

# Exposure to Hypersexualized Rap Imagery and the Relationship among Self-Esteem, Cultural Identity and Body Image of African American Female Students

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**ABSTRACT**—The purpose of the study was to identify relationships among psychosocial indicators and exposure to hypersexualized rap imagery. African American female college students (N=112) indicated time spent viewing and listening to rap music, identified their attitudes and perceptions of rap music, and responded to measures of self-esteem, cultural identity, and body image. Participants who experienced excessive exposure exhibited more positive empowerment scores than participants who experienced minimal exposure. Respondents with minimal exposure exhibited less positive artistic/esthetic scores than those with moderate exposure. Participants with more positive violence/misogyny scores exhibited lower self-ideal. Implications for promoting healthy relationships are explored.

**KEY WORDS**—rap music, self-esteem, body image, Black college students

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## Introduction

**B**EFORE THE ERA OF MUSIC VIDEOS, THE HISTORY OF RAP MUSIC was of a medium that audibly depicted social conditions and expression. This connection between social condition and expression is especially sought after from adolescents and young adults aspiring to formulate an identity of self during this developmental stage (Adams & Fuller, 2006). Today's commercialized hip-hop has created a landmark milestone in contemporary culture when a substantial segment of an entire generation of youth of primarily African American descent defines themselves by a musical culture (Rose, 2008).

This new generation has narrowed its identities to the perimeters of the established norms of hip-hop (Krohn & Suazo, 1995). In doing so, Black female college students may identify with the overt visual stimulations (a leading expression of so-called Black video culture) of other Black women depicted in demoralizing manners in videos (Henry, West, & Jackson, 2010). Henry et al. (2010) reported that the number of African American females in the hip-hop community creates an equally high proportion of African American women who are vulnerable to the genre. Due to the highly visible role of the African American female within hip-hop, African American college females may be extremely influenced by the culture. Sexist ideas promoted by hip-hop have "devastating effects to the psyche and identity of the development of Black women" (Henry et al., 2010, p. 238). Professors teaching at historically Black colleges and universities have expressed concern with "Black students' preoccupation with rap lyrics, attachment to materialistic hip-hop ideals, and what appears as an academic disconnect" (Henry et al., 2010, p. 238). The problem has been recognized, but, the justification for and extent of the problem is not known.

### Background of the Problem

Thomas, Witherspoon, and Speight (2004) reported that African American women have experiences based on the isms of society as well as indigenous values that influence identity and states of being. Another dichotomous position at a micro level (extracted from a macro level) in hip-hop is the reference of African American women being strong and admired, but also demonized and to blame for the condition of African American men. According to Pough (2004), one of the reasons for this dichotomy is the con-

tradictory imaging of African American women since the days of slavery. Some of the images of African American women are of “the welfare queen, the matriarch, the mammy, the seductress, the strong Black woman, and the always sexually available Black woman” (Pough, 2004, p. 217). These and other images can become distorted and harmful to the group, particularly if they are even remotely in contrast with the status quo (Pough, 2004).

In the following paragraphs, the concepts of self-esteem, cultural identity, and body image are defined to provide historical and definitive associations as they relate to African American women. Afrocentric scholars define *self-esteem* as a “fundamental human motive to protect and refine feelings of self-worth” (Dixon, Zhang, & Conrad, 2009, p. 347). Hip-hop culture, which includes rap, language, and all its peculiar internal and external expressive identification, represents a collective consciousness for Black youth. In other words, African American youths identify their self-esteem in terms of the hip-hop culture.

*Cultural identity* is usually the primary foundational system of how individuals learn and view the world. As Arora and Yeh (2003) explained, Western and non-Western cultures have often been differentiated based on the notions of interdependent and dependent self-construal. The type of orientation (independent versus interdependent) in which individuals are socialized has a strong impact on their beliefs, thoughts, emotions, and motivations. The search for the identity of self and the self’s culture is not equal across races; it is more prevalent in adolescents of color (Phinney, 1992).

