

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: THE REALEST NIGGA: CONSTRUCTIONS OF BLACK
MASCULINITY WITHIN RAP MUSIC

Jason Nichols, Master of Arts, 2006

Thesis directed by: Professor Nancy Struna
American Studies

This thesis attempts to complicate and raise questions about Black masculinity and hip hop. It contains information gathered for ethnographic interviews conducted with rap artists. In these interviews, one can see that issues of performance of gender and gender authenticity are central. This thesis addresses how interview subjects negotiate the internal differences between their rap persona and their everyday identity. As both a teacher, student and a rap artist, these are questions I am attempting to reconcile for myself; thus, I am not absent from the research. This thesis concludes that artists are reluctant to call their own rap persona a performance, for fear that it would be acknowledging that it was somehow an ‘act’ or not ‘real’. My informants describe their rap identity with words like “aggressive” and their everyday persona as “patient”. When asked about what characterizes a ‘real’ man, they nearly always use the same words they used in describing their everyday persona.

The methodology for this thesis includes primary and secondary sources as well as interviews.

THE REALEST NIGGA:
CONSTRUCTIONS OF BLACK MASCULINITY WITHIN RAP MUSIC

Jason Nichols

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
2006

Advisory Committee

Professor Nancy Struna, Chair

Dr. Jared Ball

Assistant Professor Psyche Williams-Forson

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Over the past 30 years, hip hop, particularly rap music, has continually gained the admiration of young people worldwide. However, media attention to commercial rap music has focused on one type of performative black masculinity, which is expressed through violence and aggressive posturing (Rose 35). As Mathew Henry discusses in "He's a Bad Mother *\$%@!#", "This particular version of Black masculinity has been popularized by the large scale commodification of hip-hop culture. Yet this hyper-masculine façade is neither unique to hip-hop nor particularly new" (122).

Rap artist Curtis Jackson aka 50 Cent captured the imagination of the youth of this nation in 2003 (Coates 1). Many would argue that as a lyricist, 50 Cent is inferior to some of his contemporaries, such as Nas, Jay-Z, and the ever-controversial Eminem. However, 50 was the most visible hip hop artist of 2003 because of black masculine performance. He had been shot, jailed, and forgotten until his own rugged individualism resurrected his bullet ridden, tattooed body. Instead of making a humble return to the top, thanking God and others who helped him along the difficult journey, he arose without a smile except when gloating over his victory over his enemies. He took lyrical shots at other high profile rappers and warned that he does not "Back Down." He flashed a toothy grin at the ladies and bragged about his "magic stick," a metaphor for his phallus, which apparently does wonders in the bedroom. 50's theatrical performance of the "real" is a type of masculinity that places the black male in the position of the "disobedient 'other' in relation to white male patriarchal control" (112). He and others like him claim to be 'real niggas'. According to Rux, "niggaz, who have invented the alter ego of a New Savage God- a gun-toting nationalist radical with supreme sexual prowess and

unsurpassable talent to counter Bill Cosby's 1980s middle-class Negrodum." (18) I have done a series of interviews, analyzed lyrics and hip hop spaces, and examined the roots and traditions that have influenced the culture since the 1940s. These actions were taken in an attempt to decipher how and why agents of hip hop culture, particularly rappers, construct their masculinities as they do.

My interest in this subject began with personal reflection. During a family reunion, my aunt questioned my authenticity as a rapper because of my privileged upbringing, level of education, my Standard English speech patterns, and profession. I initially refuted her opinion, stating that I was not the only rapper who is middle class and educated. I ran down my list of rap artists who come from suburban middle class backgrounds: Chuck D, Run-DMC, Puff Daddy (Diddy), and Heavy D, among others. She finally asked me if I "acted" the same in my professional environment as I do when I am on stage. After further self-examination, I realized that she was both correct and incorrect.

I do feel at times that I have two identities, which are signified by two different names. Jason is mild-mannered and somewhat humble, polite with good posture and a firm handshake. He is an educator who considers himself both fair and opinionated. Jason can be seen donning a collared shirt or a Cosby-esque knit sweater. He is a committed boyfriend and concerned uncle and son. Haysoos is wildly boastful and borderline pompous. He is politically aware, yet invulnerable and blunt. He walks with a stroll reminiscent of a 1970s Blaxploitation private 'dick.' He is, or at least appears to be, unphased by confrontation. The two are not mutually exclusive; Haysoos' hip hop vernacular could emerge at any moment while Jason is ranting to his students about

racism in the media. My stage identity, as well as my professional persona, is a performance. However, my aunt was implying that one was 'real' and the other was 'fake.' I contend that they are different spaces and require different constructions of masculinity. Neither identity can be viewed as real or fake.

I chose to limit my study to Black men because there is no one that is more an object of both adoration and scorn, admiration and contempt. They are, along with the assistance of Black women and Latinos, the creators of hip hop and its primary spokesmen and ambassadors.

Black masculinity as expressed through commercial hip hop is usually void of vulnerability, to the point where NWA used say "Real Niggaz don't die." The importance of an examination of Black masculinity as expressed through mainstream hip hop is self evident. Hip hop is an extremely popular youth culture that is now a worldwide phenomenon. For many, hip hop may be the only exposure to Black American males and their culture they receive. Hence, hip hop culture could be the international ambassador for African American manhood. In addition, a study of gender cannot be conducted "outside history and culture" (Brittan 1). In order to adequately study masculinity, it must be placed in proper historical and cultural context.

This thesis functions as a tool to complicate more than explicate issues of masculinity and authenticity, and rappers' perspectives on them. I will attempt to present the existence of dual identities of rappers: one under their given name, and the other under their emcee alias. I acknowledge the fact that many of the artists I interviewed have a different class reality than the mainstream rappers I sometimes use as evidence.

Methodology

I conducted several interviews for this thesis. I posed several questions to hip hop agents, primarily emcees, about how they define ‘real’ manhood. I had my subjects ponder the differences or similarities between their identity under their rap pen name and their given names.

Chapter 2

Theory and Methodology

This thesis will use the "structured action theory" as a theoretical basis for its findings. Therefore, the concept of masculinity, though expressed differently, has been constant for Messerschmidt describes this theory by stating that "gender grows out social practices in specific social structural settings and serves to inform such practices in reciprocal relation" (6). Structured action theory also theorizes men "in different social positions achieve masculinity in different ways," depending on the "resources available to them" (Reilly 13). In addition, it is my opinion that many conditions that effect Black males have evolved, but have largely gone unchanged. According to Winant, "all the social practices that influenced racial dualism in 1903 continue today: the segregation of the minority (and particularly black) communities, the discriminatory and regressive allocation of underemployment, undereducation, and other forms of substantive inequality to members of these communities"(8). These systems of domination have been constant for generations of Black men, from the 1940s to the present hip hop generation. Moreover, Messerschmidt characterizes gender as something one can "do" (6). I choose to use the word perform. Performance theorist Judith Butler asserts "the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts" (Butler 272). Acting out one's gender can be a slightly individual decision but in most cases they "specify pre-existing cultural relations; they are rarely, if ever, radically original" (277). Gender is not a static concept. According to the structured action theory, we show that "we are male or female by means of concocted behaviors that may be interpreted accordingly" (7). In other words, the way one acts in a hip hop setting

such as a nightclub or bar to demonstrate that they are one gender or another is often different than the way they perform gender at work. For this reason, I will recount some of the cultural and gender norms of hip hop spaces in this document. As gender is linked with behavior, I attempt to show that one who exhibits strong behavior can be seen as more of a man than others.

Many scholars have lumped all hip hop together into one essentialist brown mass. I acknowledge that hip hop differs from east to west, north and south, independent and commercial, hardcore, crunk, conscious, hyphy, gangsta, screwed, and backpack. Many of the artists that I interviewed avoided labels and viewed them as limiting. However, the crowds that they associate themselves with, market their music to, and perform for, determine the way they perform their masculinity in their lyrics and demeanor when they are in hip hop spaces. Each of these hip hop categories and identities, however, have their own performance of what is real, which is affected by the same basic principles of Black masculinities. Masculine performance in hip hop alters depending on the social structures that surround the culture.

There are other scholars who have done work on masculinity and hip hop. Robin D.G. Kelley has written two books that were useful to my own work. However, this thesis is original because in place of just using the words of popular artists, it includes primary interviews with artists that represent the thousands of rappers who have not yet made it in front the MTV cameras and cannot afford bling. Kelley and others have not done ethnographic research and certainly not with ‘underground’ rappers.

When I speak about a theatrical performance of the real, it is not to take away from the legitimacy of some of the claims that 50 Cent and others are making. Black

males are indeed being shot, jailed, and forgotten, disproportionately more than other races and genders in the United States (Madhubuti 69). It is my claim that a performance of a particular masculinity seems to prevail in hip hop above others, and it is rooted in the urban struggle. I characterize it as a performance because many rappers say something similar. Some of the rappers I interviewed thought of their rap persona as an "exaggeration." Ice Cube, the self-proclaimed "nigga ya love to hate," said that rap music is performed in a "theatrical way" (Saddik 110). Project Pat, a well-known rapper from Memphis, Tennessee stated the following about the reality of the claims made within his rap music:

Well, it's just a job. It's just like Al Pacino can play Carlito in Carlito's Way. It's a job. Al Pacino's not a gangster. He's an actor. You gotta look at it like this, I can tell y'all rap tales and hood tales and some of the tales be similarly true and a lot of the tales guys can relate to. Some of the things I've done, somebody else did, or I know about, but all in all anything on me it had to have been the past. I'm not out here doing it now. You can't be out here selling crack on the corners and rappin'. (Diva)

It is also my belief that alternate forms of Black masculinity arise in hip hop during short stints of American economic prosperity. The Clinton era budget surplus and job growth in the United States ushered in the bling-bling period, where gangsta emcees in the 50 Cent vein took a back seat to flashy metrosexual rappers such as Ma\$e and Puff Daddy. This form of masculinity has seen a recent reemergence with the rise to stardom of Kanye West. Some in the academy have attributed hip hop's version of Black masculinity (the assumption is that it is one, uniform expression) to a rearticulation of the Black power patriarchy (hooks 150).

The Early Burden of Black Masculinity: The Talented Tenth

While 1940s "Black protest literature" had focused on "scarcity, invisibility, silence, depravation and lack" of Black males, the part of the Black Power agenda of 1960s and 1970s was to romantically "proliferate the imagery and activity of strong Black warriors, frequently assumed to be male warriors" (Ross 602, 604). Others believe American media use it to reinforce the image of the American macho. The Black male image is utilized to show not only can we exploit weaker nations economically and militarily, but if it came down to it, we could kick your ass the old fashion way. According to anti-violence educator Jackson Katz, Americans (in this instance, meaning those from the United States of America) "construct violence as a cultural norm." Thus, I primarily intend to use literary studies, economics, and masculinity studies in order examine Black masculine performance in hip hop.

