View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk
brought to you by CORE
provided by OpenEdition

Parcours anthropologiques

8 | 2012
Anthropologie des pratiques musicales

Girls' Game-Songs and Hip-Hop: Music Between the Sexes

Kyra D. Gaunt

Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/pa/116
DOI: 10.4000/pa.116
ISSN: 2273-0362

Publisher
Université Lumière Lyon 2

Printed version
Date of publication: 31 October 2012
Number of pages: 97-128
ISBN: 1634-7706
ISSN: 1634-7706

Electronic reference
Kyra D. Gaunt, « Girls' Game-Songs and Hip-Hop: Music Between the Sexes », *Parcours anthropologiques* [Online], 8 | 2012, Online since 20 April 2013, connection on 30 April 2019. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/pa/116 ; DOI : 10.4000/pa.116

Parcours anthropologique

Girls' Game-Songs and Hip-Hop : Music Between the Sexes

Kyra D. Gaunt
Baruch College, City University of New York

> "Eeny meeny pepsadeeny / Oo-pop-pop-sa-deeny
> Atchi-catchi-liberatchi / I love you, tu-tu, shampoo
> Saw you wit your boyfriend, last night
> W hat's his name / Andy White
> How do you know?
> I peeped through the keyhole, New—sy!
> Wash those dishes, Laz—y!
> Gimme some candy, Stin—gy!
> Jumped out the window, Cra—zy!
> Eeny meeny pepsadeeny / oo-pop-pop-sa-deeny
> Atchi catchi liberatchi / I love you, tu-tu, shampoo"
> (Girls' handclapping game-song practiced in Philadelphia during the 1970s; see appendix for musical transcription)

This article (adapted from a chapter in my book *the games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double-Dutch to Hip-Hop* published by NYU Press, 2006) explores the remarkable and veiled connections found between girls' musical game-songs - an oral and embodied tradition of same-age group play that includes 1) hand-clapping games, 2) embodied cheers, and 3) double-dutch jump rope activities accompanied by a series of interchangeable rhymed-chants - and commercial songs recorded by male artists over several decades. These separate, gendered spheres of musical activity are in conversation with one another, forming a dialectical bridge between children and adult culture, and vernacular and popular culture. These connections provide insights into the social and distinctly gendered construction of taste[1] in black popular songs and black girls' musical play.

[1] What I mean by "black popular taste" are the distinctions drawn by people who identify with musical blackness, particularly domestic citizens of African descent who primarily trace their recent ancestry to living in the States throughout most of the 20th century, who also identify primarily with conventional African American styles of music and dance traced back to the Southern roots of the blues, field hollers, and the earliest forms of black popular dance and spiritual music from the 19th and 20th centuries. By taste I invoke the sociological, aesthetic, economic and anthropological constructions of styles, affects, acquisitions, and communal works and identifications associated with musical blackness including dance,

Fieldwork for this study was conducted from 1994 to 2002 through two sets of networked connections. One from game-songs collected between 1994 and 1996 from black girls ages 9 to 13 that were located near the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, where I attended graduate school. I discovered a diverse repertoire of game-songs from assorted settings but it all began from overhearing a set of handclapping game-songs and cheers shared by twins in Ypsilanti, Michigan including an unfamiliar blues-based version of *Miss Mary Mack*. I was in part a native ethnographer of these games as I knew a related version of most of the game-songs but this one was totally new to me and it sparked my curiosity.

The second set of networked connections to game-songs came from solicited interviews with seventeen African American women from the university community who ranged in age from eighteen to sixty-five, included undergraduates, graduate students and staff, and reflected the regional variation or a diaspora of black girls' play throughout the United States (I purposefully excluded women of Caribbean descent in this study). The eldest of the women interviewed was born in 1938. The youngest was born in 1982. Six of them had grown up in metropolitan areas and suburbs surrounding Detroit (the home of Motown). The remainder came from Los Angeles, California; Chicago, Illinois; Memphis, Tennessee; Shreveport, Louisiana; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Baltimore, Maryland; and the nation's capital in Washington, D.C. The regional diversity included the Midwest, the East Coast, the South, and the West Coast allowing me to reflect the national implications of these oral and kinetic traditions.

My intention was to create a context in which to interpret black culture across regions shaped by female-gendered narratives, memories, and experiences. These women shared their life stories through black musical interactions with females and males, which allowed a gendered analysis of musical blackness as well as a feminist reading of performance identity and culture.

The game-song *Eeny meeny pepsadeeny* (mentioned earlier), like several others, features so-called nonsense language. This sonic expression is marked by dramatically contrasting timbres and the non-lexical manipulation of vowels and consonants. The phrase "atchi catchi liberatchi" at first glance seems like children's gibberish. However, it is actually a special linguistic code, a language game that conceals the meaning of the expression "education liberation". The dramatically contrasting timbres are further nuanced by the assonance (internal rhymes) within each phrase. Similar linguistic codes are consistent with certain "novelty" dance songs recorded by male artists found in the jump-band jive of the Savoy Sultans in the 1940s, doo-wop from the

---

gesture and linguistics. Ultimately, it speaks to the question of how black folk socially and culturally judge, formulate, and revise what is considered beautiful, funky and proper within their communal cultures.

1950s, and lyrics in early rhythm-and-blues and rock 'n' roll during the 1950s and '60s. The opening flurry of language in Little Richard's *Tutti Frutti* ("A-wop-bop-a-loo-bop-a-lop-bam-boom") is probably the most well-recognized example of phonic manipulation though there is no obvious hidden meaning. Early hip-hop culture reflects a similar pattern of manipulation for sonic expressiveness, making language a means of musical expressivity. The opening scat from the early hip-hop classic "Rapper's Delight" is another example. "I said-a hip hop, the-hippee, the-hippee to the hip-hip-hoppa ya don't stop // the-rock it to the bang-bang-Boogie, say, up jump the-Boogie, to the rhythm of the Boogie, the-beat". Here, for instance, "the Boogie" refers to the "boogie down" Bronx and the overall meaning is to start by shouting out the originating significance of place in the emergent history of a new style of musical performance. This wasn't nonsense. It was like "pig-Latin", a way to speak to insiders from the Bronx with "rules" that would seem unfamiliar to outsiders of the culture while at the same time linking the expression to earlier styles of scat, linguistic improvisation and signified speech in black culture dating back to slavery.

There are several versions of *Eeny meeny pepsadeeny*. The one I am referencing here was collected during my research from an interview with Nancy (b. 1963, Philadelphia). It is a typical handclapping game : instead of using both hands to create the underlying percussive texture accompanying a chant, the two girls performing the handclapping game use only their right hands to create a four-beat cyclic pattern featuring three distinct hand and body-slapping gestures. First, the pair slap the fronts (beat one), then the backs (beat two) of each other's right hands, followed by a thigh slap (beat three), and a finger snap (beat four). This four-beat pattern repeats, creating a timeline of diverse timbres heard as a melodic or tonal pattern of high, middle, and low-pitched sounds (clap-clap-thigh-snap = mid-mid-low-high).

After presenting this game-song at the University of Pittsburgh meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology in 1997, noted ethnomusicologist John Miller Chernoff recognized the chant from a doo-wop recording he owned. On the cassette copy he sent me, I discovered that a similar version of *Eeny meeny pepsadeeny* opened the recording sung by the Philadelphia-based doo-wop group known as Lee Andrews and the Hearts. In the online *All Music Guide*, this group is recognized as "one of the finest R&B vocal groups of the 1950s," and is further categorized as "Philly soul"[2].

The group had two major hits. They hit number 11 on the R&B charts in 1957 with *Long Lonely Nights*, on the Mainline label. Then, in 1958, they had their biggest hit : number 4 on the R&B charts, with their release of *Teardrops*, which was picked up from Mainline for wider distribution on the Chess label (*All Music Guide*, http://www.allmusic.com, 05-May-2003). They were

[2] See the online site "All Music Guide": http://www.allmusic.com. Accessed 5 May 2003 via Internet Explorer.

promoted in Philadelphia by disk jockey - and later, manager - Jocko Henderson on WDAS-Philadelphia and WWOV - New York as early as 1957, so is it possible that the Philadelphia-based song titled *Glad to Be Here* (United Artists), the B-side of *Why Do I?* preceded and influenced the composition of a girls' game-song practiced in Philly Or did Lee Andrews & the Hearts imitate a locally-popular game-song that was known long before Nancy and her girlfriends performed it during the 1970s ? Interestingly, Lee Andrews (born Arthur Lee Andrew Thompson in 1938) is the father of American drummer, hip-hop DJ, music journalist and record producer ?uestlove or Questlove a.k.a. Ahmir Khalib Thompson (b. 20 January 1971). Questlove is best known as the drummer and joint frontman of the Grammy Award-winning band The Roots, which now serves as the house band for *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*. Compare the opening lyrics from *Glad to Be Here*, to the chant from Nancy's childhood version of *Eeny meeny pepsadeeny* :

Lee Andrews (lead):
"Say, Eeny meeny distaleeny / gooah my de comb-a-lee-na
Ratcha tachta boom-a-latcha / alla-ya-loo
That means we're glad to-a be here"
The Hearts (chorus):
(We're really glad to be here)
All:
"Ladies and Gentlemen, a-children too.
Here's a five boys to do a show for you
We're gonna turn all around/ gonna touch the ground
Gonna shim-sham shimmy all around
Gonna shim-sham shimmy all over the stage
We gonna shim-sham shimmy when we get paid ...
Eeny meeny distaleeny you are my da-comb-a-leeny
Ratcha tachta boom-a-latcha alla-ma-doo
It means I'm really glad to be here"
(Lee Andrews and the Hearts, 1957).

