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# Misogyny in Rap Music

## A Content Analysis of Prevalence and Meanings

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Rap music has a reputation for being misogynistic, but surprisingly little research has systematically investigated this dimension of the music. This study assesses the portrayal of women in a representative sample of 403 rap songs. Content analysis identified five gender-related themes in this body of music—themes that contain messages regarding “essential” male and female characteristics and that espouse a set of conduct norms for men and women. Our analysis situates rap music within the context of larger cultural and music industry norms and the local, neighborhood conditions that inspired this music in the first place.

**Keywords:** *rap music; sexuality; gender; mass media; hegemonic masculinity*

That's the way the game goes, gotta keep it strictly pimpin',  
Gotta have my hustle tight, makin' change off these women.  
You know it's hard out here for a pimp,  
When he tryin' to get this money for the rent.  
“It's Hard Out Here For a Pimp”—Three 6 Mafia

The 2005 Academy Award for best original song in a feature film went to Three 6 Mafia's controversial “It's Hard Out Here For a Pimp” from the film *Hustle and Flow*. The song was performed at the Oscars and immediately provoked a storm of criticism for glorifying the exploitation of women. This is only the most recent chapter in the mounting criticism directed at rap music's presentation of women. A few years earlier, rapper Eminem won a Grammy for his 2001 album, *The Marshall Mathers LP*—an album whose lyrics contained extreme hostility and violence toward women. Women's groups promptly condemned the award. More recently, the African American women's magazine *Essence* launched a campaign in 2005 against sexism in

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rap music. The magazine lamented the depiction of Black women in rap and solicited feedback from readers on ways to challenge it.

Much of the criticism of rap music is impressionistic and based on a handful of anecdotes, rather than a systematic analysis. Exactly how prevalent are misogynistic themes in this music and what specific messages are conveyed to the listeners? This study addresses this question through a content analysis of more than 400 rap songs. We document five themes related to the portrayal of women in rap music and link them to larger cultural and music industry norms and the local, neighborhood conditions that inspired this music.

### **Images of Women in Popular Music**

Gender stereotypes are abundant in popular music, where women are often presented as inferior to men or are trivialized and marginalized (Tuchman 1978). Women are not portrayed monolithically, however (Butruille and Taylor 1987; Lay 2000; van Zoonen 1994), and lyrical depictions appear to have changed somewhat over time. It has been argued that the overall trend is one of “greater diversity, more complexity, and dramatically mixed messages about the individual female persona and women’s roles in society” (Lee 1999, 355). Despite this variegation, it remains uncommon for women to be presented as independent, intelligent, enterprising, or superior to men (Lee 1999). Derogatory images are far more common.

A body of research documents depictions of men and women in different genres. A content analysis of rock music videos found that a majority (57%) presented women in a “condescending” manner (e.g., unintelligent, sex object, victim) and a fifth placed them in a traditional sex role (e.g., subservient, nurturing, domestic roles), while 8% displayed male violence against women (Vincent, Davis, and Boruszkowski 1987). Only 14% presented women as fully equal to men. A more recent study of rock videos found that traditional sex role stereotypes continue to predominate: 57% of videos in which women were present depicted them in a “conventional” manner (passive, dependent on men, accenting physical appearance), while a third presented them as strong and independent (Alexander 1999).

Country music also casts women in subordinate roles. A study of 203 country music videos featuring male performers found that two-thirds devalued women (portraying them in a condescending manner or in traditional roles), while only 9% presented women as fully equal to men (Andsager and Roe 1999). Of the 80 videos by female artists, by contrast, half fit the fully equal category. Interestingly, country songs and videos do not feature violence against women or portray them as strippers and prostitutes, apparently because of strong industry norms against such images (Andsager and Roe 1999, 81). In fact, one study found that country music advertisers pressure radio stations to screen out misogynistic songs to attract desired female listeners (Ryan and Peterson 1982).

Although rap music has been a topic of heated public debate for years, systematic content analyses are rare. One analysis of rap and heavy metal songs from 1985 to 1990 found that rap was more sexually explicit and graphic whereas heavy metal's allusions to sexual acts or to male domination were fairly subtle (Binder 1993), which is consistent with other studies of heavy metal songs and videos that have found that "blatant abuse of women is uncommon" in this genre (Walser 1993, 117). Binder's comparative analysis was limited to only 20 songs which she deemed "controversial," and the time period examined preceded rap's ascendancy in the music field. In a unique study of Chicano rap songs from 1999 to 2002, McFarland (2003) identified two main themes: A critique of racial inequality and injustice and an endorsement of male supremacy over women. Of the 263 songs that mentioned women, 37% depicted them "simply as objects of male desire and pleasure," while 4% justified violence against them. McFarland's sampling frame was based on songs he identified as popular in focus groups and on the Brown Pride Web site, rather than a more objective measure of popularity. Armstrong (2001) conducted a content analysis of 490 rap songs during 1987–1993. Lyrics featuring violence against women were found in 22% of the songs, and the violence perpetrated against women included assault, rape, and murder. Although his study makes a valuable contribution to the literature in its systematic focus on violence against women, it does not discuss other (nonviolent) depictions of women, provides little indication of coding procedures, and presents the lyrics in a brief and sketchy manner, decontextualized from larger song segments. Other content analyses of rap music (Martinez 1997; Kubrin 2005a, 2005b) do not examine the depiction of women or gender relations more broadly. This article addresses this issue.

### **Social Sources of Rap Lyrics**

Most of the studies reviewed above did not attempt to explain why lyrics portray women as they do—an admittedly difficult task. Yet artists do not work in a vacuum. We suggest that rappers whose songs portray women negatively are influenced by three major social forces: larger gender relations, the music industry, and local neighborhood conditions. The most diffuse influence is the larger gender order, which includes the cultural valorization of a certain type of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity has been defined as attitudes and practices that perpetuate heterosexual male domination over women. It involves "the currently most honored way of being a man, it requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimates the global subordination of women to men" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832). For this type of masculinity, to be a "man" requires the acceptance of attitudes that objectify women, practices that subordinate them, and derogation of men who adopt an egalitarian orientation equally affirmative of men and women and all sexual orientations (Connell 1987; Donaldson 1993; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Hegemonic masculinity exists alongside and in competition with what Connell

calls “subordinated masculinities,” and to remain normative, it requires ongoing reproduction via the mass media, the patriarchal family, and other socializing institutions. Media representations of men, for example, often glorify men’s use of physical force, a daring demeanor, virility, and emotional distance (see Hanke 1998). Popular music is a case in point: As indicated by the studies reviewed above, only a minority of songs, across music genres, espouse egalitarian gender relations or alternative masculinities, whereas the majority can be viewed as texts on hegemonic masculinity. We argue that rap, like the other music genres, is part of this broader culture of gender relations, even as some of the music challenges the dominant culture (Lay 2000).<sup>1</sup>

