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# Explicit Content: Hip Hop, Feminism, and the Black Woman

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Explicit Content: Hip Hop, Feminism, and the Black Woman

By

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THESIS

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### ABSTRACT

This work uses grounded theory and the framework of Black feminist thought to analyze the messages in contemporary hip hop music. Grounded theory was chosen to create an unbiased setting that allowed the themes to emerge rather than looking for specific occurrences. The beginning sections focus on the history of hip hop music, Black women in media and hip hop culture, hyper-masculine blackness, before reviewing key points in Black feminist thought. The top twenty hip hop songs from 2016 were studied lyric by lyric and coded into various themes resulting in three main areas of study: Formation of Black Femininity, Hyper-Masculine Blackness, and Foundations of the Hip Hop Community. These areas are specifically connected to the history of both the hip hop and Black communities. Following the analysis of lyrics, the real messages portrayed in hip hop will be discussed and what these messages could potentially mean for the hip hop community presently and going forward.

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*“Them girls, just want to take my money  
They don’t want me to give you nothing  
They don’t want you to have nothing  
They don’t want to see me find your lovin”  
Controlla (Drake, #11)*

Hip hop music gets a bad rap; some pun intended. The music genre is headed by images of gun-wielding Black men laced in gold and baggy clothes and the beautiful women who chase them. Drugs and sex are sold on every corner and the streets are paved with violence and blood. These are the images consistently fed to the public in the Hip Hop Holy Trinity of pimp-hoe-gangsta (Rose, 2008). For example, the 2006 Oscar Award winning film, *Hustle & Flow*, told the story of a southern pimp trying to make it in the rap industry with the help of his stable of women. The film won its Oscar for the song *It’s Hard Out Here for a Pimp* by the group Three 6 Mafia detailing the struggle of a pimp “tryna get da money for da rent”. Men either sell the women or engage in the drug trade and the inherent violence, often times a combination of all three. Women are always and only for sex. As a lover of hip hop music, a participant in the hip hop culture, a wife of a Black man and a mother of a Black son, this “semi-woke” Black woman could not ignore the often problematic and dangerous images produced by the industry...but man, are those beats catchy. It is this internal struggle that laid the foundation for this study. What is the music *really* saying and what does it even mean? Why have so many people aligned themselves with a community that does not support any family values, a sense of self, or even hard work...or does it? Using a grounded theory approach and a Black feminist thought framework, this research will examine what the messages are in hip hop music and what it could potentially mean for the people immersed in the hip hop community. This research will focus on the top twenty hip hop songs from 2016. The

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following sections will lay the foundations of the hip hop culture and representations of Black men and women and the influences this has on the music.

### Hip Hop Music and Culture

Hip hop culture is an all-encompassing juggernaut that is essentially made for the Black community by the Black community, but finds its way across towns and the globe with a universal appeal to an infinite number of ‘non-Black’ areas. The subject of mockery, parody, imitation, and celebration, there seems to be no end to the fallout of hip hop and its community (Balaji, 2012; Campbell, 2004; Durham, 2012; Fraley, 2009; Grealy, 2008; Morris, 2011). According to Robin Means Coleman (2006), scholars such as Martin Kilson, a professor at Harvard, are “clearly disheartened by the dissing he believes hip-hop-era babies have dished out upon civil right-era babies” (p. 87). Kilson does not believe that the hip hop community shows the respect that it should to past generations. In a more neutral statement, Hip Hop scholar Tony Mitchell asserts that “hip-hop and rap cannot be viewed simply as an expression of African-American culture; it has become a vehicle for global youth affiliations and a tool for reworking local identity all over the world” (Pennycook, 2007, p. 102). How much further hip hop will reach is unknown; but the movement shows no signs of stopping.

In the hip hop community, sex and love are often found fighting for a place among the cultural walls (Kistler & Lee, 2010; McCune, 2008; Utley, 2010; Utley & Menzies, 2009). Often, at the heart of this battle are the roles of women and the objectification, exploitation, and the over-sexualization of their bodies (Campbell, 2004; Durham, 2012; Kistler & Lee, 2010; Utley, 2010; Utley & Menzies, 2009). Adding further fuel to the fire, there is the cultural need for men to be a “man’s man” in the hip

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hop world and the issues related to this hyper masculinity and potential violence (Campbell, 2004; Durham, 2012; Greal, 2008; McCune, 2008). The woman as a commodity was not lost on the Black men of hip hop and continues to be used as a common currency in the hip hop community (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang, 2009; Durham, 2012; Frisby & Aubrey, 2012; Moody, 2007). In what follows, I will examine the sexualization, objectification, and the symbolic representation of violence against women in hip hop music.

With its prevalence and popularity, hip hop music informs the majority of the Black culture as well as the identity making of Black women. Hip hop has positioned itself as the voice of the generation and the various instances of materialism, drugs, crime, and misogyny that are presented become the controlling images of the community. These images of flashy clothes and promiscuous women may very well be the only exposure that some individuals have to Black people and culture. The majority of the genre thrives on misogynistic lyrics and violent messages that encourage disrespect and commodification of women. According to Kelley (2012), “hip hop, like other contemporary popular music, has become a highly visual genre that depends on video representations to authenticate the performer’s ghetto roots and rough exterior” (p. 258). This research will address how these hip hop works symbolically represent Black men and women.

Most of the world is formed under the notion of “an in-group vs. an out-group” and the hip hop culture is no different (Conrad et al., 2009, p. 137; Means Coleman, 2006, p. 52). Passageway behind the exclusive walls of hip hop involves different levels of experience and identity that can be signed off on by other members already established



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in the community and how credible the viewing public views the message the artist is trying to sell (Balaji, 2012; Watts, 2005). Simply put, if any individual's background story does not offer enough of a push and they receive no backing from an established hip hop entity, they will not likely make it far as a cultural icon. According to Pennycook (2007), on a global level, there is an authenticity found in the brutal lifestyle many artists lead and credibility can be established by "carry[ing] a gun, go down to the streets and try to show that you are someone that can express yourself with violence" (2007 p. 105). Balaji (2009) asserts that companies recognize the money that is involved with the Black man and his thug appeal and that some artists will play the character of the dangerous Black man thus reinforcing the stereotypes and misrepresentations of the Black man rooted in hegemonic White idealism. Black artists perpetuate these stereotypes because they are what sells.

McLeod (1999) notes the six authenticity dichotomies often used to judge if an artist is 'keepin' it real'. The first of these are staying true to yourself vs. following mass trends. There is infinitely more credit in being who you are than to be packaged and sold (see also Pennycook, 2007). If there is any inclination that the artist or their works are not genuine, then there can potentially be some backlash for the artist. The second of these dichotomies is the idea of Black vs. White. White is often viewed as weaker and feminized thus leaving little to no space for the white man as an artist (see also Fraley, 2009; Means Coleman & Cobb, 2007). The few artists who are able to transcend the color bias are often called upon to prove themselves even more than a Black artist. McLeod's third dichotomy looks at underground vs. commercial art. Underground art lends itself to a grittier, more real feel while being middle class can lead to the death of

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an individual's credibility (see also Watts, 2005). Being too commercial may cause an artist to be labeled a "sell out," meaning they have given up on being a true artist and now is just in it for the money. Another struggle presents itself in thinking of the hip hop culture in a hard vs. soft mentality (a gender/sex attribute, with "hard" being masculine). There is no place in hip hop to be soft or feminized, a place strictly inhabited by men and women are only used for sex and to show power, wealth, and to promote the masculinity of the man that they are linked to (see also Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Frisby & Aubrey, 2012; Moody, 2011). The polar opposites of the streets vs. the suburbs presents its own set of issues. Hip hop is made in the streets and "one drop of middle class blood [leads to] expulsion" (see also Watts, 2005, p. 202). An artist cannot be *real* if he or she is not from the bottom and presumably now on the top. McLeod's final piece looks at old school vs. mainstream artist works. Original Gangstas (OGs) such as Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre headed the movement to show authenticity through their music videos and often act as gatekeepers for aspiring artists (see also Albrecht, 2008). In the Black community, there are few options but to embrace and conform because "if you don't enter into hip-hop culture, then you are open to Huxtable-esque criticisms of facilitating modern racism" by violating McLeod's rules (Means Coleman, 2006, p. 86). While this is problematic, currently, the culture offers very little in-between space.

Hip hop superstar Eminem is cited multiple times as a hip hop cultural wall breaker (Albrecht, 2008; Greal, 2008; Fraley, 2009; Means Coleman, 2006; Watts, 2005). But, his membership seems to be the exception with passage granted by "his fatherless childhood in a violent inner-city neighborhood" and Dr. Dre's seal of approval (Fraley, 2009 p. 48). A fatherless home and growing up in a rough neighborhood makes

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Eminem just authentic enough to be Black and become his own seal of approval for artist like 50 Cent (McCune, 2008). No White artist has been able to make such a prominent mark on the hip hop culture before or since Eminem. Means Coleman has specific reasons to why Eminem “works” and goes into them with great length:

Eminem can also be viewed as a *product* whose participation in Black popular communication is as much about (a) African American culture producer Dr. “the new Quincy Jones” Dre (who holds extensive writing and production credits on many of Eminem’s compact discs [CDs]); (b) Eminem’s Interscope (with Shady/Aftermath Records) record-label chief executive officer Jimmy Lovine; and (c) the influence of *XXL* magazine, which is a principle publicity outlet for Interscope artists, as it is about whether Eminem is a good guy in and for hip-hop (2006, p. 84.)

No other White artist has had so many aspects of hip hop culture working in his favor and thus puts Eminem in a league all his own, indefinitely.

The hip hop industry is not something that any artist can casually step into. Each person’s career is dependent on whether or not they have the appropriate background, style, or story and authenticity is constantly questioned and tested. Eminem’s foray into the hip hop world is such a remarkable feat because he is missing one key aspect of the hip hop prototype – he is not Black. The following section will examine the key factors in how someone not readily considered part of the hip hop culture can set roots so deep in the organization through media and convergence.

### Media Culture

According to Douglas Kellner and his work on media studies, “radio, television,

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film, and the other products of the culture industries provide the models of what it means to be male and female, successful or a failure, powerful or powerless” (1995, p. 1).

