

The Moment We Realized: Triple Consciousness and the Intersectionality of Race, Gender and
Sexuality in 20th and 21st Century African American Women

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty in partial
fulfillment requirements for the degree of
MASTERS OF HISTORY

University of Central Oklahoma
2021

THESIS APPROVAL

The abstract and thesis of Tuesdae Pelt-Willis for the Master of Arts in History was submitted to the Graduate College on April 27, 2021 and approved by the undersigned committee.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of my friends, family, colleagues, mentors, professors and multiple black women across the nation.

I would like to thank Dr. Lindsey Churchill for her guidance, mentorship, and friendship while at the University of Central Oklahoma. If she had not given me the opportunity to be involved in the Women's Research and BGLTQ+ Student Center, I would not have made the friendships and lifelong career connections. With her trust and guidance, I was able to find my career choice and further it. With her support I am able extend myself into spaces I would not have previously. From the very first time I meet Dr. Churchill, she has motivated me and pushed me to reach my ultimate potentials. She continues to encourage me to keep pushing when I want to take a break and she has been very supportive and understanding and for that I am forever grateful.

Also, at the University of Central Oklahoma, I would like to thank Dr. Marc Goulding a member of my thesis committee. I have taken many Black history classes with Dr. Goulding he has helped shape my perspectives within my research. Dr. Goulding introduced me to many of the sources I utilize for my research. I have learned tremendously from him over the course of my time as a history masters student. He has challenged me as a student to become a better writer and always motivated me to do better and think deeper. I am glad to have been a part of so many of your classes. I have learned a lot from you and will continue to expand my research and knowledge into African Diaspora.

I would also like to thank Dr. Katrina Lacher, another member of my thesis committee. I attended a graduate seminar she directed at the University of Central Oklahoma, and I was able to learn so much about environmental history. The graduate course influenced my research and how I see the environment and the world through a historic lens. Your class offered me more than environmental history, it intertwined with how I view race, gender and class as well. I very much appreciate you taking the time to be a part of my committee.

Finally, I would like to thank my mother, sister, and husband for all the support and motivation to be great in any and everything I choose to do. You all have been the backbone of my life. Regardless of whatever endeavor I choose you make sure to support me wholeheartedly. I will never be able to thank you for the honesty, support and understanding you all offer me. Also, to my father and grandmother that are no longer with me physically, I know you both look down on my accomplishments and smile. Just knowing I have guardian angels pushes me farther into greatness. Thank you all and I love you with all my heart.

My research on triple consciousness received institutional support from the University of Central Oklahoma with the RCSA grant which provided me the funding of resources for my thesis and allowed for me to travel to different locations for conferences.

ABSTRACT

The Triple Consciousness Theory (TCT), inspired by W.E.B. Du Bois' Double Consciousness, argues that Black women view themselves through multiple lenses and not solely two (gender and race). Although it is unclear who first coined the term, Sara Lomax-Reese and Nahum Welang, inspired by DuBois, created articles based on the theory of Triple Consciousness by examining race, nationality and gender. My research will examine how gender, race and sexuality intersect and how the awareness of multiple consciousness changes the movements, strategies and perceptions of Black women in the United States. My work will also include the various perceptions of Black trans women and how they battle with multiple consciousness while dealing with the adversity placed among them by society. My project builds on the small amount of scholarship regarding trans women of color and the hardship they face concerning gender, sexuality and racial issues. This thesis examines specific topics including politics, sexuality, religion, economic issues, and societal expectations by showcasing the deep historical significance that Black women have in America, while also discerning the transformations caused by TCT. With this research I examine the political, social and economic strides of Black women and how we can see a pattern in successes despite adversity due to racial and gender inequality. Additionally, this research will emphasize the challenges that are faced during this process especially regarding trans women of color's societal pressures and positions on equality. I examine the profoundly important impact that Black women have contributed to the building and development of America, also, while observing how TCT influenced these women.

“The Moment We Realized: Triple Consciousness and the Intersectionality of Race, Gender and Sexuality in 20th and 21st Century African American Women.”

Table of Contents

Chapter One. Introduction.....5

Chapter Two. Triple Consciousness Theory: The Black Woman’s Experience.....13

Chapter Three. The Crenshaw Theory: Understanding Intersectionality, More Than an Abstract Term.....31

Chapter Four. She, Her, Hers: TCT’s Impact on Trans Women of Color50

Chapter Five. Conclusion.....71

Bibliography.....75

Chapter One

Introduction

Understanding what it means to be a Black woman in America requires examining various positionalities. The development of a distinct mind frame does not occur instantly but is a product of generations of oppression. Due to the impact of centuries of oppression and the constant understanding that mental development is not necessarily innate, but a byproduct of existing in multiple different positions. Triple Consciousness Theory (TCT) emphasizes the various angles of oppression inflicted on Black women and how the pressure of adaptation, understanding and sacrifice, have created an ideology that can be described as Triple Consciousness. Triple Consciousness in Black women is a psychological explanation discovered after the exploration of Double Consciousness regarding Black men in the United States. Triple oppression was the term first rendered but was popularized by Communist Party member Claudia Jones.¹ The writer that established the Double Consciousness ideology was W.E.B Du Bois. Du Bois dedicated some of his scholarly work to explain the way that Black men must be aware of their place in America. The same way that Black men were forced into learning their perception in America, by recognizing their societal expectations and racial inequality, Black women educated themselves to do the same. Adding gender and sexuality to the theory of consciousness determines the necessity for Black women to develop different ways to succeed or further themselves in America and the challenges that are faced during this process.

My unique contribution to the theory of TCT will include three factors: race, gender and sexuality while also including trans women of color. I will focus on African America women

¹ Denise Lynn. "Socialist Feminism and Triple Oppression: Claudia Jones and African American Women in American Communism." *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 8, no. 2 (2014): 1-20.

such as Angela Davis, Pauli Murray, Gladys Bentley, Audre Lorde, Marsha P. Johnson, as well as everyday African American women to highlight the areas that politics, economics, social dynamics contribute to the continuation of the (TCT).

Since the moment that African women have set foot on American soil, even before European conceptions of African nudity, sexist and racist stereotypes were placed on African women. Along with men, African women were enslaved and held as property and taught to work for the very people that opposed their humanity. African women were violated sexually and labeled as breeders all while being separated from her own children and forced to raise white children. This mindset of surviving despite adversity is programmed into Black women from the beginning of their existence in this country, this is a mentality that does not vacate as generations pass.² It is only transformed into another form of consciousness that then makes them evaluate their value or place in this country. The centuries of oppression have formed a layer of awareness that is deeply embedded and affects the way that Black women approach all aspects of their lives, be that socially, economically, politically and strategically.³ In addition to viewing the ways Black women were impacted by the pressures of society, we must view how trans Black women have also maintained these struggles as well as battling distinct ones of their own.

The more that Black women are exposed to the oppressions of race and gender in society, the more they shrink themselves to fit in the roles that society deems suitable for them, including politics, sex issues, and economic issues. Triple Consciousness exists in a plethora of ways for Black women. Race, gender and sexuality remain present in the mind of many Black women and

² Frances M Beal "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female." *Meridians* 8, no. 2 (2008): 166-76.

³ John P. Pittman, "Double Consciousness," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Stanford Center of Study, n.d.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/double-consciousness>.

they are forced to navigate in spaces where all three are monitored. Melissa Harris-Perry explains in her book *Sister Citizen*, being a Black woman in America is like trying to stand straight in a crooked room created by biases against you.⁴ My research will add to these theories by looking more in depth at the intersections of race, gender, and sexual orientation. By highlighting the tribulations that Black women face, I will be able to juxtapose that against the theory of Triple Consciousness. I argue that due to this innate development of consciousness Black women can navigate multiple oppressions because of this awareness. I also will argue TCT from the prospective of trans Black women, I will analyze how trans Black women are impacted socially, economically and mentally, furthermore articulating the awareness of TCT.

As a Black Woman, I can understand the complexities of navigating through life with adversity and oppressions that offer distinct complications. Also, I can understand how being a Black woman is a frustrating and misunderstood dwelling, being placed in a space that society created for you, unable to remove yourself from that perspective without backlash. As a thirty-three-year-old Black woman, I have been granted the opportunity to see more of life from the perspective of multiple angles. As an adolescent I grew up not aware of the ways that race, gender and class would impact my adult life but subconsciously understood like many young Black girls that the treatment I received from fellow classmates, teachers, and strangers would grant me tools to navigate through life more cognizant. Like many Black girls, I recalled times that my race and gender changed the way others viewed me. Having that sense of consciousness is a feeling that is indescribable. It is like an innate feeling that some get when experiencing something for the first time.

⁴ Tamera Winfrey Harris, *The Sisters are Alright Changing: Changing the Broken Narrative of Black Women in America*.(Oakland, California: Barrett-Koehler Publishers Inc, 2015), 7.

I recall the first time that I felt my race and I will never forget how that made me feel. I was no older than eleven years old. My stepsister and I would normally walk to the corner store to purchase our weekly stockpile of candy and treats. My favorite being the sour candies and lollipops that we called suckers. I recall the tootsie pops being the ones we would collect to unwrap and see if they had the infamous star on the package. The star would indicate that you were a lucky winner, and we would redeem them at the corner store for an additional sucker. I would purchase a few the week before and whenever I knew I had a star I would go back to the corner store and collect my free sucker. My stepsister who happened to be a year older than I, did not care too much about the free sucker reward but maintained interest in tagging along with me to the corner store. A block away from the neighborhood I lived in, my mother never made issues about me walking to the store if I did not take too long or wandered off too far. My stepsister would join our household on weekends but at this time the school year had just ended, and the summer break had begun.

Anxious about summer break and the new allowance my mother gave me I slid on my flip flops and hurried to the corner store. Running out the door after me, my stepsister decided to tag along. We make it to the store, and I notice right away that things looked different. Unbeknownst to myself the previous owners had sold the store and it would now be under new management, which I would figure out later. Not thinking too much about the change I did happen to notice that the previous owners were replaced with younger owners. The previous owners, an elderly Vietnamese couple, loved to turn an eye to troublesome young children of all races who would shoplift candy and drinks. I knew this because I had many classmates that lived in the neighborhood and majority of them did not receive allowance nor worked yet managed to leave the store with several items. Knowing my mother would knock me into next week, I did

not dare shoplift from any store. I loved how when I had a star on my wrapper the older Vietnamese lady who owned the store would smile at me with such adoring eyes while allowing me to pick another sucker, knowing I was looking at the wrapper to see if it had a star before I picked, she would still smile and let me choose. Sometimes she would hug me and whisper something in Vietnamese in my ear. Her husband would nod from around the counter and smile, I want to believe that he knew how happy this made his wife, so he overlooked the overly friendliness.

This day the older Vietnamese couple were nowhere to be found. With the wrapper from last week, I was excited to return to the counter and present my wrapper for my reward. Greeted by a middle-aged white man, the excitement quickly faded as I approached the counter and the friendliness seemed nowhere in sight. Annoyingly he told me they no longer redeem wrappers at this store and referred me to purchase anything I may need. My stepsister had already begun browsing the store with the man's eyes glued to her as I stay at the counter. He watched her so intently that I could not help but follow his eyes. As I stared at him, he is watching my sister's every move, even moving down the counter to see what aisle she was on. I backed away and followed her down the aisle. She asked about the candy and I tell her I decided to get something else. We browsed more my sister unaware of the eyes that followed but me watching from the corner of my eyes. I walked to the back wall to retrieve a drink when I heard my sisters voice yelling. I looked over and the man had her by the arm shouting. All I remember was her adamantly expressing she did not do anything and him accusing her of trying to steal. I ran to her side and let him know that it was a misunderstanding that we had money and no need to steal anything. I forced my hands in my pockets to show him we had money. He quickly snatched the cash from my grasp and said that he recognized us from the cameras, and this would pay for the

things we had previously taken. I screamed for him to return my money as he held my sister by the arm, she fought back as I pushed for my money. Another man ran from the back grabbed me and started yelling racial explicit slurs while pushing me towards the door. I lost my shoe in the process and yelled to him that I needed my money and my shoe. Both men forced me and my sister out of the store and said if we came back, they would call the police. I grabbed ahold of the man's shirt so he could not return inside without me. He yelled for someone to call the police, I let go and we run home as fast as we can. With one shoe and a torn shirt, I tried to explain to my mother what happened and pleaded with her to go back and get my money. She let me know that money was long gone and told me to never spend my money there again. All I could replay is two young girls neither of us teenagers, physically fighting with two grown men over accusations of thief. Not only were we vilified for actions of other children, but the phrase n****r b****es replayed in my head all summer. I never returned to that store like my mother told me, luckily a new 7eleven was built a few blocks away. That corner store went out of business a year later, call it karmic justice if you may but the lasting effects of that day lived in me during many other instances where I felt attacked by white males.

This state of mind that changed within me after that instance created a dwelling that is like a light switch. I have asked other Black people or women about the moment that they felt this racial awareness switch for them too. I would not find out until later this is a form of consciousness that is created due to the circumstances Black women exist in. Although this state of consciousness is not widely acknowledged it is a reality and present state that many Black women must navigate. With my research I plan to deepen the awareness of such consciousnesses and allow Black women to know that they are not alone in this thinking and cognizance.

