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Melanie Marie Lindsay
California State University - San Bernardino

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WHO YOU CALLIN' A BITCH? A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE
IMAGES USED TO PORTRAY AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN
IN RAP MUSIC

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Social Sciences

by
Melanie Marie Lindsay
June 2016

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Approved by:

Dr. Mary Texiera , Committee Chair, Sociology

Dr. Cherstin Lyon, Committee Member

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ABSTRACT

Rap music has been a major force in American culture since the 1970s. It can be political, uplifting, and celebratory. It can also be misogynistic and degrading to women, the focus of the current research. This paper begins with a brief history of the importance of music in the African American community. It then provides a history of rap music and major influences on its development through the decades. A systematic comparison of Billboard's top 5 rap videos for 2004 and 2014 follows. This section, the core analysis, compares the lyrical and visual content in terms of the representation of African American women. Findings reveal three stereotypes—Jezebel, Sapphire, and Mammy/"Baby Mama"—dominate the presentation of African American women in the videos. Based on these three stereotypes, the videos present African American women as greedy, dishonest, sex objects, with no respect for themselves or others, including the children under their care. The women in the videos are scorned by men and exist to bring pleasure to them. Differences between 2004 and 2014 with respect to misogyny and degradation of a group that has historically suffered from dual disadvantage—because of both race and gender—are minimal. This research is a call to action to pay close attention to rap songs and rap music videos and to demand change both from rap artists and the companies that back them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.

—William Butler Yeats

First of all I have to thank God my creator. Thank you for blessing me with life, health, and strength. I realize every day is a gift from you.

I want to acknowledge the great educators God placed in my life who have made this thesis possible.

Ms. Howard, my 8th grade teacher at Arthur Dixon Elementary School, taught me that I was smart enough to go to college. Praising a report I wrote, she told everyone in my class that I would one day graduate from college. For the first time, I thought to myself, I was smart, capable, intelligent, and more importantly that my voice mattered.

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My parents, Bishop Emery and Mrs. Pearl Lindsay, have always encouraged me. They saw greatness in me when I didn't see it in myself. Their practical help with caring for my children was no less vital than their prayers.

My siblings, Camile, Rachel, Erica, Brittany and Vernon, have always been my inspiration. Thank you all for your support and love.

My children—Pierre, Sydni, Cleo, and Chandler—are the best children anyone could pray for. They are the wind beneath my wings. I studied so hard, prayed so hard, and believed because of their unconditional love and support.

DEDICATION

For Pierre, Sydni, Cleo, and Chandlar. I love you more than you will ever know!

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CHAPTER ONE
STATEMENT OF RESEARCH TOPIC

Who you callin' a bitch?

—U.N.I.T.Y., Queen Latifah

As the mother of two young daughters, ages thirteen and six, I am concerned with the media's influence on young women. So many things have changed since I was a teenager, Cell phones, Facebook and Instagram were nonexistent. The way that we communicate with one another on a daily basis has changed. My teenage daughter's idea of a normal conversation with me may occur via text message while we are both under the same roof.

The germ of this thesis began when I heard my older daughter reciting rap lyrics along with our car radio—lyrics that made me cringe for their misogyny and violence. The repetition included in the song gave me the opportunity to absorb every word. I turned the radio off after it was over and asked my daughter if she felt like anything was wrong with what we just heard. I asked her about verses of the songs that stood out to me. She said she'd never thought about it before. She said, "Mom sometimes I'm not even paying attention to the lyrics, I'm just listening to the beats and the instruments that make you want to dance, and take your mind off of your problems."

The media is a powerful entity that allures individuals to listen to lyrics that are full of misogynistic and racist lyrics. Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the media's subliminal messages. To uncover the content of this subliminal impact, this current project examines rap music's lyrical content for the years 2004 and 2014, looking at the images and content of both lyrics and videos, and the criticism that appears in books, newspaper articles, and journals written between these two years. As I discuss below, these years were chosen because during this period rap music came under a lot of criticism for its misogyny. This introduction provides a brief background on rap music to ground the analysis that appears in the following chapters.

Rap music is a subcategory of hip hop music which, originated in 1970's as a way for inner city youth to express themselves. "Hip hop was offering a much more radical much more successful voluntary desegregation plan. It was bleeding- edge music with vast social implications. Rap reintegrated American Culture" (Chang, 2005, p. 245). Rap music, researchers suggest, began as a form of protest music. It is a subset of hip hop, which, as Tricia Rose describes, "is a cultural form that attempts to negotiate the experiences of marginalization, brutality, truncated opportunity, and oppression within the cultural imperatives of African American and Caribbean history, identity and community" (Rose, 1994, p. 21). Scholars have suggested that rap music originated in Africa. Some believe rap music began in the Caribbean. Others, such as Rose, describe it as a confluence of the two:

Most critics and scholars concur that rap music is a confluence of African American and Caribbean cultural expression, such as sermons, blues, game songs and toasts and toasting- all of which are recited in a changed rhyme or poetic fashion. Paul Gilroy observes, hip hop culture grew out of the cross- fertilization of African American vernacular with their Caribbean equivalents rather than springing fully from the entrails of the blues (Rose, 1994, p.135).

The artists responsible for this integration are called rappers. They merge music and lyrics together seamlessly as part of their art. While violent and sexist rap lyrics may get the greatest attention in the popular press, not all rap contains such lyrics. As with hip hop in general, rap often refers to life experiences that are rooted in pain and poverty. One of the reasons rap became so popular within the African American community is because words have a tremendous amount of value and because “Black culture lives and dies by language” (Dyson, 2009, p. 76).

The grit and the pain in most rap lyrics connect the artist and the listener. As my daughter notes, the rhythm may make a song so compelling that the listener ignores the lyrics even as she sings them. This seems to be a common experience among consumers of rap.

This research focuses primarily on the images and lyrics that are used in rap music to describe African American women. I explore the question: given that rap music began to undergo more scrutiny in the early 2000s, what effect did that

criticism have on the lyrical content? Thus I focus on the years 2004 and 2014 in order to make a systematic comparison of lyrics in both years. African American women, of which I am a member, have historically had our identity shaped by others. As Melissa Harris-Perry writes,

When they confront race and gender stereotypes, black women are standing in a crooked room, and they have to figure out which way is up. Bombarded with warped images of their humanity, some black women tilt and bend themselves to fit the distortion. It may be surprising that some gyrate half naked in degrading hip hop videos that reinforce the image of black women's lewdness. To understand why black women's public actions and political strategies sometimes seem tilted in ways that accommodate the degrading stereotypes about them, it is important to appreciate the structural constraints that influence their behavior. It can be hard to stand up straight in a crooked room (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 29).

African American women have always had to deal with the stereotypes placed upon them by the dominant society and also by standards placed upon them from some members of their own race. We have always had to prove our value does not lie solely in our physical characteristics. In the following chapters, I will focus on the images and lyrical content that is used in rap music to describe African American women.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Mistreatment of African American Women

bell hooks writes:

Indeed, slavery subjected African females to a new type of sexualized oppression, which began in the Middle Passage as slave traders and ship's crew frequently raped slaves en route, such that many a Negress was landed upon our shores already impregnated by someone of the demonic crew that brought her over. (1981, p.18)

Historians record that males were chained on slave ships because traders feared insurrection, but they did not shackle females. The slave traders avoided interaction with African males by confining them in locations where the crew and traders rarely went, choosing to have contact with African females instead (Blassingame, 1972).

In addition to rape, African women experienced gendered abuse through their children, as slave masters exploited maternal love by torturing children in order to torture their mothers:

Often the slavers brutalized children to watch the anguish of their mothers. In their personal account of life aboard a slave ship, the Weldon's recounted an incident in which a child of nine months was flogged continuously for refusing to eat. When beating failed to force the child to

eat, the captain ordered that the child be placed feet first into a pot of boiling water. After trying other torturous methods with no success, the captain dropped the child and caused its death. Not deriving enough satisfaction from this sadistic act, he then commanded the mother to throw the body of the child overboard. The mother refused but was beaten until she submitted (hooks, 1981, p. 19).

When African women were brought to the United States they were stripped of their humanity. Their reduction to their physical characteristics began on the auction block. White men examined both males and females while they were naked, inspecting them from their hair to their teeth to the size of their breasts. (hooks, 1981)

Slaves were useful for what their bodies could produce, for slave women, this meant children suitable for sale; As Angela Davis notes, "Slave-owners naturally sought to ensure that their 'breeders' would bear children as often as biologically possible" (Davis, 1983, p. 7). Female slaves were used to replenish the slave population on the plantations where they resided, especially after the eighteen hundreds when the international slave trade was outlawed.

Fredrick Olmstead, a southern white observer of the practice of slave breeding, made this comment: In the states of Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, as much attention is paid to the breeding and growth of Negroes as to that of horses and mules. Further south, we raise them both for use and for market. Planters command their girls and

women (married or unmarried) to have children; and I have known a great many girls to be sold off because they did not have children. A breeding woman is worth from one-sixth to one-fourth more than one that does not breed (hooks, 1981, p. 39).

Scholars such as Harris- Perry have suggested that the notion of breeding may have created the cultural idea linking Jezebel of the bible to black women. Jezebel is the longest lasting stereotype of black women. In one biblical reference, Revelation 2:20 states, "Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou suffers that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols." Jezebel fit a degraded stereotype of an over sexualized seductress. She was animalistic, irreligious, and a seductress. Linking this figure to slave women justified sexual exploitation (Harris- Perry, 2011).

