Sexism and Misogyny in American Hip-Hop Culture

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Introduction

> We live in a very sexist society. Popular culture exaggerates everything, including this kind of sexism, for profit. That's the nature of capitalist society and entertainment. There is no question that the sexism that's in our hip-hop videos is a reflection of how sexist men are in the world today. It's just that in the past things weren't so obvious (Russell Simmons, co-founder of Def Jam Records).

The proliferation of hip-hop culture today is so great that we may speak of a modern-day pop-cultural phenomenon. This phenomenon has found its way from the ghetto area in the Bronx to white suburbia in the U.S. and Europe over the last thirty years. The socio-cultural impact of the musical genre is visible in youth culture everywhere, as regards manners of speaking, dress codes, systems of values, etc. Since its narrow birth in 1974 till today's mass-appeal worldwide, hip-hop culture has evolved immensely. In sociological terms, this means that the expressive culture of African Americans, Caribbean- and Latin Americans has been brought to other segments of society and become popularised. The specific subject for my study, however, is the overt sexism that is present in this culture. Sexism can take on a variety of forms and expressions, as there are various degrees and definitions of this concept. Hence, I will try to locate some of these definitions and relate them to the subject matter that I have chosen for my study, which is sexism in a black urban expressive pop-cultural form.

Sexism is, according to the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* characterised by "the belief that the members of one sex are less intelligent, able, skilful, etc. than the members of the other sex, especially that women are less able than men". In this respect, the concept is based on a group's presumptions about another group. Traditionally, and confirmed in this definition, sexism is articulated as men's suppression of women. I will be discussing patriarchal structures that possibly confirm this tendency in relation to the subject of my thesis. Furthermore, the adjective "sexism" is defined as "Sexist jokes or comments […] refer to women's bodies, behaviour or feelings in a negative way" . The aspect of referring to

women's bodies in a disrespectful or disapproving way is, obviously, very important to my thesis. As this articulation of sexism concerns the physical dimensions of a woman's body, it is highly relatable to the way African American women in particular have been ridiculed or scorned. Hence, I expect to place this aspect of sexism in relation to the visual imagery that is presented in hip-hop.

A different definition of the phrase that is less specific is from the *Compact Oxford Dictionary*: "prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination, typically against women on the basis of sex". As part of my investigation is to find out what discriminatory elements there are in a culture that is essentially African American, I believe that it is also defensible to apply a racial dimension to the study. Since African Americans are a group that has notoriously been exposed to all kinds of racial discrimination, I would argue that there are notions of sexism in hip-hop that are related to this bias.

Misogyny is an articulation of sexism, and possibly its strongest expression, as it means hatred for women. Whether the concept of misogyny is applicable to every rap video displaying scantily clad women depends on the definition of the term. The most common definition of a "misogynist" is of someone who is contemptuous of women; from Greek *misos* which is the word for "hatred," and *gyne* which means "woman" (www.etymonline.com). There are definitions of the term that focus more explicitly on women's sexuality, but I find this definition to be more in tune with almost every other definition of the word that I have located. It does seem that *misogyny* is sexism in its most extreme sense, as an intensified sexist mind-set that has been impressed on people's consciousness. Moreover, the term is arguably systematised sexism, in terms of the impact of the sentiment of hate.

The biggest difference between the two concepts, if there is any, will be that sexism can go in both directions, whereas misogyny is restricted to a profoundly negative response to women specifically. I would argue that misogyny is most relevant to my investigation,

because the sexism that is present in hip-hop is specifically aimed at women. However, since part of my investigation is the study of an ethnic group, I believe discrimination in several sense of the word will be of relevance and thus I will dedicate an equal amount of attention to both topics.

In the first chapter of my investigation, I would like to take a look at how this development came about, and what the elements of hip-hop are. The distinction between rap music and hip-hop culture is in general important to recognise, as I will be using these concepts intermittently. For the sake of clarity: hip-hop is the culture, and rap is the musical expression of this culture; derived from the technique of “rapping” or talking fast to the rhythm of the music. The journey of this black underground phenomenon on the road to hyper-commercialisation is one of my concerns. There are sociological, political and racial concerns to be considered in this respect, and I will try to account for them by exploring the time and place for the birth and development of hip-hop. Since each decade has put its mark on this development, I will divide my historical update on the genre into three segments, starting in the 1970s and finishing with the most current artists and events. I will be using terminology derived from rap music and hip-hop culture in order to explain the place rap music / hip-hop culture has got as a genre in the history of popular music.

If one were to analyse the components that constitute rap music, it would be elementary to look at themes and subjects that surface when you are listening to the music. In this regard, rap music’s often controversial messages regarding women have frequently been the source of discussions on issues of sexism and misogyny. The extent of sexism in hip-hop today is so pervasive, that protests have started to come from every direction of America’s pop-cultural, feminist, and academic sphere. Hence, I would like to explore the sociological and pop-cultural factors that are present in this discussion and, by doing so, focusing especially on the topic of gender roles and relationships in African American culture. As hip-hop is essentially

an African American phenomenon, it is also the most widespread form of hip-hop today. I thus find this to be the most relevant focus of my investigation. Furthermore, as I believe there are many myths surrounding African American female sexual identity, I would like to see whether there is a connection between how African Americans are depicted in mass culture in relation to racial stereotypes, and in terms of sexuality. Thus, I am addressing these gender issues by placing them in the larger context of African American history and culture.

The reason for choosing misogyny and sexism as the core of my investigation is to some extent because of the growing tension within American hip-hop culture on this subject. For the most part, this is related to how women are depicted verbally and visually. Another reason is because of the increasingly overt focus on sexuality that is presented today in mass culture. Television programmes in the "reality" genre and the new role-models in society contribute to this increased emphasis. The media have (over) exposed people like Paris Hilton who gets attention for enacting in amateurish porn-films circulating on the internet, whereas most people are not judgemental towards this kind of behaviour, and thus applaud. The distribution of sexual images on the internet are also of significance, as these stress the ease with which one can access all kinds of material—ranging from rather innocent pictures to hardcore pornography. As such, I believe this "hype" around sexuality contributes to the definition of a mass-marketed image that you must be able to relate to. This kind of classification has been around for centuries, of course, but I believe that these images depicting female sexuality are presented more explicitly and relentlessly than ever before. I also find this especially relevant in terms of the way African American women are portrayed in relation to these images.

The discussion on the topic of sexism is due to an overall interest in hip-hop culture in the media, but it is also a result of the increasingly overt degrading depictions of women that seem to flourish in contemporary rap music and hip-hop culture. Feminists in the U.S. have to some extent picked this debate as an arena for battling the patriarchal structures that still are

considered to be an integral part of American traditionalist thinking. The current debate on sexism in hip-hop is of great interest to my study, as feminists for the first time are involved actively in a discussion of a topic that relates to a popular musical genre. There have been discussions on the depiction of women in the heavy metal –genre previously, but not one involving performers and other people who are relevant to the debate. In this respect, the discussion has triggered reactions from people in the African American community, and thus sets the tone for the debate as these are the ones who are directly affronted by the attitudes that are displayed in current hip-hop culture.

I would also like to comment on the music industry, and its role in the development of rap music and hip-hop culture. I will be discussing the rap industry's responsibility for distributing these negative depictions of women in rap artists' videos and lyrics. I believe the concept of image and authenticity is important in this respect, as I expect to find a level of deliberate marketing strategies behind the lifestyle-oriented aliases of the rap artists. Irrespective of whether these have been conjured up by the music industry, or whether the artist has created his / her own alias in order to appear on the scene with a credible image, I would like to include a discussion on whether a condescending attitude towards women is expressed through this character or image.

As hip-hop and rap music traditionally have been overwhelmingly masculine expressions, I find it necessary to take a look at the role of female artists within the hip-hop community. In this respect, I believe it will be relevant to take into consideration their responses to the pervasive sexism. The music industry's penchant for presenting women as sexually charged creatures without any real talent is also what I would like to include in my discussion on this subject. I will try to view selected female artists' careers in the light of this topic, and relate this to my discussion on sexism and misogyny.

At the centre of my attention are themes that convey misogynist and/or sexist views in rap lyrics, or videos displaying overtly vulgar and degrading depictions of women. Finding themes and views in rap lyrics that support sexism and misogyny is an extensive task, as hip-hop has a history that runs over the last thirty years roughly. However, in my analyses, I would like to focus on two or three themes that I consider particularly relevant to my investigation. The themes will be derived from the overall discussion on sexism in hip-hop, and these will hopefully have some relevance in terms of hip-hop's development.

The sources I will be using are mostly texts that concern sexism in various forms. I consider feminist texts, mostly from 2000 and onwards, to be most relevant to my study. Since the subject matter of my thesis is of a contemporary character, I believe that I will benefit greatly from choosing texts that are as recent as possible. However, I will have to supplement with texts that were written as far back as the 1990s, as these are highly relevant in terms of historical events in the history of hip-hop. For my account of hip-hop's historical development and background information, there are two sources that I will mainly be using, namely Nelson George's *Hip Hop America,* and an anthology of texts about hip-hop's expressive nature by the name of *That's the Joint! A Hip-Hop Studies Reader*. Included in George's work, is an account of what constitutes hip-hop, alongside a rendering of the most significant events in society that contributed to hip-hop's development. In *That's the Joint*, the overall focus is on hip-hop culture in all its aspects. Included in the compilation are primary sources such as interviews and lyrics.

In relation to the ongoing debate on sexism in hip-hop, I have found articles that closely monitor this discussion. These are mostly related to the extensive campaign that was held by *Essence* magazine last year, as the participants were people representing diverse views on sexism in hip-hop. Furthermore, there are sociological texts that I also will be using, as these are relatable to the present situation and history of African Americans that I regard as highly

relevant, such as race theory. In addition, I will use texts concerning aspects of psychology that I consider to be relevant. These are especially interesting in terms of gender-issues, which are feminist neutral in their approach. In this respect, I find it convenient to mention the texts of the anthology *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture*. Here, we find references to the text by Patricia Morton, for instance, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall's text on black female sexuality.

Finally, I believe it is necessary to state that I have also included some primary sources that I believe will do justice thematically. I have used lyrical texts that I find relevant in terms of devaluating women, as these necessarily reflect the currents and genre-relativity of hip-hop's development. There is also one visual analysis of a music video, which I believe is a good, although extreme, example of the explicitness of contemporary rap's expression regarding female sexuality.

Chapter One: Historical Update and Background Information on Hip-Hop Culture

Back in the Days: Old School Hip-Hop

"At its most elemental level hip hop is a product of post-civil rights era America, a set of cultural forms originally nurtured by African-American, Caribbean-American and Latin-American youth in and around New York in the' 70s" (George, viii of Introduction).

To give a presentation of hip-hop's thirty year-long history that is reasonably comprehensive over a few pages is a rather difficult task. However, I believe it is possible to extract artists and currents reflecting the changes that contributed to the development of this culture. Hence, I would like to begin by accounting for the development of hip-hop and rap over the last three decades – starting off in the middle of the 1970s.

When Nelson George refers to hip-hop as a set of cultural forms, he sees hip-hop as the by-product of a specific culture. These expressions are the music, the visual style, the verbal communication, the value system and the art of this culture. As he observes, the essence of hip-hop lies not within the music itself, since the music is only part of this organism that constitutes the culture of African Americans, Caribbean - and Latin-Americans. To be more precise, youth culture is one of the components within these cultures, whereas hip-hop is an expression of youth culture. This phenomenon that in essence was a black expression coming out of inner-city New York is now relatable to youngsters all over the globe. Former editor at *The Source*, Bakari Kitwana, comments on this:

"Black youth culture share [*sic*] a national culture […]. Black youth culture during the 1920s and 1930s, and even the 1960s was national in scope. Yet, during each of these periods, Black youth were more likely to derive values and identity from such traditional community

institutions as family, church, and school" (7). As Kitwana explains, black youth culture has a history that goes back to the first part of the 1900s. This observation points to how the sources of our (pop) cultural influences have changed over time. Today, we get our influences mainly from television, music and the movies. The elements that Kitwana mentions are still influential to some extent, but the fact remains that youth today is surrounded, and most often inspired by elements from pop culture. In current black youth culture, this tendency is most present as regards hip-hop. Essentially, this was a black phenomenon, but these products are now purchased by more white consumers than black consumers. This indicates shifts in the cultural patterns of society, as current hip-hop is a phenomenon that speaks to people regardless of race or class. Yet, this shift is also indicative of numerous marketing strategies behind the immense success of hip-hop, which have been created by the music industry.

In 1974, African Americans inhabited most of the borough of the Bronx, a part of New York City that is situated in the uptown area north of Manhattan. The Bronx could largely be characterised by unemployment, one-parent families, low income, criminal activity and youngsters in group formations with nowhere in particular to go. Writer and hip-hop *connoisseur* Nelson George grew up in New York City himself, and comments on the people who put their mark on the early days of hip-hop: "The b-boys—the dancers, graffiti writers, the kids just hanging out—who carried the hip hop attitude forth were reacting to disco, funk, and to the chaotic world of New York City in the '70s. These b-boys (and girls) were mostly black and Hispanic. (…) They were America's first post-soul kids" (George, xi).

George further explains how these youngsters represent the people who grew up in the "aftermath of an era when many of the obvious barriers to the American Dream had fallen" (xi). Thus, the emergence of the "hip-hop generation" (xi) signified a shift culturally for black people in inner urban areas, as it represented a break with old ways of relating to their surroundings. By the *obvious barriers,* I believe George refers to tribulations that black

people had to struggle with during the first half of the 1900s roughly, in the pre-Civil Rights period. These barriers made the prospective of for instance social climbing almost impossible for most blacks, as they were segregated in practice from whites and denied access to quality education, and the jobs that went with it. The Civil Rights Movement brought about changes for most blacks in their everyday lives, and opened doors that before had been closed. These changes built, according to George, the foundations on which the hip-hop generation was founded (xi). Thus, the benefits of the movement brought a new freedom of expression to a marginal culture that traditionally had been suppressed in many ways.

As a musical genre, hip-hop is by many regarded as a fusion of various musical forms. The influence from such 1970s genres as disco and funk is clearly articulated in hip-hop, whereas these genres were in turn distilled from the blues, soul and gospel – music that can be traced back to the early 1900s and beyond, and which was predominantly black. Included in this blend, there was a trace of ethnic music, originally from Jamaica, called the "dub". The blend of the more pop-oriented disco rhythms mixed with dub sounds made it possible for the DJs to conjure up new rhythmical sounds that constituted the birth of hip-hop. This synthesis was made possible by the *mixer*, which is an electronic device that allowed the DJ ("disc jockey") to shift whatever music he was playing between the turntables - where the vinyl records were played - in order to make the music go on continuously (5-7). Apart from playing records, the DJs began using the microphone and very soon they were either talking over or to the music. The distinctive style of "rapping" to music was developed this way: "'Hip-hop,' the music behind the lyrics, which are [*sic*] 'rapped,' is a form of sonic bricolage with roots in 'toasting,' a style of making music by speaking over records" (Samuels 148). When this expressive oral form emerged, it set the tone for hip-hop's further development. Oral elements in music were firmly rooted in African American culture, as the voices of the performers were the essential components alongside the rhythm. According to Dick Hebdige,

this can be traced back to the West African roots and the griots, as the word games referred to as "signifying" and "the dozens" illustrate (Hebdige 231). The *dozens* is especially interesting in this respect, as it functions as a kind of *ritual insult*, according to anthropologists (Kelley 127). Whether this is a kind of ritualised word play or not, the intent of insulting the "opponent" is clear, as the persons involved in the play try to outdo each other in rude comments. The themes that are present in this respect are usually connected to insulting each other's nearest relatives (most often their mothers), and the "performers" are usually men (Kelley 128).

In the 1970s, the musical activities connected with hip-hop were dominated by men, apart from a few women who were part of someone's "crew," as it was common for the DJ to have a unit of people with them when they performed. The *crew* did break dancing, and they were referred to as "B-boys" when they were male, as there is not much documentation on women's presence in this respect. Breaking and graffiti were thus significant expressions of hip-hop culture the way it emerged in the beginning. Record spinning, rapping, breaking and graffiti constitute "old school" hip-hop elements. The *old school* - concept denotes the early period of hip-hop, and it is often associated with the three "original" DJs, or founding fathers of hip-hop; Afrika Bambaataa (Kevin Donovan), Kool Herc (Clive Campbell) and Grandmaster Flash (Joseph Saddler) (George 20). I will, however, get back to the significance of *old school*, when summing up the development of hip-hop in its early days.

