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April 2010

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### Recommended Citation

Lewis, Ladel (2010) "White Thugs & Black Bodies: A Comparison of the Portrayal of African-American Women in Hip-Hop Videos," *The Hilltop Review*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/hilltopreview/vol4/iss1/3>

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## WHITE THUGS & BLACK BODIES: A COMPARISON OF THE PORTRAYAL OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN IN HIP-HOP VIDEOS

By *Ladel Lewis*

**Abstract.** The continued appearance of African-American women as performers in rap and/or hip-hop videos has called attention to the male gaze<sup>1</sup> and the ways in which young African-American women negotiate their sexuality. The most popular music videos of Caucasian and African-American hip-hop artists from 2003-2005 were analyzed and compared to determine the levels of sexism between the two cultures. With these videos, this study replicated a qualitative content analysis from another study that identified three prominent characteristics: (1) the level of sexism; (2) the presence of intimate touch and/the presence of alluring attire; and (3) which race portrayed women in a more sexist manner. From those distinctions, it was discerned that the majority of videos featuring both races possessed low levels of sexism, if any at all. Regarding sexual iconography, barely half of the Caucasian sample depicted women wearing alluring attire, and approximately a quarter of them revealed women engaged in intimate touching scenes with men and women. It was concluded that African-American rappers portray African-American women in a more sexist manner than their white counterparts in the name of hip-hop.

Now I chill real ill when I start to chill  
 When I fill my pockets with a knot of dollar bills  
 Sipping pints of ale out the window sill  
 When I get my fill I'm chilly chill  
 Now I just got home because I'm out on bail  
 What's the time? it's time to buy ale  
 Peter eater parking meter all of the time  
 If I run out of ale it's Thunderbird wine  
 Miller drinking chicken eating dress so fly  
 I got friends in high places that are keeping me high  
 Down with Mike D. and it ain't no hassle  
 Got the ladies of the eighties from here to White Castle

-Beastie Boys, *Hold it Now, Hit it*.

### 1. Background

Previous explorations about the way African-American men portray black women in rap videos have exposed an extreme amount of sexism. For example, rap videos present scantily clad women primarily posing seductively and/or being groped and fondled. Black artists have been the objects of media criticism in the black middle

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<sup>1</sup> The male "gaze" refers to how males sexually view the females. This gaze adds to the commodification of women's bodies which in turn perpetuates sexism.

class cultural magazines *Essence* and *Ebony*, on mainstream news programs such as *Paula Zahn Now* on CNN and the cable program *America vs. Hip-Hop*. The ways in which white artists portray black women, in contrast, is hardly, if ever, discussed. This article addresses inquiries in that area.

Hip-hop's inception in the early 1970s and subsequent exponential increase in popularity has mystified the masses, drawn attention to how hip-hop culture influences the lives of so many inner-city minorities, and gained the attention of many suburbanites. As the mid-1980s approached, Music Television (MTV) began to see a decline in the viewership of its successful video programming, which consisted primarily of rock and heavy metal videos. A new product was needed to keep this thriving powerhouse afloat (Yousman, 2003). Executives decided to take a chance and explore this new genre affiliated with what the South Bronx and many other inner-city residents called "rap." This was the introduction of hip-hop to mainstream society and the beginning of a lifestyle openly embraced by white kids from the suburbs.

The Beastie Boys were one of the first prominent white rap groups. They were able to successfully cross over onto predominantly black musical turf and solidify a firm place in the history of hip-hop. They met with little resistance because this three-man crew was not imitating black authenticity or reciting lines about racial oppression and growing up in the ghetto. Rather, they rapped about universal, juvenile topics such as getting drunk and having fun. While the topics and themes of their lyrics did not mimic those of their African-American counterparts, their clothing and behavior did. They visually mirrored their African-American counterparts in the videos, thereby reinforcing the sexual images of African-American women (Hess, 2005). The Beastie Boys continued to mimic the black rapper and hip-hop community's clothing and behavior, which allowed them to fit in and be accepted. Furthermore, popular acceptance of the Beastie Boys made it acceptable for white viewers to mimic these traits, including the sexual exploitation of African-American women.

