"Now I Ain't Sayin' She's a Gold Digger": African American Femininities in Rap Music Lyrics

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“NOW I AIN’T SAYIN’ SHE’S A GOLD DIGGER”: AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMININITIES IN RAP MUSIC LYRICS

By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation reports the results of a study about representations of (Black) women, sexuality, and gender relations in rap music lyrics. I explore the extent to which rap music lyrics reproduce or challenge gendered, racialized, and sexual stereotypes of African American women. I ask how men rappers differ from women rappers in depicting (Black) women and themselves. I show what qualities or practices, particularly sexual qualities and practices, are considered as feminine or womanly in rap music and hip-hop culture and how these qualities and practices are similar to or differ from mainstream gender hegemony. I examine whether and how rap music lyrics construct a hierarchical and complementary relationship between (Black) masculinity and femininity. I ask which feminine meanings and practices are treated as “pariah femininities” and point to features of hegemonic masculinity in hip-hop culture and the broader African American community. Finally, I ask whether and how gendering practices represented in rap music lyrics constitute resistant femininities and challenge White and middle-class gender hegemony.

I created a database of rap songs on platinum albums with an original release date of 1984 through 2000. I randomly selected 450 songs from the sampling frame for content analysis. In general, I find that rap music both reproduces and contests prevailing gender, race, class and sexual ideologies and social structures. My analysis of rap lyrics suggests that many male rappers depict (Black) women as promiscuous sexual “freaks” and “bitches” who have sex with men for money and/or other material goods. In many lyrics, they describe their desire for and engagement in sexual activities with freaks and bitches, but they do not express respect. Some women rappers reproduce gendered and racialized stereotypes in their lyrics as well. Still, other women and men rappers challenge these negative images in their songs and offer alternatives. Instead of calling for a reserved or muted sexuality for African American women, a few women rappers depict themselves and other Black women in lyrics as sexually free, in control of their sexuality, and financially independent from men.
You can say I’m desperate, even call me perverted. But, you say I’m a dog when I leave you fucked and deserted. I’ll play with your heart just like it’s a game. I’ll be blowing your mind while you’re blowing my brains. I’m just like that man they call Georgie Puddin’ Pie. I fuck all the girls, and I make ‘em cry. I’m like a dog in heat, a freak without warning. I have an appetite for sex, ‘cause me so horny (2 Live Crew; “Me So Horny”).

I have no love for hos. That’s somethin’ I learned in the pound . . . I know the pussy’s mine. I ma fuck a couple more times. And, then I’m through with it, there’s nothing else to do with it. Pass it to the homie, now you hit it cause she ain’t nothin’ but a bitch to me. And, y’all know that bitches ain’t shit to me . . . It ain’t no fun, if the homies can’t have none (Kurupt in Snoop Dogg’s; “Ain’t No Fun (If the Homies Can’t Have None)”).

You know I – thug em, fuck em, love em, leave em cause I don’t fuckin’ need em. Take em out the hood, keep em lookin’ good, but I don’t fuckin’ feed em . . . I’m a pimp in every sense of the word, bitch . . . Let em play with the dick in the truck. Many chicks wanna put Jigga fist in cuffs. Divorce him and split his bucks. Just because you got good head, I’ma break bread so you can be livin’ it up? Shit I parts with nothin’, y’all be frontin’. Me give my heart to a woman? Not for nothin’, never happen (Jay-Z; “Big Pimpin’”).

Much ado has been made over the misogyny in rap music and of hip-hop culture. So much so that in January 2005, Essence magazine launched a “Take Back the Music Campaign” that encouraged critical dialogue among diverse communities about representations of Black women in popular media particularly in rap music and videos. The campaign sought to examine the effect of these images on adolescent Black girls and
boys and on relations between Black men and women, to explore and promote alternative and more diverse representations of Black women, and to recruit artists and readers alike to participate in these efforts. To be sure, misogynist representations of (Black) women are not exclusive to rap music and hip-hop culture. And, hip-hop culture and rap music are not the only forms of cultural production that the (White) mainstream and the powerful in U.S. society have excoriated for their presumed representation of deviant values and sexuality.¹ I italicize presumed because in many ways, rap music, particularly “hardcore” or “gangsta” rap, is a reflection, manifestation, and sometimes exaggeration of the violent, sexist, misogynist, homophobic and racist culture of the United States in general.

This dissertation reports the results of a study about cultural representations of Black women, sexuality and gender relations in rap music lyrics. It is an examination of images of (Black) women that suggest how they are to construct their identities and interact with (Black) men (Collins 2004; Longmore 1998; Martin 2003; Stephens and Phillips 2003). I argue that socio-historical racial and gender stereotypes persist and are reproduced in images of African American women in much of popular music, including rap music lyrics (Collins 2000, 2004). However, some rap music lyrics do not reproduce stereotypes and others directly defy stereotypes. My intention throughout is to evaluate how rap music lyrics reproduce and/or resist ideologies of gender, race, sexuality and class in representations of women.

In this introductory chapter, I review my research questions and data and introduce rap music, hip-hop culture and hip-hop scholarship. In doing the latter, I discuss the music industry’s profit motives for producing and disseminating rap music including how these commercial interests may influence rap music’s content. My interest in and encounters with rap music unavoidably shape my analysis. I note the diversity of

¹ Media pundits and cultural critics have historically condemned non-mainstream and/or non-White cultural productions, particularly that of African Americans and especially music for its representation of a perceived deviant sexuality. For example, mainstream White America initially opposed Elvis Presley and rock and roll music which heavily borrowed, if not blatantly copied, African American blues, R&B, and gospel. The White mainstream was appalled at his sexually suggestive dance moves and denounced the infiltration of African American culture into the mainstream media of radio and television. And, misogynist representations of women in rock and roll music are ubiquitous. One of the more extreme examples, that once again drew heavy criticism from parents, the media, and other groups, was the glam rock and big-hair bands of the late 1970s and 1980s.
and changes in rap music over time, how rap music eventually drew attention and concern from the government and some advocacy groups and how my interests coincide with these developments. I also review literature on women in rap music and hip-hop culture, highlighting scholars who focus on sexism and misogyny in rap music and others who focus on how women artists challenge and resist dominant ideologies about Black women. Literature that shapes my analysis chapters on gender as a social institution, the interaction of gender with other systems of power, hegemonic masculinity and femininity, and pariah femininities are also reviewed. Finally, I suggest how my findings contribute to the literature on rap music, the intersection of gender, race, class and sexuality, and hegemonic and pariah femininities and I overview the chapters to follow.

Research Questions and Data

My study asks several questions about the representation of Black women, sexuality and gender relations in rap music lyrics. These questions centrally concern the variety of images of Black women in the lyrics of rap music. To be more specific, I explore the extent to which rap music reproduces gendered and racialized stereotypes of African American women and the extent to which rap music reproduces socio-historical beliefs about African American women’s sexuality. I ask how men rappers differ from women rappers in how they depict Black women and/or themselves. I also explore whether rappers counter or resist dominant ideologies about Black women, and if so, how. I also ask if rap music lyrics containing representations of women who challenge hegemonic femininity disparage or commend women for (potentially) disrupting the dominant gender order.

Mass media, as a social institution, has the potential to affect and influence prevailing ideas about African American women and men, their sexuality and the relations between them. Rap music, disseminated through mass media, may affect how Black women perceive themselves and how others, particularly young Black men, perceive and treat them. By addressing these questions, I hope to shed light on how rap music lyrics suggest ways that Black women practice femininity and sexuality. I explore these questions through a content analysis of a random sample of rap music lyrics in 450 songs drawn from a population of songs on albums that have gone platinum, i.e. sold over one million copies, between 1984 and 2000. (Research methods are described in Chapter
An Introduction to Rap Music, Hip-Hop Culture and Scholarship

Rap music is a genre of popular music that urban African Americans largely developed and perform (Chang 2005; Pough 2004; Rose 1994; Watkins 2005). Unlike the approach of many previous studies of rap music, rap music videos, hip-hop culture, rap artists and entertainers, this study is a systematic analysis of representations of Black women in popular rap music lyrics. To provide context for my analysis, I introduce rap music as a popular music genre and hip-hop culture. I also briefly review debates about what qualifies as “rap” and what does not. I note the corporate interests that drive rap music production and consumption and I provide a short, and necessarily truncated, overview of scholarship on rap music and hip-hop culture.

The term “rap,” in its general usage, is a verb with several meanings. To rap means “to strike,” “to utter sharply or vigorously,” or “to talk or discuss,” among other slang meanings. Generally speaking, rapping as an art form consists of an artist speaking rhythmically, poetically, and sometimes, though not necessarily, rhyming. Rapping can occur with an accompanying beat and/or instrumental music or without. Most rap music is characterized by a recurrent beat frequently accompanied by a looping bass-driven dance track which supplies the rhythm and counterpoint for a vocalist’s or multiple vocalists’ brisk, often boastful, slangy, and rhyming lyrics and story narration (Rose 1994).²

Most hip-hop and rap historians locate rap’s origination to gang-affiliated neighborhood block parties in the mid- to late-1970s in the South Bronx in New York City (Chang 2005; Dimitriadis 1996; Fricke and Ahearn 2002; Pough 2004; Rose 1994; Watkins 2005). There is some contention, however, about the origins of rap music (Rodriquez 2006). Some hip hop scholars and historians contend that the origins of rap can be traced as far back as to the African bardic tradition, in which tribal leaders told

² This definition is inherently vague. For example, some jazz, blues, and especially Caribbean musicians and song writers used “rapid, slangy, and often boastful rhyming” over recurring beats long before the term “rap music” appeared in the cultural lexicon. In particular, Jamaican musicians and rock steady crews, the predecessors to contemporary reggae music, had long been using “talk over and dub” that has become characteristic of rap music (Rose 1994).
oral histories through music and song (Keyes 2002). Rose (1994:21) acknowledges the historical Afrodisporic cultural foundations in rap music and hip-hop culture but considers them particular to a place, time and cultural context, specifically to “the margins of postindustrial urban America” and “the deindustrialization meltdown where social alienation, prophetic imagination, and yearning intersect.” All of these historical accounts of the emergence of rap music and hip hop culture have merit. For the purposes of my analysis, I limit rap music to what is generally understood as contemporary rap music in the United States, that which record companies and artists have recorded for mass production and consumption and that is generally included in the rap music “sections” of music stores or purchasing websites.

Rap music is one element of hip-hop culture. *Hip-hop culture* refers to the styles and aesthetic, including clothing, dancing, visual art, etc., associated with rap music (Chang 2005; Dimitriadis 1996; Dyson 2004; Kitwana 2002, 2004; Rose 1994). Others, such as Watkins (2005), Kitwana (2002, 2004), Lusane (2004) and Neal (2004a) also characterize hip hop as a movement. Rap music is the element of hip-hop culture that has attained the most commercial success. (See Chapter 2 for a more detailed summary of the history of rap music and hip-hop culture).

Because of the far reach of its influence and its impact on youth, it is imperative that sociological scholars subject rap music and hip-hop culture to critical analysis. Lusane (2004:351) characterizes rap music and hip-hop culture in this way:

> For many black youths in the United States . . . the world is a ghetto. Trapped in and witness to cycles of violence, destitution and lives of desperation, their aspirations and views find expression in . . . hip hop whose most dynamic expression is in the form of rap music. On the one hand, rap is the voice of alienated, frustrated and rebellious black youth who recognized their vulnerability and marginality in post-industrial America. On the other hand, rap is the packaging and marketing of social discontent by some of the most skilled ad agencies and largest record producers in the world.

This description of rap music frames rap music and hip-hop culture as both cultural expressions of marginalized Black youth in the United States and as commodified products sold to consumers across the globe. Social and economic conditions and public
policies that contributed to the isolation, poverty and racial inequality of many inner-city neighborhoods fostered the emergence of hip-hop culture and rap music (Chang 2005; Watkins 2005). These conditions largely persist in many poor minority inner-city neighborhoods. I argue that rap music is not merely a reflection or outcome of these social conditions. Rap music also culturally produces an array of ideas about working- or under-class African American women and men. Thus, it is a substantial influence on the form, content, and quality of relationships between young Black women and men.

Lusane’s characterization of hip-hop culture and rap music also draws attention to a point of contention in hip-hop and rap music scholarship—“authenticity” debates (Armstrong 2004; Dyson 1993; Gilroy 1992; Judy 1994; Kelley 1997; Light 1992; Neal 2004b). These debates center on whether or not and to what degree rap music and hip-hop culture are “authentic” cultural expressions of the African American working- and/or under-class. Neal (2004d:493) argues that the commercial and mainstream success of rap music has created tensions “between long-standing narratives in the black community that have equated mainstream acceptance with ‘selling out’ and basic desires to craft a lifestyle out of [rappers’] skills and visibility as rap artists.”

Cultural explanations of rap music’s development and proliferation are incomplete without consideration of the commercial interests that drive its production and consumption (Neal 1997; Negus 1999; Quinn 2005). For example, Lena (2006:487) finds that “starting in 1988, the largest record corporations charted substantially more ‘hardcore’ rap songs than independent labels.” Rap music brings listeners to producers and record labels that produce music for profit and revenue. My study is limited in not directly addressing the production and consumption processes of rap music. Yet, it recognizes that rap music’s production and content are heavily influenced by the corporate interests of producers, record labels and the music industry as a whole and the tastes and sensibilities of consumers. The profit motives of rap artists likely affect the content of their lyrics. Rather than analyzing the market relations of production and consumption of rap music, I focus on rap song lyrics that are produced in the market for listeners’ consumption.

Throughout the 1990s and the turn of the century, hip-hop culture and rap music research have become a burgeoning field of inquiry across academic disciplines (Forman
The proliferation of articles in scholarly journals and academic books about hip-hop culture and rap music makes an exhaustive account of this scholarship impossible. Other gauges of the emergence of rap music and hip-hop culture as a field of academic study include the “establishment of various institutes and research centers, including the founding of the Hiphop Archive housed in the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research at Harvard University” (Forman 2004:3) and the publication of hip-hop studies readers, such as those edited by Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal, *That’s the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (2004), and William Eric Perkins, *Droppin’ Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture* (1996). I highlight recent and prominent themes in hip-hop and rap scholarship below.

In the main, scholarship on hip hop and rap music focuses on the following issues: 1) the street code, rhetoric of violence and nihilism in rap music (Aldridge and Carlin 1993; Armstrong 1993; Kubrin 2005a, 2005b; Quinn 1996); 2) the aesthetics of rap music as social, cultural, political, and nationalistic resistance and opposition to mainstream society, culture, politics, and nationalism (Boyd 1997; Chang 2005; Decker 1993; George 1998; Henderson 1996; Lusane 2004; Neal 2004a; Potter 1995; Rose 1994; Stapleton 1998); 3) the negotiation and meaning of public space and place in hip-hop cultural practices (Baldwin 1999; Bennett 2000; Forman 2002; Rose 1996; Toop 1984, 1999); 4) production technologies embedded in social and economic systems of trade (Bartlett 1994; Dimitriadis 1996; George 1998; Schumacher 1995; Shusterman 1992); 5) the mainstream appropriation, commodification, marketing, production, distribution and consumption of hip hop culture and rap music and the effects of commercialization on the culture (Blair 1993; George 1998; Hazzard-Donald 1996; Lena 2006; Neal 2004a; Negus 1999; Rose 1994; Swedenburg 1992; Watkins 1998, 2005; Watts 1997); and/or 6) the history of the emergence, development, and exportation of hip-hop culture and rap music (Chang 2005; Forman 2002; George 1998; Rose 1994; Toop 1984; Watkins 2005). My goal is to build on this work in ways that I explain below.

**My Encounters with Rap Music**

I now explain my interest in and experience with rap music and note that rap music is quite diverse, having changed substantially in recent years. My interest in studying rap music developed over time. Though I was aware of rap music prior to
entering college in the early 1990s, I did not develop a particular interest in it until I entered college. The friends I made at a small and predominantly White liberal arts college introduced me to the music. At first, as I recall, I was intrigued by the beats and music from which rap sampled, largely the soul and funk music of the 1970s from artists such as James Brown, Funkadelic/Parliament, and Stevie Wonder, among others. As an insular liberal arts college, the students organized their own parties every weekend, which consisted of someone checking out stereo equipment to be used in the courtyard of the campus dorms. Students who checked out the equipment made mix tapes (this was prior to the era of “burning CDs”) of songs that provided backdrop for socializing early in the evening and later became the music to which many students in attendance danced. Although not all students enjoyed or played rap music, my group of friends and I found the music, along with the aforementioned funk and soul music, enjoyable for dancing. At the time, the music did not interest me as a topic of study.

Later in my undergraduate studies, I enrolled in a popular culture course for which I was required to write a research paper. I had taken a race and ethnicity course a semester before and had begun to not only dance to rap music but to actually listen to the lyrics. I thought analyzing the rap music’s lyrics for themes of racial inequality and strife would make an interesting study of the emerging and ever-more-popular form of music. As a young and developing sociologist, my early “research” was neither systematic nor extensive but it revealed that many rap artists were speaking directly to the issues of racial inequality that had congealed in many of America’s inner-city communities. As a graduate student, I continued that research agenda developed it into a master’s thesis. Not only were many of the lyrics describing the deplorable conditions in inner-city neighborhoods, I found that many of the lyrics projected a sense of nihilism and hopelessness for the future (Kubrin 2005b).

At the same time my interest in rap music was developing in the early 1990s, a new form of rap music, “gangsta” (or gangster) rap, emerged as one of the, if not the, most dominant sub-genres of rap music. Gangsta rap is noted for “its vivid sexist, misogynistic, and homophobic lyrics, as well as its violent depiction of urban ghetto life
N.W.A. (Niggaz with Attitude), an L.A.-based gangsta rap super-group with several members who later became platinum-selling solo artists, producers, and record-label owners, is generally credited with popularizing the sub-genre. The explosive, platinum sales of this sub-genre of rap music during the early 1990s is noteworthy considering the music had very little, if any, radio play or marketing (Watkins 2005). The lyrics were too profane and violent for commercial radio without significant editing.

Gangsta rap became the most controversial and popular sub-genre of rap music for better or for worse. On the one hand, it gained so much media attention that rap artists as a whole benefited. On the other, for many who are unfamiliar with the history and diversity of rap music, gangsta rap became synonymous with the entire rap music industry. While rap had been somewhat successful before gangsta rap, ironically, it was the most controversial sub-genre that propelled it into the mainstream and earned it heavy public scrutiny. To some, gangsta rap was the voice of alienated and marginalized Black youth who sought to bring public attention to the conditions of inner-city neighborhoods and gang violence (Watkins 2005). For others, gangsta rap was a clever marketing scheme that played on Whites’ fears of and fascination with the urban, racial “Other” and allowed them to vicariously experience and appropriate the exotic and dangerous (Watkins 2005). Whatever the case, gangsta rappers benefited and “emerged as an unlikely group of music makers who turned the blighted conditions of ghetto poverty into an oasis of adolescent fantasy and popular entertainment” (Watkins 2005:46).

By the turn of the century, rap music and hip hop culture were no longer solely the music and culture of disaffected inner-city Black youth. Rap music and hip hop culture were part of the mainstream and had reached youth and cultures across the world. In addition, rap music and hip hop culture had drawn the attention of diverse and powerful groups for its explicit language, depiction of violence and misogyny. For example, in the late 1980s, police departments across the U.S. had distributed the lyrics of the N.W.A. song, “Fuck Tha Police” to law enforcement officers and organizations, and many refused to offer security detail for N.W.A. concerts, thus forcing several to be

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3 Though it became generally associated with West Coast rappers with a history of involvement in the urban gang lifestyle, including drug and weapons trafficking, prostitution rings, and neighborhood urban warfare, it began in the urban ghettos of New York and Philadelphia in the late 1980s (Watkins 2005).
canceled (Chang 2005). For shows that had not been canceled, police were a heavy presence. In Detroit, police converged on the stage and forced the group to flee as the audience repeatedly shouted “Fuck the police.” Federal agents often stopped their tour buses and searched for drugs, accusing members of using their rap group as a front to further their gang-supported drug trade, despite nothing ever being found (Chang 2005). The FBI even wrote a letter to N.W.A.’s record label, Priority Records, noting their concerns about the song and warning against future production of anti-authority and violent songs (Chang 2005; Watkins 2005).

Many civil rights leaders and feminist groups began to take note of rap music, particularly gangsta rap. C. Delores Tucker, who helped to found the National Political Congress of Black Women (NPCBW) and later became the chairperson of the Democratic National Committee’s Black Caucus, took up a fight against gangsta rap in 1993. She lashed out at the music industry and corporate executives for the images of Black women and violence they were disseminating. She gained the support of both conservatives and liberals and along with Senator Carol Mosely Braun organized a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing in 1994 on gangsta rap, an inquiry into “the effects of violent and demeaning imagery in popular music on American youth” (Chang 2005:452). However, Tucker’s inquest became more of a forum for government officials calling for strengthening youth crime laws and, for all intents and purposes, broadening what Chang (2005) has called the War on Youth, or the culture war between civil rights elders and leaders and youths of color.

The hearing sought neither to understand the reason for the nihilistic violence and misogyny of rap music nor to solve problems that fostered the deteriorating conditions of the inner-city and the rise of gang violence. It merely sought to contain and control the ideas, music and culture of inner-city Black youth. It failed (Chang 2005). The Youth Task Force, a primarily environmental justice group organized by civil rights activist Angela Brown, organized their own fora to creatively critique, and yet support, rap music and hip hop culture (Chang 2005). And, gangsta rappers continued to sell platinum album after album.

Gangsta rap even became popular among my friends, particularly my male friends, at my small liberal arts college in the mid-1990s. I had not really paid that much
attention to the actual lyrics until I began to conduct my research. One reason I had not
paid much attention to the lyrics of gangsta rap is that the music behind the rapping was
so infectious, danceable, and catchy, the kind that “gets stuck in your head.” As Watkins
(2005:50) notes

... the danceable grooves and hummable hooks that made Death Row’s [the
record label of many gangsta rappers, including N.W.A.] music a favorite among
radio programmers also smoothed over the deeply ingrained misogyny and sexual
violence that throbbed throughout the music.

After breaking through the “danceable grooves and hummable hooks” and actually
listening to the lyrics, I found that gangsta rap was often misogynistic, degrading toward
women, and it sometimes described acts of physical and sexual violence against women.
In addition, music videos of rap singles shown on MTV and BET, among other music
video channels, depicted Black female bodies as nameless and faceless sexual objects
often when lyrics have little to do with women or sexuality (Emerson 2002). After
honning my sociological imagination and skills especially with regards to gender and race
in graduate school, I took a new direction in analyzing rap music lyrics, which is
represented by this study. The next section provides an overview of women as subjects
and objects of rap music and hip-hop culture.

**Women and Rap Music**

What are rappers saying about women in their songs? Because rap music has
become so culturally pervasive and has been the subject of many public and recent
debates about Black women, sexuality and sexual violence, it is useful to investigate and
analyze the representations of women in rap music. Some contemporary scholarship and
research has found that hip hop culture and rap music actually influence how young
urban and Black youth understand themselves, society, and neighborhoods in which they
live and how they interact with one another (Arnett Ferguson 2000; Keyes 2002; Kitwana
2002; Patillo-McCoy 1999; Wingood, et al. 2003). While many point to a select number
of songs that are particularly violent and misogynistic, predominantly gangsta rap songs,
there has been little to no systematic analysis of the portrayal of African American
women in rap lyrics. It is easy to find rap lyrics that are demeaning toward women. My
dissertation ascertains the prevalence and types of representations of women in lyrics and speculates on their social, cultural and political significance.

My analysis of rap music lyrics focuses on images of women and how they reproduce and/or resist dominant ideologies of gender, race, class and sexuality. Until recently and with few exceptions (see for example Berry 1994; Forman 1994; Gaunt 2003; Haugen 1999; Keyes 2004; Morgan 1999; Porter 2001; Pough 2004; Roberts 1994, 1996; Rose 1991, 1994), most research paid scant attention to women and the gender and sexual politics in rap music and hip-hop culture. In addition, many historical accounts ignored or erased the contributions and skills of Black women (rappers) to rap music and hip-hop culture (Pough 2004; Rose 1991).

One reason for the omission of women in hip-hop scholarship is that the rap music industry is hypermasculine, phallocentric and male-dominated, according to Neal (2004c). Because many consider rap to be highly aggressive and ultra-masculine, some men rappers and music industry executives believe women are incapable of being skilled rappers or authentically “hardcore” (Pough 2004; Rose 1991, 1994).^4^ According to Rose (2004:292), “. . . social critics [such as Nelson George] who . . . [neglect] women rappers would probably claim that these women are in many ways just ‘one of the boys’.” The implication is that women rappers cannot be feminine and skilled rappers or that rappers who are feminine are unskilled. Despite male dominance in the industry, Gwendolyn Pough (2004) shows how women have been part of rap music and hip-hop culture from the beginning. Although there are fewer women rappers than men rappers, some women rappers have had a significant influence within and outside the rap music industry and hip-hop culture (Pough 2004; Rose 1994).

Previous research on Black women in rap music and hip-hop culture either emphasize sexism, misogyny and the reproduction of dominant ideologies about and stereotypes of Black women or overstate Black women artists’ resistance to sexism and misogyny and rejection of dominant ideologies (see Chapter 2 for an explanation of dominant ideologies about Black women). For example, Joan Morgan (1999:72), a self-

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^4^ Queen Latifah’s song “Ladies First” is one example of how women rappers challenge beliefs that Black women cannot rap. She raps, “Some think that we can’t flow [rap] (can’t flow). Stereotypes they got to go (got to go). I’m gonna mess around and flip the scene into reverse. With what? With a little touch of ladies first.”
described “hip-hop feminist,” notes the sexism of many rappers and asks why women’s denigration makes men feel more “like men.” She writes:

My decision to expose myself to the sexism of Dr. Dre, Ice Cube, Snoop Dogg, or the Notorious B.I.G. [successful gangsta rappers and producers] is really my plea to my brothers to tell me who they are. I need to know why they are so angry at me. Why is disrespecting me one of the few things that make them feel like men? . . . As a black woman and a feminist, I listen to the music with a willingness to see past the machismo in order to be clear about what I’m really dealing with. What I hear frightens me.

She acknowledges that there are women of what she calls the “hip-hop generation” who are willing to participate in their own subordination by, for example, appearing in rap music videos that portray them as little more than sexual objects.

Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins (2004:82), hooks (1992), and Cole and Guy-Sheftall (2003) argue that rap music and hip-hop culture helps to spread misogyny, sexism and homophobia within the African American community. They suggest that men rappers denigrate Black women when they call and treat women as “hos,” “bitches,” “skeezers,” “chickenheads,” and “gold diggers.” The cavalier reference to (sexual) violence, the categorization of Black women as sexual freaks and manipulative bitches and the valorization of men’s sexual conquests in rap music negatively affects how young Black women and men understand and treat one another. According to Collins (2004), the gender and sexual politics in hip-hop culture negatively affects heterosexual love relationships, creating mistrust between Black men and women who accuse one another for systemic unemployment, inferior education and housing, and other problems associated with urban poverty. Like Morgan, Collins (2004:129) underscores that it is not just men rappers who reproduce sexualized and objectified images, or what she calls “controlling images,” of Black women. Some women rappers, such as Lil’ Kim, and Black women who clamor for the “video ho” roles in rap videos, also objectify “. . . their own bodies in order to be accepted within this Black male-controlled universe.”

Other scholars highlight women rap and hip-hop artists who in various ways reject sexism and misogyny in rap music and/or present themselves as sexually independent and free agents rather than as objects. Pough (2004) emphasizes rap music
and hip-hop culture as important sites where African Americans “bring wreck” to or upset dominant race, class and gender ideologies and negative images or stereotypes. Rappers and Pough (2004:17) use the phrase “bringing wreck” to characterize how Blacks continue to fight racism, boast about their talents and skills, and recreate and define themselves to transform dominant conceptions in order to be seen and heard as productive and valuable members of society. She also argues that women rappers “bring wreck” to dominant stereotypes and ideologies about Black women and their sexuality and their marginalization both within society and the rap music industry. Specifically, she cites women rappers who were popular in the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as Queen Latifah, Salt-N-Pepa, and MC Lyte, who challenge and respond to male rappers’ characterization of women as “bitches” and “hos” in their song lyrics. Other popular women hip-hop artists, songwriters and producers of the mid- to late-1990s, such as Erykah Badu, Missy “Misdemeanor” Elliot, and Lauryn Hill (a member of the rap group The Fugees and solo artist) present themselves as “independent, strong, and self-reliant agents of their own desire, the masters of their own destiny” (Emerson 2002:116).

However, Pough (2004:11) also recognizes the misogyny in much of hip-hop culture and says “. . . the culture inhibits [Black girls’] growth, denigrates Black womanhood, and endangers the lives of young Black girls . . . .”

Rose (1991, 1994) shows how women rappers maintain a critical dialogue with men rappers and audiences about sexuality, heterosexual relationships, and hegemonic—western and White—notions of feminine beauty. She argues that many women rappers in their music videos and song lyrics emphasize their financial and sexual independence and, less frequently, their (sexual) dominance of men. Rose (1994:147) identifies “three central themes” in women’s rap music: “heterosexual courtship, the importance of the female voice, and mastery in women’s rap and black female public displays of physical and sexual freedom.” Pough (2004) and Rose (1994) call attention to women rappers who challenge hegemonic ideas about Black women and the western (White) feminism

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5 Some rap groups even refer to themselves as “wrecking crews” (Pough 2004:15). In addition, Queen Latifah raps, “Check it, dig it, while I rip it. Check it while I wreck it . . . I’m ready to set it off again. Wanna bet I can wreck you and your next of kin . . . Attacking with my tactics, I’m loaded like a full-metal jacket . . . The suckas know my name is sitting on the tips of their brains, but they shame, they scared to face me, yet they wanna disgrace me, erase me. They must be freaking crazy” (“Black Hand Side”).
that largely excludes women of color’s and working-class women’s concerns. Rose (1994) says that some women rappers see western (White) feminism as “anti-men.” Although they may convey their dissatisfaction with men in songs or elsewhere, they do not want to align themselves with a movement that undermines the common interests and struggles of Black women and men. Thus, some Black women rappers assert their independence (from men) and yet seek companionship and alliance with Black men (against racism). Black women rappers’ reservations about feminism are reflections of their “. . . status as black women, which places them in a contradictory position vis-à-vis black men in a racist society” (Rose 1994:177).

This study shows that representations of women in rap music lyrics are complicated and often contradictory. Emerson (2002) finds the same to be true of representations of Black women in music videos in various music genres. Some rappers, men and women alike, appropriate ideologies and negative stereotypes of Black women, including their sexuality. Others, however, do not. Some rap music lyrics challenge dominant race and gender ideologies, and other lyrics represent “pariah femininities” (see below) that stigmatize and disparage women who enact them (Schippers 2007). In some cases, individual rappers do all (or none) of the above in different songs or even within the same song. I turn now to a literature review on gender as an institution and the intersectionality of gender, race, class and sexuality to set a context for analyzing representations of Black women in rap music lyrics (Chapters 4 and 5).

Gender as an Institution and the Intersections of Gender, Race, Class and Sexuality

In this dissertation, gender is conceived of as an institution (Martin 2004, 2006; Lorber 1994). Understanding gender as an institution focuses attention on organized and embodied practices—the doings of people and collective groups in interaction with one

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6 Rose (1994) interviews several women rappers, MC Lyte, Queen Latifah, and Salt, who express their reservations about self-identifying as feminist. Rose (1994:176) writes “I would say that a feminist believed that there was sexism in society, wanted to change and worked toward change. Either wrote, spoke, or behaved in a way that was pro-woman, in that she supported situations (organizations) that were trying to better the lives of women. A feminist feels that women are more disadvantaged than men in many situations and would want to stop that kind of inequality.” When presented with this definition, MC Lyte responds, “Under your definition, I would say I am [a feminist].” Queen Latifah expresses the most reservations about labeling herself a feminist and prefers to self-identify as pro-woman, and Salt accepts the term feminism but with certain limitations, “not in a strong sense where I’d want to go to war or anything like that.”
another that continuously reproduce and/or change gender relations (Martin 2004). Gender scholars note that people “do” and/or “practice” gender (Acker 1990, 1992; Connell 1987, 1995 and with Messerschmidt 2005; Kondo 1990; Leidner 1991; Lorber 1994; Martin 2003, 2006; Schippers 2002; Thorne 1993; West and Fenstermaker 1995; West and Zimmerman 1987). There are differences, however, in how gender scholars characterize gender, gendered practices, or what Martin (2003, 2006) calls “gendering practices.” Acker (1992), for example, sees gendered practices as embedded in other social institutions—primarily, but not exclusively, the family and capitalist economy—creating what she calls “gendered institutions.” Risman (1998, 2004) conceptualizes gender as a social structure that operates on three analytical levels—the individual, interactional and institutional. Gender as a social structure, according to Risman (1998:28), “is deeply embedded [in society] as a basis for stratification, differentiating opportunities and constraints.” Lorber (1994) and Martin (2004) define gender as a social institution alongside, working in-between and interdependent with what have traditionally been defined as social institutions, such as the family, economy, religion, media and polity.

Inherent in Acker, Lorber, Martin and Risman’s conceptualizations of gender is a focus on the dialectical relationship between structures and institutions and agency (Andersen 2005). The social practices of embodied agents actively (re)create social structures and institutions, including gender, and the social structures and institutions they (re)create frame, limit and enable opportunities for practicing, acting, and/or doing. For example, Martin’s (2003:354) distinction between “gendering practices” and “practicing gender” captures how gender is both institutionalized and dynamically exercised. The gender institution provides possible actions, or “gendering practices,” to be taken up or rejected by men and women that are tacitly recognized as “being manly” or “being womanly.” “Practicing gender,” or “practicing femininity” and “practicing masculinity,” refers to the active gendered doings of people, “the literal event,” and/or “the means by which the gender order [or institution] is constituted.” Social structures

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7 This emphasis on embodied practice counters postmodern claims that masculinity and femininity are merely discourses or symbolic only. Masculinity and femininity have no meaning outside the actual doings and interactions of physical bodies in the concrete social world (Connell 1995; Martin 1998).
and institutions give meaning to practices, actions, and/or doings so that they “make sense” to individuals and those with whom they interact.

Central to the gender institution are: 1) “power differentials” between men and women; 2) gendered norms accompanied by “particular expectations”; 3) recurrent “gendering practices” of “embodied agents” that are often “inconsistent, contradictory, and rife with conflict”; and 4) a gender ideology that justifies gender “arrangements, [institutional] practices, and social relations” and is “widely known” and “generally believed” (Martin 2004:1256-7). The mass media is also a social institution through which gender ideology is disseminated, reproduced and contested (Collins 2004). Popular culture constitutes an arena in which ideologies are represented in and through “symbolic practices” (Connell 1995:72). I examine how dominant ideologies, including ideas about gender, race, class and sexuality, are reproduced and contested in the medium of rap music (lyrics) regarding representations of Black women.

Scholarship on gender, race, and class as intersecting and “mutually constructing systems of power” and inequality also shapes my analysis (Collins 2004:11). Collins (1998, 2000, 2004) and Andersen (2005) characterize the stratification system as a matrix of domination in which gender, race, and class (as well as sexuality, age, ethnicity, ability, nationality, etc.) constitute intersecting axes of domination and subordination. Baca Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotolo, and Messner (2000) characterize the stratification system as a prism through which gender is structured and ordered to produce an array, or spectrum, of gendered practices. Connell (1995:75) adds that gender “is unavoidably involved with other social structures. It is now common to say that gender ‘intersects’—better, interacts—with race and class.” And, Martin (2004:1266) points out that the gender institution links “to other institutions including . . . race/ethnicity, social, class, heterosexuality/sexuality and age, among others.”

These gender scholars highlight the intersection, interaction, relation, and/or interdependence of gender, race, class, and sexuality—among other forms of social stratification—in (re)producing power relations and inequality and structuring relationships between groups and individuals. The metaphors characterizing the interaction of multiple systems of power and inequality differ; but all call for moving beyond mere “difference” and reject the idea that gender, race and class are separate and
isolated systems of power and inequality (Andersen 2005). Thus, it is impossible to talk about the gender institution and the associated practices of masculinity and femininity apart from other social structures, particularly, but not limited to, race, social class and sexuality.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Pariah Femininities

Masculinity and femininity are the result of persistent, recurring and ordered social practices that comprise and uphold the gender institution (Martin 2003, 2004; Connell 1987, 1995). Connell (1995:72) conceives of masculinity and femininity as “gender projects,” implying that people must actively work to (re)produce masculinity and femininity. Masculinity and femininity are not individual attributes or types of people but are sets of characteristics or qualities that are generally recognized as masculine or feminine (Schippers 2007). Masculinity and femininity are relational and socially constructed (Andersen 2005; Baca Zinn and Dill 1996; Collins 2000, 2004; Connell 1987, 1995, 2000; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Schippers 2007). That is, masculinity only has meaning alongside femininity that defines what masculinity is not, and what is considered masculine or feminine varies over time and space.

People (can) engage in masculine and feminine practices in ways that (re)produce or destabilize the gender institution (Lorber 1994, 1999; Butler 1990, 1993; Martin 2003). In addition, men and women may (and do) engage in practices that are normatively “inappropriate” for their gender in ways that do not challenge or upset the gender institution (Lorber 1994). Men can enact feminine practices and women can enact masculine practices without losing their identities as men and women, although they may be socially ridiculed (see, for instance, Rupp and Taylor’s study of men who perform as drag queens in Key West 2003). In this way, men do not “possess” masculinity and women do not “possess” femininity. Rather, as Schippers (2007:86) says, people “. . . move through and produce masculinity [or femininity] by engaging in masculine [or feminine] practices.” Masculinity is not reducible to what “men do” or

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8 Martin (2003, 2006) also argues that people may or may not consciously or “reflexively” practice masculinity or femininity in accord with or in opposition to the gender institution.

9 For example, men may dress “in drag” and practice “femininity” without upsetting the gender institution that prescribes that there are two and only two genders. In our society, “drag queens” are considered “really men underneath” their dress and practices.
what “men are” and femininity is not reducible to what “women do” or what “women are” (Connell 1995; Schippers 2007). To essentialize masculinity and femininity denies that women can act “masculine” and men can act “feminine” and that there is considerable variation in how men as a group and women as a group practice gender.

Gender scholars generally concur that the contemporary gender institution in Western industrialized and patriarchal nations benefits masculinity and men and subordinates femininity and women. However, Connell (1987, 1995, 2005 and with Messerschmidt 2005) reminds us that not all masculine practices are equally valued and/or uphold patriarchy. Some men’s practices do not reproduce men’s dominance while some do (Anderson 2002; Bird 1996; Chen 1999; Connell 1995; Hennen 2005; Schippers 2007; Schrock and Padavic 2007). Men’s dominance in a patriarchal society is accomplished through the practice of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987, 1995, 2005 and with Messerschmidt 2005; Schippers 2007; Yeung, Stombler, and Wharton 2006).

Hegemonic masculinity is not an attribute of particular kinds of men nor a static and/or universal set of practices. Connell (1995:76) says, “It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable.” In other words, the practice of hegemonic masculinity is that which is dominant in a particular society at a particular point in time (Martin 1998).

To an extent, all men are privileged in a society in which men are dominant, even though many men do not practice hegemonic masculinity or do not do so at all times and places (Bird 1996; Connell 1995; Schippers 2007). Hegemonic masculinity is fundamentally about demonstrating difference from, and superiority over, women or anything deemed “feminine.” Connell (1987, 1995) sees hegemonic masculinity as socially constructed in contrast to femininity and in relation to multiple subordinate and marginalized masculinities. According to Connell (1995), in contemporary Western industrialized societies, subordinate/marginalized masculinities (may) include but are not limited to some practices of racial/ethnic minority men, homosexual/non-heterosexual men, and/or working-class men.¹⁰

¹⁰To Connell (1995:78), the subordination of homosexual masculinities is one of the, if not the, most fundamental inequalities between different groups of men. He says, “Oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men. Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity . . .”
One limitation of Connell’s theory of hegemonic and subordinate/marginalized masculinities is his failure to offer concrete criteria for determining which of men’s practices are hegemonic or subordinate/marginalized in the contemporary gender institution. If hegemonic masculinity is a “configuration of practice” that is dominant at a particular place and time and is not reducible to what White heterosexual middle- and upper-class men actually do, it stands to reason that any man (or woman for that matter) may embody hegemonic masculinity (Martin 1998; Schippers 2007). In addition, Connell contends that subordinate masculinities are often confounded with feminine practice(s). In this theoretical framework, Schippers (2007:88) says “. . we are left with no conceptual apparatus with which to distinguish femininity from subordinate masculinities unless we reduce femininity to the practices of women and masculinity to those of men . . . .”

A similar problem applies to how Connell (1995:76) conceptualizes marginalized masculinities that result from the interaction of masculinity with race/ethnicity and class. He warns that we must use care not to characterize multiple masculinities as personality types or suggest that there is “a black masculinity or a working-class masculinity.” As Schippers (2007) notes, despite Connell’s advisement, it is difficult to differentiate in his theoretical model the “configuration of practice(s)” of marginalized masculinities from the actual men or groups of men who enact them. Just as masculinity in general cannot be reduced to what “men do,” Black masculinity cannot be reduced to what “Black men do.” For instance, in the U.S., there is the idea that some White men (can) “act like Black men,” even though to many it may be a disingenuous “act.”

Collins (2004:193) implies that Black men cannot by definition fully embody hegemonic masculinity because, in her estimation, “Whiteness” is requisite. She says, The best that Black men can do is to achieve an “honorary” membership within hegemonic masculinity by achieving great wealth, marrying the most desirable women (White), expressing aggression in socially sanctioned arenas (primarily as athletes, through the military, or law enforcement), and avoiding suggestions of homosexual bonding. But, if brute body strength, physical aggression, wealth accumulation and competitiveness are qualities of hegemonic masculinity, then many Black men—for
example, professional athletes as Collins suggests—also embody hegemonic masculinity. Collins (2004:199) says the same of Black women and hegemonic femininity. She says, “Black women, by definition, cannot achieve the idealized feminine ideal [i.e., hegemonic femininity] because the fact of Blackness excludes them.” Collins’ formulation is limited, too, in conflating hegemonic masculinity/femininity with what heterosexual, middle- or upper-class White men/women do. In addition, when Connell and Collins link hegemonic masculinity to “heterosexual, middle-class, and white status . . . male dominance falls through the conceptual cracks when considering groups whose members are not white and middle class” (Schippers 2007:88). Although Black men may practice marginalized masculinities, many still “do dominance” or embody practices that subordinate (Black) women and thus, in this respect, are engaging in a form of hegemonic masculinity—that dominates women. The question remains as to how to distinguish between the “configurations of practice” of hegemonic and subordinate/marginalized masculinities.

