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Bitches Ain't Shit but Hoes and Tricks:

An Examination of Gender in M.K. Asante's *Buck*

When we think of an autobiography, we think of a mostly factual representation of an individual's life, or at least a collection of an individual's reflections based on real life events. Though autobiography, memoir specifically, allows for exaggeration or alterations, a prerequisite for writing in general necessitates language that an audience can read and most importantly, understand. M.K. Asante's memoir *Buck*, however, not only pushes conventional dialect aside, but simultaneously demonstrates an obligatory verbiage that speaks from the author's point of view. Throughout this essay, I will be examining how misogynistic language throughout Asante's adolescence, specifically in rap music and inner city street culture, establishes a tense and destructive stage for gender relations as a whole.

The major problem with using vernacular that can be interpreted different ways is that often times, those words and phrases can easily be wrongly interpreted. Unfortunately, these misunderstandings often stem from an ignorance about a different culture. Especially when that culture is already marginalized because of race or socioeconomic standing, a unique way of speaking often leads to being further ostracized by the dominant group. Comprehending poetry, specifically in the form of rap music, can prove particularly difficult because the idioms are easily misconstrued. In conjunction with difficulty of understanding dialect, a further difficulty lies in the fact that the beats and tones found in rap music are often notably assertive. Simply put, these lyrics, the poets themselves, the culture at large is dissimilar. While this type of diversity is

not always destructive, to an already relegated culture, difference often serves to further negative perceptions.

Before we delve into the overarching effects of language, additional context is necessary to comprehend even this paper. M.K. Asante is now a bestselling author, a noted film maker and rapper in addition to serving as a tenured professor at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland. Growing up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, however, his beliefs and viewpoints were largely a result of gang mentalities regarding drug dealing, money making, and as this paper will demonstrate, negative conceptions of women. In order to firmly establish these influences, I will necessarily use the explicit language an adolescent Asante used in conjunction with the dialect of his peers. Additionally, I will use language similar to the types of rappers that largely shaped Asante's transition into manhood. In order to better understand this language, I will include footnotes throughout the paper translating words and phrases into a more traditional vernacular. Finally, throughout *Buck*, Asante uses his childhood nickname "Malo" to differentiate between his current state of being, as opposed to his adolescent self. For the purposes of this paper, I will do the same.

As it applies to Asante's original conception of women, the most important words applied specifically to Malo's female contemporaries, include the word "bitch" and the word "hoe." As these two words relate specifically to gender stereotypes, neither word is particularly endearing. The term "bitch" generally refers specifically to a person, male or female, that performs services for another, and is often degraded as a result. A "hoe," on the other hand, refers to a person, usually female, who gains a reputation of being easily coerced into performing sexual services, and is consequently besmirched for doing so. Before a full examination of how demeaning words like bitch or hoe are used among Malo and his friends can be accomplished, we must first

understand how Malo's perceptions are, to some extent, developed organically. Once these processes are at least introduced, in order to fully comprehend the language utilized both by Malo and those rappers he cites periodically throughout his memoir, we must examine the social constructs and lyrical influences that allow these types of sentiments to be propagated. Throughout the course of the narrative, Malo's conception of women is completely transformed. As his journey would indicate, however, it took his ass a lot to get there.

Though an argument could be made that Asante's initial views of women are completely unfounded, it appears responsible to first acknowledge how these conceptions are developed on a cerebral level. As Malo represents an adolescent male, he is subject to a phenomenon experienced (to varying degrees) by men known as the sexual body part recognition bias. Succinctly put, the sexual body part recognition bias is the idea that relatively speaking, you could throw a random vulva on any woman without rendering the woman unrecognizable. Furthermore, cognitive psychology suggests that the brain has different methods of processing how to recognize a person as opposed to an object. Through a method referred to as global processing, a person learns to recognize faces and bodies. More importantly for our discussion, however, global processing also requires information about how human body parts are constructed in relation to one another, knee bone connected to the thigh bone type shit. Local processing on the other hand, allows a person to recognize objects which for our purposes, would indicate one particular feature of the human body. Furthermore, research appears to indicate that a vulva is more easily recognizable as an object, as opposed to say, a woman's arms. At the opening of the memoir, although Malo and his friends likely have never seen a vulva with their own eyes, Malo and his boys are likely to recognize a vulva as an object without too much

variance. Problematically, it would seem that for the majority of his adolescence, Malo remains unable to comprehend women as anything beyond a set of sexually-specific body parts.