During inception of hip-hop on MTV, white patronage was believed to be the driving force behind the sales success of so many hip-hop artists. Although music data studies at that time did not clearly show the races of individuals purchasing rap albums (Kitwana, 2005), *The Source*, a hip-hop magazine that caters to a predominantly male audience and views itself as the authority on hip-hop (Bailey, 2006), reported that more than 70% of rap music buyers were white (Yousman, 2003). The typical rap fan's love of or mere fascination with the genre developed into more than something to do or a way to be rebellious. Identifying with hip-hop culture set a standard to which to adhere, to the degree that it became a mode of initiation to fit in with minority groups, and even their own inner circles. What Cornell West (1994) described as the Afro-Americanization of white youth was demonstrated by whites who adopted a hip-hop swagger and wore hip-hop brand-named clothing; that is, clothing developed by rappers such as Rocawear by Jay-Z, Sean John by Diddy, Fetish by Eve, Phat Farm by Russell Simmons-Brother of Leader of Run DMC, and Wu Wear by Wu-Tang Clan and the "sagging" jeans style of rap artists signature to this genre. These ideas and values were reinforced by the white rappers in their videos, and were also displayed in the emergence of mainstream white hip-hop artists.

After the Beastie Boys' era began to pass, artists like Robert Van Winkle, known as Vanilla Ice, emerged. Unlike the Beastie Boys, Van Winkle appeared to capitalize on black culture by imitating African-American hip-hop artists in his lyrics as well as his behavior and dress, rather than actually living the black experience. While the Beastie Boys sang about what they knew and dressed like the rappers they are, Vanilla Ice was inauthentic in his music and style. This contributed to the difficulties other white artists had trying to be embraced by the hip-hop community. According to Light (1999):

When African-Americans complained about white rappers' cultural imperialism, Vanilla Ice made [their observations] painfully obvious from his stiff rhyme flow and awkward use of rap slang (at one point he boasted how he strapped on his jimmy, thinking jimmy meant "condom" instead of "penis") (p. 124).

3<sup>rd</sup> Base, another white rap group that rose to temporary fame in the early 1990s with their song, *Gas Face*, attempted to gain cultural credibility by criticizing Ice's "wannabe" image (Kitwana, 2005). In their music video, *Pop Goes The Weasel*, a Vanilla Ice look-alike was shown being beaten up and removed from the stage. This proved that white artists could have their authenticity challenged and lose their sustainability when they pretended to live the black experience and borrow from urban terminology.

Another prominent white rap artist is Marshall Mathers, also known as Eminem and as "Slim Shady," who attempted to change the stigma of whites in rap. Eminem's autobiographical (and sometimes absurd) lyrics generated street credibility in the hip-hop community, as well as the black community, in general by not insinuating a life unfamiliar to him (Hess, 2005). He used his white identity as a selling point for the record label Aftermath Entertainment. He maintained the position of "white forerunner," which earned him the distinction of being the "Elvis of Hip-Hop" (Light, 1999). Other white artists, such as Paul Wall and Bubba Sparxx, also rose to the challenge to solidify their position of credibility as white hip-hop artists in this African-American dominated genre. In doing so, it was considered commonplace for them to take on customary themes associated with hip-hop, such as flashy lifestyles and sexist behaviors, such as referring to women as "bitches" and "hoes" (Kitwana, 2005). In most cases, this meant exploiting and commodifying African-American women (Karenga, 1993). In just one example of this trend, Eminem is quoted in Bakari Kitwana's (2005) book *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop*:

Girls I like have big butts  
No they don't, cause I don't like that nigga shit  
Blacks and whites, they shouldn't mix  
But black girls only want your money  
Cause they be chicks (p. 136).

Also of relevance to this discussion is the question of profitability. Are music producers and labels getting wealthy as they perpetuate sexism in the world of hip-hop? Jim Levin, CEO of Time Warner, is a prime example of this practice. Although his label assisted 2 Live Crew's founder, Luther "Luke Skywalker" Campbell (net worth \$11 million), in selling millions of records on which artists sang about women performing oral sex on men and men engag-

ing in sexually explicit acts with women, Levin's net worth alone was approximately \$775 million (Hooks, 2002). An obvious problem arises when individuals, including rap artists and CEOs, who receive the monetary benefits from this exploitation of women, refuse to take responsibility for these negative portrayals. As a result, pornography in music and other media adds to callous attitudes toward women in general (Surette, 1998). These cultural and economic factors, while interesting, would constitute an entire study in and of themselves. Thus, this study focuses solely on the portrayal of black women in the rap videos of white artists, though the question of "who profits" should never be far from our minds.