W.E.B. Dubois theorized early in his career that a "talented tenth" should lead the Black race towards a more successful future. Noted scholar Mark Anthony Neal refers to the "talented tenth" concept as a "stridently patriarchal notion." (Neal 9) At the early part of the 20th century, a member of the so called "talented tenth" was considered to be "the proverbial 'strong black man'" and the philosophy as a "part of a normative and necessary black masculinity" (9) Neal states that the talented tenth notion of masculinity was a "sanitized" version of the same "sexism, homophobia, and misogyny" that rears its head frequently in hip hop. (8) I would take Neal's metaphor further and say that the sexism, homophobia, and misogyny of the Dubois era have been stripped of its perfume. Hip hop allows these characteristics to exist in their natural, foul smelling state. One could say that hip hop is more "authentic" in exposing the crisis of Black masculinity.

Strike a Pose: The Tough Guise and Influences Upon Black Masculinity

The general performance of masculinity has been termed the "tough guise" by anti-violence educator Jackson Katz. In the film entitled "Tough Guise: Violence, Media, and the Crisis of Masculinity," Katz stated that masculinity is a "mask ... a pose, an act" used to cover one's emotions or "shield vulnerability." One can look again at 50 Cent as an example of a man who shields his vulnerability. He bragged about his tough and seemingly bulletproof exterior in his hit "In Da Club," in which he raps, "I got hit shells but I don't walk with a limp (adlib: "I'm aight!)." According to Katz, men receive pressure from society to conform to a narrow definition of manhood, exemplified by "dominance and control." He continues to say that these ideals and the behavior that accompany them are learned through being exposed to the media. Mr. Katz says that this "tough guise" may affect men of color even more than white men because "there is so little diversity of images of them" within the media". The theatrical performance of the real is the tough guise in its extreme. It is all based upon how one wants to be perceived, however, the performance rappers portray is on a much larger scale. Educational consultant Jawanza Kunjufu, based on the research of Michael Brown for his book *Images of a Man*, states that the "picture of manhood held by most African American male youth" is as follows:

How much pain or violence can you inflict on another person;

How many girls can you impregnate and not get married;

How much reefer you can smoke, pills you can drop,

And wine you can drink;

How many times you can go to jail and come out "un-Rehabilitated;”

What kind of clothes you wear;

How much money you have;

What kind of car you drive;

My progressive sensibilities tell me to dismiss Kunjufu's findings as racist. However, I cannot deny their existence in rap music. Further, I cannot deny, as Katz believes, rap music and mass media's influence over youth.

The images of Black masculinity and manhood are not purely homegrown in the Black community. Though in this very document I trace the ultra-aggressive "nigga" or "badass thug" image back to the characters "from a relevant history of slavery, reconstruction, ghetto realism, black civil rights, arts and radical movements and mythic Blaxploitation heroes," it is also a product of Brian DePalma's "Scarface," a story of a Cuban gangster, Mario Puzo's "Godfather" saga, "James Cagney" and "Humphrey Bogart.” (Ruz 22) Hip hop artists were documented on a re-release of Scarface on DVD, talking about the influence of the film on their slang, personas, and music. Terms like "Yayo," another word for cocaine, were introduced in the film and are now common hip hop slang. Artists spoke about Tony Montana's refusal to ever be compromised, his rise from abject poverty to a luxurious lifestyle, and about his "morals" as a "gangsta." Recording artist Eve, also spoke about how Montana refused to possess less than the very best, even when it came to dominating women. When he saw his love interest in the film, he "had to have her." Notorious B.I.G. elaborated on some of Scarface's rules and morals in his street record the "Ten Crack Commandments" when he warned potential gangstas to not "get high on your own supply." He prefaces that line taken from the film with

"know you heard this before," an acknowledgement of the film's influence on hip hop audiences. Everyone from Ice Cube, Tupac, the LOX, and Nas to Big Pun, Raekwon and countless others have either directly quoted, sampled, or made reference to the film.

There are rappers who have adopted alter egos with the names of Italian gangsters both real and fictional, such as Corleone, Gotti, and Capone. They have named their entourages 'Mafia' and the 'Commission.' Author Nathan McCall states in his book

What's Going On:

Because they're largely invisible, black males fantasize obsessively about reaching stations in life that they think will raise their profiles and win them the world's acknowledgment. Because they feel powerless, they're consumed with the symbols of power - gangstas, guns, and shoot-'em-ups. So they tune in to the music and imagine themselves as black godfathers and black Al Capones.

Tupac Shakur, quite possibly the most influential rap artist in history, referred to his video featuring Snoop Dogg by stating the following:

We wanted to put the mirror up to show you where we got these gangster ideas ... So we took all these scenes out of classic movies with gangsters in them ... not gangsters named Doo Dirty and Snoop and Tupac ... but gangsters named Lucky Luciano and Don Corleone and John Caddy, Al Capone and Smitty. (Dyson 317)

What It Is: Masculinity Defined and Contextualized

Scholars have often conflated the meaning of masculinity and masculinism.

Masculinity is a social construct that changes, or at the very least, fluctuates.

Masculinism, however, "takes it for granted that there is a fundamental between men and women" which "justifies male dominance." (Brittan 4) I argue that masculinism has existed in some form since our countries inception. Masculinism is closely related to

patriarchy, which Ronald Murray defines as "a coterie of kinship laws, prohibitions, and regulations that allows men to marshal authority over the reproductive capacities of women and to pass familial wealth and status to male heirs." (7) This idea supports my assertion that masculinity is a performance that is adjusted to fit the circumstances surrounding the performer. Masculinity has changed for Black male musicians over time. For example, in the 1960s it was acceptable and even masculine for a singer to wear a 'conk' hairstyle, a glossy, sequin suit, and a smile. They sang about falling helplessly in love with the girl of their dreams. By the 1990s rappers and singers both could be seen wearing army fatigues, cornrows, and frowning. They sang songs about "freakin you" rather than loving women. However, by the mid 1990s, as mentioned before, Puff Daddy and Ma\$e made the sequin suit and smile Black masculine image reemerge.

During the Black Power movement, Roland Murray asserts that masculinity should be seen as an ideology in itself. He stated that if we accept Althusser's definition of masculinity, which is as "a system of signs and representations that allows individuals to position and be positioned as subjects within a given social reality, then masculinity clearly serves this function within Black Power discourse." (6) Using this same definition, masculinities are ideologies within hip hop as well.

Many scholars have written on the subject of black masculinity, without mentioning its multiplicity. A masculinity that comprises a complex deviance from American social and educational norms and values, meanwhile remaining within the confines of "commodity capitalism" has been the focus of many critiques of Black masculinity. The single-minded concentration on one type of masculinity is not necessarily a product of the (hip hop) culture itself. Black masculinity has become the

"embodiment of U.S. arrogance, extravagance, and aggression" (Ross, 1). However, when mentioning the multiplicity of masculinity, Connell suggests that scholars:

Need not reduce the sociology of masculinity to a post modern kaleidoscope of lifestyles. Rather, it points to the relational character of gender. Different masculinities are constituted in relation to other masculinities and to feminities - through structure of gender relations and through other social structures. (736)

Connell's idea bring us back to Messerschmidt's structured action theory. Gender and masculinity are performed based upon the circumstances and people that surround us. Commercial hip hop has created an environment that nurture much of the aggressive behavior we see being portrayed in music videos and hear in song lyrics.

Though post-structuralist scholars have accepted the idea that most everything in life is a social construction, I believe it is still necessary establish that aggressive masculinity, such as the type that is prevalent in mainstream rap music, is not natural but a learned behavior. Making this point clear will keep racist, anti-hip hop scholarship from misusing this research to say that Black men are somehow genetically predisposed to sexualized or violent behavior. According to Brittan, "men will only behave aggressively if they have learned it is appropriate to do so." (7) There are some who cite experiments with primates of the animal kingdom and their aggression, and try to find a "correlation between hormones and behavior." (9) Others have gone as far as to cite the fact that men have a Y chromosome, or that women have more body fat than men. (Kunjufu 34) However, if violence can be reduced to testosterone levels, what of the men who are not overly aggressive? (Brittan 10) Does that automatically mean they are deficient in the male sex hormone? In addition, Anne Fausto-Sterling points out in her book, *Myths of Gender* that scientific evidence tying aggressive behavior to testosterone

has been largely inconclusive, and even suggests that "elevated testosterone levels may result from aggressive behavior" (127). As far as the chromosome theory, it was believed that an extra Y chromosome made someone criminally aggressive. However, science proved later that males with an additional Y chromosome were generally less intelligent but not necessarily more aggressive. (133)

The social construction of gender falls under the umbrella of what Carl Hanock Rux has interpreted as Fanon's "dream of identity." (18) According to Rux:

For now, the oppressed continue to live in the dream of identity, the dream that (in reality) the oppressed are, in fact, Negro, Colored, Black, Minority, Afro or African American, Hispanic, Oriental, Dykes, Bitches, Hos, Niggaz. All accepted as real identities. The acceptance of these identities further compels a performance of these identities, whether compliant or rebellious.

For the oppressed group, in this case Black American males, to accept and perform identities, Rux claims that their must be "a historical narrative of, or opposes the construct of, these identities." (18) I tend to agree with Carl Hanock Rux's belief that oppressed people are not completely agents of their own identity. Thus, Blacks did not create the image of the angry, violent, invulnerable, oversexed Black man that someone like 50 Cent embodies in its entirety. It was however, articulated long ago by the oppressors of Black men (i.e. white males). 50 Cent's persona is a slight rearticulation of the Black buck stereotype that was used to justify the random murder of thousands of Black men in the early part of the 20th century.

MTV, one of the major media outlets for hip hop, not to mention a champion of 50 Cent and his image, has worked overtime to portray Black men as angry and aggressive. On March 7, 1998, the network ran a special edition of its popular and

pioneering "reality" show, "The Real World," entitled "MOST DANGEROUS" (Orbe 35). The show was designed to be a 7-hour long marathon of the series "most intense conflicts" (35). According to Orbe, though African American men made up "less than 9 percent of all cast members, they were featured in over 50 percent of the "most dangerous segments" (35). Many of the incidents involved the Black men's housemates stating that they feared them, and on at least two occasions, the word rape came up, though there were no situations that actually involved a serious sexual assault.