Connell (1987:184-5) says femininity is not and/or cannot be hegemonic because of women’s subordination to men in patriarchal societies. He recognizes that various femininities exist and favors the term *emphasized femininities* for feminine practices that are complicit in the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity and the subordination of women through “. . . accommodating the interests and desires of men.” Other femininities, he argues, defy, resist or refrain from accommodating hegemonic masculinity. Still others are complex and contradictory “. . . combinations of compliance, resistance and cooperation.”

Gender scholars continue to develop, theorize, utilize, and critique the concepts hegemonic masculinity and subordinate/marginalized masculinities (Schippers 2007), albeit often in inconsistent and contradictory ways (Martin 1998). The concepts of hegemonic *femininity* and subordinate/marginalized *femininities*, however, remain under-developed, -theorized, and –utilized (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Martin 1998; Pyke and Johnson 2003). Recently, however, Schippers (2007) has provided a comprehensive theoretical foundation for conceptualizing gender hegemony, hegemonic femininity and subordinate/marginalized femininities.

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See, for example Kimmel, Hearn and Connell (2005) and Kimmel and Messner (2007).
masculinity and hegemonic and marginalized femininities, or what she calls pariah femininities.

Schippers (2007:95) defines pariah femininities as a “set of characteristics” or “features” of hegemonic masculinity that when enacted by women are “stigmatized and sanctioned.” In other words, when women act like men and do dominance sexually, competitively, authoritatively, or otherwise, they are often penalized, denigrated, and cast as deviants, or pariahs. For example, if women sexually desire women, one of the main features of hegemonic masculinity, they are often called “dykes” and, in some contexts, treated as sexual deviants. If women engage in sexual practices with multiple partners, another feature of hegemonic masculinity in many local contexts, they are denigrated and called “sluts.” If women occupy authoritative positions, give orders, control the behavior of others, and/or are aggressive and competitive, they are stigmatized as “bitches.” Women who behave in these manners challenge hegemonic masculinity and are thus cast as pariahs.

In Schippers’ theory of gender hegemony, the hierarchical and complementary relationship between masculinity and femininity is the key to understanding hegemonic masculinity, hegemonic femininity and pariah femininities. Central to this hierarchical and complementary relationship in Western industrialized and patriarchal societies is the assumption of the “naturalness” of heterosexual desire or the “erotic attachment to difference” (Schippers 2007:90). Because Western industrialized societies are compulsorily heterosexual, Schippers argues, sexual desire for the feminine is considered characteristic of masculinity as sexual desire for the masculine is considered characteristic of femininity. Masculine sexuality—the penetrator—is constructed as dominant and complementary to feminine sexuality—the penetrated (Butler 1990; Schippers 2007; Segal 1994). According to Schippers, gender hegemony also relies on other qualities considered masculine, such as brute body strength, the use of strength in physical and/or violent acts, competitiveness and the exercise of power and influence in authoritative positions. These qualities provide justifications for men’s supremacy over women when coupled with lesser feminine qualities, such as physical weakness, the incapacity to use violence (successfully), cooperativeness, being too emotional, obedience, powerlessness, and/or helplessness.
Schippers (2007:90-2) locates the hegemonic significance of masculinity and femininity in the “... idealized quality content of the categories ‘man’ and ‘woman’...” Schippers conceptualizes masculinity and femininity not as “configurations of practice” but rather as “sets of meanings” or “qualities” that are produced through and frame gendering practices and provide justifications for the gender order within a particular context, group or society. Unlike postmodern claims that relegate masculinity and femininity to the realm of the symbolic (or discourse) only, Schippers regards embodied practice as essential to the reproduction of symbolic meanings associated with masculinity and femininity. Here, she decouples “... sets of meanings for what women and men are and should be (masculinity and femininity)” from the “mechanism (social practice) by which these meanings come to shape, influence, and transform social structure.” In Schippers’ definition, masculinity and femininity are broadly understood and believed configurations of meaning—i.e. what it means to be “manly” or “womanly”—that justify the gender institution and inequality and enable/limit practice. In this way, men can act “womanly” and women can act “manly” without disrupting the hierarchical relationship valuing masculinity over femininity.

Schippers (2007:94) says that “hierarchical configurations of masculinities and femininities” are not the result of “... their difference from and inferiority to hegemonic masculinity as Connell suggests, but instead against the idealized relationship between masculinity and femininity.” The idealized relationship in Western patriarchal societies privileges masculinity over femininity. Schippers defines hegemonic masculinity as,

... the qualities defined as manly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to femininity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.

Unlike Connell, Schippers says femininity is/can also be hegemonic. She defines hegemonic femininity as,

... the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.
In Schippers’ model, hegemonic femininity results from practices that complement hegemonic masculinity and reproduce women’s subordinate position in relation to men. When women “do femininity” in ways that support men’s dominance—that is, doing submissiveness, compliance, passive heterosexuality, etc.—they are also complicit in the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity and the maintenance of the gender institution. In Schippers theory of gender hegemony, hegemonic femininity is favored over pariah femininities.

When women challenge gender hegemony or do gender in ways that do not support the idealized and hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity, they are often marginalized, stigmatized and/or sanctioned. One way, Schipers (2007:95) says, women (may) do this is to embody the qualities of hegemonic masculinity—sexually desiring the feminine, being authoritative, using violence, and/or taking control and not being obedient sexually or otherwise. In Schippers’ model, femininities that take on the quality content of hegemonic masculinity are pariah femininities. She does not consider these femininities “subordinate” because they are not necessarily “. . . inferior, as contaminating to the [idealized] relationship between masculinity and femininity.” To Schippers, identifying the qualities of pariah femininities help reveal the distinct qualities of hegemonic masculinity in specific local contexts.

According to Schippers (2007:96), there are no “pariah masculinities” because men who embody femininity do not challenge the hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity. In other words, “. . . men’s homosexual desire and being weak and ineffectual are not symbolically constructed as problematic masculine characteristics; they are constructed as decidedly feminine.” And, the feminine is devalued, denigrated and disparaged in patriarchal societies. In addition, she argues that, in contrast to Connell’s position, there are no “subordinate masculinities” because there are no masculine qualities that upset the idealized and hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity. In her model, Connell’s “subordinate” masculinities are the product of men who “do” hegemonic femininity, or what she calls male femininities.12

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12 Because my study addresses representations of women only, I do not directly address male femininities.
An important feature of Schippers’ model for my study is its assertion that gender is culturally and contextually relative. Within any one society there can be multiple configurations of meaning that comprise hegemonic masculinity, hegemonic femininity and pariah femininities within particular local contexts. Schippers avoids Connell’s problem of conflating various masculinities and femininities with the gendering practices of racial/ethnic and working-class groups of men and women by not defining their practices as multiple masculinities and femininities. Instead, Schippers (2007:98) sees “. . . this variation as hegemonic masculinity and femininity refracted through race and class difference.”

Other gender scholars (cf. Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Dellinger 2004; Schrock and Padavic 2007; Skelton 1997; Schippers 2002) also argue that the qualities of hegemonic masculinity are negotiated, constructed and (can) vary within local contexts and practices. For example, Schrock and Padavic (2007) show how men in Batterer Intervention Programs interactively construct and reassert features of hegemonic masculinity, specifically demands for deference, despite or in spite of program attempts to develop more egalitarian gender attitudes, beliefs, and actions in men’s relationships with women. Other research has examined local constructions of hegemonic masculinity in educational institutions (Skelton 1997), gender-charged work organizations, such as the workplace of a feminist magazine and a heterosexual pornographic magazine (Dellinger 2004), and an alternative hard rock sub-culture (Schippers 2002). I would also argue that hegemonic masculinity (and hegemonic femininity) may vary in local contexts ranging from counter-cultures, to the cultures of racial/ethnic minorities, to other music-associated sub-cultures, such as hip-hop culture, to sexual sub-cultures, and/or working-class cultures.

Various meanings of masculinity and femininity are not only culturally relative and refracted, they are also mutually constructive and depend on one another for meaning. The hegemonic masculinity and femininity of various racial/ethnic minorities and/or working-class cultures (may) differ from the hegemonic masculinity and femininity of White middle-class culture. However, the racial/ethnic and social class differences in the meanings of masculinity and femininity are often used to legitimate the
“naturalness” and “rightness” of mainstream, White middle-class gender hegemony and racial/ethnic and class subordination. According to Schippers (2007:100),

Gender hegemony benefits from race and class hegemony when the gender practices of subordinate race and class groups are defined as problematic or deviant in order to reify and legitimate the ideal quality content for femininity and masculinity.

For example, according to Collins (2000, 2004), the prevailing Black gender ideology of “weak men” and “strong women,” has historically been used to justify African Americans’ subordinate position in U.S. society (see Chapter 2). When African American women and men fail to accomplish “normal” (White middle-class) gender arrangements—the male provider/female homemaker—and more importantly, when Black men fail to establish patriarchy, Black men use other masculine qualities to assert their dominance of women, particularly by using misogynistic discourse and violence. One form of misogynistic discourse, I suggest, is rap music lyrics that denigrate women and anything considered feminine. Other research also finds that men are more likely to use violence against women when they are made to feel vulnerable or their sense of masculinity is threatened (Anderson and Umberson 2001; Atkinson, Greenstein, and Lang 2005; Shrock and Padavic 2007).

Schippers also alleges that masculinities and femininities that do not reproduce men’s dominance and women’s subordination and are not stigmatized in particular local contexts are alternative femininities and masculinities.¹³ This allows for the possibility that femininities of racial/ethnic minorities or working-class women may actually bring advantages to women rather than subordinate them (in their relations to/with men) in ways that are not available to or discouraged for White middle- or upper-class women (Collins 2000, 2004; Schippers 2007). I would add that there may be femininities and masculinities that not only reject the hierarchical and complementary relationship between masculinity and femininity but also actively challenge or resist that relationship in the broader society or in a particular cultural context—what I call resistant

masculinities and femininities. That is, some subcultures whose members do not follow and reject gender hegemony in mainstream culture do not necessarily disrupt the dominant gender order. Resistant masculinities and femininities actively challenge gender hegemony in mainstream culture (Lorber 2005). I now reflect on how these theoretical perspectives frame my study and what it can contribute to literature on these various perspectives.

Theoretical Perspectives and Research Contributions

These theoretical perspectives and concepts—gender as a social institution, the intersection of gender with race, class and sexuality as systems of power, and theories of hegemonic masculinity and pariah femininities—shape my analysis of rap music lyrics. I use them to shed light on how rap music lyrics reflect or challenge hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity, race, class and sexuality in hip-hop culture. The qualities or features of hegemonic masculinity and femininity in hip-hop culture differ in some ways from those of White mainstream middle-class culture. I explore the representation of (Black) women in rap music lyrics in order to show the qualities and practices, particularly sexual qualities and practices, that are considered to be feminine or womanly in rap music and hip-hop culture. I also show how these qualities and practices may differ from mainstream gender hegemony. I examine whether and how rap music lyrics construct a hierarchical and complementary relationship between (Black) masculinity and femininity. I also consider which feminine meanings and practices are treated as pariah femininities and point to the features of hegemonic masculinity in hip-hop culture and the broader African American community. Finally, I ask whether and how the gendering practices represented in rap music lyrics constitute resistant femininities (and resistant masculinities) in ways that challenge White, middle-class gender hegemony. In doing so, my aim is to reveal how rap music both reproduces and contests prevailing gender, race, class and sexual ideologies and social structures. This effort allows me to ponder the implications of rap music lyrics on U.S. popular culture and, in particular, the life experiences and identities of African American women.

I hope also to contribute to literature on rap music and hip-hop culture by providing an extensive and systematic analysis of representations of Black women who have largely been ignored in hip-hop scholarship. I hope too to add to literature on the
intersection of gender with other systems of power, particularly, race, class and sexuality. Finally, I hope my study illustrates and refines conceptions of hegemonic femininity, pariah femininities and alternative or resistant femininities.

**Overview of Dissertation Chapters**

This dissertation is organized as follows. Chapter 2 provides a historical account of rap music and hip-hop culture and places this history within the context of broader social changes and race, gender and class ideologies within the U.S. Chapter 3 describes the data and research methods of my study. Chapter 4 examines the representation of (Black) women as sexual freaks, prostitutes and bitches in rap music lyrics. Chapter 5 discusses the representation of (Black) women as mothers, lesbians, divas, sister saviors and earth mothers in rap music lyrics. Both Chapters 4 and 5 explore the differences in how men and women rappers present these characterizations of African American women in their lyrics. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the study’s key findings and reflects on how the analysis may contribute to theoretical understandings of gender, race, class, and sexuality, including intersections between them. It also addresses the implications of the findings for ideologies about and the identities of African American women in U.S society.
CHAPTER 2

PLACING RAP MUSIC AND HIP-HOP CULTURE IN CONTEXT: WILLIAM JULIUS WILSON AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SOCIAL CLASS AND PATRICIA HILL COLLINS AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RACE, SOCIAL CLASS, GENDER AND SEXUALITY

In this chapter, I examine the research and scholarship of African American sociologists William Julius Wilson and Patricia Hill Collins in explaining the persistence of African American poverty, disadvantage, and isolation in inner-city ghettos of U.S. major metropolitan cities. Wilson’s and Collins’ analyses are not competing perspectives and their differing intended audiences and aims guide their analyses of race relations and concentrated ghetto poverty. Wilson primarily aims to make social policy recommendations and directs his analyses toward social policy makers. His proposed strategies include but are not limited to “balanced economic growth” strategies (i.e., embracing policies that promoted economic growth not only in the upper tier of the labor market, but also in the lower-rungs of the economic ladder), job-skills training, “education-to-work” transitional programs, universal health care, equalizing and reforming public education, universal child care support and/or assistance, and “crime and drug abuse prevention” and treatment (Wilson 2004:159).

Collins characterizes her work as a “diagnostic project,” primarily aiming to raise questions among academics rather than providing answers about the complex relationship(s) between socio-historical ideologies about gender, race, class and sexuality and social structural changes over time. Wilson (1978, 1987, 1996) postulates that the changing structure in the economy and various social policies have resulted in a high rate of joblessness in inner-city communities, particularly among young Black men. He sees the loss of men’s jobs in urban centers as the central, though not the only, determinant in the persistence of inner-city social problems, such as the rise in female-headed families and crime. By contrast, Collins (2000, 2004) argues that race, class, gender and sexual ideologies have shaped representations of Black femininity and masculinity and have been used as powerful justifications for the subordination of people of African descent in
the U.S. and elsewhere across the globe. To Collins, these ideologies as well as broader economic changes and social policies have been constitutive of its racist past and the new “colorblind” racism of the present.

First, I focus on placing the emergence of rap music and hip-hop culture in the context of broader historical, social, economic and political changes that resulted in the concentration of urban ghetto poverty. Then, I turn to William Julius Wilson’s structural argument that social class is increasing in significance while race is decreasing in significance in determining life chances and outcomes. Next, I explore Patricia Hill Collins’ socio-historical analysis of race, gender, class and sexual ideologies represented in images of Black women (and men). Finally, I provide a historical account of the origins of U.S. hip-hop culture and rap music, note women’s participation in early hip-hop culture, and discuss “gangsta rap” as the subgenre of rap music that propelled it into the mainstream of the music industry and the broader culture.

**The Emergence of Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture in the U.S. Urban Context**

The emergence of rap music and hip-hop culture is linked with larger structural, economic and political processes that resulted in the growth of poor inner-city neighborhoods predominantly inhabited by people of color in the U.S. (Chang 2005; Rose 1994; Watkins 2005). Economic changes, migration patterns, and government policies that were in progress well before the dawn of the Civil Rights movement shaped the concentration of urban blight, poverty, and racial inequality that came to characterize American central cities (Katz 2002; Wilson 1987, 1996). By the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s, the resolve and optimism of the Civil Rights movement had significantly dwindled (Chang 2005). Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X had been murdered. The country had turned its attention to the atrocities of the Vietnam War. And, the social policies and economic re-structuring that had begun several decades ago resulted in the concentration of poverty in the urban ghettos of America’s central cities (Katz 2002; Wilson 1987, 1996). Some of the features of racial and economic inequality in many inner-city neighborhoods include the decrease of job opportunities in inner city poverty-tract areas and the increase of “jobless ghettos” (Wilson 1987, 1996), racial disparities in wages and assets (Oliver and Shapiro 1995), persistent residential disparity and segregation (Massey and Denton 1993), and overt and institutional discrimination in law.
enforcement (Hacker 1992; Wilson 1987), work institutions (Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991; Moss and Tilly 2001; Newman 1999; Wilson 1996), education (Condron 2007; Hallinan 2001; Kozol 1992; Roscigno 1998; Walters 2001), and services such as health care (Smith 1999).

In many ways, these trends have either persisted or worsened since the 1970s. There continue to be large disparities in wealth between African American and White families (Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Shapiro 2004). These disparities are largely the result of cumulative disadvantages to African Americans from past discrimination and racially exclusive federal policies. Policies such as the GI Bill, VHA and FHA mortgage guarantees gave low-interest mortgage loans to White suburbanites and redlined central city minority neighborhoods after World War II. These social policies allowed Whites to accumulate wealth largely in the form of home equity and denied these same opportunities to minorities in central cities (Duster 1988; Herbold 1994; Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Shapiro 2004; Wiese 2002).

Economic restructuring, in particular deindustrialization and the transformation of a manufacturing to a predominately information- and service-oriented economy, and various social policies that had begun well before the 1970s had firmly taken hold of and permanently changed the face of American cities by the end of the 1960s (Katz 2002; Wilson 1996). These massive transformations resulted in the movement of the majority of affluent Whites and the few businesses that were left after the demise of the manufacturing sector away from urban centers, taking with them the tax base that sustained cities’ infrastructures, social programs, and cultural institutions (Wilson 1987, 1996). Despite, or perhaps because of, these rapid social and economic changes and lack of financial and social support for mainstream outlets for creativity, youth created their own entertainment and styles, a hip-hop culture, that crafted “new identities, explosive art forms, and later, whole industries” (Watkins 2005:9).

Current forms of institutional racism and discrimination also contribute to the concentration of urban ghetto poverty and result in many racial and ethnic disparities in housing, education, health and crime. Many poor inner-city Black and minority youth face growing up in homes that do not meet basic public safety codes in racially segregated neighborhoods with little to no connection to the formal labor market (Massey
Despite the passage of the Fair Housing Act, mortgage loan and real estate companies continue to discriminate against African American home buyers, resulting in an entrenched residential segregation (Bond and Williams 2007; Crowder, South, and Chavez 2006; Haynes 2001; Iceland and Wilkes 2006; Massey 2001; Williams, Nesiba, and McConnell 2005). Poor minority neighborhoods are also more likely to be located near some of the nation’s most hazardous waste sites (Mohai and Saha 2007). Inner-city infants are often born with various health conditions because of the lack of prenatal care and toxic home environments and there continues to be a large health gap between U.S.-born African Americans and Whites (Echevarria and Frisbie 2001; Read and Emerson 2005). Infant mortality rates in inner-city neighborhoods are high and often rival those of some Third World countries (Hummer 1993; Hummer et al. 1999).

A majority of Black inner-city youth grow up in low-income families headed by single mothers (Cabrera, Hutchens and Peters 2006; Dickerson 1995; Dill 1998). They receive inferior educations at inferior schools or inferior programs within schools and continue to have lower educational outcomes when compared to their White and suburban counterparts (Condron 2007; Hallinan 2001; Kozol 1992; Roscigno 1998; Walters 2001). And, there are often few prospects for gainful employment with a living wage if and when they graduate from high school (Newman 1999; Wilson 1996). Many employers continue to discriminate against applicants based on their race (Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991; Wilson 1996). As a result, crime, drug use and distribution, gang activity, and general social disorganization are rampant in these neighborhoods (Wilson 1996). Moreover, once a person has a criminal record, it is very difficult for him or her to subsequently secure employment (Pager 2003).

Many inner-city youth see little hope for the future. With little trust in law enforcement and the judicial system to protect residents and control violence and a lack of community-based organizations to help maintain social organization, some inner-city youth see gangs as an attractive option (Anderson 1990, 1999; Wilson 1996). This is the social context in which rap music and hip-hop culture emerged. As Rose (1994:34) states, “Hip hop culture emerged as a source for youth of alternative identity formation and social status in a community whose older local support institutions had been all but
While slavery, the overt racist policies and practices in the Jim Crow-era South, and segregation of African Americans in the North help explain disparities in life outcomes between African Americans and Whites, various scholars, including William Julius Wilson and Patricia Hill Collins, have proffered explanations of contemporary racial disparities between Blacks and Whites in the U.S.

**William Julius Wilson and the Significance of Social Class**

Wilson offers an explanation in *The Declining Significance of Race* (1978), alleging that social class now matters more than race for explaining the fate and life chances of young Black (and White) people (Cancio, Evans and Maume 1996; Morris 1996; Wilson 2004). In addition, Wilson (1987, 1996) postulates that broad economic and structural transformations and various social policies have resulted in a high rate of joblessness in inner-city communities, particularly among young Black men, resulting in a host of other urban social problems. Discrimination based on race matters more for older African Americans because it blocked entry into upper-sectors of the labor force and placed them at the bottom of seniority ladders (Cancio, Evans and Maume 1996; Morris 1996; Wilson 2004). By contrast, a sizeable portion of the younger African American population is at the bottom of the U.S.’s stratification system not because of racial discrimination, but because of their inferior (poor, disadvantaged, etc.) social class, he argues. As a result, their life outcomes are significantly hindered.

There are significant (racial) changes in the U.S. that seem to support Wilson’s (1978) argument. African Americans have gained footholds in managerial and professional occupations, in political institutions and legislative bodies, and in mainstream popular culture, especially in popular television series (Morris 1996). Wilson, himself, appears to be a product of these changes. He was the first full-time African American professor in the University of Chicago’s sociology department in 1972 (Morris 1996; Wilson 2004). In addition, some research had found that young educated African Americans had made significant gains in the labor force and closed the earnings gap between themselves and similarly-educated Whites (Freeman 1973; Featherman and Hauser 1976).

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14 For example, television shows such as *Good Times, Soul Train, The Flip Wilson Show,* and *Sanford and Son* were fairly popular television shows that featured and appealed primarily to African Americans.
Wilson does not deny that past racial discrimination negatively affects the plight of the urban Black poor (Wilson 2004). However, instead of overt and personal racism and discrimination, he argues that impersonal historical and structural changes in economic markets are largely responsible for the current concentration of urban ghetto poverty (Duster 1988; Morris 1996; Patillo-McCoy 1999; Wilson 2004). Deindustrialization, associated with larger relations of world economies and processes of globalization, account for part of the decrease in job opportunities, particularly manufacturing jobs, for those within the nation’s metropolitan inner-cities (Wilson 1978, 1987, 1996).

However, Wilson also suggests that political changes and social policies benefit and assist many middle-class African Americans in education and the labor market. The growth of the Black middle-class is the result of an increased emphasis on diversity in corporate America and federal affirmative action initiatives that had enhanced the opportunities of college-educated African Americans (Wilson 1978, 1987, 1996). According to Wilson (1987, 1996), these impersonal structural and political forces result in a dual and segmented labor market. Poor and inadequately educated African Americans (and other minorities) with few job skills appropriate for the new service and technology economy are trapped in the lowest sector of the economy—a proportion unemployed or employed in service jobs with low wages and little opportunity for advancement. Many in the Black middle class have attained corporate middle-management positions and a considerable proportion of Black middle-class employment is in federal, state and local government bureaucratic institutions (Wilson 2004). In Wilson’s analysis, “money whitens” and “... racism diminishes the further up the economic ladder African Americans climb” (Collins 2004:75). According to Wilson (1987), the poor urban African Americans trapped in the lowest sector of the economy constitute a new permanent social class in U.S. metropolitan areas – the Black “underclass,” or the truly disadvantaged.

Wilson (1987, 1996) addresses two competing perspectives about Black underclass culture. On the one hand, the culture of poverty thesis posits that the relative isolation and poverty of the Black underclass was the result of an enduring and pathological culture that deviates from the values and goals of mainstream society.
According to this thesis, the lack of a normative structure in which hard work, steady employment and commitment to family are valued causes the social disorganization, tenuous connections to the formal labor market, crime, the breakup of the two-parent nuclear family, and a host of other social problems in many minority inner-city neighborhoods (Wilson 1987; Wilson 2004).

On the other hand, an alternative “situational” perspective holds that poor urban African Americans do not have values and norms significantly different from those of middle-class White mainstream America. This perspective emphasizes that social isolation and economic marginalization impede poor Blacks’ ability to achieve mainstream goals unless they adopt socially unapproved means for doing so (Wilson 1987; Wilson 2004). In other words, members of the Black underclass share values of hard work and material wealth and prosperity, but lack opportunity structures in the formal labor market to realize those goals. So, they vary in their adaptations to the lack of opportunity structures. Some completely drop out of the formal labor market. Others turn to state assistance for subsistence. And, still others sell illicit drugs or become involved in other criminal enterprises.15 The lack of economic opportunities results in what “looks like” a lack of values – strains in interpersonal relationships, violence, drug abuse and addiction, and the dissolution of the two-parent nuclear family.

Wilson (1987, 1996) disputes some claims of the culture of poverty thesis. He does not agree that the culture of the Black underclass was enduring, long-term and pathological. At the same time, he does not dismiss the thesis altogether, claiming that there is a culture among the Black underclass that is at odds with that of mainstream society. However, Wilson (1987) argues it is not “pathological.” It is a rational response to their structural position in society. He does not see this culture as something endemic to the population, and as such, could change given employment opportunities, education, and job-skills training (Wilson 1987, 1996; Wilson 2004).

In this formulation, culture is seen as an outcome of the social structure. In a sense, Wilson’s argument closely mirrored the “situational” perspective, but with one added dimension. He sees the culture of the Black underclass as a reaction to their structural position within society and largely the result of middle-class and non-poor

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15 This perspective partly emerged from Robert K. Merton’s (1968) strain theory of deviance.
working-class Blacks and Whites moving out of inner-city neighborhoods to the suburbs (Wilson 2004). According to Wilson (1987, 1996), the movement of middle-class families out of inner-city communities erodes the tax base and depletes the resources needed to sustain important African American community organizations, diminishes the integration of African Americans and their interests based on race, and removes middle-class “role models that served as a ‘social buffer’ to lower classes” (Wilson 2004:103). The Black underclass’ social isolation from mainstream society, as well as their weak ties to the labor market, are responsible for their “ghetto” culture (Wilson 1987, 1996). As a result, Wilson’s (1987, 1996) policy recommendations boil down to “more jobs,” particularly for young African American men, and universal social programs for everyone as well as variable need- and race-targeted affirmative action programs (Dill; 1997; Duster 1988; Wilson 1996; Wilson 2004). His public policy recommendations are robust and reflect a “macrosociological model of institutional and technological change” (Wilson 2004:159).

Many scholars are concerned with the implications of Wilson’s claim that race is declining in significance.\(^\text{16}\) They are also troubled by his overemphasis on the labor market and the economy, with scant, if any, attention to other institutions and social issues, such as education, gender, politics, residential segregation and discrimination, and the criminal justice system, among others (Dill 1986, 1997; Feagin 1998; Morris 1996; Payne 1989; Willie 1979). Some scholars, such as Bonilla-Silva (2006), Collins (2000, 2004), Feagin (2000), Morris (1996), and Willie (1979, 1989), emphasize the importance of institutional racism and/or the new “color-blind” racism (defined shortly). Wilson largely conceptualizes discrimination as overt discriminatory acts by individual persons, particularly employers, leading him to conclude that contemporary discrimination is not a significant contributing factor to the development and maintenance of the Black underclass. These scholars charge that Wilson ignores the concept of and research on institutional racism which sees racism as primarily systemic and embedded in the institutions of society rather than as ideas contained in an individual’s head or individual

\(^{16}\) For Black scholarly critiques of Wilson’s work, see Clark (1980), Marret (1980), Payne (1979), Thomas (1979) and Willie (1979). There are also several White scholars who offer significant analysis and critiques of Wilson’s work. See for example, Pettigrew (1980) and Margolis (1979). In addition, Cornel West, a Black scholar and contemporary colleague of Wilson’s, wrote Race Matters in 1993 in part as a rejoinder to and reconsideration of the argument that race was declining in significance in the early 1990s.
practices of discrimination (Collins 2000; Feagin 2000; Morris 1996; Wilson 2004). Additionally, Willie (1979), Feagin (1991) and other researchers find that racial discrimination against middle-class African Americans persists even after the dismantling of *de jure* segregation and discrimination.

Other scholars concerned with gender, gender inequality, and poor minority women, such as Collins (2000, 2004), Dill (1989, 1997), Edin (2000), and Jarrett (1994) among others, critique Wilson’s work for virtually ignoring Black women in his analysis of the Black underclass (Wilson 2004). In particular, they point to his lack of adequate attention to African American women’s employment opportunities, or lack thereof, in the new technology and service economy and his oversimplified explanation for the rise in the number and proportion of single-parent families headed by Black women (Collins 2000; Dill 1997; Edin 2000; Jarrett 1994). He does not consider why certain jobs, such as manufacturing jobs that tend to pay higher wages and have better benefits, are “men’s jobs” and how urban Black women are often relegated to lower-paying service jobs with little room for advancement and few or no benefits.

In *When Work Disappears (WWD)*, however, Wilson (1996) does explore employment among women in inner-city Chicago neighborhoods. He finds that Black women are also considerably segregated from working, college-educated, and married people, often more so than men because of childcare responsibilities. In addition, in *WWD*, Wilson (1996) responds to critics who claim he ignores or downplays the significance of racial discrimination by surveying employer attitudes toward various groups in inner-city Chicago. He finds that employers still harbor negative views about Black workers, including women. However, he also finds that, in the main, employers favor Black women workers over Black men workers (Dill 1997).

Wilson’s attention to Black women’s (un)employment improves his previous analyses but does not fundamentally change his main argument that it is the loss of men’s jobs that has produced a majority of social problems in inner-city neighborhoods in Chicago and other major metropolitan areas. For example, he says that the loss of Black men’s jobs is linked to, although not the sole cause of, the rise of single-parent families headed by Black women. Significantly and a subject that I return to in Chapter 6, Wilson (1996:87) finds that in the mid-1990s,
Only one-quarter of the black families whose children live with them in inner-city neighborhoods in Chicago are husband-wife families today, compared with three-quarters of the inner-city Mexican families, more than one-half of the white families, and nearly one-half of the Puerto Rican families.

He sees single-parent families headed by women as problematic and significant in the perpetuation of urban Black poverty (Dill 1997). By implication, Wilson suggests that urban Black women and children’s poverty could be ameliorated through marriage to employed men. Although he argues for universal and race- and need-based social programs to assist all disadvantaged families, his main policy recommendations aim to address men’s joblessness. According to Dill (1997:420), Wilson “. . . fails to address the ways family life could be strengthened by eliminating barriers to employment for both women and men.”

In addition to his oversimplified explanation for the rise in female-headed Black families, Feagin (1998) says that Wilson ignores the role of racial ideologies historically and in contemporary U.S. social relations and structures in the reproduction of racial inequality. As noted previously, Wilson’s argument is structural, focusing on large transformations in global economies and the effect of those transformations on local inner-city labor markets and the suburbanization of job opportunities. Wilson primarily explains African Americans’ current status as the result of “market dynamics” or “natural fluctuations in the global economy” (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Feagin 1998:1130). Lost in Wilson’s structural analysis is the significance of racism, in particular racist ideology, in reproducing racial inequality and urban poverty among African Americans and other racial minorities (Feagin 1998; Omi and Winant 1994). In addition, Wilson fails to account for how race, gender, class and sexuality ideologies intersect. These ideologies have historically shaped and continue to shape U.S. social policies, facilitate the reproduction of race, gender, class, and sexual stratification, and are disseminated through global mass media (Collins 2004). In the next section, I examine Patricia Hill Collins’ analysis of the “new racism” and the intersectionality of race, gender, class and sexual ideologies.
Patricia Hill Collins and the Significance of Ideologies about and Intersections of Race, Gender, Class, and Sexuality

As noted, Wilson (1987, 1996) points to unemployment among young Black men as the preeminent factor resulting in and explaining the strained (heterosexual) relationships between young Black men and women and the dissolution of the two-parent family. Patricia Hill Collins (2000:244) does not deny that larger structural transformations in the global economy and local labor markets in central cities have had a significant impact on both urban Black poverty and relationships between Black women and men. She notes, “His [Wilson’s] work documents how the emergence of mother-child families among working-class African-Americans can be attributed in part to a changing political economy that disadvantaged U.S. Blacks.” However, Collins (2000, 2004) also sees representations of Black femininity and masculinity and ideas about Black sexuality throughout European and U.S. colonialist history and popular culture as significant and constitutive of the racist past and the “new racism” of the present. That is, racism and sexism cannot be understood apart from one another, she argues. Joblessness among young Black men contributes to the new contours of inequality and poverty in inner-cities. But, men’s unemployment alone cannot explain how the predominantly White hegemonic culture has defined and controlled “Black sexual politics” within and between other dimensions of power based on race, gender, class and sexuality, among others (Collins 2000, 2004).

Unlike Wilson who contends that racism and racial discrimination are less significant than in the past, Collins (1998, 2000, 2004) as well as other contemporary race scholars, such as Bonilla-Silva (2006), Feagin (1998, 2000, 2006), Gallagher (2003), and Guinier and Torres (2002), see racism as significant, although more covert than in the past. Collins (2004) identifies three features specific to the new racism in the post-civil rights United States and elsewhere in the world. Like Wilson, Collins argues that transformations in global capitalist market relations have contributed to the concentration of Black urban poverty in the United States and the exploitation and subordination of people of African descent and other people of color transnationally. People of color are

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17 Collins (2004:349) defines Black sexual politics as “a set of ideas and social practices shaped by gender, race, and sexuality that frame Black men and women’s treatment of one another as well as how African Americans are perceived and treated by others.”
consistently at the bottom of income and wealth distributions across the globe. Collins (2004:33) says, “First, new forms of global capitalism frame the new racism.” Global capitalism is as old as European colonialists’ first travels to Africa and the African slave trade. Contemporary global capitalism is characterized by the concentration of wealth, capital and power in the owners and stockholders of relatively few transnational corporations. Contemporary global capitalism is not, however, the result of impersonal, naturally occurring “market dynamics.” Owners and investors make decisions to transport capital to local economies where labor and land are inexpensive, labor is easily exploited, and government regulation is ineffectual or non-existent (Feagin 1998; Collins 2004). When capital is moved globally, people of color in the U.S. and elsewhere are disproportionately affected locally through the loss of jobs and the resulting disinvestment in minority neighborhoods (Collins 2004; Rose 1994; Wilson 1987, 1996).

The second feature of the new racism, according to Collins (2004), is the decreasing power of the state to regulate corporations and mitigate the effects of racism and labor exploitation in the United States and across the globe. Local, state, and federal governments are relatively powerless in creating and implementing policies aimed at ameliorating racial inequality and economic exploitation. The third feature of the new racism is the increasing power of the mass media to disseminate race and gender ideologies across the globe that justify the gender-specific exploitation of people of color in local contexts (Collins 2004). The representations of people of color in the mass media are complex and often contradictory. On the one hand, the mass media reproduces gendered and sexualized stereotypes, what Collins calls “controlling images,” of people of African descent and other people of color. On the other, the mass media largely portray race relations in the U.S. as if racism no longer exists.

Several scholars, including Collins (2004), Bonilla-Silva (2006), Gallagher (2003) and Guinier and Torres (2002), define colorblindness or colorblind ideology as the predominant post-civil rights perspective (of many Whites) in the U.S. that race is no longer a significant determinant of life chances, the “playing field is level,” and racism is a relic of less-enlightened past. Bonilla-Silva (2006:1) says, “Most whites assert they ‘don’t see any color, just people’; that although the ugly face of discrimination is still with us, it is no longer the central factor determining minorities’ life chances . . . .”
Rather than the absence of racism, these scholars emphasize that colorblindness is characteristic of the new racism, or *colorblind racism*.

Central to colorblind racism are beliefs that the U.S. is a meritocracy where one’s position in society is due solely to individual effort, qualifications and values and that any disadvantages result from minority groups’ refusal to assimilate culturally and/or lack of values, such as a strong work ethic (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Gallagher 2003). Colorblind racism preserves and conceals White advantage, allows Whites to explain their advantaged positions as earned, provides a nearly impermeable justification for racial inequality, and absolves Whites from responsibility for the subordinate position of minorities in the racial hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Gallagher 2003). Denying that race in any way determines life outcomes legitimates Whites’ status and justifies and obscures the social arrangements that reproduce racial inequality, privilege, and disadvantage (Gallagher 2003). The mass media play a large role in perpetuating colorblind ideology by obfuscating the reality of racial inequality. Gallagher (2003:25) writes,

> The post-race, color-blind perspective allows whites to imagine that depictions of racial minorities [in the media] working in high status jobs and consuming the same products, or at least appearing in commercials for products whites desire or consume, is the same as living in a society where color is no longer used to allocate resources or shape group outcomes.

At the same time, the mass media reproduces stereotypes through gendered and sexualized images of people of color. According to Collins (2000, 2004), “controlling images” in Black popular culture reflect what she calls “past-in-present” ideas about Black femininity and masculinity, including ideas about Black sexuality. Throughout Collins’ work is an emphasis on both continuity and change in socio-historical race and gender relations and ideologies. She argues that the new racism in the U.S. has not taken the place of the old racism represented in the institution of slavery, the *de jure* racial segregation and discrimination in the Jim Crow South, and the urban hyper-segregation and discrimination in Northern and Midwestern metropolitan areas following the migration of African Americans from the South. Instead the racism of the post-civil
Collins (2000, 2004) traces contemporary controlling images of Black women in Black popular culture to the gender-specific ideologies that accompanied European colonial rule and exploitation of African peoples and the political economy of chattel slavery in the U.S. These ideologies were/are both maintained and transformed in the subsequent racial formations in the Jim Crow South, the urban ghettoization of the North, and the post-civil rights era. Social Darwinist ideas about African inferiority led early 19th-century European colonialists to conclude that Africans were by nature exotic and animal-like, including their sexual practices. The image of the wild and overly-sexed promiscuous African woman and the “naturally” violent and overly-sexed Black man was an ideology that played a major role in justifying and maintaining the enslavement of people of African descent in the U.S. (Collins 2004; Takaki 1993).

Collins (2000, 2004) argues that the political economy of chattel slavery relied on gender-specific forms of racial oppression. Black women’s ability to reproduce made them vulnerable to sexual exploitation from their masters (and Black men to a certain extent). To justify master/slave sexual exploitation, Black women were portrayed as animalistic, “naturally” wild and sexually insatiable, and therefore incapable of being raped. According to Collins (2004:56), “The institutionalized rape of enslaved Black women spawned the controlling image of the jezebel or sexually wanton Black woman.” Jezebels were often described as lighter-skinned, mulatto or half-breed (Stephens and Phillips 2003). The descriptor half-breed reflects how jezebels were seen as animalistic. The image of Black women as natural breeders validated the subordination of Black women’s sexuality to the reproduction imperatives of slavery and encouraged the birthing of numerous children, Collins says. Under slavery’s profit imperatives, Black women were stripped of sexual and reproductive agency and their bodies were not their own. Their bodies were subject to hard manual labor in agricultural fields. Because most

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18 See Omi and Winant (1994) for an explanation of racial formation theory.
19 See for example, Collins (2004) analysis of the treatment of Sarah Bartmann, the Hottentot Venus, who was forced by French colonialists to leave the Cape of Africa and display herself to European crowds fascinated by the tales of the exotic, animalistic body of African women. During her performances, she was displayed partially nude and people poked her buttocks to see if they were “real.”
women slaves performed hard manual agricultural labor, the image of Black women as obstinate mules who needed constant physical prodding justified their animal-like treatment. According to Collins (2004:56), the controlling image of the buck and the objectification of African men’s bodies as “big, strong, and stupid” and “naturally violent” justified the physical disciplinarian mechanisms used by Whites to “tame” them and make them suitable for hard agricultural labor. These images are reproduced and transformed in contemporary images of working-class African Americans in popular culture (Collins 2000, 2004).

Other images of African women in slavery justified their position as domestic servants and were the antecedents to middle class-specific images of African American women in contemporary Black popular culture, according to Collins (2000, 2004). Under slavery, an additional class of Black women (and men) worked in the homes of their masters. Domestic African slaves were considered less-threatening to their masters because they were thought to be “tamed enough” to suppress their presumed natural tendencies for depraved sexuality and violence. White slave owners constructed the controlling image of Mammy for domestic slave women (Collins 2000, 2004). Because she was seen as unattractive according to White Western standards either because of age, skin color, or other physical attributes, the Mammy was seen as asexual rather than overly sexual. As such, she was non-threatening and served as nanny, cook and other domestic and intimate positions with in the White family household. The Uncle Tom image justified the exploitation of domestic men (Collins 2000, 2004).

The exploitation of house servants differed from agricultural field hands but they were subject to abuse and mistreatment as well, according to Collins. For example, historical evidence shows that, just as the jezebel, the Mammy was subject to rape and sexual assault (Stephens and Phillips 2003). Collins (2000, 2004:57) argues that controlling images under slavery that distinguished domestic slaves from agricultural slaves established a preliminary class ideology to legitimate systemic class divisions among African Americans in subsequent racial formations, including the post-civil rights era. She says, “. . the representations developed for domestic servants foreshadowed contemporary understandings of assimilation and the skills needed for racial integration.”
These images provided the foundation for successive reworkings of race, gender, class, and sexual ideologies about Black women (and men) in racial formations following slavery (Collins 2000, 2004; Stephens and Phillips 2003). Under Jim Crow segregation in the Reconstruction era of the South, new forms of gender-specific racism, exploitation, and violence as well as ideologies to justify segregation emerged to minimize the perceived threat to White civil society. During this era, “race science” developed powerful biological inferiority theories to explain racial difference and legitimate institutionalized segregation (Collins 2000, 2004). Many Black women were still seen as sexually promiscuous and morally depraved and post-emancipation were subject to rape by “all White men” rather than by just their masters (Collins 2004:65). Other “domesticated” Black women continued to serve as domestic workers for White families which made them vulnerable to (sexual) exploitation as well. Black men were still seen as hypersexual and violent and as potential rapists. Lynching emerged as a way to control Black men who were seen as threatening to the purity of White womanhood, as well as for other reasons, Collins says.