In relation to the process in which the video women are chosen to represent the hip-hop culture, the concept of colorism and the unique American history surrounding concepts of beauty are examined. *Colorism* or the age-old concept of *color struck* is a legacy rooted in slavery that suggests to Blacks that other Blacks with European features are more highly valued. The features of the American beauty standard include white skin, blonde hair, blue eyes, youthful appearance, and low body mass (Dixon & Maddox, 2005). The standard of beauty includes decidedly European features and body shapes, and many “women develop distorted body image disorders as a result of unobtainable outcomes” (Molloy & Herzberger, 1998, p. 631). Although approximately 31% of the U.S. population includes ethnic minorities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001), minimal research has been conducted on this group’s perceptions and experiences with body image.

Media continuously reinforces the American beauty standard, creating and exacerbating anxiety in the female population (Molloy & Herzberg-

er, 1998). The standard of beauty is not only depicted by Whites but also Blacks, particularly in rap (Dixon et al., 2009). In a qualitative study by Stephens and Few (2007), the effects of stereotypical images of Black women in hip-hop were found to have an influence on Black adolescents' perspective of self-beauty because of their internalization of Eurocentric standards of beauty. The female participants in this study noted that women must be sexual and seductive to get dates with men (Henry et al., 2010).

According to feminist theorists, women are objectified, particularly by men, and women are socialized to value themselves based on their appearance (Forbes & Frederick, 2008). Development of a body image occurs as a person establishes a subjective formulation based on self-observation as well as positive or negative body language feedback from others (Sohn, 2010). If the feedback African American women receive from rap and hip-hop is that African American women in music videos are showered with material gain based on their European features (the American standard), then their body image can be distorted or confused.

### Statement of the Problem

As music videos have become increasingly popular in the 21st century, women of all ages are exposed to music that is laden with sexual connotations and messages that vie to define who they are as women. Some women are aware of the misogynistic implications and others are desensitized to the degrading lyrics, particularly those in rap music. These depictions and definitions of womanhood can cause stress and undermine self-esteem, cultural identity, and body-image perceptions of African American women because rap artists appear to target this cultural group via both lyrics and scantily clad stereotypical visual depictions in music videos. Sexualization has an impact on women's "space for action" (Coy, 2009, p. 372), aspirations, identities, and achievements by defining femininity and beauty according to narrow sexual characteristics.

Because of hip-hop's expansive status and the primary source of Black identity in hip-hop, Black women may mimic the sexist ideas represented in hip-hop to satisfy their need to belong to a culture, even though doing so may be unhealthy (Rose, 2008). Although scholars have critically analyzed the content of rap music, none has quantitatively analyzed the targets of the music—African American women (Dixon et al., 2009). There have also been no investigations of the relationship between racial identities

and roles among African American women and female adolescents (Buckley & Carter, 2005). The problem is the extent to which this hypersexualization and these degrading lyrics have harmed African American women is not fully known.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the relationships among psychosocial indicators (self-esteem, cultural identity, and body image) that affect the emotional development and mental health of African American female college students and time spent viewing and listening to hypersexualized rap imagery. Despite recent studies that suggest a link between rap videos and risky behaviors such as binge drinking, marijuana use, and multiple sexual partners, there is a need for more studies that target identity and self-esteem (Hunter, 2011). The influence of media on women's sense of self is problematic in all cultures. However, this study focused on African American female college students, due to a need to understand the psychological effects of hip-hop genre in regards to race and gender exploitation among this population (Henry et al., 2010).

### Theoretical Framework

This research study is grounded in cultivation theory and objectification theory. These theoretical orientations were selected due to the impact of the media on individuals and the suggestion that stereotyping is very much a part of the programming experience that affects society on a micro and macro level. Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) objectification theory is valuable in identifying how repeated sexual visual images in the media can consequentially affect individuals' mental health status and condition and socialize society. Cultivation Theory, developed by Professor George Gerbner, proposes that excessive viewing equates to long-term effects that present in a gradual, minute, however, indirect and cumulative manner. Essentially, television shapes and 'cultivate' the viewers sense of reality. Ultimately, violence, sexuality, and body image distortions are pervasive health effects that have been associated with excessive television viewing (Hammermeister, Brock, & Winterstein, 2005). The two pathways that contribute to disproportionate gender mental health problems are overt (direct) and subtle (indirect).

