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Rhythms of Resistance: Black Masculinities Through the Lens of Jazz

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ABSTRACT

The thesis investigates black masculinity in relation to music, a form of art that, possibly more than others, allowed musicians and singers to renegotiate the prejudices concerning their blackness and gender. Black music also worked as a tool to destabilize accepted notions, such as black inferiority. I will analyze recorded musical performances, especially in jazz, to understand how black male identity has been shaped. In particular, through different musical icons, I will explore issues related to the association between gender and musical instruments, homosexuality, disability, and aging in the black community.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to be a real man? Within the field of Gender Studies, in the 1980s research on masculinity came to light as a necessary complement of Women's Studies to answer this tough question. Manhood is not specifically related to men but it is a performance, thus several types of masculinities do exist. However, even today people do not have a clear idea of what masculinity means: being greatly influenced by societal stereotypes and fixed norms, there is the belief that the "real" man does not show emotions but rather aggression, power, and dominance over women and minor categories, including black people. This thesis aims to explore the notion of masculinity, particularly black masculinity in the United States, which is classified as marginal and not recognized. In particular, it investigates its redefinition within jazz music, a vital instrument for African American people to express, negotiate, and reinforce their manhood.

The problem of this research lies in the first place in the understanding of the concept of masculinity, indeed, a white, heterosexual male is typically what comes to mind when one thinks of the dominant ideal of masculinity; moreover, the current society is experiencing the "Boy Crisis", in other words, young males have behavioral disorders due to toxic notions such as hegemonic masculinity. In the second place, as bell hooks stated "This is a culture that does not love black males … And that especially most black men do not love themselves". It is crucial to recognize that they do not share the same standpoint as white men as far as their nature of masculinity is concerned. African Americans more than white males lack the comprehension to express how they feel, not to mention that they are feared and victimized by the negative stereotypes born in the nineteenth century that are still in the collective consciousness.

The main aim of this thesis is to analyze the notion of black masculinity from various perspectives, that is to say, considering Gender Studies, Jazz Studies and black performance, Black Disability Studies, and Ageing Studies. To achieve this objective, I will adopt a multidisciplinary approach, combining interviews and biographies of eminent jazz musicians, surveys, personal experiences, and some primary sources for each field of study.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters. The first chapter examines what is meant by masculinity and the various performances of the notion, among which are toxic and hegemonic masculinity. It also points out the importance of recognizing Black Masculinity Studies as a distinct field of research in which black men have their place.

The second chapter looks at black art as a ritual moment that is necessary to destabilize misrepresentations of what African American people are affected by and to create a space that does not exist elsewhere. Jazz music, the main focus of this research, has been and still is a vital instrument for black men to express, negotiate, and creatively reinforce black manhood. Many black icons will be helpful to read Harlem from various perspectives, still not often spoken about, including the fact that in the 1920s Harlem was the epicenter of the cultural coming-out movement and had the highest concentration of men willing to go out in public in drag. In the end, it will follow an examination of jazz musical instruments, typically considered female but used to assert masculinity.

The third and final chapter is dedicated to a recent field of studies, Black Disability Studies, and how black disabled men perform and redefine their masculinity, especially through bodily performances in jazz music. Moreover, there is a focus on the jazz performances of eminent senior musicians who have declared the benefits of the Third and Fourth ages and a sense of personal autonomy contrary to common stereotypes.

CHAPTER I

BLACK MASCULINITY

1.1. What is Masculinity?

Since the 1980s a new and fascinating branch of Gender Studies has developed, Masculinity Studies, which has attracted academic contributions, especially from the Anglo-Saxon world. The main idea of this interdisciplinary field is that masculinity or manhood, should not be seen as an accepted category, but should be made explained, highlighted, and studied. In the words of the scholar Antony Easthope, "Social change is necessary and a precondition of such change is an attempt to *understand* masculinity, to make it visible" (Reeser 16)[1]. This type of study was inspired by feminist theory. It was closely correlated with it until the 1980s so that it was sometimes difficult to draw a clear line between Masculinity Studies and feminism (16).

Throughout the 1990s, the terms "masculinity" and "masculinities" came to substitute "Men's studies", thus, masculinity research moved into the field of Gender Studies. This shift occurred because the basic notion of manhood has changed over time due to the development of society and culture, and the passage of time. Academics have viewed masculinity as plural while acknowledging that it tends to exhibit some recurring characteristics, such as power and dominance over women (Reeser 14). For this reason, it is necessary to talk about "masculinities" and not just a single type of "masculinity" (Adichie 42)[2].

[1]Harry Brod, "Scholarly Studies of Men: An Essential Complement to Women's Studies", *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1990. Quoted in Reeser, 16.

[2] The concept of "masculinities" is stated by several scholars including Connell, Kimmel, and Adichie.

One of the first academics to specialize in this field and take an interest in the men's movement in the mid-1960s was Harry Brod, who approached it as "a necessary complement to Women's Studies" (Reeser 16). In Brod's words, Masculinity Studies are "the study of masculinities and male experiences as specific and varying social-historical-cultural formations" (15). Another key figure in this field is the sociologist Raewyn Connell who has been one of the first to take an interest in this type of study and has been of paramount importance in defining the concept of manhood, particularly the notion of "hegemonic masculinity". To sum up, when it comes to masculinity reference should be made not only to scholars, such as Connell, Staples, and Brod, who were among the first to examine the term, but also to later scholars, such as Kimmel, Barret, and Messner (Connell xiv), who have revised it over time due to the recognition of the existence of many masculinities. For this reason, when it comes to masculinity it should be mentioned the interlinked concept of physical "performance" (54)[3].

So what is meant by masculinity? As Connell explains in her second edition[4] of *Masculinities,* masculinity, also referred to as manhood, is a set of behaviors, roles, and traits generally associated with boys and men. Male gender has recently been distinguished by the idea of the biological sex of men because both men and women are capable of exhibiting masculine characteristics. Furthermore, masculinity is socially and culturally constructed, although some behaviors that are considered masculine are biologically determined. Standards of manhood vary across cultures and historical periods. (Connell 67-68). Other sociologists such as Kimmel, whom Connell counts among the best in the field of masculinity (xiv), also claim that it is a notion that changes over time: "Masculinity is not a coherent object" (67).

[3] An in-depth analysis of the notion of "performance" will be provided in paragraph 1.1.3. "Black masculinities".
[4] Research on men and masculinities was already becoming more diverse internationally at the time *Masculinities* was first published (1995). Since then, this trend has accelerated.

The notion of manhood assumes that people believe in personal agency and individual differences; that is to say, it is based on individualism that emerged in early modern Europe along with the expansion of colonial empires and capitalist trade. According to Connell, however, masculinity is also inherently relational: "masculinity" exists only in comparison to "femininity" (68). Women were considered different from men, but different in the sense that they were the incomplete representation of the same character and had, for instance, less of the faculty of reason. In the nineteenth century the bourgeois ideology of "separate spheres" went hand in hand with the idea that men and women did not possess qualitatively different characters. As a result, the concept of masculinity appears to be a recent historical product, a few hundred years old at most. Furthermore, Connell notes that definitions of masculinity have followed four main strategies to describe the qualities of a masculine person: essentialist, positivist, normative, and semiotic (67-71).[5]

Manhood is not an isolated object but it is a component of a larger system (Connell 67). It is not a biological, innate, or essential notion but there are dominant and subordinate masculinities and these are usually correlated with factors such as sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, and race. Moreover, masculinities are never homogeneous in a given historical context. Initially, these considerations were misinterpreted as a refutation of feminism's arguments rather than an expansion of them. On the contrary, the theoretical frameworks of Masculinity Studies show how a hegemonic social system subjugates both men and women to maintain its dominance. Michael Kimmel has written extensively about how the concept is historically and culturally constructed, specifically in the United States. Moreover, while cultural descriptions of gender exist in all countries, not all of them embrace the idea of

[5] For a more detailed discussion see: Connell, R. (2005). *Masculinities* (2nd ed.). Routledge. "Defining Masculinity", 67-71.

manhood. In contemporary usage, the term implies that an individual's behavior depends on the kind of person one is.

Cultural descriptions of gender exist in all countries but not all have the concept of masculinity (Connell 67). Thus, in the words of the authors Jackson II and Balaji, "Masculinity studies have generally been ghettoized by a Eurocentric paradigm of whiteness and its Others"[6] (Reeser 37). Particularly, in Western society, masculinity encompasses characteristics such as strength, independence, assertiveness, bravery, and aptitude for leadership, therefore, society believes that the establishment of norms serves to symbolically reproduce the gender role by associating the specific attributes and traits believed to rightfully belong to the male gender. The most important norms are avoiding any hint of femininity, not showing one's emotions, striving for success and achieving higher social status, never needing the help of others, physical strength, aggression, and finally homophobia (Connell 67-68).

1.1.1. The Birth of Masculinity Studies

Before analyzing in-depth the concept of masculinity and the several related notions related, it is crucial to emphasize that it was essential to create a discipline dedicated to the study of manhood. Over the last 20 years, the relatively new academic field of critical men's and masculinity studies has experienced a significant upsurge. This field, which drew its initial inspiration from sociology, psychology, history, and anthropology, views masculinity as a historical, cultural, and social construct. It also seeks to shed light on the origins and expressions of masculine dominance and power, investigate the construction and performance of masculine identities, and clarify the differences and similarities between men as individuals

[6] Ronald Jackson II and Murali Balaji, Introduction, in Global Masculinities and Manhood, 21. Quoted in Reeser, 37.

and as a group concerning sex, sexuality, identity, culture, and other enduring social issues across a broad spectrum of academic disciplines (Bhatti 1).

Despite their long history of prominence in academia, males were an "absent presence" until the 1970s, when they began to be examined as "gendered beings". The second wave of feminism in the 1960s boosted the women's movement, but it was not until the 1970s that men began to doubt the legitimacy of their position of authority (Bhatti 1-2). In fact, in the 1970s males were drawn to study "the men" by the feminist movements and women's curiosity in patriarchal systems and masculine dominance. The male identity faced a crisis as a result of the achievements of liberal feminism and the rise in women's visibility in the public and economic spheres. Women's fight for gender equality in a patriarchal society was seen as a victory of women over males when their economic participation rose. The old gender norms were under threat as men were perceived to be losing their status as decent breadwinners (3-4). Therefore, the early research was an attempt to restore the lost prestige of men in relation to women who contended that men suffer as a result of the advancements made by feminist movements. Conversely, several academics took a pro-feminist stance, embracing feminism and criticizing patriarchy. Rather than upholding the patriarchal systems that currently exist, they acknowledged that males must change for a more equal society (5). In short, it became imperative to pay attention to both the males who comprise the "privileged" as well as the women who comprise the "less privileged", but also to comprehend how males construct masculine dominance or maintain their masculine authority within the gender systems (5, 9).

The first phase of research on masculinity concentrated on the advantages and disadvantages of being a male, the dominance of men in the social structure, and the challenges faced by them but it was in the 1980s that the concept was explored as a social construction, and the emphasis was on outlining masculinity norms in particular contexts, such workplaces, sports and educational institutions (10). Hence, the study of masculinity drew heavily from the

body of empirical research that described how masculinities are constructed in specific settings built up in the 1980s and 1990s. Specifically, the research included studies of schools and workplaces (e.g. Cockburn 1983, Heward 1988), investigations into sexualities and careers in athletics (e.g. Messner and Sabo 1990, Connell 1992), and historical narratives of evolving notions of masculinity (Phillips 1987). These studies enabled a clear break from the previous dominant abstract "sex role" framework by providing a considerably more specific, varied, and detailed picture of males in gender interactions (Connell xiv). Since the 1980s these studies have significantly grown until the 1990s when Masculinity Studies have been accepted as an academic field of its own with a larger opening to new theoretical perspectives and theoretical insights such as post-structuralism, post-colonialism, queer and sexuality studies (Bhatti 10).

The field originated primarily in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, but then it expanded to explore regional, national, and local masculinities throughout the world; therefore, research from the English-speaking world has been the first ethnographic moment surfaced. However, early interest in men's gender practices had also been shown by feminist and gay research in central and northern Europe. These two groups, namely the European and the English-speaking world, shared an interest in applying masculinity studies to the analysis and prevention of violence, as well as an interest in how changes among males were related to modern feminism. According to Connell, the attention to this theme has accelerated over time, and a dedicated discipline to the study of masculinity helps identify men's interest in change. The emergence in recent years of study collections from many areas and nations, as well as individual monographs, is an indicator of the field's global expansion, in addition to an ongoing output of volumes mostly focused on Britain and the United States (Connell xiv).

1.1.1.1. Hegemonic Masculinity

Within the contemporary Western gender order, there are some behaviors and connections that construct the main masculine patterns (77). In particular, the concept of hegemonic masculinity, recently formulated by Raewyn Connell[7] and one of the major theoretical advances, has been the "central pillar" and "traveling theory" which has made a significant contribution to the field of Masculinity Studies worldwide (Bhatti 12-13). Originating from Antonio Gramsci's theory of class relations in *Prison Notebooks* (Donaldson 645), the term "hegemony" refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group establishes and maintains a dominant position in social life. Anytime one type of masculinity can be more socially and culturally elevated than others. Hegemonic masculinity is defined as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 77). Indeed, the term was coined and is primarily employed to preserve the central focus in the critique of masculinity (Donaldson 645). Moreover, since hegemonic masculinity is "always constructed in relation to various subordinate masculinities as well as in relation to women"[8], it can be understood as internal hegemony, or rather hegemony over subordinate masculinities like gay men, and external hegemony, for instance, hegemony over women. However, hegemonic behaviors do not always reflect the behavior of the majority of males and may continue to exist as cultural norms (Bhatti 15-16).

According to Connell, there are four different types of masculinity: hegemonic, marginalized, complicit, and subordinate. Hegemonic masculinity is the ideal of masculinity

[7] The theoretical concept of "hegemonic masculinity" is widely attributed to Connell's seminal book *Masculinities* (1995).
[8] Connell, R. (2005). *Masculinities* (2nd ed.). Routledge, 183. Quoted in Bhatti, 15.

that is accepted in a particular culture at a certain time. It shapes how individuals perceive and understand the world and provides a defense mechanism for maintaining and legitimizing patriarchy. Still, it can change depending on place, time, and the struggles a particular society faces. As a consequence, hegemonic masculinity differs from the concept of patriarchal masculinity[9], as the former must constantly reinvent itself to maintain and regain its power (17). For this reason, it is not a fixed concept, instead, it is better understood as "the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position that is always contestable" (Reeser 21). To sum up, one must consider the fact that this idea is inherently relational, that it only exists in comparison to "the other" (Connell 68). Therefore, when considering masculinities, one should not only consider the several kinds of masculinities, but also the relationships between them: relations of subordination, dominance, and alliance (37).

Hegemonic masculinity does not only relate to women, and homosexuality, but also to ethnicity. Connell classifies black masculinity[10] in the United States as marginal because it is neither accepted nor able to continue to be recognized, meaning that the hegemonic masculinity's whiteness cannot be disregarded. In wider terms, priests, journalists, politicians, psychologists, designers, playwrights, filmmakers, actors, writers, academics, sportsmen, and musicians are usually considered the most influential agents. In the words of Gramsci, they are the "weavers of the fabric of hegemony" as they control gender norms, express their ideas and experiences, and reflect on gender relations. "Hegemonic masculinity is naturalized in the form of the hero and presented through forms that revolve around heroes: sagas, ballads, westerns, thrillers, books, films, television, and sporting events" (Donaldson 646). The crucial difference between hegemonic masculinity and other masculinities is not the control over women, but the

[9] It is the idea about and practice of masculinity that emphasizes the superiority of masculinity over femininity, and the authority and power of men over women. In-depth analysis in the following paragraph.
[10] An in-depth analysis of black masculinities is provided in the following paragraph.

control over men and its representation as “universal social advancement”, to use Gramsci’s words (655).

1.1.1.2. Toxic Masculinity

A concept closely linked to hegemonic masculinity and a much-discussed and felt topic is toxic masculinity, which has become a popular term in the language of the media and, in recent years, in academic language as well. In 2015, Michael Kimmel, the director of the Center for the Study of Men and Masculinities and a leading scholar in the field of masculinity, helped launch the first Master’s program in Masculinities Studies in the United States. His goal is to analyze what it means to be a man in today’s world. In his first lectures, Kimmel asks his students two questions: “What does it mean to you to be a good man?” and “What does it mean to be a real man?”. According to the answers, Kimmel claims there is still a lot of confusion today about what it means to be a man. This is because boys receive confusing messages from society (Kimmel “Tackling The Boy Crisis” 2:00-5:00).

What is toxic masculinity? The Good Men Project, a website and social platform founded by Tom Matlack in 2009, defines toxic masculinity as “a narrow and repressive description of manhood, designating manhood as defined by violence, sex, status, and aggression. It is the cultural ideal of manliness, where strength is everything while emotions are a weakness; where sex and brutality are yardsticks by which men are measured, while supposedly “feminine” traits — which can range from emotional vulnerability to simply not being hypersexual — are the means by which your status as “man” can be taken away”[11]. In other words, toxic masculinity refers to those aspects of hegemonic masculinity that are socially destructive because they promote negative behaviors such as violent dominance,

[11] Quoted in The Good Men Project, https://goodmenproject.com

aggression, misogyny, and homophobia. There is a fear of being perceived as effeminate or gay (Kimmel n.p.).

