

Hip-hop culture has rapidly expanded into mainstream popular culture through a growing commercialization. With this sudden and ever expanding shift, it is important to understand its impact on today's society at large. This paper will focus specifically on hip-hop's role in violent behavior towards women. As recent reports have shown that 80% of adolescents who have access to MTV view videos on an average of 25 minutes to two hours each day, assuming safely that the majority of these videos are hip-hop related, we are able to conclude that their messages are influencing societal thoughts (Seidman 11). From this paper's assessment of the situation, we may further conclude that hip-hop plays into a hindering influence as it has continued to incubate society's acceptance of violent behaviors towards women. These influences, played out both lyrically and visually, are diagnosed and discussed in the paragraphs to follow.

The issue of violence towards women stems from a history of raising young females within a society which, at large, presents violent acts towards them as normal, acceptable and/or encouraged. Unstated rules of the gender roles, those being masculine and feminine, are heavily forced upon our youth during their maturation. Young boys are encouraged to possess traits such as athleticism, strength, and to be unemotional. Young girls are sent messages to be nurturing, passive

and accepting individuals. One of the most violent/unhealthy situations stem from an issue of control, and society sends messages to men to control and women to be obedience or complying, it is easy to see how a formed relationship between the two sexes might lay the foundations for an abusive/unhealthy relationship.

Statistically speaking, these types of relationships can be shown through reported incidents and events taken place in the United States alone. As target, women are 10 times as likely than men to be victimized by an intimate. Each day four women die in this country as a result of domestic violence totaling an estimated 1,400 deaths per year. In addition to these deaths, an estimated two to four million women of all races and classes are battered annually. Out of those incidents, at least 170,000 require hospitalization. In addition to batter and abuse, there is also a sexual assault listing of a reported 132,000 rapes per year with an estimate that in addition to these reports there are at approximately two to six times that many women raped, but that these rapes go unreported (www.now.org). With these shockingly high and ever growing statistics at our fingertips we begin to see a result of an underlying problem facing society at large. Why is this happening? What makes it ok?

As stated before, hip-hop has increasingly begun to influence popular culture. Through media and press reviews and headlines, hip-hop news and related stories are fed

directly to our youth. Along with these informational messages come also hip-hop messages, specifically messages about behaviors. In the film *The Electronic Storyteller: Television and the Cultivation of Values*, George Gerbner asserts that in modern times the stories and values that are being taught to children are no longer being told by their parents or teachers but instead through the television. He claims that television images often become part of how one perceives reality (*The electronic story teller*). Likewise, considering the fact that much of the time in which adolescents view music television it is hip-hop related or themed, it is apparent that these videos and images are cultivating the minds of today's youth.

The representation of women in hip-hop is limited. Most ways in which they are represented are through a creation of a character and/or their participation in visually simulative, for the male gaze, situations. Assessing common representations, they are incomplete and thus lead to further stereotypes and a hindering ability to even be seen as humanistic. On the surface, we can say close mindedly that women are indeed represented; upon further investigation, we can begin to see how and for whom they are represented and how this representation is a violent one.

In the films *Dreamworlds* and *Dreamworlds 2* the creator, Sut Jhally claims that women seen throughout music videos are merely used for bigger sales, bigger paychecks and bigger stakes. We are commonly shown how women in

these videos, majority of the time, do not have significant purpose of a human-value. They are objects, things, bodies, shapes, outlines, parts and shadows that are used time and time again to attract the male gaze to the image maintained throughout music entertainment and television. Using women in these ways consequences their representation as limited and accepting of these images. It is this messaged mentality which leads to societies display of minor acts of harassment or verbalized abuse - such as cat calls towards women, but sometimes it can lead to larger problems - such as rape (*Dreamworld*).

One huge message that the video pointed out was how music television represents women in a role of sexual pursuers and seekers even to the point where a "no" really signifies a "yes." Time and time again, the film pointed out examples of this video-woman aggressively attacking a man sexually and enjoying every minute of it. In some cases (opposite to the previous), the videos also showed a more standoffish female almost shy and insecure but still filled with sexual drive that overcomes her hesitance through the man's continual pursuit. Hip-hop videos represent this female character both visually and lyrically. Often times male rappers are surrounded and fondled by females throughout their videos. Lyrically they boast of sexual encounters in a violent nature. In the song "Oochie Wally," rapper Nas instructs "Little young thing/Go around my dick with your tongue ring/Deep throat my 9 inch/Gut from the front and/Grind

from the side and/Fuck from the behind and/Grab her ass, slap her ass/She screaming like she dying/Nigga cum 4 times without even trying/I beat that pussy up, there's no denying." What comes to question is the consensual nature to this type of encounter. Addressing the female as "young thing" makes one question how young? Is she legal? The lyrics "Grab her ass, slap her ass/Screaming like she dying" makes one think of how stating the word "no" is not always necessary when one is stating a no. No can be insinuated through all types of messages - tears, shaking, and certainly screaming. The third lyrical analysis is from the line "Nigga cum 4 times without even trying" as it seems here that this encounter was for his sexual pleasures and experiences.

