

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE SOCIAL ROLE
OF BLACK AUNTS IN THE
AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY**

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ABSTRACT

Aunts are constantly perceived as extended family members designated to support the nuclear family according to western familial traditions. Previous research has consistently relied on said traditions for studying Aunts within different cultures. Consequently, this hegemonic ethnography has not only hindered the ability of Aunts to be examined through other cultural perspectives, but it actively reinforces their role as universal, assuming everyone adheres to western family structures. This study will utilize data from TikTok in identifying and examining the social role of Black Aunts in the African American community through Afrocentricity and Africana Womanism. Contrary to the initial research, Black aunts' responsibilities stem from West African traditions. My findings will indicate that Black aunts serve multiple roles within their communities necessary for survival, entertainment, cultural memory, and aid.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Aunts are identified as members of the family dynamic whose responsibilities support the family structure. Throughout their entire lives, even into adulthood, she has served as an inspiration to children.¹ In contemporary society, literature has regarded her as the individual who consistently maintains the unity and harmony of her family all while projecting her existence at the periphery of the western family unit. Despite her minimal public role, her abilities behind closed doors are said to be astounding.

As always, academia explores aunts through the Eurocentric perspective, depicting her only as an aunt through blood relations and secretly painting her as the help. While she obtains a status of authority, she is not to undermine the child's parent and ask for permission before giving gifts, even candy.² This belief is one of the numerous gaps in scholarship regarding aunts and their role within society. This conception has been forced onto others because of the lacking scholarship about aunts. The role of moms, fathers and grandparents has been heavily researched; meanwhile the extended family, a term centered in western ideology, has been concentrated as a whole. While Eurocentric families potentially view this as an everyday occurrence, this is not a universal experience throughout the African diaspora.

¹ Kristoffer Chelsom Vogt, "The extended family in transitions into adulthood: a dynamic approach," *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23 no.9 (2020): pp. 1234-1248, doi: 10.1080/13676261.2019.1663799, 1241

² Elizabeth Bernstein, "Be the Favorite Aunt or Uncle You Were Destined to Become," *Wall Street Journal*, Dow Jones & Company, Inc., Aug. 9, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/be-the-favorite-aunt-or-uncle-you-were-destined-to-become-11660046442>

The structure of African American families has roots in West African traditions, but the aunt does not require a blood relation. The African American community heavily observes the admiration of Aunts, Aunties, and TeeTees. In the Black community, an aunt could be a much-respected older woman, a long-term family confidant, or a childhood friend. The sensation behind Black Aunts has become so famous that celebrities such as Maxine Waters, Dionne Warwick, Mary J. Blige, and Angela Basset have been crowned aunts by the people. Aunts win the hearts of their peers through various forms of love and care, whether it is providing compassionate care during times of illness, passing down beloved family recipes for future generations to enjoy during celebratory events or encouraging the family to vote for Elizabeth Warren.³ They have devoted themselves to uplifting their Black communities and providing guidance to the new generation of aunts as they navigate their current roles.

Countless blogs have orchestrated conversations around the associations, stereotypes, and tropes of someone other than family referring to them as Auntie. With the term recently developing positive connotations among younger generations of women, many mid-age women alongside filmmaker Ava DuVernay, Gayle King, and Oprah Winfrey, express their disdain for being called Aunt fearing it will age them. On the contrary, others have learned to embrace the title as a means of respect and endearment. In recent times, there has been a shift in the way society perceives Black Aunthood. Thanks to social media and pop culture, it is now seen as a highly anticipated responsibility that many are eager to take on. From Erik Killmonger's famous line "Hey

³ Johnathan Capehart, "Why Aunt Gloria Wants Biden to Pick Elizabeth Warren," *Washington Post*, WP Company, June 29, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/06/29/why-aunt-gloria-wants-biden-pick-elizabeth-warren/>

Auntie” in Black Panther to Auntie clap backs and the modern Rich Auntie Movement, more Black women of all ages gladly accept the role.

While the term is gaining more exposure from an African American perspective, what is the social role of a Black Aunt in the African American community? Is she only to help her immediate family? Is an aunt a role attained by age and responsibilities? Is there a “one-aunt-fits-all?” The objective of this thesis is to answer the questions above. With social media serving as a major channel for Africans to communicate around the diaspora, TikTok, the social media platform, was chosen for sample purposes. Through this platform, Black content creators share their unique interpretations and experiences with their audience for various reasons, ranging from informational to comedic relief. With these videos, my thesis will analyze the social role of Black Aunts from an Africological viewpoint using Afrocentricity and Africana Womanism. Utilizing these theories is an essential step for progressing the research on Black Aunts, considering they are grounded in the history and culture of African people. Given that this research focuses on Black women, it is only appropriate to examine their potential as aunts through theories prioritizing their well-being.

This research aims to do the following: 1) uncover the roles Black Aunts serve in the community, 2) identify characteristics comprising of an African American Aunt, 3) understand why she is adored by many and 4) trace her role in West African culture.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are numerous articles written about the roles of parents and grandparents. However, more scholarship needs to be done on the part of aunts. Even less scholarship regarding Black aunts and their effects on the African American community exists. Notable trends regarding her duties throughout the results were present. Subsequently, analyses about aunts were grounded in white family structures of nuclear and extended families. Due to the lack of academic literature, readings from different cultures were utilized if similar characteristics were present. In addition, literature examining family structures was found helpful. All literature had to discuss how aunts contribute to their communities. This review has been separated into six reoccurring themes based on how aunts were viewed or what their role entailed.

Parenting

Aunts stepping in as caregivers is not a new phenomenon. Among the top reasons she is loved derives from her passion for raising nieces and nephews. Regina Davis-Sowers, a leading sociologist, found parenting to be a significant aspect of aunts, whether they volunteered or by force. Though Davis-Sowers has not claimed her work as Afrocentric, she has published multiple works of scholarship regarding Black Aunts such as "It Just Kinds of Falls in Your Hands: Factors that Influence Black Aunts' Decisions to Parent Their Nieces and Nephews" and "Salvaging Children's Lives: Understanding the Experiences of Black Aunts Who Serve as Kinship Care Providers Within Black Families." Her research found maternal aunts were the second most likely caregivers for

children removed from their parent’s custody.⁴ Another established sociologist, Ashley Barnwell, wrote similar findings. Similarly, Barnwell spoke of aunts taking in children as a form of familial obligation ensuring the family name lived on without extensive damage. In her research, she labeled this obligation as bolstering, an aspect of shadow-work, regarding aunts raising the family’s children. While both Barnwell and Davis-Sowers concluded aunts’ step-in caregiving roles to nieces and nephews, Barnwell believed their work was hardy yet invisible. Both authors had utterly different approaches. Evidently, their perspective on aunts differed in accordance with their cultural differences. Barnwell’s approach in her argument regarded aunts’ roles as family historians. Davis-Sowers’ approach, on the other hand, the aunts “felt like [it is] something I had to do.”⁵ Taking in nieces and nephews felt like a family obligation⁶. While Davis-Sowers’ helped pave the way for Black Aunts to be researched from their perspective, she fell flat using Black Feminism as her chosen methodology.

Support Systems

Cross et al. argued that the African American extended family was an instrumental support system. The ability to support and be supported depends on reciprocity. More specifically, closeness and the type of need affects the ability to support and reciprocate the same favors asked. Therefore, examining the family structure (closeness to relatives) is necessary to understand the support dynamic.⁷

⁴ Regina Davis-Sowers, “It Just Kind of Falls in Your Hands”: Factors that Influence Black Aunts’ Decisions to Parent Their Nieces and Nephews.” *Journal of Black Studies* 43 no.3 (2012): pp 231-250, doi: 10.1177/0021934711415243, 234.

⁵ Ibid., 239.

⁶ Ibid., 240.

⁷ Cross et. al, “Instrumental Social Support Exchanges in African American Extended Families,” *Journal of Family Issues*, 39 no.13 (2018): pp3535-3563, doi: 10.1177/0192513X18783805 pp.3537.

Likewise, Zinobia and Taylor argued that villages were significant to community development. The people dedicated to the aid, safety and development of each child were found essential.⁸ Although both authors spoke about the essence of togetherness, their research subjects differed. Cross et al. focused primarily on adults while Zinobia and Taylor focused on Black girls. Cross et al. only selected four types of support to confirm their findings. Consequently, this dampened their research considering the numerous ways in which families assist each other. Nonetheless, their research further proved extended families conducive to the African American community. Correspondingly, Zinobia and Taylor detailed the variations in which Black women provide social support to Black girls. Be that as it may, their argument became decrepit once men's involvement was eliminated in the discussion of Black girls' development.

Culture Bearer

Nah Dove, a well-cited Africana Womanist, has written numerous works of scholarship regarding the status of African women such as "African Women, Power Of, Defining a Mother-Centered Matrix and Matriarchy and Patriarchy." Considering her publications among Afrocentric scholars, she is most noted for advocating the role of African women around motherhood, cultural bearing, and makers of change transmitting cultural knowledge to their children.⁹ In terms of my research looking at aunts in the diaspora, one of the points this research does not address is where we start with people

⁸ Bennefield Zinobia & Jackson Taylor, "The Girls are Alright: Examining Protective Factors of US Black Culture and Its Impact on the Resilience of Black Girls and Women," *Open Cultural Studies*, 6 no.1 (2002): pp.218-227 <https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2022-0148>, 220.

⁹ Nah Dove, "African Women, Power of," in *The Sage Encyclopedia of African Cultural Heritage in North America*, ed. Shujaa & Shujaa, (SAGE, 2015), pp1-5, doi:<https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483346373.n49>, 2.

that are culturally dislocated. Dove's work, however, is notable for tracing African women's status in antiquity. Rather than focusing on the patriarchal effects on women, she emphasizes their importance within their societies. Her scholarship creates a space for African women to discover their role prior to European contact, often referencing Kemet society. Similarly, Zinobia and Taylor's ideas of Black women molding future generations align with Dove's. Unlike Dove, they did not collectively label these women. Instead, they were referred to as members of the village providing collective care among Black girls.¹⁰ Unfortunately, this notion was one of their most significant flaws. Not only did their work focus solely on Black girls, but none of the facts provided were traced to African practices.

