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"Dreams are not for people who look like you" – The social construction of Black girlhood in Jacqueline Woodson's *Another Brooklyn*

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This thesis examines the social construction of Black girlhood in the novel *Another Brooklyn* by Jacqueline Woodson (2016). It focuses on analysing the main character's coming-of-age experience, viewing Black girlhood as a site on which multiple systems of oppression intersect. The analysis is executed utilizing two theoretical approaches: intersectional feminism and social constructionism. The thesis is thus based upon two premises – firstly, that womanhood is shaped by multiple systems of power and is thus not a unified experience for all women, and secondly, that these systems of power uphold controlling images of Black womanhood through socially constructed knowledge.

The thesis posits that controlling and at times contradicting social expectations restrict August's agency and formation of a positive self-image. The relationship between August and her three friends is seen as a space in which a culture of resistance against Black girls' treatment as the 'other' is cultivated. Through processes of re-socialization, August finds ways to deconstruct and be liberated from essentialist notions of 'true womanhood'. *Another Brooklyn* thus succeeds in demonstrating the ways Black girlhood is socially constructed through externally defined, oppressive controlling images. However, Black girlhood and womanhood are also portrayed as sites for finding positive self-definitions and resisting systematic devaluation.

Key words: intersectional feminism, Black feminist criticism, social constructionism, African American literature, otherness, Jacqueline Woodson, *Another Brooklyn*

Table of contents

1   Introduction

> Somehow, my brother and I grew up motherless yet halfway whole. My brother had the faith my father brought him to, and for a long time, I had Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi, the four of us sharing the weight of growing up *Girl* in Brooklyn, as though it was a bag of stones we passed among ourselves saying, *Here. Help me carry this.* (August's narration in *Another Brooklyn*, 4)

In the excerpt above, the protagonist of Jacqueline Woodson's 2016 novel *Another Brooklyn* – August – compares the burden of having grown up as a girl in Brooklyn in the 1970s to carrying a bag of stones. In this thesis, I analyze *Another Brooklyn* (henceforth *Brooklyn*) and what this "weight of growing up" means for August as a lower-class girl of color. More specifically, I examine how August's coming-of-age experience is affected by intersecting social expectations and presumptions, and how she reacts to these expectations. Applying social constructionist theory to intersectional feminism, I argue that controlling and at times contradicting expectations restrict August's agency and formation of a positive self-image. The relationship between August and her three friends is seen as a space in which a culture of resistance against Black girls' treatment as the 'other' is cultivated. Through processes of re-socialization, August learns to subvert essentialist assumptions that have formerly controlled her. Keys to this liberation for August are going to college and discovering jazz music. *Brooklyn* thus succeeds in demonstrating the ways Black girlhood is socially constructed through essentialist assumptions and oppressive controlling images. However, Black girlhood and womanhood are also portrayed as powerful sites for resisting and deconstructing these assumptions and expectations. I will tie the analysis to Black feminist writings about systematic oppression and inequality by, e.g., Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks and Barbara Smith to further understand the complexity of August's narrative.

Brooklyn is a lyrical coming-of-age story of August and her three childhood friends, Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi. The frame story is about the grown-up August, now a successful anthropologist, reminiscing her past when revisiting Bushwick, her childhood neighborhood, for her father's funeral. She looks back on her friendship with the three girls and the painful memories tracing back to their seemingly carefree teenage years. The novel portrays the growing pains brought by entering puberty, sexual abuse being one prominent threat faced by the girls. At the time, the girls' friendship means everything to August, but by the time she accidentally encounters Sylvia as an adult, the two are no longer friends, she has lost touch with Angela, and Gigi has committed suicide. The themes of the novel include sexuality, body, class, death, and religion, of which I have chosen class, sexuality, and body as the focal

points of my analysis, as they may be regarded as important sites where systems of gender and race intersect.

In the first paragraph of the novel, the adult August declares: "[W]hat is tragic isn't the moment. It is the memory" (*Brooklyn*, 1), which I believe to be a pivotal idea in the book: when living her childhood, the conditions of her life were a given to August – she only understands the tragedies of her life in retrospect. In addition, living in denial and seeking distractions is one recurring theme in the novel. The title *Another Brooklyn* appears to refer to people trying to distract themselves from their current situations: "Everywhere we looked, we saw the people trying to dream themselves out. As though there was someplace other than this place. As though there was **another Brooklyn**" (*Brooklyn*, 77; emphasis added). For most of her youth, August is unable to accept that her mother has died of suicide (*Brooklyn*, 166–67). Moreover, the grown-up August does not seem to be ready to face his father's recent death in the present: "I tried not to think about the return to my father's apartment alone, the deep relief and fear that came with death" (*Brooklyn*, 8). Perhaps, like those people she saw "dreaming themselves out," August finds a way of distracting herself by thinking about her youth, which makes up the bulk of the novel. Every now and then, the present-time August brings up death rituals of different cultures, which is her field of research, possibly to help her cope with her own losses: "In Fiji, so that the dead were not left alone in the next world, their loved ones were strangled in this one, the family reunited in the afterlife" (*Brooklyn*, 167).

Although *Brooklyn* is a fictive story, African American author Jacqueline Woodson's own background and memories from her youth function as a backdrop for the novel and places it in the "real world" in a sense. The 170-page novel is narrated by August as she goes through her childhood memories primarily based on the years she lived in Bushwick with her father and little brother from 1973 onwards, from the age of eight to sixteen. The book's dedication reads: "For Bushwick (1970–1990) / In Memory." In an interview with Budd Mishkin (2016), the author explains that she wanted to "put Bushwick in the pages as it existed in the '70s and '80s" (0:04), and that it was her intention to create a "spare and engaging and urgent narrative that existed in, um, a small place and time" (0:34). While *Brooklyn* is not a memoir, Bushwick is presented in a way Woodson remembers it, complemented by her research about the phenomena that occurred in and changed the neighborhood at the time (PBS Books 2016, 4:10). This considered, August's story can be viewed to reflect Woodson's views of the Bushwick she grew up knowing. Woodson also notes that there are bits of her in every

character she has written, and that the story has been influenced by her sheltered youth and religious upbringing (ibid.).

In the author's note section of *Brooklyn* (171–74), Woodson explains that prior to the beginning of the writing process, she thought about "what it means to grow up girl in [the United States]." Partly using her own experience and memories, she began to sketch the story of August and her three friends. Finally, Woodson asks herself: "Do I know more now? About girlhood? About what it means to be a woman of color, vibrant and visible and adored? About what it means to hold on to that love and then, just as quickly, let it go? I think so…" As I read *Brooklyn* for the first time, similar questions about girlhood, color, love, and society that Woodson describes having thought of, took hold of my attention as well. The question of "what it means to grow up girl" in the country of hierarchy and oppositions, especially as a lower-class person of color in the 1970s, has guided me towards analyzing the novel as an intersectional feminist work with the supposition that immutable factors of self, such as gender and race, bear social meanings which affect one's life when growing up.

My motive for choosing this topic lies in my own interest toward the subject and my fondness of the novel under examination, as well as in the importance of bringing forth and discussing the works of Black female writers, especially Black lesbian writers, who generally have been underrepresented in literary discussions (Smith 1985, 3–4). While the number of published works by Black female and LGBTQ+ authors has increased rapidly since the 1970s and the plurality of African American experiences are more widely acknowledged instead of simply considering the Black male experience as the norm (Dickson-Carr 2005, 2–16), Black female history and literature remain in the margin in women's studies (Ducille 2006, para. 38). On the other hand, due to the growth of public interest on Black female issues, more knowledge is made accessible to larger audiences, thus making the choice of this particular topic possible for me.

Although generalizing the African American female experience and repeating the narrative of Black women simply "having it worse" than the rest of the world is to be avoided (Hill Collins 2000, 124; Carby 1987, 10), gender, race, class, and sexuality should be acknowledged as "systems of domination in which individuals construct unique identities" as remarked by Patricia Hill Collins (2000, 127). Moreover, Hill Collins (2000, 128) adds that there is a "collective standpoint" of similar experiences and history that connects Black women. This said, while connecting theoretical considerations to my own interpretations on

the thoughts and struggles of a fictional character, I also recognize the diversity of Black female experiences in the US, which is to say that any of the interpretations made in this thesis are not to be understood as attempts to generalize or universalize experiences of millions of African American women but rather, as attempts to understand the social conditions of said "collective standpoint" and its presence in the novel under scrutiny. In any case, I think it is valuable for privileged people such as myself to inform ourselves about Black rights issues in order to attain a more comprehensive understanding about the conditions that intersecting systems of power posit, and thus promote the liberation of people who are persistently pushed to the margins of society.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. In chapter 2, I introduce the theoretical frameworks functioning as a background for the thesis. I first discuss feminism and its amalgamation with intersectionality and post-structuralist theory. Next, I talk briefly about social constructionism and link it to Judith Butler's notions on gender performativity and the 'otherness' of Black women. The analysis of *Brooklyn* takes place in chapters 3, 4 and 5, which focus on themes of class, sexuality, and body, respectively. In these chapters, I analyze situations that depict the reality of Black girlhood as a socially constructed one, and which measures are taken to subvert the controlling constructs. As the events of the novel take place in a 'real' time and space, I use socio-historical information and to understand the extensive implications of racial-sexist oppression on Black girlhood. Finally, to conclude the thesis, I bring the main points of the analysis together in chapter 6 while also discussing the possible limits of this study.

Before moving on to the theoretical background of the present study, a few disclaimers about the stylistic and terminological choices opted for in the thesis are in order. First, it should be noted that in *Brooklyn*, dialogue is indicated with italicization of the words instead of quotation marks. All italicized emphases found in the direct citations are therefore original; mine are indicated with boldface. Secondly, despite the problems with talking about *race* when referring to African American people, I continue to use the term to distinguish race, an established social category primarily determined by one's physical traits, from *ethnicity*, a term that most commonly concerns categorization based on cultural identity (Merriam-Webster 2021, para. 1). I do not agree, however, with the biologically essentialist ideology behind the emergence of the term. Rather, race is viewed as a tool for social identification, and as a culturally constructed system that creates and upholds structures of privilege. Referring to *race* and *Blackness* when discussing African American people of color is also

exercised in order to stay in concordance with the terminology used by Black feminist scholars. Further, Black as a term signifying a racial identity is capitalized in this thesis to recognize and respect the shared history and identity of African American people, thus following the style used by Black feminists such as Angela Y. Davis ([1981] 1983), Barbara Smith (1998), Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), and Patricia Hill Collins ([1990] 1991).

2   Theoretical background

In this chapter, I introduce the theoretical background and methodological approaches of the present study. On the basis of the theoretical frameworks, the analysis of the novel is underlain by two overarching premises: firstly, that being a woman is not a unified experience but is also shaped by other systems such as race, class and sexuality, and secondly, that these systems of power create socially specific conditions from which essentialist notions about Black womanhood, for instance, emerge. In section 2.1, I discuss the relevance of intersectional feminist criticism by examining the shortcomings of the women's rights movement and universalist feminism while opting for a more diverse, post-structuralist view of womanhood. In section 2.2, I introduce the main ideas of social constructionism as theorized by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann and connect them to Butler's notions of gender performativity. Finally, I bring together ideas of intersectional feminism and social constructionism to discuss the construction of the Black female identity and agency. Introducing the theoretical frameworks of the present study is accompanied by relevant examples from *Brooklyn* to place these considerations in context.

2.1   Feminisms and intersectionality

While feminism is a household term in the contemporary society and most people have an idea of its main objectives, feminist thinking has a long and complex history with multiple different subcategories and dimensions to it. The feminist movement is often, though not unproblematically, divided into three waves. In general terms, the first wave emerged in the mid-19th century and lasted roughly until the Second World War, although both the starting point and the endpoint can be debated upon (Moynagh and Forestell 2011, xxiii). The first wave of feminism was mostly motivated by demands of equality between men and women and promoted women's suffrage and right to work, for example. Having been dominated by middle- and upper-class white women, the women's rights movement was for the most part both racist and classist in nature (hooks [1981] 1992, 122–49; Davis [1981] 1983, chap. 3–4).

This thesis utilizes selected ideas of both second-wave and third-wave feminists. Second-wave feminism was a diverse and highly theoretical movement in the 1960s and 1970s. In the US, it emerged in connection with other leftist postwar movements such as the Black Power movement (Krˌløkke and Sørensen 2005, 8). While it was mostly concerned with revealing the extent of patriarchy in everyday life and promoting solidarity and sisterhood among all

women, there was also a rise of 'difference feminism' or 'identity feminism,' whose advocates of marginalized backgrounds addressed the differences and inequality between women (Kroløkke and Sørensen 2005, 10–12). For instance, the works of bell hooks ([1981] 1992) and Angela Y. Davis ([1981] 1983) addressed the ways race should be brought into feminist discussion. In Europe, French feminists suggested deconstructing the universalist assumptions revolving around the binary notion of gender and developed, for instance, the idea of *l'écriture féminine* (Kroløkke and Sørensen 2005, 13–14). Like the second wave, third-wave feminism is also a multi-dimensional and diverse phenomenon. Among other things, third-wave feminists are interested in promoting anti-essentialist thinking and, for instance, expanding the definition and boundaries of gender (Kroløkke and Sørensen 2005, 16–17). Embracing ambiguity and uncertainty, third-wave feminists are fueled by the will to redefine feminism and accept the chaotic nature of the world (Kroløkke and Sørensen 2005, 17–18). Third-wave feminism serves as a platform for the development of various subcategories of feminism such as postcolonial feminism and queer theory (Kroløkke and Sørensen 2005, 19). One of the best-known third-wave theorists is Judith Butler, whose ideas are discussed in subsection 2.2.2.

Feminist literary criticism started to develop in the 1960s and 1970s due to the second wave of feminism (Barry 2017, 123). Literary criticism was closely tied to the women's movement, which means that it is not to be looked at as a subcategory of feminism as such, but as a crucial part of feminist thought (ibid.). For instance, in her classic work *Sexual Politics* ([1971] 1977), Kate Millett criticized the ways women are portrayed in fiction written by men while also theorizing feminism as a whole. Another notable second-wave feminist to criticize American literature is Judith Fetterley, who brings attention to the powerlessness of women in literature and argues that literature highlights how "the experience of being American is equated with the experience of being male" (1981, xii). According to Gayale Greene and Coppélia Kahn (1985, 1), feminist literary criticism is guided by two underlying premises: first, that the inequality between the male and female gender is a cultural construct, and second, that the assumed universality of the male experience has dominated the way knowledge is produced. In conclusion, "gender is constructed in patriarchy to serve the interests of male supremacy" (Greene and Kahn 1985, 3). The objective of feminist criticism is twofold – first, it aims to reveal and deconstruct the universalist, sexist assumptions about women, and secondly, to bring about more varied insights into women's experiences and

contributions to culture (Greene and Kahn 1985, 1–2). With the present thesis, my aim is to maintain this tradition.

2.1.1 The need for Black and intersectional feminism

Intersectional feminism emerged from the Black feminist movement of the second wave of feminism (Carastathis 2016, 15). It maintains that the power relations causing these social hierarchies do not function in isolation but are mutually reinforcing (Phipps 2021, 275). This was not recognized sufficiently during the first wave of feminism, as the women's rights movement of the time largely excluded the interests of Black women. While claiming that all women have the same social status (hooks [1981] 1992, 120), white women praised Black women for the very roles white women wanted to reject, such as the role of a child bearer and a sex object (hooks [1981] 1992, 5). Moreover, white feminists talked about work as a liberating force (hooks [1981] 1992, 146), which was deemed rather ironic by Black women considering their history of enslavement, and the tendency of white women to continue using Black women as a source of cheap domestic work after emancipation in order to maintain their class positions (Hill Collins 2000, 74). To Black women, racism was a more pressing issue than sexism at the time (hooks [1981] 1992, 1), and while white women of the feminist movement failed to address racism, Black male activists of the time upheld patriarchal interests (hooks [1981] 1992, 8–9; Crenshaw 1991, 1252–53). This left Black women in 'double bind', as expressed by Sojourner Truth (hooks [1981] 1992, 3–4).