Some argue that popular music over the past three decades is also part of a larger cultural resistance to feminism, an attempt to block progress toward gender equality and resuscitate male domination. As Lay (2000, 239) argues, “Popular music can be read as a vehicle for heterosexual male concerns [over the advancement of women and gays] and, more importantly, for the recuperation of hegemonic masculinity.” Stated differently, this music can be seen as part of a larger ideological process of persuading the population that heterosexual male supremacy is natural and normal. Rap is part of this backlash. Collins (2000, 82, 144) considers rap to be one of the contemporary “controlling images” used to subordinate Black women, and Oliver (2006, 927) argues that rap’s sexist lyrics “provide justifications for engaging in acts of violence against black women” (see also hooks 1994; Rhym 1997). But it may also be seen as an effort to control all women, because rap is consumed by youth from all racial and ethnic groups. Such images have real-world effects insofar as they contribute to gendered socialization and perpetuate gender inequality (Barongan and Hall 1995; Johnson et al. 1995; Wester et al. 1997; Martino et al. 2006).

Rap artists are also influenced by pressures from elites in the music industry. To maximize sales, record industry moguls encourage provocative, edgy lyrics. Producers not only encourage artists to become “hardcore” but also reject or marginalize artists who go against the grain. As a result of such practices, a directly proportional relationship has developed between rap music’s explicitness and the sale of its records.

In response to corporate pressures, many rappers abandon political and social messages and focus instead on material wealth and sexual exploits (Powell 2000). In his documentary, *Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, Byron Hurt (2007) asks one aspiring rapper why rap artists focus on violence and misogyny. The rapper freestyles a verse about whether he could have been a doctor, a father, or police officer. He then says, “That’s nice, but nobody wanna hear that right now. They don’t accept that shit.” When Hurt asks, “Who is ‘they’?” the rapper answers, “The industry. They usually don’t give us deals when we speak righteously.” Indeed, Kitwana (1994, 23) finds that artists in search of securing record deals are often told their message is not hard enough, they are too clean cut, that “hardcore” is what is selling now, and that they should no longer engage in social commentary (see also Krims 2000, 71). The

consequence? According to Smith (1997, 346), “Many of today’s rappers make the ghetto visible in order to sell and to be sold.”

The pressure for artists to rap about hardcore themes is perhaps most evident in gangsta rap.<sup>2</sup> A statement by Carmen Ashhurst-Watson, former President of Def Jam Records, is revealing:

The time when we switched to gangsta music was the same time that the majors [record companies] bought up all the [independent] labels. And I don’t think that’s a coincidence. At the time that we were able to get a bigger place in the record stores, and a bigger presence because of this major marketing capacity, the music became less and less conscious (Ashhurst-Watson, quoted in Hurt 2007).

Her account is confirmed by recent research which documents that as rap increasingly became produced by major record labels, its content became more hardcore to encourage sales. In a longitudinal analysis of rap music production and lyrical content, Lena (2006, 488) finds that “starting in 1988 the largest record corporations charted substantially more ‘hardcore’ rap songs than did independent labels. In the eight years between 1988 and 1995, majors charted up to five and a half times as many hardcore rap singles as all their independent competitors combined.” She concludes that “major record labels produced the majority of puerile rap” during this later time period. This was in stark contrast to earlier periods where rap lyrics emphasized features of the local environment and hostility to corporate music production and values.

The bias fostered by record companies is recapitulated in the kind of rap music that gets the greatest airplay on radio stations. Hip-hop historian Kevin Powell points out that “in every city you go to in America. . . [rap stations are] playing the same 10-12 songs over and over again. So what it does is perpetuate the mindset that the only way you can be a man—a black man, a Latino man—is if you hard. To denigrate women. To denigrate homosexuals. To denigrate each other. To kill each other” (Kevin Powell, quoted in Hurt 2007). This privileging of hegemonic masculinity and negative depiction of women is driven by an interest in selling records (Rhym 1997). As long as this type of music continues to sell, “record labels will continue to put ethics and morality aside to release [violent or sexist rap]” (McAdams and Russell 1991, R22).

Consumers play a key role in this process. Misogynistic representations of women and the more general marketing of “hood narratives” (Watkins 2001, 389) occur, in part, in response to a perceived consumer demand for stereotypical representations of the ghetto, and specifically of young Black men and women. Listeners of rap, many of whom are White youth, can vicariously experience the ghetto, a place symbolizing danger and deviance (Quinn 2005, 85). As one white listener of rap music claims,

I’ve never been to a ghetto. I grew up in upper middle-class, basically white suburbia. . . . And to listen to [rap music] is a way of us to see . . . a completely different culture. It’s

something that most of us have never had the opportunity to experience. . . . And the stuff in the music, it appeals to our sense of learning about other cultures and wanting to know more about something that we'll never probably experience (quoted in Hurt 2007).

Such cross-cultural learning may be quite biased. As Quinn (2005, 91) argues, “with its provocative pop-cultural portrayals of the ghetto, there can be little doubt that gangsta rap helps to reinforce racial stereotypes held by many whites.” Indeed, when Hurt asked the White listener quoted above whether the music reinforces stereotypes, she answered affirmatively. Although explicit lyrics and misogynistic representations of women have made rap music highly marketable, they have also “reinvigorated popular beliefs about black deviance and social pathology” (Watkins 2001, 389). In short, the production and lyrical content of rap music are inextricably linked; as such, music industry interests can be viewed as one important source of rap music lyrics.

Rap music also has local roots, which help shape the content of the lyrics. More so than other genres, rap is a “localized form of cultural expression” (Bennett 1999a, 77; 1999b). Hip hop and rap initially developed out of the lived experiences of youth in disadvantaged, black neighborhoods and was “incubated in the black community’s house parties, public parks, housing projects, and local jams” (Powell 1991, 245; Rose 1994a). Although the music industry’s influence has become increasingly apparent, even today rap continues to be marketed as a cultural reflection of life on “the streets” of America’s inner cities. In fact, the music industry sends agents into these neighborhoods for the express purpose of gathering “street intelligence” on what is popular; they do this by visiting record stores, clubs, and parties (Negus 1999, 502).

The degree to which a particular music genre, and particularly male artists within that genre, endorse male supremacy in their lyrics may be related to broader, societal opportunities for affirming hegemonic masculinity—opportunities that vary to some extent by racial and class background. Poor, marginalized Black males have historically faced obstacles to asserting their masculinity, and they continue to be denied access to conventional institutional avenues through which masculinity may be established. According to Skeggs (1993), music historically served as a medium that provided Black men with an alternative resource for asserting their masculinity.