Storyteller

Janice Hamlet, Dove and Barnwell write that women were the foremost storytellers in their communities. Hamlet, having specialties in African American rhetoric, identified storytelling as oral stories through spoken word, song, music, dance and symbolism.¹¹ Dove shares this same sentiment in "African Women, Power of." However, differing from Hamlet, Dove associated storytelling as a form of African spirituality asserting medicinal healing, wisdom, knowledge, ethics and morality as additional methods,¹² whereas Hamlet scraped the iceberg. Given Hamlet's experience,

¹⁰ Zinobia & Taylor, "The Girls are Alright: Examining Protective Factors of US Black Culture and Its Impact on the Resilience of Black Girls and Women," 220.

¹¹ Janice Hamlet, "Discovering Great-Great-Aunts Mary and Martha: The Impact of the Oral Storytelling Tradition," *Signature*, 2019, <https://www.sigtheatre.org/events/201920/gp/discovering-great-great-aunts-mary-and-martha-the-impact-of-the-oral-storytelling-tradition>.

¹² Dove, "African Women, Power of," 3.

she possesses the ability to relate her content to contemporary African Americans, often making references to current phenomena.

Barnwell all together referred to aunts' storytelling as "keepers."¹³ According to her ideology, keepers are an aspect of aunts being servers, protectors, hoarders or guardians. This definition, though not based on Afrocentricity, is also a responsibility found within Zinobia and Taylor's article. Likewise, storytelling for aunts takes shape as researchers and theorists, according to Khubchandani.¹⁴ All four authors acknowledge that aunts hold the power of knowing which knowledge to keep and which knowledge to pass down.

Khubchandani's approach however, was written from her South Asian culture. Among the major topic point were aesthetics, sensations, habits and effects. Khubchandani's article set her apart for numerous reasons. First, she created new terminologies, such as Auntervention and Aunterpretation, that better fit her perception of aunts. Secondly, she provided a different perspective on aunts. Thirdly, she dismantled many auntie stereotypes created by western ideologies in South Asian culture.

A noticeable difference in Barnwell's article from the rest was the privilege of reading old journals, diaries, family trees, and letters in enhancing her definition of keeping. Her article would not be deemed Afrocentric, but the decision to use this article resided solely on Barnwell's breakdown of what her role looks like from her perspective and if Black aunts shared those same responsibilities.

¹³ Ashley Barnwell, "Aunting as Family Shadow-Work," *Journal of Family History*, 47 no.3 (2022): 317-331, DOI: 10.1177/03631990221079784, 324.

¹⁴ Kareem Khubchandani, "Critical aunty studies: an aunterduction," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 42 no. 3 (2022): pp. 221-245, doi:10.1080/10462937.2022.2081912, 234

Lastly, Dove and Hamlet along with Zinobia and Taylor's readings provided a better insight into the role of aunts as storytellers. These articles were written from a Black perspective. All articles managed to include one or more of the following: historical relevance, cultural practices, Black women's role within the community and how it benefits the Black community.

Terms of Ageism and Stereotypical or Endearment and Honor

Dahleen Glanton, author for Chicago Tribune, and Juanita Davis, contributor for Sister of AARP, agree that bestowing the title aunt was a badge of honor, signifying her leadership. While they shared similar sentiments, Davis took a personal approach making her argument more appealing to women relating to her. In comparison, Glanton applied a persuasive technique of gathering Black women celebrities' opinions on the subject.¹⁵ For this reason, the strength of their arguments enables a new agency within the African American community because Aunt is now being viewed from their cultural perspective. From that new outlook, it redefines what she is based on her actions. The weakness, however, is that it is very anecdotal. The lack of scholarly evidence, preferably historical, lowers the validity of their argument.

Authors Khubchandani's and Davis attested to associating aunts with ageism. Both authors argued that media is the main component feeding aging propaganda using aunts as the vehicle. Khubchandani and Davis similarly attacked western media from their cultural standpoints. Khubchandani utilized South Asian culture in dismantling the

¹⁵ Dahleen Glanton, "Is Auntie a term of endearment or the mother of all stereotypes for African American women," *Chicago Tribune*, (Chicago, IL), June 21, 2019.

aunt aesthetic.¹⁶ The most notable aspect of her article was being able to critique a Western ideology from her own cultural perspective. In the same breath, a significant flaw in her work consisted of creating new lingo based on Eurocentric terms like “Auntylectual” rather than searching for terms in the same culture she referenced. On the other hand, Davis’s argument is again weakened by using personal experiences as her approach.¹⁷

Fictive kin

Robert Staples claims John Blossingame, a pioneering historian in enslaved history, discovered the formation of kinsmen among enslaved Africans as a family thus providing emotional nurturance, love and empathy resembling traditional African family patterns.¹⁸ Chatter et al. and Stewart agree with the statement. Unanimously, all articles agreed that African Americans holding to fictive kinship was an adaptation of kinship practices in African family structures. However, Stewart differed by locating the practice from West African traditions. Similarly, Oyerinke Oyewumi, a leading Nigerian scholar in gender discourse, highlighted the cultural connection Stewart asserted by stating:

The predominant principle organizing African families has been consanguineal and conjugal: blood relationships constitute the core of family. Many brothers and sisters live together, along with the wives and brothers and children of all. In this kind of family system, kinship is forged primarily on the basis of birth relations, not marriage ties.¹⁹

¹⁶ Khubchandani, “Critical aunty studies: an aintroduction,” 229.

¹⁷ Jonita Davis, “Is Being Called Auntie Really a Good Thing?” ME TIME, August 20, 2021, <https://www.sistersletter.com/me-time/how-i-accepted-auntie>.

¹⁸ Robert Staples, “Reflections of the Black Family Future: The Implications for Public Policy,” *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 12 no.1 (1988): pp. 19-27, <http://libproxy.temple.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/reflections-on-black-family-future-implications/docview/1311811166/se-2>, 21.

¹⁹ Oyerinke Oyewumi, “Family Bonds/Conceptuals Binds: African Notes of Feminist Epistemologies,” *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 25 no.4 (2000): pp. 1093-1098, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3175493>, 1096.

While there is a plethora of scholarship regarding fictive kinship in the African American community, Taylor et al. took a different approach urging ethnographers to expand beyond low economic Black families as their research subject. They further claimed their current focus insinuates that Black families of all economic statuses only rely on fictive kinship for financial and material needs.²⁰ They are joined in this argument by Stewart. Paralleling ideas, Stewart shared this argument emphasizing the dire need to also include African Americans of higher economic status in their research. Furthering her argument, she claimed their needs are not only different because of their economic differences but because they still have to meet family obligations on account of their economic advantage.

Missing Pieces

Undoubtedly there is significant evidence of specific characteristics of aunts. Most articles attested to her initiatives in taking care of the family- assuring everyone stays afloat, whether taking care of nieces and nephews or ensuring the family business stays within their confinement.

Most articles shared similar shortcomings: absences of origin surrounding the term, scarce academic journals and research, and the need for more discussion about relationships between aunts and different family members. Most of all, many articles primarily used Eurocentric methods of ethnography when referencing aunts from different cultures. The few authors that did use resources grounded in their culture did not challenge the western family structure imposed on theirs.

²⁰ Taylor et. al, "Fictive Kin Networks among Africa, Black Caribbeans, and Non-Latino White," *Journal of Family Issues*, 43 no.1 (2022): pp. 20-46, DOI: 10.1177/0192513X21993188, 22.

The language authors chose to use raised several red flags. Choosing to use labor when discussing aunts' roles has negative connotations. The term "labor" often gives the impression of a job that involves clocking in and out. It is evident that most authors need to understand African culture before writing about them. Consequently, this caused many of them to endorse terms such as nuclear and extended family.

Lastly, scholars identifying as Afrocentric stuck with Yoruba and Akin cultures when referencing African and West African cultures. This would not be an issue if the authors did not make certain statements consistent with "Africa consists of many cultures" just to stick with the two that's been repeatedly studied.

Additional research is desperately needed for Black Aunts. While characteristics and attitudes towards were prevalent, more academic research should be tailored towards tracing the role itself in antiquity. The village-set mentality, spirituality, the origins of the function and other names for aunts in other African languages are areas to be examined from an Afrocentric perspective. Most readings examined her role in the family settings but did not discuss the variety of aunts and if her role and duties were extended to non-blood related people. With Black culture being its own entity, it is impossible to continue writing about Black aunts within the Eurocentric lens because their cultures are not the same, and neither are their experiences.

My research undoubtedly is trailblazing for Black women around the diaspora. I argue that examining Black aunts' role in the African American community is only valuable if studied from an Afrocentric perspective. Seeing their lives analyzed through theories grounded in their experiences not only allows Black aunts to view themselves as centered in research but it illuminates their agency.

Through my thesis, I will assist in closing the gap in scholarship regarding these women by utilizing Afrocentric theories in discussing Black women as aunts. Uniquely, my thesis will also trace components of Black Aunts along with the lack of necessity for blood relation to Ancient Egypt, Kemet. In doing so, it plays a critical part in reclaiming cultural memory- an essential aspect of Afrocentricity. The lack of Black Aunt scholarship is expected within Eurocentric epistemologies, given that European women are the center of their focus. However, as Afrocentrist, part of the responsibilities is researching African women through epistemologies grounded in their culture and experiences.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

My research will Afrocentrically examine the social role of Black Aunts in the African American community and their purpose within the family unit. Traditionally, academics study and research people of African descent from the eurocentric epistemology. Leading Afrocentric scholar and educator Serie McDougal III expressed the importance of Africana Studies, saying:

What distinguishes Africana Studies from other disciplines is primarily its approach to study and its purpose. That unique approach is defined by unique concepts, theories, and paradigms. Given that Africana Studies has its own concepts, theories and paradigms, it is its own discipline and not a derivative of other disciplines. Africana Studies is multidimensional because it applies its concepts, theories and paradigms to the African experience through multiple subject areas.²¹

Given the importance of Africana Studies, learning from a Eurocentric standpoint creates mental insanity for Africans since it conditions them to learn about themselves from an outsider's perspective. It also mentally damages neo-colonized Africans loyal to conducting their research using eurocentric methods and ideologies. That being said, two theories will ground this research. The first one, Afrocentricity, holds significance because it places African people at the center of their phenomena. The second one is Africana Womanism because it focuses on Black women's experiences, especially those who also play the role of aunt.