Kellner goes further to say that “media culture intersects with political and social struggles and helps shape everyday life, influencing how people think and behave, how they see themselves and other people, and how they construct their identities” (1995, p. 2). Individuals who are not exposed to the Black community on a regular basis most likely receive information and form beliefs about the community from what is seen on television, broadcast news, and the cultural artifacts shown through the media including hip hop music and values.

In her article “Feminist Perspectives on the Media” Von Zoonen notes that “media are perceived as the main instruments in conveying respectively stereotypical, patriarchal, and hegemonic values about women and femininity” (2012, p. 31). With the various forms of media (television, internet, radio, and streaming services) and the numerous devices to play them on (smart phones, tablets, laptops, even watches) there is very little space to escape the images constantly reproduced by various communities including the ones created by the Black community through hip hop music and videos. To individuals outside the Black community, “media images provide cues to understanding the ways in which women of color are imagined in our society” (Crenshaw, 2012, p. 113). If an individual has no personal experience with a Black woman, the media becomes a guide of what to expect of them and how these women should be treated.

With the hip hop culture being one of the main vehicles transporting images of Black women, what kind of messages are being sent to individuals outside of the Black

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community? What do these images, that could potentially be labeled as problematic, mean to an entire community of women that can easily find themselves being defined by these images? Hip hop begins to create a blueprint for Black women.

With the global appeal and commodification of the hip hop culture, many aspects have begun to cross over into popular music and culture. Chaney (2009) cites a study that identifies six themes in multiple genres of music including hip hop and pop. These themes include “men and power, sex as a top priority for males, objectification of women, sexual violence, women defined by having a man, and women as not valuing themselves” (p. 60). All of these themes are problematic for women and paint them in sexually objective ways that leave them little identity outside of relationships to men. These themes and the tendency for hip hop and pop songs to cross into each other’s charts makes the two genres very similar and makes hip hop more marketable to the mainstream, popular music audience. According to LaMarre, Knobloch-Westerwick, and Hoplamazian (2012), “pop music contains messages, artists, and cultural references non-specific to a single ethnic group” which makes it more appealing to a larger range of people (p. 154). While hip hop is a product primarily created by Black individuals for the consumption of Black people (a FUBU, popularized by the hip hop clothing brand by the same name, “For Us, By Us”), pop music has no direct ties to color or race which leads to some overlapping among the communities. While both hip hop and pop music are driven by similar themes as stated by Chaney above, the hip hop community is further motivated by hyper-masculine Blackness, violence, and objectification of women, which are not key factors in the pop community.

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### Hyper-Masculine Blackness History

Means Coleman blames popular communication for its “overly reductive narrative of Blackness” and “to let popular communication tell it, all we need to know about Blackness can be learned through *Roots* (slavery), *I’ll Fly Away* (Civil Rights movement), *Good Times* (soul era), and *MTV Cribs* (hip hop)” (2006, p. 88). The media is at the forefront of informing the world to how Blackness works and is portrayed (Balaji, 2009; Dubrofsky & Hardy, 2007). Moody insists “that Black men and women have partially accepted the myths about them, which contributes to the creation of sexual and racial barriers for them as a group” which leads to in-group friction (2011, p. 46). These myths include that notions that as people Black men and women have to be hyper-sexual and aggressive. If Moody’s point holds any validity, Black men are hyper-masculine because they believe they are supposed to be and Black women are hyper-sexual because they believe they are supposed to be. Further still, this implies that the majority of these identities will be formed by this hyper-masculine/sexual dichotomy.

The importance of authenticity and the objectification of women feed into “Black hyper-masculine representations as a response to historically racist stereotypes” (Greal, 2008, p. 855). Greal suggests that the Black man “plays on the fear of the big Black dick, he is the triumphant rather than the castrated victim” and notes that “women remain the collateral victims of Black male empowerment within this discourse” (2008, p. 858). Since Black men feel that they must constantly prove themselves and not be perceived as weak, they take on the super masculine role as a way to constantly assert their dominance (Conrad et al., 2009). In the hip hop community there are strong lines in Black and White binary; Black becomes what is masculine and White becomes linked to femininity, and simply put there is no place for femininity in hip hop unless it is a woman playing the

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role of property (Means Coleman & Cobbs, 2007).

According to Means Coleman (2006), there is a fascination with the notion of being Black enough and that real blackness is “in urban places (not museum spaces), in hard ‘baller’ masculinity (not what Molloseau calls the ‘gentlemanly’), and in the consumption of disposable products such as car rims, ‘throw-back’ jerseys, and bling (not investments in abstract art)” (p. 80). This lends a hand to the materialism that runs rampant in hip hop. Often, the Black artist is found trying to define himself by his material possessions and the women he keeps around. Women essentially equate to wealth and become another bargaining chip in the Black man’s repertoire of drugs, jewels, and jams.

In the hip hop culture, masculinity is directly related to power and violence. The trope of the hyper-masculine, angry, Black man is directly related to how women are treated inside the community and represented in hip hop music. There is a direct relation between art and life, a mirror even. Often, artists grow up in communities that are failed on systematic levels by family, schools, and government and in turn are pushed into illegal activity to survive whether that be drug dealing, theft, gangs, or the sex industry. Using the music industry as a way out, they rap about what they know, feeding the same detrimental lifestyle back into the community but this time there is a stamp of approval because this person has now “made it out the hood.” In this process, Black women become a status symbol showcasing the Black men’s wealth. While Black women are often seen as currency in the hip hop community, this is not the first time they have been prized for their body parts.

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### Black Women and Hip Hop

Black women have a long history of being over-sexualized beings with the most notable being Saartje Baartman (Sarah Bartman) a.k.a. The Hottentot Venus and the complete misunderstanding, objectification, and later mutilation of her body by misguided Europeans (Campbell, 2004; Dubrofsky & Hardy 2008; Durham, 2012; Fuller, 2011; Morris, 2011). Yet, this risky mania is just as prevalent inside the hip hop culture as it is out. There seems to be no end to the dangerous obsession of the Black woman “and the urban freak body popularized by ‘booty’ music from Southern hip hop culture” (Durham, 2012, p. 43). The hip hop culture shows the Black woman in many different lights, few that are flattering, including; the Black woman as a possession, “welfare mother,” “race-loyal Queen,” “classless ho,” “big booty ho,” “hoochie,” “baby mama,” and “Gold digger” (Campbell, 2004 p. 502; Durham, 2012 p. 39; Utley, 2010 p. 301; Utley & Menzies, 2009 p. 68). This, coupled with the hyper-masculinity that drives the hip hop culture often finds the Black woman, or in McCune’s case, the feminized gay man, in a difficult position (Campbell, 2004; Durham, 2012; Greal, 2008; McCune, 2008).

Women are presented as victimized, submissive props in hip hop and valued as objects and accessories to their male counterparts (Aubrey & Frisby, 2008; Conrad et al., 2009; Frisby & Aubrey, 2012). While there is a current movement in hip hop on the idea of the “independent woman,” there seems to be contradicting ideas of what exactly this means. Moody (2007) uses *Urban Dictionary* to define an independent woman as “a woman who pays her own bills, buys her own things, and does not allow a man to influence her stability or self-confidence” (p. 44). Within the same paragraph, Portis is quoted saying that “independent women do not need a pat on the back for doing what



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grownups are supposed to do: pay their bills; buy houses and cars” (Moody, 2007, p. 44).

The idea of the ‘independent woman’ creates yet another divide between Black women and Black men.

Black male artists are also participating in the independent woman movement. Rappers Drake, Yo Gotti, and Webbie and their songs “Fancy,” “5 Star Bitch,” and “Independent,” respectively, all claim to support and praise the independent woman but focus on appearance and what that woman can do for them (Moody, 2007). These types of backhanded compliments tend to “subordinate and elevate independent women simultaneously” (Moody, 2007, p. 48). A claim of independence is good but how can that independence ultimately help the man? There has also been an influx in overall “girl power” songs but few that fall into the hip hop genre. The industry is still extremely male dominated and leaves little room for the actual voices for women of color.

There is also an inward battle raging in the hip hop culture based in the dominant ideology’s perception of beauty. According to Dagbovie, “during and after slavery, many whites thought that mulattos [lighter-skinned or mixed individuals] were intellectually superior to ‘pure’ Blacks, a notion that confirmed white supremacy” and still divides the Black and hip hop communities (2007, p. 218). Studies have shown that fair toned women with more European features are highlighted over darker women and in hip hop videos (Conrad et al., 2009; Moody, 207). This has become a source of real tension within both Black and hip hop communities. Generations of Black people still make reference to this blatant colorism that just creates a further divide in the culture.

While Campbell (2004) discusses Notorious B.I.G.’s song *Big Booty Hoes*, she points out that “it is the willingness to perform graphic sexual acts on Biggie that makes

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[the woman] deserving of disrespect, and therefore of the name ho” (p. 502). Campbell (2004) goes so far as to call Beyoncé a “delirious booty-wiggling ho” to Jay Z’s “limousine-riding pimp” (p. 502). While Beyoncé is not considered a hip hop artist, she is most definitely part of the hip hop culture and her marriage to hip hop OG Jay Z signifies her importance in this conversation. To bring both of these points full circle, Campbell (2004) poses one very important question deserving of an answer, “if African-Americans are the pimps and hoes, then who are the johns - the ones consuming the images” (p. 502)? More importantly, is it too extreme an idea to look at the men and women of hip hop as pimps and hoes and the consumers as johns or is this the way the culture should be viewed from here on out? In the hip hop community, women are presented as more of a commodity rather than a person and are often used to show wealth and power and used to garner respect from other men. The Black woman continues to be represented as another form of currency and prize used to highlight the heterosexual Black man’s dominance to other heterosexual Black men.