Though a thorough investigation of colonialism is outside the scope of this thesis, I believe the Black community in the United States to be an internal colony. (Turner 62) Thus, the community and its members cannot be investigated without mention of their colonial status. I will use a Black Nationalist framework to show how Black males have been forced to view themselves through the eyes of outsiders, and that this is a necessary component of colonization. According to scholar James Turner, "Black nationalism addresses itself to the cultural and psychological malaise of the oppression Blacks have had to endure." (61) In short, the images of Blacks in mainstream media have been colonized, and this has even trickled its way into underground communication such as rap music by luring artists with the often-false promise of financial reward. This idea is related to my thesis as Dr. Jared Ball stated in his dissertation "Freemix Radio: The Mixtape as Emancipatory Journalism," that "music" is "a sustainer of the internal Black colony" (110). One could argue that is the reason Bob Marley's image has been changed from political critic to careless marijuana smoker, why Public Enemy was essentially banned from the spotlight in the prime of their popularity, and even why John Lennon was assassinated.

Black Nationalism teaches that "a man cannot begin to be involved in the revolutionary process until he looks at himself (and thereby others) with new feelings and new ideas." (63) The white supremacist power structure benefits from controlling the widespread images of Blacks because it effectively holds off revolution. The images of Black males in rap music and mainstream media as a whole are simple rearticulations of the old stereotypes that Bogle writes about: the Uncle Tom, Buck, and Coon. In a conversation I had recently with a colleague, she pointed out that one of the most visible rapper/producer groups of this millennium, Little Jon and the Eastside Boys' names were Big Sam and Lil Bo (i.e. Sam-Bo). As an early Black Nationalist, Marcus Garvey understood long ago that the "black man is doomed as long as he takes his ideals from the white man, sealing his feeling of inferiority and self-contempt." (Turner 67) The challenge of this thesis will be to see if the rappers themselves view hip hop and its popular images in this way, and how they feel they fit into this paradigm.

According to Dr. Jared Ball, "Hip Hop is mass media." Thus, it is a part of the process of socialization for millions of people. It informs the world what to think of Black American male youth. Venise Berry says "Stuart Hall argues that the mass media are the most important instruments of twentieth-century capitalism for maintaining ideological hegemony because the media provide the framework for perceiving reality."

(vii) Berry puts Bogle in perspective, about how old images of blacks males have grown to be established in the American and global psyche. Berry states:

Stereotypical ideals and attitudes have been formed and solidified over decades into accepted ideologies and norms about African Americans ... I do recognize that they serve as a primary source of communication in this country, and,

therefore, their images and ideals can affect specific people, at specific times, in specific ways, depending on the context of the situation. (viii)

Popular culture is the medium in which as Omi states, "racial ideologies have been created, reproduced, and sustained" (Orbe 33). This thesis agrees with Orbe's assertion "that the images of Blacks in the media historically have remained largely invisible, marginalized to the point of insignificance, or been limited to specific stereotypes" (33). Research continues to show that media still portray African Americans in stereotypical roles" (33). Media generally work to promote images through semiotics (34). Orbe describes semiotics as an associative process of signification where a signifier (name/image) is intentionally used to signify a concept. Thus, when one sees rapper DMX yelling, making threatening gestures, barking, and shirtless to expose his dark, muscular frame, one quickly associates this with the angry Black buck stereotype. The repetitive presentation of these images makes the association quicker for audiences, and makes it easier to lump those who do not fit the image as easily in with the rest.

I agree with Berry's assessment that "rap music encompasses the power and ideology of urban Black male populations." (264) However, my analysis will be a departure from conventional wisdom on hip hop. I do not believe hip hop "provides a voice for the voiceless" as much as it once did. Rather, it has become a vehicle for capitalism, which benefits from a limited portrayal of Blacks males in media. Berry and Looney give many examples of rap songs in which the lyrics address the adversarial relationship many black males have with what is seen as an occupying force in Black communities, the police. They do an excellent job establishing that hip hop's antecedents, such as the Black Panther Party, spoke out against police occupation and

abuse decades earlier. However, the majority of their examples come from the mid to late 1980s. None of their examples comes from after 1993. It is my contention that the mid 1990s ushered in a new era of hip hop wrought with commodification and commercialism. I reject the term "the bling-bling era," because it does not properly convey the role of capitalism and product placement. Even Gil Scott Heron's classic poem/early rap "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised," was co-opted by Nike who claimed "the revolution is about basketball." (McCall 5)

Frantz Fanon gave a poignant analysis of the crisis of Black masculinity in his work, *Black Skin White Masks*. He stated over and over that his aspiration was to "be a man among other men." (112) However, until he experienced a moment of self realization, he enjoyed the fear that his blackness inspired in others. When one "little boy" stated "Mama, see a Negro! I'm frightened," Fanon had made up his mind to "laugh myself to tears," at least indicating that he wanted to give the image of being pleased by the power that exists in being feared. (112) In many ways, Fanon stated that the Black man's attempt to inspire fear is a self fulfilling prophesy. He said the following:

The white world, the only honorable one, barred me from all participation. A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man - or at least like a nigger. (114)

It is my argument that hip hop has defined an authentic, real nigger (or nigga) as a Black (or Latino) male who is invulnerable and inspires fear in friends and foes. Robin D. G. Kelley stated in *Yo' Mama's Dysfunktional*, that even liberal social scientists believe they already "knew what 'authentic Negro culture' was before they even studied it in depth. Kelley said that scholars thought the following:

The "real Negroes" were the jobless men hanging out on the corner passing the bottle, the brother with the nastiest verbal repertoire, the pimps and hustlers, and the single mothers who raised streetwise kids who began cursing before they could walk. (20)

As Paul Gilroy stated, this was not seen as "one black culture among many, but the very blackest culture." (Harper 98) African American males are not the only people to see themselves through the eyes of others. Sartre claimed that Jews:

Have allowed themselves to be poisoned by the stereotype that others have of them, and they live in fear that their acts will correspond to this stereotypes. (Fanon 115)

According the former president of Guinea, Sekou Toure, this phenomenon is a "form of seasoning called the science of dehumanization." (Kunjufu 33) The science of dehumanization is defined as "the process of indoctrinating youth against yourself by internal development for external reward." (33) The stereotype that effects the Black male is that he "is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly." (Fanon 113) We can look at popular rap songs and see where these opinions have been internalized in young Black men. 50 Cent rapped that he was "an animal" on a track of the same name, LL Cool J had a song called "I'm Bad," Royce Da 5'9" said his "flow" was "mean" on "Let's Grow," and on the party track "One More Chance" the late Notorious B.I.G. stated that he was "Black and ugly as ever."

Scholars have also referred to the "cool" aesthetic as an expression of Black masculinity, many times seen in hip hop. Jazz musicians such as Miles Davis brought the cool aesthetic to jazz in 1950s, and were recognized by their clothing, speech, and demeanor. The cool jazz artists could often been seen donning dark shades, which were

also worn by the Black Power agents such as Stokely Carmichael and later by rap music stars. According to Robin D.G. Kelley, coolness is "merely another mechanism to cope with racism and poverty" (24). He further defines cool as "putting up a front of competence and success" (24). This pose, which sometimes manifests itself physically, can damage a male's opportunity to experience an intimate relationship with a female (or other males) (31). One can clearly see how this cool pose has been a common thread throughout the 20th and 21st century. As far as the physical manifestation is concerned, one need only look at photographs of cool jazz artists, members of the black panther party, and Run-DMC side by side to see the continuity.

The "tough guise," as it exists within hip hop culture among black males, falls under the theoretical perspective of what Connell termed "hegemonic masculinity" (Messerschmidt 10). Hegemonic masculinity is an "idealized form of masculinity" dependent upon "a given historical and social setting" (10). Other forms of masculinity are vilified in the shadow of this ideal. According to Messerschmidt, hegemonic masculinities usually stress "authority, control, independence, competitive individualism, aggressiveness and the capacity for violence" (10). Hegemonic masculinity is so often tied closely to ownership, competition, and territory, that violence becomes a "personal and political resource" (Messerschmidt 10). This form of masculine performance can be seen in the practice of "battling" in hip hop. Whether it is a b-boy battle, a DJ battle, a graffiti battle or a rap battle, many interpret these as actually replacing physical confrontations. The 'Brooklyn Rock,' for example is a series of aggressive poses that closely mimics fighting. However, one can observe these battles and see that they are often merely simulations of violence. The movements in a b-boy battle are often taunting

the opposition. The power moves are also about establishing territory. Many battles begin because one believes his space has been infringed upon. B-boys sometimes grab their genitals, partly for protection, and partly as a masculine boast. Many rap battles, whether face to face or on record, are sessions in which usually two men belittle one another's masculinity. For example, these lyrics are from 50 Cent's song "Back Down," directed at his arch-nemesis Ja Rule:

Any living thing that can not coexist with the kid must cease existing/
Little nigga now listen/
Your Mammy your Pappy, that bitch you chasing/
your little dirty ass kids, I'll fuckin erase 'em/
The success was not enough, you want to be hard/
knowing if you got knocked, you'd get fucked in the yard(adlib: "bend over")/
You's a pop tart, sweet heart your soft in the middle/
I'll eat you for breakfast/
Your watch get exchanged for your necklace ... I know niggas from your hood/
You have no history/
Never poked nothing, never popped nothing, nigga stop front/
Jay put you on, X made you hot, now you walkin 'round like you some big shot/
Ha, PUSSY!

The end of the song has a supposed effeminate homosexual coming to the aid of Ja Rule, stating that "big things come in small packages," referring to Rules diminutive stature.

The implied message is that Ja Rule associates with homosexuals, and therefore may be one himself. One can look at 50's verse and see that he is clearly stating that Ja Rule would be forced into homosexual sex were he ever to be incarcerated, because he is not man enough to ward off such an attack. According to Messerschmidt, "heterosexuality" is a "fundamental indication of hegemonic masculinity."(10)

The point of 50's comments is to make Ja seem to be less than a 'real' man, and to say that his current performance of Black masculinity is not authentic. Nas and Jay-Z traded jabs with similar masculine and sexual overtones. Nas referred to Jay-Z as a "dick riding faggot" in his diss track "Ether" and stated, "I rock hoes, y'all rock fellas." Jay-Z responded by saying that he had "more in Carmen" referring to his sexual prowess in an

encounter with the mother of Nas' daughter in his song "Super Ugly." Even off record, I have been to and participated in countless battles where the two emcees rap about how the other is a "faggot," has a small penis, or is not tough enough. The environment is no different in face-to-face lyrical confrontations. Kenn Starr, a Prince Georges County, Maryland-based, Virginia-born emcee stated in an interview I conducted with him that the subject matter in battles he has either attended or participated usually consists of "questioning the opponents sexuality" or "threats to an opponents well-being." Talal, a rapper from the infamous Cherry Hill section of Baltimore, stated that the objective of battling is "showing your opponent you're stronger and better" than he is, and that "egos and testosterone are all part of it."