²¹ Serie McDougal III, "Methodologies in Africana Studies Research," in *Research Methods in Africana Studies* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc, 2014) 31.

Afrocentricity

Afrocentricity is the foundation for an Africological grounding for research about African people. Popularized by Molefi Asante during the 1980s, it is a paradigmatic theory that seeks to give agency back to African people. Asante defines the theory itself as “a consciousness, quality of thought, mode of analysis and an actionable perspective where Africans see, from agency, to assert subject place within the context of African history.”²² Asante elaborated on this further: “Afrocentricity is not the data but the orientation to the data.”²³ Therefore, orientation is how one views the said data. Thus Afrocentric pedagogy locates Africans within their proper culture and history dating back to the beginning of civilization. The critical concepts of Afrocentricity include agency, centeredness and victorious consciousness, all of which can be utilized around the diaspora.

Afrocentricity is guided by the Afrocentric paradigm in which Ama Mazama comprises of three aspects in her book *The Afrocentric Paradigm*:²⁴ I) Affective, cognitive and conative aspect- this consists of the metaphysical dimension (perception of all reality is the reality is the centrality of the African experience), the sociological dimension (specific conceptual methods and theories), and exemplars (trained Afrocentrist creating solutions to said problems). II) The structural aspect- having numerous trained Afrocentrist challenging white supremacy. III) The functional aspect-

²² Molefi Kete Asante, “Ama Mazama and Paradigmatic Discourse.” in *The Afrocentric Manifesto*. (Malden, MA 02148: Polity Press, 2007), 16.

²³ Molefi Kete Asante, “Ama Mazama and Paradigmatic Discourse.” in *The Afrocentric Manifesto*. (Malden, MA 02148: Polity Press, 2007), 49.

²⁴ Ama Mazama, “The Afrocentric Paradigm,” in *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, (Trenton, New Jersey: African World Press, 2003) 9, 23, 27, 31.

understanding Afrocentricity is more than an exercise of intellectual thinking rather an activation of consciousness, knowing Eurocentricity is no longer the answer.

Critics of Afrocentricity argue it is just a reaction to Eurocentricity, a concept defined “focusing on Europe, its people, institutions and cultures sometimes in an arrogant way.”²⁵ It has also been said that Afrocentricity attempts to replace Eurocentricity as a hegemonic paradigm. Additional critiques are based on the confusion between Afrocentricity and Afrocentrism along with Africanity. As previously mentioned, Afrocentricity is a conscious and revolutionary way of thinking. Afrocentrism is a false attempt at a religious significance to the idea of African-centeredness in reference to a broader cultural movement.²⁶ Africanity however, is the practice of African customs.²⁷ Others attack Afrocentricity assuming it is “inverted Eurocentrism,” claiming the basis of Afrocentricity’s fundamentals “embrace the same faulty geographical thinking they so effectively expose.”²⁸ These critics are not just from Africana Studies but from all areas of academia including dislocated black people. However, since Afrocentricity is not ethnocentric and demonstrates respect for all cultural differences, it can be valuable to all ethnicities.

Since Afrocentricity locates Black women as the center of focus, this study goes deeper than relying on Westernized notions of what an aunt is and squeezing Black Aunts into their family realm. While Afrocentricity provides a perspective on African culture

²⁵ Molefi Kete Asante, “Ama Mazama and Paradigmatic Discourse.” in *The Afrocentric Manifesto*. (Malden, MA 02148: Polity Press, 2007), 7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁸ Martin W. Lewis and Karen E. Wigen, “Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism,” in *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997) 116.

and history, Africana Womanism focuses on Black Women's experiences and contributions to the community.

Africana Womanism

Afrocentric theorist, Clenora Hudson Weems, created Africana Womanism in the 1980s citing it as “an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent...grounded in African culture...focuses on the unique history, needs and desires of Africana women.”²⁹ She created this theory out of the necessity for African women to reclaim their proper identity and collective struggle as a key toward harmony and survival for humanity. Given that this research examines Black Women, it would be beneficial to utilize another theory based on the experiences of African people, specifically African Women.

Africana Womanism duly notes that a strong family structure is needed for African liberation. It takes a village consisting of men and women to ensure Black longevity. We see examples of this concept through the cycle of life (sperm and egg) and through complementary relationships. Ongoing, Black women are still fighting systems of white supremacy- a common issue that has also taunted Black men. Both genders have acknowledged the power of being stronger together. Hudson states, “If our real goal in life is to be achieved- that is, the survival of our entire race as a primary concern for Africana women- it will have to come from Africana men and women working together.

²⁹ Clenora Hudson Weems, “Africana Womanism.” in *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, ed. Ama Mazama (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2003) 154.

If Africana men and women fight within the community, they are ultimately defeating themselves on all fronts.”³⁰

Additionally, Hudson Weems’ Africana Womanism theory understands that cultural heritage is a dynamic part of what defines African women. These cultural aspects, according to Dove, should be taught to future generations as she labels Black women “culture bearers.”³¹ However, the usage of “womanism” strikes debate. As Hudson-Weems states, reclaiming Africana women was the main goal, but the term womanism has roots in Eurocentricity as well as the social norm that comes attached. While Hudson-Weems explains that choosing “woman” was due to its relevance with the human race, it should not be confused with “women” as configured in Western norms.

Born out of Afrocentric theory, Africana Womanism is commonly based on an African heritage through multiple forms: history, spirituality, communal lifestyle, reciprocity, self-naming, reclamation, etc. Particularly within the African American community, her areas of expertise are channeled through various avenues of the community, i.e., motherhood, spirituality, friendship, etc. Through the lens of Africana Womanism, her lifestyle and wisdom are drenched in Black women’s experiences and history. Concerning Black Aunts Davis-Sowers further quotes,

Previous research has not demonstrated any formal or institutional expectations that define the role obligations of aunts or nieces/nephews, these black women learned familial and communal expectations of aunts through interactions with their own aunts.

³⁰ Ibid., 162.

³¹ Dove, “African Women, Power of,” 2.

They also witnessed other women in their communities enacting the role of aunts, including their mothers, grandmothers, and community othermothers.³²

“Black” Feminism, a concept coined by Kimberly Crenshaw also in the 1980s, was deemed insufficient for multiple reasons. First, prepositioning Black in front of feminism is problematic because feminism is a movement established for the betterment of white women. It’s solely grounded in the history and culture of white middle-class women. Adding insult to injury, it was created as a racist reaction to the ratification of the 15th Amendment which gave Black Men the right to vote before them. Hudson-Weems argues the term was appropriate for European women given their history with patriarchy among their male counterparts- traditionally a problem African women did not have to face. Traditionally in African societies, women were not displaced as secondary to men as they historically have been in western hierarchies. Second, “Black” Feminism also lays claims based on Black Women’s experiences. However, the main difference is their utilization of an intersectionality matrix which allows them to create a space for being black and a woman.³³ Thirdly, its ideology only requested liberation for Black women. This notion directly correlates to feminism’s origins in attempting to be seen as equal to men by separating themselves in many aspects of life from their male counterparts. Additionally, it defies one of the concepts of complementary relationships between men and women necessary for the Black community.

³² Regina Louise Davis-Sowers, “Salvaging Children’s Lives: Understanding the Experiences of Black Aunts Who Serve as Kinship Care Providers Within Black Families.” (Dissertation, UMI Number: 3218310, 2006) 97.

³³ Ama Mazama, “A Constrasive Analysis of Africama Womanism, Black Feminism and African Womanism” in *Africana- Melanated Womanism in It Together* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022), 42.

Terminology

In search of agency and mental liberation, Asante asserts that “reclamation of names, places and concepts create dislocation in the African world.”³⁴ Nomenclature is essential because it is the soul of the orientation, location and axiology belonging to the research. As a form of perception, language reflects social history and cultural traditions. Destroying the person’s language is destroying the culture as well. Too often are the terminology used regarding African people grounded in western nomenclature. Kimani Nehusi confirms this notion quoting, “Eurocentric scholarship employs obscuring terminology such as English-based, Dutch-based, French-based.”³⁵ Therefore, terminology must come from the mother tongue. This is a case in point that this can be shown at the hand of western language planning through lexical modernization. Mazama proclaims:

Lexical modernization is equally suspect...this modernization process seeks is not so much the creation of new words...rather the imposition of Western concepts on our minds as an effective way of violating the boundaries of our mental privacy while forcing us further into a Eurocentric mold.³⁶

When the people continue to use terminology foreign to their own to describe themselves such as feminist, Marxist, and Post-Modernist, they trap themselves in what Nobles identifies as concept incarceration.³⁷ Operating from an alien framework is inconsistent with African culture. One automatically dislocates themselves using theories and methods

³⁴ Asante, “The Afrocentric Manifesto,” 28.

³⁵ Kimani Nehusi, “From Medew Netjer To Ebonics,” in *Ebonics and Language Education of African Ancestry Students* Clinton, ed. Crawford (New York and London: Sankofa World Publishers, 2001), 11.

³⁶ Ama Mazama, “An Afrocentric Approach to Language Planning,” in *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, (Trenton, New Jersey: African World Press, 2003), 209

³⁷ Na’im Akbar, “Africentric Social Sciences for Human Liberation.” in *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, ed. Ama Mazama (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2003), 132.

designed to research African bodies from the margins. For that reason, many African scholars have become neocolonialists mindlessly unaware of their advocacy of inferiority, leaving them stuck in a cognitive hiatus, a break in the continuity of logical reasoning, a missing logical step in one's thinking.³⁸ Undoubtedly, this action, whether conscious or unconscious, supports white supremacy by continuing to produce work within their epistemology.

