Flexing, Twerking, and Popping Mollies:
A Textual Analysis of Hip-Hop Songs and Music Videos

Jarlisa Corbett

Rochester Institute of Technology

A paper submitted
in partial fulfillment of the
Bachelor of Science Degree
in Applied Arts & Sciences
Communications and Marketing

Degree Awarded:
Fall Semester, 2014
The members of the committee approve of the thesis of Jarlisa Corbett presented on November 23, 2014.

______________________________
Ammina Kothari,  
Second Reader

______________________________
Keith Jenkins  
Thesis Advisor

______________________________
Patrick Scanlon  
Director - School of Communications
Acknowledgements

Special Thanks To:

Dr. Keith Jenkins

Dr. Ammina Kothari

Dr. Tomicka Wagstaff
# Table of Content

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... 5

Introduction .................................................................................................................... 5

Literature Review .......................................................................................................... 7

  Blackness in Hip-hop ............................................................................................... 7

  Women of Color in the Media .................................................................................. 10

  Sexualizing Women of Color in Hip-hop ............................................................... 12

  Masculinity and Hip-hop ......................................................................................... 14

  Standpoint Theory ..................................................................................................... 16

Research Questions ..................................................................................................... 17

Methods ......................................................................................................................... 18

Results ............................................................................................................................ 21

Discussion ....................................................................................................................... 26

Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 29

References ....................................................................................................................... 31

Appendix ......................................................................................................................... 33
Abstract

This study is a textual analysis of hip-hop songs—both lyrics and music videos. Using standpoint theory, the study examines hip-hop songs and music videos’ gender dynamics, the power structure between men and women, and popular themes. The paper discusses “blackness” within hip-hop, women of color in media and in hip-hop, masculinity and misogyny within hip-hop music, and defines standpoint theory in general and in relation to hip-hop music. The importance of this study is to understand how hip-hop culture handles social dynamics such as race and gender relations as observed through hip-hop artists’ and rappers’ visual and lyrical expression.

Introduction

With an audience made up of mostly teens and young adults, hip-hop artists such as Sean ‘Diddy’ Combs, with a net worth of approximately $700 million, and Jay Z, with an estimated $520 million net worth, have capitalized off of their fans through music and other ventures, and, today, others are now trying to also leave their mark in the hip-hop industry (Greenburg, 2014, forbes.com). For example, in Miley Cyrus’s, a famous pop music singer, recent interview with MTV during a television documentary, she expressed her interest in black culture and also her perceptions of it based on what has been presented through hip hop. Worsely (2011), an American studies scholar, uses a hip-hop magazine, The Source, to show that hip-hop culture plays a heavy hand in commercial appropriation of black stereotypes. Traber (2012), in using CB4, a satirical film about hip-hop culture, believes that even rap music perpetuates certain negative connotations about black culture.
One example, ‘ratchet’ culture has become recently both popular and infamous in recent years. Stallings (2013) explains:

Ratchet has been defined as foolish, ignorant, ho’ishness, ghetto, and a dance. It is the performance of the failure to be respectable, uplifting, and a credit to the race, as opposed to the promotion of failure or respectability that is important here. (p. 135)

Bloggers, entertainment news sites, and other sources of popular culture news such as Thyblackman .com, E! Television network and the Madame Noir blog have had some say on the influence of the recently popular ratchet movement. The glorification of acts such as ‘twerking,’ a sexually suggestive dance style, and ‘popping mollies,’ the act of ingesting the synthetic drug, ecstasy, has warranted many responses from acceptance and participation to disgust and scrutiny. Such extremes make one wonder how hip-hop culture may reflect upon the culture most associated with it, black culture.

Those who watch hip-hop music videos are unlikely to pay attention to lyrics of some of the current hip-hop songs. Additionally, it is doubtful that people would watch a music video to find deeper meaning of a song, but rather to be entertained. If people looked deep enough, they would see the underlying gender dynamics within the lyrics and songs. Some may discern that some of these songs depict women, namely women of color, as sex objects. Then, there is the use of derogatory terms towards these women. These derogatory and misogynistic terms are then sometimes used in a ‘complementary’ context in order to justify their use. However, these performers often do not just stop at words; their music videos also have their purposes. They use “the emphasis on the physical aspects of Black womanhood, [which] is amplified in music videos,” and sex “to sell both the performer (regardless of gender) and performer’s image” (Balaji, 2010, p. 6).
Not all hip-hop music videos tell the story as written in the actual lyrics, however. The connection of song to music video is not always obvious and may sometimes seem nonexistent. Focusing on race/ethnicity and feminist standpoints under the scope of the Standpoint Theory this study is a textual analysis of hip-hop music videos and its corresponding lyrics. It analyses the gender dynamic, power structure between men and women and the relationship between the rap lyrics and scenes in the music videos.