Whilst developing a conception of women through the lens of the sexual body part recognition bias, according to psychologists Jens Förster, Sarah Gervais et al. argue in their joint composition, "Seeing women as objects: The sexual body part recognition bias," outside factors contribute significantly to objectifying pussy.<sup>1</sup> As we begin to move towards the effect that social and lyrical influences have on Malo, cognitive psychology suggests that Malo is not unique in his negative conception of women, or even in the way he develops his perceptions. Though women's body parts are often seen as interchangeable, other research has demonstrated that women have some type of control over at least discouraging objectification. According to development psychologists Regan Gurung and Carly Chrouser in their work, "Predicting Objectification: Do Provocative Clothing and Observer Characteristics Matter?" provocative clothing may naturally narrow people's attention to a woman's sexual body parts. Accordingly then, women become increasingly objectified when they wear provocative clothing that accentuate their assets.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Gurung and Chrouser found that particular body movements could further draw attention to the body parts of women, adding to a foundation for sexual objectification with underlying negative consequences. Turns out, objectification is a hell of a process.

Because my argument relating to gender cannot be attributed solely to Malo's negative perception of women, it remains vital to remember that Malo does not appear to be alone in his objectification. In chapter six, for example, Asante remembers a 12 year old Malo at the subway

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<sup>1</sup> Pussy = A woman

<sup>2</sup> Assets = Sexual Body Parts

station with his friends hoping to get his dick wet.<sup>3</sup> As a girl gets off the train, Malo's best friend Amir asks the group "Would you hit it?" (Asante 53). In this particular context, as opposed to physical assault, the term 'hit' is synonymous with having sex. Furthermore, nothing could be more objectifying than referring to a woman as an "it." For some, sex is an emotional experience to be had between two people who love each other. For Amir, however, it would appear that sex is nothing more than a shallow pleasure. This process of objectification becomes further facilitated by Asante's friend Ryan who replies to Amir's question by saying "I'd tear it up." In this instance, same rules apply; the term "it" is objectifying. Perhaps more disturbing however, the verb "tear" implies a carelessness if not a sense of violent intentions on the part of Ryan. Though Malo does not contribute directly to the conversation, there is an implicit quality in the type of language his friends use that seemingly help contribute to Malo's conceptions of women.

More importantly, regarding the evolution of Malo's perceptions of women, the question becomes: how can Malo and his friends come to any conclusion about women without really knowing how sex, or a relationship with a woman feels? Without that knowledge, there would appear to be no empirical evidence Malo and his boys can point to in order to decide if sex is even worth having, much less if sex is all women are good for. Presumably, none of them have had sex, and Asante gives no indication that Malo nor his friends have been in any type of amorous relationship. Regardless, even if neither Malo nor his friends truly believed that women and sex were interchangeable, the degrading language used to describe the relationships between men and women disintegrates any respect for women in and of itself. This development of a negative ideal is an example of what is referred to by psychologists as a "performative."

According to performance studies scholar Judith Hamera in her work, *Opening Acts*:

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<sup>3</sup>To get a dick wet = To have sex

*Performance in/as Communication and Cultural Studies*, she states “*Performativity* is a particular linguistic method of making and doing.” She further asserts that “...a performative is both an agent of and a product of the social and political surround in which it circulates. Its effects are reinforced through repetition” (Hamera 6). According to this notion of performatives, the more that Asante and his friends use demeaning language, the idea that women are worthy of respect recedes. For the majority of Malo’s maturation regarding his views of women, the actions of certain types of women, in addition to the language of his peers allows him to develop a mindset that while unfortunate, is understandable at a cognitive level.