In this thesis I broaden the awareness for Triple Consciousness theory and use the lives of influential figures to showcase the cognizance that exists in multiple Black women and continues to this day. I plan to format each chapter to accentuate the importance that Triple Consciousness theory presents. Starting after the introduction I will present in the following chapter, Triple Consciousness Theory: The Black Woman's Experience the Triple Consciousness Theory and what that definition means. By defining the term, it will connect the meaning regarding the lives of the women that will be covered in the thesis. This will present the framework of my argument, providing a foundation on the theory and its significance. In this chapter I will use examples of Black women's experiences to help further articulate the argument that Triple Consciousness is developed in Black women over time. Also, that in most cases Black women experience at some point in their lives, situations that bring more attention to the fact Black women must navigate through the world with the multiple awareness. By setting the foundations of Triple Consciousness and what it means it will give a better understanding to how it has been a prominent ideology that existed in the minds of African American women, even if they were unaware of the term.

In the third chapter The Crenshaw Theory: Understanding Intersectionality, More Than an Abstract Term, I highlight the understanding of intersectionality, I will give more of a theoretical examination of the similarities of intersectionality and Triple Consciousness as well as the differences among the two. While studying Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory, I will delve into the foundation of TCT and how it intertwines with the intersectionality aspect. I utilize the works of Patricia Collins and Ange-Marie Hancock to further expound on the concept from the lens of other scholars. By emphasizing lives of activists and advocates like Angela Davis and Audre Lorde, I accentuate how TCT is prevalent in a variety of Black women. Also, underlining how

sexuality is a present feature in TCT with the mention of Lorde's contributions. By uncovering the experiences of these women, I am also able to see how TCT plays a pivotal role in the advancement of African American women. Also, bring attention to the workings of both women that contributed to the understanding and awareness of living in a world that requires you to exist in multiple positionalities. This chapter will also investigate the feminist movements from a Black women's perspective and how this outlook altered political and social positions from African American women.

In the fourth chapter *She, Her, Hers: TCT's Impact on Trans Women of Color*, I emphasize TCT concerning trans women of color, I will apply interviews from trans women of color from the present and combine those stories with those of trans women of color from the past. While referencing the accounts of present trans women, I will tie these into the concept of TCT with people like Pauli Murray, Ma Rainey, Gladys Bentley, and Marsha P Johnson. Some of those are trans women and some are examples of how sexuality and gender play a significant part in the adaptation of TCT.

In the conclusion all these chapters will be brought together to conclude how TCT is a theory among African American women. I will use the research from all the chapters to conclude my thesis and finish the understanding of TCT. Also, this chapter will showcase how TCT is an evolutionary theory and can continue with the times as long as society is continuing to develop the way that it is. TCT will always remain a prominent theory that African American women have adapted to and in the future possibly exploring how this is applied to the arts such as music, cinema and other artistic avenues.

Chapter 2

Triple Consciousness Theory: The Black Woman's Experience

The Black woman's experience and what it means to be a Black woman in America is a diverse and fascinating experience. The development of theory for this distinctive consciousness derived from generations of subjugation. As discussed in the introduction Triple Consciousness in Black women is a psychological explanation discovered after the exploration of Double Consciousness in Black men in America. Writers like W. E. B Du Bois and Frantz Fanon had their own adaptation of what multiple consciousness are, but their perspectives did little to explain the perspectives of an African American woman. Authors like Frances Beal, Angela Davis and Audre Lorde will contribute to the understanding that is Black women's experience. Some will be visited in this chapter and others will be explored in later chapters.

Double Consciousness

Being an American is problematic to many different degrees but being a Black man in America is magnitudes harder. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, better known as W.E.B. Du Bois, born on February 23, 1868, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts.⁵ While growing up in a predominantly white American town, Du Bois recognized himself as mulatto or mixed race, but freely attended school with whites and remained enthusiastically supported in his academic studies by his white teachers. In 1903, Du Bois published his ground-breaking work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, an assortment of 14 essays, a collection of philosophical perceptions on the

⁵ "W.E.B. Du Bois," Biography.com (A&E Networks Television, January 7, 2021), <https://www.biography.com/activist/web-du-bois>.

ideology of being Black. In the following years, he unyieldingly opposed the idea of biological white superiority and vocally supported women's rights.⁶ Du Bois understood the complexity of being an African American male in a white society and how to navigate more than just the white perceptions but those created within Black people's own community. With this acknowledgement the understanding of Double Consciousness was created. I use this theory to directly validate what is the Triple Consciousness Theory. By understanding the implication of Double Consciousness in Black males and how being a Black male in American society comes with various hinderances, then the juxtaposition of Triple Consciousness is authenticated in Black women.

Double Consciousness is a term W. E. B. Du Bois coined that embodied the core of being African American. Du Bois' central theme stayed on the recurring fight between the multi-faceted groundwork of self-identifying with African culture, while existing in an American construction altered specifically to cater to white Americans. Double Consciousness relates to being a Black person in this society, but the evaluation of the effects on men of color is completely different. Double Consciousness is the incorporation of being man in society while adding the layer of being a Black person. The essence of being a Black man in America often comes with a burden. In *Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois references how the ideals of "Negroes" of his time would change and be replaced by new Negro social consciousness⁷ This consciousness developed from the teachings of preachers and teachers and force a Black man to reconsider his placement in America. In my opinion this will dictate the future, causing Black men to question how race and class intermingle. He explains how the "Negro" is created, describing a Negro as a

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ W. DuBois, "The Souls of Black Folk," in *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: Chelsea House, 2021), 97.

clownish simple creature at times loveable within its limitations.⁸ Du Bois refers to the perceptions of these men's minds to be encompassed in walls that are so thick and high, they dare not think to break them.⁹ He distinguishes the survival between race and class and how these two things intertwine in a Black man's existence.

Race and class interconnect in various ways with American men, and with Black American men the residual effects of that intersectionality can often be negative. In this research the history of these distinct levels of consciousness are examined and brought together to define the characteristics of Triple Consciousness for Black women in the 21st century. The combination of being an American and being a Black woman is a conscious assessment that impacts the minds of Black women. Understanding this requires the reemergence of the Double Consciousness that Du Bois explains in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Leaders like Malcolm X have spoken to the results of being Black in America, the quintessence of what being a part of a country but never fully accepted and the mindfulness that manifests because of that. Undeniably referenced in a speech by Malcolm X in 1964, "Sitting at the table doesn't make you a diner. You must be eating some of what is on that plate. Being here in America does not make you an American. Being born here in America doesn't make you an American."¹⁰

W.E.B. Du Bois communicates the history of the American Negro is in part the lack of understanding for the mental awareness that is required to maneuver while being two different people. Also, the consciousness that is required to understand the place that Black people have in this country. The need to maintain one's true self, while watering down the African background. This is a brief description from Du Bois about Double Consciousness:

⁸ Ibid, 108.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "The Ballot or the Bullet," speech, April 3, 1964, Cleveland, Ohio (published in Malcolm X Speaks, Ch. 3, 1965).

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a particular sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.¹¹

Double Consciousness is acknowledged as an understanding in which a person would fall short of accurate self-consciousness, but is a consciousness of oneself, nonetheless. It is also part of a more multifaceted feeling of multiple thought processes of competing thoughts and ideals. This appears to be a social contrast opposed to a simply bio-racial given that is accredited to people of African descent in America. DuBois clarifies that Blacks are required to view themselves from both the inside and outside parts of society. Blacks are required to view all negative perspectives that have been placed onto them. By viewing these perceptions, they manifest multiple identities. Having two opposed identities means that a lot of time and energy is spent negotiating and tolerating the struggles between who one is as a person and how one fights to live with the misrepresentations of the outside world.¹² DuBois observes the different levels that Blacks struggle with and the duality of Double Consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk*, in the tenth chapter he addresses the critical phase of “Negro religion”:

From the double life every American Negro must live, as a Negro and as an American, as swept on by the current of the nineteenth while yet struggling in the eddies of the fifteenth century, — from this must arise a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality, and a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence. The worlds within and without the Veil of Color are changing, and changing rapidly, but not at the same rate, not in the same way; and this must produce a peculiar wrenching of the soul, a peculiar sense of doubt and bewilderment. Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to

¹¹ Marc Black, *Fanon and DuBoisian Double Consciousness*. (2007).

<https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1209&context=humanarchitecture>.

¹² Ibid.

double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretense or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism.¹³

Here Du Bois differentiates the two different social worlds and the double awareness that is created. He brought understanding to the relevance on Black lives that Double Consciousness generates. Du Bois' formation of Double-Consciousness stresses its acknowledged relation to the "two-nesses of the Negro psyche. Du Bois never explicitly clarifies the relation between Double-Consciousness and two-ness in his texts, but the understanding of the psyche helps to build the foundation to the creating of Triple Consciousness Theory.

By investigating the roots of the construction of multiple consciousness' we can next examine this ideology from the prospective of a Black woman. Before delving into Triple Consciousness, we must next view the Double Consciousness from another perspective, the viewpoint of Frantz Fanon. Frantz Omar Fanon born July 20, 1925 in Fort-de-France, in the French colony of Martinique, was a complex character, with multiple identities. His parents belonged to the middle-class community of the island: father a descendant of slaves, mother of mixed French descent. In Fort-de-France, he studied at Lycée Schoelcher, where one of his teachers was poet and writer Aimé Césaire. Césaire's obsessive denouncement of colonial racism had a major inspiration on the receptive Fanon. As a young rebel, he agitated against the Vichy regime in the Antilles and traveled to Dominica to support the French resistance in the Caribbean. Afterwards, he found himself in France where he joined the resistance against Nazi Germany. While serving in the military, Fanon experienced racism on an everyday basis. In

¹³ John P. Pittman, "Double Consciousness," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Stanford Center of Study, n.d.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/double-consciousness>.

France, he observed that French women avoided Black soldiers who were surrendering their lives to liberate them. This sparked a consciousness in Fanon that enlightened him to the reactions from the world towards Black people no matter what they were accomplishing.¹⁴

Fanon wrote *Black Skin, White Masks* when he was 27. Published in 1952, it was his first and most enduring book. It was disregarded at the time that it was written, and its significance was only recognized after his death. *Black Skin, White Masks* was one of the first books to investigate the psychology of colonialism. It assesses how colonialism is internalized by the colonized, how an inferiority complex is taught, and how, through the mechanism of racism, Black people end up emulating their oppressors.¹⁵ This speaks to the development of generations following slavery and how many descendants of slaves end up practicing the same rituals of their ancestor's tormentors.

The most understandable chapter is "The Fact of Blackness." In this chapter Fanon translates his reflection of consciousness onto the paper. "All this whiteness that burns me. I sit down at the fire and became aware of my uniform. I had not seen it. It is indeed ugly. I stop there, for who can tell me what beauty is?"¹⁶ "This straightforwardness and anger made some people who read it uncomfortable because in a "civilized" society it is not acceptable to face uncomfortable truths and direct honesty about systematic racism. This is exactly what makes *Black Skin, White Masks* such a powerful and lasting allegation of racial disparities in western society.¹⁷ This shows exactly what consciousness Fanon developed that allowed him to articulate the awareness of his skin to that degree. Although he may write about the personal experience

¹⁴ Homi K. Bhabha Bhabha and Ziauddin Sardar, "PDF" (London, 1986).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

with blackness, it speaks directly to the double psyche that existed. Reading *Black Skin, White Masks* there is a need to also be mindful of the timeline that it was written and the discriminative language when pointing out experiences between men and women of color. Fanon comes closest to DuBois' concept of Double Consciousness by saying, "Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has to place himself, his customs and the sources on which they are based, were wiped out because they conflicted with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him."¹⁸

Du Bois and Fanon created a narrative that addressed Black men in American and the experiences that constructed their intellectual opinions regarding Double Consciousness. This is only developed in detail for those that live in that world on a constant basis. There is an ability to understand the ideology of Double Consciousness but to live in the unrelenting pressure of that awareness is heavy. When observing men and the weight of possessing multiple mindfulness' in society, it is hard to not look directly to the effects that the same mindfulness would have on women of color. Specifically, when we look to Black women and trans Black women.

Triple Consciousness

From a historical perspective, being born a woman once classified you as being a second-class citizen in America. While women were lower in the structure of this country, being born Black in America did not qualify you as human at one point in history. Now add being born a Black woman while in America. Black women are one of the foundations of the upward construction of America. They are the backbone for so many things yet are left to fend for

¹⁸ Marc Black, *Fanon and DuBoisian Double Consciousness*. (2007).
<https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1209&context=humanarchitecture>.

themselves unsupported with little assistance to bring attentiveness to matters directly affecting them. There are so many societal norms and gender expectations for how a woman should act. Often taught to be pleasant, clever, respectful, show emotion but not too much, cook, clean, provide and be a caretaker.¹⁹ Women are overlooked regarding the multiple societal expectations. Then there are conflicting stereotypes that exist about a Black woman, often categorized as uneducated single mothers who are aggressive, loud, and angry. Triple Consciousness for a Black woman is living and existing in a society that believes most of those stereotypes as precise.

Black women in America live between the categories of both their race and gender. Their existence lies within the limitations of a white patriarchal society. In *The Sisters are Alright* by Tamara Winfrey Harris, she asks in her introduction *The Trouble with Black Women*, what is wrong with Black women? The questions speak to the perception that other cultures have concerning Black women. Also, the awareness that they must maintain to live among other races and cultures. Winfrey Harris explains how Black women are to blame for multiple issues including urban violence, the welfare state in America, and the disintegration of the Black family.²⁰ Media approaches them as problems and oddities and then frequently disrespects them. This all occurs from the roots of American history for the Black woman. What is often not emphasized in the structures that were created is the reasonings to why some of these stereotypes exist.