Afrocentrist should always strive to center their terminology within the Afrocentric Paradigm. Since Afrocentric theory is less than half a century old, it still has ways to go regarding nomenclature. Unfortunately, many African scholars are content continuing to use western terminology for multiple reasons: 1) the term is highly recognized across multiple fields of scholarship, 2) it's easier to place "Black," "African," or "Africana" ahead of said concept instead of finding a term already created, 3) rather than being trained to locate said terminology in African languages, they were conditioned to use the language of their oppressors 4) which leads to an alarming level of comfortability. This is a common flaw in the world of Africana Studies and must be addressed with urgency.

Terminology often used

Aunt, extended family, Black/African and woman will be recycled repeatedly throughout my thesis. It is important to note that the term aunt is rooted in western language. In this section, the terms above along with nuclear and extended family and fictive kin will be defined. Lastly, this paper will use western rooted terminology

³⁸ Ama Mazama, "Cognitive Hiatus and the White Validation Syndrome: An Afrocentric Analysis," in *Black/Africana Communication Theory*, ed. K. Langmia (2018): pp.25-38, https://doi.org.10.1007/978-3-319/75447-5_3, 29.

sparingly as I am currently searching for replacements in African languages. The terms Black and African will be used interchangeably. Both are terms used commonly in conversations between people of African descent. Self-claiming as Black has become a common notion. In search of identifying with a word most fitting for African people in the United States, Black rose to fame during the Black Power Movement in the late 1960s. However, referring to African people as Black became a long-standing issue within the community because Black does not associate with a heritage.³⁹ Unlike Africa, where does Black originate from? White supremacy stripped Africans of their culture during enslavement. In the years to follow, that same system has been found responsible for creating and spreading negative connotations about Mother Africa. As a result, this ensured that African people chose to identify with a color rather than a name adequately located in their historical context. While black has been adopted as a sense of pride, others refuse to identify as black due to its negative associations with death, mourning, evil magic, and darkness.⁴⁰

Aunt is commonly defined as “the sister of one’s father or mother...the wife of one’s uncle or aunt”⁴¹ Authors like-minded to Khubchandani believes “Aunties are women, femme, and queer figures adjacent to or at the periphery of a nuclear family formation.”⁴² Consequently, many articles viewed Aunts as fictive kin based on the Eurocentric nuclear family concept. In a few readings or regular conversations with

³⁹ Patricia Reid-Merritt, “Defining Ourselves: Name Calling in Black Studies,” *Journal of Black Studies*, 40 no.1 (2009): pp. 77-90, doi: 10.1177/0021934709338672, 80.

⁴⁰ Maude Bass-Krueger, “The Secret History of the Color Black,” *Google Arts & Culture*, June 10, 2023, <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/the-secret-history-of-the-color-black/fwISZyrkPUt0IA>

⁴¹ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “aunt,” accessed March 25, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/aunt>.

⁴² Khubchandani, “Critical aunty studies: an auntroduction,” 234.

continental Africans, she is never referred to as aunt. Noticeably, she was referred to as Momma [first name or nickname] or by relation (the husband's brother's wife).

Fictive kin is mainly defined as “a relationship with an individual who is not related by birth, adoption or marriage to a child, but who has an emotionally significant relationship with the child.”⁴³ According to Pearl Stewart in her article “Who is Kin? Family Definition and African American Families,” fictive kin are accorded the rights of a member of the extended family but are in turn expected to meet the responsibilities of a family member.⁴⁴ It has also been established that fictive kin become family members for various reasons from long-term friendship to providing a good or service during that family's time of need. While fictive kin as extended families have been linked to West African family practices, this notion can be traced even further to Ancient Egypt, Kemet. Kimani Nehusi, a leading Afrocentrist reclaiming Kemet for African liberation, stated:

In Kemet, notions of ancestor, father, mother, son, daughter, brother and sister were extended beyond blood ties from very early in the development of that civilization. In fact, it is likely that the people who became the ancient Egyptians held these ideas and corresponding practices even before they became the people of Kemet, since the very same concept is general in Afrika.⁴⁵

⁴³ Julia J. Eger, “Legally Recognizing Fictive Kin Relationships: A Call for Action,” *American Bar Association*, March 1, 2022, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_interest/child_law/resources/child_law_practiceonline/january-december2022/fictivekin/#:~:text=A%20fictive%20kin%20relationship%20is,child%20welfare%20system%20by%20preventing

⁴⁴ Pearl Stewart, “Who is Kin? Family Definition and African American Families,” *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 15 no.2/3 (2007): pp. 163-181, https://doi.org/10.1300/J137v15n02_10, 165.

⁴⁵ Kimani Nehusi, “The It Neter or father of the god: a case study of cultural dislocation and (re)location in Kemet. Part I: The royal court, miscellaneous examples, and Senenmut,” *Moja: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Africana Studies*, 3 no.1 (2022): pp. 10-24, <http://libjournals.unca.edu/moja/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/MOJA-2022-Nehusi.pdf>, 11.

Anthropologists and sociologists in comparative family studies define nuclear and extended family as “centered around a monogamous conjugal union and comprised ideally of a married couple and their unmarried children” by Sadarkasa⁴⁶. With nuclear families being the basis of their family structure, extended families were described as “two or more nuclear families linked through the parent-child relationship.”⁴⁷ Intriguing enough, while the definition of the extended family now includes non-related families, it still displaces roles such as Aunts on the exterior of the family community. Usage of this term will not be seen after this mention. As stated earlier, fictive kins are marginally viewed members of the family that were scooped up along the way through their contributions.

Woman is vaguely defined as an adult female person⁴⁸. A fundamental problem with the definition revolves around questioning what female is and where that definition exists in African cosmology. In the western ideologies terms such as man and woman are associated with genders. Oyewumi wrote:

Gender is a construction of two categories in hierarchical relation to each other; and is embedded in institutions. Gender is best understood as ‘an institution that establishes patterns of expectations for individuals [based on their body-type], orders the social processes of everyday life, and is built into major social organizations of society, such as the economy, ideology, the family and politics.’⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Niara Sandarkasa, “Value Premises Underlying Black Families Studies and Black Families,” in *The Strength of our Mothers: African & African American Women & Families; Essays and Speeches*, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press), 4.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 5

⁴⁸ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “woman,” accessed March 25, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/woman>.

⁴⁹ Oyeronke Oyewumi, “Making History, Creating Gender: The Invention of Men and Kings in the Writing in Oyo Oral Tradition,” in *The Invention of Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 39

According to Asante, “African languages do not distinguish between the pronouns “he” and “she” as is done in Western languages and suggests an entirely different conception of the place of women and men in the community.”⁵⁰ In Kemet, gender roles were important in their society as sex and gender were adamantly marked. This difference highlighted sex as biological whereas gender on the other hand is constructed.⁵¹ Meaning gender roles are a social construct with different perceptions per culture.

The language commonly used to refer to families will be used for my thesis. *Aunt-* applies to any woman, blood-related or not, assisting the community. There are several ways to fulfill this role, such as babysitting, taking older nieces and nephews shopping, and offering social support to friends and family. *Village/community* comprises individuals (women, men, and children) coming together to assist each other as support modes. Like Aunts, a person’s village does not have to only consist of blood-related relatives. The village, more than community, correlates to African family systems, creating a concept of togetherness. Both terms are used interchangeably. *Black/African-* As mentioned earlier, these terms are often used to identify people of African descent. These terms will be consistently used in the same manner throughout this thesis. As an Afrocentrist well aware of the implications behind “black,” the decision to use this term was based on familiarity.

⁵⁰ Asante, “The Afrocentric Manifesto,” 48.

⁵¹ Kimani Nehusi, “The Construction of the Person and Personality in Africa,” in *Regenerating Africa*. (2017): pp. 61-76, DOI:10.2307/j.ctvh8r2t1.10, 65.

With my research identifying Black Aunts as women who have made striving contributions to keeping the African community afloat in all aspects of life, their key aspects of Black aunts are the following:

- Belong to a family unit
- Though her role is familial, she doesn't have to be blood-related
- While age is not a determining factor, she serves as an advisor to the family
- She's typically not an enforcer of authority
 - hints separating her role from a mom or grandmother
- Family members generally consult her because of her lack of enforcement, creating a confidential environment
- Seen as independent with flexibility (with or without the "nuclear family.")

Method

My methodology includes a thematic analysis of oral history as they appear on social media platforms. I analyzed 54 videos created between 2021 and 2023 from a well-known social media platform, TikTok.

All qualified videos had to meet the following criteria: content creators had to be of African descent and their content had to revolve around Aunts. If a video only briefly mentioned aunts in passing, it was not used. All content was surveyed and categorized into fitting characteristics. The characteristics recorded were centered around its central concept. i.e., if the aunt was babysitting their niece or nephew, it was classified as a Caregiver Aunt. They were combined if a particular characteristic lacked sufficient video content but was similar to another.

My objective is to use the findings to understand the conceptual role of Black women, particularly in relation to the significance of Black Aunts. The intent is to see how their experience with Black Aunts molded the videos and if that shaped generations of aunts. Each video will be evaluated and determined if it aligns with Afrocentricity, Africana Womanism or neither. From the results, I plan to highlight the correlation between the TikTok videos and the two theories to detect the social role of Black Aunts in the African American community. Once I have sorted the videos into their corresponding theories, I will expound on the rationale behind each categorization. Furthermore, I will incorporate relevant literature pertaining to each theory to substantiate and clarify my reasoning.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

After watching approximately 50 TikTok videos, numerous characteristics were repeatedly found. For that reason, the characteristics were split into six categories: (1) caregiver, (2) cooking, (3) cool, (4) rich or bougie, (5) spiritual and (6) messy. Many categories shared similarities. A single video could be split between categories if it shared specific characteristics. While this research only details the categories above, the following will also be mentioned: “auntie” attire, the difference in videos depicting older versus newer aunts and categories with overlapping characteristics. Mentions of videos will lead with the abbreviated category followed by the chronological number in which it was viewed.

