DEE-JAY DROP THAT “DEADBEAT:” HIP-HOP’S REMIX OF FATHERHOOD
NARRATIVES

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By

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DEDICATIONS

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DEE-JAY DROP THAT “DEADBEAT:” HIP-HOP’S REMIX OF FATHERHOOD NARRATIVES

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines hip-hop fatherhood narratives from 2010-2015 influenced by drug addiction, mass incarceration, underground economies, trauma, and dysfunctional co-parenting. Explicitly, the paper explores how marginalized, urban African American dads are imagined as protectors, providers, and/or surrogates in hip-hop lyricism. Additionally, the research pays attention to hip-hop artists’ depiction of identity orchestration and identity formation of black adolescents and patriarchs by utilizing David Wall’s theories on identity stasis. Moreover, the dissertation critically analyzes hip-hop lyrics that reflect different concepts of maleness such as hyper-masculine, the complex cool, biblical, heroic, and hegemonic masculinities. In sum, the paper examines rap lyrics use of mimicry calling into question representative black male engagement with American patriarchy.

Introduction

Pining for the magic dust from a fairy godmother, music critic Stanley Crouch longs for a knight in shining armor to rescue his daughter from the horde of “unsuitable males” of the hip-hop generation. In his article entitled “Memo to Young Black Men [18-35] ...Please Grow Up,” he laments the lack of “good” male prospects for his “nearly 30-year-old daughter who has never been close to marrying anyone.” Perhaps as a music critic, Crouch cannot help himself as he looks at hip-hop as the source of his and his daughter’s angst. He describes the musical genre as rebellious music deriving “from the bottom of the cultural slop bucket in which punk rock curdled.” Crouch further contends hip-hop’s construction of the Black male body as “the street thug, the gang member, the drug dealer and the pimp” has led countless masses of Black men to perform a “lifelong part as a “man-child.” Crouch’s attacks on hip-hop culture are akin to the critiques leveled against rock and roll, blues, and even Crouch’s beloved jazz. Interestingly, Crouch’s quest to reclaim and/or remix authentic Black manhood, reminiscent of African Americans writers and thinkers of times gone by, makes his commentary fascinating, ironic, and so much like a hip-hop song.

Crouch’s criticism of hip-hop and Black masculinity is short-sighted. I contend hip-hop represents Amiri Baraka’s “changing same,” as the constantly shifting voice and cultural identifier of the Black masses--specifically urban Black males. Even, Crouch’s commentary supports this in following:

Hip-hop began as some sort of Afro protest doggerel and was very quickly taken over by the gangster rappers, who emphasized the crudest materialism in which the ultimate goal was money and it did not matter

how one got it. The street thug, the gang member, the drug dealer, and the pimp became icons of sensibility and success. Then the attitudes of pimps took a high position and the pornographic version of hip-hop in which women become indistinguishable bitches and hos made a full-court press on the rap "aesthetic."

In the passage above, Crouch rightfully argues hip-hop furnishes narratives presenting Black male identity as hyper-masculine and misogynistic. Subsequently, his comments illustrate hip-hop promotes "the attitudes of pimps" making it hard for Black males to recognize women beyond the "rap aesthetic" of "bitches and hos." Perhaps this is the reason Crouch's daughter cannot find a "good" husband among the poor prospects of her generation. But Crouch's consternation of his daughter's marital status also, ironically, evinces male chauvinism and patriarchy; and his assessment of the music genre paints hip-hop as the sole cause of Black males' so-called lack of developmental growth, which is far from true.

While I certainly agree hip-hop functions as a cultural marker of Black male identity, the music genre also reflects the historical struggles of Black males in contemporary times. Hence, the music highlights what Michelle Alexander calls "the New Jim Crow" (mass incarceration, drug addiction, social injustice, etc.) stemming from unresolved hostile conditions during the antebellum. Crouch's critique ignores these social conditions. Moreover, he fails to consider the complexities of gangsta rap narratives and grossly ignores counter or alternative narratives of Black male identities in hip-hop music. Lastly, the music critic does not consider that if hip-hop has the power to negatively influence Black male identity, then it also has the power to address and

perhaps reverse issues related to Black masculinity.

As a fatherless youth, from the Westside Projects of St. Louis, hip-hop functioned as a paternal space contributing to the formulation of my identity as a man and later as a father. As Jay-Z eloquently states in *Decoded*, for me and many of my peers (from the 80's and 90's), "we were kids without fathers, so we found on wax and on the streets and in history, and in a way, that was a gift (255)." In other words, for many young Black males, hip-hop music furnishes blueprints about Black masculinity. In my case, rappers, KRS-ONE (Knowledge Reigns Supreme Over Nearly Everyone) and the rap group X-Clan taught me knowledge of self and of African and African American history. From rap group Public Enemy, I developed a thirst for cultural politics and political resistance. Likewise, emcees (another word for rappers meaning masters of ceremony) such as Ice Cube, Tupac, Nas' narratives served as a form of catharsis for me as I endeavored to survive life in the projects. As the latest iteration of African American literature, hip-hop addresses the changing same quest for masculinity and holistic identity.

Throughout male-authored African American literature, the question of masculinity and conceptions of patriarchy have long been a common theme. Due to the peculiar institution of slavery, most Black males lost connection to their cultural roots that shaped the contours of maleness associated with specific African regions. Ergo, like Crouch, many African American critics, scholars, thinkers, and writers, supposed Black masculinity were suspended in a fixed state of adolescence. Consequently, many Black male writers' literary works constructed conceptions of patriarchy and masculinity that both emulate and defy white American paradigms. For many of these thinkers, Black masculinity must be established, reconstructed, and/or regained at all costs. Thus, Black

male identity remains in constant flux.

Unfortunately, what bell hooks terms “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” have negatively influenced most Black males’ perception of maleness. Oftentimes, the idea of Black manhood, is simply a changing same performance of “colonial mimicry.” In *Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha writes:

Colonial mimicry is a desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite...Mimicry is, thus the sign of double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which appropriates the Other as it visualizes power. (86)

Through Bhabha’s definition of colonial mimicry, one can see African Americans’ (as the marginalized Other) reenactment of the colonial/dominant culture represents a pursuit for stable identity in a hostile American landscape. Therefore, the Other seeks access to colonial power through imitation, which proves problematic and futile. In actuality, historically, Black males have been denied full access to domination, power, and control afforded to their white male counterparts. Therefore, any reference to an actual unencumbered patriarchy is flawed. Besides this fact, any desire for such authority and power is morally perverse since it is based in domination. Sadly, for many Black males the saga for authentic male identity continues as evidenced in African American literary and musical traditions.

This essay employs several terms associated with masculinity and patriarchy. For instance, my use of the phrase conceptions of “Black patriarchy” suggests Black fathering-whether surrogate fathers, mentors, or biological fathers- is merely the illusion of male influence as opposed to a concrete reality. In addition, I employ the term “Black

fatherhood” throughout the dissertation when referencing qualities or characteristics associated with male parenting. Moreover, I frequently utilize the term “fatherneed,” borrowed from Kyle Pruett, which suggests:

The temperamental fit between father and child, the competence a man feels as a result of his child’s positive response to him, the man’s perception of his own father’s competence with him and the man’s age(s) when he perceived it—all probably play a part in the timing of when a man claims his fatherhood emotionally. (80)

Above all, this dissertation explores the evolutions of Black masculinity and conceptions of patriarchy via colonial mimicry in hip-hop lyricism—the latest incarnation of African American literature. In the subsequent section, I survey African American literary movements to illustrate the evolution of Black maleness impacted by colonial and postcolonial conditions. Additionally, the dissertation shows how writers, from the Antebellum to Hip-hop, shape masculinity and fathering for future generations. The aim is not to question the validity of the narratives, but to highlight the depictions of maleness, notably fathering and images of masculinity.

Plantation Paternalism: From Product to Provider

Prior to the European encounter, Olaudah Equiano's slave narrative captures a glimpse of Black masculinity in Africa rarely evidenced in other African American literature. In the narrative, Equiano's father's experience functions as a representation of precolonial African manhood. Equiano's father, as a man of distinction, or “*Embrenche*” worked with other community elders and chiefs to preside over male socialization of the youth. Here, Equiano reveals that African manhood functioned as a communal unit based

on upholding the standards of the whole rather than the political agenda of the elite. According to Equiano, “[a] mark [or a tribal scar representing grandeur] is conferred on the person entitled to it” which demonstrate manhood was not based on age, but a completion of rites of passage (116). In essence, Equiano’s narrative reveals Black masculinity was once a process of ritualized communal male socialization designed to help establish one’s position or mission in life.

Although there is scant research on pre-colonial African fathering and male socialization, one thing for certain is that it was vastly different from American patriarchy. According to scholar Jean Allman, anthropologist R. S. Rattray’s research on precolonial Ashanti fathering shows fathers as providers and primary caregivers of their children once they have passed infancy. Precolonial Ashanti fathers were expected to give their “ntoro (spirit)” and name their children and in return the children were obligated to provide a coffin for their patriarch. Most importantly, Allman writes, “a father was expected to raise his children, to discipline, and to train them; in turn, he could expect to be served by them, but under no circumstances did he own them (301).” Unfortunately, due to the perils of trans-Atlantic slavery, Equiano and most of his countrymen never fulfilled their destinies into manhood in accordance to their customary traditions. Luckily, Equiano's iconic narrative documents one of many precolonial African traditions of manhood. As noted below, subsequent slave narratives written by African American male authors illuminate the impact of Eurocentric patriarchal masculinity on the psyches of African American men for generations to come.

Invariably, antebellum African American literature portrays the horrific cultural shift for Africans in their transition from men to childlike beasts under the system of

European chattel slavery. African American male writers such as William Wells Brown, Frederick Douglass, Solomon Northup, and several others provide readers with grave depictions of masculinity in the new world. Unlike the customary African traditions mentioned in Equiano's slave narrative, Western Black masculinity functioned under the sole proprietorship of white elites who often utilized brutal force to maintain power and control over the oppressed. In "Slavery Cannot be Covered by a Broadcloth or Bandanna," critic Michael Pierson writes that "patriarchal masculinity" in American slavery is a term that "called forth visions of a strong patriarch with dependents (both white and Black) who owed him unquestioned obedience in return for his protection and the necessities of life" (386). Under this regime, most enslaved African American males appear in early slave narratives as individuals chained to a constant state of infancy in this patriarchal institution. For example, in *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave*, Brown writes, "He [the master] told me I must behave myself, if I did not want to be whipped again" (325). Here, Brown illustrates African Americans in captivity were regarded as emasculated man-children, in contrast to the popular position held by most slave owners that slaves enjoyed a beneficial paternalistic relationship with their masters. According to critic Gerald Jaynes, in "Plantation Factories and the Slave Work Ethic," such an argument by slave owners and their proponents functioned as "an integral part of the defense of an institution, increasingly under attack in the nineteenth century." In fact, several fugitive or newly freed slave narrators depict "plantation paternalism" as a master-slave relationship established through heinous physical and psychological violence, ultimately shattering plantation myths of blissful relationships between benevolent patriarchs and docile "Sambo" children.

Similarly, in Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, the author gives accounts of slave masters committing heinous acts of psychological cruelty even towards their own enslaved offspring. Douglass recounts the painful experience of his own father, a slave master, purposely separating him from his mother which was a “common custom” in Maryland. He contends that this practice was designed to “hinder the development of the child's affection towards its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child” (396). Moreover, Douglass bemoans countless events where masters sold their own flesh and blood or had their “white sons” beat their own brothers. He suggests that these experiences proved traumatic for slave offspring whom the master/father was to “protect and defend” according to the mythology of plantation paternalism. Indeed, several African American slave narratives illustrate plantation paternalism as a scarring experience that left African American males feeling dejected and victimized. Arguably, these horrific circumstances influenced Black male narrators' conceptions of Black masculinity for newly freed or escaped slaves. In turn, antebellum Black writers' assertion of provider and protector of one's family and community become markers of Black manhood.

Case in point, newly freed slaves figuratively assumed the mantle of patriarch in African-America literature through self-affirmations of self-ownership and being a provider. For example, after purchasing his freedom Equiano writes, “I who had been a slave in the morning, trembling at the will of another, was to become my own master, and completely free (Ch. 7).” The ideal of becoming one's own master represents a restoration of humanity to a being that was once considered—a thing, a beast, and a commodity. Ironically, the word “master” from the word “slave master” epitomizes for the slave his

or her bondage and freedom because, like the master, the slave upon liberation could enjoy the fruits of his own labor. Likewise, according to Solomon Northup in *Twelve Years a Slave*:

They understand the privileges and exemptions that belong to it—that it would bestow upon them the fruits of their own labor, and that it would secure them the enjoyment of domestic happiness. They do not fail to observe the difference between their own condition and the meanest white man's and to realize the injustice of the laws. (370)

In light of the arduous struggle to establish manhood from childlike relegation, it is only fitting that the transition from commodity to provider would become such a prominent fixture in antebellum literature. The slave's ability to provide for himself meant that he would be able to offer financial security to a family. This “domestic happiness” was obviously a pleasure fugitive slaves coveted and would be emblematic of their newfound manhood and status as a patriarch. For example, Douglass writes, “I worked that day with pleasure I had never before experienced. I was at work for myself and newly married wife.” The quotation reveals Douglass, as a provider and patriarch, enjoys the privileges afforded only to white males as demonstrated by his ability to “work” and make claim to a wife. Given that, the status of provider is paramount to the formation of Black masculinity in antebellum literature.

Concurrently, the male slave's capacity to preserve his position as patriarch depends on his potential to safeguard the collective. In his narrative, Douglass holds in high regard his association with “Mr. Nathan Johnson” and other “working” men determined to “protect each other from the bloodthirsty kidnapper[s] at all hazards”

(446). Douglass esteems these men for their commitment to be responsible for the lives of other colored residents. He records a humorous account of a “religious old gentleman” organizing a meeting to capture a Black betrayer who threatened the freedom of a fugitive slave. Douglass writes,

The people came at the appointed hour, and organized the meeting by appointing a very religious old gentleman as president, who, I believe, made a prayer, after which he addressed the meeting as follows: “*Friends, we have got him here, and I would recommend that you young men just take him outside the door, and kill him.*” (447)

Here, the camaraderie among the men in the community to protect the life of a fugitive slave, even at the expense of a fellow resident, suggests the preservation of the collective was most important to the establishment of Black manhood. For the subsequent generations of African American writers, the protection and social responsibility of the collective whole will become a focal point in Black literature.

Although, African Americans may have lost some of their traditional cultural connections to rites of passage into manhood, the journey of Black masculinity continues to evolve as evidenced in later works of African American literature. While the vestiges of plantation paternalism surely negatively impacted African American males, Black writers document how escaped/fugitive African American men were able to reclaim their humanity under hostile conditions. Most notably, the Black male writers during Reconstruction will advance and complicate Black masculinity and conceptions of patriarchy to address the multifaceted needs of the emancipated Black males of that generation.

The Talented Compromise: Racial Uplift Ideologies Reinforcing White Patriarchy

During Reconstruction, African American male authors' depictions of patriarchy and masculinity shift largely, in part, due to the ending of slavery. Some of the most noticeable changes in African American literature are seen in rural and urban landscapes where, for the first time, Blacks experience lawful mobility. African American literature, whether philosophical or fiction, becomes ripe with expectations towards promises of a better future set amidst an historical backdrop of slavery and exploitation.

Arguably, the Reconstruction era, illustrates the demise of plantation paternalism and the beginning of a self-discovery journey for African American male identity. As a result of the emancipation from slavery, the patriarchal master-slave relationship mythologized in plantation paternalism dissolved. Losing their centuries-old racial/cultural hierarchical positions, fallen white patriarchs would seek to maintain control over African American communities through lynching and Jim Crow laws. Simultaneously, Black male authors' writings in this period began to restructure that patriarchal void by constructing a positive Black male identity which would represent their own self-determined humanity and masculinity. Thus, propagandistic literature predicated on individual achievements to instill racial pride, a sense of purpose, and the betterment of the Black race would abound to serve as a counter offensive to the increasing systemic disenfranchisement of post slavery.

Iconic texts such as Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* and W.E.B. Dubois' *Souls of Black Folk* offer didactic approaches which engendered African American masculinity through economic and intellectual pursuits designed to build a legacy for

future generations. In fact, African American literature during this era featured the struggles and triumphs of overcoming a fragmented paternalistic history within the African American community. Similar to their predecessors from the antebellum era, Reconstruction African American writers address the psychological void of fatherlessness and lack of positive images of Black masculinity by centering on labor and the protection of the family. Hence, giving birth to racial uplift ideology imagined to be a mostly patriarchal group of elites that would lead the Black masses out of supposed cultural backwardness. At this point in history, African American manhood reflected a need to be a race man or a credit to the entire race of African American people.

African American literature written during the Reconstruction focused heavily on the economic and educational development of freed African Americans who held hopes of fulfilling the ideals of democracy. After the Civil War, African Americans reached a nadir in race relations, facing white backlash in the form of lynching and Jim Crow laws. Thus, Black writers and philosophers sought ways to address the color issue. Scholars such as Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois served as “generative father figures,” by didactically writing literature with aims of developing African American elites that would uplift the Black masses. “Fatherhood in Contemporary Black America” by scholars, Michael Connor and Joseph White, delineates: “Generative fathering includes any nurturing activity that contributes to the life of the next generation such as the development or creation of more mature persons, products, ideas, or works of art. The essence of generativity is contributing to and renewing the ongoing cycle of generations” (5). Since Reconstruction writers were concerned with the betterment of the Black masses, the concept of generative fathering seems apropos. With fatherlessness being a

widely experienced byproduct of slavery, the writers had to improve upon and utilize some elements of Eurocentric patriarchy and African cultural retentions to construct blueprints of Black masculinity. Therefore, seminal works such as Booker T.

Washington's *Up from Slavery* would draw from the fatherlessness of slavery to inspire future generations of Black men to pursue their happiness through legacy-building.

In *Up from Slavery*, Washington's experiences of fatherlessness act as an impetus for legacy-building in his conception of Black masculinity. Washington re-appropriates his fatherlessness to establish his position as a generative father to the larger Black collective. He expounds,

More than once I have tried to picture myself in the position of a boy or a man with an honoured and distinguished ancestry which I could trace back through a period of hundreds of years... Years ago I resolved that because I had no ancestry myself I would leave a record of which my children would be proud, and which might encourage them to still higher effort.

(47-48)

For Washington, the absence of fatherhood/ancestry shapes his conception of masculinity as an emerging patriarch that would accomplish remarkable things to make his children proud and encourage them to attain higher goals. Historically, it is well known in African American literature that “me” signifies the “we;” therefore, it is plausible Washington hopes to inspire Black men to achieve “a record” that would uplift the entire race. In fact, Washington contends, “The influence of ancestry” can be utilized to help move forward the race because it affords the individual a “proud history...which serves as a stimulus to help him to overcome obstacles when striving for success” (48). It is clear,

Washington perceived legacy-building as the key to advancing a race that must not only overcome fatherlessness, but also racial strife, to achieve the American dream.

Washington was painfully aware that he was writing during an era where legalized, domestic terrorism and Jim Crow laws threatened the survival of African American communities. Even though he had written articles condemning lynching in the South, Washington was still well-respected by the White community due to his submission and almost apologetic stance on slavery, as well as his overt apathy for civil rights. Indeed, it is quite plausible that Washington's advocacy for cultural assimilation into the dominant culture can be read as both a form of protection for Black audiences and appeasement of white audiences. In particular, Washington's humility may have served to ease the psychological assault suffered by elite white males who lost their legal authority as master/patriarch. It can be argued that Washington, a former slave, was primarily concerned with the preservation of Black families that he witnessed being systematically terrorized by the dominant culture. Subsequently, Washington narrows his scope to persuade men of color to seek economic pursuits as opposed to civil rights to provide financially for their families. In so doing, Washington's depiction of Black masculinity required African American males to literally and figuratively assimilate, emulate, and appease the dominant culture.

In sum, Washington's paradigm of Black masculinity proves problematic for men of color who are taught to devalue their culture and aspirations for basic human rights in exchange for economic stability. In Chapter 7 of Washington's book entitled "Black Race and Red Race," Washington describes himself as a "house father" teaching the Native American students "discipline, cleaning, etc. (80)." For Washington, as a middle-man

patriarch, the ultimate sign of civilizing the “wild” Indian is through total assimilation into White decorum, language, and religion. In addition, Washington claims to be “a friend and adviser, and not an overseer” while taking a paternalistic tone in his “Atlanta Exposition Address” where he instructs those of his race to “cast down their buckets” and cultivate friendly relations to gain economic opportunities to become breadwinners (147). On the contrary, other Reconstruction Black male writers and scholars such as W.E.B. Dubois are not willing to accept the rural South's Faustian bargain. These writers will advocate for social equality and civil rights which is reflected through their literary/philosophical depictions of Black manhood.

In W.E.B. DuBois' *Souls of Black Folk* and James Weldon Johnson's *Ex-Colored Man*, the authors' depictions of Black masculinity go beyond economic stability, but rather they hearken intellectual pursuits and social responsibility for the masses. For example, in his chapter, “Of the Training of Black Men,” Dubois argues that “we shall hardly induce Black men to believe that if their stomachs be full, it matters little about their brains” (729). He further suggests “the function of Negro college” must create a “talented tenth” of Black college-bred men that will be committed to the “social regeneration of the Negro and must help in the solution of problems of race contact and cooperation.” Like Washington, Dubois' theory of social regeneration reinforces a new type of generative fathering, one that is defined by a sense of purpose and pride extending past mere economics, but the betterment of the race. Likewise, Johnson's *Ex-Colored Man* further reiterates Dubois' ideals. In *Ex-Colored Man*, the unnamed character laments “selling his birthright for a mess of pottage” by passing for a white man to pursue a life of wealth instead of fighting for the civil rights of Southern Blacks. In the novella,

Johnson juxtaposes the unnamed character with Shiny to signify that a life without purpose and uplifting the masses limits one's manhood. Hence, these individuals become Ex-Colored Men.

To conclude, writers such as Washington, Dubois, and Johnson represent a generative fathering designed to uplift the masses by molding conceptions of Black masculinity to address the economic and intellectual needs of a newly emancipated generation. This required art to be utilized as propaganda, a didactic paradigm that will encourage future generations to take a course of action. As Blacks became more urbane, the aforementioned Black male writers became the gatekeepers for the self-proclaimed "New Negroes" of the next literary era--the Harlem Renaissance. Throughout the Harlem Renaissance, the emergence of the "New Negro" called for an artistry that would challenge white patriarchal values to establish a sense of Black masculinity.

To Be or Not To Be: Harlem Renaissance African American Literature

Harlem Renaissance artisans' utilization of literary art to condemn Western patriarchy while establishing a sense of Black masculinity embodies Dubois' concept of "double consciousness." In other words, the literature of that era represents the dualistic or twoness of Black males' desire to assimilate into a patriarchal American landscape, while at the same time, being painfully aware that African Americans are denied that space due to Jim Crow and institutional racism. Harlem Renaissance writers, then, aptly capture that Black male frustration and Oedipus-like desire to kill the traditional white patriarchal system which has rendered historic and contemporary injustices on his well-being.

Considered by many to be the father of the Harlem Renaissance, scholar Alain Locke declares that the rural “social bogeyman of Negro Past is no more” and that the New Negro is militant and more vocal, speaking out against the social conditions of oppression. Poets such as Langston Hughes and Claude McKay of this era reflect that same fiery rhetoric of Locke. In fact, Langston Hughes’ and Claude McKay’s poems both entitled, “Mulatto,” feature biracial protagonists that challenge notions of white patriarchy from the antebellum past.

Particularly, in McKay’s poem, the protagonist seeks to take the mantle of patriarchy from a white father who has caused him injustice. He writes: “Because I am the white man’s son—his own, /Bearing his bastard birth-mark on my face, /...Forever fight him for my rightful place” (1-2, 4). Here, the lines suggest that the male protagonist’s position as “the white man’s son” should entitle him to an inheritance that has been withheld from him for centuries. Plausibly, McKay’s protagonist’s birth mark represents the stain Black males bear because of slavery. Thus, as a native son of America, they deserve a “rightful place” in citizenship. McKay further contends that this right must be attained at all costs, even if it means killing the father. He writes, “A warring Ishmaelite, unreconciled, /When falls the hour I shall not hesitate/into my father’s heart to plunge the knife” (11-13). The final lines suggest African Americans are akin to the biblical “Ishmael,” son of Abraham and his slave woman, Hagar, whom was banished from the inheritance of his father. However, unlike Ishmael, there is no physical being or celestial father to guide and protect the main character. Hence, the “Ishmaelite’s” journey into manhood goes “unreconciled” unless he can “plunge the knife” in his father. Perchance, McKay is suggesting that Black masculinity cannot be

established unless the patriarchal ways of the past have been eradicated.

On the other hand, Hughes' "Mulatto" protagonist repeats the refrain, "I am your son, white man," in hopes that the guilt or consciousness of the patriarch father will emerge and lead to white acceptance of African Americans. Surely, this sentiment presents in sharp contrast to McKay's protagonist and exemplifies the complexity, or "double consciousness," of determining Black masculinity, patriarchy, and social status, reminiscent of the days of Washington and DuBois.

Subsequently, the ambivalent messages of militancy and hopeful integration will reach a boiling point in the 1940's-1950's as Protest Literature will become the dominant literature for African Americans. Artists like Sterling Brown and Hughes demonstrate how Black males utilize subversion and laughter as salve to endure and overcome the pain of Jim Crow. Given that, Black writers such as Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison draw from the urbane image of Black male identity to establish concepts of Black masculinity and conceptions of patriarchy.

Fight the Power: Protest African American Literature

With the conclusion of WWII in the 1940's, African American male authors embodied the bitterness experienced by many African Americans in the face of America's hypocritical touting of democracy abroad, yet failed promises of democracy at home. As a result, scores of African Americans grew weary with the notions of racial uplift ideology as they realized that African American elites and folk alike suffered muted and blunted ambitions amidst universal lack of opportunities and social inequality. Most importantly, African American male youth struggled with unfulfilled fatherhood, engaging in acts of violence and mayhem against their own communities in search of

manhood. Accordingly, protest literature authors, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin took issue with white patriarchal norms and the social generative fathering of the Reconstruction and Harlem Renaissance eras. Vehemently, their works exposed the atrocities that Black males suffer when trying to emulate and establish masculinity as promoted in those previous eras. Furthermore, writers such as James Baldwin advocate for a form of social fathering as a means of enabling Black males to heal from the paradigms of American masculinity.

In Richard Wright's literary works such as "The Man Who Was Almost a Man," *Black Boy*, and *Native Son*, the absence of father figures served as an impetus for misguided youth to demonstrate manhood through acts of violence and anger. Scholars Michael Connor and Joseph White contend that if fatherhood goes unfulfilled "sometimes, as one moves through adulthood, rage, disappointment, and feelings of rejection" leads many urban males to embrace hyper-masculinity as authentic Black identity (6). Distinctively, in *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas represents a new image of Black male identity never seen before in Black literature. He is a young, angry Black urbanite who seeks to emulate the violence associated with white male patriarchy via the infliction of hostility on his friends and members of the community. Bigger is not cognizant of the reality that his bravado makes him a victim to the social ills of his community. Wright's sectioning of the text chapters into "Fear," "Flight," and "Fate" illustrates Black males are placed in hostile racist environments where they must struggle and/or seek a quest for liberation by any means. Oftentimes these adolescents suffering their worst fears and indignities without a male figure leaves these individuals feeling fated in life.

Also, in the text, readers find that Bigger laments the suffocated strongholds of Black male identity under the surveillance of white supremacist patriarchal forces. Wright pens, “They choke you off the face of the earth. They do not even let you feel what you want to feel. They after you so hot and hard you can only feel what they doing to you. They kill you before you die.” Here, Bigger embodies the disgruntlement that Black males endure when they are restricted from pursuing their hopes and dreams because of institutional racism. The feeling of being prey to “hot and hard” glances or being handled by white supremacist forces causes many Black males to react to this oppression with anger. According to bell hooks in *We Real Cool*: “It is a defense. Taught to believe the world is against them, that they are doomed to be victims; they assume the posture of victimizer. First embracing the ideals of patriarchal masculinity that make domination acceptable...” (57). Richard Wright supports this contention in his essay “How Bigger Was Born” where he describes five real life “Biggers” from his personal life who defied any and everyone, including the Black community and Jim Crow. The common threads that link these Biggers appear to be poverty, disenfranchisement, and unfulfilled fatherhood—a blueprint for manhood that would enable Black men to navigate through a labyrinth of oppression.

Conversely, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* reveals how fathers, surrogate fathers, and mentors can prove just as problematic for the development of Black males into manhood. Overall, the novel challenges conservative notions of Black masculinity and patriarchy. Specifically, the unnamed protagonist stumbles and endures much trauma when trying to ascribe to the acceptable patriarchal models. For instance, in the rural South, his grandfather's subversive defiance when dealing with the dominant culture

influences the unnamed character to become a minstrel-like servant to white folks.

Alternatively, the unnamed protagonist follows the doctrines of Black masculinity present by other Black males, both racial uplift and revolutionary rhetoric, and finds himself coerced to become a survivor and a traitor to himself and broader community.

Consequently, each model of manhood keeps the unnamed character running until he begins to look within and utilize self-affirmation and individualism to embrace his invisibility and shape it to work for him. The implied message is African American males must navigate their own paths and not be arrested or married to a community that may restrict the search for truth.

According to the doctrines of Dubois, the educated elite have a paternalistic and social responsibility in the training and betterment of future generations. However, as James Baldwin's "Sonny Blues" shows, this is not always the case. After assuming the role of father figure, the unnamed character, a math educator, emotionally neglects his younger brother, Sonny, who eventually seeks escapism through drug use. Arguably, Baldwin's unnamed character as a mechanical, analytic educator, conveys the idea that Black intelligentsia are emotionally inept to nurture the disenfranchised even within their own families. Moreover, Baldwin's "Sonny Blues" suggests that Black males' inability to show vulnerability proves detrimental to the development of Black youth.

In "Sonny Blues," the brothers' parents' concealment of a horrific vulnerable moment in their family history can be read as an act of self-protection and colonial mimicry of American patriarchal value systems. For example, Sonny's gregarious and alcoholic father uses loud talk and outlandish behavior to mask the pain of witnessing his brother being mauled down by racist Whites:

“He never mentioned it,” she said, because I never let him mention it before you children. Your Daddy was like a crazy man that night and for many a night thereafter...I helped your father get safely through this world. Your father always acted like he was the roughest, strongest man on earth. And everybody took him to be like that.

Here, the father, sworn to secrecy by his wife, concealed this tragic story to protect his children from the truth and uphold a false sense of stoic manhood. Consequently, the unnamed protagonist and Sonny’s relationship as siblings suffers because neither one has been taught how to express emotions. Baldwin’s short story is representative of generations of men remaining chained by these types of strongholds. Thus, Baldwin’s “Sonny Blues” may advocate for a paradigm of Black masculinity where vulnerability can be expressed, and emotional healing be passed down to future generations.

Arguably, Baldwin utilizes a jazz performance between Creole (father figure) and Sonny (son) as a salve for the psychological wounds endured by Sonny during his fathered experiences. Baldwin’s employment of the blues/jazz aesthetic, through the paternalistic relationship between Sonny and Creole, is musical in nature. Melodiously, Baldwin’s tune of manhood, appears in the jazz scene where Creole, a social father to Sonny, encourages Sonny to play jazz piano with his band:

Up there, keeping the beat with his whole body, wailing on the fiddle, with his eyes half closed, he was listening to everything, but he was listening to Sonny. He was having a dialogue with Sonny. He wanted Sonny to leave the shoreline and strike out for the deep water. He was Sonny’s witness that deep water and drowning were not the same thing—he had been there,

and he knew. And he wanted Sonny to know. He was waiting for Sonny to do the things on the keys which would let Creole know that Sonny was in the water. (1748)

This passage, steeped in metaphor, elucidates a paternalistic relationship where Creole nurtures Sonny through a rite of passage expressed through the musicality of jazz. According to bell hooks in *We Real Cool*, “the blues, [articulates] in song... [African American males’] pain, their sense of hopelessness, their lamentation...It let them express their sorrow without shame” (93). Critics such as Tony Bolden claim some jazz/blues musicians serve as “secular priests” or spiritual fathers for the Black community (65). The fact that Baldwin chose jazz music is quite compelling because to make a good composition, jazz depends on improvisation and uniformity to be in perfect balance. Creole's “dialogue with Sonny” represents the frank and honest discourse that Black mentors, surrogate fathers, and biological fathers must have with their sons to show them how to navigate the “deep waters” of American society. In other words, Baldwin elucidates how Black males must share their testimonies and truths with future generations, rather than perform false scripts of masculinity authored by the colonial power structure. The unnamed character further sustains this assertion in the following:

Freedom lurked around us and I understood at last, that he could help free us if we would listen, that he would never be free until we did...And he was giving it back, as everything must be given back, so that, passing through death it can live forever. I saw my mother's face again, and felt, for the first time, how the stones of the road she walked on must have bruised her feet. I saw the moonlit road where my father's brother died.

(1749)

In short, this excerpt reveals that freedom derives from reciprocity between past and future generations. Thus, Black masculinity and conceptions of patriarchy must be malleable and in constant flux by building upon the legacy of the past; yet, shaped to handle the conditions faced by the present generation. Moreover, the notions of Black masculinity and patriarchy must be predicated upon a continuous dialogue that allows each generation the freedom to define manhood in their own terms.

Finally, I argue Baldwin's "Sonny Blues" advocates for Black males to express their emotional selves to become fully human. Sonny's relationship with his bandleader/father figure, Creole, furnishes an archetype for Black masculinity based on vulnerability and understanding. In fact, we witness the unnamed narrator's humanity through his newfound appreciation of Sonny's musical testimony. He allows himself to become attuned to "the pain of his mother's bruised feet" and his father's pain witnessing the death of his Uncle. Regrettably, many Black male writers have yet to catch the rhythm of the musicality of Baldwin's depiction of Black maleness. Unfortunately, in subsequent generations, many Black writers renounced Baldwin's masculine paradigm because of institutional racism and legalized terrorism.

The Impact of "Father Lacking" and Mimicry of Patriarchy in the 1960's – 1970's

During the turbulent 60's, many Black father figures--social, generative, and biological-- came under attack by government-sponsored operations that sought to eradicate any messianic figures. For instance, the F.B.I served an integral role in the political assassinations of leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Bobby

Hutton, and many others. For Black America, these men were deemed generative father figures or at least symbols of manhood. I contend that the destruction of these larger-than-life male icons contributes to experiences of “father lacking” for this and later generations of African American communities. With regards to this, Sharon Patricia Holland employs Hortense Spillers term “father-lacking” as “the condition of the community...in a process of mourning that requires no dead body, per se, but merely the idea of one looming (*Soul Babies*, Neale 67).” Without question, African American communities mourning the loss of powerful patriarchs became outraged. I argue poems such as Amiri Baraka’s “Black Art” calling for “poems to kill” reflected the African American communal longing for self-protection and resistance. Unfortunately, the artists’ quest to retrieve lost manhood led to an adoption of toxic masculinity via the colonial mimicry of American patriarchy. In *We Real Cool* bell hooks defines American patriarchy as imperialist, white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy, she writes:

Black males are socialized from birth to embrace the notion that their manhood will be determined by whether or not they can dominate and control others and yet the political system they live within (imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy) prevents most of them from having access to socially acceptable positions of power and dominance, then they will claim their patriarchal manhood, through socially unacceptable channels. They will enact rituals of blood, of patriarchal manhood by using violence to dominate and control.

In the excerpt above, the scholar contends many Black males have been conditioned via various forms of media to define maleness through means of power and influence.

Consequently, for marginalized pockets of the Black community the blueprints of Black masculinity and conceptions of Black patriarchy became obscured. Those individuals looking to take part in American patriarchy have been convinced they must engage in individualistic, competitive, and toxic behaviors to become men.

Regrettably, many African American males begin to emulate American patriarchy utilizing violence to dominate the most vulnerable within the Black community. Perhaps Black males' fear and/or eagerness to act as protectors of their households serve as motives for the mimicry of pernicious bravado. Considering this, some Black leaders, embracing the fears of female-led households demonized in the Moynihan report, took their frustrations out on Black women. For example, Black Panther cofounder Huey P. Newton, admits they [Black leaders] were "afraid [women] might castrate [them], or take the nuts that [they] might not have to start with" (Neale 5-6). Perhaps, after undergoing centuries of emasculation, some Black males viewed male supremacy as veritable maleness. Yet, this supposed maleness is built on a shaky foundation concealing Black males' insecurity and victimization under white male supremacy. According to Neale,

The strict code of discipline directed toward Black children is just one example of the violence directed within the community to protect it from the violence directed toward the community from beyond. But such inward violence...was also associated with patriarchal and heterosexist tendencies that denied full agency to women, queers, and others within the Black community. (5)

During the antebellum, many slaves would beat their children into submission to protect them from cruelty of the slave masters. In the same vein, 60's Black patriarchs emerged

as strict disciplinarians in an effort to protect their children from white legalized terrorism. Sad to say, some Black males, under the influence of American patriarchy, became tyrants within their community by embracing homophobia and suppressing the voices of women. Black males, who were male supremacists, did not value the voices of women or “queers” because they are not valued in male dominant circles of American society. In *Soul babies*, Neale explains the rigidity of Black male identity manifested, by hyper-masculinity and homophobia was originally designed to establish a fortified male identity. He writes,

During earlier eras, when the threat of state-sanctioned violence against them was more prominent and overt, Blacks rigorously closed ranks around common notions of Black identity, even if such homogeneity was a fictive gesture. By coalescing around the myth of shared heterosexual identities, themselves socially constructed in relation to mainstream American perception of the function of Blacks in American society, African American often protected themselves from the most heinous forms of violence. (5)

In the passage above, Neale implies many African Americans of the 60’s and 70’s adopted an identity that was both performative—“a fictive gesture”—and in some instances perversely patriarchal. Ironically, the adoption of this archetype of Black male identity exemplifies colonial mimicry. According to Bhabba, “mimicry is not the familiar exercise of dependent colonial relations through narcissistic identification...Mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask...The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its

authority (88).” In other words, the marginalized Other (Black males) does not desire to become (white patriarchs) the colonial. Nor does the Other wear the Paul Lawrence Dunbar’s mask to subvert colonial power. For the marginalized Other, mimicry is a space of double vision or consciousness that seeks to disrupt the authority. That said, BAM (Black Arts Movement) artists’ weapon of choice for such a disruption is the spoken word.

“Inner-City Blues:” Using the Pen to Stick It to the Man

As BAM writers and thinkers challenged the 60s and 70s, status quo white literature became the battlefield. The scholar, Tony Bolden contends BAM artists perceive the written word “as property reserved for the elite (65).” Therefore, the writers created an oral literature that “questioned the hegemony of traditional literature...designed specifically for the sensibilities of the working-class Black folk (23). Here, Bolden contends writers like Baraka viewed literature as an elitist space. He proclaims that academics create social and linguistic divergence between the writer/thinker and his or her audience --especially the marginalized Other. Hence, they advocated for a literary aesthetic that would create linguistic convergence with underserved masses. Again, Bolden conceptualizes BAM writers as “blues poets [who utilize] vernacular to counter (mis) representations, describing, and responding to Black experiences in styles that challenge conventional definitions of poetry, resisting ideological domination (37).” Without question, the blues poets used the vernacular as acts of mimicry and resistance. BAM poets’ application of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), English—a language forced upon African bonds people—represents a disruption of colonial authority because it is regulated by African American speech

patterns and cultural nuances. Not only does the employment of this language counter master narratives about Black identity as “uneducated,” “submissive,” and “docile;” and attacks the “ideological domination” of the colonial structure; it questions their position as sovereign.

BAM founding members, Amiri Baraka and Larry Neale, advocated for masculine and aggressive verbal art to champion the causes of the urban Black masses. Under their regime, African American writers were expected to recognize their position as colonialized “to question the hegemony of dominant forms (Bolden 32-33).” Above all, Baraka promotes Black literature “that more closely resembles...expressive forms”—athletic in nature—embodying the spirit of Jack Johnson or Sugar Ray Robinson (Bolden 16). Boxing, the sport of choice for most Blacks during this time, represents a rare combination of athleticism, intelligence, machismo, and competitiveness valued in American patriarchal societies. That said, blues poets forged a literary style “to represent the experiences of what Black people called ‘the streets’ (Bolden 23).” For instance, critic Neale calls for Black poetry to epitomize “Malcolm X speeches” and “James Brown [’] s scream” to not only replace but to destroy “Western poetics” (32-33). Neal imagines the new Black poetry to represent “Nommo,” an Afrocentric term employed by Molefi Asante, meaning the power of the spoken word.