Though performatives are a linguistic tool, when these particular messages are then propagated by real life occurrences in both media and cultural/social encounters, Malo could rationally conclude that women are worthless except for the sexual services they provide. In conjunction with the idea that provocative clothing can lead to objectification, a strip club would be a perfect storm of sorts for adolescent men to develop and reinforce their negative conceptions of women. As Malo experiences a strip club for the first time, before he even goes inside the club, he hears 2 Live Crew’s “Face Down Ass Up.” Surprisingly, “Face Down Ass Up” is not about sensual lovemaking between two individuals. When a man is having sex with a woman such that her face is down and her ass is up, the lack of facial contact allows and encourages further objectification. Asante specifically cites the lyrics, “Pussy ain’t nuttin but meat on the bone / Suck it or fuck it or leave it alone...” which, of any particular line, most effectively summarizes the song’s message (Asante 96). Aside from promulgating the idea that a vagina has no other relevant purpose, in a wider context, “pussy,” as 2 Live Crew appears to indicate, would refer to women in general. Particularly in the setting of a strip club where women

literally are not anything but objects used for sexual pleasure, the lyrics of 2 Live Crew further establish the capability of performatives.

Again, though performatives refer explicitly to messages furthered by language, as the strip club dynamic demonstrates, performatives undoubtedly have a relationship to performances as well. Taking this idea of performances a step further, in a short, yet completely encompassing description of the scene, Malo reports, “The stage is porn” (97). Even if the multiple meanings of stage were not in Asante’s head, the word “stage” is interesting because of the individual meanings of the word. Stage can certainly mean the place where a performance takes place (which, at a strip club, would certainly make sense). Furthermore, the word stage also means “a point, period, or step in the process of development.” Even if porn is only a performance, that is to say, fake, it seems feasible that Asante’s view of women, here especially when he sees that they’ll suck dudes off for money, transpires as a time where his view of women initiates.<sup>4</sup> At a point when Malo is already surrounded by language indicating that women are objects, an environment that serves to objectify women would only further Malo’s developing sense of objectification.

Strictly using the term stage as it refers to a platform for showcasing talents, Asante’s friend Scoop makes a similar observation when he pronounces that the strip club is the setting of the “Pussy Olympics.” Though the stage as porn would seem to have an underlying effect, Scoop’s description, in addition to being more overt, may also serve to be more telling. While the Olympics are many things, most comprehensively, the Olympics, at least as most Americans know it via different types of media, are a spectacle. Because no regularly held event of any kind is more visible than the Olympics, when applied to “pussy,” strip clubs serve to give women a

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<sup>4</sup> Suck Dudes Off = Perform Fellatio

platform to showcase their relevant “talents” on a highly visible stage. Furthermore, relating to the competitive nature of Olympic events, strip clubs would seemingly serve as a fixture for an objectification competition. Even Malo is shook, however, when the host of the strip club yells out, “Let’s get this dick-sucking contest started!” (98).<sup>5</sup> Forget that his friend Amir is one of the contestants, forget the commentary of the host, forget the opportunity to clown Amir for lasting “...one minute, twenty one seconds”, the sight of three women fellating for money to the cheers of the crowd certainly entails degradation.<sup>6</sup> In a wider context, respect largely stems from a respect for a person’s different characteristics and abilities. If every woman’s predominant talent is sexual, every women would be a hoe.

Based upon Asante’s experiences from his time hitting on girls at the subway station to his experience at the strip club, it would appear that getting laid would be the predominant goal of Asante and his friends. Love, however, is not yet a goal or even a concept. Except for getting a couple phone numbers, Asante makes it seem that Malo and his friends are largely unsuccessful in fulfilling that goal. Though most teenage boys have a hard time, at least initially, interacting with women, the more time they spend around women, the more comfortable they tend to be. Undoubtedly, there are certain characteristics most women find attractive in men. With that in mind, the strip club experience prevents Malo from conceiving of a woman interested in love or a relationship of any kind not involving money. While the spectacle at large is overwhelming, Malo’s first personal experience with a stripper commences his education, “My eyes lock on this short, bowlegged girl. She shuffles over and poses for me, bending over and touching the floor with her hands. Her thighs, shiny with baby oil, look like glazed hams. ‘You