Among Kimmel's various contributions, in the interesting discussion at a TED Talk in Australia in 2015, the sociologist analyzed the so-called "Boy Crisis"[12], in other words, he emphasized how, according to recent statistics in the United States, boys are in trouble, as they are more likely to be diagnosed with a behavior disorder, get prescribed stimulant medications, fail at school, get drunk, commit a violent crime, and/or take their own life[13]. Surveys show that boys are two and a half times more at risk for emotional immaturity than girls and unfortunately two and a half times more likely to commit suicide. Kimmel also reports that an education professor at an Australian high school, named Wayne Martino, received surprising answers when he asked boys and girls what they thought of English and languages in general. Boys hate English because they have to express their feelings in that language. That is exactly what girls like about English because they can talk about what they feel. Other interesting feedback has been received from workshops. Kimmel decided to hold workshops with boys in Australian schools to find out how young men approach their education. He found that boys, not only in Australia but also in the United States, see academic disengagement as a sign and a way to prove their masculinity. In other words, if they do not care much about school, it is a "badge of honor" for them among their male friends (Kimmel "Tacking The Boy Crisis" 3:00-9:10).

What does it mean to be a good man? Boys always reply in the same way: it means having honor and integrity, doing the right thing, standing up for the little guy, taking responsibility, being a good provider and protector, and making sacrifices. These are universal ideas, or rather, society spreads them and suggests them again. They are everywhere. Boys

[12] Farrell W., Gray J. (2018), *The Boy Crisis: Why Our Boys Are Struggling and What We Can Do About It*.
[13] "The Mask You Live In", https://therepproject.org.

learn them from Homer, Shakespeare, from the Judeo-Christian heritage. What does it mean to be a real man? When it comes to answering this question, boys claim that being a real man means being strong, and tough, enduring pain, never showing emotion, and, above all, never crying. Men learn what it means to be a real man from other men (father, older brother, male friends). Kimmel insists that men and boys should discuss what it takes to betray their values to prove their masculinity. Kimmel also states that men already know how to behave, or rather that they should not change or be different, but be more authentically themselves (Kimmel "Tacking The Boy Crisis" 9:50-11:30).

Among the several interventions done by Kimmel, a mention should be made of "The Mask You Live In" (2015), a documentary by Jennifer Siebel, where experts and academics discuss masculinity and particularly toxic masculinity. "The Mask You Live In" follows boys and young men as they grapple with America's limited idea of masculinity and struggle to be true to themselves. The characters are confronted with messages that encourage them to disconnect from their feelings, devalue genuine friendships, objectify and demean women, and settle disputes through violence. These messages come from the media, their peer group, and even the adults in their lives. For boys to become "real" men, they must navigate identity challenges caused by these gender norms that are intertwined with race, class, and circumstance. Experts from the fields of sports, education, neurology, psychology, and media also share their perspectives and empirical data on the "Boy Crisis" and strategies for overcoming it. In the end, "The Mask You Live In" shows how society can raise a healthier generation of men (The Representation Project)[14].

[14] For a more detailed discussion see: https://therepproject.org.

1.1.3. Black Masculinities

A white, heterosexual male is typically what comes to mind when one thinks of the dominant ideal of masculinity. However, a phenomenon of current interest, Black masculinity, cannot be analyzed without looking at white masculinity and hegemonic masculinity, as the two concepts are intertwined. Indeed, central components of hegemonic masculinity are sexism and homophobia, which are also aspects of African American masculinity. The social construction of black masculinity is not exclusively the product of black men, rather, it is shaped by the views of both genders as well as cultural factors. Indeed, some scholars such as bell hooks have emphasized the importance for men to participate in the sharpening of the women's movement and to engage with men's liberation: "Black women cannot speak for black men. We can speak with them" (hooks xv). White men created a specific image of black men that portrayed them as children rather than men and as bodies rather than minds. As a result, white racism and oppression, which often take the form of toxic and hegemonic masculinity, help to shape African American masculinity.

African American men must simultaneously adopt masculine characteristics to protect themselves from many institutional and personal sources of victimization, as well as those who attack them. Black boys are especially watched by their mothers and grandparents in early childhood for behaviors they view as "deviant or questionable", actions that are not conform with the formation of a typical masculine identity. The boundaries of this view are also delineated across all developmental stages by adult leaders, peers, and classmates in school, unstructured play, league sports, and artistic endeavors.

The socialization of African Americans as individuals and as a community was uniquely shaped by their centuries of subjugation as slaves, their subsequent seven years of "freedom" and their tentative experiences with the rights of U.S. citizenship before the

implementation of Jim Crow laws (1876-1965), and the ongoing struggle for civil rights. Almost everything about being African American, including one's cultural narrative, has in one way or another emerged socially in opposition to, in resistance to, or in accommodation of a dominant cultural narrative of masculinity that serves primarily to denigrate them. To sum up, African American masculinity embodies significant aspects of resistance and rebellion, in addition to conforming to a domineering and traditional white masculine identity. Resistance to repressive responses directed towards vulnerable individuals are common outcome of opposition to dominant authoritarian structures. This type of cycle trajectory is demonstrated in a variety of settings and supported by family, laws, peers, and behaviors that are approved also by the state (Johnson and Norwitt n.p.).

Because of their enslavement, black men occupied a unique place in the United States racial and gender hierarchy: the social hierarchy placed black masculinity at the bottom and white manhood at the top. For black men toxic masculinity was the tenet, on the contrary being vulnerable or feeling insecure about themselves was seen as a flaw (A.A. Young Jr. 438-450). Even if they were aware of their vulnerabilities and fears in private, their public persona frequently served to hide them. In the words of Richard Wright, "They don't let you feel what you want to feel"[15]. For this reason, the idea that sensitivity or insecurity should not be seen as a weakness, but rather as an important aspect of the black male experience, has been a key theme in theorists' writings. Only through some expressions of art, among which blues and jazz music, do black men find an invitation to be vulnerable, to express their true feelings, and to break open their hearts. Music, more than other artistic forms, helped them create a resistance to the patriarchal notion that a real man should never express genuine feelings (hooks 139). In this sense, the emasculation of black males and the reconstruction of gender-power structures was necessary for colonizers to enforce their white masculine agency and as a result of the

[15] Quoted in bell hooks, "We Real Cool" 130.

persistence of white masculine ideals, black masculinity began to be perceived as "the other". Therefore, because of colonialism, the previous definition of manhood was altered to black masculinity to support white men's dominant status. The hegemonic figures were motivated to preserve power dynamics since they were aware of opposing forces that had the potential to dismantle their supremacy (Adichie 43-48). Although barely studied by historians, it is known that after the Second World War white men's oppression drastically accelerated; this was partly caused by what some academics have called "the crisis of white masculinity" which was brought on by several social, political, cultural and economic shifts in the middle of the twentieth century. Thousands of men were returning from the warfront with psychological and bodily injuries which made it even harder to embody a masculinity characterized by physical prowess and aptitude.

However, thanks to the black liberation movement and the increasing number of talented black men, such as the boxer Jack Johnson and the Olympian Jesse Owens[16], the dominance of white males in popular culture has been challenged. White middle-class men have frequently defined their manhood about different racial, ethnic, and class-based masculinities including those of blacks in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s when African Americans were the most visible minority group. In fact, during this period the middle class found it easier to see black men as worthy of respect, admiration, and emulation due to challenges to anti-black racism but also because of the black freedom movement's power which challenged U.S. preconceptions of blacks as bumbling and feminized fools. Some white men began to think that they could resolve the crisis that threatened to emasculate them by hanging

[16] For a more detailed discussion see: McLeod, "The Construction of Masculinity in African American Music and Sports", "We Are the Champions: The Politics of Sports and Popular Music"; A.A. Young Jr., "Black Men and Black Masculinity"; Lowe B., *The Beauty of Sport: A Cross-disciplinary Inquiry.*

out with black men, taking on what they perceived to be black men's styles and sensibilities but also by acting and speaking in the same way (Bausch 5-6-7).

1.1.3.1. The Birth of Black Masculinity Studies

The study of black masculinity is a recent phenomenon that has developed quite rapidly in the field of Gender Studies over the past few decades. Although sociologists made a clear shift in focus to the study of black men in the 1960s, it was not until much later that they began to focus more intensively on the conceptualizing of black masculinity and the analysis of the problematic situation of African Americans. Literary analysis is an important and dynamic subfield of masculinity research in the 21st century.

According to several influential scholars[17] belonging to the field of Black Masculinity, it is still not recognized that black men are treated as marginal. Therefore, it was felt that a dedicated field of study was necessary. Black studies have primarily focused on the United States. According to the researchers, black men in the United States are subjected to racial and sexual discrimination, exclusion, and other forms of marginalization. This treatment is based on a history of prejudiced representations of black people, in other words, on ideas and caricatures of black males as a challenge to the domination and power of white men in politics and society (Ogungbure 275-278). In 1982, Robert Staples, in his work *Black Masculinity: The Black Male's Role in American Society*, encapsulated under the term "dual dilemma" the disadvantages blacks have as men have been more than offset by their subjugation as members of a racial minority. Therefore, he claimed that African American masculinity is a form of gender that has been colonized by the history of slavery in the United States (Reeser 20-25).

[17] Billson, J.; Mason, H.; Harper, S.R.; Bush, E.C.; MCurry, T. J., Black, *Black Male Studies: A Series Exploring the Paradoxes of Racially Subjugated Males*; Cose, E., *The Envy of the World: On Being a Black Man in America*; Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism;* hooks, "Reconstructing Black Masculinity"; Russell, *The Color of Discipline: Civil Rights and Black Sexuality*.

Most citizens today still believe that the history of African Americans begins with slavery, and white men are the ones who produce these derogatory images that continue to support their supremacist ideology in the present day (2).

The Afro-psychologist Richard Majors is regarded as the person who founded African American Male Studies in 1991 (Sailes xiii). However, it was not until 2017 with the book *The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood* by the American scholar Tommy J. Curry, who won an American Book Award, that researchers understood that Black Male Studies must be studied separately with a multidisciplinary focus on topics such as masculinity, class, and race, and the theoretical foundations for this field were demonstrated (Zack 230). Curry's 2018 book *Killing Boogeymen: Phallicism and The Misandric Mischaracterization of Black Males in Theory*, also laid the groundwork for Black male studies, so much so that Doctor Lawrence A. Rasheed has called Curry the "father" of Black male studies (Rasheed 10). Noteworthy in terms of the first sociological contributions to the social experiences of black men are also to be considered previous works such as *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899) by W.E.B. Du Bois and *Black Metropolis* (1945) by St. Claire Drake and Horace Cayton. Their main argument concerns the fact that black men had a lot of work to do to bring about stability in family life, the workplace, and civic society. Thus, sociological studies have established a strong and persistent connection between black men, the streets, and the standard of their social lives. Subjects such as race and ethnic relations have piqued the interest of scholars in several disciplinary subfields, including culture, gender, education, family, health, stratification, work, and mobility (A.A. Young Jr. 438-439).

As Brod had suggested, with the birth of Black Masculinity Studies the concept of black manhood has evolved over time showing also its plurality (Reeser 18). Society still believes that the African-American account begins with slavery. When it comes to African Americans, they feel the need to search for images of their ancestors but especially in African American

history there is still the prevailing white supremacist desire to maintain their dominance over black people in the nation and around the world (hooks 1). Bell hooks, through ten essays of her groundbreaking work of 2004, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, suggested how black men have been criminalized and dehumanized by racist and sexist ideas that have grown in American culture, as well as the ways these myths have hurt the black male community (151). The author traced back African American history to analyze how the concept of black masculinity has developed over time to the present day. She emphasized the importance of the practice of solidarity on the part of black women, indeed, she was a black woman who wanted to add her voice to the chorus of voices speaking out on behalf of black male liberation. Having seen the suffering of black men increase for years, hooks felt the urgency to speak with them (xiv, xv).

We Real Cool comes from hooks' personal life experiences, particularly it uses examples of her family life, her brother and her father, to prove the "patriarchal domination" of black male thought, stating that "Anyone who claims to be concerned with the fate of black men in the United States who does not speak about the need for them to radicalize their consciousness to challenge patriarchy … colludes with the existing system in keeping black men in their place, psychologically locked down, locked out" (xi). Hooks' childhood was marked by the black community's perception of men as having to live up to a rigid, aggressive, and easily enraged masculine ideal of power, which she dubbed "phallocentrism"[18]. The motivation for writing this work was to let people know that this masculine ideal is a result of a white supremacist culture. Thus, the author traces back black men's history calling attention to the notion of "patriarchal masculinity" since the first essay named "Plantation patriarchy"[19].

[18] Men's dominance increasingly focused more and more on their sexual organs. In the words of hooks, the mindset that associates manhood with control over women's erections is referred to as "phallocentrism". For a more detailed discussion see: Jenkins "Reconstructing Black Masculinity" 3:33-3:50.

[19] Connell, *Masculinities* (2005). The term "patriarchy" became widely used around 1970 when feminism employed it to speak about the system of gender dominance. "The main axis of power in the contemporary

Both in *We Real Cool* and in "Reconstructing Black Masculinity" (2017), hooks invites the reader to reflect on power and gender relations between black men and black women. Indeed, black womanhood is another intertwined concept with black masculinity. In her analysis, the author emphasized how distorted images of masculinity negatively influence and prevent relationships with black women. She noted that in an attempt to replicate the repressive dynamics they encounter as a result of racism, black men may feel pressured to assert control and power in their relationships.

The autobiographical writings of free and enslaved black men, included in the annals of history, claim that originally black males did not share the same standpoint as white men as far as their nature of masculinity is concerned. They had to be taught patriarchal masculinity but also that it was acceptable to use violence to establish their power. Black men from many African tribes with different languages and value systems learned patriarchal masculinity in the "new world" which was shaped by the gender politics of enslavement and white supremacist dominance over them (hooks 2). Slave narratives demonstrate how white people conditioned black males under slavery who had to think of themselves as patriarchs. In other words, they had to achieve freedom through work and take care of black women because being free they could be able to provide for their families. As a consequence, the dominator model established by white masters to measure black male progress was adopted by a significant portion of black men as their standard. Indeed, when slavery ended those black men used violence to exercise their power over black women: it was a repetition of the strategies of control previously used by white slave masters. Patriarchal masculinity had become an accepted ideal that would be strengthened by twentieth-century norms (4).

European/American gender order is the overall subordination of women and dominance of men – the structure Women's Liberation named "patriarchy". It persists despite resistance of many kinds, now articulated in feminism" (65, 74).

However, even during slavery, black males were refusing those fixed norms. The individual black men who planned routes to freedom devised plans of resistance to slavery and created new lives for themselves and their people challenging the patriarchal white supremacist norm. The majority of them tried to improve the situation after being set free and frequently sought safety among Native Americans, relocating to tribal societies where patriarchal masculinity, with its emphasis on violence and the enslavement of women and children, was not the norm. In this regard, it should be mentioned the groundbreaking essay "The Tradition of John: A Mode of Black Masculinity" by Rudolph P. Byrd. This work, published in *Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality*[20], represents a figure of alternative masculinity in African American folklore. John, also known as Jack, wants to suppress ideological traps such as racism, homophobia, and sexism. He speaks to black people's ability to struggle, persevere, and triumph but above all he is considered a manifestation of black male agency. Byrd clarifies: "Committed to the overthrow of slavery and the ideology of white supremacy, John is the supreme antagonist of *Old Massa* and the various hegemonic structures he and his descendants have created and, most disheartening, many of them predictably still cherish. John's various acts of resistance are reflected in his most exemplary values and attributes: mother wit, the power of laughter and song, self-assertion, self-examination, self-knowledge, a belief that life is a process grounded in the fertile field of improvisation, hope, and most importantly love. And his aspirations? Nothing less than the complete emancipation of Black people from every species of slavery. These are the constitutive elements and aspirations that together comprise the tradition of John. In these days of so many hours, it is a mode of Black masculinity grounded in enduring principles that possess…a broad and vital instrumentality" (4-5).

[20] It is the first anthology of writings by 19th and 20th-century African American men on the categories of race, gender, and sexuality.

In the fifties, the vast majority of black folks tried to conform to patriarchal models of marriage and family such that they were obsessed with the idea of protecting their families. In particular, according to a popular notion of manhood, "the possession of money and the things it can buy will make him a man in the eyes of his family and society" (Wilkerson n.p.). To quote the American writer Julius Lester "It is partially true that blacks have accepted the white man's image of themselves. However, it is also true that they have resisted accepting this image"[21] (hooks 11). Another important issue concerning white patriarchy and black masculinity regards gender. Black gender roles have been significantly impacted by racial integration which has contributed to the environment in which the majority of black men and women embrace sexist ideas about gender roles. The black guys who have fully internalized white supremacist patriarchal standards of manhood are the ones who are most concerned about emasculation and castration (11-12).