Come later in this same song are the lines "Fuck my whole crew/You know how we do/You got that girl pussy I can share with my people/Be a brave girl, do you thing." These lines represent a vocalized mentality seen throughout many hip-hop songs. This belief is that women are supposed to engage in these types of behaviors and that they ultimately serve no other purpose but that of sexual fulfillment. Claiming and portraying these women as such, degrades them to throw-away status/material. In the song "When the Last Time" by the Clipse, the rapper proudly states this throw-away concept in his lyrics "She already knew from the beginning/That she's added to the list of chicks that I done been in." Another rapper, DMX, insinuates in his song "It's All Good" that once his

sexual encounter is complete the female serves no further purpose in his lyrics reading "I tell them bitches 'I'll be back' and they believe that shit!" Further, DMX also portrays this act as a woman's duty as Clipse did in his line, same song, "Still gave up the ass and dough, she was supposed to."

Analysis to follow, bring us to the concept of minimization, that is to cut a woman down to a representation of her parts rather than her whole. Represented as the female who keeps beat with her backside, tempts you with her lip-syncing lips and flaunts her voluptuous chest. According to Jean Kilbourne, creator of the *Killing Us Softly* video series, the objectification of women allows for violence against them to be made easier. The use of a woman's breast, lips or butt portrays her to be merely body parts and not as a human being (*Killing us softly*). By minimizing women to these imaged parts, hip-hop videos have allowed for women to have no face, no ideas, no values and ultimately no mind. Their appeal to the opposite sex and in comparison to others is merely based on physical stature. Rapper, Sir Mix-A-Lot demonstrates this concept in his song entitled "*Baby Got Back*" in the lines describing an encounter with a female spotted for her backside. He raps, "'Cause you notice that butt was stuffed/Deep in the jeans she's wearing/I'm hooked and I can't stop staring/Oh baby, I wanna get wit'cha/And take your picture/My homeboys tried to warn me/But with that butt you got makes/Me so horny." Here we see a male individual taken back by a

backside. There is no regard to the female's personality, beliefs or values, she is merely a nice ass and in the world of hip-hop that's good enough criteria for attraction. What this message therefore teaches our youth is that, for little girls, it is ok to be viewed as a nice ass, a sexy set of lips or some big tits; and for young boys it is desirable for you to attract these types of women over the others. Hip-hop takes this desire challenge a step further a later show how one is able to attract these women through material possessions.

Messages of material gain to increase ones status among women are seen increasingly throughout videos and lyrics. Because of this, both males and females are being taught that these are appropriate behaviors. Females are being told that they should seek out and be desired by men who offer them material possessions. Males are being told that this is all a female is after and once it is given they are allowed to do as desired with the female. Notorious B.I.G. in his popular song entitled "*Big Poppa*" raps "To the honies getting' money playin' niggaz like dummies" as they are assumed to be seen during his nights out. These essentially gold digging females are portrayed also in songs like Jay Z's "I Just Wanna Love U (Give It 2 Me)" where he states the line "Let's keep it real ma/You savin' it for karats/You wanna see how far I'ma go/How much I'm a spend." Later in the same verse he exemplifies the previously stated message that once given these material possessions they must show their appreciation

however called upon. Jay Z pens the line " Fuck it, I might wife you and buy you nice whips/Ma, but you really gotta ride nice dick" as his request for the material gifts given. In this analysis we see how females in many ways are selling their bodies for possessions and that they are learning that further exploitation of their bodies is acceptable when there is a providence of material goods.

Another way women are violated is through ethnic and cultural stereotypes. This is an act of violence as it further limits their ability to be different, or to act outside of these boxes. We are able to see this through a visual display of Asian women in hip-hop videos always dressed in traditional clothing and seemingly working in a massage parlor or dark-skinned black women, represented in tribe-like attire or animalistic behaviors.