This opportunity structure can be linked specifically to the conditions in disadvantaged neighborhoods. It has been argued that the content of rap music reflects, at least to some extent, gender relations among youth in many inner-city communities. Several ethnographic studies provide evidence of discord between men and women in disadvantaged, minority neighborhoods. The harsh conditions of the ghetto and barrio provide residents with few conventional sources of self-esteem (Liebow 1967; Horowitz 1983; Bourgois 1995), which can lead to unconventional means to win respect. Violence is one means of eliciting respect from others or punishing those who withhold it (Kubrin and Weitzer 2003), but men are also admired for economically and sexually exploiting women. Four decades ago, Liebow’s (1967, 140-144) ethnographic study of a low-income, Black neighborhood described how important it

was for men to be seen as “exploiters of women,” even if they did not always treat women in this way. Recent research indicates that exploitation and degradation of young women is still a feature of some inner-city communities today and continues to shape gender relations (Miller and White 2003). Anderson’s (1999) study of an African American community identified several dimensions of a distinctive neighborhood culture, what he calls the “code of the street.” For many young men in such neighborhoods, the street code places a high value on sexual conquest, promiscuity, and the manipulation of women:

Because of the implications sex has for their local social status and esteem, the young men are ready to be regaled with graphic tales of one another’s sexual exploits. . . . Status goes to the winner, and sex is prized as a testament not of love but of control over another human being. The goal of the sexual conquests is to make a fool of the young woman. . . . [The male] incurs sanctions [from his peers] for allowing a girl to “rule” him or gains positive reinforcement for keeping her in line. . . . In many cases the more the young man seems to exploit the young woman, the higher is his regard within the peer group. (Anderson 1999, 150, 153, 154)

A similar male street culture is documented in an ethnographic study of a Puerto Rican barrio in New York City (Bourgois 1995, 1996). Rooted in conditions of socio-economic disadvantage which strip men of traditional sources of dignity, this street culture is characterized by a high level of male promiscuity, the “celebration of the gigolo image,” the value of “being an economic parasite” on one’s girlfriends, and justifications for violence against women (Bourgois 1995, 276-295).

We do not argue that neighborhood, industry, or larger cultural forces, as just described, are necessarily direct causes of the lyrical content or images, but instead that these forces are an essential part of the context within which the messages contained in rap are best understood. Our study thus can be situated within the recent literature on gender relations that recognizes the importance of multiple contexts in which gender roles and identities are reproduced (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

## Research Method

This study focuses on a time period that has not been examined in previous research on this topic. All rap albums from 1992 through 2000 that attained platinum status (selling at least 1 million copies) were identified ( $N = 130$ ). Sampling only platinum albums ensured that the music had reached a substantial segment of the population. To identify the sample, we obtained a list of all albums that went platinum between 1992 and 2000 from the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). The RIAA, which compiles, analyzes, and reports on the quantity and value of recorded music shipped into market channels, is considered the premier source for comprehensive market data on



music trends in the United States. We went through the list and used the Web site ARTISTdirect (<http://www.artistdirect.com>) to identify “rap” albums. ARTISTdirect is a comprehensive online network of resources that provides, among other things, detailed information about artists/groups. We typed in the name of each artist/group and the Web site classified the precise music genre.

Our analysis begins in 1992 because gangsta rap began to flourish around this time (Kelley 1996, 147; Smith 1997, 346; Krims 2000, 83; Watkins 2001, 389; Keyes 2002, 104; Kitwana 2002, 14).<sup>3</sup> Our interest in this starting point is related to the fact that misogyny and related themes (i.e., violence) are popularly thought to be more prevalent in gangsta rap than in rap generally. Yet, these themes are not exclusive to gangsta rap, which is why we selected all rap albums rather than just gangsta albums. As noted by Krims (2000, 87), rap albums typically mix genres and so songs that contain misogynistic lyrics would have been left out of the analysis had we only sampled gangsta rap albums.

The analysis ends in 2000 because that year marked a turning point in the industry’s increasing commercialization and greater detachment from its neighborhood sources (Kitwana 1994, 23; Krims 2000, 71; Watkins 2001, 382). Our time frame thus captures a period when rap music more closely reflected grassroots values and local conditions on the street and was somewhat less commercialized than today, although the interests of record labels were important during this time period as well.

The 130 albums contained a total of 1,922 songs. Using SPSS, a simple random sample of 403 songs was drawn and then analyzed.<sup>4</sup> Each song was listened to twice in its entirety by the authors, while simultaneously reading the lyrics. The lyrics were obtained from *The Original Hip-Hop/Rap Lyrics Archive* (<http://www.ohhla.com/all.html>). Each line was coded to identify major misogynistic themes. Misogyny refers to lyrics that encourage, condone, or glorify the objectification, exploitation, or victimization of women. In cases of uncertainty regarding the meaning of a particular word or phrase, we consulted *The Rap Dictionary* (<http://www.rapdict.org>), a comprehensive online dictionary of rap terms. During the coding, careful attention was paid to the context in which the lyrics were stated. This is especially important in rap, given that it is rooted in the Black oral tradition of signifying and other communicative practices (Smitherman 1997, 4). Signifying is a way of speaking that involves ritual insult (commonly referred to as “playing the dozens”) and double entendre (see also Keyes 2002; Lee 2005, 83). With signifying, words have alternative meanings beyond their conventional usages and should not necessarily be taken literally. In our coding, we were careful to interpret the lyrics within their larger contexts. Finally, an independent researcher coded a random subset (16% of the sample songs) to assess intercoder reliability. With respect to misogyny, agreement occurred in 73.4% of the songs, indicating fairly strong consensus.

## Findings

Misogyny was present in 22% of the 403 songs ( $N = 90$  songs, by 31 rappers).<sup>5</sup> This means that misogyny is much less pervasive in rap music than some critics believe, but is clearly a significant theme. Female rappers accounted for only 5 of the 90 misogynistic songs, as well as an additional 8 songs (out of the remaining 313) that did not have misogynistic lyrics. The scarcity of female artists shows just how male-dominated rap was during this time period, especially at the platinum level (George 1998; Troka 2002, 82). We include a separate analysis of the eight nonmisogynistic songs by female artists for purposes of comparison to the messages contained in our main sample.

Although misogynistic messages appear less frequently in rap than is commonly believed, significance is not simply a matter of frequency. Also important is the nature and intensity of the messages. Our content analysis identified five misogynistic themes that appear with some frequency, as shown in Table 1: (a) derogatory naming and shaming of women, (b) sexual objectification of women, (c) distrust of women, (d) legitimization of violence against women, and (e) celebration of prostitution and pimping. Our presentation of findings identifies the frequency of each theme, substantive messages and subthemes in the lyrics, and the ways in which the lyrics reflect societal gender relations, record industry pressures, and neighborhood conditions in disadvantaged communities.