While the songwriting credits are attributed to Calhoun and Henderson (perhaps Royalston "Roy" or Wendell Calhoun, who were members of the group, and disk jockey/manager Jocko Henderson), two other striking connections are present within these lyrics to girls' musical play, which open the door for a discussion of the compositional influence of girls' games on popular recorded songs, and to the converse. First, the phrases "We're gonna turn all around / we're gonna touch the ground" are a common chant accompanying double-dutch and single-rope play. Second, "shim-sham shimmy" recalls a segment of a handclapping game-song known as *Hot dog* or *Down, down baby*, which I will discuss later. Perhaps the "traditional" or public domain performance of girls' games could be credited as the source of this song, performed by Lee Andrews and the Hearts. The regional connection to Philadelphia between Nancy, Lee Andrews and Questlove of The Roots

suggests a probable oral connection and gender dynamic where black girls' musical play was influenced by the recorded songs of black male popular artists. At the very least, it suggests that popular music long before hip-hop was incorporating everyday, found sounds, or folklore, into its compositional processes.

Still, what does this oral and kinetic intertextuality between girls' musical games and black popular songs say about the role of gender in the social construction of popular musical taste (and other dynamics of power between the sexes), if, for example, girls' games were found to be influencing the compositional choices and production of male performances of black popular music from rhythm and blues to hip-hop ? For a moment, let's consider the unnoticed resemblances in musical approaches to speech play and beats (like a rhythm section), as well as the repetition and revision that define both the kinetic orality of girls' games and the cutting, mixing, and sampling of hip-hop DJs and producers, who tend to be male.

Girls' performances of rhymed verse, which occur in unison choruses as well as in individual expressions of identity within call-and-response formulas, are clearly equivalent to the largely male, rhymed speech-play known as rapping and emceeing in hip-hop. Even the kinetic orality of creating, mimicking, and mixing familiar beats, performed as embodied percussive gestures in girls' games, are equivalent, or analogous to, the primarily- male technological practice on the turntables or in digital sampling, where DJs and producers sample percussive breaks, familiar vocal hooks, and beats or grooves, from previously recorded songs.

But how does this connection get hidden from view? The way that gender constitutes social relations and metaphorically signifies relationships of power in black culture has a great deal to do with this blind spot.

In a dissertation on singing games in Los Angeles, Carol Merrill-Mirsky asserts that children's music is influenced not so much by schooled learning, or the direct involvement of adults, but rather by an informal network of learning to be musical, which is found in everyday and popular culture (Riddell, 1990 : ix). Thus, analyzing the intertextuality between separate spheres of gendered musical activity should reveal significant processes that are in dialogue between everyday and popular culture, which are not so obvious to us.

Uncovering the veiled intertextuality of vocal expression and musical embodiment that too often is overlooked is critical to also understanding the discourse of gender at work here. These game-songs offer a way to think about the production of popular musical taste through the lens of the relations between the sexes, which is rarely examined. Most studies focus attention on the performance of gender by one sex or another, rather than examining the dialectical relations of power and performance between females and males in musical contexts.

HIP-HOP, GENDER, AND COMMUNITY

The interpretive connections I discovered (and trace in this chapter) emerged from moments of serendipity common in analyzing networked relationships across time and place. It is a compelling story about the not-so-obvious oral and kinetic correlations between elements of African American girls' musical play, and elements of African American popular music performed by men, from popular 1950s rhythm and blues songs to chart-topping hip-hop songs.

The everyday practice of girls' games trains or socializes them into an embodied and communal sense of identity through the in-body formulas associated with blackness, but this does not explain why girls (and later, women) take a backseat role in mass popular-music production. Girls' attraction to the opposite sex - including the care-taking roles many low-income daughters assume for their siblings while parents work, the significance of teenage pregnancy, and the raising one's own children sometimes at a young age - may be contributing factors. With few exceptions, girls tend to stop playing their musical games sometime between the onset of puberty and the end of adolescence. As they depart from these games, girls appear to become primarily consumers (listeners and dancers), rather than producers (primary agents as composers and performers) of popular musical and cultural activity, even though the games they once played closely resemble aspects of hip-hop practice and other forms of popular song.

When I first began to make a connection between girls' games and hip-hop, I assumed that this suggested that girls were simply learning - or teaching themselves - how to become good listeners. While this is plausible, I came to believe that girls' games were actually a primary resource for the construction of black popular taste, and that their practices were exploited because they occupy the public domain where copyright and royalties are not assigned or assumed. Simply put, black girls' musical practices are relegated to an insignificant sphere as children's play and culture. Girls’ game-songs are used and co-opted in an adult domain of commercial production dominated by black men searching for the perfect beat to signify their turf of blackness while also appealing to mass commercial tastes for black dance music or a top 40 hit.

Over a significant period of sharing stories from my interviews with colleagues and friends, and listening to various songs mentioned in these interviews, I discovered a trail of mass-mediated popular dance songs performed by male artists that correspond to a trail of popular handclapping games and cheers featured in African American girls' play. In one case, the rhyme and performance of *Mary Mack* appears to precede a mass-mediated recording that usefully borrows material to engender social interaction around a provocative dance in the early 1960s, known as *the Dog*. In another case, a handclapping bridge and a cheer are apparently based on popular hits

associated with Michael Jackson when he was an emerging teenage heartthrob.

There are other, more ambiguous cases where the direction of influence is not so apparent. Taken together, these cases are evidence of the various levels and directions of transmission that constitute a dialectic of the popular production, facilitated by kinetic orality, that exists between the games black girls play, and hit songs by male performers, from rhythm and blues in the late 1950s to rap and hip-hop in 2000 and beyond.

DOWN, DOWN BABY / DOWN YOUR STREET IN A RANGE ROVER

The most recent connection I found between girls' games and hip-hop involves the game *Down, down baby*, also known in some circles as *Hot dog*, which points to the suggestive hip rotation that accompanies this word in the performance.

Section A:
"Down down baby, down down the roller coaster
Sweet Sweet baby, I'll never let you go"
Section B:
"Shimmmy shimmy ko-ko pop
Shimmy shimmy pow (or bop)!
Shimmmy shimmy ko-ko pop
Shimmy shimmy pow!"
Section C:
"Grandma, grandma sick in bed
Called the doctor and the doctor said"
Section D:
"Let's get the rhythm of the head, ding dong
We got the rhythm of the head, ding dong
Let's get the rhythm of the hands, [clap clap]
We got the rhythm of the hands, [clap clap]
Let's get the rhythm of the feet, [stomp stomp]
We got the rhythm of the feet, [stomp stomp]
Let's get the rhythm of the hot— dog
We got the rhythm of the hot— dog"
Section E:
"You put it all together and what do ya get:
Ding dong, [clap clap], [stomp stomp], hot— dog
You put it all backwards and what do you get:
Hot— dog, [stomp stomp], [clap clap], ding dong!"

Each section of *Down, down baby* is its own contained unit. Several of these units are occasionally transposed into other game-songs, analogous to the cut-and-mix culture of sampling. They also connect to vernacular discourse back to the 1930s, and back to popular songs over a fifty-year period (1950-2000).

The first connection is the most recent. Section A recently appeared as the chorus in a song called *Country Grammar*, by the Grammy award-winning rap artist Nelly, who hails from St. Louis. Nelly credits himself as the writer of the lyrics, with music by Jason "Jay E" Epperson (Basement Beats/Universal Music Publishing/ASCAP, 2000), but on his website, he states that the chorus is based on a chant from a "children's game" (choosing not to specifically attribute it to the gendered sphere of "girls'" play) (www.nelly.net).

While it is true that both girls and boys may perform *Down, down baby*, it is clear in the everyday performance of such play that boys consider girls the primary agents and performers of such games. Girls "own" these games in much the same way that boys and men are seen as the primary agents in hip-hop performance, whether in the everyday, or in the music industry.

Nelly's song employs significant elements of *Down, down baby* : the melodic or tonal approach, the rhythmic delivery, and key linguistic features of the lyrics, including "sweet sweet baby", revised as "Street sweeper baby / cocked ready to let it go". These are the lyrics to Nelly's version :

> “S going down down baby / yo street in a Range Rover
> Street Sweeper baby / cocked ready to let it go
> Shimmy Shimmy cocoa, wha? / listen to it now
> Light it up and take a puff / pass it to me now.”
> (Repeat)

He has re-contextualized the lyrics to meet the demands of hip-hop's masculine-coded identity politics, altering the "sweet, sweet" line to emphasis being "cocked ready to let it go", and signifying on the last line, on the marijuana culture surrounding hip-hop and youth culture.