¹⁹ Loryn Hairston, "The Double Consciousness of a Black Woman," Her Campus, accessed April 9, 2021, <https://www.hercampus.com/school/hampton-u/double-consciousness-black-woman>.

²⁰ Harris, 8.

Slavery was a monumental influence on the treatment of Black women. African women underwent magnitudes of atrocities while being held captive in America. African women often experienced sexual violence while being labeled as breeders. They endured being separated from their own children and forced to raise their master's children. This mindset of oppression and being viewed as a product in white society is programmed into the Black woman from the beginning of their presence in the country. It also does not vacate as generations pass. It is only transformed into another form of consciousness that then makes them evaluate the value or place in this country. A question that previously existed but in a different context. Literature such as *More than Chattel* by David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine²¹ and *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* by Dr. Joy DeGruy.²²

The more that Black women are exposed to the stereotypes, the more they diminish themselves to fit in areas. ²³Triple consciousness exists in the miscellaneous levels of society for Black women. Class, race and gender remain present in the mind of many Black women and they are forced to navigate in spaces where all three are monitored. Melissa Harris-Perry explains in her book *Sister Citizen*, being a black woman in America I like “trying to stand straight in a crooked room created by biases against you.”²⁴ “When they confront race and gender stereotypes, black women are standing in a crooked room and they have to figure out which way is up. Bombarded with warped images of their humanity, some black women tilt and bend themselves to fit the distortion.”²⁵

²¹ David Barry Gaspar, and Darlene Clark Hine, eds. *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*. (Indiana University Press, 1996.)

²² Joy DeGruy Leary and Randall Robinson, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (United States: Joy DeGruy Publications Inc., 2018).

²³ Harris, 9

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

Several black women bend to fit so much that they are broken from the pressure to be something they are not, mainly because of the lack of acceptance. Black women face multiple health issues due to stress. These burdens often impact Black women physically in a negative way and add to the generational health concerns. According to Self website article “8 Health Conditions That Disproportionately Affect Black Women” by Zahra Barnes, Black women are 10 times more likely to face mental health issues. Black women are more vulnerable and experience sadness, hopelessness and worthlessness more frequently.²⁶

Those that do not conform can be known as some of the more radical Black women but have a lasting effect on other women of color. Triple Consciousness is not an easy weight for Black women because they have been taught to ignore the widespread misogyny and destructive thought patterns that exist in their communities. They are required to concentrate on issues of race, blindly standing by secular and religious traditions that have been holding them back for generations.²⁷

In *Double Jeopardy*, published in 1969, Frances Beal explains the existence of a Black woman is in a way a “slave to a slave.” By the reduction of the Black man in America to abject oppression, the Black woman has no protector and is used as a scapegoat. The Black woman has been used as a culprit for the evils that the horrendous system has perpetuated on Black men. Her physical image has been misaligned by the sexual assault and abuse that was placed on her by white colonizers.²⁸ She goes farther by explaining the economic exploitation that Black women faced by being forced to be maids to white women and wet nurses to their offspring, while

²⁶ Zahra Barnes, “8 Health Conditions That Disproportionately Affect Black Women,” SELF, accessed April 12, 2021, <https://www.self.com/story/black-women-health-conditions>.

²⁷ Kathy Henry, *Beyond Black and White*. <https://www.beyondblackwhite.com/triple-consciousness-black-woman/>. 2013.

²⁸ Frances M Beale, *Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female*. 1969.

watching their own slave and struggle to survive. Beale brings to the attention not only the generations of Black women that are affected but the way that Black women are conscious of their placement behind Black men. Although the desire for Black men to be accepted is a priority to Black women as well, there is a fallacious reasoning that for the Black man to be strong the Black woman must be weak.²⁹

Triple Consciousness presents more than just the social effects, there are mental health effects that come with programming your mind into adapting to certain spaces. Many Black women in America wear the badge of being a strong and resilient Black woman. There is a sense of honor that is associated with struggling mentally. Having generations before you that were able to survive and get through the unimaginable, Black women tend to focus on the tasks instead of ourselves. We are proud of our tenaciousness and never let the world see the pressures that we face. But we are suffering silently with the mental and physical health issues while carrying the multiple burdens of family, school, work and community obligations. These compounded with personal occurrences of trauma and loss, all while living in an environment of persistent racial and gender discrimination can be unbearable. Dr. Joy DeGruy in *Post Traumatic Slavery Syndrome* covers how historically Black women's physically and emotional strength have attributed to their health.

Black women are more likely than white women to have experienced post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from childhood traumas, sexual and physical violence. Black women are also more likely to have stresses directly connected to family issues, employment struggles, financial problems, discrimination, racism and safety concerns related with living in areas that

²⁹ Ibid.

are unsafe.³⁰ Black women are also more likely to be depressed and when they are depressed their symptoms are more severe, last longer and are more likely to impede with their ability to function at school, home and work. Black women often can carry feelings of unhappiness, insignificance and uselessness.³¹ While maintaining all these symptoms, Black women denounce medical help or treatment because of the stigma of being able to survive all environments. This also occurs due to the distrust for medical staff due to negative experiences and not being believing Black women's pains or concerns.

In addition to ignoring symptoms, fewer than 50 percent of Black women with mental health needs receive treatment. Shame is a key barrier that prevents this from occurring. Black women also often prefer a Black mental health care provider, and there are too few Black social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists.³² According to the American Psychiatric Association, out of 41,000 psychiatrists, only 2 percent are Black.³³ This is a direct result in the diversity in employment in certain fields. Also, speaks to the amount of Black people who obtain the ability to obtain higher education to seek jobs in the medical field. In low-income communities, mental health services are rare and if they are available waiting lists are extensive. Finally, more than 16 percent of Black women are uninsured, and many cannot afford treatment. So, there is an added pressure of not wanting to seek help and if there is a desire it must be obtainable to these women. Meanwhile, the psychological wear and tear of being a resilient Black woman takes a toll on the

³⁰ DeGruy, 102.

³¹ Inger Bennett-Zeigler, "*The Strong and Stressed Black Woman*," <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/25/opinion/strong-stressed-black-woman.html>.

³² Courtland Milloy, "Perspective | Black Psychiatrists Are Few. They've Never Been More Needed.," *The Washington Post* (WP Company, August 11, 2020), https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/black-psychiatrists-are-few-theyve-never-been-more-needed/2020/08/11/7df9eeea-dbeb-11ea-8051-d5f887d73381_story.html.

³³ *Ibid.*

mind and body.³⁴ Black women tend to lean on religion to assist with the ailments associated with living in this America. This can be problematic for some because the root of the issues can often be ignored. W.E.B DuBois stated it clearly about his opinion on Black church and religion.

The theology of the average-colored church is basing itself far too much upon 'Hell and Damnation'—upon an attempt to scare people into being decent and threatening them with the terrors of death and punishment. We are still trained to believe a good deal that is simply childish in theology. The outward and visible punishment of every wrong deed that men do, the repeated declaration that anything can be gotten by anyone at any time by prayer.³⁵

One of the biggest issues with Double or Triple Consciousness is that some white Americans have the privilege of being are unaware of its existence. To endure the pain associated with living in multiple worlds can be difficult. DuBois wrote. Whites need not understand or live in the Black world in order to thrive. But Blacks must grapple with the painful 'double conscious- ness' that may result [in DuBois' words], "An almost morbid sense of personality and a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence." ³⁶

In the movie *The Color Purple* (1985), there is a scene where the older white woman Miss Millie is unaware of the chaos that she has caused the character Miss Sophia. Miss Millie takes Sophia to her home after years of imprisonment to visit her children and family. After an unsuccessful attempt to back herself out of the driveway in her new car, Millie causes a scene when Sophia's Black male family members try to assist her. She eventually makes Sophia take her home after spending no time with her family. This movie is interesting and accentuates the lack of understanding of how it feels to be a Black person in a white world. Many of Black women are confronted with the lack of empathy or understanding for the struggles that endure.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ W.E.B. DuBois. n.d. *Goodreads*. https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/10710.W_E_B_Du_Bois.

³⁶ Marc Black, *Fanon and DuBoisian Double Consciousness*. (2007).

<https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1209&context=humanarchitecture>.

The obliviousness that is connected to some white Americans makes it harder to navigate in a society that was constructed against you. The understanding that allies are few, creates more wakefulness to societal impacts.

In some instances, having multiple consciousnesses creates impostor syndrome in Black women. Impostor Syndrome is an inescapable feeling of self-doubt, insecurity, or fraudulence despite often overwhelming evidence to the contrary. It can be seen most in smart, successful individuals but can appear in those that have multiple odds stacked against them. It often rears its head after an especially notable accomplishment, like admission to a prestigious university, public acclaim, winning an award, or earning a promotion. Impostor Syndrome does not discriminate, it can affect people of every demographic. Most of them that suffer have a feeling of being like a fraud like. Minorities and women are among hardest hit by impostor syndrome.³⁷ The downside to Black women labeling moments of self-doubt as impostor syndrome, we flatten the complications and inescapability of White Supremacy and patriarchy. Not only that, Black women are told they need to just “lean in” or “pull themselves up by their bootstraps.” At the same time as never acknowledging that when they do lean in, and when they do pull themselves up, they are still met with opposition from individuals and institutions who are invested in their marginalization from many public spaces.³⁸ The issues with impostor syndrome are that many Black women do not know about it or that they are practicing the behaviors that are correlated to

³⁷Savvy Psychologist Ellen Hendriksen, “What Is Impostor Syndrome?” Scientific American (Scientific American, May 27, 2015), <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-is-impostor-syndrome/>.

³⁸Jenn M Jackson, “It’s Not ‘Impostor Syndrome’ When You’re Black and Woman,” WaterCoolerConvos, October 5, 2020, <http://watercoolerconvos.com/2016/04/20/its-not-impostor-syndrome-when-youre-black-and-woman/>.

imposter syndrome. The self-doubt that is associated with Triple Consciousness and impostor syndrome get pushed aside along with other toxic behaviors. Black women are programmed to not speak about issues that plague them because of the desire to not complicate the spaces where ironically, they are judged.

It takes a strong mind to be able to battle being Black, being in a certain class, as well as being a woman. That is the trifecta of consciousness that is present in the mind of a Black woman in America. Black women must not let go of this cognizance but inform more white men and women about this to where it decreases the complications connected to it. Every day as a Black woman internalizes different awareness based on their level of hierarchy, meaning that acknowledging that they are often the bottom perspective in society they will account for being considered as that in all facets. White men at the top, white women are next, the multiple other persons of color in between, Black men and then finally Black women. The mindfulness that comes with living in a society and knowing that you come last carries a load that only strong people can transport. With this strength builds character to overcome obstacles because you know the odds that are present. Being equipped with the tools to combat socio-economic oppressions can be an advantage in a society full of disadvantages for Black women.

Black women have been cognizant of their skin and the problem that comes with that. Also, their class in America and where that places them. Lastly, their gender and the fact that women are looked as lesser to men in many areas in this country. Triple the acknowledgments and triple the burdens. All the things that can be heavy or hard to deal with are also some of the things that make Black women's strength as unique as it is. Without the mental capacity to carry

the weight of the world, Black women may not have had the fortitude to be the support for others.

When discussing the different views of Black women, it is important to account for the historical perspective from American society. The misogyny that Black women have had to endure attribute to the various ways they developed. Various troupes such as the Jezebel, Mammy, and the Sapphire are all contributions to the view of African American women and how they can develop consciously despite being viewed as these caricatures. The term misogynoir speaks to the misogyny that black women must face. Coined by queer black feminist Moya Bailey, Misogynoir attests to the misogyny directed toward black women.³⁹ Although Bailey intended this to apply toward Black women in pop culture, the misogynoir has been present in American culture much longer than recent times. Bailey's stance on misogynoir is that the racial aspects and gender aspects cannot be separated.⁴⁰ What it really is, is an intersection where the two things, race and gender meet. Due to the caricatures that were placed on Black women like the Jezebel, Mammy and Sapphire, they had to tolerate things like misogynoir. When speaking about the Jezebel, Mammy and Sapphire terms it is imperative to understand the origins of the terminologies about Black women. Jezebel is the portrayal of Black women as lascivious in nature, innately promiscuous, and even predatory.⁴¹ This conceptualization is based on a time during slavery where mixed race women were often deemed as prostitutes when some would become willing concubines.⁴² This stereotype was used as a justification for the sexual

³⁹ Verve Team, "Feminist Facts: What Is Misogynoir?" September 4, 2018, <https://medium.com/verve-up/feminist-facts-what-is-misogynoir-5392c29d6aab>.

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ "The Jezebel Stereotype," The Jezebel Stereotype - Anti-black Imagery - Jim Crow Museum - Ferris State University, accessed April 9, 2021, <https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/jezebel/index.htm>.

⁴² Ibid.

relationships between white men and Black women. The “Jezebel” is the woman whose insatiable appetite would not fancy relations with Black men but only desired white men. Feeding into the notion that white men or slave owners were not raping their slaves. This is far from the truth and led to the circulation of the Jezebel trope. This circulation would extend far beyond slavery into the Jim Crow Era.