Black feminism, a diverse movement in itself, emerged during the second wave of feminism (Krøløkke and Sørensen 2005, 14). As mentioned, Black women did not always relate to the issues of white women, and they problematized the way political movements discussed one social issue at a time separately from others and thus failed to recognize the conditions of Black women's social lives (Hill Collins and Bilge 2016, chap. 1, para. 4). One of the early Black feminist groups was the Combahee River Collective, who were among the first ones to articulate the need for intersectional feminist methodology (Ruíz 2018, 337; Hill Collins and Bilge 2016, chap. 3). In *A Black Feminist Statement*, the collective talk about the intersecting oppressive forces that make their position in society unique:

> The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we
> are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class
> oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis
> and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are
> interlocking. **The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our**

> **lives.** As black women we see black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face. (The Combahee River Collective [1977] 2019, 29; emphasis added)

This statement encompasses the core idea of intersectional thought: the synthesis of interlocking systems of oppression places individuals in different social positions. A similar account is made later by Hill Collins ([1990] 1991, 222), who calls for analyzing different systems of oppression as interlocked instead of studying them separately. This "expands the focus of analysis from merely describing the similarities and differences distinguishing these systems of oppression and focuses greater attention on how they interconnect" (ibid.). A critical stance towards universalist views of women is also taken by Butler (2002, 19–20), who states that "the insistence upon the coherence and unity of the category of women has effectively refused the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of "women" are constructed." All these statements thus demand analysis on the intersections of gender, race, class and sexuality as mutually shaping women's lives. For instance, sexual abuse is not only attributable to patriarchal sexism but also to the fact that women of color and of lower class are more vulnerable to reproductive and sexual exploitation compared to white and wealthy women (hooks [1981] 1992, 74; Millett [1971] 1977, 122).

2.1.2 Post-structural, anti-essentialist feminism

As the third wave of feminism celebrates the chaotic nature of the world, it has also been influenced by post-structuralist thought. In her essay "Feminist, Female, Feminine" (1989), Toril Moi discusses the differences between the terms present in the title and problematizes the binary oppositions by which we define those terms as well as the essentialist thinking common to first-wave and, to some extent, second-wave feminist thought. When trying to redefine what femaleness and femininity is, feminists buy into the inaccurate and oppressive nature of binary oppositions and patriarchal metaphysics (Moi 1989, 123–24). For instance, Moi argues that Hélène Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine* leans on a form of biological essentialism (Moi 1989, 125). Crediting Cixous' other work, Moi suggests the act of deconstruction developed by Jacques Derrida to be applied to feminist criticism in order to not fall in the trap of patriarchal essentialism. Discarding the notion of the world consisting of static binaries such as male/female and masculine/feminine allows us to adopt more plural concepts of female identity and truly free ourselves from social normativity and essentialist thinking. Appropriating a male philosopher's theory does not contradict with the core idea of

feminism, Moi argues, as all ideas, feminist ones included, are more or less "'contaminated' by patriarchal ideology" due to the all-pervasive history of patriarchal power (Moi 1989, 118). The origins of a particular idea, Moi argues, is not in itself important, but what matters is how it is used and what effects it has (ibid.).

As the notion of a universal essence unifying all women is abandoned, the implications of anti-essentialist feminism on politicizing women as a group may be problematized (Barry 2017, 134–35; Crenshaw 1991, 1299). While focusing on the 'unifying essence' might help promote sisterhood among women, it fails to take into account the different social conditions that diversify the experiences of women and posit them in social hierarchies, as is established in discussions about the women's rights movement during the first wave of feminism. There is indeed a need to recognize differences among individuals within the group in question, as all women are also in one way or another affected by other social dimensions such as race and class (Crenshaw 1991, 1242). However, one might not need to abandon categorization entirely: according to Crenshaw (1991, 1299), demanding this might raise too much anxiety, and "[r]ecognizing that identity politics takes place at the site where categories intersect thus seems more fruitful than challenging the possibility of talking about categories at all." Perhaps, rather than viewing femininity as an essence, one might consider it as a *position*, as contemplated by Moi (1989, 127).

As may be seen in the paragraph above, the post-structural, anti-essentialist approach shares various ideas with intersectional thought. All women are not the same and do not share the same experiences, and Black women are not just Black and female but hold culturally specific experiences and conditions due to the synthesis of these interlocking systems. In this thesis, femaleness is approached from a post-structuralist angle in the sense that binary oppositions and essentialist notions of womanhood and sexuality are seen as products of social and cultural structures. As we shall see, essentialist assumptions revolving around Black womanhood restrict August's agency and freedom to express herself and pursue her dreams. As she grows up, August learns to resist – in other words, deconstruct – those expectations and controlling images she faces as a teenager.

2.1.3 Intersectional feminism as an anti-essentialist method

Intersectional feminism is used as a lens through which the analysis of the present study is conducted. Since the experience of being a woman is not a unified entity but a complex and ever-changing one, feminist literary criticism needs to recognize the relevance of various,

mutually reinforcing axes of power that affect those experiences and therefore, affect the literary works made by, and written about, women. Intersectionality may thus be used as a method to deconstruct the universalist notions regarding womanhood by analyzing literary texts in relation to those complex power structures instead of only focusing on the single axis of gender. To do this, I deem it necessary to understand how the intersecting power relations are reflected and discussed in literature. In particular, the relevance of studying Black women's literature, and the literary traditions of Black women are discussed in this subsection.

Studying Black female authors' texts through the intersectional lens is worthwhile for a number of reasons. First of all, in literary texts, struggles present in real lives of African American women are uncovered. According to Hill Collins ([1990] 1991, 83), Black women's literature is a medium through which the struggles and internalized oppression of Black women may be addressed and studied:

> Literature by Black women writers provides the most comprehensive view of Black women's struggles to form positive self-definitions in the face of denigrated images of Black womanhood. Portraying the range of ways that African-American women experience internalized oppression is a prominent theme in Black women's writing.

Thus, literature provides an opportunity to understand the specific nature of oppression experienced by Black women, if one considers that "internalized oppression" and "denigrated images of Black womanhood" result from intersecting and mutually oppressive power systems of gender and race. Secondly, expression through the written word is a particularly empowering way of resistance for Black women, for whom literature has long been made inaccessible (Hill Collins [1990] 1991, 102). Finally, discussing texts written by Black female authors is a way to recognize and bring forth the intellectual tradition and knowledge produced by an oppressed group, as suppressing this knowledge has made domination of Black women as a group easier (Hill Collins [1990] 1991, 5).

In literature, the resistance of Black women against externally created controlling images are reflected in certain recurring themes. These include depictions of the "suspended woman" who may find relief in drugs, religion or madness, Black female characters denying and rejecting connections to other Black women in order to dismantle the negative status associated with their skin color, and the process of personal growth toward positive self-definitions (Hill Collins [1990] 1991, 83–84). The last theme is particularly applicable to

Brooklyn, as August's journey shares a similar arch with that of another novel's character discussed by Hill Collins ([1990] 1991, 84–85):

> The personal growth experienced by Renay, the heroine in Ann Allen Shockley's *Loving Her* (1974), illustrates the process of rejecting externally defined controlling images of Black womanhood. […] By the novel's end Renay has begun to resist all external definitions of herself that stem from controlling images applied to Blacks, women, and lesbians.

The other two themes are also somewhat present in the novel. There are indeed Black female characters who use drugs (Miss Dora, a neighbor whose son has died in the Vietnam War), are absorbed in their religion (Sister Loretta), and turn mad (August's mother). August herself could symbolically be seen as a "suspended" girl especially at the beginning of the novel, as she watches Sylvia, Angela and Gigi through the apartment window while being forbidden to go outside (*Brooklyn*, 18–19). Sylvia's family, in turn, are trying to distance themselves from the 'common' Black people by emphasizing their class status and cultural civilization, which will be discussed in chapter 3. Lastly, African American women tend to write about African American women and their relationships (Hill Collins [1990] 1991, 98), which is a prevalent theme in *Brooklyn* as well.

In order to fight the essentialist assumptions about Black women, Hill Collins ([1990] 1991, 106) brings into focus the importance of self-definition as a way of resistance, since "[t]he journey toward self-definition offers a powerful challenge to the externally defined, controlling images of African-American women." This empowering resistance may occur via various ways of action, but also through self-knowledge and development of consciousness (Hill Collins [1990] 1991, 110–11). A Black female character becoming empowered by her changed consciousness is often present in Black women's literature as well, which can further empower the readers (ibid.). Therefore, the act of writing itself is a way of resisting systems of oppression (Hill Collins [1990] 1991, 102). August's story may thus be seen to resist interlocking systems of oppression in two ways: through the arch of August's character, and through the very act of Woodson writing her story.

In her essay "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," Barbara Smith discusses the need for Black feminist literary criticism and lists some main principles a critic could make use of. She talks about recognizing the identifiable literary tradition of Black women in terms of themes, style, aesthetics, and concepts (Smith 1985, 8–9). Similar to Cixous' (1976) thoughts on women's writing, Smith mentions the specific language intentionally used by Black women to

describe their and their characters' thoughts, and notes that "[the] use of black women's language and cultural experience in books *by* black women *about* black women results in a miraculously rich coalescing of form and content and also takes their writing far beyond the confines of white/male literary structures" (ibid.). Therefore, paying close attention to wordings and language may prove useful in Black and intersectional feminist literary criticism, and will thus be exercised in the present study.

When discussing *Brooklyn*, understanding the uniqueness of Black female authors' literary tradition would benefit the conversation, as may be seen in the reviews and comments about the novel online. One of the uppermost and most liked review on Goodreads.com is a rather negative one written by, judged by her profile, a white British woman named Emily May (2016). The majority of her criticism is aimed at the "flowery, distant and fragmented" language that she does not relate to, as she makes fun of a piece of dialogue where Gigi says that August looked "[*l*]*ost and beautiful*" (*Brooklyn,* 38). She also finds the plethora of men described as predatory "ludicrous" (May 2016). While another apparently white person compliments May's reviews and says that he bases his reading decisions partly on them (Bobbi 2016), one reader criticizes her review, saying: "I'm guessing you didn't grow up a poor black or brown girl in 1970's Brooklyn? Maybe you didn't grow up speaking the way these characters do, and maybe the men you knew growing up didn't behave the way the men in this book did, but this was a reality for many of us growing up" (Terry 2016). This thread shows the significance of intersectionality as an anti-essentialist method and respecting the literary decisions Black female authors, as they are distinctive on their own terms and do not necessarily abide by the white tradition or preferences. The lack of understanding where the stylistic and thematical choices come from clearly contributes to other people's way of reading the novel, and even to the choice of not reading it at all.

2.2   The social construction of identity

In this section, I discuss identity, knowledge, and agency from a social constructionist perspective. Linking the theoretical approach to agency, I explore the social construction of Black womanhood by building on the works of Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks. Judith Butler's gender performativity theory is explored as an application of social constructionist thought. However, analyzing ways of doing and undoing gender alone is insufficient when intersectionality is considered, as gender is but one aspect of a complex identity affected by multiple factors that bear social meaning (Butler 2002, 6–7). Therefore, it is more appropriate

to take identity as a whole, with primary focus on the intersection of gender and race, under scrutiny, and approach the matter of identity from a broader social constructionist angle while utilizing Butler's notions of performativity in intersectional contexts.

The rather abstract and unstable concept of identity is used in this thesis to loosely refer to one's subjective idea of oneself in relation to the surrounding society. Berger and Luckmann ([1966] 1991, 152) define *identity* as a "location in a certain world." In short, "the individual becomes what he is addressed as by his significant others" (ibid.). Along with internalized norms that shape one's behavior, identity contributes to the "character of the self as a social product" (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 68). When acquiring an identity, a certain social world is also internalized: "To be given an identity involves being assigned a specific place in the world. As this identity is subjectively appropriated by the child […], so is the world to which this identity points" (ibid.). A child learns and internalizes social norms from their "significant others" and based on these norms, builds a coherent identity which "incorporates within itself all the various internalized roles and attitudes" associated with that identity (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 153). The identity appropriated by a person may be formed, for example, on the basis of the name they are given or the commands they receive as a child (ibid.). Identity is also a "precarious entity," as it depends on the people the subject socializes with, and those people may change over time (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 118). Due to identity being formed in relation to other people's realities, it may be considered to be a particularly *socially* constructed entity. Identity, then, is an important aspect of one's self-image.

2.2.1 Social constructionism: viewing the self as a social product

Social constructionism is a sociological and social psychological approach that is rather challenging to define unanimously due to its multidimensional nature and the disparities among the theorists associated with the theory (Burr 2015, 2). Theorist Kenneth J. Gergen (1985, 266) articulates the main objectives of social constructionism as follows:

> Social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live. It attempts to articulate common forms of understanding as they now exist, as they have existed in prior historical periods, and as they might exist should creative attention be so directed.

The works of Berger and Luckmann may be regarded to succeed in this mission. In *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* ([1966] 1991), Berger and

Luckmann study the production of social knowledge and an individual's subjective idea of the self as a product of socialization. In short, they hold that each 'objective' fact in the social world is a work of subjective consciousness that becomes objectivated through socialization. As they put it, "a man produces himself," meaning that the nature of the human being is constructed by their social environment (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 67–69). The theory is influenced by the Marxist proposition that "man's consciousness is determined by his social being" (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 17). Berger and Luckmann view the social 'reality' as an ongoing dialectical process of internalization, objectivation and externalization and maintain that an individual member of society "externalizes his own being into the social world and internalizes it as an objective reality" ([1966] 1991, 149). Objectivation, in their terms, means "[t]he process by which the externalized products of human activity attain the character of objectivity" (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 78). Internalization deals with the process of the objectivated social world being retrojected into consciousness via socialization (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 78–79). Externalization, in turn, is an "anthropological necessity" that occurs through human activity and produces social order (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 70).

The knowledge that contributes to the perception of one's place in the world is constructed through social practices. According to Berger and Luckmann, the production of social knowledge and thus, the socialization of an individual takes place when interacting with one's environment. The subjective realities of others are conveyed to the individual by different signs and symbols, of which the most important one is language (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 51–56). These subjective realities mediated by surrounding people then become objective information in the recipient's consciousness, especially at an early age (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 149–51). For instance, a child from an upper-class family acquires different kind of 'knowledge' about the world than a child of a lower social status. The validity of the knowledge at hand, then, is taken for granted until further notice (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 58). This knowledge is then internalized, objectified and externalized, and thus continues to construct reality (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 84–85; 121–22). According to Berger and Luckmann, the process of socialization may be divided into two types of interaction: primary socialization, which is the first socialization faced by a child that makes them a member of society, and secondary socialization, which is any type of socialization occurring after primary socialization (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 150). Primary socialization sets the base for the child's worldview, which will be difficult to alter

later (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 152–57). Secondary socialization deals partly with more role-specific knowledge that, according to Berger and Luckmann, has its roots in institutionalization and the division of labor ([1966] 1991, 158). In general, these 'sub-worlds' mediated in secondary socialization carry less significance than the 'base-world' adopted in primary socialization (ibid.). Here, Marx's influence on Berger and Luckmann's theory is apparent.

The 'knowledge' gained through socialization continues to be shaped by following social interactions. Everyday conversations with one's 'significant others' and 'less significant others' maintain and reaffirm the subjective reality one has internalized, and the new information harmonious with this reality builds on the internalized knowledge taken for granted (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 169–72). In the context of *Brooklyn*, compulsory heterosexuality resulting from essentialist assumptions about gender might serve as an example, a topic to be discussed further in 4.3. The reality may also be altered by processes of "re-socialization," which require relationships with people who guide the individual into a new reality and segregation from the people who have previously constructed the individual's reality (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 177–78). August befriending Sylvia, Angela and Gigi after her mother's passing could be seen as an example of reality altering through re-socialization: August's mother tells her not to trust other women (*Brooklyn*, 41), but when in Brooklyn, the girls become close friends and share their secrets (*Brooklyn*, 56). As the girls' friendship deepens, August comes to believe that her mother was wrong (*Brooklyn*, 75). Thus, Sylvia, Gigi and Angela challenge and change August and her mother's 'knowledge' about women.

The subjective realities of the generalized 'others' may also be incoherent and contradict one another, resulting in "unsuccessful socialization," which causes asymmetries between subjective and objective realities (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 183). With unsuccessful socialization, differing roles or identities may arise along with guilt and confusion (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 188–90). August navigating the controlling images of Black girlhood and feeling ashamed when failing to conform to her role as a virtuous daughter, as discussed in 4.2.1, is an example of this kind of shame produced by contradicting messages. Unsuccessful socialization results in one asking, "Who am I?" (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 183). This is the least likely to occur in societies with simple division of labor and minimal distribution of knowledge where each person is assigned a simple position, for instance that of a peasant or a knight (ibid.). A more complex identity,

in turn, arises when other possible realities are revealed through socialization with individuals whose subjective knowledge differ from each other (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 191). I hold that despite the confusion and shame they may bring about, re-socialization and unsuccessful socialization are keys to August's personal liberation: her going to college and thus being separated from the people in her past while finding other possible realities and self-definitions through jazz music help her gain autonomy.

The key implication of Berger and Luckmann's account on this thesis is that knowledge about the world, oneself, and other people largely depend on the environment in which the individual grows up. As described above, 'knowledge' is relative in the sense that it depends largely on subjective realities that are maintained through processes of internalization, objectivation and externalization. The social constructionist view is in line with the anti-essentialist notion of human nature: it argues, as phrased by Vivien Burr (2015, 6), that "there are no 'essences' inside people that make them what they are." Categorical thinking is, therefore, a product of socially constructed information and objectivated attitudes based on faulty generalizations. For instance, being born with female organs, non-white skin and into a lower-class family affects how one is treated, which in turn affects how one sees oneself. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that social information creates power, and one treats others on the basis of that social knowledge (Burr 2015, 5). In *Brooklyn*, different forms of social power, norms and oppression may indeed be detected in August's daily social interactions and the ways she is treated by others.