The entire title listed for this track on the compact disc reads, *Country Grammar (Hot...)*. The ellipsis in the parenthetical title telegraphs the vulgar omission of language in the phrase, "hot shit", which predicts and boasts of the imminent popularity of the track. And Nelly's debut album quickly became "hot shit"; it reached number 1 on the pop (rather than rap) charts within five weeks of its release.

The hook in this "hot shit" unwittingly drew in male and female fans of various ethnicities because many of them would have been familiar with the popular game-song, not only as it appeared in schoolyards and playgrounds, but as it was featured briefly in director Penny Marshall's film *Big*, starring Tom Hanks (1988).

In casual conversations with female listeners, I began to query them about the origins of the chorus, and it became clear that they had immediately recognized that Nelly was "sampling" their former play. But the male listeners were not so quick to see the connection. Only when I made the connection plain in our conversation, did men realize - often with a relief that was like finally solving a puzzle - that they had recognized the tune all along, but

didn't know why. The guys were not expecting, and therefore were unable, to see the connection between a girls' musical practice, and the masculine hype of the latest hip-hop song. Though they knew it was familiar, they simply couldn't place it in their social memory.

This demonstrates a gender-divided consciousness of how we view (and what we expect of) the sources and resources of hip-hop sampling. It also suggests a gender-divided consciousness of black social memory that may be shaped by the distinctions made between childhood and adulthood, or the local popular versus the mass popular sphere. All of this is blurred by the context of orality itself, which does not allow one to readily trace the origin of repetitions and revisions.

SHIMMY SHIMMY KO-KO POP

Though the B section of *Down, down baby (Shimmy shimmy ko-ko pop / Shimmy shimmy pow!)* appears in Nelly's *Country Grammar*, it connects to other various sources. It can be linked to a book about girls' games called *Shimmy Shimmy Coke-Ca-Pop! : A Collection of City Children's Street Games and Rhymes* (Langstaff and Langstaff, 1973), but it can also be traced back to a refrain in a popular novelty song by the name of *Shimmy shimmy ko-ko bop*, recorded by Little Anthony and the Imperials and released in 1956. The opening verse (now glaringly racialized) refers to "sittin' in a native hut," and frames a context of the then-popular dance known as *the Shimmy*[3].

What I find interesting is that the novelty of the game-song *Down, down baby* is how it culminates in the oral-kinetic conjunction of a seemingly erotic or sexual gesture - the dance-like rotation of the hips in time to the undulation and inherently rhythmic punctuations within the expression "hot— dog" (the tone of the expression rises and builds up to a closed, or stopped - rather than explosive - "t" sound, eliding and forming the initial consonant of the punctuating sound of the word "dog"). The word "shimmy" is itself a form of phonic manipulation, or dramatically contrasting timbres (Wilson, 1992), suggesting actual kinetic behavior ; the whole phrase is aesthetically funky : "Shimmy Shimmy ko-ko pop / Shimmy shimmy pow!". Here, words are set in motion verging toward actual movement. There is no lexical meaning, which is why many people assume black girls' games (and some black musical speech) are "nonsense." But something else is being said, being languaged that is beyond our immediate comprehension and makes sense to my ear. It's musical and esoteric. Then, the motion of the words stops on a dime at "pow", forcing a break in the flow of the "music".

[3] One website indicated that Little Anthony omitted this song from their repertoire when they performed on the oldies circuit in 2003 : despite the popular appeal of the song for his audiences, it is said that he hates performing the novelty of it.

A synergy of word and body - a somatic form of onomatopoeia - becomes apparent in the kinetic orality of girls' play. By "onomatopoeia", I mean the naming of a thing or action by a vocal imitation - not only the sound associated with, say, shaking one's hip in a beaded flapper dress - also associated with the rhythmic accents internally associated and felt by embodying such movement. This gyrated gesture appears to display the movements of sexual intercourse to any onlooker, but for girls it's merely play. The movement is also, however, a way of learning to move one's hips in a way that will become useful, on and off the dance floor, in their embodied relations with others.

This gesture stands out from the performance of instructing the rocking back-and-forth of the "head [ding dong]", or instructing action from the "hands [clap clap]", and the "feet [stomp stomp]". The gyrating performance of the lower "feminine" torso, from the waist to the hips, is not indicated in the verse. Instead, "hot—dog" replaces and omits any reference to that part of the body, and it is literally felt and witnessed, rather than spoken - a gesture that clearly recalls *the Shimmy*.

The same material was present in a song performed by a well-known black, male doo-wop group in 1956, and in a black girls' handclapping game-song performed in 1995, which raises a question: Which came first—the chicken-or-egg? Might there be something to say about girls' games influencing popular songs by male artists, particularly those involving popular dances like *the Shimmy?* The popular songs that included the title *Shimmy*, were recorded - or more accurately covered - by white and black male groups during the period. As a dance, *the Shimmy* remains present in rituals of tap dancing where tap dancers even have a ritual performance that incorporates the gesture.

GRANDMA, GRAND-MA—, SICK IN BED

The first interesting connection I found was to the "Grandma, Grand-ma—, sick in bed" section of *Down, down baby* that speaks to the long and slow generation of folklore, as it is traditionally conceived. If you were to take heed of the lyrics literally, the cure for what ails Grandma is to apply rhythm to parts of her body (head, hands, toes, and pelvis), or perform rhythmic and sonic actions performed as embodied display (clapping, stomping, gyrating).

In my earlier work (1997) I indicate that girls are learning how to move their hips in unison or synchrony with words or ideas. The undulation of the voice saying "hot— dog" is matched in time and space with the rotation of the hips, with hands akimbo. Girls (as well as boys) need to learn this to become proficient dancers who can socialize well within different contexts of a black community.

How are they preparing to learn a life-long repertoire of social dances that often involve pelvic thrusts, hip rotations, and torso contractions and releases

(as percussive and visual punctuation)? Such danced gesture would play a role in discovering another connection between *Down, down baby* and mass popular culture.

In the 1930s, Lydia Parrish collected folklore in the Georgia Sea Islands among people of African descent residing there. The material was originally published in 1942 as *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands* and reprinted in 1965. This island is known as one of the richest regions of African retentions in the U.S. to this day. Since the islanders did not suffer under the watchful eye and penetrating rule of whites (because the whites were primarily absent from the island), Africanisms were allowed to thrive in forms of language and behavior that scholars have been able to observe throughout the twentieth century.

Among a variety of stories and games, Parrish documents a game called *Ball the Jack*. And in her transcription of the game, I stumbled upon a familiar lyric that bears a striking resemblance to *Down, down baby*. Compare the two segments:

Hot dog:
"Grandma, grandma / sick in bed
Called the doctor / and the doctor said"
Ball the jack:
"Old Aunt Dinah / sick in bed
Send for the doctor / The doctor said"

This, alone, might not warrant making a clear association between a girls' game-song practiced in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1995, and a folk game-song from the Georgia Sea Islands in the 1930s. But a stronger connection between *Down, down baby* and *Ball the Jack* became apparent to me when Parrish described the movement of the players. In a chapter titled "Ring-Play, Dance, and Fiddle Songs", she describes the practice in possessive characterizations that reflected the power-laden discourse of an early-twentieth-century folklorist - one who also had certain privileges as a white woman:

"Several of our Negroes "Ball the Jack," as well as the African performer who did a similar serpentine wriggle [Parrish suggests "snake hip" as a far more appropriate nickname for the dance]...
Some day, if I ask enough questions, I may discover the original name of the dance - if it had one. Just why it should have been called by a railroad term I can't figure out, unless its African name had somewhat the same sound.
Susy's head and shoulders are stationary and so are her feet, but there is a flow of undulating rhythm from chest to heels, with a few rotations in the hip region, done to this rhythmic patter :

"Ole Aunt Dinah
Sick in bed
Send for the doctor
The doctor said:

> Get up Dinah
> You ain' sick
> All you need
> Is a hickory stick
> An' I ball the jack on the railroad track. "
>
> And so on ad infinitum; the words are of no particular moment, only sounds for carrying the rhythm. A box and a stick would do as well.
> "Ball the Jack" was brought to the St. Simon's [Island] about fifty years ago by an "up-country" Negro, and has been performed ever since - to the accompaniment of shrieks of contagious laughter by the little Negroes" (Parrish, 1965 : 117).

The name of this ring-play or dance, "Ball the Jack" reminded me of a song I had seen printed in my *Real Little Ultimate Jazz Fake Book* (Hal Leonard, 1992) called "Ballin' the Jack" (1913). When I read through the song, with words by Jim Burris and music by Chris Smith, I recognized the tune. I had heard it before somewhere :

> "First you put your two knees close up
> Then you sway 'em to the left, then you sway 'em to the right
> Step around the floor kind of nice and light
> Then you twis' around and twis' around with all your might
> Stretch your lovin' arms straight out in space
> Then you do the Eagle Rock with style and grace
> Swing your foot way 'round then bring it back
> Now that's what I call "Ballin' the jack"
> (Words by Jim Burris and music by Chris Smith, Christie-Max Music and Jerry Vogel Music Co, Inc., 1913)

What connected *Ballin' the Jack*, *Ball the jack*, and *Hot dog*, was a "twis' around," a "serpentine wiggle" that suggested a shimmy, whether as erotic display or dance. Dancing has been non-gendered in African American history. By that I mean that both women and men do not see it as limited to one sex or the other. However, the roles within social dances and certain gestures, can surely be read differently on the male and female body, depending upon the social mores and class values of the times or specific sacred or secular contexts.

