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# SHAKE IT, BABY, SHAKE IT: CONSUMPTION AND THE NEW GENDER RELATION IN HIP-HOP

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**ABSTRACT:** *Hip-hop is a popular music genre that has generated a multi-billion dollar industry. Although its gender and race relations have historically been problematic, they have recently transformed in particular ways. This study examines the forty-one best-selling rap videos of 2007–2008. Through a qualitative content analysis of videos and lyrics several themes emerged. Hip-hop’s focus on conspicuous consumption, buttressed by the success of entrepreneurial rap moguls, has merged with strip club culture to create a new gender relation based on sexual transaction. The “rap lifestyle,” marketed to consumers through multiple media outlets, focuses on the consumption of designer clothes, jewelry, cars, and liquor, often sold by the rap moguls’ companies. Rap music videos advertise these products, as well as the consumption of women of color’s sexual performances. The new hip-hop gender relation has also transformed the politics of dancing to fit the strip club themes of consumption and sexual transaction.*

**Keywords:** hip-hop, strip club, rap, African American, women of color, consumption, gender relations, racism

In 2007 *Forbes* magazine published its first annual list of hip-hop’s biggest earners, titled “Hip-Hop’s Cash Kings” (Greenburg 2008). The featured “hip-hoppreneurs,” such as Jay-Z (Shawn Carter), 50 Cent (Curtis Jackson), Diddy (Sean Combs), and Kanye West, earn their money not only on album sales, but from retail sales of their own products and savvy investments (Greenburg 2008). In 2008 Curtis “50 Cent” Jackson earned over \$150 million, in part due to his stake in Vitamin Water (purchased by Coca-Cola as part of a \$4 billion deal). The hip-hop mogul has contributed to Vitamin Water’s success with his own signature flavor, “Formula 50.” In the same year, Jay-Z entered into a \$150 million deal with concert promoter Live Nation. Few would have predicted that rap music, born in the ashes of the South Bronx just over thirty years ago, would make it to the cover of *Forbes* magazine in one generation.

Hip-hop’s recent focus on entrepreneurship and marketing has created a culture where hip-hop is experienced primarily through consumption rather than

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production. Simultaneously, hip-hop has forged new and burgeoning relationships with the adult entertainment world—particularly strip clubs and pornography production (Hunter and Soto 2009; Miller-Young 2008). Over the past decade, a new genre of rap music from the American South (a.k.a. the “Dirty South”) has risen to ascendancy (Miller 2004; Sarig 2007). It employs the strip club as its muse and has shifted the racial-gender relation in hip-hop once again. This article explores how hip-hop’s new relationship with products and consumption, coupled with the rise of strip club culture, affects the lyrics and video imagery now produced in mainstream rap music.

Hip-hop is a cultural movement originally comprised of four elements: MCing (rapping), DJing, graffiti art, and breaking (break dancing). These four elements emerged in the South Bronx in the early 1970s after a decade of gang warfare, state violence, so-called “urban renewal” policies, and general abandonment (Chang 2005). Out of these ghetto and barrio neighborhoods came a cultural force of creativity, unity, and social protest (Rose 1994). In the 1970s and 1980s most people connected to hip-hop were producing or participating in one of the four elements. Young men and women of color were rapping at parties, scouring record stores for old funk albums, creating graffiti art on subway cars, or carrying around pieces of cardboard and working on their newest breaking moves (George 1998).

Since the early 1990s, the public engagement with hip-hop has shifted from a focus on cultural production to one of consumption. This shift follows the change in hip-hop that began with its mass marketing to larger and whiter audiences in the United States (Kitwana 2005; Lena 2006; Tanz 2007). Hip-hop began as a cultural practice of young blacks and Puerto Ricans in New York in the 1970s and evolved to become a commodity based on racial caricatures and sold to largely white audiences at a substantial profit to music executives. The shift from cultural practice to commodity was solidified with the advent of gangsta rap in the early 1990s. Relying heavily on images of black criminality and hypersexuality (Armstrong 2001), gangsta rap set a juggernaut of commercialization in motion that has showed few signs of slowing. Now that mainstream hip-hop has evolved into a largely commercial enterprise targeting a young and white buying audience, most people are consumers rather than practitioners. Fans can consume hip-hop by purchasing ringtones, magazines, fragrances, shoes, cars, entire lines of clothing, video games, pornography, specialty liquors, and more.

In the logic of millennial late capitalism, rap music now sells much more than songs, sex, or politics. Rap music sells a “lifestyle.” This “lifestyle product” is created through the countless commodities now associated with hip-hop. Consumers can buy PimpJuice energy drink (Nelly), Roc-a-Wear sunglasses (Jay-Z), Sean John jeans (Diddy), or Conjure Cognac (Ludacris) to emulate the rap lifestyle whose image is built on the foundation of cars, women, drugs, and strip clubs. This lifestyle product is reinforced through lyrics, music video, online fan gossip, and constant marketing. The consumer-driven lifestyle product is epitomized in 50 Cent’s newest product in his G-Unit line: the interactive pornography video. The pornography trade magazine, *Adult Video News*, reports that the interactive DVD, *Groupie Love*, will “take viewers inside his X-rated lifestyle” (Villa 2004). “You’re banging their girls backstage at the concerts and hanging with them on the tour bus. . . .

The viewer will be able to choose which girls to have sex with and where the sex will take place" (Mullen in Villa 2004). Highlighting the opportunities for industry cross-promotion, *Groupie Love* won *Adult Video News* awards for both the Best Interactive DVD and Best Music, featuring eleven new tracks from 50 Cent. The new hip-hop lifestyle product draws on the mainstreaming of pornography (Edlund 2004; Hunter and Soto 2009), the sexualization of blackness (Collins 2004), and the trend toward conspicuous consumption (Mukherjee 2006). How do the new products and images of hip-hop represent women of color's bodies? The answer to this question requires an understanding of the role of the strip club in popular culture.