Early Relationship Patterns between African American Males and Females

Women were also denied the protection of men. Angela Davis writes:

The typical slave family was matriarchal in form, for the mother's role was far more important than the father's. In so far as the family did have significance, it involved responsibilities which traditionally belonged to women, such as cleaning house, preparing food, making clothes and raising children. The husband was at most his wife's assistant, her companion and her sex partner. He was often thought of as her

possession (Mary's Tom [in "Uncle Tom's Cabin"]), as was the cabin in which they lived. (Davis, 1983, p.16)

It was through female slaves that the slaveholder tortured male slaves. Sociologist Robert Staples suggests that rape was used to manage male slaves. Staples believed that when the masculinization of male slaves was undermined, he lost his sense of self-worth which made him begin to doubt his ability to break the chains of slavery (Staples, 1973). Hooks disagrees with Staples and questions his understanding of African culture. Hooks notes African males were taught to only protect the women of their tribe with whom they shared a common language. She believes that only after many years of being enslaved, did slaves begin to bond on the basis of color (hooks, 1981, p. 34). Davis agrees with hooks and states that after the systematic dissolution of tribal ties, the rape of women became a way of managing men (Davis, 1983).

Hooks notes that "No annals of history record that masses of black slave men were forced to execute roles traditionally performed exclusively by women" (hooks, 1981, p. 21); indeed, female slaves worked in the fields alongside men. Even with respect to its human property the slaveholding society protected the notion that men were unfit for certain duties by exempting slave men from "feminine" duties such as food preparation and childcare. While the plantation house might have a valet or butler, the vast majority of domestics were female; as hooks writes, "black men were not forced to assume a role colonial American society regarded as feminine" (hooks, 1981, p. 22). Female slaves were required

to work longer hours than male slaves, and they did it with their children strapped to their backs (hooks, 1981).

Slavery created distinct, if connected, systems of oppression for male and female slaves. Scholars suggest that many African American men have viewed African American women as another enemy because differences that began in slavery (hooks, 1981). The tension between African American women and men would persist over the centuries; the issues of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. that affect both African American men and women are similar yet different. Oppression of black men during slavery has been described as a de-masculinization for the same reason that virtually no scholarly attention has been given to the oppression of black women during slavery. Underlying both tendencies is the sexist assumption that the experiences of men are more important than those of women and that what matters most among those experiences of men is their ability to assert themselves patriarchally (hooks, 1981, p. 22).

The hardships faced by African slave women gave rise to the idea of the strong black woman. While it may be possible to reclaim aspects of this idea to credit the power of survival that women of African descent have displayed through the centuries, its roots lie in a degrading, subhuman vision. To quote hooks:

To explain the black female's ability to survive without the direct aid of a male and her ability to perform tasks that were culturally defined as 'male

work,' white males argued slave women were not "real" women but were masculinized sub- human creatures (hooks, 1981, p.71).

While the slaveholders' commitment to patriarchy led them to keep the female work for the female slaves, it prompted them to degrade women who could do "men's" work.

A common myth asserts that African women were built differently from European women. They were intrinsically alluring sexually but believed to be unfit to bear their own legitimate offspring. The figure of Saarah Barrantman, also known as the Hottentot Venus, exemplifies the dominant culture's relationship to African women's bodies in the nineteenth century. Baartman was born in South Africa in 1785. She was taken to Europe in 1814 and displayed naked for approximately four years. Europeans were fascinated by her because of her large breasts and because of the shape of her genitals. Spectators would stare at her for hours as if she was an exotic animal at the zoo. When she died in 1815, at the age of 30, her body was dissected by researchers, parts of which were kept on display in museums in Europe (Willis, 2010).

There are systematic policies and laws as well as cultural norms that have been set in place to keep African American women and men disconnected. During slavery, women were more valuable than men because of their capacity to breed. The African American male lost his identity during slavery. Even though slavery took place many decades ago, the African American male in a sense is still searching for his rightful place in the United States as well as in his

home. As we will see below, many scholars have argued that rap articulates this quest.

Stereotypical Images of African American Womanhood: Jezebel, Baby Mama, and Sapphire

Images of Jezebel, Mammy, Sapphire and the unwed “baby mama” are commonly found in rap videos and lyrics. Tanya Golash-Boza summarizes the significance of these images:

Jezebel is a name with biblical origins that has come to signify an oversexed or hypersexual black American woman have been prominent in political and popular culture since the Civil War and influences how black women perceive themselves and are perceived by others. Mammy is a stereotypical image of a black maid, encapsulated by the Aunt Jemima icon and taking its name from Mammy in *Gone with the Wind*. Sapphire was one of the main characters on *Amos n’ Andy* and is a caricature of an angry black woman (Golash-Boza, 2014, p. 98).

The representation of the Jezebel image portrays African American women as sexually available, affirming the message that they are willing to do anything for attention and affection which is an image often found in rap videos. The Jezebel image dovetails with the image of the video vixen (Steffans, 2005). While shows like *BET Uncut* gave them new prominence, the stereotype of Jezebel has been used as far back as the early 20th century, as Tom Burrell describes:

The Jezebel stereotype was used to excuse rape and justify the slave owner's carnal desires. After all how could it be rape, if the victim is properly designed for seedy sexual indulgence? During the first half of the 20th century, the myth manifested itself in the form of everyday objects- from postcards to novelty items. Today the Jezebel and Brute stereotypes reinforce the ageless idea that blacks are morally loose, culturally retarded, and sexually perverse. This is why we should not only care, but should care enough to change (Burrell, 2010, p. 49).

Another image found in popular videos is that of the "baby mama," a slang term for a woman who has a child out of wedlock, although there are some cases in which the term attaches to married African American women, as when Fox News termed President Obama's wife, Michelle Obama his "baby mama" during one election year. Harris-Perry described the horrific incident:

Baby mama is a derogatory term for the mother of children born outside of marriage; it usually implies that the woman is difficult and bothersome to the children's father—thus the slang phrase "baby mama drama" Many commentators found this reference to Mrs. Obama appalling, denounced Fox News and elicited an apology. While Fox has earned a reputation as particularly virulent on issues involving the Obama family, their characterization of Michelle Obama was not motivated by political opposition alone: it was rooted in the specific history of shaming black women as sexually immoral (Harris- Perry, 2011, p. 273).

Rap music says that the “baby mama” is to blame for getting pregnant. She may have tricked her child’s father into getting her pregnant for her own manipulative reasons and, is obsessed with getting money and other types of support from her child’s father, or any man she can fool into thinking he is the father of her child. The welfare queen stereotype, which is closely related to the “baby mama” stereotype, suggests she is also a parasite on the state. According to rap lyrics, she might deny a father access to his children as revenge for his failure to remain in a relationship with her, or, if he fails to seek that access, it is her fault for being such a nag. Her children’s poor decisions reflect her failure to make her relationship work. She has multiple children by different men because she is sexually loose and irresponsible (Perkins, 1996).

Perkins calls attention to an earlier era’s depiction of the “baby mama” in Ice Cube’s “You Can’t Fade Me.” The lyrics describe a sexual encounter with a woman he deems unattractive and unworthy of him, making sure not to be seen with her, saying he needed to get inebriated to forget the encounter. When she tells him of her pregnancy he threatens violence, saying he can perform an abortion himself. The song concludes with the information that the baby was someone else’s (Perkins, 1996). The song paints the picture of African American women as promiscuous, irresponsible, manipulative, and unable to notice when a man treats them as objects worthy of disgust.

The strongest and most dangerous stereotype is that of Sapphire. The idea of the angry black woman has a long history in U.S. culture, extending

back during slavery which created a prototype in the first half of the 20th century. Sapphire is described as an angry, overbearing black woman, who is all knowing, degrades her husband, makes him feel worthless and incompetent, she is unwilling to compromise, and refuses to consider the opinions or needs of others. She is also loud and disrespectful to others, but demands other's respect. Harris-Perry sums up the psychic harm this stereotype does to African American women:

This stereotype does not acknowledge black women's anger as a legitimate reaction to unequal circumstances; it is seen as a pathological, irrational desire to control black men, families and communities. It can be deployed against African American women who dare to question their circumstances, point out inequalities or ask for help. Both white policy makers and black patriarchs can dismiss gendered claims as the ranting of eye-rolling, neck popping, and 'oh- no-you didn't' angry black women. Black women's concerns can be ignored and their voices silenced in the name of maintaining calm and rational conversation. Their anger is not experienced as a psychological reality but is seen through an ideology that distorts black women's lived experiences (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 89).

It is important to understand that these stereotypes harm African American women in numerous ways. Harris-Perry sums it up this way:

As an orientation toward the world built on a set of beliefs about the intrinsic qualities of African American women and about how those

qualities may be appropriately manifested in the way black women think, speak and act, the strong black woman has both emotional and political consequences (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 216).

The controlling images of the Jezebel, Sapphire, and the “baby mama” are used to reinforce the degradation of African American women. The African American community needs to recognize and understand the damage these images do to African American women in particular and the community as a whole. When one consistently sees these images being played out in the media as a representation of African American women, the question should be asked who is responsible for this false portrayal.

The Importance of Music in the Lives of African Americans

One way in which slaves coped with the abuses that they faced daily was through music. Drums were used in Africa in spiritual rituals and in everyday life. Slaves brought their religion and music to the United States. They made drums which were used to communicate political messages, which ultimately led to the banning of drums on plantations (Dyson, 2009, p. 55). Blassingame acknowledges that music was very important to slaves:

The secular songs told of the slave’s loves, work, flogging and expressed his moods and the reality of his oppression. On a number of occasions he sang of the proud defiance of the runaway, the courage of the black

rebels, and the stupidity of the patrollers, the heartlessness of the slave traders, and the kindness and cruelty of masters (Blassingame, 1972, p. 115).

Blassingame (1972) continues to argue that music became an articulation of resistance to a culture that treated slaves as if they didn't have souls or feelings. The language used in certain songs expressed the inequalities slaves faced on the plantation and became a way of insisting on their humanity. Most importantly, slave songs contained coded messages for escape.