The objectification theory has become a respected perspective within the feminist and counseling psychology community. The objectification theory is also in alignment with multicultural feminist and social justice

missions in counseling psychology (Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011). This encourages psychologists and other mental health professionals to examine and understand how contextual factors can influence women's well being. Some of the psychosocial consequences include increased self-consciousness, increased body anxiety, disordered eating, and body shame. This theory has been used to explore various dependent variables such as the above psychosocial consequences and stereotype formation, sexual perception, and sexual typing. These theories are applicable to the current study due to the ways in which media shape thought and perception regardless of critical images and/or the extent in which the viewer relates to the character, high exposure of media content, and direct or indirect manifestations of exposure to sexually objectified female images.

### *Significance of the Study*

This study is significant because findings derived from it will fill a gap in the literature by initiating dialogue and understanding of an overlooked and vulnerable group in society. The intent of this study is to identify the impact of hypersexualized rap imagery and content on the self-worth and self-acceptance of African American female college students. Through knowledge and understanding of the problem, interventions can be implemented to prevent and combat societal influences that harm individual and group growth.

## **Methods**

### *Research Design*

A descriptive, correlational research design was used in this quantitative study. Survey instruments and a demographic questionnaire were administered to a sample of African American women. Data obtained from these instruments were subjected to statistical treatment to identify relationships among self-esteem, cultural identity, body image, perceptions and attitudes toward rap, and frequency of exposure to hypersexualized rap imagery. The Statistical Package for Social Services Software (SPSS version 20) was used for data analysis and descriptive statistics.

### *Selection of Subjects*

The target population was African American female college students who attended the Chicago State University. The public Midwestern university is

located in a predominately African American community, with more than 4,600 students. The ethnic composition of the university is 78% African American, 7% Hispanic, 7% White, 71% female, and 29% male. The criteria for inclusion in the study were (a) self-identification as African American, (b) female, and (c) enrollment as an undergraduate or graduate student at the university. Professors were sent a recruitment email and asked to share the online survey link to students. As an incentive to participate, students could enter in a drawing for a \$50 gift card. Entries were submitted separately from the survey to maintain anonymity.

### Instrumentation

*Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)*. The RSES is a 10-item Likert-type instrument used to measure the individual's self-worth (Rosenberg, 1989). The 10 items are answered on a 4-point scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. The scale ranges from 0–30, with 30 indicating the highest score possible. The RSES typically exhibits high reliability. Test-retest correlations are usually in the range of .82 to .88, and Cronbach's alphas for different samples are in the range of .77 to .88 (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1993; Rosenberg, 1986). Studies have exhibited a unidimensional and a two-factor (self-confidence and self-deprecation) configuration to the scale. The Rosenberg self-esteem scale is perhaps the most widely used self-esteem measure in social science research. Numerous studies have confirmed the validity and reliability of the instrument.

*Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)* was designed for research with adolescents and young adults regardless of ethnic subscription (Phinney, 1992) and is one of the most popular and frequently used measures in multicultural research (Ponterotto, Gretchen, Utsey, Stracuzzi, & Saya, 2003). The MEIM is grounded in Erikson's theories of identity formation (Phinney, 1992) and has been used in numerous studies, consistently demonstrating high reliability with alphas typically above .80 across a wide range of ethnic groups and ages. The instrument measures two factors, ethnic identity search (a developmental and cognitive component) and affirmation, belonging, and commitment (an affective component). For the purposes of the current study, only ethnic identity search was used in the analysis. Measures of internal consistency (coefficient alpha) were demonstrated in studies involving four high school and six college samples. Across these developmental groups, alphas were similar. Alphas for ethnic identity search range from .81 to .92, with a mean of .86 (Ponterot-

to et al., 2003). Factor analysis and convergence with measures of parallel constructs are two methods for examining validity. Two exploratory factor analyses have been published as of early 2012, which found that the Ethnic Identity (EI) and Other Group Orientation (OGO) scales are relatively independent due to low intercorrelations of  $-.08$ ,  $-.13$ , and  $.19$ , respectively, across three samples (Ponterotto et al., 2003).