Another important aspect of hip hop music is sexual objectification. DeFrancisco and Palczewski (2014) define objectification within feminist theory as when “women are seen as objects – things to be looked at rather than people who act” (p. 230). Aubrey, Henson, Hopper and Smith (2009) cite Fredrickson and Roberts for a definition of sexual objectification; “it occurs whenever a woman’s body, body parts, or sexual functions are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they were capable of representing her” (p. 272). Hip hop music often places an extreme amount of importance on a woman’s beauty and physical attributes. There are whole songs dedicated to women being in strip clubs or compared to material possessions like

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cars and still further, regarded as human produce just right for the picking. For example, R. Kelly's 1995 hit *You Remind Me* boasts lyrics stating: "You remind me of my jeep, I want to ride it/ Something like my sound, I want to pump it/ Girl, you look just like my cars, I want to wax it/ And something like my bank account, I want to spend it, Baby." The female body becomes the king crop of the modern day Black man. According to DeFrancisco and Palczewski (2014), the male gaze:

[Presumes] sex of the viewer is male, and even when the viewer is female she views herself through men's eyes. Thus, when a woman assesses her body, she does so not from the perspective of another woman (or from her own perspective), but from the perspective of a man (p. 230).

The majority of media is presented from a male perspective especially media images from the hip hop community. Women are often the ultimate accessory and are directly related to power and wealth; to have this most beautiful object, you have to have earned it. Women, like a car or clothes, become a status symbol. The more women a man has, the more wealth a man can have. The more beautiful and sexualized that woman is, the more respect a man has. It becomes a cycle; more money brings more women and more women brings a higher perceived status and eventually, more money.

The constant sexual objectification of women in hip hop leads to what DeFrancisco and Palczewski (2014) call commodification; "the selling of cultural, sexual, or gender difference in a way that supports institutionalized discrimination" (p. 237). While men dominate the hip hop culture, women are exploited for their sexuality and femininity; "women are presented as sexual objects. The male gaze persists, where women are treated as objects of desire, rather than as agents of action" (p. 242). Women

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cannot do, they are done to and they become a possession of the man to be used to signify status, akin to a watch or new car. With the constant bombardment of sexual images, women can sometimes self-objectify and reproduce these problematic images (Aubrey et al., 2009 & Defrancisco & Palczewski, 2014). Sexual objectification coupled with the hyper-masculine Blackness of men in the hip hop community presents a problematic state and even more troubling images for women in their struggle to form their own identities. For much of its conception, hip hop is still very much a “for us, by us” industry as long as the “us” is male. Often positioned as the ones being acted upon and not doing any acting themselves, women and Black women in particular, were forced to find their own voices and take some agency over their lives.

### Black Feminist Thought

Black feminist thought is a theoretical framework headed by Patricia Hill Collins and asserts that the “dialectic of oppression and activism, the tension between the suppression of the African-American woman’s ideas and [the] intellectual activism in the face of that suppression constitutes the politics of U.S. Black feminist thought” (2000, p. 6). This framework prioritizes varying aspects of the lives of Black women including work life, controlling images, self-definition, sexual politics, love and relationships, motherhood, and activism. Each area helps to frame how the identity of Black women is created while acknowledging each individual outside force and influence that shapes these identities. There is no one right way to be a Black woman and Black feminist thought highlights the need and value for each of these experiences and individual circumstances.

When it comes to Black women and their work lives, Hill Collins (2000) notes

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that “one core theme in U.S. Black feminist thought consists of analyzing Black women’s work, especially Black women’s labor market victimization as *mules*” (p. 51). Dating back to slave culture and present day, Black women have been treated and seen as less than or animal-like making the substandard and ill treatment of them acceptable. This also made it easier for them to be viewed as objects, whether that be another tool for the land or a breeder of more slaves. Because these women were viewed as property- their bodies were another tool of the Master to do with as he saw fit. In her book, *Pimps Up, Ho’s Down: Hip Hop’s Hold on Young Black Women*, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting notes that young Black women were “either ‘hot pussy for sale’ – and hence Nelly swipes a credit card through a young woman’s buttocks in the now infamous ‘Tip Drill’ video- or they were ‘pussy for the taking,’ as Louisiana rapper Mystikal explains in ‘Pussy Crook’” (2007, p. 4). Still, the Black woman’s body is broken down into parts and valued for its use to others, rarely offering the opportunity for them to be seen as a whole person.

According to Hill Collins (2000), Black feminist thought is also key in fighting against the controlling images of Black women. These images can include the mammy, welfare mother, or Black lady and “are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be rational, natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life” (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 77). Showing Black women as asexual, or unsexualized creatures, nurturers (mammies), or as hyper-sexual baby producers that need assistance to help with their children (the welfare mother), or even as so aggressive that they are not *soft* enough to be loved by a man (the Black lady) creates dangerous stereotypes that are reinforced constantly in the media and daily life.

Self-definition is another core value of Black feminist thought. Hill Collins (2000)

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asserts that “much of the best of Black feminist thought reflects this effort to find a collective, self-defined voice and express a fully articulated womanist standpoint” (p. 110). Hill Collins’ concern with Black feminist thought having a strong womanist foundation stresses the importance of the movement’s need to be inclusive of all women and recognize the various ways that the world effects women. Black feminist thought seeks a common reflection that will have ties to the majority of Black women and is grounded in their lived experience. The area of study also makes it a point to note that scholarship in Black feminist thought does not have to come from just scholars but can also be heavily influenced by women not in academia. In her work *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*, bell hooks states that “difficulties arose and arise around unconsciously held beliefs and assumptions rooted in White supremacy (notions that Black people are academically inferior, or that Black people are racists if they critique whiteness and White privilege)” (2010, p. 98). hooks identifies a key factor in why there are a number of issues for Black women in academia and also proves the need for education outside of traditional academic settings. She encourages Black women not to just lean on the images portrayed in television but also on their own experiences.

Within the context of Black feminist thought, one of the most important aspects when dealing with Black sexual politics is that “rape, incest, misogyny, in Black cultural practices, and other painful topics that might implicate Black men remain taboo” (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 135). Because of this cultural mindset, Black women often feel that they should not speak on any topics that could potentially show Black men in a negative light. In some instances, the status of being a Black individual seems to be weighted more than being a woman. Regularly, Black women are led to believe that they have to protect the

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Black man- even if it is at her own expense.

When it comes to relationships, “many Black women reject feminism because they see it as being antifamily and against Black men. They do not want to give up on men – they want Black men to change” (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 164-65). Similar to sexual politics and the cultural need to protect the Black man, Black women refuse to give up on the Black man and will potentially sacrifice their happiness in an attempt to stay loyal to the race. According to Hill Collins (2000), “because hegemonic ideologies make everyday violence against Black women appear so routine, some women perceive neither themselves nor those around them as victims” (p. 172). The current Black culture reinforces a division between being Black and being a woman and makes Black women choose Black men over their womanhood. Black feminist thought encourages women to embrace their womanhood and also supports the validity of their experiences in forming their view of the world and day-to-day life.

Motherhood is an extremely important part of Black feminist thought and the Black community. In some cases, “glorifying the strong Black mother represents Black men’s attempts to replace negative White male interpretations with positive Black ones” (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 189). This seems to present its own problems for Black women as they often had to live up to this superhero-like persona that seemed to encourage not needing a Black man in their lives. These Black women who have been raised in a culture built on loyalty to Black men must now learn how to live without them and raise families without them due to current cultural trends of having children out of wedlock and the mass incarceration of Black men.

Black feminist thought also touches on activism within the Black community.

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Citing the importance of education, Hill Collins (2000) notes that “it is no accident that many well-known U.S. Black women activists were either teachers or somehow involved in struggling for educational opportunities for African-Americans of both sexes” (p. 227). Activism within Black feminist thought is reflected in the education of the people. Education has always been cited as the key to growth and Black feminist thought follows this thinking.

Black feminist thought’s specific focus on the struggles and oppression of Black women makes it the perfect foundation for a study of hip hop and Black women. An analysis of the hip hop culture through this lens lays a solid framework identifying various aspects of identity-making in this selected music. Controlling images, love and relationships, and sexual politics of Black women will all become key themes informing this research.

### Research Questions

Grounded in the existing scholarship on the representation of Black women in popular culture, this project will investigate the objectification and sexualization of women in hip hop music and broadcasts to individuals inside and outside of the culture. While not all of the women in the videos are strictly Black, the nature of hip hop music being for Black people by Black people sends a message to of what women in the hip hop community should look like.

*RQ 1: How does contemporary hip hop culture construct gender norms for Black women through their visual and lyrical content?*

This research will also examine the physical as well as perceived violence and various form of hyper-masculinity that the hip hop culture fosters through its music and



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broadcasts to individuals inside and outside the culture. Historically, Black men will assert their dominance through violence, whether that is towards a woman or another man (Greal, 2008).

*RQ 2: How does contemporary hip hop music construct gender norms for Black men through their visual and lyrical content?*

### Methods

This research will use the theoretical framework of Black feminist thought to analyze the representation of Black women through lyrical and visual content. In order to explore contemporary references of hip hop culture, the Billboard music website was selected to gather songs from because it does not cater to one specific genre of music and “it is judged by experts to be the fairest and least subjective” (Cox, 2013, p. 276). The Billboard website ([www.billboard.com](http://www.billboard.com)) was accessed January 30, 2017 and a search was done for the top twenty songs of 2016. Hip Hop/ R&B songs are often grouped together as is the case with Billboard so the combined genres will be used to represent the hip hop culture for this research and will be addressed as just "hip hop" for the remainder of this research. This is an accurate portrayal of the hip hop culture because it represents the most played songs of the genre through the most recent complete year. All lyrics will be retrieved from Apple Music for consistency. Music videos will be viewed through the YouTube website ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)). All songs chosen have been confirmed that their lyrics appear on this site. Only the artists' official videos will be used for this analysis.

The top twenty Hip Hop songs of 2016 were:

1. “One Dance” Drake featuring WizKid
2. “Panda” Designer

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3. “Work” Rihanna featuring Drake
4. “Needed Me” Rihanna
5. “Me, Myself and I” G-Eazy and Bebe Rexha
6. “Hotline Bling” Drake
7. “Too Good” Drake featuring Rihanna
8. “Broccoli” D.R.A.M. featuring Lil Yachty
9. “Here” Alessia Cara
10. “The Hills” The Weeknd
11. “Controlla” Drake
12. “Jumpman” Drake and Future
13. “Don’t Mind” Kent Jones
14. “Don’t” Bryson Tiller
15. “Low Life” Future featuring The Weeknd
16. “For Free” DJ Khaled featuring Drake
17. “Starboy” The Weeknd featuring Daft Punk
18. “2 Phones” Kevin Gates
19. “Oui” Jeremih
20. “In the Night” The Weeknd

The twenty songs were all downloaded on Apple Music and total one hour and sixteen minutes of music. The author created a playlist with only these songs and listened to it constantly over the course of this research to be familiar with the material.