He advocates for poetry to have the soul moving force of music and Black sermonistic discourse. Hence, the human voice would replace or eventually murder the text alienating everyday folk. Bolden contends, “Neal proposes ...the destruction of the text. That is, he dismisses the written text and emphasizes the human voice. As, such, Neal anticipates hip-hop...directing the poetry toward a pre-future poetics in which the human

voice becomes an instrument (32-33).” Critic Geneva Smitherman supports this contention in the following:

In using the semantics of tone, the voice employed like a musical instrument with improvisation, riffs, and all kinds of playing between the notes. The rhythmic pattern becomes a kind of acoustical phonetic alphabet and gives Black speech its songified or musical quality. [Blues poets and later] Black rappers use word sound to tap their listeners’ souls and inner being in the same way that the musician uses the symbolic language of music to strike inward responsive chords in his listener’ hearts (Bolden 66).

Here, Smitherman argues the voice acts as a consciousness-raising instrument for many in African American communities. On this subject, critic Miles White contends, “Out of the experiment came...expressive practices and poetic voices including Harlem’s The Last Poets, recognized by hip-hop pioneers like Afrika Bambaataa as “the first or original style rappers (35).” Undoubtedly, BAM artists paved the way for socially conscious and streetwise artisans like Public Enemy, X-Clan, KRS-One, Rakim, Nas, Kendrick Lamar, J. Cole, and many others. While many of the creators and thinkers of this time failed to acknowledge or give voice to the corrosive impact of American patriarchy effecting Black families, the contributions of Black Arts Movement, the voice for the Black Power Movement, deserves much respect for redefining African American literature. Moreover, scholar Mark Anthony Neale credits BAM artists for providing “leadership in regard to deconstructing the myth(s) of American identity, particularly as constructed within mass media and popular culture (Neale 102).” He writes, “These scholars and artists, like their

most influential political icon, Malcolm X, dared to imagine a ‘postcolonial’ America and Africa that included their role as its dominant aestheticians (Neale 107).”

Life Not So Sweet on the Sugar Hill: Fatherhood, Hip-hop, and the Era of Reaganomics

Like Stanley Crouch, critics like Miles White and Michelle Alexander, compare hip-hop to a minstrel show. Comparable to Vaudeville performers, some rappers exchanged the burnt cork Blackface (used in minstrel shows) with diamond chains, dub sacks of weed, gold teeth and a mouth full of hardcore and misogynistic rhymes. As Alexander points out in *The New Jim Crow*, some emcees “display...the worst racial stereotypes and images associated with the era of mass incarceration—in which Black people are criminalized and portrayed as out-of-control, shameless, violent, oversexed, and generally undeserving (173).” Considering white males remain the largest consumers of hip-hop music—these negative images of African American depravity (in some segments of hip-hop) certainly do not aid marginalized communities’ quest for social justice and liberation. Alexander rightly points out the many rap narratives perpetuate race and class stereotypes that may have lasting negative effects on African American communities. However, like the Black Arts Movement and Black Nationalist era, hip-hop at its best represents and reflects the Black males’ complex struggle to establish a holistic identity.

Following the Black Arts Movement, hip-hop lyricism serves as the latest iteration of African American literature to address masculinity and Black fatherhood. In *Prophets of the Hood*, scholar Imani Perry argues, “hip-hop engages in another form of mimicry... [thug mimicry] which offers a social critique and a disruption of white

supremacist authority (109).” Perry term “thug mimicry” suggests some rappers embrace or utilize a thug persona (derived by white fears and stereotypes about Black males) as a narrative space to give a close exegesis of the white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy. Through poetic narrative, rappers shed light on the hypocrisies and imperfections of mainstream society, while at the same time advocating for autonomy for communities living on the “fragile existence, mediated by his own encounters with white male patriarchy” (119). That said, hip-hop functions as an organic text to wrestle with the changing same post-slavery conditions impacting vulnerable Black communities. As White highlights, “Like 1960s jazz and other expressive forms that gave voice to the Black arts movement...hardcore rap performances has (re)framed Black masculinity within a socio-cultural context where the public expressions of anger and rage are privileged affective strategies, even though they are largely depoliticized” (18). Since its inception in the 1970’s, hip-hop has evolved from a local party music (popularized by the rap group the Sugar Hill Gang) to a powerful voice for a generation ignored by the Reagan Administration.

Simply put, most inner-city residents, disregarded and vilified by mainstream society, could not adjust to climatic changes of a collapsing urban economy. Political prisoner and author, Mumia Abu-Jamal states, “while we [Americans] are...conditioned to think that this rough economic reality for Black America...is our norm, that ain’t necessarily so...Blacks had a strong presence in the world of work...with little more than a high school diploma...Those days are gone!” (79). During the Reagan era, Black communities became decimated by deindustrialization, globalization, and poor education. According to Jeff Chang in *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, “[Under] Reagan’s recession...Black

poverty hit a twenty-five-year peak in 1983, with 36 percent of the population counted as living below the poverty level (177-178).” Unfortunately, Black males who sought to provide for their households begin to look to underground economies leading to increase homicide rates and mass incarceration. Adding fuel to the fire, conservatives employed color-blind rhetoric to publicly condemn the marginalized. Conservatives and political pundits replaced racist rhetoric such as “niggers” with words like “criminals” and “thugs” as code for the African American community—in particular Black males. *The New Jim Crow* reveals, “To great effect, Reagan echoed white frustration in race-neutral terms through implicit racial appeals. His color-blind rhetoric on crime, welfare, taxes, and state’s right clearly...having a racial dimension, through claims to that effect were impossible to prove” (48). Moreover, the Reagan Administration utilized media-based stereotypes as fodder to cut social and educational programs (in particular music programs) and “pass tougher-on-crime [laws] and to enhance the federal government’s role in combating it (49).” For the victims of the Reaganomics, hip-hop functioned as a voice of resistance to challenge status quo narratives.

Indeed, Hip-hop functions as the voice of a voiceless people. As Abu-Jamal argues, “hip-hop began as something that could be called profoundly oppositional to the governing narrative about the world and about Black youth (44).” As a counter-response to the dominant culture, I argue hip-hop artists utilize art as a weapon to address social conditions impacting urban African American families. In fact, these artists’ narratives challenge all to interrogate and redefine the African American family—in particular Black fatherhood and masculinity.

Perfect Strangers Remixing “The Deadbeat”: Links Between Hip-hop and Fatherhood

Black males continue to be the poster boys for “deadbeat” dads. For example, Alexander’s *New Jim Crow*, recounts President Obama’s Father’s Day speech “dedicated to the subject of Black patriarchs ‘AWOL’ in the lives of their children” (180). In his speech, the former President describes African American dads as “irresponsible,” “immature,” and as individuals who would rather “be boys instead of men.” However, as Alexander highlights, many media and political figures oftentimes fail to give a comprehensive view of Black fathers—in particular—low-income, nonresidential male parents. While scholars like Michelle Alexander, Roberta L. Coles, Ronald Mincy, and Kyle Pruett’s research disproves the racialized myth of African American fathers as “deadbeats,” this narrative remains popularized in mass media.

Conservative politicians originally labeled divorced, middle-class, white men as “deadbeats” because many failed to offer financial support to their respective families once the marriage was over. Conversely, several studies show low-income, nonresident fathers are not “deadbeat dad” but rather “dead broke” fathers. Mincy’s *Failing Our Fathers* shows, “dead broke-dad[s]... were younger and less educated than the deadbeat dads and the former were more likely to be never married” (Mincy 43). Nonetheless, mainstream society offers little empathy for these fathers who endure joblessness, poor education, and health care. In consequence, some low-income Black fathers turn to underground economies to escape the stigma of the deadbeat mythology which exacerbates their problems.

Michelle Alexander contends marginalized Black fathers face discrimination because of the so-called War-on-Drugs and tougher-on-crime laws. She asserts, “[Many] Black men are unable to be good fathers...not because of a lack of commitment or desire

but because they are warehoused in prisons...locked away for drug crimes that are ignored when committed by whites” (180). In this quote, Alexander makes two profound points. First, she (and scholar Marc Lamont Hill) illustrates that, under the Reagan and subsequent political regimes, crime functions as a racialized social construct. The conservative media-based stereotype of African American males as “thugs” validates government policies harshly punishing Black populations for offences ignored in white communities. Secondly, Alexander shows some Black men are “unable to be good fathers” simply because they are poverty-stricken in a police state. Many African American males continue to be portrayed under this stereotypical image which cause real life threats to the most vulnerable members of the Black community. Ironically, early hip-hop also contributed to the disparagement of Black fathers.

In an era of Crack, Mass Incarceration, and Reaganomics, one might assume hip-hop would champion issues related to African American fatherhood—but this is not the case. While songs such as Tupac Shakur’s “Dear Mama” depict even “crack fiend mamas” as “Black queen mamas,” the wounds of “father-lacking” have evolved from mourning to rage in this era. During the 1980s-to early 2000s, most of the prolific storytellers of hip-hop offered limited and negative depictions of Black fathers. Neale in the *New Black Man* contends several Black father-son “relationship[s] are marked by distinct silences—each marking his own masculinity with the subtleties of respect, fear, anger, arrogance, disappointment, pride, and wonder that rarely directed at each other, but always lurking unspoken (121).” 2Pac, Jay-Z and many other fatherless emcees gave voice to pregnant silences--suffered by Black children--linked to traumatic and absentee fatherhood.

Tupac Shakur's "Still I Rise OG," and Jay-Z's "Where Have You Been," both autobiographical narratives, offer scathing critiques of African American patriarchs. Before I analyze the lyrics, it is important to note in African American literature the "me represents the we." In other words, the verbal artist personalized narratives are understood to be representative of the changing same in the Black community. Ergo, the fathers, in these narratives represent negative archetypes of male identity. Hence, the dads are depicted as abusive, absentee, and negligent. For instance, in "Still I Rise (OG)," Tupac raps,

Not to disrespect my peoples but my poppa was a loser
 Only plan he had for momma was to fuck her and abuser
 Even as a little seed, I could see his plan for me
 Stranded on welfare, another broken family

In the quote above, Tupac's narrative, adds flesh to bell hooks' assertion Black males associate "patriarchal sex" –the "spreading [of one's seed]" as a marker of manhood (66). Here, the emcee description of his father as an abusive and womanizing loser appears on the surfaces as yet another narrative about the adolescent, shortcomings of Black men. However, the concluding lines of the quote reveal Tupac's "broken family" is "stranded on welfare." Nonetheless, Tupac takes the position that his poppa's plan for his life was abject poverty rather than highlighting the social conditions that may shaped his father's behavior. Hence, the narrative shows Black dads as heartless "deadbeats." Likewise, in Jay-Z's "Where Have You Been" condemns his patriarch, a struggling drug addict, for abandoning his family:

Do you even remember December's my birthday?

Do you even remember the tender boy?
 You turned into a cold young man
 With one goal and one plan
 Get mommy out of some jam, she was always in one
 Always short with the income
 Always late with the rent

In the passage above, Jay-Z questions his father's integrity. Consequently, Jay-Z's dad's absence caused the rapper to lose his childhood as he becomes a drug dealer as well as parent-figure for his household. One can surmise from the concluding lines that Jay-Z equates fatherhood solely in terms of economics. Jay-Z juxtaposes his dad as an inept provider ("Do you even remember December's my birthday?") and his own reluctant position as parent-figure with monetary terms like "income" and "rent." From this, one can deduce Black fathering has been reduced to finances. According to Neale, low-income fathers experience social pressure to provide in anemic economies which prompts "men to leave their families because they feel unfit...if they fall upon hard times" (156). Without question, fathers like Jay-Z's dad are more vulnerable to engage in high risk behaviors like drug addiction, criminal, and other illicit underground activities. Like colonial master narratives, early hip-hop fatherhood stories limited African American fathering experiences to narrow scripts of race and gender. That aside, many contemporary hip-hop artists furnished much-needed accounts to aid the development of Black youth, in particular Black males from undeserved communities.

Indeed, hip-hop furnishes social scripts that challenge master narratives on race and fatherhood. Certainly, hip-hop lyricism at times reflects American patriarchy through

performances of misogyny and hyper-masculinity. Yet, the genre acts as space to orchestrate multiple narratives of Black male identities in search of balance with the potential to reimagine and reinvent African American selfhood. For instance, rapper, Rhymefest, states, “[he] like many Black men in America, sought a father figure wherever I could, because my biological father was not present. I turned to...media personalities (yes, rappers) and did what most people searching for God do: took a little piece of what I thought was good from each one, and molded myself in its image (Silver 163).” The life stories of Black fathering enable individuals to develop their own internalized narratives to “make sense of external stimuli” of the outside world (Rice 14). In short, as Jay-Z aptly delineates in *Decoded*, hip-hop culture enables marginalized communities to “find their fathers on wax.”

My dissertation will interrogate hip-hop's vacillating images of patriarchy and masculinity in rap lyricism. Comparable to Dubois' “double consciousness,” I argue hip-hop's patriarchal mimicry metaphorically represents multiple warring souls, warring for and against mainstream normalization within one Black body. Also, I call into question antiquated concepts of Black fatherhood and maleness that relegate males to emulating hegemonic manliness. Before I discuss hip-hop's role in the identity formation of African Americans, it is important to recognize hip-hop as literature.

Hip-hop as Literature

This dissertation builds upon Adam Bradley's scholarship in the groundbreaking text *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip-hop*, which posits hip-hop lyrics are a synthesis of Western language/poetics and African American musical and literary traditions (xiv). Bradley's comparative analyses of rap lines to standard Western poetics reveals striking

similarities, proving that hip-hop lyrics adhere to meter, rhyme, and other conventional poetry devices. Ergo, hip-hop rhymes can and should be interpreted as verse. However, what sets hip-hop lyricism apart from traditional American poetry is the genre's commitment to African American vernacular. Like its predecessors, blues, jazz, funk, Black arts movement and soul, hip-hop artists utilize Black vernacular— “the racialized rhetoric of rap music”—to create social and linguistic convergence with everyday folk (9).

Geneva Smitherman's “The Chain Remain the Same: Communicative Practices in the Hip-Hop Nation” demonstrates grammatical features in hip-hop lyricism that link the genre to what she calls African American Vernacular Language (AAL). Below, I provide the reader with a summary of Smitherman's findings:

One of the most distinctive and widely cited grammatical features of AAL is the use of *aspectual* be to indicate iterativity; that is, actions or attributes that are continuous, intermittent, or ongoing. Another copula pattern common in AAL is zero copula. This form occurs in environments where the meaning is noniterative or static. In AAL, future tense is often indicated with *go*, a nasalized vowel sound close to, but not identical with, EAL's “gone” and *not* the same as colloquial EAL's “gonna.” Among AAL speakers, /Ang/ and /ank/ are used in words such as *think*, *sing*, and *drink*. (9-10)

In the passage above, Smitherman asserts that rap artists, many of whom are college educated, utilize code-switching and AAVE (African American Vernacular English) to create linguistic convergence with the marginalized (11). Additionally, rappers utilize

AAL to maintain social distance from unenlightened members of the dominant culture (11). Moreover, she maintains that hip-hop artists are especially skilled at “semantic inversion” coding language as “an act of linguistic empowerment.” For example, in hip-hop culture words like “bad” means “good.” Thus, these Black communicative practices in rap continue the literary tradition of the African American community.

Hip-hop lyrics feature another major tradition in AAVE—Signifying. Scholar Henry Louis Gates’ seminal work on “signifying,” in *The Signifying Monkey*, applies to hip-hop culture. Signifying a rhetorical practice of “boasting, besting, [intertextual discourse] and repetitions” finds its origins in West Africa (Bradley 181). Similar to hip-hop deejays, who blending vintage musical sounds, emcees engage in intertextual discourse with literary authors and writers to reinvent, reimagine, reinforce, or challenge ways of thinking. In fact, in *Prophets of the Hood*, Imani Perry notes that Sam Floyd describes signifying as “a way of saying one thing and meaning another; it is a reinterpretation, a metaphor for the revision of previous texts and figures; it is tropological thought, repetition with difference, the obscuring of meaning—all to achieve or reverse power, to improve situations, and to achieve pleasing results for the signifier (61).” I argue signifying empowers hip-hop storytellers to influence meaning, critique written/oral traditions, and reverse the colonial/Western gaze. Above all, the genre has the power, through narrative, to alter what becomes known as truth.

Arguably, the storytelling elements of rap music lyrics establishes the musical genre as poetic narrative. Like ancient griots, most hip-hop artists utilize poetry to convey stories. Parallel to Western epic poems, some rap lyrical tales are presented in first and third person narratives featuring elements of plot such as: exposition, rising

action, climax, falling action and resolution. Clearly, hip-hop stories mix elements of social commentary, fantasy, and music to appeal to the aesthetic and cultural tastes of the hip-hop generation. According to Bradley, “Advocates often cite rap’s stories as proof of the music’s truth telling capacity, its prophetic voice for the everyday people” (158).

For the hip-hop generation, “the everyday people” primarily represents the urban Black male experience painted against the canvas of institutional racism. Rappers use “Narrativizing” as “a strategy to explain a point, to persuade holders of opposing views to one’s own point of view, and to create word-pictures about general, abstract observations about life (Smitherman 12).” Moreover, rap’s “music truth telling capacity” does not abide by conservative codes of respectability instead it appeals to the tastes of the underclass. Critic Brittney Cooper contends, “the goal of [hip-hop is] ...to demand visibility, recognition, and voice, if not access better social conditions (56). Ergo, emcees parables “privilege street consciousness and cultural literacy” catering to audiences looking to “celebrate protagonists who know how to survive in the mean streets of the city (Cooper 56). Michael Jefferies’ *Thug Life* illustrates the social functions that hip-hop narratives serve in the lives of some of the marginalized Other. In his study, Jefferies notes, “Respondents affirm hip-hop role’s in helping them cope with suffering and guilt affirming their [rappers’] vulnerability as a key element of the connection” (55). I argue contemporary rap fatherhood narratives contribute to the changing-same construction of Black male identity via colonial mimicry. Thus, the stories are literature--cathartic at the least and healing at its very best.

Sampling for Manhood: Hip-hop Narratives and Black Male Identity

Scholars like Mark Anthony Neale in the *New Black Man* argue fatherhood and Black masculinity are intertwined in such a way that they cannot be seen as separate entities. Without a doubt, hip-hop lyricism offers a unique purview of the developmental journey to self as it pertains to urban Black males. It is important to note that African American men are not a monolithic group; however, “the language of hip-hop narrative has the capacity to facilitate...engagement and understanding when looked beyond stereotype” (Rice 174). The fathering stories in hip-hop specifically address teenage angst to forge self against a backdrop of racist narratives and New Jim Crow politics. Likewise, fatherhood presented in hip-hop lyricism represents and problematizes Black minors’ multifaceted excursion for visibility and self-affirmation.

Ergo, this dissertation builds upon David Wall Rice’s theories on narrative, orchestration of identity and identity stasis as it applies to young Black males. Although Rice’s theory centers on the development of adolescent males, I deem it fitting to utilize his theory for fathers of the hip-hop generation (between the ages of 16-45). Like these young men, marginalized fathers of hip-hop generation, especially fatherless patriarchs, must form their identity out of nothing. For these dads, the concept of fathering is a negotiated space against external forces of institutional racism and internal forces of parental alienation and maternal gatekeeping. While I will not attempt explicating the psychological influences on adolescent personalities since this is a literary study, I will use Rice’s theoretical construct of narrative and identity to examine the representations of fatherhood and African American masculinity in rap lyricism.

I argue that hip-hop narratives serve a role in the identity formation of Black males. According to Rice in the article “Rakim, Ice Cube then Watch the Throne:

Engaged Visibility through Identity Orchestration and the Language of Hip-Hop Narratives,” “the self” acts as an empty container “for many identities or self-aspects...these identities are naturally driven toward a state of equilibrium...and Identity Orchestration is the process by which this is done” (177). Arguably, the self becomes the site for the ambivalence of colonial discourse, the organic battleground of the warring souls or multiples selves of the Duboisian theory of double consciousness. Hence, the narratives epitomize multiple identities of “the self” seeking balance through difference or imitation of the colonial—imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. The latter proving much problematic for a plethora of reasons. Nonetheless, hip-hop contributes the context of identity orchestration. Black males orchestrate selves, sampling for manhood (like a DJ), to forge their sense of being. Rice’s theory presents four forms of identity stasis:

- 1) Identity Dilemma Articulation is a form of identity stasis that is closely aligned with Dubois’s conceptualization of double consciousness. As a form of identity stasis, Identity Dilemma Articulation is the realization of a bifurcation of identity that creates a dilemma.
- 2) Unadulterated Presentation of Self is a form of identity stasis in which the individual negotiates a need to maintain fidelity to how and who one is within a universal context of racism.
- 3) Burden of Proof Assumption is a form of identity stasis in which the individual negotiates a stereotype imposed by the universal context of racism to confirm or disconfirm as correct or incorrect.

- 4) Acute Identity Expression is a form of identity stasis in which hyper-articulated self-affirmation is through an outline of strengths or weaknesses that allow for recognition. (Rice *Balance* 55-65; “Watch the Throne” 177)

I argue rap fathering stories reflect Rice’s “Identity Dilemma Articulation,” specifically in songs where the protagonist acknowledges his identity is bifurcated based on the dynamics of race, class, and gender. In addition, I contend, hip-hop fatherhood narratives represent the “Unadulterated Presentation of Self,” where emcees, as protagonists, affirm their identities as an act of defiance towards mainstream society. While many of the narratives can be read as resistance to respectability politics, some of the stories employ the “bad nigger motif” or acts of hyper-masculinity as authentic maleness. Consequently, Black fathers and adolescents who embody these narratives may face dire consequences with the criminal and family court systems. Other fatherhood narratives epitomize Rice’s concept of “Burden of Proof” as a direct response to American patriarchal socialization. As Perry asserts earlier, most artists tend to not completely adhere to mainstream value systems for risk of being deemed “a sellout (109).” However, many narratives address the burden of “identity assumption” and “relationship to stereotype.” For example, in “Letter to My Son,” rapper Don Trip endures the label of “unfit father” because mainstream media depict Black men as “deadbeats.” Many African American male rappers construct narratives that either rebel against or add clarity to their fathering experiences. Likewise, most artists’ stories function as didactic tales offering alternative archetypes of Black masculinity to offset stereotypes about low-income fatherless children. Lastly, some fatherhood accounts reflect Rice’s theory of “Acute Identity

Expression” through stories that jazz musician Thelonious Monk terms “ugly beauty.” These hip-hop songs are usually autobiographical accounts where emcees take ownership of their flaws and triumphs as father figures. In fact, I contend many fatherhood tales personify Langston Hughes’ words in “The Negro and the Racial Mountain:” “We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual...selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too.” While living under the tyranny of colonial discourse, I contend that hip-hop fatherhood narratives serve as mimicry to reinvent male identity or establish a balanced self for the folk.

As contemporary griots, many Black males perceive hip-hop artists as having “privileged” knowledge that is highly “valued.” In fact, Rice contends, “hip-hop stories generally...operates from explaining race and because of the active role attributed to narratives in the defining of self” (178). Thus, this privileged knowledge challenges global perspectives, derived from media-based stereotypes akin to Said’s concept of Orientalism, furnished by colonial authorities that subjugated Black male identity. In my close reading of hip-hop lyrics, I utilize Wall’s theories to examine Black fathering and constructions of masculinity.

My dissertation examines hip-hop fatherhood stories from 2010-2015. Specifically, I explore mostly African American male rappers’ autobiographical and fictional accounts examining their images of Black fatherhood and personalized tales of their identity formation as adolescents. Moreover, the dissertation gives close analysis to emcees’ employment of first, second, and third person narrative; as well as poetic devices like simile, metaphor, repeated themes, tone, word choice, rhymes, and structure. I argue

hip-hop fatherhood narratives expand on African American literary tropes, musical traditions, and folklore motifs such as: didacticism, blues theory, spirituality, the grotesque, the “bad nigger” and the “bad bitch.” These autobiographical and fictional stories are presented as individualized/communal testimonies about the urban marginalized or subaltern Black American experience. That said, this latest incarnation of African American literature shares common bonds with other genres of written works. For instance, I contend that hip-hop fatherhood narratives can be read as Homeric epic poetry or Shakespearean tragedy. Like Western lore, rap stories feature fathers and fatherless adolescents struggle for manhood, self-hood, and purpose. For instance, I explore fatherhood narratives written from the perspective of fatherless sons where the emcee seeks to reverse the Oedipus complex to reconnect with estranged patriarchs. Hence, hip-hop fatherhood narratives offer a complex depiction of Black fathers and masculinity.

Overview of the Chapters

The chapters of the dissertation are thematically organized by specific life experiences that shape African American fatherhood in most marginalized urban communities. In chapter one, entitled “Dear Daddy: Drug Addiction in Hip-hop Fatherhood Narratives,” I give close readings of rap lyrics focusing on substance abuse and fatherhood. Particularly, I explore hip-hop narratives where fathers detail how the pressure to be a breadwinner led them to a life of crime and drug use. For instance, artists such as Schoolboy Q depict the misuse of prescription medications as a form of escapism—or an alternate space—to alleviate the societal pressures of being a patriarch. Hence, the fathers appear as victims of the disease of substance abuse which renders the

individuals' incapable of sustaining healthy relationships with their families.

The latter half of the chapter, examines the negative impact of drug-addicted fatherhood on the identity formation of an adolescent. Specifically, rappers perform representative urban fathering experiences shaped by substance-abuse. Here, I critically analyze lyrics where sons' mimic their fathers' addiction and high-risk behaviors and daughters seek to fulfill their fatherneed in romantic relationships. Lastly, the dissertation explores rapper's use of the "complex cool" and wounded storytelling to didactically show their respective audience(s) coping strategies to overcome the traumas of this experience.

Chapter Two entitled "A Hip-hop Blues Prayer in the Belly of the Beast: Incarceration, Underground Economies, and Urban Landscapes" explore hip-hop father narratives about fatherhood under the strain of confinement and underground economies in the inner-city. Here, I contend these narratives both reinforce race and gender stereotypes about Black dads. In this chapter, some of the rap songs, specifically performed by gangsta rappers, illustrate the negative impact a patriarch's incarceration has on the identity construction of male children. In contrast, I analyze hip-hop's interpretation of the Oedipus complex in songs where emcees, as parentified sons, seek to restore relationships with estranged fathers. I conclude the chapter by focusing on didactic hip-hop lyricism that offers inner-city youth alternate blueprints of manhood based on African and Christian cosmology.

In Chapter Three, "The Seeds Hatched: Hip-hop's lyricism demonstrating the effects of Intergenerational and Transgenerational Trauma on Black Adolescent Identity Formation," I look at narratives where rap artists recount childhood stresses of father-

lacking related to gun violence, negligence, and drug addiction. Here, emcees' lyrics demonstrate correlations between suffering and fatherless youth adoption of thug personas to acts as surrogate father figures for their households. I further discuss the negative impact of paternal intergenerational trauma on identity formation as adolescents. Specifically, I explore generational curses in father-son relationships effected by substance abuse, domestic violence, and criminal behavior.

Chapter Four, "Baby Girl Trauma and Baby Mama Drama" continues the dialogue about intergenerational trauma as it relates to father-daughter relationships. In these narratives, women rappers employ the grotesque to deconstruct the image of "the strong Black matriarch" to illuminate the importance of African American dads. Moreover, I explore fatherhood narratives centered on "baby mama drama." Specifically, I interrogate controversial lyrics where rappers disparage the mothers of their children for gatekeeping, undermining, and confronting attitudes. Furthermore, the chapter looks at Black fatherhood as a negotiated space—where males experience anger and vulnerability—and is deemed a threat by some to motherhood.

Methodology

My methodology builds upon Matthew Oware's work in "Decent Daddy, Imperfect Daddy: Black Male Rap Artists' Views of Fatherhood and the Family." His study centers on mainstream male rappers' narratives about motherhood, fatherhood, and parenthood. Oware critically analyzes over 300 hip-hop songs from 2004-2009 to examine popular male rappers' attitudes towards their parents, the mothers of their children, and their children. In contrast to Oware's database, my hip-hop database compiles hip-hop songs from 2010-2015 that includes mainstream and up-and-

coming/underground artists to get a broader perspective. Specifically, I focus solely on rap lyrics dealing with fathering and father-child relationships. Particularly, I explore the years 2010-2015 because according to scholar, James Braxton Peterson in *Hip-hop*

Headphones:

[This] current era of Hip-hop is still unfolding...since the demise of Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G., the rise and resultant malaise of the platinum era, and the more contemporary turn toward affect and emotional intelligence in popular forms of music, social justice issues, and movements have impacted the content of the music and the political subjectivity of most Hip-hop generation artists. (28-29)

Besides that, hip-hop has evolved over its forty-plus years of existence. For instance, many veteran emcees have experience personal growth as they have become fathers. Moreover, some hip-hop artisans are considering the impact addiction, mass incarceration, psychological trauma, media-based stereotypes have on perceptions of Black masculinity and fathering. The fact, many rappers conceal these introspective tracks between commercial hits (featuring stereotypical misogyny, homophobia, and materialism) can perhaps be read as a form of coded discourse, considering that Black males rarely have the platform to discuss these issues beyond the realms of barbershops. Ergo, my dissertation examines hip-hop fatherhood narratives addressing the developmental arcs between fathers and children largely because there has been scant investigation on this topic. Specifically, the dissertation covers rap narratives mentioning the challenges low-income fathers face as they ascribe to measure up via colonial mimicry to tenets of American patriarchy. In other words, these black males strive to

become traditional breadwinners and protectors who manage their household through acts of control, power, and influence. In most cases, women and children are expected to dominated, submissive and pay homage to this individuals. Also, my research explores positive and problematic paradigms of masculinity affecting the identity stasis of urban Black males because of American patriarchal socialization.

Specifically, the database includes fatherhood narratives appearing on Billboard's chart top-selling rap albums from 2010-2015. Additionally, the dissertation incorporates songs from artists' mixtapes and commercial albums who appeared in the 2010-2015 *XXL's Freshmen Class*. I chose to use the data from *XXL magazine* because it is considered by many to be rap's most prominent publication on hip-hop culture. Each year XXL journalists select a list of upcoming underground artists; hip-hop heads predict will be trendsetters in the industry. Thus, I selected a list of songs I believe represents the most current, popular, and critically acclaimed narratives on identity, fatherhood, and Black masculinity.

In my research, I utilize several types of narratives featuring multiple archetypes of Black fathers.

- **Autobiographical Narratives:** Emcees offer personalized accounts of their fathering or childhood experiences. Most of these narratives centers on the rappers' biological fathers or their adolescent experiences as self-fathers or surrogate father figures for their household.
- **Third-Person Narratives:** Third-person narratives are usually fictional or didactic stories where emcees implicitly or explicitly act as social father figures for their listening audience. Some emcees utilize this narrative style when

discussing surrogate father figures such as: gang members, uncles, and OG's/mentors.

- **Epistolary Narratives:** Epistolary narrative are stories emcees deliver in a letter format. Oftentimes, emcees will utilize this style to create ethos when discussing incarcerated fatherhood. Many incarcerated fathers communicate with their offspring via the written letter.
- **The Use of Imperfect Second-Person:** In some of the narratives, the emcee employs second-person to speak directly to their listeners. This second person is considered imperfect because the connection between the speaker and audience is merely employed to advance the story or add dramatic effect.

In Appendix I, my database has a list of artist names and song titles and an array of topics covered in the lyrics. Each category represents that most prevalent topics appearing in the rap narratives such as: drug addiction, mass incarceration, underground economies, trauma (which includes intergenerational trauma), and negative co-parenting (commonly known as baby mama drama). Hip-hop lyrics about these subject matters are prominent in rappers' fatherhood accounts. I argue the emcees' stories are representative of the conditions endured by Black families in marginalized communities. The hip-hop chronicles under these talking points represents a counter response to simplified narratives on Black fathers and masculinity often shrouded under the veil of mainstream mass media.

Additionally, I investigate hip-hop fatherhood narratives that reinforce and challenge master/media-based stereotypes on the urban black fathering experience. My research builds on the scholarship of Homi Bhabba, W.E.B Dubois, Tricia Rose, bell

hooks Ronald Mincy, Michael Jefferies, Marc Lamont Hill. Thus, I focus on contemporary colonial mimicry through narratives on masculinity and fatherhood from an African American perspective.

In the dissertation, I answer the following research questions: How does emcees' narratives show fathering and fathered experiences impacted by drug addiction, mass incarceration, underground economies, trauma, and dysfunctional co-parenting? How are dads imagined as protectors, providers, and/or surrogates? How does hip hop artists depict the orchestration and identity formation black adolescents and patriarchs? How does hip-hop lyrics reflect different concepts of maleness such as: hyper, the complex cool, biblical, heroic, and hegemonic masculinities? In sum, I examine rap lyrics use of mimicry calling into question representative black male engagement with American patriarchy and hegemonic manhood.

Chapter 1: “I’ll Always Love Momma” and Hate My Daddy: Addiction in Hip-hop Fatherhood Narratives

On Mother’s Day, one can hear songs paying homage to mamas like The Intruders “I Always Love My Momma,” Boyz II Men “A Song for Mama,” and The Spinners “Sweet Sadie.” Likewise, Tupac Shakur’s “Dear Mama” and underground rapper, Fashawn’s “Mother” are examples of many rap odes to mothers enduring substance abuse. Though, both rappers acknowledge their mothers as “crack fiend mommas,” their songs express empathy and unconditional love. Unfortunately, most rap artists do not extend this type of compassion to Black patriarchs. A broader analysis into the discography of rappers reveals many male hip-hop artists demonstrate forgiveness and understanding to drug-addicted mothers while articulating contempt for strung-out fathers. Like Gil-Scott Heron’s “The Bottle” and The Temptations’ “Papa Was a Rolling Stone,” rap songs from the golden era represent drug-addict fathers as “deadbeats.” To put it bluntly, 80s and 90s male rappers such as Jay-Z, Beanie Siegel, and Tupac illustrate a bone-deep hatred for their daddies. Feasibly, many male artists despise their dads because they failed to embody media-based images of patriarchs popularized on American television or films. Maybe rappers’ experience of “father-lacking” hinders their ability to show compassion towards dads who could not defend them from the horrors of urban life. Whatever the case may be, early hip-hop artists exhibited indifference towards male parents.

In this chapter, I observe the latest hip-hop fatherhood narratives centering on drug addiction. Like rap songs from the golden era, these hip-hop rhymes center on crack cocaine, alcoholism, marijuana use, and its influence on African American fathering. Additionally, contemporary artists’ lyrics also focus on opiates—addictive

painkillers--the latest epidemic impacting the millennial hip-hop generation. Moreover, rap narratives about fathering and substance abuse has become more complex. In some narratives, patriarchs are portrayed as heartless, abusive, and violent men who wound the lives of their children. However, the emcees' first-person reports feature correlations between paternal substance abuse and adolescent mental health issues linked to trauma. Hence, the narratives observe the intergenerational effects of substance abuse on Black families. Rappers' songs show low-income dads succumbing to underground economies in order to become breadwinners. The narratives imply that, in these environments, fathers will transform from drug traffickers to victims suffering in the euphoric crutches of substance abuse. In these harrowing accounts, rappers make palpable the sickness of this disease that systematically isolates fathers from their loved ones. Finally, I analyze rap lyrics focused on paternal addiction and its impact on the identity formation of marginalized Black adolescents.

Charging like the Horsemen of the Apocalypse, crack cocaine--the Pestilence--plagued the 80s hip-hop generation. Under Reaganomics, disenfranchised communities, demonized and devalued by mainstream society, became the dumping ground for the hard drug. According to Jeff Chang, "cocaine was moving through routes that had sometimes been facilitated by U.S. right-wing interests in Latin America" (204-205). These "routes" flowed into impoverished populaces in major cities already decimated by high unemployment rates and urban decay. Subsequently, the notion of Black drug use as more severe became popularized. Reagan's *War-on-Drugs* agenda targeting African American impoverished communities called for tougher crime laws, longer prison sentences, and mass incarceration as a solution for the epidemic. As such, these

conservative policies disproportionately effected Blacks-- a fact quite problematic considering whites used illegal drugs at a similar rate and did not face such harsh penalties (Alexander 7, 99).

Blacks were plagued by high rates of “infant mortality,” “prison sentences,” and “homicides” as result of crack. According to authors of *Freakonomics*, crack rock trumped “any other single cause since Jim Crow” in its harm to Black America (White 78). Individuals lost their humanity due to the highly addictive effects of crack cocaine. Previously considered a narcotic of opulence, pure cocaine was largely consumed by wealthy white patrons until infamous pusher “Freeway Rick Ross” discovered a method to make the drug cheaply (209). Then, it became known on the street as crack rock. Marginalized individuals consumed the product to emulate the elite or to feel emboldened. Chang writes, “cocaine strengthened the shakiest of your convictions and made you feel powerful before the world” (206). For ephemeral moments of euphoria, impuissant persons experienced escapism from urban calamities. However, as they descended into addiction, these individuals wreaked havoc on their respective communities. As written by Chang, “Aqeela Sherrills, then a teenage Grape Street Crip, watched his Watts neighborhood change. ‘Once an individual got hooked...They was robbing, stealing, jacking, everything’” (208). Many people addicted to the narcotic engaged in criminal acts to attain their next high, much to the detriment of their families.

Lamentably, the children of crack addicts faced adverse conditions as fathers and mothers began to neglect and abandon them. In *Hip-hop America*, Nelson George illuminates crack’s influence on African American households with images of “grandmothers struggling to...[take] custody of their... grandchildren” (41). One might

consider the government massive spending on the War-on-Drugs may have best been served offering substance abuse treatment. Conceivably, the children of crack addicts could have benefited from their parents addressing the root of their addiction. Perhaps, these communities could have healed.

The Impact of Drugs on Hip-hop Music

Crack had a profound impact on hip-hop culture. The soapflake-shaped narcotic transformed the genre from a party to hardcore music (White 78). Imitating life in inner-cities, rap narratives began to center on the crack trade while simultaneously popularizing the use of drugs. In the succeeding chapter, I will analyze the influence of drug-dealing on hip-hop. For now, I will center on rap music promotion of drug use.

During the Crack Era, hip-hop developed an ambivalent attitude towards drug use. Imani Perry supports this assertion in the following:

The use of drugs...are an outlaw practice frequently affirmed in hip-hop: 'Befitting the outlaw character of the hardcore rapper, ingesting huge amounts of legal and illegal substances amounts to a ghetto pass and a union card. Getting high is at once pleasurable and political: It heightens the joys to be found in thug life while blowing smoke rings around the constraints of the state.' In addition, to metaphors of drug addiction, there is a plethora of references to drug use within hip-hop, particularly used by the artists when it comes to drinking liquor and smoking marijuana. (105)

Here, Perry asserts in hip-hop, drug usage establishes and affirms one's identity or Black authenticity. For some marginalized individuals, the adoption of the urban outlaw or bad nigga motif acts as psychic armor to victimization. It should not be hard to imagine the

children of addicts camouflaging their pain through rings of smoke. Hence, one's ability to mask the pain of living in a state of helplessness symbolically functions as a middle finger to the establishment.

Nonetheless, scholars rightfully argue hip-hop bears some responsibility for promoting substance abuse considering its detrimental impact on marginalized communities. For instance, Tricia Rose writes in *Hip-hop Wars*, "If Black ghetto street life were really being represented, we'd hear far more rhymes about...the terrible intergenerational effects of drug addiction" (139-140). Without question, hip-hop narratives about slum dwellers turned Tony Montana far exceed songs observing the "intergenerational effects of drug addiction;" still, the music shows empathy towards victims struggling with dependency issues. In fact, rap artists' songs about substance abuse vividly depict psychological trauma suffered by children and women living in underserved communities. Particularly, rap music offers countless scores of redemptive odes dedicated to drug addict mothers overcoming their habits to raise their children.