As Southern Blacks migrated to the North to find jobs and escape the harsh conditions of Jim Crow segregation in the South, they encountered new forms of economic exploitation and dominant ideologies used to justify their exploitation (Collins 2000, 2004). The “race science” that had emerged post-emancipation was used to legitimate segregation in urban ghettos that confined African Americans to dilapidated housing and the most dangerous and poorly remunerated jobs. At the same time, they enjoyed more rights than Southern Blacks, established their own social organizations, and benefited from improved job prospects than in the South, according to Collins (2004). In addition, class divisions in the Black community became apparent and entrenched, particularly in images of Black femininity.

Middle- and working-class women of the urban North in the 1920s and beyond worked to dispel prevailing ideologies about Black women and their sexuality though in different ways (Collins 2000, 2004). Rejecting hegemonic ideologies about sexually insatiable and promiscuous Black women, middle-class Black women, especially churchgoers, favored a “politics of respectability” exemplified by “cleanliness of person and property, temperance, thrift, polite manners, and sexual purity,” according to Collins.
(2004:71; also Higginbotham 1993). Many middle-class Black women defined the conduct and manners of later working-class Black migrants as improper and in need of reform.\textsuperscript{20} Collins argues that politics of respectability, even in the context of racial segregation, sought to mimic submissive/passive forms of middle-class White femininity and gain approval from the dominant society.

While some newer migrant working-class Black women in the North became trained in the politics of respectability, others rejected it. Collins says that in the North, Black women were allowed to define and express their own sexuality unlike the South, where after emancipation, their reproductive capacities and the need for labor subordinated their own (sexual) needs and desires. Working-class Black women in the North were navigating the ideological strictures of the asexual Mammy and denigrated promiscuous jezebel. Primarily through blues culture, Collins (2004:72) argues, working-class Black women favored a “...sexuality grounded in sensuality and desire.” Blues culture allowed women to express their sexuality apart from middle-class notions of respectability and the religious dictates of sexual submissiveness and purity (Collins 2004, Davis 1998).

In the post-civil rights era, these socio-historical “controlling images” of Black women (and men) in the U.S. are incorporated and transformed in contemporary Black popular culture. Collins (2004) finds that sexual freaks, bitches, and Bad Black Mothers (BBMs) constitute contemporary “controlling images” of working-class Black women mostly in film and television. She also finds that modern mammies, Black ladies, and “educated bitches” are the predominant “controlling images” of middle-class Black women. I define these “controlling images” in Chapters 4 and 5 and integrate them with my analysis where appropriate. And, where not appropriate, I suggest that other images of Black women are circulating in hip-hop culture and the rap music industry.

Contemporary class-specific images construct Black gender ideology as the converse of “normal” White hegemonic gender ideology, such that representations portray “Black men as being inappropriately weak and Black women as being

\textsuperscript{20} For example, Collins (2004:71) says, “Black middle-class reformer Jane Edna Hunter’s description of the sexuality of dance halls and nightclubs draws heavily upon Western discourses of deviant Black sexuality and eerily foreshadows some contemporary condemnations of hip-hop culture: ‘Here, to the tune of St. Louis voodoo blues, half-naked Negro girls dance shameless dances ... The whole atmosphere is one of unrestrained animality, the jungle faintly veneered with civilized trappings.’"
inappropriately strong,” Collins says (2004:178-9). Central to the construction of racial
difference and African American cultural inferiority has been the hegemony of White
gender ideology in mainstream society that valorizes the hierarchical relationship
between active, dominant masculinity and passive, subordinate femininity (Collins 2000,
2004; Schippers 2007). The apparent reversal of this gender ideology among African
Americans is used to legitimate their subordinate position in the racial hierarchy.

The primary representations of working-class Black men in Black popular culture,
according to Collins (2004), are as athletes and criminals. These images portray them as
unable to achieve masculinity associated with White middle-class men through doing
well in school, assuming leadership positions in well-paying jobs and supporting their
children and wives. Their only source of strength is in their use of violence and
aggression in socially acceptable ways, such as through sport (Collins 2004). Collins
also says that middle-class representations of Black men as sissies and sidekicks portray
them as emasculated, feminized and stripped of their stereotypical “Blackness” in order
to make them less-threatening and more palatable to mainstream White civil society.

Class-specific images of Black femininity represent them as abnormally strong.
Collins (2004:179) says,

Whether working-class “bitches” who are not appropriately submissive, bad
mothers who raise children without men, or “educated bitches” who act like men,
this Black female strength is depicted and then stigmatized. Not even the modern
mammies and Black ladies escape this frame of too-strong Black women. Such
women may receive recognition for their strength on the job, but it is a strength
that is placed in service to White power and authority.

The hegemony of White gender ideology in mainstream society benefits from racial and
class hierarchies (Schippers 2007). In the complex system of stratification by race,
gender, class, and sexuality, Black gender ideology is characterized as undesirable and
problematic legitimating the relative subordination of both middle-class and working-
class African Americans.

In the post-civil rights era in which colorblind ideology is hegemonic, the social
problems endemic to many inner-city minority communities are obfuscated through the
media portrayal of a multicultural and meritocratic America. At the same time, race,
gender, class and sexual ideologies persist even while the dominant culture denies their existence. For example, as I explain below, a majority of consumers of rap music are young White men. White youth listening to rap music (and some producing rap music) and wearing hip-hop inspired fashion serve as exemplars (for Whites) of how racism and segregation have been eliminated (Rodriquez 2006). At the same time, rap music and hip-hop culture constitute an arena in which ideologies of race, gender, class and sexuality and often negative images of Black women (and men) are reproduced and contested (Collins 2004). The next section explores hip-hop culture and rap music origins.

**Hip-Hop Culture and Rap Music Origins**

Because rap music has become so pervasive and influential in popular culture, it is important to understand what hip-hop culture and rap music are and from where they emerged. Hip-hop’s pioneers and early participants did not intend nor could they imagine that hip-hop and rap music would ever be commercially successful or even remotely an interest to anyone outside the confines of their particular inner-city neighborhoods. Hip-hop culture and rap music emerged in the early to mid-1970s from America’s inner-city ghettos, particularly the South Bronx of New York City (Chang 2005; Dimitriadis 2004; Pough 2004; Rose 1994; Watkins 2005). Destructive urban renewal policies in New York City, largely conducted under the management of urban planner Robert Moses, destroyed many ethnic minority communities and relocated economically marginalized people of color into parts of the South Bronx (Chang 2005; Rose 1994). In the mid seventies, most of the youth’s creative and stylistic energies that came to be defined as “hip-hop” were confined to a “seven-mile circle” around Crotona Park in the Bronx (Chang 2005). By the 1980s, when the Reagan administration cut budgets in education, particularly music and art programs, ghetto youth began rhyming to beats mixed and scratched through turntables used as instruments (Lusane 2004). Hip-hop began as the array of activities and styles that minority youth engaged in and developed to have fun in an urban environment that had little (fun) to offer.

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21 For photographs of the South Bronx during this time period, the context in which hip-hop culture and rap music originated, see Mel Rosenthal’s exhibit at [http://library.duke.edu/exhibits/melrosenthal](http://library.duke.edu/exhibits/melrosenthal).
As I explain shortly, most accounts define hip-hop as a “culture” that encompasses “four elements” – b-boying or b-girling, graffiti writing, DJing and MCing – the basic elements of rap music (Chang 2005:110; Pough 2004; Rose 1994). Some question whether these elements constituted an overarching “culture,” rather than disparate and incongruent activities that hip-hop historians cleverly wove together into a neat account of the origins of hip-hop. Whatever the case, Chang (2005:111) argues that the activities

. . . shared a revolutionary aesthetic. They were about unleashing youth style as an expression of the soul unmediated by corporate money, unauthorized by the powerful, protected and enclosed by almost monastic rites, codes, and orders.

A b-boy or b-girl refers to someone who break-dances. Most break-dancers were young Black and Latino men who lived in poor and/or working-class neighborhoods, though a few young women participated in the style of dance. The b-boy/b-girl dance was an aggressive club dance that originally incorporated many martial art elements and included speedy footwork, quick movements to and up from the floor, and later, intricate floor-movements with a variety of stylistic head and back spins (Chang 2005). By the mid 1970s, youth too young for the club scene began performing the dance at house parties, outside block parties, and on street corners with nothing more than some cardboard for floor moves. In the beginning, break-dancing groups were uncommon and b-boys and girls stood in a circle, or “cipher,” while each individual dancer tried to show up others’ styles and moves when it was his or her turn.

As the style of dance spread to other New York boroughs, b-boy “crews,” including the Zulu Kings, Rock Steady, and Crazy Commanders, formed and battled one another (Chang 2005). In many ways, the dance provided an alternative to gang violence that plagued deteriorating urban neighborhoods and many “b-boy styles had their roots in the gangs” (Chang 2005:116). The mainstream eventually co-opted break-dancing and it even became the subject of popular films, such as Beat Street (1984), Breakin’ (1984) and Breakin’ 2: Electric Boogaloo (1985) (Pough 2004). Elements of break-dancing have been absorbed by professional hip-hop dance choreographers. Break-dancing as originally practiced has largely disappeared. However, recent years have witnessed a resurgence of the dance in some urban clubs and a new form of urban-inspired dance,
“crumping,” that borrows from the b-boy/b-girl tradition is gaining in popularity among minority urban youth.

Graffiti writing is another element of what came to be known as hip-hop culture. Graffiti writing is the act of writing your chosen pen name, or alias, in a unique style that often includes large bubble or block letters, background effects, and techniques giving the appearance of three-dimensions using primarily spray paint on public property, most notably subway trains, or other buildings (Chang 2005; Rose 1994). The graphic pen names became known as “tags” and “bombs” and the act of graffiti writing “tagging” or “bombing” (Chang 2005). To most in the city, graffiti writing was vandalism, a criminal act worthy of nothing other than criminal prosecution (Chang 2005; Rose 1994). To graffiti writers, it was art and an act of rebellion for those who could not afford the canvases, oil paints, and other materials traditionally associated with art. As one graffiti writer said,

Subways are corporate America’s way of getting its people to work. It’s used as an object of transporting corporate clones. And the trains were clones themselves. They were all supposed to be silver blue, a form of imperialism and control, and we took that and completely changed it (cited in Chang 2005:122).

Although graffiti writing originated in primarily minority urban ghettos, it was the first of the hip-hop elements to migrate beyond the borders of those neighborhoods primarily because the main canvases, subway cars, moved to other parts of the city. And, graffiti writing was the most “desegregated” of the four elements. Chang (2005) explains, “Upper East Side whites apprenticed themselves to Bronx-based Blacks. Brooklyn Puerto Ricans learned from white working-class graff[i]ti kings from Queens” (119). As with break-dancing, graffiti writers developed “crews” that sparred with one another sometimes without ever meeting. Rival crews and artists would bomb trains bound for another crew’s neighborhood and tag over another artists’ tag, resulting in “style wars,” which is the name of a documentary film that chronicled the rise and fall of graffiti writing. And, just as break-dancing virtually vanished, graffiti writing came to its demise. The city of New York and the MTA (Mass Transit Authority) won a long battle against graffiti writing by locking up new and out-of-use subway trains in barbed-wire fortresses and locking up the artists that used them as their canvases (Chang 2005).
While some graffiti survived for a time in art galleries of affluent collectors sure that they had found the next new thing, it eventually faded as many art fads do. But, traces of graffiti writing remain, in smaller “tags” on city subway trains and other public facilities, and in the art that provides the covers for rap albums.

In the early years of the developing hip-hop culture, there was no rap music. There was DJing and MCing. The original meaning of DJ, or deejay, referred to a disk jockey, most often a radio announcer, who plays pre-recorded songs from records or LPs (discs) in a set for an audience (Chang 2005). The act of “DJing,” or what also came to be known as “spinning,” became a complex skill with a set of stylistic techniques that involved more than just playing recorded music. Historical accounts of hip-hop credit DJ Kool Herc, a Jamaican-born DJ who began providing music for house parties, as the originator of the hip-hop art of DJing (Chang 2005; Watkins 2005). Without the means to afford live music performances and with discos and clubs closing their doors because gang violence made them dangerous, poor and/or working-class youth were drawn toward DJs who threw block parties and whose main purpose was to keep the crowd rocking and dancing (Chang 2005; Watkins 2005). DJs built elaborate sound systems including enormous speakers and turntables (record players) often from abandoned automobile radios and other scraps left in dilapidated and deserted buildings (Chang 2005; Watkins 2005). DJs competed with one another in the size and complexities of their sound systems, in their ability to draw a crowd, and in their techniques.

While DJ Kool Herc is considered the originator, Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmaster Flash are credited with revolutionizing the art of DJing. Bambaataa took DJing to new heights by mixing two or more records to create a new sound, and he became a master programmer (Chang 2005; Vincent 2004). “He mixed up breaks from Grand Funk Railroad and the Monkees with Sly and James and Malcolm X speeches” and mixed and played everything from rock, salsa, to soul and funk (Chang 2005:97). Grandmaster Flash, born Joseph Saddler, was committed to mastering and improving upon the art of DJing, attended block parties and studied the DJs, in particular DJ Kool Herc. Flash felt that DJ Herc’s play set was a bit shoddy and failed to keep the crowd “rocking” when the “break,” or “the get down part” of a song, came back around and was not on beat with the other sounds he was mixing (Chang 2005; Watkins 2005:27).
What Grandmaster Flash did to the art of DJing was to isolate the “break” (hence break-dancing), usually a sample from the percussion and/or bass track of a soul or funk song, and set it on loop to be overlaid with the harmony and melody of (an)other song(s). He did this by re-creating the turntable as an instrument rather than a music player and developing mixers to create complex and new musical sounds out of previously recorded music. “Back in his room with his screwdriver, soldering iron and insatiable curiosity” (Chang 2005:112), Grandmaster Flash created new instruments, that contemporary DJs can now buy as pre-built multi-turntables, mixers and various kinds of needles, from thrown away parts, speakers, and stereos (Pough 2004; Watkins 2005).

Grandmaster Flash was so-named because his hands were so fast when mixing and re-playing the break beat on the turntables. He even created new terms to characterize the “theory” and “movements” of DJing, like the “torque factor” and “clock theory” (Watkins 2005). Flash defines the torque factor as “how I judge the turntable from the state of inertia to when it is up to speed” (cited in Watkins 2005:28). Clock theory explains “his decision to re-repeat particular sections of a record by spinning the disc back a few rotations to constantly play the break beat” (Watkins 2005:28). Out of his innovations came other innovators who created techniques such as scratching, or moving a record rapidly back and forth across the needle to create a “scratching” noise, slip-cueing, phrasing, cutting, and phase shifting.

DJing, however creative it is at mixing recorded music into new sounds and dance grooves, is only part of what became rap music. In hip-hop’s early years, the MC, or Master of Ceremonies, commenced the “ceremony” of what was essentially the live-performance show of the DJ by introducing the DJ and the music and kept the energy of the crowd up and moving (Watkins 2005). MCs spoke between songs, encouraged the audience to dance, called out to particular people in the crowd (which later became known as a “shout out”), and often narrated short stories and jokes in between sets and/or songs. MCs also functioned as “battle-shields” for the DJs to “keep rivals from stealing their two most prized possessions: their records and their technique” (Watkins 2005:13).

The DJ was the main attraction of the early hip hop performances of DJ Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa, and others. Grandmaster Flash’s first attempts at live performance did not draw much of a crowd. His style of isolating the break beat,
scratching and flashy movements was so foreign to the onlookers that they did not react in the way he expected (Chang 2005). He wanted to make the crowd move, not stare, so he enlisted the help of an MC, Keith “Cowboy” Wiggins. Cowboy would vocally exalt the talents of DJ Flash, and exhort the crowd to “Say ho!” and “Throw your hands in the air and wave ‘em like you just don’t care,” two callings that would become familiar phrases in the rap music to follow (Chang 2005:113). Grandmaster Flash then recruited four more MCs, and they became known as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious 5, one of the first “rap groups.”

In a few years, MCing emerged, that is, emcees became the stars of the show (Chang 2005; Watkins 2005). They began doing more than just introducing the DJ and music and encouraging audiences to dance. They began to rap, or talk in rhythms using rhyme, alliteration and verse, over the break beats and mixes of dance tracks. By the late seventies, many DJs were rapping, or if they were not, they were enlisting MCs to rival the up and coming rap stars of crews like Grandmaster Flash and the Furious 5 (Chang 2005). Around the same time, groups began to record their shows on tapes for distribution (Watkins 2005). These “mix tapes,” or tapes of DJs’ creative mixing of parts of recorded music overlaid with the MCs raps, were used to promote their skills and advertise for upcoming shows. Contemporary artists still use mix tapes to promote their skills and “build their reputations and a loyal following” in an effort to attract the attention of music industry labels for a record deal (Watkins 2005:14). And, unlike the other elements of hip-hop culture, graffiti writing, b-boying and b-girling, mix tapes continue to be made, and rap music has been commodified into a multi-billion dollar industry.

Hip-hop historians continue to define the culture in terms of these four elements – DJing, MCing, b-boying and b-girling, and graffiti writing (Chang 2005; Rose 1994). Some go further and identify hip-hip not only as a culture but as a “way of life” (Chang 2005; Forman 2004; Pough 2004; Rose 1994), a “generation” (Chang 2005; Kitwana 2002; Watkins 2005), a “movement” (Chang 2005; Pough 2004; Watkins 2005), and/or a “nation” (Forman 2004; Neal 2004; Toure 1999), or some combination thereof. Those who characterize hip-hop as a way of life point to how the culture created a way of
speaking, new vocabularies, a way of posturing and walking, and a style of dress that is now a highly profitable industry producing urban or hip-hop sportswear.

To some, hip-hop has come to define a generation. Those who define and combine groups of people within the brackets of particular years of birth are usually the “generations” of years before. The baby boomers have characterized the (White) generation after theirs as “Generation X,” a name “that seemed to sum up for boomers the mystery of the emerging cohort” (Chang 2005:1). This same generation has also become characterized as the “post” generation – “post-civil rights, postmodern, poststructural, postfeminist, post-Black, post-soul” (Chang 2005:2). To some, the label of “Generation X” and its associated meanings applied only to White youth. Black youth of the same generation were the Hip-Hop Generation, a testament to how influential hip-hop had become. According to Bakari Kitwana (2002), the Hip-Hop Generation is comprised of Blacks who were born between 1965 and 1984. But, to Chang (2005), the construction of generations is mostly fiction and definitions are too narrow to encompass all who have influenced or been influenced by hip-hop culture and rap music. Kitwana’s definition, Chang (2005) notes, does not include many of the culture’s innovators or all of those born after 1984 who are producing and driving the consumption of products influenced by hip-hop culture.

Although hip-hop culture and rap music began as a creative form of art and entertainment, some of its participants and creators saw the potential of hip-hop and rap to be a political, positive, and consciousness-raising force for urban, minority youth. For this reason, hip-hop has been characterized as a movement (Watkins 2005). For example, Afrika Bambaataa was not only an innovator in the art of DJing, but also an innovator in grass-roots organization. Afrika Bambaataa is a former Black Spade gang member and founder of the Universal Zulu Nation—a hip-hop consciousness-raising organization (Chang 2005; Watkins 2005). The group met weekly, sought to curb gang violence, critically discussed the effect of drugs and violence on many inner-city neighborhoods, and promoted “unity, anti-violence and self-help to the streets” (Watkins 2005:23).

22 According to Chang (2005) and Watkins (2005), Bambaataa was inspired by a mid-sixties film called Zulu. Zulu chronicled the battle of thousands of Zulu in Natal, South Africa against the colonizing British Empire’s military. He was also “inspired by the ferment of social and political struggle that partially characterized the sixties and seventies” (Watkins 2005:23).
Afrika Bambaataa added what he saw as a necessary fifth element—knowledge—to hip-hop culture (Chang 2005). I now turn to an exploration of women’s contributions to early hip-hop culture and rap music.

**Women in Early Hip-Hop Culture**

Young Black and other minority women participated in and helped shape the beginnings of hip-hop culture and rap music, though to be sure, they were outnumbered in what became a male-dominated, hyper-masculine and often sexist genre of music. “Hip-hop may be a uniquely testosterone-filled space, but to say that women have not contributed significantly to its development is false” (Pough 2004:9). Ironically, it was a woman, Sylvia Robinson, who gave rap music, a genre that came to be known and reviled for its misogyny and violence, its first commercial success (Chang 2005; Watkins 2005).

Historical accounts of the emergence of rap music as a commercially viable genre of music credit Sylvia Robinson with building and signing the first rap group to have a song played on mainstream radio to the label Sugar Hill Records, named after a Harlem neighborhood (Chang 2005; Watkins 2005). The group was The Sugar Hill Gang, who was not really a “gang” at all and scarcely knew one another when Sylvia approached them about creating a rap album. They had never done a live performance, been on stage together before they had a hit single, or gone through all of the hard work that early hip-hop artists did to earn a reputation and “street cred” (Chang 2005).

Sylvia was both loathed and praised for her push to make rap music a money-making enterprise (Watkins 2005). Most of hip-hop culture’s pioneers considered The Sugar Hill Gang and their first and only major hit single, “Rapper’s Delight” in 1979, to be “a watered-down knock-off that had neither the style nor the tenacity of the real thing that was emerging across the Hudson River” (Watkins 2002:18). And, they considered the success of the song that reached “number four on the R&B Singles Charts and . . . number thirty-six on the pop charts” the result of outsiders trying to co-opt the culture for personal gain (Watkins 2005:18). And, that is exactly what Sylvia Robinson, and her husband Joe Robinson, who was less involved in recruiting or creating the talent, intended to do. But, they also saw the potential of rap music to bring a “message” to the
world about the condition of inner-city neighborhoods in the boroughs of New York City and across America.

Not only did Sylvia produce the first commercially successful rap hit, she also pioneered, with the help of a Sugar Hill Records songwriter, Ed “Duke Bootee” Fletcher, the first rap single to be characterized as “message” rap (Chang 2005; Watkins 2005). The song was called “The Message,” and Grandmaster Flash and the Furious 5 was the group Sylvia enlisted to make it. Flash and his crew were skeptical and even opposed to making the song. Flash felt that hip-hop and rap music were about having a good time and forgetting about the troubles and stark reality of the everyday hardships of urban, ghetto life, as depicted in one of the more poignant verses of the song below (Chang 2005; Watkins 2005).

Broken glass everywhere, people pissing on the stairs
You know they just don’t care
I can’t take the smell, can’t take the noise
Got no money to move out, guess I got no choice
Rats in the front room, roaches in the back
Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat
I tried to get away, but I couldn’t get far
‘Cause the man with the tow truck repossessed my car
Don’t push me ‘cause I’m close to the edge, I’m trying not to lose my head
Ah huh huh huh huh. It’s like a jungle sometimes
It makes me wonder how I keep from going under (Grandmaster Flash and the Furious 5, “The Message”).

Robinson produced and distributed the song anyway, and besides one verse that Melle Mel (an MC in the Furious 5) wrote, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious 5 had no part in composing the lyrics of the song. Despite their protestations, Grandmaster Flash and Furious 5 had their first radio hit in 1982 with “The Message” that “went on to reach as high as number four on the R&B charts and sixty-two on the pop chart” (Watkins 2005:21).

Before the early commercial success of hits like “Rapper’s Delight” and “The Message,” young Black and Latina women were involved in the development of and
participated in the hip-hop culture. Two were b-girl, Baby Love, and graffiti writer, Lady PINK (Pough 2004). They and other women were participating but it was a struggle to gain respect and credibility in the predominantly masculine world of early hip-hop culture. As Lady PINK recounts,

I was getting sexism from ten-, twelve-year-olds saying that you can’t do that, you’re a girl . . . . I had to prove that I painted my own pieces. Because whenever a female enters the boy’s club, the world of graffiti, immediately it’s thought that she’s just somebody’s girlfriend and the guy is putting it up . . . . They just think that she’s on her knees and bends over for the guys. And that’s the kind of word that went out about me and goes about every single girl that starts to write (cited in Chang 2005:120-121).

Another female graffiti writer, STONEY gained respect only when she managed in 1972 to tag the Statue of Liberty (Chang 2005). The riskier and bigger the canvas, the greater respect a graffiti writer amassed.

There were women MCs and DJs too and eventually rap artists and groups that were performing in the early days of rap music. There was female rapper Roxanne Shante; groups such as Sequence (another Sugar Hill Records group), the Mercedes Ladies, Finesse, and US Girls; and later on, women rappers who achieved mainstream success such as MC Lyte, Queen Latifah, and Salt-N-Pepa (Pough 2004). The number of women rappers and DJs who have recorded their music and the commercial success of that music pale in comparison to that of men but Black women did, and to a lesser extent, still do have a voice. They have also struggled to be heard in the male-dominated world of hip-hop. Still, Black women were a large part of the audience of the early rap performances and they continue to listen to and buy the music “even when most of it is sexist and degrading to Black womanhood” (Pough 2004:9).

Although it is important to recover and recognize the important contributions of women in the history of hip-hop culture as a few hip-hop scholars have done, it is not my intention to re-write the history of hip-hop. I am more interested in exploring the messages that rap music lyrics contain about Black women and, more specifically, the images of Black femininity the lyrics portray. I analyze the lyrics of rap music, which

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23 See, for example, Forman (1994), Guevara (1996), and Veran (2001).
have been and continue to be critical and subversive of the dominant culture, and at the same time, have exploited (Black) women and their bodies. Many rappers continue to reproduce the dominant (White) culture’s caricatures and misrepresentations of Black women: from jezebels, mammys, and breeder women to sexual freaks, gold diggers, and baby mamas (Collins 2000, 2004; Stephens and Phillips 2003).

Much of both White and Black popular culture has historically been and continues to be permeated with sexism, sexual conflict between men and women, and misogyny. One only has to turn on television, particularly, though not exclusively, sports broadcasting, to view a barrage of commercials that use scantily-clad women to sell products from beer to automobiles (cf. Messner and Montez de Oca 2005). The sexualization and objectification of women is a big seller in American culture at large, increasingly in the global marketplace and in the music industry in particular. But, it was one genre of rap music, “gangsta rap,” that took misogyny to an extreme and at the same time propelled rap music into the mainstream, as I describe below.

Gangsta Rap: Misogyny, Violence and the Young Suburban White Men Who Propelled Rap into the Mainstream

“Gangsta” rap, one subgenre of rap music, usually contains gangster, or crime, narratives including “the selling and using of illegal drugs; firearms and their use on other people; various sorts of crime (murder, armed robbery, pimping, etc.); and what might be regarded in some circles as ‘promiscuous’ sex” (Haugen 2003:430). The humble origins of rap music and hip-hop culture had little to do with portraying an authentic “ghettocentricity” or being sufficiently “hard” and “gangsta” for commercial success, nor were the extreme misogyny and violence characteristic of gangsta rap a pervasive part of the music. As bell hooks (1994) once stated in response to a request for her to comment on misogyny in the then fairly new “gangsta” rap genre:

[A] central motivation for highlighting gangsta rap continues to be the sensationalist drama of demonizing black youth culture in general and the contributions of young black men in particular . . . . [G]angsta rap does not appear in a cultural vacuum, but, rather is expressive of the cultural crossings, mixings, and engagement of black youth culture with the values, attitudes and concerns of the white majority . . . .
Most of the outrage directed toward gangsta rappers, not only for their misogynistic lyrics and videos, but for what some saw as the glorification of the violence and criminality of the so-called “thug” life, occurred because it was not Black and Latino ghetto youth that generated the impressive sales figures of gangsta rap. It was predominantly young, suburban White men who purchased the music (Neal 2004a; Watkins 2005). What is even more astounding is that groups such as N.W.A. (Niggaz With Attitude), that later gained the attention of the FBI for their song “Fuck tha’ Police,” had little to no radio or music video play and no marketing campaigns in the early 1990s when the gangsta rap sub-genre was in its infancy. “What the producers of gangsta [rap] discovered was that the more outrageously they performed, the more success they accumulated” (Watkins 2005:51). It is doubtful that gangsta rap would have garnered the media attention or ire that it did nor would it have been nearly as successful without young White middle-class men as its predominant consumers.

The success of gangsta rap is riddled with contradictions. Gangsta rappers claim their music is the voice of and gives voice to young, disaffected, urban Black (male) youth. In fact, if a gangsta rapper is found to not be “authentically ghetto,” i.e. poor and/or working-class from an inner-city neighborhood, his hop-hop credentials, “street cred,” and indeed his masculinity are questioned (Watkins 2005).24 The claim of the “ghettocentricity” (Kubrin 2005a; Watkins 2001) of gangsta rap is difficult to maintain when it is clearly suburban White male youth who consume and perhaps influence the content and production of that music. Rap music, early in its history and in general, appealed to disaffected youth precisely because it was oppositional to the corporate controlled music industry and the mainstream. “[T]he journey from the margins to the mainstream contradicted some of the prominent truisms in hip hop about street cred and authenticity” (Watkins 2005:126). Pough (2004) describes these contradictions as hip-hop’s largest dilemma: remaining committed to the marginal urban youth culture that imagined and created the art forms or becoming commercially successful in the mainstream culture. Despite these contradictions, rap music and the hip-hop culture of

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24 For example, when Ja Rule, a popular rapper, began producing rap music with a softer R&B feel and sound that was particularly appealing to girls and young women, “an all but forgotten market in hip hop’s soaring economy,” other rappers, particularly 50 Cent, began questioning his street credibility and masculinity (Watkins 2005:1-2).
which it is a part have changed the landscape of American and international popular culture and music, particularly among youth.

While rap music had some commercial success prior to the gangsta rap of the nineties, it was that sub-genre of rap music that gained it national and mainstream recognition, for better or worse. Gangsta rap pushed the sales and radio play of rap music to a level that competed with other forms of popular music and influenced what came to be defined as “pop” music. “Despite its street credentials and ghetto-tough creed . . . by the late 1990s rap had not only become part of the pop music establishment, it was the establishment” (Watkins 2005:52). Rap had become a music genre that was rivaling other musical styles—such as country, R&B, and traditional “pop” music—in sales and radio play and shaping other genres as R&B and teen pop musicians, such as N’ Sync and Britney Spears, began using “street-oriented beats and ghetto-theme lyrics” in their music (Watkins 2005:34). While rap music influenced and continues to shape the content and style of other popular forms of music, the hip-hop culture of which it is a part transformed popular culture in the United States and throughout the world.25

Conclusions

It is important to subject the images of (Black) women in rap music lyrics and hip-hop culture more generally to analysis because these images are transported, interpreted and transformed across the globe in particular local contexts. Czarniawska (2008:146) argues that images and representations move across time and space when they are materially “translated” into “. . . a text, a drawing, a model . . . .” or in this case, a music lyric. Ideas about gender, race, class and sexuality (among others) contained in images that travel across contexts are transformed into “material reality” when they influence and shape local ideas and practices. Czarniawska (2008) calls the process by which ideas and images are disseminated across the globe (what has traditionally been defined as globalization) “glocalization,” because the interpretation and conversion of ideas and practices are always done within local contexts. Rap and hip-hop culture have

25 It is not uncommon to see youth of a variety of nationalities wearing urban street clothes from American labels such as FUBU and Rocawear that were developed and designed specifically for hip-hop youth or t-shirts with specific rap group labels or images. In addition, there are now a multitude of rap artists hailing from nations around the world, e.g. King Giddra and Kohei Japan from Japan, EmZipper and Shooary from Iran, and Santi Y Sus Duendes and Lisa M of the Dominican Republic who are credited with developing “merenrap,” a blend of rap and merengue.
reached youth cultures in places as diverse as Japan, Brazil and Iran and are translated and altered in local contexts. Consequently, images of women and ideas about sexuality in rap music and hip-hop culture potentially influence how people, particularly young people, think about, interact with, and treat women within local and varied contexts and societies.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This dissertation explores the gender, race, class and sexual imagery in characterizations of African American women in the lyrics of rap music. As was noted earlier, I created a database of rap songs on platinum albums, albums that sold at least 1,000,000 copies according to the Recording Industry Association of America’s (RIAA) records and standards, with an original release date of 1984 through 2000 for my content analysis. By focusing on songs on platinum albums, I assured that a substantial number of consumers had purchased and listened to the music. As I explain shortly, I randomly selected 450 songs from the sampling frame. Below, I describe the rap album population and song sampling frame. Then I describe my coding procedures and provide operational definitions and a brief explanation of the codes. Finally, I provide an explanation of my analysis procedures.

Rap Album Population and Song Sampling Frame

My first step was to obtain a list of “platinum” rap albums that were released between 1984 and 2000. To begin, I used the Original Hip-Hop Lyrics Archive (OHHLA) at http://www.ohhla.com. OHHLA is the most comprehensive on-line database of the lyrics of established rap artists on any album sold in stores or through national websites such as Amazon, Best Buy and Tower Records. OHHLA was developed in 1995 and has grown into the premier resource for lyrics of rap songs. The Webmaster, Steve ‘Flash’ Juon, maintains the website, and lyrics can be submitted by anyone. However, there are rules and guidelines for submitting artists and lyrics. Lyrics must be from established rap artists or songs featuring rap artists and are inspected for quality. This does not mean that the lyrics are entirely accurate, but each submission is subject to corrections by others through the webmaster.

OHHLA provides a link to “all artists” on its website. I used its list to identify contemporary rap artists and groups. The list is, as far as I know, the most exhaustive list of rap artists and groups. However, it includes some artists who are not strictly rap artists.
or who produce music that can be included in several musical genres. For example, there are some women artists—Mary J. Blige, Lauren Hill, and Erykah Badu, to name a few—who could be cross-classified in the rap and soul or R&B genres. Pough (2004) says these women are “hip-hop soul divas” whose music has blended rap and R&B music. Many songs on these artists’ albums are not strictly rap music because the lyrics are primarily sung. However, all of these cross-classified artists are associated with hip-hop culture either because they have formerly been a part of a rap group (e.g. Lauren Hill who was a member of the Fugees), have been produced by rap artists (e.g. Mary J. Blige), or have some songs that could be considered rap and/or have rapped or sung on other rap artists’ albums. Thus, if these artists were listed in the OHHLA archive, I considered them rap artists.

I entered each rap artist into the RIAA’s searchable database with the format specified as “ALBUM” to determine if the artist had any platinum albums. If the album had an original release date within my chosen time period, each song on the album was included in my population. I obtained the play-lists from Amazon.com, which provides the names of songs on every music album or compact disc available for purchase. The number of rap albums with original release dates in the specified time period that had gone platinum was 195. The 195 albums had 2,933 songs (N = 2,933). I drew a simple random sample of 450 songs (N = 450), roughly 15 percent of the sampling frame, for analysis using a random numbers generator.

Rationale for Time Period. The year 2000 is a useful end date for avoiding problems associated with internet downloads. The exponential growth in the downloading of music from the internet at the turn of the century is problematic for determining what music is being consumed widely. The RIAA did not begin its Digital Sales Award until 2004. Initially, 45 single songs were included in the group of


27 My population does not include compilation albums with a variety of artists and my sampling frame does not include instrumental songs. In addition, many albums begin and end with tracks called “intros” and “outros.” These are generally not radio-length songs, and some are not what would be considered a song at all. Many rap albums have tracks that are mainly short skits, interludes, or intermissions between songs. These tracks were excluded from the sampling frame of songs.

certifications for gold (500,000 units sold) and platinum selling singles. Since 2004, a number of musicians are awarded gold and platinum awards for downloaded singles. However, there is no record of sales prior to 2004.

Run D.M.C.’s Raising Hell, released in 1986, was the first rap album to go platinum. However, one album with an original release date of 1984, Whodini’s Escape, and two albums released in 1985, including Run D.M.C.’s second album King of Rock and LL Cool J’s first album Radio, eventually sold one million copies. I included albums in the sampling frame if they were released in 2000 or prior but failed to go platinum until after the year 2000. Appendix A lists the sample of songs analyzed.

Coding Procedures

To code the songs, I printed the lyrics, read them, and listened to the song as I read the lyrics again to correct for any mistakes. For the most part, there were very few mistakes in the lyrics I downloaded from OHHLA. For some songs, I listened to the song and/or parts of the song more than once when I was unclear or had some question about the lyrics or the meaning of the lyrics in the context of the song’s entirety. I referred to The Rap Dictionary, an on-line dictionary of slang terms found in the lyrics of rap, when I was unsure about the definition or connotation of a word or phrase.

I coded a number of qualities of the rappers and of the song lyrics. For example, I recorded whether the rapper was a man or woman, or if there were multiple rappers, men or women, or both. In all, 379 (84.2%) songs have exclusively men rappers, 43 (9.6%) songs have exclusively women rappers, and 28 songs (6.2%) featured both men and women. If songs featured women and men artists, I recorded whether women or men were the predominant rappers. For example, some women rappers or women rap groups feature a male rapper on their song for one stanza or for the chorus. Of 28 songs with men and women rappers, men were predominant on 22 (78.6%) while women were predominant on six (21.4%).

Once I was sure of the lyrical content and gender of the rappers, I read the lyrics again and coded each line to determine if there were references to women in the song.

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29 Interestingly, the album’s success is generally credited to the song “Walk This Way” and its accompanying video on MTV recorded with the rock band Aerosmith. This was the first song to appeal to listeners outside rap’s relatively small consumer base at the time.

30 http://www.rapdict.org
and if so, how women were represented. Some reference is made to women in the lyrics of 382 songs (84.9%). I then coded lyrics for images of African American women that Patricia Hill Collins (2004) identifies in her analysis of Black popular culture, focusing on television and film and for the sexual scripts that Stephens and Phillips (2003) see embodied in the personas of women icons in popular Black youth and/or hip-hop culture. Stephens and Phillips (2003) identify the Diva, Gold Digger, Freak, Dyke, Gangster Bitch, Sister Savior, Earth Mother and Baby Mama as contemporary sexual scripts (defined shortly) for African American women in Black popular culture. Collins (2004) identifies freaks, bitches and Bad Black Mothers (BBMs) as “controlling images” of working-class Black women and modern mammies, Black ladies, and educated bitches as “controlling images” of middle-class Black women in Black popular culture and mass media. Below, I explain the concepts \textit{script} and \textit{image}, including how I utilized them in my analysis.

\textit{(Sexual) scripts and images.} Collins (2004:18) argues that mass media, particularly films, television shows and (music) videos, supply “social scripts” that “show people appropriate gender ideology as well as how to behave toward one another.” And, she says, “images and representations do not determine behavior, but they do provide the interpretive context for explaining it. Social scripts suggest how to behave.” Stephens and Phillips (2003) examine representations of Black women in African American youth culture, including hip-hop culture. They argue that it is more precise to conceptualize these representations as “sexual scripts” rather than simply as images. To Stephens and Phillips (2003:5), the word “image” implies simple “visual representations or two-dimensional symbols of people or objects.” Because sexuality is something that is socially learned, they suggest that it is “socially scripted” or a “part” that people enact. Stephens and Phillips also argue that scripts vary with social context.

Ideas about sexuality and sexual behavior are symbolically and culturally defined and sexuality is socially constructed (Andersen 2005; Stein and Plummer 1994). How people express sexuality—under what circumstances, in what kinds of settings, in what ways, with whom, how frequently, and for what reasons—is culturally relative and learned (Kimmel and Fracher 1997; Longmore 1998). For example, the history of sexuality in the U.S. shows how sexual ideas and practices change over time and with
changes in other social institutions. Until the nineteenth century in America, Judeo-Christian ideology was firmly entrenched in beliefs about sexuality and family. “Proper” sexuality was that between a married man and woman for the purposes of procreation only (D’Emilio and Freedman 1988; Longmore 1998). It was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that the idea that sex enhanced (heterosexual) couples’ feelings of intimacy and emotional connections became somewhat mainstream. And, it was not until the “sexual revolution” of the 1960s and 1970s that cultural meanings of sex within or outside relationships emphasized personal pleasure (D’Emilio and Freedman 1988; Seidman 1991).

Understandings of sexuality affect identity constructions, how a person sees her- or himself, how persons interact with one another, and how a person conceives others think about and interact with her or him (Longmore 1998; Stephens and Phillips 2003). Symbolic interaction theory suggests that people acquire ideas about (their) sexuality from sexual messages communicated in constantly shifting cultural or social contexts, including from the mass media (Longmore 1998; Stephens and Phillips 2003). That is, ideas about sexuality that men and women glean from society affect the construction of their sexual selves and how they relate to one another sexually (cf. Czarniawska 2008). People are not just passive objects of society in the construction of (their) sexuality; they are also active agents in the development of their sexual selves (Longmore 1998; Mason-Schrock 1996).31

I do not see sexuality, as Stephens and Phillips (2003) do, as a “part” that people play. To say that it is a “part” people play is to suggest that it is a role. Sexuality is no more a role than are gender and race. Gender scholars have already noted the problems in conceptualizing gender as a role (see for example Acker 1990, 1992; Risman 1998, 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987). The most important problem with conceptualizing gender as a role is that it neglects social structure and power. Like gender, race and class, sexuality too is about power. Sexuality is a “form of oppression” and a “system of power and privilege with serious and often damaging consequences resulting from homophobia and sexually exclusionary practices and policies” (Andersen 2005:448). Some scholars,

31 See, for example, Mason-Schrock’s (1996) analysis of how transsexuals employ self-narratives to construct their gendered and sexual identities anew within the context of group interaction.
such as Collins (2004), call the system of power associated with sexuality *heterosexism*, meaning that homo-, bi-, and trans-sexuality are stigmatized as deviant (cf. Rogers and Garrett 2002). However, sexuality also intersects with gender, race, class and other dimensions of social stratification (Andersen 2005; Collins 2004; Nagel 2003; Weber 2001; West 1993). These intersections produce a wide array of sexual practices and identities (for example, the sexuality of working-class African Americans), other than homo-, bi-, and trans-sexuality that are subordinated and stigmatized as deviant (Collins 2004).

It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the myriad of ways that sexuality structures and is structured by, interacts with and operates within, between, and around gender, race and class. But, I do recognize that sexuality does not operate in the same ways as do gender, race, or class (Andersen 2005). As Collins (2004:95) notes, while racism and heterosexism share some common features and affect each other, they also diverge in significant ways. For example, she says “. . . both use similar state-sanctioned institutional mechanisms to maintain racial and sexual hierarchies.” However, race is visually identifiable such that, for the most part, African Americans cannot “pass” as White in the way that people who are not heterosexual can often “pass” as heterosexual. In addition, under the new “color-blind racism,” Whites no longer publicly identify themselves as racists or make obviously racist comments especially around minorities (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Collins 2004). By contrast, “U.S. society’s assumption of heterosexuality along with its tolerance of homophobia imposes no such censure on straight men and women to refrain from homophobic comments” in many public settings (Collins 2004:113-4).