Although Jezebel would be one of the stereotypes that existed for Black women during slavery it would not be the only one. The Mammy caricature would be the more prominent one of the three. The Mammy stereotype carried the depiction of a happy heavy set Black woman with a motherly persona, who was often happy to assist a white family in raising and nursing their children.⁴³ From slavery well into the Jim Crow era, according to Ferris State University’s Jim Crow Museum, the Mammy persona would serve for political, social and economic interests of mainstream white America.⁴⁴ A historian, Catherine Clinton, says that the Mammy image was created to redeem the relationship of Black women and white southerners in response to the North’s anti-slavery attacks.⁴⁵ Also claims that this stereotype did not exist much before the Civil War. Patricia Turner, a professor of African American Studies would confirm that many white slave owners before the Civil War would not have the luxury to have Black women as house servants opposed to field hands, only the very wealthy slave owners would have this as reality.⁴⁶ The domestication of slaves is debatable among historians, but it is evident that the

⁴³ Chanequa Walker-Barnes, “Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength,” in *Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), p. 85.

⁴⁴ “The Mammy Caricature,” The Mammy Caricature - Anti-black Imagery - Jim Crow Museum - Ferris State University, accessed April 9, 2021, <https://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/mammies/>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Mammy persona fits that narrative and is another reason it is important to understand the plight of a Black women historically.

Opposite of the Mammy figure, the Sapphire is a harsher stereotype and gives off the portrayal that Black women are angry, loud, malicious and stubborn. Given our historical experiences I would think that would be an acceptable demeanor but understand that this narrative is harmful and like the other stereotypes is carried on throughout history so much that it is difficult to steer away from. Ferris University's Jim Crow Museum addresses that over time this portrayal of Black women as the Sapphire have done damage to the Black women and is used as a technique to socially control or punish Black women who do not fit the societal norms.⁴⁷ These representations are a constant in popular culture and tools that are harmful for the progression of Black women in America. By understanding this racial troupes and the effects they present long-term, historians can dissect the ways they impact awareness. I specifically look to these typecasts as more reasons to why Black women must bear awareness for how societies perceive them and use it against them in many instances. This attributes to the TCT that would be present in many Black women because of living in the perceptions of one or all these categorizations every day.

⁴⁷ "The Sapphire Caricature," The Sapphire Caricature - Anti-black Imagery - Jim Crow Museum - Ferris State University, accessed April 9, 2021, <https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/antiblack/sapphire.htm>.

Chapter Three

The Crenshaw Theory: Understanding Intersectionality, More Than an Abstract Term

In 1988, a paper titled “*Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*” submitted to the University of Chicago Legal Forum by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, introduced a theological term called intersectionality.⁴⁸ In this multidimensional contrast of the black women’s experience in America, Crenshaw highlights how race and gender are often treated as mutually exclusive categories regarding the analysis of experiences.⁴⁹ Crenshaw introduces intersectionality as a theory where black women cannot solely be viewed by race and gender alone both are intertwined to reinforce each other in multiple ways. The experiences of Black women cannot be categorized in the frame of only being Black and a woman, we must examine the multiple ways that sexuality, economic, social and political aspects contribute to the multiverse workings of Black women. What differentiates the theoretical ideology that Crenshaw has presented in comparison to the ideology of triple consciousness is simple. Although Crenshaw’s theory highlights the multiple intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality, what Triple Consciousness adds to that argument is the mental development that is present during this intersection. The ways that a Black woman is aware of the social, political and economic changes that are present because of her race, class and gender is TCT. Furthermore, intersectionality has been expanded in subsequent years to talk about multiple identities beyond race, class, gender and nationality to include disability, religion, age, immigration status and

⁴⁸ Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” HeinOnline, March 8, 2021, <https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals%2Fuchclf1989&div=10>.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

many other identities. In this chapter I will explain how intersectionality and TCT are intertwined and because one exists the other is generated.

When viewing intersectionality analytically, there are several points that are assessed. In *Intersectionality (Key Concepts)*, Patricia Hills Collins and Sirma Bilge argue how intersectionality is more of an analytical tool. Also, how intersectionality provides a framework for explaining how classifications of race, class, gender, age, and citizenship status position people differently in the world.⁵⁰ Intersectionality does not just affect the intersection of social inequalities but the way we think about these inequalities. Among the categories of minorities, black women are among those that face economic barriers. Collins and Bilge argue that intersectionality creates a rethinking of many concepts, among those would-be wealth, public policies, and feminism. While examining intersectionality it is crucial to merge the perception of race with that of class and gender. In *Critical Race Theory*, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller and Kendall Thomas utilize contemporary legal thought and doctrine regarding race to determine constant assumptions and presuppositions. They also used it as a tool to address the deep-rooted issues of racism in America. While observing this writing myself I came across key points that would highlight the comprehension of racial consciousness. An excerpt from *Critical Race Theory* states this:

This ambivalence toward race-consciousness is best understood as a symptom of liberalism's continued investment in meritocratic ideology and is unacknowledged resistance to reaching any deep understanding of the myriad ways racism continues to limit the realization of goals such as equal opportunity. This liberal ambivalence is particularly manifested in today's debates particularly about affirmative action. But it is also reflected in the lukewarm liberal defense of the Great Society programs of the 1960s and the other policies which were adopted to address contradictions between American ideals and historical realities. Like the Harvard Law School administration's response to the demand of a course focus on race in the law, the liberal position reflects an abiding uncertainty about the value of such projects, and in a lingering wistful sense

⁵⁰ Patricia Hills Collins and Sirma Bilge. *Intersectionality (Key Concepts)*. (Medford, MA: Polity Press. 2020), 19.

that if we could just agree to abandon race consciousness, racism and racial power would somehow recede from the American political imagination.⁵¹

The statement above helps with understanding the legal views associated with racial consciousness. In my own terms, I would state this as acknowledging the outside perimeter of a cataclysmic dilemma. Basically, they are stating that adding awareness to the issue alleviates the crux of the obstacle, but this would be like saying the acknowledgement of issues can fix the systems that created them and continue to keep them, which is not entirely true. Some of the reasons that it is important to emphasize intersectionality and TCT is the understanding of how one ties into the other. By understanding the various ways different categories in our lives intersect we can understand the development of TCT.

In *Critical Race Theory*, the utilization of defining and examining racial consciousness is beneficial for understanding intersectionality because it warrants solid discernment on how race is one of the bigger pieces of intersection. Black women know unequivocally that race and gender are the biggest obstacles that they face regarding their placement in society. Knowing that two of the distinct characteristics that they carry will ultimately impact them in some way or form will help with developing consciousness. Understanding why race is so prevalent will give another understanding how gender is easily the second biggest issue. Black women are forced to grapple with the intersection of race and gender on multiple fronts. But thinking into how both individually impact Black women would clear the understanding to how they can apply a multiple form of oppression. Combining the two and introducing sexuality into this realm of

⁵¹ Kimberlé Crenshaw et al., *Critical Race Theory: the Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (New York: The New Press, 1996). xxix.

predetermined impediments, helps bring to the surface how TCT can be present in many black women before they know what it is.

In, *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, editor Toni Cade Bambara gives insight to the many layers of being a Black woman. Focusing on stories of multiple authors, Cade insinuates the complexities of Black women. In the article title “The Black Woman as a Woman,” Kay Lindsey states the issues in the liberation movements. In the Black Liberation Movement, women are finding themselves lacking the promotion of women’s issues because of the Women’s Liberation Movement focusing mainly on the oppression of women as a class. This places the Black woman outside both political entities, despite being part of both oppressions.⁵² The intersectionality of being a woman and Black does not excuse the fact that both are not simultaneously treated the same in their categories. The intersection describes the way that both are oppressions at the same time but the TCT expresses the acknowledgement of these multiple oppressions and how they permeate the psyche. Kay Lindsey further explains how classifications and categorizations of groups of people have always placed the benefit on the classifier.⁵³ Therefore, in the classification of Black oppressions, the classifier would be Black males and in the case of women’s issues white women are also placed as the classifier, thus leaving Black women to be placed subsequent in both categories.

Intersectionality is more than an abstract or ahistorical term because of the multiple ways that each intersection is deeply rooted in historical context. Ahistorical definition states the term as; not concerned with or related to history, historical development or tradition.⁵⁴ Why would I place intersectionality in that category as more than an abstract or ahistorical term? It is because

⁵² Toni Cade Bambara. *The Black Woman: An Anthology*. (New York, NY: WashingtonSquare Press, 1970), 103

⁵³ Bambara, 104.

⁵⁴ “Ahistorical,” Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster), accessed April 9, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ahistorical>.

intersectionality's definition is the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.⁵⁵ Thus making the marginalized individuals, normally rooted in historical context. When realizing that many of these marginalized groups have backgrounds where the oppression has occurred over time, we understand how it impacts the present.

Many Black woman activists have demonstrated the qualifications of intersectionality as well as exhibiting the characteristics that would indicate they also would carry awareness that could be considered TCT. Social, economic and gender hinderances have forced Black women to thrust themselves into politics, government and activism. Women like Angela Davis have demonstrated multiple forms of intersectionality as well as a unique emphasis that would determine that she possessed TCT. In her writings, Davis often speaks to the ways that Black women encompass many different individualities that force them to thrive in extreme situations. Looking at her own life, born in the segregated Alabama in 1944, Davis knew about the racial turmoil of Blacks in the south at an early age. Her neighborhood in Birmingham, Alabama the target of many KKK bombings would be referred to by the patrons as "Dynamite Hill."⁵⁶ Meaning the constant bombing of Black residences due to the KKK or white patrons caused the Blacks to refer to it as explosive. Davis would later leave the south for an education in Massachusetts, there she would formulate her ideals and activism regarding black radicalism, communism and international feminism. During the Civil Rights

⁵⁵ "Intersectionality," Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster), accessed April 9, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intersectionality>.

⁵⁶ History.com Editors, "Angela Davis," History.com (A&E Television Networks, November 9, 2009), <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/angela-davis>.

Movement, she would join the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Black Panther Party (BPP), both would not excuse the machismo associated with political movements. As a woman of color, Davis was aware of the multiple consciousness that would impact her over time. Being a woman in the Black power movement would warrant the appeal from not only American politics but transnationally.

As stated in *Becoming the Tupamaros Solidarity and Transnational Revolutionaries in Uruguay and the United States* by Lindsey Churchill, the critique of the “macho posturing” of the proviolence BPP mirrored the later criticisms by female members of sexism within the Tupamaros.”⁵⁷ Churchill speaks to the Uruguayan focus on the communism and black activism that Davis presented and the similarities to the imprisonment of African Americans as political prisoners mirrored that of Uruguayans. But it was the fascination with her womanhood and appearance that would sometimes take precedent even for the Leftist in Latin America. The sexualizations of physical features is not shocking when referencing woman leaders. Women often battle with the believability of their stances for equality because of the enthrallment with physical attributes and the belief of advantages of being attractive. This is another form or awareness that women possess, the knowledge of different treatment because of how they may be viewed physically in society. Davis is among those that physical appearance captivates the attention of male gazed society, but the elegance of character and intellectual proponents is how she overcomes that misfortune. I believe she is a prime example of TCT seeing how she navigated through the obstacles presented to her and still managed to maintain understanding of

⁵⁷Lindsey Churchill. *Becoming the Tupamaros Solidarity and Transnational Revolutionaries in Uruguay and the United States*. (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014), 73-75

those obstacles. She expressed in her autobiography how she understood the differences linked with her race and gender at a young age.

At the age of four I was aware that the people across the street were different — without yet being able to trace their alien nature to the color of their skin. What made them different from our neighbors in the projects was the frown on their faces, the way they stood a hundred feet away and glared at us, their refusal to speak when we said, "Good afternoon."⁵⁸

Davis recounted how the racial intolerance affected how she grew up in Alabama and affected her outlook regarding racial issues. She was able to see how growing up as an African American child was not parallel to growing up as a white child in society. She continues reflection on how people viewed her in her family when living in Alabama in the early 1940s and 50s:

An elderly couple across the street, the Monteys, sat on their porch all the time, their eyes heavy with belligerence. Almost immediately after we moved there the white people got together and decided on a border line between them and us. Center Street became the line of demarcation. Provided that we stayed on "our" side of the line (the east side) they let it be known we would be left in peace. If we ever crossed over to their side, war would be declared. Guns were hidden in our house and vigilance was constant.⁵⁹

Davis' references her childhood and how growing up for her was not any different than majority of the African American children who grew up during that time. Also, was not different from some of the circumstances of African Americans children growing up in more modern times in the United States. Reading her autobiography, I can clarify some of the ways that TCT would be existing and how that would be impact a younger child growing up in racially charged dynamics. Since a young age Angela had to traverse through circumstances where race is considered a disadvantage. Davis was aware of the

⁵⁸ Angela Davis. *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1974), 76.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

public perceptions of Black women and used that to fuel her rhetoric to become a revolutionary figure. This altered the leadership perspective on women's roles specifically regarding women who were part of the Black revolutionary movement.