The role of the DJ was similar to that of a singer in a rock band, as he was basically the star of the performance. An integral part of these performances were the "battles" between the DJs and their crews, where the disc jockeys played against each other. They were battling for the audience's approval, and each had their respective crew break dancing against each other. Graffiti in the way of "tagging" on old subway cars was an illegal activity manifested by guerrilla-oriented slogans. The civic authorities were not too pleased with these art-forms on

public buildings, and graffiti is still today a hot topic as some consider it vandalism, while others think of graffiti as an art-form in its own right (George 12).

These factors are all indicators of a milieu that was largely characterised by **gang-related formations**, because it was essential to belong to a certain group that you could fit in with (i.e. the crews and graffiti-units). **Competitiveness** was also an essential aspect, as the nature of the break-battles illustrates where the aim was to outdo each other. Together with the graffiti "wars," they both indicate a certain *show off* factor to the scene. **Masculinity** is another trait to hip-hop's early days, as a form of self-expression. The "dozens" is an example of such masculine expressive form, as is the overall male focus and the exclusion of women in the culture. The artistic outlets that are mentioned are all masculine in their expression, both in their competitive nature and also in their accentuation of *brotherhood*. **Attitude** was equally important, as appearing on the scene with credibility was closely linked to having an individual expression. It was vital to have something new to say and to get your message across comprehensively. The best way of achieving this was to appear as someone with guts and self-confidence. However, the hostile attitude that to a large extent is associated with for instance the "gangsta" -image was less dominant back then, since the oral and visual expressions were considered far more important in those days.

As it were, the emergence of rap music and hip-hop culture coincided with the rebellious music of punk-rock. Both musical expressions were largely dependent on the attitude of the performer, as it was crucial to display disregard of the "establishment", referring to the dominant middle-class segment of society. Ideologies and common ideals were established by this majority, and thus were considered general truths by many. Punk-rock was predominantly white, and it grew out of the area around New York City simultaneously as rap. The music was largely based on live performances, whereas the record companies soon approached the performers in order to turn them into recording artists. What made the punk-rock genre

significantly different from hip-hop, besides its immediate success, was the fact that many of its performers were women, such as Patti Smith of Patti Smith Group, Deborah Harry of Blondie and Lydia Lunch. All of whom were female performers of punk-rock either as solo artists or as members of a band. In hip-hop, there were no female performers yet, but the question remains as to what in the milieu of punk-rock was so different from hip-hop in producing male and female artists. The genres are equally aggressive in their expression, but the attitude is clearly not in itself sufficient to explain the absence of female performers in hip-hop. This indicates that there are some culturally rooted conceptions regarding gender in hip-hop, which is a hindrance for women in achieving credibility for their musical abilities.

Eventually, rap music outgrew the "hood", and soon the DJs were approached by independent labels who were interested in releasing their material. The mentioned three "founding fathers" of hip-hop dominated the genre in hip-hop's early days. They are said to have captured "the spirit of openhearted innocence that created hip hop culture" (George 20). The innocence that Nelson George refers to is a naivety where the quest for money is relatively absent, and the enjoyment of music on its own terms is almost the sole ambition. Hence, the end of the *old school*-era was a marker, as it was synonymous with the changes that the new quest for money brought about.

At the threshold of the 1980s, rap music had been recorded and lost its rudimentary character. 1970s hip-hop is by many considered summed up in Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" from 1979, which also functions as a "signal barrier breaker, birthing hip-hop and consolidating the infant art form's popularity" (Dyson 61). Thematically, the song is a celebration of sheer enjoyment of music and self-expression, and thus as *old school* as they come. Rap music that was released after this commercially successful song is often referred to as disconnected from the *old school*- ideals. This change is represented by a shift in focus regarding the values and themes that were prominent in hip-hop culture's early days.

From Old School to Gangsta: the Eighties

"Globalization certainly accounts for some 'positive' outcomes, such as the success of rap music (…). In terms of wealth, those hip-hop generationers who are at the upper end of the middle class and beyond have enjoyed increased income and wealth during the 1980s and 1990s"(Kitwana 12). During the 1980s, hip-hop as a cultural expression went through some major changes. These changes were largely in step with the changes that took place in the rest of society. As Bakari Kitwana observes, the 1980s was a period of growth and development, and rap music became commercially very successful in this decade. The globalisation-phenomenon represented factors that in retrospect had significant influence in areas such as economy, education, politics, and a number of other sociological or cultural aspects relevant to my investigation. There was a new focus in society, something that the Reagan government was largely responsible for, and which led to an emphasis on materialism and personal wealth. This focus brought about changes in standards of living, working conditions, income, education, social welfare and several other aspects to the lives of the majority of U.S. citizens.

However, most African Americans had few if any possibilities to tap into these developments, and were thus further marginalised and disempowered. Consequently, standards of living decreased and drug-related problems increased in urban areas for this ethnic group. Global corporations replaced the national corporations, which resulted in a few selected people gaining enormous wealth. The gap between the haves and the have-nots grew larger (Kitwana 11-12). This was relatable to the situation of African Americans, and manifested itself not only in hip-hop's potential as an influential pop-cultural expression, but also in the tension that steadily built up as a reaction to the gap that was now widening.

In uptown New York City, the legacy of hip-hop from the 1970s was still visible. Break dancing and graffiti dominated the culture more than the music did, as they had become expressions that movies and other pop-cultural forms had picked up. Nevertheless, the

musical expression was definitely going somewhere. The introduction of MTV, the antecedent to every video-based television programme since, initiated a whole new scrutinising of the artist. The major companies grew steadily more conscious of the economic potential that was embedded in hip-hop music. As a consequence, the music developed immensely in the first half of the decade, approximately between the years 1981-85. In this period, rap music developed and hip-hop culture expanded rapidly, as a direct result of the interest shown by the record companies – and consequently by the record-buying audience.

Two releases that were hugely successful outside of the U.S. as well were Kurtis Blow's "The Breaks" from 1980, and "The Message" by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five in 1982. These records represented a notable change both thematically and attitude-wise in hip-hop and rap. Both tunes are concerned with social injustice, and especially in "The Message" the focus is on descriptions of inner city ghetto life. Together with "The Breaks" these tunes were responding lyrically to the chaotic and hopeless situation that many African Americans and other ethnic groups in inner city areas had to deal with. These records marked the definite break with *old school* rap, as the *naïve* tunes that were released in the late 1970s lacked the edge and social awareness that was reflected by these new releases. Hence, this new sub-genre within the early 1980s rap was labelled "Message rap". Clearly, this period mirrored and perhaps foreshadowed social issues and inequalities that grew out of the decade that represented the beginnings of modern globalisation.

In 1984, rap music took a new turn. The commercial success of the rap-group Run DMC marked a turning point in hip-hop's development. The significance of Run DMC was that they were the first non-white act in many years to capture an almost entirely white audience. This marked the beginning of the "crossover-artists" who later in the decade followed on the same path. The fusion between pop and hip-hop and rock and hip-hop was further developed by artists such as DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince (Will Smith), Tone Loc and The Beastie

Boys. The latter are interesting in that they were initially a white punk-group from Brooklyn, New York. They got a record deal on Def Jam Records, the major hip-hop record company owned by producers Russell Simmons and Rick Rubin, for the release of their 1986 album *Licensed to Ill*. The success of The Beastie Boys was largely due to the fact that their music was considered rap, yet it was bought by white people almost exclusively. Thematically, they were preoccupied with party culture, as in the song "Fight for Your Right (to Party)", and they generally praised irresponsible behaviour in their music. This phenomenon did not go unnoticed by the media, and they appeared as the opening act of Madonna's *Virgin* tour of 1986, along with their music generally functioning as the soundtrack of fraternity-parties all over U.S. and in Europe. However, this act triggered a discussion in the hip-hop community about race and credibility. Apparently, the music of these white guys from Brooklyn was not to be considered hip-hop only because their producers were black (George 66). In this respect, race was brought into context all of a sudden. This has been the cause for debate later in the history of hip-hop also, as for instance when the white rap artist Eminem (Marshall Mathers Jr.) emerged in the late 1990s. The question of credibility is closely connected to that of authenticity, and this is crucial in hip-hop. Black artists like MC Hammer, for instance, experienced being similarly rejected by the hip-hop community, because they regarded him as a "non-authentic" rapper. This happened despite the fact that he was black and had sold millions of copies of (his first) record.

As rap continued to expand, the direction in which it was now heading was very different from that of the earlier days. The artists were now making big money as opposed to their precursors from the *old school*-era, and they had become artists in their own right. Black artists, who people usually thought of in terms of Michael Jackson and Prince, had now been replaced by artists within the hip-hop genre. This was partially due to massive rotation of their videos on MTV, an example of the record producers' ability of mastering new mediums in

promoting their artists. As the 1980s came to a close, there was a new hip-hop genre on the rise, which was the music of "gangsta" rap or "reality" rap as it is referred to by some (George 42). In order to explain how this genre came about, I will have to look into a different kind of field, which is that of drugs.

Gangsta's Paradise: Nihilistic Values on the Rise

> I think what has happened is the gangsta image has ingrained itself so deeply into the youth culture that it just became taken for granted. [At first], gangsta rap was about selling crack on the corner and shooting up members of other gangs. Now it's more about living the life you can live once you've committed all those horrible crimes (McGruder n.pag.).

In his comment, *Boondocks* creator Aaron McGruder sums up (article by Phil Kloer for *The Atlanta Journal*) the way hip-hop has developed in the direction of mainstream over the last fifteen years. The shift from ghetto-aesthetics to a *bling-bling* lifestyle that resembles *Playboy*'s Hugh Hefner, is noteworthy. Commercialisation certainly plays a significant part in the process, but there is another component that has contributed to hip-hop's development during the late 1980s and early 1990s in particular, namely drugs.

In the *old school*-days of hip-hop, drugs were not uncommon. When DJs were doing their park-party routines or were performing in clubs, drugs were an integrated part of the socialising agenda for many of the people attending. The "Blaxploitation" films that soared in the 1970s showed stereotypically how cocaine and heroin were widely used in inner city areas by many African Americans. Mainly because of this, an equation mark was put in front of drug use and hip-hop culture, something that was not entirely far-fetched. Later on, cocaine and heroin were gradually replaced by something called "angel dust" in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. According to Nelson George, this man-made psychoactive drug could cause "uncontrollable aggressive behaviour" (39). Eventually, *angel dust* was again replaced by cocaine, which was still rather expensive. But when people discovered that they could boil

cocaine into a residue that formed a new drug; "crack" or "freebase" was introduced and soon used pervasively in certain environments. This drug was much cheaper than cocaine, and there was easy access to it. George further observes in *Hip Hop America* how *gangsta*- rap is a direct consequence of the extended drug-use that took place in inner-city and suburban areas in the 1980s (George 42). The *gangsta*-genre was an articulation of the violent actions and organised crime that traditionally occurred in drug-related cultures. *Gangsta* rap is preoccupied with, and sometimes glorifies, the culture of drug use in America's inner cities.

Hip-hop's further development illustrated that the *gangsta*-phenomenon maintained its position as a commercially vital component of the larger music scene; although it was gradually replaced by the "pimp"-genre in recent years. There was a notable shift towards the end of the 1980s in rap music, and in the artists that were promoted. Mid-1980s artists like Run DMC and LL Cool J were rapping about for instance black pride, as rap group Run DMC did in 1986 ("Proud to be Black") or relationships ("I Need Love" by L.L. Cool J from 1987). The subject matter of the *gangsta*-rap movement was either socially related matters, and therefore at least thematically in tune with the *message*-rap of the 1980s. But there were also lyrics about homicide, and a profoundly negative attitude towards women that emerged with this genre. Salient in these categories were Public Enemy, N.W.A. ("Niggaz with Attitude") and 2 Live Crew. Sporting various agendas and talents, they all obtained massive commercial success. One thing they had in common was the controversy that surrounded them. Whereas Public Enemy displayed a socially conscious and black nationalistic agenda in their music, N.W.A. was occupied with the harsh and brutal reality of downtown Los Angeles in particular. Descriptions of violence and criminal activity all emerged in blatant and unabashed language, and their attitude towards women was not exactly what one would describe as loving (to put it mildly). The music of N.W.A. earned the tag "hardcore" rap in that they combined depictions of stark inner city reality, with glorifications of violence and terrorism.

The censorship issue was raised with the release of these albums, but the controversy reached new heights with 2 Live Crew. Their defiant attitude and outright misogynist stance is visible on their 1989 album *As Nasty as They Wanna Be.* The Miami-based sextet blends raucous rhymes with pumping Miami bass, their music was heavily influenced rhythmically by the music of Public Enemy. Nevertheless, the lyrical content was far more controversial. After 2 Live Crew had caused much uproar and debate in the aftermath of this release, they later re-rerecorded their 1989 album in a "clean" version. This release was called *As Clean as They Wanna Be*, and it was intended for youngsters and people who might be offended by the original version. The band is still notorious for the original release, but as I will deal with misogynist attitudes in lyrics in a different chapter, I leave this for now.

The hybridisation of rap music that started in the 1980s indicates the extent to which hip-hop no longer was a New York phenomenon. Hip-hop culture had become something that took on a national or even international character. This quality was again reflecting the increasingly international quality of America's inner cities, and factors that contributed to this development were immigration, demographic change and new forms of information (Kelley 131). Mirrored in rap music, there were themes such as politics, racism and sexism. The notion of hip-hop's role as a narrator of stories about black people living under harsh conditions in the ghettos of inner city America, now had turned out to be an entirely different cultural form altogether. Rap and hip-hop's expression had contributed to blurring the boundaries between "white" music and "black" music, much in the same way as Elvis Presley had done when he emerged in the 1950s, as most of rap's buying audience was white. But there was tension on many levels in the hip-hop community.

The cultural polarisation of the East Coast and West Coast in the U.S. became epitomised by a dispute in hip-hop that ended tragically. The East Coast / West Coast feud began around the time N.W.A. made themselves heard. The roots of this dispute are rather

vague, but this feud put its mark on rap music and hip-hop from then on. To be more precise, it was officially ended in 1997 with the murder of Christopher Wallace ("Notorious B.I.G."). The nihilistic approach to life that was conveyed in the music of N.W.A. and similar artists was part of the argument. The East Coast referred mainly to the Northeast cities of New York and Philadelphia, whereas the West Coast referred to the city of Los Angeles. In certain areas of Los Angeles, African Americans lived to a large extent in *housing projects* that were synonymous with the areas of Compton and downtown Los Angeles. Many of the performers of *gangsta* rap grew up in these areas, and thus placed Los Angeles on the hip-hop map.

In the early 1990s, rap-music had come a long way since the term "Back in the Day" was applicable. In an interview for hip-hop magazine *The Source*, Nelson George asked the three founding fathers of hip-hop what they thought of hip-hop the way it had become, and Grandmaster Flash gave this answer: "I think that somebody went around and said that in order to cut a hit record, we have to disrespect our brothers, mothers and children. What people don't realize here is that hip-hop has a large influence on people."(George 1993). What this hip-hop pioneer points to, is that hip-hop has lost its focus on what is important, which used to be the music. This interview took place about thirteen years ago, but the focus within hip-hop is not significantly different from that in1993. We saw that rap music developed from underground music in the 1970s, to making it big on the charts in the 1980s, with help from existing genres and strategic record producers. Simultaneously, there was a shift regarding the values and focus in hip-hop culture, that occurred in the late 1980s. The yuppie-culture of the 1980s had a strong hold on the *noveau riche* artists who emerged on the scene with big record companies backing them up. In this climate, the record industry got a firm grip on the *gangsta*-genre, and made it profitable. Many of the artists who were operative in the 1990s are still making music, either as artists or producers. They have never sold as many records as they do today. Artists like Snoop Dogg (Calvin Broadus) and Dr. Dre (André

Young) epitomised the *gangsta*-rapper, and enjoyed massive success from being in the right place at the right time.