In other realms of hip hop, the battle concept is different but still boils down to masculine themes of conquest, ownership and territory. I interviewed known Washington, D.C. area DJ/graffiti writer Kali about race, masculinity, and battles among DJs and writers, and the distinction of these battles from emcee battles. Kali has a series of popular mixtapes called "Powermoves" and was a member of the 2DK graffiti crew. He also was a renown party DJ in the area. Kali comes from a middle class background, attended private school in Baltimore and earned a master's degree in 2002. According to Kali, graf battles always begin in a "passive aggressive" manner, with one writer crossing out another's tag (an individual's stylized way of signing his/her name) or painting over one's piece. Unlike emcee battles, "it's never friendly, because writers risk a lot to get up," said Kali. Writers risk being caught by police and put themselves in dangerous situations in order to make sure their art is up to standard.

Graffiti writers work under aliases, so the battles are anonymous. However, Kali stated when one's identity is found out, battles between rival crews can, and many times do, turn violent. "I don't care what anyone says, the violence has always been there," Kali stated. He told of one instance where someone wrote "toy" next to his tag. To call someone a "Toy" is an insult, meaning that that person is child-like and insignificant. The use of this word I found to be intriguing. Society associates toys with children, and certainly not with grown men. Again, it is one hip hopper saying to another 'you are less than a real man'. Members of his crew claimed to know who it was and vowed to retaliate by destroying the other crew's art and with violence. "Eon (another 2DK writer) told me that he and some other guys were going to fuck the dude up," Kali explained. This situation is a clear case of one person attacking the other's manhood and violence being the consequence.

Masculinity can be expressed in DJ battles as well. Many DJs do routines with body tricks with aggressive looks on their faces. Others scratch records with sexualized profanity directed at opposing DJs. Other DJs, according to Kali, are "turntablists and win battles purely off of the sounds they are able to make with records. The best known of this class of DJ is Qbert. Kali admitted in our interview that these people were on the fringes of DJing. Party DJs enjoy a certain celebrity status and popularity with women. "(Name Omitted) once told me 'the best is when a girl says she'll suck your dick if you play her favorite song,'" Kali said. He explained that some DJs use their status to "dominate women."

Kali, comes from a unique vantage point in order to comment on race in the D.C. hip hop graffiti scene. He is Filipino, and expressed that that fact sometimes gave him

access to the worlds of the Black hip hop agents as well as white ones. He felt as though Blacks better trusted him because he isn't white, therefore he does not represent oppression and colonization to them. Whites however viewed him as a silent minority because he is Asian American, and said things around him that they may not have said if he were Black. Kali said the following with regard to race and the DC graffiti scene:

The main thing I noticed is that on some level, the white writers actually want to deface property. Most of them are from the suburbs of Maryland and Virginia and don't bomb in their own neighborhoods. They go to the city ... It's almost like they want to colonize it ... It's about ownership for the Black and Latino kids. They want to own their surroundings and beautify them.

Black cultural critic Haki Madhubuti, stated that Black men are "virtually landless, powerless, and moneyless in a land where white manhood is measured by such acquisitions" (69). Masculinity must be viewed as "what people do under specific social structural constraints" (Messerschmidt 8). Those social structural constraints for Black males are landlessness, powerlessness, and moneylessness in the United States. According to Messerschmidt, "power relations among men are constructed historically on the bases of race, class and sexual preference," with wealthy heterosexual white males being the most powerful (9). Thus, Black males are forced to find different terms to define their manhood. According to Clyde W. Franklin II:

For a variety of reasons, basic tenets of what would become known as "American masculinity" evolved beyond the grasp of Black men during this period. This is not difficult to understand because the model of masculinity in America had been constructed by the patriarchal slave-master system. (5)

Hip hop is a culture that was founded, developed, and controlled by underclass, Black males, the majority of whom were and are presumably heterosexual. Therefore, the focus of the culture has been on their male and sexual privilege and superiority. It has grown to address the aspirations to attain wealth as well. Even for those who are gay, a community within hip hop is developing that is attempting to express its masculinity by performing the same way as their heterosexual counterparts. In essence, Black males within the hip hop generation ascribe to a "hegemonic masculinity"(Messerschmidt 10).

The desire to appear invulnerable can cross lines of sexual orientation for Black males particularly in the hip hop generation. There is a burgeoning gay hip hop scene in which men posture in much the same manner as their (presumably) heterosexual counterparts. They are referred to as homo thugz, or as James Earl Hardy, author of the B-boy Blues trilogy calls them, "homie-sexuals" (Trebay). These men make a clear distinction between themselves and the "faggots" often mentioned by famous rappers like Jay-Z and DMX. They often do not refer to themselves as gay, viewing it as a white construction. According to Connell, "to many people, homosexuality is the negation of masculinity, and homosexual men must be effeminate." (736) Many could easily mistake the "homo thug" persona for an "oppositional masculinity," one "that explicitly resists and possibly challenge hegemonic forms." (10) Though they challenge "norms" as far as sex, the behavior and performance in a hip hop setting is very similar, except for the absence of women. Sexual conquest is still the focus. One can listen to advertisements for "all the dick and ass you can," but with the disclaimer "sissies need not apply." (Trebay)

Many black men who engage in sex with the same gender in today's society avoid the term gay because it is equated with weakness and passivity. (Estes 163) Not only is

being classified as gay seen as anti-Black, as Kanye West stated in an interview with MTV's Sway, "the opposite of hip hop is gay." Indeed, hip hop is often anti-gay; I contend that rap, particularly gangsta rap has had moments of violent homo-eroticism within its lyrics. Ice Cube rapper claimed that his enemies would "get fucked with no Vaseline" on his seminal diss track entitled No Vaseline, aimed at his former group NWA. NWA retorted back that they would fuck him "with a broom stick." Both parties stated this while insisting that the other was a "punk" (an insult hurled at gays).

bell hooks states that the "reclamation of the Black race" has been framed as "it's a dick thing" (Riggs). Because of decades of supposed emasculation by white males and the cruelty of the slave experience, Black males have been forced to take charge of the community for the sake of the entire race. Franklin states that "the concubinage of Black women following the Civil War undermined the Black male's efforts to become a "man."

(5) According to hooks in her book, *Salvation*, "Despite the fact that the systematic institutionalization of white supremacy and everyday racism made it impossible for the vast majority of African-Americans to create family life based on the sexist assumption that men should be the providers working to sustain the material needs of the family and women nurturers taking care of emotional needs and the concerns of the household, black people have worked hard to conform to this model." (156). In other words, "many Black men end up treating Black women" in the same oppressive manner that "white men treat white women" (Madhubuti 61). Janwanza Kunjufu refers to Black men as "aspiring chauvinists," because they "wish to dominate their women as Europeans dominate their(s)," but "they do not hire and fire, and do not control the means of production." (Kunjufu 38) Without this means of control, total domination is impossible, however

they express the longing for power through domestic violence, rape and other oppressive acts. The desire to replicate white male patriarchal dominance can be explained in Freudian terms with the concept of "identification with the aggressor." Anna Freud wrote about this idea concerning children:

By impersonating the aggressor, assuming his attributes, or imitating his aggression, the child from the person threatened into the person who makes the threat. (Elkins 118)

The pressure to conform to the sexist white supremacist characteristics that served to subordinate and suppress women did not only come from Black men themselves. hooks suggests that despite the fact that male domination often left women "dissatisfied" with their home lives, she still witnessed "black females disparaging black men for not embracing the role of provider.(157)" In the words of Kevin Powell, "Patriarchy, as manifested in hip hop, is where we can have our version of power within this very oppressive society." (Powell 77) Capitalism has been oppressive to many men, but especially to African American males (Horrocks 58). According to Roger Horrocks, in a capitalist society men become "angry and destructive ... not because they haven't got any money, but that as persons they are devalued" because " they are seen purely as units of production" (58). Marxist theory claims that patriarchy and its relative masculinity can be explained with the following:

The Marxist theory of patriarchy is materialist: it claims that it is a reflection of economic production and property relations. Or to put it more simply, patriarchy is a means of organizing production. Thus Engels argued that matriarchy gave way to patriarchy because of the division of labor. (Horrocks 52)

Contrary to the belief held by Connell, I hold that masculinity and patriarchy are very closely related precisely due to the fact that both can and at times are changing. As Connell stated, feminist scholars reject the notion that patriarchy is "ahistorical." (736) The same is true for masculinity, if one believes the tenets of the structured action theory. Horrocks' interpretation of Marxist theory supports the idea that the emergence of the bling-bling era of hip hop was emblematic of Black culture's acceptance of capitalism. Socialist groups like the Black Panthers no longer existed or captured the admiration and imagination of the people. By the mid 1990s, Black people wanted to be more like Oprah Winfrey than Elaine Brown. According to an article in American Enterprise by Richard Minitzer and Black conservative writer John McWhorter, "the black middle class grew dramatically and size and wealth" during the Clinton era economic boom of the mid-1990's. The buying power of Blacks as consumers increased by \$200 billion during this period (Minitzer, McWhorter). Hip hop Mogul Puff Daddy (as he was called at the time) and his protégé epitomized the era. On the song "Bad Boys" Ma\$e claims to not even "understand the language of people with short money." For a period, Black masculinity, in acceptance of capitalism, paralleled mainstream white masculinity. The attitude became, 'Who cares if someone else has a stronger sexual prowess, when with money I can sleep with women that are otherwise unattainable'" and "who cares is someone else is tougher, if I can pay someone even tougher to handle any physical confrontation that may arise."

Recently, hip hop has witnessed a merging of two masculinities. Now, many mainstream rappers claim gangsta credibility, but also flaunt their wealth. Rappers like 50 Cent, Cam'ron, and T.I. cling to their street credibility, but also "stunt" in oversize

platinum chains, mink coats and expensive cars. They chastise others for not being tough enough, as well as for a lack of financial stability. 50 Cent referred his adversaries as "window shoppers," because they go to "the jewelry store staring at shit you can't buy."

