

# The Sexualization of Childhood

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*Childhood in America*

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PRAEGER

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# Still on the Auction Block: The (S)exploitation of Black Adolescent Girls in Rap(e) Music and Hip-Hop Culture

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The message that young Black women's bodies can be purchased cheaply on the open market is a grim, modern-day reminder of slavery. In some ways, Black women are still on the auction block!

—Cole and Guy-Sheftall

In the early 1970s black and Latino youth in the economically depressed South Bronx created hip-hop culture, which encompassed deejaying, graffiti writing, break dancing, and rap music. Although they produced fun dance music, these marginalized young people exposed the social problems that ravaged their impoverished communities: drug abuse, poverty, police brutality, racism, and gang violence. This urban youth-based culture has grown into a multiracial, global phenomenon that permeates almost every aspect of society—from language to fashion, the dance club scene, and the general way in which young people interact with one another. Contemporary hip-hop music includes Christian and politically conscious rap music that is progressive, transformative, and even life affirming. In the 1980s when corporations began to depoliticize and financially exploit the popularity of hip-hop, rap music and music videos became the most powerful, influential, and frequently consumed product of hip-hop culture. Those that depicted violence and explicit sexual content received heavy rotation on radio and television.<sup>1</sup>

According to psychologists, this content can contribute to the *sexualization* of girls, which can be conceptualized as a continuum of

offensive behavior, with sexualized evaluation (e.g., looking at someone in a sexual way, leering) at the less extreme end and sexual exploitation, such as childhood sexual abuse at the more extreme end. *Self-sexualization* can occur when girls think of themselves primarily or solely in sexual terms or when they equate their physical appearance with a narrow, often unattainable, standard of beauty.<sup>2</sup> Many concerned parents, public health experts, and social critics denounce hip-hop music lyrics and videos for hypersexualizing black adolescent girls. More specifically, they have argued that black girls may develop sexual scripts based on hip-hop culture, which in turn shapes how they express their sexuality and view themselves as sexual beings.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, exposure to sexualized images in hip-hop has been found to influence black girls' perception of male-female gender roles, attitudes toward sexual assault, physical dating violence, and physical attractiveness.<sup>4</sup> This is troubling from a public health standpoint. Music videos and lyrics that perpetuate gender inequality and glorify risky sexual behaviors but rarely provide healthy sexual messages or emphasize possible negative health consequences may increase the likelihood that black adolescent girls will have unplanned pregnancies, early sexual onset, or sexually transmitted disease (STD) acquisition, including HIV/AIDS.<sup>5</sup>

Displaying anonymous, nude black female bodies has a long history in Western societies, from the exhibition of enslaved women on the auction block to representations of black female bodies in contemporary hip-hop music videos.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to (1) discuss six sexual scripts that are commonly found in hip-hop culture and music videos; (2) examine possible consequences associated with exposure to hip-hop scripts for black girls; and (3) make suggestions for intervention.

## SEXUAL SCRIPTS IN HIP-HOP CULTURE

When black men and women were sold as slaves, their bodies were stripped naked, examined, and then sold, traded, and bought on the open market. Unlike white women who were draped in layers of clothing during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, nudity among black women, although it was forced, implied that they lacked civility, morality, and sexual restraint. The systematic sexual exploitation of black women, including rape and forced breeding, was used to produce a perpetual labor force. The Jezebel stereotype, which stigmatized black women as promiscuous, was created to justify these sexual atrocities and excuse the profit-driven sexual exploitation of black women.<sup>7</sup>

Black women's commodified bodies continue to be exploited for profit. Put simply, corporations create the images, profit from them, and sell them back to black teens and other consumers under the guise of "authentic" black culture. African American performers, producers, and music executives also have participated in this economic exploitation.<sup>8</sup> For example, Black Entertainment Television (BET), the oldest and most popular 24-hour television network whose programming is targeted to African Americans, reaches more than 76 million households. On any given weekday, viewers can watch 15 hours or more of music videos.<sup>9</sup>