*Body-Image Ideals Questionnaire (BIQ)* is based on if individuals' beliefs of their physical attributes align with physical ideals and the importance of attaining the ideals (Cash & Szymanski, 1995). The initial BIQ included 10 physical characteristics: height, skin complexion, hair texture and thickness, facial features, muscle tone and definition, body proportions, weight, chest/breast size, physical strength, and physical coordination. The revised 22 item BIQ version included an item termed overall physical appearance (Cash & Szymanski, 1995). Participants are asked to think about how they are and desire to be. Part A allows participants to rate the degree to which they match their personal physical ideal on a 4-point response scale from 0 (exactly as I am), 1 (almost as I am), 2 (fairly unlike me), to 3 (very unlike me). Part B asks the participants to rate how important it is that they represent each physical ideal from 0 (not important), 1 (somewhat important), 2 (moderately important), to 3 (very important). To date, all studies have included college samples, which echo diversity in demographics (Cash & Fleming, 2000). The BIQ has good internal consistency for men and women. Cash and Fleming (2000) found the BIQ to be associated with the other assessments such as the Situational Inventory of Body Image Dysphoria (.58) and the Appearance Schemas Inventory (.46) for 136 women. The BIQ has significant correlations with public self-consciousness (.34) and perfectionism (.28) among 284 college women. Further analysis confirmed significant associations of the BIQ with psychosocial functioning-social evaluative anxiety (.43), depression (.47), and eating disturbance.

*Rap Music Attitude and Perception Scale (RAP)* is based on a review of more than 65 conceptual and empirical articles with varying attitudes and perceptions regarding rap. Tyson (2005) identified 110 constructs of rap music as possible items for the RAP. A content analysis reduced the assessment to a 26-item measurement. This measurement was instrumental to this study in identifying the African American college females' identification, if any, regarding any associations of rap with empowerment and misogynistic behavior, and if they consider this art form artistic/esthetic. A 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5



= *strongly agree*) was used to measure their perceptions. Higher scores on the total scale and its three subscales indicate more positive attitudes and perceptions about rap music (Tyson, 2005). Tyson (2005) reported good internal consistency of the RAP. The internal consistency of the full RAP scale was .90. The reliability values obtained for the artistic/esthetic scale were .84; violence/misogyny was .86, and empowerment was .88. The criterion validity analyses were established by producing coefficients for the RAP and its three subscales. The higher scores on the measurement were positively correlated with the time spent listening to rap and the RAP was moderately associated with the participant's ownership of rap music and correlated to whether it was favored. The results indicate that the RAP scale had good criterion validity and suggests good criterion validity for the subscales (Tyson, 2005).

#### *Additional Questions*

Respondents were asked to give their age and year in college. They were asked questions to determine the amount of time spent listening to rap music and watching rap videos in order to obtain the frequency of exposure to hypersexualized imagery.

## **Results**

#### *Description of the Sample*

Data were collected from 112 females through surveys built with the online software and website Survey Monkey. Seven respondents did not respond to enough items to score some of the scales and were removed from the data analyses. The remaining 105 cases were used in the analyses of the research questions. The ages of these respondents ranged from 18 to 57 and averaged 29.7 years ( $SD = 10.41$ ). Sixty percent of the women were upperclassmen (juniors and senior). More than 90% of the women identified themselves as Black or African American. The majority of the respondents identified their fathers (85%) and their mothers (89%) as Black (see Table 1). The ages of the respondents ranged from 18 to 55. An analysis was conducted to determine if differences existed between females aged 18 to 25 ( $n = 55$ ) and over 25 ( $n = 50$ ) on the seven variables of interest. No significant differences were found between the two groups of female college students.

The reliability estimates for the rap music attitude and perception questionnaire, self-esteem, and cultural identity scales were measured using

Table 1. Description of the Sample (n = 105)

Characteristics	n*	%
<b>Age</b>		
18–25	55	52.4
26–35	22	21.0
36–45	15	14.3
46–55	11	10.5
56–57	2	1.9
<b>Classification</b>		
Freshman	9	8.6
Sophomore	17	16.2
Junior	33	31.4
Senior	30	28.6
Graduate	16	15.2
<b>Ethnicity of respondents</b>		
Asian	0	0.0
Black	96	91.4
Hispanic	5	4.8
White	0	0.0
American Indian	1	1.0
Mixed	3	2.9

\* Participants did not respond to all items

Cronbach's alpha coefficient (see Table 2). With one exception, the values obtained in the current study were slightly lower than alpha coefficients reported in other studies. However, the values obtained were above 0.70, an acceptable reliability coefficient (Nunnally, 1978).