The blues have roots in slavery. As Blassingame notes, it had certainly been invented by 1850, well before emancipation. Relying heavily on circumlocution, metaphor, and innuendo, the slaves often referred to fear, infidelity, love, hard times, work, slave coffles, conjuration, food, drinking, sex, and freedom in their songs (Blassingame, 1972, p.121).

The influence of blues in American music goes beyond rap as Dyson observes,

Blues irony and tragicomedy, and its humor too, flood the plaintive cries of Howlin' Wolf, the weeping guitar of B.B King, the salty wails of KoKo Taylor, and the artful hawks of the otherwise smooth Bobby Blue Bland. Their craft testifies to how blues artists ministered to Negroes seeking consolation for the griefs of ghetto existence. (Dyson, 2009, p. 56)

Scholars like Dyson have compared rap music and the blues:

The blues functioned for another generation of blacks much as rap functions for young blacks today: as a source of racial identity, permitting forms of boasting for devalued black men, allowing commentary on personal and social conditions in uncensored language and fostering the ability to transform hurt and anguish into art and commerce (Dyson, 2009, p. 56).

Ragtime grew out of the blues in the early 1900s, with Scott Joplin, its most famous composer and performer. Ragtime gave birth to jazz, which soon superseded its popularity and made a greater showcase of protest and identification of oppression. Amiri Baraka, a very well known poet and activist spoke about the influence of jazz in the African American community. Baraka describes the place of jazz in African American protest music thus:

Jazz is an idea paradigm for criticizing and parodying the white tradition because of it is signifying tradition. The linguist Geneva Smitherman has defined signification, a mode of black discourse, as 'the verbal art of insult in which a speaker humorously puts down, talks about, and needles- that is signifies on- the listener (Harris, 1985, p.19).

Scholars have written about music and the way it has been used to be a voice for the oppressed. Each genre has influenced the next; they are not independent of one another, they are dependent upon one another. The blues, ragtime, and jazz influenced hip hop and rap. As Dyson writes, "Blues and jazz, rhythm and blues and soul have all been viewed as indecent, immoral and

corrupting black youth” (Dyson, 2009, p. 56). Dyson further contends that rap music has been used to criticize criminal justice policies, educational policies, and criminal activity, as well as the absence of African American fathers and a system of oppression of minority populations. Given its progressive intent, then, rap music’s devaluation of women, the subject of this thesis, is in some sense perplexing.

As an African American female, I too can relate to many of the issues that rap artists passionately reference in their songs. I too have lived in poverty, and have been affected by injustice, racism, and inequality. Most rap songs have lyrics that people from all walks of life can relate to. In the following section, I will explore some of the images that have historically been associated with African American women in my analysis of music videos and rap lyrics.

The image of the Jezebel, Sapphire, and “baby mama,” as previously mentioned, are stereotypical images that are still used today to describe African American women. The media brandishes them through music videos and rap lyrics, as well as other outlets to exercise hegemonic control over the image of African American women in society. The media’s power over consumers is enormous. The ideology rap music articulates about women can lead women to fail to recognize the structure that limits them. Christopher Thorpe describes the harm of stigma:

The causes of stigmatization are numerous, but can include idle gossip and negative attitudes that arise from ignorance and or class or race based

tensions. This then leads to negative stereotyping of an individual by the wider group. Over time, the individual internalizes these labels to the extent that they inform the person's self-evaluation and identity. By this point the individual has acquired a stigmatized identity (Thorpe, 2005, p. 195).

Rap and Hip Hop

Rap music first emerged in the United States in 1970 when Sugarhill Gang's song "Rapper's Delight," became a major hit across the United States. Millions of singles were sold. Its lighthearted subject—its own rhythms—and fresh sound captured audiences (Rose, 1994). Rap music was influenced by certain traditions that have been in existence in the African American community for hundreds of years.

African Americans have always had a strong oral tradition. Folktales were passed down from generation to generation—stories that were used to convey messages about values and principles. Blassingame describes folktales in West Africa:

Throughout the region story-telling was an art form including acting, singing, and gestures that served as the favorite evening entertainment. Often accompanied by drums and responses from the audiences, West African tales showed that people valued family ties, children and knowledge (Blassingame, 1972, p.24).

Words have always been important in the African American community. Scholars also suggest that the pulpit has influenced rap music (Dyson, 2009). While Christianity among African-Americans began in slavery with the denial of native religions by slaveholders, the black church has become a significant source of activism against racism and the dominant racial hierarchy. The pulpit has been used to promote social changes that were needed within the community. In the black Protestant tradition when the pastor, preaches from the pulpit, he wants to elicit an emotional response from the congregation. The words of the pastor/preacher are powerful within the African American community, as the impact from leadership figures, like the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Reverend Jessie Jackson Jr., Reverend Al Sharpton and T.D Jakes's have shown throughout history. Dyson addresses the relationship between preachers and hip hop artists, quoting Pastor Reverend Willie Wilson, "Hip Hop artists in many instances are the preachers of their generation, preaching a message which, too often those who have been given the charge to preach prophetic words to the people have not given" (Dyson, 2001, p. 202).

Poetry also played a role in shaping rap music; it was extremely popular among young, progressive African Americans in the 1960s. Poets such as LeRoi Jones (later known as Amiri Baraka), Gil Scott Heron, and Maya Angelou, wrote about politics and injustice within the community against the backdrop of the civil rights movement. Poems such as Baraka's "Wise I," "Ka Ba," and "Monday in B-

Flat,” as well as Heron’s “The Revolution Will Not Be televised” anticipated rap through rhythms and rhymes:

You will not be able to stay home, brother

You will not be able to plug in, turn on and crop out

You will not be able to lose yourself on skag and skip

Skip out for beer during commercials

Because the revolution will not be televised

The revolution will not be televised

The revolution will not be brought to you by Xerox

In 4 parts without commercial interruption

The revolution will not show you pictures of Nixon

Blowing a bugle and leading a charge by John Mitchell

General Abrams and Mendal Rivers to eat

Hog maws confiscated from a Harlem sanctuary

The revolution will not be televised

The revolution will be brought to you by the Schaefer Award

Theatre and

will not star Natalie Wood and Steve McQueen or

Bullwinkle and Julia

The revolution will not give your mouth sex appeal

The revolution will not get rid of the nubs.

The revolution will not make you look five pounds

Thinner, because the revolution will not be televised, (Heron, 1974).

“The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” was set to jazz music, and used to uplift the community and inform society that African Americans are organizing and will demand change in their communities. Rap music is an extension of both poetry and folktales.

Rap’s Trajectory 1970-1990

Early rap songs, such as “Rapper’s Delight” focused on light subjects such as partying. The lyrics to “Rappers Delight” articulate a cheerful multiculturalism:

Now, what you hear is not a test I'm rappin' to the beat,
And me, the groove, and my friends are gonna try to move your feet
See, I am Wonder Mike, and I'd like to say hello,
To the black, to the white, the red and the brown,
The purple and yellow. But first, I gotta
Bang bang, the boogie to the boogie,
Say up jump the boogie to the bang bang boogie,
Let's rock, you don't stop,
Rock the rhythm that'll make your body rock
Well so far you've heard my voice but I brought two friends along,

And the next on the mic is my man Hank,

C'mon, Hank, sing that song! (Robinson, Edward, Rogers, 1979)

Three categories have emerged within rap over its history: party rap, mack rap, and reality rap. Party rap is for dancing and generally comments on lighthearted subjects. Most of the rap songs in the 1970s—including Funk You, By the Sequence, The Fatback Band's single, King Tim III - as well as Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" were party rap songs. Mack rap, while it persists into the current day, gained popularity in the 1980s. Adam Krims defines the "mack" of "mack rap" as "not necessarily a literal pimp [the street name for a pimp]... But a man whose confidence, prolificness, and (claimed) success with women mark him as a "player" (Krims, 2000, p. 62). Mack rap styled the singer as a Mack. Williams Perkins connects it to Blaxploitation films of the 1970s, "particularly superbly, but more important Max Julien's wicked portrayal of the Oakland pimp Goldie in *The Mack*" (Perkins, 1996, p. 27).

As music videos grew in importance due to the emergence of MTV, they became part of the articulation of a song's meaning. Rap stars who made mack rap tended to wear a lot of jewelry- artists such as Run- D.M.C, Big Daddy Kane, and Doug E. Fresh as well as 2 Live Crew wore large necklaces with medallions and flashy clothing. The Group 2 live crew and other mack rappers began the tradition of rapping about women's body parts, most significant their derrières. Songs such as "Baby Got Back" by Sir Mix-A-Lot, was extremely popular. This song which was recorded in 1991, was the second bestselling song in the U.S in

1992 (Light, 1999). Alan Light states, “Sir Mix-A-Lot’s ‘Baby Got Back’ and 2 Live Crew’s ‘Me So Horny’ mixed pop hooks and repetition with a cartoonish version of African American sexuality. These songs brought seemingly taboo, ‘exotic’ aspects of ‘black’ culture into mainstream” (Light, 1999, p.128). The Baby Got Back video features numerous women, who have on very little clothing, as they gyrate in front of the camera and other males featured in the video.

The last category labeled Reality rap includes so-called “gangsta” rap, a highly culturally charged area of rap music that has proven extremely lucrative. Gangsta rap refers to rap that describes gang life or more generally life in urban communities from the perspective of a disaffected figure. Dyson ties it to the west coast, saying it “emerged in the late 80’s on the West Coast as crack and gangs ruled the urban centers of Los Angeles, Long Beach, Compton, and Oakland” (Dyson, 2009, p. 233). “Reality rap includes any rap that undertakes the project of an epistemological/ ontological project to map the realities of (usually black) inner life” (Krimm, 2000, p. 70). It arose, along with mack rap, in the 1980s, but lacks the bravado of mack rap. Reality rap gives voice to the pain and struggles of African Americans over the centuries and in contemporary times. Rap artists rapped about poverty and police brutality, inequalities in regards to education, local economic decline, and racism. It began to articulate the rage of youth in face of tragedies that were commonplace in urban America.