What if we consider, for a moment, that the shimmy or serpentine wiggle signified an African retention, in opposition to the more Victorian-based and Protestant values found in dominant U.S. culture ? Might it explain why this suggestive gesture remains and continues to be picked up again and again, across time and place, in black performance cultures ?

With *Down, down baby* alone, we see oral transmission of material that connects culture across time and place. We have Nelly in 2000, *Shimmy Shimmy Ko Ko Pop* by Little Anthony and the Imperials in 1956, an allusion to a

popular game in *Ball the Jack* (1930s), and the "twis' around" movement in *Ballin' the Jack* (1913).

We must pay attention to the meanings of both oral and kinetic transmissions of culture. Girls' games are the vehicle for teaching the ideals of black music-making, but it also becomes a practice that teaches notions of gender. In each case, except for the Georgia Sea Island connection, there is a difference in the sex of the performer - a voiced separation of gender.

Lydia Parrish does not make any reference to gender relations or differences between the sexes, when she records details about *Old Aunt Dinah* or *Ball the Jack*. But there is a suggestion about the kinetic behavior - a reaction to it - that Parrish records. There is something provocative and sexual about the serpentine wiggle she describes - the same gesture that becomes the centerpiece of a game-song practiced by girls through the latter part of the century. Young girls - girls who are not of childbearing age -, practice it.

Girls are generating this oral-kinetic material, and I wonder if they are generating it first, or if they are regenerating it (as in appropriating it from popular songs by male artists, or from the local popular culture). Both popular songs and the game-songs are tapping into the "real" popular, as Stuart Hall (1992) refers to it: the vernacular performance of songs and dances.

Might the use of girls' games be catapulting fans' interest in these male artists, and even generating popular taste and interest ? These songs use girls' games to generate the popular taste, but because most of us do not assume that girls and women are *producing* music culture - that *children* are producing culture, in the industrial sense - no one is concerned with the borrowing of this music from the public domain. No authority or ownership is ascribed to the folks it came from. As in Nelly's case, it is simply considered "black" culture - it is not seen as gendered.

From these connections, we get a rich picture of a gendered musical blackness that circulates between the sexes as social dance. It allows one to consider that women and girls are playing a vital role in the production of popular taste - not just the sonic popular taste, but through embodied performance and interaction.

MARY MACK AND WALKIN' THE DOG

The next connection was discovered from an interview with Linda, who was kicked out of school for a particular dance. The dance was to the song by Rufus Thomas, which began with *Mary Mack*. This again suggested the chicken-and-egg relationship, or what I began to conclude was more accurately a form of oral-kinetic discourse, shaped by a gendered dialectic between the sexes. That's when I began to look for it in other places.

The practice of "borrowing" from one setting to another is inevitable in music, where orality is still the dominant form of transmission. And the lyrics

and gestures found in both game-songs and in various forms of recorded musics, suggest a dialectical relationship: between the culture of children and adults, between so-called “folk music” or “music of the everyday” and recorded songs, and between the popular music of local performers and mass-mediated musics. Ultimately, this points to the uselessness of juxtaposing "folk" music (implying the past, communal transmission, generation, and the everyday) and "contemporary" or "popular" music (implying a break with the past, the present, youth culture, and commercial mass media).

In black cultures, dances are acquired as a kind of cultural capital: learned from parents or older siblings, borrowed from dance shows on television and cable, appropriated from distant relatives (young and old, on summer vacations), and even acquired during interactions between Northern and Southern relatives during funerals and family reunions.

Parallels exist between a black popular social dance and the song lyrics about it (for example, *the Twist*, performed by Chubby Checker, *the Dog*, associated with a song by Rufus Thomas, *the Tighten Up*, sung by Archie Bell and the Drells, and *Rock Steady*, by Aretha Franklin, etc.). These parallels are important, because words that describe movement in conjunction with those gestures (i.e., an onomatopoeia of the body) demonstrate the critical synesthesia within kinetic orality.

Dances are often linked to specific songs or musical styles; certain dances are gesticulations of the sonic textures and timbres associated with funk, soul, or more minutely, a specific dance is linked to a particular song(s). For example, the dance *the Dog* was performed to *Walkin' the Dog*, recorded by Rufus Thomas in 1963, and *the Bounce* was performed to a popular song of the same name by rapper Jay-Z (1998).

The top-ten hit song *Walkin' the Dog*, written and performed by Memphis radio disk jockey and humorous R&B artist Rufus Thomas (1917-2001), which was later covered by the Rolling Stones on their first album, borrows several ideas from *Mary Mack*. Thomas's fondness for recasting familiar tunes as party songs (which were later labeled "novelty songs"), is reflected in other songs he recorded based on girls' game-songs, as well as other children's musical play, such as *Little Sally Walker* and *Old MacDonald Had a Farm*. *Walkin' the Dog* helped to popularize a provocative dance known as *the Dog* in black communities across the nation; the suggestive dance involved rhythmically thrusting one's hips back and forth to the beat of the song.

The four-measure intro to *Walkin' the Dog*, recorded on Stax Records, samples from the traditional recessional wedding march by Felix Mendelssohn - the same motive used two years later in 1965 for the opening theme of ABC's *The Dating Game*, written by Chuck Barris and David Monk. The music then settles into a soulful Memphis groove with an ascending bass line, beginning on the tonic and walking up the scale through degrees 2 and 3, 5, and 6, and then the octave (delineating a major pentatonic scale), before returning to the tonic on the downbeat of the next measure.

This bass line sounds distinctly like the bass line that would later accompany *My Girl*, written by Smokey Robinson and recorded on Motown by the Temptations; the dance that my mother taught me to perform to this style of music was called *the Stroll*. All roads lead to the mating game between a boy and girl : strolling down the avenue with my girl, or walkin' the dog with Mary Mack :

1st verse (8 measures):
"Ma-ry Mack dressed in black / Silver buttons all down her back
How low, tip-see-toe / She broke a nee-dle and she can't sew
Chorus (8 measures):
Walkin' the dog / Just-a walkin' the dog
If you don't know how to do-it / I'll show you how to walk the dog."
2nd verse:
"I asked my ma-ma for fifteen cents / See the elephant jump the fence
He jump'd so high, he touch'd the sky / Never got back 'til the fourth o' July"
Chorus:
"Walkin the dog / Just-a walking the dog
If you don't know how to do-it / I'll show you how to walk the dog.
Middle eight (rap over sax solo):
Come on! Come on, love! / Ba-by, ba-by / Quite con-tra-ry / Tell me how your garden grows? / You got / Silver bells / An' you got / Cockle shells / Pretty-maids all in-a row."
Chorus:
"Walkin' the dog / Just-a walkin' the dog
If you don't know how to do-it / I'll show you how to walk the dog".

Recorded on June 17, 1963, the use of a girls' handclapping game-song as resource for making a popular hit probably went un-noticed, as did the exploitation of black artists for profit, which was a standard practice during the segregated politics of the era. Infringement on copyright wasn't a problem. This commercial song-version closely emulates the game-song *Mary Mack* in its verses, which are set to a different melody. The reference to the popular chant *Mary, Mary, quite contrary* - in the middle eight bars - suggests that the implicit subjects and explicit objects of the song are girls and childhood.

Then, as now, the game-song *Mary Mack* would have been considered, under public domain, the property of the public, assignable to anyone legally, except, perhaps, girls and children. Thomas would own exclusive rights to the song, because children's music is folklore, part of the public domain. As "the property of the public", everyone except the girls, who are the primary agents of such music-making, can claim ownership to *Mary Mack* as intellectual property. In fact, Thomas borrows the lyrics from *Mary Mack* for *Walkin' the Dog*, but he uses a newly-composed melody, perhaps to claim authorship forthrightly, or he may have simply added the text to a previously-composed melody.

> "[Popular] songs with references to familiar folk tales and sagas or to everyday speech or street-corner games tended to include listeners in a community of improvisation and elaboration... [The songs] ritualistically confirmed the commonality of everyday experience... [They] survived because of their appeal as narratives, but also because they marshaled the resources of the past as part of defining identity in the present" (Zap Mama, *Sabsylma* liner notes).

References to the popular children's rhyme *Mary Mary, quite contrary* in the middle eight bars or the bridge, and the use of the verses from *Mary Mack*, all suggest that gender plays an important role in the production of popular music. Male artists like Thomas serve the status quo of sexual orientation by appealing in one way or another to the Marys out there. The music and dance was luring girls and women to the dance floor at a time when social desegregation created a need to legitimize the social status of blacks. Thus, girls needed to be respectable and avoid lewd dancing and other incorrigible behavior with boys. But black popular dancing has always been about the ritual of romance, though it does not necessarily lead to sex. Leslie Segar (a.k.a., Big Les), one of the earliest notable hip-hop choreographers and former television host of BET's *Rap City*[4], captured the idea well when she said, "They say dancing is the vertical expression of the horizontal fantasy. It's true, because dancing is extremely sexy to me" (Allah, 1993 : 50).