Lotus-Eating: A Father's Perspective on Drug-Addicted Fatherhood

Hip-hop songs like Danny Brown's "30" and Schoolboy Q's "Prescription/Oxymoron" are examples of rappers discussing substance abuse and parenting from a father's perspective. Particularly, SchoolBoy Q's, "Prescription/Oxymoron," details his fathering experience from a drug dealer to substance abuser. In "Oxymoron," Q's hook "I just stopped selling crack today/O-X-Y a moron" highlights his vulnerabilities and shortcomings as an unemployed patriarch. The emcee's elation to switch from "selling crack" to OxyContin indicates the racist

oppressive conditions shaping some marginalized Black fatherhood. According to Yale sociologist Elijah Anderson, “[many Black fathers are] demoralized by the scarcity of employment opportunities and the negative stereotyping of their gender and race. Out of a sense of desperation and hopelessness they turned to involvement in the underground economy and criminal activity” (Mincy 6). Thus, Schoolboy Q’s narrative illustrates the impetus of the marginalized fathers’ orchestration of identity as patriarch and drug dealer stems from poverty and stereotype. For some marginalized fathers, the competing identities of drug trafficker and father achieve stasis through Rice’s concept of Burden of Proof. Under this concept, low-income fathers assume the drug dealer stereotype as a positive because it nourishes their respective households. To be sure, the low-income Black male patriarch identities are negotiated by external forces of race and poverty. Many Black dads endure the burden of the stereotype of “deadbeat” which houses racist, media-based constructed selves of the absentee, the neglecter, and the abuser. Moreover, male parents engaging in underground economies bear the burden of the stereotype of being deemed innately criminal, heartless, and without a moral compass. Schoolboy Q’s narrative represents contemporary marginalized fathers attempting to find stasis by supporting their children through the trade of pharmaceutical drugs. By selling pharmaceutical drugs, the marginalized Other endeavors to mimic white capitalist patriarchal identity. The fathers achieve breadwinner status fundamental to white patriarchal standards by capitalizing off a presumed upscale white clientele typically reserved for white proprietors. Also, the marginalized Other accomplishes stasis by upholding an unadulterated identity as upscale drug trafficker. His status as drug pusher affirms media-based image of authentic Black maleness. However, his status as a

provider and access to white spaces disrupts the stereotype.

Q's narrative represents the mindset of many powerless patriarchs conditioned to distinguish no difference between legitimate and illegal economies. For instance, Q's line, "80's, get these off new shoes for my baby" insinuates the selling of OxyContin for some dads struggling to provide is deemed acceptable. In fact, scholar, Alice Eagly contends, "our societal expectations reinforce the breadwinner role as the most important fatherhood role...[explaining] why fathers who fail to provide financially are disparaged" (Mincy 69). Thus, Schoolboy Q's assumption of the drug dealer stereotype articulates the conditions impacting marginalized fathers without judgement. Even though Q self-deprecates by calling himself a "moron" for engaging in drug trade, he finds validation from white clientele and his ability to provide for his daughter.

The rapper's change in clientele from stereotypically ghetto consumers to affluent customers engenders a sense of visibility rarely experienced by low-end drug dealers. For example, Schoolboy Q raps, "stop selling crack, cause white don't fuck with niggas/vanity slave, got whips and chains/dirty money, clean money the same. He illustrates this oppressive relationship by juxtaposing double entendre images of Black and white. As mentioned earlier, all races consumed crack cocaine; however, Blacks' use of the narcotic became clichéd and deemed more severe. For this reason, Schoolboy Q eloquently states "whites don't fuck with niggas." Thus, Schoolboy Q's declaration that he "stop selling crack," associated with a maligned urban clientele, and now sells prescription drugs grants him access to opulence linked to white space. One might consider Schoolboy Q's segue from crack to prescription drugs dealer as a marker of social mobility and rugged individualism, given that major pharmaceutical companies

and medical practitioners who circulate the merchandise are largely respected and rarely demonized by the media. In this sense, the rapper conveys the African American patriarch/drug dealer struggle for identity against the exploitative political background of the Black (white) market. Keep in mind, historically African Americans have not been seen as men—and certainly not as fathers by mainstream society. Yet they have been conditioned to imagine white males as the quasi symbol of male patriarchy through the media. I argue that Schoolboy Q, as central character, endeavors to gain close proximity to whites and materialism, representing the marginalized Other's struggle for such visibility.

Furthermore, Schoolboy Q's line, "vanity slave got whips and chains" evinces the African American quest for liberation under mimicry led to capital gain. As marginalized Black patriarchs emulate American patriarchy value systems as providers, acquiring commodities (as status symbols) proves vital to the establishment of one's maleness and identity. In the narrative, Schoolboy Q labels himself as "vanity slave," leading to the belief low-income dads indulge in consumerism to mask insecurities linked to slavery and post-slavery conditions. This is evident in the rapper's use of words like "whips" and "chains," slang for cars and jewelry, have connotations to enslavement. Conceivably, the narrative implies marginalized communities shackled to economic goods become slaves to fantasies of white capitalism as liberation from debt and the oppressive life of the underclass.

For many of these dads, the pressure to sustain against insurmountable odds coerces many to engage in a lifestyle ultimately contributing to death, prison, or drug addiction. Hence, Q's narrative illustrates many of these fathers' ventures to be a

provider are thwarted as they become induced into the dreamy clutches of drug addiction.

To add ethos to his narrative, the track engages intertextually with the sampled track of Portishead's "Undenied." Schoolboy Q's first-person narratives signifies on Portishead's eerie love song, making it an ode to his dependency. In his lyrics, Q personifies his addiction as a mythological siren sheltering him in an endless, euphoric state of ecstasy:

Prescription drugs, I fell in love
 My little secret, she gon' kill a thug
 My body numb, she like to give me hugs
 I love her touch, I get a rush
 When she don't come around, I start to go nuts
 My heart erupts, I'm curled in pain

Here, Q describes his habit as a femme fatale. Notice, the rapper's use of the AAVE future tense shown with "gon" and zero copula in "gon' kill a thug" signifies love as an addiction and pain. Moreover, Q's words like "love/thug/hugs" and "rush/nuts" alternate each line of affection with the line that illustrates some form of suffering. Arguably, the random structure of the lines and rhyme patterns reflects Q's erratic behavior (or relationship) with drugs. A cursory glance of the lyrics, it is arduous for one to decipher if Q, the protagonist is consuming the intoxicant or if the intoxicant is devouring him. This alternative space of existence alienates Q from his daughter and diminishes his ability to be a competent father. Q details how the seductive power of prescription drugs renders him incapable of socializing with his family.

Like Odysseus's journey in the land of Lotus-Eaters, Q's "Prescription," depicts

prescription addiction, as an alternative space detouring and derailing, a patriarch from his life duties. The emcee continues his allegorical tale as he describes his dependency as a fatal attraction:

Prescription drugs, show me love

...

Stuck in this body high, can't shake it off

I'm falling off, I can't hold a thought

What's wrong with me? Now the pressure creep

I'm stressing deep, even in my sleep

My mommy call, I hit ignore

My daughter calls, I press ignore

Here, the emcee employs phrases like “can’t shake it off,” “I’m falling off,” and “I can’t hold a thought” often used to characterize passionate relationships. Arguably, the rapper utilizes these phrases to illustrate the intense feelings of euphoria when one uses prescription drugs like Xanax, Adderall, or Percocet. In addition, Q’s idiom “stuck in this body high” may refer to the dangerous side effects from overdosing on the products. Without question, most addicts when amid drug addiction become self-absorbed and oftentimes isolate themselves from their loved ones. Q’s parental neglect becomes much more visible. Profoundly, the lines “What’s wrong with me? Now the pressure creep/I’m stressing deep, even in my sleeps” indicate Q is painfully aware his illicit affair is disrupting his relationship with his daughter. While the narrative shows substance abuse impedes a young father’s ability to attain identity stasis, the rapper/protagonist attempts to “assume responsibility of his identity” as a father in “relationship to stereotype” shows

evidence of his identity orchestration (Rice 64-65). Moreover, as the song progresses, the daughter's calls or pleas for her dad to "wake up" becomes a haunting chant throughout the song. Furthermore, Q's inability to answer her questions, "What's wrong? You tired? You mad?" exhibits the damaging effects of substance abuse. Here, the narrative constructs male parents who struggle with substance abuse as absentee figures in the lives of their children. Hence, the dads are imprisoned in an alternate euphoric space of solitude that render the individuals' incapable of receiving or giving human contact.

In contrast to 90s rap, Q's daughter's utterance "I love you, daddy" offers a scant example of a child voicing unconditional adoration for a strung-out father. Q's narratives furnish the reader a more adequate understanding of drug addiction and its influence on Black paternalism that extends beyond the mythology of the deadbeat dad. Fortunately, Schoolboy Q overcame his addiction—fleeing the land of the lotus-eaters behind—to become a more desirable father for his daughter.

“Father Why You So Far Away:” A Son’s Perspective on Drug-Addicted Fatherhood

Isaiah Rashad has several fatherhood narratives like "Soliloquy," and "Heredity," demonstrating his strained relationship with his father. Most notably, Rashad's "Heavenly Father" illustrates the impact of substance-abusing patriarchs on the identity formation of Black adolescent males. In his narrative, Rashad, as protagonist, endeavors to escape his father's legacy of alcoholism and substance abuse. Moreover, the emcee earnestly rummages around for patriarchal identities to alter his fatalistic perception of Black masculinity. Assuredly, Rashad's account advocates for a counter-narrative of

Black masculinity to neutralize hyper-masculine behaviors. Rashad's narrative is a tragic saga that communicates the need of positive male affirmation for children of substance abusers.

Rashad's "Heavenly Father" centers on his erosion in faith in paternalistic love and understanding. Ironically, the song features a sample of *Crowns of Glory*, "Lord Hold Me in Your Arms," a track regarding God easing the burdens of man through fatherly love. Throughout, his narrative, Rashad searches for life-affirming truth to break free from his father's legacy. In fact, he engages in rhetorical conversations with God, science (medical professionals), his biological father, and male rappers. Unfortunately, the emcee's search for truth goes unfulfilled causing the artists to seek escape and refuge in drugs.

In the opening verse, Rashad, a suicidal adolescent, pursues a more intimate relationship with his heavenly father to unearth his purpose in a corrupt world. This hip-hop parable presents the protagonist orchestration of identity as a journey for truth, authenticity, and male identity:

Now everybody telling me a lie
 Lordie, give me something for my soul
 See I don't wanna think of suicide
 So please don't take the lock key off my door

In the quotation above, the rapper employs zero copula and half-rhymes conveying the half-truths he has been told by "everybody" in his circle. Moreover, Rashad incorporates a bluesy tone to his delivery which illustrates his depressed self-destructive state of mind. Furthermore, the gospel background in combination with secular lyrics conveys the

impression that Rashad's life-affirming search for "something" must derive from a patriarchal entity or his existence will be in peril. Thus, the emcee demonstrates Gate's vernacular theory of signifying through Rashad's use of irony in the passage below:

See I've been tired of fucking all these girls
 And I've been tired of spending all my dough
 And if I give my story to the world
 I wonder if they'd book me for a show
 ...

The story's storyteller tell it wrong
 And glorify the horror and the wealth

Despite his use of zero copula in his lyricism, Rashad embodies Rice's concept of Unadulterated Presentation of self by refusing to embrace mainstream hip-hop-furnished male stereotypes. At this part in the narrative, Rashad develops identity stasis by bucking the system. Instead of glamorizing misogyny and materialism, Rashad confesses to the Lord that his vices are the source of his struggles with veracity and masculinity. Markedly, the lines reflect a tone of anxiety and frustration with contemporary society valuing commerce over authenticity.

Additionally, Rashad's phrase "storytellers tell it wrong" conveys to his audience some constructions of Black male identity are purposely fraudulent. Hence, adolescents are being conditioned to "glorify the horror and the wealth" as accurate depictions of Black identity. Moreover, Rashad's lines "I've been tired" of "fucking/spending dough" show his performances of racist scripts popularized in rap has left him empty. Ergo, at this point in the narrative, Rashad leans on his heavenly father to guide him to a noble

purpose. However, as a hip-hop artist, Rashad wonders if his audience would “book him for a show” if he promotes something alternative to the stereotype. Hence, he is conscious as artist those who actualize stereotypes are financially rewarded over those who choose to rebel against such stereotypes. According to Tricia Rose in *The Hip-hop Wars*:

Mainstream white consumers drive hyper-demand for these images (whites are raised on images of Black thugs—images that appeal and seem authentic to whites), thereby fueling higher sales given the size of white consumer market, which then encourages unscrupulous corporations to demand more of these images to make greater profits. This in turn encourages Black youth, who are raised on images of Black thugs...The idea of Black men as gangstas, thugs, pimps, and of Black women as hoes and tricks feeds long-standing myths about Black people, and this normalized racist history is largely what makes such images popular. (89)

Arguably, Rashad’s narrative shows the vulnerability of Black children to these media-based images of Black maleness. Explicitly, those individuals who are sons of substance abusers are peculiarly vulnerable. Oftentimes these individuals do not have positive male figures who can offer counter-narrative to offset these scripts. Rashad supports this contention in the passage above. His pleads with his “heavenly father” for “something” suggests he is seeking a new narrative in life. A narrative of freedom and truth. Yet, he fears he will be isolated from his peers and fans if he pursues this path. Rashad external and internal struggles and failures for candor causes the emcee to ponder: “Heavenly father why are you so far away.” In other words, the lyrics suggest the rapper feels

abandoned and neglected by his heavenly father at this critical juncture in his life. In the following verses, Rashad explores the world of science in pursuit of truth.

In the subsequent verse, Rashad looks to the world of science and logic in search for guidance. He recounts his experiences with medical professionals to address his metaphysical and psychological concerns:

Look now, I'm praying that I make it 25
 They be calling doctors for my health
 And "no" is kinda hard to say to drugs
 I been having problems with myself
 And I been asking questions, where the love?
 And they don't give me answers, just a check

The opening line shows Rashad transitioning from "praying" or spiritual counsel to medical experts. Obviously, his loved ones represented by the word "they" deem the artist's health concerns paramount due to his drug use. However, the rapper's use of the aspectual "be" makes clear to the audience his treatment continues to be inept.

Furthermore, the emcee contends these professionals have been unable to find an alternative to drugs to offset his way of thinking. To emphasize his point Rashad's references Nancy Reagan's 1980's antidrug slogan "Just Say No to Drugs." The laughable Republican catchphrase signifies the status quo offers no viable solution to address causes for drug use among the marginalized.

Given that, Rashad, as main character, is cognizant that his "problems with [himself]" stem from a lack of love and compassion during his upbringing. This further suggests he does not have positive male role models in his life that can offer counter-

narratives to offset his father's paradigm of manhood. Thus, the scientific realm proves limiting to understand Rashad's metaphysical concerns that it is inevitable that he will follow his father's footsteps. As the narrative continues, Rashad's delineates his fathered experiences led to his adolescent and adult psychological issues.

Although, the emcee/protagonist narrative about his father fuels his identity orchestration; Rashad appears unable to maintain identity stasis because he is not cognizant of his emulation of his father's behavior. Like Schoolboy Q's "Prescription," Rashad image of his father, is an individual who is distant and caught up in addiction to develop a meaningful bond with his son:

And Daddy, why you call me when you're drunk?

And why you never love me when I need it?

And I don't wanna be like you no more

And I been trying to cope, I'm getting weeded

The quotation above shows how Rashad's father's addiction has emotionally scarred the emcee. Again, Rashad's use of rhetorical questions reflects his search for patriarchal guidance and love. This is illustrated in lines where he questions his father's shortcomings. In the lyrics below, the emcee chronicles the impact his father's drug induced absence has had on his psyche:

And they don't know my issues as a child

Because I was busy cutting on myself

And hanging from the playground wasn't wrong

Until you got a rope up on your neck

And I been losing more than just my mind

Gathering what's left of self-respect

Above, Rashad provides the reader with a visceral account of his shocking upbringing. Although he does not acknowledge his father in the lyricism, the escapism imagery points to his father's negative influence on his life. For example, the rapper utilizes imagery of "cutting" and "hanging" signifying Rashad/the protagonist employed self-harm to numb himself from the pain of losing self-respect. Undoubtedly, a trait he learned from his alcoholic father. According to Pruett in *Fatherneed*, "Fatherless kids are more prone to depression than kids with a father, [and] are twice as likely to...abuse more drugs [and]...try (and succeed at) suicide more often" (158). Arguably, some sons of substance abusing fathers grapple with self-esteem issues and oftentimes seek escapism through drug use—a tactic learned in their fathered experience. Due to his father's negligence, Rashad physical and emotional rift from his father serves as impetus for the emcee to cope with his father loss through "getting weeded." Thus, the narrative implies sons of substance-abusing fathers are highly susceptible to become drug users in adulthood.

In his final verse, Rashad's unfulfilled fatherneed has led him into a state of hopelessness and discontentment with patriarchy. The music undergoes a dramatic shift from the gospel background to a minimalist drum beat often utilized in spoken-word venues. The rapper's tone changes from a sing-song pattern to a somber flow which creates the pathos of vulnerability giving insight into the psychological trauma of his drug addiction:

Look hey I smoke too much

The problems of a twenty-something

I drink too often, there's liquor pouring from the faucet

You would assume by following the tunes

That I'm doomed to die young, addicted to dry plum

Rashad as protagonist gives the reader insight into his life as an addict. His “problems [as] a twenty-something” is numbed by alcohol and “dry plum” slang for marijuana. I argue the “problems” of this “twenty-something” is rooted in his desire to be fathered and submitted to racist social scripts of Black male identity. Thus, his identity is severely unbalanced. In Dubois’s theory of “double consciousness,” he proclaims it requires “dogged strength” to keep a “dark body” from being “torn asunder.” Rashad’s narrative shows what happens when “dogged strength” wanes. Throughout the tragic tale, the narrator’s thirst for fatherhood via counter-narratives to a world that assumes Black adolescents are “doomed to die young” goes unquenched. The protagonist is painfully aware of his twoness—bifurcated identities of the man he wants to be versus the environment shaping his self-hood—crumbles under his dilemma. Hence, the protagonist succumbs to mental illness utilizing drugs and acts of misogyny to mask the pain of his unbalanced identity. Thus, the narrative reveals Rashad/the central character has surrendered to fulfill his father’s legacy as embracing the idea he is “doomed to die young.” Thus, he has complied to accept this paradigm as proclaimed truth in his mantras “these bitches ain’t shit/and pussy is my greatest vice.”

The lyrics in the final verse are antithetical to the subject matter in the previous verses. Clearly, he conforms to the very racist and sexist stereotypes from which he appeals to his heavenly father to liberate him. In fact, the emcee ends his narrative by succumbing to drug use as he wages war against patriarchal figures in hip-hop culture: “I love smoking weed, I hate advice/I know some niggas that talk good/The wise men from

a long line of bitch made and bridesmen.” Here, Rashad lyrics take on a hyper-masculine tone as he professes a love [of] smoking weed and a hatred for advice. The subsequent line illustrates the emcee’s vexation with “niggas that talk good.” In other words, Rashad expresses his pain and discontent with male narratives of Black masculinity. In fact, he labels wise men as “bitch made and bridemen” which implies these individuals are effeminate or dominated by their wives. Considering the previous verses, it appears Rashad has been convinced there is no truth nor authentic Black male identity. He raps, “No need for your two cents and burning your blueprints/...Just need a moment of silence, just close your fucking mouth.” Clearly, Rashad denounces “blueprints” or paradigms of maleness as he alienates himself from these individuals. Again, this behavior gathers its roots in his relationship with his estranged father. Arguably, the absence of his father’s love contributes to Rashad’s self-destructive behavior in adulthood as he has become “infatuated with violence, [with a] gun in [his] fucking mouth.” Furthermore, Rashad conveys discontent with ineffective father narratives as he criticizes other rappers and storytellers for “generic” and “aged” flows that reinforce gender stereotypes. Lastly, Rashad ends his narrative in Shakespearean fashion as he laments his fated identity: “and I’m so misrepresented by niggas that claim trill/And they souls was never in it.” Here, Rashad’s narrative signifies the lives of Black adolescents and young men have been “misrepresented” by surrogate hip-hop patriarchs. In other words, the emcee lyrics indicate the absence of “trill,” (slang for truth and realness) leads many astray blindly accepting false blueprints as gospel.

Indeed, the images of fatherhood constructed in “Heavenly Father” reflect paternal neglect and alienation. This narrative implies sons of substance-abusing fathers

during their adolescent years are in search of a holistic patriarchal identity and/or maleness. Rashad's lyricism reflects the quest for manhood traverses the mortal and metaphysical world. Unfortunately, for many males, family histories of drug addiction lead many fatherless youths to rebel against positive conceptions of patriarchy only to embrace hyper-masculinity as truth.

Cracked personalities: Nicki Minaj's Narratives of Substance Abuse, Fatherhood, and Romance

In my database, Nicki Minaj is the only mainstream female emcee who has utilized hip-hop as a platform to discuss fatherhood and substance abuse. In her song, "I'm the best," she gives a cursory example of her father's bout with crack addiction. In a single line, Minaj raps, "when my daddy was on crack I was crack." Despite her father's addiction to crack cocaine, Minaj's rhymes suggest she overcame her past by cultivating catchy lyricism that proved addictive for her fans. Moreover, Minaj's lyrics hearken back to her 2009 song "Autobiography" where she shares intimate details about her childhood.

Growing up in Jamaica, Queens, as a Trinidadian immigrant, Onika Miraj, professionally known as Nicki Minaj, survived a horrific drug-addicted fathered experience. In multiple interviews, Nicki Minaj describes her father as physically and verbally abusive towards her mother and siblings. For instance, she recounts childhood memories of her mother being dragged "down" by her crack addict and alcoholic father. In addition, emcee recalls another occasion where her father attempted to murder Minaj's mother by burning down the house. In an MTV documentary, writer Vanessa Grigoriadis of The New York Times quotes Minaj:

“From early on in my life, I looked at a woman not having her money as the biggest curse. . . Now that I’m an adult, I realize that women stay whether a man’s rich or poor. It’s just a weakness” (7).

Yet, in her rap narratives, Minaj depicts her mother as a pillar of strength within her life despite her mother remaining years with her father. In fact, Minaj’s mother Carol, in a 2014 interview with Pete Samson (of the *Sun*), states: “It helped her [Nicki Minaj] learn not to relive my life. She became strong and very conscious of dominant and obsessive men.” Perhaps Minaj’s paternal experience helped to shape the emcee’s identity as a self-proclaimed “boss bitch” --the femme fatale of rap. Throughout her career, Nicki Minaj is famed as a fiercely aggressive businesswoman boasting autonomy over brand, body, and sexuality. Yet, the *Mirror* states, in an interview with Minaj, “She ‘pray[ed] that God would make [me] rich so that I could take care of my mother’ and she suffered ‘a phobia about unlocked doors’ because it was only way to protect her mother.” (Strang)

Like most children of substance abusers, Minaj’s statements suggest as an adolescent she may have been parent figure for her mom. According to scholars Emily Baggett, Anne Shaffer, and Hannah Muetzfeld in the scholarly article “Father-Daughter and Young Adult Romantic Relationships Among College Women:”

Parentification, specifically, refers to role reversals in which a child takes on caregiving responsibilities typically expected from the parent (Chase, 1999), where there is a failure to preserve the typical boundaries between parent and child, such that the child becomes responsible for meeting the parents’ needs rather than the parent serving the child’s needs. Parentification has consistently been associated with family characteristics

known to be detrimental to children's development, such as parental alcoholism and family instability... (761-762)

Nicki Minaj served as her mother's personal confidant, and her career aspirations and desire to protect her mother imply she attempts to meet her mother needs. It is plausible that Minaj's father's destructive behavior paradoxically shaped her perception of her mother as both a weak victim and pillar of strength. This may explain Minaj's creation of multiple alter-egos as a rapper. I speculate Minaj's numerous personas give her a sense of identity stasis which can be perceived as an instrument of empowerment, autonomy, and strength.

Indeed, Minaj through hip-hop narrative remains in constant identity orchestration, never seeking a holistic identity that would make her vulnerable to the male patriarchal gaze. In *The New York* magazine, Minaj describes the origins of her alter-egos in the following: "To get away from all their fighting, I would imagine being a new person," Minaj says. "'Cookie' was my first identity—that stayed with me for a while. I went on to Harajuku Barbie, then Nicki Minaj. Fantasy was my reality" (Goodman). Indeed, Minaj utilizes fantasy as a coping strategy to endure her traumatic upbringing, reflect her mood, and musical expressions. According to writer Linda Nielsen in the book *Father-Daughter Relationships*, daughters of substance abusers "[learn] to suppress their own needs and feelings in hopes of creating predictable, stable relationships. Without a strong identity of her own, she is like a chameleon, that lizard that constantly changes colors to match the surroundings" (246). Certainly, in the song "Autobiography," she exhibits chameleon-like attributes with multiple selves throughout the narrative such as: vulnerable adolescent, a "bad bitch" or "gangsta," and lover/child

to her unnamed paramour. I argue Minaj's fathered experience functions as the common thread linking all the personas throughout the narrative.

A Legacy of Sound and Time-binding

Minaj's "Autobiography," from a musical standpoint, intertextually builds upon Raphael Ravenscroft "A Whole Lotta Something Going On" and Beanie Sigel's "Feel It the Air." The "Autobiography" embodies Gates' vernacular theory of unmotivated signifying altering Ravenscroft's bluesy sound to fit the contours of her narrative.

Ravenscroft's ballad from his solo album fittingly titled *Her Father Didn't Like Me, Anyway* centers on the demise of a passionate relationship. In the song, the protagonist like a secular priest "can feel it in the air" he and his lover are growing apart.

Ravenscroft's saxophone acts as a musical canvas as the focal character prophetically laments loss of his paramour. In 2005, Philadelphia-bred rapper, Beanie Sigel's "Feel It in the Air," signified on Ravenscroft's sound to convey his story about the lifestyle of a gangster. Sigel's lyricism feature hardcore rhymes laced with spiritual imagery blends effortless with Ravenscroft's melancholy sound. That said, Minaj's "Autobiography" revises Sigel's hardcore lyricism and utilizes Ravenscroft's music to make an original and compelling narrative.

Unlike the Ravenscroft and Beanie Sigel, Minaj's "Autobiography" functions as three separate vignettes as opposed to a centralized plot. The first vignette, Minaj, as protagonist, recounts her childhood fathered experience. The emcee orchestrates her identity embracing a bad nigga/bitch motif as she fantasizes avenging her mother's by killing her father. Subsequently, the second vignette, Minaj, as central figure, embraces a hybrid identity of lover/child as she recounts a loss of love. In this vignette, Minaj

appears as a blues woman lamenting the hurt she causes a paramour she deemed a father figure and a protector. The concluding vignette, Minaj features the blues motif of combining the spiritual and secular as the emcee engages in dialogue with her aborted child. Here, Minaj participates in an emotional discourse with her lost child explaining her reasons and regrets for aborting him or her. Notably, the artist utilizes a singular identity in this particular vignette. Overall, Minaj utilizes multiple personas which I argue stem from a tragic drug-addicted fathered experience.

Like African griots, Minaj engages in what scholar Alfred Korzybski general semantics concept of time-binding. According to Korzybski, what separates man from animal is humankind ability to transfer information from previous generation and build upon those ideas, which demonstrates linear progression. It is critical to note that African griots did not ascribe to Eurocentric conceptions of time as linear instead most deemed time as cyclical. In other words, most traditional African griots perceived no demarcations between past, present, or future. Ergo, in Minaj's song the concept of time is a continuous ongoing cycle—the changing same. That said, Minaj's hip-hop vignettes may illustrate the continuous suffering Black women have endured because of African American males adopting American patriarchal value systems.

Furthermore, the rapper constructs drug addicted patriarchs as callous abusers who utilize violence to intimidate and control the most vulnerable member of their families. In addition, Minaj's construction of her ex-boyfriend as a surrogate father figure can be viewed as a counter image to her depiction of her dad. Without question, Minaj's image of her boyfriend, fulfilling the paternal role of protector and provider, can be seen as the opposite of her daddy. Hence, he unconsciously fulfills her fatherneed.

Undoubtedly, Minaj's lyrics are representative of the impact of drug-addicted fatherhood on the identity formation of children of substance abusers.

Nicki Minaj's Vignette on the Childhood of Children of a Substance-Abuser

The "Autobiography" opens with Minaj stating, "This is the autobiography of Nicki Miraj." Here, the rapper utilizes her government last name "Miraj" illustrating to the audience this account will be an authentic look into her life. In the opening hook, she raps, "May the lord protect me as the world gets hectic/My voice projected my life reflected." Her rhymes are delivered in a subtle tone that sounds like a prayer. Arguably, the rapper's request for protection from God emphasizes the lack thereof from her father who acts as a tormenter in her household. Without question, Minaj's voice "projects" her early life fatherneed for protection from the hectic world of her father's addiction.

In the first verse, Minaj functions as narrator and vulnerable teen protagonist. As she recounts an instance of her father's drug-induced act of violence towards his family:

Daddy was a crack fiend, two in –

The morning, had us running down the block, like a track team

When you burnt the house down and my mother was in it

How could I forget it? The pain is –

Infinite,

Here, Minaj gives a visceral account of her father's abusive behavior. Notice, the lines feature elongated pauses represented by dashes and commas allowing the audience to take in the gravity of the fathered experience. For instance, the opening line shadowed by a pause enables the listener to take in the chaotic event of Minaj's family fleeing from

a burning home. Moreover, the emcee utilizes the simile “had us running down the block, like a track team” to reemphasize the significance of her experience and cultural background. Here, Minaj’s simile functions as a double entendre highlighting her Trinidadian background (a country known for its track stars) and her family in a state of flight. Additionally, Minaj shifts from third to imperfect second person perspective. By altering the perspective, the rapper draws the audience into her family distress of nearly losing their mother in a house fire. In the subsequent lines, she shifts her narrative from second person to first person breaking down barriers to grant the audience a direct account into her adolescent thoughts. The use of the rhetorical question “how can I forget it” allows the listener to understand how this incident functions as a reoccurring nightmare in her psyche. Consequently, Minaj’s verse becomes increasingly violent which is reflected through her “bad bitch” or “gangsta” persona in the concluding lines of the verse.

In spite of fatherhood illustrated in her lyrics, Minaj’s narrative becomes rife with patricidal fantasies in the conclusion of the first verse. The rapper embodies the “bad bitch” popularized in hip-hop lore as she imagines enacting revenge on her father:

Grab the iron and Black out, like I’m retiring
 Nightmares of you, killing my mother
 The reason that I sleep, with my head under the covers
 And they should’ve thrown a book at you –
 Cause I hate you so much, that it burn when, I look at you

In the passage above, Minaj muses on gunning down her father with the reckless abandon of a retiree who has nothing else to look forward to in life. Again, the emcee utilizes

imperfect second person to persuade the audience to experience Minaj's trauma of living with the fear of her father possibly killing her mother. As the narrative shifts from second to first person, Minaj implicitly demonstrates fatherneed in the third line of the passage. Arguably, Minaj's childhood wounds communicate a desire to be engulfed in the protective realm she finds when her head is under the covers. Consequently, her father's behavior constitutes a barrier from him fulfilling a role of protector. Thus, Minaj evokes the "bad bitch" persona as a form of self-preservation. Additionally, Minaj's lyrics feature a series of brief pauses and a quickened pace to her flow creating the pathos of anger and rage. The anger tone of this part of the narrative is further emphasized in the final line of the verse where she declares hatred for her father. In the subsequent verse, Minaj's fathered experience manifests itself in her romantic relationship.

Minaj's Vignette on the Demise of the Relationship with her Father/Lover

In the second verse of Minaj's "Autobiography," she embodies a hybrid persona of the lover/child. Arguably, as speculated about many children raised by abusive, drug-addicted fathers, her lyrics demonstrate emotional transference of fatherneed from patriarch to loving partner. Due to the fact, most of these children experience trauma such as violence and fear of abandonment by loved ones. Scholar Joan Morgan writes about the Electra complex from a hip-hop's perspective in her groundbreaking feminist text *When the Chickenheads Come Home to Roost*. In the text, she writes:

the fear of abandonment became a self-fulfilling prophecy in my romantic relationships...the disgruntled daddy's girl chose my men for me. And because I was a Lolita with a mad Electra complex, that meant ending up

with men that were just like my father...It took a few years and some serious emotional bruises before I realized that my adult needs would never be fulfilled until I let go of the anger. Instead of looking for my father in relationships, I had to learn to accept him for the humanly imperfect man he is. (127-128)

In the quotation above, Morgan's use of self-fulfilling prophecy speaks to the recreation of childhood trauma into adulthood romantic relationships. Arguably, some children of substance abusers replay tragic narratives in adulthood relationships. Thus, the narratives time binds the past and present and possibly foreseeable future. While certainly, Morgan's use of the Electra complex does not read as a psychoanalytic concept of a daughter sexuality competing with her mother; alternatively, it represents a daughter's desire to possess a patriarch or an ideal of self-concept of fathering. In other words, the boyfriend imagined as a father figure, becomes a metaphorical space of hypercorrection. In the case of Minaj's "Autobiography," the entertainer via narrative binds time through an adult relationship in attempt to get unfulfilled needs met. Furthermore, the excerpt advises children experiencing father-lacking undergo emotional bruises until they learn to embrace their fathers and not look to partners to fix their past. Thus, one must seek balance via to recognizing the selves of the lover and daughter/child are separated entities governed by a male dominance (Rice 177).

It is quite plausible, Minaj, as protagonist, relationship fizzles due to her inability to recognize her identity as the lover/child should be bifurcated. Like most children of substance abuser, Minaj, as lover, unconsciously sees her boyfriend as a surrogate father figure which eventually places a strain on their love affair:

It's official, it's over and I can't let you go
 But I gotta let you know, all the shit I did
 Made me feel like, I'm dyin real slow
 cause no one understands me they don't know
 what to do when I'm hurt when I'm angry
 You was my friend and my man and my daddy

In the passage above, the self-critical protagonist assumes responsibility for the demise of the relationship. While the main character does not offer explicit details about her boyfriend, rarely in love affairs is one party solely to blame for a breakup. Marni Greenburg, in her article entitled “Common Relationship Challenges for Adult Children of Alcoholics” writes, “[Children of Substance Abusers] can be extremely self-critical. As children, they were often blamed or identified as the cause of the trouble. Thus, they may take responsibility for and attempt to “fix” their partner’s mistakes, even when doing so makes them feel resentful.” In addition to describing her paramour as blameless, the narrator endows him with omniscient qualities. Notice, the emcee states only her boyfriend possess the capability to “understand [her],” and address her emotional needs.

At first glance, one may take the position that young adults often express this type of emotionality in loving partnerships. However, the portrayal of her boyfriend as her friend, man, and daddy suggests she imagines her partner beyond the role of companion. In the narrative, Minaj’s boyfriend represents a trinity of maleness. Perhaps, as a friend, he pays attention to her emotional and/or financial needs. As her man, in hip-hop culture meaning lover or intimate partner, he satisfies her sexual needs. One may consider the word “daddy” as a pop culture term utilized in romantic relationships as simply a term of

endearment. However, considering Minaj's first verse, the lyrics suggests the protagonist's use of the word may symbolize her seeing her boyfriend as a quasi-father. If so, the final depiction would be considered deviant if one does not consider the first vignette portrays the protagonist as a victim of negative fathering.

As mention earlier, children of substance abusers, especially those parentified, oftentimes erode boundaries in intimate relationships. Veritably, the concluding line represents in erosion of such boundaries. According to Linda Nielsen in "How Dads Affect Their Daughters into Adulthood," "poorly-fathered women [are more likely] to turn to their boyfriends for emotional comfort and support." As the narrative continues, I contend Minaj's (as protagonist) lyrical construction of her boyfriend as lover/father indicates a desire to hypercorrect her fathered experience.

Minaj's narrative conveys the idea children raised by substance abusing dads tend to recreate dysfunction in their romantic relationships. Perhaps it is because many of these individuals believe they are unworthy to be loved or envision their lovers as their patriarchs. In her narrative, Minaj as child/lover protagonist, characterizing her paramour as a surrogate father can be viewed as an unconscious attempt to fulfill her fatherneed. She raps, "You was there, when that bitch tried to stab me/Anything I ever needed, knew you had me/Cause of you, all them chicks couldn't stand me." Clearly, Minaj's construction of her boyfriend as a protector serves to counter her experience with her abusive father. Moreover, her acknowledgement of her "man" giving her "anything [she] needed" to the point "all the chicks couldn't stand [her]" suggests he functioned as an emotional supporter and provider. It is plausible, Minaj's construction of her lover as an embodiment of paternalistic values renders him the antithesis of her father. Nonetheless,

she could not function in this type of relationship.

Minaj's lyrics illustrate that the psychological wounds caused by drug-addicted fatherhood has the potential to ruin a child's future romantic relationship(s). Minaj's rap lyrics further illustrate this in the following:

So why I hurt you that's the question
It took this long for me to learn my lesson
'Cause now all I want is peace and get drama
I finally understand the true meaning of karma

In spite of Minaj's boyfriend's efforts, he fails to satisfy her emotional needs. Minaj questions why she "hurt" her boyfriend admitting she desires "peace" yet attracts "drama." Perhaps, the deep psychological wounds of children of abusive, drug addicted fathers cause some of the individuals to sabotage their relationships to get to a space of familiarity. Again, Marni Greenburg argues,

They [children of substance abusers] may feel adored by their partner one day and rejected the next; they desire closeness with other and subsequently push them away. They fear abandonment, yet also shy away from the real vulnerability that intimate relationships require. Some [children of drug addicts] may assume that they are not worth the love of their partner and feel they will ultimately be rejected...fearing that love is only conditional.

This may explain why Minaj ends the verse stating she "finally understand the true meaning of karma." In spite of children of substance abuser desire to distance themselves from a destructive fatherhood experience; it seems most helplessly recreate

the same environment in their romantic relationships.

Minaj Third Vignette: A Hip-hop Blues Woman Cry

In her final vignette, Minaj lyricism shapes her identity as a contemporary blues woman. Like Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith and a host of other blues women, Minaj final verse centers on her grief and loss. Moreover, the emcee lyricism involves elements of spirituality against a backdrop of dismal urban reality. Specifically, the central figure laments her decision to abort her unborn baby. In the concluding verse, Minaj speaks to her unborn infant explaining she was too immature and “too busy tryna” have fun to handle raising a tot. Notwithstanding, the protagonist remains haunted by the loss of her child and she laments listening to “people who told [her she] wasn’t ready” (Minaj). The central character grief is momentarily broken as the unborn youngster says, “Mommy don’t cry, can’t you see I’m right here” (Minaj). Here, Minaj’s narrative incorporates African spirituality (featured in blues music) as the narrator finds comfort in her unborn baby, in an astral space, empathizing with her. Arguably, the progeny functions as a representation the protagonist futuristic self who comforts the needs of Minaj as a matriarch. Indeed, the unborn infant acts as an alternative version of Minaj’s bad bitch persona in the first verse (her mother’s protector); instead of being a killer the baby plays the role of confidant. Moreover, the spiritual infant represents a parentified version of Minaj acting as caregiver for a mother figure. Hence, the tragic legacy of the child of substance abuse continues for future generations. Thus, Minaj’s final vignette binds and completes the cycle of time.

Without question, Minaj’s “I’m the Best” and “Autobiography” constructions of substance-abusing and surrogate father/lovers are quite thought-provoking. The

narratives show how Minaj's father's unprovoked violence and torment causes her, as adolescent, to orchestrate multiple personas just to survive. Her alter-egos as vulnerable teenager, "bad bitch," and "lover/child" illustrate the negative impact drug addiction has on the development of adolescents. Minaj's lyrics are representative of many scarred women who carry the burdens of patriarchy in their upbringing and future relationships. Lamentably, the narratives imply these individuals relive the psychological nightmares throughout their lives aimlessly looking to others to fulfill the voids of father loss.

Testify: The Complex Cool and The Wounded Healing of Drug-Addicted Fatherhood

August Alsina's first-person narrative "Testify" centers on his father's drug addiction and its impact on his adolescent identity formation. Bereft of paternal guidance and love, the protagonist embraces a hyper-masculine identity to shroud his emptiness and his thirst for father-need. Conservative scholars like McWhorter contend that Black males' adoption of this hip-hop identity also known as "the cool pose" blocks them from succeeding in mainstream society. Nevertheless, Alsina's "Testify" extends beyond the parameters of what is known as the traditional cool pose. For he is not a social deviant seeking to detach himself from an oppressive white society. The central figure manifests what Michael Jefferies terms "the complex cool," as a "collective discursive phenomenon" in hip-hop that accepts and rejects American hegemonic masculinity. Jefferies in *Thug Life, Race, Gender and the Meaning of Hip-hop* writes of the complex cool:

...openly foregrounds and sustains the conflicts of Black American masculinity rather than concealing them, saturating these struggles in an

appealing marinade of pride in one's hip-hop skills and sensibilities. (66)

Here, Jefferies description of the "complex cool" constitutes an amalgamation of Dubois' double consciousness and Bhabba's colonial mimicry. Specifically, for the latter, Jefferies asserts the ambivalent nature of hip-hop narrative constructions of Black masculinity are fluid. In fact, Jefferies draws from Bhabba's concept of fixity to affirm his point hip-hop identity is complex because it is not fixated. Instead, the genre constructions of maleness are both performative and authentic. In other words, hip-hop embodies bravado and hegemonic masculine tendencies valued in American patriarchy; yet it presents the pain and "guilt" associated with this lifestyle.