Before any song or video analysis was done, the number of artists and the amount of times they made the chart were noted:

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- Drake is mentioned seven times: five times as the main artist and two as the featured artist. Drake is linked to 35% of all songs listed.
- The Weeknd is mentioned four times: three times as the main artist and one time as a featured artist.
- Rihanna is mentioned three times: two times as the main artist and one as the featured artist. Two of her three songs listed are collaborations with Drake.
- Future made the list two times: once as a joint collaboration with Drake and once as the main artist with a feature from the The Weeknd.
- All other artists are featured one time on the chart.

It is important to also note that Rihanna, Alessia Cara, and Bebe Rexha are the only women listed on the chart as the main artist or in a collaboration. The women do not have any songs listed together and collectively make up only 30% of the songs mentioned. By these numbers, Drake is more influential by himself than all three women who made the chart combined.

It is also important to note that Billboard does have a Hot Rap Songs Chart. Hip hop and rap music are very closely linked but have some distinct differences. Hip hop is the more mainstream music; it is easier to process for radio and television play while rap music lends itself to more overtly sexual and edgy content. Hip hop is definitely the more marketable of the two subgenres. While these subgenres vary, the top ten songs on the rap chart are all located on the hip hop chart resulting in a 50% cross over. No songs are charted in the same place but seem to follow the same order in popularity. For example, “Panda” by Desiigner is #2 on the hip hop chart but #1 on the rap chart.

This research used a grounded theory analysis, which allowed for themes to

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emerge rather than the researcher looking for specific occurrences (Tracy, 2013). This allowed for a less biased examination of the works that prioritizes what is actually in the music and not what individuals are led to believe is in the music. Songs were coded based on various themes that present themselves. Potential themes will include hyper-masculine blackness for men or various controlling images for women. The study expects to find various other images and will note them as they arise.

The first step was a close textual analysis of the lyrics through an open coding process. According to Tracy, this “primary-cycle coding begins with an examination of the data and assigning words or phrases that capture their essence” (2013, p. 189). Every line of each song was analyzed and placed into a corresponding category. For example, lines like “she was numb and was so co-dependent” from The Weeknd’s *In the Night* and Drake’s “girl you got me down, you got me stressed out” in *Hotline Bling* were coded under the Control/Power category. There were no set categories and categories were continually created for the entire selection of songs until each line was able to be coded. A second level of coding was done to combine categories in relatable groups. For example, the categories of Commands and Overt Aggression were condensed into one category for their often common grouping together in the song. Each song was listened to without looking at the lyrics or visual images followed by a study of the actual lyrical content. Any cultural slang will be defined and analyzed accordingly. Sexual references and contributors to hyper-masculine Blackness (violence, drugs, and materialism) were all noted in lyrical and visual content. The audio-only version of the songs were used to identify any musical cues that draw attention to certain words or phrases. The viewing of the visual images presented in the official music videos was the final area of study. Not

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every song had a video and in many cases, videos are not able to be seen without internet access which makes actual lyrical content more readily available and more focused for this study. Six of the songs analyzed did not have an official video released by the artist.

These songs included:

1. “One Dance” (Drake featuring WizKid)
2. “Too Good” (Drake featuring Rihanna)
3. “Controlla” (Drake)
4. “Jumpman” (Drake & Future)
5. “For Free” (DJ Khaled featuring Drake)
6. “Oui” (Jeremih)

While Drake is the most featured artist in the study, five of his six songs are not accompanied by a music video. Visual images were analyzed for various content including how cameras pan over women’s bodies, how much body a woman has exposed, and what actions the woman is performing throughout the video. These artifacts were coded in independently by the author.

### Analysis Section

During the study of the twenty songs analyzed, eighteen different themes arose. Each of these eighteen themes fell into one of the three main groups evident and grounded in the text: the formation of Black femininity, hyper-masculine Blackness, and the foundations of the hip hop community. Hip hop music offers numerous examples to support the study of these themes and each play a key role and various purpose in the hip hop community. The following table lists each of the three groups and which themes fell

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into each category. Although Black femininity and masculinity are reliant on each other, there are still specific differences. The themes listed under Black femininity all have direct involvement with women while themes listed under hyper-masculine Blackness can be completely independent of women or directed at both women and men. Some lyrics could fall into multiple categories and were coded as such. After each category is defined and analyzed, the entire work will look at the mixed messages shown in the hip hop music of today.

Table 1: Resulting Categories of Hip Hop

<b><u>Black Femininity</u></b>	<b><u>Hyper-Masculine Blackness</u></b>	<b><u>Hip Hop Foundations</u></b>
1. References to Women	1. Safety and/or Violence	1. Love or Lack of Love
2. Things Done to Women	2. Authenticity	2. Higher Power
3. Control and/or Power	3. Commands and/or Aggression	3. Drug and Alcohol Use
4. Objectification and/or Use of Women's Bodies	4. Money and/or Materialism	4. Time and/or Place
5. Compliments	5. Crime	5. Popular Culture References
6. Sex and/or Inferred Sex		6. Loyalty
		7. Needs and/or Wants

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### *The Formation of Black Femininity*

The first theme discovered is the formation of Black femininity. This theme will be discussed first because women's issues are often placed after that of men or the general collective. The formation of Black femininity is key to this study. Various examples arose of how a woman, often a Black woman, in the hip hop community should act and carry herself. With the pervasiveness of hip hop throughout the world, people not in the community can look to the visual and lyrical works of artists (often Black men) as cultural artifacts and a way to peek in on the Black community from a distance. The formation of Black femininity is composed of six of the themes mentioned above.

One of the themes included in the formation of Black femininity are references to women. References to women comprise any time a woman was addressed or became the subject of the song or a verse of lyrics. This theme includes pet names for women such as "sunshine" or "baby girl" or more vulgar "broad" and "ho." These items were grouped together to show women's lack of agency and how men often create the light in which they are viewed. For example, "baby girl" incites a different feeling about a woman than referring to her as a "broad." This is not to be confused with things that are done to women. Actions taken towards women will comprise another theme and will be discussed shortly. There are thirty-nine references to women in the songs analyzed. References to women include lyrics like "I have a Stella Maxwell right beside me" (G-Eazy and Bebe Rexha, #5), "you know your baby mama fond of me" (D.R.A.M. #7), "I know I'm going to get my bitch back" (Future, #12) and "and you know a nigga keeps ten wifeys" (Future, #15). In G-Eazy's verse, he refers to his woman as a Stella Maxwell,

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a popular model. He takes one woman and makes her the base for another woman which complicates the message about what women are supposed to look like. Stella Maxwell's model frame is now seen as the type of woman to attract artist of G- Eazy's caliber.

D.R.A.M.'s reference to someone else's baby mama being fond of him is also problematic. In the hip hop community, baby mamas (or simple the mother of a man's child or children) are often seen as off limits to other men even if the man and the mother of his child are no longer in a relationship. D.R.A.M.'s use of the term "baby mama" not only calls upon the breeder stereotype (the idea that Black women do nothing but have children generating during slavery) but also takes away some of the agency of this woman by defining her as property of a man.

While two of these songs feature popular artist Future, each reference shows women in a different light. The first example refers to the woman as Future's "bitch." Within the Black community, the word bitch has begun a process of becoming something similar to a term of endearment. According to Sharpley-Whiting (2007), the word bitch has taken on a transformation similar to the word "nigga." When used among two close friends, the term is almost synonymous with the less aggressive "girl." When used by a man referring to his significant other, "my bitch" can be read as "my girl/lady/woman." While there has been some revolution around the word bitch, it can also still be used as an oppressive term in hip hop. For instance, Future says that he knows he is going to get his bitch back, which frames the woman as his possession and simultaneously portrays her as an animal that needs to be recaptured.

On the other end, Future mentions that he "keeps ten wifey's." Wifey is a term of endearment in the hip hop community that plays off of the role of a husband/wife pair



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(wife is to wifey as husband is to hubby). While to be a wifey is a “good” thing, Future’s need to have ten of them does water down much of the significance. One woman is not enough for a “nigga” like him. In Future’s video for *Low Life*, he and The Weeknd are surrounded by women in an empty warehouse in a dystopian society. The women do not talk or move but offer themselves as props to Future and The Weeknd’s active bodies. They all stand still or gyrate very slowly and allow the artists to drape themselves on their female bodies. The woman becomes commodified property that can be counted toward the man’s assets.

Being referenced as baby mama’s, bitches, wifeys, and models paint women in a very specific light. They can be used for procreation but can also be used as property or defined by their relationship to a man or valued for their looks. While some of these findings are inherently worse than others, none can be read as strictly positive or negative. For example, in her song *Needed Me*, Rihanna refers to herself as a “bad bitch.” She is beautiful, she is accomplished, and she does not necessarily need a man. The majority of women would probably prefer to be a wifey over a bitch but still with the proper qualifier (HIS bitch, THAT bitch, BAD bitch, HEAD bitch-in-charge), some women may find power in the title.

The next theme key to the formation of Black femininity is when things are done to women. This includes any act that is done to a woman that is out of her control. These do not have to be overtly sexual acts but could just involve mentioning that a woman has been touched or moved that was beyond her power. There are five references of things being done to women. These include “grips on your waist” (Drake, #1), “I put my hands around you” (Drake, #6), “put that dick up in her pussy bet she feel it in her toes”

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(D.R.A.M., #7), “left hand is steering the other is grippin your thigh” (Bryson Tiller, #14), and “she was young and she was forced to be a woman” (The Weeknd, #20).

Both Drake and Bryson Tiller highlight their touching of the women in areas that are highly popular in the hip hop community. Women are prized by the shapes of their breasts, hips, and thighs and both men focus on these areas. The verb “grip” is used in two different lines and shows a more aggressive form of touch rather than a more soothing caress or a neutral hold. In his song *Too Good*, Drake goes from gripping the woman to putting his hands around her. This still places the man in a power position and shows that the woman is being acted upon. D.R.A.M.’s more aggressive and sexual infused lyric still places as him being the one in control and the woman being acted on. His lyric is the only overtly sexual line that is directly in reference to something being done to a woman without her expressed consent in the lyrics. The final example is The Weeknd’s claim that the woman in his song was young and she was forced to be a woman. He does not specify what action took place that forced her into adulthood but the video for the song has various scenes in a strip club with the artist pictured gazing up at the woman. Drake’s *One Dance* was not accompanied with a video and Tiller’s *Don’t* does not feature any scenes that illustrate his word choice of gripping the woman’s thigh. Gripping each woman’s waist or thigh asserts a power over them and removes some of the agency within their own bodies. In each example, the women’s bodies become an extension of the men controlling them.

