, these newfound relationships and experiences with Afro lesbian women pushed me further along my oval path to my starting point. Coincidentally, in an almost selfishly opportunistic way, I wanted to capitalize on my accumulating histories with incorporating these experiences into my academic life by participating in pertinent research opportunities.

Develop(ing) Critical Consciousness

Even before I was a graduate student concerned with gender and sexuality, I was fascinated with what brought certain types of people together romantically and platonically. What sparked this interest was observing how my peers, who did not seem socially compatible, facilitated friendships and, ultimately, romantic relationships. Due to taking a human sexuality class in my sophomore year at Purdue, I learned that proximity and various degrees of homogeneity brought people of seemingly different types of backgrounds together (Crooks & Baur, 2013). Coupling was not a simple process of meeting another person who was demographically similar, but of those who shared similar values, interests, life goals, activities, and cultural components (Crooks & Baur, 2013). As I observed these interesting occurrences, I began to ponder foundational research questions that would eventually guide my academic career. Therefore, I

dedicated myself to studying gender and sexuality research outside of studies based merely on heterosexuality and monogamy.

Wanting to narrow down my research interests closer to sexuality studies instead of relationships between friends, I sought out research opportunities where I could observe and document negotiation behaviors among romantically-involved dyads. I facilitated this opportunity through interning for Dr. Evelyn Blackwood at Purdue University. For 12 months, I transcribed interviews that she conducted with lesbian-identified women who lived during the 1970s sexual revolution in San Francisco. Through my assignment, I was able to listen to the recordings and analyze the stories told by several women in how they came to select their social groups and romantic partners during the LGBT movement occurring at that time. This experience further pushed my interest to pursue a sexuality-focused track in graduate school.

Develop(ed/ing) Critical Consciousness

Upon arriving to University of Northern Iowa, my goal was set on seeking out LGBTQA-identified individuals from all demographics who would be open in talking about their relationships and sex lives for the purpose of research. However, soon after being exposed to the social climate (white, heteronormative, rural, and conservative) of the state that I was in, I knew I had to focus my academic attention elsewhere to compile enough research to graduate on time. Because of this, I quickly realized that I had to change my primary research interest of sexuality studies to gender and ethnic studies. As a result, I switched my attention from primarily studying the dominant group and adding more to white academia, to focusing more on my people (Afro folk) and contributing to

research relevant to our lives. My personal perspective and research focus changed through taking one demanding course, qualitative studies, during my first semester in graduate school.

Knowing that I wanted to concentrate on the relationship dynamics of Afro women, I went into the field to study how Afro college women facilitated and maintained friendships on campuses for this qualitative research methods course. I did this by conducting interviews with women whom I had previously known from my undergrad institution and gathered more participants through snowballing recruitment and word of mouth. From this project, the women demonstrated that having similar interests and classes helped them initiate friendships; whereas the longevity of those friendships were predicated upon trust and how similarly they were treated like family. Through this field work, I sharpened highly important interviewing and thematic techniques that would be important to utilize in my future thesis research.

Most importantly, through taking several courses in communication studies at University of Northern Iowa, the functions of rhetoric and performance began to coagulate and tie together dominant themes found in Afro culture. The functions coalesced with ethnic themes in that Afro folk simply do not live in the shadows of the dominant group, but instead thrive in their own discursive communities by marking that space with specific rituals and life lesson applications (Hazzard-Gordon, 1990; Squires, 2002). Through simply being in a body coded as Afro within a space coded for Afro people to gather, that body is facilitating a performance for that culture by simply existing in that space (Burke, 1966).

In this research, I have left my current placement in academia to circle around back to the starting line where my cultural roots and discursive locations are. However, I take my “historied” self (i.e., my education and life experiences; Berry, 2013) along with me to explore the Afro bar experience as a discursive location. I return to understand the process of myself, academia, and Afro culture at the end of this thesis project to highlight the continuing, dynamic nature of my “historied” self.

Societal Afro Place and Space

I find it important to reference demographics to not only note the lack of Afro folk in Cedar Falls, Iowa, but to recognize the lack of my people’s representation in the larger society (United States Census Bureau, 2015). According to the United States Census Bureau (2015), as of 2015, Afro folk make up 13 percent of the country’s population; however, only 43 members of the House and two in the Senate of Congress are Afro (Manning, 2014). Even smaller, only 3.5 percent of people in Iowa identify as Afro where the top five cities for Afro representation are Des Moines, Davenport, Waterloo, Cedar Rapids, and Iowa City (IowaDataCenter.gov, 2016). Specifically, as of 2014, the city of Waterloo held an Afro population of 10,844 residents making them 10 percent of the city (IowaDataCenter.gov, 2016). Afro folk primarily came to Iowa during the Industrial Revolution millions traveled north during the Great Migration for jobs and better lives for their families (Tolnay, 2003); however, the majority of Afro migrants went to states with more urbanized cities since these locations provided more job opportunities that could take on larger numbers of people seeking work (Trotter, 1991). Iowa’s mostly rural landscape explains why there is such a small population of Afro folk

in Waterloo, let alone the state of Iowa, compared to other states in the Midwest (Trotter, 1991).

Despite the smaller population and geopolitical location, Afro folk have still found and developed spaces in which to perform their culture. These locations serve as safe spaces from the dominant group (i.e., white folk) for them to engage in cultural performances and rhetoric pertinent to their daily lives, community critiques, and social issues (Johnson, 2003). Examples of cultural performances include traditional dances of leisure (i.e., cha-cha slide, jookin', and the electric slide; Twining, 1995) at house parties and clubs, prayer and worship in churches (Hazzard-Gordon, 1990), and playing the dozens (i.e., cracking [making] jokes or poking fun at someone; Watkins, 1994). Examples of rhetoric include speaking in code or "reading between the lines" type lessons, often utilized through speaking in Afro vernacular and sayings (Boylorn, 2013; Hazzard-Gordon, 1990). Afro vernacular is a creolized version of English that troubles verb tenses and personal pronouns (i.e., she be working in there sometimes with yo' cuzzin) of standard white English vernacular (Cukor-Avila, 2002). Since these performances and types of strategic rhetoric are incongruous with the dominant society, many Afro folk seek refuge in their own discursive locations to perform and speak how they see fit without correctional repercussions from the dominant public sphere (Hazzard-Gordon, 1990).

My Personal Afro Place and Space

Although previous research tends to valorize ethnic discursive locations as relatively safe spaces away from dominant interests, I find my own gender, sexual, and

ethnic performances are viewed as more acceptable in the public sphere than in Afro enclaves. Dominant public spaces, where I have always felt more comfortable performing my Afroness, were in my all-white classrooms and with close friends in spaces dominated by the dominant group, such as small college-town bars, commercial chain restaurants, and other places of the like. My comfort for performing in areas of the public sphere stems from being policed by fellow Afro peers on the way I performed my Afroness in ethnically homogeneous social spaces. In the dominant public sphere, whites and other ethnic groups took my performance of Afroness at authentic face value due to my melaninated skin. I can perform easily to my liking and they cannot, nor will they ever, have the license to police how I perform my Afroness – unlike my ethnic peers could.

However, when I am in ethnically homogenous social spaces, I tame down my performance of what I intend to signify my Afroness. This is because I may not perform my ethnic marker up to code (i.e., attitude bearing, fight ready, neck rolling, eye rolling, analytical glances) compared to the seemingly “more authentic” Afro performers who may be present. Consequently, due to Afro exclusion from the larger society, many Afro folk may feel compelled to constantly practice their culture’s performances and rhetoric in order to maintain ethnic group cohesion (Johnson, 2003). I, on the other hand, have come to find solace and community with those individuals who appreciate my efforts to perform and who may also lack “authentic” qualities in their ethnic performances. Intra-ethnic counterpublic groups where I found peace and solidarity were Prince fan clubs, habitual traveler clubs, *quare* spaces dominated by Afro women (Johnson, 2001), and

Afro bars with regular patrons. These people give me the confidence that I, too, can participate within enclaves (Squires, 2002) of my ethnic counterpublic to at least have some solidarity with my larger ethnic group.

Thus, I find the need to be reflexive in my positionality within my ethnographic study of City Central's sports bar. By placing myself as a participant within the enclave of the bar's culture, I could explore not only my own position in relation to others in the bar, but to have a clear view of how patrons interact with one another in a space of leisure and comfort – a space safely stowed away from the surveillance of the dominant public.

Research Questions

The questions that I seek to ask and address in the discussion section are as followed:

1. What communicative practices characterize Afro bar culture?
2. How do Afro folk's communicative performances in an Afro bar constitute it as a counterpublic?

CHAPTER 2

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Afro Culture

Austin, R. (1998). "Not just for the fun of it!" Governmental restraints on Black leisure, social inequality, and the privatization of public space. *Faculty Scholarship*, 667-714.

Austin argues that Afro leisure is the most regulated activity by whites. There are several government restraints on Afro leisure that negatively impacts social equality, their participation in the symbolic economy, and their ability to create jobs. Both many bourgeoisie Afro and white folk approve on the legal restraints due to the belief that working-class Afro folk invite a criminal or undesirable presence and activity so both social and private spaces. Because whites dictated that Afro folk have a socially inferior status in society, white folks and bourgeoisie Afro folk do not see working-class Afro folk as desirable sharers of leisure space. Additionally, whites see Afro leisure activities (i.e., group-oriented, social, and urban activities) as different from their preferable leisure activities, and thus should be excluded, yet monitored, because they see it as violent and dangerous. These regulations are employed by legal sanctions and the government masks or de-ethnicizes them by attributing the ordinances to "curbing crime and promoting social safety." Sanctions that disproportionately affect Afro folk also include curfews, restrictions to community facilities, venue licensing complications, anti-loitering laws, anti-cruising, and limitations on public transportation routes. I will use this study to observe how social and legal

sanctions have maybe pushed the bar to exist in the area it is currently located. I will also reference this article to show how access to different material and cultural resources facilitate idiosyncratic cultural and social practices among Afro folk in the bar setting.

Bell, Y. R., Bouie, C. L., & Baldwin, J. A. (1990). Afrocentric cultural consciousness and African-American male-female relationships. *Journal of Black Studies*, 21(2), 162-189.

Bell, Bouie, and Baldwin theorize that Afro male-female relationships are problematic because they internalize and adhere to Eurocentric structure and values (i.e., individualism, polarized traditional gender roles, physical-material influence, power, and physical gratification). They also posit that relationships are troubled because Afro folk have internalized Eurocentric stereotypes of Afro bodies, such as Afro women being domineering, emasculating, and aggressive Afro men being lazy, irresponsible, hypersexual, and criminal. Instead, Afrocentric cultural standards emphasize intrinsic over material qualities that promote relationship and community cohesion among Afro folk. Citing previously established work, the authors define the African American Worldview view as an interpretation of Afro psychological functioning and behaviors that “prioritizes the affirmation of Black life” (p. 169) and is guided by 1. oneness with nature and 2. survival of the group. The view encapsulates four main values: victory (belief that group will achieve all goals), sacrifice (giving one’s self to partner and wider group), vision (family/community building planning), and inspiration (having holistic instead of fragmented community relation). These all

facilitate the intellectual and spiritual commitment of Afro relationships and community. The authors test the African American Worldview perspective by surveying whether couples with high or low Afrocentric values prioritize and exemplify more Afrocentric qualities or Eurocentric qualities in an experimental study. Both hypotheses in the study were supported in that those couples with more Afrocentric consciousness scored high in having Afrocentric values whereas those with less consciousness scored high in Eurocentric values. I will use this problematized model to measure the disclosure of gendered relationships in the bar space.

Cooper, F. R. (2006). Against bipolar black masculinity: Intersectionality, assimilation, identity performance, and hierarchy. *UC Davis Law Review*, 39(853), 853-906.