**Literature Review**

The objective of this section is to use following literature to support the relevance of examining gender and race relations and identity as presented in hip-hop music and the accompanying videos. It also provides current findings and information from other studies that aid in supplying readers with understanding of the grounds and goals of this study.

**Blackness and Hip-Hop**

The following literature focuses on defining “blackness” and “whiteness” and what these terms may mean in lieu of hip-hop culture. Studies by Means-Coleman (2006), Traber (2012) and Fraley (2009) on the development of blackness within popular culture help in exploring the extent to which hip-hop culture influences the molding of the conceptual development of “blackness.”

To define the implications of ‘blackness’ in hip-hop, one must discuss the concepts of ‘blackness’ and ‘whiteness’ in American media. Means-Coleman (2006) discusses the redevelopment of black culture in popular culture and disputes much of the preconceived assumptions in relation to commonly known black cultural forms by analyzing what many would
not associate with being black. She starts by referencing Gilbert Rodman, saying that he “argues that the American mainstream media does not handle race, specifically racial identity politics and racially defined cultural investments, very well” (Means-Coleman, 2006, p. 79). Further into her discussion, she relates some examples of perceived “blackness” and “whiteness;” for instance, she uses Erika Molloseau’s example of basketball player Grant Hill, because of his “‘multidimensionality’ as a Black male athlete,” to thwart stereotypical notions of black masculinity and athleticism (Means-Coleman, 2006, p. 80). Because Grant Hill had such a dynamic personality and identity as black male athlete, many stereotypes carried with being a black athlete often did not apply to him. The purpose of Means-Coleman’s study was to examine how hip-hop “attempt political relevancy,” and because of its and the people involved perceived images, much of “its efforts are dismissed” (Means-Coleman, 2006, p.90). Means-Coleman’s study is significant because she is able to define ‘blackness’ and ‘whiteness’ using American mass media, and discuss what it means to be black navigating mass media such as print, television, and film in the US.

Traber (2012) uses the film *CB4*, a satirical piece on hip-hop music and culture, as a source to delve into the effects the reception and perceptions hip-hop has on black culture and identity. In his assessment of hip-hop, Traber (2012) states that “[hip-hop] is so thoroughly associated with blackness […] that to separate the two is tantamount to genocide for the most committed fans and critics since African Americans dominate the form in the music industry” (p. 124). Though it is popular opinion that hip-hop is heavily entrenched in black culture, the previous statement is arguable in light of various successful non-blacks, such as Eminem and M.I.A., in the hip-hop music industry. Also, fans and critics more partial to socially conscious hip-hop music could probably argue that the destruction of hip-hop is more of a self-destruction
due to current trends and controversies. *CB4* uses irony to contribute its own assessment of hip-hop culture and its mostly negative effects on the perception of black identity and culture (Traber, 2012, p. 126-7). Traber (2012) explains:

> The film’s attack on rap stereotypes—their naturalization and eager consumption by the audience—can be enlarged by reading it as simultaneous attack self-enforced racial boundaries. (p. 126)

Traber’s analysis on the satirical piece broaches the possibility of the destruction and deterioration of black identity being due to a self-fulfilling prophecy presented by participants of hip-hop culture. This is important to acknowledge for this study because even though there are performers of other races and ethnicities in hip-hop, the music and culture is ultimately related back to African Americans.

Fraley (2009), focusing on hip-hop and its implications of ‘blackness’ and ‘whiteness,’ uses hip-hop to assess the social construction of race, specifically White rappers’ involvement and attempts of authenticity in hip-hop. He explicitly uses Eminem, and his film *Eight Mile*, as prime example of this phenomenon. Fraley (2009) describes the effects hip-hop has on the implications of race:

> Hip hop renders visible the complexities of racial identities, exposes spaces of racial hybridity, and reveals difficulties involved in the struggle to dismantle essentialist notions of race in favor of more fluid and unstable racial categories… (p. 39)

Fraley talks about the significance of discussing “White participation” in hip-hop because of its initial appearance in the early 1980s and its contribution to “racial articulation and constructions” (Fraley, 2009, p. 39). He states that, “responding to issues of authenticity that seemingly
essentialize racial identities by striving for real representations, White MCs have used various strategies to substantiate their legitimacy in hip hop culture” (Fraley, 2009, p.39). This dialogue goes on to relate the concept of skin color versus racial stereotypes and perceptions, white rappers being influenced by the current popular discourses within hip-hop, and the concept of white rapper being ‘down.’ In conclusion, Fraley (2009) supports Traber’s study stating that though members of the hip-hop community fight relegation, they, in some aspects, also embrace it if not to keep some racial boundaries.