Sexuality as a system of power is also implicated in the gender institution but does not operate in the same way as gender does. For example, West and Zimmerman (1987:136) say that people hold one another accountable for their gender across social contexts. A person may not live up to hegemonic gender norms but he or she does so “at the risk of gender assessment.” Whatever a person does in any particular situation, it is always done in ways that make that person accountable as a man or woman. This does not hold for sexuality across all situations and contexts. People may engage in activities “at the risk of sexuality assessment” and this risk may be greater or lesser depending on
social context. But, people are not held accountable for their sexuality in every activity and across all social contexts in the same way they are held accountable for their gender.

Collins (2004:6) defines sexuality as a “system of ideas and social practices that is deeply implicated in shaping American social inequalities.” It is unclear whether Collins considers sexuality to be socially scripted. If mass media show people how to behave toward one another in gendered ways, I presume mass media also show people how to behave toward one another sexually. For instance, mass media, for the most part, do not show adults being sexual with children or the practice of incest, and if they do, these sexual practices are portrayed as deviant and immoral. In addition, sexuality is not just “ideas” and “practices.” If people are active agents in the construction of their sexual selves, as Mason-Schrock (1996) contends, then sexuality is also about identities.

Collins (2000, 2004) also says that dominant race, gender and sexual ideologies are represented in “controlling images” of Black women (and men) in mass media. According to Collins (2004:350), these “controlling images” are:

the gender-specific depiction[s] of people of African descent within Western scholarship and popular culture. The terms representations and stereotypes also describe this phenomenon. Representations need not be stereotypical and stereotypes need not function as controlling images. Of the three, controlling images are most closely tied to power relations of race, class, gender and sexuality.

As I understand this formulation, representations are not necessarily stereotypes, though they can be. Stereotypes are always representations. But, I do not understand when and how stereotypes do and do not function as “controlling images.” In addition, I am unclear about whether and when images of people of African descent or of people in general in scholarship and popular culture are not “controlling,” thus I avoid this notion altogether.

I use the terms image and script to describe representations of African American women in rap music lyrics, and there is no essential difference between the two terms. Like Collins, I see mass media images as providing scripts that suggest how people should act in ways that are considered normatively appropriate for their gender and
sexually. In the main, I use the more generic term *script* rather than *sexual script* because scripts (may) advise people on how to behave in ways other than sexually.

I conceptualize scripts providing ideas about sexuality, similar to how Martin (2003, 2006) characterizes gendering practice. Martin (2003:351) says, “To view gender as practice means, among other things, to view it as a ‘system of action’ that is institutionalized and widely recognized but also is dynamic, emergent, local, variable and shifting.” Similarly, sexuality is practice, or a “system of action that is institutionalized” that people tacitly know as sexuality but which varies across time and space and is performed in local contexts. Furthermore, Martin says, “… because they are local, some gendering practices are optional actions that can be invoked or ignored during interaction. People practice the practices that the gender institution makes available . . . .” Sexual scripts are optional actions people practice in relation to the system of and ideas about sexuality in interaction with others. Like gendering practices, scripts are made available to people through social institutions, such as the mass media. Sexual scripts indicate how people *may* behave sexually but they do not *require* that they behave in accordance with them. That is, they do not *determine* behavior. Sexual scripts in mass media, however, do suggest ways to act sexually.

I do not conceive of “images” as only two-dimensional visual representations or symbols as do Stephens and Phillips (2003). Included among the various definitions of “image” in *The American Heritage Dictionary (4th ed)* are:

1. The opinion or concept of something that is held by the public.  2. The character projected to the public, as by a person or institution, especially as interpreted by the mass media.  3. A vivid description or representation.  4. A concrete representation, as in art, literature, or music.

When I say “images” of women in rap music lyrics, I do not mean visual representations but I do mean a description, representation, characterization of and/or ideas about women and their (sexual and gendering) practices. I avoid the term “controlling image” because I want to leave open the possibility that all images are not controlling.\(^{32}\)

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\(^{32}\) The criteria for what images are controlling versus not controlling have not been established and are outside the scope of this study.
Gender and sexuality themes. I also coded lyrics for what I call other “gender and sexuality themes,” which are discourses that concern constructions of femininity, masculinity and sexuality. However, these themes cannot accurately be described as images of (Black) women. For example, I coded when lyrics expressed homophobic or anti-gay attitudes and beliefs. There were also variations in the way rappers use the term “bitch” and, in some cases, they do not use the term in reference to women. However, the term does carry with it gendered and sexualized meanings, especially when male rappers use it to denigrate other male rappers’ skills and challenge their masculinity. I also note when rappers reject or challenge negative images of Black women although they do not necessarily offer tangible alternatives.

As necessary in the coding process, I added other codes when other images, scripts and gender and sexuality themes related to Black women emerged from the data and subtracted codes when I realized that they could not be ascertained in rap music lyrics. For example, Collins (2004) distinguishes between Black “ladies” who are depicted as loving, respectable wives and mothers in heterosexual marriages within the setting of the home and modern mammies who are asexual and loyal to their bosses and work institutions and are shown primarily at work in films and television shows. In addition, the “educated bitch” is primarily depicted as an educated woman with a powerful work position who takes care of herself, has control of her sexual relationships, but is not married and generally not portrayed in the home. I could not make such distinctions in rap music lyrics because the images are not situated visually within home and work settings. Instead, I framed divas, sister saviors and earth mothers as scripts for middle-class Black women in rap music lyrics, as I describe below.

Some additional scripts and gender and sexuality themes that I use are prostitute, referring to men as bitches, empowered bitch, rapper’s mama, homophobia, and challenging images and sexual scripts. Later in the coding process, I re-coded earlier songs to add the new codes. In all cases if an image or theme was present, I coded the song as 1 for it. If absent, I coded a 0 (1 = yes, 0 = no). Song lyrics and one lyric line can contain multiple codes. That is, lyrics could contain the freak, gold digger, and prostitute images as well as the sexuality theme, homophobia. If so, I coded each image or theme as present in the song. I define the categories for coding below.
Table 3.1 defines the categories for my coding procedure.

### Table 3.1: Code Definitions of Images and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freak</td>
<td>sexually uninhibited, promiscuous, wild, and desiring &quot;freaky&quot; sex; alternatively called &quot;ho,&quot; slut, floozy, chickenhead, hoochie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prostitute</td>
<td>trades sex for money as a vocation, usually through a pimp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold Digger</td>
<td>uses sex for financial or material rewards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Gangsta&quot; Bitch</td>
<td>aggressive, uses violence and sexuality to support and protect Black men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowered Bitch</td>
<td>in control of their sexuality; sexually, financially and artistically free and independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Mama</td>
<td>mothers (except rappers' mothers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rappers' Mama</td>
<td>rappers' own mothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyke</td>
<td>homosexual woman; alternatively called butch, ice queen, fish, bulldagger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homophobia</td>
<td>derogatory names for and/or acts of violence against homosexuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diva</td>
<td>&quot;high-maintenance;&quot; requires constant attention and expensive goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Savior</td>
<td>abides by the teachings of the Black Church; relationships with men informed by her relationship with God; often asexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth Mother</td>
<td>educated; politically conscious and Afrocentric; in control of her sexuality and relationships with men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referring to Men as Bitches</td>
<td>meant to be emasculating; encourages rappers to prove their “manhood.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging Images/Scripts</td>
<td>rejecting or resisting negative images of Black women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Freak.** The freak is a woman who is sexually uninhibited, promiscuous, wild, and desiring sex at any time (Collins 2004; Stephens and Phillips 2003). Moreover, freaks want and aggressively pursue "kinky" or "freaky" sex, or deviant sex, that is not practiced within a deep relationship or emotional connection with a man. Rappers (and
others) alternatively refer to freaks as hos, sluts, floozies, skeezers, chickenheads, and hoochies. If a rapper explicitly refers to a woman as a freak, ho, slut, or other similar name and/or characterizes a woman or women as sexually wild and/or promiscuous, I coded the freak image as present.

Prostitute. Prostitutes trade sex for money as a vocation. In many lyrics that contain the prostitute script, men rappers self-identify as pimps. Prostitutes may also be sexual freaks, but prostitutes are financially remunerated for sexual acts. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between hos (short for whore) who are freaks and hos who are prostitutes. If the term “ho” appears in lyrics, I looked at the context and content of the song to determine whether a rapper uses the term to refer to a prostitute. If a lyric describes women trading sex for money as a profession, as having a pimp who controls those transactions, and/or actually refers to a woman as a “prostitute” or “hooker,” I coded the prostitute script present and not the freak or gold digger script (see below). However, one song could contain all three scripts simultaneously.

Gold digger. A gold digger is a materialistic and manipulative “bitch” who seeks out relationships with men who can and will buy her expensive goods and services (Collins 2004; Stephens and Phillips 2003). Men are only of use to gold diggers insofar as they can meet their material demands. The distinction between a gold digger and a prostitute is a muddy one but I felt the distinction was significant and should be made. The distinction between a gold digger and a prostitute is significant because gold diggers do not have pimps and/or do not make trading sex for money their profession. A variation on the gold digger script is a woman who has sex for drugs, i.e. the “crack ho” (Collins 2004). If a rapper describes a woman who uses her sexuality and/or explicitly trades sex for material assets and/or drugs, or if the lyrics contain the phrase “gold digger,” I coded the song as containing the gold digger script.

“Gangsta” bitch. The “gangsta” (gangster) bitch is a woman who uses violence and/or sexuality to support and protect men, particularly (but not always) a man with whom she is having a sexual relationship. The gangsta bitch is aggressive, emotionally strong, and actively participates in hip-hop culture associated with gangsta rap (Stephens and Phillips 2003). Rappers often refer to a gangsta bitch as a “bad ass bitch” or a woman who is “down for her man,” oftentimes willing to sacrifice her life for him
(Pough 2004). If a rapper depicts a woman who uses violence to support and protect men and/or sexuality to hustle and garner information from other rival men or gangs, or if the lyrics contain the phrase “gangster or gangsta bitch,” I coded the gangsta bitch image as present.

**Empowered bitch.** Empowered bitches portray themselves or are portrayed as financially, artistically and sexually free and independent. Empowered bitches “control their own sexuality . . . ‘get a freak on,’ which remains within their control and on their own terms” (Collins 2004:127). Empowered bitches, unlike the gold digger, do not have sex for material rewards. They may support the men with whom they have a relationship but unlike the gangsta bitch, they do not sacrifice their own well-being for men. If a woman rapper describes herself or another woman as an independent woman who defines her sexuality and does not allow men to control her in or outside of relationships in lyrics, I coded the empowered bitch image as present. If a man rapper characterizes a woman in this manner, I coded the empowered bitch image as present.

**Baby mama.** I coded the baby mama image present in any lyrics with a reference to a mother, except lyrics in which the rapper refers to his or her own mother. I also noted how rappers characterize baby mamas, particularly how men rappers portray the mothers of their own children. Thus, I coded whether the description of the baby mama was positive, neutral or negative.

**Rappers’ mama.** I coded the rappers’ mama image as present when rappers refer to their own mothers in lyrics. Like “baby mamas,” I recorded whether the portrayal of rappers’ own mothers is positive, neutral or negative.

**Dyke.** If rappers refer to lesbians in their lyrics, I coded the dyke script as present. Rappers use other derogatory names for lesbians as well, including, butch, ice queen, fish, or bulldagger (Stephens and Phillips 2003). If these terms were in the lyrics, I coded the dyke script as present. Some men rappers call women who refuse to accept men’s sexual advances “dykes” regardless of their actual sexual orientation. I also recorded the dyke script as present in this scenario.

**Homophobia.** I coded homophobia as present in when a rapper uses derogatory terms to refer to homosexuals and/or lesbians, such as “punk,” “homo,” “fag,” “dyke,” and “bulldagger”; explicitly calls someone a derogatory name that is often applied to
homosexuals; describes acts of violence or potential acts of violence against homosexuals; and/or derides homosexuals in any other way, including making them the comedic foil of a story in song.

_Diva._ A diva is a middle-class woman with “an attitude” (Stephens and Phillips 2003). Divas require constant attention and expensive goods (such as jewelry, clothing and cars) to maintain their status and contentment. The diva expresses an elegant sexuality that is enticing, but never “freaky” or blatant (Stephens and Phillips 2003). Divas are successful on their own, so unlike the gold digger, they do not seek relationships with men for material gain or reward. However, divas expect the men with whom they have relationships to be high-achievers and bolster their status. I coded the diva script as present if lyrics describe a woman who is “classy,” does not express “freaky” sexuality, craves attention and/or desires a relationship with a man who is successful and can complement her status.

_Sister savior._ The sister savior rejects any sexuality other than heterosexuality within marriage for the purposes of procreation (Stephens and Phillips 2003). She is often portrayed as asexual. Her relationships with men are informed by her relationship with God and the historically patriarchal and heterosexist Black Church (Stephens and Phillips 2003). Because the Black Church teaches that men are to lead and that women should take a supportive role, the sister savior often subordinates her own needs to those of men and the Black Church. I coded the sister savior image as present if lyrics admonish women against sex generally or sex other than sex within heterosexual marriage and/or contain some kind of reference to Judeo-Christian axioms regarding women and sex.

_Earth mother._ Earth mothers are educated women who are politically conscious and Afrocentric (Stephen and Phillips 2003). While the religious dictates of the Black Church constrain the sister savior’s sexuality, Earth mothers’ sexuality is based in a spirituality that embraces traditional African cultures, skin tones, hair, and clothing (Stephens and Phillips 2003). Earth mothers maintain control of their sexuality and relationships with men and reject subordination and oppression based on gender and race.

_Referring to Men as Bitches._ In coding the lyrics, I was careful to record how a rapper was employing term _bitch_. The term “bitch” does not always refer to a woman in
the lyrics of rap music. Sometimes, rappers refer to one another or other men as bitches. When a man rapper calls another man rapper or man a “bitch,” I coded the theme “referring to men as bitches” as present.

Challenging negative images/scripts. Finally, I coded rap lyrics as challenging negative images of African American women when rappers explicitly acknowledge their existence in rap music or other forms of popular culture and critiques or resists them. Some rappers who reject these negative images rap about a relationship based on love, respect, and honesty rather than mistrust, sexual exploitation, violence, and pain. Others may raise concern about women’s portrayal as bitches and “hos” and rap about how women should be treated as queens or with respect. Still others reject other forms of domination and subordination of Black women. If any of these conditions are met in lyrics, I coded the theme “challenging negative images/scripts of African American women” as present.

Code Frequencies, Percentages and Intercoder Reliability.

Table 3.2 shows the frequencies, percentages and intercoder reliability for each of my coding categories.
Table 3.2: Code Frequencies, Percentages, and Intercoder Reliability for Images and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Song Totals</th>
<th>Song Percentage</th>
<th>Intercoder Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reference to women</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>84.9%</td>
<td>98.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freak</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>96.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prostitute</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>98.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold Digger</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>99.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangsta Bitch</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowered Bitch</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>98.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Mama</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>99.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rappers' Mothers</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyke</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>96.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homophobia</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>93.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diva</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>99.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Savior</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>99.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth Mother</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>97.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referring to Men as Bitches</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>96.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging Images/Scripts</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>88.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 provides the list of codes, the number and percentages of songs in which each code appears, and agreement percentages assessing intercoder reliability. The most prevalent image of (Black) women in the sample of rap music lyrics is the freak script. Perhaps the freak is the most common image of Black women in rap lyrics because of the ferocity and endurance of socio-historical beliefs about the “wild sexual natures” of women of African descent (see Chapter 2). Only three other images and themes appear in more than 10 percent of the sample: the gold digger, rappers’ mothers, and referring to men as bitches. While other scripts appear in the lyrics of relatively few songs, this is an exhaustive list of images that I found in the lyrics. In other words, when rappers rapped about women and/or their relationships with women, they generally employed one or more of the preceding scripts.

To determine the reliability of my coding procedures, I hired an undergraduate research assistant to independently code 216 songs, or 48 percent of the total sample of randomly selected songs. This assistant listened to the songs as she read the lyrics I provided and coded the lyrics as she read them, using my definitions (Table 4.1).
calculated “agreement percentages” (Kubrin 2005a) which reflect how frequently the research assistant and I agreed on whether an image, script, or theme were present or not in the lyrics.

For all codes, there was a high level of agreement, all but one over 90 percent. The agreement percentage for the code “challenging images/scripts” was 88 percent. Perhaps assessing whether rappers are rejecting the dominant ideology about Black women and/or their sexuality is open to more interpretation than the other codes. Readers should perhaps use caution when interpreting my results on challenging negative images (see Chapter 6).

**Analysis Procedures**

Burawoy (1998) posits the extended case method to make connections between the micro-processes of particular “cases,” situations and/or experiences to the macro-structures of the larger context or society. Typically, positivist social scientists employ standardized survey research and sampling and statistical techniques to make connections and predictions from a large number of aggregated particular cases to general concepts, laws and/or structures representative of an entire population. Positivist social scientists arrive at generalizable concepts, laws and/or structures through what Burawoy (1998) calls a “procedural objectivity,” which is meant to limit the distorting effects of the social scientist intervening in the world and any idiosyncrasies of a particular context. Positivist social science advocates detachment from the societies scientists research (Burawoy 1998). However, the positivist social science model cannot avoid what are known as context effects, including the effect the researcher and/or interviewer has on research subjects (Burawoy 1998; Harding 1991; Haraway 1991).

Social scientists who do survey research recognize the significance and consequences of context effects and continue to attempt to develop techniques for controlling for them (better). Because social science cannot evade the effects of context, some have suggest the abdication of science altogether in favor of “hermeneutic” approaches emphasizing “situated knowledges” (Haraway 1991) or, in the case of

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33 Context effects include interview effects, respondent effects, field effects, and situation effects (Burawoy 1998).
34 See for example Bauman (1987), and Haraway (1991).
feminist theorist Sandra Harding (1991), a “successor” science (Burawoy 1998). Burawoy (1998) advocates a different approach, arguing that there can and should be two models of science—positivist and reflexive—each with different kinds of questions that can be asked and answered and each with limitations and flaws. 

The charge of positivist social scientists against ethnographic studies has been that they can only make generalizations about the particular small group or culture in which they participate and/or observe and not about large social and historical processes and structures. However, there is a long tradition in anthropology and sociology of connecting ethnographic data about local processes, interactions and customs of particular (small) communities and/or groups to the extralocal contexts and structures of a society or societies (Burawoy 1998; Collins 1998; Smith 1987). Burawoy (1998) formalizes this tradition in naming and explicitly identifying the features of this method. He calls the method the extended case method.

Instead of problematizing social context as a distorting feature of social scientific research, reflexive science and the extended case method makes context and its distorting effects the “stuff” of “reality” to be researched. Positive science emphasizes separation of subject and object. By contrast, reflexive science encourages “engagement” with the world and presupposes the social scientist’s “participation in the world” and the social context being researched (Burawoy 1998:5). “[R]eflexive science elevates dialogue as its defining principle and intersubjectivity between participant and observer as its premise” (Burawoy 1998:14).

Whereas the objectivity of positivist science is a procedural one, the objectivity of reflexive science is an embedded one, “dwelling in theory” (Burawoy 1998:28). A key feature of reflexive science and the extended case method is the extension, modification, amplification and/or complication of theory and previous research through the analysis of specific cases, including but not limited to social groups, cultural productions and/or phenomena. While Burawoy (1998) identifies ethnography and/or participant

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35 Burawoy (1998) distinguishes between models of science, including positive and reflexive, and methods, in this case survey research and the extended case method. While survey research is the typical method employed in positive science, it is not the only method, nor does survey research have to adhere to positive science tenets. The same can be said of the reflexive model of science and ethnographic research.

observation as the archetype of the extended case method, he also argues that other techniques of data collection and analysis can utilize the extended case method.

In my content analysis of rap music lyrics, I aim to extend, amplify and complicate Patricia Hill Collins’ (1998, 2001, 2004) theories about the intersectionality of hierarchical systems of power based on race, class, gender and sexuality and the resulting “matrix of domination.” I attempt to illustrate how dominant ideologies about Black women are reproduced or contested in rap music lyrics. I also aim to enhance and clarify conceptions of hegemonic femininity (and hegemonic masculinity), pariah femininities and alternative or resistant femininities. The codes in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 frame my analysis of contemporary images of African American women as well as several gender and sexuality themes. My analysis goes back and forth between theory, previous research and the data to illuminate and connect these issues. In addition to coding whether an image or theme was present, I made notes in the form of analytical memos (Turner 1981) on lyrics in 105 songs that most typify and illustrate images of African-American women and other gender and sexuality themes.

The limitation of reflexive science and the extended case method is the presence of “power effects” between the observer and the observed, or researcher and subject. Power effects include “domination, silencing, objectification and normalization” (Burawoy 1998:22). Because social scientists are participants in the societies and world they study, they are intimately involved and embedded in relationships of domination and subordination. We live in a society that “confers dominance” on persons by virtue of their race, class, gender and sexuality (McIntosh 1988). So, it is unavoidable that researchers dominate and are dominated by their subjects, depending upon their position in hierarchical relations of domination and subordination.

Social scientists, particularly ethnographers, can only include in their analysis a limited number of subjects. As a result, there are innumerable other subjects that are silenced. In connecting local and particular processes to larger social structural forces, reflexive science runs the risk of objectification, “that is hyposatizing social forces as external and natural” (Burawoy 1998:23). By “dwelling in theory” and seeking to enhance, advance and/or change theory, reflexive science threatens to incorporate idiosyncrasies of particular cases and normalize them, instead of seeing them as
experiences and practices unique to a particular social group or phenomenon. In other words, reflexive science can become a tool for reducing the complexity of social groups and phenomena to specific theoretical concepts that can be researched and applied in other settings for purposes of analysis and control (Burawoy 1998).

As a middle-class White woman, I am inevitably implicated in relations of domination and subordination, and my position within hierarchical power relations undoubtedly inform my understanding and analysis of rap music, which is a predominantly African American and working-class art form. I no doubt silence many in the rap music industry and hip hop community by focusing solely on the work of platinum-selling artists. In addition, as previously noted, there are specific problems, including the danger of objectification, in analyzing art forms for indications of broader social structures and processes at work. Although I reduce the complexity of the rap music industry and hip hop culture by focusing only on rap music lyrics and by not participating in and/or soliciting the thoughts and ideas of people within the rap music and hip-hop culture industries, I believe this project is justified. As noted in Chapter 2, rap music and hip-hop culture have been transported across the globe and (re)interpreted and transformed in local contexts. Rappers (re)produce negative images and representations of (Black) women, youth continue to consume rap music, and the gendered and sexualized images (may) affect how young (Black) women perceive themselves and how others, particularly young (Black) men, perceive and treat them.

Conclusions

This dissertation is envisaged as an extended case, following Burawoy (1998). I use the extended case method to relate the specific case of rap music lyrics to broader institutional patterns of the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality as axes of domination and subordination as well as dominant ideologies about Black women and their sexuality (cf. Collins 1998, 2000, 2004). I also relate rap music lyrics to conceptions of hegemonic femininity (and hegemonic masculinity), pariah femininities, and alternative or resistant femininities (cf. Connell 1987, 1995, 2005; Schippers 2007).
CHAPTER 4

FREAKS, PROSTITUTES AND BITCHES IN RAP MUSIC LYRICS

In this chapter and the next, I focus on images of African American women and other gender and sexuality themes in rap music lyrics. This chapter examines how men and women rappers depict (Black) women as sexual freaks, prostitutes and bitches. Men rappers often depict women negatively, as sexual freaks or “hos,” although they often express sexual desire for freaks. Women rappers sometimes express themselves as aggressive sexual freaks who know what they want sexually and how to get it from men. Sexual freaks are distinguished from prostitutes in rap music lyrics. When men rappers refer to women as prostitutes, they often do so to portray themselves as pimps. The representation of women as bitches in rap music lyrics is disputed and often contradictory. At times, rappers portray women who use their sexuality to con men into providing them with material rewards, i.e., gold diggers, as “bitches.” At other times, rappers describe women as “gangsta bitches” who are aggressive and valued as companions and conspirators in gang-related activities. In some lyrics, women rappers portray themselves as strong, “independent bitches” who define their sexuality and make a living apart from men. In the next section, I provide a summary of my analysis aims in extending theories on the intersection of gender, race, class and sexuality and hegemonic femininity and other femininities. Then, I turn to my analysis of images of (Black) women in rap music lyrics.

Analysis Aims

In Schippers’ (2007) model of gender hegemony (see Chapter 1), the dominant gender ideology in Western industrialized societies favors hegemonic femininity over other femininities. Schippers (2007:90) defines “hegemonic features of culture” as:

. . . those that serve the interests and ascendancy of ruling classes, legitimate their ascendancy and dominance, and encourage all to consent to and go along with social relations of ruling.

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Gender hegemony is one feature of hegemonic culture and, in Western industrialized societies, hegemonic masculinity “serves the interests and ascendency of ruling classes,” which historically have been comprised of White heterosexual middle- to upper-class men. Hegemonic masculinity results from practices that reproduce women’s subordinate position in relation to men. That is, women who are submissive, compliant, (hetero)sexually passive, nurturing, and subordinate their needs to the needs of men are complicit in the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity and the maintenance of the gender institution. In the United States and most Western industrialized societies, hegemonic masculinity has predominantly been associated with the practices of White heterosexual middle- to upper-class women (Collins 2000, 2004).

In Schippers’ model, however, any woman may embody the qualities of hegemonic masculinity within any particular local context and not all White heterosexual, middle- to upper-class women embody the qualities of hegemonic masculinity at all times and places. Women who are not submissive, sexually passive, compliant, nurturing etc. upset the dominant gender ideology that ensures the “. . . dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Schippers 2007:94). That is, when women enact features of hegemonic masculinity—sexually desiring the feminine, being authoritative, using violence, and/or taking control and not being obedient sexually or otherwise—they disturb the hierarchical and complementary relationship between masculinity and femininity that ensures the dominant status of men and the inferior status of women. According to Schippers (2007), femininities that take on the “quality content” of hegemonic masculinity are pariah femininities. Women who embody pariah femininities are stigmatized and not favored in the dominant gender order.

Schippers (2007) asserts that the qualities of hegemonic masculinity, hegemonic femininity and pariah femininities are negotiated, constructed and vary in local contexts and practices. Identifying the qualities that are stigmatized when embodied by women (can) facilitate identification of the features of hegemonic masculinity operating in any local context. Schippers also claims that alternative femininities and masculinities do not ensure the dominant status of men and the inferior status of women. My analysis suggests that some femininities circulating in hip-hop culture actually provide advantages to women rather than subordinate them (in their relations to/with men), making alternative
femininities available to young (Black) women. Finally, there are some local contexts in which resistant femininities and masculinities reject the hierarchical and complementary relationship between masculinity and femininity and actively challenge that relationship in the broader society’s dominant gender ideology (Lorber 2005).

In general, images of African American women in the mass media have transformed over time reflecting African Americans’ more complex and varied current political and economic statuses (Collins 2004). Contemporary images, for example, reflect the upward mobility of some African Americans into the middle class. Collins (2004) distinguishes between working-class and middle-class “controlling images” of Black women and identifies them in Black popular culture, from television shows, to films, to hip hop culture and rap music. She says that working-class images of African American women include freaks, bitches, and “Bad Black Mothers,” or “BBMs.” Middle-class images of African American women consist of Black ladies, modern mammys and “educated bitches.”

My analysis aims are three-fold. First, my aim is to determine if the lyrics of contemporary rap music employ the representations Patricia Hill Collins identifies in her analysis of Black popular culture or other images of African American women. Second, I identify the qualities of hegemonic femininity and the variety of pariah femininities circulating in hip-hop culture by examining images of (Black) women in rap music lyrics. By identifying the qualities of pariah femininities in rap music lyrics, I also aim to ascertain the features of hegemonic masculinity in hip-hop culture (also see Chapter 6). Finally, I ascertain whether rap music lyrics offer any alternative or resistant femininities (as well as any alternative or resistant masculinities). Note that throughout, I integrate literature in the substantive findings in Chapters 4 and 5. In the next section, I discuss the socio-historical and contemporary meanings associated with the term freak and show how men and women rappers use the term to characterize (Black) women and/or themselves.

**Freaky Freaks Freak**

The term *freak* generally means something or someone who is abnormal, unusual, aberrant, deviant, and/or irregular. For example, a freak occurrence could refer to an unusual weather outbreak. The word also harkens back to nineteenth-century
entertainment shows—freak shows—that featured people with birth defects, such as webbed or clubbed feet and hands, people of unusual height or breadth, and “bearded” or “overly-hairy” women (Collins 2004). But, it also connotes an association with the wild, the uncultured and untamed.

European colonists of Africa presumed that Africans were biologically more similar to the wild animals amongst them than to humans, or more exactly, White European men (Collins 2004; Stephens and Phillips 2003). Their “proximity to wild animals, especially apes, raised in Western imaginations the specter of wild sexual practices in an uncivilized, inherently violent wilderness” (Collins 2004:120). Darwinist ideas informed Western beliefs in a human hierarchy based on race. Europeans ranked Africans lowest in terms of cognitive aptitude, moral decency, physical and sexual health, and cultural development. As such, Europeans defined African sexual behaviors that did not conform to White European Christian notions of sex as bound by procreation and marriage as wild, uninhibited, morally degenerate, and in a word, “freaky.” Under slavery, slave owners used this ideology depicting women of African descent as sexually and morally deviant, freaky, and “jezebels” (see Chapter 2), to justify rape.

The term freak, when used to describe women, particularly African American women, evokes a specific “sedimented historical meaning” (Collins 2004:120). But, in contemporary popular culture, including rap music, the term has more generally become associated with ideas about sexuality, sexual behaviors, and sexual identities (Collins 2004). “Freaky” sex is deviant, or “kinky,” sex. A “freak” is thought to engage in deviant sexual behaviors. And, to “freak” is to “fuck.” However, the term has broadened to also describe a style of dance or simply the act of dancing, people who live at the margins of society and/or people who actively resist the mainstream or the norm. For example, Chic, a disco group from the 1970s, had a song “Le Freak” that encouraged people to “freak out” on the dance floor (Collins 2004). Some rappers use the term freak to refer to dancing. Snoop Doggy Dogg asks people to “freak, freak y’all, into the beat y’all” (“Party with a D.P.G.”). DMX raps on a song for The Lox, “This is a beat that I can freak to” (“Money, Power, & Respect”). When Missy Elliot’s 2001 song “Get Your Freak On” topped billboard charts, what “get your freak on” meant varied widely among different audiences (Collins 2004).
Rappers employ the term *freak* in various ways, including ways that describe the act of “fucking,” characterize sexual acts as outside the boundaries of what is considered normative, and/or stereotype Black women as sexually promiscuous. For example, Timbaland raps “We be freakin’ up in my jeep” about “a girl” he “digs” (Timbaland and Magoo; “Man Undercover”). Rappin’ 4-Tay, who raps on a Too $hort song, raps that “Hos in the world, trying to play it sweet, knowing damn well that they wanna freak” (Too $hort; “Don’t Fight the Feeling”). Ja Rule’s song “Between Me and You” featuring Christina Milan, a woman artist who sings the chorus, depicts an affair between them while each is in a relationship with another. They characterize what they do with one another as “freaky things”; Ja Rule says that the woman has “a lot of freak” in her; and he raps about how they get their “freakin’ on.” Coolio warns against “getting a freak on” without protection against the transmission of a sexually transmitted disease:

```plaintext
Everybody listen up cause I’m about to get my speak on
Fools be trippin’ when it’s time to get their *freak on*
Runnin’ around town, puttin’ it down without no protection, for they erection . . .
Iesha slept with Mark and Mark slept with Tina
And Tina slept with Lupe and Lupe slept with Rob . . .
Rob slept with Lisa who slept with Steve and
Steve was positive, HIV
Ya better cool your ass off cause it’s too damn hot. (Coolio; “Too Hot”)
```

As Coolio describes “fools” engaging in sexual behavior as getting “their freak on,” he perpetuates the image of African Americans, men and women, as sexually promiscuous, immoral and uninhibited. However, a rapper from House of Pain, one of the few White male rap groups in my sample, also uses the term *freak* as a verb to describe sexual activity and to characterize himself and the women he is interested in “freaking” as freaks:

```plaintext
Ya know we’re liftin’ up skirts, grabbin’ on the snatch
Feelin’ on the skin, I’m knockin’ on your door
Honey let me in, cause I’m down with the *freaks* mo baby
I’m at my sexual peak, young lady . . . ready, serve, entertain like Merv
Griffin’, sniffin’ panties, I’m a perv . . . the *freakin’* who’s speakin’
```
*Freaks* it every weekend. (House of Pain; “House and the Rising Sun”)

There are other instances where men rappers refer to themselves as freaks. 2 Live Crew is one of the, if not the, most notorious male rap group for using objectifying, misogynist lyrics. Almost every 2 Live Crew song contains the freak script. In the following excerpt, they imply that Black men can be freaks as well:

Sittin’ at home with my dick on hard
So I got the black book for a *freak* to call
Picked up the telephone, then dialed the 7 digits
Said, “Yo, this Marquis, baby! Are you down with it?”
I arrived at her house, knocked on the door
Not having no idea of what the night had in store
I’m like a dog in heat, a *freak* without warning
I have an appetite for sex, ‘cause me so horny. (2 Live Crew; “Me So Horny”)

The freak script is the most prevalent image of young (Black) women in rap music lyrics. I did not code lyrics as containing the freak script if rappers used the term to describe dancing or other popular usages that do not explicitly refer to women. In my sample, forty-two percent of the songs, or 187, refer to women as freaks or by one or more aliases—such as ho, slut, hoochie, skeezer, floozy or chickenhead. This script is derivative of the sexually uninhibited jezebel under conditions of chattel slavery (see Chapter 2).

For the most part, the freak is portrayed very negatively in rap music but some scholars question whether there is a difference between women who are comfortable with their sexuality and derive strength from it, particularly when it is women rappers who describe themselves as freaks, and women who reproduce patriarchal scripts or male-defined fantasies (Collins 2004; Pough 2004; Stephens and Phillips 2003). Over 42% of songs (161) with exclusively men rappers refer to African American women as freaks. Of songs with exclusively women rappers (43), only 25.6% (11) contain the freak script. Of songs that featured both men and women rappers (28), 53.6% (15) characterize a woman or women as freaks. I explore the ways in which men and women rappers characterize women and/or themselves as sexual freaks below.
My analysis shows that men rappers reproduce and readily accept the freak script, and will have sex (not committed relationships) with freaks but they do not express respect or admiration for freaks. They depict freaks as sexually uninhibited, willing to “fuck” at any point, in any location, with anyone, with multiple partners simultaneously, and/or in any position (Stephens and Phillips 2003). In the lyrics of many male rappers, freaks represent a pariah femininity (Schippers 2007). They are stigmatized and denigrated for engaging in “freaky” sex and/or for having multiple sexual partners. Scarface’s song “Use them Ho’s” depicts women as hos with an insatiable appetite for sex and engaging in “freaky” sexual behavior:

[Rapper – K.B.]
These hos wildin’ but still I got ‘em under control
Impatiently, waitin’ for some dick that’s swole
They just some horny ass bitches that love to fuck
Tellin’ me how they suck dick and swallow the nut (they swallow it up)
I thought I told ya ‘bout one of these hos that put my foot inside her pussy
Then took it out and sucked my toes. (Scarface; “Use Them Ho’s”)

Luniz raps about a woman whom he explicitly calls a freak and is so promiscuous and wild that she has to have multiple partners at the same time:

A bitch is a bitch as a ho is a quick nut, like this slut named Kim I knew
She fucked me, fucked him, and she fucked all of them too
So we worked the train on her and left enough stains on her neck
Looking like a gold chain on her . . . so if you bump into this bitch on the streets
And you like the pussy deep, nigga speak because she’s just a freak. (Luniz; “She’s Just a Freak”)

Men rappers describe freaks as good for a “fuck,” but underscore that they are not interested in relationships with them and do not love or respect them. Too $hort warns “Never make a ho into a housewife” (“Hoes”) and to “Never fall in love with your ho” (“Pimpology”). Men rappers often claim that hos or freaks do not deserve to be respected. In another song, Too $hort raps about a woman in a club with whom he wants to “fuck” but says that she is otherwise worthless and treats her accordingly:

I’m only out to fuck a bitch, fuck tryin’ to charm her
I treat a fine ass bitch like dirt
No money in her purse, a fuck is all it’s worth
Lookin’ hella good in the club like a ho
Bitch, you need to go find a nigga to buy some mo’ drinks. (“Coming up Short”)

Snoop Dogg raps that he will have sex with freaks all night but that he does not love or value them, like he values his “G’s” (short for gangstas) or male friends:

I got bitches in the living room gettin’ it on
And, they ain’t leavin’ ‘til six in the mornin’ (six in the mornin’)
I got a pocket full of rubbers and my homeboys do too
So turn off the lights and close the doors
But (but what) we don’t love them hos, yeah!
So we gonna smoke an ounce to this
G’s up, hos down, while you motherfuckers bounce to this. (“Gin and Juice”)

Similarly, Ludacris raps “If you a pimp and you know you don’t love them hos. When you get on the flo’ (nigga throw dem bows) (“Southern Hospitality”).

Furthermore, men rappers express that they may sexually satisfy themselves with a freak “but do not have bragging rights of having done something (or someone) unique” (Stephens and Phillips 2003:22). While freaks may be good for a quick sexual escapade, association with freaks does not enhance their masculinity to the degree that having sex with a woman who is perceived as sexually unavailable does, either because she is in a relationship with another man or because she is a “respectable lady.” For example, Too $hort raps about having sex with his “homeboy’s bitch” and giving her more pleasure than his “homeboy” (can):

I fuck her like I know you won’t, pull out my dick and make her lose hope
Stick it back in and make her take some notes
If that’s your bitch, homeboy you better keep her
Cause she won’t stay off my beeper . . .I keep getting that good shit
S.D. [step daddy] wanna fuck your bitch come through and make the ho so happy. (“Step Daddy”)

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37 “Throw ‘dem bows” is a reference to a club dance.
Many men rappers imply that what a freak does sexually with them, she almost certainly does with other men. In fact, it is sometimes the case that men do not want to admit that they have sex with freaks, particularly freaks who fall short of their standards of physical attractiveness. Three 6 Mafia raps about a freak that “likes it from the back” and “don’t even need a bag to hide [her] face” (“From Da Back”). Similarly, in a song that instructs men to show hos “what they pussy made fo’,” Devin implies that he needs to be drunk to have sex with an unattractive “ho” and he makes sure no one will find out:

[Rapper – Devin]
What the fuck is this thick neck big bitch here?
Man I shoulda bought a 16 ounce beer . . .

[Rapper – K.B.]
Stop trippin’ and just take ya clothes off
‘Cuz all pussy feel the same when the lights go off . . .

[Rapper – Devin]
Man that’s too much, for just one fuck
And I’ll pass, you can’t even tell the difference
‘Tween their stomach and their ass . . .

[Rapper – K.B.]
You done fucked a skinny, ugly ass ho, so nigga what’s up
Who give a fuck if you fuck these broads?
Nobody knows, so just drank and smoke this dank
And let’s fuck these hos. (Scarface; “Use Them Ho’s”)

Similarly, Ice Cube describes an unattractive woman with “the pit-bull face” and directs her to “hold your big fat butt steady, ‘cause yo ho I got the paper bag ready” in his song, “You Can’t Fade Me.” This same woman who becomes pregnant claims that Ice Cube is the father nine months later, and he worries because “everybody in the hood already knows it’s supposed to be mine so they laughing at me.” In sum, men rappers depict freaks as morally corrupt, manipulative, and untrustworthy and their lyrics advise treating them with disdain. Thus, men rappers cast the freak as a pariah femininity (Schippers 2007).
Women rappers who depict themselves as freaks construct contradictory personas. On the one hand, they construct femininities that are counterhegemonic to (sexual) practices associated with White, middle-class femininity, direct their lyrics toward the men who would characterize them as sluts and hos, and maintain that they are in control of their sexuality and the men with whom they have sex. On the other, they often enact and (re)produce the freak script that men rappers belittle and disparage. It is unclear to me as well whether women rappers who express themselves as (sexual) freaks are enacting pariah, alternative or resistant femininities, an issue I will return to in Chapter 6.

Lil’ Kim and Foxy Brown are two women rappers who occupy this contradictory space in the rap music industry. They rap about their sexual exploits (as do men rappers) and tell men what they must do in order to please them sexually. For example, Foxy Brown raps on a Ludacris song:

You gotta li li li lick me from my ass to my clit
Then you gotta su-suck pussy while I sit on your dick
And I wanna talk some shit while I feel it get stiff
And then rubba-dub on my tits while I nut on your lips nigga.

(Ludacris; “What’s Your Fantasy [Remix]”)

Similarly, Lil’ Kim boasts, “Bet I wet cha like hurricanes and typhoons. Got buffoons eatin’ my pussy while I watch cartoons” (“Queen Bitch”).

Lil’ Kim’s and Foxy Brown’s personas imply that they are self-made women. But, to a large degree, men rappers constructed Lil’ Kim’s and Foxy Brown’s personas as contradictorily, sexually liberated and aggressive “gangsta bitches” (see my analysis of the gangsta bitch script below) and catapulted their careers after the “gangsta rap” of men rappers became commercially successful. Jay-Z (a man rapper) wrote most of Foxy Brown’s songs on her first album in 1996, *Ill Na Na* (a pet name for her vagina). At the time, she was only sixteen, and Def Jam records thought they could sell this image, but did not think that she could construct it herself (Pough 2004). Because she was so young, many music critics were appalled by her sexually explicit and violent lyrics. Similarly, the Notorious B.I.G., also known as Biggie Smalls, before his death, wrote many of Lil’ Kim’s early lyrics and produced her songs (Pough 2004). Some music and Black popular magazines have accused Lil’ Kim and Foxy Brown of being “puppets, victims of their
male crews – the late Biggie Smalls, Junior Mafia, and Puff Daddy in Lil’ Kim’s case and Jay-Z, Nas, AZ, and Cormega in Foxy Brown’s case” (Pough 2004:186).

In my sample of songs that feature men and women rappers and where men rappers are the predominant rappers, i.e. women rappers are “guest” rappers on men’s albums, twelve of twenty-two or 55 percent contain the freak script. In contrast, only a quarter of songs that feature exclusively women rappers contain the freak script. Later in their careers, for Lil’ Kim after the Notorious B.I.G. was murdered in 1997 and for Foxy Brown after Jay-Z dropped her from Def Jam the first time, the women became somewhat more independent and seem to have more creative freedom in their music and lyrics. Their personas changed very little since then, however, although Foxy Brown attempted unsuccessfully to change hers and, perhaps as a result, sold fewer records than in the past or than Lil’ Kim did (Pough 2004). Foxy Brown after her break from Jay-Z and Def Jam tried to make a career and define herself on her own terms. She had several public altercations with the men who tried to control her (career) and she later went back to Jay-Z, this time to his own Roc-A-Fella music label for her “comeback” album in 2005. Escaping the freak script once a woman has been labeled as such may be impossible to do in hip-hop culture (Stephens and Phillips 2003).