Cooper argues that post-civil rights white anxiety pushed the narrative of bipolar Afro masculinities – the *Good Afro man* and the *Bad Afro man* – to see which Afro bodies qualify for acceptance and inclusion into the dominant culture. The *Good Afro man* is well-educated, speaks white vernacular English, desexualized, distances self from Afroness, void of criminal tendencies, and assimilates to white culture whereas the *Bad Afro man* is crime-prone, hypersexual, and identifies with his Afroness. Dominant culture separates and almost directs what it means to be Afro into intraethnic hierarchies with providing “assimilationist incentives” (i.e., job opportunities, acts of inclusion, and decent treatment) for those Afro men who pursue the *Good Afro man* image whereas demarcating those who emulate the *Bad Afro man*. Since white supremacy is founded on the exclusion of Afro folk from the public sphere, they are only willing to include few token assimilated

Afro men to present as a barometer for other Afro men to measure up. To be different from white is to challenge the dominant culture of white supremacy, so *Good* Afro men who “cover” their social markers are less likely to demand change to this system whereas *Bad* Afro men threaten the system. However, whites posit the illusion of inclusion in that *Good* Afro men may trade in their ethnicity and sexuality for inclusion, but they are still never truly accepted since they are still “black-skinned white men” (p. 896). Cooper applies critical/cultural theory of sex/gender by positing that Afro men must relinquish the desire to subordinate their own ethnic members based on gender – women – and sexual orientation – gay men – in order to challenge this white-created intraethnic hierarchy. I will use this theory of gender in my literature review to cite how Afro men may negotiate friendships with other men who have either assimilated to whiteness or remained loyal to the integrity of their ethnicity.

Dawson, M. C. (1994). A Black counterpublic: Economic earthquakes, racial agenda(s), and Black politics. *Public Culture*, 7, 195-223.

Dawson argues that Afro folk have segregated themselves off from one another and, thus, destroyed the solidarity of one monolithic Afro counterpublic. He argues that their focuses on different battles, such as Afro women’s rights compared to Afro men’s rights, styles of responding to critical situations significant to Afro communities, and concerns of politics and economics offset basic ethnic unity. He argues that the main dissention in the Afro community lies in politics, where white folk in the public sphere exclude and ignore Afro folks’ political thought and those Afro folk also exclude fellow ethnic members who are

Republican. Under the system of white supremacy, whites strategically constructed wages and labor markets to separate off the Afro middle and working classes during the height of civil rights protests. This economic separation created rifts between Afro folk of different classes and distracted them from the major fight at hand for civil rights. Whites also imposed ethnic discrimination upon Afro folk on the job, which removed minorities from jobs, cut their pay, and made their lives more psychologically and economically difficult. Their economic depressions harmed Afro social organizations and strategically disrupted ethnic unity. Afro men's patriarchal gender roles also disrupt unity by men subjugating women and other women policing fellow women into subordinate roles (application of the social construction of gender). I will use Dawson's work to point out how ethnicity, class, and gender play out in the bar setting with observing different classes of Afro folk come or do not come together and refer to one another in the space.

Inwood, J. F. (2011). Constructing African American urban space in Atlanta, Georgia. *Geographical Review*, 101(2), 147-163.

Through analyzing accounts of the residents, workers, and organizers of Auburn Avenue, a redeveloping political counterpublic for Afros in Atlanta, Georgia, Inwood argues that places can be ethnicized through ethnic codification of space production. Auburn Avenue was once a booming counterpublic for Afro folk to organize against ethnicism by creating counterdiscourses by asserting Afro agency in all-Afro communities. "The heart of the black counterpublic were public spaces, specifically those spaces where African Americans could come

together in a relatively safe environment free from white society's gaze" (p. 148). One resident described that it was a place for all Afro folk to come and engage in Afro commerce and success in the face of white ethnicism. Another resident posited that Auburn Avenue was a spiritual place for Afro folk, in that they were able to express their humanness there when they could not or were not allowed to express it anywhere else. However, white supremacy's tool of constructing a highway through this powerful and political Afro community dismantled the neighborhood and created "differential racialization," or intraethnic divides, within the Afro community (i.e., class divides between upper-middle class and working class Afro folk; intersectional tie). Integration also caused upper-middle class Afro folk to relocate to white neighborhoods and business establishments. This further dismantled powerful communal spaces for Afro folk. Now Big Bethel church aims to redevelop the community to bring back cohesion and commerce among Afro folk to reestablish that once successful counterpublic that countered ethnicism and formulated counterdiscourses of Afro urban space and living. However, although the plan is to revitalize community through redeveloping this space, it also reifies class divides within the Afro community by displacing the poor people who already live there in attempts to restore the community.

Johnson, J. (2010). Manning up: Race, gender, and sexuality in Los Angeles' slam and spoken word poetry communities. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 30(4), 396-419.

Johnson applies a critical/cultural theory of sex/gender by studying ethnic and gender relations at two different poetry clubs to survey the poets' negotiations of

upholding *Strong Afro Man* or *New Afro Man* rhetoric and performance(s). Afro men created the archetype of the *Strong Afro Man* as a response to whites' stereotypes of Afro men being lazy, unemploy(able)ed, and infantilized. It encompasses being emotionally-void, hard-working, protector of the family, and responsible. This rigid model does not allow for any gender fluidity or negotiation whereas the concept of the *New Afro Man* does. Consequently, *Strong Afro* men are emotionally castrated and not socialized to learn to language of expression emotion; therefore, disabling them to share pain lest they forgo being an authentic Afro man. However, the *New Afro man* is androgynous, fluid, and allows more flexibility in what it means to be masculine. Additionally, Johnson posits that it is progressive, complex, and contradictory in that it embraces the grey areas of Afro masculinity that are still under social construction. Consequently, due the "queering" of traditional Afro masculinity (i.e., being a *Strong Afro Man*), *Strong Afro* men and even some Afro women question the sexuality and ethnic authenticity of *New Afro* men. This inability to negotiate new and additional ways of performing Afroness is what exemplifies sexism and heterosexism in Afro-centered social spaces, such as the poetry lounges. However, many men in one poetry lounge agree that the *New Afro Man* is an archetype to aspire to be better than the generation before, because it is not afraid to challenge those conceptions and misconceptions about Afro male identity.

Mercer, K. (1987). Black hair/style politics. *New Formations*, (3), 33-54.

Mercer posits that Afros' hair styles have always been political. Due to Eurocentric beauty standards, Mercer argues that Afro folk suffered and still suffer an inferiority complex when it comes to their skin tone and hair. To maintain this systematic ethnicist division, whites and unconscious persons of color (i.e., POC who support Eurocentrism) in power have instituted historical and present-day pigmentocracies, which are hierarchies of class stratification beauty requirements and division of labor, to reinforce assimilation to whiteness. Specifically, the white public often includes those who successfully "cover" their social markers of *difference* (i.e., bleaching skin and straightening hair) while excluding those who either fail or refuse to "cover" their ethnic markers (i.e., wearing hair in its natural state and being content with their melaninated skin). To straighten the hair is to have a "diseased state of black consciousness" (p. 33) and to surgically alter ethnic features to fit whiteness is to possess a "psychologically mutilated black consciousness" (p. 33). Therefore, many Afro folk have always had to deal with the cognitive dissonance of straightening their hair to better cope with the ethnicist system of socially-constructed white superiority versus affirming their Afroness literally and figuratively. Wearing one's hair in an Afro or dreadlocks, thus, signified resistance to Eurocentric beauty standards in affirming Black was indeed beautiful during the Black Power Movement. However, it was until, like almost every other art form that Afro folk have created, whites and other ethnic groups depoliticized Afros and dreadlocks by appropriating them into parody and personal use. However, Afro folk still

intentionally and unintentionally mediate their Afroness by wearing their hair in several styles fitting and not fitting the Eurocentric standard of beauty.

Reid-Brinkley, S. R. (2008). The essence of re(sex)pectibility: Black women's negotiation of black femininity in rap music and music video. *Meridians*, 8(1), 236-360.

In response to dominant representations, Afro women construct oppositional resistances of Afro femininity, but also engage in disciplinary actions of Afro women's subjectivity. The author developed her argument analyzing *Essence's* magazine scribble boards, where readers responded to the singer Nelly's derogatory music video of "Tip Drill." Using the specific wording of the responses, the author used intersectionality by analyzing the history of subjugated women, class, age, and sex of the women. She supplied sufficient evidence by citing sources proclaiming the culturally theorized dichotomy of the "good woman" and "bad woman;" where "good women" are queens who defy dominant stereotypes and "bad women" are whores who promote those same stereotypes. Colloquially, "good women" are somewhat privileged by avoiding quick stereotype application whereas "bad women" are oppressed by quick stereotype application. The meaning behind the argument entails that Afro women make "safe spaces" for themselves, but within those spaces are policed regulations regarding dominant representation-abiding behavior (i.e., inappropriate and oversexualized behavior). Totally excluding a fellow Afro woman would be too much, but the threat of exclusion is enough to police behavior. Reid-Brinkley's argument will be useful in my analysis of video models and their representation

because of the “good woman/bad woman” dichotomy. Using this research, I am able to analyze why and how Afro women conform to performing over-sexualized roles in music videos for the male compared to the ones who do not, but who are still in sight of the male gaze.

Squires, C. R. (2002). Rethinking the black public sphere: An alternative vocabulary for multiple public spheres. *Communication Theory*, 12(4), 446-468.

Squires proposes that instead of one monolithic Afro counterpublic, that there are several counterpublics. Creating multiple publics based on social identity markers within an ethnic group, instead of one public based solely upon ethnicity, removes the ambiguity and vagueness from them. Counterpublics are mediated spaces that marginalized people create to strategize against oppression from the dominant public, which is made of white, able-bodied, heteronormative men. These counterpublics exist because the marginalized space and discourse holders were and are excluded from the dominant public. Squires applies intersectionality by positing that though multiple Afro publics aim for different centralized goals pertaining to their social identity markers, they all share the common mission for Afro socioeconomic advancement. The publics that Squires operationalize are enclaves (safely hides conversations and spaces from the white public view to develop Afro ideologies and protests in “hidden transcripts” since they are excluded from the dominant public), counterpublics (increases public communication between dominant and marginalized group(s) by bringing enclaved “hidden transcripts” to the public sphere to campaign against oppression and detail group interests), and satellites (remains separate from the public and

counterpublics to build and stabilize their own institutions, but will converge only when their interests are met in either the dominant public or other counterpublics). Despite the author's theory of multiple publics, she posits that the general Afro public has two goals: 1. negotiating Afroness through discourse and 2. pursuing specific and beneficial Afro interests. These goals allow Afro folk and allies to fight in unison for the same goals of interest.

Wallace, D. M. (2007). It's a MAN thang": Black male gender role socialization and the performance of masculinity in love relationships. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 1(7), 11-22.

Wallace argues that love relationships between Afro men and women have always been problematic, but previous authors on the topic have never come to a consensus on why, who, or what was responsible for this dissention. Therefore, she applies the critical/cultural construction of sex/gender by positing that Afro folk have issues maintaining romantic relationships because males and females are socialized differently due to ethnicized gender roles. Previous authors note how the enslavement of African peoples have altered the way in which Afro men and women interact with another, and take on Eurocentric models of gender role expectations (i.e., men being strong, rational, and provider whereas women are weak, irrational, and dependent on men). Wallace asserts that Afro boys are groomed into men at early ages and that becoming a man is a natural and automatic thing after his first sexual encounter. Because Afro masculinity is based heavily around multiple sexual conquests, many Afro men are not socialized how to communicate and facilitate familial and partnership relationships.

Unfortunately, both men and women have internalized this hypersexualization and thus has problematized their relationships. Wallace concludes that since Afro women have been taught how to be “fathers” (i.e., provide for and protect the family) as well as “mothers” (i.e., nurture and care for the family), Afro boys should too be socialized to be “mothers” as well as “fathers.” In order to uncomplicate the effects of white supremacy upon Afro relations, Afro folk should reconstruct how they socialize gender with themselves and with their children.