Critique of Rap Music

It was during the period of the early 1990's that we begin to see a backlash against misogynistic rap lyrics. Record labels generated millions of dollars from rap artists, but politicians, and other people with influence began to speak out against rap music (Perkins, 1996). In 1990 *Washington Post* published an article in response to mack rap:

The real issue is hate-filled music that is abusive of women—especially black women—and an assault on its young audience's budding concepts of good sex, good relationships, and good times. Dorothy Height, head of the National Council of Negro Women, was particularly concerned with the music's negative impact on young black females. Height said, 'Black women are looking for ways to protest the music without making it all the more risqué and attractive to rebellious young people. Generally speaking, I favor upholding anyone's First Amendment rights, but this music is damaging because it is degrading to women to have it suggested in our popular music they are abused, that it is fun to abuse us and that we like to be abused. This kind of exhibition at a time when all of us are struggling to strengthen our community and deal with problems hurts us badly (Williams, 1990).

Dorothy Height was not the only public figure decrying the misogyny of rap lyrics. The educational establishment claimed rap artists threatened the core values that schools were trying to instill in youth, advancing a fantasy of life

styles that didn't necessarily rely on graduating from high school or attaining mainstream success. Law enforcement spoke against rap, responding to rap's professed attitude towards law enforcement—such as in N.W.A's song "F the Police."

Rap Challenges the Prevailing Racial Hierarchy

Perkins (1996) notes, artists such as Tupac Shakur in his 1993 single "Keep Your Head Up" single showed that he had empathy towards single poor mothers. He used his voice to uplift those that were considered outcasts by the larger society.

I give a holler to my sisters on welfare
Tupac cares, if don't nobody else care
And uh, I know they like to beat ya down a lot
When you come around the block brothas clown a lot
But please don't cry, dry your eyes, never let up
Forgive but don't forget, girl keep your head up
And when he tells you ain't nuttin' don't believe him
And if he can't learn to love you you should leave him
Cause sista you don't need him
And I ain't tryin' to gas ya up, I just call em how I see em
You know it makes me unhappy (what's that)
When brothas make babies, and leave a young mother to be a pappy
And since we all came from a woman

Got our name from a woman and our game from a woman
I wonder why we take from our women
Why we rape our women, do we hate our women?
I think it's time to kill for our women
Time to heal our women, be real to our women
And if we don't we'll have a race of babies
That will hate the ladies, that make the babies
And since a man can't make one
He has no right to tell a woman when and where to create one
So will the real men get up
I know you're fed up ladies, but keep your head up (Shakur, 1993).

Toure writes that the
victim of continued societal oppression brings to the situation a wholly
different set of views of what is legitimate for change. The victim is more
willing—much more willing to risk the future because he has very little to
lose and a lot to gain (Toure, 1992, p. 180).

Gangsta rappers such as N.W.A (Niggas With an Attitude), consisting of
the young men known as Ice Cube, Ezy E, MC Ren, DJ Yella, and Dr. Dre, fell
into this category. Their lyric sheets credit them as “crazy motherfuckers.” Ice
Cube, articulated the concept of reality rap when he was questioned by a
reporter (Perkins, 1996, p.121). N.W.A was known for speaking against racism in
general and the condition of African Americans in Los Angeles specifically.

Almost in response to rap criticism of societies' targeting young black men, during the 1980s and 1990s stricter drug laws went into effect. As Alexander writes:

A war has been declared on young black men, and they have been rounded up for engaging in precisely the same crimes that go largely ignored in middle and upper-class white communities—possessions and sale of illegal drugs. For those residing in ghetto communities, employment is scarce—often nonexistent. Schools located in ghetto communities more closely resemble prisons than places of learning, creativity, or moral development. And because the drug war has been raging for decades now, the parents of children coming of age today were targets of the drug war as well (Alexander, 2010, p.172).

N.W.A articulated the anger of the African American community because of the injustices that they saw every day in their neighborhoods (Serrano, 2015). The lyrics to one of their most famous songs exemplified the violence that characterized their songs in general:

From the gang called Niggaz with Attitudes
When I'm called off, I got a sawed off
Squeeze the trigger, and bodies are hauled off
You too, boy, if ya fuck with me
The police are gonna hafta come and get me
Off yo' ass, that's how I'm goin' out

For the punk motherfuckers that's showin' out
Niggaz start to mumble, they wanna rumble
Mix 'em and cook 'em in a pot like gumbo
Goin' off on a motherfucker like that
With a gat that's pointed at yo' ass
So give it up smooth
Ain't no tellin' when I'm down for a jack move
Here's a murder rap to keep yo' dancin
with a crime record like Charles Manson
AK-47 is the tool
Don't make me act the motherfuckin' fool
Me you can go toe to toe, no maybe
I'm knockin niggaz out tha box, daily
Yo weekly, monthly and yearly
Until them dumb motherfuckers see clearly
That I'm down with the capital C-P-T
Boy you can't fuck with me
So when I'm in your neighborhood, you better duck (N.W.A , 1998)

Underprivileged African American youth recognized the phrases and word choices found in rap music as norms (Serrano, 2015). Scholars such as Perkins, write about some of the critiques of the police and what was viewed as their racist approach to enforcing law and order characterized in several of N.W.A.'s

songs. Television stations and radio stations took action, banning N.W.A. music, and several concerts arenas refused to host them, even though their enormous popularity suggests they would have sold many concert tickets (Perkins, 1996). N.W.A spoke out against racism and injustice and was unapologetic about their lyrics.

Rap, as other forms of cultural expression, reflects the period in which it is produced, as every decade or so the subject shifts. As the 1980s dawned and with it Ronald Regan's War on Drugs, rappers turned to heavier subjects. Placing this new emphasis on subjects that were much more serious in historical perspective, Alexander writes,

Thousands of young, black men were suddenly swept off the streets and into prisons. Violence in urban communities flared in those communities, not simply because of the new drug—crack—but because of the massive crackdown, which radically reshaped the traditional life for black men (Alexander, 2010, p.174).

In 1989, Milt Ahlerich, then an assistant director in the FBI, sent a letter admonishing the record label Priority Records for distributing N.W.A's debut album "Straight Outta Compton." He wrote that "Fuck Tha Police," the album's second song, was promoting violence against law enforcement officers. As Serrano notes, "These actions of course, all had the opposite effect of what was intended. The album's popularity only grew" (Serrano, 2015, p.67).

The establishment's concern may have been heightened because of the fact that white suburban kids who wanted to know what it was like to be black and live in the inner city purchased the overwhelming majority of records produced by N.W.A. and other similar groups (Garofoli, 2010). They felt that listening to rap music made them part of a movement and that it allowed them to be a part of the black experience. Parents and others were very uncomfortable with this, fearing the effects of music with violent content in the white suburbs of America.

In 1988, Los Angeles Police Chief Darryl Gates ushered in the age of the mass incarceration of black youth when he implemented "Operation Hammer," coincidentally that same year N.W.A. released their most famous album, "Straight Outta Compton." In Operation Hammer, almost 1,500 youth in South Central Los Angeles were picked up for "looking suspicious." "While most were charged with minor offenses like curfew and traffic violations, some were not charged at all but simply had their names and addresses logged in the LAPD antigang task force data base" (Perkins, 1996, p.131). The most controversial track from "Straight Outta Compton" is the song, "Fuck Tha Police." The music video for the song, "Fuck Tha Police," opens with a mock trial in which N.W.A is the judge and jury and the police are the defendants, each member of the group offers his own testimony, After promising to tell "the whole truth and nothing but the truth," Ice Cube takes the stand and explodes with an indictment against

racism, repression and the practice of criminalizing all black youth (Perkins, 1996, p.131).

Toure (1992) describes the situation African Americans faced in the 1980s, which gangsta rap articulated:

The problems of the city and of institutional racism are clearly intertwined. Nowhere are people so expendable in the forward march of corporate power as in the ghetto. At the same time, nowhere is the potential political power of black people greater. If the crisis we face in the city is to be dealt with, the problem of the ghetto must be solved first (Toure, 1992, p.149).

Toure also states,

Racism is both overt and covert. It takes two, closely related forms: Individual whites acting against individual black, and acts by the total white community against the black community. We call these individual racism and institutional racism. The first consists of overt acts by an individual, which cause death, injury or the violent destruction of property. This type can be recorded by television cameras. The second type is less overt, far more subtle, and less identifiable in terms of specific individuals committing the acts. But is no less destructive of human life. The second type originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society and thus receives far less public condemnation than the first types (Toure, 1992, p.4).

It was the second type of racism and oppression that gangsta rap groups like N.W.A. attempted to address.

The U.S built its racial hierarchy in the 1980s on maintaining silence about covert racism and taking as little action as possible on overt racism. When white teenagers purchased gangsta rap albums referencing these problems, they brought the real issue of their neighborhoods right into the homes of those the system had most empowered. Rap brought America's dirty laundry into the open for people who would have preferred that people in the ghetto simply did not exist. According to Harris-Perry wrote, "Rap music pulled the curtain up between the ghetto and the larger society" (Harris-Perry, 1989, p.64). People shrank from the idea of censorship, yet the exposure of the fact that racism still existed in the United States into the 1980s made them highly uncomfortable. Whites in the U.S. were petrified of rap music and its popularity, especially among white youth. Reality rap, particularly gangsta rap, continued to be very popular in the 1990s. Tupac Shakur and The Notorious BIG led the charts. In one piece of scholarship, Dyson writes:

Tupac is perhaps the representative figure of his generation. In his haunting voice can be heard the buoyant hopefulness and the desperate hopelessness that mark the outer perimeters of the hip-hop culture he eagerly embraced, as well as the lives of the millions of youth who admired and adored him (Dyson, 2001, p. 13).