The practice of "borrowing" from one setting to another is a natural outcome of oral-kinetic communication and the relations between sexes; the performance between dance partners is the practice of call-and-response as kinetic orality. Children's music, like youth or popular music, is influenced not so much by schooled learning or the direct involvement of adults, but by an informal network of learning to be musical, which is found in everyday culture (Riddell, 1990 : ix). Analyzing the intertextuality between black girls' games and popular songs helps us discover overlooked and significant connections in the production of music and culture, as well as in the learning of black musical aesthetics.

The process of social memory at work in girls' games has a great deal to tell us about the production of black popular musical taste. We might want to seriously consider that girls are a primary influence on the production of popular taste by way of male artists borrowing from the female sphere of black musical activity. Male artists are mirroring the production aesthetic that exists in everyday culture.

Let me digress for a moment to discuss reactions to Philip Tagg's assertions about the misuse and meaning of "black music" which I heard are well-known in French circles.

---

[4] The cable station Black Entertainment Television or BET, aired its first rap show in 1994 and it aired until 1999.

In an open letter published in the journal *Popular Music* (vol. 8, no. 3), musicologist Philip Tagg, who proclaims himself to be a "white, middle-class intellectual", attempts to raise a constructive discussion on music, race, and ideology by questioning the needs that give rise to terms such as "black" or "European" music (Tagg, 1989). He writes:

> "We are all implicitly expected to know exactly what everybody else means and to have clear concepts of what is black or African about 'black music' or 'Afro-American' music, just as we are presumed to have a clear idea about what is white or European about 'white' or 'European' music. I just get confused. Very rarely is any musical evidence given for the specific skin colour or continental origin of the music being talked about and *when evidence is presented, it usually seems pretty flimsy to me from a musicological viewpoint*" (emphasis added; Tagg, 1989, see http://www.theblackbook.net/acad/tagg/articles/opelet.html).

In print, there seems to be no justification, particularly by a white music scholar, for a "black" musical experience in the anti-essentialist climate of academic discourse as well as the threat of being called "racist". I can assert here that it matters who is speaking about ethnic and/or cultural musical differences relative to black, Francophone African, Afro-Caribbeaan, and/or African American music. It matters who has the authority to shape or interrogate the discourse of musical blackness, not unlike the linguistic games mentioned above in Rapper's Delight, that signifies insiderness in its public performance while it may also limit outside knowledge. Discussions of what "black music" is brings attention to the lack of inter-cultural communication about African American subjectivity within predominately-white institutions of higher learning in the States, at the very least, where whiteness rules.

When it comes to discussions of "black music" or musical blackness, biological determinism lurks deep within the imagination of the American public. *Rhythm* and *soul* are key examples. What many listeners or "outsiders" experience as biological differences between the races are actually learned but we rarely discuss the intellectual and embodied development of culture here. This is the primary aim behind my book - to provide an understanding that helps people get how musical blackness is learned and I get an added bonus of confronting gender biases by focusing on girls within black culture as well.

While "having rhythm," as it's referred to in African American musical discourse, may be a cultural "rule," but the so-called rule must first be *learned* to be followed. African Americans *learn* to discipline their kinesthetic sensibilities and their highly social musical embodiment.

In my own journey as a native ethnomusicologist, I pondered how I feel "at home" *in* my musical identity. How and why does (or did) my identification with African American musical experience seem so eternal, an ancient "changing same" (cf. Le Roi Jones a.k.a. Amiri Baraka, 1967), to borrow an expression that perpetually crops up in academic discussions of black music (as if classical and other musics do not subscribe to the similar "changing

sameness"). Like a spoke in the wheel of time, I always felt and had come to know myself to be a great "black" dancer which others acknowledged. Throughout my life, I thought I'd always had rhythm. I often imagine I can intuitively figure out earlier styles of black dance just from hearing the music that accompanied it – cultural memory, too, is learned. I would sense, as a result of my perspective, a sense of being connected to previous generations through interactions learning dances from my mother, watching dance on "Soul Train" or vintage films of black music-making, from recordings of shouters and songstresses; from all this I told myself how to read who I am by what I interpreted from the recent and distant past. I experienced the past in what I saw and what I did as a black dancer.

While writing up this research in the late 90s, that illusion was shattered. My mother corrected me and my constructed memories. She had *taught* me how to dance. She taught me, in essence, how to have that "different rhythm in living and being" that British cultural critic Paul Gilroy mentioned in his book *The Black Atlantic* (1993b). She reflected what happened in my toddler years: "Your first experience (of moving to music), I could see it. It was like you were on the wrong side of the beat" (personal communication, August 11, 2001). The discovery was registered in a fear that I didn't have a good sense of rhythm on my own. This is taste-making at the level of cultural learning. And even if you don't know how to dance well in black culture, you also learn what "good" dancing and having rhythm looks like. In re-telling her version of my life she added, "So… I danced with you a lot".

That was not exactly how I had recalled it. But I vividly remembered my four-year-old toes struggling to stay afloat on my mother's furious *Lindy*-hopping feet. Until that day my mother shared with me, I had no idea it was because I *didn't* have rhythm - I didn't have a good sense of dancing with the beat to records she played every Saturday night on a record player embedded within a credenza. Our stereo doubled as living room furniture. I merely assumed, in hindsight, that she was teaching me specific choreographies (like the Lindy-hop) and other dances, which I actually *did* learn from her, which she acquired before my birth—oral-kinetic transmissions of black culture are felt not seen or intellectually understood. I learned *the Twist*, *the Funky Chicken*, *the Australian Slop*, *the Tight Rope*, and *the Tighten Up* (which we danced to the song of the same name by Archie Bell and the Drells). I even learned how to do *the Freak* from my mother, a single party-going parent, a popular disco dance that came out in the 1980s.

My kinesthetic memories of dances, and the music that went along with them, were vivid. And before my mother gave me another explanation, I created one in my head: I figured she was passing on local and national popular traditions that had been more closely connected during segregation. I believed I had the right sensibilities to put everything into action, and that my African American body came with rhythm in it. My mother was just teaching me the choreographies, and I wasn't wrong about that.

Believing self and group identity come naturally, as I discovered second-hand from my mother. It is part of the customary phenomenology of identity politics. We want to believe who we are, is fixed, set, and complete—a belief that is especially common in the collective consciousness surrounding black musical experience. Even while recognizing that I *learned* how to have rhythm, my sense of my musical blackness—my sense of belonging and being socially affiliated with a distinct African American culture—remains. So there must be some essential cultural, rather than biological, need for this subjective (and spiritual) feeling that is both about the self and about being a part of the social experiences known as "African American" that are, as a rule, learned.

I am well aware that presumptions about fixed conceptions of ethnicity, culture, and subjectivity, as well as generalities about singular black musical identity, are viewed as problematic (Radano 2000, 4); (Frith 1996, 108). However, showing her vision back in 1990, bell hooks warned:

> "Criticisms of directions in postmodern thinking should not obscure insights it may offer that open up our understanding of African American experience. This critique of essentialism is useful for African Americans concerned with reformulating outmoded notions of identity. . . [However,] this critique should not be made synonymous with a dismissal of the struggle of oppressed and exploited peoples to make ourselves subjects" (Hooks, 1990 : 28-29).
> "There is a radical difference between a repudiation of the idea that there is a black "essence" and recognition of the way black identity has been specifically constituted [through] experience", hooks adds (*ibid* : 29).

In the wake of deconstructing purely imagined identities, music scholars may lost sight of the phenomenology of African Americans' everyday musical experience. It is my committed assessment that this oversight is complicated by a lack of attention to the ways musical blackness is learned. More black and non-white scholars need to understand and investigate how black musical discourse and black musical subjectivities in African American culture are learned through *everyday* social practices to offset the white-washing of cultural phenomenology.

To be clear, the musical subjectivities of African American males and females across generations and regions are not a "blind recapitulation of givenness" (Jackson, 1996: 11). African Americans develop active relationships with what has gone before and what imaginatively lies ahead, to make a future, or a *home*, out of the "sedimented and anonymous meanings of the past" (*ibid.*) at the level of the individual, group, community and region. These sedimented and anonymous meanings are boundless; they are not confined by race or sex, though they tend to be bound, on the surface, to things "American".

Use, not logic, conditions belief. That the phenomenologist is loath to essentialize such terms as nature, femininity, or Aboriginality does not preclude an appreciation that a separatist, essentializing rhetoric is often an

imperative strategy for besieged groups and ethnic minorities in laying claim to civil rights and cultural recognition… Ideas can be meaningful and have useful consequences even when they are epistemologically unwarranted" (Jackson 1996, 13).

Anthropologist Michael Jackson characterizes it well. Cognitive moves to deny *phenomenological* musical experiences do not take into account "how people immediately experience space, time, and the world in which they live" (Jackson 1996, 12).