Another way to conceptualize social constructionism is to think about the base on which a person makes decisions and develops their identity. According to Charles Horton Cooley's looking-glass-self theory, people construct ideas of themselves according to how they think other people view them (Cooley 1922, 184; Schubert 2007, 1). The looking-glass-self theory is often encapsulated in the phrase originally articulated by Cooley himself: "I am not what I think I am and I am not what you think I am. I am what I think you think I am" (Reitzes 1980, 632; Bierstedt 1970, 189). A similar account can be found in Berger and Luckann's ([1966] 1991, 44) work, as they hold that self-reflection is "typically occasioned by the attitude towards [one] that *the other* exhibits" and is therefore "typically a 'mirror' response to attitudes of the other." This view is at the crux of social constructionist thought and crystallizes the idea of identity being a socially constructed entity – the people in a society reflect the values and expectations that to them, seem to be fixed in the society in question. Consequently, one acts according to what they think is appropriate in other people's opinion.

In the light of this theory, the decisions August makes in *Brooklyn* are based on what she thinks is expected of her.

It is worthwhile to address the possible problems regarding the social constructionist approach. Social constructionism has been criticized for it possibly implying that if all categories are only constructed by humans, they do not "exist" and thus, do not carry significance in reality. This idea may be used for racist purposes, for example – if races do not exist, does racism exist either? Is there a Black culture, if the very 'Blackness' of people is questioned? This applies to practically any marginalized group – if gender is a mere construction, is sexism also a made-up issue? To use social constructionism as a tool for belittling the experiences of oppressed people is harmful and unfounded, as in my opinion, this type of reasoning constitutes a logical fallacy: like race, racism is not to be determined non-existent on the grounds of its abstractness – rather, just like race, it is a phenomenon produced by evaluative attitudes of the human conscious toward certain assets that differ from what is valued by the subject. Those values very much do exist in the consciousness and have been mediated forward by means of socialization. Instead, social constructionism may be used as a tool for examining the ways these categories control the way we see ourselves and other people, a purpose for which it is used in this thesis. To talk about the construction of Black womanhood is not to say that the socially constructed nature of categories makes them insignificant or non-existent in our world, as articulated by Crenshaw (1991, 1296):

> [T]o say that a category such as race or gender is socially constructed is not to say that that category has no significance in our world. On the contrary, a large and continuing project for subordinated people – and indeed, one of those projects for which postmodern theories have been very helpful – is thinking about the way power has clustered around certain categories and is exercised against others. This project attempts to unveil the processes of subordination and the various ways those processes are experienced by people who are subordinated and people who are privileged by them. It is, then, a project that presumes that categories have meaning and consequences. And this project's most pressing problem, in many if not most cases, is not the existence of the categories, but rather the particular values attached to them and the way those values foster and create social hierarchies.

Recognizing that categories hold power and have social consequences is, indeed, a paramount priority in this thesis. I maintain that social constructs are, in essence, internalized norms endorsed by the society. These internalized constructs may be challenged and free will attained by recognition and resistance, as proposed by some theorists (Burr 2015, 141).

2.2.2 Meditations on performativity

One of the most influential contemporary feminist theories is third-wave feminist Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity. Butler (1988, 528) holds that gender exists in repeated actions that build one's identity. In addition, Butler (1988, 527) suggests that the reality of gender is performative, and that certain types of acts are viewed as either showing conformation to an expected gender identity or contesting that expectation in some way. According to Butler (2002, 33), gender expressions are not a result of a stable identity as such, but in fact construct identity – in her words, there is "no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results." Furthermore, gender is an unstable identity as it is not something one *is* per se, but rather, something one *does*, as one can never fully *become* a certain gender (Butler 2002, 25). Thus, through a stylized repetition of acts, gender comes to be a "constructed identity" (Butler 2002, 179). Performative action is not a conscious, voluntary choice, which differentiates it from performance (Butler [1993] 2011, 60). Occasionally, however, these acts can be subversive and reveal the "groundlessness" of gender (ibid.). Thus, gender may also become "undone" through subversive bodily acts.

Butler ([1993] 2011, 209) suggests that race can also be viewed as a performative construct that becomes materialized through reiteration and exclusion. She holds that the concept of race has been produced to serve racism, as explained in an interview (Blumenfeld and Breen [2005] 2016, 11). Therefore, race may be performative in the sense that it "brings into being what it names […] that institutional exercises repeatedly construct race within a set of differentials that seek to maintain and control racial separateness" (ibid.). However, similar to Crenshaw's take, Butler also stresses that race ought not to be overlooked as a mere "unreal" fabrication bearing no political meaning, but that the notion of race as a construct should be utilized in counter-racist strategies (ibid.). I agree with the view of racial categorization being a constructed, performative means of oppression, as the concept of race is one originally theorized in favor of Western white supremacists (Harrison 1995, 50–51). Nevertheless, race can also be viewed as a source of empowerment and positive identification.

Butler's work shares similar glossary and has many other resemblances to Berger and Luckmann's account on the social construction of the self. As pointed out before, they argue that the individual "simultaneously externalizes his own being into the social world and internalizes it as an objective reality" (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 149). Similarly,

Butler suggests that gender expressions constitute one's identity (2002, 33). Both considerations thus share the view of individuals 'producing' themselves and each other through subjective norms. Further, Berger and Luckmann compare different roles as products of institutionalization to acts of performance: "The roles *represent* the institutional order. […] The institution, with its assemblage of 'programmed' actions, is like the unwritten libretto of a drama. The realization of the drama depends upon the reiterated performances of its prescribed roles by living actors" (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 92). In other words, roles assigned and adopted by individuals construct themselves through reiterated action.

When a social role is internalized, the social world around it becomes subjectively real to the individual and is thus taken for granted (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 91). Butler's suggestion that performative acts are often unconscious also concurs with Berger and Luckmann's idea that internalized roles restrain the individual from fully acting according to their free will:

> The sector of the self-consciousness that has been objectified in the role is then also apprehended as an inevitable fate, for which the individual may disclaim responsibility. The paradigmatic formula for this kind of reification is the statement 'I have no choice in the matter, I have to act this way because of my position" (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 108).

When juxtaposing these considerations of performativity and social constructionism, I deem it natural to view gender as an example of a socially constructed role that produces itself through societal norms brought into existence by repeated actions of individuals. These ideas on roles and performativity are applied when studying the ways August acts as a teenager. I view that there are multiple roles August is conditioned to conform to, which arise from her being a lower-class girl of color. It follows that while gender may well become a role in itself, it is also an attribute that creates more specific roles by serving as a base of controlling images of Black women, for example. Given the intersectional approach of the present study, attempting to extract the performative reiterations of gender from the way August acts is alone hardly meaningful. Rather, focus is aimed at the 'groundlessness' behind performative reiterations of gender, as regardless of one's actions, Black women's 'access' to their womanhood can still be denied through controlling images. In addition, while conforming to the expected roles of womanhood is not necessarily voluntary, the 'groundlessness' behind them may be revealed through subversive acts. August resisting the pressures to conform to a certain roles assigned to her is seen as this type of subversive action. How August's actions conform to or contest the socially constructed expectations is under attention in the present

study, following the idea that the social variables creating these expectations are, in essence, performative constructs, and that the social expectations are based on ultimately arbitrary binaries such as male/female, Black/white and rich/poor.

2.2.3 Black womanhood and constructions of otherness

To contextualize the power of socially constructed knowledge, considerations about its consequences on Black womanhood are in order. Hill Collins (2000, 77) states that "[u]nder scientific racism, Blacks have been construed as inferior, and their inferiority has been attributed either to biological causes or cultural differences." She also asserts that Black women are blamed for not conforming to the "cult of true womanhood," which denotes flawed gender relations and partly causes the notion of Black people's cultural inferiority (ibid.). Furthermore, Black women are persistently seen as the "other," which is due to the pervasiveness of controlling images of Black women (Hill Collins 2000, 88). The controlling images of Black women, including those of the Mammy, Matriarch, Welfare Queen, Black Lady, and Jezebel, maintain intersecting oppressions and are "designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal and inevitable parts of everyday life" (Hill Collins 2000, 69). For instance, the typification of Black women's nature as emotional and passionate has been used to justify their sexual abuse (Hill Collins 2000, 71). Because the claims of Black women's nature are scientifically unfounded, it follows that these controlling images are socially constructed. The controlling images have laid the foundations for Black women's resistance (Hill Collins [1990] 1991, 92). The tradition of resisting the controlling images by doing something that is not expected of Black women suggests the existence of a collective Black women's consciousness (ibid.), which implies that socially constructed images of Black women have also been collectively internalized through processes of socialization.

In Berger and Luckmann's ([1966] 1991, 47–48) work, we might find a reason for the emergence of controlling images of Black women in the American society:

> The social reality of everyday life is thus apprehended in a continuum of typifications, which are progressively anonymous as they are removed from the 'here and now' of the face-to-face situation. At one pole of the continuum are those others with whom I frequently and intensively interact in face-to-face situations – my 'inner circle', as it were. At the other pole are highly anonymous abstractions, which by their very nature can never be available to face-to-face interaction. Social structure is the sum total of these typifications and of the

recurrent patterns of interaction established by means of them. As such, social structure is an essential element of the reality of everyday life.

Because an individual cannot have a meaningful relationship with all the people in the world, these "typifications" about people whom they do not interact with are created based on their general knowledge or assumptions. In this light, systems of race and gender create these typifications about Black women, which in turn might cause controlling images to arise. This, however, does not justify the systematic oppression of Black women by any means. As socially constructed knowledge about Black women is biased to benefit the white male elite (Hill Collins [1990] 1991, 221), Black women are doubly marginalized when it comes to constructed typifications. Portrayals of Black female characters in literature replicate and reflect these constructed stereotypes (Hill Collins 2000, 73), which shows how Black women are persistently seen through the lens of controlling images and otherness and how the harmful stereotypes can be passed on through literature. Conversely, one significant way to minimize faulty assumptions about Black women might then be to read literature written by Black female authors instead of resorting to the narratives construed by, for instance, white or male authors.

Hill Collins (2000, 90) alleges that colorism is rooted in constructed binary oppositions of Blackness and whiteness, as they "gain meaning only in relation to one another." Likewise, treating Black women as the 'other' is a result of dichotomous thinking: "African-American women occupy a position whereby the inferior half of a series of these binaries converge, and this placement has been central to our subordination" (Hill Collins 2000, 71). For example, since standards of female beauty traditionally favor Eurocentric features, Black women's physical attributes such as color of skin and texture of hair are often seen as less desirable than those of white women. In other words, "blue-eyed, blond, thin White women could not be considered beautiful without the Other—Black women with African features of dark skin, broad noses, full lips, and kinky hair" (Hill Collins 2000, 89). Addressing how oppositional dichotomies imply that one is superior to the other and how this leads to subordination of the 'other', she notes:

> Denying Black women status as fully human subjects by treating us as the
> objectified Other in a range of such dichotomies demonstrates the power that
> dichotomous either/or thinking, oppositional difference, and objectification wield
> in maintaining interlocking systems of oppression. Analyzing the specific,
> externally defined, controlling images applied to African-American women both
> reveals the specific contours of Black women's objectification and offers a clearer

> view of how systems of race, gender, and class oppression actually interlock. (Hill Collins [1990] 1991, 70)

I find this excerpt to point out the benefits of post-structuralist feminism that challenges binary oppositions of gender, race and other social variables. Moreover, Hill Collins (2000, 70–71) points out that binary thinking is problematic due to its tendency to objectify one element as a means of subordination and dominance. Evaluation of appearance is a common element in the objectification of all women, which has specifically oppressive and painful consequences on Black women who cannot reach the hegemonic standards of beauty (Hill Collins 2000, 89–90). Therefore, post-structuralist feminism is needed to subvert these binary oppositions that are used to dominate women under intersecting oppressions.

The social construction of Black womanhood has restrictive implications on Black women's agency. hooks ([1981] 1992, 9) talks about how Black women have been driven to simply react with submission when their interests are not talked about instead of challenging or questioning the absence of said topic in the context of the suffrage conflict in the 19th century.

> That black women did not collectively rally against the exclusion of our interests by [the black patriarchy and the feminist movement] was an indication that sexist-racist socialization had effectively brainwashed us to feel that our interests were not worth fighting for […]. [W]e did not talk about ourselves, about being black women, about what it means to be the victims of sexist-racist oppression.

This suggests that even Black women identify themselves as the 'other', as less important and their needs less worthy of attention. One way of resisting this submissive role and bringing about change, thus, is "talking back," which means "speaking as an equal to an authority figure" (hooks 1986, 123). On the other hand, a Black woman being "too assertive" and rejecting the submissive role of an "ideal Black woman" is viewed as unfeminine (Hill Collins 2000, 75–76). In *Brooklyn* (70), as August and her friends talk back to boys by saying "*Don't even say my name. Don't even put it in your mouth,*" the boys reply: "*You ugly anyway*", thus defeminizing them. The threat of being defeminized due to controlling images may therefore limit Black women's agency and freedom of expression.

Black women have faced highly contradictory expectations when it comes to acting in a 'feminine' way. While Black people have been dehumanized throughout history, feminine traits and sexuality of Black women are dismissed in the light of controlling images. The "ideal Black woman," that is, the Mammy, is depicted as asexual (Hill Collins 2000, 73–74). The Matriarch myth portrays working Black women as a bad mothers, as they work too hard

and emasculate Black men (Hill Collins 2000, 75). Controlling images and negative stereotypes, thus, are "anti-woman" (hooks ([1981] 1992, 70). Hooks argues that due to Black women having continuously been seen as sexual savages – as Jezebels, that is – many have tried to shift the focus of attention from their sexuality toward their maternal traits, thus causing other negative stereotypes such as the Aunt Jemima, Sapphire, and Amazon stereotypes to arise on white people's part (ibid.). The idea of Black women having systematically submitted to the terms of other people, or being put into boxes by them, is relevant when discussing performativity: the history of Black women in America is saturated with instances of collectively acting in a way that they are conditioned to, to the point that they may not have regarded their own interests as worth bringing up. If Black women try to change perceptions about themselves to a more positive direction, other types of negative images emerge. Thus, on one hand, gender performativity is not a simple matter in intersectional contexts as Black women are doubly marginalized and quickly defeminized by the negative stereotypes and controlling images, even if they try to emphasize their feminine, maternal assets. On the other hand, this exposes the artificiality of the binary oppositions that underlie gendered expressions.

To conclude, socially constructed knowledge is seen as the catalyst for socially normalized performative acts that further develop one's identity and self-image in this thesis. I contend that not only one's own actions build their character and identity, but that these performative actions and expressions affect other people and their identities as well. This position is supported by Berger and Luckmann's ([1966] 1991, 169) view according to which "the reality of everyday life is ongoingly reaffirmed in the individual's interaction with others." In addition, Hill Collins ([1990] 1991, 79) holds that "African-American women encounter [the ideology of domination] through a range of unquestioned, daily experiences. But when the contradictions between Black women's self-definitions and everyday treatment are heightened, controlling images become increasingly visible." For instance, in *Brooklyn,* August's boyfriend's actions construct the way August sees herself as well. As we shall see in section 4.1, Jerome tries to pressure August into having sex with him, and when August refuses to do so, he leaves her – highlighting Jerome's presumption of August being sexually available to him and her worthlessness to Jerome when this notion is subverted. In light of social constructionism, performative actions are thus understood as different types of manifestations of internalized social ideals and realities, and as ideas of appropriate behavior associated with one's personal attributes that may limit an individual's sense of agency. These

controlling images and ideas, I argue along with Hill Collins and hooks, are imposed by external, intersecting systems of power.

3   Intersections of Black girlhood and class in *Another Brooklyn*

This chapter opens the analytic part of the thesis. In this chapter, I study the development of August's class-consciousness and how she reacts to the realization of her lower-class position. Special attention is brought into the overlapping of class with femininity and agency. It is found that due to her being a poor girl of color, August is conditioned to think that she is and will remain a "ghetto girl," a controlling image to be subverted as she grows up.