Though Lil’ Kim and Foxy Brown are the quintessential women of the gangsta rap sub-genre and the most (in)famous women rappers for their sexually explicit lyrics and aggressive sexuality, other women rappers have followed in their footsteps. Trina and Shawnna are two such rappers. Trick Daddy (a man rapper) first featured Trina on a track in 1998 and she was featured on other rap artists’ albums afterwards. She has since had a few solo albums after that. Shawnna, formerly a member of a women’s rap group (Infamous Syndicate) who gained limited acclaim, was featured on several artists’ albums and did not release a solo album until 2002. Both women launched their solo careers by guest rapping on Ludacris’ first album, which went platinum, and the chart-topping single “What’s Your Fantasy.” Again, both women project an image of a sexually aggressive freak who is in control of her sexuality and will have sex anywhere at any time with anyone or with multiple partners:

38 Jay-Z dropped her the first time after her first album. They since reconciled and had a second fallout.
39 She is also the daughter of legendary blues guitarist, Buddy Guy.
[rapper – Trina]
Cause I’m a bad bitch and I’m off the glass (okay)
Having sex in little jets ménage à trois
Getting buck wild no matter where we are, Indie 500 in the back of the car
In a dark ass club on the back of a bar. (Ludacris; “What’s Your Fantasy [Remix]”)

In another rap lyric, Shawnna asks if a man can handle her and describes the kinds of sexual deeds in which she will and does engage:

[rapper – Shawnna]
I wanna do it where your girl gon' see and get mad at me
I want a nigga that’ll grab the weave and turn my eyes Chinese
Tell me baby can you handle me? I wanna do it all in your mouth
Then I’ll pull the ass out, make you bounce ‘til you pass out . . .
I like a nigga when he face down, mouth wide . . .
Oh see get on your knees, and I’ll show you what’s my fantasy . . .
Tell your bitch she ain’t gotta be mad at me. (Ludacris; “What’s Your Fantasy [Remix]”)

Another common theme in these lyrics is of sexually aggressive freaks who engage in sexual activities with men who are in relationships with other women. These women rappers insinuate that they can be just as sexually promiscuous as men rappers can and brag about how they can sexually satisfy men better than the women with whom they have a relationship. Their raps often address the sexual double standard that lauds men for having multiple partners and characterizes women as sluts or hos for doing the same thing. Another example comes from Lil’ Kim who asks,

Is she drop-dead fine? Does she like it from behind?
Is she fly? Does she got a style like mine?
Tell you how you feel when you inside it . . .
Girls know not to leave they man around me
I get my hands on ‘em, he puttin’ rent and a Benz on me. (“She Don’t Love You”)

In my discussion of the gold digger script below, I show that some women rappers also admit to having sex for material goods and/or claim that their sexuality is so powerful
that men feel compelled to buy them material goods. Foxy Brown also refers to her sexuality as a weapon to use against men. “Sexual status, we’s the baddest. Girls, we got the weapons, niggaz, gotta have this” (Foxy Brown; “Fox Boogie”).

Two other women rappers, Missy “Misdemeanor” Elliot (now known as simply Missy Elliot) and Da Brat, also present themselves as both sexually powerful and as men’s sexual objects. In some songs, they distinguish themselves from freaks but in others they seem to flaunt their sexuality and rap about their sexual exploits as well. For example, Missy raps about how she denies men’s sexual advances in night clubs unlike women who go to clubs to meet and have sex with men with money:

Hey daddy-daddy, why these chickenheads, ooh they be so petty . . .
In the club, I see niggas, they think I’m super fly, they blow me sugahs
So I cut them short like some scissors
They trying to take me home, they give me liquor . . .
“I thought you was a freak,” never that . . . You just a silly ho, this I know
You be at every show, for the dough, hear me now. (Missy ‘Misdemeanor’ Elliot; “Beat Biters”)

Missy separates herself from freaks, or chickenheads, and “hos” who come to shows looking for “dough,” i.e., gold diggers, and boasts about how she resists men’s advances and attempts to get her drunk and take her home from clubs. In the same song she warns other women that, “You might catch me somewhere stickin’ [having sex with] your baby daddy” (“Beat Biters”).

Missy Elliot differs from Lil’ Kim and Foxy Brown because though she has collaborated with long time friend and producer Timbaland (as well as other artists), she is largely a self-made woman (Pough 2004). She has sold more albums and singles than any other woman rapper and has had more platinum albums, six, than any other woman rapper. Missy also pens her own songs. Not only is she successful as a woman rapper in an industry that men dominate, she is a well-respected song writer and producer for other artists, including male artists, who have become successful largely by her efforts. On occasion, Missy flaunts her sexuality as do Lil’ Kim and Foxy Brown but it is less central to her image than it is to theirs.
Da Brat is interesting because although Jermaine Dupri (a man rapper) helped launch her career, she, like Missy Elliot, developed her career relatively independently from men (Pough 2004). She was the first woman rapper to have a platinum solo album (in 1994). Furthermore, she did not make her sexuality central to her public persona and instead portrayed herself as a “gangsta” (see the analysis of the “gangsta bitch” below). Her clothes and style were perceived as masculine and some, including men rappers, questioned her sexuality. Da Brat rapped in an aggressive style, expressed her willingness to use physical violence and dressed in masculine attire—do-rags (a bandana covering her hair), baggy jeans, oversized shirts and tennis shoes. Some men (and women) in the rap music industry labeled her a “dyke.” She acknowledges the ambiguity of her sexuality in one lyric of a song, “They say is she is or is she ain’t a dyke. You curious cause you wanna fuck me tonight” (Da Brat, “Breeve On Em”). Ironically, as her album sales and career slowed, she discarded her “gangsta”/masculine image for a more sexually explicit and acceptably feminine one in her lyrics and videos for her 2000 album, *Unrestricted*. Though music critics did not receive it as well, it still went platinum, unlike her previous album.

Like Missy, Da Brat at times distinguishes herself from freaks in her rap lyrics and at other times raps about her sexual exploits. Da Brat even calls herself a *ho*. In one song, she boasts about her rapping style claiming that there is “No ho that can flow like I flow” (“Da Shit Ya Can’t Fuc Wit”). In another, she brags about her “flow” or rapping style and her sexual deeds:

On the west side of Chi [Chicago] with my thieving click, believe a bitch  
Cause ain’t no nigga hated on the pussy yet  
Squeeze the dick, got grip, they can’t forget  
Ain’t a ho tight like me, flow tight like me  
Quote, write and recite, fuck all night like me. (Da Brat; “Breeve on Em”)

The lyrics of another of her songs clearly distinguish her from hos, especially those that try to steal her rapping style. However, she also expresses solidarity with them and

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40 There is still speculation that circulates on the web and throughout the hip-hop community about her sexual orientation.
encourages them to “get their papers” or money and material rewards for their sexual favors:

Where all my bitches at? Girls make ‘em love to hate us
And whether you classy to dick suckin’ or a trashy bitch get your papers
I gotta eat throw these bows silently creep on these hos
That’s robbin’ my flows . . . . (Da Brat; “All my Bitches”)

My analysis indicates that some women rappers who depict themselves as freaks also portray the image of a strong Black woman in control of her sexuality as well as the men with whom they have sex. At the same time, they (may) project the stereotype of the sexually uninhibited and wild African American woman who needs “freaky” sex all of the time to remain satisfied. The latter woman engages in what some may see as “high-risk” sexual behaviors and takes pleasure in crossing the boundaries of customary and morally tolerable sexual behaviors (Collins 2004; Schippers 2007; Stephens and Phillips 2003).

Men rappers generally do not value women who embody the freak script perhaps because sexual prowess and promiscuity are valued characteristics of hegemonic masculinity in hip-hop culture. Thus, the freak may constitute a pariah femininity within hip-hop culture. However, when women rappers express themselves as sexual freaks, it is unclear whether they are reproducing male-defined fantasies and therefore also reproducing their subordinate position vis-à-vis men or challenging hegemonic notions of femininity that value sexually passive women. Whether women rappers construct their personas themselves or men rappers construct it for them, it is clear a freak script sells albums. While some women rappers assert themselves as sexually liberated freaks, they distinguish themselves from women who actually sell their bodies and trade sex for money as their vocation, that is, prostitutes. I turn next to a discussion of prostitutes in rap music lyrics.

Pussy Sells: Prostitutes

Rap music lyrics also depict the prostitute as a freak. However, prostitutes are paid to be freaks and often, though not always, pay pimps a hefty portion of their earnings. The prostitute script appears less frequently in rap song lyrics (about 10 percent of songs) than does the freak script. One purpose of portraying women as
prostitutes in rap lyrics appears to be to bolster a man rapper’s image as a pimp. Many men rappers refer to or characterize themselves as pimps, men who see and use women as their property, as prostitutes, to lease out for sexual favors for which they receive a portion of the fee. Pimps often use violence or threaten violence to keep women under their control, and rappers who characterize themselves as pimps describe their use of violence as well. For example, in a song entitled “Pussy Sells,” Goldie Loc (a man rapper) describes how he “plays” prostitutes and will physically assault them if they do not pay him a portion of their earnings:

[rapper – Goldie Loc]
There go the corner girl, now post up
If you come back with no chips [money], you gets slapped up
I might hit you with the pimp stick . . . But a pimp like me got paid (got paid)
And a ho like you got played (got played). (Snoop Dogg Presents tha Eastsidaz; “Pussy Sells”)

Men rappers sometimes refer to themselves as a pimp without explicitly calling women prostitutes or hookers, although to call themselves pimps is to imply that they “employ” prostitutes. In other cases, men rappers explicitly rap about the number of hookers they “have.” For example, rapper Murphey Lee raps “I got not one, two, three, four, five, but six whores” (Nelly; “Steal Da Show”). Others brag about how much money they make from prostitutes. Jay-Z’s song “Big Pimpin’” is primarily a song about how much money he and his friends make from prostitutes and the material goods they buy. He claims he, “makes a mill [million] up off a sorry ho . . . We be big pimpin’, spendin’ G’s” (Jay-Z, “Big Pimpin’”).

Men rappers who characterize themselves as pimps brag about how they “break hos” into becoming prostitutes for them. They also claim “they take care of their girls.” 2Pac raps, “That’s the way it goes, it’s time to shake a ho, make the dough. Break a ho when it’s time to make some mo’” (“Definition of a Thug Nigga”). A rapper in the group N.W.A. tries to convince a hooker to make him her pimp and promises he will “take care” of her if she “takes care” of him:

I think her name was Clara
And she was guaranteed to give a muthafucka whatever he needs
To be perfectly honest she was a hooker
So I took her a 100 yards, to the boulevard
I told her “I’ll take care of you, you take care of me”
You’ve got a P I M P and all I want is the money. (N.W.A.; “One Less Bitch”)

Some rappers give themselves credit for protecting and raising young women on the streets. At the same time, they frame these women as valued only for the commodity they sell and the money they earn for their pimps. Too $hort raps about how he “raised” one of his prostitutes and taught her well and asks another pimp to “take his bitch” when she has outlived her usefulness to him:

Now take my bitch, she won’t complain about shit
Cause I taught her well, she got game for a trick
It ain’t hard to tell she belongs to me
I pimped her 15 years in this industry
Now her pussy so big I don’t want no mo’
But she still down with me cause I raised that ho . . .
We getting’ all the money, we cashin’ all the checks,
I ain’t no fake pimp nigga, you can take my bitch. (Too Short; “Take my Bitch”)

Some men and all women rappers who reference prostitutes or prostitution in their songs warn people about the dangers of prostitution. Only three songs featuring women rappers make some reference to prostitutes and/or hookers. Salt-N-Pepa cautions women that prostitution can lead to sexually transmitted diseases or jail:

I wasn’t tryin’ to be a hooker sellin’ pootang
Up and down the block just ain’t my thang
I seen a lot of women fall and gettin’ fast money
Cause either AIDS or jail will get that ass, honey. (“Big Shot”)

Eve warns young women about running away from home and trying to make it on their own on the streets before they are adults. She tells the story about how she could have ended up as a prostitute, and instead became a stripper, before she established a rapping career:

My mammy was my shelter but I broke free, wanting to be grown, rebelling
Ain’t no telling what I’d be pussy selling (huh) never would I
Instead I wore a g-string, thought never could I
Thought I had to, to be grown beginning of my life. (“Heaven Only Knows”)

One man rapper, LL Cool J, also raps about the possible consequences of prostitution, but directs his warning to men who would pay for a prostitute’s services:

She’ll let you inside, make you pay for the ride
Take off her pants and then it smells like someone died
You say “What the heck,” because you already paid
Not knowin’ that the guy that went before you had AIDS. (“The Bristol Hotel”)

In sum, some men rappers reproduce the image of (Black) women as prostitutes to augment their status as pimps. In general, the prostitute script in rap lyrics positions femininity and women as subordinate to men and masculinity and is not contaminating to the hierarchical and complementary relationship between masculinity and femininity (Schippers 2007). Unlike freaks who are not valued in men’s rap lyrics, the prostitute is valued to the extent that she earns money for her pimp. Other rappers caution audiences about the costs of prostitution for women and patrons. In the next section, I turn to the varied characterizations of (Black) women as bitches in rap music lyrics.

**She’s a Bitch**

This section argues that the bitch script, including the gold digger, gangsta bitch and empowered bitch, in rap music lyrics is paradoxical and contradictory. In 1999, Missy Elliot topped the billboard charts with her song, “She’s a Bitch.” In the song, she boasts about her rapping skills and portrays herself as an empowered bitch both physically and financially:

Nigga stole my car, why didn’t you get mine, give yo’ ass a black eye . . . .
She’s a bitch, see I got more cheese, so back on up while I roll up my sleeves
She’s a bitch, you can’t see me, Joe, get on down while I shoot my flow
She’s a bitch, when I do my thing, got the place on fire, burn it down to flame.
(Missy ‘Misdemeanor’ Elliot, “She’s a Bitch”)

Missy does “her thing” and is a bitch but on her own terms. She makes her own “cheese,” or money, and implies that she is willing to fight to protect what is hers. Similarly, Lil’ Kim adopts the moniker “Queen Bitch.” In her song, she boasts that she is
the “Queen Bitch, supreme bitch” and that she is rich and will definitely “stay dat bitch” (“Queen Bitch”).

The term *bitch* is pervasive in the lyrics of rap music. Almost half (48.2%) of the songs in my sample contained the word “bitch.” The term has several meanings, connotations and usages within rap music lyrics. The word “bitch” means different things in different contexts and its use does not always describe or characterize a person. Some rappers refer to life in general or a particular social situation and/or environment as being a “bitch.” For example, Nas describes life as a bitch in his song “Life’s a Bitch.” Other rappers use the term to refer to being stuck or trapped in a situation or environment, such as being “up in this” or “around” this “bitch.” For instance, Public Enemy raps, “The bigger the Black get, the bigger the feds want a piece of that booty. Intentional rape system, like we ain’t paid enough in this bitch, that’s why I dissed them” (“Who Stole the Soul?”). There were also several variations in the use of the term bitch when referring to an actual person.

Men rappers do not use the term bitch to characterize women exclusively. They also apply the term bitch to other men whom they wish emasculate or challenge. For example, rappers label men bitches in 57 songs, or 12.7 percent of my sample. Many men rappers construct personas of and/or have lived the “code of the street” as gangstas, thugs, and hustlas and have little trust in law enforcement and they occasionally call police officers or other law enforcement officials bitches (Anderson 1990, 1999; Kubrin 2005a). For example, Bizzy, a member of Bone Thugs-N-Harmony, raps about how he calls a police officer from whom he is running a bitch. “In ’91 I’m runnin’ from the fuckin’ cops, don’t ya know it. That *bitch* was tryin’ to find a hiding spot, he show it” (“Mind on our Money”). Some also call men who “snitch,” or report crime, to law enforcement bitches. 2Pac (under his Makaveli alias) raps, “Have these *bitch niggas* snitchin’ . . . The feds surely hope that they could finally nail me for sellin’ dope” (Makaveli; “Life of an Outlaw”). Men rappers also use the term to characterize rivals or potential rivals in gangs and/or the illicit drug trade industry. C-Murder raps on a TRU song:

As I walk out the crack house strapped with my bulletproof vest
Cause I can’t live with no bullets up in my chest
I’m a soldier, bitch I told ya . . . Cause it’s a known fact that I sell crack
You fuck with me, I’ll smoke your ass like cuz smoked this track. (TRU; “Eyes of a Killa”)

Another variation is to call men or other rappers bitch niggas or bitch ass niggas. For example, Ol’ Dirty Bastard raps, “Bitch ass niggas counterfeit the funk [marijuana]” (Wu-Tang Clan; “Reunited”). Finally, they call other men rappers bitches to belittle their rapping skills or style or challenge their masculinity. For example, Busta Rhymes boasts about his “hardcore” rapping skills and calls other rappers “soft”:

Yo, every time, you, I’m on the scene
High beam the lights and watch who will remain supreme . . .
Bounce on the beat and watch how a nigga work it
Buck wild makin’ your speaker short circuit . . .
Now I see a bitch nigga soundin’ so soft
Make a nigga cough, breakin’ and turn your ass off. (“So Hardcore”)

Men rappers use the term bitch discursively as an insult through which they police the boundaries of masculinity in hip-hop culture. To call a rival man rapper a bitch is to question his talent and artistry, to challenge his masculinity and to cast him as like a woman.

The conventional meaning and usage of the term bitch refers to a woman who is lewd, aggressive, disagreeable, or otherwise fails to meet hegemonic femininity standards, that is, fails to be submissive or subordinate to men. When men rappers call women bitches, they typically, though not always, use the term to derogate women. Men rappers characterize women who fail to be complicit in the reproduction of the dominant position of men vis-à-vis women as “bitches.” According to Collins (2004:123), the “bitch” image in Black popular culture portrays Black women as “aggressive, loud, rude, and pushy” and is a “reworking of the image of the mule of chattel slavery.” While the mule was merely obstinate and required physical discipline and management, the bitch is “confrontational and actively aggressive.” However, some men rappers describe women who are aggressive and violent and yet still ensure the dominant position of men and the

41 This discursive use of the word “bitch” as an affront to a rapper’s sense of masculinity is similar to the process Pascoe (2005) observes in high school boys’ use of the term “fag” to police the boundaries of masculinity.
inferior position of women as “gangsta bitches.” Still other rappers, predominantly women rappers, describe bitches or themselves as women who assert their independence sexually and otherwise apart from men. Below, I discuss the various ways in which men and women rappers characterize women as bitches.

The gold digger uses her sexuality and/or provides sexual favors for material goods and resources, but unlike the prostitute, does not trade sex for money as a profession and does not have a pimp. Fifty-five songs, or 12 percent of my sample, contain the gold digger script. The gangsta bitch is a woman who is strong and willing to use violence to protect herself and the man or men with whom she has (a) relationship(s). She may also participate in or support illegal commerce activities in which “her man or men” are involved. The gangsta bitch script is present in 36, or 8 percent, of songs. Finally, an empowered bitch is a woman who is in control of her sexuality and who aggressively pursues and achieves her goals, whether for sexual pleasure or for material well-being, independently from and/or in spite of men. Empowered bitches are represented in 19, or 4.2 percent of songs.

Who is Saying that She is a Gold Digger? The gold digger script portrays women as calculating and materialistic bitches who consciously and deliberately use sexuality to swindle money and material goods from men. Rap songs often depict a gold digger as uneducated, unemployed, and/or having no other valuable qualities or attributes other than her sexuality (Stephens and Phillips 2003). She trades her only commodity, her body, for material rewards. As noted above, the gold digger script appears in 55 songs (12.2%); four feature exclusively women rappers and five feature men and women rappers. Women rappers that rap about gold diggers seem to extol and support them and may themselves describe how they use their sexuality to persuade men to buy them expensive material goods. The gold digger script appears in 46 songs with exclusively men rappers. Most men rappers do not respect gold diggers and they warn other men about them, casting them as only out for material gain.

One of the more popular songs in 2005 and 2006 in American popular music was Kanye West’s “Gold Digger,” and it is still played in regular rotations on the radio. The album on which it appears, Late Registration, has gone multi-platinum. Though it is not in my sample because it was released after the year 2000, I note it because of its high
level of commercial success and the subject-matter of its namesake. A portion of the lyrics of the song follows:

[Chorus]
Now I ain’t sayin’ she’s a gold digger (when I’m in need)
But she ain’t messin’ with no broke niggas (repeat)
Get down girl gone head get down (I gotta leave)

If you fuckin’ with this girl then you better be paid
You know why it take too much to touch her
From what I heard she got a baby by Busta
My best friend says she used to fuck with Usher
I don’t care what none of y’all say I still love her . . .

She was supposed to buy ya shorty TYCO with your money
She went to the doctor, got lipo with ya money
Should of got that insured got GEICO for ya money
If you ain’t no punk holla We Want Prenup
WE WANT PRENUP!, Yeah
Cause when she leave you ass she gonna leave with half . . .

He gone make it into a Benz out of that Datson
He got that ambition baby look in his eyes
This week he moppin’ floors next week it’s the fries
So, stick by his side . . .
But you stay right girl
But when you get on he leave yo ass for a White girl. (“Gold Digger”)

In this song, Kanye West not only portrays a woman as a gold digger, but also as a freak who has been rumored to have had relationships with several rich men and has a child with one of the men. He tells listeners that this woman is not interested in

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42 Busta (Rhymes) is a successful rapper who has several platinum albums, and Usher is a popular R&B artist with several platinum albums.
relationships with men who are not affluent. He raps about how she was supposed to purchase TYCO (toys) for a man’s shorty (child) and instead used his money for lipo, or liposuction. He encourages men who may be contemplating marriage to a woman like her to get a “prenup,” or prenuptial agreement, a contract that prevents a wife from taking assets, earnings or property from a man should they divorce. Finally, in the last stanza, he clearly distinguishes a Black bitch or gold digger from a “White girl.” He implies that if a Black woman “gets on,” meaning she argues with or “nags” the man with whom she is having a relationship, the man will leave her “ass for a White girl,” a girl that is presumably not so aggressive, argumentative or greedy, and/or who embodies subordinate and submissive qualities of femininity. Yet, Kanye raps that despite all of these shortcomings, including what others may say about her, he “still loves her.” He seems to marvel at her ability to use her sexuality to get what she wants, her ability to “hustle.” He encourages her to go on and do what she does, that is, use sexuality to get what she wants, or “gone ahead” and “get down.”

Most men rappers do not depict gold diggers this favorably. 2Pac raps about a woman he loves like a “sista.” But, he does not respect her and he encourages her to change her gold digging ways. She wonders why it is that people call her a “bitch,” and he instructs her that it is because she is a gold digger:

Still lookin’ for a rich man, you dug a ditch
Got your legs up, tryin’ to get rich
I love you like a sista, but you need to switch
And that’s why they called U bitch, I betcha
You wonder why they call U bitch (repeat). (2Pac; “Wonder why they Call U Bitch”)

For the most part, men rappers depict gold diggers as women who seek out men to buy them expensive goods, such as name brand and designer clothes, expensive jewelry, automobiles, and expensive drinks or liquor. Black Rob raps about a conniving and manipulative woman that had him “so fucked up in the head” that he “bought the bitch diamonds and pearls” (“Whoa!”). Sisqo raps about the expensive jewelry, or “bling,” that he bought “bitches”:

What these bitches want from a nigga?
I’ve been keepin’ you up on it
Bling bling’n, on that jewelry girl I bought it. (DMX; “What these Bitches Want”)

Similarly, Onyx describes a woman for whom he bought diamonds and Moet (expensive champagne):

Man I was trickin’ on this bitch man
I was buyin’ this bitch diamonds and the whole shit
Motherfuckin’ Moet, ya know what I’m sayin’? (Onyx; “Da Nex Niguz”)

Wyclef Jean raps about a man who feigns being affluent to impress a materialistic “girl” who spends his money with her friends at malls. He drives a Mercedes Benz that is not his to impress her:

Buyin’ her fake furs and takin’ her to the fever
Quiet as it’s kept that ain’t even his Benz
She spends his franklins [money] at the malls with her friends
Material girl, livin’ in a material world. (Wyclef Jean; “We Trying to Stay Alive”)

In a Silkk the Shocker song, there is a conversation between Silkk and an unidentified woman who is portrayed as a gold digger who sits at home and calls him while he is at his studio working to come home so she can go shopping:

Woman: Man you and that studio make me sick.
Silkk: Man you trippin’. Woman: You need to come home.
Silkk: For what?! Woman: Cause I need to go shopping.
Silkk: A’ight, I’m gonna come home right now, a’ight?
Woman: Naw naw forget it. Just stay where you at and when you do decide to come home bring me a ring or somethin’. (“I Want to be with You”)

Too Short describes gold diggers as rabbits who flock to him for diamonds and “carats.” But, he underscores that he is not fooled by these “bitches” and that all they are good for is sex:

Bitches be like rabbits swarmin’ diamonds and carats . . .
Wanna drive my car closed-up, that’s when you lost me
I tell a bitch real quick, I ain’t no Tootsie Roll
All you good fo’ is some head and some pussy, ho! (Too Short; “Coming Up Short”)  

Gold diggers may also have sex with men to get their everyday needs met, such as for groceries, rent or to pay the electricity bill (Stephens and Phillips 2003). For example, like Too Short, Pretty Boy raps about how men should not let “pretty” bitches dupe them into paying their bills. He raps on a Foxy Brown song, “Don’t let that pretty shit fool you, you. I ain’t pay that bitch phone bill” (Foxy Brown; “Baller Bitch”). A song called “The Curse of Money” warns other men who are or may become wealthy. It describes many ways that gold diggers (and others) try to con men rappers out of their money after they make it big, including getting them to pay their bills:

[rapper – Mack 10]
Bitches wanna get laid, and everybody need their bills paid (Everybody) . . .  
They wanna kick it cause I go the curse of moolha [money]. . .  
What the fuck was they doin’ before Mack 10 was rappin’? Tell me  
(What the fuck?) how can I remain a man of seven figures  
When I’m rushed by gold diggers every time I get bigger? (Ice Cube; “The Curse of Money”)

Raphael Saadiq raps on a Snoop Doggy Dogg song and describes a woman who is a tease and refuses him sex until her rent is due and she needs money:

But if you keep on teasin’ me girl, I’m gonna change your plan  
I know when you’ll change your mind  
That’s when your rent is due (your rent is due) and you’re many months behind. 
(Snoop Doggy Dogg; “Somethin' Bout Yo Bidness”)

Another type of gold digger is the crack ho or a woman who will screw for drugs, or a “fix” (Collins 2004). Coolio describes a woman who “gave it up” because she thought that he would give her “some crack.” But, like Too Short and Pretty Boy, he was not fooled by her motives or tactics. He raps, “And I won’t be strayed by a lame ass dame. Keep my dollars in my pockets cause I’m hip to ya game” (Coolio; “Hand on my Nutsac”). Silkk the Shocker raps on TRU song about a woman who wants to perform oral sex in exchange for “candy,” i.e. drugs. “Got this ho that said she wanna suck my
According to men rappers, gold diggers see men as good only insofar as they will provide and satisfy their material needs and desires, whether for drugs or expensive designer jewelry and so on. Gold diggers may refuse sex once they have established relationships with men who meet their material needs. For example, Ice Cube advises men about gold diggers who will spend their money on getting their hair and nails done and then refuse to have sex with them:

And they’ll get you for your money, son
Next thing you know you’re getting’ their hair and they nails done
Fool, and they’ll let you show em off
But when it comes to sex, they got a bad cough
Or a headache, it’s all give and no take
Run out of money, and watch your heart break
They’ll drop you like a bad habit. (N.W.A.; “I Ain’t the One”)

A gold digger will also withhold sex if her demands are not met. If they are not met continuously or over a period of time, she will end the relationship, or “drop you like a bad habit,” and seek out a man who meets them. Furthermore, if a man marries a gold digger, she is liable to take half of what he is worth when and if she divorces him. In this respect, gold diggers, according to men rappers, have a great deal of power. Nas raps about his bossy wife who is threatening to divorce him and take half of his earnings and assets:

It was nothin’ I can do about it, like she the boss and shit
Started talkin’ this divorcin’ shit
I gave her my half rib, half my crib [house], half my cake [money]
Half my car, half my kids? Can’t get that. (Nas; “K-I-S-S-I-N-G”)

Another rapper offers an explanation for why Black women are only interested in men who are affluent or have sufficient means. Rapper, Eddie Griffin, characterizes a woman’s mother as the biggest “pimp,” one who would sell her daughter to a man with a good job, a good car, and the means to buy her material goods. He asks, “What ever happened to just falling in love?”:
[rapper – Eddie Griffin]
Well let me tell you the biggest pimp
On planet motherfuckin’ Earth is her momma
It’s her momma that told her, “Get a man that got a good job girl!”
Make sure he got a good car girl!
Make sure he can take you out and buy you somethin’ girl!”
What happened to just fallin’ in love with a nigga with a bus pass
Just cause you love the nigga?” (Dr. Dre; “Ed-ucation”)

Overall, then, men rappers depict gold diggers as selecting men as sexual partners based on the men’s financial status and resources. Gold diggers are manipulative and untrustworthy, and if their material wants and desires are not met, they terminate a relationship and/or seek out relationships with men who can “buy her somethin’.” Because men rappers see gold diggers as (potentially) having power over them, they are a threat to men’s dominant status. Consequently, men rappers denigrate and marginalize them and gold digging practices are characteristic of a pariah femininity within hip hop culture (Schippers 2007).

Some women rappers admit to seeking relationships with men who are wealthy, willing to buy them expensive goods, and live luxurious lifestyles and present themselves as worthy and deserving. They see no reason to have relationships with men who cannot provide them the lifestyle they desire. They derive pleasure from using their sexuality to control and dupe men into meeting their desires. They know when and how to use their sexuality to get what they desire. And, they seem to imply, if men are going to call them sluts and hos anyway, they might as well get rewarded for engaging in sex with them.

Foxy Brown distinguishes herself from women who have sex with men without getting something from them and advises women to “get that cheese,” or money, and to get as much as they can from men with whom they have sex:
Chicks fuckin’ for nothin’, please mama
Betta get that cheese, villain is on her knees
Tell her fuck the mink, she want a Persian land. (Foxy Brown; “Fox Boogie”)
Similarly, Foxy Brown asks women what they would do if a man without means made sexual advances to them. She advises them that men already know what they “are like” and that they should be getting “ice,” or diamonds, from men before they “fuck” them:

Now, what would you do if a broke nigga came by?
Would you fuck him or would you deny?
Shit, it ain’t like he don’t know what we like
Just a little bit of ice, carats straight for life
Then maybe we can talk about us ‘fuckin’ tonight. (Foxy Brown; “Tramp”)

Lil’ Kim, a.k.a. the Queen Bitch, also distinguishes herself from other women in her songs. She describes herself as rich and a queen, unlike other bitches, so she can demand more from the men with whom she has relationships. She calls other women “bitches” and “chickens” (or chickenheads) if they have sex with men, “giving up the butt,” without getting material rewards. She insinuates that she is cleverer than such bitches are. She does not care if men call her a slut because she gets what she wants. Finally, she asserts that she will not sign a prenuptial agreement (“prenup”) with a man and that a man must be willing to share equally and give her half “up front.” She says she deserves these accommodations because her “sex be the best”:

[rapper – Lil’ Kim]
But I’m a real bitch so you know I do real things
Only real bitches live like queens – Get it?
I be the richest, shitting on these bitches, while chickens cluck giving up the butt
I plays the cut with the Daddy Warbucks
You can call me a slut, who gives a fuck
That’s fine nigga shit, I’m good with mine
I can tell by your shoes you know what I want
Fuck a prenup give me half up front
My sex be the best so we split these costs
You can stop sayin’ mine, and start sayin’ ours. (Jazy-Z; “I Know What Girls Like”)
Da Brat calls herself a def (really good) ho at manipulating a man into giving her money to pay for what she wants. She brags that she can “bust open another nigga’s account” and make a “motherfucker pay for the rims” on her BMW automobile:

You must not know how a so so def ho bounce
To bust open another nigga’s accounts and be out
To the tellee or the ATM in a 750 gray bm

Made a motherfucker pay for the rims. (Da Brat; “All my Bitches”)

Women rappers who acknowledge using men to provide them with material goods imply that they deserve to be treated to the good things in life. They portray other women who give in to men’s sexual advances without being rewarded with expensive goods as foolish. And, they advise women to use their sexuality to get whatever they want in life.

Does the gold digger contribute to her own subordination or oppose dominant gender and race ideologies and social practices? On the one hand, women rappers who portray themselves as gold diggers control their own sexuality and decide when and how to turn it on to get what they want from men, albeit their sexuality must be partially male-defined for the con to work. On the other, the gold-digging bitch is an image that can have negative consequences in the way that (Black) men perceive and treat women. It casts doubt, suspicion, fear and mistrust on (Black) women’s motives for being in relationships with men. It is this suspicion and fear that drives Kanye West to ask men to “holla” “WE WANT PRENUP!” He may not be saying she is a gold digger but his words suggest as such. To my knowledge, he and 2Pac are the only men rappers who recognize a woman as a gold digger and “still love her.”

_Gangsta Bitches: A Gangsta’s “Main Squeeze.”_ Compared to their depictions of freaks and gold diggers, Black men rappers seem to respect gangsta bitches more. Generally, the gangsta bitch script is admired and revered in hip hop culture. Just as many men rappers describe themselves as hustlers who are street savvy and will do whatever is necessary to survive on the streets, rappers likewise portray a gangsta bitch as a self-reliant hustler and survivor (Anderson 1990, 1999; Kubrin 2005a; Stephens and Phillips 2003). Rappers alternatively dub the gangsta bitch as a “down ass bitch,” “bad ass bitch,” a woman who is “down for her man” or a “baller bitch.”

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43 See, for example, Foxy Brown’s song “Baller Bitch.”
portray a gangsta bitch as a woman who is involved in inner-city gang culture, including drug and weapons trafficking. The gangsta bitch script challenges subordinate/submissive versions of femininity in portraying a self-reliant, aggressive woman who is admired. And yet, the gangsta bitch script fails to disrupt the hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity, ensuring the dominant position of men and the subordinate position of women (Schippers 2007). Her aggression and self-reliance are often used in the service of men with whom she has relationships (Stephens and Phillips 2003). As noted earlier, the gangsta bitch script appears in 36 songs or 8 percent of my sample. Exclusively men rappers use the gangsta bitch script in 20 songs. Six songs by women rappers and 10 that feature men and women rappers contain the gangsta bitch script. In this section, I show how men rappers portray gangsta bitches and how some women rappers characterize themselves as gangsta bitches in rap music lyrics.

Men rappers, particularly gangsta rappers, appear to want, need and seek out companionships with gangsta bitches. They portray gangsta bitches as being there for them sexually, under any circumstances and also if and when they get into trouble with the law or rival gangs. Gangsta bitches participate in and contribute to any illegal business the men are involved in and they commit crimes, often taking the “rap” for “their man” if law enforcement apprehends him. Some gangsta bitches “carry illicit substances or weapons in their body cavities or clothing” (Stephens and Phillips 2003:27). For example, Biggie Smalls raps, “I got my honey on the Amtrak with crack in the crack of her ass” (“I Really Want to Show You”). A “good gangsta bitch” or “down ass bitch” does not snitch. “She does the time . . . She becomes a survivor in jail” (Pough 2004:189). Gangsta bitches are framed as protecting a man’s businesses and interests if he is caught and/or does time in jail. Furthermore, she is there for “her man” when he comes out of jail.

Men rappers express the need for a gangsta bitch, or “down ass bitch,” they can trust. For example, 2Pac instructs his “down ass bitch” to be there for him and prepared to get “fucked down” when he gets back from prison:

I’m through trial, no more smiles, for a couple years
They got me goin’ mad, I’m knockin’ busters on they backs
In my cell, thinkin’, “Hell, I know one day I’ll be back”
As soon as I touch down
I told my girl I’ll be there, so prepare, to get fucked down
The homies wanna kick it, but I’m just laughin’ at cha
Cause you is a down ass bitch, and I ain’t mad at cha. (“I Ain’t Mad at Cha”)
The Hot Boys describe a gangsta bitch who is “on the down low for her nigga,” meaning she does not publicly discuss or boast about her sexual or business relationship with him. She satisfies “her nigga” sexually and “takes the charge” if the police discover their illegal activities. If he goes to jail, she continues his business until he returns:

On the down low for her nigga she a nasty bitch
I tell her touch it, she gon’ reach down and grab the dick
I bust a nut, get soft, she get it back hard
The police kick in the door, she takes the charge
If a nigga go to jail, she run for her nigga
Money orders, business and front ones for her nigga. (Hot Boys; “I Need a Hot Girl”)

Eazy E tells the story of a gangsta bitch who actually entered a courtroom with a gun and fired at the police and bailiffs to prevent her man from going to prison for six years. She failed, got shot in the process and ended up in prison for attempted murder:

On a six year sentence my man didn’t budge
Bailiff came over to turn him in
Kilo G looked up and gave a grin
He yelled out “Fire!” then came Susie
The bitch came in with a submachine uzi
Police shot the girl but didn’t hurt her
Both upstate for attempted murder. (Eazy E; “Boys N Tha Hood (G-Mix)”)

Silkk the Shocker raps about a woman who stood beside and helped him even when he was wanted by the police. This gangsta bitch was someone he trusted with his money if the police did apprehend him:

[rapper – Silkk the Shocker]
Now through thick things ya stood beside me
When I was on the run, you help me on the real . . .
I need someone who could be trusted
Take this hundred g’s in case a nigga like me get busted. (Master P; “Gangstas Need Love”)

Not only can a gangsta bitch be trusted with money, she can be counted on to take action against her man’s rivals or enemies. Westside Connection raps about the only kind of woman they need, one whose “qualifications” include being “penitentiary bound,” having “c-sections [scars], tattoos, stretch marks and bullet wounds,” and “down to do a drive by on [their] enemies” (“Westward Ho”).

Other men rappers characterize gangsta bitches as willing to use their sexuality to hustle and garner information from other rival men or gangs (Stephens and Phillips 2003). Gangsta bitches may divert rival men’s attention and get them into compromising situations so that her gang or “crew” may take some action or catch rival gangs off guard. For example, Freddie Foxx raps on a Naughty by Nature song about his “baddest” girl who uses her sexuality to “knock off” a rival:

I send my baddest girl to your house to play the heart breaker
She’ll lay you down and put hickeys on your chest
Then turn around and blast you with a .33 shot Tec
You couldn’t rap, you was wack from the get-go
So you got bumped off by my head ho. (“Hot Potato”)

Other rappers rap about gangsta bitches from rival crews who harm them. Ice Cube narrates a story about a man who was on the receiving end of a gangsta bitch’s sexual manipulation. He warns men to distrust them:

She said “Take off your clothes, jump in the bed”
While she powder her nose, you get butt naked, cause you ready to wreck it
Cause you’s a motherfuckin’ punk, next thing you know
The door flies open with a blast
With four niggas in ski masks pointin’ a gun at the pimp . . .
Drove you far, tied up in the trunk of your own fuckin’ car
Take you out and pop the cap, I told you the bitch was a trap
Don’t trust em! (“Don’t Trust Em”)
Men rappers expect gangsta bitches to use their sexuality to demonstrate their devotion to and allegiance with them (Stephens and Phillips 2003). While men rappers respect and might even love gangsta bitches because of their loyalty, they make it clear that gangsta bitches should not expect a committed or monogamous sexual relationship. For example, 2Pac says that “real women,” or bitches who “throw down,” make the world go round but underscores that “just cause we bone [have sex], don’t mean you own me” (“Run the Streetz”).

A song that vividly depicts the relationship between a gangsta rapper and a gangsta bitch is the Notorious B.I.G.’s (a.k.a. Biggie Smalls, or just Biggie) song “Me & My Bitch.” The song is a tribute to his gangsta bitch. In the narrative, rival gangs murder her. Biggie raps, “I know it was meant for me. I guess the niggas felt they had to kill the closest one to me.” At the beginning of the song, fellow crew member and rapper, Puff Daddy (a.k.a. P. Diddy) asks a woman if she would ever kill for him and if she would “ever fuck around” on him. In this depiction, a good “gangsta bitch” is a woman who will kill for her man and never cheat on him, even though he will not extend the same promise to her (Pough 2004). Biggie raps that he will “treat her right” as long as she acts the way he wants her to but if she “talks slick,” or does not behave, he will “beat her right.” He considers her “his wife,” but not in the traditional sense. He will never give her a ring or marriage ceremony but assures her that she is his “main squeeze” and “best friend.” He admits to having “tricked on her,” or cheated on her, even while she “bagged nickels [marijuana]” for him, i.e. assisted him with his drug trade. She also helped him plan “robberies on [his] enemies.” He puts his trust in her and knows that she is “the one who’d never snitch.” He admires her for loving him when he was “broke” and when he was “filthy fuckin’ rich.”

While this is a fictional narrative, it suggests a reason for why men rappers value gangsta bitches. Biggie loves his “bitch” because she stands by him, because she does what she is asked to do, and because she loves him, not because of her intrinsic qualities. He raps, “And then we lie together, cry together. I swear to God I hope we fuckin’ die together.” Ultimately in the song narrative, she dies because she loved him, although he swears revenge on whoever took her life. In real life, Biggie’s “main squeeze” was Lil’ Kim during and after his marriage to Faith Evans, a popular R&B singer. Ironically,
Biggie Smalls was murdered in 1997, while Lil’ Kim continues to rap and make money rapping about her relationship with him.

Some women rappers, including Lil’ Kim, Foxy Brown, Da Brat, and Mia X, also express a gangsta bitch script. Lil Kim’ says Biggie was her “nigga” and she was Biggie’s “bitch” (“Hold on”). She raps, she will “kill a nigga for my nigga by any means bitch” and compares herself to Pam Grier (“Queen Bitch”), an actress whose characters in blaxploitation films in the 1970s, such as Sheba, Baby, and Foxy Brown (the moniker that woman rapper, Inga Marchand, uses) were precursors to the contemporary gangsta bitch script. Blaxploitation films prior to Pam Grier, such as Shaft and Superfly, used Black women as sexual objects of the central men characters and heroes (Collins 2004). By contrast, Pam Grier’s characters were the central characters in her films. Pam Grier’s characters become the superheroes in these films, defeating drug cartels, protecting communities, using violence, or “kicking butt” to bring down the “bad guys,” particularly crooked White men, while remaining “beautiful, sexy, and exotic” (Pough 2004:66).

