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The Portrayal of African American Women in Hip-Hop Videos

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THE PORTRAYAL OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN HIP-HOP VIDEOS

By

Ladel Lewis

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
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Ladel Lewis
This study analyzed 52 of the most popular hip-hop videos aired on Black Entertainment Television in the summer of 2004. Using a qualitative content analysis instrument used in a previous study, three prominent characteristics in these videos were identified: (1) the level of sexism, (2) the presence of intimate touch and/or the presence of alluring attire. From those characteristics, it was discerned that there were more videos that possessed high levels of sexism than those that had very little or none. It was also found that the majority of the videos depicted women wearing alluring attire and having intimate touching scenes with men as well as other women in the videos. It was concluded that in these rap videos, women are portrayed in a sexist manner and male artists are more prone than female artists to exploit women as sexual objects in the name of hip-hop.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It was October 1979. The Disco Bubble within which American pop culture had floated for the past three years had just burst—as bubbles usually do—in abrupt fashion. Music industry insiders were dropped on their heads without the slightest clue about what to do next. Suddenly, something entirely new hit the nation’s airwaves. At first listeners were probably under the impression that the radio was playing Chic’s Good Times, a recent No. 1 record by one of disco’s top groups. This new song had the rhythm track from Good Times, all right, but instead of the icy melody of Chic’s original, three men spoke exuberantly in rhyme. By the end of the record’s first phrase, a new era’s arrival had been announced: “I said hip, hop…”

Hip-hop. It had been around for several years, but except to select residents of the Bronx and Upper Manhattan, it was completely unknown. The arrival of Rapper’s Delight by the Sugarhill Gang, however, insured that hip-hop would remain a secret no longer (Light, 1999, p.23).

Music has been a means of drawing boundaries between generations (Wilson, 1992), especially within the African American community. Music is not only used as a tool for entertainment, but also as a vehicle to tell a story, whether fact or fiction. As vehicles of culture, music can divide generations or usher in new sub-cultures (Wilson, 1992). When absorbed acoustically, music can change one’s state of mind from happy to sad or reinforce an individual’s current state of emotions. When in love, music can enhance the feeling of love with its enchanting hooks and melodies. When music is transformed from a record to a visual aid called a music video, it is considered a powerful means of portraying values to which targeted listeners/viewers can relate. Professor Sut Jhally (1995) who wrote, edited and narrated video
documentaries titled *Dreamworlds* (1991) and *Dreamworlds II* (1995) mentions that the video serves as a marketing/promotional tool for the artists; listeners can not only see the song put in motion, but also put a face to the voice. As Williams and Greenson are quoted in Wilson (1992), “Music videos are designed to appeal to adolescent audiences, combining the impact of television with the sounds and messages of youth transmitted through popular music” (p. 2).

Today’s inner-city African American youth are living in a cultural environment dominated by hip-hop culture. Since its emergence in the mass media, the hip-hop culture has been an avenue by which a lot of adolescents and young adults, especially those of African American descent, express themselves and make sense of their world. Although non-minority youth listen to rap solely for entertainment purposes, rap artists serve as educators for minority youth because these artists are looked upon as role models. As a result, the death of slain hip-hop icons such as Tupac Shakur and the Notorious B.I.G are more relevant to young and struggling Black people than Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton being alive (Powell, 2003). Because artists like Shakur have such a tremendous influence, everything that is communicated by hip-hop artists, whether by video or audio, positive or negative, is considered gospel. This especially holds true regarding the sexist attitudes towards women.

The appearances of African American women in hip-hop videos call attention to the ways in which African American women are portrayed in mass media. The literature on the representation of African American females by authors such as Tricia
Rose, Angela Davis, Patricia Hill-Collins and Bakari Kitwana has focused extensively on the exploitation of African American women. Moreover, the presence of sexism is one way to examine exploitation. Many scholarly articles and books have been published about how rap videos portray women such as Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women's Equity in African American Communities by Johnetta Cole and When Chickenheads Come Home to Roast: My Life as a Hip-Hop Feminist by Joan Morgan. “Even though many people have made claims about rap music and its effect on its listeners, research on music video effects generally focuses on young Whites and their attitudes about rock and roll, punk, or heavy metal” (Sullivan, 2003, p. 609).

While there are studies that were done in the past about rock videos on Music Television (MTV), very little research has been done in regards to hip-hop videos on Black Entertainment Television (BET). Despite the controversy surrounding the hip-hop videos, relatively little systematic research has been done. Although many leaders have argued about the effects of rap on its fans, studies exploring effects of rap are few because the small amount of research on hip-hop focuses solely on hip-hop’s lyrical content, history and performers (Sullivan, 2003).

By conducting a content analysis of hip-hop music videos, my study provides a basis to identify how African American women are depicted, which artists (categorized by sex) exploit women in videos more frequently, and to determine if there is a link between sexism and the intimate touch between men and women in my video sample, which is not something that has been done within the existing research.
Answering these questions will permit me to examine if African American women are being exploited by themselves or their male counter-parts in the name of hip-hop.

Much of the research on rap music videos explores its history and development as a social movement (Rose, 1994, 2002). Although these studies have contributed to an understanding of hip-hop, they are more focused on music artists and less on rap fans. Thus, my research marks a departure from previous research because it focuses on both the artists and the effects hip-hop has on the individuals that watch these videos. Instead of merely suggesting how African American women are portrayed through hip-hop videos, qualitative research needs to be conducted in that subject area. A major reason is because qualitative research simply requires a broader and less restrictive concept of design than most quantitative designs (Bickman & Rog, 1998). Just as Wilson (1992) performed a qualitative analysis of videos on MTV. A qualitative approach worked best for my research as well. Reflecting on Vincent’s (1989) and Vincent, Davis and Boruszkowski’s (1987) similar study on the portrayal of women in rock videos on MTV using qualitative analysis; I will duplicate their study by focusing on hip-hop videos on BET.

Vincent (1989) and Vincent, Davis and Boruszkowski (1987) used a four item ordinal consciousness scale of sexism that measured how women are portrayed, as well as the presence of alluring apparel and intimate touch. These are useful measurements for examining the sex role portrayals found in hip-hop videos and is appropriate for my research because many of the studies analyzing rap have been mostly theoretical, focusing on the role of rap music in popular culture and its use as
a form of resistance (Sullivan, 2003). In addition, few theoretical claims have been substantiated through empirical work. This is important because most articles about the influence of hip-hop videos are solely opinion or theory-based, and not supported by empirical social research. Opinionated and theoretical approaches such as those of black feminist theorists are not enough to produce facts concerning the portrayal of women in videos. The theories should be used in conjunction with reliable and effective procedures that explore and expose the textual meanings of the portrayal of African American women in hip-hop videos (Creswell, 2003).

I go beyond earlier studies that focus primarily on the representation of African American women in the media by using William Gerbner’s cultivation theory in conjunction with Albert Bandura’s social learning theory, to examine how the sex of the music artists relates to the level of sexism in hip-hop videos, and how the routine presentation of African American women are interpreted by rap fans (Vincent, 1989; Vincent, Davis & Boruszkowski, 1987). Duplicating the methods and statistical analysis used in Vincent’s and Vincent, Davis and Boruszkowski’s study, I analyze the information by coding all data and imputing it into SPSS Software so a chi-square analysis could be performed. Finally, a cross tabulation analysis of variables is performed on the independent and dependent variables and I begin my interpretation.

Although much has been written about the significance and impact of hip-hop culture on the lives of African American youth, specific measures of sexism have not been employed to measure how African American women are portrayed in hip-hop culture. From this study, I seek to develop awareness and work towards a solution in
remedying the way African American women are portrayed in the hip-hop community, and the way society portrays women as a whole.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Hip-Hop Music: Historical Perspective

The origination of Hip-Hop is known as a social street movement with its roots embedded in gang culture and ghetto communities in New York City (Dates & Barlow, 1990). In the mid to late 1970’s, during a time of economic downturn, hip-hop emerged as a form of self-expression and as a way to talk about the current situation of Blacks and Latinos and what was going on in the world (Powell, 2003; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). In 1978, ‘rapping’ emerged out of this culture and became popular with rap groups such as the Treacherous Three, Jazzy Five and Sugar Hill Gang (Dates & Barlow 1990). Since rap comes from the street, and reflects inner-city street life, its themes were often quite topical, such as politics, racial equality, and poverty. In short, hip-hop is a reaction to American classism, racism, and the United States government’s abandonment of its war on poverty because it gave poor minorities an option other than death, a voice, and some visibility (Kitwana, 2002).

Rising from the ashes of the Civil Rights/ Black Power movement, this cultural phenomenon which included graffiti art, break dancing (b-boying) was birthed by pioneer deejays like Afrika Bambataa and Grandmaster Flash during the time of afros and funk music (Dyson, 1996; Powell, 2003). Although instances of graffiti writing can be traced back to the late 1960’s in Philadelphia, graffiti art, also
known as tagging, became popular for this generation. Jenkins notes in Light (1999), “This freeform script advertised the presence of a growing handful of inner-city youthsters, rogue street soldiers” (p.35). These crews stylistically tagged some of the highest, tallest and most visible and most dangerous spots throughout the city. Subways, prominent buildings and highway overpasses were frequently used as markers for this outlet. These artists used expensive paints on their various canvasses to relay personal messages to one another or to express their views on issues in their community.

Break-boys (b-boying) also known as break dancing began to emerge as the way hip-hoppers expressed themselves through dance. It took place when deejays, such as the expatriate Jamaican deejay and founding father of hip-hop, Kool Herc, would drop a beat on the turntables (segments of records where all other musicians stop playing their instruments to let the drummer continue to play). “This was also done by getting two copies of the same record and cutting back and forth between them in order to prolong the break or sonic climax” (Light, 1999, p. 15). This break in the beat (or break beat) caused all of the b-boys (and b-girls) to go crazy by performing backspins (spinning on their backs), turtles (walking on one’s hands with the body in a horizontal position) and other skillful moves (Shapiro, 2001). Unwittingly, Kool Herc stumbled upon the starting point for hip-hop, dance and techno today (Light, 1999). This physical art form was not only a youth fad that sparked competition among some of the best dancers representing their
neighborhoods, but break dancing was a way that poor kids lacking community programs could display their gymnastic skills.

Brief History of Rap on BET and MTV

Beginning in the early 1980’s, media and entertainment corporations slowly began to discover Blackness in the form of hip-hop as a hot commodity (Kitwana, 2002). Since MTV had a larger rock music audience and because hip-hop and other predominantly Black musical forms were considered controversial and a threat to advertisers, those specific Black music genres were put on the backburner (Ogg & Upshall, 2001). As a result, Tyrangiel asserts that accusations from famous African American artists, like the late Rick James, sparked debate over the racist undertones MTV was indirectly sending over the airwaves (Light, 1999).