Particularly, Alsina's "Testify" performative aspects are drawn from Black sermonic discourse and what scholar Marc Lamont Hill terms "wounded storytelling." Like the quasi-Black preacher, Alsina employs a sing-songy cadence, ever-changing modulation, and signifies on secular and spiritual imagery generating a sense of ethos with marginalized children of substance abusers. Above all, the artist wounded healing functions as the secret recipe of his brand of "appealing marinade." Hill wounded healing work as a pedagogical approach where individuals "expose their wounds" through narratives to heal themselves and others. He compares wounded healing to the Black church tradition of testifying "in which a member of the congregation shares a personal story...as a means by which to affirm the goodness of God" (271). Although my analysis of "Testify" does not measure its effects on storytelling community. Nonetheless, I argue, Alsina, as protagonist, exposes his wounds in a didactic manner with his audience.

Plausibly, for the listening audience the story may offer multiple collective selves

that can be orchestrated to assist an individual to establish balanced identity. Moreover, I contend his use of AAVE through his fatherhood narrative commissions the artist to constitute social and linguistic convergence with his listeners. Lastly, Alsina's account conveys adolescent oppositional defiance to authority, misogyny, and glorifies the unsavory elements of street life. While at the same it demonstrates Black youth vulnerability to inept education, poverty, and dysfunctional families.

The main character's opens his narrative by exposing his wounds of fatherlessness and father-lacking. For instance, he sings, "I remember wishin' that I knew my dad/ then I remember wishin' I could get him back." Notice, the rapper drops the final consonant "g" in the word "wishing." In AAVE (and the dialect of some Southern whites), the dropping "g" is a linguistic feature in the dialect. Like individuals testifying in the Black church, Alsina, a New Orleans Native, singing in this dialect creates ethos and authenticity with his listeners. In the tradition of the Black church, testifiers' testimonies are often seen as true relatable confessions of the heart. As a protagonist/narrator, Alsina use of rhetoric creates a sense of ethos and pathos to empathize with the issues of children of substance abusers. Here, Alsina's repetition of the phrase "I remember wishin'" places emphasis on the impact of his dad's addiction on his childhood. For example, his first use of the phrase suggests, he desires to unearth his dad's life story. Unfortunately, his patriarch's untimely death deprives the rapper of this opportunity leaving a permanent void—an unhealed wound—in his psyche. Later, I analyze Alsina's lyrics to interpret how the absence of his father's narrative effects the entertainer's identity formation.

The subsequent line illustrates Alsina's anguish and aspirations of vengeance for

calamities suffered as a result of his biological father's substance abuse. In the lines below, the emcee relives moments:

For every single night that he told me he was comin' and he didn't,
for every single dollar that my mama 'nem was missin'
For everything I wanted and was told I couldn't get it,
and that I had to face it that my daddy was addicted (damn)

Alsina employs the repetitive preposition “for every” to capture traumatic events of his fathered experiences. For example, the first line centers on the protagonist's anger towards his male parent for absenteeism and neglect “every single night” he did not show as promised. In the ensuing line, he seeks to exact retribution for his dad stealing vital resources from his “mama ‘nem” to maintain his drug habit. Lastly, the emcee wishes to repay his father for not being a provider and abandoning his family in abject poverty. Ergo, his lasting image of his daddy is an uncompassionate and fiscally irresponsible patriarch who forsaken his flesh and blood. Undoubtedly, in contemporary times, African American fathers who fail to support their children run the risk of psychologically wounding their offspring. For Black adolescent males, this psychological wound is further exacerbated in cases where Black patriarchs are addicted to drugs. The sum of Alsina's experiences coalesces into a tragic image of drug “addicted” fatherhood which looms a shadow over the formation of his male identity.

“Testify” illustrates the complexity of Alsina's identity as he embodies hip-hop's rebelliousness while at the same time exposing his deep-rooted insecurities to the listening audience. For the former, the artist recollection of his formative years conveys his conflicted selfhood and challenges the notions of the traditional cool pose. For

example, he raps, “I remember waking up, being broke but still it wasn’t breaking us/I remember why I broke the rules ‘cause I ain’t really have nobody to look up to/I remember cutting class, being bad ‘cause I ain’t have what them other kids had.” Here, Alsina, as adolescent/protagonist, constitutes both Rice’s theories of Acute Identity Expression and Unadulterated Presentation of Self. For the former, the artist outlines his weakness and insecurities stemming from a life of poverty. Yet his presentation of vulnerability can be seen as a strength. Alsina’s unadulterated presentation of self is two-fold. As adolescent protagonist, he embraces an identity of defiance commonly associated with thug mimicry. Yet, as rap narrator, he defies the thug persona by being reflective instead of nihilistic.

In addition, Alsina employs first-person narrative and the repetitive phrase “I remember” placing emphasis on growing up destitute and his need for male affirmation. In the first line, Alsina utilizes the alliterative “b” in words such as “being,” “broke,” “but,” and “breaking.” Arguably, the “being” and “broke” implies living in poverty extends beyond mere economic status but rather it is a state of existence. The subsequent alliterative “b” words, “but,” and “breaking” represents a resistance to the stigma associated with being impoverished. At first glance, the central figure’s declaration of being impervious to ignominy of poverty could be thought of he is embodying the traditional cool pose. Moreover, considering the fact, the emcee does not utilize internal rhyme scheme in this line on the surface shows he has not been effected by hardship. In other words, he has not internalized the conditions of poverty. Thus, his resistance typifies a hip-hop rebelliousness to the establishment and its social constructs of class.

Nonetheless, the ensuing lines demonstrate the contradictions of his selfhood.

Notice the following two lines, where Alsina utilizes internal rhyme schemes vacillating from oppositional defiant behavior to reflective moments of vulnerability. For example, he acknowledges as an adolescent he “broke the rules,” “cutting class,” and “being bad;” which can easily be misread as the traditional cool pose positing such behavior represents a social detachment from mainstream society. Alternatively, Alsina’s lines evokes a longing for acceptance into the social mores of the dominant culture. The rapper exhibits oppositional behavior because he is in want of someone “to look up to” or male affirmation. Thus, it seems quite logical, the main character as a fatherless adolescent, would act out against authority figures to mask his insecurities as a burgeoning young man. Moreover, Alsina’s lyrics demonstrate his vulnerabilities as an adolescent male is exacerbated because he “ain’t have what them other kids had” or he lacked material items. In other words, Alsina’s rhymes conveys he lacked coping mechanisms to escape the pain of living in poverty. Thus, he opts to “cut class” and “be bad” because he is frustrated he cannot participate in grotesque consumerism—the American Dream. According to Jefferies for poor urbanites the contemporary American dream is consumption:

That is, hood residents do not celebrate flashy clothes and expensive cars because they are embedded in a noble and uniquely expressive Black culture; they celebrate luxury items because they are denied traditional paths to positive self-image, and self-and social esteem can only be achieved through purchase and ownership of these goods as a coping strategy. Those who cannot consume luxury items are considered less valuable, both financially and socially, than those who can, and in order to

know oneself as someone who is valuable, the consumer, especially the Black consumer, must possess and use expensive commodities that signal his or her value to others. (77)

As a result of his fathered experience, the protagonist embraces a male identity of rebelliousness and vulnerability. In spite of his desire to assimilate into mainstream society, his drug-addicted fathered experience functions as a scarlet sigil making him a vagabond in search of a holistic identity. As the narrative continues, the central figure's quest for maleness prompts him into the underground of drug culture.

Like many marginalized youth, the leading character becomes a “d-boy” or drug dealer embracing the street life as a means of survival and male acceptance. The emcee depicts “the trap” or underground street economy, as a threatening environment that fosters hyper-materialism and hyper-masculine behavior for misguided youth. He illustrates the gritty realities of this underground economy in the following:

Damn it's gettin real, Damn it's gettin real
 Didn't graduate, I'm thinkin damn I gotta deal
 So I hit da block, sellin rocks just to eat a meal
 So I grabbed da Glock, kept it cocked.

Here, Alsina's lyrics suggest some Black males engage in underground economies because they lack meaningful resources. For many marginalized fatherless African Americans, the American Dream is an inverse Black hole that seduces the youth to fulfill the prophecy of racist Black stereotype:

My niggas stayed with the packs
 ...

Yeah yeah, we stayed in the trap, yeah everyday in the trap
 These hoes was chasing the cheese, so we would stay with the rats
 And we was riding down, dipping low, I stayed in the back
 In the X5 stunting, we ain't know how to act
 Spending money like it's nothing 'cause we gon' get it back

Alsina's use of "we" and "my niggas," conveys he has found male acceptance by participating in drug economy. He and his male cohorts fortify their maleness through acts of hyper-masculine behaviors in the trap. Notice, the central character's collective fascination with this lifestyle is illustrated by alliterative "c" and "d" in phrases like "chasing the cheese," and "riding down, dipping low." Without question, the adolescent protagonist assumes the identity of the stereotypical drug dealer embracing it as authentic Black maleness. Without the guidance of a positive male role model, the central figure became vulnerable to the lures of the street life. Nevertheless, as the narrative continues, Alsina exposes the wounds he suffered by embracing this lifestyle.

Alsina concludes his narrative recounting personal tragedies caused him to re-orchestrate and alter his identity. In the lyrics below, the rapper gives his testimony:

Had a dream but I said I wasn't fucking with that
 Mel told me I would make it, I ain't fucking with that
 But he told me that it wouldn't hurt to give it a try
 Hardest thing out in New Orleans, never seen 25

In the excerpt above, the protagonist "had a dream" to live a life outside of the trap. However, he is hesitant to pursue the dreams. Perhaps he fears such a change would alter his lucrative lifestyle and identity. Nonetheless, Mel's, a respected male figure, offers Alsina an alternative narrative by encouraging him to strive for his ambition. Moreover,

Mel's death functions as a catalyst for Alsina's lifestyle change:

Right then I woke up, broke out, told my nigga's had to roll out,
 moved to the A and got motivated, that inspiration don't run out
 Heard my brother got gunned down and it hurt me to my heart,
 So I kept grindin', I kept pushin', he told me to go far

In the passage above, he exemplifies defiance as he leaves the collective to forge a new identity. Similar to several biblical stories of reluctant prophets, the main character has a dream or purpose over his life; yet his environment and low self-esteem compel him not to want to “[fuck] with that.” However, the deaths of his friend “Mel” and “his brother,” males who exemplify strength (“hardest thing out in New Orleans”) and toughness serves as the impetus for Alsina's life-changing decision to pursue his dream:

So I can't stop at no crib, can't stop at no car,
 Gotta. Keep. Goin. Like there ain't no tomorrow
 So I'm goin hard everyday, til I got nothin' to say, nothin' can stand in my
 way,
 I gotta stay, to show my nigga's a different way (waaayyy)
 ...
 I'ma tell the truth and the whole truth
 'Cause there ain't no need to lie
 And I ain't tryna keep it all inside
 So I gotta testify, for you and I, I testify

In the passage above, the main character epitomizes Rice's concept of burden of proof. He demonstrates this by seizing ownership of his d-boy image and through narrative he

empowers others not to embrace this identity. In the passage above, Alsina shows the pursuit of one's dream must extend beyond material items such as "cribs" or houses and fancy "cars." Instead, his lyrics suggests he gains contentment through wounded healing as a storyteller who "shows [his] niggas a different way." Alsina's narrative reimagines masculinity as the acceptance of truth and vulnerability. Without question, Alsina personifies wounded healing in the final lines of the story. In fact, Alsina utilizes the oath to "tell the truth and the whole truth" usually given during court testimonies to symbolize his commitment to others. Arguably, the emcee heals himself and possibly the wounds of others by emerging as a social father figure to those traumatized by drug addicted fatherhood.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have critically analyzed fatherhood narratives detailing fathering and fathered experiences linked to substance abuse. A close reading of emcees' lyrics from the position of the marginalized patriarch proposes societal pressures coerce some low-income fathers to engage in underground economies. Songs like "Prescription/Oxymoron" shows drug dealing as a marker of social mobility for those who live in the gaps of modern society. Oftentimes these individuals "get high off their own supply," becoming victims of substance abuse. Once the fathers succumb to addiction they transform into self-loathing narcissists unconsciously isolating themselves from their families. Thus, the image of drug-addicted fatherhood illustrates the nature of the disease that consumes the life force of the victims and their family.

Songs like Rashad's "Heavenly Father" show drug-addicted fatherhood has a corrosive effect on the identity formation of Black adolescent males. His poetic tale is

representative of many males who have endured the trauma of a father's substance abuse. The adolescent character fruitless struggle to escape his dad's legacy of addiction communicates the dire need for a positive male affirmative in poverty-stricken communities. Moreover, the narrative gives a visceral account on how a father's drug addiction may lead a youth to exhibiting self-harming behaviors. Additionally, the lyricism implies some children of substance abusers ultimately express a deep disdain for humankind because of the dire need for fatherneed. Ultimately, the stories bring much required awareness to the need of positive counter-narratives to those living with this particular fathered experience.

Likewise, Nicki Minaj's "Autobiography" emblematically illustrates the impact of paternal drug addiction on the orchestration of adolescent identities. Her track portrays drug addict patriarchs' violent and abusive behaviors foster low-esteem leading some teenagers to emulate aggression in their adult lives. In her song, Minaj, as protagonist, embodies the "bad bitch" persona as a defense mechanism which stems from her father's offensive conduct. Moreover, Minaj narrative implicitly proposes children raised by drug addict fathers are more likely to recreate dysfunction in their romantic relationships. "Autobiography" effectively makes this case when Minaj, as the lover/child protagonist looks to her boyfriend to fulfill her fatherneed. Thus, the abusive inherent qualities of substance-abuse fatherhood are shown to generate psychological wounds that ripple in the adult lives of children of substance abusers.

Lastly, Alsina's "Testify" construction of fatherhood is visceral, displaying the ugliness of substance abuse. In the story, the father presented as a non-existent void plagues the lives of his family. However, Alsina's redemptive narrative show some

children of substance-abusers can heal via wounded storytelling. His narrative embodies the complex cool encouraging adolescents to seize ownership of their pain and find their life purpose.

A Hip-hop Blues Prayer in the Belly of the Beast: Incarceration, Underground Economies, and Urban Landscapes

This chapter explores master narratives and counter-narratives on African American fathering experience as it pertains to incarceration, underground economies, and naturalistic urban landscapes. Specifically, I challenge conservative and popular media that blame hip-hop and marginalized Black males for oppositional behaviors without empathy “to the forces working against these young people” (Rose 81). In fact, I mine hip-hop narratives to search the influence of American patriarchal socialization on some Black males’ mimicry for maleness and fatherhood. Explicitly, I consider narrative depictions of the naturalistic urban landscapes—the hyper-ghetto and prison industrial complex—shaping Black male identity. I examine hip-hop lyricism that humanizes fathers who are ex-offenders from marginalized communities. Moreover, the chapter centers on gangsta rap lyrics where a fathers’ incarceration had a negative influence on the formation of an adolescent male identity. Additionally, I explore stories that signify on Sophocles *Oedipus Rex* where fatherless sons seek to regain childhood by restoring the logical order of father-son relationships. Lastly, the chapter focuses on didactic hip-hop lyricism offering alternate blueprints of manhood for youth living in naturalistic urban landscapes. The blueprints of Black masculinity are based on spiritual cosmology which demonstrates the herculean efforts needed to influence change in these communities.

Deadbeat Masters: Master Narratives of Black Fatherhood

Danny Brown’s image of urban Black fathers epitomizes master narratives of African American patriarchs as felonious “deadbeats.” In the track “Juno,” Brown

reimagines the film *Juno*, a pop culture movie that romanticizes white suburban teen pregnancy, from the perspective of marginalized dads from the inner city. While *Juno*'s representation of a determined feminist teenage mother making executive decisions regarding the welfare of her child defies gender stereotype, the film infantilizes the white teen dad. I argue this is by design. The white patriarch's comedic innocence and naivety shields him from the negative critique experienced by many teenage dads of color. In contrast, Brown's version of *Juno* depicts marginalized Black teenage fathers as lawless miscreants who lack economic or intellectual prowess to fulfill the role of fatherhood. Problematically, Brown signifies upon Tupac's iconic, "Brenda's Got a Baby" a song capturing the comprehensive systematic causes of teen pregnancy to demonize all young patriarchs. His fatherhood narrative indicates "our [American society] willingness to shame, contain, and blame Black poor" as if they are "more poorly behaved or...more committed to crime" (Abu-Jamal and Hill 81-82). Brown's lyrics uphold long-lasting racial and class stereotypes of hapless African American biological fathers lacking the integrity and fortitude to be competent parents.

Brown's "Juno" monolithic depiction of adolescent patriarchs as "deadbeats" becomes more lucid in the opening verse of the hip-hop narrative:

A nigga be a nigga get locked or get hit up

Now you looking at that nigga like

"Homeboy, I thought you was gonna help me I'm all by myself

See you gonna help me take care of this" (Baby)

The rapper's use of the aspectual "be" in the line "A nigga be a nigga" portrays African Americans as a monolithic criminal collective. As mentioned earlier, Smitherman

describes the aspectual be in AAVE (African American Vernacular English) to evoke something that is continuous and ongoing. Brown characterizes African American patriarchs as “niggas” who are inescapably bound to become incarcerated or murdered in concrete jungles. Notwithstanding, the entertainer’s portrayal of African American youth as delinquent is unoriginal, as the text, *The Classroom and the Cell* reveals:

Angela Davis made a critical point, perhaps more explicitly than any other scholar...at the close of the Cold War, the American empire needed a new enemy. The enemy that they decided on and targeted was “criminality”
...And who makes the best internal enemy? The Black folks who have
been the eternal alien in this country, of course. (84)

Historically, American society has produced myriads of racist Black caricatures; however, “at the close of the Cold war,” African Americans became the social pariahs of criminality. Under Reganomics, media and government sponsored organizations brought to life the social construct of Blacks as lawbreakers to validate “tougher-on-crime laws.” Brown’s “Juno” shows evidence that society “has long associated Blacks with criminal behavior, high imprisonment rates reinforce this association in the collective public mind” (79). The rapper’s hip-hop tale fits into race and gender master narratives regarding Black male identity as innately immoral. At first glance, Brown’s lyrics suggest these individuals are products of a hostile environment fostering perpetual cycles of mass incarceration and violence. Nevertheless, the use of the teenage mother’s voice creates the pathos Black males are simply irresponsible patriarchs. Ergo, the commonly held image of the struggling single-Black mother juxtaposed with the silent image of the rogue Black dad endorses the mythology of the Black deadbeat father.

Furthermore, Brown highlights the so-called inadequacies of Black fatherhood by depicting them as inept providers. In the lyrics below, Brown utilizes the second point of view in his narrative as he lambastes urban dads for their inability to be providers. The lyricism below illustrates the point:

Put you on child support, now you gotta go to court
 Now they hit your checks to take care of that (Baby)
 Thought about abortion, but she couldn't afford it
 And you was locked up, fighting them charges
 Now you on the street, diapers ain't cheap
 And you slang weed to take care of that (Baby)
 No education, the odds are slim of making it

Arguably, Brown utilizes the second-person to draw his listeners in or to make an intimate connection with his audience regarding fatherhood. It is plausible, Brown's fatherhood narrative may serve as a cautionary tale to demystify the appeal of teen pregnancy popularized in modern media. For instance, fatherhood scholar Ronald Mincy asserts:

Inmates and vulnerable nonresident fathers share many of the same characteristics that make it difficult for them to find regular jobs. In particular, they are likely to be men of color and to have little schooling. Without social supports and facing limited employment and earning prospects, many ex-offenders violate parole or commit new crimes, which lands them back behind bars. (27)

In truth, the entertainer's lyrics highlight "no education" leaves many poverty-stricken

fathers with limited options. Nevertheless, the emcee bombards his audience with images of court fees, child support, and abortion costs implying the father's role is reduced to solely economics. Notice, the passage above is bereft of any emotional or spiritual attachment to parenting. In addition, Brown's rap lyrics characterize Black fathers, specifically ex-offenders, as individuals exclusively relying on underground economies to provide for their children. For example, he raps ex-offenders must "slang weed" because "diapers ain't cheap." Brown's depiction of Black fathers as delinquents reincarnates what Miles White calls "the folkloric bad nigger whose foray into hip-hop turned the ghetto into a surrealistic playground of racial fantasy" (28). Again, Brown's rigid image of African Americans as victims of urban decay infantilizes masses of patriarchs as a collective that must perpetrate crimes to nurture their household. Thus, some hip-hop tales are divorced from diverse images of Black dads. According to Tricia Rose in *Hip-Hop Wars*:

The stories of Black street culture—which are at the heart of “keeping it real” rhetoric—do not represent all or even most of Black ghetto life. But by letting commercial hip-hop become a nearly constant caricature...we’ve come to equate Black poverty with street life. This denies and silences a wide range of Black urban ghetto experiences. (139)

Without question, Brown's lyricism and deadpan delivery establishes a tone suggesting undeserved patriarchs are doomed to succumb to challenges of inner-city life. Hence, hip-hop stories like Brown's "Juno" advocates Black fathers are damned to play the deadbeat in contemporary master narratives of Black masculinity.

Lord Release: Underground Economics and Naturalistic Landscapes

Cultural critic bell hooks takes the position hip-hop music's "aggressive presentation of invulnerability" shrouds the pain endured by marginalized males to uphold the appearance of the "real" (93). What hooks' argument does not consider is that hip-hop is the grandchild of the blues. Particularly, fatherhood rap narratives like Chance the Rapper's "Lord Release" express the grief and hopelessness of those living in the trap. In "Lord Release" the nameless father grapples to regain his moral integrity as he makes a Faustian bargain to support his family with drug money. Throughout the narrative, the dad often prays to God for escape from this lifestyle. The focal character's articulation of his conflicting identities as a fatherless father and drug trafficker illustrates the patriarch deems this lifestyle as a dilemma.

In "Lord Release" the unnamed dad's experience of father-lacking and his fear of losing his son causes the character to pursue earning a living through underground economies. Chance the Rapper's lyrics illustrate this in the opening verse:

And she wants me to get out of the drug game
 She doesn't realize how much it causes me pain
 I just want my son to grow up with a dad with him
 My father couldn't love his kids
 So he wanted to abandon them

In the excerpt above, the protagonist exhibits signs of cognitive dissonance. Despite the fact the dad's drug-dealing lifestyle "causes [him] pain," he appears driven to do so by the impact of having been abandoned and unloved by his own father. Haunted by memories of fatherlessness, the nameless dad appears to correlate financial security with involved fatherhood. Scholar James Braxton Peterson contends, "the hegemonic forces

that rigidly construct Black masculinity are the economic lack and ad-induced desires that collude to produce the collective willingness to engage in the underground economy” (151). That said, Chance’s narrative presents the urban environment as a naturalistic force. The blues and hip-hop function as the mouthpiece to demonstrate the impact the force has on the Black body. Blues expert, Amiri Baraka, described city blues as the soundtrack of urbanites that “took its life from the rawness and poverty of the grim adventure of ‘big city livin’” (105). Hip-hop functions as the latest incarnation of city blues for the contemporary generation. Unequivocally, the music discloses the hostile conditions of inner-city living shaping the contours of Black masculinity and fatherhood. The “rawness” of the poverty serves as a major impetus for males to engage in colonial mimicry of American patriarchy. Particularly for many low-income fathers, the societal pressure proves paramount to become breadwinners in economic deserts. Thus, some patriarchs strive to epitomize pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps mentality only to realize they lack shoestrings. In other words, most low-income Black males face poverty, inadequate education and health, and the historical baggage of American racism.

Nonetheless, the Black males’ struggle to survive and thrive exemplifies heroic masculinity. Scholars Douglas B. Holt and Craig J.T. Thompson study on heroic masculinity centers on white males as man-of-action hero models, defining heroic masculinity as a “rebellious spirit” to own one’s autonomy which can be “channeled in socially beneficial projects” (428). I argue the intellectuals’ concept of heroic maleness which is an amalgamation of the rebel and the breadwinner models can be applied to marginalized African American dads. Particularly, those who “embody the rugged individualism of the rebel while maintaining their allegiance to collective interests, as

required of breadwinners” (428). Holt and Thompson acknowledge white businessmen like Trump, Gates, or Jobs who market themselves as the bad boys of bureaucracy as heroic models. These men are self-made or reinvent themselves to establish an identity of rebellion, independence, and power. In Hollywood cinema, everyday white men-of-action heroes are depicted as rebels with a cause. For example, cable series like *Breaking Bad* and *Shameless* depict white males, as loving patriarchs, and criminals, revolting against a flawed economic system to sustain their families. However, mainstream media has derided most Black males as rebel models or “immature boys...more warrior than father” (Holt and Thompson). Nonetheless, in *Prophets of the Hood*, Perry posits in hip-hop “the drug-dealing outlaw” of “American culture and media” operates as a “subversive message” to “white supremacy” (104). This “subversive message” derives from blues culture. According to Baraka in *Blues People*:

There was always a border which the Negro could not go, whether musically or socially...The Negro could not ever become white and that was his strength; at some point always, he could not participate in the dominant tenor of the white man’s culture. It was at this juncture that he had to make use of the other resources, whether African, subcultural, or hermetic. (80)

Here, Baraka’s contention evokes the ambivalence of the modern-day colonial mimicry of the marginalized other. Specifically, low-income dads cannot fully exercise patriarchal authority like their white counterparts nor should they attempt to because such power is toxic. Yet, the Black male’s inability to gain autonomy over his maleness remains a source of grief. As bluesmen, many Black males subvert white authority and attained men-of-action status by learning how to commodify their pain into cultural productions like music

or comedy. For many Blacks, the realm of entertainment works as the space where one can experience reinvention and self-definition to a certain extent. For other Black males, the hustle or entrepreneurship functions as another avenue for limited liberation. Consequently, some low-income fathers must “make use of” limited resources compelling many low-skilled men to seek refuge in the trap. Explicitly, I contend hip-hop fatherhood man-of-action paradigm as an amalgamation of the breadwinner and the rebel models governed by one’s domain.

Chance’s depiction of the urban father encapsulates my definition of the man-of-action hero model. The emcee’s lyrics illustrate my point in the following:

I don't sell rocks just because I want to
 I sell for my son it's so that he don't have to
 I know now when don't seem like some father ish
 But the money in my sock is my son's scholarship

In the passage above, the unnamed father attempts to subvert white institutional forces that create poverty by engaging in the Black market. Scholars Imani Perry and Jon Michael Spencer maintain the pronoun “I” in traditional African American musical lyricism is synonymous with the marginalized community/audience. The first two lines of the quotation makes known the nameless father (and those from marginalized communities) reside in a location where one “sell rocks” with the hope of breaking generational cycles of poverty. Dr. Michael Eric Dyson contends, “The engine of the prison-industrial complex is fueled by the containment of Black upward mobility and the disenfranchisement of Black citizenry” (151). This environment serves as fertile ground—the dilemma—where warring identities (father and drug dealer) are being

negotiated for identity stasis. Thus, some marginalized patriarchs are coerced by their environment to become man-of-action in pursuit of an inverse American Dream. To understand the term inverse American Dream, one must discern how class works in America. Michelle Alexander has written:

What is key to America's understanding of class is the persistent belief—despite all evidence to the contrary—that anyone, with the proper discipline and drive, can move from a lower class to a higher class. We recognize that mobility may be difficult, but the key to our collective self-image is the assumption that mobility is always possible, so failure to move up reflects on one's character. But extension, the failure of a race or ethnic group to move up reflects very poorly on the group as a whole.

(13)

The quote above illustrates the ambiguities in the colonial mimicry for American patriarchy. For the marginalized Other, “the persistent belief” in upward mobility drives the lower class to strive for what they perceive as higher-class status. However, the underserved are regulated to naturalistic urban landscapes where fatherhood compels many to attain “scholarships” through nefarious means. Hence, their American dream is inversed from the traditional pursuit of happiness. Many patriarchs suffering from poor “collective self-image” are conditioned to believe failure to provide reflects “very poorly” on oneself and their legacy. However, Chance's lyricism advocates for African American male parents to escape the perils of the man-of-action hero model through a spiritual relationship with God.

In “Lord Release” the male protagonist signifies the Christian “backslider” from

blues lore as he re-orchestrates his identity through dialogue with God. Notice in the lyrics below, the central figure converses with God to recognize redemptive qualities within himself:

But Lord you know now that I have the best intent
 And I been at the church, though I ain't the best of men
 I got my wife and son so I know you loving me
 Tell me I'm more than these God damned drugs on me

In the excerpt above, the anonymous dad affirms his identity by “outlining his strengths and weaknesses” which represent Rice’s concept of Acute Identity Expression. Notice, the nameless father pleads with the “Lord” to overlook his transgressions to take into account his “best intent” to care for his household. Moreover, the protagonist acknowledges he has not been a “the best of men.” Nevertheless, his attendance “at the church” suggests he seeks salvation. Arguably, the character deduces his salvation stems from his relationship with his family. Thus, he pleads with God to give his life meaning because he knows he is “more than these God damned drugs.” In the quoted passage below, the father seeks a more profound meaning for his life:

I know you put me on Earth for more than this ish
 Give me a miracle, or blessing, three wishes
 Whatever it takes, just give me a new start
 I ask for one thing though please release my precious heart

The nameless father’s pleas for redemption reads like an answer to W.E.B. Dubois question in *Souls of Black Folk*: “What if the Negro people be wooed from a strife for righteousness, from a love of knowing, to regard dollars as the be-all and end-all of life?”

(266). The father's use of the words "miracle," "blessings," and "three wishes" suggest he is seeking God's favor or a sense of hope. In fact, the word "three" constitutes a transformation per biblical numerology which suggests the dad is seeking a "new start" in life. In the final line, the patriarch asks God to release his precious heart—to reconstruct his patriarchal identity—and woo him back into strife for righteousness.

Chance's narrative articulates the voice "issuing from the Black hole" of urban landscapes—economic deserts—where some fathers succumb to the lures of street life. Notice, the nameless father's story being "atopic placeless" grants the audience to occupy the blank spaces with their own personal fathering experiences. According to Houston Baker, "The blues offer a phylogenetic recapitulation—a nonlinear, freely associative, nonsequential mediation—of species experience. What emerges is not a filled subject, but an anonymous (nameless) voice issuing from the Black (w) hole" (5). Like Johnson's *Ex-Colored Man* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Chance's nameless narrator acts as the representative voice of the low-income everyman. Moreover, the unnamed patriarch functions as the prisoner to the blues matrix—a space where moral values are strained under the hostile conditions of abject poverty. Scholar Houston Baker, contends the "blues matrix" represents "a point of ceaseless input and output, a web of intersecting, crisscrossing impulses always in productive transit" (3). In other words, the marginalized other remains stationed at a site where he faces struggle and quest for liberation under multiplicities of the modal Black experience. Like Richard Wright's *Native Son*, the nameless character navigates naturalistic urban landscapes through corridors of "fear," "flight," and "fate." Moreover, the protagonist governed by "crisscrossing impulses" of fatherhood remains in search of a productive holistic identity. Hence, Chance's image of

the urban Black father is a transient being undergoing matrices of adverse inner-city experience in search of stable patriarchal identity.

Chance the Rapper's "Lord Release" functions as a counter-narrative to the American portrait of the inner-city Black dad. The emcee image of African American patriarchs as bluesmen and reluctant man-of-action-hero in naturalistic urban landscapes shows the complexities of Black masculinity and fatherhood. Hence, Chance's lyrics are representative of the metropolitan patriarchal experience where fathers seek flight through spiritual reconnection or face the fate of death or prison life.

The Counter-Narrative: A Father's Redemption

Kanye West's "All of the Lights" represent the multiple selves orchestrated by ex-felon patriarchs to construct a productive singular identity. The main protagonist faces anxiety as he struggles to endure his conflicted identities as a thug and a paternal figure. Arguably, West evokes the thug persona in his fictional account because it is widely accepted as authentic Black maleness in mainstream hip-hop. Critic Jefferies contends "hip-hop narrators" utilize the bad nigger motif as a "protective wall" to uphold the appearance of hegemonic masculinity while speaking about "vulnerability" (99). In the story, the imperfect father evokes sympathy not commonly given to ex-offenders. West's fictional chronicle conveys the ex-felon fears of being replaced as a father figure and isolated from his daughter. Moreover, the tale conveys the ex-felon struggles to shed his propensity for toxic male dominance which has functioned as a form of self-preservation in the prison system. Arguably, West's rap narrative may offer a paradigm to exhort marginalized males to alter their identity. Additionally, the story may persuade the audience(s) to grant such individuals the opportunity to evolve. As Jefferies eloquently

writes, “Trouble is transformed from a source of trauma to a badge of honor that earns thugs the right to be vulnerable.” Thus, West’s fatherhood narrative shows an incarcerated father redefining his conception of masculinity for his child’s sake.

In his fictional narrative, West depicts his character as an antisocial abuser. The protagonist serves time in prison for physically assaulting the mother of his child. Most likely the audience will take offense to the protagonist hyper-masculine and misogynistic conduct. As the character recounts the events leading to his confinement: “I slapped my girl, she called the feds/I did that time and spent that bread.” West’s use of zero copula and nonchalant delivery creates an ethos of the “bad nigger” in African American folklore in today’s time known as the urban thug. The primary character embodies the mimicry of white supremacist patriarchy through displays of toxic masculinity. The character’s propensity for violence can be read as an imitation of hegemonic masculinity. Consequently, some marginalized individuals utilize brutality to gain control and to confirm a false sense of maleness. Considering, the lines are bereft of any remorse regarding his assault and the lyrics are devoid of any details about his stint in prison; it conveys to the audience he has not been rehabilitated. To be sure, the ex-offender as a pupil of the “ghetto university” acts out in the way as he has been socialized:

I’m heading home, I’m almost there

I’m on my way, headed up the stairs

To my surprise, a nigga replacing me

I had to take ‘em to that ghetto university (all of the lights)

Ostensibly, the character upon his release takes his ex-girlfriend’s new beau to “that ghetto university.” The narrator’s use of semantic inversion in the term “ghetto

university” proves crucial to the understanding of the narrative. To understand the “ghetto university” one must hearken back to Wu-Tang Clan’s song, “C.R.E.A.M (Cash Rules Everything Around Me)” where Inspectah Deck raps, “living in the world no different from a cell.” In other words, the unnamed patriarch resides in a segregated community “the hyperghetto” where residents are universally educated to attain respect by the code of the streets. The text *Thug Life* points to Elijah Anderson definition of code of the streets as a “set of informal rules governing the interpersonal public behavior, particularly violence” (Jefferies 85). Many marginalized males are socialized to “quest for respect” as a means of survival and to affirm one’s male identity. As Jefferies points out,

Ghetto residents cannot ensure their public safety without respect, and because respect is hard won and easily lost, many of the measures taken to secure it may seem obscene, irrationally violent, or petty to outside observers. Without adequate protection and aid from the state and other legitimate institutions, violence emerges as a viable tactic for both self-preservation and the administration of justice for hyperghetto/prison residents (Kubrin and Weitzer 2003). (86)

Here, Jefferies contention implies there lies no distinction from life in hyperghettos and the prison industrial complex. Most urban Black males are socialized to deal with adversity and vulnerability through aggression to keep respect. In *We Real Cool*, hooks writes, “whether in an actual prison or not, practically every Black male...has been forced at some point...to hold back the self he wants to express, to repress and contain for fear of being attacked, slaughtered, destroyed” (ix). In West’s hip-hop tale, the

character is hurt to find “a nigga replacing” him as a father/lover attacks his rival to uphold his sense of male identity. The narrative reveals his identity is predicated on dominance and control on the most vulnerable in his household. However, as the narrative continues, the audience witnesses a dramatic change in the character as he realizes his paternal rights are jeopardized because of his behavior.

In the second verse, the father’s estrangement from his daughter serves as the impetus for his purgation from male supremacy. Signifying on prison motifs like *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, West’s character experiences social isolation that leads to his conversion. West lyrics details his metamorphosis of his paternal protagonist:

Restraining order

Can't see my daughter

Her mother, brother, Grandmother hate me in that order

Public visitation

Here, the central figure experiences what it is like to be under “all of the lights.” In other words, he undergoes the pain of being legally confined under public surveillance and scrutiny because of his conduct. Additionally, the character encounter with these social barriers disrupt his bifurcated identities of the thug and father. Lifting the veil of the ice-grilled thug persona, West exposes the character’s anguish via images of disapproving relatives, “restraining order” and “public visitation.” Most importantly, the narrative dismantles racist mythology of the deadbeat by demonstrating the impact of losing his daughter has on the protagonist.

Despite the protagonist’s criminal background, many disenfranchised fathers may empathize with the character. As I will discuss in Chapter four, many low-income fathers

endure criminalization, parental alienation, and/or maternal gatekeeping. In the story, the protagonist locked in this state of purgatory begins to self-reflect. In three consecutive lines, West employs “I” statements as he takes responsibility and actions to rectify his behavior. He exemplifies Rice’s concept of Acute Identity Expression through his acknowledgements of his shortcomings as a man. This is a moment of conversion as the character seeks to develop a productive holistic identity. For example, the lines “I made mistakes/I bump my head” suggests the protagonist/father acknowledges his egregious conduct. Additionally, the line, “I’ll be more supportive” indicates the central figure will become attentive to the needs of his ex-girlfriend and daughter. Moreover, the principal character does not place blame on anyone for his behavior. Some critics may suppose the patriarch seeks redemption because he is destitute of economic funds or looks for favor from his ex-lover. However, this argument overlooks the patriarch, pleads with his ex-lover, is not for his benefit but rather to bar their daughter from “growing up in that ghetto university.” For example, West raps, “she need a daddy/Baby please, /Can’t let her grow up in that ghetto university (all the lights).” Here, the father recognizes his presence is essential to his daughter’s healing process and growth as a woman. The character’s epiphany embodies the concept of Burden of Proof because he takes responsibility for his stereotypical behavior as a thug. Arguably, the unnamed dad does not want his child to fall victim to male supremacy perpetuated in inner-city communities. To assure his daughter does not fall victim to the ghetto university; the central figure realizes he must change his life.

As the narrative concludes, the audience sees the transformation of the patriarch. In the first bridge below, the protagonist makes a declaration to become a better man. For

instance, the lines, “Getting mine, baby/Got to let these niggas know/Getting right babe” shows the growth of the father. Notice in the quote above, the alliterative “g” and the repetition of the verb “get” places emphasis on the actions of the central figure. When he says, “getting mine” it implies the patriarch will take ownership or responsibility for his family. Likewise, the line “got to let these niggas know” infers the protagonist will act as a protector of his household. The subsequent line, “getting right babe” suggests he is evolving for the betterment of his family. The following quote supports this contention:

Unemployment line, credit card declined

Did I not mention I was about to lose my mind?

And also was about to do that line

K, okay, you know we going all the way this time

Here, the phrases “unemployment line” and “credit card declined” reflect the challenges the main protagonist face as an ex-offender. The next two lines show the father has become cognizant of past conduct. Arguably, the protagonist aggressive demeanor and potential drug use mentioned in the third line may have contributed to abusive behavior. The concluding line suggests the main character is going to commit to his promise to be supportive for the sake of his daughter.

West’s “All of the Lights” function as a redemptive fatherhood story. The central figure’s tale offers a template for both abusers and the common public to heal. According to Pruett writer of *Fatherneed*, “men who maintain family ties while in prison have lower rates of recidivism and that their kids show some moderately positive outcomes” (140). That said, West’s fatherhood narrative illustrates the challenges ex-offenders face as fathers and the importance of services to help them develop vital parenting skills.

The Son's Perspective: Gangstas need Daddies Too

Since the emancipation of slavery, America label Black males as criminal. According to Ava DuVernay's documentary the *13th*, post-slavery conditions serve as the primary reason for the overrepresentation of African Americans in the prison industrial complex. Specifically, in *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, Joy Degruy Leary contends:

While most believe that the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, a loophole was opened that resulted in the widespread continuation of slavery in the southern states of America—slavery as punishment for a crime ...Life as a leased convict was no better than life as a slave, at times even worse. After all, not only were they less than human, they were now criminals. (86-87)

The passage above highlights for many African Americans the abolishment of slavery was merely a fallacy. The “loophole” of the 13th amendment allowed the dominant culture to keep control of Black male bodies via legalized terrorism. The status quo used crime as a social construct to devalue African American life and maintain a populace of free labor. Under laws like leased convict, Black males charged with bogus crimes (like loitering) could be forced into a life of servitude and leased out as property to wealthy business owners. Hence, slavery did not end; it evolved across generations.

In fact, each political regime has put their individual take on the amendment to validate the disenfranchisement of marginalized African American men. As mentioned earlier, during Reaganomics Black male bodies are warehoused under the guise of tougher-on-crime laws. Many of these men were coerced to take plea bargains to avoid facing long mandatory jail sentences by going to trial. Consequently, for most African

American males the label of criminal does not end when the inmate pays their debts to society. Some ex-felons face discriminatory hiring practices, exhaust their rights to vote, and forfeit their rights to basic citizenship. In other words, the males become politically and spiritually emasculated as a result of being criminalized.