Just like their enslaved ancestors, contemporary black women's bodies are accessible, exchangeable, and expendable on the new cyber-auction block. For example, in a genre of hip-hop music commonly referred to as *booty rap*, there is a clear reference to the culture of strip clubs and pornography as scantily clad women simulate sex acts with male rappers and other female performers. These anonymous background dancers are sexualized status symbols who are owned by rap artists, similar to their luxury cars, Rolex watches, and gold medallions. *Gangster rap* glorifies pimping, senseless gunplay, an insatiable appetite for marijuana and liquor, and misogyny, in the form of physical and sexual violence against women.<sup>10</sup> Researchers have identified six distinct sexual scripts in popular rap music: Diva, Gold Digger, Freak, Gangster Bitch, Baby Mama, and Earth Mother.<sup>11</sup>

### **Diva**

The *Diva* embodies a narrowly defined Westernized standard of physical beauty: a slender build, long hair, and lighter eye and skin color. She wears designer clothes, and her hands and feet are perfectly manicured, which gives her the appearance of an impeccably coifed middle- or upper-middle-class woman. In order to retain her social status, a Diva requires luxury cars and expensive jewelry.<sup>12</sup>

### **Gold Digger**

Unlike the Diva who trades sexual favors for social status, a *Gold Digger* will sell, rent, or trade her body or sexuality for hard currency; basic needs, such as groceries; or consumer items, including manicures, new clothes, or vacations. Her relationships are typically short-term financial arrangements. When the money runs out, the Gold Digger runs out on the man, often leaving him bankrupt and bewildered.<sup>13</sup>

### **Freak**

Dressed in revealing clothing and sometimes mistaken for a prostitute or stripper, a *Freak* is an insatiable sexual sensation seeker who is motivated by her own desire and pleasure. She will forgo love, emotional attachment, and even money in order to pursue a wide range of unconventional sexual activities, including group sex or sex with strangers. An "undercover" *Freak* is less overt and behaves like a "good girl" during the day; however, in a smoky dance club or in the bedroom, she engages in kinky wild sex.<sup>14</sup>

### **Gangster Bitch**

A *Gangster Bitch* glorifies the poverty-stricken, drug-infested, violent inner-city. To illustrate, Lil' Kim, the sexy, couture-clad rapper, projects a video persona of a violence-prone, foul-mouthed, gun-toting, 40-ounce malt-liquor-guzzling bad girl who boasts about her sexual prowess and impersonal sexual encounters. Sexuality also can be used to prove her loyalty to a boyfriend. She loves her partner enough to participate in his various criminal enterprises, including theft, drug distribution, and even murder. The couple's romantic motto is "Ride or Die," which means that a *Gangster Bitch* will accept death or imprisonment before she would "snitch" to the police.<sup>15</sup>

### **Baby Mama**

If a child is born, the *Baby Mama* script is enacted. She is the mother of a man's child(ren) whom he did not marry. Although they may occasionally have sexual contact, the couple is not currently involved. These relationships are characterized by conflict, drama, and mutual hostility. According to the script, the *Baby Mama*, who intentionally became pregnant to maintain a relationship with the baby's daddy, constantly begs for money, denies the father visitation with the child, interferes in his future relationships with other women, and uses the legal system to harass him. As a result, the man is justifiably angry, makes disparaging comments about the *Baby Mama*, denies paternity, and avoids paying child support.<sup>16</sup>

### **Earth Mother**

Of course, there are hip-hop artists who do not sexualize themselves or other young black women. Artists such as Lauryn Hill, Jill Scott, and Erika Badu, project an *Earth Mother* sexual script, which is characterized by an Afrocentric, political, social, and spiritual self-awareness. These

performers wear head wraps and flowing robes, style their hair in Afros or dreadlocks, exude a more subtle sexuality, and sing about female empowerment and self-acceptance.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, the Diva, Gold Digger, Freak, Gangster Bitch, Baby Mama, and Earth Mother are pervasive scripts in music videos and hip-hop culture, which generate the lion's share of airtime and profits. And so these are the scripts that black adolescent girls are more likely to internalize or act out in their daily lives. Carla Stokes, a health educator, reviewed 27 technologically sophisticated Internet home pages constructed by black girls aged 14 to 17 who resided in southern U.S. states.<sup>18</sup> She discovered that the majority of these girls created hypersexualized cyber-personas. Four girls described themselves as *Down-Ass Chicks* or *Bitches*, which was analogous to the previously discussed Gangster Bitch.<sup>19</sup> Four girls embraced the identity of *Pimpettes* or female "players" who juggled multiple partners and manipulated men for economic gain. Nine of the sites were in keeping with the *Freaks* persona. For example, one 15-year-old girl wrote: "I am wonderful in bed . . . I am down fo whateve'."<sup>20</sup> Other girls posted pornographic images that depicted humans or cartoon characters engaged in sexual activity or used sexually explicit rap songs as background music, such as "MySpace Freak" by C-Side or "P-Poppin" (pussy poppin') by rapper Ludacris. Although it isn't possible to determine whether these girls' cyber-personas reflect their offline identities and behaviors, to the extent that these home pages are the stage on which they are rehearsing sexual scripts, these self-representations should raise concerns.<sup>21</sup>