In non-capitalist societies, men are satisfied to be feminine. For example, in Tahiti, according to Horrocks, men cook, have homosexual encounters and flee from fights without shame (60). Cornel West agreed that Black males want to be associated with certain behaviors, including sexual prowess and being an object of fear ("Tough Guise" Film). Though I agree that Black men are partly agents in their own masculinity, it is worthwhile that words such as want and choose are over simplifications. Willot and Griffin state the following:

We would argue then, that men do not simply choose between rejecting or conforming to traditional masculine roles. Our argument is that certain available discourses and structures constrain both the issues which are seen as important and the ways in which men position themselves in relation to those specific issues. (Mac Un Gail 80)

In other words, employment is often unavailable to Black men, thus it is less important. Women, however, are available, so dominating them and demonstrating sexual prowess gains greater importance than (legal) employment due to the circumstances.

It is also important to draw a distinction between legal employment and illegal employment. I would argue that employment is still important to Black men in hip hop in many cases. Providing for oneself and one's children is important to Black males in hip hop, and is similar to white, middle class, heterosexual masculinity, which according to Willot and Griffin, has been constructed as the "norm." In hip hop, employment could involve criminal activity, such as robbery or peddling drugs. Notorious B.I.G., often

regarded as the greatest rapper of all time, introduced his song "Juicy" by saying "this album goes out ... to all the people that lived in the building I was hustling (selling drugs) in front of that called the police on me when I was just trying to make some money to feed my daughter." Philadelphia emcee Cassidy talks about selling drugs among other hustles, both legal and illegal, in order to feed himself and his child on his smash hit "I'm a Hustler." He states that he has "the product/ narcotics for the customer" because his "bills come in too soon/ my son going to be two soon." However, providing for women is less of a concern in mainstream rap music for the most part.

The sexual prowess in hip hop mainstream culture has outweighed the desire to provide for women. According to Franklin, "When many Black males were blocked in their efforts to assume aspects of the male role, they constructed and developed alternative definitions of the male role -ones that could be fulfilled with minimum interference from societal blockage of goals" (6).

Now, the goal appears to be to have sex with women without having to monetarily support them. In the words of "the god emcee" Jay-Z, "all I give a chick is hard dick and bubblegum." This expression of invulnerability is, however in line with the idea "that men's emotions should be suppressed" and characterizes "their warmth and sensitivity unmanly, and their sexuality compulsively heterosexual" (7). According to Madhubuti, "black men and women are becoming antagonists, and the liberating cooperation, respect and single mindedness of spirit and purpose that existed are being replaced with the gross forms of competition, decadent individualism and sexual exploitation" (61). Better still, the objective at times is to convince your woman to support you, which is exemplified in the recent emergence of the reverence of pimps and

the pimp/hoer culture within hip hop. This phenomenon could reflect a general shift in the masculine expectations for American males across the board. Ehrenreich documents the change in masculinity from the 1950s to the 1980s:

In the 1950s ... there was a firm expectation ... that required men to grow up, marry and support their wives. To do anything else was less than grown-up, and the man who willfully deviated was judged as somehow 'less than a man'. This expectation was supported by an enormous weight of expert opinion, moral sentiment and public bias, both within popular culture and the elite centres of academic wisdom. But by the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, adult manhood was no longer burdened with the automatic expectation of marriage and breadwinning. The man who postpones marriage even into middle age, who avoids women who are likely to become financial dependents, who is dedicated to his own pleasures, is likely to be found not suspiciously deviant but 'healthy'. And this judgment, like the prior one, is supported by expert opinion and by the moral sentiments and biases of a considerable sector of the American middle class. (Ehrenreich, 1983, pp. 11-12) (Brittan 2)

More recently, Clyde W. Franklin II, stated that:

Black male, like much of the Black community, realize that persistent discrimination, the decline of smokestack industries, the suburbanization of jobs, and generally stagnating urban economics all have led to decreasing employment and chronic unemployment for large numbers of Black males during the 1990s (Larson 1988, 109-10). As a result, Black males along with much of the Black community have constructed alternative general definitions of masculinities for Black males. (15)

Chapter 3

Dual Identities

In popular media, rappers' two identities have become more apparent to me. In the past, rappers would just simply use their rap alias when they accepted acting roles. Recently rappers who are newer to the silver screen are using their given names in the credits of their films. For this thesis, I looked at the classic hip hop film, "Wildstyle." In "Wildstyle," we watch the protagonist, an Afro Latino from the rugged South Bronx struggle to find a way to convert his art from a boyish hobby to a way of sustaining himself. He argues with his older brother who is in the army, who chastises him to be a man, and stop doing graffiti.

The rappers in the film portray masculinity in different ways. There is the group "Double Trouble," who wear suits and carry toy guns on stage, in order to resemble 1920s gangsters. Throughout the film, one never witness women rapping onstage, only in the backseat of a car, on the way to a hotel to have sex with male performers and their friends and associates.

For this thesis, I interviewed several rap artists, however, three particular emcees, stood out from the rest. The first artist was Doom aka The Prophet of Doom. Doom is short and slight of build, and normally wears wire rimmed eye glasses. He usually quietly paces around event spaces, shaking hands with familiar faces. When his group, O.U.O. (an acronym for Of Unknown Origin) is introduced, a transformation takes place. He steps to the side of the side of the stage and gently folds his glasses as if to not want to even smug them. Much like Bruce Wayne emerging from the dark, quiet confines of the Bat Cave, Dumicani, a mild mannered systems consultant and father of two ceases to be.

Enter the Prophet of Doom. Dumancani's soft-spoken tone and friendly raspy voice are converted into the menacing sound of Doom, which is the ironic fate of opposing emcees. Much like Mussolini, though Doom stands a mere 5'5", on stage he is larger than life.

Dumicani was born in Zimbabwe. His early cultural influences were those of his native land. However, Dumicani and his brother began listening to a low wattage radio station in Zimbabwe that played authentic American hip hop from time to time. The two young boys were hooked almost instantly. They begged their mother to bring home rap tapes from her frequent business trips to the U.S. and the U.K. He became a huge fan of Run-DMC, LL Cool J, KRS- One, Rakim, and Mantronix. "My older brother was probably the biggest influence growing up since he was a DJ and got all the music we were exposed to early on and he schooled us about rapping, popping, and electric boogalou," Dumicani exclaimed. They would stand around and mimic the lyrics word for word, while they imitated the poses they saw in the hip hop magazine, The Source. Dumicani's spirit became impregnated by rap music and the expressions that accompany it. He eventually began writing his own rhymes and making lo-fi recordings. Hip hop was also going through a period of trying to connect itself with its African roots. Dumi felt as though he was answering a call from his long lost brothers in the west, and he felt he could contribute authentic stylings from the motherland. Dumicani gave birth to a new identity during this period. Dumicani began emceeing under the name Dumi Right, and he and his brother formed the group Zimbabwe Legit. After traveling to the United States, Dumi Right aka the Prophet of Doom aka Doom-E meet with a writer from The Source, who helped them secure a major label recording contract with Hollywood Basic in the early 1990s. However, the album was shelved indefinitely when the label folded.

Today, the Mr. Hyde that is Dumis Right must share time with his Dr. Jekyll-esque alterego, Dumisani. According to Doom,

You'll find Dumisani in khakis, a button down shirt and dress shoes working at a client site, working on implementing a software system or doing data analysis. He is low key and focused, and frequently commended for his hard work. You'll find Doom-E on the other hand commanding the crowd to throw their hands up as he rocks the mic at an underground hip hop show in a club. He is boisterous and outspoken; he is articulate yet street. You wouldn't suspect that he is a mild mannered consultant by day. His Peter Parker to Spiderman; disguised and secret is safe for the time being.

Dumis is clear about the dichotomy between his two identities. He stated, "Doom-E is the creative side of my personality, I get to define the rules and call the shots. Dumisani is the analytical part of me; I analyze issues and solve problems." He indulges in the fact that he can "release my pent up energy" and be "boisterous and loud" when he raps, which would be considered inappropriate in other aspects of his life and identity.

When Dumis speaks about what defines a real man it seems to encompass more of his 'Dumisani' identity, than one of his rap aliases. He states that "a real man is someone that doesn't need to posture or front to prove how hard he is". His description of a real man as someone who "can hold down a job and take care of a family," sounds similar to his software analyzing Dumisani persona. He also stated the qualities that make him a good emcee have not assisted him in fatherhood, but the "being a father has made me a better person."

When asked about the differences and similarities between his two identities, Ashley aka Soulstice, a Chicago-bred, Maryland-based emcee had a distinct response.

“When I first started out (rapping) they were different,” he explained. “You just have to find your voice.” Yet, Ashley claims that “Soulstice is still a character.”

One can find Kareem on his computer intent on solving questions, in search of his Master’s degree in Business Administration. He graduated from the University of Maryland, and he is fluent in French. He has seen many parts of the world, and he is the son of a diplomat. Kareem identifies himself as Black, but is racially ambiguous by appearance. He is often mistaken for Latino or Filipino, but is very insistent and proud of his African heritage. However, at times Kareem wears the mask as if he absconded with it after raiding Dubois’ tomb. His alter ego, Napoleon, is Kareem after he has put on this mask. According to Kareem, they are not separate; Napoleon is merely a concentrated manifestation of parts of his personality. He describes his rap persona as “ambitious, confident, and aggressive.” “I don’t disassociate Napoleon and Kareem,” he explained. However, having lived in the same building with the two identities and being a friend of both, I feel confident I can distinguish between the two. Kareem is the fellow I see at the grocery store at 1 a.m., because we both like to avoid the pushy soccer moms and the lines. Kareem is whom I beep at when I see him jogging along the side of the road when I am driving by. Napoleon is the person who strolls into shows with an entourage of men and attractive women, wearing dark shades, and a super star swagger.

Napoleon was born when Kareem was about 10 or 11 years old. He was pushed into existence from hanging around the basketball courts and watching television. “The visual aspect (of hip hop) influenced me,” Kareem explained. Kareem is very clear in stating “Napoleon is a part of Kareem.” He considers Napoleon to be a “reality rapper,” who was influenced by Nas, Big Pun, Wu Tang Clan, and reggae artists such as Capleton.

However, being fluent in French and having lived in Paris, he claims that French rap artists speak more to his personal experience.

Napoleon never feels constrained by the lack of vulnerability in rap. As a reality rapper, his topics range from the break up of his family to the hedonistic duet with another emcee in which they shout the demand “get your pussy on the floor.”