Gangsta rap is still popular today, although it has taken on a different form. The genre referred to as "pimp rap" has largely taken over what was formerly associated with *gangsta* rap, and the subgenre is now represented by successful artists such as former *gangsta* Snoop Dogg and Midwest-rapper Nelly. Although Nelly (Cornell Haynes Jr.) can be said to belong to the pop-rap category that has proved popular over the last twenty years, his image and videos suggest all the themes that are associated with the pimp-genre, such as hedonism, money, and women.

Chapter Two: African American Gender Representation

African American Women's Role and Identity: Pre-Colonial to Present

In the year 2000, African Americans made up 36.4 million or 12.9 percent of the total population of the United States, whereas 2.3 million lived in New York City, and Chicago came second with 1.1 million African Americans (www.africanamericans.com/CensusProfiles.htm). These facts indicate the size of the population that African Americans represent in the U.S. today. However, there are other factors to be considered such as economy, class-belonging, education and gender. In my research on misogyny and sexism--in this case used to illustrate how African American women are treated within a specific cultural context (hip-hop)--I will attempt to answer some questions that are related to these issues. For instance, are there any specific gender- based conceptions regarding the relationship between man and woman rooted in African culture? If so, then is there an explanation for the way black women in particular are presented in hip-hop? If not, then perhaps the depictions of black women in hip-hop are products of the record producers' penchant for increase in sales.

I will mostly be concentrating on various matters that are relatable to this discussion. The first section of this chapter is concerned with different aspects of African American women's lives, focusing especially on family life, sexuality, and slavery in various senses of the word. I would like to date my investigation in this respect to the pre-colonial period up to the time that Africans were brought to America as slaves, and pay particular attention to the values and gender roles that were present in the African community then regarding women. I will also discuss to what extent these values changed when the Africans were brought to America and

attempt to find aspects of women's role and identity from this period that are recognisable today.

In the second part of the chapter, I will be focusing on the role of black men. I find this relevant in order to see whether there is any development in the way African American men have been relating to their female counterpart. In this respect, I will pay most attention to the male expressive cultural forms that have been created in inner city areas, as these are related to hip-hop culture's emergence. In the third section, my focus will be on the relationship between man and woman within African American families today. The concept of the *broken home* is vital in this respect, as well as that of the *one-parent family*.

As the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s merged with the Women's Movement, the lives of black women were altered in many areas. Since these changes were brought about on behalf of African Americans as the result of a call for equal rights as citizens, they contributed to shaping the identity of African American women as seen today. African American women are as multi-faceted as women of any colour, yet there is an unmistakable tragic history constituting their past. The cultural legacy of African American women has penetrated the whole nation, and it is especially evident in forms of popular culture such as music, film and literature. Literature by women of this ethnic group has become a genre in its own right, and literary personalities such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker are familiar names even to those who are unfamiliar with literature.

Before colonisation by the British settlements in the Southern Colonies of North America in the 17th century (www.africanamericans.com/Slavery), there already were slaves within the African community. The slaves in pre-colonial times were either women or young girls, performing domestic chores for their (male) owners. Women were desired as slaves mainly because of their productive and procreative abilities (Moss 28). In recognising women based on these categories, it would seem like men in the pre-colonial period saw women

mainly as household servants and not as their equals. This indicates a society where gender-roles are clearly defined. Women dominated the domestic sphere, but were seldom recognised outside of the home as they did not have much influence in public decision-making (Moss 20). Men thus had the most power regarding issues that had an impact on people's lives. Moss further observes that "although women were recognized as essential to society, men sought to control women's status and minimize their influence through myths and biological constraints" (20).These biological constraints can be traced back to ancient Greece, where Aristotle in his philosophical observations pointed to how women were the fertile, but passive soil in which men planted their "seeds": "the female does not emit seed" but is rather "a cause of generation in some other way" (Mayhew 32). This reinforces the idea that women do not define themselves, but are defined by their surroundings, also known as "othering". This I will, however, return to when dealing with black women's role in the period of slavery. The biological classification is also relatable to men's traditional dominance over women, making it "natural" that the man should function as the head of the family. A woman's position in the household has thus been defined from this stance.

As women maintained their role within the house or in the field of agriculture, their positions could improve with age. Other ways of improving their position that were available to women were related to religion, or rather their role in religious ceremonies. Moss notes that spirit possession cults where women were prominent, has represented an arena for battling male domination and marital abuse (25). Hence, it does seem as if women's identity in pre-colonial times was closely connected to nature. They were apparently perceived as mythical and almost primitive creatures, and represented a double-edged presence in men's lives; both as necessary means of bringing them children and also as fearsome and powerful *witches*. The notion of the witch is a negative image as it portrays women as a threatening and vengeful

force. This notion is not only rooted in African culture, as femininity represented in such a way is evident in almost every culture.

The period of slavery in the U.S., which ranges roughly from the early 1600s to 1865, officially ended with the ratification of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution that outlawed slavery in the U.S. in 1865 (www.africanamericans.com/Slavery). This period spawned numerous narratives that in agonising detail recounted the brutality and dehumanised conditions that people of African descent had to endure. The situation for most ethnic African women in this period worsened greatly. The classification of black women as primitive commodities was reinforced, and their sexuality was compromised through rape and other forms of abuse and humiliation, although at this point, humiliation was brought on by the white slave owner, and not by men of the same race and colour. This was largely due to the devaluation of black women that stemmed from the notion of their being animalistic and primitive: "the Black woman's promiscuity and physical unattractiveness—overt manifestations of her animal-like traits—cause her to be devalued because she is unable to reach the standard of feminine beauty and behavior required of 'ideal' women" (Guy-Sheftall 26). Hence, we here find a new justification for the devaluation of the black woman as she is considered less feminine, and therefore not a genuine woman by their standards. Feminist theorist Joy James comments: "African-American women by definition could not be 'violated' because they were without 'virtue'" (136). As such, rape was also warranted, based on the presumption that these women had no feelings that could be hurt, and because they were shameless.

The notion of black women as immoral is upheld even today. Joy James also observes how the definitions of black men and women together fit into the "code of chivalry […] in bipolar stereotypes of White knights and ladies; Black sexual brutes and savages" (James 136). These classifications show that black men and women were identified as equal—in the

sense *equally* savage—by the white slave masters. Hence, it illustrates that both men and women were regarded as citizens with no rights, and could therefore be treated as equals to animals. James continues: "A White man, by definition a 'gentleman' in comparison to African Americans, would not rape a 'lady' (White woman) and could not rape an object (Black woman)" (James 136). The code of "chivalry" that James is referring to echoes the observation by Guy-Sheftall on the topic of classifying black women as mere objects, and therefore not even capable of being raped. The white woman is classified also, but hers is the category of upper-class notions of what a woman should be like. Consequently, the objectification of black women was based on the presumption of her as an alien, derived from her "otherness": "The episteme of racialized patriarchy was articulated in racialized voids. Black women, given their slave status, were excluded as the 'other'; without rights" (Eisenstein 77). I find that these aspects verify the view of black women's sexuality as an element that can be belittled or even ignored. In retrospect, the trials that black men and women had to endure in this period put its mark on the African American population, and singled them out as a people who "struggled and survived".

It was not until around the rise of African American activism in the 1960s, that a new awareness arose in black women in the U.S.. The Civil Rights Movement brought on a whole new perspective on black people as a force to be reckoned with, although this was chiefly restricted to the men who participated. The Women's Movement coincided with the Civil Rights movement, and could be divided into two segments: the liberal "women's rights" and the radical "women's liberation" (Polatnick 110). In relation to race, activism of this kind largely manifested itself as a white women's movement, as these were clearly overrepresented in the majority among the protesters. "As many black women/women of color saw white women from privileged classes benefiting economically more than other groups from reformist feminist gains, […], it simply reaffirmed their fear that feminism was really about

increasing white power” (hooks 42). In this respect, it seems like the notion that black women had of feminist activism was regarded as wrong and indifferent. Nevertheless, there were black women who were involved in activist activities to improve the conditions of their lives, for example in the cities of Mount Vernon and New Rochelle near New York City. Sociologist Rivka Polatnick has observed how black women there were concerned with issues regarding male domination within black or community organisations. Some formed separate anti-sexist women’s groups, although they did not consider themselves as part of the white-dominated women’s movement (110).

The main concern of the women who partook in these activities was related to the way they were being treated by the male part of the population. Some of Polatnick’s findings concern the relationship between men and women. In an interview with a black social worker referred to as “Pat R.”, she concludes that “under conditions of poverty, the family becomes an arena of power struggles” (Polatnick 112). Her observations on black urban family life show that family-structured relationships often function as outlets for emotional stress. As a consequence, the battle for equal rights and decent standards of living took on new dimensions. The struggle that initially had been directed towards both landlords and the welfare system now was also directed towards black men.

Reactions from the men who lived in either of these cities and / or were connected in some way to the activist women, were so far yet to be heard. Their reactions came eventually, and they were often violent. Documentation shows that many of the women who participated in the movement, had been beaten by their men. The reason for this was clear: the men felt that the power they had over their women was slipping away from them, and thus they wanted it back. A manifestation of this battle came with the introduction of the birth control pill in these communities. Pat R. received a statement by the Black Unity Party of Peekskill, N.Y. entitled: “Birth Control Pills and Black Children” (Polatnick 116). This statement drew a

parallel between the increase in women's use of the pill to racism and white supremacist thinking, as they referred to the pill-use as "Race control" (116). The conflict took on nationalistic motives in this sense, and the activists' battle turned from a movement for the rights of women, to a discussion on racial and nationalistic issues. The women felt that the pill helped them regain control over their lives, whereas the men's control-driven motives for keeping their women in check by impregnating them, now faltered. Their lack of responsibility frustrated the women, who in their newfound awareness started questioning the motives of the men. The challenges that the women of Mount Vernon and New Rochelle had to deal with, illustrate the importance of addressing issues that have a direct influence in one's life. We can also see to what extent topics like gender, race and class are interrelated in a multitude of ways. The sexist attitude the women were met with from their men when they attempted to turn the discussion on birth control into a racist conflict by attacking white people, reinforces this notion: "In the 1960s and 1970s, black women of all social classes recognized these divisions and redefined a black feminist identity, but since then these differences have resurfaced" (Scott n.pag.).

Pride and Prejudice: Expressive Male Culture

> For certain African-American men, pride and arrogance are bound together like electrical wiring. Twisted tight and full of energy these two qualities often become one supercharged current that burns away humility. In general this is perceived as a bad thing. Yet for generations of disenfranchised men this has been an invigorating source of self-empowerment (George 50).

There are plenty of myths and a multitude of notions surrounding the black man. Consequently, what people believe to be the truth sometimes becomes "true" eventually, even if there is no empirical evidence available. What Nelson George is referring to, is one of the popular myths that one might encounter today, namely that of the African American male as

arrogant and proud. How this came into being, he states, is because of the need for a "system of survival," which is the basic function of the pride that some men displays (George 50). He mentions also that this is something that has been going on for generations, even when there are apparent signs of negative reactions from the surroundings. Thus, the behaviour of some African American men follows a pattern that is socially unacceptable. Nonetheless, this pattern is sustained as a way of responding to the outside world.

George further elaborates on the subject of male pride: "Black male pride is a weapon and an attitude. It is an attack on the negative and it is a way to spin the negative on its head" (51). By observing how there are two sides to the kind of arrogance that some African American men display, George points out the way these men use it not only for protection, but also as a way of presenting yourself to the world as a part of your identity. At the same time, it is a way of keeping people at bay as you signal through your hostility that you are "impenetrable". The arrogance becomes in itself a weapon, and not just for protective purposes. As such, it becomes an expression of masculine identity in that it can both be seen as an articulation of defence, and also as a way of turning negativity into something positive, for instance in the encounter with racism. Aggression can this way be a possible outcome caused by this arrogant behaviour, as there is a discrepancy between the ways you see the world, how you are perceived by the world and how you see yourself.

African American studies scholar Robin D.G. Kelley attempts to break down the set of cultural codes that sociologists have come up with in order to explain expressive black urban culture. He sees part of the problem in the social scientists' definition of "culture", and comments:

> Much of this literature not only conflates behaviour with culture, but when social scientists explore "expressive" cultural forms or what has been called "popular culture" […], most reduce it to expressions of pathology, compensatory behavior, or creative "coping mechanisms" to deal with racism and poverty (Kelley 120).

In his discussion, Kelley points out how compensatory behaviour and coping mechanisms are mere expressions that oversimplify the study of an ethnic group's cultural forms. In this respect, he seems to take a different stance than Nelson George, who identifies *self-empowering* as one of the aspects of the arrogance that some African American men display. This constitutes a different sort of coping mechanism, as it is a way to take control over one's life and turning it into something better. Kelley admits that "some aspects of black expressive cultures certainly help inner city residents deal with and even resist ghetto conditions"(120). Thus, there are ways in which people who live in inner-city areas can cope with harsh realities and avoid being victimised in the process. This, I think, supports George's view to some extent. Kelley further remarks that "most of the literature ignores what these cultural forms mean for the practitioners" (120). He observes how some of these studies often *neglect* important aspects of their subjects, by overlooking the effect of a particular cultural phenomenon on the people who are the subject of the study. Consequently, I find it necessary to take a look at the mechanisms that are at work regarding the way African American men in inner-city areas experience their day-to-day reality, to see if there is a common denominator that functions as a driving force behind their actions.

When discussing survival strategies, Robin Kelley mentions an example that illustrates how these are working in practice, as illustrated in the studies of Lee Rainwater and Ulf Hannerz, which is the concept of "soul". "*Soul* is the expressive lifestyle of black men adapting to economic and political marginality. This one word supposedly embraces the entire range of 'Negro lower class culture'; it constitutes 'essential Negroness.' Only authentic Negroes had soul" (Hannerz 123). I believe this concept tallies well with George's notion of self-empowerment in African American men. This definition of *soul* indicates that the concept is intrinsically linked to black men's identity, and it claims a certain level of authenticity. According to Kelley, Hannerz insists on linking this concept to the relationship between man

and woman: “Success with the opposite sex is a focal concern in lower-class Negro life” (Hannerz 123). Thus, the element of courting is important, and there are rules of conduct on how to go about it. Furthermore, Kelley believes that this is traceable in soul music’s rendering of courting or lost love (123). This assumption is, I believe, an interesting aspect of African American men’s social life that is visible through much of popular music today as well, although in more “direct” versions. I will, however, return to this in the section preoccupied with lyrics and themes in contemporary rap music.

Kelley further remarks on the findings of Rainwater and Hannerz: “Being ‘cool’ is an indispensable component of soul; it is also regarded […] as a peculiarly black expression of masculinity. […] Cool, not surprisingly, is merely another mechanism to cope with racism and poverty” (Kelley 123). As I have understood it, the concept of being *cool* is a certain way of behaving towards others, and it is a trait that is closely connected to black masculine identity. Being *cool* can also be a different form of self-empowerment or survival strategy, as Lee Rainwater and David Schulz comments on the function of this particular coping mechanism: “(to) make yourself interesting and attractive to others so that you are better able to manipulate their behavior along lines that will provide some immediate gratification” (Rainwater and Schulz 123). I believe that George’s observation regarding the arrogant black male is one aspect of the coolness that is referred to here. Also, the aspect of “immediate gratification” is interesting in that it touches upon aspects of egocentricity and general manipulative behaviour.

All the traits that have been mentioned so far merge into a set of survival strategies that might be applicable to urban African American men. A possible consequence of this behavioural pattern is a complication of the relationship between man and woman: “while it helps young black males maintain an image of being “in control,” it can also make “intimate relationships” more difficult to achieve” (Schulz 123). This way, the coping mechanisms

referred to as “soul” and the “cool pose” might work against alliances between men and women as the man is too absorbed in his own image and strategy. I believe the image of “being in control” refers to a masculine expressiveness that is illusive, and thus is an obstacle to intimacy. Moreover, this assumption illustrates how the distance between male and female grows larger as these stereotypical images of identity are sustained.