During the early 1980’s, a number of networks begin to emerge in reaction to MTV’s restrictive programming policies. Based in Washington D.C., Black Entertainment Television (BET), a conservative network aimed to deliver quality information and entertainment to the African American population was established by Robert L. Johnson, Founder, Chairman and CEO (Light, 1999). Since 1984, BET has added approximately 2 million subscriber homes per year (Hunt, 2004). Video shows, like Video Soul, catered primarily to rhythm and blues (R&B) artists and were the cause of the success of BET and the exposure of Black artists by means of the music video. Shows of this caliber began to take over the daily 16 hour a day programming and BET began to experience an increase in viewership for both
African American, and Caucasians alike. “As BET grew, it began to diversify its program offerings and image by creating shows like Teen Summit, a Saturday noon show for youth; and Black Agenda, a series of forums on issues of interest in the Black community” (Hunt, 2004, paragraph 4).

The emergence of this vast untouched viewing market could not be ignored. It began to influence youth across the globe (Powell, 2003). As a strategic move, hip-hop artists such as the Fat Boys and Run DMC began to collaborate with Rock and Roll icons The Beach Boys (Wipeout) and Aerosmith (Walk This Way) to establish a foot in MTV’s door. In addition, the Beastie Boys, the first rap act to top the Billboard charts by employing traditional rock ‘n’ roll shock tactics, helped make rap music a mainstream currency with their hit song, (You Gotta) Fight for Your Right (to Party) (Light, 1999; Ogg & Upshal, 2001). MTV began to claim their stake in the market by airing programs such as Yo! MTV Raps. They recruited VJ’s (video jockeys) such as Fab Five Freddie, an African American personality and a one-man hip hop industry who gravitated from all aspects of hip-hop culture. He became one of rap’s most prolific video directors, and captured a substantial portion of the hip-hop audience as well as the attention of major corporations (Ogg & Upshal, 2001).

Today, BET, a subsidiary of Viacom, Inc. (the owner of all three major music networks), is noted as being one of the nation’s leading television networks. The BET network reaches more than 80 million households according to Nielsen media research, and can be seen in the United States, Canada and the Caribbean. In addition, BET is a dominant consumer brand in the urban marketplace with a diverse
group of branded businesses such as BET Hip-Hop, which is considered an attractive alternative for cutting edge entertainment and tastes. They gained prominence within the Black community by becoming one of the first major television networks to focus primarily on issues that affect African Americans, especially those who embrace hip-hop culture.

**Previous Studies of BET (and MTV)**

The Portrayal of African American women in the hip-hop culture has been a pressing, yet controversial issue in the black community. News networks such as CNN have run stories about it, while *Essence* magazine dedicated a year long feature about hip-hop’s outlook and on Black women’s sexuality. Within the articles, entertainment insiders, academic scholars and consumers candidly discuss their points of view and potential remedies to these portrayals. However, there is little empirical research available regarding hip-hop’s portrayal of African American women. In 1986, Brown and Campbell compared gender and race portrayals on BET’s *Video Soul* and MTV (Brown & Campbell, 1985). That research revealed how Blacks and Whites were portrayed in anti-social and pro-social behavior.

Previous research on MTV suggests women are portrayed in a sexist manner. Vincent, Davis and Boruszkowski (1987) concluded that women are used as sexual objects. In 1989, when this study was revisited, it was revealed even during a period when the music video industry was being criticized for its orientation to sex, sexism was still abounding (Vincent, 1989). Jhally (1991, 1995) observed that the portrayal
of women in these male directed videos is based exclusively on male fantasy, and the women participated in a male “dreamworld.” In this “dreamworld,” women outnumber men and are willing to have sex with any man.

As Gehr states in Wilson (1992), “We refer to most TV as ‘commercial’ television; actually MTV can lay claim to that title because that is precisely what it is” (p. 20). Many researchers view networks that are primarily dedicated to music videos as an ongoing commercial because it reinforces product familiarity (Wilson, 1992). The cable networks not only assist the viewing audience with becoming familiar with the music artist, but it also helps the artist advertise compact discs and tapes (Jhally, 1995). Yet, such analyses have not explicitly entertained the question of how African American women are depicted in hip-hop videos, more specifically on BET.

The Influence of Hip-Hop

Since hip-hop’s emergence in mainstream mass media in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, it has influenced the arenas of fashion, art, television, film, literature, and journalism (Watkins, 1998). In 1986, the rap group Run DMC pioneered making popular songs that endorsed major corporation’s products such as the Adidas sneaker. Hit songs such as My Adidas helped Run DMC become the first rap group to go platinum, and eventually sell three million copies. Rap groups such as Public Enemy and the X Clan began to promote Black awareness and pride. From there, items that embraced Black culture, such as neck charms with the continent of Africa on them
began to flood this profitable market. In addition to shoes and accessories, fashions such as MGM Jogging suits, thick gold chains and big framed glasses known as Gazelles were the fad during that time period. Today, groups such as Nelly & the St. Lunatics are upholding this tradition by setting the trend for the “in” in hip-hop fashion (Kitwana, 2002; Light, 1999). Their smash hit *Air Force Ones* promoted the Nike Corporation and remained at the top of the Billboard charts for months. In most African American communities, Nike “Air Force Ones” are the standard sneaker for hip-hop dress. These types of songs and representations influence young African American adolescents not only to listen to the music, but also to purchase the sneakers regardless of the price.

Major hip-hop icons founded and promote clothing lines such as Enyce, Mecca, and Sean John that specifically target the hip-hop market. Def Jam recording artist LL Cool J (which stands for Ladies Love Cool James) promoted the popular clothing line FUBU (For Us By Us) that was very popular as well as pricey in the late 1990’s. Hip-hop clothing lines such as Roc-a-Wear, founded by retired rap artist Jay-Z; Sean John designed by P Diddy (formerly known as Puffy); and Phat Farm by hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons, are just a few of the hip-hop labels that are being embraced heavily by all youth, but faithfully by African American youth.

During the late 1980’s, hip-hop’s prominence was not only evident within the American music scene, but also within American culture as a whole when artists such as MC Hammer began to win Grammy’s and land advertisement deals from mainstream corporations like Pepsi and Taco Bell (Kitwana, 2002). Currently, hip-
hop artists such as Lil Kim, Missy “Misdemeanor” Elliot, Ludacris and Fat Joe, endorse major companies such as Old Navy, Gap, Sprite, Adidas and M.A.C. Cosmetics. In addition, potato chips called “Rap Snacks” are being found in local supermarkets. The bags for these bite-sized snacks feature the picture of hip-hop artists such as Murphy Lee and the Youngbloodz as well as positive sayings geared towards the youth. Advertisements for these snacks can be found in magazines such as People and Maxim. Lil Romeo, a New No Limit Recording Artist, is on the front of the “Bar-b-quin’ with my Honey” (Honey Barbeque) flavored potato chips that advocate “staying in school.” For reasons such as these, hip-hop artists have become or are perceived as the dominant public voice of the hip-hop generation.

Having proven themselves as marketable entertainers with successful music careers, rappers also began to star in film and television sit-coms. Eve, known as the First Lady of the Ruff Ryders entourage, has starred in Ice Cube’s comedy Barbershop (2002) and Barbershop 2 Back in Business (2004). She also has her own hit comedy sit-com called Eve on Fox that airs during primetime, as well as a new female clothing line, Fetish, that she successfully introduced in the fall of 2003. Also, multitalented entertainer Queen Latifah continues to make her mark in mainstream media as well. With the release of her jazz album The Dana Owens Album (2004), the release of major box office hits featuring the Queen, such as Bringing Down the House (2003), Taxi (2004), her Oscar nomination for her role in Chicago (2002) and her starring role in the highly anticipated spin off of Barbershop 2, titled Beautyshop (2005) she is indeed setting the standard for women of color in music and movies.
With movie deals in conjunction with the lucrative endorsements from Covergirl Cosmetics and an invitation to host the 2005 Grammy Awards, Queen Latifah continues to prove her endless abilities.

The Motion Picture Industry has also witnessed the presence of hip-hop. Black Cinema catapulted young black directors such as Spike Lee into the glare of the media spotlight with the success of *Do the Right Thing* (1989). John Singleton’s film *Boyz N the Hood* (1991), and Allen and Albert Hughes’ *Menace II Society* (1993), proved to be extremely competitive at the box office, generating enormous sums of money for major and independent film distributors (Watkins, 1998). Those films jumpstarted the careers of actors such as ‘gangsta’ rapper Ice Cube, who went on to make African American household classics such as *Friday* (1995) and *Players Club* (1998).

Advertising in mainstream publications was not enough for this thriving culture. Due to its enormous success, various magazines dedicated exclusively to hip-hop were born (Powell, 2003). King Magazine, Vibe, The Source, and XXL are just a few of the publications that are widely available in major retailers throughout the nation. In addition to these well known magazines, there were also numerous magazines which circulate regionally. For example, in 2003, Rodney Jenkins and Cecil Cross founded *LOOK* (Love of Our Kind) Magazine. These young entrepreneurs realized how lucrative the hip-hop market was and decided to stake their claim by targeting college students. Today, their magazine can be found circulating at Southern Historically Black Universities. Although several magazines
have numerous ads from major corporations and top designers, they provide a sincere dedication to rap culture and provide exposure to new and current artists while covering deep issues in the hip-hop community (D & Jah, 1997, p. 10).

Not only does hip-hop influence what African American youth buy, and how they dress, it also has a significant impact on how they speak and relate to one another (Kitwana, 2002). This Black cultural representation is encoded within the lyrics of rap. And, therefore, reinforces the claim that hip-hop both validates the world it comes from and communicates that world to outsiders (Light, 1999). Five Percenter expressions like “word is bond” (meaning I am telling you the truth), “fa-sho” (for sure), “holla” (meaning to talk to someone or telling somebody that you will speak with them later) and “fly” or “fresh” (means look good or that that speaker approves highly of the object at hand) work their way into the conversational language of not only Black youth, but all youth around the world (Nelson, 1998). In essence, the process of cracking the ever shifting code of hip-hop lingo is a huge part of the fun of listening to the music (Light, 1999). Given hip-hop’s tremendous influence, expanding into the political arena is inevitable (D & Jah, 1997; Kitwana, 2002).

The prominent linguistics of the hip-hop generation has been used to introduce this culture to the world of politics. During the 2000 Presidential election, rap music mogul and Rush Communications CEO Russell Simmons announced that he was turning his attention to bringing the hip-hop generation into the mainstream political process. In 2001, that vision became a reality and the first Hip-Hop Summit
was held in New York City, empowered by the theme “Taking Back Responsibility” (Kitwana, 2002). Today, Simmon’s agenda continues to be carried out across the country. The Hip-Hop Summit 2004 in Detroit brought out Detroit’s mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, also known as the first hip-hop mayor, to stress the importance of the voice of the hip-hop generation. The theme for this specific location was “Making an Impact Socially, Politically, Economically, and Musically.” This event featured a panel of well-known artists such as Detroit’s own Eminem, industry executives, and local community leaders stressing the importance of getting involved in the political process and taking responsibility for the community. The summit in Detroit alone contributed to over 70,000 young people becoming registered voters. However, the audience, which was primarily made up of thriving artists and producers appeared not only to be there for the message, but most importantly for an opportunity to distribute their demos to top executives. That is understandable considering that hip-hop music sales showed a 31% increase from 1997-1998, with annual sales of rap music exceeding $700 million; making it the fastest growing music genre in America (Kitwana, 2002; hooks, 2002). By and large, hip hop makes approximately $3-$4 billion a year for the music industry alone (Dyson, 1996).