Despite the raunchy, sexual nature of some of his own lyrics, Napoleon vehemently disagrees with the idea that hip hop is sexist. He called it a “very uneducated statement,” and basically believes that hip hop is a microcosm of the larger society, which has a disdain for women. When asked to recite the favorite verse he ever created, he stated the following:

Acting shady and I’ma call it about a sip from being alcoholic
Slick as Al Capone is with the skills to make an album awesome
Gave birth to little Legends can't afford the child support and insubordinate
Cowards get forced on life support I’m nice Napoleon
Known for flowing and throwing style in the coffin styles galore
I’m mic scorching tongue sharp enough to fight a swordsman
Styles like Feraggamo Salvatore in El Salvador
Lamping enhancing to advance in Sodom and Gomorra
Coach players like Tommy Lasorda told you to guard ya daughter
Got an army of soldiers waiting for me to launch an order
Got a subconscious aura that guides sort of reminds me of a young Mose
Finding me slinging darts wit no remorse and

Swing out my dick's enormous real niggas support us
Dead ya squad, make a hit and I got a chick to sing the chorus
Lyrics I mix with Morphine spit for the team
We close like victory seems I'm Diarrhea shitting the cream
Peep my diary living a dream fiery vivid extreme
Guillotine fill em up with an unlimited stream
Of blazing, Beam laser seem crazy basically graze ya heat ya
Feed ya to the undertaker now meet ya maker .

As one can see, Napoleon makes reference to violence, and claims to have superior sexual prowess. He warns the public to “guard your daughter,” and boasts about the size of his phallus a la NWA. Kareem chose the name of the French dictator, partly because of his roots in France, but also because of his self-proclaimed “short man’s Napoleonic complex” and desire for “world conquest” through his music.

An examination of emcees identities under their rap alias versus under their "government name," are imperative to a study on how they construct their identities. Articulation theory can be used to show the manner in which these identities co-exist. Stuart Hall defines Articulation theory as:

The form of the connection that can make the unity of two different elements, under certain conditions, it is the linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute, and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged? (Kraszewski 49)

Dr. Dre, the producer and integral member of the innovative West Coast rap group, NWA exemplifies Hall's articulation theory with his choice of his rap name. He states on the song "Niggaz 4 Life":

Why do I call myself a nigga you ask me
Because my mouth is so motherfuckin nasty
Bitch this, Bitch that, nigga this, nigga that
In the meanwhile, my pockets are gettin fat.
Gettin paid to say this shit here
Making more in a week than a doctor makes in a year

(Quinn 208)

Dr. Dre is clearly presenting a view in contrast to the role of a race artist. He "rejects the assimilationist ethic of entrance into the professional-managerial class" and shows that "disaffected black youth no longer feel fighting freedom battles through cultural achievements is a viable approach in view of persisting and entrenched political disadvantage." (Quinn 208) In doing so, he is scoffing the medical profession, even though he has given himself the title "doctor." His taking the name doctor is both an embrace and rejection of the title. On some level, he has given himself the title because he recognizes it as one of distinction. However, he also is thumbing his nose at the system because he is giving himself the title, instead of having to earn it through years of schooling. In addition, he adds insult by saying that despite the lack of education and legitimacy, he still makes more money "than do those who heal and care for the sick." Thus, Dr. Dre makes "unity" of these "two different elements" but only "under certain conditions." (Quinn 208)

The artists I interviewed, however, had a different interpretation of why they and others chose particular rap names. Two artists in particular stated that their hip hop

persona is not different from who they are, just an "exaggeration" of certain parts of their personality. For example, Kenn Starr's given name is Ken, he added the Starr to denote the flamboyant, flashy side of his personality. It also of course makes reference to the Clinton/Lewinsky investigator. Emcee Todd "Talal" Wyche's rap name was actually given to him by his father. He explained to me that once his father became Muslim, he started calling him Talal, which apparently means "admirable, king, or prince." Ashley "Soulstice" Llorens said his rap persona was a character, which implies it is something that he plays, acts or performs.

Pimpin' Aint Easy

The admiration of pimps started even before hip hop grew to be a worldwide phenomenon. Blaxploitation films of the 1960s and 70s featured characters like "Goldie" and "Dolemite," who used their strong sexual prowess and mind control tactics to gain the undying loyalty of their women, both black and white. The pimp image is loved by Black men on the silver screen because he is the total opposite of a victim (McKissack 1). Blacks remember the days of the slow witted Stepin Fetchit, "who bowed and scraped at the feet of white actors at every opportunity" (ironically, Lincoln Perry aka Stepin Fetchit joined the Nation of Islam in the 1960s and reemerged in the public eye as a member of Muhammad Ali's entourage (nytimes.com and answers.com)). The influence of film on Black culture is undeniable, as Blacks "buy half of the movie tickets sold annually - amounting to \$2.1 billion - and attend 2.6 movies a month compared to 1.8 for whites" (Carter 2). As Richard Carter stated, coming out the revolutionary sixties with the Black Panthers and their natural hairstyles, rifles, and tough demeanors, "Black was not only beautiful ... it was bad (meaning 'good')" (Carter 2).

Blaxploitation films can be historically situated at a time when four important things were occurring. Two of those things, according to Kraszewski, are that nationalist groups though still numerous, were "beginning to lose public interest and political power" and "the conditions of black poverty worsened." (49) Lastly, hip hop was in its developmental stages and rap music was in its very infancy.

Blaxploitation protagonists were often sticking it to the man, but did not necessarily side with Black Nationalists. Shaft, perhaps the most widely known blaxploitation film hero was a private dick who did not "take any guff from ... black revolutionaries" (Briggs 2). His character is said to have "transformed the whole culture" for adolescent Black males (Briggs 1). They used his style, walk and indifferent demeanor (Briggs 1). They admired his status as a "bona-fide sex machine"(Briggs). Though his character was not a revolutionary or Black Nationalist, he represented a "new kind of Black manhood made possible by the movement." (Estes 180) According to Estes:

He (Shaft) was a man who supported and protected his community, but also an individual, free to live his life as he choose, out from under the thumb of "The Man." If his relationships with women on screen untouched by the feminist movement that was challenging such images of dominant masculinity, Shaft did not seem bothered by this. In many ways, Shaft was the cultural embodiment of the hyper-masculine image that the Panthers had initially created for themselves. (180)

It is not a coincident that John Singleton's remake of Shaft featured rap music star Busta Rhymes, in order to make the film relevant to the hip hop generation. It was a blatant attempt to court young Black males to see themselves in Shaft's story. Superfly

continued the legacy of the hypersexualized protagonist, who was not above "beating up" a white cop or a "black competitor" (Briggs 4).

Superfly, which was released in 1972, one "year after Shaft," took it one step further than did Shaft. Instead of being a private detective, Superfly was a cocaine peddler and casual drug user (4). Audiences of young Black men and boys still stared in awe of a Black man who had control of his women, and was not afraid of the police, who have always been known as occupiers and brutes in the Black community (4). The same threads of masculinity that ran through scenes in Shaft were present in Superfly; he resorted to violence to solve his problems indiscriminately and he had sex with both Black women and the "forbidden fruit," white women. According to Sara Evans, "For Black men, sexual access to white women challenged the culture's ultimate symbol of denied manhood." (Estes 81) Multiplatinum rapper Snoop Dogg stated that movies like "The Mack" and Superfly were influential during his childhood. He said that these films "might have glorified a criminal mentality in the black community but for us they were the bomb, good guys we could relate to and bad guys we could throw popcorn at." (Dogg 18)

The image of the pimp with the perm and his loyal white hoe has not disappeared from the media. The 2005 film "Hustle & Flow" featured Terrence Howard as a middle aged pimp called DJay who aspires to be a rapper, attempting to make a direct correlation between the two. However, the film's director (and writer), unlike with Shaft and Superfly, is a white man by the name of Craig Brewer, selling an image of Black masculinity based on stereotypes back to Black youth. Brewer claimed in one interview to want "to represent these people that I know." (Walsh) In essence, the filmmakers have

colonized Black masculinity. DJay forces his Nola (the white prostitute) to have sex with a storeowner so he can obtain a good microphone free of cost. He throws a woman out of his house along with her newborn child. Throughout the film when dealing with women, Djay "combines sweet talking with the threat of violence." (Walsh) The film's theme song was heard in clubs and on radio nation wide with its refrain "Beat That Bitch" (or the edited "Whoop That Trick"). The film pictured black males jumping up and down, moving their hands in a violent chopping motion screaming the previous refrain. According to Kenn Starr, the popularity of the 'pimp' is a part of the culture's desire for patriarchal dominance over females. In an interview I conducted with him, he stated the following:

For several years now, male artists have capitalized off of the exploitation of women. A prime example of this is the glorification of the pimp culture, which has become a mainstay in popular rap music.

50 Cent's hit song "P.I.M.P." gives credence to Kenn Starr's claim. 50 raps the following:

I told you fools before, I stay with the tools

I keep a Benz, some rims, and some jewels

I holla at a hoe til I got a bitch confused

She got on Payless, me I got on gator shoes

I'm shopping for chinchillas, in the summer they cheaper

Man this hoe you can have her, when I'm done I ain't gon keep her

Man, bitches come and go, every nigga pimpin know

You saying it's secret, but you ain't gotta keep it on the low
Bitch choose with me, I'll have you stripping in the street
Put my other hoes down, you get your ass beat
Now Nik my bottom bitch, she always come up with my bread
The last nigga she was with put stitches in her head
Get your hoe out of pocket, I'll put a charge on a bitch
Cause I need 4 TVs and AMGs for the six
Hoe make a pimp rich, I ain't paying bitch
Catch a date, suck a dick, shit, TRICK

50's rhyme is talking about not only physically dominating women, but also economically exploiting them. The women's label only earns them Payless brand shoes, while 50 himself wears expensive alligator skin footwear. He brags about not paying the "hoes" and casually mentions that one of his most reliable laborers was injured by her last john. In addition, the pimp or hustler image is popular because it does not reflect "sadness or hurt" as a response to the frustrating obstacles that face many Black males. (Rideout) Blaxploitation films made a second rise to prominence in American cinema in the early 1990s with the release of films such as *New Jack City*, *Boyz N the Hood*, and *Menace 2 Society*. The opening of *New Jack City* and *Boys N the Hood* were both met with violence when they opened in theaters around the country, causing some theater owners to stop showing them (Newsweek 7/22/91). It can be argued that these films breathe new life into old stereotypes about Black males. Nino Brown, the lead character in *New Jack City*, though pictured as streetwise and intelligent, he is also short, stocky, dark-skinned, and violently impulsive. He also has an uncontrollable sexual appetite, as he betrays his

closest comrade by having sex with his girlfriend. O' Dog is much like Nino Brown minus the Buck-like physical attributes, but also minus the calculated intelligence. Though much more developed and complex as a character, Doughboy also thinks to resort to violence or at least the threat of violence in order to resolve problems first. One scene in the film has Doughboy screaming, "we have a problem here?" lifting up his shirttail to display a gun to potential rivals. After the murder of his brother, his immediate response is to hunt the men who are responsible down and kill them.