### Naming and Shaming

A number of rap songs can be described as a full-fledged “status degradation ceremony” directed at women—a “ritual destruction of the person denounced” (Garfinkle 1956, 421). In these songs, it is typically women in general, rather than a specific person, who are shamed with derogatory names. This theme was present in half (49%) of the misogynistic songs.

Our analysis identified instances of naming and shaming but, as discussed earlier, we did not automatically assume that all conventionally “negative” labels were necessarily disparaging. For instance in rap culture, the terms “bitch” and “ho” are not necessarily intended to be derogatory, depending on the lyrical context (Kitwana 1994, 25; Keyes 2002). Ice Cube talks about a “wholesome ho,” and Too \$hort refers to his “finest bitches” and a “top-notch bitch.” Although recognizing that some listeners consider such terms offensive in all usage, we coded conservatively by including in our naming-and-shaming category only lyrics that were unambiguously derogatory. For example, Eminem’s song *Kill You* talks about “vile, venomous, volatile bitches.” Other rappers condemn the slut, tramp, whore, hoochie, “lying-ass bitch,” “shitty hoe,” “prima donna bitch,” and so forth. A favorite rap term is “chickenhead,” which reduces a woman to a bobbing head giving oral sex. Status

**Table 1.** Misogynistic Themes

Theme	Frequency in Songs (%)
Naming and shaming	49
Sexual objectification	67
Distrust of women	47
Legitimizing violence	18
Prostitution and pimping	20

Note: Frequency in songs identified as misogynistic, not within the larger sample of rap songs (where 22% of the songs were categorized as misogynistic).

degradation was the sole theme of some songs, present in every verse. Sweeping attacks are sometimes generalized, while other lyrics reveal particular rationales for degradation, such as women's failure to cooperate with men:

We couldn't get no play from the ladies  
 With seven niggas in a Nav [Navigator] is you crazy?...  
 So we all said "fuck you bitch" and kept rolling  
 (Snoop Dogg, *DP Gangsta*).

Even rappers' female relatives are not immune from such attacks. Eminem says that "all bitches is hoers, even my stinkin' ass mom" (*Under the Influence*). Eminem's unbridled hostility toward all women, including relatives, is somewhat extreme but not unique in this music genre.<sup>6</sup>

The flipside of this naming process is found in lyrics that praise men who treat women poorly. In these lyrics, it is a badge of honor for men to verbally and physically abuse women, and men win respect from other men when they act like "players," "pimps," and exploiters of women—financially, sexually, and emotionally. This theme is reflected throughout the data, closely mirroring the neighborhood street code described by Anderson and others. The variety of disparaging labels for women is not paralleled for men, either in rap or in the larger culture. Insofar as rappers derogate other men, they tend to use feminized terms, such as bitch or pussy—a staple of hegemonic masculinity.

It is important to point out that these lyrics essentialize women by portraying them as inherently "Other" and different from men by nature. Many of the labels refer to women's anatomy or sexuality, and the lyrics endorse the age-old notion that "biology is destiny."

Some rappers report that verbal abuse of women is encouraged and rewarded by the music industry:

Rappers like me always disrespectin' ladies,  
 Wonder why it's like that, well so do I.  
 But I just turn my back and then I go get high,  
 'Cause I get paid real good to talk bad about a bitch.  
 And you bought it, so don't be mad I got rich.  
 (Too \$hort, *Thangs Change*).

In an interview, Brother Marquis from two Live Crew echoed these sentiments: "I'm degrading [women] to try to get me some money. . . . And besides, you let me do that. You got pimps out here who are making you sell your body. Just let me talk about you for a little while . . . and make me a little money" (quoted in Collins 2000, 143-144). By this logic, because women are already exploited by pimps, there is no harm in subjecting them to lyrical shaming. The larger point is that rap industry norms, more so than in other types of music, encourage artists to disparage women (Kitwana 1994, 23; Smith 1997, 346; Krims 2000, 71).

### Sexual Objectification

Sexual objectification of women was evident in 67% of our misogynistic songs. Sexual objectification refers to the idea that women are good only for sex. These lyrics mirror the street code's exhortation that men avoid commitment, marriage, and caring for children; instead, women are to be sexually used and then quickly discarded (Liebow 1967; Bourgois 1995; Anderson 1999; Miller and White 2003). N.W.A. captures this theme with a song titled "Findum, Fuckum, and Flee." Puff Daddy offers another example: "Call me Sean if you suck, call me gone when I nut. That's the end of us, get your friend to fuck" (Sean "Puffy" Combs, on Notorious B.I.G., *Notorious B.I.G.*). Consider also the following songs:

Bitches ain't shit but hoes and tricks  
 Lick on these nuts and suck the dick  
 Get's the fuck out after you're done  
 And I hops in my ride to make a quick run.  
 (Dr. Dre, *Bitches Ain't Shit*)

I'm only out to fuck a bitch, fuck tryin' to charm her.  
 I treat a fine ass bitch like dirt  
 No money in her purse, a fuck is all it's worth.  
 'Cause Short Dawg'll never cater to you hoes  
 And if you ain't fuckin,' I say "later" to you hoes.  
 (Too \$hort, *Coming up \$hort*).

High value is placed on having scores of sexual partners and even sharing them, another way in which women are de-individualized:

I meet a bitch, fuck a bitch  
 Next thing you know you fuckin' the bitch  
 (Notorious B.I.G., *Friend of Mine*).

Anderson (1999) discusses the extreme peer pressure on young men in disadvantaged neighborhoods to have casual sex with women as a way of affirming their masculinity. This norm is a hallowed one in song lyrics:

I had niggas making bets like, did he fuck her yet?  
 Ask her did he touch her bra, when I say nah they say ahh  
 So tomorrow I use that pressure to undress her  
 But the more I caress her, more I feel like a molester.  
 (Mase, *I Need to Be*)

By the end of this stanza, peer pressure has resulted in sexual aggression.

Some rappers make it clear that they intend to put women “in their place” by demeaning strong and independent women. Redman boasts, “I turn an independent woman back into a hoochie” (*Keep On '99*) and Notorious B.I.G. raps, “I like ‘em . . . educated, so I can bust off on they glasses” (*Big Booty Hoes*). Some of the lyrics in this thematic category, therefore, may be seen as resistance to women’s growing autonomy, education, and independence—messages that cross-cut the other themes in this music as well. As indicated earlier, this backlash against women’s liberation and reassertion of traditional masculinity can be found in other popular music genres as well.