One of the most common themes presented throughout all of the songs and a key part in the formation of Black femininity are control and power struggles. This includes references to a person asserting their authority in a situation. There are seventy-five

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references to show a control and/or power situation. Examples include “you took my heart, my keys, and my patience (Rihanna, #3), “I was good on my own, that’s the way it as, that’s the way it was” (Rihanna, #4), “I’m tryna be cool but I may just go ape shit” (G-Eazy & Bebe Rexha, #5), “gotta get a handle on you” (Drake, #6), “excuse me if I seem a little unimpressed with this” (Alessia Cara, #8), “you gone have to do it at my tempo” (The Weeknd, #9), and “you make me feel like I did you wrong” (Drake, #10).

While there are very few women artists listed in the songs collected, this category contains lines from multiple female artists. There are varying understandings of control and power presented in the lyrics. Rihanna’s declaration that her heart, keys, and patience were all taken in her song *Work* shows some of these varying levels. The man has taken her heart, which gives him a specific power over her personally. He also has taken her keys, which could mean two different areas of power. He could have control over her location- if she literally means keys to her car or house. She would not be able to get in or out of somewhere and would also not be able to go a long distance requiring her to rely on him to make significant moves. Rihanna could also mean keys in a more abstract sense such as the keys to her success. He could take away something that allows her to live the life she lives whether this be her talent, looks, or skill. This man has also taken Rihanna’s patience, which could mean the end of their relationship or affect the relationships she has with other people. Rhianna’s actions have begun to alter Black femininity and challenge what is and is not expected or accepted of Black women in the hip hop community.

In the example provided by G-Eazy and Bebe Rexha, G-Eazy is on the verge of going “ape shit” because he has lost his power and control. In fact, he is so powerless that

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this person is driving him to potential violence. Often a theme in the hip hop community, and the younger Black community, is the idea that someone can cause the violence brought to them by doing or not doing something to another person. G-Eazy and Bebe Rexha have lost so much power that they are potentially about to cause real damage in whatever environment that they are in. Eazy's power has been challenged so much that he may have to resort to violence to rectify the situation. If a person has upset G-Eazy or Bebe Rexha, then they could potentially be on the receiving end of physical or verbal violence. G-Eazy states that he's "tryin to be cool" but he woman has upset him so much that physical violence is possibly what he feels is his best option.

Often, women are framed as having no power except when they have upset a man enough to force him into assaulting her. In his song *Too Good*, Drake declares that he has to "get a handle" on his woman. This paints the image that this woman is out of control and needs to be reeled in. She is wild and it is up to the man to tame her. The Weeknd's *The Hills* demands that the woman is going to have to "do it" (have sex) at his tempo. For whatever the activity is, he needs to set the pace and be in charge of how far or how fast the two progress. There is no discussion about her contributions; he has made the final decision in how things are going to be done. Drake stating that the woman of his song makes him feel like he did her wrong gives her some of his power. He never admits that he did do something wrong but Drake saying that he feels like he did implies a certain level of guilt or worry. When a person realizes they have hurt another, they can become more willing to do things out of their day-to-day activities to please the other.

Rihanna's assertion that she was "good on her own" shows that she does not need a man and was able to navigate a life without one. Alessia Cara's admission that she is

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“unimpressed” mirrors Rihanna’s lack of a need for a man. In Rihanna’s *Needed Me* video, she walks through a strip club and finds the man she is looking for. He is sitting down on a couch and the two exchange no words as he looks up at her. He takes out a wad of money and throws it in Rihanna’s face and she responds by pulling out a gun and shooting him multiple times. Rihanna is the one initiating the violence and asserting her dominance over the man. She seems to be in control the entire video and never once seems to second guess her actions or motive. Physically, she is always higher than him and seems to be one step ahead. Both women challenge the common understanding of femininity in hip hop music by not just being an accessory to a man but clearly stating that she does not need one at all.

The fourth theme comprising the formation of Black femininity is the objectification and use of women’s bodies. Often through lyrics and camera angles, women’s bodies become fragmented and the focus becomes their breast, thighs, and behinds. In some cases, artists speak of how women use their bodies or how men can use them. This includes any lyrics that focus on a specific part of a woman’s body and appreciation of her physically. These lyrics are similar to the category containing things done to women but without the actual touching. Lyrics of this nature focus on the act of looking by the artists. There are twelve references to objectification or use of women’s bodies none of which come from the female artist. Examples include “ass black, but them eyes looking Asian” (Kent Jones, #13) and “engagin’ where I’m gazing at her hips” (Kevin Gates, #18). Kent Jones completely compartmentalizes the woman he is speaking of. Her behind is that of a Black woman which feeds into the traditional stereotypes of what is expected of a Black woman’s body. This woman also has “Asian looking” eyes

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that contribute to highly fetishized views of women that are of Asian descent. Sharpley-Whiting notes (2007) that “the ideal woman is indeed Black-derived, curvy, and *thick*, but she is also *paprika’d* and salted with difference” (p. 38). The woman is never seen as a whole but for the various pieces that most attract Jones. Kevin Gates has a similar understanding when he openly admits to be engaged when gazing at the woman’s hips. Both artist use verbs like “looking” and “gazing” that play directly into voyeuristic representations. In his video for *Don’t Mind*, Jones finds himself at a mansion pool party surrounded by women in bathing suits lounging in a pool. Jones and the men he is with gaze longingly at the half-naked women as the camera pans over exposed behinds and stomachs. Women are to be looked at especially when a piece of their body is enticing to the person (read man) doing the looking. As mentioned above with Defrancico and Palczweski (2014), the framing of the majority of media images is from a man’s point of view and assumes that the audience is also male. It appears that even in lyrical content, women are framed by the proportions of their bodies.

The formation of Black femininity also includes the use of compliments. This includes any references to recognize a person’s body of work or lifestyle but not of their actual body or any parts of it. There are fourteen references to compliments in the material analyzed. Examples include “had some fun on the run though, I give it to you” (Rihanna, #4) and “cause you look even better than your photos” (The Weeknd, #9). Rihanna’s use of compliment is to recognize the man and for what he brought to their inferred relationship. While her song *Needed Me* is simply about how her mate needed her and not the other way around, she wants him to recognize that his presence was at some points appreciated. Rihanna’s stance of complimenting a man while still casting

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him aside shows the role of Black women in hip hop in a new light that allows room for more power and agency. The Weeknd offers a more common and neutral compliment to the woman of his song. In the social media age consumed by filters, angles, and specific lighting, to say that a person looks better than what they portray digitally can mean a world of difference. While The Weeknd uses compliments in his song, there are no specific scenes within the video that seem to promote him complimenting anyone. Both artists use compliments in different ways but still use them to recognize, if only for a line, the counterparts of their songs.

The sixth and final theme comprising Black femininity includes references to sex or inferred sex. Since sex is directly tied to Black women, it was grouped with the formation of femininity over hyper-masculine Blackness. This includes any references that speak directly to sex or allude to sexual acts. There are forty-four references to sex or inferred sex. Examples include “I only fuck you when it’s half past five” (The Weeknd, #9), “I know when that hotline bling/ it can only mean one thing” (Drake, #10), “she was tryna join the team, I told her wait” (Drake & Future, #12), and “she gives me desktop ‘til I overload” (Kent Jones, #13). The Weeknd’s declaration of the only time that he will have sex with this particular woman does not leave much to be inferred. Clearly, she is not important enough to make any other time in his roster than these early morning hours. On the other hand, Drake presents a more readily available schedule for his woman in *Hotline Bling*. He knows that when the hotline blings or more simplified, when his phone rings, it means only one thing, sex. Another important aspect sexual lyrics are the subtle references that may or may not be immediately picked up on. For individuals not completely immersed in the hip hop culture, some cues may be missed. When Drake and

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Future say that a woman is trying to join the team, they are saying that this woman is willingly trying to become one of the women that Drake and or Future regularly sleeps with. They have no concern with being in a relationship or are they asking for anything more than just sex. In *Don't Mind*, Kent Jones' reference to desktop is really a nod to oral sex. In the line prior to this one, he speaks about how every time he comes around he "goes for broke" which leads the audience to believe that these actions are a common occurrence. Drake's *Hotline Bling* video features women in tight jeans and heels working in a phone sex call center. The women do not do any overtly sexual acts but the video clearly shows that there is a sex industry and that hip hop plays a role in it. The connection between the music and sex is so common that areas such as phone sex call centers are not even taboo. Regardless of whether sex is always an option or if there are only specific times for certain people, it is none the less an important aspect of the hip hop community being the seventh most referenced theme in all of the songs.

Compliments are another contributor to hip hop music. Rihanna and The Weeknd both use compliments in different ways and present a more positive light for the role of women. Rihanna uses her agency to take power in her relationship. She takes control by being the one who can give out the compliment instead of receiving it. In most cases, male control is not shown through compliments but in a more assertive manner. Rihanna's use of compliment in control shows that there can still be caring in female power dynamic. The Weeknd's comment, while still positive, does focus on the outer beauty of the woman without considering anything else she can offer. It is still a very superficial understanding of her worth but not to the point of the blatant objectification that is common. In the hip hop community, women are often valued for what they can



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give men and the most sought after asset is sex. The Weeknd and Drake offer two varying sentiments to the need of sex. While Drake offers a more playful option to women and sex, The Weeknd's more aggressive verse seems to be more in line in what people have grown to expect from hip hop, sex, and the portrayal of women. These examples begin to show hip hop and women in a different light than many are accustomed to.

