Sticks and stones may break my bones but rap can never hurt me: McLyte's Portrayal of African-american images of women in the hip hop culture

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ABSTRACT

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STICKS AND STONES MAY BREAK MY BONES BUT RAP CAN NEVER HURT ME: MC Lyte’s portrayal of African-American images of women in the Hip Hop culture

Advisor: Dr. Daniel Black

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This thesis examines the definition and redefinition of women’s images through the music of MC Lyte. My research demonstrates how MC Lyte has emerged from the male-dominated Hip Hop demoralization of women and how MC Lyte uses her music and media to empower young females. This thesis explores the history of Hip Hop and culture, and how MC Lyte has evolved and changed the way women are seen in Hip Hop.

The objective of this thesis is to examine MC Lyte and how her music evolved and empowered females in Hip Hop music. This research uses scholarly works of Clenora Hudson Weems (1993), African Womanist, Gwendolyn Pough’s (2004) Check it While I Wreck It, as well as the input of Tricia Rose’s (1994) Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America. These scholarly works, not only delve into the Hip Hop world, but also the issues that plague women, feminism, and the African-American movement. This thesis analyzes lyrics from MC Lyte as a tool to clearly see the struggles and progressions that women have endured within the Hip Hop culture.
It is the intent of the researcher to show how black womanhood has been defined and redefined as it emerges in black Hip Hop music and to appreciate the unity of the black female voice through the music of MC Lyte. This paper shows positive and negative attributes of black women in Hip Hop and how they responded to these attributes. This is important because it expresses how the female artists have found a way to communicate their feeling in regards to how they are viewed by larger society, and its affects. They have chosen to identify themselves with and by their music.
STICKS AND STONES MAY BREAK MY BONES BUT RAP CAN NEVER HURT
ME: MC LYTE’S PORTRAYAL OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN IMAGES OF
WOMEN IN THE HIP HOP CULTURE

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY

SIVI KENYATTA BOBBITT

DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

GOD: “I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me!”

To Mr. Joe R. Bobbitt, my father, who passed on during this process and will not be able to share this experience with me: I finally finished Daddy! Woo Hoo!!

Thank you mother, Mrs. Geraldine Bobbitt, who continuously supported and pushed me through this challenging process, even when I wanted to throw in the towel, then burn it!

MC Lyte: You are a true inspiration to me. The accomplishments you continue to make for women in Hip Hop have yet to come to fruition. I am humbled by you, and thankful that you took time to speak with me. You are truly the Best Female MC!

DJ Spinderella: Thank you so much for taking the time out of your hectic schedule to speak with me and allow me to publish your opinions in my thesis. You have clearly been instrumental in changing the way women are seen in Hip Hop.

DJ MonaLisa: You got me the interview with DJ Spinderella; thank you so much!

Mr. Ken Uhlig: Although we have gone separate ways, your flexibility as my supervisor allowed me to grow my education. Thank you for understanding and supporting me. My sincere thanks are extended to Dr. Daniel Black, Chair of my Thesis Committee and Advisor, Dr. William Jelani Cobb, Thesis Committee Member and Advisor, and Dr. Josephine Bradley, Chair of the African American Studies Department and Advisor.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DJ       Disc Jockey
MC       Master of Ceremonies, Microphone Commander
Mic      Microphone
**DEFINITION OF TERMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baby Mama</td>
<td>A term used to define an unmarried young woman (but can be a woman of any age) who has had a child. Most of the time it is used for when it was simply a sexual relationship, compared to ex-wife or girlfriend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biggin Up</td>
<td>To give respect or to acknowledge someone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chickenhead</td>
<td>Usually a female, who likes to give oral sex. The word chickenhead comes from the movement that the female’s head makes while performing oral sex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diss</td>
<td>A shortened version of &quot;disrespect.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diva</td>
<td>Bitchy woman that must have her way exactly, or no way at all. Often rude and belittles people, believes that everyone is beneath her and thinks that she is so much more loved than what she really is—selfish, spoiled, and overly dramatic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dope</td>
<td>A word that describes something that is extremely cool, such as music, clothes, people, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emcee</td>
<td>Derived from the original abbreviation &quot;MC,&quot; now used as the generic term for anyone who speaks over a beat, or performs songs that could be termed &quot;Hip Hop.&quot; Afrika Bambaataa and his contemporaries at the Universal Zulu Nation were the first to exemplify this term. Originated as a term for the only individual at a party who could speak on the microphone while the DJ (Disk Jockey) was looping the hook or the beat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freestyle</td>
<td>The music first developed in the early 1980s primarily in major cities like the New York, Philadelphia, and New Jersey area of the Eastern United States of America. It was a fusion of 1970s disco and 1980s breakdancing music, influenced also by sampling found in Hip Hop.</td>
</tr>
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Gangsta Bitch  A female with a reputation for violence and crime. Generally a gay female in nature but not limited to that variety. This type of female tends to have an extremely foul and vulgar mouth, and flips the "Bird" in almost every photograph taken. Her idea of fun is taking her son shopping for a Gun.

Gangsta Rap  Glorifies rape, murder, women as sex objects, guns, etc.

Gear       Any type of clothing that you wear.

Hip Hop    A name for the four elements of the late 1970s New York City renaissance which includes break dancing, emceeing, (rapping) graffiti, and turntablism.

Ho         A whore. A woman who uses her body, or gives the impression that a man can be intimate with her, for material gain or to boost her own ego.

Indie      In terms of music it would be independent of major labels/mainstream.

MC         Short for master of ceremonies or mic controller. Essentially a word for a rapper but the term is not limited to Hip Hop. Drum and Bass, Garage, Happy Hardcore, Ragga and old school rave all feature MCs; however with these genres, the MC generally MCs live while a DJ mixes the tunes, whereas Hip Hop MCs mainly do so while recording a song.

Mic        An abbreviated term for the word microphone.

Skeezers   An immoral woman with no pride; one who engages in humiliating and degrading sexual acts for little or no gratitude or reward.

Skills     Someone who is prolific in a field of sports or everyday life. One who is very good at what they do.

Urban      City-like. From the Latin word "urbs," which means "city."
Wreck  To really beat someone physically or verbally; to hand it to them. When used as an adjective ('wrecked') it becomes a word to describe how messed up someone was because of a physical or verbal beating, or sometimes because of substance abuse

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the cultural impact of MC Lyte in defining and/or redefining images of black women in Hip Hop music. MC Lyte is a woman who has been able to sustain her popularity within the Hip Hop community since her appearance in the late 1980s. She is well-respected as a pioneer and continues to be a visible force within Hip Hop as it constantly evolves into a worldwide phenomenon.

In order to examine how MC Lyte has impacted Hip Hop culture, one must first define culture. Diana Kendall offers in Sociology in our Times: The Essentials that culture is "the knowledge, language, values, customs, and material objects that are passed from person to person and from one generation to the next in a human group or sociology" (Kendall 2000, 48). When examining culture, it is necessary to understand all components and how they interrelate within the context of Hip Hop music. There are five different components of culture: symbols, language, values, norms, and material possessions. Kendall defines a symbol as anything that meaningfully represents something else. Language is defined as a set of symbols that expresses ideas and enables people to think and communicate with one another. Values are collective ideas about what is right or wrong, good or bad, and desirable or undesirable in a particular culture. Norms are established rules of behavior or standards of conduct (Kendall 2000).
In order to establish how MC Lyte has impacted Hip Hop culture, it is first necessary to note that the values ascribed to the Hip Hop culture stand as a repudiation of core American values. According to the Organization for American Core Values (2005), the American core values are truth, honesty, equality, patriotism, respect, responsibility. It appears that these American core values are broad enough to encompass every culture; unfortunately, cultures that differ from the dominant society feel the need to further define their values. Within the African-American community, the core values mirror the struggle and lifestyle of this community. According to research done by California State University at Berkeley, African-American values are defined as, sharing, expressing personal style, being real and genuine, being assertive, expressing feelings, bouncing back, and distrust of the mainstream establishment.

The Hip Hop community epitomizes African-American core values within its culture and music. Hip Hop culture or specifically rap music comes from the urban streets and was initially used as a tool to communicate and resolve differences within the community. Rap has not always been an avenue through which blacks are sometimes degraded. When it was created in the mid-to-late 1970s, it was meant to divert children’s attention away from drugs and gang violence and toward something more meaningful (Khaleel 2004). Rap was a voice for the urban poor, oppressed, and racially profiled. Raps’ roots are based on a foundation that its lyrics would bring forth something positive. The misapprehension of rap music and its purpose are often a result of the language used in this music. This could be because of the unique differences between black vernacular or Ebonics and what most consider as Standard English.
The black vernacular used in Hip Hop culture is of major importance because it is used to define the images of women portrayed within the Hip Hop community. Two of these images, the mammy and the Jezebel, are frequently seen throughout Hip Hop culture. According to Patricia Hill Collins’ (1990) *Black Feminist Thought*, black women have been assaulted from enslavement to the present with a variety of negative societal images: mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and Jezebels. These controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, and poverty appear to be natural, normal, and an inevitable part of everyday life. Maintaining these images of black women and defining them as the “less than desirable” in society provides ideological justification for race, gender, and class oppression that is often glamorized in rap music. The alleged emotional, passionate nature of black women has long been used to justify black women’s sexual exploitation. Although these negative images existed long before rap music was created, they are products of enslavement and have been passed from generation to generation through several methods.

According to Patricia Hill Collins (1990), the Jezebel, also defined as the sexually aggressive woman, is the central nexus of the upper echelon and continues to negate and demoralize images of black women. These stereotypes constitute an effort to control black women’s sexuality, which lies at the heart of the oppression of black women. Mammy, on the other hand, is in complete opposition to Jezebel. She is seen as a somewhat positive figure, but is an asexual individual. These preconceived definitions of Jezebel and mammy are the images that MC Lyte has chosen to redefine in her music. The images of black women in rap have changed as time has progressed. When women
first took the microphone, they resembled their male counterparts; baggy jeans, t-shirts, chunky gold chains. Ladies grew tired of being objectified in rap lyrics and the similarities in appearance ended as women brought new messages to the world in response to the sexism that existed in commercial rap music by males (Durrett 2004).

The rationale of this thesis is to determine how the images and lyrics in MC Lyte’s body of work have impacted Hip Hop culture and how her interpretation of rap music has been used as a tool to empower women. The definitions of women’s images that MC Lyte seeks to redefine date back to enslavement and have been assigned to women of color throughout the evolution of African-American music. Indeed, the challenges that MC Lyte faced when she entered the rap industry are not new. Obstacles that women face have been in existence and can be referenced as far back as 1826, according to Eileen Southern’s (1997) text, The Music of Black Americans. Southern notes that even in 1826, women vocalists have made attempts to redefine these images.

There is clearly a separation in how female musicians are critiqued and it is based on their image, music style, and, in some cases, personal choices. Musicians such as Nina Simone and Mahalia Jackson would be associated with Patricia Hill Collins’ definition of the mammy, while artists such as Bessie Smith, Etta James, Dinah Washington, Billie Holiday, and Aretha Franklin would be ascribed to the image of the Jezebel. Mahalia Jackson is revered more than any other single person as the woman who brought gospel to the attention of the world and established many milestones in its history and is affectionately known as the Queen of Gospel. She married, but eventually
divorced because of the pressures from her husband and their conflict with her swearing not to sing secular music.

In complete opposition of the aforementioned examples of the mammy image, several female artists have characteristics ascribed to the Jezebel image. One of the most famous singers of this musical movement is Bessie Smith also known as the “Empress of the Blues.” The list of women who lent their voices to grow this new music is astounding, long, and regal titles were given to all of them. Bessie Smith was also put under the microscope for her personal choices. She was openly bi-sexual which caused a separation between her and her husband Jack Gee. She was also one of the first popular female singers to allude to a woman’s desire for sexual gratification in her music (Alexander 1999).

The preconceived molds and images that have labeled these female artists come from a predominantly male establishment and, as noted in this research, do not begin with rap music. However, women in music, specifically within the Hip Hop culture represent more than Jezebels and mammies. The rap industry, like that of many other genres, is male-dominated. The result is that these women are confined in an image that these people of power have created for them. As rap music evolved and became more popular, the 1990s showed a trend of women as targets of male rap lyrics and generally not portrayed in a favorable light. Those in power also felt that women’s voices could not supply the requisite loudness and abrasion they felt was a major feature of rap music. Commercial success of rap is built on generalizations of negative images. For most black women rappers to be successful, they have to conform in some ways to these negative
images. When women first took the microphone, they made a point to rap about subjects that their male listeners could identify with and they also physically dressed the part. As rap music evolved it became chronicles of events that women rappers may have experienced directly or indirectly. There were opportunities to discuss issues and topics that would normally be considered politically incorrect in today’s society. These songs helped their listeners gain insight into how young African-American women provide for themselves a relatively safe free play zone where they creatively addressed questions of sexual power, the reality of truncated economic opportunity, and the pain of racism and sexism (Rose 1994). Women rappers addressed issues pertinent to women such as domestic violence, dominant notions of femininity, and black women’s sexuality. They used their performances to refute, deconstruct, and reconstruct alternate visions of their identity (McNair 2003).

Black women rappers such as MC Lyte work within and against dominant sexual and racial narratives in American culture. They interpret and articulate the fears, pleasures, and promises of young black women whose voices have been relegated to the margins of public discourse. These resistant voices in rap music have sustained an ongoing dialogue with their audiences as well as male rappers about sexual promiscuity, emotional commitment, infidelity, the drug trade, racial politics, and black cultural history. Works by women rappers that place black women’s bodies in the spotlight have a similarly contradictory effect; they affirm black women’s beauty while preserving the logic of objectification (Rose 1994).
Rap music is currently becoming a scapegoat for society’s failings which is clearly seen in existing research and texts. Most of the research currently being done by black feminists and feminists on rap focuses on the sexism and misogyny while work showing women rappers doing reconstructive work is curiously sparse. There is a noticeable gap in existing research in terms of women’s perspective and place in Hip Hop. Artists such as MC Lyte do not dwell on their sexual prowess or cast themselves at the center of violent escapades. They are more likely to be sober observers commenting from the sidelines. Neither naïve nor self-effacing, they tear into the competition (Pareles 1989). The role of a woman rapper can be seen as a double-edged sword. In defining her role, there is an inconsistency with regard to women supporting black men rappers regardless if they denigrate or defend black women. This concern has been raised on numerous occasions particularly in the arenas that promote feminism and womanhood. MC Lyte is uncomfortable with being labeled a feminist and perceives feminism as relative to white women who appear to adopt an opposition to men and their views. She clearly expresses her frustrations with men, but does not want to be considered anti-black male.

Society must come to terms with the fact that young black women, along with the rest of the children of the millennium, “like it or not,” appear to be getting their life lessons from rap music. Voices like Roxanne Shante, MC Lyte, Queen Latifah, Salt n Pepa, are few and far between. The first step to re-defining the images and power of women in rap is recognizing the tremendous possibilities Hip Hop culture and rap music have to offer (Pough 2004). It is obvious that these women have stories to tell that are
not just about how much money they make/have or how many men they can get, but about their lives and experiences. Mainstream artists like MC Lyte have proven that women can take control of the images they put out, while creating their own image and becoming successful.

In Hip Hop’s infancy, women rappers were without a voice. A male presence was needed in order to speak and be heard. Women were controlled by others and could not define themselves. The few who tried were unsuccessful in rap, but were able to gain some notice albeit challenged, in other genres of media and music. Women endured an uphill battle for recognition in the rap industry because they did not fit the mold that was created for women in the rap genre. In order to succeed, most women artists came in through the back door, establishing credibility behind the scenes or they redirected their talents in other arenas such as writing and producing where they were less likely to be ignored. Once their talent was noted and respect gained from their male peers, they were able to bring themselves into the forefront. In most cases, these women were seen as entertainers, not specifically as rap artists.