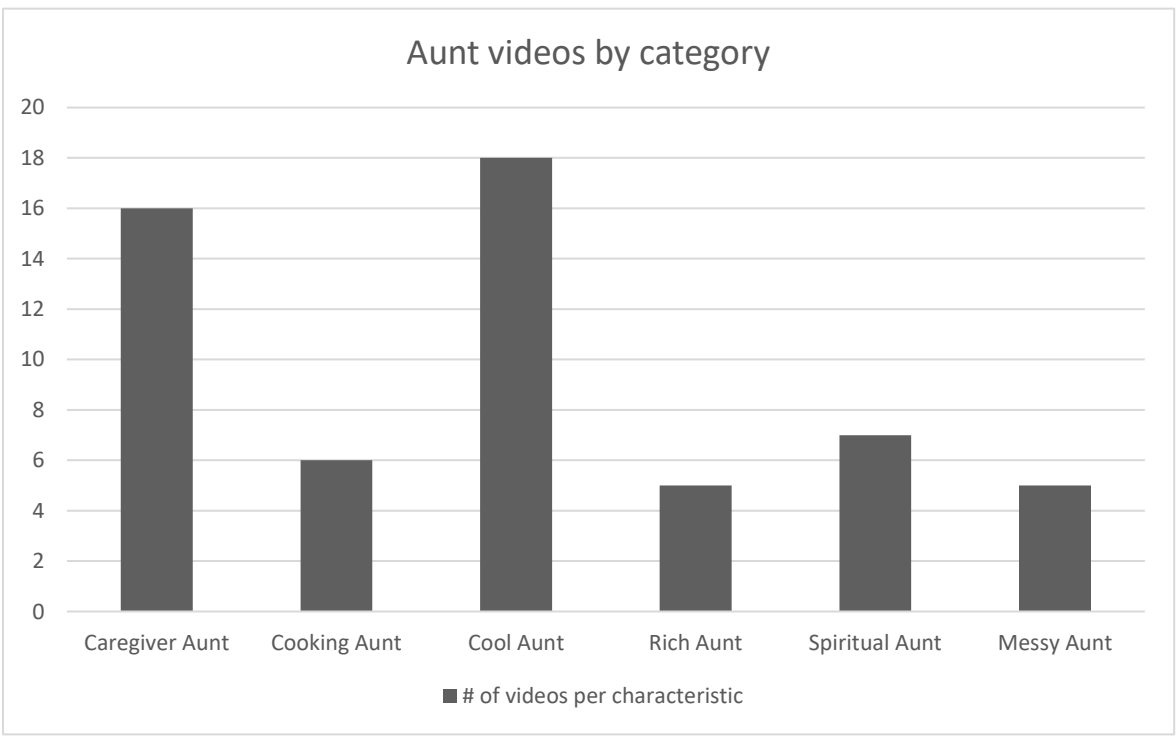


Chart 1: Displaying the main characteristics of Black Aunts in TikTok videos.

Caregiver Aunt

The aunts depicted as caregivers made up 29% of Black Aunt material. In these videos, aunts were performing duties customarily found in the role of a mother or grandmother. This was seen in ways of introducing babies to new foods (CG2), showing new parents sleeping techniques resembling a bassinet (CG10) or introducing young women and men to soursop (CG15). In other instances, aunts took in nieces and nephews that were removed or evicted by their parents (CG4, CG14).

In this category, the caregivers displayed a higher authoritative figure. Examples of this notion were demonstrated in multiple videos. In video CG8 when the aunt attended a “parent-teacher” conference in her sister’s (the daughter’s mother’s) absence. Again CG7, an aunt arrived with a belt in her hand after receiving a call about her nephew’s behavior thus establishing, she had become the disciplinarian at that moment.

An intriguing aspect of this category was the number of babysitting videos. 25% of the videos categorized as caregiving were in the form of watching their nieces and nephews even when they did not want to. This ranged from lounging around watching television in matching robes and bonnets (CG6) to the aunt realizing she had to care for the baby once it began to cry (CG3).

Cooking Aunt

Surprisingly, cooking aunts only comprised 11% of the total videos watched. Family favorite dishes such as Macaroni and cheese, greens and sweet potato pie were commonly mentioned in videos related to Black Aunts. At family functions like cookouts and Thanksgiving, each aunt was solely responsible for bringing their signature dish

(CK5). Hilarious enough, in CK4, even Caribbean content creators expressed their love for African American macaroni and cheese.

Content creators often showed their aunts either preparing or bringing their food. In both instances, there was a sensation of pride among the women. In CK3, the cooking aunt arrived satisfied and fashionably late to the family function because she stayed up all night preparing the food. The nephew recording the video even applied a theme song upon her arrival emphasizing her acknowledgment of knowing the food was terrific.

Most contents regarding cooking aunts were at family functions. Very seldom were their videos illustrating cooking aunts on a regular day. The sheer entertainment of this category is based on the family's opinions- hints why certain aunts are only allowed to bring special dishes.

Cool Aunt

The Cool Aunt category is a compilation of videos labeling the aunt trendy, cool

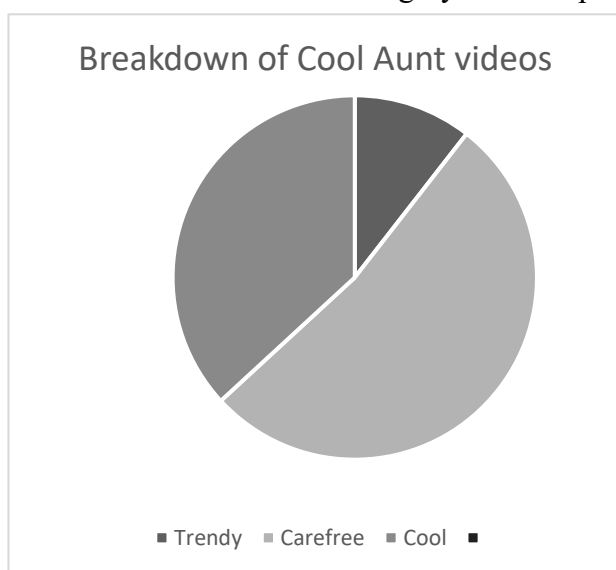


Chart 2: Breakdown of videos depicted as the "cool aunt."

and carefree. In total, this characteristic made up 32% of the videos depicted. According to the content, she's the cool aunt due to her trendiness and carefree and independent lifestyle.

Content creators characterized themselves as trendy mainly due to her "up-to-date" attire (TD1, TD2). This attire resembled

the younger generation's style. This was primarily in response to new sneakers (TD1) and

hairstyles (TD2). In both videos, the aunts made fashion decisions based on recommendations from their nieces or nephews. Other areas included keeping up with the new lingo and dances.

Videos designated with carefree vibes came in variations. CF5 depicted an aunt chaperoning a field trip but loosely watching from afar and consuming Hot Cheetos. The aunt in CF6 re-enacted being more upset that her “special snacks” were eaten though her nephew’s hurt stomach. Unlike caregiving videos, few aunts declined to babysit (CF5, CF1). Numerous aunts created content visiting siblings only to chill, take pictures with nieces and nephews, and then return home, especially if they were newborns (CF3, CF4, CF7, CF8, CF10).

Other videos of her being seen as cool were taking her niece to Target and Starbucks after mom said no (CL2), dancing to “Tootsee Roll” at a cookout (CL3), and relating to the younger generation without judging them (CL1).

She’s the funny aunt people enjoy being around. She laughs and jokes with anyone who speaks to her, particularly at family functions.

Rich Aunt

Only 9% of the videos pertained to the rich auntie though that phrase is widespread and steadily gaining attraction. For this category, rich and bougie were used interchangeably. However, there were apparent differences between the two.

Rich and bougie aunts shared similarities in expensive tangible items such as clothes, cooking utensils, accessories, housing and cars. The rich aunt earned her name mainly because she’s free from children (“child-free” is usually placed in the caption). Her

lifestyle allows a different type of independence. The income typically intended for raising children funded maintaining her self-defined lavish lifestyle. The depiction of affluence was constantly reinforced in videos with the frequent display of lavish clothing and extravagant vacations. (RA1, RA2, BA1, BA2). Nieces and nephews loved her by unwarranted gifts and money (RA2). One content creator documented her experience at her Bougie aunt's house. (BA4) Throughout the video the aunt was recorded pulling out "the good China" for lunch and tall glass cups for lemon-cucumber water. While the aunt saw this as her everyday experience, the niece couldn't help but laugh.

Spiritual Aunt

Spiritual aunts comprised 13% of the total videos. The spiritual videos explained the value of healing properties such as cultural memory and herbs instead of Big Pharmaceuticals. A self-proclaimed Spiritual Aunt also spoke about the maternal health crises as it's an important issue pertinent to Black Women (SA12).

Spiritual aunts spoke on various issues from hair to dreaming about snakes. Exclusive to hair, a Spiritual Aunt provided reason around the importance of not attaching someone else's hair into your locs. (SA2) She and the commentators explained how the technique had gained attraction among couples as a romantic gesture, but it's rumored to be a soul tie.

Meanwhile, other spiritual aunts were explaining the value of spirituality as a way of connecting with ancestors. In SA4, she educated her viewers on the topic of spirits/ancestors remaining present while one is enduring mental health episodes. She reassured her followers while disclaiming the popular video which made her "duet" it. In

South Africa, another Spiritual Aunt documented her journey to becoming a Sangoma, a ngoma healer practicing traditional African medicine through ancestral spirits, medicinal plants, and oils. While she is not African American, she advocated for Black people around the diaspora to practice Sankofa for African spirituality to awaken their cultural identity (SA3).

On the religious aspect, a content creator captured the spiritual aunt at a cookout blessing the food with prayer (SA5). The video shows her performing a long prayer, resembling the ones given in a church. Unsurprisingly, the video was captioned “the praying aunt who takes 30 minutes to bless the food.”

Messy Aunt

Messy aunts only accounted for 9% of total videos. This is a surprise considering this aunt was heavily featured in family-oriented videos, i.e., cookouts. However, there weren't significant differences between the videos dedicated to her. Therefore, she is often seen as distant from everyone and secretly gossiping in a low-toned voice avoiding being overheard (MA2, MA3, MA6). In MA6, the messy aunt searches through multiple pans of food judging them on smell and appearance. For comedic relief, she asked, “who made the potato salad” knowing it would cause an uproar. As with CK5, she ridiculed people for bringing anything outside her assigned dish. Given the number of videos featuring the messy aunt, her role is substantial to the family dynamic.