Tupac, it has been stated, had two sides. He was extremely passionate when it came to issues that affected the black community. His mother, Afeni Shakur, was an active member of the Black Panther Party and emphasized the organization's emphasis on community empowerment in his upbringing. She cultivated in her son a sense of the experiences of African Americans, showing him the possibilities that uniting and educating young people might afford. Tupac's early connections imparted wisdom that would influence him throughout his life. It appears in the songs he wrote to empower his generation, in the attention he brought to the realities of being raised by a single mother, and the pain associated with having a parent addicted to drugs. He described his understanding of rap's intent and purpose when he told an interviewer, "We are living in so much poverty and despair that by rapping about it, kind of making it seem like we controlling it, it makes us feel better about being here" (Quinn, 2005, p.181).

Over the course of his short life, Tupac Shakur exemplified what W.E.B Dubois described as a double consciousness—an experience Dubois shared, of having to be able to assimilate into the larger society but also keep his ties to the community. Tupac felt the need to act out of anger and sometimes he gave into the pressures that he faced. Yet his murder, and that of Notorious B.I.G, deprived rap of two of its greatest artists. Both artists became transparent through their music. They used their experiences to try to inform the larger society that there are reasons why people sell drugs; there are reasons why people commit crimes.

They wanted the larger society to know that the issues faced within the ghetto are complex. By calling attention to these issues in their work, they took risks and influenced millions.

Gangsta rap caused some to pay attention to what was happening in urban America. Toure describes those conditions:

The problems of the city and of institutional racism are clearly intertwined. Nowhere are people so expendable in the forward march of corporate power as in the ghetto. At the same time nowhere is the potential political power of black people greater. If the crisis we face in the city is to be dealt with, the problem of the ghetto must be solved first (Toure, 1992, p. 149).

Among the weapons the white power structure employed to try to stifle the voices of gangster rappers was to hold them legally responsible if a listener committed a violent act. Tupac was among the artists targeted in this way, in the case of a Texas police officer killed by a young Hip Hop fan (Price, 2006, p. 61).

Rap Lyrics Change in the New Millennium

Rap music changed significantly in the new millennium. It became less about speaking about real life issues that affect the community and more about materialism and the lyrical content became more harmful and degrading to women. While misogynistic lyrics always existed, they exploded in the period on which the current study focuses. Terri Adams and Douglas Fuller, identify six manifestations of misogyny that appear in rap lyrics:

(a) degrading statements about women's sexuality, (b) statements that promote sexual violence, (c) statements that categorize women as inferior to men (d) descriptions of women as a group as gold diggers or users (e) suggestions that women only bring men pain or inconvenience (f) the idea that women are property (Adams, 2006, p. 940).

Statements such as these draw on a long history in the United States. As hooks notes, "Institutionalized sexism, that is, patriarchy-formed the base of the American social structure along with racial imperialism. Sexism was an integral part of the social political order white colonizers brought with them from their European homelands" (hooks, 1981, p. 15). Thus, as music generally does, rap reflects ideas that are commonplace, reflecting the environment that produces it. hooks continues:

The sexist, misogynist, patriarchal ways of thinking and behaving that are glorified in gangsta rap are a reflection of the prevailing values in our society, values created and sustained by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. As the crudest and most brutal expression of sexism, misogynistic attitudes tend to be portrayed by the dominant culture as an expression of male deviance. In reality they are part of a sexist continuum, necessary for the maintenance of patriarchal social order (hooks, 1994, p.2).

It is quite clear that the targets of the misogyny in rap lyrics are African American girls and women who are prominently featured in rap videos. As such,

misogynistic rap lyrics reflect the discrimination and prejudice African American women have suffered since our arrival in the United States.

Rap articulates a love hate relationship between some artists and women. They often express love and affection for their mothers and hate for the mothers of their children. “Baby mama” is described as bossy women who are portrayed by the father of their children as irresponsible, untrustworthy, angry and vindictive and by contrast to Mammies, who are loving, devoted, and patient (Adams, Fuller, 2006, p. 945). Dyson characterizes the “trend” in which young black males love their mamas but loathe their “baby mamas” as “paradoxical but predictable” (Dyson, 2001, p. 23). U.S. patriarchal values harm heterosexual relationships in the African American community through a process in which men blame women for discrimination and prejudice, rather than putting the blame where it belongs (Tyree, 2005).

In a systematic study of the words rappers use to distinguish between their own mothers and their “baby mamas,” Tia Tyree (2009) found that rap lyrics refer to mothers as “best friend, angel, strong sista, baby girl and the most beautiful girl in the world” while they call baby mamas bitches, gold-digging bitches, dumb bitches, sluts, freaks, and other derogatory terms (Tyree, p. 54). As Dyson writes,

It is patently unfair to blame poor black mothers with severely limited resources for the social hardships their children endure. And yet poor black urban culture seems to nurture femiphobia—the fear and disdain of

the female, expressed in the verbal abuse and protracted resentment of women (Dyson, 2001, p. 181).

It is almost as if Sapphire, the angry black woman with no real need for a companion, is competing with Jezebel, the woman whose only purpose is sex. Sapphire is considered strong and independent, attributes most rap songs ascribe to mothers. Yet she is emptied of her subjectivity by the expectation that she will sacrifice her last resources to take care of her children. Dyson writes,

Another feature of femiphobic culture is the simplistic division of women into angels and demons, both of which are problematic. If women are viewed as angels, the moment they depart from prescribed behavior they're made into whores or bitches. If they are viewed as demons, it denies the complex sexual personae that all human beings express (Dyson, 2002, p. 189).

Due to the fact that we live in a white patriarchal society, men set the standard the majority of the time. During slavery African American men weren't given respect. They were not allowed to be the head of their households as they saw their loved ones being abused and sold away. They had no rights and their opinions didn't matter. Today we are still affected by the lack of authority given to African American males. Rap music provides an outlet for African American males to voice their unique frustrations and anger.

An interview with Ice Cube in 1992 reveals his discomfort around talking about African American women's rights, as he steadfastly avoided discussing

them, saying that racial equality should be sufficient for women just as it would be for men, saying that black women should “look up” to black men (Chang, 2005, p. 336). Rappers who do not respect black women contribute to strife in the African American community, especially as long as young people look up to them.

The Effects of Rap on Younger Generations

Music videos often degrade the women who appear in them, using them as objects. They wear few clothes, say nothing, and seek the camera’s eye without evidencing a point of view. Scholarship on the effects of these images on adolescent girls demonstrates harm. The Institutional Review Board Committee on Human Research’s study in the late 1990s screened 1130 African American female teens between the ages of 14- 18 in several medical clinics, health departments and school health, and examined the relationship between the sexual stereotypes found in rap music videos and health outcomes. Participants completed a survey about their viewing habits and sociodemographic characteristics and then completed an interview about their health and provided a urine sample for marijuana screening. The researchers employed logistic regression analyses to seek correlations. Results showed that “adolescents who perceived more portrayals of sexual stereotypes in rap music videos were more likely to engage in binge drinking, test positive for marijuana, have multiple sexual partners, and have a negative body image” (Peterson, 2007, p. 161). “In

another study conducted among African American female adolescents, youth who viewed rap music videos illustrating female teens in sexually subordinate roles reported an increased acceptance of teen dating violence and endorsement of stereotypical beliefs regarding gender and sex” (Peterson, 2007, p.1162).

A third survey of thousands of low-income African American teens between the ages of 16 and 20 across the country, focus on sex, sexuality, and the media, particularly music videos. The researcher reported:

The message young women are getting is that if they can't get something they want through their talent or ability, and then they have something else that they can use, and that's their bodies. They are learning that what's important about a woman is her body, not her mind. So that means. I am a commodity; therefore I'm going to use that commodity to get what I want (Jeannine, 2005, p. 4).

This study suggests that when girls use their bodies as barter, they are more likely to engage in risky behavior like unsafe sex, sex with multiple partners, or sex with men many years their senior.

A fourth study provides a year's worth of data about 522 African-American girls in rural and poor neighborhoods in Alabama (Jeannine, 2005, p. 5). Even after the researchers adjusted their data to accommodate for differences such as family income, and whether the teenagers were from one or two parent families, results were startling. As one of the lead investigators describes:

We divided the group into girls who watched fewer than 21 hours a week of music videos and girls who watched more. We found that girls who watched more videos were 60 percent more likely to have contracted an STD during the year, twice as likely to have multiple sex partners, and 60 percent more likely to use alcohol and drugs. A content analysis of rap music videos taken from the end of year countdowns aired on U.S. cable outlets (i.e., BET, MTV, and VH1) found that thin females were overrepresented among the 258 female characters who appeared (87.6% Black, 5.8% White, 6.6% other). Further, the content of the video correlated with the size of the women's bodies. Music videos that focused on sex or materialism featured smaller women, while in music videos expressing political awareness; women were more likely to have larger body sizes (Zang, Dixon, Conrad, 2009, p. 787).

In the videos I analyzed, I found that most of them featured very thin models, significantly smaller than most African American women. This discrepancy is harmful because the images that are used in rap videos are not a true representation of most African American women. Cultivation theory, which states, "that the more time a person spends watching television the more such images will shape their normative beliefs and attitudes" aids in my analysis of this phenomenon (Zhang, 2009, p. 787). Adolescents are particularly vulnerable, and they need to be exposed to as many positive images as possible. If a young teen

constantly sees images that glorify women who are seductive they may begin to feel that this is the norm, and that their sexuality determines their worth.