The significance of this research is that it forces scholars and Americans, in general, to wrestle with a nonacademic soldier who fights diligently against current images of women portrayed in Hip Hop and who has sacrificed greatly to define or redefine images of women in Hip Hop culture. This perspective is sorely needed and long overdue. No other art form impacts black youth like Hip Hop; consequently, this study will help readers understand that the impact of Hip Hop is not always negative.
Indeed, in the case of MC Lyte, the researcher argues that the impact is instructive and transformative.

**Conceptual Framework**

This research is guided by a Hip Hop Womanist perspective based on Clenora Hudson-Weems’ Africana Womanist theory. Weems defines Africana Womanism as a representation of the Africana Woman and her positive self-actualization. Therefore, she must properly name herself and her movement, Africana Womanism. This is a key step which many women of African descent have failed to address. Many force themselves to fit into molds that were not created for women of color. By renaming themselves Africana Womanists, they have taken the initiative to differentiate their struggle from the white woman’s struggle (Weems 1993).

Africana Womanism is the inherent notion that women of African descent and their experiences allow them to be set apart from other women of different cultures. Feminism has already proven that women in general are not treated as equals in American society. Weems (1993) builds on that by saying that women of African descent have two predetermined challenges they face, one, their gender and, two, the color of their skin. Weems believes these two predetermined facts have enabled this group of women to endure more hardships and have a perspective on life in American society separate and distinct from white women. Her theory differs from Patricia Hill Collins’ Black Feminist Theory because Weems believes that in order for a woman of African descent to prosper, the African man must prosper as well. Their struggle is combined and in some ways used as pawns against each other to weaken their
relationship and growth. If women embrace, support and encourage men of African
descent it will build a stronger relationship between them which will produce a stronger
black family.

Much like the women who subscribe to Hip Hop culture, the Africana woman has
a different attitude and approach to men in her world in comparison to white women or
those women who embrace the mainstream society. This presence assures her of their
joint struggle toward a common destiny free from oppression. Africana males have been
labeled as being unaccustomed to the privileges and advantages enjoyed by white males;
therefore, it is not necessary for the African female to see her man as her primary enemy
as do some of the white feminist groups. Since Africana men have never had the same
power to oppress the majority as white men have, Africana men are embraced warmly
from the Africana woman’s perspective. This perspective is skewed in Hip Hop music
by its portrayal of women’s images and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes. For
example:

When you really look at the stereotypes and deal with the substance of
what is being said, it is quite complimentary. What is being said about is,
that Black women are wonderful mothers and nurturers (mammies), that
we are sexually at home in our bodies (oversexed), and that we are self-
sufficient and tough (henpecking and overbearing). And isn’t that exactly
what every woman wants to be: Loving and nurturing, sexually at home
in her body, competent and strong? (Morrison 1989, 48)

Contrary to the white feminist’s need to be equal to men as human beings, black
women have always seen themselves as equal to their counterparts, in spite of some
Africana men’s attempts to subjugate them on some levels. During American slavery, for
example, some believe that Africana women were as harshly treated, physically and
mentally, as were their male counterparts, thereby challenging the alignment of Africana women and white women as equals in the struggle. Africana men and women have been equal partners in the struggle against oppression from early on. Thus, they could not afford the division based on gender. The chief role of the Africana women is to aid in bringing to fruition the liberation of the entire race. Unfortunately, the current direction of Hip Hop and its tendency to perpetuate women has created challenges that prohibit Africana women from successfully completing their role as strong and intelligent mothers, daughters, and sisters in the urban community.

The Hip Hop womanist has to present herself through the lyrics of her music as well as her image as a self-definer, who alone defines her reality. From a historical perspective, women of Hip Hop have always managed to make up for deficiencies by creating a separate, private reality for themselves and their family, regardless of the images defined by the commercialization of rap music.

The Hip Hop womanist is family-centered, and is more concerned with her entire Hip Hop culture rather than with just herself and her sisters and brothers. While the concern for the survival of this community, both personal and collective, are of utmost importance to the Hip Hop womanist, the mainstream feminist is self-centered or female-centered interested only in self-realization and personal gratification denying the potential to unify the Hip Hop community. The Hip Hop womanist does not have the luxury of focusing her efforts around the commodification of women in a society where the entire community is at stake. Until the entire Hip Hop community is free from victimization,
she is not free. Even if she does overcome the battle of sexism, she will still be left with the battle of racism facing her community, her family and herself (Weems 1993).

The Hip Hop womanist framework allows the lyrics of MC Lyte to be analyzed using the perspective of educating men and women of color. It examines the positive and negative realities that transpires in relationships within the Hip Hop community and encourages change for the betterment of the community in its entirety. It does not focus on women alone, but how to grow and strengthen the black family as a whole.

**Methodology**

Content analysis is the primary methodology employed in this study. Content analysis is defined as "A standard methodology in the social sciences for studying the content of communication. It is the study of recorded human communications, such as books, websites, paintings, and laws. Who says what, to whom, why, to what extent, and with what effect" (Babbie 1975). Ole Hosti uses a broader definition of content analysis as "Any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of message" (Holsti 1969). Content analysis allows the researcher to review the lyrics presented and formulate judgments, inferences, and opinions of what the author was trying to portray in the words and alliterations used. For the purposes of this research, the lyrics of MC Lyte were examined to determine how she constructed and/or reconstructed images of women in Hip Hop.

This research uses Ole Hosti’s basic communication paradigm to identify what images and messages are received from lyrics that talk about women’s definition of themselves. There are three basic categories that these assumptions can be grouped into:
• Make inferences about the antecedents of a communication
• Describe and make inferences about characteristics of communication
• Make inferences about the effects of a communication. (Holsti 1969)

The criterion for song selection was based on songs that focused on women’s perspective and experiences as the central theme. The research analyzed findings by looking at specific songs by MC Lyte in relationship to specified themes and messages to determine artist intent and if the intent was successful.

**Research Questions**

Research Question 1: In what ways does MC Lyte transform, define, or redefine images of women in Hip Hop?

Research Question 2: What has been the cost of such an endeavor?

**Organization of Chapters**

This chapter provides clarity on the purpose, rationale and significance of this research. In addition, it details the conceptual framework and methodology which guided the research. Chapter II presents the review of the literature related to this discussion of black women and Hip Hop and the relevance of Hip Hop for the black community. Chapter III is an overview of previous and existing challenges black women endure in the rap industry. This chapter also provides examples of female rap artists before and during the debut of MC Lyte who was able to redefine the images that existed. Chapter IV is the analysis and findings of the research that reveals if MC Lytes’ lyrics are a reflection of the elements of black feminism as defined in the conceptual framework. In addition, the chapter briefly discusses other female rap artists who have or have not embodied these
images through their lyrics. Conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter V.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the first scholarly articles to discuss misogyny and women’s images in rap music was written by bell hooks. A plausible explanation by bell hooks (1994) for the negative misnomers associated with rap suggests that rap music, the commercialization of it, as well as its marketing tactics are just reflections of the dominant white patriarchal society that moves it into mass production. In her 1994 article, *Sexism and Misogyny: Who Takes the Rap*, bell hooks reveals the direct link to the media marketing and the dominant society. She also notes how it places the blame on rap music for ideals that the dominant society embodies. The young African-American culture is “demonized” by highlighting gangsta rap proclaims bell hooks. She feels this negative attention is a contemporary remake of the critically acclaimed film “Birth of a Nation” because society is suggesting that gangsta rap is the vehicle that can destroy America.

According to bell hooks, there is no way to answer why rap music has been given the full responsibility for being the only artistic form that has perpetuated American misogyny. In order to answer this question one must look at the values of the men and women who produce gangsta rap by exploring how they seduce young black men who find that they can make more money producing lyrics that promote violence, sexism, and misogyny than with any other content. She then goes on to say that the negativity ascribed to gangsta rap is the product of anti-feminist backlash and the laborious
challenges that young black men endure to produce gangsta rap. This artistic form is used as a means for artists to express their repression and humiliation. They spew words on tracks that are considered too "taboo" for civilized young men to speak.

bell hooks makes some remarkable connections and is very thorough in her analysis of why gangsta rap has become the foundation for the negativity associated with African-American culture. What she does not do is give examples of rap lyrics that are associated with these negative connotations and show as a rebuttal that positive rap music exists.

In 1995, Beverly Guy-Sheftall published a text entitled *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. In this scholastic work, Guy-Sheftall takes on the challenging task of discussing three major topics that have taken on heated debate within the African-American community, one of them being rap music. Sheftall states that all three of the debated trends share two characteristics. They all contain an oppositional edge, which offers respite from the oppressive realities of daily life that is present in a hostile dominant culture. Each trend also presents a very male-centered definition of the problems confronting the black community and proposes pseudo solutions that further marginalize and denigrate black women (Sheftall 1995).

Although Sheftall feels that rap among other issues perpetuates the vilification of black women, she does recognize that there are women within the rap industry who have made it their mission to counteract these notions. Women rappers such as Queen Latifah, MC Lyte, and the all-women rap trio Salt n Pepa also speak in a different voice with regard to gender politics. Although these women have been reluctant to criticize fellow
rappers in public for fear that such criticism might fuel racist biases against the genre as a whole, they have created a counter discourse through their own music. Sheftall also notes, that there is truth in the notion that part of the attack on black musicians by censors of various brands reflects a racial double standard. This standard exempts rock groups and performers like Madonna or Motley Crue.

Michael Eric Dyson’s, *Between God and Gangsta Rap*, written in 1996, discusses the relationship of rap music and the major events in African-American culture. He separates his works into chapters dedicated to the “Joys and Concerns of Black Men’s Lives,” “Politics of an Identity,” and “the Songs of Celebration.” Dyson outlines the social aspects of Hip Hop culture and how it has affected the maturation of people of color. Dyson’s affinity for the Hip Hop culture is noted and evident in this text. The connections that Dyson makes between Hip Hop and the social movements of people of color are relevant. However, it is not a clear reflection of the lyrics that the Hip Hop culture uses as its vocal piece.

Nelson George’s 1998 text, *Hip Hop America*, is a historical analysis of the growth of Hip Hop music and culture. Nelson starts from its infancy at SugarHill Records to its current young adult status in commercial America. He provides the reader with a discussion of Hip Hop culture and music and illustrates Hip Hop’s dramatic changes and growth spurts. George’s summation of Hip Hop takes many turns and is an overall view of the chronological timeline of Hip Hop and what social events caused Hip Hop to make adaptations through its evolution.
George dedicates a chapter to showing the connection with mainstream supporters by drawing a "straight line" to Hip Hop sales. This connection shows that Caucasian teen audiences have been strong supporters of rap for nearly twenty years. The connection made between the rap audience and record sales is important because the media claims that rap is not supported by the dominant society and is not a credible genre of music.

*Hip Hop America* briefly touches on the lyrics of rap music in its chapter about Luther "Uncle Luke" Campbell of the group 2 Live Crew. George portrays this artist as a historian for his community and in some way defends Luke from allegations of promoting misogyny, violence, and degradation of women. George recalls his experience as a panel participant at Spelman College, a historically black women’s institution. He proposed questions to the attendees of Spelman College as well as young men from neighboring Morehouse College, an all-male historically black institution, regarding how they felt about the lyrics of artists such as 2 Live Crew. The response that George receives was in direct support of the ideal that these lyrics are alliterations of true events, while they may not be the norm, they still exist. Some of the Morehouse students from the Miami area informed George that Luke knows those girls, "He was just rapping about the freaks he knows in Liberty City!" As the Morehouse Men talked about Luke, the Ladies of Spelman spoke in Luke’s defense as well. They proclaimed that Luke was only talking about his personal experiences with these “skeezers,” and they validate everything he says in his music. They believed that there was nothing false or demeaning about his lyrics if what he was saying in his songs is a true representation of women he encountered. He discusses how the impact of women in rap is very minute and that he
does not see longevity in women artists. George’s inability to provide an in-depth
analysis of this phenomenon is where the text is lacking. He does show the significance
of women in rap and how their presence and messages contributed to its growth. His text
actually implies that they have no relevance in the Hip Hop community. One of George’s
comments in reference to the irrelevance of the female impact in Hip Hop is used as the
Pough takes George’s comment and builds a compelling argument on how women have
made positive, long-lasting changes in Hip Hop and who these women are.

One of the first full-length texts discussing the importance of Hip Hop in today’s
culture as well as the contributions that women made to the rap industry was written by
Tricia Rose in 1999. She entitled this work Black Noise. According to scholars, Tricia
Rose’s Black Noise is generally recognized as the first scholarly study of Hip Hop. Rose
examines three central themes that dominate the works of women’s rap: heterosexual
courtship, importance of the woman’s voice, and public displays of physical or sexual
freedom.

Rose (1999) states that black women rappers are in dialogue with one another,
with male rappers, with other popular musicians, with black women fans, and with Hip
Hop fans in general. Dialogism accommodates the tension among black men and women
as well as black women’s frustration regarding sexual oppression at the hands of black
men.

Rose looks specifically at women rappers, MC Lyte and Salt n Pepa who have
reputations for piercing raps that criticize men who manipulate and abuse women. Their
raps talk about men taking advantage of women, cheating on them, taking their money and leaving them for other unsuspecting women victims. Similar to women’s blues they are aggressive, offering witty warnings directed at men and at other women who might be seduced by them in the future.

She shows the co-relation between women rappers such as Queen Latifah, MC Lyte, Yoyo, and Salt n Pepa and their ability to form a dialogue with working-class black women and men, offering young black women a small, but potent culturally reflexive public space. They have carved out a woman-dominated space in which black women’s sexuality is openly expressed. They affirm black women working-class cultural signs and experiences that are rarely depicted in American popular culture.

In *Black Noise*, Rose (1999) gives a chronological and ancestral look at rap music. She shows how it spawns from Blues, and Rhythm and Blues and grew into its own genre. She also shows how this music is a reflection of a new generation who have grown and called themselves the Hip Hop culture. Rose does an excellent job of showing the value of rap music in today’s society and the importance of the Hip Hop culture. She also takes time to focus on the women pioneers in the rap industry and how their styles and contributions have evolved over the years. In essence, *Black Noise* is an outstanding example of the importance of the Hip Hop culture and its music.

Jon Caramanica’s article, *Pretty Thugs*, in the May 2000 issue of the *Boston Phoenix* pays homage to those few women artists who were able to prevail and be seen among the dense representation of men in the rap industry. He set the precedence by identifying MC Lyte as the most potent woman voice in rap, “Her lyrics were fierce and
carefully constructed, strong enough to challenge even premier male lyrics” (Caramanica 2000). Discussing her ability to rap about anything, sexually transmitted diseases, love, clothes, and would occasionally tear other MC’s into pieces. On par with her male counterparts, MC Lyte could lyrically explore a range of topics and did so in a manner that the guys would know not to challenge her.

The time of Lyte was also a time when Hip Hop was one nation. There was no coastal separation. After the 1990s began, so did separatism; there was now east versus west and north versus south, conscious versus gangsta, for example. Every aspect of rap was now in opposition the other. During this time, it was difficult for the female voice to be heard. Artists, such as Heather B and Boss made attempts but would be forgotten as soon as they were seen. Then the emergence of Lil Kim and Foxy Brown changed women’s voice in rap and women were not only being heard, but were now being seen.

In today’s rap industry a balance is needed in order to be a successful woman artist. Rap artists Eve and Rah Digga are propelling their sexual images into compelling rap careers. These ladies wear the latest fashions and give high energy performances, sometimes rapping in high heels while showing a little skin to get their listeners’ ears open. As lyricists, once they engage their audience with their appearance they can contain them with their music. This is considered a small sacrifice for a voice that needs to be heard.