There are, however, key differences between Pam Grier’s characters and contemporary gangsta bitches in rap music. Gangsta bitches do not use their assets to defend the African American community from criminal elements. Rather, they portray themselves as part of those criminal elements, ready to use violence and aggression against rival gangs or law enforcement. For example, Da Brat raps about “motherfuckers” who want to “test her” and cops that want to arrest her, and raps “But, fuck that, ya get a hole in ya fuckin’ head” because “it ain’t no thang for me to lay a busta down” (“Ain’t no Thang”). Lil’ Kim raps about a rival who she “knocks off” in a gunfight and boasts, “the funny thing about it, I’m a bitch and got niggas runnin’ from me” (“Revolution”). Rapper, Mia X, raps on a Snoop Dogg song that she is up for any illicit activities to support his needs:

- What you want to do nigga is fine with me
- Name your game, scandalous sprees, or robberies
- Moving keys [kilos of drugs] for your needs from state to state. (Snoop Doggy Dogg; “Picture This”)

Another key difference between Pam Grier’s characters and gangsta bitches is that Pam Grier’s characters are the central heroes in her films. In addition, her characters use their
sexuality to seduce, distract, and catch “bad guys,” although little if any attention is paid to their actual love or sex lives (Pough 2004). By contrast, a “gangsta bitch” defines herself in relation to the man (or men) with whom she is having a sexual relationship and to whom she is loyal.

Because she is aggressive, uses physical violence and does not exhibit submissive/subordinate forms of femininity, gangsta bitches may be perceived as masculine (Berry 1994). Haugen (2003) says that it is more appropriate to see gangsta bitches as being appropriately “gangsta,” rather than inappropriately “feminine,” or masculine. The “gangsta” genre of rap entails the use of profanity and themes such as firearms, drugs, violence, sex and loyalty to a crew to develop and bolster street credibility. Gangsta bitches are loyal to the point of giving their lives for their men, or as Lil’ Kim raps, “her mens” (“Hold On”). Foxy Brown raps about how she is married to “The Firm,” the name of her crew which includes men rappers Nas, AZ, and Nature and says she is willing to die for them. She raps:

Me and you forever hand in hand
I’m married to The Firm boo, you gotta understand (understand)
I’ll die for ‘em, give me a chair and then I’ll fry for em (fry for em)
And if I gotta take the stand, I’m lie for ‘em (lie for ‘em). (Foxy Brown; “Letter to the Firm (Holy Matrimony)”)

Similarly, rapper Mia X vows loyalty to her crew, the TRU click, which consists of men rappers Master P, Silkk the Shocker, and C-Murder, as well as other rappers on Master P’s No Limit label (Keyes 2004). She raps about how she will “go to war” for them, describes herself as a “soldier,” and portrays her crew as her “family”:

Motherfucking right I’m a take it how it come like a soldier
TRU click TRU bitch go to war for ya
In the kitchen at the stove cookin’ up the product
Cause fiends love it most when you give it to em rocked up
Chopped up bitches in the game that was talking
But they didn’t know hos got them feds stalking . . .
It’s the tank, so you know you can’t stop this
Watch this young Black family take this whole industry
And run it, thinkin’ bout you while we done it. (Master P; “Thinkin’ Bout U”)

Gangsta bitches are revered by their peers and the gangsta men with whom they have relationships. Unlike the gold digger, she does not use her sexuality to con men with whom she has relationships into paying for her material needs and desires. Victims of gangsta bitches, members of rival gangs or “crews,” however, may disdain them and/or aggressively and violently retaliate. In addition, gangsta men expect “their” gangsta bitch to sexually satisfy them and a gangsta bitch uses her sexuality to manipulate and deceive men in rival crews. Thus, for the most part, she is unable to control her own sexuality; it is controlled by and used for her man or men. The practices and characteristics of the gangsta bitch position femininity as complementary and subordinate to masculinity and are therefore qualities of hegemonic femininity within hip hop culture (Schippers 2007).

Like the gangsta bitch script in the lyrics of some women rappers, the public persona of rappers such as Lil’ Kim, Foxy Brown and Mia X in real life are also contradictory. On the surface and in their lyrics, there is the image of a tough, self-confident, and powerful woman who knows “what she wants and knows how to get it” (Pough 2004:183). In a climate where much of popular culture represents Black women as bitches and where a critical dialogue concerning images of (Black) women in popular culture is missing, at least rappers such as Lil’ Kim, Foxy Brown and Mia X assert a woman’s agency in their public personas. For example, Lil’ Kim proclaims that she will “stay dat bitch,” regardless of the public critiques that cast her as raunchy and anti-feminist (Pough 2004). By contrast, Pough (2004) says that in many magazine interviews, Lil’ Kim and Foxy Brown reveal their personal, real-life struggles with low self-esteem, particularly in their relationships with men and perceived shortcomings in physical appearance.44 Lil’ Kim has also spoken about her real-life past as a teenage runaway from an abusive father and prostitute who relied on men and tricking to survive on the streets. Women rappers, in their lyrics and public personas, often portray contradictory images of Black women—some depict them as little more than sexual props for “their men,” some devalue their lives in favor of men, and some portray them as

44 See, for example, Marriott (2000).
powerful and in control of their sexuality. I turn my attention now to an empowering script for Black women in rap music lyrics.

*Empowered Bitches: Listen to my Independent Funk.* The gold digger and gangsta bitch scripts are not particularly empowering for (Black) women. Collins (2004) claims that young people, particularly her African American students, distinguish between “Bitches” with a big “B” and “bitches” with a little “b.” Thus, the Black bitch is a “contested representation” (Collins 2004:125; Keyes 2004; Pough 2004). In the same way that many rappers and African Americans use the word “nigger,” or “nigga” to reclaim the power of the word for themselves and negate the power of the word when Whites use it, some women (and men) rappers use the term “bitch” with to refer to a powerful, “super-tough,” and “super-strong” woman who is in control of her sexuality worthy of respect and admiration (Collins 2004; Morgan 1997; Pough 2004; Smitherman 1992; Sutton 1995).

Do any scripts in rap music lyrics depict a “bitch” in ways that empower African American women as sexually free and independent? An empowered bitch is a woman who does not need men to define her although she may have relationships with men. She is, however, independent and she makes her own decisions and money, challenges the dominant gender ideology and/or recognizes herself as strong and skilled as a rapper apart from men. Nineteen songs, or 4.2 percent of my sample, portray women as empowered bitches. Interestingly, all of these lyrics are women rappers’ lyrics, although two songs are by women rappers who are featured on a man rapper’s song.

All platinum-selling women rappers are empowered to the extent they have “made it” in an industry that is male-dominated and phallocentric and often openly hostile to women. Each woman has struggled to attain success. Some of them rap about how they are just as skilled, if not more skilled, than men rappers, and boast that they are bitches who create their own music and are not scared of competition. For example, Mocha raps on a DJ Clue song, “When I spit move way back, you get sprayed at. I write

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45 There have been numerous debates over whether the re-appropriation of the words *nigger* and *bitch*, among others are empowering acts. For example, Collins (2004:121) writes, “On one level, *freak, nigger, bitch,* and *faggot* are just words. But on another level, these terms are situated at an ideological crossroads that both *replicates and resists* [emphasis added] intersecting oppressions.” The debate is outside of the scope of this research. However, there is a clear difference between men rappers who use bitch as a derogatory term for a woman, and women rappers who call themselves bitches.
my own shit bitch, can you say that? (“I Like Control”). Similarly, Missy Elliot raps about her lyrical skills on the same song and emphasizes that other MCs (rappers) should not “fuck with” her:

Wooo, I get it hot like heat, you the MC that ‘posed to scare me?
Ahhh, scream ’til my voice get hoarse, spit on the mic, make all ya’ll moist
Hey, you don’t wanna fuck with me. (DJ Clue; “I Like Control”)

Empowered bitches say they make and manage their own money and are successful on their own terms. Salt-N-Pepa acknowledge that the rap industry is about the “paper chase,” or money, but also say they are educated and strong enough to manage the game:

It’s all about the great paper chase . . .
So read me all the rules so I can have my money right
Cause I’m a new lady boss keepin’ game tight. (Salt-N-Pepa; “Big Shot”).

In another song, Salt-N-Pepa rap, “I’m not a man, but I’m in command” (“Expression”) implying a woman can be in control of her own life and/or career.

Like Foxy Brown and Lil’ Kim, Salt-N-Pepa, composed of MCs Salt and Pepa and DJ Spinderella, are unafraid to be sexual or to talk about sex and their sexual relationships with men. In their heyday in the late 1980s to mid-90s, they wore tight-fitting, skin-revealing clothes in videos and stage performances. According to Keyes (2004:269), their image was that of the “fly girl,” or an independent Black woman who is comfortable with her sexuality. The “fly girl” dons stylish clothing, hairstyles, jewelry and make-up that emphasize “aspects of Black women’s bodies considered undesirable by American mainstream standards of beauty,” i.e. “their full breasts and rounded buttocks and thighs” (Keyes 2004:269). Unlike Lil’ Kim and Foxy Brown, who at times appear to be controlled by their crew of men and swear their allegiance to them in their lyrics and in their real lives, Salt-N-Pepa’s lyrics suggest that they are in control of their own sexuality and lives. They present themselves as subjects rather than objects in their lyrics, explore the power of the erotic and construct their personas unashamed of being sexual (hooks 1993; Keyes 2004; Lorde 1984).

In their real-life early rap career, however, Salt-N-Pepa did not always write their lyrics. They were one of the first all women rap groups to enter the rap music scene and
be as successful as men rap groups. Men control major record labels and are the majority of music producers and it often takes the sponsorship of a man or men for women to break into the genre (Emerson 2002; George 1998). Salt’s then-boyfriend and producer, Hurby Azor, wrote many of their early songs. However, by 1990, Salt was writing some of their lyrics, and by the time of their fourth album, *Very Necessary*, the group was writing most of their songs (Keyes 2004). Despite not writing their lyrics, they nevertheless project an image of independent women in control of their sexuality, money and relationships with men. For example, in their song “Independent Funk,” Salt-N-Pepa rap:

> Woman and I am independent
> I make my own money so don’t tell me how to spend it
> Cause you need me, and I don’t need you
> So listen close, boy, to my independent funk
> Yeah, can you feel it?
> Yes, it’s my, it’s my independent funk. (“Independent Funk”)

Similarly, they rap “I’m a sister with a grip on my life” (“Live and Let Die”). Salt-N-Pepa assert their skills as MCs and say that their raps are “strong enough for a man, but made for a woman” (“I Like to Party”).

In several other popular songs, including “Shoop” and “Most Men are Tramps,” they critique the hierarchical valuation of masculinity over femininity and hegemonic femininity that casts women as sexual objects who are subordinate to men. In one music video, they put men in trench coats with only red G-string underwear underneath which they intermittently and quickly display (Collins 2004; Keyes 2004). In “Shoop,” Salt-N-Pepa rap about men’s bodies similar to how men rappers often depict women’s bodies:

> Ummm, you’re packed and you’re stacked especially in the back
> Brother, wanna thank your mother for a butt like that (thanks, Mom) . . .
> You’re a shot gun – bang! What’s up with that thang?
> I wanna know how does it hang? (“Shoop”)

According to Collins (2004:127), Salt-N-Pepa do not aim to objectify the men in their songs or videos but “to use role reversal to criticize existing gender ideology” that normatively casts women as sexual objects. As their careers progressed, Salt-N-Pepa
made it a part of their mission to talk about sex, present themselves as powerful sexual women, educate women and men about the dangers of AIDS and promote the practice of safe sex (Keyes 2004). Salt even rewrote one song, “Let’s Talk about Sex,” for a public service announcement entitled “Let’s Talk about AIDS” (Keyes 2004).

Another group, TLC, promotes safe sex and projects an image of the independent strong woman, or empowered bitch. Their song, “Waterfalls,” addresses AIDS and narrates a story about a man who failed to use a condom and developed lesions on his face, implying he contracted HIV. Lisa “Left Eye” Lopes, one of the three members of the group, displays a condom in place of a lens on her eyeglasses (Keyes 2004). In many videos, members of this group append brightly-colored condom wrappers to their outfits (Keyes 2004). TLC’s style differs from Salt-N-Pepa’s in that they wear baggier clothes and challenge the prevailing standard of beauty in the music industry. In fact, one of TLC’s most popular songs, “Unpretty,” confronts normative beauty standards. They rap and sing:

Why do I look to all these things to keep you happy
Maybe get rid of you, and then I’ll get back to me, yeah . . .
You can buy your hair if it won’t grow, you can fix your nose if he says so
You can buy all the make-up that M.A.C. can make, but if
You can’t look inside you, find out who I am
To be in the position that make me feel so damn unpretty. (“Unpretty”)

In addition to promoting safe sex and challenging prevailing beauty standards, TLC’s lyrics promote independence and trusting, healthy relationships with men. One member, rapper T-Boz, raps about a relationship with a man who is controlling and tries to interrogate her about where, when and with whom she goes. In the lyrics, she tells him to “hit the road” and terminates the relationship:

I ain’t one to be questioned about who and where I’ve been
I ain’t one to be questioned about what time I came in
Tryna squeeze, baby please, hit the road and don’t come back
Cause I can’t trust a relationship with no trust and that’s a fact. (TLC; “Switch”)

The group encourages women in such relationships to “switch,” or it, and “don’t take no mess from nobody.”
Ultimately, empowered bitches control their sexuality, construct their own personas, and challenge sexism and patriarchy that strips them of the right to define themselves. Da Brat raps, “All my bitches that live the hood life, good life, that don’t need a nigga for shit” (“All My Bitches”). Empowered bitches do not need men to define and/or control them, although they may seek relationships with men based on respect and mutuality. Missy Elliot tells men with whom she has relationships to realize that “To have me, yes you lucky” (“The Rain (Supa Dupa Fly)”). Images of (Black) women as empowered bitches resist the gender hegemony in hip-hop culture that casts women as passive objects of masculine sexual desire and fantasy (Collins 2004; Forman 1994). For women rappers who (can) celebrate their independence and sexuality, rap music can be a forum for expressing and defining their sexuality and challenging the hierarchical and complementary relationship between masculinity and femininity in hip-hop culture and the broader society. Thus, the empowered bitch script represents a resistant femininity.

Conclusions

The freak is the most prevalent image of young Black women in rap music lyrics. In my sample, over 40 percent of songs contain a reference to freaks or one of its aliases. The freak image may predominate in rap lyrics because it reflects socio-historical ideas about the sexual nature of Black women. The prostitute image differs from the freak image in rap music lyrics in that rappers who reference prostitutes describe a woman who makes trading sex for money her profession. In addition, when men rappers rap about prostitutes, they usually rap about them when they rap about themselves as “pimps.” The bitch script is varied in rap music lyrics. Some men rappers describe women as gold diggers, or bitches who manipulate men (sexually) for material gain. The gold digger is the second most represented image of (Black) women appearing in a little over 12 percent of songs. Gangsta bitches are valued for their camaraderie, aggression and sexuality when used to assist the man or men with whom she has a relationship. Significantly, only women rappers describe themselves or other women as empowered bitches—women who are strong, (sexually) independent, and do not allow men to define or control them. In addition, the empowered bitch is the least represented image in rap music lyrics other than the dyke script and scripts specific to middle-class Black women, which I turn to in Chapter 5. I discuss these and other images of Black women, including mamas, dykes.
and middle-class-specific scripts—divas, sister saviors and earth mothers—in rap music lyrics in Chapter 5.
In Chapter 5, I focus on how men and women rappers represent Black women as mothers, lesbians, divas, sister saviors and earth mothers in lyrics. For the most part, when rappers rap about the mothers of their children, they portray them in a negative light. By contrast, rappers largely rap about their own mothers as selfless and giving mothers who did their best to raise children. Most references to lesbians (and gay men) in rap music lyrics are negative and often include homophobic slurs. More often, when men rappers call women “dykes,” it is because the story the rapper narrates involves a woman who rejects him sexually. Divas, sister saviors and earth mothers are scripts specific to middle class Black women. In general, these middle class scripts reject the freaky sexuality associated with working-class Black women, though in different ways. Because rap music is predominantly a working-class or “underclass” genre of Black popular music, there are very few references to these middle-class scripts in rap music lyrics. I also comment on rap music lyrics that challenge or resist negative images of Black women. In the next section, I examine the differences in how rappers portray the mothers of their children versus how they portray their own mothers.

**Baby Mama Drama vs. My Hard Workin’ Mama: Representations of Mothers**

Men rappers often call the mothers of their children bitches. In a climate where racist ideology has historically linked African peoples to animals, Black men who refer to the mothers of their children as bitches evoke a set of meanings that reproduce racist and sexist beliefs about Black women’s sexuality. The use of this term for Black women suggests that Black women are like female dogs or “bitches [that] ‘fuck and produce litters of puppies,” according to Collins (2004:130). African American women who become single mothers fail to accomplish “normal” (White middle-class) gender arrangements—the male provider/female homemaker. “Moreover, they [African American mothers] allegedly pass on their bad values to their children who in turn are more likely to become criminals and unwed teenage mothers” (Collins 2004:131).
The “baby mama” script in the lyrics of rap music may be viewed as reproducing stereotypes of young Black women who do not plan for pregnancy, are often single, are ill-prepared to take care of children, and may rely on public assistance. Their mothering skills and practices are questioned, even disparaged. The images of the “Bad Black Mother” (BBM) and “welfare queen” used to justify punitive social policies incorporate elements of the image of “breeder woman” under chattel slavery and the Jim Crow South (Collins 2000, 2004). Moreover, men rappers also characterize the mothers of their children as conniving bitches who intentionally get pregnant to swindle money from them. Typically, rappers depict their own mothers, like the mothers of their children, as poor, working-class and single. Unlike the mothers of their children, however, they generally do not refer to their mothers as bitches. Also, while they often consider their “baby’s mama” to be immoral, manipulative, and promiscuous, they portray their own mothers as loving, good-hearted, honest, and asexual.

_Baby Mamas._ The _baby mama_ is a script that can co-exist and often does along with other scripts. In other words, a freak, gangster bitch and gold digger can all become baby mamas (Stephens and Phillips 2003). I coded the baby mama script as present in a song if a rapper makes any reference to the mother of his children or any other young mother who is not his own. In my sample, 29 songs (or 6.4 percent) contain the baby mama script. In addition to recording whether the script was present, I coded for whether the representation is positive, neutral or negative. Neutral representations of baby mamas simply mention mothers without making any evaluation of them as people or mothers. For example, Dre of Outkast raps, “Just willin’ to get what I deserve, my kids to have a mother and a little house, with a dog in the backyard goin’ ‘woof-woof’” (“Ova Da Wudz”). A similar example comes from Takitha, a singer who sings on a Wu-Tang Clan song about “single mothers filled with stress” (“Second Coming”). Of the 29 songs with the baby mama script, nine were neutral. Only three women artists, including Takitha, mention mothers, and all of their mentions were neutral. As a result, I focus on how men rappers depict baby mamas. Men rappers predominantly portray baby mamas negatively.

Seventeen songs, nearly 60 percent of the 29, contained negative representations. The negative portrayal of baby mamas casts Black women as “Bad Black Mothers,” or “BBMs” as Collins (2004) says. Cultural representations of BBMs depict them as
negligent and inattentive to the needs of their children and/or rude and abusive toward their children (Collins 2004). Some men rappers express such images of Black mothers. 2Pac raps about a mother who leaves her children with her mother while she goes to bars and clubs to flirt and have sex with men:

You leave your kids with your mama, cause your headin’ for the club
In a skin tight miniskirt, lookin’ for some love.
Got them legs wide open, while you’re sittin’ at the bar. (“Wonder Why They Call U Bitch”)

2Pac implies that not only is the mother neglectful of her children but she is also promiscuous. This song contains several negative images of (Black) women and asks them to consider why others call them “bitches,” as implied by the title of the song.

Ironically, men rappers often portray African American women as sexual freaks and impart their sexual desire for freaks while disparaging Black mothers who actively pursue sexual encounters with men. This reinforces the Madonna/whore dichotomy whereby motherhood is disassociated from women’s sexuality (Pough 2004). In other words, men rappers accept African American women as sexually promiscuous freaks (though they may not respect them), but they expect mothers, especially the mothers of their own children, to be sexually passive or asexual. When mothers violate these expectations, men rappers treat these “baby mamas” as sexually promiscuous “hos” who are not worthy of respect or assistance with raising their children. For example, a Too Short song reflects the Madonna/whore dichotomy by asserting that women should remain virgins before they marry and censures “teenage girls” who “find it normal to carry a baby” (“Thangs Change”). In another song, Too Short acknowledges that men, or daddies, need to take responsibility for their children and that many of the girls, or in his words “bitches,” they impregnate are too young for that responsibility. He raps:

How many mothers in the house tonight, ladies?
How many daddies take care of them babies?
They got to learn to take care of their own
Getting girls pregnant and leaving ‘em alone
Fine little bitches, way too young . . . . (Too Short; “Step Daddy”)

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At the same time, Too $hort also brags about his sexual escapades with these young mothers and denigrates them as sexually promiscuous freaks who have children with multiple men. He raps, “She’s so freaky, she’ll make you shout, one on the way and got two at the house, three different daddies, and all is well” (“Step Daddy”). Too $hort also describes how he briefly and superficially plays “step daddy” to these children even though he has no respect and does not care for the women with whom he has sex and her children:

Play step daddy for a minute or two and then fuck her, that’s how it’s done
It’s not my daughter and it’s not my son, so what if your kids start tearing shit up
I really don’t give a fuck. (“Step Daddy”)

He warns other men to “lock your back doors” and “check your hos.”

The theme of men rappers having sex with other men’s babies’ mamas is repeated in a Scarface song. The song begins with a recording on an answering machine in which a man, the father, screams at his babies’ mama, suspects her of engaging in sexual relations with another man, and calls her a bitch:

Yo bitch, this is (beep) pick up the phone, bitch. I know you’re in there.
You fucking with that old fucking ass face now, huh bitch.
Where my motherfucking kids at, bitch, fucking bitch, punk ass bitch?! (“Goin’ Down”)

Scarface reveals later in the song that he is the man with whom this woman is “fucking.” He echoes Too $hort’s sentiments by knowingly having sex with one of his “homie’s [i.e. friend’s] baby’s mama” and asserting that he does not care about this woman or her children. He justifies his actions by claiming that if his “homies . . . caught one of my hos, they’d do the same to me” (“Goin’ Down”).

In addition to portraying baby mamas as immoral and sexually promiscuous, men rappers often depict the mothers of their children as selfish, calculating bitches who purposely get pregnant to “trap” men into a relationship and providing for them and their children (Stephens and Phillips 2003). Alternatively, they may charge women with scheming to entrap them by falsely claiming that they are their baby’s daddies. Ice Cube narrates a story in which a woman, whom he calls the “neighborhood hussy,” accuses him of being the father of her unborn child. But, when she gives birth, the baby “came
out . . . looking like [his] next-door neighbor” and a blood test proves that he is not the father (“You Can’t Fade me”). Ice Cube tells the woman, “Excuse me bitch it’s a switch. You can’t fade me . . . Yo, you ain’t playing Ice Cube out,” meaning that the woman could not trick him into believing that he is the baby’s daddy. In another song, Eddie Griffin raps about a woman who gets pregnant while having a sexual affair with a man who has a relationship with another woman and a family. He yells at her:

You knew when you got with the nigga he already had a woman
You knew he already had a family, but you fucked him anyway!
And then when you thought you gon’ lose the nigga
You went and got pregnant – didn’t you bitch, didn’t you!
The ole keep a nigga baby
And, then when the nigga ain’t around, what do you tell the child?
“Aww that nigga ain’t shit, that’s why yo’ daddy ain’t here, cause that nigga ain’t shit.” How ‘bout bein’ a woman and tellin’ the kid the truth
That yo’ mama, you was a ho! Tell the kid!
Mama was a ho, I was weekend pussy . . .
I was just a dumb bitch, tryin’ to keep a nigga that I wanted. (Dr. Dre; “Education”)

This song accuses the woman of deliberately getting pregnant in the hopes that the man with whom she was having sex might break off his relationship with another woman. When that scenario does not materialize, she explains to her child his/her father is not around because he is irresponsible. Eddie Griffin suggests that she tell the “truth” and calls her a bitch, ho, and “weekend pussy” for trying to manipulate the man into establishing more than just a sexual relationship with her by intentionally getting pregnant. Interestingly, he does not acknowledge the man’s obligations in impregnating the woman with whom he has an affair.

Another variation of a negative baby mama script consists of a woman who uses drugs either during or after pregnancy. The image of the “crack mother” emerged in the early 1980s as the media dubbed crack cocaine and the births of crack-addicted babies alarming epidemics and then President Reagan declared an all out “War on Drugs” (Collins 2004). Poor Black, drug-addicted women living in the inner-city became ideal
foils for the administration’s push for increased punitive measures against drug users and distributors (Collins 2004). Cultural representations portrayed crack mothers as self-centered criminals who abused their unborn and unwanted children (Collins 2004).

A few rappers in my sample refer to crack mothers in song lyrics. Master P raps about “crack babies in the hood with AIDS infected mothers” (“More 2 Life”). The rap group Digital Underground tells the story of a Black pregnant teenager who overdoses on crack through the eyes of a fictional cop that discovers her body:

Ahh yes, victim ID
Young Black female, uhh eighteen, she’s pregnant . . .
Apparent crack overdose, I’m gonna need backup
Nine-eleven, nine-eleven, nine-eleven
Uhh cancel that backup call, we’ve lost her. (“The Danger Zone”)

A final variation on negative portrayals of Black mothers is that of the racialized “welfare queen.” The depiction of poor Black mothers as uncontrollable child breeders became synonymous with the term *welfare* and racism facilitated the welfare debate, the White backlash against government assistance to the poor and the eventual dismantling of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) (Abramovitz 2002; Ammot 1990; Collins 2000, 2004; Misra, Moller, and Karides 2003; Neubeck 2002; Quadagno 1994). Critics of social welfare expenditures believed that welfare encouraged laziness and promiscuity and that poor mothers taught their children to be lazy and irresponsible, resulting in a “cycle of dependency” (Albelda 2002; Bane and Ellwood 1994; Edin and Lein 1996, 1997; Fraser and Gordon 1994; Harris 1993; Katz 2002; Misra, Moller, and Karides 2003; Piven 2002). Poor Black women became the targets of the conservative Reagan and Bush administrations and their agendas of shrinking government programs (Collins 2000, 2004; Katz 2002). The image of the African American welfare queen as a lazy woman content to live off the public dole and reproduce poverty through breeding was one that drove White voters to the polls to vote for candidates that promised to reduce government assistance to a population that was portrayed as greedy, rather than needy (Gordon 2002; Katz 2002; White 2002).

Ironically, Black women’s attempt to conform to mainstream (i.e., White heterosexual middle-class) standards of hegemonic femininity resulted in rolling back
social welfare policies that would allow them to do so. Historically, mainstream standards of femininity value motherhood above all else; a “good mother” should forgo career aspirations and stay home to care for her children (Albelda 2002; White 2002). In addition, a “good mother” should be married. Contrary to most arguments that the main objective of welfare reform is to require welfare recipients to work, Mink (2002) contends that the main objective of welfare reform is to reinstate the nuclear patriarchal family. When African American women secured their right to public assistance through the Civil Rights Movement, mainstream society and public policy makers stigmatized Black women who did not work for pay in the formal economy, were not married and utilized social welfare programs to support them as stay-at-home mothers and their children (Collins 2000, 2004; Mink 2002; White 2002).

Some men rappers stigmatize baby mamas for accepting or relying on state assistance to support themselves and their children. For example, Ice Cube raps about an overly “bitchy” Black woman who complains when “the county check wasn’t right” (“Once Upon a Time in the Projects”). 2Pac reproduces the stereotype of the greedy African American woman who uses welfare cash assistance to buy superfluous goods and services for herself rather than spending it on necessities and childcare. He raps, “More money from the county and thanks to the welfare, you’re about to get your hair done . . . You wonder why they call you bitch (“Wonder Why They Call U Bitch”).

The label baby mama appropriately describes men rappers’ characterization of the woman’s part in the relationship with the man with whom she has a baby. For most men rappers, baby mamas are essentially the mothers of a man’s child and “nothing more” (Stephens and Phillips 2003:34). In the lyrics of rap music, men do not expect to nor do they have long-term committed relationships based on love and respect with the mothers of their children. Instead, they depict relationships with baby mamas as tedious and contentious. They refer to their dealings with the mothers of their children as “baby mama drama,” a phrase that has seeped into the mainstream culture. Snoop Dogg raps that his “baby mama [is] full of drama” (“D.O.G.’s Get Lonely 2”). 2Pac explains that having children is not for him because he does not want “no baby mama drama . . . Why plant seeds in a dirty bitch waitin’ to trick me” (2Pac & Outlawz; “Hell 4 a Hustler”). Rapper B-Legit describes the “drama” with his baby mama when his “paper come up
short,” i.e. he fails to make enough money. And, he says he will use physical violence if his baby mama causes too much drama and takes him to court:

We stressed main, paper come up short

Plus this bitch with my baby tryin’ to take me to court . . .

I one, two, and slap the fuck outta you

So go on about your business bitch, and do what you do. (Scarface; “Do What You Do”)

Baby mamas (potentially) upset power relations between men and the women whom they impregnate. As the preceding example suggests, baby mamas can utilize state-sanctioned power to get the resources they may need or desire to take care of their children. Men rappers disparage and malign women whom they identify as the mothers of their children, especially those that fail to meet their standards of motherhood—i.e., mothers who they see as non-nurturing, manipulative, lazy and/or sexually promiscuous. Therefore, the qualities associated with baby mamas in hip-hop culture constitute pariah femininities within hip hop culture (Schippers 2007). And yet, a few rappers describe amicable relationships between themselves and the mothers of their children—thus positive representations.

Three songs represented baby mamas or women’s relationships with the fathers of their children positively. Surprisingly, one comes from Ice Cube who in other songs often belittles and objectifies baby mamas and women generally. In his song, “The Product,” he tells a story of his life as a thug and hustler and explains that he is “the product” of his environment, i.e. the ghetto, which is presumably his reason for treating women the way he does. By the end of the song, he is trying to make a change in his life. He raps, “I got a little baby on the way, so I’m tryin’ to go straight. I’m with my baby’s mama, out on a date” (“The Product”).

“Soon You’ll Understand” narrates the story of Jay-Z’s relationship with his best friend’s sister, Gina, in the first half of the song, while the second half is an ode to his mother (see Rapper’s Mamas below). He has known Gina since he was young and watched her mature into a “grown woman.” He describes how he was there to support and comfort her as a friend when her boyfriend lied to and cheated on her. She develops romantic feelings for him and he pleads for her not to love him and tells her that she
deserves a man “like a lawyer or a doctor with a Ph.D.” He raps, “But you see how I am around girls. I ruin ‘em all . . . a different girl every night forever.” He asks her to leave or “told her to skate,” but she “chose not to,” and eventually, he succumbs to her advances and she becomes “the mother of [his] baby.” He admits that they “fight” and “throw a fuss,” but he doesn’t want her to hate him. He raps, “I ain’t ready to be what you want me to be. Because I love you, I want you to leave, please” (“Soon You’ll Understand”). We cannot know what he means by being unready for what she wants him to be. But, unlike the negative representations that depict baby mamas that as sexual freaks unable to control their fertility and/or conniving bitches trying to trap a man by becoming pregnant, Jay-Z claims to care for the woman in the song narrative.

Finally, Will Smith, in his song, “Afro Angel,” raps about a teenage girl, Tamika, who became pregnant in high school. In the song narrative, Tamika gets pregnant very young but she gets her life together. She stands up to her “thug” boyfriend who fathered her child. “She stepped to Russ. Told him it’s either them drugs or us, either them thugs or us” (“Afro Angel”). Tamika moves away from Russ and later reunites with him when he gives up the “drug game” to marry her and help raise their child. Although the story may be fanciful or fictional, Smith portrays this baby mama positively—strong-willed, independent and attentive to the needs of her child. In these few instances, the baby mamas do not have the qualities characteristic of a pariah femininity. The women in these narratives do not “nag,” are seen as appropriately “motherly” or nurturing, are not sexually promiscuous, and/or do not pursue legal action forcing the men who fathered their babies to contribute resources. With the exception of these three songs, the representation of Black (teenage) mothers in rap music is generally consistent with the stereotype of the ignorant, negligent, and overly-sexed child breeder. As noted already, this portrayal of baby mamas differs vastly from how the majority of men rappers characterize their own mothers (Stephens and Phillips 2003).

Rappers’ Mamas. Most men rappers rap about their mothers in a reverent way. They rap about their mothers in 49 songs, nearly 11 percent of my sample. As with the baby mama script, I coded whether rappers provide positive, neutral or negative evaluations of their mothers. Of 49 songs that referred to rappers’ mothers, 17 have neutral representations—that is, simple references to their mothers and no judgment of
them as either mothers or persons. For example, 2Pac raps, “Mama, I’m still thuggin’, the world is a war zone” (“Picture Me Rollin’”). Rappers boast in other songs that now that they have made it in the music industry, their mothers “don’t have to work no mo’” (Lil’ Troy; “Small Time”) or that “Mommy’s out the ghetto now” (Bone Thugs-N-Harmony; “It’s All Mo Thug”). In addition, two women artists or groups, Salt-N-Pepa and Eve, mention their mothers, and both references were positive representations, although brief.

Of the songs that refer to rappers’ mothers, 27 of 49, contain positive representations. Most men rappers depict their mothers as tireless, selfless and honest mothers and as workers who did the best they could to raise their children and teach them right from wrong. In “Soon You’ll Understand,” Jay-Z presents himself as a prisoner who writes his mother from his cell. He raps about how his mother “tried to teach him better” but “he refused to grow” because he “wanted things like bling bling ice [diamonds and/or expensive jewelry].” He also describes how he disobeyed her rules and brought drugs into her house and understands why she was embarrassed to have a “son who sold drugs.” He raps, “Meanwhile, you workin’ hard like two or three jobs tryin’ to feed me and my siblings, makin’ and honest livin’ . . .” He admits to making things rough for her but asks her to “try to understand” and asks her for “money for commissary” (“Soon You’ll Understand”). Like Ice Cube who says he is “the product” of the ghetto, Jay-Z seems to imply that he became a victim of the inner-city streets and asks his mother to understand and forgive him.

Other rappers narrate similar stories about relationships with their mothers. B.G. raps about how he grew up in the ghetto “watchin’ niggas shoot out.” He raps, “My mama tried to keep me inside but I snuck out the back” (Juvenile; “Get It Right”). Rapper Product G&B appears on a Wyclef Jean song and tells how his “mama came home from a hard days work at day time a maid at night time a nurse; work so hard to make sure we survived” (“Runaway”). Snoop Dogg describes how “four young brothers got shot in the street” while he goes to school and his “mama go to work, cold bustin’ her ass.” Although she struggles, he always has “beans, rice, and bread on [his] shelf” (“Doggz Gonna Get Ya”).
Big Boi of the rap group Outkast reminisces about the days when his “mammy had to work in the kitchens.” His “mammy” tried to get him to make “better grades [in school] to make a better life,” but he “never had no love or respect [then]” and “ran the streets and broke curfew” (“Ain’t No Thang”). His practice of calling his mother his “mammy” evokes an image of the Black woman as domestic servant under chattel slavery (Collins 2000, 2004). The mammy image is one of an overweight, unattractive and darker-skinned middle-aged woman who is submissive to her master and his family (Collins 2000, 2004; Stephens and Phillips 2003). Moreover, the mammy is asexual and is considered to be non-threatening to the moral fiber of her White family, i.e., her (lack of) sexuality does not tempt her master or taint the family with depraved ideas or behaviors (Stephens and Phillips 2003). In the context of rap music lyrics, the word mammy reinforces the idea that rappers think of their (own) mothers as asexual beings who subordinate their own needs to the needs of others, particularly their jobs and families (Collins 2000, 2004).

Many rappers portray baby mamas as being deservedly single because of their licentious behavior. And yet, rappers seem not to blame their mothers who also were (or are) single. Significantly, I found only two references to a rapper’s father in my sample of lyrics and in both songs, rappers depict their fathers as “crazy.” In the song, “Papa Crazy,” Run-D.M.C. raps about one of their fathers who is rich and married to a woman other than the rapper’s mother. The rapper’s mother, on the other hand, is “makin’ nothin’ while she sweeps.” The song implies that his “papa” is rich by criminal means because the last person that asked him “about his dough, how he got paid . . . got sprayed and laid [shot and killed] because . . . papa was crazy.” In another such song, a man rapper raps, “It’s getting so hard, can’t even make an honest dollar. Mom was on welfare, Pop’s a freakin’ lunatic. I’m just a young brother who’s trapped in the wrong pit” (Mo Thugs; “Searchin’ 4 Peace”).

Unlike the mothers of rappers’ children whom they portray as sexually promiscuous, immoral, and manipulative, men rappers largely depict their own mothers as asexual, honest and hard-working. Because men rappers largely describe their mothers in this manner and value and respect their mothers, asexuality, honesty and hard-work are characteristics considered “motherly” and womanly in the hip-hop cultural context.
Furthermore, male rappers' lyrics suggest that their mothers often sacrifice themselves to meet their needs. These characteristics do not upset the hierarchical valuation of masculinity over femininity and are thus qualities of hegemonic femininity within hip-hop culture.

A few representations of rappers’ mothers are not favorable. Five songs contain negative depictions of rappers’ mothers. For example, Mo Thugs describes one rapper’s mother as being on welfare and implies that it is not an “honest” way to make a living. Most rappers praise the efforts of their loving mothers to keep them off of the street and away from gang activity however fruitless those efforts may be. In contrast, Biggie Smalls in his song “I Really Want to Show You,” portrays his mother as a nag. He raps, “I had to get P-A-I-D, that’s why my moms hate me.” Black Rob describes his mother as single “raising [him] with no father.” He depicts his mother as a lazy alcoholic woman who is neglectful of her children. He raps:

Never had a dime, my life a crime
Had me when I was nine, mom drunk off of wine
Ran with all kind her mind stayed with the stupor
‘Til a point she paid no mind to the supper . . .
And she wasn’t trying to do nothin’
You would think for the sake of the kids
She would enroll in school or somethin’. (“Life Story”)

These negative examples, while few in number, resemble how rappers portray the mothers of their children.

Dykes: Heterosexism, Homophobia and “Bulldagging Ass Bitches”

According to Collins (2004), at the bottom of the gender, race, class, and sexuality hierarchies are working-class lesbian women of color. Homophobia and heterosexism also affect Black homosexual men and standards of hegemonic masculinity place them at the bottom of the gender hierarchy for men Collins (as well as Connell 1995) says. Rappers, particularly men rappers, reproduce these hierarchies when they denigrate lesbians or derogatorily refer to women who refuse their sexual advances as dykes and bulldaggers and refer to homosexual men as punks and faggots. While
homophobia, homonegativity, and heterosexism\textsuperscript{46} are endemic to American culture in general (Herek and Glunt 1993; Negy and Eisenman 2005), hip hop culture is particularly inhospitable to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) people.

Many scholars and journalists have pointed to the rampant homophobia and heterosexism in hip hop culture and African American culture in general, including Chang (2005), Collins (2004), Keyes (2004), Pough (2004), Rose (1994), and Stephens and Phillips (2003). Twenty-three songs in my sample, just over five percent, contain homophobic lyrics, or lyrics that use homophobic slurs such as fag(got), homo, dyke, and bulldagger, or they describe actual or potential acts of violence against homosexuals. For example, Brother Marquis of 2 Live Crew opens the song “Dirty Nursery Rhymes” by using the format of the popular “yo mama” game whereby rappers and Black youth hurl insults at one another by making disparaging remarks about each others’ mothers. He raps, “My mama and your mama was talking a little shit. My mama called your mama a bulldagging ass bitch.” Considering the respect and reverence with which many men rappers rap about their mothers and the homophobia in hip hop culture, to call another rapper or man’s mother a “bulldagging ass bitch” is a grave put down. To call a woman a bulldagger is to imply that she is not only a lesbian but a masculine person who acts like a man (Walker 1993). There are no positive representations or images of homosexuals and/or lesbians in my sample of rap music lyrics; most are negative. In some songs, there are neutral passing references to homosexuals and lesbians. For instance, Lil’ Kim raps, “We came to a red light, gave right-of-way to pedestrians two Black and White lesbians (hey hey baby).”

The \textit{dyke} is another script for young (Black) women in rap music lyrics. Eleven songs, a little over 2 percent, contain references to lesbians. Two of the eleven feature women and men rappers where women are the primary artists on the songs. As mentioned earlier, Da Brat addresses those who question her sexuality because of her “gangsta” image in the song “Breeve on Em” when she raps, “They say is she is or is she

\textsuperscript{46} Homophobia refers to feelings, or an “affective response,” such as fear, apprehension, uneasiness, disgust, etc. a person experiences when interacting with LGBT persons (Adams, Wright and Lohr 1996; Negy and Eisenman 2005). Homonegativity refers to “the cognitive component,” or “negative attitudes, beliefs or actions” toward homosexuality (Negy and Eisenman 2005:292). Heterosexism refers to “an ideology and system of power that defines what constitutes normal and deviant sexuality, . . . distributes social rewards and penalties based on this definition, . . . and treat[s] heterosexuality as natural, normal, and inevitable” (Collins 2004:351).
ain’t a dyke,” and Lil’ Kim makes a passing reference to a lesbian couple in one song. All other songs that contain the dyke script are songs by men rappers and groups.

*Homophobia and heterosexism in hip-hop and African American culture.* Just as there is opposition to tackling sexism and sexual violence in the African American community, there is also concern that paying attention to heterosexism and homophobia will detract from the struggle against racism—long deemed the primary injustice to African Americans (Collins 2000, 2004). Several scholars find that homophobia and anti-gay attitudes and beliefs are more prevalent among African Americans than among Whites in the U.S. (Fullilove and Fullilove 1999; Kennamer, Honnold, Bradford and Hendricks 2000; Lewis 2003; Negy and Eisenman 2005).47 One reason for resisting acceptance of homosexuality in African American communities is the historical power of the Black Church. Religion has played a powerful role in social movements against racism and oppression (Collins 2000, 2004). Like many White Christian Churches and other organizations, the Black Church admonishes homosexuality and other sexualities other than heterosexual sex in the confines of marriage between a man and woman. Everything else is viewed as deviant, unnatural, dangerous and a sin against God (Brown Douglas 1999; Collins 2000, 2004; Stephens and Phillips 2003). While some may claim to “love the sinner and not the sin” and accept homosexuals as sinners and people, the Black Church generally teaches that same-sex relationships violate Christian morals and values and that homosexuals cannot be true Christians.