**Women of Color in the Media**

It is important to look at how women of color are portrayed in mass media and how they actively participate within the media themselves. Studies done by Calloway (2010), Griffin (2013), Coman and Scarlat (2014), and Gordon (2008) assist in the analysis of the female persona in hip-hop videos.

Coman and Scarlat (2014), examine modern women in general as a portrayed by current mass media, using quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze articles published in the media. Coman and Scarlat (2014) distinguish and define three types of women portrayed in the media, “the woman-politician, the successful woman and the pseudo-star” (p.906). They found that women politicians were mainly viewed as unintellectual in comparison to their counterparts, whereas the successful woman is thought of as the “gentle fairy” and pseudo-stars were considered nothing more than an accessory (Coman and Scarlat, 2014, p. 913). The results of their study show that much of a woman’s success is equated with “beauty [as] defined by: youth vitality, slimness, no obligations or prejudices” (Coman and Scarlat, 2014, p. 912). Their study is important in showing that women in western culture, in general, have some misconceptions, stereotypes and negative attitudes perpetuated in mass media to overcome.

Most portrayals of Black women are found on Black situation comedies, which have been criticized for perpetuating negative images and relying on minstrel-era stereotypes as the basis of their humor. These stereotypes of Black women include the sexually promiscuous Jezebel, an image created and popularized to justify the sexual exploitation of Black women during and after slavery. (p.246)

Gordon supports his claim by connecting the sexualization of black women with the music industry, more specifically music videos (Gordon, 2008, p. 246). The point of Gordon’s study was to provide an analysis on the vulnerability of African American girls to the media. This is significant in showing contemporary perspectives of women of color in the media.

Also focusing on black actresses, Griffin (2013) uses Precious, a film based on the novel “Push” by Sapphire, as a vehicle for discourse about the representation of black femininity in the media. She states that because much of media is “White” owned and controlled, it is still heavily entrenched in “oppressive racial ideology” and has made Caucasians the onlookers and people of color the “looked at” (Griffin, 2013, p. 183). She categorized images, dubbed “controlling images”, of representations of black femininity (Griffin, 2013, p. 183). Griffin states, “Controlling imagery, such as the mammy, jezebel, matriarch, and welfare queen, forecloses diverse representations of Black femininity beyond the pretense of the dominant imagination and orchestrates demoralized understandings of Black girls and women” (p. 183). This discussion of the representation of women of color in media, specifically film, may be translated over to hip-hop music as it relates to music videos and imagery developed through lyrics.
Sexualizing Women of Color in Hip-Hop

In this section, texts that explore the social implications of using black women as sex symbols in hip-hop are examined. These articles use hip-hop culture, lyrics and music videos to explain how black women being consistently casted in submissive roles such as prostitutes and strippers may affect the perception and treatment of black women in western society.

There are women in the hip-hop industry who use their own sexuality in order to either further their career or make a name for themselves. This practice is not exclusive to hip-hop dancers and video ‘vixens,’ black models and/or actresses who often are the lead female in hip-hop music videos. For example, women rappers such as Lil Kim, Nicki Minaj and Trina are known for their explicit lyrics, highly sexual music videos and flaunting their own sexuality.

Murali Balaji (2010) discusses the ownership of the identity of Black womanhood. She defines potential positions of “self-definition” by black women in music videos while accounting for the cultural facets that duplicate and exploit Black women’s sexuality (Balaji, 2010, p.6). She argues that there is a vast level of uncertainty with the images of Black womanhood that assault consumers of television networks such as BET and MTV and how the “self-conceptualization” of the women who choose to play those roles corresponds.

There are many opportunities for youth to be exposed to these hip-hop songs and music videos through media outlets such as radio, television and the internet, varying on their availability to each particular child, so it is important to discuss the effects based on its social implications. The over exposure women of color in the media have a possibility to effect young girls of color self-perception and may cause them to allow their male counterparts to treat them negatively.
Stephens and Few (2007) examine “African American preadolescents' acceptance” and use Stephens and Phillips (2003) sexual scripts--the Diva, Gold Digger, Freak, Dyke, Gangster Bitch, Sister Savior, Earth Mother, and Baby Mama. Stephens and Few (2007) define the Diva as a woman who uses sex as a vehicle for social climbing (p. 51). They also define the Gold Digger as a woman who uses sex for monetary and material gain, while the Freak is defined as a woman who would engage in sex with many partners “for her own gratification” (p.51-52). The Dyke was described as a “woman who has rejected sex with men and may have adopted masculine postures,” and the Gangster Bitch was defined as a tough woman, may be involved in gang culture, who uses sex to show unity with her man (Stephens and Few, 2007, p.52). Stephens and Few (2007) also define a Sister Savior as a woman who avoids sex due to moral and religious reasons, while the Earth Mother is a woman who as a sense of self developed from an “Afrocentric political and spiritual consciousness that is obviously part of their everyday discourse and worldview” (p.52). They describe the final identity as such:

Once an illegitimate child is born, the Baby Mama script is enacted. Her title aptly and wholly describes this woman’s role—she is basically the mother of a man’s baby and nothing more. This attitude reflects popular beliefs that the Baby Mama purposely becomes pregnant so that she could maintain a relationship while making the biological father financially indebted to her or to keep a part of him (Stephens and Few, 2007, p.52).