Afro Performance

Dance, D. C. (1998). Introduction. In D. C. Dance (Ed.), *Honey, Hush! An anthology of African American women's humor* (pp. xxi-xxxv). New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Dance posits that Afro women's use of humor is not only for laughter, but for functions of relief, bonding, therapeutic practice, and means of surviving quotidian life. Due to Afro women's daily struggles with white supremacy and patriarchal hierarchy, Dance argues that in-group humor amongst Afro women is a behind-closed doors affair because of its implications upon the ethnic female body by wider society. Humor facilitates this intersectional tie because, historically, patriarchal order discouraged women from “cracking jokes” or even laughing loudly, as these were typical behaviors of men. Similarly, Afro folk faced yet another stereotype of being “laughing clowns, incapable of serious and tragic concerns” (xxiii) if they engaged in laughter in the presence of whites. Therefore, Afro women adapted to engaging in humor behind closed doors (i.e.,

in bars, kitchens, homes, and etcetera) and away from the outside (white) world amongst other Afro women. Due to these public, societal restraints, Afro women formulated the witty response to jokes, “*Honey, hush!*” or “*Hush yo’ mouth!*,” which is not to silence the person, but to playfully express disbelief or to signify that the joke goes against social order. The author applies a cultural theory of gender and ethnicity when positing that the women in her life followed traditional gender behaviors in public when speaking (i.e., polite, dainty, and quiet), but were the opposite in private (i.e., loud, offensive, and humorous) with their female companions. Dance also argues the body language and rhetorical strategies that accompany Afro women’s humor (i.e., arched eyebrows, head bobbing, hands on hip stances, double negatives, repetitions, and verbal nouns). I will use this phenomenon to measure how Afro women use and validate humor in the bar space.

Johnson, A. (2014). Confessions of a video vixen: My autocrigraphy of sexuality, desire, and memory. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 34(2), 182-200.

Johnson utilizes autocrigraphy, which is the textural analysis and scholarly recall of personal, institutional, and social conditions that make up an individual, to complicate the boundaries of sexuality and gender in recalling and retelling her experience of being a video model in two popular music videos. She strengthens her argument by switching back and forth from her reflection to the usefulness of autocrigraphy. She uses intersectionality when examining her and her companions’ Afro flesh, men-serving gender roles, and heterosexual sexual orientation. She uses critical and cultural theory of sex and gender when revealing

her oppression by surrounding males and male video directors shouting sexual and derogatory extremities at her and the other models during her privileged experience of being featured as a principle model in two prominent rap videos. Interestingly, during one of the shoots, she owned the sexually-explicit lyrics aimed at and about her and salaciously conforms to the sexual messages, defending her temporary feelings that Afro women silenced their own sexualities (i.e., “be a lady outside but a freak behind closed doors”), and that only bad arises when the viewer does not critically view their sexualities the same way as the one showing it. However, once the shoot is over, she “wakes up” and realizes her undoing of Afro women’s work to preserve and sanctify the ethnicized body by feeding into the exploitive lyrics. I will use this theory of cognitive dissonance outlining the owning versus exploiting of one’s body for mass consumption in my analysis.

Johnson, E. P. (1995). SNAP! culture: A different kind of “reading”. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 15, 122-142.

Johnson studies the popular nonverbal behavior of “snapping,” which is the sound that the thumb and the middle finger make when they slide off of each other quickly. Popular discourse, specifically derived from Afro women and then appropriated and populated by gay Afro men (critical/cultural theory of sex/gender), signifies this behavior as an “outing” process in acknowledging someone’s nonheteronormative sexuality or characteristic flaw. However, Johnson places snapping within the larger category of signifying (can be direct and indirect), which the verbal and nonverbal art of dueling. Indirect signifying

happens when someone “beats around the bush,” when party A addresses party C instead of B, exposing another’s personal information in the presence of others, and when a third party tells someone that another person has tarnished their character in a way. If that person confronts the other then the act was successful. Direct signifying, also called “playing the dozens,” is a highly aggressive, audience-participating game of verbal dueling in which the winner is the person with the best verbal dexterity in ritually insulting someone. Behavioral signifying can also include eye rolling (direct), smirking (indirect), and poking lips (indirect). To “read” someone is to “set them straight” and can be either serious (belligerent attitude change) or playful. To playfully “read” someone is to reveal their flaw or falseness, a lie, or some derogatory claim, usually in the presence of known audience members. To seriously “read” someone is to reveal an intimate detail or something “off limits” in the presence of mixed company (i.e., completely unknown or known and unknown audience members).

Johnson, E. P. (2003). *Appropriating blackness: Performance and the politics of authenticity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Johnson posits that being Afro and/or “doing” Afroness is a performative act, an act of appropriation since Afroness is vague, ambiguous, and constantly debated. Johnson applies intersectionality in proposing that Afroness is appropriated by everyone for cultural capital, including Afro folk themselves. Like gender, Afroness has no original, and Johnson argues that ethnicism’s tool of socially dividing ethnic group members in different rungs of socioeconomic status has played a huge part in Afro folk arguing what social markers authenticate true

Afroness. Consequently, certain Afro folk uphold a hierarchy that privileges positionalities of Afroness while discrediting others. For example, urban, heteronormative, vernacular-speaking, working-class Afro folk are said to be the true authenticators of Afroness. This is because, according to the Afro Power movement in the 1960s, middle- and upper- class Afro bourgeoisie seemed susceptible to assimilate to oppressive white culture and forget their Afroness or “where they come from” with speaking white vernacular English, being educated out of their “native politics, marrying white partners, and relocating to white and ethnically-mixed neighborhoods. The author mentions Marlon Riggs, creator of the film *Black Is... Black Ain't*, to expound how Afroness encompasses a range of possibilities, capabilities, abilities, identities, and positionalities, and not an exclusive melaninated skin tone. Riggs also questions how could there be Afro love for one another when different identities and positionalities are at odds with one another.

Morgan, M. (2004). Signifying Laughter and the Subtleties of Loud-Talking: Memory and Meaning in African American Women's Discourse. *Ethnolinguistic Chicago: Language and literacy in the city's neighborhoods* (51-76). New York, NY: Routledge.

Morgan asserts that Afro women negotiate their gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity by engaging in complex storytelling by using linguistic and cultural practices adapted from being ostracized out of the white public sphere and the Afro patriarchal counterpublic. Morgan also suggests that Afro women hide the “real story” in the absences/voids of their stories by laughing and loud-talking. Regardless of generation, the two rhetorical devices function to hide or displace

negative or indifferent attitudes towards an occurrence or idea. For example, when talking about ethnicism, a woman may laugh at the end of her account to save face and displace hurt feelings or humiliation and/or loudly pronounce words of disagreement (i.e., you, say, and no). Those who share and/or in the know about the culture are able to discern the “real story” and meaning within the stories. Afro women also may tell stories of others with such personalized emotion that they position themselves in the story in which they had no literal involvement. Morgon also positions that Afro women’s discourse can be indirect (for specific hearers), direct (for any hearers), and directed (for general hearers, but responsibility of hearer to declare oneself as a target of that speech). Afro vernacular English, and informal and coded speech with local and situated audiences characterize indirect discourse (i.e., includes laughter and loud-talking). Formal, regulated, and standard speech for activities and within institutions characterize direct discourse. Directed discourse makes the implicit explicit, determines power, knowledge, and truth with being aimed at a general audience.

Tarone, E. E. (1973). Aspects of intonation in Black English. *American Speech*, 48(1/2), 29-36.

Tarone argues that Afro folk’s speech intonation in social interactions communicates the intent and attitude of the speaker. She posits that intonation reveals the speaker’s true feelings about the subject at hand and that the in-group audience actively responds in turn. This is called “call and response” that is prevalent in the Afro community. Involved persons in discussion usually expect a response from a fellow audience member and there is rarely ever the answer of

silence. This is because the speaker alternates their range of vocal intonation to encourage collective thought processes and response(s) from the group. Since this tends to be culturally exclusive to Afro culture, white folk usually misinterpret Afro folks' true meaning and intent when they listen to their passionate discussion. Because of the alternating range in pitch and volume, Afro folk may intimidate unknowledgeable whites with their volume and intensity of conversation. Afro culture values oral-aural skills more so than reading and writing, and therefore they tend to practice passionate intonation heavily when "playing the dozens." This competitive game of verbal dexterity and quick wit usually occurs in the presence of audience members and the one who outtalks and outsmarts the other wins and gains status. To provide a pioneering study for Afro intonation, Tarone records and phonetically transcribes the discussions of two groups, one Afro and one white, as they debate social issues to measure the auditors' lengths and widths of pitch range. Tarone found that Afro folk used wider and higher pitches when speaking with others compared to whites who used shorter and lower ranges of pitch.

Bar Culture

Faluyi, D. (2015). An exploration into the objectification of self in female hip-hop culture as a form of misogyny or empowerment in the eyes of the viewer. *Journal of Promotional Communications*, 3(3), 446-464.

Faluyi uses Black Feminist Theory and focus groups of randomly selected, college-aged women to argue that Afro female viewers interpret Afro women's music video performances as either misogynistic or empowering by analyzing the

groups' discourse. Faluyi concludes three main matrixes of analysis from the focus group: body image and its influence, cultural norms and stereotypes, and the commercialization of hip hop culture. Black feminist theory also gives voice to the marginalized groups of Afro women who are left out mainstream feminist theory. The author does not apply intersectionality in her argument due to the examination of women's interpretations on commercialized and exploited, heterosexually-categorized Afro women. There are no added layers or dynamics to this analysis but it captures an idea of how Afro female performers are consumed by fellow Afro women. Even though the focus group discussed how salacious images of Afro women are desirable but shameful (i.e., the sexy, yet underestimated woman), the argument's conclusion encompassed the belief that Afro performers are exploiting themselves in a misogynistic nature for the white male gaze. Additionally, Faluyi argues that a double standard of perception where the general audience better received white women more than Afro women when performing dances that were appropriated from Afro culture. Faluyi suggests that exploitation allows further oppression of Afro women as a whole group. This finding is beneficial to the analysis of Afro women's representation in music videos since it captures the meanings of the three main themes of perceived body image, cultural stereotypes, and hip hop commercialization.

Hazard-Donald, K. (2004). Introduction. In M. Forman & M. A. Neal. (Eds.), *That's the joint!: The hip-hop studies reader* (pp. 505-516). New York, NY: Routledge.

Hazard-Donald posits that Afro dance has a cyclical history that distinguishes it from other Afro Atlantic cultures in that their dances appear, disappear, and

reemerge decades later in an updated form. The author applies intersectionality in mentioning that although class stratification and work impacted the origins of Afro dance, hip-hop is enjoyed by not only every socioeconomic level of Afro folk, but is also imitated and appropriated by non-Afro people. The author then lists the evolutionary history of Afro dance that was influenced by time and space. For example, signature Afro dance shifted from rural to urban characterization after the Great Migration and during the industrial era (i.e., hunched over and flat-footed to upright and light-footed dances), and going from community-focused dancing to mainly dyad-focused dancing. Before the loss of manufacturing jobs for many Afro men who were in the majority of heading households, popular themes in rhythm and music focused on marriage, family, security, and other relationship-dominated themes. However, due to the white supremacist job market hiring more Afro women instead of men, there was a shift in music themes and dancing formations (i.e., transition of political to apolitical music/dance, relationship to singlehood themes, and male-dominated and -exclusive solo dances; application of critical/cultural theory of gender and ethnicity). This economic shift in Afro families, gender relations, and economic structures facilitated the foundation of hip-hop, which originated among marginalized working- and lower-class Afro youth. The three types of masculine-exclusive dances cited derived from competitiveness, energetic routines, and facilitated identity and peer-group status development. Dance is Afro culture is so pivotal

that not being able to dance questions the authenticity of an Afro person. I will use this research to survey how Afro folk dance in the bar space.

Hunter, M. A. (2010). The nightly round: Space, social capital, and urban Black nightlife. *City & Community*, 9(2), 165-186.

Hunter argues that urban Afro folk can transform place into space with facilitating unconventional opportunities at a night club in Chicago called The Spot. The author found that along with performing leisurely activities, patrons also used the space to facilitate meaningful social networks and socioeconomic opportunities. Patrons are able to do so in this space because the bar intentionally or unintentionally promotes the presence of diverse bodies with sponsoring eventful Friday night “gay nights” and Saturday night “straight nights.” Although this is not the only club in Chicago to do so, it brings people from different socioeconomic levels, neighborhoods, and different sides of town together to meditate and break down sexual segregation, limited social capital, and ethnic segregation. Intersectionality applies here since diverse patrons, who would otherwise be segregated, help one another with the daily round within the realm of the nightly round. Hunter defines the daily round as paying bills, caring for children, and going to work, whereas the nightly round encompasses all of the behaviors, interactions, and actions that typically occur in a nightclub. Patrons use this space to find babysitters, car rides, emotional and financial support, exchange information on job and welfare opportunities. According to a quote given by one of the patrons, “the club is more than just this shake your ass kind of place it can

be and it is for a lot of people a space to get what you need, so you make your life better” (p. 176). I will use this research to measure the synonymy in seeking unconventional services in the bar space.