Unofficial Categories

Auntie attire or “mood”

While not an official characteristic of Aunts, 9% of the videos mentioned their attire or mood. Auntie attire varied in style depending on personality, event, or mood. Attire came in different styles, but the 90's aesthetic became popularized. Among the most popular apparel in content dedicated to this category was a 27-wig piece, large bamboo gold hoops, brown or red lipstick with a dark lip liner, a drawn-on mole and trendy clothes (AM3, AM4, AM5).

Unanimously the “auntie mood” came with a distinct uniform and a chill environment. In these relaxed settings, videos showed women getting comfortable into moo moos, putting on satin bonnets, pouring a glass of wine, turning on her favorite television show, or playing Anita Baker (AM1, AM2). This goes for younger and older aunts.

When dressed up however, depending on her style, she dressed for the occasion. At an outdoor concert, a woman described the attire for what separated “Aunties” and “TeeTees.” According to AM6, she attended a concert featuring R&B artists from the '80s. From her observations “Aunties” were the women styled in jeans and a dressy top while “Tee Tees” were dressed to the nines in all white alongside their husbands, down to the accessories.

Rich Aunt’s attire embodied the concept of glam. In a specific video, she is robed in fancy clothes, a fur coat, sunglasses a toy dog (RA2). Her hair was tucked away in a fashionable headscarf, but others sported a long weave.

Variations in age

Within each age category, younger and older aunts exhibit distinguishable variations. This notion is most visible in Caregiver Aunts, Cooking Aunts, Cool Aunts, Rich Aunts and Messy Aunts. While there is no certified age separating younger and older aunts, becoming an older aunt came with time, wisdom and experience. For each category listed, one or more observations were made.

Caregiver Aunts: Older aunts were likelier to take in nieces and nephews. They offered more parental advice to new couples and handled babies with more delicacy- given their experiences. There was a higher level of authority among the elder aunts than the younger ones. Younger aunts were more likely to babysit. If anything, they seemed more elated to be of service. One aunt recalled hosting a sleepover for fourteen teenage boys at her house. Another aunt made a dancing TikTok video with “the toddler no one wants to watch.”

Cooking Aunts: Older Aunts oversaw the families’ favorite meals at get togethers. As mentioned earlier, each aunt had their signature dish. This is not to say younger aunts didn’t have a decision in the plans or may not have contributed, but it was understood in that family dynamic that the older aunts were the matriarch. Younger aunts created content perfecting what they hoped to be their signature dish to avoid being the “aunty who can’t cook.” Based on the popularity of being a Cooking Aunt within the Black community, BuzzFeed (a food series) has dedicated an entire sector on YouTube specifically for aunts of different cultures to try each other’s food online. I want to note here that many young aunts unashamedly disclosed their lack of cooking abilities (whether due to time management or disdain for being in the kitchen) and opted to follow cooking recipes from the internet, family members or order pre-made foods.

Cool Aunt: By far, younger aunts were painted cooler. Solely due to their closeness in age, the connection was seen as easier to establish. Older aunts have the same potential to qualify as cool aunts, but it comes with understanding the younger generation.

Rich Aunt: This category had a balanced amount of older and younger aunts. As mentioned earlier, a rich aunt's basis revolves around extra income. In the videos designated for this category, younger aunts were seen mainly in expensive clothes and cars. In comparison, older aunts had more expensive housing décor, such as kitchen and dining sets.

Messy Aunts: Besides Cooking Aunts, this category is mainly comprised of older aunts. Assuming her role was grounded in judgment and gossip, the content characterized older women as the perpetrators. However, age was not a factor in "clapping back" at anyone casting judgment against her. The clap backs were just as messy and hurtful as the ones directed at her even though she isn't seen as the messy one.

Overlapping social roles

As previously mentioned, a video could easily contain multiple characteristics. The characteristics did not define who she was but rather the role she was occupying. It's very feasible for a messy aunt to share factors designated the cool aunt, spiritual aunt, or even cooking aunt. It can be simultaneous or asynchronous.

Cool Caregiving Aunt, Cool Messy Aunt, Cool Rich Aunt: In multiple babysitting videos, cool aunts transform into caregivers. In CG3, an aunt who prided herself on being cool quickly realized she would have to step in as a caregiver when the baby started crying, getting hungry, or soiling their diaper. Contrarily, the messy aunt was constantly depicted

creating chaos but presumed cool if “clapping back,” returning insults when met with disrespect (CL7, CL8). In video CL7, an aunt defended a Black Girl’s skincare routine after a commentator attempted to belittle her. For video CL8, the aunt clapped back at commentators for making fun of her “manly” voice. Factors such as independence were heavily found in rich aunt and cool aunt. The independent component of both categories is linked to the ability to move freely. While the rich aunt is still associated with money, her attitude and behavior toward everyone deem her cool.

Messy Cooking Aunt, Messy Bougie Aunt: Messy attributes were found in multiple categories behind caregivers. Referencing back to CK5, this is a prime example of a messy cooking aunt. Being in total control, she had unanimous power and abused them while assigning people their contributions according to her beliefs. In most videos, the bougie aunt gained that title due to her attitude toward others. This was actively seen in BA3 when the content creator labeled her two-faced about different aunts at the cookout. Throughout videos featuring bougie aunts (specifically with family), she barely showed affection, only spoke to specific individuals and expected an unattainable level of cleanliness (BA3, CK6-cleanliness and appearance).

CHAPTER 5 CONTENT ANALYSIS

Each category had characteristics consistent with original cultural forms in African traditions, given the interruption of enslavement. Multiple categories, if not all, had features suitable for both theories. Spiritual, Cooking and Caregiving aunts were most consistent with the traditions, but Rich and Messy aunts still had markers of western ideologies. Features of Cool, Rich and Messy aunts found in contemporary aunts were inconsistent with Afrocentricity and Africana Womanism as they appear in our family structures today. This chapter will analyze the results in three separate sections: categories aligned with Afrocentricity, categories aligned with Africana Womanism and categories with no alignment to either theory.

Categories aligned with Afrocentricity

Caregiving and Spiritual aunt videos were mostly aligned with Afrocentricity. Throughout the videos, was a great sense of community well-being whether it was physical, mental, or spiritual. However, the main characteristic conjoining the two categories was its strong sense of communality. Within Afrocentricity, communality has been instilled through multiple generations. As the African proverb goes, if you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far then go together. According to the results, this was seen as taking nieces and nephews into their custody and developing consciousness of the world around them.

Recalling Davis-Sowers's article, "It Just Kind of Falls in Your Hands: Factors that Influence Black Aunts Decision to Parent Nieces and Nephews," one of her

participants believed an aunt served the same purpose as a mother. “An aunt is someone who stands in the gap and sometimes plays the role of Mama.⁵²” Black Aunts within her article understood that if no one else took care of the child, there was a high risk of them being hauled into foster care. Many Black Aunts couldn’t fathom the idea of strangers raising their kin -blood-related or not. Even if the child couldn’t permanently live with her, she ensured they could stay with another person in their village, such as Godparents, and continued to provide care. Though these women understood family members had the right to say no, some thought it was very selfish not to accept that parental role when the children were in need. Multiple aunts did not understand Black families who fell short of caring for their own. Many of her interviewees called their sisters who declined to parent nieces and nephews selfish.⁵³

Similarly, Zinobia and Taylor reported, “The role of the Black Aunt thus signifies the important tradition of the community helping raise a child in the community...Often, Black women are the village.⁵⁴” Across the board, the family’s well-being was the priority. In the African American Family structure, the village is a crucial component to the development of Black children, partly to being surrounded by adults actively dedicated to their growth.⁵⁵ Not only does this promote familial strength, but it also creates high levels of trust.

⁵² Regina Davis-Sowers, “It Just Kind of Falls in Your Hands”: Factors that Influence Black Aunts’ Decisions to Parent Their Nieces and Nephews, 243.

⁵³ Regina Davis-Sowers, “It Just Kind of Falls in Your Hands”: Factors that Influence Black Aunts’ Decisions to Parent Their Nieces and Nephews,” 241.

⁵⁴ Imani Williams, “Sisterhood in Action: What It Means for Black Women to Really Take Care of Each Other,” *For Harriet* (blog), April 4, 2015, <http://www.forharriet.com/2015/04/sisterhood-in-action-what-it-means-for.html>.

⁵⁵ Zinobia and Taylor, “The Girls are Alright: Examining Protective Factors of US Black Culture and Its Impact on the Resilience of Black Girls and Women,” 220.

The women of the community historically mold the axiology of that child (fundamentally who they are as a person and how they view their values.) Nehusi explained within “The Construction of the Person and Personality in Africa” the $\bar{\text{V}}$:*ib* or heart is a communal aspect that seats consciousness and morality. It’s also home to the person’s character, virtue, principles, competence, motivation and will. The U :*ka*, or guarding spirit, of the person is conceptually passed on from parents.⁵⁶ Molding the *ib* is the obligation customarily exercised by the mother. In this situation, the aunt who provides care steps up to take on a parental role. In Dove's article, “African Women, the Power of,” she recalls African women culture bearers stating:

African women must recover and reclaim that knowledge. African mothers are their children’s first teachers. African women must ensure cultural ties are not compromised...as mothers, they must see themselves as bearers of culture and makers of change who learn to transmit cultural knowledge to their children.⁵⁷

With this knowledge, African children learn to value who they are, their culture and where they stand in the cosmology. Lessons ranging from the relationship between all living things and nature to understanding the principles of Maat (peace, harmony, justice, truth, reciprocity, balance and propriety, etc.) are prominent. From an early age, this practice ensures a proper location and orientation in African culture. Through an Afrocentric epistemology, children of all ages develop their African agency as well as victorious consciousness in their spirit.