#### *Description of the Variables*

Table 3 contains the range, mean, and standard deviation of each variable. The variables were examined for normality. Skew and kurtosis values were within acceptable norms and 105 cases were examined for multicollinearity and outliers. All data were found to meet the assumptions of both multivariate analysis of variance and standard regression analysis. The respondents were asked to indicate the amount of time they listened to or watched rap

Table 2. Reliability of Scales

Scale	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha coefficient in current study	Published alpha coefficients
Rap music attitude and perception			
Empowerment	12	0.84	0.84
Misogyny/Violence	9	0.80	0.86
Artistic/Esthetic	4	0.72	0.88
Rosenberg self-esteem scale	10	0.76	0.77–0.88
Cultural identity	5	0.78	0.81–0.92

music and/or videos. Four types of media across each day of the week were assessed (Table 4). By almost a 2 to 1 margin, cell phones were used more often to access rap music and/or videos than other media. The number of hours was then categorized into three groups (minimal, moderate, and excessive). Approximately the same percentage of respondents (40%) were minimally exposed or excessively exposed to hypersexualized imagery.

Table 3. Description of the Variables (n = 105)

Variable	Min	Max	M	SD
Frequency of exposure to hypersexualized imagery (hours per week)	0	126	38.21	43.89
Empowerment	13	60	38.87	8.46
Misogyny/Violence	9	38	19.35	5.96
Artistic/Esthetic	4	20	14.15	3.76
Self-esteem	15	30	25.80	4.03
Cultural identity	1	4	2.98	0.65
Body-image ideals	-3.00	5.55	0.74	1.64

Table 4. Frequency of Exposure to Hypersexualized Imagery by Type of Music Media

Type of Music Media Variable	Min	Max	M	SD
TV	0	84.00	8.04	12.55
Cell phone	0	84.92	18.46	26.73
I-pod or other MP-3 device	0	65.00	5.30	11.86
Computer	0	84.00	9.97	16.05
Total	0	126.00	38.21	43.89

Categories of Frequency of Exposure to Hypersexualized Imagery in Rap Music

Frequency Scale	n	%
None to minimal exposure (0–1 hour/day)	44	41.9
Moderate exposure (2–6 hours/day)	19	18.1
Excessive exposure (over 6 hours/day)	42	40.0

## Research Questions & Hypotheses Testing

### Research Question 1

Do differences exist in the self-esteem, cultural identity, and body image of African American female college students with different levels of exposure to hypersexualized imagery?

HO1: No differences exist in the self-esteem (as measured by the Rosenberg self-esteem scale) of African American female college students with different levels of exposure to hypersexualized imagery.

HO2: No differences exist in cultural identity (as measured by the multigroup ethnic identity scale of ethnic identity search) of African American female college students with different levels of exposure to hypersexualized imagery.

HO3: No differences exist in body image (as measured by a composite score of the body-image ideals questionnaire) of African American female college students with different levels of exposure to hypersexualized imagery.

The independent variable in Research Question 1 was levels of exposure to hypersexualized imagery. The dependent variables were self-esteem, cultural identity, and body image. Table 5 contains the means and standard deviations of the dependent variables by levels of exposure to hypersexualized imagery. A multivariate analysis of variance using Wilks' Lambda was not significant [ $F(6,200) = .38, p = .89$ ]. No differences existed in the self-esteem, cultural identity, and body image of African American female college students with different levels of exposure to hypersexualized imagery. The null hypotheses were not rejected.

Table 5. *Self-Esteem, Cultural Identity, and Body Image by Levels of Exposure*

Variable	Levels of rap music exposure					
	Minimal (n = 44)		Moderate (n = 19)		Excessive (n = 42)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Self-esteem	26.07	4.05	26.53	3.99	25.19	4.05
Cultural identity	2.96	0.73	3.09	0.66	2.94	0.56
Body-image ideals	0.67	1.73	0.57	1.11	0.88	1.75

#### Research Question 2

Does level of exposure to hypersexualized imagery mediate attitudes toward rap?

H01: The level of exposure to hypersexualized imagery does not affect African American female college students' attitudes toward rap music as measured by the empowerment subscale of the rap music attitude and perception questionnaire.

H02: The level of exposure to hypersexualized imagery does not affect African American female college students' attitudes toward rap music as measured by the violence/misogyny subscale of the rap music attitude and perception questionnaire.