The History of the Portrayal of African American Women in Hip-Hop

In the beginning stages of hip-hop, female artists were present, but were often left in the shadows of their male counterparts. In 1981, Sha-Rock, the only female of the legendary Funky Four Plus One was the first widely visible female MC (short for
Mistress or Master of Ceremony) as well as the first female rap artist to perform on Saturday Night Live (SNL) (Ogg & Upshall, 2001; Light, 1999). In the mid 1980’s, African American females started to make their presence known in this male dominated art form called rap. Women’s participation in hip-hop has meant a serious celebration of creativity and sex appeal (Light, 1999). Salt ‘n’ Pepa provided the break though success for female MC’s with their first album *Hot, Cool & Vicious* (1986). It went double platinum, making them the first female rappers to achieve such commercial success (Shapiro, 2001). Artists such as JJ Fad (Just Jammin Fresh and Def) began to emerge and became one of the first female rap groups that went gold and made the US pop charts with their smash hit “Supersonic” (Shapiro, 2001; Nelson, 1998). In addition to being the first female solo artist to have a gold single, MC Lyte’s superlative debut album *Lyte as a Rock* (1988) was deemed one of the finest albums of the era by a male or female (Light, 1999; Shapiro, 2001). But, *Ladies First*, Queen Latifah’s duet with British born rapper Monie Love, remains the definitive feminist hip-hop statement of the 1980’s because it is simultaneously woman-centered and pro-Black (Ogg & Upshall, 2001; Rose & Ross 1994).

Due to the domination of the hip-hop industry, the portrayal of African American women has also begun to manifest itself in popular media. Artists such as Yo-Yo, one of the most respected women in hip-hop, managed to convey a women’s perspective in hip-hop without becoming a stereotype or succumbing to male fantasies (Shapiro, 2001). She maintained a pro-feminist, yet Afro-centric stance that led her to be looked upon as a leader in the Black community. However, since the
mid-1980’s, Black female musicians and dancers have been increasingly pressured to participate in highly visual and sexually exploitive strategies for selling mainstream popular music (Rose, 2002). Since attention is their primary focus, this image is seen as positive and gets them the attention they desire by making them stars in their own right (Hutchinson, 1999; Jhally, 1995). Brooks affirmed that statement by arguing, “Although women may have little power in other spheres, women do have power in the sexual arena” (1995, p. 59). It is claimed that ideology establishes emancipation, a sense of agency and control of their body. Rose argues,

Salt-N-Pepa (and their female deejay Spinderella) are carving out a female-dominated space in which Black women’s sexuality is openly expressed. Black women rappers sport hip-hop clothing and jewelry as well as distinctively Black hairstyles. They affirm a Black, female, working-class cultural aesthetic that is rarely depicted in American popular culture. Black women rappers resist patterns of sexual objectification and cultural invisibility, and they also resist academic reification and mainstream, hegemonic, white feminist discourse (Rose, 1994, p. 126).

These arguments suggest that African American women articulate a feminist sensibility through their music videos. As Roberts noted in Emerson (2002), Missy “Misdemeanor” Elliot, Da Brat, and other African American women artists’ assertive rhetoric, aggressive sexuality, and defiant stance are evidence of a feminist consciousness. However, the tough posture exuberated by these women artists were a major reason why they were beginning to be accused of not writing their own rhymes and sold such low, relatively non-profitable numbers. Even if they reinvented themselves from baggy clothes to skin tight garments, they made substantially less than male artists with comparable sales (Jhally, 1995; Light, 1999). With the core rap
audience being male, they were not ready, and still remain unwilling to take women rappers seriously and give them their full respect (Sullivan, 2003; Powell, 2003).

How These Portrayals Are Problematic

Light affirms that the image of the MC (Master of Ceremony), one of power over money, sex, and the streets, is by its very nature it is unwomanly (1999). Moreover, in a lot of rap lyrics and videos, women are discussed as less valuable than drugs (Kitwana, 2002). On Jay-Z's multi-platinum hit “Money, Cash, Hoes” (1998), from the Volume 2: Hard Knock Life Album, he quotes, “Sex murder and mayhem romance for the street-Only wife of mines is a life of crime.” From there, roles are assigned, transmitted and reinforced by way of the culture and embraced by young people all over the globe (Powell, 2003).

As a result, many hip-hop generationers began to not only look at rap music as entertainment, but a way of life. Kitwana asserts,

“In the 1980’s and 1990’s, many hip-hop generationers quickly realized that a forty hour a week, minimum wage job wouldn’t meet their basic needs. That is why being a rap star or athlete is more realistic than becoming a doctor or lawyer in the black community. Since entertainers are easily accessible through television and respected, that is who many inner-city kids pattern their lives around (2002, p. 146).

Today, more and more African American youths are turning to hip-hop music and tuning in to hip-hop music videos. Unlike their White counterparts, who claim to listen to hip-hop music because it has a “good beat,” African Americans were more likely to say that they listened to hip-hop music because it was truthful and teaches
them about life (Sullivan, 2003). It can be argued that they learn more from videos and rap songs then they are learning from schools (D & Jah, 1997). According to Emerson (2002), recent ethnographic studies of African American youth have demonstrated the importance and impact that hip-hop culture has on the ways in which African Americans make sense of their lives and social surroundings. Youth are going right from school to their homes to watch videos (D & Jah, 1997; Rose & Ross 1994). That can be observed today, by the increase in hip-hop music video shows aired on BET such as 106 & Park, BET.com, Rap City Tha Bassment and specific networks whose primary function is the airing of music videos such as MTV2 (formerly known as The Box), as well as the increase of popular video games featuring mainstream hip-hop artists and their music.

Those programs have a major influence on teen-agers and young adults that are in the process of finding themselves by way of the hip-hop culture (Kitwana, 2002). Video games such as Def Jam Vendetta (2004) and Def Jam’s Fight for New York (2004) are popular video games that are made for and primarily purchased by young men and adult males alike in the hip-hop community. These games have current rap icons such as Ludacris, Lil Flip and DMX serving as dominant opponents. Video games themed after this popular culture not only serve as a marketing tool for these top selling video games, but also portray the women that are featured as girlfriends to be groupies and sex partners to the contenders. Female characters, such as Lil Kim, can be seen wearing lingerie type apparel and with their breasts protruding through their shirts. The winners of these video game fighting bouts not
only win the match, but also receive bonus points for winning the hearts of multiple women. The polygamous attitudes being reinforced by video games are not only unhealthy for the portrayal of African American women, but all women in general. As the title ‘pimp’ is indirectly reinforced and embraced by rappers and quoted in their lyrics, individuals that support these attitudes are upholding the fact that it is okay for women to be classified as ‘hoes’ (Kitwana, 2002).

This pimp mentality is establishing that women’s primary purpose is for sex and entertainment (Powell, 2003). A firm indication of this mentality is the smooth transition of hip-hop into the adult entertainment industry. This can be witnessed when viewing the soft porn images of rap music videos and XXX hip-hop videos such as Doggystyle (a Snoop Dogg/Larry Flynt joint venture) to emerging magazines like King and Black Gold that blur the lines between pornography and hip-hop (Kitwana, 2002). As a result, male rappers are looked upon as ‘Messiahs’ to young African American youth, while the condescending treatment of African American females continues to increase.

This type of pornography has racist overtones against Black women (Tong, 1998). Hooks asserts that the Black body has always been associated with a hyper-sexuality, and as a result of that, African American women are reduced to a mere spectacle (hooks, 1992). This is why the objectification of women prevails in everything, especially the hip-hop culture. This has certainly contributed to the throwaway mentality that some young African American men have concerning their female peers (Kitwana, 2002). According to Brooks, this objectification is related to
At the centerfold syndrome. Men observe women; therefore, women are the objects and men are the objectifiers (Brooks, 1995). That implies that men have the right to look at women as visual stimulators and the women must accept that role and carry it out.

Black women are not only depicted as objects, but they are depicted as animals, needing to be tamed (Tong, 1998). "While time has softened the glaringly crude projections of African Americans in the popular press, the mainstream view of African Americans is still warped by years of persistently negative portrayals" (Newkirk, 2000, p.36; hooks, 1981). Although the hip-hop genre and the music videos that are used to promote records and performers have been harshly criticized for the anti-black woman messages and images contained within them, the explosion of sexually explicit expression by Black female performers may represent the music industry’s profiting from long standing sexual ideas about Black women (Emerson, 2002; Rose, 2002). A telling indication of the wide acceptance of these views among African American women is the success of sexually explicit artists such as Lil Kim, Trina, and Foxy Brown (taking her stage name from a 1970’s blaxploitation flick), and the many young women who identify with these women as role models (Shapiro, 2001). Lil Kim’s album *Hardcore* (1996), which features her in sexually suggestive positions, went platinum and helped usher in the age of the self-proclaimed ‘hip-hop bitch’ (Shapiro, 2001). As Good in Light (1999) states, “She openly speaks raunchily about having sex and getting paid for it” (p. 375), and has paved the way for new and upcoming artists to follow in her footsteps.
According to Dyson, rap lyrics and videos are permeated by the emblems of sexual addiction because a sexist sentiment pervades a lot of rap music (1993). The primary role of black women in male hip-hop videos is to be an exotic plaything or a strip club dancer (Rose, 2002). This is not a positive portrayal because patrons of strip clubs view women as sexual objects and re-inscribe female bodies in very sexist pornographic imagery (Kitwana, 2002; hooks, 1992) that exudes what Karenga describes as the flesh connection. The flesh connection grows from the pornographic characteristics of society when women become exploited in the pursuit of sexual gratification (Karenga, 1993). Although having sexual relations are inevitable and essential to the procreation of human life, it is degrading when it represents depersonalized sexual exchanges absent or nearly absent of mutual respect (Tong, 1998). This also proves to be problematic because hip-hop artists have constructed their entire careers around some women’s willingness to trade loveless sex for material gain as a top priority for “hooking up” or engaging in non-love related intimacy (Kitwana, 2002), what Karenga defines as the cash connection or commodification (Karenga, 1993).

Since a commodity is a good being sold on the capitalistic market in exchange for some type of compensation, the correlation serves as a very accurate description of the commercial relationships between many of African American men and women. After a woman has been transformed into a commodity, reduced to parts of her body and physically or ideologically whipped into compliance, she can only become
dependent or develop a dependency connection towards her oppressor (Karenga, 1993).