The 1960s marked an important shift and the coming of age for black males when they acknowledged that, behind their skin, they were brothers united by manhood and a common patriarchal devotion. Furthermore, by the late sixties and early seventies, a new version of patriarchy and manhood based on capitalism had developed. In this kind of society human worth was measured by the dollar; thus, in particular black men have tried to assert their male identity with making money by any means necessary (49). As a consequence, lying and cheating to earn money became more acceptable in black communities. Black men still encounter a culture that perpetuates the myth that they would never be able to accumulate enough wealth or influence to extricate themselves from the oppressive white racism of the workplace. On the one hand, the street seduces young folks to lead a life of hustling and selling drugs; on the other hand, white-supremacist patriarchal mass media teaches them that it will be

[21] Lester, J. *Look Out, Whitey! Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama*, 1968
Quoted in bell hooks, 11.

their home by the time they are six years old (64). Only the strong and violent survive. Besides, more than any other group, black educated men are regarded suspiciously and considered enemies. The logic of the soul-murdered black boy keeps them mentally enslaved. To quote the group Black Men for the Eradication of Racism: "We've accepted a definition of ourselves that's killing us in a way no bullet ever could" (130). In fact, by reading any book or article about black manhood one will learn that black guys are violent. They are represented as demons, monsters and beasts. What is more, one of the traits attributed to them was a lack of emotional responsiveness, in other words black males being uncivilized brutes did not have the ability to experience regret or dread, or the capability to feel complicated emotions. As a result, racist ideology held that in order to contain the dehumanized beast, black men must be subjugated by white supremacists. Nowadays, being surrounded by a violent reality that they are unable to alter, many black men might as well behave like a beast. The simplest way to assert patriarchal manhood was thought to be aggression (46).

Another crucial moment for the concept of black masculinity was marked by the 1990s, a period in which blaming black women replaced the white supremacist narrative of emasculation. As the twentieth century started, the most significant change happened in private concerning the realm of the black body and its sexual politics. Black sexuality, portrayed as the deviant counterpart of white normative sexuality, was suppressed by white people, for this reason, they lived in a world in which survival was more important than sexual desire. The end of slavery and subjugation freed the black body from the white, racialized, and idealized sexual fantasies. In fact, during slavery sexuality was associated with lynching: the body parts of lynched black folks were frequently photographed and the pictures sold. Patriarchal sex was the means through which African Americans asserted their masculinity in a segregated society. They felt helpless and usually became enraged with women who they believed to have sexual control over them, including the ability to arouse them and decide whether or not to have

intercourse. This was also accompanied by the construction of the "Black Rapist Myth" according to which black men represented a threat to the purity and virtue of white women. This stereotype is based on the idea that black men, being portrayed as primitive and animalistic, had irrepressible instincts and also served to legitimize the lynchings of which they were victims (66).

To sum up, sexuality was perceived as a war zone where they had to assert dominance. There was not only the need to control women's bodies but also an obsession to have intercourse with white women in order to get revenge on the white men who had mistreated and oppressed them. In this regard, very little is published on how many white men felt impotent in their relationships with strong white women, and to what degree the image of emasculation that racist white guys projected onto black males was representative of those feelings. Consequently, white patriarchal thought prevented black men from thinking creatively about their lives, thus, they blindly accepted and followed established life scripts conveyed through the media, family, and school according to which they should not express emotions. In fact, due to the perception of black men as beasts, there is minimal care for the emotional well-being of black boys and their sense of themselves is threatened by intimacy (68-70).

1.1.3.2. The Power of Feelings: Emotional Fluency, A Necessity to Survive

Black male cultural expressivity is another central issue in Black Masculinity Studies, or rather, black men's communication habits, physical expression patterns, and basic life perspectives. Given the aforementioned notions of hegemonic and toxic masculinity, they were not able to express their feelings and vulnerabilities, mainly because of the idea that white men had propagated. Furthermore, black males are not taught the language of "emotional fluency" and how to cultivate safe spaces, thus, they lack the comprehension to express how they feel

and what are their needs. Emotional fluency is the ability to sense, translate, and effectively apply the power of emotions in a healthy and productive manner. When it comes to black boys and men, it's rarely tears, but rather an embrace of behaviors, acts of violence, drug abuse and suicide. "African American communities are lacking safe places for black boys to express and release their emotions and they also lack support groups as well"[22]. Safe spaces and emotional fluency are a necessity for them to survive and shape the outside world and not be shaped by it (Evans "Emotional Fluency" 3:39-9:30).

Almost every black man in the United States has had to suppress and hide his true self at some point in his life for fear of being attacked, killed, or destroyed. Black males live in a prison of the mind from which they cannot escape. This is a reality that unfortunately sounds familiar to them as they struggle with negative stereotypes. This was also pointed out by the artist and scholar Fahamu Pecou in a TED Talk in 2019. Pecou emphasizes the fact that the black male body defines what black men are and how they are seen. Who they are does not matter to the world since black masculinity is seen as the quintessential embodiment of men as outsiders and rebels, victims and criminals. About the movie *Menace II Society* (1993), he claims that he was profoundly traumatized after watching it because he could easily identify with the story of the young man Caine. It stands for something black men have heard, seen, and told countless times throughout their lives: black men cannot change how their bodies are perceived. White racist ideas and patriarchal notions of masculinity influence how they see themselves (Pecou "An artist's counterpoint to black masculinity" 0:00-2:00). As the sociologist Connell states, masculinity is not an innate or static attribute, rather it is a performance that requires the demonstration of traditionally masculine traits (Connell 54). To convey this message and better understand how external representations affect black subjectivity, it should be metioned the psychoanalytic theory of the "mirror stage" (*stade du*

[22] American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, "Boys Don't Cry" (2021)

miroir) formulated by Jacques Lacan. In an excerpt from his essay "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious", Lacan states that external representations strongly influence a person's subjectivity. The human being begins to form an opinion about himself based on images that seem to mirror his ideas about who he is. Identity is thus formed from the outside in. Understanding black male identity and performance is crucial, as these representations are for the most part incredibly problematic and limited. The notion of a rebellious black man willing to take his destiny into his own hands and seek freedom for himself and his loved ones has been shattered (Lacan n.p.). This image must be restored as an example of revolutionary manhood. In this context, Ellis Cose advises black men to show some confidence, even if they have to fake it, to let others know they are not to be envied (bell hooks, 14).

When it comes to understanding the origins of these ideas, one should go back to the studies of black men conducted between 1970 and 1990, a time known as "the era of the underclass" when much attention was paid to urban poverty. At the time, the common perception of black men was that they were not only severely economically impoverished, but also socially and culturally isolated from the majority of the American population. The idea behind the "culture of poverty" was that those who were less fortunate in life often sank into hopelessness, despair, and apathy. The research's foundation was the relationship between excessive disengagement from work, violence, and crime. This culture required its members to act aggressively and assertively to protect themselves from the negative influences of their social environments. Black males were thus found to exhibit public personas composed of extremely expressive approaches to public engagement. The higher and disproportionately incarceration among black men in metropolitan areas has been associated with aggressive policing. In the United States, black males have the highest mortality and lowest life expectancy of any ethnic group, and they have continued to be the object of public curiosity

due to the focus of past generations of sociological work on the streets (A.A. Young Jr. 440-442).

Black men have been defined as "a group apart", as also stated by Ellis Cose in his work *The Envy of the World: On Being a Black Man in America* (2002). Being seen as an isolated group and unable to express their feelings, black men have felt the urge to find a space where they can express themselves freely. In various forms, art can show them something different from what they have normally experienced and create a world that does not exist elsewhere (Pecou "An artist's counterpoint to black masculinity").

1.2. What is Cool? Identity Stereotypes of Black Men

Brute, untamed, primitive, thoughtless, and emotionless are the main stereotyped representations of black men. They are feared and victimized by those negative stereotypes born in the nineteenth century that are still in the collective consciousness today. As a result, for some black men, it has been challenging to withstand sexual objectification and the application of unfavorable prejudices (bell hooks, x).

We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity is a crucial work when it comes to black stereotypes, in fact, it discusses the misconceptions surrounding black masculinity and how the public perception views it. But what does "cool" mean? In 1992, J. Billson and R. Majors developed the "cool pose" theory. Generally, "coolness", or being "cool", refers to an aesthetic attitude, behavior, and appearance that is admired. For the majority, being cool is synonymous with being composed and in control (OED). However, one of the characteristics of "cool" is its mutability, or rather, it changes over time and among cultures and generations. According to Professor R.F. Thompson, in Yoruba and Igbo civilizations of West Africa "cool" or "Itutu" means physical beauty, kindness, elegance, and the capacity to diffuse tensions. Thompson discovered that the African diaspora's cultural definition of the term differs from that of

Europeans: in traditional African civilizations it has a great deal of weight, significance, and spirituality that is lacking in Western contexts[23] (Thompson n.p.). Many words, among which the term "cool", have migrated from African-American Vernacular English to Standard English. For instance, it was popularized in jazz circles by tenor saxophonist Lester Young (OED), such that a jazz style is called "cool jazz" stressing a restrained and carefree solo approach[24]. In *What is Cool? Understanding Black Manhood in America* (1995), M.K. Connor analyzes the term in the post-war African American experience: "cool" began to develop another meaning concerning the silent opposition against racial injustice and a self-respecting manifestation of masculinity (Conner n.p.). Thus, Majors and Billson argue it is a strong component of black masculine urban culture. The "cool pose" theory states that it relieves the tension brought on by racism, rejection, and social inequality for Black men, giving them a sense of control, strength, and confidence. Unfortunately, media and academics have maligned these facets of African American culture (Boddie n.p.). Malcolm X blended intrigue and terror, and Miles Davis embodied the key components of "coolness" (G.E. Clarke n.p.).

In *We Real Cool* and "Reconstructing Black Masculinity" bell hooks argues that the image of black masculinity is the result of stereotypes that portray black men as lazy and idle. White supremacists use these stereotypes as an effective tool to devalue the labor of black males in the eyes of the public consciousness. These misrepresentations help to minimize the importance of black men and deny their employment. At the same time, integration has contributed to an environment in which the majority of black women and men accepted sexist notions of gender roles that originated in white culture. The author calls for the black community to stop viewing white gender norms as something black men should emulate (Jenkins "Reconstructing Black Masculinity" 0:50-3:13).

[23] For a more detailed discussion see: Thompson, Robert Farris. African Arts.
[24] For a more detailed discussion see: Hill, Donald R. (2005). "Music of the African Diaspora in the Americas".

White-supremacist capitalist patriarchy sees black men as a threat to be contained, as the black enslaved male seeking liberation from the chains. The identities that black men are permitted to choose for themselves are nonetheless heavily influenced by unfavorable preconceptions about the nature of black manhood. In a dominance-oriented culture conflating emotions such as love and hate, brainwashing is a strong component so that the two get confused. If black men were loved, they would be able to see a life free from confinement and not only one in which they were bound. As a result, black males perceive themselves as alone and disconnected from any sense of collective identity.

"Sadly, the real truth, which is a taboo to speak, is that this is a culture that does not love black males, that they are not loved by white men, white women, black women, or girls and boys. And that especially most black men do not love themselves. How could they, how could they be expected to love surrounded by so much envy, desire, hate? Black males in the culture of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy are feared but they are not loved. Our culture does not love black males and most of them do not even love themselves"[25] (hooks ix-x).

Maybe the ones who complain would like the world to know that desire and envy are not aspects of love as they are told. If they were loved they could envision themselves as being beyond confinement, instead of only being able to live lives that were restricted, caged, and locked down (ix).

Among other writers, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, one of Nigeria's most well-known authors in recent times, challenges these stereotypical representations of the male African identity through her characters by including examples of submissive and complicit masculinities. The black male, represented by the white-supremacist society as the uncivilized and unfeeling brute, murderer, and frightened, has no voice and no opportunity to express

[25] Quoted in bell hooks' *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*

himself (P.R. Roy 40). According to a prominent black journalist, Ellis Cose, there is a lot of fear, “fear of the righteous anger of young, black men; fear of the potential power, bubbling beneath the system in the alienated hearts of the dispossessed”. Anyone who claims to care about what happens to black men in the United States but keeps quiet about how they need to radicalize their consciousness to confront patriarchy is working hand in hand with the current system to keep black men in subordination and psychologically locked out. As a consequence, the negative stereotypical images still heavily influence the identities that black men are allowed to create for themselves (hooks xi). Thus, young folks, especially in the sixties, considered Malcolm X, more than any other black man, a crucial representation of black male refusal of those stereotypes to liberate and educate themselves to critical consciousness. He was the embodiment of the black male who refused to let the dominance of race, gender, and class determine who he was. Individual black males, like Malcolm X and W.E.B. Du Bois, have overcome prejudices by creating identities that decolonize black people’s brains and have understood that white patriarchy is an interrelated dominance system that will never give them complete empowerment. The evidence suggests that patriarchal masculinity is the force that menaces black life proposing an ideal of manhood that cannot be reached and undermining their positive agency (hooks xi). Furthermore, according to several scholars, including bell hooks, most media and mainstream books are conservatives who support patriarchal thinking; hence, they do not include writings of black activists on the subject. Black men are not even represented in the small amount of anti-patriarchal literature that addresses them directly and offers guidance on the road to liberation and critical consciousness education. In this regard, even though black people are the owners of some publishing houses and magazines, the majority of them in the media are conservatives who embrace traditional ideas or they succumb to the allure of increased financial gains and entry into mainstream authority as compensation for advocating a less extreme message. However, the lack of work is another significant

testimony that the plight of black men is not taken seriously (xiv). In the words of the black feminist author Michele Faith Wallace "When you look at so-called black leadership as reflected by the mainstream media, what you see is a motley crew of the narcissistic, the vaguely ridiculous, and the inept"[26]. As a consequence, black men are losing ground because of the lack of collective response and their experience of emotional loneliness. Despite this, on the one hand, there is the desire to be acknowledged by other men, particularly white men, as "men" and patriarchs; on the other hand, there is a strong need to address male liberation (xi-xii). Thus, it is fundamental to mention black art as a powerful tool to destabilize stereotypes and misrepresentations since black men have not had a significant voice yet (xiv).

[26] Quoted in bell hooks xi.

CHAPTER II

JAZZ PERFORMANCES OF BLACK MASCULINITY AND GENDER

2.1. Performing Male Blackness: A Rite of Resistance

Masculinity is the totality of interrelated elements that constitute a social, corporeal, dynamic, and symbolic performance (Connell 54). When it comes to black masculinity, it should be mentioned that it is an intricate notion that deals with how it is portrayed, understood, and experienced in both social and cultural contexts. This concept addresses how black males navigate their identity in a society often dominated by sexist and racist stereotypes, and also focuses on issues of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and power. These misrepresentations limit black men's opportunities to express their manhood and distort the complexity of their actual experiences. The black man's adoption of patriarchal thinking is exactly the kind of reasoning that will keep him psychologically sick and oppressed. Enlightened black people know this: they lack a national platform to train their critical consciousness. Their self-esteem is low. This feeling of being victimized is one of the things that prevents people from regaining the sense of agency they once had. For this reason, many black people turn to forms of expression such as art, sports, and music to find redemption and validation, feeling the need to demonstrate their worth through accomplishments (hooks 89).

In this regard, several scholars[27] such as bell hooks emphasize the importance of mass media following the imperialist white-supremacist capitalist culture (hooks 33). Early in life, the majority of black males are inundated with the notion that they live in an all-powerful universe that does not want them to prosper and wants to see them die. However, most black

[27] For a more detailed discussion see: Gray, H. "Black masculinity and visual culture"; McLeod, K. "The Construction of Masculinity in African American Music and Sports"; hooks, b. "Reconstructing Black Masculinity"; Gayles, J. *Stepping Off Stage: Towards a More Reflexive Blackness*.

males are socialized to be victims of emotional abuse, both at home and school, even before the media gets a firm grip on their minds. The early childhood socialization of black males is most fiercely and mercilessly associated with the patriarchal relations that maintain guys should not show feelings or emotionally care about others (81). One method used by white artists and activists to revitalize white middle-class masculinity was the appropriation of fictional traits associated with black masculinity that were promoted in the media such as strength, power, freedom, and rebellion (Bausch ii). Yet, despite their frequent celebration of black masculinity's strength, mass media ultimately reduced black manhood to a series of consumable images, reinforced the structurally-based privileges denied to black men, and reduced black manhood to a series of consumable images (iii). As a consequence, the media has propagated and appropriated black masculinity as a national commodity that supports the stereotypical, violent image of Americans worldwide (McLeod 224).

In terms of how black performances[28] are portrayed visually in the United States, they have historically been influenced by and in opposition to prevailing racial and masculine discourses, particularly those associated with whiteness (Gray 401). Though they reinterpret and replicate patterns of patriarchal control, and include some of its more unsettling elements in black vernacular style and passionate performance, contemporary depictions of black masculinity continue to subvert dominant conceptions of whiteness. Under Reaganism, neo-conservatives made use of the black masculine physique: black heterosexual masculinity was utilized to connect the symbols of individual responsibility, nationalism, family, and whiteness with acts of patriotism in popular culture, television news, and policy discussions. While they diverted attention from the economy, racism, sexism, and homophobia, mainstream moral and class structure, as well as media representations of impoverished black males including Rodney

[28] For a more detailed discussion see: H.L. Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey*; P.H. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*; M.E. Dyson; Tricia Rose; R. Walcott.

King and Willie Horton, served as the symbolic basis for igniting and maintaining anxieties about crime, the nuclear family, and middle-class security. In the minds of the public, this embodiment of black manhood is constantly seen as the reasonable target of monitoring, control, and punishment. To keep white Americans safe, this black male body unites the major institutions of white masculine power and authority such as the police, the criminal justice system, and the news media (402). Representations of black male youth are supported by concepts of manhood that are firmly rooted in conventional ideas of authenticity, heterosexuality, and sexism (403). Another significant front in the cultural politics of blackness is how media portrayals of black masculinity function: the traits that define the racial and cultural boundaries of a counter-hegemonic blackness are used to depict the black man self (404). A kind of commodity fetishism known as "black musical masculinity spectacularization" obscures the hard work done by black musicians so that they can only be viewed as examples. The gap that exists between the "average" black guy and these top artists' extraordinary skills, talents, and accomplishments contributes to the continuation of white male hegemony in North America. This scenario is a story of social advancement that tells young black males about the benefits of heterosexuality and individualism in capitalist social relations. In Miles Davis's career is evident the drive for extraordinary improvisational virtuosity that characterizes much African American music culture. It also aligns with the need to stand out from one's peers and to signify oneself to the cultural restrictions that such performers believe they live under. Thus, spectacular improvisation serves as a metaphorical and literal freedom. In McLeod's view, the popularity of these performances in both black and white culture can be partially explained by this theory. It not only revitalizes performance and technique but also leads to social empowerment, as the exceptionalism that black artists have had to fulfill in the past to be accepted by white audiences has raised expectations of spectacle, which in turn has heightened standards of virtuosity (McLeod 222).