Hutchinson, J. F. (1999). The hip hop generation: African American male-female relationships in a nightclub setting. *Journal of Black Studies*, 30(1), 62-84.

Hutchinson used ethnography to survey how men and women interacted with one another from the perspectives of Afro women who frequented a particular nightclub referred to as Club X. Her big finding was the sexual transactions that occurred within the club and how men and women operated on socially constructed rules of gender to access short- and long-term courtships. In selecting a partner, Hutchinson found that the women categorized men on their occupation, personal appearance (i.e., clothes and physical attractiveness), and potential as a sexual partner or serious partner. Potential one-night stands were men who seemed like they had money, danced well, and spent money whereas potential serious partners were those with educations, money, and a reputation of not being a “player (i.e., a ladies’ man). Men also had categorizations for women where “good girls,” who did not frequent the club often or had a reputation for sleeping with several men, were marriage material. However, men categorized those women who frequented the club often, wore hypersexual or revealing clothing, and danced salaciously as “cheap whores.” People selected mates based on sexual dancing ability (demonstrated sexual abilities), clothing (women’s revealing clothing and men’s expensive clothing signaled sexual availability), and economic

potential (women's jobs and men's cars, money, and clothing brands). Due to these superficial criteria, Hutchinson concludes that Afro men and women constantly engage in a bartering system, where women give sexual favors to men in exchange for economic favors. In comparison, relationship statuses symbolize security, companionship, sex, and status. Being a "baby's mother" complicates this finding in that these women are not girlfriends and their child(ren)'s father will never marry them; however, the fathers will likely continue to seek sex from them and provide them with economic support.

May, R. A. B. (2001). *Talking at Trena's: Everyday conversations at an African American tavern*. New York, NY: NYU Press.

May conducted qualitative research at a predominately Afro-frequented bar on the south side of Chicago to study how Afro folk facilitated community and made sense of their everyday lives with one another. Using participant observation and semi-structured interviews, he found that mostly older men of various professional grades and backgrounds frequented this bar, discourage the presence of single women, and held an exclusionary systematic process against young Afro patrons. Since they, along with the owner, wanted to uphold the traditional integrity of the bar, the owner prohibited youth from entering with a variety of physical and cultural defense mechanisms (i.e., the real entrance being the back door, dress codes, and surveillance of behavior(s) before permitted entrance). Many of the older men valued marriage, family, and cohabitation, and therefore interpreted the presence of single women to be a threat to the bar's integrity as

well. It was defined as a “man’s place” where patrons would often frequent after work to drink, relax, and engage in discourse about family life, sex, work, and interethnic relations with oppressive whites. Even though patrons drank, fellow patrons frowned upon drinking in excess since they placed high value on socializing and contributing to conversation. Division of labor and class stratification did not matter to the men as long as they held “good jobs” that took care of their families and business affairs (intersectionality applied). Bartenders and fellow patrons often questioned men who would come in during hours that they were usually supposed to be at work.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Participants/Location

After obtaining IRB approval, I began gathering data. Participants in this research project were patrons of the New City Sports Lounge located in the city of Waterloo, Iowa (the most Afro concentrated city in Iowa: IowaDataCenter.gov, 2016). Due to its location, most of the participants are Afro folk, specifically those ranging in age from 25 and 70. All participants identified as either male or female. Education status varied with all of them having completed high school and/or their GED. All participants reside and are employed in Waterloo.

As previously mentioned, this sports lounge is a modestly-sized social space. It is located between a gas station and a converted mini-mart. Inside, there is a long bar area for patrons to sit down and order drinks, a small, hardwood dance floor, giant mirror in front of the dance floor, a booth area on the other side of the establishment, 12 large black tables, and a kitchen in the back where patrons can order food.

Procedures

Lens

Of the multiple ways in which one can conduct research, I engaged in both autoethnobiography and ethnography, specifically critical ethnography. I addressed my findings and supporting anecdotes similarly to how Johnson (2014) organized her self-reflexive findings with citing flashback memories as she told her experience of being a video vixen in Hip-Hop music videos. With autoethnobiography, I found it necessary to

be reflexive in my work due to the need for reflexivity in ethnography. Through this method of reflexivity, I engaged myself with participants in order to understand their bar culture and performance better than being a non-participatory observer.

Ethnography is the detailed study of people and their culture (Esterberg, 2002). *Critical ethnography* studies marginalized people with the goal of making their lives better (Madison, 2011). Bettering research participants' quality of life includes creating a space where their voice can be heard by people who can change the system (Conquergood, 1985). This approach aims to critically analyze their current dispositions and cultural circumstances and amplify the voices of marginalized group members (Madison, 2011). Critical ethnography encourages researchers to leave their research site in a better condition than when the researcher entered it (Madison, 2011).

In this study, I engaged in the ethnographic tradition by providing a thick description of the rituals, habits, and norms that characterize Afro folks' communicative performances in bar spaces. However, I did so in order to fashion Afro-centric knowledge about counterpublics—a topic that has traditionally been dominated by white, masculinist perspectives with the exception of Squires (2002). In doing so, I provided corrective view to the representation of Afro bodies performing Afro activities in leisure – something which society thought and continues to think of criminal activities (Austin, 1998). I use the terms *counterpublic* throughout my entire thesis to signify *discursive locations*, *discursive locations of counterpublicity*, and *locations of discourse*. I use the term *enclave* to signify that the discursive location is separated willingly from the public

sphere with the intent to reenter only to engage in the daily round (Hunter, 2010) and not to demand systematic change (Felski, 1989; Fraser, 1990).

Interviews

The most common types of interviewing methods are structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Berg, Lune, & Lune, 2004; Esterberg, 2002; Heyl, 2001). *Structured interviews* usually require a pre-drafted sheet of mostly yes- and no-answer questions and takes place in designated space between the researcher and participant (Esterberg, 2002; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Because of the close-ended answer nature of this interviewing style, participants do not have much room to expand on their answers (Esterberg, 2002; Heyl, 2001). Similarly, *semi-structured interviews* entail a pre-drafted set of open-ended questions with more room for the researcher to ask additional questions and for participants to expand on their answers (Esterberg, 2002; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). On the other hand, *unstructured interviews* do not require a pre-drafted set of questions and the interview is more like a casual conversation that occurs spontaneously in any setting between the researcher and participant (Esterberg, 2002; Heyl, 2001). Although researchers run the risk of forgetting to ask important questions pertinent to their research in this style, more answers and information can flow much more freely from the participants if trust is garnered during this type of conversation (Esterberg, 2002; Robertson, 2002).

Out of these three styles, I utilized the unstructured interview approach due to informal setting of the bar. Due to the casual environment of the space, I did not want to interrupt the laid-back vibe of the bar by using structured or semi-structured questions

from a pre-arranged list. I felt that this type of strategy would make patrons uneasy and unwilling to provide honest and authentic responses to questions. Specifically, I asked participants how they utilized bar space to perform their culture and interact with others.

Positionality

Positionality entails the qualities, abilities, privileges, oppressions, appearances, and overall experiences that one may share with a group or research sample (Chiseri-Strater, 1996; Madison, 2011; Robertson, 2002). It positions or situates the researcher in their research, where they are then able to critique both individual and group cultural relativity (Robertson, 2002). Positionality has the ability to dictate whether or not a researcher may be able to blend in within a research setting, with a subject or subjects, and also has control over the amount of effort and time a researcher may have to put in to blend well enough to conduct his or her work (Madison, 2011; Robertson, 2002).

My positionality brings with it a few advantages, disadvantages, and an ethical responsibility (Esterberg, 2002). Things such as insider statuses (i.e., sharing social markers and experiences) and outsider statuses (i.e., not sharing social markers or experiences) heavily impact the quality and outcome of a research project (Conquergood, 1991; Esterberg, 2002; Jackson, 1989). For example, advantages of sharing social status and markers with participants may grant a researcher with special access to their group of study (Esterberg, 2002). These advantages may also grant more ease of access to the location site than would someone with no shared status and marker (Esterberg, 2002). Disadvantages, such as not sharing identities and experiences, may require a researcher to earn acknowledgement, placement, and trust in a community or access to a location

(Esterberg, 2002). However, in all, I aim to achieve a “dialogical performance,” in which I want to “bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another” (Conquergood, 1985, p. 9) in what it means to be Afro and transform a space through performing Afro culture within it. By engaging in “dialogical performance” with having genuine conversations with participants to understand their collective bar culture and performance, I aspire to genuinely understand my research site and participants to continuously facilitate discourse about their lives (Conquergood, 1985).

Due to my shared ethnic heritage, culture, ebonics, and nationality (Afro woman with American citizenship and fluency in Afro vernacular), I felt that I was successful in blending in with participants and the overall space because I did not face resistance from anyone when seeking new information and access to new participants. Even though I had fears that my young age of 24 would limit my access in acquiring trust from older patrons (i.e., those aged 30 and older), I found that they were more than willing to share their personal stories and other information beneficial to my research.

Because of my positionality, I held an ethical responsibility to not take advantage of participants and avoided acquiring personal information that did not benefit my research goals (Conquergood, 1985). I also had the responsibility to be truthful about my personal self with participants while maintaining my professional integrity (Esterberg, 2002; Huisman, 2008; Robertson, 2002). Despite having shared characteristics with my research subjects, I fully engaged in “reflexive ethnography” in which I reflexively acknowledged my positionality at both the beginning and end of this thesis project

(Madison, 2011). I did this to be accountable for my research, position of authority, and accurately reflect the participants' culture and representations (Madison, 2011; Huisman, 2008). Lastly, I gained informed consent by asking them if they would like to participate in a short interview after giving them a succinct spiel about my project and after they told me that they had no more than two drinks upon arrival to the bar.

Data Collection

Over a period of seven months from September 2016 to March 2017, I visited the bar every weekend and two varying weekdays (i.e., Monday through Thursday) out of the week. During the weekends, I stayed in the bar for two to three hours and typically arrived between 9pm and 12am; whereas, on weekdays (i.e., Monday through Thursday), I stayed for one to two hours and arrived between 4pm and 7pm. The difference in my time spent at the bar is due to there being more people to interview on weekends and during hours later in the day. I interviewed a total of 17 people using unstructured interviews and engaged in participant observation of the research site. The interviews lasted between 10 to 30 minutes.

To accurately preserve the participants' answers and my site observations, I discreetly recorded their responses and my own personal notes in a pocket-sized notebook while sitting in my car immediately after I had left the bar for the evening. There were five instances throughout the seven-month period when I recorded notes and responses in the notebook when I arrived home from the bar, which is a 15-minute drive. I did not use any other recording devices, such as audio or video recorders to retain

participant trust and comfort. Additionally, I maintained confidentiality by changing the names of the bars and participants to pseudonyms in my research.

Data Analysis

I utilized thematic analysis after data collection. *Thematic analysis*, the most commonly used method in communication research, draws out common themes from several discourses with different participants within a setting (Bell, 2008). I chose this method after finding that my data fit thematic analysis.

From conducting interviews, observations, and retrieving information from recorded data, I construed reoccurring themes that were largely based around a familial/kinship social structure. These subthemes were migration, community (kinship) development, and rituals of hospitality. I formulated these themes from coding keywords, phrases, and observations in my notes that were significant to migration, kinship, and rituals of hospitality. Coded occurrences that signified migration were my observations of participants' travel from one place in the bar to another place, and participants' travel amongst the three Afro bars in Waterloo. Coded occurrences that signified kinship were the amount of instances in an interview that participants referred to other people as either blood or fictive kin relatives. Finally, I coded occurrences that signified rituals of hospitality were the communicative performances patrons engaged in to make new patrons feel "at home."

Thick Description

I added a thick description to the prospectus in order to set the scene of my research site for my audience (Geertz, 1994). I aim to visually bring the audience along

with me to the specific bar and its people that I want to study. The importance of this section is to highlight the adrenaline rush that one may experience going to this bar and to introduce the feeling of adventurous community within and around this space. I describe adventurous community as an unpredictable setting filled with a group of like-minded people aiming to socialize, court, laugh, dance, and drink.