H03: The level of exposure to hypersexualized imagery does not affect African American female college students' attitudes toward rap music as measured by the artistic/esthetic subscale of the rap music attitude and perception questionnaire.

The independent variable in Research Question 2 was levels of exposure to hypersexualized imagery. The dependent variables were the three subscales of the rap music attitude and perception questionnaire. Table 6 contains the means and standard deviations of the dependent variables by levels of exposure to hypersexualized imagery. A multivariate analysis of variance using Wilks' Lambda was significant [ $F(6,200) = .38, p = .005$ ]. The empowerment [ $F(2, 102) = 3.87, p = .02$ ] and artistic/esthetic [ $F(2, 102) = 4.53, p = .01$ ] subscales were statistically significant, indicating that the three groups were different on these two subscales of the rap music attitude and perception questionnaire. Post hoc analyses found statistically significant differences between minimal exposure to hypersexualized imagery ( $M = 36.32$ ) and excessive ( $M = 41.19$ ) exposure to hypersexualized imagery on responses to the empowerment subscale and between minimal exposure to hypersexualized imagery ( $M = 13.26$ ) and moderate exposure to hypersexualized imagery ( $M = 16.26$ ) on responses to the artistic/esthetic subscale.

These results indicated that, for this sample, respondents who had excessive levels of exposure to hypersexualized imagery had more positive empowerment scores than those with only minimal exposure. Those respondents with minimal exposure to hypersexualized imagery had less positive artistic/esthetic scores than those with moderate exposure. Therefore, Null Hypotheses 1 and 3 were rejected, while Null Hypothesis 2 was not rejected.

Table 6. Attitudes Toward Rap by Level of Exposure

Variable	Levels of rap music exposure					
	Minimal (n = 44)		Moderate (n = 19)		Excessive (n = 42)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Empowerment	36.32	8.31	39.67	8.33	41.19	8.11
Misogyny/ Violence	18.04	6.15	21.00	6.51	19.98	5.31
Artistic/ Esthetic	13.26	3.72	16.26	3.46	14.12	3.62

### Research Question 3

Which attitudes toward rap are best predictors of self-esteem, cultural identity, body image, and frequency of exposure?

H01: Self-esteem is not predicted by the empowerment, violence/ misogyny, or artistic/esthetic subscales of the rap music attitude and perception questionnaire.

H02: Cultural identity is not predicted by the empowerment, violence/ misogyny, or artistic/esthetic subscales of the rap music attitude and perception questionnaire.

H03: Body image is not predicted by the empowerment, violence/ misogyny, or artistic/esthetic subscales of the rap music attitude and perception questionnaire.

H04: Frequency of exposure to hypersexualized imagery is not predicted by the empowerment, violence/misogyny, or artistic/esthetic subscales of the rap music attitude and perception questionnaire.

The dependent variables in Research Question 3 were self-esteem, cultural identity, body image, and frequency of exposure to hypersexualized imagery. The predictor (independent) variables were empowerment, violence/ misogyny, and artistic/esthetic subscales of the rap music attitude and perception questionnaire. Four standard multiple regression analyses were conducted to determine if each of the dependent variables could be predicted by the three independent variables.

Self-esteem was regressed on the three independent variables. No significant model was obtained [ $F(3, 101) = 1.13, p = .34$ ]. No independent variables were statistically significant predictors of self-esteem. Cultural identity was regressed on the three independent variables. No significant model was obtained [ $F(3, 101) = .90, p = .45$ ]. No independent variables were statistically significant predictors of cultural identity. Body image was regressed on the three independent variables. A significant model was obtained [ $F(3, 101) = 2.77, p = .045$ ]. The violence/misogyny subscale of the rap music attitude and perception questionnaire was found to be a statistically significant predictor of body image ( $B = -.27, t = -2.73, p = .007$ ). Neither of the other two subscales was found to be a statistically significant predictor of body image. The negative beta value indicated that respondents with more positive violence/misogyny scores had lower self-ideal

with strong physical ideals. However, the amount of variance of body image determined by the three scales was small ( $R^2 = .08$ ).