The current texts analyzed create a new light for the formation of Black femininity. Women are still referred to outside of their names as evident by Future's use of bitch and wifey. While each of these pet names has a different connotation, they still bring very specific images to mind when they are used. There is a certain level of assumed respect when a woman is framed as a "wifey" and not just a "bitch;" even if she is framed as a specific man's bitch, she is still being labeled an animal. There is also the common theme of things being done to women without their initial consent. As stated above, while none of these actions are overtly sexual or violent, they do present a context that shows that what is done to a woman's body is out of her control. It also gives the man performing the action power over that woman's body and reinforces the struggle for dominance over all women's bodies. Even though none of these actions were blatantly violent or sexual, they were without consent and leave no responsibility to the man. The idea of control and power is a constant issue in forming femininity within the hip hop culture. Both Rihanna and Alessia Cara make attempts to gain back some of the control often lost to women in hip hop music. Neither woman seems to be complacent in the box that is often painted for women in the hip hop industry, neither seem to be interested in being an accessory or prize for a man and have taken lengths to show that they are both

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unimpressed and uninterested in needing a man in their lives. While Rihanna and Cara's works try to find new roles for women, much of hip hop music still frames women by their body parts and how they can be used to please men. Rihanna is the main focus of her video asserting a clear dominance over the male protagonist. While Bebe Rexha is billed as co-artist on the *Me, Myself, & I* track, she is often used as a background piece to G-Eazy's main portrayal. In their videos, Cara and Rihanna seem to have taken on a more masculine role by making themselves the center of the visual images; cameras are constantly on them. Rihanna's body is constantly highlighted by her breast and behind but is made more masculine by being an active part of the videos and not just a prop. Rexha takes a more traditional route and is often seen behind G-Eazy or feature on camera for spurts at a time. Kent Jones and Kevin Gates both utilize the male gaze to frame women not as a whole person but by their most appealing body parts and continues to use certain features to mark them as a sexualized other. Women have begun to take more agency over their lives even within the male dominated and often misogynistic hip hop culture. The following sections look at the how the current lyrics form the hyper-masculine blackness so prevalent in the hip hop community.

### *Hyper-Masculine Blackness*

The second main category presented in the texts is the idea of hyper-masculine blackness. Black men are often charged with the task of asserting their masculinity through violence, materialism, and aggression and these acts are perpetrated throughout hip hop music. According to author Tricia Rose (2008) of *The Hip Hop Wars*, "hyper-sexism has increased dramatically, and homophobia along with distorted, antisocial, self-destructive, and violent portraits of Black masculinity have become rap's calling cards"

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(p. 1-2). The hyper-masculine male is often seen as hyper-sexual and driven by reckless behavior. References of sex were placed in the category of formations of Black femininity because they specifically involve women even though hyper-sexuality is a trait of Black men. Hyper-masculine blackness is composed of five of the themes mentioned above.

The first theme is comprised of the safety-violence dichotomy. This includes any fears or concerns for one's safety or blatant references to violence against oneself or others. In both the hip hop and Black communities, violence has become a Catch-22. Communities become unsafe and violence presents a way to protect one's self or loved ones and to also provide the basic necessities to survive but in the same breath, this violence makes the communities even more unsafe. This theme includes physical, mental, or sexual violence. There are twenty-eight references to safety and or violence in the artifacts presented. Examples include "everyone knows how this lifestyle is dangerous" (G-Eazy & Bebe Rexha, #5), "nigga touch my gang and we gone turn this shit to Columbine" (D.R.A.M., #7) and "every day a nigga try to test me/ every day a nigga try and end me" (The Weeknd, #17). It is interesting to note that while this section looks at hyper-masculine blackness, G-Eazy is a White man. He still recognizes that the lifestyle, which can be read in a broader term as the music industry or more specifically the hip hop community, can be a dangerous place. As it appears that G-Eazy and his form of performing is more hip hop than anything else, it is assumed that he is referring to the hip hop community and the obvious pitfalls that are so prevalent in the industry. If these issues are lessened or worsened by him being a White man is not known. Even though he is not Black, G-Eazy has now successfully contributed to the formation of hyper-

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masculine Blackness and still perpetrates some of the themes of hip hop music. It is not clear whether or not his race diminishes his message but it is interesting to note that his messages are similar enough to his Black counterparts to make it into the top twenty songs of the genre. This particular song by G-Eazy is also featured on the popular video game NBA 2K17. This game is very popular in both the Black and hip hop communities and may contribute to the recognition of G-Eazy in these communities. D.R.A.M. takes a more direct approach and offers the opportunity to escalate the violence if it occurs. His notification that he could turn things “to Columbine” is a reference to the 1999 school shooting at Columbine High School where two students murdered dozens of staff and students before taking their own lives. While it is highly unlikely that D.R.A.M.’s massacre would result in a suicide, a reference of this magnitude sends a very strong message on how far he is willing to go for his “gang” and that mass deaths are the only option if he feels that they are being threatened in some way. In his song *Starboy*, The Weeknd notes that every day someone tries to test him and every day someone tries to kill him. When he is being tested, he is given the choice of whether or not he decides to retaliate but his life is also in danger every day. In an interesting turn, in his video for *Me, Myself, & I*, G-Eazy’s reckless behavior puts himself in danger. He goes to a party, drinks, and takes a car that he drives too fast and eventually ends up getting into a car accident. It is common in the hip hop culture for violence to become the immediate answer to perceived disrespect or misunderstandings and also reckless behavior putting his own life in danger.

The second theme that arose was the idea of authenticity. This includes any references to facts that show street credentials or an upbringing that demonstrates a rags

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to riches or “started from the bottom and now at the top” mentality. There are fifty-two references to show authenticity in the songs analyzed. Examples include “hope you killas understand me” (Desiigner, #1), “I don’t need no introduction” (Drake & Future, #12), “to keep it one hundred girl, I ain’t no saint” (Bryson Tiller, #14) “finding me ballin’ hard, come from grindin’ hard” (Kevin Gates, #18) and “grown man, suit and tie” (Jeremih, #19). Desiigner makes a plea to all the “killas” because he knows that what he is doing is something that they would understand and appreciate- the activity is most likely illegal. Drake and Future are so well known for their escapades that they do not need to be introduced to anyone. Tiller utilizes the popular phrase of “keepin it one hundred” meaning that whatever he is saying is one hundred percent true and that there is no reason for anyone not to believe him. Kevin Gates makes it a point to note that his “balling hard” does not just happen. He had to grind hard to get where he is at now. That grinding could be any number of things from hustling, selling drugs, or and other illicit or honest work. Balling does not come over night; whatever the work is, it has to be done. Jeremih claims his authenticity through noting that he is a grown man and shows that through a suit and tie. Often, appearance is the most important aspect of the hip hop culture. Does the person have *the look*? Jeremih choosing to demonstrate that he is a grown man through wearing a suit and tie shows how he should be treated like a grown man because he looks like a grown man. In his video for *2 Phones*, Gates shows how his illegal drug business interrupts his legitimate career as a rapper. He’s in the booth recording his song while two of his phones are ringing about transactions that need to be made. Gates shows that his ability to ball comes directly from his constant work ethic,

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whether it is a legal or illegal business. Artists must not only do the work to be successful but also provide the image that they are.

Another key theme comprising hyper-masculine blackness are the use of commands and overt aggression. These can include any references that tell another person what they must do and imply that there will be consequences if the action does not happen. This theme also includes any hostile, verbal attacks towards others. There are fifty-eight references that include commands or overt aggression. Examples include “soon as I text, reply me” (Drake, #1), “shit, what the fuck you complaining for” (Rihanna, #4), “say fuck y’all to all of y’all faces” (G-Eazy & Bebe Rexha, #5), and “nigga get your own tryna pick a nigga bone” (D.R.A.M., #7). Drake’s demand for a reply message as soon as he texts creates a pressure on the woman and gives him the power over their interactions. He becomes not just in charge of what he can say to her but also at the speed to which he can expect to hear back in reply. Rihanna, on the other hand, offers another view of hyper-masculine blackness by becoming the aggressor. Her questioning the man and asking him “what the fuck he’s complaining for” takes some of the traditional masculine hip hop power and applies it to Rihanna. She is the one asking questions so she becomes the one in charge; making her the more masculine character. G-Eazy’s aggression is evident in his statement of being on the edge and willing to dismiss anyone who is trying to speak to him. D.R.A.M. demands that other men get their own bone (or hustle) instead of trying to pick at his leftovers. Rihanna’s video for *Needed Me* displays her as the aggressor for this entire process. The femininity that Rihanna is exploring in this video does not match what is normally advertised as Black femininity in the hip hop community and her referring to the man as a complainer and subsequently

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killing him in the music video frames her as the masculine character and thus threatens long standing beliefs about femininity and masculinity. She is in a strip club but not a dancer, the male antagonist throws money in her face and she does not flinch, and she wielding a gun and killing a man, all things women are rarely seen doing in hip hop. According to hip hop culture, she should be dancing, looking for money, and trying to please the man. By challenging all of this, Rihanna becomes the hyper-masculine character. Each artist uses commands and aggression differently but it is clear that in these scenarios, they are the ones in charge.

Probably the most known aspect of hip hop culture is the rampant obsession with money and materialism. This includes any references to money, spending or making money, clothes, jewelry, cars, or other tangible assets. There are sixty-five references to money or materialism. Examples include “wake up Versace shit, life Designer” (Designer, #2), “ice on my neck costs ten times three” (D.R.A.M., #7), and “money coming fast, they never get to sleep” (Drake and Future, #12). Designer references Versace, one of the most popular brands in the hip hop community. He also uses a play on words with not just saying this life is designer but that this life belongs to Designer. He has the style that makes him a man of hip hop. D.R.A.M. makes it a point to call out the jewelry that he wears and how it costs thirty thousand dollars (“ten times three”) essentially bragging to whoever will listen. Drake and Future take a more traditional route with mentioning how the money is “coming so fast”, most likely from some illegal activity, that the men receiving it cannot sleep or they may miss something. While Designer is “waking up in Versace”, the company that Drake and Future keep refusing to go to sleep. In his video for *Panda*, Designer spends a majority of his time in a stolen X6

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Phantom car driven by hip hop great Kanye West. The men drive in circles at elevated speeds drawing attention to the car they are in. Each artist has varying methods of what to do with their money and how to get it but the bottom line is that a person has to have it.