So far I have mostly concentrated on gender in separate sections, and mentioned one sex in relation to the other only in terms of subjugation. As the subject for my study is misogynist and sexist views in an expressive black cultural form (hip-hop), I would like to focus on identity in relation to sexuality in particular. Are there discrepancies in African American male-female relationships that explain the mass-marketed negative depictions of women in hip-hop that we see today? I find it necessary to take a closer look at what constitutes African American female identity, and relate this to male identity in terms of stereotypical representations. Also, I would like to look at the one-parent family, and the concept of the *broken home*.

I have already touched upon how women in both colonial and post-colonial times were treated, and what their roles were characterised by. Not surprisingly, the identity of African American women can be seen to have been largely defined from men’s viewpoint, as society has been founded on men’s values and notions. Black women’s sexuality has traditionally been objectified or neglected, as for instance illustrated by the period of slavery. Regarding the African American male, I believe the concepts mentioned in relation to how they deal with their surroundings in inner-city areas, are key terms to understand how they relate to women. The concept of “being cool” was commented upon, as this was regarded by the scholars as a coping mechanism that might make an intimate relationship difficult. Robin Kelley comments on the subject: “The masculinism of soul in contemporary ghetto ethnography has survived to this day, despite the last quarter-century of incisive black

feminist scholarship. The ethnographic and sociological search for soul has made a comeback recently under a new name: the 'cool pose' " (127). Studies in this area in the 1990s has picked up and strengthened the ideas of the scholars from the late 1960s and early 1970s, believing that intimacy problems between the sexes occur due to an upholding of adaptive strategies in men. Even if there is disagreement on whether these strategies are to be applied this way, these studies make some interesting remarks about intimacy. Confidence is a key word in this respect, as these problems regarding intimacy might be the result of low self-esteem in African American men. Low self-esteem stems from the chaotic and helpless conditions of the inner cities that many African American males might experience. This may be applicable, in addition to experiencing problems in intimate relationships, to having a low paid job, housing conditions, no sense of identity, etc. Thus, these strategies are sustained as a means of acquiring self-confidence, and the definition of the "cool pose" that follows, is highly relatable to their handling of the situation: "cool pose is a ritualized form of masculinity that entails behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single, critical message: pride, strength, and control" (Majors and Mancini Billson 127). The aspects of *strength* and *control* are crucial in understanding the quintessence of masculinity, and they confirm the notion of the man as the dominant component in a relationship. The restlessness that may be the outcome of these characteristics in terms of relationships is identifiable in how men often refuse responsibility, and thus reject traditional family life. In addition, I believe these traits are relatable to the machismo-culture of hip-hop, as displayed throughout its history. Consequently, they are all contributors to the stereotyping of black men that I believe is quite pervasive in this culture, largely because they correspond to the rowdy notion that many non-blacks still have of black men.

Feminine Characteristics as Applied within a Masculine Context to African American Women

African American women are yet to have these adaptive strategies applied to them. In relation to dysfunctional families, women are statistically hugely overrepresented in terms of one-parent family structures. Female characteristics have traditionally been associated with qualities like "softness, nurturing, faithfulness, intimacy" (George 186). These traits do not tally with the aspects of African American masculinity identified earlier. Commitment is important in this respect, as the everyday struggle for existence in ghetto areas is difficult, and being a single mother even more so under these conditions. Out of 8.8 million black families in the U.S. in the 2002 census, 48 % were married-couple families, and 33 % consisted of two members (www.africanamericans.com/CensusProfiles.htm). This indicates a high percentage of one-parent families within African American communities, as over half of the families are not reported as dual households. In addition, the percentage of children living in their grandparents' household was as high as 9 %, and this is the highest rate for any race or ethnic group. Reasons for the child not living with its parents can be manifold, yet there is little doubt that there has been a continuous problem in African American communities concerning family structure. I find it possible that there are certain problematic aspects to relationships that are transmittable to children, based on how they are raised.

In Omar Tyree's novel from 1993, entitled *Flyy Girl,* the effect of such a transmitted relationship-pattern is depicted. As the reader is introduced to the female protagonist, Tracy Ellison, we get to know her family situation as she and her brother are raised by their single mother in a suburban area of Northwest Philadelphia. The father is absent, but he supports them economically. We see the consequences of a broken family in a very young girl who barely in her teens starts seducing boys, and then dumps them as soon as they show any real interest in her. I believe this novel, which has been labelled "an urban classic," nicely

illustrates the issues regarding commitment that is commonly characteristic of African American male-female relationships in urban areas. As this novel is set in a middle-class environment, the economic difficulties that might be relevant to people living below the poverty line are absent here. However, generally recognisable subjects of unrequited love, broken relationships and sex as a means of self-empowerment are present. Furthermore, the role of the protagonist is uncharacteristically masculine. When traits of strength and control (as found in the studies of black urban male behaviour) are applied to Tracy, she comes across as a genuine tomboy who uses sex as a means of control rather than of self-empowerment.

Sexuality in a relationship between man and woman is a fundamental element constituting the essential biological component of procreation. Within many African American relationships, this aspect has become somehow problematic. One of the recurring problems regarding black female sexuality, is that of their history in which sexuality has been distorted or ignored. Notions of the black female as a sexually uninhibited and animalistic creature are still to some extent pervasive in western culture today. Illustrations of this can be found both in popular culture, and in everyday representations in the media. Significant about black female sexuality, however, is the frequency in which it is conjoined with the sexuality of black men, and thus kept within the narrow boundaries of race. White female sexuality is in comparison rarely linked to ethnicity, and the same applies to the sexuality of white males.

Historian Patricia Morton observes how black women usually are classified according to different traits and characteristics determining which category they will be placed under. The three most popular ones are the “passive domestic worker”, represented by the “Mammy”, the “emasculating Matriarch” identified as the “Superwoman”, and the chronically promiscuous “Jezebel” (Farrington 133). The myth of the *Mammy* would be the stereotype that most often represents the de-sexualised female, as her sole concern is that of taking care of (other people’s) children, and performing domestic chores. The *Jezebel*- concept represents the

Mammy's counterpart as it displays no tendencies towards housekeeping or nursing. I believe this myth is most relevant to my investigation, as it represents a projection and embodiment of stereotyped black female sexuality. This accentuates the perspective of black women as being "naturally" promiscuous, and lends credence to the representation that African women often are associated with. The jezebel-term is derived from Queen Jezebel, wife of King Ahab in the Bible, and it is used to describe a "shameless or immoral woman", according to the *Compact Oxford Dictionary*. This notion is substantiated through accounts from the early days of colonisation, where the characteristics of the black female were largely presented as savage, to the point of being suspected of having sexual intercourse with apes (Farrington 55). These myths paint a rather unflattering picture of black female sexuality, and they are clearly related to the theories concerning the black female as the *other*, as someone who is without the "normal" characteristics of a human being.

Feminist Zillah Eisenstein observes that "Feminism rejects patriarchy's fictional homogenization of women as though they are all the same, and also different from men in the same way" (Eisenstein 62). In her comment, Eisenstein refers to the "otherness" that was mentioned briefly in connection to the way women have been defined and marginalised, sexually and otherwise. The ways in which race and sexuality are relatable to this definition, is described further as "Difference 'others' women from the standard men. Men in this viewing are also privileged as white and not-working-class. Women of other colors than white are further 'othered' in complex form through race, along with other classes" (62). I deduce from this that the middle-class white woman is placed above the coloured woman, whereas a white woman who belongs to the working class is identifiable with a woman of colour belonging to a class higher up in the hierarchical structure. Eisenstein traces this form of patriarchy in American society back to the colonisation period, where slaves and women in particular were denied any rights as citizens. She thus sees patriarchy's gender oppression as

inextricably linked to racism. The de-humanisation that constitutes the slaves' experience is further extended to sexual exploitation, which was quite common in the period of slavery. Today, Eisenstein reckons, the story is necessarily no different as she draws parallels between sexual exploitation through colonialism and global capitalism (85).

Globalisation and capitalism have been identified as two of the driving forces behind the development of hip-hop, as observed by Bakari Kitwana. These factors largely contributed to the development of hip-hop as a sellable product, and thus placed this cultural phenomenon in the hands of other forces than the ones regarding hip-hop as an expressive form of art. The capitalist system is usually represented by opposing forces with mutual financial interests, and thus becomes a system in which there is room for subjugation. This adds to the further complication of the relationship between the blacks and whites in the U.S., according to Eisenstein as "race and sex always exist intermingled" (136). She sees miscegenation and the mixture of the races as proof of this, and further comments on the absence of a re-visioning of gender oppression problems: "The attempt to enlarge consciousness of the colonized […] is truncated by masculinist blinders" (136). As a consequence, important gender-issues related to race are not prioritised, or even ignored in modern democratic debates, within the framework of the masculine consensus. Hence, I would like to take a closer look at whether there really is a debate around these issues, and relate the discussion to the question of sexism and misogyny in hip-hop culture.

Feminism's Discussion on Stereotypes in African American Culture

As identified in the chapter on hip-hop's background and history, the African American character is so embedded in hip-hop that we speak of it today in terms of an African American phenomenon. There is, of course, the Latino-cultural aspect to hip-hop as well, but the style, the jargon, the music are in essence expressions of urban African American culture. Today's

discussion of the negative perspectives on black female sexuality ranges from feminist debates concerning patriarchal subordination in the West, to debates on the topic of race and biology. The latter is of interest to my study, as far as the aspect of sexuality is concerned. By attempting to render feminism's role in relation to sexism and misogyny, I hope to deduce what constitutes black female sexuality as perceived today. While investigating these topics, I feel that there is need for a closer examination of what feminism in terms of race currently represents. Images in current music videos and in magazines depict black women filtered through the aesthetics of hip-hop. The lyrics of rap music also denigrate women, and thus the music and culture of hip-hop become advocates of extremely disrespectful attitudes towards women. The male egocentrism that was mentioned in connection with *gangsta* rap's progress is still flexing its muscles. As a replacement of the old "*gangsta* attitudes" that emerged in the 1990s, we see an extension of the same mentality in a new wrapping through the character of the "pimp".

The pimp-image can be traced back to the 1970s when hip-hop emerged, and African American culture had its heyday of ethno-centric pop-cultural boost as the result of the male-oriented Civil Rights Movement. In inner urban areas, the emphasis on image and the increase in drug-use contributed to making the style of the *pimp* popular. The *Blaxploitation*-films contributed largely to this trend in black popular culture, whereas the prostitute that naturally came with the "package" was not glamorised in the same fashion. From style of clothing to ways of walking; the pimp became synonymous with the slick and fast-talking African American male residing in the inner areas of New York City. He became a style-icon, and he was more preoccupied with the relation between himself and his drug-dealing and sex-buying customers, than with the well being of the women he controlled. To the women, the presence of the pimp constituted a kind of "security" in their lives, economically and otherwise. But since the women represented the pimp's primary source of income, there was not much

goodwill around if they "neglected" their job in any way. Violence and other means of abuse became the result whenever these women did not fulfil their duties. Thus, the relationship between the pimp and the prostitute was that of a very unequal dependency, almost comparable to that of master and slave. The glamorous pimp-image that was presented through the media and other pop-cultural channels, contrasted heavily with the women-beater and drug-dealing hustler who "ruled" the streets of New York City's black neighbourhoods in the 1970s.

Today, the pimp-image as portrayed by many of the great rap artists such as Snoop Dogg and 50 Cent is to a great extent the result of the music business' focus on the need to increase record sales. The characteristics of the "pimp rapper" are more often than not conjoined in videos with images of half-naked women who "strut their stuff" alongside the rapper, who is usually fully clothed. In African American relationships, the pimp/prostitute relation is often echoed in the liaison between young girls and men who are involved in criminal activities. The currency is sex, and the prize is money, respect and power. The woman gets clothing, jewellery, and a certain kind of security in return for her "favours". Her criminal boyfriend uses her good looks and sex-appeal as a means to heighten his status among his mates. Whereas the woman serves the function of being a trophy, and a pretty real-life doll serving her boyfriend's needs. In a sense, this makes her a socially accepted prostitute, as she uses her body as sellable goods. She is conscious of her boyfriend's criminal activities and she accepts them, as the money makes her lifestyle possible. This kind of exchange corresponds to the image that is often presented in rap videos, as women are mostly portrayed as easy and promiscuous. The accepted "criminal boyfriend ↔ promiscuous girlfriend" constellation thus contributes to maintaining the notion of the African American female as a "sexually liberated" woman--on the man's terms.

Feminist Gwendolyn Pough states that “we must make visible the plight of young black women who often mistake male violence and abusiveness as expressions of ‘gangsta love.’ After all, they are bombarded with images of young black women, like themselves, in rap videos that celebrate women willing to commit crimes for their men” (190). This way, violence in relationships is brought into context, and Pough relates this to the way young black women are depicted in ways that make them appear as having weak resistance to criminal activities. Pough further observes that “the fastest growing prison population in this country is Black women. They are going to jail for smuggling drugs, largely because of their relationships with men who are involved in criminal activities” (190). The fact that female incarceration-rates are increasing, indicates that a shift is occurring in the African American community, as the development went from black men incarcerated largely in the 1990s, to women now trading places with men in this respect. The consequence of this development can be devastating in terms of decrease in birth-rates, and the long-term social effects that can also be damaging to the African American part of the population as a whole. Pough’s solution for ending this crisis is to raise the consciousness of feminists on this issue, and engage the vanguard of the hip-hop community in order to help these young women in expanding their horizons to heighten their self-esteem (190). She also calls for more commitment towards young black women from the feminists in the U.S.

Throughout 2005, *Essence*, the foremost lifestyle magazine for black women in the U.S., conducted a campaign based on raising the awareness of its readers on the topic of the negative images of women in rap. This was called “Take Back the Music,” and engaged many people who were either observers or key players on the hip-hop music scene. The decision made by the people at *Essence* to focus on the attitudes in hip-hop regarding women, was made after an incident at the black women’s college Spelman in Atlanta. Here, the students protested against the appearance of rap-artist Nelly performing for a fundraiser on campus, as

they found his lyrics to be insulting to women. The focal concern of the campaign was to discuss mass-marketed negative portrayals of women, and not on censorship. Rap artist Nelly gave his own opinion on the subject in an interview, and on the criticism that followed the video release of his most recent hit single “Tip Drill”. He uses the restrictions of censorship as an example of the compromising that he has to deal with artistically. Nelly further states that “Hip-hop videos are art and entertainment. Videos tell stories; some are violent, some are sexy, some are fun, some are serious. As for how women are shown in the videos, I don’t have a problem with it because it’s entertainment” (Byrd / Solomon 84). Carolyn West, Associate Professor of Psychology, comments on the role of censorship: “We live in America, and people have a right to produce those images, so I’m not talking about censorship. But even if the artists won’t be responsible, the community has to hold them accountable” (Byrd / Solomon 86). West addresses the role that censorship plays, in stating how each individual has his or her responsibility for making choices that are morally defensible. In this respect, Nelly’s argument on entertainment for entertainment’s sake is not convincing regarding sexism in rap videos, as they portray women mostly as a piece of meat. The women appearing in the videos are there by their own choice, and they will probably use the same argumentation as Nelly does. However, the aspect of morality is, according to West, more important than the value of entertainment.

As Patricia Morton observed, there are different stereotyped notions of the black female, as they tend to be categorised in relation to their race. For the most part, these images are presented in mainstream rap music, which is mostly bought by a white audience. Russell Simmons, co-founder of Def Jam Records, comments: “Although these records and videos are offensive, young girls can learn a lot about the mind-set of the young guys they’re going to school with. Now that the truth is out there more, young girls can learn to deal with guys” (Byrd / Solomon 84). In admitting that the visual and audible material that is promoted in rap

is offensive, I believe Simmons confirms that sexism is *inherent* in every man. Being one of the people who has profited heavily on rap music's development, he is consequently one of the people who is responsible for the graphic marketing strategies. He also states how hip-hop today has an "educational purpose", meaning that it is supposed to teach young girls something about the young boys they will eventually go on a date with.

For hip-hop's sexism to teach young girls something important about life, is something I find to be a contradiction in terms. If sexism has an educational purpose at all, then my guess would be that this can only be in a world where the lives of women are in the hands of others, and where they are thus inferior in relation to men. In my opinion, this would be a patriarchal and misogynist society where women exist for men's pleasure only.