## **2. Cultivation Theory**

Gerbner and Gross (1976) believed that "heavy exposure to cultural imagery will shape a viewer's concept of reality...The television set has become a key member of the family, the one who tells most of the stories most of the time" (p. 176-184). The two scholars developed cultivation theory, sometimes referred to as the "cultivation hypothesis" or "cultivation analysis." This theory suggests that media teaches about American values as well as myths (Vincent, 1989). Furthermore, the theory also argues that television has long-term effects that are gradual and indirect, but cumulative and significant.

Cultivation theorists are best known for their study of television and its impact on viewers, and, in particular, for their focus on violence. Other research grounded in cultivation theory focused on the mass media as a socializing agent, and investigated whether television viewers experience a mainstreaming effect, which is when they come to believe television's depiction of reality the more they watch it (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). This was a central conclusion of cultivation theorists. In addition, other studies have considered this theory relevant when dealing with topics such as prejudice based on gender, ethnicity, and age. For example, many posit that television music networks are major socializing agents among adolescents—at least indirectly—which is consistent with previous research (Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Wilson, 1992). At the time, studies also showed that entertainment programming was the most important source of information and socialization for African-American adolescents (Stephens & Phillips, 2003). Brown, Campbell, and Fisher (2008) assert, "African-American teenagers are more likely than white teenagers to report watching music videos because they want to emulate the people in the videos and learn the latest fashions and dance moves" (as cited in Bryant, 2008, p. 357). Yousman (2003) summarized the trend by stating, "when they write the history of popular culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they can sum it up in one sentence which is, white kids want to be as cool as black kids" (p. 367).

In contrast, hip-hop's initial focus was to autobiographically verbalize the realities of everyday life in the ghetto, which allowed the artist's life to shape the music. Cultivation theory accurately predicted that the actions of current hip-hop followers of all races were being influenced by the mainstream messages of the music. A recent study showed the more time participants spent viewing rap music videos, the greater likelihood they would accept the negative images in those videos (Bryant, 2008).

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In many rap videos, women are viewed as passive, sexually aggressive, and willing to be utilized at will. Television and other informative outlets exhibit women who appear to enjoy being stared at, groped and squeezed by random individuals (Jhally, 1995). A woman is considered abnormal if she does not comply with the actions of a man or fit the mold of her assigned gender. In this manner, young women learn the qualities of being feminine and young men learn how to perceive women. Moreover, these images falsely exhibit how white males should interact with African-American females.

Although cultivation theory emphasizes the importance of mediation on the symbolic function of television in its cultural context, it has been criticized for oversimplification, in that the theory is considered to be subjective because it is based solely on the act of television viewing. Cultivation theory tends to underplay the point that there are heavy and light viewers, and that viewers vary in other ways, such as age, sex, and education. The theory also ignores the social dynamics of television use. When the viewer has some direct or indirect lived experience of the subject matter, the cultivation effect may be reduced. McQuail (1987) argued that "it is almost impossible to deal convincingly with the complexity of posited relationships between symbolic structures, audience behavior and audience views, given the many intervening and powerful social background factors" (pp. 99-100). In short, people's attitudes are likely to be influenced not only by television, but also by experience and interaction with other people. However, although cultivation theory may oversimplify the impact of television's influences, this theoretical framework is more than sufficient for this specific study because this paper focuses primarily on rap artists and how they portray African-American women in their videos, not on the viewers who watch.

Sexism has continued to be a universal force against which women of all races have battled. This issue has become increasingly detrimental to African-American women because they are expected to mirror the narrow stereotypical images set forth by mainstream media. African-American women's oppression is being further systematized and structured ideologically because of how they are depicted within hip-hop videos. They are frequently depicted as objects of male pleasure because their role is primarily sexual (Emerson, 2003). Tragically, these restricted and controlled images and beliefs that are embedded in youth of all races at a young age serve to justify the mistreatment of all black women (Tong, 1998; Jhally, 1995).

In this dominant ideology, the line between fantasy and reality is blurred. Vincent (1989), and Vincent, Davis and Boruskowski's (1987) video study on content described in this article was designed to empirically test that hypothesis.