Davis highlighted an understanding to the gender specific experiences that Black women faced and the racial hindrances that without question would be placed on her and individuals focused on the progression of African Americans. Although Davis would not be an official member of the Black Panther Party, she would help promote the visualization of revolutionary womanhood that the party encompassed. In Ashley D. Farmer's *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era*, Farmer testifies to the stretching of boundaries of the party's gendered ideals. Also, how the "Black Revolutionary woman brought the Panther's closer to their proletariat revolution by combating the structures of capitalism, liberation and male chauvinism."⁶⁰ Farmer would state that the movement from the 1970-75 would develop an expansive political identity, integrating Black mothers and feminists, and consequently lengthening the definition of a Black revolutionary woman. This would diversify the political identity of the Black Panthers and expanded the community support.⁶¹

Like the women of the Black Panther Party, Davis would be challenged by the government tactics and propaganda. In August of 1970, Davis would be charged of supplying guns used in a courthouse takeover. Johnathan Jackson would take a judge, prosecutor and three jurors' hostage along with the Black defendants. This would lead to the deaths of the judge and three Black men being killed.⁶² Due to her correspondence

⁶⁰ Ashley D. Farmer. *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press. 2017), 72-73

⁶¹ Ibid, 77

⁶² Bettina Aptheker. *The Morning Breaks: The Trial of Angela Davis*. (Cornell University Press, 1997).

with the Soledad Brothers, George being the brother of John and her purchasing the guns used for the takedown, Davis would be deemed an American threat by the FBI. The FBI would place Davis on the FBI's Top 10 Most Wanted List making her the 3rd woman to be placed on the list.⁶³ Davis stated in her autobiography that while on the run she would utilize the homes of friends and often moved in the night to stay out of eyesight. Davis is a woman who dealt with the magnified hate of the government and law enforcement to perpetuate an agenda to discredit the Black revolutionary. She would later be acquitted of all charges brought against her, but the widespread global backing would signify that her story began way before her incarceration and would continue long after.

As previously stated, growing up she recognized the difference that white society faced regarding class, gender and race. In her autobiography she explains on her first day at school as a "big kid" noticing the differences as she passed into certain parts of town. As she approached the overpass above the railroad tracks, she noticed the dilapidated structures. Davis stated:

Some of the houses were a motley whitewashed color. Others were covered with ugly brownish-black asphalt siding. They were spread throughout an area of about three-square blocks seemed to be proof of the way that white bureaucracy had gone about establishing a "school" for Black children."⁶⁴

Referencing the use of rundown houses after the inhabitants had become evicted and using those as the schools for Black children. Davis expressed the agony of watching the less fortunate peers in her school who she knew were deserving of the same food, clothing and warmth go without. Some of her closest friends would wait outside the lunchroom watching their peers as they consumed their food.⁶⁵ Her mother a

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Davis 1974, 86

⁶⁵ Ibid.

schoolteacher would often take food to her children and Davis would recount these were her first introductions to class differences. She believed that everyone lived the way that her and her family did. Until her experiences in school, she recognized that poverty's belief of if you did not work hard enough was the reason you went without was untrue. Noting that these experiences gave her the strong perspective of the history for Blacks.⁶⁶

Focusing on the class experience of a young Davis gives clarity to the Triple Consciousness. Davis knew that even as a young child that her peers of Black children were under funded in school and less fortunate than their white counterparts in neighborhoods across town. She even emphasized the differences of de jure segregated schools and de facto segregated schools of the north. Having the advantage of attending both, she was able to compare the education quality of both. This signified the Black identity that she possessed. She expressed that she "recalled the pervasive ambivalence at school and ambivalence which she confronted in every classroom and school related event."⁶⁷ Davis would go on about her childhood experience, the segregating of schools and neighborhoods as well as the treatment from white neighbors as Blacks surfaced in their dwellings. All were equally unpleasant, and some would result in tragic events. Detailing the bombings, fires and explosions that would occur would signify the reasons why Davis felt the fight for Blacks was necessary.

Repeatedly the development of consciousness in Davis is demonstrated over time. The quandary that Blacks faced would impact how she decided to navigate through the remainder of her adulthood. Living through the segregated south, she developed an

⁶⁶ Ibid, 88.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 89

understanding of race and class. As time progressed, she would attend college and develop the awareness for gender and class. Solidifying the dominate theme of multiple consciousness. Davis would go on to become a National Committee Member of the Communist Party, a co-chairperson of the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression and as a member of the executive boards of the National Political Congress of Black Women and National Black Women's Health Project. She utilized the lectures and articles that reflected her involvement in these movements to complete many of her books, one being *Women, Culture and Politics*.⁶⁸

Davis understood the strong traditional struggles associated with the women's and racial movements. The concern over jobs, working conditions, higher wages and racist violence were complications both movements possessed. Without the understanding of the intersectionality of both movements and how she herself is an equal participant in both, Davis would not have been able to pinpoint the naïveté that others outside the movements or non-people of color within both possess. Rationalizing the reality of segregation within both, the whiteness in the women's movement is parallel to the sexist backing in the racial movement. Equal plights for the Black women who is striving for the same equality in both. When demonstrating Triple Consciousness, it speaks to the understanding that the fight within a fight will remain present but that understanding of that fight activates awareness to navigate through it. Knowing that as a Black woman in society that forcefulness is required to gain footing in both movements and Davis exhibits that tremendously.

⁶⁸ Angela Y. Davis. *Women, Culture and Politics*. (New York, NY: First Vintage Books. 1990), 10

When mentioning influential women regarding race, gender, class and sexuality, the intersections of all those come to mind when contemplating the life of Audre Lorde. Lorde known for her feminism, intersectionality, and poetic stance on gender and sexuality used her art to specify her passion for fighting civil and social injustice. Her poetry would tackle issues involving racism, sexism, capitalism, feminism, lesbianism, Black identity, civil rights and disability. Race, gender and class were among those that she would emphasize. Starting from the beginning of her life, Lorde addresses her identity and what it meant to her at that age. In *Zami: A Spelling of my Name*, Audre Lorde brings up her thoughts of sexuality to the forefront early. As a young child she expresses the adoration for a woman in her neighborhood. Speaking of this woman of such elegance and uniqueness. Lorde emphasized that older women would look at this woman and frown upon her style, but Lorde admired her attitude. She states in the beginning,

DeLois lived up the block on 142nd St and never had her hair done, and all the neighborhood women sucked their teeth as she walked by. Her crispy hair twinkled in the summer sun as her big proud stomach moved her on down the block while I watched...I tried to peep under her blouse as she walked by, I never spoke to her because my mother did not. But I loved her, because she moved like she felt she was somebody special.”⁶⁹

She accentuated her admiration for DeLois because she was a big Black woman that seemed to be fearless. Making a note to show that it was more than just physical but she admired the boldness that DeLois possessed. Reading this excerpt demonstrates that Lorde was not afraid of her thoughts regarding sexuality. She knew that her attraction to

⁶⁹Audre Lorde. *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name*. (New York, NY: Crossing Press. 1990), 9.

women went deeper than just the physical but the way that women carried themselves added to her desire to be near them.

Race was also something that Lorde would have a realization about at a young age. The daughter of Caribbean immigrant parents, she would recognize the complexation of her mother versus that of her and her father. Her mother a Grenadian immigrant passed more for Spanish because of her lighter skin. Lorde acknowledged the difference but not being able to fully articulate it at the time. She would refer to her mother as a powerful woman. Noting that the two together would seem to somehow still be lesser than a man. Acknowledging the patriarchal hierarchy associated with gender despite knowing that her mother encompassed more than the credit she was given. Confirming the sharing of power in her household, she speaks to how she would have thought she would have learned to treat a woman based off her dad, but it was her mother's presence that gave her value.⁷⁰ Her parents would create a narrative that insinuated that class only existed because of the how hard people worked or did not work. Lorde's upbringing was very opposite to the beliefs of Davis' parents. Lorde hints that the beliefs of her parents were shared among her and her siblings but recognized that most of the stories she would encounter were told of people nothing like her or her family.⁷¹ She speaks of the whiteness in society that she would read about in stories and how she knew that it did not apply to her. She would later explore poetry in her teenage years, most of her peers were considered outcasts like herself.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 20.

⁷¹ Ibid, 22.

In *Zami*, Lorde notes that while attending the Hunter College High School that she would participate in workshops for the Hunter's Writing Guild, there she would feel the unacceptance from her peers. She rationalizes that the reason she was not accepted was because she was queer. Many of her friends would question her sexuality to her directly. One of her friends Ginger asking her "Are you gay, or aren't you?"⁷² This causes Lorde to come to terms with her sexuality identity more than she did as a child. She admits to herself and her friend Ginger that she is a lesbian. Ginger would be one of her first female relationships in college. Knowing that she is lesbian, Lorde opens the awareness of how she will be perceived because of her love for women. She brings attention to how she would exhibit TCT by addressing her sexuality in more of her works as a young woman. Lorde acknowledges that in many parts of her poetry.

With the acceptance of her sexuality in her younger years, I believe that this helps direct Lorde into many other aspects of her life regarding sexuality and identity. With the understanding of who she is as a Black queer woman, she is then able to solidify the stance that she takes regarding issues of gender. As Lorde progresses in life, so does her ideals on feminism and activism. In her book, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*, Lorde opens with what poetry is and can do. Explaining that it is a form of distillation of experiences and from the that many concepts, knowledges and understandings are birthed.⁷³ The artistry in her explanation of poetry is very rhythmical, and she speaks to the existence of a Black woman as beautiful but tough. Highlighting the darkness that is creates the depth that holds the creativity and strength.⁷⁴ Lorde

⁷² Ibid, 131.

⁷³ Audre Lorde. *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*. (UK: Penguin Random House. 2017), 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 2.

emphasizes the need to be more in touch with the non-European consciousness, touching the point of how this is a necessity to understand the power one holds.⁷⁵ This is what TCT encompasses, the ability to understand the consciousness that a Black woman possesses and tie that to the identity outside of European customs and ideals. What Black women understand about themselves creates a bridge to lessen the gap regarding hinderances that may be approached in their lifetime. By tapping into that ideology, they can steer spaces unfamiliar because of the awareness of complexities that occur because of race, class, or gender. Lorde formulates the art of poetry as the tool to open consciousness in women especially women of color. Lorde highlights the form of a women as this.

Women see ourselves diminished or softened by the falsely benign accusations of childishness of non-universality, of changeability, of sensuality...The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us the poet whispers to our dreams. I feel therefore I can be free. Poetry coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary demand. The implementation of that freedom.⁷⁶

Lorde uses this book to hit key points of a woman's essence as a source of power. Accentuating the understanding of this power comes for the mindfulness that power is often used, or unused but requires acknowledgement. In the passage titled, "Uses of the Erotic," Lorde speaks to the erotic as a form of power that women possess. She explicates the erotic as a deep female and spiritual plane.⁷⁷ She stresses that every oppression must corrupt or distort within the culture to warrant the ability to change that oppression. Underlining the cheapening of women in Western society, often women are oppressed, abused, vilified and taught to believe that the very form of power that we possess is

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 4.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 6.

inferior.⁷⁸ Lorde notes that the suppression of this power “the erotic” that women are taught to gain strength through the suppression of the power that makes us the unique creatures that they are. We still must recognize that the patriarchal illusion of power is constructed from the male models of power in society. In order to acknowledge the power that women suppress; we must view the power structure from the male-controlled lens.

One of the things that Lorde demonstrates in her works is the differences between women should not merely be tolerated. Instead of accepting these differences she advocates to use them as tools to assist in the dismantling the structures set by a patriarchal society. The acceptance of the differences helps people to understand how to liberate themselves.⁷⁹⁸⁰ Lorde would criticize Second Wave Feminists during the 1960s due to how they would handle race, gender, class and sexuality. Feminism was viewed as a movement that empowered all women. The inconsistency in this emerged due to the fact that women of color in the feminist movement would require different positionalities but were often homogenized together. The neglecting of differences in social groups would cause backlash toward activists of the women’s movement.⁸¹ In *Sister Outsider*, also by Audre Lorde, she emphasized the absence of recognition of most of the society is made up of the Black and Brown lower-class people who are often left out of social movements. The task of people of color to educate white people of our humanity.⁸² Lorde

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 18.

⁸⁰Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldua, and Toni Cade Bambara. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. (New York, NY: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press. 1984), 94-97.

⁸¹Audre Lorde. *Sister Outsider*. (New York, NY: Crossing Press. 2007), 114-22.

⁸² Ibid.

spoke to the understanding that Black people possess regarding Western society's view of them:

Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it and if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals as a result those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion.⁸³

When looking at this from the angle of Triple Consciousness, Lorde acknowledges that there is a sense of awareness that is required to handle these differences that society presents. The mention to ignoring in this excerpt recognizes that there is a cognizance there regardless how compelled that individual may be to change the circumstances. The mention to of copying, shows that there are innate consciousness' that are dissimilar to the society lived in and to exist in such society in a more comfortable form it often requires the person to mimic the habits while addressing the issues in majority instead of looking at it from a more magnified lens. The reference to the destroying would mean that we too possess the understanding that this ideology is unfit for the nature of Black people and to progress as people we must eliminate it. Lorde communicates that race, gender and class are not so much the entirety of the differences that separate us but the refusal to recognize those differences and distortions.⁸⁴

The Triple Consciousness that Lorde often exhibits in the way she speaks to her art and literature of Black women. She is very detailed in emphasizing that the works of Black women are overlooked by white women, particularly because white women are

⁸³ Ibid, 115.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

unable to attach themselves to the understanding of some Black art because of privilege. Having gender being the only opposition to your plight would make you more unattached to the struggle of other oppressions. Lorde recognizes that the experiences of white women in comparison to Black women are “too different” or challenging to connect to because of the “built in privilege.”⁸⁵ Dialogue about the pain and assault due to a racist patriarchy is harder to digest when there is little to no relation. Lorde speaks about the constant requirement to pick out things about herself as a Black woman. Picking out the parts that solidify an argument on oppression but ignoring other forms of oppression. She states that “being accused of being a lesbian has led many Black women to testify against themselves.”⁸⁶ Here Lorde is noting the ignoring of Black lesbians from Black heterosexual women. She claims that heterosexual Black women are conditioned to believe that lesbianism is a white women problem and the perils associated with lesbianism are not as significant as the fight of racial equality. Preaching to the programming of women, Lorde exclaims the social control that causes women to accept one area of human difference as authentic and others as not.⁸⁷

Lorde often speaks to power and the future progression of women in society rests fully on the understanding of the power they hold. In *The Black Unicorn*, a collection of poems from Lorde, it is not difficult to interoperate the understanding of power she is portraying through her messages. In the poem “But What Can You Teach My Daughter,” Lorde hints the consciousness that women possess. That even her daughter knows liberation, freedom and hurt. The short poem speaks volumes to the understanding that a

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 121.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 122.

woman would embrace regarding the world around her and what could someone outside of that understanding instruct her daughter. It is a deep short articulation of the cognizance that Black women acquire and how we are programmed to believe that the outside teaching is of more value than those ingrained though life experiences.