Kevin Powell, activist and author, observes how the sexism today is in some ways worse than during the period of slavery: "Black women, dating back to slavery, have always been depicted by this society as sexually loose, as whores, as objects to be used, then discarded. What is new about this mind-set is that there seems to be no boundaries, no coded language in the way men-Black men-rap or sing about and relate to Black women nowadays" (Byrd / Solomon 84). In his comment, Powell addresses the question of what makes current sexism towards black women in rap come across as even worse than during the period of slavery. The coded language that he mentions is, I believe, related to the ways in which racism and discrimination previously have been systematised in one way or another. In the discrimination that much of today's mainstream rap displays there is no such system, with the possible exception of the consensus on referring to women as either "bitches", "hoes" or "skeezers".

The sort of lifestyle that much of rap music promotes today is synonymous with the lifestyle of the newly rich. But it is also equal with a life where men are in total control of women, and they can go about their business without anyone interfering. Pop-cultural correspondent for CNN, Touré, comments on this in an interview for *Essence* magazine on

this issue: “Hip-hop is primarily a male preserve, a world where men talk about what they’ve done with or to other men. The massive success of a White man like Eminem shows that White males are more accepted within hip-hop than Black females” (Byrd / Solomon 86). Once again, the amount of respect that a (black) woman can expect to receive is determined by her biology. Echoing the findings of Zillah Eisenstein on how race and sex intermingle, Touré’s observation articulates one of the ways in which sexism pervades hip-hop. He also stresses how the view that is conveyed of women in hip-hop “is obviously the wrong message to send to young women and young men who will have to create relationships that become the families of the next generation” (86). Thus, he addresses issues that may cause problems for the male-female relationships of the next generation. Since this is the hip-hop generation, then the next will perhaps be the “post- hip-hop” generation. If today’s sexist development continues, then the next generation will possibly exhibit a perception of black women that is both extremely negative and wrong.

As the different perspectives have been presented, I find that on the topic that I have chosen for this investigation, there are two phases in the socio-cultural history of African American women that have been highly contributory to shaping their sexual identity. First, we have the period of slavery where black women were denied all their basic human rights. Now, this would be applicable to black men as well, but as far as the aspect of sexuality goes, only women were objectified sexually in profoundly abusive and dehumanising ways. In this period, African American women were considered as (almost) equal to black men, but only in the sense that they were black and thus without any rights as citizens. Second, the capitalistic society that we live in today has largely contributed to the depictions we see of black women in contemporary popular culture. In a culture where making fast money is considered one of the primary goals in life, the method of making money is of little importance in the long run. The effects of this “neglect” as regards hip-hop culture are presented in the next chapter,

where I will attempt to analyse the components on which rap music is based, both in terms of visual and lyrical elements conveying sexism.

Chapter Three: Sexist Lyrics and Visual Imagery

Stereotyping of Women in Hip-Hop Culture

So far in my investigation, the focus has primarily been on whether there really is visible sexism / misogyny in the culture of hip-hop and rap music, and from where the sexism stems. The findings have mainly been taken from sociological and feminist sources, whereas now I will turn to popular culture in order to locate the visual and lyrical mechanisms that hip-hop culture consists of. On the subject of sexism and misogyny, there are several aspects to be regarded, and one that is especially significant to my investigation is the way in which men regard and depict women in this culture. Also of relevance is how this view is conveyed in the lyrics and videos. The artists and videos that I choose to focus on will be significant in terms of how they in their artistry display a sexist view towards women, and how this attitude is articulated in the music. As both genders can be exponents for a sexist view, I will take them into consideration for illustrative purposes. Consequently, the artists that I choose will be relating to these terms and they will be extracted from each decade, beginning in the 1970s. Thus, I would like to trace sexism in hip-hop over the last thirty years approximately; to see how it has evolved since hip-hop became a part of the music scene. However, I will mostly concentrate on the last fifteen years of hip-hop as I find this period to be of greatest relevance in terms of sexist imagery and lyrics.

The record industry's role in shaping and creating images is also of great interest, as the industry traditionally "moulds" their artists in accordance with current tastes and trends. Hence, I will have to look for the extent to which there is a sexist "trend" in hip-hop culture, and/or overall in the entertainments industry. The "ethical" versus the "aesthetic" aspect is crucial here, as I will also have to explore the normative aspects of the industry's

responsibility in their marketing strategies. First of all, though, I will be looking at stereotypical representations of women in hip-hop culture, along with degrading terminology and the "slang" that is associated with these stereotypes as a foundation for my analyses.

Traditionally, the labelling of black women has been closely tied to sexual characteristics, as it has been used to describe their identity as exhibiting "animalistic" or primitive traits. In the vocabulary of rap music, the *jezebel*-term has been replaced by a number of other descriptive terms, frequently referring to women in a derogatory manner. The tendency in rap of referring to women as "bitches," for example, is commonly found alongside other colourful and often graphic terms used in describing women. The definition of the word, according to *Online Slang Dictionary* is "a derogatory term, usually a female." It also states that the word can mean "a servant". What is interesting about this particular term, however, is that in hip-hop it is used as a reference to both sexes. Whether or not that makes the term less derogatory depends upon how it is used, whereas the term is for most people still associated with negative descriptions of women. A signal of aggression is closely connected to the use of the word, and it is often used alongside another term frequently found in rap lyrics, namely the label of the "hoe". While the *bitch*-concept is considered gender-neutral by some, and thus regarded as non-offensive on the basis of sex, this term is directly derived from the word "whore". As such, it is clear what the initial meaning of the word was, whereas it can also mean "an unfriendly person, usually a female", and it might even function as a greeting, but then usually between males, as in "What's up, hoe?" (www.ocf.berkeley.edu). Still, most people would undoubtedly feel uncomfortable if someone referred to them as a *hoe*. Although the term has become "familiarised" as the definition illustrates, it still has negative connotations to most people as regards sexuality.

A third concept that has been applied to women in hip-hop is the word "skeezer". As observed by Tricia Rose, this term is largely based on the presumption that a woman is only

after a man for his money, and uses sex as a means to obtain it (296). As I will attempt to illustrate in my analyses of sexist lyrics and imagery in rap, the *skeezer* is largely characterised by her manipulative traits and dangerous appeal. In this respect, this term is arguably the most negative of the three. Since the *bitch* and the *hoe* concepts are not – according to the definitions that I have been able to locate--employed on the basis of gender, the *skeezer* is thus the most explicitly negative term that men in hip-hop terminology applies to women as a sign of disrespect. The women are usually capable of using tricks and other means of manipulation in order to get what she is after. These tricks consist of using her sexuality for all it is worth, also in trapping him by means of pregnancy, then move on to lure someone else, for instance his best friend (295).Hence, it is the woman who is the "bad" person in these relationships, as she uses her considerable erotic powers to manipulate the man.

American Studies scholar Tricia Rose comments on female stereotypes by stating how women in rap are divided into at least two categories: "the 'kind to take home to mother' and the 'kind you meet at three o'clock in the morning'" (295). She further observes how the latter is the one who is only after the man's money, his car and cash, and the first one is a rare specimen of womanhood (295). These polarised stereotypes are much in tune with traditional notions of the black female, as the *jezebel*-stereotype falls into the last category of women, and the *superwoman* would be the hard-to-come-by woman with abilities that are "approvable" for a woman. In more general terms, these stereotypes are also applicable to the whore/madonna dichotomy. Neither of these stereotypes are easy to live up to for women, as they are both moulded in men's consciousness and therefore not, by definition, their own. Nevertheless, most women have traits that probably can be associated with both the whore and the madonna category.

Another female category which is recognisable in hip-hop's depiction of women that is considered to be more on women's terms and therefore not as negative is the "fly girl". These girls are often linked to men who sport the "pimp" image, as they display a fondness for expensive cars, jewellery and the fast lifestyle often associated with today's *pimp*-rappers. An important aspect of the fly girl image is *attitude*. According to Cheryl L. Keyes, the description of a girl that is *fly* is of someone "in chic clothing and fashionable hairstyles, jewelry, and cosmetics, a style that grew out of the blaxploitation films of the late 1960s through the mid-1970s. (…) The fly persona in these films influenced a wave of Black contemporary youth who, in turn, resurrected flyness and its continuum in hip-hop culture" (269). Thus, this character grew out of the 1970s *Blaxploitation*-aestheticism, and could largely be regarded as the pimp's female equivalent in this respect. They are similar in that they are both sexually assertive and proud, and also in being confident to the point of being a *show off*.

In rap, the *fly*-image is highly significant. In the 1980s, the female rap trio Salt-N-Pepa were considered the ultimate fly-girls as they were unafraid of showing their sexual side, along with their ability to use wit in order to ridicule or scorn men that wanted to criticise them or were rude. In this respect, they were attacking men much in the same way as they were being affronted themselves; by being women in a sexist male-dominated setting. Robin Roberts observes in her study "Ladies First" that "[r]ap's fly girl image is (…) far more than a whim, for it highlights aspects of Black women's bodies considered undesirable by American mainstream standards of beauty" (Roberts 1995). By accentuating bodily traits of black women that normally are considered unattractive by the patriarchal male (white) standards, the conception of black female sexuality was thus boosted in mass culture around this time in the late 1980s. Roberts continues: "They [Salt-N-Pepa] portray via performance the fly girl as a party-goer, an independent woman, but, additionally, an erotic subject rather than an

objectified one" (269). As such, Roberts would like the fly-girl's image to have relevance well beyond the particular time period in which she made these comments in 1994. The fly girl- image in rap is still around, but whether its significance is the same as in Salt-N-Pepa's heyday is a question of in what direction notions of black female sexuality have moved, and how it is portrayed in popular culture.

Today, the representation of the fly girl in rap's imagery has largely been replaced by the image of the "self-defined bitch". As the name indicates, there is an element of active involvement from women in bringing about this definition. Whether or not this could be an extension of the fly-image, is, however, debatable. According to Cheryl Keyes, the female MCs of the 1990s came to "revise the standard definition of *bitch*, from an 'aggressive woman who challenges male authority' (Penrice 1995) to an aggressive or assertive female who subverts patriarchal rule" (Keyes 271). By reclaiming the *bitch*-word, these women made a statement regarding the way they were being treated by men, and instead made it a term that supposedly lost its power of insult. Already a complicated term as the non-offensive gender "neutral" definition indicates, the concept still has negative connotations. It is significant, that the shift regarding the definition of the *bitch*-term coincided with the growth of *gangsta* rap that began early in the 1990s. Certain female artists who launched their careers in the 1990s adapted the *bitch*-image, and teamed this up with *fly* and hardcore attitudes that made their videos and performances extremely sexually charged. The female performers who fronted this new "hybrid" image were Foxy Brown and Lil' Kim (271). Their artistic image, which is based on sexual assertiveness and a confrontational attitude, corresponded to the image of their male counterparts, namely the *gangsta*-rappers. Their glorification of violence, drugs and obscenity is largely founded on the same attitudes and values that the female duo exhibit. Thus, they come across as female rappers who want to be presented as *bad*. Foxy Brown and Lil' Kim's affiliation with artists who consider themselves to be *gangsta*-rappers—or pimp-

rappers today— proves just that, as Keyes observes: “The bad girl image also parallels the ‘badman’ character (such as John Hardy, Dolemite, and Stackolee) peculiar to the African American oral narrative. [They] commonly exploit the ‘badman’ or ‘bad nigguh’ types in the toast, a long poetic narrative form that predates rap” (Keyes 272). In this respect, the image of the bad girl in rap has its roots in African American oral tradition, and has its male counterpart in the “badman”. This could to a large extent explain the longevity of “badness” in rap that was initiated with *gangsta* rap in the 1990s. The likes of Foxy Brown and Lil’ Kim, appropriately named “sistas with attitude” (271), are not necessarily very skilled in their performance, and they are better known for their sexual assertiveness and flamboyant appearance as artists.

To the hip-hop-oriented feminists, these women are considered to be a negative influence when it comes to rejecting sexism in rap. Joan Morgan states that hip-hop’s bad girls may not sustain long-lived careers in rap because “feminism is not simply about being able to do what the boys do—get high, talk endlessly about their wee-wees and what have you. At the end of the day, it’s the power women attain by making choices that increases their range of possibilities” (Morgan 1997). Accordingly, the “badness” of these female performers is not considered genuine, neither by the men in the business or by feminists. As they try to emulate the behaviour and attitude of their male counterparts, theirs is not approved as they step on masculine turf in this respect, and thus have to compensate for being women by displaying every aspect of their sexuality as part of their image. Florida-rapper Trina is a current example of such a “bad girl”, and she comments on her prospects as a *bad* girl in rap at the release of her DVD “Trina Live and Uncut”: “I’m a chick in the game who is working and people respect that. Yes, it has a lot to do with the whole sex appeal, but it’s a mixture of that image and me as a person. It’s my whole strong attitude” (www.allhiphop.com/hiphopnews). This

tally well with the statement made by Touré in chapter two, as he observed how white males were more easily accepted in hip-hop than women.

The Lyrical Contents of Sexist Rap

As part of my analysis of sexism in hip-hop culture, I would like to locate the elements that constitute sexism. In doing so, I will have to look for themes and other common denominators that can help me in the understanding of how sexism is conveyed within a popular subculture like hip-hop. The vocabulary of rap is a significant part of this picture, but the tone of voice and the way the words are delivered are also of interest. If, for instance, the theme is infidelity, then I will have to search for lines that are concerned with the state of the abandoned lover or insults that are thrown at the one who has cheated. Moreover, I would like to divide themes into categories in order to identify common themes that illustrate visible sexism or misogyny. Themes that I believe are particularly relevant for my analyses are:

a) The pimp/prostitute relationship

b) Women portrayed as false and manipulative

c) Men portrayed as "players".

I will be addressing these themes as I go along, focusing on lyrics that in some way reflect them. What is more, I will take a look at the derogatory terms that were mentioned in the previous section and see how the use of these has developed over time in texts within the rap genre.

In 1977, soul singer Clarence Reid released a record under his alias "Blowfly" entitled *Porno Freak*. This release is considered by many people to be the first rap record with x-rated lyrics, including titles such as "To Fuck the Boss", and "The Girls Want to Fuck". Many of today's artists cite him as a source of inspiration, as many of his tunes have been sampled by prominent rap artists (www.allmusic.com). In 1979, the R&B crooner James Lemmons wrote

and recorded under the name *Lord Nasty* a tune called "Disco Slut". The lyrics of this song were considered highly offensive to women, but as he released it independently, the song never reached mass audiences. Nevertheless, he is considered alongside Clarence Reid to be a forerunner to the offensive songs that are released today. Other titles that were penned by *Lord Nasty* were: "My Babysitter Jacked Me Off" and "Nasty Hoochie Booty" (www.sfweekly.com). Although both of these artists were into parody-making and stand-up comedy, their lyrics were still considered offensive and the records were often sold "under the counter" because of this (www.allmusic.com). Consequently, these two artists invented the "dirty rap" genre in these early days of hip-hop.

In the old-school era of the early 1980, the artists were not particularly interested in making songs that were offensive to women, but sexism was visible in other ways. Female rappers who wanted to make careers for themselves, experienced that the world of hip-hop was masculine and rather hostile towards women who tried to compete with them on their own turf. Some women managed to get their foot in but many never made it past the threshold, as I will comment on further in the last section of my investigation

The sexism that is visible in today's rap is more a result of the *gangsta*-era, than the old school or hybridised 1980s. Hence, the sexism that one encounters in current rap music stems largely from the 1990s. Artists who emerged in the late 1980s/early 1990s known for their sexist attitudes towards women, were 2 Live Crew and N.W.A in particular. The group 2 Live Crew is especially significant in this respect, and many people still consider them too vulgar by far, even by today's standards. A song that was considered a hit by 2 Live Crew is called "Me So Horny", and it is the opening track of their 1989 controversial record *As Nasty as They Wanna Be*. The tune consists of four verses, and the members of the group sings on one verse each, portraying themselves in various situations. There is an intro containing sampled material of talking, of which the first four lines go:

What'll we get for ten dollars?

Every 'ting you want

Everything?

Every 'ting

(www.lyricsdownload.com).