In 2003, Beverly Guy-Sheftall in conjunction with Johnetta Betsch Cole wrote *Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women’s Equality in African-American Communities*. This text is a collection of thoughts, ideas, and statistical research that addresses the
misnomers and truths accompanied with rap music and the commercialization of the Hip Hop culture. This publication shows a different perspective than Guy-Sheftall’s (1995) previous publication *Words of Fire*. There is now an understanding that Rap music enables us to better understand the perspectives of America’s “disenfranchised youth,” even though it is not always a mirror of their everyday lives (Cole 2003). Cole and Guy-Sheftall also are able to draw the connection between rap and blues. Like rappers, male blues singers celebrate the sexual prowess of black men and blame Black women for their problems. Blues lyrics are blatantly raunchy and make references to the seductive nature of women. But usually the blues were not played in the presence of or listened to by children or even teens as it was considered primarily “grown folks” music (Cole 2003). This comment brings an interesting point that mirrors a lot of rappers claim that they are entertainers, not parents and they should not be held responsible for the morals, values, and rearing of the world’s children. It is the parent’s responsibility of the parents to protect their children from being exposed to anything they are not mature enough to ingest. Cole and Guy-Sheftall also discuss the major accomplishments of women within this genre of music in comparison to other genres. Despite the resistance, black women have made more advances in Hip Hop than white women in rock and roll and heavy metal. Women Hip Hop artists do create and perform songs with healthy messages. Unfortunately, these songs receive little to no airplay (Cole 2003).

In a section of his book, *Hip Hop America*, music critic Nelson George (1998) writes, “Hip Hop has produced no Bessie Smith, no Billie Holiday, and no Aretha Franklin” (Cole 2003, 184). This statement has concerned several women within Hip
Hop and clearly raised an eyebrow for author Gwendolyn Pough. Pough’s (2004) text, *Check It While I Wreck It*, as a journey to disprove this statement. Pough coins the term bringing “wreck” and shows how ladies of Hip Hop “wrecked the industry.”

Pough (2004) suggests that bringing wreck does not always change the world, but it is capable of making small and meaningful differences. Bringing wreck offers new possibilities for the potential of black women’s speech and action. Black women have had to develop and pass on to future generations of black women a form of verbal and nonverbal expression that combines politeness with assertiveness. It is necessary to assert oneself and make oneself visible. It is also necessary to maintain a degree of civility and politeness while being assertive. The challenge lies in channeling black women’s use of language toward meaningful change. Pough examines the contributions of Roxanne Shante, MC Lyte, Queen Latifah, Salt n Pepa, YoYo, Missy, and Eve and how the “wreck” they brought improved the woman’s position in Hip Hop and the public sphere.

Hip Hop is a representation of children who came of age in the 1970s, whose parents experienced the Black Power Movements and were daughters and sons of the Civil Rights Movement. The young ladies of Hip Hop were learning to walk and skip rope during Reaganomics, gangs, and crack. They got their first bras and went to Proms during Rodney King and Tawana Brawley, and the deaths of TuPac and B.I.G are the first encounters they have with the loss of an icon. They became of legal drinking age and discovered their sexual freedom as the world opened its arms to the Clinton Era and
the beginning of an existence with terrorism, now watching their children make attempts to emulate their predecessors.

Six specific women rappers added tremendously to the culture. Roxanne Shante, MC Lyte, Salt n Pepa, Queen Latifah, Missy Elliot, and Eve identify how black women have taken a stance, brought “wreck,” “dissed” another, educated others with their experiences in their music and show how they continue to do so. The researcher examines songs by these artists that spoke to the experiences of women of color coming of age in the Hip Hop era. These women wrote songs that have a moral to the story. They confirm that there is nothing wrong with making mistakes if there is something positive to learn from it. Their music showed listeners that women of color are sexual, are capable, prepared for a challenge, are constantly evolving and have no problem speaking up for themselves.

_Check It While Wreck It_ is a summation of how six well-renowned women rap artists have made their mark in the Hip Hop industry. Pough (2004) discusses the direct and indirect influence that Roxanne Shante, MC Lyte, Queen Latifah, Yo-Yo, Eve, and Missy have had on the Hip Hop culture, rap music, and women as a whole. She examines the chronological evolution of women in Hip Hop culture and how they were able to expand on what their predecessors began. She discusses the importance of women to be individuals and heard separately in the rap industry. She also discusses how women have always spoken for themselves and defended themselves against misogyny, and the growth spurts of the music industry. Pough’s text is an important piece of literature for the African-American community. She is one of the first to look solely at
the rap industry from a woman’s perspective and to solely look at the music of women rap artists. Until its publication this has not been done on any major scale.

In December 2004, the *Washington Post* published an article entitled, “Ladies Last: Once Atop the Scene, Female MC’s Are Singing the Blues,” by Teresa Wiltz. In this article Wiltz reflects back to the late 1980s when women in rap were a reflection of an Afrocentric diva, referencing Queen Latifah’s image in her music video for her song “Ladies First.” She discusses how women rappers like Roxanne Shante, MC Lyte, Yo-Yo, Salt n Pepa and Sister Souljah took their places. They were known throughout the industry because they represented what Hip Hop culture thought a woman MC should be. This attitude continued to evolve and, in 1999, Lauryn Hill, the first woman and first woman MC took home five Grammy’s. She then accelerates to 2004 when only one woman rapper was recognized at the Grammy awards, Remy Ma, and she is the lone woman in the rap group, The Terror Squad. In essence, Wiltz feels that after 30 years of loyalty Hip Hop has given women the boot.

She mentions that in the rare instances when one sees a woman rapper, she is portraying herself as a sexual object and discussing how much her love costs. Wiltz uses rappers Lil Kim and Trina as examples of these images. Wiltz says that women who embrace artists such as Lil Kim and Trina are women who love Hip Hop and are happy to see some representation in a male dominated genre of music.

In Wiltz’s interview with Hip Hop writer and former MTV co-host Toure says that the rap game is not built for women, but in the past, women still found a way to play. He then mentions Roxanne Shante and her entry to rap at the age of 14 with her hit
Roxanne’s Revenge, a dis record in response to Roxanne Roxanne by U.T.F.O. Mostly women MC’s who evolved were accepted because they were aligned with an established male camp. Wiltz references women rap artists, Queen Latifah, MC Lyte, Salt n Pepa and Eve as examples.

Wiltz notes that Jean Grae, a South African born and Brooklyn-bred rap artist is an example of how the larger industry responds to those who will not allow themselves to be molded into their commercial image. She has been referenced by Rolling Stone as “the best kept secret on the indie Hip Hop scene.” Regardless of her undeniable skills as a lyricist she has had several disappointments trying to negotiate with a major label. Grae now produces her own music and continues to negotiate with larger labels.

In her article, Wiltz sites a comment made by Aaron McGruder, creator of the comic strip The Boondocks: “Watching a woman rap tough is like watching a woman play basketball. It’s not sexually appealing in any way, and pop culture and rap culture is all about sex” (Wiltz 2004). His statement is an honest and true summation of what drives the revenue in the music industry, sex. Even artists known for their tomboy images have begun to soften their images more. Wiltz uses Eve as an example saying that “Even Eve’s covered up her TWA-teeny-weeny-Afro with a blond weave” (Wiltz 2004) The pressure for women to stay visually appealing has taken away from the content of the power of rap music. Wiltz closes these thorough and concise summations of women’s evolving role through Hip Hop with an encouraging reference to Hip Hop culture. She states that rap is about power, both fighting the power and also claiming it.
All it takes is for one woman MC to break through and record labels will be scrambling to find five copycats the next day.

Michael Marino’s May 2005 review of Professor Cheryl Keyes’, Rap Music and Street Consciousness discusses Keyes’ ability to connect the rhythm and style of rap music to a deeper tradition that encompasses several centuries. She discusses how rap is rooted in native African oral traditions that involve telling stories by chanting to different rhythms. Keyes proposes that the activism of the 1960s added messages of political consciousness to rap music and added to the traditions of African-American culture.

Keyes clarifies the debate as to where rap music comes from, suggesting that it is the growth of various combined elements. Political consciousness, the New York club scene, the rise of the DJ and the creation of the rhyming “MC” were the elements that made rap, which eventually became a synonym with commercial success. Keyes also discusses and defends the accusations of misogyny and violence that are ascribed to rap music by attempting to raise awareness that all rap music, does not fall under this umbrella. Keyes’ ability to provide a historical context for rap music while tying it brilliantly to African-American heritage is flawless. While the foundation of rap is important, Keyes does not go into detail about the lyrics of rap music and the artists whose music is not misogynistic nor supports violence. Keyes does not give examples of the different types of rap music that has evolved since its beginning in the late 1970s, including but not limiting to music of self-empowerment.

In the summer of 2005, the Journal of African-American History published a special Hip Hop edition. One of the journal articles published was entitled,
"Oppositional Consciousness within an Oppositional Realm," by Layli Phillips, Kerri Reddick-Morgan, and Dionne Patricia Stephens. These authors believe that women have a dual oppositionality within Hip Hop which includes:

- Talking back to men in defense of women and demanding respect for women;
- Women’s empowerment, self-help, and solidarity;
- Defense of black men against the larger society.

The authors note that women rappers are women trying to educate one another in order to help one another avoid life’s pitfalls, or overt assertions of sisterhood. Talking about their life experiences and what they have seen in their music has provided guidance and a mirror for identifying which path a woman should choose.

Their research indicates that women’s autonomy and solidarity are more directly demonstrated in songs of women’s empowerment and self-help that are addressed directly to women. They attempt to bring women to consciousness about their oppression as well as to provide direct messages of support to each other. Women often talk about their experiences with men in this strand of discourse especially when, the intended audience is women. Black women’s unique viewpoint is directly invoked through the lyrics written by women for women.

Layli Phillips, Kerri Reddick-Morgan, and Dionne Patricia Stephens set themselves apart from other research by openly discussing black women’s support of black men in the ride or die songs or Bonnie and Clyde anthems. These songs convey women’s willingness to help men in dangerous situations. The endeavor often involves the drug trade or the redemption of a man’s honor. Two examples of these types of songs
are Yo-Yo’s *Bonnie and Clyde Theme* from 1993 and Eve’s *Dog Match*. These songs send a message to black men, as well as to the world at large, that black women are black men’s allies.

These authors recognize that although black women are allies of black men, they will not take lightly to being disrespected and will exhibit a traditional feminist orientation when they talk back to men to reclaim women’s respectability, when they fight back against violence against women, and when they express alliance with men who are viewed as antisocial by the larger society. Women rappers and their musical kin allow themselves to contest sexism within the Hip Hop universe as well as confront it in mainstream society. Hip Hop feminism survives and thrives because they are honest with themselves and others.

In November 2005 edition of *SheJay*, an online networking community of female Dj’s, producers, vocalists, and musicians, an article entitled “Female Rappers: A Dying Breed?” written by Tachelle Shamash Wilkes, was printed to explore this phenomenon. This article discusses the inability of record companies to take a chance on fresh and unique talent in the women’s rap market. In the 1990s women artists with sexualized images became the biggest revenue for major labels with strong and consistent sales figures and with large promotional dollars pushing and supporting these images. Artists such as Lil Kim equate these sexy images to a form of feminism and independence. The validity of this their theories is constantly questioned and challenged. Many of these artists have ghost writers that are men. These men dress the female artists up, tell them how visually attractive they are and then push them out into mainstream. The confidence
these women artists have begun to inflate because of the attention and the sales results, and the cycle continues. The writer expresses the need to hear the stories that brought artists like Lil Kim to where they are now. She believes that there is a demand to hear about their lives and experiences and not just about how much money they make or how many men they can get to buy them things. She indicates that women artists can take control of their images and be who they want to be. She uses as example artists such as Queen Latifah and Eve who have both found success in acting. Her article concludes by calling out to women emcees to make their voices heard.

Katelyn Noderer and Julien Pell’s (2006) review of MC Lyte and Joan Morgan’s discussion about misogyny in Hip Hop is a summation of a lecture titled From Fly Girls to Bitches and Hos presented at Lehigh University in September 2006. In this discussion, Morgan examines how the overly sexual image of women exists outside of the world of Hip Hop citing reality television shows such as Laguna Beach and The OC as examples. She notes how the desires of women have changed in the statement that, “When I grew up, I wanted to play with Barbie. This generation wants to be Barbie.” Some believe that this is a direct reflection on what has been seen in Hip Hop music. MC Lyte’s reference of how Hip Hop music depicts life like a huge party without problems explains how the images in music videos have women trapped in a party image. Morgan says that Hip Hop makes us aware of aspects of our culture by making visual images which challenges people to discuss them.

This review explores some powerful aspects about misogyny in Hip Hop and how the overly sexual young woman is not just in the black culture, but that this image is seen
in popular culture as well. This review also brings to light the power of imagery and how constantly viewing images that are meant for entertainment can sometimes cross over into how things are approached in real life. Although this discussion touched on some powerful issues it did not talk about the other aspects of Hip Hop culture that Morgan mentioned. It instead was continuing to discuss the same images that were seen as trapping woman.

*To the Break of Dawn: A Freestyle on the Hip Hop Aesthetic* by William Jelani Cobb published in February 2007 provides an in-depth breakdown of the artistic and creative value of Hip Hop music and its lyrics. Cobb’s method of translating lyrics of several renowned and respected Hip Hop artists into layman terms is exceptional. He makes note to venture into every genre of Hip Hop and use not only male artists but female artists as examples of the evolution of the lyrics contained within rap.

Similar to William Jelani Cobb’s research, the researcher also analyzes the evolution of lyrics in reference to women’s images by using the works of MC Lyte as an example. This evaluation is a chronological journey through the music of this artist and identifies the growth and changes made in order to accommodate a changing society. This thesis aims to analyze the lyrics of MC Lyte who is consciously committed to the self-empowerment of African-American women and their images through her music and accomplishments in this male dominated industry.
CHAPTER III

THE CHALLENGES OF BEING A FEMALE RAP ARTIST

Hip Hop culture has transcended into an urban genre that has touched almost every industry in today's society. The commercialization of Hip Hop through its music, namely rap, has brought forth many fans, as well as many who oppose rap music for various reasons. There are some critics who feel rap music perpetuates the commodification of women, the glamorization of drugs and inner-city life, and is a negative stain on the growth of young America. It has also been named as one of the factors that has caused the dismantling of the black family. Anti-rap advocates such as Bill Cosby and C. Delores Tucker have openly expressed their disdain for rap music and its negative impact on American society through lectures, public comments, and even lawsuits.

Bill Cosby, one of the most well-known comedians of color, made the following statement in his speech in Chicago at the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition and Citizenship Education Fund's annual conference on July 1, 2004: “They think they're hip. They can't read; they can't write. They're laughing and giggling, and they're going nowhere” (Dickerson 2004). The first question is to identify the “they” Cosby is referring to in his statement. Because Cosby used the adjective “hip” to describe “they,” one can conclude the “they” Cosby is referring to is the “Hip Hop” community. If Cosby is referring to the artists of the Hip Hop community, he has made a gross
generalization and has given an enormous amount of power to the influences of one musical genre on the educational direction of today’s younger generation. To date, as far as the researcher knows, Cosby has not done any research to justify his statement, and the researcher contends that his comments are clearly based on personal biases and misguided information. Cosby claims that rap music is one of the catalysts that is stunting the growth and prosperity of the black community. In reality, the artists Cosby refers to as “illiterate” are the Chief Executive Officer’s (CEO) of major companies including, but not limited to, music labels, clothing labels, actresses, award winners, and champions for women’s empowerment. Cosby is obviously unaware that there are several members of the rap community, such as Roxanne Shante and David Banner, who have degrees in higher education. Is he aware that a large majority of the artists in the rap community have their own community outreach organizations? “Love is Blind,” founded by Eve, and the “Intelligent Black Women’s Coalition” founded by YoYo are just a few examples of social consciousness organization that provide financial assistance, education, empowerment, and enlightenment to young people of color.