Once I am dressed and in my car, I turn my music from the pop station to one of the three rap and hip hop stations that are on SiriusXM in order to mentally prep myself to visit one of my favorite Afro-frequented spaces in Waterloo. Smooth beats and rhymes fill my sound system and I switch the gear from park to drive and pull off. The highway is nearby, so I automatically increase my speed in 35 mph zones to get to the 65-mph highway ramp to merge. Although I have been pulled over 10 times in the past for speeding, I still try my luck with going 10 miles over the limit as the adrenaline-filled music flows within my car and through my ears. Once I am off the highway into a 55-mph zone, I slow my speed from 75 to 60 since I am in residential street now and do not want to get pulled over by the police. Luckily, I go through every intersection smoothly with constant green lights.

Although I have traveled on this same route to this bar plenty of times, I always forget where the bar is located. Relying more on sensory memory (i.e., sight) than actual direction, I stay on the same road until I come across a winding path with a 35-mph limit and concrete borders that separate the median so that cars will not hit one another if they go too fast around the bend. Once I am through the curve, I immediately recognize the neighborhood of the bar. I pass a few slightly dilapidated houses and establishments such

as a converted gas station, an Afro-frequented restaurant called Salt and Pepper's, and a small used-car dealership. Despite frequent trips to the bar, I still find myself searching along the side of the road. When I spot a large barbecue smoker, I know to slow down, switch on my blinker, turn on my amped up confidence, and, thus, performance, and make a right into the pot-hole filled entrance.

Upon entering the lot, there are two running cars parallel-parked along its entrance with several other cars running in the lot with their lights either on or off. The lot is always half full since I arrive a bit early by Afro folks' terms at 11pm. The appropriate time to arrive is around 12am or 12:30am, sometimes even as late as 1am if the bar closes at 2am to show face and catch the last of the action. I find a parking space at the front of the lot that faces the Kwik Star gas station across the street, and sure enough, at least one of the two cars that surround me still has its drivers inside. To the left of me in a silver 2003 Chevy Impala, there are two women donned in full dress and makeup texting on their phones with another female friend in the back looking at me and/or at my car. I play my music loudly in an attempt to earn my rights to admission into the social space, to show that I am down with having my personal soundtrack. My windows are still up, so my bass is enough to let others know I am playing my music. After fumbling through my purse and making sure my makeup is on point in the rear-view mirror, I feel satisfied that I have earned my keep. I switch off the ignition and exit my car.

Still on stage, I utilize my catwalk skills as I stroll seemingly carelessly through the sound of over-the-top bass from older and newer model cars and SUVs, and the

subtle haze of hand-rolled cigarette smoke. There are usually people standing outside by their cars or sitting inside of them as they make conversation or simply chill. As usual, there is a small group of young and older men chattering around the entrance of the bar who look to me as I approach the door. Being an attractive woman, I almost never have to open the door for myself as one of them usually beats the other in opening the door for me, proving that classic chivalry still exists within our culture. I smile politely and give a courtesy thank you as I stroll through the door. Once I enter the bar space, I immediately look to my left at the bar and barstool area for possible seating but instead choose one of the eight black, round tables to seat myself. The seats are tall, black stools made of leather and are torn and rickety from old age. I always curse the bar for not replacing their depreciating furniture while I carefully try to seat myself gracefully without looking like a pretty fool. Once I am safely seated, I put my purse on the table and finally survey the darkened scene.

In this establishment, the specified spaces are set up within this box of a layout. Upon entering, there is bar area immediately to the left with a wall stocked with liquor and small 32-inch TVs for patrons wanting to eat, drink, and watch television. To the right upon entering are bathrooms for men and women, a touch screen jukebox machine, and an out-of-service ATM. The whole room is carpeted dark blue with the exception of a 12x12 foot, hard wood dance floor off of the corner of the bar space. A wall-to-ceiling mirror meeting the hard wood is at the front of the space for patrons wanting to watch themselves or others dance. If it is a slow night or sports event occurring, patrons have the option to pull down a large projector screen in front of the mirror to watch television.

The combination dance floor and projector area can be viewed from the middle of the space which is filled with black, round tables and tall, black leather barstools. On the other side of the space there are three more 32-inch TVs above five brown and green booth table areas for extra viewing, along with a corner for the disc jockey station for mixing music – typically rap and hip hop – for the whole space to enjoy. Usually, a tall, bald-headed man stands at a computer, never looking up from the screen and constantly clicking keys to transition smoothly to the next song after the previous one ends.

However, it is common for a few men to crowd around the DJ space to request songs or chat with the DJ and amongst one another. Finally, at the back of the space is a designated pool table area that doubles as a photography corner for special events held by the bar, such as birthdays or fashion events. Beside it, there is a kitchen that serves soul food. Customers have to walk up to the window and there is a cook there who will take orders quickly. For newbies, there is a large menu that lists meals that customers choose from if they do not know what they want.

Contemporary hip hop music plays and there are is a group of dressed up women drinking and eating at one of the neighboring tables. Close by, a group of men stoically play pool under a spillage of bright light. Regardless of the individuals who play on any particular night, they almost never look up from their game, and instead focus on the balls rolling on the green or inside sockets. However, I do sometimes catch glimpses of them shaking up with other men who have joined the game, but never engaging in other distractions such as dancing or eyeing attractive men and women who walk by. Judging by their stoic or relaxed facial expressions, another group of men in their late 20s, 30s,

and 40s at a table closest to the touch screen jukebox and broken ATM machine, chat about seemingly important issues. I then check the food service window to see if the light is lit in the kitchen to signify that they are still serving food, just in case I may want to order something later.

Then I take a quick glimpse at the bar in thought of what I would like to drink and then I remember that I have to go to the gas station across the street to get cash. Unfortunately, this space only accepts paper currency. It frequently makes me question whether or not I should get a drink because there is a \$2.50 fee to use the ATM, or I could travel 10 minutes to my local bank to avoid a withdrawal fee. Sometimes I bite the bullet and drive to my bank and other times I decide not have a drink at all. But this time, I bite the bullet, get the cash, and purchase a couple of drinks. I usually tip the waitress one or two dollars to show my appreciation for a strong drink and I sip quickly and quietly as I survey the scene once more. Since returning, there are a few more people present.

Looking towards the bar on the left front side of me, I usually notice one or two “outsiders” (i.e., non-Afro women) huddled at one end of the bar talking to two more Afro women who have maybe brought them here. Because of their physical identity salience, it makes me realize how my own Afro identity disguises me in this particular space, going unnoticed because I meet the unwritten skin color and hair type criteria to be here. Thinking of my identity and soaking in the aura of my melaninated people makes me appreciative to be at peace within this space.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

Finally, out of class and done with the work week, I bump my trap music and carelessly swerve into the parking lot of City Central in preparation for another night of fun at the bar. There are several cars parked in haphazardly to fit the ever-changing organization of the lot since there are no dedicated white lines to establish parking order.

As I check my makeup in my mirror and continue listening to my music, I notice that there are cars leaving only to be replaced by newcomers entering the lot. Cars with blaring loud bass music surround me as well, accompanied by the aroma of tobacco. They leave their cars running as they light cigarettes, talk to their passengers, caress their loved ones, shake their bodies from laughing hard at some joke, and look out to see who is coming and leaving the bar's entrance.

The night is dark and only one streetlight illuminates the parking lot where I am able to scope the brand of cars sitting idle. More new model cars, such as Mercedes Benz, BMW, Jeep, Ford, and Chrysler vehicles not only outnumber but outshine older model cars, such as Pontiac, Chevy, and Oldsmobile vehicles. I imagine what they do for their daily rounds, if their children (if they have any) are put to bed or being baby sat, if they are really smoking blunts instead of cigarettes (which the car next to me confirms with the loud [i.e., obvious] smell of cannabis), and if they will ever leave their cars to venture into the bar.

In this chapter, I explore the ways that Afro bar patrons situate the bar as a location of discursive performance. I use the overarching construct of family to

encompass the relationships amongst the bar patrons who are regulars of City Central, the main bar for Afro folk to congregate in Waterloo. According to my interviews with regular patrons of the bar, all of whom are over 30 years in age, people in the bar claim one another as family, share blood and fictive ties, had grown up together since childhood, worked together in alternate bar and grille establishments, and visit the bar daily.

Here, I utilize the theory of counterpublic discourse, which Felski (1989) and Fraser (1990) define as the proliferation of discursive practices in a safe space constructed and operated by marginalized group members (i.e., those who do not fit the “mythical norm” of white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, cisgender, and Christian/Catholic identities; Lorde, 1984) in reaction to the hostile and oppressive public sphere. Both scholars argue that it is in the best interests of the oppressed members to 1. perform their individual selves and their cultures safely out of the public sphere’s gaze; and 2. organize and strategize political resistance to publicly confront and critique the practices of oppressive structures (Felski, 1989; Fraser, 1990). Counterpublics are not meant to be understood as mere places or spaces but are made up of performative, practical, and linguistic discourses (Felski, 1989; Fraser 1990).

Three themes emerge out of the bar culture’s discursive location: the literal and figurative practices of migration, community (kinship development), and rituals of hospitality. All three components relate to the central, overarching concept of family in that most families tend to migrate together (Johnson & Roseman, 1990), reinforce community with one another (Scannapieco & Jackson, 1996; Taylor & Chatters, 1986;

Taylor, Chatters, Hardison, & Riley, 2001), and perform rituals that strengthen their bonds (Duranti, 1997; Rothenbuhler, 2006).

In the context of my study, I use migration in both in the metaphorical and literal sense— showing the ways that movement within/between spaces characterize the Afro folk bar scene. Migration is the movement of a large group or groups from one place to another in search of better opportunities (Johnson & Roseman, 1990). Kinship development involves treating non-blood related friendships as familial relationships (Scannapieco & Jackson, 1996). Rituals of hospitality strengthen kinship ties via acknowledging one another's existence and solidifying another's membership in a group through sharing customs and routines (Duranti, 1997; Rothenbuhler, 2006). The patrons at the bar play these three themes out in how they move from one bar to another throughout the evening with “the crowd,” integrate friendships into their family structures, and engage repetitious rituals that strengthen family ties with one another – all of which are discursive performances that frames a counterpublic.

Migration

During my first few nights of coming to the bar, I initially found it confusing that some visitors will sit and/or socialize in their vehicles and never venture into the bar. That is until Demon, a regular of the City Central and devout biker of the BC club, asked me if I would rather drink and smoke at home or be in the cut surrounded by others. That is when I realized that City Central is a place to escape, a place transformed into a space by patrons removing their professional façades and white masks to decompress and be

Afro again. It is a space to recover their identities and finally be backstage from eight hours of being onstage to earn their living in the daily round of dealing with white folk.

At the mouth of the bar entrance stands a crew of people shooting the shit, laughing loudly, drinking, and smoking cigarettes. To my right, finally, three women, dressed in body-shaping jeans, heels, whipped hairstyles, and bust-emphasizing blouses, get out of a dark blue, early 2000s model Dodge Durango and head towards the bar's entrance. I was not surprised that the men standing at the bar's entrance zone stare in their direction as the group of women continue their booty-swishing strut to the entryway. From what I could see, the women were nicely dressed for the party occasion and were stunningly beautiful with their hair, makeup, and overall appearance.

Secretly, I am not ashamed to wish my own derriere was as plump as theirs. Then I suddenly worry about doing the very thing that I have studied and protested against in my formative college years: objectifying my very own ethnic and sex group in a hypersexual ideology. Cognitive dissonance fills my heart as I attempt to reconfigure my errant thoughts to appreciate these Afro women as more than a target for carnal urges. Nevertheless, once the trio nears the door, two of the men gesture to open the door for them but, of course, only one manages to complete the gesture with a smile as the women thank them with smiles in return.

Satiated with my review of outside politics for the night, I shut off my engine, get out of the car, and perform my own strut towards the bar while displacing my ever-so-distant insecurities about my physical appearance in the back of my mind and, instead, exude confidence and a badass attitude that encompasses a straight-forward line of

vision, a cocky smile, and a determined strut up my make-believe walkway. Thankfully, the men feed my cry for attention by acknowledging my presence, smiling and nodding, and moving to open the door for me. I thank them politely and continue into the bar.

Once inside, five heads closest to the door spin to look at me enter. I give them a polite smile and move along the bar 'til I see Frankie, a self-identified trans man who has shown me who is who of the bar, where and why "the crowd" moves from bar to bar, and the overall dynamics of the regulars who frequent the space. We greet one another with a hug and I take my place next to him on a stool.