3.1   Developments of class-consciousness

August's family of three lives "on the edge of poverty" in Brooklyn (*Brooklyn*, 122). They do not starve, but they live in a one-bedroom apartment and wear low-quality clothes, for instance (*Brooklyn* 42–44). When her father works in a men's clothing store for the first few years they live in Brooklyn, August is aware that they are not wealthy, but not truly poor either. "We didn't understand the kind of poverty we lived in. […] Most days, we had enough," August says, referring to her and her brother (ibid.). She sees the extremely poor children in Brooklyn, reads about starving children in Biafra and notes: "No, we were not poor like this. […] But still" (*Brooklyn*, 65–67). According to Millett ([1971] 1977, 40), Black men made significantly less money on average than white men in the 1970s, while Black women made the least money of all. In addition, Black women in the United States are in the most vulnerable position when it comes to economic exploitation compared to white people and men (Hill Collins 2000, 74). When August befriends Sylvia, Angela and Gigi, she pays attention to Angela's jacket that is too small like hers, and she wants to show Angela that they come from the same place (*Brooklyn*, 36). This implies that August's self-image is shaped by her class, which is reflected in the way she identifies with her friends.

August's family faces a particularly tough financial situation one summer. Her father loses his job, and they resort to food assistance as the New York City electricity blackout leaves them without a working refrigerator (*Brooklyn*, 81). When August stands in line with her brother, she hopes not to run into her friends: "I looked for Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi – afraid I'd see them, hungry and hot like us. Reaching for the brown bags with ashamed and ashy hands" (ibid.). It is thus apparent that there is shame associated with poverty, and that August wishes to be the only one of her friends to need assistance. It is also mentioned that due to the broken refrigerator, August's father needs to go out and find some ice to keep their food from going bad (*Brooklyn*, 79), and later, a remark is made that Sylvia's family has a refrigerator that

dispenses ice (*Brooklyn*, 101). This ironic disparity may be seen to showcase August's consciousness about her lower-class living conditions: when in lack of money and a working fridge, her family is deficient in things essential to them, the lack of ice making them lose even more money as their food goes bad, while Sylvia may indulge herself in using ice for other, less urgent purposes, as an amenity.

The power outage leads to people looting white-owned stores on Broadway (Bushwick), and August and her brother want to participate as well: "We saw two boys sharing a pair of new roller skates, one still carrying the box beneath his arm. We saw teenagers running toward Broadway and asked again and again if we could go. *It's stealing*, my father said. *We don't steal*" (*Brooklyn*, 80). August explains that she wants to join the looters due to having heard that these stores are owned by rich white people (ibid.). She seems to see a chance of either acquiring things that her family could not otherwise afford or making money by selling looted items. In reality, a concentration of high numbers of looting in New York neighborhoods during the blackout has been found to correspond the residents' rate of poverty (Wohlenberg 1982, 42). Consequently, Bushwick, having been identified as a low-income area at the time, was among the neighborhoods in which the highest numbers of looting occurred (Wohlenberg 1982, 34–35). Broadway, which is the main strip of Bushwick, was indeed a popular destination for looting during the blackout, as a total of 134 stores were looted along one and a half miles of Broadway (Mahler 2003, 81).

Since it has been argued by the Legal Aid Society that looting stores during the blackout was a form of social protest inflicted by unjust class disparities (Mahler 2003, 82), August wanting to go loot white-owned stores can be seen as an attempt to protest the concentration of wealth in the hands of white people. This attempt is made redundant by her father, according to whom she belongs to a family who does not steal. August's father's insistence might stem from his religious beliefs, as he soon comes to be a devoted member of the Nation of Islam, a religious and political organization in the US. Consequently, August and her brother convert from Christians to 'Black Muslims' as well. Stealing is against Islamic values – the Quran (5:38) maintains that theft is to be punished by cutting off the thief's hands, regardless of their sex. The Bible (Exod. 20:15) also forbids stealing, and while being in transition, this moral may still guide the father's strict stance. Since the prohibition of theft in the Bible has also been interpreted to concern kidnapping and slavery (Little 1980, 400–01), August's father might also choose to rise above the sins committed by slave traders. As New York goes dark, he insists his family stay in the 'light' in this sense. As the patriarchal 'head of the family', he

therefore limits August's agency and ability to resist power imbalances. The chance to steal from the rich thereby encapsulates the complexity of intersecting issues posed by systems of class, religion, race, and gender.

As a setting, the Bushwick of the 1970s showcases the notion of lower-class people of color as the 'other'. Formerly a middle-class area, it begun to transform in the 1950s as residents of lower-income neighborhoods migrated into the area and wealthy people started to move out (Wohlenberg 1982, 39; Mahler 2003, 78). *Brooklyn* depicts this phenomenon that is called 'white flight' as well. The new residents of Bushwick were mostly of African American or Hispanic descent, while the middle-class people were predominantly white (Mahler 2003, 78). August first notices this phenomenon when she is locked indoors after moving to Bushwick at the age of eight: "White people we didn't know filled the trucks with their belongings, and in the evenings, we watched them take long looks at the buildings they were leaving, then climb into stations wagons and drive away" (*Brooklyn*, 21). August notes how she never got to know the white residents, but she knew their moving vans (*Brooklyn*, 83). She adds:

> We knew the people who came to help, checked their cars many times, then glared at the boys in the street. […] We knew the songs the boys sang *Ungawa, Black Power. Destroy! White boy!* were just songs, not meant to chase white people out of our neighborhood. Still, they fled. (ibid.)

This suggests that the fleeing white neighbors are intimidated by the boys in the street singing songs about Black empowerment. August also describes how three white boys who had pastel-color collared shirts and "blond crew cuts" did not play with them. August remarks that as the white boys went away in their fathers' station wagons, "it was hard not to see the brown boys differently in their cutoffs and dirty white T-shirts, ashy kneed, chipped wooden tops violently spinning" (*Brooklyn*, 82). August's class-consciousness is thus developed by comparing the appearances of the boys, suggesting that stylizations of body make class differences more perceivable to her. Perhaps, class might in this sense be seen as a performative construct.

The white flight seems to emphasize August's awareness of poor people of color as the 'other'. As long as August stays in Bushwick, she will be a part of this otherness as well. Further, August is warned that speaking "jive talk," an African American Vernacular English slang originally developed in Harlem, will keep her "uneducated and in the ghetto," so she begins to curate her speech and only speak jive whispering (*Brooklyn*, 91). Bushwick as a milieu is thus an allegory to the conditions of August's life that she strives to escape. She

starts to pursue a future in Ivy League, the reason being that "Bushwick had once been a forest and we had been called ghetto girls even though we were beautiful and our arms were locked together and our T-shirts blared our names and zodiac signs" (*Brooklyn*, 154–55). As she is accepted into Brown University, a highly selective Ivy League institution, she succeeds in this mission. When August returns to her father's funeral in her thirties, she claims: "Death didn't frighten me. Not now. Not anymore. But Brooklyn felt like a stone in my throat" (*Brooklyn*, 9), showing that despite the re-socialization she has undergone after moving away, her past still affects her.

Back when August and her family lived in SweetGrove, a fictional place in Tennessee, before the mother's death and the family's move to Brooklyn, they were not particularly wealthy either. Their house was in a deteriorated condition and their lands are ultimately confiscated by the government due to unpaid taxes (*Brooklyn*, 51–54). The poor condition of the house did not, however, bother August as she and her brother "moved through the house [they'd] always known without seeing the ways in which it was sagging into itself" (*Brooklyn*, 51–52). It seems that August becomes conscious of her class only when she socializes with her friends and other people in Brooklyn. In Berger and Luckmann's terms, August had adopted her parents' worlds in primary socialization, and thus took their economic situation for granted. In other words, she has objectivated and internalized the reality of living with the assets and resources provided. Not until she is exposed to secondary socialization, that is, people from outside her family, does she become conscious of other kinds of realities as well, of having fewer resources than some of her peers. When socializing with other people, she starts to compare her wealth to others', particularly Sylvia's as seen in the next section, and begins to fathom the extent of her poverty. She understands that her lower-class status has social implications. Therefore, class-consciousness socially constructs her identity and reduces her sense of agency. This realization along with the direct consequences of growing up poor seems to contribute to the 'weightiness' of growing up as a girl in Brooklyn.

3.2 Self-image and identity shaped by racist-classist attitudes

August becomes particularly self-conscious of her social class and the way she looks when visiting Sylvia's polished home, where her parents make August, Gigi, and Angela feel unwelcome: "Angela, Gigi and I watched from the doorway, stopped at the entry by her mother's sharp eye. Beyond this point, the woman's brow said, you don't belong. Even here is too far" (*Brooklyn,* 101). Sylvia and her sisters are taught 'proper' manners at home by a

French woman (*Brooklyn,* 100–01). It is clearly in Sylvia's parents' interests to distance their family from the ways of the supposedly disreputable lower-class Black people in order to secure a successful future. According to Hill Collins ([1990] 1991, 84), resorting to class privilege and rejecting connections to other Black people can be a way to resist the negative images associated with Blackness. The parents' attitudes, however, make August feel uneasy in her skin. The self-consciousness about her background and upbringing that emerges from this encounter affects the way August thinks about her future.

> [Sylvia's] parents questioned us. Who were our people? What did they do? How were our grades? What were our ambitions? Did we understand, her father wanted to know, the Negro problem in America? Did we understand it was up to us to rise above? His girls, he believed, would become doctors and lawyers. *It's up to parents*, he said, *to push, push, push.*
>
> Once, as a young child, my mother asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. *A grown-up*, I answered. She and my father laughed and laughed.
>
> But listening to Sylvia's father, I felt myself straightening my back, tilting my chin up. Law, I wanted to say, like you. I want truth, I wanted to say. An absolute truth, or if not truth, reason – **a reason for everything**. But the hems of my bellbottoms were tattered. My socks in this shoeless house had holes in the heels. In the winter, because of my own absentmindedness, my hands and arms were often ashy. How could I even think of **aspiring to anything** when this was how I walked through the world? Sylvia's mother's flick of an eye said to us again and again, *Don't dream. **Dreams are not for people who look like you.*** (*Brooklyn*, 102–03; emphasis added)

The passage above demonstrates particularly clearly how as a teenager, August is inclined to act and think according to what she thinks other people want or how they see her. Her thoughts are comparable to Cooley's social constructionist utterance concerning the looking-glass-self: "I am what I think you think I am." As a child, and perhaps until this moment, August has not had great ambitions or plans for the future. After hearing Sylvia's father's opinions, however, she wants to please him by showing enthusiasm towards a profession he would respect. She even seems to get a little carried away finding a side of herself that would agree with this new dream – her wish to know the truth, or at least a reason for "everything." Perhaps she also wants to convince Sylvia's father that she comes from a family of good values. Nevertheless, she suddenly becomes self-conscious of her ragged clothes that denote her lower-class status. She is immediately certain that she should not even aspire to become "anything" because of her appearance and what she thinks Sylvia's mother thinks of her and the other girls – that dreams are not for people who look like her. Further, Sylvia's mother can be seen to discourage August from going after the ideal 'American Dream', an ideology that

includes a promise of success to those who are determined enough to pursue it. These two conflicting messages, Sylvia's father and mother's, apparently leave her silent and anxious.

What Black activists in the 1960s and 1970s recognized as powerful, Sylvia's family sees as a problem. Sylvia's sister telling Sylvia not to try to act like "*a dusty, dirty black American*" (*Brooklyn*, 105) and her father talking about Black people as a "problem" in the previous excerpt contradict the mentality of the Black Power movement taking place in the US at the time. While the movement is not explicitly mentioned in the book apart from a few references (*Brooklyn*, 11; 83; 93), Sylvia's parents' views may be read as a counterforce to the Black Power mentality by certain wordings. Sylvia's mother discouraging August from dreaming could serve as an antithesis to Martin Luther King's ([1963] 2009) "I Have a Dream" speech, in which he dreams of freedom for all Black people. While King dreams that his children will not be judged "by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (ibid.), Sylvia's father says that it is up to the children to "rise above," and up to their parents to push them. On the other hand, pushing children to pursue his idea of a successful future may be his way to resist and subvert racist assumptions about Black people – perhaps, another part of King's ([1963] 2009, 231) speech would resonate with him: "We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline." Nevertheless, Hill Collins (2000, 76) brings into focus the problems of thinking that one's wealth is dependable on one's upbringing and that it is up to the individual to rise above poverty, as this diverts the attention away from societal problems. In any case, Sylvia's parents' views make August feel as if she is not worthy of dreaming of a bright future due to her appearance as a poor Black girl. Their classist attitudes imply that in order to be respected, Black people need to work hard, as if to 'bypass' their Blackness. Navigating these constructions of Blackness and womanhood as something to be either empowered by or ashamed of characterizes August's journey of self-discovery throughout the novel.

The class differences and their respective proximities to power become even more apparent and bothersome to August when Sylvia's parents forbid the girls to spend time with Sylvia and make her change schools. Sylvia's father believes that education and a successful career is key when it comes to dismantling this 'problem' he refers to in the recent passage, and he assumes that it is one thing that distinguishes her daughter from August, Gigi and Angela: "*Go home*, he said. *Study. Become somebody better than you are*," he says to the girls and does not let them inside their house (*Brooklyn*, 108). August recognizes how he sees them: "[W]e were no longer Sylvia's friends but ghetto girls. […] We could have blamed his

stinging words on his stilted English. We could have said *Fuck you, man* – become who he thought we already were. But we were silent" (*Brooklyn*, 108–09). Here, August acts against the looking-glass self, as she chooses not to act in the way Sylvia's father sees her. This, however, seems to be done either in order to gain his respect, or due to feeling powerless in front of him. Therefore, it may hardly be seen as an act of resistance, but rather, as a lack of sense of agency.

Sylvia's father's classist attitude is a disempowering force against August, Angela and Gigi. It seems that he sees August as a prospective "welfare queen," which is a controlling image of poor Black women who depend on monetary assistance to make ends meet, by which they have become "symbols of what was deemed wrong with America" (Hill Collins 2000, 80). August is self-conscious and ashamed due to Sylvia's father's hatred: "We turned away from Sylvia's door, said goodbye to each other at the corner, each of us sinking into an embarrassed silence, ashamed of our skin, our hair, the way we said our own names" (*Brooklyn*, 109). Here, the interlocking of systems of gender, race and class work together to make the girls see themselves as 'others' by making them feel ashamed of their bodies and speech. The recent development makes August feel powerless: "In class, Sylvia's empty seat reminded us of her father, his arms folded across his chest, his glare a reminder of a power that was becoming more and more familiar to us. **A power we neither had nor understood**" (*Brooklyn*, 109–10; emphasis added). August, as a poor girl, thus acknowledges her lack of power against a wealthy man. This may also be interpreted as further distancing August from the Black Power movement, which largely enforced male dominance and chauvinist attitudes (Fleming 2001, 207).

As seen in this chapter, the lack of wealth makes August feel less beautiful. This is mostly due to Sylvia's parents' attitudes. The image of a "ghetto girl" therefore serves to defeminize her. Whereas August, Gigi and Angela see "the lost and beautiful and hungry" in each other (*Brooklyn*, 38), Sylvia's mother make them feel quite the opposite: "[W]e were no longer lost and beautiful but ragged and ugly, made so by a flick of her mother's eye" (*Brooklyn*, 101). Taking into consideration the passage already brought up, in which August explains her motive for applying to Ivy League universities, she appears unable to subvert the image of a ghetto girl regardless of her proving not to be 'ragged' and 'ugly': "[W]e had been called ghetto girls even though we were beautiful and our arms were locked together and our T-shirts blared our names and zodiac signs" (*Brooklyn*, 154–55). Even though her reiterated actions and self-image speak against it, August is seen as an unladylike ghetto girl. Therefore,

due to her class, August is not able to fully take pride in her femininity. This shows how systems of gender and class simultaneously affect one another. Furthermore, it shows that while gender is a performative construct, performative acts do not necessarily suffice to construct the kind of social role one expects when prevailing controlling images are concerned. For instance, even though clothes may be used to seek affirmation of one's beauty and social situation (de Beauvoir 2011, 571–81), in August's case, this affirmation remains unreciprocated due to other intersecting systems of oppression that neglect her attempts to subvert the controlling image of a ghetto girl.

In *Brooklyn*, children's lives are influenced by their parents' wishes and opinions. August wonders: "Maybe this is how it happened first for everyone – adults promising us their own failed futures" (*Brooklyn*, 63). As she continues to talk about education and future careers the parents have pressured each of the girls to follow, it appears that August thinks that prior to the children's own possible aspirations, the notion of one's future is at first constructed through the parents' worlds and perhaps remain that way. For instance, Sylvia, whom her father wants to become a lawyer, does not know what she wants herself: "When we asked, *What do you love?* Sylvia looked around her perfectly pink room and said, *I'm not the boss of me. How the hell would I even know*" (ibid.). As for August, her father has said that she is "bright enough to teach" (ibid.), even when she wants to become a lawyer like Sylvia, which is somewhat condescending. According to hooks ([1981] 1992, 82), many young Black women tend to repress their career aspirations "for fear of undermining the self-confidence of Black men." As August becomes a researcher, she resists this tendency by inverting her father's views in a way: instead of becoming a teacher, she decides to study and create knowledge for a living. Thus, she resists the future that her father sees fitting for her, while showing that she is more than "bright enough" to merely teach what others have discovered. By being accepted into an Ivy League school and having agency over her choices, she also shows that she cannot be denied dreaming or discouraged from seeking success.