Moreover, Cosby apparently feels that his frequent donations to his sons Alma matter, Morehouse College, is his token of community outreach, and is his way of showing some sort of a philanthropic example. The rap artists who Cosby claims are going “nowhere” include young people committed to outreach, going beyond their own comfort zones to help others, and donating both time and money to help those in need. Cosby must acknowledge that the generation he describes as “laughing and giggling” and “going nowhere” is one of the most affluent and respected generations of color in the
history of America. These “hip” individuals are a marvel because of their ability to use the power of words to articulate as well as entertain those who listen with an open ear. The raw honesty regarding the challenges of being a person of color in America is portrayed on a level that all can understand, even those who receive their interpretations with biases.

C. Delores Tucker, President of the National Congress of Black Women, is another critic of Hip Hop and advocates against rap music and the impact it has on the images of women, particularly women of color. Her claim is that rap music is not only personally offensive, but also commodifies African-American women. This commodification in her opinion has deemed women of color victims of rap music, who because of media attention are unable to express their supposed disdain towards this type of music. In addition, she states that rap music, namely the songs of the late rap artist, Tupac Shakur, directly affected her. Tuckers’ complaint alleged: “intentional infliction of emotional distress; slander; invasion of privacy; and a derivative consortium claim.”

Her unfounded claims and anxiety towards rap music was displayed during her lecture, "The Ramifications of Gangsta Rap." In this lecture, Tucker’s underlying theme was that "It is a crime that we are promoting these kinds of messages. Tucker then implied that rap music is responsible for why her "seven-year-old niece (born to a 13-year old mother) says that she "wants to be a gangster." She claims an embellishment of words meant for entertainment is responsible for teen pregnancy. Tucker’s focus should be on examining the parental capabilities of the teenage mother rearing her seven year old niece, not the music that generations across the color lines listen to. “Gangsta rap/ Porno rap” did not
impregnate her family member nor was it the main source for nurturing, rearing and
guidance for her seven-year old niece. It is likely, that the lack of parental supervision
and the absence of open communication are also contributors to teenage pregnancy, not
just the existence of rap music. However, female rap artists like MC Lyte have addressed
some of the same concerns through her rap music. MC Lyte continuously addresses the
pressures that women of color encounter as they come of age in urban communities and
the effects that society has had on their maturation.

Some may wonder why so much attention is given to this genre. Rap is about
power, both fighting the power and claiming it (Wiltz 2004). Scholars and anti-rap
advocates have failed to hear the true voices of rap music and the messages yearning to
be heard. The Cosbys and Tuckers have helped create a “hoopla” surrounding this
artistic musical form. Yet despite the historical use of violent lyrics in country and folk
music, these artists are rarely blamed for escalating murder and domestic violence rates
(Richardson 2002). People who react negatively to this music (rap) are often unable to
decode its lyrics, style, and message (McNair 2003). It is the voice of a mysterious and
silent generation that came of age in the Reagan Era. Rap music is a dialogue that
combines wisdom and misinformation that is multicultural and politically incorrect at the
same time.

Their biases are based on a particular segment of women in the Hip Hop culture.
However, a significant part of mainstream American culture is based on sexism and
misogyny. Hip Hop culture or rap music more specifically, is frequently condemned for
its misogynistic exploitation of women unlike other genres. Exploitation of women in
Hip Hop culture has become a norm for both the artists and audiences alike. MC Lyte was not the first female artists to witness the challenges of being a woman in the rap industry, both on the stage and off struggling to define their value in the industry.

Unfortunately for some, the measure of value had been defined as their own worth in regards to what they can do for and get from a man. The Hip Hop culture frequently sees women who are willing to take risks with their bodies, minds and hearts hoping to raise their socioeconomic status and gain security for their children's future, and they have learned to use their sexuality to do this. Kathy Dobie from *Vibe Magazine* conducted interviews that were published in the September 2001 issue with four women who all regularly had one-night stands or ongoing sexual relationships with rappers. One of the women *Vibe* talked to is Nikki, a thirty-year-old woman who has had many lovers in the Hip Hop industry. *Vibe* said, "... Her lovers read like a Who's Who of rap." Her reason for partaking in multiple insignificant relationships with rappers was, "I've got nothing to offer ... no education, no good job, no nothing. So why would a man want me, other than sex? I felt I had to give, so I used myself." Many women like Nikki regularly put all of the blame on themselves for being used by men. They assumed and accepted that men would oppress and disrespect them. As another one of the women described, "If you had the right kind of man that wasn't controlling, and you were like a team, it'd be cool ... But there's no man out there like that" (Dobie 2001, 196). The four women described a new low in relationships between men and women within the Hip Hop community. Men thought that women were only worth giving them sexual favors, and women thought men are only worth giving them money.
Hip Hop culture is frequently condemned for its misogynistic exploitation of women. Exploitation of women in Hip Hop culture has become an accepted part of it for both the artists and audiences alike. Not all rap songs are misogynistic and all black men do not speak and think this way, but large percentages within Hip Hop culture do. The name calling disrespects, dehumanizes, and dishonors women. If a man labels a woman with any of these names, he may feel justified in committing physical or psychological violence against her. The name-calling may also be representative of the way these men are thinking and feeling the anger, disdain, and ill feelings toward women. Joan Morgan, who refers to herself as a Hip Hop feminist, reveals, "Yeah, sistas are hurt . . . but the real crime isn't the name-calling, it's their failure to love us—to be our brothers in the way that we commit ourselves to being their sistas" (Morgan 1999). Many black men within Hip Hop culture who battle racism and oppression themselves everyday have been conditioned by society not to trust or love, and if they do not love themselves, it is difficult for them to love women or anyone else in a healthy manner.

Misogynistic Hip Hop does not only expose black men's pain, but it also shows the issues that black women may want to deal with. Much of the sexual exploitation in Hip Hop culture is done with the consent and collaboration of women. A significant amount of misogynistic Hip Hop consumers are women, and hundreds of bikini-donned women show up for the music video shoots as unpaid participants (Morgan 1999). Dance clubs and back stages of concerts are flooded with women who express willingness to do anything sexually with a man to get drinks, money, jewelry, or just to feel privileged and wanted.
Women, especially black women, have less access to power, material wealth, and protection than their male counterparts and so have historically used sex (in prostitution and various other domains) as the "bargaining chip" by which power is often accessed. Misogynistic ideas and practices from the past have been passed down to today’s Hip Hop youth. For example, during slavery the black woman was often forced to have sexual relations with any male (slave masters, overseers, and slaves) that desired her. Black women were sometimes used as breeding instruments to produce more human property, and at other times forced to have sex to pay the for food, the safety of her children, or to be treated less harshly on a day to day basis. They were "paying" with their bodies as a survival strategy.

Thus, out of this emerged the stereotype of black women as promiscuous and oversexed, and this shaped some black women's sexual morality. Some started to look at themselves as society viewed them, and some accepted that they had no control over their own bodies. Some black men wanted black women to have a subordinate role in the home while some women wanted men to be the sole economic providers. Black men and women have been, for the most part, unable to meet each other's expectations, but these same obsessions are demonstrated in Hip Hop culture. Some women want men to be the economic providers, and use their sexual power to receive economic gain from men. While some men within Hip Hop want women to be passive and have learned to manipulate women by offering money and power to them.

In a study done about black male/female relationships of the Hip Hop generation, many black men in the Hip Hop culture that were interviewed valued economic resources
and used these resources as a way to manipulate and control women. Some women negotiated with their bodies for things that they wanted (Hutchinson 1999). In order to gain access to these things and to get the love and attention from men that they want, some women felt they must cater to the exploitative images of what men want and think women should be.

Besides a basic desire for self-expression, most female rappers were driven by the same thing that drives male rappers—they wanted to show that they could “rock the mic.” But too often for the earliest generation of female rappers, the men and boys in ciphers were not overly willing to pass the microphone, so it is not surprising that the first commercially successful female rappers only received recognition by recording responses to their male peers (Rose 1994). Rose argues that the role of the black female rapper is that of engaging in a dialogic relationship with black male rappers in which they are able to “talk back” to the dominate ideas of black femininity, sexuality, and male/female relationships that appear in male rappers lyrics and video images. She proposes that rap music and Hip Hop culture, instead of being entirely oppressive to women, may actually create a space for black women to assert independence, agency and control over their sexuality.

Black feminist and performing artist Sarah Jones made her own statement against the exploitation of women in music with the words:

your revolution will not happen between these thighs . . .

the real revolution ain't about booty size . . .

and though we've lost Biggie Smalls
your Notorious revolution
will never allow you to lace no lyrical douche
in my bush . . .
your revolution will not be you
smackin' it up, flippin' it, or rubbin' it down
nor will it take you downtown or
humpin' around . . .
you will not be touching your lips to
my triple dip of
French vanilla butter pecan chocolate deluxe
or having Akinyele's dream
a six-foot blowjob machine . . .
your revolution will not happen between
these thighs . . .
because the revolution, when it
finally comes, is gon' be real” (Jones 1997)

Ironically, Jones's "Your Revolution" makes a powerful statement against indecency—in particular, the sexual exploitation of women in popular music. The song, originally a poem, pulls no punches in making its feminist critique, taking direct aim at famous Hip Hop songs by artists including LL Cool J and Notorious B.I.G. by quoting and then denouncing some of their macho lyrics. Jones's song is inspirational as seen in the words: “You can be in the Hip Hop game, but you do not have to be no 'ho.” There's
nothing else out there besides this song that tells girls that. Jones tells women that they
do not have to allow these lyrics to be true, because “Your revolution will not happen
between these thighs.”

Moreover, female rappers, and there are many of them, address issues pertinent to
women such as domestic violence, dominant notions of femininity and black female
sexuality. According to Cheryl Keyes, female rappers "Use their performances to refute,
deconstruct and reconstruct alternative visions of their identity" (McNair 2003) Keyes
considers women’s contribution to rap music to be significant. She categorizes female
rappers as Queen Mothers who have contributed significantly, for example, by
appropriating negative terms like “b*tch.” It is the appropriation of terms like “b*tch,”
“ho,” and “ni**a” which is often misunderstood.

Hence, just because a voice is feminine does not mean it is feminist. To carry that
label means that a woman is engaged in the battle to fight political, economic and social
sexism. Presently, black women have so many things threatening them—black women
are dying of AIDS at a growing rate; women are becoming an alarming presence in the
prison system, due in part to their intimate involvement with men in the drug game, a role
that is often glamorized and glorified in music. Further, women are still experiencing
forced single parenthood, domestic violence, police brutality and the complete
breakdown of families. Feminism is about embracing power without reducing it to what
is between women’s legs.

Although Hip Hop has been a male-dominated movement, women have played an
important role in its development. Women have always been a part of Hip Hop culture
and a significant part of rap music. There are many female artists/groups that have most certainly contributed to the artistic growth of rap music and Hip Hop culture in general. Roxanne Shante, Salt n Pepa, Queen Latifah, YoYo, and especially MC Lyte have all made a very powerful impact on the Hip Hop Culture.

Of special note is Roxanne Shante who was one of the first female artists in Hip Hop. At the age of thirteen, she was the rapper on a surprise hit U.S. single from 1985 entitled "Roxanne's Revenge." She was also well known for her "answer raps," or songs that were answers to insulting songs by other rappers-in particular UTFO's "Roxanne Roxanne" and "Roxanne's Revenge." Roxanne Shante was an artist known for her freestyle skills and answer raps. Shante was arguably one of the best freestyle rappers in the game and even had such intimidating skills that some male rappers were scared to battle her.

Shante is important not just because she was a great freestyle rapper, but because her skills elevated the art form, by making the “answer rap”... a viable means of entry to the public sphere for some early female rappers. Shante, in this sense, was a ground-breaking artist who paved the way for other female rappers to become a viable part of the rap music world. At twenty one, she retired, disenchanted with the music business, went to college and emerged with a master's degree in psychology. She now works as a criminal psychologist for New York State, assessing the mental health of criminals up for parole.

On the other hand, one of the first successful all women rap groups was Salt n Pepa. This duo had unprecedented showmanship and elevated the level of artistry in Hip
Most of their lyrics were written by their founder/producer Herbie Azor. Although their lyrical skills were certainly not the best ever heard, they presented a whole "package" that had never been seen before, from their dance moves to the way they dressed, and even their haircuts. They created a new style for women in the Hip Hop culture.

Before Salt n Pepa, no one had elevated the level of showmanship in Hip Hop music and performance. They showcased the whole "packaged talent", and prior to them all that was seen at shows was a male-centric back and forth strut, meant to intimidate the audiences. There was no choreography, changes of wardrobe or requested crowd participation. This set them apart and, and thus, Salt n Pepa became the most successful female rap group in history. The three—Salt (Cheryl James), Pepa (Sandi Denton), and DJ Spinderella (Dee Dee Roper)—first attracted attention in 1986 and are the only female rap group to be repeatedly certified platinum.

When asked in an interview if they felt they had a social responsibility to their audiences, their response was:

\[...\] People look up to us. Teenagers look up to us. We all have little sisters and cousins who look up to us, and we see what they go through. So we have to be an example. A lot of artists come into this business and they don't see things that way. But as you get older—and now that we also have children—your conscience starts working on you. You have to give your fans and your children something that they can use in life (Wilson 1995).

They are a very positive influence for women in Hip Hop.
In an interview the researcher conducted on March 19, 2007 with Salt n Pepa member DJ Spinderella (Dee Dee Roper), we discussed the impact Salt n Pepa has made on the rap industry and how their challenges as women differed as time progressed.

Q: How were you received when you first got into the rap industry?

A: It was pretty accepted. SnP had a little resistance. Men would look at us as a one hit wonder. We didn’t care what they thought we kept it moving and kept climbing. As a DJ, I was questioned if I could really spin.

Q: How are you received now?

A: I get the RESPECT! It’s an awesome feeling. Back then it was like being in a fishbowl and looking out. Now I get to actually hear from the people that were behind us. It’s touching because I can hear the stories of how we influenced and strengthened them by our music.

Q: What type of impact did you want your music to make on the rap industry, if any?

A: The 80’s was very strategic for women period, not just in music, careers. The strength of women increased in that era and we were a part of that. It’s great to be apart and have that connection. We saw how our music inspired and motivated people. Incredible feeling for people to actually connect and to hear currently how our music has been able to touch. To hear how beautiful and strong women have become from back then. It makes me proud to see that women are continuing to be strong.

Q: What is your perception of the images of women in the rap industry when you started? And currently?

A: Images back there wasn’t a place for women, there were very few women. It was a big boys club. We were seen as very cute. But we were coming up on their ass, not only are we females making it happen we were going against the great rappers. It was needed. and the doors were opening. SnP brought the WOMANHOOD to rap. You don’t have to be one way to rapper. TODAY... the gates have been flooded by sexism. You can either be looked at as a strong woman or as an object. Sex is natural for a woman. When you base everything on just that... you don’t get everything that a women is. There is so much more to offer. I wish we could have our horizons broaden more today.
Q: Has your music changed or perpetuated these images

A: My contribution in the culture itself. . . I’ve pretty proud of what I’ve done. I’ve grown as a business woman and as a woman period. I’ve made my presence known in the industry by incorporating it into the radio. I am bringing good things to the table with so much more to come

Q: What do you think the next steps are for female artists in Hip Hop?

A: More doors that need to be opened. . . not for a particular reason. Women are busy doing their thing. . . it’s HARDER than it used to be. You have to look at how it was done in the past. Some of the female rappers that have made it have had a great team around them, and undeniable talent and have filled a void that was needed. . . and not JUST AS A WOMAN! Lyte, Latifah, Roxanne Shante, TLC. NO FEAR!!

Q: What is the legacy that you want to leave as a female Hip Hop artist?