The rise in videos showcasing Spiritual Aunts comes as no shock, as African Americans continue to shift towards African spirituality and discard mainstream

⁵⁶ Nehusi, “The Construction of the Person and Personality in Africa,” 65

⁵⁷ Dove, “African Women, Power Of,” 2.

religions. Spiritual aunt videos were especially aligned with Afrocentricity being that it is a major component of the African cosmology as a permeating essence of life, allowing all living things to affix with nature, ancestors and the world around them. Spirit also doubles as a mode of knowledge (intuition) often described as a “gut feeling.”

Ama Mazama quotes Kwame Nantumbu, defining spirituality as an entity that “represents a direct connectedness, inter-relatedness with nature, the cosmos, the universe and that spiritual God-force, Amen-Ra, the giver of life.”⁵⁸ According to Mazama, spirituality is an aspect African people do not feel separated from but thoroughly intertwined with the cosmos and universe, undoubtedly centered around it.⁵⁹ Inherently, spirituality serves as a vehicle for Africans to connect with ancestors, respect their cultural heritage and as a tool in accepting reality. This can be practiced individually for the betterment of the person or community.

Spirituality has often been a feature of African resistance in liberation. For the African community, spirituality has historical ties to rebellions in all forms of white supremacy. Instances include Harriet Tubman in the physical liberation of enslaved Africans to poetically chanting Black Lives Matter as a result of police brutality. Other examples consist of wearing natural hairstyles openly at corporate jobs, giving birth at home, seeking Black therapists, using natural remedies in opposition to big pharmaceuticals and trusting intuition as a source of knowledge.

⁵⁸ Ama Mazama, “Afrocentricity and African Spirituality,” *Journal of Black Studies*, 33. no.2 (2002): 218-234, doi: 10/1177/002193402237226, 226.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 220.

Spirituality and faith played a significant role in Aunts serving as caregivers found in Davis-Sowers' article "It Just Kind of Falls in Your Hands": Factors that Influence Black Aunts' Decisions to Parent Their Nieces and Nephews" and Zinobia and Taylor's article "The Girls are Alright: Examining Protective Factors of US Black Culture and Its Impact on the Resilience of Black Girls and Women." Davis- Sowers reported aunt had faith in God and believed it was His plan to raise those children⁶⁰. The aunts believe they were "helping spirits" that were not only helping the family but helping humanity by believing it was their responsibility. On the same spectrum, Zinobia and Taylor further claimed that introducing spirituality to Black girls created a conscious awareness of the world around them as well as their ancestors. "Spirituality allows Black women to examine their relationships with themselves, other people, and their ancestors as a powerful protective source."⁶¹

While the importance of practicing spirituality was explained as a benefit for adults, Zinobia and Taylor highlighted the importance of spirituality in a child's life. Zinobia and Taylor view Black spirituality as a crucial factor that protects black children from white supremacy. According to their research, it provides a protective space for black girls to define and love themselves.⁶² Given that an essential factor of Africana womanism relies on the experiences of Black women, they rely on each other, creating a community of support through spiritual kinship, i.e., sisterhood. Sisterhood served as a protective bond for women and young ladies to love each other in the form of advice,

⁶⁰ Regina Davis-Sowers, "It Just Kind of Falls in Your Hands": Factors that Influence Black Aunts' Decisions to Parent Their Nieces and Nephews," 242

⁶¹ Zinobia & Taylor, "The Girls are Alright: Examining Protective Factors of US Black Culture and Its Impact on the Resilience of Black Girls and Women," 222

⁶²Ibid., 220

lending a listening ear, providing words of encouragement, and much more. From observing their mothers, aunts and sisters Black girls learn to value the spiritual connections between each other and the world. Zinobia and Taylor further assert:

With these generational teachings, Black girls can deeply understand that their practices are sacred, their histories rich and their futures open...As Black girls come to understand their own spirituality, they are able to dream and imagine different circumstances because they know they possess the power to successfully navigate the world around them.⁶³

Not all Spiritual Aunts created content grounded in African spirituality. With Christianity being a religion many African Americans still follow, the content reflected their faith. Jaqueline Mattis found this to be true in her study of African American women using spirituality as a form of coping mechanism. Mattis shares:

The most consistent finding regarding the coping experiences of African American women is that religions and spirituality hold central places in the women's coping repertoires. African American women use formal religious involvement and private devotional practices (e.g., prayer) to negotiate a range of adversities including race, class, gender oppression family and parenting stress, financial stress illness, psychological distress, and a vast array of daily hassles.⁶⁴

Among her interviewees, copious amounts of African American women used coping mechanisms resembling African spirituality such as forms of accepting reality, questioning its purpose as a life lesson or part of destiny, completely surrendering the issue to a higher power and interpreting messages from the living and deceased via dreams.

Lastly, Messy Aunts are not an organic fit into the African community, but its origin of storytelling is, even though the stories told by her could be more conducive.

⁶³ Ibid., 222.

⁶⁴ Jacqueline S. Mattis, "Religion and Spirituality in the Meaning Making and Coping Experiences of African American Women: A Qualitative Analysis," *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 26 (2002): pp. 309-321, doi:10.1111/1471-6402.t01-2-00070, 313.

Storytelling is an oral tradition dating back to ancient civilizations. As briefly mentioned, African American women as teachers, filmmakers, and even liars story tell via songs, proverbs, old songs, and other modes of oral communication.⁶⁵ The art of Black Aunts channeling as storytellers is grounded in African epistemology. Their stories are from the unique histories, needs, and desires of the African community. These classical stories have served as modes of advice necessary to the physical and mental survival living in western hegemonic societies. Dove affirms this notion by stating:

[African women] drew upon the power of their spiritual strengths and their ancestral knowledge to survive...Nonetheless, African spiritual systems provided the basis of cultural unity through word, song, music, storytelling, dance, symbolism, medicinal healing, wisdom, knowledge, ethics and morality for the survival of women and men.⁶⁶

Barnwell classified her ability to maneuver knowledge and store family history as keepers.⁶⁷ This privilege holds the power of making or breaking relationships. As a keeper, withheld information can either keep familial peace or cause generational pain. Barnwell pointed out, “Practices of keeping secrets can steady or tilt family dynamics. There can be an immense power in holding potentially damaging knowledge, choosing how it be narrated and when and to whom it may be disclosed.⁶⁸”

Categories aligned with Africana Womanism

Rich, Cooking and Cool aunts mostly aligned with Africana Womanism. Each video created was based on Black women’s experience. Whether it was the content

⁶⁵ Hamlet, “Discovering Great-Great-Aunts Mary and Martha: The Impact of the Oral Storytelling Tradition.”

⁶⁶ Dove, “African Women, Power Of,” 3.

⁶⁷ Barnwell, “Aunting as Family Shadow-Work,” 324.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 319.

creator interacting with them personally or the aunt producing the content herself. The common factor between these categories was the love these aunts gave their families whether it was a need or their sheer desire. As a result, the videos depicted these women were made purely out of admiration for them. Unlike the categories aligning with Afrocentricity, there was more than one characteristic bonding these categories together under Africana Womanism.

Though Rich Aunt content comprised 9% of total videos, it is an ideology swiftly becoming adopted by women of all races. Being the rich aunt is not a new phenomenon; however, it has become a popularized movement among African American women who would rather live or remain child-free until the time of their own choosing. When freedom is mentioned in reference to her richness, it's regarding the financial independence of her child-free status. The rich aunt can utilize her dispensable income on herself rather than the everyday and major expenses of raising a child. Rich aunt content creators fit this narrative by their attire- the fancy clothes. It comes as no surprise that the only value of richness and freedom is associated with her pockets.

For many Black Women, there is a heightened fear of childbirth. Hypothetically, this is in part of the high maternal mortality rate. According to Donna Hoyert, in 2021, the maternal mortality rate for Black Women was 69.9 per 100,000 births.⁶⁹ This was 2.6 times higher than their white counterparts. Even I, as a Black woman, am terrified of death from childbirth as women in my family and close friends battled issues such as high blood pressure and preeclampsia. Professional tennis player Serena Williams even

⁶⁹ Donna Hoyert, "Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States 2021" last modified March 16, 2023, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/maternal-mortality/2021/maternal-mortality-rates-2021.pdf>.

suffered a pulmonary embolism (and was initially ignored) after giving birth to her first child.⁷⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s 2017 study of the United States fertility rate showed a decline among minority women all around.⁷¹

Rachel Cargle, the founder of Rich Auntie Supreme, reported, “I was seeing online the decision not to have kids seem to be rooted in a dislike for children.⁷²” Immediately she understood those feelings were anecdotal and far-fetched to hers. In explaining her choice of using “auntie” she highlighted the bond and support of families while simultaneously symbolizing freedom and community. Given her explanation, women identifying as such are still contributing members to their family structures and society. Choosing to live child-free does not make her less of a “woman,” nor does it make her less joyful or dysfunctional to the African American community.⁷³

As discussed in the results chapter, a significant portion of the Cooking Aunt videos revolved around family gatherings, including Thanksgiving, Christmas, 4th of July, and casual cookouts. Passing down generational recipes and teaching young people to prepare favorite family dishes were among the examples found grounded in Black women's expertise. Authors Zinobia and Taylor declare this practice sacred and rooted in Black spirituality.⁷⁴ In a similar fashion, characteristics of the Cooking aunt were also

⁷⁰ Claire Miller, Sarah Kliff and Larry Buchanan, “Childbirth is Deadlier for Black Families Even When They’re Rich, Expansive Study Finds” New York Times (New York, Feb. 12, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/02/12/upshot/child-maternal-mortality-rich-poor.html>

⁷¹ Lymon Stone, “Baby Bust: Fertility is Declining the Most Among Minority Women,” *Institute for Family Studies*, March 16, 2018, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/baby-bust-fertility-is-declining-the-most-among-minority-women>

⁷² Elizabeth Ayoola, “The Rich Auntie Movement is Empowering Black Women Who Don’t Want Kids,” *Essence*, March 1, 2023, <https://www.essence.com/lifestyle/the-rich-auntie-movement/>.”

⁷³ Ayoola, “The Rich Auntie Movement is Empowering Black Women Who Don’t Want Kids.”