As is custom, many inmates (isolated in pastoral communities) plights go unrecognized by the common public. For the purpose of my argument, it is paramount to recognize mass incarceration as an African American fatherhood issue. Consider for a moment, African Americans constitute roughly 40% of the prison populace, despite the reality they only comprise 6.5% of the U.S. population. Given the fact, the majority of the inmates are low-income Black fathers one must consider the following questions: What happens to these convicts' families? What impact does a fathers' incarceration have on the identity formation of an inmate's child? One might assume as a sovereign power and moral leader of the democratic world, America would offer provisions to address the multiples needs of this underserved population. Instead, in the 1990's many right-wing conservatives and liberals ignored the plights of these inmates and showed very little compassion to their children.

In the 90's many politicians and academics branded urban youth as super predators. Princeton scholar, John Dilulio coined the term "superpredators" to describe urban teenagers as remorseless and innately criminal. In addition, he predicted they would generate an unprecedented wave of crime in America. Mass media outlets and television programs popularized Dilulio's racist theory depicting mostly Black male adolescents as rapists and heartless killers. Moreover, politicians like Bill and Hilary Clinton used this theory to confirm tougher-on-crime laws charging teenagers as adults.

Soon after, Dilulio's prediction of the rise of urban super predators proved untrue; in fact, juvenile crime had markedly decreased. Although Dilulio and the Clinton later apologized for their political stance; nonetheless, scores of Black adolescents endured psychological and sometimes physical damage as a result of this unproven theory.

Consequently, many political pundits and the media did not consider the impact Reganomics and the age of mass incarceration had on the upbringing of Black adolescents. According to Ashley Nellis' survey in the 2012 *Sentencing Project*: "many people sentenced to life as youth had had a close family member in prison either currently or at some point in their life. More than a quarter of juvenile lifers have had a parent in prison and 59.1% of juvenile lifers have had a close relative in prison" (12). It is clear, many of the so-called superpredators were socialized as adolescents to normalize prison as a sort of rites of passage. Many minors witnessed and suffered the trauma of losing a parent or loved ones to the penal system. Without question, some of these adolescents became products of group homes and child protective services which causes some minors to become more aggressive and antisocial. Most notably, African American males lacking positive male figures to offer counter-narratives on Black identity are more susceptible to view hyper-masculine media-based stereotypes as authentic maleness.

According to Nellis,

Incarceration of one's father has been documented to demonstrate a particularly strong influence. Children with an incarcerated father express significantly more aggression than other children, an effect that can be detected as early as 5 years of age. In addition, the negative effects of an absent father are even stronger when the father is incarcerated than when

he is absent for any other reason. (12)

Thus, the so-called superpredators were in desperate need of mentorship and guidance to overcome these obstacles. Unfortunately, the strategies presented by conservatives further worsened their problems.

Conservative texts like William J. Bennett and John Dilulio's *Body Count* advocated a three-point strategy to address these so-called superpredators. They write,

As an initial step, society must not for the sake of "tolerance and open-mindedness" condone immoral acts but instead acknowledge its recent moral displacement and fight to reestablish morality in America's social fabric. Second, parenthood must be resurrected as a privilege reserved for only those who can afford the temporal and psychological costs of raising children. Finally, society as a whole must "remember God," as the spiritual component of moral poverty is the most vital, given that this struggle will be "won or lost in the human heart" (88-89)

In the passage above, conservatives resolve to eliminate "tolerance and open-mindedness" and return to an archaic or non-existent American moral code. Moreover, the pundits argue parenting should be reserved to the financially stable households that can afford the "costs of raising children." The conservative coded language implies only the elite or wealthy are capable of parenting and raising minors who will become model citizens. Moreover, the commentary implicitly contends parents from marginalized communities are unindebted in the future of their children. Notice, the conservative strategy does not consider urban decay and post-industrial communities in its commentary. Furthermore, the conservative policy reduces parenting to economics rather

than communal and familial efforts. Lastly, the program calls for parenting to remember God, religious preference aside the proposal is not grounded into tangible solutions. Nonetheless, the consequence of being labeled a superpredator further exacerbates the social conditions suffered by Black adolescents in particularly those who are fatherless.

Hence, critics like as Bakari Kitwana, condemn rap for infusing prison and criminality into the Black popular consciousness. Indeed, hip-hop gives visibility to those entangled in hyperghettos and the prison industrial complex shedding light on controversial topics shunned by mainstream media. The genre communicates the horrors of inner-city life with subjects such as: “tales of drug dealing, pimping, petty crime, dropping out of school, and joining a gang” (Rose 51). Some critics go as far as to suggest hip-hop is the root cause for urban mayhem. But is this accusation fair considering hip-hop reflects the social conditions of the inner city. In *Born to Use Mics*, Dyson argues,

It was in this climate of criminalization that hip-hop essentially cut its teeth throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as it coupled its demand for recognition with a righteous indignation that bore witness to the devastations occurring in its midst. In this climate, it’s no surprise that what would become the prison industrial complex was front and center within the hip-hop imagination. (51)

Dyson contention summons memories of rapper Tupac Shakur acronym of T.H.U.G.L.I.F.E. (The Hate you give Little Infants Fucks Everyone). Hip-hop was born into a climate of criminalization within the loophole of the 13th amendment that locked away their male parents and labeled them superpredators. Moreover, the music industry

demands rappers to glorify their pain as marketing schemes to fulfill racist fantasies of Black deviance. Most important to the topic, some gangsta rappers' imagination has been influenced by the incarceration and the criminalization of the male figure. It is not hard to imagine; Black youth narratives would consider these wounds and anxieties of fulfilling the prophecy of the criminal legacy promoted by the status quo.

In this segment, the cursory mentions of fatherhood in gangsta rap represent the suffering of marginalized youth struggling to mimicry maleness and to construct selfhood. With that said, I amend a statement by Baraki Kitwana in his groundbreaking text *The Hip-hop Generation*:

Unfortunately, young Blacks [have been conditioned] in popular culture [to] link criminality with Blackness. Between pop culture and new media reports, misconceptions continue to define reality for an uncritical public.

(80)

Given that, Black adolescents often bear the scars of this manufactured reality. In Lil Durk "52 bars" and Bobby Shmurda "Hot Nigga" the artists' embodies the super predator stereotype in its remorseless depiction of homicidal gun violence. However, the rappers' perfunctory details about their fathers' incarceration deserves much attention on the topics of patriarchal mimicry and adolescent identity formation.

These lyrical testimonies illustrate the contradictory effects of heroic masculinity on the identity formation of Black adolescent males. Specifically, the entertainers' narrative correlates their experiences of incarcerated fatherhood to their lyrical presentation of criminal/rebel and breadwinner selves. In both songs, the rappers, as protagonists, individualities do not appear to become orchestrated to achieve a singular

balanced identity. Perhaps, as gangsta rappers, the artists look to uphold a hyper-masculine mask to retain street credibility or it is simply for marketing purposes. To adhere to my subject matter, I argue the rap stories suggest as sons of incarcerated fathers they lacked the counter narratives to orchestrate balanced identities. As a result, the tales indicate the artists' male identities are locked in a state of suspended animation.

As a son of a drug kingpin and Black Gangsta Disciple, Dontay Banks, Chicago rapper, Lil Durk's lyricism in "52 bars" presents Black masculinity and fatherhood as criminal. "52 bars" calls to memory Mafioso film reels where machismo defined by imagery of heartless, homicidal gun-play represents maleness. Yet, in the middle of his verse, Lil Durk's lamentation over his father imprisonment reads as a call for fatherneed. In his semi-autobiographical narrative, the 22-year-old rapper's adolescent desire for paternal guidance appears to resonate in his adulthood. Additionally, the rapper wears his fatherhood trauma like a flossy chain to validate his thug persona. In Noisey's *Chiraq* documentary, Lil Durk states, "My daddy was one of the big guy...I seen a lot of it growing up...I'm like man 'I wanna be just like him.'" Hence, the artist's lyrics implicitly glorifies his dad's legacy while simultaneously this inheritance function as the impetus for the rappers' anxiety and paranoia. Indeed, as the protagonist Lil Durk's dualistic identity embodies heroic masculinity. Interestingly, in the narrative, Lil Durk serves as a tattooed human container housing conflicting selves locked in constant lassitude.

For example, in the lyrics below," Lil Durk's yearning to be fathered functions as an impetus for rebellious, hyper-masculine imagination. He raps, "Son needed his daddy I still need him right now/He doing life in the Feds need that appeal right now/ I catch a body I'm gone, I'm dipping right out of town." Here, the emcee exposes his gaping

wound of fatherlessness which is quickly doused by menacing bravado. Undeniably, the rapper's lyrics represent a longing for paternal guidance and an implicit mimicry to follow his patriarch's legacy of toxic masculinity. As mentioned earlier, some marginalized fathers associate criminal activities as a means to reach patriarchal status as breadwinners. As the narrative keeps on, it appears Lil Durk is hell-bent on continuing this tradition. In the third line, Durk, as central character, appears paranoid he is destined to become imprisoned like his father. Thus, his construction of male identity is bifurcated between fatalism and sanguine attitude towards familial relationships.

Furthermore in "52 bars" Lil Durk epitomizes the problematic elements of heroic masculinity. His story depicts the urban terrain as a naturalistic environment where one is destined to undergo ill fate. He illustrates this in the following:

I don't really give a fuck all my niggas we be in it

We be 30 deep at least 30 of us polled up

Taking risk I hope to see my baby growing up

...

Pussy, money, weed, loyalty, trust is what a nigga lust.

In the passage above, Lil Durk uses the aspectual be and zero copula to portray the 30 as a makeshift collective family. While, the 30 offers camaraderie and protection like a traditional family; the 30 bond is predicated on groupthink conformity. Lil Durk's description of his "niggas" "polled up" (meaning packing pistols) suggest there is no space for alternative views when it comes to attaining respect through violence. Thus, the narrative shows some groups of marginalized adolescents fortify thug identity through a collective bond to affirm their maleness. Without question, this masculine

space would seem appealing to many fatherless youths especially those with incarcerated fathers existing in marginalized communities.

It is plausible, the absence of Lil Durk's father induces him to trust what he can observe in front of him. Arguably, Lil Durk identity as the "thug" or "man-of-action hero" stems from his experience with incarcerated fatherhood. It is not arduous to imagine without precise parental guidance he sought male affirmation from the hodgepodge collective of the 30. Undoubtedly, the circle functions as a makeshift family unit based on "loyalty and trust." In fact, Lil Durk states these values are "what a nigga lust." That aside, the rapper articulates his aspiration to see his "baby growing up." Indeed, the central character yearns to be a father. Arguably, the absence of his father further illuminates Durk's desire to have a presence in his child's life. Nonetheless, the rapper fatalistically accepts he is doomed to repeat his father's mistakes and become incarcerated. In "52 bars" the absence of the protagonist father appears to have stunted his development as such he struggles between being a thug and a family head. I argue some fatherless sons recreate their patriarchs' lifestyle to set up a psychological bond by carrying on their dad's legacy. I strongly contend, Lil Durk, as protagonist, desire to see his baby grow up serves as evidence he exemplifies aspects of the breadwinner synonymous with heroic masculinity. Yet, Lil Durk as central figure appears conflicted largely because he constitutes male identity through the acquisition of "pussy," "money," and "weed." The urban "badman" or "thug" indulgence in nefarious activities emulates the most criminal elements of the colonizer or dominant culture. For "the pussy" represents the degradation of womanhood to sexual commodities which in turn accentuates masculine power and control. Additionally, money symbolizes economic

power to fuel one's ability to control and exploit the most vulnerable members of the community. Lastly, weed functions as a form of escapism to enable the thug to transcend guilt—it enables historic amnesia—which has always been a crucial element to the power of the colonizer. As a result of patriarchal mimicry, the protagonist identity is locked in a state of suspended animation.

Similar to Lil Durk, Brooklyn rapper Bobby Shmurda, hip-hop imagination has been influenced by his father's drug dealing past and incarceration. In his smash hit song, "Hot Nigga" the emcee presents a dualistic identity of the thug and makeshift patriarch or "son-band." Popularized by his "shmoney dance," "Hot Nigga" boasts about Bobby Shmurda's gang activities and his exploits in drug economy. Like, Lil Durk, Bobby Shmurda mentions his father's legacy as a drug dealer to either establish his maleness and/or as a marketing strategy. On the track, the entertainer brags he has "been selling crack since the fifth grade." Throughout the song, the rapper centers on life in the trap. He recites a litany of male cohorts who are either facing charges or have been incarcerated. On the surface, Bobby Shmurda's narrative construct of masculinity fulfills racist fantasies of Black deviance and lawlessness. Conversely, the cursory mentioning of his parenting opens the door to explore the impact of fatherlessness and parentification on adolescent youth. Undoubtedly, Shmurda's construction of heroic masculinity is rebellious. However, the rapper shows signs of a reluctant family man.

As a result of his father's incarceration, Shmurda's identity becomes split as husband and son as he assumes the role of patriarch in his household. In the narrative, Bobby portrays his mother as a confidant supporting his endeavors as a drug trafficker in the trap. He raps, "Mama said no pussy cats inside my dog house/That's what got my

daddy locked up in the dog pound.” Shmurda metaphor of “dog” suits two purposes in the narrative. The initial point, the rapper refers to his dad as a dog to symbolize his ferociousness and savagery as a marker of male identity. The second reason of the metaphor “dog” in the phrase “dog pound” or prison constitutes a space where feral males are contained by white institutions of power. Interestingly, the rapper’s use of the metaphor dog to represent his father imprisonments also serves to assert his bifurcated identity as drug dealer and sonband. Notice, the rapper’s mother’s advice “no pussy cats inside my dog” establishes Shmurda as top dog who must learn from his fathers’ mistakes as a trafficker. Hence, the mother is portrayed as surrogate wife/partner as she advises the adolescent in drug dealing activities. The lyrics suggest as the breadwinner he must be aware of his business associates who may jeopardize his heinous operations. Here, Shmurda portrays his father’s stint in prison as a cautionary tale. However, the moral lesson is not to avoid underground activities instead to ameliorate his father’s paradigm. In this song, Shmurda depicts incarcerated fatherhood as an experience contributing to the parentification of marginalized adolescent males to become breadwinners. That said, the lyrics suggest oftentimes parentified adolescent youth turn to underground economies to care for their families in attempt to play the role of patriarch. Consequently, Shmurda’s lyrics imply patriarchal pressures prompt him to become a drug dealer. Unfortunately, on October 19, 2016, art imitated life, as the rapper pleaded guilty to drug, gang-affiliation, and weapons charges for crimes he claimed he did not commit. The entertainer is currently serving seven-years in prison.

This score of gangsta rap songs convey the problematic influences of prison culture and incarcerated fatherhood on hip-hop lyricism. Critic Miles White rightfully argues:

artists who have made their names in a vile trade must ultimately bear the burden of what I call a “Bert Williams problem” ...The most egregious consequences of perpetuating historically pejorative meta-narratives of Black males—of reinserting the bad nigger into contemporary popular culture, of making hustling appear to be a viable life choices even in the face of nothing better—are likely to last beyond their own careers and well into the future. (88)

In the passage above, White makes a valid point in his condemnation of gangsta rappers who popularize criminality as authentic Blackness. His theory of “Bert Williams problem,” a famous African American minstrel performer, implies rappers put forth a problematic image of Black identity impacting marginalized Black folk. However, as poet, Langston Hughes argues in “The Negro and the Racial Mountain” Black artists must not propagandize their art. Instead they must show the beauty and the ugliness of Black culture. Thus, the songs stand for social conditions marginalized youth undergo in inner-city communities as well as the identity crises suffered by some low-income fatherless sons. It appears from the son’s perspective the impact of incarcerated fatherlessness causes some adolescents males to highlight manhood through acts of heroic masculinity never to receive identity stasis. However, it is crucial to note many hip-hop fatherhood narratives show some fatherless sons face and overcome incarcerated fathering through various forms of identity orchestration.

Playing the Role of Daddy

The epistolary narrative “Daddy,” focuses on Kirko Bangz’s parentification as a result of his patriarch’s incarceration. The artist shows the ethos of a fatherless son as he crafts in first-person a letter to his imprisoned male parent. As in tradition of African American writings, I argue the artist narrative can be read as an unmotivated signifying on Western literature. Specifically, I describe Kirko Bangz’s “Daddy” as a variant of the Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*. Because of the fact, the rapper as protagonist unwittingly replaces his father as patriarch. According to James Braxton Peterson in *Hip-hop Headphones*:

Hip-hop artists make substantive songs but when an extremely popular artist does so the message may have more potential to reach more people. Jay-Z does not do this often but when he does the results can resonate...there is an obvious Oedipal intimation...alluded to in the lyrics of the song. (81)

While Kirko Bangz has yet to reach the acclaim and status of veteran rappers as Jay-Z; nonetheless, a precise analysis of his lyrics reveals its potential to resonate to fatherless audiences via Oedipal intimation. In “Daddy” the entertainer forfeits his childhood years when his dad is imprisoned as he becomes a reluctant surrogate husband/father figure to his mother and siblings. The arc of the narrative recounts his dad’s incarceration, the demise of his childhood and his struggles as the man of the house.

Furthermore, the rap song epitomizes Rice’s concept of identity dilemma. While Bangz’s, as protagonist, makes a concerted effort to orchestrate patriarchal identities of provider and protector of his family; nonetheless, the central character desires to

recapture a lost childhood and to generate a meaningful connection with his male parent. Unlike King Oedipus, Kirko does not act out patricide fantasies; in lieu, the male child wants to render his dad to his legitimate place or restore the logical order of the father-son relationship. Arguably, the narrative implies the establishment of one's paternal figure is necessary to restore identity balance to parentified youth.

Without question, "Daddy" speaks to those fatherless parentified sons who out of necessity sacrifice their childhood to perform adulthood. Bangz opens his letter explicating the psychological pain his father's imprisonment has on him:

...yo ass behind bars and now I hide behind bars

I got too much pride to let anyone inside

Don't let anybody ride cause any night I might fly

Any night I might die

But I'm still living for Josh and I'm only living for Corey

Here, the entertainer employs a double entendre for the word "bars" signifying his dad's prison walls with the emotional walls the rapper has around his heart. As a rapper, most audiences expect male artists to "hide behind bars" or rap lines about hyper-masculine themes upholding race and gender stereotypes. In fact, the emcee's line, "I got too much pride to let anyone inside" suggests this code of manhood does not afford him the freedom to show vulnerability. Nonetheless, his lyricism reveals the surrogate patriarch struggles to uphold the traditional stereotype of the emotionless father. Bangz's lines "any night I might fly" and "any night I might die" suggests the emotional bondage of patriarchy evokes feelings of suicide. Nevertheless, the adolescent dad obliges to endure

his personal trauma for the sake of his siblings. As the letter continues, the emcee documents the sacrifices he undergoes as a surrogate father figure.

Bangz's letter conveys repressed anger as he orchestrates his identity to assume the role of sonband (meaning son and husband). Specifically, the protagonist's frustration stems from the loss of his innocence and his performance of protector for his mother and siblings. He makes this visible in the following lines:

I love my mama a lot

And I still can't get the thought of you smackin' her in her mouth out my head

So I'm thinkin' about smacking you up a lot

...

And they say life is about forgivin' and forgettin'

And how the fuck I'm gone forgot when I'm holding my lil' sister

Here, Bangz's juxtaposes memories of his dad hurting his mom with fantasies of exacting retribution on his daddy for the atrocities. His recollection of his mother's oppression functions as rising action in the narrative because Bangz's male identity is complicated by his patriarch's behavior. As an adolescent, he experiences vulnerability and powerlessness to defend his mother from his father's abuse. Hence, the trauma the protagonist undergoes extinguishes his goodness. In fact, Bangz's use of violent imagery "smack you up" to fortify his position as a surrogate patriarch and protector illustrates his exposure to negative male socialization. Again, like Oedipus, the central figure unwittingly replaces his father via psychological time-binding the past and present to hypercorrect his fathered experience. Thus, the lyrics depict the rapper, as adolescent

male, forced to fulfill the role of sonband. Concisely, the man-child is quite overwhelmed.

Bangz's letter to his father details the demise of the rapper's childhood and his obligatory performances of fatherhood. The emcee raps, "I been playin' ya role since nine while other children were happy just to be living/I never was playing with em'." Notice, the word "playing" in phrases "playin' ya role" and "never was playing with em'" symbolizes the death of the protagonist's childhood and transition into adulthood. The repetition of the word "play" emphasizes the role of father is unnatural and performative. Bangz's later line "I'm sitting with mama cryin' we behind on the rent" further supports this contention. It is at this part of the narrative; the primary character asserts his identity as makeshift patriarch in defiance to his status as child. Hence, the use of the pronoun "we" imply the rapper and his mother are equal partners on the rent. In the excerpt, the artist, as protagonist and adolescent seek to make sense of the externalized stimuli of the adult world. The lyrics illustrate this mostly fatherless space function as the site of ambivalence in patriarchal mimicry. In other words, the entertainer ascension into maleness is rife with multiple tensions between desires to be a child and a man; the tension to emulate and defy masculine scripts learned from his father's abusive behaviors. Moreover, the father's paradigm of masculinity represents the tension of the marginalized other to seek patriarchal dominance via toxic masculinity. However, individuals emulating these performances of power in mainstream society are silenced, vilified, and oftentimes bear dire consequences. These scripts complicate Dubois's theory of double consciousness. Profoundly, Bangz's lyrics illustrate the protagonist awareness of his augmented pieces of male identities negotiated to solidify his collage of

Black male identity. As the narrative continues, the emcee conveys his struggles to find balance playing the role of patriarch.

Bangz's shows his frustrations as a surrogate father. He raps, "And since the fourth grade this shit never go away nigga/And now my lil' brother going both ways nigga/But I love him the same can't say I wasn't a shame when I heard it man I cried as I boarded my plane." Again, the rapper as protagonist communicates to his father the emotional burden of performing patriarchy. In fact, he blames himself for his younger brother's sexual orientation. The lyrics suggest the emcee internalizes events out of his control as personal failures. Profoundly, the tone of the concluding lines evokes a feeling of humiliation. In the hyper-masculine world of hip-hop culture, many males deem homosexuality as a sign of weakness and gross immorality. Perhaps, as a surrogate father, Bangz's "shame" has little to do with his brother's sexual orientation; in lieu, he may behold it as a foible to his parenting. Despite his shortcoming, Bangz's prides himself on being the breadwinner of his family.

Here, Bangz's lyrics constitute his surrogate fatherhood through constructs of being a provider. He illustrates this in the following:

I just racked up on my change sacrifice some thangs
 Moved my family out the hood cool house can't complain
 But my mama still rollin' round in something less than range
 But I brought it one morning when she had nothing left but pain
 Just to see her mood change to sunshine from rain

Here, the emcee employs opulent economic symbols of success such as "getting change," "cool house," and "Range" to show he is a superior wage earner. The

words/phrases such as, “sacrifice,” and “can’t complain” sets up a tone suggesting contributions made are effortless. Most noticeable are the protagonist’s endeavors to please his mother. The rapper boasts about purchasing an expensive “range” or Range Rover for his mother to ensure she is happy. Notice, Bangz’s identity is synchronized to his role as a patriarch. He executes his role as patriarch through compensatory spending and serving as his mother emotional confidant. Later in the text, the emcee desires to recapture his childhood through a reconnection with his incarcerated dad will become paramount despite his accomplishments as a surrogate father.

Assuredly, Bangz’s narrative works as a variant of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*. Instead of fantasizing patricide, Kirko empathizes with his father. He seeks to understand his father’s violent and neglectful behavior towards his family. In the narrative, the emcee conveys this to the audience:

And then you told me that you lost yo pops when you was six I'm realizing
It's starting to make sense
I'm reading over again tryna make it make sense
Man I feel sorry for you chillin' in that pin

The passage above, the protagonist relates to his father’s father-lacking. The lyrics imply Bangz’s father shortcomings as a patriarch stems from losing his father at the age of six. Although, the protagonist struggles to “make it make sense;” he shows compassion rather than judgment. In fact, Bangz’s utilizes hyper-masculine and misogynistic imagery in the following lyrics to show a bond with his estranged father:

But you seen my videos so yeah you know the deal
...

And you know I keep some bitches with me aha
 You know I gotta make these niggas envy
 And as for my car man I'm riding some Black on Black
 Cause ya little boy got them racks on racks
 I remember when he use to have that seventy-two Camaro
 Now I'm running around looking for a seventy-two Camaro
 Cause damn you was just too cool 22 and I still wanna be like you

At first glance, Bangz's lyrics appear simply as braggadocio. However, the frequent use of "you know" when referencing "music videos," "bitches," and making "niggas envy" show the artist trying to have rapport with his father. Arguably, the rapper imagery symbolizes the protagonist's perception of his patriarch's paradigm of Black masculinity. Moreover, the emcee referring to himself as "ya little boy" a term of endearment signals a desire to rekindle a long-lost father-son relationship. Hence, the artist reaches identity stasis by reclaiming his child position. For example, his aspiration to acquire a "seventy-two Camaro" to be "too cool" like his dad shows he wants to fulfill his father need. Thus, Bangz's "Daddy" epitomizes a reversal of the Oedipus complex experienced by some sons of incarcerated fathers.

Kirko Bangz's epistolary narrative constructs parentified fatherhood as a hesitant status where adolescent youth assume the role of provider and protector. Ill-prepared young men are pressured to fulfill the role of husband and father for their families. Although emcees may experience frustration and anger towards an incarcerated father; critics should not rush to read these laments as sign or off-shoot of patricide. Instead, the stories may show an ardent desire to restore the father's position as patriarch.

The next part of the chapter centers on incarcerated surrogate father figures and their influence on fatherless youth. These hip-hop narratives reveal fatherless sons in search for male affirmation lead astray by embracing negative stereotypes of Black manhood forged by the street and prison life. Ex-gangbanger, now Christian rapper Lecrae, rap narrative equates the crisis of fatherhood illustrated in hip-hop lyricism to “Original Sin” and the Adamic Fall of Man. His rap song, “Just Like You,” advocates for adolescent males to embrace a biblical form of masculinity.

Sins of the Adamic Father

Lecrae’s “Just Like You” interrogates and challenges traditional concepts of masculinity. The rapper’s testimony shows how perpetual cycles of the negative surrogate fathering condition fatherless youth to embrace gang and prison culture. Hence, the narrative illustrates the plight of fatherless sons as they quest for a definitive paradigm of manhood. Moreover, the lyricist advocates for biblical manhood for the heirs of Adam to offset hyper-masculine beliefs of patriarchy that imprison the minds of some Black male adolescents. In a YouTube video published by *Desiring God*, Lecrae interprets “biblical manhood” as a blueprint of masculinity designed by God in accordance to Judeo-Christianity. The Christian rapper proclaims males do not attain manhood by simply engaging in mimicry of American patriarchal socialization. In actuality, the artist equates Western concepts of patriarchy to passive maleness. Lecrae contends Adam walked through life passively blaming his wife Eve for his shortcomings. Likewise, in contemporary times, men take a passive role in their responsibilities as husbands and fathers. Additionally, the rapper states “any mammal can provide for his own” meaning most male diminish the role of fathering to provider. Given that, Lecrae

advocates for men to emulate the life of Jesus Christ. The rapper affirms, as a man and Son of God, “Jesus walks in authority and respects authority” demonstrating maleness through acts of selflessness and sacrifice to the most vulnerable members of society. That said, Lecrae’s version of masculinity utilizes Jesus as the prototype of manliness where individuals submit to a life of benevolent servitude for their family.

Some critics may suppose the acceptance of biblical manhood makes up another type of patriarchal mimicry. Even, Amiri Baraka has written “the African’s swift embrace of the white man’s God [is] social awareness in the sense that...he was living in a white man’s world” (33). This view seems persuasive at first especially considering the bible was used to subjugate the marginalized Other. However, the embrace of Judeo-Christianity on the part of African Americans does not automatically represent a direct imitation of Western patriarchal values. For instance, in “Letter from a Birmingham jail,” Martin Luther King Jr. utilized biblical references to challenge white male dominance and various manifestations of colonial rule. Additionally, numerous Black writers and thinkers use elements of the blues philosophy to transform the sacred to address the psychological needs of the Other. Again, Baraka writes:

the blues is formed out of the same social and musical fabric that the spiritual issued from but with the blues the social emphasis becomes more personal, the “Jordan” of the song much more intensely a human accomplishment. (63)

Like Bhabba’s concept of colonial mimicry, African American artists’ use of Western religious doctrines in literary and verbal art is a microcosm of the site of ambivalence. For the bluesmen and hip-hop artists, the changing same narrative simultaneously

represent and resist patriarchal mimicry in quest to redefine Black male identity.

Like Kirko Bangz's "Daddy," Lecrae's "Just Like You" is an epistolary narrative about surrogate fatherhood and its effects on male adolescent identity formation. In this narrative, Lecrae, as the protagonist suffers from father-lacking. His estrangement from his biological father serves as a catalyst for his quest for male affirmation. To fulfill his fatherneed, Lecrae looks to his Uncles for the blueprint of Black masculinity:

Dear, Uncle Chris, Uncle Keith, Uncle Ricky
 Before the Lord get me, I gotta say something quickly
 I grew up empty since my daddy wasn't with me
 shoot I wasn't picky I'd take any male figure

The narrative opens as a prison letter expressing homage to his uncles who are surrogate father figures. Additionally, Lecrae gives voice to the emptiness experienced by many fatherless males; his testimony illustrates his yearning for male affirmation. Consequently, the scarcity of positive male role models compels him to perceive aggressive behaviors as authentic Black maleness.

Lecrae depiction of surrogate fatherhood is rife with performative acts of hyper-masculinity presented as authentic maleness. In the narrative, he recounts how his uncles initiate him into a warped perception of maleness:

I loved the way you used to come through,
 Teach me to do the things that men do
 True,
 You showed me stuff I probably shouldn't have seen,
 But you had barely made it out your teens,

Took me under your wings
 I wanted hats, I wanted clothes just like you,
 Lean to the side when I rolled just like you

Here, Lecrae shed light on his surrogate father figures spending quality time to instruct him on manhood. Lamentably, the teaching of manhood comes at the expense of Lecrae's innocence as he witnesses "stuff" [he] probably shouldn't have seen." The lyrics imply marginalized inner-city youths are socialized to mature beyond their years oftentimes without the precise guidance of a positive father figure. The narrative points out Lecrae's surrogate dads' stories of masculinity are comparatively limited primarily because they are barely out of their teens. Ergo, the surrogate fathers' depictions of manhood are merely material consumption and performative acts of hyper-masculinity. Lecrae utilizes images like "hats," "clothes," and "lean[ing] to the side" showing maleness reduced to consumer products and hardcore posturing. Thus, the rapper embodies media-based stereotypes of the thug as authentic Black male identity. Lecrae, as an adolescent, internalizes these performances as authentic representations of Black manhood.

Under the tutelage of imperfect surrogate fathers, Lecrae's aggressive acts of behavior become normalized as maleness. The lyricism shows this in the following:

Didn't care if people didn't like you,
 You wanna bang, I wanna bang too
 Skyline, pyru
 If you would've died, I would've died too,
 You went to prison, got sick, lost your pops,

Yeah, I cried too

Without question, the absence of Lecrae's biological father left a void, provoking him to embrace the lifestyle of his mentors. He indicates the depth of his loyalty using zero copula to claim he would die for these individuals. Out of this loyalty, the protagonist valorizes the gang and prison culture as a rite of passage into manhood. This paradigm of manhood is fatalistic. Lecrae's fatalistic imagery of "prison," illness, and father loss reflect the seemingly inescapable conditions of those who live in the gaps of mainstream society. Hence, Lecrae's lines propose fatherless youth individualities are restricted by perpetual cycles of hyper-masculine scripts of Black identity emanating from urban decay and prison culture. That said, the Christian rapper exhorts these individuals to reconfigure their selfhood by confirming a relationship with God.

This contention is supported at the end of the narrative when Lecrae renounces his hyper-masculine persona in exchange for an identity based on Christian spirituality. Like Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Lecrae's poetic tale reimagines the biblical concept of "Original Sin:"

I remember the first created being,
 And how he shifted the blame on his dame
 For fruit he shouldn't have eaten,
 And now look at us all out of Eden,
 Wearing designer fig leaves by Louis Vuitton
 Make-believing
 But God sees through my foolish pride,
 And how I'm weak like Adam, another victim of Lucifer's

Here, Lecrae employs biblical imagery describing the current state of masculinity with “Original Sin” and the “Fall of Man.” The emcee’s reimagining of Original Sin places blames on Adam instead of Eve for the fall of man. Hence, Adam “the first created being,” the father of humankind curses his male heirs who inherits his failures across generations. Lecrae depicts Adam as a man (like the rapper’s father) who does not accept responsibility for his actions because he “shifted blame to his dame” Eve. Also, the rapper’s reference of “designer fig leaves by Louis Vuitton” implies like Adam, generations of males attempt to conceal their insecurities through physical or metaphysical outer wears. In sum, Lecrae portrays males as cursed brethren using false conceptions of masculinity to hide the fact they are “victim[s] of Lucifer.” Lecrae’s narrative suggests these flawed images of masculinity and patriarchal values incarcerates mankind ostracizing them from the paradise (“Eden”) they seek. Explicitly, the rapper acceptance of biblical manhood can be read as what Rice describes as identity stasis through Acute Identity Expression. Plausibly, the rapper’s narrative didactically instructs men to proclaim their maleness by authoritatively affirming their strengths and weaknesses. Lecrae’s testimony specifies how he reached personal freedom by being vulnerable and living the blueprint of manhood by emulating Jesus Christ.

Lecrae’s reconstructs his male identity by embracing the teaching of Jesus Christ. In the lyricism below, the rapper documents his conversion from male dominance to his acceptance of spiritual vulnerability:

But then in steps Jesus

All men were created to lead but we needed somebody to lead us

More than a teacher

But somebody to buy us back from the darkness

You can say He redeemed us,

In the passage above, he presents Jesus as an archetype of masculinity. His lyrics suggest males are “created to lead” but must under the leadership of a more prominent power greater than themselves. Hence, the rapper’s construction of masculinity does not adhere to the American conception of patriarchy. Instead, Lecrae’s model of maleness places emphasis of embracing submission and vulnerability. Men are prompt to seek guidance from Jesus who has “redeemed” mankind. Accordingly, fathers are expected to guide their families with love rather than male dominance. In fact, the lyrics suggest men does not have control even over their own lives. Ergo, male leadership is presented as a position of service. He illustrates this in the following:

Taught us that real leaders follow God,

Finish the work ‘cuz we on our job

Taught us not to rob

But give life, love a wife like He loved the Church

Without seeing how many hearts we can break first

Here, Lecrae’s explication of manhood instructs fathers to be accountable “real leaders” of their families and communities. They are expected to affirm love through sacrifice and devotion. They must “love a wife like [Christ] loved the Church” which means fathers must be courageous protectors willing to devote their life to their family. For in the bible, Christ sacrificed his life for humankind. Lecrae’s interpretation of manhood compels men to embrace a form of maleness that is the antithesis of conventional machismo. Given that, the rapper hints his depiction of manhood would be considered uninspiring to

most men from marginalized communities. He raps,

Because being just like you is what I'm s'pose to be

...

They say you came for the lame

I'm the lamest

I broke my life, but you say you'll replace it

I'll take it

Lecrae concludes his fatherhood narrative by pledging his allegiance to follow Jesus model of manhood. In fact, he utilizes the word “lame” and “lamest” as a double entendre to describe masculinity. For men adhering to convention machismo, the word “lame” conveys the impression Lecrae’s brand of manliness is considered weak or feeble simply because it lacks dominance. However, for Christian fathers, Lecrae use of the word “lame” shows his maleness will be defined by love and vulnerability. His view of manhood is one of brokenness that can be healed with an intimate connection with a spiritual father.

The last part of the chapter focuses on fatherless sons and surrogate father figures as modern-day urban blues people. This part of the chapter interrogates urban adolescent male formation at the crossroads of the sacred and the profane. Like Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, rapper, Kendrick Lamar employs the unnamed narrator motif as a teenager seeking guidance into manhood. Also, like *Invisible Man*, Lamar’s journey into manhood functions as a veiled critique of mentorships for African American male adolescents. His journey illustrates the complexities of father estrangement, prison lore, and concepts of respectability as befits Black youth.

Poe Man's Dreams

Kendrick Lamar's "Poe Man's Dreams (His Vice)" functions as a didactic fatherhood narrative for marginalized African American youths. The quintessential bildungsroman depicts the emcee, as an adolescent protagonist, at the crossroad of the blues matrix. As an aspirant to achieve selfhood Lamar must endure a matrix of Black masculine experiences. Throughout the narrative, the protagonist signifies upon Edgar Allan Poe's vices (alcohol and opiates) as a metaphor to depict the lures marginalized males must survive to complete manhood. I assert each of Lamar's verses in the song is divided into three parts constituting an urban rite of passage: separation, liminality, and incorporation. In each phase, Lamar, as character is indoctrinated into archetypes of maleness by different constructs of Black patriarchs. As the narrative concludes, the rapper achieves identity stasis by affirming his selfhood as a hip-hop secular priest/social father figure.

Separation Phase

In some traditional African societies, juvenile males endure cultural rituals to celebrate personal growth from boyhood to adulthood. Without question, variations of these African rituals were kept alive in African American music, literature, and folklore.

In Lamar's narrative, multiple constructions of fatherhood serve as the impetus for his "separation phase" in his rite of passage into manhood. Lamar's lyricism discloses this in the following:

I used to want to see the penitentiary, way after elementary
Thought it was cool to look the judge in the face when he sentenced me
Since my uncles was institutionalized

my intuition has said I was suited for family ties

My mama is stressing, my daddy tired

Here, the lyrics depict the main character as a candidate seeking membership into manhood. Uninspired by his parents who are “stressing” and “tired,” the teenage protagonist, longs to separate from his immediate family to join the ranks of his institutionalized uncles. His gleeful image of “the penitentiary” and facing “judges” suggests he derives from an urban community where criminal activity and prison culture are valorized. In fact, Lamar confesses his aspiration to be initiated into his familial fraternity of incarcerated men would make him “suited for family ties.” Juxtaposing Lamar’s affinity for his uncles’ lifestyles with his scant description of his father’s tiredness; one can gage the gravitational pull or excitement incarcerated father figures have on some marginalized Black youth. Undoubtedly, Lamar’s lyrics show as an adolescent male he was drawn to hyper-masculine images of manhood and rebellious executed by the “bad men” of urban lore. Lamar’s lyrics suggest early adolescence is a critical stage in the formation of Black male identity. These individuals must overcome the vice of the street and prison life if they expect to reach productive manhood. In the second phase, liminality or transition, Lamar delves deeper into the vices shaping adolescent Black male identity.

Transition Phase

Most rites of passage paradigms feature a liminal or transition phase where aspirants are separated from their primary group but are not yet a member of their new congregation. In blues theory, the transition phase is called the crossroads--a site of go between--good and evil, sacred, and profane, and life and death. Moreover, Papa Legba,

a trickster loa of African cosmology, functions as the gatekeeper of the crossroads. In African American literature and music, Papa Legba remains a constant fixture functioning as an entity of conversion and balance. The deity offers aspirants the choice of path at the crossroads. Lamar preserves this tradition in his fatherhood narrative.

For our purposes, the spirit of Legba is present in the liminal state or crossroads of Lamar's adolescent identity formation. His interaction with experienced patriarchs is representative of modern-day fissures between the hip-hop generation and mature age groups. Through his narrative, Lamar takes prior generations to task for their failure to communicate and mentor young Black males. Lamar spits the frustrations of adolescent males in the following lines:

I need me a weapon, these niggas ride
every minute, hour and second, ministers tried
to save me, how I'm gon' listen when I don't even hear God?
Heaven or Hell, base it all on my instincts
My hands dirty, you worried bout mud in your sink

Lamar's use of half rhymes such as "ride/tried" and "instincts/sinks" indicate his place at the crossroads between profane and sacred planes of existence. Additionally, his lines about prison culture "I need a weapon, these niggas ride" vacillates with rhymes peppered with religious imagery like "ministers." Veritably, Legba's presence is felt, as a space of discontent and frustration representative of urban teenage angst. On one side, the narrator desires "a weapon" implies he is in search of protection in an environment where "niggas ride" on the vulnerable. However, the patriarchs/ministers offering of spiritual salvation give Lamar, as an adolescent, no solace. For instance, the rapper's

lyrics suggest elder generations use of spirituality such as “speaking to God” are abstract to today’s youth. For instance, Lamar’s line implies the concepts of spirituality such “Heaven or Hell” are not tangible for a peer group relying on “instincts” or real-life experiences. In other words, the lyrics show some in the hip-hop generation values empirical evidence because they “don’t even hear God” due to the harshness of their surroundings.