This research serves as an introductory examination of how white rap artists portray African-American women in hip-hop videos. Based on cultivation theory, four research questions were asked: (1) Did white rap artists portray African-American women in hip-hop videos in a sexist manner? (2) Did white rappers' videos possess more intimate touch than those of African-American artists? (3) Did white artists' videos possess more alluring attire than those of their African-American counterparts? (4) Compared to African-American men, did white rappers portray African-American women in a more sexist manner in the name of hip-hop?

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1. Sampling**

Qualitative data collection techniques for this video content analysis proved to be beneficial when examining the relationship dynamics that shaped race and sexuality (Stephens & Few, 2007). I obtained a sample of 11 rap videos from the Internet sites Yahoo Music! and AOL Music. Due to the lack of nationally known white rap artists, a sufficient sample could not be acquired using the basic cable networks (MTV and BET). Also, rap videos by white artists were not regularly represented on weekly video shows, so extracting measurable samples which used that technique was not possible. Finally, relevant videos may have been omitted from the sample because the artists' videos were not available on the particular web sites. Research could be improved as outlined in the "Future Recommendations" section of this article.

The timeline I used to sample videos ranged from January 2003 to December 2005. I eliminated all videos recorded earlier than 2003 (such as Eminem's *Stan* and Bubba Sparxx's *Ugly*), and later than 2005 (such as Sparxx's *Ms. New Booty*) for two primary reasons. First, if I did not exclusively use videos from this timeframe, they would not have been analogous to the original videos used for my previous non-published study concentrating on African-American males. The methodological issue could have corrupted the comparative analysis. Secondly, since mainstream rap songs remained popular for only a short period of time before they were replaced and often forgotten, I expanded the initial research to include either older or more recent videos from 2003 to 2005 to represent the mainstream artists who received airplay. This may not have accurately represented the portrayal of African-American women during this specific time period, as political situations or shifts in culture may lead to a difference in popular culture. Also, it must be noted that the levels of sexism in general may have increased or decreased before or after this time. In essence, using either outdated or current videos could have tainted the findings severely, as in the case of Vincent's revisited study (1989).

#### **3.2 Barriers to Research**

There were several other factors that affected the selection of videos used in this study. For example, social trends may have caused an increase or decrease of sexism in hip-hop videos. When Vincent reexamined the portrayal of women in rock videos in 1989, he noticed that an increase in public awareness changed the study he had completed eighteen months earlier. The ad hoc group, Parents Music Resource Center, led by several prominent congressmen, made charges at a U.S. Senate Hearing that there was too much sex and violence in rock music and videos (Vincent, 1989). These hearings brought major attention to the rock and video industry. When Vincent performed his study after this crucial period in history, he observed a 22% decrease in videos rated level one (displaying the highest amount of sexism), and a 173% increase in videos rated level four (displaying the least amount of sexism). Thus, any research conducted during a period of political or cultural change may not generate a true representation of "typical" white artists' hip-hop videos.

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Another factor that affected the selection and use of videos in this study was the difficulty in accurately and equally comparing videos according to Vincent, Davis, and Boruszkowski's (1987) sexism scale, which has been used to examine sexism in rock videos. Although a video may have been placed in the same category as another, the scale did not measure the frequency of sexist elements.

I coded and categorized all videos into six categories: artist, title of song, sexism classification, intimate touch, alluring attire and mixed-artist video.

### 3.3. Operationalizing of Variables

My independent variable was the race of the main performing artist. The race of the artist was based on obvious physical characteristics and by any reference to his race in his lyrics. Although some artists, like Pit-bull, appeared to be white, the lyrics were closely inspected and autobiographic research was conducted to determine their minority status, which disqualified them from the sample. It was important to document the race of the artists because this revealed if there was an obvious difference in the way African-American women were portrayed by African-American males in hip-hop videos compared to the way white men depicted them.

Unlike the studies of Vincent (1989), and Vincent, Davis, and Boruszkowski (1987), I created a category titled "Mixed-Race Artists." This category was measured by a (Y), which signified that the song included artists of mixed races or an (N) when the song was exclusively by a white artist. This category was created to reveal whether having a co-artist of another race in the video affected the levels of sexism by either reducing or increasing the levels. This provided specific findings, such as whether white videos were more or less sexist with or without their minority counterparts. Leaving the groups combined would not expose this important data.