This "conversation" evidently represents a discussion about how much they, the group, can obtain for ten dollars. The group is seemingly engaged in a transaction with a prostitute, and they are enquiring about how much she is willing to do in order for them to pay her ten dollars. The answer, which is repeated as a question, obviously comes as a delight to the men who are asking. For the price of ten dollars, the woman is willing to go "all the way"; not only with one of them, but with several as suggested by the "we" of the opening line. This willingness to do the "job" for a very small amount of money, combined with not shying away from having group sex, indicates that the woman the men are talking to is promiscuous.

Incidentally, this sampled conversation is from the movie "Full Metal Jacket" by Stanley Kubrick, and it does represent the male protagonists' dealings with a prostitute. I believe this nicely illustrates and stresses the extent to which sexism is evident in the song, by their choosing this particular sample as an intro.

The text continues on to the verse, where one of the group's members (brother Marquis) is at home where he describes his plans for the evening, which is to call someone for sex. Line 2 of the first verse: "So I got the black book for a freak to call / Picked up the telephone, then dialed the 7 digits / Said, 'Yo, this is Marquis, baby! Are you down with it?'" (2-4).

The seeming randomness of calling someone whom he locates in his address book for sex, indicates that brother Marquis has done this before. It would also seem as this is how he normally goes about it whenever he wants to have sex, as there are no indicators of a relationship on an emotionally intimate level. The woman is merely described as a "freak," a

term which informally means someone “who is obsessed with a particular activity or interest” (www.askoxford.com). In this context, it is not hard to imagine what that “particular activity” might be. Also, the frankness of how he asks her is notable in that it indicates how he is completely unselfconscious about his own sexuality. The song continues, and various members of the group are describing their sexual encounters or they explain why they are so active in this field: “I’m a freak in heat, a dog without warning / my appetite is sex, ‘cause me so horny” (8-9). As these are the last lines of each chorus, I find that this is very suggestive of the theme. I believe that this is relatable to the pimp/prostitute theme because of the suggestions of paying the woman for sex, and since it portrays the man as a pimp and/or a player. The player plays games and plays them very well, whereas the pimp is someone who is directly linked to women who engage in sexual activities for money. The common denominator is that they are both in control of their respective domains.

When continuing to look at lyrics in rap music that convey sexism, I would like to try to see sexism not just from the vulgar side as displayed by 2 Live Crew, but also from the side aspiring to express why men have this attitude towards women. In this case, there is a song by rap group Bell Biv Devoe who released an album in 1990 called *Poison*. The title track of the album was a hit upon its release, although the group itself did not sustain career longevity. In the song “Poison”, there is a story about a failed relationship with a girl who is referred to as “Poison”. The opening lines go: “Poison / Yeah spot a man of freedom for a fact” (1-2), (www.top-lyrics.elizov.com). The first-person narrative refers to the experiences that he went through in this particular relationship, and he is addressing the other members of the group as a kind of warning not the get involved with a girl in the same way he did. Apparently, independence is important to him, which is the insight he probably has gained after the break-up. His view on what happens if you get involved with a girl as described in the text, is suggested in line 18 of the song: “Miss her, kiss her, love her, wrong move you’re dead” (18).

The consequences of being in a relationship with a woman and refusing to play by her rules, is according to the male narrator fatal. This is elaborated in the chorus: "That girl is poison / never trust a big butt and smile / That girl is poison poison" (19-21). Hence, the woman in the text is portrayed as poisonous and dangerous. The text continues on the same note, and lines 26 and onwards describes what the woman is after and how she goes about getting it:

> She's so fly, she'll drive you right out of your mind
> Steal your heart when you're blind
> Beware she's schemin', she'll make you think you're dreamin'
> You'll fall in love and you'll be screamin' dreamin' (26-29).

The narrator observes how he "got caught" in the first place; telling the listener about how attractive she looks and how she uses her allure to ensnare him while he is unaware and "off guard". He then continues to describe how helpless he is after he is smitten by her, and then he finds himself in a waking nightmare after being manipulated by her. The rest of the text continues in the same way, and several other stories are chronicled in the lyrics in order to emphasise why women are dangerous. The woman is portrayed as a toxic creature, ruthlessly using her sex-appeal and good looks in order to "trap" the man into obeying her. The man is depicted as defenceless against her charm, and that is why the song is formulated as a warning for other men to take their "precautions" against women. There is only one woman that is described here, but the text suggests that this applies to every woman around and thus displays a profound distrust towards women. The reference to African American women's physical features indicates that this applies especially to them, and thus is something that also has a racial dimension. Hence, I believe the song "Poison" thematically belongs to the second category, where women are depicted as false and manipulative; known in hip-hop's vocabulary as the *skeezer*.

An artist who presents a similar view of black women as that of Bell Biv Devoe, is the rap artist Ice Cube from *gangsta*-pioneer rap group N.W.A. (Niggaz With Attitude). After pursuing a solo career, he released an album in 1990 called *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted*. He was very much part of the west coast/east coast battle, and he is famous for his controversial lyrics of first-person narratives about violence, drugs and women. On *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted* album, there is a tune called "The Bomb". The word "bomb" is in black slang referring to "something exceptional" (www.voxcommunications.com), and the track is very much related thematically to that of Bell Biv Devoe. In the song, Ice Cube wants to take a stab at everyone he dislikes, including women. The text goes:

> I love Black women with a passion
> But when they gotta go and show their ass in
> I gotta clown the hoes yeah
> You gotta watch the ones with the big derrieres
> They'll steer you wrong (38-42).

Ice Cube first states how he loves black women, then goes on to say that whenever women are in any way acting to his dislike, for instance showing off in any way, then he feels he must treat them with disrespect. Lines 41 and 42 are clear warnings to other men to not get tricked by woman with large behinds, as these women—in his experience—will mislead you, or rather manipulate and trick you. The lyrics of this song clearly depict women as manipulative and potentially dangerous. The man is presented as defenceless towards women who are sexually attractive, unless he finds a way to "control" them—in this case, to ridicule them.

In 2004, Snoop Dogg (Calvin Broadus) released and album called *R&G (Rhythm & Gangsta): The Masterpiece*, which featured a track entitled "Can You Control Yo Hoe?". The title gives the theme away, but I would like to have a look at the text anyway. The intro of the song suggests that the "boys" are about to have a serious men-to-men talk about women:

“Niggas, get your milla genuine draft, cause it’s milla time, we about to go hard on these hoes” (1-2) (www.lyricsdownload.com). The second line indicates that the men involved are getting “fed up” with the way they are being treated by women. The chorus of the song elaborates on the discussion:

> Can you control your hoe? (You got a bitch that wont do what you say)
> You cant control your hoe? (She hardheaded, she just wont obey)
> Can you control your hoe? (You've got to know what to do, and what to say)
> You've got to put that bitch in her place, even if its slapping her in her face.
> Ya got to control your hoe. Can you control your hoe? (4-8)

The word “hoe” as I have commented upon, basically means “whore”. The text in parenthesis in lines four and five describes how the women referred to are acting towards the men seen from the men’s point of view, as opposed to how they want her to act. Line six states that the man has to take charge and take control of her, and line seven suggests that the male should not shy away from using violence to have his way with her (“even if its slapping her in the face”). The lyric then turns to describing a scenario where the narrator comes to visit his friend—who is among the listeners—when his girlfriend opens the door, and then there is a quarrel. The second verse continues where the row involving the girl is over, as he addresses her directly:

“This is what you made me do; I really didnt want to put hands on you. / But bitch you playin?with fire, i'm so sick and tired, of loud mouth bitches like you, / a nigga had to go and put tips on you, cause bitch you playin?with fire, i'm so sick and tired” (20-22).

The text suggests that the narrator has been assaulting the girl, and that he does not feel bad about it, although he admits that he was reluctant to do so. The phrase “you playin?with fire” contains a threat of what he might be capable of if further provocation from the female takes place. The aggressive tone of voice and the threats towards the woman in the lyrics,

suggests that the narrator considers female “interference” as a problem that should be gotten rid of. He is fed up with having “to put up with” women who are unafraid of talking back to the man, and thus uses violence as a means to stop her. The fact that he suggests that his friend should solve his “problems” in the same fashion, only emphasises how strongly he feels that violence towards women can be justified. The “control” of the woman that the narrator refers to--and seemingly wants to uphold--indicates an idealisation of imbalanced relationships where one person controls the other. Thematically, this is relatable to the pimp/prostitute relationship, where the woman is controlled by the man who “manages” her. I believe this view of relationships can be seen as a natural extension that the “pimp” image in rap conveys, as women are portrayed as property belonging to the man. I also find that the justification for violent behaviour towards women, and the importance of *brotherhood* stresses the negative outlook on women to the extent of which I see it as outright misogyny.

The Emergence of the Pimp

In the latter part of the 1990s, *gangsta* rap took a new turn, which was initiated after the killings of Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. in 1994 and 1996 respectively. This marked the “end” of the east coast/west coast feud, and thus a new era in hip-hop began. Even if negative lyrics about women were frequent in *gangsta* rap in the 1990s, the lyrics of the next generation of rap artists from Snoop Dogg to Nelly brought such attitudes to new heights. Due to an explosion in sales on both sides of the Atlantic, teamed with the devastation over losing two of rap’s most prominent artists, the imagery and lifestyle of the artists changed. The *ghetto*-oriented aestheticism that was previously so popular with most *gangsta*-rappers had now turned into a Hugh Hefner lifestyle, complete with money, women and drugs. The values thus were not very different, although the preoccupation with criminal activity was now replaced with a penchant for the finest champagne. To some of the rap artists, this lifestyle

came as a natural extension of the lifestyle that they had before, as rap now dominated about seventy percent of the hit-lists, and they were reaping the benefits of increased record-sales.

The pimp was definitely born. According to black slang, the definition of a pimp in rap is someone who is flashy and popular with women. It also states how "Pimp doesn't usually refer to the classic definition of pimp as a manager of prostitutes. In Hip-hop slang, to say "you're a pimp" is to pay a guy a complement" (www.voxcommunications.com). Accordingly, this definition leaves no doubt about the status that the *pimp* has, and the effect that he is able to induce in people. The *pimp* then becomes a symbol of hip-hop's answer to the American Dream; a (nearly) self-made man who is idolised in terms of personal wealth and freedom. As hip-hop culture arguably represents today's foremost expression of black culture, the *pimp* thus becomes an idol for many African Americans.

The image of the "pimp" in rap has also made an impact visually. Videos presenting women in bikinis or less, together with fully clothed men, are more or less the norm in current rap. One video that has caused uproar in the feminist camp and among other entertainers is the video for rap artist Nelly's "Tip Drill". Now, what exactly is a "tip drill"? According to webpage www.tip-drill.com, it is "another word for a girl" derived from basketball, where a tip drill is when the players "line up and tip it off the backboard consecutively, one after another".

The video features Nelly and his male friends in and outside a mansion-like villa. The camera follows Nelly as he walks into the villa, where he is welcomed by many black girls in bikinis. The scenes show mainly the girls dancing around, while Nelly and his friends are drinking. The men are all fully clothed throughout the video, whereas all some of the girls are shown topless. They are shaking their buttocks suggestively towards the camera, and displaying postures that are fit for acrobatics. The women are constantly touching each other in suggestive ways, and the men are also *physical* towards the women in the same way. Nelly

and his mates repeatedly throw money at the women's crotches and/or buttocks. At the end of the video, Nelly swipes a credit card down the buttocks of one of the dancers.

The way women are presented in this video indicates that they are promiscuous prostitutes who will do anything for money. In that respect, the portrayals echo the lyrics in 2 Live Crew's "Me So Horny". The "highlight" of the video, where Nelly uses his credit card, is actually more powerful than the images of the half-naked women. The aestheticism that this video represents is not unique in any way in relation to contemporary rap music. This kind of portrayals of women is more the norm than the exception, although in this particular video the flirtation of the hip-hop industry with porn is not as "concealed" as in the promotional videos for similar artists, like Snoop Dogg or Usher. Over the next section, I will take a look at the way the hip-hop industry is responsible for producing these images.

Keepin' It Real: The Hip-Hop Industry and Its Role

The realm of entertainment has always been preoccupied with sexual exploitation for the sake of earning money. There are numerous examples of this throughout the history of popular culture, and the discussion on this topic has frequently focused on the issue of censorship. Rap music and hip-hop culture are no exceptions, and there have been constant conflicts regarding freedom of speech in the history of hip-hop. Issues have ranged from indecency in lyrics, as was the case with 2 Live Crew's 1989 album *As Nasty as They Wanna Be,* to themes about cop-killings as in N.W.A.'s "Fuck Tha Police" from the album *Straight Outta Compton*. However, the question of censorship is not what the debate around sexism in rap is basically about. When the University of Chicago held its conference last year on feminism's place in hip-hop, they made a conscious point out of not letting the topic become a matter of indecency. It is undeniable that the music industry plays an important part in presenting the artists, as they manage the artists and are fully aware of the currents and trends of the

consumer market. And yes, as illustrated by the video for "Tip Drill" amongst many, today's trends in rap music tend to portray the male artist as a pimp and the (black) female as a sex object under his control.

Camilla Evans, a publisher and editor of "Fish'n'Grit"—a magazine where rappers and porn stars are featured alongside each other—comments on how the situation in rap is today: "We've been using sex to sell music for years. Now we're just flipping it to have music sell sex" (Edlund, n.pag.). I believe this statement sums up the reason for the rap industry's affiliation with porn rather well. Obviously, the tendency can be found in popular music as a whole, but nowhere in as undiluted and brazen a form as in rap music today. An aspect to take into consideration in this respect is the image of the artist that is created by the music industry. I believe the audience/market that the music and images are designated for are worth considering also, as I find that both market and images contribute to upholding sexist attitudes in rap. In addition, I would like to find out how the "trend" of sexism that is displayed in hip-hop deviates from similar pop-cultural forms, and how the emphasis on sex in society in general has an impact on the way this is conveyed.

The question of authenticity is closely associated with that of creating images and identity in rap. This was especially evident when the *gangsta*-genre was dominant. The artists who considered themselves to be part of this genre, dwelled on themes of violence, drugs, and tales from street-life in the ghetto in general. What was significant about this genre, however, was that the artists claimed to live the life they were describing in their lyrics. This lifestyle was to be considered inseparable from their real-life personas, and their artistic image only accentuated this further. In this sense, the gritty realism of urban inner-city ghetto lifestyle was glorified. This glorification has been further developed in rap since the *gangsta*-era's heyday, and today it is made visible by artists such as 50 Cent (Curtis Jackson) whose semi-biographical movie of his life as a *thug* was released recently, much in the same vein as

Eminem's film *8 Mile*. As hip-hop made its giant leap into the *Billboard* charts in the summer of 1991—an event that coincided with the new system of measuring the record sales in the U.S. called *Soundscan*-- hip-hop was no longer regarded as a sub-cultural black phenomenon (Samuels 147). Significantly, this happened simultaneously with the rise of gangsta rap, and because of this the gangsta-genre came to be regarded as a commercially vital part of hip-hop culture. Thus, the music of *hardcore* gangsta-rappers N.W.A. entered the charts at number one, a group that never before had reached any higher up on the list than number 27 (147).

A consequence of gangsta rap's newfound success commercially, was that African American culture was brought to other segments of society. In the late 1980s, artists such as Run DMC and Will Smith had an audience that was mostly white and thus different from the early days of hip-hop; the old school-era's black expressive cultural form. Artists that emerged in the aftermath of these crossover artists naturally became representatives for this new expression in hip-hop and in mass-culture generally. David Samuels observed in 1991 that "although rap is still proportionally more popular among blacks, its primary audience is white and lives in the suburbs" (147). This development indicates that there had been some changes in rap music's expression, which led to this significantly newfound interest in rap music. Samuels continues: "The history of rap's degeneration from insurgent black street music to mainstream pop points to another dispiriting conclusion: the more rappers were packaged as violent black criminals, the bigger their white audience became" (147). As Samuels observes, the percentage of white consumers buying rap music grew proportionally alongside the emergence of the gangsta-subgenre. The record companies distributing this music probably discovered the "new" market for rap in the late 1980s, and used this knowledge for all it was worth.