There was a time when you had to go to a strip club to see women half naked dancing in provocative ways. “While the network described “BET Uncut” as a show for adults, teenagers were watching it as well,” Jeannine, wrote (2005, p. 165). Further, “Teenage girls are perfecting hypersexual stripper moves like booty clapping, dropping and poppin and showing them off at middle-school dances. These are dances young girls didn’t use to know about. Now it is something that they aspire to” (Jeannine, 2005, p. 165).

Misogyny in Rap Videos

It is important to look at the media and the way it portrays women, because these images have the power to control what we believe. As Patricia Hill Collins writes,

Contemporary music videos of Black male artists in particular became increasingly populated with legions of young black women who dance, strut, and serve as visually appealing props for the rapper in question. The women in these videos typically share two attributes- they are rarely acknowledged as individuals and they are scantily clad. One Black female body can easily replace another and all are reduced to their bodies (Collins, 2005, p.129).

Modern day video vixens are our contemporary version of Saarah Baartman—reduced to her physical appearance, naked and on display. Harris-Perry notes the connection:

Hip- Hop videos put the Venus Hottentot's exaggerated sexual organs back on display for the voyeuristic pleasure of the paying public. Though separated from her by many decades, corporate-controlled hip-hop music and culture created a new set of tilted images portraying black women as lusty, available, and willing partners (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 66).

Misogyny compromised the progressive value of gangster rap. For example, a portion of N.W.A.'s catalog, the lyrics Ezy-E wrote, were misogynistic. The song "One Less Bitch on Efil4zaggin," for example, states, "To me, all bitches are the same: money- hungry, scandalous groupie hos that's always riding on a nigger's dick, always in a nigger's pocket." This language is asserting once again that women aren't valued and that they are only useful for sexual relations. These lyrics are degrading, and filled with sexism and harmful language that is disrespectful to African American women. Scholars such as Dyson, address misogyny and its use in rap music. He states,

Still, the crude misogyny and sexism that are rampart in Hip Hop are deeply disturbing. The sheer repetition of "bitch" as the proper name of females is not only distressing but destructive. It sends the message to young girls and women that their price of admission to Hip Hop culture is the acceptance of self- denigration (Dyson, 2002, p.130).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

I used qualitative methods and content analysis to conduct my research, analyzing the images of women used in rap music videos associated with the top five rap songs, according to Billboard's charts, for the years 2004 and 2014. Referencing the images of jezebel, sapphire, and baby mama having determined that the mammy image generally did not appear, I analyzed each video's images, message, and lyrics.

I analyzed 10 rap videos (based exclusively on their appearance on Billboard's top 5 rap songs of the years 2004 and 2014), and created a chart with the three categories at the top and the names of the videos listed on the side. As I watched the videos, I made a mark in each of the categories to indicate the presence of the jezebel, sapphire, or baby mama stereotype in imagery or lyric. I then compared and contrasted the results for each year.

2004

- Topsy- J-Kwon
- Overnight Celebrity- Twista
- Slow Motion-Juvenile Featuring Soujia Slim
- Lean Back- Terror Squad
- Drop It Like Its Hot-Snoop Dog Featuring Pharrell

2014

- Lifestyle- Young Thug feat. Rich Homie Quan
- Hot Nigga- Bobby Shmurda
- Fight Night- Migos
- Seen It All- Jeezy Feat. Jay Z
- The Catch Up- Drake, 0-100

Figure 1. Billboard's Top Five Music Videos from 2004 and 2014

Name of Song	2004			Name of Song	2014		
	Jezebel	Babymomma	Saphire		Jezebel	Babymomm	Saphire
Tipsy	6		1	Lifestyle	19	1	
Overnight Celebrity	10			Hot Nigga	Shmurda- no women		
Slow Motion	13	4		Fight Night	8		20
Lean back	35		11	Seen It All	6		
Drop It Like It's Hot	25			The Catch Up	7		

Figure 2. Video Results

2004 Videos

Tipsy- J Kwon

Some of the first lyrics to this song are, “Teen drinking is very bad. Yo I got a fake I.D though.” This video’s story centers on inebriation. The entire video is about becoming inebriated. There are scenes which include people at a party gambling, drinking alcohol, and smoking weed. Female dancers, are featured gyrating in virtually every scene wearing very little. They are also shown numerous times, posing in sexually suggestive positions. One scene shows one of the dancers exiting a bathroom, and the camera shows a man standing behind her, insinuating that they had recently had sexual relations just moments before. The video clearly normalizes drinking; whereas the term tipsy is often used to mean “slightly drunk” and literally refers to a loss of balance due to alcoholic

consumption, the people appear to be quite drunk and extremely sexually uninhibited. The message shown is that alcohol facilitates sexual behavior.

Overnight Celebrity - Twista

In this video which features Twista, the rapper tries to persuade scantily clad women that he will make them famous (“an overnight celebrity”) if they have sex with him. Whipped cream features prominently in his invitation. The language used in this video is offensive, such as hos. He uses the term ho to refer to a woman he takes to buy whatever she wants. The lyrics describe a shopping spree that Twista takes a female in the video on where he buys her, “ice” (slang for jewelry), comparing the action to Kobe Bryant’s purchase of a multimillion dollar ring after she decided to forgive him for being unfaithful to her. “I drive whips [fancy cars] that the hos like” further equates women with gold digging. This trope denies women sexual desire and agency as well as material independence or the ability to love.

Slow Motion- Juvenile Featuring Soujia Slim

This video takes place in a single setting—a park in an urban community. In this video the rapper Juvenile describes having sexual relationships with numerous women, including “four or five married bitches.” The lyrics imply women are only useful if they are pleasing him sexually. While children play in the background women dance suggestively, smiling as if the rapper’s slurs—the lyrics refers to bitches and hos—flatter them. The implication that single African American mothers have so little care for our children represents a profound insult

to the work that we do and the responsibility we shoulder for the future of the African American community. There are also lyrics that state, “You must have heard about them hos that I beat up in my home. They wasn't telling the truth baby you know they was wrong” which deny and don't deny that the rapper committed assault. It is also mentioned that if a woman is menstruating then he wouldn't have anything to do with her. (“If you going through your cycle I ain't with it I'm gone”). This once again is a representation of how women are only needed for sexual purposes. It also portrays the message that if a woman can't fulfill the sexual desires of her partner than she isn't needed and will be abandoned.

Lean Back- Terror Squad

The message this song revolves around is that criminal activity—cooking cocaine, armed robbery, extortion, and grand larceny—are glamorous, part of the gang lifestyle. Once again the overall message is that one should, be involved in criminal activities, because this is what is necessary to attract beautiful women. Also Like “Overnight Celebrity,” the women featured in the video are gold diggers. They pose in a sexually suggestive manner, and they are wearing very little clothing. The role of the women in this video is simply to dance and to cater to the artist. They are strictly in front of the camera because they are attractive.

Drop it like It's Hot- Snoop Dog Featuring Pharrell

Like “Lean Back,” this video glorifies criminal activity, primarily drug use, and makes specific reference to the Crips, a notorious Los Angeles gang. While

it describes the men in the video as “pimps,” there’s no apparent prostitution. The men wear a lot of jewelry, suggestive of their wealth. The women wear very little, suggestive of their sexual objectification. The men are shown “Crip walking”—a swagger that is a signature style of the “Crip” gang. Like the women in “Overnight Celebrity” and “Lean Back,” all the women want are material goods.

2014 Videos

Lifestyle- Young Thug Featuring Rich Homie Quan

The theme of this video is that if you work hard you will make it from the bottom to the top. In one scene, the featured artist takes a stack of cash to his mother. She receives it happily, hugging him to express her thankfulness. She seems unsuspecting of her son’s possession of large amounts of cash. Most of the other scenes have sexual connotations. One of the first of these occurs on a private plane, where the rapper parties with a white woman—her race signifying the status he has achieved. Yet the lyrics refer to women as bitches. In another scene, several women move together on a large bed, rubbing each other’s bodies in a sexual way. The women look directly at the camera, suggesting the performance is to entice the male onlooker, not to pleasure each other. Like many of the 2004 videos, the message equates sexual success with money for men. Many people drink or take illegal drugs in the video. A pan of a closet shows the clothing and shoes the rapper has purchased, equating material wealth and consumerism with sexual success.

Hot Nigga- Bobby Shmurda

This video features men only. Like “Drop it Like it’s Hot” and “Lean Back,” it glamorizes the gang lifestyle and specifically gang-related killing. The lyrics and imagery reference guns, murder, and illegal drugs. The lyrics refer to women as bitches and Hos. The men drive fancy cars and wear expensive clothing, suggesting gang membership and that criminal activity offers wealth and that material possessions provide happiness.

Fight Night- Migos

Like “Lifestyle,” “Fight Night” equates happiness to material wealth, portraying women as gold diggers, and, of course, as “bitches.” The man in the video uses alcohol and drugs to entice women to have sexual relations. References to oral sex in the imagery portray women as nothing more than an object to satisfy men. In the video’s narrative, the women fight in front of an all-male audience. They fight for their men while showcasing their bodies instead of their power. The sexually explicit lyrics referred to them as bitches, as they took seductive stances. In one scene, two women fight inside a boxing ring while men cheer them on; one of the women is knocked out completely. The other woman celebrates as the woman lies on the floor. Her prize awaits her: the attention of the males in the audience. She then steps over her rival and celebrates. The women featured, who were acting as professional fighters, were a combination of the Sapphire and Jezebel stereotypes.