Hurley (1994) defined sexual iconography as the exposure of breasts, buttocks, lingerie, bikinis, mini-skirts, and sexually suggestive expressions and the caressing of body parts (Hurley, 1994). Since sexual iconography played a major role in the analysis of gender subjectivity, intimacy and the dress of the women in hip-hop videos were taken into account. Vincent measured sexual iconography in two primary categories: intimate touch and alluring attire. Intimate touch included individuals who were touching themselves or each other in an intimate manner. These categories were measured by either being absent or present.

My dependent variable was the level of sexism in hip-hop music videos. One of the original scales used was a heuristic model of classification by Pingree, Hawkins, Butler, and Paisley, called the scale of sexism. This was originally designed to test for sexism in print advertisements. Later, Vincent *et al* modified the same scale to measure sexism in music videos. This scale could be converted easily because just like advertisements, videos used high amounts of sexual imagery (Jhally, 1995). Since this scale was proven valid and reliable in both studies and in previous hip-hop research (Lewis, 2005), it was thought to be a reliable source for this investigation as well.

I reviewed each video and coded the level of sexism according to the presence of its characteristics on the sexism scale, with Level I displaying the highest amount of sexism and Level IV displaying no sexism. Each video was placed into one of the four sexism categories, but notably that the categories were not necessarily mutually exclusive or exhaustive (Wilson, 1992). If a video was coded for more than one level,

the highest level was used to determine its classification. For example, if a video displayed Level I and II characteristics, it was classified as Level I.

The following describes the four-item ordinal scale that measures how women were portrayed:

Level I: “*Condescending.*” The woman is portrayed as being less than a person, a two-dimensional image. This characterization may include the “dumb blond,” the sex object and the whimpering victim. It can also include an aggressive sexual role. Here women are used as sexual objects, in exclusively decorative roles, or presented in roles where others do her thinking for her.

Level II: “*Keeping Her Place.*” Some strengths, skills, and capacities of women are acknowledged, but tradition also dictates “womanly” roles. She may be presented outside domestic or decorative situations (i.e., where she participates to some degree in a recreational or intellectual environment), but she is always submissive to men. The emphasis is on subservience in romantic or secondary relations. A high emphasis on sexual attributes is still found here.

Level III: “*Contradictory.*” Emphasizes a dual role where a woman plays a traditional, subservient role while also displaying a certain degree of independence. This character’s independence is gained at the expense of her subservience. Anything she does outside of domesticity and nurturance is viewed as “something extra” (women may have secondary interests but that domesticity/nurturance dimension is of foremost importance). Examples: A woman skilled at operating a computer is placed in a situation where she must teach a man how to use the Internet but then lets him believe she thinks he knows how and that he is just humoring her. A woman fantasizes that she can assertively tell a man to stop talking down to her, but in actuality finds that he only laughs at her and degrades her more, and that she must be good natured about it. .

Level IV: “*Fully Equal.*” The woman is treated as a person (possibly a professional) with no mention of her private life. The video does not remind us that domesticity and nurturance are non-negotiable and are considered the woman’s work as well. Women are viewed non-stereotypically (Vincent, 1989; Vincent, Davis, Boruszkowski, 1987).

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1. Levels of Sexism**

A sample of eleven videos is used for this hip-hop study, compared to the 52 videos extracted from my previous research regarding African-American males on BET (Lewis, 2005). Two significant themes emerged from the data when the scale of sexism was applied. According to the findings, differences in sexism portrayals between African-American musicians and white musicians were observed. My results supported the notion that although sexism towards African-American women was pre-

sent, the prevalence of sexism was lower in white artists' music videos (Table 1).

**Table I. Mixed-Race Artist and Sexism**

	White Artists	Mixed-Race Artists	Total
Level 1: Condescending	1	3	4
Level 2: Keep her place	0	0	0
Level 3: Contradictory	0	0	0
Level 4: Fully equal	6	1	7
Total	7	4	11

Of the videos sampled, 36% portrayed black women in a Level I sexist manner, while 56% of African-American videos from the previous study were classified as such (Lewis, 2005). In Paul Wall's video, *Sittin Sideways*, black women were portrayed as wallpaper. Their sole purpose was to be sexy and desirable. In Eminem's video, *Ass Like That*, under-the-skirt shots (camera angles from the ground) of women from a variety of nationalities were shown, signifying African-American women were not being subjugated exclusively. This reinforced the negative stereotypes that as one rapper showed these themes, the rest followed suit.