The reason that Lorde and her work is so significant to the understanding of TCT, is because of the many viewpoints that she covers. She takes into consideration the Black experience, the woman experience and the queer experience. All these intersections produce consciousness that can only be obtained through experience. This comes with knowing that I am navigating a society where the male perspective is superior to a female's, the white experience always takes precedent over the Black one and heterosexual existence is seen as normative, and queerness is not.

With TCT, the main distinction from its theory and that of intersectionality is that TCT is a derivative of intersectionality. By understanding how queer Black women could endure difference experiences based of the intersections of all their variables, we are able to account that the combination of these experiences creates an awareness that changes how they perceive their experiences. By understanding Black women and the obstacles that they must overcome because of the multiple intersections, we in turn are able to understand that awareness is developed over time and assist in the preparation of future endeavors. Because Angela Davis and Audre Lorde were able to understand their childhood and adult racial implications, gender inequality, and economic statuses; they both are able utilize that awareness to prepare them for any circumstance where those would be an issue. In the next chapter I will examine the trans Black women experience with TCT and how it impacts trans Black women.

Chapter Four

She, Her, Hers: TCT's Impact on Trans Women of Color

Like intersectionality, Triple Consciousness covers more than just race and class. Gender and sexuality are also addressed while examining the impact of social, economic inequalities. In this chapter the stories of trans women of color will add an emphasis to how TCT is a mindset that African American trans women also carry. This chapter will bring together the understanding that living and adapting to society as a trans African American woman carries a sociogenesis that changes over time. By exploring trans activists like Marsha P Johnson, queer blues singers like Gladys Bentley, and influential figures like Pauli Murray will help to evolve this understanding. Interviews from trans women of color that I have interacted with personally will be the conclude the analysis of TCT in this chapter. It is important to understand the issues that trans Black women face regarding their intersectionality and how TCT is present in their lives like its existence in cisgender Black women.

The normalization of gender in our society has been an added pressure to the existence of trans women in American. The understanding that how you look on the outside would directly impact how some people treat you regardless of how you feel internally can spark the existence of TCT in trans Black women. When we add the racial aspect to the already growing compressions, we see that trans African American women must adapt to being women in a society that generally places them in a lower status because of race but pushes them farther because of gender. *In Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*, author C. Riley

Snorton introduces a story of a black trans teen who would become the first trans to win homecoming king in a rural North Carolina high school. Blake Brockington would garner national attention and raise a few thousand dollars for charity along with winning the title of homecoming king. Snorton highlights when explaining Brockington's story that when transitioning Blake's family questioned why a person would who is "already black" would add an additional oppression.⁸⁸ This viewpoint is common among African Americans especially regarding gender and sexuality.⁸⁹ Many view the subjugations that are associated with being black as the apex of the oppression, gender and sexuality burdens collectively fall underneath the oppression of race. But like African American women with trans African American women, race and gender intertwine simultaneously. In an excerpt from *Black Women in White America* by Gerda Lerner, an essay titled "The New Black Women," Fannie Barrier Williams asserts:

Afro-American women of the United States have never had the benefit of discriminating judgments concerning their worth as women made up of the good and bad of human nature... These women have been left to grope their way unassisted toward a realization of those... standards of family and social life that are the badges of race respectability. They have no special teachers to instruct them. No conventions of distinguished women of the more favored race have met to consider their peculiar needs. There has been no fixed public opinion to which they could appeal; no protection against the libelous attacks upon their characters and no chivalry generous enough to guarantee their safety against man's inhumanity to woman. Certain it is that colored women have been the least known, and the most ill-favored class of women in the country.⁹⁰

As this excerpt applies to the misunderstandings of African American women, trans black women are no exception. This concept of living in a society that leaves them unassisted in their expectations of normalcy while discouraging them from believing that this doctrine of American normalcy applies to them is impractical. Black trans women knowing how they are viewed by

⁸⁸ C. Riley Snorton. *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. 2017), 9-14

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Gerda Lerner. *Black Women in White America*. NY, Vintage Books. 1992), 575

American society gives them an imperceivable burden that some are unable to conquer. Knowing that you are part of a society that looks down on you because you are assigned male at birth then to realize the gender that you internalized is more oppressed than your birth gender is a hard idea to grasp for some trans women. Some African Americans like Brock's parents find it easy to question the decision to take on these burdens. The idea that being trans is a choice diminishes the beliefs that trans women are completing themselves by becoming on the exterior what they have always been on the interior.

Many trans black women are among the higher numbers of the nation's suicide cases because of the concealed pressures of adapting in a society that is not as accepting of their lives.⁹¹ Besides the skyrocketing suicide cases among trans black women or trans women of color, the murder rate is much higher. According to the website National Center for Transgender Equality, in August of 2020, the number of trans persons murdered in that year alone surpassed the amount of the last seven years.⁹² The article that lists the data regarding the murders of these trans people, explains that out of the 28 deaths, 23 or those were women and majority of those were trans black women or women of color.⁹³ Snorton references Janet Mock, a well-known trans black woman who wrote in her memoir *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love and So Much More*, that authoring her story came with the realization that she lived with survivor's guilt.⁹⁴ Survivor's guilt often is a belief that you too should be the victim of crimes committed against members of the same race, gender, or class and the fact that you were not

⁹¹ By: NCTE, "Murders of Transgender People in 2020 Surpasses Total for Last Year in Just Seven Months," National Center for Transgender Equality, September 15, 2020, <https://transequality.org/blog/murders-of-transgender-people-in-2020-surpasses-total-for-last-year-in-just-seven-months>.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ Snorton, 172

brings guilt to your existence. With the murder numbers increasing each year for trans women, the suicide numbers are increasing as well. Website out.com highlights a few of the murders of black trans women in their article, “11th transgender Victim of Violence, Making 2021 on Track to Become Most Deadly Ever” by Donald Padgett”

2020 was historically deadly for the transgender community. A record 45 trans people were violently killed last year, eclipsing the previous high of 31 in 2017. As usual, transgender women of color were disproportionately impacted by the violence. The true number of victims will never be known, as many go unreported or are misgendered in death. Sadly, 2021 is proving deadly as well with the recent murder of Rayanna Pardo, who was struck and killed by a car while trying to escape a small mob in Los Angeles, California, on March 17. It is unclear if she ran into traffic or was pushed to her death by the homophobic mob.”⁹⁵

This is just one of the horrific murders of a trans black woman and the number continue to climb. Padgett continues to list some of the murders of trans Black women that have occurred this year.

Tyianna “Davarea” Alexander, 28, a Black transgender woman, was shot in the head while walking with a friend in Chicago early on the morning of Wednesday, January 6. She was pronounced dead at the scene in the city’s Greshman neighborhood. Her friend, 31-year-old Brandon Gowdy, was shot in the arm and was later pronounced dead at a local hospital. Bianca “Muffin” Bankz, 30, a Black transgender woman, was shot to death in Atlanta, Georgia, January 17. A former foster child, Bankz was killed in her new apartment following struggles with homelessness. Police believe Moses Miller killed Bankz before dying by suicide. Dominique Jackson, 30, a Black transgender woman, was shot and killed in Jackson, Mississippi, January 25. Police discovered her fatally wounded body inside a vehicle that had struck a utility pole, and she was pronounced dead at the scene. Initial police and media reports misgendered Jackson. Friends and family describe Jackson as “sweet and kind,” with dreams of competing on RuPaul’s Drag Race. Fifty Bandz, 21, a Black transgender woman, was shot and killed in Baton Rouge, Louisiana on January 28. Fifty was reportedly killed by a man she had been in a relationship with for over a year. Family, friends, and local advocates released balloons in her memory and plan on holding a memorial service for her as well.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Donald Padgett, “11th Transgender Victim of Violence, Making 2021 On Track To Become Most Deadly Ever,” OUT, March 22, 2021, <https://www.out.com/crime/2021/2/03/all-trans-americans-killed-violently-2021#media-gallery-media-1>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

All these murders took place in 2021 and bring awareness to the fear that trans Black women live in. Majority of the murders that occur are those of trans Black women, trans Black men are also being murdered in increasingly higher numbers but according to Time Magazine's online article trans women of color make up 4 out of 5 anti trans homicides. Time Magazine stated this "A rising number of transgender women of color have been killed in Hate Violence Homicides, according to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, which is coordinated by the Anti-Violence Project. A total of 22 women were killed in 2017, compared to 12 in 2013. However, the HRC notes that data collection about the murder of transgender people is often "incomplete or unreliable," because some deaths will not be reported, and some victims may not be identified as transgender in the media."⁹⁷ Many of these women are targeted because of them being trans, the understanding that is developed to protect oneself from the perils of society is a big form of TCT.

In *Black on Both Sides*, Snorton reviews the political propositions, theories of history and writerly experiments of trans identity.⁹⁸ The use of fugitive slave narratives and Afro modernist literature delve into the account of Black people living in/as different genders.⁹⁹ Snorton says *Black on Both Sides* explains how the condensation of transness into the category of transgender is a racial narrative as it also attends to how blackness finds articulation within transness.¹⁰⁰ This adds to the research of TCT because the inclusivity of race and gender. Trans or any other gender specification prefixed with race

⁹⁷ Gina Martinez and Tara Law, "Murders of Black Trans Women Reveal a CRISIS, Advocates Say," June 12, 2019, <https://time.com/5601227/two-black-trans-women-murders-in-dallas-anti-trans-violence/>.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 286.

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 300.

cannot be understood in seclusion. Like Snorton's book, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* unveils the social upheavals of being a black and queer. It emphasizes some of the existences of black women in an era where one's reality is transcribed for them. Written in the various stories, some dating back to the early 20th century. These stories like those in Snorton's writing showcase the understanding for different varieties of love from black queer relationships.¹⁰¹ The queer relationships archive the lives of historical queer relationships. Just like trans identity, queerness in the black history is not a foreign as some may deem it. When viewing queerness, Black trans people are historically forgotten or grouped together with other queer individuals.

When considering the combination of being black and being trans, we can fathom the mental processes that are associated with their consciousness. Many must adjust to a new realm of life, while processing that the previous life hinderances come in a different package. Social, economic, religious standpoints can seem familiar, but the weight may be placed differently. In many cases, the societal normalcy of that status can shift with that. The metamorphosis of the mentality from the perception of being assigned male at birth to being a Black female can be a difficult one for trans Black women. Historically, society deems Black males and females lesser than those of other races or ethnicities. It is the internally contention that causes black individuals to understand the likelihood of historical structures crumbling due to gender transition would be far-fetched. Individuals like Pauli Murray an American civil rights activist who became a lawyer, women's rights activist, Episcopal priest, and author tangled with the position that society has placed them in and how this influenced their life.

¹⁰¹ Saidiya Hartman. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*. NY, W. W. Norton & Company. 2019.

Throughout this portion regarding Pauli Murray, I will reference them by their preferred pronouns. I do this to be historically accurate as well as respecting the individual that I am writing about. I have utilized interpretations of historians regarding Pauli Murray's beliefs on the limitations of gender that bound them throughout their life. By uniting the understanding of Pauli Murray and their life I can connect how TCT would be an intricate part of their development as a black person. Pauli Murray, an icon to many LGBTQ activists, remained relatively low key about their non-traditional identity and sexual orientation. Many friends were unaware of Pauli Murray's gender identity. I was able to uncover sources that look back and compare how historians have written about Pauli Murray's sexuality, identity and race. Also, the historian's opinions on how Murray dealt with their gender identity and if it played a part in their historical contributions.

While examining the life of Pauli Murray, Rosalind Rosenberg's *Jane Crow: The Life of Pauli Murray* helped to articulate the convoluted details that evolved Murray into the individual they became. Rosalind's timeline covered the southern childhood of Murray up to their time as a Reverend of an Episcopal Church. Murray at a young age was an orphan, their mother died from a cerebral hemorrhage while pregnant with their sibling and their father was committed to a hospital for the insane shortly after. Rosenberg refers to how Pauli's perspective about their childhood and their parents added to the beliefs that Murray carried regarding boundaries. Rosenberg problematically supposes that at the young age between their mother's passing and father's departure, Pauli an intelligent young child experienced domestic violence and family tragedy during the time that most children develop a sense of gender identity. Rosenberg believed that it is possible that the contribution of her father's violence and the mixture of race identity played a critical role in Murray's upbringing and later outlook on life. Roseline

Rosenburg does not present a main argument in *Jane Crow*, but more so a look at how a mixed-race orphan struggled against all arbitrary distinctions in society and grew up to be an activist, lawyer, poet, professor, and priest who according to Rosenburg, “challenged other well- settled conventions, mostly in obscurity, but with transformative effect.”¹⁰²

Murray’s critical thinking on race encouraged Thurgood Marshall to utilize her legal scholarship on race and discrimination as a tool to shift the discourse regarding segregation in the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case.¹⁰³ Murray’s outlook on gender would later persuade activist Betty Friedan to participate with them in the founding of the women’s chapter of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), later named NOW (National Organization for Women).¹⁰⁴ Later the term Jane Crow, coined by Murray assisted in the first supreme court victory from Ruth Bader Ginsburg, *Reed v. Reed* (1971) that recognized a women’s constitutional right to equal protection.¹⁰⁵ All of these things Murray accomplished while struggling with gender identity. I emphasize the struggle with identity because it allows historians to see the multiple sides of Murray and recognize that while battling race issue in the era of civil rights movement, Murray’s internalized struggle with gender identity may have impacted the way that conducted gender issues in government and politics as well.