Hip hop is an interesting contrast to the protest literature of the featured images of the Black male as being silenced, invisible and hardly noticed by the larger society that dominated the Black literary world for a long period in this century (Ross 2). However, music videos, televised sporting, and political events made way for Black males to be heard. Black males didn't have to see themselves being sprayed by hoses and chewed by police K-9s any longer. Contrary to the theory espoused by Cornel West, I am in agreement with Arthur Flannigan Saint-Aubin that Black sexuality, particularly Black male sexuality is no longer being silenced in the same manner as it was in the early 20th century. The post Harlem Renaissance writers such as Ralph Ellison lived through a period where Black males were invisible and their sexuality was suppressed by the threat of lynching and the sexual exploitation of Black women, which exposed his lack of hegemonic patriarchal control. However, one need only look at Tennessee-based rapper Young Buck's music video for his smash hit entitled "Let Me In," to see women girating for crowds of on looking men, while Young Buck demands to be let in to do what he pleases. Those who challenge Buck's rhetorical requests face an implicit threat of violence (He raps "50 deep up in here/ what you gon' do?"). Buck's song suggests that

because of his money and power, he can, regardless of race, gain patriarchal and sexual control. He even states that he "know money'll make Halle Berry come out them panties." However, it is my assertion that masculine or sexual expression from Black males that deviates from the Buck and 50 Cent vain is still silenced. There are no Black characters on Will and Grace. The show included the late Gregory Hines for a short period of time, but his character was hypersexual and commitment-phobic.

Gangsta, Gangsta

Gangsta rap often times bears the burden of having to atone for everything 'wrong' with hip hop. There are of course cultural critics such as Bakari Kitwana who dismiss Gangsta rap and the masculine performance that embodies it as having been "contaminated" by white racism and commercialization. Salim Washington echoes Kitwana's sentiment, stating that "the United Statesian cultural landscape relegates black artists to the role of cheaply bought talent to be packaged and 'developed' according to the dictates of white businessmen whose interests are seldom artistic but unabashedly commercial" (Grant 6). This commercially propelled image of Black men as perpetrators of violent crimes extended beyond hip hop. In Mary Beth Oliver's examination of reality television shows and news broadcasts, evidence shows that Black males are far more likely to be portrayed committing a violent crime rather than a non-violent offense (7). In essence, the American viewer, both Black and white, has been programmed by commercial music and television to think violence is the typical response for an authentic Black male. While many gangsta rappers and fans cite freedom of speech and artistic expression for why they rap about the themes they do, opponents in the Black community thirst for emcees to fulfill the role of the traditional "race artist," much like the early

writers of the 1940s such as Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison. According to Dyson, the race artist is one who "sacrifices" his/her own outlook, "visions," or expression in order to positively represent "the social and political aspirations of blacks as a whole." (414) This disagreement dates back to Wright's admonishment of Zora Neal Hurston's portrayal of African Americans in her books. (<http://authors.aalbc.com/zoraneal.htm>) Hurston saw her characters and their vernacular as true to life, Wright saw them a detrimental to the image that Black should present to the larger society. These critics uphold "politically 'conscious rap' as the more 'genuine' African American art form." (Saddik 113)

Many so-called conscious rappers still perform masculinity in a fashion that says 'I am a real man' and ignores vulnerability. According to Chicago-bred emcee Soulstice, the resurgence of conscious rap is a "direct reaction to the rise of West Coast gangsta rap in the early and mid 90s." Common is respected by many to be a conscious emcee, for his eloquent statements and politically charged, open-ended questions. However, Common has been known to state that he is willing to "rip a nigga for New York to West Coast, Chicago/Don't give a fuck where he from/He'll get beat like a drum," I am not saying that Common and Young Buck perform masculinity in the exact same manner. Common's image, wardrobe, and much of his rap content clear present a masculine performance that deviates from the commercial rap masculinity model. However, my intention is to show that Common and Young Buck are not polar opposites, nor are they part of a good versus evil binary that some cultural critics have placed them in. Kenn Starr, who "usually tries to avoid labels," says he is often characterized as a "conscious rapper." However, he stated in an interview I held with him that the masculinity of conscious rappers and gangsta rappers is "based in the same principle; which is showing

strength." Furthermore, scholar Michael Eric Dyson states that in the late 1980s and 1990s "conscientious rappers were often viewed as controversial figures whose inflammatory racial rhetoric was cause for caution and alarm." (412) Therefore, Dyson continues to say that "the hue and cry directed against gangsta rap by the new defenders of 'legitimate' hip-hop" like Kitwana "rings false." (412)

Critics of so-called gangsta rap, often forget that rap's gangsta emcees have supplied the world with some of the most complete and politically charged descriptions of ghetto life in this country. The production is wrought with "samples of helicopters, police sirens, remarks of racist police officers and mock courtroom scenes," which illuminate the occupation of black communities by police and the inequities of the criminal justice system. (Quinn 206) Their raps, dating back to NWA and other early gangsta rappers, are often about "police surveillance and harassment, racial profiling, brutality and the failing school system. (206) Gangsta rappers construct their identities as "'underground poets and 'real niggas', they are commenting in their own roles as pro-cultural mediators and their roles in the creation of black underclass imagery" (Quinn 207). On the same token, NWA admitted that much of their music did not mirror reality in urban neighborhoods, but were in fact "inspired by popular films like *Innocent Man* starring Tom Selleck and *Tango and Cash*" (Kelley 39).

It is not my intention to portray rap music as if it is completely void of this hypermasculine sentiment. On the contrary, the theatrical performance of the disobedient other is at its very core. Though there were parallel movements occurring in inner city ghettos across the United States, hip hop culture and rap music were born on the rugged concrete streets of the South Bronx section of New York City (Rose 36). The South

Bronx was the one of the nation's most visible examples of poverty and urban decay. According to Tricia Rose, "it is more widely perceived as the desolate land of burned-out, vandalized, condemned and abandoned buildings with poor black and Hispanic families living among the ruins." (36) The Bronx consisted of secure white immigrant neighborhoods in the 1950s. However, the creation of an expressway caused homes to be demolished, and resulted in nearly intolerable noise and air pollution (Rose 36). Just as quickly as white families hurried out into White Plains and Yonkers, Black and Hispanic families were ushered in, often by welfare. Business owners followed suit and "nervous landlords sold their property to professional slumlords." (Rose 36) For this economically ravaged community, rap was "a form of resistance and self identification" for Black youth. (37) The art of rapping "developed as a part of a collective voice for those who had been condemned to silence." (37) The Black urban poor were the forgotten tribe of a marginalized people. With their newly found voice, they decided to reclaim their lost masculinity. As Kenn Starr stated in our interview:

The root of attitudes of black men within hip hop is the unspoken desire for black men to establish and maintain their dominance/control over social circumstances directly involving us both presently and historically.

The seventies were followed by the 1980s, also known as the 'crack era', for the strong impact rock cocaine had on inner cities. The drug is often sold on the open air market, thus gun violence increased as a result of disputes over botched sales and drug territory (Coates 3). According to Professor Robin Kelley, Reagan era society began to divest in urban centers and social programs (Coates 3). Black nationalists believed that America had launched a full scale war on Black men, and began making the claim that

young Black males were an "endangered species" (3). The streets became tougher as jobs became scarce. The reactionary Reagan/Bush administration sliced into budgets for social programs meanwhile putting money into police forces (Coates 3). With social conditions falling apart in Black communities, the Black macho theatrical performance gained a new energy. In 1986, Philadelphia based rapper Schoolly D gave birth to the subgenre of hip hop commonly called gangsta rap (Coates 2). He was followed by classic gangsta rap acts such as Kool G Rap and DJ Polo, NWA, and Ice T.

Sexuality and Dominance

Black male hip hopper's masculinity is partly reclaimed through b-boy sexuality and sexual conquest. I have named it b-boy sexuality and sexual conquest as to distinguish it from the larger societies focus on male hyper (hetero) sexuality. B-boy refers to the original style and culture that encompassed the hip hop fashion, dance, and attitude. The "b" in b-boy originally stood for "break" referring to the part of the record that early hip hoppers enjoyed dancing the most, though some have made the strong argument that it stood for "Bronx," the section of New York City where the style is said to have developed. For this project I am saying the "b" stands for "Black," because in many ways the sexuality can be viewed by those on the surface as predatory, much like the lead character, Bigger Thomas, in Richard Wright's infamous novel, *Black Boy*.

I am not suggesting that the patriarchy of white America and b-boy sexuality are completely independent of one another. However, the b-boy sexuality takes a slightly different shape in the context of a hip hop environment. It also is erroneous to conflate this with black male sexuality or masculinity in general. Prior to the 1970s, Black male sexuality was widely expressed through doowop and soul singers. But whereas Lenny

Williams sang "Girl, you know I love you!" 50 Cent clearly states that he's "into having sex I ain't into making love," on his smash hit "In Da Club." Janis Faye Hutchinson's, ethnographic research of a gangsta rap club in Houston, Texas revealed some interesting ideas about b-boy sexuality and the sexual dynamics of a hip hop environment. In her research, she found that "not only must young men have sexual conquests, but they must prove it. Therefore, they must talk about sex and girls with other young men." (67)

Janis Faye Hutchinson also discusses sexual dancing in the piece (67). She describes one situation in depth which is indicative of hip hop gender relations. Dancing in gangsta rap nightclubs, according to Hutchinsons research, "mimics the physical act of sex".

For example, one night a woman was dancing with her back to her boyfriend. She put her "butt" in his crotch and proceeded to move in a circular motion against his genital area. He was not dancing, just standing. (67)

The previous scenario indicates that b-boy sexuality is patriarchal, in which women are expected to serve a male's desires sexually. This idea is corroborated by the fact that the man was motionless, drinking a beer, while the woman who accompanied him on the dance floor worked to stimulate him sexually. When I first gave a draft of this paper to a professor whose opinion I value, he commented that this dance was "as old as time" in the Black community, as if I was making a mountain out of a mole hill. As with many aspects of hip hop culture and behavior, it has been borrowed and modified for a hip hop audience. I agree that everything in hip hop culture is, at the very least, part of a long African American cultural tradition. In commercial hip hop black masculinity and b-boy sexuality, "men crave validation and view women's bodies as an avenue for that

validation" (71). Just as I stated earlier, commercial hip hop can be an example of U.S. arrogance and masculine bravado; it can also be seen as a microcosm of American sexism and patriarchy in its rawest form. Ice Cube addressed this idea in an interview with the Village Voice's Greg Tate. When asked if he thought rap music was "hostile to women," he responded, "The whole damn world is hostile to women"(Rose 295).