### **Black Sexual Politics and the Rise of the Strip Club**

Contemporary hip-hop has shifted in recent years to include a new subculture: the strip club and commercial sex work. Many recent hits have revolved entirely around the premise of women as sex workers including 50 Cent's 2003 mega-hit "P.I.M.P." about pimps and prostitutes and Lil Jon and the Eastside Boyz' 2003 club favorite, "Get Low," about women working as strippers. Rappers from all regions of the U.S. have created hits about strip club culture, but Southern rappers have become best known for raps about strippers, strip clubs, and prostitutes, earning them the now popular designation, the "Dirty South" (Grem 2006; Miller 2004). The long-standing controlling image of the "jezebel," the hypersexual black woman, has been updated and, in today's hip-hop, is now represented as a stripper, and almost exclusively African American.

Strip clubs are important in today's hip-hop industry, not simply as cultural spaces but as economic ones as well. Many potential rap singles are first tested by DJs in strip clubs. If the single is successful in the strip club it often moves to regular club play and radio airplay (Sarig 2007). In this way strip clubs play an increasingly important role in the hip-hop industry. They inform lyrical and video content and also serve as gatekeepers for more lucrative recording contracts.

Although rap music has taken on many forms in its thirty-plus year lifespan, its troubling gender relations have never left the spotlight (Weitzer and Kubrin 2009). From party music, to political rap, to gangsta rap, to booty rap, all genres have raised the issue: how should women be represented in rap and how should they represent themselves? Although chart-topping women rappers were common in the early 1990s (Salt-n-Pepa, Queen Latifah, and MC Lyte, for example), their presence has been greatly diminished as commercial rap has become increasingly homogenous (Emerson 2002; Forman 1994; Pough 2004; Skeggs 1993). In fact, no female rapper has had a top ten single in over five years (Billboard Charts 2004–2008). Regardless of whether the rapper draws on the controlling image (Collins 2000) of the "strong black woman" (Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliott) or the "black whore" (Lil' Kim), whiter audiences have coincided with less interest in the voices of black women rappers in the past decade.

While women rappers have become virtually invisible, women video dancers have become more and more common (Morgan 2002; Sharpley-Whiting 2007). The video dancers, often called video "hoes" or "vixens," refer to an American imaginary where women of color are understood as debased sex objects (Sharpley-Whiting

2007; Shelton 1997). As video dancers, women of color are represented as interchangeable bodies instead of active voices. Often dressed in lingerie, swimsuits, or other equally revealing clothing, the video dancers function to enhance the heteronormative masculinity of the male rappers in the video (Hurt 2006; McFarland 2003; Perry 2003). The role of the video dancer has become increasingly important as many mainstream hip-hop magazines such as *XXL*, *King*, and *Vibe* feature favorite dancers and even offer "centerfold" pictures of them similar to traditional pornography magazines (Fitts 2008; Ogbur 2007).

I contend that the images of women in mainstream contemporary hip-hop are purposefully women of color, and overwhelmingly black. Constant images of white women "on the pole" or sexually servicing black men with oral sex would surely garner national outrage, especially by white audiences. But whites comprise the largest segment of the buying public and their desires for racialized sexual spectacle drive the mainstream hip-hop industry.

In fact, the global spectacle of black female bodies today is uncomfortably similar to the European display of Sara Baartman 200 years ago. Just as European visitors came to Paris to see Baartman in her cage and ogled her buttocks, today white consumers view multimedia images of black women with exceptionally large (and often surgically altered) breasts and buttocks. Today, however, it is not only white audiences who come to ogle the black female "object/body," but a global audience.

I draw on Collins's (2004) theory of a new "black sexual politics" to help understand how blackness and consumption shape gender relations through global media and capitalism. Black sexual politics "consist of a set of ideas and social practices shaped by gender, race, and sexuality that frame Black men and women's treatment of one another, as well as how African Americans are perceived and treated by others" (Collins 2004:7). Sexual and gender relations inside and outside of the African American community are shifting in relation to three important discourses: (1) the mainstreaming of pornography culture, (2) black capitalism and consumption, and (3) post-Civil Rights colorblind racism.

The racialized gender politics of mainstream hip-hop are "new" because they are the result of the intersection of several larger social, political, and economic trends. First the pornification of youth culture (Hunter and Soto 2009), which is widely evidenced in today's media content, reframes sexual/gender relations, both heterosexual and queer, in ways that center the male gaze. Second, economic restructuring and the postindustrial economy (Kelley 1994) have left the black working class without options for social mobility but have increased the U.S. cultural imperative for shopping. The ideology of black capitalism as a solution to black poverty has resurged (Marable 1983) and black hip-hop moguls are the contemporary Horatio Algiers (Smith 2003). Finally, the dominant discourse of colorblind racism has allowed white consumers to "cross-over" into black music genres they once avoided (Tanz 2007). White listeners can consume the music and images of a corporate construction of blackness while maintaining a safe distance from black pain and institutional racism. These three social trends have all shaped the way the new black sexual and gender politics is communicated in contemporary mainstream hip-hop.

Black sexual politics are useful not only for understanding changing gender relations in the African American community. As Collins (2004) suggests, this theory is not limited to the “particular” but can be used as a tool to help understand the changing gender and sexual relations in the greater U.S. society and how they draw on controlling images of blackness. I use the theory of a new black sexual politics to understand broader themes of sexuality and power, racial discourse, gender equity, and conspicuous consumption.

### **Music Videos and the New Conspicuous Consumption**

Rap’s focus on consumer products and strip club culture is obvious through its music videos. The rap video is not just a commercial for a song, but a commercial for all kinds of other products that are placed in the videos. Seventy-five percent of songs in this sample referred to products by brand name. In fact, rap videos have an increasing number of paid product placements, just as feature films do (Kaufman 2003; Williams 2005). The vast majority of videos in this sample highlighted products that viewers could purchase such as Dayton Rims for cars, Nike shoes, Blackberry smartphones, many kinds of liquor (Hennessy, Alize, and Patron, for example), and dozens of cars (Cadillacs, Porsches, Lamborghinis, Magnums, Hummers, and more). Mega-star Lil Wayne even marketed the most commodified place on earth, Las Vegas, in his number one video “Lollipop.”