Sexual objectification of women has a flipside in the sexual empowerment of men. Male sexual bravado and hypersexuality were present in 58% of the misogynistic songs. A common practice is bragging about how easy it is for “players” to get women to have sex: “Witness me holla at a hoochie, see how quick the game takes” (2Pac, *All 'Bout U*).

Men win respect from other men for a high number of sexual conquests without commitment. Although present throughout the culture, it appears to be especially prized in disadvantaged neighborhoods where men often lack other sources of dignity and self-esteem. In fact, there is a striking correspondence between the street code in inner-city communities and this music theme. Just as young men earn respect from their peers if they are viewed as having casual sex with many women (Liebow 1967; Bourgois 1995, 1996; Anderson 1999; Miller and White 2003), rappers likewise frequently brag about their sexual exploits, and are rewarded for doing so. A good example is rapper 50 Cent, who has been frequently nominated for Grammy Awards for songs with precisely these themes (e.g., *Candy Shop* and *Magic Stick*).

Both in rap songs and among neighborhood peers, bragging earns respect because the “expression [of masculinity] requires performance and recognition: masculinity is not only a state that men have to achieve, they have to be seen to achieve it” (Fiske 1993, 129). Low sexual achievers and those who seek a long-term relationship with a woman are ridiculed and subordinated because they are less active practitioners of this (extremely utilitarian) version of hegemonic masculinity: “their games [are] seen as inferior, and their identities devalued” (Anderson 1999, 151).

If having multiple sex partners earns respect, men also face an ongoing threat of sexual competition from other men. In other words, “Women provide heterosexual men with sexual validation, and men compete with each other for this” (Donaldson 1993, 645). Men are thus instructed to use their sexual talents or material goods to steal other men’s women:

Say dog, what kinda nigga be on top of the world?  
 Million dollar status got me on top of ya girl.  
 (Hot Boys, *Fired Up*)

Men are also rewarded for demonstrating that they are sexually superior to other men:

Get freaky, and do it wild  
 On the floor, doggy style.  
 While your bitch be crying “please don’t stop”. . . .  
 I fuck her like I know you won’t.  
 If that’s your bitch, homeboy you’d better keep her  
 ‘Cause she won’t stay off my beeper.  
 You can’t fuck her and I appreciate it  
 Even though I know you hate it. (Too Short, *Step Daddy*)

Finally, sexual objectification is expressed in gangbangng. In these songs, several men have sex with one woman, whether consensually or not, and the woman is highly depersonalized. Some involve gangbangs with underage girls, while others describe sex with heavily intoxicated women:

All on the grass [marijuana], every bitch passed [out]  
 A first not last, when we all hit the ass.  
 Doin’ tricks jacked up like a six  
 One pussy, and thirteen dicks. (Westside Connection, *The Gangsta, the Killa, and the Dope Deala*)

Kisha got did right yeah  
 Fucked the whole Cash Money clique all in one night yeah.  
 (Lil’ Wayne, *Kisha*)

There is evidence that such gangbanging takes place in some disadvantaged minority neighborhoods. One study of Black youth in north St. Louis, for example, reported that 40% of the young men interviewed admitted they had engaged in such behavior, which helped them gain status among their peers (Miller and White 2003, 1219).

The sexual objectification of women and the hypersexuality of Black men portrayed in these lyrics can be linked to larger stereotypes about Black sexuality—stereotypes that date back to colonialism and slavery and that are still quite salient today (Skeggs 1993). Rappers exploit these stereotypes in their music.

### **Distrust of Women**

Suspicion of women is a significant theme in rap songs—a tension that is mirrored to some extent in the communities in which rap originated (Anderson 1999). Almost half (47%) of the misogynistic songs displayed deep distrust of women. There is both a diffuse sense of distrust (e.g., Dr. Dre’s verse, “How could you trust a ho?” *Bitches Ain’t Shit*) and several specific reasons to be suspicious of women, who are seen as prone to entrap, betray, exploit, or destroy men. First, it is claimed that teenage girls lie about their age:

See nowadays man you got to know these bitches age  
 ‘Cause they ass be real fast when they be goin’ through that phase.  
 You fuck a girl that’s young, and you gonna end up in the cage  
 (Mase, *I Need to Be*)

Second, women stand accused of making false rape accusations in order to get a financial settlement:

Don’t take the pussy, if she fightin’  
 ‘Cause you saw what happened to Tupac and Mike Tyson.  
 ‘Specially if you large [famous], some hoes is trife [petty]  
 Get you on a rape charge, have you servin’ your life.  
 (Nas, *Dr. Knockboot*)

Third, men are warned to be wary of the femme fatale—especially women who seek to set men up for robbery, assault, or murder. Ice Cube’s song, *Don’t Trust ‘Em*, talks about a woman who lured a man to her home where there were four men who beat the man, stole his money, and killed him. The song ends, “I told you the bitch was a trap. Don’t trust ‘em.” This scenario seems to be fairly common, judging from our data:

You know they [women] might be the one to set me up

Wanna get they little brother to wet [kill] me up. . . .  
 Bitches be schemin', I kid ya not  
 That's why I keep my windows locked and my Glock cocked.  
 (Notorious B.I.G., *Friend of Mine*)

The femme fatale is iconic in popular culture, as illustrated in many films (e.g., *Double Indemnity*, *Fatal Attraction*, *Basic Instinct*), all of which feature a villainous woman who uses her beauty and sexuality to exploit or victimize innocent men. These women are presented as thoroughly evil and condemned for departing from their traditional gender role. Interestingly, there is no equivalent label for men who act this way toward women. What is especially remarkable about rap's use of this icon is its claim that all young women are potential femmes fatales; the music sends a strong signal to men to be wary of women generally.

A fourth refrain is that women frequently lie to men to get pregnant. The value many young poor women place on having babies, as one of the few sources of dignity in their lives, is quite strong (Anderson 1999, 162-166; Edin and Kefalas 2005). For many young men in these neighborhoods, a woman's pregnancy is viewed quite differently, something to be feared and denied: "To own up to a pregnancy is to go against the peer-group street ethic of hit and run" (Anderson 1999, 156). Rappers express an identical concern. 2Pac asks, "Why plant seeds in a dirty bitch, waitin' to trick me? Not the life for me" (*Hell 4 a Hustler*). Paying child support is just one of the fears. Snoop Dogg raps:

I ain't lettin' nothin' leak cause if things leak, then I'm a get caught  
 And I can't get caught cause you know how they do it about that child support.  
 Shit, bitches is cold on a nigga who ain't got his game tight  
 Getting 18.5% [child support payments] half your life.  
 (Snoop Dogg, *Freestyle Conversation*)

Too \$hort describes an even worse scenario after getting a woman pregnant:

No more player, no Shorty the Pimp  
 I get paid, divert a check and get 40%.  
 All the homies talkin' bad, hair down, walkin' sad  
 Got the broad livin' with me, baby sayin' "Dad!" . . .  
 I could try to mack again but the bitches won't want me  
 'Cause I'm all washed up, broke, fat, and funky.  
 I lost everything that I worked to be.  
 (Too \$hort, *Coming Up \$hort*)



Young men who fall prey to such women are ridiculed by their peers (Anderson 1999). It is not only the material cost of fathering a child that is feared in these songs, but also fatherhood in general. This may be regarded as an extreme form of traditional masculinity, where the father is largely absent from his children's lives. As Donaldson (1993, 650) states, "In hegemonic masculinity, fathers do not have the capacity or the skill or the need to care for children. . . . Nurturant and care-giving behavior is simply not manly." Our rap songs convey this message in no uncertain terms.