Seen It All- Jeezy Featuring Jay Z

The message in this video is that drugs are a normal part of everyday life. The rappers glamorize heroin, crystal meth, and cocaine. Drug dealers make a lot of money, and going to prison is a badge of honor—a recognition of your service to the community in distributing drugs. The greatest rewards in life are money, cars, and women. The women in the video cater to the men. They are simply in the video to look pretty and to dance. They don't have any power and their presence isn't felt.

The Catch Up- Drake, 0-100

The message in this video is that one should do whatever it takes to have money and women. The lyrics refer to women as bitches and hos. There are also references to infidelity and using women in whatever manner men want. The women in the video have very few articles of clothing on, and their bodies are constantly on display.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Jezebel Image

The Jezebel image appears in nine out of ten of the videos. Women are portrayed as objects for the male gaze defined by their sexual availability. The objectification of these women was enacted by using them as objects and props. They wear minimal clothing and were clearly selected to titillate and showcase their bodies. They have no voice, no point of view, and no apparent distinction from one another. The videos' presentation of these sexualized figures promotes the ideology that women are akin to the possessions a man can obtain when he acquires fame and fortune. They may be the most prized objects in the triumphant rappers' trove of acquisitions, yet they are as dehumanized as the chains he wears around his neck and just as fungible. Their presentation suggests that women are only useful if they are able to arouse men—particularly men with power and subjectivity—e.g., the rappers themselves.

The Jezebel image essentially draws on an image created during slavery to justify the rape by white masters of African American slave women, a form of sexual terrorism enacted to manage the slave population. While women were tortured by it, men were emasculated. In order to justify the practice, white society constructed an image of black women as hypersexualized figures for whom the question of consent to sex was devoid of meaning. In rap videos the

men who exploit this constant sexual availability are black instead of white, and lacks the physical and legal power over the objectified body of African American women that white slave owners had. And yet he holds economic power over the sexual object of his desire and presents her in a similar manner to the stereotypes constructed over 200 years of slavery. The dance moves may be radically different but the stereotype is achingly and dangerously familiar.

The comparative analysis of the jezebel image in the videos and lyrics of 2004 and 2014 show a small but real shift. The use of the Jezebel image declined between 2004 and 2014. The only video, titled Hot Nigga by Bobby Shmurda, did not contain such an image which was released in 2014. The 2004 video “Lean Back,” performed by the group “Terror Squad,” featured thirty-five separate instances of the jezebel image. While the jezebel image appeared in a greater number of 2014 videos than any other stereotype, suggesting its association with the prototypical rap video, the video that featured the Jezebel image the most in 2014, “Lifestyle,” by the artist “Young Thug feat. Rich Homie Quan,” had nineteen different occurrences.

Sapphire Image

The second most common stereotype across the ten analyzed videos was that of the sapphire image. The Sapphire image portrays African American women as overbearing and full of rage. This image is closely associated with the angry black woman image. Contrary to the researcher’s hypothesis, the image

appeared in only two videos in 2004 and one video in 2014. However, it remains a significant stereotype in the body of videos and songs addressed here, not least because it appears multiple times in each of three videos.

The angry black woman image has been used to manage black women largely since emancipation. Based on this stereotype, a black woman who expresses her actual feelings on a subject may be condemned as failing to adhere to standards of womanhood and politeness. While steady insult of racism and sexism in a system that maintains a rigid hierarchy with African American women having the least access of any group to many of the resources and wealth of American life might reasonably make anyone angry, the angry black women image has been used to delegitimize expressions of such anger. In the workplace and other crucial settings, a racist system exacts real economic costs on women who do not police themselves to avoid conforming to the Sapphire stereotype. Its perpetuation in rap videos thus presents a significant problem.

The Sapphire image appeared twenty different times in the 2014 rap video titled "Fight Night," which features the artist "Migos." It also appears in 2004 in the video for the song, "Lean Back," which features the group "Terror Squad," eleven different times. Finally, it appears once in the 2004 video "Topsy," which featured the artist "J-Kwon."

“Mammy”/“Baby Mama” Image

The term “baby mama” refers to African American mothers, particularly if they are unmarried. The “baby mamas” in videos are greedy and selfish. They focus on what they can get from men and appear to have little interest in using such resources for the good of their children. In presenting mothers of children in an unfavorable light, the videos enact a particularly harsh critique of the characters that inhabit the videos; the children of these women will clearly bear the cost of these women’s irresponsibility, although the videos themselves tend to focus on the cost African American men bear when greedy baby mamas seek to extract child support payments and other forms of support.

Some decades before the term “baby mama” gained currency, President Ronald Reagan created the myth of the welfare queen—an African American woman who exploited the social safety net for vast profit. Like the jezebel and sapphire images, this stereotype served to blame African American women for the vulnerabilities a rigid hierarchy created. While a perpetuated system of cyclical poverty and racism makes some African American women dependent on the state, the myth of the welfare queen portrays them as victimizing the system rather than being its victim.

The image of the “baby mama” appeared in two of the videos analyzed—four times in the 2004 rap video titled, “Slow Motion,” and once in the 2014 video titled, “Lifestyle.” These videos feature “Juvenile Featuring Soujia Slim” and “Young Thug. Feat. Rich Homie Quan,” respectively.

I was hoping that there would be a substantial difference in the role that women were cast in rap videos between 2004 and 2014. However, my findings show there was no significant difference. The images continued to play into the stereotypes that the prevailing society has always applied to African American women. They still appear in subservient roles to men, who have all of the power. Lyrics often degraded women, who danced as if they could not hear them. Put simply, the videos in 2004 and 2014, objectified women. The women featured had neither power nor backbone. They played the role of the beautiful seductress, subjugating their own personhood to the project of serving a man. The image of the sapphire and the “baby mama” appear considerably less often than Jezebel in the videos, with Sapphire appearing in three videos and baby mama in two.

Discussions

Rap: The Corporate Connection

Music Corporations understand that degraded images of African Americans sell records. In Spike Lee’s movie Bamboozled, he shows how corporate control monopolizes the media. In the opening scene from Bamboozled, one of the characters, a white male named Dunwitty is having a conversation with an African American character named Delacroix. Dunwitty is the boss of Delacroix and he informs Delacroix that he needs to make television shows that are more controversial. Delacroix states, “What is it you want from

me? Some sitcom that takes place on a watermelon patch? Some show that follows four nigger generations of junkies and crackheads? You want me to go back to the ante bellum days?" Dunwitty responds, "Yes! Yes! Yes! I want a show that will make headlines, that will have millions and millions of households tuned in, glued to their televisions every week. I want advertisers dying to buy on this show. I'm gonna squeeze this show out of you if it kills you" (Imsdb.com). This is an example, albeit fictional of who is controlling the images found in television and in the mass media. This may be a clue why these images are continually perpetuated decade after decade. According to Lee's film stereotypes sell. Scholars have much to say about the relationship between rappers and corporations.

There are myriad forces making profits from rap, the least of which may be the artist. The record label, the radio stations, the concert venues all get a piece of the action. A discussion between Tricia Rose, the author of *Black Noise* (1994), a foundational scholarly text for the study of hip hop, and Carmen Ash Hurst- Watson who has a long history of working in the media industry, is worth quoting in some detail here. It addresses what Rose terms the "profoundly confining and unequal relationship" between large corporations and rap artists quoted in Neal (Neal, 2004, p. 551).

CAW: The primary issue in the music business is profit. So, even black record executives with a conscience are trapped by rules of the institution. Artists on all labels get exploited; some get exploited less than others.

Really big- name stars get exploited less, but what they get paid is not commensurate with the profits that they generate, and their creative control expands only as much as the company feels they can sell this new product. This is one of the reasons so many artists behave in temperamental ways that seem juvenile and irrational, and it explains why label executives accept artists' quirkiness and artist's negative behavior and so on. When record companies give them the limo, or the girls, or whatever else they give them, it's not out of some largess or because they think its fair compensation. It's like...

TR: The European settlers giving tobacco and beads to Native Americans in exchange for land.

CW: Yeah, right.... It really is like that. It is very difficult for an artist to break out of these lengthy contracts. It's very rare for an artist to be able to be both an artist and a businessperson, and to get some control over their career at that level. That's very, very hard and frustrating (Neal, 2004, p. 551).

Many corporations make profits by selling goods to the African American community. Scholars argue that large corporations are exploiting rap artists and the African American community (Toure, 1992) (Rose, 1994) (Neal, 2004). They promote division within the African American community by promoting music that is not a true representation of daily experiences in urban communities. A corporation with no stake in the future of the African American community may

maintain certain stereotypes if they contribute to their bottom line, stereotypes that are a product of what Toure calls “the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of subordinating a racial group and maintain control over that group”—i.e., racism (Toure, 1992, p.3).

The period, the current study addresses follows an upheaval in regard to who controlled (and continues to control) the revenue rap can generate. As Chang writes, five companies controlled eighty percent of the music industry, and, separately, Viacom owned both MTV and BET the major outlet for music videos (Chang 2005, p. 443). Around the turn of the millennium large corporations bought smaller corporations, gaining control over rap music and the music videos associated with it. Under the influence of record labels, rap songs became increasingly generic. However, artists fought back, going underground to produce their own records independently. As the number of corporations decreased it appears that the message changed and the images were used in rap videos changed as well. The dancers in music videos wore less and less clothing. An emphasis on money may be the most disturbing aspect of rap music’s metamorphosis during this time. Hooks describes the troubling nature of this emphasis:

When the deluded young are forced to face the reality that we are bound by class, by limited resources, by the exhaustion of glories, by endless exploitation, they become rage filled and rage addicted. Only death, self-mutation, or the slaughter of their peers appeases. They cannot kill the

oppressor because they do not know who the oppressor is. They do not understand class politics or capitalism. In their minds, to be without money is to be without life (hooks, 2000, p.87).