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<sup>5</sup> Shook = Shocked, Overwhelmed

<sup>6</sup> Lawd have mercy, she sucking the earth, wind, and fire out his dick!” “She sucking the black off his shit!” (Asante 99). Clown = Make fun of



dancing or datin?’ she asks” (97). Malo then goes on to describe his initial confusion about her inquiry, and when he turns her down, Amir interjects, “We get [pussy] for free” (98).<sup>7</sup> If Malo’s conceptions were at all in doubt, Scoop proceeds to lay down the golden rule of dealing with women when he asserts, “Nothing’s free... With hoes, somehow you always pay. Always.” For Malo and his friends, pussy is the goal worth working for. With that goal in mind, stackin paper would be the first step in achieving that objective.<sup>8</sup>

After leaving the strip club having learned that money can buy women’s sexual services, Malo begins the process of learning why money also proves synonymous to power. As he narrates going to steal his mother’s car, he runs into the repo man taking the car away. Though Malo presumably understands that money is a form of currency exchanged for goods and services, after a brief conversation with his mother, he ascertains that money is the answer for all of his problems. When Malo fully comprehends this reality in relation to the poverty his family lives in, he states, “Fuck this broke-ass picture” (103).<sup>9</sup> According to rapper Lil Wayne, in his song “Sorry 4 the Wait,” he states “Money in the power, power in the money, this shit’s Magic, Stan Van Gundy.” In other words, money has extraordinary power just as Stan van Gundy, the coach of a professional basketball team called the Orlando Magic, is not only paid well but wields supreme power over the team. More pertinently as it relates to women, according to Deborah Gruenfeld, Cameron Anderson, and Dacher Keltner in their joint essay “Power, Approach and Inhibition” they state, in communities of all economic ranges, low power women are often viewed as more purchasable for powerful men (Anderson, Gruenfeld, Keltner 268).

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<sup>7</sup> Inquiry = “Dating? You wanna go on a date?” I’m confused. “Datin means fuckin,” Scoop laughs (97).

<sup>8</sup> Stackin Paper = Earning Money

<sup>9</sup> Fuck this broke-ass picture = I am upset with my financial situation.

While these studies are not exclusive to Malo, they are consistent with the idea that a strip club, for example, would lead men to view sex and women to be interchangeable. Taking that idea a step further, "... [power is] an individual's relative capacity to modify others' states by providing or withholding resources or administering punishments," Malo wants money so that he can have power over his circumstances (265). Simultaneously then, the sexual services of women would be within his reach.

While finding a way to make money serves as the goal, the language involved with acquiring money goes back to the difficulty understanding the considerations of those in Malo's situation. As he is no way qualified to earn significant money legally, he looks to drug dealing as a method of earning. Because gang members control the drug trade, inevitably, Malo joins a gang. In the gang, he learns the commandments of the thug life, one of which perfectly articulates the relationship between women and money. "Money over bitches. Chasing bitches, you'll run out of money. But chasing money, you'll never run out of bitches" (Asante 107).<sup>10</sup> As Asante moves even further from recognizing women as human, he looks back to Capone-N-Norega's "Illegal Life," specifically the lines, "9 6 the deal, we real about this cheddar, forever. / Corner standing, in any weather" (26). While "9 6 the deal" simply refers to the year Capone-N-Norega got a record deal, the phrase "...we real about this cheddar, forever" refers to the money that Kiam Akasi Holley (Capone) and Victor Santiago Jr. (Norega) focus on procuring. To further establish this point, the phrase "Corner standing, in any weather" implies that Holley and Santiago will stand outside in any weather selling drugs and are fully committed to making

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<sup>10</sup> This notion is backed by many rappers, most notably 2Pac's M.O.B. (Money Over Bitches)

money. While these decisions do not yet apply to Malo, the lyrics of such raps contribute to Malo's systemic maturation. Cake. Cake, cake, cake, cake, cake.<sup>11</sup>