⁷⁴ Zinobia and Taylor, “The Girls are Alright: Examining Protective Factors of US Black Culture and Its Impact on the Resilience of Black Girls and Women,” 222.

found in Nigerian wives, as detailed by Sandarkasa. “Wives throughout the compound collectively were responsible for preparing and distributing food for special occasions such as weddings, naming ceremonies and funerals.⁷⁵ Although this detail falls under Afrocentricity, it demonstrates one of the many continual traits between Nigerian and African American women.

Categories neither aligning with Afrocentricity nor Africana Womanism

Rich Aunts’ refusal to reproduce, the Messy Aunts’ continuation to spread chaos and the ideology behind Cool Aunts did not align with either theory. Features within their characteristics lie in western ideologies. This is not to say the category as a whole does not align with either theory, just components of its core concept.

While Rich aunts’ interest in “freedom” may be viewed as a form of liberation, one might argue that the decision to withhold from reproducing for leisure and luxurious outings is selfish. “In the west the self is primary, and survival depends on the cultivation of self-centeredness.⁷⁶” This perception undercuts the African value of communalism (togetherness, us) while correlating directly with the Eurocentric concept of individuality (self, me before you).

The decision of women to prioritize their personal goals over starting a family has been associated with the third wave of feminism, which is referred to as "choice feminism."⁷⁷ While this phase has been glamorized as the wave of sexual liberation,

⁷⁵ Niara Sudarkasa, “African and African American Family Structure,” in *The Strength of Our Mothers African and African American Women & Families: Essays and Speeches*, (Trenton, New Jersey: African World Press, 1996), 100.

⁷⁶ Marimba Ani, “Individuality”, “Freedom” and “Self,” in *Yorugu: An Afrikan-Centred Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior* (Baltimore: Afrikan World Books, 1994), 341.

⁷⁷ R. Claire Snyder-Hall, “Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of "Choice,” *Perspective on Politics*, 8 no.1 (2010): pp. 255-261, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25698533>, 255.

choice feminism, according to Snyder-Hall, advocated freedom not as "the capacity to make individual choices" but rather as the ability to determine your own life path.⁷⁸ It can be argued that the Rich aunt's ulterior motive to remain single and child-free stems from this idea. This doctrine can potentially offset complementary relations in the African American community. According to Africana Womanism, this can cause tension and damage to the community's defense to fight white supremacy given its belief that the survival of the African race falls on African women and men working together. This is not to say that individuality does not exist in African traditions, but community advancement should always be a priority.

Mwalimu Baruti, however, argues that the choice not to produce offspring is escaping responsibilities. Baruti claims, "It is our responsibility. Without procreation, the family would cease to exist and there would no longer be the possibility of nation-building. Only in a nonAfrican reality could children become a burden, a restraint on the parents' upward and/ or spatial "mobility," an abortive choice."⁷⁹ In traditional African values, the cycle of life is among the most important.

The idea of the Messy aunt telling the story is connected to the culture, but the stories she tells, we can problematize as we continue to observe aunties in our culture and their responsibilities as cultural keepers. Most Messy Black aunts were depicted as infamous gossipers with nasty attitudes and two-faced behavior. Unfortunately, this type of aunt is noticeably found throughout the results at an alarming amount. On the opposing side, "clapping back season" gained popularity through multiple social

⁷⁸ Ibid, 256.

⁷⁹ Mwalimu K. Bomani Baruti, "Complementary: The Quality of IWA in Love," in *IWA: A Warrior's Character* (Atlanta: Akoben House, 2010), 204.

platforms as nieces and nephews immediately directed rude comments back at their messy aunts. While these videos produced humorous content, it's grounded in violence. This behavior is not grounded in either theory, for it is a vicious cycle of constantly attempting to hurt the other person. The root of its demeanor is very anti-community.

Lastly, while the Cool Aunts had relatable moments aligning with both theories, the gist of her being cool is mainly because of her laid-back mentality. Any aunt can be cool, but every aunt cannot cook, be considered wealthy or take in nieces and nephews. Therefore, being cool on its own does not have a firm grounding by itself.

Additional Findings- Stereotypes

While my research aimed to examine the social role of Black Aunts through TikTok videos, it would be a disservice not to acknowledge the stereotypes demonstrated in them. Stereotypes have haunted Black Women for centuries affecting their living experiences. Unfortunately, its rampant ignorance is prevailing throughout digital media as well. Listed below are the repeated illustrations found in my research.

- Older aunts dress tacky. Their attire is way out of season. They're constantly wearing a worn-out wig or a bandana. They're portrayed sauntering with a slouch and out of breath.
- Older aunts -portrayed mainly by men- had astronomically large breasts, buttocks and hips. (Content creators would stuff their clothes with pillows)
- Older aunts were prudes not capable of having fun.
- Cooking aunts have the national "cooking arm." (When she stretches her arm, a significant amount of her arm jiggles.)
- "Hood" aunts are loud, have many kids and only come to functions for food and gossip.
- All Bougie aunts have nasty attitudes.
- Rich aunts are child and man free.
- Young aunts are incapable of cooking a proper meal.

“Overturning the negative stereotype recognizes and reclaims Black (African) women’s spiritual power and consciousness heritage.”⁸⁰ To the untrained mind, constantly seeing stereotypes contorts one’s perception. Not only are these stereotypes egregious, but they’re easily accessible for anyone to watch. Khubchandani described the stereotypical aunt’s attire as “frugal, out of style and gaudy accessories.”⁸¹ The historical taunt insinuating overweight women as great cooks pipelines to Aunt Jemima’s “mammy” stereotypes.⁸² Problematic for many reasons, the attempt to personify women with excessive buttocks for comedy ties directly to the “Europeans’ perverse and racist fascination with enlarged buttocks” with Saartjee, Saraah Bartman.⁸³ Satirical as is Black Women, during the Reagan era, they were labeled hood for receiving welfare although they were neither the majority nor the original receivers.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Joyce E. King, “Staying Human: Forty Years of Black Studies Practical Critical Activity in the Spirit of (Aunt) Jemima,” *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies - Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity*, no.14 (2019), 11, doi: 10.1080/18186874.2019.1690399

⁸¹ Khubchandani, “Critical aunty studies: an aintroduction,” 229.

⁸² Joyce King, “Staying Human: Forty Years of Black Studies Practical Critical Activity in the Spirit of (Aunt) Jemima,” *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies -Multi-, and Transdisciplinarity*, 14 no.2 (2019): pp. 9-31, <https://doi.org.10.1080/18186874.2019.1690399>, 13.

⁸³ Brenda Schmahmann, “Senzeni Marasela’s Reworking of Women’s Histories in Beyond Booty: Covering Sarah Baartman and Other Tales,” *TEXTILE*, 19 no.1 (2021): pp. 49-75, doi: 10.1080/14759756.2020.1773612, 53.

⁸⁴ Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, “Welfare Crises, Penal Solutions, and the Origins of the “Welfare Queen,” *Journal of Urban History* 41 no.5 (2015): pp. 756-771, doi:/10.1177/0096144215589942, 757.

CONCLUSION

Aunts become members of the family through passion and commitment. Her influence in the community is the crux of the village, providing emotional and social support to anyone in need. Undeniably, these women willingly undertake the responsibility of imparting knowledge and preserving Black culture, safeguarding the well-being of children both mentally and physically, and molding the very essence of the community. As seen in Chapter 4, these conceptions are performed through storytelling, sisterhood, family traditions and more.

To thoroughly examine the social role of Black Aunts, we must first acknowledge and recognize these women as leaders in the community and their villages would fall apart without their presence. Scholarship provided by Zinobia & Taylor, Dove, Sandarkasa, Oyewumi and Davis-Sowers, Harden, etc., ensured readers understood Black Aunts operate as the glue of her family. This perception is demonstrated by extending herself across the multiple roles in the results chapter.

Though the terms village and extended family are used interchangeably, they function on the same beliefs. Like traditional African Family Structures, the family is considered anyone of blood relations including parents, children, grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews.⁸⁵ However, the African American family structure, in comparison to the African family structure, includes non-blood-related people. As defined earlier, an aunt could be a long-term family friend or a random woman one has

⁸⁵ Kholofelo Charlotte Motha, "Educational Support for Orphaned Children: What Can We Learn from the African Extended Family Structure?" *Children & Society*, no.32, (2018): 51.

encountered. Essentially “That’s where you get Aunt Rene or Aunt Keisha, when in fact, she may just be your mother’s choir mate or mother’s best friend.”⁸⁶

A question posed in the introduction asked if aunts came in a one size fits all. One of the limitations surrounding this topic was placing them in that Eurocentric frame. Attempting to view Black Aunts from a lens other than Afrocentricity is detrimental, being Black Aunts are valued differently in African American culture. It would be impossible to get a complete insight into Black Aunts and their contributions if they were being researched from epistemologies created to place them on the margins of society. The following differences from previous literature were present in my research: 1) African American women were centered in their culture. 2) Their roles were traced to West African family structures thus creating cultural unity. 3) The usage of social media videos (TikTok) comprised the sample collection. Each video featured an aunt displaying their life or Black content creators imitating them. 4) It dismantled the idea of aunts only being blood-related. 5) It highlighted the variations of aunts in the Black community. 6) Lastly, Afrocentricity and Africana Womanism were present in most videos.

The ability to research Black people and their phenomena is the basis of Afrocentricity. With Africana Womanism branching from Afrocentricity, it too would not exist if Black Women’s experiences were never considered. These considerations should be taken wholeheartedly in the discussion of Black aunts. The real change starts with Afrocentric scholars. When dislocated Black scholars continue to produce scholarship grounded in Eurocentricity, they continue the heinous cycle of mental abuse among their

⁸⁶ Brandon T. Harden, “They may not get a holiday but ‘aunt’s are the backbone of the black community,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 13, 2018.

own people. Analyzing TikTok videos provided valuable insight into how African Americans view their aunts. Although great strides advocating the exploration of Black aunts have been made, more social and historical research is needed to further enhance their representation in academic spaces. If aunts are truly beloved as they are often claimed to be, then the level of affection shown should match the level of recognition and appreciation given to them.

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