Many African Americans also believe that homosexuality is a White pathology according to Collins (2004). The dominant and racist European ideology has historically associated African peoples with animals ruled by primitive (sexual) instincts for copious reproduction. This ideology connects myths about Africans’ presumed insatiable sexual appetite and promiscuity with a presupposition of heterosexuality. Because Europeans presumed Black people were closer to nature than to human civilization and that heterosexuality is the only “natural” sexual orientation (resulting in procreation),

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47 Curiously, Lewis (2003) finds that homophobic beliefs and attitudes are more prevalent among African Americans than among Whites but African Americans support gay civil rights and oppose discrimination against gays and lesbians in employment more than Whites do. In addition, Negy and Eisenman (2005) find that Black college students harbor slightly more negative beliefs and attitudes toward LGBs than White college students. However, “after frequency of church attendance, religious commitment, and SES were taken into consideration, any previously suggested ethnic differences in homophobia and homonegativity vanished” (Negy and Eisenman 2005:295).
homosexuality was thought to be unfeasible and non-existent among people of African
descent (Cole and Guy-Shetfall 2003; Collins 2004).

Such beliefs have seeped into contemporary ideas and practices. The actual
existence of African American homosexuals has failed to refute hegemonic beliefs about
the naturalness of heterosexuality and the “Whiteness” of homosexuality. Instead, Black
ideology has explained their existence as due to pathologies of homosexual individuals,
the Black family structure, and/or racism within the larger culture (Collins 2004).
According to Collins (2004), many Black Christians believe that the decrease in
heterosexual two-parent families and the lack of positive role models for young Black
men in particular produces weak men who become homosexual. Other explanations
include “a loss of traditional religious values” in the African American community, “the
emasculcation of Black men by White oppression,” and “a sinister plot by White racists as
a form of population genocide” (Collins 2004:108).

In recent years, a strategy has developed among African American men to cope
with the contradictions between the belief in the naturalness of heterosexuality and the
practice of homosexual sex—the Down Low (DL) subculture. Black men “on the Down
Low” live public lives as heterosexual men with girlfriends and wives and secretly have
sexual encounters with men in clubs or in other ways—both anonymous and planned
(Collins 2004; Phillips 2005; Williams 2004). In a heterosexist society, there have
always been gay and bisexual people who lead double lives but the emergence of a secret
subculture of (Black) men who engage in homosexual acts with one another is a
relatively recent phenomenon (Collins 2004; Phillips 2005).

Although they engage in homosexual sex, Black men on the DL usually do not
define themselves as bisexuals or homosexuals and do not associate themselves with the
larger LGBT community (Williams 2004). To Black men who do identify themselves as
homosexual, furthermore, the DL subculture provides a haven where they can avoid the
admonishment, rejection and threats associated with coming out and retain their
relationships with friends, family and the larger African American culture (Denizet-
Lewis 2003). However, there are consequences to the DL. It does not challenge the
heterosexism and dominant gender and race ideologies that foster the need for such a
subculture, and for those who do not use condoms, it can threaten lives including those of
women with whom they have sex (Collins 2004; Williams 2004). Public health officials are increasingly concerned about the spread of HIV/AIDS throughout the DL community and to their wives and girlfriends (Collins 2004). About two-thirds of U.S. women who tested positive for AIDS in 2001 were African American (Denizet-Lewis 2003).

The foregoing issues have merged to create an intolerant and often dangerous climate in African American and hip hop culture for LGBT people. For example, Luniz raps, “Now I done had it with all that static. I’m thinkin’ I should load my automatic and let all these faggots have it” (“900 Blame a Nigga”). It is common for rappers to use a homophobic slur to discredit the masculinity, honor, and or “street cred(ibility)” of another man. Rapper Sheek criticizes the rap music industry for believing what “some faggot-ass reporter Don, wrote in your life” in the magazine *Vibe* (The Lox; “Goin’ Be Some Shit”). Similarly DMX challenges the masculinity and street cred of another man when he raps:

Let me break it down for you he’s about to attack you
Still standin’ here faggot? You must want me to smack you
You ain’t been there or done that, fuck is y’all niggaz tellin’ me
I’m the only nigga walkin’ the streets with four felonies. (“Ain’t No Way”)

“Dykes”. Heterosexual men rappers consider women who have sex with other women freaks, while they also accept and encourage it if they are permitted to participate or observe (Stephens and Phillips 2003). For example, Wais raps on a Jay-Z song, “Gettin’ shorties [women] like a thespian, had an episode with two lesbians. Got a fetish for that” (“If I Should Die”). However, it is more common for men rappers to call women who reject them (sexually) “dykes,” or some other derogatory term for lesbians. Women who reject men as sexual partners threaten men’s ability to control them and therefore jeopardize men’s sense of themselves as men, including their “manhood.”

Men rappers deem lesbians who do not allow men’s participation in or observation of their sexual behavior as abnormal, unnatural, psychologically deficient or damaged, or morally suspect (Pharr and Raymond 1997; Stephens and Phillips 2003). The assumption is that women (and men) are naturally heterosexual and that lesbians must have been wronged by a man or men and are merely denying men sexual access out of contempt and malice (Souljah 1994; Stephens and Phillips 2003; Villarosa 1994). The
most common usage of the dyke script in the lyrics of rap music occurs when men encounter self-assured, empowered women, that is, women who do not allow them to control their sexuality and/or women who refuse their sexual advances. For example, rapper Hittman raps about a party scene in which he “hits on” a woman. He asks her if she is in a relationship and she becomes angered by his advances. Because she is not flattered or impressed, he calls her a bitch and a “dyke”:

“Yo, is this your man?” “No.”
Grab the bitch’s hand, “I’m Hittman” . . .
Maybe too extreme cause the sister got steamed
Then Miss Thing tried to scream on my brethren
I got mad spit flame on the name Stefan, tattooed on her arm
Ho, you ain’t the bomb, must be a dyke. (Dr. Dre, “Ackrite”)

In another song, rapper B-Legit describes an altercation with his baby mama, calls her a bitch and insinuates that the reason she has left him is because she has “turned” lesbian:

You like to run shit, do what you do
You fuck with powder bitch? Hey yo, do what you do
You turn dyke too? Yeah, do what you do
But if it’s fuck me bitch, then it’s fuck you too. (Scarfase; “Do What You Do”)

Another depiction is of dykes as having simply “not experienced ‘good’ sex with a man” (Stephens and Phillips 2003:23). Ice Cube raps about a woman and compares their relationship to the one between Tina and Ike (Turner). He raps:

It’s intense dreamin’ of a black picket fence
His and her nine’s teach you how to rhyme on the mic
You Tina and I’m Ike
Know you ain’t a dyke cause you seem to like the way I lay pipe [have sex].
(Westside Connection; “Westward Ho”)

Ice Cube raps that the woman with whom he is in a relationship cannot be a dyke because she likes having sex with him. The lyrics imply that women who are dykes may have not

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48 By all accounts, this is not a favorable comparison since Tina publicly accused Ike of violent spousal abuse during their marriage which ended in divorce.
had “good” sex with a man or that the men with whom they have had sex are just not as talented as he is.

While not directly addressed in my sample of rap music lyrics, there is a tendency in hip hop culture in general to identify women rappers or other successful women as lesbians or spread rumors about their sexuality. I have noted such issues regarding Da Brat’s sexuality that she addresses in a song. In addition, there are rumors that Queen Latifah, a talented rapper, song writer, singer, producer, actress, and business woman, is gay (Pough 2004; Stephens and Phillips 2003). Queen Latifah, despite success in several branches of the entertainment industry where she got her start as a rapper has never had a platinum-selling album. As a result, her songs are not in my sampling frame. Perhaps it is because she presents herself as self-assured, self-made, powerful, and in control of her sexuality and does not seem to use her sexuality to sell herself or her music, characteristics that are not valued in hip hop culture or a wider American culture where sex and violence sell. Though she has never had a platinum-selling album, she won Grammy, NAACP Image and Soul Train Music Awards for her song “U.N.I.T.Y.” in 1994 (Collins 2004).

Many of Queen Latifah’s songs address the sexism and objectification of women in hip hop culture and rap music and the general plight of Black women. In “U.N.I.T.Y.”, Queen Latifah raps, “Every time I hear a brother call a girl a bitch or a ho, trying to make a sister feel low. You know all of that gots to go.” She also raps about how she challenged and refused the sexual advances of a man who tried to grab her as she passed by and called her a bitch to impress his group of friends:

I bring wrath to those who disrespect me like a dame
That’s why I’m talking, one day I was walking down the block
I had my cutoff shorts on right cause it was crazy hot
I walked past these dudes when they passed me
I turned around red, somebody was catching the wrath
Then the little one said (Yeah me bitch) and laughed
Since he was with his boys he tried to break fly
Huh, I punched him dead in his eye and said “Who you calling a bitch?”
(“U.N.I.T.Y.”)
In another song, she raps about women on welfare who are trying to make a better life for themselves but are ignored or disparaged by the government. She raps:

A woman strives for a better life, but who the hell cares?
Because she’s living on welfare
The government can’t come up with a decent housing plan
So she’s in no man’s land. It’s a sucker who tells you you’re equal! (“Evil That Men Do”)

Another song and its video, “Ladies First,” in which Queen Latifah collaborates with a British woman rapper, Monie Love, celebrates the diversity, talent, independence and importance of Black women in hip hop culture and global civil rights movements (Pough 2004; Roberts 1994, 1996; Rose 1994). The video opens with pictures of Black women activists Angela Davis, Winnie Mandela, and Sojourner Truth and features Queen Latifah as a “Third World military strategist” who oversees the replacement of White-dominated regimes with Black ones using Black power-fist figures placed on a map of Southern Africa (Rose 1994:164). The lyrics of the song address the sexism in hip hop culture including the view that women cannot rap or “flow” or hold their own in the rap music industry. Queen Latifah raps:

I break into a lyrical freestyle
Grab the mic, look into the crowd and see smiles
Cause they see a woman standing up on her own two
Sloppy slouching is something I won’t do
Some think that we can’t flow (can’t flow)
Stereotypes, they got to go (got to go)
I’m a mess around and flip the scene into reverse
(With what?) With a little touch of “Ladies First”. (“Ladies First”)

Claims that successful Black women are dykes often come from African American men’s erroneous ideas that a woman’s achievements are assaults on them (Stephens and Phillips 2003). Queen Latifah has been successful in rap music and the larger hip hop culture where men dominate. She has not made male-defined sexuality central to her rap persona. She does not publicly discuss her sexual relationships, and she directly challenges the hierarchical valuation of men and masculinity over women and
femininity, including men’s dominance in rap music and other venues. Thus, rumors that she is gay have been circulating in popular media and hip hop culture for years (Pough 2004). In addition, her role as Cleo in the film Set It Off portrayed the Black lesbian character as dominant, masculine and butch. This depiction “flows into perceptions of dark-skinned, big-boned Black women as being less feminine and more ‘mannelish’” (Collins 2004:198) and fueled the rumors about her sexuality. In her book, Ladies First: Revelations of a Strong Black Woman, Queen Latifah (1999:125) addresses these very issues.

But it’s insulting when someone asks, “Are you gay?” A woman cannot be strong, outspoken, competent at running her own business, handle herself physically, play a very convincing role in a movie, know what she wants—and go for it—without being gay? Come on . . . People fueled those rumors when I wasn’t dating anyone. I felt as if I should run out and get a boyfriend, if only to say, “Look, I have a man, I’m not gay.” Ridiculous.

Women such as Queen Latifah are hampered in their efforts to empower women when they are constantly baited and challenged to prove their heterosexuality (Pharr and Raymond 1997; Pough 2004).

And yet, there are signs of change on the sexuality issue. For example, Queen Pen unashamedly proclaims her identity as a Black lesbian. Though she has not had a platinum selling album, she attained some success and critical acclaim with her 1997 album My Melody which includes a song, “Girlfriend,” that narrates the story of her sexual relationship with another woman (Keyes 2004).⁴⁹ Even more recently, a community of LGBT rappers has emerged, and some have defined this new genre in rap music as “homo hop.” Phat Family is a global association of hip hop artists, writers and fans who support LGBT agendas, produce LGBT music, organize events for artists and fans and seek to carve out a safe and welcoming space in hip hop culture and the rap music industry.⁵⁰ In addition, New Yorker, Now Toronto, CNN and NPR articles and broadcasts have featured LGBT rappers and addressed homophobia in hip hop culture. In 2007, the first ever tour of gay, lesbian and bisexual rap artists, or the Homorevolution

⁴⁹ Me’Shell Ndegocello, an openly lesbian R&B artist, also sings on the song (Keyes 2004).

⁵⁰ See http://www.phat-family.org
Tour, began in the Pacific Southwest and continued into the Midwest. Featured artists included Deadlee (who cleverly calls himself a “gayngsta”), Johnny Dangerous, Bigg Nugg, Tori Fixx, JFP, FoxxJazell, and Smut Stud among others. While none of these artists has had a platinum-selling album, several have appeared in documentaries, mainstream media interviews, and MTV’s LOGO network, featuring LGBT shows, documentaries and music.

While such signs of change may point to a more favorable climate for LGBT rappers, hip-hop culture is still generally compulsorily heterosexual. Women rappers and women who participate in the broader hip-hop culture face challenges that may prevent them from addressing LGBT issues or coming out of the closet if they are gay, bisexual or transgendered. Women’s sexual desire of other women and rejection of male-defined feminine sexuality constitute qualities of pariah femininities in hip-hop culture (and the broader mainstream culture). The stigmatization of lesbians in hip-hop culture suggests that standards of hegemonic masculinity include sexual desire for the feminine and the ability to control (women) (Collins 2004; Connell 1992; Messner 1990; Schippers 2007).

In the next section, I discuss images of Black women that are associated with the characteristics and practices of the Black middle-class.

**Scripts Associated with Black Middle-Class Women**

The dominant Black gender ideology, as well as sexism, racism, classism and heterosexism affect the scripts available to middle- to upper-class Black women as well as working-class Black women. Gender hegemony in the broader mainstream culture prescribes the qualities femininity presumed to be typical of White, middle- to upper-class, heterosexual women as normative. Collins (2000, 2004) argues that Black women are often unable to “achieve” these characteristics. A common strategy among middle-class African American women historically is to approximate those standards as best they can, as I describe shortly.

Historically, in White middle-class culture, normative qualities of hegemonic femininity require a woman to have a husband whose status and earnings allow (and sometimes demand) her to (re)produce “legitimate heirs for the intergenerational transmission of property” (Collins 2004:198). She should be a stay-at-home mother who

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51 See [http://www.homorevolution.com](http://www.homorevolution.com)
nurtures her husband and heirs and provides them with a clean, safe and welcoming domestic setting. She is also supposed to be submissive to the authority of her husband and to White men generally. Thus, Collins (2004) sees the norms of hegemonic femininity residing in a woman’s heterosexual marital relationship with a (White) man.

Under conditions of slavery and later, it was often impossible for African American women to marry a man with the means to support them, much less to the extent that they could be stay-at-home mothers and homemakers. Black women have historically worked alongside men in the cotton fields and as domestic servants during slavery and the Jim Crow South, in the factories of the North and more recently in the public and service sectors of the U.S. economy (Collins 2000, 2004). In addition, until recently among a small number of middle- and upper-middle-class Black families, there was little to no intergenerational transfer wealth to children (Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Shapiro 2004). Unlike White middle- and upper-class women, Black women did not depend on men for financial sustenance and status (Collins 2004). As a result, they failed to meet the presumed standards of hegemonic femininity that valorizes this arrangement.

Because many African American women lack an option to not participate in the paid economy, the image of the middle-class Black lady rejects scripts associated with Black working-class femininity and attempts to approximate White middle-class femininity (Collins 2004). In short, working-class scripts for Black women are examples of what not to do or be for middle-class Black women, according to Collins (2004). She argues that middle-class Black women must pursue a “politics of respectability” that disallows freaky sexuality or any sexuality other than marital heterosexuality. It also forbids promiscuity, manipulative “bitchiness,” single motherhood, and abundant sexual reproduction with numerous children.

The Black Lady, Modern Mammy, and “Educated Bitch”

The Black lady script refutes stereotypes about Black women’s unbridled, freaky and promiscuous sexuality. Collins (2004) sees the character of Claire Huxtable on the popular sitcom of the 1980s, The Cosby Show, as the quintessential Black lady. Claire played wife, mother and lawyer on the show, although she was almost exclusively shown at home. She was always impeccably coiffed in conservative, professional clothing, and her sexuality was never on display even in scenes where she and her husband were in bed
together. In this scenario, her sexuality was subdued and was only implied within the boundaries of marital heterosexuality (Collins 2004).

The modern mammy image harkens back to the mammy script under slavery and the Jim Crow South. The mammy image is that of a domestic servant who has been domesticated and trained to care for her master’s family and home and to put the family’s needs above her own (and her own family) (Collins 2000, 2004). Because she was unattractive according to White Western standards either because of age, darker skin color, large size or other physical attribute(s), she was seen as asexual rather and thus unable to taint the home with (sexually) depraved thoughts or deeds (Collins 2000, 2004; Stephens and Phillips 2003).

The modern mammy is a reworking of an image that places Black women in the service of White dominated institutions and White men bosses in professional settings. Collins (2004) sites several television shows which place Black women characters in professional settings where they are subservient to their White men bosses and/or a White dominated professional organization. Most such modern mammy characters, e.g. Anita Van Buren, a lieutenant of the New York Police Department on the popular Law and Order drama series, are shown exclusively in work settings and their family lives are given scant attention (Collins 2004). The implication is that, above all, modern mammy characters are loyal to their professions and bosses and they are asexual. “They are team players and their participation on the team is predicated on their willingness to lack ambition for running the team and never to put family ahead of the team” (Collins 2004:141).

Finally, the “educated Black bitch” is a relatively recent image of and sexual script for middle-class Black women in popular media. It is a re-working of the working-class “bad ass” or powerful bitch ala Pam Grier for middle-class standards of respectability in the workplace. The educated Black bitch image is an attractive, well-dressed, successful and career-oriented woman who is in control of her sexuality and life (Collins 2004). Collins (2004) identifies the character Jacqueline (played by Robin Givens) in the film Boomerang as an example of the “educated Black bitch.” Robin Givens, portraying Jacqueline as an influential executive in a powerful corporation, treats men in the same way that many men, including the main character of the film Marcus,
treat women. Jacqueline flips the script on Marcus (played by Eddie Murphy) when she treats him as a sexual conquest. By the end of the film, Jacqueline is depicted as the ultimate bitch who is not appropriately submissive and who abuses her authority to get what she wants from men. Marcus, through his sexual relationship with Jacqueline, realizes by the end of the film that another educated but suitably submissive Black woman, played by Halle Berry, is the one for him (Collins 2004). The Berry character, it turns out, is championed throughout the film.

The Diva, Sister Savior, and Earth Mother: Middle-Class Scripts for Black Women in Rap Lyrics

Rap music is associated with African American inner-city street culture and the working-class or even the “underclass.” In addition, many rappers grew up in poor inner-city neighborhoods, were part of urban street culture and/or were working-class before hitting in big in the music world. Collins (2004) identifies the Black lady, modern mammy and “educated bitch” as the primary scripts available to middle-class African American women (see Chapter 2). I did not expect to nor did I find these images of Black women in rap music lyrics.

Unlike television and film where characters can be viewed in particular contexts, lyrics provide almost no contextual information. Collins (2004) distinguishes between Black ladies who are depicted as loving, respectable wives and mothers in heterosexual marriages within the setting of the home and modern mammies who are asexual and loyal to their bosses and work institutions and are shown primarily at work. I could not make and/or could not find such distinctions in rap music lyrics. Stephens and Phillips (2003) find that there are other kinds of scripts for middle-class African American women in Black popular culture, specifically, the diva, sister savior and earth mother. Although Stephens and Phillips (2003:15) identify only the diva script as being “embedded within a specific class framework,” my data suggest that the sister savior and earth mother scripts are also primarily middle-class. In my sample, the diva script is present in six songs (1.3 percent), the sister savior script in two songs (.4 percent), and the earth mother script in 4 songs (.9 percent). I discuss each briefly.

Divas. Similar to the Black lady, the diva rejects freaky, promiscuous sexuality but unlike the Black lady, the diva displays a sultry, subdued sexuality. Like the
educated Black bitch, the diva makes her own money, has attained a secure and high
financial status, and uses her resources to maintain a respectable and beautiful appearance
(Stephens and Phillips 2003). The diva is perceived as a “high-maintenance” woman.
Divas treat their looks as important assets. They spend money on themselves in buying
expensive clothes, jewelry and services to sustain their appearance. They are deemed as
attractive according to mainstream standards of feminine beauty. They have “good” hair
that is not too kinky or their hair has been straightened to look more like European hair.
They are “not too dark skinned,” they have slim bodies, and they have curves in the
“appropriate” areas –e.g., breasts and buttocks, and they show just enough skin to remain
sexually alluring without being perceived as promiscuous (Stephens and Phillips
2003:15). Divas’ sexuality may be alluring but it is never over the top. They construct
an image of beauty and are “out of the league” of most men.

The diva is well-mannered. However, in certain circumstances divas can become
bitches. Divas are often depicted as “having an attitude” and they “see themselves as
someone to be worshipped or adored” (Stephens and Phillips 2003:15). The diva craves
the attention of men and others, and if she is not the center of attention or is not receiving
the material rewards she assumes she deserves, she may assert herself and clash with
other women. For the most part, a diva is depicted as independent and able to take care
of herself. Unlike the gold digger, she does not pursue relationships with men to swindle
them out of their financial assets. However, she does pursue men to augment her status
or avoid tarnishing her image (Stephens and Phillips 2003).

A TLC song, “No Scrubs,” describes the kind of men that divas do not want a
relationship with:

A scrub is a guy that thinks he’s fly and is also known as a buster
Always talkin’ about what he wants and just sits on his broke ass . . .
I don’t want no scrub, a scrub is a guy that can’t get no love from me
Hangin’ out the passenger side of his best friend’s ride, tryin’ to holler at me . . .
Well a scrub checkin’ me but his game is kinda weak
And I know he cannot approach me ‘cause I’m looking like class and he’s looking
like trash, can’t get with a dead beat ass.
To TLC, a scrub is man who does not work, is lazy, and/or not motivated to better his life. The women of TLC imply a diva status by rejecting men who they deem as “trash,” “broke,” “dead beat,” and/or unable to meet their standards or enhance their “class.”

Many women R&B singers and artists whose music appeals to broader middle-class audiences, such as Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight, Whitney Houston, and more recently Beyoncé Knowles of Destiny’s Child, have been dubbed divas. But, because rap music is associated with the working-class, most women rappers and other women artists associated with hip-hop culture are not perceived as divas. Missy Elliot is a woman rapper who has achieved success not only as a rapper and song-writer but as a producer of many R&B and rap artists’ (men and women) songs and albums. Some of her lyrics hint at a diva status. In her song “They Don’t Wanna Fuck With Me,” she boasts about her car and how much money (dough) she has made and claims that others who want a piece of her earnings despise her for her status and style (stilo). She raps:

The M-I to the S-S, they put that on my chest
My car’s the way that I flex . . . They want a piece of this pie . . .
They hate the way that I hee, they hate the way that I hee-haw
‘Cause I got too much dough, you know my stilo [style]. (Missy Elliot; “They Don’t Wanna Fuck With Me”)

A few men rappers express a desire for (relationships with) divas as opposed to “thug girls,” working-class bitches and/or gold-diggers. Rapper Baby raps on a Hot Boys song that he needs a “hot-n-spicy ho I can shop with.” Though he still refers to his potential mate as a “ho,” he clearly distinguishes her from a working-class woman: “Fuck a ‘thug girl,’ them hos can only suck my dick. I need a hot girl to represent this uptown shit” (Hot Boys; “I Need a Hot Girl”). Another rapper, Too Short, raps on a Jermaine Dupri song:

Ain’t no broke down, lazy, gold digging, cute bitch
Come around me gettin’ credit cards and don’t do shit, bitch
I keep a woman with a house and her own career
So when I buy her a diamond ring, it’s just a gift. (Jermaine Dupri; “Jazzy Hoes”)

Too Short differentiates working-class gold diggers who are lazy and use his credit cards from middle-class divas with their “own careers” who accept material rewards as a “gift”
rather than in exchange for sex. Because divas have their own careers and men rappers do not describe them as threatening to men’s dominant status, they are not marginalized in the lyrics of these songs and cannot be said to be representative of the qualities of a pariah femininity (Schippers 2007). Though divas make their own money, they are not disruptive to gender hegemony in hip-hop culture whereby masculinity and men are valued over femininity and women.

*Sister saviors.* While divas desire men who will bolster their status, sister saviors’ criteria for relationships with men come from their relationships with God and the Black church. Like the Black lady and modern mammy, the sister savior pursues a “politics of respectability” (Collins 2004). However, the sister savior’s “respectability,” particularly as it relates to her sexuality, is informed by the patriarchal and heterosexist teachings of the Black Church (Stephens and Phillips 2003). Like the asexual modern mammy, a sister savior sees sex and any hint of sexuality in her dress or character as contradictory to her religious faith. Sister saviors are modest, reserved and submissive especially in relationships with men (Brown Douglas 1999; Grant 1992; Hoover 1993). For instance, Brown Douglas (1999) reports some Black churches insist women conceal their legs with a coverlet while sitting in church so they will not divert the attention of or incite “unholy” and depraved thoughts in men. The biblical story of Eve as a sexual succubus who distracts men from their relationship with and trust in God affects the (sexual) identities of all women and their relationships to men in societies with Judeo-Christian histories (Stephens and Phillips 2003). Thus, patriarchal understandings of the Bible almost entirely inform sister saviors’ conceptions of theirs and others’ sexuality.

As I mentioned in relation to the dyke script, the Black Church does not generally talk or teach about human sexuality other than heterosexuality within the boundaries of marriage and procreation. Consequently, the Black Church does not offer sister saviors the analytical skills that would help them construct their sexual selves. In addition to using fear to create “feelings of guilt and shame about sexuality,” the Black Church also prevents discussion about “sexual health concerns” that can endanger the lives of African American women and men (Stephens and Phillips 2003:30). Black women who are highly religious and attend church services regularly are less likely to use prophylactics and condoms to prevent pregnancy and STDs and they are more likely to have sexual
partners older than themselves; they also generally have little power over their sexual identities and encounters and are more likely to feel embarrassed and ashamed about their own bodies and sexuality (Stephens and Phillips 2003). According to Collins (2004:107), the Black Church often asserts a double standard where young unmarried women are denounced for pregnancy and the men who impregnated them are not admonished. She says, “The girls are often required to confess their sins and ask for forgiveness in front of the entire congregation whereas the usually older men who impregnate them are excused.”

Two songs in my sample, one by a man rapper and one by a woman rapper, contain elements of the sister savior script. In one song, Ja Rule seems to recognize the negative sexual representations of young African American women in rap music and the larger cultural context and aims to teach his daughter not to be a victim of stereotypes of the overly promiscuous and/or gold-digging Black woman. He raps:

Daddy’s little baby, must learn this world is shady
And the color of your skin don’t make you less of a lady
Degrade yourself, never ‘cause I’m teaching you better
Life ain’t all about cheddar [money], diamonds and leather
Understand you a Black sister in this White man’s world
Don’t let it get ya down girl
It’s essential that you grow amongst your group
So you don’t grow too fast and be doin’ lord knows who . . .
And I’m a raise you too Black too strong beautiful
Tell the truth, let you know what women go through
Lies and deceit, the nigga you love he gone cheat . . .
Keep yo head steady, baby this world ain’t ready
Make me proud you daddy’s little baby. (Ja Rule; “Daddy’s Little Baby”)

In other songs, Ja Rule describes Black women as stereotypically promiscuous and/or “bitchy.” But, in the ode to his daughter, he implores her to be a “lady,” and to not “grow too fast” and “be doin’ lord knows who,” or engage in licentious sexual activity. He also wants to teach her “better,” to show her that life is not all about material wealth or “cheddar, diamonds and leather.” He implies that “daddy’s little baby” should reject the
freaky sexuality associated with working-class Black women and with men who lie, deceive and cheat. However, in rejecting those scripts, he offers no tools or skills to help her to make informed decisions about her own sexuality or to be anything other than an asexual Strong Black Woman, or SBW (Collins 2004; Morgan 1999).

Similarly, rapper Eve’s song “Heaven Only Knows” addresses young Black women and asks them to grow to be SBWs. She raps, “The way you find out what life’s about is simply living to be strong, stay strong. Let nobody crush you. Your body is your temple young girls. Don’t let him touch you.” Eve repeats the Black Church’s oft taught lesson that Black women must resist open expressions of sexuality and that sexual activities and intercourse are violations of a woman’s body or temple. This lesson comes from a Bible verse that says the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. This verse has been used as an admonition for Christians to treat their bodies as gifts from God that should not be defiled by immoral sexual activity and/or abused through the use of drugs and alcohol.

The sister savior script denies young Black women the right to make their own decisions about sexuality. The message is that to be a dutiful and respectable Christian sister savior, a young Black woman must reject and/or conceal any her sexual being and obey Christian men (with whom they have a relationship) and the Black Church. Consequently, sister saviors do not contaminate the hierarchical relationship between masculinity/men and femininity/women (Schippers 2007).

*Earth mothers.* By contrast, the earth mother script, or what Keyes (2004) calls “Queen Mother,” encourages consciousness about and informed control of Black women’s sexuality and sexual identities. The earth mother, like the Black lady, embodies a politics of respectability. Unlike the Black lady, hers is a respectability that is grounded in an Afrocentrism and knowledge of the history of the subordination of people of African descent and women across the globe (Stephens and Phillips 2003). The earth mother embraces her African features, practices self-love and has developed a keen political understanding of and often speaks out against the subordination of Black women in society and by (Black) men (Keyes 2004; Stephens and Phillips 2003). These qualities and the image of the earth mother are often articulated in styles of dress; the way they style their hair, rejecting chemically straightened hair to approximate the look of White
hair and embracing African styles, such as afros, headdresses, and dreadlocks; their
general self-assured and confident dispositions; and in their acceptance of body shapes
and sizes that are not the standard of beauty in mainstream society (Stephens and Phillips
2003). For example, rapper Lauryn Hill raps in her song “Doo Wop (That Thing,):”
“It’s silly when girls sell their soul because it’s in. Look at where you be in hair weaves
like Europeans, fake nails done by Koreans.”

Like the sister savior, the earth mother’s sexuality is informed by her spirituality,
but it is not a spirituality defined by the patriarchal Black Church. While some earth
mothers may incorporate lessons and elements from organized religions, such as
Christianity, Islam, and even Rastafarianism, these women do not let organized religion
define their identities or sexuality. For example, Lauryn Hill dons dreadlocks, a hairstyle
central to the identities of Rastafarians, embraces an African interpretation of the bible
when she raps “Our survival since our arrival, documented in the Bible, like Moses and
Aaron” (“Final Hour”), named her son Zion (which to Rastafarians is Ethiopia), and
makes other references to Rastafarianism in her music, such as the holy city of Lalibela in
Ethiopia. The earth mother script links a Black woman’s strong sense of identity and
sexuality to an Afrocentric spirituality and intellect (Stephens and Phillips 2003).

Similar to the “educated Black bitch,” the earth mother is also educated, but not
for purposes of career advancement, financial power or material wealth. Education for
earth mothers is primarily a means to self-empowerment and self-definition outside the
strictures of the dominant Black gender ideology that would label Black women as
uneducated, bitchy and promiscuous. In addition to using education for self-
empowerment, earth mothers are decidedly anti-materialistic which is antithetical to
mainstream hip-hop culture. For example, Lauryn Hill raps:

It’s funny how money change a situation
Miscommunication leads to complication
My emancipation don’t fit your equation
I was on the humble, you on every station . . .

52 Not in my sample.

53 While Lauryn Hill makes references to Rastafarianism and Christianity, to my knowledge, she does not identify as such. In addition, Rastafarianism, like Christianity and Islam, is and has historically been patriarchal and exploitative of women.
Now, now how come your talk turn cold
Gained the whole world for the price of your soul
Tryin’ to grab hold of what you can’t control
Now you’re all floss [showing off], what a sight to behold
Wisdom is better than silver and gold. (“Lost Ones”)

In this song, Lauryn implies that other rappers produce rap music for the fame and material wealth, but at a “price” of their “souls.” By contrast, she produces more conscious rap aimed at gaining and spreading “wisdom” or knowledge.

Like Lauryn Hill, Stephens and Phillips (2003:31) identify several women artists, who are not necessarily rappers, but who are associated with hip-hop culture and who incorporate hip-hop styles and beats in their music. They say that “Macy Grey, Jill Scott, Angie Stone, India Arie and Erykah Badu” embrace the earth mother script. Erykah Badu, in particular, is known for elaborate African headdresses and clothing and, unlike the others, her songs are included in my sampling frame of rap music lyrics. Four songs in my sample contain the earth mother script and two of them appear in songs by Erykah Badu. Not only is the earth mother unapologetically spiritual, politically conscious and confident in her (sexual) identity, she expects others with whom she has a relationship to be the same. For example, an Erykah Badu describes her need and desire for a partner who is also spiritual and contributes to her quest for knowledge and wisdom. She sings, “If you want to feel me, better be divine. Bring me water, water for my mind” (“Kiss me on my neck”).

Stephens and Phillips (2003) describe earth mothers as frequently intimidating in their demeanor to others, especially to men. Because she is confident, educated and spiritual, men may fear that they cannot meet her expectations. The earth mother does not tolerate relationships that threaten her self-love or spiritual quest for knowledge. In one of Erykah Badu’s most popular songs, “Call Tyrone” (not in my sample), she narrates a story of her breaking off a relationship with a man who did not fulfill her spiritual and intellectual needs. She advises him to “call Tyrone and tell him come on, help you get your shit.”
One song in my sample relays the desire of a male rapper for a woman who embodies the earth mother script. A rapper of Arrested Development sees beauty in the naturalness of a Black woman. He raps:

Your beauty is endless and I’m hoping to explore
Brothers may say you’re ugly, but I disagree . . .
Free as the wind blows, tall as a tree grows
Wild like nature, yet calm as a field
Hair is natural, lips are natural . . .
I have nothing but pure intentions
Everything we’ll be will be natural. (“Natural”)

Unlike the popular gangsta rap genre of the early 1990s, Arrested Development is a politically conscious and Afrocentric rap group that shares similar values with the contemporary earth mother.

The earth mothers’ qualities and practices are characteristic of a resistant femininity in hip-hop culture. They are not hegemonic in that they do not ensure the idealized and hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity (Schippers 2007). Earth mothers challenge gender hegemony in mainstream culture by contesting prevailing gender, race, class and sexual ideologies and rejecting relationships (with men) that threaten self-definition and empowerment. That the earth mother script only appears in four songs in my sample and only one song by male rappers suggests that the earth mother image of Black women is not supported or well-represented in popular platinum-selling rap music and mainstream hip-hop culture. However, the earth mother image may be more supported in other non-mainstream and politically conscious rap music. I now explore how rap music lyrics challenge negative images of Black women and resist gender hegemony that values men and masculinity and devalues women and femininity.

Challenging Negative Images of (Black) Women and Resistant Femininities in Rap Music Lyrics

Forty-one songs, or 9.1 percent, in my sample contain recognition of and a direct challenge to negative representations of (Black) women in hip-hop culture and/or express a desire for relationships between women and men based on love and respect. And, yet, although they challenge negative images of Black women, they do not necessarily offer
tangible alternatives. But, some suggest resistant femininities. For example, of 41 songs
that challenge negative representations of (Black) women, four contain an empowered
bitch image and four contain an earth mother image. Twenty-five songs with exclusively
men rappers, 13 songs with exclusively women rappers and three featuring both men and
women challenge negative images of Black women. Some examples of rappers’
challenges to negative images of women follow.

Public Enemy raps about the rampant sexism and misogyny in (the history of)
American culture particularly directed toward Black women:

They disrespected mama and treated her like dirt
America took her, reshaped her, raped her
Nope, it never made the paper
Beat us, mated us, made us attack our woman in black . . .
Black woman’s privacy invaded for years and years.
You cannot count my mama’s tears
It’s not the past but the future’s what she fears
This generation generates a new attitude
Sister to you we should not be rude. (Public Enemy, “Revolutionary Generation.”)

In this song, Public Enemy suggests that the hip-hop generation needs to adopt a new
attitude toward women and says men should not be rude to women. Later in the song,
Public Enemy raps about how “brothers and sisters” need to stand together and respect
one another to be strong and resist violence. Similarly, the Beastie Boys rap, “The
disrespect to women has got to be through” (“Sure Shot”).

L.L. Cool J raps on several songs about love and respectful relationships with
women (although in other songs he reproduces negative images of Black women). In
“One Shot at Love,” he raps:

Physical and mental, those are two different loves
Physical’s a moment, mental is forever
If the physical fades and gets weak, all of a sudden
Remember, it’s the mental love that keeps you together
You gotta be strong and endure the hard times
Cause after hard times, good times always follow
And when you’re kissin’ and huggin’ and makin’ love
Treat that person like there’s no tomorrow.
In this song, L.L. asserts that women have value other than in their physical appearance and sexuality and suggests that love should involve “mental” love. Nas raps about a woman he loves, their marriage and planned honeymoon, and how he enjoys pleasing her. He raps:

Drivin’ off in the Rolls Royce just married on the plates
We can spend our honeymoon in the states
You can throw your friend the bouquet
Somethin’ in the back of my head say
For us two, maybe cuz I love you
Hug you squeeze you, touch you, tease you
As long as we together it’s heaven for me to please you. (“K-I-S-S-I-N-G”)

Like L.L. Cool J and Nas, other men rap about love and the value of developing and sustaining intimate relationships based on trust and respect. According to Pough (2004), however, they are few and far between.

Some women rappers acknowledge stereotypes and deny the stereotypes apply to them. And, they censure men who reproduce negative images of Black women. For example, TLC raps about rejecting men who call women “hos”: “If a man is a man and he calls you a ho, ain’t no point in playin’, if he doesn’t know (yeah)” (TLC; “Shock Dat Monkey”). Similarly, Salt-N-Pepa rap about getting the “digits” [phone number] of a man and rap, “A ho? No, that don’t make me” (“Shoop”). Finally, a woman rapper on a Too $hort song raps:

Punk I’m not a tease, I’m not a skeezer
And most definitely, not a dick pleaser
You dreaming, and scheming, and fiending for my lust
You don’t have enough, for you I feel disgust
Wait, small thing I hate
For goodness sakes, if I wanted someone small I would masturbate. (“Don’t Fight the Feeling”)
This woman expresses disdain for men who would label her a “skeezer” or “ho” and thus rejects predominant ideologies about Black women and sexuality.

**Conclusions**

Men rappers portray mothers in vastly different ways. In the main, they depict the mothers of their child or children as manipulative women who became pregnant to ensure relationships with them or to obtain financial support from them. If they do not secure relationships with the fathers of their children, men rappers also largely censure the mothers of their children for having sex with other men. For the most part, rappers portray their own mothers in a positive light, as selfless women who work tirelessly to support her children often in the absence of a father. The image of rappers’ mothers is the third most represented, appearing in nearly 11 percent of songs. Other than the scripts associated with middle-class Black women, the dyke script is the least represented, due in part, I suspect, to the stigmatization of homosexuality in hip-hop culture. Over 5 percent of songs contain homophobic slurs and/or anti-gay beliefs and attitudes. Because rap is a genre of music associated with the working- or under-class, images associated with middle-class Black women—the diva, sister savior, and earth mother—are the least represented. As noted, some lyrics challenge negative images of Black women although they do not necessarily offer alternatives to them. The empowered bitch and earth mother images do resist the hegemonic gender order that ensures the dominance of men over women.

Images of working-class and middle-class African American women in rap music and other forms of Black popular culture are fluid scripts that are related to one another and reflect historical ideas about gender, race, class and sexuality. And yet, these scripts are not mutually exclusive. One woman may embody a variety of scripts and/or may change scripts depending on her social context(s), although it may be rare for a woman to enact scripts that do not correspond with her class status (Stephens and Phillips 2003). By no means are African American women required to enact these scripts. However, because of their appearance in various forms of Black popular culture, Black men and the broader culture may form ideas about, classify and label Black women according to their understanding of a particular script.
My analysis shows that some other scripts are less prevalent in the lyrics of widely consumed rap music. However, rap lyrics are but one element of hip-hop culture and these scripts are reproduced in everything from hip-hop videos to hip-hop inspired cinema (Emerson 2002; Collins 2004). While negative scripts other than the freak script appear in the lyrics of fewer songs, there are few true alternatives for Black women in rap music lyrics. When rappers rap about women and/or their relationships with women, they generally employ one or more of the preceding scripts.
Chapter 6 discusses my findings from Chapters 4 and 5. I briefly summarize them and reflect on how they extend prior theories of gender regarding hegemonic femininity and masculinity, pariah femininities, resistant femininities and the intersections of gender with other systems of power—race, class and sexuality (Burawoy 1998). I discuss how my results relate to Wilson’s structural argument of inner-city racial inequality and Collins’ thesis that race, gender, class and sexual ideologies as well as broader changes in the economy explain inner-city racial inequality. I conclude that neglecting the dialectical relationship between ideology and social structure is a mistake and urge future scholars to take it into account. My findings suggest that popular culture and mass media—in this case, rap music lyrics—play a role in disseminating race, gender, class and sexual ideologies and provide justifications for placement in systems of social stratification and for the stratification system itself. I comment on the influence of corporate interests in this regard. Finally, I reflect on the advantages and limitations of the study and suggest topics for future research.

On Hegemonic Femininity, Pariah Femininities, and Hegemonic Masculinity in Rap Music Lyrics

Analysis of images of (Black) women in rap music lyrics, discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, illustrates that hegemonic femininity and pariah femininities in mainstream hip-hop culture both differ from and are similar to the qualities and characteristics assumed to be hegemonic for White middle-class women. In Schippers’ model of gender hegemony, characteristics of hegemonic masculinity and femininity and pariah femininities are contextually relative. That is, they (may) vary among sub- or counter-cultures, racial/ethnic cultures, social class cultures, etc., including hip-hop culture. Hegemonic masculinity and various femininities in local contexts may (or may not) differ from the broader mainstream hegemonic culture, that which is typically associated with heterosexual, middle- to upper-class White culture in the U.S.
Connell (1987, 2005) argues that femininity cannot be hegemonic and prefers the term *emphasized femininities* to describe femininities in compliance with men’s hegemonic masculinity projects including, but not limited to, deference rituals in work and home relationships and foregoing career pursuits to allow men to pursue theirs while taking on unpaid child and home care responsibilities. Emphasized femininities, according to Connell, therefore reproduce the gender institution and men’s dominance.