Additionally, the lyricist’s rhymes insinuate elder generations allegiance to codes of respectability thwarts much needed opportunities to guide Black youth. Notice Lamar’s last line, “My hands dirty, you worried bout mud in your sink.” He uses the image of dirty palms to condemn the elders for their scruples to mentor for fear they may ruin their “sink” or reputation. Another interpretation of Lamar’s image of soiled hands may refer to Jesus condemnation of the Pharisees’ for criticizing his disciples for eating with uncleansed palms. The moral of Jesus’s parable is the humankind’s notions of morality, or respectability does not supersede God’s charge for humanity to be non-judgmental and supportive. Arguably, Lamar’s narrative proposes Black adolescents experience a sense of alienation from religious elder male peer groups. For blues people, Legba becomes the spirit of refuge and transformation for this breed of outcasts at the crossroads. In the reincorporation/final phase of his rites of passage Lamar employs social fathering to mentor this lost generation.

Incorporation Phase

The final phase of the rites of passage features the aspirant reaching his identity as a part of the new group. In the narrative, Legba restores balance as the rapper converts into a social father figure as a hip-hop secular priest. Lamar’s image of a social father

function as an amalgamation of profane incarcerated fatherhood and a revised concept of spirituality. Thus, the emcee's depiction of fatherhood is one of holistic balance—an incarnation of Legba.

Lamar's narrative achieves balance by paying homage to the paternal figures essential to the rapper's identity formation. For example, he finds positives in relationships between incarcerated father figures and marginalized Black youth whose bonds secure spaces for teachable moments:

But anyway, this for my niggas
 Uncles, twenty-three hours sending pictures
 ...
 You came home to a pocket full of stones
 A MetroPC' phone, then you went back in
 So when I touch the pen, the pen is in my view
 I'ma get it right just so you

Here, Lamar evokes a general tone of homage for "his niggas" or "Uncles" whom lives he deems as organic testimonies for today's youth. He extracts his creativity from the lives of blues people--the outsiders--thrust out of the mainstream and respectable circles. Lamar's lyricism immortalizes ex-cons' existence who are oftentimes isolated and forgotten by mainstream society. In fact, Lamar's use of the word "pictures" suggests he recognizes the humanity of those locked away. His use of images like "pocket full of stones," and "MetroPC phone" evokes a sense of empathy for these individuals who are products to their environment. It is plausible, Lamar views the lack of opportunities and being misunderstood (poor communication-MetroPC phones) as the basis for the father-

son camaraderie between incarcerated father figures and some marginalized adolescents. Thus, Lamar's commentary offers balance to commonly-held beliefs of incarcerated father figures. His rhymes illustrate the extraordinary value the rapper places on these family ties. Moreover, Lamar's aspirations to become an artist rather than a criminal implicitly prove his incarcerated father figures are living examples of moral lessons turned into flesh. The emcee's use of the word "pen" signifies both the art of writing and the prison industrial complex. Thus, the rapper vows to utilize his art to voice stories of the incarcerated to "get it right" or enlighten marginalized youths.

Additionally, Lamar gives homage to his biological father for the sacrifices, so the rapper could fulfil his dreams. His lyricism delivers balance to his depiction of his father he previously described as "tired" living a tedious existence:

But anyway, this for my pops
 On his lunch break eating in that parking lot
 ...
 he was stressing me, getting what I deserved
 Somebody said my name on the radio, he ain't know
 I was ready for the world that minute
 So the next time he roll up and drop grams in it, he probably be
 Out of work, laid back...

Like the prodigal son, Lamar reconnects with his biological father having undergone his maturation into manhood. His acknowledgement of his dad "on his lunch break eating in that parking lot" suggests he now understands his male parent endured an uneventful life so Lamar can ascend to greatness. Lamar's depiction of his patriarch has blossomed into

image of selflessness for his dad who “stresses” that his son gets his deserved accolades. “Poe Man Dreams” evinces many marginalized fathers hope for their sons to accomplish their goals and not fall victim to the vices of the concrete jungle. That said, Lamar continues his paternal legacy as a social father figure to those many think a fallen generation.

In the concluding verse, the central figure makes a dramatic shift from naïve adolescent to a hybrid of the thug/minister assuming the role of hip-hop social father. His lyricism becomes tapestry of sacred and profane as the emcee as infuses elements of Black sermonic discourse to relate to living conditions of most marginalized African American males. The text announces this in the following:

You think about it, and don’t call me lyrical
 Cause I’m just a nigga that’s evil and spiritual
 ...
 I penetrate the hearts of good kids and criminals
 Worry some individuals that live life critical
 So won’t you bare witness while I bare feet
 So You can walk in my shoes and get to know me

In the passage, Lamar shifts back and forth from first-person to second-person perceptive creating the pathos of call and response. Additionally, the structure of the lyrics vacillates on lines of spiritual and profane themes. The modification of the narrative reflects Lamar’s (re)creation of Black fatherhood. Lamar’s identification as “a nigga that’s evil and spiritual” presents masculinity and fatherhood as a physical manifestation of Papa Legba. Thus, he achieves identity stasis via acknowledging and embracing his negotiated

selves which embodies Rice's concept of Identity Dilemma Articulation. In other words, as a quasi-spiritual patriarch, Lamar understands the dilemma Black adolescents face when forging self-hood. His use of phrases like "worrisome individuals" and "live life critical" implies Black males' quest for the American dream laden with closed doors and limited opportunities. Moreover, the emcee "bearing witness" to their pain disrupts the Western gaze of absolutism that reduces the marginalized Other to binaries of good and evil. Alternatively, the rapper brings awareness to the meager prospects colonial society gives "good kids and criminals" which coerces them to mimic white capitalistic patriarchy. Additionally, his status as secular priest and social father figure offers a counter-narrative to enable others to orchestrate their identity stasis. In *Blues and Evil*, critic, Jon Michael Spencer contends blues songs function as secular sermons for the backsliders, excommunicated by the church and respectable circles of the community. Despite his street vernacular, Lamar aims to "penetrate the hearts of good kids and criminal" with a brand of patriarchy conveyed through grace and non-judgment. The rapper takes the position "individuals" living under "critical" conditions need sacred/profane fathering that "bears witness" to the trappings of city life. His incorporation into hip-hop secular priesthood functions a blueprint to survive the urban landscape to formulate one sense of self-hood.

Lamar's "Poe Man's Dreams" signifies upon Edgar Allan Poe's vices and the struggles inexperienced urbanites must overcome on their journey to Black maleness. His narrative riffs off the blues motif, as his character voyages across the crossroads of life as he becomes a social father to the hip-hop generation. His narrative maintains the tradition of Legba utilizing the stories of the profane and sacred to get Black youth to

their destination of selfhood. As a hip-hop social father figure, Lamar becomes Legba in flesh, a gatekeeper for the secular and spiritual world. Thus, he uses lessons from incarcerated, spiritual, and everyday father figures as cautionary tales for marginalized Black adolescent males.

Conclusion

This chapter centers on hip-hop fatherhood tales about incarceration, underground economies, and naturalistic urban landscapes. I explore African American fathering experiences in hip-hop lyricism from the perspective of dads and sons in urban settings. While some of the stories reinforce popularized master narratives of Black patriarchs as “deadbeats,” specifically those formerly incarcerated or fathers with criminal backgrounds; most of the hip-hop tracks function as counter-narratives complicating the image of Black fatherhood.

The rappers’ stories express a modern-day blues people struggle and quest for liberation against colonial forces of American patriarchy. For the hip-hop generation, deindustrialized America is a wasteland where economic deserts coerce fathers to pursue an American dream that is inversed. Immortalized in chapter headings decades ago in Richard Wright’s *Native Son* this environment subjugates Black dads to traverse corridors of fear, flight, and fate. Hence, male parents are shown facing naturalistic urban landscapes that reduce fatherhood to meager survival in underground economies. Thus, condemned fathers lessen to simply financial providers. In addition, sons of incarcerated fathers embody the “bad nigger” motif of African American literature and folklore to epitomize a man-of-action model of heroic masculinity. The anti-heroes exhibit the rebellious behaviors of the bad man of Western culture. Additionally, they have a sense

of community and family. Thus, these rappers' constructions of male identity are bifurcated between fatalism and sanguine attitude towards familial relationships. Despite, these challenges hip-hop father narratives present patriarchs as survivors rather than victims.

Some rappers present hip-hop fatherhood narratives as redemptive stories where ex-offender fathers change their male dominant attitudes for the sake of their family. These central figures conveyed as hardened criminals are not painted as a monolithic group; but as individuals who can change despite the court of public opinion. Likewise, in rap songs where rappers reflect on their fathered experience, incarcerated fathers are portrayed as empathetic beings despite having moral or character flaws. Thus, male artists in the narratives try to reverse the Oedipal process by understanding and reconnecting with estranged patriarchs. Lastly in some rappers act as social father figures interrogating traditional scripts of masculinity and offering alternate blueprints of masculinity based on Christian and Vodou morals. Hence, these hip-hop fatherhood narratives demonstrate the complexity of Black fathering in urban concrete jungles.

Chapter 3: The Seeds Hatched: Hip-hop's lyricism demonstrating the effects of Intergenerational and Transgenerational Trauma on Black Adolescent Identity Formation

Back in elementary, I thrived on misery
Left me alone I grew up amongst a dyin' breed
Inside my mind couldn't find a place to rest
Until I got that Thug Life tatted on my chest

...

And though my soul was deleted, I couldn't see it
I had my mind full of demons tryin' to break free
They planted seeds and they hatched, sparkin' the flame
Inside my brain like a match, such a dirty game

-----Tupac "So many Tears"

I often drift when I drive
Having fatal thoughts of suicide
Bang and get it over with
And then I'm worry-free, but that's bullshit
I got a little boy to look after
And if I died then my child would be a bastard -----Geto Boys "Mind Playing Tricks on Me"

Like many ghetto bastards, my identity as an adolescent African American male was shaped by intergenerational and transgenerational traumas. For the former type of trauma, I am the product of parents who were victims of generations of father-lacking. Markedly, my father, a lifetime miscreant and drug dealer, discovered his biological dad's identity in his twenties only to lose him shortly to a heart attack. Lacking paternal guidance and a formal education, he associated hyper-masculinity, drug-dealing, and procreation with manhood. For the latter trauma type, I and many of my fatherless brethren suffered father-lacking as the result of historic terrorism inflicted on our biological, surrogate, and social father figures. Please note the trauma of father-lacking does not apply to solely absentee fathers for it impacts individuals who lack a productive

relationship with residential dads. Moreover, it pertains to Black male youth whose “souls” are “deleted” because of a patriarch’s drug addiction, incarceration, or abusive behaviors. Conceivably, these are the demons fatherless emcee Tupac Shakur speaks of in his classic hit “So Many Tears.” I, too, struggled with the demons of father-lacking planting seeds of inadequacy, low self-esteem, depression, rage, and psychological pain. The wound is excruciating for it is deficient of emotional currency to develop into feelings of love or hate; yet the cursed void bears substantial weight. Moreover, one feels its heaviness when hungering for benevolent white fathers of American television or the Huxtables (from the *Cosby Show*) knowing these male figures are not living within your tenement. One wonders if he is doomed to repeat the footsteps of his father. For many, hip-hop culture offered a medium of catharsis to endure the pain of fatherlessness. In fact, Abu-Jamal and Hill’s text, *The Classroom and the Cell*, characterize rappers as “wounded healers” for the hip-hop generation (129). These poets transformed our anger, aggression, and lack of self-confidence to lyrical therapy that we could bob our heads to and heal. Before I initiate my conversation about hip-hop and the traumas associated with African American fathering; it is crucial to discuss the legacy of trauma endured by African Americans.

As a result of Trans-Atlantic slavery, African Americans have and continue to endure the effects of intergenerational trauma. Intergenerational trauma is the transmission of historical oppression and its negative consequences across generations. In her seminal text, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, scholar Joy Degruy writes:

Trauma is an injury caused by an outside, usually violent, force, event or

experience. We can experience the injury physically, emotionally, psychologically, and/or spiritually. Traumas can upset our equilibrium and sense of well-being. If a trauma is severe enough it can distort our attitudes and beliefs. Such distortions often result in dysfunctional behaviors, which can in turn produce unwanted consequences. (14)

Without question, slavery was a physically and psychologically violent event severely injured past and present generations of African American people. The communal and individual identities of a people became unbalanced causing multi-generations to see themselves through the eyes of the oppressive regime. Explicitly, African Americans males bore gut-wrenching indignities witnessing loved ones being raped, maimed, and killed by mostly white authority figures. Being denied access to proper counseling, it is not hard to imagine these men underwent feelings of low self-esteem, hopelessness, rage and feeling of impotence. Similar to victims of Stockholm Syndrome, some Black males, brainwashed by acts of violence, began adopting the belief system of their oppressors as a means of survival. Inevitably, African American males would mimic white capitalist patriarchy. Considering they were hostages to a strange new world and the counter-narratives from their African origins were mostly severed by colonial forces. Moreover, Blacks still suffer from the legacy of Jim Crow and New Jim Crow laws like police brutality, mass incarceration, food and economic deserts, and poor health. That said, African American writers and thinkers document the Black male quest for maleness via colonial mimicry.

From the antebellum to hip-hop lyricism, African American literature chronicles the journey of Black males to forge masculine identity by emulating and redefining white

capitalist patriarchy. In antebellum and neo-slavery narratives, slave writers such as Douglass and Equiano associated maleness with the freedom to capitalize off one's labor. Arguably, these life stories gave birth to Booker T. Washington's and W.E.B. Dubois's theories of vocational education and racial uplift ideals. Hence, the early Black intelligentsia supposed industry and artistic beauty would afford African Americans visibility privileged by their white counterparts. Yet, James Weldon Johnson's *Ex-Colored Man* showed the flaws in this logic. Through the anonymous narrator fleeing from his Blackness after witnessing a lynching illustrates African Americans regardless of status are malleable to the hammer of white legalized terrorism against the Black body. In Richard Wright's literary catalogue, Black males are tragic fatherless urban figures rebelling against yet falling victim to antagonistic forces of white space. Additionally, James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" depict African American males parents masking their vulnerabilities through gregarious machismo or illicit drug use. Moreover, the grandfather in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* portrays African American patriarchs as victims of white patriarchy negotiating their identities in a fruitless expedition for autonomy and visibility. Thus, African American literature reflects what Degruy labels "differential anxiety and adaptive survival [tactics] passed down from prior generations...many of whom likely suffered from PTSD" (123). The excerpt suggests some Black males suffer anxieties linked to their feelings of difference as the marginalized Other; they experience feelings of powerlessness, suicide, and/or self-harm because of micro and macroaggressions stemming from trauma. In other words, many Blacks develop a need to emulate white capitalist patriarchy to be recognized as a male and/or for mere survival. Unfortunately, this anxiety manifest itself in dysfunctional

behaviors and/or bifurcated identities largely because *difference* is strongly upheld by colonial force. Consequently, many males especially dads, are unable to see these paradigms of masculinity are inherently flawed and should not be mimicked.

It is clearly evident, African American identity has been shaped by the traumas of the American experience. While many present-day generations do not experience firsthand the agony of being uprooted from an ancestral homeland, losing of cultural traditions and a sense of humanity; the legacy of trauma has been passed down like family heirlooms. In *Balance*, Rice utilizes the theory of “Race Self-Complexity” to explicate the influence of race on identity formation of adolescent Black males. He writes,

Race self-complexity also accepts the position that race has meaning in Black Americans’ construction of their individual past, present, and collective future selves. The meaning of race also has associated a requisite racism that is a psychological reality at any given time for Black Americans and informs a thematic psychological unity in self-construction (33).

Here, the excerpt implies Black male identity “past, present and collective future selves” have been shaped by intergenerational and transgenerational trauma pertaining to race. Transgenerational trauma is trauma that is transferred from the first generation of trauma survivors to the second and further generations of children of the survivors. Without question, the sons of victims/survivors of Reaganomics and the War-on-Drugs selves have been impacted by institutional racism and the effects of negative Black fatherhood. For example, urban planners historical practice of redlining based on race implicitly shapes

marginalized African American communities to adopt dysfunctional practices to endure unhospitable living conditions. In these hyperghettos, fathers are most likely to befall victims of gun violence, unemployment, drug addiction, underground economies, and incarceration. As a result, these dads are more likely to engage in domestic violence and become absent in the lives of their children. For marginalized adolescents, the absence of a father figure makes youth more susceptible to embrace gang culture, misogynistic and homophobic behavior. In *Fatherneed*, Pruett asserts “fatherlessness is any social class seems to catalyze a kind of obsessive hyper masculinity...the most violent cultures had the least paternal involvement” (159). That said, hip-hop lyricism is the latest incarnation of Black literature to exhibit the transgenerational effects of trauma impacting Black adolescents via negative fathering.

Nevertheless, Miles White takes the position rap narratives further exacerbates the traumas suffered by marginalized youth. In hip-hop culture, the urban thug is a social pariah both idolized and feared within African American communities and broader mainstream society. He is a metaphor for Black criminality often a stereotypical myth of the urban superpredator. Moreover, he is an uncontrollable force of mayhem; a symbol of racist fantasies of Black deviance, hopelessly bound to endure tragic self-destructive death. The history of the thug, as a marker of Black male identity, stems from the bad nigga motif of Black folklore promoted as racialized Western outlaws like Stagolee. Hence, some rappers promote this persona as authentic Black maleness to appease their multi-racial audiences and to gain access to hegemonic masculinity via toxic manhood. Furthermore, he contends the masculine performances of hip-hop lyricism serve as fodder for the right to validate the subjugation of the disenfranchised. White has written:

Rap and masculine performance began to move in tandem with a dark new reality on the street that has been very contradictory in the sense that it has created untold wealth and left a great deal of devastation in its [path] during a time in which the country also took a hard turn to the political right. (62)

What this argument fails to take into account is that most emcees engage in performative acts of race and gender stereotypes much like a trickster to subvert the Western gaze. Arguably, this presentation of an unadulterated self embodies tenets of Bhabba's colonial mimicry that advocate the Other utilizes imitation to disrupt the power of the colonizer. According to Jefferies, "trouble is transformed from a source of trauma to a badge of honor that earns thugs the right to be vulnerable, spiritual and loving" (99). Specifically, in hip-hop fatherhood narratives, most rappers have either witnessed or experienced social isolation and distress because of fathered experiences. Ergo, many artists' songs about their fathered experiences are promoted through constructed images of authentic maleness perhaps to compensate for father-lacking. Additionally, thug narrators utilize semantic inversion through coded language and they employ, narrativizing as a form of identity stasis to cope with racism and negative fathering. Thus, rap music functions as an instrument to articulate pain associated with psychological trauma. Scholar Imani Perry contends hip-hop more than any other genre of Black music has "far more explicit expressions of rage and more intimate expressions of psychological pain" (8). According to Jefferies in *Thug Life*, rap narrators utilize a "barrier of authenticity...as a protective wall" to "speak about their vulnerability...in the context of hegemonic masculinity" (99). I contend the "barrier of authenticity" represents Rice's concept of unadulterated

presentation of self.

This chapter concentrates on hip-hop fatherhood narratives that address African American fathering experiences as it relates to multiple acts of suffering. Unambiguously, all the narratives center on emcees' reflecting on their personal traumas associated with fatherlessness because of gun violence, negligence, and drug addiction. The following rappers' autobiographical stories are comprised of hostile, urban trauma where fatherless sons are expected to undertake patriarchal identities, while yet searching for positive father figures for themselves. Unfortunately, these parentified sons acting as father figures employ thug personas to establish their roles as providers and protectors within their families. In the latter part of the chapter, I explore fatherhood narratives where rappers sing about paternal "generational curses" on their adolescent identity formation. Notably, I explore generational curses in father-son relationships impacted by substance abuse, domestic abuse, and cycles of violent behavior. Like fugitive slave writers and bluesmen, some rappers' extract the experiences from hood life to create didactic tales to extend paternal guidance to fatherless Black males. Arguably, the reality raps can be read as counter-narrative to offset the textual influences of media-based stereotypes on Black male identity. Ultimately, the chapter explores trauma and its influence on the construction of Black male identity and fatherhood in hip-hop lyricism.

Meek Mill's "Traumatized": The Scarring Effects of Gun Violence and Father-Lacking

The Philly-based rapper, Meek Mill's "Traumatized" is an example of the scarring effects of father-lacking on the psyche and identity formation of adolescent Black males. In the narrative, the emcee recounts the traumatic impact his father's death

as a victim of gun violence had on his upbringing. Implicitly, in Mill's recount is evidence redlining and lax regulation laws contribute to the perpetual gun violence which leads to the death of his father. Explicitly, the story shows Mill's as narrator loss of innocence supplanted by an apoplectic longing to avenge his father's death:

When I find the nigga that killed my daddy know Ima ride

...

Yeah, you ripped my family part and made my momma cry

So when I see you nigga it's gon' be a homicide

Cuz I was only a toddler, you left me traumatized

You made me man of the house and it was grindin' time

In the passage above, the narrative shows the trauma of father-lacking serves as a catalyst for the narrator's orchestration of identity. "When I find the nigga that killed my daddy know Ima ride" illustrates the demarcation of self—an awareness of identity split between childhood and adulthood. Emphatically, the narrator expresses his identity dilemma through words like "toddler" and "man of the house" which are markers of his bifurcated identities. Additionally, the phrase "you made me man of the house" represents a new unadulterated presentation of self via thug patriarchy. Hence, Mill's use of a thug persona signifies his street credibility, feelings of helplessness and his performative act of Black masculinity.

As well, his lyrics confirm and disconfirm the stereotypical image of the thug. For, he demonstrates thoughts of "homicide" affirming toxic masculinity through his pronouncements of hyper-masculinity. On the track, Mill literally screams his bars upon a haunting piano loop, creating pathos of anger and despair. His trauma as Jefferies states

in *Thug Life* acts as a “badge of honor” (99). Yet, the rapper disrupts the thug image by his admission his father’s murderer “left [him] traumatized.” Moreover, the emcee vividly paints a portrait of the nadir of his nuclear family, descending into dysfunction due to the death of his father. Typically, men are shunned from expressing moments of vulnerability and helplessness. However, Mill’s thug persona affords him such freedom. In addition, Mill’s use of the alliterative “t” with the words “toddler,” and “traumatized” evinces his suffering as he briefly becomes the makeshift patriarch of his family. Additionally, the emcee employment of dropping off the consonant g in “it was grindin’ time” creates linguistic convergence with the “real” thugs who recognize his plight. Because Mill, like many marginalized parentified sons, mimicry of white capitalist patriarchy comes through an engagement in underground economies.

Mill’s narrative reveals the tragic death of his father coerces, the narrator as makeshift patriarch, to participate in underground economies to “feed the fam.” In early African American literature, manhood was affirmed by freedom and acts of industry to legitimately care for one’s family. However, bell hooks points out Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin In the Sun* documents a philosophical shift in Black male attitudes towards money and labor (15-16). In particular hooks analysis of Walter Lee reveals urban African American males starting to associate capital by any means as liberation. Similarly, Mill’s narrative is a portrait of a contemporary marginalized adolescent patriarch becoming a provider via the Black market:

now them main niggas respect me

I had to learn to be a man

Learn to hold my hands

Learn to work that scale, turn them ounces into grams

Learn to stack this money work till 2 and feed the fam

In the quotation above, the narrator's traumatic experience of father-lacking works as the impetus for his orchestration of identity. Given that, Mill's narrative portrays the formation of male identity becomes fortified by aggressive behaviors and participating in the drug trade. In particular, Mill's repetition of "learn to" imply aggressive behaviors are not biologically innate but rather it is a form of male socialization in these environments. Notice, his inception into maleness derives from the respect he receives from his "main niggas." The narrative reveals Mill had to "learn to be a man" by seeking male affirmation from nefarious urban dwellers. In addition, Mill as protagonist achieves identity stasis by assuming the racial stereotype of the thug and drug dealer. "Learn to hold my hands" imply his attained respect by demonstrating a propensity to inflict violence onto others to constitute manhood. Besides that, these acts verify his identity as thug, it shows as a surrogate father figure he can be a protector. Without question, the role of protector would be essential to a fatherless youth who has loss his patriarch to gun violence.

Additionally, the artist's account implies the demise of his dad compels him to pursue his father's place as wage earner. Mill's poetic anecdote referencing "turn[ing] them ounces into grams" shows he partakes in the drug trade to fulfill this patriarchal obligation. According to Miles White, "There is often little separation between the trauma of lived experience that often goes with Blackness, impoverishment, and social marginality in the United States, particularly in the lives of young Black males who gravitated to the allure and deceit of the streets" (62). Despite the perverse acts, Mill's

narrative still disembowels the racially bigoted stereotype of the superpredator; for as a poor stricken youth his acts appear out of necessity as opposed to malice. Arguably, his lyrics are representative of many underclass Black youths traumatized by father-lacking that deem underground economies as the sole means of sustenance in poor communities. Thus, Mill's fatherhood narrative shows urban thug identity as a coping mechanism for father-lacking and male adolescents' struggles to be a patriarch within their household.

Ain't No Doctors or Firemen: Surrogate Fatherhood in Gang Culture

Jay-Rock's autobiographical narrative, "They Say," delineates his meager origins as a rebellious adolescent, seeking some semblance of fatherhood in the poverty-stricken city of Compton, California. Arguably, his quest for fatherhood stems from the psychological void left from his father of whom he eloquently states was "in and out [of his] life and shit." In the passage below, he recalls how his desire to fulfill his fatherhood led to his surrogate relationships with "gang bangas," "dope dealers" and "neighborhood hustlas:"

Growin up I was a knucklehead Boy you never listen to me!

Thats what my momma said Im from the projects

I ain't never had shit Me and my older brother

We had to share a mattress No heat, no lights

Had to keep them candles lit

...

Gang bangas dope dealers replaced my father

Neighborhood hustlas taught me to get them dollars

Thats when I became a problem

Like many rappers, Jay-Rock's narrative muses on project life and the psychological trauma associated with fatherlessness. Here, he characterizes himself as a knucklehead—a label inculcated by his momma. Arguably, the emcee reflects the invisibility he (and other destitute Black males) experience because of their fatherless underclass position. Jay-Rock's imagery of poverty such as “no heat,” “no light” and sharing a mattress with his brother,” further supports this contention. Under these conditions, the rap narrator lyrically asserts the neighborhood drug dealers replaced his father and usher him into a problematic and false sense of masculinity. It is plausible, his narrative is representative of poor Black male adolescents' feelings of impotence due to the absence of a positive father figure. Fatherless sons oftentimes fall victim to the impressionable influence of gang bangas which further exacerbate the traumas prevalent in naturalistic urban landscapes. In fact, Jay-Rock's line, “Neighborhood hustlas taught me to get them dollars,” implies that obtaining filthy lucre is a token of urban Black maleness. Thus, the narrative suggests gang culture function as a space of surrogate fatherhood that negatively alters adolescents' conception of fatherhood and Black male identity.

In fact, Jay-Rock's poetic story presents gang life as an alternative family structure that is as fiercely loyal as it is problematic. Thus, the gang life functions as a kindred collective for the fatherless. His narrative puts on display the social forces that compel clusters of teenagers to become thugs. In “They Say” gang culture frequents a space of masculine surrogacy predicated on the absence of positive male role models in marginalized communities:

It's hard to grow up be a doctor or a fireman

When you constantly seeing that g ride tire screeching
 And them shots firing
 All the time it happens frequently
 The hood inspired me, to be a G
 I bled for the game did it all for the letter B

Notice, the rhymes suggest it is arduous for Black adolescents residing penurious locales to aspire to be “a doctor or a fire man.” In fact, the rapper joined Piru Bloods, a notorious Los Angeles gang to be a part of a family. Hence, Jay-Rock's line “The hood inspired me, to be a G” suggest fatherless Black males are indoctrinated into the culture out of necessity to affirm some guise of African American masculine identity. Moreover, the line further signifies the rap narrator suffered from the absence of paternal life stories to shift his gang mentality.

Despite his father-lacking wounds, the rapper paints himself as a social father figure when he proclaims his allegiance to the “fatherless son” struggling to navigate the perils of ghetto life. In the coda of “They Say,” the emcee employs didacticism and shows compassion to often misunderstood youth who need guidance to navigate their hostile environments. Jay-Rock implies the difference between him and other gangbangers is that he learned how to hustle or commodify his pain into creativity. That said critic Houston Baker in *Blues Theory* claims slave writers recognized in order to transform from product to human they had to commodify their life stories. Hence, slaves who could read and write and later bluesmen who possessed musical talent could extract the experiences of the marginalized for commerce and to uplift the race. In the lyrics below, Jay-Rock assumes the position of the thug and social patriarch:

The only difference is I'm not slangin
 Nickels and dimes More like slanging these rap lines
 Verses of truth
 When I step in the booth
 Niggas know I pour my soul out for the struggling youth
 For that fatherless son who needed love so he ran with a crew

Through rap narrative, the emcee achieves identity stasis in the form of unadulterated presentation of self. He paints himself as a social father figure when he proclaims his allegiance to the “fatherless son” struggling to navigate the perils of ghetto life. Notice, the emcee utilizes the hustla’s idioms juxtaposing drug dealing metaphors “nickels and dimes” to signify his acts of didacticism. He disrupts the image of the stereotypical drug dealer to impart life stories to enable “fatherless sons” to orchestrate their identities in a constructive way. His brand of reality rap functions as an alternative space of Black patriarchy. Jay-Rock as a modern griot arguably makes it his mantra to undertake personal responsibility to uplift the community that birthed his talent. Like Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* and Dubois’s *Souls of Black Folk*, Jay-Rock's “They Say” functions as a patriarchal cautionary tale for the marginalized. Given that, Jay-Rock’s concluding verse illustrates how hip-hop functions as a space of social fathering to empower rappers to help others to avoid the trappings of gang life and the trauma of father-lacking.

“Who am I? Aye who am I:” The Trauma of Father Absenteeism

In contrast to Meek Mill and Jay-Rock, J. Cole's “Adolescence” is a narrative of a

teenage everyman coping with the angst of fatherlessness. J. Cole, as protagonist bereft of self-confidence, recognizes himself in a state of uncertainty regarding his male identity. While most teenage boys grapple with orchestrating male identities, J. Cole's angst is nuanced by historic and media-based stereotypes of Black male identity. Throughout the narrative, the artist broods he cannot be a "certain type of nigga" which he describes as a "ball player." Here, J. Cole's lyrics represent Rice's concept of identity dilemma articulation. By positioning his authentic identity against the racialized archetype of the Black athlete, J. Cole demonstrates he is cognizant of his twoness. Scholar, Edward Said contends, "the construction of identity is bound up with the deposition of power and powerlessness in each society" (332). Historically, for many poverty-stricken African American youths, athleticism grants them limited access to hegemonic masculinity. In the United States, American patriarchy is synonymous with competitiveness and bravado; nonetheless, Black males are admired mostly for athleticism but rarely for the other aspects of their humanity. That said, those individuals who do not exhibit those qualities are vastly ignored—rendered invisible. Additionally, J. Cole's lyrics imply that as a fatherless Black male his lack of aplomb is further exacerbated by the absence of a patriarchal figure. In the passage below, the emcee contemplates the ramifications his father's absence has on his psychological well-being:

On the bench, cause my lack of confidence won't let me fly

I ain't grow up with my father, I ain't thinkin' 'bout that now

Fast forward four years or so from now I'll probably cry

When I realize what I missed, but as of now my eyes are dry

Cause I'm trying to stay alive

In the city where too many niggas die
 Dreamin' quiet trying to dodge a suit and tie
 Who am I? Aye who am I

Here, J. Cole's use of the sports analogy "on the bench" signifies his loss of self-confidence because of his father's absence. In fact, J. Cole's traumatic experience of father-lacking is so severe he "ain't thinkin' bout that now" because he represses the thoughts just to maintain. Cultural critic Jelani Cobb in Byron Hurt's hip-hop documentary *Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, contend Black males use "psychic armor" to protect themselves from showing impotence. In the quotation above, J. Cole's as an adolescent employs the Paul Dunbar "mask" to avoid shedding tears over his father-lacking. Moreover, the latter lines of the song assert J. Cole (and other marginalized Black males) must put up this front to survive in their hostile surroundings. Additionally, the rapper's metaphor of "suit and tie" can be interpreted in many ways regarding male identity. The suit and tie could symbolize societal pressure for Black males to negate cultural bonds to assimilate into mainstream society. Moreover, the metaphor could imply the everyday man can fall victim the urban underworld where one wears a suit and tie in the court system or a funeral. I argue the narrator ponders if the absence of a father or paternal narratives will contribute to his spiritual death. Regardless, J. Cole's lyrics suggest an everyday man can end up dead either physically or metaphysically if he does not develop a holistic Black male identity. The last line, "Who am I? Aye who am I" most likely reflect the protagonist yearnings for a paternal life story to alter his identity.

In J. Cole's concluding verse, his peer, a drug-trafficking thug, furnishes the life story altering the identity of the rap narrator. Initially, the protagonist contemplates

engaging in underground economies to enter a life of thugdom. Providentially, his friend imparts his personal narrative to challenge J. Cole's thoughts about this type of Black masculinity:

17 Years breathing his demeanor said more
 He told me, "Nigga you know how you sound right now?
 You won't my mans, I would think that you a clown right now, listen"
 "You everything I wanna be that's why I fucks with you
 So how you looking up to me, when I look up to you?"
 "You bout to go get a degree, I'm bout to be stuck with two choices:
 Either graduate to weight or sell a number two
 For what? A hundred bucks or two a week?

Notice, J. Cole depicts the "demeanor" of the thug as a man mature beyond his years. I argue the peer's narrative functions as form of paternal instruction. In the phrases, "'Nigga you know how you sound right now?" and "you a clown right now" the unnamed friend discourages J. Cole aspirations to become a miscreant. Furthermore, the anonymous peer unravels the glorified image of thug life by showing how it limits an individual's potential for upward mobility. That said, the thug statement, "You everything I wanna be that's why I fucks with you" implies he desires to live a life beyond the streets. In fact, the line "You bout to go get a degree" suggests the unnamed friend wants to be educated. Nonetheless, the peer accepting the stereotype of thug as truth further illustrates how powerful the psychological strongholds of race are in America. Additionally, the thug's narrative demonstrates how the impact of father-lacking induced him to undergo his fate.

As the thug continues his narrative, he exhibits the effects of his traumatic upbringing. He questions J. Cole: “Do you think that you would know what to do if you was me? /I got, four brothers, one mother that don't love us/If they ain't never want us why the fuck they never wore rubbers?” Here, the thug shows his spirit has become embittered by his parents. In particular, he criticizes his mother for not loving him and his siblings. Undeniably, his childhood is so traumatic he questions the purpose of his existence. The fact, the thug does not explicitly mention his father suggests he persists in an environment where father-lacking is normal. Arguably, the peer and J. Cole share a communal bond of father-lacking so profound it provokes them to suffer in silence. With that said, in the song, the friend’s narrative functions as a paternal-like life story enabling J. Cole to achieve identity stasis.

J. Cole, as protagonist, achieves identity stasis via presentation of unadulterated self. He raps,

I felt ashamed to have ever complained about my lack of gear

...

Thank you mama dry your eyes, there ain't no reason to cry

You made a genius and I, ain't gon' take it for granted

I ain't gon' settle for lesser, I ain't gon' take what they handed

Nah I'm gon' take what they owe me and show you that I can fly

In the passage above, J. Cole begins to recognize himself as a genius and vows to never “settle for lesser” by succumbing to the stereotype of the thug. Nevertheless, his use of zero copula and AAVE implicitly suggest he will not apply for Dubois’s talented tenth membership. In other words, he will not assimilate into African American elitism but

rather he remains loyal to his cultural identity of the urban Black male. Without question, the unnamed peer life story caused J. Cole to feel shame about contemplating embarking into thug life. Indisputably, the thug narrative helped him to realize material consumption pales in comparison to a life of “genius” and integrity. Arguably, the lyrics illustrate Black male adolescents’ quest for white capitalist patriarchy requires one to sell their soul for a mess of pottage. Thus, he achieves identity stasis through a presentation of unadulterated self by not settling “for lesser” media-based Black identity. In fact, J. Cole as principal character vows to “fly” the expectations of universal racism to attain the goals “they” meaning White America owes him.

Plausibly, J. Cole’s “Adolescence” illustrates the traumatic effect on father-lacking on the psyches of Black males. His lyrics demonstrate the lack of self-confidence and repressed emotionality some marginalized teenagers suffer in fatherless communities. Furthermore, the narratives show thug life stories that go beyond stereotype can serve as fuel for identity orchestration. Lastly, the rapper’s song indicates a need for positive paternal life stories for all Black adolescents.

Your name is Faggot: Homophobic Slurs and Racialized Epithet Responses to Father-Lacking

Historically, the Black community has been anti-gay and quite homophobic. From the church to African American literature, homophobic rhetoric has rigidly shaped the contours of Black masculinity. Perhaps, this is because Black masculinity has yet to be defined in its own cultural terms or maybe it is because of strict religious doctrines. In literary works like Baraka’s “Black Art” and Johnson’s *Ex-Colored Man*, males illustrating effeminate undertones are viewed as weak and immoral men. Alas, the tradition of homophobia rhetoric in African American literature continues today in hip-

hop culture. Like artists such as Earl Sweatshirt and Eminem, rapper Tyler the Creator of *Odd Future* employs homophobic rhetoric and racial epithets to convey anger towards his absentee father.

In this segment, the rapper, Tyler the Creator, shows a choleric deposition when describing his father-lacking experiences and its impact on his emotional well-being. On the track, “Answer” Tyler recites rhymes laced with profanity and anti-gay slurs in a conversational flow to articulate his feelings towards his father:

Hey Dad, it's me, um...

Oh, I'm Tyler, I think I be your son

Sorry, I called you the wrong name, see, my brain's splitting

Dad isn't your name, see Faggot's a little more fitting

In the passage above, Tyler the Creator uses a sarcastic tone in a mock phone conversation with his father. Arguably, he employs this shock tactic to shield the pain of his father’s absence in his life. The fact, Tyler employs a faux phone conversation rather than a face-to-face interaction to symbolize the distance between him and his father. This is further emphasized when he contemptuously states “I think I be your son.” Again, Tyler the Creator’s mockery can be read as a defense mechanism to shroud his vulnerability. This contention is further emphasized with the emcee’s gross appropriation of the homophobic slur “faggot” to describe his father. The word “faggot” in this instance is not used to denigrate his father’s sexuality but rather it is an affront to his authenticity as a man. The text, *The Classroom and the Cell* reveal:

The pain of fatherless, of early rejection and abandonment, has produced an entire generation of brothers and sisters who are deeply wounded...the

hip-hop generation has turned the absentee father into a social pariah within our community. Hip-hop has made it thoroughly uncool to abandon your kids. (Abu-Jamal and Hill 129)

Here Tyler constructs the image of an absentee father as an “uncool social pariah.”

Unfortunately, the emcee accomplishes this at the expense of degrading some of the most vulnerable members of the community. Lamentably, Tyler the Creator’s use of homophobic language constitutes a barrier of heteronormative masculinity to shroud the pain of his father’s “rejection and abandonment.”

In addition, the rap narrator’s assails his father by denigrating his African heritage. Moreover, the emcee as protagonist expresses the traumatic effects his father abandonment has on his identity. Tyler’s rhymes, “Mom was only twenty when you ain’t have any fucks to spare/You Nigerian fuck, now I’m stuck with this shitty facial hair.” Notice, the rap narrator links his father’s abandonment to his identity dilemma. The racialized phrases, “Nigerian fuck,” and “shitty facial hair” indicates his awareness of how Black identity is viewed through the imperial eyes of American culture. For example, Tyler the Creator professed hatred for “shitty facial hair” reinforces the stereotype Africans have coarse and/or unruly hair deemed unappealing in mainstream society. The words “I’m stuck” symbolize his awareness of his twoness as a person of color. Tyler the Creator’s narrative of absentee fathering conveys rage emblematic of most fatherless Black adolescents. However, the lyricism complicates the fathering experience by detailing the repressed desires of his fatherneed.