When female bodies are turned into commodities, the women, in turn, are seen as Jezebels. The Jezebel is a stereotypical image that feeds into the hyperactive sexuality myth of black women (hooks, 2004). She is defined by using her excessive, exotic, and unbridled sexuality to get attention, love, and material goods (Rose, 2002; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). In today’s terminology, Jezebels are referred to as tricks, chicken heads, gold diggers, hood rats, tip-drills, hoes, scally-wags, skanks, pigeons, and broads (Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Kitwana, 2002). The way the hip-hop generation refers to each other illuminates gender antagonism, and it is evident in their hostile tones which rarely convey a sense of affection or camaraderie (Kitwana, 2002). The use of negative words when referring to one another or “Calling individuals outside of their name,” which means calling someone a derogatory name instead of their legal name, is considered commonplace (Rose & Ross 1994; Powell, 2003). Rap pioneer Queen Latifah asserted in her Grammy winning song *U. N. I. T. Y (Who You Calling a Bitch)* from her CD titled *Black Reign* (1993) that she did not agree with the negative connotations given to women and that she would not accept them. She stated, “You got to let him know, you ain’t a bitch or a ho.”

But today, this slanderous vocabulary has increased and has become second nature. Women have demonstrated immunity to this verbal mistreatment by going so far as to say “If they (women) act like one (a bitch), they should be checked (a slang term for put in their place)” (Kitwana, 2002, p. 86). This constant reference to women
only reinforces the perverted expression of male dominance, patriarchy and reasserts the stereotyping of women as sexual objects intended exclusively for male pleasure (Dyson, 1993). While this may be looked upon as a mere form of entertainment, using black females as ‘vide-hoes’ (video + hoes) mirrors ancient stereotypes of black sexual identity dating back to slavery.

The reduction to a mere spectacle is demonstrated in recent hip-hop videos where scantily clad women parade around the screen regardless if the song has a sexual theme or not. The rump shaking African American women in these videos serve as stage props that are synonymous with hip-hop music (Kitwana, 2002). She [the African American woman] is not looked at as a whole human being, because she is only noticed for certain body parts (hooks, 1992), and the brain is not one of them.

Bombarded with images representing black female bodies as expendable, black women have either passively absorbed this thinking or vehemently resisted it. Popular culture provides countless examples of black female appropriation and exploitation of “negative stereotypes” to either assert control over the representation or at least reap the benefits of it (hooks, 1992, p. 65).

Gilbert and Taylor argue in Hurley (1994) that gender ideologies are vital in the construction of subjectivity because they legitimize the idea that there are appropriate female thoughts and behaviors which correspond to one’s biological femaleness. One way a woman’s femininity is judged is by the presence of tight and revealing clothing. If a woman’s apparel is loose fitting, she is considered tomboyish, non-sexy, less than a woman or even a lesbian. Critics have pointed out that many discourses in hip-hop culture reproduce dominant and distorted ideologies of women’s sexuality, especially those of African American women (Emerson, 2002).
Many critics argue that since hip-hop is often the only means by which many White Americans come into contact with black life, its pornographic representations and brutal stereotypes of Black culture are especially harmful (Dyson, 1996). If African American women are portrayed to be or act a certain way on television, it may be assumed this is a representation of African American women as a whole. The unbalanced portrayals of Black women in the media help create the global impression that they are over sexed (D & Jah, 1997).

Hip-Hop and HIV

Hyper-sexuality is another major concern in the hip-hop community. “Although statistics from the United States Census Bureau show that Black women disproportionately outnumber Black men, hip-hop videos really over-exaggerate this reality, because for every one male, there is well over more than one female” (Kitwana, 2002, p. 109). This imbalance in gender ratio in the Black community is further exploited by the overwhelming popularity of songs by artists that boast about having polygamous sex devoid of intimacy. In 50 Cent’s hit single In Da Club he quotes,

You can find me in the club, bottle full of bub
Look mami I got the X (ecstasy) if you into taking drugs
I’m into having sex, I ain’t into making love
So come give me a hug if you into getting rubbed.

These nymphomaniac attitudes have not remained just on television but have migrated into the sexual lives of the viewers (Jhally, 1995). Being promiscuous, especially with an assortment of partners is not only practiced in these videos, but
also encouraged. However, there are severe consequences that accompany these behaviors.

Human Immune Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), once considered diseases that struck primarily gay white men, fast became a disease of young African American heterosexuals (Hunter, Kalichman, Kelly, Murphy & Tyler, 1993). Although African Americans make up only 11% of the United States population, they comprise over 50% of the annual new infections (Centers for Disease Control, 2005). In 2003, black men had the highest rate of new HIV diagnoses (103 cases per 100,000 population) of any racial or ethnic population. In 2003, the rate of HIV/AIDS was 18 times greater among black women than among non-Hispanic white women (Centers for Disease Control, 2005). Currently AIDS is the leading cause of death for Black men and Black women between the ages of 25-44 and at least 50% of newly reported cases contracted the disease by sexual activity and are under 25 years of age (Kitwana, 2002, p. 78).

In 1997, BET and The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, a non-profit foundation dedicated to providing information and analysis on health issues, teamed up to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS. This collaborative effort titled Rap It Up, designed to educate and encourage African Americans to get tested, is known to be one of the largest public education efforts geared towards the Black community. Although this campaign claims to spark disease awareness, the messages in a lot of popular videos shown on BET that imply 'having spontaneous sex with multiple people is okay' negates the effort. These mixed messages are part of the problem of
why the hip-hop generation is faced with the dilemma of how to treat themselves and those of the opposite sex.

Sexist Ideologies

Since hip-hop music videos are a dominant driving force for the emerging hip-hop generation, they play a crucial role in influencing and reinforcing the thinking of their spectators. The objectification of women has become more chronic among the hip-hop generation because they not only watch patriarchal and oppressive views towards women in mass media, but they also swear and live by them (Kitwana, 2002). As a result, many hip-hop generationers have adopted the anti-Black woman attitudes espoused in many rap songs. Capitalizing on degrading styles that portray overt sexuality helps to reinforce the ideology of African American women’s sexuality as deviant and illicit while reaffirming patriarchy (Aldridge, 1991; hooks, 1981).

A critical point that must be raised is that the hip-hop generation did not invent sexism, but it is a symptom of American culture (Rose & Ross, 1994). Women continue to struggle for equality in the workplace as well as at their places of worship because according to most feminist theory, it is the very thread that holds this country together (Tong, 1998). Russell Simmons states, “There is no question that the sexism in hip-hop videos is a reflection of how sexist men are in the world today” (Byrd & Solomon, 2005, p. 83). A major indication of this can be observed when the constitution had to be amended in order for women to be treated as equal
citizens and allowed the right to vote. Although giving women the right to vote served as a milestone for the progression of women’s rights, sexist ideas were constantly being reinforced by the religion that many hold sacred and uncontested.

This ideology is extremely prevalent in Judeo Christianity; the most openly practiced and accepted religion in America. Judeo Christian Ethics help breed cynicism between men and women, especially those of African American descent (Aldridge, 1991). As Powell quotes in Kitwana (2002), “Patriarchy, as manifested in hip-hop, is where we (men) can have our version of power within this very oppressive society” (p. 95). While hip-hop is not any more sexist or misogynist than other forms of American culture, it is the most explicit and criticized form of misogyny around today (Powell, 2003).

Male and female artists alike, as well as corporate America, are reaping the harvest that was planted by hip-hop pioneers. Observing the critical role hip-hop culture has taken in the lives of American youth, especially those of African American descent, is phenomenal. Noting the positive attributes of this culture, as well as the negative, this impact was undeniably inevitable. Observing the rapid progress of this movement, it must be stressed that the way African Americans, especially women, are portrayed is not by accident, but strategically reinforced.

Utilizing George Gerbner’s cultivation theory in conjunction with Albert Bandura’s social learning theory, I will not only discuss how watching television may influence the perception of reality, but how associating with like-minded peers may reinforce our attitudes towards women in hip-hop.
CHAPTER III
THEORY

In this chapter, I identify my theoretical perspective. I strongly consider the utilization of Gerbner's work on cultivation theory and briefly conclude with Bandura's work on social learning theories.

Cultivation Theory

Believing that "heavy exposure to cultural imagery will shape a viewer's concept of reality," Gerbner states, "The television set has become a key member of the family, the one who tells most of the stories most of the time" (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 176-184). From that hypothesis, Gerbner and associates came up with the cultivation theory (sometimes referred to as the cultivation hypothesis or cultivation analysis), a theory suggesting that media teaches us about American values as well as myths (Vincent, 1989). This theory argues that television has long term effects which are gradual and indirect, but cumulative and significant.

Cultivation theorists are best known for their study of television, its impact on viewers, and in particular for their focus on violence. However, other research grounded in cultivation theory looks at the mass media as a socializing agent and investigates whether television viewers experience a mainstreaming effect, which is when television viewers come to believe the television's depiction of reality the more they watch it. This is a central conclusion of Cultivation theorists. Although best
known for their studies pertaining to television violence, other studies have considered this theory relevant when dealing with topics such as gender roles, ethnic groups and age groups. This position is consistent with previous research which suggests—at least indirectly—that television music networks are major socializing agents among adolescents (Wilson, 1992). Furthermore, studies have also shown that television, particularly entertainment programming, is the most important source of information and socialization for African American adolescents (Stephens & Phillips, 2003).

While watching television is considered enjoyable and entertaining, it has been found that when comparing by race, African Americans spend the greatest amount of time watching television, hip-hop videos in particular (Sullivan, 2003). Chuck D of the rap group Public Enemy, rationally defended that statement by describing rap music as the ‘Black CNN’ (Kitwana, 2002), because that is where a lot of adolescents and young adults turn for information. That is to say, the way in which videos portray women is apt to capture the attention of even the occasional viewer (Wilson, 1992).

In a lot of rap videos, women are viewed as passive, yet sexually aggressive, and willing to be utilized at will. These informative outlets exhibit women enjoying being stared at, groped, and squeezed by random individuals (Jhally, 1995). If a woman does not comply with the actions of the male or fit the mold of her assigned gender role, she is considered abnormal. From there, young women learn what is
expected in order to be considered feminine, and young men learn how to perceive them.

Due to those consequences, Gerbner views the television not as a reflection of the world, but a world in itself (McQuail & Windahl, 1993). In contrast, that was not always the case with hip-hop. During hip-hop’s inception, its focus was to tell the autobiography of the realities of everyday life in the ghetto, meaning the artist’s life shaped the music. Today, that is not totally the case. Cultivation theory accurately predicts the actions of current hip-hop followers are being influenced by the mainstream messages of the music.

Although this theory emphasizes the importance of mediation on the symbolic function of television in its cultural context, it has also been criticized for over simplification. It is considered to be subjective because it is based solely on television viewing. Cultivation theory tend to underplay the point that heavy and light viewers do vary in other ways in addition to their television viewing habits such as age, sex and education. These theorists ignore the importance of the social dynamics of the television use. When the viewer has some direct or indirect lived experience of the subject matter, this may reduce the cultivation effect. In addition, McQuail states, “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” (Boyd-Barrett & Braham, 1987, pp. 99-100). In short, our attitudes are likely to be influenced not only by television, but also by experience and interaction with other people.
Social Learning Theory

According to Albert Bandura’s social learning theory, human behavior is explained in the terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral and environmental influences (Vincent, Davis, & Boruskowski, 1987). Bandura emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors (behavior modeling), attitudes and emotional reaction of others (Bandura, 1977). It considers that people learn from one another. Therefore, people are products of what they are exposed to.