A: That you can make it in an industry that people said you can’t. No holds barred... no limits. I still have a fire burning for more . . . When I figure it out . . . you’ll know about it. Legacy hasn’t been fulfilled yet!

Another female rap artist, Queen Latifah was born Dana Owens in East Orange, New Jersey. She, her brother Winki, and her mom lived in a modest apartment. Queen Latifah was totally captivated by Hip Hop and rap music. She would change into her “Hip Hop gear,” catch the train to New York City and hang out all night in the Latin Quarters watching rappers like Grandmaster Flash, Doug E. Fresh, Salt n Pepa, the Beastie Boys, Run-D.M.C., and MC Lyte. She was living the life, taking it all in and bringing all the fashion styles and music back to New Jersey. Latifah worked at Burger King during the day so that she would have the money for her weekend trips. After her mom introduced her to Mark the 45 King, Latifah started hanging out in his basement working out her rhymes. She used Hip Hop and rap as another way to communicate and
get her point across. In the summer of 1987, she heard her song “Princess of the Posse” on the radio and the Queen was born.

In her book, *Ladies First: Revelations of a Strong Woman; Queen Latifah*, she talks about the importance of women making the move to be strong and self-reliant using her rise to stardom as a rapper and actress as an example. In her book she says that she is not a psychologist or sociologist; she does not have any degrees and is not an expert on life. What she is, is a young black woman from the inner city who is making it, despite the odds, despite the obstacles she has had to face in the lifetimes that have come her way. She also says that she would like people to see her as someone who is proud and comfortable with who she is . . . Be secure in yourself. You don’t need me or any other public person, for that matter, to validate you.

Latifah has dealt with many obstacles in her life—drugs, alcohol, criticism for her weight, and a serious depression after the loss of her brother. Through this adversity she has learned to love herself and is trying to send the message to other women. She comments:

Life will put you through plenty of tests and throw many obstacles your way, but it’s how you pass those tests, how you overcome those obstacles, that distinguishes you as a queen. I am worthy of the title Queen. So are you, and with God as the center of your life, you can never be dethroned” (Queen Latifah 1987, 12).

Queen Latifah's feminism draws on the design of rap to affirm the importance of women promoting themselves and other women. Rap, like all other forms of popular music, is not inherently feminist, but in this genre, as in other popular genres, female performers use specific generic qualities to promote a feminist message. Rap is noted for
its emphasis on lyrics, and through the lyrics, female rappers like Queen Latifah and MC Lyte make explicit assertions of female strength and autonomy. Since rap revolves around self-promotion, women rappers are able to use the form without appearing to be unduly narcissistic.

Latifah does this by using the very forms that are used to denigrate women and redefines them, thus reclaiming those forms for women. At the same time, by using rap and Afrocentricity, she redefines the images of African-American women and moves it towards an Afrocentric outlook. Being an African-American woman in the rap industry does not mean abandoning her African heritage; instead, it becomes an additional source of strength and power. Her attire, in particular, reveals the way in which an African-based clothing style can assert femininity and provocativeness that resists the nakedness and exposure of Western styles for women. Latifah's Afrocentricity operates both culturally and politically. Her regal bearing, her name, and her self-promotion associate her with a tradition of African royalty. Through her attire, she draws attention to styles and colors that have African characteristics.

Latifah's use of Afrocentricity draws her work into debates about postmodernism and its relation to African-American culture. African-American culture creates and draws upon postmodernism, just as modernism involved an appropriation of earlier African-American culture, jazz and sculpture, to name just two examples. Rap is exemplified by the skill of the artist Cobb demonstrates in To The Break of Dawn, "He'll idle with some prelim scratches to let the crowd know what's coming next. And if his boy got skills enough, if the verbal game is tight enough, that right there will be the
kinetic moment, which blessed split-second when beat meets rhyme" (Cobb 2007, 49).

Rap draws on qualities of non-Western music that overlap with postmodernism. For example, scratching demonstrates one of the postmodern qualities of rap because it involves the appropriation of another record. While appropriation is postmodern when it appears in conjunction with music video's other postmodern qualities, such as fragmentation, pastiche, and self-reflexion, it is also African-American, Afro-Caribbean, or version of these combined. This method of producing music, and the frequent use of parts of melodies from other songs as part of a rap record or sampling, emphasizes pastiche and fragmentation, two fundamental aspects of postmodernism.

Moreover, Yo-Yo, born Yolanda Whitaker, has been among the most sophisticated and unpredictable female rappers from the West Coast. She does not take an overtly feminist stance, but urges young women to show sexual restraint and to use their minds as well as their bodies. In an article she wrote in *Essence Magazine*, October 2005: “Reclaiming the Mike,” she says:

I was battling to be sexy, I was battling to be feminine, I was fighting to show my strength with all these men, I was fighting to be respected as a dope MC. Still people would ask, Do you think that you're a role model? I'd say, No, raise your own kids. It's not up to us. I didn't want that responsibility. At least not until I went to New York for a promotional event and a little girl came up to me rapping my lyrics: I'm the type of girl that's down for my n--. . . I said, No, no, no! Don't say that. That's when it hit me, Oh, my God. It was so much . . . I guess I knew instinctively that Hip Hop could be a means of communication and empowerment (Whitaker 2005).

She once explained that the disrespectful lyrics that were being put out by her male counterparts were not something that was embraced by many of the women she grew up around. She noted that many women of color were fighting back but she was
one of the few lucky ones to get a platform, which she used to her advantage. Instead of giving into industry pressure to tone it down and become the stereotype of a clueless, helpless female, Yo-Yo brought to life an organization that she had started in high school called the Intelligent Black Women’s Coalition.

The Intelligent Black Women’s Coalition provided a space for Yo-Yo to step up and continue the other activities she had been doing in high school including visiting youth centers and women’s shelters talking to young girls, while she herself was still young and learning. It was through the Intelligent Black Women’s Coalition that Yo-Yo was able to effectively address important issues like AIDS, self-esteem, abuse, education, pregnancy, and employment. Yo Yo is also a community activist who regularly breaks bread with all sorts of important figure heads like Congresswoman Maxine Waters, who was an advice columnist for young women in *Vibe Magazine*, and who is currently a popular radio personality for 93.5 KDAY.
CHAPTER IV

REDEFINITION OF THE IMAGES OF WOMEN THROUGH
THE LYRICS OF MC LYTE

Never has there been a more potent female voice in Hip Hop than that of MC Lyte. Her lyrics are fierce and carefully constructed, and strong enough to challenge any male rap lyricist. She rhymes about sexually transmitted diseases, love, clothes, and tearing sucker MCs into tiny little pieces. MC Lyte is a female lyricist who remains on par with the male rappers. Because of her lyrical prowess, the men in the rap industry are not likely to create difficult situations for her. She is a pioneer of epic proportions and like many of the male rappers of her era, she raps about issues that are both significant and life-altering (Perkins 1996).

More so, Hip Hop would definitely be different if MC Lyte had not come along in the late 1980s and re-established the female voice in Hip Hop. She is a dynamic rapper with an unprecedented style. Born Lana Michelle Moorer in Brooklyn, New York, MC Lyte emerged in 1986 at the age of 16, with a striking bravado which earned her much attention and solidified her position as one of the most significant female MCs in the game. What legitimized MC Lyte’s early career was her sharp wit and willingness to go mic-for-mic with all rappers, regardless of gender. She is also known as one of the only women who writes her own lyrics and refuses to compromise her image and messages for commercialization. Her commitment to who she is may be one of the reasons she
became more successful than her brothers, Milk Dee and Gizmo, who recorded under the name of Audio Two.

MC Lyte’s impact on Hip Hop lies in the creativity of her lyrics. She has redefined women’s images with her music and, in fact, transformed stereotypically negative images into more positive ones. MC Lyte’s ability to reinvent herself as time progresses shows that as long as female artists stand strong and stay true to who they define themselves to be, longevity and success can be achieved. In her song, “Lyte as a Rock” (MC Lyte 1988), MC Lyte says, “There are Hip Hop leaders, this you know. We also have Hip Hoppers that follow. By the tone of my voice, you can tell I am a scholar, I’m also the leader of the Hip Hop followers.” Clearly, she presents herself as a leader without being an overtly sexual or a completely de-sexed one which has become prevalent in rap music. By doing so, she has redefined her place as a woman who can enlighten those who perpetuate the Jezebel and mammy images in Hip Hop.

One of the major controversies that exist in the Hip Hop community concerns who controls women’s image and who profits from such images. There comes a point in female rap artists’ career when they are forced to make a choice to present themselves in a manner that perpetuates women’s images or show their true selves. Some female artists undoubtedly feel that conforming to an image created by male entities in Hip Hop is a small price to pay for notoriety and prosperity. MC Lyte has refused to conform and has paid the price for such trailblazing since she entered the rap scene in 1987. She refuses to have someone else determine what she should say in her music, how she should present herself, and what her image should be. MC Lyte is one of the few female artists who,
upon entry, took a stand on what her image is and how she wanted to be seen by her fans. She was not sidetracked by the commercialism and the misogynistic images of rap music.

The connection to misogynistic music and behavior may be evident in other areas of young people's lives, too, says Dr. Michael Rich, a pediatrician at Children's Hospital Boston and spokesperson for the American Academy of Pediatrics' Media Matters campaign. "The music portrays this kind of dating violence and coercion around sexual activity as normal relationships," says Rich. He continues, "I see an acceptance among teenagers—both girls and boys, of the kind of sexual objectification celebrated in this kind of music. There is this notion that it's okay to be used for sex and that there is not any emotional commitment necessary" (Williams 2003). That sense of acceptance is one of the reasons the American Academy of Pediatrics started its Media Matters campaign in 1998. In addition to lobbying for stronger music-industry standards, the program explores the impact of media messages on children's health and behavior and advises pediatricians and parents about addressing the problem: "Media are a source of information and a source where young people learn about relationships," Rich said. "Although no one can claim a 100% causality for behavior, there is certainly a strong association" (Williams 2003).

Tricia Rose acknowledges in her text Black Noise that most women rappers did not get in the industry because they saw themselves as feminist warriors fighting misogyny in rap music. In fact, many of those women consciously distanced themselves from even the perception that they might be feminists. Besides a basic desire for self-expression, most women rappers are driven by the same thing that drives male rappers--
they want to show that they have lyrical skills. But too often for the earliest generation of
women rappers, the men and boys in ciphers were not overly willing to pass the mic, so it's not surprising that the first commercially successful women rappers such as Roxanne Shante and Salt n Pepa only got air play by recording responses to their male peers (Rose 1994). Rose argues that the role of the black woman rapper is a relationship of dialogue with black men rappers in which they are able to “talk back” to the dominate ideas of black femininity, sexuality, and male/female relationships that appear in male rappers’ lyrics and video images. She proposes that rap music and Hip Hop culture, instead of being entirely oppressive to women, may actually create a space for black women to assert independence, agency, and control over their sexuality. MC Lyte was aware of this potential and learned to use this creative space to her advantage and create her own feminine voice for women.

Just because MC Lyte’s voice is feminine does not mean she is a feminist. To carry that label means that she would be engaged in the battle to fight political, economic, and social sexism and this is not her vowed mission. However, she does contribute to the feminist cause by showing another perspective of women in her music. MC Lyte is an example of women embracing power without reducing it to the existing negative images of women.

Although Hip Hop has been a male-dominated movement, women have played an important role in its development. Women have always been a part of Hip Hop culture and a significant part of rap music. There are many women artists/groups that have certainly contributed to the artistic growth of rap music and Hip Hop culture in
general. Roxanne Shante, Queen Latifah, Salt n Pepa, YoYo, and especially MC Lyte have all made a very powerful impact on Hip Hop Culture.

Separating herself from other female artists who entered the rap industry in the late 1980s, MC Lyte wrote her own lyrics and she only rapped about things she knew or experienced. This was a rare talent then, and is still seen sporadically in Hip Hop. She gave a voice to women whose lyrics were previously a form of male ventriloquism. Some women were denigrated and constantly fed lyrics by the male authorities who decided what they should say and how they should present themselves. The female point of view was never sought or required. The male authorities in rap music have made attempts at depicting positive images of women. These images are based on a masculine interpretation, implying that women are not aware of their sexuality. They are given a new identity by the male authority de-sexing the true image of women in rap music. The male constructed images of women can be seen as a manifestation of what Collins defines as the mammy image. Mammy is seen as the only somewhat positive figure although she is de-sexed (Collins 1991). Female artists who chose to adapt were told their place and did not object regardless of the cost. They just did what they were instructed to do. MC Lyte was the first solo artist to appear on her own without any male introduction. Until 1987, female rap artists were introduced by an existing male rapper who was already respected in the Hip Hop community, therefore vouching for her ability and her lyrical skills.

Gwendolyn Pough (2004), an avowed black feminist, also chides the feminist movement for its failure to take seriously the voices of black women in Hip Hop. Se
comments that "Black feminism needs to be accountable to young black women, saving their lives and widening their worldview and the choices they feel they can make."
Pough continues by adding that "In order to accomplish this—in order to reach young black women, feminism needs to come down from its ivory tower."
Pough links the ignoring and silencing of black women's voices in Hip Hop to larger societal issues (Neal, 2004). According to Pough (2004), "Black women's speech and expressive culture have been limited in the public sphere due in part to circumstances...such as maintaining community, promoting black manhood at the expense of black womanhood, and constantly vindicating black womanhood against misrepresentation." Pough adds that black women's voices have also been "limited because the places in which they have been allowed to thrive have been devalued."
Pough's comments perhaps challenge the conventional thinking that when black women get together in the beauty parlor or in the kitchen, it is simply an opportunity to complain about trifling men and a chance to gossip.

MC Lyte alludes to this in her song “10% Dis” (MC Lyte 1988): “Others write your rhymes, while I write my own I don’t create a character, when I’m on the microphone. I am myself, no games to be played, no script to be written, no scene to be made” (MC Lyte 1988). In the beginning of her career, other rap artists assumed that MC Lyte was a product of Audio Two. Soon after, rap artists—male and female—recognized that MC Lyte was her own person, and not the product of anything but her own life experiences. When her lyrical skills were challenged, she not only showed up for the battle but also verbally destroyed her opponents most often, regardless of gender. MC
Lyte gained the respect of her peers for staying true to Hip Hop and who she was as a woman in this male dominated industry. She was one of the first to take the necessary steps to redefine the formally assigned images of women that had little-to-no value for who women really were. Her ability to stand strong has allowed her to grow as an artist and to evolve as a mainstay voice in the Hip Hop genre.

In her song entitled, “Act Like You Know,” MC Lyte (1991) speaks about the hidden presence of positive women in the Hip Hop community and how their input is ignored. She takes on this challenge by letting the audience know that she is someone worth listening to: “Takin on the world, slammin it and bangin it. Keepin it hard, but still I'm changin it.” Exhibiting a strength that is rarely seen, she is not afraid of what challenges her. She is willing to accept the challenge of redefining women’s images because she believes that what she says will change people’s perspectives and how they view women in the urban community.

She communicates her lyrics with assertiveness and aggression, not allowing the listener to decide if they would like to hear what she has to say or not. MC Lyte demands attention as she redefines women’s images through her lyrics. Her goal is to enlighten, even by force if necessary, those within ear reach with the lyrics: “Now that I've schooled you and put you up on the scoop. Posse or massive, solo or group, Take it in stride, it's an inside top secret heavy duty type of thing that I'm swingin” and informs the listener that what she has to say is top secret and to be taken with care.

In these verses, “I'm sure that I can relieve you, of the stress, if you admit, and just permit me to go for mine and drop a line and exit,” MC Lyte asserts that by listening
to what she has to say, she can show listeners a different image of a woman, one that is rarely seen in rap music. She asks for compliance so she can enlighten listeners with her lyrics and redefine traditionally stereotypical images of women (MC Lyte 1991).

