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Modern day Jezebels: Racialized sexuality and the images of black women in contemporary hip-hop videos

Hip-hop music emerged in the 1970's as a countercultural strategy to deter inner city youth from the influence of violence and gangs; it was a form of social expression. The dominant images in early hip-hop music videos were reflective of black urban culture with an emphasis on black empowerment. Current hip-hop music videos differ substantially from those of the past. Today the dominant images and symbols in these videos are less about empowerment and social justice and more about materialism and the exploitation of black women. The purpose of this research is to recognize/investigate how contemporary hip-hop music videos simultaneously reflects and reproduces race, gender, and class oppression of Black American Women. Methods: A qualitative investigation was conducted with nine Black American Women between the ages of 18-24 attending the University of Missouri. The face to face interviews were to assess how they felt and what they thought about the images that appear in contemporary hip-hop music videos. Questions focused on topics such as: meanings imbedded in the images and their relationship to stereotypes of black women, rationals for the use of particular images, attributions of accountability, and the consequences of these video images for the lives of Black women. The interview transcripts were analyzed for common themes in responses to the questions. Preliminary Findings: Several themes emerged from the data. A few of them are: 1. Images of Black women in music videos differ from "everyday" Black women - women in music videos are "other" Black women. 2. The respondents felt that the men (both black and white) they interact with in their everyday lives expect them to act, dance, and dress like women in music videos. 3. Many of the respondents attribute the use of these images to the notion that "sex sells" and do not see these images as the exploitation of black women.