Since young people tend to hang around peers that share the same interests and hobbies, this constant interaction reinforces assumptions and attitudes. For example, athletes tend to hang around other athletes just as lesbians and homosexuals tend to share a stronger bond with others who have similar sexualities. As a result, Jhally asserts that the combination of assumptions and attitudes promote and reaffirms certain behaviors (1995).

These theories help frame my research because they propose that exposure to sex-role and other societal stereotypes found in mass media in conjunction with being affiliated with like minded associates, will help foster the development of comparable attitudes and behaviors (Vincent, 1989). In essence, a lot of rap music videos supposedly tell what it means to be young and Black. Likewise, the more these youths are exposed to the lifestyles that are exemplified within rap lyrics, and to peer groups that embrace the lifestyles exemplified through this culture, the more young people will identify and conform to them in their personal environment.
In turn, by Black women being portrayed a certain way within this culture's videos, and her oppression is being systematized and structured from an ideological dimension. These freedom restricting, set of controlling images are placed on Black women. Tragically, those images and beliefs that are embedded in African American youth at a young age serve to justify the mistreatment of black women (Tong, 1998; Jhally, 1995). From this dominant ideology it is obvious that the line between fantasy and reality blurred. Using the work of Vincent (1989) and Vincent, Davis and Boruskowski (1987), it is the goal of this study to empirically test that hypothesis.
CHAPTER IV

METHODS

The purpose of the present study is to examine the portrayal of women in music video portrayals. To guide this study based on cultivation and social learning theories, a series of research questions were created: 1) How are African American women portrayed in hip-hop videos? 2) Does the sex of the main performing artist(s) influence the amount of sexism in the video? 3) Is there a correlation between the presence of women wearing alluring apparel and sexism? 4) And, is there a link between sexism and the intimate touch between men and women in the video sample? Finally, I discuss the criteria used in selecting the sample videos.

Introduction

Although I am not using human subjects to conduct my research, an awareness of ethical considerations must be maintained. Readers may get the wrong idea and conclude that all hip-hop videos portray women in a negative light. This research was not designed for that purpose. Robin Roberts states in Emerson (2002) that many contemporary female hip-hop artists such as Lauryn Hill, Jill Scott, Queen Latifah, and Erica Badu promote a positive feminist consciousness. Many male artists such as Common (formerly known as Common Sense), Mos Def, and Talib Kweli also do not promote negative images of their female counter-parts. Instead,
this research identifies videos that do and identifies those responsible for this portrayal.

Secondly, I want to reaffirm the fact that African American women are not the only women being exploited and that the notion of exploitation is not new. Many women of all races are facing similar problems like this around the world. Vincent’s (1989) and Vincent, Davis and Boruszkowski’s (1987) studies demonstrated this when they studied the portrayal of women in rock videos during the early 1980’s. This study alone shows that during various time periods, various groups of women have been portrayed in a sexist fashion (Jhally, 1995).

Lastly, this study does not necessarily reflect the personal positions of the artists. Realizing that the music industry is a business, the artists must not only produce good music, but sell their music to a broad consumer base. This study is not to purposely isolate and condemn the artists, nor the record companies, but to simply identify a relation between the level of sexism and the sex of the main artists, while observing intimate touch and alluring apparel.

Keeping in mind that no research is flawless, I have documented some problems that I have encountered while conducting my research. First, the only videos included in the sample were aired on the BET network. That network airs the most hip-hop videos because they cater exclusively to a more predominantly African American hip hop audience more than other networks such as VH1, MTV and MTV2. Those other networks may play different hip-hop videos or a more diverse
selection of videos that could prove to be more or less sexist than BET. That fact alone could alter my findings significantly.

Second, I recorded the videos every Friday afternoon during the summer break for school aged adolescents. Consequently, I limited the videos to those reviewed before or after that time period. Since the same popular videos usually may be in constant rotation, I only get to sample select ones. The levels of sexism may in rease or decrease before or after my study.

Third, different trends may cause an increase or decrease of sexism in hip-hop videos. When Vincent re-examined the portrayal of women in rock videos, he noticed that an increase in public awareness changed the study he had done 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). The 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 the videos rated level one (level one displaying the highest amount of sexism), and a 173% increase in the videos rated a level four (level four displaying the least amount of sexism). If I conduct research during a time period that may experience some kind of change, my findings may not be a true representation of typical hip-hop videos.

Next, it may be difficult to accurately label equally sexist videos according to the sexism scale. Although a video may be labeled the same as another, the scale does not measure the frequency of sexism. Jay-Z’s video 99 problems (2004) was
totally free of sexism until the very end when an instance of a woman was shown in a bikini squeezing a soapy sponge on her body. That one specific scene classified that video as ‘Level I” in addition to making alluring apparel present. However, videos with multiple images of sexism and women dressed very provocatively such as Jay-Z’s video featuring UGK titled *Big Pimpin* (2000), is be coded as a Level I as well.

Lastly, I may have missed an instance of sexism due to the fact the hip-hop show did not play the video in its entirety. In comparison to other networks, BET omits a lot of footage from its video programming. They may begin a video from the middle and not play it for its duration. An example is in Lil Scrappy’s video *No Problem* (2004); I almost omitted an important instance of sexism at the very beginning as the network subtracted a couple of seconds from that video. That alone could have changed that specific video from being classified as a Level I to a non-sexist Level IV.

**Typology Used For Study**

I gathered my information by conducting a content analysis using a convenience technique. My unit of analysis is the actual (three- to five-minute) music video, which consists of 52 hip-hop music videos that feature African American women and men performers. My method is based on Vincent (1989) and Vincent, Davis and Boruskowski’s (1987) qualitative analysis of music videos. This study is considered qualitative because although I am tallying the videos, I am placing them in empirically derived thematic categories.
Data Analysis

My first independent variable is the sex of the main performing artist. This measure was used to differentiate rock and roll videos on MTV (Vincent, 1989). I determined the sex of the artist based on obvious characteristics such as their dress, physical body parts, and names. It is important to document the sex of the artists because it reveals if there is an obvious difference in the way African American women portray themselves in hip-hop videos, versus the way African American men portray them. Documenting the sex of the artist also puts into perspective the ratio of women hip-hop videos being aired in comparison to male videos.

Unlike the studies of Vincent (1989) and Vincent, Davis and Boruszkowski (1987) that only divided the videos into two main categories, ‘All Male’ and ‘All Female/Mixed’, I divided the videos into five distinctively separate categories titled ‘Female Artists,’ ‘Male Artists,’ ‘Mixed Artists,’ ‘Female Artist with a guest male artists’ and ‘Male Artist with a guest female artist.’ I separated the categories because I wanted to see if having an artist of the opposite sex in videos reduced or increased the likelihood of them having a high level of sexism. This provided specific findings such as whether women’s videos are more or less sexist with or without their male counterparts and vice versa. Leaving the groups combined does not expose this type of important data.

Next, I measured the dress of the women in hip-hop videos, since sexual iconography plays a major role in the analysis of gender subjectivity. Hurley defines sexual iconography as the exposure of breasts, buttocks, lingerie, bikinis, mini-skirts
and sexually suggestive expressions and the caressing of their body parts (Hurley, 1994). Vincent measured sexual iconography in two primary categories: 1) Intimate Touch: Individuals that are touching themselves or each other in an intimate manner. 2) Alluring Apparel: Apparel such as the kind described above that is the wardrobe for the women participating in that video. These categories are measured by either being absent (A) or present (P).

My dependent variable is the level of sexism in hip-hop music videos. I used a heuristic model of classification by Pingree, Hawkins, Butler, and Paisley's called the scale of sexism, which was originally designed to test for sexism in print advertisements (Vincent, Davis, & Boruszkowski, 1987). This scale was able to be converted so easily because just like advertisements, videos use high amounts of sexual imagery (Jhally, 1995). As a result, this specific scale was modified by Vincent, Davis and Boruszkowski (1987) to measure sexism in rock videos. Since this scale was proven valid and reliable in both studies, it is a reliable source for my research as well. Another coder of the opposite sex and 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 the least amount of sexism. I placed each of the videos into one of the four sexism categories; yet, it should be noted that the categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive nor exhaustive (Wilson, 1992). If a video is coded for more than one level, the highest level was used to determine its classification. The four item-ordinal scale that measures how women are portrayed is employed here:
Level I: “Condescending.” The woman is portrayed as being less than a person, a two-dimensional image. This characterization includes the “dumb blond,” the sex object and the whimpering victim. It can 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.

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 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 with certain skills is placed in a situation where she must teach a man something but then eases up before she embarrasses him. A woman fantasizes that she can act assertively/aggressively to men but in actuality finds that she cannot.

Level IV: “Fully Equal.” Treated as a person (possibly a professional) with no mention of her private life. Does not remind us that domesticity and nurturance are non-negotiable and are considered the woman’s work as well. Women are viewed as non-stereotypically (Vincent, 1989, p.156-157; Vincent, Davis, Boruszkowski, 1987, p. 752).

Videos Selected For Sample

The videos were taped daily during a thirteen week period throughout the summer of 2004 from the broadcast programming of the predominantly black cable network BET. The sample included those current videos on the television show 106 & Park, Rap City, The Bassment, and BET.com Countdown. I narrowed my sample
to this network because they centralize their programming at this specific time around hip-hop, thus, airing the most hip-hop videos.

I am using a convenience sample because I was allotted a limited amount of time to record videos. Therefore, the 56 cases I selected were based on their availability for this study. According to Wilson, “There is little turnover each week in the countdown. There were generally only two or three new videos added to the countdown as debuts each week” (1998, p.27). I found that to be true in my study as well. She recorded videos on a daily basis for twelve weeks, and only achieved 30 videos after stratifying her raw sample of 49 videos. Although I am not exclusively targeting countdown shows, the same popular videos that are played on shows I selected are quite monotonous.

Broadcast outlets strategically target music video programming and recording companies toward a youth market; therefore, the scheduling of music videos would reflect the viewing patterns of adolescents and young adults in the target age range (Emerson, 2002). The times I recorded videos were after school, before or after work and late afternoon between 3:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m., so I was be able to tape during times of day that have most shows that air hip-hop videos.

I eliminated all videos recorded earlier than the year 2000 such as Method Man and Redman’s Da Rockwild, for two primary reasons. If I did not exclusively use the most recent videos (which may be determined by a video count down, videos being aired on a repetitive basis on video request shows, or videos dated before 2000), my sample would be too large or may not represent the portrayal of African
American women in videos today. Using older videos could taint my findings severely, as in the case of Vincent’s revisited study (1989). In that study it was observed that the content of videos may change during a short time span. For that reason, studying current hip-hop videos proves to be sufficient for this study.

I also eliminated videos classified as rhythm and blues and Reggae Dancehall. Although Beanie Man’s video King of Dancehall and Kevin Lyttle’s Turn Me On are aired on hip-hop television programming, and embraced by the hip-hop generation, they do not qualify as hip-hop videos because they are not classified as rap and can not be clearly linked to the hip-hop cultural movement. After subtracting the above videos, 52 videos remained for analysis and constitute my sample.