In the chronicle, the rap artist achieves identity stasis obtaining a stereotypical image of Black machismo as authentic male self. Through his rhymes vacillating

paternal hatred and a desire for fatherhood, Tyler illustrates the impact of father-lacking on a young African American male identity formation:

Also stuck with a beautiful home with a case of stairs
 So you not being near fucking fire-started my damn career
 ...
 The fuck is an Okonma? I'm changing my shit to Haley
 And I ain't just being passive, nigga.
 You're a fucking faggot, nigga.
 Got a show on Monday, guess who ain't getting no passes, nigga?
 But if I ever had the chance to ask this nigga
 And call him...
 I hope you answer [x4]

Here, in the opening lines, Tyler the Creator's epitomizes Rice's concept of Burden of Proof Assumption by embracing white capitalist patriarchal values. His rhyme highlighting "beautiful home with a case of stairs" and "career" acts as markers of success and identity. Furthermore, his line "who ain't getting no passes, nigga" are exemplars of the rapper utilizing status and capital as demonstrations of power. In fact, he touts his power and his disdain for his father through his aspiration to change his government name from Okonma to his alter-ego Haley. Consider the rapper's father's last name "Okonma," an Igbo surname meaning "good man," suggests he questions his masculine authenticity. Ergo, Tyler's contemplation of switching the name to his misogynistic and homophobic alter ego Wolf Haley can be read as an act of defiance. His assumption of this identity is proven throughout the verse as the tone of the narrative becomes more ominous. Notice the emcee's repetitive use of the racial epithet "nigga"

and the homophobic slur “faggot” to denigrate his father. Yet, towards the end of the verse, Tyler delivers his rhymes in a somber tone as he ponders what a real-life conversation would be like with his father. The repeated phrase “I hope you answer” signifies Tyler the Creator's lyrical rant can be read as merely a front or defense mechanism to hide his desire for fatherhood. Hence, the fatherhood narrative can possibly be read as a cautionary tale for fathers and fatherless youth. Thus, it would imply paternal life stories are necessary to discourage adolescent quest for masculinity via American patriarchal mimicry.

Welcome Home: Overcoming the Trauma of Father-Lacking through Reconnection

Unlike Tyler the Creator’s “Answer,” Dizzy Wright's lyrical narrative “Welcome Home” depicts a father-son bond as a vital component of Black male identity. The story illustrates the absence of this bond may oftentimes lead fatherless sons to embrace street and drug culture. Moreover, the narrative implies a reconnection between an estranged father and son may inspire adolescents to embrace biological and social fatherhood. Arguably, Wright's narrative functions as a blueprint to convey to fatherless boys the importance of taking the first step towards reconnecting to overcome the psychological trauma of absenteeism.

Wright articulates the profound impact his estranged father had on his perception of fatherhood. Earlier in the song, the emcee portrays himself as a misguided youth who associated manhood with drug-dealing and alcoholism. As the song proceeds, Wright’s emergence into fatherhood helped him realize the psychological impact his patriarch’s absence had on his upbringing. For example, he raps, “I just met my father for the first

time/Him being missing made me embrace mine.” Here, the rapper claims his dad's absence motivated him to father his children. Additionally, Wright's patriarchal void inspires him to rekindle a bond with his daddy.

In the narrative, Dizzy vividly recounts his reconnection with his father. He illustrates this in the following:

Well now this Funk Volume shit is just A little more than rapping and
collabing
Cause it got me to finally meet my Daddy
I wonder what the nigga be like
Is he focused, is he hustling
Can he hang in a discussion?
Got off the plane
Seen him and shook his hand
Like it was nothing Nigga why you fronting
You was happy as shit (Ahhhhh)

Dizzy delivers the above lines with the giddy cadence of an adolescent son meeting his estranged father for the first time. Notice from the third to the fifth lines, the emcee asks a series of questions which suggests he is nervous about the upcoming meeting with his father. Moreover, the questions are centered on identity; arguably, the rapper is eager to uncover the mysteries of his own maleness. However, all the questions cease when the son encounters dad for the first time. The rapper declaration that “[he] was happy as shit” suggests the void of his father 20-year bid in prison has been healed. Vastly different from the dismissive attitudes of 90’s rappers, Wright’s story encourages marginalized

youths to reconnect with their estranged fathers. Furthermore, the narrative reveals the entertainer, and his dad immediately established a bond allowing him to minister to Wright who in turn conveys this message to his fans.

Without question, Dizzy's narrative depicts his newly formed bond with his father a testimony of forgiveness inspiring fatherless adolescents to free themselves from the trauma of father-lacking. The emcee imparts his father's words of wisdom to his listeners:

Smile on my face
 Learned how to be great
 Be better than me
 Just try every day
 Words of wisdom
 I ain't rapping the same
 This shit tat on my skin
 That's the shit he had on his brain

The line “smile on my face” is quite compelling for hip-hop generation that mostly ascribes to “ice grills” and hardcore posturing as markers of Black male identity. Arguably, Wright's smile suggests the real-life bond with his patriarch surpasses previously held notions of Black masculinity. It is plausible, the rapper's advice to the hip-hop generation to take advantage of their freedom may be linked to his dad's plights when he was institutionalized. Indeed, Wright's father's counsel “to be better than [him]” suggesting fatherless males like Wright must strive “every day” to avoid the paths that may lead to incarceration. Hence, he achieved identity stasis via Acute Identity

Expression meaning he acknowledges his strengths and weakness as a man. Thus, the emcee pledges to never rap about illicit subject matter for the sake of misguided fatherless sons. The lines, “This shit tat on my skin/That’s that shit he had on his brain” implies the rapper will openly display his patriarch’s inner wisdom.

The next segment of the chapter focuses on transgenerational trauma and its effects on the identity formation of adolescent Black males. In these fatherhood narratives, I examine lyrics where rap narrators reflect on their childhood experiences; specifically, their socialization into Black manhood. In most of the accounts, the emcee’s view themselves as victims of their fathered experiences. Hence, they believe they are doomed to repeat the sins of the father.

Generational Curses

“My Daddy Taught Me:” Cycles of Substance Abuse

Fatherhood stories like Isaiah Rashad’s “Heredity” illustrate the impact of paternal transgenerational alcoholism on the construction of Black male identity. Unequivocally, Rashad’s lyrics convey how his fathered experiences have cursed his identity. In his narrative, Black maleness is portrayed as an emotionless isolated space of existence:

My daddy taught me how to drink my pain away
 My daddy taught me how to leave somebody
 My daddy taught me how to smoke my load and go
 My daddy taught me you don't need nobody
 So one time for the caged bird And one time for the real niggas
 And slow dance on the Jäger
 And one time for the little niggas

Here, “So one time for the caged bird and one time for the real niggas” is representative of the legacy of intergenerational trauma experienced by Black youth. Profoundly, Rashad's use of the term “caged bird,” deriving from the literary works of Angelou, suggests substance abuse taints Black male identity. Explicitly, the term “caged bird” signifies upon Maya Angelou’s autobiographical bildungsroman” where the iconic poet as protagonist struggles with identity stem from parental abandonment and racism. In the quotation above, Rashad recounts his father life lessons, juxtaposing the use of uncontrollable substances as a form of escapism. The lines suggest Rashad's fathered experience socialized him to perceive the use alcohol, drugs and misogynistic relationships as suitable behavior for Black males. On the surface, Rashad has silently accepted his paternal curse and the historic race and gender oppression that restricts men from expressing pain to uphold maleness. However, the emcee’s narrative demonstrates he has negotiated his identity as an alcoholic to articulate the pain of his fathered experience. Notice, as he recounts his childhood he communicates loneliness, pain and self-induced alienation of which are not deemed manly; yet his assumption of the stereotype permits him to disclose this part of his humanity without judgement. Instead of transferring his curse to the next generation; he dedicates the track to the “caged bird,” the “real niggas, and the little niggas as a cautionary tale.

For example, Rashad’s narrative illustrates the corrosive impact his fathered experience has on his behavior in adulthood. In “Heredity” Rashad use of repetition, the absence of the consonant “g” and the sounds of static as a backdrop to create pathos of pain and drunkenness:

I ain't eatin' in the morn' I be sippin' on the Henny, Henny

You been lookin' for the wrong one, wrong one, wrong one

Ain't thinkin' bout your love

I be shittin' on your feelings, feelings

And you be lovin' on the wrong one, wrong one, wrong one

Some critics may argue Rashad's repeated references to himself as "the wrong one" can be read as a Casanova-like character simply frolicking with his lover's emotions.

However, a closer reading of the lyrics "ain't thinking bout your love" and "shitting on your feelings" suggests he is incapable of expressing healthy love. According to Abu-Jamal and Hill, "the lifelong trauma [of father-lacking] ...causes and...undermines our ability to navigate the world in a healthy and functional ways. Until we figure out how to address those wounds, we'll continue to struggle with love in every aspect of our lives" (129). Considering this, the emcee declarations of unrequited love for his unnamed paramour further highlights a lack of self-love commonly associated with sons raised by fathers with substance abuse problems." In the first line, the artist forgoes proper sustenance for "Henny" slang for Hennessy in the morning. This line lends itself to multiple interpretations which suggest the emcee suffer from substance abuse. For instance, it is a commonly held belief individuals who begin their mornings with alcohol are indeed alcoholics. Another widespread perception of alcoholics is the belief these individuals must drink alcohol to limit the effects of hangovers after excessive drinking. Thus, Rashad's fatherhood narrative implicitly advises sons of substance abuse to orchestrate their identities in opposition of their fathers. If not, they are doomed to repeat the constructions of manhood performed by their patriarchs.

"Surviving off cold cuts and cold Spam:" Repeating Violent and High-Risk Behaviors

In addition to substance abuse, many hip-hop artists convey their fathered experiences through the lens of transgenerational traumatic cycles of violent and high-risk behaviors. Songs like Shy Glizzy's, "Sad to Say," Vince Staple's, "Nate," and Freddie Gibbs' "Broken" depict male aggression as a learned behavior stemming from negative fathered experiences. Notably, Freddie Gibbs' "Broken" is an example of the negative effects of paternal transgenerational cycles of violence on the formation of Black male identity. Gibbs' narrative reveals as an adolescent his fathered experience affirmed maleness through acts of dominance and power. This conception of Black patriarchy is representative of many inner-city urbanites living in poverty-stricken communities. Historically, poor Black male urbanites have been denied access to arenas of socio-political power. Oftentimes some males take out their frustrations on the most vulnerable members in their domains. Considering this, the narrative reveals Gibbs and his father utilize their allegiances with gangs and law enforcement as a medium to demonstrate masculine power and control. Arguably, Gibbs' contrived male power serves to shroud the fragilities of his concept of masculinity.

In fact, Gibbs' title "Broken," serves as a double entendre to represent low-income status and his "broken" childhood spirit. This is illustrated in the following:

Surviving off cold cuts and cold Spam
 Can't see eye to eye with my old man Hiding my insecurities with this
 gang flag
 We both despise the police, but he wore the same badge
 And as I child I admired that, now I wonder how
 He was a pig, but you was barely making 20 thou

I guess that's why you put me on that lick for 20 pounds

The images of substandard food such as “cold cuts” and “spam” function as a metonym of hardships placing further emphasis on conditions that shaped his identity. Gibbs' autobiographical narrative employs the alliterative “s” and “c” in words like “Surviving,” “Spam,” “cold” and “cold cuts” which illustrates his upbringing in abject poverty.

Moreover, Gibbs appears rightly critical of his dad a police officer rousing him to engage in underground economies (you put me on that lick for 20 pounds). It is quite plausible, Gibbs' dad malcontent with his occupation in law enforcement; serves as impetus for Gibbs' violent and deviant behavior conveyed in the narrative. Without question, Gibbs' admiration and contempt for his patriarch is quite visceral throughout the narrative.

For example, Gibbs voices his disapproval of his daddy being a “crooked” cop; nonetheless, he assimilates into the image of a thug crafted by his father. Moreover, Gibbs' lyrics suggest he as protagonist struggles with the trappings of his Black male identity, yet he unconsciously mimics his father's detestable behaviors:

life of crime is all we ever shared from then to now
 And I'm a crook and you crooked, that's all we got in common He
 chucked the deuce to my mama, so much for family bonding
 But how could something so destined to be just get demolished?
 Running through groupies and boppers, I guess I got it honest And
 honestly I know I'm out here fucking up
 Seven grams of rock, I stuff 'em in my nuts

In the passage above, Gibbs appears unable to overcome the male socialization derived from his fathered experience. Although, the emcee laments his childhood upbringing; yet

he seems compelled to follow in his dad's footsteps. For instance, Gibbs laments over the fact his patriarch "chucked the deuce" or abandoned his mother in pursuit of nefarious wages. Yet, he admits utilizing his status as a rap star to degrade women as a trait "he got honest" from his father. Additionally, the rapper professes his dealings in drugs derives from his desire to amass wealth. It can be inferred his dad's dealings as a "crooked" cop stemmed from this same desire to achieve the inverse American dream. Hence, many Black men from marginalized communities are socialized to perceive money as a manifestation of manliness and perhaps liberation from the limits placed by white male authority. Arguably, Gibbs lyrical narrative is emblematic of many marginalized Black youths who engage in underground economies because of a paternal figure. In other words, the lyrics suggest generational curses of violent/criminal behaviors pose a challenge for adolescents to overcome without a proper countermeasure.

Bitch Bad: The Making of a Misogynist

Female rapper, Angel Haze's narrative "Bitch Bad" affirms domestic violence as a learned behavior that stems from hyper-masculine male socialization. In my research, Haze offers the only story showing transgenerational trauma in a step-father-step-son relationship. Her story documents the construction of an unnamed step-son's misogynistic identity due to witnessing the domestic abuse suffered by his mother:

Now imagine her little brother's maybe 9 or 10

We have no idea exactly what's relaying on his end

Until one day he's out and probably playing with his friends

And to beat and treat a woman like a bitch is what he pretends

...

But mixed with misconceptions and his hatred for his mama

He grows up to hate the weakness in a woman

Thinks that if he beats her it will potentially make her stronger

Here, the rapper creates the pathos of empathy as she challenges the listener to imagine a pre-teen male becoming normalized to violence against women. Haze's picture of domestic violence as a childhood game illustrates the corruptive influence an abusive patriarch can have on the mind of a minor.

Furthermore, Angel Haze's lyricism suggests the fatherless son lacks a positive male role model who could serve as a buffer to negative male socialization. Consequently, Haze' fatherless son character develops bifurcated male identities of a misogynist and protector:

Little boy bystander gets infected with a sickness

See he grew up wishing his father would come and fix it

And wish mama away and show abuse is what a fist meant! Power!

But the abuser put his fist in all the little boys dreams

Till he sifted and mixed his shit in To be what he hated wasn't the aim

But his hatred really made him exactly what he became

Observe the structure of the passage; in the first three lines, the unnamed son is characterized as a "little boy bystander" residing in a hostile domain of male dominance and hyper masculinity. As a fatherless child, the boy learns social cues about manhood by witnessing his stepfather's brutal behavior towards his mother. Obviously, the unnamed character traumatized by the violence wishes "his [biological] father would come and fix" or rescue him and his mother from their unfortunate

circumstances. Arguably, the child desires for his biological father to act a protector point to the son's fatherneed. Because this fatherneed has not been met the "little boy" turns his frustration and anger towards his "mama." Thus, the narrative suggests this sort of toxic environment acts as the fertile ground that gives birth to misogyny. Here, Haze explains the protagonist learned conception of patriarchy as a sickness that has tainted his perception of manhood. Her lyrics suggest the absence of his biological father failed to offer a counter-narrative to the conception of patriarchy. Thus, the rapper's narrative is representative of Black males who have endured the psychological trauma of absenteeism and domestic violence. The lyrics show some Black men engage in misogynistic behaviors by witnessing the abuse of mothers. Oftentimes, the males internalize hatred towards women because they have not been shown an alternative view of maleness. Ironically, Angel Haze's fatherless character learns how to become "a man" through the birth of his daughter.

In the conclusion of Haze's narrative, the birth of the fatherless son's daughter becomes the zenith of his internal quest for maleness. Haze's lyrics convey that profound impact fatherhood had on his perception of women. Moreover, the narrative suggests positive fatherhood can serve as a catalyst to break the generational curse of domestic violence:

Now as they grew up in the world
 The little boy's lost and has him a little girl
 And his life changes-again
 He don't ever wanna see her hurt by men
 To protect her through everything on earth he can

And that moment he understands

Woman should never be hurt by words or hands

And just like that that little boy becomes a man

Like fatherhood narratives such as Jay-Z and Kanye West's "New Day," Angel Haze portrays the birth of a child as a vessel to break generational curses. Here, the "little boy" rediscovers his innocence through his "little girl, which suggests true manhood is the acceptance of one's femininity and vulnerability. As the story continues, the "little boy" reverses his generational curse by vowing to "protect her through everything." Without question, the protagonist, role as a father serves as a catalyst to orchestrate an alternate Black male identity. In the passage of above, he achieves identity stasis by becoming acutely aware of his shortcomings as a man. Furthermore, he redefines his perception of the protector. Notice the line "Woman should never be hurt by words or hands" implies a patriarch's protection of his child can be done without violence and male dominance. Haze's song like, T.I.'s "Wonderful Life, Game's "Like Father like Son 2" and Jay-Z and Kanye West "New Day" show to become good fathers one must be the antithesis of American patriarchy. Markedly, the lyrical stories depict positive connections between a father, and a child can correct the transgenerational traumas stemming from negative fathered experiences.

Conclusion

This chapter focuses on African American fatherhood and the influence of trauma in Black adolescent male identity formation in hip-hop lyricism. Specifically, I focus on the scarring effects of parentified fatherhood on adolescent males who lost fathers because of gun-violence. Here, I explore hip-hop fatherhood narratives where parentified

sons assume thug personas to fulfill paternal roles of protectors and providers for their families. In addition, the chapter pays close attention to hip-hop lyrics correlating father need and surrogate paternalism in gang culture. For example, I examine rapper Jay-Rock as a hip-hop social father figure who utilizes fatherhood narratives to exhort Black youth to avoid the perils of gang life. Moreover, the chapter centers on hip-hop stories of fatherless sons who connect their low self-esteem and vulnerability to media-based stereotypes to the absence of their patriarchs. In some instances, the emcees as sons react to their father-lacking with acts of aggressive and homophobic behaviors. Having said that, the chapter includes an example of a fatherhood narrative that asserts adolescent males can overcome the trauma of father loss through reconnecting with an estranged father.

Lastly, the chapter centers on issues of intergenerational and transgenerational trauma reflected in hip-hop lyrics. Explicitly, I explore the impact of substance and domestic abuse passed down in father-son relationships. The narratives examine sons who despise their fathers' negative conduct; yet, they repeat the behaviors in their adult life. The sons appear unable to overcome male socializations derived from their fathered experience.

Chapter 4: Tangled in Anansi's Web of Father-Lacking Trauma and Dysfunctional Co-Parenting

Imagine going to court with no trial/
Lifestyle cruising blue behind my waters/
No welfare supporters, more conscious of the way we raise our daughters – Nas “If I ruled the world”

The fact that so many Black fathers weren't expected to be involved speaks to the underlying “father bias” that exists in the larger society and often discourages men from playing such roles.... I've found myself offended, for example, on the occasions that folk assume that the time I put in with my daughter is somehow an aberration. (Neal 108)

Black men loving their mothers, especially when/if their fathers are absent, is expected and celebrated in the Black community. Even the music of self-described thugs puts their mamas on a pedestal. Baby mamas? Not so much. (Cooper 25-26)

Deep in the underbelly of slave ships, Africans stripped naked managed to smuggle their spider-god Anansi and all his stories. While Anansi, the trickster deity has evolved in African American folklore into other exotic animals like Brer Rabbit; he continues inspiring his worshippers to resist and subvert authority. His weapon of choice—the spoken word—consists of signifying language to enable his listeners to overcome powerful oppressive forces. Ergo, in African American folklore, the trickster serves a crucial function to the storyteller and listener alike enduring the “changing same” of American life. According to Lawrence W. Levine in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*:

...to the world of African and Afro-American tales, the animals inhabiting these tales...were almost thoroughly humanized. The world they lived in, the rules they lived by, the emotions that governed them, the status they craved, the taboos they feared, the prizes they struggled to attain were those of the men and women who lived in this world. The beings that

came to life in these stories were so created as to be human enough to be identified with but at the same time exotic enough to allow both storytellers and listeners a latitude and freedom that came only with much more difficulty and daring in tales explicitly concerning human beings (103-104)

The excerpt above shows African/African American folklore derives from the human condition. Today, the marginalized other acts as a human trickster orchestrating identity to reach “the prizes” in America. Assuredly, some subjects clothe themselves in gender and racial stereotype to undermine or transcend constraints placed by mainstream society. Others look through imperial eyes, seeing education or economic status as a way to fully assimilate into their sought-after restricted authoritative space. Nonetheless, the trickster identity stays bifurcated between the planes of reality and exoticism. Borrowing from Levine’s concept of “exotic” both storyteller and listener quest “daring in tales” for freedom of the self-hoods; nevertheless, their journey is oftentimes “determined by their situation.”

In this chapter, rappers who are fathers struggle to free themselves from addictive aspects of white capitalist patriarchy to defend their daughters from the destructive forces of male dominance. For instance, in Nas’ “Daughters,” his female child burgeoning sexuality and romantic relationships make him acutely aware of his shortcomings as a father. As a self-proclaimed player, Nas’ lyrics read like a trickster tale where the protagonist “pimp shit,” or ploys for womanly affection comes back to haunt him. Undeniably, this is quite a feat considering in *New Black Man*, Neal rightfully contends:

Young men often see hip-hop as a haven to articulate their frustrations

with women—girlfriends, mothers, baby-mamas, groupies—but they are rarely capable of turning the critique upon themselves in order to interrogate their own roles in creating and maintaining dysfunctional relationships with women. (158)

Nas' "Daughters" is a rare hip-hop track where the rap narrator critiques himself for creating dysfunction in the lives of womankind. Historically in African American literature, the trickster uses signifying language to outwit a dominant oppressive force. However, in this narrative, the trickster signifies on himself and other male tricksters. By observing his daughter succumb to a younger player's rhetoric, the narrator questions his past behaviors of using capital and status to seduce women into illicit sexual affairs. Without question, Nas' track functions as a story within a story. Typically, males in hip-hop culture celebrate womanizers who show a nonchalant attitude towards lovers. However, Nas, status as player and father, causes the listening players to "interrogate their own roles in creating dysfunctional relationships" with all womankind. Explicitly, Nas utilizes the players' discourse as a cautionary tale for fathers who are Casanovas. That said, female rappers also use the trickster motif in their cautionary stories.

Traditionally, male rap artists' depictions of Black female trickster summons memories of antebellum caricatures of African American women as the "Jezebel." In "Stereotypes of Black American Women Related to Sexuality and Motherhood" Lisa Rosenthal and Marci Lobel writes:

...the sexualized exploitation of Black women during slavery and are consistent with the "Jezebel" archetype. Black American women also continue to be stereotyped as poor, uneducated, young, single mothers

who sleep with and use men for money (“gold diggers”).

Male artists’ narratives continue showing destitute Black women as female tricksters bartering their dignity and sexuality to undermine their so-called rightful position as patriarchal head. Moreover, these images do not account the naturalistic forces affecting urban life such as wage gaps, discrimination, sexual assaults, and harassment which hurt Black women. Additionally, some male artists’ gross misperceptions of women of color perpetuates right-wing media-based clichés of Black female identity. In my database, female rappers Angel Haze and Tink’s narrative unmask the so-called trickster. Both emcees’ stories center on fatherless daughters suffering as victims rather than willing participants in sexoeconomics. In addition, the protagonists exemplify the fatherless daughter or fatherless woman syndrome, a disorder some women endure as result of a dysfunctional or non-existent relationship with a father. Scholar Jonetta Rose Barras writes “Fatherless Woman Syndrome” is:

rooted in the feelings of being fundamentally unworthy and unlovable...these feelings wind about and lead to chronic rage, anger, and depression that are rooted in our fear of abandonment rejection, or commitment...Many seek to salve the father wounds through “sexual healing,” engaging in the extremeness of promiscuity or anti-intimate behavior, either of which can worsen the situation. (6)

In the passage above, fatherless daughters become victims of trauma and male abuse oftentimes stemming from their first interactions with a male—their fathers. Scholar, Joan Morgan in her iconic text, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost* supports this contention, she writes:

Black America is quickly becoming a nation of fatherless daughters...The statistics do not begin to tell our stories—the daughters who’ve had violence, imprisonment, illness, addiction, depression or abandonment rob them of fathers both—physically and emotionally (122).

Likewise, Barras’ text asserts, the absence of a loving male relationship causes some adolescent and young women to exhibit problematic emotional behaviors. The excerpt further implies women of color are not innately hypersexual or sexually wanton in fact some women consider “sexual healing” as an escape from the trauma of father-lacking. The female artists use dysfunctional father-daughter relationships to generate empathy for women enduring multiple traumas linked to patriarchal dominance. Their narratives signify upon male rappers’ tales of the “gold digger,” and the “thot” (that hoe over there) by articulating the silence suffering of the vixen oftentimes muted in male artists’ discourse. I contend, the protagonists as subjects of these narratives exhibit Rice’s identity stasis concept of burden of proof. For both storyteller and listener, these life stories “negotiate a stereotype imposed” by Black males and white patriarchal norms “to both confirm and disconfirm as correct or incorrect” (64). In addition to the “Jezebel” stereotype, hip-hop culture addresses the strong Black woman schema (SBW) a conventional image of the “Sapphire,” a caricature of the Black female as emasculator.

War Over the Seeds: Identity Construction Influenced by Negative Co-Parenting

The perfect storm of the quintessential “deadbeat” father versus “the strong Black women or “baby mama” arises from negative factors linked to master narratives of African American identity. As mentioned in earlier chapters, African American fathers

still struggle with the stereotype of the “deadbeat dad” despite countless research that proves otherwise. In these stories, paternal identity functions as a negotiated space often manipulated by Black women and white institutions of power. In this chapter, I explore constructions of Black male identity influenced by maternal gatekeeping, undermining, and conflicts in unwed liaisons.

Consequently, some male artists depict “baby mothers” as money-hungry antagonists who use child support and the court system to exhort their capital or interfere with the relationship with their children. Again, these images of Black mothers/women find its origins in the plantation mythology of “the “Sapphire.” According to Rosenthal and Lobel:

The mammy archetype is the image of an unattractive Black mother who is strong and content in her caregiving role for many children, in the service of White slave owners or White employers. The “Sapphire” (or “matriarch”) archetype is the image of an aggressive, dominating, angry, emasculating Black woman.

Hip-hop culture continues to perpetuate the racial stereotype of the Black woman as the overbearing matriarch. In many rap songs, baby mamas do not allow the male parent to exercise parental rights considered solely her domain. Other rap tracks depict African American women as a hybrid of the “Jezebel” and the “Sapphire.” In these instances, the female parents use their sexuality to control the other parent. If he rejects her she exploits her position as mother to get the police or court to do her bidding. Ergo, the baby mama becomes the root cause of dysfunction in some African American families. In *Hip-hop Wars*, Rose suggests male rappers recycle aspects of the Moynihan Report

asserting “Black female-led families as pathological” (68). This racist and sexist depiction of Black mothers is inaccurate and problematic on multiple levels. Without question, some mothers show father bias and engage in maternal gatekeeping popularized in an American society that consider patriarchs as solely financial silent partners. Nevertheless, some Black women feel the need to adopt a strong Black woman schema as a form of protection because of multifaceted socio-political and historical factors. In this battle of the sexes, the future of African American families lies in the balance.

Hip-hop lyricism, specifically in fatherhood narratives, reflects the current state of negative co-parenting in many Black families. In *the Hip-hop Generation*, scholar Bakari Kitwana highlights rap “expressions like ‘baby momma’ and ‘baby daddy’ signify unwed liaisons and some form of parental alienation (115-116). He further contends the expression signals the demise of the romantic relationship, “the bitterness that things didn’t work out; or hostility between the parents. Moreover, he argues the contempt is exacerbated by “child support enforcement laws” or “anger mother feels over the disappearance of a child’s father or jealousy over new relationships” (116-117). Notably, hip-hop storytellers construct the Black family as a battleground for the warring clans of fathers confronting mothers (and vice versa) for control of the children. The latter half of the chapter entitled “baby mama drama” centers on negative co-parenting relationships. Specifically, I explore narratives addressing maternal gatekeeping, undermining, and conflicts in unwed liaisons. The image of fatherhood is fearful, rebellious, and adversarial to Black women. While in narratives written by men African American women become emasculators and gold diggers using child support as a weapon. In *Hip-hop Wars*, Rose contends:

Hip-hop is known for embracing certain “strict-father” –based conservative values, such as a patriarchal, aggressive, sometimes violent masculinity; and priority is given to individualism and personal success over community empowerment. (107).

These fatherhood narratives are the latest incarnations of African American literature to illustrate the conflict and dysfunction in some marginalized co-parenting relationships. Furthermore, I argue the hip-hop narratives advocate for African American parents to tap into the spirit of Anansi by retelling and reimagining their identities outside of the Western gaze. As the chapter begins, I consider it apropos to end the introduction with another quote from Rose: “Both parents should be sharing the duties and responsibilities attached to parenting, and obstacles that interfere with this joint project should be removed” (70).

The Player's Curse: The Anxiety of Fathering

In his early years as an emcee, Nas' songs like “Poppa Was a Playa,” and “Fetus,” concentrated on his father’s misogynistic conduct and how it shaped his identity. Like his dad, jazz musician Olu Dara, Nas labeled by many as the greatest rapper of all time; is also well known to be a “player” and a “ladies man” within the music industry. Nonetheless, in Nas’ “Daughters” he evaluates his own sexist attitudes against women and its traumatic effects on his family. Additionally, the narrative illustrates his paternal anxieties of raising his daughter, Destiny. Without question, the song illustrates how a productive father-daughter bond has the power to disrupt a generational curse of misogynistic behavior.

In “Daughters,” Nas ponders if he is experiencing the “player's curse” when his

daughter's indiscretions with a love interest become public. To clarify, the player's curse in hip-hop culture is when a womanizer patriarch has a female child. Ironically, the dads' expose their daughters to misogynistic behaviors they later fear their daughters may fall victim to:

...she was taught and raised like
 A princess, but while I'm on stage I can't leave her defenseless
 Plus, she's seen me switching women, pops was on some pimp shit
 She heard stories of her daddy thuggin'
 So if her husband is a gangster can't be mad, I'll love him
 Never, for her I want better, homie in jail dead that

Here, Nas' fatherhood narrative articulates the fear of “the player's curse” manifesting itself in his daughter’s life. Possibly, Nas narrates in first-person to create correspondence and a sense of empathy with other fathers. Notably, his somber tone and anxious delivery place emphasis on his frustration with Destiny's relationship with a convict. Markedly, he employs the literary device of flashback and past tense in his lyrics to show his self-reflection. The line “she was taught and raised like a princess” shows as a dad he embraced white capitalist patriarchy. Specifically, the term “princess” suggests he placed his daughter on a pedestal, treated her like royalty or a fairytale damsel in distress. Although this conduct may be well-intentioned, it promotes the male chauvinistic fantasy womankind must be protected by a male figure. In fact, Nas emphasizes this in the “while I'm on stage I can't leave her defenseless.” In contrast, the emcee opposing identities as “the thug,” “the gangster” and romantic trickster upholds another type of male dominance. He illustrates his allegiance to hip-hop Black cultural

identity as he boasts about “switching women” and “thuggin.” Initially, Nas maintained identity stasis via unadulterated presentation of self by linking Black cultural symbolism with mainstream values. However, his daughter’s interest in the opposite sex has caused him to experience identity imbalance. Explicitly, Nas term “dead that” signifies he has become acutely aware his performance of masculinity is problematic and has a corrosive influence on his child. Without question, the lines didactically convey to marginalized Black fathers the role of protector, does not supersede a father's responsibility to nurture. Indeed, Nas’ lyrics suggest he realizes his hyper-masculine image formed his daughter’s perception of maleness.

Despite his attempts to insulate Destiny from negative male attention through education, the teenager romantic escapades became the fodder for celebrity gossip columnists on social media. It is plausible, this event causes Nas to question his fathering. In detail, he contemplates if his failures are a result of the player's curse:

At this point I realized I ain't the strictest parent

I'm too loose, I'm too cool with her

...

I thought I dropped enough jewels on her

...

They grow fast, one day she's ya little princess

...

They say the coolest playas and foulest heart breakers in the world

God gets us back, he makes us have precious little girls

The lyrics “At this point I realized I ain't the strictest parent/I'm too loose, I'm too cool

with her” illustrate Nas employed a laissez-faire or permissive parenting approach in his fathering of Destiny. The fact, he is “too cool” or liberal with Destiny implies as a father he did not instill discipline and guidance during her formative years. Considering, Nas’ career as a musician and seeing his father’s womanizing lifestyle as a jazz artist; it is plausible he deemed this parental method as an ideal way to establish comradery with a daughter at times he rarely got to see. Undeniably, the rapping narrator aware of his imbalanced identity questions his mimicry of American patriarchal values. For instance, the rapper fortifies his masculine role as the provider represented by symbols of opulence like “princess” and “jewels.” Nevertheless, Destiny’s burgeoning love life brings about Nas’ awareness he did not drop “enough jewels on her.” The lyrics lead to the belief he regrets not educating and giving boundaries to inform Destiny’s choice in a romantic partner. Considering, the word “jewels” have a double connotation in hip-hop lingo as precious stones and words of wisdom. Nas’ narrative shows his perception of a provider as a giver of luxury items or words of encouragement is quite finite. Many fathers see their role as a provider as solely from an economic standpoint. Oftentimes, some fathers perceive extrinsic gifts as the proxy for emotional bonding with a child. Many Black male’s emulation American patriarchy leaves them feeling less competent as fathers. In addition, the rap narrator interrogates the significance of stereotypical Black male image as the “coolest playa and foulest heartbreaker.” His lyrics suggest, “foul heartbreakers” meaning fathers engaging in womanizing and misogynist behavior causes the great harm to the identity formation of daughters. Hence, these tricksters of womanly affection are bound to experience karma via their children relationships. Ergo, the player curse is a continuous cycle of flawed masculinity negatively impacting womanhood.

In the concluding lines, Nas orchestrates his identity to become a more understanding and nurturing father. Without question, the rap narrator achieves identity stasis per Rice's concept of Acute Identity Expression. In other words, the patriarch/protagonist enduring an intense moment of clarity comes to terms with his own strengths and weaknesses which authenticates him as a man. Undeniably, the rap narrator's identity crisis makes him aware of the suffering of womankind and the double standards of male/female sexuality in Black and mainstream communities:

And I ain't tryna mess ya thing up
 But I just wanna see you dream up
 I finally understand
 It ain't easy to raise a girl as a single man
 No, the way mothers feel for they sons
 How fathers feel for they daughters
 When he date, he straight, chip off his own papa
 When she date, we wait behind the door with the sawed off
 Cause we think no one is good enough for our daughters
 Love

Nas' lyrics suggest he does not desire to interfere with his daughter's love affairs. Thus, he does not want to control or limit her selfhood. Nonetheless, the rapper wishes for Destiny to elevate her standards when choosing a suitable partner. While Nas embraces the traditional role of the Western protector with a "sawed off;" he reconstructs his father identity to become a nurturer for his daughter. Nas comparisons of mother-son relationships to father-daughter bonds imply he acknowledges the double standard in

fathers raising girls. He realizes this chasm can only be resolved through “love.” In other words, Nas’ lyrics imply fathers must place more emphasis on instilling intrinsic values such as understanding and love. This mode of thinking is quite revolutionary considering the sharing of emotions and vulnerability is not traditionally celebrated in hip-hop without the guise of thug persona. In truth, Nas lyrics embody hip-hop expert, Dion Chavis, fatherly sentiments in *Be a Father to Your Child*, he writes:

So today as a man...I am doing everything in my power to make sure that I am here to raise my child. Times have changed, and the messages in most of today’s music don’t line up with the morals and values that are needed to raise a child. I must be there for my daughter as much as I can. As a child of Hip-hop and a child of the struggle, it is my duty to make sure that she has the core values of the culture instilled in her. (143-144)

Indeed, Nas’ trickster tale “Daughters” challenge dads to look beyond racial and mainstream performances of maleness in the rearing of children. Alternately, the lyrics inspire the listeners to wield the transformative power of the culture to redefine Black male identity and change the legacy for our daughters’ sake.

Tink – Strip Club: She Got It from Her Daddy

Chicago female emcee, Tink’s rap narrative “StripClub” combination of the sacred and profane images of Black womanhood, the mama, and stripper, challenges hip-hop Black males’ gaze. Like the player’s curse, some Black dads measure the success of their parenting based on their daughters’ ability to avoid sexual objectification in a male-dominated society. In Natalie Hopkinson and Natalie Y. Moore’s *Deconstructing Tyrone*, the scholars write the “new standard for Black fatherhood has been set; call it the ‘pole

test” (105). Comedian Chris Rock coined the term “pole test” in a comedy routine in which the entertainer measured the success of a father based on his daughter’s sexual behavior. Ergo a father who has a daughter who strips on a stripper pole is viewed as a poor dad. Here, I apply Hopkinson and Moore’s writings as a retort to these men, “But seriously, who are these men? Strippers are almost never allotted a high degree of character development whether before the camera or on the stage” (107). Likewise, in hip-hop narratives by male artists mothers appear as one-dimensional, asexual “Sapphires” whose life is totally absorbed in the lives of her children. In “Decent Daddy, Imperfect Daddy” scholar Matthew Oware contends, male rappers depict their mothers “as nurturers” who “dote over their sons, foisting unconditional love upon them despite their actions or behaviors” (341). Considering male emcees through narrative depict women in the sex industry as mindless, money hungry “Jezebels” and mothers as sacred demigods. Tink coalescence of these antithetical images of the mother and stripper is quite profound in her song “StripClub.”

“StripClub” a story about a teenage stripper seeking male attention serves as an example of the traumatic effects of paternal absenteeism on the identity formation of adolescent girls. The third-person fictional account illustrates the fatherless woman syndrome affecting many poverty-stricken teenagers. The unnamed protagonist shows signs of low self-esteem or self-worth because of growing up in an emotionless and negligent environment. Lamentably, the fatherless daughter looks to escape conditioning through misguided sexual healing. Tink raps, “Never had love from her father/All she needed was attention (attention), attention (attention)/ Nineteen had a little baby.” In the lines, the daughter’s unrequited love for the father and male attention (repeated

throughout the line) may serve as the impetus to the teen having a child at an early age. Ill-prepared to handle the rigors of parenthood, the text shows the teenager's quest for fatherhood leads to a life of sexual exploitation. Arguably, Tink's "StripClub" signifies upon the image of the matriarch and stripper to uncover the female trickster motif popularized in most male rap narratives.

Like Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Tink employs the grotesque to deconstruct both mythologies of "Sapphire," the stereotypical "strong Black mother" and "Jezebel" the "gold-digging" stripper. According to Miles White, "The appropriation of the Black body as the grotesque Other may be a contradictory impulse of attraction and repulsion on one hand advanced cultural modernism in artistic movement but that, on the other hand, marked the Black body in white as always discordant, incongruous, and decontextualized" (15). The image of "Sapphire" and "Jezebel" has given visibility to marginalized womankind. Undoubtedly, hip-hop has revised the Moynihan depiction of the Black mother as the "tangled of pathology" to a sacred status. Moreover, the stripper image has come to be viewed by some as space where women can exercise autonomy over of their body and sexuality. Nevertheless, hip-hop's modified "Sapphire" is still denied agency, considered asexual, and is incongruous to progressive womanhood. In contrast, the "Jezebel" stays merely a guilty pleasure simultaneously admired and vilified under the male gaze. This is revealed in the following hip-hop lyrics:

Dropped out of school just to raise it

...

But now she's at the red diamond, every weekend she shining

Trying to make ends for the kid (no-no, no-no, yeah-yeah)

Paying for tuition with her body
 Popping "X" pills in the lobby
 Don't wanna remember what she did
 What she did that night oh-no

In the excerpt, the protagonist achieves identity stasis as the mother and stripper. Her dilemma of father-lacking and poor education coupled with her physical attractiveness has made her conscious of her bifurcated identity. Notably, the teenage mother retains her position as *strong Black matriarch* by making ends “for the kid.” Yet, she upholds the stereotype of “Jezebel” by “paying for tuition with her body” and “shining every weekend at the red diamond.” Tink’s depiction of a mother is both loathsome and empathetic. Plausibly, Tink’s use of the grotesque exposes the psychological pain of the teenage mom who must “[pop] ‘X’ pills in the lobby” to endure sexual objectification. The fact the unnamed character wants to forget what she “did that night” proves the cognitive dissonance she endures by assuming this identity. Without question, the protagonist’s quest for her father’s attention and her financial needs has led her to a career in the sex industry. Moreover, the protagonist’s male clients give her the male validation she missed from her father. Additionally, Tink’s chorus epitomizes the intergenerational trauma of fatherlessness suffered by some African American fatherless daughters.

Ultimately, Tink’s chorus to “Stripclub” manifest the unnamed protagonist’s re-creating her childhood trauma in her adult life. This is illustrated in the following:

20 years old and she ain’t got time to play
 Baby daddy gone, money getting low

...

Stripclub (yeah-yeah) Now she living at the stripclub

Here, parenthood is presented as a marker of doom (“no time to play”) stripping innocence and selfhood from female adolescents. Notice, Tink’s line “Baby daddy gone” show the nameless narrator’s choice in romantic relationships will give birth to another cycle of fatherlessness for the next generation. Without question, Tink’s “StripClub” illustrates the negative impact of fatherlessness on female adolescent identity formation.