Women generally have some power in these particular hip hop settings. They can control the type of attention they get from men by the type and sparseness of their outfits. Though men are recognized to be the "hunters" and women the "trophies" in the gangsta hip hop sexual game of cat and mouse, women allow themselves to be conquered by men based upon certain criteria such as proposed economic wealth (68). Eddie Murphy stated in his comedic classic 'Raw' that men have a need to "conquer as much pussy as they can get" (Riggs).

I do acknowledge that some of the expressions of Black hip hop masculinity may be regional. Hutchinson's study takes place in Houston, Texas, where expressions, especially ones such as dance, may be different in other parts of the United States. The music played may be different between Houston and Los Angeles. However, I maintain there exists a common thread in commercial Black hip hop masculinity.

Many would argue, as Salim Johnson does in *Race Traitor*, that Black gangsta hip hop artists are "cheaply bought talent to be packaged and 'developed' according to the dictates of white businessmen whose interests are seldom artistic but unabashedly commercial" (Grant 6). One cannot deny that commercial hip hop is driven by money. Millions of dollars are at stake, sometimes with one release. However, the attitude, overt

sexuality, and masculine bravado displayed in commercial hip hop can be seen as part of a long tradition that at the very least, dates back to the Blues.

Prison And Violence

Hip hop also seems to have an infatuation with prison incarceration. Chris Rock once told a joke that people in the Black community show more love and respect to a man who has just be released from being incarcerated than to a young man who returns home with a college degree. The ability to withstand the mental and physical difficulties of prison life is attached to masculine strength. Rappers often quote their rap sheet in order to prove their credibility. Jadakiss of The LOX, stated that he and his affiliates "know how to bid/so y'all go ahead and squeal" on his hit "We Gonna Make It." Emcee/Actor DMX has bragged about being imprisoned off and on since he was 7 years old.

One must not only endure the "bid" or prison time, but not be victimized by a sexual assault. This reason is why 50 Cent rhymed that if Ja Rule "ever got knocked (arrested or incarcerated)" he would "get fucked in the yard" on his song "Back Down." Noreaga stated that traitors get "locked; that's why you come home gay." Buckshot of the classic rap group Black Moon, raps on "Buck 'Em Down," of a character who "on the streets he was tough/ locked up he was sweet stuff," alluding to this character having relations with other men while incarcerated.

The first fact that must be acknowledged is that prison time is a reality for many Black males. Black males comprise about half of the nation's prison population (Hutchinson). According to a report by Justice Department, "10 percent of all black males between the ages of 25 and 29 are in federal and state prisons," and that does not

include those housed in local jails and detention centers and those awaiting trial (Hutchinson). According to the Washington D.C. based advocacy group the Sentencing Project, one third of all Black males are in prison, on parole, or on probation (Hutchinson 2). Charismatic cultural critic Michael Eric Dyson states, "between 1980 and 2000, three times as many black men were sent to prison as were enrolled in college or the university." (Dyson 150) Black leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Huey P. Newton, George Jackson, and Eldridge Cleaver had all experienced some form of incarceration. Even as the nation has started to send more drug offenders to rehabilitation centers than prison, this has not been the trend for Black males. (Hutchinson) Drug sentencing laws, particularly those involving crack cocaine, and mandatory minimum sentences ensure that the punitive system will remain filled by Black males (Hutchinson). The FBI issued a report stating that "more whites are arrested for the crimes of murder, rape, robbery, assault, and drug related offenses than blacks, but they are less likely to be imprisoned" since 1991 (Hutchinson 2). More Black male youth are tried as adults more than white male youth (Hutchinson 2). Masculinity itself carries the connotation that one can avoid being victimized even when stripped down into a vulnerable condition such as incarceration. The single sex environment makes one look to "achievements in physical combat" for a sense of self worth and dignity (Toch 171). Maintaining one's dignity is of the utmost importance in prison; an environment "redolent with restrictions, frustrations, and affronts to self-esteem." (171)

According to rapper Soulstice, a great deal of rap music is inspired by "struggle and self-preservation." In this case, one preserves oneself through raw street violence. A popular phrase in hip hop in the late 1990s was "Ride or Die," giving credence to the idea

that one must go on the violent offensive or perish like an unmanly coward. Huey Newton, founder of the Black Panthers, found that this ideal was common for people in poor ghettos. Newton once stated:

Fighting has always been a big part of my life, as it is in the lives of most poor people ... I was too young to realize that we were really trying to affirm our masculinity and dignity using force in reaction to social pressures extended against us. (Estes 156)

Much of the violence in heard in rap music is meant to be taken literally. The authentic rapper may use metaphors when describing things other than violence. When it comes to brutality, bloodshed, and illegal pursuit of money, one is expected to "keep it real" as the old hip hop adage goes. Rapper Kenn Starr has a song dedicated to rappers who rap about violence and drug dealing who do not really live that lifestyle, entitled "Walk the Walk." Puerto Rican Emcee Fat Joe and his Terror Squad affiliates have made "realness" and authenticity mantra. Fat Joe, who also answers to Joey Crack and Cooked Coke, rapped on "He's Not Real":

Everybody talking gats/ Really don't pack 'em/ 98 percent
of these rappers is all actors/ Stay frontin/ Like you wild
out and spray something/ Come to find out you ain't never
spray nothin/ I think the games gon' lose the sport/ dudes
get bruised and fought/ then choose the courts ... A damn
shame/ I'm from the streets where it's fair game.

Admonishing rappers for not false claims of violent activity and gangsta credibility are common in the dialogue between emcees. So, I disagree with Robin D.G. Kelley's assertion that "many of the violent lyrics are not intended literally. Rather they are boasting raps in which the imagery is used to metaphorically challenge competitors on the mic - an element common to all hardcore hip hop." (Grant 8) Further, keeping it real

is not limited to hardcore rap. Conscious rap darling Common, warns all comers on "Doin' It" that he will "bitchslap them," and also echoes Fat Joe's sentiment, when he says to rappers "you wasn't sayin you were a thug before Pac came." Michael Eric Dyson stated that "many critics divide the wheat from the chaff in hip hop by separating rap into its positive and negative expressions. That distinction often ignores the complexity of hip hop culture and downplays rap's artistic motivations" (Dyson 309).

Chapter 4

Conclusion

Though many of hip hop's masculinities have patriarchal characteristics, it was not my intention to place a value judgment on the culture. I simply wanted to highlight the reasons for the prevalence of hypermasculinity within hip hop, and establish a cultural precedence for it. The interviews allowed artists to explain their own masculine performance. Most told of having two identities; one under their hip hop alias, and another under their given name. Their explanations led credence to Messerschmidt's structured action theory, which states that "gender grows out social practices in specific social structural settings." (6)

However, the one shortcoming of this thesis is that I was forced to use a great deal of "white masculinist scholarship," as well as feminist scholarship to back my ideas with an established theoretical framework. The cultural standpoint certainly differs between white and Black masculinity (Jackson 732). Ronald Jackson points out that "feminist and masculinist theories do not begin with the same pretext" (732). He states the following:

All feminist theories proceed with reference to an oppressed condition. Certainly, all masculinist theories cannot begin this way. So, it is not the aim of masculinist scholars to propose methods by which men can free themselves from matriarchal subjugation. But, both sets of theories do seek to define and liberate the self, whether for individual or community well-being. (732)

I spoke both of 'masculinity' and 'masculinities' in an attempt to avoid using an essentialist perspective of Black male identities. Acknowledging other identities is

paramount, but in the interest of focus, I believe it nearly impossible to completely avoid essentialism.

Ronald Jackson describes Black manhood as being xenophobic, expanding upon a theory put forth by Goldberg by making it "culture-specific" (737). Xenophobia is normally recognized as the "extreme fear of strangers almost to the point of hatred," however "when applied to masculine studies, xenophobia refers to the fear males have of reaching manhood - a mature, responsible, spiritually grounded self-conscious state" (737). I believe that this is not true in its entirety; however, Black male culture has had its moments of xenophobia, which have led to commercial hip hop. For this purpose, among others, I created a brief cultural continuum.

Napoleon aka Kareem claimed that "a lot of artists are scared to be themselves," but also followed that statement by saying that "you don't know what's inside of a man." Most of the artists that I interviewed, including the ones who were not included in this paper, described their hip hop persona as an extension of their everyday personality, a vehicle for them to express the suppressed aggression within them. However, it is my belief that rap music constrains a person's ability to admit that they are performing an aspect of gender, rather than something that is natural to their personality. The statement has become hip hop cliché, but artists are pressured to "keep it real," which means to be true to one's experience. In recent years "real" has also become synonymous with "aggressive" or even "gangsta." Fat Joe raps about his street credibility as a hardened criminal in "He's Not Real." Jay-Z accused Nas of being nothing more than a story teller of street tales that he witnessed from the window of his Queens Project apartment. In

their famed battled, he says Nas had never sold drugs or held guns, and possibly the worst insult to his masculinity of all, claimed to have sex with the mother of Nas' daughter.

The performance of 'Black male rapper,' for the most part has to be one which expresses some form of masculinity. In my opinion, this has been a theme throughout the history of Black cultural expression and is a symptom of an imposed Black male anxiety about his manhood. The widely accepted theory that Black men have been emasculated has resulted in Black men-accepted Eurocentric notions of masculinity, for which they never intended to be included.

I have concluded that rap artists are very concerned with their authenticity as rappers and as Black men. My informants, though not yet career rappers, were very conscious of the answers they gave, and made sure to carefully walk the line between speaking the truth and incriminating themselves for unauthentic speech or behavior. They were all hesitant to call their rap identity a performance. A performance connotes 'acting,' which would mean it is not real or it is false. They thought this aggression which they displayed when rhyming was 'naturally a part of their personality.' They were aware of what kinds of things were acceptable for both of their identities and attempted to navigate through the expectations on both sides. Race and gender both involve some level of performance, and because of the heavy burden of a dual performance, Black men, particularly rap artists, often have anxiety about proving they are authentic. I cannot pretend that even though I am doing this analysis that under a different set of social structures I am not concerned with my own authenticity. For career rappers, 'keeping it real' is tied to an investment of time and money they have made in

their profession. Regardless of whether it is true, rappers are aware that if audiences question the authenticity of your performance, your career is in jeopardy.

Essentially, there are two categories or manners in which to perform for masculinity, and each is fulfilled by having both a rap identity and an everyday persona. The performance under the government name is personified by being a good father, a provider, being intelligent, and a hard worker. The performance under the rap identity is one, which is exemplified by expressing aggression, sexual prowess, a lack of vulnerability, and power to dominate others, both male and female.

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