Stephens and Few (2007) found that these scripts “influence participants' conceptualizations of their own and general African American female sexuality, which differed significantly according to gender” (p. 48). This means that each of the participants involved in the study were able to recognize each of the eight scripts and say that each were encountered daily within hip-hop
culture. This is important to acknowledging the fact that most women in hip-hop or fans of hip-hop are aware of the various images of women of color being presented in hip-hop.

**Masculinity and Hip-Hop**

In this final section, the concept of black masculinity in hip-hop culture is explored. Specifically, definitions of masculinity and what it means to black culture and also the role played by hip-hop music in constructing black masculinity is examined.

The portrayal of masculinity in hip-hop not only affects the treatment and roles of women of color, but also how black males may be viewed, treated and expected to act. Oware (2010) analyzed gangsta rap music and how it “is predicated on an essentialized and limited construction of black masculinity” (p. 22). His study showed that rappers tend to relate the image of the black male to a form of masculinity that means showing “extreme toughness, invulnerability, violence and dominance,” in addition to alluding to “hypermasculinity, misogyny and homophobia” (Oware, 2010, p. 22). Oware (2010) examined a sample of 478 songs, each of which contained sexism, misogyny, bravado, violence or homophobia; however, he also found that the songs contained other subjects that described “black male camaraderie” (p.27).

Misogyny, the dislike or ingrained prejudice against women, in hip-hop, though barely researched, is ever present. In some scenarios, men are found to be using derogatory terms toward women and committing acts, such as throwing money at women or plying them with copious amounts of alcohol, to sexualize them. Weitzer and Kubrin (2009) explore rap music’s reputation for being misogynistic. Their content analysis identifies five gender-related themes reoccurring in rap music—“themes that contain messages regarding ‘essential’ male and female
characteristics and that espouse a set of conduct norms for men and women” (Weitzer and Kubrin, 2009, p. 3). Their analysis positions “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” (Weitzer and Kubrin, 2009, p. 3). The presence of these sort of music videos not only effects women of color’s self-perception, but also how black men may perceive and treat them.

Iwamoto (2003) analyzed violent, misogynist, and hypersexual expressions of hip-hop lyrics and self-portrayal of artists such as deceased rapper, Tupac Shakur, for those unaware of the full meaning of the “Cool Pose” and the socioeconomic and cultural influences that produce the archetype associated with “Thug Life.” He points out that part of Tupac’s draw to his fans, is the vulnerability of which he is able to combine with his toughness, without jeopardizing his ‘cool’ image. Iwamoto’s study of Tupac sheds light on a more dynamic image of masculinity in hip hop.

**Standpoint Theory**

As previously stated, the feminist standpoint theory is being used to conceptualize this study. Wood (2005) defines standpoint theory as a group of theories that “focus on standpoints defined by, for instance, race-ethnicity and sexual orientation” (p. 61). This section focuses on connecting Standpoint Theory to the study of hip-hop music.

Wood (2005), in her review of the feminist standpoint theory and muted group theory, explains that “feminist standpoint theory analyzes how patriarchy naturalizes male and female divisions, making it seem natural, right, unremarkable that women are subordinate to men” (Wood, 2005, p. 61). Wood (2005) defines feminist standpoint theory by listing its key claims, one of them being:
Standpoint refers not simply to location or experience, but to a critical understanding of location and experience as part of—and shaped by—larger social and political contexts and, specifically, discourses. By implication, a standpoint is an intellectual achievement that reflects—and necessarily entails—political consciousness. Standpoints are not given based on biology or any other essential factor. Instead, they are earned through political struggle that creates oppositional stances based on recognition of and resistance to dominant worldview. (p.62)

Hekman’s (1997) assessment and understanding of feminist standpoint theory coincides with Wood’s analysis, which states that “[he] believe[s] that feminist standpoint theory has laid the groundwork for such a politics, [‘politics of differences’], by initiating the discussion of situated knowledges” (p.342). Wood’s definition and analysis aids in providing understanding to readers about feminist standpoint and standpoint in general.