Frequency of exposure to hypersexualized imagery was regressed on the three independent variables. A significant model was obtained [ $F(3, 101) = 3.77, p = .013$ ]. The empowerment subscale of the rap music attitude and perception questionnaire was found to be a statistically significant predictor of frequency of exposure to hypersexualized imagery ( $B = .37, t = 3.24, p = .002$ ). Neither of the other two subscales was found to be a statistically significant predictor of frequency of exposure to hypersexualized imagery. The positive beta value indicated that respondents with more positive empowerment scores had higher frequencies of exposure to hypersexualized imagery. However, the amount of variance of frequency of exposure to hypersexualized imagery determined by the three scales was small ( $R^2 = .10$ ).

Null Hypotheses 1 and 2 were not rejected, while Null Hypotheses 3 and 4 were rejected. Self-esteem and cultural identity was not predicted by the subscales of the rap music attitude and perception questionnaire. Body image and frequency of exposure to hypersexualized imagery were predicted by one or more of the subscales of the rap music attitude and perception questionnaire.

### Discussion

The responses from a sample of 105 women found that by virtually a 2 to 1 margin, cell phones were the device of choice to access rap music videos. In addition, approximately 40% of the respondents accessed rap music 1 hour or less a day, while another 40% were exposed to the hypersexualized imagery of rap music more than 6 hours per day. No differences were found in the psychosocial indicators of self-esteem, cultural identity, and body image across the various level of exposure to hypersexualized rap imagery.

Peterson et al. (2007) examined if the perceptions regarding sexual stereotypes in rap music videos were associated with unfavorable health aftereffects and concluded that adolescents who perceived more portrayals of sexual stereotypes in rap videos had an increased probability of binge drinking. In contrast, the results of the current study appeared to indicate no differences of psychosocial indicators with exposure to rap imagery. Similar to the current study, Hammermeister, Brock, Winterstein, and Page (2005) assessed the frequency of television watching to determine if individuals who viewed television less than 2 hour per day displayed a more positive psychosocial profile than frequent viewers did (over 2 hours per



day). However, contrary to the findings of the current study, Hammermeister et al. found that differences in depression, hopelessness, self-esteem, and weight satisfaction were found for females.

The violence/misogyny subscale was found to be a statistically significant predictor of body image. Participants with more positive violence/misogyny scores exhibited lower self-ideal (a perception of how one should behave based on individual standards). According to objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), females in American culture adopt an observer's perspective in regards to self, which ultimately results in self-objectification. This phenomenon decreases a female's cognitive space for action and increases self-consciousness and a concern with her physical appearance. In relation to the current study, objectification theory, which places women's bodies in a sociocultural context, would substantiate the outcome that participants with more positive violence/ misogyny scores exhibited lower self-ideal with strong concern with physical ideals, body monitoring, and diminished awareness of internal bodily states.

The empowerment subscale was found to be a statistically significant predictor of frequency of exposure to hypersexualized imagery. Participants with more positive empowerment scores experienced higher frequencies of exposure to hypersexualized imagery. Other previous research further suggests that rap content promotes negative behaviors, while containing community empowerment themes (Conrad et al., 2009). Zillman et al. (1995) stated that rap could be used as a tool to combat oppression in society. Kubrin (2006) concluded that 68% of gangsta rap lyrics reiterate the idea of respect and this concept is suggested just as often as violence. Obviously, these concepts conflict with community building and expressions of African American culture. Iwamoto, Creswell, and Caldwell (2007) examined how rap affected diverse college students and concluded that rap music elicited powerful emotions and important meanings across ethnic groups. The avid fans appeared to exhibit a greater sense of pride and self-concept.

No differences in psychosocial indicators (self-esteem, cultural identity, and body image) were found across different levels of exposure to rap. The female respondents' strong perceptions of rap's violence/misogyny appeared to lower self-ideal, accompanied with strong physical ideals. While outcomes concerning increased sexual partners, violence, and aggressive behavior have been linked to the exposure to rap imagery, contradictions and inconsistencies exist as well due to conflictual glorification of violence

yet with an endorsement of respect. Although the female participants in the study agreed that rap is misogynistic and violent, 40% view and/or listen to this type of music and believe that it promotes empowerment. The females' conclusion could certainly be due to loyal race markers that protect the cultural group even to the detriment of the female.