When viewers watch a music video, they can also see the clothing line, shoes, and liquors of choice that the rapper either sells or endorses. The economic relationships have become even more savvy, however, as rappers frequently include unpaid product placements in their songs with the forethought that the de facto endorsement will lead to future economic collaborations. This happened with Southern rapper Nelly’s 2002 song “Air Force Ones,” which celebrated the Nike athletic shoe of the same name and led to his eventual lucrative shoe contract with Nike to develop his own signature shoe, the “Air Derrty.”

Unlike the conspicuous consumption that Veblen (1899/1994) described as the leisure class’s way of differentiating itself from lower social classes, consumption in the world of hip-hop is slightly different. For Veblen, members of the elite leisure class set the standard for consumption that lower social classes tried to emulate. In the late 1800s, the wealthy communicated their high status and power by purchasing goods and services at exorbitant prices with little utility. Veblen’s theory suggested that it wasn’t enough to simply be wealthy and powerful, but that elites invested in ostentatious displays of wealth to contribute to class differentiation.

Interestingly, Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption is somewhat inverted in hip-hop discourse because hip-hop is associated with “the streets” and the urban underclass, yet the most popular rappers are now part of the “leisure class” and serve as tastemakers for the entire globe. Although individual rappers are typically wealthy from their music careers, they maintain a “ghetto aesthetic” that connects their style and consumption patterns to the black and Latino poor (Smith 2003).

Hebdige (1979) notes a similar race and class nexus in cultural movements such as the Beats, the mods, and the hipsters. Many white members of those counter-cultural movements drew on black cultural forms to create “style.” What is unique

about this pattern in the new millennium is the significant role that global capitalism plays in commodifying and selling these cultural products. Rapper Young Jeezy best represents this phenomenon in his recent "Go Getta" video where his recording label "Corporate Thugz" is tattooed across his hands, embodying black criminality and black capitalism. The conspicuous consumption of hip-hop sets trends and creates "envy" as Veblen suggested, but it does so from a contradictory class position. This may be best exemplified by Kanye West's recent collaboration with Louis Vuitton. West created a new line of shoes with Marc Jacob of Louis Vuitton that was debuted at Fashion Week in Paris in 2009 (Roberts 2009). True to the pattern of Veblen's leisure class, the shoes sell for between \$800 and \$1,200.

Jean Baudrillard's (1988) theory of object relations is useful in understanding hip-hop's focus on conspicuous consumption. He suggests that in advanced capitalism "subject relations" are replaced with "object relations." By focusing on consumption instead of production, Baudrillard describes a new social experience mediated through objects, where people relate to one another through their purchases. This trend fits the shifting gender relation in mainstream hip-hop.

### DATA AND METHODS

The Billboard music charts are the most widely recognized authority on music popularity both inside and outside of the music industry. Billboard charts are based on both sales and radio play as measured by industry standards, Nielsen Soundscan and Broadcast Data Systems. For this reason, I used Billboard charts to draw my purposive sample of commercially successful rap singles. This article only analyzes chart-topping, commercially successful rap because it is the most widely viewed and heard. Although there are compelling reasons to study alternative, conscious, or underground hip-hop, it is also crucial to analyze mainstream, best-selling hip-hop because it is the soundtrack of many people's lives, especially those of young people (Kubrin 2005a). Looking at mainstream rap also ensures that I am not choosing "extreme examples," but rather the most popular trends and patterns.

This sample of songs includes the top fifteen "Hot Rap Tracks" from the Billboard chart in 2007 and the top fifteen in 2008. This resulted in a subtotal of thirty songs. Because this study includes both music videos and lyrics, I also wanted to include videos that were extremely popular even if the single did not make it into the top of the charts. To address this, the sample includes rap videos that were listed in Billboard's "Top 25 Hot Videoclips" in 2007 and 2008 that were not already in the sample. The "Hot Videoclips" chart includes all genres, so any rap videos listed were widely viewed by many consumers across musical genres (seven from 2007 and four from 2008) for a total of forty-one videos in the sample (see appendix).

One of the challenges to analyzing rap music is the extremely vulgar and foul language that is endemic to the genre. The lyrics can make even the biggest fan blush when read aloud off the printed page. Although this presents a challenge, it is crucial that researchers engage the culture of hip-hop. If we cannot speak it aloud, we cannot comprehend, comment on, and affect the creative and commercial processes of hip-hop culture. Many songs come in two versions: "explicit" and "clean."

Contrary to what one may expect, the two versions are usually not very different. "Clean" versions are usually the same song with only a few words changed or electronically "scratched" out in hip-hop DJ style. Examples include changing the word "niggaz" to "Gs" (as in gangstas) or changing "bitches" to "chicks." Most scholars believe that "explicit" versions are much more popular among consumers (Rose 2008). This belief is evidenced on iTunes, for example, where explicit versions are almost always significantly higher in "popularity," a rough measure of downloads. However, many consumers also listen to songs on the radio and watch videos on cable networks where they are likely to also come into contact with the "clean" version. For this study, I have used the "explicit" version of the song lyrics because I believe it better captures the listener's experience of the song. However, I agree with Rose (2008) that the listening experience between "explicit" and "clean" is actually not that different because even when the sound is "scratched out" the listener/viewer knows what word is supposed to be there.

After I selected the forty-one videos, I purchased them on iTunes. In cases of videos with explicit and clean versions, I purchased and watched both. The few videos that were unavailable on iTunes I watched on YouTube. I found all song lyrics on the Internet. I watched the videos a minimum of six times each, both with and without sound, over the course of three months and read over the lyrics for each song multiple times until several themes began to emerge. I used the grounded theory approach to let patterns emerge from the data, rather than entering the research process with a hypothesis (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

The first round of coding revealed over a dozen themes including what I called the princess narrative, pornography and sex work, performances of masculinity, depictions of Southern poverty, the politics of dancing, the racialization of space, and consumption. Through the technique called "concept mapping," I determined that several of these themes were connected by the larger theme of gender relations and consumption. For example, songs that depicted men buying their girlfriends many luxury items were similar to songs that described men buying strippers gifts and paying them to perform. It was only after four rounds of analysis, re-coding, and quantitative counting of specific images and lyrical references (such as brand names, strip clubs, and "making it rain") that the more precise themes became apparent: object relations, strip clubs, and the politics of dancing. Using these themes I conducted a "close reading and textual analysis" (Emerson 2002) of the entire sample of music videos and lyrics.