Forman (1994) utilizes black feminist theory and standpoint as lenses to study women in rap. Forman’s (1994) goal was to increase understanding about the “enhanced role of ‘the women in rap’,” “within the context of the music’s capacity to communicate particular sociocultural perspectives and new possibilities for women’s social empowerment” (p.35). He then discusses rap under the scope of black feminist theories and then standpoint. Describing female rappers’ uses for rap music, Forman (1994) explains that “the music also provides an important medium through which women’s sexual desires and fantasies can be defined and shared, disrupting the often recurring scenario whereby women are cast as passive objects of an active masculine libidinal drive” (p.42). Forman’s work is important because he uses the black feminist theory and standpoint as a framework for his study on rap music. Because standpoint theory
frames my study, Forman proves to be a good reference point. Using standpoint theory, this study posits the following research questions:

**Research Questions**

- What is the typical gender dynamic in hip-hop music videos in terms of roles and physical interactions?
- How is the power structure between men and women presented in hip-hop music videos?
- What are the overall reoccurring themes in hip-hop music videos in connection to the songs’ lyrics?

**Methodology**

The type of study done for this research is a textual analysis. Mckee (2003) describes a textual analysis as “a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world.” It involves gathering data primarily for cultural studies, media studies, mass communication, sociology and philosophy. Textual analyses may be used to interpret different texts such as advertisements, artwork, print media, television programs, films, and, in this case, music videos and lyrics.

First, a list of 25 hip-hop music videos was compiled, shown in the appendix on page 33, based on the top downloaded hip-hop music videos on iTunes as of September 2014. A codebook was created; then, “I Know You Want Me” by Pitbull, a hip-hop music video not from the list, was used as reference point. This song was randomly chosen from a larger list showing the top 100 downloaded music videos on iTunes. The purpose of the codebook was to identify coding categories for analyzing the lyrics and music.

For lyrics, these were the subjects analyzed:
• the occurrence of derogatory words
• references alluding to money and extravagant living
• references to having or getting any number of women and descriptions of their appearances, mention of drug and alcohol use on the performers themselves
• The use of drugs and alcohol on women
• The mention of partying
• Descriptions of sexual activities
• Shows of masculinity through money, sexual prowess or acts of violence

For music videos, these were the subjects analyzed:

• The gender of the hip-hop artist(s)
• Hip-hop artists’ style of dress
• The presence of dancers
• Dancers’ style of dress (if applicable)
• Dancers’ gender(s)
• The style of dance choreography
• The use of a ‘video vixen’
• The overall theme of the music video

In addition, YouTube was used to gather the number of likes, dislikes, and views of each music video. According to the codebook, each category were defined before coding the list of music videos and lyrics. The coding for the rap lyrics and music videos were based on the occurrence of each category. Listed below are the codebooks’ categories along with their definitions and examples.
## Music Video Codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artist Gender</td>
<td>Describes if the Artist(s) of the song are male, female, or both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist Style of Dress</td>
<td>Describes the fashion trend or style of clothing the artist chose to wear in the music video.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancers</td>
<td>Identifies whether there are choreographed background dancers being used for the music video.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancers Gender</td>
<td>Describes whether the background dancers are male, female, or both.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancers Style of Dress</td>
<td>Describes whether or not the dancers’ costumes, or outfits, are revealing copious amounts of skin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style of Dance Choreography</td>
<td>Identifies whether or not the dance choreography is sexual in nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Vixen</td>
<td>Refers to the use of a leading lady in the acting and/or modeling profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Identifies whether or not there is an overarching theme of the video (i.e. sex, luxury lifestyle, empowerment, etc…)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Lyric Codebook
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Derogatory Words Towards Women</td>
<td>Uses words or phrases considered as showing critical and disparaging attitudes towards women either socially or sexually.</td>
<td>“And if I tip a bitch, we fuckin’”—Juicy J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money/Lifestyle References</td>
<td>Describes the rapper having copious amounts of money, mentions the possession of items or services from luxury brands, or the action of extravagant spending.</td>
<td>“Clique ballin' out like the '98 Lakers”—Juicy J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership of Women</td>
<td>Shows whether or not the rapper talks about how he, or she, is able to obtain any number of women based on his or her prowess and/or social standing</td>
<td>“Tryna grab a bitch off the runway”—Juicy J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Physical Attributes</td>
<td>Describes one or more aspect of a woman’s physical appearance.</td>
<td>“Her ass so fat, I told her drop it down”—Young Thug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug and Alcohol Use</td>
<td>Shows whether or not the rapper talks about the use of narcotics and/or recreational drugs and alcohol in a social setting.</td>
<td>“Every n**** in here wanna know what I’m drinkin. Myx Moscato, n****s”—Nicki Minaj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug and Alcohol Use on Women</td>
<td>Describes the rapper plying a woman, or women, with alcohol and/or drugs in order to gain agreement or sexual favors from them.</td>
<td>“Say she never smoked I turned her to a stoner (smoking now)”—Wiz Khalifa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partying</td>
<td>Describes the act of partying, whether in a house, dance club, or any unconventional location as part of his or her lifestyle or to have fun.</td>
<td>“I’m on the floor, floor I love to dance”—Nicki Minaj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Describes sexual acts</td>
<td>“And white girls gimme becky (becky)” –Wiz Khalifa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>note: ‘becky’ is another term for fellatio</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td>Alludes to masculinity based on ability to provide for the woman, or women, in his life; sexual prowess; ability to</td>
<td>“Mr. Leave-Her-At-Home-He’ll-Take-Your-Ho”—Lil’ Bibby</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
defend himself and/or crew by ways of acts of violence; or homophobic lyrics.