2.1.1. What is Black Performance?

Before analyzing the notion of black performance in-depth, it is crucial to understand what performance generally means. Performance is a bodily activity that generates meaning; it is the re-actualization or display of symbolic systems through artificial mediating artifacts like living bodies (McKenzie n.p.). In her most influential work *Gender Trouble*: *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Judith Butler makes one of the most important contributions to gender theory and feminist studies by questioning conventional ideas of identity and sexuality and proposing the concept of gender "performativity" which is described as "that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (Butler xii). Her central argument is that there is no inherent link between gender and biological sex, rather it comes from one's actions. According to her theory of "performativity"[29], gender is a continuous act repeatedly performed via nonverbal communication, speech acts, and social practices rather than a permanent reality; in other words, it is created and reinforced by societal norms (Mitrano n.p.)[30]. The idea that an individual's identity serves as the basis for their secondary behaviors is subverted by this performative perspective. As an alternative, speech acts and symbolic communication are seen as both the source and the result of an individual's identity, which is constantly redefined through actions, behaviors, and gestures (Cavanaugh n.p.).

So what is meant by black performance? E. Patrick Johnson explains in his groundbreaking work *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (2003) that blackness is not a fixed identity, still, it is a performance that can be taken by people of other races as well. How blackness is performed is closely related to cultural manifestations

[29] The term "performative" was first described by philosopher of language John L. Austin (1962) as the capacity of speech and communication to act or to consummate an action.
[30] Mitrano, F. (2023). Lessons 9,10: Judith Butler. American Language. University of Ca' Foscari (Venice). Delivered from 4th April 2023 to 11th April 2023.

including language, body language, and music. “Performance is dynamic and generative, enabling difficult and controversial stances and poses that ultimately help us better to articulate our objects (and subjects) of inquiry” (Johnson 6-7). It is the paradigm that allows blackness to be appropriated. As a term, it has been widely used in many disciplines and fields, then it has evolved into a catch-all encompassing cultural, aesthetic, and social communication events. According to scholars such as Mary Strine, Beverly Long, and Mary Frances HopKins, it has become caught up in disagreement over its nature (6). This controversial identity may highlight the gaps in strict disciplinary boundaries and define performance parameters to analyze, interpret, and theorize a particular text or sociocultural event. To sum up, studying performance helps understand blackness and vice versa.

The performance paradigm sheds light on the cultural mirroring and the conflict between tradition, which stabilizes cultural forces, and the ever-changing elements of culture, which serve as an area for social critique, change, and reflection. The intersection of the histories of performance and blackness is the place where otherness is (Johnson 7). In this regard, history reveals that white Americans have a habit of appropriating other people’s cultural expressions viewing them as their own. The issue becomes much more complex when white people take black identity: blackness is frequently fetishized by white people, a practice that bell hooks refers to as “eating the other”. Therefore, the performance of black signifiers by white-identified subjects has always an impact that is already entwined in the discourse of otherness, and the historical significance of white skin privilege inevitably creates a contentious connection with its Others (4). The notion of performance is also constructed in opposition to scientific reason and rational thought, and it is connected to the body, emotions, and feelings. In Western intellectual traditions, black people are devalued in both the academy and society along with the devaluation of their performance. Thus, to support the colonial and racist gaze, black performances such as music, speech, and dance, become the setting where individuals

and their actions are perceived as “spectacles of primitivism” (7). According to Patricia Williams, it facilitates how the Other is perceived and not seen “depending upon a dynamic of display that ricochets between hypervisibility and oblivion” (8).

However, it does not necessarily facilitate blackness. Williams adds that blackness may transcend the performative in certain instances; that is to say, it is not limited to the theatrical fantasy of the white imaginary that is projected onto black bodies or always consciously acted out; rather, it also refers to the unavoidable racial experience of black people. Blackness either supersedes or explodes performance. It now exists in the liminal region of the psyche, where it is without agency, hidden from the colonizer’s gaze. In this regard, the author speaks about “a sense of split identity” that encloses one’s experience of living blackness and the theatrical enterprise of black life as fantasy (Johnson 8). The method by which society invests bodies with social significance is informed by racial performativity; in fact, blackness provides a means of rethinking performance theory by compelling it to be grounded in practice, particularly in the context of a culture that is capitalist, patriarchal, and white supremacist (9). The physical environment in which performances take place, as well as the interactions between the artist and audience and the artist oneself, are necessary considerations in the concept of performance. For this reason, what defines a performance as such depends not only on the context but also on the event’s aesthetics: the expectations, conventions, and rules of the setting, performer, and audience differ in each situation, and they all contribute to a better understanding of performance events (11).

2.1.2. Performance of A Ritual Moment: Black Masculinity as Art

W.E.B. Du Bois claimed that black art is a powerful tool to destabilize stereotypes and misrepresentations of what black people are victims of. Art should be conceived as propaganda and has a major role in the struggle for racial justice[31]. As a result, art can show black people something different from what they have usually undergone and create a space that does not exist elsewhere. Through art, one can dispel these myths and preconceived notions, build a universe, and establish connections. Theorists like bell hooks and Judith Butler contend that performance strategies are one way through which people create gender and racial identity (Salih 63).

When it comes to black performance as art, it should also be mentioned the collection *Let's Get It On: The Politics of Black Performance* (1995) in which hooks offers a thought-provoking look at questions surrounding cultural identity and performance practice. The work assesses the viability of African American performance art in modern culture and its evolution from slavery to contemporary society. It can be claimed that, since African Americans can never fully separate themselves from their surroundings as a minority subculture within a wider white society, all facets of black life can be understood as a performance. According to the author, when it comes to art, one of the spaces in which black people feel free to express themselves, two types of performance can be distinguished in African-American identity: performance as "survival", interlinked to the notion of wearing a mask, and performance as "ritual play", as art (hooks 210). The first kind of performance entails a blackness exhibition to be viewed by nonblack spectatorship and is readily transformed into an act of "complicity"; the latter functions as a critical intervention and a rite of resistance that emphasizes the creation of new expressions of identity and liberating practice. Indeed, in black expressive culture, the

[31] For a more detailed discussion see: W.E.B. Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art" (1926).

performative arts are the consequences of circumstances of oppression and exploitation (211). In this regard, hooks claims that their nationwide presence illustrates the problematic character of African American performance, live art, and related practices in the West today. They embody the fusion of old customs in which ritualistic performance was used, particularly during ceremonies of possession, for survival goals or ritualistic objectives. This is the result of plantation life and slavery merging and becoming madness which expresses issues that affect a large number of black people from all socioeconomic classes, including a lack of community, alienation from daily life, fractured individualism, and the loss of organized resistance (210).

Performance practice in its entirety has been a key component of the decolonization process under white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks 212). In the post-slavery southern culture of apartheid, young black children were approached to "live arts" as something to be appreciated and encouraged to show their talent. Displaying talent was an expression of artistic creativity but also a political protest against racial presumptions regarding black people's potential. In the words of hooks, "We performed for ourselves as subjects, not as objects seeking approval from the dominant culture". Performance was a celebration and a ritual moment wherein a liberating subjectivity was declared. Throughout African American history it has played a key role in the liberation struggle, primarily because it has not required the same material resources as other creative genres. The voice transformed into a performed act, into an instrument, could be used by everyone and anywhere (211). Through performance, one could go outside the bounds of acceptable discourse concerning both the decorum of African American cultural mores and the dominant white culture, proving that the black race was not uncivilized. The first black performative arts were born in the early nineteenth century, a period in which oration and recitation of poetry emerged (212). However, in African languages, the word "art" does not even exist nor does African art categorize itself into distinct categories (Schuller 4). African American performing artists have consistently been at the forefront of the

collective black political self-recovery movement, contributing to the decolonization process and the creation of liberating identities. In the words of Peggy Phelan[32], "Performance implicates the real through the presence of living bodies. In performance art spectatorship there is an element of consumption: there are no left-overs, and the gazing spectator must try to take everything in … Live performance plunges into visibility – in a maniacally charged present – and disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control"[33] (hooks 218-219).

In his major work *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (1988), Henry Louis Gates Jr. extensively analyses the notion of performance which is crucial to understanding African American culture and language. In his view, performance is interlinked to the practice of "Signifyin(g)"[34], a crucial aspect of black culture and a rhetorical strategy rooted in African American vernacular traditions. It is a language game, not a response to white racism, not even a collective black wish-fulfillment to white racism (Gates 70). According to Gates, performance serves as the medium for Signifyin(g) and it is not just a form of entertainment, rather it is an essential part of how black people interact with language, culture, and identity. In other words, performance, which goes beyond the spoken word, is a vital means of expressing black culture: tone, gesture, facial expression, rhythm, and other paralinguistic components that give language life, are some examples. African American cultural practices revolve around this dynamic use of language, which adds to a complex, multi-layered method of communication (51-52). "Signifying allowed you a choice – you could either make a cat feel good or bad. If you had just destroyed someone or if they were down already, signifying could help them over. Signifying was also a way of expressing your own feelings

[32] Peggy Phelan is one of the founders of Performance Studies International.
[33] Phelan, P. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993), 148. Quoted in bell hooks, 219.
[34] Gates parenthesizes the *g* at the end of the term to indicate that in the spoken vernacular the final consonant is usually not pronounced (Warren 224).

… Signifying at its best can be heard when the brothers are exchanging tales"[35] (H. Rap Brown). Among several scholars, Gates states that performance can also be used as a means of resistance: black performers have asserted their own identities by challenging prevailing cultural narratives through it. It becomes a means of regaining agency and power in different societal manifestations, including spoken word, dance, and music. The author points out that the performer's ability to connect with the audience and convey the message is important to the success of Signifyin(g); this is frequently achieved through improvisation[36] and manipulation of language. The interconnection of the Signifyin(g) practice with the performance can be seen in oral expressions, particularly in the tradition of the so-called "dozens", which are the verbal insult rituals (Gates 69).

2.2. Musical Performances: A Focus on Jazz

Black masculinity in music is a dynamic and multidimensional performance that changes depending on the historical, social, and cultural environment, rather than a single, static notion. Jazz, labor camp music, and other musical genres have all contributed to the ongoing reinvention and validation of black men's masculinity. They have used music to convey their cultural identity, strength, vulnerability, and leadership. In an environment frequently controlled by racism and injustice, music has been a vital instrument for black men to express, negotiate, and reinforce their manhood.

Already according to ancient Greek ideas, the combination of power and beauty was the mark of the ideal man and this is partially responsible for today's connection between music and masculinity in Western civilization. Indeed, Aristotle wrote in *Politics* that music and gymnastics were crucial to boys' education, and music, in particular, was "capable of

[35] Quoted in Gates, 44.
[36] An in-depth analysis of the notion of "improvisation" will be provided in paragraph 2.2. "Musical Performances: A Focus on Jazz".

producing a certain quality of body". Unlike the widespread Western belief that the two worlds exist independently of one another, for the Greeks the arts together created a complete individual (McLeod 205). The fusion and heightened musical intensity are particularly prevalent in the African American community. The world of music, together with that of sport, has been seen by black males as a place of possibilities where alternative masculinity could be expressed[37] (hooks 22). Black people, since they are children, may learn the lesson that they would receive better treatment suppressing their anger and any other strong emotions that make adults uncomfortable. What little attention and encouragement they receive can only come if adults perceive them as doing properly (88). One of the main reasons so many black males turn to sports, and music in particular, for solace and validation is the drive to demonstrate their worth via achievement (89). Sports and music, which both promote a "no pain, no gain" attitude to practice and a stoic focus on performance, are the two domains where this is most prevalent (McLeod 205). Through music black males were enabled to communicate a wide variety of complex feelings, from the greatest happiness to the deepest sadness and anguish. Still, more than any other reason, music was an act of resistance to the patriarchal notion that a real man ought never to show vulnerability. The core and essence of music, especially blues and jazz music, was in an emotional recognition of the agony that black males experience daily. "The soul's need not to be abandoned, to find shelter in a secure emotional place" (hooks 139). Compared to other popular music genres, African-influenced approaches to music seem to place a greater emphasis on such characteristics. As Henry Louis Gates notes, African American language and culture are often characterized by the play on conventional patterns or formulas enclosed in the term "groove". "Groove" represents a visual and nonverbal aesthetic frequently found in black music that is crucial to understanding the development of black

[37] E. Patrick Johnson; M. E. Dyson; Tricia Rose; M.A. Neal; K. McKittrick; T. Rodgers; G.P. Ramsey Jr.; T. Nyong'o.

masculinity in this field, which can be compared to the physical experience of the boxing ring[38] (207). In the 1930s there was the advent of the “battle of the bands” where black audiences had to determine the outcome; such occasions symbolized the African American community’s real and symbolic empowerment (209). The “cutting contest” was another type of musical rivalry and perhaps the most noticeable instance of male gendering in jazz performances (Ake 33). It served as a ritual battle, a means for black men to show off their dominance and authority through virtuoso competitive performances that went against the social and economic (Joyner 217). These competitions were a continuation of the "duel" mentality that originated in the violent gang conflicts of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries in Europe. Other important urban word games to be mentioned are “Signifyin(g)” and “The Dozens” that infuse black culture. For instance, in “The Dozens”, a West African oral tradition-based ritual, two competitors compete against one another as to mental toughness, wit, linguistic skill, and personal strength by alternately disparaging, or "snapping”. However, with the rise of hyper-masculine gangsta rap, the humorous and competitive spirit of most African American culture frequently erupted into actual violence (McLeod 209).

When it comes to black performance in music, African American work songs should be mentioned since, on the one hand, they embody the notion of performance as “survival” described by bell hooks in her work “We Real Cool”, on the other hand, they are examples of how black masculinity expressed itself. Black men had the opportunity to demonstrate qualities often associated with masculinity, such as physical strength and endurance, while also building their sense of community and shared identity[39]. This new music grew out of a multicolored array of musical traditions that were carried to the new globe by people from Europe and Africa

[38] For a more detailed discussion see: K. McLeod “The Construction of Masculinity in African American Music and Sports”.
[39] For a more detailed discussion see: Lomax, A. “The Land Where the Blues Began”; Baraka, A. “Blues People: Negro Music in White America”.

throughout the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries during slavery. Among the main events that lead to the spread of "jazz"[40] as a new American music, there are the importation of Negro slaves into the United States and the rituals of the Place Congo[41] in New Orleans in the mid-nineteenth century, a park that was the meeting place of slaves and their descendants, considered the precursors to jazz[42]. Thus, it is possible to determine the musical connections between early jazz and the many African and European traditions (Schuller 3-4). Work songs had no set form as they were part of an almost oral culture; records only started to come in after 1865, when slavery officially ended. Black song traditions are the source of many songs performed by enslaved Africans; some were introduced by the captors to boost morale and keep the Africans working on time, while others were sung as a reminder of home. They promoted a sense of community among workers, helped coordinate group tasks, and made strenuous labor more tolerable. Slaves used them as a form of resistance and survival to take charge of their surroundings and stay connected to their cultural identity. Additionally, they have been viewed as a way to endure adversity and express resentment verbally or creatively, having often been employed as a means of opposition and insurrection (Jackson 773-796). It is interesting that in the black culture, language, is "the tongue of a beaten people"[43], and its meanings are connected to musical sound. Essentially, language functions only when combined with rhythm. Therefore, American jazz's scat and bop lyrics are not surprising considering the intrinsic musicality. Indeed, jazz is an African musical genre that has been transferred and carried on (Schuller 5-6), it is a way of life that created both music and culture (Peretti 120).

[40] For a more detailed discussion see: Schuller, G. *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development*; Baraka, A. *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*; Ward, G.C. *Jazz: A History of America's Music*; Martin, H., Waters, K. *Jazz: The First 100 Years*; Gioia, T. *The History of Jazz*; Stowe, D.W. *Swing Changes: Big-Band Jazz in New Deal America*.
[41] For a more detailed discussion see: Cavin, S. *Journal of Jazz Studies*.
[42] For a more detailed discussion see: Cavin, S. "Missing Women: On thee Voodoo Trail to Jazz".
[43] Quoted in Peretti, 131.