The distance between rap and the community grew as the rap message of African American self-actualization became diluted as it was filtered through corporate demands. The media aided and abetted the music industry in the dilution of the radical nature of rap. As hooks writes,

Mass media has been the pedagogical tool used to teach the poor and working class to think like the rich. Socialized by the media to believe that ruling classes are morally better and superior to those without class privilege, they do not feel allegiance to members of their own class to those who are less fortunate. They believe that the wealthy have earned the right to rule (hooks, 2000, p. 77).

Similarly, Thorpe claims,

The state and its consumerist forces control the media in the modern world. The media reflects and disseminates that state's dominant values and ideologies, and manipulates society into buying goods, services, and lifestyles. Society and individuals are lulled into believing and conforming to the media message (Thorpe, 2015, p. 187).

Solutions

Several programs have been created to establish unity within the community; they were also used as a response to the sexism found in rap music, such as the “Take Back the Music Campaign.” In the spring of 2004, the predominantly African American, all-women student body of Spelman College protested a planned appearance of the rap artist Nelly on campus to promote a bone-marrow drive. Student and faculty members alike objected to a rap video that showed women walking around in bikinis and high heels and Nelly as he swiped a credit card down the crevice of a woman’s rear end (Cummings, 2004). *Essence* magazine responded to consolidate the students’ protest with a campaign they called “Take Back the Music” (Reid-Brinkley, 2008).

The purpose of the campaign was to bring the issues to the forefront in regards to rap music and its lyrical content. Its purpose was to also talk about the images that are used in music videos that portray women of color in a negative light. *Essence* called on the African American community to participate in dialogue in regards to misogyny and rap music, staging events in several cities throughout the United States over the course a year. The campaign’s webpage listed six goals:

- (1) to create a “platform for discussion”;
- (2) to explore the effects of the negative imagery in popular hip-hop and rap music;
- (3) to encourage “balance” in the representation of black womanhood;
- (4) to encourage readers to be self-reflective in evaluating their arguments;
- (5) to “promote

artists who deliver positive alternatives”, and (6) to create a “blueprint” for activist involvement in the “Take Back the Music” campaign (Byrd and Solomon, 2005, p. 82-86).

Reid Brinkley explains:

Essence reaches 7.6 million readers, most of them African American women, and a monthly circulation of one million copies. It also boasts a 29% male readership. The magazine is known for addressing issues that are important in the African American community (Reid- Brinkley, 2008, p. 243).

The Take Back the Music campaign called attention to issues that were directly related to the African American females experience in regards to rap music.

Several thousand people responded to the campaign. “The respondents, largely black women, engaged in a heated debate over the issue of misogyny in rap music and video. The *Essence* website created scribble board sections for each article that appeared in January through December 2005 issues” (Reid-Brinkley, 2008, p. 244). I applaud *Essence* magazine for creating a forum where both African American men and women could communicate about issues that are unique to our community. Unity is the key to building a stronger community.

Scholars have suggested that the only way to end racism and give African American women our due as partners in building the future is to come together as a race and face our issues head-on. As Toure writes,

Black Power...calls for black people to consolidate behind their own, so that they can bargain from a position of strength. But while we endorse the procedure of group solidarity and identity for the purpose of attaining certain goals in the body politic, this doesn't mean that black people should strive for the same kind of rewards (i.e., end results) obtained by the white society. The ultimate values and goals are not domination or exploitation of other groups, but rather an effective share in the total power of the society (Ture, 1967, p. 47).

I wholeheartedly agree, the healing has to start within our communities. We cannot look to record companies to stop profiting off our personal pain. We have to find ways to come together and find peaceful solutions to the universal pain that is within our community.

Once united, we can get rid of racism through "political modernization." As Toure defines it, political modernization includes three major concepts: (1) questioning old values and institutions of the society, (2) searching for new and different forms of political structure to solve political and economic problems, and (3) broadening the base of political participation to include more people in the decision making process (Ture, 1967, p. 39).

As a people, we have to pay attention to what is happening in our community and the images that are being portrayed and used to describe African American women and men. The stereotypes that have been used

to describe African American women have deep roots in a racist society.

Ture writes:

Racism is not merely exclusion on the basis of race but exclusion for the purpose of subjugating or maintains subjugation. The goal of the racists is to keep black people on the bottom, arbitrarily and dictatorially, as they have done in this country for over three hundred years. The goal of black self-determination and black self- identity—Black Power—is full participation in the decision making processes affecting the lives of black people, and recognition of the virtues in themselves as black people (Ture, 1967, p. 47).

When we see women who are dressed in a seductive manor in music videos and who are degrading themselves, it is the community's responsibility to speak out against such images. It is also the community's responsibility to question the artists who are allowing the record companies to use them as puppets and explain to them how such images are harmful to the community as a whole. It is also the community's responsibility to make the record companies accountable. While White young people have historically been major supporters of rap sales, if the African American community refuses to purchase music or concert tickets, rap artists and the record companies will be forced to change the way women are represented in rap videos. There is power in numbers. Whenever a group of people come together, and address an issue, and are determined to change policies that affect them, the larger society listens. A prime

example would be the Civil Rights Movement, and The Women's Rights Movement.

"We must not apologize for the existence of this form of group power, for we have been oppressed as a group and not as individuals" (Ture, 1967, p. 49). African Americans need to question the motives behind using the stereotypes for decades to describe African American women and demand that those who control the content of rap music, do better by African American women. Scholars have stated that we need to encourage more positive images of ourselves. We must take the negative images that have been used to destroy our community and embrace images that uplift our community (Ture, 1967). If African American men and women were to understand the universal issues that each group faces then we can find a solution that both would benefit from. African Americans must unite.

Ture writes: "Black Power seeks to correct the approach to dependency, to remove that dependency, and to establish a viable psychological, political, and social base upon which the black community can function to meet its needs" (Ture, 1967, p. 81). This means that we need to define ourselves. We need to define what it does or doesn't mean to be a man, a woman, and more importantly what it means to be an African American Man, and African American Woman. We need to define what is beautiful and what has value. What does it mean to be a good woman, and what does it mean to be a good man? We need to look at the issues that we face every day and come up with positive solutions that can

be passed down from generation to generation. We need to take back our power. We need to have conversations with our youth, so that misogyny can become a distant memory. We need to educate ourselves so that we can better deal with the issues that we face within our communities. It starts with us. African Americans need to reevaluate our own values and what is important to us. We need to govern ourselves (Woodson, 1990, p.123).

We also need to be aware that certain values have been passed down from slavery. The ideas have been engrained in our very DNA, causing years of generational damage and destruction (Ture, 1967, p. 39). Once we root that out it should be easy to demand that our representation in the media be based on truth and not stereotypes.

While Black music at its best has often offered a supplementary argument for political change, it is not a substitute for actual politics. The music can help alter the mindset of the masses, create awareness of the need for social change, dramatize injustice, and help articulate the disenchantment of significant segments of the citizenry. But it cannot alone transform social relations and political arrangements. Politically charged music can reinforce important social values, but it cannot establish them (Dyson, 2005, p.70).

We as a people create our own value systems, cultural traditions, and belief systems. We need to acknowledge our failures as a people and find the strength to create new images in the media. We have to stop accepting images that are not a true representation of who we are as a people. We have to make a

decision to stop the misogyny used in rap videos so that generations that follow will not continue the idiosyncrasies that have become commonplace.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I began this project with one objective: to examine rap music and its ideologies in regard to women, a concern that a conversation with my daughter prompted in me. My hypothesis that I would find at least some distinction between the way the top rap videos of 2004 and those of 2014 proved wrong.

The persistence of the Jezebel image and the appearance of degrading forms of the Sapphire image and the presentation of the baby momma as a predatory monster, to be sure, represents disturbing signs that the dominant culture's particular disregard of the personhood of African American women persists. Black women are one of the most devalued female groups in American society. Prejudice and cruelty have long governed our lives. Both white people and black men have considered us in terms of the enemy or the scapegoat. Uniting with white women to defeat the patriarchy or black men to defeat the racial hierarchy becomes difficult because of the constant threat of such treatment. Either group might stereotype or revile us at any time. A sociological study of low income black male-female relationships showed that most young black men see their female companions solely as objects to be exploited. Most boys in the study referred to black women as "that bitch," or "that whore" (hooks, 1981, p. 108).

I have had these labels and titles placed upon myself on more than one occasion. I dream of a world in which my daughters will never know them, but this project made clear to me how difficult that will be. I have heard African American women referred to as the angry, whorish, and unfaithful countless times. Rap has rewarded African American men who use this terminology often with wealth and fame. It generally provides crumbs from that table for the African American women who participate by appearing in videos. We are nameless and valueless in American culture—but we are also brave.

My research into the social situation of slaves revealed that African American women have always carried the majority of the responsibility in the African American community. Caring for children has always been our special burden, and we have never been excused from the role of provider. I had always believed that African American men and women should share the same burdens and the same anger. What I found is that they each have their own trials and tribulations based off of gender, class, educational background, and social economic status.

This historical reality has created tension between African American males and females, but one we can surmount, once we recognize the brokenness in our communities. Slave masters created this system with the express intent of preserving a social structure built on racism. As Toure and others have suggested it is possible to dismantle the problems that plague the African American community, including the misogyny found in rap videos.

Rap music, even with its lyrical content that at times can be damaging to the images of women and the African American community, can be a positive force for change. It has the possibility of changing the dialogue surrounding African American women, and indeed change attitudes of the larger society. We need to acknowledge, believe, and affirm the African proverb that states “I Am because we are.” As history clearly shows, it is the responsibility of the oppressed to change the ideologies, and images that have lead to their oppression. Like Dorothy Height, and the students at Spelman, African American women must push back against these graven images, it is only then that real change will take place.

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