From there, I individually coded all 52 videos into SPSS and distinctly categorized them into seven categories: artist, title of song, record label, sexism classification, intimate touch, alluring apparel, sex of main artist. I used the name of the artists, title of song, and record label as it was displayed on the opening credits of the video. Since the Record label was available, and it may hold some type of significance, it would be a logical idea to document it. I coded the sexism classification, intimate touch, and alluring apparel as described previously. In the case of sex of artists, I observed obvious feminine and masculine characteristics to decipher males from females and identified them according to their various titles. After the task of coding was complete and verified, I used SPSS to cross tabulate each variable with one another to produce chi-square tables, values and significance levels.
After all of my data was accurately coded, and analyzed, I carefully examined the findings.
CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I analyze my data using Chi-Square analysis while being guided by the work of Vincent (1989) and Vincent, Davis and Boruszkowski (1987). From there, I determine how African American women are portrayed in my sample by identifying the presence of the four levels of sexism and analyze who perpetuates the negative portrayals. This analysis leads toward a discussion of values in the chapter which follows. In addition to categorizing the fifty-two videos by the sexism scale, the videos are also categorized by the sex of the main performing artists, the presence of intimate touch and alluring apparel. My analysis of the data show how those categorizations relate to the sample. Next, I discuss the way each category relates to the data.

Sex of Main Artist(s)

The first observation extracted from my data is that out of all my sample videos, none of them are from sole female artists. According to Table I (See Tables), 1.92% of the sample is by a female artist featuring a male artist. That specific video was shot for the song Goodies by Ciarra featuring Peety Pablo. The next category is the male featuring a female artist with 5.77% of the sample fitting into this category. Those videos are Lean Back by Terror Squad featuring Fat Joe and Remy, Jimmy Choo by Shyne featuring Ashanti, and Sunshine by Lil Flip featuring Lea. Mixed
artists groups such as Crime Mob, a group of teenagers, represent two percent of the sample with *Knuck if you Buck*. With all categories combined, only 9.62% of my sample possessed a female artist. The most frequently occurring category in terms of sex of artist is male. Videos by male artists compose well over 90% of my sample, with artists Like Ludacris, Jay-Z, and Nelly having multiple videos being represented.

Although there was not a strong representation of other classifications outside of male, it is still necessary to report the chi-square value. According to the chi-square analysis, there appears to be a relationship between level of sexism and the sex of artist. In terms of the data pertaining to this specific study, male artists appear to produce more sexist videos than females.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexism Coding</th>
<th>Sex of Artist</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mixed Artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condescending</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep her place</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contradictory</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully equal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ X^2 = 19.922, \text{ d.f.} = 9, p = .018 \]

Table I: Level of Sexism by Sex of Artist

Levels of Sexism

In the terms of the sexism scale, the data from those videos show that 55.8% of the observations were rated Level I: “Put Her Down” on the sexism scale. The actions in those videos includes acts of overtly gazing at women’s body parts, a disproportionate amount of women to men, women standing around or ‘posing’ by
the rapper, and women gesturing that they are in need of sexual attention by licking their lips and staring seductively into the camera. In addition, the men are gawking at women’s buttocks at close range while the women gyrate in a sexually provocative manner as some of the lyrics to the song blatantly insinuate having sex, that included the rap group 213’s video for their song *Groupie Luv*. Here, girls that are considered undesirable (overweight, thick glasses, bad teeth) are shown literally chasing men that are obviously not attracted to them and beating up the so called ‘pretty girls.’ Towards the end, the undesirable women take off their costumes and are transformed into more attractive (long hair, thin, revealing clothes) women that the men want to be with. At the conclusion of the video, the women (or groupies) and the men got together. Another instance is in B.Gizzle’s (B.G.) video titled *If I Want It*. During one scene, a naked woman is lying in bed pleading with B.G. to come to her, implying she wants sex. He refuses her advances by waving her off with a very emotionless look; tells her ‘No’ as he grab a briefcase of money and walk out the door. The last instance is in Nelly’s video titled *Flap Your Wings*. Here, scantily clad women are performing a sexually suggestive dance to the chorus, “Drop down and get your eagle on girl.” The term ‘Eagle’ comes from the sexual term ‘spread eagle’ that refers to opening up the legs wide, bending over and assuming the position for anal or vaginal penetration from the rear (Farlex, Inc., 2005).

**An important finding that I observed while randomly watching other video shows on BET is that some of the videos shown during primetime hours are also played after hours (approximately 2:00am-3:00am) on the late night video show**
*Uncut.* This program features “R” rated and lightly censored hip-hop music videos that require a disclaimer to be displayed after each commercial break. The disclaimer read, “This program is for mature audiences only. It contains material which some viewers may find objectionable or inappropriate for viewing by children under the age of 17. Viewer discretion is advised.” Therefore, it comes as no surprise that all of the videos in my sample that matched the ones shown on *Uncut* indisputably received a Level I classification.

The next category with the highest amount of videos was found at Level IV: “Fully Equal” (32.7%). From my findings, I was surprised to see as many videos classified as Type IV’s. From the small representation of videos that have female artists as the primary artist, all of them fit into this category, while only 26.92% of videos by sole male artists are represented here. These videos displayed women and men walking down the street together, standing together and separate scenes of individuals going about life in a non-sexist manner. In Ludacris’s video, *Southern Fried/Blow it Out your Ass*, non-sexists shots of males and females lip-synching and dancing were dominant throughout the video. In Kanye West’s video *All Falls Down*, featuring a female co-star, the primary theme of that video was the female running throughout the airport to catch a plane while West chased after her.

As I performed a more in-depth analysis of Level IV videos, I found that it is important to note that a lot of videos that were classified non-sexist according to the scale, scarcely represented women. Ludacris’s song *Diamond in the Back* showed women as ‘extras’ who were present only to fill space. They were not allotted
enough time for a representation to be discerned. Here, he was driving an old car around the neighborhood and incorporated young children that were imitating him and his friends when they were growing up. Next, 8ball and MJG’s video, You Don’t Want Drama and Yung Wun’s Tear it Up, show women in the same light as the previously mentioned video. However, the primary theme of these videos contained people jumping around slam dancing (bumping into one another purposely), scenes of rappers posing by luxury cars, fraternities and sororities, and marching bands. Political awareness was also a topic that is addressed on this level. In Jadakiss’s video Why, he is followed by a mixed group of men and women as he walks down the street and talks about politics and questions a lot of controversial subjects such as wasting money on material goods verses saving and why the program that allowed inmates to receive a degree in prison have been taken away. But just like the previously mentioned videos, this video does not contain a representation of women. That begs the question, “Are these videos labeled non-sexist because women are not in them or highlighted” and “If women were highlighted, would it be in a sexist manner?” According to the data, it could be assumed they would.

The next level is Level II: “Keep Her Place” representing (7.7%) of the sample. Although sexism may not be as high on this level, there is still a strong presence found here. Shyne’s video Jimmy Choo falls into this category. Since he is currently incarcerated, this video portrays him being away and his girl friend (Ashanti) is constantly caressing her body while she thinks about him, looks at his pictures, and looks at video tapes of him. Another instance of Level II sexism is
found in Sum Village’s video *Selfish*. Here, all kinds of women wearing tight and revealing clothes are responding to a casting call. At the casting call, the women are willing to do whatever it takes to gain the interest of the guys judging them.

Finally, there is the Level III: “Traditional Role or Two Places” type videos which represent 3.8% of my sample. In these videos, women were literally abandoning friends and other primary obligations to be with a man at any cost; but they also demonstrate the ability to function in real life situations. In the video *My Place* by Nelly, he is trying to persuade a woman that he is not in a relationship with to go home with him and have sex. Although she appears to decline his offer, it appears that she finally succumbs to his invitation. The final representation of this category is Lil Romeo’s track *My Cinderella*. Although it does not show blatant signs of sexism, it portrays the young rapper trying to get with multiple girls and the girls forsaking what they were doing previously and giving in to his advances.

Alluring Apparel

As for alluring apparel, which consists of undergarments, highly seductive apparel and nudity, 69% of all the videos (Level I-IV) displayed this characteristic. A lot of videos possessed up close ‘body shots’ of women wearing revealing clothes that showed excessive cleavage and their buttocks which are only covered with a g-string. This type of photography involves the camera moving up and down women’s bodies at will while exploring every detail (Jhally, 1995). It is done to focus on specific body parts. In *White Tee* by Dem Franchise Boys, the camera was taking a
ground angle which consists of having the camera shoot the women from a ‘looking under your skirt view’. These views focused exclusively on body parts as if they are more important than the individual’s face. Not only do the videos highlight those areas, but they also do things to strategically draw attention to those target areas. In Guerilla Black’s video titled *Compton*, women wearing tight and revealing clothes are not only gyrating on men, but their bodies (breast in particular) are oiled up to make them appear sweaty and ‘hot’.

Bone Crusher’s video *Take Your Clothes Off*, fits in this category as well due to the fact that it shows half-naked women in bikinis and bikini tops. Ironically, the setting for the video was not near a swimming pool or beach. Another instance is in Mase’s video *Breathe, Stretch, Shake*, women are aggressively dancing and shaking in short tennis skirts and revealing tops. The data shows there is a relationship between high levels of sexism and the presence of alluring apparel ($X^2 = 40.402$, d.f. = 3, $p = .000$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexism Coding</th>
<th>Alluring Apparel Absent</th>
<th>Alluring Apparel Present</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Condescending</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep her place</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contradictory</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully equal</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2 = 40.402$, d.f. = 3, $p < .05$

Table II: Level of Sexism by Alluring Apparel

On the contrary, men in these videos were fully clothed. Silkk the Shocker’s video, *We Like Them Girls*, show men fully dressed while women are wearing
lingerie and tight fitting shirts, with one that read, ‘I love passion.’ Another example of this discrepancy is in Jay-Z’s *Big Pimpin* video. Unlike the other videos, this one actually takes place in a tropical climate by a swimming pool, therefore, justifying women walking around in bikinis. However, men had on jeans, multiple shirts, athletic jerseys and fur coats.

It is important to note that the higher the level of sexism, the more provocative the apparel became. For instance, in Terror Squad’s video which earned an undisputable classification of Level I, a woman was exposing her breasts by wearing a see through shirt. However, in the Level IV video *All Falls Down* by Kanye West, the clothing worn by the female was far less revealing. The absence of such provocative apparel appeared to be appropriate because the theme of the video is based on him taking his female companion to the airport while rapping about being self conscience. Eighty-one percent of the videos possessing alluring apparel were rated Level I on the sexism scale. Not one Level I video was free of the presence of alluring apparel. While on the contrary, 88% of the videos that did not contain alluring apparel were coded Level IV or “Fully Equal” on the sexism scale.