One of the results of this newfound marketing strategy was the self-promotion of the artists as "niggas," whereas women became similarly categorised as either "bitches" or

"hoes": "manhood [is] mutated into 'nigger-hood,' and the black female mystique twisted into prostitution" (Watts 599). This self-defined stereotyping is noteworthy as it began around the time when hip-hop and rap were being recognised outside of the hip-hop community, and indicates a certain kind of marketing "profiling" that never before was visible in hip-hop culture. Samuels explains how this is directly linked to the white segment of the population's newfound interest in rap: "Rap's appeal to whites rested in its evocation of an age-old image of blackness: a foreign, sexually charged, and criminal underworld against which the norms of white society are defined, and, by extension, through which they may be defied" (147-148). In this sense, the stereotyped "blackness" that the performers of rap display, is connected to the way they are perceived by the white segment of the population. Consequently, these artists were defined not on their own terms, but on the terms of the white population and the record industry. With regard to the gangsta-genre, this was evident in how the artists presented themselves as violent and sexist. This notion has been sustained until today, as the pimp-image—a popularised black character that emerged in the 1970s-- is an extension of the gangsta-rapper.

Watts elaborates on this issue: "My point is not simply that these artists exemplify a 'street' orientation in their artistry and in their lives, but that there exists a spectacularly symbiotic relationship between the dictates of the street code and an energetic American consumerism" (601). As such, the street code and credibility aspect in the gangsta-genre are to be regarded as part of the "package" that the record companies present to the (white) consumer. There are numerous examples of the so-called gangsta-rappers being involved in shoot-outs or cases of homicide, as for instance when rapper Tupac Shakur was shot dead in 1994, or when Snoop Dogg was charged and tried for murder early in the 1990s. But Watts maintains that "as the street code gets explosively commodified and artists get juiced beyond their maddest dreams, they are compelled to maintain their celebrity status by 'authenticating'

their self-presentations in increasingly grittier terms" (601). In other words, a possible outcome of this "authentication" would be the *pimp*-image in rap, and consequently the hardened and more explicit sexism that is conveyed in hip-hop today. Watts also observes that the artists will thus feel "encouraged to display the ferocity of street knowledge on and offstage" (601). This could lead to their artistic personas and their private identity being jeopardised, and also promote de-humanising values further than what we see today. As a result, the stigmatisation that black people currently experience in relation to the music industry's artistic promotion might develop into a mass-marketed racially stereotyped freak show.

A current trend in rap that is visible today, and that can be seen as an extension of the authentication that Watts mentions, is the role of the rap artist as a host in porn productions. This trend was initiated by rapper Snoop Dogg in his XXX-rated feature-length video called "Snoop Dogg's Doggystyle" in 2001. The film, in which Snoop Dogg acts as a "host" guiding the viewer, features porn stars alongside famous rappers engaged in sexual activities, and the porn clips are alternated with songs by Snoop Dogg. The success of this video was such that it reportedly sold more than four times what is considered a best-seller in the porn industry, and spawned a "sequel," called "Hustlaz: Diary of a Pimp" two years later. (Amber n.pag.). Rappers Ice-T and 50 Cent have followed up on the trend, and 50 Cent released an interactive sex DVD titled "Groupie Luv" in 2005, featuring him and the group G-Unit. Also last year, Playboy TV introduced a new hip-hop themed series called "Buckwild," featuring mainstream rap artists like OutKast, Busta Rhymes and Snoop Dogg engaging themselves with a group of women referred to as "The Buckwild Girls" (Edlund n.pag.). These are just a few examples of the lucrative teaming of rap music with porn. When creative and commercially successful artists like OutKast are drawn to the porn world, it indicates that there seems to be no alternative to the current *pimp*-image that is based on a sexist approach to women. But is this

"sexist trend" as explicit in other areas of mass-culture, or is hip-hop culture still considered more exploitative towards women than the rest?

An editor at *New York* magazine, Ariel Levy, wrote a book on the topic of the trend of sexism called *Female Chauvinist Pigs* in 2005. Here, she explores what she refers to as "raunch culture," in which she looks into how the "[n]ew sexual liberation differs from early-model sexploitation" (Zeisler 55). In an interview with *Bitch* magazine, Levy offers some insight on how this shift came about and gives the reader an idea of how *raunch culture* has become an accepted form of entertainment—mainly from women's point of view. The reason for the title, she explains, stems from "[w]omen imagining that hotness of one particularly commercial mold is the highest achievement of womankind. Which is essentially the perspective that people who we used to call male chauvinist pigs had" (Levy 56). In this respect, the women have traded places with the formerly sexist men and become just as sexist themselves. Levy mentions some examples to illustrate this phenomenon, as for instance the "Girls Gone Wild" concept on TV where young college girls flash their breasts for the camera. She further notes how this show is only another product of our sex-fixated society: "You happen to exist at a time when exhibitionism is the cultural ideal that's being imposed on all women" (56). If that is the case, then the sexist tendency in rap and other pop-cultural forms are mere results of a general development. Furthermore, Levy compares the female chauvinist trend to "tomming," a coping strategy among African Americans which is basically "[t]he idea that a marginalized person stands to gain more by aligning herself with the dominant group than by forging an alternative on her own" (56). By comparing the sexist trend in society to issues of race and survival strategies, Levy points to the disharmony that still exists between man and woman on the topic of sexual identity. The disharmony is rooted in the lack of self-definition that was mentioned in connection with the situation of black women in the U.S..

Moreover, since the sexism has “turned”, according to Levy, from women to men, it is as men have projected their sexism onto the women. This stems largely from having no existing alternatives, thus sexism is the outcome. Levy further observes how the result of not having any alternative sexual identification “isn’t a moment of explosive sexual hedonism. It’s just a moment where sexual performances of one particular kind are overvalued” (58). This certainly explains hip-hop’s current interest in porn, as this represents the most graphic, stereotyped depictions of sex there is.

Consequently, the social repercussions of the over-sexed images represented in mass-culture, could lead to young girls having trouble defining their own sexuality at an early stage. As Levy puts it: “expressing licentiousness before you’ve even experienced lust is like this central project for teenage girls. They are taking up the challenge of seeming as wild as possible before they have even felt [sexual desire]” (59). This is especially vital for young black girls, as there are seemingly no alternatives to the role of the “hoe”, the “bitch” or the “skeezer”, a type of labelling that has not changed much since the period of slavery.

Chapter Four: The Women Answer Back

Obstacles in Dealing with Sexism in Hip-Hop

As observed in the previous chapter, sexism is noticeable in many aspects of mass culture, and in hip-hop it is only too recognisable. Even if the sexism is "cartoon"-like or part of a "hegemonic intertextuality," it is definitely present (Bayles n.pag.). Responses to misogynistic attitudes have been noted, and are now coming from within the hip-hop community itself. Feminists have been reacting against negative attitudes towards women for some time, but since many black women feel that they are disloyal to black men by criticising their sexist attitudes, reactions have been scarce. Journalist Clarence Page gives her opinion on this matter: "Cultural change begins with conversations, freely expressed and from the heart. We [African Americans] too often silence ourselves with politically correct 'ghettocentric' notions that black-on-black criticism of any sort is a form of racial betrayal" (Page n.pag.). This explains part of the reason why sexism in hip-hop has become as pervasive and mass-marketed as what we see today. The problematic communication on these issues indicates that the problems African Americans are facing in relationships still need mending.

Martha Bayles has identified three main obstacles that one will encounter when trying to deal with the sexism that is present in hip-hop. In this chapter, I will investigate these obstacles and, to a certain extent, determine whether there is anything to be done about the demeaning views that are present. In addition, I would like to account for various responses to sexism by female rappers who are "in the game," since many of them are women who attempt to defy chauvinistic tendencies through their music and performances.

According to Bayles, the first main obstacle is "the shameless manipulativeness of the rap industry" (n.pag.). In my discussion of the rap industry in the previous chapter, I identified

the business as a purveyor of sexism and misogyny in many respects. The manipulative aspect is significant in that it locates the control-aspect of the entertainment industry as a whole. I find the music industry to be manipulative on several levels, and one of them is in its depictions of women. Bayles illustrates her point by mentioning one of several episodes involving male rappers who have been arrested for attempted assault or even murder since the days of the *gangsta*-era. She mentions the term "street credibility" in this respect, and thus echoes the observations made by David Samuels on the issue of "stereotyped" blackness. In relation to the way rap artists belonging to the *gangsta*-genre portrayed themselves, this might be true. As the majority of the target audience for rap is white—between seventy or eighty percent of all rap CD's are today sold to whites—the manipulation lies mainly in how the rap industry still "draws its talent and mystique from poor black communities" (Bayles n.pag.). In this sense, the aspect of *authenticity* is still just as valid as a marketing strategy today, but the cynicism stretches beyond street credibility to the humiliation of women.

The next obstacle according to Bayles, is the politics of people like the Reverend Al Sharpton. Sharpton is an activist who has been working against hip-hop's exploitative tendencies in recent years, and his political organisation is called "The National Action Network." The methods he uses are that of non-tolerance, as he repeatedly has tried to get rap artists he considers violent or sexist banned from being played on radio stations (www.sohh.com). Also, he has attempted to involve the government, as he would like them to regulate the hip-hop artists. The criticism that has followed Sharpton's attempts mainly argues that he is aiming in the wrong direction. As one DJ and hip-hop commentator puts it: "Instead of calling the radio station and complaining about the artist, we need to ask who's in charge? Who's provoking violence and letting DJ's use the 'N' word?" (Bayles n.pag.). Thus, he addresses the industry rather than blaming the artist for using profane language. I find that from some camps within the hip-hop community, interference from the outside is considered

a good thing, as long as the criticism is "objective" and committed. What I believe is Bayles' main concern regarding Reverend Sharpton's meddling, is that it only reinforces the gap between conservative moralists who fail to see that not all people in rap are about guns and hoes, and those who are all about guns and hoes. Sharpton is one of the more recent activists in this regard, and it is easy to draw a line between him and former meddlers such as Tipper Gore. They both represent the sort of criticism that preaches morality and triggers debates on the question of censorship, rather than welcoming an open and constructive dialogue on these issues.

The third obstacle is what Bayles refers to as "academic feminism", an issue she raised at the feminist conference on hip-hop's sexism held at the University of Chicago in 2005. Again, the question of morality and hence censorship is brought up by how some feminists in academic milieus use the "[l]anguage of morality when describing how crunk [recent southern-based sub-genre in rap presenting provocative lyrics] degrades women" (n.pag.). Even if these feminists are intent on bringing a discussion on how women are portrayed in rap to the surface in academic debates, their means are seemingly not working as planned. Bayles continues to observe how "moral revulsion got bracketed as naïve, and we groundlings were instructed to view 'Tip Drill' as part of a 'hegemonic intertextuality' in which 'the structures of racism, patriarchy , heterosexism and advanced consumer capitalism' are 'embedded' or 'inscribed' […]" (n.pag.). This illustrates how the lack of an academic strategy regarding sexism in hip-hop, may lead to a diminishing of a real discussion of these serious issues. Bayles then concludes with a comment on how the reluctance of these critics to take seriously the criticism formulated by those representing the standpoint of public morality, contributes to the issue remaining unsolved.

As far as the academic discussion on the subject of sexism in hip-hop is concerned, the question of morality interferes with and obstructs the communication, and thus leaves any

attempts at real understanding futile. The same goes for Reverend Sharpton's attempts to make this discussion a public matter—his strategies fail, however noble his intentions may be. The industry represents a different obstacle, as its interests lie mainly in the maximization of profit, and thus the question of morality is almost completely absent from their agenda. Hence, the emphasis on such issues in two of Bayles' obstacles, prevents a thorough investigation and a fertile dialogue on the topic of sexism in hip-hop. Intentions are good, but there are many aspects that need to be considered when regarding hip-hop as a social / pop-cultural phenomenon, and one tries to fit this into a politicised agenda. Here, *Essence* magazine seems to have had greater success on this subject, as they have managed to heighten the awareness of African American women to the point where they know something is wrong within their community. By directly involving the artists and producers in this discussion, they are forced to re-think some aspects of their depictions of women.

Bitches with Problems: Female Rappers' Response to Sexism

Even if there are those who come to the conclusion that there are no female artists in hip-hop with integrity, there is no denial that those who actually are concerned about sexism and negativity towards women have a reasonable advantage as they are already in the milieu. Artists such as Queen Latifah, Missy Elliott and MC Lyte are women who have made names for themselves in hip-hop, and they come across as artists who do not compromise artistic integrity with flaunting sexuality in their performances. Tricia Rose has observed how the main problem with regard to how women are presented in rap, is related to how most scholars analyse rap "outside of its socio-historical framework." Such neglect can lay rap and hip-hop open to misinterpretations, and she further states how "[w]omen rappers are especially vulnerable to such misreadings [of meaning and context] precisely because their presence in rap has been consistently ignored or marginalized, even by those social critics who have

published some of the most insightful analyses of rap" (Rose 291). When addressing the issue of women's marginalisation in rap, I believe Rose fails to recognise the fact that hip-hop is an essentially masculine culture. Historically, it has been difficult for women to gain respect in milieus that are dominated by males, and vice versa. Accept is not given overnight, and there are certain adjustments to be made from both sides.

Rose mentions Nelson George's account of hip-hop's road to mass-marketing in *Hip Hop America* from 1998 as an example of such neglect, as he "forgets" to include any female artists in his account of the development in rap which Rose refer to as "a sentimental rap retrospective" (292). George is quite preoccupied with the *old school*-days of hip-hop, but as these represent hip-hop's early days, there were few if any women around in rap. Today, the story is quite different as there are female rappers within many of rap's sub-genres. Thus, the commercialisation process has opened doors to women that before were closed. However, such categories as "crunk" or "murder rap" still contain no visible female rappers, and thus confirm the sexism that is especially evident in these particular sub-genres of rap. There are exceptions, however, and the sub-genre referred to as "mack rap" can be seen as a female equivalent to the male "pimp rap." *Mack rap* is fronted by such profiled artists as Foxy Brown and Lil' Kim, as these come across as portraying the eroticised *fly*-girl.

Rapper MC Lyte does not belong to the "mack rap" category, but is more usefully linked to the "afrocentric" wave in hip-hop that occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s. When asked whether there is a distinct female category in rap, she promptly divides female rappers into three groups: [t]he early 1980s, the mid-1980s through the early 1990s, and the late 1990s (Keyes 266). Apparently, there were no significant female rappers in the late 1970s. In the early 1980s, when rap became politicised with the emergence of "message rap," she only identifies two artists who were part of the first female "crew" in rap.

In the early stages of rap, Tricia Rose observes how “women’s participation […] was hindered by gender considerations” (294). This certainly explains why there were few if any female artists at all, despite the seeming joyous and inclusive nature that characterises the *old school*-era. She further states how the subject matter and themes in women’s rap concerned challenging “dominant notions of sexuality, heterosexual courtship, and aesthetic constructions of the body” (294). As sexism in rap has never been as pervasive as it is today, these concerns seem largely restricted to artists and sub-genres that no longer are around on the music scene. Either that is the case, or the attempts of the female artists to make a difference in terms of sexual discrimination towards women are futile.

The third category in rap which MC Lyte refers to, illustrates why the struggle seems to have come to a halt, as it includes artists such as the above mentioned Lil’ Kim and Foxy Brown. Female artists such as Missy Elliott and Da Brat, who also belong to the third and last category of female artists, question the male hierarchy that dominates rap in their music. But the truth is that rap exhibits few, if any, female artists who actively work against the normative standards of rap today. Afrocentric Queen Latifah, who is placed in the second category of woman artists in rap, no longer displays any real interest in gender issues in her music, and has also spent much of her time in recent years pursuing a movie career.