A key component of jazz is the creative process of improvisation which may be viewed as an expression of personal autonomy. Through improvisation, black musicians were able to express a creative masculinity that was unrestricted by social conventions. Jazz performers were focused on honing their group performances and skills as well as combining sounds on paper and the bandstand. The improvisation of many lines simultaneously is a typically African concept and is perpetuated in most forms of early jazz, music marked above all by "collective improvisation" (Schuller 57-58). It is the heart and soul of jazz and enables an individual or community to grow in reaction to regulations and guides to social empowerment. It is the capability to overcome self-consciousness (Herzig, Baker 183). Indeed, the term "jamming" describes situations of fluid behavioral cooperation that happen with little self-disclosure and consensus. "Jamming" can be considered a reinforcement of a model of creative competitive performance for black males (McLeod 218). "Male creativity … required wide-open spaces, symbolic frontiers where the body could do its thing, expand, grow, and move, surrounded by a watching crowd. Domestic space, equated with repression and containment, as well as with the "feminine" was resisted and rejected so that an assertive patriarchal paradigm of competitive masculinity and its concomitant emphasis on physical prowess could emerge"[44] (219). To sum up, black male musical performances can be seen as a reminder of black people's marginalization and estrangement from a unifying salve and mainstream culture, which has promoted black masculinity stereotypically and aggressively (McLeod 223). According to Richard Wright, music is a potent weapon for resistance and healing as well as a reflection of the psychological anguish caused by institutional racism. The "soul murder" depicts the terrible effects of dehumanization on black souls, but music offers a way to communicate, rebel against,

[44] bell hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," in Media and Cultural Studies: Key works, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglass M. Knellner (Maiden, Mass.: Black well, 2001), 435. Quoted in McLeod, 218-219.

and rise above that pain. According to Wright's view, music is a crucial component of the fight to recover and reinforce black identity, dignity, and humanity[45].

To examine how the concept of black masculinity in jazz music has developed over time it is necessary to do a chronological analysis. After 1940, jazz was viewed by sociological scientists and others as a deliberately deviant subculture, embraced by angry men who wanted to be hated by the squares in their community (Peretti 120-121). "Jazz is after all an abstract art, and so the results the player got were abstract, but based on the world as he knew it, suffered and dreamed it could be" (H. Carmichael)[46]. Generally speaking, jazz was a male fraternal activity, thus men considered it a space of fraternity; in fact, women had minor roles. Contrary to many artists, music composers, and other professionals of this century, early jazz musicians most definitely did not cultivate a noteworthy oasis of innovation and tolerance in contemporary urban America; indeed, they made subtler and less conscious changes to the cadence of their lives and behaviors (Peretti 121-127). In his work, *The Creation of Jazz: Music, Race, and Culture in Urban America* (1992), the scholar of American studies and history Burton W. Peretti, provides an analysis of jazz stressing the fact that it had a significant role in the social and economic advancement of African Americans but also that jazz's identity has always been deeply rooted in both racial and gender norms. Furthermore, he stresses how jazz was one of the most potent forms of black American culture, in fact, through its iconic figures and performances it contributed to redefining the idea of masculinity (Joyner 214-217).

Louis Armstrong[47] was one of the most important jazz pioneers, and his influence extended beyond music to include the redefining of black manhood in the United States. In

[45] For a more detailed discussion see: R. Wright. "The Man Who Lived Underground" (1944); "Black Boy" (1945); "Native Son" (1940).
[46] Quoted in Peretti, 121.
[47] For a more detailed discussion see: Giddins, G. *Satchmo: The Genius of Louis Armstrong*; Brothers, T. *Louis Armstrong: Master of Modernism*; Berrett, J. *The Louis Armstrong Companion: Eight Decades of Commentary*; Riccardi, R. *What a Wonderful World: The Magic of Louis Armstrong's Later Years*.

Louis Armstrong: Master of Modernism and *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans* (2017), Thomas Brothers wrote extensively on how Armstrong, through his art and personality, has navigated the racial and social tensions of his time, helping to redefine black masculinity. Particularly throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Armstrong's career was a critical phase in his development as a powerful and positive symbol of masculinity. The artist's background in New Orleans and the environment in which he was raised shaped his identity as a black artist and his view of the meaning of being a man (Brother n.p.). Scholars emphasize Armstrong's ability to convey masculinity that combined strength with joy: his iconic smile came to represent a kind of manhood that challenged the rigid stereotypes associated with black men so much that he became a cultural icon and international ambassador, known as "Satchelmouth". Thus, he altered the way black males were viewed and portrayed in popular culture by demonstrating that black manhood could be strong and honorable rather than violent and subservient. Gabbard effectively captures the potential for affirming masculinity when he describes Armstrong's appearance in a 1932 Hollywood short, where the artist is stereotyped dressed in leopard skin. The transformation is complete as soon as Armstrong raises his trumpet, "adopts an erect stance", and begins to play (Johnson 3).

In the same period, during the 1930s and 1940s, another significant contribution was that of Duke Ellington[48], universally recognized as one of the most influential musicians of the twentieth century. Known as "Harlem's Aristocrat of Jazz", his approach distinguished Ellington from his contemporaries. It granted him professional respect from a few other African American artists in the context of the late 1920s and early 1930s racial situations. However, by the 1950s things had drastically altered, and even Ellington had to prove that he was still a legitimate "race" man. Thanks in large part to Ellington, jazz evolved from a straightforward

[48] For a more detailed discussion see: Cohen, G.H. *Duke Ellington's America*; Teachout, T. *Duke: A Life of Duke Ellington*; Tucker, M. *The Duke Ellington Reader*.

popular entertainment genre to a recognized and revered art form. The notion of black masculinity was greatly impacted by this because it showed that black men could succeed in highly competitive creative professions and win acclaim around the globe. Throughout fifty years, he represented a unique and revolutionary force in the music industry. In addition, as one of the most well-known black public personalities in history, Ellington showed leadership on issues of equality, civil rights, and America's place in the world. Harvey G. Cohen states in *Duke Ellington's America* (2010) that he has deliberately constructed a public image that embodies dignity and refinement which allowed him to challenge and subvert gender and racial stereotypes of the era. Ellington is renowned for his impeccable style and captivating onstage persona, thus, he personified a refined masculinity that contrasted with the coarseness and hostility frequently associated with African American males. His music, which blended intricacy and refinement to depict an intellectual and cosmopolitan masculinity, enhanced this image even more. Ellington's impact not only was "the strongest that any American artist had yet made", but also he "was again redefining the parameters of American and African American culture, dispelling older cultural prejudices, and demonstrating the versatility of both traditions"[49] (Harvey 108-110).

Bandleader, composer, and jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker, known by the nicknames "Bird" or "Yardbird", played as a soloist and was a key developer of bebop, a fast-paced jazz style with complex harmonies and technical skill. In the words of the author Robert George Reisner, in the work *Bird: The Legend of Charlie Parker* (1962), "He was a strange bird in that his migratory habits were not fixed … The man was full of surprises" (Reisner 21). His personal life was characterized by several issues, including drug abuse and relationship difficulties. The combination of creative brilliance and personal fragility contrasted the clichés of physical

[49] Harvey, G.C. *Duke Ellington's America*, 469, 555. Quoted in Harvey, M.S. "Duke Ellington's America by Harvey G. Cohen, 109.

strength and invulnerability that were frequently placed on black men and created a picture of black masculinity as something complicated. His multifaceted music and troubled personality represented a new kind of black manhood, in other words, the outcast artist who defies expectations and social norms (11-27). “He was tricky; he was shifty; he could put up more defenses than anyone. He was terribly charming; he was monstrously aggressive. He had a big thing about race. He was not paranoid about it, but he never made a real adjustment to it. Bird partially solved this problem by becoming one of the greatest musicians who ever made sound” (19).

When it comes to the end of the 1940s until the 1950s and 1960s, the era of the civil rights movement and the period when the women’s movement initially gained traction, the two major personalities in the history of jazz were John Coltrane and Miles Davis. During a period in which a crisis of black male leadership and male identity was even stronger, Davis emerged as a genuine male leader in a male-dominated field (Early 154-156). Coltrane and Davis are a potent symbol of the intricate relationships between race, class, and cultural politics about the construction of the black masculine identity and public persona. These musicians defied prevailing societal presumptions about masculinity and whiteness as contemporary pioneers in musical aesthetics, societal vision, and personal style. From Miles' defiantly cool pose and fine vines to Coltrane's black and third-world internationalism that framed his ceaseless spiritual and musical quest, jazzmen articulated a different way of knowing themselves and seeing the world through the very "structures of feeling" they assumed and enacted. They saw blackness as a potent emblem of the masculine, and, like their contemporaries, portrayed a kind of black masculinity that not only attacked whiteness but also banished it to the cultural periphery (Gray 401). Celebrated as the “modern primitive”, the jazz man was policed as a societal menace for defying the function that the dominant culture had assigned him. He was a man who embodied masculinity that overtly opposed the prevailing norms of place and property: pleasure, nihilism,

drugs, excess, and personality were all essential elements of this style that did not fit into the predominant cultural logic. According to Professor Herman Gray, the varied and intricate relationships between genders that exist in the jazz community are shown by the lives and careers of Miles Davis and John Coltrane: while Coltrane's wife was a valued member of his band, Davis frequently mistreated and mocked women. He argues that, while the black jazz man's brand of manhood first challenged mainstream white discourses on heterosexual masculinity, this same strong and rebellious black masculinity frequently upheld unequal power relations between men and women toward women (402).

Miles Davis[50] represented a particular type of masculinity and a distinct approach to male leadership; he was not only a musical giant but also an icon of black pride and masculinity (Woodworth 126). It is interesting to highlight that jazz critics and historians have never been able to adequately convey the allure and strength of his playing (Walser 343), but also that several controversies surround this icon because of missed notes, drug use, or electric instruments (344). He gained notoriety as a bebop trumpeter, offering an alternative to the postwar masculine identity of gray flannel suits, wild solos, and a militant machismo. Black Power intellectuals like Amiri Baraka hailed him as a hero for his refusal to conform to the audience's expectations or respect the bounds of polite society and musical style (Woodworth 126). In short, the public was captivated by Davis because he appeared to have the key to being "cool". For Davis, the act of voluntarily creating a certain identity was one of the crucial elements of jazz: he became a leader in the 1950s and 1960s using his music to force himself on the consciousness of the public. Thus, he became the first black man to accomplish this in a way that both the black and white public would take seriously. Even Columbia Records, the company that signed Davis in 1955, wanted to sell him as an artistic visionary black male

[50] For a more detailed discussion see: Troupe, Q. *Miles: The Autobiography*; Szwed, J. *So What: The Life of Miles Davis*; Cole, G. *The Last Miles: The Music of Miles Davis*, 1980-1991; Yudkin, J. *Miles Davis, Miles Smiles, and the Invention of Post-Bop*.

(Early 157). He aspired to be a successful businessman while simultaneously taking risks, being fashionable, enjoying life to the fullest, and setting an example of integrity and pride (159). However, some scholars such as Gerald Early, speaking about the reincarnation of the myth of Peter Pan, count Davis in this description. Indeed, because he began performing at rock venues when he was middle-aged, his was the worst possible perversion of the masculine ideal consumed by an uncontrollably youthful fixation and defying authority by refusing to acknowledge the glorious past of jazz (158). Ultimately, Davis was considered a cool man also because he embodied virility, hard effort, and controlled violence bringing all the athleticism and spectacle of a boxing match into his stage performance (Woodworth 127)[51].

2.2.1. The "Unknowing Queer History"[52]

Jazz is a kind of music and a significant mirror reflecting the black community's shared identities and sociopolitical landscape. Because of this, studies of how black musicians have experienced and understood gender, homosexuality in particular, as well as effeminacy in general, shed light on the nuances of black masculinity itself and some of the real struggles that still face people who do not always fit the stereotypically macho and heteronormative mold that is maintained by a large portion of the music industry across genre boundaries. For this reason, it is only quite recently that experiences of homosexuals, bisexuals, transsexuals, and cross-dressers have been able to express themselves. Jazz developed during a period when it was the most dynamic musical genre for organizing and expressing gender identities, and it also had a crucial role in the growth of the African American community by redefining concepts of masculinity and sexuality.

[51] An in-depth analysis of black masculinities is provided in Gerald Early, "On Miles Davis, Vince Lombardi, & the Crisis of Masculinity in Mid-Century America", pp. 154-159.
[52] Quoted in Tucker, 2.

In the civil rights movement (1954-1968), the goal of achieving citizenship was built on heterosexuality and in opposition to non-heteronormative conduct. However, before the ascendancy of the civil rights movement in the 1950s, black American working-class society was significantly more accepting of homosexuality and non-heteronormative manners than was the black middle class or white culture in general. As Brian Ward has pointed out, the new wave of African American singers sang of uncertainty, rather than presenting the king of dark, unsettling sexuality that scared white adults. Black gays eventually came to symbolize every aspect of African American working-class culture that civil rights activists recognized as impediments to obtaining citizenship (Russell n.p.). Racist misconceptions about African Americans in jazz have been perpetuated by the mainstream media, portraying them as extra-sexual, primitive, and exotic. However, jazz has been the target of "uplift" ideology, which understandably views it as a symbol of genius, dignity, and high art. This seems to eliminate sexuality from the conversation, but it frequently solidifies specific and extremely limited conceptions of black hetero-masculinity into ideas about what jazz means. If a dominating vision of the jazzman is built, even idealized, as hyper-hetero-masculine at one discursive moment or another, scholars, such as Jonathan N. Ketz and Sherrie Tucker, try to break this pattern by demonstrating that certain real jazz performers “deviate” from that standard. However, categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality are of recent origin, and their meanings have changed over time[53] (Tucker 4). Scott Herring promotes a method known as the “unknowing queer history” to avoid producing information about, categorizing, or recognizing “understandings of non-normative sexual bodies of any color, class, and gender”. Liberating forgotten histories is not the only step in bringing disadvantaged subjects from the past into visibility; queer desire may also objectify when it comes to knowable queer topics

[53] The late 19th-century discourse in the United States gave rise to a crisis in the concept of homo/heterosexuality, which was fueled by presumptions about the racialization of bodies (5).

(2). For many issues, jazz is often used as a sign of "straightness", possibly even as a "straightening device" on several historical occasions. Jazz and improvisational music-making contexts have been affected by gender and ideas of masculinity which have reinforced the concept that these genres are defined and dominated by males; being seen masculinity as a norm, such social constructions are seen as inherent qualities of this kind of music (Canham 10). However, the new straight norm took the stage during the period known as the "Jazz Age" (1918-1928) in New Orleans, "the romantic, colorful, exotic, hyper-sexual birthplace of jazz", helping to make heteronormativity fashionable (Tucker 5-6). Romantic fantasies about the jazz musicians as "the outsider with a life in debauch and an insatiable appetite for women" conceal jazz as a unique venue for males to exhibit their intimacy and emotion without violating the "prohibition against homosexuality". In fact, during several historical moments, many have criticized jazz as a homophobic workplace (10). As poet Ted Joans[54] put it, "blowing a masculine stick" and "avoiding the faggot's trick" are advised in jazz scenes where musical and social interactions assume an unmistakable heterosexual orientation, one that facilitates non-threatening male bonding, the rituals of which are covered up and approved by insiders (Hollerbach 165). Indeed, not only the terminology employed in jazz music, such as "swinging hard", "digging in", "kicking ass", "poppin'" and "burnin'", convey an active and aggressive phallocentricity, but also the instruments[55] such as the timbre of the guitar, and the way they are played, characterize this kind of genre as masculine (Hollerbach 166).

In "A Spectacle in Color: The Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem" (1989), Eric Garber presents a homosexual Afro-American subculture that started to take form in New York's Harlem at the beginning of the twentieth century (Garber n.p.). In the 1920s, Harlem was a "homosexual mecca"[56] and the epicenter of the cultural coming-out movement (Russell

[54] Quoted in Wilmer 1980, p. 204
[55] An in-depth analysis of instruments and gender is provided in the following paragraph.
[56] Professor G. Chauncey. Quoted in Russell, "The Color of Discipline: Civil Rights and Black Sexuality".

n.p.). Thousands of Afro-Americans moved to northern cities around the turn of the century, and this was a major historical aspect in the creation of the lesbian and homosexual subculture: they identified themselves as "New Negroes", made Harlem their capital, and displayed a newfound militancy and pride. The ensuing burst of self-consciously Afro-American artistic expression of the 1920s, referred to as the "Harlem Renaissance," had a significant influence on the advancement of American arts in the years that followed. Notable characters from the Harlem Renaissance were homosexual and bisexuals, such as Alain Locke and Langston Hughes; they often socialized in settings where bourgeois morality was conspicuously lacking.

Homosexuality was a part of the blues' world too. The "sissies" and "bull daggers" mentioned in the blues, for instance, "were ridiculed for their cross-gender behavior, but neither shunned nor hated" (Garber n.p.). In these songs, homosexuals were frequently made fun of, but still, they were recognized as an integral element of black working-class culture. The Hamilton Lodge Ball, an annual cross-dressing party in Harlem, was acknowledged as the country's first drag party in 1869. Harlem may have had the highest concentration of men willing to go out in public in drag (Russell n.p.). Developing psychiatric institutes were also attacking black guys; nonetheless, within the framework of pre-existing Afro-American organizations and customs, black lesbians and gay men were able to create a vibrant community all their own. Private parties were the best place for Harlem lesbians and gay men to socialize, providing a private and secure space. Among Afro-American institutions, "the buffet flat"[57] frequently promoted patronage of homosexuals. They had popped up in the late 1800s to accommodate black travelers who were returned away from hotels operated by white people for the night. As explained by the celebrated entertainer Bricktop, "Buffet flats were after-hours

[57] Ellington, Duke. "Buffet flat", 1938.

spots that were usually in someone's apartment, the type of place where gin was poured out of milk pitchers".