4 De/constructing Black female sexuality in *Another Brooklyn*

This chapter examines the construction of Black female sexuality and subversions of those constructs in *Brooklyn.* It is evident that as a teenager, August cannot explore her sexuality freely or in peace due to various kinds of pressures that come from different directions. In other words, intersecting oppressive ideologies such as patriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormativity construct August's sexuality so that she is discouraged to make autonomous decisions and act on her own intuition. Girlhood seems to become a burden instead of a pleasure due to the conflicting expectations surrounding sexuality that come up early in August's life: the objectification and hyperheterosexualization on one hand, and the expectation to remain a virtuous daughter on the other.

In *Black Feminist Thought*, Hill Collins (2000, chap. 6) discusses sexual politics of Black womanhood and the relationship between power and sexuality in the US history. While feminist theorists such as Kate Millett and Simone de Beauvoir argue that both gender and female sexuality are constructs of patriarchy (Millett [1971] 1977, 26–33; Beauvoir 2011, 420–21), Hill Collins (2000, 127) takes the argument further by suggesting that in light of former studies, Black female sexuality may be viewed as "being constructed within an historically specific matrix of domination characterized by intersecting oppressions." In other words, intersecting systems of power and oppression create culturally and historically specific conditions in which different aspects of life and identity, such as sexuality, are constructed. To fight the essentialist assumptions about Black women, Hill Collins stresses the importance of self-definition, especially in the context of sexuality (2000, 131). By having agency over their sexualities, Black women can change and resist the stereotypical representations and ideas of their sexualities. Therefore, a Black woman's sexuality can become a powerful site of resistance.

4.1 Sexual objectification and pressure

Sexual objectification becomes evident already in August's pre-teen years: "At eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, we knew we were being watched." (*Brooklyn*, 71). As August and her friends' bodies transform, they start gaining unwanted attention from men, even from strangers, and traumatizing incidents such as Gigi's rape occur (*Brooklyn*, 71–74). At one point, a predatory shoe-repair man offers the girls a quarter for showing their undergarments. August explains that they were not mature enough to even understand the situations they

underwent: "*Just a little*, the man said. *Please*, the quarter, held up and gleaming between his thumb and pointer finger as we shook our heads *No* and embarrassed tears we didn't yet understand sprang forward" (*Brooklyn*, 72). The girls were sent to this shopkeeper specifically by their parents (*Brooklyn*, 71). It therefore appears that the girls did not have a choice but to go to him and be sexually harassed, thus having little agency over the situation.

When the girls turn thirteen, August recalls: "[I]t seemed wherever we were, there were hands and tongues. There were sloe-eyes and licked lips wherever our new breasts and lengthening thighs moved" (*Brooklyn*, 113). The girls do not seem to fully grasp the implications of their entering puberty: "Something about the curve of our lips and the sway of our heads suggested more to strangers than we understood" (*Brooklyn*, 74). They were forcefully separated from the childhood innocence they tried to hold on to (*Brooklyn*, 73–74), which is due to them being hypersexualized by boys and men. As the girls' bodies start to transform, August remarks: "The world *was* ending. We had been girls, wobbling around the apartment in Gigi's mother's white go-go boots and then and then and then. Little pieces of Brooklyn began to fall away. Revealing *us*" (*Brooklyn*, 70). The girls are not ready for this: "We hand-songed *Down down baby, down by the roller coaster. Sweet, sweet baby I'ma never let you go* because we wanted to believe we were years and years away from the sweet, sweet babies" (*Brooklyn*, 75). Only in retrospect does August realize that she and her friends were seen as sex objects by men even though they were too immature to fully understand it at the time. It seems that for August, growing up as a girl means being exposed to the world, particularly to the male gaze, in an undesired light at a very young age.

The sexualization of Black women is systematic and based on a constructed image of sexual looseness, making Black women a group most vulnerable to sexual victimization. Throughout history, Black women have been generally regarded as "sexually permissive, as available and eager for the sexual assaults of any man, black or white" (hooks [1981] 1992, 52). This thought partly stems from the Jezebel stereotype, a depiction of a Black woman as a sexually available, immoral breeder (Thomas et al. 2004, 429), which applies to teenage girls as well (Patterson 2015, 30–31). The seriousness of sexual assault targeted towards Black women has often been overlooked and downplayed in contrast to assaults suffered by white women (hooks [1981] 1992, 52–53; Crenshaw 1991, 1267–69). Because of this thought of Black women as 'sexual savages', forcefully having sex with them has not been considered a serious crime (hooks [1981] 1992, 35; Crenshaw 1991, 1271), which makes approaching them easier as opposed to white women. Due to the sexual objectification, August becomes wary of her

surroundings and the girls give each other advice on the places they should not wear dresses to (*Brooklyn*, 71). They start walking everywhere together, even though they pretended to be able to walk the streets alone (*Brooklyn*, 74). Already at such a young age, August's safety and innocence are disturbed as she is bombarded with sexual insinuations, and thus, her actions are partly determined by the threat of becoming sexually assaulted. Socially constructed images of Black female sexuality therefore limit her agency.

The boys August meets from the age of thirteen onwards seem to view her through the Jezebel lens, as something they could target their sexual drive towards and expect no resistance: "[M]en and boys were everywhere, […] whispers into our ears as we passed strangers. Promises – of things they could do to us, with us, for us" (*Brooklyn*, 114–15). August regards the sexual allusions as normal, and Jerome, four years her senior, tells her that someday, they are going to have sex (*Brooklyn*, 100). August does not take it seriously and agrees, after which Jerome kisses her (ibid.). In two to three years, Jerome starts to pressure August into having sexual intercourse with him, which August refuses, possibly in fear of pregnancy (*Brooklyn*, 125; 127; 145). She lets Jerome have oral sex with her, but coitus is out of question (*Brooklyn* 123–25). This ultimately results in Jerome leaving August (*Brooklyn*, 145). Before this, Sylvia encourages her to have sexual intercourse with Jerome: "*Oh just do it*, Sylvia said. *He's too fine to let slip away*" (ibid.). Therefore, August is pressured to have sex even if she did not want to. After Jerome and August break up, Sylvia and Jerome start dating in secret and soon, at the age of 15, Sylvia gets pregnant. Jerome chooses the girl that would have sex with him, and it seems that he was in a relationship with August only because of the expectation of sexual intercourse. Jerome breaking up with August and her finding out that he is dating Sylvia is traumatic to her, as she almost loses her ability to speak and later goes to therapy because of this. Thus, the peer pressure of gaining sexual experiences and pleasing the male gender can be seen to affect her mental health negatively.

Despite the prefabrication of August's sexuality in her early teens, she finds her group of friends a convenient way to resist some expectations and shield herself from damaging assaults. Boys who call the girls' names are startled by them walking together everywhere: "The four of us together weren't something they understood. They understood girls alone, folding their arms across their breasts, praying for invisibility" (*Brooklyn*, 70–71). Walking together thus challenges the ideas boys have about girls. Hill Collins ([1990] 1991, 95) discusses the "Black women's space," a place for Black women to converse freely and thus develop a culture of resistance. This safe space is a "prime location for resisting

objectification as the Other" (ibid.). In *Brooklyn*, the four girls' friendship seems to function as this kind of Black women's space where they are able to resist their sexualization. However, when August is alone, she is not as capable of speaking up for herself as a teenager.

Through re-socialization, the constructedness that characterizes August's early sexual life changes into self-determination and sexual liberation as she grows up. Getting away from Brooklyn is a gateway to this: "When I stepped off the bus in Providence, Rhode Island, I was alone. I had wanted this – to step outside of Brooklyn on my own, no past, just the now and the future" (*Brooklyn*, 159). August discovers jazz music that changes her notion of the world profoundly (*Brooklyn*, 160–61), and starts having affairs with boys: "I spent my twenties sleeping with white boys in photo-less rooms filled with jazz. As I pushed their resistant heads down, I thought of Brooklyn, of Jerome and Sylvia and Angela and Gigi. I cried out to the sounds of brown boys cursing and Bowie's trumpet wailing" (*Brooklyn*, 161). The coalescence of jazz music and sexuality imply that jazz empowers her and is of assistance in her sexual liberation. It seems that thinking about home and her past is still a great part of her, and perhaps she now acknowledges the significance of her former social relations to her story. Moreover, by defining the white boys as her "lovers" and 'using' them for sexual pleasure, August proves to have control over these sexual encounters. This can be viewed as August subverting the tradition of white men exploiting Black women sexually and changing her narrative from being sexually vulnerable to owning her body and sexuality. In addition, while she could not walk the streets of Brooklyn alone in fear of sexual harassment as a child, she later travels the world alone for living, thus challenging this internalized fear.

Although this thesis focuses on August's narrative, it should be noted that she is not the only one affected by oppressive systems of power. In terms of sexuality and coping with objectification at a young age, the four girls seem to share the weight of navigating the socially constructed images of Black girlhood that affect their sense of agency. Shifting the attention from August to Gigi momentarily, we see her being conditioned to think that it is up to her to avoid becoming sexually assaulted: when Gigi is raped at the age of 12, she does not tell her mother about it because she would blame it on her (*Brooklyn*, 57–58). Gigi is also harassed by the pastor when singing in a church choir, and the girls advise her to avoid him:

> *The pastor at my church comes up behind me sometimes when I'm singing in choir*, Gigi said. *I can feel his thing on my back. Don't sing in you church choir. Or if you sing in it, go to another place while you sing.* And she whispered how she was the queen of other places. *Close my eyes and boom, I'm gone. I learned it from my mother*, she told us. (*Brooklyn*, 72)

Sharing advice about how to avoid threatening situations is the girls' way of trying to resist sexual exploitation, and as expressed by Gigi, the blame is sometimes laid on the victim. The mindset of women having to learn to protect themselves better has also been present in the feminist movement and as such, is an insufficient method to battle sexist oppression as argued by hooks ([1981] 1992, 191): "Teaching women how to defend themselves against male rapists is not the same as working to change society so that men will not rape." The parallels between the presumed mindsets of Gigi's mother, the girls and the feminist movement suggest that women are led to believe that men assaulting women is an unchangeable condition. The act of physical submission or passivity may thus be viewed as resulting from performative reiterations of gender.

4.2   Regulation of sexual relationships

According to Hill Collins (2000, 84), controlling images of Black women "represent elite White male interests in defining Black women's sexuality and fertility." As seen in the previous section, the Jezebel image can be used to justify sexual exploitation, as August's willingness to have sex already at an early age is taken for granted by Jerome and Sylvia. However, other controlling images such as the Mammy and Black Lady depict Black women as asexual albeit fertile figures, who nevertheless make unsuitable partners for white men (ibid.). Therefore, Black women's sexuality and reproduction are not only exploited by viewing them as sexually promiscuous, but their sexuality may also be denied as a means of controlling them. In addition to the controlling images being emphasized by white institutions, attempts to control Black women's sexualities persist in patriarchal Black communities as well (Hill Collins 2000, 84). The two specific Black institutions to uphold controlling images of Black women as mentioned by Hill Collins (2000, 88) are Black churches and families. In *Brooklyn,* August's sexual freedom is restricted by values of the Nation of Islam and the pressure to maintain the dignity of her family, as is shown in this section.

4.2.1   Expectations of abstinence

Whereas the Jezebel stereotype serves to pressure August into sexual submission, young women should abstain from sexual relationships according to the values of August's family and their religion. August's father and brother do not seem to know about her boyfriend Jerome, and August promises Sister Loretta, who helps August's family to follow the

teachings of the Nation of Islam, to protect her "temple" (*Brooklyn*, 123). Sister Loretta is sometimes called "Sister Mama Loretta" by August and her brother (*Brooklyn*, 95), implying that she is a prominent and important figure in August's life at the time. In August's teenage years, pregnancy is seen as a threat against agency. As Gigi's mother turns out having been a teen mother, August and her friends think: "This would never happen to us […]. We knew this could never be us" (*Brooklyn*, 40). The prospect of pregnancy seems to be unimaginable to the girls. Later, a girl from her school, Charlsetta, is sent away, "back Down South" as her brother puts it, due to her becoming pregnant at sixteen (*Brooklyn*, 125–26). Charlsetta's premarital teen pregnancy results in public humiliation and disapproval of the family. August realizes that this kind of humiliation and rage expressed by the family could occur in her life as well if she had sexual intercourse with Jerome, which results in August becoming cautious and refusing to do so (ibid.). She is afraid of the "Down South" she might be sent both physically and mentally, as were her friends: "There was some Charlsetta buried in each of us. […] We pulled our boyfriends' fingers from inside of us, pushed them away, buttoned our blouses. We knew Down South. Everyone had one" (ibid.).

The fear of pregnancy implies that August does not have access to, or is not fully aware of contraceptive methods, which would be understandable since she would probably have to confront her father to arrange an appointment with a doctor and to get the money to do so. It is also worth noting that at the time, Black women were often in an inferior position when it came to reproductive rights (hooks [1981] 1992, 74), and that the birth control movement mostly concerned white, middle-class women (Davis 2003, 353). Moreover, illegal abortions caused the deaths of 2000-5000 women yearly in the US (Millett [1971] 1977, 43–44), which further accentuates the dangers of unwanted pregnancies to those who cannot afford or otherwise access a legitimate abortion. The pressure of maintaining the family's reputation and the lack of access to birth control possibly prevents August from exploring her sexuality during her teenage years. Her having affairs with several people in college might be due to the change in her social life, as she is distanced from her family and the values acquired at home might carry less significance.

It seems that August has internalized both ideals of Black girlhood, one that encourages her to engage in sexual interactions and another that promotes chastity. These two ideals could be viewed as August's 'generalized others' that contradict one another, as mentioned in 2.2.1. Millett ([1971] 1977, 119) holds that while women are often objectified due to patriarchy, they are not encouraged to enjoy their sexuality. This seems to hold true for August: as

Jerome has oral sex with her, she feels "tearful" as she realizes having failed to protect her temple (*Brooklyn*, 123), which suggests that she feels guilt for exploring her sexuality. The socially enforced view of abstinence is present in her wordings when Sylvia has sex for the first time: according to August's narration, Sylvia's father "lost" her when she lost her virginity (*Brooklyn*, 144). This suggests that August associates *loss* not only to one's virginity, but innocence and possibly respectability as well – a father loses his daughter when she loses her virginity. It is also possible that she thinks this to hold true in Sylvia's family specifically, as when Sylvia's first boyfriend shows up at their house, he threatens to shoot him, apparently in order to 'protect' her daughter (ibid.). Again, this shows the systematic culture of controlling and regulating Black women and girls' relationships in the name of protecting them.

4.2.2 Sexual relations and race

August's family and their religious and political beliefs shape her assumptions about white people. August's father and brother turn into devoted members of the Nation of Islam after the move to Brooklyn. August also becomes a so-called Black Muslim, but she is not as engaged in the religious life as the rest of her family. In the Black Muslim culture, white people are often referred to as 'devils,' and so do the people in August's home. Sister Loretta refers to 'white devils' when criticizing August's family for eating pork: "*The white devil's poison*, she said. *The white devil's swine. Slave food*, she said. *And we're nobody's slaves anymore*" (*Brooklyn*, 91). It is therefore apparent that August is not encouraged to associate with white people, let alone with white men. This notion is present as August's brother assumes that August is having a relationship with a man, whom he refers to as "the Devil" (*Brooklyn*, 11). Moreover, hooks ([1981] 1992, 67–70) points out that after slavery, many Black women have been discouraged to seek unions with white men by their families, partly due to racial solidarity and the trauma caused by slavery and partly due to a sexist attempt to control Black women's sex lives. Whatever the reason, August internalizes the notion of white people being evil when growing up.

While August is not encouraged to seek relationships with white boys or men by her social circle, she resists this internalized view by losing her virginity to a white boy after moving away from home: "*That's crazy,* the white devil of a boy who would become my first lover turned to me and said, his skin so pale I could see the blue veins running through it" (*Brooklyn*, 159–60). She continues to have affairs with white boys: "When I pulled my lovers

into me, my eyes closed tight against the faces I had grown up believing belonged to the devil, I imagined myself home again, my girls around me, the four of us laughing" (Brooklyn, 161). The fact that she still associates these boys with evilness implies that the opinions about white people she grows up hearing have impacted her notion about who she should or should not socialize with. However, her views about white boys seem to have changed in college, possibly due to a process of re-socialization she undergoes when moving away from Brooklyn. By having affairs with white boys, August deconstructs the polarized views imposed by her family and uses her sexuality to resist their previously forced beliefs.