Compared to African-American men, white male rappers did not portray African-American women as sexist in the name of hip-hop. The majority of the videos (64%) were designated "not sexist" or classified as Level IV according to the sexism scale. That was the opposite of the African-American male study that found sexism in 67.3% of all videos (Lewis, 2005). Since the videos were classified as only Level I or Level IV on the sexism scale, Level II and Level III classifications were not applicable. This finding was not surprising because the 2005 study pertaining to African-American male rappers did not have a strong representation of these categories either.

It is noteworthy to focus on the fact that the videos that possessed artists from mixed races were more sexist than those of lone white artists, with 76% of the videos falling in to the mixed category (Table 1). Paul Wall's video, *They Don't Know*, featuring two African-American artists, was an example of this. It showed scantily clad African-American women washing cars in a sexually suggestive manner. On the other hand, Eminem's "solo" video, *Toy Soldiers*, explored his grief over the murder of a fellow band mate and how he was denouncing what was labeled "hip-hop beef" (physical and verbal confrontations between hip-hop artists). The data showed there was a relationship between high levels of sexism and the presence of mixed race artists ( $X^2 = 4.055$ , d.f. = 1,  $p = .044$ ).

Men and women being treated equally emphasized the absence of sexism. These videos often depicted people in naturally realistic environments or did not include African-American women. For example, in Eminem's animated video, *Mosh*, the artist raps:

Let the president answer a higher anarchy

Strap him with an Ak-47; let him go, fight his own war  
 Let him impress daddy that way  
 No more blood for oil, we got our own battles to fight on our own soil  
 No more psychological warfare, to trick us to thinking that we ain't loyal.

The lyrical content and the cartoon-like characters express disappointment with the current political situation. The video called for all races to unify for social justice. In Paul Wall's video, *Girl*, the artist was shown having marital problems with his African-American wife. Wall was trying to express his love for her, but apparently she decided to heed the advice of her African-American female peers and divorced Wall. The video setting then switched to a courtroom where the woman was unsuccessfully suing him for alimony and his material possessions. Although this video was not characterized as sexist based on the 4-item sexism scale definitions, it reinforced a stereotype that African-American women are connivers for money or "gold-diggers" (Stephens & Phillips, 2003).

#### **4.2. Intimate Touch**

Although the relationship between intimate touch and sexism categorization was insignificant, the intimate touch findings brought attention to the way men and women exchanged bodily contact. About 25% of the white artists' videos sampled had some level of intimate touch compared to over 50% of the African-American videos. Although intimate touching was present at all levels, it was more sexual in some cases. In Level IV videos, intimate touching, such as hugging, was not as extreme as it was in Level I videos, which consisted of pelvic gyration, fondling, and groping. That alone calls attention to the way men and women displayed intimacy towards one another in hip-hop videos, and how the young adult viewing audience translates that relationship.

Table II: Level of Sexism by Intimate Touch: White Rap Artists (2009)

	Absent	Present	Total
Level 1: Condescending	2	2	4
Level 2: Keep her place	0	0	0
Level 3: Contradictory	0	0	0
Level 4: Fully equal	6	1	7
Total	8	3	11

$$X^2 = 1.637 \text{ d.f.} = 1 \text{ p} < .201$$

When intimate touch was compared to the amount of sexism in videos, the data

supported that the more sexist the video, the more likely intimate touch was present. Although videos rated “sexist” were assumed to possess scenes of intimate touching, it was found that some Level I videos did not possess this characteristic, such as Paul Wall’s *They Don’t Know*. Here, women in bikinis were being gazed at without any physical touching, proving that sexism existed outside of physical interaction with another person.