Additionally, there were buffet flats that catered specifically to homosexual males. Gay customers were typically pressured to conceal their preferences and fit in with the straight clientele. At the Hot Cha, at 132nd Street and Seventh Avenue, a more refined group of black homosexual men congregated every night to enjoy Jimmy Daniel's singing and Garland Wilson's piano performance. However, the most famous gay-oriented club of the era was Harry Hansberry's Clam House. Costume balls, parties, speakeasies, and buffet apartments in Harlem provided a place for gay encounters, even if they did not encourage the development of homosexual networks. The Harlem entertainment scene served as a gathering spot for black lesbians and homosexual males. Notable composer Porter Grainger and choir conductor Hall Johnson were among the performers who openly declared their sexual orientation (to their audiences Garber n.p.). Another proliferating center was Chicago where the greatest drag craze in the nation began; indeed, drag balls and shows were common in working-class and African American neighborhoods. Black and white gay men and lesbians frequently frequented jazz clubs and blues bars on the south side (Russell n.p.). To sum up, the Black Belt of Chicago and Harlem are the birthplaces of LGBT culture in the United States.

However, black men often followed their sexual inclinations inside the boundaries of their hometowns, staying where they were raised. In this regard, one of the first crossover black artists, widely recognized in rock'n'roll music, was Richard Wayne Penniman, known as Little Richard and under his performances as "Princess LaVonne"[58], a gifted pianist, singer, and composer, well-known drag performer on the "showbiz" circuit who rose to fame in the 1950s as the self-described "king and queen of the blues" (Russell n.p.). Early in the 1950s, Richard

[58] In this regard, among his biggest hits there are "Tutti Frutti" (1955); "Rip It Up" (1956) and "Long Tall Sally" (1956).

made the acquaintance of openly homosexual musician Billy Wright, who gave him style advice on how to shape his long hair into a pompadour, as well as pancake makeup. Later on, he said, “I wore the make-up so that white men wouldn’t think I was after the white girls. It made things easier for me, plus it was colorful too” (Collier 60).

Apart from James Baldwin, who was one of the most famously gay men in the United States, Billy Strayhorn’s[59] jazz biography is an interesting example since it provides insight into how an out homosexual black man navigated his social, professional, and personal life in a particular setting and period. Even today there is no agreement over the definition of a queer jazz subject, or who should name the jazz subject as queer (Tucker 3). Another different model of the male jazz musician is Ornette Coleman whose style and music served to minimize the phallocentric elements of jazz music, highlighting masculine roles and status in the genre, especially among black artists. He is heard hinting at the political and sexual questioning that characterized the 1960s and 1970s. According to Ake, the way Coleman conducted himself and the music he produced had the effect of downplaying the “phallocentric aspects of jazz music, destabilizing positions of masculinity and prestige in the jazz community," which in turn led to a rise in resentment because the black bebop musician could be seen as one of the most potent of all American males as long as musical virtuosity was connected to phallic power” (Ake 40). This highlights the potential link between the masculinity portrayed by jazz artists and that of the men who participated in the black power and civil rights movements (Johnson 14).

[59] For a more detailed discussion see: Hajdu, D. *Lush Life*; Barg, L. *Queer Arrangements: Billy Strayhorn and Midcentury Jazz Collaboration*.

2.2.2. Jazz Musical Instruments Defining Gender

Masculinity Studies is a significant area of research that has opened up the theoretical possibilities for "listening for gender" in Jazz Studies. Writing on masculinity in jazz has progressed from supposed, sometimes conscious, jazz norm to visibility as gender construction, rather than from presumed absence to inclusion to gender analysis. Early academics and critics revolved around ideas of racialized masculinity. It is evident the conflict between the desire to emulate and support music firmly rooted in black cultural practices, and the desire to make the music recognizable to white audiences, who thought that classical music was the highest form. Jazz became to be recognized as a unique black art form suitable for white artists to perform.

In musical performance, male dominance is still a potent phenomenon, even if women are breaking taboos and playing instruments that were once considered the domain of males. Thus, the realm of musical instruments remains male-dominated. According to Ellen Koskoff, compared to vocal performance, instrumental performance is more frequently associated with cultural ideas of gender and control. Men's status and authority are preserved and protected in the tight systems in which musicians operate; indeed, there are several instruments known as "instrumental monopolies" worldwide that women are often not allowed to touch or play. However, although sometimes downplayed and overlooked in jazz histories and criticism, the wives of jazz musicians had a significant influence on their husbands' lives and the music industry (Rustin and Tucker n.p.).

Many distinct connections with either femininity or masculinity can evolve through social practices. A powerful form of gendering is sexual symbolism in musical instruments: wind instruments, for instance, have phallic and orgiastic implications. Their gender is made clear when sexual features like breasts and genitals appear, or particular material selections

made from the wood or skin of a male or female animal or tree. [60] Some instruments carry gendered personal names, thus their masculine identity supports concepts of male authority and order. Gender-neutral personal names can also be feminine: Lucille[61], in the American blues musician B.B. King's guitar, represents a quasi-heterosexual/cross-gender relationship with the instrument. On the one hand, giving an instrument control over oneself is not something that women would likely do, on the other hand, a common idea is that women lack the physiological strength to play a particular instrument. The objectification of women as objects of sex by males may also be connected to the male inclination to form cross-gender instrument-human connections (Doubleday 3-28).

Playing music in public might turn into a traditional celebration of masculine dominance. One result might be that male musical proficiency becomes the standard, while female instrumental proficiency is seen as abnormal. Men play instruments, and women dance or sing. When it comes to jazz history in the United States, according to several scholars researching gender, such as Jane Hassinger, instruments like flutes and strings are considered to be supposedly female, whereas percussion, brass, and reeds belong to the male category. In other words, instruments serve as gender significators: they might be referred to or shown as male or female entities, as paired entities combining traits of both sexes or as family members based on gender. Gender disparities exist in the realm of musical instruments, with males predominating in instrumental skill (Doubleday 17-22). Men's instruments and their sounds are often connected to power in terms of economy, ritual, and sexuality (Koskoff 122). There is a variety of reasons why a musician may decide to play an instrument that belongs to the opposite sex; these include inspirations from the arts or spirituality, the need to try new things or bring about change, the need to shock or draw attention, or the drive to make money. It is

[60] A male tree was thought to promote warlike forces.
[61] An in-depth analysis of this musical instrument will be provided in the paragraph 2.2.2.2. Guitar.

crucial since it affects society because it provides a model that others can emulate. The majority of musical instruments are typically performed by males due to social norms, thus, playing instruments is key to the construction and expression of manhood (Doubleday 17-22). Follows an analysis of some instruments played in jazz music to emphasize how crucial it is that musical instruments convey gender.

2.2.2.1. Piano and Guitar

The piano, together with the guitar, was promoted as a symbol of wealth, class, taste, and respectability. However, it is interesting to know that it was considered among the "suitable" musical instruments for women, in fact, in nineteenth-century Europe and North America, the piano was a valuable item for women and girls, and also a significant symbol of social mobility (Doubleday 22). Playing piano was a required part of a middle-class girl's education as it was thought to provide discipline and a skill that would help attract a husband, something that men were not taught. Two representations of middle-class economic status were the piano and women's sexual purity. The piano was the quintessential "female" instrument. It serves as a woman's place where she may express her sexuality without compromising her innocence or her body's chastity, and a means of communicating her desire through playing. The piano came to be gendered female by association (Koskoff 121). For this reason, issues related to sexual orientation sometimes affected a musician's choice of instrument. One of the many examples is the famous New Orleans jazz pianist Jelly Roll Morton who initially shied away from playing the piano for fear of being judged effeminate or possibly homosexual. Thus, by the time he was seven, he became a proficient guitarist. Having heard the piano played at the New Orleans French opera house, he wanted to play it but the gentleman "had long bushy hair". Indeed, the piano was considered an instrument for a lady, and this confirmed to him that if he played the piano he would be misunderstood: "I didn't want to be called a sissy. I wanted to marry and raise a family to be known as a man among when I became of age" (Doubleday

23-24). Some feared that music would effeminize men, thus, many young men from the middle class and aristocracy were forbidden from learning the piano in personal settings, which prevented them from developing their skills for public performance. Men with a musical inclination were directed toward various instruments, such as the flute, violin, or voice but it was not expected of gentlemen to play the piano. The gendered division between the public and private domains appears to have permeated the musical world, as seen by the pronounced differences between women as piano music consumers and males as creators. The piano was a symbol of sexual pleasure. It alludes to a veiled threat to the domestic harmony and the innocence of Victorian ladies.

In "The Guitar in America: Victorian Era to Jazz Age" (2008), Noonan provides a background for the guitar in the United States. As the author suggests, up until the late eighteenth century, it was considered an instrument of culture, suitable for the parlor and for accompanying the voice. The appeal of the guitar began to wane around 1850 as the piano and banjo gained popularity until the 1880s when it attained renewed popularity. This instrument helped define and was in turn defined by America's music such as jazz and blues, being a social and cultural leveler (Noonan 3). Studies of American popular music stress how transgressive the guitar was emphasizing its role in breaking down musical and social barriers and becoming an iconic instrument (4). The jazz guitar has often been associated with masculinity; indeed, as Ingrid Monson claims, it has helped to reinforce the gendered hierarchies within this genre. One of the most significant examples of jazz guitarists during the twentieth century was Wes Montgomery who is considered among the three real innovators of the jazz guitar with Charlie Christian and Django Reinhardt. His more emotional and melodic approach was crucial to contrast the expected aggressive and virtuosic style of other male guitarists (Monson n.p.). "A severely underrated player during his lifetime" was Grant Green, one of the greatest heroes of jazz guitar and immediately recognizable for his "lithe, loose, slightly bluesy and righteously

groovy" sound (Erlewine n.p.). He gave rise to simplicity and directness in his playing which was firmly established in Black musical tradition (Hunter n.p.).

2.2.2.2. Wind Instruments: Saxophone and Trumpet

Wind instruments have intricate levels of gendered meaning too. Stephen Cottrell, among others, has pointed out many relevant concerns, especially regarding the saxophone: one relates to the different physical forms of the instrument, which can be seen as either feminine, particularly in the S-shaped variants, or masculine, especially in the phallic-looking soprano saxophone; another issue is the saxophone's hybrid status, which philosopher and musicologist Theodor W. Adorno called "zwischengeschlechticher", literally "between genders", as it straddles the categories of woodwind and brass. According to this concept, the brass was strongly associated with men, indeed, by playing high notes, the brass player advertises a physicality that has come to be associated with masculinity, whereas the woodwind was considered appropriate for female artists. When it comes to the saxophone, women and men have traditionally played the instrument together; furthermore, speaking of performance practice, Cottrell notes that it might be interpreted "both as a symbol of predatory phallic behavior, and female sexual allure"[62] (Doubleday 13-14). However, having complex gendered meanings, some scholars do not agree with the same theory placing the saxophone only among the "masculine" instruments, while the flute and harp are considered on the side of the female pole (Koskoff 121).

In "*Mo' Better Blues* and Representations of the Jazz Trumpet" (1992), Krin Gabbard stresses the importance of these instruments for black jazz performers and their masculinity, focusing his attention on the trumpet which is considered stereotypically male due to its form and occupation of the space (Johnson 1). Contradictions have long plagued white America's

[62] Cottrell 2006. Quoted in Doubleday, 14.

perception of black manhood, particularly during the jazz trumpet era of the 1920s and 1930s when African American artists used it to express their sexuality. The attributes required to succeed in the jazz industry were considered “masculine” prerogatives: a relentless focus on job advancement that often involved being away from home and family; aggressive self-confidence on the bandstand, showcasing one's “chops” or pure blowing strength. The black man was seen as both a symbol of hyper-masculinity and pitifully unmanly, as was frequently the case with Louis Armstrong. Jazz, like many other facets of black culture, gave its practitioners a lot of freedom to show their masculinity without resorting to less mediated displays of phallic power, which were routinely repressed by white culture (Gabbard 47). According to Professor Ingrid Monson, the jazz performer idealized by white musicians was a stereotypically dangerous black man (Johnson 4).

The first trumpeter to emerge as a jazz hero was Buddy Bolden. Generally speaking, New Orleans jazz was considered the only “real” jazz whose performers were considered primitive geniuses and their fans dreamt about blackness and masculinity appreciating jazz’s propensity for rhythmic and improvisatory music (Rustin and Tucker n.p.). Pitch, speed, and emotional intensity are the three elements that make up the phallicism of the jazz trumpet, all of which Armstrong significantly enhanced in the 1920s. Other musicians, who came after him, have discovered various approaches to handling this aspect of the trumpet (Gabbard 45). African Americans have dominated the jazz trumpet’s history, particularly those who employed the instrument to project masculinity during periods when other forms of expression were dangerous (47).

Armstrong often played his trumpet to show phallic masculinity coupled with a great deal of the sexual innuendo that was already a crucial component of jazz performance, although most Americans today remember him as a smiling clown. It is possible that Armstrong’s prominent musical descendant, Dizzy Gillespie, was alluding to the phallic character of his

instrument when he bent the bell upward to mimic an erection. Gillespie has often talked about the “virility” of black jazz. In the four decades since he lowered his trumpet, a fresh breed of trumpeters has surfaced, moving away from the instrument's more overtly sexual potential but without giving up on jazz's sensual corners. These newer artists are far less concerned with phallic display, even if they have not accepted castration in any way. Their aesthetic preferences may be categorized as "post-phallic" (Gabbard 44). In 1950 Fats Navarro, Clifford Brown, and Miles Davis were all set to take the lead in carrying on the Armstrong/Gillespie tradition. 1950 saw the death of twenty-six-year-old Navarro from heroin addiction, while 1956 saw the death of twenty-five-year-old Clifford Brown on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. The stage was essentially set for Miles Davis, who is without a doubt the most important trumpet player after Armstrong, considered, together with John Coltrane, a contemporary pioneer in musical aesthetics, cultural vision, and personal style challenging dominant cultural assumptions about masculinity and whiteness.

Moreover, he was seen as the one who negotiated the complex gender ordering of black American experiences and sought and found in artistic expression a political voice (Rustin and Tucker n.p.). Davis came from a comfortable middle-class family, making him maybe the first significant black trumpeter. Fast dashes throughout the instrument's range, spikes into the upper register, and an often exaggerated sensibility for climaxes are just a few of the many phallic aspects that Davis's playing retained. Not only did he refuse to adopt a friendly performing character, but he also made a point of walking off stage when other musicians were soloing and frequently turned his back on the crowd. Constantly attentive to sartorial elegance, Davis began wearing more elaborate clothing, at the same time he ignited his band and began to embrace more mainstream songs in the late 1960s. Many attributes surrounding his playing accentuated the phallicism of his image, notwithstanding the jazz history cliché that claims his performance declined after the late 1960s (Gabbard 47). Even in the 1940s, Davis was playing

his trumpet to show emotional depth, reflection, and even vulnerability, despite his desire to project an almost inflated macho character. When Davis made a "mistake", or rather when his tone wavered or he appeared to miss a note, it was not a result of a deficiency in technical ability. Generally speaking, a trumpet player's inability to hit the correct note was considered a manifestation of their sexual impotence[63]. Since the 1950s many black trumpeters have been introverts, such as Art Farmer, Clarence Shaw, Booker Little, and Ted Curson, rather than extroverts and dominators. Several young performers who have been influenced by the successful trumpeter Wynton Marsalis have adopted a post-phallic sound in recent years. Terrence Blanchard, Marlon Jordan, Wallace Roney, and Marsalis all perform in an often subdued style that conventionalizes Miles Davis's modal improvisations from the mid-1960s. Like many jazz artists of the past several decades, Davis's more recent cohorts have reinterpreted his reserved yet refined performance persona from his middle years as an emotionless performer with an extremely formal dress code. The rise of the post-phallic trumpet might be linked to a group of African Americans who are more affluent, better educated, and more class-conscious. As a result, they may feel less pressure to assert their manhood through the provocative gestures of working-class music such as hip-hop and rap (48-49). However, one of the main means used to assess musicians' virtuosity and phallic potency was the cutting contest, unofficial competitions where the winners seek to play more intricate harmonic replacements while playing faster, louder, and higher than the opponents. At least for one evening, the "winner" of a competition is treated like "the king," with all the prestige and attention worthy of jazz royalty, the audience's adoration, and, perhaps most importantly, the opportunity to play a greater show the following night (Johnson 12).

[63] The trumpet's phallicism is conceptualized as vulnerability to castration or impotence in many films such as in *Mo' Better Blues* (1990) and by various Hollywood filmmakers, but also in Theodor W. Adorno's theory of jazz.

CHAPTER III

DISABILITY AND AGING: BLACK MUSICIANS' EXPERIENCE

3.1. Black Disability Studies

The third and final chapter of the thesis is dedicated to analyzing a recent field of studies, Black Disability Studies, and its interconnection with blackness, particularly male blackness, being double marginalized for their ethnicity and disability. The second part of the research is dedicated to how black disabled men perform masculinity, especially in music, a field in which bodily performances are significant to convey one's identity. Thus, it is interesting to explore how disability redefines and represents black masculinity with a focus on jazz music. Moreover, the last part focuses attention on the jazz performances of eminent senior musicians who have declared the benefits of the Third and Fourth ages contrary to stereotypes.