Results

Each of the September 2014 top twenty-five downloaded music videos on iTunes did well on YouTube, garnering millions of views. As illustrated in Figure A., five of the twenty-five videos had more than 300 million views each, with Macklemore & Ryan Lewis and Eminem coming out on top with nearly 600 million views each. Seven out of twenty-five got between 100 and 300 million views each, and the majority had anywhere between seven and 99 million views leaving “Krazy” by Lil Wayne as an outlier with less than one million views. The top two music videos garnered over two million likes, six had between one and two million likes, four had between 500,000 and 800,000, eight music videos had between 100,000 and 500,000, and five had between 10,000 and 100,000 likes. The trend in dislikes for the music videos were, at most, half of the corresponding number of likes. However, there was no clear trend with subject matter in relation to number of views. Meaning, there was no type of rap song preferred over the other in terms of the topic, but there was a trend in terms of who the artist was. Macklemore & Ryan Lewis had two songs listed in the top twenty-five most downloaded iTunes music videos, both of which made it on the top ten most viewed music videos of the list. Both Eminem and Nicki Minaj also made it on the top ten most viewed—Eminem with all three of his listed songs and Nicki Minaj with three of four of her songs listed. Also on the list with four songs, Iggy Azalea made it to the top ten with only one.
Each music video was analyzed based on eight categories: rapper’s gender, rapper’s style of dress, presence of dancers, the dancers’ genders, the dancers’ styles of dress, the presence of video vixens, and the music videos’ over all themes. There were only two female rappers who appeared on the list, Nicki Minaj and Iggy Azalea, each of which having four songs on the list. The same two were featured in the only three songs that involved rappers of both genders. The remaining twenty songs were male dominated. For the only two women on the list, they wore only formfitting and revealing clothes in all of their music videos. In fourteen of the eighteen music videos featuring male rappers, the rappers chose to wear urban fashions (i.e. baggy pants, fitted hats, gold chains, graphic t-shirts, etc.). Of the other four music videos, two, “Krazy” by Lil Wayne and “Thrift Shop” by Macklemore & Ryan Lewis, showed the male rappers wearing character based costumes and the other two, “No Mediocre” by T.I. featuring Iggy Azalea and “Change Your Life” by Iggy Azalea featuring T.I., showed the rapper wearing professional attire. Only eight of the twenty-five music videos had professional dancers in them, with all of
them featuring female dancers and one also having male dancers. Seven out of eight showed dancers wearing revealing clothing, and six of eight showed choreography of a sexual nature. Twenty music videos did not have video vixens, however many did use models as extras which will be discussed later. The five videos with vixens showed them wearing formfitting club attire, i.e. short and revealing dresses and high heels. Finally, as illustrated in *Figure B.*, The themes of the music videos were, for the most part, without an obvious trend. Nine did not have a specific theme, meaning they chose to utilize more than one. The other themes include dance, the ‘hood’ (as in low socio-economic neighborhoods), luxury, a specific movie reference or theme, partying, summertime, and sex.

![Hip Hop Music Video Themes](image)

*Figure B.*

The textual analysis for the songs’ lyrics yielded a more diverse, yet focused, set of results than the analysis on the music videos. One song, Wiz Khalifa’s “We Dem Boyz”, contained all coding themes in its song, three contained eight, two contained seven, six contained
six, one contained five, three contained four, two contained three and two, one contained one and four contained none of the coding themes. Individually, however, the use of derogatory words towards women was at a little over fifty percent with thirteen songs. References to money and a luxury lifestyle was very popular with a count of seventeen of the twenty-five songs containing them. Although not in the majority, the number of songs containing lyrics showing the ownership or obtaining of women was ten, while descriptions of women’s physical attributes in songs was eleven. Content about drug and alcohol use was at a count of sixteen, but the mention of drug and alcohol use on women was surprisingly low at only five songs. The number of songs with partying references was also unexpectedly low at eight. There were sixteen songs containing lyrics alluding to or describing sexual acts, and thirteen equating socioeconomic standing and/or sexual prowess to masculinity. These findings are illustrated below, in Figure C.