### Implications

Studies consistently label the behaviors exhibited in rap imagery visuals and lyrics as destructive misogynistic behaviors. In relation to this study, sexualization in media influences and constrains conclusively females' space for action. Women of all ages are exposed to music that is laden with sexual connotations and messages that vie to define Black womanhood. The American Psychological Association (2007) linked sexualization to lack of self-esteem, depression, and degree of body dissatisfaction. Considering the findings from this study, counselors can expect that many college women will be exposed willingly or extraneously to hypersexualized rap. Counselors must exude cultural sensitivity, comfort in topic, and understand the ramifications of stereotypes and objectification surrounding its debilitating effects of devastating the psyche and confusing identity development in African American women. It is imperative to implement preventive measures to resist negative internalizations and self-perpetuation of objectification as well as interventions to combat potentially negative outcomes from exposure to hypersexualized programming.

The implications for professional counselors and counselor educators, particularly on college campuses are many. Culturally responsive counselors should encourage exploration of thoughts, feelings, concerns, and perceptions surrounding identity and beauty standards, as well as stereotypes and roles regarding African American women in media without delegitimizing students' perceptions. It is important to educate college women regarding media's role in society; the ability to interpret the media and decode sexist, hypersexualized stereotypes; gender equality; history of African American women's portrayal in media; and the effects of exposure to hypersexualized content (objectification).

Through a collaboration between the film/media, counseling, and women's studies, colleges should consider hosting workshops to educate the student body regarding the effects of media on African American females' ability to define self and make educated, consistent decisions that ultimately affect their *call to action* regarding personal and collective growth. It

is recommended that counselors use group therapy, a productive modality that allows individuals to exchange with cohorts from various age groups historical experiences to process their individual and collective experience as women regarding identity, definitions of beauty, societal portrayals, cultural expectations, and coping/thriving skills.

#### *Limitations*

Data were collected from more than 100 African American college female students on one predominately-Black university campus; thus, the ability to generalize the study's findings to other populations of African American college females may be limited. The information provided by the women in the study was collected using self-report measures. Self-report measures are a necessary tool for behavioral research; however, many problems associated with self-reported measures might affect the validity of the conclusions drawn in the study. The frequency of exposure to hypersexualized rap imagery was collected using self-reported minutes and hours of listening or viewing across seven days of the week. That method may have skewed the results for those women who listen to a lot of music, but were not accurate in their report of the actual number of hours of listening and view during the week.

#### *Recommendations*

Although misogyny has particularly targeted African American females as historical institutionalized stereotypes were used to justify the degradation and treatment, few studies have been conducted on this phenomenon. The results of this study may help to expand the body of knowledge that addresses the impact of frequency regarding viewership of hypersexualized rap imagery on the psychosocial indicators (self-esteem, cultural identity, and body image) of African American female college students. Rap/hip hop is a constantly evolving culture that should be studied on multidimensional levels to ascertain the influence of this culture on individuals' life domains.

Future studies should examine how men experience and interpret hypersexualized rap imagery. Other ethnicities, such as Africans, Native Americans, and Arab Americans, are also viewing hypersexualized content; however, limited studies have focused on the psychosocial indicators of these groups' in relation to viewership.

Although older women had higher levels of self-esteem, cultural identity, and appreciation for art than women under the age of 25 did, these dif-

ferences were not statistically significant. Future studies with larger sample sizes should further explore whether age may serve as a protector factor against the negative messages found in music.

As an expansion of the current line of research, the researcher will consider conducting a phenomenological study that allows for a more individualized account of participants' perceptions of their experiences. In addition, the drench hypothesis (Bahk, 2001), which suggests that excessive television viewing as well as exposure to intense specific cultural portrayals influence acceptance of portrayals and leave strong viewer impressions, may be a theory to consider when explaining the results of studies such as the current one.

## Conclusion

As earlier studies have indicated, exposure to hypersexualized rap imagery could have a negative impact on the health of African American females. The idea of race gender bashing is a not a new concept, just different in modern day delivery. Ultimately, *gendered racism* suggests that African American women experience simultaneous oppression due to being both Black and female (Thomas et al., 2004). It is imperative that mental health professionals and researchers assess the developmental needs of African Americans, educate this targeted population about the impact of media and damaging stereotypical messages, and design strategies to combat objectification and development of self-defining skills.

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