Black Disability Studies examines the intersection of blackness and disability. To ensure that black disabled people are not forgotten or marginalized, the field's first aim is to uncover them from the archives and clarify their experiences. Secondly, it has committed itself to comprehending where blackness and disability work as discourses, outside their association with black disabled bodies. Furthermore, it is hoped that, according to these studies, black individuals with disabilities will be valued and central to society in the future. Since many of the researchers and activists in this area experience disability under systems of medical neglect and inequity, the discipline is in some ways impacted by the lived experience of disability. Black Disability Studies has come to life only in recent years; indeed, the parodic chapter "Introducing White Disability Studies"[64], in the second edition

[64] Bell, 2006.

of the *Disability Studies Reader* by Lennard J. Davis (2006), is recognized as the moment it was called into being[65] (Pickens n.p.). This emergent field of interest mainly explores the relationship between race and disability as oppressive and privileged systems, combining research, theories, and approaches from postcolonial studies and feminist studies, particularly black feminist theory, disability, and black studies (Schalk 5). Scholars such as Christopher Bell, Nirmala Erevelles, and Therí A. Pickens, have progressively shown how black activists and intellectuals have conceived disability as an identity, an experience, and a political category differently than white intellectuals; for this reason, scholarly methods have to be modified. According to the article "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History" (2005) by disability historian Douglas C. Baynton, oppressed groups, including women, black people, and immigrants, passively accepted the idea that they do not deserve full citizenship and rights, thus, acknowledging in silence that "disability is a justifiable rationale for discrimination and exclusion" (6). However, it is important to stress that black disabled people are still not considered because of whiteness and racism; in fact, disability justice was born only in the mid-2000s for disabled black people, disabled queer people, and disabled queer people of color (7). Furthermore, Disability Studies scholar Chris Bell claims that Disability Studies is among those areas of study where black people are viewed as less than equal; indeed, society continues to include them in the branch of "White Disability Studies" (Lennard 282).

Disability Studies scholars argue that the border between disabled and non-disabled is arbitrary, and determined by social, historical, and contextual factors. For instance, they have demonstrated that the interconnection between disability and race is so strong to the point that perceptions of what is a disability, who is and is not disabled, and when inclusion

[65] For a more detailed discussion see: Lukin, *Disability Studies Reader* (2013); introductions to scholarly volumes such as Bell 2011, Pickens 2017 and Pickens 2021; Erevelles 2011, Erevelles 2015; Miles 2019.

should or should not be granted have been influenced by race. As a result, it is essential the understand the specific racial and historical black experiences of disability to comprehend black disability politics[66] (Schalk 14). African Americans experience several inequities also because of impairments and cultural reactions to this condition. According to many researches, among the several racial and ethnic groups in the United States, the black community still has today one of the highest rates of disability and severe disabilities due to historical, sociological, and economic issues. Certainly, African American's history of slavery, discrimination, and legalized forced labor enhances their current positioning in society. However, compared to white Americans, they typically get fewer and lower-quality services[67] and, as a consequence, they benefit less from disability policy, practice, and research (Heller et al. 15-16). Black people may have less access to medical services, medication, and doctors due to the disadvantages that come with being impoverished or disabled, thus, worsening mental health disorders (567). A crucial role in the understanding of disabilities is played by culture, or rather, it affects how societies see and deal with them. African Americans are more likely to rely on their immediate and extended families and to value an interdependent approach to managing disability. Furthermore, the black community is less likely to believe that a disability calls for resources or intervention.[68] At the moment, the majority of black people and members of other racial and ethnic minorities obtain services from non-members of their own culture; this is, according to some scholars, caused by the cultural mismatch (16). Many of them do not even receive a disability diagnosis, treatment, or even knowledge of their condition until they are involved in the criminal justice system, being African Americans overrepresented in the American prison

[66] For a more detailed discussion see: Schalk, "Black Disability Politics Now" in *Black Disability Politics*, pp. 140-154.
[67] Balcazar et al. 2010; Drum et al. 2011. Quoted in *Disability in American Life*, Heller et al., 15.
[68] For a more detailed discussion see: Terhune 2005. Quoted in *Disability in American Life*, Heller et al., 16.

system[69]. However, the inequities the community has to face have a better chance than before of being significantly reduced thanks to disability policy experts and researchers (17).

So to what degree do the disability movements fail to recognize the needs of African Americans? People at these intersections[70] in most cases are invisible to social justice organizations and academic programs. In *White Disability Studies: A Modest Proposal* (2006), Chris Bell stresses the issue of black people's invisibility and the absence of intersectionality in this field of studies. Indeed, disabled people and members of racial minorities were viewed as unwanted and inferior at the turn of the twentieth century too. Moreover, black persons were perceived as having a mental illness or a poorer intellectual aptitude, such that sterilization and institutionalization were used by the eugenics movement to reduce the number of individuals born into these identities and eradicate undesirable qualities they believed to be inherited (Heller et al. 402). In 2001 Baynton demonstrated how, historically, disabled people have not only been oppressed because of their condition, but also because it has been used to marginalize and exclude groups of minorities (405).

[69] For a more detailed discussion see: Balcazar et al. 2010. Quoted in *Disability in American Life*, Heller et al., 17.

[70] The term *intersectionality* was coined in 1989 by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw. "It was created to describe the invisibility of African American women in a discrimination employment case in which the company argued that it did not discriminate against women, because it employed women, and that it did not discriminate against African Americans, because it employed African Americans" (Crenshaw 1991). Quoted in: Heller et al., 401.

3.2. Jazz Embraces the Difference

Guys have often asked my girlfriend, "Why are you with him, he can't do anything for you? He ain't nothing but half a man"- Charlie.

I guess I'm not supposed to be a man anymore, just because I'm paralyzed … I guess I'm not a man anymore – Bobby.[71]

Regarding disability as performance, the analysis looks at how people behave: it recognizes that everyone actively highlights the importance of social agency and bodily experience. According to this perspective, "disability is not viewed as a fixed and stable status, but one that is shaped by context, and is therefore dynamic and unstable. Disability is considered a fluid reality where each individual plays an active role in shaping" (Heller et al. 189). Each aspect of everyday life, including the freedom to act, is impacted by the power dynamics of the current social order in which disability performances occur. It is crucial how a disability inspires a performative act since it draws people's attention and affects how others react to the disabled person. Certainly, both individuals with and without impairments can benefit from this. For instance, blind people frequently report hearing someone speak very slowly or loudly, while people with physical disabilities claim that they always have to control their sight. In addition, interactions in which the impairment is not acknowledged may involve a performance intended to maintain a first appearance of normalcy or an intentional act to reveal the condition (190).

Disabled people can perform their identities in multiple ways, through "passing", "overcoming", and "enhancement", maintaining or challenging the social order. An example of a performative act that reinforces conventional views about disability is the overcoming of impairments via engagement in activities not usually associated with

[71] Some testimonies. Quoted in Bender, 86.

disability, questioning society's negative interpretation. This discourse guides performers who accept disability as a fundamental component of their identity rather than making attempts to downplay or eradicate it. However, on the one hand, some persons intentionally show their "disability pride"; on the other hand, there are those who embrace it through a "disability masquerade" as a form of protest. As a result, a subversive framework is created with the notion of disability as performance, highlighting social agency and how people may redefine what ability, disability, and "normalcy" mean[72] (Heller et al. 190-191).

When it comes to the performance of black masculinity for disabled people, it is fundamental to analyze how this notion is redefined. Generally speaking, being a man means being emotionally and physically powerful, respected, and self-independent, which is central to American ideology (Kimmel 1986); in fact, refusing assistance is the most adopted strategy to preserve independence. Researchers[73] stress the necessity for men to present others with a body that functions normally and the ability to stay "mentally strong". Keeping a distance between the "knowing and unknowing" is another strategy to safeguard their self-presentation regarding bodily control and emotional strength (Bender 66-85). To navigate each social context, including workplace, marriage, and public spaces, disabled men had to let go of conventional notions of masculinity, particularly some level of independence and social interactions precisely due to their limitations (86). Black and white men have distinct perspectives on racial background, nonetheless, both have to compromise their identities as self-sufficient men (103-104).

Music is one of the arts that has shaped and reflected the meaning and reality of disability in certain historical periods and locations, and its history is deeply entwined with that of disability as a cultural practice (Straus 113). In "Normalizing the Abnormal:

[72] For a more detailed discussion see: Nili R. Broyer and Gili Hammer.
[73] For a more detailed discussion see: Bender (2006).

Disability in Music and Music Theory" (2006), Straus analyses an important recent movement called "experientialism", according to which human beings make sense of the world through a deep awareness of their bodies; as a result, people "make sense of music in embodied terms" (121). One of the physical experiences that music and music-related discourse may be regarded to transmit is disability (122). Although there has been an increasing focus by music education researchers on disability studies in recent years, the field still has a lot to learn from the latter (bell et al. 23).

In a context such as jazz in which the body is essential to one's expression, disability has compelled artists to reimagine what it means to be a man. Impairments complicate masculine expressions in this music genre, which impacts movement and physical performance on stage. However, some performers have developed extraordinary musical abilities despite their physical restrictions. As George McKay states, major jazz-disabled figures are representative and offer a unique perspective on navigating disability in the entertainment industry due to their creative practice that is a part of their life experience, or their foundational role in creating music. This musical genre created in a context of oppression, struggle, and liberation can be conceived as inclusive since it has wanted and has been able to accept novelty, flexibility, and innovation (McKay 2). However, the field of jazz studies is somewhat behind the times when it comes to understanding the relationship between music and disability. Certainly, this is surprising given that it is a genre that likes to think of itself as culturally and socially liberating. Furthermore, the integration of disability studies into musicology has in recent years resulted in the establishment of substantial models for applying disability studies hermeneutics to music. "Jazz is a form of music founded on disability; it is a form of music *sounded* on disability; it is a socio-cultural practice made by and making space for disability" (13).

To discuss some disabled jazz musicians who cover an important role in this field, it is interesting to mention that jazz itself has been defined as a "disease". Generally speaking, already before the 1920s it was a common belief in the disciplines of psychiatry, medicine, and music that certain music was pathological or "disabling", and it had a noticeable impact on jazz debates; in fact, jazz was associated with words such as "infection", "virus", "epidemic", and "cancer" (Johnson 14). Particularly Russell L. Johnson, among other critics, reports that jazz and its associated dances were seen as flawed, causing their devotees to suffer from mental and physical problems. In addition, it was considered little more than a noise, as many song titles make clear: "The Wang Wang Blues", first recorded by Paul Whiteman's orchestra in 1921 and later by Duke Ellington, "Wall Street Wail" (1929) and "Echoes of the Jungle" (1931) by Ellington himself, Louis Armstrong and his Hot Five's hit "Heebie Jeebies" (1955), and many others (26). Especially during the 1920s, commonly remembered as the Jazz Age, many people considered jazz music and dance to endanger individuals' health and the nation itself (13-14). Indeed, he explains that the "disability argument against jazz started from the critics' reaction to the fact that due to syncopation and polyrhythms, the music failed to follow "normal" rhythms. It was unrhythmical, discordant, and ultimately defective music … Jazz dancing reminded critics of the movements of people with epilepsy or nervous disorders … Jazz was an undesirable element behind the new American nervousness of the times" (17,18,21). In that same period in America, jazz was a leader in the discussion of illness, disability, noise, and rhythm. Newspapers, popular and academic periodicals, lecture halls, and books were full of descriptions of jazz as crippled music with an effort to legitimize the genre (31-32). Some U.S. newspaper headlines from that period alerted readers to the music's crippling risks, especially for young women claiming: "Actress says jazz deform

girls' legs, or, in the context of pregnancy, jazz life may mean cripples[74]" (3). Furthermore, the new Irish Republic organized public campaigns against it in the 1920s and 1930s stating that "jazz affected mental illness" or it "has made a terrible number of people abnormal, and … these people have lost control of themselves"[75]. In 1921 the "Irish Independent" maintained that various scientists working on musico-therapy found out that "the effect of jazz on the normal brain produces an atrophied condition on the brain cells"[76] (McKay 4). Among its several critics, the automaker Henry Ford and the Canadian Bureau for the Advancement of Music believed that jazz prevented individuals from realizing their greatest capacity of thought. It did not require mental concentration, real constructive mechanical or artistic work, strength, or discipline, such that it was seen as "the product of incompetents"[77]. This led many to think they ought to ban the music altogether[78], claiming that jazz "had done more harm" to America "than drink ever did". As a consequence, critics of jazz as disabled and disabling music frustrated jazz performers (Johnson 23-24).

In opposition to this analysis, other studies of music and disability, among which Professor Alex Lubet's work, suggest that differently from classical music's "rigidity", jazz music exhibits far greater accommodation for individual limitations, allowing for distinctive approaches to virtuosity and serving as an appropriate model for the full involvement of artists with disabilities[79]. Besides, a performer without impairments would never be inspired to create music, or an impaired musician may make music that an abled person would not be able to. Thus, the careers of significant jazz performers have been shaped by both these situations and music's creation has been centered around sonic

[74] For instance, it leads to birth defects. Quoted in Stras 2009, 318 n.8, 319 n.9.
[75] For a more detailed discussion see: Hogan 2010, 66, 68-9.
[76] Quoted in Hogan 2010, 66,68-9.
[77] The *Defender's* David Peyton in the words of the *New York Times*. Quoted in Johnson, 23.
[78] For instance, the mayor of Wilkes-Barre in Pennsylvania tried to ban jazz in his city in 1924. In the end, it failed to pass but other cities across the country did enact jazz prohibitions, mostly focused on public dance halls. Quoted in Johnson, 23.
[79] For a more detailed discussion see: Lubet 2011.

anomalies. Essential components of its creative process are adjustment and improvisation, all characteristics that relate to the lived experience of disability. In other words, the unusual approach to instrumentalism is widely accepted, and for aspiring disabled jazz performers "necessity has been the mother of … stylistic invention"[80]. In addition, to further emphasize the expressive flexibility of the music, free improvisation has promoted accessibility to creativity and a less aesthetic sensibility, including the anti-technique turn of second-generation European free performers (McKay 5). In this regard, Susan M. Schweik points out that, among American arts, blues stands out for asserting disability, or even, that impairment constituted the blues. As Stuart Broomer argues, "Jazz usually cultivated grandeur in its naming – King Oliver, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, the Pres' Lester Young, Lady Day, … The blues, however, had an eye for the quickly noted disability. Apart from some early singers with regal titles … the blues celebrated the infirm (Peg Leg Howell and Cripple Clarence Lofton)"[81] (4). To conclude, it could be claimed that the essence of jazz is, in the words of Lubet, the "embrace of difference" (5).

3.2.1. A Longstanding Trope: The Blind and Black Musician

The objective of this part of the research is to examine some representative black artists in the field of Disability and Jazz studies since they had a pivotal role in the evolution of the genre, together with a unique perspective on navigating disability in the entertainment industry through their creative practice. Each artist has explored differently or similarly what it means to be or to become disabled; thus, it is interesting to analyze how this exploration has changed through their music and performance and whether it was conscious, even if there is still little scholarship that could make it easier to determine how

[80] Lubet 2011, 65. Quoted in McKay, 5.
[81] For a more detailed discussion see: Susan M. Schweik, 2009.

disability affects cultural production (McKay 2). The MLA Committee on Disability Issues in the Profession recommended in 2005 that further research[82] was needed to better understand African American artists and their works in the context of Disability Studies (Stallings 197). In this regard, Rowden makes assumptions about how these performers' disabilities influence their sexual and intellectual aspects as well as how society interacts with them and their work. Thus, it is crucial to analyze the sexual and gender representation in African American cultural output by disabled persons looking at physical blindness, the normative gaze of "able" bodies, and presumptions about masculinity and sexuality (199).

Examining the autobiographies of these musicians demonstrates a close connection between musical creativity and disability. For instance, the pianist Horace Parlan, stricken with polio in his birth year, was encouraged to start playing instruments as a part of his rehabilitation and physical therapy when he was young. Several well-known jazz musicians, including Charlie Haden and David Sanborn, had a formative experience with childhood polio during seasonal outbreaks before the introduction of mass vaccinations in the 1950s. However, whether a musician's successful musical career resulted from their childhood illness or musicality's emergence as a therapeutic reaction to the illness's symptoms is debatable. Furthermore, jazz has often created room for blind or visually impaired musicians, including Roland Kirk and Art Tatum, also because, as Rowden notes, "for centuries, music has been one of the few respectable careers available for blind people (as it was for African Americans)" (McKay 6).

Cornetist and bandleader Charles Joseph "Buddy" Bolden is not only acknowledged as an "important pivotal figure in early jazz history"[83] but also as the first jazz musician.

[82] For a more detailed discussion see: Terry Rowden's *The Songs of Blind Folk* and Kari J. Winter's introduction to the edited slave narrative *The Blind African Slave, or, Memoirs of Boyrereau Brinch, Nicknamed Jeffrey Brace* which is one of the few works in African American literary studies to broach the subject.
[83] Marquis 2005, 82. Quoted in McKay, 6.

According to Dr. Sean Spence's theory[84], Bolden's mental conditions were crucial assumptions that led to the attitude of improvisation, from which jazz was born. He was unable to read music, thus, improvising was the only way he could play. In other words, this theory asserts that jazz was allegedly first played because of the cognitive disabilities of his mental condition. Scholars point out that Spence's assertion that Bolden's possible motor difficulties were behind his resort to improvisation seems invented; in fact, nearly all Black artists had little to no experience with written music, and improvisation was already common in many types of black music before jazz started, and many accounts of Bolden's life and playing are rare, uncertain, or mythical. However, Bolden did experience a series of mental health crises, such as depression, dementia, and fits to insanity that led him to be violent. His fascinating story, together with his unspoken accomplishments and influence, point to cognitive disability as the fundamental element of the jazz tradition. To conclude, music may accurately represent mental states, even those categorized as diseases or impairments, without the use of words as a mediator (McKay 6-8).