### **From Gender Relations to Object Relations: Hip-Hop and the New Logic of Consumption**

Data from this study reveal several compelling patterns about the relationship between conspicuous consumption and gender relations in popular rap music videos. As hip-hop has become more commercialized and connected to an ever-increasing number of product lines, that pattern has intersected with the way relations between men and women are portrayed in lyrics and music videos. In the new logic of hip-hop consumption, gender relations are mediated through consumption of high-end designer products including clothes, shoes, jewelry, and cars.



For example, in the single, "Whatever You Like," by rapper T.I., the male persona in the song offers the African American female love interest a world of expensive objects. The video opens in a fast food, fried chicken restaurant, where she is the cashier and he is the patron (playing himself as T.I.). T.I. tells her, "You too cute to be working here" and slips her his phone number. She is ecstatic about being noticed by a famous rapper and their ensuing romance is described through a series of expensive items that he purchases for her and the new life of luxury that she gets to experience with him. The video shows the rapper happily watching his new girlfriend as she devours expensive dinners and revels in the spotlight at red carpet events. She relishes each new designer item and their joint consumption of designer clothes, blinged out jewelry, and expensive cars. Their shared conspicuous consumption is the representation of their "love." An excerpt of the lyrics describes the scenario. ("Stacks" refer to stacks of money in large denominations.)

Stacks on deck, Patrón on ice  
 And we can pop bottles all night  
 Baby, you could have whatever you like  
 I said, you could have whatever you like  
 Anytime you want to pick up the telephone  
 You know it ain't nothin' to drop a couple stacks on you  
 Want it you could get it my dear  
 Five million dollar home, drop Bentleys, I swear  
 Yeah, I want yo' body, I need yo' body  
 Long as you got me you won't need nobody  
 You want it, I got it, go get it, I buy it  
 Tell 'em other broke niggas be quiet  
 My chick could have what she want  
 And go in every store for any bag she want  
 And know she ain't never had a man like that  
 To buy you anything ya own desire I that. (T.I., "Whatever You Like," 2008)

The romantic/sexual relation which is the subject of the song is entirely predicated on the notion that the male character can and will provide the female character with any material object she wants, thus the chorus, "You can have whatever you like." He wants her sexually ("I want yo' body, I need yo' body"), he likes her dependence ("long as you got me you won't need nobody"), and he communicates his superior masculinity through his wealth ("tell 'em other broke niggas be quiet"). Although "Whatever You Like" is pitched as a love song, it is essentially an object relation mediated through consumption and power. There is very little reference to their love or their lust, the majority of the lyrics and the video focus on the rapper's ability to provide expensive objects for the woman and her love of consuming those objects. This phenomenon is what Jean Baudrillard (1988) calls the object relation. For Baudrillard, in a world now completely oriented toward consumption, subject relations are transformed into object relations. That is, people relate to one another through shared consumption patterns rather than shared values, ideologies, or affections (Baudrillard 1988).

In his single, "She Got It," rapper 2 Pistols describes his pursuit of a woman working as a stripper.

Young boss baby, I treat cha, treat cha to the finer things  
 Neck bling, wrist bling, wedding ring? Nah, I'm playin'. (2 Pistols, "She Got It," 2008)

Much in the style of "Whatever You Like," this excerpt focuses on the expensive products the male character can provide. Steeped in strip club culture, 2 Pistols' single focuses on consumption *with* and consumption *of* the female character in the song. His rap, "neck bling, wrist bling, wedding ring? Nah, I'm playin'," also highlights the focus on objects rather than connection (emotional or sexual). He's willing to buy her expensive diamond jewelry (bling) for access to her body, but he doesn't want to get married. The point is not that the rapper eschews marriage and the heteronormative roles that go along with it, but that the relation is not predicated on anything but expensive objects. There is no relation based on sex, love, passion, or any "subject" relation.

Although some songs still refer to men buying expensive gifts for women as in the two examples above, a significant number of songs describe the attraction between the male and female characters through their shared "lifestyle" as signaled by the consumption of luxury items. In the song, "I Won't Tell" by Fat Joe, the male character relates to the woman he is romantically interested in by talking about all of her expensive possessions and all of his. Unlike the popular "gold digger" theme of 1990s gangsta rap, several of today's top rap songs depict women as "having their own." Although financial independence is a recurrent theme in hip-hop, black women here operate only as consumers of and models for products, not subjects, sexually or otherwise. The "I Won't Tell" music video opens with a shot of rapper Fat Joe and a beautiful woman of color lounging in each other's arms and having dinner on a luxurious private jet. The camera pans the scene and focuses in on several things: their sunglasses, her diamond ring, her designer shoes, and her Louis Vuitton bag. Both the video and the lyrics describe their secret romance while referring to high end designer clothes, jewelry, and fashion accessories.

She said, ya earring-look at that thing  
 That's even bigger than the rock on my ring' . . .  
 The wrist is Jacob, earring Chopard . . .  
 Millionaire frames, Perrier rocks  
 Every day a different chain nigga get ya gear up  
 Name another fat guy fly like me  
 and get you right, lay pipe all night like me  
 Call you Fruity Pebbles cause you got so many Spy bags  
 Purple ones, yellow ones, sky blue, the white bag  
 Hermes shit wherever you lay your eyes at  
 Red card, black card, I could buy that. (Fat Joe, "I Won't Tell," 2008)

In this small excerpt alone, several high end luxury items are mentioned: a Jacob and Co. watch, a Chopard diamond earring, Louis Vuitton Millionaire sunglasses, Perrier Diamonds, Spy bags by Fendi, and designer Hermes. The first lyric excerpt where the female character comments on the size of his diamond in relation to hers is a telling example of the new consumerism in rap's gender relations. Their flirtation is mediated through the "bling" of their expensive jewelry. In fact, without

the mention of these myriad product lines, there is no story left in the lyrics or video. The products are the story. In keeping with Baudrillard's theory of object relations, there are no more subject relations, just object relations. In addition to the lyrics, the "I Won't Tell" video imagery depicts a secret romance between the male character (played by Fat Joe) and his female love interest. The romance is expressed through several "high lifestyle" scenes where the couple is vacationing in a beachfront hotel, eating dinner on a private jet, and partying in an expensive club. Their romance is communicated through their shared "lifestyle" experience. The video also serves as a four minute commercial where the rap "lifestyle" is sold and a series of products are advertised to help achieve that lifestyle.