While specific words, lyrics and actions from all types of stimuli have an undeniable effect on Malo's view of women, we have to understand that Malo is not glued to his conceptions of women fostered in a misogynistic environment (and even if he was, he is still only a teenage boy). While the idea that a teenage boy's mind jumps back and forth is common knowledge, according to Monica Luciana in her work, "Adolescent brain development in normality and psychopathology," she concretely establishes that "...behavioral flexibility, or shifting, is the process through which individuals are able to adjust to changing environmental conditions or feedback" (Luciana 1327). She goes on to confirm, "[studies in behavioral flexibility] have consistently supported a linear progression of prefrontal maturation through adolescence with a leveling off in late adolescence and early adulthood..." (1328). In other words, it is the developmental norm for adolescents to jump back and forth between their beliefs based on the situation at hand. Though Malo is certainly influenced by negativity regarding the value of women, because of this behavioral flexibility, it would be feasible to argue that he would also be open to positive influences as well.

Although those constructive stimuli are few and far between, Asante does elaborate on inspiration from Malo's girlfriend, Nia. Regrettably, however, Malo's conceptions of women are only complicated by the early stages of his relationship. On one hand, judging from Malo's reactions to negative language concerning Nia, love seems to temper Malo's misogynistic tendencies. When Malo's friend Ryan asks him "You love that bitch?" Malo angrily replies, "She ain't no bitch. Chill with that...and yeah I'm feeling her, so fall back" (Asante 111). In

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<sup>11</sup> Cake = Money as in "Pound Cake/Paris Morton Music 2" by Drake feat. Jay Z

contrast to Malo's apparent belief implying that all women are bitches or hoes, apparently Nia is somehow different. The pause in this ellipses space implies that in addition to being neither a bitch nor a hoe, Nia evokes feelings that Malo may not have felt for any other women. While Nia may jumpstart a certain tolerance for women, however, certain types of rap lyrics in conjunction with the actions of his friends do not make Malo's transition easy. Regarding the "act" and going back to the concept of performatives, author Judith Hamera tells us that performatives extend their authority primarily through repetition. In order to effect a change in Malo's attitude towards women as objects, in a misogynistic environment, it will take an enormous amount of pushback by Malo as an individual.

Asante is forced to examine gender as it relates to his own development. Because one of the purposes of *Buck* is to speak for a wider group, it would make sense to utilize outside resources resonant to the messages absorbed by Malo. In chapter 17 of *Buck*, Asante continues a personal examination of how he views Nia, while remaining skeptical of the value of his female peers. Asante utilizes the phrase "Some Type of Way" as the chapter title to refer to the ways in which he feels about Nia, however, he certainly does not have final authority over the usage of that phrase. Though this chapter begins the process of pushback against misogynistic performatives, Asante cannot fully explain how extreme these negative perceptions are. In 2013 (the same year *Buck* was published) Atlanta rapper Rich Homie Quan released his single "Type of Way" that climbed all the way to number 50 on the US Billboard Hot 100 chart, and number 8 on the US Billboard Hot Rap Songs chart. Now, before Rich Homie even begins rapping, he goes, "That's right hoe." Though we have begun an exploration into the usage of hoe, Rich Homie utilizes the word hoe in yet a different context to mean any person that is subject to his power because of the money he has. In the convoluted language of Malo and his peers, bitch and

hoe can mean the same thing. Rich Homie Quan further establishes the power that money provides in his bridge, “My niggas been hustlin' trying to make him something / Ain't no telling what he'll do for the paper / Soufflé, I'm straight, I steak my plate.” In other words, his friends have been working hard in order to earn money. “Soufflé, I’m straight, I steak my plate” would imply that his “cake” or economic situation is excellent, allowing him to enjoy first-class conveniences like steak. As Malo enters into his late teens, those first-class conveniences apply to women as well.