It is important to note as well my use of the term dark-skinned in the above example. Because society's acceptance of a beautiful black woman is that of a light-skinned black woman and hip-hop's representation is that in the same, the appearance of a dark-skinned black female is done so dehumanizing or animalistically. Celeste Crenshaw and Paula Caffey explore this representation further in the film entitled "Black Women on the Light, Dark Thang" which explores the politics of color within the African-American community and how being too light or too dark has profoundly influenced their life, relationships, and representations. If these dark-skinned women are to be shown they are to be represented

less than and degraded to an acceptable status. Jay Z's song entitled "Girls, Girls, Girls" could not be a more perfectly written dialogue of these enforced and represented stereotypes. He raps "I got this Spanish chica...said she likes to cook rice/I got this black chick...always talking out her neck making her fingers snap/I got this French chick who loves to French kiss/I got this Indian squaw the day that I met her asked her what tribe she from...she said you better be Chief Lots-A-Dough/I got this African chick...she like Jigga Man 'why you treat me like animal?'" As some might argue that Jay Z is merely joking about these stereotypes, it is still interesting to question why these are considered funny and what messages their humored quality are allowing for. One might assume and/or witnessed that after a while those being attacked by the punch-line stop laughing. As did the "African chick" Jay Z spoke about when she questions his treatment towards her as animalistic. As in previous discussion where a female might "scream out" during sexual activities and this be storied to a man's crew instead of taken into consideration as a potential "no" or cry for help, the ignoring of these stereotype cry-outs allow for further discrimination.

Aside from honing in on themed lyrical stories and plot lines, a simple assessment of a collected group of terms often used to describe women throughout hip-hop songs justifies alone ways in which women are verbally assaulted. Master P in his song "Bitch I Like" addresses women as bitch

throughout the entirety of his song. Like Master P's display the term bitch is often used interchangeably with any female reference. Outkast in their song, "We love these hoers" describes women hoers as women with weaves and fake nails and laughs often at them throughout the song as if they are insensitive "ha ha ha ha we love these hoers." Ludacris like Outkast and many others also uses the term hoe to describe women in his song "You's a Hoe" the song itself has a military feel as it chants "You's a hoe/I said that you's a hoe" convincingly throughout. Three Six Mafia penned and successfully profited off their song "Chickenhead" a term used to describe what they say is a worthless female who runs around aimlessly and annoyingly. The famed Snoop Dogg raps in his song "Paying for Pussy" never once using her/she terms but through the pussy reference we are aware of the female. Eminem often times uses the term chick and slut throughout his raps involving female characters. In the song "Asshole Naked" rapper Uncle Luke featuring Ice Cube refers to women as undercover dykes, claiming to know the deal with women "trying to pay their phone bill." As degrading and derogatory terms roll in from the masses we finally assess the concluding situation.

As we have recently seen and experienced commercialized hip-hop launch into popular culture it is important to keep in mind what we are watching and what we are allowing society at large to accept. As some have recently celebrated in Academy Award winner Halle Berry's

success, it is important to that we, as a society, continue to recognize that the black female actress is still highly under-represented and under-recognized for her achievements in Hollywood. This is the same to say that as not all hip-hop artist choose to further victimize and degrade women, there are those who do and it is these artist who get mainstream attentions and their messages heard. It is a difficult cycle to address. On the one hand you want to allow freedom of speech and none censorship of the arts, but at the same time you hope individuals choose to represent all peoples respectfully. As hip-hop emerged as a vocal cry from oppressed and violated individuals, one would hope that they would, more so than most, be able to recognize their own oppression and violent tendencies towards others. When assessing the hip-hop representation of women we see that this is the exact opposite, instead women are both lyrically and visually degraded and exploited time and time again. As we see some shifting occur with female rappers gaining mainstream voice and attention there is hope for a balance in female representational control. What is definitely not argued is for those females coming mainstream to begin themselves to echo back and degrade and/or dehumanize their male counterparts. Instead there is hope that they will shift attention onto themselves as humans with beliefs, thoughts and attitudes worth listening to, rather than being representative of objects and/or body parts. Conceptualized as theory this has and will prove to be difficult in action. Just recently, Missy Elliot's

"Work It" song lyrically battles Outkast's past hoe description re-titling girls who get their "nails done/Get a pedicure, get your hair did" as "fly gals." In the same song, however, a few stanzas prior to, she declares that she's "Lost a few pounds and my waist for ya," "ya" being the male spectator thus placing important value on her body image rather than self worth.

It is a difficult and individualized approach that must be made when participating in hip-hop expansion, be it through radio listening, CD purchase or concert attendance. As some may not partake in the heavy analysis of hip-hop's hand in hindering violent behaviors against women, it is important to note that these issues do occur and to some they are effectively altering minds. What is important is one's ability to create one's own identity separate from the ideology of a culture. Teaching and educating ourselves and our youth about what is going on is the first step to changing the condition.

Authors Biography



This piece was authored by Heidi Chase. She is a 22 year old, Boston native, third year student at George Mason University. She is intending to graduate May of 2004 with an integrative studies major concentrating in cultural art therapy through New Century College. Along with her major she intends on minoring in women's studies. This Spring, 2003, she has plans to study abroad in Costa Rica for four months engaged in an intensive language program and to conduct an independent study on Costa Rican women and their experiences with pain. She is extremely happy that this paper has been completed and would like to conclude by letting you know that in the picture above she is positioned with the main man in her life, her dog Moon Shadow. ☺