It should be noted that seven of the 27 girls in the study rejected self-sexualization. Three girls proudly titled their Web sites *Virgin* and created home pages that highlighted their sexual purity and intelligence. Stokes referred to these seven girls who had "begun the critical process of creating independent self-definitions" as *Resisters*.<sup>22</sup> On their Web sites, they described themselves as well-rounded, personable, confident, self-possessed young woman. For instance, one 16-year-old wrote: "if u looking for a fashion model/u got da wrong 1 . . . /so don't read any further."<sup>23</sup>

Adolescents from all ethnic backgrounds must grapple with difficult questions as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood: "Who am I?" and "How do others perceive me?" Hip-hop and rap music lyrics project complex, often contradictory, multifaceted images of black adolescent girls. Black teenage girls may be torn between the expectation of respectability derived from their parents and community and sexualization that masquerades as sexual liberation. It is important to appreciate that the images projected in hip-hop

videos are more than mere visual representations. Rather they can be more accurately described as sexual scripts, which can become guidelines that teach black girls why, where, when, how often, and with whom to express their sexuality.<sup>24</sup>

### CONSEQUENCES OF HIP-HOP SCRIPTS FOR BLACK GIRLS

The process of developing a healthy sexual identity can be especially difficult for black adolescent girls as they attempt to negotiate their emerging sexuality amid conflicting and discrepant cultural scripts and images from the mainstream media, hip-hop culture, their peers, and their parents.<sup>25</sup> Despite immense challenges, such as poverty and negative peer influences, many black girls are able to rewrite sexualized scripts and build a healthy life.<sup>26</sup> However, for many girls, exposure to hip-hop culture and rap music videos and lyrics has been associated with poor body image, the normalization of using sexuality as a commodity, confusion about gender roles, the development of adversarial male-female relationships, greater acceptance of teen dating violence, and sexual risk taking.

#### Poor Body Image

The legacy of American slave-era beauty preferences regarding skin color, hair texture, and body type are replicated in hip-hop videos. Typically the love interests of male performers and background dancers are multiracial or lighter-complexioned black women with long, straight hair. In some cases these women are "created" with the use of colored contact lenses, hair weaves, and camera filters. Although the camera features the faces of lighter-skinned women, it lingers on the big butts of the darker-skinned women.<sup>27</sup> Preadolescent black boys, aged 11 to 13, clearly stated their preference for curvaceous black women with large breasts, ample thighs, and large round buttocks, particularly if the women had long hair and lighter skin color.<sup>28</sup> Although it seems that they enjoy an advantage in the dating game, light-complexioned girls may be highly sexualized or find themselves wondering if partners are more attracted to their physical appearance than to their personalities.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, darker-skinned black girls appear to have a greater investment in resisting narrowly defined beauty images. In focus groups preadolescent girls expressed happiness with their overall appearance, including their brown skin. Still they believed that boys preferred girlfriends and sex partners who fit the appearance of hip-hop dancers.<sup>30</sup> This realization or perception can cause great pain and

feelings of rejection among some brown-skinned black girls. One teenager reflected on a high school crush:

It was obvious and evident that most if not all of the black boys in my school wanted nothing to do with black girls, which was sort of traumatizing. . . . In the final analysis, I ended up feeling that there was something wrong with him, but it was hell getting there.<sup>31</sup>

### **Sex as a Commodity**

Hip-hop has glamorized pimping and prostitution by associating this form of sexual exploitation with materialism in the form of flashy attire, money, and expensive vehicles. When compared to other ethnic groups, the odds of having exchanged sex for money or drugs were higher among African American youth.<sup>32</sup> Although these young women (and men) may appear morally lax, many of these sex-for-money exchanges occurred in the context of "survival sex" or "compelled childhood sexual contact."<sup>33</sup> Typically, impoverished black girls, some as young as 12 and 13 years old, traded sex for basic necessities, such as food and shelter, which in turn left them vulnerable to pimps, pornographers, and sexual traffickers (e.g., see [www.exploitedblackteens.com](http://www.exploitedblackteens.com) or [www.pimpmyblackteen.com](http://www.pimpmyblackteen.com)).