As songs like Sorry 4 the Wait, M.O.B., and Pound Cake/Paris Horton Music 2 would indicate, lyrics propagating the C.R.E.A.M. mentality are nothing new.<sup>12</sup> More importantly as it relates to our discussion, the ways in which Rich Homie Quan uses the phrase “some type of way” prove especially telling in the battle Asante is fighting in his understanding of gender roles. Three lines into the hook of “Type of Way”, Rich Homie Quan states, “This bitch I'm with got me feelin' some type a way.” Asante subverts this idea in his memoir to describe Nia in a positive light. Though Malo is forced to deal with significant problems throughout his life, his conversations with Nia exasperate his notions of women in that his feelings for Nia do not line up with the CREAM/MOB mentality.

According to management psychologist James M. Leonhardt in his composition, “Avoiding the risk of responsibility by seeking uncertainty: Responsibility aversion and preference for indirect agency when choosing for others,” he states “When choosing among negative outcomes on behalf of others, responsibility increases the decision makers' exposure to risk” (Leonhardt 406). As this relates to our discussion of language, without ambiguity, Malo would be exposed to types of risk, most notably the risk of choosing a woman over money.

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<sup>12</sup> C.R.E.A.M = Cash Rules Everything Around Me

When Nia tells Malo she has fallen in love with him, Malo responds “Crazy” (Asante 112).

While an in depth discussion of words like crazy is beyond the scope of our current discussion, as with many of the words Malo uses, the word “crazy” can have multiple meanings. In terms of the way Malo uses it in his interactions with Nia, however, crazy is utilized to describe a feeling or emotion that simply does not make a lot of sense. Consequently, utilized in this way, crazy would aptly describe the phrase “some type of way.” Though Asante likely did not consult Rich Homie Quan before he wrote *Buck*, he would undoubtedly have to concede that because of the nature of rap, words and phrases can have multiple meanings, none more right or wrong than another. Even if accidentally, Malo’s usage of ambiguous rhetoric parallels the fluidity of Malo’s decision making, and in turn, his conceptions of women.

Ignoring the ways in which Malo develops his views on Nia, or for that matter women in general, the precarious nature of romantic relationships serve as a roadblock for someone who enjoys complete freedom of choice. According to Leanne K. Knobloch and Denise Haunani Solomon in their work, “Interference and facilitation from partners in the development of interdependence within romantic relationships,” they state “Individuals embarking on a romantic association begin a fundamental shift between autonomy and interdependence” (Knobloch, Haunani 124). Outside of how a “romantic relationship” is defined or even what it entails, Nia’s involvement in Malo’s developmental process would indicate that romantic relationships require a concession of autonomy. Problematically, Malo has come to want self-sufficiency. Because he understands personal sovereignty can be achieved by getting money, he would have to choose Nia over money. Seen through the lens of romantic relationship, Malo would be forced to conclude that feeling “some type of way” about a woman would plausibly lead to some type of

interdependence. As Asante establishes throughout *Buck*, Malo's ultimate challenge becomes finding a middle ground between the ideal woman and just another bitch.

Adolescence has long been characterized as a time when individuals begin to explore and examine psychological characteristics of the self in order to discover who they really are, and how they fit into the world in which they live. Nia would then require one type adjustment, while his friends, and the money Malo craves would require another. While Malo's experience in the strip club begins his education, he graduates to 300 level classes when he begins the process of actually acquiring those Benjamins.<sup>13</sup> He then quotes rapper AZ when he states, "Visualizin the realism of life and actuality / Fuck who's the baddest a person's status depends on the salary (Asante 126). He follows this quote by reminiscing on his own experiences with jawns, "...I see how jawns react to bread."<sup>14</sup> This notion is fully established when he discusses his experiences with a particular jawn named Jade. When Jade notices Malo is driving a Mercedes Benz, Malo narrates, "I barely have to speak, she just hops in and starts giving me head in the whip" (126).<sup>15</sup> As it relates to our discussion about gender, Jade pushes the idea that women objectify men as checking accounts when she tells Malo, "Nghz are like bank accounts. Without money, they don't generate interest." Though Nia represents one type of woman, Malo jumps back and forth between his conceptions of women when hoes come out to play as he's simply driving around.