Kanye West, whose songs and videos are among the least formulaic in commercially successful rap, also draws on themes of consumption in gender relations. His single, "Flashing Lights," contains lyrics that portray a romance through a shared lifestyle of high-end consumption. Although the video is an edgy sexualized murder scene (a beautiful woman in lingerie blowing up a car and then bludgeoning Kanye West's character with a shovel), the lyrics present a love story filled with the requisite luxury lifestyle items.

She don't believe in shootin' stars,  
but she believe in shoes and cars  
wood floors in the new apartment,  
couture from the store's department  
You more like L'eau de Stardee shit,  
I'm more of the, trips to Florida  
Order the hors d'oeuvres, views of the water.  
(Kanye West, "Flashing Lights," 2008)

Like Fat Joe's "I Won't Tell," Kanye West raps about the fancy lifestyle that he and the female love interest share. In the song, the rapper describes their mutual affection through their mutual consumption: ("she believes in shoes and cars" and "couture from the store's department") and he prefers "trips to Florida, hors d'oeuvres and views of the water." In this way, the two characters relate to each other through their contrasting preferences in consumption patterns. As in previous examples, the substance of the connection between the male and female characters is product, and consequently, without the product, there is no actual relation left. This pattern is found again and again in today's best-selling rap. Rapper Yung Berg tells a story of his attraction to a woman through their designer shoes in his hit "Sexy Lady."

and how she doin' (man) she did it proper (damn)  
three hours and we both kept on our Pradas  
I had my loafers she was in dem heels. (Yung Berg, "Sexy Lady," 2007)

The catchy part of these lyrics is the reference to having sex while both wearing the same brand of designer shoes. Prada shoes make the sexual escapade interesting and meaningful. Their connection is not just love, or lust, but products.

In the top rap single of 2007, "Make Me Better," by Fabolous, the rapper tells a story that is seductive in its relatively positive portrayal of the woman in his life. Unlike the "ride or die chicks" in much rap music, Fabolous describes a woman

who is a romantic partner and business partner. The video imagery confirms this interpretation of the song. The male and female characters, both dressed to the nine's, exchange conspiratorial glances across the room in a club where seeming illicit "business" is being done. They communicate by cell phone and she looks out for him. She is portrayed as both powerful and sexy, an unusual pairing in commercial hip-hop. Interestingly though, even a song like this relies on the now formulaic consumption-oriented gender relation. The chorus, or hook, is sung by pop sensation Ne-Yo.

I'm a movement by myself, ooh, but I'm a force when we're together  
Mami, I'm good all by myself, ooh, but baby you, you make me better.

In the verse, rapper Fabolous describes their connection:

The sag in my swag, pep in my step  
Daddy do the Gucci, Mami in Giuseppes. (Fabolous, "Make Me Better," 2007)

The rapper is referring to two high-end designers, Gucci and Giuseppe Zanotti, an expensive shoe designer. Their partnership is solidified through their designer labels. Part of why they are a "force when they're together" is because they both consume the finest products. "Make Me Better" was the number one rap song of 2007.

### **The Strip Club as Site of Consumption**

Consumption patterns in hip-hop music videos reflect the growing influence of product placements and shared marketing deals. However, the orientation toward consumption has also merged with the influence of the "Dirty South." Increasingly in commercial rap, sexual relations are described as transactional in nature, that is, men pay for access to women's sexual services. This form of consumption, where men pay to consume women, is found most often in hip-hop's favorite scene, the strip club. Because these sexual transactions are also racial, part of their appeal to buying audiences is the reinforcement of dominant narratives about African American and Latina women, and the concomitant symbolic protection of white femininity by its absence in these representations.

The logic of consumption structures the gender relation in strip clubs, largely because women dance and take off their clothes for money from male customers. Although the consumption is not "conspicuous" in terms of designer brands, the consumption is conspicuous because commercial rap has helped make the strip club a public place and part of the mainstream imagination. Overt strip club references are found throughout the chart topping songs and are present in a full 24 percent of the videos in this sample. Examples of strip club culture include references to "the pole," dancing for money, and throwing money at women who dance.

Ain't never seen something that'll make me go  
This crazy all night spending my dough  
Had the million dollar vibe and a body to go  
Them birthday cakes they stole the show  
So sexual, she was flexible, professional, drinking X&O  
Hold up, wait a minute, do I see what I think? Whoa!

Did her thing, seen Shawty get low  
 Ain't the same when it's up that close  
 Make it rain, I'm making it snow  
 Work the pole, I gotta bank roll. (Flo Rida, "Low," 2008)

I know she got it 'cause she lookin at me like she want it, (want it)  
 She drop it low, make me wanna throw some D's on it, (hey)  
 Whatever it is you can't stop it, 'cause she get low,  
 When she on that pole, and that lets me know . . .  
 She got it, she got it, she got it. . . (2 Pistols, "She Got It," 2008)

She give a new definition to the word curve  
 Got chicks in the strip club envying her. (Kardinal Offishall, "Dangerous," 2008)

After she dance on that pole  
 I pull my can so quick and fast  
 When that ass hit the floor. (Crime Mob, "Rock Yo Hips," 2007)

Many rap videos also show imagery of women dancing at strip clubs that the male rappers patronize. In the 2007 video "Party Like a Rockstar" multiple women are shown dancing on a stripper's pole and another woman is shown writhing on the floor while dozens of people spray shaving cream on her, mimicking a porn video or strip club. In today's commercially successful rap, strip club culture is found throughout both lyrics and music videos (Hunter and Soto 2009). The movement of pornography and strip club imagery into popular culture is not unique to rap music, but part of a larger trend of the mainstreaming of pornography, particularly in youth culture (Caputi 2003; Kinnick 2007).