"You want a drink?"

"Nah, I'm good," I look around and notice there are a lot of older patrons at the bar tonight. Usually most go home around nine or ten o'clock on Fridays and Saturdays to avoid the young crowd.

"It's a lot of people here tonight. I'm surprised," I admit to Frankie.

He swallows a sip from his shot glass of vodka, "Yeah, it's darts night, tonight. The darts club is here for their biweekly battle."

"Oh, okay. That makes sense. You guys sure do have a lot of clubs," I jest.

Frankie shrugs, "That's the beauty of City Central, always some new shit going on. Everybody's going to go to North End soon though."

"Oh really?"

He turns to me, "Yeah, they're supposed to be having an event up there for the biker club."

“Damn, where did everybody go?” I notice that now most of the patrons who were at the bar are now crowded around the dart board playing the dozens and playfully belittling the competition of their rival teams.

“I told you they’re playing darts girl. Everybody getting ready to leave in a minute.”

Frankie and I thus commence to bantering back and forth about why I do not want to go out with him to dinner outside of the bar. I explain to him that not only am I not interested in dating anyone but that it is extremely unethical for me as a researcher. This is not the first time we have argued about this, so I find myself barely listening to our conversation because I am looking at the cook hand out Styrofoam boxes insulated in plastic bags to different patrons surrounding the darts board. My mouth starts to water as I smell the food that some of the patrons bring back to the bar to eat. Still, through Frankie’s bantering, I overhear a group of men agree to go outside and smoke. They leave their opened, half-full drinks covered with a napkin at the bar. Nobody touches them nor their seats held by the bartender until they return several minutes later.

By the time that they do come back, Frankie has ceased his bantering and plays a sulking game as he slowly finishes the rest of his shot. I think to myself how can he sip on straight liquor without gagging. I could not handle it. As I am noticing another micro-migration of people move towards the dance floor to groove to the 90s rhythm and blues beat, the waitress unintentionally interrupts my thoughts to ask if I wanted a drink. I decline the offer, and again, after she asks if I am sure and she departs to serve other patrons. I look at the three people dancing on the dance floor and see two older

gentlemen cheer them on as they head to the dance floor as well. I smile in admiration because they are clearly comfortable enough in to start a slow-grooving dance party on a once-empty dance floor by themselves.

I start to think of the times I have done the same at the bars near my undergraduate institution when I had just turned 21, but the peripheral sight of a large mass of people entering the bar distracts me. Including the waitress and myself, about four people turn their heads towards the door as a sound of excited greeting floods the entryway of the bar. Men call out to one another by name, shake hands, hug one another, and asks how each other is doing. I smile at this lovely display of brotherly love and wonder that these are the familial images between Afro men that white America does not get to see... such a shame.

Frankie suddenly snaps me out of my intellectual daze with elbowing me, "I'll be back. My bro is here. Watch my drink for me."

He covers it with a napkin and hops off the chair. He is only 5'5 but marches up to the taller cisgender men with purpose to greet and shake hands with them. In kind, they return the gesture and they talk in elevated voices with smiles on their faces for a joke that was passed between them. A man, who was not a part of the newly arriving group, interrupts their animated banter with tapping Frankie's friend on the shoulder and tilting his head to the side towards the door to signal that they go outside. Frankie's friend nods his head at him, shakes up with Frankie, asks him something that I cannot hear, and Frankie gestures with his hand an affirmation, but holds up his finger to signal that he wait.

Frankie heads back over to me, “We’re about to go to North End. You want to come?” he asks as he grabs his drink and takes the last gulp.

I shrug my shoulders, “Sure,” I grab my coat and begin to depart with them when someone from the bar grabs my arm.

I quickly turn my head and see one of my regular participants, Gloria.

“Hey, girl where you goin’? I was trying to get your attention at the other side of the bar but you acted like you didn’t see me!”

With worried concern that I had slighted one of the participants unintentionally, I reply, “No, I didn’t see you at all! Hey!” I waive in humorous vain, “I’m sorry.”

“Girl, don’t worry about that, ya’ll about to head to North End?”

“Yeah!” I exclaim even though I am wondering how she knows. Later, I will realize it is simply the wave of migration amongst the bars, a phenomenon that I will participate in regularly over the coming months of my research. She agrees that she will meet us there after she finishes her drink and shooting the shits with her cousins who had just arrived. I wave goodbye and head to my car to follow the modest fleet of seven cars that just departed to head to North End.

Migration is a predominant theme found in Afro culture due to the African presence in virtually every continental space before European colonialization and expansion, a historical migration often neglected and unreported in world history (Fernandez-Armesto, 1987; Van Sertima, 1976). Afro movement patterns and tendencies are also symbolized by the significant number of people migrating from the south to the north when slavery was abolished and when jobs became available to them north of the

Mason-Dixon Line post-Civil War (Tolnay, 2003). Typically, it was easier for the family if the husband or both of the parents left their children in the south to find work up north, and then later send for the children and/or the extended family to relocate with them after the parent(s) secured employment (Gottlieb, 1978; Grossman, 1989; Tolnay, 2003).

Usually, with the movement of people includes the similar conveyance of culture, where Southern families brought their southern values with them, specifically the concept of community building and maintaining the family, up north (Barnes, 1981).

Themes of literal and symbolic migration permeate in this bar's culture where most of the participants, migrated from the south or east to settle in Iowa. Of the regular bar patrons, two middle-aged female participants relocated to Iowa from Illinois with their families to secure better employment. Similarly, during childhood, eight middle-aged men moved from Arkansas and Mississippi with their families to find better employment opportunities up north as well. A large tractor corporation is one of the main employers that brought many of the patrons to Iowa for employment.

One of the new people in the bar, Joanna, told me that she was originally from Mississippi and relocated to Iowa with her family after her father secured employment at the tractor company. Soon enough, by way of an uncomfortable introduction, I found out that she was also the girlfriend of a male patron, Luis, who I spoke to frequently in the bar. What made my meeting her personally uncomfortable was that Luis flirted with me several times to no avail. Unfortunately, one of the other male patrons, Tim, who I also spoke to frequently knew of Luis's advances and introduced Joanne as Luis's girlfriend with a crooked smile on his face and mischievous gleam in his eye. My eyelids opened

wide and my heart started beating several pumps per second. The last thing I needed for my research site was there to be a scene where I was accused of courting another patron's significant other. Of course, this was my first time ever hearing that Luis had a romantic partner and I only hoped that she had no idea that her man was constantly trying to take me out to dinner every time we ran into one another at the bar.

So after being introduced to Joanna, I felt that I had no choice but to engage in small talk with her as we were watching Luis, Tim, and the owner of the bar play pool, "So what brought you to Iowa?" I asked.

"I was born and raised here," she said with a sweet smile.

"Oh really? Your family is originally from here?"

"Yeah, my parents are, but my grandparents and their parents are originally from Mississippi."

I gasped and shook my head, "Everyone is from Mississippi here! You're like the umpteenth person I met whose family is from Mississippi."

She laughs and nods, "Yeah, it's a lot of us up here."

"Is the tractor company what brought them up here?"

"Yup," she nods, "And I work there too."

"Oh really? As what?"

"A supervisor."

Patrick, a middle-aged male participant, moved to Iowa when he was a young adult to escape ethnicist police brutality in Mississippi to live with family who were already settled in Iowa. He, too, works at the tractor corporation in machinery. I asked all

of them if they would ever move back to the states they came from now that they are financially secured and all told me no due to the establishment of both employment and familial roots in Iowa. However, they particularly emphasized that they would not relocate due to the importance of staying close to family.

“Nah, I wouldn’t ever go back down there to Mississippi to live. I’d sure as hell visit because I still have family down there, but I wouldn’t go back down to live.”

“Why not,” I ask before I sip on a glass of water.

“Because, them policemen used to love picking me up. That’s why I have a record now. I was a young buck, getting into trouble by minding my own business. That’s what they like to do, fuck with you when you’re minding your own. That’s why I moved up here with my grandparents. My momma got tired of me getting into trouble with the law and fightin’, so she packed me up and sent me up here to be with my grandma. Found work at the factory and had a job ever since. Now I’m making good money and my daughters are up here. I wouldn’t go back. I love Mississippi, I’m a Mississippi boy ‘til the day that I die, but I wouldn’t go back down there.”

The history of migration continues to play a role in the formation of social circles in Iowa. Because of the tractor company, Waterloo has the highest Afro population percentage in Iowa (IowaDataCenter.gov, 2016); however, there is a small selection of social spaces dedicated to fostering and supplementing Afro culture and comfort.

There are three major bars that patrons visit: City Central, BC, and North End. Many of the participants labeled City Central as the central meeting place to meet their friends and other Afro folk who want to connect with one another in a social space. BC is

an unlicensed social bar that is owned by one of the patrons and is the site for motorcycle functions for their local, Afro-owned biker club. North End is a club that used to be co-owned by Dale, but is now owned by one man, Ricky, who I did not have the pleasure of meeting. From what the participants told me, Dale and Ricky co-owned North Central but split their partnership due to irreconcilable differences.

However, although City Central remains the central meeting place for patrons to gather, create community, and maintain their kinship networks, the patrons do not view it as their sole discursive location. Rather, they migrate to a variety of Afro bar spaces – a practice that circulates not only their bodies but discourses across multiple spaces where they can (re)produce and (re)establish their cultural selves and sense of community. All three of the bars serve as locations where discourses of resistance circulate, but the participants acknowledge and claim City Central as their primary hub of community.

It is important to note that this migration from bar to bar is not synonymous with bar hopping. Moving together signifies and strengthens their community bonding since a large group of people migrate in group cohesiveness instead of two or three people moving from bar to bar in small units. Since the patrons migrate amongst the three Afro-owned bars that are owned by members in their familial structure, the Afro dollar and proliferation of discourses stay within the kinship network.

Community (Kinship Development)

Throughout studies of Afro American family structures, familial networks of kinship continue to arise out of non-biological relationships, or building community (Taylor et al., 2001). Scannapieco and Jackson (1996) describe kinship as non-blood or

non-marital relationships between people who share benefits and responsibilities, which are typically prescribed within blood- or marital-related families, amongst one another. This sort of relationship arises out of friendships developed in church, between neighbors, childhood friends, and visitors of a same venue (i.e., bars, schools, and workplaces; Taylor & Chatters, 1986; Taylor et al., 2001). Thus, physical institutions offer places where people can build community with one another and relocate established relationships to another larger common ground: the bar.

While having a club soda with a fellow patron, I asked Jeremy's relation to KB, "So how long have you been kicking it with KB?"

He scrunches up his brow and smiles, "I've been knowing that bastard since we were kids! We grew up together."

"Oh so you guys are related?"

"Shit, damn near. I call him my cousin, but we're not really blood related though. That doesn't matter because I still see him as my cousin. The owner, KB, and me all grew up together around these people."

"So you guys basically have the same circle of friends, huh?"

"Yup, pretty much. We all know one another, ran in the same circles, have family that's married to one another. Shit KB's auntie was my cousin's best friend's sister. I don't know if you can follow that, but I guess it's the best way to put it."

Historically, the kinship system developed from traditional roots of Afrocentricity and African familial systems, in which rearing children was the community's responsibility as a whole and, in turn, those children would care for older adults when

they matured themselves (Asante, 1991; Johnson, 1999). Coincidentally, this systematic pattern of communal responsibility within the familial structure was also shown on slave plantations (Scannapieco & Jackson, 1996). New coming enslaved folk, who were ripped from their families and placed on different plantations by white slave traders, owners, and catchers, were cared for by the enslaved adults who were already there (Scannapieco & Jackson, 1996). Thus, informally adopting unrelated people as kin was passed down to the Afro family structure (Scannapieco & Jackson, 1996).

For instance, Patrick, the middle-aged gentleman who moved to Iowa to escape ethnicist police in Mississippi, referred to another patron, KP, as his brother when I asked how he knew him by way of casual conversation about his family.

“KP makes sure to check in on them for me since I have to travel out of town to Sioux Falls for work.”

“You let him watch your daughters?” Initially, I was shocked that he allowed a man that was not related to him around his young daughters, and I guess that shock showed on my face because he returned the side eye that I was giving him.

“Yeah? That’s my brother. Ain’t nothing wrong with their uncle watching them or checking in on them.”