Even more common than the other subthemes in this category is our final one: The woman as gold digger only interested in men for their money:

Watch the honeys check your style  
 Worthless, when they worship what you purchase.  
 They only see ice [diamonds], not me, under the surface  
 What's the purpose?  
 (The Lox, *I Wanna Thank You*)  
 You must be used to all the finer things  
 Infatuated by what money brings.  
 It seems to me you hoes will never change.  
 (Scarface, *Fuck Faces*)

It is significant that the 2006 Grammy Award for Best Rap Solo Performance went to Kanye West's song, "Gold Digger," which complains about a woman who seduces a man to get his money. Such recognition can be interpreted as one way in which the music industry helps to perpetuate stereotyped images of women.

Several female rappers in our sample reinforce the idea of women as gold diggers interested solely in exploiting men (cf. Pough 2004). Missy Misdemeanor Elliott sings, "If you want me, where's my dough? Give me money, buy me clothes" (*All 'N My Grill*), and in another song:

Hot boys  
 Baby you got what I want.  
 See 'cause y'all be drivin' Lexus jeeps  
 And the Benz jeeps, and the Lincoln jeeps.  
 Nothin' cheaper, got them Platinum Visa's.  
 (Missy Misdemeanor Elliott, *Hot Boys*)

As does Lil' Kim:

I fuck with dudes with Member's Only jackets  
 That sleep on brass beds, with money for a mattress.  
 Everything I get is custom made

Niggas wanna get laid; I gotta get paid.  
(Lil' Kim, *Custom Made*)

Men's fear of being exploited by women has a long history and is by no means unique to rap music. Yet, the gold digger fear is especially acute among men who are nouveau riche such as the newly successful rapper. They have achieved rapid upward mobility and celebrity status, and thus have precarious new wealth that can be lost. It may be less salient among poor men who have few assets to lose.

### Legitimizing Violence

Norms regarding appropriate conduct are ineffectual if not backed up with sanctions for those who disregard the norms. Violent punishment is one such sanction. Compared to the previous themes, condoning violence against women was less frequent but does appear in almost one-fifth (18%) of the misogynistic songs. Violence is portrayed in these songs, first of all, as the most appropriate response to women who act disrespectfully toward men, just as it is for men who disrespect other men (Anderson 1999; Kubrin and Weitzer 2003; Kubrin 2005a). Juvenile asks, "If she think you're jokin', is she goin' get a quick chokin'?" (*March Nigga Step*), and Dr. Dre tells us that "snobby-ass bitches get slapped out of spite" (*Ackrite*). Violence is seen as fitting for other "offenses" as well. Mase raps, "If she make my nuts itch [from an STD], I kill that slut bitch" (*I Need to Be*); N.W.A. has a song titled *To Kill a Hooker*; and Eminem tells listeners to "rape sluts" (*Who Knew*), prostitutes, and other women:

Slut, you think I won't choke no whore  
'Til the vocal cords don't work in her throat no more?!  
Shut up slut, you're causin' too much chaos  
Just bend over and take it like a slut, okay Ma? (Eminem, *Kill You*)

Several rappers threaten women with assault or rape if they refuse sex:

Slap you with my paw, all across your jaw  
Break fool [act violent] on these bitches while I'm breakin' the law  
You come up in my room, look bitch you takin' it off. (Snoop Dogg, on Notorious B.I.G., *Dangerous MC's*)

These sorts of justifications for the use of violence are mirrored, to some extent, in disadvantaged communities, as borne out in some ethnographic research. For instance, Miller and White (2003, 1237) found that both girls and boys in the inner city believed that male violence was appropriate when the girl seemed to have "forgotten her place."

Examples of such misconduct include girls who “run their mouth,” “act a fool,” dress inappropriately, or drink too much. As in rap music, violence in these communities is portrayed as situationally appropriate. By contrast, girls’ violence was defined by boys as “rooted in their greater emotionality,” which is another example of how gender differences are naturalized (Miller and White 2003, 1242).

A related subtheme is the positive value placed on sex that is aggressive and injurious to women. Rappers take pride in women being “drilled,” “wrecked,” and otherwise roughed up during intercourse. Men demonstrate their dominance over women by such representations of rough sex. This subtheme was also evident in rap during the preceding time period, as documented in Armstrong’s (2001) study of songs produced in 1987–1993.

In the songs in this category, rappers (a) pride themselves on sex acts that appear to harm women, (b) justify other acts of violence, (c) warn women who challenge male domination that they will be assaulted, and (d) seem to invite male violence against women. There is a dual message here, one for women and one for men: Violence is portrayed as the most appropriate response to women who violate gendered etiquette or who do not “know their place” and men are encouraged to abide by this principle. The main purpose of such songs, therefore, appears to be the normalization of violence against women as a means of social control. The music both espouses a set of gendered norms and advocates sanctions for those who violate these norms.

### **Women as Prostitutes, Men as Pimps**

Pimp chic is a recent cultural innovation. It draws on pimp imagery and the language of pimping and prostitution, but has broader meaning. As Quinn (2000, 116) observed, “The divergent articulations of the pimp as trope and type point to the versatility of this misogynist, street-heroic figure.” To “pimp” something can mean to promote it or to accessorize it. MTV, for example, has a show called “Pimp My Ride,” where old cars are spruced up with expensive gadgets to create the ultimate pimpmobile. The term pimp is often synonymous with “player,” a man who excels at attracting women or glamorized hustlers who conspicuously display their riches. Here, “the pimp image is more central than his occupation” (Quinn 2000, 124). The celebration of both pimp imagery and real pimps is pervasive in rap culture. Ice-T, Snoop Dogg, Jay-Z, and others claim to have been real-life pimps; at least one rapper (K-Luv the Pimp) has been arrested for pimping and pandering; a 2003 film called *Lil’ Pimp* starred a 9-year-old boy as the film’s hero; and a year after Nelly released his 2002 song and video, “Pimp Juice,” he launched a new energy drink of the same name.