4.3   Sexual orientation and heterosexism

In *Brooklyn*, August is treated as a heterosexual girl and consequently, as someone who is sexually oriented towards the male gender. Her sexual orientation is thus socially constructed and taken for granted, and she internalizes the heterosexual norm. For instance, the heteronormativity of the society is present when Jerome tells August that they are someday going to have sex, as discussed earlier. In other words, heteronormativity is objectivated through reaffirmation of the heterosexual world in socialization, as might be articulated by Berger and Luckmann. Butler (2002, 42) talks about the heterosexual matrix and "compulsory heterosexuality" which work together with attempts to universalize gender identities. Compulsory heterosexuality is a "regulatory practice" by which the links between gender, sex and desire are reinforced through one another, thus serving heteronormativity and patriarchy through binary thinking (Butler 2002, 24–26). In turn, non-heterosexuality shakes the premises of gender and can therefore be seen as the first "gender trouble" (Butler 2002, xi).

Further, Hill Collins (2000, 128–31) writes about heterosexism as a system of power, which has to do with the common view of heterosexuality as a superior form of sexual expression, thus justifying its domination in society. Hill Collins (2000, 128–29) demands analysis on the way heterosexism is linked to race, gender, and class, as both on a symbolic and structural level, the effects that heterosexism has on people varies and are shaped by these factors. For instance, the hyperheterosexualized Jezebel image of Black women results in regarding homosexuality of a Black woman as deviant and wrong. The pathologization of the Black female sexuality therefore constructs norms regarding the preferred forms of sexual expression available to women of color.

At the end of the novel, August mentions having had both female and male lovers in her adulthood around the world, which seem to vary from casual affairs to more long-lasting relationships:

> In the Philippines, a beautiful brown man pressed his lips to my feet again and again, saying, *Always begin here.* In Wisconsin, I promised my housemate turned lover that I'd stay with her always. Months later, as the scattered pages of my dissertation lay finished and approved on the floor beneath us, I kissed her slightly parted lips as she slept and left in the night. In Bali, I waited at night for a beautiful black man from Detroit to show up in the dark. *Say it*, he begged, our bodies moving against each other with such a hunger, we laughed out loud. *It's just three damn words*. […]
>
> Once in a café in San Francisco the woman I had lived with for eight months asked why did I sleep with fisted hands. (*Brooklyn*, 161–62)

This excerpt implies August's bisexuality. Whether she realizes this as an adult, or if this is something she has suppressed intentionally in order to comply with the heterosexual matrix remains uncertain as August seems rather indifferent about the gender of her lovers and does not discuss this change much further. However, it seems that as a teenager, her sexual expression has been directed by the heterosexual matrix, which she has internalized as the only reality available to her. She is indoctrinated in the supposition that she, as a female, is to be sexually orientated towards men, thus conforming to the norms of compulsory heterosexuality. As she grows up, she discovers other options and subverts the 'compulsory' order of sex, gender and desire.

There are some hints of bisexuality among the girls as they grow up. When having a sleepover at Sylvia's home, August and Sylvia wear baby-doll pajamas that "felt obscene and made [them] giddy" (*Brooklyn*, 116). The girls seem to be at least little attracted to each other: "We slow-danced with each other. Angela showed us how to French-kiss and we spent hours practicing. We practiced until our bodies felt as though they were exploding. We whispered, *I love you* and meant it. We said, *This is scary* and laughed" (ibid.); "We stroked the sharp knots of [Angela's] cheekbones, moved our fingers gently over her lips, lifted her shirt, and kissed her breasts. We said, *You're so beautiful*" (*Brooklyn*, 117). It seems that August and her friends touch each other and practice kissing in the name of preparing themselves for kissing boys, however, the feeling of a body almost "exploding" suggests that at least August is aroused by the girls. When growing up, August idolizes Sylvia and her beauty, and although she notes that she just wanted to be like Sylvia (*Brooklyn*, 62), by the way she

describes her appearance, she seems to have had a type of crush on her: "When she laughed, her beauty stilled me" (*Brooklyn*, 39).

It seems that August ignores her sexual feelings towards her friends or tries to pass them off as something else, that is, as platonic admiration and as useful practice for the future. As Jerome asks August where she has learned to kiss, August says: "*Don't worry about it*" (*Brooklyn*, 116). She is reluctant to tell him the truth "because he was eighteen and I was nearly fourteen and nothing mattered but hearing *I love you* and believing he meant it" (ibid.). It appears that the pervasiveness of compulsory heterosexuality makes August not want to risk hearing Jerome tell "I love you" by admitting having kissed girls. Since desire towards men is traditionally expected of women due to the male/female binary, having a boyfriend might be important to August as it strengthens her identity as a girl. Her relationship with Jerome can be seen as a performative act that reaffirms her gender identity.

According to Barbara Smith (1985, 15), heterosexuality can be regarded as the only privilege Black women may have: "None of us have racial or sexual privilege, almost none of us have class privilege, maintaining 'straightness' is our last resort." She believes that due to the commonly low social status of Black women, it is more difficult for them to come out as non-heterosexuals, as they do not have the privilege of maleness, whiteness or in most cases, social class (ibid.). This may be the case for August, too: because August cannot have Sylvia's promising future, she wants to brag about her experiences with Jerome to Sylvia (*Brooklyn*, 103–06), as if it was the most meaningful thing in her life at the time. She seems to think that the sexual experiences with Jerome make her interesting and worthy of Sylvia's approval and attention. Perhaps, it might also be a way of overcorrecting and disguising her sexual interest towards women. Intriguingly, August does not express being in pain until she finds out that Sylvia and Jerome are together (*Brooklyn*, 149) – as such, Jerome leaving her does not seem to rouse these feelings. The distress might therefore stem from her possibly being in love with Sylvia, though this is not made explicit.

August continues to face expectations about heterosexuality as a grown-up, as her brother suggests it is time for August to start a family. "*You're gonna be too old to be somebody's mama if you don't get busy. My brother grinned. No judgment. […] Just saying it's time to stop studying the dead and hook up with a living brother. I know a guy*" (*Brooklyn*, 7). To his suggestions, August responses: "*No judgment is a lie*" (ibid.), and "*Don't even*" (*Brooklyn*, 8). This implies that she is still expected to conform to the traditional role of Black women as

child-bearers. Regardless of his words, August still feels judged for her life choices. Nevertheless, she does not seem to care about it and is content and confident with the path she has chosen. She has thus liberated herself from the socially constructed pressures of committing to 'the cult of true womanhood'.

Going back to Hill Collins and the idea of self-definition and sexuality as powerful tools of resistance both in real life and in literature, August's casual female relationships can be viewed as an ultimate way to resist the power of heteronormative society and the heterosexist construction of Black female sexuality. In a manifest written by the Radicalesbian collective (1970, 221–26), lesbianism is seen as the most complete form of feminism, as it displays women's autonomy and independence of patriarchal interests. Although August does not define herself as a lesbian, she deconstructs the essentialist notion of Black female sexuality and shows independence from the male gender. On the other hand, the anti-essentialist queer critique problematizes the universalism that revolves around the gay/lesbian conversation (Barry 2017, 148). In this sense, August's possibly unfixed sexual identity avoids the essentialism and binary oppositions associated with lesbianism and gayness, thus making any assumptions and generalizations about her sexuality redundant. However August's sexual tendencies are looked at, they promote a kind of radical, post-structuralist and anti-essentialist way of self-definition.

5 Black female body as a site of oppression and resistance in *Another Brooklyn*

Thus far, I have examined August's coming-of-age experience from the perspectives of class and sexuality. The significance of the body as a site of oppression and resistance may be observed already in the previous chapters, as it is an integral element in many parts of the analysis and cannot fully be excluded from the previous themes. In this chapter, Black female body as a site of oppression and resistance is discussed more closely by drawing on the themes of the previous chapters. Class and sexuality as systems of power can be seen to come together to accentuate the markedness of the Black female body, making it a site particularly inclined for oppression and resistance. For instance, according to hooks ([1981] 1992, 74), "[l]ower-class women, and many Black women consequently, have the least control over their bodies" specifically in the context of reproductive rights. Moreover, Millett ([1971] 1977, 122) states that poor women are more often seen as sexual chattel than rich women, making poor women's bodies vulnerable for sexual exploitation. Therefore, systems of oppression come to materialize in the body. Body can also be used as a site for resisting intersecting oppressions: for instance, August and her friends walk everywhere by linking arms together, and speech is used for 'talking back' to boys.

Butler (2002, 12–13) suggests that body itself is a construction, meaning that the body gains its significance through the mark of the gender (ibid.; Butler [1993] 2011, x). Though her statement may appear paradoxical, it emphasizes the power of social systems as constructing and construing our objectivated realities. Conversely, bodily inscriptions also bring socially constructed categories such as gender into existence, as "[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body" (Butler 2002, 43). Moreover, ideas and standards of beauty have a great role in the 'making' of gender: as argued by Erica Reischer and Kathryn S. Koo (2004, 299), "the body beautiful may be read as a primary site for the social construction and performance of gender." While race is ultimately a cultural construct, it also comes into existence through inscriptions of the body, which is in turn affected by the social meanings it bears. Intersecting systems of oppression therefore present Black women as the 'other' when it comes to body and beauty, as discussed in subsection 2.2.3.

5.1   Stylization and agency of the material body

Attempts to control and denounce Black women's sexuality are linked to regulating the way they should stylize and hide their bodies in *Brooklyn.* This is connected to the fact that a Black female body is viewed as a "temple" by Black Muslims. On the surface, this seems like a positive analogy, but is mostly used as an excuse for restricting August's life. Like Millett ([1971] 1977, 102–05) notes, women are often made to believe to be superior to men as a means of manipulation, which seems to hold true in this case. Already at an early age, somewhere between eight and ten, August is conditioned to think that she should hide her body from the men's gaze, as a passer-by, a Black Muslim that spreads the word of his religion, stops August and her father on the street on their way to a Christian church and tells August to cover her body: "The man looked at me, his eyes moving slowly over my bare legs. *You're a black queen,* he said. *Your body is a temple. It should be covered*" (Brooklyn, 25). August reacts to the encounter with feelings of self-consciousness and shame: "In the short summer dress, my legs seemed too long and too bare. An **unlocked** temple. A temple **exposed**" (ibid.; emphasis added). The use of the words "unlocked" and "exposed" imply that she thinks she had made a target of herself for predatory men, having thus internalized the notion that her body is to be blamed for her sexualization.

According to hooks ([1981] 1992, 110), the Black Muslim movement was concerned with purifying Black women of their 'unclean' sexuality in the 1960s. This may have been the impetus for the man's comment as well: a woman's sacred body should not be regarded as sexual, and it is her responsibility to make sure no man is lured into sin. This again demonstrates how Black women are held responsible for their sexual exploitation. It seems that the stranger is not merely trying to be helpful but takes his time looking at August's legs before advising her to put on more concealing clothes. He uses his power as an older man to dictate how a Black female should dress, and conditions August to believe that her body should be hidden, even in the summer as a child. A moment before, August has adored the way Sylvia, Gigi and Angela walk down the street in shorts and halter tops, and she herself does not question the way they dress (*Brooklyn*, 18). This implies that the man is the first one to make her think that there is a 'correct' way to look, the way being dictated by patriarchal values that also appear to be connected to race, considering his statement about the 'Black queen's temple'.

The social construction of the sexed female body is behind attempts to control and limit August's agency. Sister Loretta persuades August to conceal her hair and dress and behave according to the ideals of Black Muslims, promising that August would "grow up to be as beautiful as Lola Falana" if she was modest and followed Elijah Muhammad's teachings (*Brooklyn*, 95). However, August does not quite follow Sister Loretta's advice, as she only pretends to conform to these guidelines: "So I pressed my legs tight together, draped baggy shirts over my new breasts, and promised her I'd remain the sacred being Allah had created. But I was lying" (ibid.). Later, August takes back control over her appearance by refusing to cover her head in public, as her "Muslim beliefs lived just left of [her] heart" (*Brooklyn*, 97). His father accepts this and apparently convinces Sister Loretta to accept her choice as well: "*Let her be who she's trying to become*, my father said" (ibid.). August also continues to eat pork in secret with her friends (*Brooklyn*, 6; 97). This shows that August's idea of beauty is not something that can be acquired by following Muslim teachings.

Black womanhood and class intersect on the body particularly through evaluations and stylizations of appearance in *Brooklyn*. As discussed earlier, August believes Sylvia's mother to think that dreams are not meant for someone who looks like her, which denotes that due to her appearance, she should not wish for a brighter future. Therefore, appearance and class affect one another and limit August's agency. The controlling image of a ghetto girl also links notions of class and beauty to evaluate Black female bodies. Another element present in *Brooklyn* is the recurring mentions of ashy skin, referring to the dryness of black skin that creates an ashy look. Mentions of ashy skin are often accompanied by remarks of poverty, suggesting ashy skin to highlight poorness (*Brooklyn*, 43; 81; 82). Moreover, the aversion of white people and rich Black people to associate with lower-class Black people links together race and class, also showcasing the interrelation of these variables. This is highlighted by August contrasting the white "pastel boys'" clothes and appearances with those of the brown boys living in Bushwick (*Brooklyn*, 82). *Brooklyn* therefore shows the interconnectedness between performative systems of class and race, both being brought into consciousness through the body while being simultaneously affected by one another. The markedness of female, Black, and lower-class bodies thus have particular social implications on the agency of poor Black women.

The culture of physical resistance is developed within the 'Black women's space' formed by the four girls, by which they attempt to gain agency over their bodies. For instance, prior to befriending Sylvia, Gigi and Angela, August admires from afar how safe, strong and

"impenetrable" the girls look when they walk with their arms linked together (*Brooklyn*, 25). The linking of arms is a recurring act among the girls (*Brooklyn*, 18–19; 24; 34; 35; 99), an act that August strongly associates with safety and strength. Using the specific word "impenetrable" can be seen to emphasize how linking arms with the girls is a way to unite their power and shield their bodies from sexual assault. When Gigi is raped at the age of 12, the girls buy razor blades and start to grow their nails long in order to protect themselves and each other (*Brooklyn*, 58–61). They practice how Gigi would slash the man the next time he would try to make a pass at her (*Brooklyn*, 58), and the girls hide blades inside their knee socks (*Brooklyn*, 61). However, they are still powerless against the reality of their neighborhood, which was apparent to everyone: "But Brooklyn had longer nails and sharper blades. Any strung-out soldier or ashy-kneed, hungry child could have told us this" (ibid.). As their efforts to be in control over their bodies by carrying blades and growing nails prove insufficient, they give up on fighting violence with violence but continue to walk everywhere together, arms linked together, their unity as the only real protection against boys and men:

> We pretended to believe we could unlock arms and walk the streets alone. But we knew we were lying. There were men inside darkened hallways, around street corners, behind draped windows, waiting to grab us, feel us, unzip their pants to offer us a glimpse.
>
>   We had long lost our razor blades and none of us had ever truly stopped chewing our nails. But still… (*Brooklyn* 74–75)

August's narrative hereby shows the lack of real agency she has over her body as a woman against predatory men, as walking the streets alone is not considered an option for her as a teenager. This continuous threat of her body being taken advantage of adds up to the weight of growing up girl in Brooklyn. However, August also uses her body to resist her objectification and the threat of sexual assault with the act of linking arms with her friends. As brought up earlier, her traveling the world alone as an adult shows liberation from the fear of going from one place to another in solitude.

5.2   Speech as a mediator of social realities

As argued in subsection 2.2.1, intersecting systems of oppression ultimately result from the social construction of knowledge. The objectivated realities are mediated from one individual to another through language, which makes speech an essential tool for upholding and subverting prevailing systems of power. This can be seen in *Brooklyn*, as August faces both oppressive and empowering messages through dialogue and speech. The lack of hearing about

people whom August identifies with in everyday speech can be seen to inhibit the development of her identity – her 'location in the world', if you will. Moreover, speech becomes a medium of reaffirmation and resistance as the girls share their stories and find comfort in their similar experiences, remind each other that they are beautiful, and talk back to boys. Traumatizing situations may also result in speechlessness and silence. As Black women's freedom of speech has been more limited than others' throughout history – take efforts to prevent Sojourner Truth from speaking in the first National Convention on Women's Rights (Davis [1981] 1983, 63), for example– the revolutionizing power of words is taken under examination in this section.