Now to return to my discussion of girls' game-songs. Because most definitions of folklore exclude commercial performance, consumers and listeners, as well as scholars who may denigrate black expressive or popular cultures, rarely connect the production and dissemination of vernacular oral traditions to popular music production and distribution at first glance. Gene Bluestein recognizes five essential qualities that characterize "true folklore," according to folklorists: "it must be oral, traditional, anonymous, 'formalized,' and present in different versions" (1994: 13). Quoting material representing the International Folk Music Council of 1954, he further defines that the term "folk music," as an orally-transmitted practice, "evolved from rudimentary beginnings by a community *uninfluenced by popular and art music*... The term does not cover composed popular music that has been taken over ready-made by a community and remains unchanged, for it is the refashioning and recreation of the music by the community that gives it its folk character" (*ibid*.: 14-15). Bluestein contends that this definition may be useful in European folk contexts, but does not do justice to the processes operating in the United States. He counters:

> "Almost from the beginning, [U.S.] popular culture has had a very close and symbiotic relationship with folk sources of our society... At the same time that folk and popular styles continue their own development in both rural and urban regional settings, materials from folk tradition have strongly colored popular expression... The relationship between the two is so intimate that it makes more sense to talk about poplore than folklore in the United States" (*ibid.* : 66).

This is a useful argument that explains part of what is going on between girls' games and black popular musical genres, such as hip-hop: there exists a symbiotic or dialogic relationship in which both spheres are creating and re-fashioning new musical ideas, based on pre-existing material from the other realm. The circulation of culture at work in girls' musical play is arguably a microcosm, or a mirror image, of what takes place in certain instances within the production of mass popular musics, such as Nelly's *Country Grammar*. In other cases, the direction of the influence is not as clear, suggesting a constant musical interchange, and a gendered interplay between the local popular sphere of girls' games and the mass popular production of musics, from rhythm and blues to hip-hop.

JIG-A-LOW AND THE OTHER MICHAEL JACKSON

I love mentioning the anthropologist Michael Jackson above. But this section is about the other Micheal Jackson - the superstar of music and dance and his powerful connection to black girls' musical play.

Jig-a-low is a cheer I learned from Jasmine and Stephanie that reveals a different aspect of the relationship between girls' games and popular songs by male artists. In this case, the artist is the young, emerging, solo artist, Michael Jackson. And the aspect highlighted here concerns the use of kinetic orality, or transmissions of movement or motion that are used to key into an older game, an older dance, and a relevant social history as embodied social memory.

Michael Jackson is referenced in other girls' games, directly and indirectly. His aura as a teenage idol is directly signified in the handclapping-bridge for four players called *Tweedle deedle dee* or *Rockin' Robin*. The game-song is named after the chart-topping hit recording *Rockin' Robin* by Michael Jackson from his first solo album *Got to Be There* in 1971. But the game-song may have preceded the biggest hit from MJ's album peaking at number two on the Hot 100 and R&B charts. His version was a cover. The original was performed by Rhythm n Blues recording artist Bobby Day in 1958 under the title "Rock-in Robin". The original also reached number two on the Billboard Hot 100. Although it was Day's only hit single, its popularity may have been captured in the oral-kinetic displays of black girls in the early 1960s but the game-song I and others have learned is ordinarily associated with idolizing Michael Jackson.

A less direct reference to Michael Jackson appears in a game-song called *Candy Girl*, which I witnessed at a P.A.L. (Police Athletic League) Center in Harlem in 1994. *Candy Girl* was one of the first hits of the teenage boy-group New Edition that formed in Boston that was envisioned as "The Jackson Five" of the 80s with a hip-hop flair. They formed in 1978 but reached their earliest popularity in 1983 with the release of the hit single *Candy Girl*. It became a number one hit on the R&B charts but reached only #46 on the Billboard Top 100 chart. *Candy Girl* did not have much crossover appeal despite lead singer Ralph Tresvant sounding a lot like Michael Jackson. The white majority audiences reflected by the sales on the pop charts in the early 80s found the new jack feel of R&B/Hip-Hop music too urban (read: too black).

The game-song "Jig-a-low" would be another instance of Michael Jackson's resonance among young girls. The expression "jig-a-low," which sonically resembles the word "gigolo" but probably signifies the notion of a "jig" or a dance "down low" in the colloquial sense of "gettin' down", features call-and-response between two or more girls with opportunities for each player to lead and "do their thang" - showing off their individual performance and identity within and among a group of peers. Definitions of "jig" in the *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* include "to move with rapid jerky motions," and

"to dance in a rapid lively manner of a jig" (1999). These meanings are not lost in the performance of this game-song.

The lyrics in the latter part of the game-song describe an action that accompanies the directions inscribed in the chant of "jig-a-low":

> "Well, my hands up high / My feet down low
> And this the way I jig-a-low
> Well, her hands up high / Her feet down low
> And that's the way she jig-a-low"
> Refrain:
> "Jig-a-low / Jig-jig-a-low"
> [repeat the refrain until the next girl introduces herself]

Simple claps on beats two and four accompany the refrain, while the call-and-response sections lack any significant body-slapping, clapping, or finger-snapping which seems unusual for a cheer. But movement is not lacking in the delivery of the dance.

In introducing herself, each player inserts her name into a scripted verse of call-and-response, in dialogue with the other girls (one or more) playing the game. In the table below, you will find (line-by-line from left to right) a representation of the patterns of unison call-and-response chanting shared by nine year-old twins Jasmine and Stephanie, and the exchange of their roles (swapping between leader and follower, caller and responder) as they are required throughout the performance.

Line nos.	**Call**	**Unison**	**Response**
		REFRAIN	
1		Jig- a-low—, jig-jig-a-low—	
2		Jig- a-low—, jig-jig-a-low—	
	PART 1		
3	**Jasmine**: Hey Stephanie!		**Stephanie**: Say what?
4	**J**: In–troduce yourself!		**S**: Know what?
5	**Jasmine**: In–troduce yourself!		**Stephanie**:

			OK!
6	**Stephanie:** My name is Ste–phanie	[They exchange roles here]	**Jasmine**: Yeah!
7	**S**: I got the mu—scle		**J**: Yeah!
8	**S**: To do the hu—stle		**J**: Yeah!
9	**S**: I do my thang		**J**: Yeah!
10	**S**: On the video screen		**J**: Yeah!
11	**S**: I do the ro-, ro-, ro-, ro- ro-bot [punctuates each syllable with the dance called the "Do Do Brown"]		**J**: She do the ro-, ro-, ro-, ro-ro-bot [Jasmine imitates Stephanie's version of the dance]
		REFRAIN:	
12		Jig- a-low—, jig-jig-a-low—	
13		Jig- a-low—, jig-jig-a-low—	
	PART 2		
14	**S:** Hey Jasmine!		**J**: Hey what?
15	**S**: Are you ready?		**J**: To what?
16	**S**: To jig?		**J**: Jig-a-low?
17		Jig what?	
18			**Stephanie**: A-low
19	**Jasmine**: Well—,	[Exchanged roles again]	**Stephanie**: Well—,

	My hands up high my feet down low and THIS's the way I jig-a-low [Jasmine creates a stylized move on "THIS's"]		My hands up high my feet down low and THIS's the way she jig-a-low [Stephanie mimics Jasmine's stylized move on "THIS's"]
		REFRAIN:	
20		Jig- a-low—, jig-jig-a-low—	
21		Jig- a-low—, jig-jig-a-low—	

This cheer actually explores contemporary "street" dance styles. When I first observed this game-song between the twins, I noticed that Jasmine and Stephanie were performing the then-popular dance I had participated in as a graduate student in Detroit metropolitan nightclubs and house parties. This dance could be readily witnessed on a Detroit's televised "New Dance Show," which featured local African American teens and young adults dancing in their hottest club attire to the latest hits and re-mixes. (Local dance culture in Detroit is distinguished by a fast-paced, thump-oriented music known as "bass," which originated as a style in Miami). As a result, the dance was easy to recognize.

The current dance moves were curiously being performed by the twins to the name of an earlier dance popularized by Michael Jackson, which was a street style of dance before Jackson made it nationally popular. The dance was called *the Robot*. The oral and kinetic juxtaposition of a popular 1970s dance, and a popular 1990s dance, suggests both continuity and change in a curious way: while the name was orally transmitted, the dance was not. Instead, the latest style replaced the out-of-style dance practice.

Assuming that the term is actually a remnant of the former style of dance, the use of a contemporary style evident in the Detroit area, alongside the verbal articulation of a formerly popular dance, *the Robot*, also suggests that its contemporary practitioners (generations of girls in this particular location) adapted the movements and dance found in *Jig-a-low*, making them suitable to the present. Girls create variations within their orally- and kinetically-transmitted texts that reflect both the black past and the present, embodying a social memory of black style.

The Robot was the national dance craze of my youth during the mid- to late 1970s. I remember watching a dancer named Damita Jo Freeman, a popular "Soul Train" regular, skillfully perform the moves every week often to the sounds of the hit *Dancing Machine* by the Jackson Five from the album *Get It Together* (1973).