Although she hardly ever addresses the media accusations and rumors of her private life, MC Lyte (1991) uses “Beyond the Hype” as a moment to address her fans and the media. Her message addresses how she will not discuss the rumors and myths that the media portrays about who they perceive her to be as an artist or in her personal life. She clearly states that she is beyond all of that and does not wish to entertain their questions with answers: “Can't, you, see, I'm beyond the hype, and all that type of jazz and pizzazz, I'm, into, reality, forget the fantasy, this is me, beyond the hype, so don't believe, what you read, cause they'll deceive.” MC Lyte reclaims who she is by not subjecting herself to others’ definition of what they want her to be. Challenging the existing images portrayed by the media, which define women as unable to direct their own path without male influence, she teaches women to have the boldness to chart their own paths as they define themselves as self-sustaining individuals. By not openly defining her sexuality, she leaves herself room to be whoever she chooses, regardless of what the media implies.

The questioning of MC Lyte’s sexuality stands as proof that a black woman of voice and power is relegated either to lesbianism or to masculinity. In other words, the agency MC Lyte insists upon maintaining causes the public to question her sexuality, stripping her of femininity because in America, a black woman cannot possess both agencies and femininity. For black women the binary opposition of the jezebel on one
hand and the silent, meek housewife or mammy on the other, leaves MC Lyte to be categorized as lesbian precisely because America leaves no room for a beautiful, feminine voice which has the power to stand for and fight for itself. Only men do that. Hence, when women do it, especially black women, they are acting like men, and women who act like men are circumscribed in a masculine aura so that there power and dominance can be understood and found acceptable. This is the price MC Lyte pays for being self sufficient and self determining. However, she is willing to pay it, having apparently concluded that the other option would leave her far worse.

MC Lyte exposes how the media and their false stories pertaining to women’s images are sometime exaggerated and taken out of context. Her message is clear. People should not listen to what they see or hear on the television or follow what the media produces because it’s not real life. The truth in most cases is embellished for entertainment. Lyte comments: “The media blows things out of proportion, the public’s eye, proceed with caution it’s a dog eat dog world, but we’ll be alright, all we gots to do is stick together, and move beyond the hype” (MC Lyte 1991). In other words, she encourages the public to be critical thinkers so that they do not become pawns of the capitalistic, self-servicing media machine.

These statements, made by MC Lyte, are in direct support of the post-Civil Rights core values of the African-American community which professes distrust of the mainstream establishment. MC Lyte illustrates how easily consumers are led to believe everything they read, watch, or hear. She demonstrates how foolish it is to base ones opinions on the media’s embellishment of unrelated fallacies. MC Lyte’s ability to depict
the medias’ tactics in engaging an audience enlightens those who were oblivious to their mode of operation. It also aids her listeners in discerning between the facts or fictions of contemporary media. MC Lyte reiterates the notion that with the media, one must take things with a “grain of salt.”

Many female artists argue over who the best female lyricist is in the rap industry. Even before she was honored in 2006 as the best female (Lyte 1991), MC during the VH1’s Hip Hop awards, decided to address this argument briefly in “Can You Dig It?” MC Lyte (1991) informs everyone that she is better than all competition, male or female when she says: “It'll get stronger, much stronger, long live the king, but the Lyte lives longer, It's well argumented and well documented, I hold the title of the best, you can't prevent it.” She briefly touches on why she is the best when she says: “So I strive to be the best lo and behold. Every rhyme I write, you gots to chant them, every song I sing, a national anthem.” She lets her listeners know that they are beneficiaries of her abilities because they continue to support her and what she does, bringing momentum to her quest to redefine the images of women. She is changing the image of the female rap artist from a de-sexed mute to a role model who speaks her own mind.

Hence, for MC Lyte, these lyrics are meant to encourage women like to know that they can also achieve great things. They do not have to stand in the shadow and allow someone to take away their femininity and voice like mammies would. They can be strong and eloquent and make their opinions known. She believes if she is able to be successful, any woman can be successful and inquirers: “Is there a message in my music? If I can do it—you can do it!” (MC Lyte 1991).
Rap is often seen as a form of music that is misogynistic and has no real purpose. MC Lyte (1991) wrote “Kamikaze” to demonstrate her purpose and goal in making rap music. She argues that if the style of rap music changes she can easily adapt to it and call it her own, she claims: “They try to keep it down, because I talk to a beat in other words, because I try to TEACH. . . . don’t we have any morals anymore? Or did rap take the toll out the f*ckin door? Well if it did, hardcore’s back to claim it. I’m a take it, change it, F*ck it, rename it.” She then goes on to discuss the negative impact of not using rap music as an artistic instrument, MC Lyte posits: “You Hip Hoppers got to be selective, And stop letting that Bullsh*it slide for rap, can’t you see that it’s a brainwash . . . trap?” (MC Lyte 1991). These verses redefine the perception that female artists can only fall into the male authorities’ pre-determined images of women in rap music, the mammy, or the Jezebel; if then do not find values as well as a voice for themselves. MC Lyte believes that women can be whoever they want to be and to begin to think with their own minds instead of being led by the male authority.

MC Lyte uses herself as an example of how rap music can be used as an artistic tool of teaching others, redefining her purpose as a female rap artist. In “Kamikaze,” she tells the consumers that the music that the media emphasizes is not helping them grow and they are constantly being fed music that does not enrich their minds. She states: “But when I talk of education, you fear that drugs and such, you don’t wanna hear that” (MC Lyte 1991). She explains her theory in writing her music that is, everyone wants to be happy. She explains that “in order to appreciate happiness . . . some type of grief you must experience.” “Kamikaze” is a lesson from MC Lyte revealing her purpose as a rap
artist to her listeners. She shows them a part of her reality by sharing advice and experiences with the statement, “... If you are always satisfied life will just pass by, you would’ve never tried” (MC Lyte 1991).

“Kamikaze” shows the media and the critics that women in the rap industry are more than hood ornaments and overtly sexual beings. MC Lyte shows that she is a lady with a purpose to teach and illustrate positive messages in her music. Redefining her purpose as a woman in the urban community, she is making known that she is a role model and a woman to listen to and follow and she does not have to compromise who she is to be respected.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the urban community experienced a financial low. Reaganomics was in full swing and it was difficult to find jobs. A quick and easy fix to the decline in financial income was dealing drugs. Drug dealing was not only lucrative but an easy occupation for urban youths to enter. The customer base had already been created and the supply and demand for narcotics was at its peak. In her song “Not Wit’ A Dealer,” MC Lyte (1989) discusses the dilemmas and negativity that come along with dating a drug dealer. Her female character Cecilia could be categorized as a Jezebel by Collins’ definition. However, MC Lyte redefines Cecelia and she is seen for more than a Jezebel, she is seen as a pawn and a woman that was manipulated by her desire to be in love with a man. Even when all that is right and reasonable presents itself as an escape from her Jezebel lifestyle, she chooses the opposite direction out of obligation to her man, she states: “Miss C said No, I'm stayin with my man
He stands by me, so I too must stand” (MC Lyte 1989).
Currently, rap music appears to dictate what women want, but from a male perspective. In most cases, if not all, the male imagery of women is inaccurate because a man cannot possibly know who a woman is, he can only assume. MC Lyte is one female rap artist who strives to give a voice for women. She dictates their needs and experiences through her lyrics and reveals to the urban community who she really is. In the majority of rap music, women are seen as sex kittens looking for a man to take care of them because they are unable or unwilling to take care of themselves. MC Lyte touches on this phenomenon in her song “Not Wit A Dealer” (MC Lyte 1989). This song is a story about her friend, Cecelia, whose love was bought through material gifts by a drug dealer and voiced in the words: “Her love he bought just to warm his bed, I tried to tell her, but it went out the other ear, she didn't wanna hear, what I had to say.” As the story continues Cecelia’s friends, including MC Lyte, make several attempts to warn her that everything in life, including love, comes with a price. Although unfortunate, this scenario has happened to numerous women in the urban community and has not stopped. These women are at times blinded by material things and never ask questions about what the cost is to them or what they would need to do to earn such gifts. Very similar to a Jezebel or the sexually aggressive women, in this case there is an exchange of sexual favors for material items.

In instances, such as the one described in “Not Wit A Dealer” (MC Lyte, 1989), the price that is paid for monetary convenience is never worth the sacrifice. MC Lyte gave her character Cecelia opportunities to redefine who she was and not be seen as the Jezebel selling her body for material gifts or the mammy who is constantly told how to
think and what to say, without ever thinking on her own accord. MC Lyte talks of Cecelia’s struggle in the following manner: “She came to me and said (Lyte, what do I do?), Forget about Born, or else you’re through (Ahh . . .), she said (but, but I love him!); Hm, I wonder, is love worth bein six feet under?” Most women who choose this lifestyle always face a crossroad where they are asked to make a decision and possibly pay the ultimate price of that decision with their lives. Those women who choose to redefine who they are in a positive direction heed these warnings early and leave the unhealthy relationship. MC Lyte takes this story a step further enlightening the listener of the consequences of not taking control and redefining the existing images of who women are when faced with this situation when she says, “She ran down the stairs in a minute or more, I heard a thunderous roar, (*shots*) Born and Cecilia—killed by Uzis, see why it pays to be choosy?” (MC Lyte 1989).

In 1993, MC Lyte became a Grammy nominated artist. She was nominated for Best Rap Performance for her song “Ruffneck” from her album Aint No Other. “Ruffneck” was written as a response to Apache’s song entitled “Gangsta Bitch.” Apache is a rapper out of Queen Latifah’s “Native Tongue” camp who came out with a one hit wonder discussing his definition of the woman he would want to be with, a “Gangsta Bitch.” Apache describes his gangsta b*tch as:

Yo, I need a gangsta b*tch; she don't sleep and she don't play. Stickin up girls from around the f*ckin way; strapped but lovable, hateful but huggable. Always in trouble and definitely f*ckable, see her now, booms and pounds, she's mine friend; puffin on a bl*nt, sippin on a Heineken she's got charm, a firearm to match mine, goin to the movies packin his and her nine's wearin Carhart and leather, motherf*ck the weather on Valentine's day, doin stick-ups together no one to blame, no shame in her game and when we f*ck she makes me scream out her name she's not petty, confidant, ready right for late night,
we play fight with machetes. This goes out to all the gangsta hoe pros Give me a ghetto girl, f*ck a Soul Train hoe. (Apache 1992)

In response to the chauvinistic attack on women in Apache’s song, MC Lyte released “Ruffneck” which quickly climbed to the number one spot on the U.S. Rap charts. Her hit single “Ruffneck” becomes the first rap single by a female artist to go gold and was nominated for a Grammy. In this song, MC Lyte describes what she is looking for in her ideal man, someone who is a little rough around the edges but will be there for her when she needs his support: “I need a ruffneck, I need a dude with attitude. . . . Actin' like he don't care, when all I gotta do is beep him 911 and he'll be there. Right by my side with his ruffneck tactics, ruffneck attitude, the ruffneck bastard” (MC Lyte 1993).

MC Lyte knows from her upbringing and clearly understands that because of the socioeconomic status of urban communities, urban youths are not given the same opportunities as others. Most times, a way has to be made out of no way and MC Lyte uses “Ruffneck” as an anthem for the men in her life that go that extra mile. Some see this song as homage to the men in the urban community which places them in direct opposition to mainstream society. By showing her admiration for urban man she once again displaying the camaraderie between the Hip Hop community and post civil rights African-American Core Values. MC Lyte finds these differences attractive and powerful, and declares that a “Ruffneck” is the man she would want to be with and declares: “I need a ruffneck, I need a dude with an attitude.” It is clear that she wants a man who is outspoken and is not easily swayed by mainstream society. A man that takes charge and in some ways makes others fear him always demanding that she is respected by saying:
“Actin' like he don't care, when all I gotta do is beep him 911 and he'll be there.” She redefines who women are and how they should demand to be treated without hindering their mates’ manhood. She demonstrates that women have power in their relationship and can be considered an equal, redefining the notion that women are best when submissive.

Consequently, as MC Lyte evolved as an artist so did her music. She continued to tackle subjects that were very sensitive and showed her ability to see the reality and changes in every day urban life. Her song “Eyes Are the Soul” (MC Lyte 1991), recognizes the spirits of the urban youth and how their lives are deeply affected by poor choices and loss of direction. This song is a reflection of the effects that negative choices and desperation have had on the urban community and how it attacks not only the victims but also the families of those affected. She discusses the abused, the children of the abused and teen pregnancy. All of these unfortunately remain normal concerns with females in the urban community. MC Lyte’s music is showing the nation that women rap artists are very aware of what is happening to the younger females. Her music is an attempt to reach out to young women who live in the trenches of negativity so they can learn a lesson and redefine their image’s as women. She aims to teach young women to understand that they do not have to ascribe to the existing images and to deny the route that society has chosen for them. They can make their own way by redefining who they are.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, there were several epidemics plaguing the urban community, drug abuse, HIV-AIDS, teen pregnancy, poverty, and child
abandonment. MC Lyte chose to address some of these issues in her song “Eyes Are the Soul.” In one of the verses she speaks on the continuing epidemic of teenage pregnancy and the challenges a young woman faces as she described her ordeal by stating: “I look into her eyes, she's so young, but I know, where she's comin from” (MC Lyte 1991).

She chooses to narrate this topic from the young woman’s point of view. Letting the listener know exactly what is going through the young ladies mind as she is forced to make life altering choices. Her description of the young women is found in the words: “White shirts and skirts with pleats, she cried, fear in her voice. Not knowing, she had a choice” (MC Lyte 1991). The voice that is heard in this song is important because there have been limited opportunities to hear the voice of a teenage girl who was uninformed. Mainstream society, assumes that teenagers “know better” and that they are educated about sexuality and have knowledge of the consequences that accompany their choices. This song clearly tells a different story in the words, “If she knew that she’s not the only one in school that didn’t use the caution, facin, raisin a baby or abortion” (MC Lyte 1991). She discusses how this young lady’s mis-education has affected her relationship with her own mother, which is something that is often seen in the urban community. Some parents argue that they do not want their children to follow in the footsteps of those who have not prospered, but many have not educated their children on what steps to take to avoid that path. When the child has a misstep, the parent may want to disown and alienate them because of their own internal failure and disappointment with the words, “Her mother said she had to leave.” Out of helplessness, despair, and no guidance, a lot of these young women become teenage mothers on their own or terminate their
pregnancies. MC Lyte says, “Who wants to be where a baby is not received no ultimatum; she’s going to the GYN to put it to an end”. In this case, MC Lyte's female character chose to terminate her pregnancy (MC Lyte 1991).

However, “Eyes Are the Soul” is powerful for various reasons. Once again, MC Lyte has clarified a topic that mainstream society has made assumptions and inferences about. It is assumed that teen pregnancy comes from lack of discipline, rebellion, drug addiction and many other negative misnomers. MC Lyte brings to light that this is not always the case. The media has a tendency to highlight the negative stories and make them repetitive, forcing the mainstream society to believe that story is the only story. MC Lyte has brought another perspective and the female voice to the mainstream that would not have been seen through normal media avenues. She forces the Hip Hop community and mainstream society to view women in ways that compel people to see women as human beings and not simply sexual objects.

Because of her non-provocative style and reserved image, MC Lyte has been the recipient of questions and rumors with regard to her sexuality. Although MC Lyte chose never to respond to the media and its rumors, her music reflects the desires of heterosexual women and the issues that they encounter in their intimate relationships. By not responding and staying true to her image and convictions, MC Lyte has once again redefined the images of women. She shows that being a woman does not mean you have to be blatantly sexy or visually provoking to experience love and heartbreak in relationships, “I gave him the number, I saw it in his eyes, She gave me the number? Hmmm I'm surprised. Good conversation, over the phone, he began to come for me
whenever I was alone . . . I don't care about the other girls, just be good to me!” (MC Lyte 1991). In her single, “Poor Georgie,” MC Lyte (1991) reminisces on a relationship she had with a young man who died in a car crash before the connection materialized. Death, although unfortunate, is a reality in the urban community and is something that everyone in this community can relate to.