Table III: Level of Sexism by Intimate Touch African-American Rap Artists (2005)

	Absent	Present	Total
Level 1: Condescending	7	22	29
Level 2: Keep her place	1	3	4
Level 3: Contradictory	2	0	2
Level 4: Fully equal	15	2	17
Total	25	27	52

$X^2 = 20.653$ , d.f. = 3,  $p < .05$

Table IV. White Artist Data (2009): Level of Sexism by Alluring Apparel

	Absent	Present	Total
Level 1: Condescending	0	4	4
Level 2: Keep her place	0	0	0
Level 3: Contradictory	0	0	0
Level 4: Fully equal	6	1	7
Total	6	5	11

$X^2 = 7.543$ , d.f. = 1,  $p < .01$

### 4.3. Alluring Attire

Data showed that 45% of all white videos possessed the presence of alluring attire, compared to almost three-fourths of African-American videos. Of the Level IV videos, only one video (Eminem’s *Lose it*) contained women’s outfits that were considered alluring. This video briefly showed black females mimicking background hip-hop dancers of the late 1980s/early 1990s by wearing dated bra-like tops with span-

dex shorts (a style of dress worn by pop icon MC Hammer and his entourage). Eminem impersonated MC Hammer by wearing big-framed glasses, extremely baggy pants, and also emulating his outdated dance moves. As shown in Table IV, there was a significant relationship between alluring attire and sexism.

Table V. African-American Artist Data (2005): Level of Sexism by Alluring Apparel

	Absent	Present	Total
Level 1: Condescending	0	29	29
Level 2: Keep her place	0	4	4
Level 3: Contradictory	2	0	2
Level 4: Fully equal	14	3	17
Total	16	36	52

$$X^2 = 40.402, \text{ d.f.} = 3, p < .05$$

It was also important to note that African-American women were not the primary target of all white rap artists. A few videos, such as Eminem's *Lose it*, were not labeled sexist, and Bubba Sparxx's *Back in the Mud* did not show the presence of alluring attire because they did not exclusively exploit African-American women. In Sparxx's rock-rap hybrid video, a white cheerleader was shown in a revealing modified cheerleading outfit. This did not qualify as a valid alluring attire classification because the cheerleader did not meet the criterion for race. Although women were not acting subserviently or serving as "wallpaper" for men, the wearing of water-saturated, bra-like shirts revealed excessive exposure of stomachs and breast cleavage.

Vincent et al asserted that, since the provocative dress of women was not so different from that found in magazine advertisements, the fairly seductive clothing was accepted as not being sexist, but feminine (1987). In turn, the more skin one showed and the more tightly one's clothes fit, the more feminine they were considered. If women of all races were examined in this study, the findings may be different. It is important to note that all women were subject to sexism, and one race's experience was not more imperative than the next, but this specific research focused exclusively on African-American women.

## 5. Conclusion

Did white male rap artists degrade African-American women in hip-hop videos? Clearly, the answer is yes. Did they do it as often as their African-American counterparts? Based on this preliminary study, the appropriate answer is no. Regardless of the apparent effect of ethnicity, it is imperative that this type of debasement continues to be examined. The intent of this paper is not to serve as a call for censorship, but to

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invoke thoughts about dismantling unfair patriarchal practices against minority women that have become commonplace in mainstream television.

According to Kitwana (2002), “due to hip-hop’s role in shaping a whole generation’s worldview, including our ideas about sex, love, friendship, dating and marriage, rap music is critical to any understanding of the hip-hop generation’s gender crisis” (p. 82). Furthermore, Hooks (1992) stated, “to change the representation of black women from sexual objects, we must be willing to transgress traditional boundaries” (p. 45). That poses a degree of difficulty within the arena of hip-hop because black male artists assert power and authority that is usually suppressed in a very oppressive, Euro-centric society (Kitwana, 2002). Furthermore, white artists replicated these behaviors, which were endorsed by black rappers, while making a substantial amount of money in the process. Record executives and rappers were not naïve; they were making strategic choices to push music that would be embraced by mainstream society.

In the past, inner-city minorities looked to this music to tell their stories and give them hope while having fun in the process. Today, this thriving generation continues to look up to hip-hop for the same reasons but they are coming up short with the less-than-positive messages being relayed. Since videos are a part of a social process by which young people understand the world (Jhally, 1995), their influence as transmitters of ideas should be more carefully considered. Society as a whole must go through a transformation process by critiquing those choices and their impact on inner-city and suburban residents (Hooks, 2002; Kitwana 2002).