The *Robot* featured the funky mechanization of the dancing body to signify a collective response, not only to the driving force of funk and soul music, but also the mechanical (assembly line) practices and technological innovations that were emerging in labor, science, and the science fiction of the day. More than any other black social dance practiced by both women and men, *the Robot* was concurrent with, if not a precursor to, emergent styles of dance associated with rap and hip-hop culture (most notably the art of *popping*, *locking*, and *pop-lock* dancing often associated with popper Fred Berry, a.k.a., "Rerun," of the black television show "What's Happening").

The actual dance that Jasmine and Stephanie performed in place of *the Robot* in *Jig-a-low*, was known as the *Do Do Brown*. This dance involved a rapid locomotive action, popping one's pelvis or booty, back and forth - a style of movement my former jazz dance instructor called a "funky backer and a funky upper," (referring to the alternation of pelvic thrusts, or torso contractions, back and forth). It accompanied the song from which its name was taken: *C'mon Babe* [*Do Do Brown Version*], recorded by Miami-based entrepreneur Luther Campbell (a.k.a., Luke Skywalker) and his *Banned in the U.S.A.* (1990) by 2 Live Crew (*All Music Guide*, http://allmusic.com, 07-May-2003). The style of music to which this song *Doo Do Brown* belongs has many labels including *Southern rap, party rap, dirty rap, bass music*, *booty music, a booty phat classic, a club re-mix classic*, and *a strip club classic*. It remained a classic in clubs for over a decade, from 1989 to 2002 (allmusic.com). The alternating pelvic thrusts and torso contractions occurred every eighth-note pulse in the fast-moving tempo of *Do Do Brown* (130 beats per minute or more) (See Luther Campbell's website at unclelukesworld.com/about.htm).

In performing this dance, you could look like you were having convulsions (if you didn't execute it well), or you could look super funky, in-control, fashionable - even sexy - while your gold-hooped earrings, shaped like two kissing dolphins, flapped in the air. In the age of television dance shows and videos, the dance was often executed at an angle for onlookers, with the dancer in profile, glancing over her shoulder - or, more provocatively - with her behind attracting men's gazes. Because of the accentuated, popping action of the booty, females were primarily associated with this dance, though men performed it as well. This association explains the name of the style or genre of this music: "booty" or "bass" music. In this case, "bass" doubly signifies on the *low end* of the body, particularly black women's bodies, and the aesthetic ideals of feeling and emphasizing the *low end* or frequencies of the music.

Unlike the interconnections between old and new songs and games found in *Down, down baby*, *Jig-a-low* demonstrates oral and kinetic interrelationships

between black popular social dancing and the rhetoric about the performance of musical embodiment ("I do my thang / On the video screen"). Connections are still made with hip-hop performance. And an interplay between the sexes is still at work - in this case, between social dances that may signify conventional sex roles in popular culture. For females, it may be signifying their dominant (or subordinate) role as dancers in hip-hop videos, which were receiving a great deal of critical and negative attention in the mid-1990s, when Jasmine and Stephanie were playing this game. For males, the music referenced "bass" or "booty" music sung by male artists, and the idea that female fans responded to their voices suggests a patriarchal control over women's bodies through music.

My take on the performance of *Jig-a-low* as an oral-kinetic etude in gendered musical blackness was that it was about learning to master styles of embodiment and social interaction (i.e., delivering call-and-response effectively). The game-song highlights an example of "auto-sexuality" (Miller 1991) in girls' play where the performance of sexual identifications is expressed for themselves, by themselves - without the presence of boys though it is all about their identification with boys. The dance called "Do Do Brown" is implicitly designed to attract the gaze of men with its hip punctuations, but learning the dance itself involves mastering styles of movement and gesture that will be used throughout the repertoires of black dance girls will encounter over a lifetime. Many of those dances might be considered sexual or erotic display. Whether the *serpentine wiggle* found in *Down Down Baby* or "Do Do Brown" in *Jig-a-low*. In these cases, there are issues of sex identity, gender relations, and embodied significations that are suggestive of, but do not explicitly allude to sexual behavior and erotic gesture. These are entwined in a deeper understanding of the power of black music across time and space. Such information tells us more about the power of what's popular than anything else we can unravel, because it requires a subjective involvement in the social and embodied memory of black music and dance.

This article described various oral and kinetic connections and interconnections to show how girls' musical play in handclapping games, cheers, and - to a lesser degree - double-dutch, are a local formation of a "popular" culture that is in constant dialogue with the mass-mediation of black male performances, engendering and sustaining certain musical and social relationships between the sexes, and between children and adults in African American communities. This interpretation of black musical culture blurs conventional distinctions between folk and popular culture, while it opens up a conversation about gender and power relative to female participation in both the learned ways of being musical in everyday African American musical practice, and the political production of what's popular in mass culture.

There are various levels of dialogue or discourse at work. In addition to the dialogue (between the sexes, children's folk (or vernacular) performance is in

dialogue with adult expressions of music and dance, and both reflect aspects of what would conventionally have been perceived as separate spheres of culture: folk vs. popular transmission. On another level, female expression and activity in a semi-private sphere (the local popular sphere of African American neighborhoods), is in dialogue with male expressive activity in a more public sphere (mass-produced and -mediated songs and videos on radio and TV).

If the everyday practice of girls composing and interchanging bits of familiar chants, and making beats out of popular approaches to body percussion, functions as one of the earliest popular music formations in African American communal culture, then the interrelationships between black girls' "popular" musical culture and similar musical expressions in male artists' mass popular music unveil ways that black actors become aware of their own gendered sociality. This simultaneously disguises the social construction of popular music and the integral participation of women and girls in defining the dominant popular music culture.

In his 1981 essay "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Popular'", Stuart Hall forwarded a critical point about popular culture that relates to the interplay between girls' musical games and the male-dominated popular culture of hip-hop. He invites us to consider how forms of mass or commercial popular culture offer elements of "something approaching a recreation of recognizable experiences and attitudes to which people are responding" (Hall, 1981: 233). The appeal of mass popular music is not necessarily a matter of a passive consumption, market manipulation, or the debasement of - in this case - African American music or culture. He asserts that popular culture plays on the contradictory domain of the "real vernacular," or the local popular culture - the ordinary musical experiences that people make in African American contexts everyday, such as girls' musical play (ibid.).

If, as Paul Gilroy (1993b) contends, participation in musical practice, particularly the ubiquitous social forms of anti-phony, or call-and-response, provides the most significant locations that dramatize the "identity-giving model of democracy/community" (*ibid.*: 200) in African American and diasporan cultures, then this ethnographic and cultural examination of the connections and interconnections between the performance of girls' games and hip-hop reveals important moments of culture in motion; it reveals the social and musical construction of a gendered musical blackness and community.

This work raises as many questions about women's interests in hip-hop as it perhaps answers. Girls' games give us some insight into black girls' and women's interest in a contemporary style of music that, on the surface of things, seems misogynist, sexist, and hostile to females, while it co-opts feminine behavior and dress (i.e., black women's styles of hair [see Snoop Dogg], and long baggy pants that resemble dresses rather than conventions of men's clothing).

At best, hip-hop as a male-dominant practice figuratively and rhetorically excludes women ("Bitches ain't shit but hos and tricks", Snoop Dogg on Dr. Dre's *The Chronic*, 1987). At its worst, hip-hop excludes women from participation in the community-building role that music tends to play in black youth and popular culture.

Hip-hop is a contradictory space for women. On one hand, it offers young women the possibility of a "popular" or social identification with an African American group-consciousness through musical participation, such as making popular or familiar beats through embodied gestures, rhyming or chanting, and learning the linguistic and embodied codes of ethnicity and gender (black and female). On the other hand, hip-hop uses these same musical and cultural practices - making beats with technology, rhyming or rapping, and encoding ethnicity and gender (black and male) in ways that deny the former agency and authority of women and girls, which deny things feminine, and co-opt behaviors associated with female gender roles and power. My research suggests that power works in both directions between males and females, but the popular (read: mass culture) context of hip-hop tends to eclipse our comprehension of the dialogic and interdependent social formation of a black musical identity and popular music.

Even more compelling is the fact one will find few pertinent examples of female hip-hop artists "sampling" from their own realm of the popular: borrowing popular phrases or ideas from game-songs that articulate a feminist or womanist agenda and audience (male and female) in hip-hop. If Nelly can use it for masculinist purposes, why can't Queen Latifah, MC Lyte, Queen Pen, or Lauryn Hill flip the script? Why haven't they? One wonders if that might be the ultimate upsetting of the ways in which gender signifies power in actual performance and practice. Men can adopt and co-opt girls' games, and still keep their music masculine, hard. Are female artists avoiding using their "girl" culture because it might be viewed as excluding men? This nasty complaint was often launched against black women, and was particularly evident during the controversy around the film adaptation of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. (See the 25th anniversary article on the controversy in The Grio: http://www.thegrio.com/entertainment/the-color-purple-25-years-later-from-controversy-to-classic.php).

Stuart Hall states "transformation is at the heart of popular culture studies because it involves the active re-working of traditions" (Hall, 1981: 228). This is the changing same of which Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones) once wrote (1967). It is that something that appears to persist; yet new relations are developed. "What matters is *not* the intrinsic or historically fixed objects of culture, but the state of play in cultural relations: to put it bluntly and in oversimplified form - what counts is the class struggle in and over culture" (Hall, 1981: 235).