Although the mainstreaming of pimp chic is a fascinating cultural trend, we do not include it in this thematic category. Instead, we use the conventional, narrow definitions—namely, men who employ prostitutes. In coding, we were careful to

distinguish references to prostitution and pimping, in the strict sense, from pimp chic. Women as prostitutes/men as pimps was a theme in 20% of the misogynistic songs.

Prostitutes are the quintessential figures of sexual objectification and exploitation, even if many of them see themselves as exploiting customers instead (Weitzer 2005). In rap, both prostitution and pimping are defined as legitimate economic pursuits and celebrated—themes which are almost nonexistent in other music genres (Quinn 2000). The notion that women are only good for sex is epitomized in male discourse regarding prostitutes, and some rappers go to great lengths to present such women in one-dimensional, impersonal terms:

Let's me and you lay in these hoes  
 And show 'em what they pussy made fo'. . . .  
 Let's leave without payin' these hoes  
 And show 'em what they pussy made fo'.  
 (Scarface, *Use Them Ho's*)

Here women are reduced to their sex organs, and not even worth paying for their services.

Some artists describe the hardships faced by pimps, such as Ice-T's "Somebody's Gotta Do It, Pimpin' Ain't Easy!" and Three 6 Mafia's academy award winning song, "It's Hard Out Here for a Pimp." Others revel in the multiple benefits of pimping:

Around the world, getting money,  
 I'm pimpin' hoes on Sunday.  
 I'm the kind of nigga you'll work all night fo'. . . .  
 Wanna see how much pussy these hoes can sell.  
 It's like hypnosis, I pimps your mother, I pimps yo sis'  
 Hoes be nothin' but slaves for me, ready to go to their graves for me.  
 (Too Short, *Pimp Me*)

Pimping and prostitution are glorified:

Nuthin' like pimpin'. . . .  
 I'll make the White House a hoe house, and all the pimps  
 To just set up shops like they do in Vegas  
 Legalize pimpin' for all the playas.  
 Puttin' fine ass bitches in the streets and the hood  
 Every year a nigga trade for a new Fleetwood [Cadillac].  
 (Too Short, *Ain't Nothing Like Pimpin'*)

And rappers ask listeners to give pimps the respect they deserve:

This ho, that ho make me rich. . . .  
 I'm back in the game, getting' my dough  
 And fuck any motherfucker that say it ain't so.  
 (Snoop Dogg, *Buck 'Em*)

Quinn (2000, 117, 135) argues that simply by drawing attention to pimps' exploitative practices and misogyny, these lyrics contain a "dissident" subtext that partially undermines such conduct even as it reinforces and condones it. This interpretation, of dual and perhaps contradictory messages, is a function of Quinn's broad definition of pimping to include both "players" and traditional pimps. In our sample of lyrics, we found celebration, not critique, to be the norm with respect to the pimp-prostitute relationship.

Street prostitution is typically located in both disadvantaged and marginal/transitional neighborhoods. Residents of these areas face obstacles in finding work, and prostitution and pimping may be seen as preferable to dead-end, low-paying jobs. Insofar as rap music emerged out of conditions in these neighborhoods, we might expect the sex trade to be one theme, and indeed it is in one-fifth of our misogynistic songs. At the same time, neighborhood conditions do not exist in a vacuum but interact with external factors. Ice-T invokes legendary pimp Iceberg Slim's book, *Pimp: The Story of My Life*, as the inspiration for his lyrics: "Ghetto hustlers in my neighborhood would talk this nasty dialect rich with imagery of sex and humor. My buddies and I wanted to know where they picked it up, and they told us, 'You better get into some of the Iceberg stuff!'" (quoted in Quinn 2000, 123). Several rappers also claim to have been influenced by the romanticization of the iconic pimps featured in the blaxploitation films of the 1970s (Quinn 2000). Snoop Dogg, for instance, states, "When I started seeing those movies in the '70s, like *The Mack* and *Superfly*, that helped me to more or less pick who I wanted to be in life, how I wanted to live my life, how I wanted to represent me" (quoted in Moody 2003). Those films not only painted pimps as role models for young black men but also purported to describe life in the ghetto—well illustrated in the 1999 documentary, *American Pimp*. Coming full circle, several famous pimps have appeared in rap videos. Rap's glorification of pimping is thus linked to both neighborhood conditions and a larger, preexisting pimp culture (in films and books), which itself originated on the streets.

## The Voices of Female Rappers

According to one analyst, "Rap provides a medium to mobilize feminist strategies of resistance, to give voice to the experience and concerns shared by young black

women, or to explore and articulate various aspects of desire and pleasure” (Forman 1994, 54). Did the lyrics of female rappers, during this time period, contain elements of an oppositional subculture directed at misogynistic male rap? Did they call hegemonic masculinity into question and reject the negative images and messages regarding women? Or were they silent or compliant with respect to male constructions of proper gender relations?

To determine whether female rappers objected to the negative portrayal of women in rap, we analyzed lyrics by female rappers that were not included in our original sample (because they did not contain misogynistic themes). Recall that only 13 of our 403 songs were by women; 8 of these 13 did not contain misogynistic lyrics. Analysis of these eight songs reveals very little resistance to sexism during the time period under study. Only one song, by Eve (*Love is Blind*), directly challenges male mistreatment of women. In this song, Eve alternates between cursing a man who abused her girlfriend and questioning her girlfriend’s decision to stay with this “snake mother-fucker.” In one stanza, she asks her friend:

What kind of love from a nigga would black your eye?  
 What kind of love from a nigga every night make you cry?  
 What kind of love from a nigga make you wish he would die?  
 And you stayed, what made you fall for him?  
 That nigga had the power to make you crawl for him. . . .  
 Smacked you down cause he said you was too tall for him, huh?  
 (Eve, *Love Is Blind*)

This song stands alone in its rejection of violence toward women. This is not to suggest that female rappers accepted misogynistic lyrics; instead, the fact that they offered such little resistance likely reflects industry norms at the time. During the 1990s, women were grossly underrepresented in rap generally, and gangsta rap in particular, and were channeled instead into hip-hop and R&B. For women to gain acceptance in this male-dominated industry, they had to conform to existing industry norms and required male sponsors, who often appeared on one of their songs or in their videos (Nelson 1998, 184; Emerson 2002). For this reason, the most common theme in our sample of songs by female artists involves the entry-level claim to being a bona fide, skilled rapper. Like many male artists at the time (Kubrin 2005a), women demanded respect for their talents as rappers and would boast about this. In nearly all cases, bragging about one’s skills on the microphone was the entire point of the song.