Now, I could go into detail about Malo's experience with other women; suffice it to say there are plenty to choose from. Additionally, his education thus far has taught him that nothing is more important than cash. His final interaction with Nia stands as the culmination of his

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<sup>13</sup> Benjamins = Money in the form of 100 dollar bills

<sup>14</sup> Jawns = Hoes

<sup>15</sup> Head = Fellatio, Whip = Car

understanding that these hoes ain't loyal.<sup>16</sup> Thinking he's doing something nice for Nia, Malo goes to a jewelry store and buys an expensive tennis bracelet for her. Because Nia knows about Malo's economic situation (at least his legal economic situation) she asks Malo if he's selling drugs. In an attempt to dismiss the situation, because of his encounters with other women, Malo tells Nia "[Money] is all that matters" (139). In response Nia tells Malo, "Money doesn't impress me. Everything isn't about money" (140). Because of poverty, Malo cannot understand that notion. More to the point, Malo can't understand women who are not drawn to him even with the knowledge of his paper game.<sup>17</sup>

Malo may at some level respect Nia, he cannot love her because of his love for money. Additionally, Malo may love Nia, but going back to the idea of performatives, he has not yet told Nia he loves her. While seemingly insignificant, when in a relationship, even saying something like "I respect you" can go a long way. Furthermore, because Malo does appear to commit to his acquisition of money, it would appear that two committed relationships cannot work. According to Daniel J. Weigel, Bret A. Davis, and Kristy C. Woodard in their joint work "A two-sided coin: Mapping perceptions of the pros and cons of relationship commitment," they state "Due to the... rise of a therapeutic culture that encourages self-improvement and self-awareness...one long-term relationship during one's life may no longer be the dominant model" (Davis, Weigel, Woodard 363). If self-improvement is analogous to improving an economic situation, a full commitment to Nia, or any woman for that matter, cannot exist. Furthermore, if women can be bought for sexual pleasures, then love, as it relates to the love between two people, is increasingly overrated.

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<sup>16</sup> Hoes ain't loyal = Women who have differing opinions on different issues, and leave a man as a result.

<sup>17</sup> Paper game = Economic Situation



With that in mind, when Nia gives Malo an ultimatum, that is to say forces Malo has to choose between her and the grind, he chooses the hustle.<sup>18</sup> Besides, “A chick who knows her position will never lose her place...” (Asante 164). In Malo’s mind then, because Nia doesn’t seem to care about how much money he has, Nia doesn’t understand her position. Unfortunately for Malo, in a fight with his mother, she incinerates all his money and his means to acquire more. Because Malo is left without money or the means to acquiring more, there are no hoes around for him to wield power over. While women stop fawning, Malo’s conception of women does not change simply because he understands the loss of his authority. In other words, because money is everything, Malo understands that he is nothing. Now that he’s on his own without anything to love, enigmatically, he goes back to the only thing that made him feel anything without his money: Nia. Because of Malo’s choice to grind, Nia is not around. However, Malo’s definitive conversion regarding his views on women comes as the result of a larger issue, one that can provide meaning to all aspects of his life.

Because Malo has no money and no prospects, he travels to Ft. Worth, Texas in order to visit his aunt and uncle. Additionally, whether intentional or not, getting out of Philadelphia allows Malo the chance to step back, and figure out what he wants out of his life. While away, he has a chance to discuss different topics with his uncle, “...death, life, belief” and while sitting at dinner, Malo’s uncle tells a story that begins a larger process of realization (186). His uncle testifies, “There’s a war between two wolves inside everybody. One is anger, jealousy, greed, resentment, inferiority, lies and ego. The other’s good. It’s love, peace, beauty, happiness, truth, hope, joy, humility, kindness, and empathy” (187). Up until this point in his development, Malo has embodied the wolf that is anger, jealousy, greed etcetera. Right before he leaves his aunt and

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<sup>18</sup> Grind = The word necessary for Malo to make money, The Hustle = Grind

uncle's, however, he turns to his uncle and asks, "...who wins...between the two wolves?" his uncle then responds "The one you feed" (188). Though Malo does not immediately understand the gravity of the answer, it jumpstarts his maturation process in all aspects of life. Going back to Nia's ultimatum, Malo's choosing the hustle proves to be a microcosm of his larger choice as to what kind of person he wants to be. As it relates to our conversation, Malo has ascertained that his money brings power; especially as it relates to women. Because Malo knows he has power over women, he perceives women as less than human, or at least, lesser than males who have money. Though Malo may not have power over women, his time with his uncle gets him to understand that at the very least, he has power over himself.