![Figure C](image_url)
There were some unexpected findings in both textual analyses. One being how many of the rappers took to using references of violence, net-worth, sexual prowess and, at times, homosexuality to emasculate other men. For example, Eminem often used words like “gay” or “faggot” to describe other men, often adversaries, who did not fit in with his perception of manhood. In the song, “Rap God”, Eminem raps a line about his adversaries saying, “I’ll still be able to break a motherfuckin’ table over the back of a couple of faggots and crack it in half.”

Also, based on preconceptions of popular rap/hip-hop songs, it was expected that the most popular subject matter would be sex; however, it turned out to be about money and lifestyle. Rappers would also often use derogatory terms in a complimentary manner when describing women. For example, “I got a bad bitch,” a popular line to use, would mean that his or her woman is of high socioeconomic status and beautiful. Another unanticipated finding was that Nicki Minaj often sexualized men as male rappers would women and even used what could only be described as a male equivalent of a video vixen in some of her music videos. The use of dancers and video vixens did not turn out to be as high as initially thought because most of the rappers opted to use groups of scantily-clad models as extras in their music videos for much of the scenes. Other findings, such as answers to the research question will be addressed in the discussion.

Discussion

To reiterate, my research questions dealt with finding the typical gender dynamics, power structure between men and women, and popular themes within hip hop music videos in connection to the songs’ lyrics. The typical gender dynamics in the male rappers’ songs and music videos were, for the most part, as expected. The roles the men played were roles of the
provider and bread winner, in a manner of speaking, while the women were expected to reap the benefits of the men’s riches, be provided for and to cater to the men’s needs—sexual or otherwise. On the other hand, in the female rappers’ songs and music videos, the dynamics turned out to be marginally different. The women played the role of being self-sufficient, financially independent women; however, the men’s role, most evident in Nicki Minaj’s songs and music videos, were to provide support and sexual satisfaction.

After examining the gender dynamics of hip-hop music videos, it was easier to explore the power structure between men and women in the chosen songs and music videos. The power structure between men and women in songs and music videos for the male rappers placed men in the dominant position. The men regarded themselves as the ones who make the money and ‘take care’ of the woman or women in their lives; however, there is another way in which women were regarded in the majority of the songs and videos. Women, namely ‘beautiful’ women, were also utilized as status symbols for men to display their assumedly high socioeconomic standings. For instance, in “Main Chick,” Kid Ink raps a verse, stating:

Fly ma’fucka, everything is imported. Don’t try to act too important, I know your game.
You got a gang of n***s all over you, but you all over here on me. Girl, I ain’t tryna dog ya. Bad bitch only thing I call you.

Rappers Nicki Minaj and Iggy Azalea, the only women to make it on the list, managed to portray themselves as powerful female rappers. Using their financial independence and penchant for hard work, they attempt to set themselves on equal ground of their male counterparts. One example is in “Fancy,” when Iggy Azalea states, “better get my money on time, if they not money, decline.” However, they used comparisons to other women and their desirability towards men as proof of their claims of being at the top. In “Anaconda,” Nicki Minaj talks about how a
man sees her saying, “he keep telling me it’s real, that he love my sex appeal because he don’t like ‘em boney, he want something to grab.”

Other than gender dynamics and power structure, there were other commonalities examined in hip-hop music videos and lyrics, such as popular themes within music videos in relation to the song’s lyrics. In general, some popular themes within this list of hip-hop songs were sex, drug and alcohol use, and, the most popular, money and lifestyle. There were some exceptions, however. Songs like “The Monster” and “Not Afraid,” by Eminem, and “Can’t Hold Us” and “Thrift Shop,” by Macklemore & Ryan Lewis, did not contain any of the themes listed in the codebook. While some songs’ music videos like “Krazy” by Lil Wayne, with an insane asylum theme, and “Shell Shocked” by Juicy J, with a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles theme, and others used their music videos as a way to, for a lack of a better term, illustrate their music, other songs did not. It was noticed for those that some music videos had seemingly nothing to do with the actual content of the song. So, if anyone were watching the music video they would not know the subject matter of the song unless they were paying attention to the lyrics of the song.