The "black sexual politics" framework makes visible the racialized performance of pornography in hip-hop where men of color are represented as sexually aggressive and women of color are represented as objects for male pleasure and ridicule. As Collins (2004) suggests, black sexual politics are not simply about the African American community, but signal shifts in larger U.S. gender relations as they are influenced by capitalism and colorblind racism.

### **Consumption and the New Politics of Dancing: "Getting Low" and "Making It Rain"**

Strip club culture in hip-hop gives new roles to male and female characters in lyrics and videos. The songs and videos socialize viewers in the new gender relation of sexual transaction. This pattern is most noticeable in the five songs that fall into the category I call "instructional dance videos." These songs each popularize a new dance and teach viewers how to do it through lyrics and examples in the music video. Consumption is accomplished as dance is reshaped from an activity that young men and women do together to one where women perform for men and men pay for the service. In the fantasy world of rap video, women dance *for* men rather than *with* them. In the new "black sexual politics" on the dance floor, young people mimic a transactional sexual relation, and their models in the videos are men and women of color.

Through videos, viewers are shown new dances that mimic those done by strippers for money (Sarig 2007). These “stripper moves” or “pole tricks” focus on buttocks and vaginas and “getting low” to the floor where these orifices would be more exposed to a viewer. For example, in “Rock Yo Hips” one of the male rappers says, “I thought I saw a putty cat” as a reference to seeing the woman’s vagina. Notably, the majority of these new dances are done exclusively by women for a male audience, much like dancing in the strip club. In the “Rock Yo Hips” video a crew of women dancers wears hot pants (a.k.a. booty shorts) and tight white tee-shirts with midriffs exposed. They dance seductively to the chorus, “I like it when she rock her hips, then wave, and sip.” The excerpts below illustrate the instructional dances.

I like it when she show me she can  
Rock it, roll it, drop it to the floor  
Bouncing slow, Shorty’s all pro, That’s the way to go  
Jello booty ooo-wee  
Got a nigga glacin’ every time that–react  
‘I thought I saw a putty cat  
Gimme, gimme, gimme that  
Fat cat, don’t act on a pimp  
You got me enticed by the way you rock them hips  
You’s a trip, girl, doing all them tricks  
That’s what’s up, I like that shit a lot, come holla at a thug . . .  
I walk in the club and she wobbling and shaking  
I wanna take to the house  
So a player start breaking in  
Her motherfucking back like a player suppose  
Goddamn lil’ buddy, touch your toes  
Goddamn lil’ buddy, take off your clothes  
And let me see that apple bottom  
And that brown booty, ohh . . .  
Shorty slide up and down on that pole,  
V.I.P. that’s how it motherfucking goes. (Crime Mob, “Rock Yo Hips,” 2007)

Once you pop, pop lock it for me girl get low  
If yo mama gave it to you, baby girl, let it show.  
(Huey, “Pop, Lock, and Drop It,” 2007)

Shawty had them Apple Bottom jeans (jeans)  
Boots with the fur (with the fur)  
The whole club was looking at her  
She hit the floor (she hit the floor)  
Next thing you know, Shawty got low, low, low, low, low, low, low, low  
Them baggy sweat pants  
And the Reebok’s with the straps (with the straps)  
She turned around and gave that big booty a smack (hey)  
She hit the floor (she hit the floor)  
Next thing you know, Shawty got low, low, low, low, low, low, low, low.  
(Flo Rida, “Low,” 2008)

Each of the examples above contains the staples of the instructional dance sub-genre. This includes "hitting the floor" with her buttocks, "getting low" (which is more likely to show the woman's vaginal or anal orifices), "letting it show," and "doing tricks" (which refers to pole tricks from the strip club). The trend in instructional dance songs is indicative of a changing gender relation portrayed in rap music video. Women are encouraged to dance for men and, in the process, perform a highly sexualized femininity for a male gaze. However, the dancing has economic implications as well: women dance for men as if they are strippers.

The number one rap track of 2008, Lil Wayne's "Lollipop," captures this dynamic very effectively. Shot in the consumption capital of the world, Las Vegas, Lil Wayne and fellow rapper, Static, enter the world's largest limousine, "Big Blue" (available for party rental), where scores of beautiful women of color in small dresses are waiting for them. Each woman dances for the rappers, and for the viewers, seductively looking straight into the camera. The "Lollipop" video is now featured on the website for Big Blue, where customers can make reservations to emulate the rap lifestyle experience.

In many rap videos, male characters express approval to women for their bodies or their dancing by "making it rain" or throwing cash at them. In this way, the sexual relation is reduced to an object relation or a consumer transaction. For example, Huey raps in "Pop, Lock and Drop It," "If you a balla pull a stack out and slap her on da aayy." Pulling out a "stack" (of bills) and slapping the woman with it on her "ass" is the new form of sexual compliment from men to women.

If women and girls' new role in hip-hop is to learn dance moves that mimic those done by strippers, then men and boys' new role is to learn the behaviors of the "high rolling patron" of the club. This is accomplished through the now common phrase "make it rain." Consistent with the strip club theme in commercial hip-hop, rappers "make it rain" when they throw bills (dollars in large denominations) at women as they dance in the strip club. This is a highly ritualized practice and can be connoted entirely without words and simply by a hand motion. The motion requires one hand out, palm up, as if holding a large stack of bills. The other hand mimics sliding bills off of the imaginary stack into the air in rapid fire as if one could "make it rain" by sending all these bills fluttering into the air. Male characters in today's rap "make it rain" to express pleasure at seeing a beautiful woman working in the strip club, and to communicate the power to structure the transaction through their role as consumer. Twenty percent of songs in this sample use the phrase "make it rain."

got a handful of stacks  
 Better grab an umbrella  
 I make it rain (I make it rain)  
 I make it rain on them hoes, I make it rain (I make it rain)  
 I make it rain on them hoes. (Fat Joe, "Make It Rain," 2007)

Whether in Miami, Cincinnati or in Riverdale  
 Arizona, California, make it rain anywhere. (T.I., "Big Things Poppin'," 2007)

I'm the biggest boss that you seen thus far  
 Ten black Maybachs back to back in a lane