Another prodigious disabled musician to be remembered is the pianist Oscar Peterson, particularly known for the speed of his performances, he suffered a stroke in 1993, underwent intense physical rehabilitation, and eventually made his way back to the concert stage in the same year, even if with longer gaps for recuperation. According to Lubet he "regained only extremely limited use of his left hand in his playing, almost always playing only the occasional bass note … He was thus, post-stroke, practically a one-handed pianist"[85]. Based on his findings, a new aesthetic sensibility of technical limitations and an aesthetic maturing in response to loss were born. Furthermore, two of Peterson's post-stroke albums include a second pianist playing with him, hence, in his point of view, "the

[84] Professor of psychiatry at the University of Sheffield. Presentation to the Royal College of Psychiatrists in 2001.
[85] Lubet 2013, 153, 156. Quoted in McKay, 11.

prosthetic function is performed not by devices, but by people[86]". To sum up, it can be claimed that jazz is a music genre that allows for and embraces such adjustments (McKay 11-12).

Analyzing some experiences of blind black artists helps understand how impairments have been seen as indicators of difference but also of emasculation by their spectators. Known as the "Father of the Texas Blues", "Blind Lemon" Jefferson's musical experience is part of this narrative. His blindness was not a problem for him, despite this it was the reason why he was considered weak and emasculated such that people paid to watch him. His blindness and blackness combine to shape perceptions of his masculinity, thus the manhood of a blind black man is called into question as it does not easily fit the stereotyped hypermasculinity. However, Jefferson made this work for his benefit: he was a skilled combatant since he changed the story to make his impairment profitable. In fact, he capitalized on his devotion to popular ideas of black masculinity while also playing with preconceptions around blindness to gain money and prestige. Not only is it racist and ableist to witness a blind black man suffer pain, but it is also an ableist belief that he should not be able to defeat the presumably white-sighted "fighter". On the one side, Jefferson's disfigurement, which was the resulting scar from his impairment, was seen as a marker of difference by spectators; on the other side, it served as proof that he triumphed against others who believed that his situation was hopeless. In the words of Terry Rowden, black blind musicians must be accounted for within a "network of interrelated identity concerns that might initially seem to be unrelated political and social issues"[87]. In this regard, Jefferson serves as a texture for the Jim Crow era, offering a reminder that when disability becomes politicized, it can no longer be viewed as neutral. As a consequence, disability

[86] Lubet 2002, 153. Quoted in McKay, 12.
[87] Terry Rowden, *The Songs of Blind Folk: African American Musicians and the Cultures of Blindness*, 1. Quoted in Pickens, 94.

always occurs together with other intersecting identities, including those involving sexual orientation, class, gender, and race. It is hard to distinguish between disability as a social and cultural construct and impairment as a medical or mental issue. Associating disability with blackness constituted a threat to the privileges accorded to the former since the latter was accused of being unworthy of such rights. It was dangerous to link disability with blackness since it put the former's rights at risk. Because of this, the ableist metaphors, such as being black is a disability, and the oppressive analogies erase the specificity of the critical terrain and the complexities of both experiences (Pickens 93-97).

When it comes to the investigation of this trope, the first musician that gained enormous popularity as a result of the black and blind trend, also being able to play an instrument, is the slave pianist Thomas Wiggins, commonly known as Blind Tom. He was considered one of the earliest black celebrities, such that he did national tours and large concerts, and the first documented autistic savant, indeed, he had no musical training (Davis et al. n.p.). Blind Tom soon became an inspiration to several potential musicians of his time, but also a prize possession for those who owned him. In this regard, it is interesting to acknowledge that during slavery, it was usual for slave owners to "hire out" skilled slaves, including slave musicians, for financial gain. What happened was that a lot of slave owners fostered their slaves' musical talent with the express intent of profiting more from their work and elevating their status in the plantation community. Tom, among others, was given free access to the piano and "special pet treatment" by Colonel Bethune (Southall 141-152). People who were both enslaved and disabled were put to work on stage, which often made them far more valuable than regular plantation laborers because they could earn money from ticket sales, souvenir photos and programs, and appearances at rich houses. All of these things brought in a large amount of money for the slave owners. For instance, Blind Tom's performances were nearly $100,000 a year. However, African American

artists began to use the term "blind" before their names as a marketing gimmick in the early twentieth century, following in the footsteps of Blind Tom. For this reason, nowadays it is possible to read about country blues or Delta blues artists such as Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Willie Johnson, and the Blind Boys of Alabama (PBS Origins 0:00-3:25). Blind musicians' disability was expected to become part of their performance and naming: the term "Blind" took the place of the performer's name or surname, placing his disability over his individuality (Stallings 198-199). Harold Schonberg characterizes Tom in "The Great Pianists" (1962) as "a curious and pathetic Negro slave, born a mental defective" who was shown as a master pianist due to a successful promotional myth. Most of the advertisements about Tom were probably gimmicks, including the statements that he had a great memory "like all blind people" or that his mysterious creative, and persuasive abilities were the product of some "satanic gift". Even if blind from birth, he is said to have written more than a hundred pieces. However, likely, most of his artistic endeavors were never documented because improvised.

Rahsaan Roland Kirk was an African American jazz multi-instrumentalist also known for his ability to play several instruments simultaneously[88], including three saxophones at a time. Kirk is a fascinating jazz musician when considering his condition; in fact, he had a vision impairment caused by an iatrogenic accident in a hospital when he was a child. According to Terry Rowden, author of *The Songs of Blind Folk: African American Musicians and the Cultures of Blindness* (2009), "more than any other African American blind artist, Kirk was both self-consciously black and self-consciously blind"[89]. People can hear about his experience as a disabled artist since he has explored it in his

[88] Among his instruments there were the stritch, the manzello (two wind instruments), the "black mystery pipes" (a piece of bamboo and some hosepipe), flutes, but also alarm clocks, sirens, recorders and whistles. Most of these would be hanging round his neck during shows: as a blind man on stage he would always know where each was, and that it was within reach. McKay, 10-11.
[89] Terry Rowden 2009, 94. Quoted in McKay, 10.

music-making; the title track of his album *The Inflated Tear* (1968) is one of his vocal and musical depictions of his childhood being blind. Moreover, he acknowledged the relationship between race and disability, as can be seen in the featuring music played using the black notes of the piano *Blacknuss* (1971), where the difference between the "e" of blackness and the "u" stands for the difference between sight and sound. During his performances, Kirk used to dress in an eccentric and arresting style, thus, he was often regarded as a clown or a showman. "He was truly a sight to behold, with his nostrils flaring like a mad bull and his cheeks puffed out like a monstrous chipmunk, pumping air continuously into a strange array of instruments that hung from his body like crazy plumbing or tangled octopus' tentacles, all stuck together with masking tape"[90]. In the last years of his life, he became a multiply disabled musician because of a major stroke in 1975 that paralyzed the right side of his body; despite that, he kept touring, recording, and playing (McKay 10-11).

In *Music, Disability and Society* (2011), Lubet analyses the cases of three jazz artists including the pianist and composer Horace Parlan. Stricken with polio, he was affected by partial paralysis of his right hand, which brought to a very "pungent" left-hand chord voicing technique, with the right comping using extremely rhythmic phrases (Feather et al. 6). Surprisingly, he is well-known as a sideman than as a soloist, which once again speaks about jazz's capacity as a cultural system to include performers with physical limitations that affect performance, contrary to classical music, for instance, or other genres that are disabling for pianists with hand impairments (Tucker 2-6).

Certainly, among blind musicians, a mention should be made of the successful artist Stevie Wonder, who is also an accomplished civil rights and disability activist; famous is, indeed, his speech at the 2016 Grammy Awards where he affirmed: "I just want to say –

[90] Rowden 2009, 93. Quoted in McKay, 11.

before saying the winner – that we need to make every single thing accessible to every single person with a disability". Even if he became blind shortly after birth, by the age of nine he was already proficient in drumming, harmonica, and piano playing (Heller et al. 764-765). Even if musicians such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Louis Armstrong strongly influenced Wonder's dynamic approach, the societal constraints that racist and ableist discourse imposed on his body appear to have impacted the enduring humanitarian aspect of his musical genius (Stallings 197). To conclude, a mention should be made to Ray Charles who has subverted the trope of the black and blind musician. Indeed, he was an exceptional musician because he followed in the footsteps of other artists who succeeded in selling themselves as musicians and people with disabilities. At the same time, he lived and rejected this legacy, being aware of the existence of this trope. He not only refused to play guitar since he did not want to become the stereotypical blind musician, but also he decided he did not want to become Blind Ray Charles, but rather the singer Ray Charles, putting into use his agency, which is an important issue when it comes to slavery. Nowadays many contemporary blind artists keep trying to break the trope, such as Andre Lewis, and several organizations, like RAMPD.org founded by Lachi, want to make the work more inclusive and amplify disability culture in the music industry (PBS Origins 3:26-6:29).

3.3. Aging and Disability: The Power of Music

This last section of the research would like to focus its attention on another relatively undiscussed[91] topic: the power of music according to aging and disability experiences. Compared to aging or disability alone, far less is formally known about the experience of aging with a disability[92] (Putnam et al. 3). So what is meant by "older adult"? Laslett (1989) affirms that later life comprehends the Third (ages between 50 and 75) and Fourth (ages over 75) life phases. Usually, people belonging to the second category are exposed to many stereotypes since the Fourth age is described as a period of disengagement, mental and physical decline, and dependency on other individuals (Creech et al. 83-98).

Since people with impairments are experiencing longer lives than in the past, a new area of academic studies has been created on this population group that is considered new and distinct. More and more individuals are realizing the need to create procedures and policies to assist them as they age. Although the number of older disabled people is increasing, there are still gaps in the demographic data in the United States. Certainly, aging with disabilities means that several age-related issues manifest earlier than in the case of individuals without disabilities. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that aging with lifelong disability is a recent phenomenon, thus, there is little research on the topic, specifically on how this group of people ages, what to expect, their needs, and how to support them effectively. Not only they are likely to develop poor health in old age but they lack education too. In general, older persons who have permanent impairments do not have

[91] There is the need to raise awareness of how long-term disability experiences affect the aging process and consequences for individuals in later life, but also to expand scholarship and research to make people with disabilities who are aging more openly recognized as a population subgroup. Quoted in Putnam et al. 3.

[92] "To be included in an ageing with disability study, researchers often specify a disability onset age of 64 or less, but there is no formally defined upper bound of onset age for inclusion in the population of persons ageing with disability". Quoted in Putnam et al. 5.

many opportunities to exercise their right to self-determination, which is considered, specifically by men, a weak point (Heller et al. 17-19).

Professor Alex Lubet claims that Disability Studies research in music is far mostly American, as seen by the works of Lerner and Straus. In this regard, jazz offers a cultural substitute formed out of hardship and an imperfect product rather than a repertoire of canonized texts (Tucker 2-3). However, less attention has been paid to the power of music in the lives of older adults. According to several scholars[93], music is one of many artistic, cultural, and "spiritually refreshing" leisure that encourage self-expression, good health, and well-being. Some interviews and research from 2012[94] state that old jazz musicians have several advantages compared to individuals from the same or previous generations, being professionally active in the music field. In particular, they think of their life as a positive one, not only from a financial point of view but also because they have the opportunity to maintain their social network. Furthermore, interviewees affirm that their playing has a therapeutic effect and a positive emotional attitude, increasing their creativity and optimistic attitude, not to say that social recognition may take many forms and certainly influences an individual's sense of self-respect (Milosavljević 7-19). Engaging in activities like singing, listening to music, and playing instruments helps people feel comfortable and develop self-recognition. Less recently Coffman (1999) also looked at the connection between music and quality of life, surveying 52 senior musicians. The results showed that actively creating music was linked to several areas of quality of life, such as social contact, feeling enriched, and a sense of accomplishment. However, music benefits in old age are related to well-being and the progression of one's skills; Gibbons (1984, 1985) states that senior musicians can learn new musical skills in positive groups and environments where

[93] For a more detailed discussion see: Iwasaki, Coyle, and Shank (2010, p. 485).
[94] For a more detailed discussion see: the project Anthropological Study of Serbia – from Cultural Heritage to Modern Society.

they are treated as functioning adults. Moreover, "elderly persons have innate capacities for musical development, and those capacities are maintained with age"[95] since continuing plasticity of the brain and receptivity to instrumental music learning compensate for diminished memory capacity, hearing, and sight. When it comes to instrumental music making, it is a common belief that it is a privilege for younger people. Despite that, interviewees, especially adult piano students, notice several personal benefits due to the commitment to this activity like the alleviation of stress, dream fulfillment, self-satisfaction, and achievement; not to mention the psychological well-being, in fact after eight weeks of music making there were notable and persistent improvements in depression, distress, and mood (Creech et al. 83-98).

In 1953 psychologist Harvey Lehman in his work *Age and Achievement* stated that, analyzing the lifetime productivity of prominent artists and composers, creativity and production peak in one's thirties and forties after which they gradually diminish. For a long time, mass media and public opinion fostered the time-honored myth that seniors must gradually lose their ability to learn, leaving them with little other option than to watch and observe contrary to young people. Indeed, the normal process of aging entails a gradual reduction of corporal functions. However, when it comes to intellectual functioning Wayne Dennis, in his article "Creative Productivity Between the Ages of 20 and 80 Years" (1966), found out that artists do not necessarily experience a decline in creativity but changes in performance may come with age. Several eminent artists have continued to be incredibly productive during their Third and Fourth age, thus, a loss of creativity and thinking does not always accompany aging (Lowell 1-2).

During the last ten years of his life, Duke Ellington gave life to 137 short compositions and other works such as "The Far East Suite", not to mention that on his

[95] Gibbons (1985), p. 49.

deathbed he wanted to continue working on his jazz opera "Queenie Pie". However, in his article, Lowell pointed out that the American value system, based on a youth-oriented system, does not encourage elderly people to expand their minds; this is mostly due to fears that engaging in such activities may result in negative feedback or self-underestimation. Therefore, seniors believe they are too old to study and use their imaginations, or that being still interested in some activities is improper given their age. Anthropologist Gregory Bateson wrote, "Man lives by propositions where truth depends upon his believing them. If he believes that the old is no good, weak, and stubborn … then to a great extent that will become true of the old in the population where that is believed and the old themselves will believe it and will reinforce the general belief that that is so" (1950:52). On the contrary, the magazine of traditional jazz "The Mississippi Rag" reviewed some jazz musician still active during their lives such as saxophonist and trumpeter Benny Carter who is said to have played at 71 years old better than he has ever done. For this reason, Lowell was encouraged to discover how many examples of gifted senior artists were still performing in jazz festivals, tours, and groups, which is interesting to analyze especially in this kind of genre since it involves a very creative and spontaneous activity. In this regard, a mention must be made of Count Basie (74), Roy Eldridge (67), and Lionel Hampton (65). However, Lowell's interviews have focused their attention, especially on eminent figures like tenor saxophonist Eddie Barefield, trumpeter Doc Cheatham, and composer and former leader of the Clouds of Joy orchestra Andy Kirk. Doc Cheatham can be considered the most respected sought-after jazz trumpeter at age 84, having also begun his career as an improvising jazz soloist only at 64 years old. "It's too much for one man to play lead and solo too. But I decided to like a lead trumpet, and I didn't see where it was going to harm me, but it did. Nobody ever heard of me". Later in the interview, he claimed, "I'm looking forward to living a long time and playing. Playing and living". Many musicians have

defined improvisation as the core of jazz and “a synonym for spontaneous creativity”. “I’m less daring than I used to be but more sure of myself. My technique has improved and I can draw from my experience”, explained Milt Hilton, former Cab Calloway bass player, talking about age and creativity. In the same way, pianist Cecil Taylor affirmed, “I’m playing better than I’ve ever played in my life. The older you get the better you are. It takes a long time to become seasoned. I think I’m improving creatively … The recent stuff is a lot better”. To conclude, from several interviewed musicians it has surfaced that aging entails an improvement in creativity and performance but also resourcefulness and skill. Furthermore, they travel only when it is convenient to maintain a modest life and take care of their life and it seems that the jazz public enjoys their performances. In fact, Doc Cheatham maintained, “They seem to accept me and appreciate the things I do. Even teenagers seem enthusiastic”. However, they do not fear criticism for not acting their age but it is the self-fulfilling prophecy that makes creativity and performance possible (Lowell 2-13).

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this dissertation was to shed light on the actual notion of masculinity that does not conform to the behaviors and roles generally associated with men, thus it is not biological or innate, and to emphasize the importance of having a separate field of study in which black men can feel accepted. Being black is not a fixed identity, rather it is a dynamic performance. Jazz, in particular, has played a significant role in the social and economic advancement of African Americans, not to mention being deeply rooted in both racial and gender norms. Recent surveys and interviews have shown that teaching the importance of emotional fluency is still a present and complicated issue, but one that is not recognized due to societal norms, especially in the education of black males.

Black Masculinity Studies is a significant area of research that has opened up theoretical possibilities for "listening to gender" in jazz studies: it has opened up not much-discussed perspectives, including homosexuality and drag balls and shows. In this regard, research has shown that musical instruments typically considered feminine, such as the piano, were played by jazz musicians to perform their masculinity.

The third and final chapter, concerning Black Disability and Ageing Studies, has explored another little-discussed topic, that is to say, jazz performances by significant disabled older musicians who have noted the benefits of the Third and Fourth ages, a sense of independence and young audiences' appreciation of their creative performances.

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