Early in *Jane Crow*, Rosalind Rosenburg covers the many different views that Pauli Murray had regarding her race. Dedicating the first chapter to her childhood and the second to her college life, Rosenburg depicts the variation of acceptance that Murray carried with them about their race and gender. Murray, a white passing adolescent recounted the racial misfortunes experienced during their childhood. At fifteen, Pauli graduated first in their class in 1926. Pauli

¹⁰² Rosalind Rosenburg, *Jane Crow: The Life of Pauli Murray*, (New York, Oxford, 2017), 1.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

nicknamed Paul embraced the freedoms that the 1920s allowed, young women were tampering with gender norms by cutting their hair shorter, wearing shorter skirts and taking on masculine nicknames.¹⁰⁶ According to Rosenberg, Pauli would use these youthful protests to combat against the overstressed femininity that was associated with the previous generation. Pauli's choices represented the male identification emerging within them at an early age and the suppression of that lasted majority of their life. Rosenberg highlights that after their college years while living in New York, Murray learned about the early development of sex. While studying the works of sexologists like Magnus Hirschfeld, Murray learned that many modern scientists rejected the idea of two sexes. Pauli fascinated with Havelock Ellis' writing on "pseudo-hermaphrodites" accepted the idea that women secretly possessed testes despite appearing to be female. This sparked the idea in Pauli after researching hormones, that possibly women could internally be male and would become fully male after taking hormones.¹⁰⁷

Later in *Jane Crow*, Rosenberg covered Pauli's law school career, a time where the Pauli was fighting Jim Crow prejudice but was astonished to find the real battle would be gender. The term Jane Crow would emerge based on the gendered prejudice that Murray received at Howard Law School. Murray states in her own memoir, *Proud Shoes* that while being so preoccupied with race, the awareness of the other marginalization did not cross their mind. Pauli spoke about the feeling of being a "minority of minorities" being the only female in class of thirty students. Rosenberg attests to the feeling of "sexual maladjustment" that Pauli suffered from, a feeling of "being a Black man trapped in a Black women's body."¹⁰⁸ This indication showcases that Murray not only had this belief of being trans, but even at a time where the definition did not

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 29.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 51.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 115.

exist, Pauli was in tune with their gender identity. During their time in law school, Murray noticed the attentiveness the males would receive in her classes and felt their voice was not being heard. Pauli toyed with the ideal of deepening their voice with hormones but to their dismay every doctor refused. Rosenberg focuses on the effects of gender dysphoria, something that had manifested in Pauli during their time at Howard. Here is Rosenberg's view on Murray's gender dysphoria; "As evidence that her problems were rooted in a pseudo-hermaphrodite condition, Murray reported feeling "terrific mental conflict on the point of wearing dresses or pants," because in "pants, it is difficult to make persons believe she is not a boy; in dresses her awkwardness is the object of hilarious comment on the part of closest friends."¹⁰⁹

Rosenberg continues highlighting the many accomplishments and devotions towards race issues as well as gender issues. She acclaims Murray's continued fight against race discrimination took precedence throughout her career in law school. Murray's unrelenting combat against segregation and employment discrimination launched them into dealings with many great civil rights and women's rights leaders. Rosenberg, addresses the relationships Murray acquired with people like Eleanor Roosevelt and Thurgood Marshall and how they propelled them more into teaching and government service. In realization of Murray's many accomplishments, race and gender were very much present in all aspects of their evolution, looking closely it is also clear that there was a consciousness about both their whole life. TCT is not an ideology that is known among the mindsets of those that display the theory but embedded deep within the understanding that regardless of what spaces they occupy they will have to develop or evolve due to their race, gender and sexuality. By understanding this development, I

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 120.

argue that TCT would have been present in Murray and something they carried throughout their life.

Before Pauli Murray, other Black figures in history would navigate the road of gender and sexuality and leave perplexing suggestions of trans identity. Influential figures like Gladys Bentley would carry the identity of trans before it became an official term. During the Harlem Renaissance where music, literature, and Black culture existed in abundance, Gladys Bentley is among those thought of as “royalty.” The “Bulldagger” a title that she carried with satisfaction, refers to the way she would dress and how she was viewed. Known for her masculine attire, Bentley would often perform in a full tuxedo adorned with a top hat. The New York Times states that “In his 1940 autobiography, Langston Hughes called her “an amazing exhibition of musical energy a large, dark, masculine lady, whose feet pounded the floor while her fingers pounded the keyboard, a perfect piece of African sculpture, animated by her own rhythm.”¹¹⁰ Also, they reference how Bentley viewed herself stating “she wrote in a 1952 essay for Ebony. “Even though they knew me as a male impersonator, they still could appreciate my artistry as a performer.”¹¹¹ The liberated philosophy of the Harlem Renaissance often showcased the acceptance of gay culture. Bentley is among the many blues performers at that time that embraced her sexuality. One of the first performers to express trans identity, Bentley still used the pronouns she/her.

Born in 1907, Bentley recalls how her parents at a young age worried about her attraction to females. It was also stated in the book *Bulldaggers, Pansies and Chocolate Babies:*

Performance, Race and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance by James Wilson its stated that

¹¹⁰ Giovanni Russonello, “Gladys Bentley, Gender-Bending Blues Performer and '20s Harlem Royalty,” The New York Times (The New York Times, February 1, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/obituaries/gladys-bentley-overlooked.html>.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Bentley's mother vehemently prayed for a son. According to in this article Gladys Bentley, "Girls," her mother believed, "were fated for trouble." The author states that "in both cases, whatever the cause for wanting a boy over a girl, the gender inversion of both children is an implied result of their parents' yearning, ardent prayer, and visualization of the coveted son."¹¹² Conscious as a child that her gender and sexuality identity could be problematic, Bentley still was able to combine that with her talents and rise to fame during the 1920s. Performing in illicit clubs and underground parties, the Clam House, a 1920s gay speakeasy would become the place where she would be the main attraction. The Clam House gained a reputation of showcasing the biggest names in Harlem, celebrities from all over would attend the underground club. Bentley would later brag to several sources of her luxurious lifestyle living and performing in Harlem, she would brag about marrying a white woman from Jersey and living a life that few could imagine at the time. In the article, *A Spectacle in Color: The Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem* by Eric Garber, the author states the economic toll that many homosexuals faced despite the acceptance in many Harlem clubs. He states,

Despite the relatively tolerant attitude shown toward homosexuality by Afro-American culture, black lesbians and gay men still had a difficult time. Like other black migrants, they soon learned that racism crossed the Mason-Dixon line. Economic problems, unemployment, and segregation plagued black communities across the North. High rents and housing shortages made privacy a luxury for Harlem's newcomers. Moreover, black homosexuals, like their white counterparts, were continually under attack from the police and judicial systems. In 1920, young lesbian Mabel Hampton, recently arrived in Harlem from Winston- Salem, North Carolina, was arrested on trumped-up prostitution charges and spent two years in Bedford Hills Reformatory. Augustus Granville Dill, distinguished business editor of the NAACP's *Crisis* and personal protégé of DuBois, had his political career destroyed when he was arrested for soliciting sex in a public restroom. Black gay people were also under attack from the developing psychiatric institutions; Jonathan Katz cites a tragic case in which a young black gay man was incarcerated for most of the 1920s at the Worcester (Massachusetts) State Hospital. But despite racial oppression,

¹¹² Wilson, James F. *Bulldaggers, Pansies, and Chocolate Babies: Performance, Race, and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.1175684>.

economic hardship, and homophobic persecution, black lesbians and gay men were able to build a thriving community of their own within existing Afro- American institutions and traditions.¹¹³

When the mid 1930s hit, the attitude once Prohibition took place shifted, tolerance toward sexuality and sexual illicit music began to disappear. Many of the clubs that Bentley and other blues artists like Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith would perform at were abruptly closing. Police presence created pressure on the artist and Bentley in 1934 would leave Harlem for Los Angeles. Still a performer in many clubs but with a different look. Her attire changed from the tuxedos and top hats she wore in Harlem, now she would perform in shirts to please some of the club owners. After flourishing in what she would call her true self, she would now be required to suppress the gender identity, sexuality and lifestyle that she was accustomed to living. On the horizon of McCarthyism, the Red Scare would bring attention to queer people that looked astronomically different than the reception they received in Harlem, New York in the 1920s. Many queer people were forced to hide their sexuality and Bentley was among those who once labeled herself as strictly attracted to women shifting to heterosexuality. As the years passed the Bentley that once flirted with women while adorning men's clothing is seen touring and performing dressed as a woman. In the 1950s she would admit to having married men twice and denouncing her sexuality altogether.

No longer the bull dagger blues performer, Bentley minimized the trailblazing historical significance of her own life because of her location and what was going on during that time. What brings to light the modification that Bentley reacquired in her lifetime suggests that TCT

¹¹³ Eric Garber, "American Studies @ The University of Virginia," American Studies @ The University of Virginia, accessed April 10, 2021, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug97/blues/garber.html>.

would be present. Socially, Bentley would have to alter her lifestyle, she would live a life of recognition for her sexuality and gender expression to later convert back to a lifestyle that she felt like was not her authentic self. Economically, she lived a lavish and fortunate life by playing in some of the most popular clubs, Bentley was able to afford an expensive home and vehicle at a time where economically many Black women were not as fortunate. This would significantly change with the prohibition laws changing and tolerance for known homosexuals was low.

Bentley aware of being a Black woman in America was privileged to see a period in her lifetime where race, gender and sexuality were not hinderances to her succession. Being aware of where race, class, gender or sexuality places you in society is easier to digest when you are a success.

When Bentley alters her sexuality and had to face the changes in economic class, it brought an understanding about society. How society does not view Black women based on their views of themselves but more on the societal view of Black women at that time. Outside of Harlem and certain parts of Los Angeles, Bentley was still a Black woman whose place in society was lesser. While dealing with the shifts to her life, while battling financial changes and moving three thousand miles away, she also had to deal with hormonal changes. In an essay for Ebony Magazine titled “I Am a Woman Again” Bentley admits that she had endured hormone treatments to help her in her identity as heterosexual.¹¹⁴ Taking into consideration the outward projection of sexuality in Harlem nightclubs, Bentley’s world happened a shift, this shift made her question if lesbianism was a realistic lifestyle. Bentley admitted that she had completed an autobiography, but it was never published, and she would later pass away from complications from the flu in 1960.¹¹⁵ The suppression of identities is related to the acknowledgement of TCT.

¹¹⁴ Russonello.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Having the awareness that society will not accept you as you are, thus changing that way that you view society. Also impacting the way that you navigate through this society.

So far viewing the lives of Pauli Murray and Gladys Bentley it was imperative to assess the lives of everyday trans Black women and include their stories and obstacles to help bring awareness to the triple consciousness that they develop. In February of 2021, I had the pleasure of interviewing two different trans Black women. One who wanted to remain undisclosed, the other whose name is Kennedy had no issue with their identity being revealed. This situation of masking one's identity is a tremendous issue within the trans Black community. Bringing it back to Triple Consciousness, developing a mindfulness that the spaces you occupy are not always hospitable, is a constant consciousness. Helen Cade Brehon's "Looking Back" describes a Black woman in "white" America as experiencing a plethora of concerns. Living in a capitalistic threatened democracy where you experience hate, love, fulfilment, need, pride and embarrassment can bring a jumbled mentality that is difficult to navigate but it something that trans Black women are living with.¹¹⁶

Trans Black women are not just mentally affected but economically as well. In a report from the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC) and National Center for Transgendered Equality (NCTE) the discrimination for trans Black women is reported at devastating levels. According to this report 26 percent of trans Black women are unemployed. That is two times the rate of other transgender races and four times the rate of general population. 41 percent of Black trans women reported to have experienced homelessness. The majority reported to live below the poverty line with 34 percent have a total household income of \$10,000 or less.¹¹⁷ Income and

¹¹⁶Bambara 1970, 287

¹¹⁷ "New Analysis Shows Startling Levels of Discrimination against Black Transgender People," National LGBTQ Task Force, September 16, 2011, <https://www.thetaskforce.org/new-analysis-shows-startling-levels-of-discrimination-against-black-transgender-people/>.

poverty have a huge impact on the lives of trans Black women but that is not the only disparity. Healthcare is a big issue in the lives of trans Black women. According to NBJC and NCTE same report, one fifth of the Black trans population are living with HIV.¹¹⁸ Healthcare is an ongoing issue in America and trans Black women are in the same if not more extreme dilemmas when it comes to getting the healthcare needed. Many do not receive the medical care they need nor the mental health care that is needed. More than half of the respondents in this survey stated that they have experienced harassment in school, the workplace or in everyday occurrences. More than half have admitted to contemplating suicide.¹¹⁹

Living with this day in and day out is one of the biggest reasoning for my interview with a trans Black woman named Kennedy. I wanted to have someone tell their own version of what day to day experiences of a trans black woman feel like and how TCT is something she developed pre and post transition.