The final theme encompassing hyper-masculine blackness is the notion of crime. This includes any mentions of illegal activity (barring drug use that has its own category). There are eight references to crime in the songs analyzed. With the very negative reputation that hip hop music has, it was expected that there would be more references to crime. When ranked with all the other themes, crime is second to last only after the category of things done to women. Both of these themes are presented in the media as some of the most common occurrences in hip hop culture. Examples include “I got car jack city” (Desiigner, #2) and “I turn the Ritz into the poor house/ it’s like eviction number four now” (Future, #15). Yet again, Desiigner is playing with his words. Carjackings are illegal and have been a serious issue in inner cities, so much so in his city that he refers to it as Car Jack City, which is a play on word from the popular film *New Jack City*. He begins his video for this song by committing a carjacking and then riding around the city in the stolen vehicle. While in the stolen car, he does various other illegal activities until the end of the video. The Weeknd sings Future’s hook to *Low Life* and notes that even while they are in the upscale Ritz Carlton hotel that he will still treat it like it is any other poor house and eventually be asked to leave the hotel or for his connection to the poor house, be evicted. He is not concerned with any property damages or doing anything that would be illegal in the room because he is already prepared to be made to leave for these activities.



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Just as Black femininity has been brought into question by scholars and this research, the idea of hyper-masculine blackness has also been shown in a new light by both women and men of hip hop. G-Eazy, Bebe Rexha, and D.R.A.M. all stressed the importance of the safety-violence binary in the hip hop community. One artist recognizes that the industry in general is not safe and the other notes that given an opportunity, he will resort to extreme measures to protect his “gang.” Kevin Gates and Jeremih discuss their authenticity in different manners. Gates notes that his working hard allows him to “ball hard;” shop, live, and travel as he sees fit. Jeremih takes a simpler approach noting that his authenticity can be found in the way he dresses and how he carries himself. Drake and Rihanna each take a different use of commands and aggression. While Drake demands that his texts be responded to as soon as they are seen, Rihanna asks her counterpart why he felt the need to complain when she told him what she was about before they began their relationship. She continues in the song asking “didn’t they tell you I was a savage?” and finally rounding it out with “fuck your white horse and carriage” (Rihanna, #4). Rihanna feels that this man should have been warned about her prior to their involvement and that she is not interested in being in any type of fairy tale with him and that there is no chance for a happily ever after. Rihanna has become an example of women challenging the traditional definition of masculinity while simultaneously giving women more power as she takes it away from the man. Desiigner, Drake, and Future all play a role in focusing their works on money and materialism. Desiigner uses his money for name brands like Versace while Drake and Future are so focused on making the money that they do not have an opportunity to say how they are spending it. Desiigner and Future also appear in the crime section of hyper-

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masculine blackness. Neither artist shies away from the more dangerous aspects of the hip hop community and show it in their music and videos. Hyper-masculine blackness has very distinct attributes that include violence, authenticity, commands, crime, and materialism. These areas are prevalent throughout the music and provide an image of what a “man” is supposed to look like in the hip hop community. While both femininity and masculinity have been covered, the following sections will focus on the foundations of the hip hop community and how these are represented throughout the music and videos.

### *Foundations of the Hip Hop Community*

There were seven different themes present in the foundations of the hip hop community. These themes look at various trains of thought, logic, and positive aspects of hip hop culture that are present in the music. The entirety of this work has been based on meanings created by the hip hop culture when dealing with gender norms. The following section looks at other key factors in developing the hip hop culture. These areas are key in developing the culture and contain many of the values dispensed to mainstream audiences. Although they do not necessarily deal with gender norms, these themes arose through the grounded approach and deserved to be mentioned.

The first theme noted is love or lack of love. This includes any lyrics that mention love or strong feelings whether this be in a romantic way or platonic friendship. There are twenty-three references to show love or lack of love. Examples include “nah, it don’t work like that when you love somebody” (Drake, #11), “no matter where I go, you know I love them all” (Kent Jones, #13), and “certain that your love holds me together” (Bryson Tiller, #14). Drake acknowledges that some things should not happen when you

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love someone. There is a level of respect in the hip hop community in regards to love and because of that, some actions are unacceptable against loved ones. Kent Jones uses his love in a more playful manner noting that wherever he is at in the world, he loves all the women he encounters. This falls more in line with the idea of “having love for someone”. This does not mean that a person is necessarily in love with another person but that they have a level of respect for them that means they are cared about. Jones’ playful love for the women in his video is evident by him taking the time to play sports and laugh and joke with them through a number of scenes. Tiller notes how the love from a woman is the only thing holding him together. Even the hip hop community recognizes that love is a powerful force and that it keeps even the most hardened of artist together. Drake, Jones, and Tiller all use love in very different ways but it is still a key block in the hip hop community.

A very important part of the hip hop community is the concept of loyalty. Loyalty is any reference that includes mention of dedication to a loved one or platonic friend that demonstrates the support, consideration, or protection for a person. There are forty-three references to loyalty in the text analyzed. Examples include “if you had a twin, I’d still choose you” (Rihanna, #3), “so, tell my people when they’re ready that I’m ready” (Alessia Cara, #8) and “your man on the road, he doing promo/you said keep our business on the low-low” (The Weeknd, #9). During Rihanna’s *Work*, Drake acknowledges that if she had a sister that Rihanna would still be his pick. He goes so far as to say a twin which potentially means he could be with someone who looks exactly the same but would not have his heart like she does. The Weeknd takes a different look at loyalty but having a relationship with a woman whose man is away and she requests that

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The Weeknd keep their business a secret so that he will not find out. Often in hip hop, men are shown as the individuals having multiple partners and the ones working to keep that from a significant other. In this light, The Weeknd shows the woman as the one lacking loyalty. In her video, Alessia Cara is at a party that she has no interest in but is there to support her friends. Even though she is ready to leave, she will not leave them there alone. Each of these examples show hip hop in a different light that prioritizes the responsibility that comes with nurturing friends and relationships.

A common yet surprising theme was that of a higher power. This includes any references to God, praying, or religious undertones. This also includes any references to hoping, wishing, or praying for one's self or others that are cared about. There are twenty-eight references showing a higher power. Examples include "I believed all of your dreams, adoration" (Rihanna, #3), "yeah, lonely nights I laid awake/ I pray the Lord my soul to take" (G-Eazy & Bebe Rexha, #5), and "this the real thing can you feel the force yet" (DJ Khaled, #16). Rihanna notes how she had faith in her lover's dreams even when he may not have. This faith is rooted in something bigger than what either of them could imagine. Drake raps for DJ Khaled and refers to his higher power as a *force* and asks his woman if she can feel it too. It is not just fleeting feeling but almost something tangible that can be felt between the both of them. G-Eazy makes a play on a very common children's nightly prayer. Instead of "now I lay me down to sleep" G-Eazy lays awake and prays to the Lord for his soul to take. For any number of reasons, he is not sleeping and is more willing for the Lord to take his soul than to continue with his life. In his video for *Me, Myself, and I*, G-Eazy actually splits himself into four different people each one having a conversation with another. As he raps about being lonely and asking

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the Lord for help, his video shows a literal breaking of his life. Rihanna, G-Eazy, and DJ Khaled use higher power in different ways but each stresses the importance of having faith in more than yourself.

One of the most common occurrences in the hip hop community is drug and alcohol use. This theme includes any references to drugs or alcohol including use, distribution, and manufacturing. It is important to note that most songs and videos analyzed strictly make references to marijuana and alcohol use. With all the political battles surrounding the legalization of marijuana for recreational use and several states who have already legalized marijuana, it becomes difficult to strictly call this a problem in the community and only makes sense to have this theme exists outside of basic crime themes. Examples of the drug and alcohol theme include “in the cut I’m rolling up my broccoli” (D.R.A.M., #7), “I’ll be here, somewhere in the corner under clouds of marijuana” (Alessia Cara, #8), “cut that ivory into skinny pieces/then she clean up with her face” (The Weeknd, #17), and “I got clientele/ I just got it off the scale” (Kevin Gates, #18). D.R.A.M. refers to marijuana as broccoli as a reference to the green color and its sometimes being called “tree” in certain neighborhoods. Alessia Cara shows how commonplace marijuana is that she is at a party surrounded by smoke and no one seems to care or be bothered. The Weeknd seems to be referencing cocaine which is often called “the white” or in this place ivory. The woman cleans up the ivory with her face by snorting it. Gates also makes mention to cocaine saying that he has clientele and that he has the freshest product because it has just come off the scale. In the videos for *Broccoli* and *Here*, people are shown drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana in a party setting that seems to be reasonably managed. While there are some references to more hardcore

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drugs, the vast number of the fifty-six references refer to alcohol, which can be legally bought by anyone over twenty-one, and marijuana, which can be legally purchased depending on what state the person is in. Each time marijuana and alcohol were shown in the videos and often in the lyrics, they are a tool for relaxation or a party aid. There were no real examples showing many negative actions induced by the marijuana and alcohol use. Generally, if the lyric content mentioned marijuana or alcohol use, these images were shown in the videos. Some videos, like Rihanna's *Work*, do not officially mention alcohol or marijuana in the lyrics but show use of both through the party setting in the video. Even with the hardcore drugs being referenced, they are not shown in the videos.

Another crucial element of the foundations of the hip hop community is the idea of time and place. This includes any references to specific moments and locations that are meaningful to the artist. There are sixty-one references to time and place. Examples include "I don't want to spend time fighting/we've got no time" (Drake, #1), "you spent some time away" (Rihanna, #3) "running out of pages in your passport" (Drake, #10), "east coast nigga reppin' north side" (Future, #15), and "if we tried that we could be/somewhere in the climate is warm/long as you around me" (Jeremih, #19). In *One Dance*, Drake does not want to waste his or the woman's time fighting and stresses that they are short on time. This could potentially be a nod to the dangerous hip hop lifestyle and how individuals can be hurt or killed without notice. Rihanna notes that this man has spent some time away whether he has just left the relationship is not known but "time away" is also often used when an individual has recently gotten out of jail. Drake is concerned with how one of his ex-girlfriends is constantly traveling and not concerned with waiting around for him in his *Hotline Bling* song. Future uses his time and place

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reference to rep also known as representing for his city. This is a common occurrence in the hip hop community of representing where a person comes from whether that be a town, side, or block. Jeremih focuses on the place aspect more directly noting that he wants to take his woman somewhere warm; following with the frame that suggests that it does not really matter where they are as long as they are together. In Future's *Low Life* video, the setting of a post-apocalyptic environment provides a backdrop for just how low his life has sunken. The time and place theme allows artist to highlight the various changes in their lives depending on the time and place that they occur and this alters the music and foundation of hip hop.