Apart from Eve’s oppositional song, there was one remaining theme associated with gender relations—competition and fighting over men. In these songs, female rappers disparaged other women who they accused of trying to steal their men:

Get your own stacks [money]  
 Why you think these niggas pussy hungry?

Cause you actin' triffin'  
Layin' up, takin' his money.  
(Eve, *Let's Talk About*)

In other scenarios, female rappers claimed ownership of their man even if he had sex with other women, usually because the former was the man's wife or longtime girlfriend:

Shit, I got the ring bitch and his last name. . . .  
Any bitch could luck up and have a kid  
Any chick could fuck a nigga for spite  
But the nigga got to love you if he make you his wife  
Ughh, ya'll chicks is lonely, I'm ownin' that dick  
And on top of all this bullshit, I'm still his chick.  
(Foxy Brown, *It's Hard Being Wifee*)

Although our sample of female rappers is too small for definitive conclusions, most did not challenge the degradation of women by male artists at the time. Some female artists adopt the persona and status afforded them by men: Lil' Kim calls herself "Queen Bitch," Mia X is a "Boss Bitch" (Pough 2004), and others pride themselves on being gold diggers, but it is also important to remember that most songs by women neither accepted nor opposed such degradation. This pattern appears to have changed subsequent to the time period covered by our study. Currently, female rappers more actively confront male domination and seek to empower women, although songs by female artists today still contain a contradictory mix of themes that both challenge and perpetuate misogynistic themes (Emerson 2002; Troka 2002, 83; Jennings 2004; Pough 2004, 85-87).

## Conclusion

According to one review of popular music over the past century, the portrayal of women has increasingly shown "greater diversity, more complexity, and dramatically mixed messages about the individual female persona and women's roles in society" (Cooper 1999, 355). Much rap music, at least rap produced by male artists, runs counter to this larger trend. Indeed, a segment of rap music naturalizes certain alleged characteristics of men and women and, in accordance with these imputed differences, seeks to restrict, rather than broaden, women's proper roles and resuscitate male domination. The messages are thus both essentialist and normative—portraying men and women as inherently different and unequal and

espousing a set of conduct norms for each gender's proper behavior toward the other and sanctions for those who violate these norms.

Some analysts describe rap music as part of a larger reaction against the feminist movement, seeking to perpetuate women's inequality and reempower men. As bell hooks (1994, 6) argues, "Gangsta rap is part of the anti-feminist backlash that is the rage right now." The music contains a variety of "controlling images" directed at women (Collins 2000), and goes to great lengths to define strict gender roles, with women subordinate to men in several ways. In this sense, rap speaks to larger gender relations by making universalistic claims and instructing all men on appropriate conduct toward women, but rap artists are not solely responsible for the content of their work. The entertainment industry plays an essential role, cultivating sexist lyrics and rewarding artists who produce them with huge sums of money, Grammy and Oscar Awards, and spin-off products like Pimp Juice. In addition to this top-down dynamic, we have also pointed to a bottom-up process in which, as Negus (1999, 490) argues, neighborhood "culture produces industry" as much as "industry produces culture." In other words, rap's messages have been incubated and resonate in communities where men have few opportunities for socioeconomic success and dignity and where respect is instead often earned by mistreating young women (Liebow 1967; Bourgois 1996; Anderson 1999) as well as other men (Kubrin and Weitzer 2003). As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) point out, hegemonic masculinity is reinforced reciprocally at multiple levels—societal, community, and interactional.

It is important to emphasize that, like other music genres, rap is more varied in its content than is often recognized. For instance, this music has served as a consciousness-raising, politically progressive, liberating form of popular culture (Martinez 1997). Therefore, we want to emphasize that misogyny does not characterize rap music as a whole. This is an important finding in itself. A majority of songs in our sample do not degrade women, and there are rappers who actively challenge rap's misogynistic messages and endorse a more egalitarian form of masculinity. At the same time, a sizeable segment (more than one-fifth) of this genre does contain such messages, and our analysis indicates that these messages are rather extreme. Although women are presented as subordinate to men in a majority of rock and country songs as noted earlier, rap stands out for the intensity and graphic nature of its lyrical objectification, exploitation, and victimization of women. Other genres, in the aggregate, make more subtle allusions to gender inequality or present more muted criticisms of women (Ryan and Peterson 1982; Binder 1993; Walser 1993; Rhym 1997; Andsager and Roe 1999; Cooper 1999). Furthermore, it is important to consider what themes are largely absent in rap lyrics. Rare are lyrics that describe women as independent, educated, professional, caring, and trustworthy. Although the majority of songs in the original sample did not contain misogynistic lyrics, even these songs failed to present women in a favorable light. In other words, absence of misogyny does not equate with a positive representation of women.



Given its sources, we argue that changing the content of this music—specifically with respect to the portrayal of women—requires in part changing the conditions under which it is created, conditions that lie at the intersection of three important forces: Socioeconomic disadvantage and associated gender relations in local communities, the material interests of the record industry, and the larger cultural objectification of women and associated norms of hegemonic masculinity.

## Notes

1. It is important to recognize that rap is not monolithic. There are various themes in rap music, ranging from Afro-Centric community building to support for liberation struggles to celebration of partying to problems of racism and drug dealing. See Kitwana (1994, 32) and Krims (2000, 55) for evidence of rap music's varied content.

2. Gangsta rap is a subgenre of rap music. It describes life in the ghetto and has been controversial in part because it provides an insiders' view of crime, violence, and social conflict in the inner city (Kitwana 1994, 19; Krims 2000, 70). More so than other rap genres, gangsta rap is noted for its violent and misogynistic lyrics, which depart from the rich political and social commentary that characterizes some other rap music (Kelley 1996, 147).

3. We recognize that a few artists, such as NWA, produced gangsta rap songs before this time period; however, gangsta rap gained ascendancy in the early 1990s.

4. Originally a random sample of one third of the 1,922 songs was selected to be analyzed ( $N = 632$ ). The findings are based on a final sample size of 403 because during the course of coding after song 350, we no longer encountered new themes. Nevertheless, we coded an additional 53 songs to ensure that we had reached saturation, which is a standard practice in qualitative analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 111).

5. At first glance, it might appear that negative portrayals of women were less frequent in rap than in the other music genres reviewed earlier based on the percentage differences. However, each study operationalized such depictions in somewhat different ways, so study findings cannot be directly compared. Similarly, our finding on rap music cannot be compared to Armstrong's (2001) study of earlier rap songs because he focused on expressions of violence against women whereas our measure of misogyny is more inclusive.

6. Eminem has marketed himself as a poor or working-class White youth, which gives him some "street credibility" among Black rappers and record producers, and it has been argued that his misogynistic lyrics are intended to gain credibility as a rapper (Stephens 2005).

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