Negative notions about women have been mediated with speech from August's mother to August when she is alive. The one thing August's mother seems to have taught her is not to trust or befriend other women: "My mother had not believed in friendships among women. […] *Keep your arm out*, she said. *And keep women a whole other hand away from the farthest tips of your fingernails*. She told me to keep my nails long" (*Brooklyn*, 19); "*Don't trust women*, my mother said to me. *Even the ugly ones will take what you thought was yours*" (*Brooklyn*, 41). When August's mother dies and the family moves to Brooklyn, a process of re-socialization begins as August watches the three girls walk together and she wants to become one of them, an urge she appears not to have experienced earlier: "[A]s I watched Sylvia, Angela, and Gigi walk past our window, I was struck with something deeply unfamiliar – a longing to be a part of who they were, to link my own arm with theirs and remain that way. Forever" (*Brooklyn*, 19). As the friendship between the girls grows stronger, August is at times convinced that her mother was wrong:

> Sylvia, Gigi, and Angela had moved far past my longest fingernail, all the way up my arm. Years had passed since I'd heard my mother's voice. When she showed up again, I'd introduce my friends to her. I'd say, *You were wrong, Mama. Look at us hugging. Look at us laughing. Look how we begin and end each other*. (*Brooklyn*, 75)

In Berger and Luckmann's terms, befriending the three girls could be seen as a process of re-socialization that alters August's reality adopted in primary socialization. The excerpt implies that August would like to have a chance to change her mother's reality by talking to her as well.

In spite of the depth of the four girls' friendship, the process of re-socialization remains somewhat incomplete as August still believes that when the four girls grow up, they could not

be friends any longer: "I pressed my forehead against the floor, my arms stretched out above me. We would be women, one day, Sylvia, Angela, Gigi, and I. […] When we were women, there would be nothing. We couldn't be friends, my mother had said. We couldn't trust us" (*Brooklyn*, 99). This shows the difficulty of fully altering knowledge attained in primary socialization, as August seems to still accept the socially constructed notion of women as unreliable. Paradoxically enough, during her early teens, August still resists her mother's views by confiding to her friends and sees their friendship as unique and special source of peer support: "Who could understand how terrifying and perfect it is to be kissed by a teenage boy? Only your girls, I thought. Only your girls" (*Brooklyn*, 100). August finds comfort in knowing that there are people around who go through similar things as she does, which at the time seems to be more important than her mother's opinions. She appears to think that as long as the girls are not yet women, they may trust each other. Her mother's words about women taking what "you thought was yours" turn out to actualize when Sylvia betrays August at the brink of their womanhood, resulting in the end of their relationship.

Despite having her friends around her, not hearing or knowing enough about the experiences of people like her affects August's worldview and self-image. The notion of the male gender being the unmarked norm, thus making female body the 'other' (as elaborated by Butler 2002, 17; 24–25), is present in the subjective realities mediated to her. Back in Tennessee, when August is a young child, she goes to church with her mother and listens to the father of four girls "who looked like Angela" preach, she has trouble figuring out her place in the world: "*For God so loved the world,* their father would say, *he gave his only begotten son.* But what about his daughters, I wondered. What did God do with his daughters?" (*Brooklyn*, 23). Further, the mainstream music that played in the mass media at the time did not fully resonate with August's experiences: "[W]e didn't have jazz to know this was who we were. We had the Top 40 music of the 1970s trying to tell our story. It never quite figured us out" (*Brooklyn*, 2). Everyday speech and language, as well as popular culture, in this sense confirms the marginalization of Black women. At the very beginning of the novel, August wonders if their youth would have been different had they discovered jazz and blues earlier:

> If we had had jazz, would we have survived differently? If we had known our story was a blues with a refrain running through it, would we have lifted our heads, said to each other, *This is memory* again and again until the living made sense? Where would we be now if we had known there was a melody to our madness? (*Brooklyn*, 1–2).

August thus finds value in making the experiences of her kind heard and believes that there is a chance their stories would have had a chance for a happier ending had they known there were others who understood what they were going through. She also believes that listening to jazz music would have helped others as well: "How had Sylvia's philosophy-spouting father missed this? How had my own father, so deep inside his grief, not known there were men who had lived this, who knew how to tell his story?" (*Brooklyn*, 160).

Hill Collins ([1990] 1991, 99–102) writes about the blues tradition of Black women as a form of resistance. In addition to female relationships and writing, "African-American music as art has provided a second location where Black women have found a voice" (Hill Collins [1990] 1991, 99). Moreover, the lyrics sung by Black female blues singers often "challenge the externally defined controlling images used to justify Black women's objectification as the Other" (Hill Collins [1990] 1991, 100). In *Brooklyn*, August asks: "[W]hen we pressed our heads to each other's hearts how did we not hear Carmen McRae singing? In Angela's fisted hands, Billie Holiday staggered past us and we didn't know her name. Nina Simone told us how beautiful we were and we didn't hear her voice" (*Brooklyn*, 160–61). These words imply that had August known about female jazz/blues singers such as Carman McRae, Billie Holiday and Nina Simone, her self-image would have been quite different, again showing the power of vocalizing and bringing forth Black women's stories.

Even though the girls do not have Nina Simone tell them that they are beautiful, the four girls tell this to each other constantly, often using the specific word *beautiful* (*Brooklyn*, 38; 58; 117). August also characterizes her friends as beautiful in the narration, especially Sylvia (*Brooklyn*, 16; 39). The use of this particular word points to the Black is Beautiful movement, a mentality that emerged in the 1960s, resisting the view of Black as the 'other' by calling for Black empowerment (Reischer and Koo 2004, 308). In addition to resistance, the slogan 'Black is beautiful' is also linked to positive discourses of self-identification (Crenshaw 1991, 1297). Therefore, the four girls use speech to create and help each other create positive self-definitions. Moreover, August characterizes her Brown and Black male lovers as "beautiful" (*Brooklyn*, 161–62), which simultaneously strengthens the idea that beauty is found in all races and deconstructs the binaries of male/female, masculine/feminine and handsome/beautiful by which the word *beautiful* has come to carry specifically feminine and white connotations.

Most of the time, August seems to think of herself as beautiful as well, apart from when visiting Sylvia's upper-class home that makes her feel "ragged and ugly" instead of "lost and beautiful" (*Brooklyn*, 101). Gigi on the other hand, being of mixed race, has grown up hearing that her dark skin color is a "curse."

> We came **by way of** our mothers' memories.
>
> When Gigi was six years old, her mother pulled her in front of the mirror. *It was cracked already*, Gigi said. *I guess that should have been a sign. Broken-ass mirror and my crazy mama making promises*. […]
>
> *The only **curse** you carry*, her mother said, *is the **dark skin** I passed on to you. You gotta find a way past that skin. You gotta find your way outside of it. Stay in the shade. Don't let it go no darker than it already is. Don't drink no coffee either*. (*Brooklyn*, 55–56; emphasis added)

August noting that they "came by way of" their mothers' memories implies that each of the girls' realities are largely constructed by their mothers' knowledge, which is passed on to the girls in primary and secondary socialization. Gigi saying that the mirror was already cracked when her mother took her in front of it brings to mind Cooley's looking-glass self, and that from this point onwards, Gigi sees herself through the distorted mirror that reflects her mother's views. Moreover, Gigi's mother telling her to stay in the shade in order to find a way past her skin may symbolically mean that she should behave modestly, as is often considered ideal for Black women.

Gigi is uncertain about whether her skin and body is beautiful or not: "*It's dark*, Gigi said. *But it's got red and blue and gold in it. I look at my arms and I'm thinking skinny-ass monster arms.* […] *And sometimes*, she said, *they look so damn beautiful to me. I don't even know which thing is the truth*" (*Brooklyn*, 56). Taking into consideration Berger and Luckmann's theory, somewhat negative views on her appearance due to her skin color are mediated to Gigi in primary socialization by her mother. Eurocentric beauty standards are indeed often accepted and passed on among Black women (Hill Collins 2000, 90–91), which makes Gigi uncertain about her beauty. Moreover, through speech, Gigi's views may construct August's notion of Blackness as the 'other'. However, the girls seem to turn this around and celebrate Gigi's distinctive features by calling her "Chocolate China doll" and complimenting her hair and eyes that she has inherited from her Chinese ancestors (*Brooklyn*, 57), again using speech as a medium of empowerment.

Patricia A. Broussard (2013, 375) talks about "Black women's post-slavery silence syndrome," saying that "Black women continue to suffer from trauma they endured as a result of the dynamics of the societal structure of their world during slavery. Moreover, that social structure, by its very nature, imposed a code of silence upon Black women, which continues to exist to this day." In *Brooklyn*, speechlessness occurs when August is overpowered by her emotions and loss of agency. When August is betrayed by Sylvia, she almost loses her speech entirely: "By [the summer I turned fifteen], I was barely speaking. Where words had once flowed easily, I was suddenly silent, breath snatched from me, replaced by a melancholy my family couldn't understand" (*Brooklyn*, 2–3). When she encounters Sylvia in the subway twenty years later, she finds her voice "gone again" (*Brooklyn*, 13). Whether she is disempowered by Sylvia's actions or is at a loss of words due to other mental trauma tracing back to her youth remains unresolved.

In addition to the speechlessness caused by Sylvia's betrayal, August, Gigi and Angela remain silent when Sylvia's father sees them as ghetto girls, as discussed in chapter 3: "We could have blamed his stinging words on his stilted English. We could have said *Fuck you, man* – become who he thought we already were. But we were silent" (*Brooklyn*, 108–09). One of Angela's defining characteristics is also being silent about her troubles despite the three friends encouraging her to speak up (*Brooklyn*, 60; 117). Her mother also tells her not to tell anybody about getting her period, apparently to protect her from being seen as sexually mature by boys and men (*Brooklyn*, 114). In addition, Gigi chooses not to tell her mother about having been raped (*Brooklyn*, 57–58). Black women's silence being a remnant of the survival tactics adopted during slavery and Jim Crow (Broussard 2013, 375), August, Angela and Gigi's silences may be viewed as resulting from the disempowerment stemming from intersecting oppressions, constructing the kind of conditions where they are discouraged to speak up and talk about their experiences. In addition, silence could be seen as a performative act expected specifically from Black women.

In contrast to silence, being loud and talking back to boys is August's way to resist the threats posed by the streets of Brooklyn. Being loud may be a way to pretend being unafraid of the world: "We were learning to walk the Brooklyn streets as though we had always belonged to them – our voices loud, our laughter even louder" (*Brooklyn*, 61). August and her friends talk back to boys who call their names:

> When boys called our names, we said, *Don't even say my name. Don't even put it in your mouth*. When they said, *You ugly anyway*, we knew that they were lying.

> When they hollered, *Conceited!* we said, *No – convinced!* We watched them dip-
> walk away, too young to know how to respond. (*Brooklyn* 70)

As the boys do not know how to respond to the girls, it seems that talking back is an effective way resist the threat of becoming harassed by boys. Talking back might be seen as a subversive bodily act that challenges expectations of subservient conduct from Black women. Moreover, the empowerment brought by the friendship is apparent as the girls create positive self-definitions to replace the negative ones posed by the boys. The girls can also be seen to resist their treatment as the 'other' when they sing together: "*I and I and I and I*, we chanted. *We and we and we and we*" (*Brooklyn*, 75). The girls continue to talk back to boys and pretend to be confident: "And then we were heading toward thirteen, walking our neighborhood as if we owned it. *Don't even look at us*, we said to the boys, out palms up in front of our faces. *Look away look away look away!*" (*Brooklyn*, 74). The girls are able to talk back to boys who are presumably around their age, but judging by the other encounters in the novel, they are unable to talk back to grown men. Gaining agency through speech thus only goes so far when one is a teenage girl.

6 Conclusion

As a reader, I view August's narrative in *Another Brooklyn* as a demonstration of Black girlhood as constructed by intersecting systems of power and oppression. For August, growing up as a girl in Brooklyn means carrying a heavy mental baggage that she did not pack herself, as the white supremacist, classist, patriarchal and heterosexist society limits her self-determination and agency. Navigating the various expectations posed by the people she socializes with is accompanied by attempts of resistance cultivated within the 'Black women's space' of August and her three friends. As August grows up and goes to college, she learns to live on her own terms and liberate herself from the socially constructed norms which have controlled her life, and thus resists the systematic devaluation of Black womanhood. The "collective standpoint" of Black women as projected by Patricia Hill Collins is presented as a continuous struggle against socially constructed controlling images posed by intersecting oppressive forces. As Black women's writing itself is seen as a way of resisting systems of oppression by Hill Collins, Jacqueline Woodson's novel succeeds in deconstructing the otherness linked to Black womanhood on various levels. Given that I analyze the experiences and identity of a fictional character, I recognize that they do not accurately represent all the ways Black womanhood is viewed, oppressed, and experienced. Nevertheless, themes of self-definition and agency are prevalent in both August's narrative and in discussions about the politics of Black female identity. I am therefore inclined to see parallels between August's narrative and the social constructionist argument: the notion of one's 'location in the world' reflects the surrounding social conditions one has little control over.

While my analysis of *Brooklyn* is based on multiple secondary sources, many of which are written by Black activists and scholars, it does, like most theses, have some limitations as well. In *The Truth That Never Hurts* (1998, 49), Barbara Smith states: "I do not believe it is possible to arrive at a fully developed and useful Black feminist criticism by merely reading about feminism." She believes that the most accurate theories, including literary theory, are drawn from practice, i.e., experience of activism, as only this way one can have the appropriate tools to analyze political matters (ibid.). Smith thus criticizes academics, Black academics to be exact, who only resort to using existing theories about women's issues and feminism, which are mostly created by white scholars, and thus have limited access to the practice of the issues in question. Smith holds that activism and theory should be interrelated, and not function in isolation.

Not only is this thesis almost completely constructed upon existing theories and scholarly texts, it has also been done so by a white European woman in the 21st century, thus having no experience in Black feminist movement of the late 20th century in action. However, the issue is reversed as posed by Smith: while her concern is that the Black critics' views are one-sided due to resorting to secondary sources written mostly by white academics, I recognize that despite my using several Black writers' works as a basis for my analysis, my inexperience in activism as well as my relative privilege in a white-supremacist society make me unqualified to arrive at definitive conclusions about issues dealing with race. While this thesis might not create new kind of knowledge, or sufficiently explain what it truly means to grow up as a Black girl in Brooklyn in this context, it might succeed in examining the collective standpoint of Black womanhood in a specific socio-historical context and honoring the uniqueness and complexity of the Black female experience.

In an interview conducted years before the publication of *Brooklyn*, Woodson says that she wants to write realistic fiction and nonfiction because her family history has not been sufficiently documented on paper (AmericanGraduateDC 2012, 7:17–10:20). This is due to the fact that in the past African American people have not been allowed to read and write and thus have depended on oral history passed across generations (ibid.). According to Woodson, her great-great-grandparents took part in the Underground Railroad, and the Woodson line is an outcome of the 'relationship' between Thomas Jefferson and his slave Sally Hemings, but these connections have been denied and the oral stories of her family doubted due to the lack of written documentation (ibid.). This all has made her realize the importance of writing about her world (ibid.). This realization seems to be echoed through August's discovery of the voices of her kind: "If we had had jazz, would we have survived differently? […] Where would we be now if we had known there was a melody to our madness?" (*Brooklyn*, 1–2). The importance of sharing stories about what it means to be a woman of color in the specific time and place is therefore not only acknowledged by author Jacqueline Woodson, but also displayed through August's narrative, making the novel itself a performative. *Another Brooklyn* thus maintains Black women's literary tradition by giving voice to those who have formerly been silenced and showcasing the power their stories may hold.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Finnish summary

Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma käsittelee mustan tyttöyden sosiaalisen rakentumisen kuvaamista Jacqueline Woodsonin *Another Brooklyn* -romaanissa (2016). Tutkielman päämääränä on tarkastella sortavien rakenteiden vaikutusta päähenkilö Augustin kasvutarinaan, sekä tapoja, joilla hän reagoi tilanteisiin, jotka aiheutuvat näiden rakenteiden yhteenliittymistä ja risteymistä (intersections). Tutkimuskysymys määrittyy primäärilähteessä esitetyn huomion kautta, jossa August vertaa tyttönä kasvamista Brooklynissä 1970-luvulla kiviä täynnä olevan säkin kuljettamiseen. Tutkielman teesi on, että kontrolloivat sekä osittain ristiriitaiset oletukset rajoittavat Augustin toimijuutta ja positiivisen minäkuvan kehittymistä hänen teinivuosinaan. Kasvaessaan hän kuitenkin oppii uhmaamaan näitä olettamuksia ystäviensä, jazz-musiikin löytämisen sekä yliopiston aloittamisen ansiosta. *Another Brooklyn*in nähdään täten kuvaavan mustaa tyttöyttä erilaisten eriarvoisuutta ylläpitävien systeemien liitoskohtana sekä demonstroivan Augustin kautta, miten se rakentuu osittain ristiriitaisten sosiaalisten olettamusten ja kontrolloivien mielikuvien varaan. Toisaalta musta tyttöys ja naiseus nähdään myös positioina, joista käsin näitä olettamuksia ja mielikuvia voidaan uhmata ja purkaa.