The third and last wave of female artists in rap is still, in my opinion, the most interesting category, as it coincided with the rampant sexism that became most apparent towards the end of the 1990s. The impact of these female artists on the sexist trend in rap and hip-hop is, however, debatable. An example of a female rap artist who belongs to the last category of female performers, is Kelis. In 1999, she achieved chart success with the song “Caught Out There,” where the subject matter centred on the confrontation of a cheating lover. The song ends with Kelis murdering the man who is the centre of attention. The concluding words, “I hate you so much right now,” are repeated in the chorus throughout the song and thus sets the

tone. At this early stage in her career, Harlem-bred Kelis came across as a belligerent female rap artist, hence she was placed in the category of the "self-defined bitches" of rap. The self-defined bitch was considered a woman who dared to question existing male-defined norms, and to display "ugliness" in the sense that she allowed herself to be angry in her performances. Aggressiveness has seldom been associated with femininity, but there are several examples in the history of female rap music that shows women as fierce and provocative creatures in their own right. Nevertheless, these "warrior" tendencies were mostly combined with sexuality, in order to present the artist in a "marketable" wrapping. This happened to Kelis, as she four years later stepped out with the immensely successful producer duo The Neptunes, and released her 2003 album titled *Tasty*. The title is quite telling when it comes to subject matter, and the cover of the album is in itself relatively explicit, as it shows Kelis licking a lollipop. The development from underground rap-artistry to superstardom definitely followed this record, and the accompanying videos and lyrics left the listener in no doubt about Kelis' seemingly unproblematic transformation from angry-girl to bad-girl. Hence, Kelis now was an artist who belonged to the same category in rap as that of L'il Kim, Foxy Brown and Trina; the sexualized *fly* / *bad*-girl category which proved to be highly profitable for her. The major difference between these artists and Kelis, however, is that Kelis is talented in her artistry. This "confusing" aspect of her artistry divided her audience, as one half regarded Kelis as a former self-defined bitch with massive talent, who had made a leap into the sexist man-defined category of a female rap artist for the sake of profit, While the other half regarded Kelis as pure eye candy, with a penchant for catchy lyrics and fresh beats. The latter category consisted mainly of men, a newly-introduced segment of her fan-base who previously cringed when hearing her angry texts on the radio.

I find Kelis' alteration of her artistic image to be highly significant in terms of how female performers—even those with talent—find themselves in a compromising situation

between their own definition of sexuality and the mass-marketed male-defined version of sexual identity in rap. Some would probably say that such a stunt is to be regarded as part of the “trend-package,” as sexist imagery currently is the esteemed “currency” in rap. I would definitely agree with such sentiments if Kelis was devoid of any talent as an artist, but as the history of rap shows, there are numerous examples of female artists who rely on other “artistic talents,” which makes such a sentiment invalid. As with female rap artist Queen Latifah, also considered a highly talented and creative artist, Kelis seems to have resigned as an artist with integrity, now lacking ambitions outside of the sexual norms that are placed upon her by the rap industry in particular.

Tricia Rose describes the subject matter of female artists in rap, and finds that “music videos and live performances display exuberant communities of women occupying public space while exhibiting sexual freedom, independence and, occasionally, explicit domination over men” (294). This domination can be found in the way some female artists use their sexuality to “take control” over men. When it comes to such artists as Lil’ Kim and Foxy Brown, the control-aspect becomes clearly visible in the use of sexual performances and lyrics that more than suggest licentiousness. As mentioned, these particular women make a point of relating to men in the hip-hop community by playing by their “rules”. This means that they present themselves in the image of “super-fly” women as defined by male artists. Both of these female artists are fully aware of this, and they continue to refer to themselves as “empowered” women. Rose comments: “I would like to suggest that women rappers effectively engage with male rappers on this level. By expressing their sexuality openly and in their own language, yet distinguishing themselves from poisonous and insincere women, black women rappers challenge men to take women more seriously” (296). There seems to be two kinds of female rappers, according to Tricia Rose, the kind that has got ulterior motives in engaging with a man, and the kind that is a sexually empowered and self-defined “bitch” who

is in control of her emotions. I find that this distinction contributes significantly to the notions of female sexuality that many of the male rappers display through lyrics and videos. It seems that the intention of "challenging men to take women more seriously" often results in quite the opposite. Rose further comments:

> I am not suggesting that women have untapped power that once accessed will lead to the dismantling of patriarchy. (…) But, understanding the fear of female sexuality helps explain the consistent sexual domination men attempt to sustain over women. Without such fears, their efforts would be unnecessary (296).

The efforts that Rose refers to are, I believe, the frequently degrading oral and visual descriptions of women that have motivated feminists and artists alike in the quest for a common ground on which the sexes can meet within the African American hip-hop community. However, the "threat" that female sexuality represents, and which Rose refers to, is of great interest as it illustrates why many female artists take on the "sex-kitten" image in order to sell records. By making themselves "harmless" and less threatening, they appear as objects that more easily can be controlled and dominated. In hip-hop, this is especially evident in the way female artists "are either boy toys (Lil' Kim, Foxy Brown) or tomboys (MC Lyte, the Lady of Rage), both of which are personalities constructed around a masculine norm rather than a female norm" (Touré 2004, n.pag.). I find Touré's comment to be quite illustrative of the extent to which female rap artists are dichotomised when it comes to their own artistic image. The "tomboy" was largely visible in the 1980s, then as a virtually non-sexual being in the hip-hop community. Pioneer female rap artists like Roxanne Shanté and Salt-N-Pepa were women who—at least early in their careers—presented themselves in baggy clothing, big earrings and short haircuts. Aesthetics were different then, but there was an unmistakable similarity between women and men at this point, a similarity that is unthinkable today. Adjustments clearly had to be made on the part of women in this period, as the male-dominance in the hip-hop community was almost impenetrable. Such categorisation of female

sexuality commercially could largely stem from the "danger" of female sexuality that Rose is talking about, and thus indicate that the need to control and display dominance explicitly in rap is a response based on men's fear of uncontrollable women.

Touré further compares the "brotherly love" of the hip-hop community with the sort of brotherhood that existed between men in ancient Greece, both highly sceptical of women: "We will never see a woman rapper who is seriously challenging for the role of the number one rapper in the country. The game is not built for them" (n.pag.). In this respect, Touré addresses the issue of competitiveness that the hip-hop community is largely built upon. The aspect of ambition is relevant in this regard, and I believe the careers of Kelis and Queen Latifah illustrate this, as they chose to either quit or alter their image at the peak of their careers. Other female artists who have either disappeared or altered their career-path would be the likes of Lauryn Hill and the socially conscious Monie Love. It would thus seem like there are no roads that can seriously lead to success matching the likes of male artists 50 Cent or Snoop Dogg that is open to women.

However, there is one "genre" in rap where women have made themselves heard more comprehensively, that of the "answer records." The answer record was initially a phenomenon that came out of Los Angeles in the early 1970s, as the politically conscious "rap" group The Watts Prophets released an album in 1971 called *Rappin' Black in a White World,* in response to their East Coast counterparts from New York, The Last Poets (George 133). The so-called "call-and-response" tradition that these records also are a part of is a rather competitive streak that is visible in the way some artists show "disrespect" to other artists on record. Again, the African American oral tradition ("the dozens", "signifying") is what modern rap music is founded upon, and it is evident in relation to the "answer record" as well. This was a genre that was more prominent in the 1980s, as female tomboy artist Roxanne Shanté (Lolita Gooden) and the male rap group calling themselves U.T.F.O. (Untouchable Force

Organization) in 1984 fell out with each other, as the latter recorded what later was regarded as a one-hit wonder song by the name of “Roxanne, Roxanne.” The song was supposedly an “ode to a stuck-up woman”. Shanté in return recorded a song called “Roxanne’s Revenge,” where she makes fun of the men of U.T.F.O. (Touré 2004, n.pag.). Apparently, this is a genre in rap where women can express themselves more freely.

I believe this is another illustration of the need for a thorough make-over in the field of female rap. The lack of resistance and commitment from many of the female artists in the hip-hop community seems to be a result of the way women are repeatedly excluded or just rejected in the rap industry. The male dominance in rap is one explanation for this absence, as well as the overt sexism/misogyny in current hip-hop. One female artist, however, who is regarded by the alternative hip-hop scene as a promising newcomer, is Jean Grae. Observing that no major labels are willing to release anything by her, she claims: “The ones that will take the risk want to mold you in their own image” (Grae n.pag.). Thus, she has produced her own record, which was released at the end of 2004. Perhaps this is not a lost cause after all, and there are female artists in rap who are interested in making a difference without the interference of a large company. I would like to finish by quoting a couple of lines from a song called “Ass Like That” by notorious white rapper Eminem, in which he mocks the sexist male artists in hip-hop:

> The way she moves she's like a belly dancer
>
> She's shaking that ass to the new Nelly jams, I
>
> Think someones [*sic*] at the door
>
> But I don't think I'm gonna answer
>
> Police saying freeze
>
> Doing, doing, doing

What do you mean freeze?

Please, I'm a human being, I have needs (www.lyricsdownload.com).

Conclusion

If we return to the definition of sexism referred to in the introduction, ("prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination, typically against women on the basis of sex"), it seems as if this is the definition that best formulates the sexism that I have been exploring throughout my study. I believe most people can relate to or have experienced being misjudged or prejudiced against at one point or another in their life. However, the expressed prejudice or even hatred towards someone on the basis of gender is what many women in particular have to deal with. Thus, in relation to my investigation, this definition is accurate in terms of sex *and* misconceptions based on race.

The sexist attitudes that I have been investigating in terms of hip-hop, represent a point of view that I believe is derived from popularised representations in the media. These representations tally well with the already existing prejudiced opinions that have been created in terms of race discrimination and patriarchal values, and they are thus easy to access and adjust to for those who are so inclined. Part of the problem with these representations is the lack of alternative images. This goes for sexism in hip-hop as well, particularly so regarding African American women. If there are no counter-images that will speak against the existing sexist depictions, then there will be no progress in terms of addressing sexism directly. To an already stigmatised people, these representations are no less than contributors in this respect. I believe this applies to both genders, since African Americans historically have been forced to fight actively against this stereotyping as members of a race.

Although the Civil Rights Movement brought forth a whole new range of possibilities for African Americans to tap into, the majority today still live in a de facto segregated society. The constructed images of African Americans that the media are chiefly responsible for distributing, are what many non-black citizens believe to be the truth about black people. As long as people do not interact socially across ethnic borders, these representations will

continue to circulate. In hip-hop culture, this is still ubiquitous in terms of the stereotyping of race.

An interesting, and perhaps surprising aspect to some, is the fact that most of hip-hop's buying audience is white. The stereotyped "blackness" that has been a consequence of this, as observed by David Samuels in 1991, laid the foundation on which current imagery in rap is built. Since Samuels made his observations at the time when the *gangsta* rap phenomenon emerged, he pointed to the issue of racial stereotyping in terms of how the *gangsta* rappers presented themselves. As an example of this, he mentioned Ice Cube (from rap group N.W.A.) as he billed himself "the nigger you love to hate". This I find highly illustrative of the more pronounced form of negative stereotyping in hip-hop, which was initiated by the *gangsta*-era. The negativity was displayed mainly by African American men who acted as criminal gangsters (hence the name), and who lived up to their role as "bad", thus confirming the stereotyped conception that many non-blacks had of black people. This "badness" that was also mentioned by Cheryl L. Keyes and related to the "badman" in African American folklore, was exemplified by their female counterparts Foxy Brown and L'il Kim. The *badness* is then articulated within hip-hop's boundaries through violence and as a glorification of the "thug life" by the men, whereas for women it is expressed as commodified sexuality. This includes also what Tricia Rose refers to as "hypersexual deviance" in relation to black women (n.pag.). This deviance is what is presented as part of the "blackness" package, where African Americans are to be regarded almost as parodies of themselves.

In this respect, contemporary hip-hop reflects the minstrel shows of the 19th century, where working class white men dressed up as plantation slaves (chnm.gmu.edu). A grotesque form of entertainment, it nevertheless became a widely accepted and popularised form of entertainment up until the time of the Civil War in 1860. I believe this phenomenon illustrates the fondness people have for confirming existing stereotypes. As with stereotypical

representations of black female sexuality-- the "Jezebel" notion is an example of this-- they verify what people believe to be the true image of black female sexual identity.

I thus find the stereotypical representations of black female sexuality in contemporary hip-hop to be equal to that of the minstrels in entertainment value. The reluctance of people within the black hip-hop community to interfere with these "entertaining" stereotypes until very recently echoes the hesitation of black women in the 1960s to join the Feminist Movement, as they believed this to be based on white women's premises. It also reflects the way in which the women of Mount Vernon and New Rochelle were stigmatised the moment they tried to take control over their own lives, as in the case of the birth control pill. The tension surrounding these gender issues stems from the conflicts that are latently there, on that of race and class. This sexism is, I believe, a direct consequence of the reluctance or rather apprehension connected to shying away from dealing with these issues within the African American community.

The moral responsibility of the rap industry is—and has traditionally been-- non-existent, as it is only in the game for the sake of profit. This is also recognisable in the rest of the entertainment industry, as the current sexualised trend illustrates. The rap videos mostly concentrate on elements that define traditional masculinity, which basically means cars and women. These stereotypical images have the purpose of defining and accentuating the value of the symbolic power which the rappers claim to have. If these images are repeated often enough within the same aestheticism, I believe they will lose their "value" after a while. This is in general what American pop-art artist Andy Warhol explored, and I believe this goes for the sexist images of women in rap videos as well. When these images are presented on a frequent basis, they end up functioning as mere signifiers rather than representations of anything. This, I think, explains the current situation in hip-hop, and in the entertainment industry as a whole; of moving further in the direction of pornography. The explicitness and

graphic quality of the current representations have gone this far because it is condoned by the public. The limits of what is to be considered too explicit in popular culture have definitely been moved in this respect. The entertainment industry complies with people's requests, and it is thus only part of the bigger machinery of supply and demand. As representations in the rap industry reflect the demand from their buying audience, this basically corresponds to the requests of white teenage boys. Hence, as this group defines what the expression of rap music should be like, I believe the depictions of women will necessarily become over-sexualised at some point. Since this development regarding rap music's appeal began around the time of Run DMC's success in 1985, it tallies well with the way rap's aestheticism developed from that point on. I believe this development has only gone from bad to worse, especially in the period from around 1990 up until today. Commercial success thus became a defining marker in this respect. Monotonous depictions that are supposed to represent female sexuality in rap are only part of the matter, as the real problem lies within the boundaries of race and gender. As long as such distorted notions of what "blackness" constitutes are upheld in the rest of society, the rap- and entertainment industry are more than happy to oblige.

The campaign on the issue of sexism in rap that was conducted by *Essence* magazine last year shed some light on the difficulties and tasks that lay ahead in dealing with these issues. Also, the responses from parts of the female segment of the hip-hop community have caused some disturbance in the male camp, but not to the extent they were hoping for. The moralistic strategies where the debate is turned into a discussion on censorship, was exemplified by people such as the reverend Al Sharpton and Tipper Gore. These seem to have made matters worse by preaching morality, as they only re-establish presumptions about black people's inherent "lack of virtue". It would thus seem that these strategies are both wrong-headed and ineffective, as culture critic Martha Bayles has pointed out.

However, there have been more fruitful attempts made to tackle these problems in recent years. Black comedian David Chapelle has made waves in his shows, where he has taken on some of the most pervasive notions of African Americans, and turns them upside down. For instance, he has depicted President George W. Bush as a black man, and portrayed a blind member of the Ku Klux Klan unaware of the fact that he was black. By “flipping the script” as it is referred to in hip-hop slang, Chapelle rejects the standard conceptions that non-black people may have of black people. He also makes a point of identifying the sources of these notions, and by imitation or similar comedy techniques he is able to make people glimpse the other side of the coin. This worked, apparently, as black people as well as non-blacks found the show highly entertaining. In deconstructing existing misconceptions about racial stereotypes, I believe Chapelle was onto something. This conscious attempt to break with some of the old prejudices might have an effect on people’s mindset in the long run. Unfortunately, however, Chapelle gave up as he found himself caught between the stereotypes he was making fun of, and the ones he was creating in his show.

Nonetheless, I will argue that his attempts were more effective than that of displaying righteous harm or crying censorship when dealing with issues of sexism and racial stereotypes. By using wit as a weapon, Chapelle echoes the “coping strategies” that were discussed in relation to black men’s expressive culture. Here, the premises were that one adopted certain strategies in order to relate to surroundings that were either prejudiced (race discrimination) or just difficult in terms of poverty. When operating inside the framework of the existing notions of gender and race, the strategy thus has to be on the prevailing premises of the majority culture. That seems to me to be a much more realistic avenue of desirable change than denouncing people’s lack of moral norms or pasting “explicit lyrics”-stickers on offensive material.

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