I'ma make it rain (rain), and I'ma make it back (back)  
You are just a lame lil' homie, that's a fact. (Rick Ross, "The Boss," 2008)

(Cool) you know me  
With a skull belt and wallet chain  
Shop boys, rockstars  
Yeah, we 'bout to change the game  
Change the game? Uh oh  
They know that I'm a star  
I make it rain from the center of my guitar.  
(Shop Boyz, "Party Like a Rockstar," 2007)

DJ showed them love, he said my name when the music stop  
Young money Lil Wayne, then the music drop  
I make it snow, I make it flurry  
I make it all back tomorrow don't worry  
Yeah Young Wayne on them hoes  
A.K.A. Mr. Make It Rain on them hoes. (Lil Wayne, "Got Money" 2008)

The practice of "making it rain" serves several functions toward accomplishing a performance of masculinity. First, it shows that the rapper has access to lots of cash, presumably in larger bills. It is also a public display of cash that communicates his status to others. Second, making it rain establishes male status vis a vis the women in the strip club. The men who throw their money at the women establish power by structuring the sexual and commercial interaction. In the songs, men often demand dancing positions or sexual favors before throwing their money. By making it rain, men consume women as products at the strip club.

Making it rain also has a secondary and more explicit meaning. Several rappers also use the term to describe ejaculating on women's bodies. The term implies male sexual prowess because it suggests they have a large amount of semen. It also suggests that men have the power to ejaculate on women, as is de rigueur in mainstream pornographic video. The double entendre, commonly used in hip-hop, is further evidence of the merger between hip-hop and pornography (Miller-Young 2008).

## CONCLUSION

This article's title phrase, "shake it, baby, shake it," connotes the shifting gender relation and the move toward consumerism in today's best-selling hip-hop. Mainstream hip-hop songs that are played dozens of times each day in radio markets around the nation routinely describe male customers telling women strippers to "shake it" and then rewarding them by "making it rain." This trend highlights the commercialization of sexual relations and the increased consumption of all types of products associated with mainstream hip-hop.

Money has often influenced the relations between male and female characters in rap music. From the discussion of so-called "gold-diggers" to "baby mamas," gender relations and money have long been intertwined (Johnson 1996). Is there anything really "new" being communicated to consumers of today's rap? The data analyzed here suggest that many of the newest rap songs focus on high end consumption as



a way for men and women to relate to one another. It isn't who you are, or where you're at, but what you buy. U.S. consumerism is matched by no other nation and this fact is reflected in our most popular pop music—hip-hop.

The mass marketing and merchandising of hip-hop is extremely lucrative and indicates its acceptance into mainstream American culture. However, much of that acceptance rests on caricatures of blackness, poverty, and women of color's sexuality (Cole and Guy-Sheftall 2003; Littlefield 2008). Black criminals sell; black intellectuals don't. Black women dancers sell; black women rappers don't. While mainstream hip-hop may be at the pinnacle of its global economic success, it has never been more homogenous in content and style. As is true with any cultural form, homogeneity squashes debate and creativity. Intellectual or political debate is particularly important in hip-hop because of its close tie to poor, urban, black, and brown communities (Martinez 1997). Larger public discussions about police brutality, incarceration, joblessness, and gender relations are often engaged through hip-hop (Kubrin 2005b), but with fewer voices getting airplay, those important sociological debates fade into the background.

One of those long-standing debates centers around the role of capitalism in the black community. Leaders of the African American community, including Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Angela Davis, have debated the roles of capitalism and socialism in solving the "race problem" of the nation. What is particularly striking about the new focus on consumption in hip-hop is the seeming whole-hearted acceptance of "black capitalism" as the solution to black economic "underdevelopment" (Marable 1983). Commercial hip-hop sells more than ringtones and clothing; it also sells an ideology of capitalism endorsed by black celebrity moguls.

The role of the black hip-hop mogul is key to understanding the new conspicuous consumption. Although Veblen (1899/1994) argued that everyday people emulate elites in their consumption patterns in order to acquire social status, the new conspicuous consumption has elites imitating the aesthetics and consumption patterns of the poor. Most hip-hop artists, once poor and now rich, routinely set consumption standards and fashion trends for the nation, and the world, elites included. Increasingly, black hip-hop moguls create products that allow consumers to emulate a commodified blackness, packaged to sell to people of all races (Collins 2006).

Conspicuous consumption has overtaken rap to such an extent that the products themselves now take center stage. Baudrillard's (1988) theory of object relations captures hip-hop's trend toward consumption very effectively. He contends that people forge their identities through consumption, based on the types of things they buy. People then relate to one another through the products they purchase. Mainstream rap has changed in form and content to accommodate a constant stream of product placements. It is through these placements that rap artists create their identities and that consumers follow suit. What is left is a relation completely structured by the consumption of luxury lifestyle products, or their less expensive knock-offs. As evidenced in the data, even sexual relations based on desire or lust have succumbed in rap to be overtaken by designer shoes and private jets. The gender dynamic of the strip club is actually an extension of the mandate of consumption. Instead of jeans, phones, or liquor, men consume women's sexual performances.

Because commercial rap music is so formulaic in both lyrics and videos, it communicates a specific gender ideology that supports the culture of consumption. Music videos and lyrics communicate sexual and gendered “scripts” where male and female characters act out life’s dramas. Young people internalize these highly repetitive scripts and often use them to understand their own and others’ lives (Ward, Hansbrough, and Walker 2005). In fact, Stephens and Few (2007) found that adolescent African American girls and boys routinely used sexual scripts such as “gold-digger,” “baby mama,” “freak,” and “gangsta bitch” to make sense of their own sexuality and that of black women more generally. Hip-hop is not just the music playing on an iPod. Its videos stream through the television, its artists are gossiped about on blogs of all sorts, its merchandise is sold in all markets, and the lives of its celebrities are followed in all media. Hip-hop is everywhere and for that reason it has a strong influence on U.S. culture, and youth culture in particular. Herein lies the most important questions sociologists can ask about hip-hop: How will commercial hip-hop contribute to a changing gender relation between boys and girls? And how will this gender relation affect African American communities in particular?