Although women have to find strength from other women because that is what gets them through various life challenges and obstacles (Guy, 2004), white women need to become more sensitive to the combination of racism and sexism or “multiple jeopardy” experienced by women of color (Tong, 1998). Moreover, this is in white women’s own interest. White women quickly became a commodity for sexual exploitation on the hip-hop circuit as well. In recent videos they were witnessed partaking in degrading behavior such as engaging in sexual types of activity for the entertainment of men and serving as wallpaper. Many African-Americans of the hip-hop generation, especially women, took issue with the portrayals of women in rap music videos, but did not aggressively oppose these portrayals (Bryant, 2008). That was why it is considered an obligation for not only black feminists, but all feminists, to free African-American women from these overt stereotypes that many feel are women’s sole responsibility to correct (Squires, Kohn-Wood, Chavous & Carter, 2006).

Additionally, it is important to not only conduct longitudinal studies in this area and spread this type of knowledge in scholarly journals (Bryant, 2008), but to take this message to the masses and plant seeds of knowledge about sexism, whether at a community forum or during a conversation with an acquaintance.

Dyson (1993) asserts:

Because women by and large do not run record companies, or even head independent labels that have their records distributed by larger corporations, it is naïve to assume that protest by women alone will arrest the spread of sexism in rap. Reproach must flow from women and men who are sensitive to the ongoing

sexist attitudes and behavior that dominate black male and female relations. (p. 98).

Chuck D proclaims, “there has to be some balance” (D & Jah, 1997). Political activist and CEO of Stepson Media, Bill Stepheney, put it succinctly in his comments to the *New York Post* (May 8, 2001) (Kitwana, 2002): “What is the line that we [artists and industry executives] are unwilling to cross for profits? Is there a line? Or is it completely laissez-faire?” (p. 214).

What mainstream hip-hop has done, thanks in part to the advent of music videos, is accelerate and exacerbate woman-hating, bringing it to the world stage (Powell, 2003). The blame cannot be attributed to one individual, but to the overwhelming capitalistic desire to make money at all costs. If that meant the artists must begin to think of themselves and their peers as “niggas and bitches,” worship “bling-bling” (expensive gaudy jewelry), glorify expensive late-model automobiles, and boast about consuming and getting drunk from high-priced liquor, they will do it. They may believe those actions will be their formula for success. Tragically, however, those same ingredients may also be the recipe for the death of an entire generation.

## 6. Future Research Recommendations

This research could be improved by conducting a longitudinal study. Expanding the time frame used to examine videos by white artists could be beneficial. Additionally, expanding the sampling frame to include other video sites would be helpful. Finally, analysis of the portrayals of all women, rather than exclusively African-American women, would improve this research and findings.

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**Ladel Lewis.** Building from her Master's thesis, "The Portrayal of African American Women in Hip-Hop Videos," Ladel Lewis, a doctoral candidate in Sociology (specializing in Race and Ethnic Relations and Applied/Evaluation Research) at Western Michigan University, is in the data collection phase of her research, titled "Stop Snitching: Hip-Hop's Influence on Crime Reporting in the Inner-City." This

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A former Mott Community College and Baker College of Flint faculty member, Lewis owns a women's semi-professional basketball franchise called the Flint Lady Flames located in her hometown of Flint, Michigan. With the motto "Taking Our Game and Our Community to the Next Level," the Lady Flames partner with local businesses and non-profit organizations to restore community pride, resurrect women's professional basketball, and give post-collegiate women across an opportunity to compete for professional basketball contracts.

The American Evaluation Association (AEA), National Black Graduate Students Associations (NBGSA) and the American Sociological Association (ASA) are some of the organizations where Lewis has cast her membership. She presents contemporary research at conferences nationwide.

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## Appendix

### Coding of Entire Sample by Artists

	Artist	Title of Song	Sexism Coding	Intimate Touch	Alluring Appeal	Mixed-Race Artists
1	Eminem featuring Nate Dogg	Shake That	I	P	P	Y
2	Eminem	Toy Soldiers	IV	A	A	N
3	Eminem	Mosh	IV	A	A	N
4	Eminem featuring D-12	How Come/ Git Up	IV	P	A	Y
5	Eminem	Mockingbird	IV	A	A	N
6	Bubba Sparxx	Back in the Mud	IV	A	A	N
7	Paul Wall featuring Unknown Artist	Sittin Side-ways	I	P	P	Y
8	Paul Wall	Girl	IV	A	A	N
9	Paul Wall featuring Mike Jones and Bun B	They Don't Know	I	A	P	Y
10	Eminem	Ass Like That	I	A	P	N
11	Eminem	Just Lose It	IV	A	P	N