In addition, music videos have normalized "transactional sex" in which sexual favors are used or bartered to obtain consumer goods, such as designer clothing worn by celebrities. One Baltimore teen denied gold digging, but explained that: "If they don't have money to buy me some 'Tims' [Timberland boots], take me out . . . they don't get no rap!"<sup>34</sup> She and her peers preferred to date "sugar daddies" or "payloads" because these older men gave them money and gifts in exchange for sex. However, there was an obvious power imbalance between adult men and adolescent girls, which left them vulnerable to sexual assault, dating violence, and manipulation. In addition, they often felt powerless to refuse sex or other unreasonable demands, such as participation in criminal activity. These girls had learned that their value lay between their legs. Unlike men, however, female sexuality is a depletable commodity, and once expended, these young women were characterized as whores.

### **Gender Roles and Sexual Double Standard**

Negotiating and defining femininity in the context of hip-hop images can be challenging. On one hand, black adolescent girls who viewed videos with an overabundance of stereotypical representations of masculinity and femininity expressed more traditional views



about gender and sexual relationships.<sup>35</sup> In fact, preadolescent girls in semistructured focus groups were sexually conservative and rejected hypersexualized scripts, such as the Freak, in favor of more traditional gender roles.<sup>36</sup> Although male promiscuity was more accepted, and even expected, virginity or low levels of sexual activity were viewed as more desirable conduct for women. Similarly, black adolescent girls in high-school focus groups believed that women who appeared in hip-hop videos—and their female peers who imitated them—were “nasty” and dressed like “hoes.”<sup>37</sup> Researchers have speculated that some of these girls may be adhering to the *Sister Savior* script that decreed that sex outside of marriage should be avoided for moral or religious reasons.<sup>38</sup> To protect their daughters from sexually transmitted diseases, early pregnancy, and sexual victimization, many black mothers caution their daughters to reject sexualized images and embrace more sexually conservative values.<sup>39</sup>

Interestingly, black girls in other focus groups had mixed reactions to video images. Although a few girls complained about sexualized images in music videos, others seemed oblivious and attempted to mimic the styles and mannerisms of the dancers. For example, when asked whose video they would like to appear in, they said [hard-core rapper] Jay-Z and in other videos that featured nearly naked women.<sup>40</sup> Other black adolescents were ambivalent. In one survey, the majority of participants felt bad about the portrayal of women (58 percent) and male–female interactions (63 percent) in rap music. Yet an equal number (59 percent) tried to act, dance, or dress like the women in rap music videos.<sup>41</sup> It appears that black girls recognized the value placed on female sexuality and the cultural mandate that women accentuate their femininity and beauty or risk social rejection from female friends and boyfriends. Consequently, many black girls felt compelled to strike a precarious balance between being both sweet and sexy, all while adhering to the image of the strong, independent black woman.<sup>42</sup>

### Adversarial Relationships

It should be noted that many low-income black urban youth and young adults expressed a sincere desire to establish committed, loving intimate relationships. Unfortunately, other black male–female dating relationships are adversarial and are plagued with infidelity, lack of trust, and dishonesty.<sup>43</sup> Certainly many factors may contribute to these antagonistic relationships; however, exposure to rap music videos is one predictor of attitudes toward heterosexual intimate relationships. Specifically, as time spent watching rap music videos increased, so did

adversarial attitudes toward male–female relationships in a sample of black adolescents.<sup>44</sup> Equally as troubling, more than 50 percent of black male college students agreed that rap music accurately reflected at least some of the reality of gender relations between black men and women.<sup>45</sup> Researchers have concluded that “in shaping students’ views of sexual relationships, these videos create expectations of adversarial dynamics and of mutual disrespect.”<sup>46</sup> When conflict becomes normative, adolescent dating relationships can quickly move to become physically or sexually violent.