“Yeah, but he’s not really their uncle, right?”

“No, but kin is kin. You don’t have to share blood to be my brother. Once we have an eye to eye understanding about where we stand as men, as brothers, we good. There’s no in between. You’re either my brother or someone I just work with. That’s that Mississippi raising right there.”

Through these interactions and conversations I had with several patrons, I had the chance to observe how they read and treated one another as family. They would exemplify this by referring explicitly to one another as cousins, sisters, brothers, and aunties even though they were not biologically related.

Even though there were many fictive kin relationships (Chatters, Taylor, & Jayakody, 1994) among patrons in the bar, there were indeed patrons who were related by blood and marriage. As for fictive kin relationships, many patrons were quick to label another patron as their family (Chatters, Taylor, & Jayakody, 1994). On a random weekday night, I was telling Frankie about how I never saw the new, young bartender serving drinks the night before. He then informed me that she was his niece (by blood) and that she only bartended in the middle of the week, not the weekends when I usually went to the bar. Another woman, Carmel, had several family members working for bars that “the crowd” migrated to during different points of the evening. Hearing of all these family ties made me question how anyone dated other Afro folk in Waterloo without them being related to one another in some way. My suspicions about the strain to date among locals were confirmed by another female participant making a joke about how men usually “jumped on” (i.e., quickly courted) women who were new arrivals in town.

After my paranoia of being accused of courting her man waned, I continued conversation with Joanna, Luis’s girlfriend, when she asked, “How about you? Are you from Waterloo?”

“Oh, no, I’m from Indianapolis. I just came here for graduate school.”

“Over there in Cedar Falls at UNI?”

“Yeah.”

“Oh that’s cool. So other than UNI you’ve never been in Iowa before?”

“No, not ever. I barely know anyone here besides people here at the bar who I interview.”

“Oh wow, so you’re new meat, huh?” she asks loudly, “These men will be all over you if you’re not careful, girl. They love newcomers.”

I cringe inside and give her an awkward smile thinking that her man was one of the men she was referring to.

However, Luis was not the only man who attempted to initiate a romantic or sexual relationship with me at the bar. Even though the patrons’ cultural performances aligned more with familial networking than sexual conquests, there were instances where men attempted to court women who I did not recognize as regular members of the bar’s core kinship group. This happened with myself in beginning this research where men, including Frankie, would assume heterosexuality on my part by flirting with me to discover any desires on my part to sleep with them. However, after I rejected many advances from several men, I assumed that the men held the reasoning that since I was not “fuckable,” that I might as well had been their fictive sister. Two and a half months later, I felt that I was finally adopted into this family since I did not solicit or accept any sexual or romantic interests.

Additionally, many of the participants preferred to do things together instead of alone, such as migrate to different bars, drink together, and speak with one another in the

bar. As previously mentioned with migration, I observed several of the participants preparing to go to another bar to follow “the crowd.”

“You coming?” Frankie asked once we saw a congregation of eight people gathered at the bar’s doorway.

“Y’all are going to North End, right?” I respond.

“Yeah, you need a ride?”

“No, I’m good. I have my own car, I’ll just drive over there.”

“Alright, I’mma holla’ at my man Vic and I’ll meet you there.”

“Okay.”

He gets up from his seat and walks to the growing crowd at the door. I turn back to a Tina, a middle-aged woman who I was interviewing at the time, “You heading to North End, too?”

“Is that where everyone is going?” she asks with a scrunched-up brow.

“Yeah.”

“Yeah, I’ll be there in a minute once I finish my drink.”

“Okay.”

I wanted to be nice and build rapport with a new participant I had interviewed once before by waiting for her to finish her drink, but I noticed she had only taken two additional sips in the last 15 minutes and I started to get a little impatient. By this time, Frankie and “the crowd” had already left to North End, and I desperately wanted to keep up with the movement and action.

Tina started up conversation with another and continued taking one sip at a time. Politely, I asked, "Were you still thinking about heading over or were you trying to stay here?"

"I'll be over there in a minute. I was just going to follow you there in my car when we left."

"Oh, well I think I'm going to head over there and I'll just meet you there, okay? Just text me when you get there."

She nods and says, "Okay, I will."

I headed to North End and was there for 30 minutes relishing the live scene of my people, Afro folk, in the parking lot. There were rows of parked cars everywhere, parked more neatly and orderly than at City Central. It was my intention to go inside but I was content observing the public scene that was going on outside. People were walking around in between cars, talking with drivers and passengers of numerous cars. Around me, I see women in an old Oldsmobile lighting up cigarettes to smoke, talking and looking into the glare of their illuminated cell phones. On the other side of me, I see two men sitting in a black Chrysler 300 smoking cigars. It was particularly warm out so I had my windows up and the air on to prevent the humidity and insects from disrupting my observation.

Through my vents, the potent smell of marijuana infiltrates my car cabin along with smooth R&B music that plays from my speakers. The scene relaxes me so much that I almost forget that Tina never contacted me about her arrival to North End. I guess she was still sipping on her drink or perhaps had another.

If one patron was still finishing his or her drink and/or talking to another patron, their friend would wait patiently until they were done to drive to the different location together regardless if they were driving in the same or separate cars. Leaving a friend behind resulted in them not following the person who left them. As part of maintaining community, patrons do not leave family behind, or else they will get left behind in return. In order to sustain family ties, one must always prioritize, not disregard, others like they are meaningless.

Rituals of Hospitality

Announcing Presence and Departure

For rituals, many patrons value and engage in the ritual of formal greetings by announcing one's presence with saying hello and announcing departure by bidding goodbye. Many patrons look toward the door when someone enters in order to not only see who is arriving but if they warrant a greeting or not. Of course, familiar folk will receive verbal (i.e., spoken greeting) and physical (i.e., handshakes, hugs, backslaps) greetings and strangers will get nods, smiles, stares or nothing at all from what I have observed. To not say hello to someone for whatever reason warranted an affronted person getting another's attention by either calling their name, coming up to them and asking why they did not say hello, or staring at them until they acknowledge the other's existence. Not announcing presence or acknowledging someone familiar who has arrived has slight consequences, such as an offended person giving the transgressor a questioning look or faux attitude during conversation. Similarly, not announcing departure and

abruptly leaving will result in faux attitudes and questioning (i.e., questions about the reasoning of their departure) the next time they visit the bar.

After speaking with several people at the bar, I started putting my phone and wallet in my purse in preparation to leave.

“Well, I think I’m about to head out of here,” I announce to Frankie and Carlotta, two participants whom I was speaking with.

“Oh really?” Frankie asks.

“Calling it a night, huh?” Carlotta responds.

“Yeah, I’m tired, plus I have a paper due tomorrow I need to edit,” I admit.

“Okay, well have a good night,” Frankie says, “Do you want me to walk you out?”

“No, I’m fine, but thanks.”

“No problem, hun, have a good night,” bids Frankie.

“You too, bye Carlotta.”

“See ya,” she gives me a wave of her hand.

I make my way along the bar’s counter and see KB near the door speaking with another man. He catches sight of me as I near him and he gives me a big smile, “Hey, Jessany! How you doin’, girl?”

He opens his arms and I walk right into his hug, “I’m fine, how are you?”

“I’m good,” he responds once we separate from our hug, “You leaving?”

“Yeah, I’ve been here for a while.”

“A while?” he exclaims and his smile turns into a frown, “How long have you been here?”

“I don’t know, for about an hour.”

“An hour? I’ve been here for an hour and a half. How come you didn’t come over and say hi?”

I could tell by his scowl and the increasing volume in his tone that he was not pleased with me.

“That ain’t right, man,” he finishes.

I grin slightly out of nervousness, “I’m sorry. I saw you earlier, but you were talking to someone and I didn’t want to interrupt. Plus I was talking to Frankie and Carlotta.”

“You still could’ve said hi to somebody,” he says.

“Well, my bad, I’m saying hello now. Hi, KB,” I smile sweetly.

His furrowed brow loosens and he gives me a smirk, “Whatever.”

Therefore, the validation of identity is critically important and constructs an outing to the bar as similar to going to a family dinner: one does not simply show up to the table and not say hello. Likewise, one does not simply get up from the dinner table once finished with a meal and then leave without saying goodbye to each family member. Plainly speaking, patrons consider the lack of interpellation rude and offensive because it signals that one did not care about them, and family is supposed to care.

Providing (Drinks)

Drinking, on the other hand, seems to be the logical activity once a person has spent a considerable amount of time in the bar. Upon arriving to the bar and taking a seat either at the bar, in one the booths, or at the round tables, a waitress will come to a patron and offer them something to drink within five minutes of being there. Since the waitresses are required to only be behind the bar and serve drinks, one of them informed me that they go from behind the bar to offer drinks out of hospitality. Another act of familial hospitality was to provide if someone was without. On several occasions, many patrons, bartenders, and even Dale, the owner, offered me free drinks from time to time without expecting anything in return.

I started having a conversation with a participant when one of the bartenders offered, "Do you want a drink?"

"No, I'm fine for right now, but thank you."

"You sure?"

"Yeah, thanks."

I look back to the participant I was casually interviewing, and he was just staring at me with wide eyes.

"What?"

"You sure you don't want a drink? I could get you one if you want to?"

"No, I'm good. Thank you."

In the distance, I see a small uproar when Dale enters the bar. He starts hugging or shaking hands with people seated along the bar's counter. He eventually makes his

way down to us to hug the man I was talking to and then hugs me, “Where’s your drink, little mama?”

“Oh, I’m not drinking tonight.”

His brow furrows like I had just spoken a language he did not understand, “Why not?”

I felt confused on why this was such a hard concept for people to understand, “I stopped drinking recently, so I’m on break.”

“Okay, well if you want something just let me know and it’s on the house, okay?” he gestures.

“Okay, thanks Dale.”

“Yup.”

From this instance and several other similar instances where folk have offered me and many others drink on their dime, I have found that if one does not have the means (for a drink), another provides. The gesture of wanting to provide is an example of hospitable rituals within the family structure (Alderman & Modlin, 2013).

Preservation of Property

Another way that the patrons ritualize familial care is safe-guarding property (i.e., watching over seats and possessions). There could be five empty seats at the bar but either the patron or the bartender will tell another patron gently that the seats are reserved for those who requested them to be held. From frequenting the bar often, I found that bar space with electronics and/or empty or half-filled drinks in front of them meant that a seat

was reserved. When there were drinks left at the bar by patrons who decided to venture outside or to another part of the space, they were typically covered with napkins.

I was sitting with Frankie and we had just finished a conversation about investing in stocks and running a successful business. He puts a couple of napkins on his beer and shot glass of vodka.

“Why do you do that?” I ask without missing a beat.

“Do what?” he responds.

“Put napkins over your drinks whenever you do outside to smoke?”

“For protection.”

Now I was even more confused, “Then why don’t you take your drinks with you outside then?”

He shoots me a quick smile, “That’s illegal, girl! You can’t drink outside.”

“Oh, yeah, right,” I respond sheepishly, feeling like I should’ve known that.

“Besides,” he continues with taking a carton of cigarettes out of his pocket, “Ain’t nobody gonna’ do nothing.”

I shake my head and look down the bar to see that there are indeed multiple drinks left on the bar’s counter with napkins placed over them. I see a group of three people return to the bar’s counter to sit down and retrieve some napkin-covered drinks that were left there.

Again, leaving electronics and opened drinks at the bar to revisit and claim later shows complete trust in fellow patrons due the ideology that family would not ever steal from or harm one another (Alderman & Modlin, 2013).

Conclusion

In all, I found that the patrons of City Central situate the bar as not only a site of resistance, but as a safe haven to communicatively perform their culture without the surveillance of the dominant public. I define the patrons' organization and purpose in this enclave to gather, perform, and proliferate cultural discourses, but they do not seek to reenter the public sphere to demand systematic change. The two important aspects of resistance here are that Afro folk are gathering and performing their culture freely and safely out of the surveilling gaze of the public sphere.

Application to the Construction of Gender

Concerning the dynamic of gender constructions, I noticed that both men and women carried out prescribed masculine- and feminine-coded roles in the bar space. For instance, many men upheld the prescribed responsibility of being the provider and caretaker of the family with offering to buy drinks and preserve the property of others. Some women also exemplified the motherhood/caretaker role by bringing children into the bar while they were picking up food or stopping in to greet some of the patrons. These instances happened mostly on weekdays in the early evening where I would assume that the women had just gotten off work and picked their children up from school.