Since hip hop has such a vast community across several mediums, popular culture references are not uncommon. This includes any lyrics that draw on the listeners preexisting knowledge of popular culture. There are twenty-three references to pop culture and examples include "shoot you in your back like Ricky" (Future, #15) and "Star Trek groove in that Wraith of Khan" (The Weeknd, #17). Future's Ricky reference is from the hip hop cult classic *Boyz in the Hood*. Played by Morris Chestnut, Ricky was a high school senior with a family to support who had just recently gotten a full ride scholarship to play sports. His older brother, played by Ice Cube, was gang affiliated and Ricky ends up getting shot in the back running from his brother's opposition. Ricky's death became a turning point in the movie and a cautionary tale that even when you do all of the right things, the streets have no mercy. The Weeknd chooses to use a lighter hearted reference mixing Star Trek with the Roll Royce Wraith. References such as these do not just demonstrate the artist's creativity but also shows that they are truly entrenched

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in the hip hop culture. Listeners can feel more in tune with artists as well as a sense of belonging and pride for catching things of this nature.

The final theme of hip hop foundations are needs and wants. These include references to what the artist thinks they want or need as far as in relation to other people, from life, or for their concerns. There are twenty-two references to needs and wants. Examples include “I wanna give you better” (Bryson Tiller, #14) and “I need it all right now” (DJ Khaled, #16). Bryson Tiller sings about how he would treat a woman better than the man she is currently with and he wants the opportunity to be and do better for her. In DJ Khaled’s *For Free*, Drake raps about how he needs all of the sex a woman can give him right away. Unlike Tiller’s want for a chance to be better, Drake needs the sex that he is desiring from this woman. Both Tiller and Drake show a softer side to the hip hop music that is often not shown in various songs.

The foundations of hip hop music as presented in the text shows a side that is not often talked about outside of the community. Drake and Jones are not afraid to admit their love for someone and also introduce the idea of having love for someone without being in love with them. Rihanna, G-Eazy, and Bebe Rexha each have various moments of looking up to a higher power or using that energy to wish the best for others. Religion has deep historical roots in the Black community and that does not seem to be lost on the hip hop community. Artists often turn to a higher power in their lyrics especially when they are in the midst of a complex or difficult situation. Cara and D.R.A.M. both referenced marijuana use and attended parties with alcohol in their lyrics and videos. With marijuana use being so prevalent in all American culture, it cannot be negatively framed as only rampant in the hip hop community. Until there can be a consistent



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legislation, the recreational use of marijuana by consenting adults will still be labeled as drug use, but with an asterisk. Drake and Future each had a particular way of using time and place. Artists often reference different times or events in their lives that help form who they are. Future and The Weeknd each use popular culture references that should be understood by anyone who believes they are well adjusted into the hip hop culture. Lines such as these begin to connect hip hop with the larger world simultaneously linking television and movies to the music. Loyalty is a very important topic that Rihanna and Cara use to support the relationships they have. Loyalty in the hip hop community is often tested and plays directly into a person's reputation. Bryson Tiller and DJ Khaled each talk about their needs and wants and this becomes a common theme in the hip hop community. There can be various things that a person wants from the world but they have to be willing to do what needs to be done to really make the best of it. These artifacts show that the foundation of the hip hop community is set in some core values that are constantly played throughout the various tracks. While sex and money are often promoted so is love, loyalty, and faith in something bigger than oneself.

### *Mixed Messages*

Hip hop music has consistently been labeled as a factor in bringing down the Black community (Rose, 2008) and while there are some very problematic instances - that is not the only thing hip hop is about. There has always been a historical and cultural factor in hip hop music that allows for messages to be sent from the artist to the audiences. Rose notes that "many fans consume lopsided tales of Black ghetto life with little knowledge about the historical creation of the ghetto, some think the ghetto equals Black culture" (2008, p. 12). When the emergent themes are ranked from most common

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to least common references, many would be surprised by what themes make their way to the top and which themes are set squarely at the bottom:

1. Control/Power (75 references; coded into Formation of Femininity)
2. Money/Materialism (65 references; coded into Hyper-Masculine Blackness)
3. Time/Place (61 references; coded into Foundations of Hip Hop Culture)
4. Commands/Aggression (58 references; coded into Hyper-Masculine Blackness)
5. Drug/Alcohol Use (56 references; coded into Foundations of Hip Hop Culture)
6. Authenticity (52 references; coded into Hyper-Masculine Blackness)
7. Sex/Inferred Sex (44 references; coded into Formation of Femininity)
8. Loyalty (43 references; coded into Foundations of Hip Hop Culture)
9. References to Women (39 references; coded into Formation of Femininity)
10. Safety/Violence (28 references; coded into Hyper-Masculine Blackness)
10. Higher Power (28 references; coded into Foundations of Hip Hop Culture)
11. Love or Lack of Love (23 references; coded into Foundations of Hip Hop Culture)
11. Popular Culture References (23 references; coded into Foundations of Hip Hop Culture)
12. Needs/Wants (22 references; coded into Foundations of Hip Hop Culture)
13. Compliments (14 references; coded into Formation of Femininity)
14. Objectification/Use of Women's Bodies (12 references; coded into Formation of Femininity)
15. Crime (8 references; coded into Hyper-Masculine Blackness)
16. Things Done to Women (5 references; coded into Formation of Femininity)

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Objectification and use of women's bodies, crime, and things done to women are some of the least referenced topics in the songs analyzed. Hip hop is often cited for its harshness towards women and its encouragement of crime but both of those topics barely make their way on to the list. Similarly, while the videos did have some instances of crime, it was not a major theme through all of them. Control and power, money and materialism, and time and place round out the top of the most referenced themes. The fascination with control, money, and tangible assets may not be the best message but it is still better than rampant calls for violence and killing. With control and power being the most referenced of all themes, it brings to mind why there is such a need to be in control in the hip hop community. Black people, the main creators and consumers of hip hop, do not have a steady history of being in control of matters in their lives and even less experience with having power in them. While the majority of today's hip hop artists were born after cultural landscapes like the Civil Rights movement, modern Black communities are faced with the need for their own movements still fighting for similar rights. Schools are underfunded and over crowded, families are broken up daily by gangs, drugs, and jail, and aspirations for youth still max out at professional athletes and rappers. Music may very well be the only place some in the hip hop community are able to take in power in their lives. Time and place presents itself as a neutral message with both positive and negative aspects but still more key to laying the foundation of the hip hop community than anything else. Artist and consumers alike must know where they come from to get where they want to go. The themes of love and the belief in a higher power are often lost on people not immersed in the hip hop culture. Hip hop has a very negative reputation but loyalty is mentioned far more than safety and violence concerns. As discussed above,

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safety and violence can become an issue when communities are lacking and crime becomes the only option to put food on the table. Like every other genre of music and even every other aspect of life, there is a good and bad side to hip hop and the messages it displays. Rose (2008) states that “what I care most about is not proving that hip hop did or did not invent sexism...but showing how the excessive and seductive portrayal of these images among Black popular hip hop artists is negatively affecting the music and the very people whose generational sound is represented by hip hop” (p. 28-29). Yes, sexism is a problem and sometimes drugs and alcohol use are encouraged but these are not the only items that make up the hip hop culture. It is important to begin to look at hip hop and its messages because they matter to the countless number of people around the world who consider themselves members and perpetrators of the hip hop lifestyle. With hip hop being such a powerful force, not just in the Black community but across the globe, these messages become the windows that many people look through to learn about Black society. If these messages are consistently seen as problematic and dangerous, similar beliefs will be charged to the consumers and supporters of the genre.

## Conclusion

Scholar bell hooks (2010) believes that education does not have to be limited to individuals only in the classroom – life and community can be some of the best teachers. The same can be said for the hip hop community. An entire generation has based their understanding of the world through the style, music, and attitude of this genre of music. As with Kellner (1995) mentioned above, the media becomes a way for people to not only learn about various cultures but to create their own identities. The media creates a window into the soul of hip hop. While hip hop is often framed as a lawless land with no

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respect for women and life itself, this analysis has shown that not everything is as cut and dry as it is claimed to be. There are problematic images such as sex, illicit drugs, and violence but these are not limited to hip hop music or Black people as a whole. More importantly, it needs to be understood that many of these images are mass produced stereotypes portrayed to reinforce perceived authentic claims and sell records. Hip hop heavyweight Rick Ross was once a correctional officer at a prison. Superstar Lil Wayne raps about his guns and money but accidentally shot himself years ago. There has to be an understanding of what is real and what is fake in the industry.

Black women consistently get the short end of the stick in lyrics and videos portrayed as disposable property at the beck and call of men. They are prized for their looks and bodies and not known for their intellect or skill. While Cara and Rihanna are not the first ladies to take a step into the hip hop ring (Missy Elliot, Trina, Lil Kim, and Queen Latifah), they are heading this generation's push for the female MC. The hip hop genre and music are an important area of study for the sheer number of people that the genre touches. Looking back on both Hill Collins and hooks, Black feminist thought prides itself on the inclusion of all women's experiences being key to the formation of society. This is still true of the women in the hip hop community who engage with and listen to the music. Although the messages of hip hop music are not always supportive of women, the female experience with this music is still valid.

Some of the common themes of hyper-masculine blackness discussed earlier (materialism, authenticity, and violence) are all still present in the songs analyzed just not to the extent that the media portrays them to be. There has to be a level of separation between art and reality. How some actors and actresses will be constantly portrayed as

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the villain, hip hop has become the bad guy of the music industry. There is more to learn about this culture and the effects it has on its members, especially when it comes to the roles of femininity and masculinity. This study also brings to light some of the foundations of the hip hop community. Love and loyalty are prized and challenge common preconceived notions of the industry. It is key that hip hop begins to not be written off as just a style of music but study for the culture it truly is. While as a society people are taught to never judge a book by its cover, no claim has ever been made to not judge a person by their music.

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