One of the class struggles within black popular culture is the struggle of dialectical conversations that are shaped by the interplay between girls' games

and the latest contemporary form of black music, whether it be rhythm and blues in the 1950s, or hip-hop in 2003.

This opens up a world of observation and analysis that could revolutionize the ways in which we approach ethnographies of black popular music. We must embrace the interplay between the local and mass popular spheres, between the so-called folk or vernacular and the popular, between female and male cultures, and between youth and adults.

Unveiling the obscure musical links found within black girls' games and uncovering the musical socialization encompassed in their practices was the goal in this article. As one of the earliest popular spheres of black social practice and popular discourse, girls' musical game-songs reveal obscured musical and social connections as well as the eclipsed participation of African American girls and women who shape "black" popular culture and social discourse as a whole. The seemingly insignificant subculture of black girls' musical play plays a vital role in the social production of taste among girls and boys in local settings, and highlights popular social dances in the black community that are appropriated by local and commercially-viable artists.

The kinetic orality of African American musical aesthetics that girls learn to inhabit through these games, point to a lived phenomenology of a gendered blackness, as well as a complex web of relations that suggest an "ethnographic truth," the "spirit of the local and situational quality of knowledge and experience... positioned within the experiences of specific historical actors" (Ramsey, 2003: 41).

These games are situated in relationship to historical and social moments that are connected to the lived experiences of African American "actors," whose lives and practices point to the lived phenomenology of a distinct African American identity, community, and social memory, manifest through a kinetic orality of musical behavior.

As a realm of female practices and discourse over time, the repertoire of black girls' games reflect an ongoing "dialogue" with other musical realms that occupy the public sphere, such as jingles in advertising campaigns, or black popular songs and popular social dances mirroring those practiced in the black community past and present. A significant dimension of this dialogue occurs through the musical intertextuality, between the gestures and dances, chants, and lyrics, that operate in the realm of a larger world of commercial and vernacular popular music produced by males. This intertextuality gives body to both an individual and communal experience, because girls' game-songs and gestures, as well as mass-mediated popular music and dance, are primary among the "material and symbolic resources required to sustain" the notion of a black musical identity (Hall, 1996: 2). Stuart Hall discards the notion of "identity," and replaces it with a discursive approach known as *identification*:

> "In common sense language, identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. In contrast to the "naturalism" of this definition, the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed - always "in process". It is not determined in the sense that it can always be "won" or "lost," sustained or abandoned. Though not without its determinate conditions of existence, including the material and symbolic resources required to sustain it, identification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency. Once secured [identification with blackness for instance] does not obliterate difference… Like all signifying practices, [identification] is subject to the "play" of *difference*. It obeys the logic of more-than-one. And since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive work [the process of making sense of things, making meaning of what's happening], the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries... [Identification] requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process" (*ibid.*: 2-3).

Girls "play with" notions of race and gender relations, a "normative" sexual orientation, and musical behavior that will later be used in sexualized dancing. In the performance of these embodied musical formulas, players learn to inhabit metaphors of difference: the difference of blackness (vs. whiteness or even African-ness), musical blackness (vs. "white" identified music cultures), a musical black (female)ness (vs. musical expressions conceptually linked to black masculinity), and more. The complex social performance of black girls' games constitutes a way of experiencing self and social identity that can be complementary and contradictory in subsequent musical and non-musical contexts.

These oral-kinetic lessons in black music-making and social identity construction may explain *how* (as well as why) music plays such a pivotal role in African American culture as a whole. The collective discourse of musical embodiment may signify a racialized, or ethnic musical difference, distinguished from "mainstream" culture. But it also functions as a communal agent, offering the power to transcend differences of gender, class, age, and nationality *within* the social economy of African American culture. My analysis offers a glimpse into the dialectical tensions encompassed within this communal sensibility by concentrating on the significance of gender and embodiment in a seemingly minor context of African American musical culture: black girls' play.

INTERVIEW DATA

Jasmine and Stephanie, twins (b. 1985, Ypsilanti, Michigan). (No other biographical information; girls were adopted). Interviewed 8 April 1994. Recorded seven game-songs on audio cassette.

Linda (b. 1948, Detroit, Michigan). Interviewed 3 October 1994. Parents from Detroit, Michigan. Siblings: Two brothers. Occupation: "Non-traditional" undergraduate student at the University of Michigan. Self-Designation: African-American. Recorded on audio cassette.

Nancy (b. 1963, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). Interviewed 9 September 1995. Siblings: Three older brothers, one older sister. Occupation: Biochemist at the University of Pennsylvania, University of Michigan Ph.D. Recorded game-songs on audio cassette.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bilal ALLAH, "Can't Stop the Body Rock, Part Two: Hip-hop's Fly Choreographers", *Rap Pages* (August), 1993, pp. 48–51.

Amiri BARAKA (a.k.a. Leroi JONES), "The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)", *Black Music*, New York, W. Morrow, 1967 (1966), pp. 180-211.

Gene BLUESTEIN, *Poplore: Folk and Pop in American Culture*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1994.

Simon FRITH, "Music and Identity" *in* Stuart HALL and Paul DU GAY (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London, Sage Publications, 1996, pp. 108-127.

Kyra D. GAUNT, *The Games Black Girls Play: Music, Body and 'Soul'*, Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1997.

Paul GILROY, *Small Acts : Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*, New York, Serpent's Tail, 1993a.

Paul GILROY, *The Black Atlantic : Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1993b.

Stuart HALL, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'", *in* Raphael SAMUEL (ed.), *People's History and Socialist Theory*, Boston, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, pp. 227-240.

Stuart HALL, "What is the 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?", *in* Gina DENT (ed.), *Black Popular Culture*, Seattle, Bay Press 1992, pp. 21-36.

Stuart HALL, "Introduction. Who Needs 'Identity'?", *in* Stuart HALL and Paul DU GAY (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London, Sage Publications, 1+, 1996, pp. 1-17.

Bell HOOKS, *Yearning : Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, Boston, South End Press, 1990.

John LANGSTAFF and Carol LANGSTAFF, *Shimmy, Shimmy Coke-Ca-Pop! : A Collection of City Children's Street Games and Rhymes*, Garden City, NY, Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1973.

Michael JACKSON (ed.), *Things As They Are : New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1996.

Carol MERRILL-MIRSKY, "*Eeny Meeny Pepsadeeny*", Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1988.

Dan MILLER, "Absolute Freedom in Trinidad", *Man,* 26 (June), 1991, pp. 323–341.

Lydia PARRISH, *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands*, Hatboro, Penn., Folklore Associates, reprinted from Farrar, Straus & Co, 1965 [1942].

Ronald RADANO, "Hot Fantasies : American Modernism and the Idea of Black Rhythm", *in* Ronald RADANO and Philip V. BOHLMAN (eds.), *Music and the Racial Imagination*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000, pp. 459-80.

Guthrie P. RAMSEY, *Race Music : Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-hop*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003.

Cecelia RIDDELL, *Traditional Singing Games of Elementary School Children in Los Angeles*, Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, Los Angeles, 1990.

Philip TAGG, "Open Letter about 'Black Music,' 'Afro-American Music' and 'European Music'.", *Popular Music*, vol. 8, n°3, 1989, pp. 285-298.

Olly WILSON, "The Heterogeneous Sound Ideal in African-American Music.", *in* Jr. Josephine WRIGHT and Samuel A. FLOYD (eds.), *New Perspectives on Music : Essays in Honor of Eileen Southern*, Warren, Mich., Harmonie Park Press, 1992, pp. 327-38.

ZAP MAMA (recording artists), *Sabsylma*. Time Warner, 945537-2, 1994.

RÉSUMÉ : Cet article explore les connexions existant entre les jeux musicaux des petites filles et les chansons populaires enregistrées par des artistes masculins aux Etats-Unis durant les dernières décennies. En se basant sur l'analyse de chansons des petites filles et sur des interviews collectées auprès de femmes afro-américaines durant des enquêtes de terrain menées entre 1994 et 2002, il décrit comment les petites filles noires expérimentent, au travers des danses et des chansons contenues dans leurs jeux, une forme de socialisation musicale et d'apprentissage d'une identité noire de genre.
Kyra D. Gaunt met en lumière l'intertextualité orale et kinétique existant de façon cachée entre les jeux des petites filles et les musiques populaires afro-américaines, pour interroger la place du genre dans la construction sociale du goût musical. Ces regards portés aux sources de la construction sociale du goût et de la division de genre dans les chansons populaires afro-américaines - qu'il s'agisse du Rythm'n' blues ou du hip-hop -, démontrent comment les jeux des petites filles, par les claquements de main, les exclamations, les jargons auxquels ils donnent lieu, contribuent à la formation locale d'une culture « populaire ». En constant dialogue avec les performances d'artistes masculins médiatisés par l'industrie musicale, ils engendrent et renforcent dans les communautés afro-américaines certaines relations sociales et musicales se tissant entre les sexes, et entre les enfants et les adultes.

MOTS-CLÉS : Identité noire, jeux de chansons, intertextualité, genre, identité raciale, gout musical noir, espace public, petites filles américaines