Research from the fields of psychology and public health shows that increased exposure to mainstream rap videos, even when controlling for others factors, has negative effects on the mental and physical health of African American girls and boys. When African American girls watch more hours of rap music videos they are more likely to binge drink, smoke marijuana, have multiple sexual partners, have a negative body image (Peterson, Wingood, DiClemente, Harrington, and Davies 2007), get arrested, hit a teacher, and contract a sexually transmitted infection (Wingood, DiClemente, Bernhardt, Harrington, Davies, Robillard, and Hook 2003). Both boys and girls are more likely to agree with rape myths and condone violence in intimate relationships (Squires, Kohn-Wood, Chavous, and Carter 2006; Ward et al. 2005). These are all serious negative health outcomes that must be further investigated and connected to larger societal problems such as poverty, institutional racism, educational inequality, sexism, and sexual violence.

The ongoing challenge for feminist researchers and researchers of color is to fully investigate the effects of commercial hip-hop, while avoiding the limiting nature of the “politics of respectability,” the historically black middle-class ideology of “proper” womanhood and “controlled” sexuality (Reid-Brinkley 2008; Rose 2008). The politics of respectability should not prevent black women, as rappers or video dancers, from exploring the full terrain of black women’s sexualities. However, the banner of “sexual freedom” also cannot be used to ignore the uniform and problematic caricaturing of black women and girls’ sexuality (Ransby and Matthews 1993). Some forms of hip-hop, especially conscious rap and spoken word poetry, are an important source of pride, creativity, intellectual debate, and positivity in the lives of many young people of color (Clay 2003). Ideally, commercial hip-hop will expand its borders to include more of those voices, so that it can engage contemporary social problems while still providing “a good beat.”

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## APPENDIX

## List of All Songs in the Sample

<i>Title</i>	<i>Artist</i>	<i>Label</i>
<i>2007 Songs</i>		
MAKE ME BETTER SHAWTY	Fabulous Featuring Ne-Yo Plies Featuring T-Pain	Desert Storm/Def Jam/IDJMG Slip-N-Slide/Atlantic
THIS IS WHY I'M HOT	Mims	Capitol
PARTY LIKE A ROCKSTAR	Shop Boyz	OnDeck/Universal Republic
WALK IT OUT	Unk	Big Oomp/Koch
CRANK THAT (SOULJA BOY)	Soulja Boy Tell'em	ColliPark/Interscope
WE FLY HIGH	Jim Jones	Koch
RUNAWAY LOVE	Ludacris Featuring Mary J. Blige	DTP/Def Jam/IDJMG
I'M A FLIRT	R. Kelly Or Bow Wow (Featuring T.I. & T-Pain)	Columbia/Jive/Zomba
SHORTIE LIKE MINE	Bow Wow Featuring Chris Brown & JohnTa Austin	Columbia
MAKE IT RAIN	Fat Joe Featuring Lil Wayne	Terror Squad/Imperial/Virgin
POP, LOCK & DROP IT	Huey	HiTz Committee/Jive/Zomba
ROCK YO HIPS	Crime Mob Featuring Lil Scrappy	Crunk/BME/Reprise/ Warner Bros.
THROW SOME D'S	Rich Boy Featuring Polow Da Don	Zone 4/Interscope
A BAY BAY	Hurricane Chris	Polo Grounds/J/RMG
BIG THINGS POPPIN' (DO IT)	T.I.	Grand Hustle/Atlantic
THAT'S THAT	Snoop Dogg Featuring R. Kelly	Doggystyle/Geffen
GO GETTA	Young Jeezy Featuring R. Kelly	Corporate Thugz/Def Jam/ IDJMG
BUY U A DRANK (SHAWTY SNAPPIN')	T-Pain Featuring Yung Joc	Konvict/Nappy Boy/Jive/ Zomba
STRONGER	Kanye West	Roc-A-Fella/Def Jam/IDJMG
I LUV IT	Young Jeezy	Corporate Thugz/Def Jam/ IDJMG
SEXY LADY	Yung Berg Featuring Junior	Yung Boss/Epic/Koch
<i>2008 Songs</i>		
LOLLIPOP	Lil Wayne Featuring Static Major	Cash Money/Universal Motown
LOW	Flo Rida Featuring T-Pain	Poe Boy/Atlantic
BUST IT BABY PART 2	Plies Featuring Ne-Yo	Big Gates/Slip-N-Slide/ Atlantic
WHATEVER YOU LIKE	T.I.	Grand Hustle/Atlantic
A MILLI	Lil Wayne	Cash Money/Universal Motown

(continued)

## APPENDIX (continued)

<i>Title</i>	<i>Artist</i>	<i>Label</i>
<i>2008 Songs</i>		
INDEPENDENT	Webbie Featuring Lil' Phat & Lil' Boosie	Trill/Asylum/Atlantic
GOT MONEY	Lil Wayne Featuring T-Pain	Cash Money/Universal Motown
GET LIKE ME	David Banner Featuring Chris Brown	b.i.G. f.a.c.e./SRC/Universal Motown
PUT ON	Young Jeezy Featuring Kanye West	CTE/Def Jam/IDJMG
THE BOSS	Rick Ross Featuring T-Pain	Slip-N-Slide/Def Jam/IDJMG
GOOD LIFE	Kanye West Featuring T-Pain	Roc-A-Fella/Def Jam/IDJMG
MRS. OFFICER	Lil Wayne Featuring Bobby Valentino & Kidd Kidd	Cash Money/Universal Motown
SHE GOT IT	2 Pistols Featuring T-Pain & Tay Dizm	Universal Republic
DANGEROUS	Kardinal Offishall Featuring Akon	KonLive/Geffen/Interscope
FLASHING LIGHTS	Kanye West Featuring Dwele	Roc-A-Fella/Def Jam/IDJMG
SUPERSTAR	Lupe Fiasco Featuring Matthew Santos	1st & 15th/Atlantic
SENSUAL SEDUCTION	Snoop Dogg	Doggystyle/Geffen/Interscope
ROC BOYS (AND THE WINNER IS) . . .	Jay-Z	Roc-A-Fella/Def Jam/IDJMG
I WON'T TELL	Fat Joe Featuring J. Holiday	Terror Squad/Imperial/Capitol

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