MC Lyte speaks about many social issues in her music. While doing so, she also makes several strides at redefining how women are seen within the Hip Hop community. She is very careful to speak about her characters in ways that gives the listener a historical reference of the female characters and their background. In doing so, she has in several songs redefined the Jezebel image and in some cases created her own new definition of what society would depict as a Jezebel.

Successful men often get the reputation of being a ladies man because they attract a lot of women. A ladies man would be the type of man that a Jezebel would be attracted to. MC Lyte wrote “Poor Georgie” to show her listeners that a man can only disrespect you if you allow them to. If you present yourself in a lady like manner, then men will treat you like a lady. She declares, “I gave him the number, I saw it in his eyes, she gave me the number? Hmmm, I’m surprised” (MC Lyte 1991). She alludes that this gentleman is excited and felt insecure about approaching MC Lyte although he had the reputation of getting any woman he wanted. MC Lyte says, “I know for a fact George had a lot of girls spread out from state from state around the world” (MC Lyte 1991).

MC Lyte chooses to make herself the object of affection to communicate this narrative. She plainly says that she understood that he may see other women, but as a
sign of respect, she should not see them and when he is with her he needs to treat her like the queen that she is. She says, “As long as he was smart and kept his girls in check. Made sure I never saw them and showed me respect, he didn’t have to be loyal, like men should be, I don’t care about the other girls, just be good to me!” (MC Lyte 1991). By dictating the parameters of the relationship, she is setting herself apart from the Jezebels he would normally choose, as his existing female image is redefined.

“Poor Georgie” gives young ladies directives to be sure that in dating, they set themselves apart from the negative images that exist. It also shows that men treat women as they allow themselves to be treated. If women allow themselves to be treated like Jezebels and mammies, the dominant society will continue to think it is appropriate to portray the negative images. MC Lyte uses herself as an example and sets the limitations for Georgie while clarifying the repercussions of crossing those boundaries when she states,: “But if I ever saw one, that would be the end. He couldn’t kick the storyline that she was just a friend” (MC Lyte 1991). She gives young women another perspective on dating and how to redefine themselves by demanding they decide and let it be known how as women they want to be treated and respected.

MC Lyte also discusses how women are preyed on within the Hip Hop community and are often seen as promiscuous or as Jezebels. In her song “All That” MC Lyte (1991) addresses the women who live out the Jezebel images by easily giving their bodies to any man that asks, “You want some booty but you're gettin none this way, You better ask Suzy, Sally or that girl Fay.” By acknowledging that there are women who would oblige, she quickly redefines this existing image of women unveiling the idea that
there is a prevalent existence of women like her who do not ascribe to this image by declaring. “You gets NONE, you hear me you cheesy rat? Because I'm Lyte, and I'm havin NONE of that” (MC Lyte 1991).

Ultimately, she takes a stand and confronts a man who is seen as a player. When he comments on her aggression she proceeds to inform him that she knows his character and has encountered men like him before. This is important because women are often seen in the Hip Hop community as gullable uninformed victims. MC Lyte clearly states that she is not about to be fooled by his false image nor will she be hoodwinked by his charms when she posits, “He said, "My, aren't we aggressive. D*mn right, and I'm also perceptive, I know your kind, you roam around the f*ckin town, you wanna slap it, flip it, and rub it down, You want some booty but you're gettin none this way” (MC Lyte 1991).

By informing him she is not a Jezebel, she gives young women the courage to do the same and a voice to counteract the images of women in bikinis, and performers on stripper poles of some rap videos today. She gives an example of what to do when your womanhood is being invalidated by a man who assumes that you are a Jezebel. She offers advice on how these negative images should be addressed.

Women’s sexuality is constantly put on display in rap music. It is constantly inferred that women in the rap industry are mirrors of the Jezebel image, oversexed and promiscuous. “Like A Virgin” is MC Lyte’s (1991) redefinition of that image. She shows that women are sexual beings but are not easily led by their flesh as portrayed in the images of commercial rap music.
MC Lyte initiates a dialogue of a young lady who expresses her inner thoughts about the object of her affection. These thoughts are intimate and in most instances would not be shared openly. MC Lyte uses her candidness to connect with young ladies who are listening to this song and who have or may encounter this same experience. She states, “You was in your house, I was in mine, as long as we were chatting on the line, it was fine . . . You’ve been beggin for some time, for me to come visit. You never got mad though, if I wasn’t widdit” (MC Lyte 1991). In this last verse MC Lyte is showing young ladies that male and female relationships can begin with more than just a physical connection which is in opposition of the Jezebel and many images that are currently seen. Women’s images are either overtly sexual or completely de-sexed. “Like A Virgin” shows young people, its best to start a relationship with friendship than to begin with a physical union because of the possible consequences demonstrated in the lyrics, “Suppose I got pregnant, damn I’d be lost; my mom woulda kicked me out to live with Jack Frost” (MC Lyte 1991).

Also, in order to see how far you have you have progressed, it is at times necessary to see where your journey began. MC Lyte talks about her chronological progression in the rap industry and how she has evolved and grown with it. She reflects on the images of the women when she first entered the rap industry in her song “Bad as I Wanna Be” (MC Lyte 1997) when she posits, “I remember when I hit the scene it was the second phase, rope chains two finger rings, those were the days Latin Quarters my Puma suit was cool.” MC Lyte realized that because of the medias images of women and their ability to influence various audiences, her rap career could end at any moment. She
discovered that all artists must have something other than music to fall back on. A music career could be used as an entry to other aspects of entertainment and should be explored: “When your rap life dies and you still alive n*gga, you better know how to survive” (MC Lyte 1997). MC Lyte stresses the importance of having a plan and that success is hard work, “It aint easy, it aint supposed to be” (MC Lyte 1997). By opening the door to options, MC Lyte allows women to continue to create their own images and make them positive.

As time progressed, the negative stigma associated with women and the rap industry, makes it necessary for female artists to now define who they are in the industry. By doing this they are able to separate themselves from the negative imagery and stereotypes that exist. MC Lyte did this in her song entitled “God Said Lyte” (MC Lyte 2003). Female artists have unfortunately been assigned the roles of a sex kitten or a tomboy in the rap industry and the lyrics they produce normally follow suit. MC Lyte makes it clear that she is not one to put in any category and does what she can to set herself apart from other female rap artists, isolating herself from existing images as a contributor to this musical genre when she declares: I’m giving ‘em rhymes of feminine kind, keeping it tight Knockin; the edge off they shoulder Colder than any MC, and hotter than the next” (MC Lyte 2003). Her lyrics exude confidence as she calls attention that her music does not reflect the Jezebel images: “Ready to raise the roof, off the vocal booth, put hoes back on track cause they loose. When I push beef it’s like flaming y’all tender as I serve these loose rappin’ broads. She’s sellin straight up sex by the seashore” (MC Lyte 2003). Although MC Lyte unmistakably disassociates herself from the more
promiscuous images associated with rap, she makes note that she is still a woman and a sexual being who uses discretion as she states: “I keeps a tight lip bout what the light hits” (MC Lyte 2003). Redefining her mammy image and taking back her sexuality by informing her listeners that there is nothing wrong with sex as long as it is a responsible act and not a tool to confuse people of what a relationship should be; she challenges women in being a responsible adult, and who should not display themselves like the Jezebel images in some rap music. There are rap videos that reward the Jezebel images for their promiscuity as well as, indiscretion which sends the incorrect message to young women in the urban community.

MC Lyte (2003) touches on this topic again in her song “Lyte the MC” when she declares, “Never catch me in no sleazy act, I ain’t a easy act . . . You is me and I is you, listen reppin’ for the hood, gotta give ‘em a taste.” Her raps focus on deconstructing the negative female images portrayed in rap music which are being used irresponsibly. The raps perpetuate misinformation to those who do not interface with the urban community and its women most importantly, on a regular basis. Because some of the offenders are her counterparts in the Hip Hop community, MC Lyte makes a point to not place blame or work against other artists, however, she notifies individual artists that they are solely responsible for the impact of portraying whatever image they choose.

This approach to women or redefining women presents a challenge for the rap industry that has become prosperous because of its commercial appeal. With that commercial appeal, comes the sacrifice of the artistic nature of rap music. Unfortunately in most cases the brand to be sacrifice is the female image. The result is that it is difficult
for some women to find true success in the music industry and even more rare in the rap genre. The rap industry is known and profits from its misogynistic undertone and its constant portrayal of the Jezebel and mammy images in its media outlets. Female artists are sometimes forced to choose between who they are as an individual or the image the record labels think will be profitable. Most times, these images are in complete opposition of each other. Female artists have been dropped from their label for not making the more profitable choice. MC Lyte (2003) speaks about her experience in her song “Ride Wit Me” with the verse: “Race, got a lot a rats but I cant be caught, or bought cos I wont sell out, that’s why me and the big dogs, we fell out. Not with a major, but I’m still major league.” MC Lyte allows young women to have a different outlook of the images they see on television. MC Lyte helps redefine the existing image by revealing that most of the women portrayed are acting a role or part and this is not who they are outside of the entertainment world. She uses herself as an example to illustrate some of the challenges that female artists face in the rap industry. Her reference to being not with a “major” alludes to the challenges she faced with her own record label.

Nevertheless, due to the mixed messages that some rap music portrays about male and female relationships a lot of young women are misinformed about the positive aspects of dating and getting to know someone that may turn into a life mate. Current music displays promiscuity as the pillar of all relationships, platonic or otherwise and can be misleading to young people who have not experienced life on a mature level. Many rap songs continue to perpetuate the Jezebel stereotype as an image for young women to model.
"Not Wit A Dealer," "Ruffneck," and "It's All Yours," are all songs whose general theme is based on male/female relationships and interaction. Similar to the Jezebel, these characters would initially be viewed as sexually aggressive, whores, or morally unrestrained women. MC Lyte redefines these women by allowing the listener to hear a female view of women and she is able to show positive attributes that can not be contained in the existing images.

Lyte's "It's All Yours" (MC Lyte 1998) is a culmination of her path of redefining women in rap music. The song illustrates the stages that young people encounter in a positive relationship. It is necessary to have this illustration because of all of the negative images that exist within the Hip Hop community. The current images show males and females interacting on either a business level or a purely physical level. The underlying theme is material goods in exchange for sexual acts and young people with no direction are emulating these messages. Artists fail to clarify to their consumers on a consistent basis that music is for entertainment purposes and should not be mirrored in any real relationship. Intimacy and love are left for other genres of music and are rarely seen in rap music to exhibit realness. MC Lyte uses herself as the main female character in this love song as she traces the relationship from its infancy to its current stage.

"It's All Yours" is one of the songs which redefine the recurring Jezebel image and turns her into a positive example of womanhood. This song details the journey of two neighborhood adolescents that have known each other since childhood. After being separated by relocation they continue to work on their relationship. We listen as the two characters grow, mature, and eventually fall in love. "Its All Yours" is the female
characters narration of their journey and her realization that she is now ready to become intimate with the man that as an adult she now wants to marry. The attributes of this character fall in line with what the Hip Hop community would describe as something in complete conflict of the mammy and Jezebel images currently used. This new female image is comfortable with her sexuality and open to discuss it, but understands that with hasty decisions in regards to sexuality, negative outcomes can possibly follow. She is not ashamed of being a person who is desired and is not scared of the responsibility that may come along with it. This character appears feminine yet sexy, she is intelligent yet shows some naiveté, and she is independent while committing her life to a man who will provide for her and their family to come. This character has learned to unite the sexuality of being a woman with the wisdom of being a lady. She is not mammy, a de-sexed woman nor is she Jezebel, the promiscuous.

The very first verse of “It’s All Yours” is, “Our love is old-school like Mary Jane's” (MC Lyte 1998). She informs the listener that the relationship she is sharing is not something that transpired on a whim, there is history, and with that comes changes and challenges. This relationship started when both were younger, innocent but not pretentious. She mentions that they first met on the subway and caught each others eye. Although meeting on a subway may appear to be random, MC Lyte uses the subway as a way to connect with her audience. The subway is the major mode of transportation for a large number of her listeners, and having the main characters meet there resonates with quite a few members of her female fan base. This makes their meeting seem real and believable to young women and helps them easily identify with the message in this song.
She reiterates the importance of maintaining a friendship in an intimate relationship with the words, “This is for all the years you've been my companion as well as my best friend” (MC Lyte 1998). This verse shows the importance of knowing the person you are in a relationship with and being comfortable enough to be friends but that relationships do not always have to be sexual. She says, “Our love is like a Romeo and Juliet flick so surreal but yet picturesque. There were problems I can admit, but we handled it and still the candles lit” (MC Lyte 1998). The images that are currently seen in rap music only show the sexual side of relationships, reiterating the Jezebel image constantly. MC Lyte speaks of the details that really make relationships last that are rarely seen in the misogynistic videos. By doing this she is redefining who women are and their roles in intimate relationships. Revealing that challenges will be encountered but, because of the foundation of friendship, they are able to move through their issues and work it out.

“It’s All Yours” educates young women on how to remain strong and steadfast and not to allow themselves to become weak to their flesh and end up as sexual pawns. Songs like “It’s All Yours” give young women another example of how they can be desirable and sexual beings but also be relevant and strong in an intimate relationship. They do not have to reduce themselves to just being a sexual tool, they can be a best friend, a women with an opinion, as well as a lover. MC Lyte is able to further redefine images of women by showing the progression of the relationship and that being a strong and desirable woman is more than an image, it is a journey of growth and maturity.

Since her Grammy nomination in 1993, MC Lyte has done several collaborative efforts with artists such as Janet Jackson, Xscape, Missy Elliot and Beyonce to name a
few. She has continued to develop her career and even engaged in acting for a short period of time on UPN’s hit show *One on One*. MC Lyte was recognized as a Hip Hop Icon in 2006 on VH1’s Hip Hop honors. She is known as the greatest female rapper of all time and now uses her fame as an activist and motivational speaker. She continues to be outspoken about the misogyny that often taints the art form she helped pioneer. In an interview with Joan Morgan in a 2005 issue of Essence magazine, Lyte gives her views on misogyny within Hip Hop when she posits:

> When it comes to the misogyny in Hip Hop, black women haven't been able to change things because we're not standing together. Many decisions are not made by the artist alone. Black women are going to have to involve the black men who are on the programming and promotions teams, the video directors and the record execs. It's going to take one of these really respected directors to say to an artist, ‘I won't have a woman dressed like that in a video,’ because that challenges the artist to say, ‘Okay, what other ideas do we have that would be exciting to watch?’

> There are ways to be sexy and classy without being borderline disgusting. As well as, ‘The way women are being portrayed reflects what's really going on in our community. You have to teach a younger generation of women about self-respect and self-esteem—that they can separate themselves from what they see and hear on television and radio. And they have to see enough variety in the types of portrayals of women to know they have a choice.’ (Morgan 2005)

Her analysis of courtship seems to acknowledge that there are dishonest men and that she is not interested in negotiating on their terms. In her music, Lyte allows herself to set the tone of the interaction and subsequently articulates the new ground rules that will protect her from repeating the mistakes made in past relationships (Rose 1994). MC Lyte's lyrical skills and verbal prowess topped those of a lot of her male peers when she initially came out. Her delivery was so dynamic that she elevated the rap game by simply being in it (Poust 2004).
In an interview the researcher conducted with MC Lyte on March 5, 2007, the researcher asked her to discuss the differences between how she was received when she first entered the rap industry and how she is seen now and how the images of women have differed through time.

Q: How were you received when you first got into the rap industry?
A: As a little sister. I was told that before anyone saw me they thought the voice belonged to a little boy. After meeting me they treated me like their little sister. The press loved the idea of a new female mc speaking of the crack situation. It made good news.