**Intimate Touch**

In regards to intimate touch, 52% of the videos displayed some type of contact such as hugging, kissing, contact while dancing, simple touching and self-caressing behaviors that appear to mimic masturbation. T.I.’s video *Let’s Get Away*, obviously demonstrates this by highlighting on women in bikinis and revealing clothing
grinding on various men, sucking on one another, groping themselves and each other, and feeding each other strawberries. In contrast, D-12’s video *How Come/Git Up* only had a couple of instances of a woman hugging multiple men. However, that action showed the presence of intimate touch. When examining how sexism relates to the presence of intimate touch, it was found that there is a significant relationship between them ($X^2 = 20.653$, 3 d.f., $p = .000$). The data also show a pattern of the higher the level of sexism, the more likely intimate touch would be present in the video. Of all videos that possessed intimate touch, 82% of them were rated Level I.

Examining how these variables relate to one another is very important. When it is broken down by the sex of the musician, my analysis shows that 97% of the videos classified as “Condescending” were by sole male artists. Terror Squad’s video *Lean Back* fits into the male featuring a female classification as well and helped complete the “Condescending” category. The male category and male featuring a female category made up the “Keep Her Place” level of sexism. In Lil Flip’s video *Sunshine*, he is on a musical tour doing a photo shoot. Disregarding the fact he has a significant other, women are constantly throwing themselves at him and giving him

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexism Coding</th>
<th>Intimate Touch</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condescending</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep her place</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contradictory</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully equal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Table III: Level of Sexism by Intimate Touch
their telephone numbers. Although this section was made up of only three videos, all of them represented men as primary artists. The Level III videos were exclusively composed of the male category. In addition, the Level IV videos included only 26.92% of male artists, but 100% of the videos by female artists. One-hundred percent of the mixed artist’s category is found here. In Crime Mob’s Level IV video, *Knuck if you Buck*, a violent song about fighting, no extreme sexism was detected.

When a cross tabulation was conducted between alluring apparel and intimate touch, data show that there is a significant relationship between the absence of alluring apparel and the absence of intimate touching. Moreover, there is a relationship between the presence of alluring apparel and the presence of intimate touch \( (X^2 = 14.389, \text{ d.f.} = 1, p < .05) \).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intimate Touch</th>
<th>Alluring Apparel</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IV: Intimate Touch by Alluring Apparel

**Video vs. Lyrics**

Because the focus of this study focuses on the way African American women are visually depicted, this lyrical depiction is especially an interesting finding. Due to the fact each video is a conglomerate of visuals, music, and lyrics; each one contains complex thematic content (Wilson, 1992). Upon analyzing the lyrics for further
indications of sexism, it is important to note that in some cases, sexual themes are prevalent throughout the videos even though the lyrical content of the songs had nothing to do with sex. In Young Buck’s song, *Let Me In*, women are dancing with one another in a sexually suggestive manner and women are gyrating on men while the men stand there. When the lyrics are carefully examined, the initial song is about the rapper gaining entry into a nightclub with a weapon (nine millimeter hand gun) and obtaining material goods.

In another instance, the song may not be focused on women nor is the video exclusively dedicated to them, but the chorus reflects something totally different than what the song illustrates. A way to get women into videos is to show them as a part of the storyline or song, but on numerous occasions the connection is not that clear (Jhally, 1995). The rapper Lil Wayne’s song *Bring it Back* also fits in this category. The lyrics to this song are talking about him being very successful. Suddenly, during the chorus that goes “Hands on your knees and bend your rump…,” the camera switched to a scene that showed women wearing short skirts and halter tops shaking their behinds to the beat. In Jay-Z’s video for *99 Problems*, he is being depicted as a man with multiple problems such as getting shot, murdered, and harassed by law enforcement officials. Although women do not make an appearance throughout the entire video, the hook states, “Having girl problems I feel bad for you son, 99 problems and a bitch ain’t one.”

Lastly, when coding the videos, I thought it would be interesting to note the record labels along with my data. It can only be assumed that record labels may
influence the amount of sexism in hip-hop videos. However, those findings proved to be insignificant and a relationship was not established. In the next chapter, I identify and elaborate on the findings which emerged from this chapter.
CHAPTER VI
DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss the findings and how they relate to the research questions. In conclusion, I also discuss ways to alleviate the negative portrayals, and the outcome if a solution is not found.

Sex of Main Artist(s)

Due to the fact my sample did not have an equal representation of women, I did not have much variety in determining how female artists portrayed themselves in comparison to males. However, the absence of a representation by female artists was a very significant finding. Some valid explanations may be that females are not currently producing music videos at the same rate as men, there are currently far fewer female hip-hop artists, or females are not producing the types of videos that make the video request and video count down shows. An underlying reality may be that females are not being respected as rap artists because ‘hip-hop’ is considered to be for men. Consequently, we can conclude that there is a difference in the way males and females present sex-role stereotypes in hip-hop videos. When females are featured as co-artists in videos, it appears that the level of sexism decreases. Only one video was by a female artist, but she was accompanied by a male artist. That fact alone raises the question, “If the male artist wasn’t in the video, would that video have received the same amount of heavy rotation?”
There could be a subconscious message that even when a female is the primary artist, a male needs to be present in order for the female to gain notoriety. Moreover, it appears that since the artist was a female, and according to the sexism scale the theme of the video was free of sexism, the sexism had to be made up for by the way of apparel in order to keep the general hip-hop population interested. Thus, female artists must present themselves as males have constructed them in hip-hop videos.

In Crime Mobb’s video Knuck if you Buck, there was very little sexism being demonstrated here. However, the ages of the artists must be taken into consideration. Since the group is composed of high school aged teenagers, maybe the reason their video is free of sexism is because of parental or legal constraints.

Levels of Sexism

The next research question dealt with which sex of hip-hop music artist makes the most videos with the highest and lowest amounts of sexism. While examining the data, I found there was a significant difference in sexism portrayals in videos by primary male musicians and those by primary female musicians. The distribution of male-only videos, which made up 90.39% of the sample, was not occurring by chance and overwhelmingly portrayed women condescendingly. According to my data, it appears that male artists appear to have the most sexism in videos.

Using the scale of sexism, I was able to answer my proposed questions. My primary question was, “How are African American Women Portrayed in Hip-Hop
Videos?” My results support the notion that sexism is fairly high in music videos. With 67.3% of the videos portraying women in a sexist manner, the pattern seems quite clear. Women are consistently portrayed as over-sexed and are willingly at men’s disposal. In addition, women are obligated to obtain a certain look in order to be considered attractive. Having short and kinky hair, wearing glasses, being overweight, imperfect teeth and wearing non-revealing clothes were not prevalent characteristics to ‘desirable women’ (hooks, 2002).

Even in the mild cases of sexism (Level III), women who were operating with confidence without a male influence are totally distracted when men come around. At the end of Nelly’s video My Place, it shows how a woman gives in to the desires and demands of her male companion. That is showing that women totally focus on men and feel it is their duty to give in to the males’ desires under any and all circumstances.

The lowest level of sexism is emphasized by the few videos I reviewed where man and women were treated equally. These videos often depicted people in naturally realistic environments. For example, in J-Kwon’s video Hood Hop, everyone is dancing in non-revealing styles of clothes that are commonly worn by people in individual situations. In Wako and Skip’s video Nolia Clap, people are shown shooting dice, standing around and just doing nothing. That is very realistic because people are not always engaged in physical activities. This approach is a major exception for the video portrayal of women. However, although these videos
did not stress sexism, some were proponents of other things, such as incarceration and violence.

Alluring Apparel

In the case of alluring apparel, it is observed that even though a video may not be classified 'sexist' at all according to the sexism scale, traces of covert sexist themes may still exist. In many of Level IV videos, women’s outfits were considered alluring. Cierra’s video Goodies portrayed men and women in this video to be Fully Equal, but the outfits worn by the female artist and her back-up dancers displayed the presence of alluring apparel. Although women were not acting subservient or serving as “wall paper” to men, they were wearing 'bra like' shirts revealing their backs, stomachs or breasts. They also wore low-cut form fitting pants so their undergarments could be purposely seen. Vincent, Boruszkowski and Davis asserts since the provocative dress of women is not so different from that found in magazine advertisements, the fairly seductive clothing is accepted not as being sexist, but feminine (1987). In turn, the more skin one shows and the more snuggly one’s clothes fit, the more feminine they are considered. The baggier one’s clothes are, the more they are labeled as a ‘tomboy.’ Carmen Ashurst-Watson, president of Def Jam Recordings and president of Rush Communications states, “Record companies have not yet found a sure-fire sales strategy for female rappers” (Rose & Ross, 1994, p. 143). This statement explains, in part, the warped way women are portrayed in media
and draws attention to why female music artists, especially hip-hop artists, must ‘show some skin’ in order to gain the attention of their male counterparts.

A large portion of the videos that were not marked sexists according to the sexism scale still maintained a degree of sexism. Sexism is perpetuated quite effectively through the way the women in hip-hop videos are dressed. There were significant differences between alluring dress and sexism. There was also a significant difference between such dress and performer’s sex. Is this a coincidence? Not really. If there was a larger representation of female hip-hop artists in this sample we would probably see a consistent presence of alluring apparel. Why? As stated above, video dress is not so different from what is found in magazine advertisements (Vincent, Davis, & Boruszkowski, 1987). Since videos are not only selling the artist, but also lifestyles the videos characters wear contemporary clothing that happens to be fairly seductive.

Intimate Touch

The intimate touch findings brought attention to the way men and women exchanged bodily contact. This categorization consisted of slightly more than half of the videos in the sample. Although intimate touching was present at all levels, it was more sexual in some cases. When intimate touch is compared to the amount of sexism in videos, it is obvious that the more sexist the video, the more likely intimate touch will be present. On the contrary, the less sexism in the video, the less likely intimate touch will be present. 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 and fondling.

Although videos rated sexist were assumed to possess scenes of intimate touching, I found that some Level I videos didn’t possess this characteristic such as Juvenile & Soldier Slim’s *Slow Motion*. This finding proves the point that sexism can exist outside of physical interaction. That alone calls attention to the way men and women display intimacy towards one another in hip-hop videos, and how that relationship is translated by the young adult viewing audience.

As in Vincent, Davis and Boruszkowski’s study, my research not only brought attention to the way hip-hop videos portrayed women, but also how they glorify luxury and material wealth (1987). These videos show life as a ‘good time’ with minimum responsibilities. Peety Pablo’s videos *Freak-a-leak* show half naked girls posing on expensive cars and gyrating their genitals on multiple men. In addition, they portray relationships between males and females to be commitment free of sexual intimacy; therefore, breeding resentment between black men and women (Kitwana, 2002). It appears that acting out in such a manner would cause a strain on Black relationships (Karenga, 1993), and the way African Americans are represented in society.

Future Research

In the near future a qualitative analysis is needed to conducted on how African American men are portrayed in hip-hop videos. “Far more
than any other generation, the hip-hop generation was the one for which Blackness became synonymous with drugs, sex and crime” (Kitwana, 2002, p. 38), and those actions are part of the reason for its stagnation as an art form (D & Jah, 1997).

Nowadays, many young brothers want to be hustlers, rappers, ballplayers, pimps and players (Powell, 2003). As a result, it appears to be the standard for them to be draped in multiple pieces of jewelry, drinking multiple alcoholic beverages (while extending their middle finger), posing by expensive automobiles, surrounded by multiple women and referring to themselves as pimps and thugs. Although the Webster’s dictionary defines thugs to be individuals that are law breakers, it calls to question why do the hip-hop generationers continuously glamorize the title and lifestyle?