Generally, this study’s findings mirrored those of the literature examined. For example, Oware’s (2010) assessment on how masculinity in hip-hop and rap music, though focused on Gangsta rap, was consistent with what was found in this study. To reiterate, Oware (2010) stated that rappers tend to relate the image of the black male to a form of masculinity that means showing “extreme toughness, invulnerability, violence and dominance,” in addition to alluding to “hypermasculinity, misogyny and homophobia” (p. 22). Some rappers did use extreme toughness, violence, dominance and homophobia in addition to some observations not made by Oware, such as sexual prowess, to display their masculinity. Another example of the findings agreeing with the literature is Balaji’s (2010) assessment of black women’s tendency to self-
define and, at times, sexually exploit themselves and this study’s findings that Nicki Minaj and Iggy Azalea, the only female rappers on the list, had a tendency to use their physical appearance and sexuality in their music videos. However there were some findings that were either not addressed in the literature or did not produce enough information or results to make a true comparison. For example, Nicki Minaj’s music videos presented the idea that men could also be sexualized, but by women. Also, there were not enough videos containing video vixens to make a comparison to the literature. This realization introduces some shifts within this study.

As previously stated, there were some shifts in the study, the main one being the sample size. If the sample size were larger, then the results would have been more conclusive. Also, with a larger sample I would have been exposed to a wider variety of songs and videos to possibly define some new trends in hip-hop music or redefine old ones. Even though the list of hip-hop music videos was not created by me, but gathered from another source, another shift in this study was that there was too few music videos by other female rappers to truly examine women in hip-hop self-definition.

There were some new understanding gained through this research. It was found that gender dynamics in hip-hop may not be as black and white as initially anticipated. Both men and women of color, and in some rare cases other races and ethnicities, are at risk of being exploited in some way. Whether it is Nicki Minaj discussing a black man’s sexual prowess or Wiz Khalifa talking about the number of women he can ‘take’ from other men, the exploitation of people of color, in general, should be further discussed.
Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides some groundwork for further research in hip-hop music and culture. There are two possible studies being considered: an ethnography of the hip-hop club scene and a quantitative study involving others interpreting rap lyrics. The ethnography would involve observing the happenings inside of hip-hop clubs. For instance, I would examine the ratio of men to women. I would also look at who are dancing and how they are dancing. Furthermore, I would analyze interpersonal interaction between men and women, women and other women, and men and other men by watching nonverbal cues. Also, I would listen to what type of hip-hop music is being played. In addition to observations, I would also probably do short interviews, with permission of course, with some of the club-goers and ask questions about this like what made them go out or come to that particular club. The purpose of this study would be to examine social interaction within the hip-hop scene on a smaller scale and to also how hip-hop and R&B music could possibly effect those interactions.

The other possibility for further research is a quantitative study involving others interpreting rap and R&B lyrics. This idea came from a popular YouTube channel by the Fine Bros. called React. On this channel they have a series called Teens React, and as the title alludes this show entails teenagers reacting to things in pop culture, one of them being music lyrics. This study would entail individuals from a wide range of cultural backgrounds reading and interpreting the lyrics to a number of hip-hop and R&B lyrics. Additionally, an interview or survey would be done to record some of the people’s feelings based on their interpretations of the songs. Then the results from all of the people’s analyses would be compared and contrasted to pinpoint any popular trends in understanding. The purpose of this study would be to examine
how others may react to hip-hop and R&B music and view hip-hop culture as a result of analyzing these songs.
References


### Appendix

#### Song List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Song</strong></th>
<th><strong>Artist</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Anaconda</em></td>
<td>Nicki Minaj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Black Widow</em></td>
<td>Iggy Azalea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fancy</em></td>
<td>Iggy Azalea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hold You Down</em></td>
<td>DJ Khaled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>No Mediocre</em></td>
<td>T.I., Iggy Azalea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Turn Down For What</em></td>
<td>DJ Snake/Lil Jon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>We Dem Boyz</em></td>
<td>Wiz Khalifa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hot N</em>****</td>
<td>Bobby Shmurdda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Work</em></td>
<td>Iggy Azalea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lifestyle</em></td>
<td>Rich Gang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Krazy</em></td>
<td>Lil Wayne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Low</em></td>
<td>Juicy J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Change Your Life</em></td>
<td>Iggy Azalea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>No Flex Zone</em></td>
<td>Rae Sremmurd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Shell Shocked</em></td>
<td>Juicy J/Wiz Khalifa/Ty Dollar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Monster</em></td>
<td>Eminem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rap God</em></td>
<td>Eminem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Not Afraid</em></td>
<td>Eminem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pills N Potions</em></td>
<td>Nicki Minaj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Super Bass</em></td>
<td>Nicki Minaj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Main Chick</em></td>
<td>Kid Ink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Studio</em></td>
<td>ScHoolboy Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Thrift Shop</em></td>
<td>Macklemore &amp; Ryan Lewis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Starships</em></td>
<td>Nicki Minaj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Can't Hold Us</em></td>
<td>Macklemore &amp; Ryan Lewis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>