Q: How are you received now?
A: Still very well respected.

Q: What type of impact did you want your music to make on the rap industry, if any?
A: I want my lyrics to have the ability to change one's mind. I want to enlighten and inspire a younger generation of people.

Q: What is your perception of the images of women in the rap industry when you started?
A: Women in videos were strong and opinionated. We had something to say that was relevant to the times we were living in.

Q: And currently?
A: Many more times than not women are used as objects, "eye candy" they call them. I believe, to a great degree, female singers and MC's feel the need now to compete with the other women being presented in men's videos.

Q: Has your music changed or perpetuated these images?
A: My lyrics have always been timeless because they deal with real issues. People can relate to real circumstances.

Q: What do you think the next steps are for women artists in Hip Hop?
A: To remain true and take it back to the essence. Speak of what they know and focus on touching others with sharing their experiences. Don't be fearful of making sense with your content. Don't shy away from honesty.

Q: What is the legacy that you want to leave as a woman in Hip Hop?

A: As a women who never bit her tongue and used every opportunity to share the knowledge I've been blessed with.

MC Lyte’s commitment to redefining the male-centered images allowed women rap artists that came after her to broaden the scope and bring forth new images for women in the rap industry. Women rap artists began to emerge with new images some became more controversial visually, while some took the lyrical path to express who they are as women.

There were some who were determined and ascribed to MC Lyte’s redefinition of a woman’s image in rap by not using their sexuality as a vehicle and conforming to the sexist images portrayed in the media. MC Lyte allowed women rappers like, Missy Elliot, and Eve to continue her legacy by staying true to their musical talents and not succumbing to the misogynistic images of women that rap currently portrays. The successes of these women have shown that women have a future in rap music that goes beyond the mammy and Jezebel images. They have followed the path of MC Lyte and have become successful by simply being who they are.

Missy Elliot is one such woman who stands on the shoulders of MC Lyte. She came onto the rap scene back in 1997 and since then has become a formidable figure within the Hip Hop industry. She blends together techniques from Jamaican dance hall music, Blues, and male rap in order to create a distinct and empowered sense of black female sexuality. Her lyrics are primarily focused on the experiences of the lower class
urban African American women. She speaks the lived experiences of urban African
American women in a language that refuses the dominant and normalized discourse. Her
lyrics can be vulgar, crude, and often insulting wordplay with a focus on sexuality and
sexual antagonism.

Missy raps about aggression between women when men cheat on their partners.
The language is definitely vulgar, unfeminine and demonstrates violence between
women, but Elliot knows no boundaries, she is clear that many of her lyrics are for
women when she says,

. . . People always say Why your mouth so vulgar? Why you got to sing
all those nasty records? But I be representing for my ladies and we’ve got
something to say. We’ve been quiet too long, lady like, very patient. We
always had to deal with the guys talking about how they gonna wear us
out on records, and so I had to do records that were strictly representing
for my ladies. (Missy Elliot 2002)

In “She’s a B*tch,” off of her album Da Real World, she raps about the rights of women
to call themselves b*tches. She addresses the idea, that language can, like cultural
symbols, be re-defined and become empowering. “Basically a b*tch to me is a power
word. It’s basically a female knowing what she wants and going after what she wants. If
you’re calling me a “b*itch” cos’ I’m going after what I want and I am confident about
myself, then that’s what you’re gonna have to call me” (Missy Elliot 2002).

The artist Eve came into the Hip Hop scene in the late 1990s. Eve was one of a
new breed of tough, talented, commercially viable female MCs to hit the rap scene during
the late '90s. Though she could be sexy when she chose, she was not as flamboyant as
other women. She started out as a singer in her early teens, performing with an all-
female vocal quintet. She was also honing her skills as a rapper in impromptu battles
with friends, and before she left high school. After her mother remarried she felt the need to escape. She began working as a stripper in a Bronx strip club. It was there that she met rap artist Mase who encouraged her to stop disrobing and start rapping on a professional level.

In her song, *Love is Blind*, Eve illustrates how, with rap she is changing the cultural norms by creating a song that expresses her experiences of being African-American and female. Eve addresses the nature of power within a male/female relationship. She begins by addressing the man who killed her best friend. She addresses the way the boyfriend controls, manipulates, and threatens her friend, causing the woman to live in fear. Eve is telling a story of a black woman who is oppressed by her powerlessness in a relationship with a black man. However, not matter the race, women of all races can relate to the message she is sending forth.

Eve’s song and video addresses domestic violence within a black relationship is revolutionary. She could be seen by some as a traitor to her race in telling the story of a black male on black female violence. Also, she could be seen as taking the chance by telling the story of a woman’s retaliation for that violence. In the end, the boyfriend kills the friend and Eve retaliates. Eve was courageous by sending out a message such as this. Not only is she telling a story of domestic violence but also the different types of violence members of her community must deal with. Because of this song, Eve began to change the male master narrative of the Hip Hop culture. She has also openly brought out issues of domestic violence and the seriousness and the reality of it and, how it should not be a
private matter. Lastly, her song displays the black sisterhood—the loyalty, camaraderie, and the love of other black women, which is rarely seen in Hip Hop culture.

There are female Hip Hop artists, as we have seen, and consumers who are trying to fight against sexism within Hip Hop, but many times they are not taken seriously. Some female artists try to work within the current male-dominated industry and play the expected misogynist role and have achieved success doing so, such as Foxy Brown and Lil Kim. Although research tends to glamorize the success that artists such as Lil Kim and Foxy Brown receive, they are accepted because they embrace the misogynistic images of women in the rap industry and exploiting it to a level that redefined their purpose in the Hip Hop community. MC Lyte, however, stands alone as the pioneer of this movement.

MC Lyte is a pioneer of epic proportions and like many of the male rappers of her era, she raps about issues that are both, significant and life-altering (Williams 2006). Her commitment to Hip Hop and its success is unwavering. She is a woman who has made it a point to define who she is in Hip Hop culture, which allows other women to do the same. MC Lyte is a groundbreaker, a rebel, an artist, a lyricist, and a revolutionary. She is the blueprint for women who believe they are more than the Jezebel and mammy images that have been assigned to them by the dominant culture. Through her career she has defined and redefined the place and value of women in Hip Hop and in America.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to examine how the lyrics of MC Lyte define and/or redefine women in the Hip Hop community. The research in this thesis clearly shows that MC Lyte has made it her aim to change the image of women in Hip Hop not only through her music, but through her image. She has opened doors for women in rap music and has secured a future for them.

When she entered the rap industry with her groundbreaking song entitled, I Cram To Understand You, she was one of the first rappers, male or female, to discuss the social impact of crack addiction. From that point on, her purpose was to speak about real-life situations in her music educating men and women within the Hip Hop community.

As she matured along with her music, she was recognized for her ability to show the female perspective in rap which had not been truly recognized up to that point. Women were forced to hear men’s ascertains of them in rap music. MC Lyte was one of the first to speak on the behalf of women therefore changing the definition of women that had been created by men within the rap genre. Women were no longer sexual objects or the basis for men’s allusions of grandeur; they had their own voice and dictated who they were to the Hip Hop community. Through the lyrics of MC Lyte, women were able to discuss their opinions and issues on male/female relationships, the drug infestation, and what they truly desired in a man.
Her tenacity to stay true to who she was and not be swayed by the commercial media is a testament to women and men within the urban culture. MC Lyte showed that women did not have to change their physical image to be heard or to be successful. It was not necessary to dress in a provocative manner to be seen, nor was it necessary to verbally oblige and condone the misogynistic behavior of some of the male rappers for people to listen.

Research does not discuss the challenges that other women rap artists endure who have followed MC Lyte’s example. In order to be seen as successful within the commercial media, these women would have to use their sexuality to move them into the mainstream. By refusing to do so, these women artists are recognized within the Hip Hop community but are not commercially successful.

Fortunately, there were some who were determined and ascribed to MC Lyte’s redefinition of a woman’s image in rap by not using their sexuality as a vehicle and conforming to the sexist images portrayed in the media. MC Lyte allowed women rappers like, Missy Elliot, and Eve to continue her legacy by staying true to their musical talents and not succumbing to the misogynistic images of women that rap currently portrays. The successes of these women have shown that women have a future in rap music that goes beyond the mammy and Jezebel images. They have followed the path of MC Lyte and have become successful by simply being who they are.

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Artist Eve came into the Hip Hop scene in the late 1990s. Eve was one of a new breed of tough, talented, commercially viable female MCs to hit the rap scene during the late '90s. Though she could be sexy when she chose, she wasn't as over the top. She started out as a singer in her early teens, performing with an all-female vocal quintet. She was also honing her skills as a rapper in impromptu battles with friends, and before she left high school. After her mother remarried she felt the need to escape. She began working as a stripper in a Bronx strip club. It was there that she met rap artist Mase who encouraged her to stop disrobing and start rapping on a professional level.

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different types of violence members of her community must deal with. Because of this song Eve has begun to change the male master narrative of the Hip Hop culture. She has also openly brought out issues of domestic violence and the seriousness and the reality of it, how it should not be a private matter. Lastly, her song displays the black sisterhood—the loyalty, camaraderie, the love of her sistas, which is rarely seen in Hip Hop culture.

There are female Hip Hop artists, as we have seen, and consumers who are trying to fight against sexism within Hip Hop, but many times they are not taken seriously. Some female artists try to work within the current male-dominated industry and play the expected misogynist role and have achieved success doing so, such as Foxy Brown and Lil Kim. Although research tends to glamorize the success that artists such as Lil Kim and Foxy Brown receive, they are accepted because they embrace the misogynistic images of women in the rap industry and exploiting it to a level that redefined their purpose in the Hip Hop community.

Foxy Brown and Lil Kim clearly make a statement to younger audiences that it pays to be provocative. The covers and inserts of their CDs, show them with their breasts barely hidden by a bikini’s or in lingerie. When appearances are made whether it is a red carpet event or their own record-release parties they are normally wearing see-through outfits or clothing that barely covers them.

Lil Kim markets herself as a sexually outrageous diva interchanging incomparable style, undeniable talent, coated with an explicit approach, which has made her one of rap music’s most notorious "It" girls. Her music and image has caused some to reference her as a hell kitten, Hip Hop's nasty girl, sex symbol, glamour baby, diva ho, and a disgrace
to black womanhood. She refers to herself as the Queen Bee, a nickname for Queen B*tch and believes that sex is power. In her terms, b*tches (women) do what they have to do to get paid even in these post feminist times, when opportunities and black female role models are more plentiful than ever. Although this idea is peculiar and in opposition to what women of color have been fighting for, many black women find Kim's message empowering.

Lil' Kim and Foxy Brown are known as "gangsta bitches" and are credited as the catalysts for the revolutionary sexual persona of the new generation. They have established their fame largely because of their risqué fashions and explicit lyrics. They rarely if at all discuss the social status of African-American women in their music, but are clearly heard since they are among the most successful of the contemporary female rap artists. The new generation personifies what has perhaps been one of the most destructive images of African-American women, the Jezebel. African-American women have for centuries tried to redefine themselves to contrast the Jezebel image. It appears that these artists' have used this image to gain success and has continued to be glorified by emerging female rappers. Regardless of how women of the past have fought, this image continues to be resurrected from history and projects a distorted image of African-American women.

Artists such as these and the so-called "p**sy" power they portray—the literal or figurative use of what's between their legs to get the material things they want—completely defeats the positive images of women that female rappers MC Lyte, Queen Latifah, and Salt n Pepa try to display. Besides "biggin' up" every female who slept their
way to the top, it perpetuates the gold-digging, highly sexualized, whorish image that black women have been trying to kill since slavery. Even throughout Hip Hop's brief history, women have fought to be respected as real emcees without reducing themselves to their genitalia. Rap is pregnant with lyrics that will make the average listener think male rappers have some serious anger, if not outright hatred, for them. Black women and women in general are bombarded with images that show women as only token pieces, to be sported like jewelry. For too many years female fans that lived, breathed, and died Hip Hop have had to grapple with this ugly contradiction: How can one love the music that only sees women as b*tches and hoes, especially when female artists such as Lil Kim and Foxy Brown act like the males continuously referencing sex, drugs, money, and material possessions? These images are an example of what is being reflected in the younger audiences.

One of the reasons many Black women find Lil Kim's messages far from empowering is its ability to reinforce many of the stereotypical images of women in Hip Hop. It promotes the idea that women pursue sexual relations with young black men simply out of material desire with the relative financial rewards that come with being the "baby-mama" and "chickenheads." But is in the context of this line of thinking that Pough finds value in the lyrics of women like Lil' Kim and Foxy Brown. Pough (2004) writes in her text *Check it While I Wreck It*, that the sexually explicit lyrics of women rappers like Lil Kim and Foxy Brown, offer black women a chance to face old demons and not let the stereotypes inform or control their lives or who they are. After years of black women being read as supersonic—or asexual, in the case of the mammy
stereotype—the lyrics of these women rappers offer black women a chance to be proud of—and indeed flaunt—their sexuality ultimately redefining their image.

Music has always been a very important cultural tool in the movement for black rights, and rap is no exception. A look at some of the debates taking place within rap can provide an idea about how the black community and women in particular are dealing with sexism (Fernandes 1997). One solution could be to change the culture, system, and ideology so sexist lyrics are not written.

Education could be the first step in changing gender relations in the Hip Hop community. People first need to be made aware that women's rights are being violated verbally in the sexist lyrics, in physical interactions at Hip Hop events, and in the general way that Hip Hop youth interact with one another everyday. A change in the Hip Hop culture's collective consciousness can spread to the larger population, or vice versa. We need knowledge to act and speak out against the exploitation of women, not only in Hip Hop culture, in all cultures everywhere.

As the writer was researching this thesis, she was very surprised about how little information was published on the issue of sexism and Hip Hop culture. What the writer did find were excuses: “It's only a song,” or “it’s what sells.” “I don’t find the degradation of our women, no matter what the race, as a selling point.” This is the information our young people hear and will learn from. Young boys will assume it is okay to treat a female in this manner because it is always heard.

The writer also feels that more female artists need to take a stand. It is never okay to be degraded and viewed as a piece of meat; women are not bitches and whores no
Women need to take pride in who they are and to believe that they have worth and value.

It would be advantageous if further research would analyze the work of female rap artists who have made it their purpose to promote positive images of women within the Hip Hop community. These artists, male and female, exist; unfortunately there is so much concentration on the negative aspects of rap music that these artists are often overlooked and ignored. The media must take responsibility for the one-sided messaging it continues to portray about rap music and the Hip Hop community. Until further research is done to expose the empowering aspects of women in rap music and their contributions to this musical genre, the negative images will remain.

Music has always been a very important cultural tool in the movement for black rights, and rap is no exception. A look at some of the debates taking place within rap can provide an idea about how the black community and women in particular are dealing with sexism (Fernandes 1997). One solution could be to change the culture, system, and ideology so sexist lyrics are not written.

Women need to believe that being a “strong, independent woman” does not mean showing off your body for men. Nor does is mean posing like a car model next to a HUMMER or Phantom (that you may or may not own). Other than how much money you have, being a “strong, independent woman” does not mean that how you look is the most important thing going for you. More female artists need to use their voices to teach women (and men) that women are precious, valuable human beings who deserved to be
heard and respected. Until women fight for women, the perpetuation of negative images will continue.


**Dissertation**


**Journals and Magazines**


**Internet Sites**


Newspapers


**Videos, CDs and Other**


_________. “Not Wit A Dealer.” *Eyes On This.* (1989). CD.


_________. “Aint No Other,” “RuffNeck.” *Aint No Other.* (1993). CD.

_________. “Bad As I Wanna Be.” *Bad As I Wanna Be.* (1997). CD.

_________. “Its All Yours.” *Seven & Seven.* (1998). CD.