The long term effects of this can have an adverse reaction to African American males that may not be able to become undone. Such negative images may lead to and enforce current stereotypes that are currently in place regarding them, as well as African American youth. The images that the youth considered to be cool are the same images that are used when profiling criminals.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

During the Golden Era of hip-hop, there was a diversity of Black voices and styles that co-existed peacefully (Powell, 2003). If you were into the ‘street thing’ you could choose from artists such as Kool G Rap & DJ Polo. If you preferred the ‘political thing,’ X Clan and Public Enemy would satisfy those taste buds. For those who enjoyed the ‘party scene,’ Ton-Loc and Kid-N-Play would suffice their musical needs. Those who participated in the ‘flower-child bohemian thing’ or related to the ‘middle class prankster,’ De la Soul and DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Price catered to those needs. Subsequently, that diversity is no longer celebrated and what was known as hip-hop has become watered down to cater to mainstream ‘male’ audiences. Afeni Shakur, mother of the late Tupac Shakur accurately states, ‘The message in hip-hop music has gotten away from what Blacks in the past, such as the Black Panthers fought for. Their original ideology that women were not to be treated as sex objects appears to be an oxy-moron of how women are treated today’ (Guy, 2004, p. 76).

What can we do to dismantle this unfair patriarchy against minority women that has become as American as apple pie? ‘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" (Kitwana, 2002, p. 82). Hooks states, “To change the representation of Black women from sexual objects, we must be willing to transgress traditional boundaries” (1992, p. 45). That poses a degree of difficulty within the arena of hip-hop because, there, male artists can assert power and authority that is usually suppressed in a very oppressive and Euro-centric society (Kitwana, 2002), while making a lot of money in the process. Rappers are not naïve; they are making strategic choices to push music that will be embraced by mainstream society.

As in the past, inner-city minorities looked to this music to tell their story and give them hope. Today, this thriving generation continues to look up to hip-hop for the same thing, but are coming up short with the less than positive messages being relayed. Videos are a part of a social process by which young people understand the world (Jhally, 1995). That is why rap music’s influence as a transmitter of ideas should be more carefully considered and society as a whole must go through a transformation process by critiquing those choices and their impact on Black life (hooks, 2002; Kitwana 2002).

Likewise, challenging stereotypical and degrading images, lyrics and practice in the hip-hop industry is necessary. Just as whites need to be more vociferous about racism in their communities, men need to speak up about sexism among each other (Powell, 2003). Although women have to find strength from other women because that is what gets them through (Guy, 2004), white women need to become more sensitive to the combination of racism and sexism or ‘multiple jeopardy’ incurred by women of color because they see the world differently (Tong, 1998). That is why it is
considered an obligation for not only Black feminists, but all feminists, to free African American women from these stereotypes. Additionally, that is why it is important to not only spread this type of knowledge in scholarly journals that are primarily read by select individuals, but 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 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 (1993, p. 98)."

Chuck D proclaims, "There has to be some balance" (D & Jah, 1997).

Consequently, that balance may be difficult to achieve when the number of women running major record labels are examined. It is a very macho industry across the board, not just with rappers (Rose & Ross, 1994). 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). Are the producers and labels getting wealthy as they perpetuate sexism to the world? Jim Levin, CEO of Time Warner is a prime example of this. Although his label assisted 2 Live Crew’s founder, Luther ‘Luke Skywalker’ Campbell, (net worth $11 million) in selling millions of records that talked about
women performing oral sex on men and men doing sexually explicit acts with women, Levin’s net worth alone is approximately $775 million (hooks, 2002). From there, it is obvious that individuals receiving monetary benefits of this exploitation of women refuse to take responsibility for this negative portrayal. As a result, the pornography in the media adds to the callous attitudes towards women (Surette, 1998).

Political activists such as Minister Conrad Mohammad consistently call for summits of Black rap artists, industry executives and activists to discuss ways of holding the hip-hop industry accountable to the Black community. However, these calls are being silenced by individuals that are profiting from misogyny. Since profiting from the selling of BET to Viacom Inc. in 2000, for $3 billion dollars, billionaire and BET CEO Robert L. Johnson justified the representation of negative images by saying “Record companies and their artists create the videos. I never produced a video in my life. ....Our job is to give him (them) a voice” (Meeks, 2005, p. 112). Artists refuse to accept responsibility as well. Multiplatinum rapper Nelly stated, “As for how women are shown in videos, I don’t have a problem with it because it’s entertainment. Women are in the videos by choice” (Byrd & Solomon, 2005, p. 85). In return from his standpoint and prompted by his borderline pornographic music video titled Tip Drill, Spelman College the most famous black women’s college in the country, sparked a protest against Nelly, causing him to cancel a bone marrow drive he was conducting for his terminally ill sister (Byrd & Solomon, 2005; Wyatt, 2004). In a contradictory statement from Jay “Icepick”
Jackson, senior vice president of Ruff Ryders Records, a prominent hip-hop label states, that his children can not listen to hip-hop music nor watch hip-hop videos, but insinuates it is okay for other people’s children to listen to it (Byrd & Solomon, 2005).

In conclusion, many believe that the vulnerability of hip-hop generation women are the primary participants of their own oppression (Guy, 2004; Kitwana, 2002) because artists and producers can only do what the women allow. The Black female must face herself and realize what she must struggle against to achieve self-actualization by countering the representation of herself, her body, and her being expendable (hooks, 1992). In addition, the hip-hop community needs to confront its own sexism and view women as men’s equals, daughters of God, image bearers of God (Tong, 1998). If not, they will continue to slit the very throat of the life-source of our community.

What mainstream hip-hop has done, thanks in part to the advent of music videos is accelerate and exacerbate the woman-hating to the world stage (Powell, 2003). The blame can not be attributed to one individual, but to the overwhelming capitalistic desire to make money at all costs. If that means 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. In return they believe those actions will be their formula for success. But tragically, those same
ingredients will also be the recipe for the genocide of an entire generation (Guy, 2004).
APPENDIX

Coding of Entire Sample by Artists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Title of Song</th>
<th>Record Label</th>
<th>Sexism Coding</th>
<th>Intimate Touch</th>
<th>Alluring Apparel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Peety Pablo</td>
<td>Freak-a-Leak</td>
<td>Jive Records</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Jay-Z</td>
<td>La La La</td>
<td>Roc-a-Fella</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. T.I. featuring Jazze Pha</td>
<td>Let's Get Away</td>
<td>Grand Hustle/Atlantic</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Bone Crusher featuring Ying Yang Twins</td>
<td>Take Ya Clothes Off</td>
<td>So-So Def/Zomba Label Group</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Lil Flip</td>
<td>Sunshine</td>
<td>Sucka Free Records/Sony Urban/Columbia</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ludacris</td>
<td>Diamond in the Back</td>
<td>Disturbing the Peace/Def Jam South</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. 8 ball and MJG</td>
<td>You Don't Want Drama</td>
<td>Bad Boy Entertainment</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Ludacris</td>
<td>Splash Waterfalls</td>
<td>Disturbing the Peace/Def Jam South</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. J-Kwon</td>
<td>Hood-Hop</td>
<td>So-So Def/Zomba Label Group</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Slum Village</td>
<td>Selfish</td>
<td>Barak/Capitol</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>P</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. D-12</td>
<td>How Come/Git Up</td>
<td>Shady/Interscope</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Lloyd Banks</td>
<td>I'm So Fly</td>
<td>G Unit/Interscope</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Lloyd Banks</td>
<td>On Fire</td>
<td>G Unit/Interscope</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Track</td>
<td>Label</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Yung Wun</td>
<td>Tear it Up</td>
<td>Full Surface/ J records</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Kanye West</td>
<td>Jesus Walks</td>
<td>Roc-a-Fella</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Nas</td>
<td>Thief’s Theme</td>
<td>Ill Will/ Sony/ Urban/ Columbia</td>
<td>IV</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Lil Wayne</td>
<td>Bring it Back</td>
<td>Cash Money</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>P</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Nelly</td>
<td>Flap Your Wings</td>
<td>Derrty/ Fo Real/ Universal</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Young Buck</td>
<td>Let Me In</td>
<td>G Unit/ Universal</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Jadakiss featuring Anthony Hamilton</td>
<td>Why</td>
<td>Ruff Ryder</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Mase</td>
<td>Welcome Back</td>
<td>Bad Boy Records</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Jay-Z featuring UGK</td>
<td>Big Pimpin</td>
<td>Roc-a-Fella</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>P</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Young Rome featuring Omarion</td>
<td>After Party</td>
<td>T.U.G./ Motown</td>
<td>I</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Lil Scrappy</td>
<td>No Problem</td>
<td>BME/ Reprise Records</td>
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<td>Houston featuring Chingy, Nate Dogg, I-20</td>
<td>I Like Dat</td>
<td>Capitol Records</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Diplomats Presents: Jim Jones</td>
<td>Certified Gangsters</td>
<td>Diplomat/ Koch Records</td>
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<td>Ludacris</td>
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<td>B Gizzle aka B.G.</td>
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<td>Chopper City/ Koch Records</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>Kanye West featuring Saleena Johnson</td>
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<td>Roc-a-Fella</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>8ball and MJG featuring Shannon Jones</td>
<td>Straight Cadillac Pimpin</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>The Relationships The Source Untouchables featuring Benzino</td>
<td>Nolia Clap</td>
<td>Rap-a-Lot 4 life/UTP Records</td>
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<td>Wako and Skid</td>
<td>Groupie Luv</td>
<td>VT Records</td>
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<td>What's Happening</td>
<td>Collipark/TVT Records</td>
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<td>Cash Money/Universal Records</td>
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<td>Crime Mobb</td>
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<td>213</td>
<td>Slow Motion</td>
<td>Cash Money/Universal Records</td>
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<td>Juvenile featuring Soldier Slim</td>
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<td>Akon featuring Styles P</td>
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<td>Cash Money/Universal Records</td>
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<td>Ciarra Goodies</td>
<td>Slow Motion</td>
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<td>LL Cool J</td>
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<td>Cash Money/Universal Records</td>
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<td>Nelly featuring Jaheim</td>
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<td>Body Head Bangerz featuring YoungBloodz</td>
<td>Slow Motion</td>
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<td>Guerilla Black featuring Beanie Man</td>
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<td>Dem Franchise Boys</td>
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<td>Cash Money/Universal Records</td>
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<tr>
<td>49. Silkk the Shocker</td>
<td>We Like Them Girls</td>
<td>The New No Limit/ Koch Records</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>P</td>
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<td>50. Lil Romeo</td>
<td>My Cinderella</td>
<td>The New No Limit/ Koch Records</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>51. Shyne featuring Ashanti</td>
<td>Jimmy Choo</td>
<td>Def Jam</td>
<td>II</td>
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<td>52. Mobb Deep</td>
<td>Real Gangstaz</td>
<td>Infamous/Zomba</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>P</td>
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