When speaking to Kennedy, she made sure it was clear that she is not the spokesperson for all trans Black women and had a unique outlook on how TCT is clearly something she established. After explaining to her what TCT is and what impact it carries for Black women, I wanted to understand what it was like for Kennedy living as assigned male at birth first and how that transition to Black female felt from her perspective. I understand that the approach to this topic can yield some skepticism because who can determine the mindset of both genders in one interview, but this is just to give insight to how it fit the analysis of TCT from a trans Black woman's perspective. I will utilize the perspective of Kennedy and well as the interview from the

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

anonymous trans black women to show the similarities of their mentalities regarding race, class, gender and sexuality.

Starting with Kennedy the first question that I asked was pertaining to race. I wanted to know that crucial moment that she realized that she was black or where race became a significant factor in her outlook on life. Just like the title of this thesis, the moment that you realized that you are going to be perceived as different or inferior. As a woman of mixed race, her father is Dominican/African and her mother is white, she grew up not fully understanding the concept of race. Aware that her mother and father looked significantly different it was more of the norm and did not bring wakefulness until she was told by her mother the how to handle racial issues that come with being a Black male. Pre-transition, she would be taught the “dos and don’ts” of a Black male in an American society. The precursor to functioning in Black skin formulated her outlook on being Black. Kennedy states that it felt like a list of rules that were associated with being a Black male. Like Du Bois and Fanon’s ideologies of the Black man in American, Kennedy would navigate most of her life in that consciousness. Knowing that when you interact with people your tone, body language and demeanor can ignite presuppositions that were determined before you were born. A feeling of a burden to always wear a cloak of racial consciousness. One of the things that Kennedy stated made her feel connected to her blackness is oppression. When people view you, they do not see a nice individual or someone they can understand. What is initially seen is what race you are and what is associated with that racial identification is the background of oppressions. All the things that make you a person are discounted, and your skin tone takes precedent over human decency.

While continuing the interview many things come to the forefront on the topic of trans Black women’s perception in society. One of the biggest things considered is the shift mentally

and physically from visible perceived male to visible perceived female. I say perception because the exterior or gender expression is often the way that trans people are associated with a specific gender. Kennedy did speak about the term “passable” meaning that she believed that she now is considered able to visually “pass” as a female. She stated this about transitioning.

Going into transitioning you understand what is going on around you. There are things that I can do pre-transition, even being feminine pre transition I could do things I cannot do now. I realized as a Black female, I was not protected the same way and even as a black male I did not fear for my safety as much as I do as a Black woman.¹²⁰

This statement attests to the consciousness that Black women carry on an everyday basis. To hear that the safety of a Black male is less questionable brings to attention how unprotected a Black woman may feel in various circumstances. Kennedy also speaks to how it feels to be a woman in how she believed she is viewed now opposed to before as a Black male. This is how she feels about transitioning from assigned male at birth.

I could walk around and be as free and loud as I wanted, no one would question the boldness that a black male carried. As a woman, I am not able to take up space the same way. I feel like as a trans woman or a black woman, people do not want you to take up that space. There are so many different expectations thrown onto me. I realize that appearance expectations are different. I have different societal expectations than I did before.¹²¹

The way that Black women are expected to be docile and fit the narrative that society has placed on us highlights the biggest focus on TCT. The awareness of oneself in a world that is not prepared to accept the you that you are. TCT among trans black women is exceptional and interesting because they have the vantage point of seeing multiple consciousness through the lens of being perceived as male and then as female. They have been developed in the mythology of

¹²⁰ Pelt-Willis, Tuesday. Kennedy Interview. Personal, February 11, 2021.

¹²¹ Ibid.

Black men in America and experience the vitriol associated with being a Black woman. This provides the capacity to empathize with both genders and the ability to distinguish the differences that each may face, while psychologically training oneself for any outcome.

When mentioning trans Black women many throughout history have followed in the footsteps of one extraordinary individual. Marsha P. Johnson, a pioneer for gay liberation activism and a gay rights advocate was known for her position in the Stonewall Uprising in 1969. Johnson was a founding member of the Gay Liberation Front and co-founder of Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (S.T.A.R). Born in 1945 and assigned a male gender at birth, she would later prefer to be referenced as Marsha P. Johnson. The P stands for pay no mind. According to *A Black Women's History of the United States* by Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross, Johnson carried the carefree spirit of a cultural icon. Even though she was free with her style of dress, she often adorned a razor for protection against attacks. It was noted that Black women would endure attacks daily in Greenwich Village, New York.¹²² After the Stonewall Uprising and even the founding of the safe space for transgendered people (S.T.A.R), Johnson still lacked the funding that would be obligatory to continue to remain off the streets. Earlier in her life working as a sex worker, drag performer and modeling for names like Andy Warhol, did not stop the struggles of living as a trans woman in America. In an interview by Eric Marcus with roommate and fellow activist Randy Wicker, Johnson would attest to the treatment of drag queens by the police. When asked if she was afraid to get arrested, she utters:

Oh, no, because I'd been going to jail for like ten years before the Stonewall, I was going to jail 'cause I was, I was originally up on 42nd Street. And every time we'd go, you know, like going out to hustle all the time they would just get us and tell us we were

¹²²Daina Ramey Berry, and Kali Nicole Gross. 2020. *A Black Women's History of the United States*. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press. 2020), 196-197.

under arrest. They'd say, "All yous drag queens under arrest, so we, you know, it was just for wearing a little bit of makeup down 42nd Street."¹²³

Marsha P. Johnson knew that the likelihood of her being arrested for trying to be herself among the other people just like her was great. Living with understanding that the world will view you often unkindly than necessary is a hard burden to entertain. It has been documented that Johnson suffered from mental health issues. It was claimed at times that she would bounce back between the Marsha P. Johnson and the identity as her assigned male at birth. Her assigned male at birth identity would go into violent fits that would lead to some of the arrests and hospitalizations.¹²⁴ When this would happen, Johnson's friends and fellow advocates would gather up funds to bail her out or pay for her hospital stay. This noted by Stonewall historian David Carter as one of the reasons that he believed other gay liberation advocates were skeptical on giving Johnson her credit for the movement in the early 1970s.¹²⁵ Randy Wicker would confirm that Johnson's angelic persona would often be more unpredictable than acknowledged and referenced the many gay bars that she was banned from.¹²⁶

According to Wicker, Johnson would be in a sick state requiring multiple hospitalizations, her body would look more fragile than usual, and this would be the state that she remained in up until her demise. Marsha P. Johnson's body was found in the Hudson River following the 1992 Pride parade. On the back of her head was a suspicious head wound. Johnson's death is documented as a suicide, but friends close to Johnson

¹²³Eric Marcus, "Marsha P. Johnson & Randy Wicker," Making Gay History (Making Gay History, March 16, 2020), <https://makinggayhistory.com/podcast/episode-11-johnson-wicker/>.

¹²⁴David Carter. *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution*. (St. Martin's. 2004) 66.

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶Steve Watson, "Stonewall 1979: The Drag of Politics," The Village Voice, October 14, 2020, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2019/06/04/stonewall-1979-the-drag-of-politics/>.

maintain suspicion.¹²⁷ Circulation of a story of local homophobic gentlemen getting into a fight with Marsha before her death were present but no legal action was taken. Her death changed from being filed as suicide to undetermined. The handling of her death attests to the treatment of trans deaths conducted by law enforcement.

Trans Black women must endure the multiple conditions of a society constructed to suppress or ignore them. TCT showcases that this development of understanding the tools afforded to you can only take you so far. Also, that the awareness of the plight associated with having a gender identity that is different from the one assigned to you at birth does not alter the difficulty that is associated with race. The understanding of racial identities and how they intersect with gender identities in society could be a pivotal advantage in the navigation of a black trans woman.

Pauli Murray, Gladys Bentley and Marsha P. Johnson demonstrate the tenacity that it takes to transition in a society that handles you harshly based on race and gender. I believe that since all these individuals were influential in multiple aspects that having multiple consciousness would benefit them. Pauli Murray was able to overcome the hardships of her childhood due to racial identity, while growing up with gender dysphoria, they combated racial inequalities during the civil rights movement to going on to become a priest. Gladys Bentley was able to imprint their spot in jazz history while battling gender stigmas. Marsha P. Johnson staked their mark in the Gay Liberation Movement while signifying the tragic outcome of many black trans women. Since all these people knew that race, gender and sexuality played a significant role in their

¹²⁷ Sewell Chan. "[Marsha P. Johnson, a Transgender Pioneer and Activist – The New York Times](#)". March 8, 2018. *The New York Times*. [Nytimes.com](#).

progressions as people in society It could be believed that TCT is embedded in their awareness and assisted in the steering in their lives. One could say that because of having the multiple layers of consciousness these individuals gripped their lives and flourished on multiple fronts.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Triple Consciousness Theory (TCT) is an assessment to the frameworks that societal, economic and generational pressures, norms and difficulties have placed on Black women throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Because of the disadvantages placed on Black women over time, it is understandable that these women were able to develop the awareness to mentally prepare themselves for the tribulations that may impact their lives. Being Black in a society that has deemed you lesser since its existence, while also being a gender that is determined you weaker heightens an awareness that combats the obstacles that you would have to overcome. All the women spoken about in this thesis offer more than an analysis of how TCT can impact life decisions but also offer an outlook that is the essence of what it means to be a Black woman.

At this very moment in time, history will write itself and we will dissect the understandings of what being a Black woman entails. We will remove the lens of our historical perspectives and give insight to the inner workings that created what I would deem is TCT. Since TCT can come in many forms just as intersectionality it can be accessed from many different lenses. This thesis has covered the form of TCT through the lens of Black American women who happen to be queer or transgendered. Understanding the combination of these intersections cause us to believe that TCT can be developed at an early age and carried on throughout a Black woman's lifetime. What I pull from this assessment is that no matter the age or area of the country, Triple Consciousness Theory lives in African American women. From the early years of

slavery to the modern times of the new millennium, we as Black women have had to withstand the pressures of society while steering through a world not fit to cater to any of the junctures we possess.

TCT indicates that with the adaptation of mental awareness, heterosexual Black women, Black queer women, and Black trans women all have similarities in addressing this consciousness. Although they may not understand what this consciousness is called or how it pertains to them specifically, they understand that it is something that is ingrained in them. You do not have to be born with a certain development for it to occur but the similarity in this development for all of these women, is where the occurrence exists. When thinking about my childhood and growing into the adult that I am now, I can with certainty say that I knew the moment I was perceived differently and exactly why that happened. Since then, I have navigated throughout my life careful to understand that there are hindrances that are only subjective to me and those that look like me. I have grown to understand that when you look back through history there are many women who have endured or will endure similar situations regarding race, gender, class and sexuality. What TCT means to me is having an understanding of what that is and where it comes from. Now I can put a definition to a feeling that I have carried through my life and will continue to exist as long as I do.

With defining this consciousness and outing an understanding for its development, it brings light to a term that impacts black women daily. I plan to continue this research and extend it farther to articulate the existence of that “moment” of realization. The moment we realized is more than a particular time but a distinct interaction that caused a switch to activate or circumstances in life that caused awareness. After that activation there is no longer the naivete about how race, gender, class or sexuality may impact your life but when it will. When you know

that these things are going to influence you or how others receive you then it changes the arenas that you are in. It is not an instance of where I can exist type of feeling but a what could happen to me while existing in these different arenas.

TCT is a theory that changes the way that I view Black historical figures because I see the points where having that mental clarity about your race or gender will impact one's life. Having the sense of awareness that you will be impacted negatively in points of your life will often change the trajectory of certain situations whether that be socially or economically. The key assessment of TCT is that it is an awareness that is often developed consciously, it is a self-diagnosis of mental clarity that can be pin pointed based on adaptation in certain situations. The main significance of TCT is that different intersections of "woman" carry some form of mental consciousness about race, gender, and sexuality. I argue is that this is a consciousness that is more innate in African American women because of the obstacles that are put in place due to those intersections. TCT in a white trans woman, could carry similar aspects. The mental awareness that it entails to be able to function in a society of cisgender white males suddenly changes when some privileges are revoked automatically due to the acknowledgment of being a part of another gender. This suddenly changes the viewpoint on how as a woman this individual may be perceived, treated, and accepted. In comparison, the viewpoint of other white trans women in comparison to a Black trans woman is ability to be privileged regarding race but not with gender identity. Black trans women have the moment of "realization" of their position in the lowest ranks of the hierarchy and that can be a difficult burden to endure. This often can create a very harsh environment to overcome.

In conclusion, I would like to help bring understanding to how Black women and trans Black women traverse a society that has placed them at the bottom and continues to treat them

lesser. As a Black woman, the awareness that I have developed is due to the knowledge pertaining to the society that I exist in. Without having that mental awareness, I think the impact of that would feel different and hinder my growth as a Black woman in society. With the concluding of this thesis, I want to emphasize that although the world's perception of Black women is harsh and, in many cases, unwarranted, Black women are some of the most resilient humans on earth. Despite having the odds stacked against us in America since the beginning of its existence, we manage to obtain the tools withheld from us and prosper. TCT is one of the reasons that this resilience and flourishing can occur.

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