### Sexual and Physical Violence

Rap artists visually and lyrically beat, rape, verbally abuse, and even murder black women in their lyrics. Nearly every gangster rapper’s CD has an obligatory “Beat that Ho” song, and sex has become a form of torture in which men are encouraged to break “that thing in half” and “leave some stretch marks” in a woman’s mouth after oral sex. Even gang rape is depicted; in one song rappers described a line of 14 men prepared to take turns placing themselves “two on top, one on the bottom” of an underage girl.<sup>47</sup>

It is too simplistic to say that hip-hop or rap music *causes* violence against women. Nonetheless, this musical genre, along with other forms of musical expression, has advocated, glorified, justified, and condoned this conduct, which in turn may desensitize listeners to misogyny and violence.<sup>48</sup> As evidence, when compared to black male college students who disliked explicit lyrics, those who preferred this form of rap had significantly more rape-prone attitudes (e.g., “I think that many women are ‘bitches’” or “Under certain circumstances date rape is understandable”).<sup>49</sup> Are young men mimicking the behavior in music, or is music a reflection of the sexual violence in society? The temporal order is unclear. Either way an unacceptable number of black adolescent boys, 40 percent in one sample, had participated in a gang rape.<sup>50</sup> Some victims were as young as 13.<sup>51</sup>

Music videos may influence how black adolescent girls perceive violence against women. For example, even exposure to nonviolent, sexualized hip-hop music videos has been associated with greater acceptance of dating violence among black teen girls. In fact, viewing these videos brought the females’ acceptance of premarital dating violence up to the level of the males’ acceptance.<sup>52</sup> In addition, black teen girls frequently expressed victim-blaming attitudes. After listening to and discussing *Love Is Blind*, a song about a young woman who was murdered by a physically and sexually abusive boyfriend, black high-school girls expressed some sympathy but concluded that women

should "just leave" an abusive partner. In addition, they read and discussed a vignette that described a case in which a young woman danced with a rap star and was subsequently raped in his hotel room. According to the participants, the hypothetical victim, and women in general, are responsible for projecting the "correct" image to men in both public and private settings. When a woman's conduct is "too sexual," she is responsible for her victimization. How should a girl respond to harassment or assault? Participants recommended wearing unfashionable oversized clothing or carrying a concealed weapon, such as a knife. Seeking help from adult authority figures, such as teachers, was perceived as ineffective.<sup>53</sup>

Taken together, it appears that misogynistic hip-hop may encourage boys and men to perpetrate violence against girls and possibly make girls more accepting of their victimization. This is troubling because a substantial number of black adolescent girls will be physically or sexually victimized.<sup>54</sup> For example, in community samples of low-income black adolescent girls, 33 percent had been raped or sexually coerced, and more than 50 percent had been pushed, shoved, or slapped by a boyfriend.<sup>55</sup> Victim-blaming attitudes may influence how they respond. To illustrate, mental health problems can be exacerbated if survivors endorse the Jezebel stereotype, as measured by items such as "People think black women are sexually loose." The greater endorsement of such beliefs among black rape survivors was related to increased use of victim blame attributions, which in turn was related to lower levels of self-esteem.<sup>56</sup>

### Sexual Risk Taking

When compared to other music styles, such as rock and soul, rap and hip-hop lyrics and videos depicted more references to drugs and alcohol and multiple sexual partners.<sup>57</sup> Concerned parents, public health experts, and social critics have long denounced hip-hop's vulgar lyrics, videos, and dance moves as a leading cause of risky sexual behavior among adolescents. There is growing evidence to support this assertion. Researchers followed 522 black adolescent girls over a 1-year period and assessed their health behaviors, rap music video viewing habits, and perceptions of portrayals of sexual stereotypes in rap music videos (e.g., "In rap music videos, how often are black women portrayed as sex objects?"). The median hours of exposure to rap music videos, primarily gangster rap, was 14 hours per week. Girls who viewed more videos, particularly if they perceived that the videos contained sexual stereotypes of black women were twice as likely to have had multiple sex partners, more than 1.5 times

as likely to have acquired a new sexually transmitted disease, used drugs, and used alcohol over the 12-month follow-up period.<sup>58</sup> In addition, the participants who perceived that the videos contained more sexual stereotypes of black women were more likely to engage in binge drinking, test positive for marijuana, and have a negative body image.<sup>59</sup>