The Remix Angel Haze’s Bitch Bad: Fatherless to Option less

Again, I revisit Angel Haze’s “Bitch bad” this time to assess how the trauma of fatherlessness is oftentimes re-created in a victim’s adult romantic relationships. The emcee signifies upon the traditional male rap narrative of the single Black mother as a “welfare queen” and “Jezebel.” Instead, Haze’s narrative unmask the female trickster motif to confirm the devastating effects of Black male emulating white capitalist patriarchy on marginalized Black women. Haze’s “Bitch Bad” examines a mother conflicted relationship with an abusive man. Like Anne Petry’s *The Street*, Haze’s young matriarch is vulnerable to sexuo-economic relations prevalent in marginalized communities:

Now imagine that there’s a shorty

Fatherless or optionless

Grinding from checks depositing

Trying to get on public housing list

Mother meets a man with ample amount of funds

But in order to get that she's gotta give 'em some

So he treats her like a beats her like a

Cleans her up and keeps her like a

Screams and yells then seats her like a

Like a bitch

Here, Haze portrays her character as “fatherless and option less.” The phrase implies young women growing up without the guidance of a loving male figure are susceptible to forging loving relationships with men to fulfill their fatherneed. Some fatherless young mother may view abusive paramours as surrogate father figures if they can offer financial stability and protection. In the quotation, Haze describes her character as “grinding” which indicates she is a hardworking individual. Moreover, the emcee image of the protagonist “trying to get on public housing list” illuminates her struggle to survive the squalor of lower-class life. Indeed, she is a struggling mother. Arguably, Haze’s characterization of the nameless matriarch as “fatherless and option less” suggests the trauma of fatherlessness had deep psychological ramifications on the character adulthood development. Hence, the unnamed mother choosing a man not solely because he “has ample funds” disrupt the hip-hop mythology of the gold digger. Instead, it points out the protagonist’s desire to fulfill her paternal void. Haze’s multiple similes like “treats her like,” “beats her likes,” “seats her like” demonstrates the unnamed matriarch equates the controlling and dominating actions of her lover with fatherhood. Conversely, the unnamed matriarch’s lack of autonomy and selfhood is connected to her history of fatherlessness and sexuo-economic dynamics. Haze’s character relationship with the abuser renders her in an infantile state of existence. Having absolute economic control and power, the abuser as patriarch treats her like a “bitch.” Hence, she becomes an

object—the commodity--property of an abusive coward. Undoubtedly, Haze's construction of fatherlessness and abusive patriarchy suggests the trauma of paternal absenteeism has far-reaching and lasting effects on our most defenseless citizens. By unmasking the image of the female trickster; the reader can fully observe the damaging effects of American patriarchy on womanhood. Although Haze does not give the male suitor voice; it is apparent he has assumed toxic masculinity as authentic maleness. His actions of domination illustrate his need for control and authority which fortifies and reveals the fragility of his masculinity.

The final segment of the chapter explores father-child relationships disrupted by negative co-parenting. Many of the most problematic and venomous hip-hop fatherhood narrative center on dysfunctional co-parenting often described in lyrical stories as “baby mama drama.” In hip-hop culture, “baby mama drama” is an antagonistic co-parenting relationship usually between unwed couples where confrontation is manifested through gatekeeping, undermining, and conflicts. Scholars like Rebecca Kauffman, Jay Fagan, and Ronald Mincy contend fatherhood is a negotiated space governed by relational as well as socio-political forces. Ergo, fathers that have a negative communication with the mothers of the child or children are more likely to face obstacles that may strain the father-child bond. While there are several examples of “baby mama drama” in hip-hop lyricism; the following section will offer brief examples of these fatherhood narratives to explore constructions of Black masculinity and fatherhood.

Baby Mama Drama

Gatekeeping: A “Letter to My Son”

In “Letter to My Son,” Don Trip constructs fatherhood as a negotiated space

governed by the emotional whims of the “baby momma.” Don Trip's narrative gives the most visceral and emblematic account on gatekeeping affecting African American fathering. In the article “Paternal Identity, Maternal Gatekeeping, and Father Involvement,” Brent McBride defines “maternal gatekeeping” as a mother’s refusal “to relinquish family responsibility [to a father] by setting rigid standards (362).” Moreover, he contends these mothers “desire to validate a maternal identity and differentiated conceptions of family roles.” Underneath his mask of bravado, Don Trip employs sarcasm to shroud his paternal challenges as he unfolds his first-person narrative about his experience dealing with gatekeeping:

Please, no pity for a G
 Though I’ve got a son that I barely get to see
 ...
 Yea, right, lucky me
 Well fuck Keltra Pope and whoever disagrees

Markedly, Don Trip’s first line “no pity for a G” meaning “gangsta” sets up his bifurcated identity as a gangsta and a loving father. He preserves his loyalty to Black masculine identity as “gangsta” while at the same he bucks the stereotype of the deadbeat dad. Particularly for many disenfranchised Black males, gatekeeping is considered an affront to Black masculinity from both a relational and socio-political standpoint. Many African American patriarchs take this viewpoint because according to Joan Morgan:

Men’s anxieties and doubts about parenting are dismissed...as illegitimate and irresponsible behavior. Furthermore, [fathers are] legally denied all the options granted to an expectant mother...he can’t abdicate his parent

rights without the mother's consent and he must pay child support. (173)

As rap narrator, he acts as a human trickster because his "G" persona allows him to expose his vulnerabilities to socio-political forces without suffering the indignities of the everyman. For example, the line "fuck, Keltra Pope," empowers the emcee to vent his frustrations with his child's mother without losing his sense of maleness. Additionally, the line "Yea, right, lucky me" can be read as a sarcastic retort to mainstream society depiction of dads as "deadbeats." Consequently, many marginalized dads engage in underground economies to dispute this fallacy.

Undeniably, Don Trip's construction of patriarchy is akin to what Homi Bhabba would describe as colonial mimicry, as he can only embody a partial representation of American patriarchy. In addition to historical oppression, many low-income Black fathers cannot fully take part in white capital patriarchy simply because they lack the means. As said before, this brand of masculinity proves toxic; yet some Black males feel compelled to emulate this system. Although, the rap narrator uses money as a status symbol, his position as patriarch is compromised because it is reached through the Black market. This is illustrated in the following:

Apparently, I'm an unfit father, cause all I know is dope
 And all I got is dirty dollars
 But I'm selling dope to help my family get farther
 Cause no 9 to 5 is gonna prevent us from starving

In the quotation, above, Don Trip employs the adverb "apparently" to change his stereotypical label as "unfit father" (per mainstream standards) and as a marker of his masculine/paternal identity. Don Trip's use of the cultural signifier of "unfit father"

highlights the social conditions that shape his paternal identity. The line, “all I know is dope and all I got is dirty dollars” illustrate the lack of good paying employment opportunities coerces him to provide via drug trade. Also, the lyrics imply for the low-income father social mobility is an illusion because “no 9 to 5” will allow him to properly support his son. Thus, Trip’s narrative implies as a poor Black dad he exists on the fringes of poverty and illegal activity. Consequently, the stigma of his existence plays an integral role in his interpretation of court decisions about his fathers’ rights. In his urban parable, Black mothers and the court systems are a powerful tandem intervening in the low-income dad’s quest for patriarchy.

Like literary works from the Black Arts Movements, Don Trip’s lyricism portrays the mother of his child as an “emasculator” and a “manipulator.” Moreover, his rhyme shows her using a white oppressive court system to limit his rights as a father. Notably, the rapping narrator vilifies his baby mama as a modern-day “Sapphire” displacing him from his child’s life:

All this bullshit I’m going through to see my first child
 See his first steps. See his first smile. Hear his first words. Teach him
 how to count
 But I guess I’ve been counted out, seeing as, the bitch don’t want me
 around
 When I speak to him, he don’t recognize the sound
 I know she enjoys it, so I suck it up an smile

Arguably, the lyrics angry tone and zero copula capture the pathos of a non-residential father struggling to establish a parental bond. The alliterative “s” and the repetition of the

word “first” in phrases like “see his first step” sheds light on the trauma experienced by alienated dads. Even though, the rap narrator presents himself as “gangsta” father; the latter half of his self cannot shroud his suffering. Despite the fact, he attempts denying it in the line “I suck it up and smile.” The trickster mask begins to slip as he laments the tandem of the baby mama and court system:

And your mama's low down

She's just doing everything to hurt me right now

...

She don't understand that this shit will bruise you too

And now I gotta take the bitch to court, so either way, it's a lose – lose

I tried talking to the bitch, but she keeps using you as a bargaining chip

...

Why you with this shit? Cause I ain't read you no vows?

Here, Trip dubs his child's mother as “low down” meaning “cunning” or “spiteful” for using maternal gatekeeping as a form of retaliation for their failed relationship. In the fifth line, Trip helplessly declares that going to court to resolve the dispute would result in a “lose-lose” for him and his child. Plausibly, this is because traditional nuclear families are the gold standard for the dominant culture. In addition, *When the Chickheads Come Home to Roost* reveals, “As a society we've moved from the notion of wives and children as property as experience during common law, to the notion of children as mother's property. Instead of making mother second-class citizens, we make fathers second-class citizens by arguing that they're optional” (178). In cases of unwed couples, most courts hold on to antiquated belief systems that deem mothers as the

natural caregivers. Ergo, Trip's narrative suggests most courts tend to side with mothers in child custody cases. Moreover, his narrative implies most mothers are cognizant of this belief system and utilize their children "as a bargaining chip" to receive child support and restrict visitation time. In some instances, mothers utilize these tactics as revenge for the failed romantic relationship Trip supports this contention, in the lines "Why you with this shit? Cause I ain't read you no vows?" The profanity-laced rant expresses the pain, frustration, and anxiety of a father enduring the politics of co-parenting. Here, Trip's claim to never submit to his baby mama or the court system hearkens back to the badman in African American folklore. For instance, characters such as Stagolee or Shine vow to never show pain or vulnerability to oppressive forces as a form of defiance. Without question, Don Trip's construction of the father expands beyond racial stereotype; however, it still reinforces toxic masculinity as authentic maleness.

Indeed, Don Trip's narrative symbolizes the struggles of many marginalized African American fathers who must swim (like Shine) against the currents of racial and gender prejudices. Notwithstanding, it is essential to note, in the rap story the mother of his child lacks a voice. In fact, she is a caricature of Black female identity. What may be thought as maternal gatekeeping can also be looked at as a mother protecting her child from a parent engaging in nefarious acts. Although later in the narrative the rap narrator shows potential to evolve as a father by contemplating abandoning a life of crime to go to school; yet his feeling of the baby mama has yet to develop. This construction of Black parenthood is indeed problematic. Once again, for maternal gatekeeping to become taken seriously with segments of the African American community the narratives of Black mothers will have to change as well. In the next segment, I explore maternal

undermining in hip-hop lyricism and its influence on the construction of African American fatherhood.

Unmasking the Reality of Maternal Undermining for a Role Reversal of Fatherhood

Several hip-hop songs like Nipsey Hussle's "Reality," and "Tyga's "Dad Letter" features correlations between maternal undermining of Black fathers and parental alienation. Oftentimes in these fatherhood narratives, the dad's perspective is silenced, justifying a mothers' claim for the separation between the patriarch and child. Tyga's "Dad Letter" is an example of the "parental alienation syndrome" where a mom directly undermines a son's attempt to forge a relationship with his father. According to Jayne A. Major in the article "Parental Alienation Syndrome,"

In the *moderate* category of parental alienation are conflicting parents who exercise little control over their anger and go ballistic when they are upset, without any consideration of how their anger affects other family members.

In Tyga's song, the rapper's mother humiliates his attempt to reconnect with his estranged father. In the lyrics below, the matriarch exhibits moderate category of parental alienation. Without question, the mother does not consider the effect his behavior has on her son:

Dream of meeting you dad
Moms really getting mad when I call you that
I don't understand
your phone numbers all I ask

She laughs with her jaw dropped like the movie Mask

Tyga's lyrics reveal a potential constructive relationship with his father would be considered an affront to his mother. Notice the emcee's juxtaposition of the alliterative "d" for words like "dream" and "dad" with the alliterative "m" in words such as "moms" and "mad." Without question, the words underline Tyga's desire to forge a relationship with his father and his mother's aspiration to disrupt this bond. Not only does Tyga's lyrics convey his mother's "little control" over her anger; her "ballistic" reaction to Tyga's request for his father's phone number reveals she does not consider the impact her behavior has on his psyche. In fact, Tyga's description of his mother's laughter as menacing as "The Mask," insinuates his mother is behaving in an outlandish manner. Ultimately, she deflates his esteem and longing to associate with his father. This is clear when one considers "The Mask" is an anti-hero based on the shape-shifting, Norse God, Loki who utilizes mischief and trickery to debase the Gods. Arguably, Tyga utilizes this simile to signify his mother's tactics of deceit and foolishness to discourage him from setting up a bond with his dad. One may embrace the position the matriarch is simply trying to protect her son from being hurt by his absentee dad. Nonetheless, Tyga's mother's vexation over his want to acknowledge and converse with his father illustrates she devalues the rapper's patriarch. Hence, Tyga's "Dad's Letter" shows how some mothers fracture the bonds between fathers and their children to uphold their parental position. In contrast to Tyga's "Dad's; Letter," rapper Joe Budden employs a compassionate tone in his fatherhood narrative centered on maternal gatekeeping and undermining.

Joe Budden's "Role Reversal" is a rare account where a surrogate or step-father

shows empathy towards an estranged biological dad. In most instances, biological dads and surrogate father figures tend to have strained relationships because of negative co-parenting. Scholar, Ronald Mincy posits, “re-partnering by mothers and fathers reduces father involvement with and without new children. This is probably because re-partnering...create competing priorities in ways that lead to co-parenting problems and gatekeeping” (96). In other words, custodial parents who “re-partner” tend to perceive their paramour as a replacement parent which supersedes the position of the non-residential parent. The guardian parent’s romantic relationship with the step or surrogate creates this feeling. Unfortunately, some custodial parents develop a toxic competitive environment in which the biological/non-residential parent becomes alienated from his or her child. In Budden’s song, the artist as protagonist and surrogate father-figure defends the non-residential biological dad because he too is a victim of maternal gatekeeping. The rap narrator juxtaposes his surrogate fathering with his biological fathering experience to illustrate how he has been undermined as a patriarch:

Lookin from the outside may seem like you neglect him

But when he slips up and calls me "dad," I correct him

I protect him

When baby girl start ventin about you, I say "respect him"

And though it seems out of order

My own mistakes have turned me into your biggest supporter

Notice, the lyrics feature the dropping of the final constant g in words like “lookin” and “ventin.” Perhaps, Budden utilizes this feature of AAVE to establish linguistic convergence as a storyteller with the non-residential dad and the listening audience. The

narrative presents the rap narrator identity stasis as acute identity expression. By witnessing the non-residential father's experience with maternal gatekeeping and acknowledging his own mistakes, Budden has become acutely aware of his identity as an estranged patriarch. For example, in the line "Lookin from outside" the protagonist recognizes the non-residential father has been alienated because of being perceived as an absentee "deadbeat." Moreover, the line "baby girl start ventin" shows the emcee recognizes his girlfriend's employment of negative language to undermine the biological dad is problematic. While the rapper actively takes part in his stepson's life as a protector; he preserves the unnamed dad's position by asking that the mother of the child refrain from undermining the male parent. Instead of joining in the "baby girl" "ventin" session, Joe urges the mother to show "respect" to the biological father to avoid tainting her son's perspective. Additionally, the emcee affirms the natural father's position of the patriarch by correcting his stepson when he calls Budden his dad. The rapper position as the biological father's "biggest supporter" stems from his fathering experiences where the mother of his child undermines him.

As the narrative continues, Budden depicts the mother of his child as a modern-day "Sapphire" who emasculates and interferes with his position as patriarch. Moreover, his lyrics suggest his baby mother's hatred towards him has restricted his involvement with his son. Notably, the image of fatherhood is muted and dominated by an insecure matriarch clinging to her position of parental power. Again, the narrative constructs Black fathering as a negotiated space dictated by an overbearing matriarch:

...the way he's bein raised, I don't condone

Nah, 'cause his pops been gone

Fuck it, I'll explain it to him later when he grown
 Old enough to have a phone
 Askin why mommy hate me
 and he got to sneak to call me whenever he's alone

Again, the emcee's lyrics feature the dropping the final consonant g in words like bein and askin. However, this time around his lyrics conveys the artist experience of parental alienation. Markedly, the aspectual be in line "the way he's bein raised, I don't condone" implies the mother is continuously rearing the child without his consent. Moreover, the phrase "cause his pops been gone" suggests Budden's status as non-residential dad or ex-boyfriend may have led to him being exiled from his son. This contention is further supported in the line "askin why mommy hate" which hints at the dad has been undermined as a parent. Undeniably, Budden's depiction of his prospective communication with his son suggests he feels the child will suffer the same resentment rapper Tyga faced in Dad's Letter. Furthermore, his somber delivery creates the pathos of hopelessness to convey his inability to play an active role in the upbringing of his son. According to Pruett, "Women cling to control to the point of micromanaging, especially when they are working, to reassure themselves and reaffirm their competence and essential goodness as mothers. They often overtly discourage paternal involvement in child and domestic care because of their time-honored belief that men will screw it up (152)." In the autobiographical narrative, Joe contemplates on a day when he could converse with his son without interference from the mother of his child. Without question, Budden's lyricism is representative of marginalized dads whose efforts to father are thwarted by the mother of their children.

Indeed, Joe Budden's rap song conveys an original point of view on maternal gatekeeping from a surrogate and biological father's perspective. His story how important it is biological and surrogate fathers set up a healthy bond in negative co-parenting relationships. Additionally, the emcee rhymes illustrate his identity stasis as a loving yet estranged dad. This is critical because, in mainstream media, many patriarchs especially Black fathers are assumed to not want to take part in the upbringing of a child. The rapper's lyrics disrupt the mythology of the absentee dad by contemplating strategies to overcome the matriarch's interference as a burden of proof. Nevertheless, Budden's depiction of his child's mother as a stereotypical all-powerful emasculator can be perceived as scapegoating to excuse his parental neglect. Because the mother does not have a voice in this song, the reader cannot decide which feeling proves more valid. Nonetheless, the artist's lyrical story illustrates the trauma children suffer because of negative co-parenting. While, hip-hop fatherhood narratives focus intently on gatekeeping and undermining; the genre most prominent depiction of co-parenting conflict centers on child support.

“Bitch Tried to Child Support Me:” Conflict in Co-Parenting Relationships

In rap lyrics, Black fathers consider child support as a stigma—a scarlet letter—or a badge of shame on fatherhood. Pruett takes the position child support as “public policy has far-reaching implications for individual lives. Child support enforcement laws are a cookie-cutter approach to an enormously complex problem resulting in shallow and devaluing stereotypes such as the deadbeat dad” (15). Arguably, the historic and collective belief of Black patriarchs as a “deadbeat” and non-essential parent to the child-

rearing process contributes to this opinion. In addition, some patriarchs resent the fact child support enforcement focus solely on financial provisions and places little value on a dad giving quality time and spiritual maintenance. To be sure, in some rap songs the notion of child support is considered a personal attack on one's masculinity and fatherhood. Perhaps, this can explain why many male rappers reinforce the female stereotype of the Black mother as a hybrid of the "Sapphire" and "Jezebel" myth.

Many contemporary rap tracks showcase "baby mommas" as "money hungry groupies" or "gold diggers" who intentionally get impregnated to gain capital and celebrity status. Once, the woman becomes a mother she exploits her children as leverage to wield power over the artist. These stereotypical depictions of Black mothers prove just as problematic as the stereotype of the deadbeat Black father. Lamentably, hip-hop stories reveal child support and Black co-parenting as a negative and complex conundrum for marginalized communities.

Case in point, Rich Homie Quan's verse in "Freestyle" presents child support as the impetus of conflict between him and the mother of his son. In his lyrics, the dilemma of being put on child support has made him cognizant of his bifurcated identity as a father and perceived "deadbeat dad:"

My baby momma just put me on child support
 Fuck a warrant, ain't goin' to court
 Don't care what the white folks gon' say I just wanna see my lil boy
 Go to school, be a man sign up for college, boy
 Don't be a fool, be a man, what you think that knowledge fo'?
 She dissed me in high school, no reason to acknowledge her

Lead by example, I don't fuck round with no followers

Here, Rich Homie Quan's statement "my baby momma put me on child support" is delivered in a sing-songy cadence. It creates the pathos the artist is nonchalant regarding recent legalities with his child's mother. However, the rapper demonstrates his identity stasis as a dad via disproving the burdensome stereotype of the "deadbeat." In fact, the artist's plea to see his "lil boy" and the instructions on the ways of maleness affirm his fatherly tutelage and disrupt the stereotype. Explicitly, the rapper's use of urban vernacular acts as a marker of cultural identity juxtaposed against the commonly perceived mainstream fatherly words of wisdom. Also, his lyrics "fuck a warrant" illustrate the artist's defiance against "the white folks" meaning the court system that has summoned him. It is plausible, the entertainer views the court system presence as unwarranted because he possesses the tools to father his son on his own. For instance, in the narrative, the phrase "be a man" is repeated twice in lines where the rapper urges his son to value education. Here, the lines suggest constructions of masculinity must be grounded in scholarship. While Rich Homie Quan's verse challenges the myth of the deadbeat dad it reinforces gender stereotypes about Black female identity.

Notice, in his verse, the artist reduces the conflict with the co-parent to a scorned ex-lover upset because he no longer "acknowledge her." Absent of voice in the story; the "baby mama" appears to seek child support to avenge this minor offense. In fact, he labels his child's mother as a "follower" who engaged in a romantic fling with the rapper after he acquired fame and status. Like most male rap fatherhood narratives, the rapper became a parent in an unwed liaison which may have impacted his involvement in his child's life. Moreover, the emcee like most dad's experience (or perceived experience)

with gatekeeping and parental alienation makes the topic of child support appear more punitive. According to Pruett “when a [father] feels that he has significant input into his son’s everyday life and relationships, the financial and emotional commitment and sacrifice make more sense to him and feel less punitive” (14). Unfortunately, in these unwed liaisons, the matriarch is viewed as a modern-day “Jezebel” cunning a man out of his earning. Ergo this lyrical presentation of Black fatherhood is depicted as a rebellious and defiant response to the supposed alliances between “baby mommas” and the government in child support cases. That said, Lil B’s “Child Support Me” provides another example of Black male rappers responding negatively to child support enforcement.

In my database, Lil B's “Child Support Me” proves to be one of the most problematic and misogynistic songs to address co-parenting conflicts linked to child support. Notice, in his song title, the rapper uses the term “child support” as a verb which suggests his “baby mama” utilized legal action to exert dominance over him. According to Ronald Mincy, “stereotypes such as “deadbeat dad” suggest that fathers resent and avoid child support on principle simply because they do not want to pay...it was not because they did not care to support their children financially. Instead, they were frustrated because they felt that the methods used to establish, monitor, and enforce their payments were unjust” (45). On the surface, Lil B threatening the life of his “babymama” affirms the stereotype of the deadbeat dad; however, the lyrics convey his frustration with the process of child support rather than the caring of his child:

Bitch tried to hit me for child support, lash a bitch up in court

....

This hoes plottin' right now, I'm
thinking bout somethin [ugh!]

These bitches tryna come up, actin like they shirt tucked

In the excerpt above, the rapper depicts his child's mother as a "bitch" and "hoe" "plotting" to collect his money. His lyrics suggest his baby mama and other contemporary "Jezebels" use underhand tactics to attain wealth from famous artists. For example, "these bitches tryna come up, actin like they shirt tucked" imply women put on a facade to get the court to support their position. Notably, Lil B achieves identity stasis by assuming and redefining the stereotype of the deadbeat as an anti-hero fighting to maintain his masculinity in a father biased society. Moreover, his use of Black Vernacular English generates the pathos of many marginalized fathers who lack the conventional language to articulate grievances against child support enforcement. However, the rapper's construction of fatherhood of lashing "a bitch up" is hyper-masculine which may turn support away from this legitimate issue.

In these fatherhood narratives, the subject of child support creates confrontation in co-parenting relationships. While these rap stories challenge stereotypes about "deadbeat dads" attempting to avoid paying child support. The narratives depict Black women as one-dimensional beings fixated on utilizing the legal system to undermine Black males. Lamentably, what is lost in songs like Rich Homie Quan and Lil B's narratives is the welfare of his child. Although, the child support system is flawed; it protects all parties involved in the provisions for child rearing. For mothers, child support ensures the child will have his or her basic needs met. As for fathers, child support provides legal proof of support to ensure paying dads will not face jail time. In addition, support payments

document monies given to avoid the court from determining provisions as simply as gifts from the father. Despite its problematic portrayal of co-parenting and child-support; hip-hop opens the door to develop meaningful dialogue around this issue.

Romantic conflicts

In hip-hop fatherhood narratives the demise of a romantic relationship is depicted as another source of conflict in co-parenting relationships. In my database, most of the narratives center on unwed romantic relationships. As mentioned earlier, the lyrics articulate the struggles of mostly dysfunctional, non-traditional families. Particularly, Black fathers are depicted as being inept in maintaining a committed relationship with the mothers of their children. In contrast, Jay-Z's fatherhood narrative entitled "Jay-Z Blue" is a rare example in which a rapper discusses fathering in a marital relationship. On wax, the veteran emcee conveys his deepest fears about marriage and fatherhood:

This relationship shit is complicated
 All I know is we ain't speaking everyday
 I fucking hate it
 I don't wanna duplicate it
 I seen my mom and pop drive each other motherfuckin' crazy
 And I got that nigga blood in me
 I got his ego and his temper
 ...
 Father never taught me how to be a father, treat a mother
 I don't wanna have to just repeat another leave another
 Baby with no daddy want no mama drama

In the quote, above, the structure is a juxtaposition between Jay-Z present relationship challenges and his childhood memories of family dysfunction. Moreover, the excerpt illustrates how conflicts in his marriage have made him aware of his twoness as a father. Although he strives to forge a paternal identity as the antithesis of his father, the legacy of his dad shapes his identity. Jay-Z affirms this fear in words “blood,” “ego,” and “temper” which are symbols of his patriarch’s heritage he fears will eventually derail his marriage. The line, “father never taught me how to be a father, treat a mother,” suggest his upbringing has left him ill-equipped to manage a family. In addition, the rapper conveys his fear arguments with his wife, Beyoncé, will lead to a ruinous co-parenting relationship he endured with his parents. His construction of Black fatherhood is one of constant fear of “mama drama” where he expects his daughter, Blue Ivy will grow up “with no daddy.” In fact, this dread is epitomized in the musical composition of the song.

In “Jay-Z Blue” the artist’s fatherhood anxiety is more raw and visceral against a musical backdrop of dialogue from the movie *Mommie Dearest* and Notorious B.I.G. “My Downfall.” He samples “no wire hangers” which suggest like the protagonist in the film, Jay-Z’s anxiety to be a good father may render him helplessly attached to his daughter. In addition, his use of Notorious B.I.G.’s “My Downfall” a track in which the slain rapper fantasizes about the impact his impending death will have on his daughter exemplifies Jay-Z’s anxiety over the potential downfall of his relationship will have on his seed. Arguably, his musical samples are representative of the psychological trauma endured by fatherless fathers as they embark on their quest for a holistic fathering identity. Hence, in these narratives, the romantic relationships have a profound impact on the construction of African American fatherhood.

Conversely, The Game “Like Father and Son 2” presented the only concrete example of functional co-parenting even after the demise of a romantic relationship. “Like Father Like Son 2” is a scarce example of a constructive father-son bond despite not sustaining an amorous relationship with the child’s mother:

I wanna thank my baby mamas Tiff and Eliska for everything
 Y'all deserve the world, I wasn't worthy of no wedding ring
 It ain't be one day since I met you I wasn't there for you
 Wasn't husband material, but you know I really cared for you

While Game pays homage to his “baby mamas;” he acknowledges he would not make a suitable husband. Arguably, the lyrics demonstrate Rice’s identity stasis concept of Acute Identity Expression. In other words, the rapper constructs his identity as a father by holding himself accountable for his shortcomings as a man. The Game’s following lyrics illustrate his limitations in romantic relationships does not hinder him as a father:

All these tours taking the toll, I can see it in his eyes
 So I stopped tours, stopped rapping, didn't give a fuck about
 Nothing that happened after recording The Doctor's Advocate
 Catching up with my son, cause ain't nothing more important
 Than walking inside the Footlocker, copping them matching Jordans
 Helping him with his jumper, the day he turned 9
 I asked him what he want for his birthday, he said to spend some time
 ...
 Anybody can be a daddy, just bust a nut and leave
 But I'm a father, and I'm be everything he need and more

In the passage, above, The Game displays his commitment as a father with examples of personal sacrifice. The lyrics reveal The Game “stopped tours,” “stopped rapping,” to father his son. Moreover, the rhymes show the artist as an economic and emotional provider from “copping Jordans” and helping his son “with his jumper.” The Game further illustrates his bond with his son in the line “I asked him what he want for his birthday, he said to spend some time.” Arguably, the concluding lines illustrate that The Game’s bond with his son is a deep lasting relationship. His last lines are didactic as he imparts to the listener that fatherhood requires deep commitment. Despite the romantic conflicts, The Game’s song is representative of an effective fathering experience. Indeed, fatherhood can be rewarding when co-parents work together and can overcome conflicts for the betterment of the children.

Conclusion

This chapter paid close attention to generational curses or intergenerational traumas and how it shapes the construction of Black masculinity and the identity formation of Black female youth. Additionally, the dissertation explored the stressors associated with negative co-parenting. Although the rap narratives challenge the stereotype of the deadbeat dad; it does so at the expense of Black women. In fact, some fatherhood stories continue the “Sapphire” and “Jezebel” myths about Black women/mothers. Undeniably, the Black fatherhood narratives represent the marginalized African American male mimicry of American patriarchy. That said, hip-hop continues to spin Anansi’s web of storytelling to survive, to complicate, and resist the “unchanging same” traumas impacting people of color.

Chapter 5 “Now do you want an encore, do you want more?” aka The Conclusion

A general overview of the dissertation

During the golden era of hip-hop, 1980's-1990's, the most prolific storytellers reinforced stereotypes of Black fathers as “deadbeats.” In fact, most of the emcees wrote poetic tales portraying dads as absentee, abusive, and negligent. A critical discussion on African American fatherhood and hip-hop culture is necessary and long overdue. Hip-hop functions as the latest edition of the Black musical/literature to address the changing same of the quest for authentic maleness. Explicitly, the discourse interrogates Black male's various forms of mimicry to achieve maleness via American patriarchal values. Profoundly, rap artists' narratives convey representations of Black males emulating and redefining conceptions of fatherhood and adulthood. Moreover, the findings of my study of hip-hop songs from 2010-2015 advance a more complex view of fatherhood. The rappers' narratives complicate the image of fathers and masculinity through the lens of marginalized urban Black experiences such as: substance abuse, mass incarceration, underground economies, trauma, and dysfunctional co-parenting skills. My dissertation gives visibility to an underserved population adding to a body of knowledge preceded by Ronald Mancy, Tricia Rose, Imani Perry, Joan Morgan, bell hooks, Michael Eric Dyson, Michael Jefferies, Marc Lamont Hill, Marc Anthony Neale, Matthew Aware, David Wall Rice and a host of other scholars.

In addition, I try illustrating to the reader a map marking the development of images of African American patriarchs in literature. Throughout the discourse, I show how male and female emcees imagine dads as protectors, providers and surrogates living

in naturalistic urban landscapes. Furthermore, the dissertation looks at the impact urban Black fathers have on the identity formation of African American adolescents. Notably, the discourse conveys cultural connections of hip-hop lyricism to literary tropes, musical traditions, and folklore motifs. Moreover, the dissertation offers critical readings of several hip-hop lyrics that looks at the genre as both poetry and narrative.

My application of David Wall Rice's concepts of "Identity Stasis" enables readers to understand the urban African American quest for holistic selfhood using narratives. Indeed, I try proving rap fatherhood lyrics contribute to the formation of multifaceted Black identities by offering the sustenance of storytelling to reimagine and reshape adulthood. Likewise, Jeffries' "Complex cool" and Hill's "Wounded Storytelling" allow scholars to consider the coping strategies hip-hop offers youth to endure problematic fathering experiences

That said, I thematically organized the dissertation to specific socio-economic experiences affecting African American fathering. My discussion on substance-abuse and fatherhood, looked at hip-hop lyrics written from the perspective of the father and child. It was imperative to involve artists whose narratives give readers insight into the pitfalls of addiction and its impact on their children. For example, Schoolboy's Q's "Prescription/Oxymoron" conveys societal pressures coerce marginalized fathers to engage in underground economies that lead many to a life of drug addiction. For the latter, rappers like Isaiah Rashad, Nicki Minaj, and August Alsina's childhood narratives were included because they are representative of the struggles of many Black youths. Like most poor Black teenagers, the rappers' fathers drug addiction caused the emcees to act out in high-risk behaviors that had lasting ramifications in their adult life. In addition,

August Alsina's "Testify" didactically illustrates adolescents can overcome the stigma of parental substance abuse through wounded storytelling.

The ensuing section of the dissertation centers largely upon the devastating effect of mass incarceration on Black families. Recent documentaries like Ava DuVernay's *The 13th* and Jay-Z's *Kalif Browder Story* sheds light on the crisis of the prison industrial complex. That in mind, I explored hip-hop fatherhood stories that not only looks at confinement but the socio-economic conditions that lead many low-income fathers astray. While some accounts like Danny Boy's "Juno" reinforce the master narrative of Black fathers as "deadbeats;" other rappers point to deindustrialized economic deserts, inadequate education, and lack of opportunities as the root cause that lead Black males to prison. Moreover, the dissertation pays attention to rapper's discussion on plight of fathers who continue to remain ostracized despite repaying their debts to society. Additionally, hip-hop artists' redemptive narratives show male parents fighting to overcome race and masculine socialization for the betterment of their children. In other narratives, many emcees' recount childhood experiences where they lost their innocence due to the fact they were expected to fulfill their dad's role within their household. Despite their anger, the rappers' lyrics suggest that artists look to reverse the Oedipus complex by reconnecting with their estranged fathers. Other emcees employ African cosmology and/or biblical masculinity in their lyricism giving these paradigms to give adolescents alternative archetypes of maleness.

From the beginning of the discussion, I found it necessary to define Pruett's term "fatherneed" because it conveys the desire of both fathers and children to bond. Given that, the concluding sections of the dissertation were difficult to write because it is so

near and dear to my heart as a father. The chapters centered on intergenerational and transgenerational trauma and dysfunctional co-parenting relationships were daunting. In truth, I considered these sections hard to write because the trauma of father-lacking or fatherlessness that emcees displayed in their lyricism is like my life story. The rap artists discussions on the search for male acceptance while living in hostile environments were quite visceral. Personally, I have seen many Black males like the rapper Jay-Rock who had to look to gang life as a space for surrogate fathering. Likewise, I have recognized adolescent women rapper Tink speaks of in “Stripclub” who have succumbed to male exploitation in search of masculine validation. Consequently, as a father I have endured gatekeeping, undermining and conflicts that had negative impact on myself and my children. This dissertation deals with the difficult and oftentimes ugliness of co-parenting. It shows the Black family as fragile and dysfunctional as well as resilient and strong—a universal reflection of the American experience. I tried bringing awareness to hip-hop narratives that give voice to daily tragedies hidden behind closed doors.

Limitations of the Study

This study engages primarily with narratives about the Black male experience. Without question, hip-hop has been enriched by artists like Queen Latifah, Missy Elliot, Lauryn Hill, Foxy Brown, Lil Kim, and Eve; unfortunately, because of the scarcity of women voices in this era of hip-hop, my research features lyrics by only three female emcees. Feasibly, my dissertation will open the door for future conversations about hip-hop narratives, womanhood, and the formation of Black female identity. Additionally, I use Rice's theory of “identity stasis” by focusing solely on hip-hop lyricism that complicates Black identity and masculinity. Nonetheless, the dissertation does not try

making a claim on the psychological impact these narratives have on adolescents' personalities. Moreover, my discussion centers exclusively on the urban African American experience. In attempt to stay on the topic, I purposely left out the voices of white and Latino emcees. Additionally, I did not give attention to Black fathering experiences outside of marginalized urban communities. This study is not exhaustive, and it is merely one conversation of many sorely needed dialogues about fatherhood and hip-hop.

The Benefits of the Research

This research adds to the growing body of hip-hop and African American literature by expanding on links between sociology, psychology, and literary texts. This latest incarnation of Black literature may prove vital to high-school and collegiate courses on Masculinity, Women and Gender Studies, and African American literature. Outside of academia, I strongly believe fatherhood narratives in hip-hop lyricism can be used as a tool of engagement for at-risk youth programs. After recently attending fatherhood conferences in Atlanta and Kansas City, I realize my work can be of service to practitioners, programmers, and policy-makers. Considering, these professionals are seeking narratives to empower marginalized fathers especially those between the ages of 14-35. In addition, I work with *Missouri's Focus on Fatherhood* programs organizing hip-hop events offering youth the opportunity to address issues on fatherhood and identity. As a father and scholar, I consider this work to be my ministry and ongoing scholarship for years to come. I consider it proper to end my dissertation with a foundational scripture verse from Isaiah 1:17: "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow."

Appendix I: Hip-hop Database (2010-2015)

Artist (Birthplace) "Song"/ Year	Seniority Status		Content Themes						
	Veteran (V) Mainstream (M) Up-and-coming (U)	Epistolary	Addiction	Protectors	Providers	Co-Parent Conflicts	Surrogates	Trauma	Prison
Kirko Bangz (Texas) "Daddy"/ 2011	U	X			X		X	X	X
"Daddy's Girl"/ 2011	U	X		X		X			
Rich Gang (Georgia) "Lifestyle"/ 2014	M				X				
Isaiah Rashad (Tennessee) "Heavenly Father"/ 2014	U		X					X	
"Fake Trill"/ 2014	U		X					X	X
"Hereditry"/ 2014	M		X					X	
Bobby Shriverda (New York) "Hot Nigga"/ 2014	M							X	X
J. Cole (North Carolina) "No Role Models"/ 2014	M						X		
"Adolescence"/ 2014	M		X				X	X	
"Lost Ones"/ 2011	M				X	X			
"Breakdown"/ 2011	M		X				X	X	X
Nas (New York) "Daughters"/ 2012	V			X	X			X	
Don Trip (Tennessee) "Letter to My Son"/ 2011	U	X			X	X			
Jay-Z (New York) "Glory"/ 2012	V				X			X	
"Jay-Z Blue"/ 2013			X		X	X		X	
Schoolboy Q (California) "Prescription/Oxymoron"/ 2014	U		X		X				

	Seniority Status	Content Themes							
Artist (Birthplace) “Song”/ Year	Veteran (V) Mainstream (M) Up-and-coming (U)	Epistolary	Addiction	Protectors	Providers	Co-Parent Conflicts	Surrogates	Trauma	Prison
Tyler the Creator (California) “Answer”/ 2013	M	X						X	
Nicki Minaj (New York) “I’m the Best”/ 2010	M		X					X	
Kevin Gates (Louisiana) “I Don’t Get Tired”/ 2014	M				X				
Joe Budden (New Jersey) “Role Reversal”/ 2010	V				X	X	X		
Big Krit (Mississippi) “Rich Dad, Poor Dad”/ 2012	U								
Jay-Z and Kanye West (New York/ Illinois) “New Day”/ 2011	V							X	
LeCrae (Texas) “Just Like You”/ 2010	V						X		X
Chance the Rapper and Vic Mensa (Illinois) “Lord Release”/ 2010	M			X	X	X		X	X
August Alsina (Louisiana) “Benediction”/ 2014	M	X	X		X			X	
“Testify”/ 2014		X	X	X					
Lil Durk (Illinois) “52 bars”/ 2013	U		X		X			X	X
Kendrick Lamar (California) “Poe Man Dreams”/ 2011	M			X			X		X

	Seniority Status	Content Themes							
Artist (Birthplace) “Song”/ Year	Veteran (V) Mainstream (M) Up-and-coming (U)	Epistolary	Addiction	Protectors	Providers	Co-Parent Conflicts	Surrogates	Trauma	Prison
Lil B (California) “Child Support Me”/ 2014	U					X			
Nipsey Hu\$\$le (California) “Reality”/ 2010	U				X		X		
Fashawn (California) “Boy Meets World”/ 2010	U				X		X		X
“Man of the House”/ 2015	U				X				
Freddie Gibbs (Indiana) “Broken”/ 2014	U				X				
Jay-Rock (California) “Diary of a Broke Nigga”/ 2010	U				X				
“They Say”/ 2010	U		X		X		X		
T.I. (Georgia) “Wonderful Life”/ 2012	V	X	X					X	X
Drake (Toronto) “Look What You Done”/ 2011	M					X		X	

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