Many of the men also performed prescribed suitor roles when those who attempted to court me assumed of my heterosexuality and singleness. These assumptions were indicative of heteronormativity since most of the patrons in the bar were already married or spouses to opposite-sex partners, had children as products of a heterosexual couplings, visited the bar in two's and three's, and that the only "out" non-

heteronormative individual in the space was Frankie. He made his trans identity known by wearing masculine clothing and jewelry, flirting with women, and openly claiming his trans identity. Even though I did not identify as heterosexual but loving of all gender identities, I did not make my sexual identity outwardly known besides disclosing it to those who inquired – which was the same thing as making it publicly known since word and gossip circulates quickly in the bar.

Familial Themes

Thus, through studying the bar as a site of counterpublicity of the bar, I generated three familial themes. Just like the African presence in pre-colonial history, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the Great Migration, Afro folk still exercise literal and symbolic movement from place to place. Seldom does anyone move alone or in pairs, but often in groups of five or more people to another safe space within their discursive network (i.e., City Central, BC, and North End). Examples of this movement can take the form of small-scale movement (i.e., moving from different points inside the bar space or outside of the establishment) or large-scale movement (i.e., moving from one bar to another). With that movement fosters and supplements family and community involvement, in which hospitable rituals strengthen and reinforce familial ties by way of recognizing and acknowledging family/kinship members with greetings, providing, and preserving property.

From the familial themes, I saw that the patrons upheld their kinship network by practicing these discursive performances at City Central. According to traditional counterpublic theory (Felski, 1989; Fraser, 1990; Mansbridge, 1996; Squires, 2002),

patrons would not be able to, or at least they would have a difficult time, performing these behaviors comfortably within the gaze of the dominant public. Similar to how whites virtually erased and hid the history of the ancient and pre-colonial, intercontinental African presence from history, destroyed families and societal structures of African families during slavery and the time of Jim Crow, the patrons' communal structures would be vulnerable to the public's surveillance (Berlant & Warner, 1998; Squires, 2002). Therefore, patrons situate their communicative culture in this discursive location of the bar to resist the public's destructive critique.

Even though patrons use the bar to undress from their professional facades of the day and rebuild their sanities and sense of Afroness again through interacting with their fictive family, they do not have a *modus operandi* to demand systematic change from the dominant public. Therefore, the patrons' absence of oscillation reinforces the finding of City Central as an enclaved space (Squires, 2002). This discursive location serves as a space to facilitate a sense of family, provide relief from the stringent work day, and nurture community among patrons. In this next chapter, I will explore this theme of resistance through familial ties as a way to offer an Afro-centric extension of counterpublic literature.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Purpose

Overall, the purpose of my research was to contribute Afro-centered scholarly work to the social sciences. I explored how Afro folk performatively use a bar space to constitute an (enclaved) counterpublic within a predominately white area. My thesis sought to address two research questions. First, I wanted to know what communicative practices characterize Afro bar culture. Through my results chapter, I detailed how Afro folk characterized their cultures in the bar by engaging in communicative practices that utilized shared stories of migration, prized blood and fictive kinship ties to others, and engaged in hospitality rituals as ways of constituting the space as quintessentially Afro. Second, I wanted to explore how Afro folk's discursive performances in an Afro bar constitute an enclaved space that proliferates multiple discourses. In this chapter, I build upon the insights I gleaned through answering my first research question to address the relationship between Afro bar culture and counterpublic scholarship.

In addition to the theoretical implication for counterpublics, I return to my autoethnobiographical lens to detail how the process of this thesis has influenced my thinking as a college-educated, working class, Afro woman of color. In the reflexive section, I review the findings of my ethnography and return to reflexively explore how this project has been meaningful for me. In doing so, I show how this project has led me to insights about myself as an Afro woman living in predominately white spaces. Furthermore, I detail how inhabiting the Afro bar space helped me reevaluate and renew

my commitment to my people and their struggles under white supremacy. Finally, I show how I grew more into my ethnicized womanhood by being encircled by those who shared my history, heritage, and culture. In this environment, I managed to not only conduct an Afro-focused study, but thrive in a community that fostered my self-love and Afrocentricity by it encouraging ethnic behavior, discourse, and perspectives that were suppressed in my majority white academic community. In studying the culture in this bar, I managed to find a diamond in the rough with discovering a supportive familial network in one of the predominantly-Afro neighborhoods of Waterloo.

Relation to the Literature

Enclaves are hidden, safe, discursive locations that have access to the dominant public if it desires (i.e., for the purpose of working and seeking public services like government support and childcare; Hunter, 2010; Squires, 2002). When performing within the public sphere, marginalized groups engage in “public transcripts” and communicatively perform their true selves in enclaves with “hidden transcripts” (Squires, 2002). “Public transcripts” reinforce and reinstate classist, ethnicist, and sexist hierarchal social order and marginalized individuals may use this during weekly involvement in the predominantly white workplace (Squires, 2002). On the other hand, “hidden transcripts” contradict the hierarchal social order and proliferate multiple discourses beneficial to the counterpublic, which define Afro culture and spaces (Squires, 2002). Therefore, I argue that the bar functions as an enclaved location and that the culture itself is counterpublic.

With a counterpublic being an ethnic discursive and practical performance (Felski, 1989; Fraser, 1990; Squires, 2002), I argue that the patrons transform City

Central into a discursive location of counterpublicity by performing three familial themes: migration, community (kinship) development, and rituals of hospitality. Thus, the bar's culture is counterpublic and grants the patrons with a carved-out enclave to safely perform their multiple discourses (Squires, 2002). Since the patrons withdraw willingly out of the public sphere to proliferate their cultural performances, their site of resistance remains out of the surveillance of the white gaze. Additionally, despite Felski (1989) and Fraser (1990) arguing that it would be better for counterpublics to oscillate (i.e., reenter the public sphere and demand change to oppressive structures) between spheres, the patrons demonstrate no desire to do so. Instead, they relish in the fact that they have an enclave to perform their culture in the company of their kinship network rather than focusing on the strains of white oppressive structures in the public sphere.

Because Afro culture is counterpublic, the patrons represent the history of their discursive fluidity through their continuous migration. Both literal and figurative, their movement develops their discourses, discursive bodies, and performances as they migrate from enclave to enclave (i.e., City Central, BC, and North End). In this network, they perform their culture by engaging in practices that solidifies them as a counterpublic family unit. Migrating should not be misunderstood as bar hopping, which is understood as a one or two people making an intentional effort to find the most fun scene in the space of a single night. Rather, participants engaged in migration are often in a large group of five or more people who move within an established enclaved network owned by kin members to proliferate discursive culture.

Establishing community and kinship ties amongst one another is critically important because it marks and solidifies membership in discursive locations. The kinship system and performances that occur within the bar “counter” the idea of not only stereotypic idea of Afro leisure as criminal (Austin, 1998), but that meaningful, long-lasting familial relationships take precedence over casual, transitory, and meaningless relationships. These relationships also defy traditional societal standards concerning familial relationships by many of them not being related by blood – but still treat one another as blood-related kin.

Rituals are discursive practices that form the backbone of the community and kinship network that proliferates its culture from enclave to enclave. Additionally, Asen (2000) posits that one of the main purposes of a counterpublic is for members to build coalition amongst themselves in a “behind the scenes” type of operation. I argue that the way participants perform in the bar is strikingly similar to this aspect of Asen’s (2000) counterpublic theory in performing shared rituals with one another (i.e., announcing arrival and departure, providing [drinks], and safeguarding property [i.e., saving seats]). Those who habitually perform these practices allows members to sift out who is real family and who is not.

Finally, Felski (1989), Fraser (1990), and Inwood (2011) posit that another important focus in counterpublics is for members to engage in transformative discourse that resists and helps them overcome the oppressive power structures that threaten and critique their interests, needs, and identities. In this, I argue again that although patrons freely chose to establish City Central as an outlet to heal and “recharge the battery” in

dealing with oppressive structures in society (i.e., the workplace). They gather together at the end of the work day outside of the public gaze to undress themselves of their white facades and reclaim their Afro identities through shared and celebrated discursive performances.

Autoethnobiographical Reflexivity

In returning to my journey as a “historied” individual (Berry, 2013), I reflect on the depth and critical knowledge about Afro folk—our histories, passions, and relationships—and its influence on my identity development. Using my knowledge as a “historied” woman in returning back to a predominantly Afro, working class space, I found that I was able to (re)assimilate with my people after being away (in the world of white academia) for so long. Surprisingly, most likely due to my shared identities with the group, I was able to assimilate fairly quickly into the group and its culture after passing one critical, preliminary test: accepting myself so that others could accept me as well.

Due to my childhood experiences of having my gender and ethnic authenticity critiqued by those sharing my ethnic identity, I came into the bar believing that I would face similar instances there considering that it was an all-Afro bar. Unfortunately, I was not wrong, but I found myself having to quickly grow thick skin in order to deflect what they thought to be harmless jokes. I felt that I had to quickly mature to study the family so that I could establish rapport, show that “I’m down and will roll with the punches,” and demonstrate a faux invulnerability. Interestingly enough, I found that I had gone through an almost overnight remedy for my personal insecurities in order to show my

face the next day at the bar. Thus, I attribute that result to the familial “tough love” that I experienced at the bar, that if the world had not already taught me to grow thicker skin by now that they would... and they did! In order to show my authentic interest in them, I had to first be authentic with myself.

In forming relationships with patrons and understanding their culture by establishing rapport and recording their stories, I fulfilled a meaningful purpose in wanting to contribute Afro-based research to academia. I did this by situating my present self in an Afro counterpublic to develop a deeper understanding and knowledge of my ethnic group. Throughout my study, I was able to put aside my own stereotypes about urban, casual bar culture when I learned of the family structure between patrons in this bar. They provided me with a different perspective in that bar patrons were more than happy to “reunite” and kick back with one another from the work day while even greeting the occasional stranger instead of completely ignoring them. In bar settings, I thought many assumed the persona of suspicious, unattached small-talk, but I found that they taught me through engaging in several conversations that strangers could be trusted and that others will listen when you need a listening ear. This experience did not heighten any personal sense of self love, but it did heighten my ability to break down my personal barriers in speaking with people since I grew accustomed to the open, family atmosphere of the bar.

I made sense of my “historied” self and established comfort within the counterpublic of my ethnic group by learning that the aggressive, almost “bully-like” barricade of the tight-knit family is just that: a façade. I learned to be patient with

(re)acculturating to this group of ethnic peers and to accept myself as a cultural anomaly so that others could, too, accept me as well. I found that my awkwardness was not overlooked, but disregarded as they considered me part of the bar's family after being initiated by Frankie.

“Hey, who is this pretty young lady you’re talking to?” asks a short gentleman who I later learned was a mortician and funeral director in Waterloo.

Frankie acknowledges him with a nod of his head and shakes his hand before replying with a smile, “This is my homegirl, Jessany. She’s cool people and doing a research study on us.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, by seeking to explore how Afro folk create and (re)produce their communicative culture in an enclaved discursive location of counterpublicity, I reflected their experiences and maintenance of their community through an autoethnobiographical lens. Through this lens, I critiqued myself and my progression from a girl in an ethnic, working-class neighborhood, to a rising scholar in academia, back to a predominantly Afro counterpublic as an Afrocentric, college-educated individual. This circular progression demonstrates my development as a “historied” individual. Through my participatory observation and situating of the self within City Central, I found that its patrons created and utilized the bar as a discursive, enclaved space by migrating together, establishing community, and performing shared rituals that reinforced their familial bonds out of white surveillance – a community network which I had the opportunity to explore, understand, and memorialize through this research study.

I argue that the patrons of this bar make it function as a safe enclave for organization out of the gaze of the public sphere. I see the people in the bar “countering” against the public (Asen, 2000) with their performances of familial structure and defiance of societal expectations. More so, the bar culture functions mostly as an enclaved space to undress their cloaks of white performances from the work day and re-center themselves in their Afrocentricity with their fellow kin members. Finally, I argue that the patrons indeed resist white hegemonic society by establishing and thriving in a self-made Afro community where they can safely enjoy the fruits of a fictive family reunion every day.

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