By contrast, Schippers (2007) argues that femininity *can be* hegemonic even when feminine practices reproduce the gender institution and men’s dominance. Women are disparaged for failing to meet standards of “proper” femininity just as men are stigmatized and marginalized for failing to meet standards of hegemonic masculinity. Because some forms of femininity are preferred, Schippers calls marginalized femininities, or those that fail to meet the standards of hegemonic femininity, *pariah femininities*. For example, Boyd (2007:96) finds in her examination of feminine embodiment portrayed on the reality show about cosmetic surgery, *Extreme Makeover*, “. . . some forms of feminine embodiment are privileged over others . . . .” Women who do not meet the beauty standards of hegemonic femininity before surgery are portrayed as flawed, “even called ‘masculine’,” and therefore pursue cosmetic surgery to bring them up to hegemonic feminine beauty standards.

According to Schippers (2007:94-5), hegemonic femininity is a set of qualities characterized as “feminine” or “womanly” that reproduce “. . . and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.” Pariah femininities, according to Schippers, consist of a set of qualities of hegemonic masculinity that when enacted by women are “stigmatized and sanctioned.” By examining pariah femininities, it is possible to preliminarily identify possible features of hegemonic masculinity in hip-hop culture. In Schippers’ model, hegemonic masculinity is a set of qualities characterized as “masculine” or “manly” that reproduce “. . . and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to femininity [and women and girls] and that, by doing so, guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.”
Hegemonic femininity in rap music. Hegemonic feminine qualities in hip-hop culture as represented in rap music lyrics include 1) providing sexual services for men to make money (for pimps); 2) aggressive hustling often using sexuality in support of men with whom women have a (sexual) relationship; 3) selfless hard work for mothers in the formal labor market, asexuality, and nurturing and disciplinary mothering in raising children; and 4) having a career, being well-mannered, modesty, adhering to the patriarchal teachings of the Black Church, and subdued sexuality or asexuality for middle-class women. These hegemonic features of femininity in hip-hop culture are represented in the prostitute, gangsta bitch, rapper’s mama, diva, and sister savior images in ways I explain below.

Prostitutes do not disrupt the hierarchical and complementary relationship between masculinity and femininity and thus they uphold gender hegemony in mainstream hip-hop culture. Unlike freaks who are not valued in men’s rap lyrics (see below), the prostitute is valued to the extent that she is the “property” of her pimp and makes money for him. Some men rappers describe themselves as pimps who control and “take care of” their property. Collins (2004:128) says that a prostitute who “. . . hustles without a pimp and who keeps the compensation is a bitch who works for herself.” And, yet, autonomous prostitutes also do not subvert gender hegemony because they must submit to men’s sexual desires in order to receive compensation and are ultimately placed in a potentially dangerous position vis-à-vis men. A few rappers warn about the dangers of prostitution and the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases.

The gangsta bitch script is paradoxical because the gangsta bitch expresses qualities characteristic of hegemonic femininity in hip-hop culture that would be considered characteristic of a pariah femininity in the broader mainstream culture. Gangsta bitches are depicted as aggressive, self-reliant hustlers and survivors in the harsh conditions of urban street life. These qualities are often revered in hip-hop culture unless a rapper reports being a victim of gangsta bitches’ aggression and hustling skills. The gangsta bitch eschews mainstream qualities of hegemonic femininity in the broader culture that have typically been associated with the practices of heterosexual White middle-class women—physical weakness, non-violence, cooperativeness, nurturance, emotion, obedience, and/or helplessness. And, rap music lyrics express that men with
whom a gangsta bitch has a relationship use her to support their own agendas. Gangsta bitches participate in their own subordination by, for example, satisfying men’s sexual desires when and where men decide, assisting them in illegal business activities, taking the “rap” for men when law enforcement apprehends them, and/or (ultimately) giving their lives to protect men. Gangsta bitches thus do not contaminate the hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity; instead they ensure the dominant position of men and the subordinate position of women (Schippers 2007).

Men rappers portray their own mothers in a positive light in song lyrics. (Notably, there are only two references to rappers’ fathers in the song sample.) Like the mothers of their own children, rappers’ mothers are portrayed as the heads of single-parent households. But, unlike the mothers of their own children, men rappers see their own mothers as conforming to standards of motherhood that mimic what the broader U.S. culture expects of working-class (Black) single mothers. For example, they do not describe their mothers as sexually promiscuous, as they do the mothers of their children. They largely describe their own mothers as hard workers (rather than as lazy) who work for (low) pay in the formal labor market, who do not receive state financial support, and who do their best to raise their children properly despite hard circumstances. And, rappers describe their mothers as selfless nurturers and disciplinarians who sacrifice their own needs to care for their children. Because men rappers largely cherish and appreciate their mothers, asexuality, nurturance, selflessness, honesty and hard-work are characteristics considered “motherly” and womanly in the hip-hop cultural context. These characteristics do not contaminate the hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity and are thus characteristic of hegemonic femininity within hip-hop culture (Schippers 2007).

Stephens and Phillips (2003) identify divas and sister saviors as sexual scripts available to African American women in Black popular culture including, but not limited to, hip-hop culture. Because I find very few instances where divas and sister saviors are represented in rap music lyrics and because rap music and hip-hop culture are associated with the working- or under-class (Chang 2005; Pough 2004; Rose 1994; Watkins 2005), I

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54 One representation of a rapper’s mother is negative and the male rapper implies that his mother was lazy and dishonest for receiving welfare payments.
frame these scripts as middle-class-specific. Characteristics of both divas and sister saviors may, however, represent qualities of hegemonic femininity in the broader African American culture of which hip-hop culture is a part. In the few instances in which I find diva images in rap music lyrics, rappers do not depict them as a threat to men’s dominant status and they are not disparaged. Although divas have their own careers, they are not contaminating to the hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity in hip-hop culture and the broader culture (Schippers 2007). Sister saviors are also non-threatening to the hegemonic valuation of masculinity over femininity because they obey the patriarchal teachings of the Black Church (see Chapter 5). Thus, their qualities are characteristic of hegemonic femininity (Schippers 2007). I now turn to pariah femininities and features of hegemonic masculinity in hip-hop culture as represented in rap music lyrics.

Pariah femininities. Qualities of pariah femininities in hip-hop culture as represented in rap music lyrics include 1) freaky and/or promiscuous sexuality; 2) being manipulative sexually or otherwise, and in particular, using sexuality and/or engaging in sex for personal material gain and rewards; 3) for mothers, being neglectful and/or non-nurturing, using state power to compel fathers to provide (financial) support for their children, and/or receiving welfare to support their children; and 4) expressing sexual desire for and engaging in sex with women. These features of pariah femininities in hip-hop culture are represented in the freak, gold digger, baby mama and dyke scripts in rap music lyrics in ways I explain below.

Men rappers disparage women who are sexual freaks, or “hos,” although many admit desiring and engaging in sex with these women. Freaks are stigmatized and denigrated for engaging in “freaky” sexual practices and/or for having numerous sexual partners and/or a voracious appetite for sex. Many men rappers emphasize that they have no romantic feelings for and do not respect women they consider sexual freaks although they may have sex with them. They assume that what a sexual freak does with them she does with other men. Men rappers describe treating these women as pariahs with disdain and contempt.

Men rappers ridicule and belittle women who have sex with multiple partners perhaps because they are engaging in behaviors that have traditionally been defined as
masculine. Having (heterosexual) sex with multiple women is one feature of hegemonic masculinity in the broader culture and mainstream hip-hop culture (Connell 1987, 1995). And, because men are normatively viewed as the aggressors in sexual pursuits and women are viewed either as passively acquiescent or resistant to sex, sexual freaks upset the hegemonic gender order when they are the aggressors. Because they describe these women as “easy” and sexually available to all men, they cannot claim to have overcome all women’s resistance to sex. As such, sex with sexual freaks does not bolster claims of sexual prowess, which is a feature of hegemonic masculinity.

Some women rappers, such as Foxy Brown and Lil’ Kim, describe themselves as sexual freaks and tell men in their lyrics exactly what to do in order to satisfy them sexually. Because they portray themselves as sexual aggressors, they are also contaminating to the hierarchical and complementary relationship between masculinity and femininity and the hegemonic gender order (Schippers 2007). These women rappers imply that they can be and are just as sexually promiscuous as men and boast about their sexual prowess and abilities to sexually satisfy men better than other women.

When women rappers brag about their sexual exploits in their lyrics, it is uncertain whether they are embodying sexuality as defined by and for men—thus participating in their own subordination (cf. MacKinnon 1987)—or are resisting the sexual passivity that has historically been associated with hegemonic, White, middle-class notions of femininity. Perhaps both are occurring at once. To Collins (2004:127), the “. . . issue of control becomes highly important . . . Some women are bitches who control their own sexuality—they ‘get a freak on,’ which remains within their control and on their own terms.” We cannot know whether these women are in control of their sexuality without being privy to knowledge about who writes/wrote their lyrics and for what purposes, who controls the production of their music and personas, and their own intentions in describing themselves in this manner. Pough (2004) notes, for instance, that Foxy Brown and Lil’ Kim were largely not in control of their music and public personas in their early careers, suggesting that perhaps they participated in their own subordination.

Gold digging practices are characteristic of pariah femininities in hip-hop culture as well. Men rappers generally disparage and malign gold diggers. Men rappers describe
gold diggers as potentially having power over them, using their sexuality to garner material goods and money from them. Furthermore, men rappers describe gold diggers as dangerous and threatening to their manhood. For example, one rapper describes the dangers of marrying a gold digger who may take half of his wealth if the relationship should terminate (see Chapter 4). Having the power to control others and material wealth is characteristic of hegemonic masculinity in the broader culture and mainstream hip-hop culture. Thus, when women use their sexuality to usurp power, they threaten the hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity and men’s dominance over women. Some women rappers describe themselves as gold diggers who know how to get their (material) desires met by men. While they describe themselves as powerful in this respect and flaunt their ability to manipulate men, their sexuality is an expression of what they know men want not what they want. Their actions thus do not constitute the autonomy to define themselves sexually.

Unlike how they characterize their own mothers, men rappers largely malign mothers of their children. They disparage their “baby mama” for failing to meet their standards of motherhood and thwarting men’s ability to control them—i.e., mothers who they see as non-nurturing, “bitchy,” manipulative, lazy, sexually promiscuous, and/or as using “state power” to garner financial assistance from men who father their children. Men rappers often describe the mothers of their children in song lyrics as conniving bitches who try to “trap” men into relationships that provide financial support to them and their children. They also often characterize the mothers of their children as sexually promiscuous freaks and gold diggers who manipulate men. Their lyrics assert that “good mothers” are/should be asexual.

Some men rappers rap about treating their “baby mamas” with disrespect and disparaging them for utilizing state-sanctioned means for obtaining financial support by taking them to court. Some also express beliefs of many in the broader U.S. culture that Black women who receive state assistance are lazy welfare cheats. Because baby mamas may use courts to get resources from men who father their children and because they may obtain state support to raise their children without men, they potentially threaten men’s dominance. Thus, the qualities of baby mamas in hip-hop culture are characteristic of pariah femininities (Schippers 2007).
Some rappers also stigmatize or ridicule gays and lesbians. Women who are not heterosexual impede men’s attempts to control women them sexually and therefore threaten the hegemonic valuation of masculinity over femininity. Lesbians’ refusal to embody male-defined feminine sexuality and acquiesce to men’s sexual advances are qualities of pariah femininities. The derision of lesbians in hip-hop culture indicates that sexual desire for women and the ability to control (women) are characteristics of hegemonic masculinity in hip-hop culture. These qualities of hegemonic masculinity are generally associated with the practices of heterosexual White middle- to upper-class men as well (Collins 2000, 2004; Connell 1992; Messner 1990; Schippers 2007). In the next section, I discuss how rap music lyrics disseminate gender, race, class and sexual ideologies that provide justification for the subordination of (Black) women (and men) in hip-hop culture and the broader U.S. culture.

On the Intersection and Significance of Gender, Race, Class, and Sexual Ideologies in Rap Music Lyrics

My analysis shows that rap music lyrics reproduce socio-historical beliefs about women of African descent and their sexuality. My results lend support to Patricia Hill Collins’ (2000, 2004) claims that Black popular culture contains “past-in-present” gender- and class-specific “controlling images” of African American women. Broad structural changes in the economy and the loss of Black men’s jobs in the inner-city may have significant negative effects on relationships between African American women and men and, in particular, on working- or under-class African American marriage rates as William Julius Wilson (1987, 1996) contends. I suggest that gender- and class-specific racial ideologies are disseminated through mass media and inform the decisions of public policy makers (e.g., the architects of welfare reform in the mid-1990s), corporate decision makers who move capital and job prospects to the suburbs or overseas, employers who make hiring decisions, and (Black) men and women in their relationships to/with one another.

Wilson (1996:132) reports significant negative attitudes toward Black workers among employers in a survey Chicago employers. He finds that inner-city Mexicans and Puerto Ricans have weak ties to the labor market but that employers generally hold more favorable views of them as workers than they do of Black workers, particularly Black
men workers. He suggests that it is difficult to disassociate employers’ legitimate evaluations of workers’ skills, or lack thereof, from discrimination based solely on race. But, he finds the most common beliefs about Black men workers include “... assertions that they procrastinate, are lazy, belligerent, and dangerous . . .”

The controlling image of the buck and the objectification of African men’s bodies as “big, strong, and stupid” and “naturally violent” justified the physically brutal means for “taming” them to work in the agricultural fields under slavery, according to Collins (2004:56). While it may be hard to differentiate objective evaluations of potential workers’ skills from racial discrimination, it is also difficult to deny that employers’ beliefs echo and are informed by racial ideologies (Collins 2000, 2004). In addition, it is hard to imagine how employers “objectively evaluate” the skills of Mexican and Puerto Rican men, since many are new immigrants who know little English. Like contemporary ideologies about Black men, contemporary ideologies about Black women survive from the past. Negative images of Black women eerily resemble “controlling images” used to legitimate chattel slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and the hyper-segregation of Northern industrial metropolitan areas (Collins 2000, 2004). These images cannot be explained solely by structural changes in the economy or the resulting loss of urban minority men’s jobs. The persistence of pernicious gender-specific ideologies about African Americans and their sexuality may partly explain why Wilson (1996) finds the rate of husband-wife families lower for inner-city Chicago African Americans (only 25 percent) than for other inner-city Chicago families, including Mexican (75 percent), Puerto Rican (nearly 50 percent), and White families (more than 50 percent).

Racial ideologies about African Americans and their sexuality are unique to African American history and they are reproduced/reworked (and contested) in contemporary Black popular culture, including hip-hop culture and rap music lyrics (Collins 2000, 2004). I provide some examples here (see also Chapters 4 and 5). The image of the jezebel under slavery and the Jim Crow South framed African American women as naturally promiscuous, animalistic and sexually depraved, ultimately providing justification for their rape. This image is reproduced and reworked in the contemporary image of the sexual freak or “ho” in rap music lyrics. The obstinate “mule” image of the woman who needed physical discipline and nudging in the agricultural fields under
slavery is reworked in the gold digger and gangsta bitch scripts in rap music lyrics. While the “mule” was obstinate, men rappers depict gold diggers as belligerent, boorish, argumentative, and greedy bitches. Their lyrics express that gold diggers will refuse sex and/or end relationships with men who will not or cannot provide them with material goods. Their lyrics also convey that gold diggers should be “put in their place.” Gangsta bitches are portrayed as aggressive and violent street hustlers who need guidance and prodding from men to put their aggression to use for men’s own agendas. Men rappers’ portrayal of baby mamas is reminiscent of the “breeder woman” under slavery who was required to have as many children as possible and the “welfare queen” image in the post-civil rights. Finally, men rappers depict their mothers as asexual, honest, hard-working women who subordinate their needs to the needs of their children and their bosses in the formal labor market. This characterization resembles the mammy image under slavery; the mammy was “tamed enough” to work side-by-side with her master’s family and subordinate enough to place her and her family’s needs below that of her White masters.

As Bonilla-Silva (2006:10) notes, “. . . it would be foolish to believe that those who rule a society do not have the power to at least color (pun intended) the views of the ruled.” Cultural ideologies—historically created by Whites to justify the history of violence against and exploitation of African Americans—also generate mistrust and suspicion between African American women and men. According to Collins (2004:184), under the “new racism,” gender-specific ideologies about African American women portray them as “too strong” and Black men as “too weak.” Black women . . . are counseled to “let” Black men lead . . . . Helping to deflect attention away from the major structural changes of the new racism, African American men and women are encouraged to blame one another for economic, political, and social problems within African American communities.

This seeming perversion of “normal” gender ideology provides Whites with justification for African American’s inferior status in U.S. society.

Strong women and weak men in rap music lyrics. My results seem, at first glance, to refute Collins’ thesis that gender ideology is reversed in African American culture. Men rappers’ characterization of women as hos, gold diggers, manipulative bitches, etc. seems to indicate men’s strength and women’s weakness in hip-hop culture. However,
men’s denigration of women in rap music arises from what appears to be fear or apprehension of women’s potential power. When women describe themselves as sexual freaks who tell men exactly what they need to do in order to please them (sexually) or when they assert an ability to be as promiscuous as men, men rappers belittle them and call them “hos.” Men rappers warn other men about women who use sexuality to con men out of money and material goods calling these women gold diggers in their lyrics. Men rappers express a fear of being the victims of gangsta bitches but they also seek companionship with gangsta bitches whom they can control sexually and use for their own ends. Men rappers express apprehension of women’s ability to use the power of the state to take resources away from them if they father a child and/or marry and they encourage to get “prenups.”

It would be a mistake to imply that men are powerless in hip-hop culture or the rap music industry. The rap music industry is a social institution that Black men control to a degree, although corporate interests also drive the production of much of rap music as I explain shortly (Kubrin 2005a, 2005b). Without the means to establish dominance like heterosexual White middle- to upper-class men can, Black men use other means to assert dominance over women, in this case, by using misogynistic, violent and objectifying discourse in rap music. Unlike Collins (2004) who asserts that Black men, by definition, cannot practice hegemonic masculinity, I suggest that indeed they do—and within the subculture of hip-hop. They embody characteristics considered “masculine” or “manly” that reproduce the hierarchical valuation of masculinity over femininity that ensures their dominant status relative to women (Schippers 2007). And, as I suggest, their practice of hegemonic masculinity works to exclude and/or push women out of hip-hop culture and the rap music industry.

_Hegemonic masculinity and marginalized masculinities reprised._ Within the gender hegemony of the _broader culture_ of the United States typically associated with the practices of heterosexual White middle- to upper-class men and women, the gendering practices of Black men in hip-hop culture are without doubt _marginalized_. I do not intend to “throw the baby out with the bath water” in refining Connell’s (1987,

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55 Other research also finds that men are more likely to use violence against women when they are made to feel vulnerable or their sense of masculinity is threatened (Anderson and Umberson 2001; Atkinson, Greenstein, and Lang 2005; Shrock and Padavic 2007).
formation of hegemonic, subordinate, and marginalized masculinities as Schippers suggests (2007:96-7). She says that there are no pariah masculinities and that “. . . there are no masculine characteristics that are stigmatized as contaminating or as subordinate.” She calls what Connell refers to as subordinate masculinities female masculinity. That is, some (gay) men who act feminine are not enacting a subordinated masculinity. Their practices are not “. . . problematic masculine characteristics; they are constructed as decidedly feminine” and, as such, they are denigrated and subordinated.

Schippers does not address whether qualities considered manly within local contexts or among ethnic minority men are characteristic of marginalized masculinities in the gender hegemony of mainstream U.S. culture. I argue that they are and that some masculine characteristics are indeed stigmatized in U.S. culture. Key to the practice of hegemonic masculinity in the mainstream U.S. culture is the ability to control both women and some men. Men’s opportunities to control major institutions differ by race, class, sexuality, age, and other axes of domination and subordination. As Kivel (1998) notes, the ability to control differs from the use of violence. The practice of hegemonic masculine control in the broader U.S. culture emphasizes intellect, institutional power, and status to produce desired outcomes. Such control is achieved through capital, education and social networks, all to the typical exclusion of minority, working-class, and poor men. When minority, working-class, and poor men use physical strength and violence to achieve desired outcomes outside of socially approved ways, such as in sports, they are marginalized in mainstream culture (Kivel 1998). One way high status White men exert control of others is through creating and manipulating mass media ideologies.

“Controlling images” reprised. My analysis suggests also that rap music has been and may be a valuable site for (Black) women to challenge and resist gender- and class-specific racial ideologies disseminated in mass media. Collins (2000, 2004) says ideologies of African American women and men are disseminated through “controlling images” in Black popular culture and the mass media. Collins (2004:133) recognizes that “. . . rap and hip-hop culture constitute one site where misogyny is freely expressed and resisted.” She does not, however, explore how women resist misogyny in rap music and/or whether some images of African American women (or men) are other than
“controlling.” My results show that not all images of (Black) women in rap music lyrics are “controlling” (Chapter 5). Although few in number, the empowered bitch and earth mother scripts in rap music lyrics support women’s independence and (sexual) self-definition.

Empowered bitches embody qualities that resist the hegemonic construction of femininity in mainstream hip-hop culture and the broader society. It is noteworthy that all lyrics containing the empowered bitch script are women’s lyrics—that is, they are rapped by women. Empowered bitches express their sexual independence from men, construct their own identities, make their own money apart from men, and resist the hegemonic gender order in both mainstream hip-hop and the broader U.S. culture. Images of empowered bitches in rap music lyrics challenge the qualities of hegemonic femininity that frame women as passive objects of masculine sexual desire and fantasy or as gangsta bitches who subordinate their (sexual) needs and desires to those of men. Although no men rappers reference empowered bitches in my sample, they also do not disparage women who are independent and make a living apart from men. Empowered bitches are not treated as pariahs—as are freaks and gold diggers—and, thus, represent a resistant femininity.

Earth mother images also suggest qualities resistant femininity (although the earth mother image is more underrepresented in rap music lyrics than the empowered bitch image is). I suggest that one reason this script appears in very few rap music lyrics is because it is a script primarily associated with middle-class women. However, the earth mother image may be more prevalent in other politically conscious and underground rap music and/or in other African American music genres and subcultures (Stephens and Phillips 2003). The earth mother’s qualities fail to reproduce women’s subordination and men’s dominant status (Schippers 2007). Earth mothers resist gender hegemony by opposing dominant gender, race, class and sexual ideologies and eschewing relationships with men that preclude self-definition and empowerment. If I am correct in these interpretations, it is possible that hip-hop culture can be an important site where Black

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56 However, men rappers do disparage independent women who reject them sexually and, in particular, reject men and desire women as sexual partners. That is, lesbians are treated as pariahs.
women contest dominant ideologies. However, as I explore next, the door to that site may be closing for Black women.

On the Commercial Interests that Drive Rap Music’s Production and Consumption and the Declining Significance of Women in Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture

My study does not directly address whether and how commercial interests influence the content of rap music lyrics and this is not the focus of my study. As noted in Chapter 1, other scholars see this issue as central to the analysis of hip-hop culture. Some scholars view rap music and hip-hop culture as the authentic expression of the frustrations and alienation of inner-city minority youth whereas others contend that commercial interests have co-opted rap music and hip-hop culture as commodities that are packaged and sold to consumers around the globe. The latter scholars question whether rap music and hip-hop culture are authentic representations of Black working- and/or under-class culture only (Chang 2005; Watkins 2005). It is essential to know whether images of Black women are authentic expressions of inner-city African American culture or whether corporate interests (and the profit motives of rappers themselves) drive misogyny in rap music lyrics. Are they reproducing negative images of African American women and misogyny because they know that these images sell music to a wider audience of consumers? If indeed misogyny sells, it is imperative that future research address why consumers purchase and listen to this music. Because scholars (cf. Chang 2005; Kubrin 2005a, 2005; Pough 2004; Watkins 2005) generally agree that rap music has become more commercial and mainstream over time and my data span time, I address this issue briefly.

In her study of the “street code” (cf. Anderson 1990, 1999) in rap music lyrics, Kubrin (2005a) argues that the commercialization and global dissemination of rap music has weakened its ties to the “authentic” street culture of inner-city African American youth. More specifically, “while still popular today, beginning around 1999, it [gangsta rap] became highly commercialized” and “the year 2000 represents a turning point in the rap music industry whereby production values more clearly addressed commercial competition, pushing cultural production and reproduction aside” (Kubrin 2005:367). Thus, debates about whether rap music lyrics reflect true street culture and the material conditions of inner-city African American youth or whether musicians and producers
have found a lucrative marketing scheme to sell records are pervasive. Either way, commercialization exists whether or not it “began” in the year 2000, as Kubrin asserts. I, as well as other scholars, suggest that it began prior to the year 2000, even as early as the late 1980s, and grew over time in the 1990s.

Lena (2006:487) finds that “starting in 1988, the largest record corporations charted substantially more ‘hardcore’ rap songs than independent labels.” One element of “hardcore” and/or “gangsta” rap is misogyny, as I explain below (Kubrin 2005a). Lena’s findings suggest that rap music produced by the largest music corporations may contain more misogyny than the rap music produced by smaller independent labels. Rap music associated with major industry labels—music on albums that are more likely to go platinum—blends elements of street authenticity with “hardcore” elements that turn profits for the music industry (Lena 2006). In other words, sex and violence sell, and rappers, producers, and record labels recognize tropes that sold in the past and continue to sell, including those that portray inner-city Black men as violent “gangstas, thugs, and hustlas” and women as bitches and “hos” (Kubrin 2005a).

My limited longitudinal data show that over time and as rap music became more commercialized, the number of lyrics containing misogyny increased. I suspect that because (more) large corporate recording studios are now producing rap music, “hardcore” rap music containing nihilistic (Kubrin 2005b), misogynistic, and violent themes has increased. Neal (1997:117) argues that rap music “thrive[d] on its own” for quite a period of time in the 1970s and 1980s when there was very little commercial interest, allowing for “its relatively autonomous development . . . .” And, Neal says, “. . . corporate labels virtually ignored Hip-Hop music until the mid-1980s.” Thus, if misogyny in rap music lyrics has increased over time, it would suggest that corporate interests indeed contribute to the increase in “hardcore” elements.

One element of the street code that Kubrin (2005a:364-5) finds in rap music lyrics is men rapper’s use of “sexual promiscuity and conquest” narratives to obtain respect and recognition. She finds that among different elements of the street code, including respect, violence, material wealth, violent retaliation, and nihilism, misogyny is the least referenced—found in only 22 percent songs in her sample. In my sample, 187 songs, or 42 percent, contain misogynistic lyrics, with misogynistic lyrics defined as those that
objectify women and/or advocate or describe acts of violence against women. I provide two brief examples to illustrate how I coded lyrics as misogynistic. “One Less Bitch,” a song by N.W.A., describes explicit acts of violence against a woman, including her murder:

She was the perfect ho but what do you know
The bitch tried to gag me, so- I had to kill her…
Yo, I tied her to the bed, I was thinking the worst
But, yo I had to let my niggaz fuck her first yeah
Loaded up the 44 yo, then I straight smoked the ho. (“One Less Bitch”)

I consider lyrics to be objectifying when they do not regard women as individuals/subjects, depict women as interchangeable, characterize women as property, and/or reduce women to their bodies and/or parts of their bodies as if they are disconnected from an actual person. For example, rapper Brother Marquis of 2 Live Crew raps about his sexual liaisons with seven different and seemingly interchangeable women for each day of the week. He calls these women “My Seven Bizzos” also the title of the song. He raps:

On Thursday there’s Trina, her perfume lingers
She likes to suck my dizzo, my tizzo and my finger
On Friday there’s Frances, who likes to take chances
When her husband’s at work, she does me dirty dances
She’s my own private skeezer, she’s not a dick-teaser . . .
On Friday there’s Susie [etc.] . . .
My seven bizzos, seven days, seven ways, too much, my seven bizzos.
 (“My Seven Bizzos”)

Thus, my results show that misogyny is more prevalent in rap music lyrics than Kubrin (2005a) finds.

My data allowed me to explore whether lyrics that reflect misogyny have increased over time. They have. Table 6.1 shows the number of rap songs with misogynistic lyrics on platinum-selling albums released in each year of the specified time frame.

57 A bizzo is a derogatory term for a woman and is a variation on the term “bitch” in hip-hop culture.
Table 6.1: Number of Songs Containing Misogynistic Lyrics by Year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Misogyny Song Totals</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1993</td>
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<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>1998</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total | 41 |

Thus, misogyny in rap music lyrics increased in frequency between 1985 and 2000, with 1998 being a peak year.


. . . [M]edia consolidation also affected hip-hop’s content. Women in hip-hop lost the most. During the late 1980s, videos had been a boon to women rappers. Queen Latifah, for instance, presented herself in the Fab 5 Freddy-directed video for “Ladies First” as a matriarch, military strategist and militant . . . . A decade later, successful female artists like Missy Elliot and Lauryn Hill were the exceptions rather than the rule. Scantily-clad dancers seemed in endless supply, while women rappers were scarce. Big money clearly had a distorting effect. My findings also indicate that women rappers are fewer and fewer in number over time. Since 2000, the last year for my sampling frame, only three women rap artists had an album go platinum—Missy Elliot, Eve, and Lauryn Hill. Self-proclaimed hip-hop feminist, Joan Morgan (1999:68-9), notes an increase in misogyny in the culture and music that she loves. In a hypothetical love letter to hip-hop (her “homeboy”), which she likens to being in an abusive relationship, she writes,

The old-school deejays and M.C.’s performed community service at those school yard jams . . . . As for sistas, we donned our flare-leg Lees and medallions, became fly-girls, and gave up the love. Nobody even talked about sexism in hip-
hop back in the day. All an M.C. wanted then was to be the baddest in battle, have a fly-girl, and take rides in his fresh O.J. . . . We haven’t been fly-girls for a very long time . . . . The abuse is undeniable . . . . Things were easier when your only enemies were white racism and middle-class black folk who didn’t want all that jungle music reminding them they had kinky roots. Now your anger is turned inward. And I’ve spent too much time in the crossfire, trying to explain why you find it necessary to hurt even those who look like you.

Morgan points to commercialism as the key culprit in the rise of misogyny in hip-hop culture but she remains hopeful that things can change. She also says that rap music is one of the only fora for working-class Black women to resist prevailing stereotypes and ideologies about them.

Lauryn Hill did just that. She is one of the more successful women rappers in recent years as a member of The Fugees—a relatively politically conscious rap group. She has also worked as a as a solo artist on two albums: The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill and MTV Unplugged 2.0. The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill album gained wide critical acclaim and earned Lauryn five Grammys in 1999—a record for a woman solo artist. Since the 2001 release of the MTV Unplugged 2.0 album, rumors have swirled in the music industry and in popular culture media as to why she no longer records. Rolling Stone says that she became involved with a “shadowy spiritual adviser, then abruptly fired her management team and the people around her.”

Rolling Stone also reports that she said, “I had created this public persona, this public illusion, and it held me hostage” and the magazine speculates that part of her being “held hostage” was an emotionally abusive relationship with Wyclef Jean, a member of The Fugees. Some of the lyrics to her song “I Get Out” on her last album MTV Unplugged 2.0 in 2001 suggest reasons why she left the rap music industry. Perhaps the misogynistic turn in rap music and hip-hop culture also played a part in her departure. In this song, she sings about being victimized, put into a box, and abused by those who say they love her. She sings,

I get out, I'll get out of all your boxes, I get out
You can't hold me in these chains . . .

I won't be compromised no more, I can't be victimized no more
I just don't sympathize no more, cause now I understand
You just wanna use me, you say "love" then abuse me
You never thought you'd lose me, but how quickly we forget
That nothin' is for certain, you thought I'd stay here hurtin'
Your guilt trip's just not workin', repressin' me to death . . .
No more compromises, I see past your disguises
Blindin' through mind control, stealin' my eternal soul
Appealin' through material to keep me as your slave
But I get out . . . Oh, I get out of all your boxes . . .
Oh, you'd have everyone believe that you're the sole authority
Just follow the majority, afraid to face reality
The system is a joke, oh, you'd be smart to save your soul
And escape this mind control . . . Just get out . . .

While Lauryn Hill understandably decided to “just get out,” other Black women have not sat idly while rap music disseminates misogyny and negative images of them. For example, Watkins (2005:217-8) describes how students at Spelman College, a historically Black college for women, held a demonstration against the music video for male rapper Nelly’s song “Tip Drill.” The video features objectifying and sexualized images of Black women depicted in “one degrading pose after another” simulating “soft-core porn.” To quell the students’ outrage, Nelly’s philanthropist foundation, 4Sho4Kids, planned a bone marrow drive on Spelman’s campus. Outrage by students and the media attention from “the Associated Press, MTV News, the Washington Post, and USA Today” forced Nelly’s organization to cancel the event.

Whether misogyny is increasing and women’s significance in rap music and hip-hop culture are decreasing is an issue calling for further study. It would be useful to compare misogyny in other music genres that corporate interests control as much as or more than rap music. Is the same degree of misogyny present in other musical genres? Corporate influences may or may not explain these developments. If not, the misogyny rampant in rap music may be representative of widespread beliefs and practices in hip-hop and, more generally, inner-city African American youth culture. The next section
addresses the advantages and limitations of the study and suggests other topics for future research.

Strengths, Limitations, and Implications for Future Research

Examining rap music lyrics on albums that have gone platinum is an advantage because it ensures that a significant number of people have purchased and listened to the music. However, a better measure of the most widely consumed music might be songs with the most radio play, as documented by Billboard ratings. This information was not readily available to me, however, particularly for the earliest rap artists and songs. The records of the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) were made available through its website. Also, because my sampling frame includes only songs from albums that were released in 2000 or prior, it does not examine rap music released after 2000. Future research should examine more contemporary rap music and consider internet download sales as a measure of popularity and consumption. Research of contemporary popular (downloaded) rap music lyrics would illuminate whether misogyny and negative images of African American women persist, are increasing, or are decreasing.

Another advantage of my research is its systematic and comprehensive analysis of rap music lyrics. Most research on rap music lyrics to date has not been based on a random sample of songs. A simple random sample of rap songs on platinum-selling albums allows me to draw conclusions about images of Black women in all popular rap music released in 2000 or prior. That is, I can assume that the images I find are representative of popular rap music in general. Many scholars have purposively sampled rap music lyrics. While such studies provided an invaluable resource from which to launch my research questions and analysis, their findings and conclusions cannot be said to be representative of popular rap music.

A third advantage of my research is its focus on representations of women, gender, and sexual politics. With few exceptions (see Chapter 1), most research on rap and hip-hop culture has ignored or taken gender for granted. That is, most of it uncritically assumes that men are the presumptive rappers. Many researchers who have examined gender and women in hip-hop culture have emphasized the prevalence of misogyny or of women’s resistance to misogyny by asserting their independence and autonomy. My study’s findings are less optimistic. I find that mainstream rap music
lyrics contain many negative images of Black women, particularly a stereotype of Black women as sexually promiscuous freaks or “hos.” Yet, my findings also show that representations of Black women in rap music lyrics are also complex and paradoxical. Some resistant femininities in rap music lyrics provide advantages to (Black) women in ways that are discouraged for White middle- or upper-class women. For example, the empowered bitch script encourages and supports the autonomous and independent expression of sexuality and women’s autonomy and independence in general. The great majority of lyrics, however, subordinate women in their relations to/with men.

My study cannot address the effects of rap music images and ideologies, however. Other scholarship has shown that hip hop culture and rap music affect how young urban and Black youth interact with one another and understand themselves (Arnett Ferguson 2000; Keyes 2002; Kitwana 2002; Patillo-McCoy 1999; Wingood, et. al. 2003). For example, Wingood et. al. (2003) suggest that images of Black women hip-hop culture negatively affect young Black women’s mental, physical, and sexual health outcomes. I tend to agree, given my findings, that it would be difficult for Black women to listen to rap music and not feel denigrated. The dissemination of negative images of what Black women can/should be in rap music lyrics has an impact on young African American women’s self-concept to the extent that they listen to this rap music and believe that these are the only scripts available to them. But, it also affects them to the extent that others listen to rap music and form ideas and beliefs about Black women. We need research also on how rap music images affect young men, considering that not only Black men consume rap music. Research should include their understanding and treatment of women. Do they prompt men to view women as promiscuous sexual freaks unworthy of respect, as sexual objects and potential conquests, and/or as manipulative and conniving bitches to be feared and controlled?

My study examines rap music and hip-hop culture in only the U.S. Because rap music and hip-hop culture are disseminated world-wide, research in other cultures would also be valuable. It is important to understand the images of women in rap music in other cultures and how these images inform ideas about women and how they are/should be treated. How are rap music images of gender, race, class, and sexuality understood,
accepted, and transformed in other cultures? Is this music harming relations among women and men worldwide? My analysis suggests that it may well be doing just that.

Finally, my study fails to explore non-mainstream genres of rap music or aspects of hip-hop culture or to examine how people in the rap music and hip-hop culture industries explain and interpret images of Black women. Many contemporary (underground) rap artists and groups create music lyrics that are not misogynistic or laden with violence, including but not limited to, Common, The Roots, Blackalicious, and Jurassic 5. As I note in Chapter 5, there is also a burgeoning genre of “homo hop” music that rejects the homophobic and anti-gay sentiments so often found in rap music and hip-hop culture. “Homo hop” artists who are openly gay assert their right to participate in and contribute to hip-hop culture. Future researchers should study such counter-culture artists by focusing on the subjects of this music, not only its objects. Many people inside and outside the rap music industry and hip-hop culture actively fight, protest, and resist the negative images of Black women in rap music. We should know more about them.

Conclusions

My results suggest several conclusions. First, rap music lyrics are rife with negative images of Black women. Although some of the scripts are not as prevalent as the freak script, the scripts I identify constitute an exhaustive list of possible scripts for African American women. The vast majority of images that I identify are negative; they frame Black women as sexual objects but they also depict them as unworthy in many varied ways—as wives, mothers, and (girl)friends. This pattern is not accidental. It is modal in men rappers’ work but it also shows up in women rappers’ lyrics.

Second, my results support Patricia Hill Collins’ assertion that socio-historical gender, race, class and sexual ideologies are reproduced in Black popular culture, including rap music lyrics, and they cast doubt on William Julius Wilson’s claims that race is declining in significance in U.S. society. They support Collins’ assertion that intersectional analysis is required to understand the lives of real people—of Black people who are women as well as men, of sexed people who are gay as well as straight, and of classed people who are poor and underprivileged as well as middle-class and/or privileged. Wilson’s singular focus on race and class prompts scholars (and others) to
focus on Black men and to ignore Black men’s participation in creating a gender order that denigrates and devalues women.

Third, my results show that Black women rappers, more than Black men rappers, assert images of Black women that are positive and healthy. Some women rappers do not reproduce negative ideologies about Black women and their sexuality. And, a few men rappers challenge negative images of women in rap music and hip-hop culture and encourage others to respect women. Finally, some women rappers’ lyrics contain resistant femininities that encourage women to be strong, independent and sexually autonomous.

Finally, my results agree with Schippers’ (2007) thesis that hegemonic femininity exists even as it supports the hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity and reproduces men’s dominance and women’s subordination. My analysis of rap music lyrics show that (Black) women are disparaged for not adhering to the standards of hegemonic femininity in hip-hop culture. My analysis also shows that hegemonic standards of femininity vary in local contexts. That is, the qualities of hegemonic femininity are in some ways the same as and in other ways differ from qualities of hegemonic femininity in mainstream U.S. culture. In contrast to Connell (1987, 1995), Schippers argues that there are no masculinities that can be characterized as subordinate. She says that when (gay) men act feminine, they are not embodying a form of masculinity; they are embodying femininity and are therefore denigrated. She also says that there are no masculinities that are stigmatized. I suggest otherwise. The qualities of hegemonic masculinity in hip-hop culture differ from the qualities of hegemonic masculinity in mainstream U.S. culture because rap music lyrics often describe interpersonal violence as a legitimate means to control (women). Hegemonic masculinity in mainstream U.S. culture encourages controlling others through non-physical means by, for example, using status, institutional power and intellect to control others. This control often is violent (in its effects). By contrast, Black and/or low status men are disciplined and stigmatized for similar violent behavior (Kivel 1998). Thus, some qualities of hegemonic masculinity in hip-hop culture are indeed stigmatized in mainstream U.S. culture and are therefore, as Connell (1987, 1995) contends, marginalized.
## APPENDIX A.
### SONG SAMPLE

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Album</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<td>Dirty Nursery Rhymes</td>
<td>As Nasty as They Want to Be</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1989</td>
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<td>Me So Horny</td>
<td>As Nasty as They Want to Be</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1989</td>
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<td>My Seven Bizzos</td>
<td>As Nasty as They Want to Be</td>
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<td>1989</td>
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<tr>
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<td>California Love (Remix)</td>
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<td>1996</td>
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<td>Check Out Time</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>1996</td>
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<td>Definition Of A Thug Nigga</td>
<td>R U Still Down? (Remember Me)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1997</td>
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<td>Fuck The World</td>
<td>Me Against the World</td>
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<td>1996</td>
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<td>I Ain't Mad At Cha</td>
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<td>Life Goes On</td>
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<td>Wonda Why They Call U Bitch</td>
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<td>Still I Rise</td>
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<td>Mama's Gun</td>
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<td>Hello Nasty</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>You Don't Know Me</td>
<td>Life Story</td>
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<td>Clog Up Yo Mind</td>
<td>The Art of War</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1997</td>
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<td>Get Cha Thug On</td>
<td>The Art of War</td>
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<td>1997</td>
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182
<table>
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<th>Artist</th>
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<th>Album</th>
<th>Gender</th>
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<td>E. 1999 Eternal</td>
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<td>1995</td>
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<td>Bow Wow</td>
<td>Bounce With Me (Extended LP Mix)</td>
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REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jennifer M. Pemberton received her B.A. in Sociology from New College of Florida in 1997, her M.S. in Sociology from Florida State University in 2001, and her Ph.D. in Sociology from Florida State University in 2008. Her research interests include Sex/Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Urban Sociology, Sexualities, Social Stratification, Family, the Welfare State and Social Policy, Social Movements, Social Psychology, and Theory (feminist, sociological and critical). She is currently a Visiting Instructor in the Department of Sociology & Anthropology at the University of North Florida.