

THE MIX TAKE BACK THE MUSIC

Russell Simmons, cofounder of Def Jam Records and now chairman of Hip-hop Summit Action Network

We live in a very sexist society. Popular culture exaggerates everything, including this kind of sexism, for profit. That's the nature of capitalist society and entertainment. There is no question that the sexism that's in our hip-hop videos is a reflection of how sexist men are in the world today. It's just that in the past things weren't so obvious. Men were holding doors for women, but then they'd do things privately that kept women from being equal citizens. Now when you watch videos and you see the girls dancing, it's a more raw expression of the same sexism. Although these records and videos are offensive, young girls can learn a lot about the mind-set of the young guys they're going to school with. Now that the truth is out there more, young girls can learn how to deal with guys.

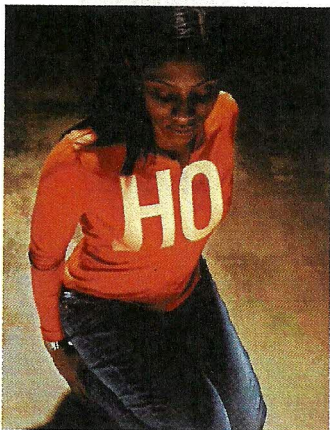
Danyel Smith, author, and a former editor-in-chief of *Vibe*

Now that I'm not editor-in-chief of a magazine or a full-time music journalist, I'm more of an average viewer of videos. I used to watch with a business mind-set. How much money did they take to make this? Who is the director? Is it going to help sell the album? Now I think, *Do I like this? Is it fun for me?* When I watch it, my reaction to the video depends on how I'm feeling about myself. If I'm having an insecure day, I'll probably feel angry at this narrow idea of women that is being shown over and over on the screen. But if I'm not feeling insecure and watch videos, I'll probably just be bored.

Sex sells; there's no other way to say it. It's the journalism equivalent of "If it bleeds, it leads." For rhyming, it could be something like, "If it's not naked, it's not a hit record." When I was an editor, I was trying to sell magazines. When I put women on the cover, it was always my goal to make it interesting. With women the easy thing is to put someone in a sexual pose or in an outfit that shows off her body. I would have to do what I had to do sometimes and find my balance somewhere else. There's nothing wrong with showing off a Black woman's body, but we need the balance; we need other images as well. It's bad when there's only one thing or when sex is the constant focus. We're beautiful.

Jessy Terrero, video and motion-picture director

I had an experience at the end of a video shoot. The record label brought strippers in at the last minute because they wanted to shoot two scenes with them. It was the label's marketing department's decision; they wanted a version they could service to BET's *Uncut* and places where people play raunchier stuff. In that situation, it wasn't my doing. I was hired to deliver a certain product to the label, and they're like, "You're going to shoot these two girls in this scene," and it was what it was.



Datwon Thomas, editor-in-chief of *King* magazine

In the hip-hop industry, we get so competitive and do what will win and what will sell and go to any ends to make that happen. You get so caught up in competing that you may drop your guard and do something crazy. For example, if *Smooth* or *Maxim* has a hot girl that we featured or wanted to and they get her in a swimsuit, I think I want to show her topless in a thong. Or they photographed her with body paint, I have to put a vanilla wafer over her chest. I don't want to get locked into that. Eventually you'll have a butt-naked woman just standing there.

I've been able to not let it engulf me. I've been a victim but haven't been engulfed. I have two daughters and a wife; I can't just give in to this.

Touré, pop culture correspondent for CNN and author

Hip-hop is primarily a male preserve, a world where men talk about what they've done with or to other men. The massive success of a White man like Eminem shows that White males are more accepted within hip-hop than Black females. Black women in hip-hop are portrayed, in songs or videos, as either silent, willing strippers or complaining, troublesome meddlers. Female rappers are either boy toys (Lil' Kim, Foxy Brown) or tomboys (MC Lyte, the Lady of Rage), both of which are personalities constructed around a masculine norm rather than a female norm. This means the women are defining themselves in reaction to what men want, rather than what they want. This is obviously the wrong message to send to young women and young men who will have to create relationships that become the families of the next generation.

If people are asking for it, who's to say that is wrong? If people don't like it, they should vote at the record store."

—DEBRA LEE

Carolyn West, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology, University of Washington, Tacoma

Many adults are quite ignorant about what's out there. We can't afford to pretend it doesn't exist. We live in America, and people have a right to produce those images, so I'm not talking about censorship. But even if artists won't be responsible, the community has to hold them accountable.

My fear is that girls don't even see their own victimization anymore. They say, "I'm a bitch, I'm a ho, I'm a tip drill." As porn moves more into the mainstream, it only normalizes the behavior and how we deal with sexual assault and violence.

I get concerned when I see girls mimic the X-rated clothing that Lil' Kim wears or the X-rated lyrics of songs like Kelis's "Milkshake." It puts young girls in positions that they can't handle once the attention is drawn to them. □

Ayana Byrd and Akiba Solomon have written for *Vibe* and *The Source* and are the editors of *Naked: Black Women Bare All About Skin, Hair, Hips, Lips and Other Parts*, due this summer.