These statistics point to complex interconnections among exposure to hip-hop culture, rap music videos and lyrics, and life circumstances. Poor body image, using sex as a commodity, confusion about gender roles and power imbalances in dating relationships, and adversarial or violent relationships have all been linked to sexual risk taking, which increases the probability of contracting STDs, including HIV. These associations are particularly troubling from a public health perspective. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, of those adolescents diagnosed with HIV in 2003, African American girls made up 72 percent of the people in the 13- to 19-year-old age group.<sup>60</sup>

To conclude, some black adolescent girls claim immunity from the influence of media messages.<sup>61</sup> Similar to secondhand cigarette smoke, which can adversely impact the health of nonsmokers, I would argue that some of the scripts in hip-hop culture can have a negative effect on the psychological well-being of black adolescent girls, even if they are nonconsumers or deny its impact. These sexualized images are so deeply embedded in our history and culture that they can obliterate individuality. Consequently, black adolescent girls expend an enormous amount of psychological energy and time trying to counter these images, ignore them, or act them out.

## **REBUILDING THE VILLAGE: STRATEGIES AND SOLUTIONS**

Although some black girls face immense challenges, such as poverty and negative peer influences, they are not passive consumers of media images. In fact, many black girls empower themselves to rewrite sexualized scripts and build a healthy life for themselves.<sup>62</sup> In the sections that follow, I will offer specific ways to assist them, including research, media literacy, and parental and community involvement.

### **Future Research Directions**

Some researchers have (mis)represented the experiences of black girls through qualitative data collected from impoverished high-risk convenience samples. Culturally sensitive measures should be

developed to assess attitudes toward rap music.<sup>63</sup> In addition, focus groups and qualitative methodologies can be utilized to understand how black adolescent girls consume music videos and rap lyrics, interpret the images within them, and resist acting them out.<sup>64</sup> Among African American youth, higher levels of socioeconomic status and spiritual religious coping were associated with rejection of negative images of women in rap music videos.<sup>65</sup> This finding highlights the importance of surveying black girls from diverse backgrounds. For example, it would be helpful to evaluate how higher-functioning, more educated, middle-class black girls, perceive sexual scripts in hip-hop and music videos.<sup>66</sup> This will enable scholars to develop more complex conceptual models to understand how media contributes to the sexualization and sexual socialization of black teens.<sup>67</sup>

### Media Literacy

Black women and girls have attempted to hold the music industry, including performers, responsible for the sexualized images that they produce. For example, in his "Tip Drill" video, rapper Nelly ran a credit card through the crack of a dancer's buttocks. The students at Spelman College, a historically black women's college in Atlanta, began a "take back the music" protest in response to objectionable song lyrics and videos. These young activists conducted community forums, wrote articles, and lobbied the music industry to change these images.<sup>68</sup> More recently, black feminist scholars have testified before the United States Congress about stereotypes and degrading images of black women produced by hip-hop artists and the music industry. During these congressional hearings, representatives of the music industry were clear: they are in business to entertain and to operate a profitable corporation.<sup>69</sup>

Black girls cannot wait for hip-hop artists or the music industry to become socially responsible. They must be equipped with media literacy skills, which will allow them to critically examine hip-hop images and to deconstruct them by asking themselves and others: Who created these images and why?, Who profits from the sexual objectification of black girls and women?, and What is the history behind these representations? These media literacy skills also are transferrable to gendered, violent, and sexualized messages in other forms of media, including television, film, magazines, video games, and music lyrics.<sup>70</sup> Organizations such as Helping Our Teen Girls in Real Life Situations, Inc. (HOTGIRLS.org) are designed to provide these media literacy skills.