According to sociologists Nicky Duenkel, Judy Pratt, and Julie Sullivan in their joint work "Seeking Wholeheartedness in Education: Power, Hegemony, and Transformation" they state:

The interplay between established power dynamics and internalized beliefs and actions that reinforce these dynamics (self-policing) create layers of oppression which are often invisible, making it difficult to recognize the subtle manipulation exerted upon us daily by our relationships, roles and cultural norms. (286)

In short, this particular excerpt simply reiterates the power of performatives. However, it also implies that positive performatives entail the "subtle manipulation exerted upon us daily by our relationships, roles and cultural norms" in the same way that morally negative performatives do. When removed from the environment in which selling drugs leads to money and money leads to power, Malo grasps the idea that love for a woman "is a drug like the strongest stuff ever" (J. Cole). Malo understands firsthand the demand for some method of getting high. As Malo continues his development, he begins to find that love is a high money can't buy.

With the newfound understanding that love for something other than money is culturally acceptable, Malo starts to admit his willingness to love. While going into detail regarding the concept of “love” is beyond the realm of our conversation, according to psychologist Wendy Ann Correy in her essay, “Michael’s Story: Love and Vulnerability in a Close Relationship,” she states “Love and vulnerability are partners in survival by being complementary and mutually sustaining” (Correy 4). Going back to Duenkel, Pratt and Sullivan, “We learned that there is power in our wholeness...In recognizing and claiming our vulnerabilities, we were learning to live in them day to day” (Duenkel, Pratt, Sullivan 289). There is no type of vulnerability in the power Malo had as a result of his drug dealing. In a sense, that would imply that Malo never truly loved money. More importantly, however, admitting a love for Nia would require vulnerability not just to Nia, but to his outside influences as well.

Though the process of admitting vulnerability is a part of Malo’s development, as it relates to his conception of women, the relationship between love and respect prove far more important. According to Dr. Marcia W. Baron in her composition, “Love and Respect in the Doctrine of Virtue” she argues, “The similarity between duties of love and duties of respect stems from the fact that all are derived from respect for humanity” (Baron 41). Because Malo limits his more developed conceptions of women to his relationship with Nia, he does not fully elaborate on his perception of women in general. However, if Dr. Baron is right and Malo has to, in some way, respect Nia in order to love her, his love is necessarily rooted in some type of respect for humanity. As Asante has described, there are plenty of individuals, many of whom are women, who do not warrant his admiration. By loving and valuing even one woman, however, Malo is forced to recognize that women in general deserve some kind of respect.

Ultimately, *Buck* revolves around a young man's maturation process in all facets of life, most pertinently, his education. Because education comes in all shapes and sizes, throughout the course of the memoir, Asante demonstrates that schooling can only do so much for your education. As that edification relates to his views of women, the negativity surrounding his adolescence inevitably led him to conclusions that, in addition to being unethical, were detrimental to his development as a man. The process of developing love and respect, really for any group of people, is not something that just happens. It can only be developed through experiences with people that gradually earn respect. *Buck* provides an example in which we can trace Asante's development from adolescence to his late teens. Going back to Monica Luciana's argument, however, it's important to remember that perspectives are a fluid concept. In a culture where women seem to latch on to powerful men, Asante verifies that there are plenty of women who may not be held in a high regard. When Malo is able to take a step back and acknowledge his love for Nia, he begins to understand that for all the women that do not merit deference, there are women who are more than deserving of admiration.

Bitches ain't shit but hoes and tricks?

Well, maybe not.

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