*Another Brooklyn*in juoni perustuu kehyskertomukseen, jossa kolmissakymmenissä oleva August palaa Brooklyniin isänsä hautajaisiin. Augustista on sittemmin tullut menestyvä antropologi, joka tutkii eri kulttuurien kuolemaan liittyviä uskomuksia ja rituaaleja. Lyyrisen romaanin varsinainen sisältö koostuu nuoruusmuistoista, jotka valtaavat Augustin mielen tämän kohdattuaan sattumalta entisen ystävänsä Sylvian metrossa. Huomion keskiössä ovat August, Sylvia sekä kahden muun tytön, Gigin ja Angelan, välinen ystävyys sekä nuoruuteen ja murrosikään sijoittuvat kipeät muistot, joiden traagisuutta August ei ymmärtänyt tapahtumien sattuessa. Oleellisena teemana on myös totuuden kiistäminen, jota August harjoittaa erityisesti käsitellessään äitinsä itsemurhaa. August näkee halun paeta totuutta myös muissa Brooklynin ihmisissä, mistä juontunee romaanin nimi. Tapahtumat sijoittuvat suurimmaksi osaksi 1970-luvun Bushwickiin, Augustin kahdeksannesta ikävuodesta kuuteentoista, jonka aikana ystävykset kohtaavat läpi murrosikään liittyviä myötä- ja vastoinkäymisiä. Tyttöjen välinen ystävyys on kaikki kaikessa, kun heidän muuttuvat kehonsa tuovat mukanaan muun muassa seksualisointia, ahdistelua sekä hyväksikäyttöä. Kun August kohtaa Sylvian metrossa kaksikymmentä vuotta myöhemmin, ystävyyssuhteet ovat kuitenkin yksi toisensa jälkeen päättyneet: Sylvian kanssa August ei

tahdo olla enää tekemisissä, Angela on ilmeisen etäinen, ja Gigi on tehnyt itsemurhan. Muita romaanissa esiin tulevia teemoja ovat esimerkiksi luokkatietoisuus, seksuaalisuus, kehollisuus, kuolema ja uskonto.

Tutkielma jakautuu kuuteen päälukuun. Ensimmäisessä luvussa, johdannossa, käydään läpi tutkielma pääpiirteissään, esitellään primääritekstin keskeiset aiheet sekä valotetaan motivaatiota aihevalinnan taustalla. Luku kaksi käsittelee tutkielman teoreettista taustaa käyden läpi feminismin ja feministisen kritiikin osa-alueita sekä identiteetin rakentumista sosiaalisen konstruktionismin näkökulmasta. Augustin kasvutarinaa analysoidaan täten kahden premissin nojalla: ensinnäkin, että naiseuden kokemukseen vaikuttavat merkittävästi myös muut rakenteellista eriarvoisuutta lisäävät muuttujat kuten rotu, yhteiskuntaluokka sekä seksuaalinen suuntautuminen, ja toisekseen, että rakenteellinen sorto perustuu sosiaalisin prosessein muodostuviin käsityksiin todellisuudesta. Nämä premissit kulkevat punaisena lankana läpi tutkielman analyysiosion. Tarkemman tarkastelun kohteeksi analyysissä valikoituvat yhteiskuntaluokan, seksuaalisuuden sekä kehollisuuden teemat, joita käsitellään vastaavasti käsittelyluvuissa kolme, neljä ja viisi. Luku kuusi vetää yhteen tutkielmassa tehdyt havainnot sekä nostaa esiin tutkielman mahdolliset puutteet.

Teorialuku jakautuu kahteen alaosioon, joista kumpikin jakautuu edelleen kolmeen alakohtaan. Osiossa 2.1 jaetaan feminismin historia karkeasti kolmeen aaltoon, joista tutkielman kannalta oleellisimmiksi määritellään toinen ja kolmas aalto. Feminismin ensimmäisen aallon aatteellisia puutteita käsitellään kohdassa 2.1.1 nostamalla esiin intersektionaalisen feminismin tarpeellisuus naiseuden kokemuksen monipuolisuuden ymmärtämisessä. Intersektionaalisen feminismin määritellään pohjautuvan mustaan feminismiin (Black feminism) ja tarkoittavan aatetta, jonka mukaan naiseuden kokemus ei ole universaali, vaan siihen vaikuttaa oleellisesti myöskin esimerkiksi rodullistamisen sekä luokkasyrjintä. Kohdassa 2.1.2 luodaan katsaus kolmannen aallon poststrukturalistiseen feminismiin, joka vuorostaan haastaa essentialistiset näkemykset naiseudesta dekonstruoiden esimerkiksi sukupuoleen tavallisesti liitettyjä binäärimääreitä. Kohdassa 2.1.3 yhdistetään intersektionaalinen ja poststrukturalistinen feministinen ajattelu, kun tarkastelun kohteeksi otetaan afrikkalaisamerikkalaisnaisten kirjallisuusperinne sekä representaatio kirjallisuudessa. Havaitaan, että intersektionaalisen feminismin käyttäminen poststrukturalistisena, anti-essentialistisena metodina laajentaa ymmärrystä niin afrikkalaisamerikkalaisnaisten kirjallisuusperinteitä kuin heidän kirjoittamiansa naishahmojakin kohtaan.

Osio 2.2 käsittelee tietoa, identiteettiä sekä toimijuutta sosiaalisten prosessien tuloksena. Sukupuoli (gender) ja rotu nähdään sosiaalisina konstruktioina, joihin perustuvat essentialistiset oletukset esimerkiksi mustasta naiseudesta. Identiteetti määritellään löyhästi tarkoittavan paikkaa sosiaalisessa maailmassa. Kohdassa 2.2.1 esitellään sosiaalisen konstruktionismin keskeiset ajatukset. Sosiaaliskonstruktionistisen teorian päälähteenä käytetään Peter Bergerin ja Thomas Luckmannin *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* -teosta ([1966] 1991), joka esittää todellisuutta koskevan tiedon olevan sosiaalisten prosessien jatkumon aikaansaannosta. Berger ja Luckmann jakavat nämä dialektiset prosessit kolmeen vaiheeseen: tiedon sisäistämiseen (internalization), objektivointiin (objectivation) sekä ulkoistamiseen (externalization), jotka kukin osaltaan muodostavat ja ylläpitävät sosiaalista tietoa. Tämä tieto välittyy yksilöltä toiselle sosialisaation kautta, jonka yksi tärkeimmistä välineistä on kieli. Berger ja Luckmann jakavat sosialisaation muodot primääriseen ja sekundaariseen (primary and secondary socialization), joista ensimmäinen ajoittuu lapsuuteen ja muodostaa perustan yksilön maailmankatsomukselle ja jonka päälle jälkimmäisestä omaksuttu tieto rakentuu. Käsitykset todellisuudesta voivat myös muuttua uudelleensosialisoitumisen (re-socialization) myötä, joskin primäärisessä sosialisaatiossa omaksutun tiedon muuttaminen on huomattavasti sekundaarista hankalampaa. Toiseksi sosiaalisen konstruktionismin keskeiseksi näkemykseksi nostetaan Charles Horton Cooleyn ajatus siitä, että ihminen on sitä, mitä luulee muiden ajattelevan hänen olevan, mikä kiteyttää ajatuksen identiteetin ja minäkuvan muotoutumisesta sosiaalisena prosessina.

Kohdassa 2.2.2 esitetään Judith Butlerin ajatus sukupuolen performatiivisuudesta yhtenä sosiaaliskonstruktionistisen ajattelun mahdollisena feministisenä sovelluksena. Butler väittää sukupuolen perustuvan olemisen sijaan tekemiseen, mikä vuorostaan luo perustan sukupuoli-identiteetille. Butlerin näkemyksen mukaan myös rotu on performatiivinen konstruktio, sillä sukupuoli-identiteetin tapaan se luo itse itsensä. Butlerin käsitys sukupuolen performatiivisuudesta katsotaan kuuluvan sosiaalisen konstruktionismin piiriin, sillä näiden kahden teorian välillä on havaittavissa lukuisia yhtäläisyyksiä. Kohdassa 2.2.2 esitetään, että performatiivisuusteorian funktio tutkielmassa on toimia välineenä Augustin toiminnan tarkastelulle sekä auttaa havainnoimaan mustaan naiseuteen liittyvien paineiden ja odotusten tieteellistä perusteettomuutta. Kohta 2.2.3 käsittelee näitä paineita ja odotuksia historiallisesta näkökulmasta nojaten Patricia Hill Collinsin ja bell hooksin mustan feminismin kulmakiviteoksiin, ehdottaen mustaan naiseuteen liittyvän toiseuden käsityksen (otherness)

johtuvan sosiaalisesti konstruoiduista negatiivisista mielikuvista, joita ympäröivät binääriset ajatusmallit.

Tutkielman analyyttinen osuus alkaa mustan tyttöyden ja yhteiskuntaluokan risteymien havainnoinnilla *Another Brooklyn*issä luvussa kolme. Osiossa 3.1 tarkastellaan Augustin omia käsityksiä perheensä varallisuudesta sekä sen vaikutuksia hänen haluunsa varastaa häntä rikkaammilta New Yorkin sähkökatkoksen aikana. Omien sanojensa mukaan August ei lapsena ymmärrä perheensä köyhyyttä, sillä Bushwickissa asuu myös paljon häntä köyhempiä lapsia. Hän kuitenkin vaikuttaa häpeävän huonoa sosioekonomista asemaansa. Augustin luokkatietoisuus vaikuttaa muodostuvan toisten ihmisten kautta, peilaten Bergerin ja Luckmannin argumenttia sosialisaatiosta identiteetin rakentajana. Buswickissa tapahtuva etnokulttuurinen muutos, 'valkoisten pako' (white flight), nähdään myös rasismin ja luokkasyrjinnän yhdistävänä ilmiönä. Bushwickin tilanne 1970-luvulla toimii siten allegoriana rodullistettujen ja köyhien toiseuttamiselle ja eriarvoisuudelle, josta August vapautuu kasvaessaan ja muuttaessaan pois.

Osio 3.2 keskittyy Sylvian varakkaiden vanhempien asenteisiin Augustia kohtaan. August tuntee, miten Sylvian vanhemmat paheksuvat häntä hänen sosioekonomisen asemansa vuoksi. Sylvian äiti saa Augustin tuntemaan, ettei hänen näköisensä ihmisen pitäisi unelmoida menestyksestä, ja hänen isänsä viittaa mustuuteen ongelmana, jonka yläpuolelle afrikkalaisamerikkalaisten ihmisten on noustava. Sylvian vanhempien asenteet nähdään antiteesinä niin Martin Luther Kingin "I Have a Dream" -puheelle kuin Black Power -liikkeellekin, sillä he eivät vaikuta ajattelevan Augustin ansaitsevan parempaa asemaa yhteiskunnassa hänen taustansa vuoksi. August kokee tulleensa nähdyksi 'ghettotyttönä' riippumatta siitä, miten hän kantaa itsensä, mikä osoittaa performatiivisuuden riittämättömyyden kontrolloivien naiskuvien edessä. Päästessään maineikkaaseen yliopistoon ja edetessään urallaan August osoittaa, ettei häntä voida estää unelmoimasta ja tavoittelemasta menestystä sosioekonomisen taustansa johdosta.

Luvussa neljä tarkastellaan *Another Brooklyn*in kuvauksia mustien tyttöjen seksuaalisuudesta ja seksualisoinnista sosiaalisen konstruoinnin ja dekonstruoinnin näkökulmasta. Seksuaalisuus nähdään alueena, jolla kohtaavat niin patriarkaattiset, rasistiset kuin heteroseksistiset olettamukset liittyen mustaan naiseuteen ja seksuaalisuuteen. Rakenteellisen sorron muotojen yhdistymisen katsotaan luovan puitteet mustien naisten seksuaalisuuden sosiaaliselle rakentumiselle ja toisaalta ristiriitaisten odotusten syntymiselle. Mustien naisten ja tyttöjen

hyperheteroseksualisointi juontaa juurensa orjuuteen sekä kontrolloivaan Jezebel-mielikuvaan, joka esittää mustat naiset seksuaalisesti moraalittomina villi-ihmisinä. Toisaalta mustaan naiseuteen liittyvät myös mielikuvat aseksuaalisista naishahmoista. Kontrolloivia kuvia ja toiseutta voidaan uhmata seksuaalisen toimijuuden haltuunotolla sekä positiivisella itsensä määrittelyllä, jolloin seksuaalisuus voidaan nähdä myös merkittävänä vastarinnan välineenä.

Osiossa 4.1 käsitellään Augustin nuorena kohtaamaa hyperseksualisointia sekä seksuaaliseen kanssakäymiseen liittyviä paineita. Miehet ja pojat Brooklynissä näkevät Augustin Jezebel-mielikuvan kautta, ja hän tuntee olonsa turvattomaksi. August ja hänen ystävänsä suojautuvat seksuaaliselta hyväksikäytöltä kävelemällä kaikkialle yhdessä ja neuvomalla toisiaan paikoista, joihin ei kannata mennä. Osiossa 4.2 kiinnitetään huomiota tapoihin, joilla Augustin seksuaalista käyttäytymistä pyritään rajoittamaan perheen arvoista ja uskonnosta käsin. Havaitaan, että hänen odotetaan pidättäytyvän seksuaalisesta kanssakäymisestä ja ettei hänen toivota sosialisoivan erityisesti valkoisten poikien tai miesten kanssa. Näistä odotuksista hän vapautuu yliopistossa, jossa hänellä on lukuisia irtosuhteita valkoisten poikien kanssa. Osio 4.3 keskittyy havaintoihin Augustin ilmeisestä biseksuaalisuudesta, jonka esitetään dekonstruoivan mustaan naiseuteen liittyviä universalistisia näkemyksiä ja osoittavan Augustin vapautuneen heteroseksistisen yhteiskunnan aiheuttamista paineista.

Luvussa viisi tutkitaan mustaa naiskehoa vallankäytön ja vastarinnan välineenä *Another Brooklyn*issä. Erilaisten sosiaalisten rakenteiden katsotaan tavalla tai toisella kohtaavan keholla tehden siitä tilan, jossa rakenteiden tuottamat oletukset ja normit materialisoituvat. Täten niin seksuaalisuuden kuin luokkasyrjinnänkin nähdään liittyvän mustien tyttöjen kehon toimijuuteen, kehonkuvaan ja ulkonäön arvosteluun, joihin liittyviä ajatuksia vaihdetaan puheen kautta. Luvussa tutkitaan mustan naiskehon toiseutta ja toiseuttamista sekä näitä käsityksiä uhmaavia tapoja kehollisuuden ja puhumisen näkökulmasta. Osiossa 5.1 keskitytään konkreettiseen kehoon kohdistuviin odotuksiin sekä tapoihin, joilla kehon fyysisyyttä hyödynnetään näiden odotusten horjuttamiseksi ja vastustamiseksi. August kokee nuoresta asti paineita peitellä kehoaan miesten katseilta, mikä johtuu Nation of Islam -järjestöstä kumpuavista näkemyksistä. Tämä nähdään yrityksenä rajoittaa Augustin toimijuutta sekä saada hänet ajattelemaan, että seksuaalisen hyväksikäytön ehkäiseminen on naisen vastuulla. Sosiaalisen luokan ja ulkonäön vuorovaikutus nähdään ylläpitävän ajatusta mustan naiskehon toiseudesta. *Another Brooklyn*issä kehoa käytetään ehkäisemään seksuaalisen vallankäytön uhriksi joutumista, kun August ja hänen ystävänsä kulkevat

kaikkialle yhdessä käsi kädessä. Osiossa 5.2 tutkitaan puhumista sosiaalisten todellisuuksien välittäjänä ja rakentajana niin positiivisessa kuin negatiivisessakin valossa. Sanat rakentavat Augustin ja hänen ystäviensä minäkuvia ja naiskuvia. Puhumisen, vastaan sanomisen ja omien kokemusten jakamisen nähdään olevan avainasemassa mustien naisten voimaantumiselle.

Tutkielman yhteenvedossa todetaan, että *Another Brooklynin* voidaan katsoa kuvaavan mustan tyttöyden sosiaalista konstruointia Augustin tarinan kautta. Musta tyttöys nähdään alueena, jolla sorron muodot kuten seksismi, rasismi ja luokkasyrjintä kohtaavat rajoittaen Augustin toimijuutta. Näistä rajoittavista tekijöistä August vapautuu aloitettuaan opinnot yliopistossa ja löydettyään jazzmusiikin. Kokonaisuudessaan *Another Brooklyn* nostaa mustien tyttöjen ja naisten kokemusten esiintuomisen tärkeyden, minkä johdosta teksti itsessään nähdään performatiivisena teoksena. Yhteenvedossa todetaan myös, ettei tutkielman tarkoituksena ole universalisoida afrikkalaisamerikkalaisnaisten kokemuksia tai tehdä siihen liittyviä johtopäätöksiä, vaan tarkastella Hill Collinsin mainitseman mustien naisten kollektiivisen näkökulman esiintymistä *Another Brooklyn*issa historiallisessa ja sosiaalisessa kontekstissaan sekä kunnioittaa mustan tyttöyden kokemusten ainutlaatuisuutta.