### Parental and Community Involvement

Limited parental monitoring has been associated with greater exposure to rap music videos.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, parents need to become involved. In fact, many children welcome their parents' input. Among black adolescents, "hands-on parenting," defined as restricting CD purchases and setting curfews, and perceived parental disapproval of teen sex reduced the likelihood that exposure to sexual content in media would be associated with early sexual onset.<sup>72</sup> In focus groups, black girls stated that their father's disapproval of certain sexual behavior or attire was extremely influential. Perhaps these girls would be less likely to mimic the sexual behavior in hip-hop videos. Parents may need to restrict or limit their children's media diet. Other parents can listen to the music and watch the videos with their children and try to appreciate and comprehend their content. By sharing a common language, parents and children may be able to open the lines of communication for critical discussion about sexuality, substance abuse, violence, and gender roles.<sup>73</sup>

Black youth in particular can no longer depend on a deeply textured network of extended families, faith communities, fraternal organizations, school clubs, sports teams, and other community associations to transmit knowledge and values. If "it takes a village to raise a child," according to an African proverb, it is now time to rebuild that village.<sup>74</sup> This means that parents must partner with educators, health care providers, and mentors to provide a safe space for black girls to critically analyze gender politics, their personal definitions and attitudes about sexuality, and contradictory messages presented in hip-hop culture.<sup>75</sup> For example, girls can explore the question: "How does one enact sensuality, beauty, and strength simultaneously without crossing one of many lines of unacceptable behavior?"<sup>76</sup> Parents and service professionals must be careful to avoid blaming girls for their victimization encouraging them to explore their emerging sexuality while helping them to avoid becoming sexualized, developing poor body images, or becoming so sexually repressed that they can't take pleasure in their budding sexuality. Black adolescent girls and young women who resist oppressive cultural scripts can serve as powerful peer educators. In addition, parents and service providers can collaborate with the girls they seek to help by building on the empowering aspects of hip-hop and youth culture and acknowledging their expertise about the role of media in their lives.<sup>77</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The sexual scripts depicted in rap music and hip-hop culture are not only abstract theoretical constructs but have real, material, and tangible impact on black adolescent girls' daily lives. However, the

desire to clean up the language and images in hip-hop does little to address the sexism, class oppression, and misogyny that inform the treatment of black girls within black communities or the larger society. Parents and other stakeholders must work to change the life circumstances, or in some cases the lack of life options, that facilitate the sexualization of black adolescent girls, which too often leads to unplanned pregnancies, early sexual onset, sexually transmitted disease acquisition, and victimization. In addition, there is a need to put the financial, intellectual, and creative energy into helping black girls and young women to establish their own blogs, Web sites, podcasts, e-newsletters, and radio shows (for examples, see <http://whataboutourdaughters.blogspot.com> and [HOTGIRLS.org](http://HOTGIRLS.org)). With the support of media literacy, parents, strong communities, and their own resilience, black adolescent girls can refuse to be placed on the cyber auction block.

27. For instance, see Linn, Susan, *Consuming Kids: The Hostile Takeover of Childhood* (New York: The New Press, 2004), and Pipher, Mary, *Reviving Ophelia*, op. cit.

28. Stepp, Laura Sessions, "Unsettling New Fad Alarms Parents: Middle School Oral Sex," *Washington Post*, July 8, 1999, p. A1.

29. Farkas, Steve, Johnson, Jean, and Duffett, Ann, *A Lot Easier Said Than Done: Parents Talk about Raising Children in Today's America*, New York: Public Agenda, October 2002.

30. For instance, see Hewlett, Sylvia A., and West, Cornel, *The War on Parents: What We Can Do for America's Beleaguered Moms and Dads* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

31. The book *So Sexy So Soon*, op. cit., provides much more detailed help on how to work with children on issues related to the sexualization of childhood.

32. For concrete help doing this, see Levin, Diane E., *Remote Control Childhood? Combating the Hazards of Media Culture*, op. cit.

33. For help shaping responses to the age, needs, and questions of specific children, see Chrisman, Kent, and Couchenour, Conna, *Healthy Sexual Development: A Guide for Early Childhood Educators and Families*, op. cit.

34. There are a growing number of organizations working to accomplish this. Many of them can be found on the Web site of the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, [www.commercialfreechildhood.org](http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org).

## CHAPTER 7

1. Jones, K., "Are rap videos more violent? Style differences and the prevalence of sex and violence in the age of MTV," *Howard Journal of Communication* 8 (1997): 343-56; Pough, G. D., *Check It while I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004).

2. American Psychological Association, Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2007), retrieved on February 11, 2008 from [www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html](http://www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html).

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## CHAPTER 8

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